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Plutarch and the Epistemic Authority of Euripides

Abstract: Plutarch attributes a high epistemic authority to Euripides, in particular in the domain of moral psychology and ethics, but also for political, religious or even medical questions. This is because in his plays Euripides shows himself to be an expert of the *condition humaine*. Moreover, already in the literary and philosophical tradition prior to Plutarch, Euripides enjoyed the reputation of being the most philosophical of poets. His plays were zealously excerpted and many verses were included in gnomologies and cited by various authors. Modern scholars therefore disagree on the sources used by Plutarch: did he take a particular citation from the indirect tradition or was it one of his *Lesefrüchte* from the plays themselves? In this contribution the criteria used by philologists in order to adjudicate this issue are subjected to close scrutiny. This article moreover examines the practice of *epanorthōsis*, which consists in ‘correcting’ the words spoken by a character in a play. These corrections usually do not imply a real criticism. Nevertheless, the very use of this technique, signaling the author’s critical way of dealing with literary texts, shows that the epistemic authority bestowed upon Euripides is not unconditional, since it is not above criticism.

Had Plutarch been just your typical philosopher writing in a dreary and sober style, citations of playwrights would merely have had the function to contribute interesting ideas. Plutarch is, however, more than a writer of dry philosophical tracts. The latter are in fact few and far between. Surely Plutarch is a philosophical author, but one who wishes to convey philosophical ideas in a stylistically beautiful and entertaining manner. Accordingly, many citations of Euripidean verses – actually, most of them – serve merely or primarily stylistic purposes. Those are either not part at all of a philosophical argument or discussion, or they add nothing new or relevant, not even the fact that they provide endoxic support for views that Plutarch endorses.¹ He for instance uses the Euripidean phrase “but the discussion must be carried back”² just to mark a transition to a new topic of conversation in an elegant way. This expression

1 This paper was written in the context of the research project “Epistemic authority in Late Ancient Commentaries”, funded by the Internal Research Fund of the University of Leuven.

Cf. Mitchell 1968, 11: “In Plutarch’s time, therefore, it was customary for an author to cite poetry at one time for its thought, at another for style or diction, or simply as ornament to enhance his own style or display his learning”. This is, however, only true for authors with literary ambitions, not for instance for manuals of philosophy.

2 ἅλλ’ ἀνοιστέος [ὁ] λόγος, from the *Melanippe Sapiens*, fr. 481,11 Kannicht, quoted by Plutarch in *De E* 390C and *De def. or.* 431A.

clearly has no special meaning in the contexts in which Plutarch uses them. Adding no content to the conversation, it is merely a rhetorical flourish. Or when a speaker in a dialogue wants to tell a story that he has taken from elsewhere, he can say “not mine the tale”, without even mentioning Euripides by name (as the author of the expression, to be sure, not of the tale), as that would almost amount to insulting the audience’s sophistication.³ Such examples could easily be multiplied.

In this contribution I shall focus on those *other* citations: those that add to the inquiry and provide content, either by introducing a novel point of view, whether or not in agreement with Plutarch’s own, or lending additional support – providing authority – for views expressed by Plutarch, by another author quoted by him, or by a character in one of his dialogical works.

I will look at these references to Euripides from the perspective of authority – epistemic authority, to be more precise. Epistemic authority is to be distinguished from executive authority, which is aimed at regulating behaviour, and comprises, among other forms, moral, religious or political authority. Epistemic authority, on the contrary, is the authority related to knowledge and beliefs. In principle these two basic forms of authority are clearly distinct, but in practice they are often intertwined. Yet for the sake of analysis it is better to keep them apart. Obviously, the figure of Euripides also enjoys moral authority within Plutarch’s intellectual universe, but that is an aspect that I shall not touch upon, except indirectly, insofar as his moral authority follows from its epistemic counterpart.

Our research team in Leuven has developed a model to describe with precision the phenomenon of epistemic authority, a real phenomenon that exists independently of any explicit conceptualisation or theory building.⁴ The model maps the different factors that enter into the authority relation or are otherwise attached to it, and thereby helps to distinguish different types and cases of authority.⁵ For my present purpose it mainly serves a heuristic function. It is not my intention to superimpose a heavy theoretical apparatus on ancient texts, but rather to use the model in order to distinguish more clearly different types of epistemic authority by looking at the variations in the different factors in the authority relation. Epistemic authority is an extremely complex phenomenon, but ultimately, and ontologically, it is a relation that comes about in virtue of the attribution of a certain quality – that of being a reliable and trustworthy source of information – to a person or even a thing (more precisely, to a sign). The precise quality attributed may vary (from *prima facie* reliability and trustworthiness to the extreme case of infallibility and nondefeasibility). Moreover epistemic authority is linked to a specific epistemic domain and is attributed on certain grounds. Ideally, all of these should be specified, but unfortunately our sour-

³ καὶ οὐκ ἐμὸς ὁ μῦθος, from the *Melanippe Sapiens*, fr. 484,1 Kannicht, quoted by Plutarch in *Quaest. conv.* 718 A, and already by Eryximachus in Plato, *Symp.* 177a3–4.

⁴ By this remark I anticipate the objection that ancient Greek does not have a word for “authority”.

⁵ The model was first developed in Opsomer and Ulacco 2016 and further refined in Aerts and Opsomer 2017.

ces do not always allow this. In order to describe the phenomenon of epistemic authority with greater precision, it is in addition important to determine who attributes authority (in this case: the author Plutarch), who or what is the bearer of authority (in this case Euripides, but possibly also his texts or even single characters in his plays), the epistemic domain over which the authority is meant to hold (they will be diverse, as we shall see), the grounds that are supposed to justify the attribution as these are communicated to the attributor's intended audience(s), and the rhetorical means by which this is done.

1 Some Criteria for Plutarch's Citation Practice and their Critique

After Homer and the philosophers Aristotle, Chrysippus, and Plato, Euripides is the author Plutarch cites most frequently.⁶ Possibly Plutarch even wrote a work completely devoted to Euripides. Such a work is at least featured in the *Lamprias Catalogue* (number 224, Περὶ Εὐριπίδου). This catalogue is an ancient list of works, the large majority of which are texts authored by Plutarch, but which also includes spurious items.

Plutarch could count on the fact that not only most of the verses he quotes, but also many of the mythological stories and plots of his plays were well-known to his readers (or at least that they would feel ashamed if they failed to recognise the citation or allusion; familiarity with the great literature of the past would be part of one's cultural capital, to use a modern sociological concept). This is shown by the fact that in the majority of cases Plutarch does not even bother to tell the reader from whom he is quoting. I take it that this is part of a communicative strategy that has the function of creating a bond between author and the intended reader: both are "in the know". The quotations are not always anonymous, however. Occasionally Plutarch adds expressions like "according to Euripides", "as Euripides says" or as the "Euripidean [character in the play] says."⁷ In these cases Euripides is usually cited to confirm a point of view or for the sake of embellishment and literary *variatio*, or both. Sometimes Plutarch adds his own comments. These are the more interesting cases for our purpose.

As is clear from Plutarch, but also from the occurrence of quotations in other ancient authors, his sophisticated audience⁸ knew many verses by heart and were fa-

⁶ Helmbold and O'Neil 1959, 30–33; O'Neil 2004, 232–235.

⁷ E.g. *Marc.* 21,6 and *Cim.* 4,6: κατὰ τὸν Εὐριπίδειον Ἡρακλέα. *De prof.* 84F: τὸ Εὐριπίδειον ἐφ' ἐκάστω φθεγγόμενοι. *De tranq.* 475C: ἐκεῖνο τὸ Εὐριπίδειον. *De aud. poet.* 25C and *De cup. div.* 526C: κατὰ τὸν Εὐριπίδην; *Quaest. conv.* 643F: ἡ Εὐριπίδειος γραῦς.

⁸ Surely we cannot assume that everyone who was part of Plutarch's actual audience was equally erudite. What I here mean are rather prototypical members of an intended audience, ideal figures

miliar with the stories and plots. Some of the verses had by Plutarch's time acquired the status of γνῶμαι and were circulated in gnomologies. Euripides' plays indeed lend themselves very well to the extraction of easily remembered sayings.⁹ There may be several reasons for this. Euripides puts remarkable, that is, unusual and therefore striking, expressions in the mouth of his characters. He had moreover acquired a reputation for writing plays that contain "philosophical" remarks, which certainly stimulated hunters for quotable phrases. Things said by Euripides' characters are easily generalisable outside their original context, or rather, they do not even need to be generalised, as they are already general in the form in which they are expressed. The salient remarks made by his characters are quite often nicely contained within a single verse or a sequence of complete verses and are therefore easier to remember. And, more than in other tragedians, the remarkable statements are found in the spoken parts, the iambic *rhêseis*, rather than in the lyrical sections.¹⁰ Ancient readers actively looked for γνῶμαι in Euripides' plays and Plutarch's audience very likely knew a considerable portion of them by heart. It is all the more remarkable that there are so many different sayings quoted by Plutarch and that for a considerable number he is our only source. The Chaeronean indeed cites at least 270 different verses or sequences (there are quotations that cannot be attributed to a specific play, but are undoubtedly Euripidean, whereas for others the authorship is unclear). Plutarch cites from all plays extant today, except for *Rhesus* and *Helena*, and from 36 lost plays. Undoubtedly, some of the 95 *adespota* are also Euripidean (55, if the proportional division of attributable verses is respected).¹¹ Although Plutarch was an avid reader, we may safely assume that he too will have made use of gnomologies.¹² Moreover, he will certainly have found citations and other material, such as anecdotes, in the literature that he discussed or consulted for writing his own works, borrowing them from there.

This is the conclusion reached by L. Di Gregorio, who has conducted a systematic investigation into Plutarch's sources for Euripides and the other two great tragedians.¹³ His aim is to distinguish, to the extent that this is possible, between citations that result from direct consultation of their works and those for which Plutarch relied on intermediate sources. Di Gregorio criticises the wide-spread, but insufficiently examined assumption that Plutarch had direct access to the original texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides, and that he consulted those originals almost every time he cited one of them. What in general speaks against the assumption of direct usage, so Di Gregorio, is the fact that Plutarch wrote many of his works in his modest home

that would function as objects of aspiration. Useful background and reflections on Plutarch's intended audience are provided by Johnson 2010, esp. 200–207 and Van Hoof 2010, esp. 19–27.

⁹ Cf. Quint. 10,1,68: *sententiis densus* ("full of striking reflections").

¹⁰ Kannicht 1997, 69; Most 2003, 49–52.

¹¹ Kannicht 1997, 70.

¹² Kannicht 1997, 70 n. 15.

¹³ Di Gregorio 1979, for Aeschylus and Sophocles, and Di Gregorio 1980, for Euripides.

town, which lacked a big library, and also the fact that the use of papyrus scrolls made it difficult to look up a passage quickly.¹⁴ The indirect tradition, on the contrary, was “extremely easy”¹⁵ to consult. In order to assess which quotations can be presumed to stem from a direct reading, Di Gregorio arranges them by tragedy, carefully examines the context, and compares them with citations from the same works in other authors. I cannot here discuss his arguments for particular quotations in detail, but I propose instead to have a look at his general argument and its underlying assumptions.

When examining specific quotations from Euripides, Di Gregorio makes the default assumption that they do not stem from a direct reading of the original work.¹⁶ It is only when there is sufficient evidence pointing in the other direction that Di Gregorio is willing to accept that Plutarch had direct knowledge of Euripides’ work. He tends to put his negative conclusion in a somewhat bizarre and misleading way, by saying that (it is likely that) Plutarch had no “direct”, “personal”, or “first-hand”, knowledge of the work in question,¹⁷ whereas what he really means is that Plutarch did not consult the material text of the original work at the time of inserting the quotation in his own work.¹⁸ That this is what he has in mind is clear from cases in which he accepts that Plutarch was acquainted with a certain tragedy, having read it, but nonetheless “did not know it first-hand” when quoting from it.¹⁹ Having first-hand knowledge of a tragedy or some of its verses is of course perfectly compatible with encountering them in an anthology, a gnomology, or another author. And it is possible to encounter a verse, and having decided to include it in one’s work, to look it up in the original before doing so, although Di Gregorio is probably right that Plutarch may have considered this too burdensome a way of proceeding.

In order to arrive at his judgment concerning specific quotations or quotations grouped by the tragedy from which they stem, Di Gregorio makes use of evidence, sometimes strong, sometimes merely indicative, and weighs the different kinds of evidence on a case by case basis in a manner that does not allow for a reconstruction in an algorithmic model but is rather an example of a specialised skill to which the good philologist is privileged. Let us review the main types of evidence to which he explicitly appeals. With some exceptions, Di Gregorio – whom I take to be a typical example for a specific philological practice (the authors whose views he contests use

¹⁴ Di Gregorio 1979, 12.

¹⁵ Di Gregorio 1979, 15–16.

¹⁶ Typical is a sentence like: “non mi sembra proprio si possa affermare, sulla base delle citazioni fatte nell’opera a noi pervenuta, che lo scrittore di Cheronea abbia letti i *Cretesi*”, Di Gregorio 1980, 65. Or also: “Nessuna delle citazioni plutarchee di questo dramma [...] *presuppone* una lettura diretta” (*id.*, 70, my italics).

¹⁷ Di Gregorio 1980, 49, 68 *et passim*.

¹⁸ Di Gregorio 1980, 73: “nel momento in cui scriveva.”

¹⁹ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 57, 66–68, 74.

very similar argumentative strategies)²⁰ – does not state his assumptions as neatly as I try to do here. The following is therefore a rough reconstruction of his argumentative toolkit and an appreciative discussion, but at the same time a critique of a particular philological practice.

1. (Presumed) presence of the quoted verses elsewhere in the indirect tradition:
 - a. in some cases, Plutarch explicitly states that he found the verse in the work of some author;²¹
 - b. if a verse or group of verses is cited elsewhere, they are more likely to stem from gnomologies or anthologies or are held to be common knowledge.²² In some occasions, the quoting author indicates the proverbial character of certain verses.²³ Conversely, if Plutarch is the only witness, this constitutes a counter-indication weakening the presumption that the verse stems from the indirect tradition.²⁴
 - c. The likelihood that Plutarch relied on an intermediate source correlates with the frequency with which the verses in question are cited elsewhere – a high frequency being an indication for their celebrity.²⁵
 - d. The older the earliest quotations, the more probable it is that Plutarch relies on indirect tradition.²⁶
 - e. In cases where different authors cite exactly the same selection of verses from a longer passage, Plutarch most probably relies on an indirect tradition.²⁷
 - f. Cases in which the combination of two or more quotations (from one or more authors) occurs in different Plutarchan works is held to constitute overwhelming evidence for the assumption that the author relies on an indirect tradition.²⁸
 - g. The fact that a quotation is thematically grouped with other quotations, most often from different authors, is an indication that it is not first-hand. Di Gregorio even takes this to be an indication for a “Stoic-Cynic diatribe”

20 For instance Schläpfer 1950 and Mitchell 1968, whose arguments Di Gregorio discusses throughout his text.

21 Di Gregorio 1980, 56. A case that Gregorio does not discuss, as it cannot be assigned to a specific play, is fr. 974 Kannicht, quoted in *Praec. ger. reip.* 811D. According to these verses god (glossed as the King of the world, hence to be identified with Zeus) does not micromanage the world but only looks after great things, whereas small things are left to fate (τύχη). These lines are quoted in Plutarch's account of “Critolaus the Peripatetic” and moreover agree with the Peripatetic take on divine providence.

22 E.g. *Alcestis* 780–785, see Di Gregorio 1980, 47.

23 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 48, 52, 53, 55, 57, 58–59.

24 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 70–71.

25 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 49, 63, 65, 68, 73.

26 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 46, 55, 65.

27 For instance from the prologue of the *Archelaus* fr. 228 Kannicht.

28 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 47.

as their source, since in that tradition it was customary to present such groups of quotations ordered according to the “antilogical schema” and to make use of gnomologies ordered according to the same principle.²⁹

- h. If another author cites the same verse for the same purpose, it probably stems from an intermediate source.³⁰
- i. The fact that verses are cited by Stobaeus, other texts with an anthological character, or a grammarian such as Orion, constitutes strong evidence for the assumption that Plutarch took them from the indirect tradition.³¹
- j. The more famous the person (character) who speaks, the more anecdotal their words or the more closely linked to well-known historical events, the more likely it is that Plutarch cites them second-hand.³²
- k. If a verse illustrates an idea that is current in “popular philosophy”,³³ it probably belongs to an indirect tradition.
- l. Plutarch’s presumed sources for a specific work. If we have good reasons to believe that Plutarch used a specific source for one of his works, we may presume that he takes the tragic quotations from there.
 - i. In the case of the *Lives* Plutarch is held to be strongly dependent upon previous historians, who therefore can be presumed to provide the tragic quotations.³⁴
 - ii. Where Plutarch uses the quotation in a philosophical polemic or an account of philosophical issues that were also debated in other schools, the philosophers who are his points of reference are likely to have provided the quotation. This is especially the case when Plutarch discusses Stoic authors or uses Stoic sources, as the Stoics, in particular Chrysippus, were known to make literary quotations part of their argument.³⁵ In some cases Plutarch explicitly states that a philosopher he is discussing has adduced Euripides in support of his argument. See e.g. *Stoic. rep.* 1049A (Chrysippus, *De deis* III). Here there can be no doubt.³⁶

²⁹ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 50, 53, 56, 57, 60, 71.

³⁰ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 64.

³¹ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 47, 53, 57, 60.

³² E.g. Di Gregorio 1979, 18.

³³ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 73.

³⁴ *Thes.* 15,2 is an illustrative example. Plutarch first states that according to the most tragic version of the Minotaur story the Athenian youngsters meet their deaths in the Cretan labyrinth, adding two Euripidean trimeters describing the Minotaur (*Cret. fr.* 472a; 472b29 Kannicht). But then he says that Philochorus writes that the Cretans do not agree with this version: Φιλόχορος δὲ φησιν οὐ ταῦτα συγχωρεῖν Κρήτας (*Thes.* 16,1). Di Gregorio 1980, 64 argues that it is natural to think that Plutarch will have found the two verses in Philochorus. That is of course possible, but not certain, since it is not clear whether these words are to be taken *de re* or *de dicto*. Is it Plutarch who opposes the two versions or was it already Philochorus? *Non liquet*, both interpretations are equally “natural”.

³⁵ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 46, 54, 59–60.

³⁶ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 55.

2. *Variae lectiones*:

- a. Textual variations are a strong indication that Plutarch is citing from memory and misremembers;³⁷
 - b. but they could also be due to the fact that he cites from a different (indirect) tradition;³⁸
 - c. if Plutarch himself cites the same verse in different places and with variations, it is likely that he used different sources or that he cites from memory.
 - d. If Plutarch deliberately and freely modifies a line from Euripides (but how could one be certain about that?), this means the line was so famous that he did not need to spell this out or even mention the fact who the original author is. Hence, Di Gregorio argues, Plutarch did not use the original text.³⁹
 - e. On one occasion Plutarch provides the information that Euripides wrote two different versions of the opening verse of a play (the *Melanippe Sapiens*), quoting them both and stating that the second version is the one that is currently in circulation (ὥς νῦν γέγραπται, *Amat.* 756B–C). He would not have written this if he did not have first-hand knowledge of the text.⁴⁰
3. The very character of the verses quoted: if they are sentential-apophthegmic in nature or may be thought to be *loci communes*,⁴¹ they were probably taken from a gnomology or from memory.⁴²
 4. The manner in which Plutarch introduces and embeds the quotation.
 - a. If neither the name of the author nor that of the tragedy are mentioned, or only the author but not the tragedy, Plutarch may not have known the provenance of the quotation – hence did not read the original. It could also mean, however, that the verses in questions were so famous that it was not necessary to mention their provenance – which in its turn speaks against a direct consultation of the original. The omission of the name of the author could also be attributable, however, to a striving for “intellectual elegance.”⁴³ Conversely, the mention of the provenance and even of the character speaking a certain line, is evidence for Plutarch’s familiarity with the play – but *not* when the indirect tradition associates the verse with the character.⁴⁴
 - b. A lack of reference to the dramatic context, and, a fortiori, a mismatch between the dramatic context and the context in Plutarch are held to be strong

37 E.g. fr. 24b Kannicht, cited at *De fort.* 98D and *De soll. an.* 959C. See also Di Gregorio 1979, 14 and Di Gregorio 1980, 53.

38 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 53, 56.

39 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 55.

40 Di Gregorio 1980, 66.

41 Di Gregorio 1979, 19.

42 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 46, 52, 59, 68, 73.

43 E.g. Di Gregorio 1979, 12, Di Gregorio 1980, 60.

44 E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 65.

counter-indications against direct knowledge of the first.⁴⁵ Conversely, where Plutarch shows himself to be perfectly aware of the original context, a first-hand acquaintance with the tragedy in question is likely.⁴⁶

- c. The fact that Plutarch cites the name of the author or the work is no proof for his direct use of the text, since he may have cited from memory.⁴⁷
- d. If the verses do not fit the context well, it is likely that Plutarch just copies from a later author.
- e. There are several cases of Plutarch misattributing verses, notably to the wrong character, to the wrong tragedy, or even to the wrong author.⁴⁸ In these cases he probably cites from memory.
- f. Occasionally, the formula used to introduce a verse contains an indication about the nature of his source. When he adds the indefinite particle πού to expressions such as “X says”, he probably did not check the original.⁴⁹ Or when he says that in similar occasions we always think of the same Euripidean words,⁵⁰ the proverbial nature of the verse in question is clear. Other examples are less clear however: Di Gregorio infers from the introduction “For who has pronounced such an encomium on his fatherland as Euripides?” that the ensuing quotation is second-hand, since this formula implies that these verses are well-known.⁵¹
- g. On a few occasions, Plutarch mentions a theatrical performance of a play: “as we hear Ino say on stage, expressing regret over her deed” (ὥσπερ τῆς Ἰνουῦς ἀκούομεν ἐν τοῖς θεάτροις λεγούσης, ἐφ’ οἷς ἔδρασε μεταμελομένης, *De sera* 556A; Philostratus, too, mentions a performance of the *Ino*: cf. *Vit. Ap.* 7.5).⁵² Di

⁴⁵ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 50, 72.

⁴⁶ E.g. Di Gregorio 1980, 60, 61, 63, 67, 72, 74. One may compare an interesting remark made by Mossman 1999, 218: The sufferings of Hecuba are repeatedly quoted (*Pelop.* 29,10; *De Alex. Magn. fort et virt.* 334A), but Plutarch does not say which play he has in mind (it could be *Hecuba*, of course, but also *Troades*): “it did not exactly matter what the piece was or who the author was, and probably Plutarch did not know. But it needed to be something poignant and heart-rending and pitiful for the story to make sense, and the story of Hecuba is the ideal one to exemplify a tragic tale.”

⁴⁷ E.g. Di Gregorio 1979, 12.

⁴⁸ E.g. Di Gregorio 1979, 13; Di Gregorio 1980, 56, 58, 63.

⁴⁹ E.g. Di Gregorio 1979, 15.

⁵⁰ Cf. *De prof.* 84F–85A: [...] τὸ Εὐριπίδειον ἐφ’ ἐκάστῳ φθεγγόμενοι φεῦ, τοῖσι γενναίοισιν ὡς ἅπαν καλόν (fr. 961 Kannicht). “[...] at each experience of this sort give utterance to this sentiment of Euripides *The noble honour find in everything*.” (tr. Babbitt)

⁵¹ *De ex.* 604D: τίς γὰρ εἶρηκε τῆς ἑαυτοῦ πατρίδος ἐγκώμιον τοιοῦτον, οἷον Εὐριπίδης; (“For who has pronounced such an encomium on his native land as Euripides?”, tr. De Lacy and Einarson) followed by four verses from the *Erechtheus* fr. 360,7–10 Kannicht, combined with five verses from an unidentified tragedy, fr. 981 Kannicht. Cf. Di Gregorio 1980, 55.

⁵² Also *De esu carn.* 998D–E appears to evoke a theatrical performance: σκόπει δὲ καὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ τραγωδίᾳ Μερόπην ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτὸν ὡς φονέα τοῦ υἱοῦ πέλεκυν ἀραμένην καὶ λέγουσαν ὠνητέραν δὴ τήνδ’ ἐγὼ δίδωμι σοι / πλῆγὴν (fr. 456 Kannicht), [...]. “Consider also Merope in the play raising her axe

Gregorio presumes that these performances would not be of whole plays, but rather of selections of famous passages.⁵³

Di Gregorio concludes that Plutarch had direct knowledge of the *Bacchae*, *Hercules Furens*, *Ino*, *Hippolytus*, *Iphigeneia Aulidensis*, *Cresphontes*, *Cyclops*, *Medea*, *Orestes*, *Hypsipyle*, *Phaethon*, *Phoenissae*, and, with some reservations, also of *Electra*, *Melanie Sapiens*, and *Scyrii*. If Di Gregorio is right, then, Plutarch would have had first-hand knowledge of three or four plays belonging to the alphabetic edition, and five of the 'select' plays. Di Gregorio has no doubt done a fine job, even if many of the details are disputable. Admittedly, the accumulation of heterogeneous indications sometimes makes up to some extent for the weakness of the different pieces of evidence considered in isolation. A different weighing of the various criteria, however, would in single cases deliver the opposite conclusion. In general, I feel he has an exaggerated confidence in several of his conclusions, yet the general picture that emerges is by and large correct. The criteria used are intuitively plausible, yet many of them do not stand up to closer scrutiny. I would claim that despite this, he has provided convincing evidence that Plutarch found many of his quotations in the indirect tradition, yet this does not exclude the fact that the Chaeronean had first-hand knowledge of the same verses. There is an additional reason why this dichotomy between first-hand and second-hand knowledge does not work, a reason that invalidates several of Di Gregorio's arguments and criteria: we now know, through the work of L. Van der Stockt and his team, that Plutarch compiled thematically organised collections of quotations, anecdotes and the like, which he put to use when composing his works. Plutarch not only talks about such hypomnemata (*De tranq.* 464F), they have also left many traces in his works in the form of recurring clusters of quotations and anecdotes.⁵⁴ The inference that the occurrence of a cluster or the repetition of certain quotations across various works points to the use of an indirect tradition⁵⁵ is therefore no longer warranted.

These philological issues provide an indispensable back-ground for assessing what exactly Plutarch does with Euripides when he cites verses for their content and to study what kind of epistemic authority he enjoyed. We now at least have a rough idea of the plays of which Plutarch may have had first-hand knowledge and of the types of sources he will have used otherwise.

against her son himself because she believes him to be that son's murderer and saying *This blow I give you is more costly yet [...]*." (tr. Cherniss and Helmbold)

⁵³ Di Gregorio 1980, 60. For an in-depth analysis of this issue, see M. Hose's contribution to this volume.

⁵⁴ Cf. Van der Stockt 1999a, 1999b, 2004; Van Meirvenne 2002. See also Pelling 2002, 70–73, 84–85 (n. 3); Xenophontos 2012, 61–63, and 67–68 for a complex cluster containing a quotation from Euripides (from the *Aeolus*, fr. 23,2 Kannicht).

⁵⁵ See especially the criteria under the headings 1, f–g; 2, c; 4, a–d.

2 Euripides' Reputation

In Plutarch's day, and, more generally, among ancient authors, Euripides enjoyed a considerable epistemic authority. Obviously, this does not mean that the ancients, more precisely the cultured readership of authors such as Plutarch, believed everything he said, but still that they regarded him as generally wise and as in some sense philosophical.⁵⁶ They perceived him as having considered opinions, believing that he had a keen insight in human nature and the human condition, that he was a rational and critical thinker,⁵⁷ that he was knowledgeable in many different fields, but also that he voiced opinions that were in some cases unusual, yet therefore also challenging and worth thinking about. Euripides' learning, his bookishness,⁵⁸ and his wisdom⁵⁹ were part of his public image, already during his lifetime but certainly posthumously. It was not uncommon to refer to him as "the philosopher of the stage" (σκηνικός φιλόσοφος).⁶⁰ Aristotle may very well have thought⁶¹ of Euripides when he defined the γνώμη as a statement of a general kind regarding questions of practical conduct, about what is to be done and to be avoided.⁶² The reason these *gnōmai* were so beloved with later authors were not, however, purely didactic. These authors clearly also relished their wit and beautiful or surprising phrasing, even in cases where they had not much to say.

56 Cf. Aeschin. *In Tim.* 151: ὁ τοίνυν οὐδενὸς ἤττον σοφὸς τῶν ποιητῶν Εὐριπίδης ("again, Euripides, a poet than whom none is wiser"); 153: σκέψασθε δέ, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, τὰς γνώμας ἃς ἀποφαίνεται ὁ ποιητής ("examine the sentiments, fellow citizens, which the poet express", tr. Adams); Quint. 10,1,68: *in iis quae a sapientibus tradita sunt paene ipsis par* ("[striking reflections], in which, indeed, in their special sphere, he rivals the philosophers themselves", tr. Butler); Athen. 4, 158e: κατὰ τὸν σὸν Εὐριπίδην [...] κὰν ἄλλοις δέ φησιν ὁ σκηνικός οὗτος φιλόσοφος ("to quote your Euripides [...] and elsewhere this philosopher of the stage says"); 13, 561a.

57 Ar. *Ra.* 973–979.

58 T 49–50 Kannicht. E.g. T 50a = Ar. *Ra.* 939–943.

59 T 158–165 Kannicht.

60 T 166–169 Kannicht.

61 Most 2003, 145.

62 Arist. *Rhet.* 2,21, 1394a19–25: Περὶ δὲ γνωμολογίας, ῥηθέντος τί ἐστὶν γνώμη μάλιστα' ἂν γένοιτο φανερόν περὶ ποιῶν τε καὶ πότε καὶ τίσιν ἀρμόττει χρῆσθαι τῷ γνωμολογεῖν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις. ἔστι δὴ γνώμη ἀπόφασις, οὐ μέντοι οὔτε περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον, οἷον ποῖός τις Ἰφικράτης, ἀλλὰ καθόλου, οὔτε περὶ πάντων, οἷον ὅτι τὸ εὐθὺ τῷ καμπύλῳ ἐναντίον, ἀλλὰ περὶ ὅσων αἱ πράξεις εἰσὶ, καὶ <α> αἶρετὰ ἢ φευκτά ἐστί πρὸς τὸ πράττειν. "We now turn to the use of maxims, in order to see upon what subjects and occasions, and for what kind of speaker, they will appropriately form part of a speech. This will appear most clearly when we have defined a maxim. It is a statement; not about a particular fact, such as the character of Iphicrates, but of a general kind; nor is it about any and every subject – e.g. 'straight is the contrary of curved' is not a maxim – but only about questions of practical conduct, courses of conduct to be chosen or avoided." (tr. Rhys Robert).

Plutarch appears to have shared this general perception. He considers Euripides to be one of the great ancient poets,⁶³ whose wisdom is proverbial.⁶⁴ There can be no doubt, however, that he identifies him as a poet, not as a philosopher.⁶⁵ That said, Euripides is a *philosophical* poet. This does not mean that he acquires a second identity, as a philosopher, but rather that according to Plutarch his identity as a poet is of a special kind, borrowing elements from philosophy. In the introduction to his *Table Talks* Plutarch quotes Euripides on the blessings of oblivion (*Or.* 213)⁶⁶ and contrasts this with the attachment to memory of “the most famous philosophers Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Speusippus, Epicurus, Prytanis, Hieronymus, and Dio of the Academy” (612D). The reference to Euripides can hardly be considered disparaging; the comparison with the philosophers rather shows Plutarch’s esteem for the thinker Euripides.⁶⁷

3 Plutarch’s Advice on How to Listen to the Poets

In order better to understand Plutarch’s use of Euripides it may be wise to take a good look at his remarks on how to deal with literary authors more generally. In his text on *How the Young Should Study Poetry* Plutarch expresses the view that poetry is not only a welcome addition to philosophical study, but also necessary for a solid education, the reason being that it marries pleasure with usefulness.⁶⁸ Poetry is

⁶³ *Quaest. conv.* 706D. The *Phoenissae*, *Medea*, *Electra*, and the *Bacchae* count among the most famous Athenian plays: cf. *De glor. Ath.* 349A. Cf. Di Gregorio 1976, 151–152; Perris 2015, 508.

⁶⁴ *De glor. Ath.* 348C–D: [...] ὡς ἡ Θεμιστοκλέους δεινότης [...], ὡς ἡ Περικλέους ἐπιμέλεια [...], ὡς Μιλτιάδης ἡλευθέρωσεν, ὡς Κίμων προήγεν εἰς τὴν ἡγεμονίαν, εἰ οὕτως ἡ Εὐριπίδου σοφία καὶ ἡ Σοφοκλέους λογιότης καὶ τὸ Αἰσχύλου στόμα κτλ. “[...] to compare with the shrewdness of Themistocles, [...] with the diligence of Pericles, [...] with the liberty which Miltiades bestowed, with the supremacy to which Cimon advanced her? If in this manner the wisdom of Euripides, the eloquence of Sophocles, and the poetic magnificence of Aeschylus [...]” (tr. Babbitt)

⁶⁵ *De am. prol.* 496F. This is in fact indirectly confirmed by a passage that may seem to indicate something different, namely that philosophy would be part of Euripides’ identity: at *De aud. poet.* 46B in the expression Εὐριπίδης ὁ ποιητής the appositive noun identifies Euripides, whereas the phrase ἀνὴρ δ’ ἂν οἶμαι φιλόσοφος καὶ πολιτικός predicates a philosophical and political mindset of the same person. Likewise, to say that Euripides is “the philosopher of the stage” (cf. n. 98) is not to claim that he is a philosopher in the full sense.

⁶⁶ The same line is quoted again at *De curios.* 522D.

⁶⁷ I disagree with S.-T. Teodorsson calling the association with *Or.* 213 (ὦ πότνια Λήθη τῶν κακῶν ὡς εἴ σοφή, “O mistress Oblivion of ills, how clever you are”, tr. West) unsuitable for the convivial context (Teodorsson 1989, 34). The quotation is rather typical of Plutarch’s light-hearted and slightly ironic, indeed playful way of handling his texts. Moreover, it is typical for *gnomai* that their field of application is broader and more general than the original context that occasioned them. As we will see, in some cases the original context lends another layer of meaning to the text in which it is quoted, whereas in other cases it simply plays no role.

⁶⁸ *De aud. poet.* 15F: ὅθεν οὐ φευκτέον ἐστὶ τὰ ποιήματα τοῖς φιλοσοφεῖν μέλλουσιν, ἀλλὰ προφιλοσοφητέον τοῖς ποιήμασιν ἐθιζομένους ἐν τῷ τέρποντι τὸ χρήσιμον ζητεῖν καὶ ἀγαπᾶν. “Wherefore pro-

propaedeutic to philosophy, as he emphasises in the closing words of his essay (37B). Plutarch's position towards poetry is overall defensive.⁶⁹ For a Platonist, such as Plutarch undoubtedly is, poetry is always somewhat suspect.⁷⁰ One of the main problems is that poetry arouses pleasure, a pleasure that is easily misdirected towards the actions and characters portrayed. Yet what we should admire is in most cases not what is represented, but rather the skill of the artist. That skill implies that the poet should achieve likeness (ὁμοιότης), suitability (τὸ προσήκον), and plausibility (τὸ πιθανόν).⁷¹ One should never forget that poets are not philosophers. They enjoy a certain license, are not bound by the same requirements and do not have to respect the strict philosophical meaning of terms. When they use the word “happiness”, for instance, they do not perforce use it in the full philosophical sense of the complete possession or attainment of the good or of the fully accomplished life. Often they merely call the rich or well-reputed person happy (24F–25A). Plutarch lets this remark be followed by quotations from Homer and Menander, who do use the term “happiness” correctly, that is, in the manner of the philosophers, but also by our Euripides, who deviates from philosophical usage, thus causing much confusion and disturbance. His use of words is “figurative and distorted”, as exemplified by quotations from *Medea* and *Phoenissae*.⁷² The verse from the latter work speaks of tyranny as “happy injustice.” Plutarch's remark can be read as a warning, an excuse or both: one has to be aware of poetic license, but also, it would be misguided to censure Euripides for his use of words. Yet one thing is clear: Euripides is not here speaking as a philosopher. For a philosopher of any creed (in the Posthellenistic schools), injustice and happiness are incompatible, just as happiness cannot be unpleasant.

Plutarch's arguments in *De audiendis poetis* can be used as a guide to understand the way in which he deals with Euripidean quotations elsewhere. Sure, the essay's subject is more specific: it deals with the question how young people should listen to poetry. It is giving advice on how to train the young, who are particularly susceptible, submissive and gullible (ὑπηκόους καὶ χειροθῆεις, 14E). Yet it cannot be denied that most of Plutarch's works have a didactic and moralistic outlook.

etry should not be avoided by those who are intending to pursue philosophy, but they should use poetry as an introductory exercise in philosophy, by training themselves habitually to seek the profitable in what gives pleasure, and to find satisfaction therein.” (tr. Babbitt)

69 Van der Stockt 1992, 40.

70 See also Di Gregorio 1976, 168, 172; Nic. 5.

71 Van der Stockt 1992, 41.

72 *De aud. poet.* 25 A: Εὐριπίδης δὲ πολλὴν ἐργάζεται ταραχὴν καὶ σύγχυσιν ὅταν λέγῃ μὴ μοι γένοιτο λυπρὸς εὐδαιμόνων βίος (*Med.* 603) καὶ τί τὴν τυραννίδα, ἀδικίαν εὐδαιμόνα, / τιμᾶς; (*Phoen.* 549) ἂν μὴ τις, ὥσπερ εἴρηται, ταῖς μεταφοραῖς καὶ καταχρήσεσι τῶν ὀνομάτων ἔπηται. “But Euripides works much disturbance and confusion when he says, *May I ne’er have a painful happy life*, and *Why do you honour show to tyranny, Happy iniquity?* Unless, as has been said, one follows the figurative and distorted use of the words.” (tr. Babbitt, slightly changed)

Even if not all are written for the young, the same lessons would seem to apply, with some qualifications.

4 Praise and Censure

In general, Plutarch has a high opinion of Euripides, and thinks the tragic poet has many things to tell us that are worth pondering, even if we do not always agree with him. Sometimes the praise is explicit and abundant, as when in the *Life of Sulla* (4,4) he calls him “wise and knowledgeable about political diseases”, when he warns against the dangers of *philotimia* as being the worst of daemons. Euripides here appears to have a deep understanding of human nature. The reference is to *Phoenissae* 531–534, which is a part of the famous speech of Iocasta, a rich source of *gnōmai*.⁷³ From the same speech Plutarch elsewhere quotes the line according to which not everything about old age is bad (*Phoen.* 528, quoted in *De ad. et am.* 73C) and the saying that “the less becomes hostile to the more” (*Phoen.* 539, quoted at *De frat. am.* 484B). The context of the latter quotation is a discussion of equality and inequality. It is one of the famous, that is *endoxic*, examples (484B: χρήσθω καὶ παραδείγμασιν ἐνδόξοις) in this domain, along with a saying attributed to Pittacus, regarding the acquisition and loss of money. Next, however, Plutarch mentions Plato’s view (*Rep.* 8, 547a)⁷⁴ and says the latter is more general and metaphysical in nature. One could rightly claim that Plato’s epistemic authority is *greater*, but it is more precise to state that what Plutarch tells us here is that it pertains to a *more universal domain*: because Plato’s insight is metaphysical, it is more universally applicable, for it is about equality *absolutely* (ἀπλῶς). Iocasta’s words are more particular, for they are restricted to the domain of human justice. This confirms that Euripides’ epistemic authority is seen as belonging to the domain of ethics and human nature, among others, not so much to metaphysics.

Some “philosophical” statements in Euripides meet with Plutarch’s full approval. Plutarch thinks that Euripides is wiser than the Stoics for thinking that in human life good is always mixed with bad (one of Plutarch’s favourite topics), whereas the Stoics think that it should be possible to eradicate badness. One of his favourite quotations in support of his Platonist position stems from Euripides’ *Aeolus*: “good things and bad things cannot occur separately, but there is a kind of commingling, which is well” (οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο χωρὶς ἐσθλὰ καὶ κακά, | ἀλλ’ ἔστι τις σύγκρασις ὥστε ἔχειν καλῶς, fr. 21,3–4 Kannicht). These lines are quoted, with explicit reference to the Stoics, at *De aud. poet.* 25C–D (without the last three words); at *De Is. et Os.* 369B, as part of a doxography of dualistic positions, and similarly at *De*

⁷³ Scharffenberger 2015, 294–295.

⁷⁴ Also *Quaest. Plat.* 1002D; *An procr.* 1015F.

tranq. 474A.⁷⁵ This ties in with the idea that Euripides is an expert of human nature, who has understood the duality between passions and reason. In this respect Euripides is like Plato and Aristotle, but unlike the Stoics, who are wrong on this, so Plutarch thinks. In his work on moral virtue he quotes two lines from *Hippolytus* (385–386) in which it is said that “modesty” (αἰδώς) is of two kinds, one bad, the other good.⁷⁶ Plutarch comments that this is because passions are capable of following the lead of reason, but can also turn against reason. Whether Euripides knows this through introspection or careful empirical observation, he undeniably has a keen psychological insight, which is also the reason why Plutarch attributes to him epistemic authority in this domain. Plutarch takes these words as representing a general truth about human nature, disregarding the fact that they are said here in a particular context: that of Phaedra, a woman, speaking to the Trozenian women, appealing to female values.⁷⁷

Another pet topic of Plutarch’s is friendship and its relation to truth. When discussing this idea in *De adulatore et amico* 62D, he quotes from Polynices’ words opposing the simplicity of plain truth (and justice – but that aspect is omitted from the quotation) to the word of the flatterer (Polynices speaks instead of “unjust words”) that is “sick and in need of dextrous remedies.”⁷⁸ One of Plutarch’s favourite quotations is a verse from an unknown play that had acquired a proverbial status, mentioning a physician who is keen to heal others, but is full of sores himself (fr. 1086 Kannicht, quoted at *De ad. et am.* 71E–F; *De cap. ex inim.* 88D; *De frat. am.* 481A; *Adv. Col.* 1110E). Plutarch cites numerous maxims for moralising purposes. An example is a passage from *Bacchae* 386–388 about the dangers of talkativeness (*De garr.* 503C); another is his praise of the moderate, who even under the influence of wine persevere in moderation (*Ba.* 317; *Ti. & C. Gracch.* 10,6; *Cons. ad Apoll.* 609A).

That the authority of Euripides was appealed to in moralising contexts may not come as a big surprise, but that his expertise was also held to cover matters of health is not what would expect. Yet on more than one occasion Plutarch appeals to Euri-

75 The citation is part of a hypomnematic cluster. See n. 54.

76 *De virt. mor.* 448F–449A: ὁ δ’ εἰπὼν αἰδώς τε· δισσαὶ δ’ εἰσίν, ἡ μὲν οὐ κακὴ / ἡ δ’ ἄχθος οἴκων· ἄρ’ οὐ δῆλός ἐστι συνησθημένος ἐν ἑαυτῷ τοῦτο τὸ πάθος πολλάκις μὲν ἀκολουθοῦν τῷ λόγῳ καὶ συγκατακοσμοῦμενον, πολλάκις δὲ παρὰ τὸν λόγον ὅκνοις καὶ μελλήσεσι καιροὺς καὶ πράγματα λυμαινόμενον; “Is it not obvious that he who said, *And modesty. Two kinds there are: the one / Not bad, the other burdening our homes*, has perceived in himself that this emotion often follows the lead of reason and is arrayed at reason’s side, but often, contrary to reason, by hesitations and delays ruins opportunities and actions?” (tr. Helmbold)

77 Most 2003, 154–155.

78 *De ad. et am.* 62C: ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ φίλου τρόπος ὥσπερ ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας μῦθος ἀπλοῦς ἐστὶ κατ’ Εὐριπίδην [cf. *Phoen.* 469] καὶ ἀφελὴς καὶ ἁπλαστος, ὁ δὲ τοῦ κόλακος ὄντως νοσῶν ἐν αὐτῷ φαρμάκων δεῖται σοφῶν (= *Phoen.* 472) καὶ πολλῶν νῆ Δία καὶ περιττῶν. “For the character of a friend, like the language of truth, as Euripides puts it, *simple*, plain, and unaffected, whereas that of the flatterer, in very truth *Self-sick*, *hath need of dextrous remedies*, and of a good many too, I venture to affirm, and of an uncommon sort.” (tr. Babbitt)

pides for exactly that reason. For instance, Plutarch repeatedly cites (*De tranq.* 465C; *An seni* 788F; *Adv. Col.* 1126A) the advice that Electra gives to her brother, who is hallucinating and in a state of bodily stupor, to stay in bed (*Or.* 255–259). The fragility of health is another insight for which the *Orestes* is quoted (*Or.* 981), together with two lines from an unidentified, but Euripidean play (fr. 971 Kannicht).⁷⁹ Twice Plutarch cites *Medea* 190 for the idea that the lyre should not be used in accompaniment to wine.⁸⁰

Plutarch's admiration for Euripides should not blind us to the fact that there is also a good deal of criticism. Quite regularly Plutarch says that Euripides has said something “wrongly” and that we have to correct him. One gets the impression, however, that Euripides is not the real target of his criticism. The faultfinding does not detract from Plutarch's admiration for Euripides. The criticisms are rather meant to arm the reader or listener not to jump to the wrong conclusions. It is about the moral lessons to be drawn, or not to be drawn, from the plays. The fact that Plutarch sometimes approves and sometimes disapproves of the same verse strongly suggest that the criticism voiced in the one case was not to be taken absolutely, but related to a specific argumentative or dialogical context. The focus is not then on saying that Euripides is wrong, but rather on making a transition to a new point using a quotation from Euripides, who is set up as a straw man. A good example is *Ba.* 298–299, “Bacchic frenzy and a manic state of mind contain much that is prophetic” (τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον | καὶ τὸ μανῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει), which is quoted approvingly in *De def. or.* 432E (κατ' Εὐριπίδην), but criticised in *Quaest. conv.* 716B, where one of the interlocutors of the conversation denies that bacchic madness is needed for divination (οὐ διὰ “τὸ βακχεύσιμον καὶ μανῶδες” ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδης εἶπεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι κτλ.). On closer inspection, the latter remark is not a serious criticism of Euripides at all. For Euripides had not said that bacchic madness is a necessary condition for divination, but merely that it is a sufficient condition. And to the issue discussed here, the powers of the god Apollo, it simply does not apply. Plutarch, or at least his brother, who is speaking here, does not dispute that madness, or the case of drunkenness discussed in this *Quaestio*, may arouse certain powers. This contrived criticism rests on an imprecise interpretation of the Euripidean lines. Yet precision does not matter here, where the Euripidean verse is merely an evanescent intellectual flourish added to a speech.

A more serious type of criticism seems to be implied when Plutarch in *How to distinguish the flatterer from the friend* states that we have to reply to Euripides who claims (*Or.* 667) that if the daemon grants us luck, we do not need friends.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Non posse* 1090C. *Or.* 981 is also quoted in *De def. or.* 416D.

⁸⁰ *Coniug. praec.* 143C; *Quaest. conv.* 710E.

⁸¹ *De ad. et am.* 68E–F: οὐ χεῖρόν ἐστι καὶ περὶ τούτων διελθεῖν καὶ ἀποκρίνασθαι τῷ Εὐριπίδῃ λέγοντι ὅταν δ' ὁ δαίμων εὖ διδῷ, τί δεῖ φίλων; ὅτι δεῖ μάλιστα παρρησιαζομένων φίλων τοῖς εὐτυχοῦσι καὶ τὸ ἄγαν ὑφιέντων τοῦ φρονήματος. “It would therefore be well to discuss this matter also, and to make a reply to Euripides when he says, *When Heaven grants us luck, what need of*

This goes against Plutarch's deepest convictions and against one of the leading ideas of the treatise. To a modern reader, Plutarch's criticism of the poet seems bizarre. Does Plutarch not know that Euripides is not speaking in his own name, but puts these words in the mouth of a certain character in a specific situation and with a specific audience? In this case it is Orestes who is addressing Menelaus. However, this way of proceeding is common practice in Plutarch, who most of the time just refers to Euripides or another tragedian, either praising or censuring him, without spelling out who exactly is speaking. This is another indication that it is not the person of the author that is in the focus, but rather the content of what is being said. In the passage at hand Plutarch continues his argument and, merely a few lines down, quotes Euripides approvingly. He is arguing that in reversals of fortune there is no use for a friend's frankness and criticism, but what is needed are rather words of consolation and encouragement. This is stated in a verse from the *Ion* (732),⁸² but Plutarch tells us neither the title of the play nor the name of the author. The erudite reader may know, however, that it is a Euripidean line and may understand that it was not Plutarch's intention to attack the poet in person. The discussion simply is not *about* the poet, it is about the techniques of friendship. Who provides the material for the discussion and who is responsible for its content, is of secondary importance.

In *De audiendis poetis*, a more theoretical work on literature, Plutarch explicitly recommends combining different and diverging quotes from the same poet, *in casu* Euripides (*De aud. poet.* 20F):

πάνιν Εὐριπίδου λέγοντος πολλαῖσι μορφαῖς οἱ θεοὶ σοφισμάτων / σφάλλουσιν ἡμᾶς κρείσσονες πεφυκότες οὐ χεῖρόν ἐστιν ὑπενεγκεῖν τό εἰ θεοί τι δρῶσι φαῦλον, οὐκ εἰσιν θεοί, βέλτιον εἰρημένον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

Again, when Euripides says, "By many forms of artifice the gods defeat our plans, for they are stronger far (fr. 972 Kannicht), it is not bad to subjoin, "If gods do aught that's base, they are no gods" (*Bellerophon*, fr. 292,7 Kannicht), which is a better saying of his. (tr. Babbitt)

This remark is part of a broader argument, in which Plutarch gives practical advice on how to use the poets based on an understanding of the nature of mimetic art. Once again, he does not care to clarify that Euripides is not speaking *in propria persona*, but rather just pretends he does.

friends? The reply is that in good fortune men have most need of friends to speak frankly and reduce their excess of pride." (tr. Babbitt)

⁸² *De ad. et am.* 69A: εἰς ὄμματ' εὖνου φωτὸς ἐμβλέψαι γλυκὺ παρηγορῶντος καὶ παραθαρρύνοντος. " 'Tis sweet to gaze into a kind man's eyes, when he offers consolation and encouragement." (tr. Babbitt)

5 *Dramatis personae* and the Poet

Plutarch is fully aware of the fact that one should not simply project the views expressed by the *dramatis personae* upon the poet. When what is at stake is a judgment of the poet himself, greater care is needed. *In that case*, we have to distinguish between the author and the character. Sometimes the poet even hints at his own disapproval of the words of his *dramatis personae*. *De aud. poet.* 19D–E gives an example from Homer, who sometimes comments on the words of his characters by drawing a contrast between their words and deeds. At *De aud. poet.* 19E, Plutarch uses evidence from outside the text in order to distinguish between Euripides' own view and that of his characters: he cites a remark Euripides himself is said to have made when people complained about a character in his play. When his fellow citizens complained that his Ixion was a detestable and impious character, Euripides pointed out that he had him removed from the stage fastened to the wheel (19E). By doing so, Plutarch implies, Euripides gave an unmistakable sign of his disapproval of the character.

The distinction between *dramatis persona* and author can be used to free the latter from blame. Dubious utterances can indeed be imputed to the character rather than the author. Plutarch is of the view that undignified utterances are not fitting for a beautiful character, but also that noble words should not be put in the mouth of an ugly character (*De aud. poet.* 18D). A competent poet *has to* make ugly characters say ugly things. (This rule, if adhered to strictly, would obviously limit the possibilities for the author creating complex characters.) As an example,⁸³ Plutarch quotes the words of Eteocles in the *Phoenissae* to the extent that, “if one must needs do wrong, far best it were to do it for the sake of tyranny” (*Phoen.* 524). He explains these statements are wicked and wrong, but perfectly fitting for Eteocles.⁸⁴ Quoting the same lines disapprovingly in another work,⁸⁵ he again specifies that it is the character who is speaking. This time, however, he uses the words to make another point. More precisely by modifying the words and applying them to another issue, they can be made not only acceptable but also useful. Plutarch keeps the general structure, but substitutes the core terms: “if one must needs seek repute in such matters as food and drink, far best it were by continence for the sake of health.”⁸⁶ This is an example of a special technique, called “correction”,

⁸³ For further examples, see Di Gregorio 1980, 60.

⁸⁴ *De aud. poet.* 18D: εἴπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι / κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν, [...] μοχθηροὶ μὲν εἰσι λόγοι καὶ ψευδεῖς, Ἐτεοκλεῖ δὲ [...] πρέποντες. “If one must needs do wrong, far best it were / To do it for a kingdom’s sake, [...] These, it is true, are wicked and fallacious sentiments, but fitting respectively for Eteocles.” (tr. Babbitt)

⁸⁵ See also *Crass.* 37 (4), 3. Cicero (*De off.* 3,82) criticises the same verses, of which Caesar was fond (Suet. *Caes.* 30,5).

⁸⁶ *De tuenda san.* 125D–E: εἴπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, φησὶν ὁ Θηβαῖος οὐκ ὀρθῶς λέγων, τυραννίδος πέρι / κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν· ἡμεῖς δὲ βέλτιον ὥς, εἴπερ φιλοδοξεῖν πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα, ἐγκρατεῖα κάλλιστον ὑπὲρ

“adjustment” or “revision” (ἐπανόρθωσις), to which I shall come back in the next section. Plutarch discusses this practice in *De audiendis poetis*: one corrects the maxim by echoing and at the same time modifying it. Plutarch uses this technique regularly when quoting from literary works. Whereas in the example given above he merely says that “we can say this better”, in other cases he is more outspoken and says that *we should change* one or more words.

In the consolatory treatise *On Exile* Plutarch takes issue with Euripides’ negative characterisation of exile. Plutarch begins by saying that many readers take issue with Euripides because they think he condemns exile. Precisely because he is so highly regarded by many people, it is important to address this issue.⁸⁷ Then he calls attention to the fact that Euripides presents his remarks in the form of question and answer, and proceeds to the quotation from the *Phoenissae*, where Iocasta is asking the questions and Polynices answers. Polynices calls the loss of country a surpassingly great ill: the exiled is not able to speak his mind and is therefore reduced to the status of a slave. Moreover he is forced to bear the folly of the mighty. Plutarch comments that Polynices’ assumptions are wrong;⁸⁸ it is not characteristic of a slave not to be able to speak their mind; that description rather fits a prudent person who knows when to restrain their speech and be silent. He adds that as a matter of fact Euripides himself states this in plain words elsewhere, and quotes a line from the *Ino*, without however identifying it: “to remain silent where it is necessary and to speak where it is safe” (fr. 413,2 Kannicht). The second mistake is to think that only the exiled must suffer the folly of the mighty. For that is also true for the people who remain behind at home. But the greatest mistake is to think that the exiled is deprived of free speech (παρρησία).⁸⁹ Polynices’ negative, lamenting attitude towards exile smacks of ingratitude and is fully misguided. At 599D, near the beginning of the treatise, Plutarch has already quoted the first line of the extract from the *Phoenissae* and has made it clear that it is Polynices who speaks. Polynices thereby becomes the target of Plutarch’s subsequent arguments. Plutarch was not the only one to find

ὕγιαιας. “If one must needs do wrong, are the words of the Theban, who is not correct in saying, *far best it were to do it for a kingdom’s sake*. But we can improve on this by saying that if we must needs seek repute in such matters as food and drink, *far best it were* by continence for the sake of health.” (tr. F.C. Babbitt)

87 *De ex.* 605F. Compare Dio 17,8: καὶ μὴν ὃ γε Εὐριπίδης, οὐδενὸς ἥττον ἔνδοξος ὢν τῶν ποιητῶν, τὴν Ἰοκάστην εἰσάγει λέγουσαν πρὸς τὸν Ἑτεοκλέα, παρακαλοῦσαν αὐτὸν ἀποστῆναι τοῦ πλεονεκτηῖν τὸν ἀδελφόν [...]. “And further, Euripides too, a poet second to none other in reputation, brings Iocasta on the stage addressing Eteocles and urging him to refrain from trying to overreach his brother [...].” (tr. Cohoon)

88 See Scharffenberger 2015, 302–303. Scharffenberger usefully compares Plutarch’s remarks in *On Exile* with those of his friend Favorinus in a work on the same topic and with the same title (although it is certainly wrong to categorise Favorinus as a Stoic; on Favorinus and Plutarch, see Opsomer 1998, chapter 5).

89 *De ex.* 605F–606A.

these words inappropriate. A scholion to *Phoen.* 388 is similarly critical.⁹⁰ This shows that Euripides' words were indeed perceived as problematic. Yet by distinguishing between Euripides and Polynices, Plutarch does not need to censure the former: he can shift the blame to Polynices and moreover is able to provide a corrective (also quoted at *De garr.* 506C) from another work of Euripides.

The fact that words are attributable to *dramatis personae* does not always provide an excuse. It can even create a new problem, namely when morally depraved characters exult in beautiful or at least aesthetically alluring speech. In *De aud. poet.* 27F–28A, Plutarch quotes Sophocles saying that beautiful words cannot proceed from unfair deeds (F 839), but also tells us that Sophocles is wont to provide his ugly characters with alluring words and humane reasons, thus contradicting his “own” claim (rather that of one of his characters). And he adds that his “comrade in arms” (σύσκηνος) – that is, Euripides, whom he does not call by name – does the same. Plutarch refers to Phaedra's words, presumably in the *Hippolytus Unveiled* (test. v, TrGF 5,1, 465), and to Helen's words directed at Hecuba in *Troades* 919.

6 “Correcting” the Poet

Despite what its name may suggest, the ἐπανόρθωσις is not a procedure that consists in correcting a mistake. It should not be confused with what ancient scholars call διόρθωσις, which is indeed used to describe philological emendations of texts involving the correction of mistakes in the transmission and the removal of interpolations.⁹¹ The idea of the ἐπανόρθωσις, on the contrary, is not to restore a text to its presumed authentic state, but rather to use an expression or an idea one finds in a text or a maxim that one knows by heart and to revise it so as to make a novel point, a point that corresponds to one's own views or textual strategy.⁹²

A rather innocuous version is that where a different meaning needs to be given to seemingly inappropriate statements, for instance about the gods. Plutarch gives some examples of this procedure, which he indeed calls ἐπανόρθωσις, at *De aud. poet.* 24A–B. This procedure does not imply any changes made to the text. Yet, as we will see, there is also a more invasive form of ἐπανόρθωσις (in this context he also uses the word μετάρρᾳσις,⁹³ “*Umschreibung*”). Plutarch often associates this

⁹⁰ *Schol. ad Eur. Phoen.* 388: οὐκ ἐν δέοντι δὲ γνωμολογεῖ τοιούτων κακῶν περιεστώτων τὴν πόλιν. τοιοῦτος δὲ πολλαχοῦ ὁ Εὐριπίδης. “Not fittingly he speaks in gnōmai: such evils befalling the city. This is Euripides' manner in many places.”

⁹¹ Cf. Montana 2015, 90–94; Montanari 2015, 642–643; 651–652. A different use of the term διόρθωσις is found in *De Alex. Magn. fort.* 334C7, where it pertains to grammatical or stylistic corrections made at the request of the author of a tragedy and under his supervision.

⁹² “Correcting” sometimes just means making the point even stronger: *Cons. ad Apoll.* 104A, citing Demetrius of Phalerum's use of *Eur. Phoen.* 555–556.

⁹³ E.g. *Cat. Ma.* 19,4; *Dem.* 8,2; *Otho* 18,1.

kind of *epanorthōsis* with Stoics.⁹⁴ They may have been the originators of this practice,⁹⁵ but Plutarch clearly makes it his, and does not even seem to think of a possible Stoic ownership of the term. What is more, he ascribes the same practice already to Demosthenes. The latter, he says, used to make excerpts from the speeches he chanced to hear, condensing them into *gnōmai* and periods, and making all sorts of adjustments (ἐπανορθώσεις) and revisions (μεταφράσεις).⁹⁶ Either this is an anachronism, or the practice is indeed preellenistic.⁹⁷ At any rate, this passage shows that Plutarch did not regard the technique as originally, let alone exclusively, Stoic.

A nice example of Plutarch's application of this procedure to Euripides can be found in the *Precepts of Statecraft*. There Plutarch cites the example of Areius, who used his friendship with Caesar in order to create goodwill for his hometown of Alexandria. Can this be compared to the favours, such as procuratorships and governorships, that people hope to obtain by haunting the doors of powerful men? In addressing this question Plutarch refers to *Phoenissae* 524–525, that is, the words of Eteocles that we have discussed above. Eteocles says that if one must do wrong (ἀδικεῖν), it is best to do so for the sake of tyranny (τυραννίδος). Plutarch suggests the following revision: substitute ἀγρυπνεῖν for ἀδικεῖν and πατρίδος for τυραννίδος. The sentence then reads: “if a man needs to *spend sleepless nights* and haunt another man's door, it is best to do so for the sake of his *native land*.” Otherwise, he says, “it is preferable to welcome and hold fast friendships based on equality and justice” (tr. Fowler).⁹⁸ These last words allude to Iocasta's words at 535–538 (and also 541–

⁹⁴ Cf. *Stoic. rep.* 1039F (Theognis); *De aud. poet.* 33D (Zeno ἐπανορθούμενος τὸ τοῦ Σοφοκλέους); 33C (Cleanthes and Antisthenes *rewriting* Euripides). In the last passage the term is παραδιόρθωσις, which is apparently used interchangeably with ἐπανόρθωσις.

⁹⁵ See also the contribution by Michael Schramm in this volume.

⁹⁶ *Dem.* 8,2: ἐτι δὲ τοὺς λόγους οἷς παρέτυχε λεγομένοις ἀναλαμβάνων πρὸς ἑαυτὸν εἰς γνώμας ἀνῆγε καὶ περιόδους, ἐπανορθώσεις τε παντοδαπὰς καὶ μεταφράσεις ἐκαινοτόμει τῶν εἰρημένων ὑφ' ἑτέρου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἢ ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ πάλιν πρὸς ἄλλον. “And still further, whatever speeches he chanced to hear delivered he would take up by himself and reduce to propositions and periods, and he would introduce all sorts of corrections and changes of expression into the speeches made by others against himself, or, contrariwise, by himself against others.” (tr. Perrin)

⁹⁷ One could also argue that Socrates' interpretation of the Simonides poem in Plato's *Protagoras*, 340a6–347a5, makes use of the technique of ‘non-invasive adjustment’, consisting in reinterpreting the meaning of single words used by the poet. Plato even uses the term ἐπανόρθωμα, 340a8 and 340d7 (also ἐπανορθόω, 340d8). Contrary to the later practice, however, the focus remains on interpretation, not revision.

⁹⁸ *Praec. ger. reip.* 814E: ἄρα γ' ἄξιον τῇ χάριτι ταύτῃ παραβαλεῖν τὰς πολυτάλαντους ἐπιτροπὰς καὶ διοικήσεις τῶν ἐπαρχιών, ἃς διώκοντες οἱ πολλοὶ γηράσκουσι πρὸς ἀλλοτρίαις θύραις, τὰ οἶκοι προλιπόντες· ἢ τὸν Εὐριπίδην ἐπανορθωτέον ἄδοντα καὶ λέγοντα [Plutarch distinguishes sung metres and spoken trimetric iambic verses], ὡς εἴπερ ἀγρυπνεῖν χρὴ καὶ φοιτᾶν ἐπ' αὐλειον ἑτέρου καὶ ὑποβάλλειν ἑαυτὸν ἡγεμονικῇ συνηθείᾳ, πατρίδος περὶ κάλλιστον ἐπὶ ταῦτα χωρεῖν, τὰ δ' ἄλλα τὰς ἐπὶ τοῖς ἴσοις καὶ δικαίοις φιλίας ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ φυλάττειν; “Is there any comparison between such a favour and the procuratorships and governorships of provinces from which many talents may be

545),⁹⁹ who sung the praise of equality.¹⁰⁰ Thus Plutarch as it were corrects Euripides through Euripides. Instead of censuring Euripides or Eteocles, he transforms the text in order to make a different point. Plutarch may have had envisaged a sophisticated intended reader, able to understand what the author is doing. In the next paragraph Plutarch adds a further qualification, namely that the statesman should avoid humbling himself and his state. In this complex passage, Plutarch shows himself a master in the art of dealing with literary texts, by applying a gnomic expression to a completely different context.

An interesting example of the invasive kind of “correction” is found in one of the more technical philosophical treatises, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*. Here Plutarch quotes a line from the *Troades* and connects it with a pressing philosophical issue. Euripides, he says, makes a mistake in using the disjunctive instead of the copulative conjunction when he says “Zeus, whether the necessity of nature or the intelligence of mortals”, because Zeus is both necessity and intelligence.¹⁰¹ Plutarch thus asks whether the expression “necessity or intelligence” is appropriate “for the power that pervades all things” and whether it would not be better to substitute *kai* for *ē*. What he seems to disregard completely is the complicating fact that the prayer speaks of intelligence of mortal people. D. Babut¹⁰² has argued that Plutarch is actually making fun of the Stoics, by parodying their habit to “correct” authors in this way. Signs of this are that he is talking about a Stoic expression for their immanent active power (ἡ διήκουσα διὰ πάντων δύναμις) and also using technical grammatical terms from Stoic logic.¹⁰³ It is moreover true, as we have seen, that ἐπανόρθωσις is a Stoic technique. So in fact he would be mockingly criticising their immanent conception of god. Be that as it may, the adjustment in no way constitutes serious criticism of Euri-

gained and in pursuit of which most public men grow old haunting the doors of other men's houses and leaving their own affairs uncared for? Or should we correct Euripides when he chants the sentiment that if a man must spend sleepless nights and haunt another man's court and subject himself to an intimacy with a great man, it is best to do so for the sake of his native land, but otherwise it is best to welcome and hold fast friendships based on equality and justice?” (tr. Fowler)

99 These words from Iocasta are also quoted in *Quaest. conv.* 643E-F: ἰσότητος γάρ, ἣν πόλεις τε πόλεσι συμμάχοις τε συμμάχους ἡ Εὐριπίδειος γραῦς (*Phoen.* 537) φησι συνδεῖν, οὐδὲν οὕτως ὥς ἡ περὶ τράπεζαν κοινωνία δεῖται, φύσει καὶ νόμῳ καὶ ἀναγκαίαν οὐ καινὴν οὐδ' ἐπέισακτον ὑπὸ δόξης ἔχουσα χρεῖαν. “Euripides’ old woman says that equal treatment *City with city entwines and ally with ally*, and nothing is so in need of that quality as company at table; their need is natural and not factitious, fundamental and not a novelty introduced by fashion.” (tr. Clement–Hoffleit)

100 Fowler 1936, 242–243.

101 *An. procr.* 1026B: Εὐριπίδης δ' οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἀντὶ τοῦ συμπλεκτικοῦ τῷ διαζευκτικῷ κέχρηται Ζεὺς εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεος εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν. (*Tro.* 886) καὶ γὰρ ἀνάγκη καὶ νοῦς ἐστὶν ἡ διήκουσα διὰ πάντων δύναμις Ζεὺς. “Euripides has erred in using the disjunctive instead of the copulative conjunction in the prayer *Zeus, whether natural necessity or the intelligence of mortal men*, for the power that pervades all things is both necessity and intelligence.” (tr. Cherniss)

102 Babut 1969, 141.

103 See, e.g. DL 7,71 (= SVF 2,207).

pides. The next two lines from the same tragedy are, as it happens, quoted¹⁰⁴ in another technical philosophical work.¹⁰⁵

Other types of apparent criticisms, that are actually mere creative uses of literary texts, consist for instance in giving a wider application to a statement that is serviceable. One takes it out of its original context and applies it to something completely different, even if this implies changing the literal meaning of the statement. Chrysippus has advocated this practice, and Plutarch happily endorses it. One could call it a technique of generalisation, wider application, or transfer.¹⁰⁶ Plutarch in general recommends such creative uses of texts: one should try to “supply a deficiency here, or amending there, saying the same thing in other words, or attempting to treat the subject in a wholly new way.” This is in fact what Plato himself already did with the discourse of Lysias, he says (*De aud.* 40E). Plutarch is thinking of the *Phaedrus*, of course.

7 Real Criticism

Occasionally, Plutarch disagrees with Euripides himself, not just with something said by one of his characters. A case in point is the alleged historical truth in the story of Theseus and the Thebans, related in the *Supplices*. According to the version told in this play, Theseus masters the Thebans in battle. This is wrong (οὐχ ὡς Εὐριπίδης ἐποίησεν ἐν τραγωδίᾳ, “not as Euripides has it in his tragedy”), Plutarch says in *Theseus* 29,5: for the two parties engaged in negotiations and reached a truce. Plutarch also gives reasons for his disagreement: he follows the majority of specialists (οὕτω γὰρ οἱ πλεῖστοι λέγουσι, “for so most writers say”). Indeed, most authors, including the historian Philochorus but also Euripides’ fellow playwright Aeschylus claim that Theseus and the Thebans reached a truce (καταμαρτυροῦσι δὲ τῶν Εὐριπίδου Ἰκετίδων οἱ Αἰσχύλου Ἐλευσίνιοι, “the account of Euripides in his *Suppliants* is disproved by that of Aeschylus in his *Eleusinians*”, tr. Fowler).¹⁰⁷ This example shows that in historical matters, Euripides’ epistemic authority is far from absolute. But this is probably true for most people writing about history. His epistemic authority is defeat-

¹⁰⁴ Plutarch has slightly modified the citation by switching from second to third person. He does the same at *De Is. et Os.* 381B, where he quotes the same lines, making ὁ θεῖος λόγος their grammatical subject.

¹⁰⁵ *Quaest. Plat.* 1007C: μᾶλλον δὲ κίνησις οὔσα καὶ τάξις αὐτὴ καὶ συμμετρία χρόνος καλεῖται· (Eur. *Tro.* 887–888) πάντα γὰρ δι’ ἀφόφου / βαίνων κελεύθου κατὰ δίκην τὰ θνήτ’ ἄγει. “Or rather, being motion and order itself and symmetry, [the nature of the whole] is called time, *For all that mortal is, going his noiseless path, he guides aright.*” (tr. Cherniss)

¹⁰⁶ *De aud. poet.* 34B: τὴν δ’ ἐπὶ πλεόντων λεγομένων χρησιν ὑπέδειξεν ὁρθῶς ὁ Χρύσιππος, ὅτι δεῖ μετὰγειν καὶ διαβιβάζειν ἐπὶ τὰ ὁμοειδῆ τὸ χρήσιμον. “Chrysippus has rightly indicated how the poet’s statements can be given a wider application, saying that what is serviceable should be taken over and made to apply to like situations.” (tr. Babbitt)

¹⁰⁷ For background to Euripides’ version of the facts, see Lauriola 2015, 323–324.

ed by the greater number of those who hold a different view, but probably also by the fact that professional historians such as Philochorus give a different account (based on their research), and that they add detailed information which makes their version even more plausible.

This is one of the rare cases where it is Euripides himself who is criticised, without there being the possibility of shifting the criticism to one of his characters.

Also in religious matters Euripides is sometimes overruled by a higher authority. In *De Pyth. or.* 407D, Plutarch quotes the line from the *Phoenissae* (958–959) where it is said that only Apollo ought to give oracles. The god himself does not follow this command, as Theon, the most authoritative figure in the dialogue, comments, but instead uses humans to convey his prophesies.¹⁰⁸ The fact that these words are put in the mouth of Teiresias makes it of course difficult to exculpate Euripides. Teiresias is an expert in these matters and there is no reason to portray him as not speaking the truth. So here, in the domain of religion, Euripides' authority is defeated. Generally, however, Euripides' epistemic authority in matters religious is high.¹⁰⁹

8 Conclusion

In Plutarch's intellectual world, Euripides enjoys a considerable, but certainly not indefeasible epistemic authority especially in the domains of moral psychology and individual ethics, but also in ethics applied to the political scene. He is above all a discerning judge of human nature. Together with the fact that he proves to be well-aware of the vicissitudes of human life, this earns him a reputation for being philosophical. Plutarch's reason for thinking so are due partly to the tradition in which he stands, which already conferred a similar authority upon the third of the great tragic playwrights, but also to Euripides' explicit reflections, the fruits of which he presents in pointed, brief and eminently quotable sentences. His authority moreover extends to the domain of medicine, though to a lesser extent: Euripides is here invoked in just a few cases, which are moreover hardly controversial. One could therefore expect it to be much more easily set aside.

The fact that Euripides' epistemic authority, in the related domains of ethics and psychology, is strong, but not incontestable is confirmed by the practice of "correcting" Euripides. While this was a time-honoured technique of philosophical literary criticism that does not imply actual criticism, the very fact of using it signals that the attitude towards an author is less than perfectly reverential. It is telling that Plu-

¹⁰⁸ *De Pyth. or.* 407D: οὐ πείθεται γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τῷ Εὐριπίδῃ ὥσπερ νομοθετοῦντι καὶ λέγοντι Φοῖβον ἀνθρώποις μόνον / χρῆν θεσιψιδεῖν. "For the god does not follow Euripides when he asserts as if he were laying down a law: *None but Phoebus ought for men to prophesy.*" (*Phoen.* 958–959)

¹⁰⁹ *Suppl.* 975–977, on sacrifices that Apollo turns down; cf. *De E* 394B; *Hecuba* 422, cited in *Non posse* 1104D, on the reality of the afterlife, where Euripides is "one of the ancients", a fact that for Plutarch certainly enhances epistemic authority.

tarch does not apply this technique of feigned corrections to quotations from Plato.¹¹⁰ Most of the criticism of Euripides is more apparent than real, but in some cases Plutarch does disapprove of him. The cases that I have highlighted pertain to Euripides' authority in matters of history.

Finally I would like to point out that by managing the epistemic authority of Euripides and by communicating this in his writings, Plutarch enhances his own authority, or more precisely, sets up the scene in such a manner that his readers are likely to attribute epistemic authority to himself. For he presents himself as a knowledgeable author able to appreciate, evaluate and even criticise the authority of another great author.

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¹¹⁰ The single possible exception would be *An. procr.* 1016C, but on closer inspection Plutarch affirms that Plato's words need no other correction (ἐπανόρθωσις) than a mere clarification of their meaning by means of other Platonic passages.

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