Four Exegetical Notes on Plutarch's Dialogue on Love
[Cuatro Notas Exegéticas sobre el Diálogo del Amor de Plutarco]
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Abstract
These notes offer interpretations of Plutarch, Dialogue on Love 756D, 764C-D, 764E, and 770A-B.
Key-Words: Plutarch, Dialogue on Love. Textual criticism.

Resumen
Estas notas ofrecen interpretaciones sobre Plutarco, Diálogo del Amor 756D, 764C-D, 764E, y 770A-B
Palabras-clave: Plutarco, Diálogo del Amor. Crítica textual.

I do not go far
Do you not see how mighty is the goddess Aphrodite [= Euripides, fr. 898.1 TrGF ]?
She sows and gives that love
From which all we upon this earth are born [= Euripides, Hippolytus 449-450]. (Loeb tr. modified)
The phrase πόρρω γὰρ οὐκ ἄπειμι has caused problems for some translators and interpreters. Both the Budé³ (‘[s] ans aller plus loin’) and the Loeb edition (‘not to go farther’) translate as if πόρρω

1 C. Hubert, 1938.
were a comparative⁴. H. Görgemanns, although offering a correct translation, comments that the meaning of the phrase within the context is unclear⁵. D. Russell correctly translates ‘I go not far away’⁶ and rightly observes elsewhere that the phrase does not indicate the return from a digression, as the Budé and Loeb translations suggest, but, on the contrary, a promise to go further along the lines of the argument⁷. As a matter of fact, γάρ suggests that these words even mark the beginning of a digression. Indeed, the whole part on Aphrodite and Eros and their relation as cosmic gods is structurally speaking a digression; the return from this digression is indicated by οὐν at 756f⁸. This fits into Plutarch’s strategy of underemphasising the most important parts of his speech in the Dialogue on Love (cf. 762a-b; 763f; 770b)⁹. The interpretation of the sentence is not a problem if we keep in mind the general point which Plutarch is making here (i.e. that questioning the existence of one god has important implications for the other gods). The concrete example is that, if Eros is undermined, Aphrodite suffers from this as well and the unity of the Greek pantheon is threatened. The jump from Eros to Aphrodite is indeed not πόρρω: both gods are closely associated (cf. e.g. 756e, 752a-b).

Dialogue on Love 764c–d

πλὴν ἐκείνῃ γε δόξειαν ἄν διαφέρειν, ἢ δείκνυσιν ἡλίος μὲν ἐπὶ γῆς τὰ καλὰ καὶ τὰ αἰσχρὰ τοῖς ὁρῶσιν, Ἐρως δὲ μόνων τῶν καλῶν φέγγος ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα μόνα τους ἐρῶντας ἀναπείθει βλέπειν καὶ στρέφεσθαι, τῶν δ’ ἄλλων πάντων περιορᾶν. (Teubner ed. modified [underlined])

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

The Dialogue on Love is preserved in only two manuscripts: Parisinus gr.

⁷ D. Russell, 1997, 101. Moreover, he notes the iambic rhythm of the phrase and suspects that it is a quotation from an unknown dramatic source (D. Russell, 1997, 110 n. 10; cf. D. Russell, 1993, 378); this does not strike me as particularly compelling.
1672 (E) and Parisinus gr. 1675 (B). These manuscripts read ἐπὶ γῆς, as I do here along with G.N. Bernardakis, A. Barigazzi and M. Valverde Sánchez in his translation. A.J. Kronenberg’s emendation ἐπίσης (‘equally’), however, has now become generally accepted. Barigazzi states that ‘[a] prima vista la correzione [sc. to ἐπίσης] sembra imporsi’, while I even fail to see the problem with the reading of the manuscripts. Although I follow his reading, I differ very slightly from Barigazzi in the interpretation of the passage. He defends ἐπὶ γῆς ‘perché suggerisce il cammino che si percorre, secondo Plutarco, sotto la guida di Eros, dalle cose belle sulla terra verso gli intellegibili del mondo iperuranio’. However, the procession from the sensible to the intelligible will only become relevant later in the comparison (764d-e) and it is not necessary to import this further development here in order to make sense of the passage. The opposition between the sun and ἔρως explored here is an opposition which plays out squarely in the sensible world and is quite trivial (like the examples given just before this passage, 764b-c): on earth the sun illuminates both beautiful and ugly, whereas the lover will be focussed on the beautiful on earth. The later opposition between the sun as guide towards the sensible and Eros as guide towards the intelligible has not yet come into play here.

**Dialogue on Love 764e**

άποστρέφει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ τὴν διάνοιαν, χάρις καὶ λαμπρότητι τῆς ὄψεως γοητεύων καὶ ἀναπείθων ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν αἰτεῖσθαι τά τ’ ἄλλα καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἑτέρωθεν μηθέν· (Teubner ed. modified [underlined])

For it is the sun that turns our attention from intelligibles to sensibles, bewitching it by the charm and brilliance of vision,

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10 M. MANFREDINI, 1976 offers the most extensive discussion of the (uncertain) relation between these two manuscripts.
11 G.N. BERNARDAKIS, 1892.
12 A. BARIGAZZI, 1986, 245.
15 The difference between the two oppositions becomes clear if we look at the persuasive effects of ἔρως and the sun in both instances. In the passage under discussion ἔρως persuades (ἀναπείθει) us to look at and turn to (στρέφεσθαι) beauty on earth. In the later, more Platonically coloured development (see next exegetical note) it is the sun which persuades (ἀναπείθων, 764e) our διάνοια to look for truth on earth and turns it towards this earthly beauty (ἀποστρέφει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσθητά), while Eros does the opposite this time.
and urging it to seek truth and everything else in her or in her realm, and not in any other place.

(Loeb tr. modified)

The verb αἰτεῖσθαι, which is the reading of the manuscripts, is generally regarded as corrupt\textsuperscript{16}. Following G.N. Bernardakis\textsuperscript{17} and the Budé edition, which keep αἰτεῖσθαι, I would disagree. If the reason is that the exact expression does not occur elsewhere and that αἰτεῖσθαι is used rather freely, then it should be noted that in these pages of the Dialogue on Love Plutarch often resorts to creative language, even to the extent of using hapax legomena – not unlike Plato in Socrates’ second speech in the Phaedrus (244a-257b). An unfamiliar construction or a not quite straightforward meaning alone are surely no reasons for emendation. The Budé keeps αἰτεῖσθαι, translating ‘[le soleil] tâche à nous persuader de ne chercher qu’en lui et autour de lui la vérité et tous les autres biens, sans jamais nous adresser ailleurs’,\textsuperscript{18} There is no need, however, to make ‘nous’ the subject of αἰτεῖσθαι: Plutarch is still talking about the διάνοια (ξοκε

\[\ldots\] φαρμάττειν τὴν διάνοιαν ὁ ἢλιος, 764f), as D. Russell’s translation rightly suggests\textsuperscript{19}. The generally accepted conjecture (κεῖσθαι) obscures this.

**Dialogue on Love** 770A-B

καὶ γὰρ ὁ νόμος βοηθεῖ καὶ γεννήσεως κοινῆς <ὁφάσις> καὶ τοὺς θεοῦς Ἕρωτος ἢ φύσις ἀποδείκνυσι δειμένους. οὕτω γὰρ ‘ἐρᾶν μὲν ὄμβρου γαῖαν’ οἱ ποιηταὶ λέγουσι καὶ γῆς ὑφρανόν, ἔραν δ’ ἢλιον σελήνης οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ συγγίνεσθαι καὶ κυεῖσθαι καὶ γῆν δ’ ἀνθρώπων μιτέρα καὶ ζων καὶ φυτῶν ἀπάντων γένεσιν οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον ἀπολέσθαι ποτὲ καὶ σβεσθῆναι παντάπασιν, ὅταν ὁ δεινὸς ἔρως ἢ μέρος τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἕλιον ἀπολύπη ἀπολέσθαι ποτὲ καὶ παύσηται ποθοῦσα καὶ διώκουσα τὴν ἐκείθεν ἀρχὴν καὶ κίνησιν; (Teubner ed. modified [underlined])

The law, in fact, assists since procreation too is a shared undertaking; and nature shows that the gods need eros. It is in this sense, then, that the poets say that ‘the earth loves rain’ [Eur., fr. 898.7 TrGF] and that heaven loves earth; and in this sense, too, natural

\textsuperscript{16} The Teubner edition places a crux. D. Wytenbach, 1797, 65 suggested reading αἰωρεῖσθαι, κεῖσθαι (which was adopted in the Loeb edition, as well as in W. Sieveking, 1940, 136 and H. Görgemanns, 2011) or διαιτᾶσθαι.

\textsuperscript{17} G.N. Bernardakis, 1892; G.N. Bernardakis – P.D. Bernardakis – H.G. Ingenkamp, 2011.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. also M. Valverde Sánchez – H. Rodríguez Somolinos – C. Alcalde Martín, 2003, 99: ‘induciéndonos a buscar en él y en torno a él la verdad y lo demás, y a no buscar nada en otra parte’.

\textsuperscript{19} D. Russell, 1993, 272.
philosophers assert that the sun loves the moon and that she unites and that she conceives. And since earth is the mother of all men and a source of generation for all beasts and plants, will she not be destined to perish at some time or other and be completely extinguished if ever the mighty Eros or a part of the god abandons matter and if ever she stops longing for and pursuing the principle of her motion which derives from that source? (Loeb tr. modified)

(1) The two manuscripts read γεννήσεως κοινῆς²⁰. The text does not seem to be intelligible without addition. Therefore, I adopt A. Barigazzi’s conjecture <οὔσης>, which is also printed by H. Görgemanns. As Barigazzi points out, γεννήσεως κοινῆς <οὔσης> is more readily explained as a haplography than other proposals which boil down to the same meaning²¹. However, I depart from Barigazzi and Görgemanns by reading γεννήσεως κοινῆς <οὔσης> with ὁ νόμος βοηθεῖ instead of with the following clause²². Just stating that ‘the law assists’ without giving any further information seems abrupt and a bit unclear. Greek legal concern with procreation within marriage is well documented, both in Plutarch and elsewhere²³. Moreover, only this reading places the passage in the context of Plutarch’s description of the ideal marriage as a mutual endeavour (769ε-770α).

(2) For ἐρᾶν δ’ ἥλιον σελήνης οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ συγγίνεσθαι καὶ κυ

²⁰ M. Valverde Sánchez – H. Rodríguez Somolinos – C. Alcalde Martín, 2003, 118 retains the reading of the manuscripts (which is also printed by G.N. Bernardakis, 1892), interpreting γεννήσεως κοινῆς along with Ἐρωτος as an object of δεομένους (cf. also D. Wyttenbach, 1797, 86). This, however, would make for an odd word order. D. Russell, 1993, 281 suggests a lacuna; G.N. Bernardakis – P.D. Bernardakis – H.G. Ingenkamp, 2011 suspects a gloss.

²¹ A. Barigazzi, 1986, 262. The Teubner, Budé, and Loeb editions add <ἐνέκα>; cf. also W. Sieveking, 1940, 162.

²² The Loeb translation seems to take the two word groups together but translates rather freely: ‘The law, in fact, assists Eros in bringing about procreation in all societies (γεννήσεως κοινῆς <ἐνέκα>).’

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

²⁴ This is the reading of E. B, the other manuscript, has ἦλιον δὲ σελήνης, adopted by D. Wyttenbach, 1797, 86.
object\textsuperscript{25}. Reiske’s argument ‘κυεῖσθαι
de sole nequit dici’ (in the Teubner apparatus) seems compelling: κυέω
(LSJ: ‘bear in the womb, be pregnant with […] [m]ed., bring forth […]
abs., to be big or pregnant’) cannot be said of a male subject\textsuperscript{26}; the passive
is only said ‘of the embryo or foetus’ (LSJ)\textsuperscript{27}. Agreeing with this argument
but resisting the ensuing conjecture, I suggest that the subject changes twice:
the subject of ἐρᾶν is the sun, the subject of συγγίγνεσθαι are both the sun and
the moon\textsuperscript{28}, the subject of κυεῖσθαι is, indeed, the moon\textsuperscript{29}. This once again ties
in with the emphasis on reciprocity\textsuperscript{30}.

The abrupt change of subject is rather fitting given the context. It occurs again (and this
time with certainty) in the next example: ἰπολίπη καὶ παώσιται – the subject of the
first verb is the male principle (akin to the sun), while the subject of the second verb
is the female principle (akin to the moon).

(3) Instead of the manuscripts’ μέρος,
editors have unanimously printed H.
Stephanus’ 1572 emendation έµερος. I
wonder whether this is as compelling as it
seems. After all, in the Platonic Questions
(2.1001c) Plutarch has no problem with
calling the rational part of the world soul
α τοῦ θεοῦ […] μέρος. Although the

\textsuperscript{25} Reiske is followed by G.N. Bernardakis, 1892; W. Sieveking, 1940, 162; H.
and by the current Teubner edition.

\textsuperscript{26} A notable exception is Plato’s use at Symp. 206c, where metaphorical pregnancy is
extended to include males (πάντες κυοῦσιν ἄνδρωποι). See G. Vlastos, 1981, 21 n. 59.
Cf. also D.D. Leitao, 2012.

\textsuperscript{27} Pace M. Valverde Sánchez – H. Rodríguez Somolinos – C. Alcalde Martín,
2003: 118: ‘el Sol ama a la Luna y se une a ella y la fecunda’; cf. D. Wyttenbach, 1797, 86.

\textsuperscript{28} Cf. Amat. 765c for a similarly abrupt shift in subject involving the same verb: οὐκ ἂν εἴη πολὺς
χρόνος, ἐν ᾧ τὸ σῶμα τῶν ἐρωμένων παρελθόντες ἐσω φέρονται καὶ ἅπτονται τοῦ ἤθους,
† ἐκκαλούμενος τὰς ὄψεις καθορῶσι καὶ συγγίνονται διὰ λόγων πολλά καὶ πράξεων ἀλλήλοις.
The ἐρασταί are the subject of the first three main verbs (φέρονται, ἅπτονται, καθορῶσι). The
word ἀλλήλοις makes it clear that the subject of συγγίνονται are both the ἐρασταί and the
ἐρωμένοι. Cf. G. Pasqual, 1997, 218. (On the στύξ in this passage, which does not affect the
argument here, see A. Barigazzi, 1986, 249–250; H. Görgemanns, 2011, 180 n. 330).

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

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. De Is. et Os. (e.g. 356a, 372d-f), where mutual love between Osiris (the demiurgic
figure akin to the sun) and Isis (the matter-like figure akin to the moon) drives the cosmos.
Cf. also my next remark sub 3.
context of the passage under discussion is obviously less technical, it is not a stretch to suspect that Plutarch is thinking along the same lines here. The god Eros, who plays the role of Platonic demiurge in the Dialogue on Love (esp. 756d-f), is somehow present in matter while remaining a divinity. Through his presence he provides ἀρχὴ καὶ κίνησις, which is indeed what the world soul does (cf. e.g. De an. procr. 1024c-e). In this regard, Eros can be compared to Osiris, who is the demiurgic figure in On Isis and Osiris (cf. esp. 374b-c, where Osiris’ identification with the demiurgic Eros is brought to the fore). Isis, who is associated with matter (cf. 382c), is the one who desires and pursues Osiris (ποθοῦσα καὶ διώκουσα, 371a; cf. 374f-375a), who as a demiurgic divinity is also present in matter through his efflux, which constitutes the rational part of the world soul (371a-b). Similarly, matter in the Dialogue on Love desires and pursues (ποθοῦσα καὶ διώκουσα) Eros, of whom a part (μέρος) is present in matter. On this interpretation, which ties in with Plutarch’s general views on cosmology, it makes sense to read the manuscripts’ μέρος instead of the rather redundant conjecture ἵμερος.

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