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Plutarch

From The Parallel Lives Pericles

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FROM: "<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/plutarch/lives/home.html>"

(Excerpt)

1.1 .On seeing certain wealthy foreigners in Rome carrying puppies and young monkeys about in their bosoms and fondling them, Caesar¹ asked, we are told, if the women in their country did not bear children, thus in right princely fashion rebuking those who squander on animals that proneness to love and loving affection which is ours by nature, and which is due only to our fellow-men.

2 Since, then, our souls are by nature possessed of great fondness for learning and fondness for seeing, it is surely reasonable to chide those who abuse this fondness on objects all unworthy either of their eyes or ears, to the neglect of those which are good and serviceable. Our outward sense, since it apprehends the objects which encounter it by virtue of their mere

impact upon it, must needs, perhaps, regard everything that presents itself, be it useful or useless;

3 but in the exercise of his mind every man, if he pleases, has the natural power to turn himself away in every case, and to change, without the least difficulty, to that object upon which he himself determines. It is meet, therefore, that he pursue what is best, to the end that he may not merely regard it, but also be edified by regarding it. A colour is suited to the eye if its freshness, and its pleasantness as well, stimulates and p5nourishes the vision; and so our intellectual vision must be applied to such objects as, by their very charm, invite it onward to its own proper good.

4 Such objects are to be found in virtuous deeds; these implant in those who search them out a great and zealous eagerness which leads to imitation. In other cases, admiration of the deed is not immediately accompanied by an impulse to do it. Nay, many times, on the contrary, while we delight in the work, we despise the workman, as, for instance, in the case of perfumes and dyes; we take a delight in them, but dyers and perfumers we regard as illiberal and vulgar folk.

5 Therefore it was a fine saying of Antisthenes, when he heard that Ismenias was an excellent piper: "But he's a worthless man," said he, "otherwise he wouldn't be so good a piper." And so Philip² once said to his son, who, as the wine went round, plucked the strings charmingly and skilfully, "Art not ashamed to pluck the strings so well?" It is enough, surely, if a king have leisure to hear others pluck the strings, and he pays great deference to the Muses if he be but a spectator of such contests.

2 1 Labour with one's own hands on lowly tasks gives witness, in the toil thus expended on useless things, to one's own indifference to higher things.^a No generous youth, from seeing the Zeus at Pisa, or the Hera at Argos, longs to be Pheidias or Polycleitus; nor to be Anacreon or Philetas or Archilochus out of pleasure in their poems.

2 For it does not of necessity follow that, if the work delights you with its grace, the one who wrought it is worthy of your p7esteem. Wherefore the spectator is not advantaged by those things at sight of which no ardour for imitation arises in the breast, nor any uplift of the soul arousing zealous impulses to do the like. But virtuous action straightway so disposes a man that he no sooner admires the works of virtue than he strives to emulate those who wrought them.

3 The good things of Fortune we love to possess and enjoy; those of Virtue we long to perform. The former we are willing should be ours at the hands of others; the latter we wish that others rather should have at our hands. The Good creates a stir of activity towards itself, and implants at once in the spectator an active impulse; it does not form his character by ideal representation alone, but through the investigation of its work it furnishes him with a dominant purpose.

4 For such reasons I have decided to persevere in my writing of Lives, and so have composed this tenth book, containing the life of Pericles, and that of Fabius Maximus, who waged such lengthy war with Hannibal. The men were alike in their virtues, and more especially in their gentleness and rectitude, and by their ability to endure the follies of their peoples and of their colleagues in office, they proved of the greatest service to their countries. But whether I aim correctly at the proper mark must be decided from what I have written.

3 1 Pericles was of the tribe Acamantis, of the deme Cholargus, and of the foremost family and lineage on both sides. His father, Xanthippus, who conquered the generals of the King at Mycale, married Agariste, granddaughter⁵ of that Cleisthenes p9who, in such noble fashion, expelled the Peisistratidae and destroyed their tyranny, instituted laws, and established a constitution best attempered for the promotion of harmony and safety.

2 She, in her dreams, once fancied that she had given birth to a lion, and a few days after bore Pericles. His personal appearance was unimpeachable, except that his head was rather long and out of due proportion. For this

reason the images of him, almost all of them, wear helmets, because the artists, as it would seem, were not willing to reproach him with deformity. The comic poets of Attica used to call him "Schinocephalus," or Squill-head (the squill is sometimes called "schinus").

3 So the comic poet Cratinus, in his "Cheirons," says: "Faction and Saturn, that ancient of days, were united in wedlock; their offspring was of all tyrants the greatest, and lo! he is called by the gods the head-compeller." And again in his "Nemesis": "Come, Zeus! of guests and heads the Lord!"

4 And Telecleides speaks of him as sitting on the acropolis in the greatest perplexity, "now heavy of head, and now alone, from the eleven-couched chamber of his head, causing vast uproar to arise."^{7c} And Eupolis, in his "Demes," having inquiries made about each one of the demagogues as they come up from Hades, says, when Pericles is called out last:—

"The very head of those below hast thou now brought."

4 1 His teacher in music, most writers state, was Damon (whose name, they say, should be pronounced p11with the first syllable short); but Aristotle⁸ says he had a thorough musical training at the hands of Pythocleides. Now Damon seems to have been a consummate sophist, but to have taken refuge behind the name of music in order to conceal from the multitude his real power, ¹⁵⁴and he associated with Pericles, that political athlete, as it were, in the capacity of rubberc and trainer.

2 However, Damon was not left unmolested in this use of his lyre as a screen, but was ostracized for being a great schemer and a friend of tyranny, and became a butt of the comic poets. At all events, Plato⁹ represented some one as inquiring of him thus:—

"In the first place tell me then, I beseech thee, thou who art

The Cheiron, as they say, who to Pericles gave his craft."

3 Pericles was also a pupil of Zeno the Eleatic, who discoursed on the natural world, like Parmenides, and perfected a species of refutative catch

which was sure to bring an opponent to grief; as Timon of Phlius expressed it:—

"His was a tongue that could argue both ways with a fury resistless, Zeno's; assailer of all things."

4 But the man who most consorted with Pericles, and did most to clothe him with a majestic demeanour that had more weight than any demagogue's appeals, yes, and who lifted on high and exalted the dignity of his character, was Anaxagoras the Clazomenian, whom men of that day used to call *Nous*," either because they admired that comprehension of his, which proved of such surpassing greatness in the investigation of nature; or because he was the first to enthrone in the universe, not Chance, nor yet Necessity, as the source of its orderly arrangement, but Mind (*Nous*) pure and simple, which distinguishes and sets apart, in the midst of an otherwise chaotic mass, the substances which have like elements.

5 1 This man Pericles extravagantly admired, and being gradually filled full of the so called higher philosophy and elevated speculation, he not only had, as it seems, a spirit that was solemn and a discourse that was lofty and free from plebeian and reckless effrontery, but also a composure of countenance that never relaxed into laughter, a gentleness of carriage and cast of attire that suffered no emotion to disturb it while he was speaking, a modulation of voice that was far from boisterous, and many similar characteristics which struck all his hearers with wondering amazement.

2 It is, at any rate, a fact that, once on a time when he had been abused and insulted all day long by a certain lewd fellow of the baser sort, he endured it all quietly, though it was in the market-place, where he had urgent business to transact, and towards evening went away homewards unruffled, the fellow following along and heaping all manner of contumely upon him.

3 When he was about to go in doors, it being now dark, he ordered a servant to take a torch and escort the fellow in safety back to his own home.

The poet Ion, however, says that Pericles had a presumptuous and somewhat arrogant manner of address, and that into his haughtiness there entered a good deal of disdain and contempt for others; he praises, on the other hand, the tact, complaisance, and elegant address which Cimon showed in his social intercourse.

4 But we must ignore Ion, with his demand that virtue, like a dramatic tetralogy, have some sort of a farcical appendage. Zeno, when men called the austerity of Pericles a mere thirst for reputation, and swollen conceit, urged them to have some such thirst for reputation themselves, with the idea that the very assumption of nobility might in time produce, all unconsciously, something like an eager and habitual practice of it.

6 1 These were not the only advantages Pericles had of his association with Anaxagoras. It appears that he was also lifted by him above superstition, that feeling which is produced by amazement at what happens in regions above us. It affects those who are ignorant of the causes of such things, and are crazed about divine intervention, and confounded through their inexperience in this domain; whereas the doctrines of natural philosophy remove such ignorance and inexperience, and substitute for timorous and inflamed superstition that unshaken reverence which is attended by a good hope.

2 A story is told that once on a time the head of a one-horned ram was brought to Pericles from his country-place, and that Lampon the seer, when he saw how the horn grew strong and solid from the middle of the forehead, declared that, whereas there were two powerful parties in the city, 155 that of Thucydides and that of Pericles, the mastery would finally devolve upon one man, — the man to p17 whom this sign had been given. Anaxagoras, however, had the skull cut in two, and showed that the brain had not filled out its position, but had drawn together to a point, like an egg, at that particular spot in the entire cavity where the root of the horn began.

3 At that time, the story says, it was Anaxagoras who won the plaudits of the bystanders; but a little while after it was Lampon, for Thucydides was overthrown, and Pericles was entrusted with the entire control of all the interests of the people.

Now there was nothing, in my opinion, to prevent both of them, the naturalist and the seer, from being in the right of the matter; the one correctly divined the cause, the other the object or purpose. It was the proper province of the one to observe why anything happens, and how it comes to be what it is; of the other to declare for what purpose anything happens, and what it means.

4 And those who declare that the discovery of the cause, in any phenomenon, does away with the meaning, do not perceive that they are doing away not only with divine portents, but also with artificial tokens, such as the ringing of gongs, the language of fire-signals, and the shadows of the pointers on sundials. Each of these has been made, through some casual adaptation, to have some meaning. However, perhaps this is a matter for a different treatise.

7 1 As a young man, Pericles was exceedingly reluctant to face the people, since it was thought that in feature he was like the tyrant Peisistratus; and when men well on in years remarked also that his voice was sweet, and his tongue glib and speedy in discourse, they were struck with amazement at the resemblance. Besides, since he was rich, of brilliant lineage, and had friends of the greatest influence, he feared that he might be ostracized, and so at first had naught to do with politics, but devoted himself rather to a military career, where he was brave and enterprising.

2 However, when Aristides was dead,¹¹ and Themistocles in banishment,¹² and Cimon was kept by his campaigns for the most part abroad, then at last Pericles decided to devote himself to the people, espousing the cause of the poor and the many instead of the few and the rich, contrary to his own nature, which was anything but popular.

3 But he feared, as it would seem, to encounter a suspicion of aiming at tyranny, and when he saw that Cimon was very aristocratic in his sympathies, and was held in extraordinary affection by the party of the "Good and True," he began to court the favour of the multitude, thereby securing safety for himself, and power to wield against his rival.

4 Straightway, too, he made a different ordering in his way of life. On one street only in the city was he to be seen walking, — the one which took him to the market-place and the council-chamber. Invitations to dinner, and all such friendly and familiar intercourse, he declined, so that during the long period that elapsed while he was at the head of the state, there was not a single friend to whose house he went to dine, except that when his kinsman Euryptolemus gave a wedding feast, he attended until the libations were made, and then straightway rose up and departed.

5 Conviviality is prone to break down and overpower the haughtiest reserve, and in familiar intercourse the dignity which is assumed for appearance's sake is very hard to maintain. Whereas, in the case of true and genuine virtue, "fairest appears what most appears," and nothing in the conduct of good men is so admirable in the eyes of strangers, as their daily walk and conversation is in the eyes of those who share it.

And so it was that Pericles, seeking to avoid the satiety which springs from continual intercourse, made his approaches to the people by intervals, as it were, not speaking on every question, nor addressing the people on every occasion, but offering himself like the Salaminian trireme, as Critolaüs says, for great emergencies. The rest of his policy he carried out by commissioning his friends and other public speakers.

6 One of these, as they say, was Ephialtes, who broke down the power of the Council of the Areiopagus, and so poured out for the citizens, to use the words of Plato, too much "undiluted freedom," by which the people was rendered unruly, just like a horse, and, as the comic poets say, "no longer had the patience to obey the rein, but nabbed Euboea and trampled on the islands."

8 1 Moreover, by way of providing himself with a style of discourse which was adapted, like a musical instrument, to his mode of life and the grandeur of his sentiments, he often made an auxiliary string of Anaxagoras, subtly mingling, as it were, with his rhetoric the dye of natural science. It was from natural science, as the divine Plato says,¹⁵ that he "acquired his loftiness of thought and perfectness of execution, in addition

to his natural gifts," and by applying what he learned to the art of speaking, he far excelled all other speakers.

2 It was thus, they say, that he got his surname; though some suppose it was from the structures with which he adorned the city, and others from his ability as a statesman and a general, that he was called Olympian. It is not at all unlikely that his reputation was the result of the blending in him of many high qualities.

3 But the comic poets of that day, who let fly, both in earnest and in jest, many shafts of speech against him, make it plain that he got this surname chiefly because of his diction; they spoke of him as "thundering" and "lightening" when he harangued his audience, and as "wielding a dread thunderbolt in his tongue."

There is on record also a certain saying of Thucydides, the son of Melesias, touching the clever persuasiveness of Pericles, a saying uttered in jest.

4 Thucydides belonged to the party of the "Good and True," and was for a very long time a political antagonist of Pericles. When Archidamus, the king of the Lacedaemonians, asked him whether he or Pericles was the better wrestler, he replied: "Whenever I throw him in wrestling, he disputes the fall, and carries his point, and persuades the very men who saw him fall."

The truth is, however, that even Pericles, with all his gifts, was cautious in his discourse, so that whenever he came forward to speak he prayed the gods that there might not escape him unawares a single word which was unsuited to the matter under discussion.

5 In writing he left nothing behind him except the decrees which he proposed, and only a few in all of his memorable sayings are preserved, as, for instance, his urging the removal of Aegina as the "eye-sore of the Piraeus," and his declaring that he "already beheld war swooping down upon them from Peloponnesus." Once also when Sophocles, who was general with him on a certain naval expedition, praised a lovely boy, he

said: "It is not his hands only, Sophocles, that a general must keep clean, but his eyes as well."

6 Again, Stesimbrotus says that, in his funeral oration over those who had fallen in the Samian War, he declared that they had become immortal, like the gods; "the gods themselves," he said, "we cannot see, but from the honours which they receive, and the blessings which they bestow, we conclude that they are immortal." So it was, he said, with those who had given their lives for their country.

9 1 Thucydides describes the administration of Pericles as rather aristocratic, — "in name a democracy, but in fact a government by the greatest citizen." But many others say that the people was first led on by him into allotments of public lands, festival-grants, and distributions of fees for public services, thereby falling into bad habits, and becoming luxurious and wanton under the influence of his public measures, instead of frugal and self-sufficing. Let us therefore examine in detail the reason for this change in him.

2 In the beginning, as has been said, pitted as he was against the reputation of Cimon, he tried to ingratiate himself with the people. And since he was the inferior in wealth and property, by means of which Cimon would win over the poor, — furnishing a dinner every day to any Athenian who wanted it, bestowing raiment on the elderly men, and removing the fences from his estates that whosoever wished might pluck the fruit, — Pericles, outdone in popular arts of this sort, had recourse to the distribution of the people's own wealth. This was on the advice of Damonides, of the Deme Oa, as Aristotle has stated.

3 And soon, what with festival-grants and jurors' wages and other fees and largesses, he bribed the multitude by the wholesale, and used them in opposition to the Council of the Areiopagus. Of this body he himself was not a member, since the lot had not made him either First Archon, or Archon Thesmothete, or King Archon, or Archon Polemarch. These offices were in ancient times filled by lot, and through them those who properly acquitted themselves were promoted into the Areiopagus.

4 For this reason all the more did Pericles, strong in the affections of the people, lead a successful party against the Council of the Areiopagus. Not only was the Council robbed of most of its jurisdiction by Ephialtes, but Cimon also, on the charge of being a lover of Sparta and a hater of the people, was ostracized, a man who yielded to none in wealth and lineage, who had won most glorious victories over the Barbarians, and had filled the city full of money and spoils, as is written in his Life. Such was the power of Pericles among the people.