

RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘The friend-making table’: variety and the definition of friendship in Plutarch’s *Table Talk*

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Abstract

Plutarch’s *Table Talk* asserts the ‘friend-making’ (φιλοποιός) character of the symposium seemingly unproblematically (612D, 621C). Yet it is not entirely clear how readers are to understand the dynamics of social variety in the work, or how its presentation of friendship relates to Plutarch’s formal pronouncements elsewhere on the subject. This article explores connections between *Table Talk* and aspects of *On Having Many Friends* and *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*. It also considers some ideas around *poikilia* in Plutarch in connection to discussions of complexity and simplicity in *Table Talk*, as a window onto the work’s presentation of amicable variety. I argue that social variety is often the implicit target in discussions of party pragmatics and gastronomic variety. Unlike the moral essays, *Table Talk* ultimately endorses a broad conceptualization of friendship’s and variety’s value, inviting readers to rethink Plutarchan ideas for the sympotic context.

Keywords: Plutarch; *Table Talk*; friendship; *poikilia*; symposium

I. Introduction

In recent years the tendency to view Plutarch’s *Table Talk* (*Quaestiones conuiuales*) as an unsystematic mass, best quarried for random bits of lore, has been challenged by studies that show the text to be an engaging and coherent structure in its own right.¹ Far from being an off-putting miscellany, the work is increasingly recognized as inviting readers into its ‘social ποικιλία’ as fellow interlocutors, prompting them to engage with a range of topics across its variegated content.² Still, questions concerning the work’s purposes and effects persist, including its connections to other parts of Plutarch’s corpus. This article explores some implications of *Table Talk*’s assertion of the symposium’s ‘friend-making’ (φιλοποιός) capacity, programmatically announced at the work’s start (1 *praef.*, 612D), along two related lines of inquiry. One concerns how readers are to interpret *Table Talk*’s presentation of amity in relation to Plutarch’s ideas on friendship expressed elsewhere. *Table Talk* appears to valorize the very *poluphilia* and loose amity against which Plutarch warns in such works as *On Having Many Friends*, and readers are accordingly invited to situate Plutarch’s presentation of sympotic friendship in relation to his formal disquisitions on the topic. Related to the work’s amicable

¹ On the *Quaestiones conuiuales*’ coherence, see König (2007) 44–45; Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011b) 26–27. On its blend of dialogue, philosophy and miscellany, Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011a). On the once-dominant tendency towards fragmented reading of Plutarch, Günther (2018) 184–85.

² See Klotz (2011) 164–65 (‘social ποικιλία’, p. 165). Further: Teodorsson (1989–1996) 1.55–56; König (2007) 56; König (2009) 90; Titchener (2011) 48; König (2012) 70–71.

variety is the question of how to interpret *Table Talk*’s idea of variety more generally. After all, *poikilia* can carry ambiguous connotations, and so it is worth asking how *Table Talk* represents its own brand of multiplicity. Is social *poikilia* good *poikilia*, and if so, why? How do positive and negative ideas of variety converge in the symposium? Speculations about the benefits of variousness appear directly and indirectly in *Table Talk*, and I aim to show how the text ‘thinks’ by analogy about variety and companionship as intertwined, even in discussions which on the surface concern the pragmatics of party-giving or gastronomic variation.

By conjuring connections between social and intellectual variety, *Table Talk* evokes topics that Plutarch contemplates in other works and thereby affords readers the chance for comparative consideration across his corpus.³ Such comparison inspires readers to the very mode of flexible thinking encouraged by *Table Talk*’s dynamic of group discussion.⁴ Plutarch, too, as author of other works becomes an implicit interlocutor, as it were, in dialogue with the ‘Plutarch’ of *Table Talk*, a text in which he also appears as a character.⁵ Recall of and occasional tension between aspects of *Table Talk* and Plutarch’s wider corpus complicate any easy sense of his authority and intensify the need for engagement by the reader, who is encouraged to parse the ways in which Plutarchan ideas might apply in different genres or contexts.

In what follows I discuss (section II) interpretive issues raised by *Table Talk*’s foregrounding of the symposium’s friend-making capacity, including some connections to notions of variety in Plutarch. I then turn (section III) to close readings of specific portions of *Table Talk* that either explicitly or implicitly consider friendship or variety, with some attention to ways in which these scenes interact with notions expressed in other Plutarch texts. I conclude with a discussion (section IV) of how the role of the ‘shadow’ articulates *Table Talk*’s broad notion of sociality. I argue that while sympotic sociality evokes ambiguities from Plutarch’s corpus on the topics of both friendship and variety, *Table Talk* ultimately offers a more open-ended, flexible idea of friendship than that endorsed by Plutarch’s treatises. The work’s expansive ethics of amity helps to define the nature of the Plutarchan symposium. *Table Talk*’s tendency towards undogmatic, unresolved answers is in part enabled by a fluid notion of sociality, in which intellectual variety echoes and implicitly reinforces the value of social *poikilia*.

II. Tabling friendship and variety

Plutarch situates *Table Talk* in a double framework of friendship. The work is addressed to Plutarch’s friend Sossius Senecio, well-known as the dedicatee of *Progress in Virtue* and the *Parallel Lives*.⁶ Moreover, as Plutarch implies at the outset, the symposium is in part about making friends: ‘Letting what happens over wine fall into complete oblivion not only militates against the so-called friend-making character of the table but also has the most highly reputed of philosophers to bear witness against it’ (τὸ δ’ ὄλωσ ἀμνημονεῖν τῶν ἐν

³ For the probable late date of *Table Talk* (ca. 99–116 CE), giving it a potentially retrospective angle, see Jones (1966) 72–73; Jones (1971) 137; Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011b) 4. Cf. Pelling (2011) 207 n.3. On the relative chronology of Plutarch’s friendship texts, Helmbold (1939) 245; Jones (1966) 70–72.

⁴ The reader is in some sense invited to mirror the hallmark quality of Plutarch’s own flexibility (on which see Harrison (1991) 4664–65; Eshleman (2013) 164).

⁵ On the work’s narratological complexity, wherein the ‘voice of Plutarch’s older self edits the words of the younger “Plutarch”’, see Klotz (2011) 167. On Plutarch as author and internal persona, Kechagia (2011) 78–79 n.4; Pelling (2011) 229–31; Hobden (2013) 231–32; Xenophontos (2016) 176–77.

⁶ On Senecio, see Wardman (1974) 39; Duff (1999) 288–89; Pelling (2011) 208. Senecio’s status as recipient of *Table Talk*, *Progress in Virtue* and *Parallel Lives* neatly encapsulates different aspects of Plutarch’s corpus: miscellany, moral essay, biography.

οἶνω μὴ μόνον τῷ φιλοποιοῦ λεγομένῳ μάχεσθαι τῆς τραπέζης, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων τοὺς ἐλλογμωτάτους ἀντιμαρτυροῦντας ἔχειν, 612D).⁷ Plutarch presents his text as an enactment of friendship: if retrospection underscores the filiating ends of the party, beyond its occurrence in real time, failure to recall the party's conversations becomes an ethical lapse that disrespects the relationships produced at the friend-making table.⁸ Plutarch therefore extends the actual symposium's potential for friendship to the power of the text itself: the literary work structured around the symposium, by virtue of being dedicated to a friend, reinforces the friend-making premise of its intra-diegetic proceedings.

A few scenes in, Theon echoes Plutarch's paratextual framing, stating the symposium's τέλος (1.4, 621C):⁹

τοῦτο δ' ἦν φιλίας ἐπίτασιν ἢ γένεσιν δι' ἡδονῆς ἐνεργάσασθαι τοῖς παροῦσιν. διαγωγὴ γάρ ἐστιν ἐν οἶνω τὸ συμπόσιον εἰς φιλίαν ὑπὸ χάριτος τελευτῶσα.

This [aim] was through pleasure to generate among those present the intensification of friendship, or to bring it into being. For the symposium is a passing of time over wine that through gracious goodwill results in friendship.

'Intensification' (ἐπίτασις) requires that those at table already be friends; but for those who are not, the evening may inspire new relationships.¹⁰ Hence the original 'friend-making' quality of the table is also twofold: to confirm existing friendships and to generate new ones.

None of this may seem remarkable at first blush. And yet, the declaration of the symposium as friend-forming generates certain opacities. Presented as the apparent condition of the symposium and one of its overriding aims, friendship as a concept for philosophical analysis is in fact scarcely addressed in *Table Talk* and never as an explicit subject among the symposiasts.¹¹ By contrast, Plato and Xenophon, both programmatically cited at the start of *Table Talk* (612D), devote attention in their *Symposium* texts to ideas of *philia* (albeit in connection with *erōs* rather than with how symposia foster *philia*).¹² Xenophon's Socrates, for instance, offers a robust definition of τὸ φιλεῖσθαι (*Symp.* 8.18) as part of his discourse on desire (8.1–42) and the superiority of 'friendship of soul' (τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς φιλίαν) to 'enjoyment of the body' (τὴν τοῦ σώματος χρῆσιν, 8.28).¹³ While *Table Talk*, for its part, clearly situates itself within this sympotic literary tradition, its generic affinities are hardly predetermining: indeed, scholars have noted many differences between the Platonic-Xenophontic symposium and *Table Talk*, including the latter's unusual amalgamation of sympotic, zetetic and miscellanistic forms.¹⁴ Although its early allusion to the subject of friendship may recall the general ethical focus of Socratic sympotic conversation, *Table Talk's* internal conversations do not take up the subject

⁷ On 612D, see König (2011) 190–92. Plutarch's Greek texts are from the Loeb Classical Library, unless otherwise stated; translations are my own.

⁸ On memory's philosophical implications, see Xenophontos (2016) 177–78.

⁹ Compare *Conv. sept. sap.* 156C–D, 158C, with Romeri (2002) 172–76; Hunter (2018) 105–06.

¹⁰ See Stadter (1999) = (2015) 101.

¹¹ On the topics appropriate to the Plutarchan banquet, see González Julià (2009) 67.

¹² See, for instance, Eryximachus' conclusion that *erōs* enables friendly feeling (ὀμιλεῖν καὶ φίλους εἶναι) among humans and between humans and gods (Pl. *Symp.* 188d8–9). On the ethical focus of sympotic literature, Hobden (2013) 213; Xenophontos (2016) 173.

¹³ Socrates' definition of eroticized friendship includes genial conversation (εὐνοϊκῶς δὲ διαλέγεσθαι), mutual trust (πιστεύειν δὲ καὶ πιστεύεσθαι) and common support in fortune good and bad (8.18). See also Xen. *Symp.* 8.12–15, 25.

¹⁴ Kechagia (2011) 78–81. Further, Teodorsson (2009); Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011b) 13–16; Titchener (2011) 35–36; Hobden (2013) 197–98; Xenophontos (2016) 173–74. On miscellany, Morgan (2011).

directly or make entirely clear *how* the symposium forges friendship. Nonetheless, since friendship is a topic on which Plutarch comments in other works and one of long-standing philosophical vintage, the reader may be prompted to examine its contours in *Table Talk*.¹⁵ Already one may wonder how, for instance, *Table Talk* imagines friend-making to occur if attendees are supposed *ab initio* to be friends.¹⁶ This issue is compounded by the potential presence of 'shadows', guests of guests, and similarly by the extent to which agreement is expected at the symposium, inasmuch as harmony is presented in Plutarch's friendship treatises as a key component of companionship.¹⁷ In short, we may ask whether and how the symposium's conditions on these and other aspects of amity differ from those that Plutarch presents elsewhere.

That sympotic gatherings are associated in Greek literature with anxieties about falsehood, flattery and parasitism, all bad ingredients for friendship, only adds to these considerations.¹⁸ Plutarch's description of the 'so-called' (λεγομένω, 612D) friend-making capacity of the symposiastic table may hint at this lineage.¹⁹ Theognidean verse, for instance, invoked by Plutarch in *On Having Many Friends* (96F), represents at various junctures anxieties about the changeability of one's drinking companions; it famously encourages imitation of the octopus for maintaining a mutable, 'dappled disposition' (ποικίλον ἦθος) in relation to fellow symposiasts (Thgn. 213–18 W).²⁰ In *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, Plutarch notes that hosts give ear to false friends (ever quick to book dinners: 64F) as soon as the hand-washing water is presented (50D), quoting Eupolis' *Flatterers* on 'friends from saucepan to just after dessert' (54B). Concerns over flattery and superficiality probably help to explain Plutarch's dismissal, in *On Having Many Friends*, of the faddish belief that just because people have shared a drink once, they can be called friends (*De amicorum multitudine* 94A). Thus, if *Table Talk*'s opening reference to friendship is traditional, so are worries about the meaning of sympotic comity.

Anxiety about friendship's legibility at the symposium, where wine can cloud judgement and potentially produce false fellow feeling, lies behind Plutarch's brother Lamprias' comments at *Table Talk* 7.10 (715F):

τὸν δὲ δὴ φόβον οὐδενὸς ἦττον ἐμποδῶν ὄντα βουλευομένοις ἐξελαύνει, καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἄλλων παθῶν ἀφιλότιμα καὶ ἀγεννῆ κατασβέννυσι, καὶ τὸ κακόηθες καὶ τὸ ὑπουλον ὥσπερ τινὰς διπλόας ἀναπτύσσει τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ παντὸς ἦθους καὶ πάθους ποιεῖ καταφάνειαν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις.

Wine drives away the anxiety which is no small hindrance to those who deliberate, and it quells many other unseemly and sordid emotions. It discloses the malice and deceit concealed in the folds of the soul, as it were, and in speech it makes transparent every part of character and emotion.

Here the promise of the Plutarchan symposium is that the gathering *exposes*, rather than helps to conceal, bad character.²¹ Yet even as one acknowledges some rosininess in *Table Talk*'s pedestalling of friendship as the party's operative end, the optimistic energies

¹⁵ For Plutarch's views on friendship and its philosophical background, see O'Neil (1997); Van der Stockt (2011).

¹⁶ See Stadter (2009) = (2015) 109–10. Compare Agathon's command (Pl. *Symp.* 212d1) to admit a guest if he is 'one of our friends' (τις τῶν ἐπιτηδείων).

¹⁷ See *De amicorum multitudine* 96E–F, with below. On shadows, see section IV below.

¹⁸ See Whitmarsh (2006) on flattery; Hobden (2013) 157–58 on deceit.

¹⁹ On the use of focalizing verbs at *Quaest. conv.* 1 *praef.* and 1.1, see Xenophon (2016) 179.

²⁰ See Neer (2002) 14–23; Whitmarsh (2006) 98–101. Cf. Thgn. 1071–74 W.

²¹ See, however, *Quaest. conv.* 645B on not raising subjects that might reveal others' flaws, with Stadter (1999) = (2015) 102. On the symposium's revelation of character in Plutarch's *Lives*, see Titchener (1999) 496–99. On wine as producing either fellow feeling or enmity, compare *Conv. sept. sap.* 149C, 156D–E.

cannot shed the murkier inheritance of symposiastic vigilance, intimated in the concern over the hidden feelings wrapped in the ‘folds of the soul’.²² The positive possibilities framed by Lamprias have the effect of underscoring the very anxieties about sympotic amity they appear intended to dispel. The dinner party, as a zone of varied voices and views in which distraction, disagreement and multifariousness may predominate, would in fact seem to constitute an ambiguous site for forging friendship.

Uneasiness about sympotic friendship is moreover connected to another worry that bears on *Table Talk* and its representation of friend-making: namely, Plutarch’s ideas of variegation (*poikilia*) and multitude, concepts linked to both the kinds and number of people Plutarch thinks one should know. It may at first appear that a positive sense of variety applies to the symposium, much as positive valuations of the concept may describe variegated visual and literary phenomena.²³ Certainly, there is little surprise in discovering Plutarch’s repeated emphasis on variety in *Table Talk*.²⁴ He refers, for instance, to a ‘miscellaneous’ gathering (παντοδαπούς, 615D), a characterization that recurs in describing Callistratus’ tendency to ‘imitate Cimon among the ancients by giving pleasurable parties for many and diverse guests’ (ἐμμεῖτο τῶν παλαιῶν τὸν Κίμωνά πολλοὺς καὶ παντοδαποὺς ἐστιῶν ἠδέως, 667D). Plutarch’s mention of ‘highly diverse fare’ (αἱ τράπεζαι ποικιλώτατοι, 667E) echoes this emphasis on social diversity. The poikilistic quality of *Table Talk* is also foregrounded in the recherché etymology Plutarch provides for *skolion*, moving in a ‘complicated and twisting’ (ποικίλον καὶ πολυκαμπές, 615C) manner, requiring many guests to contribute.²⁵

All the same, the very things (versatility, variety) figured as positive features, if not acclaimed virtues, of the diverse *Table Talk* might prompt thought of more ominous forms of versatility and variety. Recall that Plutarch uses the language of variety when characterizing the flatterer and false friend, notable in connection to the variegated symposium and its premise of friendship. The many-sided flatterer is ‘neither simple nor one’ (οὐκ ἀπλοῦς οὐδ’ εἷς, *De adulatore et amico* 52B) but ‘manifold and dappled’ (παντοδαπός ... καὶ ποικίλος), a faker who ‘rearranges and reshapes himself’ (ῥυθμίζει καὶ σχηματίζει) as if composed of ‘some mouldable matter’ (ὥσπερ ὕλην τινά, 51C).²⁶ Relatedly, having a multitude of friends signifies an unstable and multifarious soul (*De amicorum multitudine* 97A–B):

As natural philosophers say of the shapeless, colourless substance and matter that are the underlying basis of everything, which of itself turns into everything, and is now fire, now liquid, then gas and then solid again, so in fact will there need to be, for the possession of many friends, an underlying basis of soul that is highly sensitive, multiform, supple and easily moved to change (πολυπαθῆ καὶ πολύτροπον καὶ ὕγρὰν καὶ ῥαδίαν μεταβάλλειν).

If one’s character is multiple, the sameness (96E–F) sought in friendship will manifest in an unfortunate multiplicity of attachment.²⁷ The distractions of *poluphilia* hinder a deep sense of connection (95B), lead to absurd overcommitment (95C–D) and produce troubling forms

²² Cf. Xenophon (2016) 194 on Maximus of Tyre’s denunciation of symposia as unbecoming for virtuous men (*Orationes* 25.6a).

²³ On variety as an aesthetic good, see Briand (2006) 43–44; Nünlist (2009) 198–201; Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011b) 23; Bevegni (2014) 321. Cf. [Plut.] *De liberis educandis* 7C: ‘Variety is delightful’ (ἡ δὲ ποικιλία τερπνόν). Compare Grand-Clément (2015) 415.

²⁴ Compare Oikonomopoulou (2011) 109 on polymathy.

²⁵ On the *skolion* as ‘emblematic’ of social interaction: Klotz (2007) 653.

²⁶ See Konstan (1997) 100.

²⁷ See Russell (1973) 94 on *poluphilia* as a ‘symptom of inconstant character’; Wardman (1974) 137 on virtue’s consistency.

of inattention (ἀμελεῖα, 95D), all relevant concerns in the potentially distracting sympotic context, filled with various guests and possibilities for *poluphilia*.

One might instinctively parse the foregoing as differences between a (negatively figured) sense of a person's dispositional variety and a (more positively figured) sense of symposiastic variety. But this would be to obscure the ways in which Plutarch himself, including in the above passage on *poluphilia*, blurs distinctions between internal and external, or between what one might call ethical *poikilia*, character that exhibits a variety of forms, and seemingly more innocuous forms of outward variety.²⁸ Plutarch at times links the aesthetic properties of things one encounters with the shaping of character, positing permeability between artefact and *ēthos*. In *How to Study Poetry*, for instance, he elaborates some of the ways in which uncritical engagement with literature can affect character. Plutarch at one point summons the octopus when conveying poetry's potentially perilous variety (*De audiendis poetis* 15B–C):

'Bad things lie within the head of the octopus; good dwells there also' (πολύποδος κεφαλῇ ἐν μὲν κακὸν ἐν δὲ καὶ ἐσθλόν) ... Likewise, in the art of poetry, there is much that is pleasurable and nourishing for a young man's mind, but equally as much that is disturbing and delusive if he listens to it without proper instruction.

The variety inherent to poetic content demands vigilance. At another point, Plutarch explicitly links *poikilia* with poetry's capacity for deceitful, emotional persuasiveness (*De audiendis poetis* 25D):

ἀνευ δὲ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς μάλιστα μὲν ἢ ποιητικῇ τῷ ποικίλῳ χρῆται καὶ πολυτρόπῳ. τὸ γὰρ ἐμπαθὲς καὶ παράλογον καὶ ἀπροσδόκητον, ὃ πλείστη μὲν ἔκκληξις ἔπεται πλείστη δὲ χάρις, αἱ μεταβολαὶ παρέχουσι τοῖς μύθοις· τὸ δ' ἀπλοῦν ἀπαθὲς καὶ ἄμυθον.

But when it is split off from the truth, then above all does poetry make use of variety and a diversity of effects. Variations provide stories with emotional force, unlooked for and against our expectations, and with these variations come the greatest moments of astonishment and delight, whereas a simple narrative without variety is unemotional and not story-like.

Young readers must develop stability of character to withstand reading's unpredictable motility. Nor are adults immune to variety: in *On Affection for Offspring*, Plutarch describes how humans grow to be 'compounded of many viewpoints and serendipitous judgements' (μιγνυμένα δόγματα καὶ κρίσεις ἐπιθέτους) and their natures 'become various' (ποικίλη γέγονε, 493C). Finally, in *On Having Many Friends*, again after citing Theognis, Plutarch stresses that the octopus changes colour only externally; its alterations 'lack depth' (βάθος οὐκ ἔχουσιν, 96F). By contrast, the changes undertaken in adapting oneself to many friends are more consequential: 'Friendships seek a *complete likeness* in character, emotion, word, practice and disposition' (αἱ δὲ φιλίαι τὰ ἦθη ζητοῦσι **συνεξομοιοῦν** καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα καὶ τὰς διαθέσεις, 97A). *Poluphilia* is a danger more coronary than cosmetic, as it were.

Returning, then, to the idea of sympotic friendship, one may be led to ask, upon recognizing how Plutarch moots the potential effects of various stimuli on character: what of listening in the context of the symposium? Are interlocutors not vulnerable to the parade of views on offer? How is the partygoer to withstand the possibly discombobulating

²⁸ On *poikilia* and character, see Detienne and Vernant (1991) 18–20 regarding Odysseus; Briand (2006) 44. On variety as inspiring a multitude of responses, from acclamation to anxiety, see Fitzgerald (2016) 7.

conversational variety or the potential craftiness of a particular speaker? How should one maintain vigilance, amid bibulous repartee, sufficient to judge interlocutors' character and suitability for friendship? In sum, although the idea of variety with reference to the symposium might seem positive, if not rudimentary, the surface *poikilia* and *poluphilia* of *Table Talk* become less anodyne when set in the context of Plutarch's ideas elsewhere on character and friendship, variety and simplicity, external exposure and internal effect. Variety may be an aesthetic virtue, but it is not necessarily an ethical or social one.

As we shall see, *Table Talk* alludes to but also mollifies some of these concerns. Its discussions of social interactions and, in one exceptional case, of friendship directly (4 *praef.*) summon Plutarchan ideas of amity. Relatedly, its discussions of variety (social, gastronomic or otherwise) often only appear to concern the practical functioning of the symposium. For the engaged reader, conversations on variety and simplicity activate Plutarch's wider moral universe, including his ideas on friendship. Certain discussions in *Table Talk* are thus potentially overdetermined in ways that make them about *more* than the pragmatics of conducting a party. Inasmuch as the text is populated by and intended for philosophers (8 *praef.*, 716D–F), interlocutors and readers need not worry that they are being misled by shallow sophists.²⁹ But this also means that one should not write off apparently slight conversations as devoid of philosophical suggestiveness.

III. Reading the party

When *Table Talk* introduces the friend-making capacity of the dinner party, Plutarch's readers, including Senecio, may believe they already have a sense of what friendship means from *On Having Many Friends* or *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*. Although friendship is not directly taken up at length in its intra-diegetic party scenes, key topics from Plutarch's friendship essays, including judgement, likeness and harmony, arise at various points in *Table Talk*.³⁰ Yet differences also emerge, helping readers to apprehend the nature of symposiastic friendship. The analogical potential of exchanges about seating arrangements, decoration or the fare on offer invites readers to compare seemingly superficial matters with deeper topics discussed in Plutarch's corpus.³¹ Plutarch hints at this analogical slippage himself (629D), as it is hard to maintain the putative distinction between narrowly 'sympotic' topics (συμποτικά) concerned with conducting the party and more expansive intellectual topics. Aspects of the former are inflected by the latter, and 'both together' (συναμρότερα) create the category of symposiastic discourse (συμποσιακά).

i. Judging variety (Quaest. conv. 1.2, 3.1, 3.2)

As stated in *On Having Many Friends*, judgement is of the utmost importance (κυριώτατον ἡ κρίσις, 94B) to the process of making friends. An idea of social judgement comes up early in *Table Talk*, too, in the work's second question (1.2).³² Specifically: should the host, having judged different personalities among the guests, decide the seating arrangements or leave them up to invitees? At first the language of judgement refers to the argumentative orbit,

²⁹ See Schmitz (2012) 82–84; Stadter (1999) = (2015) 103–04.

³⁰ See Stadter (1999) = (2015) 101 on the 'problem' of 'proper proportion or blend'.

³¹ My focus on friendship's and variety's value is not meant to foreclose other possible subjects that intra-diegetic scenes may activate by analogy, such as the well-ordered soul or cosmic harmony.

³² On social arrangement in the scene, see Van der Stockt (2002) 122–25; Xenophontos (2016) 182–85. Cf. *Conv. sept. sap.* 149B.

but considerations soon turn to the issue of judging character type, recalling ideas familiar from Plutarch’s friendship treatises.³³ Plutarch’s self-effacing *recusatio* at *Quaest. conv.* 1.2 may be read as a programmatic clue to interpreting a work often taken to be polyvocal rather than consistently authoritative or dogmatic.³⁴ Plutarch says of his own role (616F): ‘After these arguments [on whether the host or guests should decide the seating arrangements] had been put forth and the present company were demanding a judgement, I said that, since I had been picked as mediator, not judge, I would take the middle way’ (ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ ταῦτ’ ἐρρήθη καὶ τὴν κρίσιν ἀπήτουν οἱ παρόντες, ἔφην ἐγὼ διαιτητῆς ἡρημένος οὐ κριτῆς βαδιεῖσθαι διὰ μέσου, 616F). He goes on to state that it is not hard to make distinctions among guests (οὐ λίαν χαλεπὸν εἶναι δοκεῖ τὸ περὶ τὴν διάκρισιν, 617D), a view taken up by his grandfather Lamprias, whose proposal for seating arrangements will both echo and alter some ideas of judgement familiar from Plutarch’s treatises.³⁵

Guests, Lamprias says, should be arranged not by rank or prestige but for the purpose of pleasure (618A). The guiding force should be consideration ‘not of the worthiness of each person but the relation and harmony of each to each, as is the case with other things that are pooled together for a common purpose’ (οὔτε τὴν ἐνὸς ἐκάστου σκοπεῖν ἀξίαν ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐτέρου πρὸς ἕτερον σχέσιν καὶ ἁρμονίαν, ὥσπερ ἄλλων τινῶν εἰς μίαν κοινωσίαν παραλαμβανομένων, 618A). Lamprias’ goal of harmony, however, results in an unexpected strategy: the placing together of temperamental opposites (618D–619A). On the one hand, Lamprias voices anxiety at the disorder (ἀταξία) that may arise at a party, leading to ‘other unspeakable horrors’ (κακοῖς ἄλλοις ἀμυθήτοις, 618C). Yet on the analogy of builders, painters and shipwrights, whose different materials are ‘combined and fitted together’ (συντεθέντα καὶ συναρμοσθέντα) to produce ‘the unified work’ (τὸ κοινὸν ἔργον) possessing strength, beauty and utility (618B), the party should create harmony *through* difference. Therefore, seating rich with rich, young with young or ‘friend with friend’ (φίλω φίλον) is ‘static and ineffectual for the heightening and creation of goodwill’ (ἀκίνητος γὰρ αὕτη καὶ ἀργὴ πρὸς εὐνοίας ἐπίδοσιν ἢ γένεσιν ἢ τάξις, 618E). Rather, it is better to seat ‘the mild-mannered with the grumpy, the young (who like to listen) with the aged (who like to talk), the reserved with the loudmouth, the quiet with the snappy’ (δυσκόλω δὲ πρᾶον ἀδολέσχω δὲ πρεσβύτη φιλήκοον νεανίσκον τῷ δ’ ἀλαζόνι τὸν εἴρωνά τῷ δ’ ὀργίλω τὸν σιωπηλόν, 618E).

The proposed configuration muddles the homology of temperament Plutarch elsewhere imagines as a precondition for friendship.³⁶ Whereas in *On Having Many Friends*, he rejects the idea that friendship can arise between people of ‘differing characters’ (ἤθεσι διαφόροις) and ‘unlike feelings’ (πάθεσιν ἀνομοίοις, 96E–F), in Lamprias’ scenario, like shall not be seated with like: instead, assembled guests will be sorted by character type and offered provocation by those who differ from them, in what perhaps could be seen as a version of what Blanchot, discussing friendship, called ‘the interruption of being’.³⁷ Since it is necessary to judge disposition as a determining factor for balanced sociality, the ‘likeness’ (ὁμοιότης, 96E) of spirit called for in *On Having Many Friends* cannot obtain here from the start, if the party is already to be composed of people known to have different

³³ See *De amicorum multitudine* on discerning likeness and not regarding a friend as ‘other’ (ὡς ἕτερον, 93E), effected through a long period (πολλῷ χρόνῳ, 94F) of determining similarity of souls (96E–F). See further *De adulatore et amico* 51B, with Russell (1973) 93–96; Van der Stockt (2011) 28–36.

³⁴ On Plutarch’s alternating roles in the text as a ‘didactic figure’ and as ‘someone who can learn’ (171), see Klotz (2011) 167–78; also König (2011) 191–95. Cf. Xenophon (2016) 186–91 on Plutarch’s ‘predominance’.

³⁵ Note the jocular tone of Lamprias’ asking permission to ‘rebuke a judge [sc. Plutarch] who is talking mumbo-jumbo’ (νοθετήσαι ληροῦντα δικαστήν, *Quaest. conv.* 617F), adding to the sense in which Plutarch is upstaged in this scene; see Xenophon (2016) 183.

³⁶ See *De amicorum multitudine* 96D–97B, with Xenophon (2016) 184–85 on ‘reconfigurations of Plutarch’s moralizing input’.

³⁷ See Critchley (1998) 266–67.

temperaments. Moreover, on Lamprias' view a good gathering *needs* people of different types.³⁸ In his elaboration of seating arrangements he effectively advocates, and indeed assumes the requisite conditions for, a kind of social variousness. At 1.2 it is precisely a variety of guests, arranged so as to encounter persons unlike themselves, that becomes the basis for potential connection.

Lamprias' analogy to shipwrights encourages the reader to think analogically in other places, too, and to read for moments in *Table Talk* that make good on Plutarch's claim that the acme of true understanding is 'to philosophize without seeming to philosophize' (συνέσεως ἄκρας φιλοσοφοῦντα μὴ δοκεῖν φιλοσοφεῖν, 614A). Subsequent conversations in fact intimate such parallels between ostensible topics of sympotic discourse and analogues in the social sphere. Consider *Quaest. conv.* 3.1, where a stray reference to variety in the decorative orbit carries potential analogical implications for social variety and the possibilities of sympotic *poluphilia*. The scene concerns whether garlands made of flowers rather than leaves should be used at drinking parties, conjuring the fraught relationship between *poikilia* and luxury, ornament and barbarism (646B). Ammonius hints at the danger of visual variety: the host Erato's multicoloured flowery garlands (ποικίλων χρωμάτων καὶ ἀνθηρῶν, 645E) are evidence, he says, that although Erato supposedly spurns the chromatic scale in music, he 'leads into our souls through eyes and nose, as if through other doors, the excess and luxury that he excludes through the ears, making the garland a matter of pleasure, not piety' (τὴν διὰ τῶν ὠτῶν ἀποκλείει τρυφήν καὶ ἡδυπάθειαν, ταύτην τὴν κατὰ τὰ ὄμματα καὶ κατὰ τὰς ῥίνας ὥσπερ καθ' ἑτέρας θύρας ἐπεισάγων τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τὸν στέφανον ἡδονῆς ποιῶν οὐκ εὐσεβείας, 645E). Cosmetic colouration introduces the perils of 'excess and luxury'. This recalls the issue of permeability discussed above (*De audiendis poetis* 15B–C; *De amicorum multitudine* 96F–97A), in which character may be affected by external forces, with explicit attention here to sensory perception that reaches the soul.

For his part, however, Erato offers an upbeat defence of the flowery wreaths and the 'kaleidoscope of inimitable colours and complexions' (ποικιλίαν δ' ἀμμήτοις χρώμασι καὶ βαφαῖς, 646D) that nature produces. Colouration is a natural delight (ἡδύ, 646D), which Erato distinguishes from the 'deceitful raiment and tinctures' (δολερὰ εἴματα καὶ χρίματα) of human manufacture. Nature, he argues, is a positive pleasure and therefore above suspicion, even when producing apparent luxury (646E). To the extent that it picks up on Plutarch's scene-setting detail that 'garlands of various sorts' (παντοδαπῶν ... στεφάνων, 645D) had been distributed to the many guests (πλείονας ἐστιῶντος, 645D), Erato's defence of variegated garlands indirectly reinforces the image of him as host of a variegated gathering. The reference to floral variety (646D), then, is only apparently superficial; it in fact adumbrates, in the context of a mixed gathering at which assorted garlands are distributed, a parallel between the dappled aesthetics of the party's decorative scheme and the social characteristics of the diverse crowd. Ammonius' worries about 'excess and luxury' are thus analogically allayed: the variegation of the garlands comes to stand not for 'deceitful' (δολερὰ) colouration but rather for a naturally occurring *poikilia* (646D) recapitulated by the presence of the party's many guests.

This metaphorical blur between multicoloured garlands and social variety recurs in the scene immediately following (3.2).³⁹ In a conversation nominally focused on ivy (648B), readers are invited to connect the variegated garlands of 3.1 with the evening's intellectual activity (similar to the way in which the description of *skolion* as intricate is made to refer to the party's many contributors, 615B–C). At 3.2, Ammonius' playful (μειδιῶν) reference to

³⁸ Cf. Eshleman (2012) 22 n.5 on tensions between the 'competing ideals' of symposiastic heterogeneity and sociocultural homogeneity.

³⁹ Titchener (2009) 396 n.2 cites *Quaest. conv.* 3.1–2 as among several scenes that are connected dramatically.

Trypho’s ‘dappled speech’ (ποικίλον ... λόγον), ‘as though it were a garland’ (ὥσπερ στέφανον, 648B), draws an overt link between the ‘colourful’ talk of one guest, voiced among varied attendees, and the aforementioned variegated party garlands (648B ~ 646D). The parallel not only brokers an artful transition between 3.1 and 3.2, but it also extends the idea of social *poikilia*. The work’s harmonics are such that synecdochic objects and speech from the party represent in discrete form the evening’s sundry components.⁴⁰ The negative associations of *poikilia* are recast in positive terms that reflect the tapestry of guests. *Table Talk* is again encouraging its readers to think connectedly.⁴¹

Returning once more to 1.2, then: even if no ultimate mechanism exists within 1.2 to give a definitive imprimatur to Lamprias’ proposal, his argument posits a social configuration patently disjunctive to the presumed social arrangement that would arise were one to follow formal Plutarchan ideals on friendship in his essays. A structural elegance thus emerges in Lamprias’ offering his proposal after Plutarch has himself declined the role of judge, for the kind of variety called for creates social conditions that differ from those judged best by Plutarch elsewhere. The discernment required for determining friendship in *On Having Many Friends* is softened. The quality of sameness would impede both Lamprias’ diverse gathering and the variegated party that Erato throws at 3.1, where the garlands themselves reflect the mixed company in their different hues.

ii. Redefining friendship (*Quaest. conv. 4 praef.*)

Plutarch’s curbed authority at *Quaest. conv.* 1.2, and the seeming vindication of social variety at 3.1–2, may be programmatic, then, not only for the diverse atmosphere of *Table Talk* but also for how readers should situate the Plutarch of *Table Talk* in relation to Plutarch the author outside this particular text. In fact, several books on, in *Table Talk*’s most explicit discussion of friendship, Plutarch presents the chance to rethink the definition one might derive from other places in his corpus and to consider it anew in the sympotic circumstance. The preface to book 4, although iterated outside the symposium proper, nonetheless shows the Plutarch of *Table Talk* hailing a flexible idea of amity that differs from his treatises on friendship.

Plutarch begins the preface by citing Polybius’ advice to Scipio Africanus never to return from the marketplace without having befriended a fellow citizen (659F). The counsel seems to offer a neat parallel: much like Polybius to Scipio, so does the Greek Plutarch now advise the Roman Senecio, the advisory act itself an index of amity.⁴² But Plutarch uses the story somewhat against expectation. He exhorts Senecio to avoid rigid interpretation of the word ‘friend’ when contemplating the anecdote (659F): ‘We must avoid taking the word “friend” rigorously and pedantically (πικρῶς μηδὲ σοφιστικῶς) to mean the unchanging steadfast sort (τὸν ἀμετάπτωτον καὶ βέβαιον), but rather take it broadly (κοινῶς) to mean any person of goodwill (τὸν εὖνον)’. Plutarch here recalls but also contravenes his own advice in *On Having Many Friends*, where only the person of steadfast character (βέβαιον ἦθος, 97B) can be the true friend, and where friendship depends on rigorous discernment. Senecio is advised, in effect, to reconsider some of Plutarch’s own definitions. To be sure, Plutarch does not excise earlier concepts wholesale: he still advises Senecio to make friends only with the good (660A) and remarks that friendship takes time (χρόνω πολλῷ, 659F), in line with tenets of *On Having Many Friends*. By

⁴⁰ Compare *De esu* 994D on a courtroom argument packed with ‘many and varied emotions’ (πάθει πολλοῖς ... παντοδαποῖς), suited to the listeners’ ‘many different sorts of minds’ (εἰς ψυχὰς ... πολλὰς καὶ ποικίλας).

⁴¹ See König (2007) 61–62; Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011b) 24–27.

⁴² On Senecio as epitomizing companionship between Greek intellectuals and Roman elite, see Pelling (2011) 208–09. See also Hobden (2013) 234.

refocusing matters on goodwill (εὐνοία), however, Plutarch isolates the essential ingredient of friendship while eschewing more restricted definitions of its contours.⁴³ The overture to a loosened definition, Plutarch's moderating for Senecio ideas searchable elsewhere in 'Plutarch', is itself an act of intellectual goodwill on Plutarch's part that intimates the spirit with which one ought to approach the party.⁴⁴

The direct relevance of the anecdote becomes clear a few lines later, in a passage that happens to clarify some lingering quandaries from the text's opening sections (612D and 621C, quoted above). Plutarch now states that Polybius' advice is applicable not only to the forum but also to the symposium (660A–B):

ἀλλ' ὄρα τὸ τῆς παρανέσεως, εἰ μὴ μόνον ἔχει δεξιῶς πρὸς ἀγορὰν ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς συμπόσιον, ὥστε δεῖν μὴ πρότερον ἀναλύειν ἢ κτήσασθαι τινα τῶν συγκατακειμένων καὶ παρόντων εὖνουν ἑαυτῷ καὶ φίλον. εἰς ἀγορὰν μὲν γὰρ ἐμβάλλουσι πραγμάτων εἵνεκεν καὶ χρεῖων ἐτέρων, εἰς δὲ συμπόσιον οἱ γε νοῦν ἔχοντες ἀφικνοῦνται κτησόμενοι φίλους οὐχ ἦττον ἢ τοὺς ὄντας εὐφρανοῦντες. διότι τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ζητεῖν ἐκφορὰν ἀνελεύθερον ἂν εἴη καὶ φορτικόν, τὸ δὲ φίλων πλέον ἔχοντας ἀπιέναι καὶ ἡδὺ καὶ σεμνόν ἐστίν.

But consider whether you think the advice from Polybius appropriate not only in the public square but also at dinner: namely, one should not let a party wind down before acquiring for himself a new friend and well-wisher among the other diners and attendees. On some errand or other task people hurry into the marketplace, but they attend a party, if they are thinking about it the right way, as much to acquire new friends as to delight those whom they already count as friends. To the extent that it would be boorish and unsophisticated to want to carry off anything else, it is both a pleasing thing and a point of pride to come away with a bonus to one's circle of friends.

This passage appears to pick up on some of the questions prompted by the work's opening claims to friend-making, especially with regard to the assumption that the invitees should already be friends. Such is not the case, it would seem, if Plutarch views the party's purpose as 'acquiring friends' (κτησόμενοι φίλους) no less than giving pleasure to those who *already are* (οὐχ ἦττον ἢ τοὺς ὄντας εὐφρανοῦντες). The reference to the marketplace recalls the initial advice from Polybius but also a rather different point that Plutarch makes in *On Having Many Friends*, where he states that we do not simply become friends with someone by 'collecting them in the marketplace' (ἀγορᾶς φιλίαν συλλέγουσιν, 94A). The surplus of friends (φίλων πλέον) in particular presents a clear change from the strictures of the friendship treatise, in which multitude signifies an undesirably multifaceted character (97A–B, above). In the preface to *Table Talk* book 4, then, Plutarch dials down the definition of *philos*, enabling a notion of acceptable sympotic *poluphilia*. If the symposium is a site of potentially anxious amity, Plutarch puts Senecio at ease, suggesting that abstract Plutarchan ideas of friendship can be reformulated for commensal reality.

Now, one could argue that the purpose of *Table Talk* is fundamentally different from Plutarch's friendship essays, which explore the topic in a didactic manner. On this view, we should not expect the same authoritative pronouncements from the sympotic work as from a moral essay. This is perhaps especially so with regard to *Table Talk*, which presents a

⁴³ On εὐνοία, see *De amicorum multitudine* 93F with O'Neil (1997) 113–14.

⁴⁴ See Xenophon (2016) 186 on Plutarch's role in *Table Talk* in service of his readers' 'ethical well-being'.

complicated oscillation between Plutarch's assertiveness and self-effacement, part of its complex reworking of the sympotic role played by Socrates.⁴⁵ At the same time, *Table Talk* does aim to offer philosophical instruction.⁴⁶ Plutarch's representation of himself as capable of being 'taught' (as at 1.2) or as reworking definitions (as at 4 *praef.*) helps to reinforce the necessarily dialogic, communal nature of the intellectual endeavour.⁴⁷ The dialogue is not confined to intra-diegetic characters but extends outwards to Plutarch's engagement with his reader, who may well turn to other parts of Plutarch's corpus in interpreting aspects of *Table Talk*. The fact, then, that Plutarch in the book 4 preface raises and reformulates the concept of 'friend' in ways that depart from his own pronouncements elsewhere implies that differences of genre cannot necessarily be taken for granted. Plutarch reformulates the definition not strictly because the generic context is different; he does so to show *how* that context works. The preface to book 4 amounts to an authoritative pronouncement, to be sure, but one that also authorizes Senecio's (or any reader's) capacity to read actively, even if it means reading Plutarch 'against' Plutarch.⁴⁸ If the protocols of genre were entirely obvious, Plutarch might not feel compelled to initiate Senecio's adjustment for differences. Instead, by implicitly inviting comparison with his other statements, Plutarch not only authorizes that friendship can mean different things in different contexts, but he also performs *Table Talk*'s adaptive mode of knowledge: his encouragement of Senecio's intellectual flexibility on the subject of (re)defining 'friend' enacts the very refining of viewpoint to which polyphonic, sympotic conversation might well lead.

For all that, Plutarch's modified definition is not without ambiguity. He recasts sympotic friendship as 'goodwill', but it remains unclear how goodwill in the sympotic context should be assessed. If goodwill is found, for instance, in those who do not disagree, then what of the temperamental opposite with whom one might be seated, should Lamprias have his way (1.2)? One idea of goodwill is inherent in the disposition of the right-minded guest, who when focused on the aim of friendship overcomes the base desires of the flatterer and parasite (4 *praef.*, 660B):

καὶ τοῦναντίον ὁ τοῦτου παραμελῶν ἄχαριν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀτελεῖ τὴν συνουσίαν ποιεῖ καὶ ἄπεισι τῇ γαστρὶ σύνδειπνος οὐ τῇ ψυχῇ γεγονώς· ὁ γὰρ σύνδειπνος οὐκ ὄψου καὶ οἴνου καὶ τραγημάτων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ λόγων κοινωνὸς ἦκει καὶ παιδιᾶς καὶ φιλοφροσύνης εἰς εὐνοίαν τελευτώσης.

Contrariwise, anyone who does not take care to make a friend renders the social event incomplete and ungratifying. He leaves having feasted with his stomach but not his mind. The true guest comes to share not only food, wine and dessert, but also as a companion to conversation, fun and the amiability that culminates in goodwill.

Rendering the social occasion 'incomplete' (ἀτελεῖ) recalls the language of purpose from early in *Table Talk* about the ends of the sympotic gathering (τέλος, 621C). A mere attendee is philosophically irresponsible, thwarting the party's purpose and making his own experience less delightful (ἄχαριν), having attended only in body and not in spirit, much like the parasite who is a 'body of all belly' (*De adulatore et amico* 54B).⁴⁹ The company is

⁴⁵ See Brenk (2009) 52; Klotz (2011) 168–71. Cf. Hobden (2013) 233–34 on Plutarch's 'authorial self-staging' (234) in 'meta-Sympotic' (229) relation to predecessors.

⁴⁶ Klotz (2007) 656–59; Kechagia (2011) 78–81 on Platonic, Xenophontic and Aristotelian forms.

⁴⁷ See König (2011) 194, 202–03.

⁴⁸ See Titchener (2011) 44–45 on recall and comparison; Hobden (2013) 232 on Plutarch's 'creatively develop[ing] appropriate new perspectives ... for the reader to think his way through'.

⁴⁹ See 7 *praef.* (697C), where Plutarch distinguishes between basic bodily nourishment and the richer fare of social interaction.

more important than the food. Plutarch implies that the true σύνδειπνος comes for both physical and mental sustenance as a ‘companion in conversation’ (λόγων κοινωνός) and intellectual play as well as, crucially, a companion on the *trajectory of goodwill* (εἰς εὖνοιαν), which serves the larger aim of all involved in expanding the circle of amity (τὸ δὲ φίλων πλέον).

Before moving to the scene at 4.1, which I suggest continues the themes of the preface to book 4, I wish to note how Plutarch drives home his closing prefatory detail that ‘wine mixed with conversation provides a point of contact for the holds of friendship’ (ταῖς δὲ φιλικαῖς λαβαῖς ὁ οἶνος ἀφὴν ἐνδίδωσι μινύμενος λόγῳ, 660B). Already in the friendship treatises Plutarch’s analogies of ‘mixing’ and ‘blending’ interrelate friendship with food and drink.⁵⁰ He closes the preface to book 4 with comments on wine’s contribution to the symposium’s desired sociality (660C): ‘For conversation, by means of wine, disperses its capacities for humane feeling and character formation from the body into the soul and spreads it about thoroughly’ (λόγος γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸ φιλόανθρωπον καὶ ἠθοποιὸν ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ἐποχετεύει καὶ συνδιαδίδωσιν, 660C).⁵¹ Key is the ‘mixing’ of wine with conversation, the very blending that applies by analogy to the mixing of company proposed by the work. While party talk (συμποτικός λόγος) moderates the effects of alcohol by ‘not allowing the drinkers to be completely carried away by the wine’ (οὐκ ἔῃ διαφορεῖσθαι παντάπασιν ὑπὸ τοῦ οἴνου τοὺς πίνοντας, 660C), wine ‘makes the company pliable and ready to take an impression, as it were, from the seal of friendship’ (καθάπερ σφραγιδι φιλίας εὐτυπώτων καὶ ἀπαλῶν διὰ τὸν οἶνον ὄντων, 660C). On this claim, wine softens the company and readies it for minting, in a metaphor similar to that by which Theognis expressed worry over the ‘counterfeit’ man (κιβδήλου, 117 W). The interplay of conversation and wine, much as the work had earlier proposed an interaction of different forces (*Quaest. conv.* 618D–619A), produces a meaningful evening. Based on this image, readers may continue to sense the ways in which other discussions of food and drink reflect on the social dynamics at play.

iii. Harmony through diversity (*Quaest. conv.* 4.1)

In the scene immediately following, Plutarch’s looser definition of friendship and thoughts on sympotic harmony are analogically extended, during an exchange in which images of gastronomic, intellectual and social variety continue to converge. The fundamental contrast between the variegated and the simple recurs, and in light of the ethical resonances of these concepts described earlier, I suggest that discussion of such matters at 4.1 implicates larger concerns of social relation.

The scene nominally considers whether a varied diet (ποικίλη τροφή) is more easily digested than a simple one (τῆς ἀπλῆς). Set in the home of Philo the physician, the conversation is prompted by the ‘robust’ (νεανικός) feast he has provided. After a preliminary exchange between Philo and Plutarch, in which the latter notes that despite the ‘fancy and costly provisions’ (τὰ περιττὰ καὶ πολυτελεῖ, 660E) Philo has neglected to set out ‘basic staples’ (τῶν ἀναγκαίων καὶ χρησίμων, 660E), discussion turns to the merits of simple and elaborate eating. Philinus reminds the company of the host Philo’s own previously stated views: ‘We have more than once heard you say that simple fare is more digestible than fancy variety’ (σοῦ πολλάκις ἀκηκούτες ὅτι τῶν ποικίλων τὰ ἀπλᾶ μᾶλλον εὐπεπτ’ ἐστίν, 661A). Meanwhile Marcion, contending that Philinus’ austere views might scare off the guests, proposes to make an argument in favour of ‘mixed food’ (ποικίλην

⁵⁰ Compare *De adulatore et amico* 94D and *Quaest. conv.* 661B, 661E, with below; see κρᾶσις at *De adulatore et amico* 95B.

⁵¹ Interpretation is difficult: Hubert corrects to συνδιαδίδωσιν from T’s καὶ ἐν δίδωσιν, which would allow conversation to ‘contribute to’ wine’s effect (Clement and Hoffleit (1969) 293). See Teodorsson (1989–1996) 2.16 *ad loc.* (reading καὶ ἐν δίδωσιν).

τροφήν, 661A), thereby ensuring that Philo’s guests can enjoy the offerings. Philo, we are told, takes Marcion up on his offer, while Philinus is deputed to give the argument in favour of simplicity (661A).

Already from this opening setup we may conclude that Philo is willing, in the context of his own party, to compromise on the view he has often (πολλάκις) put forward at other times, by now hearing an argument in favour of variety if it has the potential to gladden his guests. The practicalities of the symposium induce adjustment of tenets, now echoing intradiegetically what we have just read in Plutarch’s prefatory advice to Senecio to recalibrate his definition of friendship. There Plutarch in effect had encouraged an openness to social variety; the scene at 4.1 in turn includes an apparently unaccustomed view in favour of culinary potpourri that by its conclusion will also conjure parallels with social variety.

At the start of his speech in favour of simplicity, Philinus reminds his listeners that the argument is really not his own, but rather should be thought of as Philo’s (οὐκ ἐμός ... ὁ μῦθος, 661B), thereby underscoring for his listeners how the eventual claim (from Marcion) in favour of mixed fare contradicts the host Philo’s usual perspective. Philinus justifies simple fare through comparisons to animals, who do better on a simple diet (661B), and the ill, who should stick to staples as per doctors’ orders (661B). When divergent foods come together, Philinus asserts, they resist each other; he adduces the danger of mixing wines, too, commenting both indirectly and overtly on social issues: ‘Change and lack of regularity are unsettling ... Persuasion and assent are more effectively obtained by conflicting views than by different types of food’ (ἐκστατικὸν γὰρ ἢ μεταβολὴ καὶ τὸ ἀνώμαλον ... μᾶλλον ἂν ἐκ λόγων ὑπεναντίων γένοιτ’ ἂν πίστις καὶ συγκατάθεσις ἢ πέψις ἐκ διαφόρων ποιότητων, 661D). The interlocutor’s point is one of contrast, but the reader will find it difficult, on the heels of the book’s preface on friendship, to miss the analogy between the social variety discussed there and the questions raised in 4.1 about gastronomic variety. Moreover, given that Philinus is deputed to offer what is in essence the ‘losing’ argument of this scene, his attempted separation of intellectual variety and mixed cuisine collapses: the argument favouring many foods will be given the last word, thus echoing with reference to food the implicit argument of 4 *praef.* favouring multitude (of friends).

In light of Philinus’ final point that harmony cannot be achieved by different types of drink but is achievable through ‘conflicting viewpoints’ (λόγων ὑπεναντίων), it is notable, and indeed mimetic of the idea aired, that the opposed view offered next by Marcion, supposedly representing the counter-argument, in fact *affirms* Philinus’ statement. The scene thus creates through ‘conflicting views’ a kind of harmony. Insofar as *Table Talk* often concerns seemingly minor topics (for example, the relationship between lightning strikes and truffles (4.2); why firs and pines are not grafted (2.6); whether it is necessary to strain wine (6.7), etc.), its setting would appear vulnerable to the pettifoggery that Plutarch describes in *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* (see 59B–74E), in which false friends offer cheap bits of frankness of little consequence. Yet, as we have seen, apparently trivial matters in *Table Talk* have a way, through analogy, of allowing the text to comment on more serious issues. In this case, opposed discussants end up both endorsing and enacting disquisitional variety, creating unexpected harmony or argumentative echo through difference, in their discussion of gastronomic variety, all following on an authorial preface advocating a sort of social variety. Indeed, after making the point that the purpose of digestion is to effect change (μεταβάλλειν τὴν τροφήν, 663B), Marcion says, ‘Like is not moved by like. It is instead opposition and difference (ἀντίταξις καὶ διαφορὰ) that through the mixing of opposites (τῇ πρὸς τὸ ἐναντίον μίξει) expel certain qualities and cause them to dissipate’ (663B).⁵² In effect, although ostensibly staging an opposed set of views (for and

⁵² This viewpoint on balanced opposites sets Marcion up for an argument in favour of moderation (663D), making good on Lamprias’ plan for achieving harmony through the joining up of opposite personalities (*Quaest. conv.* 1.2).

against variety), the two speakers end up advancing similar claims about harmony as achieved through difference. For Philinus, opposed views produce harmony (661D), and for Marcion the mixing of opposites has a salutary effect (663B). Varied fare and varied discourse fold into each other, strengthening the sense that a variety of friends and views is needed to produce the desired intellectual atmosphere.

In fact, following the apparent conclusion of Marcion's argument in favour of variety, he adds a dig at the advocates of a 'salt-and-bean' diet, close friends who proverbially show up even if all one offers is a feast of legumes (663F–664A):⁵³

You partisans of 'salt and beans' have somehow missed the fact that variety is more pleasant, and the more pleasant is more appetising (ὄτι τὸ μὲν ποικίλον ἥδιόν ἐστι, τὸ δ' ἥδιον εὐορεκτότερον), and the more appetising is healthier, so long as you remove surplus and excess ... But these things [i.e. various condiments and sauces] are superfluities and frivolities (περίεργα καὶ σπερμολογικά).

This comparison ties the discussion directly to the social realm and points up the analogies I have been delineating. The very term 'salt-and-bean' endorses a brand of social exclusivity among persons whose genuine amicability is proved through virtuous disregard for fancy food. Marcion's snipe is not, however, merely about a paltry meal. The shape of his argument up to this point implies that close friends who come over repeatedly, no matter the meal, not only miss the fact that culinary 'variety is more pleasant', but also that their repeated presence *hinders* social variety, and thus the potential to arrive at intellectual harmony through the presentation of opposed viewpoints.⁵⁴ On this understanding, intimacy among a constricted 'focus group' of friends is anathema to the symposium. Marcion's argument, uttered in Philo's home following his dappled repast (τὰ παντοδαπὰ ταῦτα καὶ ποικίλα, 661E), is not gainsaid by the end of 4.1. Instead, openness to a variety of foods, viewpoints and, through the analogous dismissal of salt-and-bean friends, to sympotic *poluphilia* is the preferred attitude at this juncture in *Table Talk*. As in the wider work, so in this episode does an idea of variety win out.

IV. The shadow knows (*Quaest. conv. 7.6*)

The final vignette I wish to examine, from the latter portion of the work, gathers together several of the concerns I have described throughout this paper while also introducing a new element. The scene reveals how dinners, if not always serving deeper friendship, nonetheless may engender incipient acquaintanceship, although not necessarily for the host. As such, the discussion shows how Plutarch's ideal of the friend-making table may support a broad-minded notion of *who* is to do the friend-making.

The topic is shadows, secondary guests not directly invited. After a speech by Caesernius against allowing such people to appear, not knowing if they will be 'graceful company' (χαρίεντες, 707D), Plutarch takes up their defence. Ideally, the host should anticipate who the shadows might be and issue pre-emptive, 'rather friendly' (φιλικώτερον) invitations (708B):

⁵³ See *Quaest. conv.* 5.10 (684E–F), where Apollophanes says the phrase refers to 'friends of such intimacy as to dine even on salt and beans with us' (οὕτω συνήθεις ... τῶν φίλων, ὅστε καὶ πρὸς ἄλα δευπνεῖν καὶ κύαμον). There is another slightly different definition (*De amicorum multitudine* 94A; *De frat. amor.* 482B): 'salt-and-bean' friends are those who have proved themselves true by sharing so many meals as to build up the proverbial 'bushel of salt'. Even if one follows the latter idea, an idea of exclusivity obtains.

⁵⁴ See Stadter (2009) = (2015) 112–13 on the text's preference for cross-talk over 'shop-talk'.

μείζων γὰρ ἢ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ χάρις, ὥς μὴ λανθάνοντος ὅτι τούτους ἀσπάζεται μάλιστα καὶ τούτοις ἡδιστα σύνεστι καὶ χαίρει τιμώμενοις ὁμοίως καὶ παρακαλουμένοις.

It is a greater honour and favour to our guest when it does not elude us that these [i.e. anticipated shadows] are the persons to whom he most cleaves and in whose company he takes the greatest pleasure, and whom he celebrates seeing honoured equally, invited along with him.

The accent falls less on the symposiarch's accruing new intimates and more on his providing an atmosphere of social fertility for others. Plutarch says that it is vulgar (φορτικόν) to ask what food or wine someone enjoys, but neither 'offensive nor out of place' (οὐκ ἀηδὲς οὐδ' ἄτοπον) to let invitees bring friends: doing so allows guests to be rather jovial (εὐφραίνεται ... μάλιστα, 708D).

Plutarch's defence of shadows relies on the view that allowing guests to bring their friends offers a stay against randomness: 'Guests must not be left to chance (οὐ τοὺς τυχόντας), but must be friends and intimates of one another (προσφιλεῖς ... καὶ συνήθεις ἀλλήλοις) who take pleasure in getting together' (708D). This urge against randomness recalls *On Having Many Friends*, where readers are encouraged to avoid 'chance acquaintances' (τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι, 94E). It also echoes comments from *Table Talk* 645F–646A, where Ammonius draws an analogy between the 'natural' pleasures of food (akin, he says, to guests of guests) and a disordered appetite (akin to uninvited guests). Plutarch likewise invokes a gastronomic analogy, but to unexpected effect (708D):

Cooks concoct their meals from different flavours (ἐκ χυμῶν διαφορῶν) ... but there would not be a positive and mutually delightful dinner arising from people unlike in their background and sympathies being melded together into the same group (μὴ ὁμοφύλων μῆδ' ὁμοιοπαθῶν εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ συμφθαρέντων).

It now appears that the variety presumed at 1.2 (seating the unlike together) and 3.1 (where the ornate garlands reflect the varied company) is rejected. Consequently, the possibilities of new acquaintanceship are diminished, if in the effort to curb randomness the unlike are not to be present at all.

Yet Plutarch accords an important role to the shadow, who must exercise, he says, 'ample discretion' (πλειστης εὐλαβείας, 709C). Even if it must be allowed that their judgement will at times foster the randomness Plutarch seemingly wishes to avoid, he states that, among other considerations, it is up to the shadow to assess whether the invitee wants 'there to be friendship between themselves and the main host and whether the host is a good person (χρηστόν) who is worthy of friendship' (φιλίας ἄξιον, 709D). The shadow must also judge whether the host is likely to view him as a 'starting point for friendship' (φιλίας ... ἀρχὴν, 709E). In short, Plutarch's argument admits that there are occasions when the host must cede invitational control to his friend: 'There are times when we must let him decide' (ἔστιν ὅτε ποιητέον ἐπ' αὐτῷ, 708C). Flexibility extends down the social ladder. Even as Plutarch wishes to check randomness (708D), his argument ultimately leaves the door open to chance social surprise.

Just as Plutarch suggests (*De audiendis poetis* 25C–D) that *poikilia* in poetry can generate effects of surprise and emotional astonishment that hold the listener's attention, so, too, might the potential surprise of the shadow's contribution enliven the intellectual *poikilia* of the symposium. The role of judgement, programmatically complicated by the conversation at 1.2, returns here, only to be devolved to the shadows, based on *their* perception of the social potential of the gathering. Contrasting all of this with Plutarch's comment that 'topics of conversation, no less than our friends, should be permitted at dinner only if they have passed *examination*' (ὄθεν ἄξιόν ἐστι μῆδὲν ἦττον λόγους ἢ φίλους **δεδοκιμασμένους**

παραλαμβάνειν ἐπὶ τὰ δεῖπνα, 697E), one senses an unresolved tension. The latitude permitted the shadow exists primarily in the judgement required to shape the social dynamics of the dinner in the first place, the wishes of the host notwithstanding. Rather than the host's judging among friends, the friend's friend may now judge the host. The scene at 7.6 imagines the possible convergence of different poikilistic energies, with the unknown shadow heightening the potentially random quality of the dinner party, a notion itself contained by a text that is in tension with other Plutarchan ideas. In line with the sense that *Table Talk* is a reader-involving work, in which analogy between internal guest and external readerly 'participant' avails itself, the shadow functions as a further analogue for the reader and reiterates the aleatory surprises of setting Plutarch's miscellany against other parts of his corpus.

V. Conclusion

Table Talk textualizes the fluctuations of sympotic conversation into the 'aesthetics of the unexpected'.⁵⁵ Readers grapple with its changes in subject and perspective and are afforded opportunity to read the work in relation (harmonious, disjunctive or otherwise) to other parts of Plutarch's oeuvre. In a work that invites readers to mirror the discussants in puzzling through problems, inconsistencies within Plutarch's text and in relation to his other works act as provocations. Plutarch's own non-sameness becomes a form of philosophical *poikilia*, jostling readers to reflection. By implicitly revisiting and sometimes challenging views from *On Having Many Friends* and *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* that favour a more rigorous sociality, *Table Talk* encourages readers both to engage with Plutarch's corpus and to exercise the intellectual flexibility that is a hallmark of the dialogic *Table Talk*. We have observed how ideas of friendship in the work, the fostering of which is among the symposium's purposes, often sit at odds with more 'formal' Plutarchan treatments of the topic. We have also seen how the text's discussions of variety on seemingly pragmatic topics (how to seat people, what kinds of garlands to have, what types of food to serve) are tinged with philosophical concerns, activating indirectly or by analogy questions about the value of social *poikilia* and sympotic *poluphilia*. The work elucidates a positive notion of variousness, social and intellectual, against the wider backdrop of variety's potential complications. Plutarch reveals, especially in the preface to book 4, a contextual willingness to recast his 'own' criteria for friendship and amicable variety, a gesture that not only marks the complex interplay of his narratorial authority and humility but also models for readers the pliant thinking that the give-and-take of sympotic exchange should kindle.

If, finally, friendship offers, in Blanchot's phrase, an 'interruption of being', an interruption of one's own sense of completeness and correctness, we might say that sympotic thinking serves friend-making precisely in its capacity for provisionality, 'interruption' and reformulation. Indeed, at a fundamental level, the proposed seating of temperamental opposites or the admission of 'shadows' indicates an openness to alterity. Plutarch's looser notion of friendship in *Table Talk* thus well suits the sympotic occasion, in which different viewpoints are likely to challenge one's sense of certitude. A looser sociality is of a piece with the work's indeterminateness and with allowing someone the necessary room and place (χώρα καὶ τόπος, *Quaest. conv.* 678E) to be an 'other' (*De amicorum multitudine* 93E), or even just someone else's friend.

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⁵⁵ Bevegni (2014) 329 ('estetica dell'inatteso').

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