The City and the Self in Plutarch

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There can be no mistake that Plutarch is preoccupied with ethics as a factor of politics throughout the *Lives* and often in the *Moralia* too. His programmatic comments on the polity mesh with discussions of the moral outlook or emotions. The city-state itself in Plutarch is much textualized as a psychological agent and morally sentient (yet not necessarily virtuous) being; conversely, the *polis* translates into a rich metaphor for the human soul. This two-way mirroring of the *polis* and the soul in Plutarch’s writing has not been, to date, systematically explored. Furthermore, Plutarch’s rhetorical experiments in homology between the city-state and the human self[[1]](#footnote-1) need to be seen in the light of his philosophical orientation towards Plato. The Plutarchan macrotext[[2]](#footnote-2) contains plenty of sophisticated intertextuality that is underwritten by one of Plato’s hallmark argumentative moves in the *Republic*. Through his explicit and implicit deployment of the Platonic city-soul analogy Plutarch achieves a kind of synergism of philosophical contents with literary language.[[3]](#footnote-3)

I

A shoe must fit the individual and his foot, and be trimmed down if it seems too big. Yet one must never curtail (κολούειν) the city and reduce it to one’s own size (κατάγειν πρὸς αὑτὸν) and measure it against one’s own soul – if one happens to have a small and slavish (ἀνελεύθερον) soul... (trans. H. Lamar Crosby, modified)

So Dio of Prusa, in a speech (40.11) urging his fellow citizens not to persist in their quarrel with the neighbouring township of Apameia. Dio’s passage illustrates how seamlessly political rhetoric merges with reflection on character in the educated Greek discourse under the Roman empire. The *polis* and the psyche are played off against each other along a dynamic ethico-political continuum. Plutarch contributes a great deal to this discourse, from different angles. ~~For instance, i~~ In the essay *Old Men in Politics* he advocates active engagement with the affairs of the city-state,[[4]](#footnote-4) under the premise of ethical excellence:

for it is not only our hands or feet, or the strength of our body that is property and part (κτῆμα καὶ μέρος) of the city, but, first of all, the soul and the soul’s assets (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς κάλλη) – justice, self-discipline, wisdom (797E; trans. H. N. Fowler, modified)

But Plutarch can also query the relationship between the virtuous soul and the city. In a fragment (fr. 143 Sandbach) of a lost work Περὶ ἡσυχίας, there is praise of solitude equated with rejection of the *polis* as a space where ‘the souls are shut in’ (αἱ ταῖς πόλεσιν ἐναπειλημμέναι ψυχαί).[[5]](#footnote-5) The last, textually somewhat unsound sentence of the fragment argues that the better forms of culture have been divinely segregated (θεοὶ διακρίναντες [...] τὰς παιδείας) from ‘the certain dreadful and foul things in the cities’ (τῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι δεινῶν τε καὶ μιαρῶν τινῶν).[[6]](#footnote-6)

Probably the most famous text where Plutarch ruminates on character vis-à-vis the *polis* is the opening of the *Demosthenes*-*Cicero*. In this programmatic proem Plutarch insists that the success of the moral self is not contingent upon a premium location. Virtue, like a hardy plant, can grow in any place (*Dem*. 1.3 ἐν ἅπαντι ῥιζοῦσθαι τόπῳ), therefore

ὅθεν οὐδ’ ἡμεῖς, εἴ τι τοῦ φρονεῖν ὡς δεῖ καὶ βιοῦν ἐλλείπομεν, τοῦτο τῇ μικρότητι τῆς πατρίδος, ἀλλ’ αὑτοῖς δικαίως ἀναθήσομεν. (*Dem*. 1.4)

we should not blame the puniness of our fatherland but rather ourselves, if we somehow fall short of thinking and living in the normative way.

True happiness exists mostly in the moral character (1.1 τὴν ἀληθινὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, ἧς ἐν ἤθει καὶ διαθέσει τὸ πλεῖστόν ἐστιν) and does not require a grand metropolitan environment. As I have argued elsewhere,[[7]](#footnote-7) in the prologue of the *Demosthenes-Cicero* Plutarch asserts the priority of a philosophical attitude, which he gently but firmly claims for his writerly persona too, over the external political and cultural space that is centred on the notion of the city: a great city is not a pre-requisite for the goods and achievements that *really* matter. Whereas in Dio’s passage quoted above the *polis* and the individual soul are polarized by way of reproach to the ethically and politically short-sighted audience, in the *Demosthenes-Cicero* the self, informed by the normative values of virtue, is the winner against the *polis*.

Moreover, according to Plutarch, the city is beholden to the philosopher’s enlightened self for taking good care of the everyday needs of the community and, ultimately, for its survival. The latter idea transpires in Plutarch’s much-cited statement in the second chapter of the *Demosthenes*, ‘I live in a small city, and stay there fondly, lest it becomes even smaller’ (2.2 ἡμεῖς δὲ μικρὰν μὲν οἰκοῦντες πόλιν, καὶ ἵνα μὴ μικροτέρα γένηται φιλοχωροῦντες). Routine on-the-ground management of the city ties in with the same imperative; in the *Advice on Statesmanship* Plutarch offers, again, himself as the paradigm of responsible involvement even with the more prosaic aspects of running his hometown (*Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 811B-C esp. οὐκ ἐμαυτῷ ... ταῦτ’ οἰκονομεῖν ἀλλὰ τῇ πατρίδι).[[8]](#footnote-8) It would be fair to say that the Plutarchan rationale for local patriotism and ‘microidentity’[[9]](#footnote-9) rests on moral and behavioural benchmarks which are, almost paradoxically, above localism. For Plutarch, the (broadly) philosophical self is integrated into yet not fused with the city-state – the values of the self, in the final analysis, trump the *polis*[[10]](#footnote-10) but are programmed to serve and support the *polis* nonetheless.

Plutarch’s tendency to prioritize the selfhood over the city is, however, counterpointed by his frequent use of assimilation between the *polis* and the individual self in the functional (rather than normative) sense of somatic or psychological entity. Thus, the existence of a generic city is explained from the principle of organic, body-like continuity:

ἓν γάρ τι πρᾶγμα καὶ συνεχὲς ἡ πόλις ὥσπερ ζῷον (*De sera* 559A)[[11]](#footnote-11)

A city, like an animal, is a single and continuous thing

Envisioned as a body, the city-state may be attributed anatomical features such as sinews (νεῦρα)[[12]](#footnote-12) or ears[[13]](#footnote-13); it is prone to fall ill politically (e.g. *Arat*. 2.1; *Cor*. 12.5; *Dion* 41.3; *Mar*. 35.1; *Dem*. 27.5; *De frat*. *am*. 484D; *Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 809E) and require healing (e.g. *Cat. Mi*. 44.3).[[14]](#footnote-14) The historical profile of a *polis* may be kitted out with traditional costume and other paraphernalia (*Lyc*. 30.2).[[15]](#footnote-15) Like a person, a city has its horoscope (*Rom*. 12.6).

Plutarch is equally fond of inscribing cities with psychological and moral qualities and, through language that borders on personification, making these cities into ethical agents. Every so often in the *Lives* it is, literally, the *polis* that experiences emotions – for example, joy and grief, excitement, pride, or various degrees of fear;[[16]](#footnote-16) takes political preferences;[[17]](#footnote-17) has “a feel for valour” (*Comp*. *Nic*.-*Crass*. 3.1 πόλει [...] ἀρετῆς αἰσθανομένῃ); acts with exemplary gentleness;[[18]](#footnote-18) amuses itself;[[19]](#footnote-19) undergoes education[[20]](#footnote-20) or educates others about good government and respectable living,[[21]](#footnote-21) and so forth. Even from this incomplete sample of what the Plutarchan macrotext can offer, it is clear that Plutarch operates with essentially the same set of criteria for ethico-political evaluation of city-states and individuals. This very approach is inculcated in children who study classical literature:

ὁ ποιητὴς [...] τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων ἀνάγκην ὀρθῶς ὑποδείκνυσιν, ὅτι καὶ πόλεσι καὶ στρατοπέδοις καὶ ἡγεμόσιν, ἂν μὲν σωφρονῶσιν, εὖ πράττειν πέπρωται καὶ κρατεῖν τῶν πολεμίων, ἂν δ’ εἰς πάθη καὶ ἁμαρτίας ἐμπεσόντες [...] ἀσχημονεῖν καὶ ταράττεσθαι καὶ κακῶς ἀπαλλάττειν (*De aud*. *poet*. 23D-E)

the poet [...] correctly shows the inevitable course of things, that cities, armies, and leaders are destined to flourish and overcome the enemy if they behave with self-discipline, but if they fall into passions and errors [...] they [are destined] to disgrace themselves, be thrown into confusion, and end badly.

Plutarch’s diagnosis of Sparta’s corruption through the influx of wealth is shored up by the argument that private and public morality are related to each other as parts to the whole:

ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλῷ τάχιον ἀπὸ τῶν κοινῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἐπιρρέουσιν οἱ ἐθισμοὶ τοῖς ἰδιωτικοῖς βίοις ἢ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον ὀλισθήματα καὶ πάθη τὰς πόλεις ἀναπίμπλησι πραγμάτων πονηρῶν. τῷ γὰρ ὅλῳ συνδιαστρέφεσθαι τὰ μέρη μᾶλλον, ὅταν ἐνδῷ πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον εἰκός, αἱ δὲ ἀπὸ μέρους εἰς ὅλον ἁμαρτίαι πολλὰς ἐνστάσεις καὶ βοηθείας ἀπὸ τῶν ὑγιαινόντων ἔχουσιν (*Lys*. 17.8-9)

Indeed, it takes far less time for public practices to spill over into the ways of private life, than it does for individual lapses and failings to fill entire cities with bad situations. For it is natural that the parts are perverted along with the whole, when that deteriorates; but the follies coming from a part into the whole find many correctives and aids in the parts which remain healthy. (trans. B. Perrin, modified)

On this principle, psychologizing cities suits Plutarch in a strategic fashion. But the trope can be reversed just as well, when an individual soul is compared to a *polis*. A neat example is the tension between irrational desire (τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν) and reason (τῷ φρονοῦντι) in the soul of the self-controlled person, visualized by means of a quotation from Sophocles:

‘πόλις δ’ ὁμοῦ μὲν θυμιαμάτων γέμει ὁμοῦ δὲ παιάνων τε καὶ στεναγμάτων’ ἡ τοῦ ἐγκρατοῦς ψυχὴ διὰ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν καὶ τὴν διαφοράν. (*De virt*. *mor*. 445D, with Soph. *OT* 4-5)[[22]](#footnote-22)

‘The city is filled with incense but also with prayers for health and groans’– the soul of the self-controlled man, because of inconsistency and conflict.

Further symbolism can be generated via references to *polis* institutions; for example, the archive (γραμματοφυλακεῖον) is a simile for an individual’s memory (*De cur*. 520B),[[23]](#footnote-23) and the treasury (ταμιεῖον) helps to depict the human self as a repository of affects or, again, memories (*De tranq*. 473B; *Anim*. *an*. *corp*. 500D; *Quaest*. *conv*. 672E; *Mar*. 46.2).[[24]](#footnote-24)

II

In the polyphony of traditions behind Plutarch’s ethico-political thinking[[25]](#footnote-25) pride of place belongs to Plato. Plutarch is a Platonist thinker and an expert reader of the Platonic oeuvre (*Quaest*. *conv*. 718C). He endorses the theory of the composite soul, but also brings it into play when talking about character and political action.[[26]](#footnote-26) The tropes he employs to describe politics are often loaded with Platonic intertextuality, as Suzanne Saïd demonstrates in her brilliant article ‘Plutarch and the People in the *Parallel* *Lives*’.[[27]](#footnote-27) For the purposes of this paper, one Platonic text has particular resonance – I am referring of course to the *Republic*, where Plato develops the analogy between the soul and the city-state. I am not going to delve into the debate about the philosophical value of this analogy,[[28]](#footnote-28) but shall limit myself to two propositions about how the *Republic* frames this analogy and is, in turn, framed through it.

1. The thrust of the soul/*politeia* analogy in Plato is to establish parallelism between the structure of the tripartite psyche (comprised of the rational element and two irrational elements,[[29]](#footnote-29) the spirit and the appetites) and the types of citizenry in the *polis* (441c4-7, 580d3-5). Plato pursues this line of reasoning in Book 4 of the dialogue (434dff) and amplifies it in Books 8 and 9.
2. When Plato refers simply to πολιτεία‘within’ the individual (*Resp*. 591e1, 608b1, cf. 579c5, 590e3-4), this is shorthand for the argument about the tripartite structure.

Plutarch certainly knows well Plato’s *Republic*. Plutarch’s overall views on human nature and the role of education and virtue in politics and specifically his ideas on ‘great natures’ are indebted to the *Republic*,[[30]](#footnote-30) even though he acknowledges the political impracticality of Plato’s project (*Phoc*. 3.2; *De Alex*. *fort*. 328D-E).[[31]](#footnote-31) He quotes passages from the dialogue to prop up his own political analysis (e.g. *Resp*. 552c-d *~ Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 818A; *Resp*. 473d *~ Num*.20.8-9, *Comp*. *Dem*.-*Cic*. 3.4), but also converts Plato’s words into maxims applicable to the ethics of ‘private’ relationships and situations (e.g. *Resp*. 462c – *Con*. *praec*. 140D, *De frat*. *am*. 484B, *Amat*. 767D; *Resp*. 422e-423d ~ *Quaest*. *conv*. 678D).[[32]](#footnote-32)

Hence it is perfectly legitimate to suppose that the Platonic analogy between the soul and the city-state is present on Plutarch’s conceptual and stylistic horizon, too. This is one conclusion that scholars sometimes forget to draw from the Plutarchan appraisal of Lycurgus’ understanding of the nature of community and morality, which was a forerunner of the later philosophical utopias scripted by Plato and others:

He thought that happiness in the life of a whole city was due to the same factors as in the life of a single individual, namely virtue and internal unanimity (ὥσπερ ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς βίῳ καὶ πόλεως ὅλης νομίζων εὐδαιμονίαν ἀπ' ἀρετῆς ἐγγίνεσθαι καὶ ὁμονοίας τῆς πρὸς αὑτήν). ... Plato took this as basis of his constitution (ταύτην καὶ Πλάτων ἔλαβε τῆς πολιτείας ὑπόθεσιν), and Diogenes and Zeno... (*Lyc*. 31.1-2, trans. R. Waterfield)

In fact, the majority of Plutarch’s references to the city as an ethical agent might be implicitly nodding in the direction of the *Republic* – working around the shorter version of Plato’s city/soul analogy, as it were. Given the overarching importance of Plato for Plutarch, such ‘deep’ intertextual contract with the *Republic* looks both plausible and valid. In other words, the reversible correspondence between the city and the self [[33]](#footnote-33) is in itself a Platonic echo, even when Plato is not remotely cited. Consider the anecdote about Philip of Macedon’s City of the Wicked:

ὥσπερ ἡ πόλις, ἣν ἐκ τῶν κακίστων καὶ ἀναγωγοτάτων κτίσας ὁ Φίλιππος Πονηρόπολιν προσηγόρευσεν. (*De cur*. 520B)

... like the city where Philip settled the vilest and most boorish men, dubbing it Poneropolis.

Plutarch appears to have no qualms about presenting the king’s joke as a fact of political history; hisimmediate source is probably Theopompus (*FGrHist* fr. 110). Still, the correlation, which here is sarcastic and dystopian, between the community and the ethical status of its members is poised to evoke Plato’s Callipolis.

Plutarch puts the Platonic city/soul analogy to work in ways that are indicative of his own socio-cultural and intellectual agenda.[[34]](#footnote-34) Thus, it is well known that Plutarch views the reality of his lifeworld as fundamentally peaceful:[[35]](#footnote-35)

πολλὴ γὰρ εἰρήνη καὶ ἡσυχία, πέπαυται δὲ πόλεμος (Theon in *De Pyth*. 408B)

For there is total peace and quietude, war has ceased...

πέφευγε γὰρ ἐξ ἡμῶν καὶ ἠφάνισται πᾶς μὲν ῞Ελλην πᾶς δὲ βάρβαρος πόλεμος (*Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 824C)

All war, Greek or foreign, has fled and disappeared from amongst us.

In socio-political habitat shared by Plutarch and his readership (‘amongst us’)[[36]](#footnote-36) warfare is no longer a concern. For the internal, that is psycho-ethical, identity of the contemporary consumers of the Plutarchan macrotext the situation could not be more different.[[37]](#footnote-37) In the similes of Plutarch’s essays the cities may be at war with each other or become victims of a quasi-encore of the Persian aggression:

For just as city-states chastened (σωφρονιζόμεναι) by wars with neighbours and continuous campaigning would prize orderly government and healthy constitution (εὐνομίαν καὶ πολιτείαν ὑγιαίνουσαν ἠγάπησαν), so men who are forced, because of certain enmities, to behave soberly in their lives... (*De cap*. *ex inim*. 87E, trans. D. Russell, modified)

Darius sent Datis and Artaphernes to Athens with chains and bonds for the prisoners; likewise, these men bring boxes full of contracts and bills, as fetters, against Greece and march and drive through the cities (τὰς πόλεις ἐπιπορεύονται καὶ διελαύνουσι)... (*De vit*. *aere* 829A, trans. D. Russell, modified)

Saliently, in the domain of the self there is no let-up in the conflict between the recommended norms and the destabilizing forces of, typically, πάθος and pleasure. This conflict can be metaphorized[[38]](#footnote-38) as inter-city warfare of classical Greece:

My own experience with anger (ὀργήν), having confronted it twice or thrice, was that of the Thebans (ἐμοὶ γοῦν συνέβη... τὸ τῶν Θηβαίων παθεῖν). When they for the first time beat off the allegedly invincible Spartans, they were never defeated by them thereafter. (Fundanus in *De coh*. *ira* 454C)[[39]](#footnote-39)

The parallel between the city and the self intensifies, however, when the soul’s resistance to a particular kind of πάθος is imaged as a siege (πολιορκία) [[40]](#footnote-40) that the soul must weather relying on the resources of philosophy:

ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ οἱ πολιορκίαν προσδεχόμενοι συνάγουσι καὶ παρατίθενται τὰ χρήσιμα τὰς ἔξωθεν ἐλπίδας ἀπεγνωκότες, οὕτω μάλιστα δεῖ τὰ πρὸς τὸν θυμὸν βοηθήματα πόρρωθεν λαμβάνοντας ἐκ φιλοσοφίας κατακομίζειν εἰς τὴν ψυχήν (Fundanus in *De coh*. *ira* 454A)

Just as people who anticipate a siege and have no hope of help from outside, collect and amass all the useful things, so we must acquire in advance from philosophy the reinforcements against temper and import them into the soul.

The pleasures of culture can also jeopardize our moral self. In Book 10 of the *Republic* Plato’s Socrates warns that the person who listens to poetry should be alert and anxious about the ‘state within himself’ (608a7-b1 εὐλαβητέον αὐτὴν ὂν τῷ ἀκροωμένῳ, περὶ τῆς ἐν αὑτῷ πολιτείας δεδιότι). Plutarch replicates the message of the Platonic caveat, but instead of πολιτεία he uses the more concrete image of a fortified city which is, again, invested by enemies. The ethical risks entailed in the soul’s exposure to the pleasures of literature and theatre are compared to enemy infiltration through a single unprotected gate:

οὔτε γὰρ πόλιν αἱ κεκλειμέναι πύλαι τηροῦσιν ἀνάλωτον, ἂν διὰ μιᾶς παραδέξηται τοὺς πολεμίους, οὔτε νέον αἱ περὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἡδονὰς ἐγκράτειαι σῴζουσιν, ἂν τῇ δι' ἀκοῆς λάθῃ προέμενος αὑτόν (*De aud*. *poet*. 14F-15A)

For neither closed gates make a city unconquerable if it admits the enemies through one gate, nor does self-control in the other pleasures save a young man if he abandons himself to the auditory one...

[...] καὶ μήτε πόλιν ἀνάλωτον νομίζειν τὴν τὰς ἄλλας πύλας βαλανάγραις καὶ μοχλοῖς καὶ καταρράκταις ὀχυρὰς ἔχουσαν, εἰ διὰ μιᾶς οἱ πολέμιοι παρελθόντες ἔνδον εἰσίν, μήθ’ ἑαυτὸν ἀήττητον ὑφ' ἡδονῆς, εἰ μὴ κατὰ τὸ Ἀφροδίσιον ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ Μουσεῖον ἑάλωκεν ἢ τὸ θέατρον· ὁμοίως γὰρ ἐγκέκλικε καὶ παραδέδωκε ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ἄγειν καὶ φέρειν τὴν ψυχήν. (Lamprias in *Quaest*. *conv*. 705E)

[...] neither should the city be considered impregnable because it secures its other gates with hooks, bars, and portcullises – if the enemies have entered through a single one and are inside; nor should a man think himself invulnerable to pleasure if he is captured in the area of the *mouseion* or that of theatre,[[41]](#footnote-41) rather than in the precinct of Aphrodite. For he has given ground anyhow and surrendered his soul to the marauding pleasures.

The soul in both passages is construed defensively, as a space that could be invaded and corrupted from the outside. It may not be accidental that when Plutarch talks about the possibility of the soul’s truce and parley with ‘certain pleasures, relaxations or pastimes’ (*De prof*. *virt*. 76E), he does not explicitly conjure up the image of a siege – the setting there is a more abstract, albeit relentless war between the self and vice, κακία.[[42]](#footnote-42) The besieged city is perhaps a trope more akin to the concept of vigilant (and hence insecure) integrity of the self that needs to check, rather than manage, its contact with temptation which is, for Plutarch,[[43]](#footnote-43) the enemy at the gates.

III

While the analogy between the soul and the city is undoubtedly a Platonic feature, there are also several suggestive differences between Plutarch’s texts cited above and Plato’s extended metaphor in the *Republic* which the commentators on *Study of Poetry*, 14F-15A rightly identify as the closest parallel:[[44]](#footnote-44)

Τελευτῶσαι δὴ οἶμαι κατέλαβον τὴν τοῦ νέου τῆς ψυχῆς ἀκρόπολιν, αἰσθόμεναι κενὴν μαθημάτων τε καὶ ἐπιτηδευμάτων καλῶν καὶ λόγων ἀληθῶν, οἳ δὴ ἄριστοι φρουροί τε καὶ φύλακες ἐν ἀνδρῶν θεοφιλῶν εἰσι διανοίαις. [...] Ψευδεῖς δὴ καὶ ἀλαζόνες οἶμαι λόγοι τε καὶ δόξαι ἀντ’ ἐκείνων ἀναδραμόντες κατέσχον τὸν αὐτὸν τόπον τοῦ τοιούτου.  [...] καὶ ἐὰν παρ’ οἰκείων τις βοήθεια τῷ φειδωλῷ αὐτοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀφικνῆται, κλῄσαντες οἱ ἀλαζόνες λόγοι ἐκεῖνοι τὰς τοῦ βασιλικοῦ τείχους ἐν αὐτῷ πύλας οὔτε αὐτὴν τὴν συμμαχίαν παριᾶσιν, οὔτε πρέσβεις πρεσβυτέρων λόγους ἰδιωτῶν εἰσδέχονται, αὐτοί τε κρατοῦσι μαχόμενοι (*Resp*. 560b7-d1)

And finally, seeing the citadel of the young man’s soul empty of knowledge, fine ways of living, and words of truth (which are the best watchmen and guardians of the thoughts of those men whom the gods love), they finally occupy it themselves. ... And in the absence of these guardians, false and boastful words and opinions rush up and occupy this part of him. ... won’t these boastful words close the gates of the royal wall within him to prevent these allies from entering and refuse even to receive the words of older private individuals as ambassadors? Doing battle and controlling things themselves [...] (trans. G. Grube, modified).

In Plato the conflict centres on the acropolis; in Plutarch, the *polis* as a whole is at stake. Yet this slippage is not especially problematic – after all, in the *Life* *of Pelopidas* Plutarch notes in passing that in the old days the word ‘*polis*’ was normally applied to the acropolis (*Pel*. 18.1 τὰς γὰρ ἀκροπόλεις ἐπιεικῶς οἱ τότε πόλεις ὠνόμαζον). It is Plutarch’s emphasis on guarding the gates of the psyche that makes for a more interesting departure from Plato’s metaphor. In Plato, the gates are shut *after* the soul’s citadel (τῆς ψυχῆς ἀκρόπολιν) has been taken over by the ‘false and boastful’ λόγοι and δόξαι, so that true discourse is kept out and denied parley (560b7-d1). On the level of imagery, then, Plato does not expect the gates to protect the good regime in the soul.[[45]](#footnote-45) Plutarch, by contrast, dwells precisely on the defensive potential of the gates,[[46]](#footnote-46) provided they are given the necessary attention.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Let me stress the significance of this. The gates with which the city of the soul is furnished by Plutarch are not merely an embellishing detail (although they are that too), but a spin-off from the model of the soul wherein perception is the indispensable checkpoint and flashpoint of psychological and moral response. A useful comparandum is the description of love’s conquest of the soul in Philostratus’ *Love Letters* (12 Kayser):

Πόθεν μου τὴν ψυχὴν κατέλαβες; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι ἀπὸ τῶν ὀμμάτων, ἀφ' ὧν μόνων κάλλος ἐσέρχεται; ὥσπερ γὰρ τὰς ἀκροπόλεις οἱ τύραννοι καὶ τὰ ἐρυμνὰ οἱ βασιλεῖς καὶ τὰ ὑψηλὰ οἱ θεοὶ[[48]](#footnote-48) καταλαμβάνουσιν, οὕτω καὶ ὁ ἔρως τὴν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν  ἀκρόπολιν, ἣν οὐ ξύλοις, οὐδὲ πλίνθοις, ἀλλὰ μόνοις βλεφάροις τειχίσας ἡσυχῆ καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν ἐς τὴν ψυχὴν ἐσδύεται

From what vantage point did you seize upon my soul? Is it not plain that it was from the eyes, by which alone beauty finds entrance? For even as tyrants seize on citadels, kings on strongholds, and gods on high places, so Love seizes on the citadel of the eyes. This he fortifies, not with palisaded rampart nor with walls of brick, but with eyelids alone and then quietly and step by step he invades the soul... (trans. A. R. Benner and F. H. Fobes)

Philostratus’ imagery includes no gates per se, yet the equation of the sensory organ (the eyes) with the soul’s acropolis is key; having entered through the eyes,[[49]](#footnote-49) erotic beauty occupies the commanding position over the soul.[[50]](#footnote-50) The gates of soul’s *polis* in Plutarch are an allegory that stems from the same conceptual scheme: the soul (and by extension the person) is defined and judged by how it deals with incoming data[[51]](#footnote-51) which can be visual, aural, olfactory, and so on, as well as with more advanced and hazardous psychological configurations fuelled by the sensory data – such as desire or pleasure.[[52]](#footnote-52) The focus can be on the mechanics of perception, as in the doctor Trypho’s comment on the usefulness of garlands at drinking parties (*Quaest*. *conv*. 647C): the smell of flowers protects the head against drunkenness, ‘walling it like a citadel’.[[53]](#footnote-53) When the moralizing spectacles are on, the soul of a hero *sans reproche* (this happens to be Alexander the Great) is celebrated for being unassailable to pleasure and desire:

οὔτ’ ἀνάλωτον ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς ἡ Τύχη καὶ ἄτρωτον ἐπιθυμίαις κατακλείσασα τὴν ψυχὴν ἐφρούρει (*De Alex*. *fort*. 339A)

it was not luck that locked Alexander’s soul and kept it impregnable to pleasure and invulnerable to desire...

The idea of a strong-walled city is surely not far away.

Going back to the comparison between the *Republic*, 560b-d and the two Plutarchan passages on the gates of the soul (*De aud*. *poet*. 14F-15A; *Quaest*. *conv*. 705E), another revealing difference is observable. In Plato, the soul’s citadel is seized in the context of civil strife (*Resp*. 560a1-d2)[[54]](#footnote-54) – it is a coup d’état, rather than foreign invasion, which is what Plutarch apparently has in mind (*Quaest*. *conv*. 705E ἄγειν καὶ φέρειν). For Plutarch, the trope of ‘*polis* under siege’ means, first and foremost, a test of resilience against foreign aggression. An illustrative case study of this tropological formula is the story about Demosthenes yielding to Harpalus’ bribery:

οὐ γὰρ ἀντέσχεν ὁ Δημοσθένης, ἀλλὰ πληγεὶς ὑπὸ τῆς δωροδοκίας ὥσπερ παραδεδεγμένος φρουρὰν προσκεχωρήκει τῷ Ἁρπάλῳ (*Dem*. 25.5)

Demosthenes did not hold his ground, but was smitten by the bribe – having let the garrison in, as it were – and sided with Harpalus.

Harpalus arrives into Demosthenes’ *Life*, literally, ‘from Asia’ (25.1 ἧκεν ἐξ Ἀσίας), and the expensive cup that broke down Demosthenes’ resistance (25.5 οὐ γὰρ ἀντέσχεν) is emphatically called ‘barbarian’ (25.3 βαρβαρικῇ κύλικι); the failure on behalf of the Athenian orator to safeguard his ethico-political integrity is aligned with the idea of a Greek *polis* capitulating before troops that have come from the east. Needless to say, the lapse of Demosthenes confirms the general tenor of the trope – namely, that it is desirable to protect the self/*polis* as a locus of probity, paideia, and Hellenism. To put it bluntly, the inside of the besieged city is the good space while the outside teems with manifold badness. As far as I am aware, it is only once in the extant Plutarchan corpus that the siege-trope is loosely attached to folly: in *De tuen*. *san*. 127E, people who strain their health through overindulgence in bathing, partying, and eating are said to behave as if they are ‘stocking up food as if for a siege’ (ὥσπερ εἰς πολιορκίαν ἐπισιτιζόμενοι). And even here it does not really follow that those notional townsmen of the simile are foolish in quite the same way as the gluttons and compulsive partygoers.

Having said that, Plutarch does not bypass the allegory of civil conflict and usurpation in the psyche either. In *Control of Anger*, the temper (θυμός) is likened to ‘entrenched tyranny’ (454B ὀχυρὰ τυραννίς).[[55]](#footnote-55) Tyrants proverbially aim for the acropolis (cf. *Cat. Mi*. 33.6). So, the tyranny of θυμόςwilly-nilly presupposes the Platonic acropolis of the soul; likewise, its irrationality harks back to the *Republic*’s structural opposition between the irrational forces and reason that looms large behind the *polis*/soul analogy. Again, something passably Platonic is crystallizing across the Plutarchan macrotext – that is, ‘Platonic’ according to the sectarian idiolect of Platonism.

For a clearer view of the soul’s acropolis and tyranny as part of the Platonist repertoire of tropes illustrating the composite soul, it is instructive to look at the Stoic accentuation of the same imagery. To Marcus Aurelius the mind (διάνοια) is the self’s citadel:

διὰ τοῦτο ἀκρόπολίς ἐστιν ἡ ἐλευθέρα παθῶν διάνοια· οὐδὲν γὰρ ὀχυρώτερον ἔχει ἄνθρωπος, ἐφ᾿ ὃ καταφυγὼν ἀνάλωτος λοιπὸν ἂν εἴη (8.48)

Because of this the mind, free of affects, is a citadel, for man has nothing more impregnable wherein to retreat and to remain untaken ever since. (trans. C. R. Haines, modified)

More apposite and relevant (chronologically, too) is Epictetus’ prolonged metaphor of removing tyranny from the internal citadel of the self:

πῶς οὖν ἀκρόπολις καταλύεται; οὐ σιδήρῳ οὐδὲ πυρί, ἀλλὰ δόγμασιν. ἂν γὰρ τὴν οὖσαν ἐν τῇ πόλει καθέλωμεν, μή τι καὶ τὴν τοῦ πυρετοῦ, μή τι καὶ τὴν τῶν καλῶν γυναικαρίων, μή τι ἁπλῶς τὴν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀκρόπολιν καὶ τοὺς ἐν ἡμῖν τυράννους ἀποβεβλήκαμεν, οὓς ἐφ' ἑκάστοις καθ' ἡμέραν ἔχομεν, ποτὲ μὲν τοὺς αὐτούς, ποτὲ δ' ἄλλους; ἀλλ' ἔνθεν ἄρξασθαι δεῖ καὶ ἔνθεν καθελεῖν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν, ἐκβάλλειν τοὺς τυράννους· τὸ σωμάτιον ἀφεῖναι, τὰ μέρη αὐτοῦ, τὰς δυνάμεις, τὴν κτῆσιν, τὴν φήμην, ἀρχάς, τιμάς, τέκνα, ἀδελφούς, φίλους, πάντα ταῦτα ἡγήσασθαι ἀλλότρια. κἂν ἔνθεν ἐκβληθῶσιν οἱ τύραννοι, τί ἔτι ἀποτειχίζω τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ἐμοῦ γε ἕνεκα; ἑστῶσα γὰρ τί μοι ποιεῖ; τί ἔτι ἐκβάλλω τοὺς δορυφόρους; (*Diss*. 4.1.86-88)

How, then, is the citadel destroyed? Not by iron, nor by fire, but by judgements. For if we capture the citadel in the city, have we captured the citadel of fever also, that of pretty wenches also – in a word, the acropolis within us? Have we cast out the tyrants within us, whom we have lording it over each of us every day, sometimes the same ones and sometimes different? But here is where we must begin, and it is from this side that we must seize the acropolis and cast out the tyrants; we must give up on the paltry body, its members, the faculties, property, reputation, offices, honours, children, brothers, friends – count all these things as alien to us. And if the tyrants be thrown out from there, why should I any longer raze the fortifications of the citadel, on my own account, at least? For what harm does it do me by standing? Why should I go on and throw out the [tyrant’s] bodyguards? (trans. W. A. Oldfather)

In Epictetus, the tyrants ‘within’ are opinions that mistakenly assign value to the various phenomena extraneous to our moral self (body, property, family...); a Stoic must not tolerate such opinions but dislodge and expel them;[[56]](#footnote-56) the right judgements should rule instead. So, to Epictetus the acropolis of the psyche is a metaphorical site of the dominant value-judgements (δόγματα) that govern the self. By contrast, in the Platonist model which Plutarch subscribes to, the fight for the acropolis of the soul is between reason and the irrational energy of, notably, θυμός. Ironically, it is the Stoic rather that the Platonist schema that is closer to the scenario in the *Republic*, 560c-d, where the struggle for the soul’s acropolis is between two sets of λόγοι, not between λόγος and outright irrationality.[[57]](#footnote-57)

IV

Plutarch’s reading of Plato on the soul is biased in favour of the composite model of the psyche. Plutarch is well informed about the Platonic tripartition of the soul (*De virt*. *mor*. 442A; *Quaest*. *Plat*. IX, esp. 1007E, 1008B-C), even if he commits more fully and systematically to the bipartite model, foregrounded in the basic division between reason and irrationality.[[58]](#footnote-58) But what about the correlation between the tripartite soul and the three classes in the πολιτεία? Although the short treatise *On Monarchy*, which overtly engages with Plato’s parallel between the types of individuals and those of government (826C ~ cf. *Resp*. 544d-e), is not genuinely Plutarchan, it is undeniable that Plato’s taxonomy of political soul-types was a big influence on Plutarch. His construal of collective or individual character often fleshes out the Platonic framework. Thus, in the *Life* of Pericles the Athenian demos is profiled in terms of τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, the irrational appetite;[[59]](#footnote-59) the spirited and honour-loving types of the *Republic* are acted out by protagonists across several *Lives*.[[60]](#footnote-60) At other times Plutarch’s pedagogical and/or political argumentation visibly falls back on the Platonic analogy between the make-up of the soul and political roles in the city. As before, the analogy works both ways – from the *polis* to the self, and vice versa. Good ‘words’ (τῶν λόγων... χρηστοὺς) are ‘fostered in character, like guardians, by philosophy’ (*De aud*. 38B ὥσπερ φύλακας ἐντραφέντας ὑπὸ φιλοσοφίας τῷ ἤθει) – effectively, they are the guardian-class within the soul.[[61]](#footnote-61) Real-life soldiers, in turn, can be a political liability. Plutarch would have this problem addressed at the level of soul and education. In the opening of the *Life of Galba*, which is a clever case study in στάσις and the difficulties of containing violent military paroxysms,[[62]](#footnote-62) Plutarch claims that the solution is education of the soul – as Plato understood, martial discipline has to grow from ethics:

ὁ δὲ Πλάτων οὐδὲν ἔργον ὁρῶν ἄρχοντος ἀγαθοῦ καὶ στρατηγοῦ στρατιᾶς μὴ σωφρονούσης μηδὲ ὁμοπαθούσης, ἀλλὰ τὴν πειθαρχικὴν ἀρετὴν ὁμοίως τῇ βασιλικῇ νομίζων φύσεως γενναίας καὶ τροφῆς φιλοσόφου δεῖσθαι, μάλιστα τῷ πρᾴῳ καὶ φιλανθρώπῳ τὸ θυμοειδὲς καὶ δραστήριον ἐμμελῶς ἀνακεραννυμένης (*Galba* 1.3).

But Plato saw that a good commander or general can do nothing unless his army is amenable and of the same disposition. He thinks that the virtue of obedience, like that of a king, requires a noble nature and a philosophical training, which, above all things, blends harmoniously gentleness and humanity with spiritedness and enterprise.

It is not easy to pin down the exact Platonic passage Plutarch alludes to here, but the overall drift seems to be unmistakably towards the *Republic*.

The main fascination as well as the problem of the city/soul analogy in Plutarch is, however, that it is subject to ‘deep’ intertextual diffusion. One might say that it is the key to a sort of Platonic code for the reader to unlock from contexts which are, at first sight, not at all a commentary on Plato. ~~I shall limit myself to one~~ For example, in the *Life* *of Dion*, 41.3 the commander of the tyrant’s mercenaries, looking down from the citadel, notices that the liberated Syracusans populace are utterly disorganized: ‘no part of the city is healthy’ (οὐδὲν ὑγιαῖνον ἐν τῇ πόλει μέρος); so he launches an attack from the acropolis. *Dion* is a narrative suffused with Platonic themes, and Plato himself is a character in the story.[[63]](#footnote-63) Therefore, it is feasible that the combination of the concept of ethico-political health with the idiom of ‘part’ (μέρος) triggers an allusion to the *Republic*. ~~For~~ Plutarch could not have failed to remember that in the *Republic* supreme orderliness of the *polis* is likened to a healthy individual (372e6-7 ὥσπερ ὑγιής τις), while μέρος is used both about constituents of the tripartite soul (e.g. 444b2, 577d2-4, 583a1-3)[[64]](#footnote-64) and about classes in the city-state (e.g. 429b1-3, 552a8-10).[[65]](#footnote-65) The added poignancy of Plutarch’s intertextual game in *Dion* 41.3 is that the Platonic correspondence between the Syracusans’ character and their lack of military and political coordination is discerned and taken advantage of by a mercenary soldier who serves the tyranny – the regime defined in the *Republic* as the city’s ‘ultimate disease’ (544c6-7 ἔσχατον πόλεως νόσημα). But Plutarch can afford to respond to the *Republic* with almost provocative subtlety because its insights and phraseology are so integral to the fabric of his own writing, in the *Life of Dion* and beyond.

V

To sum up. My paper has attempted to show that a more nuanced understanding of Plutarch’s intellectual and ethico-political programme is gained by studying his use of the city/soul analogy and the tropes used to express or hint at it. Thus, it is noteworthy that the tropes for the soul in Plutarch are not dominated by contemporary references to the empire; more often than not he seems to think of a timeless (but also – palpably – classical) *polis* fighting off the enemies from its gates. The imagery of external military threat is, in effect, depoliticized – invasion and siege, in Plutarch’s *Moralia,* are happening to the human self. Such ostensibly inward turn of the city/soul analogy does not, however, make it any less valuable to Plutarch as a Platonically bent interpreter of the past and of the imperial present. The city/soul analogy helps to triangulate the three major ideological circuits of the Plutarchan macrotext: his sustained interest in human soul and character, his scrutiny of city-state politics from a perspective which is simultaneously pragmatic and idealistic,[[66]](#footnote-66) and his choice to explore both character and the *polis* with, and through, Plato.

1. Throughout this paper I use ‘the self’ more or less interchangeably with ‘character’, ‘soul’, or ‘psyche’, as the locus of psychological processes as well as an ethical texture. Translations are my own unless noted otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See D’Ippolito 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Such synergism Plutarch deems to be difficult but highly desirable: Zadorojnyi 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There is no shortage of scholarship on Plutarch’s writings on contemporary Greek politics: see e.g. Halfmann 2002; Trapp 2004; Lo Cascio 2007; Desideri 2011; Roskam, in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Unlike the souls in the countryside which are ‘not twisted by bumping into numerous petty protocols’ (οὐδὲ πρὸς πολλὰ καὶ μικρὰ νόμιμα προσπταίουσαι κάμπτονται). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Pessimistic anti-urbanism is regularly given voice by the ancient moralists: e.g. Val. Max. 7.2 ext. 2 ‘he [scil. Solon] showed that cities are piteous enclosures of human woe’ (*demonstrauit* *urbes esse humanarum cladium consaepta miseranda*); Philostr. *VA* 7.26.5 ‘cities … and city-walls seem to be public prisons’ (πόλεις ... καὶ τείχη δοκεῖ ταῦτα δεσμωτήρια εἶναι κοινά). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Zadorojnyi 2006a: 108-9, 120-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Further, Aalders 1982: 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. After Woolf 2010: 194-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. also *De exil*. 601F: ‘any city becomes homeland right away for a man who has learned to cope with [it]’ (πατρὶς δὲ γίνεται πᾶσα πόλις εὐθὺς ἀνθρώπῳ χρῆσθαι μεμαθηκότι). On Plutarch’s philosophically coloured cosmopolitanism in *On Exile*, see Opsomer 2002;Van Hoof 2010: 125-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. *Arat*. 24.6, where the city-states of the (Achaean) alliance are compared to parts of a living body (καθάπερ τὰ μέρη τοῦ σώματος). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Phil*. 16.9, referring to the Lycurgan system of training the young; cf. *Amat*. 755C for an outcry, in a gendered context, about the city’s loss of sinews (παντάπασιν ἡ πόλις ἐκνενεύρισται). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 802D: ‘the people and the city ought to be led primarily by the ears’ (δῆμον δὲ καὶ πόλιν ἐκ τῶν ὤτων ἄγειν δεῖ μάλιστα). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For medicine as a political metaphor in Plutarch, see further Martín del Pozo 1996: 186-8 and Duff 1999: 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. the rhetoric of Pericles’ critics (*Per*. 12.2): ‘we gild and adorn the city like a brassy woman – attiring herself in expensive marbles and statues...’ (ἡμᾶς τὴν πόλιν καταχρυσοῦντας καὶ καλλωπίζοντας ὥσπερ ἀλαζόνα γυναῖκα, περιαπτομένην λίθους πολυτελεῖς καὶ ἀγάλματα). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. E.g. *Alc*. 32.4 (of Athens) ‘the city’s joy was mixed with many tears’ (πολὺ δὲ καὶ <τὸ> δακρῦον τῷ χαίροντι τῆς πόλεως ἀνεκέκρατο); *Pel*. 12.3 (of Thebes) ‘the whole city was running amok’ (ἡ δὲ πόλις ἤδη μὲν ἀνεπτόητο πᾶσα); *Ages*. 30.7 (of Sparta) ‘he made the city more hopeful and pleased’ (ἐλαφροτέραν ἐποίησε ταῖς ἐλπίσι καὶ ἡδίω τὴν πόλιν); *Cim*. 10.7 (of Athens) ‘those [men] the city is rightly proud of’ (ἐφ’ οἷς ἡ πόλις μέγα φρονεῖ δικαίως); *Cat*. *Mi*. 59.1 (of Utica) ‘the city… went just short of crazy’ (ἡ μὲν πόλις … μικροῦ δεῖν ἔκφρων γενομένη); cf. *Ant*. 75.4 (of Alexandria) ‘when the city was quiet and downcast due to fright and apprehension about the future’ (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ καὶ κατηφείᾳ τῆς πόλεως διὰ φόβον καὶ προσδοκίαν τοῦ μέλλοντος οὔσης); *Phoc*. 2.4 ‘and a city that finds itself in unwished-for circumstances becomes easily startled and too sensitive – because of its frailty – to allow frank speech’ (καὶ πόλις ἐν τύχαις ἀβουλήτοις γενομένη ψοφοδεὲς καὶ τρυφερόν ἐστι δι’ ἀσθένειαν ἀνέχεσθαι παρρησίας). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Lys*. 3.3 (of Ephesus) ‘he [Lysander] found the city well disposed towards himself and eagerly embracing the Spartan cause’ (τὴν πόλιν εὑρὼν εὔνουν μὲν αὑτῷ καὶ λακωνίζουσαν προθυμότατα); *Tim*. 2.2 (of Corinth) ‘that the city was generally pro-freedom and a permanent loather of tyranny’ (καθόλου τὴν πόλιν … φιλελεύθερον καὶ μισοτύραννον οὖσαν ἀεί. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Arist*. 27.7 (of Athens) ‘the humanity and kindness, which the city is still amply demonstrating in our time’ (ἧς φιλανθρωπίας καὶ χρηστότητος ἔτι πολλὰ καὶ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἡ πόλις ἐκφέρουσα δείγματα); *Fab*. 18.4 (of Rome) “the aplomb and mildness of the city’ (τὸ φρόνημα καὶ τὴν πρᾳότητα τῆς πόλεως). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Quaest*. *conv*. 710F ‘the city having fun with such earnestness was not in its right mind’ (οὐκ... σωφρονεῖν τὴν πόλιν μετὰ τοσαύτης σπουδῆς παίζουσαν (a Spartan’s comment on Athens). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Num*.15.1 (of Rome) ‘after such tutoring in religion, the city has become so docile’ (ἐκ δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης παιδαγωγίας πρὸς τὸ θεῖον οὕτως ἡ πόλις ἐγεγόνει χειροήθης). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Lyc*. 30.5 ‘looking up to the Spartiates’ city in its entirety as a mentor or teacher of respectable life and orderly constitution’ (πρὸς δὲ σύμπασαν τὴν τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν πόλιν ὥσπερ παιδαγωγὸν ἢ διδάσκαλον εὐσχήμονος βίου καὶ τεταγμένης πολιτείας ἀποβλέποντες. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Plutarch recycles the same Sophoclean quotation in four further contexts, three of which describe the self under emotional or psychological pressure: *Quaest. conv*. 623C; *De amic. mult*. 95E-F; *De superst*. 169D. Only in *Ant*. 24.3 the quotation is used about the mood in an actual city. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Van Hoof 2010: 198 n. 63 wants to preserve the metaphor of the soul as a house (cf. *De cur*. 515B) and so understands γραμματοφυλακεῖον as a ‘room’ where records are kept; Hendrickson 2014: 399 n. 119 narrows the meaning further to ‘book chest’. Yet in *Arist*. 21.4 (which both Van Hoof and Hendrickson refer to) the word certainly means the city archive, as it does in the epigraphic evidence (IG XII supp. 364, lines 12-16; IG V.1 20.a lines 2-4); the understood political function of the space, whether a room or a building (although there is a case for believing in the latter), is crucial. It is thus more likely that the soul of the curious person in 520B is a *polis*, rather than a house. This is not to deny that for Plutarch the household is a proportionable unit of the *polis*: cf. *Lyc*. 19.7; *Comp*. *Arist*.-*Cat*. 3.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. With one exception (Chlidon’s storeroom: *De gen*. 587F), ταμιεῖον in Plutarch refers invariably to the state treasury – of a generic Greek city (*Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 820C) or of Rome (*Publ*. 12.3; *Luc*. 29.10, 37.6; *Pomp*. 25.6, 45.4; *Cat. Mi*. 18.3; *Caes*. 28.8; *Cic*. 12.2; *De frat*. *am*. 484A, etc). This preponderance is the proof that the Plutarchan image of ταμιεῖον within the human self emanates from conceptualizing the self as a miniature city. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Brock 2013. One relevant strand here is the classical idea that ‘city is the men’, which is ready grist for the moralist’s mill. Consider the verdicts passed on the collective behaviour of particular city populations by the Plutarchan narrator (*Agis*-*Cleom*. 23.1) or by an observer within the narrative, such as the Younger Cato (*Cat. Mi*. 13.5; *Pomp*. 40.5). See also Pérez Jiménez, in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See, respectively, Opsomer 2008; Gill 2006: 229-38 and Duff 1999: 72-98; Beneker 2012: *passim*. On Plutarch’s theory of the soul, see generally Baltes 2000; Cacciatore 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Saïd 2005: 19-20, 22-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See e.g. Anderson 1971; Williams 1999; Annas 1981: 124-51; Lear 1992; Pender 2000: 196-99; Höffe 2011: esp. 62-9;Leroux 2005; Thein 2005: 254-63;Ferrari 2005: esp. 37-104, 109-16; Blössner 2007; Bilski 2009; Brock 2013: 152-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Or, rather, ‘drives’: Blössner 2007: 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See generally Aalders 1982: 41-2; Hershbell 1995. For ‘great natures’, see Duff 1999: 47-9, 60-5, 224-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. It is worth remembering that not all Platonists under the Roman empire have given up on Plato’s ideal constitution(s): cf. Porph. *Plot*. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Imperial Greco-Roman literature in general thrives on Platonic intertextuality; see e.g. Hunter 2012. Interestingly, Dio’s passage cited at the beginning of this paper (40.11) could be alluding to the *Republic*, 495b5-6: a small nature will never ‘do anything great’ for an individual or for a city (σμικρὰ δὲ φύσις οὐδὲν μέγα οὐδέποτε οὐδένα οὔτε ἰδιώτην οὔτε πόλιν δρᾷ). On Dio’s use of Plato, see Trapp 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Although it is debatable whether this reversibility is quite true for Plato’s *Republic*. See Ferrari 2005: 85-7 *contra* e.g. Anderson 1971: 16, 22-4, 173-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cf. Liebert 2016: 35-6: ‘Plutarch needs Socrates’s assertion that city and soul correspond – but he does so with a twist. Whereas the form of political science that emerged from Socrates’ founding insight tended to treat the city and its regime as windows to the citizen’s soul, Plutarch thinks in the opposite direction and treats the citizen’s soul as a window onto the city.’ The last comment, however, is severely one-sided. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See, generally, Dillon 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Plutarch’s use of first person pronouns as a device for negotiating solidarity with the readers is now well understood: Pelling 2002b: 269, 272-3, 276, 278 = 2004a 405-6, 411-13, 420-1; Zadorojnyi 2006a: 107; Van Hoof 2010: 53-4, 93, 130, 143-4, 162, 167, 196-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Russell 1983: 23-6 rightly highlights the recurrence of war in Greek rhetorical scenarios under the empire:‘Sophistopolis is usually at war with her neighbours [...] War [...] was essential to the declaimers’ world. [...] So war is perpetual. Sometimes the army marches out and there is room for heroism – always in defence, for Sophistopolis is never the aggressor – and at other times the city is under siege. This too sets problems.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See also Fuhrmann 1964: 157-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cf. 457D ‘setting up a monument in the soul to victory over anger’ (ἐν <τῇ> ψυχῇ στῆσαι κατὰ θυμοῦ τρόπαιον). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cf. Max. Tyr. 35.7. Plutarch is visibly fond of the image of siege in inter-school philosophical polemics: *Adv*. *Col*. 1120D; *Comm. not*. 1069B; *Non posse* 1095A. It also describes the plight of a debtor: *De vit*. *aere* 828B. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The distinction between μουσεῖον and theatre implies different formats of cultural experience; see Zadorojnyi 2013: 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. ‘Thus if you are conscious of having combated vice day and night without stopping, or at least of having only infrequently suspended your guard and having admitted (but not regularly) some pleasures, relaxations, or pastimes – envoys from vice, as it were, under ceasefire – then you are likely to proceed towards the future boldly and eagerly’ (οὕτω συνειδῇς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας τε καὶ νύκτωρ ἀεὶ τῇ κακίᾳ διαμεμαχημένον, ἢ μὴ πολλάκις γε τὴν φρουρὰν ἀνεικότα μηδὲ συνεχῶς παρ’ αὐτῆς οἱονεὶ κήρυκας ἡδονάς τινας ἢ ῥᾳστώνας ἢ ἀσχολίας ἐπὶ σπονδαῖς προσδεδεγμένον, εἰκότως ἂν εὐθαρσὴς καὶ πρόθυμος βαδίζοις ἐπὶ τὸ λειπόμενον). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. As well as for other ancient philosophical writers. Cf. Sen. *De ira* 1.8.2 ‘I say, the enemy must be withstood at the very first frontier; if he has invaded and approached the city-gates, he will not spare the prisoners (*in primis, inquam, finibus hostis arcendus est; nam cum intravit et portis se intulit, modum a captivis non accipit*). For the mind [...] itself transforms into the affect (*animus*... *in adfectum ipse mutatur*).’ [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Hunter and Russell 2011: 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Note the more literal snub at the notion of fortification in the *Laws* 778e6-779a5 (trans. T. J. Saunders, modified): ‘A wall never contributes anything to the health of towns, and in any case is apt to encourage a certain softness in the souls of the inhabitants. It invites them to take refuge behind it instead of tackling the enemy and ensuring their own safety by mounting guard night and day; it tempts them to suppose that a foolproof way of protecting themselves is to barricade themselves behind their walls and gates, and then drop off to sleep, as if they were brought into this world for a toil-free life...’ (τεῖχος... ὃ πρῶτον μὲν πρὸς ὑγίειαν ταῖς πόλεσιν οὐδαμῶς συμφέρει, πρὸς δέ τινα μαλθακὴν ἕξιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν ἐνοικούντων εἴωθε ποιεῖν, προκαλούμενον εἰς αὐτὸ καταφεύγοντας μὴ ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους, μηδὲ τῷ φρουρεῖν ἀεί τινας ἐν αὐτῇ νύκτωρ καὶ μεθ’ ἡμέραν, τούτῳ τῆς σωτηρίας τυγχάνειν, τείχεσι δὲ καὶ πύλαις διανοεῖσθαι φραχθέντας τε καὶ καθεύδοντας σωτηρίας ὄντως ἕξειν μηχανάς, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ μὴ πονεῖν γεγονότας). Further negativity about the wall(s) is found in *Grg*. 519a3 and *Tht*. 174d3-e2; somewhat more neutrally, city-walls (τείχη) are prominent in the protection-centred category of ‘possessions in the *polis*’ (τῶν ἐν πόλει κτημάτων): *Pol*. 288b1-6, with 287e1.For the historical background of Plato’s misgivings about city walls, see Ober 1985: 52-6, 82-4. Plutarch in his political pronouncements is just as ready to rate the city-walls below the mettle of the city’s army:*Quaest*. *conv*. 639E ‘a *polis* that has men who can fight and conquer has no great need of walls’ (οὐ μέγα πόλει τειχῶν ὄφελος ἄνδρας ἐχούσῃ μάχεσθαι δυναμένους καὶ νικᾶν), cf. *De laud*. *ips*. 543B (with Dem. 18.299). Predictably, it is the Spartans who vindicate the irrelevance of city-walls for men of true valour: *Lyc*. 19.12; *Apophth*. *Lac*. 228E, 210E, 212E, 217E, 240A. In *Lys*. 14.10 Sparta’s wall-less power is poignantly invoked by the Athenian statesman Theramenes who also maintains that city-walls can be sacrificed – the date is 404BC! – for the sake of the citizens (τῶν πολιτῶν... ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ καταβαλοῦμεν). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. There is similar fixation with the doors of the self’s metaphorical house threatened by intrusion of πάθος or pleasure: *Cons*. *ux*. 609F: sorrow (πένθος) ‘must be fought off at the doors’ (δεῖ μάχεσθαι περὶ θύρας αὐτῷ); Ammonius in *Quaest*. *conv*. 645E: ‘he shuts out the luxurious indulgence that comes through the ears, but ushers into the soul, as if by other doors, the one that comes through the eyes and the nose’ (τὴν διὰ τῶν ὤτων ἀποκλείει τρυφὴν καὶ ἡδυπάθειαν, ταύτην τὴν κατὰ τὰ ὄμματα καὶ κατὰ τὰς ῥῖνας ὥσπερ καθ’ ἑτέρας θύρας ἐπεισάγων τῇ ψυχῇ). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Hunter and Russell 2011: 75 read a latent reference to betrayal ‘from within’ into *De aud*. *poet*. 14F-15A. While Plutarch is certainly familiar with such scenarios (e.g. *Pyrrh*. 32.1), I believe that Plutarch’s image serves rather to bring out the core idea of insufficient vigilance by the defenders, which he knew could prove fatal in a real siege, e.g. *Marc*. 18.3 ‘one tower … which was sloppily guarded … the wall there was climbable’ (πύργον τινὰ ... φυλαττόμενον μὲν ἀμελῶς ... τοῦ τείχους ἐπιβατοῦ παρ᾿ αὐτὸν ὄντος), *Sulla* 14.1-2 ‘not guarding the approaches to the wall at the Heptachalcum … the spot that could be seized’ (μὴ φυλάττοντα τοῦ τείχους τὴν περὶ τὸ Ἑπτάχαλκον ἔφοδον καὶ προσβολήν [...] τὸν τόπον ἁλώσιμον), *Cam*. 35.4 ‘and took control of the walls, for nobody was keeping guard’ (καὶ τὰ τείχη καταλαβών· ἐφύλαττε γὰρ οὐδείς). The fall of the anonymous *polis* sketched out in *Quaest*. *conv*. 705E is certainly closer to the latter narratives. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. As variant to the manuscript reading οἱ ἀετοὶ, ‘eagles’. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. On erotic visuality in Philostratus’ *Love-Letters*, see Walker 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The comparison of eros with a tyrant is mobilized in Plato’s *Republic*, 572e4-573b8, 573d4-5, 575a1-3. See e.g. Larivée 2005; Scott 2007a. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. In Plato, perception is certainly relevant for the tug-of-war in the composite soul and the ethical outcomes thereof (the Leontius anecdote, *Resp*. 439e7-440a3) – but, crucially, the desires and pleasures are immanently inside the city (431c9-d5). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Hunter and Russell 2011: 74-5 adduce several relevant passages. It should be emphasized that in Apuleius’ *Met*. 5.19.5 the image of ‘gates thrown open’ (*portis patentibus*) refers to collapse of convictions, followed by assault on the person’s ‘thoughts’ (*cogitationes*) – the topos is thus given a markedly cognitive twist. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. αἱ δὲ τῶν ἀνθῶν ἀπόρροιαι πρὸς τοῦτο θαυμασίως βοηθοῦσι καὶ ἀποτειχίζουσι τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπὸ τῆς μέθης ὡς ἀκρόπολιν. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Pender 2000: 206-13; Brock 2013: 153 and 176. Cf. *Resp*. 605b3-c1: ‘it [mimetic poetry] arouses, nourishes, and strengthens this part of the soul and so destroys the rational one, in just the way that someone destroys the better sort of citizens when he strengthens the vicious ones and surrenders the city to them. Similarly, we’ll say that an imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by gratifying its irrational part...’ (τοῦτο ἐγείρει τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τρέφει καὶ ἰσχυρὸν ποιῶν ἀπόλλυσι τὸ λογιστικόν, ὥσπερ ἐν πόλει ὅταν τις μοχθηροὺς ἐγκρατεῖς ποιῶν παραδιδῷ τὴν πόλιν, τοὺς δὲ χαριεστέρους φθείρῃ· ταὐτὸν καὶ τὸν μιμητικὸν ποιητὴν φήσομεν κακὴν πολιτείαν ἰδίᾳ ἑκάστου τῇ ψυχῇ ἐμποιεῖν, τῷ ἀνοήτῳ αὐτῆς χαριζόμενον). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Just like war, tyranny is a menace that is absent from the political landscape of Plutarch’ day: *De Pyth*. 408B: ‘seditions and tyrannies do not exist’ (καὶ στάσεις οὐκ εἰσὶν οὐδὲ τυραννίδες); *Prae*. *ger*. *reip*. 805A: ‘today [...] the affairs of city-states are not about leadership in wars or deposition of tyrants’ (νῦν [...] τὰ πράγματα τῶν πόλεων οὐκ ἔχει πολέμων ἡγεμονίας οὐδὲ τυραννίδων καταλύσεις). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Note that in Epictetus the philosophically informed values are assaulting, not defending the citadel of the self; cf. Marcus Aurelius’ image (7.7) of the soldier storming the walls (ἐν τειχομαχίᾳ). In Plato, capturing a fortified city is a simile for tenacious intellectual enquiry (*Soph*. 261b5-c4). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Cf. Gill 2006: 304-22, esp. 315-17; Kalimtzis 2012: 45-7, 118-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See n. 26 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Saïd 2005: 13-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See e.g. Pelling 2002b: 344-6 on Coriolanus; Stadter 1999: 482-6 and Duff 2008b: 14, 21-2 on Lysander; Zadorojnyi 2006b: 282-5 on Themistocles. See generally Nikolaidis 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. For fuller analysis of the intertextual relationship between *On Listening* and the *Republic*, see Jazdzewska 2013. On the connection between “guardianship” and philosophy in the Republic, see Long 2013: 28-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ash 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Zadorojnyi 2011; Opsomer 2011: 159-68; Nerdahl 2011; Beneker 2012: 87-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Plutarch’s usage too: *De virt*. *mor*. 447A ψυχῆς μέρος*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Again, broadly comparable usage can be found in Plutarch, e.g. *Cat. Mi*. 41.3 ‘and the argument was spreading through the still sensible part of the city…’ (καὶ μέντοι καὶ λόγος ἐχώρει διὰ τοῦ σωφρονοῦντος ἔτι τῆς πόλεως μέρους). Of course μέρος dovetails particularly well with the idea of city as body. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See Pelling 2004a; Van Raalte 2005; Opsomer 2011; Zadorojnyi 2011: 147-9; Liebert 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)