Classical Quarterly 61.1 278–293 (2011) Printed in Great Britain
doi:10.1017/S0009838810000522

PLEASURE, PLUTARCH'S *NON POSSE* AND PLATO'S *REPUBLIC**

Plutarch's work *That it is impossible to live pleasantly following Epicurus* (*Non posse*) is devoted to showing that the Epicureans are mistaken in their understanding of pleasure, the gods and death, and therefore fail in their project of offering a recipe for living a pleasant and good life free from irrational fear. Plutarch's demonstration of the Epicureans' failure relies heavily on a set of Platonic assumptions about the body and soul and their respective pleasures but it also cleverly – albeit sometimes very selectively – uses the Epicureans' own texts and their known anti-Platonic position on a range of philosophical topics as the evidence on which it bases its critical interpretation of these philosophical rivals.[1]

It is not surprising, of course, that Plutarch should choose a Platonic work on which to found his criticisms. It is perhaps more surprising that, in offering a criticism of Epicurean hedonism, Plutarch did not reach for the *Philebus*, nor even the *Protagoras* or *Gorgias*, but instead turned to Plato's *Republic.* The claim that the *Republic* is Plutarch's primary point of reference should not require much defence, particularly since Plutarch himself makes clear and obvious reference to the *Republic* in various places in the work.[2] However, a careful account of the way in which Plutarch uses the *Republic* opens two important perspectives on *Non posse* as a whole.

Section I shows that *Non posse* demonstrates how Plutarch was prepared to interpret certain passages of the *Republic* in support of a very general anti-Epicurean agenda. Socrates' defence in Book 9 of the view that the properly philosophical life is the most pleasant uses both dialectical arguments and also the full apparatus of the *Republic*'s developed ontology and psychology. This offers Plutarch a rich set of resources for demonstrating the Epicureans' errors in all these related areas. There are, in addition, important signs of how Plutarch was prepared to take a

* My thanks to the participants at the Oxford 'Plutarch and philosophy' conference, 14–15 July 2008, particularly to the conference's organizer, Eleni Kechagia, for comments on an earlier version of this essay.

[1] My overall interpretation is therefore quite unlike that proposed by G. Roskam, 'The displeasing secrets of the Epicurean life. Plutarch's polemic against Epicurus' political philosophy', in A. Casanova (ed.), *Plutarco e l'età ellenistica. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi. Firenze, 23–24 settembre 2004* (Florence, 2005), 351–68, at 360: 'For here too [*sc*. in *Non posse* as well as *Adv. Col.*], the whole discussion is conditioned by a specific polemical strategy, viz. the technique of attacking the philosophical opponent from the inside. Such a strategy of course implies that one starts from the premises of the opponent himself. Accordingly, Plutarch always introduces his reflections by a reference to Epicurus' own convictions (1097A, 1099D, 1099F–1100A).' Certainly, Plutarch refers to Epicurean tenets and texts. But this does not seem to me to be enough for his overall strategy to be usefully characterized as dialectical rather than a partisan polemic.

[2] By 'Plutarch' here I mean the author of the work rather than the character present at the discussion it relates. Much of the dialogue, particularly the early sections, is voiced by the character 'Theon'. He and Aristodemus agree to take up and continue the criticism of the Epicureans begun by Plutarch's first-person persona in *Adv. Col.*

more liberal view in contrast to the original Platonic stance on the restricted nature of the intellectual pleasures experienced by the rational part of the soul. Section II shows how this in turn sheds some light on Plutarch's more general view of embodied human psychology.

Finally, section III briefly makes a case for viewing *Non posse* in the broader context of a long-running history of debate and polemic between Platonism and Epicureanism. Epicureans and Platonists were undoubtedly concerned about the proper understanding of the nature and value of pleasure and there survive traces of the skirmishes between them that surely form the backdrop to Plutarch's work. Furthermore, we should also see *Non posse* as a contribution to a series of Epicurean attacks on and Platonist defences of the *Republic* itself.[3]

I

Plutarch's most striking use of Plato's *Republic* comes at *Non posse* 1091D–E:

τὸ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον οὐκ ἀγαθόν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα τῆς φυγῆς τῶν κακῶν κεῖται τὸ ἐφετὸν καὶ τὸ αἱρετὸν καὶ νὴ Δία τὸ ἡδὺ καὶ οἰκεῖον, ὡς Πλάτων ἔλεγε, καὶ ἀπηγόρευε τὰς λυπῶν καὶ πόνων ἀπαλλαγὰς ἡδονὰς μὴ νομίζειν, ἀλλ' οἷόν τινα σκιαγραφίαν ἢ μίξιν οἰκείου καὶ ἀλλοτρίου, καθάπερ λευκοῦ καὶ μέλανος, ἀπὸ τοῦ κάτω πρὸς τὸ μέσον ἀναφερομένων, ἀπειρίᾳ δὲ τοῦ ἄνω καὶ ἀγνοίᾳ τὸ μέσον ἄκρον ἡγουμένων εἶναι καὶ πέρας· ὥσπερ Ἐπίκουρος ἡγεῖται καὶ Μητρόδωρος, οὐσίαν τἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀκρότητα τὴν τοῦ κακοῦ φυγὴν τιθέμενοι καὶ χαίροντες ἀνδραπόδων τινὰ χαρὰν ἢ δεσμίων ἐξ εἱργμοῦ λυθέντων ἀσμένως ἀλειψαμένων καὶ ἀπολουσαμένων μετ' αἰκίας καὶ μάστιγας, ἐλευθέρας δὲ καὶ καθαρᾶς καὶ ἀμιγοῦς καὶ ἀμωλωπίστου χαρᾶς ἀγεύστων καὶ ἀθεάτων.

For what is imposed by necessity is not good; the object of our aspiration and choice lies beyond the escape from ills; yes, and so too does what is pleasant and in harmony with our nature, as Plato said, who forbade us to regard riddance from pain and discomfort as pleasure, but as instead some trick of perspective as it were or blend of what is in harmony with our nature with what is alien to it, like a blend of white and black, which occurs when people ascend from a lower to a middle region, and suppose, in their lack of any expertise or knowledge of the higher region, that the middle is the summit and the end. So Epicurus supposes, and Metrodorus too, when they take the position that escape from ill is the reality and upper limit of the good; and thus their delight is that of slaves or prisoners released from confinement, overjoyed to be anointed and bathed after the cruel usage and the flogging, but knowing neither the taste nor the vision of a free man's delight, pure, untainted, and bearing no welts from the lash.

(tr. B. Einarson and P.H. De Lacy)

Commentators rightly point out that in this passage Plutarch borrows heavily from Plato's *Republic* 9.584d ff., which is an obvious passage for Plutarch to have in mind.[4] There, Socrates outlines two criticisms which are taken by Plutarch to apply

[3] While I concentrate in this essay on *Non posse* since it contains Plutarch's most sustained treatment of Epicurean hedonism, it is clear that similar concerns surface in other works. See e.g. *An seni* 786C, *De lat. viv.* 1129B (Us. 411, 412)

[4] Cf. H. Adam, *Plutarchs Schrift non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* (Amsterdam, 1974), 36 and n. 73; K.-D. Zacher, *Plutarchs Kritik an der Lustlehre Epikurs. Ein Kommentar zu* Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum: *Kap. 1–8* (Königstein/Ts., 1982), 208–10; J.P. Hershbell, 'Plutarch and Epicureanism', *ANRW* 2.36.5 (1992), 3353–83, at 3373; F. Albini,

to the Epicureans' account of the ideal pleasant life. Plutarch finds ammunition to use against his principal target in this very section of *Republic* 9 and can therefore point to clear Platonic authority for his anti-Epicurean polemic: the Epicureans are just as misguided as the poor opponents whose misconceptions Socrates dismisses.

Socrates' first criticism is based on his insistence that the absence of pain is a distinct state from the experience of pleasure. In other words, he tries to dispel the notion that the relief from pain is truly a pleasure and instead wishes to show that it is a mere false pleasure, a shadow of the true and original pleasure (ἐσκιαγραφημένη in Plato at 583b5, cf. σκιαγραφία in Plutarch at 1091D). Such false or illusory pleasure is to be contrasted with true, positive, pleasure which is not simply a comparative improvement on a previous or subsequent state of pain. Socrates mounts a dialectical argument aimed at some opponents who claim that the state of pain-free health is in fact the most pleasant state possible, but that this is only evident once someone is no longer in that state and is instead suffering some kind of sickness (583c10–d2). In response, Socrates sets about convincing his opponents that, on the basis of their own assumption that one's proper hedonic state might be incorrectly evaluated because of current experiences, they should think that a general state of health is in fact merely an intermediate state – neither pleasant nor painful – and not, as in their sickened state they currently claim, the highest pleasure.

Further, Socrates goes on to use as an illustration of the kind of mistake he wants to expose some people who think they have climbed to a 'higher' region when they have simply lifted themselves out of some kind of depression (584d1–e5; cf. *Phaedo* 109a ff.); they think that they have ascended to somewhere elevated but in reality have merely made it back up to ground level. Plutarch is quick to work this same comparison into his brief summary. For Plutarch, the Epicureans are much like those people in *Republic* 9 whom Socrates describes as 'sick' (οἱ κάμνοντες 583c10). These people – like the Epicureans – mistakenly consider the absence of pain to be a pleasure because, in their illness, they wrongly overvalue their previous health in comparison with their present state. It is not coincidental that a consequence of this illusion is that the sick people deny that there is any intermediate state between pleasure and pain. Pleasure, indeed the highest pleasure, is for these people properly understood as simply the removal of their pain.

This leads to Socrates' second criticism, which is based on the hypothesis of there being certain perfect intelligible objects of knowledge to which human reason naturally ought to tend and which best satisfy human rational desires. In ignoring these perfect intelligible objects – what are often termed 'the Forms' – and concentrating on the satisfaction of bodily needs, in Plutarch's eyes the Epicureans are clearly attempting to offer as the goal of life something which, considered rightly, is at best only an illusory or false pleasure.

In this same passage at *Non posse* 1091D–E there are indications that Plutarch may also be looking outside the argument specifically concerning misconceptions of pleasure in *Republic* 9 for material he can usefully deploy. For example, Plutarch here compares the state of the Epicurean who, in his eyes, knows only the cessation of pain and mistakes this for pleasure to the state of a slave or prisoner who has been released from painful torture and bondage (1091E). The prisoner may

Plutarco: Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum. Introduzione, traduzione, commento (Genoa, 1993), 34–5.

feel, comparatively, free. But he is nevertheless still in no position to experience true pleasure; he may have been freed from his bonds but he remains a prisoner. His present state may be good in comparison with his former misery, but it remains inferior to the pleasures of a free man who has never been held prisoner or beaten. Given the immediately preceding direct reference to the *Republic* it is not implausible that we are here meant to think of the central arresting metaphor in that work: the simile of the cave and the imagined release from bonds of one of the cave's prisoners who is then able to learn the true nature of things and experience true pleasures.[5] The crucial notions of (metaphorical) ascent and of being mistaken about one's true epistemological and hedonic state are clear enough in both the cave simile and the extended discussion of pleasure in *Republic* 9, and it is perfectly reasonable for Plutarch to think that they should be read together.[6]

To his mind, the Epicureans find themselves in the position of the prisoners in the cave of *Republic* 7 or the sick of *Republic* 9, concentrating overly in their misery on bodily and perceptible objects of pleasure and failing to recognize that the cessation of pain that they seek is merely a pale imitation of something much better and more stable. And this failure is linked to a general failure to recognize the existence of permanent intelligible things independent of the perceptible and bodily world. Indeed, much of Plutarch's discussion of the Epicureans' errors turns on what we might call the metaphysics of pleasure: what its proper objects are and how this is related to a proper conception of human nature. There is good material for building such a case to be found once again in *Republic* 9, more specifically in the argument at 585a–e where Socrates uses the overall metaphysical vision of Forms and particulars to distinguish between the pleasures of the soul, whose objects are pure, true and stable (i.e. the Forms) and which are registered by something which is itself everlasting (i.e. the soul) and the pleasures of the body whose objects are changeable, impure and so on, and which are registered by an impure and changeable body. These latter pleasures, says Socrates, cannot properly satisfy a person. In ignoring these perfect intelligible objects and concentrating on the satisfaction of bodily needs, in Plutarch's eyes the Epicureans are again clearly attempting to offer as the goal of life something which, considered rightly, is at best only an illusory or false pleasure. Time and again, Plutarch characterizes the Epicurean pleasures as unstable (ἀβέβαιοι), which is often coupled with the claim that they are also untrustworthy (ἄπιστοι) (1090A, 1090B, 1090D, 1091A, 1092D, 1104F), both of which are watchwords of the original Platonic account (see 585e3–5). The Epicureans are attempting vainly to achieve satisfaction and painlessness by filling something which is by nature changing and cannot be stably satisfied with objects that are themselves unstable and unreliable guides to what is of true value. And this has a further consequence for their chances of living a good human life.

Just a little further on in the *Republic* comes another passage which clearly underlies Plutarch's Platonist position: *Republic* 9.586a1–b3:

[5] Zacher (n.4), 211 also compares Pl. *Phaedr.* 258e2–5.

[6] Even if this specific reminiscence is not intended, Plutarch surely is offering a more general reminiscence of the Platonic theme of the *sōma sēma* and the notion that a preoccupation with bodily pleasure merely enslaves and further binds the soul to the body. Certainly, when later in the work Plutarch adds to his discussion the mistaken Epicurean idea that death is annihilation, he returns to that general theme: 1105D.

οἱ ἄρα φρονήσεως καὶ ἀρετῆς ἄπειροι, εὐωχίαις δὲ καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἀεὶ συνόντες, κάτω, ὡς ἔοικεν, καὶ μέχρι πάλιν πρὸς τὸ μεταξὺ φέρονταί τε καὶ ταύτῃ πλανῶνται διὰ βίου, ὑπερβάντες δὲ τοῦτο πρὸς τὸ ἀληθῶς ἄνω οὔτε ἀνέβλεψαν πώποτε οὔτε ἠνέχθησαν, οὐδὲ τοῦ ὄντος τῷ ὄντι ἐπληρώθησαν, οὐδὲ βεβαίου τε καὶ καθαρᾶς ἡδονῆς ἐγεύσαντο, ἀλλὰ βοσκημάτων δίκην κάτω ἀεὶ βλέποντες καὶ κεκυφότες εἰς γῆν καὶ εἰς τραπέζας βόσκονται χορταζόμενοι καὶ ὀχεύοντες, καὶ ἕνεκα τῆς τούτων πλεονεξίας λακτίζοντες καὶ κυρίττοντες ἀλλήλους σιδηροῖς κέρασί τε καὶ ὁπλαῖς ἀποκτεινύασι δι᾽ ἀπληστίαν, ἅτε οὐχὶ τοῖς οὖσιν οὐδὲ τὸ ὂν οὐδὲ τὸ στέγον ἑαυτῶν πιμπλάντες.

Therefore, those who have no experience of reason or virtue, but are always occupied with feasts and the like, are brought down and then back up to the middle, as it seems, and wander in this way through their life, never reaching beyond this to what is truly higher up, never looking up at it or being brought up to it, and so they aren't filled with that which really is and never taste any stable or pure pleasure. Instead, they always look down at the ground like cattle, and, with their heads bent over the dinner table, they feed, fatten and fornicate. To outdo others in these things, they kick and butt them with iron horns and hooves, killing each other, because their desires are insatiable. For the part they're trying to fill is like a vessel full of holes and neither it nor the things they are trying to fill it with are among the things that are. (tr. G.M.A. Grube)

Two further themes central to Plutarch's account are prominent here. First, Socrates ends with a reference to a familiar metaphor of pleasure as a kind of filling. People who concentrate on bodily pleasures are like people trying to fill up a leaky jar: the satisfaction they seek is forever unattainable because they have failed to attend to an underlying fault in their souls. The image is expanded more fully and famously in Plato's *Gorgias* (493a–494a) with reference to the myth of the Danaids, but it is certainly being invoked here in *Republic* too and Plutarch makes prominent use of it early in *Non posse* at 1088E–1089A and 1089D–E. The first of these is an elaborate reworking of the Platonic model which is designed also to take a swipe at the Epicureans' notorious claim that present pain might be offset mentally by either anticipating some future pleasure or recollecting some past pleasure:

εἰ δ᾽ ἀκούεις αὐτῶν μαρτυρομένων καὶ βοώντων, ὡς ἐπ᾽ οὐδενὶ ψυχὴ τῶν ὄντων πέφυκε χαίρειν καὶ γαληνίζειν πλὴν ἐπὶ σώματος ἡδοναῖς παρούσαις ἢ προσδοκωμέναις, καὶ τοῦτ᾽ αὐτῆς τὸ ἀγαθόν ἐστιν, ἆρ᾽ οὐ δοκοῦσί σοι διεράματι τοῦ σώματος χρῆσθαι τῇ ψυχῇ, <καὶ> καθάπερ οἶνον ἐκ πονηροῦ καὶ μὴ στέγοντος ἀγγείου τὴν ἡδονὴν διαχέοντες ἐνταῦθα καὶ παλαιοῦντες οἴεσθαι σεμνότερόν τι ποιεῖν καὶ τιμιώτερον; καίτοι γ᾽ οἶνον μὲν χρόνος διαχυθέντα τηρεῖ καὶ συνηδύνει, τῆς δ᾽ ἡδονῆς ἡ ψυχὴ παραλαβοῦσα τὴν μνήμην ὥσπερ ὀσμὴν ἄλλο δ᾽ οὐδὲν φυλάσσει· ζέσασα γὰρ ἐπὶ σαρκὶ κατασβέννυται, καὶ τὸ μνημονευόμενον γὰρ ἐπὶ σαρκὶ κατασβέννυται, καὶ τὸ μνημονευόμενον αὐτῆς ἀμαυρόν ἐστι καὶ κνισῶδες, ὥσπερ ἑώλων ὧν τις ἔπιεν ἢ ἔφαγεν ἀποτιθεμένου καὶ ταμιεύοντος ἐπινοίας ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ χρωμένου δηλονότι ταύταις προσφάτων μὴ παρόντων.

But when you hear their loud protest that the soul is so constituted as to find joy and tranquillity in nothing in the world but pleasures of the body either present or anticipated, and that this is its good, do they not appear to you to be using the soul as a decanter of the body, and to imagine that by decanting pleasure, like wine, from a worthless and leaky vessel and leaving it to age in its new container, they are turning it into something more respectable and precious? Yet there is a difference: the new vessel preserves the wine that has settled in the course of time and improves its flavour, whereas in the case of pleasure the soul takes over and preserves the memory of it, as it were the bouquet, and nothing else; for the pleasure effervesces in the flesh and then goes flat, and what

is left of it in recollection is faint and greasy, as though a man were to lay away and store up in himself the thoughts of yesterday's food and drink, resorting to these, we must suppose, when nothing fresh is at hand. (tr. Einarson and De Lacy)

It is not hard to see why Plutarch might have taken up this image so eagerly. In addition to the Platonic background, Plutarch can draw supplementary support for his use of this analogy from the fact that the Epicureans themselves prominently used the very same image as a way of making clear their claim that the highest pleasure is the absence of pain and can offer a stable and lasting hedonist *eudaimonia* (see e.g. Lucr. 3.935–46, 6.9–27).[7] No doubt, the Epicureans are in part responding to Plato's attacks on hedonism by recasting the Platonic image and this is what in turn provokes Plutarch to offer a Platonist response. (This is a recurrent theme: Plutarch takes up Platonic arms against Epicureans in response to their original attacks on Plato.) The philosophical disagreement between the Epicureans and Plato over the relationship between pleasure and desire is complex but, in brief, the Epicureans agree with Socrates that a 'leaky jar' can never properly be filled but disagree with the assumption that pleasures are always associated with processes of filling rather than states of plenitude. They want there to be a kind of pleasure – indeed the highest pleasure – which is precisely a state of plenitude and not a process of filling. What we need, in that case, is to set a limit to desires and in this way make sure the jar remains watertight (see e.g. Lucr. 6.9–34). For his purposes, Plutarch can again draw on the metaphysical argument at *Republic* 9.585a–e and insist that the body is irredeemably porous, so to speak, since it is a changing and impermanent item and the objects of pleasures it is able to enjoy are themselves unstable and impermanent.

Plutarch avoids any detailed engagement with the fine-grained understanding of Epicurean conceptions of the nature of pleasure; perhaps rightly so: it is far from clear whether we can make genuine and satisfying philosophical sense of this notion of 'katastematic pleasure'. Indeed, Plutarch makes no attempt to offer much of an *argument* against the Epicureans at all rather than simply reject their view on the basis of a restatement of a Platonist standpoint. But he does make great capital from the possibilities of imagining the soul and body as two vessels, particularly the idea of being able to decant pleasures from one vessel to the other. Plutarch's use of the image of the vessel is clever, in that case, because he can combine the general point about the impossibility of lasting bodily satisfaction with a further criticism of the Epicureans' own notions that remembered or anticipated pleasures may be used to counteract physical pains. Putting the two together allows Plutarch to show the absurdity of the operation of pouring from one leaky vessel to another and back again as a means of trying to store pleasures over time.[8] Of course, Plutarch's preferred understanding of the relationship between the soul and body which underpins his polemical approach to this – admittedly implausible –

[7] See for further discussion: W. Görler, 'Storing up past pleasures. The soul-vessel-metaphor in Lucretius and in his Greek models', in K.A. Algra, M.H. Koenen and P.H. Schrijvers (edd.), *Lucretius and his Intellectual Background* (Amsterdam, 1997), 193–207. The Epicureans also used the image of the body as the container of vessel of the soul (see Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt.* 65–6 and Lucr. 3.433–44) perhaps to emphasize the dependence of the proper functioning of the soul on a functioning body.

[8] The most celebrated example of this was Epicurus' own insistence on his deathbed that the recollection of prior pleasant philosophical conversations counteracted the pain of his terminal disease (Diog. Laert. 10.22). Plutarch is not impressed: 1099D–F.

Epicurean idea is quite unlike the Epicureans' own. Their distinction between the physical/bodily and the psychic, given their general physicalist approach to the soul, is rather different from Plutarch's Platonic dualism. But once again, Plutarch makes no attempt to tailor his criticisms to be particularly sensitive to the details of Epicurean psychological theory. There is no attempt, for example, to consider the Epicureans' distinction between the rational and non-rational soul or their own preferred account of the relationship between a body and a soul. Evidently, the Epicureans' own reputation for slander and polemic licenses their being paid back in kind (1086E).

The second, and related, theme from the Platonic cue at *Republic* 586a1–b3 on which Plutarch expands is the notion that the Epicureans – deliberately or not – persuade themselves to live a somehow bestial life and, in presenting us with a picture of the supposedly good human life which is in fact somehow bestial, would therefore reduce the rest of us to their sub-human level. This motif has been foreshadowed towards the close of *Adv. Col.*, 1124D–1125C, where Colotes is reported to have argued that the great early lawgivers lifted humans out of a bestial form of life. In reply, it is suggested that it is the Epicureans who mistake the proper role of law in human societies and would be unable to salvage a recognizably human life were their contractual laws to be undermined. In fact, when considered properly their position holds that the laws provide only a fragile veneer to mask the essentially bestial nature of Epicurean societies.[9] The point here is not, of course, that the Epicureans are bestial simply because they pursue pleasure; rather, the particular kinds of pleasures they pursue – in Plutarch's eyes, the pleasures of bodily gratification and pain avoidance – are not appropriate to our nature as rational thinking souls. Their hedonism is therefore based upon an impoverished view of human nature. Socrates' arresting image makes such people into animals bent over a feeding trough, looking to fill their stomachs and satisfy their appetites rather than properly tend to their rational natures. This chimes in perfectly with a common strand in anti-Epicurean polemic which compares them to pigs in particular or beasts in general, concerned with full stomachs and nothing more.[10] It is, moreover, a criticism of the Epicurean view which has already been voiced at *Adv. Col.* 1108C, but now that Plutarch's focus is more directly on the Epicureans' own positive account of the pleasant life these concerns can be given free rein and a much more expansive exposition. Plutarch can now seize the perfect opportunity to rehearse those well-known anti-Epicurean charges once again, with the full backing of his Platonic source. Certainly, he appears to be enjoying himself in recalling on a number of occasions the motif of the bestial Epicurean life. At 1091C, Epicurean happiness is compared with that of 'pigs or sheep' (cf. 1094E). The same charge reappears at 1092A–B: Epicurus perversely wants to lead us to the state in which brute animals are placed by nature, and prominently once more at 1096C–D: the Epicureans covertly 'turn the whole person into flesh' (*σαρκοποιεῖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὅλον*), fail to recognize the proper concentration on

[9] For more on the close of *Adv. Col.* see the remarks in E. Kechagia, 'Structure of Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem*: an underlying schema and its function', ch. 5 of her forthcoming *Plutarch against Colotes: Where Did the Epicureans Go Wrong?* (Oxford); available online at: <http://ora.ouls.ox.ac.uk/access/detail.php?pid=ora:1553>.

[10] For a more extended discussion of the theme and some possible Epicurean responses see J. Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of* Ataraxia, (Cambridge, 2002), 129–49.

and identification of oneself with one's soul and instead 'think it right to play swineherd to the soul with the pleasures of the body' (*ἀξιοῦσι τὴν ψυχὴν ταῖς τοῦ σώματος ἡδοναῖς κατασυβωτεῖν*).[11] Indeed, Plutarch repeats a familiar criticism of the Epicureans: their view in fact results in the absurd conclusion that non-rational animals are *better* placed than humans for living a good life since humans have to be rid of false beliefs to attain a carefree, 'ataraxic', view of the gods, death and other supposed sources of misfortune; in contrast, non-rational animals are fortunate not even to be able to form any such false beliefs and cannot therefore suffer any mental anxiety as a result (1092B–D).[12] Once again, the overall message is that the Epicureans fatally misunderstand what humans essentially are. In particular, they fail to recognize the superiority of the human rational soul and its pleasures and, as a result, cannot provide an account of a proper human life, let alone a pleasant human life. (That final point is made most clearly at 1096D–E.)

This criticism is bolstered by quotation from the offenders themselves. Plutarch thinks he can find good evidence in the Epicureans' own words of this turn away from the soul to the pleasures of the body and, more specifically, of the stomach. Indeed, it is announced early on that his criticisms will be aided by what the Epicureans themselves have to say.[13] This is not to say that the conversation is properly dialectical in the sense that is working from and wholly within Epicurean premises to uncover some sort of internal inconsistency or flaw. Rather, it is a form of polemic that will quote Epicurean sources – selectively, no doubt – and show how the grounds of the criticism to be offered can be located in authentic Epicurean texts. And it is certainly true that some of the passages Plutarch cites, particularly a passage from a letter from Metrodorus to his brother Timocrates at 1098C–D (previewed at 1087D), give a strong impression of the reprehensible outlook Plutarch wishes to emphasize since they do indeed appear to highlight above all the pleasures of a full stomach. (These also contrast, we might note, with various Epicurean claims about the relative unimportance of bodily pleasure introduced at 1088B–C.) Timocrates is a very helpful source for a writer like Plutarch, since he seems to have cast himself as the victim of some persecution by the first generation of Epicureans and even the object of a long attack by Epicurus himself (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.33; cf. Us. 41). Whatever the cause of the original falling-out, Timocrates is perfect for Plutarch's needs: an Epicurean insider who can cite with plausibility various claims by the early Epicureans which make them appear to be gluttons and hypocrites, filling out Plutarch's portrait of the school with unimpeachable first-hand evidence.[14]

[11] Also cf. *θηριώδη* at 1089C, and 1094A.

[12] For similar concerns in other writers and for a discussion of the proper Epicurean response to such charges see Warren (n. 10), 129–42, where it is also suggested that Plutarch's work *Bruta ratione uti* (or *Gryllus*) may be related to this debate.

[13] 1087D: *νῦν δὲ χρησώμεθα τοῖς διδομένοις ὑπ' αὐτῶν.*

[14] See also Diog. Laert. 10.6–7 for more of Timocrates' claims. Diog. Laert. 10.4 says that Timocrates wrote a work impugning Epicurus' Athenian citizenship. In short, Timocrates seems to have been 'extraordinarly successful … in contaminating the biographical tradition about Epicurus and Metrodorus' (D.N. Sedley, 'Epicurus and his professional rivals', in J. Bollack and A. Laks [edd.], *Etudes sur l'Epicurisme antique*, *Cahiers de philologie 1,* [Lille, 1976], 121–59, at 127, but see generally 127–32; cf. G. Roskam, *A Commentary on Plutarch's* De latenter vivendo [Leuven, 2007], 43–9). Compare also Timon of Phlius fr. 7 Diels for wording very like what is found at Plutarch *Non posse* 1098C–D.

II

Plutarch is working with a clear set of identifications: the Epicureans are like the misguided fools conned by false pleasure and, worse still, are so fixated on the body, bodily pleasures and other sensible objects of pleasure that they are in danger of betraying their rational natures and bestializing themselves. But there is yet more to be said and an even stronger case to be made. The Epicureans do not, it appears, dedicate themselves even to the usual sensible delights of human existence, at least not those of the more refined kind. They are famously distrustful of culture and *paideia* and, whether or not this is a fair representation of their stance, in Plutarch's eyes, at least, this suggests that they fail even to enjoy the best pleasures to be had via the senses: they turn away from music, poetry and other literary arts.

The train of the argument progresses by elaborating in turn the various pleasures which the Epicureans ignore. Clearly, they know nothing of the exquisite pleasures of coming to know the perfect and eternal Forms. But they are also guilty of failing to cultivate other, perhaps less refined, pleasures of the better part of our souls. When Plutarch comes to offer his preferred characterization of the pleasures appropriate to a rational human soul, his discussion implies that he is prepared to soften the restrictive account found in *Republic* Book 9. There, it is quite clear that Socrates wants true and pure pleasures, strictly understood, to be focussed only on those objects which always are and are always unchanging. Most obviously, this is a reference to the Forms – the objects of knowledge of the true philosopher ruler – but perhaps a case might also be made for pure pleasures of this kind being generated by contemplation of mathematical objects of some sort. Plutarch, however, describes a significantly more expansive notion, including among his list of appropriate sources of pleasure not only mathematics (1093D ff.) but also the study of literature, history and the like.[15] For Plutarch, we take pleasure in learning the truth even if these are truths related to contingent facts – in other words, what might be otherwise (1093A–C). All these, we are asked to agree, are rejected by the Epicureans as part of a blanket rejection of cultural and intellectual pursuits in favour of a concentration on the most basic physical needs.

This expansion in the scope of pleasures assigned to the rational soul is perhaps licensed by Plutarch's particular understanding of the dual nature of that aspect of human psychology. Plutarch is not overly explicit about his own conception of the different faculties of the soul, although we might expect him to be indebted in general terms to the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition.[16] There are, however, some important hints here and there. In this very work, for example, he gives a reasonably clear indication that he sees the working of the rational soul being turned to two separate but related functions. At 1092E he describes two general types of pleasure which a human ought properly to pursue, neither of which is grasped by the appetitive and bestial soul emphasized by the Epicureans. Pleasures from the anticipation of bodily delight are not only unstable and empty but also vulgar and immodest. The pleasures which we ought to pursue instead are described as pure,

[15] This is noted by Albini (n. 4), 35–9.

[16] See the brief remarks in J. Opsomer, 'Plutarch's Platonism revisited', in M. Bonazzi and V. Celluprica (edd.), *L'eredità platonica: studi sul Platonismo da Arcesilao a Proclo* (Naples, 2005), 161–200, at 180–3.

that is neither preceded nor followed by pain, and are attributed to the rational soul:

ἃς δ' ἄξιον καὶ δίκαιον εὐφροσύνας καὶ χαρὰς νομίζεσθαι, καθαραὶ μέν εἰσι τοῦ ἐναντίου καὶ σφυγμὸν οὐδένα κεκραμένον οὐδὲ δηγμὸν οὐδὲ μετάνοιαν ἔχουσιν, οἰκεῖον δὲ τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ ψυχικὸν ἀληθῶς καὶ γνήσιον καὶ οὐκ ἐπείσακτον αὐτῶν τἀγαθόν ἐστιν οὐδ' ἄλογον, ἀλλ' εὐλογώτατον ἐκ τοῦ θεωρητικοῦ καὶ φιλομαθοῦς ἢ πρακτικοῦ καὶ φιλοκάλου τῆς διανοίας φυόμενον. ὧν ὅσας ἑκάτερον καὶ ἡλίκας ἡδονὰς ἀναδίδωσιν, οὐκ ἄν τις ἀνύσειε διελθεῖν προθυμούμενος.

But what properly deserve to be called 'delights' and 'joys' are pure of any taint of the opposite, have no element of aching or stabbing pain, and bring no regret; the good in them is proper to the soul and really 'psychic' and genuine and not adventitious or irrational but rational in the truest sense since it comes from *the theoretical or learning-loving part of the mind or else the action-guiding and beauty-loving part*. The pleasures yielded by each of these are so many and so great that with the best will in the world no one could tell the whole story.

(tr. Einarson and De Lacy, with modifications; my emphasis)

There is a question here whether the alternatives mentioned in the clause italicized in the translation correspond to two aspects (or even parts) of the rational part of the soul – one theoretical and the other practical – or alternatively to the rational and 'spirited' parts of the soul understood more or less on the model of the tripartite soul of Plato's *Republic.* This is related, of course, to the wider question whether Plutarch adopts a full-blown tripartite psychology along the lines of that found in the *Republic* or is more inclined to work for the most part with a simpler dualistic division. That question is not to be settled here, in part because the evidence to be found in *Non posse* is not conclusive. In favour of the view that at 1092E we are offered two complementary roles for the rational soul, producing 'delights' and 'joys', is Plutarch's preceding comment that the good he is discussing is the good appropriate to the soul, what is truly 'psychic', and has no mixture of pain and the like – all of which suggests that they are somehow still meant to capture the essence of the pure rational pleasures which Socrates discusses in the *Republic.* In that case, when he characterizes these alternative aspects of *dianoia* he intends them to be understood as two faculties of the rational part of the soul or, perhaps, the rational soul viewed as acting in two different spheres, one theoretical and the other practical.[17] This interpretation would also give a more satisfying overall coherence to his view, since the pleasures he goes on to list at 1092F onwards would be difficult to assign to the *thumoeides* as described in the *Republic.* Instead they are, broadly speaking, aesthetic and cultural pleasures, concerned nevertheless with particular stories, works or occasions. They are therefore just the class of items which it would be hard to assign to the theoretical aspect of reason, if that is conceived as concerned exclusively with necessary and eternal abstract objects and truths. But on the other hand they are certainly related in some sense to a rational appreciation and a general love of acquiring beliefs and information, albeit about particular or contingent facts.[18]

[17] Plutarch's use of the term διάνοια elsewhere is not easy to pin down. It may be used simply as a synonym for ψυχή but on other occasions has a more restricted reference to the rational or 'hegemonic' part of the soul (*Virt. mor.* 441C, cf. 451B; *De fato* 571D; *De soll. an.* 960A, 960C, 963D, 969C, *Quaest. Plat.* 1001D, 1002A).

[18] Albini (n. 4), 184 n. 60, sees here a reference to the choice between an active and an intellectual life.

Support for this view might also come from *De animae procreatione* which describes reason (λόγος) in terms which suggest that it is a single faculty able to operate on both intelligible or universal and perceptible or particular objects (see 1024E–1025A and 1025D–E). Consider 1025E:

καὶ μὴν θεωρητικῆς γε τῆς ψυχῆς οὔσης ἅμα καὶ πρακτικῆς, καὶ θεωρούσης μὲν τὰ καθόλου πραττούσης δὲ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα, καὶ νοεῖν μὲν ἐκεῖνα ταῦτα δ' αἰσθάνεσθαι δοκούσης, ὁ κοινὸς λόγος ἀεὶ περί τε ταὐτὸν ἐντυγχάνων τῷ θατέρῳ καὶ ταὐτῷ περὶ θάτερον ἐπιχειρεῖ μὲν ὅροις καὶ διαιρέσεσι χωρίζειν τὸ ἓν καὶ τὰ πολλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀμερὲς καὶ τὸ μεριστόν, οὐ δύναται δὲ καθαρῶς ἐν οὐδετέρῳ γενέσθαι διὰ τὸ καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς ἐναλλὰξ ἐμπεπλέχθαι καὶ καταμεμῖχθαι δι' ἀλλήλων.

Now, as the soul is at once contemplative and practical and contemplates the universals but acts upon the particulars and apparently cognizes the former but perceives the latter, the reason common to both (ὁ κοινὸς λόγος) as it is continually coming upon difference in sameness and upon sameness in difference, tries with definitions and divisions to separate the one and the many, that is the indivisible and the divisible, but cannot arrive at either exclusively, because the very principles have been alternately intertwined and thoroughly intermixed with each other. (tr. H. Cherniss)

This is clearly a Platonist attempt to make sense of the interrelation between theoretical understanding and practical reasoning based upon a metaphysical account of the relationship between universals and particulars. The details are more difficult to tease out, but what is important for present purposes is that theoretical understanding and practical reasoning are most emphatically understood to be two related uses of a single and shared faculty of reason. (And a similar account can be found at *Virt. mor.* 443E which further identifies the virtue of the theoretical use of reason as wisdom, σοφία, and of the practical use of reason as prudence, φρόνησις.)[19] It would be reasonable to think, given this view, that there could be rational pleasures associated with both the cognition of universals and the learning or perception of particulars. In this way, perhaps we might argue that Plutarch conceives of a larger range of objects as belonging to the pleasures of reason than we might have suspected solely from reading the *Republic*.

Concerns about the pleasures appropriate to a sense of self-worth, reputation and the like, all of which might be associated with the *Republic*'s *thumoeides* are also discussed in *Non posse.* Plutarch is evidently also concerned to show that Epicureanism fails properly to acknowledge the natural sense in which humans take pleasure in fame and a good reputation and therefore continues his gradual reduction of the Epicureans' pleasures to the most basic available to human experience. Much of the discussion from 1098E to 1100D, for example, is designed to show not only that there are examples of men who have taken proper pleasure in their noble achievements but that there is a general desire for and enjoyment of such pleasures among humans. Indeed, Epicurus himself is criticized as inconsistent on this score: his own concern for a particular reputation is what drove him to

[19] There are also evident Aristotelian influences on this general view, and a strong Peripatetic influence throught *Virt. Mor.* (Compare e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 1139a5–15.) The passage at 443E is, admittedly, a little odd since it would appear to make part of theoretical wisdom a grasp of truths concerning not only heavenly bodies but also, more surprisingly, the sea. In contrast, thoughts about what is good will belong to practical wisdom only. Nevertheless, the general point is clear – that Plutarch is not averse to assigning to reason differing spheres of activity and that he tends to discriminate these by positing different kinds of object upon which a single rational faculty operates.

disown and then slander his teachers and he enjoyed the reverence paid to him by his followers (1100A–C). In the terms of Plato's *Republic*, these would indeed appear to be the pleasures of the spirited part of the soul, the *thumoeides*. (See, for example, 581a9–b5.) However, there is no explicit sign in *Non posse* of Plutarch being committed to a strong notion of psychic tripartition which would commit him to the existence of a separate thumotic part of the soul. To be sure, when Plutarch concludes the work he offers a summary of the various pleasures and goods which the Epicureans omit from a human life. And there he tells us that Epicurus kills 'the love of learning of the theoretical aspect of us and the love of honour of the action-guiding aspect of us' (*τοῦ θεωρητικοῦ τὸ φιλομαθὲς καὶ τοῦ πρακτικοῦ τὸ φιλότιμον*) and thereby denies us their due pleasures (1107C). Nevertheless, my suspicion is that, just as at 1092E, these two are both considered to be aspects of *dianoia*, which is itself a rational part of the soul, rather than distinct soul parts in the same manner as Plutarch elsewhere distinguishes between a rational and non-rational soul.[20]

In any case, it is important to note that the pleasures of the broad range of intellectual and social pursuits canvassed by Plutarch in 1093A–C certainly do not correspond, strictly speaking, to the exquisite cognitive pleasures of the philosopher-ruler imagined by Socrates in *Republic* 9. Whether they are meant to be thought of as still, in a sense, pleasures of our rational natures or are somehow linked also to a spirited part of our souls, Plutarch can nevertheless use them as part of his *a fortiori* argument: the Epicureans reject not only the best pleasures of the intellect; they even try to recommend a life which omits the pleasures which most educated readers might take to be their most intellectual or stable objects of enjoyment. Not only do the Epicureans, in that case, fail to recognize the most pleasant life possible because they do not admit the pleasure of contemplation of perfect eternal objects; they also recommend we jettison the best that most of our lives currently contain.

There may even be another inconsistency in the Epicurean theory since, as Plutarch notes at 1095C, Epicurus claimed in his work *Diaporiai* that a sage would be a 'lover of spectacle' (*φιλοθεώρος*) and enjoy more than anyone the sounds and sights of Dionysian performances.[21] For a reader already alert to Platonic echoes, this will surely recall another famous passage from the *Republic*, the discussion with the 'lovers of sights and sounds' (*φιλοθεάμονες* and *φιλήκοοι*) in *Republic* 5.475d ff., and further consolidate the Platonic image of the empiricist Epicureans as falling far short of the correct standards of knowledge, true pleasure and the good life. And this – albeit passing – reference is yet one more possible example of a motif we have seen emerge already: the charge of inconsistency is Plutarch's riposte to a hostile Epicurean reaction to Plato's *Republic*. There is some reason to think that this part of *Republic* Book 5 was in Epicurus' mind when rejecting the Platonic dissociation between philosophers and lovers of spectacle.[22] And, in

[20] Cf. *De adul.* 61D: *εἶς δέ τις ἔοικε τρόπος εἶναι φυλακῆς τὸ γιγνώσκειν καὶ μνημονεύειν ἀεὶ ὅτι τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ μὲν ἀληθινὸν καὶ φιλόκαλον καὶ λογικὸν ἐχούσης, τὸ δ' ἄλογον καὶ φιλοψευδὲς καὶ παθητικόν, ὁ μὲν φίλος ἀεὶ τῷ κρείττονι πάρεστι σύμβουλος καὶ συνήγορος, ὥσπερ ἰατρὸς τὸ ὑγιαῖνον αὔξων καὶ διαφυλάττων, ὁ δὲ κόλαξ τῷ παθητικῷ καὶ ἀλόγῳ παρακάθηται, καὶ τοῦτο κνᾷ καὶ γαργαλίζει καὶ ἀναπείθει, καὶ ἀφίστησι τοῦ λογισμοῦ, μηχανώμενος αὐτῷ πονηράς τινας ἡδυπαθείας.*

[21] Cf. Diog. Laert. 10.120.

[22] Cf. E. Asmis, 'Epicurean poetics', in D. Obbink (ed.), *Philodemus and Poetry* (Oxford, 1995), 15–34, at 18–21, who argues that this is part of Epicurus' general reaction to Platonic concerns about poetry. He and Plato agree that the content of poetry is often to be criticized.

any event, it is not implausible that Plutarch should make this connection since this passage in *Republic* 5 has a number of close similarities with the discussion with the patients in *Republic* 9 which, as we have seen, he most surely does have in mind. Structurally, both involve a two-fold discussion: Socrates and Glaucon agree independently on the basis of some previously agreed premises – themselves involving reference to what we can recognize as 'Forms' – what the true nature of pleasure and knowledge is; they also undertake a dialectical discussion with an opponent attempting to show the same conclusion but on the basis of commonly held, non-proprietorial assumptions. Further, in both passages, the reader is alerted to the mistake made by these opponents by the comment that they are 'sick' or somehow hold unhealthy opinions (584e7, cf. 476e2). Finally, it is just the objects of prime interest of the lovers of sights and sounds which are revealed in *Republic* 9 as sources of imitation or false pleasures, unstable objects enjoyed by the unstable and impermanent body, while the objects of knowledge are the sources of true and genuine pleasures of the soul. Whether or not Plato intended such a close link to be drawn between these two sets of characters, it is clear that they are in various ways analogous in the content and reasons for the false beliefs they uncover. It is also not at all implausible for a reader of the *Republic* such as Plutarch to reach for both passages in an attack on a school of empiricists and hedonists such as the Epicureans.[23]

It certainly suits Plutarch's anti-Epicurean polemical purposes to be able to draw on Socrates' characterization – at various points of the *Republic* – of the kinds of people who are overly impressed by and concentrated on what they can experience and enjoy through sense perception: the empiricist Epicureans, who famously insisted that 'all perceptions are true', can hardly announce that they are unconcerned with the perceptible world. But, according to Socrates and Plutarch, an unfortunate consequence of this concentration on the perceptible and physical is that it prevents access to what is truly and properly pleasant for humans. Epicureans therefore cannot live a pleasant life since, in failing to recognize true human nature, they fail to recognize what is properly pleasant. And since they identify pleasure and the good, they cannot – even by their own standards – live a good life.

III

We can now turn to consider the wider context of Plutarch's polemic and place it within a history of the often heated exchanges between Epicureans and Platonists. Despite the Epicureans' reputation for being generally uninterested in inter-school dialectic, they were accomplished polemicists and had for some time been engaged in criticism of Platonic works. Indeed, the Epicureans had been both interested in

But he and Plato differ sharply about the proper nature of the philosophy which ought to take the place of traditional education. For more on the Epicureans' attitude to the arts see D. Blank, '*Philosophia* and *technē*: Epicureans on the arts', in J. Warren (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge, 2009), 216–33.

[23] Another possible connection is Plutarch's choice of wording at 1091F. He is expanding on the notion that the Epicureans restrict pleasure to mere absence of pain and connects this with the idea that Epicurean pleasure is somehow subhuman; they put joy into a tiny and closed pen where it is forced to twist and turn (ἐν ᾧ στρέφεται καὶ κυλινδεῖται). Although this verb is not uncommon in Plutarch, this is the only time he uses this form. Is it perhaps meant as an allusion to the nature of the 'many beautiful things' at Pl. *Resp.* 479d4?

and aggravated by Plato since the foundation of the school. There is good evidence of a close engagement by Epicurus himself in various aspects of Plato's dialogues, including notably the *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* and also the *Republic*.[24] The first generation of Epicureans were also keen polemicists: Metrodorus appears to have written an *Against the* Euthyphro and *Against the* Gorgias, and Polyaenus wrote *Against Plato* (Diog. Laert. 10.25). Colotes, in particular, seems to have warmed to this theme. As well as the general work to which Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem* is a response, Colotes wrote works *Against the* Lysis and *Against the* Euthydemus. And, most interesting for current purposes, he was keen to criticize Plato's *Republic*; at least, we know from Proclus' commentary on the Platonic work that he was keen to offer criticisms of the myth of Er.[25] Proclus even dubs him 'the enemy of Plato', something which would in all likelihood have pleased him greatly.[26] Proclus, we might also notice, writing more than seven hundred years after Colotes, still feels it important to offer a rebuttal of the Epicurean's accusations. And he notes that Porphyry before him had felt a similar need to respond to Colotes (Procl. *In Plat. Rem. Pub.* vol. 2, 111.6 ff.)

Although the evidence is not particularly rich, there is every reason to think that the period in which Plutarch was writing *Non posse* saw the continuation of a general vein of polemic between the two schools. There is, to be sure, little explicit polemic surviving between Epicureanism and Platonism in later Hellenistic and early Imperial times, but there is no reason to think it disappeared in the period between Colotes and Plutarch; there are certainly in our sources some traces which might support such a case.[27] The second-century evidence is nevertheless much clearer. As well as Plutarch's evident interest in Epicurean theories of pleasure, we have Aulus Gellius' report of the – admittedly peculiar – view that all subsequent philosophical accounts of pleasure are dependent on one or other of Plato's descriptions of pleasure's various forms.[28] One of the views mentioned prominently in this

[24] See J. Warren, 'Psychic disharmony: Philoponus and Epicurus on Plato's *Phaedo*', *OSAPh* 30 (2006), 235–59 for a discussion of Epicurus' engagement with the *harmonia* theory of soul and its refutation in the *Phaedo*. Epicurus' *On Nature*, Book 14 (*P Herc.* 1148) discussed the physical theory of the *Timaeus.* See G. Leone, 'Epicuro *Della natura* libro XIV', *CErc.* 14 (1984), 17–107.

[25] See Procl. *In Plat. Rem Pub.* vol. 2, 105.23; 109.12; 111.6 ff.; 113.9; 116.19; 121.24. Cf. J. Warren, 'Democritus, the Epicureans, death, and dying', *CQ* 52 (2002), 193–206, at 204–5, for how Proclus plays Colotes against his atomist predecessor Democritus. For more information on Colotes' works see R. Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes. Seine Schrift 'Adversus Colotem' als philosophiegeschichtliche Quelle*, Acta Philosophica Fennica 7, (Helsinki, 1955), 26 ff. and esp. 101–7.

[26] See Procl. *In Plat. Rem Pub.* vol. 2, 113.9–10 Kroll.

[27] The question of Lucretius' interest in non-Epicurean philosophy in general is rather complicated. See, most recently, J. Warren, 'Lucretius and Greek philosophy', in S. Gillespie and P. Hardie (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge, 2007), 19–32. Philodemus clearly had an interest in the Academy and even wrote a history of the school (*P Herc.* 1021 and 164). Works such as Cicero's *Tusc.* 1 and the Pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* offer a dialogue between Epicurean and Platonic conceptions of death.

[28] See Gell. *NA* 9.5. The whole of this section is often attributed to Calvenus Taurus; it appears, for example as 18T in A. Gioé, *Filosofi medioplatonici del II secolo D. C. Testimonianze e frammenti: Gaio, Albino, Lucio, Nicostrato, Tauro, Severo, Arpocrazione* (Naples, 2002) and as §10 in M.-L. Lakmann, *Der Platoniker Taurus in der Darstellung des Aulus Gellius* (Leiden, 1995): see the remarks at 98–113. There are, however, reasons to doubt that the whole of the report concerns Calvenus Taurus' views, rather than Gellius' own. See H. Tarrant, 'Platonic interpretation in Aulus Gellius', *GRBS* 37 (1996), 173–93, esp. 187–93 and cf. J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, 1999), 138–9 with n. 5. For some more on Taurus see H. Tarrant,

connection is the Epicurean conception that pleasure is a 'well-balanced state of the flesh' (*σαρκὸς εὐσταθὲς κατάστημα*), for which Gellius uses the same Epicurean tag as appears also in Plutarch at 1089D and 1090A.[29] This short phrase therefore appears to be a favourite touchstone for this kind of anti-Epicurean criticism, precisely because of the prominence it offers to the state of the flesh rather than the soul.[30] (The phrase is also quoted by Clement, *Stromateis* 2.119 and 131. It could well be another phrase made notorious by Timocrates' selective quotation.) For his part, the second-century Platonist Calvenus Taurus seems to have been particularly attached to an anti-Epicurean anti-hedonist agenda of an extreme kind. Certainly, the terms of his attacks on Epicurus as reported by Gellius (*NA* 9.5) are uncompromising:

> Taurus autem noster, quotiens facta mentio Epicuri erat, in ore atque in lingua habebat verba haec Hieroclis Stoici, viri sancti et gravis: *ἡδονὴ τέλος, πόρνης δόγμα· οὐκ ἔστιν πρόνοια, οὐδὲ πόρνης δόγμα.*
>
> But our own Taurus, whenever he made mention of Epicurus would have on the tip of his tongue this phrase of the Stoic Hierocles, a pious and serious man: 'That pleasure is the goal of life is the dogma of a whore; that there is no providence is not even the dogma of a whore'.

The details of all this remain obscure, but it is enough for my purposes to show that there was an ongoing debate between the two schools. This debate, furthermore, points towards two features which are relevant to the interpretation of Plutarch's *Non posse*. First, the report from Gellius shows that, whether in the case of Calvenus Taurus' abusive dismissal or else the more sober attempt to undermine Epicurean innovation by pointing to an original Platonic source, there was heated discussion or polemic over the true nature of pleasure. Second, as the evidence from Proclus suggests, discussion between Platonists and Epicureans sometimes included discussion of Plato's *Republic*, perhaps instigated by an early critical work by the Epicurean Colotes.[31] Plutarch's *Non posse* fits neatly into both these strands of Platonist-Epicurean debate. For Plutarch, it would have seemed entirely natural to reach for the *Republic* as a source for material to wield against the Epicureans and their conception of pleasure. Indeed, it would have seemed perfectly apt for him to do so given Colotes' famous hostility to Plato and to this dialogue, and also the obviously fertile material in the *Republic* for producing not only alternatives to the Epicurean view but also diagnoses of their mistakes. In casting the

'Platonist educators in a growing market: Gaius; Albinus; Taurus; Alcinous', in R. Sorabji and R.W. Sharples (edd.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 BC–200 AD. BICS* Supplementary Volume 94 (2007), 449–65, at 456–60.

[29] Gell. *NA* 9.5.1: *Epicurus voluptatem summum bonum esse ponit; eam tamen ita definit: σαρκὸς εὐσταθὲς κατάστημα.*

[30] Usener prints as fr. 68 the entire sentence from Plut. *Non posse* 1089D and conjectures that it comes from Epicurus' work *On the* telos: *τὸ γὰρ εὐσταθὲς σαρκὸς κατάστημα καὶ τὸ περὶ ταύτης πιστὸν ἔλπισμα τὴν ἀκροτάτην χαρὰν καὶ βεβαιοτάτην ἔχει τοῖς ἐπιλογίζεσθαι δυναμένοις.* On the use of *εὐστάθεια* in Plutarch see Albini (n. 4), 62.

[31] Epicurus himself was no less graphic than Calvenus in his dismissal of opposing views. Epicurus famously is supposed to have said: 'I spit on the fine (*τὸ καλόν*) and those who vacantly gawp at it, whenever it produces no pleasure' (Ath. 547a [Us. 512]). It is possible that this is an anti-Platonic jibe. (And see above for Plutarch's assertion of a *φιλόκαλον* aspect of the human soul.)

hedonist and empiricist Epicureans as subject to the very failings which Socrates finds in both the 'lovers of sights and sounds' in Book 5 and also the patients and gluttons in Book 9, *Non posse* offers an object lesson in the creative use of a Platonic text for the purposes of inter-school polemic some five hundred years after the *Republic* was written.[32]

We might also, and finally, take *Non posse* to be a further sign of the variety of methods used in Plutarch's philosophical engagements. Here he is reacting to Epicureanism on the basis of a relatively detailed but heavily prejudiced reading of Epicurean sources, from a committed Platonist stance. We are as a result presented with a clear example of what it is like for an adherent of an opposing school to read, consider and react to the Epicurean position. *Non posse* is one side of a tit-for-tat Platonist vs. Epicurean polemic, whose other side is well exemplified by what we have of Epicureans like Colotes' strong and equally committed reaction to Platonic works. *Non posse* is explicitly offered as a companion piece to the *Adversus Colotem* (see *Non posse* 1086C–D), and the Epicurean polemic against other philosophers – in Colotes' case also against various Platonic works including the *Republic* – is the perfect justification, should there really be any need for one, for Plutarch to adopt this staunch approach in response. There is, in other words, no need here for Plutarch even to pretend to be considering the merits of the Epicurean view in its own terms. He feels no pressure for the criticisms he offers to be based on a charitable or even-handed interpretation of Epicurus' views. Nor does he feel the need for any serious dialectical engagement with the opposing school's philosophy. Perhaps, however, Plutarch did take that approach elsewhere, since the Lamprias catalogue (§129) includes mention of a work *Περὶ Ἐπικουρείων ἐναντιωμάτων* which might have been somewhat like the surviving anti-Stoic work with a similar title (*De Stoic. repug.*).[33] But in *Non posse* Plutarch is perfectly at liberty to write a retaliatory Platonist critique of Epicureanism from a partisan standpoint. He will never win over a committed Epicurean with this sort of polemic, of course, but that was never part of his intention.

Corpus Christi College, Cambridge JAMES WARREN
jiw1001@cam.ac.uk

[32] Cf. Hershbell (n. 4), 3362. For a more sophisticated discussion of Plutarch's interest in Colotes' work see E. Kechagia, 'Why did Plutarch write against Colotes? Reading the *prooemium* of *Πρὸς Κωλώτην*', ch. 2 of her forthcoming *Plutarch against Colotes: Where Did the Epicureans Go Wrong?* (Oxford); available online at <http://ora.ouls.ox.ac.uk/access/detail.php?pid=ora:1554>. In particular, she notes the Platonic atmosphere of the discussion related in *Adv. Col.* and the explicit Platonist sympathies of at least some of the participants. Aristodemus, in particular, is a real Plato enthusiast (*Adv. Col.* 1107E). Much of her discussion could, with little modification, be equally applied to *Non posse.*

[33] The situation with the Stoics is complicated further by their philosophical affinity with the Socratic tradition, often drawing on Platonic works, and Plutarch's own preferred account of that same tradition. For a careful and illuminating discussion of this theme in *De Stoic. repug.* see G. Boys-Stones, 'Thyrsus-bearer of the Academy or enthusiast for Plato? Plutarch's *de Stoicorum repugnatiis*', in J. Mossman (ed.), *Plutarch and his Intellectual World* (London, 1997), 41–58.