

TEORIA E PRASSI POLITICA NELLE OPERE DI PLUTARCO

Atti del V Convegno plutarco
(Certosa di Pontignano, 7-9 giugno 1993)

a cura di
ITALO GALLO e BARBARA SCARDIGLI



M. D'AURIA EDITORE IN NAPOLI

G. W. M. HARRISON

THE DEMISE OF THE PERICLEAN IDEAL
(Plutarch, *ad Principem ineruditum*)

It seems worthwhile to remind one's self frequently that Plutarch's κόσμος and his constant frame of reference was the Roman Empire under the last of the Julio-Claudians, the Flavians, and the first two of the good emperors. In this Plutarch was much more fortunate than Cato who earned Cicero's *opprobrium* because he *dicit enim tamquam in Platonis πολιτεία, non tamquam in Romuli faece sententiam* (*ad Atticum* 2, 1,8). As comfortable as Plutarch was in fifth century Athens and fourth century Greece, he was as astute an observer of his own times and did not flee to the past as a refuge from the present. Pohlenz¹ has perhaps put it best in his introduction to the Teubner volume on the political essays:

« Plutarchus, homo et sanguine et indole Graecus ... non solum in parvo suo oppidulo munera publica suspicere dedignatus non est, sed etiam in Academia sua politicas quaestiones tractavit, non ut Platonis exemplum secutus perfectam rei publicae speciem proponeret, sed ut suae aetatis Graecis maximeque iuvenibus quos secum collegerat ostenderet quomodo etiam sub imperio Romanorum vitam proavis liberis dignam degere patriaeque servire et possent et vellent ».

In regard to the essay *ad Principem ineruditum* one might further observe that it serves to demarcate the extent of the gulf separating Classical Greece from Plutarch's own time and that it replaces the vision of Athens and Hellas as propounded by Pericles in the funeral oration (Thucydides 2, 35-46) with a new vision, one in which Greece is largely absent. The world of Pericles in which Athens would have hegemony over Greece and Greece

¹ M. Pohlenz, *Plutarchi Moralia*, vol. 5 fasc. 1, Leipzig 1952, p. V.

would dominate the central part of the Mediterranean² has given way to one in which the best one can hope to obtain is a ruler ruled by law (*ad Princ. inerud.* 780C).

One might thus expect the conscious and unconscious echoes from the Funeral Oration³ and studied contrasts to it in Plutarch's *ad Principem ineruditum* to be revealing, as indeed they are. In general, one might hazard to observe that Thucydidean echoes in vocabulary and syntax are one of the hallmarks of Plutarch's style. It might, in fact, be asserted — within limits — that when Plutarch's style is the most compact and obscure, it is at its most Thucydidean and least like Plato. This is substantiated in part by an observation that the number of direct quotations from Thucydides in the *Moralia* (59) are only slightly less numerous than those in the *Lives* (72): the philosophical, introspective Plutarch had as much use for the historian as Plutarch, the ethical biographer.

The Funeral Oration delivered by Pericles in Book II can be demonstrated to have been one of Plutarch's favourite parts of the *Histories*, and is by common assent among the most complex Greek in all of Thucydides and captures Thucydides at his most reflective. Indirect reminiscences from the Funeral Oration are particularly strong in the *ad Principem ineruditum* and may have contributed to a perception that its style is inelegant. Such an assessment of its style has in turn caused some scholars to call into question the authenticity of the essay or assign it to Plutarch's *juvenilia*⁴. The number of reminiscences and the use of Thucydidean material, however, would strongly argue that this work represents Plutarch's fully developed political views.

One should also always be mindful that both the beginning⁵ and end of this essay are lost and that as preserved it is about one-fifth the length

² Although implicit in the Funeral Oration, this last aim is avowed most openly in the speech of Alcibiades at Sparta (6. 90), where he revealed that the Athenian aims were (1) the conquest of Sicily [πρώτον μὲν], (2) the conquest of Italy [μετὰ δ'], and (3) the destruction of Carthage [ἔπειτα καί].

³ All but one of the quotations from the Funeral Oration, as collected by Helmbold and O'Neil (*Plutarch's Quotations*, Baltimore 1959), come from the *Moralia* (not one from the *Life of Pericles*) and cluster in the *an Seni resp.* and *de Herodoti malignitate*. Since Helmbold and O'Neil gathered only direct quotation, their work has little bearing on this study.

⁴ One would dismiss the latter supposition immediately by comparing the *ad Principem ineruditum* to a transparently early work, such as the *de Esu carniūm*.

⁵ That the end is abrupt has never been doubted or contested. 779D could never have been the original beginning of a political essay since a reference to his addressee (cf. 776B Soranus, 783B Euphanes, 798A Menemachus) or intended audience (cf. 826B; δικαστήριον) is missing. Further, as a motto, the reference to Plato in *de Vitando aere alieno* 837D has a very different feel from *ad Principem ineruditum*.

of most of the shorter complete essays. So, too, the title ⁶ is surely not original but must have been made up by a post-Photian cataloguer who took the third sentence of the fragment as it is preserved (διὸ τοῖς ἄρχουσι χαλεπὸν ἔστι σύμβολον περὶ ἀρχῆς γενέσθαι) to have been the theme sentence of the essay and thereby made up what he considered to be an appropriate title. No other title as preserved in the Lamprias Catalogue or that of Photius would seem to fit this essay and it may indeed be the case that this is a further piece of some other fragmentary essay, such as *de Fortuna* or *de Virtute et vitio*, to name just two possibilities.

To return to Plutarch and Thucydides, one is struck immediately among the many differences in the use of similar images and language by Thucydides and by Plutarch by the two erotic metaphors. This is all the more significant since Plutarch and Thucydides normally eschewed such metaphors, although neither was a prude at retailing specific sexual behaviour of their subject when relevant to the surrounding context. Thus at 2, 43,1 Pericles challenged his listeners to be lovers of the city (ἔραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς), which had made other men bold in facing up to fear (τολμῶντες καὶ γινώσκοντες τὰ δέοντα) and ashamed [to fail] (αἰσχυνόμενοι), a clear reference to the Spartan πολιτεία ⁷.

The language in Thucydides is active and forceful, and thereby contrasts sharply with *ad Princ. inerud.* 782C where the wielding of unrestricted power is shown to have the ability to contort love (ἔρωτα) into adultery (μοιχείαν). This image itself builds upon an earlier (781D) one about Aristodemos of Argos who out of fear had himself shut into an attic with his mistress by her mother. All in this passage is dingy and illicit: there was a ceiling trap door (θύραν ἐπιροακτῆν) in the upper storey, that is the women's quarters (ὑπερῶον), which led into a secret room with a little bed (κλινίδιον) which had the effect of turning the bed into a prison cell (δεσμωτήριον) ⁸.

In fact, the defensive passivity of the *ad Principem ineruditum* is one of these most remarkable features. Only one word for daring or courage occurs in the fragment as it now survives and as used it indicates (781B) a

⁶ It hardly seems necessary to state that the essay could not have been addressed to Trajan or any other emperor, since αὐτοκράτωρ appears nowhere in the essay; cf. the lemma to 172β *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata, Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 805B, *et passim*. An opposite opinion is, however, held by M. Cuvigny, editor of the Budé, pp. 29-30.

⁷ Parenthetically one should note that both Plato and Plutarch approved of the Cretan and Spartan constitutions which encouraged the sponsoring of young men by their lovers.

⁸ Much more problematical would be a reference to the quotation of an aphorism by Polemo (780D) since Plutarch cited his view of ἔρωτα only so that he could modify it.

capricious courage which led Alexander to commit a regrettable deed. Τολμάω and θαρσέω in a positive sense dominate not only the speech in Book II of Thucydides, but especially those in Book VI where first Alcibiades and then Nicias alternately tried to present himself as the true successor to Pericles and his policy, embracing and imitating the language of the Funeral Oration.

Fear, rather, is much the dominant emotion, such as rulers fearing to accept advice (779E) so as not to compromise their power. Attention is especially drawn to 781BC where Plutarch stated that a ruler should fear to suffer evil rather than to do it, finding the first to be φιλόανθρωπος and the latter to be οὐκ ἀγεννής. This kind of fear in Thucydides led to the ὕβρις of the Athenian Empire; to Plutarch it is to recommend to the leader that he be αἰδώς in the manner of Δίκη, quoting from Hesiod. In both Thucydides (2, 40,2, and 42,4) and Plutarch, the kind of fear is φοβέω, i.e. one that would cause flight; for the fear a leader feels on behalf of his people, rather than for himself personally, Plutarch used δεῖδω (781C).

So, too, forms of φυλάσσω are weak, re-active, defensive, and pusillanimous, such as at 790A2 where a colossal statue of a ruler remains standing (διαφυλάττει) only by the inertia of its own weight, or at 780C where a flawless instinct (ἔμφυχος... λόγος) always restrains (ἀεὶ... καὶ παραφυλάττων) a leader⁹. The sense of restraint or reserve is apparent at 780D3 in relation to the gods who are said to dole out some of the good things for men and hold some in reserve (θεὸς δίδωσιν ἀνθρώποις καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν νέμωσι τὰ δὲ φυλάττωσιν). A fourth occurrence (781C) by its proximity to the quotation of *Iliad* 10,183-184 unflatteringly compares the populace who must be protected (φυλαττομένων) to sheep. Φυλάσσω does not occur in the Funeral Oration; ἀμύνω, a defense which is pro-active and aggressive, is used instead at 2, 36,4 (πολέμιον), 39,2 (περὶ τῶν οἰκείων), 42,4 (sc. αἰσχροῦν), and 43,1 (πολεμίους).

The closest synonym to ἀπαίδευτος in the Funeral Oration is ἀμαθία (ὁ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀμαθία μὲν θράσος, 2, 40, 3), that is, some men behave with courage out of ignorance, which is answered aptly by *ad Princ. inerud.*, 780D, in which it is maintained that trained and wise leader hears the voice of caution (τοῦ δὲ πεπαιδευμένου καὶ σωφρονοῦντος ἄρχοντος ἐντός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦτο φθεγγόμενος ἀεὶ καὶ παρακελεύόμενος). At 6, 13,1 Nicias tried to paint the party of Alcibiades as being full of ἐπιθυμία, while for the party of Nicias true to Periclean policy one would expect προνοία δὲ πλεῖστα.

⁹ This latter seems to be glossed almost immediately by another phrase for an inner voice which warns a leader: ἐστιν ὁ τοῦτο φθεγγόμενος ἀεὶ καὶ παρακελεύόμενος, 780D3.

For the ἀπαίδευτοι (leaders and generals) a miserable end (780B) is as sure as it would be (and ultimately was) for Athens. The *môt* is restated by Plutarch at 782E: τοὺς δ' ἀπαιδευτούς καὶ ἀμαθεῖς ἢ τύχη μικρὸν ἐκκουφίσασα... πίπτοντας. The point of this reference is to be applied generally to all men, as was Pericles' intention at 2, 40,3.

The dynamic principal, i.e. an empire not expanding is in decline, is strongly present in the Funeral Oration, the Melian Dialogue, and the speeches in Book VI. Contrarily, for the *ad Princ. inerud.*, the saying attributed to Theopompus, King of Sparta, upon his power sharing with the Ephors, seems equally applicable to the Greeks under Roman rule. When asked (779E) why he had diminished the power he would hand to his son, his reply was that he had made it greater to the extent that it was more sure (μείζονα μὲν οὖν... ὅσω καὶ βεβαιότεραν). Βέβαιος was a particularly favourite term of Thucydides, much less after used by Plutarch who greatly preferred ἀσφαλής, such as at 782D. At 2, 42,2 the statement is made that one who confers benefits is more secure than the one who receives them. The context is that of the protection Athens extended to its allies, and Pericles is deeply aware of the nuances of comparative social status between donor and grantee. By such a measure the saying of Theopompus gives the lie to its intent, and by extrapolation to the Roman Empire.

Well being and security are at the heart of this essay. The start of the fragment refers to Plato's refusal to διακοσμήσαι τὴν πολιτείαν (779D) of the Cyrenaicans because they εὐτυχοῦσιν. Later (780B) the statement is made among a series of paired antitheses that the 'disorganised cannot organise [a state]' (οὔτε κοσμεῖν ἀκοσμοῦντος) and it is finally said at 780E first that sun is the organising principle and then that it is θεός. Κοσμέω in the Funeral Oration has a far different meaning, that of 'adornment', such as the fallen were to the city of Athens (42,2 and 46,1). Other politically-charged terms have far different precise meanings between the two authors, words such as αὐγέω¹⁰, ἀπόλαυσις¹¹, and πλεονεξία¹², among ma-

¹⁰ Αὐγέω: 2, 36,3 ἐπηρξήσαμεν of the Athenian Empire; cf. Plato, *Res publica* 330B

780E αὔξεται of seeds

781A αὔξει of the reverent

781E συναύξουσι fear in tyrants

¹¹ Ἀπόλαυσις: 2, 38,2 ἀπολαύσει present pleasures
2, 42,4 ἀπόλαυσιν accomplished pleasure

780E ἀπόλαυσις prospective pleasure

¹² Πλεονεξία: 2, 35,2 πλεονάζεσθαι exaggeration of deeds of dead

782C πλεονεξίαν greed which causes confiscation.

ny others. In all cases the Thucydidean usage is more dynamic, assertive, and (to use the Latin) has *vigor*, not *robur*¹³.

Most significant is Plutarch's refutation of the call to philosophy (40,1) and to pedagogy (41,1). In the Funeral Oration the context of both statements is social and political. For Plutarch, the definition and application of such concepts had become much more restrictive. At 779E, translating the Roman technical language, Plutarch avowed that both the consilium (πάρεδρος) to a commander and his bodyguard (φύλαξ) were seated in him by philosophy. 782AB expands upon this sentiment with a statement that reason proceeded from philosophy (λόγος ἐκ φιλοσοφίας παραγενόμενος), followed by an example of the meeting of Diogenes and Alexander at Corinth. Plutarch's *recapitulatio* is that Alexander managed to be both a statesman and a philosopher.

Such a definition of a philosopher would have found little sympathy in the fifth century, particularly since Plutarch's controlling metaphor for this passage as well as the rest of the surviving part of the essay is that of a sculpture¹⁴. Through philosophy wise men make themselves copies of all that is most beautiful (σώφρονες ἐκ φιλοσοφίας ἀπογράφονται πρὸς τὸ κάλλιστον τῶν πραγμάτων πλάττοντες ἑαυτούς). Earlier (780EF), however, an objection had been raised to a wise ruler needing an image (πλάττοντος) of himself done by Phidias, or Polycleites, or Myron since the wise ruler was θεουδής and in fact rulers who tried to imitate the massiveness of colossal statues (780A) were dismissed as unworthy. Throughout the essay speaks in images of reality and not in reality itself and it avoids also the epic scale it withholds from rulers. This is very much different from the speech of Pericles whose controlling metaphor in the Funeral Oration is that of two evenly matched wrestlers (ισοπαλεῖς, 39,1) whose contests are described as ἄθλα (46,1), language redolent of the labours of Heracles.

Within Plutarch's lifetime the mantle of the Hellenic ideal was claimed by Nero and by Domitian. Soon the Hellenocentrism of the so-called good emperors, most especially Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, was seen to be somehow central to their enlightenment and success. The arts, and particularly

¹³ Lucan had the image correctly in mind when he opposed the irresistible force of Caesar (the wind) to the immovable object of Pompey (an oak); not surprising the wind won. One is tempted to see Periclean Athens as the wind and Plutarch's Greece as a majestic oak.

¹⁴ Cf. ἀνδριαντοποιούς, μιμῆσθαι, μορφήν, and ἀνδριάντων (780A2); πλάττοντος, ὁμοιότητα, ἀγαλμάτων, and θεοπρεπέστατον (780E3); εἰδωλον, μίμημα, θεουδής, πλάττουσιν, and ἀπομιμουμένους (780F3); ἀφομοιοῦντας (781A3); εἰκάζειν (781B4); εἰκός (781E5); μίμημα, ἐσόπτρου, εἰδωλον, ἀναφαίνεται, and εἰκόνα (781F5); ἀπογράφονται, and πλάττοντες (782A5); δνειράσι (782B6); μιμουμένου (782D6).

architecture of the late first and second centuries A.D., have been rightly described as « archaising », that is, attempting to be faithful to a fifth century Attic standard. Similarly, « Atticism » is a term used to describe a contemporary, parallel phenomenon in oratory. For all of the fervent striving after the hopelessly idealised world of Pericles, the words and sentiments of the *ad Principem ineruditum* demonstrate, either by accident or by design, that the words of Periclean Athens no longer signify the same concepts and that their fabric can no longer hold the same weight. The ideal of Pericles, if ever it expressed the hopes of nation, did so only once for a moment, a moment which not even words, never mind deeds, could recover. The *ad Principem ineruditum* stands as a monument to the irretrievable demise of that Periclean ideal.