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SOCRATES, THE *PHAEDO*, AND THE *LIVES* OF PHOCION AND CATO THE YOUNGER

At the end of Plutarch's *Life of Cato the Younger*, the hero casts himself -or is cast by his author- in the role of a second Socrates, specifically that of the Socrates of the *Phaedo*. Neither the Socratic note, nor the specific relationship with the *Phaedo* has gone unnoticed[1]. But I think that there is more to be said about both, in connection not only with *Life of Cato*, but also with the *Life of Phocion*, which precedes it in its pair. Cato's (and Plutarch's) Socratic imitation, seen in context, is not an isolated final flourish, but rather the culmination of a process that begins in the opening chapters of the *Phocion*. In this paper, I aim to trace this process and offer some suggestions about its significance.

1. *Phocion*

Phocion and *Cato the Younger* are one of only four pairs of *Lives* not to be concluded with a formal *synkrisis* (the others are *Themistocles* and *Camillus*, *Pyrrhus* and *Marius*, and *Alexander* and *Caesar*)[2]. The element of comparison is however displaced rather than wholly suppressed. For, in introducing the first of his two subjects, Phocion, Plutarch allows himself to draw parallels between him and his Roman counterpart at the outset. With due allowance for their individual circumstances, Phocion and Cato are compared in chapters 2 and 3 of the *Life of Phocion* as good statesmen attempting to stand up for right in corrupt circumstances, and thereby endangered; ch. 3 moreover ends with a direct reflection on the difficulty of articulating the comparison between them correctly. As has been observed, this short passage does much of the work that would more standardly be left for the end of the second of the pair of *Lives*[3]; but at the same time its early positioning allows

1 Most recently, J. GEIGER, 1979, 63; and 1996, 270-8; C. PELLING, 1997, 245.

2 Discussed by C. PELLING, 1997, 228-50.

3 C. PELLING, 1997, 245.

A. PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ, J. GARCÍA LÓPEZ & R. Mª AGUILAR (Eds.), *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles. Actas del V Congreso Internacional de la I.P.S. (Madrid-Cuenca, 4-7 de mayo de 1999)*, Madrid, 1999.

it to do something that no final *synkrisis* could, namely, to invite the reader to think comparatively, and to be on the alert for parallels, right from the start. Moreover, and here my own argument begins in earnest, this prefatory comparison is worded in such a way as to introduce a distinctively Platonic note, one might almost say a keynote, at the outset. Speaking of Cato, Plutarch cites Cicero's witicism that he behaved as if he were living in Plato's Ideal State, rather than among the dregs of Romulus; speaking of Phocion, he uses words that recall the description of a corrupted *demos* in the *Gorgias*, and so also evoke that dialogue's picture of Socrates at odds with his contemporaries[4]. A Platonizing analysis of the relationship between statesman and populace is thus established as central to understanding the resemblance between Plutarch's two subjects, and the figure of Socrates brought, if only hazily so far, into relationship with them.

Plutarch then proceeds with the life. The suggestion of a resemblance between this first subject and Socrates is immediately strengthened in ch. 4, with the discussion of Phocion's philosophical education, in the Socratic tradition (he was a pupil successively of Plato and Xenocrates), and more vividly and immediately with the statement that he went without shoes and cloak when on campaign[5]. Thereafter, as the detailed account of Phocion's civic and military career gets under way, the comparison with Socrates develops in the way described in this volume by Dr. Alcalde Martín. It is then spectacularly intensified at the end of the *Life* (ch. 36-8). Unjustly tried and condemned to death, Phocion and his co-defendants are taken back to the prison to drink hemlock. Phocion himself, in deference to a friend's request, is to drink last, but before he can do so the supply of hemlock runs out, and he has to pay for another dose from his own pocket. Sentence is carried out in spite of the fact that it is the day of the Olympieia (19 Mounuchion), and the traditional cavalry procession in honour of Olympian Zeus has to pass before the prison. Some of the passing horsemen remove their garlands, others gaze at the prison doors with tears in their eyes; all right-thinking people regard the decision not to postpone the execution, and keep the city pure for the day of the ritual, as impious in the extreme. Once Phocion is dead, the Athenians quickly repent of their action, belatedly recognizing him for the guardian of moderation and justice that he was, and honouring him with a posthumous statue and a public reburial. All of this, Plutarch concludes, in the very final words of the *Life*, 'reminded the Greeks once more of Socrates, since -they felt- there was the closest resemblance between the city's error and misfortune in the two cases.'

4 *Gorgias* 515b-519d: note particularly the shared use of medical imagery and the shared stress on the idea of gratification (χαρίζεσθαι).

5 Compare Alcibiades's description of Socrates on campaign in *Smp* 220a-d.

These words acknowledge and make explicit a feeling that is likely to have been growing on the reader for some time, since the account of the defendants' return to prison, if not the preceding trial. Not only Phocion's unjust condemnation by a temporarily unappreciative city, and his death by hemlock, but also the posthumous rehabilitation and the award of a statue, have indeed parallelled the case of Socrates, eighty years before (*cf.* Diog. Laert. 2.43). But at the same time, more subtly, the closing words also acknowledge that, in framing his own account of Phocion's end, Plutarch has taken care to make it resonate against the classic account of Socrates's, Plato's *Phaedo*. The pounding of the hemlock, which so upsets Phocion's co-defendant Thudippus, and the detail of its running out, give an echo of Socrates's question to the prison attendant, bringing in the pounded hemlock, whether there is any to spare for a libation, and the attendant's response that they pound only the standard quantity required for the job (*Phaedo* 117ab). The cavalry procession for the Olympieia, the doffing of the riders' garlands, and the question of whether the execution compromised the ritual purity of the city, recall the delay in Socrates's execution for the duration of the religious mission to Delos, and the garlanding of the ship's stern at its beginning (*Phaedo* 58a-c). Perhaps, too, the banishing and subsequent repatriation of Phocion's corpse recall the play made in the *Crito* and the *Phaedo* with the ideas of death and exile (*Crito* 44b, *Phdo* 62b ff.) and Socrates's teasing of Crito over the arrangements for his burial (115c-116a). Finally, both in his summary of the Athenians' belated acknowledgement of Phocion's *sophrosune kai dikaiosune*, and in his own single-sentence conclusion, Plutarch echoes the content and the form of Plato's ending to the *Phaedo*.

The first of the pair of lives thus ends not only with a strong assertion of a similarity between Phocion and Socrates, but with an unmistakable reminder of the Platonic Socrates and Plato's account of Socrates's end[6]. The end of the first of a pair of *Lives* is however only a provisional conclusion -in Christopher Pelling's words, 'a temporary resting point', half-way through the whole artistic unit constituted by the two *Lives* together. The eye of the reader passes on to the second leaf of the diptych with Plato and the Platonic Socrates dominating its final view of the first, and behind that, recollected from the opening pages, the suggestion that Cato too, with his appearance of having strayed out of the pages of the *Republic,* has something of Socrates about him. What then does an eye thus primed encounter when it starts in on the second life?

6 With some intriguing variation between model and imitation: e.g. whereas in *Phaedo* the narrative dwells vividly on Socrates's drinking of the hemlock, and events between then and his last shudder, Plutarch's in *Phocion* elides both the drinking and the death, preferring to take the reader outside the prison entirely at the crucial moment, showing us its closed doors through the eyes of the passing cavalry.

2. *Cato Minor* 1-57

To first appearances, nothing very much. Socrates, who loomed so large at the start and the finish of the account of Phocion, seems to be entirely absent from Plutarch's account of Cato's childhood, youth and early career. One can point to a series of details in respect of which some very general parallel can be drawn -Cato's improving moral influence on those who come into contact with him (9), his keenness to associate with the wise, trusting in his own innate nobility to recommend him (10, *cf. Smp* 216d-e), his rigorous adherence to principle and his constant reproaches in word and example to immoral behaviour (16-19), his marital problems (24-5; cf. D.L. 2.26, 36-7), and his defence of the established order and due legal form in the face of unconstitutional manipulation, especially by would-be tyrants (26-9, 31-4)- but in no case is any direct comparison made, nor any implicit hint woven into the wording.

It therefore comes as something of a jolt when, in introducing the figure of Marcus Favonius into his narrative, Plutarch characterizes his attitude to Cato by comparing it with that of Apollodorus of Phalerum to Socrates (46). This is done quite baldly, in a single sentence; in context, the point is simply to account for Favonius's role in keeping Cato in the public eye during his praetorship. But in the longer perspective of Plutarch's overall strategy in the pair of *Lives*, it does rather more than just this: it brings Socrates back into the argument; it attaches him for the first time directly to Cato; and it reminds us of Plato - for it is as Plato's character, in *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, that Apollodorus and his almost manic devotion to Socrates are best known to us. Yet, just as happened in the transition from Phocion's end to Cato's beginning, so again here, the comparison with Socrates is not immediately followed up. The seed has been planted, or replanted, but it will not germinate until Plutarch's narrative starts to move towards its conclusion twelve chapters later.

3. *Cato's End*

The final act of the drama of Cato's life, as Plutarch tells it, begins with two events, recounted in ch. 58: Cato's assumption of the responsibility of defending Utica at the beginning of the chapter, and the arrival of the news of Caesar's victory at Thapsus at its end. Cato is now physically located at the *place* of his death, and the process that is to determine the *time* of his death -Caesar's steady advance on the city- is under way. His two tasks in what remains are, first, to secure the physical safety of his entourage and the people of Utica, by assisting in the negotiation of terms and by enabling those who must to escape; and secondly, to procure his own 'escape' by suicide. Chapters 59-66 are concerned with the former task, 67-70 with the latter, though Cato's own resolve to die is first mentioned, and established

explicitly as the end towards which events are moving, in 64.2-3. We have seen how comparison with Socrates, and an allusive relationship with the narrative of the *Phaedo*, coloured the end of the *Life* of Phocion; the very same thing, but on a larger scale, and with a more complex allusiveness, now happens again at this corresponding point in the parallel *Life*.

Two phases in the process can be distinguished, corresponding to the two sections of the end-narrative already mentioned. In the first, as Cato seeks to secure Utica, and to see off the refugees, Socratic notes begin to sound in Plutarch's description of his comportment and actions, and a rough general correspondence in situation to that in the *Phaedo* begins to take shape. In the second phase, from the end of ch. 66 onwards, reference to the narrative detail of the *Phaedo* becomes more insistent, and the sense of Cato replaying an old script with variations grows more pointed.

Thus, to begin with the more generally Socratic notes, the description of Cato calming panic in Utica following the news from Thapsus in 59.1 brings to mind the Odysseus of *Iliad* 2.188 ff., restraining and cajoling the fleeing Greeks outside Troy, in a passage which Xenophon in *Memorabilia* 1.2.58-61 identifies as a favourite quotation of Socrates's, maliciously twisted by his detractors. The description of how Cato's moral influence on individuals, for all its intensity face-to-face, could dwindle when direct contact was broken (61) resembles Xenophon's account of the dwindling of Socrates's effect on Critias and Alcibiades, once they were no longer in daily contact with him, again in the *Memorabilia* (1.2.24). Cato's claim, reported in ch. 64.5, to be morally speaking the victor over Caesar, though physically on the losing side, echoes a standard perception of Socrates's moral victory over his prosecutors and judges, again originating in Plato's and Xenophon's portrayals[7]. Closer to the distinctive situation of the *Phaedo* is the representation of the contrast between Cato's imperturbable calm and the agitation of those around him in 59.2, and of the longing admiration that the people of Utica are said to feel for him in 64.2, just as his resolve to die and desert them becomes public knowledge (*cf.* e.g. *Phaedo* 58e-59a, 117c-e). Perhaps also (though this may be something that cannot fully be felt until the end-narrative moves into its second phase) the sense of time slipping away towards the end that the central character is set on, and everyone else is desperate to stave off, with the advance of Caesar towards Utica parallelling the waning towards dark of Socrates's last day.

It is however with the end of ch. 65 that the narrative of the *Phaedo* becomes Plutarch's main point of reference - not as a model for simple imitation or mecha-

[7] See for instance Max. Tyr., 3.7-8, building on such precedents as Plato, *Apol.* 39c-d.

nical repetition, but as a celebrated, canonical account of last hours, to which Cato's story moves in counterpoint, sometimes approaching it and sometimes -for reasons to which we must turn in due course- curiously diverging. Let me begin, however, by reminding you of the essential details of Plato's narrative, against which I am suggesting Plutarch's should be seen.

At the end of his account of the true earth, the rivers of the Underworld, and the journeyings of the soul after death - at the end of what we now call the 'myth' of the *Phaedo* - Plato's Socrates breaks off with the observation that this is a journey that his friends will make one day, but that he is called on to make now; it is time for him to take a bath, so as to save others the trouble of washing his dead body (115a). After the exchange with Crito about his burial, he goes into an adjoining room to bathe, leaving his friends to reflect on their approaching bereavement. He converses with his children and womenfolk, then dismisses them and returns to the main body of his friends. It is now about sunset. The gaoler enters to take his leave, then departs in tears. Socrates asks Crito to summon the attendant with the poison, and is unmoved by Crito's attempt to postpone the moment, on the grounds that the last light has not yet faded from the hills. The attendant enters, gives Socrates the cup of hemlock, and at Socrates's request instructs him in what to do. Socrates asks if he can pour a libation, and is told that there is not enough in the cup to allow it; he prays for a happy change of abode from this place to that, puts the cup calmly to his lips, and drinks. The sight of the cup at his lips, then drained, breaks down his friends' last defences; all of them weep, Apollodorus, who had been crying all along, most tempestuously of all. Socrates once again gently reproves and restrains them. Following his instructions, he walks around until his legs feel heavy, then lies down, and lets the poison's chill spread up his body from the feet, with the attendant monitoring its progress. When it reaches his lower belly, he uncovers his face, and gives his famous instruction to Crito to pay the debt to Asclepius. Crito responds, but Socrates doesn't answer him in return; moments later his body twitches, and when the attendant uncovers his face again, his gaze is fixed. Crito closes his mouth and eyes.

Now consider the corresponding sequence of events from the *Cato*. Chapters 65-6 find Cato making his last public dispositions in the face of Caesar's imminent arrival. He addresses the people of Utica for the last time with an exhortation to maintain their unity, and make their peace with Caesar; he visits the harbour to see to the safe embarkation of all who will consent to leave, acquiescing in his son's determination to stay with him, but doing all he can to dissuade his young admirer Statullius from mimicking his resolution at the price of his own safety. This done he returns to his house, where he will now stay and in which he will die (66.3). He converses with his friends, issues some last instructions to his son, and towards

evening retires to take a bath. After bathing, he dines with all his companions; the conversation becomes philosophical, and turns to the Stoic paradox that 'the good man alone is free', which Cato defends with a vehemence that makes still plainer his own resolve to seek freedom in death (67). He retires to his bedchamber, and begins to read the *Phaedo*, but breaks off before finishing it to notice that his sword is no longer hanging in its usual place over his bed, having prudently been removed by his son during dinner. He gets it back, but not before he has had to strike one of his servants for hesitation to do his bidding, injuring his right hand in the process, has had to read an angry lecture to his son and friends about the iniquity of treating him like a potentially dangerous lunatic, and address some more calmly reproachful remarks to his philosophical advisers, Apollonides and Demetrius (68-70.1). These latter depart in tears as the sword is brought back. Cato returns to his interrupted reading of the *Phaedo*, which he not only finishes, but reads through again for a second time. He sleeps, but around midnight wakes, and sends one of his freedmen, Butas, to check that all the ships carrying refugees have safely put to sea (70.3). The dawn chorus starts; having received one last visit from Butas, to report that all is now calm in the harbour, Cato has himself shut into his bedchamber again, draws his sword, and stabs himself. But because of the injury to his hand, the thrust does not run true; in his convulsions, he falls from his couch, knocking over a geometer's abacus and making enough noise to alert his entourage. They rush in to find him still alive and concious, with the greater part of his entrails sagging through the wound; the doctor thrusts them back and sews him up; with a last burst of energy, he pushes the doctor away, tears the wound open again with his bare hands, and dies (70.4-6).

The way Plutarch has constructed this sequence of events, and the setting in which they take place, make it impossible not to think of the *Phaedo*, if for no other reason initially that Plato's text is itself an element in the drama, as the work Cato reads at the end, and breaks off to secure the instrument of his death. But it is equally hard to avoid drawing comparisons with the content and narrative sequence of the *Phaedo* as well. Cato's situation, actions and experiences, as Plutarch presents them, are fascinatingly both like and *un*like those of Plato's Socrates, and thus also - to revert for an instant to a wider view - both like and unlike those of Cato's Greek twin, Phocion.

In some respects, Cato and Socrates run in simple parallel: both spend their last hours indoors, moving between rooms of a single modest building, while others with greater freedom of movement enter and leave their presence; both are surrounded by friends and family who lament their approaching death but are powerless to delay it, still less avert it; both bathe shortly before their death; both before their deaths discuss and defend the philosophical principles which sustain the spirit in which they intend to die; both maintain their conviction that death is a kind of

liberation. But in other respects, these similarities serve to point to some very striking differences, aided perhaps by two curious, almost incidental-seeming inversions of the Platonic blueprint. Plato's Socrates dies at *sunset*, on the day on which a ship has *returned* to Athens from a mission celebrating an unhoped-for restoration; Plutarch's Cato by contrast dies at *dawn*, following a night in which a fleet of ships has *departed* from Utica, carrying their passengers to safety in exile.

But whether or not these particular inversions are felt to have any individual point or substance, there is no doubt that Cato's death, for all its Socratic-Platonic framing, ends up presenting some striking divergences. The point is not so much that Cato's is a true suicide, a real case of self-killing, as opposed to a judicial execution -both deaths are after all willed, in the face of compelling external circumstance. It is rather that Cato has to work harder to achieve his end, that the path to it is notably more violent and agitated, and that the end itself is spectacularly messier. The Platonic Socrates moves smoothly and serenely from the articulation of a theoretical argument to its practial application. Once he has overcome the successive waves of argument launched against his conviction of the soul's immortality by Simmias and Cebes, his own principles allow him to regard that conviction as firmly established; no further argument or reiteration is needed (except by way of gentle, bantering reminder to Crito). The inner calm founded on this conviction, so clearly highlighted by the agitation of all around him, never deserts him. His death is a calm slipping away, just the purifying withdrawal of soul from body that he himself had earlier depicted in the argument with Simmias and Cebes[8].

Cato, in contrast, has constantly to return to argument and the assertion of principle -as if even his own resolve has constantly to be refreshed. In talking philosophy with his friends after dinner, and defending the Stoic proposition most closely relevant to his own immediate circumstances, he is already following in Socrates's footsteps, and replaying the *Phaedo*. But he has then, as if in a kind of nervous overkill, to revisit the territory of philosophical death by reading the *Phaedo* itself; his reading of the *Phaedo* is interrupted, as he detects practical opposition to his plans on the part of his household; and even when he has completed his interrupted reading, it is not enough, and he repeats it. Throughout this process, and in the suicide itself, he acts with agitated vehemence, and even anger, more often than with philosophical calm, from his intense and impassioned defence of the Stoic paradox, to the striking of his unwilling servant, and his subsequent reproaches to household and friends; he tries to regain his sword by calm enquiry, but fails to maintain that calm when he meets with opposition. The manner of his death, finally, is harsh and

8 As suggested by C. GILL, 1973.

nasty. It is not simply that, as a Roman aristocrat, he favours the blade over the cup, though that is obviously an essential element in the contrast. It is also that, because of his earlier petulant lashing out, he botches the blow, so as to make his own death messier and more painful than it need have been. This is a difficult passing (*dusthanaton*); instead of lying still and quiet like Socrates, Cato falls from his couch, upsetting another piece of furniture with an unseemly clatter; whereas Socrates's life slips away in a process that leaves almost no external signs, Cato's vital organs protrude all too visibly from his lacerated body, and are the subject of a last, appalling physical tussle between him and the doctor.

4. *The Third Man*

Cato thus replays the end of Socrates, but it does not come out the same. Why not? The short answer, 'because Cato was not Socrates, and the circumstances of Utica in 46 B.C. were not the same as those of Athens in 399' -is correct enough, but evades the real question, which is why *Plutarch* should have chosen to tell the story of Cato's end in just this way, so as both to court the comparison with Plato's Socrates, and underline the divergences. What point is he trying to make? Is the invitation to reflect on Cato, or on Socrates, or on the Platonic portrayal? As may already be clear from the discussion so far, I think the explanation is to be found in Plutarch's use of the Socrates comparison not just in his account of Cato's end, but throughout the whole of his treatment of Cato and of Phocion. As we have seen, both Phocion and Cato are compared to Socrates in life and in death, with specific reminiscence of the Socrates of the *Phaedo* coming in only as the culmination of a longer process; and this process is itself introduced by an unusual prefatory *synkrisis*, encouraging the reader at the outset to be on the lookout both for similarities and for subtle contrasts between the two subjects, and suggesting that Platonic material may become important in the articulation of these convergences and divergences. And Socrates, ultimately the Socrates of the *Phaedo*, is the principal medium through which the comparison is developed. Plutarch uses him as a 'third man', a *tertium comparationis* whose resemblances to both of the other two individually allow them to be compared not only with him but also with each other.

The point of the exercise, then, is to allow a comparison of Cato and Phocion via their shared resemblance to Socrates, in the absence of any explicit formal *synkrisis* at the conclusion of the pair of *Lives*. In constructing the comparison in this way, Plutarch is in part following well-established precedent, and in part making something new of his own. He was not the first to compare either of his two subjects individually with Socrates. He himself tells us that 'the Greeks' in general saw

Socrates's fate recalled in Phocion, and although no confirming instance now survives for us to read, there is no need to doubt what he says. As for Cato, if it is indeed true that he discoursed on freedom and read the *Phaedo* in his last hours, then he himself was the first to court the comparison, which will then have passed into the first, eye-witness accounts of his end, circulated in its immediate aftermath[9]. It is certainly drawn within eighteen months or so, by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations* (1.71ff.), and has become something of a cliché for Seneca[10]. Plutarch's originality lies first in bringing the two neo-Socrateses together, then in extending the comparison to cover other details of their lives as well as their last moments, while at the same time shaping his two narratives of those final moments so as to shadow and echo Plato's canonical account of the end of their model.

The upshot of this, its message, I suggest, bears more closely on Cato than on Phocion. For Plutarch's treatment invites his readers to compare, on the one hand, a limited, but clear and straightforward similarity between Phocion and Socrates (classical-period Athenian and classical-period Athenian, both drinking hemlock in the same prison, both righteous benefactors of their city suffering from its ingratitude), and, on the other hand, the more distant, intermittent and problematic similarity between Socrates and Cato. The very brevity of the account of Phocion's end underlines the solidity of the resemblance between his death and Socrates's; the very length and elaboration of vivid detail in the account of Cato's brings out the contrasts. One might be tempted then to read this as 'criticism' of Roman Cato, as contrasted with the more successfully noble Greek Phocion -Cato tries to be like Socrates, but the attempt is artificial, too laborious, and doomed to failure given the different circumstances, and Cato's unSocratic temperament. But this is perhaps too crude. Might it not be better to see here instead a subtle, and carefully indirect Plutarchan critique not so much of Cato, as of earlier (Roman) *writing* about Cato, and of the 'myth' of Cato that had become established in Latin historical and moral-philosophical reflection? Surveying Roman writing about Cato, such as the references in Cicero's *Tusculans* and the works of Seneca, already referred to, and still more importantly, the full-scale biographies of Cato on which he was drawing for much of his raw material in the *Life*[11], Plutarch will -on this line of explanation- have been dissatisfied by the confidence and/or the crudity of the Cato-Socrates

9 *Cf.* J. GEIGER, 1979.

10 *Ep.* 104.27ff., plus a series of passages in which Cato's and Socrates's deaths are cited as part of a longer catalogue (usually also including Regulus): *Epp.* 13.14, 67.7, 71.7, 98.12; *Prov.* 3.4, 3.12ff, *Tranq.* 16.1, *Marc.* 22.3 (I owe this list to J. GEIGER, 1979, 64, n. 61). Note particularly *Epp.* 13.14 and 67.7-13, where Seneca seems to celebrate Cato's superior toughness.

comparison. As a response, he composed his own death of Cato to suggest that matters were not so simple, taking full advantage of two possibilities open to him but not to his Latin predecessors - the fact that he was composing his *Lives* in pairs, and so could use a second, contrasting case to cast light on Cato's Socratism; and the fact that he was writing in Greek, and so could construct eloquent variations on the essential base text -the *Phaedo*- of a kind that no Latin author had access to.

5. *Another model?*

If it is right that the claim to be following in Socrates's footsteps at the end originated with Cato himself, then Plutarch's narrative, even if aimed more at Cato's chroniclers than at their subject, cannot avoid implicitly criticising him too, at least to the extent of suggesting that he didn't in fact get that close to his chosen model. However, both to speak of criticism of Cato on Plutarch's part, and to suggest that play with the Socrates comparison makes up the whole of the account of Cato's last hours, risks giving a false impression. As many critics have noticed[12], Plutarch's attitude to his subjects is normally one of judicious sympathy and generosity; in general he seeks credit for refraining from easy point-scoring or facile moralizing. This generalization seems to me to hold good for his *Cato*. Although, as we have seen, Cato clearly falls short of Socratic serenity, is unable fully to control his emotions, makes awkward problems for himself by his petulant striking of his servant, and dies with a kind of uneasy brutality, his end remains in Plutarch's telling a noble one, and he himself achieves a stature not granted to any other character in the *Life*. A large part of the reason for this, I would like to suggest in conclusion, is that, intertwined with the not wholly flattering Socrates comparison there is another model which, while not evoking warm sympathy, does help to touch Cato with a compensating grandeur.

Plutarch's account of Cato's last hours can be paraphrased, as I did earlier, so as to bring out the parallels with the *Phaedo*. But it could also be presented with a different emphasis, as the story of a man set on a suicide which is to liberate him from an intolerable state of humiliation, while at the same time threatening to expose those he leaves behind him to further danger from his and their enemies. He takes some steps for their protection, but not enough to reassure them; they beg him to

[11] He refers directly to two, by Munatius Rufus and Thrasea Paetus (37.1, 25.2), and may also have been aware of other works on notable Roman deaths known to have come into circulation towards the end of the first century AD - see again GEIGER, 1979.

[12] *Cf.* C. PELLING, 1997, pp. 231, 237-42.

change his mind, and attempt to deprive him of his sword, as one would a dangerous madman; with fierce anger, he rejects their entreaties, and demands the return of his weapon, in words that both confess and conceal what he is resolved to do with it. He tests the sharpness of the blade, to assure himself that it 'stands firm'[13], ensures that he is alone and unimpeded, and falls on his sword.

When the story is phrased like this, Cato ceases to sound like Plato's or anyone else's Socrates, and starts instead to sound like a character from tragedy; not just tragedy, but specifically Sophoclean tragedy; and above all like Sophocles's Ajax -a character distinguished by his bloody suicide by the sword, the rough anger with which he brushes aside the attempts of his family and dependants, and the grandeur, the sense of being a larger figure than anyone else on the stage, which he nevertheless projects[14]. I should like to believe that it is indeed the Sophoclean Ajax that can be glimpsed, side by side with the Platonic Socrates, in Plutarch's Cato[15]. But even if this is felt to be too specific, the general point, that Cato has something of the tragic hero as well as of Socrates about him, surely stands, and is an important corrective to seeing a relationship with the *Phaedo* as the only significant ingredient in Plutarch's presentation of his end.

Yet it may be that even in this respect, the *Phaedo* is still exerting its influence. For as he breaks off from his final account of the afterlife in *Phaedo* 115a, Plato's Socrates is made to compare himself to a tragic hero - "you, Simmias and Cebes and the rest of you, will each make this journey at some time in the future; but now it is I who, as a tragedian might put it, am summoned by destiny." "And," he continues, with apparently playful bathos, "it is just about time for me to go and have a bath." As Christopher Rowe points out in his commentary, this continuation may in fact maintain the tragic reference, as well as guying it; and if it *is* read that way, then one specific passage to which it could easily be referred is *Ajax* 654-6, Ajax's riddling announcement in the so-called 'Deception Speech' that he is off to the bathing-place and the meadows by the shore, to purify himself[16]. If this is indeed the allusion Plato intended, or rather if it is the allusion Plutarch understood him to be making, then the comparison between Cato and Ajax, or at least between Cato and a tragic hero, is as much a development from the *Phaedo* as that between Cato and Socrates.

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13 70.1: *hos de eiden hestota ton athera kai ten akmen diamenousan.*

14 The classic discussion is that of B. KNOX, 1961.

15 In order to sustain this suggestion, I need to place considerable weight on 70.1, as echo of *Ajax* 815-6, *ho men sphageus hesteken hei tomotatos genoit'an*, and on Cato's remark about treating him like a madman in 68.4.

16 C.J. ROWE, 1993, 290.

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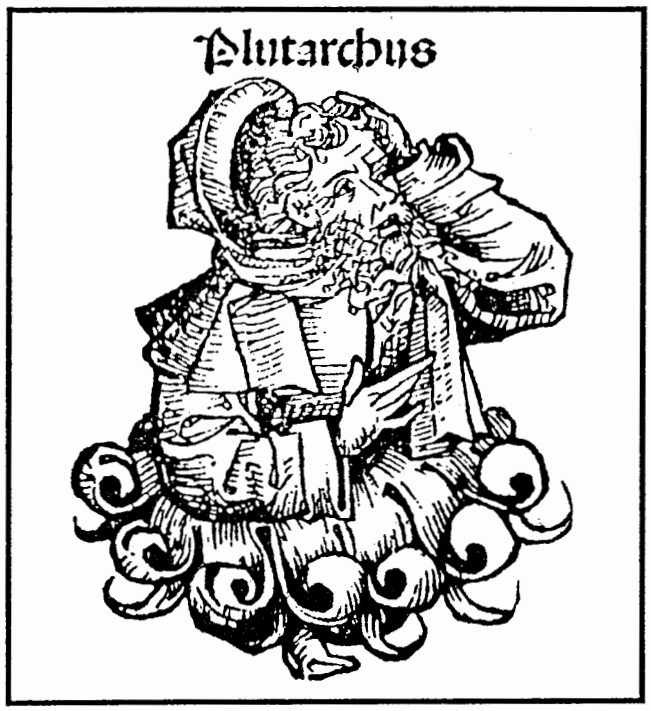

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