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OS FRAGMENTOS DE PLUTARCO

e a recepção da sua obra



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PLUTARCH'S ANGER IN AULLUS GELLIUS, NOCTES ATTICAE, I, 26

INTRODUCTION

[1.] The question if man is violent and aggressive by nature divides the scientists till this very day. Some sociobiologists, founding their conclusions on experiments with animals and then extrapolating them, would eagerly subscribe to the maxim “homo homini lupus”: evolution would have engraved into our genes the tendency towards violence and rage. On the other hand, some adherants of comparative psychology, studying human societies, would argue that circumstances are impelling aggression on a nature that is essentially peaceful.

The question is not without importance, for, in function of the solution which one adheres to, that is in function of one's view of the human ἦθος, one will propose divergent projects as to its παιδεία, and one will try to influence the individual and society in different, if not opposing manners. If man is peaceful by nature, it suffices to create the circumstances in which this natural goodness will flourish. If he is aggressive by nature, repressive measures must be taken in order to secure society.

In view of the importance and the implications of the question, it is not surprising that the Ancients occupied themselves with the question of aggression and rage, if only because — if one follows a recent study on Seneca¹ — rage was so frequent and impressive in their Mediterranean region!

¹ J. Fillion – Lahille, *Le De Ira de Sénèque et la philosophie stoïcienne des passions*, Paris, 1984, p. 8. A short overview of the Ancients' reflection on anger can be found in the same volume (p. 17-28) and in R. Laurenti – G. Indelli, Plutarco. *Sul controllo dell'ira. Introduzione*,

Be that as it may, the Ancients as well referred to the animals to argue their case. They as well associated with their observations on animals different opinions on human nature².

Stoics denied the animals any rationality: that is the privilege of man. Man's παιδεία therefore consists in cultivating this rationality as the only road to virtue and — according to Chrysippus — as the sole means to get rid of the passions, like rage, passions which, for that matter, are but false judgements.

Concerning the evaluation of anger, the Stoics thus disagreed with Plato, *Rep.* 411b, who had required a certain amount of θυμός as a condition for bravery³.

The Peripatetics on the other hand, regarded passions as the necessary basis for virtues, which are (but) excellent μεσότητες of the passions. In this case, human culture consists in exercising the passions, like rage, and to bring them to 'excellence'.

[2.] Plutarch of Chaeronea was well acquainted with the Classical and Hellenistic philosophical literature on anger. He used it extensively when, after 92/93⁴, he wrote his dialogue Περὶ ἀοργησίας⁵ (and an essay Περὶ ὀργῆς [Lamprias catalogue n° 93], of which only a fragment survives). In that dialogue, the main character, viz. Fundanus, narrates how he healed himself of the passion of anger, and notably (in § 11) how he became able to punish his slaves without being angry. In general, the dialogue can be

testo critico, traduzione e commento (Corpus Plutarchi Moraliū), Napoli, 1988, p. 7-18.

² One should, however, keep in mind that "the idea of innate aggressiveness is very rare in ancient texts": M.C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Princeton, 1994, p. 411, n. 19.

³ Cf. T. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives. Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford, 1999, p. 211.

⁴ See C.P. Jones, "Towards a Chronology of Plutarch's Works", *JRS* 56 (1966), p. 61.

⁵ Source criticism of *De cohibenda ira*: M. Pohlenz, "Über Plutarchs Schrift ΠΕΡΙ ΑΟΡΓΗΣΙΑΣ", *Hermes* 31 (1896), p. 321-338; A. Schlemm, "Über die Quellen der Plutarchischen Schrift ΠΕΡΙ ΑΟΡΓΗΣΙΑΣ", *Hermes* 38 (1903), p. 587-607; H. Ringeltaube, *Quaestiones ad veterum philosophorum de affectibus doctrinam pertinentes*, Diss. inaug. Gottingae, 1913; P. Rabbow, *Antike Schriften über Seelenheilung und Seelenleitung auf Ihre Quellen untersucht. I. Die Therapie des Zorns*. Leipzig – Berlin, 1914.

regarded as an eulogy on πραότης⁶.

Now there is an interesting anecdote in Aullus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, I, 26, where Plutarch himself is described in the very act of punishing a slave: Gellius remembers that Taurus once narrated that story. The passage naturally invites for a comparison of Plutarch's 'theory', as expounded in *De cohibenda ira* and elsewhere, and his praxis.

Before this problem can be tackled, some chronology must be brought up. Aullus Gellius was born between 125 and 130 A.D. He visited Greece in 147/8⁷, being between 17 and 22 years old. There is the origin of the scholarship Gellius will exhibit in his *Noctes Atticae*, a work started in Athens but finished (in its present state) towards 158 A.D.⁸ Among his teachers in Athens was Lucius Calvenus Taurus, a Platonist whose *floruit* is placed by Eusebius in 145 A.D.⁹ Now in the passage of Gellius, Taurus calls Plutarch '*Plutarchus noster*'. Whether this '*noster*' is understood as pointing to some degree of familiarity between Taurus and Plutarch¹⁰, or rather as pointing to a relation of master-pupil¹¹, Taurus, if born ca. 100 A.D., can have known Plutarch when he himself was about 20 and Plutarch about 80 to 85, that is: at about 120 A.D. In other words: from a chronological point of view, there is no reason to consider the implied transmission of the anecdote impossible: Taurus can have been an eyewitness at about 120 A.D.; he can have told the story to Gellius in 147.

The question, however, if things actually took place as implied in Gellius' report — and thus: if Taurus' story about Plutarch is historically true —, is another matter. But my question will not be so much about ἂν ἐγένετο but: οἷα ἂν γένοιτο: is the story about Plutarch plausible?

⁶ J. de Romilly, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque*, Paris, 1979 p. 296, and cf. L. Van der Stockt, "Odysseus in Rome. On Plutarch's introduction to *De cohibenda ira*", in *Ploutarchos* (forthcoming).

⁷ H. Krasser, "Gellius. 5" in *DNP* 4, Stuttgart – Weimar, 1998, col. 896.

⁸ Cf. R. Marache, *Aulu-Gelle. Les Nuits Attiques. Livre I-IV* (*Collection des Universités de France*), Paris, 1967, p. XII.

⁹ J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London, 1977, p. 237.

¹⁰ Cf. J. Dillon, *o.c.*, p. 237.

¹¹ As in the translation of Rolfe, see n. 12.

2. PLUTARCH IN ACTION: AULLUS GELLIUS, *NOCTES ATTICAE*, I, 26

Aullus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, I, 26 (the subdivisions are mine) runs as follows¹²:

(A) *“I once asked Taurus in his lecture-room whether a wise man got angry. For after his daily discourses he often gave everyone the opportunity of asking whatever questions he wished.*

(B) *On this occasion he first discussed the disease or passion of anger seriously and at length, setting forth what is to be found in the books of the ancients and in his own commentaries; then, turning to me who asked the question, he said: “This is what I think about getting angry, but it will not be out of place for you to hear also the opinion of my master Plutarch, a man of great learning and wisdom.”*

(C) *“Plutarch”, said he, “once gave orders that one of his slaves, a worthless and insolent fellow, but one whose ears had been filled with the teachings and arguments of philosophy, should be stripped of his tunic for some offence or other and flogged. They had begun to beat him, and the slave kept protesting that he did not deserve the flogging; that he was guilty of no wrong, no crime. Finally, while the lashing still went on, he began to shout, no longer uttering complaints or shrieks and groans, but serious reproaches. Plutarch’s conduct, he said, was unworthy of a philosopher; to be angry was shameful: Plutarch had often discanted on the evil of anger and had even written an excellent treatise Περὶ ἀπορησίας; it was in no way consistent with all that was written in that book that its author should fall into a fit of violent rage and punish his slave with many stripes. Then Plutarch calmly and mildly made answer: What makes you think, scoundrel, that I am now angry with you? Is it from my expression, my voice, my colour, or even my words, that you believe me to be in the grasp of anger? In my opinion my eyes are not fierce, my expression is not disturbed, I am neither shouting madly nor foaming at the mouth and getting red in the face; I am saying nothing to cause me shame or regret; I am not trembling at all from anger or making violent gestures. For all these actions, if you did but know it, are the usual signs of angry passion. And with these words, turning to the man who was plying the lash, he said: In the meantime, while this fellow and I are arguing, do you keep at it.”*

¹² I reproduce the translation of J.C. Rolfe, *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius. I (The Loeb Classical Library)*, Cambridge (Mass.) – London, 1961, p. 115-119.

(D) Now the sum and substance of Taurus' whole disquisition was this: he did not believe that ἀοργησία or "freedom from anger", and ἀναληγσία, or "lack of sensibility" were identical; but that a mind not prone to anger was one thing, a spirit ἀνάληγτος and ἀναίσθητος, that is, callous and unfeeling, quite another. For as of all the rest of the emotions which the Latin philosophers call affectus or affectiones, and the Greek πάθη, so of the one which, when it becomes a cruel desire for vengeance, is called "anger", he did not recommend as expedient a total lack, στέρησις as the Greeks say, but a moderate amount, which they call μετριότης.

What we have here, presents itself as one of Gellius' ἀπομνημονεύματα or *memorabilia*: he reports a lesson of his master. There is no reason to have doubts about the authenticity of the reported situation (A), Taurus giving a talk (*lectio*) and then allowing his pupils to ask questions. By the way: Gellius seems to follow the advice of Plutarch, according to whom (*De audiendo* 43C) one should have the good sense of asking the master questions in a matter in which he is fairly competent¹³. Taurus has indeed written 'commentaries' on the subject of anger.

Taurus' answer to the question was a formal discussion¹⁴ "on the disease or passion of anger, setting forth what is to be found in the books of the ancients and in his own commentaries" (B). The doctrine Taurus expounded in his answer will be summarized in (D). Gellius was clearly especially intrigued and amused¹⁵ by the illustration Taurus had added to his discussion, and so, he tells the anecdote first (C).

The anecdote is a χρεία μικτάκ¹⁶: it reports an action which is supposed to have semantic value in itself, and which is accompanied by a dictum.

¹³ Cf. M. Schuster, *Untersuchungen zu Plutarchs Dialog De sollertia animalium mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lehrtätigkeit Plutarchs*, Diss. Augsburg, 1917, p. 32.

¹⁴ "Cum ... disseruisset"; I disagree with R. Marache, *o.c.*, p. 76, n. 1: "... Taurus ne fait que donner une chrie de Plutarque".

¹⁵ "Graviter disseruisset" may well be also an indication of the way Gellius appreciated Taurus' exposition: a *serious* discussion in opposition to an *amusing* anecdote.

¹⁶ Cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1990³, p. 539, § 1119.

The *χρεία* calls for laughter: we refuse to identify with the characters and the procedure of a scene that seems to spring from comedy. The learned and didactic slave thinks he can afford to rebuke his master, although he is in no position at all to take on this superior attitude. His detachment from his pain, allowing him to comment on the procedure, is hilarious. The master, accused of inconsistency, gives a little lecture on serenity whilst he indulges in a severe punishment. He seems to take no notice at all of the fact that he inflicts pain to a human being.

This sketch thus reveals the comic technique of juxtaposing opposite images¹⁷ (violence — serenity, theory — praxis, physical pain — intellectual game) in order to unmask the situation and the characters as ‘exposure and pretence’ and thus to produce the effect proper to comedy: laughter. As such, the *χρεία* seems to be too designed and constructed to be historical. It recalls, for that matter, some other stories like the one about Epictetus (Origenes c. Celsum, chapter 7, section 53), who was once punished by his master. The master bended Epictetus’ leg, whereupon Epictetus smiled and said: “You will break it”. And when indeed the leg was broken, he said: “Didn’t I tell You You would break it?”; or the one about Zeno (SVF I, 298): when he lashed a slave because the slave had stolen something, the slave said: “It is my fate to steal”; and Zeno continued: “and to be skinned”.

But apart from that and more importantly: how could the anecdote about Plutarch be even plausible? The image of a Plutarch ‘not being angry’, but ... ‘merely cruel (?)’¹⁸, contrasts sharply with the generally accepted picture of a gentle, philanthropic, compassionate Plutarch, doesn’t it? Yet some commentators are inclined to take into consideration if not the authenticity¹⁹, then at least the plausibility²⁰ of this story, because it would

¹⁷ For this view on comedy and the comic techniques, see O. Rommel, “Die wissenschaftlichen Bemühungen um die Analyse des Komsichen”, in R. Grimm – K. Berghann, *Wesen und Formen des Komischen im Drama (Wege der Forschung, 62)*, Darmstadt, 1975, p. 4.

¹⁸ W.V. Harris, *Restraining rage. The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge (Mass.) – London, 2001, p. 65-66 calls the story repulsive.

¹⁹ O. Gréard, *De la morale de Plutarque*, Paris, 1885, p. 116: “l’authenticité ... ne me paraît pas inadmissible”.

²⁰ See e.g. L. Holford-Stevens, *Aulus Gellius*, London, 1988, p. 211, n. 96.

not contradict in any way the ideas about anger Plutarch expounded in his dialogue *De cohibenda ira*. Before checking this assessment, we'll first look at what the anecdote is supposed to illustrate: the doctrine of Taurus, of which Gellius only summarizes the essence (*summa*).

3. TAURUS' DOCTRINE, AS REPORTED BY GELLIUS

The answer to the question "Does a wise man get angry?" was, of course: "No; he strives for ἀοργησία". The fact that Taurus defines this ἀοργησία by opposing it to ἀναλγησία-ἀναισθησία suggests that he was aware of a possible misunderstanding: the 'freedom from anger' (*non iracundus animus*) should not be confounded with 'insensibility and dullness' (*animus hebes et stupens*). I take it that the Latin word *animus* is Gellius' translation of the Greek θυμός²¹.

The difference is explained in what follows (*nam*). The *affectus*, *affectiones*, πάθη, or *motus animi* (the word *motus* probably being Gellius' translation of ὄρμη or κίνησις) are not to be done away with: to be deprived of them (*privatio*, στέρησις) is not useful; it is useful to moderate them (*mediocritas*, μετριότης). Taurus' doctrine is certainly not Stoic, but it remains to be seen if he expounds Peripatetic doctrine: do we have to understand μετριότης as an Aristotelian-Peripatetic technical term, referring to the ideal mean between two vices (only one vice is mentioned!), or simply as 'moderation', a quality pointing to the fact that the impulse of the θυμός is restrained or controlled? Still, the focus on the usefulness of passions reminds one of the Peripatetics, who tried to upgrade the importance of passions in the moral praxis²².

²¹ See, e.g. C. Grimm, *Lexicon Graeco-latinum*, Leipzig, 1903, p. 204 and J. Scapulae, *Lexicon Graeco-latinum*, Oxford, 1820, col. 621. For the meaning of this *animus*/θυμός, I refer to P. Grimal, "Le vocabulaire de l'interiorité dans l'œuvre de Sénèque", in *La langue latine. Langue de la Philosophie (Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome, 161)*, Rome, p. 147: "Il est le lieu des intentions, de la colère, de la volonté, de tout ce qui, dans l'esprit, est "dynamique" et relève des réactions spontanés de l'être, d'un choix passionnel, plus que de la raison."

²² Cf. F. Becchi, "La nozione di ΟΡΓΗ e di ΑΟΡΓΗΣΙΑ in Aristotele e in Plutarco", *Prometheus* 16 (1990), p. 78.

This view on *affectus*, *affectiones*, πάθη, or *motus animi* in general is applied to a specific *motus*, viz. the *motus* which, “when it becomes a rather cruel (*saevior*) reason for vengeance, is called *ira*” (that is: ὀργή). Notice that *ira* is not to be equated with the *motus*, but that *ira* is a (gradual: the comparative *saevior*) qualification of the *motus*. This distinction as well, sounds Peripatetic. And it might well be that we discovered the second vice in the adjective *saevior*, viz. ὠμότης.

Now Taurus may well have read the possible misunderstanding of the notion of ἀοργησία in his pupil’s eyes, but he certainly also read about it “in the books of the ancients” (*in veterum libris*). Plutarch’s *De virtute morali* was most probably one of them. In 445A, Plutarch calls ‘gentleness’ (πραότης) the mean between insensibility (ἀναλγησία) and cruelty (ὠμότης); he is very Aristotelian in this matter²³. Taurus replaces the (in the context of *De virt. mor.* Aristotelian) term πραότης by the term in the title of Plutarch’s dialogue, nl. ἀοργησία; but in general, his doctrine is in agreement with Plutarch’s²⁴.

4. THE QUESTION OF CONSISTENCY

Let’s return now to the χρεία about Plutarch. Is Plutarch’s praxis, as Gellius depicts it, compatible with Plutarch’s views in *De cohibenda ira*?

[1.] In itself, we shouldn’t make too much of the somatic signs of anger Plutarch is talking about: the fierceness of the eyes, the trembling, the pale colour, etc. Those are universally perceptible and topical²⁵ *signa furoris*. But since the slave mentions Plutarch’s dialogue *De cohibenda ira* explicitly, they are most probably a reference to *De cohibenda ira* 455E-F, where Fundanus tells us what was the point of departure for his self-therapy.

“I observed that those who are transported by anger also change most in countenance, colour, gait and voice, and thus formed for

²³ On this passage, see D. Babut, *Plutarque. De la vertue éthique*, Paris, 1969, p. 68-69 and p. 154.

²⁴ Cf. J. Dillon, *o.c.*, p. 242.

²⁵ Cf. Seneca, *De Ira II*, 35, 1-2.

myself a picture of that passion and was exceedingly uncomfortable to think that I should ever appear so terrible and deranged to my friends and my wife and daughters etc.”

Plutarch in the anecdote points out that he doesn't show these symptoms, and, consequently, that he is not angry. In fact he speaks *lente et leniter* (the Greek would be something like ἡσυχῶς καὶ πράως). Fundanus in the dialogue ends his remarks on the somatic signs of anger with the observation that “there is nothing more dignified, if one is angry, than holding one's peace” (456E: ἐν ὀργῇ δὲ σεμνότερον οὐδὲν ἡσυχίας). Even if the latter statement implies that one is indeed angry, it is clear that Plutarch in the anecdote would claim to practice the πραότης and ἡσυχία that are propagated in the dialogue.

[2.] But does this ‘serenity’ allow for the infliction of the kind of punishment we witness in Aullus Gellius?

It sure does, as §11 of *De cohibenda ira* makes it clear. There, Fundanus makes three observations on punishing and anger: the first is actually an advice not to punish, the second to prevent the need for punishing. It is the third advice (459DE) that is of interest to us here:

“I always keep in mind ... that he who taught us the use of the bow did not forbid us to shoot, but only to miss the mark, and that the infliction of punishment will not be hindered by our teaching how to inflict it at the right time, with moderation, and in a useful and suitable manner (εὐκαίρως τοῦτο ποιεῖν καὶ μετρίως καὶ ὠφελίμως καὶ πρεπόντως); ...I try to get rid of my anger especially by not depriving those who are to be punished to speak in their defence, and by listening to their plea. For ... the judgement discovers a suitable manner of punishment and an adequate amount (τρόπον πρέποντα καὶ μέγεθος ἀρόπτου). Furthermore, the man who suffers punishment has no pretext left for opposing the correction if punishment is inflicted, not in anger, but after the accused has been proved guilty; and finally, the most shameful thing is avoided — that the slave should seem to be making a juster plea than his master.”

There is no doubt that Plutarch in the anecdote meets these

conditions. The slave is guilty, or, at least, Taurus leaves no doubt about that: the man is a worthless and arrogant fellow (*nequam homo et contumax*), he committed ‘some offence or other’ (*ob nescio quod delictum*; Taurus invites his pupils to accept this without further ado) and Plutarch flatly calls him a scoundrel (*verbero*). There seems to be no room for any qualification: the portrait is, in a way that is characteristic of comedy, rather caricatural — Plutarch is, of course, “a man of great learning and wisdom” (*vir doctissimus ac prudentissimus*). Furthermore, the slave is given the opportunity to plea in his own defence. But here as well, caricature is not far away: the slave is allowed to plea whilst he is already punished, his argument is weakened by a sneering commentary (“whose ear had been filled with the teachings and arguments of philosophy”) and ridiculed by the noncommittal attitude — without anger — of Plutarch (the punishment goes on during the discussion). Finally, we are supposed to accept that Plutarch inflicted the punishment in the right way, suitably, to the proper degree etc.

So Plutarch’s conduct in Gellius is compatible with the ‘teaching’ in *De cohibenda ira*. But we still do not identify with it. And that is probably because another important aspect of the story still has to be brought up: the question of cruelty.

5. THE QUESTION OF CRUELTY

By this time we are able to observe in what terms the ancients would raise the question of cruelty, and, that Taurus’ answer to Gellius did not intend to address that particular question.

Indeed, Taurus must have understood Gellius’ question somewhat as follows: “Does the wise man have the guts to be angry? Isn’t he too much washed out? Doesn’t the operation of an ever controlling reason make him incapable of energetic action?” That is also the concern of Sulla, when he says to Fundanus:

“...it is evident that the spirited part of your soul is not withering away through any abatement of vigour caused by old age, nor yet spontaneously...” (453B),

and it would be the kind of objection Fundanus refers to, when he men-

tions “the philosophers, who are said by fools to have no bile” (457D). The wise man would show a flegmatic lack of reactive response to the world and the people around him. He would be so unmoved that he is no longer capable of being affected by the world outside him, and so callous and unfeeling that he wouldn't claim what rightly belongs to him.

On the other hand, Plutarch-Taurus-Gellius would not think of cruelty as testifying to a lack of feeling, but to a lack of control and restraint by reason, so much so that the temper explodes in violent action. The misunderstanding about cruelty, being a correlate of anger, is that it would be μεγαλουργία (456F), the performing of great (and impressive) deeds, whilst in fact it only reveals lack of reason.

The scheme of the qualities involved would be this one:

A priori, Plutarch in the anecdote cannot be cruel: since cruelty is a correlate of anger (at least in *De cohibenda ira*), and since Plutarch isn't angry, he is not cruel. But let us check this *a priori*.

If it is cruel to punish without a reason, then we must recall that the slave deserved his punishment *ob nescio quod delictum*. We don't get any more information about the crime, but we must assume that Plutarch punished for a good reason and in order to correct the slave. That makes Plutarch a μισοπόνηρος, not a cruel person²⁶.

If it is cruel to punish beyond measure, at the wrong time, in the wrong way, then Plutarch cannot be charged with cruelty, simply because

²⁶ For the distinction μισοποιηρία - ὀμότης, see *De ad. et am.* 56 DE.

we get no information about the nature of the crime, its motives and its circumstances. The anecdote, as we saw, is not interested in offering this kind of information. The result is a one-sided and somewhat caricatural picture (cf. *supra*).

If it is cruel to punish and to enjoy punishing, Plutarch goes free. The anecdote gives no information about Plutarch enjoying the infliction of punishment, nor is it its concern to give that kind of information. The same goes, for that matter, for the absence of the demonstration of any 'kind' feeling — like compassion — on the part of Plutarch (in the anecdote²⁷).

Now if there is no reason to charge Plutarch with cruelty, why do we feel uneasy, why do we smile and distance ourselves? Perhaps it has to do with precisely the absence of the demonstration of *any* emotion during the whole process of punishing, and more specifically with an apparent lack of empathy on the part of Plutarch. The therapy of anger is undertaken from a largely self-centered perspective. Anger disgraces and ridicules the angry man, as Fundanus observes several times in §6 of *De cohibenda ira*, and as the slave objects to Plutarch (*irasci turpe est*). Moreover, its very cause has to do with the perception of a despised self, as Fundanus states in what comes close to an Aristotelian definition of anger²⁸:

“I observed that different persons are liable to anger from different causes; yet in the case of practically all of them there is present a belief that they are being despised or neglected (460D)”,
and a desire to take angry vengeance will follow.

And another observation is made somewhat later:

“Furthermore it is especially selfishness and peevishness, together with luxury and softness, which beget in us those continuous or oft-recurring fits of anger (461A)”.

Anger occurs when we are disappointed in our investments. We invest

²⁷ Elsewhere, Plutarch shows philanthropic feelings towards slaves: see O. Gréard, *o.c.*, p. 117.

²⁸ Cf. R. Laurenti – G. Indelli, *o.c.*, p. 164-165, n. 116.

emotionally in, and make ourselves dependent on people and material goods. But this attachment makes us vulnerable and weak; frustration makes us prone to anger. Thus anger is a sign of weakness:

“For just as with the flesh a swelling results from a great blow, so with the weakest souls the inclination to inflict hurt produces a flaring up of temper as great as the soul's infirmity is great (457A; cf. 454C)”.

What we need, therefore, is to distance and to recollect ourselves, to be more self-sufficient, to be less deeply involved in mere externals. Frugality and a sound sense of reality will prevent us from becoming disappointed in humans (463B) and in affairs of daily life, in wealth and power. In the end, the advice comes to ‘emotional detachment’.

Still, there is evil and there are wrongdoers — the anecdote in Gellius stresses the wickedness of the slave. But even in punishing the wicked, our emotional involvement should be at a low pitch, because emotional attachment, or better: the bitterness and anger that result from its frustration, risk to pervert us:

“I came”, says Fundanus, “to perceive that, in the first place, it is better to make them (= the slaves) worse by forbearance than by harshness and anger to pervert my own self for the correction of others (459C)”.

I think we regard the (excessive) emotional detachment as inauthentic. It might well be that Plutarch, in his strenuous attack of anger as the worst of all passions, even as their culmination, moved up in the direction of the Stoics; it might also well be that the anecdote in Gellius has left nothing undone to depict serene punishment in its most extreme form. But precisely because of this, we get the feeling that on a fundamental level and *à la limite*, the mechanical operation of the punishment dehumanises the wrongdoer and the corrector. People are not rational machines.

The ‘serene punishment’ inflicts pain on another human being without any sign of compassion or sensitivity. Plutarch himself would of

course modify this appreciation. He would argue that he punished in due time, in due manner, in due spirit, in short, with a μετριότης defined by reason. But the merely rational calculus of the μέτρον of punishment — a necessary procedure in the administration of justice — leaves no room for compassion: it doesn't hear the cries of the one who is being corrected. Perhaps a certain lack of empathy is a correlate of self-centered ethics.