

## Four Exegetical Notes on Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love*

**Abstract:** These notes offer interpretations of Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 756d, 764c-d, 764e, and 770a-b.

### 1. *Dialogue on Love* 756d

πόρρω γὰρ οὐκ ἄπειμι  
τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην οὐχ ὀρᾶς ὅση θεός;  
ἦδ' ἐστὶν ἡ σπείρουσα καὶ διδοῦσ' ἔρον,  
οὗ πάντες ἐσμὲν οἱ κατὰ χθόν' ἔκγονοι. (Teubner ed.<sup>1</sup>)

I do not go far  
Do you not see how mighty is the goddess [= Euripides, fr. 898.1 *TrGF*]  
Aphrodite? She sows and gives that love  
From which all we upon this earth are born [= Euripides, *Hippolytus* 449-450]. (Loeb<sup>2</sup> tr. modified)

The phrase πόρρω γὰρ οὐκ ἄπειμι has caused problems for some translators and interpreters. Both the Budé<sup>3</sup> ('[s]ans aller plus loin') and the Loeb edition ('not to go farther') translate as if πόρρω were a comparative<sup>4</sup>. H. Görgemanns, although offering a correct translation, comments that the meaning of the phrase within the context is unclear<sup>5</sup>. D. Russell correctly translates 'I go not far away'<sup>6</sup> and rightly observes elsewhere that the phrase does not indicate the return from a digression, as the Budé and Loeb translations suggest, but, on the contrary, a promise to go further along the lines of the argument<sup>7</sup>. As a matter of fact, γὰρ suggests that these words even mark the *beginning* of a digression. Indeed, the whole part on Aphrodite and Eros and their relation as cosmic gods is structurally speaking a digression; the *return* from this digression is indicated by οὖν at 756f<sup>8</sup>. This fits into Plutarch's strategy of underemphasising the most important parts of his speech in the *Dialogue on Love* (cf. 762a-b; 763f; 770b)<sup>9</sup>. The interpretation of the sentence is not a problem if we keep in mind the general point which Plutarch is making here (i.e. that questioning the existence of one god has important implications for the other gods). The concrete example is that, if Eros is

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<sup>1</sup> C. HUBERT, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> E.L. MINAR – F.H. SANDBACH – W.C. HELMBOLD, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> R. FLACELIÈRE – M. CUVIGNY, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also M. VALVERDE SÁNCHEZ – H. RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS – C. ALCALDE MARTÍN, 2003, 68: 'Pues sin ir más lejos'.

<sup>5</sup> H. GÖRGE MANNS, 2011, 155 n. 132. Cf. W. SIEVEKING, 1940, 99.

<sup>6</sup> D. RUSSELL, 1993, 259.

<sup>7</sup> D. RUSSELL, 1997, 101. Moreover, he notes the iambic rhythm of the phrase and suspects that it is a quotation from an unknown dramatic source (D. RUSSELL, 1997, 110 n. 10; cf. D. RUSSELL, 1993, 378); this does not strike me as particularly compelling.

<sup>8</sup> For this structuring function of γὰρ and οὖν see C.M.J. SICKING, 1993, 20 and 27; I.J.F. DE JONG, 1997; S.R. SLINGS, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. P. VAN NUFFELEN, 2007 on rhetorical silence in Plutarch.

undermined, Aphrodite suffers from this as well and the unity of the Greek pantheon is threatened. The jump from Eros to Aphrodite is indeed not πόρρω: both gods are closely associated (cf. e.g. 756e, 752a-b).

## 2. *Dialogue on Love* 764c-d

πλὴν ἐκείνη γε δόξειαν ἄν διαφέρειν, ἣ δαίκνυσιν ἥλιος μὲν ἐπι γῆς τὰ καλὰ καὶ τὰ αἰσχρὰ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖσιν, Ἔρως δὲ μόνων τῶν καλῶν φέγγος ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα μόνον τοὺς ἐρωῶντας ἀναπείθει βλέπειν καὶ στρέφεσθαι, τῶν δ' ἄλλων πάντων περιορᾶν. (Teubner ed. modified [underlined])

Yet, there is, it seems, a difference to be pointed out: on earth the sun exhibits both the beautiful and the ugly to men's eyes, while Love illumines only what is beautiful. Only this does he persuade lovers to contemplate and turn to; everything else they must overlook. (Loeb tr. modified)

The *Dialogue on Love* is preserved in only two manuscripts: Parisinus gr. 1672 (E) and Parisinus gr. 1675 (B)<sup>10</sup>. These manuscripts read ἐπι γῆς, as I do here along with G.N. Bernardakis<sup>11</sup>, A. Barigazzi<sup>12</sup> and M. Valverde Sánchez in his translation<sup>13</sup>. A.J. Kronenberg's emendation ἐπίσης ('equally'), however, has now become generally accepted<sup>14</sup>. Barigazzi states that '[a] prima vista la correzione [sc. to ἐπίσης] sembra imporsi', while I even fail to see the problem with the reading of the manuscripts. Although I follow his reading, I differ very slightly from Barigazzi in the interpretation of the passage. He defends ἐπι γῆς 'perché suggerisce il cammino che si percorre, secondo Plutarco, sotto la guida di Eros, dalle cose belle sulla terra verso gli intellegibili del mondo iperuranio'. However, the procession from the sensible to the intelligible will only become relevant later in the comparison (764d-e) and it is not necessary to import this further development here in order to make sense of the passage. The opposition between the sun and ἔρωσ explored here is an opposition which plays out squarely in the sensible world and is quite trivial (like the examples given just before this passage, 764b-c): on earth the sun illuminates both beautiful and ugly, whereas the lover will be focussed on the beautiful on earth. The later opposition between the sun as guide towards the sensible and Eros as guide towards the intelligible has not yet come into play here<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> M. MANFREDINI, 1976 offers the most extensive discussion of the (uncertain) relation between these two manuscripts.

<sup>11</sup> G.N. BERNARDAKIS, 1892.

<sup>12</sup> A. BARIGAZZI, 1986, 245.

<sup>13</sup> M. VALVERDE SÁNCHEZ – H. RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS – C. ALCALDE MARTÍN, 2003, 98.

<sup>14</sup> A.J. KRONENBERG, 1924, 88 is followed by Teubner; Budé; Loeb; W. SIEVEKING, 1940, 134; D. RUSSELL, 1993; G.N. BERNARDAKIS – P.D. BERNARDAKIS – H.G. INGENKAMP, 2011; H. GÖRGEMANN, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> The difference between the two oppositions becomes clear if we look at the persuasive effects of ἔρωσ and the sun in both instances. In the passage under discussion ἔρωσ persuades (ἀναπείθει) us to look at and turn to

### 3. *Dialogue on Love 764e*

ἀποστρέφει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ τὴν διάνοιαν, χάριτι καὶ λαμπρότητι τῆς ὄψεως γοητεύων καὶ ἀναπειθῶν ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν αἰτεῖσθαι τὰ τ' ἄλλα καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐτέρωθι δὲ μηθέν· (Teubner ed. modified [underlined])

For it is the sun that turns our attention from intelligibles to sensibles, bewitching it by the charm and brilliance of vision, and urging it to seek truth and everything else in her or in her realm, and not in any other place. (Loeb tr. modified)

The verb αἰτεῖσθαι, which is the reading of the manuscripts, is generally regarded as corrupt<sup>16</sup>. Following G.N. Bernardakis<sup>17</sup> and the Budé edition, which keep αἰτεῖσθαι, I would disagree. If the reason is that the exact expression does not occur elsewhere and that αἰτεῖσθαι is used rather freely, then it should be noted that in these pages of the *Dialogue on Love* Plutarch often resorts to creative language, even to the extent of using *hapax legomena* – not unlike Plato in Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus* (244a-257b). An unfamiliar construction or a not quite straightforward meaning alone are surely no reasons for emendation. The Budé keeps αἰτεῖσθαι, translating '[le soleil] tâche à nous persuader de ne chercher qu'en lui et autour de lui la vérité et tous les autres biens, sans jamais nous adresser ailleurs'<sup>18</sup>. There is no need, however, to make 'nous' the subject of αἰτεῖσθαι: Plutarch is still talking about the διάνοια (ἔοικε [...] φαρμάττειν τὴν διάνοιαν ὁ ἥλιος, 764f), as D. Russell's translation rightly suggests<sup>19</sup>. The generally accepted conjecture (κεῖσθαι) obscures this.

### 4. *Dialogue on Love 770a-b*

καὶ γὰρ ὁ νόμος βοηθεῖ καὶ γεννήσεως κοινῆς ≤οὔσης> καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς Ἔρωτος ἢ φύσις ἀποδείκνυσι δεομένους. οὕτω γὰρ ἔρᾶν μὲν ὄμβρου γαῖαν' οἱ ποιηταὶ λέγουσι καὶ γῆς οὐρανόν, ἐρᾶν δ' ἥλιον σελήνης οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ συγγίνεσθαι καὶ κνεῖσθαι· καὶ γῆν δ' ἀνθρώπων μητέρα καὶ ζώων καὶ φυτῶν ἀπάντων γένεσιν οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον ἀπολέσθαι ποτὲ καὶ σβεσθῆναι παντάπασι, ὅταν ὁ δεινὸς ἔρωσ ἢ μέρος τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ὕλην ἀπολίπη καὶ παύσεται ποθοῦσα καὶ διώκουσα τὴν ἐκεῖθεν ἀρχὴν καὶ κίνησιν; (Teubner ed. modified [underlined])

The law, in fact, assists since procreation too is a shared undertaking; and nature shows that the gods need eros. It is in this sense, then, that the poets say that 'the earth loves rain' [Eur., fr. 898.7 *TrGF*] and that heaven loves earth; and in this sense, too, natural philosophers assert that the sun loves the moon and that they unite and that she

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(στρέφεσθαι) beauty *on earth*. In the later, more Platonically coloured development (see next exegetical note) it is the sun which persuades (ἀναπειθῶν, 764e) our διάνοια to look for truth on earth and turns it towards this earthly beauty (ἀποστρέφει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ), while Eros does the opposite this time.

<sup>16</sup> The Teubner edition places a *crux*. D. WYTTEBACH, 1797, 65 suggested reading αἰωρεῖσθαι, κείσθαι (which was adopted in the Loeb edition, as well as in W. SIEVEKING, 1940, 136 and H. GÖRGEMANN, 2011) or διαιτᾶσθαι.

<sup>17</sup> G.N. BERNARDAKIS, 1892; G.N. BERNARDAKIS – P.D. BERNARDAKIS – H.G. INGENKAMP, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also M. VALVERDE SÁNCHEZ – H. RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS – C. ALCALDE MARTÍN, 2003, 99: 'induciéndonos a buscar en él y en torno a él la verdad y lo demás, y a no buscar nada en otra parte'.

<sup>19</sup> D. RUSSELL, 1993, 272.

conceives. And since earth is the mother of all men and a source of generation for all beasts and plants, will she not be destined to perish at some time or other and be completely extinguished if ever the mighty Eros or a part of the god abandons matter and if ever she stops longing for and pursuing the principle of her motion which derives from that source? (Loeb tr. modified)

(1) The two manuscripts read γεννήσεως κοινής<sup>20</sup>. The text does not seem to be intelligible without addition. Therefore, I adopt A. Barigazzi's conjecture <οὔσης>, which is also printed by H. Görgemanns. As Barigazzi points out, γεννήσεως κοινής <οὔσης> is more readily explained as a haplography than other proposals which boil down to the same meaning<sup>21</sup>. However, I depart from Barigazzi and Görgemanns by reading γεννήσεως κοινής <οὔσης> with ὁ νόμος βοηθεῖ instead of with the following clause<sup>22</sup>. Just stating that 'the law assists' without giving any further information seems abrupt and a bit unclear. Greek legal concern with procreation within marriage is well documented, both in Plutarch and elsewhere<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, only this reading places the passage in the context of Plutarch's description of the ideal marriage as a mutual endeavour (769e-770a).

(2) For ἐρᾶν δ' ἥλιον σελήνης οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ συγγίνεσθαι καὶ κυεῖσθαι (the reading of one of the manuscripts<sup>24</sup>), which is adopted in the Loeb and Budé editions, some editors accept J.J. Reiske's emendation ἐρᾶν δ' ἡλίου σελήνην, thus switching subject and object<sup>25</sup>. Reiske's argument 'κυεῖσθαι de sole nequit dici' (in the Teubner apparatus) seems compelling: κυέω (LSJ: 'bear in the womb, be pregnant with [...] [m]ed., bring forth [...] abs., to be big or pregnant') cannot be said of a male subject<sup>26</sup>; the passive is only said 'of the embryo or foetus' (LSJ)<sup>27</sup>. Agreeing with this argument but resisting the ensuing conjecture, I suggest

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<sup>20</sup> M. VALVERDE SÁNCHEZ – H. RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS – C. ALCALDE MARTÍN, 2003, 118 retains the reading of the manuscripts (which is also printed by G.N. BERNARDAKIS, 1892), interpreting γεννήσεως κοινής along with Ἔρωτος as an object of δεομένων (cf. also D. WYTTEBACH, 1797, 86). This, however, would make for an odd word order. D. RUSSELL, 1993, 281 suggests a lacuna; G.N. BERNARDAKIS – P.D. BERNARDAKIS – H.G. INGENKAMP, 2011 suspects a gloss.

<sup>21</sup> A. BARIGAZZI, 1986, 262. The Teubner, Budé, and Loeb editions add <ἔνεκα>; cf. also W. SIEVEKING, 1940, 162.

<sup>22</sup> The Loeb translation seems to take the two word groups together but translates rather freely: 'The law, in fact, assists Eros in bringing about procreation in all societies (γεννήσεως κοινής <ἔνεκα>)'.

<sup>23</sup> In *On Affection for Offspring* 493e Plutarch mentions various legal sanctions against childlessness. For passages in other authors see K. PRAECHTER, 1901, 144. The marital function of procreation is particularly important in the (Middle-)Stoic conception of the city; see e.g. I. RAMELLI, 2009, 120. For the use of this argument in rhetoric see, e.g., Libanius' *Whether one should marry* 9-12.

<sup>24</sup> This is the reading of E. B, the other manuscript, has ἥλιον δὲ σελήνης, adopted by D. WYTTEBACH, 1797, 86.

<sup>25</sup> Reiske is followed by G.N. BERNARDAKIS, 1892; W. SIEVEKING, 1940, 162; H. GÖRGEMANN, 2011; G.N. BERNARDAKIS – P.D. BERNARDAKIS – H.G. INGENKAMP, 2011, and by the current Teubner edition.

<sup>26</sup> A notable exception is Plato's use at *Symp.* 206c, where metaphorical pregnancy is extended to include males (πάντες κυοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι). See G. VLASTOS, 1981, 21 n. 59. Cf. also D.D. LEITAO, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Pace M. VALVERDE SÁNCHEZ – H. RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS – C. ALCALDE MARTÍN, 2003: 118: 'el Sol ama a la Luna y se une a ella y la fecunda'; cf. D. WYTTEBACH, 1797, 86.

that the subject changes twice: the subject of ἐρᾶν is the sun, the subject of συγγίγνεσθαι are both the sun and the moon<sup>28</sup>, the subject of κνεῖσθαι is, indeed, the moon<sup>29</sup>. This once again ties in with the emphasis on reciprocity<sup>30</sup>. The abrupt change of subject is rather fitting given the context. It occurs again (and this time with certainty) in the next example: ἀπολίπη καὶ παύσεται – the subject of the first verb is the male principle (akin to the sun), while the subject of the second verb is the female principle (akin to the moon).

(3) Instead of the manuscripts' μέρος, editors have unanimously printed H. Stephanus' 1572 emendation ἕμερος. I wonder whether this is as compelling as it seems. After all, in the *Platonic Questions* (2.1001c) Plutarch has no problem with calling the rational part of the world soul a τοῦ θεοῦ [...] μέρος. Although the context of the passage under discussion is obviously less technical, it is not a stretch to suspect that Plutarch is thinking along the same lines here. The god Eros, who plays the role of Platonic demiurge in the *Dialogue on Love* (esp. 756d-f), is somehow present in matter while remaining a divinity. Through his presence he provides ἀρχὴ καὶ κίνησις, which is indeed what the world soul does (cf. e.g. *De an. procr.* 1024c-e). In this regard, Eros can be compared to Osiris, who is the demiurgic figure in *On Isis and Osiris* (cf. esp. 374b-c, where Osiris' identification with the demiurgic Eros is brought to the fore). Isis, who is associated with matter (cf. 382c), is the one who desires and pursues Osiris (ποθοῦσαν καὶ διώκουσαν, 371a; cf. 374f-375a), who as a demiurgic divinity is also present in matter through his efflux, which constitutes the rational part of the world soul (371a-b). Similarly, matter in the *Dialogue on Love* desires and pursues (ποθοῦσα καὶ διώκουσα) Eros, of whom a part (μέρος) is present in matter. On this interpretation, which ties in with Plutarch's general views on cosmology, it makes sense to read the manuscripts' μέρος instead of the rather redundant conjecture ἕμερος.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Amat.* 765c for a similarly abrupt shift in subject involving the same verb: οὐκ ἂν εἴη πολὺς χρόνος, ἐν ᾧ τό τε σῶμα τὸ τῶν ἐρωμένων παρελθόντες ἔσω φέρονται καὶ ἄπτονται τοῦ ἥθους, † ἐκκαλούμενος τὰς ὄψεις καθορῶσι καὶ συγγίνονται διὰ λόγων πολλὰ καὶ πράξεων ἀλλήλοις. The ἐρασταί are the subject of the first three main verbs (φέρονται, ἄπτονται, καθορῶσι). The word ἀλλήλοις makes it clear that the subject of συγγίνονται are both the ἐρασταί and the ἐρώμενοι. Cf. G. PASQUAL, 1997, 218. (On the *crux* in this passage, which does not affect the argument here, see A. BARIGAZZI, 1986, 249–250; H. GÖRGEMANNS, 2011, 180 n. 330.)

<sup>29</sup> Similarly, A. BARIGAZZI, 1986, 262 keeps the texts of the manuscripts on the argument that 'il soggetto dei due infiniti non è espresso'. However, instead of assigning subjects, he considers the infinitives to be generic (translating 'e avviene che ci sono unioni e gravidanze'); cf. D. RUSSELL, 1993, 281 ('the sun is in love with the moon and joins with him, and conception follows'). This is possible, but it draws away from the point Plutarch is making here: love is reciprocal.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *De Is. et Os.* (e.g. 356a, 372d-f), where mutual love between Osiris (the demiurgic figure akin to the sun) and Isis (the matter-like figure akin to the moon) drives the cosmos. Cf. also my next remark *sub* 3.

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