

The School of Moses at Table. Sympotic Teaching in Philo's *De vita contemplativa*

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In *De vita contemplativa* the Jewish theologian Philo of Alexandria (d. after 40 C.E.) portrays a community of both male and female philosophers, called *Therapeutae* and *Therapeutrides*, who live outside Alexandria on Lake Mareotis. As their festive meal attests to the adherence to the basic structure of a symposium within the Jewish tradition, this text has been widely discussed in recent research on Greco-Roman meals as a social institution.¹ In *Meals in Early Judaism*, an anthology of important papers by a Society of Biblical Literature working group, Hal Taussig refers to Philo's account of the *Therapeutae* and *Therapeutrides* as "the most extensive, continuous portrait of Jews at table in all of early Judaism."² Other contemporary Jewish authors, like Sirach and *Pseudo-Phocylides*, taught banqueters whom to invite and how to behave at the banquets of important people.³ However, alongside the detailed report in the *Letter of Aristides* of king Ptolemeus' symposia with the sages from Jerusalem, Philo's treatise *De vita contemplativa* or *On Contemplative Life* contains one of the most detailed descriptions of a banquet among Jewish philosophers. By illustrating their manner of dress, reclining posture at table, modest menu items, and various forms of entertainment — including intellectual and spiritual activities — Philo provides us with a thick description that fits into "the main patterns of Greek and Roman meals."⁴

However, contrary to a well-established literary tradition present in writings from Plato and Xenophon to the anonymous author of *Letter of Aristides*, Plutarch, and Athaeneus, Philo does not choose to recount the symposium among his philosophers in dialogue form. Rather, his account suggests that only one leader speaks while all the others are supposed to listen quietly (*Contempl.* 75-77). Moreover, in

direct contrast to the lively reports of all manner of speeches and dialogues being held and heard at the banquets of the most eminent men – as reported by Plato, Xenophon, Aristides, Plutarch, and Athenaeas – Philo seems to hide the entire content of the philosophical discourses from his readers. This paper asks what Philo aims to achieve by modelling this mode of sympotic teaching and discourse. First, I will present a brief outline of *De Vita Contemplativa*, focusing on the treatise’s description of the way the meal unfolds. Second, I will contextualize Philo’s presentation within the ancient discourse on the role of philosophers and philosophy at a symposium. Third, I will argue, that by resisting “sympotic norms and habits,”⁵ Philo identifies the basic tension inherent in all philosophical teaching at meals: the tension between unbridled fun and recreation, on the one hand, and moral instruction and a serious search for the truth, on the other. Yet over the course of the meal, the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides will resolve this tension and reach the sympotic goal of collectively shared ecstatic happiness and joy, not so much by talking as by singing and dancing. In conclusion, I will ask what one can learn from this Jewish philosopher about teaching at meals.

The meals of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides

Most scholars are convinced of the historical existence of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides. However, Philo is our sole witness, and his account is undoubtedly idealized. From the beginning, Philo emphasizes that the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides are philosophers, curing not only the body but also souls “oppressed with grievous and well-nigh incurable diseases, inflicted by pleasures and desires, etc.”⁶ Their lifestyle is superior to those of such eminent Greek philosophers as Anaximander and Democritus.⁷ Moreover, he claims that this group of philosophers is comparable to Homer’s mythical Mysians, “the most righteous people” ever.⁸ In a recent article, I therefore placed *De vita contemplativa* in the context of ancient ethnographic discourse and argued that, rather than describing an actual sect, Philo is presenting an idealized vision of Jewish religiosity.⁹

In the tradition of ancient ethnography since Herodotus, Philo explains the origin of the group’s name (1-2) and describes the climate in which they reside (here, of course, “temperate;” 21-23), their settlement (24-5), their daily business (i.e. allegorical studies; 26-31), their worship meeting (on the seventh day; 32-33), and their lifestyle (“ascetic;” 33-39). While this first half of the writing contrasts the ideal way of life of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides with the religious

and moral decline of other peoples, Egyptians as well as Greeks, the second part holds up a mirror to the (supposed) current decline of banquet culture.¹⁰ Philo contrasts caricatures of Greek symposia to the group's festal banquet on every forty-ninth day.

Elsewhere, drinking wine leads at best to "slavish taste" (45) and at worst to enmity and wild fist-fighting.¹¹ Men "attack and bite each other and gnaw off noses, ears, fingers and some other parts of the body, so that they make good the story of the comrades of Odysseus and the Cyclops by eating 'gobbets' of men, as the poet says."¹² Those banqueters show themselves enemies to their families and homeland, and even to themselves. The reflection of Stoic moral discourse, and moreover comedy, and Menippian satire, is unmistakable.¹³ Consequently, such things as the luxurious decorations of the dining rooms, well-upholstered ivory couches, purple coverlets, expensive dishes and drinkware, erotically-dressed slaves, artistic confections, and exotic foods are branded as "Italian luxuries" beloved of Greeks and barbarians.¹⁴

Moreover, Philo criticizes literary depictions of symposia. It is true that Xenophon and Plato described the two symposia in which Socrates participated, "surmising that they would serve posterity as models of the happily conducted banquet. Yet, even these compared with those of our people who embrace the contemplative life, will appear as matters for derision (57-58). It is true that there were pleasures at both, but only moral ones. In Xenophon's account, musicians, dancers, and comedians appear, and the subject of discussion at the Platonic banquet is love, both heteroerotic and in Philo's view, even worse also homoerotic.¹⁵ "But . . . the story of these well-known banquets is full of such follies and they stand self-convicted in the eyes of any who do not regard conventional opinions" (64), despite the common notion that they are successful undertakings.

The Therapeutic symposium naturally presents an entirely different picture.¹⁶ The people gather for prayer on the forty-ninth day, clothed in white, with the utmost dignity, lifting their hands and eyes to heaven, because "they have been trained to fix their gaze on things worthy of contemplation" (66). Men and women both recline, yet the female members gather on the left-hand side of the triclinium (68). Seating is arranged "according to the order of their admission" (57). "Hostile to the pleasures of the body, the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides recline on hard benches and are served not by slaves but by the younger members, dressed of course in modest clothing."¹⁷

Neither wine nor meat is served but only bread, salt, and “as a luxury,” hyssop.¹⁸

Moreover, the banqueters also abstain from conversation. Instead,

(75) [W]hen the guests have laid themselves down arranged in rows, . . . and the attendants have taken their stand with everything in order ready for their ministry, <the president (ὁ πρόεδρος [ho proedros]) of the company, when a general silence is established>¹⁹ . . . discusses (ζητεῖ [zētei]) some question arising in the Holy Scriptures or solves (ἐπιλύεται [epilyetai]) one that has been propounded by someone else. In doing this he has no thought of making a display (ἐπίδειξις [epideiksis]), for he has no ambition to get a reputation for clever oratory (δεινότης λόγων [deinotēs logōn]) but desires to gain a closer insight into some particular matters and having gained it not to withhold it selfishly from those who if not so clear-sighted as he have at least a similar desire to learn. (76) His instruction proceeds in a leisurely manner; he lingers over it and spins it out with repetitions, thus permanently imprinting the thoughts in the souls of the hearers, since if the speaker goes on descanting with breathless rapidity the mind of the hearers is unable to follow his language, loses ground and fails to arrive at apprehension of what is said. (77) His audience listens with ears pricked up and eyes fixed on him always in exactly the same posture, signifying comprehension and understanding by nods and glances, praise of the speaker by the cheerful change of expression which steals over the face, difficulty by a gentler movement of the head and by pointing with a finger-tip of the right hand. The young men standing by show no less attentiveness than the occupants of the couches . . .

As many have noticed: “[t]he language and protocols of the Greek symposium are subverted here.”²⁰ While the exploring (ζητεῖν [zētein]) and solving (ἐπιλύειν [epilyein]) of questions by means of demonstration (ἐπίδειξις, [epideixis]) and the cleverness of speech

(δεινότης λόγων [deinotēs logōn]) of the one who sits at the head of the table (προέδρος [proedros]) incorporates the language of the table talk, “what follows resists sympotic norms at every turn.”²¹ Instead of speculation, ingenuity or a lively discussion with the other symposiasts, the teaching event in *De vita contemplativa* resembles Philo’s own accounts of Jewish synagogue worship elsewhere in his writings. Here as there, people come together to listen “quietly”²² to the lecture by one of special experience who instructs them in the philosophy of their fathers.²³ In other words, the teaching mode of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides suits a school setting better than a symposium.

To explain this intriguing observation, some have argued that this teaching is not part of the meal proper, but is meant to happen before the dining event. Indeed, some paragraphs later Philo says, the “young men [will] bring in the tables mentioned before” (81).²⁴ However, already in §75, that is before the lecturer has started, the meal’s preparations are completed and the fellow-drinkers lay down to recline (καταλιθῆναι συμπότας [katalithēnai sympotas]). In my view, the sacred tables brought in later function as a libation without wine and therefore indicate the start of the drinking.²⁵

Maren Niehoff supposes that Philo models the Therapeutic banquet on an allegedly more hierarchical Roman *convivium*.²⁶ Yet, Cicero defines *convivium* in opposition to the *symposium* (co-drinking) and *deipnon* (co-dining) of the Greeks as “co-livings, because at dinner parties more than anywhere else life is lived in company.”²⁷ Thus, company rather than hierarchy is most important in Rome, as well. More likely, Philo intends to establish Jewish wisdom as the first and main course of the Therapeutic meal, as Martin Ebner supposes.²⁸ And I also agree with Jonathan Brunberg-Kraus that Philo “idealizes the harmoniousness and unity . . . in contrast to the discord and drunkenness characteristic of Others’ banquets.”²⁹ Yet what is most important is how Philo tries to overcome a fundamental tension between teaching and the appropriate manner of table talk.

Philosophers and Philosophy at symposia

Philo is not the only one who criticizes Plato’s and Xenophon’s literary banquets.³⁰ Athenaeus’ sympotic gathering of wise men has the jurist Massurius blame Plato’s symposium for being “full of sneerers mocking each other” and too-heavy drinking and Xenophon’s for proposing homoerotic love by choosing as the occasion for the gathering the victory of the host’s boy-lover Autolycus.³¹ Massurius’s favorite models are Homer’s symposia. They instruct that

“guests who differ in ages and interests”³² be invited, that libations and drink be consumedly in moderation, and that guests “pose questions for one another ... and provide pleasure for one another ... by talking in a civilized manner.”³³ Moreover, “[a]mong the ancients, every time a group was assembled for a symposium, this was regarded as being for a god’s sake, and they wore garlands and sang hymns and songs appropriate to the gods in question. No slaves were there to serve them; instead, free young men poured the wine.”³⁴

The worst symposium is that of Epicurus (unfortunately lost) because Epicurus is said to have offered “an account of a symposium attended only by philosophers.”³⁵ They behave like “prophets of individual things.”³⁶ Too many philosophers at one table, and especially philosophers of only one school, cause danger to shared and easy conversation appropriate to this occasion.

Some even deny that a symposium is a place for philosophy at all. Diogenes Laertius has the Platonist Arcesilaus saying: “The peculiar province of philosophy is just this, to know that there is a time for all things.”³⁷ Others, like Plutarch and Macrobius, discuss this question more openly.³⁸ Yet, they confirm that which Xenophon names as the program of narrating a symposium: reporting what virtuous good men “do in their lighter moments,” or more literally “while playing.”³⁹ For Plutarch, a philosopher is not supposed to “plunge into subtle and disputatious arguments at a drinking-party,” (614f) but to

change his role, fall in with ... [his co-banqueter’s] mood, and not object to their activity so long as it does not transgress propriety. For he knows that, while men practice oratory only when they talk, they practice philosophy when they are silent, when they jest, even, by Zeus, when they are the butt of jokes and when they make fun of others.⁴⁰

That is, philosophers at meals are not allowed to ply their philosophy in a boring manner but should “take part in the general conversation and are not allowed to introduce inappropriate topics of conversation and by [their] tact and persuasiveness [attempt] to get those present to be more harmonious and friendly in their intercourse with one another.”⁴¹

The symposiasts ought to pass the speech around like a cup of wine, giving every voice an equal right to speak without privileging any single answer as the correct and only one.⁴² Another ideal is *spoudaiogeloion* (σπουδαιογέλοιοι), the combining of serious and frivolous themes presented in a playful manner.⁴³

While shared speech, discursive style and amusement are essential, other features are optional. Of course, at Plutarch's *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* — at which the diners actually numbered nineteen according to the text — the food is simple and modest in amount.⁴⁴ Wine is recommended by many because it “draws people into friendship by warming and relaxing the soul,”⁴⁵ “frees the tongue,” has “loquacity,” and “[engenders] much talk.”⁴⁶ However, moderation is recommended.⁴⁷ Plato, who notes Lacedaimonian abstinence, opts in his *Laws* for moderate consumption of wine in educational contexts.⁴⁸ Xenophon, on the other hand, does not serve wine to the young Cyrus in his *Cyropaedia*.⁴⁹

So, a wineless banquet with modest, or even ascetic food, does not violate the model. But a symposium with only one kind of philosopher, lengthy monologues, and teaching from the front does. How can Philo nonetheless claim that the symposium of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides is more worthy to serve as a paradigm (παράδειγμα [paradeigma]) for one who desires the truth (ἐρᾶν ἀληθείας [eran alētheias]) than those reported by Xenophon and Plato?⁵⁰

Sympotic ideals in *De vita contemplativa*

The ancient symposium generated a variety of literary genres:⁵¹ First, collections of poetic songs, *scolia* and elegies to be sung to the lyre and *aulos* at a symposium;⁵² second, rules prescribing banquet etiquette and appropriate behavior (the wisdom teachings of Ben Sirach and *Pseudo-Phocylides* belong to this this genre); and third, literature that purported to record what happened at one or more specific symposia (this is the genre of symposium discussions of Plato, Xenophon, Plutarch, and Athenaeus, as well as that of the *Letter of Aristeas*).⁵³ Philo's account, however, belongs to a fourth genre. He describes banquet customs of a specific group or people.⁵⁴ Similar, albeit shorter, accounts are given by Iambulus (of the meal practice of the inhabitants of the island of the sun), Philostratus (of the Indians met by Apollonius), and Iamblichus (who portrayed the Pythagoreans).⁵⁵ In contrast to the third genre, none of these authors reports speeches being held at those symposia.

Philo, however, presents at least some information on the content. He has his presider (προέδρος [proedros]) — others might call him (or her?) symposiarch — research (ζητεῖν [zēteîn] and ἐπιλύειν [epilyein]) questions arising from the Holy Scriptures or raised by some other member (ὑπ' ἄλλου [hyp allou], 75). That there could be

questions from members is appropriate in table talk, which normally focuses on problems raised by the guests present. However, this feature remains a vague allusion. The Therapeutic presider speaks slowly, with repetitions and without any ambition to develop a reputation for clever oratory but “to imprint the thoughts in the souls of the hearers” (76). As Matthew David Larsen has recently shown, this lecture style meets the ideal of Plutarch and Seneca, who “saw moral and philosophical edification as the goal of the lecture event.”⁵⁶ This goal is mentioned by Philo with regard to the content of the speech: “The exposition[s] (αἱ ἐξηγήσεις [hai exēgēseis]) of the sacred scriptures treats the inner meaning conveyed in allegory” (78). With the allegorical method, Philo continues, “the rational soul begins to contemplate the things akin to itself” (ibid). Scripture becomes a participant in the Therapeutic symposium, as many quotes of poets and other writers by the symposiasts of Plutarch and Athenaeus provide “the opportunity to bring different authors of the past into dialogue with each other and with the symposiasts of the present.”⁵⁷ Philo, however, is not merely interested in connecting with the writings of the past. As the first witness of Neo-Platonist allegory, he describes the objective of the lecturer’s efforts as being to help his listeners to rise above the visible world, to remember original Being, and so to behold original Beauty.⁵⁸

Larsen also demonstrates that Philo shares the widespread ideal of active listening. In *On Listening to Lectures* Plutarch advises the young student on how to listen properly. Like Philo, Plutarch recommends silence, bodily self-control, facing the speaker, nodding, yet also only modestly applauding.⁵⁹ Plutarch, moreover, “compares the act of giving and listening to a lecture to playing a game of throw and catch.”⁶⁰ So, as Larsen puts it, “(i)t seems doubtful that Plutarch... would have had much to complain about with respect to the lecturer or listeners among the Therapeutae.”⁶¹ However, Plutarch advises his young student on how to listen in a school context.⁶² Plutarch’s ideal of table talk sounds different: “Just as the wine must be common to all, so too the conversation must be one in which all will share”.⁶³ The Therapeutic listeners do not raise their voices to talk to each other. Yet, when the speaker has reached his aim and general applause has ended,

[t]hen the President rises and sings a hymn composed as an address to God, either a new one of his own composition or an old one by poets of an earlier day who have left behind them hymns in many measures and melodies, hexameters and iambs, lyrics suitable for processions or in libations and at the altars, or for

the chorus whilst standing or dancing, with careful metrical arrangements to fit the various evolutions. After him all the others take their turn as they are arranged and in the proper order while all the rest listen in complete silence except when they have to chant the closing lines or refrains, for then they all lift up their voices, men and women alike. (*Contempl.* 80)

More than active listening, singing includes the participants. Most literary symposia mention singing, at least in passing.⁶⁴ In *De vita contemplativa* it becomes the culmination of the sympotic event: According to their seating order, one symposiast after the other sings a hymn, composed by him- or herself or a traditional one. Women are explicitly included. While one symposiast is singing, the others listen silently and comment by chanting the closing lines and refrains. The chanting of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides develops as the conversation develops at the symposia of Plato, Xenophon, Plutarch and Athenaeus.

The context identifies the hymns as biblical psalms. However, the detailed list of genres, modes and meters points to Greek cult and drama (80).⁶⁵ The banquet of the *Therapeutae* and *Therapeutrides*, which to this point has had little in common with the wine-fueled joy and excitement of other symposia,⁶⁶ culminates soon afterwards in bacchantic enthusiasm.⁶⁷ First, men and women, each conducted by a choral leader:

sing hymns to God composed of many measures and set to many melodies, sometimes chanting together, sometimes taking up the harmony antiphonally, hands and feet keeping time in accompaniment, and rapt with enthusiasm, sometimes reproducing the lyrics of the procession, sometimes halting, wheeling and counter-wheeling in a choric dance (*Contempl.* 84).

Having criticized Xenophon's banquet for being only concerned with "flute girls" and dancers (58), Philo strikingly devotes an extensive passage to a detailed description of the Therapeutic dancing. The activity has, however, a more serious meaning. Through singing and dancing, the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides celebrate the Crossing of the Red Sea. They "copy" (μίμημα [mimēma]) and "represent" (ἀπεικονίζειν [apeikonizein]) the choir with Moses and

Miriam.⁶⁸ This re-enactment of the decisive moment in Israel's history staged at the meal can be characterized as sympotic theatre.⁶⁹ Likewise, at the end of his symposium, Xenophon stages the love affair of Dionysus with Ariadne, while Plutarch discusses genres of pentomic dancing.⁷⁰ However, whereas “the Socratic banqueters only witness the dance performance that is without dancing themselves” the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides collectively participate in their choral performance.⁷¹

It is on this model above all [that is, the choir imitating the crossing of the Red Sea] that the choir of the Therapeutae of either sex note in response to note and voice to voice, the treble of the women blending with the bass of the men, create a harmonious conce[r]t, music in the truest sense. . . . Thus they continue till dawn, drunk with this drunkenness, in which there is no shame . . .” (*Contempl.* 88-9).

With this “honorable drunkenness” or καλή μέθη (*kalē methē*) the Therapeutae and Therapeutides achieve the highest sympotic goal.⁷² While in Plato's account, Socrates is the only one among the banqueters who, at the end of a revelrous night, is able to go about his daily business soberly, all of Philo's philosophers can do so.⁷³

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that Philo aims to solve the fundamental tension between teaching philosophy and table talk. With ancient authors of symposia, Philo shares the basic consensus that table talk and teaching at table has to be a common effort on the part of all participants.⁷⁴ Yet, the followers of “the truly sacred instructions of the prophet Moses” (64) will not indulge in pure amusement nor reduce their discussion topics to themes like food, drink, and erotic love. Instead, they jointly celebrate the most important salvific event in God's history with God's people.

Moreover, with his “thick description” of the Therapeutic banquet, Philo aims to establish a *paradigm* that not only “deserves to be remembered” (57) alongside those of Xenophon and Plato, but moreover displays men and women “whose character and discourses [have shown] them to be philosophers” (57). After actively listening to an allegorical interpretation and being taught to “discern the inward and hidden truth” (78), they proceed to embody their scriptural tradition in

a dramatic choral event. This — rather than luxury, wine and elaborate food — can raise the soul to the ecstatic happiness and joy of “honorable drunkenness.” For Philo, the banquet of the “school of Moses” (63) does more than merely display the nature of *eros* (love), it builds a utopian archetype for all who desire to love the truth (ἐρῶν ἀληθείας [eran alētheias], 63). This archetype is meant as a model not only for Jews but for all followers of the school of Moses who seek to become true “citizens of Heaven and the world” (90).

Endnotes

¹ See Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahl-gemeinschaft. Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (TANZ 13; Tübingen: Francke, 1996), 183-216 and Dennis Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist. The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 158-9.

² Hal Taussig, “The Pivotal Place of the Therapeutae in Understanding the Meals of Early Judaism,” in: *Meals in Early Judaism*, eds. Susan Marks and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 117-28, at 117.

³ Sir 31:12-31 LXX and 32:7-13 LXX teach the young student to listen quietly, limit his words (32:8), and be modest in drinking and eating. Sir 32:1-6 LXX adds some teachings for the symposiarch (ἡγούμενος [hēgoumenos]): “do not exalt yourself; be among them as one of them; take thought for them, and then sit down. (2) And when you have performed all your service, recline so that you may be merry on account of them, and due to your good conduct you might receive a garland. (3) Speak, o elderly person, for it is fitting for you with accurate knowledge, and do not interrupt the music.” Translation Pietersma and Wright (32:1-3). *Pseudo-Phocilides* teaches what to serve (81-82) and advises not to invite parasites (91-94). Pace Seth Schwartz, “‘No dialogue at the symposium?’ Conviviality in Ben Sira and the Palestinian Talmud,” in *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*, Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 193-216, who argues that Sirach promotes “symptotic silence” (205). Schwartz does not take into account the different forms of teaching employed with at least two groups of addressees. He is, nonetheless, correct that Sirach is in favor of music, and that a symposium is “a sufficiently sensitive situation that music was considered a better, safer,

more enjoyable pastime than conversation” (207). On the Ben Sirach’s rules of etiquette and ethical perspectives with run directly parallel to those of the Greco-Roman world, see Smith, *From Symposium*, 134-144.

⁴ Taussig, “Pivotal Place,” 117. Cf. Andrew McGowan, “The Food of the Therapeutae: A Thick Description”, in: *Meals in Early Judaism*, ed. Susan Marks and Hal Tausig (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 129-37, 129.

⁵ Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 136.

⁶ *Contempl.* 2.

⁷ *Contempl.* 14. Philo refers to the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides philosophers also in *Contempl.* 16, 67, 69, 90.

⁸ Homer, *Il.* 13.5-6 cf. *Contempl.* 17.

⁹ Angela Standhartinger, “Philo im ethnografischen Diskurs. Beobachtungen zum literarischen Kontext von De Vita Contemplativa,” *JJS* 46 (2015): 314-344.

¹⁰ This, too, was one of the standards of ancient ethnography. Thus the Spartans know that discord ceases when greed and luxury (πλεονεξία και τρυφή [pleonexia kai truphē]) are eliminated (Strabo, *Geogr.* 10.4.16, 480C); the inhabitants of India are happy “because of their simplicity and moderation” (διὰ τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ τὴν εὐτέλεια [dia tēn haplotēta tēn euteleia]) (Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.53, 709C).

¹¹ *Contempl.* 40-47.

¹² *Contempl.* 40. The biting off of noses, ears, etc. is regarded by Plutarch as a dreadful barbarism; cf. Plutarch, *Cons. Apoll.* 113b. For the Cyclopes as anthropophagic barbarians see e.g., Ovid, *Metam.* 14.174-196.

¹³ Cf. Paul Wendland, “Die Therapeuten und die Philonische Schrift vom beschaulichen Leben: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums,” *Jahrbücher für klassische Philologie, Supplement* 22 (1896): 693-772. Reiner Bernhardt, *Luxuskritik und Aufwandsbeschränkungen in der griechischen Welt*, *Historia, Einzelschriften* 168 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 2003), 203-6; Werner Tietz, *Dilectus ciborum: Essen im Diskurs der römischen Antike*, *Hypomnemata* 193 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 323-53. There is, of course, a consensus between Greek and Roman moral discourses. Philo himself makes reference to comedy (*Contempl.* 43). For fights at symposia see e.g., Lucian, *Symp.* 43-47.

¹⁴ *Contempl.* 48-56. The same topics are encountered frequently elsewhere: cf. Musonius, *Or.* 18A, 18B, 19A, 19B. For slaves as marks of luxury see Seneca, *Ep.* 95.24. There is also a critique of male homoeroticism in Musonius, *Or.* 12. Cf. also Bernhardt 2003, 199-203, 214-17.

¹⁵ *Contempl.* 57-64. For more critique of these two literary symposia, see below.

¹⁶ See the description in Wendland, “Die Therapeuten,” 704-5.

¹⁷ *Contempl.* 72. Cf. the high-girdled transparent garments of the luxury slaves at other banquets (*Contempl.* 51).

¹⁸ *Contempl.* 73, cf. 37.

¹⁹ ὁ πρόεδρος αὐτῶν, πολλῆς ἀπάντων ἡσυχίας γενομένη [ho proedros autōn, pollēs hapantōn hēsychias genomenē, the president of the company, when a general silence is established] is reconstructed from the Armenian version. Yet the president, or more literary the one who sits in the first place (πρόεδρος [proedros]), is attested to also in *Contempl.* 79 and the silence during his speech is paralleled in *Contempl.* 31 and 81.

²⁰ König, *Saints*, 136. Cf. Niehoff, Maren. “The Symposium of Philo’s Therapeutae: Displaying Jewish Identity in an Increasingly Roman World.” *GRBS* 50 (2010): 95-116, 112: “Philo’s notion of the Therapeutic conversation radically differs from the lively sympotic discourse reported by symposium-literature, dispute with other parties is seen as an essential tool of clarifying the truth.”

²¹ König, *Saints*, 136.

²² *Spec.* 2.62: ἐν κόσμῳ καθέζονται σὺν ἡσυχία (en kosmō kathezontai syn hēsuchia).

²³ *Mos.* 2.215-6, *Spec.* 2.62. Cf. also Martin Ebner, “Mahl und Gruppenidentität: Philo’s Schrift De Vita Contemplativa als Paradigma,” in: *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität*, ed. Martin Ebner. *Quaestiones disputatae* 221 (Freiburg Br.: Herder, 2007) 64-90, here 75-6.

²⁴ The order of the courses is discussed in Ebner, “Mahl,” 73-4. On the character of the food, see: McGowan, “Food of the Therapeutae: A Thick Description,” 129-37.

²⁵ This function would explain why they are compared to the sacred tables of a temple (*Contempl.* 81). Thus the speech of the one who reclines at the first couch (πρόεδρος [proedros]) is delivered while eating like most of the speeches reported by Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophistae*.

²⁶ Niehoff, “Symposium,” 115-6.

²⁷ Cic. *Fam.* 9.24 (362). Translation of Shackelton Bailey, LCL (modified).

²⁸ Ebner, “Mahl,” 77.

²⁹ Johathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Contrasting Banquets: A literary Commonplace in Philo’s *On the Contemplative Live* and Other Greek and Roman Symposia,” in *Meals in Early Judaism* (Susan Marks and Hal Tausig ed., New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 163-173, at 164.

³⁰ Cf. Brumberg-Kraus, “Contrasting Banquets,” 166.

³¹ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.12 (182a), 5.8 (180b). There is also some critique of homoeroticism as well as inconsistency in presenting the main character in Plato, see: *Deipn.* 5.12 (187e-f). Aelius Aristides moreover criticizes the historical implausibility of Plato’s symposium. See *or.* 3 (*To Plato: In Defense of the four*), 577-87.

³² Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.13 (187f-188a), 5.3 (187b). At this point, Athenaeus praises Plato for placing a physician and a poet at a table with Socrates and Xenophon for mixing with some citizens (ιδιώτες [idiōtes]).

³³ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.12 (182b). 5.14 (188f).

³⁴ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.19 (192c) Transl. Olson, LCL.

³⁵ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.3 (187b.) Ἐπίκουρος δὲ συμπόσιον φιλοσόφων μόνων πεποιήται (Erikouros de symposion philosophōn monōn pepoiētai).

³⁶ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.3 (187b) προφήτες ἀτόμων (prophētes atomōn). Other critiques include a lack of religion (no libation) (5.7 (179d), the gathering of flatterers (5.12 (182b), and strange topics of discussion like “indigestion” (5.12 (187c)).

³⁷ Diogenes Laertius 4.42: ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ τοῦτο μάλιστα φιλοσοφίας ἴδιον, τὸ τὸν καιρὸν ἐκάστων ἐπίστασθαι (*all’ auto touto malista philosophias idion, to ton kairon heastōn epistasthai*). Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.1 (613a) reports a similar opinion expressed by the sophist Isocrates and other anonymous speakers: “For they hold that philosophy is not a suitable thing to make sport with and that we are not on these occasions inclined to seriousness.”

³⁸ Plutarch, *Quest. conv.* 1.1 (612F-615C). The fifth century author Macrobius, who raises the same question in *Saturnalia* 7.1 (and knows Plutarch’s writing). He sees the philosopher more as an educator who must be aware of his audience and context. For a similar discussion in Latin literature in the first century BCE and CE, see Elke

Stein-Hölkeskamp, *Das römische Gastmahl. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (München, Beck, 2005) 220-258.

³⁹ Xenophon, *Symp.* 1.1: τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς (ta en tais paidiais). Cf. Plutarch, *Quest. conv.* 1.1 (614F), cf. *Sept. sap. conv.* 150C.

⁴⁰ Plutarch, *Quest. conv.* 1.1 (613F). cf 8.praef 716D.

⁴¹ Dio Chrysostom, *Compot.* (Or. 27) 3. Instead the ideal symposiast is a “man that is gentle and has a properly ordered character, easily endures the rudeness of the others, and acts like a gentleman himself, trying to the best of his ability to bring the ignorant chorus into a proper demeanor by means of fitting rhythm and melody. And he introduces appropriate topics of conversation and by his tact and persuasiveness attempts to get those present to be more harmonious and friendly in their intercourse with one another.” (27.4).

⁴² Cf. Jason König, “Symptotic Dialogue in the First to Fifth Centuries CE, in: *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (ed. Simon Goldhill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 85-113, 90.

⁴³ See Debora L. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia. Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993) 136-7.

⁴⁴ Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 150C-D.

⁴⁵ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.1 (185c).

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.1 613C, 3 praef. 645A.

⁴⁷ See Plato, *Prot.* 347d-e. In Plato's *Symposion* Socrates drinks heavily but never gets drunk. Maximus of Tyrus, *or* 22.4, praises the Persians for forbidding drunkenness. Cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.133.3.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Leg.* I-II (637c-674d), cf. 637d-e and 674a. Sythians are heavy drinkers according to Plato (*Leg.* 673d-e), but non-drinkers according to Plutarch (*Conv. sap. sept.* 150D).

⁴⁹ Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia*, 150-154. In Plutarch's *Dinner of the (Seven) Wise Men*, Mnesiphilus opts to abstain from wine, because in this company of eminent philosophers “there is nothing for the wine-cup or ladle to accomplish, but the Muses set discourse in the midst before all, a non-intoxicating bowl as it were, containing a maximum of pleasure in jest and seriousness combined” (Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 156D).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Conempl.* 57, 63.

⁵¹ On these genres see: Judith Mossman, “Plutarch's *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* and its Place in *Symposion* Literature,” in: *Plutarch and his Intellectual World. Essays on Plutarch*, ed. Judith Mossman (London: Duckworth, 1997), 119-140, 120.

⁵² Emmet Robbins, “Skolion”, in: *DNP* 11 (2002): 634 and Ewen Bowie and Spoth, Friedrich, “Elegie”, *DNP* 3 (1997): 969-78.

⁵³ Traditionally Plato’s *Symposium* was seen as the master model. Cf. Josef Martin, *Symposion: Die Geschichte einer literarischen Gattung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1931) 1978-201. However, Joel C. Relihan, “Rethinking the History of the Literary Symposium” *Illinois Classical Studies* 17 (1992): 213-244 demonstrates that it is “a very eccentric symposium, when it is viewed in contrast to those literary symposia that follow it” (214). Further, “the symposium is not sympathetic to philosophers and their abstractions but tend to have common sense laugh at squabbling pedants” (217). What makes Plato’s symposium unique is that, in “dismissing the flute-girl and refusing to drink deeply, the guests attempt to deny that they are at a symposium” (220). “The clear implication is that this symposium is superior to a real symposium because words and speeches stand in for food and drink” (ibid). Philo follows this line.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Contempl.* 21 calls the *Therapeutae* an ethnos (γένος [genos]) existing in many places in the inhabited world, among Greeks as well as among barbarians.

⁵⁵ Cf. Iambulus (in Diodor 2.59), Philostratus, *vit. Ap.* 3.27, Iamblichus, *VP* 97-99. See also Mary Ann Beavis, “Philo’s *Therapeutai*: Philosopher’s Dream or Utopian Construction?,” *JSP* 14 (2004): 30-42 for a comparison of *Contempl.* See further Iambulus, *Islands of the Sun*.

⁵⁶ Mathew David Larsen, “Listening with the Body, Seeing through the Ears: Contextualizing Philo’s Lecture Event in *On the Contemporary Life*,” *JSJ* 47 (2016), 1-28, here 11. Cf. also Quintilian, *Inst.* 8,3,41.

⁵⁷ König, “Fragmentation and Coherence in Plutarch’s Symptotic Questions,” in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, ed. Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43-68, 54.

⁵⁸ *Contempl.* 78. Cf. Philo, *Praem.* 9, Plutarch, *Is.Os.* 382c-e.

⁵⁹ Plutarch, *Rect. rat. aud.* 39B, 45B-C. Larsen, “Listening,” 1-16.

⁶⁰ Larson, “Listening,” 2. Cf. Plutarch, *Rect. rat. aud.* 45.

⁶¹ Larson, “Listening,” 15.

⁶² Plutarch sometimes compares the school setting to a symposium. Cf. Plutarch, *Rect. rat. aud.* 42C, 42E etc.

⁶³ Plutarch, *Quest. conv.*1.1 614E. On the method of providing philosophical instruction at table, see R. Lopes, “The Omnipresence of Philosophy in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*,” in: *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch*, ed. José Ribeiro Ferreira, Delfim Leao, Manuel Tröster, Paula Barata Dias (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos da Universidade de Coimbra, 2009) 415-424. Eleni Kechagia, “Philosophy in Plutarch's Table Talk” in *Jest or in Earnest? The Philosopher's Banquet. Plutarch's "Table Talk" in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire*, ed. Frieda Klotz and Katerina Oikonomopoulou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 77-104.

⁶⁴ Cf. Plato, *Symp.* 176a, 181a, 214b, Xenophon, *Symp.* 3.1, 7.1, Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 157^E, *quaest. conv.* 704C-706E etc., Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 14.9-43 (617f-639a). Cf. R. Araujo da Rocha Junior, “Music and Symposium in Plutarch's *Conviviium Septem Sapientium*,” in *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch*, ed. José Ribeiro Ferreira, Delfim Leao, Manuel Tröster, Paula Barata Dias (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos da Universidade de Coimbra 2008) 505-509.

⁶⁵ Peter Jeffery, “Philo's Impact on Christian Psalmody,” in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler, SBLSymS 25 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003) 147-87, at 167: “Philo's five genres seem to have been listed hierarchically, from the relatively mundane iambic trimeter, through the grand processional *prosodion* and even more dignified *paraspondeion*, finally arriving, as it were, ‘next to the altar’ with a *parabomion*. The whole then culminated in the stanzas of choric song and dance. If they were actually performed in this sequence, the effect would have been one of growing solemnity, with a graduated increase in complexity.” Philo is well known for his reflections on musical theory. Other than Josephus (*Ant.* 2.346, 4.303) no other Jewish authors attribute meter and modes to biblical psalms.

⁶⁶ But cf. *Contempl.* 40, where Philo promises to write about “the cheerfulness of their convivial meals.”

⁶⁷ Philo explicitly compares the experience with that of *bacchantes* when he says that having drunk as in the Bacchic rites of the strong wine of God's love” (*Contempl.*85), both women and men are equally possessed by God (ἐνθουσιῶντές τε ἄνδρες ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναῖκες [enthousiōntes te andres homou kai gynaikes], *Contempl.*87).

⁶⁸ *Contempl.* 85-86, 88.

⁶⁹ See Inge Nielsen, *Cultic Theatres and Ritual Drama: A Study in Regional Development and Religious Interchange between East and West in Antiquity*, Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity 4 (Aarhus: University Press, 2002). However, some have been famously convicted for staging mysteries at banquets, see Alicibiades in Plutarch, *Alc.* 19 and *Quaest. conv.* 621B-C.

⁷⁰ Xenophon, *Symp.* 9, Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 747A-748D. Cf. C. A. Martins de Jesus, "Dancing with Plutarch: Dance and Dance Theory in Plutarch's Table Talk," *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch*, ed. José Ribeiro Ferreira, Delfim Leao, Manuel Tröster, Paula Barata Dias (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos da Universidade de Coimbra, 2009) 403-414.

⁷¹ Matthias Klinghardt, "The Ritual Dynamics of Inspiration: The Therapeutae's Dance," in *Meals in Early Judaism*, eds. Susan Marks and Hal Tausig (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) 139-161, 154.

⁷² *Contempl.* 89. For this concept, which takes up Philo's concept of "sober drunkenness" and its relationship to the Platonic idea of "divine drunkenness" cf. Hans Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik*, BZNW 9 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1929) 1-8.

⁷³ *Contempl.* 89, cf. Plato, *Symp.* 223d.

⁷⁴ The character of sympotic teaching sheds some new light on the reading of letters at Early Christian symposia. Hans Lietzmann, among others, thought that Paul's letters were read before the Eucharist was celebrated (cf. *Messe and Herrenmahl. Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Liturgie* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 3rd edition, 1955] 229). Yet, pure reading as instruction without discussion of other opinions would not fit the character of a symposium. The polyphonous event described in 1 Cor 14 represents a better example.