

# *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch*

José Ribeiro Ferreira, Delfim Leão,  
Manuel Tröster & Paula Barata Dias (eds)



## PHILANTHROPIA AS SOCIABILITY AND PLUTARCH'S UNSOCIABLE HEROES

ANASTASIOS G. NIKOLAIDIS  
University of Crete, Rethymno

### Abstract

Although the words φιλανθρωπία and φιλόανθρωπος are pivotal terms of his ethical vocabulary, Plutarch often attaches to these words meanings and nuances that appear to be ethically indifferent or neutral. One of these meanings is the sociability-nuance of *philanthropia*, which seems to describe all sorts of refined modes of behaviour such as courtesy, affability, tactfulness, friendliness, hospitality and the like. Plutarch appreciates and encourages these aspects of refined conduct (mainly in the *Moralia*), for he believes that they conduce to good human relations and promote social harmony. Yet, though some of his heroes (e.g., Phokion, Cato, Perikles) appear to be rather unsociable, Plutarch, far from finding any fault with them, explicitly or implicitly justifies and even approves of their sternness and austerity. Sometimes because he is aware that good manners and sociability, especially in the domain of politics, may be a deceptive façade that often conceals crude ambition or devious schemes and machinations; other times because he bows to the hero's moral excellence, which, under certain circumstances, seems to be somehow incompatible with the usual manifestations of sociability.

According to Diogenes Laertios, Plato distinguished three kinds of *philanthropia*: a) by way of salutations, i.e. by addressing everyone you meet on the street and shaking hands with them, b) by way of helping everyone in need, and c) by way of keeping an open house and offering dinner-parties. In other words, *philanthropia* is manifested through salutations, through conferring benefits, and through offering dinners and promoting social intercourse<sup>1</sup>.

Nobody recognizes Plato in this description, of course, since the four occurrences of the words φιλανθρωπία and φιλόανθρωπος in the Platonic corpus convey only the literal meaning of the words (love and lover of mankind), which at most could be taken to underlie the second kind in Laertios' passage<sup>2</sup>. Plutarch would also have difficulty, I think, in associating Plato with the three kinds of *philanthropia* above, but for him Laertios' description would have

<sup>1</sup> D. L. 3.98: Τῆς φιλανθρωπίας ἐστὶν εἶδη τρία· ἓν μὲν διὰ τῆς προσηγορίας γινόμενον, οἷον ἐν οἷς τινες τὸν ἐντυχόντα πάντα προσαγορεύουσι καὶ τὴν δεξιὰν ἐμβάλλοντες χαιρετίζουσιν. ἄλλο εἶδος, ὅταν τις βοηθητικὸς ἢ παντὶ τῷ ἀτυχούντι. ἕτερον εἶδος ἐστὶ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας ἐν ᾧ τινες φιλοδειπνισταὶ εἰσι. τῆς ἄρα φιλανθρωπίας τὸ μὲν ἐστὶ διὰ τοῦ προσαγορεύειν, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ εὐεργετεῖν, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ ἐστιᾶν καὶ φιλοσυνουσιάζειν. The above categorization is part of the Διαίρέσεις (*Divisiones*), the last section of D. L., book 3 (§§ 80-109), sometime attributed to Aristotle (see V. ROSE, 1971, p. 677).

<sup>2</sup> *Euthphr.* 3D: ἴσως γὰρ σὺ μὲν δοκεῖς σπάνιον σεαυτὸν παρέχειν καὶ διδάσκειν οὐκ ἐθέλειν τὴν σεαυτοῦ σοφίαν· ἐγὼ δὲ φοβοῦμαι μὴ ὑπὸ φιλανθρωπίας δοκῶ αὐτοῖς ὅτιπερ ἔχω ἐκκεχυμένως παντὶ ἀνδρὶ λέγειν, οὐ μόνον ἄνευ μισθοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ προστιθεὶς ἂν ἡδέως εἴ τις μου ἐθέλει ἀκοῦειν. *Symp.* 189C-D: ἔστι γὰρ θεῶν φιλανθρωπότητος (sc. Ἔρωτος), ἐπίκουρός τε ὢν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἰατρὸς τούτων ὢν ἰαθέντων μεγίστη εὐδαιμονία ἂν τῷ ἀνθρωπιῷ γένει εἴη. *Lg.* 713D: ...καὶ ὁ θεὸς φιλόανθρωπος ὢν, τότε γένος ἄμεινον ἡμῶν ἐφίστη τὸ τῶν δαιμόνων. *Def.* 412E: Φιλανθρωπία ἕξις εὐάγωγος ἤθους πρὸς ἀνθρώπου φιλίαν· ἕξις εὐεργετικῆ ἀνθρώπων· χάριτος σχέσις μνήμη μετ' εὐεργεσίας.