

## СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

# THE FEMININE, THE ORIGIN OF EVIL AND THE MOTION OF MATTER IN PLUTARCH'S *DE ANIMAE PROCREATIONE*

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ABSTRACT. Plutarch's *De animae procreatione* is, by the author's own admission, an unusual account of the cosmogony in the *Timaeus*, yet what is most original about it is often overlooked. The philosopher and biographer has a relatively positive view of women's intellectual capabilities, including their ability to attain virtue, and as such the suggestion that the feminine principle of the cosmos is the origin of sublunary evil presents both an ethical and a metaphysical problem. Plutarch attempts to solve this problem by separating Matter from its movement, thus theorising a third kind, disorderly motion that ultimately causes evil. Even so, he maintains a close relationship between Motion and Matter by stressing their acosmic interaction, which allows for a degree of scepticism regarding the feminine and the female while creating space for the virtue of women. He does so by incorporating Matter and Motion into a single acosmic principle of disorder, the Indefinite Dyad. This division of kinds is apparent also in *De Iside*, where it becomes clear that Plutarch intends to frame the feminine as a potentially positive force in the cosmos.

KEYWORDS: Plutarch, Plato, matter, Receptacle, motion, evil, Indefinite Dyad, Isis.

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In *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* Plutarch names three first principles, real existence, space, and becoming (1024c). This phrase, ὄν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν, is a direct quote of *Timaeus* 52d.<sup>1</sup> The exact nature and relation of these three kinds

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<sup>1</sup>The full phrase reads ὄν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν εἶναι τρία τριχῆ καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι, "real existence, space and becoming were three and distinct even before heaven came to be" (cf. *Ti.* 50d). All translations are from the LCL. Sallis has given a subtle ac-

is a notoriously difficult problem of Plato's cosmogony, and it is in particular the latter two and the origin of evil that has caused serious scholarly speculation. Much of this revolves on a reading of *Laws* 10, where Plato posits both a beneficent and a maleficent soul (896e). Demulder has highlighted the prominence of *Laws* 10, especially 892a-898e, in *De animae procreatione*.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch's dualism is well-known but its subtleties remain elusive, so scholars tend to ascribe to him a measure of inconsistency. Chlup has argued that Plutarch does theorise two opposing powers, but that the irrational is only found in the sublunary sphere and the metaphysical schema of *De animae procreatione* and *De Iside* therefore fails to clarify the relation of the irrational principle to the highest ontological level. According to Chlup, Plutarch's primary interest is ethical, for which metaphysics is only a support and a guide.<sup>3</sup> However, metaphysics also offers an explanation for ethical dilemmas not so easily supported otherwise.<sup>4</sup> Plutarch's theory of the origin of evil can thus be read as a critical expansion to his arguments for women's ability to attain both moral and philosophical virtue.<sup>5</sup>

Plutarch's understanding of the passage at *Laws* 896e which postulates two opposing cosmic souls is crucial to his view of the feminine and the origin of evil. The disordered movement of the Receptacle, described as a "shaking" of the elements in the *Timaeus* (52e-53a, cf. 57c), thus presents a real problem, since it's not quite clear whether the movement is that of the Receptacle itself. Dillon understood the Receptacle to be a source of disorderly motion but not positively evil, "a system exhibiting all the whole spectrum of possible varieties of being", while Ferrari considered the motion of Matter the result of an irrational acosmic<sup>6</sup> soul which Plutarch identified with the maleficent soul of *Laws* 10.<sup>7</sup> Vlastos identified

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count of the significance of the number three in the *Timaeus*, which indeed begins with a counting, Εἶς, δύο, τρεῖς (Sallis 1999, 7-12). Cf. *Ti.* 17a.

<sup>2</sup> Demulder (2017) 147.

<sup>3</sup> Chlup (2000) 155.

<sup>4</sup> As Bonazzi (2012, 140) notes, the object of philosophy was, for Plutarch, to attain balance between *theoria* and *praxis*.

<sup>5</sup> Nikolaidis (1997) has argued that Plutarch was a proto-feminist; see also P. Gilbert Barberà (2007) 123-132, P.A. Stadter (1999) 173-182. On Plutarch's interest in the feminine see Valverde Sánchez (2003) 442.

<sup>6</sup> This state is often described as 'pre-cosmic', although as Rist (1962, 99) and Wood (2009, 373 n. 90) point out, it is strictly speaking incorrect, since the state of things before the generation of the universe should not be taken literally – speaking of it as *before* is a necessity of language, but it is technically extemporal; I have therefore chosen to characterise this state rather as 'acosmic', which, in any case, is closer to Plutarch's use of ἀκοσμία.

<sup>7</sup> J.M. Dillon (2007) 39, F. Ferrari (1996) 47.

disorderly motion as the cause of evil but denied that there is in Plato an acosmic 'evil' soul akin to that found in Plutarch's metaphysics. Instead, he considered evil the result of soul's partnership with body, which causes irrational corporeal motions.<sup>8</sup>

Motion is a predominant theme in *De animae procreatione*. This has important implications for Plutarch's reading of the relationship between the three kinds at *Timaeus* 52d and the passage in *Laws* 10. I'm not concerned here with whether Plutarch's account is a *correct* interpretation of Plato, but rather whether it is plausible and internally consistent. My argument is two-fold: (1) Matter and Motion are separate kinds that act on the highest ontological level, that of the acosmos; and (2) they are inseparable in principle, thus Matter and (its) Motion together comprise the Indefinite Dyad (ἀόριστος δυάς). I see two advantages to this argument. The first part clarifies that the feminine is not the origin of evil and supports Plutarch's views on the virtue of women in texts such as *Mulierum virtutes* and the *Amatorius*. The second part allows for a measure of scepticism regarding women's ability to attain virtue in practice.

It is clear in both *De animae procreatione* and *De Iside* that Plutarch intends to separate the feminine from misconceptions that attribute to it the origin of evil. Matter is without quality and differentiation, and thus cannot be the cause of evil (*An. proc.* 1015d). Nor is his account here particularly inconsistent; he never assigns to Matter itself a cause of disorder except insofar as it is in contact with *disorderly motion*. Attributing the cause of evil to Matter is a misapprehension of Plato shared even by Eudemus (1015d). Characterising Matter or the feminine as the cause of evil has serious implications for Plutarch's views on the virtue of women. Plutarch does see two opposing souls on the basis of *Laws* 10 but is quite clear that they are different souls that exist on different ontological levels, and that neither the good nor the maleficent soul can be equated with the feminine principle.

The formulation at *De animae procreatione* 1015d, where Plutarch explicitly states that the feminine ("mother and nurse") cannot be the cause of evil, functions as a commentary on the inherent nature of women, who Plutarch argues elsewhere are fully capable of 'masculine' virtue (*Amat.* 769b-c, *Mulier. virt.* 242f-243a). As a result, a fundamental question arises: if the feminine is not the origin of evil, what is? In *De animae procreatione* Plutarch offers a solution to this problem by positing an acosmic motive cause which is distinct from Matter, though closely entwined with it. This configuration of acosmic being has the benefit of

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<sup>8</sup> G. Vlastos (1939) 80-82.

absolving the feminine of her role as the origin of evil, thus allowing for women's complete participation in virtue.

### *Matter and (Its) Motion*

Plutarch tends to incorporate a number of principles into the three kinds, offering a unified account of Plato's cosmology.<sup>9</sup> These principles operate at the highest ontological level, from which Sameness and Difference is derived. According to Opsomer there are two originating principles in Plutarch, indivisible being and divisible being, which Opsomer termed the 'cognitive' and the 'motive' forces. In this structure indivisible being is τὸ ὅν, while divisible being is Soul-in-Itself, and to the mixture of these is added Sameness and Difference. For Opsomer these principles are derivatives of two ultimate principles, the One and the Dyad. He argued that the "compound of divisible and indivisible being then serves as a receptacle for the admixture of the entirely antagonistic principles of sameness and difference".<sup>10</sup> But the Receptacle is ungenerated and everlasting (cf. *Ti.* 52b); it is not itself the mixture, but rather the substrate for the mixture. Hence for Plutarch, Matter and Motion are not divisible in the same way; Motion is *the being that becomes divisible in the case of bodies* (*An. proc.* 1022f) while Matter is *body divided into particularity* (1023a). Let us then first address the argument for the separation of Motion from Matter.

In Plutarch's view, the generation of soul cannot be a simple mixture of intelligible and perceptible being, since in that way one might generate anything whatsoever (*An. proc.* 1013b-c). When he begins his own exposition of the *Timaeus* at *De animae procreatione* 1014a, he notes that the substance out of which the universe came to be was already available for the demiurge (1014b). The elements were unmixed and unamiable in their acosmic state, moving with their own motions (*De facie* 926f). Plutarch calls this condition *disorder* (ἀχοσμία), the state of things from which god is absent (*An. proc.* 1016f, *De facie* 926f, cf. *Pl. Ti.* 53b). This section is most revealing and deserves closer scrutinising in light of what follows (*An. proc.* 1014b):

(1) disorder is not incorporeal (ἀσώματος), it is a state of corporeality that is amorphous (ἄμορφον) and incoherent

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<sup>9</sup> On Plutarch's unitary interpretation see Bonazzi, who states that he was among the few Platonists to attempt such a unification and is especially notable for his accounts of some of the more challenging aspects of Platonist philosophy; Bonazzi (2012) 140. On Plutarch's originality, see Ferrari, who considered Plutarch's cosmology especially distinctive; Ferrari (1996) 44.

<sup>10</sup> J. Opsomer (2007) 379-381.

(2) disorder is not immobile (ἀκίνητος), it is a state of motivity (κίνησις) that is demented and irrational

(3) disorder is not inanimate (ἄψυχος), it is the discord of the soul devoid of reason

This acosmic state is thus psychic in some sense, hence god did not make the incorporeal into body nor did he make the inanimate into soul (1014b-c; cf. *De Is. et Os.* 369a). Plutarch thereby sets up an opposition between corporeality and soul but doesn't quite yet explain what he means by 'soul'. Following Demulder, acosmic being consists of amorphous corporeality and unreasoning soul, both of which are ungenerated and have always coexisted.<sup>11</sup> God did not create the tangibility and resistance of body or the imagination and motivity of soul, but he took over *both* (ἀμφοτέρω) the principles, the former vague and obscure and the latter disordered and irrational (*An. proc.* 1014b-c, cf. 1027a).<sup>12</sup> Both were indefinite (ἄόριστος) before the intervention of the demiurge. Immediately following this passage Plutarch defines the substance of body (1014c) and the substance of soul (1014d). From the outset, then, it appears that Plutarch intends to separate Matter from (its) Motion.

In *De animae procreatione* Necessity (ἀνάγκη) and Unlimitedness (ἄπειρον) appear as properties of the divisible motive cause rather than separate principles. Plutarch identifies *soul* with Necessity, which in the *Timaeus* is something separate from the Intellect, devoid of Intellect altogether, and which produces accidental and irregular effects (*Ti.* 46e). Soul in this sense – not Matter – is the cause of evil:

Those, however, who attribute to matter (τῇ ὕλῃ) and not to the soul what in the *Timaeus* is called necessity (ἀνάγκην) and in the *Philebus* measurelessness and infinitude (ἀμετρίαν καὶ ἀπειρίαν) in the varying degrees of deficiency and excess, what will they make of the fact that by Plato matter is said always to be amorphous and shapeless and devoid of all quality and potency (δυνάμειος) of its own ... For what is without quality and of itself inert and without propensity Plato cannot suppose to be cause and principle of evil (αἰτίαν κακοῦ καὶ ἀρχὴν) and call ugly and maleficent infinitude and again necessity which is largely refractory and recalcitrant to god (*An. proc.* 1014e-1015a, cf. *De Is. et Os.* 369e, *Virt. mor.* 451b)

This passage includes an important detail: Matter is *inert*, it has no motion of its own, nor is it ἄπειρον or ἀνάγκη (cf. Pl. *Ti.* 50e). Those properties belong instead to a third kind, which is here simply called ψυχή (cf. Pl. *Ti.* 47e). Plutarch is

<sup>11</sup> Demulder (2017) 146.

<sup>12</sup> Not so according to Eudorus, who made god the causal principle of Matter; J.M. Dillon (1996) 127.

clearly trying to draw disparate threads in Plato together.<sup>13</sup> *Laws* 892d-896c argues for the priority of soul over body by positing soul as a prime cause of motion and change much like that of the *Phaedrus* (245d), where that which moves itself is the source of all motion. The worse of the two souls is responsible for the irrational motions in the cosmos (*Leg.* 898b). In the *Phaedrus* Socrates claims that bodies that derive motion from others are soulless, but those that derive motion from within by definition have souls, since motivity is the fundamental nature of the soul (*Phdr.* 246d-e). According to Gabriela Carone, Plato speaks of soul in different senses in the *Laws*, though he never explicitly says so. One *kind of soul* is soul in the abstract sense, and another is the more concrete kind that governs the universe, i.e. the World Soul. Carone argued that Plato calls Motion soul, specifically the motion able to move both itself and other things and which is thus the potentiality of change in corporeal things.<sup>14</sup> This primary motion is the cause of all secondary motions (*Leg.* 897a-b, *Ti.* 46c-e, 68e). Soul in this sense – abstract and noncorporeal – is not the same as the World Soul but only a constituent of it.

Plutarch seems to understand acosmic soul in this sense. He therefore criticises philosophers who would attribute Necessity to Matter.<sup>15</sup> Necessity is that which is measureless and infinite, i.e. soul:

As for the substance of soul, in the *Philebus* he has called it infinitude (ἀπειρίαν) ... and in the *Timaeus* that which is blended together with the indivisible nature and is said to become divisible in the case of bodies must be held to mean ... that disorderly and indeterminate but self-moved and motive principle (ἄτακτον καὶ ἀόριστον αὐτοκίνητον δὲ καὶ κινητικὴν ἀρχήν) which in many places he has called Necessity (ἀνάγκην) but in the *Laws* has openly called disorderly and maleficent soul. This, in fact, was soul in itself (ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν) ... (*An. proc.* 1014d)

Thus the cause of evil is soul, specifically the kind of soul here characterised as ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν. Soul-in-Itself is the first cause of Motion, since it is self-impelled and is thus the necessary principle of all motion in the cosmos, but it is disorderly without the Intellect.

With reference to the *Statesman*, Plutarch argues that it is Necessity that is responsible for the periodic reversal of the heavens (*An. proc.* 1015a). When the

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<sup>13</sup> According to Opsomer, Plutarch is attempting to work out inconsistencies and contradictions in Plato's work; J. Opsomer (2004) 147.

<sup>14</sup> G. Carone (1994) 277-278, 286-287. Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 895b-896a.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Cicero *Acad.* 1.27-28; Philo considers the Dyad impure and the source of infinity in Matter (*Quaest. in Ge.* 2.12), empty and divided (*Quaest. in Ge.* 4.30), yet also a female principle similar to the Receptacle in the *Timaeus* which he calls Sophia; see Dillon (1996) 163-164. As Ferrari (1996, 47) pointed out, Plutarch divides the Timaeian Receptacle into two separate aspects, one kinetic and psychic and the other passive and receptive.

demiurge withdraws from guiding its revolutions the reverse motion of the universe is a self-motion, causing destruction and change in the body (Pl. *Pol.* 269d-270c). This passage seems to attribute the reverse motion to the body, but the Stranger clarifies that the deterioration attributed to the body is due to its being infected by disorder ( $\delta\tau\alpha\xi\lambda\alpha$ ) in its acosmic state (273b).<sup>16</sup> Rohr took the cause of the reverse motion of the cosmos to be disorderly motion.<sup>17</sup> Plutarch characterises this reversal as forgetfulness, during which “the part intimate with body and sensitive to it from the beginning” periodically disrupts the harmonious movement of the World Soul (*An. proc.* 1026e-f). The ‘part’ referred to here must be Soul-in-Itself, which has always co-existed with Matter.

Disorder therefore doesn’t seem to arise from body, but rather appears as a separate principle of change and deterioration that is entwined with body and causes it to be disordered. Chlup took a similar view, arguing that Soul-in-Itself is “an unborn and everlasting source of motion, but its movements are irrational and blind”.<sup>18</sup> Chlup focused on the dualistic nature of Plutarch’s account, which has the unfortunate result of neglecting the corporeal principle in favour of its erratic movement.<sup>19</sup> Such a strict dualism cannot have productive results, but it requires something to serve as Receptacle and Matter (*An. proc.* 1026a), thus producing three kinds at the level of first principles – Intellect, Matter and Motion. The dualism in *De animae procreatione* focuses not only on the opposition between a beneficent and maleficent power but their interactions with the substrate, which is an intermediate corporeal principle. Opsomer has argued that divisible being is both material and Soul-in-Itself, but it is also a ‘non-material’ substrate which only becomes tangible Matter after the creation of the cosmos.<sup>20</sup> When Plutarch says that the source of generation is not what is

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<sup>16</sup> Literally, “having a share in” ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ ) disorder (*Pol.* 273b). Wood points out that the ‘evil’ associated with the body is not evil but disorder, and disorder is not bodily but a lack of measure; Wood (2009) 365-366.

<sup>17</sup> R.D. Rohr (1981) 201-202.

<sup>18</sup> Chlup (2000) 139.

<sup>19</sup> See for example his discussion of acosmic disorder as Plato describes it at *Timaeus* 52d-e. That section describes the “shaking” of the Receptacle and the elements, and indeed does not suggest that Matter and its movement must necessarily be separate kinds. To suggest, however, as Chlup does that Plutarch takes the shaking of the Receptacle as a description of irrational Soul-in-Itself requires setting aside the many statements in which he deliberately pronounces the separation of Matter and Motion. Chlup seems aware of this when he notes that the irrational soul of *De animae* is a response to the need to formulate a cause of evil, since it cannot be attributed either to Matter or to Intellect; Chlup (2000) 143, 154-155.

<sup>20</sup> Opsomer (2004) 142-143.

non-existent (*An. proc.* 1014b), he must then be referring not only to the unshaped corporeal being but also to the disorderly and irrational non-corporeal being which gains its existence through its interaction with Matter.

In this case he might be thinking of the *Sophist's* argument that not-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) exists because of its participation in being. There τὸ μὴ ὄν is ultimately identified as Motion, which is something other than being; it both is being and is not-being, and not-being is therefore that which is inevitable (ἀνάγκη, *Soph.* 256d). In *Against Colotes* not-being denotes a measure of Difference, of deviation from the pattern in particulars, because it is a process of becoming to which τὸ ὄν is not subject (1115d-e). Wood similarly identified the cause of evil with the not-being and Difference of the *Sophist* and the Unlimitedness of the *Philebus*. He calls this cause a “principle of disorder and negativity”.<sup>21</sup> Wood’s analysis is convincing in its argument for the relation between metaphysical principles that act on different ontological levels, and his examination of these principles across dialogues is especially elucidating for Plutarch’s understanding of Plato. For Vlastos, a cosmic disorderly Motion, like unshaped Matter, is the raw material from which the demiurge created regular movement and Time.<sup>22</sup> So in the *Timaeus* the distinction between τὸ ὄν and γένεσιν is a distinction between what exists and what only seems to exist, or has the potential to exist (28a). *De E* describes not-being as a motion in Time, a process of change and destruction that admits of no permanence in being (392e-f). Vlastos saw γένεσιν as this raw material which causes change and destruction and which without the ordering of the demiurge would be “nothing at all”.<sup>23</sup> Becoming then never really gains existence, but is always in a process of generation and destruction. This process is dependent on Matter, which provides the substrate for visible and tangible bodies. The demiurge is the source of the Forms these bodies copy, Becoming the cause of their irregularity. Thus Plutarch’s supposition that γένεσιν is “the being involved in changes and motions” (*An. proc.* 1024c). Presumably, Motion is nothing without this constant interaction, i.e. without *something* to move about Motion does not exist.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Wood (2009) 350, 357.

<sup>22</sup> Vlastos (1939) 76. This appears to be how Plutarch understood the genesis of Time; in *Quaest. Plat.* he notes that time is orderly motion which had come into being along with the heavens, but motion had existed even before this. In that state motion was indeterminate (ἀόριστος) and matter amorphous (ἄμορφος). Here too Matter and Motion appear to be separate kinds, as indicated by the use of ἄμω (1007b-d).

<sup>23</sup> Vlastos (1939) 76.

<sup>24</sup> Carone picks up on this when she notes that all motion takes place *in space* and therefore in the Matter that is distributed within space; Carone (1994) 279. Cf. *Ti.* 51b. On



Plutarch offers a particularly lucid explanation of these principles at *De animae procreatione* 1015b-e. Arguing against the Stoics, he denies that evil could have arisen from either Matter or God since the former is without quality and the latter is the Good, and if there was nothing besides evil would not have come to be. There must therefore be a third principle and potency (τρίτην ἀρχὴν καὶ δύναμιν), as Plato himself had recognised (*An. proc.* 1015b, cf. 1026a). This principle, which is soul in the sense of ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν, is at the farthest remove from god. It is essential that Soul-in-Itself is not the feminine:

In fact, while Plato calls matter mother and nurse (μητέρα μὲν καὶ τιθήνην), what he calls the cause of evil (αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ) is the motion that moves matter (τὴν κινήτικὴν τῆς ὕλης) and becomes divisible in the case of bodies, the disorderly and irrational but not inanimate motion, which in the *Laws*, as has been said, he called soul contrary and adverse to the one that is beneficent. For soul is cause and principle of motion (αἰτία κινήσεως καὶ ἀρχή), but intelligence of order and consonance in motion; and the fact is that god did not arouse matter from torpor but put a stop to its being disturbed by the mindless cause (*An. proc.* 1015d-e)

Thus far three things are clear: (1) Matter and Motion are separate kinds, (2) acosmic soul is an unreasoning disorderly motivity, and (3) disorderly Motion is the ultimate cause of evil. Yet even though they are separate kinds, it appears that Matter and Motion cannot be separated in principle. The reason for this is Motion's non-corporeality, which makes it dependent on Matter for its existence.

Plutarch often assigns Necessity and Unlimitedness to Motion but rarely to Matter.<sup>25</sup> In *De E*, with reference to both the *Philebus* and the *Sophist*, the ἄπειρον is identified as Motion and contrasted with Limit (πέρας), which is at rest (391bc, cf. *De facie.* 925f, *An. proc.* 1026a). Yet both of these kinds, body and soul (or corporeality and motivity), were indefinite (ἄοριστος) in their acosmic state (*An. proc.* 1014c). In the acosmos Motion and Matter acted on one another in a disorderly and unproductive way. While body doesn't by nature have any quality proper to itself, its share in disorder arising from the interaction of Matter and Motion in the acosmos causes bodies to tend towards disorder and irrationality if they don't seek the Good.<sup>26</sup> Hence god did not arouse Matter from idleness but put a stop to the disturbance caused in it by disorderly motion, nor did he impart the origin of change to it, since he is by nature at rest, indestructible and unchangeable, but he removed the indefinitude (ἄοριστία) and discordant motion (πλημμέλεια) through

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whether or not Motion exists see also Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 10.37ff. Aristotle reports that for Parmenides becoming is a process of emerging out of non-existence (*Phys.* 192a1-2).

<sup>25</sup> At *Quaest. Plat.* 1001d body is unlimited and indefinite when it is pure Matter.

<sup>26</sup> Wood (2009) 366.

harmony and concord and number (*An. proc.* 1015e).<sup>27</sup> In this manner he created the World Soul.

Plutarch therefore sees two souls, an acosmic soul that is itself ungenerated and irrational and the motive cause of all things generated, and a rational World Soul that is the generated mixture of the first principles and to which Intellect and Reason has been imparted by the demiurge (*An. proc.* 1016c, 1017a, cf. *De Is. et Os.* 369e, *Virt. mor.* 451b). Dillon has taken Plutarch's views on the irrational soul to mean that he sees the World Soul as essentially irrational.<sup>28</sup> Like the Indefinite Dyad, the rational World Soul and Matter, Dillon sees the 'evil' soul as a feminine principle.<sup>29</sup> Yet it seems that Plutarch considers the World Soul itself to be the rational soul, and there is little indication that there is more than one World Soul (cf. *De def. or.* 424c-d). He notes the inconsistency between the *Timaeus*, where soul is generated, and the *Phaedrus*, where soul is ungenerated (1016a). To solve this difficulty, he makes a distinction between two *kinds of soul*:<sup>30</sup>

For unsubject to generation is said of the soul that before the generation of the universe keeps all things in disorderly and jangling motion (πλημμελῶς πάντα καὶ

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<sup>27</sup> cf. *Ti.* 30a and *An. proc.* 1016c, where *πλημμελῶς* is used of discordant motivity. Chlup also notes that cosmic Intellect and its derivative human Reason has no motion of its own; Chlup (2000) 157.

<sup>28</sup> Vlastos (1939) 77-78; Rohr (1981) 200; Dillon, (1985) 111-112, 119; Dillon (1996) 206. Dillon argued that Xenocrates equated the Dyad with the World Soul, which is essentially disorderly and irrational, yet it is not clear that the soul spoken of here (fr.15 Heinze) is specifically the World Soul and not what Plutarch would term 'Soul-in-Itself'; Dillon (1996) 26. Phillips gives a succinct version of Plutarch's cosmogony which bears many similarities to that presented in this article, most notably in his recognition of three principles roughly analogous to the Intellect, Matter and Motion discussed here. He too sees an evil World Soul in Plutarch, which he equates with Soul-in-Itself; J. Phillips (2002) 233.

<sup>29</sup> Dillon (1985) 112. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 5.8, who ascribes to the Pythagoreans the view that the Monad is masculine and the Dyad feminine and thus that all odd numbers are male and all even numbers are female. Xenocrates considered both the Monad and the Dyad divine, with the former being a male principle and the latter female and the principle of soul (fr.15 Heinze). Also in Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* 288d-e, who adds the further qualification that the man "should be four-square, eminent, and perfect; but a woman, like a cube, should be stable, domestic, and difficult to remove from her place." Thus even numbers are imperfect, incomplete and indeterminate and odd numbers are the opposite (270b).

<sup>30</sup> Demulder accurately describes this as "two successive states of soul rather than two souls"; Demulder (2017) 146. Opsomer agrees that speaking of two World Souls rather than two stages of soul in Plutarch is misleading; Opsomer (2004) 143.

ἀτάκτως κινούσαν),<sup>31</sup> but come to be and so subject to generation is said on the other hand of soul that god installed as chief of the sum of things when out of this soul here and that abiding and most excellent being yonder he had produced a rational and orderly one and from himself had provided intellectuality and orderliness as form for her perceptivity and motivity. (*An. proc.* 1016c-d)

The ‘rational and orderly’ soul thus produced is the World Soul (κόσμου ψυχῆ, *An. proc.* 1017a), which contains acosmic Soul-in-Itself as a necessary part that provides motivity. God is therefore not the creator of either body or soul in the absolute sense; acosmic soul is “a certain self-moved and so perpetually activated potency of imaginative and opinionative but irrational and disorderly transport and impulse” (*An. proc.* 1017a) while the body upon which it acts is the potentiality of perceptibility. There is no Motion without Matter and there is no soul without Motion. Likewise, there is no World Soul and no cosmos without god. Without his Intellect Matter and Motion cannot be truly productive, and even though they are not the same, they are bound together by their indefinite nature. Thus we turn to the Dyad and the interaction of Motion and Matter in the body.

#### *The Dyad, the Feminine and Somatic Disorder*

Matter and Motion may not be the same, but there is one characteristic that they consistently share: ἀοριστία. The notion that this indefinitude might in fact be two principles originates in the testimony of Aristotle. He wrote that the Dyad is for Plato a duality of the “Great and Small”, which is a material principle (*Metaph.* 987b21ff).<sup>32</sup> Plutarch, like others before him, adopts the term ἀόριστος δυάς as too the use of ὕλη for Matter, while all the while referring back to Plato himself.<sup>33</sup> The materiality of the Dyad, its role as a principle of evil and its relation to the feminine therefore poses a real problem for the philosopher who wishes to absolve the feminine from any direct role in the origin of evil. This difficulty can be resolved if the Indefinite Dyad is one principle but two kinds. As Aristotle suggests

<sup>31</sup> This phrase recalls the acosmic κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως at *Timaeus* 30a.

<sup>32</sup> A common belief; Numenius ascribed to Pythagoras the view that the Dyad is Matter (Laks R69), also recorded by Diogenes Laertius on the authority of Alexander Polyhistor (8.1.25) and Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 10.277). For Philo the Dyad is Matter “passive and divisible” (*De spec. Leg.* 3.32).

<sup>33</sup> Ferrari (1996) 44-45. Becchi provides a short but useful overview on Aristotelian influences in Plutarch; F. Becchi (2014) 73-87.

in the *Metaphysics*, a non-corporeal motive cause is necessary to explain the cosmos fully:<sup>34</sup>

All those who regard the universe as a unity, and assume as its matter (ὑλην) some one nature, and that corporeal (σωματικὴν) and extended, are clearly mistaken in many respects. They only assume elements of corporeal things, and not of incorporeal (ἀσωμάτων) ones, which also exist. They attempt to state the causes of generation and destruction, and investigate the nature of everything; and at the same time do away with the cause of motion (τὸ τῆς κινήσεως αἴτιον). (*Metaph.* 988b23-29, cf. 987b20ff, 988b2-9)

Aristotle criticised philosophers who ignored the cause of motion and change because without it there can be no generation or destruction (*Metaph.* 990a9-13, 1080a5), and he ascribed to Plato and Leucippus the view that motion is eternal (*Metaph.* 1071b, cf. *Leg.* 894b). Vlastos noted that acosmic disorderly Motion is therefore also atemporal, since Time is a cyclical motion.<sup>35</sup> It's quite possible that Plutarch thought of the Dyad as an ungenerated motive corporeality composed of two kinds encompassed in a single principle.

Dillon rejected the notion of two separate principles composing the Indefinite Dyad in Plato's metaphysics, arguing instead that it is a principle that ranges between two opposing poles. For him the Indefinite Dyad is higher on the ontological scale than Matter but both are feminine, as is the World Soul. Rist too considered Aristotle's view that the Dyad is two things an error, because the plurality opposed to the One (cf. *Metaph.* 1085b, 1092b) must have been meant by Plato as the "potentiality of plurality", not a *plurality of principles*.<sup>36</sup> Plutarch, however, may have seen enough evidence in Plato to connect the Dyad with the potentiality of Motion's divisible activity in Matter, which thus causes plurality. Without this interaction the generated universe would be perfect – if Matter truly is devoid of quality except that which it gains by its reflection of the Forms, there is no satisfactory explanation for the varying and imperfect copies it produces.<sup>37</sup> A principle of motion and change must act as the catalyst for the differentiation in generated bodies. The *Timaeus* (58a) seems to address this problem when it describes Motion as the cause of irregularity.

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<sup>34</sup> See also Arist. *Cael.* 300b, where he argues that there must be a first cause of "natural" motion, because if everything is moved by something else there would be an infinite regress of forced motion.

<sup>35</sup> Vlastos (1939) 76.

<sup>36</sup> Dillon (1985) 109-110; Dillon (2003) 18 n. 33; Rist (1962) 100.

<sup>37</sup> According to the testimony of Iamblicus, Speusippus seems to have faced the same problem (*DCMS IV*, as quoted in Dillon 1985, 114).

If this view is correct, Motion and Matter are two separate kinds but inseparable in principle, and this is just how Plutarch characterises their interaction. When he speaks of the Indefinite Dyad in *De defectu oraculorum* it is “the principle underlying all formlessness and disorder” (428f). Plutarch thus treats the Dyad as a single principle, but the terminology recalls that of *De animae procreatione*: the Indefinite Dyad is (1) ἄμορφον, and (2) ἄτακτον. (1) is the formlessness of Matter before the generation of the cosmos, while (2) is the acosmic disorderly Motion which causes ἀπειρία in the Dyad. In connection with this passage, Dillon argued that the Dyad “manifests itself at every level of Plutarch’s universe, as disorderly, irrational soul, and as matter, but it is plainly something more than either of these”.<sup>38</sup> In *De Iside*, Plutarch tells Clea that the material is neither inanimate nor undifferentiated nor is it inert and inactive (374e-f). This seems at odds with *De animae procreatione*, and can only be resolved if ‘material’ (ὕλη) is here taken to mean both that which becomes perceptible and that which provides motion to perceptible bodies; a single principle composed of two kinds, Matter and Motion. The inextricable interaction of these two kinds continues in the sublunary sphere. Motion is an opinionative and imaginative faculty sensitive to the perceptible precisely because it was in constant contact with Matter in the acosmos; Matter was in motion and dispersion while Motion was divisible and erratic because of its contact with Matter (*An. proc.* 1023d, 1024a). Before the intervention of the demiurge, the perceptible was amorphous and indefinite (ἄμορφον καὶ ἀόριστον) and the faculty stationed about it had neither articulate opinions nor orderly motions (*An. proc.* 1024b). Motion was actively *disturbing corporeality* in this state.

We must then briefly return to the three kinds. In the *Timaeus*, the really existent being (τὸ ὄν) is the Paradigm, that “wherefrom” the Becoming is copied (*Ti.* 50b) and the object of Reason (28a) in the soul. This principle is masculine, the Father of creation, indivisible (35a) and ungenerated (52a). Space (χώρα) is the Receptacle (ὑποδοχή), the nurse and mother of all Becoming (*Ti.* 49a, 50d) and the place “wherein” it becomes (50b). This feminine principle is invisible, unshaped, indestructible (51a, 52b) and without any quality proper to itself, but rather moved by others (50b). The third kind, γένεσιν, is an irrational principle (ἄλογος, *Ti.* 28a), described as a motion in time (28a) and opinion (38a). Plutarch’s reading of the relation between these three kinds is set out at *De animae procreatione* 1024c: χώρα is Matter (ὕλη), which Plato sometimes calls the abode (ἔδρα) or the Receptacle (ὑποδοχή), τὸ ὄν is the intelligible (τὸ νοητός) and γένεσιν is the being involved in changes and motions (κίνησεις). Plutarch thus seems to understand γένεσιν as an acosmic disorderly motion which is ordered by the demiurge,

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<sup>38</sup> Dillon (2014) 63.

and which becomes the principle responsible for change – and ultimately evil – in the sublunary sphere.

In the *Timaeus*, as in the *Sophist*, Plato sets τὸ μὴ ὄν in opposition to τὸ ὄν – the latter is always uniformly existent and has no becoming, while the former is always becoming and is never really existent (*Ti.* 28a). The really existent is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reason, but that which is never really existent (ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν) is an object of opinion with the aid of irrational sensation.<sup>39</sup> Plutarch questions the origin of the motions of the soul that lets it apprehend the perceptible and form opinions of it (*An. proc.* 1023f). The answer is that this faculty is a result of the motivity of Soul-in-Itself (1024a). Plutarch thus understands the Becoming to be Motion (*An. proc.* 1024c, cf. 1025f), the potentiality of change when it acts on Matter and the source of opinion when it apprehends the perceptibles.

Neither Motion nor Matter is Difference, just as Sameness is not Rest; Sameness is derived from the One and Difference from the Dyad (1024d, cf. 1015d).<sup>40</sup> Plutarch describes the Dyad as the indeterminate beginning of Difference, a “doubling” which shifts from unity to plurality, though the meaning of this passage at *De garr.* 507a is somewhat obscure. One might reasonably suspect that the Dyad is neither Matter nor Motion, but the acosmic interactivity of these two interwoven kinds which thus produces Difference. Carone suggested that natural disorder is the incidental result of “random corporeal motions”; her phrasing captures the inextricable relationship of Matter and Motion quite well.<sup>41</sup> For Wood, body is not in itself evil but rather morally passive. The body cannot experience sensation without soul and distracting and destabilising sensation is the cause of bodily disorder.<sup>42</sup> Disorder is therefore *psychic* in cause and *somatic* in expression.

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<sup>39</sup> The Receptacle is introduced much later at *Timaeus* 48e as a third kind, as Plutarch notes (*An. proc.* 1023b), although he glosses the discussion of corporeality that starts at *Timaeus* 31b. In light of his comments at *De animae procreatione* 1016e-1017a this is likely due to a different understanding of the Receptacle and the Matter in it, which would lead Plutarch to regard the earlier discussion of the blending of the elements at *Timaeus* 31b as concerning the generation of the body of the universe and the later discussion from *Timaeus* 48e as concerning the acosmic bodily element that was available for ordering by the demiurge.

<sup>40</sup> This is at odds with the statement at *De Iside* 37of that the opposing principles are Sameness and Difference, although a reference to the *Laws* immediately following seems to negate this statement to an extent by including a “certain third nature”. Speusippus considered the Dyad the origin of differentiation; Dillon (1996) 12. Wood argued that Difference manifests in Becoming as the possibility for generated being, while Being is the manifestation of particular reflections of the Paradigm; Wood (2009) 367.

<sup>41</sup> Carone (1994) 295.

<sup>42</sup> Wood (2009) 361-362.

Difference institutes change, and from this change deviation from the Forms is engendered in particulars.

According to Opsomer, the irrational part of the (human) soul is the acosmic soul devoid of Reason.<sup>43</sup> I would suggest instead that the irrational part is the acosmic Indefinite Dyad composed of the material and motive kinds. Both are *essentially* unreasoning, but only one part of it, Motion (or acosmic Soul-in-Itself), is actively disorderly and irrational.<sup>44</sup> Disobedience and disorder in the human soul is the result of the differentiation of this lower part, which suggests that Difference arises in the divisibility and dividedness of Motion and Matter.<sup>45</sup> In the body, then, Difference is the principle that is responsible for deficiency, disorder and imperfection. In the World Soul, the irrational motive cause is subdued and ordered by the Intellect, but it makes itself known in the physical world.<sup>46</sup> Evil as such, and not simply disorder, exists only relative to humans (Pl. *Leg.* 900e, 903d-904c). Since in humans the soul is necessarily embodied, the appetitive part is incorporated in the body, with which it is closely associated even in its acosmic state.<sup>47</sup> The dyadic part of the soul gains influence in mortal bodies because it is present in much larger share than Reason, and that because it is divisible and infinite (cf. *An. proc.* 1015d, 1025d, 1026d).

#### *Typhonic Disorder in De Iside*

Accepting the duality of the unreasoning part(s) of the soul has serious implications for Plutarch's views on women's capacity to attain virtue. In *De animae procreatione* Intellect and Matter are gendered in the traditional way: Intellect is a masculine principle while Matter is feminine. Motion, on the other hand, is not gendered at all. It is only in *De Iside* that the anthropomorphised principle of disorder takes on a gender, and there it is in the form of Typhon, a male principle, as Dillon too has noted. Dillon identified Typhon with a sort of material principle on

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<sup>43</sup> J. Opsomer (2006) 154.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Virt. mor.* 442b; the lower part of the soul is not wholly irrational, only the perceptive and nutritive part, i.e. the appetites.

<sup>45</sup> Wood noted that Difference operates at various levels in the cosmos. In one sense it is simply the faculty which distinguishes particulars from one another, while in particulars it is the cause of variability; Wood (2009) 375.

<sup>46</sup> Chlup (2000) 149.

<sup>47</sup> *An. proc.* 1026e; Plutarch implies that the affective part of the (human) soul derives from Soul-in-Itself.

the basis that Matter is traditionally the origin of evil,<sup>48</sup> but the materiality of Typhon is distinct from that of Isis, who is explicitly a feminine principle:

Isis is, in fact, the female principle of Nature (τὸ τῆς φύσεως θήλυ), and is receptive of every form of generation, in accord with which she is called by Plato the gentle nurse and the all-receptive (τιθήνη καὶ πανδεχῆς) ... since, because of the force of Reason, she turns herself to this thing or that and is receptive of all manner of shapes and forms. She has an innate love for the first and most dominant of all things, which is identical with the good, and this she yearns for and pursues; but the portion which comes from evil she tries to avoid and to reject, for she serves them both as a place and means of growth (ἀμφοῖν μὲν οὖσα χάρα καὶ ὕλη), but inclines always towards the better and offers to it opportunity to create from her and to impregnate her with effluxes and likenesses in which she rejoices and is glad that she is made pregnant and teeming with these creations. For creation is the image of being in matter, and the thing created is a picture of reality. (*De Is. et Os.* 372e)

The use of χάρα and ὕλη here identifies Isis with Matter and Receptacle, as does her reconstruction of Osiris' lost penis (*De Is. et Os.* 373a, 359a). She is intermediate between two further principles, represented by Osiris and Typhon. These two male divinities then represent the opposing souls of the *Laws* (*De Is. et Os.* 370f-371a, cf. 369b-d, *An. proc.* 1026b). Yet more recently, Dillon has argued that Isis represents the World Soul and Typhon represents Matter and the Receptacle as a principle of disorder.<sup>49</sup> I agree with Dillon that the principle of disorder is a “positively disruptive force”, but equating Typhon with the corporeal principle rests on some questionable assumptions, not least of which is that Matter must somehow be the principle of evil, since that is how it traditionally goes.

Indeed, Plutarch himself says his account in *De animae procreatione* will be “unusual and paradoxical” (*An. proc.* 1014a, cf. 1012b).<sup>50</sup> I can find only one sure reference to the materiality of Typhon, and that passage links him also to the irrational soul: “Typhon is that part of the soul which is impressionable, impulsive, irrational and truculent, and of the bodily part the destructible, diseased and disorderly” (*De Is. et Os.* 371b). Rather than confirming the role of Matter as the origin

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<sup>48</sup> Dillon (1985) 118. See for example Iamblichus *De anima* 23 (Dillon & Finamore). Philo considers the Dyad to be the origin of evil (*Quaest. in Ge* 2.12).

<sup>49</sup> Dillon (2014) 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> Plutarch explicitly refutes both the theories of Xenocrates and Crantor; the latter (according to Plutarch's testimony) held that the mixture of divisible and indivisible being was the generation of number, which he called the Indefinite Dyad, though he denied that this mixture is soul since it lacks motivity (*An. proc.* 1012e). Instead, Plutarch argues that soul is not number, it is “motion perpetually self-moved and motion's source and principle” (1013c).



of evil, this passage makes a distinction between Matter-as-such (Isis) and the disorder that infects Matter. I can see no other solution for this dilemma than to connect Typhon to the disorderly motive cause of *De animae procreatione*, with the caveat that the two texts have very different approaches and aims.<sup>51</sup> *De Iside* is addressed to the priestess Clea and given that dramatic milieu it would not be far-fetched to expect some focus on female virtue such as we do find when Isis is described near the start of the treatise as a goddess of wisdom (351e-f).

And indeed, there are references that link the disorder of Typhon to the acosmic and unproductive Motion of *De animae procreatione*. Plutarch writes that to Typhon “there attaches nothing bright or of a conserving nature, no order nor generation nor movement possessed of moderation or reason, but everything the reverse” (*De Is. et Os.* 372a). Like the disorderly Motion of *De animae procreatione*, Typhon is ἡ τῆς ἀτάκτου καὶ ἀορίστου δυνάμεως ἀρχή - “the principle of disorderly and unlimited power” (372a). That Typhon must be the maleficent soul opposed to the *logos* of Osiris is confirmed by the reference to Zoroaster; in *De animae procreatione* the opposing powers Oromasdes and Areimanus are Intellect and Necessity (1026b), while in *De Iside* the same two powers are linked to Osiris and Typhon (369e-f).<sup>52</sup> In both accounts the former is a god and the latter a daemon, confirming the supremacy of the rational male principle. More importantly, Isis too is deified on account of her virtue along with Osiris (*De Is. et Os.* 361e). As also at *Laws* 906a-b, the struggle for order is framed as a cosmic battle, here between Osiris and Typhon with Isis as the mediating principle. Typhon remains a daemon, while Isis’ apotheosis endorses the possibility of female virtue if psychic disorder is subdued.

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<sup>51</sup> Petrucci argues for the fundamental Platonic nature of the text, which is given priority over Egyptian theology – the latter is a medium through which Platonic philosophy can be understood; F.M. Petrucci (2016), 227ff.

<sup>52</sup> Petrucci quite accurately captures the difficulty of the passage at *De Iside* 371a when he notes that Osiris and Typhon represent complex entities that could be identified with several cosmic principles in the *Timaeus* and *De animae procreatione*. Neither are therefore individual entities but rather comprehensive instantiations of Platonic cosmological functions, Osiris as positive and Typhon as negative; F.M. Petrucci (2015) 340-342. What Petrucci doesn’t comment on is the ontological status of these entities as they occupy different cosmological roles, though such a hierarchical division of ontological status is a feature of Platonic philosophy and does much to solve the difficulties of this passage. His assertion that the world “is *somehow* generated by Osiris and Typhon” (sic) is misleading, however, since Typhon has no generative qualities of his own; he is mere Necessity.

*Conclusion*

In *De animae procreatione*, Plutarch distinguishes between three kinds at the level of first principles, a division that is reflected and anthropomorphised in *De Iside*. It is unlikely that the Indefinite Dyad is a principle that is higher on the ontological scale than Matter and Motion, instead of an encompassing principle of disorder represented by Isis and Typhon. I am therefore inclined to say that Plutarch's Dyad is a principle composed of the material and motive kinds. Plutarch's motivation for the separation of Matter and Motion appears to be connected to his belief that women are fully capable of moral and philosophical virtue. Thus it is necessary to separate the feminine principle from misconceptions that attribute to it the cause of evil.

In *De Iside*, Isis is therefore a positive force, while the cause of evil is a male power. However, though male, Typhon is emasculated; he doesn't father any offspring with Nephthys but she has a child by Osiris, thus the problem must lie with him (366c) and when he is defeated by Horus he is quite literally unmanned (373c). There could be several explanations for the maleness of the disorderly principle in *De Iside*, none of which require identification with Matter or Receptacle. Perhaps it is simply a result of Plutarch's source material, in which the worse element of nature is the male daemon Typhon. It is also possible that the agender of the motive principle in *De animae procreatione* and the broken masculinity of Typhon in *De Iside* suggest a disfiguration of gender in the absence of masculine Reason. The further examination of this problem is beyond the scope of this paper. What is clear is that Plutarch doesn't consider the feminine/Matter the origin of evil, only susceptible to it due to its interaction with disorderly motion in the acosmos.

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