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Plutarchus



Plutarchus ein natürlicher maister vnd außsprichender geistlicher bescheiderer ein gepie
ter vñ anrichter des kaisers Trayani 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
gewest das er leichtlich ein gebieter des kaisers hat mögen erwinen. nemlich so des erwin
chus tet fundern fleiß dem kaiser seinen unger vier ding eingepfunden. nemlich vñer vnter
ding. vñnd er hat als ein hobgelerter man gar vil bücher von mancherley materie vñnd
sachen in hebräischen vnd lateinischen vnd lozeinischen gesung gar trefflich beschriben vñnd mit seiner
kapffheit bey Trayano angenehme begabung erlangt.

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Hear, Hear!

The pedagogical projects in Plutarch's *De audiendo* and Maximus of Tyre's first *Dialexis*¹

by

Jeroen Lauwers

Research Foundation – Flanders (Belgium). K.U. Leuven

jeroen.lauwers@arts.kuleuven.be

Abstract

This paper aims at contextualizing Plutarch's *De audiendo* and Maximus' first *Dialexis* in the pedagogical and rhetorical debate between the so-called 'true philosophers' and the so-called 'sophists', in which many gifted speakers strive for the authority generated by the title 'philosophos'. By comparing the respective interaction between rhetoric and philosophy, the right attitude of the pupils, and the place of the lecturer in both authors, I want to indicate that, whereas Maximus' text seems rather in line with the contemporary rhetorical climate of the 'Second Sophistic', Plutarch seems to have a more sincere interest in his students' well-being.

KEY-WORDS: Plutarch, Maximus of Tyre, Second Sophistic, Philosophy, Rhetoric.

In Plutarch's *De audiendo*, the young student in philosophy Nicander receives some practical instructions on the proper way of attending lectures given by philosophical teachers, instructions which Plutarch already delivered to other students of his during a lecture (37C). Against the background of this text, there is the pedagogical and rhetorical debate between the 'true philosophers' and the 'sophists', in which many gifted speakers strive for the authority generated by the title '*philosophos*'². As Hillyard rightly

¹ This paper was presented at the conference of the *Réseau Plutarque* in Málaga, November 28-29, 2008. I would like to thank Prof. Geert Roskam for his valuable suggestions.

² G.R. STANTON, 1973 correctly indicates that the title 'philosophos' was also adopted by authors like Aelius Aristides, who is nowadays typically associated with the sophistic movement of the second century AD. The instability of the definition of 'philosophy' makes the term a subject for much controversy among its true or so-called practitioners. From this point of view, one can assume that *De audiendo* is one of the treatises which D. FAURÉ (1960, I, p. 79) had in mind when he speaks of the *Moralia* as a place where "nous entrevoyons l'intimité fervente des écoles de philosophie opposée à la popularité tapageuse des écoles de rhétorique."

indicates, “Plutarch was preparing his listeners to encounter a variety of lecturers going under the name of ‘philosopher’, some of whom deserved the title, some of whom did not”³.

For a number of reasons, Maximus of Tyre’s first and programmatic speech seems well suited as a counterpart to gain a better understanding of Plutarch’s work in the context of the aforementioned debate. First of all, Maximus is difficult to categorize either as a sophist or as a philosopher⁴, for even though he himself claims to be a pure philosopher, his embellished rhetorical style brings him very close to his contemporaries of the so-called ‘Second Sophistic’⁵. Furthermore, some textual elements in Maximus’ *Dialexeis* lead to the conclusion that he delivered his speeches before a young audience of students in philosophy⁶, which links him to the educational context of *De audiendo*⁷. Besides, the formal composition of the *Dialexeis* also corresponds to a certain extent to the kind of precepts given by

Plutarch, but it nonetheless displays some particularities as well, as will be shown in this paper. Finally, Maximus’ first speech contains a rather high number of passages where the author talks on a sort of meta-level about his own practices, just as Plutarch almost continuously does in *De audiendo*. The fact that both authors make their pedagogical assumptions so explicit provides a sound starting point for a thorough comparison between the educational paradigms of both authors.

In a first part of this paper, I will demonstrate how both so-called ‘philosophers’ fashion their philosophical teaching after their own perception of proper philosophy, trying to gain the authority to speak as a philosopher on behalf of the philosophical tradition. Their different views on what philosophy would mean, then, have some implications for the precepts they give on the required attitude of their ideal student, as I will try to make clear. Furthermore, I will also say something on the different role of the philosophical speaker in both authors.

³ B.P. HILLYARD, 1981, p. xvi.

⁴ To give but one example: J. DILLON, 1977, pp. 397-400, states that “[Maximus] was a sophist rather than a philosopher, and a distinguished member of the Second Sophistic movement”, but nonetheless includes him in his philosophical survey, thus acknowledging that Maximus indeed had at least some philosophical characteristics. See also the justification of the study of Maximus as a philosopher in M. B. TRAPP, 2007, pp. 24-27.

⁵ For a classification of Maximus as a philosopher who provides mere rhetorical amusement (and Plutarch as a philosopher occupied with both philosophical content and rhetorical presentation), see D. A. RUSSELL, 2001, p. 163.

⁶ See especially G.L. KONIARIS, 1982, pp. 111-113.

⁷ For *De audiendo* as a good source to reconstruct the inside of a philosopher’s school, see M.L. CLARKE, 1971, pp. 86-87, and, more generally, M. SCHUSTER, 1917, passim.

In the end, I hope to indicate how both Maximus' first speech and Plutarch's *De audiendo* can be read as two testimonies in a philosophical sparring match in which education was one of the higher stakes⁸.

1. *Philosophy and (rhetorical) lecturing*

In *De audiendo*, Plutarch speaks rather reservedly and cautiously about the interrelation between rhetoric and philosophy. Attention to the style of a speech should be absolutely secondary (42B-E). Pleasing is neither a philosopher's task nor the goal of a philosophical lecture:

Καὶ γὰρ εἰ τοῖς λέγουσι προσ-
ήκει μὴ παντάπασιν ἡδονὴν
ἐχούσης καὶ πιθανότητα λέξε-
ως παραμελεῖν, ἐλάχιστα τού-
του φροντιστέον τῷ νεῷ, τό γε
πρῶτον.

(Plut., *De aud.* 42C)

For even though it is quite right for a speaker not to be altogether neglectful of pleasantness and persuasion in his style, yet the young man should make least concern of this, at any rate at first.

(Translation: The Loeb Classical Library)

For a critical student, rhetoric should be seen as threatening the philosophical

content. It is only after a critical evaluation of the content that both style and content can be taken into account. Until the moment when that evaluation has been executed, rhetorical appreciation and philosophical truthfulness are separated from each other and they even seem somewhat mutually exclusive⁹.

Although Maximus portrays himself as a defender of content over style (1.7), his approach towards rhetoric is not at all hostile. Rhetoric is a component of everyday life, and is therefore also an essential domain that needs to be covered by the philosopher. This appears already in the beginning of the first lecture from the analogical simile between the actor in a drama – who must be ready to play different parts dependent from the occasion – and the adaptive philosopher, and also from the following simile between the philosopher and the versatile musician:

Τὸν τῆ μούσῃ ταύτῃ [φιλοσο-
φία] κάτοχον ἄνδρα καὶ λόγον
ἄρα ἦττον ἐκείνων τῶν ᾠδικῶν
ἡρμόσθαι δεῖ πολυφώνως τε
καὶ πολυτρόπως, σῶζοντα μὲν
ἀεὶ τὸ τῶν ποιημάτων κάλλος,
μηδέποτε δὲ ὑπ' ἀφωνίας ἐκ-
πληττόμενον·

(Max., *Or.* 1.2)

⁸ For the major importance of (Greek) *paideia* in the climate of the 'Second Sophistic', see e.g. B.E. BORG, 2004. For the value of education in Plutarch's writings, see the e.g. R.H. BARROW, 1967, esp. p. 77.

⁹ About the rather rigid conflict between rhetoric and philosophy in Plutarch, see L. PERNOT, 1993, II, esp. p. 509 and, applied to literary language, L. VAN DER STOCKT, 1992, pp. 56-83, esp. p. 73.

Is it any the less necessary for the devotee of this Muse [philosophy], and for his words, to be attuned to the production of many different sounds in many different forms, than it is for the ordinary musician? Must he not constantly respect the beauty of the compositions he plays and never allow himself to be stricken by speechlessness?

(Translation: M.B. Trapp)

The voice-metaphor (πολυφώνως, ἀφωνίας) already defines a close connection between philosophical thinking and speaking (cf. also the ambiguous use of the word λόγος)¹⁰. According to Maximus, the philosopher, who must be able to adapt himself to each facet of life itself, must also be prepared to perform in public, and the public is allowed to evaluate the philosophical orator on the criteria required from a good performer, that is both philosophy and rhetoric, rhetoric hereby becoming a part of the wider philosophical scale. As will be demonstrated below, both rhetoric and philosophy fuse in Maximus into one single educational paradigm.

2. *The young audience*

Both views on the interrelation between rhetoric and philosophy have their repercussions on the prescriptions

given by each author to his young audience¹¹.

Plutarch's admonitions are rather directed to the receptive aspect of the lecture. He urges his pupils mostly to retain silence while attending a lecture (39B), and to stay humble while asking questions to the lecturer (42E-44A). A student should also refrain from too excessive admiration (40F-41E) and especially from malicious envy (φθόνος), for these feelings might be pernicious for the critical attitude which the listening students should adopt:

Φθόνος τοίνυν μετὰ βασκανίας καὶ δυσμενείας οὐδενὶ μὲν ἔργῳ παρῶν ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσιν ἐμπόδιος τοῖς καλοῖς, κάκιστος δ' ἀκροωμένῳ πάρεδρος καὶ σύμβουλος, ἀνιαρὰ καὶ ἀηδῆ καὶ δυσπρόσδεκτα ποιῶν τὰ ὠφέλιμα διὰ τὸ πᾶσι μᾶλλον ἡδεσθαι τοὺς φθονοῦντας ἢ τοῖς εὖ λεγομένοις.

(Plut., *De aud.* 39D)

Now the presence of envy, attended by malice and hostility, is not a good thing for any undertaking, but it stands in the way of all that is honourable; and it is the very worst associate and counsellor for one that would listen to a lecture, inasmuch

¹⁰ On the voice-metaphor as a key concept for the interpretation of Maximus' first speech, see J. PUIGGALI, 1983, pp. 62-63 and J. CAMPOS DAROCA – J.L. LÓPEZ CRUCES, 2006.

¹¹ Note that only a minority of this young audience came to Plutarch or Maximus for a full philosophical programme. Most youngsters came for a completion of their education and left after a year or two. See M.L. CLARKE, 1971, p. 64.

as it makes what is profitable to be vexatious, unpleasing, and unacceptable, because envious persons are pleased with anything rather than with the good points of a discourse.

(Translation: The Loeb Classical Library)

Maximus, on the other hand, considering the deliverance of speeches as an essential part of philosophy as well, does not want his pupils to remain silent, but expresses his deepest wish to be challenged by a member of his audience in a philosophical and rhetorical battle, so that he can show his true (philosophical) strength:

Εἰ γάρ, ὦ θεοί, ἐμῶν θεατῶν γένοιτό τις συναγωνιστὴς ἐμοί, ἐπὶ ταυτησὶ τῆς ἔδρας συγκοινόμενος καὶ συμπονῶν, ἐγὼ τότε εὐδοκιμῶ, στεφανοῦμαι τότε, κηρύττομαι τότε ἔν τοις Πανέλλησιν (...)

(Max., *Or.* 1.6)

I wish to heaven some fellow competitor might emerge from my audience, to share with me the dust and the exertions of this platform! Then will I win the glory of a victor's wreath; then alone will my name resound in triumph at the Panhellenic games!

(Translation: M.B. Trapp)

The negative φθόνος in Plutarch is here transformed into a fruitful

competitive spirit, i.e. φιλοτιμία (1.4), which forces Maximus (and, ideally, his students as well) to raise his own level.

The undertone of Plutarch's *De audiendo* is that philosophy is less a matter of speech than a matter of attitude, and that philosophical wisdom can only be achieved by a gradual process during which the students respectfully and slowly proceed towards moral and virtuous perfection. In Maximus' first *Dialexis*, however, the ideal pupil should be able to respond to and compete with the master, even trying to defeat him for honour's sake. That active pose of the students seems typical for a rhetorically oriented programme¹².

As I will show below, these guidelines also imply a different authorial pose in Plutarch and Maximus as well as a different position of the speaker in his own ideal learning method.

3. The lecturer and the learning method

Plutarch's opinion towards a lecturer's authority appears clearly from the following passage:

Τοῖς μὲν οὖν κατορθουμένοις ἐπιλογιστέον ὡς οὐκ ἀπὸ τύχης οὐδ' αὐτομάτως, ἀλλ' ἐπιμελεία καὶ πόνῳ καὶ μαθήσει κατορθοῦνται, καὶ μιμητέον γε ταῦτα θαυμάζοντάς γε δὴ καὶ ζηλοῦντας τοῖς δ' ἀμαρτα-

¹² Cf. T. MORGAN, 1998, p. 198: "(...) rhetoric constitutes the moment of the pupil's transition from passive recipient of education to active user of it, a transition which (...) was a vital marker of social status and power."

νομένοις ἐφιστάναι χροὴ τὴν
διάνοιαν, ὑφ' ὧν αἰτιῶν καὶ
ὄθεν ἢ παρατροπὴ γέγονεν.

(Plut., *De aud.* 40B)

Where they [the lecturers] are successful we must reflect that the success is not due to chance or accident, but to care, diligence, and study, and herein we should try to imitate them in a spirit of admiration and emulation; but where there are mistakes, we should direct our intelligence to these, to determine the reasons and origin of the error.

(Translation: The Loeb Classical Library – with modifications)

First of all, it becomes apparent here that Plutarch is not entirely hostile towards admiration and emulation, but, as we have already seen, this emulative stance is not to be interpreted in the same way as the open competitiveness evoked in Maximus' speech, for, according to Plutarch, the young listeners should not engage in a battle to deliver the best speech, but should try to focus on the speech's content, in order to examine whether it may function as proper guidelines to lead their lives in a virtuous, philosophical way.

The lecturer himself has no absolute authority in Plutarch's *De audiendo*. He must rather be considered as an object for critical study, an object which can equally well succeed (κατορθουμένοις) as fail (ἀμαρτανομένοις) in delivering an honest and useful lecture. The final responsibility thus rests in the pupils' hands¹³, for it is their task to evaluate critically the speech presented in front of them. Only then is it possible to extract the positive lessons out of lectures, and to learn even from the worst speakers.

The lecturer's position in Maximus' text is much more self-centred and narcissistic, for Maximus explicitly promotes himself as the only teacher needed to gain philosophical wisdom. He ascribes great authority to the lecturer, who should be capable of guiding a young man's life (1.8)¹⁴. Rather than pointing to the pupil's own responsibility in progressing along the difficult road towards philosophical truth, he offers an easier paradigm, in order not to scare off his youthful public¹⁵. How this paradigm is to be understood, appears very clearly from a comparison of Maximus' own position towards his audience with a flutist's towards singing birds:

¹³ D. FAURÉ, 1960, II, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ Cf. T. MORGAN, 1998, p. 82: "The absence of a curriculum would give teachers freedom but also a heavy responsibility: they would have to judge (...) what authors and exercises would best serve their pupils."

¹⁵ In *De audiendo* (47B-C), Plutarch makes a similar reassuring gesture towards his public by emphasizing the increasing facility of learning philosophy as the educational process progresses.

Ἀκροώμενοι δὲ οἱ ὄρνιθες
διαμελετωμένου τοῦ ἀύλητοῦ,
καὶ ἀντάδοντες αὐτῷ ὅσημέραι,
ἐτυπώθησαν τῇ ἀκοῇ πρὸς τὰ
αὐλήματα, καὶ τελευτῶντες, ἀρ-
ξαμένου αὐλεῖν, συνεπήχουν
πρὸς τὸ ἐνδόσιμον δίκην χόρου.

(Max., *Or.* 1.7)

Everyday the birds listened to the flutist as he practised, and sang in response; the result was that, through listening to him, their singing was moulded into tune with his playing, until finally when the man began to play they would start singing in unison, taking their keynote from him like a choir.

(Translation: M.B. Trapp)

This comparison implies that the students simply need to echo the wisdom of the teacher, *in casu* of Maximus himself. They do not have to make autonomous judgments about the value of the lecturer's utterances; they can just assume that everything the speaker says is right and must serve as a moral and philosophical example. Instead of the harsh struggle for wisdom sketched by Plutarch, Maximus offers his students imitation (μίμητις) as the easy path to philosophical knowledge and moral virtue. In this paradigm, the teacher's self is of course in the centre of the action¹⁶.

¹⁶ This tutorial position stands in contrast with Plutarch's *scepsis* in *De audiendo*: "Τοὺς δ' ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ λόγους ἀφαιροῦντα χρητὴν τοῦ λέγοντος δόξαν αὐτοῦς ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν ἐξετάζειν" (40B).

¹⁷ Cf. M.L. CLARKE, 1971, pp. 42-43. See also R. Webb, 2001, pp. 307-310 for the imitational aspect of the *progymnasmata* of Theon.

This offhand method rather seems in accordance with the imitational way of educating young pupils in the rhetorical schools of the Roman era¹⁷. One might suppose that Maximus' way of teaching 'philosophy' could be considered as a less radical change in the student's attitude after the completion of their rhetorical curriculum, whereas Plutarch demanded a more 'philosophical' pose, quite different from the one imposed at the rhetorical schools of his age. Of course, in a climate where education, rhetoric, and philosophy were the keystones of aristocratic preservation of power, the students had to face a hard decision in deliberating which kind of philosophical teaching was best suited for a meaningful life as well as for a successful career.

4. Conclusion

An instructive starting point for my own conclusion is the conclusion which Plutarch himself reaches in *De audiendo*:

Εἰ δέ τινος οὖν πρὸς ἀκρόασιν
ἐτέρου παραγγέλματος, δεῖ καὶ
τοῦ νῦν εἰρημένου μνημονεύον-
τας ἀσκεῖν ἅμα τῇ μαθήσει τὴν
εὕρεσιν, ἵνα μὴ σοφιστικὴν ἔξιν
μηδ' ἱστορικὴν, ἀλλ' ἐνδιάθετον
καὶ φιλόσοφον λαμβάνωμεν,
ἀρχὴν τοῦ καλῶς βιῶναι τὸ
καλῶς ἀκοῦσαι νομίζοντες.

(Plut., *De aud.* 48D)

Finally, if there be need of any other instruction in regard to listening to a lecture, it is that it is necessary to keep in mind what has here been said, and to cultivate independent thinking along with our learning, so that we may acquire a habit of mind that is not sophistic or bent on acquiring mere information, but one that is deeply ingrained and philosophic, as we may do if we believe that right listening is the beginning of right living.

(Translation: The Loeb Classical Library)

When confronted with Maximus' first *Dialexis*, this statement gives rise to the following conclusions:

1. In strong opposition to Maximus, as has been argued above, Plutarch stresses his students' independent thinking (εὐρεσιν) during the learning process¹⁸, which may contribute to making philosophy a deep-rooted part (ἐνδιάθετον) of one's constitution.

2. When Plutarch's treatise is taken as the constitutive norm, Maximus must rather be situated in the camp of the sophists, for he does not proclaim

the same educational project, which is, at least according to Plutarch, needed for the achievement of a right living. Maximus' conception of philosophy is rather directed towards a more formal rhetorical training, in which philosophical argumentation and knowledge of philosophical *realia* seem to be the most important features. One may well wonder whether Plutarch's view on philosophy was not the more traditional¹⁹, whereas Maximus seems to stand in closer contact to his rhetorical contemporaries of the 'Second Sophistic'. This might also be indicated by the fact that, in the closing paragraphs of his first *Dialexis* (1.6-10), Maximus feels compelled to lower his boastful voice and to prove that his paradigm must also be situated in the philosophical tradition, and cannot be reduced to simple rhetorical *Spielereien*.

3. However, Plutarch's 'more philosophical' education project in *De audiendo* should not make us blind to the fact that Plutarch is but one (coloured) voice in this didactic debate. Just like Maximus, he also wants to proclaim the (exclusive) appropriateness of his own way of philosophizing and educating²⁰. The auto-referential topic of this lecture might therefore bring us to expect a well-

¹⁸ See G. ROSKAM, 2004, p. 103.

¹⁹ Cf. D. FAURÉ, 1960, I, p. 79: "Plutarque apparaît ainsi comme éminemment caractéristique de l'éducation de son temps." Cf. also G. KENNEDY, 1972, pp. 554-555.

²⁰ Cf. D.A. RUSSELL, 2001, p. 162: "We have to remember that the philosopher and the historian are also presenting a case and not putting down the facts without regard to the audience."

deliberated rhetorical composition²¹, by which he wants to downplay pseudo-philosophical, rhetorical virtuoso's in order to restore the pupils' confidence in themselves and in the authority of the 'true philosophers', one of which he must have considered himself. Plutarch's text nonetheless differs from that of Maximus in that Plutarch did not write a grand sophistic display²², but rather a less conceited 'general' description in which the pupil's profits are more explicitly stressed than the teaching speaker's own person. It seems therefore sensible to assume that Plutarch's *De audiendo*, more than Maximus' first *Dialexis*, springs from a sincere care for the students' well-being.

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²¹ This expectation is confirmed by B.P. HILLYARD's (1981, p. 263) remark on the last sentence of *De audiendo*: "[Plutarch]'s essays do not usually have such self-conscious endings, and this is a sign of above-average literary pretensions in this essay."

²² *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

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