

REMARKS ON PLUTARCH'S *DE VITANDO AERE ALIENO*

It is a common, and irritating, practice of Plutarch's to begin his prooemium with a comparison or a contrast. Perhaps the same move may be appropriate for an essay in the interpretation of an author to whom Professor Dodds, forty years ago, wrote one of the most charming and penetrating introductions.¹ We might put it like this: to be in debt is indeed bad, dangerous and corrupting; but to acknowledge debts of learning and friendship in the manner this volume intends, is both *καλόν* and *ἡδύ*.

De vitando aere alieno is a vigorous and lively discourse. Style and subject mark it as somewhat out of Plutarch's usual line. It raises a swarm of problems. Is it genuine? Is it complete? Does it reflect a real crisis? The preliminary to any answer to these, and similar, questions seems to me to be an analysis of the speech as it stands, an attempt to show its connections of thought. This is all I shall try to do here.

The thesis *ὅτι οὐ δεῖ δανείζεσθαι* involves two distinct propositions: that borrowing is a bad thing (A); and that there are ways of avoiding it (B). To look at it in this way brings it into line with the moral failings that Plutarch discusses in treatises like *περὶ φιλοπλουτίας* or *περὶ δυσωπίας* where the principal heads of the subject are naturally the attack on the vice and the suggestions for cure.² Now both these basic propositions readily admit amplification. Proposition A can be enlarged by any means that paints the picture in darker colours, for example by representing the debtor as a damned soul (828F, 830F) or as a drowning man (831D). Proposition B leads at once to the hackneyed topics of the renunciation of luxury and the true freedom of the self-sufficient life. Plutarch did, I think, conceive of his subject under these heads. Given his moral preoccupation, this was almost inevitable. And in fact he treats the two themes turn and turn about, and we can detect the passage from one to the other, even where it is masked by the syntactical structure. But he does not announce the distinction. The *propositio* that he does make (829F, 137.6 Hubert) distinguishes arguments addressed to the poor from arguments addressed to the rich. We shall see that—as often in ancient writings—the execution of this plan is not altogether a simple story.

The speech begins with a solid concentration on the theme I have called B, the proposition that one need not borrow. This extends down to *δανειστήν* in 828E (134.2), and the transition to A is thus made in the middle of a sentence.

In detail:

827D–E (131.3–13). 'Plato forbade fetching water from a neighbour without first digging down to the clay on one's own land. Should there not be a parallel law about borrowing?'

The learned quotation sets the tone; this is no sermon at the street-corner, it is meant for an audience appreciative of elaborate allusion. But the treatment is free, not to say misleading: in *Laws* 845E, it is water that *βοηθοῦ δεῖται νόμου*, and this phrase seems to be the basis of Plutarch's *ἀπορία γὰρ βοηθεῖν τὸν νόμον*. We should note the topos of 'the law there ought to be': it is itself Platonic.³

827E–F (131.13–132.3). 'As things are, men incur debt unnecessarily, for superfluities and not for essentials. Indeed, creditors expect a guarantee of means before they will lend.'

We shall hear this again, 830D (139.7–8).

¹ 'A Portrait of a Greek Gentleman', *Greece and Rome* vi (1933), 97–107. In what follows, I refer often to the page and line of Hubert's Teubner text (*Moralia* v 1, 1957), and I shall not as a rule repeat illustrative material which is to be found there. See

also my *Plutarch* (Duckworth, 1973), 28–31.

² See now H. G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele*, Göttingen 1971.

³ *Sympos.* 181D. For *ἔδει . . . ἢ δέ* or the like, cf. *Moralia* 465D, 686D, 1129E.

827F–828A (132.4–12). ‘Borrow from your own *trapeza*; use your silver plate to make yourself your own creditor. The earthenware with which you replace it will not remind you of your obligations.’

The rhetorical question *τί θεραπεύεις* . . . ; seems abrupt, but the connection is clear enough. If borrowing is only possible for those who have means, it follows that, if you have any, you need not go outside for a loan. The *double entendre* with *τραπεζίτην* and *τράπεζα* seems certain. A probable parallel (v. *TLL* s.v. *mensa* 744.51) is in St Ambrose, *de Helia et ieiunio* 9.31: ‘ieiunium nescit faeneratorum, non sortem faeneratorum novit, non redolet usuras mensa ieiunantium.’ Here *redolet* parallels Plutarch’s *ῥζει* (132.8). The rhetoric of the passage is rich. We have not only the trope *ἡ Κωλιάς ἢ Τένεδος* (cf. *Mor.* 462B *τὴν μανίαν ἢ Ἀντίκυρα θεραπεύει* for a more familiar example), but also the oxymoron *ἐπιρρυπαίνοντος*⁴ *τὴν πολυτέλειαν* and the more characteristically Plutarchan religious imagery of unlucky days (cf. *Mor.* 417C, *Camillus* 19). Moreover, the technical terms are used with a precision which it is easy to miss: the middle *ὑπόθου* applies to a mortgagee, the point being that one should put oneself in the position of one’s creditor.

828A–B (132.12–15). ‘Those who pledge their valuables are beyond salvation, Ashamed of receiving a fair price, they feel no shame at paying interest on their own property!’

This is an alternative to be rejected: *μὲν* in 132.12 is not answered, the implied antithesis being with the ordinary borrower on security.⁵ *ἐνέχυρα*, it would seem, remain in the creditor’s possession until redeemed, though the ownership remains with the debtor, and he pays interest on the sum which has passed to him in respect of the pledge.

828B–F (132.15–134.2). ‘Yet Pericles constructed the statue of Athena in such a way that its gold ornaments could be removed for war emergencies; similarly, in fighting our war with debt, we should treat our superfluous luxuries as removable. The Roman matrons gave their ornaments for the gold mixing-bowl to be sent to Delphi; the women of Carthage gave their hair for catapult-ropes, for freedom’s sake. Yet we enslave ourselves by debt, when we ought to contract our needs in order to assure our liberties. Artemis of Ephesus gives debtors asylum: simplicity gives asylum everywhere.⁶ The oracle promised the Athenians a “wooden wall”; so God gives us a wooden table, if we would live in freedom. No elaborate equipage is necessary for our escape; any horse or ass will serve.’

This elaborate set of *exempla* presents the subject in a yet broader and grander context. We are at war with debt, the moneylender is an occupying enemy, we can choose ‘sanctuary’ and ‘freedom’ if we please. The story of Pericles clearly comes from Thucydides (2.13): the value of the gold is 40 talents—in other sources there are different figures—and the phrases *χρυσίου ἀπέφθου* and *μὴ ἔλασσον* survive the re-writing. Yet it differs from Thucydides in a significant way. Plutarch’s Pericles here shares his foresight with the people at the time the statue is made. Moreover, the emergency envisaged is not a life-and-death matter (*ἐπὶ σωτηρία*), but just ‘the war’. It could be argued that this helps the comparison; it is no doubt healthier to think of our luxuries as dispensable from the start, and selling them should not be an absolutely last resource. But these points are not explicit, and it is safer to regard the variation as simply for vividness, an exercise of the

⁴ Cf. Cercidas 4.10 Powell *τὸν ῥυποκιβδοτόκωνα*: also J. Chrys. *hom.* 56.6 in *Matth.* (7.574B): *οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς ῥύπον αὐτὸ καλεῖτε*, for *ῥύπος* in connection with usury.

⁵ The distinction seems to be that between ‘pledge’ and ‘hypothec’, as understood by students of classical

Attic law: A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens*, i 258 ff.

⁶ *Comp. Nic. Class.* *πολλὴν εὐρυχωρίαν ἢ πόλις ἔχει σχολῆς* suggests we should read *πολλὴν* for *πολλῆς* at 133.16, and perhaps also *ἰλαρᾶς καὶ ἐπιτίμων*.

usual degree of licence in anecdote, despite the historical blunders that result. Volkmann⁷ was wrong, I think, to see evidence of non-Plutarchan authorship in this.

The *κόσμος* of Athena provides a link with the ornaments of the Roman matrons; the religious purpose of their self-sacrifice and the patriotic motive of the Carthaginian women both have point when the analogy is applied to the debtor: it is a 'temple' of 'freedom' that we can build for ourselves and our families. The 'temple' theme then in turn suggests the shrine of Artemis at Ephesus, from which an obvious and conventional moral can be drawn.⁸ These associative links are meant to unify the catena of examples. The last of the series, the oracle of the 'wooden wall', is the most ingeniously contrived of all. It has an obvious link with the 'liberty' theme: *ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐλευθερίας* (133.21) is in a position of emphasis at the end of its clause. The hackneyed allusion—nothing was more banal than *τὰ Μηδικά*—is then exploited in two directions. 'Wooden wall' leads by association to 'wooden tables' and simple furniture; the oracle's words 'do not wait for horsemanship' are woven into a vivid sentence making the point that elaborately ornamented vehicles⁹ are overtaken by swift *τόκοι*, while escape from the enemy can best be assured on an ordinary horse or ass. It is in the course of this imaginative flight that the transition to the second main proposition (A), namely that indebtedness is in itself bad, in fact takes place.

828F (134.2–8). 'The moneylender, from whom we are trying to escape, does not indeed demand earth and water, like the Mede, but he strikes at your liberty all the same; whatever you do, he bars your way.'

The moral allegory of the Persian war thus continues: it reverberates again a little later, 829A (135.4). But the striking thing here is the massive structure of three pairs of balancing clauses (134.4–8) that forms the resonant conclusion of the whole carefully constructed movement. 'If you refuse to give, he duns you; if you have the money, he refuses. If you are selling, he forces the price down;¹⁰ if you are not selling, he compels you to do so. If you go to the court, he intercedes with the magistrate. . . .'¹¹ The next words, *κὰν ὁμόσης ἐπιτάττοντα* are obscure. It is not clear what the debtor asserts on oath, and there seem to be three possibilities: that he has the means to pay; that he has not; and that he is too ill to appear in court. The second view would seem to be supported by St Basil's paraphrase:¹² *ἐὰν ὁμύσης, οὐ πιστεύει· ἐρευνᾷ τὰ ἔνδον, τὰ συναλλάγματα σου πολυπραγμονεῖ*. But we have no knowledge of any technical sense of *ἐπιτάττω* that would fit. Again following Basil, we might suppose it to mean 'order an inquisition' into the debtor's means; but this would be guesswork. Emendations suggested do not convince either. The consideration that the other paired clauses indicate contrasts may incline us rather to the third possibility: if the debtor declares his inability to appear (*morbum iurat*, cf. e.g. Cic. *ad Att.* 1.1.1, 12. 13.2), the creditor takes steps to compel his attendance.

829F (134.9–11). 'Solon's prohibition of loans *ἐπὶ σώμασι* has failed; the Athenians are still enslaved.'

γάρ makes the connection clear; debt leads to slavery, though not in the literal sense; the 'enslavement' of the Athenians, despite Solon, shows this. They are enslaved, we are told, *ἅπανσι τοῖς ἀφανισταῖς*. This is difficult. We must choose a meaning for *ἀφανισταί*

⁷ *Leben, Schriften und Philosophie des Plutarch*, 1869, i 180 ff.

⁸ Cf. the imagery in Philo, *quod omnis probus* 151, where those who take sanctuary in *ἄσυλοι τόποι* are contrasted with those whose refuge is the secure fortress of *ἀρετή*.

⁹ *κερασφόρα* is difficult; it is perhaps possible that it means 'ornamented with ivory', and this would suit

the context well: cf. Plaut. *Aulularia* 167 ff. dotes dapsilis, clamores, imperia, eburata vehicla, pallas, purpuram . . .

¹⁰ For *ἐπευωνίζοντα*, cf. Demosth. 23.201 *πωλοῦσαν ἐπευωνίζοντες*.

¹¹ *ἐντυγχάνειν* suggests unfair intervention. Cf. *Mor.* 493B *ἀνευτεύκτοις*, 530A *ἐντευξιν ἀπώσαι*.

¹² *Hom. in ps. xiv*, 109D Garnier.

that makes it worth while saying that *all* this class of persons is involved.¹³ This, it seems to me, is against the view that ἀφανιστής is, in Pohlenz' words, 'nomen acerbo ioco argentariis datum', natural as such a usage would be in itself.¹⁴ For if the word carries itself a strongly pejorative flavour, ἀπασι is otiose or damaging. Failing this, we should try to give ἀφανιστής a more specific meaning—perhaps by connecting it with ἀφανίζω τὴν οὐσίαν in the sense of converting real property into money (ἀφανής οὐσία).¹⁵ 'Liquidators' might serve as a translation. But there is a further difficulty here; the debtors are not selling up, for that is rather what Plutarch would have them do. The Byzantine conjecture δανεισταῖς could well be right after all.

828F–829B (134.11–135.3). 'What is worse, they are enslaved, not to the principals, but¹⁶ to slave subordinates, as savage and relentless as the tormentors in hell who inflict punishment on the damned.'

The exaggerated imagery is not without wit; the debtors who are compared to Tantalus (135.2) are farmers, with vineyards and harvests they are not allowed to touch. The theme recurs at the end, 823A; indignation at the power of slaves is again the subject in 830D, 139.5–7.

829A–B (135.3–12). 'These men have invaded Greece, not with chains like Datis and Artaphernes, but with boxes of agreements and bills, sowing a crop of debt, which is the contrary of the beneficent crop that Triptolemus brought. It strangles the Greek cities.'

These two contrast-comparisons look both backwards and forwards, and are themselves linked both syntactically in a single period and by their internal form. In the first part of the sentence, the imagery of the Persian wars is taken up again; in the second, the mention of Triptolemus¹⁷ leads us back to the agricultural concerns to which Tantalus introduced us, and which are clearly important in the background of the speech, while the development of the metaphor by the notion of smothering by ineradicable weeds seem rather to look forward to the idea of the inextricable toils of debt. This is about to be illustrated at length.

829B–C (135.12–24). 'Hares conceive when pregnant; debts give birth before they conceive. "Pylos before Pylos . . ." says the proverb: "interest before interest . . ." we may say to the moneylenders. They can laugh at the scientists, *creatio ex nihilo* is no problem to them!'

829C (135.24–136.4). 'Tax-farming they regard as dishonourable—yet it is legal, as their exactions and confiscations are not.'

This is a new point. There is perhaps some associative link between laughing at the φυσικοί and despising the τελῶναι; but more important is the connection with what follows: the common notion is then the deceit involved in writing a bill for more than the money that actually passes. There is a textual problem, best cleared up, I think, not by adding ἀλλὰ or δὲ in 136.1, but by deleting δανείζουσι in 136.2 as a reader's comment: '. . . themselves playing the tax-gatherer illegally, or rather, if we must tell the truth, cancelling debts as they lend.' In any case, παρανόμως modifies τελωνοῦντες, while ἐν τῷ δανείζειν belongs in sense with τελωνοῦντες as well as with χρεωκοποῦντες. However much we dislike τελῶναι their activities are legal: cf. *Μορ.* 518E: βαρυνόμεθα καὶ δυσχεραίνομεν . . . ὅταν τὰ κεκρυμμένα ζητοῦντες ἐν ἀλλοτρίοις σκεύεσι καὶ φορτίοις ἀναστρέφονται· καίτοι τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὁ νόμος δίδωσιν αὐτοῖς.

¹³ Unless indeed it is ἀπασι that is wrong and it should be changed to ἅπαντες.

¹⁴ Cf. ἀφανιζόμενος 831E.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Isaeus 7.35.

¹⁶ Reading οὐδ' at 134.11.

¹⁷ For the form of the thought, compare Aesch. *Ag.* 1629 Ὀρφεὶ δὲ γλώσσαν τὴν ἐναντίαν ἔχεις, with Fraenkel's note.

829C–D (136.4–12). ‘The Persians regarded indebtedness as the greatest of evils, because it led to lying: but in fact lending leads to even more lies, and has not the excuse of necessity. The cause is *πλεονεξία* and *ἀπληστία*.’

Is there a quotation from drama in 136.11–12? We should observe: (i) *ἀναπόλαυστον . . . καὶ ἀνωφελές* is essential to the continuation of the argument (*οὔτε γὰρ*); (ii) *δλέθριον δὲ τοῖς ἀδικουμένοις* which Wilamowitz did not include in his proposed quotation, is a possible part of an iambic line, and its irrelevance to the argument may actually be in favour of its being a quotation. I conclude that Plutarch probably had a moral distich on *ἀπληστία* in mind; but the limits of the quotation are not determinable, and are certainly not as suggested in Hubert’s text.

829D–E (136.12–22). ‘For they do not use the property they acquire for proper purposes, but only bait the hook for fresh victims. The destruction spreads like fire, and the only gain the lender himself achieves is the pleasure of reading his accounts.’

This is an impressive passage, and it marks the end of the development that begins at 828F. The first point is probably commonplace in moralizing on cupidity: *cf.* Hor. *Sat.* 2, 3.104 *si quis emat citharas, emptas comportet in unum, nec studio citharae nec Musae deditus ulli . . . delirus et amens undique dicatur merito*. The second part has a number of vivid touches: *λαβών* is used pleonastically, with no object,¹⁸ on the model of the common *ἀνάγνωθι λαβών τὸν νόμον* (Dem. 20.153) or the like. The verb *σωρεύω* has conventional associations with the piling up of wealth (Diod. 1.62, 5.46; Joh. Chrys. *hom. in Mt.* 44.5; Lucian *epigr.* 12). But the effect rests mainly on the polysyndeton with *καί*, the repetition of *πόσους*, the alliteration, and the long words, especially the perfects.

829E (136.23–137.5). ‘Do not think I have myself been a victim of the moneylenders. I only want to show what a dreadful thing the whole business is.’

Plutarch recalls himself to his subject with an elegant phrase and a quotation—the same line (*Il.* 1.154) that Dio uses (*Or.* 43.8) of his own position at Prusa: he knows he has enemies, and he is leaving the city, but he has not actually suffered harm.

(829F (137.5–7). ‘You have money? Then don’t borrow, for you are not in need. You have no money? Then don’t borrow, for you won’t be able to pay. Let us look at the two cases separately.’

This dilemma and *propositio* mark a fresh start. There is indeed a connection with the words immediately preceding: to borrow in prosperity is *μαλακία*, to borrow in need is *ἀφροσύνη*. But the important thing is clearly that we hear, for the first time, a promise of what is to come. The case of the poor man clearly comes first; it is not till 831B (140.18) that we hear explicitly of the rich.

829F–830A (137.7–16). ‘Cato told an old reprobate not to add wickedness to the inevitable ills of age; so do not add the troubles of debt to the evils of poverty, or deprive it of its only blessing, which is freedom from anxiety. The proverbial “I can’t carry the goat—give me the ox” will be nothing to the situation of the debtor who can’t carry poverty and imposes a creditor on himself.’

It is noticeable here that the Cato anecdote follows very closely the phrasing in *Cato maior* 9, and not the parallel narratives in the *Moralia*: an awkward fact for those who wish to prove *de vitando* an early work, and explain its oddities by *iuvenilis ardor* rather than by the peculiar nature of its subject or occasion. As to the proverb, I assume (i) that *γελοῖον* should stand, though similar uses (e.g. 974A *γελοῖοι . . . ἔσμεν . . . σεμνύνοντες*) are usually

¹⁸ We should mentally supply *τὸ βιβλίον*: *cf.* Sen. *de ben.* 7.10.5 *patrimoni . . . liber*. ¹⁹ *Cf.* Dio Chrys. 10.10.

of persons; Plutarch means that the situation in the proverb is ridiculously trivial compared with the enormity of the debtor's predicament; (ii) that there is some connection with the story of Milo carrying a bull (*cf.* Petron. 25 posse taurum tollere qui vitulum sustulerit), so that the speaker will be an absurdly boastful athlete.

830A–B (137.16–22). ‘“How shall I keep alive?” You have hands, feet, voice; you are a human being capable of receiving and giving affection. So teach, or mind children, or be a janitor, or go to sea. Anything is better than the insistent calls of your creditor.’

This has characteristic formal ‘diatribe’ features. To take a parallel from Roman satire: *ἔρωτᾶς*; may be compared with *rogas?* in Persius (5.134), ‘*ἀπόδος*’ with his ‘*licet*’ *illud et ‘ut volo’ tolle* (ibid. 87). The theme too has a Cynic tinge: we are capable of *αὐτάρκεια* because we have the natural endowment for it. At the same time it seems to have a somewhat special slant; this appears in the emphasis laid on capacity for affection as a basic human characteristic and in the choice of professions—not digging, not begging either, but physically light work involving a certain education and a care for human relationships. When we say this, we must indeed have a reservation about *πλέων παραπλέων*, for it is not quite clear what this means.²⁰ But the suspicion that Plutarch is proposing to his Greek students a life of dependence as an alternative to financial entanglement is strengthened, I think, by what follows.

830B (137.22–138.5). ‘Rutilius reproved Musonius for borrowing because “Zeus does not borrow”, and Musonius had an apt retort. But we do not need to look at Zeus. Swallows and ants do not borrow either, though they do not have the resources for *αὐτάρκεια* that man possesses.’

Rutilius is no doubt C. Rutilius Gallicus, the recipient of Statius *Silvae* 1.4, who was *praefectus urbi* in 89 and died in 92. *ἐκείνος* suggests a famous historical character, and perhaps makes it probable that he is dead at the time of writing. The attack on Stoic pretensions (*τυφομανία*) and the appeal to the animal world are both typical of Plutarch; they are indeed connected, since one of his main fields of polemic against the Stoa is animal psychology.²¹ It would then be mildly surprising here to find him denying reason to the ants and swallows, and we should conclude that *λόγος* means articulate speech and corresponds to *φωνήν* in 137.17. But let us go on a little.

830B–C (138.5–10). ‘Men, on the other hand, have a superfluity of intelligence, which enables them to keep horses, dogs and pet birds. Surely you are as persuasive as a jackdaw, as vocal as a partridge, as brave as a hound! Surely there is someone who will help you in return for the amusement or protection you give him!’

Though the anecdote at 137.22 seems to make a fresh start, we can now see it as a step in a complicated movement connected with the ideas mooted in 137.17–20. The saying of Musonius has a bonus for the anti-Stoic; not only is it a good story in itself, but it exposes itself to the retort that the humble world around us teaches as good lessons as the Stoic's Zeus Soter. The humble world is the world of animals, who have not been vouchsafed *τέχνη*. Men are in such a superior position by comparison that they can find room at their table for protective or entertaining animals. You, the debtor, are a human being; you have qualities which can endear you to other human beings even more than their domestic animals do.

830C–D (138.10–139.4). ‘Earth and sea offer many opportunities.²² Micylus kept

²⁰ Dio Chrys. 25.5 *ἐκείθεν* (sc. Tenedo) *πᾶς μὲν ὁ παραπλέων ἐμβάλλεται κέραμον οὐδείς δὲ ὕγιη διακομίζει βῆδιως* shows that the *παραπλέων* may be a merchant in a small way, but does not help us to give a precise

sense to *πλέων*.

²¹ D. Babut, *Plutarque et le stoïcisme*, 54 ff.

²² *Cf.* Aesch. *Choeph.* 585 ff. Poetic colour is strong throughout this passage.

himself by carding wool, Cleanthes worked in a mill in order to be able to study philosophy.²³

Here it is a different kind of task that gives *αὐτάρκεια*; these are more traditional stories in the Cynic and Stoic tradition. The passage forms an alternative and more hackneyed answer to the *πῶς διατραφῶ*; of 137.16. It is not closely linked to what precedes it; we can imagine it following immediately 137.16.

830D–E (139.4–16). ‘To us this seems slave’s work. So, to secure our supposed²⁴ freedom, we submit ourselves to the whims of slaves. We do this not because we are in need but because we are extravagant. No one lends to the indigent. If we were content with necessities, there would be no moneylenders. Our debts are for luxuries and the expenses of the lavish public services we feel obliged to perform.’

The points made here are not new: indignation at the power of slaves was the theme at 829F, 134.9 ff.; and the remark that we borrow for superfluities and that creditors expect evidence of means was part of the prooemium, 827EF, 131.13 ff.

And what has happened to the supposition that we are talking to the poor? Silver-smiths, perfumers, farms, slaves, liturgies have surely nothing to do with them. I think the answer is that the transition has now taken place. In 831B (140.19) *γάρ* has given difficulty, but if Plutarch is there saying, ‘I mention these things because I am already addressing the rich’, we are free to put the actual transition to the new theme earlier. If we have to pin-point it, it is at *οὐ διὰ τὴν πενίαν* (139.7).

Parallels with *de cupiditate divitiarum* are particularly strong here: with 139.6 compare 525D *ἔστιῶσιν χαριζομένοις δορυφοροῦσιν δῶρα πέμπουσιν*; with the theme *οὐ διὰ τὴν πενίαν* compare 523F ff.; with 139.12 compare 527C *χρυσοχόων καὶ τορευτῶν καὶ μυρεψῶν καὶ μαγείρων*.

830F–831B (139.16–140.18). ‘Trapped once, the debtor never escapes. He is like the horse who let himself be bridled—but he is never turned out to pasture. Like the *daimones* of Empedocles, he is tossed from creditor to creditor. He wallows in the mire instead of getting out of it; he is like a sick man who aggravates his illness by eating.’

This series of comparisons marks a clear return to theme A; it recalls the similar series, 828F–829E. The simile of the horse, as Volkmann saw, alludes to the fable of the horse and the stag (Arist. *Rhet.* 2.20, Hor. *epist.* 1.10–34 ff.). The quotation from Empedocles (cf. *Mor.* 361C, but also 418E *θειλάτους*) again introduces the religious imagery of which Plutarch is fond.²⁵ *Κορίνθιος εἶτα Πατρὺς εἶτ’ Ἀθηναῖος* (140.3) may give an indication of where the speech is being given: not in Athens, presumably, if a Corinthian moneylender is the first resort, but perhaps at home in Chaeronea or in some other small centre.

831B–D (140.19–141.12). ‘The rich man asks how he can dispense with his slaves and his home. It is like the patient with dropsy telling the doctor he can’t slim. Remember the fable of the vultures: “it’s not your own guts you are bringing up”—in other words it’s not your own property you’re selling, for it already belongs to your creditors.’

The rich man’s question balances the poor man’s (137.16). We turn back to the theme of cure (B). The medical comparison is a stock one, but the fable that follows is not known from other sources, and has an unusual vigour about it.

²³ In 138.18 von Arnim’s correction could be bettered; read *ἔνεκα <μῆ> Ζήνωνος ἀποστῆναι μηδὲ φιλοσοφίας*.

²⁴ In 139.5 *<δῆθεν> ὤμεν* is to be preferred to Castiglioni’s *<δοκ>ῶμεν*, because we do not try to seem free, but to be free—only, of course, it is an illusory freedom.

²⁵ Elsewhere in Plutarch (637A, 870B), *οὐρανοπετής* means ‘fallen from heaven’ and carries an ironical tinge. Here it seems to be thought of as ‘flying in the sky’, as though it was from *πέτομαι* rather than *πίπτω*; Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v., cites some passages where this meaning is appropriate.

831C–D (141.7–12). ‘If you say “my father left me that farm”, remember that he also left you your freedom and citizen status, your hand and foot. But if your hand or foot goes bad, you pay someone to cut it off.’

For the materials of this section, compare (i) the speech of the impoverished veteran in Livy 2.25 *aes alienum . . . cumulatam usuris primo se agro paterno avitoeque exuisse*; (ii) Matthew 5.29 ff. (not noted by H. Almquist, *Plutarch und das Neue Testament*, Uppsala 1946).

831D–E (141.12–142.4). ‘Odysseus cast away the clothing that Calypso had given him, because it weighed him down in the sea; the *κρήδεμνον* saved him, and he did not lack thereafter. Debtors too are swimming in a storm, and he who clings to what burdens him sinks, and his friends with him.’

The ingenious moralizing of *Odyssey* V does not play fair with the story: the *κρήδεμνον* after all was a divine gift.

831E–F (142.4–15). ‘Crates abandoned his property for philosophy, Anaxagoras left his farm untilled, the poet Philoxenus gave up his estate in Sicily lest it should prove his ruin.’

Three rather commonplace examples. Not only philosophers, but even a lyric poet, could see the way to salvation.

832A (142.15–22). ‘Debtors endure exactions and servitude, they feed harpies who buy up their crops before harvest; the grapes hang ripening on the vine, but they are already sold.’

This is not commonplace. The Harpy metaphor is indeed familiar (e.g. *nummos raptura Celaeno* Juv. 8.130; Rut. Nam. 1.608; Apoll. Sidon. *ep.* 5, 7.4), but not the situation here envisaged, where a creditor claims the growing crops. The closing sentence is strikingly vivid; like the beginning it seems to echo the *Laus*: *τὴν ὄραν τὴν τοῦ τραγῶν ἀρκτούρω σύνδρομον* (844E). If this is deliberate, it is a remarkable piece of technique.

I conclude by considering briefly the major questions which the speech raises.

(i) First, its authenticity. Volkmann’s attack was answered, emotionally but effectively, by Hartman.²⁶ Little need be said. The richness of the examples is in Plutarch’s manner, the Platonic and religious comparisons especially so. The coincidences with *de cupiditate divitiarum* and *Cato maior* also make for authenticity. It remains true that there are linguistic idiosyncrasies: some notable hiatuses and some unusual or unusually used words. Volkmann drew attention to *καβάλλης* (134.1), *ἐπιρρυπαίνω* (132.9), *ἀφανιστής* (134.11), *τυφομανία* (138.1), *ὑπαργυρεύω* (142.16) and some others. We should add *χρήσιμος* in the sense of ‘essential’ (132.22, 133.10) and possibly *οὐρανοπέτης* with a meaning apparently different from Plutarch’s other usages of the word (139.20). There is thus undoubtedly a good deal to be explained in the vocabulary of the piece, but it is to be explained, I think, in terms of subject and genre. This is a speech in the ‘diatribe’ tradition, like *de amore proles, an vitiositas, animine an corporis*. And it has a social, even wordly, subject.

(ii) The question of completeness is more serious. I hope the analysis I have made shows a plausible connection of thought almost throughout. There is only one notable exception: the involved passage in 830A–C (137.16–138.10) which strikes a note distinct from that made by the more conventional *exempla* that follow. We should note too *ἀπόδος* in 137.22: when it occurs again (831E, 141.21) it seems more pointed and effective, and this may be a further indication that 830A–C is not fully welded into the whole structure.²⁷

²⁶ *De Avondzom des Heidendoms*³ (1924), 492 ff.

γὰρ δαειρίζει πένητι may also indicate incomplete

²⁷ Another repetition (131.16 ff. ~ 139.7 *οὐδεις* finish.

Whether the end is complete must unfortunately be a subjective decision. Incomplete works certainly survive: *an vitiositas, animine an corporis, aqua an ignis*. We do not of course know what the relationship is between these written records and the speech delivered.²⁸ We should allow both for the possibility that a speaker would extemporize around a prepared core, of which a written text had been made, and for the risk that our tradition depends on imperfect note-taking by hearers.

(iii) *De vitando*, unlike most of Plutarch's moral works, turns on a social problem. It is true that he sees it as an issue in personal ethics; but historians are bound to ask in what circumstances the speech was delivered. Is it evidence for a wave of distress caused by excessive borrowing and harsh creditors?²⁹ Can we say, on the evidence of this piece, that the sort of troubles that beset first-century Gaul and Britain³⁰ also laid waste Achaëa? We have, I think, to balance two sets of considerations. On the one hand, there is a specific character in Plutarch's remarks that gives them the look of immediacy. The persons addressed are young, educated and of some means; that some are called rich and some poor (829E) evidently indicates only a relative difference. We hear also—notably at the end—of the sale to creditors of unharvested crops. This too looks realistic. On the other hand, the conventional element in the theme is quite large. The young man in debt is a figure of comedy, the moneylender a universal villain:

nullum edepol hodie genus est hominum taetrius
nec minu' bono cum iure quam danisticum.³¹

The 'slavery' and 'sea' of debt are almost proverbial images: witness the gnomic wisdom of 'Menander and Philistion':

τὰ δάνεια δούλους τοὺς ἐλευθέρους ποιεῖ . . .
βλέπε τὸν δανειστὴν ὡς θάλασσαν ἢ βυθόν·
ἂν γὰρ βραδύνης, λαμβάνεις τρικυμίαν.³²

Plutarch's audience will have been familiar with these banalities. His art is to give them new life. This demands not realism, but ingenuity and imagination. We have no need to imagine an urgent problem in order to understand the motive for writing like this.

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²⁸ Cf. von Arnim, *Dio von Prusa*, 172 ff.

²⁹ A picturesque account based on Plutarch may be found in O. Gréard, *La morale de Plutarque*, 190–3.

³⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 3.40; Cassius Dio 61.2.1.

³¹ Plaut. *Mostellaria* 658, cf. 626 and the whole scene.

³² *Menandri Sententiae*, ed. S. Jaekel, p. 92: cf. also Publilius Syrus A11.