Virtues for the People
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According to Ziegler’s classification, the largest category (twenty-three titles) of the *Moralia* treatises comprises those which Ziegler (1964) labels as “Die popularphilosophisch-ethischen Schriften” (coll. 1, 66, 131ff.), a category which can accommodate even more titles, in my opinion, because some essays classified as “rhetorisch-epideiktischen” are in essence, despite their declamatory nature, fully fledged ethical tracts: *An virtus doceri possit*, for example, or *An vitiositas ad infe-licitatem sufficiat*, or *Animine an corporis affectiones sint peiores*. In any case, if we attempt to subdivide Plutarch’s writings on popular ethical philosophy into smaller and more homogeneous groups, we will probably create five subclasses. One would include, for instance, the essays dealing with virtue and vice (and their manifestations) in general and at a more or less theoretical level, notably *De virtute morali*, *De virtute et vitio*, *De invidia et odio*, etc. A second category would include essays that contain practical advice with direct bearing on our daily association with our fellow men. Here I would list *De adulatore et amico*, *De amicorum multitudine*, *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, and even *De laude ipsius*. A third subclass consists, I think, of essays pertaining to family relations and values: *De fraterno amore* and *De amore prolis*, but also *Coniugalia praecepta*. The fourth category is

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1 In this category we may also include *De profectibus in virtute* and *De cupiditate divitiarum*.

2 Ziegler (1964), col. 1 lists this declamatory essay under the heading “Die tierpsychologischen Schriften”.

3 But I would be disinclined to include here the *Consolatio ad uxorem* or the *Amatorius*, both also belonging to Plutarch’s popular ethical philosophy according to Ziegler. Yet, consolatory literature is a category on its own (let alone that this is a private and personal letter rather than a rhetorical piece with the usual stock themes and motifs; contrast the spurious letter to Apollonius, and note that the *Lamprias Catalogue* features two more consolatory epistles, nos. 111 and 157), and its contents often go beyond, I think, popular ethics. And so do several lofty pronouncements and
comprised of *De tranquillitate animi* and *De tuenda sanitate praecipua*—that is, two treatises which are concerned with living happily at large, and therefore furnish us with ample advice on how to achieve and maintain an appropriate state of mind and body. Finally, the fifth subclass would include the treatises which discuss certain faults and foibles and suggest ways to help us get rid of them. Here belong *De cohibenda ira*, *De garrulitate*, *De curiositate*, *De vitioso pudore*—that is, two treatises which are concerned with living happily at large, and therefore furnish us with ample advice on how to achieve and maintain an appropriate state of mind and body.

This paper will discuss the manner with which Plutarch treats the minor foibles of ἀδολεσχία (garrulity, talkativeness), πολυπραγμοσύνη (indiscreet curiosity, inquisitiveness, meddlesomeness), and δυσωπία (compliancy, excessive shyness or modesty, overscrupulousness). The reason for which I am leaving out *De cohibenda ira* and *De vitando aere alieno* from this discussion is that irascibility is commonly regarded as a very grave fault and not a minor shortcoming, whereas, by contrast, borrowing is a dangerous habit rather than an actual moral failing. Plutarch himself, after all, nowhere in his essay calls borrowing an affection (πάθος) or a disease (νόσημα), as he repeatedly does so in the case of the other foibles above.

For *adoleschia* see 502E (disease), 504F (affection and disease), 510CD (affect./dis.), 511E (dis.), 513D (dis.); for *polypragmosyne* 515C (affect.), 518C (affect.), 519C (dis.), 520D (affect.), 522CD.
(affect./dis.); for dysōpia 528D (affect.), 529E (affect.), 530E (dis.), 532D (affect./dis.), 533D (affect.), 535F (affect.), 536C (affect.). By calling the above foibles affections and maladies of the soul, Plutarch can open the war against them more easily; first, because affections in general are directly linked with vice (cf. *Animine an corp.* 500E: . . . ἡ κακία πολύχυτος καὶ δαψιλὴς οὖσα τοῖς πάθεσιν), and, secondly, because the affections of the soul are far worse than those of the body, as the latter are at least perceived by the reason, whereas the former escape notice, since reason is part of the afflicted soul (*ibid.*: τῶν μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸ σῶμα νοσημάτων ἔρρωμένος ὁ λογισμὸς αἰσθάνεται, τοῖς δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς συννοσῶν αὐτὸς σῶκ ἔχει κρίσιν ἐν οἷς πάσχει, πάσχει γὰρ ὃ κρίνει). Cf. *De vit. pud.* 531E. For the close relationship between pathos and nosēma, cf. also *De ad. et am.* 60D, the relevant references above (affection/disease – see nn. 30-31 and p. 220), and Pettine (1992), 129 n. 16.

To begin with, the structure of our three essays is fairly uniform⁹. One part includes the definition of the foible and a brief discussion of its main features; another consists of examples – taken from real daily life but mainly from history and literature – illustrating the behaviour of the character concerned as well as the consequences of this behaviour (dangers, ridicule, etc.); and a third part deals with the therapy of the ailment by means of suggestions and advice on the steps which one has to take in order to cure oneself. The above structure, however, is not as distinct and clear-cut as it sounds (see Appendix). Plutarch is a good prose artist and, as such, far from allowing himself to become monotonous, he is always after variatio and multiplicity in presenting his material (cf. Klaerr’s remark in n. 16).

*De garrulitate*, for example, starts off with the observation that ἀδολεσχία, subsequently depicted as one of the maladies of the soul (502E: . . . νοσήμασι τῆς ψυχῆς), is very difficult to cure; for while its remedy requires listening, the garrulous always talk and never listen (502C: οἱ δ’ ἀδόλεσχοι οὐδενός ἀκούουσιν ἀεὶ γὰρ λαλοῦσιν). Thus, we also understand what adoleschia is, since no proper definition is ever given in the treatise. *De curiositate*, by contrast, begins with an exhortation to the inquisitive: if you cannot uproot your πολυπραγμοσύνη (two definitions of the pathos [515C] are given in this case, at 515D

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⁹ For a diagram of this structure, see my Appendix. For a comprehensive analysis of their subject matter see Ingenkamp (1971), 44-62.

¹⁰ From this we may gather that Plutarch derived ἀδολεσχία from ἀδὴ + λέσχη (= ‘talk to satiety’), and not from ἀρδολεσχία (a-privative + ἀδής + λέσχη, namely, ‘unpleasant talk’).
[p. 215] and 518C [n. 42]), shift its direction and make it look inwards, instead of outwards. In other words, make your inquisitiveness investigate your inside, your inner self, and your own affairs, instead of the affairs and troubles of others. As for the beginning of De vitioso pudore, compliancy is introduced as a bad outgrowth of a good nature (528D: χρηστῆς δὲ φύσεως...[εξάνθημα])\(^\text{11}\), although immediately afterwards (and throughout this essay), δυσωπία is treated in Aristotelian terms, as one of the two vicious extremes around the quality of proper modesty (αιδῶς)\(^\text{12}\).

Our treatises differ in their central parts too. In De garrulitate Plutarch, on the one hand, underscores what a tedious and irksome fellow man the ἀδολέσχης makes (worse than the drunkard, for he talks foolishness when he is sober too – 504B) and, on the other, points out with many examples the capital dangers he is liable to bring upon himself on account of his talkativeness. These examples, however, at the same time – and perhaps primarily – illustrate and glorify the unique value and usefulness of the opposite conduct: remaining silent and being reticent. The central part of De curiositate is not clearly demarcated. Besides, unlike adoleshcia, which is illustrated with examples mostly taken from history and literature, the apparent lack of such examples of polypragmosynē obliges Plutarch to illustrate the behaviour of the inquisitive by means of instances from contemporary daily life, a welcome boon for us, indeed, because some of his examples allow us to take glimpses at contemporary social conditions and mores (see, e.g., 516E or 522A). But several of his pertinent remarks here in fact belong to the other parts of the treatise, namely, to the definition and therapy sections (cf. 517C, 518BC, 519C, and see Appendix).

The words πολυπράγμων, πολυπραγμοσύνη, πολυπραγμονεῖν do occur in the Lives, but mostly denote what their etymology suggests: to busy oneself about many things (cf. Van Hoof [2008], 300-303). Van Hoof suggests that one reason for which Plutarch’s heroes are free from polypragmosynē “as understood in On Curiosity” should

\(^{11}\) Hence the treatment of this foible requires delicate handling; for, unlike garrulity and meddlesomeness, which cannot be mistaken for some good character trait, compliancy is not very far from the commendable qualities of modesty, self-respect, and decency. In trying, therefore, to drive out one’s immoderate shyness, one ought to be careful enough so as not to eradicate one’s sense of decency along with it.

\(^{12}\) Aristotle’s attributes are ἀναίσχυντος, καταπλήξ, αἰδήμων (cf. EN 1108a33-35, EE 1221a1, MM 1193a1-2). Instead of καταπλήξ and καταπλήξ (the extremes on the side of excess), Plutarch has δυσωπία and εὐδυσώπητος (De vit. pud. 528D). Note, however, that for Aristotle αἰδῶς, although a commendable quality, is not a proper virtue (EN 1108a32: ἡ γὰρ αἰδῶς ἀρετὴ μὲν σὺν ἀκίνητη, ἐπαινεῖται δὲ; cf. also ibid. 1128b10).
be ascribed to the narrative character of the *Lives*, which “makes *polypragmosynē* not so suited as an affection for the protagonists” (p. 307). This is not very convincing, because the same narrativity does not prevent Plutarch from imputing so many other affections and failings – also unsuitable for a protagonist – to his heroes; see, e.g., Nicias’ superstition or Alcibiades’ frivolity. *Polypragmosynē* is absent from the *Lives* simply because Plutarch’s worthies were not *polypragmones* (in the sense in which the term is used in the essay), as Van Hoof herself rightly observes (*ibid.*). For other discussions of Plutarch’s concept of *polypragmosynē*, see Volpe Cacciatore (1987) and the commentaries of Pettine (1977) and Inglese (1996).

Finally, the central part of *De vitioso pudore* is the shortest of all (only one chapter). And what Plutarch’s scant literary/historical examples of *dysōpia* actually demonstrate, is, as in the case of *adoleschia* (see p. 208 and, e.g., 504F), the devastating consequences of this weakness (see below).²³

The third part of our essays, which is devoted to the treatment of the respective foibles, is the longest and most uniform (see Appendix). But even here Plutarch’s regimens are set out in various ways. In *De garrulitate* we are first required to diagnose and admit our failing, and subsequently to muse upon its shameful and painful effects, which moreover constitute the very antithesis of our expectations.¹⁴ Then we must consider the opposite behaviour and bring to our minds the mysterious and solemn character of silence as well as the praises bestowed on reticence or on pithy and aphoristic speech. Garrulity is not checked by reins, but can be controlled by habituation (*511E*... ἐπεὶ δὲ κρατῆσαι τοῦ νοσήματος). Accordingly, accustom yourself to remain silent in various situations; practise answering not hastily, but thoughtfully and succinctly; avoid speaking and dilating on your favourite subjects; and a last tip, albeit of rather doubtful usefulness: turn your garrulity into writing, for written *adoleschia* is less unpleasant (*514C*: ἡττον γὰρ ἀηδὲς ἔσται τὸ λάλον ἐν τῷ φιλολόγῳ πλεονάζον). The gist, then, of Plutarch’s psychotherapy is: first ponder on the disadvantages of your ailment, and then take up exercises intended to habituate you out of it.

¹³ Literary/historical examples of resisting *dysōpia* are appropriately discussed in the third part of the essay, where Plutarch invigorates his suggested psychotherapy by providing models for imitation as well.

¹⁴ Cf. *510D*... φιλεῖσθαι βουλόμενοι μισοῦνται, χαρίζεσθαι δέλοντες ενοχλοῦσι, θαυμάζεσθαι δοκοῦντες καταγελῶνται... ὅστε τούτο πρῶτον ιαμα καὶ φάρμακον ἦστι τοῦ πάθους, ἡ τῶν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ γινομένων ἀσθενῶν καὶ δυνητῶν ἐπίλυσιν.

¹⁵ Cf. *514AB*: an interesting psychological insight, for whoever is inclined to dilate on familiar subjects discloses his being ἀδιάφορος... καὶ φιλόδοξος. See also *513E*. 
The therapy of *polypragmosynē* is already adumbrated in the first part of *De curiositate*. And later, chapter 5 expands the idea of turning one’s inquisitiveness inwards, by suggesting its further diverting to the marvels and secrets of nature or even to the countless evildoings and crimes of history, given that *polypragmosynē* is inclined to search out evil (see p. 215 below). But Plutarch’s psychotherapy proper comprises again two things: a) reflection on the fault (dangers involved, the futility and uselessness of one’s indiscreet inquiries), and b) acquiring habits which overpower (in fact undermine) one’s inquisitiveness (520D: μέγιστον μέντοι πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πάθους ἀποτροπὴν ὁ ἐθισμός).

Some examples: refrain from reading the inscriptions on tombs or walls, accustom yourself not to look inside another’s house as you walk past it, refrain from attending a street brawl, get accustomed to ignore useless shows and spectacles, exercise to check even normal curiosity (take your time to read the letters you receive). Remember, finally, that by being inquisitive you resemble a detested informer (cf. Arist., *Rh*. 1382a7: ... μισεῖ καὶ τὸν συκοφάντην ἅπας). But this last item, which concludes the whole essay (523AB), belongs to the province of reflection, of course (cf. n. 14). Some of the above features of a *polypragmōn* appear to sustain Van Hoof’s view that the meaning and treatment of *polypragmosynē* in Plutarch’s essay may have its roots in comedy (cf. p. 303 and nn. 28 and 34). But I would not go so far as to say that Plutarch’s portrait of the *polypragmōn* is unrealistic and caricatural (p. 305), because this would defeat the serious ethical purpose of the treatise (cf. also pp. 215-16 below).

In *De vitioso pudore*, however, reflection and exercise (or *Krisis* und *Askesis*, to use Ingenkamp’s terminology; [1971], 6 and 74-124), the two pivots on which Plutarch’s suggested psychotherapy revolves, are presented in a reverse order: First come some new habits and attitudes we ought to adopt – in other words, the training and practice we need in order to overcome our weakness (chapters 5-8) – and then fol-

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16 This reversal is probably deliberate, because Plutarch, regarding *dysōpia* as a dangerous malady that causes many evils, makes haste to advise how it may be cured (530E: Ως οὖν πολλῶν κακῶν αἴτιον τὸ νόσημα τοῦτο ὁν πειρατέον ἀποβιάζεσθαι τῇ ἁσκήσει); note also that he mostly calls *dysōpia* a *pathos* (see p. 207 above). Klaerr (1974), however, sees this reversal as “la manifestation de la liberté de Plutarque”, who nowhere in his writings applies with rigour a particular plan, but “s’abandonne volontiers aux détours de l’inspiration” (p. 24). Generally speaking, however, this remark is right on the mark. See also *ibid.* p. 24 n. 2.

17 The exercises suggested are gradated (cf. also *De cur*. 520D). By not yielding to usual social pressures (e.g., to keep on drinking against your will or to praise
lows the reflection part, namely, a number of thoughts accompanied by historical examples, which, if borne in mind and taken into due account, are also expected to facilitate our endeavour to resist dysōpia (chapters 9-19). One salutary reflection, for example, is to remember that affections often involve us in situations contrary to those we desire and strive after. Thus, as philodoxia may lead to disgrace, philēdonia to distress, philonikia to defeat, and so on, dysōpia, by fearing ill repute, may involve us in outright disrepute (532D; cf. p. 220). What is peculiar to the third part – that is, to the advice section of De vitioso pudore – is the great number of historical and literary examples, which, however, also pervade the central parts of the other two essays. But, whereas there Plutarch appeals to history and literature to illustrate the foibles concerned and exemplify the behaviour of the garrulous and the inquisitive, here he finds it more fitting to use historical examples in order to validate his advice on how dysōpia can be resisted.

Let us now concentrate on each one of our treatises in turn. In Theophrastus’ Characters, there are four human types representing foibles related to speaking: the ἀδολέσχης wears out his interlocutor, whom he often does not know, with his trivial, incoherent, and foolish talk that concerns, more or less, himself and his affairs. The λάλος is not a simpleton (as the ἀδολέσχης seems to be), but suffers from real incontinence of speech (ἀκρασία λόγου); he is unable to keep his mouth shut, and thus he either exasperates others or makes them doze off. Let us concentrate on each one of our treatises in turn. In Theophrastus’ Characters, there are four human types representing foibles related to speaking: the ἀδολέσχης wears out his interlocutor, whom he often does not know, with his trivial, incoherent, and foolish talk that concerns, more or less, himself and his affairs. The λάλος is not a simpleton (as the ἀδολέσχης seems to be), but suffers from real incontinence of speech (ἀκρασία λόγου); he is unable to keep his mouth shut, and thus he either exasperates others or makes them doze off by someone out of politeness; cf. 530F-531C), you will gradually be able to reject all unlawful requests. Cf. 532C: Ὁ γὰρ ὁστὸς θισθεὶς καὶ ἀσκήσας δυσάλωτος ἐσται, μάλλον δὲ ἑλως ἀνεπιχείρητος, ἐν τοῖς μείλοις.

18 These are mostly clever repartees of illustrious men towards those who importuned them with unlawful requests. We are called to bear them in mind and somehow imitate them (533A ff.).

19 As a matter of fact, we are often aware that the petitioner is a scoundrel and that our complying with his request out of bashfulness will damage us; this is why, in the case of dysōpia, regret is present right from the start (533D: Διὸ τῶν παθῶν μάλιστα τῷ δυσωπεῖσθαι τὸ μετανοεῖν ὑπὸ υἱόν, ἀλλ’ εὐθὺς ἐν ὦς πράττει πάρεστι; cf. also 535D). Another reflection: if the wicked do not abandon their vices for our sake (tell a miser to lend money without a bond, or an ambitious man to step down from office), why should we abandon our virtue for their sake (535BC)? A final one: we ought to remember our previous regrets and the damage suffered because of our dysōpia (536CD). Cf. De cur., chapter 10 ad init.

20 But this ‘Theophrastean’ definition (as well as most of the definitions of the Characters) is a later addition (cf. Rusten [1993], 30-32 and 73 n. 1). In Plutarch τὸ περὶ τοὺς λέγοντας ἄκρασας καὶ λόγοντας emblematises drunkenness, which is linked with adoleschia on account of this very characteristic (503E); cf. also 508B. It is worth noting here that, for Plutarch, polypragmosyne is also a form of incontinence (519E: ἄκρασιας γὰρ τὸ πολυπραγμονεῖν).
his incessant talk. The λογοποιός is the newsmaker, the rumourmonger who invents untrue reports or events; and, finally, the κακολόγος is the evil-speaker, the person who enjoys disseminating bad news, relishes slanderous and malicious gossip, and is generally bent towards presenting everything in the worst possible light.

Plutarch’s ἀδολέσχης (invariably called λάλος and φλύαρος as well) combines all the characteristics of the Theophrastean types, except, perhaps, those of the newsmaker. But he also has an important particularity that is missing from the portraits of Theophrastos: sometimes because of his inability to control his tongue and keep his mouth shut, but more often out of frivolity, thoughtlessness, or misjudgement, the Plutarchean adoleschēs divulges secrets that incur his ruin.

Yet, its consequences aside, why is garrulity per se an affection (πάθος) and a malady (νόσημα) of the soul (cf. pp. 206-207 above), comparable moreover to such diseases as avarice (φιλαργυρία), ambition (φιλοδοξία), and lasciviousness (φιληδονία)? The more so, since the garrulous is well-intentioned, his aim being, as we are told, to gratify others and gain their love and admiration (see n. 14). Be that as it may, wherever we encounter examples of passions or affections or emotions in both Plutarch and other authors, we usually hear of anger, envy, malice, pity, cowardice, ambition, contentiousness, avarice, hatred, spitefulness, insolence, sexual desire, profligacy, etc. In Aristotle, for instance, ἀκρασία (with no qualifier) denotes incontinence or self-indulgence only in bodily pleasures, whereas the qualified akrasia (e.g., incontinence in anger, honour, gain – but never in speech) is an error (ἁμαρτία) and not a vice proper. In any case, outside Plutarch’s essay, talkativeness,
however incessant or foolish or harassing, is nowhere else described, to my knowledge at least, as an affection or a disease of the soul. Plutarch himself gives two indirect reasons for this characterization, but neither is plausible, let alone convincing. The first is because gar-rulity is dangerous, ridiculous, and detestable, which all are supposed to be features of passions at large, and the second because it can be combated by proper training and exercise like, again, all the other affections of the soul.

Why then does Plutarch call *adoleschia* an affection and treat it as such? I would suggest two reasons, which, as will be seen, are equally valid in the case of the other foibles. One is philosophical, as it were, and the other peculiar to Plutarch’s idiosyncracy. The philosophical reason is that, in Plutarch’s eyes, controlling one’s tongue manifests in fact the overall control of reason – in other words, the preponderance of the rational part of the psyche. Accordingly, inconstence of speech indicates lack of this control, which in turn suggests a disarrayed psyche governed, or at least influenced, by the irrational element, a situation to be strongly condemned, of course, by a faithful follower of Plato. Plutarch adroitly proves his point with the most suitable example of Odysseus sitting admirably composed beside Penelope only a few days before the slaughter of the suitors. Odysseus controlled, Plutarch tells us after quoting the relevant Homeric lines (*Od.* XIX, 210-212), every limb of his body, with all parts in perfect obedience and submission, his eyes ordered not to weep, his tongue not to utter a sound, his heart not to tremble; for his reason extended even to his irrational or involuntary movements and made everything amenable and subservient...

8: ὃτι μὲν οὖν κακία ἡ ἀκρασία οὐκ ἔστι, φανερὸν (ἅλλα τῇ ἱσως)- τὸ μὲν γὰρ παρὰ προαιρεσίν τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὴν προαιρεσίν ἔστιν). For the Stoics also, *akrasia* is not a primary, but a subordinate (to *akolasia*) vice (cf. *SVF* III, 265 [p. 65.19]).

28 With the exception, perhaps, of the slanderous talkativeness (*διαβολή*), which betrays hatred (cf. Arist., *Rh.* 1382a1ff.). On the other hand, among other lovable characters one also finds καὶ τοὺς μὴ κακαλόγους (*ibid.* 1381b5-7). The Stoic lists of affections (*πάθη*) feature no term akin to *adoleschia* either (cf. *SVF* III, 391ff. [p. 95-100]).

29 Cf. 504F: Τῶν δὲ ἄλλων παθῶν καὶ νοσημάτων τὰ μὲν ἐστι ἐπικίνδυνα τὰ δὲ μισητὰ τὰ δὲ καταγέλαστα, τῇ δὲ ἀδολεσχία πάντα συμβέβηκα. Also 511E: ἄλλ’ ἔθει δεῖ κρατῆσαι τοῦ νοσήματος.

30 ὁτι μὲν οὖν κακία ἡ ἀκρασία οὐκ ἔστι, φανερὸν (ἅλλα τῇ ἱσως)- τὸ μὲν γὰρ παρὰ προαιρεσίν τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὴν προαιρεσίν ἔστιν). For the Stoics also, *akrasia* is not a primary, but a subordinate (to *akolasia*) vice (cf. *SVF* III, 265 [p. 65.19]).

31 For the composition of *psyche*, see, conveniently, De virtute morali, esp. 441F-442E.
to itself (Helmbold’s LCL translation)\textsuperscript{32}. And, further below, Plutarch propounds that reason should be a permanent barrier in the tongue’s way\textsuperscript{33}. As a matter of fact, if reason had played its role as such a barrier, many characters of his historical examples would not have perished as they did (see p. 212 with n. 24 above).

As for the idiosyncratic reason, it is linked with a fundamental characteristic of Plutarch’s nature and personality, namely, his practical spirit combined with his loyalty to common sense\textsuperscript{34}. I have discussed this aspect of Plutarch elsewhere (see (1991), 175-86), but here suffice it to say that the very titles of several of his essays, and the amount of practical advice or perspective contained in nearly all his \textit{Moralia}, clearly demonstrate his pragmatic ethics\textsuperscript{35}. It can hardly be doubted that Plutarch’s moral essays mainly aimed at two things: individual ethical improvement and harmonious human relationships. In other words, Plutarch was chiefly interested in helping people to lead good lives both as individuals and as members of a wider society\textsuperscript{36}. Accordingly, apart from appreciating individual moral conduct, he attributes equal importance to one’s performance as a social being, for he also believes that moral excellence is tried and proven continually in our daily intercourse with our fellow men. He is, moreover, aware that the desired harmony in human relationships is best secured and maintained not (so much) by such cardinal virtues as courage (\textit{andreia}) and temperance (\textit{sōphrosyne}), for example, but...
rather through less pretentious qualities, such as considerateness, kindness, moderation, tolerance. And the glorification of praotes and philanthropia in his Lives is directly related, I would argue, to these very beliefs. Similarly, he also observes that people are not alienated from each other only by acts of injustice or a display of malice, but perhaps more often through the impact of minor failings such as garrulity or indiscreet curiosity. Finally, Plutarch assumed morality to be one, undivided and unchangeable (cf. Russell [1966], 142), and did not make a sharp distinction between major and minor ethics. He believed that such a distinction was superficial and that a person susceptible to the weaknesses of avarice, inquisitiveness, hot temper, or immoderate bashfulness could never attain ethical fulfilment. He agreed, then, with the Stoics that moral excellence was one and undivided, but, contrary to them, he also saw it from a progressive perspective (cf. his De proiectibus in virtute). This ethical fulfilment is not given by nature or fortune, but has to be conquered step by step through the most personal efforts of the moral agent, the whole human being. Hence the importance which Plutarch attaches to denouncing those minor foibles (cf. Gréard [1874], 204).

On the other hand, the characterization of polypragmosynē as a disease appears to be more justified, since, according to Plutarch’s definition, inquisitiveness is free from neither envy nor malice (515D: φιλομαθεία τις ἐστίν ἀλλοτρίων κακῶν, οὔτε φθόνου δοκοῦσα καθαρεύειν νόσος οὔτε κακοθείας) As a matter of fact, it is Plutarch’s psychological interpretation of polypragmosynē that dissociates it from mere meddlesomeness and renders it a vice. The Plutarchean πολυπράγμων is an ill-willed person (516A: τῇ κακονοίᾳ τὴν περιεργίαν ὡσπερ ὀφθαλμὸν ἐντίθησι), and therefore interested in inquiring about nothing except whatever is hidden (φιλοπευστία τῶν ἐν ἀποκρύψει καὶ λανθανόντων); and what is hidden, Plutarch implies, must be something bad, since nobody conceals a good possession (οὐδεὶς δ’ ἀγαθὸν ἀποκρύπτει κεκτημένος). See also 519C and E, where inquisitiveness is compared with adultery but also with evil speaking (see n. 53 below). Cf. also nn. 15 and 22 above.
evil, contains evil, or smacks of evil\textsuperscript{39}, provided, however, that this evil always concerns the other and never himself. In reality, the inquisitive is so wicked, and his soul so full of all kinds of vices, that he simply cannot bear to face them. Thus, shuddering and frightened at what is within, the inquisitive feeds his malice on the evil he finds without, more specifically on the troubles of others\textsuperscript{40}. In other words, prying into the affairs of others is in fact a way of escaping from oneself, a very unphilosophical attitude indeed, given that the aim of philosophy, according to Socrates at least, was first to recognize one’s own faults and then try to get rid of them (516C: ἐπιγνώσαι τὰ ἐσωτερικὰ κακὰ καὶ ἀπαλλαγῆναι)\textsuperscript{41}. This is why our \textit{polypragmōn} has no curiosity about the movements of the heavenly bodies or about the ways by which the plants grow and bloom (p. 210 above); because he can find no evil (οὐθὲν κακὸν) in those things (517E). Yet, by desiring to search out the troubles of others, the inquisitive reveals his malice, a brother affection of envy and jealousy, offspring of his own vicious nature\textsuperscript{42}.

As far as \textit{dysōpia} is concerned\textsuperscript{43}, although Plutarch almost exclusively describes it as a \textit{pathos} (see p. 207), he is at the same time careful to point out a peculiarity of this affection (namely its affinity with modesty), which of necessity requires special treatment (see n. 11). For, unlike indiscreet curiosity, which springs from a malicious nature, excessive bashfulness is a blemish of a good nature (528D; p. 208) or, to use Plutarch’s own words in the proem of the \textit{Life of Cimon}, a deficiency of virtue rather than a base product of vice\textsuperscript{44}. In fact, what makes \textit{dysōpia}...
an undesirable character trait is the element of the excess involved (528E: υπερβολή γὰρ τοῦ αἰσχύνεσθαι τὸ δυσωπεῖσθαι . . . [ἦν] αἰσχυντηλιαν μέχρι τοῦ μηδ’ ἀντιβλέπειν τοῖς δεομένοις υπείκυσαν [δυσωπίαν ὤνόμασαν]), on account of which shyness drifts into undue submission and compliance with any request (unlawful ones included), and as such it becomes the cause of bad behaviour (528D: αἰτίαν . . . μοχθηρίας) and many evils (see n. 16); for those who are too shy and comply with every petition make the same mistakes as the shameless, the only difference being that the former rue their errors and grieve over them, while the latter take pleasure in theirs.

Dysōpia, therefore, is a negative quality only because of its consequences. And this Plutarch aptly demonstrates by observing that when Homer says that modesty greatly harms and benefits men, he puts its harmfulness first. Appropriately so, Plutarch comments, for modesty “becomes helpful and profitable to men, only when reason removes its overplus and leaves us with the right amount” (LCL transl.); in other words, when reason transforms it from dysōpia to proper modesty. This once again brings to the fore the important role of reason, by the directives of which Plutarch weighs and assesses moral conduct. Thus, as the therapy of garrulity is ultimately effected with the help of reason (see pp. 213-14), so in the case of dysōpia it is reason again that will treat one’s excessive shyness or overscrupulousness and render it harmless; for a good nature (and dysōpia, as we saw [p. 208], is a blemish of such a nature) responds well to the cultivation of its rational part. Similarly, as excessive talkativeness betrays a lack of the control of reason (see p. 213), so immoderate bashfulness prevents us from using our reason (532AB: . . . ἡ δυσωπία . . . περὶ τὰ μείζονα παραιρεῖται τὸ συμφέρον τοῦ λογισμοῦ); for we often act contrary to our better judgement, sometimes lest we should appear offensive, and sometimes because we allow the shamelessness of the petitioner (although we loathe and resent it) to bring down and overpower our reason.

45 528D: τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ τοῖς ἀναισχύντοις οἱ αἰσχυνόμενοι πολλάκις ἀμαρτάνουσιν, πλὴν ὥστι τὸ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ ἀλγεῖν ἤγ’ οἷς διαμαρτάνουσι τοῦτο τοῖς πρόσετιν, οὕτως ὧς ἀκινὸς τὸ ἡδεῖσθαι.
46 529D: ‘αἰδώς, ἢτ’ ἄνθρακε μέγα σίνεται ἢδ’ ὀνίνησι’. This line comes in fact from Hesiod, Op. 318, but Plutarch apparently believed that he had taken it from Iliad XXIV. 44-45.
47 See mainly his De virtute morali and cf. Zucchelli (1965), 226.
48 528D: . . . καὶ λέγω παρασχεῖν ἐργάσιμον κατατιθέντα ἐπεικῶς δυνάμεις [sc. χρηστῆς φύσεως].
49 Some examples: when ill, we call in our family doctor and not the specialist; instead of choosing competent teachers for our children, we use those who beg for employment; instead of hiring the best lawyer for our case, we commit it to the unskilled son of a friend or relative in order to do him a favour, etc. Cf. also 531E.
This and 532AB above eloquently illustrate the motivation underlying dysópia. We yield to a request, now because we are flattered and wish to be obliging and agreeable, and now because we are timorous of the brazen importunity of the petitioner (cf. also 535D-536C). Yet we ought to make a firm stand against both and yield neither to intimidation nor to flattery (535EF). Modesty (αἰδός) is also some fear of disrepute (cf. Arist., EN 1128b12: φόβος τις ἀδοξίας) but the αἰδήμον (who shows proper modesty) is interested only in the opinions of the right people, not in those of everyone, as the καταπλήξ (cf. n. 12) is (cf. EN 1108a35: ὁ πάντα αἰδούμενος; EE 1233b28-30: ὃ δὲ πάσης [sc. δύξης] ὁμοίως [sc. φροντίζον] καταπλήξ, ὃ δὲ τῆς τῶν φαινομένων ἑπιεικών αἰδήμον). The Stoics made a distinction between αἰσχύνη (SVF III, 409 [p. 99.1]: φόβος τις ἀδοξίας) and αἰδώς (SVF III, 432 [p. 105.40]: εὐλάβεια ὀρθοῦ ψόγου). Cf. Zucchelli (1965), 220 and notes ibid.

But reason intervenes correctively also in the case of polypragmosynē. Since inquisitiveness is linked with information supplied by the senses, the more we use our minds, the less we need our senses (521D: τὴν αἰσθήσεων ὅλης καταλαβεῖν πλείονα τῇ διανοίᾳ χρώμενοι). It follows, then, that our inquisitiveness will drastically be curtailed if it is trained to obey reason (521E: μεγάλα δ᾿ ὠφεληθήσῃ τὸ πολυπράγμον . . . ὑπακούειν τῷ λογισμῷ συνεθιζόμενον)50.

Despite their essential differences, adolesschia and polypragmosynē share common aspects too51. Perhaps the most apparent one is that both foibles prevent those involved in them from fulfilling their desires. The garrulous man, for instance, yearns for listeners, but whenever he approaches a company, people either run away or remain silent to avoid furnishing him a hold (502EF). Similarly, when a snooper turns up, people stop talking about their affairs or some confidential matter, so that they may not give the polypragmōn food for gossip (519D). Further, there is also a certain interrelation between garrulity and inquisitiveness. In De garrulitate we see that garrulity may also give rise to inquisitiveness, for the garrulous wish to hear many things

50 As a matter of fact, the role of reason in combating one’s faults is self-evident. See generally the reflection sections of our treatises, and esp. De gar. 510D: to get rid of our passions (and faults), we must first realize, with the help of reason, their harmfulness and shamefulness (Οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἐθίζεται φεύγειν καὶ ἀποτρίβεσθαι τῆς ψυχῆς ὅ μὴ δυσχεράνει: δυσχεράνειν δὲ τὰ πάθη, ἕτοι τὰς βλάβας καὶ τὰς αἰσχύνας τὰς ἀπ᾿ αὐτῶν τῷ λόγῳ κατανοήσωμεν). See also n. 14 and pp. 213-14 with nn. 32-33 above. Cf. also Ingenkamp (1971), 74-80.

51 As Helmbold (1939) observes, the respective essays “are akin in many ways; portions of the later treatise [which he takes to be De garrulitate] are merely a reshaping of ideas and commonplaces which the earlier had adumbrated” (p. 471).
so that they may have many things to tell. In De curiositate, however, the same phenomenon is viewed from the opposite side, and garrulity, in the form of evil-speaking, is here presented not as the starting point, but as a necessary concomitant of indiscreet curiosity; for, what the inquisitive zealously search out they delight to tell everybody else. In the former essay garrulity is the primary fault, while inquisitiveness is presented as a spin-off or side effect; in the latter, however, the primary fault is inquisitiveness, which naturally engenders evil-speaking, given that indiscreet curiosity arises from one’s malignity (see above pp. 215-16).

All in all, Plutarch’s moral treatises are well organized: his argumentation is clear and coherent, his various observations (and here I include his comments on the historical/literary examples which he adduces) are more or less judicious and on the mark, and his psychological insights perceptive and remarkable. Yet, his zeal to substantiate his points with multiple arguments and as many practical examples as possible occasionally leads him to some unfortunate comparisons, and even contradictions or far-fetched and groundless assertions (see also p. 213). In the second chapter of De garrulitate, for instance, Plutarch remarks that, contrary to other maladies of the soul, such as philargyria, philodoxia, and philēdonia, where those affected may fulfill their desires all the same (502E: τὸ γοῦν τυγχάνειν ὧν ἐφίενται περίεστι), the garrulous man can hardly be as successful, because his prospective listeners tend

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52 508C: τῇ δ’ ἀδολεσχίᾳ καὶ ἡ περιεργία κακῶν οὐκ ἐλαττον πρόσεστι πολλά γὰρ ἀκούειν θέλουσιν, ἕνα πολλά λέγειν ἵκωσι.
53 Cf. 519C: τῇ δὲ περιεργίᾳ τὴν κακολογίαν ἀνάγκη συνακολουθεῖν ἃ γὰρ ἡδέως ἀκούοσιν ἡδὲς καλοῦσι, καὶ ἀ παρ’ ἄλλων στοιχήματι συνέλεγος πρὸς ἐκέρτους μετὰ χαράς ἐκφέρουσιν.
54 But the circle is vicious; garrulity gives rise to inquisitiveness, but inquisitiveness will furnish the garrulous with material to rattle on.
55 The interrelation between adoleschia and polypragmosynē can also be seen in that they both constitute a form of incontinence (see n. 20), and, moreover, in that aspects of the behaviour of the polypragmōn (519AB) bring to mind the behaviour of the Theophrastean λογοτεχνίας (cf. Characters 8.2-3 and n. 23 above).
56 See, for instance, 512C (adoleschia as impertinence), 520E (the harm from reading useless things), 533E (dysōpia makes us promise things beyond our power), 534B (it is easy to say ‘no’ to obscure or humble people). Cf. also n. 15. Mounard (1959) may indeed exaggerate when she calls Plutarch “un théoricien de l’âme” (see Zucchelli [1965], 225 n. 46, and Klaerr [1974], 23 n. 3), but only if we understand this statement in Aristotelian terms; for, Aristotle aside, she rightly affirms that Plutarch was “plus qu’un observateur” (ibid.), since several of his psychological judgements have gone through the filter of philosophy, if they do not directly emanate from philosophical premises (see also p. 213 above).
to avoid him (p. 218). Common experience would not agree with Plutarch here, because although the garrulous often get the opposite of what they expect from their audience (see n. 14), their propensity and desire for chattering is nevertheless fulfilled. Besides, whereas in De garrulitate the lovers of money, pleasure, and glory may fulfill their desires, in De vitioso pudore we are told that the same characters find themselves in situations which are the exact opposite of what they are seeking (532CD: πάσι μὲν τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τοῖς νοσήμασιν ἀφεύγειν δι’ αὐτῶν δοκοῦμεν, ἀδοξίαι φιλοδοξίαις καὶ λύπαι φιληδονίαις καὶ πόνοι μαλακίαις καὶ φιλονικίαις ἤτται καὶ καταδίκαι. See also p. 211).

Plutarch's essay on talkativeness is at the same time a eulogy of silence and reticence. As a matter of fact, half of De garrulitate (chapters 7-18) is a comparative consideration of the advantages of reticence vis-à-vis the utmost perils of adoleschia. All appear to revolve around the motto οὐδὲις γὰρ οὕτω λόγος ῥωθεὶς ὡς πολλοὶ σιωπηθέντες (505F). This being so, Plutarch’s attack on garrulity occasionally takes extreme forms. Here is a comparison with drunkenness (μέθη) and madness (μανία): madness (which, by implication, is worse than anger) is a bad thing and certainly to be avoided; drunkenness is madness of short duration, but more culpable than madness, because it is voluntary. The worst and most dangerous aspect of drunkenness is the incontinence of speech it involves; it follows, then, that garrulity, being incontinence of speech par excellence, is far worse and far more dangerous than drunkenness and madness (503D-F).

Many men of letters, before and after Plutarch, devoted their lives to studying, reviewing, and exploiting in various ways the bulk of classical literature. Plutarch, however, differs from most of them in that he did not indulge in the study of antiquity for professional reasons, or antiquarian and scientific interest only, or out of a desire to be wise, or even an inner yearning for truth; he did so in view of a practical purpose, namely, in order to glean from Greek and Roman authors as many moral lessons as he could, and effect through them the ethical improvement of himself and his contemporaries. And he tried to accomplish this by strongly emphasizing the importance of

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57 A similar observation is also made in De cur. 519D with regard to the inquisitive (see p. 218).
58 Cf. also De gar. 515A; De tuenda 125D; and [De lib. educ.] 10F: καὶ γὰρ αὐτοκράτορας μὲν οὐδὲις μετενόησε, λαλήσαντες δὲ παμφλησθεὶς. Further, Pettine (1992), 141 n. 81 reminds us here of Hor., Ars poet. 390: nescit vox missa reverti.
59 Somewhat far-fetched (if only because it is hard to observe it) is also the following exhortation in the therapy section of polypragmosynē: “Refuse to hear even words that have supposedly been spoken about yourself” (522B).
60 See the proem to Aem.-Tim. (1-3) and cf. n. 36.
virtuous conduct and skilfully connecting it with the great men and achievements of the two races. Plutarch indeed aims at man’s moral edification, but he is not the typical moralist, who, the whip of moral law in his hand, sermonizes *ex cathedra* and terrorizes his audience with the threat of the predominance of evil. Nor does he ever set up unbending rules or entirely perfect – and therefore unreal – models of ethical behaviour. Plutarch is convinced that perfect and absolute virtue is unattainable\(^\text{61}\), and so his admonitions are always within the capabilities of human nature, which has produced no character absolutely good and indisputably virtuous\(^\text{62}\). This is why the majority of his works have always appealed to ordinary people and to common sense\(^\text{63}\).

If all the above are taken into due account, we will perhaps be more indulgent towards Plutarch and his treatises on popular moral philosophy. Despite the ethical preoccupations and the relevant didacticism of the author, and regardless of the overabundance of practical advice and some hackneyed arguments, these writings, far from being simply a manual of commonplaces\(^\text{64}\), perhaps constitute, if compared with other similar works of later and more modern times, the best specimen of the essay genre.

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\(^{62}\) Cf. *Cim*. 2.5: καλὸν οὐδὲν εὐλογικὸς οὐδ᾿ ἀναμφισβήτητον εἰς ἀρετὴν ἦθος γεγονὸς ἀποδίδωσιν (sc. human nature). See also previous note.

\(^{63}\) As Trench (1873), 130 aptly put it, “Plutarch’s advices are both practical and practicable. Practical because they bear directly on the matter in hand and are well adapted to bring about the result desired. And practicable for they make no too difficult demand on men and are fairly within reach of all who are seeking in earnest to shun evil”.

\(^{64}\) See esp. Gréard’s (1874) judicious criticism of this view (pp. 217 and 409 ff.).
**APPENDIX**

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