

[H. North. Sôphrosune. Chapter VII - suite]

Auteur : Foucault, Michel

Présentation de la fiche

Coteb028_f0751

SourceBoite_028-11-chem | Sophrosunè.

LangueFrançais

TypeFicheLecture

RelationNumérisation d'un manuscrit original consultable à la BnF, département des Manuscrits, cote NAF 28730

Références éditoriales

Éditeuréquipe FFL (projet ANR *Fiches de lecture de Michel Foucault*) ; projet EMAN (Thalim, CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne nouvelle).

Droits

- Image : Avec l'autorisation des ayants droit de Michel Foucault. Tous droits réservés pour la réutilisation des images.
- Notice : équipe FFL ; projet EMAN (Thalim, CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne nouvelle).
Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Partage à l'Identique 3.0 (CC BY-SA 3.0 FR).

Notice créée par [équipe FFL](#) Notice créée le 22/03/2021 Dernière modification le 23/04/2021

Plutarch is perhaps the best illustration of a man of letters whose wide familiarity with philosophy, rhetoric, and poetry enriched his concept of sophrosyne with reflections of every stage in its historical development. Himself a Platonist, Plutarch normally reproduces the doctrines of Middle Platonism in the *Moralia*—although he follows Aristotle in many aspects of the system expounded in the treatise *On Moral Virtue*.¹⁴ In both the *Moralia* and the *Lives*, Plutarch makes sophrosyne profoundly important for education and morality. He habitually scrutinizes the record of his biographical subjects for this excellence when estimating their moral character; for example, he describes the austerity of Lycurgus and Numa, both of whom sought to instil *autarkeia* and sophrosyne in their people; the purity of Aristides and the *sôphrôn* ("frugal") way of life of Cato the Elder; the clean-handedness of Coriolanus; and above all the continence of Alexander, whom Plutarch (unlike most of his biographers) hails as a model of sophrosyne.¹⁵ When Plutarch wishes to encourage his readers to live a better life through contemplation of an *exemplum horribile* (as he says in his introduction to the *Life of Demetrius*), he chooses for special emphasis and rhetorical amplification those episodes that will show the degeneration of his subject from sophrosyne to licentiousness.

While the *Moralia* contain no novel interpretation of sophrosyne, they are full of curious and enlightening remarks about its relevance to a surprising variety of problems. These include the relation of *tychê* to the virtues of Alexander, the symbolism of the tortoise in statues of Aphrodite and Athene, the need for a *sôphrôn* woman to cultivate charm, the superiority of rooks and daws to Penelope herself where sophrosyne is concerned, the ruler as an image of God, made like Him by virtue, and the search for *exempla* of sophrosyne in Homer.¹⁶ The wide scope of sophrosyne in Plutarch's usage is betrayed by its numerous

of the *prepon* and the *kathêkon* (*decorum, officium*) and often comments on the need for sophrosyne in the character of kings and statesmen, but the word normally refers only to self-control and avoidance of luxury, not to political moderation or prudence. See 7. 7. 8 on the *sôphrôn bios* of Hiero; 18. 41. 8 on the character of Attalus; 8. 10. 10 on the companions of Philip I, who were kingly by reason of their acts of high-mindedness, their *σωφροσύνας*, and their daring. The use of the plural is unusual at this date.

¹⁴ See R. M. Jones *The Platonism of Plutarch* (Menasha, Wisc., 1916).

¹⁵ Lycurgus: *Life* (Loeb edition) 5. 6, 11. 4, 17. 2, 31. 1. Numa: *Life* 4. 3, 20. 7. Aristides: *Comparison with Cato* 6. 1. Cato: *Life* 1. 3, 5. 1, 19. 3. Coriolanus: *Comparison with Alcibiades* 5. 2. Alexander: *Life* 4. 4, 21. 3, 22. 4, 47. 4.

¹⁶ *Moralia* on *tychê* of Alexander: 97C, 326E ff., 337B, 339A; on tortoise: 142D, 381E; on charm: 141F–142A; on Penelope: 988F ff.; on ruler: 780D; on Homeric *exempla*: 31A–C, 32B ff.

BnF
MSS

