

Two Controversial Passages in Damascius (*In Phd.* I 275–292 and II 28)

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1. Plutarch and Damascius: a difficult problem

THE IMPRESSIVE RECEPTION HISTORY of the works of Plutarch of Chaeronea shows a remarkable paradox. From the moment of his death until late Antiquity (and far beyond), Plutarch was greatly admired. He was a precious source of inspiration for both pagan and Christian authors, who found in his wide erudition many interesting starting points for their own philosophical and literary projects.¹ The later Platonic tradition to which he himself belonged, however, seemed to be much less enthusiastic. The Neoplatonists often referred to their predecessors in their lengthy commentaries but they only rarely mentioned Plutarch, and when they occasionally refer to his view, they usually criticise it. Especially several aspects of his interpretation of the *Timaeus* were rejected, and the only Plutarch who was highly esteemed in Neoplatonist circles was Plutarch of Athens, not the Chaeronean.²

¹ This rich reception history has been much studied. A classic and excellent survey is R. Hirzel, *Plutarch* (Leipzig 1912). Shorter discussions can be found in K. Ziegler, “Plutarchos von Chaironeia,” *RE* 21 (1951) 947–962; C. J. Gianakaris, *Plutarch* (New York 1970) 129–144; D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London 1973) 143–158; J. Sirinelli, *Plutarque de Chéronée. Un philosophe dans le siècle* (Paris 2000) 443–474. Three more recent collections of papers are I. Gallo (ed.), *L’eredità culturale di Plutarco dall’antichità al rinascimento* (Naples 1998); *La tradition des Œuvres Morales de Plutarque de l’Antiquité au début de la Renaissance = Pallas* 67 (2005) 71–210; and R. M. Aguilar and I. R. Alfageme (eds.), *Ecos de Plutarco en Europa. De fortuna Plutarchi studia selecta* (Madrid 2006).

² See esp. J. Opsomer, “Neoplatonist Criticisms of Plutarch,” in A. Pérez

Plutarch's relatively small influence on the Neoplatonists should not merely be traced back to philosophical reasons, though: literary factors probably also played a part. Plutarch did not write systematic commentaries on Plato's dialogues but preferred to incorporate his exegetic insights into treatises or dialogues. The later Neoplatonists for their part usually exposed their views in detailed commentaries, where they entered into dialogue with previous commentaries and often ignored insights that had been put forward in other contexts. Typically enough, Proclus makes extensive use of Plutarch's *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* in his own commentary on this work,³ but ignores the interesting discussion of Socrates' divine sign in *De genio Socratis* when dealing with the topic in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*.⁴ When he refers to Plutarch in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, he either borrows his material from a previous source (presumably Porphyry) or from Plutarch's *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, a kind of *Spezialkommentar* on one notoriously complex passage in the *Timaeus*,⁵ whereas his quo-

Jiménez and F. Casadesús Bordoy (eds.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: Misticismo y religiones místicas en la obra de Plutarco* (Madrid/Málaga 2001) 187–199; cf. also F. Ferrari, "Plutarco in Siriano, in *Arist. Metaph.* 105,36ss.: lo statuto ontologico e la collocazione metafisica delle idee," in *L'eredità culturale* 143–159.

³ See C. Faraggiana di Sarzana, "Il commentario procliano alle *Opere e i giorni*," *Aevum* 52 (1978) 17–40, and "Le commentaire à Hésiode et la *paideia* encyclopédique de Proclus," in J. Pépin and H. D. Saffrey (eds.), *Proclus. Lecteur et interprète des anciens* (Paris 1987) 21–22 and 33–41; cf. M. van der Valk, "A Fragment of Plutarch?" *Mnemosyne* SER. IV 39 (1986) 399.

⁴ Procl. *In Alc.* 79.18–80.22. Plutarch's influence in this commentary is at best limited to a few references to his *Life of Alcibiades*, that is, he is used as a historical, not a philosophical source (cf. A. Ph. Segonds, *Proclus. Sur le Premier Alcibiades de Platon I* [Paris 1985] xiv n.5). Hermias' discussion of Socrates' *daimonion* (*In Phdr.* 65.26–69.31 Couvreur) contains more material but likewise ignores Plutarch's richer account. That Plutarch's interpretation of the myth of Dionysus and the Titans (in *De esu* I, 996B–C) is ignored by the later Neoplatonists is argued by F. Jourdan, "Manger Dionysos. L'interprétation du mythe du démembrément par Plutarque a-t-elle été lue par les néo-Platoniciens?" *Pallas* 67 (2005) 153–174.

⁵ Another possibility is Plutarch's lost work *Περὶ τοῦ γεγονέναι κατὰ*

tations from Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta* occur in a separate treatise (*De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam*) and not in a commentary.⁶ In that sense, the relative unpopularity of Plutarch in Neoplatonism is not only the consequence of important differences in perspective and exegetical approach but also of literary evolutions.

An interesting counter example to this conclusion can be found in two series of arguments concerning the Platonic doctrine of recollection in Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo* (I 275–292 and II 28 Westerink = Plutarch fr.215–217 Sandbach). Twice, these arguments are explicitly ascribed to Plutarch of Chaeronea,⁷ and their presence in the commentary both suggests that Damascius took Plutarch seriously as a contributor to philosophy and that he also looked outside the commentary tradition. Unfortunately enough, it is far from certain whether this material can indeed be ascribed to Plutarch, and the scholarly world is divided between distinguished believers and equally distinguished disbelievers.⁸ The equipollence of arguments makes it extremely difficult—not to say

Πλάτωνα τὸν κόσμον (mentioned in the Lamprias catalogue, no. 66, and probably alluded to in *De an. procr.* 1013E).

⁶ On Proclus' knowledge of Plutarch, see apart from Opsomer, in *Estudios sobre Plutarco*, also A. Rescigno, "Proclo lettore di Plutarco?" in *L'eredità culturale* 111–141.

⁷ I: ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Χαίρωνέως, vs. II: ἐπιχειρημάτων διαφόρων συναγωγὴ δεικνύοντων ἀναμνήσεις εἶναι τὰς μαθήσεις ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Χαίρωνέως Πλουτάρχου.

⁸ *Contra* authenticity: R. Volkman, *Leben, Schriften und Philosophie des Plutarch von Chaeronea* (Berlin 1869) I xii–xiv and 105; E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* III.2 (Leipzig 1903) 808–809 n.3; Ziegler, *RE* 21 (1951) 752–753; J. Hani, *Plutarque. Consolation à Apollonios* (Paris 1972) 193. *Pro* authenticity: R. Beutler, "P[lutarchos] aus Athen," *RE* 21 (1951) 970; F. H. Sandbach, *Plutarch Moralia* XV (London/Cambridge [Mass.] 1969) 388–389; L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo II Damascius* (Amsterdam/Oxford/New York 1977) 166–167; M. Bonazzi, "Plutarque et l'immortalité de l'âme," in X. Brouillette and A. Giavatto, *Les dialogues platoniciens chez Plutarque* (Leuven 2010) 75–89, at 76–77.

impossible—to reach decisive conclusions about this question, and it is fair to say here already that it is not the ambition of this article to say the last word on the matter. Several of its arguments and conclusions will remain hypothetical. Yet it is worthwhile to reopen the case, because significant progress can still be made. In what follows, I propose to do two things:

- First I shall discuss the arguments of the last two scholars who examined the authenticity of the fragments and came to opposite conclusions (Section 2). This ἔλεγχος will provide a convenient survey of the previous discussions and can be used as a starting point for further analysis.

- Then I shall try to break new ground by turning to the fragments themselves (Section 3). I contend that a close analysis of the content and general structure of the extracts in Damascius, and of their place and function in the commentary, will provide new insights and yield better results than a search for significant correspondences or differences between these extracts and Plutarch's extant works. This change of focus indeed reflects a methodological concern: to my mind, an adequate discussion of the alleged Plutarchan origin of the extracts in these passages from Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo* first of all presupposes a better insight into Damascius' own authorial strategies and purposes.⁹

2. *In utramque partem*

2.1. The most recent contribution, and the only one that is entirely devoted to the fragments, states the case in favour of the Plutarchan origin.¹⁰ Rosa Maria Aguilar—who erroneously ascribes the *Commentary on the Phaedo* that contains the fragments

⁹ This methodological approach recalls recent insights in reception studies, viz. that due attention should be given to the peculiar aims and strategies of the receiving author. See e.g. L. Hardwick, *Reception Studies* (Oxford 2003); C. A. Martindale, "Reception," *OCD*³ (2003) 1294–1295; N. Mindt, "Begegnungen mit 'der Antike'. Zum Umgang mit Rezeptionsformen," *Gymnasium* 114 (2007) 461–474.

¹⁰ R. M. Aguilar, "Los supuestos fragmentos Plutarqueos del De Anima en Olimpiodoro," *Humanitas* 55 (2003) 29–40.

to Olympiodorus—tries to prove the Plutarchan authorship of these extracts by means of a whole series of arguments.

a) To begin with, the fragments clearly show a Platonic perspective, as appears from criticisms against other philosophical schools (the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Peripatetics), from references to several Platonic dialogues (the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*), and from the praise of Plato himself as the ultimate authority. While all this is unmistakably true, it is clearly no sufficient argument: it only places the fragments in a general Platonic philosophical tradition. There they indeed belong, but this is no cause for great surprise. We could even be somewhat more precise: the polemical attacks against Stoics, Epicureans, and Peripatetics (so current in Plutarch too), coupled with the absence of any reference to later Neoplatonists, points to a Middle Platonist origin. This indeed brings us closer to Plutarch, but it does not by itself suffice to attribute the extracts to him.

b) The same holds true for Aguilar's second argument, that the fragments show a clear preference for etymological speculations. It is correct that such a fondness for etymological arguments can indeed be found in many of Plutarch's works,¹¹ but again this observation is far too general to be used as a compelling criterion. Many ancient authors, including the Platonists, in fact showed a lively interest in etymology.¹² Moreover, the argument derived from the name of *Mnemosyne*, the mother of the Muses (I 282 = fr.215h, II 28.18–19 = fr.217j), also occurs in Maximus of Tyre (*Or.* 10.9) and thus has nothing specifically Plutarchan.

c) The fragments also show, in Aguilar's view, a taste for

¹¹ See e.g. A. Strobach, *Plutarch und die Sprachen* (Stuttgart 1997) 55–141.

¹² We may in this context point to the many etymological speculations in Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*; cf. R. M. van den Berg, *Proclus' Commentary on the Cratylus in Context. Ancient Theories of Language and Naming* (Leiden/Boston 2008). For Damascius' interest in etymology see R. Strömberg, "Damascius. His Personality and Significance," *Erano*s 44 (1946) 175–192, at 185–186.

anecdotes and historical examples. This recalls Plutarch, of course, yet once again, the argument is far too vague to be decisive, and moreover, it rests on the fragmentary character of the tradition. *We* are primarily thinking of Plutarch because we are familiar with his works. But Plutarch was definitely not the only Platonist who did not confine his interest to the exegesis of Plato's dialogues. Damascius, for instance, was the author of four books of *Paradoxa* (cf. Phot. *Bibl. cod.* 130, 96b37–97a7). Closer to Plutarch, Favorinus wrote *Ἀπομνημονεύματα* and a *Παντοδαπή ἱστορία*¹³ and the orations of Maximus of Tyre contain many entertaining anecdotes and stories. Maximus even devotes one of his speeches to the topic of learning and recollection (*Or.* 10), and this speech indeed contains several charming anecdotes. Moreover, in the alleged Plutarchan extracts, this taste for anecdotes generally fades into the background. Aguilar admits this herself but she explains it by the specific character of the text: we are dealing with concise, summarizing excerpts from which most anecdotic material has been pruned away. This is correct, no doubt, but obviously undermines the cogency of this argument.

d) Finally, Aguilar points to the subtle psychological observations that occur in these fragments. It is absolutely true that such psychological refinement can often be found in Plutarch too. The author of the *Parallel Lives* knew as no other the hidden motives behind his heroes' behaviour and the implications of these motives for their characters and dispositions, and many of his moral treatises time and again illustrate his deep insight into the human soul. But in this case too, Aguilar's argument is much too general. The whole Platonic philosophical tradition has in fact devoted much attention to the soul. Atticus, for instance, correctly insisted on the paramount importance which the doctrine of the soul's immortality has in Plato's philosophy (*Eus. Praep. Evang.* 15.9.1–5 = fr.7 Baudry). This continuous interest in soul-related problems has yielded many particularly

¹³ For an in-depth discussion of the fragments from these two works see E. Amato, *Favorinus d'Arles III* (Paris 2010) 175–351.

subtle reflections in the later Platonic tradition.¹⁴ In this respect, Plutarch was definitely no *rara avis*.

e) Remarkably enough, there is one significant parallel between the extracts in Damascius and a passage from one of Plutarch's works that is not mentioned by Aguilar. One of the extracts contains a reference to Tiberius' nephew, who hunted bears and lions but could not abide even the sight of a cock (Damascius I 285 = fr.215k). This anecdote is also mentioned in Plutarch, *De inv. et od.* 537A. It has been objected that even this striking parallel is not decisive, since dissemination is the hallmark of anecdotes.¹⁵ This is true indeed, although it remains noteworthy that, apart from this passage in Damascius, Plutarch is our only source for this story in extant literature. The parallel is probably no cogent proof, given the highly fragmentary character of the tradition, but it is certainly one of the better arguments in favour of Plutarchan origin of the extracts, and it is strange that it is ignored by Aguilar.

This critical discussion has shown that there exist many incontestable correspondences between the extracts in Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo* and the *Corpus Plutarcheum*, but also that these correspondences are all very general and vague. Not one of them is sufficiently specific to be decisive, and even their cumulative strength is rather weak. At best, they demonstrate that the extracts *can* come from Plutarch, not that they actually *do* come from him.

2.2. The question remains, however, whether decisive arguments against the fragments' authenticity can be found. The best recent discussion of this is by Jan Opsomer, who by the way adopts a fairly nuanced and cautious position: "I think it is

¹⁴ See the seminal study of C. G. Steel, *The Changing Self. A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism* (Brussels 1978), and H. Dörrie and M. Baltes, *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus. Von der "Seele" als der Ursache aller sinnvollen Abläufe II* (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt 2002).

¹⁵ Thus J. Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth. Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism* (Brussel 1998) 201.

unlikely—but on the other hand not impossible—that they actually derive from Plutarch.”¹⁶ First of all, he correctly states that the many arguments in favour of the ascription to Plutarch are frail. Then he puts forward two possible arguments against authenticity, derived respectively from form and content.

a) The style of the fragments is undeniably at odds with Plutarch’s style—a point granted even by Aguilar. A case in point is the occurrence of hiatus in the extracts, as opposed to Plutarch’s well-known custom of carefully avoiding hiatus.¹⁷ Yet Opsomer correctly observes that this argument is far from unproblematic. Since we are dealing with concise summaries, it is obviously not Plutarch who holds the pen, but Damascius (or his source). Opsomer even points out that the summaries underwent at least a double condensation process: first by Damascius (or his source), then by the *reportator* of the course.¹⁸ The fact that the two lists (which are the work of two different *reportatores*) both contain similar series of quite short arguments may suggest that the most drastic condensation was already the work of Damascius himself (or his source). But even if this is true, and even though both *reportatores* were probably taking notes ἀπὸ φωνῆς, they still may have exerted a limited influence on details concerning the phrasing of the arguments. All this obviously implies that no conclusion about the Plutarchan authorship of the extracts can be built on the occurrence of hiatus.

There is, however, a second stylistic problem with these extracts: their dry, scholarly character contrasts sharply with Plutarch’s much more lively style. Hardly any trace can be found of the wealth of quotations that embellish most of Plu-

¹⁶ Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth* 200–203 (quotation at 202).

¹⁷ Cf. Ziegler, *RE* 21 (1951) 752–753: “Daß alle diese Stücke nicht aus publizierten Schriften P.s stammen ... ergibt sich schon aus der völligen Vernachlässigung des Hiats.” On Plutarch’s general avoidance of hiatus, see e.g. B. Weissenberger, *Die Sprache Plutarchs von Chaeronea und die pseudoplutarchischen Schriften* (Straubing 1895) 18–20.

¹⁸ Cf. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries* II 166.

tarch's works, and only a few echoes are heard of what may have been charming, entertaining anecdotes. Yet this, once again, is probably the direct result of the process of excerption and condensation. We may here feel the influence of doxographical techniques with their exclusive interest in the bare essence of a philosophical argument, isolated from all details and literary *ornatus*. We may recall Diogenes Laertius' summary of Plato's political philosophy as πολιτεύσεσθαι τὸν σοφόν (3.78): quite a remarkable summary of the *Republic*, though basically correct. A similar condensation process may be at work here, which makes every argument that is based on language and style weak and unconvincing.

b) Opsomer also puts forward one interesting argument based on content: in the first fragment (Damascius I 275 = fr.215a), the view of Arcesilaus is rejected. Such a criticism is quite strange in Plutarch, who seems to have attached great importance to the unity of the Academy¹⁹ and in any case throughout his extant works refrains from attacking Arcesilaus.²⁰ Yet it cannot be excluded a priori that Plutarch occasionally disagreed with Arcesilaus in one of his lost works. For first of all, we do not know the origin of Damascius' extracts: if they should be traced back to a lost dialogue, the criticism of Arcesilaus could come from a character that does not reflect Plutarch's own philosophical convictions. An interesting passage in this respect is *De facie* 922F, where the Stoic Pharnaces attacks the typical eristic strategy of the Academy: "on each occasion that they engage in discourse with others they will not offer any accounting of their own assertions but must keep their interlocutors on the defensive lest they become the prosecutors" (transl. Cherniss). This strategy obviously recalls the approach of Arcesilaus and Carneades, and it is clear that

¹⁹ As appears from the title of one of his lost works, mentioned in the Lamprias catalogue (no. 63): Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι ἀπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος Ἀκαδημειαν.

²⁰ Cf. P. H. De Lacy, "Plutarch and the Academic Sceptics," *CJ* 49 (1953/4) 79–85.

Pharnaces is not Plutarch's mouthpiece.

One may object that this way of explaining the evidence of this fragment away is, after all, an easy *testimonium paupertatis*: it is merely resorting to a hypothesis that can be neither refuted nor proved. There can, however, be added two additional observations. First, even the great scholars of the first generations of the Academy are not beyond criticism in Plutarch's works. In *De animae procreatione*, for instance, the *Timaeus* interpretation of Xenocrates (1012D–F) and Crantor (1012F–1013A) is attacked, while Speusippus' definition of time is rejected in *Quaest. Plat.* 1007A–B. Occasionally, even Plato himself is criticised, though usually in a veiled and passing way.²¹ If these distinguished philosophers can be questioned and criticised by Plutarch, then why not Arcesilaus? Moreover, it is not even certain that the fragment really contains an attack against Arcesilaus. The ambivalent phrase ὡς Ἀρκεσίλαος can be understood both as “as was Arcesilaus' opinion” and “as Arcesilaus observed.”²² If one adopts the latter alternative, the whole problem evaporates and with it the arguments against the ascription to Plutarch disappear.

3. Damascius' course on the *Phaedo*

The provisional conclusion appears to be that neither the authenticity of the extracts nor their inauthenticity can be demonstrated by means of compelling arguments. In what follows, I therefore propose to look at the issue from an entirely different point of view, that is, to bracket the question of Plutarchan authorship for a while and first look at the fragments themselves and analyse their general structure, the context in which they are mentioned, and their function in Damascius' commentary. A careful analysis will throw a new light on several

²¹ See e.g. *De coh. ira* 457C; D. Babut, *Parerga. Choix d'articles de Daniel Babut* (Lyon 1994) 574. Cf. also the rhetorical attack on Plato's *Republic* in *De Alex. Magn. fort.* 328D–E.

²² Thus M. Bonazzi, *Academici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone* (Milan 2003) 231 n.49.

aspects of Damascius' approach. Only then can we speculate, on the basis of this analysis and with due caution, about the implications that the obtained results may have for the alleged Plutarchan origin of the extracts.

3.1. A close study of the fragments immediately reveals a clear structure:

<i>Damascius</i>	<i>Plutarch</i>	<i>Content</i>
I 275–277	fr.215a–c	critical <i>status quaestionis</i> and its result (Plato as the only unproblematic explanation)
I 278–280	fr.215d–f	theoretical perspective: knowledge is hidden under extraneous things; the paradox of seeking and finding
I 281–283	fr.215g–i	linguistic and etymological arguments: <i>a-letheia</i> , <i>Mnemosyne</i> , everyday language (<i>λανθάω</i>)
I 284–287	fr.215j–m	arguments from experience and daily life: recollection of previous lives and instances of a strange phobia
I 288–290	fr.216a–c	new-born babies and natural abilities [both arguments are explicitly linked: <i>τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον</i> in the second fragment]
I 291–292	fr.216d–e	reflections about the process of thinking; its inward orientation and the delight in discovery
II 28.3–5	fr.217a–b	reflections about the process of thinking; we think from one thing to the next and we supply what is wanting in percepts
II 28.6–11	fr.217c–f	new-born babies, children, natural abilities
II 28.12–13	fr.217g	argument from daily life: strange phobia
II 28.14–15	fr.217h	theoretical perspective: the paradox of finding
II 28.16–19	fr.217i–j	linguistic and etymological arguments: <i>a-letheia</i> , <i>Mnemosyne</i>
II 28.20–23	fr.217k–l	theoretical perspective: the paradox of seeking; the results of reflection are found in the soul

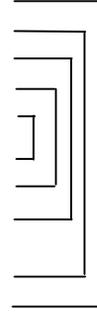
From this summarizing general overview can already be derived several conclusions that raise interesting new questions.

a) First, the lists obviously do not contain a pell-mell of arguments that are all jumbled together in a seemingly haphazard way. On the contrary, the arguments that show a thematic affinity are usually juxtaposed in the list. These general patterns may suggest that this list is indeed drawn up on the basis of a continuous reading of one work. It is true that in Damascius' day the codex had long become popular, which made it much easier to go from one passage to another and consult a work in a quicker and more cursory fashion. At that moment, excerpts could even be made without carefully going through the whole work. But Damascius' source, from which the excerpts were taken, was probably not written on a codex but on a papyrus scroll,²³ and such a scroll was far more difficult to handle. In such circumstances, it is much more likely that the excerptor simply followed the text and systematically singled out the essence of the successive arguments, rather than constantly scrolling back and forth through the book. The implication is that the succession of the different arguments in the list reflects the original, logical composition of Damascius' source.

b) This conclusion, however, immediately entails another difficult question: Damascius I (fr.215–216) obviously shows exactly the opposite structure of Damascius II (fr.217):

²³ The transition from scroll to codex was a gradual one, which only started in the second century A.D. This implies that the works of the Middle Platonists were in all likelihood still written on papyrus scrolls. Only from the fourth century A.D. on had the codex presumably definitively supplanted the scroll; see L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*³ (Oxford 1991) 34–36 and the literature quoted at 251.

- Dam. I 275–277 (= fr.215a–c): *status quaestionis*
- 278–280 (= fr.215d–f): theoretical perspective
- 281–283 (= fr.215g–i): linguistic and etymological arguments
- 284–287 (= fr.215j–m): arguments from experience and daily life
- 288–290 (= fr.216a–c): new-born babies and natural abilities
- 291–292 (= fr.216d–e): reflections about the process of thinking
- II 28.3–5 (= fr.217a–b): reflections about the process of thinking
- 28.6–11 (= fr.217c–f): new-born babies, children, natural abilities
- 28.12–13 (= fr.217g): argument from daily life
- 28.14–15 (= fr.217h): theoretical perspective
- 28.16–19 (= fr.217i–j): linguistic and etymological arguments
- 28.20–23 (= fr.217k–l): theoretical perspective



Which of the two lists has preserved the original order of the arguments? Or do they both deviate from their source? It is extremely difficult to obtain certainty in this matter and I here confine myself to the observation that a few arguments may point to the second list (fr.217) as the one that remains faithful to the original sequence. First it is striking that one argument (Dam. II 28.14–15 = fr.217h) interrupts the logical structure and is resumed further on. Damascius even explicitly calls attention to this awkward repetition (in II 28.20–21 = fr.217k: ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐπιχείρημα πάλιν ἀπὸ τῆς εὐρέσεως), which, moreover, has no corresponding counterpart in Damascius I. Its presence in Damascius II may well be explained by the excerption process: it can be regarded as a remnant of the meandering argumentation in the original source. The more systematic structure of Damascius I (= fr.215–216), which begins with a more fundamental, theoretical perspective and gradually turns to more concrete levels, in order to conclude with some theoretical reflections, would then reflect a later ordering by Damascius himself.²⁴ If that is true, this has two important

²⁴ A further argument in support of this hypothesis is that the order of arguments in Damascius I fits in very well with the general approach that can be found in the *Commentary on the Phaedo*, where Damascius—like Proclus and other Neoplatonists—frequently begins with the more general philosophical questions and only then turns to a more concrete and detailed analysis of the argument. The composition of the other list (Damascius II),

implications: (1) In neither list is the order arbitrary,²⁵ as it reflects respectively the original structure of the source and the didactic systematisation by Damascius. (2) Damascius I is later than Damascius II. This is not the place to deal at length with the relative chronology of the two versions of the *Phaedo* commentary, a topic that will probably repay closer study. I would only add, in this context, that an additional argument for the chronological priority of Damascius II may be the more extensive title of the list in this version (see n.7 above), which suggests closer affinity with the original source.

c) The latter argument, however, is not without problems, since the reliability of the title is far from certain. Opsomer regards these titles as too weak a basis for a certain ascription of the extracts to Plutarch,²⁶ and some caution is indeed appropriate here. Yet it would be unwise, I think, to ignore the information in the titles altogether. It is significant indeed that the explicit reference to Plutarch of Chaeronea occurs in both Damascius I and II. This strongly suggests that Damascius himself referred in his course to the Chaeronean, in other words, that *he himself was convinced that he was dealing with material that should be traced back to one of Plutarch's works*. If the ascription is wrong, the fault does not lie with the *reportatores* but either with Damascius or with his source.

on the other hand, which proceeds from a more superficial to a more fundamental level, recalls parallel structures that can often be found in Plutarch's works: e.g. in *De E apud Delphos*, in his discussion of Socrates' divine sign in *De genio Socratis*, in his *Quaestiones Romanae* (see for this J. Boulogne, "Les 'Questions Romaines' de Plutarque," *ANRW* II.33.6 [1992] 4682–4708); cf. also J. Opsomer, "Ζητήματα: structure et argumentation dans les *Quaestiones Platonicae*," in J. A. Fernández Delgado and F. Pordomingo Pardo (eds.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: Aspectos Formales* (Salamanca 1996) 71–83, and G. Roskam, "Two *Quaestiones Socraticae* in Plutarch," in J. M. Candau Morón, F. J. González Ponce, and A. J. Chávez Reino (eds.), *Plutarco transmisor* (Sevilla 2011) 419–431.

²⁵ *Contra* Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries* II 167.

²⁶ Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth* 201.

d) And this brings us to what is probably the most difficult problem: how or where did Damascius find this material? Either he relied on a previous source or he made the extracts himself. If the *συναγωγή* is Damascius' own work, there can be little doubt about the Plutarchan origin of the fragments. If he found the extracts in (one of) his source(s), things are more complicated. How strong are the arguments for the latter alternative? Is it likely that Damascius basically transcribed material which he found in a previous commentary or work?

It is well known that Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo* primarily rests on two works: the *Phaedo* itself and Proclus' commentary on the dialogue.²⁷ Throughout his whole work, he systematically carries on a critical dialogue with his famous predecessor, summarizing, refuting, and/or completing the latter's interpretation. Often, he simply refers to Proclus as 'the commentator' (ὁ ἐξηγητής), with a self-evidence that illustrates the latter's paramount importance even more than explicit words of praise. This pervasive influence of Proclus suggests that many references to the interpretations of earlier thinkers are likewise taken over from him.²⁸ Yet in my view, it is rather unlikely that the excerpts from Plutarch could already be found in Proclus' *Commentary on the Phaedo*. That would seem to be at odds with the more systematic approach which we know from

²⁷ And of those two, the latter may often have been the more important; cf. G. Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life. Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2000) 137–138, and *Damascius. Commentaire sur le Philèbe de Platon* (Paris 2008) CLXXVII–CLXXIX (both references deal with the *Commentary on the Philebus*).

²⁸ Cf. L. G. Westerink, *Damascius. Lectures on the Philebus Wrongly Attributed to Olympiodorus* (Amsterdam 1959) xxi (on Damascius' *Commentary on the Philebus*): "Damascius was primarily a metaphysician and to all appearances little interested in documentation. It is not rash, therefore, to suppose that for references to older works he relied entirely on Proclus." This view, however, unduly underestimates Damascius' direct acquaintance with other literature than Proclus. To confine myself to only the most obvious example: Damascius in all likelihood read Iamblichus' work himself.

some of Proclus' other commentaries,²⁹ although the *Commentary on the Phaedo* may have been different in this respect. Westerink suggests that "it may have been a conglomerate of various materials, including Syrianus' essay on the argument from opposites and Proclus' work on the myth, comparable to the 'commentary' on the *Republic*, but different from it insofar as it covered the entire dialogue."³⁰ This, of course, is not more than an interesting hypothesis, but even if it is true, there still remains room for doubt about the presence of the excerpts in Proclus' commentary. For the many other references to the interpretations of so-called Middle Platonists that can be found in Damascius and that can *ex hypothesi* (and even with a reasonable amount of plausibility) be traced back to Proclus are all fully incorporated into the exegetical discussion. There are apparently no parallels of separate lists of material derived from 'Middle Platonists' in Proclus' extant works.³¹

The listing of such previous material is much more in line with Damascius' own method of working. We may here recall the way in which he makes use of Proclus. Often, he confines himself to the core of Proclus' interpretation. The meticulous detailed analysis of each passage, with particular attention to Socrates' argumentative strategies and his way of taking into account the peculiar condition of his interlocutors, as we know it from Proclus' *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, is almost entirely absent in Damascius. Only a few vague and short allu-

²⁹ Cf. A.-J. Festugière, "Modes de composition des Commentaires de Proclus," *MusHelv* 20 (1963) 77–100.

³⁰ L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo I Olympiodorus* (Amsterdam/Oxford/New York 1976) 18.

³¹ But what if the excerpts should after all be traced back to Plutarch of Athens? One might argue indeed that Proclus' *Commentary on the Phaedo* was probably composed under the tutelage of Plutarch of Athens, on the basis of notes taken of Proclus' seminars with him on the *Phaedo*. But apart from the fact that the excerpts rather suggest a Middle Platonist context (cf. 2.1a above), one would have to suppose that Damascius simply confused the Plutarchs (given the fact that the *reportatores* both refer to the Chaeronean).

sions may perhaps be detected here and there,³² and if such passages are indeed inspired by Proclus, they reflect exactly the same approach that also returns in the extracts from Plutarch. In both cases, all flesh and sinews are removed: Proclus' skeleton meets that of Plutarch.

3.2. All this seems to suggest that the *συναγωγή* is indeed the work of Damascius and that the material stems from Plutarch. What are the implications of this hypothesis?

At this point, it is useful to have a closer look at the more general composition of Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo*. The work is in fact a strange amalgam, a hotchpotch of disconnected observations and more extensive discussions, peppered with references to the interpretations of previous thinkers. Damascius' discussion of the first argument (the 'argument from opposites'), for instance, has the following structure:³³

- general analysis (including a brief *status quaestionis*) followed by some detailed observations (I 176–182)
- a lengthy discussion of Syrianus' interpretation (183–206)
- a monograph on the issue by Damascius himself (207–252)

It is clear that this is a well-considered structure, starting from a direct discussion of the text and culminating in a systematic presentation of Damascius' own contribution to the interpretation of the dialogue. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that Damascius made an in-depth study of this section of the *Phaedo*, as his study even resulted in a separate monograph.³⁴ This is not without importance for the next sections of the work: we

³² E.g. *In Phd.* I 360, 397, 398, 404 (*ad fin.*), 562.

³³ For a detailed analysis of this section of Damascius' commentary see S. R. P. Gertz, *Death and Immortality in Late Neoplatonism. Studies on the Ancient Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* (Leiden/Boston 2011) 80–95. The next section (on the 'argument from recollection') is discussed on 97–112, but the alleged extracts from Plutarch are mentioned only in passing (101 n.7).

³⁴ Characterized by Gertz, *Death and Immortality* 191–192, as "a particularly impressive work of exegesis ... which can compete with any modern study of the argument in terms of rigour and logical sophistication."

should bear in mind that Damascius is here at least doing much more than simply transcribing and commenting upon Proclus. If he is able to do this here, then elsewhere too.

Against this background, we can now turn to Damascius' interpretation of the second argument (the 'argument from recollection'). It is in this section that occur the extracts from Plutarch. Its general structure is as follows:

- general discussion of the topic of recollection (I 253–261 ~ II 4–11)
- analysis of the argument in the *Phaedo*
 - κεφάλαια and systematic survey of the syllogisms (I 262–265 ~ II 12–14)
 - detailed observations and short discussion on the section about the Forms (I 266–274 ~ II 15–23)
- extracts from Plutarch (I 275–292 ~ II 28)
- exegetic questions and notes (I 293–310 ~ II 24–27)

In all likelihood, Damascius also studied this section of the *Phaedo* very thoroughly. Especially significant in this respect is his general discussion of the topic of recollection at the outset. The only explicit reference to a Platonic dialogue in this section is not to the *Phaedo* but to the *Theaetetus* (191C8–E1, in Dam. I 257), which seems to suggest that Damascius was interested in a fuller exploration of the theme, beyond the specific context of the dialogue he was commenting upon.³⁵ The excerpts from Plutarch could point in the same direction: they may be regarded as the fruit of Damascius' careful study of the Platonic theory of recollection in general.

This casts a different light on Simplicius' well-known characterization of Damascius as an ἀνὴρ ζητητικώτατος (*In Phys.* 624.38). Damascius was an acute, penetrating thinker, always

³⁵ We should be careful, however, not to make too much of this observation: the clear reference to 'the commentator' at I 257 shows that Damascius was even in this more general section inspired by the *Phaedo* commentary of his predecessor. The similarities between Damascius' and Olympiodorus' discussions (on which see Gertz, *Death and Immortality* 109–110) further confirm this conclusion.

looking for the truth, and with a particular gift for raising critical and challenging questions, but he was no less a painstaking author who scrutinized the previous tradition in search of interesting insights. At the same time, this passage from Damascius thus qualifies the generally accepted hypothesis that all the references to the Middle Platonists that can be found in later Neoplatonic commentaries are transmitted through the learned Porphyry.³⁶ To the extent that this hypothesis is substantially correct, this passage from Damascius proves to be a noteworthy exception.

But if Damascius indeed also examined different aspects of the ‘argument from recollection’ in detail, in this case the results of his close study and his wide reading have not been developed into a separate treatise. The question then remains why he decided to introduce all this material into his commentary. Is this *Vorstudien* or *Bausteine* for a treatise that was never written? Although it can perhaps not be excluded that the commentary contains material that has already been reworked in view of a possible monograph,³⁷ the main reason(s) should most likely be sought elsewhere. In my view, at least two elements are important for a better understanding of Damascius’ decision.

First there is a pedagogical reason. We know that the *Phaedo* was read at a relatively early stage of the Platonic curriculum

³⁶ See e.g. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries* I 14; J. Dillon, “Pedantry and Pedestrianism? Some Reflections on the Middle Platonic Commentary Tradition,” in H. Tarrant and D. Baltzly (eds.), *Reading Plato in Antiquity* (London 2006) 19; H. Dörrie and M. Baltes, *Der Platonismus im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus. Bausteine 73–100* (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt 1993) 171.

³⁷ We may here point to the function of Dam. I 293–297, a further series of problems and arguments related to the topic of recollection that has more than once been traced back to Plutarch as well, although the reference to Bion (I 293) obviously opens a new section. If this series includes Plutarchan material, this may have been isolated from the list of other extracts (in Dam. I 275–292) in view of its possible direct relevance in the discussion of the second argument. This may also explain the different order in Damascius II, where this additional series (II 24–27) precedes the list of extracts (II 28).

(Anon. *Prolog. Plat. phil.* 26.33–34). In such a context, it was definitely appropriate to introduce the students to the positions of different exegetes of the rich Platonic tradition.³⁸ And thus, throughout Damascius' commentary, many references can be found to Proclus (of course) but also to a great many other commentators and thinkers, both important and less important figures. The student who attends the whole course becomes acquainted with a significant part of the Platonic interpretative tradition on the *Phaedo* and encounters views of Speusippus, Xenocrates, Onetor, Numenius, Atticus, Harpocration, Longinus, Democritus, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Theodorus of Asine, Paterius, Plutarch of Athens, Syrianus, and so on. Moreover, in each of his discussions of the different arguments from the *Phaedo*, Damascius more specifically focuses on the position of one thinker:

argument from opposites:	Syrianus (I 183–206)
argument from recollection:	Plutarch (I 275–292 ~ II 28)
argument from similarity:	Plotinus (I 311 ~ II 29)
argument on harmony:	Aristotle (I 383–387; Strato in II 63–65)
final argument:	Strato (I 431–448 ~ II 78)

A careful study of Damascius' course on the *Phaedo* thus amounts to a partial introduction to the age-old tradition of the school. Next to precise analysis, the commentary includes, as it were, a kind of 'Platonist reader on the immortality of the soul'. And Damascius' choice of principal authors is perhaps not so surprising after all. Strato could not be ignored, being the principal opponent to the Platonists in this field. Aristotle, Syrianus, and even Plotinus were no less obvious choices. But why Plutarch? Damascius apparently saw no problem in giving him this prominent place. Did he also have positive reasons to do so?

These may be found in the second element announced above, that is, the historical circumstances and more precisely

³⁸ The same, by the way, holds true for Damascius' course on the *Philebus*, which was taught at a much later stage in the Platonic curriculum.

Damascius' precarious position as scholarch of the school of Athens. After Proclus' death, the school passed through a difficult period of transition, and, moreover, the late Platonists had to cope with the virulent opposition of Christianity, which may have persuaded more than one student of Damascius to adopt a cautious, compromising, and less 'orthodox' position.³⁹ In such a context, a dialogue with many distinguished predecessors is not a mere display of erudition: it is a return to one's intellectual roots and a way to define and underline one's own identity. This explains both the paramount importance of Proclus⁴⁰ and the many references to other thinkers throughout Damascius' commentary. It may also help to explain his interest in Plutarch. For Plutarch of Chaeronea was a famous and respected author,⁴¹ even in Christian circles. Damascius' decision to appropriate him prominently in his commentary and thus place him firmly within the Platonic tradition to which he in fact belonged may seem surprising at first sight, but on closer inspection turns out to be particularly intelligent. It illustrates Damascius' wide reading and thus adds to his authority—a strategy which characterizes the former professor of rhetoric no less than the later scholarch. Moreover, it indirectly underlines the unity of the Platonic tradition and allows Damascius to turn Plutarch's wide renown to the benefit of his own school.

³⁹ On Damascius' care for orthodoxy see P. Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif de Numénius à Damascius* (Paris 2006) 191–221.

⁴⁰ Cf. L. G. Westerink, "Damascius, Commentateur de Platon," in C. J. De Vogel, H. Dörrie, and E. Zum Brunn (eds.), *Le Néoplatonisme* (Paris 1971) 255; Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life* 138, and "Damascius," in L. P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2010) 672. For a more general survey of Damascius' attitude to Proclus see J. Combès, "Proclus et Damascius," in G. Boss and G. Seel (eds.), *Proclus et son influence* (Zurich 1987) 221–246.

⁴¹ Cf. n.1 above. For Plutarch's significant influence on pre-Plotinian Platonists see H. Tarrant, "Platonism before Plotinus," in *The Cambridge History* 71.

4. Back to Plutarch

In light of the preceding reflections, we can finally return briefly to the question of the precise origin of the fragments. If Damascius' ascription of the extracts to Plutarch is indeed reliable, from what work did he gather them?

In a famous passage of the *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, the author promises his addressee to send him a copy of what is said in the *Phaedo*, with comments (120E). This is a very interesting passage, but unfortunately it raises more problems than it solves. The authenticity of the work is uncertain⁴² and it is no less uncertain whether extensive and systematic commentaries were already written at that time. The extant evidence in fact suggests a negative answer: authors probably preferred to focus on particularly difficult isolated passages (as Plutarch did in his *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*). Yet some scraps of Middle Platonist commentaries on the *Phaedo* have come down to us,⁴³ and especially worth mentioning in this context is the anonymous lemmatic *Commentary on the Theaetetus*, which refers to a *Commentary on the Phaedo* for a discussion of the topic of recollection (48.7–11). Turning to Plutarch: there can be no doubt that he was thoroughly familiar with the *Phaedo*. He often refers to the dialogue, both to its narrative parts, to different arguments, and to points of detail,⁴⁴ yet apart from the controversial passage from the *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, there is no evidence at all of a *Plutarchus in Phaedonem*, and it is very unlikely that such a Plutarchan *Phaedo* commentary would be the source of the extracts in Damascius.

A possible alternative is a lost work on the immortality of the soul. The Lamprias catalogue in fact contains several titles of

⁴² A thorough discussion can be found in Hani, *Plutarque. Consolation à Apollonios* 27–43.

⁴³ See Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries* I 9–13, and Dörrie and Baltes, *Der Platonismus* 185–192.

⁴⁴ See R. M. Jones, *The Platonism of Plutarch* (Menasha 1916) 115–116 and 142–144; W. C. Helmbold and E. N. O'Neil, *Plutarch's Quotations* (Baltimore 1959) 58–59.

such works,⁴⁵ and from one of them (Περὶ ψυχῆς, no. 209), we have a few interesting fragments⁴⁶ that even have some features in common with the extracts in Damascius, though the correspondences are, once again, fairly general (etymological speculations, the theme of sleep, the importance of practical experience). These fragments, however, do not deal with the doctrine of recollection, and this is not without importance. In fact, the link between recollection and immortality can nowhere be found in the *Corpus Plutarcheum* (and we may add that Plutarch, strikingly enough, never refers to Plato's 'argument from recollection' in his extant works). The topic of the soul's immortality is usually elaborated in Platonically inspired myths.

The link between these fragments on recollection and the question of the soul's immortality, then, is only suggested by their presence in Damascius' commentary on the *Phaedo*. It rests on the presupposition that Damascius confined himself in his reading to works that focused on the *Phaedo* and more precisely that the work from which he excerpted also dealt with the immortality of the soul. This presupposition, however, is not without problems. We saw that the section about the argument from recollection in Damascius' commentary began with a general introduction to the theory of recollection, without specific reference to the *Phaedo*. This observation makes it plausible that Damascius borrowed his material from a work that did not directly discuss the topic of the soul's immortality but rather dealt with an epistemological issue (and was as such inspired by the *Meno* or the *Theaetetus* rather than the *Phaedo*). We could think of lost works such as *What is understanding* (Τί τὸ συνιέναι, Lamprias catalogue no. 144; connected with no. 146, *That understanding is impossible*, "Ὅτι οὐδὲν ἔστι συνιέναι) or *How*

⁴⁵ Περὶ τοῦ γνῶθι σαυτὸν καὶ εἰ ἀθάνατος ἡ ψυχὴ (no. 177) and "Ὅτι ἀφθαρτος ἡ ψυχὴ (no. 226).

⁴⁶ See the recent discussion by Bonazzi, in *Les dialogues platoniciens* 75–89. The authenticity of the fragments is usually accepted, but rejected by J. Boulogne, "L'âme et le corps chez Plutarque à partir du Περὶ ψυχῆς (fragments 173–178 Sandbach)," *Humanitas* 55 (2003) 11–27.

shall we determine truth? (Πῶς κρινοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, no. 225).⁴⁷ Alternatives are *An introduction to the soul, in three volumes* (Περὶ ψυχῆς εἰσαγωγῆς βιβλία γ', no. 48) or even more general works such as *Solutions of problems* (Ἀποριῶν λύσεις, no. 170).⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ Although the latter work may have had a more historical orientation; cf. in fact catalogue no. 124: Πῶς κρινοῦμεν τὴν ἀληθῆ ἱστορίαν.

⁴⁸ I am much indebted to J. Opsomer and G. Van Riel, and to the anonymous referees of the journal, for their valuable suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of this article.