

QUID ROMA ATHENIS?
HOW FAR DID IMPERIAL GREEK SOPHISTS OR PHILOSOPHERS
DEBATE THE LEGITIMACY OF ROMAN POWER?

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Introduction

If we were to attempt to reconstruct the history of this topic working from either *a priori* considerations or from general ideas about the roles of sophists and philosophers in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman world, we might well come up with a story such as the following: sophists, the skilled speakers who could praise anything if asked, and often men who held or hoped to hold posts to which appointments were made either by the emperor or at least with imperial approval¹, were always or almost always ready to praise the imperial system, and to adduce arguments old and new (mainly, it must be admitted, old) in favour of its benefits and its legitimacy; philosophers, on the other hand², for whom truth, virtue and individual liberty was always supremely important, often or at least sometimes questioned the legitimacy of Rome's government of the empire and of the emperor's commanding role in the system, or continued to be engaged in some degree in elaborating or countering the arguments justifying the rule of Rome over the Greek world that had been worked out by Panaetius in the second century BC and picked up by Posidonius and by Cicero in the first³. When we address the surviving evidence, however, a somewhat different picture emerges. Sophists, it is true, turn out to be the voices of praise, but not so often as one might have expected, nor so consistently: indeed we can sometimes find destabilising questioning of the imperial system in sophistic texts. Philosophers, however,

¹ For sophists' expectations of reward and influence resulting from their association with emperors see FLINTERMAN 2004, 364-368. For the diverse aspects of sophists' rhetorical and political activity see ANDERSON 1986; ANDERSON 1989; ANDERSON 1993; BOWERSOCK 1969; BOWIE 1970; BOWIE 1982; MOLES 1978; SCHMITZ 1997; PUECH 2002; WHITMARSH 2005.

² For arguments that philosophers and sophists presented clearly distinguishable profiles in the early empire see HAHN 1989, 46-53; FLINTERMAN 2004, 361-376 (with particular attention to their relations with emperors); SIDEBOTTOM 2009.

³ For differing views on the importance of Panaetius for Cicero's arguments in *off.* I 13 and *rep.* III 37-39 see GABBA 1979; FERRARI 1988, 363-374. Earlier discussions are noticed by FUKS 1938, 28 nn. 8-9. For Stoic political thought in the late Hellenistic period see SCHOFIELD 1999.

hardly ever, if at all, question the legitimacy of the imperial system or of the place of an emperor at its head, though they occasionally criticize a particular emperor's actions or (implicitly) his right to be emperor. What explains this somewhat surprising picture?

Sophists

The expected pattern is exemplified by the *Εἰς Ῥώμην* of Aelius Aristides (*or.* XXVI Keil), delivered either in AD 144 or AD 155⁴. Aristides ticks all, or at least most, of the boxes. His comparison of Rome with earlier world powers leads him to the conclusion that only the Romans have learned properly how to govern an empire⁵, and he lays great stress on their policy of offering Roman citizenship to members of local elites in all parts of the empire, even (he may hint) from as far away as Britain⁶, thereby allowing recruitment from these elites to the imperial governing class (XXVI 59-64). He betrays none of the disquiet about the restless ambition that this political generosity can encourage in individuals (and a consequent brain-drain of talent from their cities) such as we find in Plutarch⁷.

Another ground on which Aristides commends Rome is for the absolute security guaranteed to the inhabitants of the empire by the ring of legions guarding its frontiers and by the walls and *limes*-fortifications that are part

⁴ See especially SWAIN 1996, 274-284 (arguing *inter alia* for AD 155 as the date of composition and delivery), and for an excellent recent discussion see DESIDERI in FONTANELLA 2007, 3-22, with a note of recent scholarship on *or.* XXVI at 3 n. 3.

⁵ XXVI 58: τοῦτο μέντοι τὸ τοὺς πρόσθεν ἅπαντας, ὡς εἰπεῖν, ἀνθρώπους διαγυγὸν ὑμῖν ἐτηρήθη μόνοις εὐρεῖν τε καὶ τελεώσασθαι ('but this thing which had eluded virtually all of mankind hitherto was reserved for you alone to discover and bring to perfection').

⁶ XXVI 60: καὶ οὔτε θάλαττα διείργει τὸ μῆ εἶναι πολίτην οὔτε πληθος τῆς ἐν μέσῳ χώρας ('and even the sea does not cut off somebody from being a citizen nor the volume of land in between').

⁷ For example in his essay *Περὶ εὐθυμίας / De tranquillitate animi* 470b-d: εἶθ' οὕτως αἰεὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦς ἐνδεεῖς ὄντες οὐδέποτε τοῖς καθ' ἑαυτοῦς χάριν ἔχουσιν ... "Θάσιος γὰρ ἦν ἐκεῖνος". ἄλλος δὲ τις Χίος, ἄλλος δὲ Γαλάτης ἢ Βιθυνός, οὐκ ἀγαπῶν εἴ τινας μερίδους ἢ δόξαν ἢ δύναμιν ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ πολίταις εἴληχεν, ἀλλὰ κλαίων ὅτι μὴ φορεῖ πατρικίους· ἐὰν δὲ καὶ φορεῖ, ὅτι μηδέπω στρατηγεῖ Ῥωμαίων· ἐὰν δὲ καὶ στρατηγῆ, ὅτι μὴ ὑπατεύει· καὶ ὑπατεύων, ὅτι μὴ πρῶτος ἀλλὰ ὕστερος ἀνηγορεύθη ('then to such a degree are they always deficient by comparison with those above them that they never show gratitude to those on their own level ... [Plutarch here cites the early elegiac poet from Thasos, Archilochus, fr. 19 West]. "But that man was a Thasian". But another who is from Chios, and another from Galatia or Bithynia, not content if he has obtained some share in glory or power among his own citizens, weeps because he does not wear patrician shoes; and if he should wear them, he weeps because he is not yet a Roman praetor; and if he should be one of these, he weeps because he is not yet a consul; and on becoming a consul, he weeps because he has not been announced first but later'). On Plutarch's criticisms of members of Greek elites pursuing senatorial or equestrian careers cf. *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 814c-e and SWAIN 1996, 169-171.

of its defences⁸. This is one of the reasons for thinking that the speech cannot have been composed at a time of military crisis, either shortly after the British war of the early 140s that resulted in the construction of the Antonine Wall by Lollius Urbicus and the acclamation of Pius as *imperator* late in AD 142, or the troubles in Mauretania in the early 140s. But if we retain the speech's traditional date of AD 144 we must allow that Aristides is purveying a rose-tinted vision of the empire's security situation. That is not surprising given some fundamental misrepresentations in Aristides' account of the Roman army: for example, he seems to be unaware of the difference between *legiones* and *auxilia*⁹. It may be, then, that those scholars who argue for a later date of AD 155 are correct: but in that case the speech *On Rome* seems to become a pendant to the far longer speech of that same year in praise of Athens: unless one is put off by sheer length, the reader of *or. I*, the *Panathenaicus*, comes away with a greater sense of the importance of Athens as a repository of Greek traditions and as the leading player in Greek education than she comes away from the oration *To Rome*, *Εἰς Ῥώμην*, XXVI, with a sense of the significance of Rome's empire.

Several of Aristides's other speeches also offer some praise of Rome – *or. XXIII*, *XXIV* and *XXVII*¹⁰. But that praise is directed more towards the imperial house than to Rome. *Or. XXIII* and *XXIV* are totally silent on the matter of Roman citizenship which was flagged as fundamental in *or. XXVI*, and the actual names 'Romans' and 'Rome' seem to be carefully avoided. These three *Orations* – *XXIII*, *XXIV* and *XXVII* – do however share the presentation of Roman power that is found in *or. XXVI* as all-encompassing and more than sufficient to deal with any barbarian threat, and one might guess this was a widespread view in the Eastern empire by the late 160s, reinforced by the Parthian triumph of Lucius Verus. It was therefore a great shock to the Greek world when, in or around AD 171, invading Costoboci penetrated the Greek peninsula as far south as Eleusis and looted and sacked one of Greece's most illustrious Pan-Hellenic temple complexes. In his speech of lamentation Aristides talks as if it had been incumbent on Greeks to defend the sanctuary:

O you Greeks, who were children of old and now are truly children, who stood idly by at the approach of so great an evil! Will you not now, at least, you incredible people, be of some use in your own country? Will you not even save Athens?¹¹

⁸ Peace and stability within the empire (*XXVI* 68-71) is complemented by the rarity even of frontier wars (70) and secured by frontier fortifications (80) and a well-trained, professional army (72-89).

⁹ Cf. esp. *XXVI* 75, and note also 73, 85 and 88 with BEHR *ad locc.*

¹⁰ For discussion cf. SWAIN 1996, 284-295.

¹¹ *XXII* 13: ὦ πάλαί τε δὴ καὶ νῦν ὡς ἀληθῶς παῖδες Ἑλληνες, οἱ τοσούτου κακοῦ προσιόντος περιείδετε. οὐκ, ὦ θαυμάσιοι, νῦν γέ τι ἐν ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἔσεσθε; οὐ τὰς γε Ἀθήνας αὐτὰς περισώσετε; Behr's translation 'Will you not now, dear sirs, at all events get control of your-

Aristides is unlikely at this point to have known that a group of Greeks, led by the Olympic victor Mnesibulus of Elateia, did indeed try to fight off the Costoboci (as *we* know from Pausanias and the *Augustan History*). Had he done so, one would expect him to have worked this heroism into his argument. But what is striking in this *or.* XXII, the *Eleusinian*, is that there is no comment on or criticism of Roman failure to protect Greece from barbarian incursions. Is Aristides silent on Rome's failure because he wants to create a speech that achieves total and unbroken *μίμησις* of the world of the classical past? Or is he embarrassed that his praise of Roman power in earlier speeches – XXIII, XXIV, XXVI, XXVII – has turned out to be overconfident and excessive? Does he even perhaps hesitate to criticise a regime to which he may be expected to have to turn again to secure benefits for his cities or immunities for himself¹².

Another point may be made. The speeches delivered by Aristides after *or.* XXII, the *Eleusinian*, of AD 171 – i.e. the four Smyrnaean orations of AD 177-179 – although they mention Roman resources and imperial beneficence and intervention¹³, say nothing of Roman military power. Perhaps this is because it was not relevant to Aristides' themes in these speeches; but it may also be because after the shock of AD 171 Aristides' confidence in Rome's eternal power was shaken. It is a great pity we do not have a second version of the *Εἰς Ῥώμην*, re-written after the sacking of Eleusis: at least one issue on which Aristides had earlier given Rome top marks would have had to be revisited.

Overall, then, Aristides' speeches offer us a much less thorough-going endorsement of the Roman empire than is often suggested, and even *or.* XXVI at times gives the impression of a patchily-researched evaluation which has sometimes been superficially developed, even if on some topics Aristides is clearly drawing on carefully worked-out and well-informed assessments, whether his own or those of another¹⁴. Perhaps some of its oddities are to be explained by its multifarious objectives: Aristides aimed to praise Rome in

selves?' seems to me clearly to be wrong. It is ironic that this stance should be adopted by somebody who had been so energetic in extricating himself from the liturgy of serving as eirenarch (*or.* L 70-93 with SWAIN 1996, 268-271).

¹² For Aristides' exploitation of his high standing in the eyes of the emperor Marcus cf. FLINTERMAN 2004, 365-368.

¹³ XIX 2; XIX 9; XX 8.

¹⁴ Most critics base their praise or blame on the premise that what we encounter is all to be credited to Aristides. The knowledge and judgement he displays on some of the themes he touches seems to me so far from what we encounter elsewhere in the corpus that I am tempted to think that for this composition he undertook (or had an assistant undertake?) some specific research, perhaps partly in conversations with some of his eminent Roman friends.

a speech that fell within a rhetorical tradition of praising cities, but he converted that to praise of Rome's empire and its ruling class, simultaneously holding up an ideal of imperial government to which the emperor and his administration might be hoped to aspire, and conveying covert warnings to the elites of the Greek cities of the eastern empire against attempting to behave as if they had full freedom of action¹⁵.

How much, if anything, can be inferred from the fact that no other praise of Rome by a sophist has survived and hardly any other is attested?¹⁶ Many titles of lost sophistic speeches can be excavated in Philostratus' *Lives of the sophists*, yet not one of these is a praise of Rome. We might wish to add the mid-3rd century sophist, Callinicus of Petra, who was active just too late for inclusion in Philostratus' *Lives*, and to whom the Suda ascribes a work *On the renewal of the Romans*, περὶ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀνανεώσεως¹⁷. Given Callinicus' composition of a panegyric to Gallienus¹⁸, it is perhaps unlikely that *On the renewal of the Romans* was a critical review of the current state of Roman society, but there may have been constructive suggestions.

We might of course reach a different conclusion if we had any of the inaugural speeches delivered by Greek sophists when taking up the chair of Greek rhetoric in Rome that had been established by Domitian. But equally we might not. These sophists were proud of their skills and their heritage. When Hadrianus of Tyre took up the chair in Athens he is said by Philostratus to have opened his first address with the words 'Letters come once more from Phoenicia' (πάλιν ἐκ Φοινίκης γράμματα). A comparable speech delivered in Rome need not have praised either Rome or its empire. But even if it had done, the overall picture on the basis of the evidence that *does* survive would not, in my view, change: a Greek sophist, as the case of Aristides shows, can be very eloquent in praise of Rome when he is himself in Rome; he becomes less eloquent, or certainly adduces fewer grounds of praise, when talking elsewhere; and sometimes – as in *or.* XXII, the *Eleusinian* – silence can be more eloquent than words.

When we turn, however, to some works composed by sophists primarily for reading rather than for public delivery, the picture becomes rather different. The Greek world under Roman rule as represented by Philostratus in his *Lives of the sophists*, in his *On Apollonius of Tyana*, in his *Nero* and in his *He-*

¹⁵ So DESIDERI 2007. Note what seems to be a thinly-veiled criticism of Alexandria at 67.

¹⁶ If we exclude, as I think we should, Plutarch's *De fortuna Romanorum*: it is admittedly a sophistic piece of work, but the philosopher Plutarch is far from being a sophist.

¹⁷ Perhaps the same as the work *On the ancestral customs of Rome*, from which a fragment survives (printed in Polemo, ed. Hinck): so STEIN in *PIR* C 229.

¹⁸ Menander rhetor 370 Spengel.

roicus is a world where intervention by Rome, by the emperor or by a Roman administrator can seem unpredictable, arbitrary and unjust, quite unlike Aristides' picture in *or.* XXVI of benevolent governors against whose rare errors of judgement appeal to a wholly-just emperor is always possible¹⁹. Although *Lives of the sophists* heroises its 40 or so Greek city aristocrats as they stride across the stage of the Roman world from Phoenicia to Gaul²⁰, we are repeatedly reminded of the imperial stage director who can employ these men to play impressive roles for a time and then sack them. I take but one example, that of (Aelianus?) Philiscus of Thessaly²¹. Philiscus had gone to Rome to defend his claim to immunity from public service, *λειτουργία* in a Macedonian city: in Rome he had attached himself to the group around Julia Domna, and through her influence had been appointed to the imperial chair of Greek rhetoric in Athens, probably in AD 212 or 213²². Her son, now emperor, Caracalla developed a hatred for Philiscus, and when the law suit came up both forced him to plead in person and attacked him in court for his appearance, his voice and his handling of the case, eventually shouting 'Neither you nor any other of the teachers is immune: for never on account of a few wretched little speeches would I deprive the cities of those who are due to perform public services'²³. After this, however, he gave immunity to Philostratus' nephew, Philostratus of Lemnos, at the age of 24, on account of a declamation²⁴. It is not surprising that in embarking on this narrative Philostratus compares the emperors to Homeric gods who grudgingly give favours to men²⁵.

The vignettes of Greek eminences falling foul of headstrong emperors presented by Philostratus in his *Lives of the sophists* are painted in the same colours as the main themes of the *Nero*. The distinguished Stoic Musonius

¹⁹ On Philostratus see BOWERSOCK 1969; ANDERSON 1986; ANDERSON 1993; SWAIN 1996, 380-400; BILLAULT 2000, BOWIE - ELSNER 2009. On the ascription of the *Nero* to the author of *Lives* and of *On Apollonius of Tyana* see WHITMARSH 1999.

²⁰ 41 *Lives* are devoted to Greeks of the imperial period whom Philostratus regards straightforwardly as sophists (*VS* I 19-26; II 1-33); I 7-8 are devoted to Dio of Prusa and Favorinus, men who 'engaged in philosophy with the reputation of sophists' (I 8,492: τῶν φιλοσοφησάντων ἐν δόξῃ τοῦ σοφιστεῦσαι).

²¹ Philostr. *VS* II 30,622-623; cf. PUECH 2002, 376-377 no. 199.

²² AVOTINS 1975.

²³ Philostr. *VS* II 30,623: οὔτε σὺ ἀτελής οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς τῶν παιδεύοντων· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε διὰ μικρὰ καὶ δύστηνα λογάρια τὰς πόλεις ἀφελοίμην τῶν λειτουρησάντων. As WRIGHT notes in the Loeb edition *ad loc.*, these words echo Demosthenes *De falsa legatione* 421. This may raise suspicions that the phraseology owes more to Philostratus than to Caracalla, though his rhetorical training too will have been good: but it makes little difference to our assessment of Philostratus' presentation of imperial mutability.

²⁴ Philostr. *ibid.*: ἐπὶ μελέτῃ.

²⁵ Philostr. *VS* II 30,622: ὅσπερ οἱ θεοὶ Ὀμήρῳ πεποιήνται οὐ πάντα ἐκόντες ἀνθρώποις δίδόντες. Here ἀλλήλοισι is the reading of the MSS: ἀνθρώποις was conjectured by Valckenaer.

Rufus²⁶, in dialogue during his exile on the island of Gyarus with a shadowy figure Menecrates (who may draw his name from a friend of Philostratus), recalls three acts of Nero that marked his disregard of laws natural, human and divine: his attempt to cut through the isthmus of Corinth, his killing of a singer from Epirus, and his aggression towards the sanctuary at Delphi. The topic of unpredictable and extreme actions by the occupying power is picked up by a detail in the *Heroicus*: Thessalian purple-fishers have been so savagely penalized for an unspecified breach of regulations that they have been constrained to sell their land, their houses, those of their slaves who have not run away, and even their ancestors' tombs²⁷.

These scenarios are expanded into full-size canvasses in his work *On Apollonius of Tyana* in which the pure-hearted sage comes into conflict with Nero, Domitian and their agents Tigellinus and Casperius Aelianus – a conflict in which Philostratus ensures we feel that Apollonius, however irritating many of his features, is undeserving of the harsh treatment meted out²⁸.

What we read here is vehement criticism of some holders of imperial power, but nothing that makes any sort of theoretical move to contest or even to scrutinise the system as a whole. Philostratus offered himself the opportunity for such a contestation when he represented Euphrates of Tyre, Dio of Prusa, and Apollonius himself giving advice to Vespasian on government (VA V 33-35). Philostratus, in a fictional *μίμησις* of the Persian debate on constitutions in Herodotus III 80-82, has Euphrates advocate that Vespasian restore democracy (*δήμου κράτος*) to Rome²⁹; Dio that he should give Romans the choice between monarchy and democracy³⁰; and Apollonius that

²⁶ On Musonius see WHITMARSH 2001, 141-155.

²⁷ 53,22-23: *μεγάλων γὰρ ὄντων ἐπιτιμιῶν ἐπὶ τῇ κόχλῳ παρ' ἧς οἱ ἄνθρωποι σοφίζονται τὴν πορφύραν, αἰτίαν ἔσχον οἱ Θετταλοὶ παρανομήσαι τι ἐς τὴν βαφὴν ταύτην. εἰ μὲν ἀληθῆ, οὐκ οἶδα· λίθοι δ' οὖν ἐπικρέμανται σφισιν, ὕψ' ὧν ἀποδίδονται μὲν τοὺς ἄγρους, ἀποδίδονται δὲ τὰς οἰκίας, τῶν δὲ ἀνδραπόδων τὰ μὲν ἀποδέδρακέ σφας, τὰ δὲ πέπραται, καὶ οὐδὲ τοῖς γονεῦσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ἐναγίζουσιν· ἀπέδοντο γὰρ καὶ τοὺς τάφους.*

²⁸ When a 'bad' emperor's whim resulted in the genocide of a whole people, the Nasamones of north Africa, eliminated by Domitian ca. AD 87/88, the reverberations are felt in a wider range of texts: Dionysius Periegetes 208-210 (written between AD 130 and 138), Aristides *or.* XIX 9 (AD 177), Cassius Dio LXVIII 4,6 (230s AD).

²⁹ VA V 33,5: *Ῥωμαίοις τὸ δημοκρατεῖσθαι πολλοῦ ἄξιον καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ὄντων αὐτοῖς ἐπ' ἐκείνης τῆς πολιτείας ἐκτῆθη· παῦε μοναρχίαν, περὶ ἧς τοιαῦτα εἶρηκας, καὶ δίδου Ῥωμαίοις μὲν τὸ τοῦ δήμου κράτος, σαυτῷ δὲ τὸ ἐλευθερίας αὐτοῖς ἄρξαι ('the Romans have a high regard for democracy, and many of their possessions were acquired under that form of government; put an end to monarchy, about which you have said such things, and give the Romans rule by the people and yourself the honour of initiating their freedom').*

³⁰ VA V 34,3: *δίδου Ῥωμαίοις αἴρεσιν τῆς αὐτῶν πολιτείας, κὰν μὲν αἰρῶνται δημοκρατίαν, ξυγχώρει ('give the Romans the choice of their own constitution, and if they chose democracy, grant it').*

Vespasian stick to his plan of overthrowing Vitellius and himself becoming emperor (V 35). Part of Apollonius' case is grounded in *Realpolitik* – Vespasian has already gone too far to turn back. He also offers the reasonable argument that since Vespasian has been a good and highly respected governor he will also be a good emperor (V 35,7). But the most telling part of his case is that it makes little difference to him, Apollonius, what constitution is adopted for the Roman empire, and that anyway a good democracy can, like that of Periclean Athens (as his phraseology clearly hints) be a covert monarchy, while a monarchy which pursues the good of his subjects is really a democracy:

To me no constitution matters, since I live as the gods' subject, but I do not think that the human herd should perish for the lack of a just and reasonable herdsman. Just as one man of exceptional virtue changes democracy so as to make it appear that the rule of one man is better than the rest, so the rule of one man who is always looking out for the common good is a democracy³¹.

(Philostr. VA V 35,4)

Apollonius's remarks in the philosophical persona that Philostratus has given him form a helpful bridge to my discussion of philosophers. But Philostratus himself is a sophist, not a philosopher, and in the end stands not very from Aristides, who was also prepared to describe the Roman empire as a democracy: 'a democracy common to the whole world, under a single man, its best, as its ruler and controller'³². For Philostratus the idea of return to what he and other Greek writers under the empire call 'democracy', and what Romans from the West like Tacitus called *res publica*, was a fantasy simply to be toyed with. What was important (and was perceived as being important) was whether the system, call it what you may, produced a good emperor or a bad.

Philosophers

I turn now to Greek philosophers, who might be expected to have been moved by their claimed commitment to the pursuit of truth towards a more rigorous critique than an Aelius Aristides or a Flavius Philostratus³³. Yet no

³¹ ἐμοὶ πολιτείας μὲν οὐδεμιᾶς μέλει, ζῶ γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῖς θεοῖς, τὴν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀγέλην οὐκ ἀξιῶ φθειρεσθαι χήτει βουκόλου δικαίου τε καὶ σώφρονος. ὥσπερ γὰρ εἰς ἀρετῆ προὔχων μεθίστησι τὴν δημοκρατίαν εἰς τὸ ἐνὸς ἀνδρός τοῦ ἀρίστου ἀρχὴν φαίνεσθαι, οὕτως ἡ ἐνὸς ἀρχὴ πάντα ἐς τὸ ζυμφέρον τοῦ κοινοῦ προορῶσα δῆμός ἐστιν.

³² Or. XXVI 60: κοινὴ τῆς γῆς δημοκρατία ὑφ' ἐνὶ τῷ ἀρίστῳ ἀρχοντι καὶ κοσμητῇ.

³³ For the place of philosophers in early and high imperial society see above all HAHN 1989 (but as observed by M.B. TRAPP in his review in "CR" 40, 1990, 323-324, Hahn has not much to say about 'the

systematic or rigorous critique of the empire is evident. Its absence can be explained by the interplay of many factors.

One important factor is that the subjects that preoccupied those philosophers who did address major issues were in branches of philosophy other than political philosophy or jurisprudence. If we review a list of Greek philosophers of importance between Thrasyllus, the editor of the Platonic corpus, and Plotinus in the third century AD, it is evident that focus of their intellectual activities was different. Thrasyllus himself seems to be chiefly engaged, so far as we know, in the editing and interpretation of the corpus of Plato's writings³⁴. To leap to a figure nearer the end of my chosen period, Alexander of Aphrodisias was also an interpreter of and commentator on the Aristotelian corpus, though not without original ideas of his own. Aristotle's *Politics* continues to be a central text for modern western students of the history of political thought, but there is no evidence that Alexander wrote anything specifically about the *Politics*³⁵.

Favorinus, Sextus Empiricus and Galen engaged in highly technical debate in issues of logic, epistemology and metaphysics. Though we learn much from Galen about the medical, philosophical and literary milieu in which he worked, he does not address himself to the benefits or legitimacy of Roman imperial government. Of Sextus it is not certain, though it is probable, that he lived in the second century AD. The chief reason for our uncertainty is that he seems almost entirely uninterested in the world in which he lived, directing his arguments against Hellenistic philosophers, even though it is clear from his sole reference to the Roman world, i.e. to the emperor Tiberius, that he lived and worked after AD 37³⁶.

Application to such technical aspects of philosophy did not, of course, exclude interest or even involvement in political philosophy. That is demonstrated by the wide spectrum of Plutarch's philosophical interests³⁷. As well as entering technical debate with the academic Favorinus³⁸ on metaphysics,

ideology of the philosopher's calling'). Note also ANDRE 1987; MICHEL 1993; ZANKER 1995 and essays collected in GRIFFIN - BARNES 1989; GRIFFIN - BARNES 1997.

³⁴ For strong claims for the influence of Thrasyllus on the development of Platonism see TARRANT 1993; however persuasive these claims (and they have been challenged) political philosophy is not an area in which Tarrant sees Thrasyllus as active. For middle Platonism DILLON 1997 remains fundamental.

³⁵ In the *Ethical Problems* (whose authorship is debated), there is some discussion of those aspects of political theory that relate to ethics, and, at 147,28, what seems to be a reference to Aristotle (*pol.* 1253a9-10). I am indebted to Ben Morison for this reference and for discussion of Alexander's work.

³⁶ Tiberius 'used to see in the dark' (*P.* I 84: ἐν σκοτῶ ἑώρα): see BETT 2000, ix.

³⁷ The best introduction to Plutarch remains RUSSELL 1971 and for Plutarch's perceptions of Rome JONES 1966, 1-66.

³⁸ On Favorinus see Philostr. *VS* I 8 and most recently the introduction in AMATO - JULIEN 2005; WHITMARSH 2001, 116-121; HOLFORD-STREVEN 2003, 98-130. Favorinus had every reason to adopt

with Stoics on epistemology and with Epicureans on ethics, Plutarch wrote on a wide range of questions that fell within moral and political philosophy, and as a philosophical teacher in a Platonic tradition he trained up Greek aristocrats to live a virtuous and socially participatory life in the Greco-Roman world of the late first and early second centuries AD, both personally as a teacher of the young and through his writings for his addressees and for anyone else who choose to read them. One of these addressees, Q. Sosius Senecio, was a consular Roman, probably from the West³⁹, close to Trajan and *consul ordinarius* in AD 99 and 107; two of his Hellenophone addressees, C. Iulius Eurycles Herculaneus (from Laconia) and C. Iulius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappus (from the once-royal family of Commagene) were senators; and many of his Greek-born addressees and friends had Roman citizenship, as did Plutarch himself⁴⁰. He manifestly thought deeply and extensively about how Rome had come to dominate the Greek world, how its political system had slid from a republic to the principate, and what gains and losses Roman imperial rule over the Greek world entailed for its inhabitants. He had also pondered how men born into Greek city elites should best react to that rule, and what benefits they and their peers from the same class in the Latin-speaking West might reap from a Greek education.

Plutarch's essay *Πολιτικὰ παραγγέλματα* (*Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*) is often cited for its advice to the politically active class in Greek cities on the limits of their freedom and on appropriate modes of handling the Roman administration⁴¹. His *Parallel Lives* approach from numerous angles and scores of cases the features that distinguish good from bad personal and political choices and actions⁴². In his *De fortuna Romanorum* Plutarch gave a rhetorical airing to some of the factors (most of them long recognized in the Greek world) that led to the rise of Rome to its world-power status. In his Roman republican lives he shows both an excellent knowledge of late republican history and recurrent acumen in analyzing political conflict. More exposition of details and perhaps generalities concerning senatorial relations with the emperor and his armies must have been offered in

a political perspective, given his unsuccessful attempt to extricate himself from the liturgy of taking up the office of *flamen provinciae* in his native province of Gallia Narbonensis (on which incident see BOWIE 1997) and the pulling down of his statues in Corinth and Athens that seems to have followed his perceived loss of imperial favour (the former addressed in his speech transmitted as Dio *or.* XXXVII, re-edited in AMATO - JULIEN 2005; for the latter see Philostr. *VS* I 8,490).

³⁹ SWAIN 1996, 426-427.

⁴⁰ Attested by *SIG* 3 829A but nowhere by Plutarch in his extant writings.

⁴¹ See especially JONES 1971, 110-121; DESIDERI 1986; SWAIN 1996, 161-183. On Plutarch's political thought in general cf. AALDERS 1982a.

⁴² Cf. for example SWAIN 1996, 13-150; very fully DUFF 2002.

the now lost *Lives* of emperors, and we know from passages in the *Moralia* that Plutarch was not hesitant in expressing criticism of Vespasian⁴³ or referring to Domitian as ‘the tyrant’⁴⁴. But to judge from the two imperial *Lives* that survive, the *Galba* and the *Otho*, Plutarch is unlikely to have entered upon a careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, of the advantages and disadvantages of the imperial system as it developed between Augustus and Trajan (although a narrative of the year AD 68 might have been an opportune context in which to take stock of the *état de la question* at the end of the Julio-Claudian century). It is clear from many passages that Plutarch judged the current state of affairs to be better for the Greek world than the freedom and the inter-polis conflicts of the classical period, that it could even be urged that a benevolent divine power had had a hand in bringing it about, and that a reader was expected to conclude that working with the imperial administration and within such constraints as it imposed was his best choice. To that extent Plutarch is undoubtedly a supporter of *ordine* and not an instigator of *sovversione*. On the other hand the suggestion that god had been involved in leading the Greek world to its *present* situation distracts from, and is hardly a substitute for, a debate about the legitimacy of the regime. Nowhere in the voluminous writings that survive is the *legitimacy* of the imperial system debated. It is a reasonable supposition that such a debate would not have been found in the lost writings either, though these did include a two-book work on politics, and it is not impossible that had they been preserved these books would have contained some surprises⁴⁵.

We get nearer to such a debate in two of his contemporaries, the Stoic Epictetus, and Dio of Prusa⁴⁶, whose philosophy drew on Plato, cynicism and the Stoa. Both are pupils of Musonius, and in both cases we find something similar to what we found in Philostratus’ later portrayal of Apollonius (not an accident, since in constructing his fictional make-over of the historical Apollonius Philostratus surely drew on the depictions of Dio and Muso-

⁴³ *Amatorius* 771c, presumably at least partly because of his abrogation in AD 71 of Nero’s grant of ‘freedom’ to Greece (which conversely entitled Nero to reincarnation not as a viper but as a frog in the imaginative scene of *De sera numinis vindicta* 568a).

⁴⁴ *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 487c-488a.

⁴⁵ Lamprias catalogue no. 52. Mention should also be made of the fragmentarily preserved *De unius in republica dominatione* / Περὶ μοναρχίας καὶ δημοκρατίας καὶ ὀλιγαρχίας (*Moralia* 826b-827c), concluding that monarchy is the best form of government in which a good statesman might aspire to function (presumably as the monarch!). This is not generally thought to be by Plutarch, cf. AALDERS 1982b: but of course by whomever it was written, it would be an interesting witness to possible positions in this period. What survives, however, proceeds at a superficial level that does not suggest the work as a whole (apparently conceived of as a lecture, δὲ ἀλέξεις, 826b) will have been a radical inquiry.

⁴⁶ On Dio see DESIDERI 1978; JONES 1978; MOLES 1990; SWAIN 1996, 187-241; WHITMARSH 2001, esp. 183-225; 325-327.

nus he encountered in his sources): we find, that is, condemnation of bad emperors, and a focus on how a virtuous man should behave under a bad emperor.

Not surprisingly, neither the city aristocrat Dio nor the slave Epictetus are anywhere found advocating or involved in attempts to overthrow a regime, even one of a bad emperor, as were the conspirators against Nero who combined membership of the Roman senatorial governing class with Stoic beliefs. True, when Dio was exiled by Domitian it seems likely to have been the fall-out from an alleged conspiracy, but not one that was Stoic-driven⁴⁷; and earlier under Vespasian Dio seems to have aligned himself with the regime *against* philosophers when these were banished from Rome, delivering a lost speech *Against philosophers*, Κατὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων, which may have been what earned him Roman citizenship from the consul of AD 71, M. Cocceius Nerva⁴⁸. It was again Nerva who may have recalled him from exile in the year AD 96, and it was Nerva's successor Trajan who gave him the stimulus to write his four essays *On kingship* (*or.* I-IV) and on whose behalf, whether mandated or otherwise, Dio seems to have played the role of a conciliatory shuttle-diplomat in the Bithynian cities of Nicaea and Nicomedia and tried to intervene in the civic problems of Tarsus and (on one chronology) Rhodes and Alexandria⁴⁹. Such situations might well have afforded Dio opportunities for applying political theory, or for offering a general commendation of the imperial system within which these Greek cities now had to function, but he did not take them, focusing rather on the problems and dangers of inter-city rivalry and internal disorder. Nor, unsurprisingly, is any political theory to be found in the speeches Dio delivered in the course of his political difficulties in his own city, Prusa. It is almost exclusively in his four essays *On kingship* that anything approaching philosophical thought is to be found. And here the chief purpose of its application is not to question the imperial system, nor even to justify it, but to debate how a good monarch should behave. Whether any of the four essays was actually delivered as speech in the presence of Trajan we cannot tell: Dio implies in *or.* LVII 11 that this speech was a προλαλιά to ones that had been delivered to the emperor, but this may simply be to raise his profile in his performances in cities of the eastern empire, and there may be more truth in Philostratus' much-cited anecdote that when Dio spoke Greek to Trajan (riding with him in his triumphal cha-

⁴⁷ Cf. SIDEBOTTOM 1996.

⁴⁸ Cf. MOLES 1978.

⁴⁹ In favour of a Trajanic dating of both the *Rhodian Oration* (XXXI) and the *Alexandrian Oration* (XXXII) see SWAIN 1996, 428-429 with references to earlier discussions.

riot!) the emperor said ‘I don’t know what you are saying, but I love you as myself’⁵⁰.

If Dio is more eloquent in giving advice on being a good emperor, Epictetus’ *Dissertations* are replete with illustrations of how to preserve virtue when persecuted by a bad. I pick out only one example. Here Epictetus imagines an exchange between the emperor Vespasian and the intransigent advocate of republicanism Helvidius Priscus:

Helvidius Priscus too saw this, and on seeing it he put it into practice. When Vespasian sent for him so as to prevent him attending the senate, he replied: ‘It is in your power not to allow me to be a member of the senate, but till then I must attend its sessions.’

(Vespasian) ‘Well do, attend but keep quiet.’

(Helvidius) ‘Do not ask my opinion and I will keep quiet.’

(Vespasian) ‘But I must ask your opinion.’

(Helvidius) ‘And I must say what seems just.’

(Vespasian) ‘But if you say that, I will put you to death.’

(Helvidius) ‘When did I ever tell you that I was immortal? You will do your part, I mine – yours to kill, mine to die without any fear; yours to banish, mine to go without feeling distress’⁵¹.

(Epict. *diss.* I 2,19-22)

Admittedly this is a far from straightforward example. First, we are dealing with the knock-on effects of that opposition against Nero formed along a Stoic-senatorial axis that has just been mentioned, and Epictetus examines the conduct of a senator, something which will have been relevant for only some of the readers of the *Dissertations*. Secondly, such readers may well know that it was for writing a eulogy of Helvidius, exiled and then executed by Vespasian, that under Domitian Herennius Senecio in turn was executed and in the fall-out all philosophers, including Epictetus, were exiled from Rome. So Epictetus is replaying an imaginary version of a confrontation by a senator whose actions ultimately contributed to his own exile. Thirdly, the

⁵⁰ VSI 7,488: τὶ μὲν λέγεις οὐκ οἶδα, φιλῶ δέ σε ὡς ἑμαυτόν. For a rightly sceptical discussion of the hypothesis that some or all of the four kingship orations were delivered in Trajan’s presence, and reference to earlier scholarship, see WHITMARSH 2001, 325-327. On the four kingship *Orations* SIDEBOTTOM 1990 remains fundamental.

⁵¹ ταῦτα εἶδεν καὶ Πρῖσκος Ἑλουίδιος καὶ ἰδὼν ἐποίησε. προσπέμψαντος αὐτῷ Οὐσπανσιανοῦ, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς τὴν σύγκλητον, ἀπεκρίνατο “ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐστὶ μὴ ἔᾶσαι με εἶναι συγκλητικόν· μέχρι δ’ ἂν ᾧ, δεῖ με εἰσερχεσθαι.” “ἄγε ἀλλ’ εἰσελθὼν σιώπησον.” “μὴ μ’ ἐξέταζε καὶ σιωπήσω.” “ἀλλὰ δεῖ με ἐξετάσαι” “καὶ μὲ εἰπεῖν τὸ φαινόμενον δίκαιον” “ἀλλ’ ἂν εἴπῃς, ἀποκτενῶ σε.” “πότε οὖν σοι εἶπον, ὅτι ἀθάνατός εἰμι; καὶ σὺ τὸ σὸν ποιήσεις καὶ γὰρ τὸ ἐμὸν. σὸν ἐστὶν ἀποκτεῖναι, ἐμὸν ἀποθανεῖν μὴ τρέμοντα· σὸν φυγαδεῦσαι, ἐμὸν ἐξελεθεῖν μὴ λυπούμενον”.

Dissertations that we have were composed not by Epictetus himself but by the Greek senator from Nicomedia, L. (?) Flavius Arrianus, probably in the 120s AD when he was well advanced in a senatorial career that was to lead to a suffect consulate in (almost certainly) AD 129⁵². Arrian had attended Epictetus' vigorous lectures in Nicopolis around AD 108, perhaps not yet 20 years old⁵³. The version he wrote up may be a quite unreliable guide to what the Stoic ex-slave actually said, and may sometimes or often reflect the interests of the Greco-roman senatorial elite among whom Arrian had begun to move. True, he seems also to have written other types of philosophical work (e.g. on comets); and his philosophical credentials were good enough for him to be categorised as a philosopher on inscriptions⁵⁴. But as a senatorial proconsul, then consul, then later a *legatus Augusti* administering Cappadocia, Arrian was deeply implicated in the regime of Trajan and Hadrian that administered the empire and manipulated the senate just as had the regime of the Flavians, even if the first decade of Trajan was marked by ostentatious distancing from the acts of Domitian.

All this rather limits what can be concluded from this passage. But two hypotheses can be ventured. First, if in AD 108 Arrian had heard Epictetus delivering a systematic critique of the imperial system he would have retained this in the *Dissertations* only if he took the view that it was an important or productive contribution. Indeed had he thought such a critique might be read carefully by emperors or their inner circle he might even have invented one and put it in Epictetus' mouth. That he did not think any contribution to the running of the empire could be made by such a critique surely follows from his choice of the different path – Epictetus' recurrent focus on how a virtuous man should react to a vicious emperor – the same path as was followed by the sophist Philostratus over a century later in his portrayal of Apollonius' relations with Nero and Domitian in a work that he too doubtless expected might be read with care by some imperial eyes.

Conclusions

Overall neither sophists nor philosophers tackled the two basic issues: what alternative was there to monarchic government of the Roman empire, and what alternative was there for the Greek world to the now firmly estab-

⁵² On Arrian see (briefly) SWAIN 1996, 242-248; major studies are BOSWORTH 1972; STADTER 1980; SYME 1982; TONNET 1988. On Arrian's own view of the empire cf. the provocative essay of VIDAL-NAQUET 1984.

⁵³ See esp. MILLAR 1968.

⁵⁴ References in SWAIN 1996, 243 n. 8.

lished Roman regime. Discussions of the choice between monarchy, oligarchy and democracy were literary games in *μίμησις* of Herodotus Book III, whether played by somebody who may be a philosopher, the author of the pseudo-Plutarch *Περὶ μοναρχίας καὶ δημοκρατίας καὶ ὀλιγαρχίας* (who refers specifically to Herodotus, 826e) or by the arch-sophist Philostratus in his *On Apollonius* (who leaves his reader to see the Herodotean model). The questions of how an emperor should behave to ensure that he was perceived as a 'good' emperor, and how a member of the elite should behave under a 'bad' emperor, were addressed by sophists and philosophers alike, though neither did this so fully and effectively as senatorial historians like Tacitus in the early 2nd century Latin world or Cassius Dio in the early 3rd century Greek world. Like Helvidius, non-senatorial sophists and philosophers knew what roles they were expected to play.

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