

Channeling Plato: Light, Vision, and Intermediacy in Apuleius' Demonology

Apuleius establishes himself as an intermediary voice for Plato to his audience in the *De Deo Socratis*. Despite the various quotations and misquotations throughout this work, he never directly uses Plato's words. Instead, Apuleius claims that Plato—whose judgment (*sententiam*) is described as *divinam* (DDS 155)—speaks through him. Describing Plato's thought as "divine" puts the philosopher in a godlike position: he is able to communicate with the audience only through the intermediary Apuleius, much as the gods in Apuleius' demonology communicate with mortals through *daemones* (Fletcher 2009). This intermediary role, however, creates complications. Since Apuleius does not directly quote from Plato's works, the Platonic corpus does not always contain clear parallels to the ideas Apuleius presents. The *De Deo Socratis* opens, for example, with the statement "Plato divided the whole universe, as far as its chief living beings are concerned, into three parts, and thought the gods to be the highest of them" (trans. Harrison 2001). In his translation, Harrison notes that "this tri-partition belongs to the post-Platonic tradition rather than to Plato himself" (2001). When Apuleius uses the name "Plato," therefore, he may at times be presenting not only ideas which came to fruition in Platonist philosophical thought long after Plato's own time, but also, as I will suggest, ideas which are his own.

This Apuleian innovation can be demonstrated through a comparison with a demonological work of another Middle Platonist philosopher: Plutarch's dialogue *De Genio Socratis*. Apuleius says that Socrates could grasp his personal deity with his ears as well as his eyes (166). In fact, he uses several examples from earlier Latin literature to prove that *daemones* were visible to specific people (145). In Plutarch's work, the character of Simmias claims that Socrates denied the possibility of seeing a god and cross-examined those who said they have heard gods (588C). Therefore, we find in *De Deo Socratis* an idea without clear precedence both in Plato and the post-Platonic tradition. Nonetheless, Apuleius begins this treatise with "Plato" and frequently mentions his name throughout the work as the source of his words.

With emphasis on the recurring themes of light and visibility, I intend to show that Apuleius places himself in an intermediary role not just to recant Plato's philosophy, but to expound his own ideas, strengthened with by the authority of "Plato," and urge his audience toward the philosophical life. Just as he claims a visible aspect to the *daemones*, he himself is present and visible to his audience, shining forth in his words.

Works Cited:

- Fletcher, R. (2009). 'No Success Like Failure: Apuleius and the Task of the Translator.' In M. Paschalis, S. Panayotakis, G. Schmeling (eds.) *Readers and Writers in the Ancient Novel* (Ancient Narrative Supplementum 12). Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 184-196.
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