

# PLOUTARCHOS, n.s.

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Plutarchus



Plutarchus ein natürlicher maister vnd außsprichender geschichtschreiber. Er ein gepie-  
ter vñ anrichter des kaisers Traiani ist zu dieser zeit an seinem vnterthunigen vñ glaub-  
würdigkeit in fast großer achtung gewest. von dem Dolianates in sein vnterthunigen vñ glaub-  
Plutarchus der natürlich maister vnd in dem heiligthumb schen der sitten ein so vortrefflich als fest  
ten lautter vnterschied. vnd in dem heiligthumb schen der sitten ein so vortrefflich als fest  
gewest das er leichtlich ein gebieter des kaisers hat mögen erlangen. nemlich so des erweit-  
erung. vnd er hat als ein hochgelehrter man gar vil bücher von mancherley materie vnd  
sachen in Griechischem vnd Lateinischem gesung gar treffentlich beschriben vnd mit seiner  
kapffheit bey Traiano angenehme begabung erlangt.

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# Plutarch on Aristotle as the First Peripatetic<sup>1</sup>

by

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## Abstract

This contribution focuses on the question of what place Aristotle occupies in the history of Greek philosophy according to Plutarch. Rather than placing Aristotle in the Platonist or Pythagorean-Platonic tradition, Plutarch regards the Stagirite as the founder of the Peripatetic tradition. Although this philosophical tradition clearly differs from the Platonic one, it remains fairly close to Platonism, so that it can often function as Plutarch's privileged ally in his attacks against other schools.

**KEY-WORDS:** Plutarch, Aristotle Platonicus, Aristotle Pythagoricus, Aristotle Peripateticus

### 1. *Aristotle in Plutarch, or how to find a way out of the labyrinth*

Plutarch's position towards Aristotle has often been examined<sup>2</sup>. Both in the *Lives* and in the *Moralia*, the famous philosopher from Stageira is frequently introduced as a respected and authoritative source

in many different domains. Aristotle is not only referred to in the context of technical philosophical discussions but also quoted for ordinary anecdotes. His view on time, for instance, as measure or number of motion according to antecedent and subsequent (*Quaest. Plat.* 1007A) is rejected, whereas his story that Timon's grandmother every year used to hibernate

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<sup>2</sup> Good recent discussions (with further bibliography) can be found in D. BABUT, 1996; A. PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ & J. GARCÍA LÓPEZ & R.M. AGUILAR, 1999; and G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006.

for two months (*Quaest. conv.* 733C = fr. 43 Rose) is quoted with approval.

Unfortunately, Plutarch's ample use of Aristotle is not free from ambiguities and problems. Usually, his references to, and evaluations of Aristotle's position are fairly brief and directly related to a specific context, and nowhere, he provides a detailed and lengthy discussion of the Stagirite's philosophy. As far as we know, Plutarch never wrote *Quaestiones Aristotelicae*, and it is extremely doubtful whether he devoted any book length studies to (aspects of) Aristotle's works<sup>3</sup>. Several passages might *prima facie* suggest a good knowledge of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*<sup>4</sup>, but on closer inspection, there is only little cogent evidence that points to such thorough familiarity on Plutarch's part<sup>5</sup>. Often, he is rather critical of Aristotle's views. He disagrees, for instance, with the latter's doctrine of

νόησις νοήσεως<sup>6</sup> and with his theory of aether<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, he sometimes endorses and appropriates important aspects of the Aristotelian position. The classic example is to be found in *De virtute morali*, the Aristotelian flavour of which has often been underlined<sup>8</sup>.

In dealing with such problems, the commentator risks to get lost in an enormous and dark labyrinth, where different paths seem to lead in opposite directions, only to come to a dead end or – what is worse – to open out onto the monster of unfounded hypotheses. In this contribution, I would like to seek my own way out of this labyrinth, by focusing on a specific but important question, that is, *to what philosophical tradition Aristotle belongs according to Plutarch*. An answer to this crucial question may throw a new light on Plutarch's general attitude towards, and use of, the Stagirite. First of

<sup>3</sup> The Lamprias catalogue mentions studies on Aristotle's *Topics* (n. 56), on the *Ten Categories* (n. 192), and on the *Fifth Substance* (n. 44). See, however, F.H. SANDBACH, 1982, pp. 212 and 216-217; a less sceptical view can be found in D. BABUT, 1996, pp. 8-9 and G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 89 (with n. 15) and p. 338.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *Alex.* 7,5 (on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*); *De virt. mor.* 442BC (with G. VERBEKE, 1960); *Quaest. conv.* 616D; *Adv. Colot.* 1115A-C.

<sup>5</sup> In general, I side with the view of F.H. SANDBACH, 1982, esp. p. 230: "Plutarch or his sources knew of *Topica*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Historia Animalium*, *Rhetoric* III, and probably of *De Caelo* and *De Anima*. Direct acquaintance with the contents is certain only for *Historia Animalium* and *Rhetoric* III, both books for the use of which before his time there is some evidence"; cf. also P. DONINI, 1974, pp. 66-80.

<sup>6</sup> *De def. or.* 426D; see F. FERRARI, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> See G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, pp. 104-105.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., e.g., O. GRÉARD, 1885, p. 58: "C'est la pure doctrine d'Aristote; on ne saurait plus formellement se détacher de Platon"; more references can be found in D. BABUT, 1996, p. 2, n. 2.

all, however, I would like to warn about two paths which in my view end in a cul-de-sac (section 2). Then I shall try to find my own thread of Ariadne, arguing that the most obvious answer is in this case the correct one, viz. that Plutarch (correctly) regards Aristotle as the founder of the Peripatetic philosophical tradition (section 3.1). This conclusion will not do away with all problems, to be sure, but may help in explaining important aspects of Plutarch's general evaluation and use of Aristotle (section 3.2).

## 2. *Two dead ends*

### 2.1. *Aristoteles Platonicus*

In an interesting recent monograph, Karamanolis has argued that Plutarch regarded Aristotle as belonging to the Platonist tradition<sup>9</sup>. Not unlike Antiochus<sup>10</sup>, Plutarch was convinced, in Karamanolis' view, that Aristotle often preserved Plato's doctrines, but more than Antiochus, he realised that Plato and Aristotle fundamentally differed on many issues, and only used the latter when he represented the former's supposed point of view.

Karamanolis provides many arguments for his hypothesis, carefully discussing many relevant passages and dealing with as different domains as metaphysics, natural philosophy, psychology, epistemology, ethics, and logic. Lack of space prevents me from analysing all the evidence in an equally detailed way. I confine myself to three important general observations.

The first concerns Plutarch's way of quoting. In Karamanolis' view, "[t]he fact that Plutarch quotes in order to criticize suggests that his tendency to quote rarely from Aristotle testifies to a much more favourable attitude to his philosophy than to those of the Stoics and Epicureans, rather than to his unfamiliarity with Aristotle's work"<sup>11</sup>. This, however, is an unjustified generalisation of what is basically true only for Plutarch's polemical writings. The majority of quotations in the *Corpus Plutarcheum* are not polemical at all, but serve as further confirmation or illustration of Plutarch's argument<sup>12</sup>. In that sense, one could expect that Aristotle would have been quoted more often when he was really considered as a member of the Platonist tradition<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Although Karamanolis correctly points to the fundamental differences between both thinkers (pp. 87-88).

<sup>11</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 90, borrowing this argument from D. BABUT, 1996, pp. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., B.P. HILLYARD, 1981, p. XXVI and L. VAN DER STOCKT, 1987, pp. 283-285.

<sup>13</sup> Karamanolis provides (only) one example which in his view shows that Plutarch's familiarity with Aristotle's work "does not necessarily entail abundance of quotations or even references", viz. *De sollertia animalium* (pp. 90-91). However, the parallels between Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus *P.* 1,65-75, Porphyry, *Abst.* 3,3,1-3,18,2, and Philo of Alexandria, *Anim.* 13-70 show that much material should not be traced back to Plutarch's own reading but to an older anti-Stoic tradition; see already G. TAPPE, 1912, pp. 23-38.

The second general argument is derived from Plutarch's way of using Aristotle. Karamanolis correctly shows that Plutarch's use is usually well considered and far from uncritical: "he was not prepared to accept Aristotle's views when these conflict with what he considered to be Plato's doctrine. This means that whenever he uses them, he does so because he considers them as representative of Plato's own doctrines"<sup>14</sup>. This is basically correct, but it does not necessarily follow that Plutarch also considered Aristotle as an exponent of Platonism and/or "a communicator of Platonist beliefs" (p. 89). As Karamanolis perfectly realises himself, Plutarch was no Antiochus and was in all likelihood rather critical of the latter's philosophical project<sup>15</sup>. Rather than trying to reconstruct Plato's convictions on the basis of Aristotle (and the Stoics), he develops and argues his own views from (what he regards as) a Platonist perspective, and also deals with the view of other thinkers from this perspective. In other words, Aristotle is for Plutarch not a means to reach a better understanding of Plato, but Plato is and *always remains* the standard against which all thinkers, including Aristotle, are measured.

*De virtute morali* should be understood in this light as well. According to Karamanolis, "Plutarch feels entitled to use Aristotle's work in his argument because he maintains that Aristotle preserves Plato's ethical doctrine"<sup>16</sup>. Again, this way of putting the case is too Antiochean to my mind. The treatise should primarily be understood in the context of Middle Platonist ethics, in which Aristotelian and Peripatetic doctrines had already been appropriated<sup>17</sup>. It cannot be excluded, of course, that Antiochus had played a part in this process of appropriation, but it is dangerous to connect *De virtute morali* with an Antiochean point of view. While Karamanolis, as was said above, generally acknowledges the differences between Plutarch and Antiochus very well, he comes close to such 'Antiochean' interpretation while arguing that "it is because Plutarch takes Aristotle as representative [of] Plato's doctrine [...] that he integrates into the Aristotelian doctrine Platonic ideas like the localization of the parts of the soul in bodily parts (*De virt. mor.* 450F) or the image of the charioteer (445B-C; *Phaedrus* 253c-d)"<sup>18</sup>. In my view, Plutarch is doing exactly the opposite. The general perspective of *De virtute morali*

<sup>14</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Passages such as *Cic.* 4,1 show that Plutarch regarded Antiochus rather as a Stoic than as an Academic; see D. BABUT, 1969b, pp. 198-199; J. OPSOMER, 1996, p. 180; Id., 1998, p. 172; *contra*: A.G. NIKOLAIDIS, 1999, pp. 408-411.

<sup>16</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> See esp. P. DONINI, 1974, pp. 81-88.

<sup>18</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 121.

is undoubtedly Plato's philosophy<sup>19</sup> (or what Plutarch regards as such), and Aristotelian or Peripatetic doctrines are introduced into it because and to the extent that they can be reconciled with it.

The third general argument that I would like to discuss focuses on Plutarch's way of criticising Aristotle. Karamanolis shows very well that Plutarch frequently disagrees with Aristotle but nevertheless often refrains from attacking him explicitly. The question remains, however, how this approach should be understood. Once again, Karamanolis regards this as an indication that "Plutarch considers Aristotle as somehow belonging to the Platonist tradition"<sup>20</sup>. This, however, is far from certain. [1] First of all, alternative explanations are possible, e.g., the suggestion that Plutarch did not regard Aristotle's specific position on a given topic as important enough to discuss it in detail. [2] Secondly, Karamanolis' argument ignores the fact that other philosophers who no doubt belong to the Platonist tradition are no less criticised by Plutarch, *nominatim* and quite straightforwardly – although admittedly far less often than the Stoics or Epicureans<sup>21</sup>. [3] Finally and most importantly, Karamanolis' *argumentum e silentio* insufficiently takes into account the specific context of many relevant passages. One brief example may suffice here. In Karamanolis' view, the reason why Plutarch refrains from criticising Aristotle's doctrine of the soul in *Quaest. Plat.* 1006D<sup>22</sup> is "that Plutarch understood Aristotle to be close to Plato in position"<sup>23</sup>. But a closer look at the passage quickly shows that such a direct attack on Aristotle's view is simply irrelevant in the context. Plutarch is not uninterruptedly thinking of Aristotle; he is usually concerned with other things (in this case with the exegesis of a particular passage from Plato's *Timaeus*), and now and then mentions Aristotle in passing when he regards the latter's position as somehow relevant or worth mentioning. Deriving general conclusions about Plutarch's attitude towards Aristotle from the absence of direct criticism in such passages merely reflects our own bias and interests, but fails to do justice to Plutarch<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> As was demonstrated very well by D. BABUT, 1969a, pp. 71-80.

<sup>20</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 89; cf. also pp. 115 and 125-126.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Speusippus (*Quaest. Plat.* 1007AB), Xenocrates and Crantor (*De an. procr.* 1013B).

<sup>22</sup> The passage is analysed in detail by A.P. BOS, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 111.

<sup>24</sup> A similar *argumentum e silentio*, and equally problematic in my view, is to be found on p. 115, where Karamanolis correctly argues that Plutarch "is likely to have regarded Aristotle's view on the divine intellect as preserving only part of Plato's doctrine", but again regards the absence of any criticism on Plutarch's part to be significant.

Karamanolis further points to two interesting features of Plutarch's criticism of Aristotle. [1] Sharp criticism often has to yield to an emphasis on points which Plato and Aristotle have in common. While this feature is to a certain extent rather rooted in Karamanolis' reconstruction than in Plutarch himself, it generally proves true for Plutarch's polemical treatises, where, however, it should mainly be understood as an eristic strategy: Plutarch tries to isolate his philosophical opponents and to add more authority to his own point of view by connecting as many famous thinkers as possible with his own position. Aristotle is only one of the philosophers who are used in this way<sup>25</sup>, which may suggest that this feature should often be explained by polemical advantages rather than by philosophical affinity. [2] When Plutarch does criticise Aristotle, he does it mildly and constructively. It is clear of course that this supposed feature is intimately connected to Karamanolis' basic hypothesis – it risks to be merely an intelligent *ad hoc* –, but as far as I can see, any *cogent* evidence for it is simply lacking. To regard a criticism as mild or severe is often almost a matter of taste, and in any case Karamanolis himself agrees – correctly to my mind – that Plutarch's attack on Aristotle in *Adversus*

*Colotem* 1115DE is severe enough<sup>26</sup>.

Lack of space does not allow me to provide more detailed analyses of several crucial passages (such as *Adv. Colot.* 1115A-C). In general, Karamanolis' study is not without merit. He has discussed a wealth of relevant material and often provides valuable and innovative observations. His general interpretation of Plutarch, however, is in my view rather problematic, and only leads us further into the dark labyrinth. If we would like to escape from the monster of unfounded hypotheses, we better refrain from attributing to Plutarch the conviction that Aristotle was an exponent of the Platonist tradition to which he belonged himself.

## 2.2. *Aristoteles Pythagoricus*

There may, however, be another interesting way out of the labyrinth, as was shown by Donini<sup>27</sup>. He takes as his point of departure the well-known doxographic passage near the beginning of *De virtute morali*, where Plutarch refers to a philosophical tradition that begins with Pythagoras, culminates in Plato, and includes Aristotle as well (441D-442C). Basically the same tradition can be found in *De Is. et Os.* 369D-371A (where other thinkers are added)<sup>28</sup>. These passages

<sup>25</sup> See G. ROSKAM, 2007b, pp. 872-873 for other examples.

<sup>26</sup> G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 99: "The language Plutarch uses suggests that for him the Forms constitute the higher causes; so by rejecting them, Aristotle's causal explanations are philosophically inadequate. For Plutarch, this is not a small shortcoming for a philosopher."

<sup>27</sup> P. DONINI, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. also J. MANSFELD, 1992, pp. 278-290.

show, according to Donini, that Plutarch placed Aristotle in a Pythagorean-Platonic philosophical tradition.

Donini then most interestingly opposes this tradition to another one, which he finds in *Adversus Colotem*. This family includes several Presocratics (Democritus, Empedocles, Parmenides), Socrates, Plato, and the Academy (Arcesilaus and Carneades), but strikingly omits precisely Pythagoras and Aristotle. We thus obtain two distinct philosophical families. There is one problem, however, which remains and which Donini is unable to solve, that is, Plato is placed in two different philosophical traditions. Is there any indication that would enable us to choose between them?

In all likelihood, there is no reason at all why we should prefer one to the other. In fact, Donini's position is not unproblematic. As far as the first philosophical family is concerned, he erroneously disregards the polemical context of the treatise. Plutarch's philosophical loyalty here as always remains with Plato. Both Pythagoras and Aristotle are linked to the Platonic position because [1] such a link, of course, is possible in this particular context<sup>29</sup>, because [2] it thus shows that the position

of his Stoic opponents is at odds with the *communis opinio* of several distinguished philosophers, and because [3] Pythagoras and Aristotle may add an *argumentum ex auctoritate* in favour of Plutarch's own Platonist position. In that sense, the occasional juxtaposition of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle in any case reflects no less a polemical advantage than a view of one philosophical family.

The second philosophical family should likewise be understood in the broader context of the anti-Epicurean treatise. Plutarch only deals with these predecessors *who were at length attacked by Colotes*, and probably neither Pythagoras nor Aristotle were among them<sup>30</sup>. That is the main reason why both are not discussed in *Adversus Colotem*: what matters is not so much their alleged philosophical family as the scope of Colotes' work. This is not to deny, to be sure, that Colotes' opponents could be related with good arguments to one another in a specific philosophical domain (e.g. epistemology), but such an occasional conglomerate should not be isolated from its (polemical) context, and moreover, I see no reason, apart from Colotes' selection, why this second family should necessarily be confined to the

<sup>29</sup> In that sense, Donini's point remains valid: Plutarch indeed seems to have established such a philosophical connection in the specific context of *De virtute morali*; cf. also A. BELLANTI, 2003. What I deny, however, is that this conclusion holds true for the *Corpus Plutarcheum* in general.

<sup>30</sup> In all likelihood, Colotes was convinced that he sufficiently refuted Aristotle through his attack on Plato, cf. *Adv. Colot.* 1115A and C.



philosophers mentioned by Plutarch<sup>31</sup>. an additional perspective.

To conclude, the importance of the two philosophical families as reconstructed by Donini should not be overemphasised: the first is introduced *pour le besoin de la cause*, the second is the direct result of Colotes' attack. As such, the passages do not provide much information about Plutarch's general position towards Aristotle, and Donini's path, interesting though it may be, likewise comes to an end in the darkness of the labyrinth.

### 3. From darkness to light

#### 3.1. Ariadne's thread: *Aristoteles Peripateticus*

Are we doomed, then, to be swallowed up by the monster of ignorance? Perhaps only a systematic analysis of the whole labyrinth can still rescue us. This in the first place implies a systematic examination of all passages where Aristotle is connected with other philosophers. If this should be our thread of Ariadne, it is clear from the very beginning how fragile this thread actually is. For given that all passages should be understood in the light of their specific context, one easily sees how yet another monster, that of oversimplification, waits in ambush. A mere list of passages, then, will not do, but has to be corroborated by

In general, the following four categories of passages can be distinguished in Plutarch's works:

[1] The majority of passages contain occasional combinations of philosophers from different traditions. The link between these philosophers is always coincidental and directly related to the context, and does not illustrate any more general philosophical congeniality. A brief survey without much further discussion suffices:

- *De prof. in virt.* 78C-E: Solon – Diogenes – Agesilaus – Aristotle – Zeno (the whole cluster can be traced back to one of Plutarch's ὑπομνήματα; cf. also *De tranq. an.* 472DE and *De se ipsum laud.* 545A<sup>32</sup>)
- *De Is. et Os.* 369D-371A: Zoroaster – the Chaldaeans – Heraclitus – Empedocles – Pythagoras – Anaxagoras – Aristotle – Plato (all endorsing a basically dualistic philosophy)
- *De virt. mor.* 441E-442C: Pythagoras – Plato – Aristotle (doxographic passage, connected with the polemical context of the treatise; cf. *supra*)
- *De virt. mor.* 448A: Aristotle – Democritus – Chrysippus (all three retracted some of their doctrines)

<sup>31</sup> We may note that according to G.E. KARAMANOLIS, 2006, p. 86, "there is evidence to suggest that Plutarch perceived Aristotle's accord with Plato's philosophy partially through Aristotle's adherence to his aporetic spirit."

<sup>32</sup> See L. VAN DER STOCKT, 1999, and G. ROSKAM, 2005a, pp. 260-265.

- *Quaest. conv.* 612DE: Plato – Xenophon – Aristotle – Speusippus – Epicurus – Prytanis – Hieronymus – Dio (all authors of *Symposium* literature)
  - *Quaest. conv.* 616D: Aristotle – Thrasy-machus (both authors of logical treatises)
  - *Quaest. conv.* 652A: Aristotle – Epicurus (both writing on the same topic)
  - *De facie* 932BC: Aristotle – Posidonius (both writing on the same topic)
  - *Quaest. Plat.* 1007AB: Aristotle – Speusippus – the Stoics (all three proposing a wrong definition of time; against Pindar, Pythagoras, and Plato)
  - *Non posse* 1086EF: Aristotle – Socrates – Pythagoras – Protagoras – Theophrastus – Heracleides – Hipparchia (all abused by the Epicureans)
  - *Non posse* 1093BC: Eudoxus – Aristotle – Aristoxenus (all authors of works the reading of which brings great pleasure; together with Herodotus and Xenophon)
  - *Adv. Colot.* 1124C: Plato – Aristotle – Theophrastus – Democritus (all attacked their predecessors)
- which Plutarch has for the Stagirite. In many cases, their juxtaposition is again directly related to the context, and often based on superficial correspondences. In that sense, most passages could equally well be ranged under the first category:
- *De aud. poet.* 26B (on Plato's stoop and Aristotle's lisp; cf. also *De ad. et am.* 53CD, where the pair is completed by Alexander's twisted neck and harsh voice)
  - *De Is. et Os.* 382D (both called the contemplation of the intelligible world the *epoptic* part of philosophy<sup>33</sup>)
  - *De E* 389F (on the number of worlds)
  - *De Stoic. rep.* 1040A-1041B (Chrysippus as the opponent of both Plato and Aristotle)
- There are two passages which deserve special attention in this category:
- *De Is. et Os.* 375C (important agreement between Plato and Aristotle in their conception of the divinity)
  - *Quaest. Plat.* 1006D (Aristotle's definition of the soul is inadequate to explain a passage from Plato's *Timaeus*)

[2] Fairly often, Plato and Aristotle are juxtaposed as two great philosophical authorities. While this does not imply that Plutarch places both at the same level, it obviously illustrates the great esteem

It is clear that both passages seem to favour diametrically opposed conclusions. Both, however, should be understood in their own context, and neither can be used to reach more general conclusions about Plutarch's attitude towards Aristotle (and the latter's relation with Plato).

<sup>33</sup> On the connection of philosophy and mystery cults in Plutarch's work, see G. ROSKAM, 2001; cf. also P. VAN NUFFELEN, 2007.

[3] In four passages, Aristotle is connected with Academic philosophers:

- *Cons. ad Apoll.* 115B: Crantor – Aristotle  
(This passage, however, need not detain us: the connection between both philosophers seems rather arbitrary – both made approximately the same point – and need not imply a more fundamental philosophical congeniality.)
- *De comm. not.* 1069A: Aristotle – Xenocrates  
(Both agree that men are benefited by gods, parents, and teachers, but do not deal with the mutual benefits which sages receive from one another. The passage thus suggests a basic agreement between both thinkers, without, however, placing them explicitly in the same philosophical tradition. It is perfectly possible that both are introduced as authorities of different schools, who both disagree with the Stoic point of view. If this is indeed true, it would yield Plutarch an additional polemical advantage, in that the Stoics thus prove to be even more isolated and at odds with the great authorities of two different philosophical traditions.)
- *Adv. Colot.* 1111D: Plato – Aristotle – Xenocrates  
(The three agreed on the doctrine of the four elements, against Epicurean atomism. Just like in the previous passage, the fundamental agreement of the famous philosophers is underlined and confronted with the

view of Plutarch's opponents. Again, however, this juxtaposition in all likelihood mainly reflects Plutarch's eristic strategy.)

- *Adv. Colot.* 1126CD: Plato – Aristonymus – Phormio – Menedemus – Eudoxus – Aristotle – Xenocrates – Delius – Zeno of Elea

(This is a very important passage, for here, Aristotle is explicitly and unambiguously regarded as belonging to the Academic tradition. Plutarch points to the many political achievements of Plato's students. After recalling some minor figures, he turns to Eudoxus of Cnidus and Aristotle, who both acted as legislator for their country, and emphasises that both were men of Plato's company (Πλάτωνος ὄντες συνήθεις). The series is further completed by Xenocrates, Delius of Ephesus (again characterised as a follower of Plato: ἐταῖρος Πλάτωνος), and Zeno of Elea (the only Presocratic philosopher in the list). In all likelihood, the polemical context of the passage makes its influence felt here as well, but Plutarch's clear statement, even if it stands alone in the *Corpus Plutarcheum*, should not be explained away. We shall have to return to it in due course.)

[4] In a great number of passages, finally, Aristotle is connected with the Peripatetic tradition. Once again, this connection frequently rests on a merely superficial basis:

- *Quaest. conv.* 704EF: Aristoxenus – Aristotle (mentioned after each other about related themes)
- *Adv. Colot.* 1126F: Aristotle–Theophrastus (both benefited their native city)
- cf. also [*Dec. or. vit.*] 850C: Theophrastus – Aristotle (Theophrastus as Aristotle’s successor as scholarch of the Lyceum)
- cf. also *De cup. div.* 527AB: Aristotle – Theophrastus (their opinion on wealth)

Other passages, however, where Plutarch distinguishes between different philosophical schools, are of paramount importance in the context of this study, for there, Plutarch himself explicitly says in what philosophical tradition he places Aristotle. In these passages, which obviously contain by far the most cogent evidence, Aristotle is nearly always situated in the Peripatetic tradition:

- *Quaest. conv.* 635AB: Λαμπρία δὲ καὶ ἀνάγκη, πρὸ τοῦ κήπου κυδαίνοντι τὸν περίπατον καὶ τὸ Λύκειον, ἔργῳ μαρτυρεῖν Ἀριστοτέλει.
- *Quaest. conv.* 734F: Ὁ δὲ Φαβωρίνος αὐτὸς τὰ μὲν ἄλλα δαιμονιώτατος Ἀριστοτέλους ἐραστής ἐστι καὶ τῷ Περιπάτῳ νέμει μερίδα τοῦ πιθανοῦ πλειίστην.
- *De facie* 920F: ὑμέτερος γὰρ ἀνήρ [sc. Κλέαρχος], Ἀριστοτέλους τοῦ παλαιοῦ γεγονῶς συνήθης, εἰ καὶ πολλὰ τοῦ Περιπάτου παρέτρεψεν.

Sometimes the Peripatetic school, with Aristotle as its standard bearer, is opposed to other philosophical schools:

- opposition Peripatos – Academy: most clearly in *Adv. Colot.* 1115A-C, where Plutarch strongly underlines that Aristotle, and with him many of the Peripatetics (Theophrastus, Heraclides, Dicaearchus, and Strato) continuously disagreed with Plato concerning the most fundamental and important issues in physics. Cf. also *De exilio* 603BC, where Plutarch refers to the Academy as the dwelling place of Plato, Xenocrates, and Polemon, and then goes on to deal with Aristotle’s living at the Macedonian Court. Cf. also *De Stoic. rep.* 1045F-1046A, where the phrase Πλάτων [...] καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης καὶ <οἱ> ἀπὸ τούτων ἄχρι Πολέμωνος καὶ Στράτωνος obviously refers to the Academic tradition from Plato to Polemon, and the Peripatetic tradition from Aristotle to Strato.
- opposition Peripatos – Stoa: *De exilio* 605AB, where Plutarch names many members of both the Peripatetic and the Stoic school tradition: εἰ τὴν Περιπατητικὴν ἀσπάζη μάλιστα καὶ τεθαύμακας, Ἀριστοτέλης ἦν ἐκ Σταγείρων, Θεόφραστος ἐξ Ἐρέσου, Στράτων ἐκ Λαμψάκου, Λύκων ἐκ Τρωάδος, Ἀρίστων ἐκ Κέω, Κριτόλαος Φασηλίτης· εἰ τὴν Στωικὴν, Ζήνων Κιτιεύς, Κλεάνθης Ἄσσιος, Χρῦσιππος Σολεύς, Διογένης Βαβυλώνιος, Ἀντίπατρος Ταρσεύς, ὁ δ’ Ἀθηναῖος Ἀρχέδημος εἰς τὴν Πάρθων μεταστάς ἐν Βαβυλῶνι Στωικὴν διαδοχὴν ἀπέλιπε.
- opposition Peripatos – Academy – Stoa: *De comm. not.* 1069E, where Chrysippus’ wrong starting points are

opposed to the correct ones of Aristotle and Theophrastus, of Xenocrates and Polemon, and of Zeno.

There finally remains one more ambivalent passage to be discussed in this category:

- *Non posse* 1097B, where Plutarch deals with the great pleasures Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Phnias derived from their famous political accomplishments. Plutarch nowhere explicitly argues that Aristotle and the Peripatetics should directly be connected with the Academic political tradition beginning in Plato, yet it may be regarded as an important complement to the parallel passage discussed above (*Adv. Colot.* 1126CD). As far as politics is concerned (and in an anti-Epicurean context), Plutarch appears to establish a close link between the Platonic-Academic and the Aristotelian-Peripatetic tradition.

On the basis of this survey, we may conclude that the great majority of passages contains but little cogent evidence concerning the philosophical tradition in which Plutarch places Aristotle. When different philosophers are mentioned next to each other, the link is often fairly arbitrary and directly related to the context. Where Plutarch

more explicitly thematises this question, however, he nearly always regards Aristotle as belonging to the Peripatetic tradition – which, by the way, shows his historical accuracy. On the other hand, it remains true that the clear-cut distinctions between the different philosophical schools sometimes get blurred, and that Aristotle and the Peripatetic school occasionally seem to come close to the Platonic and Academic tradition (esp. with regard to politics). It may be true, then, that relating Aristotle to the Peripatos probably provides us with the thread that leads to the way out of the labyrinth, but without judicious use of this thread, we are doomed to stay in the darkness. What remains to be done, then, is to gain a better insight into the precise relation, in the *Corpus Plutarcheum*, between Aristotle and the Peripatos, on the one hand, and Plato and the Academy, on the other hand. This will be the aim of section 3.2. First, however, I would like to provide additional confirmation of the results obtained so far.

A quick look at Plutarch's œuvre shows that he often uses Aristotle as an historical source<sup>34</sup>, and no less often as the authoritative source on all kinds of physical and biological issues<sup>35</sup>. Plutarch

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., *Mul. virt.* 254F (= fr. 559 Rose); *Amatorius* 761A (= fr. 98 Rose); cf. *Non posse* 1093C. In the *Lives*, Aristotle is nearly always quoted as a historical source. Especially his Πολιτεῖαι were a rich source of information; see on this M.T. SCETTINO, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., *De tuenda* 133F (= fr. 233 Rose); *De Is. et Os.* 383D; *De Pyth. or.* 395F; *De def. or.* 430A and 434B; *Quaest. conv.* 702B (= fr. 224 Rose); 720D; 727EF (= fr. 353 Rose); 734E (= fr. 242 Rose); *Quaest. nat.* 911E; 912A (= fr. 215 Rose); 914F; *De facie* 932BC

also refers to Aristotle's literary studies<sup>36</sup>, borrows anecdotes and antiquarian information<sup>37</sup> from him, repeatedly praises his political achievements<sup>38</sup>, and recalls some of his ethical views<sup>39</sup>. It is striking that more fundamental philosophical problems remain absent from the list. Particularly noteworthy, however, are the remarkable similarities with Plutarch's use of Theophrastus. Near the end of Boulogne's careful and exhaustive study of this topic, we can read<sup>40</sup>:

Outre que le comportement public et politique de ce dernier [sc. Théophraste] lui [sc. Plutarque] fournit ponctuellement une aide dans sa polémique anti-épicurienne [...], il pense, semble-t-il, à consulter presque systématiquement ses ouvrages, parce qu'ils font partie des lectures indéniablement utiles. Il y trouve des réponses aux questions qu'on peut se poser face à des problèmes d'ordre scientifique [...], ou tout au moins des éléments de solution importants [...]. Mais c'est également une mine à la fois d'informations pour l'histoire et de

bonnes formules, qu'il s'agisse de sentences ou d'aphorismes énonçant des vérités morales.

The general resemblances between Plutarch's use of Aristotle and of Theophrastus are too obvious to demand detailed and pedantic discussion. Both Peripatetic philosophers are frequently quoted as sources of erudite and valuable observations, and provide interesting starting points for further thinking. More fundamental explanations, however, are usually derived from Plato and his followers. For Plutarch, in short, the Peripatetics appear to be especially interesting on the level of heuristics.

### 3.2. A last necessary delay

The above evidence clearly shows that Plutarch regards Aristotle as a Peripatetic philosopher. Strictly speaking, the Stagirite thus belongs to a philosophical tradition that differs from the Platonism to which Plutarch himself belongs. Such a simplifying conclusion, however, cannot be the last word. It is not merely contradicted by the evidence of some

(= fr. 210 Rose); *De prim. frig.* 948A and 949C (= fr. 212 Rose); *Aquane an ignis* 956C; *De soll. an.* 973AB; 978D; 979E; 981B (= fr. 354 Rose); 981EF; fr. 72 Sandbach.

<sup>36</sup> *De aud. poet.* 32F (= fr. 165 Rose); *De Pyth. or.* 398A (cf. fr. 130 Rose); *Comp. Ar. et Men.* 853F; *Quaest. nat.* 917CD; *Non posse* 1095A and E.

<sup>37</sup> *Quaest. Rom.* 265BC (= fr. 609 Rose) and 277BC; *Quaest. Graec.* 292B (= fr. 592 Rose); 294D (= fr. 507 Rose); 295EF (= fr. 597 Rose).

<sup>38</sup> E.g. in his *Life of Alexander*, esp. 7,1-8,3; cf. further *De Al. Magn. fort.* 327EF; *De Stoic. rep.* 1043D; *Non posse* 1097B; *Adv. Colot.* 1126D and F; see also *infra*, section 3.2.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Pel.* 3,1 (= fr. 56 Rose); *De prof. in virt.* 78DE; *De coh. ira* 454C; *De tranq. an.* 472E; *De gar.* 503AB; *De se ipsum laud.* 545A; fr. 53 Sandbach.

<sup>40</sup> J. BOULOGNE, 2005, p. 293.

passages – however isolated they may be –, but also seems to run counter to *De virtute morali*, where Plutarch without problem presents Peripatetic material as thoroughly Platonic. This raises the question of the precise position of the Peripatetic school, and its relation to Platonism, in Plutarch's works. In the few pages which remain, I would like to confine myself to deal briefly with three aspects of this complex problem which all three point in the same direction and together lead to what I regard as a possible way out of the labyrinth.

3.2.1. The first aspect which provides helpful information concerns Plutarch's explicit evaluations of different philosophers. Plato of course towers above everybody else, being not merely "pre-eminent in reputation and in influence" (*Quaest. conv.* 700B) but even "divine" (*De cap. ex inim.* 90C and *Per.* 8,2). Quite close to Plato is Xenocrates, who at least in one case seems to have reached his conclusions by divine reasoning (*De facie* 943F: *θείῳ τινὶ λογισμῶ*). The counterparts of these distinguished philosophers are the Epicureans and the

Stoics, who again and again are insulted and blamed for their utter ignorance<sup>41</sup>. Between these opposed poles can be found Theophrastus, the "most versatile and learned of the philosophers" (*Alc.* 10,3) and Aristotle<sup>42</sup>. The latter obviously belongs to the list of prominent (*ἐπιφανής*; *Non posse* 1086E) and famous (*ἐλλόγιμος*; *Adv. Colot.* 1124C) thinkers<sup>43</sup>, and in *De Stoic. rep.* 1041A, he is even juxtaposed to Plato (*δυεῖν τῶν ἀρίστων φιλοσόφων*). On the other hand, there can be found several passages where Aristotle is explicitly criticised by Plutarch<sup>44</sup>. Here already we meet the typical ambivalence which we will find back with regard to the next two aspects as well: Aristotle no doubt deserves much respect and often approaches Plato's level, yet there remains a gap which is never bridged.

3.2.2. An analogous conclusion can *mutatis mutandis* be made for the domain of Plutarch's ethics. As has been said, *De virtute morali* contains many Aristotelian and Peripatetic doctrines (although there can usually be found minor differences with Aristotle's *Ethics*<sup>45</sup>). First of all, it is

<sup>41</sup> See G. ROSKAM, 2004, pp. 271-272.

<sup>42</sup> For Plutarch's general judgement of Aristotle, see also D. BABUT, 1996, pp. 23-26.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. also *Alex.* 7,2: *τῶν φιλοσόφων τὸν ἐνδοξότατον καὶ λογιώτατον Ἀριστοτέλην*; it is not clear, however, whether this is the judgement of Philip of Macedonia or of Plutarch himself.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. also D. BABUT, 1996, p. 23: "S'il est vrai que ce jugement [...] est globalement assez favorable, il n'en reste pas moins que l'auteur des *Moralia* n'hésite pas, à l'occasion, à critiquer nommément le fondateur de l'école péripatéticienne, *ce qu'il ne fait jamais*, il faut le souligner, *quand il s'agit de Platon*."

<sup>45</sup> See B. BABUT, 1969a, *ad loc.*; P. DONINI, 1974, pp. 71-77; F. BECCHI, 1990, *ad loc.* F.

important to underline that Plutarch's use of these doctrines is directly connected with the polemical purpose of the treatise. At the level of heuristics, Plutarch no doubt found much relevant material in the Peripatetic tradition which he could use for his anti-Stoic attack, and as in other anti-Stoic polemics, Aristotle could also be quoted as an *argumentum ex auctoritate*. On the other hand, Plutarch's use of Aristotelian doctrines in *De virtute morali* cannot be reduced to a mere technique which yields a significant polemical advantage. Plutarch quite unambiguously introduces the Aristotelian doctrines as orthodox Platonic philosophy. Such an appropriation is typical of Middle Platonist ethics<sup>46</sup> and again illustrates how closely Aristotle and Plato can be connected in Plutarch's mind.

Again, however, this appropriation never results in a complete fusion. This clearly appears from Plutarch's treatises of *Seelenheilung*, where several aspects of Aristotelian and Peripatetic ethics are sharply rejected<sup>47</sup>. Such occasional criticisms show that Plutarch's ethics does not coincide with *De virtute morali*

and that Aristotelian flavour should not be regarded as an omnipresent and / or structural component of Plutarch's ethical philosophy. In this case too, the tension between attraction and distancing reappears.

3.2.3. The same tension comes to the fore even more in the field of political philosophy and praxis. As usual, Plutarch in this domain follows Plato<sup>48</sup>, but here too, Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition play a special role, which somehow recalls the case of *De virtute morali*. This appears from evidence which is usually ignored, viz. biographical information about Aristotle's political achievements. In view of the importance which Plutarch – and many others – attached to consistency between words and deeds<sup>49</sup>, this evidence is unduly neglected, even more so because Plutarch appears to take Aristotle very seriously in this respect. The Stagirite's relation with Alexander is both thematised in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (esp. 7,2-8,3) and in his rhetorical work *De Alexandri fortuna aut virtute* (327EF). No less attention is given to Aristotle's role as the great

BECCHI, 1975, p. 162 correctly insists that perfect correspondences between Plutarch and Aristotle cannot even be expected, in view of the long philosophical tradition that separates both thinkers; cf. also ID., 1978, p. 263.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 17.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., *Quaest. conv.* 704F; *De an. procr.* 1025D; fr. 148 Sandbach (with G. ROSKAM, 2003, pp. 48-49); on *De ad. et am.* 66C, see D. BABUT, 1969a, p. 78 versus F. BECCHI, 1975, p. 175.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., G.J.D. AALDERS, 1982, p. 41; G.J.D. AALDERS & L. DE BLOIS, 1992, pp. 3390-3391; J.P. HERSHBELL, 1995, p. 213.

<sup>49</sup> See G. ROSKAM, 2005a, pp. 320-335.



benefactor of his native city Stageira. Philip indeed restored the city, which he had himself destroyed, as Aristotle's teacher's fee (*Alex.* 7,2; *De Stoic. rep.* 1043D; *Non posse* 1097B; *Adv. Colot.* 1126F), and moreover, the philosopher would also have acted as a legislator for Stageira (*Adv. Colot.* 1126D). All these political accomplishments are praised and prove to be in line with Plutarch's own political ideal of the honourable course (τὸ καλόν)<sup>50</sup>.

It may be added that a similar picture can be found with regard to Aristotle's successors. Both Theophrastus (*Non posse* 1097B; *Adv. Colot.* 1126F) and Phaniás of Eresus (*Non posse* 1097B = fr. 7 Wehrli) would have delivered their native cities from tyrants, Cratippus associated with powerful Roman rulers (*Pomp.* 75,3-4; *Brut.* 24,1; *Cic.* 24,5), and Demetrius of Phalerum for a while governed Athens as the most powerful man in the city (*Demetr.* 8,3 and 10,2). As such, the Aristotelian-Peripatetic tradition can indeed be compared very well with the Platonic-Academic one, for Plato's successors likewise engaged in public life and were often successful in their ambitious political projects (see esp. *Adv. Colot.* 1126CD). Once again, both philosophical traditions thus prove

to overlap to an important extent. This helps to explain the striking passages, discussed above (cf. *supra*, 3.1, on *Adv. Colot.* 1126CD and *Non posse* 1097B), where Aristotle is placed in the Academic tradition of political activity.

Such passages gain even further relevance in the light of Plutarch's evaluations of the political philosophy and praxis of other philosophical schools. Epicureanism should not detain us here. Epicurus' apolitical philosophy is frequently attacked in Plutarch's work<sup>51</sup> and his notorious doctrine of λά-θε βιώσας is criticised at length in *De latenter vivendo*<sup>52</sup>. Isocrates is hardly better, for he never served the state, although he had ample opportunity to do so, but instead preferred to pass his entire life composing his polished periods (*Bellone an pace* 350D-F)<sup>53</sup>. The most interesting case, finally, are the Stoics. Plutarch finds little difficulty in attacking Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus for their inconsistency in this domain: even though the scholars devoted many works to political philosophy, they never engaged into politics themselves (*De Stoic. rep.* 1033BC). Here too, active participation in public life serves as the decisive criterion. Yet the Stoics' case is somewhat more complicated, for Plutarch knew perfectly

<sup>50</sup> For Plutarch's convictions regarding the correct motivations of the politician (viz. τὸ καλόν), see G. ROSKAM, 2004/5.

<sup>51</sup> See G. ROSKAM, 2005b.

<sup>52</sup> See G. ROSKAM, 2007a.

<sup>53</sup> That Plutarch was nonetheless influenced by Isocrates' political thinking has been argued by L. DE BLOIS & J.A.E. BONS, 1992 and ID., 1995.

well that there were many examples of Stoics who did enter into public life and contributed to the public interest. Paradigm par excellence in this respect is of course Cato of Utica, but Sphaerus (*Cleom.* 2,2 and 11,2), Persaeus (*Arat.* 18,1), Blossius (*TG* 8,4-5; 17,4; 20,3-4), Crates of Mallos (*Non posse* 1095D), and Panaetius (*Maxime cum principibus* 777AB) likewise engaged in politics by associating with powerful rulers. Yet in Plutarch's eyes, their achievements remain problematic. They even prove to be more inconsistent than their apolitical scholars, in that they, by entering public life, prove to take seriously the existing states and all those politicians who according to their doctrines are ordinary and silly idiots (*De Stoic. rep.* 1033EF). Their philosophy does simply not provide an adequate basis for political engagement. If that is true, we can only conclude that in Plutarch's eyes, the Academic and Peripatetic tradition has a *monopoly position* with regard to correct and useful participation in politics. In this domain, Aristotle indeed proves to be a faithful pupil of Plato.

Just as in the above discussed case of Plutarch's ethics, however, this conclusion is in need of some qualification. Here as well, Aristotle's great political achievements are frequently emphasised in a specific, polemical context, as one of the authoritative counterexamples of apolitical Epicureanism. In other contexts, Plutarch proves much more critical of Aristotle. His presence at Philip's Court

was criticised as being at odds with the philosopher's independence (*De exilio* 603C and 604D), and Plutarch further argues that Alexander was entirely justified in disregarding Aristotle's political advice (*De Al. Magn. fort.* 329BC). He also often recalls the unenviable fate of Demetrius of Phalerum, who had to witness how his three hundred statues were demolished (*Praec. ger. reip.* 820EF). In that sense, the same tension between attraction and distancing returns. In both ethics and politics, Plutarch appears to be inclined to consider the position of Aristotle and his followers as strikingly close to that of Plato, without, however, implying that both completely coincide.

#### 4. Conclusion

In all likelihood, Plutarch considered Aristotle as the first Peripatetic philosopher, which implies that he did *not* regard him as a full member of his own philosophical school. Plutarch's view was no doubt less radical than that of Atticus, yet in my view, he was no early precursor of later Neoplatonists such like Ammonius Saccas and Porphyry, who went very far in their attempts to reconcile the views of Plato and Aristotle.

Although Plutarch usually distinguishes the Platonic and the Peripatetic schools from one another, sometimes this clear-cut distinction fades away and the two schools closely approach each other. I would suggest, on the basis of the evidence discussed above, that Plutarch regards the Peripatetic school [1] as

basically different from the Platonic one, [2] but at the same time as the privileged ally among other philosophical schools (together, perhaps, with Pythagoreanism). On several domains, the similarities between the Platonic and the Peripatetic position more than suffice to form a united front, but equally often, the two philosophical paths again separate and clear indications of Plutarch's critical distancing can be found.

In my view, only such a conclusion can lead us as Ariadne's thread out of the labyrinth. Yet I do not claim to have reached the exit and survey in full clarity the solution of all problems, nor to have overcome all possible monsters. No doubt the final answer to this much discussed set of questions requires a more elaborate and detailed analysis of (several crucial passages from) the *Corpus Plutarcheum*. At the end of this modest contribution, I would be satisfied already if guided by this thread of Ariadne, our hesitating steps in the dark labyrinth at last gradually begin to approach the brilliant daylight.

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