

Many readers of Plutarch conclude that he refrained from believing in the more ridiculous myths while still adhering to superstitions of more acceptable nature. In this way, he aptly combined the priest and the philosopher. While this assessment might be true to some extent, it certainly underestimates the rhetorical character of Plutarch's writings.

Rhetoric and poetry have occasionally used religious myths as guardians of good mores. Plutarch himself shared Plato's opinion that the rhetorical use of myths, or the noble lie, was useful and necessary, granted that such myths are approximations of truth and conducive to virtue. These myths then would be a practical guide for the many and a theoretical guide for the philosophical mind.

It will be suggested that, on occasion, Plutarch knowingly employs superstition (i.e. myths instilling fear of the gods) in the hope of steering his readers away from a life of evildoing. To establish this point, we must first recognize that Plutarch himself was not superstitious and that he did not fall prey to the popular myths of Antiquity. To this effect, a brief reference to *On Isis and Osiris* will highlight Plutarch's opinion that mythology, Egyptian and Greek, is to be interpreted allegorically and not literally. It will then be shown, with reference to *On Divine Vengeance*, that Plutarch deliberately propounded a few myths for the moral good of his readers. In this dialogue, he asserts the existence of divine vengeance by recalling an obscure myth that describes the fate of an evildoer after his death. Special attention will be given to the dramatic action of the dialogue, underscoring the rhetorical nature of the text.