Scholarly Journal of the
INTERNATIONAL PLUTARCH SOCIETY


UNIVERSITY OF MÁLAGA (SPAIN)
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY, LOGAN, UTAH (U.S.A.)
In his *Political precepts*, Plutarch gives much attention to the difficult problem of the politician’s motivation. Already in the second chapter of the treatise, he collects and discusses many motivations, and concludes that there is only one which is correct, that is, a deliberate choice for the honourable course. Later in the treatise, he returns to the question, by rejecting once again the two most current and most dangerous wrong motivations, that is, φιλοπλουτία and φιλοτιμία. Plutarch finally succeeds in neutralizing the dangerous feeling of φιλοτιμία by redefining true honour and by emphasizing the absolute importance of the moral course.

With his *Political precepts*, Plutarch wants to contribute to the political education of Menemachus, a young aristocrat of Sardes. This political education includes much practical advice, to be sure, but Plutarch also deals with several fundamental questions. One of these concerns the motivations of the statesman. Which aim should be pursued by a good politician? What should be his political project, and which should be his intentions? Plutarch considers these questions important enough to deal with them at the very beginning of his treatise. Indeed, the *corpus* of the *Political precepts* begins with a discussion of many different motivations that can drive a man to political life. Some people begin a political career because they have no other occupations which are useful and worth some trouble, considering politics as a pastime and a good remedy against boredom (798CD)\(^1\). Others aim at vain glory and are led by φιλονεικία, being ambitious to win the

---

\(^1\) This is a much more elaborate version of a paper that was read at the VIIIth International Symposium of the Spanish section of the I.P.S (Barcelona, November 6-8, 2003).

1 This was the case with Pyrrhus (*Pyrrh.* 13.1; cf. also *Pyrrh.* 12.5); cf. also the attitude of Philopoemen (*Phil.* 13.3), Demetrius (*Demetr.* 41.1), and Marius (*Mar.* 31.2), and Lucretius’ famous description of the restless man at the end of the third book of his *De rerum natura* (3.1063-1067). By a similar motivation also the Epicureans could be driven to political life (cf. *De tranq. an.* 465F-466A = fr. 555 Us.). But on this point as well, Plutarch disagrees with Epicurus (*De tranq. an.* 466A).