Epicurean Myth Rationalization in Plutarch's *De latenter vivendo* and Lucretius' Catalogue of Underworld Torments

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Plutarch of Chaeronea, fittingly for a Platonist, engaged with Epicurus and his followers on a variety of topics, such as physics, ethics, politics, psychology, theology, eschatology, and so on.[1] Many of these converge in the short treatise *De latenter vivendo*, which takes aim at the Epicurean adage "live unnoticed."[2] The conclusion takes the form of a mythic pronouncement on the fates of the dead. It begins with a description of the dwelling of the pious—a sunny and rose-red place, embellished by a couplet of Pindar—where they spend their time together philosophically, in remembrance and conversation (1130C).[3] The dwelling of the wicked is described

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[1] Several accounts adduce examples of Plutarch's hostility toward Epicurus and his thought: R. Flacelière, "Plutarque et l'épicurisme," in *Epicurea in memoriam Hectoris Bignone* (Genoa 1959) 197–215; J. Hershbell, "Plutarch and Epicureanism," *ANRW* II 36.5 (1992) 3353–3383; U. Berner, "Plutarch und Epikur," in U. Berner et al. (eds.), *Plutarch. Ist "Lebe im Verborgenen" eine gute Lebensregel?* (Darmstadt 2000) 117–139. J. Opsomer, "Is Plutarch Really Hostile to the Stoics?" in T. Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *From Stoicism to Platonism* (Cambridge 2017) 296–321, contrasts his unrelenting attitude toward Epicureans with his relatively softer attitude toward Stoics, who he expects could reform and become Platonists. See also J. Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir de l'Epicure* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2003).

[2] On this adage see G. Roskam, *Live Unnoticed: On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Leiden/Boston 2007).

[3] The same passage of Pindar (fr.129 S.-M.) is quoted more fully in *Cons. ad Ap.* 120D. On the contentious issue of that work's authenticity see J. Hani, *Plutarque. Consolation à Apollonios* (Paris 1972), esp. 27–43. Plutarch also quotes

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as a "third path" (τρίτη … ὁδός), where the souls (ψυχάς) of those who lived impiously and lawlessly—namely, given the context, Epicureans—are shoved "into some darkness and pit" (εἰς ἔρε- βός τι καὶ βάραθρον, 1130C–D).[4] But the argument startlingly shifts when Plutarch rejects the traditional punishments of the underworld as if they are enacted not upon *souls*, but rather upon *bodies* (1130D):

> οὐ γὰρ οὔτε γῦπες κειμένων ἐν γῇ τῶν πονηρῶν κείρουσιν ἀεὶ τὸ ἧπαρ (κατακέκαυται γὰρ ἢ κατασέσηπεν), οὔτε βαρῶν τινων ἀχθοφορίαι θλίβουσι καὶ καταπονοῦσι τὰ σώματα τῶν κολαζο- μένων ("οὐ γὰρ ἔτι σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα ἶνες ἔχουσιν," οὐδ' ἔστιν ὑπόλειμμα σώματος τοῖς τεθνηκόσι τιμωρίας ἀπέρεισιν ἀντι- τύπου δέξασθαι δυνάμενον).

> For vultures do not constantly ravage the livers of the wicked lying in the earth—for the body has burned up or rotted away—nor do heavy burdens oppress and subdue the bodies of men suffering punishment—"for the sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones" [Hom. *Od.* 11.219] nor can the remnants of the corpses endure the infliction of rigid punishment.

Plutarch thus alludes to two of the "famous sinners" whom Odysseus saw suffering in the Homeric underworld—Tityus, condemned to suffer as two vultures devour his entrails every day as punishment for attempting to assault Leto, and Sisyphus, forever thrusting a stone uphill before it inevitably tumbles back down.[5] He presents these traditional torments as corporeal and stresses the absurdity of abusing decomposing corpses as if it could be some kind of meaningful punishment. Instead, he sug- gests another sort of sentence (1130E):

from Pindar's *Threnoi* (fr.130) in *De lat. viv.* 1130D; see also *Quomodo adul.* 17B– E.

[4] There is some disagreement about whether any text has been lost (or if so, how much) because of the phrase "third path" without a "second": see G. Roskam, *A Commentary on Plutarch's De latenter vivendo* (Leuven 2007) 217–218.

[5] *Od.* 11.576–581, 593–600. Plutarch mentions the first and last of the three presented in Homer in the same order and so implies the complete set that includes Tantalus as well.

ἀλλ᾽ ἓν κολαστήριον ὡς ἀληθῶς τῶν κακῶς βιωσάντων, ἀδοξία
καὶ ἄγνοια καὶ παντελῶς ἀφανισμός, αἴρων εἰς τὸν ἀμειδῆ
ποταμὸν [ἀπὸ] τῆς Λήθης <καὶ> καταποντίζων εἰς ἄβυσσον καὶ
ἀχανὲς πέλαγος, ἀχρηστίαν καὶ ἀπραξίαν πᾶσάν τ᾽ ἄγνοιαν καὶ
ἀδοξίαν συνεφελκόμενον.[6]

But there is truly one means of correcting those who live wickedly:
obscurity and anonymity and complete concealment, lifting them
from Lethe into the mirthless river, and plunging them into the
bottomless and yawning sea, drawing in every bit of uselessness
and laziness and anonymity and obscurity along with them.

Plutarch takes another traditional image from the underworld,
the river Lethe, and expands it into a vast ocean of oblivion. Its
inhabitants not only forget in the active sense—the most
notorious result of drinking from the mythic river—but they are
themselves passively forgotten as well.[7]

    This eschatological excursus, however, leaves many uncer-
tainties. This is the first mention in *De latenter* of any sort of
afterlife, so why does Plutarch reject traditional punishments
that have been nowhere suggested? What, moreover, is the exact
subject that suffers this punishment? The argument has shifted
from souls to bodies, but why would plunging a corpse into ob-
scure depths be any more significant than crushing its bones with
boulders? Perhaps the punishment of bodies has only been intro-
duced to negate the absurdity and the argument shifts back to
souls, which could be meaningfully said to suffer obscurity and
oblivion. Yet, while Plutarch occasionally constructs eschato-
logical myths in the style of Plato to further his argument, he
always attributes them to a character in a dialogue, who in turn

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[6] The emendations are broadly adopted, for example implicitly by
Roskam, *A Commentary* 162.

[7] F. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives*
(Leiden 1977) 24, aptly detects a pun lurking in the context of *De latenter* be-
tween Λήθη and λάθε. Although Lethe appears in the earliest attestations as
a river plain, such as in Aristophanes' *Ranae* (τὸ Λήθης πεδίον, 186) and Plato's
myth of Er (τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδίον, *Resp.* 621A), eventually, the plain became
assimilated with the river, e.g. in Virgil's *Aeneid* (*Lethaei ad fluminis undam*, 6.714)
and Lucian's *Dialogi mortuorum* (τὸ Λήθης ὕδωρ χανδόν, 13.6).

claims an exotic source or authority for the myth, unlike this treatise *in prima persona*.[8] The sudden and surprising shift to mythic narrative in *De latenter* is thus unique in the corpus.

Scholars generally focus on the philosophical content, however, rather than the form of the contention. Frederick Brenk, for instance, treats the mythic portion of *De latenter* merely as one instance of Plutarch's broader argument against corporeal punishment in the underworld.[9] Plutarch maintains a degree of skepticism about the fate of souls after death, but when he does speculate, such as in the mythic narrative that concludes the dialogue *De facie in orbe lunae*, he describes souls leaving bodies behind upon death, and wicked souls, rather than wicked bodies, suffering punishments that serve to purify them from bodily corruption (ἀφαγνεῦσαι καὶ ἀποπνεῦσαι <τοὺς> ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος, 943C).[10] Bodily punishment after death is therefore as much an absurdity for a body-soul dualist like Plutarch as for pure materialists such as Epicurus and Lucretius. But this point would be relatively trivial and hence fails to explain why Plutarch ends *De latenter* with such a pronouncement. How would it contribute to the refutation of Epicurus? Geert Roskam argues that "in rejecting such punishments, Plutarch comes fairly close to the Epicurean position." He goes on to conclude, however, that Plutarch is radically different because "his rejection proves to be based on the Platonic dualism between the mortal body and the immortal soul, whereas the Epicurean position presupposes the view of death as disintegration into atoms."[11] This interpretation

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[8] Plutarch ends dialogues with myths in *De fac.* 940F–945D and *De sera* 563B–568F—like Plato in *Grg.* 522E–527E, *Phd.* 107E–115A, and *Resp.* 614A–621D—and includes one in the middle of *De genio socratis* 589F–592E—like Plato in *Phdr.* 246A–257B and *Plt.* 268D–275A.

[9] Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled* 22–23, comparing *De sera* 564F, 565D–E. See also R. Jones, *The Platonism of Plutarch* (Menasha 1916) 66–67, and Hershbell, *ANRW* II 36.5 (1992) 3378.

[10] Cf. Theon in *Non posse* 1107B.

[11] Roskam, *A Commentary* 219, cf. 159–173. See also Berner, in *Plutarch* 127.

still does not explain why Plutarch stresses the corporeal details, such as the inability of rotting flesh to withstand weight.

The affinity with Epicurus that Roskam detected, I argue, is better understood as a similarity in argumentative or rhetorical technique, rather than in doctrinal position. The final portion of the treatise requires a distinctly Epicurean form of interpreting myths about the underworld as distorted projections of the miseries that humans inflict upon themselves in life. Lucretius provides exactly this sort of rationalization of the traditional myths about afterlife punishments (3.978–1023).[12] Although people fear the tortures in the underworld, he assures the reader (3.978–979), "Certainly, whatever things appear to spring up from deep Acheron, each is present among us in life" (*in uita sunt omnia nobis*). These stories, rather than foreboding corporeal tortures after death, arise from sufferings that people inflict upon themselves in life because of their mistaken ideas. The first example is the paralyzing fear of the gods (3.980–983):

> *nec miser impendens magnum timet aere saxum*
> *Tantalus, ut famast, cassa formidine torpens;*
> *sed magis in uita diuum metus urget inanis*
> *mortalis casumque timent quem cuique ferat fors.*

> Miserable Tantalus does not fear a stone hanging in the air, as it is said, dumbstruck with hollow fear. But rather, the empty fear of the gods besets mortals in life, and they fear whatever fortune that chance should bring upon each.[13]

There is no subterranean rock hanging over a dead man, Lucretius argues, but the false belief that comprises the real phenomenon of crippling superstition—*that* is what truly must be feared. Plutarch is apparently familiar with this same rationalization of the myth of Tantalus. In *De superstitione*, he similarly characterizes the superstitious man (δεισιδαίμων) by comparing the mythic king's punishment (170F):

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[12] Shortly before, the personification of nature attempted to dissipate fear of infernal punishments (3.966): *nec quisquam in barathrum nec Tartara deditur atra* ("nor is anyone given into the abyss or black Tartarus").

[13] Cf. S. Holm, "The Specter of Tantalus," *TAPA* 143 (2013) 385–403, esp. 389–392.

καίτοι γ’ ὥσπερ ὁ Τάνταλος ὑπεκδῦναι τὸν λίθον ἐπαιωρούμενον οὕτω καὶ οὗτος τὸν φόβον ὡς οὐχ ἧττον ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πιεζόμενος ἀγαπήσειεν ἄν, καὶ μακαρίσειε τὴν τοῦ ἀθέου διάθεσιν ὡς ἐλευθέριον.

Certainly, just as Tantalus would love to slip out from beneath the overhanging stone, so too this man, compressed by this fear, would no less love to escape it and praise the disposition of the atheist because it is freer.

Plutarch invokes the same myth as Lucretius in a strikingly similar manner: as a representation of the oppressive fear of the divine that hangs over the superstitious.[14] Cicero (*Tusc.* 4.35), in contrast, compares the same version of the myth but identifies the overhanging stone, the *poena stultitiae* ("punishment of stupidity"), as *aegritudo* ("mental distress") in general. Plutarch, however, takes the stone to represent the psychic affliction of superstition in particular. Although he attacks Epicurean atheism alongside excessive fear of the gods more broadly in *De superstitione*, his inversion of Tantalus’ punishment takes it to represent the exact same misery as Lucretius’ rationalization.[15]

The fearsome afterlife threatened to Epicureans in *De latenter*, I argue, ought to be understood by applying this exact sort of rationalization. Plutarch’s true punishment for the impious, passing entirely from memory, is what, he charges throughout *De latenter*, Epicureans inflict upon themselves in life: they willingly *choose* to live in shameful and unpleasant obscurity. This passage recalls earlier images in the treatise. Just as a disused

[14] This non-Homeric (cf. *Od.* 11.582–592) version of Tantalus’ punishment is rather prominent (e.g. Pind. *Ol.* 1.55–58 and Eur. *Or.* 4–10) and Plutarch evidently had several potential sources for the myth (cf. *De ex.* 603A, 607F). He particularly quotes Archilochus fr.91.14–15 West, which explicitly mentions the stone: μηδ’ ὁ Ταντάλου λίθος / τῆσδ’ ὑπὲρ νήσου κρεμάσθω ("nor let Tantalus’ stone hang over this island"). According to Pausanias (10.31.12), one of Archilochus’ poems had a version that combined both the stone and the Homeric punishment.

[15] Esp. 164E–165C, 171E–F. On the coherence of the treatise with the rest of Plutarch’s corpus see e.g. A. Nikolaidis, "Plutarch’s Contradictions," *AncW* 25 (1994) 213–222, at 216. Cf. D. Martin, *Inventing Superstition* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2004) 98–107.

house sinks away over time, so too a man's character drags (ἐφελκόμενον) rust and old age after it when it suffers inaction and obscurity (1129D); the impious dead similarly drag (συν-εφελκόμενον) their anonymity and uselessness along with them to the depths (1130E). Plutarch's imagistic conclusion empha-sizes the treatise's main line of ethical argument: this dreary, forgotten existence after death is just a continuation of the same miserable condition Epicureans choose for themselves. Rather than understanding from the mythic pronouncement a literal sea of oblivion and obscurity after death, he expects his op-ponents to apply the typical Epicurean remedy and so, protest-ing that lifeless corpses cannot possibly care if they disintegrate submerged in darkness, to realize that the truly dreadful pun-ishment is the unpleasant life of obscurity. A closer examination of Lucretius' imagistic interpretations reveals critical *differentia* between his Epicurean rationalizations and other interpretations of underworld myths, such as Socrates' of the leaky jars in Plato's *Gorgias*. While it is unclear whether these rationalizations are Lucretius' innovation or his adaptation of Epicurus, Plutarch's exploitation of their form in the anti-Epicurean polemic of *De latenter* demonstrates that he considers them characteristically Epicurean, given his proclivity for turning his opponents' argu-ments against themselves.

Lucretius' exhortation against fear of infernal punishment

Lucretius' *De rerum natura* consistently depicts mistaken notions about what happens in death as the among the greatest delusions in human life.[16] Before Epicurean philosophy, he argues, people were unable to resist the superstitious forebodings of seers about life after death, such as when Ennius claims to have seen the ghost of Homer (1.120–126). Later, he systematically addresses the particular vulnerability of the sleeping mind to delusional images or shades (*simulacra*), which he uses to explain how beliefs in absurd notions of life after death can arise (3.35–45).[17]

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[16] Cf. J. Warren, *Facing Death* (Oxford 2004) 3–7.

[17] On dreams in Lucretius see C. Segal, "Dreams and Poets in Lucretius," *ICS* 15 (1990) 251–262.

Together with the dread of divine punishment, another of the worst sources of needless anxiety according to Lucretius, this delusion leads to paralyzing fears of punishment after death. The third book strenuously argues that the soul is purely material and consequently mortal. The proem fittingly introduces the image of the men who absurdly attempt to appease infernal powers as a foil for the tranquility and freedom from fear that Epicurean philosophy uniquely provides (3.41–54).

The series of rationalizations of infernal punishments towards the end of the book is an especially emphatic dispersion of the traditional terrors of myth. After describing Tantalus, beset by the constantly overhanging fear of the gods, Lucretius argues that Sisyphus cannot shoulder a rock in the underworld, but rather is a living man of a sort we see constantly (*uita quoque nobis ante oculos est*), "he who resolves to seek *fasces* and savage axes from the people, and always comes away sad and defeated—for to seek power which is empty and never given, and in seeking this to always endure harsh toil, this is to shove up an inclined mountain a wearying rock that nevertheless rolls back down" (3.995–1002). The truly fearsome fate is what men subject themselves to because of their immense greed and ambition, an unstable and painful life of anxious striving.[18] The logic is similar to that of a simile: the verbal action of vainly pushing a boulder up a hill is what allows Lucretius to identify the truly fearsome verbal action, vainly striving after power and influence, by its similarity to that of the myth.

Lucretius more explicitly expounds his rationale for rejecting the myth of vultures that devour the guts of Tityus forever. Eventually nothing will be left to consume (3.984–991):

nec Tityon uolucres ineunt Acherunte iacentem
nec quod sub magno scrutentur pectore quicquam
perpetuam aetatem possunt reperire profecto.
quamlibet immani proiectu corporis exstet,

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[18] On the political significance of this passage see J. Fish, "Not All Politicians are Sisyphus: What Roman Epicureans were Taught about Politics," in J. Fish and K. Sanders (eds.), *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (Cambridge 2011) 72–104, esp. 76–81.

qui non sola nouem dispessis iugera membris
obtineat, sed qui terrai totius orbem,
non tamen aeternum poterit perferre dolorem
nec praebere cibum proprio de corpore semper.

Birds do not penetrate Tityus as he lies in Acheron, nor surely are
they able to find whatever it is they seek under his great chest for
everlasting time. However much his immense body extends, even
if his outstretched limbs reach over not just many expanses but
the length of the entire world, he will not be able to suffer eternal
pain, nor to always provide food from his own body.

The mythical assailant of Leto must be long dead, Lucretius
jeers, and any meat he could have once provided, no matter
what fantastically implausible exaggerations about his size are
granted, must have disappeared long ago. No body, a temporary
assembly of smaller material, can remain composed forever.
Rather, the figure represents a common self-torturer everyone
knows in life, the lover consumed with lustful passion: "Tityus is
here among us (*nobis hic est*), he whom, lying in love, birds tear
up and anxious distress consumes or cares from whatever other
desire cut him" (3.992–994). The maddened life of vain love is
the real object of fear, the source of the absurd delusion of under-
world vultures devouring an immense corpse.[19] The logic that
justifies the interpretation of Sisyphus is similar but less explicit.
Because the literal idea of a corpse eternally punished by a
boulder in the underworld is silly—insofar as corpses decompose
and thus cannot withstand or exert pressure—Lucretius explains
the inspiration for the story as the suffering that the ambitious
inflict upon themselves in life because of their deluded passions.

Lucretius also includes a brief smattering of other examples
but concludes with a general principle (3.1014–1023):[20]

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[19] Lucretius' identification of this living referent is fitting for Tityus, whose
attempted crime was an extreme instance of sexual violence.

[20] After Sisyphus, Lucretius summarizes other underworld terrors (3.1011–
1013): "Cerberus and again Furies and the lack of light, Tartarus breathing
out horrifying heats from its maws, which never exist and surely are not able

sed metus in uita poenarum pro male factis
est insignibus insignis, scelerisque luella,
carcer et horribilis de saxo iactu' deorsum,
uerbera carnifices robur pix lammina taedae;
quae tamen etsi absunt, at mens sibi conscia factis
praemetuens adhibet stimulos torretque flagellis,
nec uidet interea qui terminus esse malorum
possit nec quae sit poenarum denique finis
atque eadem metuit magis haec ne in morte grauescant.
hic Acherusia fit stultorum denique uita.

But there is in life fear of punishments for crimes—a conspicuous fear on account of conspicuously awful deeds—prison and downward plunge from the stone, blows, executioners, stocks, pitch, red-hot plates, torches; but even though these things are absent, the mind, conscious of its deeds, preemptively fears and holds the goads at a distance, dreads the floggings, and does not see meanwhile what limit there could possibly be to pains nor what eventual end of punishments, and so fears these same things more lest they grow heavy in death. Life here in the end becomes the Acheron of idiots.[21]

Humans fear material harm in the living world, but their intense passions distort these immediate fears, Lucretius argues, into absurd fantasies of infernal punishments in without end. By extension, it seems that other miseries in life are similarly distorted into even more painful fates after death. This satisfies a substantial burden for Lucretius' Epicurean system: it explains how traditional beliefs in something that seems supernatural could arise through an entirely natural and human phenomenon, such as the distortion of fears in life into a delusion of life

to exist" (*qui neque sunt usquam nec possunt esse profecto*). P. Schrijvers, "Sur quelques aspects de la critique du mythe chez Lucrèce," in G. Carratelli (ed.), *Συζήτησις* (Naples 1983) 353–371, at 369, draws attention to the physically absurd combination in the last example: "l'absence de lumière et la présence d'un feu effroyable."

[21] K. Kleve, "Lucretius and Philodemus," in K. Algra et al. (eds.), *Lucretius and his Intellectual Background* (Amsterdam 1997) 49–66, at 60, compares Philodemus *De mort.* col. 22.2–9.

after death.[22] These false and baneful myths must be explained away by tracing them back to the real source of fear in the material world.[23]

Much of the scholarship, however, argues that Lucretius' rationalizations are either un-Epicurean or originate from another philosophical persuasion. Richard Heinze's influential commentary traces most of Book 3 back to Epicurus, but nevertheless argues that the "allegorische Interpretation" in this passage requires a conception of poetry containing a higher level of truth ("anderen und höheren Werth").[24] Monica Gale modifies this position by attributing at least the claim that "the stories were inventions of the poets" to Epicurus, but nevertheless argues that the instantiated interpretations of myths are Lucretius' innovation because he "seems to exploit allegorical exegesis in a more positive way, and also betrays the influence of earlier allegorism."[25] This "positive" exegesis seems to better describe the physical allegorization of the names of the gods that is usually associated with Stoic interpretation. Lucretius indeed refers to this mode of allegorization after his description of the Magna Mater (esp. 2.655–660), but these rationalizations of underworld myths are rather different:[26] the former allegorizations of mythic

[22] Lucretius similarly explains the origin of beliefs in satyrs and pans as the misunderstanding of a natural phenomenon (4.572–594): sounds echo in rustic places, where such mythic creatures are thought to dwell. D. Konstan, *Some Aspects of Epicurean Psychology* (Leiden 1973) 22–33, argues that the explanation of how stories about underworld punishment falsely arise is crucial for Epicurus' psychological project: unless the fears of these sorts of mythic tortures are scientifically dismantled, there is reason to doubt that death really is nothing to us.

[23] E.g. Epicurus *RS* 11, Lucr. 3.1053–1075, Plut. *Non posse* 1092B.

[24] R. Heinze, *T. Lucretius Carus: De rerum natura Buch III* (Leipzig 1897) 184.

[25] M. Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge 1994) 36–37 with n.133. Gale's interpretation of this passage has proved influential, see e.g. E. Kenney, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura Book III* (Cambridge 2014) 209. Cf. P. Brown, *Lucretius: De Rerum Natura III* (Warminster 1997) 208.

[26] See also Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.40–41 and Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 367C–E. M. Garani, *Empedocles Redivivus: Poetry and Analogy in Lucretius* (London/New York 2007)

names emphasize the hidden truth in myths so as to defend their value, whereas the latter rationalizations explain them away by revealing through Epicurean psychology how they falsely arose.[27]

Heinze suggested other philosophical sources as the true originators of Lucretius' purportedly un-Epicurean interpretations, such as Socrates' interpretation of the leaky water jugs in Plato's *Gorgias*, and subsequent scholars have disputed the supposedly shared origin.[28] Franz Cumont argued for a Pythagorean source, Pierre Boyancé suggested either a Stoic or an Academic provenance, and Barbara Wallach claimed the "Cynico-Stoic diatribe tradition."[29]

There might be a basic similarity between Lucretius' interpretations of underworld myths and that of Plato's *Gorgias*, for instance, in that they both identify a suffering in life as the real meaning behind a myth of punishment and that the comparison between the two verbal ideas operates on the logic of a simile. They differ substantially, however, in how they perform and justify their interpretations. In that dialogue, Socrates conveys to the obstinate Callicles the image, which he attributes to "some clever mythologizing man" (τις μυθολογῶν κομψὸς ἀνήρ, 493A), of a jar that cannot be filled.[30] He likens it to the part of the soul

29–33, however, takes Lucretius' examples as a case of "personification," to which she compares Empedocles (cf. 233 n.6). D. Obbink, *Philodemus: On Piety* (Oxford 1996) 127, detects another Epicurean attack on "allegory" in Philodemus' *De pietate*, based on his reconstruction of the term ἠι]νίττο[ντο.

[27] Cf. Gale, *Myth and Poetry* 38: "Lucretius here, once again, uses allegorism not to defend but to combat the mythological view of the world." Schrijvers, in Συζήτησις 353–371, more usefully compares "paléphatéenne" rationalization. Cf. Gale 13–14. In Plutarch *De def. or.* 420B, Epicureans are characterized as denigrating opposing arguments and beliefs as myths.

[28] Heinze, *T. Lucretius Carus* 189.

[29] F. Cumont, "Lucrèce et le symbolisme pythagoricien des enfers," *RevPhil* 44 (1920) 229–240; P. Boyancé, *Lucrèce et l'épicurisme* (Paris 1963) 179–181; B. Wallach, *Lucretius and the Diatribe against the Fear of Death* (Leiden 1976) 89–91.

[30] Socrates' purported source is much disputed. Olympiodorus suggests Empedocles (*In Gorg.* 30.5) and Cumont, *Rev Phil* 44 (1920) 235, argues for a

susceptible to persuasion—with an explicit pun on "liable to persuasion" (πίθανον) and "jar" (πίθον)—and the water to pleasure (493A–C). Socrates interprets the punishment of trying to fill these leaky jars in the underworld as a representation of the living misery of the insatiable pleasure-seeker, such as Callicles. Socrates' appeal is similar to the form of Lucretius' rationalizations, at least insofar as the punishment is taken to represent the unhappiness people plunge themselves into in life. Lucretius even interprets the same myth of bearers of leaky jars in the underworld (3.1003–1010).[31] The justification for the interpretation in Plato's dialogue, however, is not the absurdity of physical punishment upon corpses, but rather two playful appeals to authority: Euripides asks whether "anyone might know, if to live is to die, and to die is to live" (492E), and Socrates heard "someone of the wise" say that we are dead, and each body (σῶμα) is also a tomb (σῆμα, 493A). While Lucretius insists upon the necessity of dispelling the myths, Socrates treats his interpretation as a linguistic game aimed at "persuading" Callicles in the context of Gorgiatic rhetoric. Plutarch's conclusion to *De latenter* most closely resembles Lucretius' catalogue of rationalized underworld punishments, rather than the Platonic example, which we might have expected the Platonist to follow.

Lucretius' interpretations of infernal torments and his theory

Pythagorean source, as he does for Lucretius' passage. I. Linforth, "Soul and Sieve in Plato's Gorgias," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 12 (1944) 295–313, at 311, even suggests an ironic reference to Plato himself. Cf. E .R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford 1959) 296–298.

[31] P. De Lacy, "Lucretius and Plato," in *Συζήτησις* 291–307, argues that Lucretius engaged broadly with Plato. The similarity of the interpretation of the water-carriers seems to be a likely candidate, especially since neither names them. T. Reinhardt, "Readers in the Underworld," *JRS* 94 (2004) 27–46, at 40–45, goes so far as to argue that Lucretius' entire underworld section is structured in response to the concluding myth of the *Gorgias*, beyond the more straightforward allusion to Socrates' allegorization of the leaky jars. Cf. D. Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge 1998) 75–82 and 91–93, on whether Lucretius' access to Plato's *Timaeus* was direct or through Epicurus.

of how they were falsely conceived are characteristically Epicurean and rather unlike the supposed parallels.[32] They are, moreover, well integrated into the poem and so explain the most notorious punishments in relation to the sufferings that Lucretius emphatically identifies as grievous examples. The fear of the gods represented by Tantalus' impending stone arises recurrently as one of the greatest causes of anxiety and horrible crimes.[33] The misery of unsatisfiable political ambitions, like

[32] Heinze, Cumont, and others also cite Macrobius, who describes another method of explaining myths of the underworld and its punishments as reflections of life, which he attributes to unnamed ancients (*In Som.* 1.10.9–10): *aliud esse inferos negauerunt quam ipsa corpora, quibus inclusae animae carcerem foedum tenebris, horrendum sordibus et cruore patiuntur. hoc animae sepulcrum, hoc Ditis concaua, hoc inferos uocauerunt, et omnia, quae illic esse credidit fabulosa persuasio, in nobismet ipsis et in ipsis humanis corporibus adsignare conati sunt: obliuionis fluuium aliud non esse adserentes quam errorem animae obliuiscentis maiestatem uitae prioris, qua antequam in corpus truderetur potita est, solamque esse in corpore uitam putantis* ("They denied that the things below were anything other than bodies themselves, in which souls imprisoned in the darkness suffer a foul prison, dreadful with filth and blood. This is the tomb of the soul, this is the hall of Dis, this they call the things below, and everything which mythic persuasion assures is there, they attempt to assign to us ourselves and to our very human bodies, asserting that the river of oblivion is nothing other than the error of the soul that forgets the grandeur of its prior life, in which it was in control before it got shoved into a body—that it thinks its only life is in a body"). The interpretations that follow differ from the *De rerum natura* passage in their treatment of most of the punishments (1.10.12–17), attention to topographical features of the underworld such as Lethe (1.10.10–11), attribution of the interpretation to unnamed ancients (1.10.8–9), and, most significantly, the focus on the presumably immaterial soul that is only temporarily "shoved into a body." Despite attempts to find a shared source for Lucretius, Plato, and Macrobius, the three differ greatly in how they view the mechanism of the creation of myth and consequentially also in the justification for interpretation. Macrobius' source is contested: Heinze assumes Posidonius (*T. Lucretius Carus* 185), while Cumont more plausibly suggests Numenius (*RevPhil* 44 [1920] 231). Cf. H. De Ley, *Macrobius and Numenius* (Brussels 1972) 7–14. They also compare Philo *Congr.* 57, but this claims little more than that ὁ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν Ἅιδης ὁ τοῦ μοχθηροῦ βίος ἐστίν ("the true Hades is the life of the scoundrel"), without explicating what sort of interpretations this might imply.

[33] In the anthropology in the fifth book, religious beliefs originate in fear

Sisyphus' boulder, has resonances throughout *De rerum natura*, such as the famous image of the tranquil sage watching from afar as men wretchedly strive for wealth and power (2.1–13).[34] Lucretius' ridicule of the maddened lover, suffering the piercing assault of passions like Tityus' birds, forms the vehement conclusion to Book 4. Lucretius, moreover, reworked these rationalizations of underworld myths for his Late Republican audience, as the Sisyphean politician and his distinctively Roman desire for *fasces* and *imperium* makes particularly clear. Together with the theory that false beliefs about death are distortions of suffering in life, these examples form a coherent and distinctive approach to rationalizing myths of underworld torment: physically absurd stories, such as a corpse which is bound to decay infinitely feeding carrion birds, must be false, and so an explanation must be sought in what is actually real according to Lucretius—such as experience of suffering in material existence. What Lucretius considers to be the worst sufferings in life, unsurprisingly, are what he takes to be the result of the worst delusions.

Epicurean contradictions and Plutarchean polemic

Plutarch's emphasis on the gross absurdities of the punishment of corpses further deepens the Epicurean flavor of the argument at the end of *De latenter*. This sort of detail lends the interpretations further rhetorical weight, given the materialist insistence on corporeal death as the dissolution of human souls.[35] The Platonist thus undermines his Epicurean opponents by turning their sort of mythic framework against their own ethical precepts, using the same examples as Lucretius. It is hard to discern,

over things which were unexplainable before Epicurus revealed the nature of the physical world, and consequently phenomena such as lightning (5.1218–1240); the gruesome depiction of Iphigenia's sacrifice is framed by the baneful influence of fear of the gods (1.82–83, 101): *saepius illa / religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta … tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*

[34] See also 3.59–64, 5.1105–1160. On the ethical significance of these rationalizations, see further A. Gigandet, *Fama deum* (Paris 1998) 359–394.

[35] Lucretius, for instance, argues that the body begins to putrefy just as the soul begins to dissipate (3.580–583).

however, whether Plutarch is drawing on Lucretius directly, or whether they share a common Epicurean source, perhaps even Epicurus himself.[36] There are three considerations—the explicit testimonies, the formulation of a similar concept by Democritus, and Plutarch's knowledge of Epicurus and perhaps Lucretius—but each is aporetic.[37] Whether this sort of rationalization was formulated by the Greek master, the later Roman poet, or some figure in between, Plutarch is nevertheless exploiting this sort of interpretation as distinctively Epicurean, which gives the conclusion of the anti-Epicurean treatise all the more force against its stated targets. This reflects his broader polemical tactic of turning his opponents' arguments against their own assumptions—but in this case, Plutarch subverts a distinctively Epicurean form of argument against a central Epicurean ethical precept.

There are two testimonies that Epicurus rationalized myths of underworld punishment in a similar manner as Lucretius, but

[36] D. West, *The Imagery and Poetry of Lucretius* (Edinburgh 1969) 103, and E. Ackermann, *Lukrez und der Mythos* (Wiesbaden 1979) 80–81, among others, argue that the rationalizations were originally formulated by Epicurus, but Gale, *Myth and Poetry* 36–38 and 93–94, reinforces the argument that they post-date him.

[37] The plausible audience for such rationalizations could form another point of contention, although this is even more speculative. Gale, *Myth and Poetry* 90, for instance, argues that the "educated upper classes" of late Republican Rome "would have been unlikely (whatever their religious views) to take seriously the surface meaning of the myths." She goes on to argue that Lucretius' motivation is his audience's interest in allegorization and Hellenistic poetics, rather than the central Epicurean ethical promise of removing grievous fears. C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura* II (Oxford 1947) 994–995, similarly worried that Lucretius' audience would not have taken this sort of fear seriously. Closer to Epicurus' time, however, the author of the Derveni Papyrus earnestly wonders how the doubters of afterlife torments could explain away the evidence of their dreams (col. v.6–10); cf. Cephalus in Pl. *Resp.* 330ᴅ–331ʙ. Plutarch, however, depicts Cassius explaining away Brutus' dream in an Epicurean fashion (*Brut.* 37.1–6); cf. *Dion* 55.2–4. See F. Brenk, "Cassius' 'Epicurean' Explanation of Brutus' Vision in Plutarch's *Broutos*," in I. Gallo (ed.), *Aspetti dello stoicismo e dell'epicureismo in Plutarco* (Ferrara 1988) 109–118.

their value as evidence is ambiguous. In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca declines to repeat "the trite Epicurean ditty" (*Epicuream cantilenam*) and so to "say that the fears of things below are empty (*dicam uanos esse inferorum metus*), that Ixion is not revolved on a wheel nor is a rock thrust onward by the shoulders of Sisyphus, nor are anyone's innards able to be reborn and carved up every day" (*Ep.* 24.18).[38] He sees the argument as old and trite, but he leaves the originator vague with the adjective "Epicurean." Either Lucretius, roughly a century before him, or Epicurus, or even another Epicurean in between, could be old enough to qualify. Seneca shares the same objection to Tityus' torture, the infinitely regenerating entrails, as Lucretius, and there is some evidence that another of his examples, Ixion, may have been present in Servius' text of *De rerum natura*.[39] Centuries further removed from Epicurus, Lactantius specifies the Greek master himself at the end of his doxography of pagan views of the soul and its fate after death (*Div.inst.* 7.7.13): "Therefore Epicurus was wrong, because he thought that this is a fiction of poets, and interpreted those punishments, which are held to be in the underworld, as existing in this life" (*in hac esse uita interpretatus est*). The scholarly consensus, however, is that Lactantius was dependent on earlier Latin authors, such as Cicero and Lucretius, for his knowledge of Epicurus, such that he could be referring to the Roman poet by the name of his philosophical progenitor.[40]

[38] Cf. Heinze, *T. Lucretius Carus* 184.

[39] H. Jocelyn, "Lucretius, his Copyists and the Horrors of the Underworld," *AClass* 29 (1986) 43–56, at 49–51. Plutarch uses the image of Ixion grasping at the empty cloud-image of Hera as a simile (*Amat.* 766A, *Max. cum princ.* 777E) but does not play on the punishment, forever spinning bound on a wheel. Seneca also refers to some of Lucretius' final compact list of features of the underworld (24.18): *nemo tam puer est, ut Cerberum timeat et tenebras* ("no one is such a child that he fears Cerberus and the darkness").

[40] H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig 1887) 228, includes these passages from Seneca and Lactantius in his edition of Epicurus as fr.341; cf. Heinze, *T. Lucretius Carus* 184 n.1. Gale, *Myth and Poetry* 37 n.133, cites Lact. *De opif. mundi* 6.1 as evidence that Lactantius assumes that Lucretius faithfully preserves

Lucretius' characterization of the origin of these notions of afterlife punishments, moreover, seems to draw from Epicurus' atomistic predecessor, Democritus. He argues (68 B 297 D.-K.): "Some people do not understand the dissolution of mortal nature, but, through knowledge of the wickedness in life, toil away their lifetimes in anxieties and fears (ἐν ταραχαῖς καὶ φόβοις ταλαιπωρέουσι), contriving mythic lies (ψεύδεα … μυθοπλαστέοντες) about the time after their death." The specific mythic lies, it follows, would resemble in form the sufferings of life, as in Lucretius' examples. Epicurus draws on Democritus often and Lucretius is fittingly charitable to the earlier atomist, as the closest to reach the truth before *qui princeps uitae rationem inuenit eam* ("he who first discovered the system of life," 5.9).[41] Either Epicurus could have taken this Democritean identification of the origin of these myths as fear of punishments in life and elaborated rationalizations of these underworld myths to dispel their potential for spreading fear, as Henry Jocelyn argues;[42] or it could have been Lucretius who sowed this idea,

Epicurus. There are some citations of Epicurus, however, without parallel in Lucretius or Cicero. R. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford 1978) 85–86, argues that Cicero's lost *Hortensius* is the probable source for these. J. Bryce, *The Library of Lactantius* (New York 1990) 256, however, examines Lactantius' corpus more broadly and argues that at least some some sources "were doxographical in nature."

[41] See also Plut. *Non posse* 1100A and, citing Metrodorus (fr.33 Körte), *Adv.Col.* 1108E–F. Epicurus' attitude seems to have been largely congenial: see P. Huby, "Epicurus' Attitude to Democritus," *Phronesis* 23 (1978) 80–86. Epicurus seems to have adopted Democritus' position on an ethical issue related to death (namely why corpses repulse us), for example, while disagreeing on the physical processes: see J. Warren, "Democritus, the Epicureans, Death, and Dying," *CQ* 52 (2002) 193–206, at 197. Lucretius, even when disagreeing with Democritus, calls him by name and signals respect, in contrast to most pre-Epicurean philosophers, who usually go unnamed: Democritus' wisdom is twice called *sancta … sententia* (5.622 = 3.371) and he is set alongside Epicurus as the other exemplary philosopher to heroically accept his death (3.1039–1044). Epicurus "first" revealed the truth, but Lucretius presents Democritus as the closest to have come before him.

[42] Jocelyn, *AClass* 29 (1986) 43.

along with various uses of these underworld images in the "allegorical" tradition, into the passage at the end of Book 3, as Monica Gale implies.[43]

And finally, there is the question of how Plutarch would have come across these rationalizations, especially given the overlap between the interpretations of Tantalus, Tityus, and Sisyphus. It is possible he knew Lucretius. Although Plutarch confesses in the beginning of the *Demosthenes* that he did not have the leisure to learn Latin better, even when he visited Rome (2.2–4), he cites Latin prose writers often enough, particularly in the *Vitae* and the *Quaestiones Romanae*.[44] However, he explicitly quotes only one Latin poet: Horace.[45] It is possible, nevertheless, that he was acquainted with more Latin poetry than he cites. In this vein, Jacques Boulogne identifies five points where Plutarch includes an argument that is known from Lucretius, but without parallel in Epicurus, which he takes as evidence that Plutarch was acquainted with Lucretius as well.[46] This instance of underworld rationalizations could be another example.

Plutarch, however, engages with Epicurus throughout his corpus. The dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta* begins with the char-

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[43] Gale, *Myth and Poetry* 37–38 n.133.

[44] R. Barrow, *Plutarch and his Time* (London 1967) 151, makes a strong claim: "Clearly Plutarch had no interest in Latin literature as such; the poets would be too difficult, the philosophers had nothing to teach him; and, as his interest was in real people, he confined himself to the historians." See also L. Van der Stockt, "Plutarch's Use of Literature," *AncSoc* 18 (1987) 281–292, and B. X. de Wet, "Plutarch's Use of Poets," *AClass* 31 (1988) 13–25, esp. 14–15, 22. Cf. P. Stadter, "Plutarch's Latin Reading," in *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* (Oxford 2014) 130–148.

[45] He cites Φλάκκος ὁ ποιητὴς (*Epist.* 1.6) in *Luc.* 39.5.

[46] Boulogne, *Plutarque dans le miroir* 14–16. The question, however, depends on how Lucretius' relationship to Epicurus is interpreted. If, for instance, Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* ch. 3, is correct in claiming that Lucretius was an Epicurean "fundamentalist," who followed *De natura* closely, it would follow that much of the Lucretian material that does not appear to be paralleled in the extant fragments of Epicurus has simply been lost.

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acter of Epicurus scurrying off after a scathing whirlwind assault upon *pronoia* (548A–C), which sets the stage for the subsequent discussions of divine punishment, of both the living and the dead.[47] Two dialogues, to which *De latenter* is sometimes considered an appendix, are especially dedicated to anti-Epicurean polemic.[48] In *Adversus Colotem*, Plutarch's class has apparently just finished reading Colotes' attempt to refute all philosophers besides Epicurus (1107E–F), which spurs the character of Plutarch to refute Epicurus' dear follower in turn. The other dialogue, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, is presented as the discussion that follows *Adversus Colotem*, but this time divided between a couple of students. In these works, Plutarch demonstrates a broad familiarity with Epicurus as well as Metrodorus, one of his most prominent followers in the first generation of Epicureans.[49] Given his extensive engagement with these Greek figures, it seems implausible that he would resort to a Latin poem for knowledge of Epicureanism, although it is nevertheless possible.

In either case, whether Plutarch was reading Epicurus directly or the later Roman poet, the rejection of corporeal punishments after death at the end of *De latenter* is indicative. In this treatise, as well as in both the explicitly anti-Epicurean dialogues, one of the key argumentative tactics is to prove that Epicurus contra-

[47] The manuscripts give the name as Ἐπίκουρος, although some print Fabricius' emendation Ἐπικούρειος. Cf. J. Opsomer, "The Cruel Consistency of *De sera numinis vindicta*," in J. Opsomer et al. (eds.), *A Versatile Gentleman* (Leuven 2016) 37–56, at 38–39.

[48] G. Lattanzi, "La composizione del *De latenter vivendo* di Plutarco," *RivFil* 60 (1932) 332–337, and Flacelière, in *Epicurea* 205–209. A. Barigazzi, "Una declamazione contro Epicuro," in *Studi su Plutarco* (Florence 1994) 115–140, objects to this chronology, but cf. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled* 12–27.

[49] In the frame of *Non posse*, a speaker mentions the criticism of a certain Heracleides that the previous discussion was too audacious (θρασύτερον) against the pair, Epicurus and Metrodorus (1086E). The latter is indeed explicited quoted often in *Non posse*: 1087A (fr.24 Körte), 1087D (fr.7), 1088B (fr.62), 1091A–B, E (fr.28), 1094A–D (fr.24), 1098C–D (frr.40–42). See also *Adv. Col.* 1108E–F (fr.33), 1125B–C (fr.6), 1125D (fr.41), 1127B–C (frr.31–32), *De lat.* 1129A.

dicts himself such that the salient ethical positions are rendered incoherent. Consistency and contradictions are broader concerns in Plutarch's works, both against the Hellenistic schools as here and in his defense of Plato as well. Plutarch's most substantial exegetical work on Plato, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, foregrounds the criticism that there is a "supposed and ostensible self-contradiction" (πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀσυμφωνίας) between an ungenerated (ἀγένητον) soul in the *Phaedrus* and a generated one (γενομένην) in the *Timaeus*—a mistake that would be beneath even a drunken sophist, Plutarch claims, and so certainly not what Plato meant (1015F–1016A). Geert Roskam accordingly characterizes Plutarch's "intellectual rules for a good debate" as emphasizing "perfect consistency of one's doctrines" and actions as the foremost "ideal."[50] In this intellectual framework, Plutarch forms many of his attacks, especially against the Stoics and Epicureans, as allegations of inconsistency. The *Lamprias Catalogue* testifies to a lost work entitled "On Epicurean Contradictions" (Περὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρέων ἐναντιωμάτων, no. 129), but even the extant trilogy of anti-Epicurean works vividly manifests this characteristic argumentative tactic.

In *Adversus Colotem*, Plutarch pointedly argues that the Epicurean Colotes not only contradicts himself, but also "enshrouds Epicurus in the largest and greatest of puzzlements" (ἀποριῶν, 1108D–E).[51] Colotes attacks Democritus, for example, for causing confusion by arguing that qualities are not objective in that "nothing is more of one sort than of another sort" (οὐ μᾶλλον τοῖον ἢ τοῖον εἶναι, 1108F). Plutarch responds that Colotes has not only neglected to read Democritus' attacks on Protagoras for this exact argument, but also failed even to realize that this idea is entailed by the "Epicurean doctrine" (δόγματι) of the infalli-

[50] G. Roskam, "How to Deal with the Philosophical Tradition?" *Ploutarchos* 8 (2010/1) 133–146, at 134, comparing *De stoic. repugn.* 1033A. See also P. Donini, "Science and Metaphysics," in J. Dillon and A. Long (eds.), *The Question of "Eclecticism"* (Berkeley 1988) 126–144, at 129.

[51] E. Kechagia, *Plutarch Against Colotes* (Oxford 2011) 174, describes this sort of refutation of as an "overturning argument." Plutarch accuses Epicurus himself, as well as Colotes, of self-contradiction in this dialogue (e.g. 1121E).

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bility of sense perception (1109A). If two people share wine and one finds it sweet but the other dry, he argues, how can the wine objectively have either quality, at least if it is assumed that sense-perception is infallible (1109B)? Colotes not only failed in his intent to criticize Democritus, Plutarch argues, but unwittingly opened up a central Epicurean assumption to ridicule.

This tactic of turning central Epicurean assumptions against particular arguments is even clearer throughout *Non posse*. As the title suggests, it is framed as an attempt to show that Epicurean precepts make life miserably unpleasurable, that the philosophy cannot even fulfill its purported ethical aim. At the outset, Aristodemus had suggested that they should argue that Epicurean teachings make living virtuously (εὖ) impossible (1086F–1087A), but Theon dismisses this as too easy and selects another burden: to show that it is impossible to live pleasurably (ἡδέως) as an Epicurean. The first part of the dialogue is structured to show that Epicurus' philosophy makes every sort of life miserable. Whether considering the pleasure-seeking life (τὸ ἡδέως ζῆν, 1087C–D), "the theoretical and inquisitive" life of the mind (θεωρητικοῦ καὶ φιλομαθοῦς, 1092E), or the active life of business and politics (πρατικόν, 1097A), each life is less pleasant, Theon argues, if it is lived according to Epicurean precepts.[52] A return to the frame, a short stroll, marks the transition to the second half of the dialogue (1100E), where two final excursuses on religious issues follow. First, Aristodemus argues that disbelief in the gods brings misery and actually removes pleasure (1100E–1103E).[53] Theon then makes a similar argument for belief in judgment, reward, and punishment after death (1104A–1107C). The latter maintains this sort of systematic engagement by dividing men into three categories—the wicked, the neutral, and the good—and argues that belief in this sort of eschatology is more pleasurable for each sort. Even for the wicked, who are afraid of afterlife punishment, this fear serves a positive role that

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[52] On the last cf. Epicurus fr.555 Usener (= Plut. *De tranq. anim.* 465F).

[53] Atheism is a recurrent target in these texts: e.g. *Non posse* 1092A–B, 1101B, *Adv.Col.* 1119D–E, 1123A; cf. 1124D–E.

ultimately prevents worse anxiety and thus allows for more pleasure (1104A–B): "The unjust and wicked, to start, dread punishments and vengeance and so fear to do anything bad, and for this reason they have more leisure while living more pleasurably (ἥδιον) and with less anxiety (ἀταρακτότερον), since Epicurus thinks that there is no other reason to avoid wrong-doing than fear of punishments." If people do no wrong, Theon argues, they have nothing to fear, except that they might do something to deserve punishment in the future. Paradoxically, according to this argument, fear of afterlife punishment lessens anxiety and maximizes pleasure, such that it is preferable for achieving the fundamental Epicurean ideal of *ataraxia*, freedom from care. In each of these cases, Plutarch's characters use the essential Epicurean tenet that pleasure is the highest good as the reason to reject a variety of Epicurean arguments.

The polemics of consistency are also central to *De latenter*.[54] The treatise even opens with a charge of hypocrisy: if Epicurus had truly believed it was best to live unnoticed, he would have written anonymously and would not have striven to make himself so famous and honored (1128A–C).[55] Actions should not contradict ideas. The assumption of pleasure as the desired end, furthermore, closely aligns the treatise with *Non posse*. Plutarch argues in *De latenter* for the public life on the grounds that it is pleasurable: its light "makes every enjoyment and every pastime and pleasure, as if some common seasoning (ἥδυσμα) mixed in, merry and humane" (1130B). The darkness without it, in contrast, is miserable. Rather than appealing to a Platonistic ideal of virtue, the treatise argues that the public life is preferable according to Epicurus' own criterion for preferability—pleasure! The concluding mythic narrative illustrates this aim further,

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[54] Roskam, *A Commentary* 139–140, argues that parts of the treatise (e.g. 1129E–1130A) even use the language of atomistic physics, as opposed to Platonistic elemental theory, to rebut Epicurean ethics. Cf. *Adv. Col.* 1110E–1112C.

[55] See also 1128F–1129A and *Non posse* 1100D. On the veracity of Plutarch's allegation, however, see M. Garani, "The Negation of Fame," in S. Kyriakidis (ed.), *Libera Fama* (Newcastle 2016) 28–44.

insofar as it shows those who are punished, who are cast into the sea of oblivion, as suffering an *unpleasant* fate, just like their lives spent avoiding public life. The choice of this style of myth and the implicit Epicurean rationalization marks a nuanced example of Plutarch's polemical campaign of turning Epicurus against himself. He not only turns a mythic exhortation steeped in traditional imagery against Epicurus, the notorious denouncer of myth and tradition, but he dismisses an absurd version of the traditional Homeric sufferings in the exact manner as Lucretius. The Platonist thus disarms the characteristic Epicurean response to his mythic pronouncement, while he simultaneously reemphasizes the main ethical argument of the treatise.[56]

The mythic narrative in Plutarch's *De latenter* is too strange, unexpected, and ambiguous to reflect a straightforward revelation of doctrine. The context of this distinctively Epicurean—rather than Pythagorean, Stoic, or other—manner of rationalizing away myths of afterlife punishment illuminates the full force of Plutarch's argument: he shifts the subject from souls to bodies to establish a materialist framework, introduces the traditional Homeric punishments to appeal to the characteristic Epicurean mockery of torturing rotten corpses, and then presents an imagistic depiction of the life Epicureans choose, expecting them to apply the same rationalization. The conclusion of *De latenter* invites its audience to reject the literal submersion of the bodies of the impious and to realize that the imagistic rendering depicts the grievous suffering they choose to inflict upon themselves in life by choosing to live unnoticed.[57]

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[56] Cf. *Non posse* 1086F–1087A.