

Silencing Plato's Text. On Plutarch's III Platonic Question

[*Plutarco e il "silenzio" di Platone: sulla III Questione Platonica*]

from

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Abstract

Among Plutarch's *Moralia*, the *Platonicae Quaestiones* are ten exegetical exercises on both contradictory and obscure passages of text by Plato. In the third *quaestio* (1001c-1002e), Plutarch examines a theoretical problem related to the similarity of the "Divided Line" (*Resp.* 509d6-511e5), i.e. whether the sensible segment is "greater" (*meizon*, 1001d) than the intelligible one, or *vice versa*. In briefly summing up the content of the Platonic similarity, Plutarch surprisingly leaves out Plato's reference to the "criterion" which should mark the difference between the upper and the lower segments of the line: the *sapheneia* (*Resp.* 511e: ὅσπερ ἐφ' οἷς ἔστιν ἀληθείας μετέχει, οὕτω ταῦτα σαφηνείας ἡγησάμενος μετέχειν). How are we expected to understand this "silence"? My purpose is to demonstrate that Plutarch's omission is voluntary, since this is meant to provide the *quaestio* with a more original, step-by-step analytical development, along with a clearer solution. Plutarch's initial silence gives him the opportunity to accurately argue against any quantitative or materialistic reading of the word *meizon*. Any interpretation of Plato's ontology which reduces the intelligible dimension to an "elementary" level (i.e. to one based on *elachista*) should be rejected. The difference between the sensible segment and the intelligible one (and, hence, the superiority of the latter over the former) has to be described in *ontological terms*. But *sapheneia* had this precise meaning in its original Platonic context: so, its omission at the very beginning of the *quaestio* turns out to be of use to Plutarch in order to guide the reader gradually towards the solution of the *zetema*.

Key-Words: Omission, Plutarch, Plato, Ontology, Divided Line.

Riassunto

Le *Questioni Platoniche* raccolgono dieci esercizi esegetici plutarchei condotti su passi platonici oscuri o contraddittori. Nella *terza Questione* (1001c-1002e), Plutarco esamina un problema teorico relativo alla similitudine della "Linea Divisa" (*Resp.* 509d6-511e5): quale segmento è "più grande" (*meizon*, 1001d), quello sensibile o quello intelligibile? Nel sintetizzare il contenuto della similitudine platonica, Plutarco omette sorprendentemente il riferimento, presente nel testo di Platone, al "criterio" che dovrebbe sancire la differenza tra il segmento superiore e quello inferiore: la *sapheneia*

(*Resp.* 511e: ὡςπερ ἐφ' οἷς ἐστὶν ἀληθείας μετέχει, οὕτω ταῦτα σαφηνείας ἡγησάμενος μετέχειν). Come dovremmo interpretare questo “silenzio”? Il mio obiettivo è dimostrare che l'omissione di Plutarco potrebbe essere volontaria, poiché mira a conferire alla *quaestio* uno sviluppo argomentativo più originale, graduale e analitico, nonché una risoluzione più perspicua. In particolare, il silenzio iniziale di Plutarco gli offre l'opportunità di argomentare accuratamente contro qualsiasi interpretazione quantitativa o materialistica del termine *meizon*. Qualsiasi lettura dell'ontologia platonica riduca la dimensione intelligibile a una realtà “elementare” (cioè, a una basata su *elachista*) deve essere rifiutata. La differenza tra il segmento sensibile e quello intelligibile (e, pertanto, la superiorità del secondo rispetto al primo) deve essere posta in termini *ontologici*. Ma la *sapheneia* aveva esattamente questo significato nel suo contesto platonico di provenienza: quindi, la sua omissione al principio della *quaestio* si rivela funzionale, per Plutarco, a guidare gradualmente il lettore/allievo verso la soluzione dello *zetema*.

Parole-Chiave: Omissione, Plutarco, Platone, Ontologia, Linea Divisa.

1¹

The objective of this paper is to deal with a philosophically remarkable case of Plutarchean silence. The text I will be commenting on is the third *Platonica Quaestio*, presumably a scholastic exercise², which extensively tackles an exegetical problem related to Plato's *Republic*. What I hope to demonstrate is that the omission that can be detected at the very beginning of the *Quaestio* is necessary for the *Quaestio* itself to be settled and developed. That is why, at the end, I will suggest that such a

silence might be considered as voluntary by Plutarch - or, at least, as one which Plutarch could not be unaware of.

2

Let's start with Plato's very own words. At 509d ff. of Stephanus' edition, Socrates compares the two genres of “what is visible” and “what is intelligible” (ταῦτα διττὰ εἶδη, ὁρατόν, νοητόν) to the sub-segments of a divided segment of line³:

You surely apprehend the two types, the visible and the intelli-

¹ This paper was read for the first time at the annual meeting of the International Plutarch Society of North America, which took place in Logan and Park City in 05.2019. I am so grateful to the organizer, Professor Fran Titchner, for her kindness and hospitality, to the scholars who took part in the discussion and to Professor Fronterotta for reading the first version of this paper. I would like to dedicate this paper to Mara, for everything she says and does.

² For other interpretations of the nature of these notes, see H. CHERNISS, 1976, 2 ff.; F. ROMANO, 1994; J. OPSOMER, 1996 and 2010.

³ On this topic, see Y. LAFRANCE, 1987 and N.D. SMITH, 1996; more recently, see M.-H. YANG, 1999; F. TRABATTONI, 2010; F.F. REPELLINI, 2010 and 2003; R. NETZ, 2003; A.P.D. MOURELATOS, 2012; M. MIGLIORI, 2006; R. FOLEY, 2008; F. FERRARI, 1999 and 2006; Y.H. DOMINICK, 2010.

ble." "I do." "Represent them then, as it were, by a line divided into two unequal sections (ὡσπερ τοῖνον γραμμὴν δίχα τετμημένην λαβὼν ἄνισα τμήματα) and cut each section again in the same ratio (πάλιν τέμνε ἐκάτερον τὸ τμήμα ἀνά τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον) - the section, that is, of the visible and that of the intelligible order (τὸ τε τοῦ ὀρωμένου γένους καὶ τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου) -, and then, as an expression of the ratio of their comparative clearness and obscurity (καὶ σοι ἔσται σαφηνεῖα καὶ ἀσαφεία πρὸς ἄλληλα), you will have, as one of the sections of the visible world, images etc. (trans. after P. Shorey)

As Socrates makes clear, the two sub-segments are unequal⁴: γραμμὴν δίχα τετμημένην λαβὼν ἄνισα τμήματα. Therefore, given that these sub-segments represent the ontological genres of "the visible" and "the intelligible" mentioned above, these latter ones too should be considered to be "unequal". But that is not all. For, Socrates says that the two sub-segments need to be divided in turn "according to the same ratio" (ἀνά τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον)⁵. That is to say - one should conclude - even the "parts" of each sub-segment are required to be "unequal".

At this point, one might ask what the unequal length of the two sub-segments exactly means and implies. Since they represent two ontological genres, as is made clear by Socrates himself (see τέμνε ἐκάτερον τὸ τμήμα [...] τό τε τοῦ ὀρωμένου γένους καὶ τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου), one could wonder, first of all, which of the two sub-segments - and hence, genres - is to be deemed as "bigger"⁶. Moreover, a legitimate doubt could arise also as far as the precise terms of such a primacy are concerned. To state it more clearly, Socrates is somehow expected to identify the criterion according to which each sub-segment/genus can be described as being, so to speak, "bigger" or "smaller".

As a matter of fact, through the means of Socrates, Plato seems to tell us what this criterion could be. For, once the second subdivision has been made, Socrates rather abruptly alludes to σαφηνεῖα καὶ ἀσαφεία, "clearness and absence of clearness", as to potentially adequate parameters to evaluate the relationship both between each part of every sub-segment and the other part, and between each sub-segment and the other; as Socrates himself puts it, "[...] as an expression of the ratio of their comparative clearness and obscurity etc. (καὶ σοι ἔσται σαφηνεῖα καὶ ἀσαφεία πρὸς ἄλληλα κτλ.)".

⁴ To tell the truth, this is a *varia lectio*, as the mss. quoted in Burnet's critical apparatus show: see the discussion by S.R. SLINGS, 2005, 112 ff.

⁵ On the nature of this ratio - whether it is continuous or discontinuous -, see V. KARASMANIS, 1988, 153-154.

⁶ This question must have been very common in the ancient Platonic tradition: see A. ULACCO, 2017 for a running commentary on two pseudo-pythagorean treatises which deal with this problem.

However, a problem arises as to what such a “clearness” (and its absence) might precisely mean - mainly as far as the visible and the intelligible genres are concerned. Now, in light of the very end of the sixth book of the *Republic*, I think these criteria are to be read as being both ontologically and veritatively revealing. In other words, σαφηνεία and ἀσαφεία are likely to mark a difference in the degree of being - and, analogously, in the degree of truthfulness⁷ - of the components of both the intelligible and the visible realm. As a consequence, the kind of knowledge related to each and every part of the divided line reaches a degree of “clearness” which varies in accordance with the truth peculiar to each ontological class. As Socrates puts it, “they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality (ὥσπερ ἐφ’ οἷς ἐστὶν ἀληθείας μετέχει, οὕτω ταῦτα σαφηνείας [...] μετέχειν)”. So, the difference in length of each subsegment might be thought to allude to the difference in truth and being which characterizes each ontological class:

[...] assume these four affections occurring in the soul (τέτταρα ταῦτα παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γινόμενα λαβέ): intellection or reason for the highest (νόησιν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνωτάτῳ), discursive reasoning for the second (διάνοιαν δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ δευτέρῳ); assign belief to the third, and to the last picture-

thinking or conjecture (τῷ τρίτῳ δὲ πίστιν ἀπόδος καὶ τῷ τελευταίῳ εἰκασίαν), and arrange them in a proportion, considering that they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality (τάξον αὐτὰ ἀνὰ λόγον, ὥσπερ ἐφ’ οἷς ἐστὶν ἀληθείας μετέχει, οὕτω ταῦτα σαφηνείας ἡγησάμενος μετέχειν).

(trans. after P. Shorey, slightly modified)

3

Let’s now turn to Plutarch. At the beginning of the *Quaestio*, when he sums up the similitude of the divided segment of line, he seems to be rather accurate in his introductory sketch. The whole passage is worth mentioning:

In the *Republic*, he likens the sum of things to a single line that has been divided into two unequal segments; again divides into two in the same ratio each of the two segments, that of the visible class and that of the conceptual (ἐν τῇ Πολιτείᾳ, τοῦ παντὸς ὥσπερ μιᾶς γραμμῆς τετμημένης ἄνισα τμήματα, πάλιν τέμνων ἐκάτερον τμήμα εἰς δύο ἀνὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, τὸ τε τοῦ ὁρωμένου γένος καὶ τὸ τοῦ νοουμένου), and, having made four in all, declares first of the intelligible segment that of the primary ideas, second the mathematical (τέτταρα τὰ πάντα ποιήσας, τοῦ μὲν νοητοῦ πρώτον

⁷ On the coalescence of being and truth in Plato’s thought, see B. CENTRONE, 2014.

ἀποφαίνει τὸ περὶ τὰ πρῶτα εἶδη, δεύτερον τὸ μαθηματικόν), and first of the perceptible segment the solid bodies and second the semblances and images of these (τοῦ δ' αἰσθητοῦ πρῶτον μὲν τὰ στερέμνια σώματα, δεύτερον δὲ τὰς εἰκόνας καὶ τὰ εἶδωλα τούτων). Also to each of the four he assigns its own peculiar criterion⁸ (κριτήριον ἐκάστῳ τῶν τεττάρων ἀποδίδωσιν ἴδιον): intelligence to the first, and thought to the mathematical segment, and to the perceptibles belief, and conjecture to matters of images and semblances (νοῦν μὲν τῷ πρώτῳ, διάνοιαν δὲ τῷ μαθηματικῷ, τοῖς δ' αἰσθητοῖς πίστιν, εἰκασίαν δὲ τοῖς περὶ τὰ εἶδωλα καὶ τὰς εἰκόνας).

(trans. after H. Cherniss)

Before moving on, a few peculiarities deserve to be highlighted and commented on. First of all, it is “the universe” (τοῦ παντός) that proves to be represented by the whole segment of line (τοῦ παντός ὥσπερ μιᾶς γραμμῆς τετμημένης). This, it seems to me, implies that the line does include whatever “is”, regardless of its potential ontological eminence; that is to say, it ends up including the Idea of the Good⁹ too. But there is also another aspect which is worth pointing out. The intelligible objects corresponding to the

upper half of the intelligible sub-segment, i.e. the Ideas, are described as “primary” (τὸ περὶ τὰ πρῶτα εἶδη). It goes without saying that, should there be some “primary” intelligible objects, there have to be some “secondary” ones as well; as is made clear soon after, these latter are to be identified with the mathematical entities (διάνοιαν δὲ τῷ μαθηματικῷ). Now: one could not help but notice that, at the very least, the terminology (but presumably the resulting hierarchy as well) cannot be immediately traced back to Plato. On the contrary, it proves to be peculiar to the Platonic tradition¹⁰.

Soon after this, in Plutarch's text two pivotal questions arise, which are likely to require a carefully and deeply meditated answer:

What, then, did he have in mind when he divided the sum of things into unequal segments (τί οὖν διανοηθεὶς εἰς ἄνισα τμήματα τὸ πᾶν ἔτεμε)? And which of the segments is larger, the intelligible or the perceptible (πότερον τῶν τμημάτων, τὸ νοητὸν ἢ τὸ αἰσθητόν, μεῖζόν ἐστιν)? For he has not made it clear himself (αὐτὸς γὰρ οὐ δεδήλωκε).

(trans. after H. Cherniss)

As is evident, we are now presented with the same questions we posed a few minutes ago when reading Plato's

⁸ On this term and its history, see G. STRIKER, 1996.

⁹ On this hotly debated topic, see now M. VEGETTI, 2017/2018.

¹⁰ See H. CHERNISS, 1976, 38 ff.

own words. But, unlike Plato, Plutarch does not provide us with any clue as to which might be the answer. For, there is a striking silence, a surprising omission in Plutarch's summary: no mention at all happens to be made of "clearness" and "absence of clearness". Actually, there is not even a trace of any *criteria* of the kind of those which were alluded to in the *Republic*, and seemed to be considered there as the possible means to draw a comparison between each part of the divided segment and the other.

4

At this point, one should consider the reason for such an omission to occur, and whether this is to be deemed as voluntary by Plutarch, or if, nevertheless, it is one Plutarch could not be unaware of. I think that there is only one way to try to find a solution: giving a brief yet precise account of the answer Plutarch himself provides us with at the very end of the *Quaestio*. For, only by understanding what, according to Plutarch, is the right clue for explaining the alleged "reticence" of Plato's text (see αὐτὸς γὰρ οὐ δεδήλωκε), one will also be given the opportunity to appreciate the real significance of the initial omission.

So, which is the "bigger" sub-segment of the divided line? And - what is even more important - what does "bigger" exactly

mean here? Plutarch extensively deals with these questions throughout the *Quaestio*. Firstly, he tests the possibility that the "bigger" sub-segment is the sensible one; later on, in the second and last half of the text, he puts the other "candidate", i.e. the intelligible, under scrutiny. In all this, the main difficulty the reader needs to tackle is the fact that the author does not explicitly declare the theoretical option he sides with. Hence, before continuing the examination, a hermeneutic criterion needs to be established - at least, should Plutarch's own position be detected. As a matter of fact, the scholars, and especially professor Opsomer¹¹, have been drawing attention to a trend in Plutarch's *Quaestiones*: when not clearly stated otherwise, the solutions favoured by the author are likely to be the final ones. As a consequence, also in the third *Platonica Quaestio* scholars usually read the second half of the text as the core of Plutarch's thought, thus concluding that, according to him, it is the intelligible which is somehow "preminent"¹². Besides, the arguments previously employed to argue in favour of the "majority" of the sensible are actually defective. For, each of them mirrors a wrong conception of the relationship between the intelligible and the sensible realm, in so much as each of them is likely to exploit quantitative or materialistic criteria, or a markedly "continualist" approach¹³. For example, at 1001d we

¹¹ See J. OPSOMER, 1996 and 2010.

¹² See L. NAPOLITANO VALDITARA, 1992; F. FERRARI, 1999.

¹³ An example of argument mirroring a continualist approach is represented by the following passage (1001f-1002a): ἔτι τῶν εἰδῶν νόησιν ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως καὶ περικοπῆς σώματος ἐπάγει, τῇ

are told that the sensible sub-segment is “bigger” than the intelligible one because the “substance” of the latter is “contracted into something little and pure (εις βραχὺ συνηγμένη καὶ καθαρὸν)”. As is rather undisputable, a corporeal consistence is necessary for a substance to be described as “concentrated” (συνηγμένη) into something “narrow” (βραχὺ):

On the face of it the perceptible segment would seem to be larger (δόξει δ' αὐτόθεν μὲν εἶναι μείζον τὸ αἰσθητόν), for the indivisible and invariably identical being of the intelligibles is narrowly and purely concentrated (ἢ γὰρ ἀμέριστος οὐσία καὶ κατὰ ταῦτόν ὡσαύτως ἔχουσα τῶν νοητῶν ἐστὶν εἰς βραχὺ συνηγμένη καὶ καθαρὸν), whereas the perceptible was provided by the dispersed and erratic being of bodies [ἢ δὲ σκεδαστή περι τὰ σώματα καὶ περιπλανῆς τὸ αἰσθητὸν παρέσχεν].

(trans. after H. Cherniss, slightly modif.)

Anyway, the problem with this kind of arguments can be summed up as follows: it is illegitimate to draw a comparison between two ontological classes through the means of a criterion which doesn't properly suit both of them. But, according to Plutarch, should “bigger” ever be understood in strictly physical terms, one would be end up exploiting exactly that kind of inadequate criterion (see 1002b, 1002d):

To the contrary, however, one might say first that, in comparing <the> perceptibles with the intelligibles, we are in a way putting mortal things on a level with the divine (πρὸς δὲ τοῦναντίον εἶποι τις ἂν πρῶτον ὅτι συγκρίνοντες τὰ αἰσθητὰ τοῖς νοητοῖς τρόπον τινὰ τὰ θνητὰ τοῖς θείοις ἐξι-σοῦμεν), for God is among the intelligibles (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς)¹⁴. [...] And, besides, it is silly to judge of things incorporeal from things corporeal (καὶ ἄλλως εὐθές ἐστι τοῖς σω-

τῶν μαθημάτων τάξει καταβιβάζων ἀπὸ τῆς ἀριθμητικῆς ἐπὶ γεωμετρίαν, εἶτα μετὰ ταύτην ἐπ' ἀστρολογίαν, ἐπὶ πάσαις δὲ τὴν ἁρμονικὴν τιθεῖς: γίγνεται μὲν γὰρ τὰ μὲν γεωμετρούμενα, τοῦ ποσοῦ μέγεθος προσλαβόντος τὰ δὲ στερεά, τοῦ μεγέθους βάθος: τὰ δ' ἀστρολογούμενα, τοῦ στερεοῦ κίνησιν: τὰ δ' ἁρμονικά, τῷ κινουμένῳ σώματι φωνῆς προσγενομένης. ὅθεν ἀφαιροῦντες φωνὴν μὲν τῶν κινουμένων κίνησιν δὲ τῶν στερεῶν βάθος δὲ τῶν ἐπιπέδων, μέγεθος δὲ τῶν ποσῶν, ἐν αὐταῖς γενησόμεθα ταῖς νοηταῖς ιδέαις, οὐδεμίαν διαφορὰν ἐχούσαις πρὸς ἀλλήλας κατὰ τὸ ἐν καὶ μόνον νοούμενον. οὐ γὰρ ποιεῖ μόνος ἀριθμὸν, ἂν: μὴ τῆς ἀπείρου δυάδος ἀνηται: ποιήσασα δ' οὕτως ἀριθμὸν, εἰς στιγμὰς εἶτα γραμμὰς ἐκ δὲ τούτων εἰς ἐπιφανείας καὶ βάθη καὶ σώματα πρόεισι καὶ σωμάτων ποιότητος ἐν πάθει γιγνομένων. Through a gradual process of “elimination”, starting from the most complex sensible objects, it is possible to reach the Prime Principles, which appear to be a kind of “minimal entities”. The process proves continuous, for it is free from any ontological “gap”. On this passage, see J. OPSOMER, 2007.

¹⁴ On the notion of God in Plutarch, see recently F.E. BRENK, 2005, 2012, 2014.

ματικοῖς τεκμαίρεσθαι περὶ τῶν ἀσωμάτων).

(trans. after H. Cherniss)

Therefore, a fresh start is required. And, in order to reach a new perspective of inquiry, it is a new reading of the word “bigger” that is necessary. Such a reading is now expected to mirror the following methodological principle: it is not legitimate to “draw inferences” (τεκμαίρεσθαι) from characteristics of the corporeal to characteristics peculiar to the intelligible. In light of this, Plutarch is finally given the opportunity to draw the comparison on a correct basis. To conclude on this point: were the intelligible to reveal itself to be “preeminent”, such a preeminence should be established in accordance with an ontologically valid criterion, i.e. not with a quantitative or materialistic one (1002c ff.):

Moreover, body is said to be without parts and indivisible because of minuteness (καὶ μὴν ἀμερές γε λέγεται καὶ ἀμέριστον τὸ μὲν σῶμα μικρότητι)¹⁵, but the incorporeal and intelligible because of its simplicity and purity and freedom from all diversity and difference (τὸ δ’ ἀσώματον καὶ νοητὸν ὡς ἀπλοῦν καὶ εἰλικρινές καὶ καθαρὸν ἀπάσης στερεότητος καὶ διαφορᾶς). And, besides, it is silly to judge of things incorporeal from

things corporeal (καὶ ἄλλως εὔηθές ἐστι τοῖς σωματικοῖς τεκμαίρεσθαι περὶ τῶν ἀσωμάτων).

(transl. after H. Cherniss)

So, it is thanks to its simplicity, purity and its being untouched by any kind of corporeality, that the intelligible is proven to be ontologically superior.

5

It is now time to return to the omission of σαφηνεία καὶ ἀσαφεία at the very beginning of the *Quaestio*. Is it possible to identify the exact reason why Plutarch could choose to be silent about these criteria? I think that it is, mainly in light of the development of the *Quaestio* itself. First of all, given the structure of the text, it seems reasonable to think the following: the communicative aim of Plutarch, when writing this text, was likely to be that of gradually showing how improper it would be to compare intelligible and sensible objects on the basis of a quantitative or materialistic parameter, or even adopting a continualist approach. But, were such an objective to be reached, it would be counter-productive for Plutarch to mention a proper criterion (like the ontological one of “clearness”) from the very beginning of the text. For, in that case, Plutarch should have immediately explained what that

¹⁵ Here it is possible to detect a sign of Plutarch’s polemic against Xenocrates, if - as I believe - the allusion is to Xenocrates’ “minimal parts”; on the matter, see M.I. PARENTE, 2006, 9 ff. and 47-48; as another example of this criticism, see Procr. an. 1022e: ἡ μὲν οὖν ἀμέριστος οὐσία καὶ αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσα μὴ μικρότητι, καθάπερ τὰ ἐλάχιστα τῶν σωμάτων, νοεῖσθω φεύγουσα τὸν μερισμόν· τὸ γὰρ ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀπαθές καὶ καθαρὸν αὐτῆς καὶ μονοειδές ἀμερές εἴρηται καὶ ἀμέριστον. I set out to elaborate on the philosophical relationship between Plutarch and Xenocrates (and Speusippus) in an other paper.

criterion precisely meant, and thus the *Quaestio* too would have immediately reached a solution. Whereas, through the means of the initial silence, both the reader and the writer are given the opportunity to test each argument and each theoretical option with an open mind. And as is rather evident from the reading of the *Quaestio*, the inquiry always appears in doubt, throughout the whole text, as to which argument will in the end turn out to display the fully right solution. Besides, what is at issue here is likely to be something terrifically important, I would venture to say vital, for a philosopher¹⁶: *i.e.* how not to draw inferences in order to describe the intelligible objects. And maybe it is not by chance that some of the mistakes Plutarch condemns were presumably made by an authoritative Plato's follower, one Plutarch often criticises: I mean Xenocrates¹⁷. So, in light of all this, the initial omission could be deemed as also polemically pregnant¹⁸, since it is functional to the gradual and hence impressive demonstration of the inadequateness of Xenocrates' philosophy.

Now: is this silence the product of a voluntary omission? Or does Plutarch simply rely on an already written *Quaestio*, where the omission was present? In my opinion, it would be not cautious to definitively side with one of these

options, as we lack a definitive piece of evidence on the matter. Nevertheless, there are at least two aspects which should be taken into account. First, Plutarch and the other Middle Platonists used to "tamper" with the texts of the sources they quoted - Plato included¹⁹. This makes it all the more probable that Plutarch simply eliminated the reference to *σαφηνεία καὶ ἀσαφεία* from his text. But, even if he did not tamper with Plato's words on his own - maybe because he relied on an already available material -, he could not help but directly revise the source. For, Plutarch had a philological and first-hand approach to - along with a deep knowledge of - Plato's dialogues²⁰. So, it is possible to conclude that, at the very least, Plutarch could not be unaware of the omission present in his introductory summary. But, as a matter of fact, he must have realised that such a silence could turn out to be unexpectedly useful.

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¹⁶ But, if the scholastic nature of the *zetema* were the case, one should rather say: an aspiring philosopher.

¹⁷ On Plutarch's debt to Xenocrates, see J. DILLON, 1999 and n. 12 above.

¹⁸ For Plutarch as a polemicist, see J. DILLON, unpublished.

¹⁹ See J. DILLON, 1989 and F.M. PETRUCCI, 2018.

²⁰ See e.g. F. FERRARI, 2004.

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