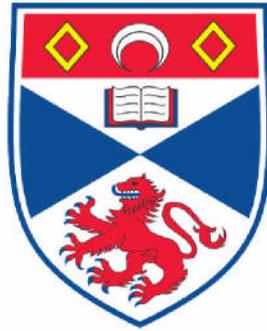


**APPROACHING DEATH IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION**

**Peter Scott Cameron**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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APPROACHING DEATH IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

Thesis submitted to the University of St Andrews  
for the degree of PhD

by

Peter Scott Cameron

November 2007

I, Peter Scott Cameron, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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I was admitted as a research student in September, 2004, and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in December, 2004; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2004 and 2007.

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## Abstract

The thesis consists of five chapters: the first functions as an overture; the second, third and fourth deal with Plato, Cicero and Montaigne respectively; and the fifth raises some questions.

The overture explores the ways in which Odysseus, Lucretius and Seneca approached death, and in the process introduces some obvious distinctions - between death viewed as the act of dying and death viewed as the state of being dead, between the death which comes to everyone and the death which comes to me, between our own death and the death of others - and anticipates certain recurring themes.

The second chapter, on Plato, is concerned chiefly with the *Phaedo* and the question of what is involved in "the practice of death". This entails an examination of related concepts and terminology in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, and of the whole subject of Platonic myth.

The third chapter discusses Cicero's views on death and immortality - both the considered reflections of the philosopher and the spontaneous reactions of the bereaved father - principally as these emerge from the *Tusculan Disputations* and the letters to Atticus.

The fourth chapter approaches Montaigne - his own experiences of death, the relationship between his earlier and later approaches, the tension between his professed Catholicism and his pagan inclinations, the difficulty and perhaps undesirability of extracting a 'message' from the *Essais* on this or any other subject.

The conclusion asks to what extent these various approaches succeed in what they set out to do, and whether any generalised, objective approach to death can ever successfully address the individual predicament, either in relation to one's own death or in facing bereavement.

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## I. Overture

The title "Approaching Death in the Classical Tradition" requires some explanation. "Approaching Death" is highly ambiguous. First it may indicate the fact that death is approaching all of us, or, as Seneca was fond of saying, that as soon as we are born we begin to approach it. Second, it may refer to the way in which I approach my own death, how I face the thought of it now, how I will face the reality then. Third, it may describe how we react to the death of others, how we deal with bereavement. Fourth, "death" may mean either the fact of death, of having to die; or the state of death, what is involved in being dead. Fifth, "approaching" may suggest not a finished stance over against death but an emerging, developing, even self-contradictory process. And sixth, there may be overtones of "Towards an understanding of . . .", with the implication that there is something tentative about the thesis itself, that it does not aim to be exhaustive and definitive. In fact all these ambiguities are both conscious and intentional, the first five because they reflect what is actually the case in the material selected, the sixth because it reflects what will be the case in the treatment of that material.

But something must also be said about the second part of the title, because while "the Classical Tradition" is (conventionally at least) less ambiguous it seems to be in collision with the table of contents - Plato and Cicero being obviously under-representative and Montaigne non-representative. And, equally obviously, if the intention were to produce a catalogue of attitudes to death in the classical world, then limiting the evidence to any three names would be absurd. That, however, is not the intention. Nor is it to describe, on the basis of archaeological, artistic and literary

evidence, how the ordinary person in the classical world viewed death.<sup>1</sup> Rather it is to examine the ways in which a selection of canonical figures, on the basis of their own ideas and emotions and experience, suggested that other people should view death. But the exercise is not simply descriptive: it will involve a consideration of whether the advice given is sound advice, whether it is logically coherent and philosophically satisfying, whether it should inform our own approach to death. And within the confines of a thesis it would be unrealistic to deal in any depth with more than three such figures along these lines.<sup>2</sup> The question then is, why these three: why Plato, Cicero and Montaigne?

As far as Plato is concerned, it would be necessary only to defend his exclusion: that is to say, in terms of range, of imagination, and of influence, his inclusion is inevitable. And if there is to be a balancing Roman, Cicero is the obvious candidate, not only in terms of range and of influence, but because we know so much about his private life and his real thoughts. But a second, equally representative, wide-ranging and influential Greek or Roman would have been hard to find. About Homer's personality, for example, we know nothing, and the state of death for his characters means only a murky half-existence. Of Lucretius' life we know next to nothing,<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> As, for example, Rohde and Cumont and more recently Vermeule and Garland do in their various ways. Cf. most recently Edwards, whose aim is rather to capture, on the basis of literary texts, the distinctively Roman attitudes to death: because of the nature of the evidence, this means essentially elite rather than ordinary Romans.

<sup>2</sup> The force of the objection that only three, whoever they are, cannot possibly be representative, may be diminished by citing Vermeule's self-deprecating uneasiness about her own field, "where it has always been customary to serve up a Homeric tag, a passage of Euripides, a red-figured vase, a quotation from one of the sacred laws of the Greek cities and a passage of Plutarch, a skeleton, a loutrophoros, a lethykos, and some lines of Cicero and Demosthenes, and to call the mixture 'what the Greeks thought about death'. After four years of reading I still do not know what the Greeks thought about death, or what Americans think either, or what I think myself." (p.x)

<sup>3</sup> As Boyancé puts it (1964, p.1): "Il a pratiqué rigoureusement, trop rigoureusement au gré de notre curiosité, le 'Cache ta vie' recommandé par son maître." To Santayana (p.20) this is no loss: "Our ignorance of the life of Lucretius is not, I think, much to be regretted. His work preserves that part of him which he himself would have wished to preserve. Perfect conviction ignores itself, proclaiming the public truth. To reach this no doubt requires a peculiar genius which is called intelligence; for

after death he sees no alternative to non-existence. About Seneca we know a great deal, but of his thoughts only those which were intended for public consumption,<sup>4</sup> and while he does allow for the possibility of a blissful afterlife, he is much more preoccupied with dying than with death.

Montaigne as the third man is a more intriguing counterweight than any of these, and his presence produces a better mixture. Of course this apparently involves moving out of the classical world altogether into 16th century France, but Montaigne is scarcely to be defined as a 16th century Frenchman. Latin was his first language and he was steeped in the literature of the ancients. Although ostensibly a Catholic, his approach to death is much more pagan than Christian, and given his debt to Lucretius and Seneca, the extent to which he quotes Cicero, and the fact that Socrates is his hero, he might be thought to offer a synthesis of attitudes to death in the classical world - were it not for the entirely distinctive nature of his own attitude and the very modern way in which this is presented to us in the *Essais*.<sup>5</sup>

But if one way of reading Montaigne is to see his starting-point as Lucretius and Seneca and his final position as in some sense Socratic, so Cicero the philosopher can be understood<sup>6</sup> as a Roman Academic in dialogue with Epicureanism and Stoicism;

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intelligence is quickness in seeing things as they are. But where intelligence is attained, the rest of a man, like the scaffolding to a finished building, becomes irrelevant. We do not wish it to intercept our view of the solid structure, which alone was intended by the artist." While this may be true of Lucretius it is not true in every case, certainly not in that of Montaigne whose scaffolding is as interesting as the building - or whose scaffolding is the building.

<sup>4</sup> M.T. Griffin (pp.4 f.) speaks of "the reader's general impression that he is not really being brought close to the author, that he is being told only what Seneca regards as philosophically interesting and no more...[Seneca] is more concerned to offer the public examples of the moral preacher, the pedagogue, the struggling student, the zealous convert, than to portray his real relationship with his addressee Lucilius, or record his own moods."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Leeman (p.322), who describes him both as the first modern intellectual and as a bridge between Seneca and us.

<sup>6</sup> Or misunderstood. Cf. Long, p.289: "We should distinguish in Cicero between the *genus philosophandi* that he favours - that is, the sceptical Academic methodology - and theses that he finds

and Homer's influence on Plato though complex is immense. It may therefore help to set the scene if the approaches of that hypothetical alternative trio - Seneca, Lucretius and Homer (or more precisely Odysseus) - are given a brief airing at this point.<sup>7</sup> It will also serve the purpose of heralding some of the recurring themes and leitmotifs. The three will be dealt with in that order, partly because Seneca's approach, being the most wide-ranging, suggests principles of classification against which to compare and evaluate the others; and partly because the question of the status of myth or poetry or fiction in the *Odyssey*, coming at the end of the overture, leads naturally into the chapter on Plato.

Death is always hovering in **Seneca**.<sup>8</sup> The *Consolationes* of course - those addressed to Marcia, to Helvia, to Polybius, to Marullus,<sup>9</sup> and to Lucilius<sup>10</sup> - deal with it expressly, but there are few of the *Epistulae Morales* in which its presence cannot be sensed. He follows convention in cramming every conceivable stratagem into each *consolatio*, even to the point of self-contradiction, and the *Epistulae* are haphazard by their nature, so that the treatment is far from systematic.<sup>11</sup> But nowhere is it his

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'plausible' (*probabilia*), which could be drawn in theory from any other school."

<sup>7</sup> It should be emphasised that just as in the body of the work there will be no question of broadening the field to include "Greek and Roman attitudes to death", so here the intention is not to identify and discuss "orthodox" Epicurean or Stoic approaches to death, but rather to ask how Lucretius and Seneca confronted it. Colish (p.2) draws attention to the dangers involved in "the sort of *Ideengeschichte* which divorces thought from the human beings who produce it, ignoring their lives, their historical circumstances, their professional identities, their intellectual proclivities, their education and associations, the genre in which they wrote, their personal concerns and conviction..." It is precisely those human beings who will be the focus of attention here.

<sup>8</sup> As Schönegg (p.15) puts it: "Der Tod ist Ausgangspunkt und Ziel seines Philosophierens."

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.

<sup>10</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.

<sup>11</sup> See Grimal p.40: "Aussi, quand il abandonne le dialogue, il a recours à la lettre, qui n'est qu'un dialogue à distance. Mais, dans le dialogue comme dans la lettre, l'exposé est dominé par la considération des cas particuliers, des appels à l'expérience, qui rendent assez malaisé pour nous de rétablir, dans tous ses chaînons, une doctrine cohérente." Cf. Leeman, p.324: "Einerseits gehören die einzelnen Aussagen in den Gedankengang oder die Gedankenreihe des einzelnen Briefes und können daraus nicht gelöst werden, ohne denaturiert und zuweilen sogar zu einer Art billiger Kalendersprüche

intention to give a theoretical account of the nature of death and its consequences: it is rather to offer practical advice on the subject of approaching death.<sup>12</sup> And this advice falls into two distinct categories: how to approach our own death, and how to approach the death of another.

Within the former category, there is a further distinction between preparing to die and preparing for the state of death, a distinction reflected in the ambivalence of the recurring verb *meditari*, meaning either “to think on, ponder, contemplate,” or “to practise, study, exercise oneself in.”<sup>13</sup> So, for example, with the first meaning, Seneca tells Lucilius that he should think every day about the transience of human life, so that he may be able to leave it with a calm mind.<sup>14</sup> Or with the second meaning, paraphrasing the *Phaedo*: “*Inde est quod Plato clamat: sapientis animum totum in mortem prominere, hoc velle, hoc meditari.*”<sup>15</sup>

*Meditari* in the first sense enables us to face dying. It amounts in fact to a kind of *ars moriendi*, but one which applies not just to the deathbed: it should be begun immediately, since its purpose is to combat that fear of dying which destroys the

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zu werden. Andererseits hat Senecas Denken über den Tod als solches nichts Systematisches, Folgerichtiges. Es ist lebendiges Gedankengut, der jeweiligen Lebenslage und Stimmung entsprechend.”

<sup>12</sup> See Kassel, p.28: “Senecas umfangliche konsolatorische Schriftstellerei gehört durchaus in den Rahmen dieser umfassenden, ganz aufs Praktische gerichteten und mit unermüdlicher Bemühung ins Werk gesetzten Seelentherapie...”

<sup>13</sup> The same ambivalence in the Greek *μελετᾶν* allows Seneca to use the same word in reproducing both Epicurus and Plato. But although he quotes Epicurus with approval he does not follow him. Seneca envisages a continual meditation on death in order to be ready when the time comes (see e.g. the reference in the following note). Epicurus (*Ep.Men.* 122-123) recommends that we meditate (*μελετᾶν*) on what brings happiness, which involves principally (*Ep.Men.* 124) accustoming ourselves to the thought that death is nothing to us (*συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον*); but once we have succeeded in convincing ourselves of this we will no longer meditate on death, since to continue to have to do so would be to admit its power over us. For Seneca, life is a constant battle against the fear of death (*De Brev.Vit.* VII.3: “*tota vita descendum est mori*”); for Epicurus, what one has ceased to fear one ceases to think about.

<sup>14</sup> *Ep.Mor.* IV.5: “*Hoc cotidie meditare, ut possis aequo animo vitam relinquere...*” Cf. *Nat. Quaest.* VI.32.12: “*Omnibus omissis, hoc unum, Lucili, meditare, ne mortis nomen reformides.*”

quality of life.<sup>16</sup> And there are various techniques. One is to think each day that this might be our last.<sup>17</sup> Another is to consider that death is never a sudden thing: it is a process which began when we were born.<sup>18</sup> A third is to remember that everyone is in the same boat, and that it is absurd to complain about a necessary condition of life.<sup>19</sup> A fourth is to assure ourselves that there will be no suffering after death. The underworld is merely something dreamt up by the poets.<sup>20</sup> Death means non-existence - "*mors est non esse*"<sup>21</sup> - and what does not exist does not suffer. The dead are no worse off than they were before they were born, just as a lamp is no worse off when it is extinguished than before it was lit.<sup>22</sup> There is no more reason to weep at the thought of our non-existence a thousand years hence than at the thought of our non-existence a thousand years ago.<sup>23</sup> All this should result in the contempt for death<sup>24</sup> which is characteristic of great men, men like Socrates and Cato, and that is a fifth technique: to dwell on their example<sup>25</sup> and so avoid the unmanliness of fear.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ad Marciam* XXIII.2.

<sup>16</sup> See *Ep.Mor.* XXVI.10: "*Meditare mortem*"; *qui hoc dicit [Epicurus] meditari libertatem iubet. Qui mori didicit servire dedit.*" Cf. *Nat. Quaest.* VI.32.9: "*Quantum potes itaque ipse te cohortare, Lucili, contra metum mortis. Hic est qui nos humiles facit; hic est qui vitam ipsam cui parcat inquietat ac perdit.*"

<sup>17</sup> E.g. *Ep.Mor.* XXVI.7: "*Incertum est quo loco te mors expectet; itaque tu illam omni loco expecta.*" Or *Ep.Mor.* XXIV.15: "*quidquid fieri potest quasi futurum cogitemus.*" (Cf. *De Tr. An.* XI (quoting Publilius): "*cuius potest accidere quod cuiquam potest.*") Or *Ep.Mor.* IV.8: "*Cogita posse et latronem et hostem admovere iugulo tuo gladium.*"

<sup>18</sup> E.g. *Ep.Mor.* IV.9: "*Ita dico: ex quo natus es, ducis.*" Or *Ep.Mor.* XXIV.20: "*Cotidie morimur; and 21 (quoting Lucilius): 'mors non una venit, sed quae rapit ultima mors est.'*" Or *Ad Marciam* XXI.6: "*Ex illo quo primum lucem vidit, iter mortis ingressus est accessitque fato propior et illi ipsi qui adiciebantur adolescentiae anni vitae detrahebantur.*" Or *Ep.Mor.* CXX.18: "*Erramus autem qui ultimum timemus diem, cum tantundem in mortem singuli conferant. Non ille gradus lassitudinem facit, in quo deficimus, sed ille profitetur; ad mortem dies extremus pervenit, accedit omnis; carpit nos ille, non corripit.*" Cf. *Ep.Mor.* LVIII.23: "*vis tu non timere ne semel fiat quod cotidie fit!*"

<sup>19</sup> E.g. *Ep.Mor.* XXX.11: "*Mors necessitatem habet aequam et invictam: quis queri potest in ea condicione se esse in qua nemo non est?*" Cf. *Nat. Quaest.* VI.32.12: "*Mors naturae lex est.*"

<sup>20</sup> E.g. *Ad Marciam* XIX.4: "*luserunt ista poetae et vanis nos agitavere terroribus.*" Cf. *Ep.Mor.* LXXXII.16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LIV.4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LIV.5.

<sup>23</sup> "*Haec paria sunt: non eris nec fuisti.*" *Ep.Mor.* LXXVII.11. (The so-called symmetry argument, discussed below in connection with Lucretius.)

<sup>24</sup> E.g. *Ep.Mor.* XXXVI.8 (giving advice to a friend of Lucilius who has just retired): "*Quid ergo huic meditandum est? quod adversus omnis tela, quod adversus omne hostium genus bene facit, mortem contemnere...*" Cf. *Ep.Mor.* LXXXII.16.

<sup>25</sup> And not just the example of great men: Seneca frequently appeals to the courage of the gladiator in

Cato indeed exemplifies not just the courage to face death but the freedom to choose it.<sup>27</sup>

And once the fear of death is contained, we are not only enabled to die well, we are free to live well.<sup>28</sup> Seneca's *ars moriendi* accordingly prepares the ground for an *ars vivendi*, but the specific content of that *ars vivendi*, the actual practice of virtue, may involve<sup>29</sup> a different orientation to death, which is evident in the second meaning of

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the face of death. See e.g. *Ep. Mor.* XXX.8; XXXVII.2; XCIII.12; *De Tranq. An.* XI.5-6. In *De Prov.* II the two are combined: Cato's death is presented as a *spectaculum* at which the gods form the audience.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. *Ep. Mor.* XIII.13-15.

<sup>27</sup> *De Prov.* II.10: "*Cato qua exeat habet; una manu latam libertati viam faciet.*"

But Seneca's attitude to suicide is ambivalent. Sometimes he thinks it wrong (*Ep. Mor.* XXIV.24, where he criticises the "*libido moriendi*"; sometimes he thinks it justified as soon as circumstances preclude peace of mind (*Ep. Mor.* LXX.5); sometimes he thinks it the philosopher's trump-card in the pursuit of freedom (*Ep. Mor.* XXIV.7, *De Prov.* II.10 - both relating to Cato's death - and *Ep. Mor.* LXX.14); sometimes he thinks it the only conceivable course (*De Ira* III.14-15); sometimes he is indifferent: *Ep. Mor.* LXX.15: "*Placet? vive. Non placet? licet eo reverti unde venisti.*" Cf. *Ep. Mor.* LXVII.5.

Tadic-Gilloteaux (p.551) denies that there is any incoherence or contradiction in all this: "En déterminant les mobiles valables du suicide, Sénèque les a tellement réduits - ni la crainte, ni la souffrance, ni le dégoût de la vie, ni la passion ne sont des mobiles suffisants - que, finalement, seul le sage a le droit de se donner la mort. Et même dans les cas où il aurait de bons motifs de se suicider, il devrait encore se poser la question: 'Ne puis-je plus être utile aux autres ni à moi-même?'"

And see the extended discussion in M.T. Griffin, pp.367-388, comparing the deaths of Seneca and Socrates. Griffin argues that Seneca's views on suicide conformed to Stoic doctrine, which was itself a "slight amplification" (p.374) of the position in the *Phaedo*; "necessity" in the latter being more widely interpreted, but always provided that "one must not be moved by a sudden impulse, or driven by one of the passions, i.e. by fear of misfortune or of death itself; by love of death or angry contempt of life." (p.382) But Griffin herself quotes *Ep. Mor.* CIV.21 where Seneca contrasts the deaths of Socrates and Zeno (who killed himself after breaking a finger): "*alter te docebit mori si necesse erit, alter antequam necesse erit.*"

Cf. also Edwards (pp.98-112), who thinks that Seneca's views on suicide "need to be seen as a key part of his project to overcome the fear of death." (p.102.) But she also draws attention to the tension between Seneca's frequent use of military imagery in the summons to face death, and his insistence that suicide is always available as an escape route (*De Prov.* VI.7: "*si pugnare non vultis, licet fugere*") - which is really tantamount to desertion in the face of the enemy.

Cf. also Colish, pp.49f.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. *Ep. Mor.* LXXXII.17: "*Quae [mens] numquam ad virtutem exsurget si mortem malum esse crediderit: exsurget si putabit indifferens esse.*" Cf. *Ep. Mor.* LXI.4: "*Ante ad mortem quam ad vitam praeparandi sumus.*" Cf. *De Tr. An.* XI.4: "*Male vivet quisquis nesciet bene mori*" and 6: "*qui mortem timebit nihil unquam pro homine vivo faciet.*" *De Brev. Vit.* VII.3 expresses the converse idea: "*Vivere tota vita discendum est et, quod magis fortasse miraberis, tota vita discendum est mori.*"

<sup>29</sup> Although some passages indicate that the *ars vivendi* following on a proper contempt for death is simply a corresponding contempt for life, which results in an impregnable tranquillity. (See e.g. *Nat. Quaest.* VI.32.4-5.) Indeed the implication is that the process is reciprocal. If we despise death we are able to laugh in the face of fortune, and if we despise life the terrors of death evaporate. Or putting it the other way round, it is the fear of death which produces the illusion that life is worth preserving, and it is the desire to preserve life at all costs which makes us fear death. The answer (VI.32.6) is to live

*meditari*. Here it is no longer a question of learning how to die (ἡ μελέτη τοῦ φυσικοῦ θανάτου), but of anticipating, practising in advance, the state of being dead. And here of course the state of death can no longer be seen as annihilation, non-existence: the practice or study of death, in the sense of a rehearsal of the state of death, presupposes some kind of afterlife.

Yet Seneca is somewhat equivocal on the subject of an afterlife.<sup>30</sup> At the lowest level there is that bald statement that "*mors est non esse*."<sup>31</sup> In other words, there is no afterlife at all. Then there is the reflection that nothing in this world is ever completely annihilated: it may disappear from sight, but it does not perish.<sup>32</sup> In other

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and die in accordance with nature: "*rerum natura te, quae genuit, expectat et locus melior ac tutior*." ("Ein Trost," remarks Waiblinger, p.81, "der neben dem schwermütigen Gedanken von der Vergänglichkeit aller Seienden [VI.32.8] freilich nur wenig zur Geltung kommt.")

<sup>30</sup> See Motto, p.188: "On the question of the soul after death Seneca is neither in harmony with the Stoic masters nor consistent with himself." Hoven (pp.109-126) distinguishes four currents in Seneca's writings: "Les textes relevés dans le premier groupe (A) indiquent que Sénèque connaît bien, et approuve en principe, la doctrine stoïcienne de l'au-delà. Mais il ne paraît guère pouvoir s'en tenir à cette 'voie moyenne' et il penche tantôt d'un côté tantôt de l'autre: certains passages dénotent une attitude dubitative (B) ou même une tendance à la négation épicurienne (C); d'autre part, dans le cas d'une réponse positive, la doctrine stoïcienne est assez fréquemment remplacée ou submergée par un 'courant mystique' (D)." (p.125.)

Cf. Leeman, p.326: "Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele ist nur eine schöne Möglichkeit von der Seneca und Cicero sich zuweilen hinreissen lassen und der sie mit echt-römischen Pathos Ausdruck verleihen, die aber in der philosophischen Todesproblematik keinen wirklichen Halt bietet." This judgement is perhaps more true of Seneca than of Cicero.

<sup>31</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LIV.4. Cf. *Troades* 407-408: "*Quaeris quo iaceas post obitum loco? / Quo non nata iacent*." Friedländer, after quoting those lines, says (1987, p.147): "An dieser unbedingten Leugnung der Festdauer hat Seneca freilich wohl nicht lange festgehalten; doch zu einem festen, alle Zweifel ausschliessenden Unsterblichkeitsglauben ist er trotz ernstlicher Bemühungen niemals gelangt." The second part of that statement may well be true: cf. Hoven, p.115: "...dans *Épître* CII nous avons affaire, semble-t-il, à une véritable incertitude, à une profonde hésitation de Sénèque." The first half, however, is rather misleading, since there is no good reason to suppose that Seneca ever held fast to a view of death expressed by the chorus in one of his plays. After all, the same chorus in the same play envisages Priam wandering free and happy in the Elysian Fields (156-162). And as Hoven says (pp.124f.), "Quant aux nombreux passages qui dans les tragédies parlent des enfers souterrains...leur présence s'explique par des raisons littéraires évidentes et n'engage nullement, croyons-nous, la pensée même de Sénèque."

On Seneca's treatment of death and the afterlife in the tragedies, see the two articles by Cattin. Essentially Cattin finds there the same range and contradictions as in the philosophical works, but on the whole he thinks that Seneca inclined to the negative view. In *Troades* 401 ("*post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil*") he says "on sent une conviction" (p.364), whereas in relation to immortality "quand il s'enchant de cette possibilité [e.g. *Ep.Mor.* 102] il ne fait qu'annoncer Platon." (p.550.)

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XXXVI.10: "*cogita nihil eorum quae ab oculis abeunt et in rerum naturam, ex qua prodierunt ac mox processura sunt, reconduntur consumi: desinunt ista, non pereunt, et mors, quam pertimescimus ac recusamus, intermittit vitam, non eripit*."

words, we too will be recycled. Then there is the offer of two alternatives: either we are destined to dwell with the gods, or to be mingled again with nature.<sup>33</sup> In other words, either paradise or recycling. And at the highest level there is the confident statement that the soul at death does indeed leave the body and join the gods:<sup>34</sup> the day of death which we fear as the end of everything is in fact the birthday of eternity.<sup>35</sup> Although of course this eternity may be subject to the Stoic qualification that the next conflagration will change even the souls of the blest into their former elements.<sup>36</sup> In other words, paradise and recycling.

At any rate, the one thing that Seneca does not make room for<sup>37</sup> is any possibility of suffering, and therefore of punishment, after death.<sup>38</sup> But there is a kind of negative punishment envisaged, in the sense that by practising death, by anticipating the release of the soul from the body, the virtuous wise man ensures that after death his soul will make the journey to the gods.<sup>39</sup> The philosopher is granted a sort of trailer of the beatific vision:<sup>40</sup> in the closing words of the *Consolatio ad Helviam* Seneca

<sup>33</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LXXI.16: "*Magnus animus deo pareat et quidquid lex universi iubet sine cunctatione patiat: aut in meliorem emittitur vitam lucidius tranquilliusque inter divina mansurus aut certe sine ullo futuris incommodo, si naturae remiscebitur et revertetur in totum.*"

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. *Ep.Mor.* CII.21-22; *Ad Marciam* XXIV.5 - XXVI.7; *Ad Helviam* XI.6-7; and *Ad Pol.* IX.7-8 (on all of which Hoven remarks (p.122): "À notre avis, aucun Stoïcien 'orthodoxe' n'aurait pu 'signer' de tels textes.") Friedländer remarks (1987, p.148) on *Ep.Mor.* CII: "Vergleicht man diesen Schluss mit dem Anfang des Briefes, so kann man sich der Vermutung nicht erwehren, dass die Zuversicht, mit der er hier spricht, eine künstlich eingeredete war." Cf. Hoven, p.122: "quant à la fin de l'Épître CII, représente-t-elle plus que le *bellum somnium* dont il est question au début de la lettre?"

<sup>35</sup> *Ep.Mor.* CII.26: "*Dies iste quem tamquam extremum reformidas aeterni natalis est.*"

<sup>36</sup> See *Ad Marciam* XXVI.6-7. But whether "*aeternus*" should be taken as similarly qualified in *Ad Helviam*. XI.7 and *Ad Pol.* IX.7 is open to question - see Hoven p.120.

<sup>37</sup> In the philosophical works, that is: the tragedies are a different matter.

<sup>38</sup> In this at least he is "orthodox". See e.g. Hoven, p.84: "...aux yeux de la morale stoïcienne, il n'est nul besoin d'une sorte de justice compensatoire dans l'au-delà; car la vraie justice est pleinement réalisée dans la vie terrestre: la vertu suffit au bonheur, seul le sage est heureux, il n'y a de mal que ce qui est honteux. C'est donc dans la vie terrestre que sont appliquées les sanctions morales du Stoïcisme."

<sup>39</sup> E.g. *Ep.Mor.* CXX.14: "*quod numquam magis divinum est [pectus mortale] quam ubi mortalitatem suam cogitat et scit in hoc natum hominem, ut vita defungeretur, nec domum esse hoc corpus sed hospitium, et quidem breve hospitium, quod relinquendum est ubi te gravem esse hospiti videas.*" Cf. *Ad Marciam* XXIII.1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Hoven, p.119: "Il [Seneca] prône la vie contemplative comme une préparation et un avant-goût

assures his mother that exile is no hardship to him because his mind has leisure to employ itself in contemplation, and, conscious of the fact that it is immortal, to penetrate to things divine.<sup>41</sup> And this, he says in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, is why and how the wise man practises death in the Platonic sense.<sup>42</sup>

The *consolatio*, obviously, is the form which contains advice on approaching another's death. But the title should not be understood as entirely synonymous with the notion of consolation in our sense, of comfort, of something which brings solace. Often it smacks much more of a schoolmasterish lecture on keeping a stiff upper lip - in other words, more *exhortatio* than *consolatio*.<sup>43</sup> For example, where Seneca refers to a letter he has written to one Marullus on the death of his little son, he says that he considered Marullus to be deserving of criticism rather than comfort, because of his womanish behaviour.<sup>44</sup> And to Marcia he declares his intention of being just as brutal, since her grief is long past the stage of warranting gentle treatment - her son had died three years before.<sup>45</sup> Marullus' little boy was only just dead, but Marullus was a man: women were allowed to be womanish for a time,<sup>46</sup> men not at all.<sup>47</sup>

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de la vie dans au-delà."

<sup>41</sup> *Ad Helviam* XX.2: "Tum peragratis humilioribus ad summa perrumpit et pulcherrimo divinorum spectaculo fruitur, aeternitatis suae memor in omne quod fuit futurumque est vadit omnibus saeculis."

<sup>42</sup> *Ad Marciam* XXIII.2.

<sup>43</sup> On the contrast between ancient and modern approaches, see Kassel, pp.3f. He quotes Harder: "Teilnahme unter Menschen berührt auf jener Nähe, die den andern gelten lässt, wie er ist, ohne zu fragen, wie er sein sollte oder was er hätte tun müssen - ohne ihn also an der Norm zu messen, vor welcher sein Leidenszustand sich als ein pathologischer darstellt. Gegen dieses Hinnehmen des Menschen in seiner zufälligen, normwidrigen Schwäche sträubt sich die griechische Anlage."

<sup>44</sup> *Ep. Mor.* XCIX.1: "Epistolam quam scripsi Marullo cum filium parvulum amisisset et diceretur molliter ferre misi tibi, in qua non sum solitum morem secutus nec putavi leniter illum debere tractari, cum obiurgatione esset quam solacio dignior." The letter began (XCIX.2): "Solacia expectas? convicia accipe." Cf. *Ad Pol.* VI.2: "Quid autem tam humile ac muliebre est quam consumendum se dolori committere?"

<sup>45</sup> *Ad Marciam* I.8: "Non possum nunc per obsequium nec molliter adsequi tam durum dolorem; frangendus est."

<sup>46</sup> Seneca refers more than once to the ancient laws restricting their mourning to a year at most: *Ep. Mor.* LXIII.13; *Ad Helviam* XVI.1.

Accordingly Seneca's aim in the *consolationes* is to cure men of any indulgence in grief, and women of too prolonged an indulgence. They are, again, a form of therapy. The *ars moriendi* involved in the first sense of *meditari* is intended to enable us to approach our approaching death by ridding us of fear. The *ars vivendi* involved in the second sense of *meditari* is intended to prepare our souls for a better state hereafter by ridding us of the distractions of the body.<sup>48</sup> The *consolatio* is intended to help us<sup>49</sup> face the death of another by ridding us of our grief.

Again there are techniques, and it became the convention, instead of choosing only those which might be especially suited to the recipient, to include everything, since these were documents written not just for the person to whom they were addressed but for publication<sup>50</sup> - which may explain, for example, why both Socratic alternatives<sup>51</sup> can be presented with equal conviction in the same *Consolatio*.<sup>52</sup> But what is perhaps surprising to us in Seneca's *consolationes* is that the obvious comfort represented by the Socratic alternatives seems to be subordinated to other considerations. Among these there are of course some which are also found in connection with our own

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<sup>47</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.13: "*viris nullum legitimum tempus est, quia nullum honestum.*"

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. *Ep.Mor.* CII.28: "*Huic nunc quoque tu quantum potes sub <duc te> voluptatique nisi quae \*\*necessariisque cohaerebit alienus iam hinc altius aliquid sublimiusque meditare.*"

<sup>49</sup> Or rather primarily to help the philosopher to help others: as Kassel puts it (p.24), the early *consolationes* were "keine Rezepte für Patienten, sondern Anweisungen für den Arzt." On the limitations of the "therapy analogy" to the *consolatio*, see Wilson, who also points out (p.49) that Seneca sees himself as both doctor and patient.

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Kassel's description (p.98) of Ps.-Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Apollonium* as an endless treatise, "in dem der ganz schattenhaft bleibende Adressat auf weite Strecken vergessen scheint..." Kassel's analysis of this document (pp.48-98) lists many of the topoi which were to be found in every *consolatio*; he quotes Pohlenz: "Wer etwa die Trostschriften...miteinander vergleicht, wird bald sehen, dass nicht bloss die einzelnen Argumente, sondern auch ganze Gedankenverbindungen und die Disposition von Gedankenreihen ganz fest geworden sind..."

<sup>51</sup> See Plato, *Ap.* 40 C. (Succinctly summarised by Seneca in *De Prov.* VI.6: "*Contemnite mortem; quae vos aut finit aut transfert.*")

<sup>52</sup> See *Ad Marciam* XIX.5: "*Mors nec bonum nec malum est; id enim potest aut bonum aut malum esse, quod aliquid est; quod vero ipsum nihil est et omnia in nihilum redigit, nulli nos fortunae tradit; mala enim bonaque circa aliquam versantur materiam. Non potest id fortuna tenere, quod natura dimisit, nec potest miser esse qui nullus est.*" And XXIV.5: "*Imago dumtaxat fili tui perit et effigies non simillima; ipse quidem aeternus meliorisque nunc status est, despoliatus oneribus alienis et sibi relictus.*" As Hoven says (p.122), some of Seneca's arguments may be included for literary rather than

approaching death: that it is the human lot to die,<sup>53</sup> that we should always expect death round the corner,<sup>54</sup> that the process of dying begins as soon as we are born.<sup>55</sup> But of those which are peculiar to the *consolatio* the most important for Seneca appears to be the requirement that grief should be moderate, both in intensity and in duration. Lucilius should not have more sorrow than is fitting,<sup>56</sup> and he should stop grieving as soon as possible,<sup>57</sup> because nothing becomes offensive so quickly as grief: protracted, it is either assumed or asinine.<sup>58</sup> People like Marullus should learn that tears can be overdone,<sup>59</sup> or conversely that there should be dignity even in grief.<sup>60</sup> The question Marcia should ask herself is whether grief ought to be acute or chronic.<sup>61</sup> But Seneca is not so inhuman, he says, as to forbid grief altogether.<sup>62</sup> The best course is a middle course.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, the principal aim of the *consolatio* for Seneca seems to be to ensure, not that the bereaved are consoled, but that they keep up appearances.<sup>64</sup> And the reason for avoiding excessive or prolonged manifestations of grief is a horror of

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philosophical reasons, as part of "l'arsenal habituel des auteurs de *Consolations*."

<sup>53</sup> E.g. *Ad Marciam* XVII.1: "*Sed humanum est;*" XIX.3: "*semper enim scisti moriturum.*" Cf. *Ad Pol.* I.4, XI.2.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.14, XCIX.32, *Ad Marciam* IX.1-5.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. *Ad Marciam* X.6, XXI.5: "*Si mortuum tibi filium doles, eius temporis quo natus est crimen est; mors enim illi denuntiata nascenti est.*"

<sup>56</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.13: "*aut enim simulatus aut stultus est.*"

<sup>59</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.2: "*discant quasdam etiam lacrimarum ineptias esse.*"

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.21: "*Est aliquis et dolendi decor.*"

<sup>61</sup> *Ad Marciam* IV.1: "*utrum magnus dolor esse debeat an perpetuus.*"

<sup>62</sup> *Ad Marciam* IV.1; *Ad Pol.* XVIII.5; *De Const. Sap.* X: "*Haec non nego sentire sapientem; nec enim lapidis illi duritiam ferrive adserimus. Nulla virtus est quae non sentias perpeti. Quid ergo est? quosdam ictus recipit, sed receptos evincit et sanat et comprimit.*" And he admits to his own susceptibility - *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.14: "*Haec tibi scribo, is qui Annaeum Serenum carissimum mihi tam immodice flevi ut, quod minime velim, inter exempla sim eorum quos dolor vicit.*"

<sup>63</sup> *Ad Helviam* XVI.1 "*et sentire desiderium et opprimere.*" *Ad Pol.* XVII.2: "*Nam et non sentire mala sua non est hominis et non ferre non est viri.*"

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Wilson, p.62: "Seneca employs the medical analogy in a way which reveals that it is, in the long run, inadequate. Healing is secondary to the preservation of modesty (*verecundia*)...The means of quelling passion are more important than the end." And p.60: "Ostensibly preoccupied with grief, consolatory writings carry underneath a strong ideological imperative concerned with self-definition

pretence, of playing to the gallery, of lamenting because lamentation is thought to be expected.<sup>65</sup> There is of course another contradiction here, because what Seneca is advocating is just as much a pretence: rather than display grief in order to conform to other people's expectations, we are to conceal our grief in order to impress other people with our fortitude.<sup>66</sup> The other people may be different in each case, and there may be a difference in the kind of the pretence involved, but in both cases our behaviour is dictated by convention and in both cases the problem of grief itself is sidestepped.<sup>67</sup>

Or relegated: because the *Consolationes* do offer in addition what to the modern mind would be understood by consolation. The bereaved are certainly expected to control and even overcome their grief, but they will find that easier to do if they bear certain things in mind. There is the futility of grief.<sup>68</sup> There is the fact that they are not alone.<sup>69</sup> There is the thought that it is better to have lost than never to have known

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and the fortification of identity. Marullus should behave like a man, not a woman."

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. *Ep.Mor.* LXIII.2: "*Quaeris unde sint lamentationes, unde inmodici fletus? per lacrimas argumenta desiderii quaerimus et dolorem non sequimur sed ostendimus...est aliqua et doloris ambitio.*" Cf. also *Ad Marciam* VII.1-2, *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.17, *De Tr. An.* XV.6.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Ad Pol.* VI.1: "*Circumstat te omnis ista consolantium frequentia et in animum tuum inquirat ac perspicit quantum roboris ille adversus dolorem habeat et utrumne tu tantum rebus secundis uti dextere scias, an et adversas possis viriliter ferre.*"

The "orthodox" Stoic position is not that we should conceal our grief but that it should be removed altogether. But here, as elsewhere, Seneca seems almost more anxious to prolong the fight (and so extract more virtue from it) than to win it outright. Cf. Wilson, pp.61f.: "...to the extent that the Stoics advocate extirpation of the destructive passions, Seneca is more interested in the act of extirpation than in the ideal state of serenity to which it should lead. Seneca locates value in the heroism of the battle, not in enjoying the rewards of victory." And cf. Edwards, pp.96f.

<sup>67</sup> There is a further irony involved here: in relation to the death of the other, Seneca seems to be recommending a kind of privatization of grief in contrast to the public display of emotion; whereas in relation to one's own death - and his own death, as reported by Tacitus, will prove to be a classic example - the audience and its reaction are always very much in mind.

<sup>68</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.6: "*supervacuum est dolere si nihil dolendo proficias.*" *Ad Marciam* VI.2: "*Sed si nullis planctibus defuncta revocantur, si sors immota et in aeternum fixa nulla miseria mutatur et mors tenuit quicquid abstulit, desinat dolor qui perit.*" Cf. *Ad Pol.* II.1.

<sup>69</sup> E.g. *Ad Marciam* XII.4: "*Circumfer per omnem notorum, ignotorum frequentiam oculos, occurrent tibi passi ubique maiora.*" Cf. *Ad Pol.* XII.2: "*Est autem hoc ipsum solacii loco, inter multos dolorem suum dividere; qui quia dispensatur inter plures, exigua debet apud te parte subsidere.*" Cf. also *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.22.

the beloved.<sup>70</sup> There is the example of famous men and women who have borne with unflinching courage the loss of spouses or children.<sup>71</sup> Or friends, because (and this is not easy for the modern mind to understand) the loss of a friend is in Seneca's book much more affecting than the loss of a child. He rebukes Marullus for reacting like a woman to his little boy's death: what would he do if he lost a close friend?<sup>72</sup>

But the *consolatio* almost by definition has its *Sitz im Leben* in the context of premature death, and one of the recurring themes accordingly deals with the imagined *cri de coeur* of the bereaved: "*sed puer decessit*"<sup>73</sup> or "*nimis tamen cito perit et immaturus*"<sup>74</sup> or "*at inopinanti ereptus est.*"<sup>75</sup> Seneca has several answers. In the first place, there is no advantage in reaching an advanced age, since we spend most of our time sleeping, or worrying, or in useless endeavour - we only actually live a small part of our lives.<sup>76</sup> Second, compared with eternity, even the longest life is incalculably short, and the difference between the incalculably short and the even shorter is scarcely worth troubling about.<sup>77</sup> Third, the one who has died in the prime of life, beautiful, virtuous, full of promise, if he had lived longer might have turned ugly and vicious,<sup>78</sup> or have had to endure illness, exile, imprisonment, suicide.<sup>79</sup> Indeed not only is it not a misfortune to die young, it is a positive blessing: if the best thing is

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<sup>70</sup> E.g. *Ad Pol.* X.3-6; *Ad Marciam* XII.1-2.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. *Ad Marciam* III and XII.6 - XV.4; *Ad Helviam* XVI.6-7; *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.6; *Ad Pol.* XIV.4-XVI.3.

<sup>72</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.2: "*Tam molliter tu fers mortem filii? quid faceres si amicum perdidisses?*" (Wilson suggests - p.66, note 31 - that Marullus may have had Epicurean leanings, and if so this comparison "with the loss of a friend is deliberately provocative as alluding to the pre-eminent value placed by Epicureans on friendship.")

<sup>73</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ad Marciam* XXI.1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ad Pol.* XI.1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.10-11. Cf. *De Brev. Vit.* III:3: even the centenarian dies "*immaturus*".

<sup>77</sup> E.g. *Ad Marciam* XXI.1-2; *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.31.

<sup>78</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XCIX.12.

<sup>79</sup> *Ad Marciam* XXII.1-4. Cf. *Ad Pol.* IX.4: "*Si bene computes, plus illi remissum quam ereptum est.*"

never to have been born, the next best thing is to depart early.<sup>80</sup> Fourth, it is in any case impossible for a man to die an untimely death, since the length of his life is predetermined.<sup>81</sup>

Now it must be doubtful whether any of this would have consoled anyone. For example, it might be thought cold comfort to point out that someone who has died at an early age of one kind of illness might have died of another kind of illness if he had lived longer. And Marcia could be forgiven for inferring that she should in fact be grieving not for her dead son but for his surviving siblings. And Solon's retort, when he was reminded in his bereavement of the futility of tears, is equally apposite to the argument that there is no such thing as dying before one's time because one's time has been decreed by fate: it is precisely this which causes us to weep.<sup>82</sup>

But perhaps more striking than the inadequacy of what is included in the *Consolatio* is the omission of any real recognition that the principal cause of grief is likely to be not the dictates of convention, nor fear of what happens after death, nor resentment against fate, but the simple fact that the dead person is no longer present. There is only one occasion when Seneca does mention this, and he does so only to brush it aside as clearly bearable: the remedy is simply to deceive ourselves that the parting is only temporary.<sup>83</sup>

And this raises a more fundamental question, that of the status of the *consolatio*, or

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<sup>80</sup> *Ad Marciam* XXII.3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ad Marciam* XXI. 4-5: "Nemo nimis cito moritur, quia victurus diutius quam vixit non fuit. Fixus est cuique terminus." Cf. *Ep Mor.* LXIX.6: "nemo moritur nisi sua morte" and see Mann for a recent discussion of this theme in Seneca.

<sup>82</sup> Diogenes Laertius I.63.

<sup>83</sup> *Ad Marciam* XIX.1.

the status of the philosopher who offers the *consolatio*. Or putting it another way, one wonders how the bereaved reacted to this kind of unsolicited (and publicly disseminated) advice on how to manage their grief better - advice which was sometimes offensive, sometimes self-contradictory, sometimes logically ridiculous, sometimes psychologically unrealistic or even dangerous.<sup>84</sup> Did the recipients of these *consolationes* ever feel gratitude to the author, or were they rather confirmed in the opinion that genuine grief is ultimately a private matter which can only be faced privately and is not susceptible to objective analysis and advice?<sup>85</sup>

But that same question must be asked in relation to our own approaching death as well: has the philosopher, or indeed anyone else, either the locus or the capacity to influence the way in which we approach our death? Seneca's moral writings expose the great paradox which lies at the heart of the matter: death is the one thing that every human being must face, it is in one sense the most objective fact of our existence, it is what above all expresses our solidarity, and the cumulative experience of mankind has resulted in boundless advice on how to face it; but at the same time my death is something only I can face, its reality is the most subjective fact of my existence,<sup>86</sup> it is what above all expresses my individuality, and however much advice I receive I have no idea how I will face it when the time comes because I can have no

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Wilson, p.60: "Marullus' reaction, on reading Seneca's denunciation of his failure to constrain his grief, can only be guessed at. Indignation? Anger? Shame? Certainly not peace of mind. Given that the epistle has evidently been devised with a view to inciting rather than soothing his feelings, what, it might be asked, of the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*?"

<sup>85</sup> Something which the writer of *Ox.Pap.I.115* understands only too well. Having lost a child herself, she makes no attempt to console the bereaved mother she is writing to: καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἦν καθήκοντα ἐποίησα καὶ πάντες οἱ ἐμοί, ἀλλ' ὅμως οὐδὲν δύναται τις πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα. As Kassel says (p.4): "Von so rührender Hilfslosigkeit sind die Verfasser literarischen *consolationes* weit entfernt. Sie glauben sehr wohl etwas ausrichten zu können πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα."

<sup>86</sup> "...mourir, qui est la plus grande besoigne que nous ayons à faire." (Montaigne II.6: 350/416.) Or as Nagel says (1986, pp.223f.): "The desire to go on living, which is one of our strongest, is essentially first-personal...and therefore it collides with objective indifference about the survival of anyone in particular. Your relation to your own death is unique, and here if anywhere the subjective standpoint

experience of it in advance.<sup>87</sup> It is the difference between Donne's two poles: "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee", and "She, she is dead; she's dead; and when thou know'st this / Thou know'st how dry a cinder this world is": between the common fate of mankind and that element of *delectus personae* which makes the common fate of mankind irrelevant.<sup>88</sup>

This paradox is less obvious in **Lucretius**, because he is concerned solely with the common fate of mankind. Indeed the element of *delectus personae* is only to be found in the celebrated passage about the cow searching for its dead calf,<sup>89</sup> while the dead man's family who foresee everlasting sorrow for themselves are sarcastically dismissed: if there is no everlasting life, how can there be everlasting grief?<sup>90</sup> Like the animal rights extremist Lucretius chooses to be humane to brutes and brutal to humans.

But of the three categories distinguishable in Seneca, it is not only the *consolatio* which is missing from *De Rerum Natura*.<sup>91</sup> The second meaning of Seneca's *meditari*, involving the Platonic practice of death, is also entirely absent, for the good and sufficient reason that it assumes an afterlife, and Lucretius is very sure that there

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holds a dominant position."

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Montaigne again (*ibid.*): "...mais, quant à la mort, nous ne la pouvons essayer qu'une fois; nous y somme tous apprentifs quand nous y venons."

<sup>88</sup> Seneca himself is aware of the paradox. The example of Sabinus, who made himself ridiculous by delegating to slaves the burden of memorising the classics, applies to dying a good death as much as to acquiring a good mind: no one else can do it for us. (*Ep.Mor.* XXVII.4-8.) And cf. *Ep.Mor.* XXVI.5ff on the gulf between word and deed in relation to dying, between bravado now and bravery then. In Seneca's own case, of course, there was apparently no such gulf. "Die *meditatio mortis*, von Seneca in den Schriften als Propädeutik des Sterbens praktiziert, wird zur *actio mortis*." (Schönegg, p.19.) But even if Tacitus' account (*Ann.* XV.60-64) is taken at its face value rather than as a literary construction (see Chapter 5 below), this does nothing to lessen the paradox.

<sup>89</sup> *De Rerum Natura* II. 352-366.

<sup>90</sup> III. 904-911.

<sup>91</sup> At least in the more restricted sense of dealing with bereavement: the word is sometimes used of

is no such thing. There is no question here of Socratic alternatives: *animus*, *anima* and *corpus* are all equally mortal,<sup>92</sup> and what follows death is extinction.<sup>93</sup> Only death itself is immortal.<sup>94</sup> Yet this is not, apparently, a simple matter of temperamental preference; it is not, apparently, mere assertion; it is not, apparently, just an atheistic hunch. No fewer than twenty-nine proofs,<sup>95</sup> or at least arguments,<sup>96</sup> are advanced in support of the mortality of the *animus-anima-corpus*,<sup>97</sup> but more important than these is the chain of presuppositions lying behind them.

First of all, the gods. Although he begins the poem by invoking Venus,<sup>98</sup> he goes on to make it clear that the gods cannot be invoked:<sup>99</sup> they are inaccessible and unconcerned,<sup>100</sup> and they have neither original nor continuing responsibility for the world and its inhabitants<sup>101</sup> - indeed they could have had neither the will nor the capacity for any such involvement, which would in any case have been against their own interests.<sup>102</sup> Their function, or rather their aim since they have no function, is simply to enjoy a life of blissful ease.<sup>103</sup> The world, far from owing its existence to the gods, is a random combination of atoms.<sup>104</sup> And so are we. But we have misunderstood the nature of the gods and, through religion, we have forged an illusory though pernicious relationship with them. *Religio*, which to Lucretius is

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Lucretius' intentions in Book III: see, e.g., Kenney, pp.31ff.

<sup>92</sup> *DRN* III. 417-424.

<sup>93</sup> III. 830ff.

<sup>94</sup> III. 869: "*mortalem vitam mors cum immortalis ademit*"

<sup>95</sup> Or perhaps one fewer: see Boyancé, 1963, p.161.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Santayana, p.49: "All that Lucretius urges about the divisibility of the soul, its diffused bodily seat, and the perils it would meet outside fails to remove the ominous possibility that troubles him" - i.e. that there is an afterlife.

<sup>97</sup> III. 417-829.

<sup>98</sup> I. 1-49.

<sup>99</sup> V. 165-167.

<sup>100</sup> I. 44-49 = II.646-651; VI. 68-79.

<sup>101</sup> II. 167-181; cf. V.195-199.

<sup>102</sup> V. 156-173; II. 1093-1104.

<sup>103</sup> III. 18-24; cf. VI. 68-79.

<sup>104</sup> II. 1058-63.

always a pejorative term, equivalent to superstition, originates in fear,<sup>105</sup> generates fear,<sup>106</sup> and feeds on fear:<sup>107</sup> fear, that is, both of what the gods may do to us now, by means of hurricanes, earthquakes or thunderbolts,<sup>108</sup> and fear of what they may do to us after death.<sup>109</sup>

That second kind of fear, of everlasting punishment after death, is whipped up by the *vates*, the priests and poets of traditional religion,<sup>110</sup> but Epicurus and now Lucretius<sup>111</sup> have precisely the opposite function: to unmask the true nature of *religio*, to trample it underfoot.<sup>112</sup> Because not only does it render us abject, it actually produces impiety - the classic example of this being Iphigenia's pathetic fate.<sup>113</sup> The purpose of *De Rerum Natura*, then, is to dispel fear - fear of the gods, fear of death, fear of everlasting punishment. And because fear is based on ignorance, the remedy lies in knowledge of the facts - *de rerum natura*.<sup>114</sup>

Accordingly, Lucretius proceeds to the analysis of the physical world, of the *animus-anima*, and of death. The world, randomly composed of atoms, is and always has

<sup>105</sup> V. 73f; I. 151-154.

<sup>106</sup> III.31-93.

<sup>107</sup> I.102-111.

<sup>108</sup> V.1218ff.

<sup>109</sup> I.102-111.

<sup>110</sup> "*nam si certam finem esse viderent / aerumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent / religionibus atque minis obsistere vatam. / nunc ratio nulla est restandi, nulla facultas, / aeternas quoniam poenas in morte timendum.*" (I. 107-111.)

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Bailey, p.13: "Lucretius then is first and foremost a missionary, whose purpose is to deliver men's minds from the tyranny of religious fears, and in particular from the fear of the intervention of divine powers in the events and affairs of the world, and the fear of death and the punishment of the soul hereafter for its misdeeds in life."

<sup>112</sup> "*quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim / obteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo.*" (I. 78f.)

<sup>113</sup> "*saepius illa / religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta*" (I.82f); "*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*" (I.101.)

<sup>114</sup> I. 127-135. Cf. Epicurus *K.D.* XI: εἰ μὴθ' ἐν ἡμᾶς αἱ τῶν μετεώρων ὑποψίαι ἠνώχλων καὶ αἱ περὶ θανάτου, μὴ ποτε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἦ τι, ἔτι τε τὸ μὴ κατανοεῖν τοὺς ὄρους τῶν ἀλγηδόνων καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, οὐκ ἂν προσεδεόμεθα φυσιολογίας.

been entirely independent of the gods, and will eventually come to an end.<sup>115</sup> The same must apply to everything in the world, and therefore to human beings and their constituent parts: the *mens* = *animus*, the *anima*, and the *corpus*.<sup>116</sup> There is no underworld - the underworld of the poets he demythologises and locates in this present life<sup>117</sup> - and no blissful eternity in the company of the gods. Death is simply absence of sensation, non-existence, and since existence is a prerequisite of suffering there is no suffering after death and nothing to be feared.<sup>118</sup>

The proper approach to death, therefore, is not to approach it at all, but to ignore it and forget about it:<sup>119</sup> it means nothing, it is irrelevant.<sup>120</sup> There is no reason to be distressed at the prospect of annihilation since we will know nothing about it - just as we felt no distress from wars which took place long before we were born.<sup>121</sup> The person who resents imminent non-existence is simply not taking the concept of non-existence seriously.<sup>122</sup> In any case, death is a condition of life, each generation passing the baton to the next.<sup>123</sup> Nature personified sums it all up: if you have enjoyed life, you should depart from it as you would at the end of a banquet, replete and *aequo animo*; if you have not enjoyed it, why do you want to prolong it?<sup>124</sup> And what would be the point? The longest life is no different from the shortest, since it

<sup>115</sup> II. 1170; V. 64-66, 91-109, 235-246.

<sup>116</sup> III. 94: "*primum animum dico, mentem quam saepe vocamus...*" Cf. III.136-139.

<sup>117</sup> III.978-1023.

<sup>118</sup> III. 866f.: "*scire licet nobis nil esse in morte timendum, / nec miserum fieri qui non est posse...*"

<sup>119</sup> See Schrijvers, p.291: "La mort est inhérente à la vie et possède une existence objective qui est indéniable. Cependant, grâce à la faculté de l'esprit de refouler les choses désagréables, l'homme est capable de tuer la mort, c'est-à-dire de lui refuser une existence subjective. De cette façon, l'homme peut se croire immortel. Il ne faut pas penser à la mort, il faut l'oublier. Voilà le remède qu'Epicure nous conseille contre la peur de la mort."

<sup>120</sup> III.830: "*Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum, / quandoquidem natura animi mortalis habetur;*"

<sup>121</sup> III. 832ff., cf. III.972-5 - the so-called symmetry argument. On the different nuances of the two passages, see Warren, 2004, pp.57ff.

<sup>122</sup> III. 870ff.

<sup>123</sup> II. 78-79: "*inque brevi spatio mutantur saecula animantum / et quasi cursores vitae lampada tradunt.*"

subtracts nothing from the duration of death.<sup>125</sup>

Once we are liberated in this way<sup>126</sup> from the fear of death, we are able to lead our lives as we were meant to, in carefree enjoyment.<sup>127</sup> That is true piety: not making sacrifices to the gods and lying prostrate before their shrines, but having a tranquil mind.<sup>128</sup> In fact it is more than piety, it amounts to a life like that of the gods themselves:<sup>129</sup> when *religio* is overthrown we are simultaneously raised to heaven.<sup>130</sup> And the source of our liberation, Epicurus, who was the first to take a stand against *religio* and the fables about the gods<sup>131</sup> and to tear away the mask and reveal the true nature of reality,<sup>132</sup> can be addressed not just as a father whose words are worthy of eternal life,<sup>133</sup> but as himself a god.<sup>134</sup>

Lucretius and Seneca therefore have this in common, that they both want to rid us of the fear of death so that we may live life properly, they both dismiss the myth of punishment in an underworld, and they both argue that extinction precludes suffering. But Lucretius differs in excluding not only any alternative to extinction after death,<sup>135</sup> and therefore any notion of practising for death, but also any notion of a life-long preparation for dying in the first sense of Seneca's *meditari* - according to Lucretius we are to remove the sting of death not by inuring ourselves to the idea but by

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<sup>124</sup> III. 931-939.

<sup>125</sup> III. 1086-1089.

<sup>126</sup> V. 18: "*at bene non poterat sine puro pectore vivi.*"

<sup>127</sup> II. 16-19; cf. Epicurus *Ep.Men.*124.

<sup>128</sup> V. 1198-1203.

<sup>129</sup> III. 322.

<sup>130</sup> I. 78f.

<sup>131</sup> I.62-79.

<sup>132</sup> V. 54: "*atque omnem rerum naturam pandere dictis.*" Cf. III. 58.

<sup>133</sup> III. 9-13.

<sup>134</sup> V. 8, 19, 50f.

<sup>135</sup> He does mention the theoretical possibility of reincarnation, but dismisses it as irrelevant because it would be effectively equivalent to extinction. III. 674-676: "*nam si tanto operest animi mutata potestas, / omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum, / non, ut opinor, id ab leto iam longiter errat.*"

unmasking it and then ignoring it. And he is just as unconcerned with the death of the other, with consoling the bereaved. In all this he is tidier and apparently more logical than Seneca. He claims that the knowledge of death is deducible from the knowledge of life, of the nature of things. As a result he offers no self-contradictory alternatives: he ridicules not only the underworld of the poets but the heaven of the philosophers as well, so that reward and punishment are equally excluded - whereas Seneca, having no grounds for denying the possibility of punishment, simply ignores it.

But that word "apparently" has been used now several times. Does Lucretius' understanding of death in fact amount to more than mere assertion based on an atheistic hunch, and is he in fact as logically consistent as he thinks he is? Take the gods. If Occam's razor ever applied to anything it applies to Lucretius' gods. Or putting it another way, if they did not exist it would certainly not be necessary to invent them. Indeed Lucretius himself comes very close to stating that we did invent them, in a kind of anthropomorphising self-projection.<sup>136</sup> Clearly their existence, whatever bliss it may entail for themselves, adds nothing, subtracts nothing, explains nothing.<sup>137</sup> It does, however, give rise to at least one logical problem. If they do live such an unconcerned and self-contained existence, sealed off from us, having no contact with us or influence over us and being entirely uninfluenced by us, how is it

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Cf. III.760-768.

<sup>136</sup> V. 1161-1193.

<sup>137</sup> Unless they are understood simply as symbolising the happiness which will be ours once we have ceased to fear them. Epicurus' relationship with the gods may have been more positive - see the discussion in Rist, 1972, pp.140-163. Rist remarks (p.163): "When we read the poem of Lucretius, we can easily be misled into supposing that Epicurean thought about the gods is almost entirely negative. It is true...that there are sections of his work in which Lucretius speaks about the blessed life of the gods in the *intermundia*, but more frequently we are learning of the evils and tragedies which false beliefs can produce and from which the enlightened philosophy of Epicurus can release us." On the other hand, Epicurus himself may have seen the gods simply as "thought-constructs". Long and Sedley (pp.144-149) conclude that "the only philosophically satisfying interpretation" of Epicurus' theology is that the gods are "a projection of man's own ethical ideal", and that Epicurus "can be compared to many nineteenth-century advocates of religion (e.g. Feuerbach, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold) whose professed theism proves on closer inspection to be an essentially moral theory, which

that we know anything about the remote life of the gods, even that it is remote? How do we know that they exist at all?<sup>138</sup>

Of course the fact that Lucretius' gods are irrelevant in every way means that any illogicalities contained in his ideas about them are also irrelevant; except that these illogicalities do put a question-mark against the self-proclaimed rigour of his intellect.<sup>139</sup> And there are other difficulties. The brevity of even the longest human life compared with the eternity of non-existence is only one way of looking at it: it is equally arguable that even the briefest life is precious compared with the eternity of non-existence.<sup>140</sup> And when Nature bids us depart from life as we would at the end of an enjoyable banquet, she rather begs the question: what happens if we are summoned away during the first course?<sup>141</sup> Again, if it is true that even the longest

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either evades or positively excludes any question of an objective superhuman deity."

<sup>138</sup> At V.1161-8 Lucretius gives two reasons for the origin of belief in the gods, although according to Bailey (p.67) "he does not, as he should have done, explain that one of the reasons is true and the other false." The second reason is astronomical and meteorological phenomena. The first is visions, whether waking or sleeping, caused by the *simulacra* (VI.76) of the gods. But if it is true that Lucretius does regard the latter as reliable evidence of the gods' existence, why does he dismiss (at IV.31-41) the visions, whether waking or sleeping, of the *simulacra* of the dead as certainly not reliable evidence of their continued existence in the underworld? (At IV.757ff. he accounts for the visions of the dead in terms which might seem to apply equally to visions of the gods.) And it may be significant that at I.127-135 celestial and natural phenomena and waking or sleeping visions of the dead are lumped together as both requiring explanation by "*ratione sagaci*".

<sup>139</sup> Cf. IV. 1-9. Feuerbach's remarks (p.74) on the inconsistencies of some more modern philosopher-theologians apply also to Lucretius: "Wo sich daher einmal das Bewusstsein des Menschen bemächtigt, dass die religiösen Prädikate nur Anthropomorphismen, d.h. menschliche Vorstellungen sind, da hat sich schon der Zweifel, der Unglaube des Glaubens bemächtigt. Und es ist nur die Inkonsequenz der Herzensfeigheit und der Verstandesschwäche, die von diesem Bewusstsein aus nicht bis zur förmlichen Verneinung der Prädikate und von dieser bis zur Verneinung des zu Grunde liegenden Subjekts fortgeht. Bezweifelst du die gegenständliche Wahrheit der Prädikate, so musst du auch die gegenständliche Wahrheit des Subjekts dieser Prädikate in Zweifel ziehen. Sind deine Prädikate Anthropomorphismen, so ist auch das Subjekt derselben ein Anthropomorphismus."

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Boyancé, 1963, p.177: "'Un instant parfait vaut toute une vie,' semble dire Épicure. Mais Lucrèce, lui: 'Une vie ne vaut pas plus qu'un instant.' C'est peut-être la même chose pour un logicien, mais non pour un psychologue, car il y a une différence d'accent."

<sup>141</sup> Nussbaum (1989, p.321) has more of the gourmet's approach: "If one dies prematurely - for example, before reaching the main course - this will be the worst sort of death; for it will make fruitless those 'courses' in the meal whose primary function was to prepare appetite and palate for the main course. (One would have eaten differently had one known the main course was not going to arrive.)"

Warren points out (2004, pp.155ff), that the Epicureans find themselves with an apparently insoluble difficulty in relation to the problem of premature death: their only antidote to the fear of premature

life subtracts nothing from the eternity of death,<sup>142</sup> is mass-suicide not the obvious solution?<sup>143</sup> Attaining tranquillity of mind during this allegedly infinitesimal lifespan (not to speak of composing seven-and-a-half thousand lines of Latin verse on the subject) seems hardly worth the effort.

More serious, however, is the paradox involved in the underlying theme of the poem, or at least of Book III, that by removing the prospect of any life after death, the present life is made more tolerable - in other words, that hopelessness produces happiness. Again Solon's retort is apposite: it is precisely the fact that there is no hope which causes us to weep.<sup>144</sup>

There are problems too in connection with the symmetry argument - that just as we did not fear the advancing Carthaginians because we did not yet exist, so there will be nothing to fear when we no longer exist. The argument (perhaps originating with Lucretius, and repeated by Cicero, Seneca and Montaigne) has recently been the

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death is *ataraxia*, but *ataraxia* can only be attained if one no longer fears premature death.

<sup>142</sup> III. 1087-1094.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Warren, 2004, p.202: "In short, arguments which try to remove the anxiety of dying prematurely by arguing that one is not benefited by living longer undermine reasons for continuing to live at all." And he remarks on *DRN* V.177-80: "So great is their [the Epicureans'] emphasis on removing any sense in which death might be an evil, they have left themselves with precious few resources to explain why continued life is worth pursuing."

<sup>144</sup> Kenny (pp.32f.) quotes Cornford, who makes the same point in relation to Epicurus: "Epicurus, it is true, abolished the terrors of hell; but he also abolished the joys of heaven...I do not know how common the horror of death may be among normal people; but, where it exists, is it not often the prospect of extinction that horrifies them? If so, the fear of death, which Epicurus claimed to have banished, is actually increased by the denial of immortality." But Plutarch had pointed this out long ago in *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*: τὸ γὰρ "ἀναισθητεῖν τὸ διαλυθῆναι καὶ μηδὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸ ἀναισθητοῦν" οὐκ ἀναιρεῖ τὸ τοῦ θανάτου δέος ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἀπόδειξιν αὐτοῦ προστίθισιν. αὐτὸ γὰρ τοῦτο ἐστὶν ὃ δέδοικεν ἡ φύσις...τὴν εἰς τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν μηδὲ αἰσθανόμενον διάλυσιν τῆς ψυχῆς. (27.1105.)

Santayana (pp.52f.) demonstrates not so much that Lucretius' argument is misdirected as that any argument on the subject is pointless: "The radical fear of death...is the love of life...Nothing could be more futile, therefore, than to marshal arguments against that fear of death which is merely another name for the energy of life, or the tendency to self-preservation...For what is most dreaded is not the agony of dying, nor yet the strange impossibility that when we do not exist we should suffer for not existing. What is dreaded is the defeat of a present will directed upon life and its various undertakings."

subject of extensive discussion by professional philosophers, sometimes in a faintly surreal way.<sup>145</sup> For example, it has been objected<sup>146</sup> that the two periods are not in fact symmetrical: death deprives us of whatever continuing existence we would have had if it had not occurred, whereas it cannot be said that by being born when we were we have been deprived of whatever life we would have had if we had been born earlier - since if we had been born earlier we would have been different people.

There is, however, a more straightforward reason why not-yet-existing is not the equivalent of no-longer-existing from the standpoint of the presently-existing subject. Lucretius' argument is that the attacking Carthaginians caused me no concern because I wasn't there. But who wasn't there? At the time of the Punic Wars there was no subject, no "I", whose presence there could be asserted or denied: whereas the subject whose continuing existence after my death is prospectively denied is certainly "I". Now Lucretius may insist that I need not fear being dead because I will not exist, but he cannot do so on the basis of the symmetry argument since there is no symmetry. The difference is between absence of identity (not-yet) and cancellation of identity (no-longer).<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Indeed there is something Pythonesque about the whole spectacle of philosophers devoting their lives to establishing that death is a bad thing after all. If death were to cut short their efforts, would that be proof or disproof?

<sup>146</sup> By Nagel, 1979, pp.7ff. In his second book Nagel is more radical (1986, p.229): "It is a fact perhaps too deep for explanation that the cutting off of future possibilities, both their nonactualization and their obliteration even as possibilities, evokes in us a very different reaction from any parallel nonrealization or nonexistence of possibilities in the past."

<sup>147</sup> As Warren puts it (2004, p.77): "The time of birth is a necessary condition of personal identity, whereas the time of death is merely contingent (i.e. I could not have been born earlier than I was, but could die later than I will." Cf. C.J.F. Williams p.218: "If 'living' means 'existing' and 'dead' 'no longer existing' it might appear that there is a *tertium quid*, 'not yet existing'. But is this really a third possibility? If I ask whether your car is black or white you may answer 'Neither; it's blue.' But if I ask...whether your father is alive or dead, I can think of no way of attaching sense to the words 'My father does not yet exist.'" In other words, as soon as the symmetry argument is applied to an actual rather than a hypothetical human being, the symmetry breaks down; and since the purpose of the argument is to remove the fear of death from actual rather than hypothetical human beings, it fails. Leeman (p.327) quotes Schopenhauer: "Wenn, was uns den Tod so schrecklich erscheinen lässt, der Gedanke des Nicht-seins wäre, so müssten wir mit gleichem Schauer der Zeit gedenken, da wir noch

But most serious of all is that Lucretius not only brushes aside the problem of how I approach the death of another, he also fails to engage with the problem of how I approach my own death. He is concerned only with Death, and with Mankind.<sup>148</sup> Indeed in asserting that death is nothing to us, he trivialises it. Chesterton said that to the pacifist's way of thinking "St George did not conquer the dragon: he tied a pink ribbon round its neck and gave it a saucer of milk."<sup>149</sup> Death to Lucretius is rather like the pacifist's dragon.<sup>150</sup> But my own death is not so easily domesticated.<sup>151</sup>

In this connection Lucretius has a good deal in common with Feuerbach. They both identified religion with superstition; they both saw the origin of religion in self-projection and the application of human predicates to a divine subject; and they both saw it as their mission to bring the gods down to earth and simultaneously to raise mankind to heaven. But they also shared this weakness, that they operated with a generalised, and ultimately abstract conception of man which loses sight of, indeed obliterates the individual, real man. Buber's criticism of Feuerbach, that he was guilty of a "Reduktion auf den unproblematischen Menschen,"<sup>152</sup> applies also to Lucretius.<sup>153</sup> Feuerbach, having unmasked religion and reduced it to anthropology,

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nicht waren. Zwischen uns und dem Tod steht das Sterben, - nicht das Nichts, sondern die Vernichtung."

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Edwards, p.84: "...in his treatment of death throughout the poem, Lucretius seems not to view it as part of an individual's life-story. Bad deaths are certainly shown in terrifying detail in Lucretius' plague narrative but they are hardly particularised."

But contrast Long (p.219) who sees Lucretius' "tendency to vivify pain and suffering...as a test and protreptic for the Epicurean novice, especially in the horrific treatment of the Athenian plague at the end of book 6 - a test to balance the optimism of Epicurean objectivity against the irrevocable predicaments of human existence, and to remain convinced that the optimism is still justified."

<sup>149</sup> Chesterton, pp.154f.

<sup>150</sup> In fact the real dragon in Lucretius' view is not death but *religio*.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Seneca, *Ep.Mor.*LXXXII.23: "*Magnis telis magna portenta feriuntur.*"

<sup>152</sup> See Küng p.249.

<sup>153</sup> Karl Barth's judgement (Vol.II. p.462) on Feuerbach is similar: "Der wirkliche Mensch dürfte doch wohl, wenn ganz existentiell gedacht werden soll, der einzelne Mensch sein. Feuerbach hat mit der Theologie seiner Zeit mit dem Menschen im Allgemeinen operiert, und indem er diesem Gottheit

proceeded to make anthropology into a religion and in doing so fell into his own trap.<sup>154</sup> Lucretius, having with Nature's aid toppled *religio* and trampled on it, proceeded to put Nature on the pedestal instead and in doing so fell into a similar trap.<sup>155</sup>

Nature personified speaks only at III. 933-962. Yet in a sense almost the whole of *De Rerum Natura* is uttered by Nature - Lucretius is her mouthpiece.<sup>156</sup> The terrors of *religio* are to be dispelled by the law of nature;<sup>157</sup> nature wants us simply to have carefree minds,<sup>158</sup> which is the definition of true piety;<sup>159</sup> and this inner tranquillity is only possible if we learn to accept that death is natural.<sup>160</sup> But the fallacy lies in believing that the personification of nature is anything more than a rhetorical mannerism. Lucretius himself warns against the divinization of Mother Earth, which he characterizes as a reintroduction of *religio*. Yet he seems unable to see that Mother Nature is no more privileged. And the fallacy is instantly exposed whenever the death

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zuschreib, über den wirklichen Menschen faktisch nichts gesagt. Und wenn er nun diese beiden doch weithin verwechselt und also vom einzelnen Menschen so redet, als wäre er jener Mensch im Allgemeinen, und also es wagt, dem einzelnen Menschen Gottheit zuzuschreiben, so hing das doch wohl damit zusammen, dass er weder um die Bosheit des Einzelnen, noch darum, dass dieser Einzelne sterben muss, ernstlich und wirklich gewusst zu haben scheint."

<sup>154</sup> See Küng pp.239f: "Ist das 'allgemeine Menschenwesen' nicht eine Abstraktion? Projiziert hier Feuerbach nicht selber etwas aus sich heraus, was es in Wirklichkeit nicht gibt? Ist somit nicht gerade dieser Mensch im allgemeinen, ist nicht dieses *allgemeine Menschenwesen eine reine Projektion*, von Feuerbach vergegenständlicht and verselbständigt? Kann die Projektion eines solchen gespenstischen Menschenwesens den Humanismus garantieren, auf den es Feuerbach zu Recht so sehr ankommt?"

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Nussbaum (1989) on the tension within Epicurean thought "between the perspective of nature and the perspective of the god" (p.324.) "This shift over to a godlike life and a godlike self requires enormous revision in human patterns of desire and of value. We are asked not to alter reactions that we have and regard neutrally, but to alter evaluative judgements that we endorse on reflection as giving us a correct account of what constitutes mortal good life. We were told that this shift is commended by nature, that it is a shift away from a religious view of life towards a life lived within the limits of a finite being. But on deeper inspection it appears that the goal of the shift is, in fact, quite different: to rise above mortality altogether, and to make ourselves into gods. But isn't this the religious view of life once again, in a slightly different form, furnished with a new conception of the divine and a new Hercules (cf. V.22ff.), but still feeding the same old longing for transcendence?" (327.)

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Santayana (p.34): "There remains the genius of the poet himself. The greatest thing about this genius is its power of losing itself in its object, its impersonality. We seem to be reading not the poetry of a poet about things, but the poetry of things themselves."

<sup>157</sup> I. 146-148.

<sup>158</sup> II. 16-19.

<sup>159</sup> V. 1198-1203.

of an individual, a real person - *der wirkliche Mensch* - knocks Nature off the pedestal: "She, she is dead; she's dead; and when thou know'st this / Thou know'st how dry a cinder this world is."

The cast of the *Odyssey* are neither *allgemeine* nor *wirkliche Menschen*: they are not philosophical abstractions nor are they characters from "real life". Partly because of the intrinsic nature of the work, and partly because of its normative status,<sup>161</sup> they have a universal quality, so that they are more real than flesh and blood. Odysseus is Everyman. This does not mean of course that the oddities of the *Odyssey* in relation to approaching death are themselves to be universalised and the underworld re-mythologised. But it does have two implications. First, that the experience of Odysseus is available to us as part of our own experience, and second, that the forms of poetry or fiction or myth or fable are potentially as legitimate a key to the mystery of death as philosophical speculation or ethical exhortation. And both these implications are evident in the *Nekuia*, where Odysseus is presented as experiencing what no ordinary man has ever experienced - direct contact with the dead.

That direct experience of the underworld controls (and reflects) the whole approach to death in the *Odyssey*. There are no "Socratic alternatives" here. Everyone<sup>162</sup> is

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<sup>160</sup> III. 964-977.

<sup>161</sup> See Halliwell (2000, p.99) on the normative status of Homer in the classical period, where the implication is "that the poet's voice is expected to be instructive and authoritative, a source of insight or guidance with established, pre-eminent credentials in the cultural tradition."

<sup>162</sup> Except for a handful like Menelaus (iv.561-568) and Herakles (xi.601-604). Cf. *Od.* v.206-10, v.333-5, ix.299-304, xv.250f. And as Clarke (2004, p.78, note 17) points out, "In the *Odyssey* Menelaus is bound for Elysium not as a favourable afterlife but as an alternative to death; and he is given this gift because he is Zeus's son-in-law, with no suggestion that other men might have the same prospect."

destined for Hades. And the house of Hades is essentially a place of darkness.<sup>163</sup> Even the last inhabited country before Hades, the land of the Cimmerians, is itself unvisited by the sun.<sup>164</sup> The characteristic epithets of Hades are all related to darkness;<sup>165</sup> Teiresias asks Odysseus why he has left the light of the sun,<sup>166</sup> Anticleia urges him to return to it as soon as possible,<sup>167</sup> Helios threatens to shine in Hades among the dead.<sup>168</sup> And "existence" in this pitch-black underworld is correspondingly bleak. It is a joyless place,<sup>169</sup> its inhabitants are pitiable,<sup>170</sup> even the most wretched status in the land of the living is preferable.<sup>171</sup> Above all, the dead seem to be speechless.<sup>172</sup>

Yet within this uniformly wretched atmosphere there is differentiation: Agamemnon is still a leader of men, still accompanied by his entourage;<sup>173</sup> Anticleia is still defined by her sorrow over her son and her pity for her husband;<sup>174</sup> Achilles is still consumed by anxiety over his son and his father.<sup>175</sup> In other words, even in the shadowy world of the strengthless dead the individual personality continues: I may lead a shadowy existence, but it is my shade.

<sup>163</sup> See Heath p.391, note 8, on recent discussions.

<sup>164</sup> xi.13-19.

<sup>165</sup> E.g. xi.15: ἤερι καὶ νεφέλη κεκαλυμμένοι; xi.19: νύξ ὀλοή; xi.57: πῶς ἦλθες ὑπὸ ζόφου ἡερόεντα; and xi.37 ὑπέξ' Ερέβους (which Clarke (1999, p.201, note 85) argues should be taken "not as a proper name but as an ordinary word for darkness in general and the darkness of death in particular.")

<sup>166</sup> xi.93.

<sup>167</sup> xi.223.

<sup>168</sup> xii.382-386.

<sup>169</sup> xi.94: ὄφρα ἴδη νέκυας καὶ ἀτερπέα χώρον;

<sup>170</sup> See e.g. xi.55, 87, 387f, 541f.

<sup>171</sup> xi.488-491.

<sup>172</sup> By implication, since it is only the blood of the sacrifices which unlocks their tongues and their memories – xi.139-149 and cf. xi.475f. At least this applies to communication with the living. See Heath: "The issues are complex and the picture is often a bit fuzzy, but we can conclude that under normal circumstances the buried dead cannot use articulate speech. They must be re-animated with blood before they can converse with the living." (p396) "In later Greek, and often in Latin, the underworld was known as the 'silent regions' and the dead as 'the silent ones', or, as the Hesiodic Scutum refers to death itself, the place 'forgetful of speech' (λαθηφόροιο, 131). This silence, however, is the absence of articulate speech." (p.398)

<sup>173</sup> xi.387-389.

<sup>174</sup> xi.187-203.

All this of course gives rise to obvious problems on a literal level, which in turn give rise to the urge either to demythologise and dismiss the "fables of the poets", or to rationalise by distinguishing different historical or symbolic layers.<sup>176</sup> If it is δίκη that the souls of the dead depart to Hades leaving flesh, sinews and bones behind,<sup>177</sup> why are they frightened of swords? How can they drink blood? How are young girls among them to be distinguished from the old men?<sup>178</sup> How are they recognisably who they were in life? How can they speak to Odysseus, or hear him, with what do they recognise him? Why does Anticleia know exactly what her daughter-in-law is doing and thinking,<sup>179</sup> whereas Agamemnon and Achilles know nothing about their respective sons?<sup>180</sup> How does Ajax remember and nurse his wrath without drinking the blood?<sup>181</sup> What conceivable litigation is it that Minos presides over?<sup>182</sup>

In other words, on that level it is all naive, childish, absurd. But on another level we, like the Phaeacians, are spellbound,<sup>183</sup> because we want to hear what the state of death is like. We know perfectly well that we cannot know this, and that the *Nekuia* in its details is full of glaring contradictions, but we are willing to suspend our disbelief in the details because details are irrelevant. Or perhaps the point is that the story, when

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<sup>175</sup> xi.492-503.

<sup>176</sup> For example, Lucretius demythologises and Seneca dismisses, while Sourvinou-Inwood and Clarke (1999) rationalise, the former on the basis of historical development, the latter on the basis of competing or complementary imagery.

<sup>177</sup> xi.212-222.

<sup>178</sup> xi.38f.

<sup>179</sup> xi.181-183.

<sup>180</sup> xi.457-461 and xi.492f.

<sup>181</sup> xi.543-567.

<sup>182</sup> xi.568-571. The judicial role assigned to the Minos of the *Odyssey* in *Gorgias* 526 C-D is obviously anachronistic. See Dodds, p.384: "Plato blandly overlooks the fact that Homer's Minos does not judge the earthly lives of the dead, but judges disputes between them."

<sup>183</sup> xi.333f.

it is authentically told,<sup>184</sup> has the power to charm us out of our disbelief.<sup>185</sup> It is not the physical impossibilities which concern us, it is the psychical possibilities: personal immortality, however tenuous; communication between dead and living; communion among the dead; the continuing force of pity.<sup>186</sup>

Accordingly, the description in the *Nekuia* of the state of death, of being dead, dominates and controls the approach in the rest of the *Odyssey* to the fact of death, of having to die. The epithets for death - for the act of dying - correspond to those for the house of Hades. All deaths are wretched.<sup>187</sup> So θάνατος rarely appears alone: it is qualified by μέλας<sup>188</sup> or κακός<sup>189</sup> or τανηλεγής,<sup>190</sup> or it is coupled with or replaced by κήρ<sup>191</sup> or μοῖρα<sup>192</sup> or πότμος<sup>193</sup> or οἶτος.<sup>194</sup> Or else some circumlocution is used<sup>195</sup> - but never euphemisms. No attempt is ever made to domesticate death, to lessen its

<sup>184</sup> For example, ὡς τέ που ἦ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας (viii. 491). See in this context de Jong, p.215: "The word 'truth' does not imply historical accuracy, but rather vivid evocation...: the task of professional singers was to preserve people's memory of the great deeds of men and gods. They did this by bringing alive the past (e.g. by frequently allowing the heroes themselves to speak) and transporting their audiences back to the past (by narrating events so graphically that they felt as if they were almost eyewitnesses themselves.) This evocative conception of epic poetry, in combination with its entertainment function, leaves the door open for amplification and invention."

<sup>185</sup> xi.367f.: σοὶ δ' ἔπι μὲν μορφῇ ἐπέων, ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἔσθλαί, / μῦθον δ' ὡς ὅτ' αἰοῖδός ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας...

<sup>186</sup> Because that is another characteristic feature of the *Nekuia*. Odysseus has nothing but pity for the dead, from his first encounter with them (xi.38f). His immediate reaction when sees Elpenor and Anticlea and Agamemnon is to shed tears (xi.55= 87= 395: τὸν / τὴν μὲν ἐγὼ δάκρυσα ἰδὼν ἐλέσά τε θυμῷ.) Even more striking is the pity felt by the dead, both for themselves - xi.59 (Elpenor), xi.391f (Agamemnon), xi.488ff (Achilles) – and for the living – xi.187ff (Anticlea for Laertes), xi.494ff (Achilles for his father.)

<sup>187</sup> xii.341: πάντες μὲν στυγεροὶ θάνατοι δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι.

<sup>188</sup> E.g. xii.92: πλείοι μέλανος θανάτοιο. Cf. xvii.326.

<sup>189</sup> E.g. xxii.14: οἱ τεύξειν θανάτον τε κακόν.

<sup>190</sup> E.g. xi.398: τίς νύ σε κήρ ἐδάμασσε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο. Cf. iii.238.

<sup>191</sup> E.g. ii.283: οὐδέ τι ἴσασιν θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν. (Cf. ii.352, v.387, xii.157, xvi.169, xix.558.) And xviii.155: ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὧς φύγε κῆρα.

<sup>192</sup> E.g. xvii.326: Ἄργον δ' αὖ κατὰ μοῖρ' ἔλαβεν μέλανος θανάτοιο. (Cf. xvi.421, xix.145.) And xxiv.28f: ἦ τ' ἄρα καὶ σοὶ πρῶτ' παραστήσεσθαι ἔμελλε / μοῖρ' ὀλοή.

<sup>193</sup> E.g. iv.562: θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν. (Cf. xxiv.31.) And xxii.416: τῷ καὶ ἀτασθαλίησιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐπέσπον. (Cf. xi.197.)

<sup>194</sup> E.g. iii.134: τῷ σφρων πολέες κακὸν οἶτον ἐπέσπον.

<sup>195</sup> E.g. xiv.89: οἶδε δέ τοι ἴσασι, θεοῦ δέ τιν' ἔκλυον αὐδὴν, / κείνου λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον. (Cf. xv.268, xxiv.96.) Or xxii.67: ἀλλὰ τιν' οὐ φεύξεσθαι οἶομαι αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον. Or ix.17: ἐγὼ δ' ἂν ἔπειτα φυγῶν ὑπο νηλεές ἦμαρ. Or x.175: πρὶν μόρσιμον ἦμαρ ἐπέλθῃ. Or xvi.280: δὴ γάρ σφι

awfulness.<sup>196</sup> Certainly there are degrees of awfulness: all deaths are wretched, but some are more wretched than others.<sup>197</sup> Yet even the gentlest death is still wretched because it condemns us to darkness and silence.

But all this is in the lap of the gods, or more precisely it has already been spun by the gods<sup>198</sup> - a consideration which is reinforced by all those "fateful" synonyms: κήρ, μοῖρα, πότμος, οἶτος.<sup>199</sup> And that conviction results in an approach to death<sup>200</sup> quite unlike the neurotic terror from which Seneca and Lucretius want to emancipate us. There is no abject fear of ever-looming death in the *Odyssey*. Fear of death is mentioned only at moments of crisis, when death seems to be imminent.<sup>201</sup> The difference is particularly clear when Phemius and Medon, reprieved by Odysseus but still unable to believe it, sit down by the altar of Zeus πάντοσε παπταίνοντέ φόνον ποτιδεγμένω αἰεί.<sup>202</sup> That constant - but temporary - expectation of death by the sword is very far from the kind of permanent existential dread which Seneca seeks to dispel by the pen.

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παρίσταται αἴσιμον ἡμαρ.

<sup>196</sup> Except perhaps on the two occasions when it is likened to sleep: xiii.79f: καὶ τῷ νήδυμος ὕπνος ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ἔπισπε, / νήγρετος ἡδιστος, θανάτῳ ἄγκιστα εἰκώς, and xviii.201-205.

<sup>197</sup> Best of all (or least awful) is to be overtaken in sleek old age – the gentle death prophesied for Odysseus himself: θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἁλδὸς αὐτῷ / ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος ἐλεύσεται, ὅς κέ σε πέφνη / γήρα ὑπο λιπαρῷ ἀρημένον. (xi.134-137. Cf. i.217f, iv.207-211, xv.407-411, xix.365-368.) Next comes dying in the arms of one's comrades, having wound up the skein of war, with proper funeral rites and posthumous fame (e.g. i.236-240, iv.490, iv.583f, xix.365-370, xxiv.30-34.) Then a "clean death" (xxii.462: μὴ μὲν δὴ καθαρῷ θανάτῳ ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἐλοίμην / τάων), as opposed to the "piteous death" of the maidservants (xxii.472: ὅπως οἴκτιστα θάνοιεν; and cf. xii.340f., where Eurylochus characterises death from hunger as οἴκτιστον) or Cassandra (xi.421f) or Agamemnon (xxiv.34). Worst of all is a shameful death, like that of the suitors (xxiv.186-190) or Aegisthos (iii.258-261) without the γέρας due to the dead.

<sup>198</sup> E.g. xi.139.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Clarke, 1999, p.251: "In particular μοῖρα and κήρ (along with πότμος, αἶσα and οἶτος) differ from θάνατος in that they are responsible not only for death but also for the planning of man's fate at his birth and its execution throughout his life."

<sup>200</sup> But perhaps "approach to death" is misleading. As Clarke puts it (1999, p.244): "The essence is that a man does not go to meet death, but rather it is death that comes to meet him."

<sup>201</sup> E.g. x.130, xvi.445-7, xxii.42f.

So the consciousness of death, of its inevitability, in no way undermines or diminishes the value of life: on the contrary, it enhances it. Life is always "honey-sweet", even the sorrowful existence of which Anticleia is deprived by death.<sup>203</sup> Odysseus may sometimes wish he were dead (for example, ironically, when he is told that he must visit the realm of the dead),<sup>204</sup> and so does Penelope,<sup>205</sup> but neither, whatever the circumstances, seriously contemplates suicide,<sup>206</sup> nor do any of the other characters.<sup>207</sup> Life is precious and death, even though it is entirely negative, is fated and therefore to be accepted with resignation - both the inevitability and the actuality.

In other words, the characters in the *Odyssey*, in accepting death as inevitable and not allowing the fear of death to affect the quality of life, seem to approach the matter instinctively - or naturally - in a way which Lucretius thinks impossible for anyone who accepts the fables of the poets about the underworld and for whom the gods are actively engaged in human affairs and open to propitiation. But while Odysseus would think Lucretius' exhortations superfluous, he would find Seneca's *consolationes* incomprehensible. Because the death of others in the *Odyssey* is met with anything but calm resignation by either sex. In fact the tears of men are even more copious than those of women, and the reaction of men and women to the death - or even the supposed death - of a spouse or child is a grief which is both inconsolable and uncomplicated: there is never a hint of embarrassment, or shame, or guilt, or any suggestion that the γέρας due to the dead might be a matter of ritual posturing.

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<sup>202</sup> xxii.378-380.

<sup>203</sup> xi.202f: ἀλλά με σός τε πόθος σά τε μήδεα, φάιδιμ' Ὀδυσσεῦ, / σή τ' ἀγανοφροσύνη μελιηδέα θυμὸν ἀπηύρα.

<sup>204</sup> x.496-498.

<sup>205</sup> xx.61-65.

<sup>206</sup> x.49-52 is more hyperbole than the reflection of a real dilemma - cf. x.53: 'ἀλλ' ἔτλην. For πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς not to endure would be inconceivable.

<sup>207</sup> The only suicide referred to directly in the *Odyssey* is that of Epicaste (xi.277-280). Rohde (p.3) goes too far in saying "to turn aside from life altogether never enters the head of anyone in Homer":

Of the minor characters, Aegyptius is always weeping for his son Antiphas, even though he has three others still with him,<sup>208</sup> and the sorrow Eupheithes feels for his worthless son Antinous is "comfortless".<sup>209</sup> But the most striking examples are Anticleia who dies of grief,<sup>210</sup> Laertes whom grief has turned into a pathetic shadow of his former kingly self,<sup>211</sup> and of course Penelope, the model of the perpetually grieving wife, whose signature tune as it were is: *ὀϊζυρὰ δὲ οἱ αἰεὶ / φθίνουσιν νύκτες τε καὶ ἡμέρατα δάκρυ χεοῦση.*<sup>212</sup> Penelope's tears are never considered a matter for reproach: on the contrary, they are the indispensable proof that she still loves her husband.<sup>213</sup> Although at one point the nurse Eurynome tells her mistress that unceasing sorrow is not good, what she means is that it is not conducive to health and beauty, not that it is wrong.<sup>214</sup> And the disguised Odysseus tells Penelope that it is both natural and right to weep for a lost husband (even after twenty years): the only reason why she should now cease is that his return is imminent.<sup>215</sup>

Absent then from the approach to death in the *Odyssey* is any form of *consolatio* on bereavement, as well as any idea of *meditari* in either of its senses. The characters are resigned to the inevitability of their own death but inconsolable over the death of others, in ironic contrast to Seneca's ideal sage, who obsessively practises for his own death and accepts that of his spouse or child with fortitude or indifference. And they seem to live life more naturally than the Lucretian ideal, in that they do so without

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the suicide of Ajax must be inferred from xi.549.

<sup>208</sup> ii.15-24.

<sup>209</sup> xxiv.423: παιδὸς γὰρ οἱ ἄλαστον ἐνὶ φρεσὶ πένθος ἔκειτο.

<sup>210</sup> xi.197-203, xv.358f.

<sup>211</sup> xi.187-196, xv.353-357, xvi.142-145, xxiv.315-317.

<sup>212</sup> xi.182f = xiii.337f = xvi.38f.

<sup>213</sup> xi.182f, xiii.336-338. Cf. the extended simile of the distraught widow at viii.523-530.

<sup>214</sup> xviii.173f. When at xix.120 Odysseus says ἐπεὶ κάκιον πευθήμεναι ἄκριτον αἰεὶ, he is talking not about bereavement but about self-pity in adversity.

reference to nature - there is, after all, something unnatural about being consciously natural.

Of course, if we have lost the art of living naturally, and if striving to be natural is itself unnatural, we seem to be in difficulties. But this is perhaps where poetry (or myth, or fiction) is able to effect something which is beyond the power of philosophy. Chesterton, in analysing the curious split in Tolstoy's literary personality, argues that "The real distinction between the ethics of high art and the ethics of manufactured and didactic art lies in the simple fact that the bad fable has a moral, while the good fable is a moral."<sup>216</sup> Seneca and Lucretius have a moral. The *Odyssey* is a moral: instead of telling us what to do, it shows us - through characters who are universal, who represent us, who either articulate our experience of life or make new ways of experiencing life available to us.<sup>217</sup> Penelope is the archetypal bereaved wife. She does not argue the case for inconsolable grief: she simply, by virtue of her role in the story, sanctifies the concept of inconsolable grief and makes it legitimate for us. We do not appeal to nature in order to legitimise our continuing sorrow: we appeal to the story of someone who behaved naturally. Or putting it another way: that her behaviour was natural is not something to be established by rational argument, it is something which we perceive instinctively (or naturally) in reading the story. In this way, we are again enabled to live naturally ourselves.

And in this way the gulf between Donne's two poles - "It tolls for thee" and "She, she is dead" - is almost bridged. The pathos of real life, of individual personal loss, is no

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<sup>215</sup> xix.262-272.

<sup>216</sup> Chesterton, pp.147f.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Finley, p.v: "[Homer's] preconceptual age and tradition gave his characters the double role at once of living their lives and showing the nature of the world."

longer swallowed up (and thereby dismissed) in a generalising abstraction: instead it finds expression in a representative figure, a figure who succeeds in being both individual and universal. (So that we actually find Penelope's inconsolability more consoling than Seneca's *consolationes*.) It is in this sense that Odysseus himself, far from being No Man, is Everyman.

Seneca at one point wishes that someone could come back from the dead to tell us what to expect.<sup>218</sup> Odysseus is that man: *δισθανής*, as Circe calls him, while other mortals die only once.<sup>219</sup> He has, it might be said, rehearsed his own death, taking the second sense of Seneca's *meditari* literally. And in doing so his experience becomes authoritative. This is the other difference, especially in relation to death, between philosophy and certain kinds of poetry: philosophy is necessarily tentative, exploratory, hypothetical; epic poetry, poetic myth claim to be authoritative, self-authenticating.

In other words the *Nekuia* is both the assertion and the proof of the validity of this approach to death. It asserts that this man Odysseus has visited the realm of the dead - has died - and lived to tell the tale. And it presents his experience of the realm of the dead as the basis on which he approaches death. And as a result Odysseus becomes representative or illustrative, in the sense that his experience of the realm of the dead is presented as evidence for what we ourselves are to expect, and the basis on which we are to approach death. The rational mind of course is irritated by this extraordinary self-confidence shown by poetic myth and wants to interrogate it,<sup>220</sup> if

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<sup>218</sup> *Ep.Mor.* XXX. 9-10.

<sup>219</sup> xii.21f. Circe actually uses the plural, of Odysseus and his comrades, but of course by the time Odysseus tells the tale he is the only survivor.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Halliwell (2000, p.104) on the attitude to the poets portrayed in the *Republic*: "The logos of

not dismiss it out of hand. But - again - it is not the details that matter. It is the power of the story to suggest possibilities. And after all, is the confidence with which the *Nekuia* asserts the reality of the underworld any less justified than the confidence with which Lucretius and Seneca deny it?

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poetry...is discourse for which the poet's authorial voice, a voice that is granted cultural authority to 'speak' on the most important matters of life, must be held responsible and subject to the ethical interrogation of philosophical enquiry." Where this leaves Plato's own poetry, his *μῦθοι*, will have to be considered in the following chapter.

## II. Plato and the Practice of Death

*Platon me semble avoir aymé cette forme de philosopher par dialogues, à escient, pour loger plus decemment en diverses bouches la diversité et variation de ses propres fantasies. Diversement traicter les matieres est aussi bien les traicter que conformément, et mieux: à sçavoir plus copieusement et utillement.*

Montaigne, *Essais*, II.12

And so the stage is set and the curtain rises on Plato. Except that Plato himself is not to be seen. Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἡσθένει:<sup>1</sup> his absence from the *Phaedo* is unusual merely in that it is expressly noted. Not only do we know little about his life (very little if the Seventh Letter is spurious), we know very little about his thinking, that is to say about what he himself thought. The Socratic problem is one thing - the question whether and to what extent the Platonic Socrates reflects the historical Socrates, whether we can ever assert with any confidence, "Socrates thought that . . ." The Platonic problem is another: whether and to what extent the Platonic Socrates reflects Plato's own ideas, whether we can ever assert with any confidence, "Plato thought that . . ." The "solution" which simply takes everything on its face value, and sees no distinction between "Plato says that" and "Plato thinks that", which treats the dialogues as simply philosophy dressed up,<sup>2</sup> and which tries to work everything up into a system with all the wrinkles ironed out, is equivalent to the approach of the fundamentalist Christian who simply appeals to "what the Bible says", and who accordingly incurs the impossible and unnecessary task of reconciling the irreconcilable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Phaedo* 59B.

<sup>2</sup> As for example in the case of Pascal or Hume who, in Schaerer's words (pp.12 f.), "conçoivent la forme dialoguée comme un artifice destiné à communiquer plus de vie aux idées exprimées - celles-ci demeurant toujours le but et la raison d'être de l'oeuvre et la discussion obéissant constamment, dans sa marche, aux intentions didactiques de l'auteur, lequel ne fait que mettre sous une forme dramatique un discours suivi..."

<sup>3</sup> The two approaches are sometimes labelled "dogmatic" and "sceptical". See e.g. Press, p.310: "...during most of its history, interpretation of Plato has oscillated between two poles. For the most part, it has been what may be called dogmatic or doctrinal; that is, it has been assumed that Plato's

Yet there is another biblical analogy which might suggest a less than total agnosticism in relation to what Plato thought - the canonical gospels. The three synoptic gospels are probably closer than the fourth gospel is to the historical Jesus, just as Plato's Socrates probably has a greater range than the historical Socrates. But the position is more complicated than that, because the synoptic gospels are certainly not straightforward eyewitness accounts - the historical Jesus still has to be disentangled from the distortions and accretions of the tradition and the interpretations of the evangelists. And to some extent a picture of the historical Jesus - or at least a picture of someone closer to the historical Jesus than the Jesus of the gospels - can be built up by comparing the evangelists with each other. (Perhaps here Plato could be classed with the fourth evangelist and Xenophon with the synoptists.)<sup>4</sup> But in the process something else emerges as well: redaction criticism, the technique of isolating the peculiar contribution of each evangelist, not only helps to clarify the picture of the historical Jesus, it also produces a picture of each evangelist, of his "theology" (although virtually nothing is known about any of the evangelists except what is contained in the gospels). And applying this to Plato means that to argue that we can

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thought consists of a more or less systematic body of doctrines which it is the primary function of the dialogues to communicate along with the arguments that Plato believes to show the truth of these doctrines...The other pole, the skeptical, emphasises the inconclusive endings of many dialogues, Socrates' perpetual questioning, and the wealth of inconsistencies, ambiguities, and apparently weak or invalid arguments, and claims that Plato does not have any settled doctrines, but always remains in doubt or open to further inquiry and argument."

A slightly different perspective contrasts the analytic and the dramatic, see Dorter, p.ix: "One is the analytic approach, which isolates individual arguments and evaluates their logical success or failure (usually the latter); the other may be called the dramatic approach, which prefers to view the dialogue as a dramatic unity rather than an aggregate of arguments."

On the dialogues as dramatic unities, and with a corresponding emphasis on literary rather than philosophical considerations, see Rutherford. (But Rutherford does not deal with the *Phaedo* at any length.) On Plato's reasons for choosing the dialogue form - i.e. on the inseparable relationship between philosophical and literary considerations - see M. Frede. And for a recent defence of the "dogmatic" approach, see Beversluis.

<sup>4</sup> At least in the sense that, while "both Plato and Xenophon make Socrates in their own image" (Rutherford, p.22), Plato carries the process much further because his image is much more complex.

know nothing at all about what he thought may be too pessimistic.<sup>5</sup> We may never be in a position to assert (in the way we can about Lucretius or Seneca) that Plato thought such and such about approaching death, but we may very well be able to assert that he thought approaching death the most important thing in life, that his approach had room for the mystical and the mythical, and that he approached the mythical in ways which were influenced by but distinct from those of Homer. In other words, although Plato may not be there on the stage as one of the players or singers, his presence is there to be felt - not only as the composer and librettist, but as the conductor in the orchestral pit.

#### 1. The Fear of Death

The argument that the dialogues are to be seen as open-ended,<sup>6</sup> as a stimulus to thought and discussion rather than as dogmatic statements of the truth, means that the approach of the systematic critic - the critic who treats Plato like Lucretius or Seneca, who adopts a systematic approach to "what Plato thought" and in the process is always on the lookout for logical inconsistencies - is misconceived. For example, on the basis of what the dialogues say about the fear of death the systematic critic might infer that Plato does not attach a great deal of importance to it, that far from finding it necessary to inure himself and others to the thought of death, as Seneca was to do, or embarking like Lucretius on a mission to rid mankind of the fear of death, he is contemptuously dismissive. There are several passages which might suggest this.

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<sup>5</sup> See Rutherford, p.26, on the shortcomings of the "panaporetic" interpretation of Plato.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Griswold, p.239: "It seems that if Plato had written one more or one less dialogue, the unity of the corpus would suffer little, precisely because its unity derives from a common goal, not the systematization of the means."

First, in the *Apology*<sup>7</sup> Socrates argues that when people fear death they pretend to knowledge (that death is the greatest evil)<sup>8</sup> which they do not have, whereas here if anywhere he is wiser than others since he does not know very much about it and he admits it.<sup>9</sup> (The systematic critic might think this somewhat at odds with the positive assertion a little later on that death is *δυοῖν θάτερον*<sup>10</sup> – it is either highly agreeable<sup>11</sup> or the greatest good.<sup>12</sup> In other words, he would deduce that for Plato it is apparently all right to entertain the hope<sup>13</sup> that death is the greatest good and therefore to welcome it, but not to think that it is the greatest evil and therefore to fear it. And he would ask why the first should be designated wise agnosticism, and the second deplorable ignorance<sup>14</sup> masquerading as wisdom.<sup>15</sup> And he might find a further paradox in the fact that according to the *Phaedo*<sup>16</sup> non-philosophers who face death bravely are said to do so out of fear of greater evils: they are brave through cowardice, which is *ἄλογον*. He might argue that this produces the curious result that to fear death is ignorant, and to brave death is irrational.)<sup>17</sup>

Second, Socrates appears to think there is something ridiculous<sup>18</sup> about the inability to face death. Those, for example, who in order to avoid the death sentence parade their wives and children in court are criticized as womanish and as making Athens a

<sup>7</sup> *Apol.* 29A: τὸ γὰρ τοι θάνατον δεδιέναι, ὧ ἄνδρες, οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ δοκεῖν σοφὸν εἶναι μὴ ὄντα.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: ὅτι μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν ἐστι.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 29B: οὐκ εἰδῶς ἰκανῶς περὶ τῶν ἐν "Αἰδοῦ οὕτω καὶ οἴομαι οὐκ εἰδέναί.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 40C.

<sup>11</sup> If it is like a dreamless sleep: indeed more than highly agreeable – it would be θαυμάσιον κέρδος.

<sup>12</sup> If it involves a journey to another place: τί μείζον ἀγαθὸν τούτου εἴη ἄν;

<sup>13</sup> *Apol.* 41C: ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑμᾶς χρή...εὐέλπιδας εἶναι πρὸς τὸν θάνατον.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 29B: καὶ τοῦτο πῶς οὐκ ἀμαθία ἐστὶν αὕτη ἢ ἐπονείδιστος.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 29A: δοκεῖν γὰρ εἰδέναί ἐστὶν ἂ οὐκ οἶδεν.

<sup>16</sup> *Phaedo* 68D: καίτοι ἄλογόν γε δέει τινὰ καὶ δειλίᾳ ἀνδρεῖον εἶναι.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the "dubious slide" in the *Phaedo* passage "from 'brave through fear' to the full-blown paradox 'brave through cowardice'" see Gallop, pp.99ff.

<sup>18</sup> καταγέλαστον – *Apol.* 35B.

laughing-stock in the eyes of foreigners. And it is considered particularly inappropriate or jarring for an old man to get worked up about imminent death.<sup>19</sup>

Third, Socrates claims that the fear of death ought to pale into insignificance beside the fear of doing wrong. The most elegant formulation of this principle is in the *Crito*:<sup>20</sup> οὐ τὸ ζῆν περὶ πλείστου ποιητέον, ἀλλὰ τὸ εὖ ζῆν, where εὖ is then defined as δικαίως. But it appears also in the *Apology* at 28C where Socrates adduces Achilles as an example of someone fearing a cowardly life more than an honourable death, and at 32D where he adduces himself as an example of the same thing: rather than concur in what he considered an injustice he chose to risk death by disobeying the Thirty.

(The systematic critic might argue that the choice between the alternatives, fear death or fear wrong-doing, may not always be clear-cut. Nor are they always mutually exclusive, though Cephalus, in Book I of the *Republic*, seems to think that they are. Cephalus says that people who are approaching death begin to take seriously the tales of the underworld<sup>21</sup> and if they are conscious of having done wrong they suffer from nightmares about what might be in store for them; if, on the other hand, like Cephalus himself - assisted by his wealth - they have done no wrong, their old age is sweetened by hope.<sup>22</sup> But the systematic critic might object that it not impossible to conceive of someone who is unconscious of doing wrong yet who nevertheless fears death. For Plato, however, such a fear seems to be met by the first two arguments: it is simply

<sup>19</sup> *Crito* 43B: καὶ γὰρ ἄν, ὦ Κρίτων, πλημμελὲς εἶη ἀγανακτεῖν τηλικούτου ὄντα εἰ δεῖ ἤδη τελευτᾶν. And cf. *Phaedo* 117A: οὐδὲν γὰρ οἶμαι κερδανεῖν ὀλίγον ὕστερον πινὼν ἄλλο γε ἢ γέλωτα ὀφλήσειν παρ' ἑμαυτῶ, γλιχόμενος τοῦ ζῆν...

<sup>20</sup> *Crito* 48B; cf. 54B.

<sup>21</sup> *Rep.* 330D: οἳ τε γὰρ λεγόμενοι μῦθοι περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου.

<sup>22</sup> *Rep.* 331A: ἡδεῖα ἐλπίς.

irrational or unmanly.<sup>23</sup> As he puts it towards the end of the *Gorgias*,<sup>24</sup> in a sentence which combines all three arguments: αὐτὸ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν οὐδεὶς φοβείται, ὅστις μὴ παντάπασιν ἀλόγιστός τε καὶ ἀνανδρός ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖν φοβείται.)

Fourth, according to Book III of the *Republic* it is actually the tales about the underworld and its horrors which create the fear of death: no one who believes such things can be expected to prefer death in battle to defeat and slavery.<sup>25</sup> All negative descriptions of what follows death must therefore be forbidden in the ideal state. In other words, fear of death is the result of an uncontrolled imagination: control the imagination by proper censorship, and the problem is solved. (The trouble is, the systematic critic might say, that not only does this nullify Cephalus' ἡδεῖα ἐλπίς, which consisted in the hope that having done no wrong he would escape the horrors of the underworld, but it collides dramatically with the harrowing description of the punishment of the wicked in Book X of the *Republic*<sup>26</sup> – rather more terrifying and certainly intended as more generally applicable than the examples in Book XI of the *Odyssey*.<sup>27</sup>)

Fifth, while the first four arguments should apply to everyone, for the true philosopher there is a more profound consideration: to one who is accustomed to contemplate everything *sub specie aeternitatis*, this life cannot be of any great concern.<sup>28</sup> Of course that is merely the negative way of putting it. And if it were the only way of

<sup>23</sup> Or childish, like the fear of τὰ μορμολύκεια – *Phaedo* 77E.

<sup>24</sup> *Gorgias* 522E.

<sup>25</sup> *Rep.* 386A-387C.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 614E-616A. Colotes the Epicurean had already noted the collision in the 3rd century B.C. (See Halliwell, 1993, on *Rep.* 615D4 and p.27, note 35.)

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Annas, 1981, p.351: "The stress is not on the useful improving power of punishment but on vindictive retribution; the very wicked are eternally tortured although they will never improve (615c-616b) and Plato's underworld is a sadistic hell, not a purgatory."

<sup>28</sup> *Rep.* 486A.

putting it, then even Socrates - in spite of having all his life striven to be a true philosopher<sup>29</sup> - admits that he would be right to feel angry at having to die<sup>30</sup> (an admission perhaps rather out of tune with the first two arguments). In fact, however, the true philosopher, far from being angry<sup>31</sup> or fearful<sup>32</sup> at the thought of death, approaches it confidently because of his conviction<sup>33</sup> that he will share in the greatest blessings after death.<sup>34</sup> (Obviously, the systematic critic will say, this reinforces the question-mark against the first argument, that those who fear death simply fail to acknowledge our ignorance of what it entails: the true philosopher, in stating that he does not fear death because he is confident that he will share in the greatest blessings after death, is failing to acknowledge his ignorance of what it entails. And conversely, as Cebes points out in the *Phaedo*, in the absence of proof that the soul is immortal, confidence in the face of death is merely foolish.<sup>35</sup>)

Now when it is pointed out to him that this approach is misconceived, that Plato is not being dogmatic, that the dialogues are philosophical dramas which demand the participation of the reader, that the intention is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of any subject by combining everything that is said about it in all the dialogues, when

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<sup>29</sup> *Phaedo* 69D.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 63B: ἐγὼ γάρ...εἰ μὲν μὴ ᾤμην ἥξειν...παρὰ Θεοὺς ἄλλους σοφοὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς...ἠδίκου ἂν οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν τῷ θανάτῳ.

<sup>31</sup> ἀγανακτεῖν is perhaps not quite as strong as Dylan Thomas's "raging", but it is certainly stronger than the Loeb translator's "being troubled" at *Phaedo* 62D, 62E, 64A, 67E. The picture conjured up is of angry, resentful resistance to death, whereas the true philosopher dies ῥαδίως (*Phaedo* 62C, 81A.) The same opposition between ἀγανακτεῖν and ῥαδίως appears at *Gorgias* 522D and *Crito* 43B-C (where ῥαδίως is accompanied by πράως).

<sup>32</sup> *Phaedo* 67E: τὸ τεθνάναι ἥκιστα αὐτοῖς ἀνθρώπων φοβερὸν.

<sup>33</sup> εὐελπὶς (*Phaedo* 63C, 64A) must imply more than good hope or strongly held hope. Everyone presumably hopes that there is a happy afterlife – and Socrates (*Phaedo* 68A) gives the example of the many men who have willingly died in the hope of seeing their dead loved ones again: the argument there is that *a fortiori* the philosopher (who is in love with wisdom and greatly - σφόδρα - hopes to find it after death) will be willing to die. But if the first is merely a case of wishful thinking, the second is merely a more extreme case of wishful thinking, unless the hope amounts to a conviction. Cf. Rowe, 1993, p.146 on 68A-B: "ἐλπὶς embraces 'expectation' as well as 'hope'." (And cf. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* xi.1, where Christian faith is described as πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις.)

<sup>34</sup> *Phaedo* 64A: καὶ εὐελπὶς εἶναι ἐκεῖ μέγιστα οἴσασθαι ἀγαθὰ ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσῃ.

<sup>35</sup> *Phaedo* 88B: ἀνοήτως.

this is pointed out to him the systematic critic might respond with some irritation that what it amounts to is to put Plato beyond criticism: it will be impossible ever to detect Plato in a fallacy or an inconsistency or a contradiction, since he can always take refuge behind the dramatist's mask. If what Plato's characters say can never be attributed to Plato himself, it can never be permissible to claim that Plato was mistaken in saying X. If it can never be said that Plato thought Y, it can never be said that Plato was mistaken in thinking Y.

But the response to that response might be that of the *Punch* reviewer who said that to criticize a novel by P.G. Wodehouse was to take a spade to a soufflé. In other words, the systematic critic is simply wielding the wrong tool: what the reader is invited to do is not to engage in logic-chopping in relation to self-contained propositions, but to continue an imaginative exploration into the unknown.<sup>36</sup> It is the difference between the τέχνη ἐν γράμμασι and the διαλεκτικὴ τέχνη of the *Phaedrus*,<sup>37</sup> to the extent that Plato's dialogue form succeeds in overcoming the limitations of the former and representing the latter.<sup>38</sup>

Needless to say, nothing in this should deter us from criticizing each argument separately on its merits, and if we can convince ourselves that Plato failed to see the fallacies in the arguments he puts in the mouths of others, we will permit ourselves to

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Griswold, p.238: "...Plato's dialogues contain no assertions by Plato, only depictions of people becoming and failing to become philosophers...Plato presents us with dramatic *imitations* of the practice of philosophising. Indeed, by withholding his own answers from his texts Plato seduces the reader into finding an answer for himself."

<sup>37</sup> *Phaedrus* 275C and 276E.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Griswold (p.238f.) on "Socrates' criticisms of writing presented at the end of the *Phaedrus*": "Plato wrote the criticisms, a fact that shows...that he both rejects the criticisms (since, unlike Socrates, he wrote) and that he accepts them (since he wrote dialogues). Plato accepts Socrates' arguments in favor of dialectical discourse, but he thinks that he has found a form of writing that blunts Socrates' criticisms of writing." Friedländer put it more succinctly when he said (1954, Vol.1, p.177) that the dialogue is "die einzige Form des Buches, die das Buch selber aufzuheben scheint."

say that in that respect he was mistaken. (And we will remember that Plato himself would not find this in the least disconcerting, always assuming that he endorsed what he has Socrates say in the *Gorgias*,<sup>39</sup> that it is more blessed to be refuted than to refute.) Nor, naturally, are we precluded from comparing passages on the same subject in different dialogues and seeking clarification from such a comparison. What is illegitimate is the use of such comparison to control our interpretation, as if what Plato means by what is said in one dialogue must be compatible with what is said in another.

## 2. The Death of Others

There is, however, one contribution which the systematic critic can make, and that is negative: a subject about which Plato says little or nothing may reasonably be inferred to be one in which he has little or no interest. There are only two passages - both in the *Republic* - which deal directly with bereavement. The principle enunciated in Book III is that tears and lamentations are inappropriate for future guardians,<sup>40</sup> and this for two reasons. First, the man who is ἐπιεικής will not consider the death of a friend (who is presumed also to be ἐπιεικής) to be terrible for the friend:<sup>41</sup> therefore he will not weep for him. Second, since being ἐπιεικής he is self-sufficient,<sup>42</sup> the death of a son or a brother will affect him less than other men, indeed he will bear such misfortunes with great calmness.<sup>43</sup> Exhibitions of grief are to be expected from the weaker sort of women and the baser sort of men, but the future

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<sup>39</sup> 458A.

<sup>40</sup> *Rep.* 387D: καὶ τοὺς ὀδυρμούς ἄρα ἐξαιρήσομεν καὶ τοὺς οἴκτους τοὺς τῶν ἐλλογίμων ἀνδρῶν.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*: φημὲν δὲ δὴ ὅτι ὁ ἐπιεικής ἀνὴρ τῷ ἐπιεικεῖ, οὐπερ καὶ ἑταῖρός ἐστιν, τὸ τεθνήσκειν οὐ δεινὸν ἠγήσεται.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: ὡς ὁ τοιοῦτος μάλιστα αὐτὸς αὐτῷ αὐτάρκειας πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν...

<sup>43</sup> *Rep.* 387E: φέρειν δὲ ὡς πραότατα.

guardians must not be exposed to the emotional outbursts of Achilles over Patroclus, or Priam over Hector.

When the question of poetry arises again in Book X, the subject of grief is reopened. It is now admitted that ὁ ἐπιεικῆς ἀνὴρ will feel some pain at the loss of a son, but he will restrain his grief in the presence of others, while allowing himself to express in private feelings which he would be ashamed to display in public.<sup>44</sup> What controls his public behaviour is λόγος καὶ νόμος, whereas in private he is at the mercy of αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος. And in a pregnant sentence<sup>45</sup> ὁ νόμος is said to enjoin calmness and restraint in this kind of misfortune, for four reasons. First, because it is not clear whether it is in fact misfortune, second because there is no point in taking it to heart, third because nothing in this life matters very much anyway, and fourth because grief stands in the way of recovery.

The first – οὔτε δήλου ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ τῶν τοιούτων – recalls the recommended agnosticism in the *Apology*,<sup>46</sup> but it appears to conflict with the earlier passage in Book III of the *Republic* where it is positively affirmed that to the ἀνὴρ ἐπιεικῆς the death of his friend is not δεινόν. In other words there is the same oscillation here between detached agnosticism and privileged knowledge which the systematic critic found in relation to the fear of death. The second, that there is no profit in grief, is true if it means that grief will not restore the dead to life, but if it means that the expression of grief will achieve nothing by way of therapy, that

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 604A.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 604B: Λέγει που ὁ νόμος ὅτι κάλλιστον, ὅτι μάλιστα ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν ἐν ταῖς συμφοραῖς καὶ μὴ ἀγανακτεῖν, ὡς οὔτε δήλου ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ τῶν τοιούτων, οὔτε εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν οὐδὲν προβαίνειν τῷ χαλεπῶς φέρωντι, οὔτε τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἄξιον ὄν μεγάλης σπουδῆς, ὃ τε δεῖ ἐν αὐτοῖς ὅτι τάχιστα παραγίγνεσθαι ἡμῖν, τούτῳ ἐμποδῶν γιγνόμενον τὸ λυπεῖσθαι.

<sup>46</sup> *Apol.* 29A.

presumably is an empirical judgement which is rebuttable by experience. The third, taken on its face value (οὐτε τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἄξιον ὄν μεγάλης σπουδῆς), puts something of a question-mark against every human endeavour, including the previous nine books of the *Republic*. The fourth, that grieving hinders the cure, is in effect a restatement of the second, but in such a way that the alleged cure is presented as infallible. Instead of behaving like hurt children, crying and clutching the sore bit, we should get into the habit<sup>47</sup> of accepting whatever happens like the fall of dice: if we do not weep we will be cured.<sup>48</sup> But of course it could equally well be claimed that weeping is the cure, and that the suppression of grief<sup>49</sup> is not only unnatural but unreasonable.

The point is that all four reasons are reasons of expediency, so that if it can be shown that they do not work then in practice they collapse. We don't know whether death is good or bad – but what if that uncertainty is itself the cause of distress? Grief achieves nothing – but what if it does? Life is not important – but what if it is (and it must be if it is important to be ἐπιεικής)? Grief hinders the cure – but what if the proposed cure is no cure at all?

At any rate, in the *Republic* indulgence in grief is presented as rooted in ignorance, as womanish and childish, and as inappropriate in the guardians. And we have a glimpse into what is appropriate, not just in the blueprint for the ideal state,<sup>50</sup> but in Plato's

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<sup>47</sup> *Rep.* 604C: ἐθίζειν τὴν ψυχὴν.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 604D: ἰατρικῇ θρηνησάμενος ἀφανίζοντα.

<sup>49</sup> To the point of refusing to allow ourselves to remember the reason for our suffering, on the ground that this is tantamount to cowardice – 604D.

<sup>50</sup> See Kassel (p.33) on what he regards as the illegitimate use of this passage from the *Republic* in the Konsolationsliteratur, e.g. Ps.-Plutarch 112 e-f: "Der Gedankengang, bei Platon in weitreichendem Zusammenhang auf den Aufbau des Idealstaates durch die innere Ausbildung seiner berufenen Träger, die dem entnervenden Einfluss der bisher erziehungsmächtigen Poesie entzogen werden sollen,

description of a “real life” situation. Because in the *Phaedo* we are shown both how the philosopher meets death, and how ὁ ἐπιεικῆς ἀνὴρ should face the death of a friend; and we also see that there is a connection between the two. In the introduction Phaedo describes his emotions to Echecrates. Since Socrates appeared to be happy and to be approaching death nobly and without fear, it was impossible to feel what might be expected in such a situation. Instead of pity, a strange mixture of pleasure and pain came over Phaedo and his friends: sometimes they laughed, sometimes they wept.<sup>51</sup> But at the end, when Socrates cheerfully downs the cup of poison,<sup>52</sup> the tears take over. Apollodorus wails aloud, Phaedo covers his face in his cloak and weeps, not for his friend but for himself in losing such a friend – until Socrates recalls them to their senses by telling them how womanish and jarring their behaviour is: it was precisely to avoid such an exhibition that he sent the women away.<sup>53</sup> And at that Phaedo and his friends are ashamed and dry their tears.

An inspiring scene, and yet in that little phrase of Phaedo’s, that he wept not for his friend but for himself, Plato seems to remind us of another dimension to all this: that grief at the death of others may have much less to do with anxiety about their future state<sup>54</sup> than with sorrow over our own present state. Our grief in fact is a measure of our loss.

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gerichtet, wird jetzt ganz der Beschwichtigung privaten Leids dienstbar gemacht, worum es Platon durchaus nicht zu tun war."

<sup>51</sup> *Phaedo* 58E-59A.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 117C.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 117D: ἐγὼ μέντοι οὐχ ἤκιστα τούτου ἕνεκα τὰς γυναῖκας ἀπέπεμψα, ἵνα μὴ τοιαῦτα πλημμελοῖεν. (Cf. *Crito* 43B: καὶ γὰρ ἄν...πλημμελὲς εἶη ἀγανακτεῖν τηλικούτου ὄντα εἰ δεῖ ἤδη τελευτᾶν.)

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 387D: οὐκ ἄρα ὑπὲρ γ' ἐκείνου ὡς δεινόν τι πεποιθότος οδύροισ' ἄν.

### 3. The Practice of Death

By contrast, one subject which the systematic critic would consider central to Plato's thinking is the afterlife and its relationship with our present existence. That there is such a relationship is evident even in the *Apology*, although the straightforward statement of the logical alternatives in the *δυοῖν θάτερον* at 40C seems to exclude it: death is either wonderful, like a dreamless sleep, or it is the greatest good. But of course there is nothing logical about these alternatives. In the first place, a dreamless sleep is not wonderful except in its effects, and *ex hypothesi* there will be no effects.<sup>55</sup> In the second place, there is no logical reason why there should not be an infinite number of other possibilities ranging from extinction to ineffable bliss, and including every shade of misery. In fact what Socrates is putting forward in his *δυοῖν θάτερον* is not a logical proposition but a personal credo. He is after all exclusively addressing those who have voted for his acquittal,<sup>56</sup> and this is reinforced at 41C by the addition of *ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ*.<sup>57</sup> In other words, it is only the good man who has reason to regard death hopefully.<sup>58</sup>

But this ethical connection between life and afterlife is most succinctly expressed in the *Phaedo*: οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀποθνήσκουν μελετῶσι.<sup>59</sup> That succinctness,

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<sup>55</sup> "Miss Seward: 'There is one mode of the fear of death, which is certainly absurd; and that is the dread of annihilation, which is only a pleasing sleep without a dream.' Johnson: 'It is neither pleasing, nor sleep; it is nothing. Now mere existence is so much better than nothing, that one would rather exist even in pain, than not exist.'" (Boswell, Vol. II, pp.435f.)

<sup>56</sup> *Apol.* 39E-40A: τοῖς δὲ ἀποψηφισαμένοις ἡδέως ἂν διαλεχθεῖν...ὑμῖν γὰρ ὡς φίλοις οὖσιν ἐπιδειῖξαι ἐθέλω τὸ νυνὶ μοι συμβεβηκὸς τί ποτε νοεῖ.

<sup>57</sup> Ἄλλὰ καὶ ὑμᾶς χρῆ, ὧ ἄνδρες δικασταί, εὐέλπιδας εἶναι πρὸς τὸν θάνατον, καὶ ἔν τι τοῦτο διανοεῖσθαι ἀληθές, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ κακὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτε τελευτήσαντι, οὐδὲ ἀμελείται ὑπὸ Θεῶν τὰ τούτου πράγματα.

<sup>58</sup> So that the position stated in the *Apology* is not unlike that in the *Phaedo* at 63C: ἀλλ' εὐελπίς εἰμι εἶναι τι τοῖς τετελευτηκόσι καί, ὥσπερ γε καὶ πάλαι λέγεται, πολὺ ἄμεινον τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἢ τοῖς κακοῖς. The only difference is that in the *Apology* Socrates does not expressly refer to the κακοί.

<sup>59</sup> *Phaedo* 67E.

however, may be misleading. It led Cleombrotus to short-circuit the process by committing suicide.<sup>60</sup> Friedländer, on the other hand, maintains that “vor allem lehrt [der *Phaidon*] ...dass Leben ein Sterbenlernen ist. Das heisst nicht erlösungssüchtig sich dem Tode hingeben, vielmehr leben im Angesichte der Idee und so, dass das Wissen um den Tod dem Leben sein Gesetz gibt...”<sup>61</sup> Somewhere in between, Sorabji assumes that what is involved is solely preparation for a new mode of existence: the Platonic Socrates supposes that “what he will principally be doing after death is *thinking*, and also enjoying his thoughts, and that philosophy can prepare you now for this very different sort of existence by occupying you with thinking, not with the seeing and feeling that is so dependent on a body... It is . . . no accident that Plato called philosophy a preparation for death.”<sup>62</sup> Which if any of these readings is correct?

The first step in answering that question is to recognize that the formula in the *Phaedo* is not some kind of oracular pronouncement which is then left to the audience or the reader to interpret. It represents the conclusion from the following propositions or assumptions:

- that human beings consist of body and soul;
- that death entails the final separation of body and soul (64C, 67D);
- that the soul survives death (64C, 70B, 80D);
- that only after death can the soul have full access to wisdom / truth / pure knowledge (65A-B, 66D-E, 68A-B);

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<sup>60</sup> See Cicero, *T.D.* I.84.

<sup>61</sup> Friedländer, 1954, Vol.1, p.94.

<sup>62</sup> Sorabji, pp.313f.

- that it is nevertheless possible for the soul to have limited access to wisdom etc. during this life (65E-66A);
- that such access is hindered by the demands of the body (65A-B, 66);
- that the person who desires wisdom etc. – the philosopher – should therefore curtail the demands of the body by separating the soul from the body as much as possible during this life (65C, 66);
- that this preliminary separation of soul from body, which amounts to a kind of purification, is the μελέτημα of the true philosopher (65E, 67D, 80E-81A);
- that this μελέτημα is a necessary anticipation of the final separation of body and soul on death, because after death only the purified soul will have full access to wisdom etc. (82B);
- that this μελέτημα can therefore be characterized as μελέτη θανάτου (81A).

There are, however, two major problems. One concerns the vocabulary, which is both varied and ambiguous, although both the variety and the ambiguity tend to be concealed by those who appeal to the text. (For example, Cicero simply has *commentatio*, Seneca simply has “*meditari*”, Friedländer simply “learning”, and Sorabji simply “preparation”.) The usual English translation of μελετᾶν is “practice”, but the English “practice” is itself ambiguous: it can describe what is done habitually (“it is my practice to ignore insults”); it can refer to the activity of a professional practitioner (e.g. a medical practice); it can refer to the constant training or study involved in mastering some technique (“practice makes perfect”); and it can be used of the rehearsal for a performance (“I must practise my speech one last time”). Μελέτημα / μελέτη / μελετᾶν have all these meanings, together with the original root sense of “care”. Not only that, the proposition that the separation of soul and body is

the μελέτημα of the philosopher is expressed in three different ways in the *Phaedo* and with varying terminology.

(a) The programmatic formulation at 64A<sup>63</sup> uses ἐπιτηδεύειν, which means essentially “to pursue”, but “pursuits” can refer either to present activities (a hobby is a pursuit) or future aims (pursuing a goal). It may seem to refer to future aims in the next sentence, where Socrates says that it would be absurd for the true philosophers to be angry at the approach of death, ὃ πάλαι προθυμοῦντό τε καὶ ἐπετήδευον. But it certainly refers to present activities at 82A-B, where the potential bees and wasps are described as οἱ τὴν δημοτικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιτετηδευκότες. . .

(b) Then at 67D-E, after stating that the release and separation of the soul during this life is the μελέτημα of the true philosopher, Socrates asks: οὐκοῦν . . . γελοῖον ἂν εἶη ἄνδρα παρασκευάζονθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῷ βίῳ ὅτι ἐγγυτάτω ὄντα τοῦ τεθνάναι οὕτω ζῆν, κἄπειθ' ἤκοντος αὐτῷ τούτου ἀγανακτεῖν; And since it is agreed that this would be absurd, it follows that οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀποθνήσκουν μελετῶσι, καὶ τὸ τεθνάναι ἤκιστα αὐτοῖς ἀνθρώπων φοβερὸν. It seems therefore that παρασκευάζειν is here used synonymously with μελετᾶν, but παρασκευάζειν itself can have either future or present connotations: to be “prepared” can mean either to be ready for a change which is still in the future, or to have changed already. And the use of the perfect infinitive at 67C clearly implies the latter.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Κινδυνεύουσι γὰρ ὅσοι τυγχάνουσιν ὀρθῶς ἀπτόμενοι φιλοσοφίας λεληθέναι τοὺς ἄλλους ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο αὐτοῖς ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ἢ ἀποθνήσκουν τε καὶ τεθνάναι.

<sup>64</sup> *Phaedo* 67B-C, where the purification involved in the separation of soul and body during this life is said to be a process of habituation – ἐθίζειν – and this purification by habituation is envisaged as something which is completed in this life: ὥστε ἢ γε ἀποδημία ἢ νῦν ἐμοὶ προστεταγμένη μετὰ ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος γίγνεται καὶ ἄλλω ἀνδρὶ ὃς ἡγεῖται οἱ παρεσκευάσθαι τὴν διάνοιαν ὥσπερ κεκαθαρμένην.

(c) Finally at 80E – 81A, from the perspective of the pure soul of the philosopher departing at death to the realm of the pure, it can be stated (rather disjointedly in the Greek) that since during life the soul had never willingly associated with the body and since this was its constant concern,<sup>65</sup> τὸ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦσα καὶ τῷ ὄντι τεθνάναι μελετῶσα ῥαδίως· ἢ οὐ τοῦτ' ἂν εἶη μελέτη θανάτου;

An additional difficulty may seem to arise from the different forms relating to death: ἀποθνήσκειν and τεθνάναι. Burnet<sup>66</sup> says that "in such phrases τεθνάναι may properly be translated 'to die'; for ἀποθνήσκειν lays stress on the process of dying, of which τεθνάναι is the completion." And he applies this rule to 64A6,C5, 67E2, and 81A1. Gallop<sup>67</sup> disagrees, and translates τεθνάναι as "to be dead" (that is, the state of being dead) in all these passages except 81A1.

Now in (a), where the true philosophers are said to pursue or practise nothing but ἀποθνήσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι, to apply Burnet's rule is to produce a distinction without a difference: to practise "'dying' (the process) and 'death' (its completion)"<sup>68</sup> is no different from practising the process of dying or practising its completion. That is to say, what is involved in 64A is a hendiadys. But if it is a hendiadys, there is no reason why the meaning of the whole should not be controlled by τεθνάναι, i.e. the philosophers practise the state of being dead (which is entered upon by ἀποθνήσκειν).<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Phaedo* 80E: μελετῶσα ἀεὶ τοῦτο.

<sup>66</sup> In his note on 62A5.

<sup>67</sup> Gallop, p.226, note 4.

<sup>68</sup> Burnet on 64A6.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 77D: When the soul is born again it cannot be born from anything other than ἐκ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ τεθνάναι - which is undoubtedly a hendiadys.

This view is supported by (b) where παρασκευάζονθ' ἑαυτὸν . . . ὅτι ἐγγυτάτω ὄντα τοῦ τεθνάναι οὕτω ζῆν is parallel to οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀποθνήσκειν μελετῶσι, and since the former clearly envisages the state of being dead, so must the latter.

In (c) both Burnet and Gallop translate τεθνάναι as "die", presumably because of the presence of ῥαδίως. Now ῥαδίως is used with ἀποθνήσκειν, of philosophers being willing to die, at the very beginning of the discussion and before the paradox of the practice of death has been broached.<sup>70</sup> Here at (c), when it is used in conjunction with τεθνάναι and in the context of the constant μελετᾶν involved in the soul gathering itself together apart from the body, it makes much more sense to understand it as referring to a willing participation in the state of being dead. Moreover the subject in (c) is no longer the philosopher but the soul itself, and it is more intelligible that the soul should be in a state of death than that it should die.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, there is nothing to prevent the "practice" of the true philosophers in (a), (b) and (c) being understood as related to the state of being dead rather than to the act of dying; and the thought is certainly more coherent if it is so understood: after all, the concentration throughout the *Phaedo* is on what happens after death, not on the process of dying.

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<sup>70</sup> *Phaedo* 62C.

<sup>71</sup> Burnet says, on τεθνάναι at 81A1: "The use of the perfect infinitive need cause no difficulty; for it is often used of the moment of death which completes the process of τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν." But it cannot often be used in this sense with the soul as the subject. And Gallop has clearly overlooked the fact that the soul is the subject at 81A1. On p.226 he argues that τεθνάναι requires the meaning "to die" (rather than "be dead") only at 62C3 and 81A1. But on p.86 he says that "Socrates will generally avoid speaking of 'dead souls' - although the soul is twice said to 'die' (77d4, 84b2) - perhaps because this would produce a conflict with the conclusion of the dialogue, that the soul is 'deathless' (106b3-4)."

Taken together, therefore, the vocabulary indicates that the separation of soul and body in this life is sometimes presented as a present practice, or occupation, or habitual activity, or study, which amounts to a kind of purification, and that this purification is something which is in principle completed before death and which qualifies the soul on death to dwell with the gods.<sup>72</sup> And at other times it is presented as a kind of imitative anticipation by the philosopher of the state of death, a training, or practice, or preparation, or dress rehearsal, or holding himself in readiness for that state, so that he may enter upon it ῥαδίως.<sup>73</sup>

The matter is, however, further complicated by the second major problem, which is the apparent confusion over whether the μελέτημα of the philosopher exhausts his activity (i.e. is in fact what is involved in philosophy), or whether it is simply the *sine qua non* for what is involved in philosophy – because there are passages which support each of these possibilities.

For example, 64A (ὅσοι τυγχάνουσιν ὀρθῶς ἀπτόμενοι φιλοσοφίας . . . οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ἢ ἀποθνήσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι) implies that the separation of soul and body during this life is an end in itself, so that philosophical activity is reduced to a kind of asceticism. So does 67D: τὸ μελέτημα αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐστὶν τῶν φιλοσοφῶν, λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος. And 80E is even more emphatic, since it is now the soul itself which is the subject of μελετᾶν: the constant activity of the soul is

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<sup>72</sup> *Phaedo* 67B-C, 69C.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 81A: τῷ ὄντι τεθνάναι μελετῶσα ῥαδίως.

separating itself from the body and this is the definition of true philosophy – τοῦτο δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦσα.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, 65D-66A describes the process involved in searching out or examining or contemplating absolute justice or beauty or goodness, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐνὶ λόγῳ ἀπάντων τῆς οὐσίας, as a matter of the most careful preparation<sup>75</sup> leading to understanding by the use of pure reason uncontaminated by any of the senses.<sup>76</sup> And here the separation of soul from body is said to be what enables the exercise of pure reason, since it is the body which impedes that exercise, as the whole of 66 explains (and in doing so equates the exercise of pure reason with philosophy). In other words, that separation is envisaged not as the activity which constitutes philosophy, but as the necessary condition for that activity, which is the exercise of pure reason. The distinction is most clearly indicated in the following sentence: ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι ἡμῖν δέδεικται ὅτι, εἰ μέλλομέν ποτε καθαρῶς τι εἶσεσθαι, ἀπαλλακτέον αὐτοῦ [sc. τοῦ σώματος] καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ θεατέον αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα.<sup>77</sup> There are two stages, separable at least in thought: withdrawal of the soul from the body, and subsequent contemplation of the realities by the soul.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. D. Frede, p.29 (on 68C-69E): "Unter der *katharsis* versteht Sokrates auch nicht etwa eine Reinigung und Verbesserung der Persönlichkeit, sondern ihre völlige Intellektualisierung (67c wird die Reinigung der Seele mit der der *dianoia* gleichgesetzt.) Diese Tugendlehre stellt insofern eine starke Verkürzung dar, als ihre verschiedenen Arten somit auf eine einzige Art von Wissen reduziert werden, das noch dazu negativer Art ist. Nimmt man diese Botschaft der Empfehlung zur *katharsis* ernst, so besteht die Tapferkeit des Philosophen allein in der Einsicht, dass der Tod der Übergang zu einem besseren Leben ist, die Besonnenheit in der, dass weltliche Genüsse nur vom Wesentlichen ablenken."

<sup>75</sup> *Phaedo* 65E: ὃς ἂν μάλιστα ἡμῶν καὶ ἀκριβέστατα παρασκευάσῃται αὐτὸ ἕκαστον διανοηθῆναι περὶ οὗ σκοπεῖ...

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 65E-66A: μήτε τὴν ὄψιν παρατιθέμενος ἐν τῷ διανοεῖσθαι μήτι τινὰ ἄλλην αἴσθησιν ἐφέλκων μηδεμίαν μετὰ τοῦ λογισμοῦ, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ καθ' αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ χρώμενος...

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 66D. This presumably describes the situation after death, but it is presented as the logical extension of what is experienced during life.

Now if the μελέτημα represents the total activity of the philosopher, i.e. is itself philosophy, and if what is involved in μελετᾶν etc. is a kind of rehearsal for the final separation of soul and body at death, then (leaving aside the somewhat half-hearted disapproval of suicide at 61C-62C) it is difficult to argue that Cleombrotus misunderstood the *Phaedo*. There is no obvious reason why the μελέτημα taken in this way should be prolonged at all, and not concentrated in one decisive moment, the act of suicide, in which the philosopher demonstrates his willingness to die ῥαδίως. And it is then difficult to endorse Friedländer's interpretation that "Sterbenlernen . . . heisst . . . leben im Angesichte der Idee," or Sorabji's that we are to spend our lives preparing ourselves to think properly.

But if the μελέτημα is the preliminary clearing of the ground (requiring constant repetition) which enables the philosopher to contemplate the realities during this life (if only indistinctly), and if that indistinct contemplation during this life is itself in some sense a necessary purification which in turn clears the way for the soul at death to dwell with the gods, then both Friedländer and Sorabji are at least partly right.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, the practice of death either envisages a way of living one's life, habitually putting philosophical contemplation above sensuality, purifying and so

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<sup>78</sup> As a matter of fact Cleombrotus may still be right as well, because if the purification can be considered at any stage complete, as 67C implies, why should death be any further delayed? The residual objection to suicide could presumably be met by arguing that the consciousness of being purified was itself the requisite sign from the gods. It is true that *Phaedo* 62C envisages some sort of ἀνάγκη, but these things are a matter of interpretation by the person involved: cf. for example, Xenophon's suggestion (*Apol.* 1, 22-23) that Socrates manipulated events because he now preferred death to life – and so may be said to have engineered a "necessity". (Cf. Warren, 2001, p.101: "Indeed, the circumstances which must obtain for suicide to be appropriate may themselves be interpreted as this divine sign.")

See also the extensive discussion of the suicide passage in the *Phaedo* in Gallop, pp.79 ff. Gallop concludes (p.85): "Socrates is not denouncing suicide at large; he is trying to explain why the philosopher's desire for death would not justify him in procuring it for himself." But it is possible to doubt whether Socrates is doing even that at all enthusiastically, given the example of Cleombrotus himself, who after all committed suicide *because* of what he had read in the *Phaedo*, not in spite of it.

qualifying oneself for the afterlife, as it were studying for one's finals; or it involves a turning away from life, an anticipation of death, indeed a hastening of death (mentally at least) because there is no real purpose in being alive except to be in a position to die. And it may be that the dramatic setting of the *Phaedo* makes the latter interpretation more probable. It is obvious that the proximity of death inevitably plays a greater part here than it does in any of the other dialogues.<sup>79</sup> The atmosphere from the outset is permeated with approaching death,<sup>80</sup> and when Socrates sends a message to Evenus telling him to follow as quickly as he can, he sets the scene for the discussion of the μελέτη θανάτου in such a way that it is bound to seem life-denying.<sup>81</sup> Because what can this message mean if not that Evenus should consider taking his own life?<sup>82</sup> After all, the repeated ἴσως with which Socrates proceeds to qualify the conventional disapproval of suicide hardly give the impression that he himself disapproves.<sup>83</sup> And then the whole activity of the philosopher is presented as a pale reflection of what can only be done properly after death: nothing else is offered as being of any significance in life except this philosophical activity, which at the highest is described as a necessarily incomplete contemplation of reality and at the

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. D. Frede, p.19: "Dass Platon sich im Phaidon zunächst so negativ über alle Aspekte des diesseitigen Lebens äussert, mag nun auf die Dramatik der Gesprächssituation wie auch auf die Konzentration auf die Frage der Unsterblichkeit der Seele zurückzuführen sein. Denn bereits dies Thema legt eine Betonung des grundsätzlichen Unterschiedes der Natur von Leibe und Seele nahe."

<sup>80</sup> *Phaedo* 58E-59A.

<sup>81</sup> On the "*locus vexatus*" at 62A see the discussion in Dorter, pp.11-18. Dorter identifies "three basic interpretations", with the following implications: that death is always better (the "traditional interpretation"), that death is sometimes better, and that suicide is always wrong. And he concludes: "Ultimately it seems to come down to a question of whether or not one believes that Plato regarded death as superior in some sense to life. To those who believe this, the traditional interpretation seems the most natural although not grammatically straightforward; those who do not believe it prefer the second or third and are similarly willing to live with the difficulties they present." (p.16.) This is a good description of how the "systematic critic" goes to work.

<sup>82</sup> *Phaedo* 61B: ἐμὲ διώκειν ὡς τάχιστα. The force of ὡς τάχιστα at 61B seems to be ignored by the commentators. If that phrase does not imply suicide, what does it imply? Even if it is taken to mean pursuing as eagerly as possible the separation of soul from body with a view to hastening the final separation at death, this simply amounts to a less dramatic form of suicide, like hunger strike.

<sup>83</sup> *Phaedo* 61C: οὐ μέντοι ἴσως βιάσεται αὐτόν· οὐ γάρ φασι θεμιτὸν εἶναι. 62C: ἴσως τοῖνυν ταύτη οὐκ ἄλογον μὴ πρότερον αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνουσαι δεῖν...

lowest as simply an ascetic renunciation of the body.<sup>84</sup> Not only is there no encouragement to exercise any of the virtues apart from what is involved in the μελέτη θανάτου, but almost the only mention<sup>85</sup> of the practical virtues of σωφροσύνη and δικαιοσύνη is disparaging: the future bees and wasps are those who have practised these virtues ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας τε καὶ νοῦ.<sup>86</sup>

On the other hand, the pervasiveness of these practical virtues in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* may suggest that to read the *Phaedo* in a way which unduly emphasises its negative, life-denying aspects is to take the dramatic context of the *Phaedo* too much on its face value,<sup>87</sup> and it is therefore necessary to look at what the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* say about the activity of the philosopher and the connection between that activity and death.

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Dorter, p.26: "Socrates does offer a resolution of the tension between the desirability of death and the duty not to take one's own life but his solution seems at first to be undertaken in bad faith. He says that the proper way for a philosopher to spend his life is in the 'practising of dying and being dead' (64ab). Although this observes the letter of the prohibition, does it follow the spirit as well or does it result in a withdrawal from life so complete that as far as rendering any service to the gods is concerned we might just as well be dead?"

<sup>85</sup> The other references are at 69B-C, where the virtues of ἀνδρεία, σωφροσύνη and δικαιοσύνη are said to exist only with φρόνησις, and to be, together with the latter, a kind of purification from the σκιαγραφία of such virtues; and at 114E, where they are again etherialized.

On the reference to δικαιοσύνη at 69B-C, D. Frede remarks (p.29): "Für die Annahme, dass Platon selbst diese *via negationis* [in 68C-69E] nicht als hinreichende Basis für eine explizite Bestimmung der Tugenden ansieht, spricht die Tatsache, dass die Gerechtigkeit, die vierte auf der Liste der vier sogenannten platonischen 'Kardinal-Tugenden', hier zwar mit genannt, in die Diskussion der wahren Natur der Tugenden der Askese aber nicht weiter einbezogen wird. Dass diese Enthaltensamkeit kein Zufall sein kann, ist leicht zu sehen. Die Empfehlung einer generellen Abkehr von der gewöhnlichen Welt und ihrer Scheingütern wäre als Bestimmung der Gerechtigkeit schlechtweg unzureichend. Denn gerade in Hinblick auf die 'soziale Tugend' lässt sich ein rein kathartisch gefasster Begriff gegenüber der weltlichen Gerechtigkeit schwer verteidigen."

<sup>86</sup> *Phaedo* 82A-B: οἱ τὴν δημοτικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιτετηδευκότες, ἦν δὴ καλοῦσι σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην, ἐξ ἔθους τε καὶ μελέτης γεγονυῖαν ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας τε καὶ νοῦ.

<sup>87</sup> D. Frede, for example, cautions (p.178): "Die so betonte 'Jenseitigkeit' sollte aber nicht als eine völlige Ablehnung der körperlichen Welt und als Verzicht auf das Zeugnis der Sinne verstanden werden. Die Ideenlehre ist von Platon als Erklärung für die veränderliche Welt und ihre Phänomene eingeführt worden. Es ist kaum anzunehmen, dass er diese Theorie, kaum dass er sie einführt, so radikalisieren wollte, dass sie für diese Welt gar nicht mehr taugt, sondern nur noch als Propagandamittel für eine jeinseitige Welt dient."

(The systematic critic might rear his head at this point and protest that this is exactly the sort of thing he has been forbidden to do. But the purpose of the comparison is not to place "the practice of death" on the Procrustean bed of the other dialogues and force its interpretation to fit with theirs. The purpose is to discover whether either of the possible interpretations of "the practice of death" in the *Phaedo* is supported or contradicted by what is said in other dialogues. Neither support for one nor contradiction of the other will put the matter beyond doubt: there is no reason in principle why Plato should not have put into the mouth of Socrates as he stood on the brink of death ideas and sentiments entirely at variance with those expressed in other dialogues - for example, because he considered Socrates' last day a suitable occasion for the discussion of immortality, and the discussion of immortality a suitable occasion for the discussion of the Forms. But if one interpretation of "the practice of death" can be more easily combined with the approaches in the other dialogues, we may feel, if not that there is a presumption in its favour, at least that we have an inclination to adopt it.)<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Vlastos, on the other hand, almost seems to operate with the presumption that the approach in the *Phaedo* will not be reconcilable with that in the *Gorgias*. "In the *Crito* [Socrates] reveals his faith in the soul's survival. In the *Gorgias* he declares it. Nowhere does he try to prove it in the earlier dialogues...The entity whose imperishableness Sm [the Socrates of the middle dialogues] is so eager to prove is an immigrant from another world conjoined precariously to a piece of matter in this one. This conjunction is its great misfortune: corruption, exile, incarceration, entombment, defilement. The imagery is Pythagorean. In the *Phaedo* we see that Sm has taken it over. He is now convinced that both intellectually and morally we would be incomparably better off if we had been spared incarnation, and that now, stuck inside an animal, our fondest hope should be to break away, to fly off never to return." (1991, pp.55f.)

That is to say, for Vlastos there is only one possible interpretation of the *Phaedo* - utterly negative and utterly different from the *Gorgias*. But the difficulty with his thesis is that the unbridgeable gulf he postulates (p.47: "how pronounced and profound are the differences") between the Socrates of the earlier dialogues and the Socrates of the middle dialogues has *ex hypothesi* been bridged by Plato himself, at least in the sense that Plato is the author of both sets of dialogues. In other words, if it was patently impossible for one man - Socrates - to think both along the lines of the earlier dialogues and along the lines of the middle dialogues, how was it possible for another man - Plato - to do just that? (Vlastos presupposes - p.50 - that "Plato in those early works of his [shares] Socrates' basic convictions.") But rather than having to postulate a historical Socrates reflected in Plato's earlier dialogues and a radically different Platonic Socrates appearing in the middle dialogues, is it not more reasonable to admit virtual ignorance about the historical Socrates and postulate instead a Plato who moves, in a coherently traceable way (expressed in different dramatic guises) from the earlier dialogues to the later? Vlastos himself agrees (p.81) that the evidence of Plato's dialogues is not enough by itself

The expression μελέτη θανάτου is found only in the *Phaedo*, but some of the terms used to explicate it appear frequently in both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. In the *Gorgias*, the significant occurrences of μελετᾶν / μελέτη are at 448E and 511B (on practice in the art of rhetoric), 500D (together with παρασκευή, on what is involved in acquiring the pleasant or the good), and 527B (on activity directed at not only seeming to be good but being good); of ἐπιτηδεύειν at 488A (on the importance of a person's character and pursuits), and 524D (on the soul after death bearing the marks of this life's pursuits); of παρασκευάζειν at 448D (in connection with rhetoric, and parallel to μελετᾶν in 448E), 507D (on what is involved in practising – ἀσκεῖν – virtue in such a way as to need no correction) and 511B (again together with μελετᾶν, on engineering a secure existence.) In addition, the verb ἀσκεῖν, which does not appear in the *Phaedo*, is used of the practice of σοφία, (487C) of ῥητορική (500C), of σωφροσύνη (507D), and of ἀρετή (527E).

The impression is, first, that μελετᾶν, ἐπιτηδεύειν and παρασκευάζειν are used more or less interchangeably in the *Gorgias* as in the *Phaedo*, and that ἀσκεῖν is another

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to establish his recovery of the historical Socrates. "The most we could learn from his writings is that in different periods of his life he puts into the mouth of Socrates philosophies which are not only different but, in important respects, antithetical. And that in itself would not give a particle of support to my claim. For there is no intrinsic reason why both of these philosophies, despite their polar differences, could not have been Plato's own original creations, at different periods of his life." (Vlastos calls the philosophies antithetical, but to take one example, having a "grandiose metaphysical theory of 'separately existing Forms' and having 'no such theory' (p.148) are not antithetical positions. The antithesis of the former would be to deny such a theory, whereas according to Vlastos (p.59) the historical Socrates had no theory at all.) But apart from whether the extrinsic evidence is in fact enough to support his claim, it is arguable that he has in fact already admitted that both philosophies are "Plato's own original creation", since what his hypothesis "proposes is that Plato in those early works of his, sharing Socrates' basic convictions, sets out to think through for himself their central affirmations, denials and reasoned suspensions of belief...In doing this, Plato is producing, not reproducing, Socratic philosophising." (p.50.) What precisely is the difference between on the one hand thinking through for oneself and producing rather than reproducing philosophy, and on the other hand one's "own original creation"? It is hardly open to Vlastos to claim a different sense of originality for the thinking of the middle dialogues, since he himself argues that much of what is said about the soul in the *Phaedo* has its roots in Pythagoreanism - in other words, it could equally be said that Plato "is producing, not reproducing, Pythagorean philosophising."

equivalent; and second, that in the *Gorgias* the activity is in every case devoid of what might be called an eschatological dimension: what is practised or undertaken or pursued, whether rhetoric or virtue, is to be achieved during this life and with this life in mind. Even the final summons to practise virtue (ἀσκῶν ἀρετήν) is immediately followed by κἄπειτα οὕτω κοινῇ ἀσκήσαντες, τότε ἤδη, ἐὰν δοκῇ χρῆναι, ἐπιθησόμεθα τοῖς πολιτικοῖς.<sup>89</sup> The practice of virtue in the *Gorgias* is presented primarily as a *sine qua non* for the *vita activa*.

That of course is due just as much to the dramatic setting of the dialogue as the concentration on the pull of the afterlife is in the *Phaedo*. The theme of the *Gorgias* is not rhetoric but the displacement of man's real purpose by the popular and professional obsession with rhetoric. Over and over again, Socrates reminds his interlocutors of the vital importance of what they are discussing. 458A: there is no greater evil than δόξα ψευδής on these matters; 472C: there is nothing finer than knowing about them and nothing more shameful than ignorance; 487B: these are questions of the greatest significance; 487C: no subject is more deserving of inquiry; 500C: even a person of little intelligence should be passionately interested in this. And the reason why the subject is so important, and not only to the philosopher, is that it concerns the way in which we should lead our lives,<sup>90</sup> what sort of person we should be and what our practices or pursuits should be:<sup>91</sup> on it, in a word, depends our happiness.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Gorgias* 527D.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 500C: ὅντινα χρῆ τρόπον ζῆν.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 487E: πόσον τινα χρῆ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τί ἐπιτηδεύειν...

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 472C: τὸ γὰρ κεφάλαιον αὐτῶν ἐστίν ἢ γιγνώσκειν ἢ ἀγνοεῖν ὅστις τε εὐδαίμων ἐστὶν καὶ ὅστις μὴ.

Since it is not skill in rhetoric that brings happiness, but leading a good life both in private and in public, this should be the object of our μελετᾶν.<sup>93</sup> And specifically this involves the practice and pursuit<sup>94</sup> of δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη. Δικαιοσύνη, of which rhetoric is the perversion or corruption,<sup>95</sup> is the essential virtue of the soul;<sup>96</sup> the orderly soul is characterised by δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη;<sup>97</sup> ὁ σὺφρων is the perfection of the good man;<sup>98</sup> the good man does well, and whoever does well is blessed and happy.<sup>99</sup> This, accordingly, is what we should aim at all our lives: all our own and our city's efforts should be directed at bringing about the δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη necessary for happiness.<sup>100</sup> And that these amount to what is referred to in the *Phaedo*<sup>101</sup> as ἡ δημοτικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ ἀρετὴ is underlined at 507E: without them there can be no κοινωνία or φιλία, since it is precisely δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη which hold the universe – gods and men – together.

All the emphasis therefore in the *Gorgias* is on the practical importance of virtue as leading to happiness in this life, and on practising δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη. Neither the purely cerebral contemplation of absolute reality nor the connection with the afterlife are so much as mentioned until the last few pages. There of course they do figure, and apparently both together in the credo at 526D: τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀσκῶν<sup>102</sup> πειράσομαι τῷ ὄντι ὡς ἂν δύνωμαι βέλτιστος ὢν καὶ ζῆν καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀποθνήσκω

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 527B: καὶ παντὸς μᾶλλον ἀνδρὶ μελετητέον οὐ τὸ δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀγαθὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶναι, καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 507D.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 465C.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 478A-B.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 504D.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 507C.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*: ὥστε πολλὴ ἀνάγκη...τὸν δὲ ἀγαθὸν εὖ τε καὶ καλῶς πράττειν ἅ ἂν πράττη, τὸν δ' εὖ πράττοντα μακάριόν τε καὶ εὐδαίμονα εἶναι.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 507D.

<sup>101</sup> *Phaedo* 82A.

<sup>102</sup> Dodds remarks: "σκοπῶν is adopted by many editors and translators, but gives a less suitable sense: Socrates is vowing himself not to research but to a way of living and dying."

ἀποθνήσκειν. And yet ἡ ἀλήθεια by itself is somewhat vague, and it is immediately, in the next sentence, interpreted as an invitation to all men to live their lives properly; nor is it at all clear what, if anything, βέλτιστος ὢν . . . ἀποθνήσκειν adds to βέλτιστος ὢν . . . ζῆν (unless it simply means dying ῥαδίως.)<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the myth at the end of the *Gorgias* is presented only as a last resort, since the previous arguments have failed to persuade.<sup>104</sup> Socrates declares himself convinced by it, but he acknowledges that others may regard it as a μῦθος γράος.<sup>105</sup> And although it indicates that the practice of virtue will make us happy both in life and after death,<sup>106</sup> the whole point of everything which has gone before is that the practice of virtue (or paying the penalty if virtue has not been practised) will make us happy even during this life.

On these two matters – the centrality of philosophical contemplation and of death and the afterlife – the *Gorgias* may be said to be at the opposite pole from the more negative interpretation of "the practice of death" in the *Phaedo*. According to that interpretation the true philosopher is entirely eschatologically orientated: he wants to withdraw from life as soon as possible and dwell with the gods and other true

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<sup>103</sup> See *Gorgias* 522D. And cf. 527E: καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἀσκοῦντες καὶ ζῆν καὶ τεθνάναι - where perhaps the meaning is "with a view to" or "in respect of both life and death." In the *Republic*, at 618B, Socrates interrupts the myth of Er to stress the importance of being able to distinguish between good and bad not only during this life, but also after death when it comes to choosing the next incarnation, but this thought is not present in the *Gorgias*.

<sup>104</sup> E.g. Dalfen, p.222: "Die rationale Argumente und alles, was Sokrates sonst aufbietet, können den Kallikles weder von seiner Lebensphilosophie noch von seinen politischen Vorstellungen und Plänen abbringen. Als letztes Mittel greift Sokrates zu einem Mythos." And Dodds (p.385, comparing *Gorgias* 527a with *Phaedo* 85cd): "Acceptance of the myth is similarly recommended here, *faute de mieux*; but Socrates really bases his appeal on the preceding ethical arguments, which are independent of the myth, though they lead to the same rule of life."

<sup>105</sup> *Gorgias* 527A.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 527C: εὐδαιμονήσεις καὶ ζῶν καὶ τελευτήσας.

philosophers.<sup>107</sup> The *Gorgias* is concerned principally<sup>108</sup> with this life, and what we are to practise here in this life is not death but the practical virtues of δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη with a view to present happiness. And “we” means all of us.<sup>109</sup>

The *Republic* is in some ways very similar to the *Gorgias* and in some ways very different, both with respect to the meaning of δικαιοσύνη and to the terminology associated with the μελέτη θανάτου in the *Phaedo*. Δικαιοσύνη is the distinctive human virtue;<sup>110</sup> it is more precious than gold;<sup>111</sup> the inquiry into its essence is the inquiry into the most important thing of all – what constitutes the good life.<sup>112</sup> The καλὸς κἀγαθός seems at one point to be defined in terms of δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη,<sup>113</sup> and in another passage it is δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη themselves which make up ἡ δημοτικὴ ἀρετή.<sup>114</sup> In the latter passage, moreover, the philosopher-ruler who is given the task of moulding people into conformity with δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη is described as practising – μελετᾶν – that task.<sup>115</sup> And at 407A μελετᾶν is used in a context very similar to the ἀσκῶν ἀρετήν in *Gorgias* 527D: indeed it is that same juxtaposition (ἀρετήν ἀσκεῖν) which μελετᾶν is used here to explicate, and what is in mind is again the straightforward practice of virtue – the activity of behaving virtuously – with no eschatological connotations.

<sup>107</sup> *Phaedo* 82B.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Rechenauer, p.243: "Doch bewegt sich auch das Plädoyer des Sokrates - und diese Feststellung ist wesentlich für das rechte Verständnis des Schlussmythos - fast ausnahmslos in einem welt-immanenten Kontext, der sich auf die irdische Existenz beschränkt."

<sup>109</sup> *Gorgias* 500C: τις καὶ μικρὸν νοῦν ἔχων ἄνθρωπος. And it may be significant that even in the myth, those who are translated to the Isles of the Blest are especially (μάλιστα) but not exclusively philosophers. (526C.)

<sup>110</sup> *Rep.* 335C: Ἄλλ' ἡ δικαιοσύνη οὐκ ἀνθρωπεῖα ἀρετή;

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 336E.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 578C: περὶ γάρ τοι τοῦ μεγίστου ἡ σκέψις, ἀγαθοῦ τε βίου καὶ κακοῦ. Cf. 344D and 618C.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 490C: ἀλλ' ὑγιές τε καὶ δίκαιον ἦθος, ᾧ καὶ σωφροσύνην ἔπεσθαι.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 500D: σωφροσύνης τε καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ συμπάσης τῆς δημοτικῆς ἀρετῆς.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*: "Ἄν οὖν τις ...αὐτῷ ἀνάγκη γένηται ἃ ἐκεῖ ὄρα μελετῆσαι εἰς ἀνθρώπων ἦθη καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ τιθέναι καὶ μὴ μόνον ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν, ἄρα κακὸν δημιουργὸν αὐτὸν οἶε γεινῆσθαι σωφροσύνης τε καὶ δικαιοσύνης..."

Now given that the express purpose of the inquiry in the *Republic* is to divorce δικαιοσύνη from its artificial<sup>116</sup> and eschatological consequences and as it were to justify justice in and for itself,<sup>117</sup> it is not at all surprising that so much of the atmosphere should be reminiscent of the *Gorgias* with its leitmotif that doing wrong is worse than being wronged – and worse in the sense of involving unhappiness in this life. But of course there is rather more to the *Republic* than that: δικαιοσύνη, φιλοσοφία, and what is involved in μελετᾶν, all share in another dimension altogether.

First, δικαιοσύνη is defined at 433A-B as τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν, but this is elaborated at 443C-D: ἀλλ' οὐ τι περὶ τὴν ἕξω πράξιν τῶν αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ περὶ τὴν ἐντὸς, ὡς ἀληθῶς περὶ ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ. . . It is a harmony or balance or order in the soul which must not only precede any political or business activity,<sup>118</sup> but which is specifically to be distinguished from the popular<sup>119</sup> principles of δικαιοσύνη as practised in everyday life (i.e. as ἡ δημοτικὴ ἀρετή), although it will nevertheless prove to be in conformity with those principles.<sup>120</sup>

Second, what appeared to be a definition of the philosopher at 490C – ὑγιές τε καὶ δίκαιον ἦθος, ᾧ καὶ σωφροσύνην ἔπεσθαι – turns out to be more a case of the minimum qualification necessary for becoming a philosopher, because the true nature of philosophical activity, like the true nature of δικαιοσύνη, can only be properly

<sup>116</sup> Although see the discussion in Annas, 1981, pp.59-70.

<sup>117</sup> *Rep.* 367B, 612A-B.

<sup>118</sup> *Rep.* 443E (cf. *Gorgias* 527D).

<sup>119</sup> τὰ φορτικά - *Rep.* 442E.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

understood in contrast with the mundane.<sup>121</sup> The distinction is formulated in terms of a higher and lower order at 500B,<sup>122</sup> and again in the application of the cave allegory at 517C.<sup>123</sup>

And third, at 535C the philosophical curriculum is said to involve τσσαύτην μάθησίν τε καὶ μελέτην, a phrase which is paralleled at 536B by τσσαύτην μάθησιν καὶ τσσαύτην ἄσκησιν: here μελέτη and ἄσκησις apply not to the exercise of already acquired social and civic virtue, but to the lengthy training, or study, or discipline, or preparation necessary for the acquisition of philosophical virtue.

But the distinction between the higher and lower aspects of δικαιοσύνη, φιλοσοφία and μελέτη does not, or should not, constitute an unbridgeable gulf. On the contrary, those philosophers who refuse to bridge it, who remain with their heads in the clouds thinking that they are already living in the Isles of the Blest,<sup>124</sup> have no place in the ideal state. They are to be compelled to re-enter the cave<sup>125</sup> in order to practise instilling into the citizens the δημοτικὴ ἀρετὴ of δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη.

In other words, the *Republic* envisages a lower-level activity consisting in the μελέτη / ἄσκησις of civic virtue (like the *Gorgias*); a higher-level philosophical activity requiring a long and rigorous μελέτη, which consists in the contemplation of absolute

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 484B: ἐπειδὴ φιλόσοφοι μὲν οἱ τοῦ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντος δυνάμενοι ἐφάπτεσθαι, οἱ δὲ μὴ ἄλλ' ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ παντοίως ἴσχουσι πλανώμενοι οὐ φιλόσοφοι.

<sup>122</sup> Οὐδὲ γάρ που...σχολῆ τῷ γε ὡς ἀληθῶς πρὸς τοῖς οὖσι τὴν διάνοιαν ἔχοντι κάτω βλέπειν εἰς ἀνθρώπων πραγματείας...

<sup>123</sup> ...μὴ θαυμάσης ὅτι οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἐλθόντες οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράττειν, ἀλλ' ἄνω ἀεὶ ἐπιέγονται αὐτῶν αἰ ψυχὰς διατρίβειν.

<sup>124</sup> *Rep.* 519C: τοὺς δὲ ὅτι ἐκόντες εἶναι οὐ πράξουσιν, ἠγούμενοι ἐν μακάρων νήσοις ζῶντες ἔτι ἀπφκίσθαι.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* 520C: καταβατέον οὖν ἐν μέρει ἐκάστῳ εἰς τὴν τῶν ἄλλων συνοίκησιν καὶ συνεθιστέον τὰ σκοτεινὰ θεάσασθαι.

reality (like the *Phaedo*); and a combination or synthesis of both of these, in which the philosopher-ruler puts into practice on the lower level the visions which he has glimpsed on the higher.<sup>126</sup> It might be said that the *Gorgias* concentrates on the *vita activa*, the *Phaedo* on the *vita contemplativa*, and the *Republic* on both. Or that the *Gorgias* concentrates on the practice of virtue,<sup>127</sup> the *Phaedo* on the practice of death,<sup>128</sup> and the *Republic* on the practice of philosophy.<sup>129</sup>

This is of course over-simplified. The *Gorgias* is more complicated than that because the concluding myth of a last judgement, although it is presented as an afterthought, seems actually to be intended as the ultimate basis for the whole argument.<sup>130</sup> The *Phaedo* is more complicated because it contradicts itself by its very nature: it purports to be the manifesto of the ivory-tower philosopher, detached from the world of phenomena and intent only on anticipating the contemplation of eternal reality, yet in fact it is an account of the philosopher re-entering the cave and stamping his vision of eternal reality on the minds of the cave-dwellers.<sup>131</sup> And the *Republic* is more

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<sup>126</sup> On the difference here between the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, see D. Frede, p.29: "Es spricht wohl für sich, dass Platon für die Differenzierung zwischen der ordinären und der wahren Gerechtigkeit in der *Politeia* einen ganz neuen Ansatz vorsieht und dafür eine radikale Neuordnung der Gesellschaftsstrukturen entwirft. So tritt an die Stelle des Postulats der Weltfremdheit der Philosophen die Forderung nach einer anspruchsvollen Bildung und Erziehung als Vorbedingung für die Fähigkeit zur Leitung der Staates."

<sup>127</sup> ἀσκῶν ἀρετήν - *Gorgias* 527D.

<sup>128</sup> μελέτη θανάτου - *Phaedo* 81A.

<sup>129</sup> See *Rep.* 486E-487B (concluding the description of the qualities necessary in the philosopher): μή πη δοκοῦμέν σοι οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα ἕκαστα διεληλυθέναι καὶ ἐπόμενα ἀλλήλοις τῇ μελλούσῃ τοῦ ὄντος ἱκανῶς τε καὶ τελέως ψυχῇ μεταλήψεσθαι; Ἔστιν οὖν ὅπῃ μέμψῃ τοιοῦτον ἐπιτήδευμα, ὃ μή ποτ' ἂν τις οἶός τε γένοιτο ἱκανῶς ἐπιτηδεύσαι, εἰ μὴ φύσει εἴη μνήμων, εὐμαθής, μεγαλοπρεπής, εὐχαρῖς, φίλος τε καὶ συγγενῆς ἀληθείας, δικαιοσύνης, ἀνδρείας, σωφροσύνης;

<sup>130</sup> *Gorgias* 527A. Cf. Rechenauer, p.244: "Sokrates liefert also eine logisch in sich schlüssige Argumentation, die aber noch nicht den entscheidenden Ansatzpunkt, dass das Sein der Seele über die irdische Perspektive hinausweist, klar ausgemacht hat. Damit bleibt in der dialogischen Darlegung eine entscheidende Deckungslücke offen, gegen die natürlich aus sophistischer Sicht leicht anzugehen war." And p. 246: "Die eigentliche Antwort auf die Zentralfrage im *Gorgias*, wie man leben müsse, erwächst nicht aus dem Logos, sondern aus dem Mythos."

And cf. Rutherford (pp.176 ff.) on the thematic connections between the *Gorgias* myth and what precedes it.

<sup>131</sup> See e.g. *Phaedo* 78A: Πόθεν οὖν, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, τῶν τοιούτων ἀγαθὸν ἐπαρδὸν ληψόμεθα, ἐπειδὴ σύ, ἔφη, ἡμᾶς ἀπολείπεις; And cf. 115B. Cf. also D. Frede, p.10: "Wie der Schwanengesang

complicated because it envisages the philosopher re-entering the cave only in the perfect state, whereas until the perfect state comes about it advises him not to meddle:<sup>132</sup> in other words, it seems to countenance only the ivory-tower philosopher in the real world, and the practical philosopher only in the ideal world.<sup>133</sup>

But it is a question of emphasis. The *Gorgias* concentrates on the practice of virtue and the *vita activa*, the *Phaedo* concentrates on the practice of death and the *vita contemplativa*, the *Republic* concentrates on the synthesis.<sup>134</sup> The comparison therefore suggests that the three dialogues can be integrated in such a way as to make the less negative interpretation of "the practice of death" in the *Phaedo* more plausible.<sup>135</sup> That is to say, it allows us to assume that the three dialogues complement rather than contradict each other. Each discloses a different perspective on the art of life or on the art of death, or on the necessary connection between the

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in Wirklichkeit ein Ausdruck der Freude über die bevorstehende Rückkehr zu ihrem Gott ist, so ist auch sein letztes Gespräch mit den Freunden ein Ausdruck dieser Hoffnung - und zugleich eine Ermahnung an seine Freunde, diese Botschaft in ihrer Lebensführung zu beherzigen. Diese protreptische Rede ist also der letzte Dienst, den Sokrates seinem Gott und seinen Freunden auf Erden erweist." And p.179: "Sokrates' Fürsorge für seine Freunde zeigt überdies, dass ihm auch am diesseitigen Fortleben seiner Erkenntnisse gelegen war."

<sup>132</sup> *Rep.* 496C-497A.

<sup>133</sup> *Rep.* 592. But at the same time Plato acknowledges the inadequacy of both – 497A: οὐδέ γε, εἶπον, τὰ μέγιστα, μὴ τυχῶν πολιτείας προσηκούσης· ἐν γὰρ προσηκούσῃ αὐτός τε μάλλον αὐξήσεται καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἰδίων τὰ κοινὰ σώσει.

<sup>134</sup> Dodds (p.384) says something similar in different terms, when he compares the *Gorgias* with the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*: "The programme [in the *Gorgias*] of first reforming ourselves and then society may also be said to look forward to those dialogues. The theme of self-reform is given a new and positive development in the *Phaedo*, where it is explained as a process of κάθαρσις or withdrawal from the body (64c-67b). And in the *Republic*, where the Platonic Socrates at last ἐπιτίθεται τοῖς πολιτικοῖς, we are shown that the possibility of a Just Society depends on the right moral and intellectual training of the individual - in other words, that the only road to true statesmanship leads through the discipline of the Academy."

<sup>135</sup> Dorter arrives at a kind of integration rather differently. He argues that the practice of death (a) entails only a "moderate asceticism" (p.29) which is really tantamount to indifference and as such is compatible with the other dialogues; and (b) "is not merely an attempt to approximate suicide without technically committing the offence. It is in fact the resolution of the tension between our selfish fulfilment in death and our duty to life; for it not only accords with that fulfilment in that it is a practising of it, but it is also equivalent to virtue or excellence, the highest manifestation of life...It may indeed turn out that once we have attained such excellence we will discover therein - like the philosopher of the *Republic* - an obligation to work for the well-being of others as well as ourselves and thus to propose specific political measures, but all that is subsequent to what is meant here." (pp. 31f.)

two – a connection so close that it is sometimes unclear whether they are not the same thing. So that it may be said that each dialogue deals with approaching death, and none deals with it finally.

#### 4. Μῦθος

But each dialogue does deal with death by way of a final myth - final in the sense of closing the dialogue and final in the sense of eschatological - so that the full interpretation of "the practice of death" requires a consideration of the status of these *Jenseitsmythen*. What authority are we to ascribe to them? Are they intended to provide a basis for belief in immortality, or do they simply express such a belief?

The first problem is how to define μῦθος in Plato's usage. Socrates offers a potentially useful definition in the *Republic* during the discussion of ἡ μουσική as part of the programme of education.<sup>136</sup> Included in "music" are λόγοι, and these are said to be of two kinds, one true, the other false. The false λόγοι are μῦθοι, but "false" is not quite correct, because he says of μῦθος: τοῦτο δέ που ὡς τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν ψεῦδος, ἔνι δὲ καὶ ἀληθῆ.<sup>137</sup> A μῦθος therefore is a λόγος which is not true but which contains truth. Unfortunately this definition immediately seems to break down because in the ensuing discussion, concerning which μῦθοι are to be permitted in musical education and which rejected, he argues that those of Homer and Hesiod

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<sup>136</sup> *Rep.* 376E-377A.

<sup>137</sup> This can mean either "μῦθοι on the whole are false, but they (some of them at least) contain some truth" or "μῦθοι are false, taken as a whole, but they (all of them) contain some truth." Translators and commentators seem to favour the second. E.g. Shorey's Loeb translation: "the fable is, taken as a whole, false, but there is truth in it also", and Morgan (p.160): "stories that are on the whole false but have some truth in them."

which tell lies about the true nature of the gods should be rejected:<sup>138</sup> in other words there are some μῦθοι which do not contain truth.

To compound matters, when Socrates begins to tell the myth at the end of the *Gorgias*, he says that he considers it to be λόγος, whereas he imagines Callicles will consider it μῦθος;<sup>139</sup> yet the *Gorgias* myth seems to belong to the same category as the myth of Er, which is referred to by Socrates as μῦθος.<sup>140</sup> And when he says that he imagines Callicles will consider it μῦθος what he means is that Callicles will see it, not as a λόγος which although untrue contains truth, but as a μῦθος γράος.<sup>141</sup> Conversely, when he says that he himself considers it λόγος what he means is that he sees it, not as one of the subclass of λόγοι which consists of μῦθοι, but as actually being true: ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν.<sup>142</sup>

Μῦθος therefore is a somewhat fluid concept: it may be a tale which is not true but which contains truth (*Rep.* 377A); or a tale which is neither true nor contains truth (*Rep.* 377D); or a tale which is entirely true (*Gorgias* 523A + *Republic* 621B). Indeed the second category is itself divisible into those tales which are to be rejected

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 377D.

<sup>139</sup> *Gorgias* 523A.

<sup>140</sup> *Rep.* 621B: καὶ οὕτως... μῦθος ἐσώθη ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπώλετο. Dalfen (p.216) concludes: "Ob eine Geschichte ein *mythos* oder ein *logos* ist, hängt nicht allein von der Geschichte ab, sondern von der Einstellung des Erzählers oder des Hörers zu ihr." But this fails to address the problem: Socrates, the Erzähler in each case, refers to the myth of Er as μῦθος and to the *Gorgias* myth as λόγος; and in each case he maintains that the myth should be believed: *Rep.* 621B: καὶ ἡμᾶς ἂν σώσειεν, ἂν πειθώμεθα αὐτῷ. *Gorgias* 526D: ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν...ὑπό τε τούτων τῶν λόγων πέπεισμαι.

<sup>141</sup> *Gorgias* 527A.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 523A. On the difficulty of distinguishing between μῦθος and λόγος see Halliwell (2007, pp. 453f.): "Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, no simple, unqualified *muthos* / *logos* dichotomy is presupposed in Plato's work. The juxtaposition of the two terms, when it does appear, has a contextual not overarching force and can be used to draw more than one distinction."

because they tell undesirable untruths, and those which are to be encouraged because they tell a noble lie.<sup>143</sup>

The second problem is whether to confine the concept. Because not only is it unclear what is meant when the word μῦθος is used: whatever it means may be intended even when the word is not used. There is an obvious example of this in the *Phaedo*. At 110A-B Socrates offers to describe the “higher” earth with the words: εἰ γὰρ δὴ καὶ μῦθον λέγειν . . . But of course he has just finished what is essentially the first instalment of that description without having used the word μῦθος at all.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, a little earlier at 107D Socrates begins his description of the soul’s journey to the underworld, guided by its δαίμων, with the bare expression λέγεται δὲ οὕτως, but what follows is nonetheless μῦθος.

There are other places, however, where it is not quite so clear that what we are confronted with is μῦθος in one of its aspects. For example, the δυοῖν θάτερον in the *Apology*<sup>145</sup> gives little indication that what is coming is in the nature of a μῦθος (understood in terms of the above definition as a false λόγος which contains or may contain truth).<sup>146</sup> Yet μῦθος it certainly is, and not only the second alternative with its

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<sup>143</sup> *Rep.* 414B ff. (The “noble lie” is referred to as a μῦθος at 415A.)

<sup>144</sup> The first instalment he introduced with the words: ὡς ἐγὼ ὑπὸ τινος πέπεισμαι. (108C). Ebert, on the other hand, maintains (p.265) that 108C-110A is in fact not myth at all but “naturwissenschaftliche Spekulation”. But Hackforth (pp.172f.) argues that the description of the earth as a sphere is the only “fact” in this passage: “What follows...is *extension* of fact, and *mythical extension*; by which I mean that it is not offered as ‘science’, although it makes use of existing scientific theories.” And cf. Morgan, p.200: “It is not possible to separate ‘mythical’ from ‘non-mythical’ sections of the narrative by content: it is all ‘myth’. Both before and after the explicit introduction of *mythos* there is material on the judgement and fate of souls and on the nature of the world. What distinguishes the final section of the narrative is its narrative elaboration.”

<sup>145</sup> 40C.

<sup>146</sup> Although perhaps a hint has been given at 39E, where Socrates turns to those who have voted for his acquittal and says: ἀλλά μοι, ὦ ἄνδρες, παραμείνατε τοσοῦτον χρόνον· οὐδὲν γὰρ κωλύει διαμυθολογήσαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους. Cf. *Phaedo* 70B: ἢ περὶ αὐτῶν τούτων βούλει διαμυθολογῶμεν; Rowe points out (1993, on 61E) that the metaphor is far from dead.

tell-tale introductory κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα<sup>147</sup> and the familiar figures of Minos and Rhadamanthus:<sup>148</sup> because the first alternative, the notion of death as nothing, is also mythical, certainly if it is compared to a dreamless sleep (which is simply a very truncated story about what death is like), but even if it envisaged only as μηδεμία αἴσθησις. The fact is that we cannot envisage what it might be like to have no sensation. Nothingness or extinction is beyond our ken, so that any words used to describe it – even the words nothingness or extinction – are attempts to imagine the unknowable, and no different in essence from the most sublime account of the soul dwelling with the gods.

At the other extreme, the process of planning the education of the guardians is described by Socrates as ὡσπερ ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντες.<sup>149</sup> And indeed the entire dialogue is referred to at one point as ἡ πολιτεία, ἣν μυθολογοῦμεν λόγῳ.<sup>150</sup> So that the content of μῦθος can range from one word to the whole of the *Republic*.

Then there are the stories about the jars in the *Gorgias*<sup>151</sup> which seem more like parables or allegories than the other μῦθοι, and which indeed are called by a different name – εἰκῶν. The trouble is they are called not only by a different name. The source is referred to as τις μυθολογῶν κομψὸς ἀνὴρ, and at the end of the first one Socrates asks Callicles if he is having any success in persuading him, ἢ οὐδ' ἂν ἄλλα πολλὰ τοιαῦτα μυθολογῶ, οὐδέεν τι μᾶλλον μεταθήσῃ; Now the allegory of the cave is

<sup>147</sup> Cf. *Apol.* 41C: εἴπερ γε τὰ λεγόμενα ἀληθῆ ἐστίν.

<sup>148</sup> Also present in the myths in the *Gorgias* (524A) and (unnamed) in the *Phaedo* (107D) and the *Republic* (614C).

<sup>149</sup> *Rep.* 376D.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 501E (λόγῳ being contrasted with the following ἔργῳ.)

<sup>151</sup> *Gorgias* 493-494.

also referred to as εἰκῶν,<sup>152</sup> and if that word can be used of both the cave and the jars, and if μυθολογεῖν can be used in connection with the jars, there seems no reason why the allegory of the cave should not also be called the μῦθος of the cave.<sup>153</sup>

Moreover, not only does Socrates refer at the beginning of the *Phaedo* to the fables of Aesop as μῦθοι,<sup>154</sup> but he fashions a fable or μῦθος of his own, in the style of Aesop, explaining the inseparableness of pleasure and pain as the result of god joining their heads together - which as Frede points out<sup>155</sup> turns into a parable of the relationship between the soul and the body.

In other words, not only is the word μῦθος given three mutually irreconcilable meanings, but the content of what are called μῦθοι, or may by analogy be considered as μῦθοι, can vary (even when the evidence is confined to the four dialogues under consideration) from a word or two to a whole book, and can include allegories, parables, fables, similes, as well as the full-blown *Jenseitsmythen* at the end of the *Gorgias*, the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Rep.* 517B and D. Both the allegory of the cave and the stories of the jars contain the verb ἀπεικάζω as well (*Rep.* 514A, *Gorgias* 493B), and both are described as ἄτοπος- *Rep.* 515A, *Gorgias* 493C.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Halliwell, 2007, p.454: "Nor does it make much sense to draw a sharp dividing line between narratives, like that of Gyges' ring, that are called *muthoi* in Plato's text, and those, such as the cave in *Republic* 7...that are not." But cf. Frutiger (pp.101 ff.), who distinguishes between allegory and myth and insists that the story of the cave is an allegory: "L'allégorie est immobile comme un tableau; il ne s'y passe rien...elle a pour objet, non pas une action, mais un état. Le mythe, au contraire, est animé comme un roman; c'est une *histoire* comportant une succession d'événements."

<sup>154</sup> Although Cebes refers to them as λόγοι (60D), i.e. the reverse of the situation at *Gorgias* 523A, where Socrates calls λόγος what he assumes Callicles will think of as μῦθος. Cf. Morgan, p.192: "Studying the *Phaedo* as it weaves back and forth between myth and argument is an exercise in determining the boundaries of Platonic *mythos*."

<sup>155</sup> D. Frede, pp.13f.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Halliwell, 2007, p.454: "We need...to beware the pitfall of equating a formal dialogue / myth distinction with a functional argument / myth distinction. The latter cannot be altogether clear-cut, if only because there is no uniform model of 'argument' in Plato's writings as a whole...The philosophical role of Platonic myths or narratives varies with the thematic and dramatic counterpoint in which they stand to their compositional settings." Or in Morgan's terms (p.155): "Myth cannot be identified by content, since the same material may function differently in different contexts."

The third problematic aspect of Plato's μῦθοι is their status, their authority. Socrates gives his assent, whether implicit or explicit, to all the *Jenseitsmythen*, an assent ranging from the εὐελπις of the *Apology*,<sup>157</sup> to the καὶ ἡμᾶς ἂν σώσειεν, ἂν πειθώμεθα αὐτῷ of the *Republic*,<sup>158</sup> to the πέπεισμαι of the *Phaedo*,<sup>159</sup> to the λόγος ἀληθῆς of the *Gorgias*.<sup>160</sup> And yet he has had each *Jenseitsmythos* at second-hand, and usually anonymously. In the *Gorgias* he has simply heard it,<sup>161</sup> in the *Phaedo* he has got it from someone,<sup>162</sup> in the *Apology* he is repeating what is said,<sup>163</sup> in the *Republic* he attributes it to Er who is otherwise unknown.<sup>164</sup> The question naturally arises, therefore, why he gives his assent to these second-hand tales?

That their authority is not irresistible is acknowledged more than once by Socrates. They may seem strange or absurd,<sup>165</sup> they may strike people as old wives' tales,<sup>166</sup> God knows whether they are true,<sup>167</sup> no sensible man would insist on their literal truth in all respects.<sup>168</sup> So where does their persuasiveness come from? Why does Socrates himself not reject them as old wives' tales? Is it because they accord with what he already believes? Are they, in other words, the expression of his belief rather than its ground?

<sup>157</sup> *Apol.* 40C, 41C. Cf. *Gorgias* 526D. Cf. *Phaedo* 63C, 114C.

<sup>158</sup> *Rep.* 621C.

<sup>159</sup> *Phaedo* 108C, 109A.

<sup>160</sup> *Gorgias* 523A, 524B.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 524A: ἂ ἐγὼ ἀκηκῶς

<sup>162</sup> *Phaedo* 108C: ὡς ἐγὼ ὑπὸ τινος πέπεισμαι

<sup>163</sup> *Apol.* 40C, 40E: κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα. Cf. *Phaedo* 63C.

<sup>164</sup> *Rep.* 614B. Cf. Halliwell (2007, p.450) on the use of indirect speech in the myth of Er: "It is equally readable as a marker of transcription, purporting to transmit a message with total fidelity, or as a constant reminder that this is someone else's version of events."

<sup>165</sup> ἄτοπος: *Gorgias* 493C, *Rep.* 515A.

<sup>166</sup> *Gorgias* 527A.

<sup>167</sup> *Rep.* 517B: θεὸς δέ που οἶδεν εἰ ἀληθῆς οὖσα τυγχάνει.

<sup>168</sup> *Phaedo* 114D: τὸ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα διισχυρίσασθαι οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς ἐγὼ διελέλυθα, οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρῖ. But cf. *Phaedo* 63C: ὅτι μέντοι παρὰ θεοῦς δεσπότηας πάνυ ἀγαθοὺς ἦξειν, εὖ ἴστε ὅτι εἴπερ τι ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων διισχυρισαίμην ἂν καὶ τοῦτο.

It has to be said that if the *Jenseitsmythen* are offered as the reason why Socrates believes in the kind of afterlife they represent, the only proper response is one of polite interest.<sup>169</sup> It would be as if a man were to tell us he believed in flying saucers, adducing as evidence only the fact that other people believed in them too.<sup>170</sup> This being the case, and given that Plato is so disparaging elsewhere about the unexamined opinions of the many,<sup>171</sup> it is tempting to adopt the alternative construction, that Socrates presents these myths as illustrations or explanations of his beliefs; so that when he says he is convinced by them or believes them or regards them as true, what he means is that as myths they contain aspects of truth, and he believes that these aspects are true because they correspond with what he already believes to be true.<sup>172</sup>

The trouble is that this takes us no further forward, since there is nothing to explain why Socrates already believes these things to be true:<sup>173</sup> even if all the arguments in the *Phaedo* for the immortality of the soul were cast-iron, it would not follow that immortality takes the form envisaged in the myths, involving judgements, rewards

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Morgan, p.201: "If, however, one does not found myth on a logical basis that is accepted by the interlocutor, it becomes a mere story."

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Halliwell, 1993, p.18: "Nor should we shirk the ultimate question whether Plato's myths are inevitably in some degree elusive and opaque, by relying on a show of symbolism in spheres where we have no other access to what is symbolised. If so, what standing does this leave the myths in the work of a philosopher whose *oeuvre* so consistently values rationality?"

<sup>171</sup> E.g. *Rep.* 479D.

<sup>172</sup> Morgan, p.187: "Socrates believes that the soul is immortal, that nothing truly bad can happen to the soul of a good person. How does he know these things? He intuits them. But this means that he cannot present them as knowledge until they have been established by argument." And p.209: "These final myths are constructed on the basis of reasoned argument and express a meta-logical intuition about the nature of the soul."

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Halliwell (2007, p.458) on the myth of Er: "The myth itself could count as an 'argument' for belief in immortality, but only if Er's testimony is treated as authoritative, which, on the face of it, Socrates takes for granted but can do nothing to validate." And at p.460: "Given the *Republic's* wavering images of the afterlife, Er's story appears out of nowhere, professing to carry an eschatological authority that the *Republic* had not previously envisaged."

and punishments, Tartarus and Isles of the Blest.<sup>174</sup> (It is as if, to vary Pascal, Plato offers us both the immortality demonstrated by the philosopher and the immortality promised by the theologian, without either acknowledging the difference or explaining the connection.) And this also gives rise to the next problematic area: in what sense are we expected to understand these myths as illustrations of his beliefs?

There are at least three possibilities. First, at the lowest level of commitment, Socrates may be preserving an ironic distance and putting forward mere hypotheses for discussion:<sup>175</sup> that is to say, these myths are illustrations not of his beliefs but of some people's beliefs.<sup>176</sup> The various protestations of conviction (πέπεισμαι etc.) would then have to be interpreted as dramatic subterfuges<sup>177</sup> designed simply to lend verisimilitude, and we would have to speak not of Platonic anonymity but of Platonic disguise, bordering on deceit: Plato dresses up Socrates / himself as a "believer". This may seem improbable, especially perhaps in relation to the *Phaedo*,<sup>178</sup> but Bolotin actually argues that the case for immortality as it is presented in the *Phaedo* is

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. Morgan (p.195) on *Phaedo* 70D: "Transmigration may seem to be verified by the three arguments for immortality, but even aside from the soundness of these arguments, it is verification by juxtaposition. Transmigration is not a *logos* in the sense of 'argument'."

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Bolotin, p.50: "This conversation, or story-telling, about immortality might not really be philosophizing so much as it is Socrates' way of passing the day of his death, in company of his young friends, as pleasantly as possible."

<sup>176</sup> As seems to be the case, for example, with the parables of the jars in the *Gorgias*: they may sound absurd, says Socrates, but that doesn't matter if they serve the purpose of inducing Callicles to change his mind. *Gorgias* 493C: ταῦτ' ἐπεικῶς μὲν ἔστιν ὑπό τι ἄτοπα, δηλοῖ μὴν ὃ ἐγὼ βούλομαι σοι ἐνδειξάμενος, εἴαν πως οἶός τε ᾧ, πείσαι μεταθέσθαι...

<sup>177</sup> On the dramatic subterfuges involved in the myth of Er, see Halliwell, 2007, p.450: "There is consequently a sort of diegetic ambiguity to the myth, leaving it suspended between testimonial confidence and imagined distance, between an air of plain truth telling and of exotic fiction. All in all, the presentation of Er's story makes its status deliberately puzzling: ostensibly factual yet astonishingly bizarre; quasi-historiographical yet shot through with traces of the poetic; redolent of traditional Greek myths...yet with a putatively non-Greek origin that lies beyond the reach of verification."

<sup>178</sup> Cf. D. Frede, p.178: "Ob es aber plausibel ist, dass Platon Sokrates als seinen 'Schwanengesang' eine nur ironisch gemeinte Diskussion über die Seele und ihr Schicksal nach dem Tod vortragen lässt, ist höchst zweifelhaft. Im Phaidon spricht nicht allein der 'Ernst der Lage' gegen eine Distanz auf Platons Seite. Auch die Tatsache, dass er offensichtlich über den historischen Sokrates weit hinausgeht und pythagoreisches Gedankengut mit einbezieht, spricht gegen eine ironische Distanzierung. Denn warum sollte er Sokrates unmittelbar vor dessen Tod Vorstellungen über das Leben und den Tod vertreten lassen, die nicht einmal er selbst teilt?"

a front, a device designed by Socrates to wean his disciples "from their reliance on his opinions. His arguments on behalf of immortality, by their clear enough weaknesses and even their falsity, may compel some of the boys, as they think back upon them after his death, to become more independent."<sup>179</sup>

Second, there is the possibility that the deceit involved is somewhat less cynical - that Socrates is perpetrating more "noble lies". That is to say, the myths are not in fact the expression of any beliefs, they are simply presented as such for the sake of "the weaker brethren".<sup>180</sup> It may be significant that the noble lie in the *Republic* is described as μῦθος,<sup>181</sup> and that the heart of the deception is referred to as τῆ ἀληθεία:<sup>182</sup> the rulers are to think of their actual education as merely a dream, and the μῦθος they are to learn to regard as the truth. We ourselves would then be in the position of the rest of mankind who come afterwards,<sup>183</sup> who believe<sup>184</sup> the myth because, human nature being what it is, the tale grows more plausible in the telling and eventually μῦθος is accepted as λόγος – καὶ τοῦτο μὲν δὴ ἔξει ὅπη ἂν αὐτὸ ἡ φήμη ἀγάγη.<sup>185</sup> The points of resemblance between that noble lie and the *Jenseitsmythen* – μῦθος, ἀλήθεια, ἡ φήμη (λέγεται / κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα), πείθεσθαι – lend some plausibility to the suggestion that Socrates did not shrink from deception in the latter any more than, eventually, in the former.

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<sup>179</sup> Bolotin p.54.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Dorter, p.81: "Socrates and Plato clearly believed that goodness is intrinsically desirable and evil intrinsically undesirable, but in a popular dialogue like the *Phaedo*, on a subject that appeals to non-philosophers as much as to philosophers, such intrinsic worth and worthlessness is illustrated at another level by the extrinsic rewards and punishments related in popular religion. Plato would be content to use these illustrations as metaphors, while allowing those who would to take them literally, like the *Republic's* 'noble lie'." And at p.7: "Like the *Republic's* 'noble lie', they are in reality metaphors, but metaphors put forward as if literal."

<sup>181</sup> *Rep.* 415A, 415C.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* 414D.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* 415D: οἱ ἔπειτα οἱ τ' ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι οἱ ὕστερον.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* 415C: τοῦτον οὖν τὸν μῦθον ὅπως ἂν πεισθῆεν, ἔχεις τινὰ μηχανήν;

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* 415D.

And the noble lie may be told more effectively when it is accompanied by the same kind of rhetorical or forensic trick which Socrates ridicules in the *Gorgias*.<sup>186</sup> There Polus tries to bolster his case by appealing to the many who think as he does, but in doing so he simply adds to the number of witnesses rather than to the weight of the argument. In the *Jenseitsmythen* Socrates may be doing the same thing, with his ὡς λέγεται, and his κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα, and his ὑπό τινος πέπεισμαι. This should really be no more persuasive than if he had said, "I imagine the afterlife will be something like this. . .", yet it sounds more persuasive to a gullible jury.<sup>187</sup>

But the trouble about the approach which explains the eschatological myth in terms of the noble lie is its assumption that Plato was as ready as modern commentators are to demystify and demythologize his ideas. Julia Annas, for example, after pointing out the depressing and (in relation to the previous nine books of the *Republic*) unsatisfactory consequences of understanding the myth at all literally, suggests that Plato (demythologizing his own myth) intended it to show us that "we are responsible for the people we are in making the choices we make. . .The myth, with its apparatus of judgement day eternally going on, makes us aware of the existential nature of decisions that make us the people we are." But she is by no means convinced by her

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<sup>186</sup> *Gorgias* 471E.

<sup>187</sup> There is a good description of what is going on in the mind of a gullible member of the jury when Rechenauer says (p.240): "Die Präsentation des Mythos stützt sich nicht auf die Autorität des Dialogführers Sokrates, sondern auf eine höhere anonyme Instanz. Es ist nicht die Person Sokrates, die hier versucht, sein Gegenüber zu bereden, sondern seine Stimme gibt nur wieder, was als 'wahr seiend' aus einem unfassbaren Anderswo zu ihm gekommen ist (*Gorgias* 523a2-3). Durch die Verlagerung der auktorialen Stimme an eine ungenannte Wahrheitsquelle verändert sich auch die Rezeptionssituation. Die mythische Erzählung erlangt eine höhere Objektivität, sie entrückt den Hörer gleichsam wie durch ein Fenster aus der augenblicklichen Dialogsituation und bringt hin in ein neues Objektivitätsverhältnis zu der jenseitigen Welt, die zugleich die Aussenseite seiner Innenwelt, seiner Seele ist. Damit wird im Mythos wie in einer Synopse die eigene Subjektivität mit der Objektivität des Wirklichen zur Deckung gebracht." That is, Rechenauer explains what he has been persuaded to believe by the appeal to external authority, not why he (or we) *should* be persuaded by it.

own suggestion: "If the myth is not threatening us with future punishments in a terrifyingly impersonal universe, but bringing home to us the importance of what we are doing to ourselves now, why is it cast in the most misleading possible form from the point of view of its message?" And she concludes: "We simply cannot be sure about how Plato expected us to interpret the myth."<sup>188</sup>

Dorter, on the other hand, is quite sure how to interpret the closing myth of the *Phaedo*. Having demythologized the "doctrine of reincarnation" into "religious metaphor", he claims: "There seems no doubt that these are Plato's views, and I see no reason to believe that Plato thought that these analogies must manifest themselves also as literal transformations after death. His religious language conveys images that vividly bring home to us the implications of our choice of a way of life and of the kind of persons that we are, and I take it that the truth of these images is intended not in their application to some incomprehensible future but to the present."<sup>189</sup> In the preface to his book, Dorter draws attention to the antithesis between the analytic and dramatic approaches, and states that his intention is to synthesise the two. But what emerges from these remarks on Plato's "religious language" is a different antithesis, the age-old one between the philosophic and the poetic, between λόγος and μῦθος. And Dorter makes no attempt at a synthesis here: he sees himself, Plato and λόγος as firmly on the side of the angels.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Annas, 1981, pp. 352f.

<sup>189</sup> Dorter, p.81.

<sup>190</sup> Halliwell (2007, p.469), like Annas, proposes a "this-worldly" interpretation of the myth of Er: "If...we focus on a this-worldly reading of the myth, the motif of a prenatal life choice can be interpreted as a stark emblem of the inescapably self-forming consequences of ethical agency, a magnified image of how at every moment ('always and everywhere') the individual soul / person is intrinsically responsible for what matters most about its existence." But unlike Annas, who gives up in despair, and Dorter, who dismisses the future dimension altogether, Halliwell concludes that "the myth does not permit its readers to settle on a definitive either-or adjudication between literalism and allegory. Appropriately, in a work whose fabric is threaded with many metaphors of journeying (through life, dialectic, and the quest for justice), each reader is left with the prospect of a continuing,

Yet there is the third possibility that Socrates, rather than simply trying to make his ideas more attractive and accessible by putting them in mythical dress, may be operating on the principle (and perhaps the parables of Jesus are an analogy) that some ideas can only be expressed by putting them in mythical dress - as a kind of *Veranschaulichung des Unanschaulichen*: he is painting pictures in words which conceivably have more power to reveal what may lie in store for us than any rigorous argument. Far from being a kind of postscript, or an optional extra, the eschatological myths would then have to be seen as the culmination, the crown, the nearest approach to the truth. Their status in relation to the preceding dialogue would be that of singing and dancing in relation to the Homeric feast - its ἀναθήματα.<sup>191</sup>

At the close of the *Phaedo* myth, Socrates proposes that the venture of believing something like it is well worthwhile<sup>192</sup> and (taking up an earlier remark about charming away the fear of death)<sup>193</sup> that it is a good thing to sing such incantations to oneself<sup>194</sup> - which is why he has prolonged the tale.<sup>195</sup> The μῦθος, on that view, the incantation (the bedtime story for "the child within"), is the supreme weapon against τὰ μορμολύκεια, against the fear of death.<sup>196</sup> And Socrates himself is the best teller of bedtime stories.<sup>197</sup> But it is not the case that "incantation is meant to supplement rational argument by appealing to our pre-conceptual nature - 'the child within' - at the

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upward journey (621c), which is also a choice of how far to follow Socrates in the moral imagination along the cyclic path between this world and the other (619e)."

<sup>191</sup> *Od.* I.152 - taking that word to mean something like "crowning justification" (which seems to be the implication of such passages as *Od.* VIII.38-45, 62-99) rather than simply "ornament" or "proper accompaniments" (see West on I.152).

<sup>192</sup> *Phaedo* 114D: τοῦτο καὶ πρέπει μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεῦσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* 77E: Ἀλλὰ χρῆ, ἔφη ὁ Σωκράτης, ἐπάδειν αὐτῷ ἐκάστης ἡμέρας...

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* 114D: καὶ χρῆ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὡσπερ ἐπάδειν ἑαυτῷ.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*: διὸ δὴ ἔγωγε καὶ πάλαι μηκύνω τὸν μῦθον.

<sup>196</sup> As Edelstein puts it (1949, p.475): "That is why we must counteract sorcery by sorcery."

<sup>197</sup> *Phaedo* 78A: Πόθεν οὖν, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, τῶν τοιοῦτων ἀγαθὸν ἐπωδὸν ληψόμεθα, ἐπειδὴ σύ, ἔφη, ἡμᾶς ἀπολείπει;

level of emotion and imagination"<sup>198</sup> (where "supplement" implies a "non-rational reassurance" which is superfluous for the philosopher), because it is specifically the "man of sense"<sup>199</sup> whom Socrates recommends to sing charms to himself.<sup>200</sup> The point is that perhaps at some stage λόγος has to give way to μῦθος (for the philosopher just as much as for the unsophisticate), and if this is the case it would make sense to see μῦθος as ἀλήθεια, indeed as λόγος<sup>201</sup> - not in the sense of the logical basis for one's beliefs, but as the only way of putting one's beliefs into words.<sup>202</sup>

But whatever status these myths have, and whether they are demythologized or not, each expressly makes ethical demands on the way we lead our lives. In the *Gorgias*<sup>203</sup> Socrates deduces from the accounts of the judgement the obligation to live as good a life as possible. In the *Phaedo*<sup>204</sup> he says that because of what he has recounted we must do our best to acquire virtue and wisdom in this life. In the *Republic* he interrupts the myth of Er<sup>205</sup> to infer that we must ἀεὶ πανταχοῦ choose

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<sup>198</sup> Dorter, p.8.

<sup>199</sup> νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρὶ - *Phaedo* 114D.

<sup>200</sup> In other words, the strategy of incantation is both available and necessary to everyone, not just the naive. Cf. Halliwell, 2007, p.470: "In such cases [as the myth of Er and the noble lie], acceptance of a story's literal veracity (cf. *Phaedrus* 229c) is not the only option; confidence in its normative authority must also be reckoned with. If we look for illumination outside the *Republic*, we find that the myth that underwrites the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo* needs to be 'repeated as incantation' (*epaidein*): that is, employed as a nonepistemic, partly self-persuasive device, used by Orphics, among others, for dealing with recurrent fears or problems. On that analogy, the mythic epilogue to the *Republic* invites a trust that might be as much *affective* as rational." Cf. also Edelstein, 1949, p.474. And cf. Morgan, p.200, on the emotional satisfaction which the *Phaedo* myth provides and which was lacking in the immortality arguments.

<sup>201</sup> *Gorgias* 523A: "Ἀκουε δὴ, φασί, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἠγήση μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον· ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν."

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Dodds, p.376: "[Plato's] eschatological myths describe a world which he admits to be beyond ordinary human knowledge (cf. [*Gorgias*] 527a); they are the imaginative expression of an insight which could not be expressed save in symbolic terms." Dodds then refers to the *Seventh Letter* 335a2 and proceeds: "The writer plainly has the *Gorgias* in mind; and if the writer is Plato we must, I think, say that the *Gorgias* myth is called a λόγος because it expresses in imaginative terms a 'truth of religion'." (Morgan disagrees (p.191): "Socrates may think that his eschatological *mythos* is a 'truth of religion', but this is not why he calls it a *logos*. He does this because he views it as an extension of his philosophical *logos*...")

<sup>203</sup> 526D.

<sup>204</sup> 114C.

<sup>205</sup> 618C.

the best life possible, and he closes it with the observation that it will save us if our souls remain uncontaminated.<sup>206</sup> And this seems to lend additional support to that interpretation of the "practice of death" which sees it not as an ascetic renunciation tantamount to "an attempt to approximate suicide without technically committing the offence,"<sup>207</sup> but rather as a part - a vital part - of the art of life.

## 5. Summary and Conclusions

Plato's dialogues are more concerned with the relationship between this life and the afterlife, between how we lead our lives and what happens to us after death, than with dying and the death of others. But the formula in the *Phaedo* which appears to encapsulate that relationship - that true philosophers "practise death" - is ambiguous, both in terms of vocabulary (μελετᾶν and its various apparent synonyms), and in terms of how "practice" relates to "philosophy" (sometimes it is simply equivalent to philosophical activity, sometimes it is the necessary condition for that activity), so that it is unclear whether the practice is oriented to this life or to the afterlife.

The dramatic setting of the *Phaedo* inevitably encourages the latter interpretation but, conversely, the absence of certain themes which are conspicuous elsewhere, particularly in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, suggests that such an interpretation may be distorted, and may need to be qualified or complemented. An examination of the *Gorgias* shows that it is at the other extreme from the *Phaedo* in its emphasis on the practical or civic virtues of δικαιοσύνη and σωφροσύνη, and in its corresponding lack

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<sup>206</sup> 621 B-C.

<sup>207</sup> Dorter p.31.

of emphasis on purely cerebral philosophical activity and - until the closing myth - on the afterlife as an inducement to ethical behaviour during this life. The *Republic*, on the other hand, seems to offer a synthesis of these opposing tendencies in its insistence that - in the ideal state - the philosopher, having glimpsed the eternal realities, must be prepared to re-enter the cave before qualifying for translation to the Isles of the Blest.

The comparison suggests that each dialogue represents a different perspective on the relationship between life and death, and that the less negative and life-denying interpretation of the practice of death in the *Phaedo* is more in tune with the implications of the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. That suggestion has then to be tested against the eschatological myths which close the three dialogues. But Plato's understanding of  $\mu\hat{\omega}\theta\omicron\varsigma$  turns out to be elusive,<sup>208</sup> both in definition and in scope, and on the question whether the *Jenseitsmythen* are the basis for his beliefs or simply express his beliefs, the evidence is inconclusive. Finally, it is uncertain whether his intention in using these myths is that we should be deceived by a noble lie, mesmerised by incantations, or enlightened by poetic imagery.

In the light of so many imponderables, a wise agnosticism may be in order. On the other hand, it could be argued that the multiplicity of problems is true to life. Death itself is so imponderable, and our attitude to approaching death so shifting with age and circumstance, that none of us can take up a permanent, unvarying stance over

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<sup>208</sup> Intentionally, in Morgan's view: "Given [Plato's] doubts about the efficacy of language and written discourse...we cannot expect that he would give a stability to myth that he denies to his own dialogues." (p.157.) On the contrary, "the richness and complexity of this mythological material is of a piece with Platonic philosophical complexity; the permeable boundaries of myth reflect the elusiveness of the dialogues...Plato writes myths for precisely the same reason that he writes dialogues: to ward off certainty and keep the philosophical quest alive in terms that acknowledge its frailty." (p.161.)

against it. The differences, tensions, contradictions between and within these dialogues, however perplexing or at times exasperating, are perhaps more of a strength than a weakness; and perhaps the proper response is not to try to reduce them all to a coherent system, nor to insist that any one of them represents Plato's real thoughts on the subject, but to allow the tensions to co-exist and each dialogue to compete with and so to complement and complete the others.

This means that the μελέτη θανάτου in the *Phaedo* need not be understood as a blueprint for the philosopher at the outset of his career, any more than the schoolboy could expect to get away with it who instead of answering the question in his exam paper quoted Socrates: "All I know is that I know nothing." The Socratic profession of ignorance is plausible only at the end of the process, and it is only when the prospect of hemlock has concentrated the mind that the art of life can be reduced to the μελέτη θανάτου. Of course the implications of Socratic ignorance can be salutary at every stage in life, and so can those of the μελέτη θανάτου. But neither offers a short cut: Cleombrotus probably made the same mistake as the schoolboy.<sup>209</sup>

And yet, whether or not Cleombrotus made a mistake, at least he responded, at least he acted, at least reading Plato made a difference to him. Whereas an uncommitted, detached, objective verdict that on the whole the *Phaedo* probably does not mean

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<sup>209</sup> As G.D. Williams puts it (p.156), Cleombrotus "jumps first to his conclusions and then to his death without testing his inferences..." Williams refers (p.162) to the comments of the neo-Platonist Ammonius on Cleombrotus and ἡ θανάτου μελέτη. Ammonius distinguishes "two kinds of death, the natural separation of the soul from the mortal body at the end of life (ὁ φυσικός θάνατος) and 'purposive death' (ὁ προαιρετικός θάνατος), or what the true philosopher undergoes in preparing his soul for its release from the body when natural death eventually claims him. By the words ἡ θανάτου μελέτη, claims Ammonius, Plato means this stage of preparation (ὁ προαιρετικός θάνατος), but Cleombrotus misunderstood him: interpreting the phrase ἡ θανάτου μελέτη as an injunction to commit suicide (ἡ τοῦ φυσικοῦ θανάτου μελέτη), he took his life accordingly." In other words, Ammonius portrays Cleombrotus "as a keen young student who studied the *Phaedo* with more enthusiasm than intelligence."

quite what it says about approaching death, seems hardly to do justice either to the solemnity of the setting or the importance of the subject. Putting it another way, and recalling the main purpose of this exercise, does Plato actually offer us any help when we come to approach our own death? Or rather, since he certainly appears to offer help, does he succeed in helping us?

The answer depends on whether we are philosophers or not. If we are not, then things are far from rosy, unless we are content with the prospect of coming back as bees, because that seems to be as much as we can hope for. Without philosophy we will be afraid to die, we will be inconsolable when others die, and our future will consist of an endless process of reincarnation. The only solution is to become philosophers, since philosophers face death fearlessly, accept bereavement calmly, and have more or less exclusive access when they die to the Isles of the Blest. But there are two difficulties: how do we know it is true that philosophers go to the Isles of the Blest, and how do we become philosophers?

To assure us of the first, we have the arguments and stories used by the philosophers. The trouble is partly that the arguments and the stories relate to different things (the former to the bare fact of immortality, the latter to the conditions which pertain to it), the connection between the two being unexplained;<sup>210</sup> and partly that the stories seem to have the status of untested hearsay, or mere assertion, or poetic fancy, or perhaps simply wishful thinking - because there must be a suspicion of wishful thinking when a philosopher asserts that paradise entails an eternity of philosophical conversation.

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<sup>210</sup> Cf. Bolotin, p.44: "And yet even if the soul does continue to exist in the state of death - and this is of course a large assumption - how can the philosopher be confident that his soul will come to be wise, or in possession of the truth, after he dies? How can he even be confident that the rulers in Hades are not ill-disposed to philosophy, and that they will not place obstacles in the way of his soul's quest for wisdom or enlightenment?"

And then, on the assumption that those of us who are not philosophers find such a reward sufficiently enticing, how do we set about earning it? How do we become philosophers? According to the *Gorgias*, we are to lead virtuous lives, which sounds reasonable and even perhaps possible. But according to the *Phaedo*, lives of ordinary practical virtue turn out not to be worth very much: as philosophers what we will really be required to do is lead lives of such contemplative detachment that logically we will cease to engage with this world altogether.<sup>211</sup> And according to the *Republic*, there is no point in even thinking about becoming philosophers unless we are endowed by nature with considerable and unusual mental gifts.

We might perhaps conclude that a recipe for approaching death which appears to be supported, at the highest, by intuition or revelation, and which benefits only the class to which the person laying claim to the intuition or revelation belongs, is less than helpful to the very large majority who are not members of that class and have no prospect of joining it. But this may be because we are looking for something which Plato does not intend to offer. To some extent, this would be Plato's own fault, since it does seem as if in the eschatological myths he is offering us a future on certain conditions which most of us are unable to fulfil, and so we turn away empty-handed in confusion or despair. It is possible, however, that if we expect less we will receive more. That is to say, if we read Plato as challenging us to view approaching death as the most important thing in life, as the controlling element in our lives, which should determine the way we live, then we will have received a great deal. How that will work out in practice, must depend on who we are and where we are. The example which Plato presents in the *Phaedo*, of the ascetic philosopher practising death or

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. Bolotin, p.48: "...if, as this [*Phaedo* 83D] implies, all pleasure and pain is necessarily at odds with the duty of the philosopher, no human being can possibly fulfil that duty."

preparing for death and led by the promise of eternal contemplation of the eternal realities, is only an example; just as the other dialogues present different examples, of different ways of practising an art of life, led by different kinds of promise - but always an art of life which is justified, or hallowed, or purified by a proper regard for the reality of death.<sup>212</sup>

In other words, if we see Plato as laying down objective rules for how everyone should live, on the basis of objective truths about what will happen when they die, we are likely to find him unhelpful. But if I see him as offering me advice on how I should live my life in the light of my approaching death, then I will be a fool not to listen to his advice. What will happen then is another story, my story: the "practice of death" epitomizes the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Cf. Bolotin, p.55: "...it does seem to me that it is in and through the activity of philosophizing that we can be most adequately reconciled - as we cannot help but want to be - to the awareness of our own mortality. In his activity of thinking the philosopher accepts, but does not simply yield to, the sadness that accompanies this awareness. And it is above all, it seems to me, because philosophy thus incorporates an acceptance of the necessity of death that Socrates characterizes it as the practice of dying and being dead."

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Schaerer, p.14: "Socrate est et n'entend être qu'un éducateur; une force invincible le pousse à s'approcher des jeunes gens et à provoquer en eux la *connaissance de soi-même*, c'est-à-dire l'éclosion d'un savoir à la fois personnel et général, différent de l'opinion individuelle (δόξα) qui est purement subjective, et de la connaissance discursive (διάνοια) qui est, ou prétend d'être, purement objective. La science la plus rigoureuse, c'est dans le *moi* qu'il va la chercher, et cette objectivation du moi est le but et la raison d'être de sa pédagogie."

### III. Cicero on Death and Immortality

*Fussé je mort moins allegrement avant qu'avoir veu les Tusculanes? J'estime que non.* (Montaigne *Essais* III.12.)

#### 1. Preliminaries

Two modern biographies of Cicero make rather different claims about his attitude to immortality. Lacey: "In this work [the *Consolatio*], Cicero also seems to have felt what would now be called a growing faith in the existence of an eternal, imperishable soul."<sup>1</sup> Shackleton Bailey: "Cicero had no firm faith in the life after death."<sup>2</sup> Lacey's assertion could hardly be inferred from the few surviving fragments of the *Consolatio*: what he really means is: "The *Consolatio* seems to support the implication of the other works, that Cicero felt a growing faith. . ." Shackleton Bailey is also writing in the immediate context of the *Consolatio*, but equally obviously it is on the basis of the other works as well that he has unhesitatingly reached the opposite conclusion.

Now Shackleton Bailey and Lacey published their biographies within seven years of each other, and their statements relate to one very specific matter on which there is a wide-ranging body of evidence - in the letters, in the philosophica, and in the circumstances of Cicero's life. There are two possible responses to their diametrically opposed conclusions. The first is that one of them is right and the other wrong. The second is that neither can be said to be either right or wrong, that it is a question which we are unable to answer because of the nature of the evidence. Which of these two responses is correct is now to be explored.

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<sup>1</sup> Lacey, p.129.

<sup>2</sup> Shackleton Bailey, 1971, p.215.

The written evidence is easily listed: it is contained in the *De Republica* (the *Somnium Scipionis*), in the fragments of the largely lost *Consolatio*, in the *Tusculanae Disputationes* (especially Books I and III), in the *De Senectute*, in the *De Amicitia*, and in the letters (especially of course to Atticus.) But it is one matter to establish what a man says: it is another matter to establish what he means by what he says, and another matter again to establish what he actually believes. And in Cicero's case there are several complicating factors.

Some of his philosophical works were written during brief respites from intense forensic and political activity, some at a time of enforced leisure (in effect retirement),<sup>3</sup> some in immediate reaction to a cruel bereavement, and some in a kind of reaction to that reaction. All of them reflect and some bear the marks of the background against which they were written: they vary from the detached to the despairing, from the cynical to the serene, from cool objectivity to naked emotion.

And of course they differ greatly in genre. The *De Republica* is a "historical" dialogue, i.e. a fictional dialogue set in a specific historical period with historical *dramatis personae*. The *Tusculans* are contemporary dialogues, perhaps with a largely factual setting, in which Cicero himself both appears and hides. The *Consolatio* was probably addressed to himself, and was certainly directed at himself as an exercise in self-therapy. The *De Senectute* and the *De Amicitia* are again "historical" dialogues, but in atmosphere more mellow, and in content more moralistic than speculative or analytical. As well as this variety of genres, there is his habit of presenting both sides of the question with equal persuasiveness - a habit deriving not just from the practice

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *De Div.* II.7: "*philosophiam nobis pro rei publicae procuratione substitutam putabamus.*"

of law and the teaching of rhetoric but from his philosophical background.<sup>4</sup>

Together, these considerations mean that it is sometimes dangerous to base the interpretation of any particular passage on what is said in another work, or even elsewhere in the same work. For example, it might be naïve to draw conclusions from the absence of any real mention in the *Somnium Scipionis* of the fate of the wicked, when the point is simply to indicate the ultimate reward of the virtuous statesman. And it might be unwise to contrast the second half of Book I of the *Tusculans* either with the first half of the same book or with the *De Senectute* and the *De Amicitia*, and to argue that because Cicero is just as persuasive when he assumes the soul's mortality as he is when he assumes its immortality, therefore there is a tension or a contradiction within his own thinking.

The letters are rather a different matter. Of course far from being homogeneous themselves, they are as mercurial in mood as Mozart. But they provide another dimension, an insight into what Cicero was feeling as well as thinking, a unique additional tool (unique at any rate in the ancient world) in the interpretation of the works written for publication. It would be going too far to claim them as a control, and to assume that they always offer the unvarnished truth about the personality within. Private letters do not necessarily reveal the unvarnished truth: the writer inevitably plays a different role with different correspondents, and the role he plays even to his most intimate friend may not be the role he plays in addressing himself. In particular, the argument from silence is a dangerous one in this context - for example, the assertion that Cicero's mourning for his daughter was short-lived because after the

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. *T.D.* II.9. And cf. *De Nat. Deorum* II.11. See Long (pp.299-304) on Cicero's strategy in attributing the philosophical / rhetorical practice of *in utramque partem dicere* largely to Aristotle.

first few months there is no further reference to her in his correspondence.<sup>5</sup>

But what the letters do say provides a significant commentary on his feelings, and significant clues to his beliefs. Without them, and without the few surviving references to the *Consolatio*, there would only be the handful of brief allusions to Tullia in the *Tusculans*, which would scarcely be enough to indicate his devastating sense of loss and the nature of his reaction to it.

This gives rise to another caveat. We know more about Cicero than we do about anyone else in the ancient world - more, that is, about his flaws as well as his virtues. Indeed one of his recurring flaws is his readiness to speak about his virtues, and one of his occasional virtues his candour about his flaws - though we know more about both from reading between the lines. As Shackleton Bailey says: "In Cicero's letters we see a Roman Consul, on any reasonable estimate one of the most remarkable men of his eventful time, without his toga. . . The letters that reveal him were never meant to become public property - his state of mind if anyone had told him that this would one day happen hardly bears imagination."<sup>6</sup>

But this exceptional access which we have to his character is liable to make us unfair in our judgement. We are tempted to compare him unfavourably with other philosophers, about whom we know nothing apart from what they have chosen to tell us. We know how they thought the wise man should live, not how wisely they lived themselves. In Cicero's case we know a great deal about how he lived, and we know how far short he fell of his own ideal "wise man". Occasionally he tells us this

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<sup>5</sup> See Shackleton Bailey, 1971, p.215.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.xi.

himself:<sup>7</sup> more often we can infer it from what we know of him from his correspondence.

An obvious example is the contrast between repeated statements in the *philosophica* about Cicero's deep regard for philosophy, and the absence of any hint of philosophical reflection or solace in the letters written during the two lowest periods of his life before Tullia's death. In the preface to Book I of the *Tusculans* he refers to his early proficiency in philosophy and his life-long devotion to it, and in the preface to Book V he extravagantly expresses his debt.<sup>8</sup> Yet the letters from exile in 58 and from Brundisium in 47 after Pompey's defeat not only make no mention of any turning to philosophy - even in small measure - but they are filled with evidence of precisely the *perturbationes* from which in the *Tusculans* the wise man is alleged to be entirely free.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of this glaring contradiction it is easy to accuse Cicero of hypocrisy. And it has to be said that he sometimes brings it on himself, not just by removing his toga in the letters but by taking a rather *de haut en bas* tone in the *philosophica*. The occasional admission of past weakness in the *Tusculans* is more than offset by the Olympian manner in which he instructs, and sometimes mocks, his young interlocutor. And at one point he offers a hostage to fortune in the form of a lament

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. *T.D.* IV.63.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* V.5 "*O vitae philosophia dux, o virtutis indagatrix expultrixque vitiorum! quid non modo nos, sed omnino vita hominum sine te esse potuisset? . . . Ad te confugimus, a te opem petimus, tibi nos, ut antea magna ex parte, sic nunc penitus totosque tradimus.*"

<sup>9</sup> All the key terms of the *Tusculans* are present in the letters of those years - *dolor, maeror, aegritudo, miseria, malum, molestia* (see e.g. *Att.* 11.9; 11.10; 11.17a; 11.25) - without any suggestion that the emotions they describe are at all unworthy. Cf. *Pro Sestio* XXII.49, where he even makes a political virtue of his *dolor*, and contrast *Par. Sto.* 29-32, where he claims that his exile was no hardship to him since he possessed the Stoic virtue of equanimity. And cf. Livy's assessment (Seneca, *Suasoriae* VI.22): "*sed in longo tenore felicitatis magnis interim ictus vulneribus, exilio, ruina partium pro quibus steterat, filiae morte, exitu tam tristi atque acerbo, omnium adversorum nihil ut viro dignum*

over the inability of philosophers to practise what they preach. They are worse than grammarians who commit solecisms, or music teachers who sing out of tune.<sup>10</sup>

Yet there are two reasons why it would be simplistic to regard fortune as having accepted that hostage by preserving the letters, and to mock Cicero in turn. The first is that as he himself points out the "wise man" of the philosophers does not exist: he is a hypothetical goal to be striven for, not an actual example to be emulated.<sup>11</sup> And the second is that what the contrast between the philosophica and the letters reveals may be not so much a charlatan as a human being like everyone else. Because there is no doubt that the letters are an invaluable window into Cicero the human being.

And on the face of it that window is the more necessary because of his professed intention in the philosophica of keeping his own views to himself.<sup>12</sup> Several times in the *Tusculans* he says that his custom is to refrain from committing himself to any school, and rather to look for what seems to be the most probable solution in every problem;<sup>13</sup> and he expressly states that in these discussions he has used Socrates as his model "*ut nostram ipsi sententiam tegeremus*".<sup>14</sup> It sounds therefore as if the *Tusculans* are a detached search for the truth which will tell us nothing about Cicero himself, but against this there are two considerations. In the first place, the view

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*erat tulit praeter mortem.*"

<sup>10</sup> *T.D.* II.12. Ironically enough, Cicero himself is warned of this very thing by Servius Sulpicius Rufus in his consolatio on Tullia's death (*Fam.* IV.5.5): "*Denique noli te oblivisci Ciceronem esse et eum qui aliis consueris praecipere et dare consilium, neque imitare malos medicos, qui in alienis morbis profitentur tenere se medicinae scientiam, ipsi se curare non possunt.*"

<sup>11</sup> *T.D.* II.51. Cf. IV.58.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. *De Nat. Deorum* I.10: "*Qui autem requirunt quid quaque de re ipsi sentiamus, curiosius id faciunt quam necesse est.*"

<sup>13</sup> I.17, II.5, IV.7. See also *De Div.* II.72, 150 and *De Nat. Deorum* II.12: "*Non enim sumus ii quibus nihil verum esse videatur, sed ii qui omnibus veris falsa quaedam adiuncta esse dicamus tanta similitudine ut in iis nulla insit certa iudicandi et adsentiendi nota. Ex quo exstitit illud, multa esse probabilia, quae quamquam non perciperentur, tamen, quia visum quendam haberent insignem et inlustrem iis sapientis vita regeretur.*"

<sup>14</sup> *T.D.* V.11.

which seems to him the most probable<sup>15</sup> will presumably be the view he adopts himself, so that the conclusions of the *Tusculans* will be his own.<sup>16</sup> In the second place, the setting of the *Tusculans* is more factual than fictional, in the sense that Cicero's own personality and circumstances are frequently in evidence, quite without disguise. The prefaces to each of the five books are written by Cicero in his own person, and the dialogues themselves contain several references to his own unhappy lot, and to the reasons for writing the *Consolatio* and the benefits it brought him.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, when it comes to seeing into Cicero's mind the letters are not necessarily transparent and the philosophica not necessarily opaque. Indeed a curious reversal of the argument concerning Plato suggests itself. Plato seemed to the systematic or dogmatic critic to be expressing in his dialogues his own arguments and conclusions, and on the basis of these conclusions to be offering advice on, for

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<sup>15</sup> There are two applications of "probable" here. One - explained in *De Nat. Deorum* II.12 - relates to the impossibility of reaching certainty rather than probability in matters of sensory perception. The other relates to the assessment of competing opinions on the sort of ethical problems discussed in the *Tusculans*. Cicero's views on the latter may be so manifest that they can be regarded as certain - i.e. it may be regarded as certain that he held them. Cf. Long, p.289: "[Cicero's] official allegiance to the sceptical Academy carries with it no doctrinal commitments outside epistemology, nor, on the other hand, need it inhibit him from approving the plausibility of philosophical theses - for instance, the immortality of the soul in *Tusculan Disputations* book 1 - if he finds the arguments in their favour more convincing than those against them."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Douglas, 1995, p.205: "In *Tusculans* 5:11 [Cicero] claims ...to be following Socrates (and Carneades) ... in concealing his own opinion and freeing others from error. It is scarcely possible to reconcile the first part of this claim with what actually happens in the *Tusculans*, even if we allow that his conclusions are only 'the most probable', and that...he cannot wholly shake off some hesitancy about the views he advances with apparent conviction."

On the question whether Cicero was justified in claiming to be a disciple of Socrates in this respect, see Vlastos, 1991, p.5. According to Vlastos, Socrates certainly acknowledged that his elenctic method could not achieve "final demonstrative certainty" but it does not follow from this that he suspended judgement about everything and never made positive assertions. "How Arcesilaus and Carneades could have associated their systematic adherence to ἐποχή with Socrates' ringing affirmations we shall never know: our information about them is too scant." Vlastos argues that Cicero (and he himself in an earlier book) fell into the same trap. But on the evidence of the *Tusculans* it looks as if, while certainly attributing to Socrates a "systematic adherence to ἐποχή," Cicero himself was just as willing to make "ringing affirmations" as in Vlastos' view Socrates was. Cf. Colish, p.141: "Cicero states in this work [the *Tusculans*] that he is merely expounding the views of several scholars without espousing any one position, on the grounds that philosophical debate assists us on the path to truth even though the answers it provides may only be probable ones. In actuality, he does arrive at positive conclusions which he professes without doubting either their certitude or their capacity to strengthen the troubled soul."

example, approaching death; whereas the dramatic critic insisted that Plato had preserved his anonymity. Cicero, on the other hand, claims that his philosophical works are impartial and say nothing about himself, whereas on closer inspection they turn out both to reflect the circumstances of his life and to disclose his own thoughts and beliefs. So in the *Tusculans* he gives three reasons for his decision to return to philosophical studies. One is that he now has the leisure to pursue what has always interested him.<sup>18</sup> Another is that he sees an opportunity for continuing service to the State by making Greek philosophy accessible to his fellow-citizens.<sup>19</sup> But a third is that no other consolation could have been found in his cruel sorrows.<sup>20</sup> He means of course not simply the consolation of activity, of having something to do, but the consolation which comes from the pursuit of wisdom. Because it is not just the writing which has brought him relief, it is the conclusions he has come to in his writing.<sup>21</sup>

In these circumstances it is reasonable to proceed in Cicero's case in the way which it was argued was illegitimate in relation to Plato, namely to treat at least some of his dialogues<sup>22</sup> not as dramatic works but as vehicles for his philosophical ideas - as philosophy dressed up; and specifically it may be reasonable to infer that recurring themes in the philosophica like the immortality of the soul were for Cicero of more than simply academic interest, and that he regarded some at least of his conclusions as more than simply probable.

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<sup>17</sup> I.66,76,83,109,111; III.76; IV.63; V.121.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. *T.D.* I.1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* I.1,5-6; cf. *De Div.* II.1.

<sup>20</sup> *T.D.* V.121, and cf. I.111 and *Att.* 12.14.3.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. *T.D.* I.111 and *De Div.* II.3 (the latter about his *Consolatio* - "*quae mihi quidem ipsi sane aliquantum medetur.*")

<sup>22</sup> E.g. *T.D.*, *De Sen.*, *De Am.* In others, such as *De Nat. Deorum* and *De Div.*, it may be that Cicero deliberately distorts the views of the various schools represented by the speakers in order "to expose the weaknesses in the ways that the philosophers have dealt with theological questions." (Colish p.110.)

## 2. The Evidence

### A. *Somnium Scipionis*

None of the three reasons which Cicero gave for writing the later philosophica applied to the *De Republica*. Composed in the years 54 - 51, at a time when he was heavily involved in law and politics (though "*cum gubernacula rei publicae tenebamus*" was overstating it),<sup>23</sup> he had no leisure to occupy, there was no need of consolation, and he was not systematically engaged in transplanting Greek philosophy to Roman soil.<sup>24</sup> And although it might be thought ironic that an eminent statesman should envisage a special place in heaven for eminent statesmen,<sup>25</sup> it would be difficult to argue that the *Somnium Scipionis* provides a window into Cicero's soul.

Certainly there is nothing systematic about the *Somnium*. It is not a treatise on death and immortality. Its status is similar to that of Plato's eschatological myths (it is clearly modelled on the myth of Er), and like them it raises the question of what relation it is intended to bear to reality. After all, it is presented as a dream. It would obviously be a mistake therefore to treat it as a systematic and exhaustive account of the afterlife.<sup>26</sup> Its function seems to be to indicate that the reward of the eminent

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<sup>23</sup> *De Div.* II.3.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Douglas, 1995, p.197: "Nor can everything that Cicero says in the prefaces be taken at face value. In particular, in the preface to *De Divinatione* 2, he implicitly treats the whole of his mature theoretical writings so far completed as forming a coherent programme of works essentially similar in character and intention. Despite this encouragement from the author himself to regard the whole corpus as all of a piece, it has long been recognised that only error and confusion can result from treating the writings of the late 50s as precisely the same in intention, treatment of sources, and the state of Cicero's knowledge of various matters, as the later series."

<sup>25</sup> *De Rep.* VI.13. (But cf. Boyancé, 1936, p.140: "Le *Songe* ne fait pas autre chose qu'appliquer au moment de la récompense suprême cette même manière d'envisager l'idéal de la vie politique . . . Son homme d'État garde encore quelque chose du philosophe platonicien.")

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Büchner, whose article criticises theories of separate sources behind the *Somnium* by emphasising the thematic links between it and the preceding books of the *De Republica*. The *Somnium* is not an independent entity (as the manuscript tradition might suggest), it is a culminating poetic

statesman will be commensurate to the otherworldliness of his motives. Or as Macrobius puts it, "*illa esse stabiliora et viridiora praemiorum genera, quae ipse vidisset in caelo, bonis rerum publicarum servata rectoribus.*"<sup>27</sup>

There are certainly several themes in the *Somnium* which are repeated or developed in the later philosophica:<sup>28</sup> for example, the argument from motion,<sup>29</sup> the divinity of the soul,<sup>30</sup> the separation of soul from body as a training for death,<sup>31</sup> the image of the body as the prison of the soul,<sup>32</sup> and the notion that the final release of soul from body must not be anticipated without divine permission.<sup>33</sup> But the chief importance of the *Somnium Scipionis* in the context of Cicero's approach to immortality is that it is evidence for his interest in the idea of an afterlife - to put it no more strongly<sup>34</sup> - many years before his bereavement.

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fiction which symbolises the theme of the whole work, the supreme importance of *virtus* of the Roman statesman. E.g. p.79: "Die Ewigkeit nach dem Tode in glücklichem Leben sieht wie ein Symbol für eine irdische Wirklichkeit aus, das im Traum verdichtet, was die grosse *virtus* erspürt, ersehnt, in sich erfährt, nämlich den Zusammenhang der objektiven selbstlosen grossen bewussten Tat mit zeitüberlegener Ewigkeit."

<sup>27</sup> SS I.4.2-3.

<sup>28</sup> See Boyancé, 1936, p.121, Note 1 for a list of parallels between the *Somnium Scipionis* and the *Tusculans*.

<sup>29</sup> *De Rep.* VI.27, cf. *T.D.* I.53f For some of the flaws in this argument, see Powell, 1990, p.165.

<sup>30</sup> *De Rep.* VI.26, cf. *T.D.* I.65f.

<sup>31</sup> *De Rep.* VI.29, cf. *T.D.* I.74f. But the verb uses in the *Somnium* is *exerceo*, and what is envisaged is the *virtus* involved in the "*curae de salute patriae.*"

<sup>32</sup> *De Rep.* VI.15. Colish (pp. 94f.) argues that while Cicero in the *Somnium* is certainly not presenting a Stoic eschatology, he does nevertheless succeed "in imbuing this common doctrine with a Stoic aura." But the notion of the body as prison of the soul is scarcely compatible with Stoicism (as Colish herself points out - at p.133 - in connection with the *De Senectute*) and the two immortals in the dream appear to have escaped from the Stoic cycle of conflagrations.

<sup>33</sup> *De Rep.* VI.15. Though as an illustration of the same principle in the *Tusculans* (*T.D.* I.74) Cato's suicide - subsequent of course to the *De Republica* - is regarded as legitimate. This implies that Cicero regarded Cato's moral / political predicament as equivalent to divine permission - and indeed the inference must be that Cato himself thought so, if as Seneca says (*Ep.Mor.* XXIV.6) he read the *Phaedo* before committing suicide.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Büchner (p. 25), who endorses the view that "Cicero sicher nicht in einem buchstäblichen Sinne an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele geglaubt hat. Es ist ein Traum." But this seems to slide from "not necessarily" to "necessarily not". It may be a mistake to read into the *Somnium* Cicero's belief in immortality: it does not follow that he had no such belief.

## B. *Consolatio* and the Letters

Cicero's daughter Tullia was born in 76. She married three times: she was widowed while still in her teens, the second marriage ended in divorce, and she was in the process of divorcing her third husband, the dissolute Dolabella, when she died. Her first child by Dolabella died in infancy; the second was born in January 45, a few weeks before her death - and the child itself was dead by the summer.

The letters reveal an extraordinary attachment to this daughter whom he still referred to in her twenties as "*Tulliolam, quae nobis nostra vita dulcior est.*"<sup>35</sup> After Pompey's defeat he writes from Brindisium that his Tullia has joined him and extols his exceptional daughter's *virtus*, *humanitas* and *pietas*.<sup>36</sup> Three weeks later, in the context of the arrangements for her divorce, she is not just exceptional, she is unique.<sup>37</sup>

And in a letter written after her death in response to bracing condolences from his friend Sulpicius Rufus, he apologises for and at the same time justifies his grief.<sup>38</sup> He points out that the examples of fortitude in bereavement cited by Sulpicius Rufus had the consolation of honourable standing in public life: and when Cicero was deprived of that he still had the domestic consolation provided by his daughter.<sup>39</sup> But now that has been removed, leaving him doubly stricken.

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<sup>35</sup> *Fam.* XIV.7.1.

<sup>36</sup> *Att.* 11.17 (12/13 June 47).

<sup>37</sup> *Att.* 11.25.3: "*ego huius miserrimae facilitate confectus conflictor. nihil umquam <si>mile natum puto.*"

<sup>38</sup> *Fam.* IV.6.

<sup>39</sup> *Fam.* IV.6.2: "*habebam quo confugerem, ubi conquiescerem, cuius in sermone et suavitate omnis*

And he was indeed overwhelmed by grief.<sup>40</sup> Tullia died in his villa at Tusculum in mid-February 45, and he went straight to Atticus's house in Rome, where he lived for three weeks and read everything ever written on the alleviation of mourning.<sup>41</sup> He then moved to his villa at Astura, and from then to the end of August (except for two breaks in April and July when he was again staying with Atticus) he wrote a letter to his friend almost every single day. And he wrote other things. In fact he wrote all day long,<sup>42</sup> and went on writing for a year and a half, a constant stream of philosophical works.

The *Consolatio* seems to have been completed in draft form by the 8 March. In the same letter in which he describes himself as writing all day long, he says that he has done something unprecedented in consoling himself through writing.<sup>43</sup> (Though he adds: "*sed omnem consolationem vincit dolor.*")

What manner of work was this which was written in the three weeks following the death of his beloved daughter?<sup>44</sup> Only a few quotations from it survive, as well as several references to it in other works by Cicero. In *De Divinatione*, where he lists and summarises all the philosophica, he says: "*Nam quid ego de Consolatione dicam? quae mihi quidem ipsi sane aliquantum medetur, ceteris item multum illam*

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*curas doloresque deponerem.*"

<sup>40</sup> Carcopino (p.278) is sceptical: "Il l'étale [sa grande douleur] dans les lettres avec une jactance qui choque notre sensibilité et ferait douter de la sienne." (Carcopino's two-volume work is a sustained stream of invective worthy of Cicero himself. Even the chapter headings are venomous: "un avocat qui coûte cher... un magistrat qui s'enrichit... un mari trop intéressé... un père trop indifférent... un beau-père trop accommodant... une vanité malade... fanfaronnades et couardise... malice et fourberie.")

<sup>41</sup> *Att.* 12.14.3: "*de maerore minuendo scriptum.*"

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: "*totos dies scribo.*"

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: "*quin etiam feci, quod profecto ante me nemo, ut ipse me per litteras consolaretur. quem librum ad te mittam, si descripserint librarii. adfirmo tibi nullam consolationem esse talem.*"

<sup>44</sup> According to Carcopino (pp.286ff) it was simply an exercise in self-inflation: "Sous prétexte d'amortir et de bercer sa détresse, il l'a rapetissée à la taille d'un exercice d'école, et il l'a profanée en l'abaissant au niveau de sa vanité littéraire... Avec un empressement fébrile, il saisit la déplorable occasion d'y [le 'genre' de la consolation] exceller comme dans les autres."

*profuturam puto.*"<sup>45</sup> And he refers to it in a letter to Atticus of 15 March 45 as his treatise on the alleviation of mourning.<sup>46</sup>

In that same letter he asks Atticus to check some facts for him, relating to whether certain historical figures had survived the death of their children, which indicates that the *Consolatio* consisted at least in part of examples of fortitude in the face of bereavement. This is confirmed by a reference in the *Tusculans*<sup>47</sup> where he says that in his *Consolatio* he found it helpful to recount the examples of those who had been able to bear the accidents of fortune, i.e. in the context, bereavement. Other references in the *Tusculans* describe the *Consolatio* as bringing together every conceivable method of alleviating mourning and grief.<sup>48</sup> And one cure apparently was to contrast the sorrows of this life with the life to come.<sup>49</sup> The only quotation from the *Consolatio* in the *Tusculans* is on that theme - the divinity of the soul.<sup>50</sup>

But there is another quotation from the *Consolatio* in Lactantius which is more personal and which introduces what is a dominant theme in Cicero's correspondence with Atticus during the months following Tullia's death - his determination to honour the memory of his beloved daughter by erecting some sort of shrine for her.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *De Div.* II.3.

<sup>46</sup> "*librum de luctu minuendo*" - *Att.* 12.20.2.

<sup>47</sup> *T.D.* IV. 63.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* III.76.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* I.76: "*M. Quo cum venerimus, tum denique vivemus; nam haec quidem vita mors est, quam lamentari possem, si liberet. A. Satis tu quidem in Consolatione es lamentatus, quam cum lego, nihil malo quam has res relinquere.*"

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* I.66: ". . . Singularis est igitur quaedam natura atque vis animi, seiuncta ab his usitatis notisque naturis. Ita quidquid est illud, quod sentit, quod sapit, quod vivit, quod viget, caeleste et divinum ob eamque rem aeternum sit necesse est. . ." And for very similar language cf. *De Rep.* VI.26: "*Deum te igitur scito esse, siquidem est deus, qui viget, qui sentit, qui meminit, qui providet. . .*"

<sup>51</sup> Lactantius, *Inst. Div.* I.15.19-20: "*cum uero,' inquit, 'et mares et feminas complures ex hominibus in deorum numero esse uideamus et eorum in urbibus atque agris augustissima delubra ueneremur, adsentiamur eorum sapientiae quorum ingeniis et inuentis omnem uitam legibus et institutis excultam constitutamque habemus. quodsi ullam umquam animal consecrandum fuit, illud profecto fuit. si Cadmi progenies aut Amphitryonis aut Tyndari in caelum tollenda fama fuit, huic idem honos certe*

The *fanum* for Tullia is first mentioned in a letter dated 11 March 45, but already it is "that" *fanum*.<sup>52</sup> He wants Atticus's approval, but his mind is made up, indeed he considers himself irrevocably bound.<sup>53</sup> The only thing he is uncertain about is the site, and it is for this that he requires the services of Atticus. There are two considerations: it must remain effectively consecrated ground ("*quasi consecratum*") through any future changes of ownership, and it must be sufficiently in the public eye ("*celebre*").<sup>54</sup> A suburban property or small estate (*hortus*) would fit the bill, but time is of the essence: "*ita tamen ut hac aestate fanum absolutum sit.*"<sup>55</sup> By the 16 March Astura itself and Arpinum have been rejected, and on the 18 March he is thinking of Drusus' place, or Lamia's or Silius'.<sup>56</sup> Money is no object, in the sense that he is determined to find something suitable and he no longer cares about plate or fabrics - this is what he wants now.<sup>57</sup>

Atticus, clearly disapproving of the whole idea,<sup>58</sup> cleverly suggests that the *fanum* might combine with an ἐγγήραμα, a retirement pad.<sup>59</sup> At first Cicero dismisses this: "*alia magis quaero.*" But a week later he has come round: the important point is the *fanum*, but he admits he does need somewhere for himself - Atticus may call it what

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*dicandus est. quod quidem faciam teque omnium optimam doctissimam approbantibus diis immortalibus ipsis in eorum coetu locatam ad opinionem omnium mortalium consecrabo."*

<sup>52</sup> "*de fano illo dico.*"

<sup>53</sup> *Att. 12.18.1: "ego, quantum his temporibus tam eruditus fieri potuerit, profecto illam consecrabo omni genere monumentorum ab omnium ingeniis sumptorum et Graecorum et Latinorum. [Which presumably means that there is an embarrassment of riches to choose from.] quae res fortisan sit refriatura vulnus meum. sed iam quasi voto quodam et promisso me teneri puto, longumque illud tempus cum non ero magis me movet quam hoc exiguum, quod mihi tamen nimium longum videtur."*

<sup>54</sup> *Att. 12.19.1 (14 March).*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Att. 12.22.3.*

<sup>57</sup> *Att. 12.23.3: "hoc opus est."*

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. *Att. 12.43.2 (12 May): "res indicat quanto opere id cupiam, cum tibi audeam confiteri quem id non ita valde probare arbitrer".* Cf. Carcopino's gloss (p.281): "Imperturbable, Atticus collectionne les instructions contradictoires, et s'abstient d'en exécuter aucune. Il a mesuré le gouffre que creuserait cette mégalomanie."

he pleases.<sup>60</sup>

And from then on till mid-July, there are constant references to the *fanum*, and to a growing list of candidates. Some turn out not to be for sale, some are too small, some are too little frequented. But his enthusiasm for the idea, far from diminishing, becomes more and more urgent. 5 May: "*loco valde opus est.*"<sup>61</sup> 11 May: "*avide sum adfectus de fano.*"<sup>62</sup> 14 May: "*intemperans sum in eius rei cupiditate quam nosti.*"<sup>63</sup> 23 May: "*cuius rei cupiditas*"<sup>64</sup> 29 May: "*urge, insta, perfice.*"<sup>65</sup>

References to possible sites continue until 9 July, when Cicero discovers that the latest candidate, the Scapula estate, will be affected by Caesar's plans to expand Rome.<sup>66</sup> "That seems," says Shackleton Bailey, "to have put an end to the whole *fanum* project. . .As for *horti*, Cicero's acquisition shortly afterwards of some near Puteoli as part of his inheritance from the banker Cluvius may have consoled him for the disappointment of his earlier plans."<sup>67</sup> He expands this slightly in the biography: "A year later a casual reference to money 'put aside for that fane' shows that it never materialised. Cicero's hankering for a suburban residence may have been diverted by his acquisition in August of a handsome property on the outskirts of Puteoli under the will of a wealthy banker."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Att. 12.25.2, and see Shackleton Bailey, 1966, Appendix III.

<sup>60</sup> Att. 12.29.2 (25 March): "*De hortis, quaeso, explica. caput illud est quod scis. sequitur ut etiam mihi ipsi quiddam opus sit; nec enim esse in turba possum nec a vobis abesse. . . vel tu illud ἐγγήραμα, quem ad modum scripsisti, vel ἐντάφιον putato.*"

<sup>61</sup> Att. 12.37a.

<sup>62</sup> Att. 12.41.2.

<sup>63</sup> Att. 12.26.1.

<sup>64</sup> Att. 13.1.2.

<sup>65</sup> Att. 13.32.1.

<sup>66</sup> Att. 13.33a.1.

<sup>67</sup> Shackleton Bailey, 1966, p.411.

But Cicero's "hankering" was not for a suburban residence: that had been Atticus' idea. And it seems improbable<sup>69</sup> that such eagerness and urgency should have been kept up for so many months, and then suddenly and permanently abandoned. It seems even more improbable when two other factors are considered. The first is that in several letters Cicero writes that he feels himself bound by a vow,<sup>70</sup> or by a feeling of duty,<sup>71</sup> or that it is a debt he owes and that he cannot find relief until he has paid it.<sup>72</sup> The second is that he had already gone public, as it were, by referring to the matter in the *Consolatio*: "*quod quidem faciam.*"<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to imagine that someone who cared as much as Cicero did about what people thought would have allowed himself in these circumstances to drop the whole matter.

There is a possible solution. Perhaps the estate at Puteoli which Cicero inherited from the banker Cluvius fulfilled the role not just of an ἐγγήραμα, as Shackleton Bailey suggests, but of the *fanum* itself. The Puteoli estate is first referred to on 11 August,<sup>74</sup> only a month after the Scapula property had fallen through, which would certainly account for there being no further mention of the *fanum* in the correspondence<sup>75</sup> - all the previous references after all had been in the form of requests that Atticus should identify or negotiate for possible sites. Moreover, Cicero's existing villas had all been

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<sup>68</sup> Shackleton Bailey, 1971, p.210.

<sup>69</sup> Though not to Carcopino (p.282): "Ainsi les jardins s'en allèrent rejoindre le bois aux oubliettes, et l'on chercherait vainement désormais dans la suite de la Correspondance une allusion au dessein que Cicéron s'époumonnait à vanter depuis quatre mois. Son enthousiasme s'est éteint aussi vite qu'il s'était allumé et les raisons qui l'ont refroidi ne sont pas plus reluisantes que celles qui l'avaient fait naître."

<sup>70</sup> *Att.* 12.18.1

<sup>71</sup> *Att.* 12.23.3: "*levatio quaedam est, si minus doloris at officii debiti.*"

<sup>72</sup> *Att.* 12.38a.2: "*hoc mihi debere videor neque levare posse nisi solvero aut videro me posse solvere...*" And cf. *Att.* 12.41.4 (11 May): "*nisi hac aestate absolutum erit,...scelere me liberatum non putabo.*"

<sup>73</sup> Lactantius, *Inst. Div.* I.15

<sup>74</sup> *Att.* 13.45.

<sup>75</sup> Except for what Shackleton Bailey (1971, p.210) calls "the casual reference to money 'put aside for that fane'" (*Att.* 15.15: "*id ego ad illud fanum sepositum putabam.*") This need not show that the *fanum* "never materialised", but simply that Cicero thought the money put aside for it was still available to him - which is consistent with the Puteoli hypothesis.

considered at one time or another (Astura, Arpinum, Tusculum), but had been rejected as not sufficiently *celebre* - which would not apply to Puteoli. And there is no doubt that he kept and used the house at Puteoli - Caesar visited him there at the end of the year.<sup>76</sup>

But whether or not what Shackleton Bailey calls "the bizarre gesture of the fane"<sup>77</sup> and Carcopino "l'orgueilleuse idée"<sup>78</sup> was ever anything more than a gesture or an idea, what was its rationale? In the letter of 11 March which first makes mention of it, he says that he has found it recommended by several of the authors he has been reading.<sup>79</sup> Presumably these authors are those who write "*de maerore minuendo*",<sup>80</sup> and presumably they recommend a *fanum* as a way of lessening grief. And clearly Cicero hopes that it will have that effect.<sup>81</sup> The question is why it should have this effect. It is certainly not a kind of psychological need for a conspicuous tomb or monument which is involved.<sup>82</sup> Indeed he explicitly excludes that. On 2 May he says that he has discovered, what had never occurred to him, that there is a fine or tax payable on *monimenta*: but it is not the fine which worries him,<sup>83</sup> it is the thought of a monument rather than a shrine<sup>84</sup> - only the latter is appropriate in the context of

<sup>76</sup> Att. 13.52.

<sup>77</sup> Shackleton Bailey, 1971, p.215.

<sup>78</sup> Carcopino, p.278.

<sup>79</sup> Att. 12.18.1: "*etenim habeo non nullos ex iis quos nunc lectito auctores qui dicant fieri id oportere quod saepe tecum egi et quod a te approbari volo: de fano illo dico.*"

<sup>80</sup> And whom he had been reading in Atticus' house - see Att. 12.14.3.

<sup>81</sup> Att. 12.37 (5 May): "*quod me a maestitia <a>vocas, multum levaris si locum fano dederis.*" Cf. 13.1 (23 May).

<sup>82</sup> Although for Carcopino (p.283) the desire for a conspicuous *fanum* is psychologically revealing: "Le Temple de Tullia, l'imagination de Cicéron ne l'avait jamais dressé qu'en hommage à lui-même. Il fallait qu'il fût somptueux pour témoigner avec éclat de l'intensité de sa douleur et de la noblesse de ses sentiments au regard de la postérité sur laquelle il tient les yeux fixés."

<sup>83</sup> It is of course according to Carcopino (p.285): "...il avoue [ in Att.12,35] sans ambages que la construction d'un sanctuaire, non seulement lui permettra d'élever sa fille jusqu'au Ciel, mais le prémunira lui-même contre le versement au trésor public des sommes égales aux dépassements de la limite que les lois somptuaires avaient assignée au luxe des monuments funéraires."

<sup>84</sup> Att. 12.35: "*quod non magno opere moveret, nisi nescio quo modo, ἀλόγως fortasse, nollem illud ullo nomine nisi fani appellari.*"

ἀποθέωσις.<sup>85</sup>

Ἀποθέωσις is the key idea, and it is this which dictates what is a suitable site:<sup>86</sup> it must therefore be *celebre*,<sup>87</sup> it must have τιμή,<sup>88</sup> its *religio* must be enduring and therefore it must be *in agro* rather than part of a house.<sup>89</sup> He does not elaborate anywhere in the letters on what precisely he means by ἀποθέωσις<sup>90</sup> - presumably he has discussed this with Atticus in the flesh,<sup>91</sup> and of course Atticus had read the *Consolatio*<sup>92</sup> which we know from Lactantius referred to the *fanum*. It seems to have little to do with the deification of heroes,<sup>93</sup> or statesmen,<sup>94</sup> or philosophers,<sup>95</sup> or human beings as such.<sup>96</sup> The quotation in Lactantius ("*teque . . . approbantibus diis immortalibus ipsis in eorum coetu locatam ad opinionem omnium mortalium consecrabo*") implies something rather different. It implies a devotional cult, both private and public, centred on a beloved person whose uniqueness can only be expressed in terms of ἀποθέωσις. This lacked precedent apparently in the Roman world<sup>97</sup> (which is perhaps why he appeals to the many - presumably Greek - authors who recommend it, and why Atticus was a reluctant aider and abettor.) But rather than dismiss the very idea as "a bizarre gesture" which was forgotten within six

<sup>85</sup> Att. 12.36.1: "*Fanum fieri volo, neque hoc mihi <dis>suaderi potest. sepulcri similitudinem effugere non tamen propter poenam legis studeo quam ut maxime adsequar ἀποθέωσιν.*"

<sup>86</sup> Att. 12.12.1: "*insula Arpinas habere potest germanam ἀποθέωσιν, sed vereor ne minorem τιμήν habere videatur ἐκτόπισμος. est igitur animus in hortis.*"

<sup>87</sup> Att. 12.19.1.

<sup>88</sup> Att. 12.12.1.

<sup>89</sup> Att. 12.36.1.

<sup>90</sup> But see Att. 12.37a: "*multa mihi εἰς ἀποθέωσιν in mentem veniunt, sed loco valde opus est.*" This seems to imply that the concept was still forming in his mind - see Boyancé, 1944, pp.179-184.

<sup>91</sup> See Att. 12.18.1.

<sup>92</sup> See Att. 12.14. And see Boyancé (1936, p.143-146) for a discussion of the background to hellenistic ἀποθέωσις.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. *De Leg.* II.19, *De Nat. Deorum* II.62, *T.D.* I.28.

<sup>94</sup> *De Rep.* VI.13.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* VI.18.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* VI.26. See Büchner (pp. 73-81) for a discussion of the background to these ideas in the *Somnium*.

<sup>97</sup> See Boyancé, 1944, pp.179-184.

months of Tullia's death, the whole episode should be taken as evidence of at least a presumption in Cicero's mind in favour of some sort of afterlife.

Cicero returned to his villa at Tusculum, where Tullia had died, on 17 May 45.<sup>98</sup>

"From this point on," says Shackleton Bailey, "the bereavement is seldom mentioned."<sup>99</sup> In the letters perhaps. But later that summer he wrote the *Tusculan Disputations*, which may be said to have been entirely inspired by his bereavement.<sup>100</sup>

### C. *Tusculanae Disputationes*

In the list of his philosophica in *De Divinatione*, Cicero summarised the *Tusculan Disputations* as consisting of five volumes which together contain the ingredients for the happy life: the contempt of death, the endurance of pain, the alleviation of distress (the worst disorder of the soul), the alleviation of the remaining disorders, and the sufficiency of virtue.<sup>101</sup> It is the first and third which have most to say about death and immortality.

#### (a) Book I. 1-25

<sup>98</sup> *Att.* 12.45.

<sup>99</sup> Shackleton Bailey, 1971, p.215. And cf. Lactantius, *Inst.Div.*I.15,21: "...fortasse dicat aliquis prae nimio luctu delirasse Ciceronem. Atqui...haec ipsa sententia nullum praefert indicium doloris; neque enim puto illum tam varie, tam copiose, tam ornate scribere potuisse, nisi luctum eius et ratio ipsa et consolatio amicorum et temporis longitudo mitigasset."

<sup>100</sup> See e.g. S.A. White, p.226: "The entire work is in effect a sustained consolatio composed in the aftermath of grave personal loss." MacKendrick, p.164: "It is to relieve his grief at Tullia's death that he marshals all his hopes about immortality in Book I: the pain, anxiety and irrational emotions for which he prescribes therapy in the middle three books are his own..." Douglas, 1995, p.214: "In the *Tusculans* we see the physician of the soul trying to heal himself."

<sup>101</sup> *De Div.* II.I.2 "*res ad beate vivendum maxime necessarias aperuerunt. Primus enim est de contemnenda morte, secundus de tolerando dolore, de aegritudine lenienda tertius, quartus de reliquis animi perturbationibus, quintus eum locum complexus est, qui totam philosophiam maxime illustrat; docet enim ad beate vivendum virtutem se ipsa esse contentam.*" Cf. M.Schofield (p.103) who thinks

As the preface indicates, the discussions purport to have taken place at Cicero's villa in Tusculum on five successive afternoons. They take the form of "Socratic" debates.<sup>102</sup> The interlocutor begins the proceedings each afternoon by proposing a topic. On the first day it is: "*Malum mihi videtur esse mors.*"<sup>103</sup>

There is an immediate skirmish which is intended to clear the ground conceptually. M. (presumably Cicero) forces A. (the interlocutor)<sup>104</sup> to admit that he does not subscribe to superstitious ideas about the horrors of the underworld ("*poetarum et pictorum portenta*"); that if the dead are not in an underworld they are nowhere; that if they are nowhere they do not exist; and that if they do not exist they cannot be wretched (*miseri*).

A. then suggests that it is wretched for us, the living, to know that we have to die (the difference from the previous stance is captured in the aphorism of Epicharmus: "*Emori nolo, sed me esse mortuum nihil aestimo.*")<sup>105</sup> M. has no difficulty in disposing of this: if, as A. has admitted, there is no evil after death since the dead do not exist, then having to die is not an evil either since it merely involves entering a condition which is admittedly not evil. And he declares that he has bigger fish to fry ("*maiora molior*"): to prove that "*non modo malum non esse, sed bonum etiam esse mortem.*"<sup>106</sup>

In order to do that, it is necessary first of all to examine what death means, and there

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that the structure of the preface to *De Div. II* indicates the central status of the *Tusculans*.

<sup>102</sup> I.8 "*fiebat autem ita ut, cum is qui audire vellet dixisset, quid sibi videretur, tum ego contra dicerem.*"

<sup>103</sup> I.9.

<sup>104</sup> The symbols M and A were added later in the tradition and are not included in Pohlenz's text. They have been retained here for convenience.

follows a doxography. Death is either the separation of soul from body, or the simultaneous annihilation of both; if the first, the soul is either immediately dispersed or it survives; if it survives, it does so either temporarily or permanently. There are also various theories about the nature and location of the soul: that it is part of the body, or inhabits a particular part of the body, or that it is breath, or fire, or an accumulation of atoms, or some kind of harmony, or - as Aristotle thinks - it is composed of a special fifth "element".<sup>107</sup> But none of those theories conflict with the proposition that "*mors aut malum non sit aut sit bonum potius*":<sup>108</sup> if the soul is identified with some part of the body it will perish with the body, and if it is breath or fire it will vanish or be extinguished - in any case there will be no sensation after death; and if it is neither *corpus* nor *anima* nor *ignis*, then there is the hope that when it separates from the body it will find its home in heaven.<sup>109</sup>

When A. rejoices at this possibility and asks to be persuaded of its reality, M. refers him to the *Phaedo* - which A. says is of no great help: while he is reading it he feels convinced, but as soon as he puts it down he finds his conviction evaporating.<sup>110</sup> M. then drives him into a corner and forces him to agree that if the soul survives death it is happy and if it perishes it is not wretched; and therefore, since death either makes us happy or frees us from wretchedness, it cannot be said to be an evil.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> I.15.

<sup>106</sup> I.16.

<sup>107</sup> I.22.

<sup>108</sup> I.23.

<sup>109</sup> I.24.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> I.25: "*M. Quid? hoc dasne aut manere animos post mortem aut morte ipsa interire? A. Do vero. M. Quid, si maneant? A. Beatos esse concedo. M. Sin intereant? A. Non esse miseros, quoniam ne sint quidem: iam istuc coacti a te paulo ante concessimus. M. Quo modo igitur aut cur mortem malum*

### Objection

There is some confusion here. A. agrees that if the soul survives it is *beatus*, and that if it does not survive it is *non miser* since as M. has forced him to admit previously it has no existence. But what A. was forced to admit previously was that the dead *tout court* do not exist anywhere, since apart from the underworld, which is dismissed as superstition, there is nowhere for them to exist. And on that basis A. had to agree that the dead are not wretched.<sup>112</sup> At that stage in the argument there were only two categories, the living and the dead, and since the latter had no existence, and therefore no sensation, there was nothing to worry about.

What has happened by I.25, however, is that there are now three categories in play: the living, the dead considered as body and soul perishing together, and the dead considered as surviving souls. In other words, the category of *mortui* now allows of the possibility of existence (not in an underworld but in heaven.) The reason for A.'s admission in I.25 that the souls which perish are not wretched is that *ex hypothesi* they have no existence,<sup>113</sup> but that ought logically to apply also to the souls which survive, since the original hypothesis was that all the dead have no existence.

The point is of course that by what looks like sleight-of-hand Cicero has excluded the possibility of there being any unpleasant sensation after death. A. is bullied into accepting that death is not an evil because the dead have no existence and therefore no sensation at all (logically, that is, they can be neither *miseri* nor *beati*.) And then the possibility is introduced that death may involve the continued existence of the soul,

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*tibi videri dicis? quae aut beatos nos efficiet animis manentibus aut non miseros sensu carentis?"*

<sup>112</sup> I.14: "Age, iam concedo non esse miseros, qui mortui sint, quoniam extorsisti, ut faterer, qui omnino non essent, eos ne miseros quidem esse posse."

<sup>113</sup> "Non esse miseros, quoniam ne sint quidem."

and it is asserted without argument that if this is the case then the soul will be *beatus*.<sup>114</sup> If A. had had his wits about him at I.25, he would have replied either: "How can the soul be *beatus*, since *ex hypothesi* when it is dead it can have no existence and therefore no sensation?" or: "If the soul does exist and have sensation after death, why should it not be *miser*?" And if he had been allowed to start all over again he might have said at the beginning: "I think that death may be an evil because the dead, if their souls survive and have sensation, may be wretched." Cicero's only rejoinder then apparently would be: "If souls survive death they are *beati*." To which the reply would be: "How do you know?"

And the upshot is that Cicero has not in fact succeeded even in the lesser aim of removing the fear of death as something wretched. It is all very well to dismiss the mythology of the underworld, the abode of the *miseri*, as mere superstition, but why is heaven, the abode of the *beati*, in principle any different?<sup>115</sup> (At I.98, ironically, he cites with approval the passage in Plato's *Apology* where Socrates looks forward to meeting Minos and Rhadamanthus in another place, whereas at I:20 he has mockingly asked A. whether he really believes that he will appear in the underworld before Minos and Rhadamanthus.)<sup>116</sup>

But although it involves sleight-of-hand, it may be simple wishful thinking that has induced Cicero to refuse to consider that *tertium datur*. At the end of Book I he says

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Gigon, p.463: "Bezeichnenderweise wird das Nachleben der Seele hier [I:25] ausschliesslich als ein Aufstieg zur Glückseligkeit in der Himmelsregion verstanden; von einem Nachleben in Unseligkeit ist nicht die Rede."

<sup>115</sup> cf. Gigon, p.460: "Sachlich ist es bezeichnend, dass die Möglichkeit eines Aufenthaltsorts der Toten unterhalb der Erdoberfläche strikte verneint wird, die Möglichkeit eines Aufenthalts in der Himmelshöhe dagegen bestehen bleibt."

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Kleijwegt, p.360: "Eine Widerlegung dieser Seite der platonische Jenseitslehre in ihrem mythischen Kleid gibt Cicero nicht; er kann sie auch nicht geben, weil damit die Autorität Platons geschwächt und die ganze These der persönlichen Unsterblichkeit der Seele gefährdet wäre."

that the thought of the loved one suffering after death is what makes bereavement most painful, so that the exclusion of that possibility is the principal source of consolation - and his principal aim.<sup>117</sup>

(b) Book I. 26-76

A. then asks M. to show if he can that souls do survive death, and if he cannot, to prove that death is free from any evil (since although he has conceded that it entails an absence of sensation, he still thinks that the prospect of being without sensation is an evil). M.'s reply accordingly falls into two parts: I. 26-76 is devoted to establishing that the soul is immortal, and I. 77-112 to maintaining that even on the assumption that the soul is not immortal, "*mors tamen non sit in malis.*"<sup>118</sup>

The argument in the first part begins with the unanimous belief of all the races of the world that gods exist and that death is not annihilation; such a belief amounts to a *lex naturae*,<sup>119</sup> and is further evidenced by the universal human concern for the future of society and civilization, and by the willingness of so many illustrious men to sacrifice their lives for the state.<sup>120</sup>

But while we are informed by nature that souls are immortal, it is by reason that we learn where and what they are.<sup>121</sup> Superstitions concerning the underworld (for

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<sup>117</sup> I.111: "*illa suspicio intolerabili dolore cruciat, si opinamur eos quibus orbati sumus esse cum aliquo sensu in is malis quibus volgo opinantur. hanc excutere opinionem mihi met volui radicitus. . .*" Cf. Kleijwegt, p.360: "In seinem Trostbedürfnis hat er also die Lehre Platons in diesem Punkte nur einseitig übernommen; seine Zuversicht auf richtiger Lebensführung war wohl nicht unerschütterlich genug um die Bestrafung im Jenseits zu erwähnen, nicht einmal als erschreckende Möglichkeit."

<sup>118</sup> I.77.

<sup>119</sup> I.30.

<sup>120</sup> I.32: "*nemo umquam sine magna spe immortalitatis se pro patria offerret ad mortem.*"

<sup>121</sup> Pohlenz (p.64) paraphrases: "Den Glauben an die Unsterblichkeit hat die natürliche Anschauung richtig bewahrt. Dagegen stellten sich bei den konkreten Vorstellungen über die Art des Fortlebens Irrtümer ein...Deshalb war die Kritik der volkstümlichen Anschauungen durch die Philosophie nötig."

example, Homer's entire *νέκυια*) arise before or without the exercise of reason, simply because of the custom of burying bodies under the ground.<sup>122</sup> The absurd notion that phantoms (*imagines*) can speak in the absence of tongue, palate, throat, lungs, derives from an incapacity for abstract thought.<sup>123</sup>

What reason - in the shape of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and Panaetius - teaches us is that the soul, whatever it consists of, is carried upwards when it leaves the body,<sup>124</sup> and that having passed from our atmosphere and penetrated into the higher regions it finds its natural home.<sup>125</sup> And there, in the contemplation of the heavenly *spectacula*, and of the *spectaculum* of the earth itself, all the longings it felt when it was in the body will at last be satisfied.<sup>126</sup> Because why should the belief of Pythagoras and Plato in the immortality of the soul not be correct? Those who disagree with them do so because they are unable to envisage a soul without a body (whereas, says M., it is probably more difficult to envisage the soul within the body.)<sup>127</sup> But the argument from motion, contained in the *Phaedrus*<sup>128</sup> and quoted in full in the *Somnium Scipionis*<sup>129</sup> and again here, is proof of its eternity.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, memory - not just the Platonic theory of recollection, but the faculty of memory in itself - together with the power of discovery (*inventio*) are proof of the divinity of the soul,<sup>131</sup> as the *Consolatio* had already argued.<sup>132</sup> It is therefore unnecessary to inquire about the

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<sup>122</sup> I.37.

<sup>123</sup> I.38.

<sup>124</sup> I.40: "*cum e corpore excesserint, sive illi sint animales, id est spirabiles, sive ignei, sublimi ferri.*" Cf. Gigon, pp.424f.: "Beachtenswert, dass noch einmal eine Alternative offen gelassen wird: nicht nur gibt es den Aufstieg, mag die Seele aus Luft oder Feuer sein, sondern auch, mag sie sich nach einer Weile zerstreuen oder dauerhaft beisammen bleiben."

<sup>125</sup> I.43.

<sup>126</sup> I.44 and 47.

<sup>127</sup> I.49-50.

<sup>128</sup> *Phaedrus* 245C-246A.

<sup>129</sup> *De Rep.* VI.27.

<sup>130</sup> *T.D.* I.55: "*ex quo efficitur aeternitas.*"

<sup>131</sup> I.65.

<sup>132</sup> I.66.

appearance or location of the soul: just as we can infer the existence of god from the stupendous works of creation, so the divinity of the soul can be inferred from these various attributes.<sup>133</sup>

M. then turns to the *Phaedo* and to the two paths which souls, according to Socrates,<sup>134</sup> may take when they depart from the body: one, a road apart, for those whose lives have been polluted by vice; the other, an easy home-coming, for those who have kept themselves from bodily pleasures.<sup>135</sup> "*Tota enim philosophorum vita, ut ait idem, commentatio mortis est.*"<sup>136</sup> And there follows an eloquent paragraph on what this *commentatio mortis* entails.<sup>137</sup>

This part of Book I concludes with M. inclining to think that, so far from death being an evil, everything apart from death is an evil for human beings - "*si quidem vel di ipsi vel cum dis futuri sumus.*"<sup>138</sup>

### Objections

(i) The argument at I.32 in support of the immortality of the soul ("*nemo unquam sine magna spe immortalitatis se pro patria offerret ad mortem*") is somewhat weakened by the fact that precisely the same argument is used in the second part of

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<sup>133</sup> I.70: "*sic ex memoria rerum et inventione et celeritate motus omnique pulcritudine virtutis vim divinam mentis agnoscito.*"

<sup>134</sup> *Phaedo* 81A-E.

<sup>135</sup> *T.D.* I.72.

<sup>136</sup> I.74.

<sup>137</sup> I.75: "*nam quid aliud agimus, cum a voluptate, id est a corpore, cum a re familiari, quae est ministra et famula corporis, cum a re publica, cum a negotio omni sevocamus animum, quid, inquam, tum agimus nisi animum ad se ipsum advocamus, secum esse cogimus maximeque a corpore abducimus? discernere autem a corpore animum, nec quicquam aliud, est mori discere. quare hoc commentemur, mihi crede, disiungamusque nos a corporibus, id est consuescamus mori.*"

<sup>138</sup> I.76.

Book I in support of the proposition that death is not to be feared even if there is no immortality: "*quotiens non modo ductores nostri, sed universi etiam exercitus ad non dubiam mortem concurrerunt! quae quidem si timeretur, non Lucius Brutus . . . in proelio concidisset. . .*"<sup>139</sup>

(ii) The quotation from the *Phaedo*, "*tota enim philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est*,"<sup>140</sup> raises two questions. The first is whether Cicero really means what he says when he endorses this Platonic teaching and gives, as an example of the sort of thing we must separate ourselves from, political affairs (*res publica*) of all things.<sup>141</sup> Has the philosopher really supplanted the virtuous statesman of the *Somnium Scipionis*? This much, however, is clear, that Cicero endorses a life-denying interpretation of the practice of death.

The second question, apropos virtue, is whether this reference to the *Phaedo* is not rather out of place in the context. M. (Cicero) is demonstrating the immortality of the soul, and up to this point all his arguments - the *lex naturae*, the essence of the soul, its eternity, its divinity - have been presented as objectively valid, in the sense that the soul *per se* is immortal and divine and therefore all souls are immortal and divine. There has been no mention of virtue, except once, incidentally, as one of the things beside *memoria* and *inventio* by which the divinity of the soul may be recognised.<sup>142</sup> That is the only use of the word in the whole of the first part of Book I,<sup>143</sup> yet it is the central concept in each of the remaining books: *dolor* in Book II, *aegritudo* in Book

<sup>139</sup> I.89. Douglas (1985, p.108) attempts to dilute the inconsistency by suggesting that Cicero "is more concerned with the fact of *belief* in immortality than the strength of the arguments for it."

<sup>140</sup> *T.D.* I.74. (It is in fact, although it purports to be a quotation - "*ut ait idem*" - a kind of composite summary extracted from *Phaedo* 64A, 67D, 67E and 80E.)

<sup>141</sup> *T.D.* I.75.

<sup>142</sup> I.70.

III, the other *perturbationes* in Book IV, are all subservient to and overcome by virtue, and Book V establishes that virtue by itself is sufficient "*ad beate vivendum*".

Virtue plays no real role in Book I because the task there is to remove the fear of death by teaching indifference to it,<sup>144</sup> and that is achieved by simply presenting two alternatives: either death is extinction, or the soul is immortal and happy. There is nothing, until this reference to the *Phaedo*, to suggest that the happiness of the immortal soul is conditional on any particular kind of behaviour during this life.<sup>145</sup> And indeed, given that the underworld and its punishments have been ridiculed as superstitious bugbears,<sup>146</sup> Cicero has left himself no room for any such condition.<sup>147</sup>

This may explain why, even when he does cite the *Phaedo*, he ignores all references to the punishment of the wicked in Tartarus:<sup>148</sup> the worst that can happen according to M. is that those who have not separated the soul from the body during this life will when they die advance more slowly,<sup>149</sup> and that for the souls of the wicked there will be a road apart - apart from the company of the gods.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> And it only appears at I.91, 95, and 109 in the second part - see below.

<sup>144</sup> See the summary of Book I in *De Div.* II.1 ("*de contemnenda morte*"), and *T.D.* II.2 ("*ex ea disputatione . . . magna videbatur mortis effecta contemptio*" etc.)

<sup>145</sup> Except perhaps I.27 and 45. Gigon (p.468) remarks on I.45 ("*praecipue vero fruuntur ea, qui tum etiam, cum has terras incolentes circumfusi erant caligine, tamen acie mentis dispicere cupiebant.*"): "Damit wird wie schon in I.27 angetönt, dass die jenseitige Seligkeit der Seele nicht von selbst zuteil wird, sondern durch entsprechendes Verhalten im Diesseits erworben werden muss." But this is very tenuous. In I.27, only famous men and women are envisaged as entering heaven while the rest are kept underground; but famous is not the same as virtuous, and the context there is primitive belief. And I.45 ascribes to the philosopher (in rather the same way as the *Somnium Scipionis* does to the eminent statesman) a special ranking in heaven, but says nothing about excluding others.

<sup>146</sup> *T.D.* I.10, 48.

<sup>147</sup> Kassel (pp.38f) makes the same point rather differently. The standpoint of the *Consolatio* generally, he says, and of Book I of the *Tusculans* in particular, is essentially incompatible with the spirit of the *Phaedo*: the difference is between a fearless and unconditional striving after truth in the latter and mere wishful thinking in the former. It is a difference encapsulated in the contrast between A's "*errare mehercule malo cum Platone...*" (*T.D.* I.39) and Socrates' ὑμεῖς μέντοι, ἂν ἐμοὶ πείθησθε, σμικρὸν φροντίσαντες Σωκράτους, τῆς δὲ ἀληθείας πολὺ μᾶλλον... (*Phaedo* 91 B-C.)

<sup>148</sup> *Phaedo* 113-4.

<sup>149</sup> *T.D.* I.75: "*tardius ingrediuntur.*"

<sup>150</sup> I.72: "*is devium quoddam iter esse, seclusum a concilio deorum.*"

(c) Book I: 77 - 119

M. now turns to the task of showing that death is not an evil even on the assumption that the soul is mortal. And when A. says that he will insist in any case on clinging to the idea of immortality M. applauds him but cautions that it is better not to be overconfident in anything, since we are liable to be swayed by clever arguments even in straightforward matters, and in the present case there is "*aliqua obscuritas*".<sup>151</sup> But then, as if unable himself to turn away from the idea of immortality, he proceeds to discount the Stoic theory of a limited survival of the soul, and to refute the twin arguments of Panaetius that souls are born and therefore perish, and that they are susceptible of pain and sickness and therefore perish.

Having done that he pulls himself together, as it were, and gets down to the task: "*spero fore ut contingat id nobis [sc. in caelum migrare]. sed fac, ut isti volunt, animos non remanere post mortem: video nos, si ita sit, privari spe beatioris vitae; mali vero quid adfert ista sententia?*"<sup>152</sup> None at all, is the answer, because then there will be no sensation after death.

What *is* painful is the thought that death means a departure from all the good things of life. But in fact, as the *Consolatio* showed, life is more wretched than good, so that death really takes us away from evils.<sup>153</sup> He will not go so far as Hegesias, whose pessimism induced several of his audience to commit suicide, but his own situation

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<sup>151</sup> I.78.

<sup>152</sup> I.82.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Pohlenz, p.102: "Der Nachweis, dass das Leben ein Jammertal sei, war Gemeinplatz der Trostschriften - cf. I.113-117."

provides him with a good example: if he had died before his present troubles had manifested themselves, death would have removed him from evil rather than from good.<sup>154</sup> Other examples of the same principle are Priam before the siege of Troy and Pompey in his prime. But even if it were admitted that the dead are deprived of good things, they cannot be said to feel the need of (*carere*) these good things since they have no sensation at all. Death is therefore not an evil to be feared, any more than is sleep, "*imaginem mortis*".<sup>155</sup>

As for the notion that it is wretched to die before one's time, such absurdities are to be dismissed like old wives' tales<sup>156</sup> because there is no such thing as "one's time". Life is like a loan made to us by nature, without any fixed date for repayment, and she can recall it whenever she pleases.<sup>157</sup> And in any case, longevity is a relative concept: Aristotle's *bestiolae* in the Pontus live only for a day, but compared with eternity our lifespan is like theirs. Rather than pay any attention to such *ineptiae*, we should concentrate entirely on the practice of virtue.<sup>158</sup> We should take as our models the deaths of Theramenes<sup>159</sup> and Socrates, whose final speech in Plato's *Apology* is then given.

There follow some Spartan examples of scorn of death, which leads rather abruptly to a survey of funerary customs: M.'s advice is that because the bodies of the dead have no consciousness, and whatever is done concerns only the living, the whole subject of

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<sup>154</sup> I.84: "*Qui et domesticis et forensibus solaciis ornamentisque privati certe si ante occidissemus, mors nos a malis, non a bonis abstraxisset.*"

<sup>155</sup> I.87-92

<sup>156</sup> I.93: "*pellantur ergo istae ineptiae paene aniles.*"

<sup>157</sup> I.93.

<sup>158</sup> I.95.

<sup>159</sup> I.97: "*Quis hanc maximi animi aequitatem in ipsa morte laudaret, si mortem malum iudicaret?*"

funerals "*est contemnendus in nobis, non neglegendus in nostris.*"<sup>160</sup> And the final "argument" is that the surest way of facing death on the assumption that it involves extinction is to have lived a life of perfect virtue - like Cicero himself, for example.<sup>161</sup>

The epilogue to Book I<sup>162</sup> quotes the judgement of the immortal gods on death - that it is the greatest gift they can bestow on man - and sums up the whole argument: the fear of death must simply evaporate before the Socratic alternatives.<sup>163</sup>

### Objections

(i) M.'s answer to the objection that death deprives us of the good things of life, is that in fact it deprives us of evil.<sup>164</sup> For example, in his own case, if he had died before being robbed of the consolations of family life and the distinctions of a public career, death would have deprived him of (future) evil rather than of (present) good.<sup>165</sup> But the objection to this answer is that it has no relevance where death occurs before the consolations of family life and the distinctions of a public career have been experienced at all. And such distinctions can hardly be insignificant if they are considered to be the ultimate consolation in the face of annihilating death when all other arguments fail to convince.<sup>166</sup> What if Pompey had died before he had become the Great? What about Tullia?

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<sup>160</sup> I.108.

<sup>161</sup> I.109.

<sup>162</sup> I.112-119.

<sup>163</sup> I.117: "*Quae cum ita sint, magna tamen eloquentia est utendum atque ita velut superiore e loco contionandum, ut homines mortem vel optare incipiant vel certe timere desistant? nam si supremus ille dies non extinctionem, sed commutationem adfert loci, quid optabilius? sin autem perimit ac delet omnino, quid melius quam in mediis vitae laboribus obdormiscere et ita coniventem somno consopiri sempiterno?*"

<sup>164</sup> I.83.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Pohlenz, p.103: "Kann doch selbst über den, der im höchsten Glücke ist, in der nächsten Stunde das Unheil hereinbrechen, so dass ihn der Tod wenn auch nicht gegenwärtigen, so doch künftigen Übeln entrückt."

<sup>166</sup> I.109.

Yet when he claims that nature owes us nothing and that she can call in the loan of life whenever she pleases, he immediately contradicts himself by saying that a death *in cunis* is more to be lamented than the death of an older child (contrary to the received wisdom) because nature has called in her gift with greater cruelty ("*acerbius*"): the child had at least begun to taste the sweetness of life ("*vitae suavitatem*"), the infant had not.<sup>167</sup>

In other words he appears to have in mind an optimum age for death (after the *vitae suavitas* has been tasted and fame and glory have been acquired,<sup>168</sup> but before anything goes wrong),<sup>169</sup> and yet he derides the notion of untimely death as an old wives' tale.<sup>170</sup>

(ii) The second significant appearance in Book I<sup>171</sup> of the word *virtus* is scarcely more suited to its context than the first was. It was out of place in the first part because the whole thrust of the argument there was that the soul is unconditionally immortal, divine and happy. And it is out of place in the second part because the argument here is based on the assumption that death means the annihilation of all sensation. Virtue can only have any relevance therefore in the sense of fortitude in facing death - which is presumably the lesson Cicero intends us to learn from Theramenes and Socrates. But in the case of Theramenes, the question "*Quis hanc*

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<sup>167</sup> I.93. Or as Dougan puts it (p.121): "half a loaf is better than no bread." But cf. *De Amicitia* 10, where it seems to be asserted that Cato's fortitude was greater because his son died not in boyhood but in the prime of life.

<sup>168</sup> I.109.

<sup>169</sup> I.84.

<sup>170</sup> I.93.

<sup>171</sup> I.95.

*maximi animi aequitatem in ipsa morte laudaret, si mortem malum iudicaret?*"<sup>172</sup> is confused: it is only if we do judge death to be an evil that calmness of spirit in facing it deserves to be applauded.<sup>173</sup> And Socrates is rather an unconvincing example of fortitude in the context of death viewed as extinction,<sup>174</sup> first because in the *Apology* he presents the alternative immortality of the soul as at least equally possible; and second because in the *Phaedo* (which Cicero has already appealed to in the previous argument) he states unequivocally that the soul is immortal.

(iii) The "Socratic" approach to the disposal of dead bodies<sup>175</sup> (which of course would apply whether the soul is considered to be mortal or immortal) raises again the question of the *fanum*. Here he says: "*quantum autem consuetudini famaеque dandum sit, id curent vivi, sed ita, ut intellegant nihil ad mortuos pertinere.*"<sup>176</sup> And he derides the self-deception of Thyestes in thinking that the dead find peace in the grave (*sepulcrum*) and that it would be a cruel fate to be deprived of a tomb: he blames Thyestes' father for not having taught him "*quatenus esset quidque curandum.*"<sup>177</sup> This may suggest that by now Cicero has, as it were, come to his senses and realises how "bizarre" a gesture the *fanum* actually was. But that would be to forget his insistence to Atticus that what he wanted was not a *sepulcrum* or a *monimentum* but a *fanum*, whose function was not to house the remains of the body but in some way to mark the deification of the soul.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> I.97.

<sup>173</sup> See Dougan, p.126: "Camerarius rightly objected to this reasoning - '*Immo vero quis laudaret magno opere illam animi aequitatem, si mortem bonum iudicaret? Nam virtus elucescit in adversis, gravibus calamitosisque casibus, non spectatur rebus prosperis et in molli vita.*'"

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Gigon, p.431: "Das eigentliche Problem: wie man sich zum Tode verhält, wenn dieser einen Übergang ins Nichtsein bedeutet, ist beinahe vergessen."

<sup>175</sup> I.102-9.

<sup>176</sup> I.109.

<sup>177</sup> I.107.

(d) Book III

The argument in Book II (the shortest book of the *Tusculans*) is straightforward. A. asserts that "*Dolorem existimo maxumum malorum omnium*",<sup>179</sup> but immediately concedes that it is a lesser evil than disgrace (*dedecus*). This means that pain can be overcome by virtue, specifically by fortitude, fortitude being man's peculiar virtue since *virtus* is taken to be derived from *vir*.<sup>180</sup> The only task therefore is to become a *vir fortis* by mastering yourself ("*reliquum est, ut tute tibi imperes*").<sup>181</sup>

But Book III deals with a different kind of pain, and it is not at all straightforward. Arguments are repeated, or resumed, or left incomplete, and the central concept is defined in slightly different ways half-a-dozen times. There is nothing to be gained by following this confusion in the order in which it appears,<sup>182</sup> so the analysis will be thematic.

A.'s opening assertion is: "*Videtur mihi cadere in sapientem aegritudo*",<sup>183</sup> and the purpose of Book III accordingly is to refute this. *Aegritudo* is said to be one of the four disorders (*perturbationes*) of the soul. (The others - *laetitia gestiens*, *libido* and *metus* - are examined in Book IV.) It is described as the soul's equivalent of physical

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<sup>178</sup> *Att.* 12.36.1.

<sup>179</sup> II.14.

<sup>180</sup> II.43.

<sup>181</sup> II.47.

<sup>182</sup> For a summary of the argument in Book III see S.A. White, pp.226ff. And cf. Philippson, who attempts to disentangle the oscillation in Book III between demonstrating that the wise man does not suffer from *aegritudo* and treating therapeutically those who do. But Philippson's analysis is preliminary to a highly elaborate reconstruction of Cicero's source.

<sup>183</sup> III.7.

pain,<sup>184</sup> and it is defined for the first time at III.25 as "*aegritudo est opinio magni mali praesentis, et quidem recens opinio talis mali, ut in eo rectum videatur esse angi, id autem est, ut is qui doleat oportere opinetur se dolere.*"

*Aegritudo* is the most damaging of the four *perturbationes*:<sup>185</sup> it is "*taetra, misera, detestabilis.*"<sup>186</sup> And while there are several forms of *aegritudo* (seven are listed at III.81 and a further fourteen at III.84 and IV.16), the most serious is that caused by mourning - *luctus* (or *maeror*).<sup>187</sup> Essentially, therefore, the task in Book III is to show that the wise man is not susceptible to *luctus*. It is a task which is easily accomplished in a general sense, by the argument that all *perturbationes* (which include *aegritudo*, which includes *luctus*) are a kind of disease (*morbus*)<sup>188</sup> or unsoundness of mind (*animi insania*).<sup>189</sup> Those who suffer from *perturbationes* are *non sani*.<sup>190</sup> Obviously the wise man is *sanus*. Ergo the wise man is free from *perturbationes* and therefore from *aegritudo* and therefore from *luctus*.

But this kind of Stoic argumentation, says M., although it is correct, requires a good deal of amplification,<sup>191</sup> because there are those who claim that *aegritudo* (specifically *luctus*) is in fact natural - sent by nature - and that it is perfectly natural and therefore not unsound or unwise or wrong to experience it. For example, Crantor is no admirer of insensibility (*indolentia*); the Peripatetics countenance moderate states of disorders of the soul; and for Epicurus the effects of *aegritudo* are natural, i.e. inevitable.

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<sup>184</sup> III.23.

<sup>185</sup> III.27: "*nam cum omnis perturbatio miseria est, tum carnificina est aegritudo.*" It involves "*tabem cruciatum adflictationem foeditatem, lacerat exest animum planeque conficit.*"

<sup>186</sup> III.25.

<sup>187</sup> III.68: "*huic aegritudini, in qua luctus inest, quae omnium maxuma est.*"

<sup>188</sup> III.7.

<sup>189</sup> III.8.

<sup>190</sup> III.10: "*ita fit ut sapientia sanitas sit animi, insipientia autem quasi insanitas quaedam.*"

<sup>191</sup> III.22.

Crantor's argument is quoted at III.12 and answered at III.71, that of the Peripatetics at III.22 and III.74 respectively; Epicurus is answered almost immediately. Except that in no case is "answered" quite the right word. Certainly the remedy for *aegritudo* proposed by Epicurus - "*bona cogitare, oblivisci malorum*"<sup>192</sup> - gives Cicero an opportunity to exercise his sarcasm. In the first place, says M., concealment and forgetfulness are not within our control; and second, since by *bona* Epicurus means *voluptates*, what this amounts to is offering our relatives caviar when they are prostrate with grief,<sup>193</sup> or soothing Andromache's distress by tucking her up in bed.<sup>194</sup>

But M.'s "reply" to Epicurus and Crantor and the Peripatetics really takes the form of a series of re-definitions of his own position, which is that *aegritudo* far from being natural involves unsoundness of mind;<sup>195</sup> that it is an idea (*opinio*)<sup>196</sup> of an instant and pressing great evil ("*magni praesentis atque urgentis mali*");<sup>197</sup> that it is a conviction (*iudicium*)<sup>198</sup> which is voluntary<sup>199</sup> and against reason,<sup>200</sup> and that it is felt to be a matter of duty.<sup>201</sup>

The proofs of the various elements in these definitions are as scattered as everything else in Book III. That *aegritudo* is *opinio* is shown by the example of men like Q. Maximus and M. Cato (and many others collected in the *Consolatio*) who accepted

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<sup>192</sup> III.35.

<sup>193</sup> III.43.

<sup>194</sup> III.46.

<sup>195</sup> III.10.

<sup>196</sup> III.24.

<sup>197</sup> III.61.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> III.80 and 64.

<sup>200</sup> III.24.

their sons' death with tranquillity because they considered *luctus* and *maeror* to be unmanly and degrading and *aegritudo* something to be spurned. "*Ex quo intellegitur non in natura, sed in opinione esse aegritudinem.*"<sup>202</sup>

That it is a matter of *voluntas* and *iudicium* is shown by the fact that grief can be kept at bay or put aside, either through fear, or through reason indicating that it is useless (*frustra*): if it is possible to set it aside, it is possible to refrain from it in the first place.<sup>203</sup>

That there is an element of perceived duty or obligation involved is shown by the guilt which is felt by people who are in mourning when they find themselves momentarily more cheerful,<sup>204</sup> or by the indignation levelled at those who accept the deaths of relatives calmly<sup>205</sup> (although those who face their own death calmly are applauded.)<sup>206</sup> "*quae nemo probaret, nisi insitum illud in animis haberemus, omnis bonos interitu suorum quam gravissime maerere oportere.*"<sup>207</sup>

All these elements are present in a final comprehensive definition at III.82: "*sed ad eundem fontem revertendum est, aegritudinem omnem procul abesse a sapiente, quod inanis sit, quod frustra suscipiatur, quod non natura exoriatur, sed iudicio, sed opinione, sed quadam invitatione ad dolendum, cum id decreverimus ita fieri oportere.*"

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<sup>201</sup> III.74. (A view associated particularly with Chrysippus - see *T.D.* III.76.)

<sup>202</sup> III.71.

<sup>203</sup> III.66.

<sup>204</sup> III.64.

<sup>205</sup> III.63.

<sup>206</sup> III.72.

In the course of developing his definition, Cicero introduces two other themes. He rejects the Cyrenaic view that unexpectedness is the principal cause of *aegritudo* but he agrees that this can greatly increase it, and that foresight and anticipation are therefore valuable weapons against it.<sup>208</sup> Indeed anticipation produces much the same effect on the wise man as lapse of time does on others: the former is protected by reason, the latter are cured by nature. Yet even in the case of the latter it is reflection which is crucial.<sup>209</sup>

Then there are the various remarks here and there throughout Book III on the strategy of *consolatio*. The purpose must be to remove *aegritudo* altogether, or to halt it, or diminish it, or divert it. But there are different theories on how this should be done: by asserting that the evil involved is non-existent, or not serious, or was not unexpected; or by the distraction of "pleasure"; or by attacking the idea that mourning is a duty;<sup>210</sup> or by giving examples of people who have endured the same loss with tranquillity.<sup>211</sup> (Cicero says that he threw all these methods into his *Consolatio*, "*erat enim in tumore animus, et omnis in eo temptabatur curatio.*")<sup>212</sup> Yet not all of them are equally effective: different people respond in different ways to different treatments. Reminding a bereaved father that his child was only mortal is unlikely to bring much comfort.<sup>213</sup> Nor is it always salutary to say "*non tibi hoc soli.*"<sup>214</sup> And it is difficult to prove to someone that he is mourning out of a sense of

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<sup>207</sup> III.63.

<sup>208</sup> III.30: In the words of Terence, let the wise man "*Pericla, damna peregre rediens semper secum cogitet, / Aut fili peccatum aut uxoris mortem aut morbum filiae.*"

<sup>209</sup> III.74: "*Cogitatio igitur diuturna nihil esse in re mali dolori medetur, non ipsa diuturnitas.*"

<sup>210</sup> III.76.

<sup>211</sup> III.58,70.

<sup>212</sup> III.76.

<sup>213</sup> III.55: (although M. seems to be ambivalent about this since he adds: "*neque tamen genus id orationis in consolando non valet, sed id haud sciam an plurimum.*"

<sup>214</sup> III.79.

duty.<sup>215</sup>

And finally there is this method of consoling oneself: "*acta aetas honeste ac splendide tantam adfert consolationem, ut eos qui ita vixerint aut non attingat aegritudo aut perleviter pungat animi dolor.*"<sup>216</sup>

### Objections

(i) Cicero never attempts to refute those who say that *luctus* is natural and inevitable. Epicurus is sidestepped by ridiculing his remedies; the rejoinder to Crantor is that we must be manly and courageous;<sup>217</sup> and the Peripatetic "mean" is dismissed on the basis that even a moderate evil is evil.<sup>218</sup> But of course that is the very thing in dispute: whether it is an evil. And Cicero's own argument, that *aegritudo* is an evil, proceeds from the assumption that it is so. *Perturbationes* are defined as *morbi*,<sup>219</sup> and those who suffer from them as *non sani*; the wise man therefore, being *sanus*, does not suffer from *perturbationes*, and therefore cannot be susceptible to *luctus*. Given that starting point, he is forced to reject any suggestion that *luctus* is in any way defensible.

(ii) This refusal or inability to see *luctus* as natural and proper, means for example that he sees it as inconsistent to applaud a man who meets his own death tranquilly and to censure a man who meets the death of his child tranquilly.<sup>220</sup> In other words having to deny that *aegritudo* is natural leads to some apparently very unnatural

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> III.61.

<sup>217</sup> III.13.

<sup>218</sup> III.22.

<sup>219</sup> III.9.

<sup>220</sup> III.72, and cf. III.67. And cf. Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* XXX.3: "*Hoc facit Bassus noster et eo animo*

results - for example that the wise man does not feel compassion.<sup>221</sup>

(iii) The method of consolation which points to those like Cato who have met the death of children tranquilly, is based on a fallacy. Their tranquillity is not evidence that they did not feel grief, nor even that they considered *luctus* unmanly and degrading.<sup>222</sup> It is simply evidence that they considered the outward forms of *luctus* unmanly and degrading. In fact it is difficult to see how any examples could be produced of the absence of internal grief.<sup>223</sup> And in any case Cato himself must be an example of someone who did feel grief, since if he had experienced no grief there would have been nothing manly about his conduct.<sup>224</sup> He may be a very good example of a man who conceals his sorrow,<sup>225</sup> but Cicero's argument is not that the wise man conceals his sorrow, but that he does not feel it in the first place.<sup>226</sup>

(iv) But the most striking thing about that wise man is how singularly he diverges from the Cicero of only a few months before. Of course Cicero admits this: "*non enim sapientes eramus,*"<sup>227</sup> and "*erat . . . in tumore animus.*"<sup>228</sup> But it does put rather

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*vultuque finem suum spectat quo alienum spectare nimis securi putares."*

<sup>221</sup> III.20: "*Etenim si sapiens in aegritudinem incidere posset, posset etiam in misericordiam.*" Cf. Kassel, p.52.

<sup>222</sup> III.71.

<sup>223</sup> This incidentally is the reason why it is impossible to answer the question "Did the ancients care when their children died?" (the title of an article by Golden) except on the basis of psychological probability. L. Stone's theory (pp.651f.) of a correlation between demography and emotion ("The omnipresence of death coloured affective relations at all levels of society, by reducing the amount of emotional capital available for prudent investment in any single individual, especially in such ephemeral creatures as infants") is less than convincing when it is applied to ancient Rome, because if it were true then the constant appeal to examples of stoical fortitude in facing the death of children would be unintelligible.

<sup>224</sup> Cicero acknowledges this himself in *De Senectute* 84, where he has Cato say: "*quem ego meum casum fortiter ferre visus sum, non quo aequo animo ferrem . . .*"

<sup>225</sup> Cf. *De Amicitia* 9, where the manner of Cato's bearing the death of his son is presented as a proof of his wisdom: "*Aut enim nemo, quod quidem magis credo, aut, si quisquam, ille sapiens fuit. Quo modo, ut alia omittam, mortem filii tulit!*"

<sup>226</sup> III.80: "*. . . nec id putet esse rectum, se quam maxime excruciaci luctuque confici, quo pravius nihil esse possit.*"

<sup>227</sup> IV.63.

<sup>228</sup> III.76.

a question mark against the lessons which Book III purports to teach. When M. at the start of Book II laments the fact that so few philosophers practise what they preach, A. asks what then is the use of philosophy? M.'s answer is that just as fields must be cultivated in order to be productive, so philosophy is the cultivation of the soul.<sup>229</sup> But Cicero tells us that he has been devoted to philosophy all his life. It sounds therefore as if he is in the position of Dionysius of Heraclea who, after spending many years with Zeno in the study of philosophy, was driven by an attack of kidney pain to assert what Zeno had denied, that pain is evil.<sup>230</sup> Presumably if Dionysius after recovering from his attack had written a book denying that pain is an evil, it would not have been well-received.

As for Cicero's claim that those who have lived honourable and brilliant lives (among whom he certainly counted himself) are immune to distress, or suffer a pinprick at most,<sup>231</sup> four words written in March 45 are enough to demolish it: "*omnem consolationem vincit dolor.*"<sup>232</sup> Yet the Cicero of that letter is much more real and sympathetic than the inhuman wise man of Book III.<sup>233</sup> The question is, what induced him to make an ideal of the latter?

The special *consolatio* which lies in the knowledge that the dead are not only *non miseri* but actually *beati*, is conspicuously absent from Book III of the Tusculans, which is devoted to how the wise man deals with another's death, or to the *luctus* which the wise man does not feel - and cannot feel without ceasing to be a wise man.

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<sup>229</sup> II.13.

<sup>230</sup> II.60: "*cum a Zenone fortis esse didicisset, a dolore deductus est.*"

<sup>231</sup> III.61: "*aut non attingat aegritudo aut perleviter pungat animi dolor.*"

<sup>232</sup> *Att.*12.14.3.

<sup>233</sup> cf *De Amicitia* 48: "*Si cadit in sapientem animi dolor, qui profecto cadit, nisi ex eius animo extirpatam humanitatem arbitramur . . .*"

That it is absent is curious, given that the whole of the first part of Book I argues the case for the immortality of the soul. And in fact Book III omits even to mention the consolation of knowing that if the soul is mortal the dead are nevertheless *non miseri*. One might have thought, after the message of Book I, that Book III was largely superfluous: what greater consolation could there be than in knowing that the dead are either happy or not unhappy? But strictly speaking Book III is not really supposed to be about *consolatio* at all:<sup>234</sup> it is about *luctus*, the most tormenting of the *aegritudines*, and its stated object is to demonstrate that the wise man is impervious to *luctus*, not to console those who in fact experience it.<sup>235</sup> And the argument used is based entirely on an extreme Stoic view of the manliness of virtue, or the virtue of manliness, and the impossibility of the wise man being assailed by any disorder of the soul.

What makes Book III stand out as harsh and unnatural, is not only its contrast with the pathos of the real-life *luctus* related in the letters to Atticus, but its contrast with the *De Amicitia*, where the same Stoic principles in the context of friendship are rejected with disgust as inhuman and as incompatible with virtue properly understood.<sup>236</sup>

It is conceivable that Cicero was driven to the stance represented in Book III by a reaction to the way he had dealt with his own bereavement.<sup>237</sup> The repeated allusions in Book III to the role played in mourning by a sense of duty echo several passages in

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<sup>234</sup> Even though Cicero himself in *De Div.* II.1 describes it as "*de aegritudine lenienda*."

<sup>235</sup> cf. S.A. White, p.226: "The question at issue in *Tusculans* 3 is whether the wise are immune to all suffering (3.7). It would have been enough, therefore, for Cicero to defend the Stoic paradox that a sage never suffers." Cf. Kassel, p.19: "In dem Nachweis, dass der Weise, wie von der *aegritudo* (Buch III), so überhaupt von jedem Affekt (Buch IV) durchaus frei ist, hat die Therapie des Nichtweisen eigentlich kein Platz..."

<sup>236</sup> See below.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Phillipson, who argues (p.276) that Cicero rearranged his source to give prominence to *luctus* as a result of his own bereavement and his consequent familiarity with the *consolationes*.

the letters.<sup>238</sup> And the many references to the fortitude with which the old Romans met the death of children suggest an embarrassment at his own weakness.<sup>239</sup> The *De Amicitia* would then represent a reaction against the reaction, a return to a more balanced and humane approach. Bereavement after all is notoriously liable to upset the judgement, and it would not be surprising if in the dozen works composed in the eighteen months following Tullia's death there should have been swings between different moods and different philosophical positions.

#### D. *De Senectute*

Written probably within six months of the *Tusculans*, the *Cato Maior* repeats the main themes of Book I, presented now not as theses to be defended but as the mature conclusions of an aged man. That they are to be taken as Cicero's own conclusions is expressly stated at the end of the preface to Atticus.<sup>240</sup>

The work takes the form of Cato's rejoinders to the four reasons for thinking old age unhappy: that it brings the end of active pursuits, of bodily strength and of most physical pleasures, and that death is close at hand.<sup>241</sup> And it is the fourth -

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<sup>238</sup> e.g. *Att.*12.14.3: "*idque faciens interdum mihi peccare videor*"; *Att.*12.23.3 [the *fanum* project]: "*levatio quaedam est, si minus doloris at officii debiti*"; *Att.*12.28.2: "*maerorem minui, dolorem nec potui nec si possem vellem.*"

<sup>239</sup> See the inferences in the letters that Atticus is trying to get him to behave more robustly, e.g. *Att.*12.20.1: "*quod me hortaris idque a ceteris desiderari scribis ut dissimulem me tam graviter dolere.*" Indeed a mere six months before Tullia's death Cicero had written a very Roman letter of "consolation" (*Fam.* V.16) to one Titius, who had lost two sons, pointing out that as far as the latter were concerned they were much better off out of it, given the political climate, and as far as Titius was concerned, his duty as a man was to maintain his dignity and to anticipate the healing effect of time by the use of reason.

<sup>240</sup> *De Senectute* 3: "*Iam enim ipsius Catonis sermo explicabit nostram omnem de senectute sententiam.*"

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

*appropinquatio mortis* - which seems to be the most cogent.<sup>242</sup> But on the contrary, even in that respect Cato finds old age not only "*non molesta, sed etiam iucunda*".<sup>243</sup> On purely rational grounds (that is to say, on the grounds of the Socratic alternatives) death should hold no fears.<sup>244</sup> And even more categorically than in the *Tusculans*, any other possibility is excluded.<sup>245</sup>

But as well as these considerations there is the authority of the great philosophers, principally Pythagoras and Plato, for accepting the immortality of the soul. And Cato is convinced.<sup>246</sup> He believes that those who have died are still living, and living the only life deserving of the name.<sup>247</sup> He looks forward to seeing his old friends, and the great men he has read about, and especially his son,<sup>248</sup> in language which recalls the description of Tullia in that letter to Atticus as "*nihil umquam simile natum puto*".<sup>249</sup> It is impossible not to feel that this passage reflects and records Cicero's own experience.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* 85.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* 66: "*Quae aut plane neglegenda est, si omnino exstinguit animum, aut etiam optanda, si aliquo eum deducit ubi sit futurus aeternus.*"

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.* 66-67: "*atqui tertium certe nihil inveniri potest. Quid igitur timeam si aut non miser post mortem aut beatus etiam futurus sum?*" Powell (1988, p.239) compares *T.D.* I.82 at this point ("*quoniam nihil tertium est*") and remarks: "No attempt is made to show that eternal life is necessarily pleasant." This is certainly true of both the *De Senectute* and the *Tusculans*, but "*quoniam nihil tertium est*" at *T.D.* I.82 actually means that there is no third thing apart from the body and the soul, not that there is no third alternative to immortal happiness and extinction.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* 78: "*sic persuasi mihi, sic sentio.*"

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* 84: "*O praeclarum diem, cum in illud divinum animorum concilium coetumque proficiscar cumque ex hac turba et colluvione discedam! Proficiscar enim non ad eos solum viros de quibus ante dixi, verum ad Catonem meum, quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate praestantior; cuius a me corpus est crematum, quod contra decuit ab illo meum, animus vero, non me deserens sed respectans, in ea profecto loca discessit quo mihi ipse cernebat esse veniendum; quem ego meum casum fortiter ferre visus sum, non quo aequo animo ferrem, sed me ipse consolabar existimans non longinquum inter nos digressum et discessum fore.*"

<sup>249</sup> *Att.* 11.25.3.

<sup>250</sup> Cf Pohlenz (p.32), for whom this passage indicates "wie sehr ihn [Cicero] der Glaube an die Unsterblichkeit, an ein Wiedersehen mit der geliebten Tullia lockt." Powell (1988, p.265) is more prosaic: "Cicero was no doubt again thinking of his own loss of Tullia."

E. De Amicitia

At the beginning of the dialogue, the young Scaevola supposes that Laelius had borne with composure ("*moderate*") the death of his dear friend Scipio Africanus, but that he could not have been unmoved by it since that would have been inconsistent with his *humanitas*.<sup>251</sup> Laelius agrees that indeed he was moved, but he found great consolation in two considerations: first that no ill ("*nihil mali*") had befallen Scipio (a common error that causes great anguish);<sup>252</sup> and second that he does not accept that death involves annihilation: he believes (as Scipio did himself)<sup>253</sup> in the immortality of the soul. But if the truth is otherwise and the soul is mortal, there is no sensation after death and so "*certe nihil mali*".<sup>254</sup>

And then at 45-48 there is a remarkable passage in which the Stoic view that intimate friendships should be avoided because they deprive the soul of freedom from care (*securitas*), is firmly rejected.<sup>255</sup> And the suggestion that friendship should be based on expediency (*utilitas*)<sup>256</sup> rather than affection is scorned.<sup>257</sup> This *securitas* is in fact to be shunned, even if doing so does entail distress of mind - to that the wise man is prone.<sup>258</sup> Virtue does not presuppose a heart of iron.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> *De Amicitia* 8.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>253</sup> A reference to the *Somnium Scipionis*.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Colish, p.135: "The conclusion that Laelius arrives at in *De Amicitia* is that the Stoic formulation of friendship is acceptable in part, but only if one substitutes a more realistic conception of human nature and of virtue for the uncompromising rationalism of the Stoa."

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* 47: "*O praeclaram sapientiam!*"

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* 48: ". . .*si cadit in sapientem animi dolor, qui profecto cadit, nisi ex eius animo exstirpatam humanitatem arbitramur . . .*"

The passage is remarkable of course because it conflicts so obviously with the description of the wise man in Book III of the *Tusculans*.<sup>260</sup>

### 3. Summing-up

#### (a) Immortality

The alternatives proposed by Socrates in the *Apology* (either the soul is immortal or death involves annihilation) form a kind of leitmotif running throughout Cicero's writings. Some of the letters<sup>261</sup> seem to foresee annihilation, others (relating to the *fanum*) imply immortality; the *Consolatio* asserts that the soul is divine, but also that death is to be welcomed not as leading to a better life but as removing us from a wretched life; Book I of the *Tusculans* is structured around the two alternatives, arguing the case first for one and then for the other; the *De Senectute* and the *De Amicitia* both come down in favour of immortality, but both include the absence of sensation as a fall-back position or consolation prize.<sup>262</sup> Of the philosophica only the *Somnium Scipionis* asserts one alternative without the other, which of course was unavoidable: the immortal Scipio Africanus could hardly postulate universal annihilation on death.

This constant tendency on Cicero's part to put the case for immortality as  $\delta\upsilon\omicron\iota\nu$

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<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

<sup>260</sup> And cf. *T.D.* V.42: "*securitatem autem nunc appello vacuitatem aegritudinis, in qua vita beata posita est.*"

<sup>261</sup> See below.

θάτερον has made difference of opinion more or less inevitable on which of the two he himself actually subscribed to. There are three possibilities: Cicero accepted or inclined to the case for immortality; he accepted or inclined to the case for annihilation; or he suspended judgement. In the light of the evidence, is it possible to say which of these is true?

The first question arising is why Cicero asserts that death is *δυσὶν θάτερον*: for example, why he structures the first Book of the *Tusculans* around these two alternatives, when he also, within the same Book, endorses the view expressed in the *Phaedo*. Because of course the *Phaedo* envisages an afterlife involving bliss and an afterlife involving punishment or purification, so that together the *Phaedo* and the *Apology* present three alternatives, the good, the bad and the indifferent. That Cicero ignored and implicitly excluded the bad, and relied on there being only the good and the indifferent, may indicate a proclivity towards a benign interpretation of death - an impression which is strengthened by the brushing aside of the interlocutor's doubts and fears at the beginning of Book I and the rather too hasty conclusion that the dead are *non miseri*.

Indeed the very fact that Book I achieves its explicit aim of removing the fear of death simply by setting out the objective status of the dead is indicative of this. While the other four books insist on the necessity (and sufficiency) of virtue in enabling the wise man to withstand the apparent evils of human existence (the various *perturbationes animi*), in Book I virtue is superfluous. In none of the passages referring to the immortality of the soul is there any real suggestion of an ethical dimension. Plato is

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<sup>262</sup> Cf. also *Pro Sestio* XXI.47 and *Fam.* V.16.4.

the principal authority, but what he says about the fate of the wicked (or of non-philosophers) is scarcely ever mentioned, and when it is the worst that can happen is that their journey to heaven will be retarded. And the absence of an ethical dimension makes the second alternative impregnable: the dead are either *beati* or *non miseri*, and death is simply explained away on the basis of objectively acquired information. There is no place for virtue and no need for wisdom. Whereas if Cicero had given equal weight to the third alternative - death followed by the punishment or purification of the immortal soul, with the consequence that the only way in which to be free from the fear of death and therefore capable of living the *beata vita* is the way of virtue - Book I would have fitted much more satisfactorily into the scheme of the whole work. This seems to imply that he really did think that there were only two alternatives.

And when the relative weight given to each of these alternatives in Book I is considered, it becomes clear where his own preference lay. As Pohlenz says, Cicero "zeigt im ersten Teile nicht nur, dass die Seele im Falle ihres Fortlebens glücklich sei, sondern beweist die Unsterblichkeit selbst und verwirft ausdrücklich die entgegengesetzte Anschauung (am schärfsten 48.9)."<sup>263</sup> The treatment of the annihilation alternative in the second half of the book is then correspondingly half-hearted, since it is provided only in case the proof in the first part has failed to convince. The result is that the force of the first part is weakened by the simple fact of there being a second part. Pohlenz concludes from this that Cicero must have had a source<sup>264</sup> for the first part by a philosopher, "der von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele

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<sup>263</sup> Pohlenz, p.28.

<sup>264</sup> It will be obvious that no attempt has been made in the above analysis "to stir the turbid waters of Quellenforschung." (Colish, p.78.) As Boyancé says in relation to the *Somnium Scipionis* (1936, p.9) it is important to distinguish two things: "l'originalité du penseur et celle de l'écrivain...Notre première

überzeugt war und nur diese erweisen wollte,” and that Cicero then provided the second part.<sup>265</sup> But a much more plausible and economical explanation for the imbalance which Pohlenz has correctly<sup>266</sup> diagnosed, is that Cicero himself was convinced of the immortality of the soul.

That inference can then be tested against the *De Senectute* and the *De Amicitia*. In each of these the acceptance of the immortality alternative is even more clearly expressed (and in the former Cato is explicitly said to be Cicero’s mouthpiece), while in each case there is a perfectly good contextual reason for stating the other alternative. In the *De Senectute* Cato is refuting the suggestion that the proximity of death makes old age unhappy, and he does this more thoroughly by covering the whole range (as he sees it) of possibilities. In the *De Amicitia* Laelius is explaining to his young interlocutors where consolation in bereavement is to be found: he himself believes in the immortality of the soul, but even if they do not accept that, there is *nihil mali* in death.

But if the suggestion that Cicero leaned towards a benign interpretation of death has ripened into a presumption that he leaned towards the immortality of the soul, is such

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tâche sera pour montrer la vanité de cette recherche, pour établir que, si aucune idée du *Songe* ne doit sa naissance à Cicéron, Cicéron est bien pourtant l’auteur véritable de son oeuvre et non on ne sait quel fantôme, sous la dictée de qui on voudrait qu’il eût écrit.” On the question of sources behind the *Tusculans*, see Douglas (1995, p.203, note 11): “J.M.Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), despite occasional notes of caution, writes (p.97) ‘at this point [*Tusculans* I:17] an essay on Death, by whomsoever composed, is inserted in the text’ and refers [p.101] to ‘the authority behind *Tusculans* I,’ basing his argument on ‘Cicero’s known methods of composition’, presumably the mere ‘scissors-and-paste’ taken for granted by earlier generations and still treated more seriously than it deserves, if somewhat sceptically, by Bringmann. . . His survey of conflicting views is apt comment on Dillon’s ‘by whomsoever’. Scholars could so rarely agree on the precise identity of Cicero’s sources because their question was wrongly formulated.” Philippson’s article is a good example of the complexity of the Quellenforschung involved, and of the self-confidence of those conducting it.

<sup>265</sup> Pohlenz, p.28.

<sup>266</sup> Gigon (p.430) disagrees: “Wir finden hier [the second part of Book I] in grösstem Stile diesselbe εποχη wie vorhin. Selbst in der Hauptfrage nach Sterblichkeit oder Unsterblichkeit der Seele will sich Cicero nicht endgültig festlegen. Dogmatische Strenge ist diesen Buche völlig fern.”

a presumption rebutted by the allegedly unequivocal assertions in the correspondence that death brings annihilation?<sup>267</sup> These are the sole instances in Cicero's writings where only one of the two alternatives is presented (apart from the *Somnium Scipionis* where only one alternative can be presented.) They are of course to be weighed against the passages in the letters to Atticus relating to the *fanum*, but do these two categories simply cancel each other out? Or do the references to annihilation suggest that the *fanum* project was an empty gesture? Or does the *fanum* project truly reflect Cicero's thinking on the question of immortality?

André,<sup>268</sup> taking his cue from Carcopino's mockery of that "orgueilleuse idée,"<sup>269</sup> stresses the significance of Cicero's letter to Toranius counselling resignation - "*praesertim cum omnium rerum mors sit extremum*".<sup>270</sup> How could these words have been written at the same time as Cicero was planning his daughter's apotheosis? Or putting it the other way round, how are Cicero's plans for the apotheosis of his daughter to be taken seriously when he could write these words at the same time? There are two possible responses. The first is that proximity in date is not the only consideration in comparing letters: more important is the recipient. It is interesting that none of the letters which refer to death as annihilation is addressed to Atticus, and all the letters which refer to the *fanum* are addressed to Atticus. As Laurand puts it: "Évidemment, il en [des idées religieuses] parle peu et ses correspondents, joyeux épicuriens ou politiques désabusés, ne goûteraient guère cette prédication."<sup>271</sup> The second is that it is not clear that the words "*praesertim cum omnium rerum mors sit extremum*" do in fact imply annihilation. They certainly imply the end of anxiety

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<sup>267</sup> *Fam.* 5.21.4; 6.4.4; 6.21.1.

<sup>268</sup> p.12.

<sup>269</sup> Carcopino, p.278.

<sup>270</sup> *Fam.* 6.21.1.

about the state of the Republic, which is the context in the letter to Toranius, but do they necessarily conflict with an expectation of the soul's immortality? As Laurand says about the remark in *Att.* 12.18 ("*Longumque illud tempus, cum non ero, magis me movet quam hoc exiguum*"): "N'oublions pas cependant que les croyants disent encore aujourd'hui: 'Il n'est plus,' sans pour cela mettre en doute l'immortalité de l'âme."<sup>272</sup>

The same considerations may apply to the other references to annihilation in the letters. To put present adversity in perspective by the reminder that death will involve the absence of all sensation,<sup>273</sup> or the end of all pain,<sup>274</sup> is not incompatible with a belief in immortality. *Expressio unius est exclusio alterius* is a maxim of the law, not of logic or psychology. The Socratic alternatives represent a maximum and a minimum expectation, and if Cicero can make his point in these letters by supposing the minimum, why mention the maximum?<sup>275</sup>

The *fanum* project itself, on the other hand, is not to be so scornfully dismissed as Carcopino and Shackleton Bailey would have it. Invective apart, Carcopino's argument is that Cicero suddenly dropped the whole idea after talking about nothing else for four months, and that he did so because he realised how costly it would be: "On est admis à soutenir que Cicéron, s'il a tiré de son orgueil autant que son chagrin ses projets de sanctuaire à la divinité de Tullia, les a sacrifiés à une avarice plus

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<sup>271</sup> Laurand, p.355.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* p.354.

<sup>273</sup> *Fam.* V.21.4: "*ut mortem, quam etiam beati contemnere debeamus propterea quod nullum sensum esset habitura.*"

<sup>274</sup> *Fam.* VI.4.4: "*praesertim cum id impendeat in quo non modo dolor nullus verum finis etiam doloris futurus sit.*"

<sup>275</sup> But cf. André, p.11: "C'est surtout dans le domaine des convictions transterrestres que la pensée de l'orateur-philosophe peut paraître flottante...Les lettres *Fam.*, 5,16 et 5,21 sont dominées par le doute et le dilemme..."

puissante sur lui que son chagrin et son orgueil réunis."<sup>276</sup> And Shackleton Bailey also infers from the sudden silence in the correspondence that the project was abruptly abandoned and that Cicero may have found consolation in the estate at Puteoli left him by Cluvius. But both these arguments would be met by the hypothesis that the estate at Puteoli represented not a substitute for the project but its fulfilment: the financial problem would no longer exist, and further references in the letters would be superfluous.

Yet even if Cicero did abandon the idea, that might be evidence of impulsiveness, vacillation, inconstancy - perhaps even of exhibitionism and avarice: it would not be evidence that he had abandoned belief in the immortality of the soul. A violently hostile and prejudiced approach sometimes fulfils the function of a devil's advocate: not even Carcopino's character assassination excludes the possibility that Cicero held such a belief, and the way in which he describes his intentions for Tullia's apotheosis, both in the letters to Atticus and in the *Consolatio* (the quotation in Lactantius), seems to turn that possibility into a probability.

How strong that belief was - whether Cicero himself considered immortality merely probable - is impossible to say, although it may be that there are hints or clues to be found here and there in the *Tusculans* in the exchanges between M. and A. In the middle of Book I, when M. turns to deal with the second alternative of annihilation, A. protests that nothing will induce him to abandon immortality. M. approves, but adds: "*etsi nihil nimis oportet confidere; movemur enim saepe aliquo acute concluso, labamus mutamusque sententiam clarioribus etiam in rebus; in his est enim*

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<sup>276</sup> Carcopino, p.285. And cf. p.284: "Plus que l'urbanisme de César, cette carence, que sans doute Atticus avait prévue, explique le renoncement final de Cicéron."

*aliqua obscuritas. id igitur si accederit, simus armati.*"<sup>277</sup> And a little further on, when A. says that he had no objection to another digression on immortality, M. replies: "*Video te alte spectare et velle in caelum migrare. Spero fore ut contingat id nobis.*"<sup>278</sup>

Perhaps these two passages capture Cicero's attitude: the hope for immortality verges on conviction, but the fall-back position is a psychological necessity.<sup>279</sup> It is as if the Socratic alternatives have become a Pascalian wager<sup>280</sup> - except that for Cicero it is more of a two-way bet, with the bigger stake on immortality as the winner.

#### (b) Death

The imbalance between Book I and Books II-V of the *Tusculans* in respect of their ethical content has the further implication that Cicero was much less concerned with his own approaching death than with the death of the other. The way in which the interlocutor's fear of death is disposed of in Book I - logically, objectively, with no ethical overtones - suggests an absence of neurosis on the subject in Cicero's make-up. Indeed the only personal allusions in Book I relate not to any fear of dying on his part but to a wish that he had died before Tullia<sup>281</sup> and to his apprehension about what she

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<sup>277</sup> I.78.

<sup>278</sup> I.82.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Pohlenz, p.32: "Namentlich in den beiden letzten Schrifte [Cato and Laelius] spürt man wie sehr der Glaube an die Unsterblichkeit, an ein Wiedersehen mit der geliebten Tullia lockt; aber dass er über die Alternative 'Entweder Fortleben oder Bewusstlosigkeit' innerlich doch nicht hinausgekommen ist, zeigen seine Briefe deutlich." Kleijwegt (p. 385) is more positive: "Weil nun die Ergebnisse des ersten Hauptteils die Unsterblichkeit der Seele nicht gewährleisten konnten, wiesehr Cicero das auch gewünscht hätte, fügte er im zweiten Hauptteil (82-119) noch die nächstbeste Möglichkeit hinzu..."

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Leeman, p.327: "Seit Platons *Apologie* (41A ff.) hat die Philosophie oft eine Art Rückversicherung in bezug auf die erhoffte Unsterblichkeit versucht."

<sup>281</sup> *T.D.* I.84.

might have had to endure after death.<sup>282</sup> Book III, on the other hand, with its references to his own reaction to bereavement and its enumeration of the manifold forms of consolation and their relative merits, indicates that he saw *luctus* as a much more dangerous enemy. In other words, in complete contrast to Seneca, who is obsessed with the question of his own death and relatively indifferent to the death of others, Cicero seems to have been unmoved by the prospect of his own death<sup>283</sup> but crushed by the death of his daughter.

The impact of Tullia's death as it is documented in the letters to Atticus can be taken at its face value - there is no need to respond to Carcopino's allegation that it was a deliberately orchestrated "grande douleur".<sup>284</sup> But the indifference to his own death perhaps requires some explanation, because the above arguments suggest not so much an unshakeable conviction that the soul is immortal, as a temperamental optimism content to accept without challenge the precarious logic of the Socratic alternatives. The question then becomes: what was the basis for that optimism?

There are two revealing passages in the *Tusculans* which suggest an answer - revealing in the sense that they are strictly speaking irrelevant to the context in which they appear, and they involve a paradox which Cicero seems to be both aware of and slightly embarrassed by. It is likely therefore that they tell us something about his real thoughts.

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<sup>282</sup> I.111.

<sup>283</sup> Except perhaps when it was imminent: Contrast Asinius Pollio and Livy on Cicero's death. Pollio: "*Atque ego ne miserandi quidem exitus eum fuisse iudicarem, nisi ipse tam miseram mortem putasset.*" Livy: "*omnium adversorum nihil ut viro dignum erat tulit praeter mortem...*" (Seneca, *Suasoriae* VI.24 and VI.22.)

<sup>284</sup> Carcopino, p.277.

The first is at I.90-91, where the argument is that on the hypothesis that death is followed by lack of sensation, the dead will not feel the need of anything: "*cum vero perspicuum sit nihil posse in eo esse qui ipse non sit, quid potest esse in eo odiosum qui nec careat nec sentiat?*" But then he suddenly says that the wise man will still consider the interests of posterity. "*quare licet etiam mortalem esse animum iudicantem aeterna moliri, non gloriae cupiditate, quam sensurus non sis, sed virtutis, quam necessario gloria, etiam si tu id non agas, consequatur.*" In other words, virtue although disinterested will win fame, which even in the absence of immortality will be eternal.<sup>285</sup>

Similarly at I.109, after the discussion of funeral customs and the conclusion that in no way do they affect the dead, he suddenly declares: "*Sed profecto mors tum aequissimo animo oppetit, cum suis se laudibus vita occidens consolari potest... quamquam enim sensus abierit, tamen suis et propriis bonis laudis et gloriae, quamvis non sentiant, mortui non carent. etsi enim nihil habet in se gloria cur expetatur, tamen virtutem tamquam umbra sequitur.*" And here the paradox is the more acute in that he uses the verb *carere* in a different sense from that in the long argument at I.87-88 that the dead "feel no need of" anything because they have no sensation: here *non carent* means "they are not deprived of". And then he goes on to say ("*quoquo modo hoc accipietur*") that Lycurgus, Solon, Themistocles and Epaminondas are not without fame ("*non possum autem dicere. . . carere gloria*"), and that anyone resembling them "*fidenti animo, si ita res feret, gradietur ad mortem.*" So although such people (and in this passage Cicero is explicitly included among them) are unconscious of having fame and glory, and because they are

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<sup>285</sup> Cf. Montaigne II.16: 604/705: "cet homme là [Cicero] fut si forcené de cette passion que, s'il eust osé, il fut, ce crois-je, volontiers tombé en l'excès où tombarent d'autres: que la vertu mesme n'estoit

unconscious cannot be said to feel the need of fame and glory or anything else, nevertheless they will not be without fame and glory. Or putting it even more paradoxically, they will not feel the need of (*non carent*) fame and glory, not just because they are unconscious, but because they will actually have (*non carent*) fame and glory.

It is tempting to conclude that these two passages in Book I of the *Tusculans* indicate why Cicero apparently approached his own death "*aequissimo animo*", and conversely that the arguments in Book III advocate an approach to bereavement which is certainly not what he actually adopted and probably not what he really endorsed.

## IV. Montaigne and Dying

*J'aymerois mieux m'entendre bien en moy qu'en Ciceron.*<sup>1</sup>

1. Background

"In the year of Christ 1571, at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, anniversary of his birth, Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employments, while still entire, retired to the bosom of the learned Virgins, where in calm and freedom from all cares he will spend what little remains of his life now more than half run out. If the fates permit he will complete this abode, this sweet ancestral retreat, and he has consecrated it to his freedom, tranquillity, and leisure."<sup>2</sup>

With this inscription, in Latin, on the wall of the antechamber to his library, Montaigne marked his withdrawal from the *vita activa* of a Bordeaux magistrate, and embarked on the *vita contemplativa* of a propertied gentleman with scholarly tastes and equipment. But with Montaigne (in spite of or perhaps because of his professed candour and eagerness to open himself up for inspection, body and soul), everything he writes has to be tested, and in fact very little in that retirement inscription can be taken on its face value.

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<sup>1</sup> III.13:1051/1218. References in French are to *Montaigne Oeuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard 1962. References in English are to *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, tr. M.A.Screech, Penguin, 1991. Page numbers for both are given, in that order. The letters A, B and C in quotations from the *Essais* indicate passages appearing for the first time in the editions of 1580, 1588 and 1595 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin text (given in Frame, 1965, p.353) is: "*An. Christi 1571 aet. 38, pridie cal. Mart., die suo natali, Mich. Montanus, servitor aulici et munerum publicorum jamdudum pertaesus, dum se integer in doctarum Virginum recessit sinus, ubi quietus et omnium securus [quant]illum id tandem superabit decursi multa jam plus parte spatii, si modo fata duint, exigat istas sedes et dulces latebras avitasque libertati suae tranquillitatie et otio consecravit.*" The above translation is Frame's. A translation into French is given in the Pléiade at p.xvi.

He had been a member of the *Chambre des Enquêtes* in the *Parlement* of Bordeaux for fourteen years, and had recently put himself forward for promotion to a higher court. But family connections in the *Grand' Chambre* disqualified him, and instead of applying for a royal dispensation he decided to resign. In those circumstances, "long weary of the servitude of public employments" may have been making a virtue of necessity. And in fact his highest public office was to come ten years later when he was elected Mayor of Bordeaux. As far as the "servitude of the court" is concerned, in the years immediately following his retirement Montaigne was made a chevalier of the order of St Michel and a *gentilhomme de la chambre* first of Charles IX and then of Henri de Navarre, and somewhat later took part in attempts to mediate between the latter and Henry of Guise. In other words, the *vita activa* was by no means a thing of the past.

But the autumnal hues of the retirement inscription are misleading in the other direction as well. Not only did the *vita activa* continue, but the *vita contemplativa* proved to be anything but a leisurely pottering around the family estate. Whether he ever intended to "complete his sweet ancestral retreat" (the Château de Montaigne acquired by his great-grandfather) is improbable: in the event he neither ruined it, as his father had predicted he would, nor did he do anything to improve it.<sup>3</sup>

Still more at variance with reality is his anticipation of "tranquillity" and "freedom from all cares". He was right in assuming that his life was more than half over, but within a few years of retirement he had ceased even to be "still entire": he had begun

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<sup>3</sup> III.9:926/1074: "[B] Puis que [C] je ne pretens acquerir que la reputation de n'avoir rien acquis, non plus que dissipé..."

to suffer the first excruciating pains from kidney stones, which were to colour the rest of his days.<sup>4</sup> And of course when he composed the inscription, the whole country had been engulfed in religious civil war for a decade, the Bordeaux region for even longer, and his sweet ancestral retreat was an obvious and constant target for both sides. As he wrote later, it was ". . .un merveilleux chef d'oeuvre, et exemplaire, qu'elle soit encore vierge de sang et de sac, sous un si long orage, tant de changemens et agitations voisines."<sup>5</sup> To be miraculously unspotted by blood or sack is not quite the same as living a life of "calm and freedom from all cares."

Yet the most striking aspect of the retirement inscription as a statement of intent is that it says nothing about the *Essais*, indeed nothing about writing at all. It seems unlikely that he had no literary pursuits in mind. He had already completed a translation of Raymond Sebond's *Theologia Naturalis*, which in spite of his assertion at one point that it was done in a few days, must have taken several months at least - it is a work of a thousand pages. And he certainly began the *Essais* very soon after retirement: Book I:20, for example, is dated exactly thirteen months later. But in I.8, *De l'Oisiveté*, he confirms the haziness implied in the inscription. His intention when he retired, he says, had been to allow his mind to enjoy itself at leisure: "Mais je trouve, *variam semper dant otia mentem*, que au rebours, faisant le cheval eschappé, il se donne cent fois plus d'affaire à soy mesmes, qu'il n'en prenoit pour autruy; et m'enfante tant de chimeres et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre et sans propos, que pour en contempler à mon aise l'ineptie et l'estrangeté, j'ay commancé de les mettre en rolle, esperant avec le temps luy en faire honte à luy

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<sup>4</sup> And which he describes in excruciating detail, e.g. *Journal de voyage en Italie*, Pléiade p.1311.

<sup>5</sup> III.9: 943/1092-3.

mesmes."<sup>6</sup>

At first sight, this looks as if writing for him was to be antidote to a disorderly mind - the chapter begins with the observation that "Si on ne les [sc. les esprits] occupe à certain sujet, qui les bride et contreigne, ils se jettent desreiglez, par-cy par là, dans le vague champ des imaginations."<sup>7</sup> Yet there is seldom any strict logical connection running throughout Montaigne's chapters, any linear progression from beginning to end. (In fact the Platonic image of the bolting horse applies as much to the *Essais* themselves as it does to the state of mind which gave rise to them.) And here his purpose in writing turns out to be not to bridle his thoughts but by recording them to contemplate at ease their apparently random oddity. Indeed far from making his mind ashamed of itself, he was to find his justification in charting its twists and turns and in laying bare its peculiarities and its contradictions.

It took time. The first edition of the *Essais*, containing Books I and II, was published in 1580. Its earliest chapters are relatively unoriginal and uninteresting,<sup>8</sup> the content largely military and historical, the style anecdotal, the genre those collections of moral exempla and sententiae popular in antiquity and in the Renaissance. But here and there, and increasingly, are to be found more personal, subjective explorations of more arresting themes - solitude, friendship, suicide, death. And in the middle of Book II appears the most chimerical and monstrous of all the chapters, the *Apologie*

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<sup>6</sup> I.8: 34/31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 33/30.

<sup>8</sup> As Frame puts it (1955, p.39), they are "meager of personality." But Starobinski suggests (p.21-2) that this conventional division into early impersonal chapters and the later ones which are characterised by self-portrait is oversimplified: "Ce qu'on doit pourtant reconnaître, c'est que la 'peinture du moi' n'est que l'évolution plus tardive d'une pensée d'emblée orientée vers la vie personnelle; la question du moi est posée dès le départ. Montaigne a tenté d'y répondre d'abord par les moyens traditionnels, et c'est pour les avoir trouvés incapables de satisfaire son attente qu'il a eu recours, par la suite, à une autre méthode, et qu'il a fait l'essai d'une autre attitude."

*de Raimond Sebond*, in its final form one of the most expanded, and even in its original form taking up about a quarter of the whole 1580 edition. Because the second edition, published in 1588, contained not only a new Book III with thirteen chapters, considerably longer on average than those in Books I and II, but also innumerable additions, by way of interpolation, to the first edition. And the posthumous 1595 edition continued this process of expansion yet further - expansion, rather than alteration.<sup>9</sup>

The result is to make it exceedingly difficult to say what Montaigne's "stance" was on any subject whatever.<sup>10</sup> Not only is any statement likely to find its contradiction,<sup>11</sup> or at least its paradoxical reformulation,<sup>12</sup> within the pages of the same chapter as originally composed; and not only is there likely to be another chapter elsewhere presenting a different point of view; but within each of the chapters there are likely to be interpolations dating either from 1580-1588, or from 1588 until his death in 1592, which modify the original argument (or even a previous addition), or challenge it, or offer a different, perhaps mellower perspective. Yet even to use a word like 'mollower' is problematic, since it implies a progression, a development in Montaigne's thought - something which he himself denies. He defends his practice of making additions rather than corrections on the grounds that he would lose something

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<sup>9</sup> II.37: 736-7/858: "[A] Au demeurant, je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes; [C] ouy à l'aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oster. [A] Je veux représenter le progrez de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chaque piece en sa naissance. Je prendrois plaisir d'avoir commencé plustost et à reconnoistre le train de mes mutations."

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sayce, p.231: "We should like to pin him down and he is determined not to be pinned down." T.S. Eliot expressed it with rather more exasperation: trying to criticize Montaigne, he said, was like flinging hand grenades into a fog. (See Bloom, pp. 150f.) And cf. Friedrich, p.324: "Es ist nicht leicht, mit seinen Todesdenken ins Reine zu kommen. Denn er war selber nicht im Reinen damit."

<sup>11</sup> One of the slogans painted on the ceiling of Montaigne's library was from Sextus Empiricus: πάντι λόγῳ λόγος ἴσος ἀντίκειται. (Pléiade, p.1423.) Cf. Friedrich, p.11: "Er hat eine verblüffende Bereitschaft für die Widersprüchlichkeit seiner selbst und der Dinge, und es ist, als ob er sich erst im Genuss der Allwidersprüchlichkeit so recht wohl fühlte."

<sup>12</sup> As Starobinski puts it (p.81): "Il n'est point de voie, pour lui, qui n'offre une bifurcation; point de

of himself if he were to change what he had written, and he adds that he does not believe his later thoughts to be more profound than his earlier: he grows older, but not wiser.<sup>13</sup>

On a subject like death, therefore, which is everywhere in the pages of the *Essais*, it is a mistake to look for a systematic presentation of his ideas, or for a clear development from one position to another, or even perhaps for a single coherent approach at any given stage in his life. And in this of course he may be psychologically more true to life than the objective scholar who tries to impose some sort of order: death does not lend itself to objective treatment, and there are few who do not oscillate in their attitude to it.<sup>14</sup>

Certainly Montaigne had had some experience of death, over and above the constant reminders of mortality to which everyone was exposed in 16th century France, especially during the religious wars. In the few years immediately before his retirement, he had lost a father, a brother, a daughter, and his closest friend; and he had almost died himself.

Pierre de Montaigne died in June 1568, at the advanced age of seventy-four and after seven years of suffering from the stone<sup>15</sup> - the affliction he bequeathed to his

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vertu qui ne se renverse en son opposé; point d'exemple qui n'appelle un exemple contradictoire."

<sup>13</sup> III.9: 941/1091.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.324: "Es ist nicht leicht, mit seinem Todesdenken ins Reine zu kommen. Denn er war selber nicht im Reinen damit. Er probiert aus, lässt keine Deutung endgültig fallen, keine endgültig zu, verhält sich auch zum Tod in der Weise des *essai*, des Versuchs, der jeweils aus dem augenblicklichen Zusammenhang auf die Sache zugeht und mit den unbehobenen Widersprüchen unausdrücklich eingesteht, dass er mit ihr nicht fertig wird. Das ist Methode, hier wie bei allen Themen der *Essais*. Hier, beim Schwierigsten, das der Mensch zu bewältigen hat, kommt sie der Sache besonders zugute... Dass Montaigne seine Aussagen nicht geschlossen hat, macht ihn reicher als seine Vorgänger und reicher als seine späteren Gegner im Bezirk des Todesgedankens."

<sup>15</sup> II.37:742/863.

son. Montaigne was not present at his deathbed - he was in Paris arranging the publication of Raymond Sebond's *Theologia Naturalis*, which his father had "commissioned" from him.

Within a year of his father's death, his younger brother, Captain Arnaud de Saint-Martin, died suddenly a few hours after being struck on the ear by a tennis ball: in his early chapter on death (I.20), Montaigne cites this among the examples of the fragility of human existence which should offset any expectation that a thirty-nine year-old will have as long again to live.<sup>16</sup>

Then in the August before his retirement his daughter Thionette died, aged two months. She was the eldest of six daughters, only one of whom (Leonor) survived infancy. A few weeks later, Montaigne dedicated to the bereaved mother his friend La Boétie's translation of Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Uxorem* - also arising out of the death of a child - in the course of which he says he leaves to Plutarch the task of consoling her. His own feelings, or lack of them, may be inferred from some offhanded remarks in I.14. He says that he has lost two or three infants in his time, not without regret but without profound grief, and he adds that he has noticed other occasions when he has met with indifference what other people regard as catastrophes - "*Ex quo intelligitur non in natura, sed in opinione esse aegritudinem.*"<sup>17</sup> It seems that in relation to bereavement Montaigne was more instinctively Stoic than Cicero was, unless (as has been argued)<sup>18</sup> this frankness is a front and he is hiding his true feelings beneath a show of cynicism.

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<sup>16</sup> I.20: 84/94.

<sup>17</sup> I.14: 61/64f. The quotation is from Cicero *T.D.* III.28.

<sup>18</sup> By Cole, who reads (p.174) Montaigne's "professions of indifference" as "the defensive denial of repressed feelings."

Certainly there is no cynicism and no concealment in relation to his friendship with Etienne de La Boétie, or to the effect the latter's death had on him. La Boétie was a fellow magistrate in the Bordeaux Parlement, three years older than Montaigne. Their friendship was instantaneous and profound: in the eyes of both, unique. In *De l'Amitié* (I.28), Montaigne describes it as so perfect as to have no rival in modern times: it is the sort of thing that occurs no more than once in three hundred years.<sup>19</sup> And La Boétie, in words recorded by Montaigne, was equally uninhibited.<sup>20</sup>

But in 1563, at the age of thirty-two, La Boétie died, with Montaigne at his bedside. They had known each other for four years. The loss of his friend had a profound and permanent effect, and perhaps accounts for Montaigne's absence of emotion in relation to subsequent bereavements. Later in the same chapter he compares the rest of his life since to smoke or dreary darkness. "Depuis le jour que je le perdy . . . je ne fay que trainer languissant."<sup>21</sup> That was written at least ten years after the event, but the immediate effect "d'une si lourde perte, et si importante"<sup>22</sup> is recorded in a letter from Montaigne to his father, almost certainly written immediately after La Boétie's death and published as the conclusion to the latter's *Oeuvres*, which Montaigne brought out in November 1570.

This letter is much more a document of its times than anything in the *Essais*. Indeed in some ways it reads like a stereotype of the late medieval deathbed scene, in which

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<sup>19</sup> I.28: 182/207.

<sup>20</sup> See "*Fragment d'une lettre que Monsieur le Conseiller de Montaigne escrit à Monseigneur de Montaigne son père, concernant quelques particularitez qu'il remarqua en la maladie et mort de feu Monsieur de la Boetie*" (Pléiade, pp.1347-60 - hereafter referred to as *Lettre*) p.1352..

<sup>21</sup> I.28: 192/217. And see also the other dedication to La Boétie inscribed in Montaigne's library at the time of his retirement, of which a translation is given in Pléiade, p.xvi.

the dying person knows exactly what is going on, accepts it resignedly, and is more likely to disguise it from his friends and relatives than vice versa; and in which the room where he is dying is as accessible and as crowded as a society drawing-room. Or in Philippe Ariès' formulation: "La simplicité familière est l'un des deux caractères nécessaires de la mort. L'autre est sa publicité . . . Le mourant doit être au centre d'une assemblée."<sup>23</sup> The interesting thing is that Montaigne seems to have been inspired by that first characteristic of his friend's death and repelled by the second.

Montaigne's letter describes the rapid progression of La Boétie's sudden intestinal illness from its onset till his death ten days later. The account is both graphic and moving, both mundane and elevated. This, he tells his father, is deliberate: even the most banal things his friend said during this illness were "un singulier témoignage d'une ame pleine de repos, de tranquillité et d'assurance;"<sup>24</sup> and whatever rose above the commonplace was "plein de bon exemple."<sup>25</sup> And in fact the style of the letter, entirely straightforward and unobtrusive, is perfectly suited to its subject matter. In spite of his emotional involvement, he is able to give a controlled and objective account of events, of the reactions of the various *dramatis personae*, of the comings and goings of wife, uncle, niece, step-daughter, friends, servants, lawyer, priest; and at the same time this perspective of the detached observer is balanced by a moving description of his own feelings and of La Boétie's sensitivity and compassion and ultimate confidence. And as the only example of Montaigne's literary style from the

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<sup>22</sup> *Lettre* p.1347.

<sup>23</sup> Ariès, p 26.

<sup>24</sup> *Lettre* p.1348.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p.1347. Starobinski remarks (p.77): "Tout au long de son agonie, La Boétie, épié par son ami, récite admirablement le rôle du sage mourant: il meurt comme un livre." But this may be because his death is recorded by a writer. Cf. Friedrich (p.326), who describes the letter as "ein Kunstwerk, das in

period before the *Essais* (apart from his translation of Sebond), it is intriguing just because the narrative is so straightforward and just because the narrator is so unobtrusive.

What particularly impresses Montaigne is the way La Boétie forces himself, in spite of his weakness and his awareness of imminent death, to disguise the truth from his wife and uncle. Indeed he is so struck by La Boétie's courage both in facing death and in concealing it from others, that he tells him that while he is ashamed of his own comparative lack of courage, he is grateful that he now has such an example to learn from in facing his own death. La Boétie assures him that this is the whole point of studying philosophy and that "quand tout est dit, il y a fort long temps que j'y estois préparé, et que j'en sçavois ma leçon toute par cuer."<sup>26</sup>

La Boétie then summoned in turn his niece and his step-daughter. To each of them he gave sound moral advice, adding to his niece that she must not mourn him too greatly, but rather envy him, and that if God were to give him the choice at that point "ou de retourner à vivre encores, ou d'achever le voyage que j'ay commencé, je serois bien empesché au chois."<sup>27</sup> During all this time, "sa chambre estoit pleine de gents<sup>28</sup> . . . pleine de cris et de larmes, qui n'interrompoient toutesfois nullement le train de ses discours."<sup>29</sup>

The following day, the Monday after he fell ill, La Boétie was much worse, ice cold,

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die unverkennbar literarisch abhängige Idealisierung zum stoisch-christlichen, sieghaften Sterben eine genaue Schilderung der geistigen und körperlichen Phasen des Sterbens einfügt."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p.1353.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p.1355.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1354.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.1356.

in a mortal sweat, almost no pulse. He cried out piteously to Montaigne, "Mon frere, n'avez vous pas de compassion de tant de tourments que je souffre? Ne voyez vous pas meshuy que tout le secours que vous me faites ne sert que d'allongement à ma peine?"<sup>30</sup> He heard Mass the next morning, and then spoke movingly to the priest and to Montaigne, asking them to pray for his soul. More than once he started up with the words, "Bien, bien, qu'elle vienne quand elle voudra, je l'attends, gaillard et de pié coy." He then seemed to see extraordinary visions, which he was unable to describe to Montaigne: only that they were "admirables, infinies, et indicibles."<sup>31</sup> A little later he wanted to speak to his wife, "et luy avoit dit d'un visage le plus gay qu'il le pouvoit contrefaire, qu'il avoit à luy dire un conte." But he was too weak, and feeling himself close to death he said, "Je m'en vais." Then seeing his wife's distress he at once corrected himself: "Je m'en vais dormir, bon soir ma Femme," and he sent her away.<sup>32</sup> He died early the next morning, as Montaigne poignantly concludes, "apres avoir vescu 32 ans, 9 mois, et 17 jours."

And finally there was Montaigne's own brush with death, which he describes in II.6, *De l'Exercitation*. The incident occurred probably about a year before he retired. He was out riding one day at a time when the religious wars were at their height and the château was "dans le moiau de tout le trouble."<sup>33</sup> Because he had not been intending to go far he was mounted on a small and inferior horse. Suddenly one of his men, on a much more powerful horse and trying to show off, rode straight into Montaigne's path and knocked him flying, so that he lost consciousness and was taken for dead. But as the men were carrying him home he recovered, and vomited up a bucketful of

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.1357.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* pp.1358-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p.1359.

<sup>33</sup> II.6: 352/418.

clotted blood. He assumed he had been shot in the head and felt closer to death than life, yet the feeling was far from disturbing. Indeed the sensation of gliding out of life, like falling into a gentle sleep, was not only painless, it was pleasant. When they got him home and to bed, he felt infinitely relaxed and comfortable: "C'eust esté sans mentir une mort bien heureuse; car la foiblesse de mon discours me gardoit d'en rien juger, et celle du corps d'en rien sentir. Je me laissoy couler si doucement et d'une façon si douce et si aisée que je ne sens guiere autre action moins poissante que celle-là estoit."<sup>34</sup> (It would be difficult to imagine a deathbed scene more remote from that of La Boétie: no heroics, no pathos, no spectators.)

There then is Michel de Montaigne, retired from the world (or at any rate professing to be) at the age of thirty-eight. The civil war is raging all around, he senses no particular purpose in life, he has no interest in managing his estates, his feelings for his wife are less than passionate, and ever since he has lost his greatest friend "je ne fay que trainer languissant."<sup>35</sup>

His solution is to retreat to the library in the tower of his château, to live permanently in his "arriere boutique",<sup>36</sup> with no ambition to make his mark again in the world. He dismisses as "une ridicule contradiction" the ambivalence of Pliny or Cicero who use retirement ostensibly to devote themselves to literature and intellectual activity but actually to enhance their reputation - or in the case of Cicero "à s'en acquerir par ses escrits une vie immortelle"<sup>37</sup> The only proper way of withdrawing from the world is

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<sup>34</sup> II.6:357/423.

<sup>35</sup> I.28:192/217.

<sup>36</sup> I.39:235/270: "Il se faut reserver une arriere boutique toute nostre, toute franche, en laquelle nous établissons nostre vraye liberté et principale retraicte et solitude."

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 239/274.

"faire comme les animaux qui effacent la trace à la porte de leur taniere."<sup>38</sup>

Retirement should not be a question of "reculer pour mieux sauter",<sup>39</sup> it should rather be an opportunity for leisurely introspection: "C'est assez vescu pour autruy, vivons pour nous au moins ce bout de vie. Ramenons à nous et à nostre aise nos pensées et nos intentions. Ce n'est pas une legiere partie que de faire seurement sa retraicte; elle nous empesche assez sans y mesler d'autres entreprinses. . .La plus grande chose du monde, c'est de sçavoir estre à soy."<sup>40</sup>

## 2. First Thoughts

If he had been consistent, therefore, we should never have heard any more of Montaigne. But in fact, in "une ridicule contradiction", his retirement turned out to be precisely a matter of "reculer pour mieux sauter". At the outset perhaps he had no inkling of this. He began to write, partly to keep on the track of the runaway horse, partly to combat a melancholic humour,<sup>41</sup> partly perhaps in a continued reaction to La Boétie's death. It has been suggested, for example, that "the Essays themselves are a compensation for the loss of La Boétie", a substitute for a level of communication which was no longer available to him.<sup>42</sup> But it may have been something deeper and more universal than that. Because the most pervasive theme in the early chapters is death, and specifically how to prepare for it in advance. It is as if Montaigne's real aim is to be able to apply to himself La Boétie's dying claim: "Quand tout est dit, il y a fort long temps que j'y estois préparé, et que j'en sçavois ma leçon toute par

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 242/277.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 241/277.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 236/271-2.

<sup>41</sup> II.8:364/433.

cueur."<sup>43</sup> Or putting it another way, it is as if he is intent on fulfilling his promise to his dying friend that the latter's courage in the face of death will serve as an example to him "pour jouër ce mesme rolle à mon tour."<sup>44</sup>

Certainly he seems to be almost obsessed with the subject. He has always, he says, been fascinated by the way people die - their approach, their last words, the expression on their faces.<sup>45</sup> And many of the allusions to death scattered about in Books I and II fall into that category. There are innumerable anecdotes and illustrations from antiquity of suicide, whether as the only honourable or the only tolerable solution<sup>46</sup> - Cato is cited several times as the model of virtue;<sup>47</sup> of a disorderly life redeemed by an orderly death;<sup>48</sup> of simple acceptance and resignation in the face of death;<sup>49</sup> of torture or the gallows being greeted with irrepressible laughter;<sup>50</sup> of imperturbability so great as to allow a calm untroubled sleep before meeting death;<sup>51</sup> of martyrdom in the pursuit of eternal life,<sup>52</sup> or of glory,<sup>53</sup> or simply because it is the custom;<sup>54</sup> of porcine indifference to death.<sup>55</sup>

But the first extended treatment of the subject - I.20, *Que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir* - gives a much better indication of the direction of Montaigne's thinking on the subject. The chapter is unique in being precisely dated: "[A] Il n'y a

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<sup>42</sup> Frame, 1965, p.81.

<sup>43</sup> *Lettre*, p.1353.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Starobinski, p.82: "Tout se passe comme si la disparition de La Boétie avait soudain découvert à Montaigne sa propre mort..."

<sup>45</sup> I.20:88/100.

<sup>46</sup> e.g. II.3; II.13.

<sup>47</sup> e.g. II.13: 594/691.

<sup>48</sup> I.19: 79/87.

<sup>49</sup> I.14: 51/53.

<sup>50</sup> I.14: 51f/54f.

<sup>51</sup> I.44: 262/303.

<sup>52</sup> I.14: 60/64.

<sup>53</sup> I.14: 54/56; cf. II.16.

<sup>54</sup> I.14: 51/54.

justement que quinze jours que j'ay franchi 39 ans."<sup>56</sup> It is also one of the best-known of Montaigne's chapters, or at least the most often quoted.<sup>57</sup>

The title is derived from the *Tusculan Disputations*<sup>58</sup> as the first sentence of the chapter makes clear: "Cicero dit que Philosopher ce n'est autre chose que s'aprester à la mort." What Cicero actually said - *tota enim philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est* - is itself a résumé in translation of several passages in the *Phaedo*. Two things are immediately striking. The first is that although the *Essais* are peppered with Latin quotations - 1264 according to one count, and this chapter alone contains thirty-eight<sup>59</sup> - the quotation from Cicero is given in French. The second is that the French is not an exact translation of the Latin. The "apprendre à mourir" of the title is not quite the same as the "s'aprester à la mort" in the first sentence, and the "philosopher" in the first sentence is not quite the same as the *tota philosophorum vita* in Cicero. In other words, the title of the chapter is at two removes from Cicero, but by not citing the Latin Montaigne is able to give the impression that he is actually quoting Cicero.

Now Montaigne's motives in using so many classical quotations changed over the years. He confesses that to begin with he was looking to bolster his arguments by giving them the authority of antiquity,<sup>60</sup> but then as his confidence grew he would add more quotations from authors whom, to his delight, he found to be in agreement with

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<sup>55</sup> I.14:54/57; II.12:470/546.

<sup>56</sup> I.20:82/93.

<sup>57</sup> Of the nineteen passages listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (4th edition, Oxford, 1992) from all 107 chapters of the *Essays*, four are from I.20.

<sup>58</sup> *T.D.* I.74.

<sup>59</sup> And there are many more indirect allusions. Brody (p.114) goes as far as to say: "L'on soupçonne qu'à l'exception d'une poignée d'interventions personnelles, l'étude approfondie des sources de Montaigne dans son essai sur la mort ne révélerait guère une seule phrase originale."

<sup>60</sup> E.g. II.12:528/614.

him. (Indeed only 13 out of the 38 quotations in I.20 were in the original version: 21 were added after 1580, and another 4 after 1588.) Yet he remained self-conscious and self-deprecating about his dependence on the thoughts of others.<sup>61</sup> In *Du Pedantisme* (I.25) there is this interpolation from after 1588: "[B] Nous nous laissons si fort aller sur les bras d'autrui, que nous aneantissons nos forces. Me veus-je armer contre la crainte de la mort? c'est auz depens de Seneca. Veus-je tirer de la consolation pour moy, ou pour un autre? je l'emprunte de Cicero. Je l'eusse prise en moy-mesme, si on m'y eust exercé. Je n'ayme point cette suffisance relative et mendiée."<sup>62</sup>

At the beginning of I.20, therefore, it may be that Montaigne cites Cicero in French partly to disguise the fact that he is paraphrasing him (which enables him at the same time to imply that the title also has Cicero's authority), and partly because, in the opposite direction, it gives the impression that he is less dependent on other men's arms and is in fact drawing from his own resources.<sup>63</sup>

And he does immediately proceed to distinguish two possible interpretations of his paraphrase: "C'est d'autant que l'estude et la contemplation retirent aucunement nostre ame hors de nous, et l'embesongnent à part du corps, qui est quelque aprentissage et ressemblance de la mort; ou bien, c'est que toute la sagesse et discours du monde se resoult en fin à ce point, de nous apprendre à ne craindre point à

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, II.10:387/458: "Car je fay dire aux autres ce que je ne puis si bien dire, tantost par foiblesse de mon langage, tantost par foiblesse de mon sens." And cf. I.25 (135/154).

<sup>62</sup> I.25. 137/155.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.52: "Der Späthumanist Montaigne will kein Nachahmer sein, sondern eine Individualität, deren geistiges Leben in der Entfaltung des eigenen Wesens besteht." And cf. III.12:1034/1197, where Montaigne says: "[C] Parmy tant d'emprunts je suis bien aise d'en pouvoir desrober quelqu'un, les desguisant et diffonnant à nouveau service. Au hazard que je laisse dire que c'est par faute d'avoir entendu leur naturel usage, je luy donne quelque particuliere adresse de ma main, à ce qu'ils en soient d'autant moins purement estrangers." And cf. further the 1588 version here (deleted, unusually, at a later date): "Comme ceux qui desrobent les chevaux, je leur peins le crin et la queue, et parfois je les esborgne; si la premier maistre s'en servoit à bestes d'amble, je les mets au trot,

mourir."<sup>64</sup> Now the first of these is clearly Cicero's own interpretation: it is essentially the argument in the *Phaedo*, which Cicero is expounding at this point in the *Tusculans*. But it is the second which Montaigne adopts as the basis for the rest of the chapter. So that by not actually quoting Cicero, or referring to Plato's original context, he manages to avoid the charge that he is not in fact elucidating either. The allusion in the title together with the paraphrase in the first sentence are really a "louping-on stane" enabling him to ride off on his chosen theme, which by the end of the third sentence is no longer either "apprendre à mourir", or "s'aprester à la mort", but "apprendre à ne craindre point à mourir."

In other words, what Montaigne appears to have in mind is not the Platonic<sup>65</sup> practice by anticipation of the state which follows death, but the self-discipline which can remove the terror from the act of dying (ἡ μελέτη τοῦ φυσικοῦ θανάτου), which results in fact in "le mepris de la mort". If we did not scorn it, death would be "un subject continuel de tourment, et qui ne se peut aucunement soulager."<sup>66</sup> It is inevitable; and it lies in wait for us everywhere, in the most unexpected places, as a series of absurd examples, both contemporary and ancient, demonstrates: one man is killed by a collision with a pig, another by a tortoise falling on his head, another dies choking on a grape pip, another (a Pope) between a woman's thighs.

The response of ordinary people ("du vulgaire") is not to think about death at all. But that is simply blind and brutish stupidity,<sup>67</sup> because in fact it simply makes matters worse. "[A] Ils vont, ils viennent, ils trottent, ils dansent, de mort nulles nouvelles.

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et au bast, s'il servoient à la selle." (1667/1197.)

<sup>64</sup> I.20:79-80/89.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.330: "...der allenthalben völlig unplatonische Montaigne..."

<sup>66</sup> I.20. 81/92.

Tout cela est beau. Mais aussi quand elle arrive, ou à eux, ou à leurs femmes, enfans et amis, les surprenant en dessoude et à decouvert, quels tourmens, quels cris, quelle rage, et quel desespoir les acable?"<sup>68</sup> Such "nonchalance bestiale" is impossible for anyone of any intelligence.<sup>69</sup>

The proper solution therefore is not to ignore death or try to run away from it, but the opposite - we must inure ourselves to it. "[A] Ostons luy l'estrangeté, pratiquons le, accoustumons le, n'ayons rien si souvent en la teste que la mort. A tous instans representons la à nostre imagination et en tous visages. Au broncher d'un cheval, à la cheute d'une tuille, à la moindre piqueure d'espleingue, remachons soudain: 'Et bien, quand ce seroit la mort mesme?'"<sup>70</sup> The ancient Egyptians had the right idea, bringing in a mummified corpse in the middle of their banquets, as a *memento mori*.<sup>71</sup>

And Montaigne claims that he himself has always behaved like this. For example, one day when he was out riding only a league from his house, he had hastily noted down some testamentary instruction, because although he was in perfect health he felt no certainty of reaching home alive.<sup>72</sup> Two memorable images sum up this approach: "[A] Il faut estre tousjours boté et prest à partir";<sup>73</sup> and "[A] Je veux qu'on agisse, [C] et qu'on allonge les offices de la vie tant qu'on peut, [A] et que la mort me treuve plantant mes chous, mais nonchalant d'elle, et encore plus de mon jardin imparfait."<sup>74</sup>

With this attitude to death the philosopher wins freedom. To paraphrase Seneca: "[A] La premeditation de la mort, est premeditation de la liberté. Qui a appris à

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 82/92.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 84/95.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 85/96.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 86/98.

mourir, il a desapris à servir. Le sçavoir mourir nous afranchit de toute subjection et contrainte."<sup>75</sup>

And that, one might think, is that. But now Montaigne goes off on a new tack.<sup>76</sup> Nature herself, he says, helps us out and gives us courage (that is, presumably, if all this stoic paraenesis has failed to produce the desired effect), because either death is violent, in which case it is also short and we have no time to be afraid; or else it is preceded by illness, in which case it is worse in anticipation than in reality - illness being an example of Caesar's maxim that things often seem bigger at a distance than close up, and death, hopefully, being another. When our bodies are decrepit we are able to face death much more easily than when we are at the peak of health. The imperceptible onset of age is nature's way of leading us down the gentle slope to death.

And the chapter concludes with a five-page soliloquy by Nature (largely borrowed from Lucretius, combined with paraphrases of Seneca),<sup>77</sup> who strengthens the preceding arguments by pointing out that death is part of the fabric of the universe, part of life itself, that it is absurd to accept life without accepting death, and that it is therefore absurd to fear death. Everyone is in the same boat, there is no escape. In any case, there is nothing to be afraid of, since there is no consciousness after death and so no unhappiness. "You" will miss nothing connected with this life since "you" will not exist.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 87/99.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 85/96.

<sup>76</sup> "Il y a plus" (*Ibid.* 88/100.)

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.334: "Das ist nun auch die Stelle, wo der Vorrat antiker Todeskunde am dichtesten zur Schau kommt, und zwar so, wie er der stoischen und epikureischen Lehre gemeinsam ist."

But then there is a postscript (already there in the original version) in which Montaigne draws attention to the fact that death seems to be faced with "beaucoup plus d'assurance parmy les gens de village et de basse condition qu'és autres." The reason, he thinks, is to be found in the trappings which surround the deaths of those of higher rank: "[A] . . .une toute nouvelle forme de vivre, les cris des meres, des femmes et des enfans, la visitation de personnes estonnées et transies, l'assistance d'un nombre de valets pasles et éplorés, une chambre sans jour, des cierges allumez, nostre chevet assiegé de medecins et de prescheurs; somme, tout horreur et tout effroy autour de nous. Nous voylà desjà ensevelis et enterrez. Les enfans ont peur de leurs amis mesmes quand ils les voyent masquez; aussi avons nous. Il faut oster le masque aussi bien des choses que des personnes; osté qu'il sera, nous ne trouverons au dessoubs que cette mesme mort, qu'un valet ou simple chambriere passerent dernièrement sans peur. Heureuse la mort qui oste le loisir aux apprests de tel equipage!"<sup>78</sup>

Now all this is rather odd. The main argument is reasonably coherent: that the only way of successfully overcoming the fear of death is by taming death, frequenting it in the sense of constantly having it before your eyes, so that when it comes you are ready for it - although it may be remarked that the above synopsis of the argument puts it a little more coherently than he does himself. It is almost impossible to deal with Montaigne (short of simply repeating his words) without making the thread of his argument clearer than it is: something which Montaigne himself would neither deny nor regret.<sup>79</sup> But in I.20 the argument is obscured not only by the style and the

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<sup>78</sup> I.20:94-5/107-8.

<sup>79</sup> III.9: 973-4/1124-6.

accretions, but by the presence (in the original version) of certain tensions.

The first tension, which has already been pointed out, is with the authority which launches him on his theme. Montaigne has in fact a very ambivalent attitude to Cicero. He quotes him more than any other Latin writer, and the *Tusculan Disputations* more than any other of his works. Yet he says some choice and nasty things about him - about his passion for glory,<sup>80</sup> about his inconsistency,<sup>81</sup> about his verbosity and rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> (Is it possible that Montaigne saw some aspects of himself in Cicero, and disliked what he saw? They do have several things in common: both lawyers; both retired from public life - in both cases, as it turns out, temporarily - and looking for a purpose; both finding that purpose in writing; both sensing that the real anchor in their lives is a friend par excellence (Atticus / La Boétie); both immersed in the philosophy of the ancients; and both in the event forging a new philosophical vernacular. And for all Montaigne's self-deprecation in relation both to reputation and to literary style, the *Essais* themselves are a sufficient proof that he was indifferent to neither.)

However that may be, he refers to Cicero in this chapter only to take leave of him immediately, and he does not refer at all to Socrates whom Cicero is quoting. This may betray another tension. Montaigne comes eventually to regard Socrates as the greatest figure of antiquity (replacing on the pedestal the younger Cato), but in the role indicated by the oracle at Delphi: as one who spends his life in the pursuit of self-knowledge, not as the speculative philosopher of the *Phaedo* "mythologizing" about the afterlife. The first interpretation of Cicero's quotation from Socrates, which

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<sup>80</sup> II.16: 604/705.

<sup>81</sup> II.12: 468/545.

Montaigne mentions as a possibility at the beginning of the chapter - the philosopher's task being to anticipate so far as possible the final separation of soul and body in death - is not one that interests him, even at this stage.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, there is no reference in I.20 to an afterlife at all, which in a chapter on learning how to die by an allegedly staunch Catholic<sup>84</sup> might seem somewhat surprising. And it is not quite an answer to say, as Screech does:<sup>85</sup> "'Death' is considered in the sense of the act of dying, not as the state of the soul in the afterlife. As such it is the concern of philosophy not of religion." It is not quite an answer because what is really surprising about I.20 is that it implies so clearly, in the closing soliloquy by Nature, that there is no such thing as an afterlife - for example, the quotation from Lucretius: "*Licet, quod vis, vivendo vincere secla / Mors aeterna tamen nihilominus illa manebit.*"<sup>86</sup>

And this of course raises the question whether Montaigne was really quite so committed a Christian as he professed to be.<sup>87</sup> There are some indications that he

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<sup>82</sup> I.40: 243/279.

<sup>83</sup> And perhaps he regarded it as meaningless, or more precisely meaningless after death and both impossible and undesirable in life.

<sup>84</sup> I.56: 303/355: "...[C] tenant pour execrable s'il se trouve chose ditte par moy ignorament ou inadvertament contre les saintes prescriptions de l'Eglise catholique, apostolique et Romaine, en laquelle je meurs et en laquelle je suis nay."

<sup>85</sup> In his preface to I.19.

<sup>86</sup> I.20: 92/105. The quotation is from *DRN* III.1090-91.

<sup>87</sup> Friedrich is in no doubt. He refers unequivocally to the "nicht unfrommen, aber unchristlichen Montaigne" (p.105). Christianity is something which "er braucht...um es wieder abzustossen." (p.95). And specifically in the context of death, "Während auf manchen Seiten der *Essais* stoische und christliche Nachklänge hörbar sind, kommt es gerade bei den Todesreflexionen eindeutig heraus, was er nicht is: weder Stoiker noch Christ." (p.357.)

For a balanced account of Montaigne's attitude to Christianity, see Sayce, pp.202-232. Sayce at one point (p.217) quotes Gibbon (Chapter 2): "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful." There is no doubt that Montaigne was more of a philosopher and a magistrate than a member of *le vulgaire*.

was,<sup>88</sup> and there is no doubt that he behaved all his life very much in a spirit of broadminded tolerance - which was why he found himself a target for both sides in the religious wars.<sup>89</sup> And there are one or two isolated endorsements of the Christian view of the afterlife, for example, to La Boétie on his deathbed.<sup>90</sup> But there are counter-indications, especially in II.12, the *Apologie de Raimond de Sebond*.

This extraordinary hybrid,<sup>91</sup> 174 pages long in the Pléiade edition, purports to defend Sebond's *Theologia Naturalis* against the twin criticisms of trying to support faith by reason, and of using weak arguments in the process. But in fact Montaigne does more than any of Sebond's critics both to challenge the status of human reason and to undermine Sebond's own arguments,<sup>92</sup> largely on the basis of Pyrrhonian scepticism. So much so that the chapter should really have been entitled *Apology for Pyrrho*. And by implication, while he ostensibly maintains an unquestioning allegiance to Christianity, his sceptical onslaught inflicts as much damage on it as on anything else.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> E.g. I.56 (see note 83 above). And cf. III.9: 960/1111.

<sup>89</sup> See III.12: 1021/1182.

<sup>90</sup> *Lettre*, p.1351.

<sup>91</sup> Starobinski (p.101) characterises it as "ce dangereux complément de théologie négative rajouté à la théologie positive du *Liber Creaturarum*", though it is questionable whether it should be called theology in any sense, even negative - cf. Friedrich, p.133: "Die 'Theologie' Montaignes - falls man von derartigem überhaupt sprechen darf ..."

<sup>92</sup> So Friedrich: "[Montaigne] wird, ohne es ausdrücklich zu wollen oder zu sagen, sein Gegner" (p.131); and "Montaigne macht sich gar nicht die Mühe, darüber nachzudenken, wie sehr die Hauptstücke seiner 'Apologie' genau dem zuwiderlaufen, was in Sebundus steht und was er einst selbst übersetzt hat." (p.132). But whether Montaigne was really so unconscious of what was going on must be debatable. Cf. Sayce, p.223: "We are bound to notice the disproportion between the two parts of the defence of Sabunde: the first, that reason can aid faith, takes up about one sixteenth of the essay; the second, that reason is no use anyway, all the rest. The first part is half-hearted..., the second is conducted with unflagging enthusiasm."

<sup>93</sup> II.12: 422/497 "[A] . . . nous ne recevons nostre religion qu'à nostre façon et par nos mains, et non autrement que comme les autres religions se reçoivent. Nous nous sommes rencontrés au pays où elle estoit en usage; ou nous regardons son ancienneté ou l'autorité des hommes qui l'ont maintenue; ou creignons les menaces qu'elle attache aux mescreans; ou suyvons ses promesses. . . Une autre religion, d'autres tesmoings, pareilles promesses et menasses nous pourroyent imprimer par mesme voye une croyance contraire. [B] Nous sommes Chrestiens à mesme titre que nous sommes ou Perigordins ou Alemans." Friedrich (p.130) remarks: "...die ganze 'Apologie' belegt, dass Montaigne die Religion, gleichgültig welche, überhaupt nur in ihrer Verknüpfung mit der Menschlichkeit, als religion *mortelle*

There are two alternatives here, if it is accepted that there is tension bordering on contradiction between what Montaigne states to be his professed religion and the implications of what he states to be his preferred philosophical position. Either he is unaware of the tension, or he is dissimulating. In other words, having denied (under the influence of Pyrrho's scepticism) that it is possible to arrive at any certainty through rational enquiry, and accepted that the critical range of Pyrrhonism extends to matters of religious faith, he is either unable to see the resulting precariousness of his own religion, or he refuses to acknowledge it.

The first alternative is less likely to be true than the second (though religious faith can make anyone illogical.) The second would be entirely understandable, either from the point of view (in such an age) of self-preservation;<sup>94</sup> or on the basis of the Pyrrhonian position itself, since Montaigne sees one who holds it as obliged to support the *status quo*.<sup>95</sup>

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*et humaine, zu betrachten vermag."*

<sup>94</sup> Although, as Friedrich points out (p.360), the absence of anti-Christian polemic in Montaigne is more a matter of irrelevance than reserve: "Sein achristliches Denken gerät auch im Todesproblem in keine Spannung zu den christlichen Restelementen, die ihm aus historischen Zusammenhängen noch anhaften. Er braucht sich gar nicht polemisch dagegen zu äussern. Sein Vermeiden antichristlicher Polemik ist nicht bloss Furcht vor der Zensur. Er bildet seine eigene Gesinnung einfach aus, unter Führung der Antike, als gäbe es überhaupt jene ganz anderen Betrachtungen gar nicht."

<sup>95</sup> II.12: 486/564. "[C] ny mescreant, [A] ny establissant aucun dogme [B] contre les observances communes; humble, obeissant, disciplinable, studieux; ennemi juré d'haeresie, [A] et s'exemptant par consequant des vaines et irreligieuses opinions introduites par les fauces sectes." And cf. *ibid.* 492/571: "[A] Aucunes choses, ils [les anciens] les ont escrites pour le besoin de la société publique, comme leurs religions; et a esté raisonnable, pour cette considération, que les communes opinions, ils n'ayent voulu les espelucher au vif, aux fins de n'engendrer du trouble en l'obeissance des loix et coustumes de leur pays." An interpolation after "leurs religions" in 1588 edition (later deleted) may be particularly significant (as Montaigne's version of "the noble lie"): "Car il n'est pas défendu de faire notre profit de la mensonge mesme, s'il est besoing." (1559/571.)

And cf. Friedrich, p.142: "Montaigne ist kirchentreu. Aber er leitet seinen Konservatismus nicht ab aus Zustimmung zum objektiven Wahrheitsgehalt der katholischen Lehre. Die Kirche erscheint ihm als etwas von altersher Gegebenes und Ordnung Stiftendes; wer in ihrem Wirkungskreis geboren ist, tut gut, sich ihr zu beugen." This is an interesting reversal of that prevalent modern approach which deplores 'institutional religion' while retaining a belief in God. In other words, whereas Montaigne (according to Friedrich, p.146) anticipated Barrès: "Je suis athée, mais je suis catholique," the modern approach is: "I don't go to church, but I am a Christian."

What is at any rate undeniable is that on the subject of the afterlife the *Apologie* is even-handedly critical of anthropomorphic credulity. The physical pleasures and pains which await us according to Plato's myths ("après la ruine et anéantissement de nos corps") are in the same category as Mahomet's paradise of nymphs and wine. Montaigne says with Socratic irony that "[A] je voy bien que ce sont des moqueurs qui se plient à nostre bestise pour nous emmieler et attirer par ces opinions et esperances, convenables à nostre mortel appetit."<sup>96</sup> The only logical approach, he says, must be that "[A] Si les plaisirs que tu nous promets en l'autre vie sont de ceux que j'ay senti çà bas, cela n'a rien de commun avec l'infinité."<sup>97</sup> Or more succinctly: "[A] S'il y a quelque chose du mien, il n'y a rien de divin."<sup>98</sup> For the conditions of an afterlife to be imagined at all, "il faut les imaginer inimaginables, indicibles, et incomprehensibles" - an arresting echo of La Boétie's dying visions: "elles sont admirables, infinies, et indicibles."<sup>99</sup>

And the same principle applies, he goes on, to any hope that we could recognise our parents or children or friends in the next world: such notions are still "terrestres et finies."<sup>100</sup> Moreover, to avoid this trap by asserting that the rewards and punishments of the afterlife relate only to our spiritual part, is to fall into another: "[A] car nous sommes bastis de deux pieces principales essentielles, desquelles la separation c'est la mort et ruyne de nostre estre,"<sup>101</sup> so that what may happen to our souls no more happens to us than the decay of our bodies happens to us. In short: "[A] Et si, pour

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<sup>96</sup> II.12: 498/578. He adds later that some Christians make the same mistake: "[C] Si, sont aucuns des nostres tombez en pareille erreur, se promettant après la resurrection une vie terrestre et temporelle, accompagnée de toutes sortes de plaisirs et commoditez mondaines."

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 498/579.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 498-9/579.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 499/579. Cf. *Lettre* p.1359

nous en rendre capables, on reforme et rechange nostre estre (comme tu dis, Platon, par tes purifications), ce doit estre d'un si extreme changement et si universel que, par la doctrine physique, ce ne sera plus nous."<sup>102</sup>

It has to be said that in applying this devastating critique to every attempt to envisage an afterlife, Montaigne seems to have lost sight of the Pyrrhonian precepts he purports to be following:<sup>103</sup> far from suspending judgement, he has become thoroughly dogmatic. The consistent Pyrrhonist would deny that we can know *anything* about the future world, even what it will not be like, even that it will not resemble or perhaps duplicate the pleasures of this world. It may very well be mistaken to proceed uncritically on the assumption that there *is* something in common between this world and the next and their respective pleasures; but there is just as little ground for asserting dogmatically that there *could* be no such similarity or even identity.

Yet that logical loophole would provide cold comfort for anyone seeking support in the *Apologie* for belief in an afterlife. Admittedly Montaigne does not, in the passages quoted above, completely exclude the possibility: it could be argued that he is simply advocating the *via negativa* - "wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muss man schweigen." The trouble is that when he does speak, he is more likely to imply the impossibility of an afterlife than to express any confidence in its actuality, or even to assert its theoretical possibility.<sup>104</sup> For example, in dismissing Pythagorean

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<sup>100</sup> II.12: 499/579.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 500/580-1.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 499/579.

<sup>103</sup> That is, what Friedrich (p.339) calls "[Eine] Skepsis, die nicht nur bezweifelt, was wir für wirklich halten, sondern auch für möglich halt, was wir bezweifeln."

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.361: "Sodann gibt es keine Unsterblichkeit bei ihm, weder im platonischen noch im christlichen Sinne...Die erschliessende Skepsis Montaignes schweigt hier: diese Möglichkeit, dass der Mensch unsterblich sein könnte, hält sich nicht offen, während sie doch sonst so viele Möglichkeiten, selbst das Wunder, offen lässt."

metempsychosis he says: "Ce qui a cessé une fois d'être, n'est plus."<sup>105</sup> It has a ring of finality.<sup>106</sup>

So far the tensions remarked on in I.20 have been those in relation to Montaigne's sources - Cicero and Plato - and those in relation to his professed Christianity. But there are also internal tensions, notably in the extraordinary postscript. Throughout the chapter there has been a series of epithets disparaging the lower orders, who typically escape from their fear of death by pretending that there is no such thing: "Le remede du vulgaire, c'est de n'y penser pas - quelle brutale stupidité - un si grossier aveuglement - cette nonchalance bestiale." All this in contrast to the stoical fortitude of the philosopher who has schooled himself to look death in the face and by doing so has gained freedom - and Montaigne is apparently presenting himself as the type of such a philosopher: he has done what is necessary, and is passing on the benefit of his wisdom in this chapter. But then suddenly, after Nature's five-page soliloquy adding her weight to the thesis that death is to be accepted without fear (except that it is actually the weight of other philosophers) - suddenly there comes this postscript.

And suddenly "le vulgaire" are no longer the brute masses, they have become "les gens de village", and "un valet ou simple chambriere"; and far from being grossly blind and stupid, it is suddenly they rather than "we" who possess an instinctive confidence when they come to die; and suddenly Cicero, Socrates, Lucretius have become irrelevant, and philosophising a waste of time: all "we" need to do is to tear

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<sup>105</sup> II.12: 500/580.

<sup>106</sup> And Starobinski's conclusion (p.50) has the ring of truth, at least as far as Montaigne's belief in a Christian afterlife is concerned: "S'il n'avait redouté l'oubli comme un total anéantissement, eût-il mis la main à la plume? En quoi il est peu chrétien. Il éprouve le souci de survivre selon sa vérité particulière dans la mémoire d'une autre génération: c'est qu'il a perdu l'espoir en l'immortalité spirituelle et en l'illumination éternelle que l'Église promettait aux élus accueillis dans la patrie céleste."

off the mask with which we have been foolish enough to cover up the face of death, and we too will be able to die "sans peur"! And it is not as if all this is a subsequent addition: it is part of the original version,<sup>107</sup> while conversely there are interpolations from after 1588 which are entirely in line with the ostensible theme of the chapter: for example, "Or des principaux bienfaicts de la vertu est le mepris de la mort."<sup>108</sup>

What is the explanation for this double tension - early passages which collide with the context and anticipate a different kind of approach to death, and later passages which confirm and strengthen the first approach? The latter may perhaps be accounted for simply on the ground that this is Montaigne's method of composition by accretion: since he is rarely convinced that one way of looking at things is better than another, and since he is equally unpersuaded that what he thinks now is necessarily superior to what he used to think, he is just as likely to add a quotation in support of a previously held opinion, or to refine it or reformulate it more elegantly, as he is to interpolate an implicit refutation.<sup>109</sup>

As far as the former is concerned, it is clearly in tune with Montaigne's temperament to want to present an unruly hybrid which points beyond itself to future possibilities, rather than an impeccably logical finished product.<sup>110</sup> But the reality is that these

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<sup>107</sup> As Friedrich puts it (p.86): "Im Todesessay I.20 nimmt, aus Seneca paraphrasiert, die stoische Lehre von der Seelenstärke gegen Todesfurcht einen gewissen Raum ein. Aber sie ist nur ein Anfang, der schon in diesem Essay, noch mehr aber in den späteren, zugunsten einer entspannten Todeswilligkeit preisgegeben wird."

<sup>108</sup> I.20: 81/91.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.324: "Im übrigen kommt es in den *Essais* nicht zum Durchbruch einer letzten, einheitlichen, bequem referierbaren Bestimmtheit der Todesdeutung. Die späten handschriftlichen Zusätze durchkreuzen auch hier wie überall in den *Essais* früher Gesagtes, oder aber sie passen sich ihm an und erweitern es sogar, obwohl Montaigne den älteren Gesichtspunkt schon längst verlassen hatte."

<sup>110</sup> And there is also the consideration that level A itself was composed in stages and incorporates unidentifiable additions and revisions: the evidence for this is in level A itself, in the opening words of II.37: "[A] Ce fagotage de tant de diverses pieces se fait en cette condition, que je n'y mets la main que lors qu'une trop lasche oisiveté me presse, et non ailleurs que chez moy. Ainsin il s'est basté à

future possibilities are already present. What lies behind this new approach in the postscript is his own experience. Of course the same can be said of the first approach, in a sense, except that there it is largely second-hand experience. He has collected anecdotes about facing death - but about how other people have faced death. He has sat for days beside the deathbed of his friend - but it was La Boétie who was dying. And that second-hand experience has perhaps been less effective than he pretends: the chapter reads less like the triumphant account of someone who has conquered his fear of death than a slightly desperate attempt by someone who is still very much afraid to persuade himself that he is not.<sup>111</sup> For example, that typical deathbed scene described with such savage irony in the postscript is uncannily reminiscent of the description of La Boétie's death in the letter to his father. It is almost as if in spite of himself - in spite of his devotion to the memory of his friend and in spite of his promise that La Boétie's courage in death would serve as an example to himself - it is almost as if he has a deep revulsion to everything about La Boétie's death, and a deep suspicion about the adequacy of the stoicism with which he faced it.<sup>112</sup>

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diverses poses et intervalles, comme les occasions me detiennent ailleurs par fois plusieurs mois. Au demeurant, je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes; [C] ouy à l'aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oster. [A] Je veux représenter le progrès de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chaque piece en sa naissance." (736-7/858) And this means that it is fallacious to assume that for example in I.20 awkward transitions or tensions are to be expected only between the different levels, while A itself represents a seamless whole. In other words, perhaps the last paragraph of I.20 really is a postscript.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. III.12: 1017/1177.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Brody's remarks on the implicit rejection in the epilogue to I.20 of what he calls "le Grand Cérémonial" conventionally accompanying death. What Brody finds distinctive about I.20 is more what is not said than what is said, because while what is said is almost entirely a mosaic of quotations from the classical world, what is not said is anything at all about religion and salvation: I.20 is in fact the first *ars moriendi* of modern times which is exclusively humanist in its inspiration. (p.109.) And cf. Friedrich (p.321) on the Essays as a whole: "Nicht von Anfang an, aber in rasch zunehmender Masse und schliesslich ganz rein geschieht in den *Essais* dieses Entdecken des Todes von der eigenen inneren Erfahrung her. Das macht sie zu einem der grossen Todestexte des nachantiken Abendlandes..."

### 3. Second Thoughts

Both revulsion and suspicion may still at this stage be largely latent, but both come to be articulated. In III.9, *De la Vanité*, Montaigne defends his passion for travel against various objections, one of which is that he might die far away from home. If he attached any importance to that, he says, he would never leave his parish, let alone France. But the objection is spurious: death is the same everywhere. In fact, there are more disadvantages than otherwise in dying at home.: "[B] J'ay veu plusieurs mourans bien piteusement assiegez de tout ce train: cette presse les estouffe. C'est contre le devoir et est tesmoignage de peu d'affection et de peu de soing de vous laisser mourir en repos: l'un tourmente vos yeux, l'autre vos oreilles, l'autre la bouche; il n'y a sens ny membre qu'on ne vous fracasse. Le coeur vous serre de pitié d'ouyr les plaintes des amis, et de despit à l'avanture d'ouyr d'autres plaintes feintes et masquées."<sup>113</sup> Far better to die on the road, among strangers.

That is the voice of experience, negative at least. It is impossible not to think that La Boétie was one of the 'plusieurs mourans bien piteusement assiegez de tout ce train': there are too many echoes here, especially of certain details such as La Boétie calling out to Montaigne "tout piteusement: 'Mon frere, n'avez vous pas de compassion de tant de tourments que je souffre? Ne voyez vous pas meshuy que tout le secours que vous me faites ne sert que d'allongement à ma peine?'"<sup>114</sup> or when, hearing his wife weeping, "il l'appella, et luy dit ainsi: 'Ma semblance, vous vous tourmentez avant le

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<sup>113</sup> III.9:956/1107. Friedrich (p.351) thinks that there may be an echo here of the *Phaedo*: "wo Sokrates die Frauen wegschickt, um 'in heiligem Schweigen' zu sterben." But of course Socrates does not send his friends away. In fact it would be difficult to imagine anything less Socratic than the sort of solipsistic death Montaigne has in mind here.

<sup>114</sup> *Lettre* p.1357.

temps: voulez-vous pas avoir pitié de moy?"<sup>115</sup>

And there are other signs that experience, direct experience, was leading Montaigne to the conclusion that stoical fortitude in the face of death was not the answer. The chapter (II.6) describing the accident when he was thrown from his horse and nearly died, begins by referring to those philosophers who train and form the soul, for example by renouncing wealth in order to practise poverty. But, he states immediately and without argument: "[A] Mais à mourir, qui est la plus grande besogne que nous ayons à faire, l'exercitation ne nous y peut ayder. On se peut, par usage et par experience, fortifier contre les douleurs, la honte, l'indigence et tels autres accidents; mais, quant à la mort, nous ne la pouvons essayer qu'une fois; nous y sommes tous apprentifs quand nous y venons."<sup>116</sup>

In other words, the exact opposite of the main argument in I.20.<sup>117</sup> And it seems that he has arrived at this opposite position as a result of reflecting on that accident - which had happened probably about three years before he wrote II.6. Because we can, he goes on, have some experience of death: "[A] Il me semble toutefois qu'il y a quelque façon de nous apprivoiser à elle et de l'essayer aucunement. Nous en pouvons avoir experience, sinon entiere et parfaite, au moins telle qu'elle ne soit pas inutile, et qui nous rende plus fortifiez et asseurez."<sup>118</sup> But he no longer means this in the sense of collecting stories at second hand, or looking at mummified corpses, or frequenting the idea of death. In fact, what he has in mind is not something we can arrange at all.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid* p.1359.

<sup>116</sup> II.6: 350/416.

<sup>117</sup> Friedrich (p.344) prefers to put it like this: "Der Essay II.6 'widerspricht' nicht dem Essay I.20. Aber er verschiebt jetzt alles so sehr in den Aspekt der inneren Erfahrung, dass etwas von jenem Essay höchst Verschiedenes herauskommt."

<sup>118</sup> II.6: 351/417.

"[A] Mais ceux qui sont tombez par quelque violent accident en defaillance de coeur et qui y ont perdu tous sentimens, ceux là, à mon advis, ont esté bien près de voir son vray et naturel visage; car, quant à l'instant et au point du passage, il n'est pas à craindre qu'il porte avec soy aucun travail ou desplaisir, d'autant que nous ne pouvons avoir nul sentiment sans loisir."<sup>119</sup> And here he repeats the thought which he had introduced tangentially in I.20, that many things, such as illness, appear more frightening in anticipation than in reality. "[A] J'espere qu'il m'en adviendra de mesme de la mort, et qu'elle ne vaut pas la peine que je prens à tant d'apprests que je dresse et tant de secours que j'appelle et assemble pour en soustenir l'effort."<sup>120</sup>

At this point, therefore, he seems to be hovering between second-hand experience, which is the subject, largely, of I.20, and direct experience which is at the heart of II.6. Because it is that direct experience of near-death which has encouraged him to hope that death really is something "plus grande par imagination que par effect."<sup>121</sup> Indeed the foretaste of death which has been vouchsafed him is not only less frightening than he had imagined it would be: it is not even unpleasant.

And he concludes that "à la verité, pour s'apivoiser à la mort, je trouve qu'il n y a que de s'en avoisiner."<sup>122</sup> Of course this is quite a different kind of "apivoiser" from the frequenting and contemplating and practising death recommended in I.20<sup>123</sup> - because the kind in II.6 is not something we can choose to experience at all. The experience envisaged in I.20 must be appropriated by each person individually: if the

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 351-2/418.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 352/418.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 357/424.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. I.20: 86/97: "Il est impossible que d'arrivée nous ne sentions des piqueures de telles imaginations. Mais en les maniant et repassant, au long aller, on les apivoise sans doubtte."

fear of dying is to be removed you must dwell constantly on the inevitability and the imminence of death. But this approach doesn't work, or at least it doesn't work for Montaigne who has tried it as much as anyone. On the other hand, the experience of death described in II.6 can only come to a few, and it cannot be stage-managed, it happens entirely by chance - which is to say, it happens not artificially but naturally.

The role of Nature in the approach to death was adumbrated in I.20, both in the minor digression which described her leading us down the gentle slope to old age and so making death easier to face, and by implication in the postscript referring to the instinctive assurance of the the "gens de village" when they come to die. But the main chapter on death from Montaigne's later years - III.12, *De la Phisionomie* - develops the central importance of nature, to the detriment of stoical philosophy and scholarly erudition.

At one point Montaigne confesses that his chapter titles do not always encapsulate their subject-matter,<sup>124</sup> and on the face of it III.12 is a good example. The sequence of ideas is: Socrates is the paragon of moral excellence, simplicity and naturalness; but Socrates was ugly; which is strange, because human beauty and human goodness are often linked. But the exposition of the first element takes up twenty-two pages in the Pléiade edition, with no overt mention of physiognomy, to which two pages are then loosely devoted; while the final four pages relate to two of Montaigne's own experiences where he thinks his own frank countenance saved his bacon.

It is the first twenty-two pages which are interesting. Socrates has now supplanted the

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<sup>124</sup> III.9: 973/1124-5.

superhuman Cato in Montaigne's mind as the model of nobility and greatness, precisely because he is human, down-to-earth, natural. While Cato was far beyond the reach of any of us, "[B] Socrates faict mouvoir son ame d'un mouvement naturel et commun. Ainsi dict un paysan, ainsi dict une femme.<sup>125</sup> . . . les plus simples y recognoissent leurs moyens et leur force; il n'est possible d'aller plus arriere et plus bas. Il a faict grand faveur à l'humaine nature de montrer combien elle peut d'elle mesme."<sup>126</sup> Knowledge, study, book-learning are greatly overrated, more dangerous than useful. "Il ne nous faut guiere de doctrine pour vivre à nostre aise. Et Socrates nous apprend qu'elle est en nous, et la manière de l'y trouver et de s'en ayder."<sup>127</sup>

This applies quintessentially to death. "[B] Recueillez-vous; vous trouverez en vous les arguments de la nature contre la mort vrais, et les plus propres à vous servir à la nécessité; ce sont ceux qui font mourir un paysan et des peuples entiers aussi constamment qu'un philosophe."<sup>128</sup> And he adds after 1588, in a kind of manifesto of his later approach compared with the earlier: "[C] Fussé je mort moins allegrement avant qu'avoir veu les *Tusculanes*? J'estime que non. Et quand je me trouve au propre, je sens que ma langue s'est enrichie, mon courage de rien; il est comme Nature me le forgea, et se targue pour le conflict d'une marche populaire et commune."<sup>129</sup>

After further denigration of the useless subtleties of erudition he gives some examples of the common people's approach. Knowing nothing of Aristotle or Cato, and aided only by Nature, they seem to face death far more simply and with far more resolve

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<sup>125</sup> III.12: 1013/1173.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 1015/1175.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 1016/1176.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

than those who face it with the aid of philosophy: "Combien en vois-je ordinairement, qui mesconnoissent la pauvreté? combien qui desirent la mort, ou qui la passent sans alarme et sans affliction? Celuy là qui fouyt mon jardin, il a ce matin enterré son pere ou son fils."<sup>130</sup> And this is especially apparent in times - like those - of pestilence and social upheaval.<sup>131</sup> His conclusion is that "[B] Nous avons abandonné nature et luy voulons apprendre sa leçon, elle qui nous menoit si hereusement et si seurement."<sup>132</sup>

Again he spells out the apparent completeness of his conversion from the argument in I.20. Because now he thinks that anticipating death in order to prepare ourselves produces the worst of all worlds: not only do we not succeed in preparing ourselves for death, but we force ourselves to live through it twice. So that Cicero's maxim is simply posturing: "[C] Ils s'en venteront tant qu'il leur plaira. *Tota philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est.* Mais il m'est advis que c'est bien le bout, non pourtant le but de la vie; c'est sa fin, son extremité, non pourtant son object. Elle doit estre elle mesme à soy sa visée, son dessein; son droit estude est se regler, se conduire, se souffrir. Au nombre de plusieurs autres offices que comprend ce general et principal chapitre de sçavoir vivre, est cet article de sçavoir mourir; et des plus legers si nostre crainte ne luy donnoit poids."<sup>133</sup> Or putting it still more baldly: "[B] Si vous ne sçavez pas mourir, ne vous chaille; nature vous en informera sur le champ, plainement et suffisamment."<sup>134</sup> This is what common folk understand naturally and what enables them to endure all kinds of ills, and if they are to be criticised as crass

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 1017/1178.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 1025/1187.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* 1026/1188.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 1028/1190-1.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 1028/1190.

and obtuse, "[B] Pour Dieu . . . tenons d'ores en avant escolle de bestise. C'est l'extreme fruit que les sciences nous promettent, auquel cette-cy conduit si doucement ses disciples. Nous n'aurons pas faute de bons regens, interpretes de la simplicité naturelle."<sup>135</sup>

One of those "good professors" is Socrates, and as an example of Socratic teaching Montaigne now repeats ("de ce qu'il m'en souvient")<sup>136</sup> the gist of Plato's *Apology*, in the course of which Socrates says - according to Montaigne - "[B] Je sçay que je n'ay ny fréquenté, ny recogneu la mort . . ."<sup>137</sup> Montaigne says he has selected this speech as an example of Socratic reasoning, because dying is part of nature (so that to fear it is quite unnatural), and Socrates explains this in the most simple and natural way, without artifice and without dressing up his thoughts in other people's words. Which gives Montaigne the excuse for two pages on borrowing other people's words, before he at last gets round explicitly to the subject of physiognomy.

Now on a superficial level this is straightforward enough. Over the years Montaigne's thinking on the subject of death and how to approach it has changed. The doubts which were already present earlier, undermining his presentation of the view that the only way to deal with death was to anticipate it by frequenting it, have expanded into the precisely opposite approach, that the only way to deal with death is to ignore it. "La stupidité du vulgaire", ridiculed in I.20, becomes - in the same words - the model attitude in III.12.<sup>138</sup> Death in I.20 is "le but de nostre carriere"; dying in III.12 "est bien le bout, non pourtant le but de la vie." Cicero's phrase "*tota*

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 1029/1192.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> On Montaigne's evolving attitude to "le vulgaire" see Frame, 1955, pp.3 ff. and 165 ff.

*philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est*", which was the battle-cry of I.20, is dismissed in III.12 as bluster.<sup>139</sup>

But a closer look may suggest that Montaigne is doubly disingenuous in III.12 and involves himself in a double contradiction. First, it might have been expected of someone who prides himself on his frankness and his abhorrence of lying, to come clean and admit that he has changed his mind and that he regards his previous position as no longer tenable. (Because it is clear from the above pairs of opposites that this is not one of those cases where he can preserve an uncommitted detachment, maintaining that he merely thinks differently now and that there is nothing to choose

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. Villey (II, pp.394f): "Il est impossible de confesser plus hautement ses erreurs passées. Sur la question de la préparation à la mort, le douzième essai du troisième livre . . . est en contradiction formelle avec le vingtième du premier livre, la théorie de 1588 avec celle de 1572." There have, however, been many attempts to argue away the contradictions between I.20 and III.12 - see Boon, pp.307f. for the first moves in this direction in the 1950s. Brody's chapter on Montaigne and death is a good example. The title to I.20 he takes not as a proposition to which Montaigne subscribes but "une simple hypothèse liminaire, discutable ou même sujette à caution." And "le vulgaire" referred to disparagingly in the first part of I.20 are not, he says, to be understood as equivalent to "les gens de village et de basse condition" of the epilogue: "le vulgaire" are envisaged by Montaigne "non pas globalement ou dans l'abstract à titre de classe sociale, mais comme proie potentielle à l'irrationalité, comme victime de tendances dénaturantes et déshumanisantes."

But it is not entirely clear why these scholars are so anxious to make Montaigne consistent. Quite apart from his own explicit admission that he does change his mind, frequently, and that the later thoughts are not necessarily superior to the earlier, what is more likely than that a man's approach to death should evolve over a period of twenty years, or even alter radically? In any case, Montaigne seems to have rejoiced in paradox and playful contradiction: inconsistency is a charge which would not have troubled him in the least. So that a reading which aims to remove all contradictions and paradox and force him into the straitjacket of strict logical consistency is likely itself to be missing the point. Moreover, it has to be said that the difference between the evolutionary and the non-evolutionary interpretations is sometimes less than clear-cut. Boon, for example, sets out (p.308) to demonstrate "l'insuffisance des arguments de la thèse évolutive et le sens profond d'unité de ce thème [la mort] dans les Essais", but what he actually establishes (p.315) is that Montaigne moved from a young man's approach to death as largely theoretical to something much more personal: "L'on sait que la venue de la maladie et de la vieillesse change radicalement sa situation. Ce qui avait été matière à réflexion devient maintenant objet d'expérience." (*Ibid.*) In other words, from "la mort" to "ma mort". And is this not evolution? Conversely, while Sayce (pp.134f.) declares (p.134) that "In the Third Book the evolution, not to say *volte-face*, is complete," and that "the evolution from one position (importance of preparation for death) to its opposite (unimportance of preparation for death) is thus established beyond doubt," nevertheless "at a deeper level" this may be a distinction without much of a difference: "Whether to be achieved through stern effort or evasive action, the object remains the same: the treatment of death as no more than an incident which hardly ruffles the surface of a serene life. Evolution, here as elsewhere, is largely the drawing out of latent potentialities."

between the two points of view: this is a practical subject - how to behave in relation to death - and he does think that his later approach is preferable to the earlier.) But instead of admitting this, he pours scorn on those who inspired his earlier view, and whom he had previously quoted with unqualified approval - notably Cicero.

It could conceivably be argued that this is to miss the point, which lies in the ironical references to his own earlier position, ironical because they deliberately echo the same vocabulary and phraseology but with quite different implications. Things are, however, more serious when it comes to citing Socrates in support of the new position, and putting words in his mouth which not only did he never say but which are actually the opposite of what he did say. It is ironical enough (ironical in a less favourable sense) that Montaigne, as part of the process of promoting Socrates' natural simplicity, simultaneously demotes Cicero by writing off the latter's "*tota philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est*" as mere puff - and omits to mention that this is actually a paraphrase of Socrates himself. Perhaps his memory let him down at this point - it was, as he often says, notoriously weak. But then he goes on to give an extended paraphrase of Plato's *Apology*, allegedly from memory: he prefaces it with the words "de ce qu'il m'en souvient." He could of course have verified his sources - he even draws attention two pages later to the fact that at the time of writing he is surrounded by his thousand volumes. Instead, by relying, or pretending to rely, on his notoriously weak memory, he is able to insert into his representation of Socrates' speech a sentence which is not in the original, which is the opposite of what is implied in the quotation two pages earlier from the *Phaedo*, and which gives Socratic authority to Montaigne's new approach: "Je sçay que je n'ay ny fréquenté, ny

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recongneu la mort."<sup>140</sup>

And this leads to the two contradictions in which Montaigne entangles himself in III.12. The first is a logical contradiction. His argument is that the proper approach to death is to forget about it and leave it to nature as the common people do, an approach which Socrates allegedly embodied; and part of his eulogy of Socrates is based on the natural simplicity of the latter's style of argument, never relying on other people's words.<sup>141</sup> But if Montaigne's new approach is simply what nature teaches and the common people embody, why not simply say so and leave it at that? If the new approach is inaccessible to philosophy, why adduce a philosopher in support? If the common people can die fearlessly without knowing anything of Aristotle and Cato, they can presumably die fearlessly without knowing anything of Socrates - and so can we. If Montaigne denies that he would have died any less happily before reading the *Tusculan Disputations*, why should he die any less happily before reading Socrates - especially since the *Tusculans* are quoting Socrates? If his mind's "buckler in the combat with death is to approach it as do the common people",<sup>142</sup> why does he need to buckle on Socrates as well? And if one of the reasons why Socrates is so admirable is his refusal to be dependent on other people, is it not rather absurd to be dependent on Socrates?

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<sup>140</sup> Friedrich, who after drawing attention to everything about Socrates which Montaigne never refers to - Ideas, immortality, cosmology, definition and objective ethical principles - proceeds (p.72): "Diese Streichungen sind charakteristisch. Sie liegen genau an der Stelle, wo Montaignes eigenes Denken Halt macht. Dabei ist nun freilich immer noch genügend sorgfältige Rücksicht auf die Überlieferung da, so dass man nicht sagen könnte, er habe Sokrates verzeichnet. Er hat nur die Umrisse enger gezogen." It is not quite clear from this which Socrates Friedrich is denying that Montaigne misrepresented. But the reality is that Montaigne does refer to the Platonic Socrates' approach to death (*tota philosophorum vita ...*) and does incorporate into the *Apology* what appears to be a fictitious contradiction of that approach ("I know that I have neither frequented death...") It is difficult not to conclude that rather than drawing narrower boundaries, Montaigne is redrawing Socrates in his own image - as Friedrich himself suggests on the previous page: "Ja man hat oft, wenn er ihn [Sokrates] schildert, den Eindruck, als schildere er sich selbst."

<sup>141</sup> Unlike himself, he adds disarmingly: some assert "que j'ay seulement fait icy un amas de fleurs estrangeres, n'y ayant fourny du mien que le filet à les lier." (III.12: 1033/1196.)

The second contradiction is factual: the Socrates of Plato (and Montaigne's Socrates is drawn at least partly from the Socrates of Plato) does not in fact, either in his words or his actions, adopt what is alleged to be the natural approach to death of the common people, namely not to reflect on it at all. Limiting the evidence to the *Apologia*, a man who spends his time pestering others to place the good of their souls above wealth and fame, who considers the unexamined life to be not worth living, and who will always prefer death to doing wrong, is hardly behaving naturally and will certainly not be taken for one of "le vulgaire".

#### 4. Further Thoughts

There is, however, more to say in relation to Montaigne's representation of Socrates in III.12. Some commentators want to revise conventional interpretations of Montaigne and to tell us what he really meant, either by reading between the lines and finding an involuntary concealment of the truth on psychological grounds, or by reading the *Essais* in such a way as to evacuate them of contradiction or inconsistency. Nehamas has a very different aim, indeed his aim is the opposite: to show that sometimes Montaigne does not mean what he says - that he can be deliberately obfuscatory or ironically ambiguous - and to allow him to remain in hiding behind the mask. "Through his discussion of Socrates' speech and his own borrowings [in III.12], Montaigne has raised, as explicitly as any author of his degree of indirectness ever could, the question whether the surface of his texts indicates their real meaning,

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 1016/1176.

whether their appearance expresses their nature. That is the central question of physiognomy."<sup>143</sup>

Nehamas' treatment of *De la Phisionomie* is in the context of Socrates' role as a model for the art of living. His thesis is that "the art of living comes in three varieties, three genres." The Socrates of Plato's early dialogues exemplifies the first: "his ideal may be universalist, but he has no means by which to prove that is right. He remains tentative and protreptic." Secondly, Plato - specifically in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* - constructs an art of living which is in fact claimed to apply to everyone and which is supported by theoretical argument. But the third genre is "the least universalist of all. According to it, human life takes many forms and no single mode of life is best for all. Philosophers like Montaigne . . . articulate a way of living that only they and perhaps a few others can follow. They do not insist that their life is a model for the world at large. They do not want to be imitated, at least not directly. That is, they believe that those who want to imitate them must develop their own art of living, their own self, perhaps to exhibit it for others but not so that others imitate them directly. Imitation, in this context, is to become someone on one's own: but the someone one becomes must be different from one's model."<sup>144</sup>

And this conceptual framework proposed by Nehamas may suggest an answer to some of the questions raised in the course of this chapter. After discussing Montaigne's use in III.12 of the Silenus theme from the *Symposium*, Nehamas says: "Socrates is not the only Silenus. Montaigne's essay and Montaigne himself are also instances of Alcibiades' image. . . Both Socrates and Montaigne need to be interpreted

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<sup>143</sup> Nehamas, p.118.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* pp.9-10.

in order to be understood. . . Physiognomy cannot be trusted, especially when one, like Montaigne, is still in the process of fashioning himself."<sup>145</sup> So Montaigne is not didactic, but neither do the *Essais* form a finished and easily accessible self-portrait. And both these approaches miss the point because they both want to use Montaigne as a model to be imitated.

A second question to which Nehamas suggests an answer is that concerning the role of nature in I.20 and III.12. Nehamas is unashamedly "evolutionist": "Philosophy had traditionally been taken as 'a preparation for death' - a tradition Montaigne himself had accepted in his early essay, 'That to philosophize is to learn to die'. But now he has a different view."<sup>146</sup> Using Socrates as a model, Montaigne arrives at an approach to death which is natural, informed by nature. But both "Socrates" and "nature" require to be explicated. Montaigne's Socrates is "the result of stitching together the testimonies of Plato and Xenophon, Cicero and Plutarch."<sup>147</sup> And Cicero's story about Socrates correcting by training a soul which at first matched his ugly exterior allows Montaigne "to think of nature not as a lost original state but as a state achieved through rational self-restraint. . . Despite the apparently central thesis of the essay, 'Of Physiognomy', one does not start as a natural being; that is something one becomes. . . Nature, therefore, is not simply the origin where individuals or society begin. More important, it is the final state in which our various inclinations work for a common purpose, refusing to trespass on one another's ground, and enable each individual to accomplish the best - the different best - of which each

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<sup>145</sup> Nehamas, pp.125-6. And cf. at p.111: "Nothing in [III.12], neither Socrates' nor Montaigne's various stories, nor even Montaigne's own writing, can be taken at face value." Nehamas quotes from III.2:782/907-8: "[B] Je ne puis assurer mon object....Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: non un passage d'aage en autre, ou, comme dit le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute."

<sup>146</sup> Nehamas, p.115.

is capable."<sup>148</sup>

Thirdly, Nehamas argues that Montaigne's strategy in constructing that composite image of Socrates is aimed at his presentation of nature. The closing speech from the *Apology* which Montaigne alleges he is quoting from memory is, in Nehamas' words, "a condensation, rearrangement, and eclectic paraphrase;"<sup>149</sup> but "despite his various sources and his own manipulation of them, Montaigne insists that Socrates' speech, as he has rendered it, is perfectly natural: 'In an unstudied and artless boldness and a childlike assurance it represents the pure and primary impression and ignorance of Nature.'"<sup>150</sup> And it is specifically from Xenophon, says Nehamas, that Montaigne derives "a non-esoteric Socrates, a Socrates who is common, straightforward, and 'natural' as can be."<sup>151</sup>

Fourth, there is the paradox involved in Montaigne's appeal to Socrates in support of his hostility to the philosophers. The general question, Nehamas says, "is how Socrates, whose main concern was to care for himself, a man who neither presented himself as, nor was teacher of anyone, could function as a model for another. The

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* p.120.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* pp.123-4.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* p.116. It is curious that both Friedrich and Nehamas labour under the misapprehension that Montaigne waters down Socrates' speech in the *Apology* by omitting any reference to an afterlife. So Friedrich (p.367): "Dabei ist es sehr bezeichnend, dass er den im Platon-Text enthaltenen Agnostizismus des Sokrates (ob der Tod gänzliche Vernichtung sei oder Übergang in ein Nachleben der Seele) beteutend steigert. Bei Platon nämlich hört man: es könnte ja immerhin sein, dass die Seele nicht untergeht. Bei Montaigne hört man das nicht mehr. Er will nicht wissen, was nach dem Tode aus uns wird." And Nehamas (p.116): "There now follows a remarkable passage, a condensation, rearrangement, and eclectic paraphrase of Plato's *Apology*, from which Montaigne has excised Socrates'...tentative view that the soul may survive the body's death." Whereas in fact Montaigne's version of the speech reads: "[B] Quant à moy, je ne sçay ny quelle elle est, ny quel il fait en l'autre monde. A l'avanture est la mort chose indifferente, à l'avanture desirable. [C] (Il est à croire pourtant, si c'est une transmigration d'une place à autre, qu'il y a de l'amendement d'aller vivre avec tant de grands personnages trespassez, et d'estre exempt d'avoir plus à faire à juges iniques et corrompus...)" (III.12: 1030/1192.)

<sup>150</sup> Nehamas, p.117.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* p.110.

question is more pressing when that other, like Montaigne, is also concerned with the care of his own self."<sup>152</sup> The answer is that Montaigne is neither imitating the example of Socrates nor offering himself as a model to be imitated. Nehamas quotes Friedrich, who said that "Montaigne's only aim is. . .to grant every person the same right to the freedom of being himself that the author claims for himself."<sup>153</sup> Or putting it another way, for both Socrates and Montaigne the Delphic injunction to "know yourself" is crucial: but whenever that injunction is obeyed it is always a different self which is known. "Socrates taught Montaigne a few general precepts, like 'Live according to your power' or 'Follow nature', which do not describe their end and offer no instructions for reaching it. To apply them, one must determine one's particular powers, which . . . are different in each individual case. Socrates also taught Montaigne that there is little to learn *from* him, even though one can learn a lot *through* him. And he taught him that to learn through Socrates is not to follow him and re-create him but, as Montaigne himself does in this Silenic text, to become his own model of nature."<sup>154</sup>

Now the trouble with all this is that when you start from the premiss that your subject is more or less impenetrable, you are likely, if you say anything at all, to err on the side of intelligibility. Or as Kierkegaard would put it, the temptation is "to paint the god Mars in the armour which made him invisible." And at times Nehamas is in danger of falling into this trap. If III.12 is "immensely complex, apparently disorganised, often contradictory";<sup>155</sup> if "nothing in the essay, neither Socrates' nor Montaigne's various stories, or even Montaigne's own writing, can be taken at face

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* pp.119-20.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* p.104.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* p.126.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* p.108.

value";<sup>156</sup> if it is so questionable whether "the surface of his texts indicate their real meaning";<sup>157</sup> if "in Montaigne's world, perhaps everywhere, it is impossible to show oneself as what one really is"<sup>158</sup> - if all this is true, how is Nehamas able to be so lucid in his analysis of what Montaigne really means, and so self-confident? Or putting it another way, what are the criteria for deciding whether his analysis is correct?

One answer to the last question would be that the test is whether the interpretation accounts coherently and exhaustively for everything in the original text. But there are several problems in that respect with Nehamas' treatment. First, there is his argument that "Montaigne's insistence that Socrates defeated his original inclination to vice through reason allows him to think of nature not as a lost original state but as a state achieved through rational self-restraint."<sup>159</sup> Because what Nehamas does not mention is Montaigne's later addition: "[B] Come Socrates disoit de la sienne qu'elle en accusoit justement autant en son ame, s'il ne l'eust corrigée par institution. [C] Mais en le disant je tiens qu'il se mocquoit suivant son usage, et jamais ame si excellente ne se fit elle mesme."<sup>160</sup> Now that addition may itself be an ironic jest,<sup>161</sup> but it does on the face of it undermine the Socratic authority behind Nehamas' interpretation of Montaigne's understanding of nature, and simply to ignore it undermines the credibility of that interpretation.

Second, there are other remarks in III.12 which seem to run counter to Nehamas' claim that in Montaigne's eyes "one does not start as a natural being: that is

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* p.111.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p.118.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* p.122.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* p.123.

<sup>160</sup> III.12:1035/1199.

<sup>161</sup> Although it echoes a passage in II.11: 402/474: "[A] ...car je ne puis concevoir en ce personnage là

something one becomes."<sup>162</sup> For example: "[B] [Socrates] ne monta rien, mais ravala plustost et ramena à son point originel et naturel et lui soumit la vigueur, les aspretez et les difficultez;"<sup>163</sup> or "[C] Fussé je mort moins allegrement avant qu'avoir veu les *Tusculanes*? J'estime que non. Et quand je me trouve au propre, je sens que ma langue s'est enrichie, mon courage de rien; il est comme Nature me le forgea, et se targue pour le conflict d'une marche populaire et commune."<sup>164</sup>

Third, there is the question of universality, and Nehamas' central contention that Montaigne does not intend to universalise, but that in order to fulfil the Socratic injunction to follow nature "one must determine one's particular powers, which . . . are different in each individual case."<sup>165</sup> Against that there is this apparently unequivocal sentence: "[B] Et en ont fait les hommes comme les parfumeurs de l'huile: ils l'ont sophistiquée de tant d'argumentations et de discours appelez du dehors, qu'elle en est devenue variable et particuliere à chacun, et a perdu son propre visage, constant et universel, et nous faut en chercher tesmoignage des bestes, non subject à faveur, corruption, ny à diversité d'opinions."<sup>166</sup>

Of course (as always) each of these quotations can be countered by others from the same chapter which go in the opposite direction. There is another (C) passage which repeats the idea of reason straightening out Socrates' vicious tendencies;<sup>167</sup> there are several passages which envisage the possibility of the "desnaturés" somehow (but that is the problem) reacquiring the lost innocence which simple people still possess

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aucun effort de vitieuse concupiscence. Au train de sa vertu, je n'y puis imaginer aucune difficulté et aucune contrainte..."

<sup>162</sup> Nehamas, p.123.

<sup>163</sup> III.12: 1014/1174.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* 1016/1176.

<sup>165</sup> Nehamas, p. 126.

naturally;<sup>168</sup> and against the universality of nature there is the remark that "[B] Les hommes sont divers en goust et en force; il les faut mener à leur bien selon eux, et par routes diverses."<sup>169</sup>

But that is not the point. Obviously Nehamas can and does cite evidence from the text of III.12 in support of his various claims. The question is rather whether his interpretation does justice to the whole of that chapter.<sup>170</sup> Or putting it another way: given the ambiguities of the content, and given that Montaigne's playful allusion right at the end<sup>171</sup> to Plutarch's habit of presenting things "[B] en ces deux sortes . . . diversement et contrairement" is clearly intended to apply to Montaigne himself, by what authority does Nehamas select one strand, one of the "two opposite and contrasting manners", and use that as the basis for his interpretation? How can he clear himself of the suspicion that in procrustean fashion he has simply arranged Montaigne to fit his preconceived theory?<sup>172</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Nehamas of course is right, that there is something unfinished about Montaigne, that he was constantly fashioning himself and constantly refashioning his thoughts. Which means that the title of Screech's translation - "*Complete Essays of Michel de*

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<sup>166</sup> III.12: 1026-7/1188.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* 1037/1201: "[C] Cette raison, qui redresse Socrates de son vicieux ply. . ."

<sup>168</sup> E.g. 1026/1188.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 1029/1191.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Sayce, p.1: "...quotations from the *Essays* taken in isolation can be highly misleading: as with the Bible, almost anything can be proved. Ideally every quotation should be related to the whole complex of attitudes, but this is hardly a practical possibility."

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* 1041/1206.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Sayce again (*ibid.*): "It follows too that, faced with such multiplicity, any critic tends to extract

*Montaigne*" - is an oxymoron, and that this heading "Conclusions" is itself misleading: "Latest Thoughts" might be better.<sup>173</sup>

Not only that, the man was a mass of contradictions, in the way he thought, the way he wrote, and the way he presented himself. Except that the word "contradiction" needs to be qualified or elaborated. There are times when two of his statements or approaches are in formal contradiction to each other - and the reason may be a progression in his thinking (or at least a change of mind), or a deliberately uncommitted proffering of alternatives, or an ironic display of the perverse nature of the human mind.<sup>174</sup> At other times what is involved is more paradox than contradiction, and the cause lies in the nature of his subject-matter or in the limitations of the human mind.<sup>175</sup> And there must also be times, given the limitations of the particular man Montaigne and the extraordinary scope of the *Essais*, when he contradicts himself unintentionally.

What all this amounts to is that it is dangerous to do anything with Montaigne except read him, since analysis or paraphrase or even quotation will inevitably result in omission and distortion.<sup>176</sup> Rather than attempting to reach some sort of finality,

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those elements which will make Montaigne in his own image."

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Friedrich's remark (p.8) on the effect Montaigne's style has on his commentators: "Das liegt am Charakter des dargestellten Autors und seines beweglichen, umherkreisenden Denkstils."

<sup>174</sup> Cf. III.2: 782/908.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. III.13: 1045/1211-2: "[C] C'est signe de racourciment d'esprit quand il se contente, ou de lasseté. Nul esprit genereux ne s'arreste en soy: il pretend tousjours et va outre ses forces; il a des esclans au delà de ses effects; s'il ne s'avance et ne se presse et ne s'accule et ne se choque, il n'est vif qu'à demy; [B] ses poursuites sont sans terme, et sans forme; son aliment c'est [C] admiration, chasse, [B] ambiguité. Ce que declaroit assez Apollo, parlant tousjours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement, ne nous repaissant pas, mais nous amusant et embesongnant. C'est un mouvement irregulier, perpetuel, sans patron, et sans but."

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.33: "Wollte man die *Essais* resumieren in einer Kernidee (etwa im *que sais-je?*) und deren Teilen, so bliebe zuviel unerfasst von dem, was sie in ihrer Breite sind...Ihre Nachdenklichkeit und Anschaulichkeit, ihr Witz und ihre Laune ertragen nicht eine verkürzte Wiedergabe, so wenig wie eine Meditation oder eine Erzählung das ertrüge." Accordingly, (p.8): "...die beste Art, ihm [Montaigne] beizukommen, ohne ihn zu erdrücken, ist das mitgehende

therefore, this "conclusion" simply asks some questions. There is a sentence in II.6 which has already been referred to: "[A] Ce n'est pas ci ma doctrine, c'est mon estude; et n'est pas la leçon d'autrui, c'est la mienne."<sup>177</sup> The first question then is, did Montaigne in fact learn anything from his investigations into approaching death?

It seems to be a reasonable inference that he saw his earlier approach as useless and that he therefore abandoned it. There is no direct evidence that he came to doubt the validity of his later approach, or that he found it less than effective - no direct evidence. But it may be remarked, as he himself remarked about Seneca, that the very fact of writing so much about death "[B] montre aucunement qu'il estoit pressé de son adversaire."<sup>178</sup> After all, it is on the face of it peculiar for someone who wants to discourage reflection about death to spend so much time reflecting about it. That the earlier approach in I.20 was not the answer, was already suggested by the contradictions contained within it. That the later approach in III.12 was not the answer either is suggested by the contradiction involved in the very act of articulating it at such length.

But a more substantive answer to the question might be that he seems first to have thought of death as "la mort",<sup>179</sup> and moved from there to seeing it as "ma mort": in other words, the universal human problem, "solved" by the traditional *artes moriendi*, became for him the problem of the death of Michel de Montaigne.<sup>180</sup> But the

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Beschreiben."

<sup>177</sup> II.6: 357/424.

<sup>178</sup> III.12: 1017/1177.

<sup>179</sup> So Friedrich (p.328) says that in the early chapters "Montaigne spricht noch in einer unpersönlichen Neutralität. Er ist noch nicht mit sich selber allein. Sein Ich steht stellvertretend für die Gattung Mensch."

<sup>180</sup> See Friedrich, p.352: "Die öfter gebrauchte Formel *ma mort*..., die die frühere *la mort* abgelöst hat, drückt den grossen Schritt aus, den er gemacht hat vom objektiven Todeswissen zur Todesnähe in der individuellen Innerlichkeit." And cf. p. 325: "Stärker als irgendein antiker Philosoph

"solution" to that problem he found in the perspective of "sa mort", his or her death, that is to say the death of other people, the valets and chambermaids, "les gens de basse condition": the problem of my approaching death is answered by how they approach death ("cette mesme mort"), or how death approaches them. And that perspective in turn throws all the emphasis back from death onto life. One could say that for Montaigne it becomes increasingly a problem of life and death: to see death as the peasant does, in terms of what is natural, involves living life as the peasant does, naturally.<sup>181</sup>

But two further questions immediately arise from that. The first is, how is the "desnaturé" to learn how to be natural again? How can the philosopher become the peasant?<sup>182</sup> Montaigne forestalls the obvious criticism that his peasants are an absurdly over-romanticised figment of his imagination with the argument: All right, even if they are actually crass and obtuse and insensitive, and even if that is the only reason why they are able to endure suffering with such constancy and steadfastness, "Pour Dieu, s'il est ainsi, tenons d'ores en avant escolle de bestise."<sup>183</sup> But how precisely do we enrol in that school? If the common people do not think about death, this is not because they have been told not to think about it, but because they naturally don't think about it.<sup>184</sup> What happens if we naturally do think about it? Can we

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individualisiert er den Tod. Er wird ihm zunehmend wichtig als sein eigenes künftiges Sterben." Cf. also Leeman, who finds in Montaigne (p.322) "eine Entwicklung von allgemeiner Erörterung über das Todesproblem zu einer immer direkteren Bezogenheit auf den eigenen Tod."

<sup>181</sup> In Starobinski's formulation (p.100): "Tandis que l'imminence de la mort incite le chrétien à diriger sa pensée vers l'au-delà, Montaigne au contraire reporte son regard sur l'en deçà."

<sup>182</sup> If "*difficultatem facit doctrina*" (III.13: 1044/1210, quoting Quintilian), why should learning be supposed capable of removing the difficulty?

<sup>183</sup> III.12: 1029/1192.

<sup>184</sup> Montaigne's own self-analysis ("[C] Je me tiens de la commune sorte, sauf en ce que je m'en tiens" - II.17: 618/722) encapsulates this problem of learning to be natural, of consciously becoming unconscious of death. Friedrich (p. 338) says that Montaigne "später dies Denken [an den Tod] wiederum absichtsvoll in ein Vergessen wandelt," but he does not explain how the trick is done. Similarly at p.365 Friedrich shows that he recognises the distinction but not the problem: "Die philosophische Qualität dieses Todesverhältnisses wird dadurch nicht geschmälert, dass Montaigne von

simply tell ourselves not to? And in what sense is it behaving in accordance with Nature to tell ourselves to stop doing what comes naturally to us? What it amounts to is this: in order to learn how to cope with death, we must imitate not Cicero, or Cato, or Lucretius, or Socrates, or Pyrrho - but Pyrrho's exemplary pig.<sup>185</sup> The trouble is that human beings cannot imitate pigs: exemplary pigs might fly.

The second consequential question relates to "sa mort" in a more restricted sense, the sense of the death of another, as opposed to my own death. Or in different terms, the problem of bereavement. It is remarkable that Montaigne has almost nothing to say about bereavement. He refers of course to the extraordinary effect which La Boétie's death had on him, but his relationship with La Boétie was itself so extraordinary that it could not possibly serve in any sense as an example to others. Nor does Montaigne see it as such. Everything about it was unique - or at least its like was not to be seen above once in three hundred years - and so, the implication is, was the effect on him of its cessation. In any case, even if it could operate as an example, it would simply teach us to equate bereavement with unrelieved gloom. And apart from that his only allusions to the death of others are indifferent or even cynical - for example, III.4, *De la Diversion*, which recommends diverting the bereaved, not as a lasting cure but as the best means of escaping unscathed from their presence. Whether or not Cole is right - that this sort of thing argues the repression of deeper feelings<sup>186</sup> - it does seem to be the case that Montaigne was unconcerned with the problem of making sense of another's death, and in particular with Ivan Karamazov's question: how to make sense

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Unwissenheit, Vergessen, Natur redet. Es handelt sich um ein hochreflektiertes Vergessen, um eine hochreflektierte Naturhaftigkeit." Here the impossible is disguised as paradox.

<sup>185</sup> See I.14: 54/57: "[A] Pyrrho le Philosophe, se trouvant un jour de grande tourmente dans un batteau, montrait à ceux qu'il voyoit les plus effrayez autour de luy, et les encourageoit par l'exemple d'un pourceau, qui y estoit, nullement soucieux de cet orage."

<sup>186</sup> Cole, p.174. And cf. Friedrich, p.327: "Es scheint, dass er den möglichen Tod seiner Nächsten

of the cruel and agonizing death of a child.

Of course there are two obvious answers to this question: one that Montaigne deliberately excludes any consideration of religion, and therefore any consideration of theodicy; and the other that the *Essais* are anything but systematic, and therefore there is no obligation on him when he discusses death to account for all its aspects. But the fact remains that within an understanding of death which is underpinned by Nature, such an attitude to bereavement seems oddly unnatural.

And oddly unsatisfying. According to Brody, *Que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir* is the first example of a profane *ars moriendi* since classical antiquity:<sup>187</sup> and there is no doubt that it is profane - or even completely pagan, as Pascal called it.<sup>188</sup> But is it really an *ars moriendi* at all? The sentence from II.6 quoted at the beginning of this Conclusion was expanded after 1588 to read: "[A] Ce n'est pas ci ma doctrine, c'est mon estude; et n'est pas la leçon d'autrui, c'est la mienne. [C] Et ne me doibt on sçavoir mauvais gré pourtant, si je la communique. Ce qui me sert, peut aussi par accident servir à un autre."<sup>189</sup> And the function of the *ars moriendi* was after all to help. The further question therefore arises: did Montaigne's thoughts on approaching death ever help anyone else?

He refers frequently to Plato, but he mentions the immortality of the soul only to stress the impossibility of coherently asserting it. He quotes extensively from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, but he ignores the stoic techniques for dealing with

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überhaupt von sich wegschieben möchte..."

<sup>187</sup> Brody, p.109.

<sup>188</sup> Quoted by Brody, p.132.

<sup>189</sup> II.6: 357/424.

bereavement and suggests nothing else instead. In his philosophy of death he is nearest to Epicurus and Lucretius among the ancients, but then his 'philosophy' turns out to be merely an artificial substitute for an original state of natural innocence, and how the "desnaturé" is to return to that original state remains a mystery. In other words, Montaigne's reflections on death hold out no prospect of anything other than extinction, they offer no consolation or advice in bereavement, and they recommend an approach to life and death which, unless it is already yours, seems to be unattainable. Can they be said in that case to amount to an *ars moriendi*?

The answer perhaps is: yes, but only as part of an art of living in Nehamas' sense - which involves us seeing Montaigne not as an example to be imitated (he is in any case inimitable) but as a great original. And that in turn means that he must be left as he is, with all his contradictions intact. We must take him as we find him, accepting his self-criticism at its face value, and resisting the temptation to make virtues of his vices.

His reflections on approaching death are from some points of view - that of the scholar who wants to systematise them,<sup>190</sup> or that of the disciple who wants to adopt them<sup>191</sup> - incoherent and useless. But from another point of view they may be said to inspire, because contradiction, paradox, vacillation, even incoherence are in this context the hallmarks of honesty and courage. His reflections show us a human being engaged in battle. He is a human being like us; he has no better armour than we do

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. I.38: 231/265: "...voulans de toute cette suite continuer un corps, nous nous trompons." Starobinski expands this (p.108-9): "Continuer un corps, ce serait faire oeuvre artificielle, vouloir imposer une figure constante à ce qui est soumis à un 'branle' perpétuel. Forme, constance, stabilité, fermeté - toutes qualités que nous invoquions pour définir les essences - ne sont que des illusions: seul les logiciens professionnels...pourront y recourir."

<sup>191</sup> Cf. the little parable in II.37: 737/858: "[A] Un valet qui me servoit à les escrire soubz moy pensa

because he refuses to shelter behind the conventional ceremonials and *artes moriendi* of his time;<sup>192</sup> and the enemy is our enemy. He seems to have somehow extricated himself from the engagement - by deserting,<sup>193</sup> or by collaborating,<sup>194</sup> or perhaps simply by surrendering.<sup>195</sup> It is not important which, because we are not expected to use his tactics in fighting our own battle. It is enough that he fought his, and wrote about it.

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faire un grand butin de m'en desrober plusieurs pieces choisies à sa poste. Cela me console, qu'il n'y fera pas plus de gain que j'y ay fait de perte."

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.363: "Er nimmt, obwohl aus anderen Gründen, den Tod so ernst wie ein Christ, aber er versagt sich christliche Tröstung."

<sup>193</sup> Cf. III.9: 956/1107): "Je ne suis point arrivé à cette vigueur desdaigneuse qui se fortifie en soy-mesme, que rien n'ayde, ny ne trouble; je suis d'un point plus bas. Je cherche à coniller et à me desrober de ce passage, non par crainte, mais par art."

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Friedrich, p.348: "Dabei wird das Negative des Todes nicht wegdisputiert: er bleibt der Zerstörer, der Feind. Aber diesem Feind kann man die Hand geben: ein befreundeter Feind."

<sup>195</sup> Cf. II.6: 357/423: "[A] C'eust esté sans mentir une mort bien heureuse; car la foiblesse de mon discours me gardoit d'en rien juger, et celle du corps d'en rien sentir. Je me laissoy couler si doucement et d'une façon si douce et si aisée que je ne sens guiere autre action moins poisante que celle-là estoit."

## V. Final Questions

The problems raised by approaching death are constant,<sup>1</sup> and they are summed up by St Augustine in a few deft sentences and in a way which suggests a framework for comparison: "*Vita misera est, mors incerta est; subito obrepat - quomodo hinc exibimus? et ubi nobis discenda sunt quae hinc negleximus? ac non potius huius negligentiae supplicia luenda? quid, si mors ipsa omnem curam cum sensu amputabit et finiet? ergo et hoc quaerendum.*" (And he adds: "*Sed absit, ut ita sit.*")<sup>2</sup> In other words, three questions: how shall we die? how shall we live? and what awaits us?

Now on the first - "*quomodo hinc exibimus?*" - it might be thought that one test of the validity of the various approaches should be the way in which those who held them actually did depart: the proof of the pudding. Or as Montaigne put it: "En tout le reste il y peut avoir du masque. . . Mais à ce dernier rôle de la mort et de nous, il n'y a plus que faindre, il faut parler François, il faut montrer ce qu'il y a de bon et de net dans le fond du pot."<sup>3</sup>

So what did they reveal at the bottom of the pot, our eloquent philosophers of death?

We have reports only in relation to three, Cicero, Seneca and Montaigne.<sup>4</sup> The first

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<sup>1</sup> Garland (p.ix) quotes Freud: "There is scarcely any other matter...upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so completely preserved under a thin disguise, as our relation to death. Two things account for our conservatism: the strength of our original emotional reaction to death and the insufficiency of our scientific knowledge to it."

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* VI.11.19.

<sup>3</sup> Montaigne, I.19: 78/87.

<sup>4</sup> St Jerome's claim that Lucretius became insane after drinking a love-potion, wrote *De Rerum Natura* during lucid intervals, and eventually committed suicide, can presumably, or at least plausibly, be dismissed as Christian polemic. See Smith's full discussion in the introduction to his Loeb translation.

two died violently, one perhaps abjectly, the other perhaps heroically; the third died in his bed, perhaps piously. Perhaps: because in each case the reports are subsequent constructions, open to the distortions of time and Tendenz. And the more in keeping the death with the life, the more suspect - perhaps - the report. The account, for example, in Tacitus of those last theatrical hours may give the impression that "mit seinem Mord hat Seneca sein ganzes Werk neu geschrieben",<sup>5</sup> but equally Tacitus himself could have written it out of Seneca's works, or at least written it up.<sup>6</sup> And there is the further possibility that Tacitus' account is more subtly ironic and describes a death "as ludicrous as it is symbolic."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Cicero's pathetic end - fleeing, vacillating, at last offering his throat to the sword<sup>8</sup> - inevitably recalls not only the image of the dying gladiator in the *Tusculans*<sup>9</sup> but the oscillation between philosophical fortitude and emotional instability which characterised his life. Yet the source behind Livy and Plutarch? Cicero's own slaves? or members of the execution squad? or tendentious propaganda? or *colores* invented for the purposes of *suasoriae*?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Schönegg, p.243. Cf. Leeman, p.333: "Er hat Wort gehalten, und seinen Tod zu seinem grössten Erlebnis und seiner Lebensrechtfertigung gemacht."

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the way Seneca himself has written up Cato's death in *De Prov.* II.9-12. See the discussion in Edwards (pp. 109-112), and compare the less flattering account in Cassius Dio 62.25.

<sup>7</sup> Dyson, p.79. According to Dyson, each of the three stages of Seneca's death is intended by Tacitus to capture "symbolically a part of his failure or hypocrisy": the botched vein-cutting compared with Cato, the botched poisoning compared with Socrates, and the final steam bath as a symbol of luxurious living.

<sup>8</sup> Plutarch, *Cic.* 48-49. See also Livy's account in Seneca, *Suasoriae* 6.17 But Livy himself is ambivalent: he appears to distinguish between the ignominious flight from death and the final moments: "*sed in longo tenore felicitatis magnis interim ictus vulneribus, exilio, ruina partium pro quibus steterat, filiae morte, exitu tam tristi atque acerbo, omnium adversorum nihil ut viro dignum erat tulit praeter mortem.*" (*Ibid.* 6.22.) On Livy's intentions and the relationship between his account and that of Asinius Pollio, see Pomeroy.

<sup>9</sup> *T.D.* II.41.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Roller, p.109, note 2: "Modern biographers of Cicero more or less throw up their hands when discussing his death." And rightly so, according to Roller, who argues that the treatment of Cicero's death in *suasoriae* and *controversiae* - it was, as the elder Seneca reports, a favourite subject for *declamationes* even in the triumviral period - may have had a decisive influence on the "historical" accounts: "the death-of-Cicero tradition as a whole is rooted in and shaped by declamation." (p.123.)

Then there is Montaigne himself. We know well enough how he would have liked to die: planting his cabbages,<sup>11</sup> or sliding pleasantly away,<sup>12</sup> or - in keeping with his life - "retirée et privée."<sup>13</sup> But the only account is by some one who was not an eyewitness: when the end approached, "he had Mass said in his room, and when the priest came to the elevation of the Corpus Domini, this poor gentleman rose up as best he could in his bed, with a desperate effort, hands clasped; and in this last action gave up his spirit to God. Which was a fine mirror of his inmost soul."<sup>14</sup> And perhaps it was. But the truth is we have no idea what he found at the bottom of the pot.

In other words, there is no guarantee that at the final curtain the mask may not still be in place,<sup>15</sup> or, even if it is removed, that any of the audience will see what lies behind.<sup>16</sup> Certainly Montaigne may be right when he says that how we die is more revealing than what we say about it in advance,<sup>17</sup> but revealing to whom?<sup>18</sup> And if even during the last scene in the play the mask may still be on, and plain French is not spoken, what chance is there of communicating our real thoughts about death at any stage before that? That is to say, can we only speak of death as "la mort", while "ma

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<sup>11</sup> I.20: 87/99.

<sup>12</sup> II.6: 357/423.

<sup>13</sup> III.9: 956/1107.

<sup>14</sup> Frame's translation (1965, p.305) of Estienne Pasquier.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps even more securely - cf. Starobinski p.98: "Qui nous assure qu'une belle mort n'est pas un chef-d'oeuvre d'artifice?...Au lieu d'un démasquage, c'est le dernier méfait du masque."

<sup>16</sup> Unless of course the audience is itself immortal, like the one Seneca imagines admiring the spectacle of Cato's protracted suicide: "*Inde credideram fuisse parum certum et efficax vulnus; non fuit diis immortalibus satis spectare Catonem semel.*" (*De Prov.* II.12.)

<sup>17</sup> He is of course not original in this: he goes on immediately to quote Lucretius III.57: "*Nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab imo / Eiciuntur, et eripitur persona, manet re.,*" And cf. Seneca *Ep.Mor.*XXVI.5: "*quid profecerim morti crediturus sum. Non timide itaque componor ad illum diem quo remotis strophis ac fucis de me iudicaturus sum, utrum loquar fortia an sentiam, numquid simulatio fuerit et mimus quidquid contra fortunam iactavi verborum contumacium.*"

<sup>18</sup> The remark is made in the context of a discussion of Solon's injunction to call no man happy until he is dead, which Montaigne interprets as referring to the manner in which a man dies. But the private or ambiguous nature of death - and it is always one or the other - means that on this basis no man can ever be pronounced happy.

mort" remains something "solitaire, toute mienne"?<sup>19</sup> Is this analogous to the remark attributed to Bultmann, that when he thought as a theologian he ceased to be a believer, because inevitably he found himself talking about God rather than to God? Are we similarly condemned to objectivity in our communications about death, so that while we may tear away the mask which our terrors and conventions have put over the face of death,<sup>20</sup> we can never succeed in removing the mask we wear ourselves (or not until it is too late)? And are our thoughts about "la mort" as inevitably and comically suspect as perhaps theology is?<sup>21</sup> Are we, as Wordsworth put it, in the dubious position of philosophers who peep and botanize upon their mothers' graves? Or - in relation to our own graves - are we simply evading the issue by endlessly talking about it, like Otho according to Tacitus: "*Plura de extremis loqui pars ignaviae est*"?<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps a way out of that impasse is suggested by Augustine's second question: "*ubi nobis discenda sunt quae hinc negleximus?*" It seems after all to be a common feature of all six that the fact of death induced them to take life more seriously: an approach encapsulated in Plato's μελέτη θανάτου, but just as evident in Seneca's "*Male vivet quisquis nesciet bene mori,*"<sup>23</sup> in Lucretius' "*at bene non poterat sine puro pectore*

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<sup>19</sup> Montaigne, III.9: 956/1107.

<sup>20</sup> Montaigne, II.20: 94/108.

<sup>21</sup> The relationship between "ma mort" and "la mort" is closely analogous to that between Kierkegaard's knight of faith and any philosophical System, or as he expresses it in the preface to the *Concluding Scientific Postscript*: "The objective problem consists of an inquiry into the truth of Christianity. The subjective problem concerns the relationship of the individual to Christianity. To put it quite simply: How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity? The problem concerns myself alone." (p.20.) The solution proposed by the System is simply "incommensurable" with the problem, and to be unconscious of this is irresistibly comic: "When I place an individual who is passionately and infinitely interested in his eternal happiness, in relation to this theory [the objective theory represented by the Church or the Bible], so that he proposes to base his happiness upon it, he becomes a comic figure. He does not become comical because he is infinitely and passionately interested, this being precisely the good in him; but he becomes comical because the objectivity of the Church theory is incommensurable with his interest." (Ibid. p.42.)

<sup>22</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.*2.47.

<sup>23</sup> Seneca, *De Tr. An.* XI.4.

vivi,"<sup>24</sup> in Anticleia's ἀλλὰ φόωσδε τάχιστα λιλαίεο· ταῦτα δὲ πάντα / ἴσθ', ἵνα καὶ μετόπισθε τεῆ εἴπησθα γυναικί,<sup>25</sup> in Cicero's "*Cuius igitur potius opibus utamur quam tuis, quae et vitae tranquillitatem largita nobis es et terrorem mortis sustulisti?*"<sup>26</sup> and in Montaigne's "Au nombre de plusieurs autres offices que comprend ce general et principal chapitre de sçavoir vivre, est cet article de sçavoir mourir; et des plus legers si nostre crainte ne luy donnoit poids."<sup>27</sup>

And particularly the last seems to capture something of the essence of the Platonic practice of death (in spite of Montaigne's apparent side-stepping of the issue in I.20): how one lives is more important than how one dies. Yet the curious thing is that the ethical dimension, Augustine's ethical link between the fact of death and the conduct of life, is only really present in Plato, for whom, in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*, what follows death is the motivating force behind the examined life. The others of course are all concerned with the good life, or the happy life, and the unmasking of death as nothing to fear enables them to concentrate on living the good or the happy life, but the ethical content of that life is not dictated by anything that may happen after death. For Odysseus the prospect after death is, essentially, unrelieved gloom: the dead, except for a handful in the Elysian fields, are *miseri*. For Lucretius the prospect is extinction: the dead are *nec miseri nec beati*. For Cicero and Seneca it is one or other of the Socratic alternatives, bliss or extinction; but if it turns out to be bliss that will in the last analysis be irrespective of how we have led our lives: the dead are *aut beati aut non miseri*. And Montaigne, ironically enough (he might be expected, as a

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<sup>24</sup> Lucretius, V.18.

<sup>25</sup> *Od.* xi.223f.

<sup>26</sup> *T.D.* V.5.

<sup>27</sup> Montaigne, III.12: 1029/1191.

Catholic, to see the dead as *aut beati aut miseri*), seems to endorse Lucretius<sup>28</sup> and ridicules Plato's conception of an afterlife involving corporeal pleasures and pains.<sup>29</sup> There is no correlation for any of them except Plato between the quality of this life and the quality of any afterlife:<sup>30</sup> the fear of death, including the fear of what may happen after death, is simply a disturbing distraction which gets in the way of living.

That refusal to approach death as something which makes me accountable for my actions during this life is both the result of and a stimulus to an objectification of death. If what is in store for us - whether good, bad, or indifferent - is independent of what we have been, then we are encouraged to look on death as simply a fact of nature - "la mort". The only differentiating feature is how I confront the moment of death, yet that turns out to be irrelevant: a private or ambiguous moment, perhaps connected with what precedes but certainly unconnected with anything which follows. And this objectification of death has itself something of the conjuring trick about it: death is nothing to be afraid of, so we should stop thinking about it (although for someone like Seneca the only way to stop being afraid of it may be to think about it constantly). So the paradoxical position is reached where the demand of approaching death to be taken seriously has been met only by declining to take death seriously: the sting of "ma mort" is removed by transforming it into "la mort",<sup>31</sup> and the sting of "la mort" is removed by transforming it into a benevolent fact of life. It's not that the dragon has been tamed with a saucer of milk: the dragon has been shown to be nothing but a pussy cat.

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<sup>28</sup> Montaigne, I.20: 93/105.

<sup>29</sup> II.12: 498/578.

<sup>30</sup> A correlation summed up in *Phaedo* 107C: εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν ὁ θάνατος τοῦ παντὸς ἀπαλλαγὴ, ἔρμαιον ἂν ἦν τοῖς κακοῖς ἀποθανοῦσι τοῦ τε σώματος ἅμ' ἀπηλλάχθαι καὶ τῆς αὐτῶν κακίας μετὰ τῆς ψυχῆς.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Montaigne, III.4: 815/943: "Je voyois nonchalamment la mort, quand je la voyois universellement, comme fin de la vie: je la gourmande en bloc; par le menu, elle me pille."

And this - most curious of all - seems to be the case even if the scenario envisaged in Augustine's third question is accepted: "*Quid, si mors ipsa omnem curam cum sensu amputabit et finiet?*" Augustine's own reaction to the possibility is appalled rejection: "*sed absit, ut ita sit.*" But for Lucretius - and for him it is not a possibility but a certainty - it represents release from the irrational fear of divine punishment. And both Cicero and Seneca, although they hope for some form of immortality, also consider the alternative of extinction with equanimity. The whole of the second part of Book I of the *Tusculans* is devoted to demonstrating that "*ne si interirent quidem animi, quidquam mali esse in morte,*"<sup>32</sup> and Seneca repeats many of the arguments. And of course the stance derives ultimately from the Socrates of the *Apology*, who likens oblivion to a pleasant sleep.

The question then arises, why Socrates, Lucretius, Cicero and Seneca find the prospect so undisturbing? Why do they not recoil in horror like Augustine, or indeed like the common man whose instinctive objections they are concerned to refute? There are of course the stock arguments: the symmetry argument, the argument that what does not exist does not suffer. But there are arguments on the other side, for example what Augustine goes on to say, that it is inconceivable that divine providence should allow such a thing - an argument which may readily be secularised into a protest against the futility of the richness of life vanishing into nothing. It is no doubt the case that what does not exist does not suffer, but (as the interlocutor in the *Tusculans*<sup>33</sup> implies) can we suffer the idea of not existing? Why is it then that these philosophers find it so easy to do so? Or is this a case of "ces beaux discours de la

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<sup>32</sup> *T.D.* I.81.

<sup>33</sup> See *T.D.* I.14.

Philosophie [qui] ne sont en nous que par contenance", of not speaking plain French?<sup>34</sup>

The point perhaps is that any discourse is forced to objectify or universalise the problem: the private nature of approaching death - "ma mort" - is by definition incommunicable. But because it is only "ma mort" which is important, or which constitutes the problem, philosophical discourse can never help.<sup>35</sup> It tries to help by concentrating primarily on the moment of death, and drawing up rules or principles which dictate how we should prepare for it or rehearse it. But it can only succeed to the extent that what has begun as play-acting continues to the end of the performance. And by treating death as theatre, it inevitably fails to deal with it as reality.

But all this is emotionally unsatisfying. The questions about approaching death are raised by the individual about the individual: when and how will I die? what will become of me? how can I grasp or be reconciled to the notion of my own extinction? Yet because the responses given by these philosophers are generalisations, all framed in terms of "us" or "mankind", they never answer the questions: they can never take away either my responsibility for my own approaching death, or my unique relationship to it and its consequences.

Perhaps that is the reason why Montaigne continues to fascinate: that he is not in the least objective, and not at all neat and pauschal. On the contrary, he is quickly

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<sup>34</sup> Montaigne, I.19: 78/87.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Nagel, 1986, p.231: "Of course from the objective standpoint the existence or non-existence of any particular objective self, including this one, is unimportant. The objective viewpoint may try to cultivate an indifference to its own annihilation, but there will be something false about it: the individual attachment to life will force its way back even at this level. Here, for once, the objective self is not in a position of safety."

dissatisfied with the Senecan concentration on the act of dying; he is impatient with the conventional trappings which mask the reality of death; he wants to die far from home, privately, alone; he approves of the simplicity of the peasant as opposed to "les beaux discours de la Philosophie."<sup>36</sup> Of course reducing everything to the simplicity of the peasant seems to be itself an objectification - death is simply to be accepted as a part of nature. But in fact Montaigne can never be a peasant,<sup>37</sup> precisely because the peasant does not ask questions, does not commune with himself and examine his life, does not write essays about death, does not engage in dialogue with his readers. Perhaps therefore Montaigne comes closest to bridging the gap between the subjective and the objective. It can never be bridged completely - my death can never be shared - but perhaps someone like Montaigne can talk to himself, in my hearing, about his death in such a way as to suggest how I can talk to myself about my own death.<sup>38</sup>

And in this he seems to be in the spirit of Plato. There is a passage in the *Laches* where Nicias says that no matter what you talk about with Socrates you always find yourself answering questions about yourself, about how you have led your life and how you are leading it.<sup>39</sup> That kind of self-examination is what Montaigne is engaged in, that is what the *Essais* are.<sup>40</sup> Indeed as Screech says, "*Essais* are the work

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<sup>36</sup> I.19: 78/87.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Glauser, p.19: "Ses oppositions sont des ruses d'écrivain. Quand il prétend vouloir ressembler aux artisans et aux laboureurs qu'il croit plus heureux que des recteurs d'université, il oublie, pour le jeu, que ceux qu'il jalouse n'écrivent pas d'*Essais* et qu'ils sont par là très peu dignes d'envie."

<sup>38</sup> Compare the way Augustine envisages his conversation with God (*garriebam tibi* - IX.1) being overheard by the Reader of the *Confessions*, e.g. X.34.1: "*Restat voluptas oculorum istorum carnis meae, de qua loquor confessiones, quas audiant aures templi tui, aures fraternae et piaae...*"

<sup>39</sup> *Laches* 187E. Cf. M. Frede (pp.216 f.) on why Plato chose the dramatic dialogue rather than the treatise: "To know, we learn from the early dialogues, is not just a matter of having an argument, however good it may be, for a thesis. Knowledge also involves that the rest of one's beliefs, and hence, at least in some cases, one's whole life, be in line with one's argument...In this way knowledge, or at least a certain kind of knowledge Plato is particularly interested in, is a highly personal kind of achievement...For, at least on these questions which matter, it is crucial that one arrive at the right view by one's own thought, rather than on the authority of somebody else, e.g. the questioner."

<sup>40</sup> Cf. O'Neill, pp.119f.: "[Montaigne] requires of us that we essay the problem of living in a manner that is faithful to the diversity of life's moods and historical patterns, trusting to no centre but what we

of an apprentice: [Montaigne's] wisdom is an 'apprenticed wisdom'. Not by accident, the last word in Book I is *apprentissage*.<sup>41</sup> And perhaps it is equally significant that at the beginning of I.20 Montaigne translates Cicero's *commentatio mortis* as "quelque apprentissage et ressemblance de la mort." Because although in I.20 he seems to set aside that interpretation, his relationship with approaching death throughout the *Essais* could well be described as μελέτη θανάτου.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, rather than explicating or interpreting "what Plato meant" by the practice of death, Montaigne practised death himself. Of course to the systematic critic (and Montaigne suffers from him too)<sup>43</sup> this is disappointing and frustrating. The systematic critic, like Clitophon, wants to be told what to do next, what precisely is involved in Plato's μελέτη θανάτου, what is the "essential thought" contained in Montaigne's *aprentissage*. But the interesting thing about the *Clitophon* is that Socrates answers not a word.<sup>44</sup>

Then there is the other question - the question of approaching "sa mort", of bereavement - which either receives no answer at all, or is again "solved" by way of

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truly find in ourselves. Thus any exploration that is guided by Montaigne is simultaneously an essay in sharing our humanity with one who, like Socrates, was never more himself than in the company of others, but who shaped his own life by never leaving hold of the question it offered him."

<sup>41</sup> Screech, 1983, p.13.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Glauser, p.29: "Le thème [la mort] est si vaste et si obsédant qu'il devient le tissu de sa vie."

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. O'Neill's criticism (p.47) of "the moralist reading" of Montaigne, "which consists of anthologizing or rendering the essential thought of Montaigne in terms of a set of timely moral maxims... It is assumed without question that there is literally an underlying essence of Montaigne's thought which can be reached with more economy, or with improved assembly, than Montaigne himself achieved. It is further assumed on behalf of the reader that the reader is interested only in the shortest way to the gist of Montaigne's thought."

<sup>44</sup> And if the *Clitophon* is not by Plato, then as Kierkegaard said (*Philosophical Fragments*, p.15) we can cite it as an independent witness to the Socratic method. Of course the *Clitophon* may not be quite as straightforward as this. But neither may it be quite as complex as, for example, Slings makes out - Clitophon is "the real Socrates" (p.53), while the Socrates of the reported speeches represents the protreptic Socratic literature which is the target of the author's criticism; Socrates' silence at the end then simply means that "he has been beaten at his own game." (p.18.)

generalizations:<sup>45</sup> by restating the problem in generalized terms it is shown not to exist.<sup>46</sup> If you have lost your child, the philosopher will console you by telling you that you are not alone, by pointing to all the countless others who have lost a child. So, by sleight of hand, it is no longer your child you have lost, it is only a child. It is no longer a case of "She, she is dead, she's dead; and when thou knowest this / Thou know'st how dry a cinder this world is." Miraculously, "she" has become just one among millions, and the world goes on as before.

Of course it is unreasonable to criticize the ancient *consolatores* for failing in something which they did not attempt. As Kassel says,<sup>47</sup> the remark of Aristippus: ἦκω παρ' ὑμᾶς οὐχ ὡς συλλυπούμενος, ἀλλ' ἵνα παύσω ὑμᾶς λυπουμένους, might serve as a motto for all of them. In Cicero's terms, the object was to enable the sufferer to endure life both as *homo* and as *vir*: as a member of the human race and therefore subject to vicissitude, but also as a man and therefore with fortitude.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, it is not unreasonable to criticize the *consolatores* for attempting

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Nagel, 1986, pp.223f.: "The desire to go on living...is essentially first-personal...and therefore it collides with objective indifference about the survival of anyone in particular. Your relation to your own death is unique, and here if anywhere the subjective standpoint holds a dominant position. By the same token, the internal standpoint will be vicariously dominant in your attitude toward the deaths of those to whom you are so close that you see the world through their eyes."

Again Kierkegaard's "incommensurability" is apposite. And just how incommensurable the objective *consolatio* is with the individual's sorrow is captured in the famous exchange in *King John* 3.4.90-98:

*Pandulph.* You hold too heinous a respect of grief.  
*Constance.* He talks to me that never had a son.  
*King Philip.* You are as fond of grief as of your child.  
*Constance.* Grief fills the room up of my absent child:  
 Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,  
 Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,  
 Remembers me of all his gracious parts,  
 Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;  
 Then have I reason to be fond of grief!

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Nagel (1979, pp.196-213, a chapter entitled "Subjective and Objective") on the difficulties incurred by thoroughgoing objectivism: "The problems...arise because certain subjectively apparent facts about the self seem to vanish as one ascends to a more objective standpoint." (p.210.) "We can pursue a unified if very etiolated conception of reality by detaching progressively from our own point of view. We just have to keep in mind what we are leaving behind, and not be fooled into thinking that we have made it disappear." (p.213.)

<sup>47</sup> Kassel, p.52.

<sup>48</sup> *Fam.* 5.17.3.

something which was impossible, and failing to see it. But Euphrates saw it clearly enough when his wife died: ὦ φιλοσοφία, τυραννικά σου τὰ ἐπιτάγματα· λέγεις "φίλει", κἄν ἀποβάλη τις λέγεις "μὴ λυποῦ".<sup>49</sup> (And this epigram seems to capture the shortcomings not only of the *consolatio* but of the ancient ethical outlook generally, as simultaneously too objective and too egocentric: the end is the good or happy life, but the good or happiness of other people are a means to that end. Ideally the two may be compatible, but where in practice they are not - for example, when the other person is removed from the scene - the priority is self-therapy. Grief is simply an obstacle to the preservation of equilibrium.)

Philosophy, in the shape of the *consolationes*, did make allowance for the possibility that there might be some delay in obeying its tyrannical commands; but in the meantime the important thing was to keep up appearances: the show must go on. (The contradiction that philosophers who make a point of not caring a straw for public opinion should attach so much importance to the public face of bereavement does not seem to have struck any of them.) But fortunately (since it reassures us that we are dealing with flesh and blood after all) we have access to what Cicero and Montaigne really felt: in the breakdown of the one - to the embarrassment of his friends - and in the permanent inconsolability of the other. Because perhaps it is this which is most unsatisfying about the *consolatores*: not just that some of their solutions to the problem of death are too neat, too pauschal, but that they purport to solve the problem at all.

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<sup>49</sup> See Kassel, p.58.

Yet there is one question which none of these philosophers of death even raise, far less answer: the Karamazov question. "If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it? . . . And so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child . . ." <sup>50</sup>

The question is: how is it possible to propose an approach to death, and particularly to the death of the other, which takes no account at all of the sufferings of the innocent? Cicero, Seneca and Montaigne all reveal an almost obsessive interest in the bereaved father: the *Tusculans*, the *Epistulae Morales* and the *Essais* are crammed with anecdotes about facing the death of children with stoical fortitude: but invariably it is the father's point of view which is presented.<sup>51</sup> There is nothing in Montaigne to distinguish the predicament (his own) of the middle-aged or elderly gentleman learning to face death, from the predicament of the dying child whose life has barely begun. And there is nothing in Cicero to suggest that the fears and disappointed dreams of the dying child might pose a more significant challenge than those of its father.

Montaigne cites the case of Hilary of Poitiers, who was so concerned about the spiritual welfare of his much-woed daughter that he prayed constantly for her early death; and when this took place he and his wife were overjoyed - so much so that his wife asked him to pray for her own premature death, in which he was also successful.<sup>52</sup> Montaigne apparently sees this as an example of Christian Stoicism. Others might see it as barbaric, and as representing the exactly opposite point of view

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<sup>50</sup> Dostoevsky, pp.250f.

<sup>51</sup> Most startlingly perhaps in *De Prov.* III.2, where Seneca suggests that "*liberos coniugem ecferre*" is good for the soul.

<sup>52</sup> Montaigne, I.33: 216/246.

from that of Ivan Karamazov, because of course in Hilary's eyes the last person to be consulted is the child herself.

For both Cicero and Montaigne (and for Seneca), the "patient" as it were is the writer himself.<sup>53</sup> If it is my death which is the issue, the question is how do I face it, how do I remove its sting, how do I persuade myself that it is not something to be feared? If it is someone else's death, the question is how do I learn to accept it, so that it no longer really affects me; or better, how do I train myself in advance so that it will not really affect me at all? And both Cicero and Montaigne pretend that their recipe has universal application: this is how death should be approached, they say, by everyone.

But how is it possible to be so naive? Just shift the centre of gravity slightly, so that it is no longer my death we are talking about, or the death of some one else as it affects me, and ask how any of these theoretical approaches can be of any possible help or relevance to, for example, a nineteen-year-old girl who is given a year to live. Montaigne apparently would say, in his first phase: "You should have been anticipating this and learning how to face it when it came so that it would hold no terrors for you;" and in his later phase he would say: "Don't think about it, it'll only make matters worse." Cicero would say: "Either the soul is immortal, in which case you should think yourself lucky; or it is not, in which case you've nothing to worry about because you won't exist and you won't be aware of anything." (And Hilary of Poitiers would say: "Give thanks to God that my prayers have been answered.")

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Long's remark (pp.33-34) on Stoicism (but he intends it for Hellenistic ethics generally): "the theory seems to treat the material well-being of other people as something that is not essential to *their* good, and therefore not something we should make it our business to promote for its own sake or be distressed about when it is absent."

The question is not so much whether any of these extraordinary statements would do any good to the unfortunate girl, but whether anyone (other than Hilary) would be so callous or crass as to make them in the first place. Would Cicero have spoken in those terms to Tullia on her deathbed? Would Montaigne have spoken in those terms to La Boétie on his? The probability is that neither of them would have found anything at all to say (except perhaps the sort of conventional noises about a happy afterlife with which Montaigne did in fact haltingly try to reassure La Boétie). Because Karamazov's question is not just that of theodicy: it is motivated by pity. Or perhaps that way of putting it is still too self-centred. Karamazov's question is a question on behalf of the child, not on his own behalf. It expresses the cry of pain, and of disappointed hopes, and of fear in the face of the unknown, which the child utters and to which there appears to be no answer. And any approach to death which does not even attempt to deal with that cry of pain and fear and disappointment is simply divorced from reality.

But curiously enough something of that reality is to be found in the fantastic world of the *Odyssey*. It is to be found generalised in the category of παρθενικαί τ' ἀταλαί νεοπειθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαι among the shades,<sup>54</sup> and individualised in the poignant fate of Elpenor. Elpenor is dismissed in the commentaries as a burlesque figure whose preposterous claim to a hero's funeral rites is humoured by an embarrassed Odysseus. But that is to measure him against the standards of heroic death in the *Iliad*.<sup>55</sup> In the *Odyssey* there are no heroic deaths.<sup>56</sup> The suitors' deaths are abject, the maids'

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<sup>54</sup> *Od.* xi.39.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Heubeck, 1989, p.81: "Elpenor requests an honourable burial. The heroic language, which intentionally recalls the *Iliad*, highlights the incongruity of Elpenor's claim to status: his birth, station in life, achievements, as well as the manner of his death, are profoundly unheroic."

<sup>56</sup> Indeed even the hero of the *Odyssey* is less than, or more than, the heroes of the *Iliad*. Cf. Clarke, 2004, p.89: "Where the *Iliad* problematises heroic excellence and explores its underlying bitterness,

pathetic, those of Odysseus' comrades - whether devoured by the Cyclops or the Scylla, or speared like fish by the Laestrygonians - accompanied by shrieks and outstretched imploring hands. No one goes gently into the darkness - the only gentle death is the one prophesied by Tiresias for Odysseus himself - and no one goes heroically. Even Achilles, who in the *Iliad* unhesitatingly chooses to die rather than live in dishonour, in the *Odyssey* yearns for life at any price.

It is that yearning for life at any price which Elpenor embodies. The manner of his dying is farcical, but the fact of his death is tragic: on the threshold of life, his experience limited to the comradeship of rowing, which he asks to be memorialised in the oar planted on his grave. Indeed there is something sublime about the pathos of Elpenor's death, just because it is so unheroic,<sup>57</sup> and just because there is no *consolatio*. The idea that death is the negation of life - in the sense of a dim awareness of its absence - entails an extraordinary enhancement of the importance of being alive. A studied indifference to death, or a victory over death, or an eager anticipation of death are all inconceivable. And so is any kind of *consolatio*. Odysseus' terse agreement to Elpenor's request has nothing to do with reflecting its

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the *Odyssey* moves below and beyond the glamour of heroism to a more fundamental level of the human condition, where the hero succeeds only by accepting the inevitability of his lowliness." Cf. also Rohdich: "Der ideologische Abstand der Odyssee von der Vergangenheit, der die überkommenen Begriffe von Heroik und Ruhm revidiert und ihren erhabenen Anspruch nach dem Mass eines neuen Weltverständnisses korrigiert, findet in der Elpenor-Gestalt seinen beredtesten Zeugen. (p.111)...In ihm ehren Odysseus und die Dichtung, deren Eponym er ist, das Unglück der verlorenen Heimat. Das traditionelle Heldengrab wird in einer zugleich niedrigeren und höheren Weise zum Zeichen: nicht mehr Künden einer der menschlichen Kondition abgetrotzten Göttergleichheit, die wertvoller wäre als das Leben, sondern Trost über einen Verlust, der banal und doch der grösste ist." (pp.113f.)

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Rohdich, p. 114: "Unglücklich gewesen zu sein...erscheint als Elpenors einzige Qualität...Der sublimierte Hunger nach Grandeur, Göttergleichheit und Unvergänglichkeit im Ruhm wird transparent auf ein elementareres Bedürfnis, das sich traditioneller Sicht als eine Degeneration zur Trivialität darbietet, nach der Intention der Odyssee aber umgekehrt den Geist des heroischen Zeitalters wie eine ungeheure Denaturierung erscheinen lässt, wie eine grossartig-schreckliche Deviation der menschlichen Geschichte, einen kalten Rausch, aus dem es gleichsam zur Besinnung zu kommen gilt."

inappropriateness:<sup>58</sup> it is simply that there is nothing more to say, no comfort to be given.

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<sup>58</sup> E.g. Heubeck, 1989, p.82: "Odysseus promises to fulfil, and by the brevity of his reply distances himself from, Elpenor's request."

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