Aurora CORTI, *L'Adversus Colotem di Plutarco. Storia di una polemica filosofica*

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Aurora CORTI, *L'Adversus Colotem di Plutarco. Storia di una polemica filosofica*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2014, 325 p., ISBN 978-94-6270-009-3.

Recent years have seen the publication of a number of significant studies of Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem*. The *Adv. Col.* has always been of interest, of course, as a source for Presocratic philosophers and also the philosophy of the Hellenistic Epicureans, Cyrenaics, and Academics. But in these recent studies it has also been considered as a whole work in its own right, with critics and interpreters becoming increasingly interested not just in looking through Plutarch to access a Hellenistic or even earlier philosophical debate but in considering how and why Plutarch decided to respond to Colotes' four-hundred year-old work *On the fact that it is impossible even to live according the doctrines of the other philosophers*. (See, for example, E. Kechagia's substantial monograph *Plutarch Against Colotes: A Lesson in History of Philosophy* [Oxford, 2011] and the series of essays collected in the 2013 volume of the online journal *Aitia* [<http://aitia.revues.org/591>].)

Corti's useful new work adds to this growing interest by offering a series of studies that deal with important aspects and themes of the work. A first chapter looks carefully at the structure of *Adv. Col.* and asks what kind of work it is. A second chapter then winds back the clock to give a detailed account of what we know of Colotes and his works, making excellent use of some difficult evidence to piece together as full a picture as is possible of the Epicurean's general philosophical background and *œuvre*. In these sections and throughout the book, Corti provides extremely full references to a wide range of secondary works and demonstrates a sure-footed mastery of a wide range of scholarship.

One question that immediately arises for anyone thinking about *Adv. Col.* is: What possible reason could Plutarch have for responding in such detail to this polemical tract by one of Epicurus' long-dead attack-dogs? Corti's answer is that, by responding to Colotes' super-*apraxia* argument, Plutarch can not only score some points against the same Epicureans he will take on in the companion work *Non posse*, but will also be able make a case for a certain view of the history of philosophy that emphasises an important continuity in the Academic tradition. And that is why Corti concentrates on the relationships between Colotes, Arce-silaus, Plato and Plutarch and leaves aside for the most part the various skirmishes between Colotes and Plutarch over other philosophers (Democritus, Empedocles, Melissus *et al.*) that are also part of the overall landscape of the work.

One of the more interesting themes of Corti's account, therefore, and the theme that dominates chapter III ('Plutarco di Cheronea: l'interpretazione unitaria dell'Accademia e la difesa del Platonismo') is the stress placed on how Plutarch and Colotes are in conflict over an entire philosophical tradition. For Colotes, only the Epicureans are free from the woeful misunderstandings that plague all the other philosophers he discusses and which render a life unliveable according to their respective theories. In particular, to his mind, a failure to recognise the truth of empiricism hampers any competing philosophical approach. For Plutarch,

on the other hand, there is an important truth recognised by all the various philosophers in Colotes' sights that he takes to be one of the cornerstones of a continuous Academic tradition that embraces Plato and Arcesilaus and can trace its roots at least as far back as Parmenides: the sensible world does not present itself to us in a way that allows us to acquire stable knowledge. Only the intelligible world is sufficiently stable for that kind of cognition and so, in the face of what we perceive, the correct approach is to adopt a form of cognitive modesty that Arcesilaus, for example, stressed in his notion of 'suspending judgement' (*epoche*) and which Plutarch himself endorses in his general attitude to our ability to acquire knowledge of, for example, the natural world. In sum, what for Plutarch shows the grand and continuous tradition of companions in arms is precisely what for Colotes shows that these non-Epicurean philosophers are all companions in guilt. The earlier Academy too, of course, had been in the business of constructing a positive philosophical lineage for its particular sceptical stance (see e.g. 1121F–1122A), so there is a further and older layer to this interpretative debate. Corti does well in picking through the complicated history of competing ancient philosophical histories.

The concentration on Arcesilaus as the central figure over whom Plutarch and Colotes are fighting also leads Corti to suggest that we should accept that there was a significant debate between the sceptical Academy and the early generations of the Epicurean school. Certainly, Colotes seems interested in putting Arcesilaus in his place, but Corti also wants to see a 'polemica oscurata' in the other direction (104–110). For her, Arcesilaus is not merely involved in a dialectical exchange with the Stoics but also offers a theory of action *in propria persona* (the defence of this claim is the theme of her chapter IV) that also has an ethical import. This ethical import is in turn at least implicitly intended as a criticism of rival schools such as the Epicureans. The evidence assembled here, however, and taken in particular from 1122D–1123E, seems to me to be inconclusive. Certainly, what we have in that passage is a response to the Epicurean criticisms from the perspective of the slandered Academy and that is clearly why, for example, there are references to the way in which the Epicureans themselves should recognise some kind of natural impulse towards whatever presents itself as good and pleasant without the need of any additional cognitive processing. But I see no reason to think that this is anything other than Plutarch's own construction offered in defence of Arcesilaus rather than evidence for some original Hellenistic Academic anti-Epicurean argument. That at least seems to be the general tactic adopted in the cases of the other philosophers that Colotes attacked: Plutarch sets out the criticisms, then points out that they are based on a misunderstanding of the original philosopher's intention, and in fact it is the Epicureans who are subject to the problems that Colotes detects in his rivals. Here too, Plutarch argues that Colotes cannot cope with the technical discussion of impression and assent and fails to comprehend Arcesilaus' position. Moreover, in fact it is the Epicureans who resolutely refused to be

moved by things that to everyone else are perfectly plain and evident, including the claim that sometimes the appearances we receive are not true.

Elsewhere in the book, Corti offers some additional interesting pointers towards the ascription to Arcesilaus of some kind of moral theory (see: 185–93 and 266–7). The evidence here is again suggestive at best and I am less convinced that we can be confident that the connection between suspension of judgement and *hesychia* at 1124A (the attitude ‘of grown men’ as Plutarch puts it at 1124B) is something we can ascribe to Arcesilaus rather than an elaboration by Plutarch; it is an intriguing suggestion nevertheless and it is certainly possible that Plutarch took Arcesilaus’ overall message to be one of a kind of cognitive modesty in the face of the perceptible world that other more robustly empiricist schools fail to appreciate. Although there are reasons to be cautious about the ascription of this ethical doctrine to Arcesilaus himself, therefore, it is certainly important to recognise that Plutarch sees that there is an ethical dimension to tackling these Epicurean criticisms. The closing sections of the work (from 1124D onwards) clearly show that Plutarch has strong reasons to think that Epicureanism is a morally dangerous movement and that standing up for the importance of piety and law is an important marker of grown-up philosophy. Even Democritus, Parmenides, Empedocles and Melissus were, in their different ways, men of law and servants of their respective cities (1126A–B).

Another theme that Corti does not pursue but which nevertheless seems relevant to understanding Plutarch’s own presentation of how to do the history of philosophy properly is his regular gripe that Colotes, either wilfully or else due to sheer incompetence, is a terrible interpreter of philosophical texts. At 1108D, for example, he complains that Colotes’ work hacks out chunks of his target texts and stitches them together like freaks displayed in the *agora*. Colotes, in other words, pays no attention to the proper charitable interpretation of the texts he reads and decontextualises parts of these works in order to serve a polemical purpose. (See also Kechagia, *op. cit.*, 41–2.) Plutarch, we should therefore surmise, is a careful and sensitive reader of what these texts intend to say and is not limited by the simple literal understanding of what a particular author has written. Similarly, at 1114D (cited by Corti on p. 146–7), Plutarch puts the contrast between the interpretative methodologies in the following terms: his opponent, Colotes, is wedded to the simple *rhema* while he is able to access and understand the *pragma* behind the particular vocabulary and expressions that these philosophers used. No doubt this contrast plays a role in the local disagreement between Plutarch and his chosen polemical opponent at this point in the text, but Plutarch is not merely scoring a point against his rival in term of scholarly rigour. The reading strategy that these comments promote also points towards Plutarch’s own understanding of the correct way to approach the history of philosophy and therefore the methods by which he feels himself able to present his preferred account of the history of his

own philosophical school. At 1114D, for example, it licenses Plutarch's attempt to understand Parmenides as a sort of Platonist *avant la lettre*.

I enjoyed Corti's reading of *Adv. Col.* and, although I am perhaps less inclined than she is to read through the text to uncover earlier Hellenistic debates, the detailed account she provides of Colotes' work and philosophical background and her presentation of Plutarch's stance on the history of the Academy in response to Colotes' attacks are important contributions to the growing recent literature devoted to this complicated and multi-layered work.

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Maxime de TYR, *Choix de conférences. Religion et philosophie*, introduction, traduction et notes par Brigitte Pérez-Jean et Frédéric Fauquier, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2014 (La Roue à livres), 162 p. ISBN 978-2-251-33974-0

La nécessité d'une traduction française nouvelle des écrits de Maxime de Tyr se faisait depuis longtemps ressentir. Plus de deux siècles se sont en effet écoulés depuis la traduction de Jean-Isaac Combes-Dounous (1758-1820) (2 tomes, Paris, 1802), magistrat et helléniste qui avait publié aussi un *Essai historique sur Platon, et coup d'œil rapide sur l'histoire du platonisme depuis Platon jusqu'à nous* (2 tomes, Paris, 1809), ouvrage aujourd'hui oublié mais qui avait fait parler de lui en son temps. Cette traduction avait remplacé à son tour celle que le père Nicolas Guillebert avait fait publier à Rouen en 1617. Depuis la traduction de Combes-Dounous, l'intérêt en France pour l'œuvre de Maxime de Tyr, sans être considérable, ne fut pourtant pas inexistant. En témoignent le travail méritoire de Guy Soury (*Études sur la philosophie religieuse de Maxime de Tyr*, Paris, 1942) et la thèse inédite de Jacques Puiggali (*Études sur les Dialexeis de Maxime de Tyr, confrencier platonicien du II^e siècle*, Lille, 1983). Cependant, une traduction nouvelle de son œuvre manquait et, en attendant que ce *desideratum* soit complètement comblé un jour, Brigitte Pérez-Jean, spécialiste du scepticisme antique, et son collaborateur Frédéric Fauquier ont assumé la tâche de traduire et d'annoter un choix représentatif des conférences de Maxime.

La traduction est précédée par une introduction (p. 13-28) qui fait le point sur ce que l'on sait de la vie et de l'œuvre du philosophe de Tyr. Sa biographie est quasiment inconnue et des maigres informations qu'on en possède, on retient une seule date fiable, sa visite à Rome sous Commode entre mai 180 et décembre 192. Son identification avec Cassius Maximus auquel Artémidore de Daldis, auteur des *Oneirocritica*, dédie une partie de son ouvrage, est possible, voire probable, mais loin d'être certaine. L'œuvre de Maxime réunit quarante-et-une *dialexeis* ou conférences transmises par une trentaine de manuscrits dont l'archétype est *Parisin. gr.* 1962, copié à Constantinople à la fin du IX^e siècle, manuscrit sur lequel se fondent les trois éditions modernes de l'œuvre de Maxime : H. Hobein (Leipzig, 1910), M. Trapp (Leipzig, 1994) et G. L. Koniaris (Berlin-New York, 1995). On trouve