



Plutarch on DIAITA: well-being, conviviality, feeding, and environment

Coimbra RED Meeting (8-9 September 2022)

Handout

Agesilaus' lame leg, Marius' varicose veins, and Nicias' kidney disease, or the importance of corporeal health for politics according to Plutarch

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Political ideals and their limits

1. *Praec. ger. reip.* 818A: Win the favour of the people by giving way in small things in order that in greater matters you may oppose them stubbornly and thus prevent them from committing errors (cf. *Phoc.* 2.6–9).

De tuenda sanitate praecepta

2. *De tuenda* 136C–D: There is a jocose remark attributed to Epameinondas in regard to a good man who fell ill and died about the time of the battle of Leuctra: “Great Heavens! How did he find time to die when there was so much going on?” This may be repeated with truth in the case of a man who has in hand some public activity or philosophic meditation: “What time has this man now for indigestion or drunkenness or carnal desires?”

The political treatises

3. *An seni* 786A: Once when Pompey was ill and the physician prescribed a thrush (which was hard to get and out of season), and someone said that Lucullus had plenty of them in his breeding-place, Pompey refused to send and get one, saying, “Could Pompey, then, not live if Lucullus were not luxurious?”
4. *An seni* 797C–D: For Menecrates a chair was placed every day by the door of the house of government, and often the ephors rose up from their session and went to him for information and advice on the most important matters; for he was considered to be a wise man and an intelligent one to be consulted. And therefore, after his physical strength had become utterly exhausted and he had to spend most of the day in bed, when the ephors sent for him to come to the market-place, he got up and set out to walk, but proceeded slowly and with difficulty; then, meeting some boys on the way, he asked them if they knew of anything stronger than the necessity of obeying one's master, and they replied, “Not being able to” (τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι). Accounting this as the limit of his service, he turned round and went home. For a man's zeal ought not to fail before his strength, but when it is deserted by strength, it should not be forced.
5. *An seni* 793E–F: Just as Alexander, wishing not to work Bucephalus too hard when he was old, used to ride other horses before the battle in reviewing the phalanx and drawing it up in line, and then, after giving the watchword and mounting him, immediately charged the enemy, and fought the battle to its end; so the statesman, if he is sensible, will curb himself when he has grown old, will keep away from unnecessary activities and allow the State to employ men in their prime for lesser matters, but in important affairs will himself take part vigorously.



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The Parallel Lives

6. *Brut.* 11.3: Once, when Ligarius was sick, Brutus came to see him, and said: “O Ligarius, what a time this is to be sick!” Ligarius at once raised himself on his elbow, clasped Brutus by the hand, and said: “Nay, Brutus, if thou hast a purpose worthy of thyself, I am well (ὕγιαίνω).”
7. *Comp. Cim. et Luc.* 1.3: Leisure, no doubt, and quiet, and the pursuit of pleasantly speculative learning, furnish a most fitting solace for a man of years who has retired from wars and politics. But to divert fair achievements to pleasure as their final end, and then to sport and wanton at the head of Aphrodite’s train, as a sequel to wars and fightings, was not worthy of the noble Academy, nor yet of one who would follow Xenocrates, but rather of one who leaned towards Epicurus.

Conclusion

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