

The Purpose and Unity of Plutarch's
De genio Socratis

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ONE OF PLUTARCH'S persistent concerns is the relationship between philosophy and politics, between thought and action: how can a statesman or a general be guided by those who have thought deeply about politics or war; how can a thinker, a philosopher, use in his theoretical works the vast experience of the man of affairs?¹ One way is by the close association of a philosopher and a statesman—the association, for example, between Pericles and Anaxagoras (*Pericles* 4.4–6.4). Anaxagoras enhanced the value men placed on Pericles' character. By associating with the philosopher, Pericles acquired a serious mind and an impressive way of speaking. He was not prone to emotional outbursts or to superstitious behavior since Anaxagoras' doctrines of physical science removed his ignorance and inexperience, and so on. Further examples are Sphaerus and Cleomenes (*Cleomenes* 2) and Aristotle and Alexander (*Alexander* 8).

In the case of less exalted mortals who do not have day-by-day association with philosophers, philosophical reason (*logos*) must affect practice some other way. *De genio Socratis* is devoted in general to explaining just how reason, which in true Platonic fashion is eternal and spiritual, can modify practice in human life and affairs, and to showing the metaphysical basis for spiritual guidance. Plutarch wishes to show how such guidance works and how the gap between thinker and doer can be bridged.² I shall argue that Plutarch's specific aim in this essay was to explain how one makes choices in a given situation and how these choices may be actively guided by *daimones*, beneficent higher powers. In the course of his discussion, Plutarch explains what

¹ This concern is apparent in *Ad principem ineruditum* 779F–780D, where he states that philosophical reason will stabilize the ruler's power and that the wise ruler has an inward guiding voice. Similarly in *Maxime cum principibus* 779B. See Alan Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1974) 212–20.

² G. Méautis, "Le mythe de Timarque," *REA* 52 (1950) 201: "This treatise, which unites the *πρακτικὸς βίος*, in the narration of the liberation of Thebes, with the *θεωρητικὸς βίος* in the discussions of the daimon of Socrates, is one of the most important of Plutarch's essays."

daimones are,³ but his main emphasis is on human beings and their motivations and reactions. The philosophical discussions (to be outlined below) establish first the major question, what was Socrates' sign and how did it guide him; then the answer: the sign was a manifestation of daimonic guidance and that all men can be guided by *daimones*, but only in so far as their own nature has been suitably formed. The discussions also present a mythical picture of the relationship between men and *daimones* and a theory of practical ethical training. The narrative sections of the essay represent action, specific examples of men's nature formed or in the process of formation, and show how daimonic guidance manifests itself in the real world. Each section of the essays reflects on the other.

In combining philosophical discussion and historical narrative Plutarch used as a model the *Phaedo*, in which the narrative from the arrival of Socrates' friends to his drinking the hemlock is likewise combined with a long discussion on the immortality of the soul. That *De genio* is modelled on the *Phaedo* has long been agreed: Archedamus meets Caphisias just as Echecrates meets Phaedo; Archedamus knows something of the events in Thebes just as Echecrates knows something of Socrates' death, but both want to know more details. The Thebans enter Simmias' house and find him sitting up on a couch, since he has an injured leg, just as Socrates' friends find him sitting on a couch rubbing his legs, which have been bruised by the chains just removed.⁴

What makes *De genio* more puzzling than the *Phaedo* is the lack of clear connection in the former between the philosophical discussions and the narration of events. The discussion in the *Phaedo* concerning the immortality of the soul is obviously relevant to Socrates' imminent death; no one could accuse Socrates "of idle talking about matters in which I have no concern" (*Phd.* 70c). The discussions in *De genio* have no such obvious relevance; one scholar has declared that the charac-

³ Alternatively, what 'the daimonic', τὸ δαίμονιον, is. τὸ δαίμονιον is the word used throughout the essay for Socrates' sign, in accord with Socrates' own usage. See *Ap.* 31D (the most complete account), *Resp.* 496c–d, *Thet.* 151A, *Alc.* I 103A, *Euthyd.* 272E, *Phdr.* 242B–c. In this essay *daimones* are considered beneficent. In other contexts Plutarch may accept the existence of evil *daimones*; compare *De def.or.* 417D. The chief works on Plutarch's theory of demons are G. Soury, *La démonologie de Plutarque* (Paris 1942), and Andres, "Daimon" in *RE Suppl.* 3 (1918) 267–322. The most sensible general discussion is D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (New York 1973) 74–83. A more recent review is F. Brenk, "'A most strange doctrine'. Daimon in Plutarch," *CJ* 69 (1973) 1–11.

⁴ These are only a few of the obviously intentional parallels which could be cited; for others see R. Hirzel, *Der Dialog* II (Leipzig 1895) 148–51.

ters should have discussed "die Freiheit oder die Vaterlandsliebe" rather than *daimones*.⁵ A. Corlu, the most recent and most thorough commentator, reviews previous opinions only to come to the conclusion that the historical narrative is not the main object of the work, that the dialogue serves the functions of (1) refuting the charge of *misologia* directed at Thebans (*Phd.* 89c, *De gen.* 575E) and more significantly, (2) treating demonology in a way not too dry and didactic. For Corlu the narrative has an esthetic effect, intended to give the reader a pleasing alternation between discussion and action.⁶ I hope to show that there is an organic connection between the discussions and the narrative.

De genio is organized around three major topics with an introductory discussion outlining the theme and a concluding narrative.⁷

INTRODUCTION (575B–577A). The essay is set in Athens, where Caphisias, a Theban ambassador, tells his Athenian friend Archedamus the details of the Theban uprising of December 379 B.C.⁸ His narrative covers the events of the day and night during which the tyrants, who were supported by the Spartans, were assassinated and the Spartan garrison was thrown into confusion.⁹

Archedamus establishes the tone of *De genio* from the first: he wants to observe "in the actions themselves . . . the details of the struggles of virtue pitted against fortune and the sober acts of daring in moments

⁵ W. Christ, "Plutarch's Dialog vom Daimonion des Sokrates," *SitzMünchen* 1901, 94.

⁶ A. Corlu, *Plutarque, Le démon de Socrate* (Paris 1970) 89. Corlu is correct in saying that the historical narrative is not the main object. He does not however successfully explain why Plutarch included the narrative in the first place.

⁷ This division is my own; there are, however, definite breaks in the action where one section ends and the next begins: A ends with the entry of Theanor, who initiates the discussion in section B; B ends with the narrator's return to hear Simmias begin the discussion which composes section C.

⁸ Sources are Plut. *Pelop.* 6–13, Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.1–3, Nep. *Pelop.* 2.1–4.2. For the relationship between the narrative of the liberation of Thebes in *Pelop.* and the narrative of the same event in *De gen.* see Hirzel, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 153, and Corlu, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 22–31.

⁹ For convenience the principal speakers of the dialogue are listed here in approximate order of appearance with a brief characterization: CHARON, a conspirator at whose house the others gather; THEOCRITUS, a seer and conspirator, very active; EPAMEINONDAS, brother of the narrator Caphisias, not an active plotter; ARCHIAS, one of the Theban tyrants; LYSANORIDES, commander of the Spartan garrison; PHYLLIDAS, a conspirator and secretary to the tyrants; SIMMIAS, the Socratic, at whose house the discussions take place; POLYMNIS, father of Caphisias and Epameinondas; GALAXIDORUS, a conspirator and a rationalist; THEANOR, a Pythagorean visitor from Italy; HIPPOSTHENEIDAS, a conspirator who becomes frightened and tries to stop the uprising.

of peril that come of reason blended with the stress and passion of the moment" (575c).¹⁰ The final result may be success or failure; the individual acts are important. Archedamus' request shows that Plutarch's essay is designed to illustrate and explain how one may see in a person's actions the virtues (*ἀρεαί*) which have been developed in him and from what source come his reasonings or motivations (*λογισμός*).

Two types of character are opposed in this introductory section: one, Charon, is "naturally guided to noble conduct by the laws and willingly assumes the gravest risks for his country's sake" (576E, transl. De Lacy and Einarson), despite the fact that he has not had a philosophical education; the other type of character, exemplified by Eumolpidas and Samidas, will commit evil deeds because of a fiery and passionate nature (577A). In other words, one's untutored nature can be prone either to good or to evil; the opposite tendencies are juxtaposed, Charon vs. Eumolpidas and Samidas.

In the figure of Epameinondas we see the influence which modifies natural tendencies, *viz.* education. While supporting the plot against the tyrants (576F–577A and 594C), Epameinondas will not actively join it.¹¹ His well-developed arguments (576F–577A) reveal that he has a reasoned basis for action and show the effects of his philosophical education. He will not be swept up in the passion of the moment like Eumolpidas and Samidas, even in passion for his country's liberation.

In this introductory section of *De genio* Plutarch has shown what he wants to consider, the details of individual human actions, and has given a specific example of how education and training can modify human nature.

A. ORACLES, OMENS, DIVINATION (577A–582C). The essay takes a new direction by recounting two communications from the daimonic realm: (a) the events connected with the opening of Alcmena's tomb,

¹⁰ Transl. P. De Lacy and B. Einarson in the Loeb ed. of the *Moralia* VII (Cambridge [Mass.] 1968) 375.

¹¹ Epameinondas appears here for the first time in *De genio*. The *Epameinondas*, now lost, was a centerpiece in the collection of Plutarch's *Lives*. See G. Shrimpton, "Plutarch's Life of Epaminondas," *Pacific Coast Philology* 6 (1971) 55–59. The narrative of the liberation of Thebes in *De genio* takes place before Epameinondas became a major political figure. As a result 'anticipations' occur, such as the attempt by Jason of Pherae to bribe Epameinondas (583F), an incident placed too early in his career. Epameinondas is the 'hero' of the essay and must therefore be glorified.

specifically the disaster to Haliartus, the ill-portent to the Spartans, and the message to the Greeks contained in the mysterious tablet; (b) the oracle given to the Delians.¹² Why does Plutarch report these communications and their meanings? (1) He wants to establish that there are generally accepted means by which the divine or daimonic realm communicates with men. That a grave like Alcmena's could be a sign and omen was widely accepted and quite traditional; compare the grave of Orestes and its significance for the Spartans in Herodotus 1.68. The oracle to the Delians is also traditional in its obscurity and lack of connection between the action ordered or described and the result desired; compare the oracle of the 'wooden walls' which Themistocles interprets (Hdt. 7.141). Plutarch is not trying to prove the validity of oracles—their validity is assumed—but to cite examples which would not arouse doubt. He is not primarily interested in the contents of these oracles but in the fact that daimonic communications such as oracles exist. (2) In reporting these communications he wishes to point out that oracles are not the ambiguous tricksters known from Herodotus, but that they have legitimate philosophical meanings and moral contents. Chonouphis, the Egyptian priest who reads the inscription from the tomb, and Plato, who interprets the oracle, place these communications in the same philosophical circle of meaning in which the rest of the essay lies. Plutarch is essentially demythologizing oracles by attaching philosophical and ethical meanings to them. The reader must be led to accept the fact that these higher powers have a moral nature and that their messages will be morally acceptable. Savage gods are of no concern here.¹³

Immediately following the discussion of oracles comes a long discussion of divination, prompted by the mystic sign mentioned by Theanor, the mysterious stranger. Galaxidorus casts contempt on this

¹² Plutarch reports the views that oracles are given by *daimones*, *De def.or.* 416ff, or that they are caused by 'prophetic currents' interacting with the human soul (432c). Both views may be reconcilable if *daimones* are the higher part of the human soul. See below n.17.

¹³ Plutarch is very reluctant to accept the idea that there may be malevolent deities or *daimones*. For him atheism is preferable to superstition (*De superst.* 164ff). When Pelopidas has a dream that he must sacrifice a blond-haired virgin, the proponents of this sacrifice can cite numerous precedents (Menoceus, Themistocles). The opponents argue philosophically that no divine being worth worshipping can delight in blood and gore. The problem is finally solved by the appearance of a palomino filly, which they sacrifice (*Pelop.* 21–22). Like Pelopidas Plutarch is caught between tradition and what he knows must be right. See Brenk, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 2–5.

talk about dreams and signs, calling it humbug (*τῦφος*). He declares that philosophy claims to act by reason alone with no resort to mysticism. He cites Socrates as the ideal philosopher, one who used no humbug, in contrast to Pythagoras and his ilk (580B–C).

The seer Theocritus objects, citing Socrates' *daimonion*, his sign, as proof that Socrates had a share of divine guidance. Polymnis, the third participant in this discussion, mentions that Socrates' sign was thought to be a sneeze, which encouraged or prevented action depending on when it occurred. He adds, however, that he does not believe this, since Socrates' actions were too forceful and determined to be affected by anything so small as a sneeze. Consequently, Polymnis does not believe that Socrates was guided by ordinary divination. Galaxidorus refutes Polymnis by claiming that a seer can in fact see great consequences in a small sign, just as a reader can know wars and kings from marks which mean nothing to an illiterate person (582A). He adds that a small sign may well have divine origin, the god (*daimonion*) using it to communicate with men (582C).

Thus ends section A on oracles, omens and divination. All three are considered to be legitimate forms of daimonic communication, each presenting messages which need to be interpreted by seers or by the wisdom of a Plato. The question raised in the argument between Galaxidorus and Polymnis is whether Socrates' *daimonion* was a communication of the sort that required interpretation, whether it was a case of divination. Galaxidorus thinks that it was and that Socrates showed skill in interpreting his sign. Galaxidorus' final sentence is a request that Simmias resolve their dispute. His answer is given in the speech discussed in section C below. To anticipate briefly, Simmias' definition of Socrates' *daimonion* is that it was not a sign requiring divination but rather a voice from a *daimon* that actively guided Socrates. The problem is that neither oracles nor divination can actively offer guidance to a layman who must make a choice, and neither can be resorted to constantly with every step one takes. Plutarch introduces this discussion of oracles and divination not to prove or disprove their validity—indeed they may be of some value as we shall see—but to show that Socrates' *daimonion* was not of this nature but was rather a direct communication from a *daimon* and hence useful in everyday life. The discussion of daimonic signs ends temporarily, and a new topic arises with the entry of the stranger Theonor.

B. ETHICAL TRAINING (582C–588B). Theanor tries to convince Epameinondas to accept money as a reward for his care of Lysis, but Epameinondas refuses. The reasons for his refusal are given at length and form a centerpiece to the essay (582D–586A). Theanor tries to convince Epameinondas by logical arguments: if it is proper for one to give a gift, surely it is proper for the other to accept it (584c). This gift is given properly, as all agree (*καλῆ γὰρ καὶ φιλόσοφος*); therefore it should be proper to receive it. Epameinondas responds with an Aristotelian theory of ethics:¹⁴ by habit and practice (*ἔθει δὲ καὶ μελέτῃ* 584E; later *ἄσκησιν δὲ καὶ μελέτῃν* 585A)¹⁵ reason can repress even inborn desires. In the same way adventitious (*ἐπήλυδες*) desires can be worn down, and the various virtues resulting from the elimination of these desires, *viz.* self-control and justice, can be developed (584E). Training to develop justice does not consist of not stealing or of not betraying one's country for money but in refusing legitimate profit, windfalls of fortune, buried treasure and so on. The man who trains himself by renouncing legally gotten money can surely refrain from illegal actions or gains. Consequently Epameinondas refuses a legitimate and generous gift in order to increase his capacity for justice.

The argument with Theanor defines in essence what ethical education consists of and shows that the capability of choosing well can be developed by habit and practice. In case the reader has missed the point, Simmias remarks that Epameinondas' greatness is due to Polymnis, his father, who provided the best education in philosophy for his children from the beginning (*ἐξ ἀρχῆς* 585D). A lifetime of habituation lies behind Epameinondas' capacity to decide and choose correctly.

The immediately following episode with Hippotheneidas illustrates the faults resulting from the lack of such habituation to good behavior.

¹⁴ Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1103a14ff; also *Eth.Eud.* 1214a14ff and Albinus ('Alcinous'), *Didaskalikos* §§30–32. For text of the latter see Plato, *Dialogi* VI, ed. C. F. Hermann (Leipzig 1907) 150–89. Aristotelian ethics were adopted by Platonists, including Plutarch. His *De virtute morali* is a compendium of Aristotelian psychology. For further discussion see R. M. Jones, *The Platonism of Plutarch* (Menasha [Wisc.] 1916) 12–13, and R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge 1937) 10.

¹⁵ *μελέτῃ* may also mean 'self-reflection', 'meditation' in how one acts; compare *μελέτας πρὸς ἑαυτόν* Pl. *Resp.* 407c. Such reflection, which is a conspicuous part of Plutarch's treatises on psychotherapy (see below n.24), can prevent one from making the same mistake again. More probable here is the usual sense as found in *Resp.* 488E, the 'study and practice' of steering a ship.

Hippostheneidas is a known weakling (586b); later the conspirators suspect that he has betrayed them through fear (595A). The barrage of reasons he gives for having sent the messenger to turn back the returning exiles shows that his reasoning is not based on logic but on his timid nature. Having such a nature unmodified by training, Hippostheneidas is naturally terrified by any alarming portent or dream. He is led by his nature in the same way as Charon, Eumolpidas and Samidas were led by theirs to do good or evil deeds. This episode is also connected implicitly with the previous discussion of divination, the alarming dream being of course one type of divinatory sign. Signs such as this dream need to be interpreted, but the interpretation depends on the nature and attitudes of the person to whom it appears. Hence the sign cannot be a positive guide by itself; the sign must be presented to a person whose nature is such that he can read the sign's real meaning.

So far in *De genio* it has been established that oracles and signs are a recognized means by which the *daimonion* (578A, 582c) communicates with men; that one's nature and its virtues are developed by habituation and practice; and that the interpretation of signs is dependent on the nature of the interpreter. The next section shows what type of nature should be developed and how ethical training and daimonic guidance work together.

C. SOCRATES' NATURE AND DAIMONIC GUIDANCE (588B–594A). Simmias, the chief speaker of this section, recounts the nature and powers of Socrates' *daimonion*. He leaves no room for divination; Socrates' sign was a direct voice from the daimonic realm which was his guide in life (*ἡγεμόνα πρὸς τὸν βίον* 589F). Socrates' mind (*νοῦς*) and soul were guided by a higher mind and a diviner soul (*ὑπὸ νοῦ κρείττονος . . . καὶ ψυχῆς θειοτέρας* 589B) which touched him from the outside. Thus Socrates did not need to interpret obscure signs, for he received daimonic communication directly. What made Socrates' nature open to such direct communication? Simmias answers by recounting the vision which his friend Timarchus, also a disciple of Socrates, had seen years before in the cave of Trophonius at Lebedeia.¹⁶ Timarchus first

¹⁶ Very similar visions are in *De sera* 563E–568A and in *De fac.* 942C–945D. The mythical psychology in the three passages is virtually identical: the soul, associated with the moon, is linked to a body derived from the earth, and the mind (*νοῦς*) derived from the sun. Pollutions from the body affect the soul and must be purged away before the soul can be

saw the universe with all its parts (590c–591d), then a voice explained to him the nature of *daimones* and of the soul (591d–592e), the latter of which is our concern here: each human soul immersed in the body to a greater or lesser degree has a higher part attached to it, which most people call ‘mind’ (*νοῦς*) but which really should be called the *daimon* (591e).¹⁷ The incarnate souls are guided by this *daimon* with greater or less difficulty. The influence of the *daimones* on the various souls (which appeared as lights to Timarchus) are portrayed as follows: some souls are mired in the body, completely distracted by passions and allowing little or no guidance to their *daimon*. Timarchus saw these souls moving in a confused and uneven manner (591d). Others are partly entangled in the body but allow their *daimon* some control; these move in jerks since their *daimon* must deal with a stubborn character and must pull the reins here and there (591e–592b). Others move evenly in a straight line. Some of this last group have been obedient to their *daimon* from their birth (*ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ γενέσεως*); these are called ‘inspired men’ (*θεοκλυτούμενον* 592c). Others of this last group are obedient because of their upbringing and education (*διὰ τροφήν καὶ παιδείαν* 592a). In other words the *daimones* can affect their human counterparts only in so far as the human souls will let themselves be affected. Some refuse guidance entirely, others rebel occasionally, the third group yields completely, each depending on how disturbed by passions they are (*ἀναταραχθεῖσαι . . . ὑπὸ παθῶν* 591d).

After recounting Timarchus’ visions, Simmias invites a contribution from the Pythagorean Theanor, who proceeds to give his own theory of divination and *daimones*: the gods give signs and omens (*σημεῖα* 593d) to most men, but they meet directly with only a few. *Daimones*, who are souls released from the cycle of rebirth, assist men who have

received into the moon (*De sera* 563d–568a, *De fac.* 943a–c). In each essay the information is conveyed in a myth, learned either in an oracular vision (*De genio*), an after-death vision (*De sera*) or from a stranger from Cronus’ island far out in the Atlantic (*De facie*).

¹⁷ This identification of *νοῦς* and *daimon* is often thought to be Stoic (cf. Marc. Aur. *Med.* 5.27), but in fact this comment of Timarchus’ guide directly corrects the terminology used by Simmias just before. Simmias had said that Socrates’ voice was a *νόησις* (588d), that the air is moved by the thoughts (*νοηθέν*) of higher beings and conveys the thoughts of the thinker (*τὸν τοῦ νοήσαντος λόγον* 589c). Timarchus’ guide wants *δαίμων* substituted for *νοῦς*. Simmias uses words derived from *νο-* often in his speech, 19 times in 588d–589e, not including *διάνοια* = ‘meaning’ in 588d. He thus prepares the way for the mythical psychology of Timarchus’ vision.

almost reached the goal, the end of their cycle, just as a retired athlete helps and encourages his successor (593D–594A). Theanor's speech posits no direct tie between *daimon* and soul, unlike Timarchus' vision in which the *daimon* is the higher, 'external' part of the soul. I take both versions as alternative explanations, neither in particular being essential to the main theme of *De genio*, human motivation and daimonic guidance. Both are equally exact or inexact. As Socrates says, "A man of sense ought not to say, nor will I be very confident, that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true" (*Phd.* 114D, transl. Jowett).

In any case Theanor recapitulates the whole discussion of divination and *daimones*. The first part of his speech (to 593D) explains how divination works: the gods guide the best of us directly by special signs (*λόγω διὰ συμβόλων*); others they guide by common divination, *viz.* omens. The second part of his speech explains daimonic guidance, which is granted to only a few. The first part refers to the argument of Galaxidorus, Theocritus and Polymnis (section A above) and summarizes its conclusions. The second part is a commentary on Simmias' discussion of Socrates' *daimonion*; Theanor takes Socrates as one of the souls who has almost reached the goal.¹⁸

Thus far in sections A and C of *De genio* the reality of communications from *daimones* has been established and a mythical substructure for daimonic guidance and control has been developed (in Timarchus' vision). Some few souls are born inspired and obedient to this guidance and control, souls like Hermodorus of Clazomenae (592c) and Socrates, as we may judge from the oracle given to Socrates' parents (589E). Such individuals are quite unusual—only two are named—and cannot be taken as models. They are the sort of person with whom *daimones* speak directly, according to Simmias, men who are calm, uninvolved in disturbances (*ἀθρόμβον καὶ νήνεμον* 589D). Timarchus sees the souls of these men who 'have understanding' (*νοῦν ἔχειν* 591E) float high, minimally entangled in the body. In other words, *daimones* most easily guide those who are least involved in mortal or earthly

¹⁸ Theanor's speech has been much discussed in the work on *De genio* and on demonology in general. The parameters of the argument were established by R. Heinze, *Xenocrates* (Leipzig 1892) 104ff, who pointed to the seeming incongruities in the speech and derived each half from different sources. Th. Eisele, "Zur Dämonologie Plutarchs von Chäronea," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 17 (1904) 34–35, spoke for the unity of the speech. The speech does fall into two somewhat incongruous parts because it summarizes and reminds the reader of the two different arguments thus far.

troubles. Most people are not of this nature; no one in *De genio* claims to hear a guiding voice. Instead the actors in this essay make decisions on their own, apparently guided by their own existing nature which has been formed by previous practice and habituation for good (Charon, Epameinondas) or for bad (Hippostheneidas). If this is the case, what room is left for daimonic guidance in the real world (as opposed to visions) of ordinary men? What relevance does the long discussion of souls and *daimones* really have?

Daimonic guidance of less obedient souls is represented mythically in Timarchus' vision: those who are not so easily guided, who have a stubborn character (*δυσπειθέσι . . . ἤθεσι* 592B), are shown as being controlled by *daimones* who pull on the reins and inflict blows which represent remorse and shame for the soul's errors, according to Timarchus' guide (592B).¹⁹ Surely this group which requires such pulls and tugs is meant to represent human beings like those we see acting in *De genio*. They are not inspired and divine like Hermodorus or Socrates; neither are they morally blind, persons who know no remorse or shame. Yet it must not be forgotten that Timarchus' vision is a mythical picture; Simmias even has doubts about its suitability for a philosophical discourse (589F). Yet the myth can be translated into psychological language. The *daimones* beat the soul until it is subdued (*κολαζομένη* 592B) like a tame animal. In the same way desires must be worn down until they are subdued (*κολαζομένας* 584E) by reason, as for example, love even of legitimate profit must be subdued (*κεκόλασται* 585C) if one is to resist dishonest greed. The verbal parallels point out the essential equivalence of the two ways of speaking, the ethical and the mythical, and make clear that the training, practice and reason of Epameinondas' speech serve the same function as do the tugs and blows of the *daimones*; both serve to restrain and repress desires and passions. Indeed the essence of Epameinondas' whole course of training is to abate even natural, not to mention adventitious, desires (584E). We may presume that when all such desires are subdued, the soul may be as easily guided by the *daimon* as Socrates' soul was from birth. In psychological terms a person easily guided by the *daimon* would be prone to good, free from any action that would bring remorse or shame.

¹⁹ Plutarch often uses the analogy of reins or cable to describe the control of the soul by *daimones*, reason or mind; cp. *De sera* 566D. On this topic see H. Mounard, *La psychologie de Plutarque*, summarized in *AnnParis* 35 (Paris 1960) 341–42.

The name of the type of training needed to be able to repress desires is 'philosophy'. Polymnis gave Epameinondas the best 'upbringing in philosophy' (585D). Epameinondas attributes to the Pythagoreans the same type of ethical training as he uses (*πάντες ἕμειν* . . . 585A). Charon is 'not a philosopher', hence it is surprising that he can act well (576D). The goal of this training in philosophy is to be 'free from passions' (*ἀπαθής* 588D, applied to Socrates by Simmias), undisturbed and calm (589D). Clearly philosophical training means ethical training.

If the best ethical training results in calmness and freedom from passions, then conversely the most detached person will be acting (or not-acting) in the most ethical way. To state this consequence so baldly is to bring out the contradiction and tension inherent in *De genio*. On the one side we have our ideal, the philosophically trained man, who is detached from the hubbub of daily life, who has no passions and desires. On the other hand we have the activist, who is trying to liberate his city. This contradiction is represented in the narrative by Simmias, incapacitated by an injury, taking no part in the conspiracy, and by Theanor, a foreigner, *ipso facto* detached; both of these are the 'professional' philosophers.²⁰ On the other side are all the conspirators, who are indeed moved by passions, e.g., Charon by patriotism, Hippostheneidas by fear, and who can be only listeners to the last stages of the philosophical discourse. One side has the good education and mental detachment but is useless; the other is mired in worldly disturbances but performs noble deeds. This contradiction, the gap between theory and practice fundamental in Plutarch's thought,²¹ is resolved completely in Socrates, partially in Epameinondas.

²⁰ Eisele, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 30, first suggested that Plutarch meant to contrast the "energischer Lebensbetätigung" of the one party with the "welfremder Spekulation" of the other. He did not develop this insight in his article, which is devoted to refuting Hirzel's views on Plutarch's demonology.

²¹ Usually the contradiction is expressed by comparing fine art and fine deeds (*καλά*). As Plutarch says at *Per.* 2, no one seeing Phidias' statue of Zeus at Olympia or hearing the poems of Anacreon wants to be Phidias or Anacreon, however much he may admire their works. Good character (*τὸ καλόν*) is not formed by imitating things but by activity (*πρακτικῶς κινεῖ*). The same principle is enunciated in *De gloria Atheniensium*, in which Plutarch upholds the value of Athenian deeds, e.g., Themistocles' wall, over Athenian achievements in the arts, e.g., tragedy (*De glor.Ath.* 348c). The art object has no value compared to the actualization of the virtues in a person's life. No art objects as such are presented in *De genio*, but Timarchus' vision comes close. Knowing the theory of human behavior and being able to act when necessary are two different things. Simmias and Theanor present

Socrates was the only man who could combine both the rôle of the complete philosopher, calm and undisturbed, and the rôle of the active citizen. In *De genio* we see him as a philosopher arguing cheerfully with Euthyphro (580D): we are reminded of a specific dialogue. Polymnis brings to mind Socrates' civic activities by mentioning Socrates' experiences in battle and his prediction of Athenian losses in Sicily (581D-E). As the perfect philosopher who has a well-controlled mind, he is open to daimonic guidance at all times and he can put this guidance to use even in so trivial an episode as meeting a drove of pigs and in so critical a time as defeat in battle. He never loses the nature which enables him to hear the daimonic voice. As a good citizen Socrates fights well for his city and advises on major civic issues. (The reader of *De genio* will also remember Socrates' obedience to the laws of Athens—*Crito* 50Bff.) In short, Socrates can lead an active life yet still be guided by his *daimon*.

Socrates thus resolves the tension between philosopher and citizen by being both. None of the other actors in *De genio* has reached so far: Simmias, obviously paralleled to Socrates in many ways,²² has attained knowledge, but he is not an active citizen. The conspiracy happens almost in front of him; he hates the tyrant's odious nature (578D); but he does nothing about it. The narrator, Caphisias, and the other conspirators are good citizens but do not have Simmias' knowledge or abilities in philosophy. Caphisias personally can contribute very little to the discussion, even when asked ("It is for you, Epameinondas, to speak" 583D).

Epameinondas comes close to attaining both goals, philosopher and citizen, and is the 'hero' of this essay. He contributes to the philosophical discussions by his reply to Theanor, a major contribution. He does not proceed to the heights of philosophy, visions and myths, although it is implied that he could if he wished: Theanor declares that Epameinondas has the same fund of doctrines as himself. Epameinondas' habit, however, is to be silent and cautious in speaking (592F). Thus he remains a hearer of Simmias' and Theanor's metaphorical flights; he does not philosophize in the same way. As a

theories; the other Thebans act. In their actions they show a character worthy of imitation. You may admire a philosopher's theories; you do not necessarily admire the philosopher. See Wardman, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 22-26. The philosopher-king seems to have no place in Plutarch's theory of government.

²² See Hirzel, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 149.

citizen Epameinondas contributes to the liberation of Thebes, not as an active conspirator but in the necessary rôle as consolidator of victory, when he and Gorgidas bring a company of citizens to the temple of Athena (598D). His reasons for not participating in the attack itself are certainly to be taken as valid; thus he can be considered equally as concerned with Thebes' fate as are the conspirators even though he does not share their methods.

Thus Epameinondas bridges the gap between philosopher and citizen. Although not inspired in the same way as Simmias, he can still actively philosophize; not as intense and fierce as some of the conspirators (Eumolpidas and Samidas 577A), he still knows of and contributes to the liberation. Why is he not as active as the conspirators? (1) Plutarch had to consider historical accuracy; Epameinondas really was not part of the conspiracy.²³ (2) More important thematically, Epameinondas' non-participation in the heat of battle makes it possible for him to have a calmer and more undisturbed soul, the kind with which a *daimon* could communicate. The conspirators cannot be calm; note the constant alarms—576D, 577B, 586B, 595A. Epameinondas' rôle allows him to remain unruffled throughout without thereby neglecting his duty as a citizen.

Epameinondas is certainly not pictured as the equal of Socrates. Nobody could be. As such his contributions are primarily ethical, not mythical or metaphysical. In this he is parallel again to the Platonic Socrates, who propounds in his own person the *Republic*, but who only listens to the metaphysical *Timaeus*. Epameinondas' theories can help in making better men, whereas the professional Simmias' contributions allow us to know merely how men are directed in mythical terms. Plutarch's interest in political philosophy and in practical ethics, as shown in the *Lives* and in his treatises on psychotherapy (*De cohibenda ira*, *De curiositate*, etc.) make it clear that he would value the theory contained in Epameinondas' speech.²⁴ Epameinondas is not a

²³ Compare the statement at *Pelop.* 5: "Epameinondas remained in Thebes [after the oligarchs came into power] because they despised him as a recluse (*ἀπράγμων*) because of his philosophy and as powerless because of his poverty." Note that here too philosophers are considered to be uninvolved in affairs.

²⁴ Plutarch's treatises on psychotherapy, *De cohibenda ira*, *De garrulitate*, *De curiositate*, *De vitioso pudore*, *De laude ipsius*, contain the same urgings to training and practice, beginning with easy tasks, until the fault is corrected. Thus good behavior is the result of training which can be systematized and taught to those who wish to improve themselves. For a general study of these treatises see H. G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarch's Schriften über die Heilung der Seele* (Göttingen 1971). For use of Aristotle's theories by Platonists see n.14 above.

metaphysician but an ethical thinker, a philosopher of a type different from Simmias but of equal value.

If no one besides Socrates actually hears the daimonic voice or is otherwise personally guided, even though he may know from Timarchus' vision that he is being guided, how can a person be sure he is on the right path? In a given situation how can one know that his choices, which are made on the basis of his nature and (ideally) of daimonic guidance, are correct? To answer this question we must return briefly to the subject of the oracles and omens mentioned at the crucial points of the narrative (see section A above). Plutarch implies by citing these omens that the liberation of Thebes was divinely inspired and guided. Following are the most important:

- (1) The evil portent for the Spartans (578A). Lysanorides must pour libations on the tomb of Dirce, which he will not be able to find since only the exiled hipparchs know the location. Hence his propitiation must fail. In addition his mission to pour libations causes him to be out of town at the critical moment of the attack. The evil portent foretells of course the expulsion of the Spartan garrison.
- (2) Simmias' aside, "God will perhaps take care of this" (*ὡς θεὸς μελήσει* 578D). The comment is significant in two ways: (a) Simmias has made the statement that mere association with tyrants is enough to make anyone hate them. He then passes to a new topic with that comment, which in context becomes portentous: the god is in fact looking after the success of the conspiracy, as we can tell from the result. (b) The comment shows Simmias' detachment. As a philosopher he will not act out his disgust at the tyrants but will leave it to the gods.
- (3) The narrator's encouragement to Hippostheneidas that "the gods are urging us to act" by the failure of Hippostheneidas' intervention (588B). The narrator considers this apparently fortuitous occurrence as a sign of eventual success.
- (4) Lightning on the right as the exiles enter Thebes (594E). This seems to be a sign indicating success without danger.
- (5) Theocritus' sacrifices, which promise success despite what is thought to be imminent danger when Charon is summoned to Archias (595E).

The occurrence of these omens in the narrative and the proving of their accuracy by the final outcome indicate that they are significant

despite the fact that they cannot be used constantly for guidance. Favorable omens are a sign of god's favor, always provided that one recognizes that the sign acts through the person interpreting it, and that consequently the message and its recipient influence each other. This proviso is illustrated by (3), (4) and (5) above: the favorable omens are discovered by those who want and are actively working for success. Hippotheneidas would not have interpreted the failure of his attempt in the same way; the lightning would have meant nothing to the tyrants if they had seen it. Likewise in (1): Lysanorides cannot propitiate the gods because of a situation for which he is at least partially responsible, namely the fact that there are no legitimate hipparchs available in Thebes. Omens come from the daimonic voice, and they work both through and in cooperation with human nature.

Too much stress should not be laid on these omens; they occur, and they are an accepted if limited source of information. Plutarch's main interest seems to be the mechanism of choice, not the verification of choice. As Archedamus says in the beginning (575c), the choices themselves and the reasons for them are important, not their eventual success or failure, which can be due to chance. To divide *De genio* schematically we can outline the mechanism of choice in this way: the narrative sections portray what happens in the 'real' world; appropriate and believable motivations are attributed to the actors in this real world. They act in keeping with their nature and habits, which are formed according to the theory of 'real-world' ethics outlined in Epameinondas' reply to Theanor. The philosophical discussions show the ideal, spiritual world; the actors in this world are not persons, but souls, *daimones*, swimmers in the universe (as in Theanor's speech, 593f). The interactions of souls and *daimones* are explained in mythical terms, not in realistic, psychological terms. Timarchus' vision is an outline of the spiritual bases of the soul's actions.

It is only in the figure of Socrates that the real world and the spiritual world meet. Simmias tells us the connection: in his actions in the real world, Socrates displayed concretely the type of soul that a *daimon* could guide. This guidance manifests itself in the real world as a voice (588c-589f). No one else in this essay manifests so concretely the spiritual world or hears such a voice. We must assume that Plutarch considered the liberation of Thebes to have been divinely

guided (otherwise the essay would make no sense), but he recognizes that this guidance is immanent in each person and is usually unrecognized. The conspirators are guided, but they cannot know it directly; they can only deduce it through signs and omens. Only in the rare or perhaps unique case of Socrates can this guidance be directly perceived. That we can perceive it in Socrates gives us a hint of how the guidance may work in ordinary men. This hint is developed in Simmias' speech and in Timarchus' vision, section C of *De genio*.

In no other essay did Plutarch attempt to combine so extensively a philosophical topic typical of the *Moralia* with an actual historical narrative from the *Lives*. Philosophical discussions are, to be sure, common in the *Lives*, but they are treated as digressions while the narrative takes decided precedence. The philosophical essays of the *Moralia* usually have a setting, with occasionally some significant action illustrating the discussion, particularly the *Amatorius*, but none has so extreme and so notable an historical background. Ancient, and especially Platonic, philosophy loved the speaking voice in dialogues and diatribes; even the sober Aristotle used the dialogue form; but in no case to my knowledge is so much narrative combined with philosophic discussion. This combination leads to confusion on the part of the reader, a confusion which I hope to have lessened by pointing out the ties between the discussion and the narrative. Essentially what Plutarch undertook was to comment philosophically on a topic from the *Lives*, how individuals are personally and providentially motivated. His comments discuss matters which are of continuing concern, for example why we react as we do to unforeseen events, in a manner which is by no means simple and which gives lasting value to *De genio Socratis*.²⁵

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