Synopsis

The articles of this chapter illustrate Plutarch's deep interest in philosophy (usage, importance, relation with politcs etc.) and his attitude towards some philosophers. More specifically the first three contributions are concerned with such matters as the philosophical use of discourse, the two levels of philosophy (popular and specialized), the relation of philosophy with history and biography, and Plutarch's practical approach to Epicureanism. The rest four concentrate on the nature and function of wisdom, practical as well as theoretical, and particularly on Solon, perhaps the most famous exponent of political *sophia*.*

Benoît Castelnérac focuses on the *Life of Lycurgus* in connection with the philosophical use of discourse. According to him, Plutarch sees in Lycurgus the historical model of Plato's philosopher-king** and presents him as the man who created the Spartan constitution and moulded Spartan education. But the harsh criticism displayed in the *Life of Lycurgus* towards written speech and rhetoric seems to run counter to the *philologia* described in the *De audiendo,* where listening to lectures, writing texts and giving appropriate eulogies form the main intellectual activities of the philosopher.

In the *Life*, the plain and unaffected style of Spartan dialogue is directly associated with Lycurgus' ideas about virtue and luxury, in other words, with the principles of simplicity and usefulness governing the Spartan daily life; and it seems that the same principles explain the very little presence of written speech in Sparta. Lycurgus forbade even his own laws to be written down, but, according to Plutarch, he had taken down the poems of Homer (*Lyc.* 4.5: ἐγράψατο), and made again correct use of writing just before he died, when he sent a letter to Sparta, writing down Pythia's words that his laws were good. Thus, he tied the Spartans to his constitution by the double bond of a spoken oath (that they would observe his laws during his absence) and a written guarantee coming from Delphi.

The interpretation of these features of the *Life of Lycurgus*, based on the treatise *On Listening to Lectures*, can demonstrate why, according to Plutarch, Lycurgus is right in criticizing as well as in making a positive use of written speech. Specifically, it seems that the criticism of written speech in Sparta is

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* For Solon see also, partly, De Blois's article in the previous chapter.

** For other philosopher-kings in Plutarch, cf. Dillon's article in ch. 4. For Lycurgus cf. also Koulakiotis' article in the same chapter.

consistent with the two levels of philosophy, one popular and one specialized, we encounter in the *De audiendo*. Only mature souls are fit to the exercise of philosophy, and Plutarch presents Lycurgus' attitude towards written speech as evidence of a complete philosophical activity. According to the author, the above analysis shows how Plutarch's works are the unified expression of his conception about philosophy; while carefully going from history to theory, and back to practical pedagogy, Plutarch explains that the activity of the philosopher is a dialogue in which he should always make good use of every form of speech.

Patricia FitzGibbon examines how Plutarch characterizes different Epicureans in his works, the possible uses he has for these constructs, and what significance his treatment of Epicureans may have in terms of the history of Epicureanism. Despite his philosophical opposition to the Garden, Plutarch's dialogues describe a civilized and even pleasant interaction of himself and his friends with the Epicureans. But upon a close investigation, Plutarch's construction of Epicurean characters, such as Boethus in *Why Oracles at Delphi are No Longer Written in Verse*, show that Epicureans serve as a foil thereby giving Plutarch's literary persona, whether Plutarch himself or characters supporting his philosophy, the superior position in the discussion. In dialogues, however, with an Epicurean presence, Plutarch either constructs Epicurean arguments which simply do not withstand his Platonic arguments, or he does not allow the Epicurean to speak or offer salient viewpoints on the topic at hand. Because the arguments of the Epicurean present are weak or non-existent, or because he is portrayed as less cerebral than the other interlocutors, Plutarch achieves an indirect or "incidental" criticism of Epicureanism. This "incidental polemic" can be further defined by contrasting it to the direct polemic contained in his 3 anti-Epicurean tracts, the sole purpose of which is to denounce Epicurean philosophy. But of the three tracts dedicated to this purpose, only one (*Non Posse*) is a dialogue, and none of the interlocutors there is Epicurean.

Mention of Epicureanism is slim in the *Lives*, but in *Brutus* there is the substantial character of Cassius, whose Epicureanism is given note more than once. Philosophy in general plays a significant role in this particular *Life*, and Brutus' impeachable character is often credited to his philosophical education. Cassius, on the other hand, although he does offer advice to Brutus based on his doctrine, bears less than desirable character traits, which however do not necessarily appear to emanate from his philosophical choice. The comparison of Plutarch's treatment of Epicureans and Epicurean philosophy in the *Moralia* and the *Lives* will investigate any similarities or differences in Plutarch's approach to assess this philosophy as a whole.

Federicomaria Muccioli, starting off from Plutarch's characterization of Phanias of Lesbos as a philosopher who was also well-acquainted with historical literature (*Them.* 13.5), explores the relations between biography, history and ethical philosophy. It is observed that Plutarch uses similar characterizations only for Peripatetic writers, and not for other Greek philosophers who wrote historical works (Posidonius, for instance, is always and only called a philosopher). So, given that Plutarch viewed history from a moral, more or less, perspective, we can conclude that, for him, those Peripatetic writers provided a very important model of philosophical history. This is further confirmed by the fact that Plutarch makes use of many historical-philosophical topics of Phanias, Theophrastus and other Peripatetic writers not only in the *Vitae*, but also, in some different way, in the *Moralia*.

Delfim Ferreira Leão deals with the character or the profile of the sapiens. It is observed that the 'Seven Wise Men', who on the whole are Greek aristocrats, present us a picture of the world as seen through the lens of their own small community. Nevertheless, the tradition could become richer and in fact reached the point of questioning itself from inside. Thus, in Plutarch's *Septem Sapientium Convivium* the *sophoi* welcome among themselves a *barbaros* (Anacharsis), and also allow the presence of an ex-slave (Aesop) and a young girl (Cleobouline) in their meetings. The coexistence of all these personalities provides a good example of the way the "Other" may be included in a restricted circle.

Jackson Hershbell examines Plutarch's views on Solon and *sophia*. He first observes that, although *Sept. sap. conv.* seems to lack internal unity and its loosely arranged episodes are held together only by the presence of the *Seven Sophoi*, its purpose may have been to provide a captivating and 'popular' introduction to early Hellenic thinkers and philosophy. Then he argues that Plutarch's *Solon*, like other *Lives*, reflects his conviction that genuine virtue is possible only when a life of 'action' is pursued, a life of political involvement (*praktikos bios*), as opposed to the contemplative life (*theoretikos bios*). Thus, at *Sol.* 3.6 Plutarch states that Solon "cultivated chiefly the domain of political ethics, like most of the wise men of the time.", although in the immediate sequel he cites verses of Solon showing a theoretical interest. Yet it is only here (*Sol.* 3.7) that the *sophos* is credited with interest in physical theory, namely in the 'theoretical' life.

In both *Solon* and *Sept. sap. conv.*, Solon is portrayed as a "legislator-hero" and as a political thinker. In the latter role, Plutarch may well have considered him to be one of Socrates' most important precursors. In any case, whatever Plutarch's often uncertain sources for his *Solon* and his portrayal of the Athenian *sophos* in *Sept. sap. conv.*, both works often show close connections

and how Plutarch used his sources and subject to reflect his own purposes as an exceedingly prolific writer and a convinced Platonist. Finally, it is argued that both *Solon* and *Sept. sap. conv.* provide consistent and valuable insights into Plutarch's concept of *sophia* and *philosophia*, and that Solon, as one of the seven *sophoi*, is an embodiment of Plutarch's view of philosophy and of the *praktikos bios*.

José Vela Tejada, after noting that Solon's political myth was shaped as the outcome of a long political and philosophical tradition going back to Solon's own elegies and living on through to Plutarch's time, thanks to the dominance of rhetoric, tries to draw the main lines of this myth by means of a comparative study of the *Solon* and the *Septem sapientium convivium*. As a biographical hero, Solon was one of the best historical models for Plutarch, since he represented the humane and philosophical politician. His wisdom was rooted in the tradition of the Seven Wise Men, attested also by Herodotus. The poet is introduced as *sophos* in political science, and the sapiential *mesotes* of Solon is underlined in the context of the ideal of *metron*, an ideal recurrent in the *gnômai* of the *sophoi*. On the other hand, a similar admiration for Solon explains his protagonist role in the *Sept. sap. conv.*, where Plutarch anachronistically inserts the discussion on the best government. Nevertheless, this work is necessary for our understanding Solon's portrait in the *Bios*.

Finally, **Inés Calero Secall** studies the *Life of Solon* in juxtaposition with Plutarch's references to Solon in the *Moralia* in an attempt to discover (a) whether Solon's character is the same in both *Life* and *Moralia*, and (b) whether the *Moralia* references to Solon coincide with the information in the *Life*. Her research yields that only a few literary quotations in the *Moralia* are missing from the *Life* (e.g. *Praec. ger. reip.* 813F), but in the *Moralia* we also find information concerning Solon's behaviour that is again missing from the *Life*. Even so, Solon is always presented as a good and moderate ruler (although some of his laws Plutarch either misunderstands or interprets with moralistic criteria), who refuses to become a tyrant and defends democracy at all costs (so also in the *Sept. sap. conv.*).