1. Introduction

When Plutarch decidedly argued that the most perfect virtue is the political one (Comp. Arist. et Ca. Ma. 3.1), he undoubtedly knew that this position was rooted in an age-long tradition of political thinking. In line with this traditional view, he vehemently attacked Epicurus’ political philosophy and urged his fellow philosophers to participate in political life. A philosopher should not live unknown, devoting himself to pleasure, but serve his country and contribute to the public interest. But what if one is indeed persuaded by Plutarch’s arguments? What if one shares his indignation over Epicurus’ parasitic philosophy (cf. Adv. Colot. 1127A) and asks for nothing better than making oneself useful for one’s fellow citizens by engaging in politics? How should one proceed in entering political life? In dealing with such questions, one should turn to Plutarch’s Political precepts.

Now one could expect to find Plutarch’s advice concerning the very beginning of one’s political career near the outset of the Political precepts. It is only in the chapters 10–12 (804C–806F), however, that this topic receives attention. Nonetheless, this is no evidence of a disordered and thoughtless approach, but rather of a well-considered and methodical one. Plutarch prefers to provide first the most important beacons which always have to guide the course of the politician and which should be appropriated by him even before he enters the political scene. The aspirant politician should first choose an honourable goal (798C–799A), and take care that he has the right means at his disposal to realize this goal, viz. moral virtue (800A–801C) and rhetorical

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1 Cf. Aristotle, EN I, 2, 1094a28–1094b7; cf. also Plato, Politicus 303e–305e.
2 Not only in De latenter vivendo (directed against Epicurus’ advice λάβε βίωσοσ), but also in Adv. Colot. 1124D–1127E and Non posse 1097A–1100D (both directed against Colotes’ position), and in some other shorter passages (De tranq. an. 465F–466A; De tuenta 135B–D; Comp. Cim. et Luc. 1.3 and Pyrh. 20.3–4); see Roskam, 2005.
3 Cf. in the first place his short treatise Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum, in which he argues that the philosopher can maximize his usefulness by associating with powerful rulers.
powers (801C–804C). In short, he should not fall into politics as into a well, but should enter public life quietly, as the result of preparation and reflection (ἐκ παρασκευής καὶ λογισμοῦ; 799A).

It is only when all these preliminary but crucial issues have been dealt with, that Plutarch turns to some essential aspects of actual political πράξεις itself, starting at its very beginning. Indeed, Menemachus should not be carried away by his great enthusiasm (cf. 798B), but should realise that each concrete step of the new politician in political πράξεις, even the first one, should be well-considered.

According to Plutarch, there are two roads the statesman can take to enter political life. One is quick and illustrious, leading to fame, but not without any danger; the other is slower, more like a foot-journey, but safer too (804CD). Plutarch’s explicit statement εἰσβαλεῖ δὲ καὶ ὅδεις τῆς πολιτείας εἶσιν, sustained by a well-balanced dichotomy and formal duality (though embellished with some variatio), suggests that this enumeration is exhaustive and that there is no tertium quid. Furthermore, from the very beginning, Plutarch seems to present the two poles as alternatives of equal value. Indeed, even before he clarifies what should precisely be understood by these two roads, he makes it clear that one cannot a priori prefer the one to the other: both in fact are characterized by their own advantages and disadvantages. One road quickly leads to a splendid reputation, but is dangerous too. It is the road of those who wish to maximize their potential for gain at all costs, even when they eo ipso maximize their potential for loss as well. The other road avoids such great risks, but also promises less glitter at the beginning of the political career. This road will be taken by those who wish to play for safe, and prefer to minimize their potential for loss, even at the cost of some gain. In any case, it is clear that the beginning politician should not make a hasty, ill-considered choice, but that he should weigh up pros and cons in a rational way.

2. Advantages and disadvantages of both roads

2.1. The quick road

After having distinguished the two alternatives, Plutarch offers some reflections that can help the politician in making his choice. Both roads, which are defined somewhat more precisely, prove to have their own advantages and disadvantages. Plutarch first deals with the quick road. The politician who opts for this alternative, directly enters political life with some

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4 Plutarch often takes his imagery from the domain of military life; cf. Fuhrmann, 254–257.
remarkable and bold deed, approving Pindarus’ (Ol. 6.4–5) conviction that “to a work’s beginning, one should set a front that shines afar” (804D).

2.1.1. Advantages. Such ambitious beginning has several considerable advantages. First of all, it clearly meets the wishes of the people, for the masses are more eager to accept a beginning politician because they are surfeited with their familiar leaders⁵ (804D). Hence, a politician who opts for the quick road from the very beginning succeeds in taking advantage of the character of his fellow citizens, and thus in applying one aspect of the advice Plutarch gave earlier in his treatise (799B). Moreover, from this argument clearly appears that an advantage of the one road is not always necessarily a disadvantage of the other. Indeed, whereas the presence of political experience proves one of the greatest trump cards of the slow road, its absence in the quick road should obviously not be regarded as a great loss.

Secondly, if political power has a quick and illustrious growth, it drives away all envy (804DE). In this perspective, the quick road seems much more attractive than the slower. Indeed, as long as one accomplishes no illustrious deed, one is of course not attacked by another’s envy.⁶ But once the aspirant politician enters public life, he should know that he will have to face envy from the very beginning (cf. An seni 787C). Hence, those who opt for the slow road, and thus for a gradual, leisurely growth, are under fire from various quarters,⁷ and many of them withered away even before they had come to bloom (804E). On the other hand, men who enjoy a great reputation are no longer envied.⁸ This is in the first place true for the old politician (An seni 787C and D; fr. 154 Sandbach), but a beginner can avoid φθόνος too, by immediately winning a great fame through some splendid achievement (804E). In that sense, envy can be compared with smoke, for when the fire blazes up quickly from the very beginning, the smoke rapidly disappears (804E; cf. An seni 787C and fr. 154 Sandbach).

2.1.2. Disadvantage. The most important disadvantage of the quick road is of course the great risks it entails (804D; 805D). Therefore, the beginning

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⁵ See, e.g., the case of Cimon; Cim. 5.4: ὁμημηρίζοντα δ’ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὴν πολιτείαν ἀσμένος ὅ δῆμος ἐδέξατο, καὶ μεστὸς ὧν τοῦ Θεμιστοκλέους ἀνήγε πρὸς τάς μεγίστας ἐν τῇ πόλει τιμῶς καὶ ἄρχας.

⁶ Cf. Themistocles’ dictum in De inv. et od. 537F: διὸ καὶ Θεμιστοκλῆς ἐτὶ μειράκιον ὧν οὐκέτι ἐφῆ πράξεις λαμπρῶν ὀὕτω γὰρ φθονεῖσθαι; cf. also Aelianus, Var. hist. 2.12; Hippasos, fr. 18.6 D.–K.

⁷ Cf. the opposition which Eumenes encountered; Comp. Sert. et Eum. 1.2–3.

⁸ Examples are Alexander and Cyrus; see De inv. et od. 538A; cf. also De inv. et od. 538B; Comp. Nic. et Crass. 2.4; Alc. 34.6. One could recall the position of Aristotle, Rhet. II, 10, 1388a6–9 and 12–13.
politician should know his bounds, seeing that a great and bold (cf. ἔχοντις δὲ τὸλμεν; 804D) action is never without any danger. On the other hand, it is certainly not impossible either, since he can follow the example of many great predecessors.

2.1.3. The perspective of the Lives. In his Political precepts, Plutarch offers four examples of famous statesmen who opted for the quick road, thus complying with a request of Menemachus (798C): Aratus began his political career by making an end to the tyranny of Nicocles, Alcibiades by arraying the Mantinean alliance against the Lacedaemonians. Pompey asked a triumph even before being member of the senate, and succeeded in persuading Sulla. Cornelius Scipio, finally, was suddenly elected consul, contrary to law, when he was only standing for the aedileship, because the Roman people admired his single combat and victory in Iberia as a mere stripling and his achievements at Carthage as military tribune (804E–805A). All these examples return in the Lives, often in a more elaborate form.9

Moreover, in the Lives can be found many other examples of heroes who chose the quick road to fame and power. To give but some examples: Theseus began his public career with the remarkable, dangerous journey from the Peloponnesus to Athens by land (Thes. 6.3–11.2). He could have chosen to make this journey by see, which would have been much safer and which moreover was the wish of his grandfather and his mother (Thes. 6.3 and 6.5), but he preferred the more dangerous road by land, in imitation of the brilliant accomplishments of Heracles (6.6–7.1). Marcus Coriolanus showed heroic courage in a battle against Tarquin, and was rewarded with a crown of oak leaves (Cor. 3.1–2). Pyrrhus displayed similar bravery in the battle at Ipsus (Pyrrh. 4.3). Both in their own way thus give evidence of the same military valour that Scipio showed in his famous μονομαχία, which is alluded to in the Political precepts. Caesar impeached Dolabella for maladministration of his province, and even if he failed to carry the day, his exploit directly contributed to his further career (Caes. 4.1). Titus Flamininus, finally, at once solicited the consulship, neglecting the offices of tribune, praetor and aedile, and succeeded in obtaining it, in spite of the indignant protest of the tribunes Fulvius and Manius (Flam. 2.1–2; cf. also Reg. et imp. apophth. 197A).

9 On Aratus, see Arat. 4.1–9.3 and Phil. 1.3 (cf. Pausanias, II, 8.2–3; Polybius, II, 43.3; Strabo, VIII, 6.25; Cicero, off. 2.81; Levi, 508–518); on Alcibiades, see Alc. 14.3–15.1; Comp. Alc. et Cor. 2.2; Nic. 10.3–8 (cf. Bellone an pace 351B; Thucydides, V, 44–47); on Pompey, see Pomp. 14.1–6 and 23.2; Crass. 7.1 and 12.4; Sert. 18.2 (cf. Reg. et imp. apophth. 203EF; Cicero, Manil. 61); on Scipio, see Mar. 12.1 and Ga. Ma. 27.4 (cf. Livy, Perioch. 50; Appianus, Libyc. 112; Cato’s saying is also mentioned in Reg. et imp. apophth. 200A and in Livy, Perioch. 49; Diodorus Siculus, XXXII, 9a; Suda, s.v. δίσσοναί, I, 66.10–13 Adler).
In none of these examples taken from the Lives is the formal theory that is elaborated in the Political precepts explicitly thematized. Here we focus on political praxis, on the challenges and dangers the politician has to face in real public life. Usually, concrete political circumstances prove to be much more complex than the abstract schemes of theory. And yet, most of these concrete examples form a good illustration of the theory of the Political precepts. They all show how the hero succeeds in overcoming dangerous risks, and how he holds the political spotlight through a remarkable deed. It is interesting to note that the pernicious factor of envy appears to be absent in these examples, and that some of them explicitly mention the fact that the hero was in the favour of the people. In that sense, Plutarch’s political thinking proves to take into account the lessons of history. Conversely, the theoretical perspective of the Political precepts can be used as a lense through which the Lives can be read.

2.2. The slow road

Against those advantages and disadvantages of the quick road, one can place the pros and cons of the slower road. The young politician who prefers the latter course, attaches\(^{10}\) himself to an older statesman who is already held in esteem (805EF). One should note that Plutarch also regards it as the duty of older politicians to educate their younger colleagues (An seni 790E).\(^{11}\) This road recalls the ancient pedagogical system of rhetoric (even though that system had been replaced in Plutarch’s times by the school practice of suasoriae and controversiae).\(^{12}\)

2.2.1. Advantages. This road, too, has several important advantages. First of all, it is much safer than the quick road (804D; 805E) and admits more leisure

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10 The term προσδραμὼν can perhaps be seen as a far echo of a verse of Simonides (or Semonides) which is used by Plutarch in this context: ἐξηήλος ἵππῳ πάλος ὡς ἄμα τρέχει; cf. An seni 790F; fr. 210 Sandbach; cf. also De prof. in virt. 84D.

11 According to Carrière, 173, “Ces débuts sous un grand homme sont aussi une transposition du principe de l’adoption impériale, qui vient de prendre une grande importance avec l’adoption de Trajan par Nerva”.

12 Formerly, the prospective orator was brought to the most important orator at Rome (eum oratorem qui principem in civitate locum obtinebat; Tacitus, dial. 34,1). He had to follow his mentor everywhere, and had to listen to all his judicial and political speeches, thus learning to fight in the combat itself (pugnare in proelio discretion; ibid. 34,2). Such education had many considerable advantages: Magnus ex hoc usus, multum constantiae, plurimum iudicii iuvenibus statim contingebat, in media luce studentibus atque inter ipsa discrimina, ubi nemo impune stulte aliquid aut contrarie dicit quo minus et index respuat et adversarius exprobret, ipsi denique advocati aspernentur (ibid. 34,3); cf. also Quintilian, inst. 10,5,19 and 12,11,5–6; Pliny, epist. 2,14,3.
(804E, 805E). Secondly, the gradual growth (κατὰ μικρόν; 805F) guarantees a certain continuity, which enables the young politician to grow together with his leader (805F). Furthermore, the politician will be able to gain much political experience: step by step, he will make himself rooted in political life (805F). Besides, he will have a lesson in obedience, which is certainly an additional advantage, as “nobody can rule well if he is not first able to serve well”¹³ (806F). Being well aware of all those important advantages, Philippus advised Alexander to win friends as long as he could, while another was king (806B).¹⁴

2.2.2. Disadvantages. However, this road has its disadvantages too: the beginning politician can easily fall victim to the envy of others (804E). Nevertheless, such φθόνος need not always lead to a destruction of the politician’s career, seeing that the slow road as well was chosen by many illustrious predecessors (805E). In this case too, a great advantage of the quick road (where such pernicious φθόνος is absent) is not necessarily an equally great disadvantage of the slower road: for if one is led towards fame by the hand of others, one both wins favour with many¹⁵ and is less hated if something troublesome happens (806B). Hence, the older leader can act as a kind of buffer between the beginning politician and the envy of others.

2.2.3. The perspective of the Lives. In this case too, Plutarch briefly mentions several examples that all return in the Lives: Aristides was made great by Cleisthenes (805F and Arist. 2.1; cf. An seni 790F), Phocion by Chabrias (805F and Phoc. 6.1–3; cf. An seni 791A); Lucullus by Sulla (805F and Luc. 2.1; 4.4); Cato by Fabius Maximus (805F and Ca. Mi. 2.3; 3.4; cf. An seni 791A); Pammenes by Epameinondas (805F and Pel. 26.5) and Agesilaus by Lysander (805F and Lys. 22.6; 23.1–2; Ages. 2.1; 3.3–4.1; 6.1–3).

And here as well, additional material can be found in the Lives. Themistocles, for instance, associated with Mnesiphilus (Them. 2.4; cf. De

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¹³ Cf. Plato, Leges VI, 762e: δεὶ δὴ πάντ’ άνδρα διανοεῖ καὶ διηθάντων ἀνθρώπων ὡς ὁ μῆ δουλεύσας οὔθ’ ἀν διεστάτης γένοιτο ἄξιος ἐπαινεῖν, καὶ καλλωπίζεσθαι χρῆ τῷ καλῶς δουλεύσαι μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ καλῶς ἀρξάει (cf. also Leges I, 643e and XII, 942c); Aristotle, Polit. III, 4, 1277b11–13: δὲ λέγεται καὶ τοῦτο καλῶς, ὡς οὐκ ἐστὶν εὖ ἀρξάει μῆ ἄρχάντα (cf. also ibid. 1277a25–27); Diog. Laert., I, 60. In this respect, Agesilaus is clearly worth imitating (Ages. 1.3; cf. also 20.2). A bad example is Perpenna (Sert. 27.1).


¹⁵ Cf. also Cicero, off. 2,46: “Facillime autem et in optimam partem cognoscuntur adolescentes, qui se ad claros et sapientes viros bene consulentes rei publicae contulerunt; quibuscum si frequentes sunt, opinionem afferunt populo corum fore se similes, quos sibi ipsi delegerint ad imitandum.”
Her. mal. 869D–F; An seni 795C), Brutus received considerable favours from Caesar (Brut. 7.4; Caes. 62.2), and Polybius followed Philopoemen (An seni 791A; cf. also Phil. 21.3). These examples further illustrate the great importance older statesmen can have as experienced and powerful patrons of their younger colleagues.

Occasionally, the conceptual opposition between the two roads is nuanced to a certain extent in the concrete political praxis that is mentioned in the Lives. Both roads indeed do not necessarily exclude one another. A very interesting example in this respect is Cimon. Just like Marcius Coriolanus, Pyrrhus and Scipio, Cimon gained a good reputation through his military bravery (displayed in his case in the battle at Salamis; Cim. 5.3). He thus seems to have opted for the quick and dangerous road to fame. Plutarch most interestingly adds that he immediately gained the favour of the people, which was surfeited of Themistocles (Cim. 5.4). Again, this clearly recalls one of the important advantages of the quick road (cf. 804D). Nonetheless, one cannot regard Cimon as a confirmed adept of the quick road, for Plutarch continues by underlining the great importance which Aristides had in furthering Cimon’s career (Cim. 5.4; cf. Arist. 10.8 and An seni 791A and 795C). Cimon thus walked on both roads, and succeeded in combining the advantages of both. The same was done by Pompey, who was supported by Sulla (806E; An seni 791A; Pomp. 8.2–3; Crass. 6.4), but who also quickly reached a position of power, receiving a triumph even without being senator (804F). Again, the Lives thus introduce to a political reality which is more complicated than the schematic theoretical perspective of Plutarch’s political thinking, but again, this theoretical perspective can also be used to clarify certain aspects of the hero’s choices and actions.

3. Limitations and possibilities of both roads

3.1. The quick road

Both roads thus prove to have their own pros and cons, and both are real alternatives that can be chosen by the politician. But whatever road the beginning politician will choose, he will in any case have to proceed in a well-considered and well-founded way.16

16 Contra Pérez Jiménez, 369, who considers the first, quick road to be that of coincidence, and the second safer road that of rational reflection, opposing this bifurcation to the much more complex situation of the Lives: “En los Praecepta gerendae reipublicae muestra Plutarco dos caminos para acceder a la vida pública, uno rápido, fruto de la casualidad, y otro lento, pero seguro, guiado por la reflexión. La práctica de las
3.1.1. Limitations. If he opts for the quick road, he should realize that several
great and bold deeds are no longer possible. Plutarch here calls attention to the
political situation of his own times: since Greece is kept under Rome’s thumb,
there is no need of leadership in wars, dissolutions of tyrannies or acts of
alliances (805A). Hence, the political reality brings with it a first important
limitation. A second limitation originates from the demand of the politician’s
own safety. Indeed, the curtailment of the power of an oppressive, oligarchic
Council forms a very conspicuous beginning of one’s political career, to be
sure, but it is by no means without danger for the beginner himself. Therefore,
one should prefer the action of Solon, who tried to re-establish concord
between the different factions of his city, to that of Ephialtes or Phormio
(805DE). It is clear that these limitations should in the first place reduce the
great risks that are part and parcel of this road. Accordingly, they have a
pragmatical rather than a moral basis.

3.1.2. Possibilities. Within the framework of these two essential limitations, a
whole range of possibilities remains open to the beginning politician. Plutarch
indeed presents a whole list of illustrious beginnings that are still possible in the
Imperium Romanum and that are not too dangerous, thus at the same time
demonstrating that the first road is even in his own times a real alternative. The
young politician can still show his excellence in public lawsuits and embassies
to the emperor, which require an ardent (cf. De tuenda 136B), brave and
intelligent man. Furthermore, he can take up many honourable practices
which have been neglected in the cities, and remove many bad customs
(805B). An honourable judgement in a great lawsuit (cf. De prof. in virt. 81A
and De vit. pud. 533D) can sometimes constitute an illustrious beginning of the
political career too, just as honesty in an advocacy for the weak against a
powerful adversary, and frankness against a wicked ruler in behalf of the right
(805B). Even enmity can often (cf. οὐκ ἄλγοι; 805B) lead to political growth.
One can indeed try to gain both power and fame by attacking, on good

Vidas Paralelas deja ver que la realidad es algo más complicada”. However, this is not
the meaning of the dichotomy which Plutarch presents, for also the first road should be
based on reflection and virtue: Aratus’ success against the tyrant Nicocles was not a
matter of mere coincidence of course, and Cornelius Scipio did not become consul
because of a chance beginning (οὐκ ἄφ’ ἦς ἔτωξεν ἀρχῆς; 804F), but because of his
military valour.

17 On the difficulties and dangers of an embassy towards the emperor, see also Philo of

18 In this way, Lucullus entered public life, attacking Servilius the Augur, the accuser
of his father (Luc. 1.1–2; Cicero, ac. 2.1; Badian, 301–306; cf. also Valerius Maximus,
5.4.4). Cicero, on his part, defended Roscius against Sulla (Cíc. 3.3–4). See further
Cicero, Off. 2.51: “Maxime autem et gloria partur et gratia defensionibus, eoque maior, si
quando accidit, ut ei subveniatur, qui potentis alius opibus circumveniri urguerique videatur”.
grounds, powerful persons (805BC). All these examples clearly show that the two previous limitations should be completed with a third one: the politician’s action should be morally good. It should be useful (805C), it should never be based on φθόνος (805C), and the fame it entails should be honourable (805C). Accordingly, one should not imitate the bad examples of men like Simmias, Alcmeon, Clodius and Menecleides, who all attacked honourable statesmen (805C), but rather indict persons such like Cleon and Cleophon at Athens (805CD).

The argumentation of this third, moral limitation is quite interesting. It is clear that virtuous behaviour is here not introduced as an end in itself, but as a means to gain fame and power. Accordingly, an attack of virtuous leaders is here rejected, not (only) because it is immoral, but (primarily) because it does not contribute to the power and fame of the politician. Indeed, if he would carry the day and destroy his noble opponent, the people will quickly repent of its anger (cf. also De coh. ira 460C; De sera num. 550E; Seneca, dial. 3,17,4), and will welcome the most easy defence as the most just: it will crush the man who has convinced them to ruin their honourable leader (805C). Such a position is quite remarkable. Plutarch has already made it clear that τὸ καλὸν should be the politician’s final end (799A), and that power and fame are only means subservient to it. Here, he seems to defend exactly the opposite position: moral behaviour appears as a mere means subservient to fame and political power. Now both perspectives can of course easily be reconciled: it is true indeed that moral behaviour can contribute to the statesman’s power and fame, but it remains equally true that this position of power and fame should finally be used in order to achieve the ultimate honourable τέλος of the politician. In this way, Plutarch’s reflections in chapter 10 give a good illustration of the character of his political thinking in the Political precepts. In the whole work indeed, moral and pragmatical demands balance one another, being both end and means of each other, and collaborating in an harmonious field of tension towards the final end of τὸ καλὸν.

19 Accordingly, Themistocles did not shun the enmity of the powerful leaders at Athens (especially that of Aristides); cf. Them. 3.1. Another example is Sulla, who opposed Marius; cf. Carrière, 173.

20 Cf. Cicero,Off. 2,51: "Atque etiam hoc praeceptum officii diligenter tenendum est, ne quem unquam innocentem iudicio capitis arcessas; id enim sine scelere fieri nullo pacto potest."

21 Cf. also Aristotle, Ath. Pol. 28,3: εἴωθεν γάρ καὶ ἐξαποστηθῆ τὸ πλήθος ύπερον μεσίν τούς τι προαγαγόντας ποιεῖν αὐτούς τῶν μὴ καλῶς ἐχόντων. One could recall the fate of Anytus and Meletus, the accusers of Socrates (cf. De inv. et od. 537F–538A; see also Diog. Laert., II, 43; Diodorus Siculus, XIV, 37.7; Themistius, orat. XX, 239c) and the cases of Phocion (Phoc. 38.1; on the parallels between the fate of Phocion and that of Socrates, see esp. Alcalde Martín, 167–169 and Trapp, 488–489), of Philopoemen (Phil. 21.1–5), of the Gracchi (CG 18.1–2), and of Otho (Oth. 17.5).
3.2. The slow road

3.2.1. Limitations. Just like the beginning politician who opts for the quick road, his colleague who prefers the slower road ought to bear in mind some important limitations. Of course, he too should bear in mind the limitations that originate from the contemporary political situation or from the demands of personal safety, although the immediate dangers of the slow road are undoubtedly less acute. Furthermore, he also has to meet several essential moral demands. First of all, he should always honour his political mentor, as he begins a relation of friendship which should be durable.\(^{22}\) For that reason, Agesilaus can be blamed for having rejected his political leader Lysander\(^{23}\) (805F). One should rather follow the example of Scipio and Laelius,\(^ {24}\) and honour one’s political mentor until the end,\(^ {25}\) even adding to his fame (806A). Furthermore, friendship in the end proves more important than political power. Accordingly, the beginning politician should never regard his political mentor as a mere means in order to gain power and fame, but should attach more importance to the latter’s friendship than to his political support, and should even abandon his ambitions if they are opposed to the wishes of his leader, emulating the behaviour of Afranius (806B).\(^ {26}\) Finally, he should not

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\(^{22}\) See *Præc. ger. reip.* 806A: ἐταξίρων; 806B: τὴν φιλίαν; 806B: φιλούς; 806B: πρὸς χάριν ἑμιλωῦντα καὶ φιλοφρονοῦμενον; 806F: μετ’ εὐνοίας καὶ φιλίας. Cf. also the attitude of Alexander towards his tutors Lysimachus (*Alex.* 24.6–7) and Leonidas (*Alex.* 25.4–5).

\(^{23}\) On the conflict between Agesilaus and Lysander, see also *Ages.* 7.1–8.4; *Comp. Ages.* et *Pomp.* 1.2; *Lys.* 23.2–24.2; *De vit. pud.* 533EF; Xenophon, *Hell.* III, 4.7–9 (which is obviously Plutarch’s source); Bos, 58–68; Shipley, 128–142. Even if Lysander was indeed too ambitious at the wrong moment, Agesilaus’ behaviour remains nonetheless blameworthy in Plutarch’s eyes, cf. *Ages.* 8.4 and *Lys.* 23.5.

\(^{24}\) When Scipio’s detractors called him the actor, but his friend Laelius the real author of his deeds, Laelius did not become conceited by such words, but uninterruptedly continued to support Scipio’s virtue and fame; 806A; *An seni* 797D; Julianus, *orat.* VIII, 244cd. On Laelius’ friendship with and support of Scipio, see, e.g., *Ca. Mi.* 7.3; *TG* 8.4; *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 200C; Cicero, *Lael.* 4, 5, 8, 10, 15, 30, 51 and 103; *rep.* 1,18; *de orat.* 2,22; *fam.* 5,7,3; Valerius Maximus, 8,8,1; Velleius Paterculus, II, 127.1; Anonym., *De vir. illustr.* 58,7. Similarly, Socrates wished to increase the honourable φιλοτιμία of his pupil Alcibiades (*Alc.* 7.3).

\(^{25}\) In that sense, Pompeius surpassed Agesilaus; see *Comp. Ages.* et *Pomp.* 1.2–3 (cf. also *Sull.* 38.1; *Pomp.* 15.3). Cf. also Phocion’s attitude towards Chabrias (*Phoc.* 7.2); a bad example is Marius (*Mar.* 10.1).

\(^{26}\) Plutarch here presents Afranius as a good example. According to other sources, however, Afranius was politically incompetent and useless; cf. Cicero, *Att.* 1.16,12; 1,18,3 and 5; 1,19,4; 1,20,5; Dio Cassius, XXXVII, 49.1 and 3; cf. also Williams – Williams, 200: “Although Plutarch’s aim was to show the virtues of coöperation and friendship, the incident, nevertheless, demonstrates the basic political position of Afranius. A man without an independent power base, special talents, or a network of
only chose as political leader someone who is famous and powerful, but
someone whose fame and power is also based on personal virtue (806BC).

Here as well, however, these moral limitations are not (only) introduced
for their own sake. For why should the beginning politician give preference to
a leader who is virtuous? In order to find a good mentor who can guide him
on his path of moral progress?27 Stricto sensu not: the politician should have
reached moral perfection (or at least have curtailed his most important faults)
before he enters political life (800A–801C). The reason is once again entirely
pragmatic: those who are not lovers of what is honourable (φιλόκαλοι) but
merely of honours (φιλότιμοι) and offices (φιλαρχοὶ) give no opportunities to a
young politician, but yield to their envy and begrudge him his success28
(806C). A bad political mentor proves to be a serious obstacle rather than a
helper, as he does not protect his younger colleague against envy – one of the
greatest difficulties of the slow road – but is envious himself. Such a man was
Marius, who attempted – though in vain – to choke the political growth of
Sulla (806CD; cf. Mar. 10.2–6 and Sull. 3.1–4.3). Sulla himself, on the other
hand, supported next to Pompeius many other young men too, some of them
even against their own will, and thus succeeded in ruling over them all,
wishing to be not the only ruler, but the first and greatest among many great
men29 (806E). Hence, the beginning politician should opt for a virtuous
political leader simply because this strategy is the most easy way to obtain
power and fame himself. For such a relation of friendship should not be
opposed to political ambitions, as in the case of Afranius. In this way,
philosophical and pragmatical interests can easily be connected with regard to
the second, slower road as well.

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27 Cf. De prof. in virt. 84B–85B on the importance of great examples in the process of
moral progress.

28 Such an attitude of φιλοτιμία and φιλαρχία is not very conducive to the good name of
the older politician either, for he will be hated by the young, and be despised by the
others (An seni 793E). Older politicians who encourage the younger ones seem much
more popular (An seni 796A).

29 Cf., however, Pelling, 176: “Plutarch has little idea of the characteristic Roman desire
to be first within the system, rather than change it”.

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4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that both roads are regarded by Plutarch as real alternatives: the one is not *a priori* better than the other. It is also clear why Plutarch adopts this position of equipollence. The differences between the two roads are very great with regard to concrete action itself. With regard to pragmatical demands, both have their pros and cons, which should be carefully computed. With regard to moral claims, however, the difference is nothing at all. Both roads are philosophically well-founded and can be reconciled with the honourable τέλος of the politician. Hence, it is up to Menemachus (and to each beginning politician) to chose that road which will in his case be most advantageous.

This illustrates an important feature of the political advice Plutarch offers in his *Political precepts*. The reader is not confronted with ready-made opinions, nor with a detailed and well-defined political course, but with thought-provoking reflections that can guide his personal political decisions. Plutarch’s advice stimulates the politician’s personal thinking, and thus contributes to the latter’s independence: the beginning politician of the *Political precepts* no longer needs an authoritarian pedagogue who repeats to him the correct answers over and over again, but a teacher with whom he can carry on a philosophical dialogue. In this way, we finally meet the *Lives* again, where we find a similar pedagogical approach. For there too, the reader finds a lot of material that he can consider and appropriate in his own perspective. *Political precepts* and *Lives* thus form a kind of diptych that can lead the politician through his career. In a certain sense, they can themselves be regarded as two roads that lead, not to political life as such, but to a virtuous political life. One of these may be slower in that it requires more time (viz. the *Lives*; cf. *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 172E); the other is more apt for politicians like Menemachus, who lack this time (798B: ἐπειδὴ χρόνον οὐκ ἔχεις). But both, in any case, in the end lead to the same philosophical destination.

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31 Cf. Roskam, 2004 on Plutarch’s view of the evolution towards greater independence in the educational process.
Bibliography


