Plutarch, Moralia

p201On Listening to Lectures

Loeb Edition Introduction

The essay on listening to lectures was first delivered as a formal lecture, and afterwards written out for the benefit of the young Nicander, who had just assumed the toga virilis, and was about to take up the serious study of philosophy. One can see in Terence, *Andria*, I.1.24, for example, how the young men of good family, suddenly released from the care of tutors by assuming thetoga virilis, conventionally took up a more or less serious avocation. Some took to horses or hunting, while others went on to the higher studies.

It must be quite evident that this essay is, in a way, a supplement and corollary to the preceding essay on the study of poetry. The former is concerned with the young, the latter with the more mature who are undertaking serious study, and particularly the study of philosophy, in which Plutarch was intensely interested. But it is quite clear that the lectures to which he refers dealt with many other subjects besides philosophy.

The essay has an astonishingly modern tone. The different types of students — the diffident student, the lazy student, the contemptuous student, the over-enthusiastic student who makes a nuisance of himself, the over-confident student who likes to ask questions to show off his own scrappy knowledge, p202the student who has no appreciation of his privilege in hearing a great scholar — all these are portrayed in a thoroughly realistic manner.

Stress is laid on the great contrast between the scholar (particularly the philosopher) and the popular lecturer (the sophist). Then as now, it seems, people were not always willing to listen patiently to the scholar, but more often inclined to resort to lectures of the lighter and more entertaining sort. In this matter, as in many others, Plutarch marks the distinction of character — the character of the lecturer, and the effect of the lecture on the character of the hearer. The sophists, having no particular character themselves and being below the general average of mankind, can do little or nothing to improve the character of their hearers, but, on the other hand, practically everything that the scholar says or does has its value for the upbuilding of character if only one have the ability to profit by it.

Proper behaviour in the lecture-room is the main theme of the essay. No lecture can be so bad that it contains nothing good, and while the lecture itself must be subjected to unsparing criticism, the lecturer must always be treated with kindly consideration, and must not be disturbed by any improper behaviour on the part of his audience.

It is worth while to compare Pliny's *Letters*, VI.17 and I.13 for the record of certain improprieties committed by audiences in Rome. On the general subject of higher education and the wide diffusion of knowledge at this time and later, reference may be made to W. W. Capes, *University Life in Ancient* p203*Athens*, and J. W. H. Walden, *The Universities of Ancient Greece* (New York, 1909).

In the catalogue of Lamprias, in which this essay is No. 102, the title is given as *Περὶ τοῦ ἀκούειν τῶν φιλοσόφων*, "On Listening to the Lectures of Philosophers," but it is probable that this title is merely explanatory, for Plutarch himself uses ἀκούειν alone in this sense in the very first line of the essay.

p205(37)1 1 The discourse which I gave on the subject of listening to lecture I have written out and sent to you, my dear Nicander, Cso that you may know how rightly to listen to the voice of persuasion, now that you are no longer subject to authority, having assumed the garb of a man. Now absence of control, which some of the young men, for want of education, Dthink to be freedom, establishes the sway of a set of masters, harsher than the teachers and attendants of childhood, in the form of the desires, which are now, as it were, unchained. And just as Herodotus[1] says that women put off their modesty along with their undergarments, so some of our young men, as soon as they lay aside the

garb of childhood, lay aside also their sense of modesty and fear, and, undoing the habit that invests them, straightway become full of unruliness. But you have often heard that to follow God and to obey reason are the same thing, and so I ask you to believe that in persons of good sense the passing from childhood to manhood is not a casting off of control, Ebut a recasting of the controlling agent, since instead of some hired person or slave purchased with money they now take as the divine guide of their life reason, whose followers alone may deservedly be considered free. For they alone, having learned to wish for what they p207ought, live as they wish; but in untrained and irrational impulses and actions there is something ignoble, and changing one's mind many times involves but little freedom of will.

2 1 We may find a comparison in the case of newly naturalized citizens; those among them who were alien born and perfect strangers find fault with many of the things that are done, and are discontented; Fwhereas those who come from the class of resident aliens, having been brought up under our laws and grown to be well acquainted with them, have no difficulty in accepting what devolves upon them and are content. And so you, who have been brought up for a long time in contact with philosophy, and have from the beginning been accustomed to philosophic reasoning as an ingredient in every portion of early instruction and information, ought to feel like an old friend and familiar when you come to philosophy, which alone can array young men in the manly and truly perfect adornment that comes from reason.

I think you may not find unwelcome some preliminary remarks about the sense of hearing, 38which Theophrastus[2] asserts is the most emotional of all the senses. For nothing which can be seen or tasted or touched brings on such distractions, confusions, and excitements, as take possession of the soul when certain crashing, clashing, and roaring noises assail the hearing. Yet this sense is more rational than emotional. For while many places and parts of the body make way for vice to enter through them and fasten itself upon the soul, virtue's only hold upon the young is afforded by the ears, Bif they be uncontaminated and kept from

the outset unspoiled by p209flattery and untouched by vile words. For this reason Xenocrates[3] advised putting ear-protectors on children rather than on athletes, on the ground that the latter have only their ears disfigured by the blows they receive, while the former have their characters disfigured by the words they hear; not that he would thus court heedlessness or deafness, but he advises vigilance against vile words, until such time as other words, of good sort, fostered in the character by philosophy, should, like watchmen, have taken under their charge the post chiefly exposed to influence and persuasion. And Bias[4] of old, on receiving orders to send to Amasis the portion of the sacrificial animal which was at the same time the best and the worst, cut out the tongue and sent it to him, on the ground that speech contains both injuries and benefits in the largest measure. cMost people in bestowing an affectionate kiss on little children not only take hold of children by the ears but bid the children to do the same by them, thus insinuating in a playful way that they must love most those who confer benefit through the ears. For surely the fact is plain, that the young man who is debarred from hearing all instruction and gets no taste of speech not only remains wholly unfruitful and makes no growth towards virtue, but may also be perverted towards vice, and the product of his mind, like that of a fallow and untilled piece of ground, will be a plentiful crop of wild oats. For if the impulses towards pleasure and the feelings of suspicion towards hard work d(which are not of external origin nor imported products of the spoken word, but indigenous sources, as it were, of pestilent emotions and disorders without number) be allowed to p211continue unconstrained along their natural channels, and if they be not either removed or diverted another way through the agency of goodly discourse, thus putting the natural endowments in a fit condition, there is not one of the wild beasts but would be found more civilized than man.[5]

3 1 Therefore, since listening to lectures is attended by great benefit, but by no less danger, to the young, I think it is a good thing to discuss the matter continually both with oneself and with another person. eThe reason for so doing is because we observe that a poor use is made of this by the great majority of persons, who practise speaking before they have

acquired the habit of listening. They think that there must be study and practice in discourse, but as for hearing, benefit will come however it be used. It is true that, in the case of persons playing ball, learning to throw and learning to catch take place at the same time; but in the use of discourse its proper reception comes before its delivery, just as conception and pregnancy come before parturition. It is said that when fowls labour and bring forth wind-eggs,[6] these result from some imperfect and infertile residue from conception; and if young men have not the power to listen, F or the habit of getting some profit through listening, the speech brought forth by them is windy indeed, and

> Void of repute and unheeded beneath the clouds it is scattered.[7]

For although they can incline and turn vessels properly to receive any liquid which is being poured into them, in order that there may actually be a filling and not a spilling, they never learn to apply themselves to a speaker and to accord attention to p213his lecture so that none of its good points may escape them. But here is the most ridiculous thing in the world: 39if they chance upon somebody who is giving an account of a dinner or a procession or a dream or a wordy brawl which he has had with another man, they listen in silence, and importune him to continue; yet if anybody draws them to one side and tries to impart something useful, or to advise them of some duty, or to admonish them when in the wrong, or to mollify them when incensed, they have no patience with him; but, eager to get the better of him if they can, they fight against what he says, or else they beat a hasty retreat in search of other foolish talk, filling their ears like worthless and rotten vessels with anything rather than the things they need. BAs skilful horse-trainers give us horses with a good mouth for the bit, so too skilful educators give us children with a good ear for speech, by teaching them to hear much and speak little. Indeed, Spintharus[8] declared in commendation of Epameinondas that it was not easy to find a man who knew more and spoke less. And it is a common saying that nature has given to each of us two ears and one tongue, because we ought to do less talking than listening.

4 1 In all cases, then, silence is a safe adornment for the young man, and especially so, when in listening to another he does not get excited or bawl out every minute, cbut even if the remarks be none too agreeable, puts up with them, and waits for the speaker to pause, and, when the pause comes, does not at once interpose his objection, but, as Aeschines puts[9] it, allows an interval to elapse, in case the p215speaker may desire to add something to what he has said, or to alter or unsay anything. But those who instantly interrupt with contradictions, neither hearing nor being heard, but talking while others talk, behave in an unseemly manner; whereas the man who has the habit of listening with restraint and respect, takes in and masters a useful discourse, and more readily sees through and detects a useless or false one, dshowing himself thus to be a lover of truth and not a lover of disputation, nor froward and contentious. Wherefore it is sometimes said not unaptly that it is even more necessary to take the wind of self-opinion and conceit out of the young, than to deflate wine-skins, if you wish to fill them with something useful; otherwise, being full of bombast and inflation, they have no room to receive it.

5 1 Now the presence of envy, attended by malice and hostility, is not a good thing for any undertaking, but it stands in the way of all that is honourable; and it is the very worst associate and counsellor for one that would listen to a lecture, inasmuch as it makes what is profitable to be vexatious, unpleasing, and unacceptable, because envious persons are pleased with anything rather than with the good points of a discourse. eNow the man that is stung by the wealth, or repute, or beauty possessed by another, is merely envious; for he is depressed by the good fortune of others; but one who feels discontentment at an excellent discourse is vexed by what is for his own good. For just as light is a good thing for those who can see, so is discourse for those who can hear, if they be willing to receive it.

Now while envy in other matters is engendered by certain untrained and evil dispositions of a man, p217the envy that is directed against a speaker is the offspring of an unseasonable desire for repute and a dishonest

ambition, and it does not suffer the person in such a mood even to pay attention to what is being said, Fbut it confuses and distracts his mind which at one moment is engaged in reviewing its own condition to see whether it be inferior to that of the speaker, then anon it turns to dwell on the other persons present to see whether they are showing any pleasure or admiration; it is disconcerted by their approval, and irritated at the audience if they find the speaker acceptable; disregards and dismisses the part of the discourse already delivered because the memory of it is painful, but for what still remains trembles with anxiety lest that part prove better than the part already delivered; eager that the speakers may most quickly have done when they are speaking most excellently; 40and when the lecture is over, it does not ponder upon any point of the discussion, but proceeds to count as votes the comments and attitudes of those present; if any approve, fleeing and recoiling from these as though frantic; if disapprove or distort the things said, hastening to join their company; and if it be impossible to distort, then it falls to making comparisons with others who could have spoken better and more forcibly to the same purport — until by spoiling and maltreating the lecture it has succeeded in making the whole thing useless and unprofitable to itself.

6 1 BTherefore a man must let his desire to hear make truce with his desire for repute, and listen cheerfully and affably as though he were a guest at some dinner or ceremonial banquet, commending the speaker's ability in those parts wherein he p219achieves a success, and favourably accepting the goodwill, if nothing else, of the speaker who propounds his opinions and tries to persuade others by the reasons which have persuaded himself. Where he is successful we must reflect that the success is not due to chance or accident, but to care, diligence, and study, and herein we should try to imitate him in a spirit of admiration and emulation; but where there are mistakes, we should direct our intelligence to these, to determine the reasons and origin of the error. CFor as Xenophon[10] asserts that good householders derive benefit both from their friends and from their enemies, so in the same way do speakers, not only when they succeed, but also when they fail, render a service to hearers who are alert

and attentive. For poverty of thought, emptiness of phrase, an offensive bearing, fluttering excitement combined with a vulgar delight at commendation, and the like, are more apparent to us in others when we are listening than in ourselves when we are speakers. Wherefore we ought to transfer our scrutiny from the speaker to ourselves, and examine whether we unconsciously commit such mistakes. D For it is the easiest thing in the world to find fault with one's neighbour, and also a useless and inane proceeding unless it be applied in some way to correcting or avoiding similar faults. And everyone ought to be ready ever to repeat to himself, as he observes the faults of others, the utterance of Plato,[11] "Am I not possibly like them?" For as we see our own eyes brightly reflected in the eyes of those near us, so we must get a picture of our own discourses in the discourses of others, that we may not too rashly p221 disdain others, and may give more careful attention to ourselves in the matter of speaking. E To this end the process of comparison is useful, if, when we have come away from the lecture and are by ourselves, we take some topic that seems to have been ineffectually or inadequately treated, and try our hand at the same thing, and address ourselves to supplying a deficiency here, or amending there, to saying the same thing in other words, or attempting to treat the subject in a wholly new way; and this is what Plato[12] actually did for the discourse of Lysias. For to offer objections against a discourse which has been delivered is not difficult, but very easy; but to set up a better against it is a very laborious task. As the Spartan[13] said, on hearing that Philip had razed the city of Olynthus to the ground, "Yes, but even he could not possibly set up such another." F Whenever, therefore, in discoursing thus upon a given subject, we find that we do not much excel those who have already spoken, we abate much of our disdain, and our presumption and self-esteem are very speedily cut short by being put to the test in such comparisons.

7 1 Now admiration, which is the antithesis of disdain, obviously betokens a kindlier and gentler nature, but even this requires certainly no little caution, perhaps even more.41 For while it is true that disdainful and self-confident persons are less apt to get benefit from the speakers, yet the enthusiastic and ingenuous are more apt to get harm; and they cause

no one to question the saying of Heracleitus,[14] that "A fool is wont to be agog at p223every word that's said." In praising a speaker we must be generous, but in believing his words cautious; as touching the style and the delivery of the performers, we should observe with a kindly and simple mind; but as for the utility and the truth of what they say, we must play the keen and heartless critics, Bthat the speakers may feel no hatred, yet their words may do no harm. For we unwittingly receive into our minds a great many false and vicious doctrines by feeling goodwill and confidence towards the speakers. Upon a time the Spartan officials, after approving the proposal made by a man whose life had not been good, appointed another man of good repute in his life and character to present it, thus quite rightly and for the good of the State trying to accustom the people to being influenced more by the behaviour than by the speech of their counsellors.[15] But in a philosophic discussion we must set aside the repute of the speaker, and examine what he says quite apart. For as in war so also in lectures there is plenty of empty show. For example, a speaker's grey hair, his formality, he serious brow, his self-assertion, Cand above all the clamour and shouting of the audience as he brings them to their feet, combine to disconcert the young and inexperienced listener, who is, as it were, swept away by the current. The speaker's style also has a spice of deception when it is pleasing and copious, and is applied to the subject with dignity and artfulness. For as most of the mistakes of persons singing to the flute escape the audience, so an exuberant and impressive style flashed upon the listener blinds him to the matter set forth. DIt seems to have been Melanthius, who being asked about Diogenes' p225tragedy, said he could not get a sight of it, there were so many words in the way; and the discussions and exercises of most popular lecturers not only use words to conceal their thoughts, but they so sweeten their voice by certain harmonious modulations and softenings and rhythmic cadences, as to ravish away and transport their hearers. It is an empty pleasure they give, and an even more empty renown they acquire, so that the remark of Dionysius[16] fits their case exactly. For he, as it appears, at some performance Epromised to a harp-player of great repute certain large gifts, but afterwards gave him nothing, on the ground that he had already discharged his obligation. "For," said he, "all the time that you were

giving pleasure to us with your singing, you were enjoying the pleasure of your hopes." And this is just the meed that such lectures have for those who deliver them; for the speakers are admired in as far as they are entertaining, and afterwards, no sooner has the pleasure of listening passed away, than their repute deserts them, and so the time of their hearers and the life of the speakers is simply wasted.

8 1 One ought therefore to strip off the superfluity and inanity from the style, Fand to seek after the fruit itself, imitating not women that make garlands, but the bees. For those women, culling flower-clusters and sweet-scented leaves, intertwine and plait them, and produce something that is pleasant enough, but short-lived and fruitless; whereas the bees in their flight frequently pass through meadows of violets, roses, and hyacinths, and come to rest upon the exceeding rough and pungent thyme, and on this they settle close,

p227Making the yellow honey their care,[17]

and when they have got something of use, they fly away home to their own special work. In such wise, then, the sincere and single-minded student ought to regard 42flowery and dainty language and theatrical and spectacular subject matter as the pasturage of drones who practise the popular lecture; these he should leave alone and use all diligence to sound the deep meaning of the words and the intention of the speaker, drawing from it what is useful and profitable, and remembering that he has not come to a theatre or music-hall, but to a school and classroom with the purpose of amending his life by what is there said. Hence it follows that in making his examination and forming his judgement of the lecture he should begin with himself and his own state of mind, endeavouring to estimate whether any one of his emotions has become less intense, whether any one of his troubles weighs less heavily upon him, Bwhether his confidence and his high purpose have become firmly rooted, whether he has acquired enthusiasm for virtue and goodness. As a matter of course, when he rises to leave the barber's shop, he stands by the mirror and feels his head, examining the cut of his hair and the

difference made by its trimming; so on his way home from a lecture or an academic exercise, it would be a shame not to direct his gaze forthwith upon himself and to note carefully his own spirit, whether it has put from it any of its encumbrances and superfluities, and has become lighter and more cheerful. "For," as Ariston says, "neither a bath nor a discourse is of any use unless it removes impurity."

9 1 CLet the young man, then, find pleasure when p229he finds profit from a discourse; but he should not hold that the pleasure derived from the lecture is an end in itself, nor would I have him hum a merry note or show a jovial face as he leaves the philosopher's school, any more than he should seek to be sprinkled with perfume when he needs a fomentation and a hot poultice; but he should feel grateful if by pungent discourse someone has cleansed his mind teeming with fogginess and dulness, as a beehive is cleared by smoke. For even though it is quite right for a speaker not to be altogether neglectful of pleasantness and persuasion in his style, yet the young man should make least concern of this, at any rate at first. Afterwards no doubt he may have an eye to that; for just as those who drink, Dafter they have quenched their thirst, begin then to observe the ornamentation of the drinking-cups and to turn them about, so the young man, when he is well replenished with doctrines and has some respite, may be allowed to inspect the style to see whether it contains anything elegant and exquisite. But he who at the very outset does not stick to the subject matter, but insists that the style shall be pure Attic and severely plain, is like the man who is unwilling to swallow an antidote for a poison unless the cup be of the finest Attic ware, or unwilling to put on an overcoat in winter unless the wool be from Attic sheep, but must needs sit still and inactive, with a delicate thin jacket of Lysias's language cast over him. EIndeed, this sort of unhealthiness has produced much barrenness of mind and of good sense, much foolery and bibble-babble in the schools, since younger men do not keep in view the life, the actions, and the public conduct of a man who follows philosophy, but rate p231as matters for commendation points of style and phrasing, and a fine delivery, while as for what is being delivered, whether it be useful or

useless, whether essential or empty and superfluous, they neither understand nor wish to inquire.

10 1 This leads up to the matter of proposing problems. FNow the person who comes to a dinner is bound to eat what is set before him and not to ask for anything else or to be critical; so he who comes to a feast of reason, if it be on a specified subject, must feel bound to listen to the speaker in silence. For those persons who lead the speaker to digress to other topics, and interject questions, and raise new difficulties, are not pleasant or agreeable company at a lecture; they get no benefit from it, and they confuse both the speaker and his speech. However, when the speaker requests his hearers to ask questions or to propose problems, one should always manifestly propose some problem which is useful and essential. Now Odysseus among the suitors is derided for

43Asking for morsels of food and not for swords or for cauldrons,[18]

for they regard it just as much a sign of magnanimity to ask for something great as to give it. But there is more reason for ridiculing a hearer who diverts the speaker to petty and frivolous problems, such as some of the young men are in the habit of proposing when they are only fooling and withal showing off their skill in logic and mathematics; take, for example, the question about the division of indeterminate propositions[19] or "What is movement as determined by the bounding side or by the diagonal?"[20] BTo such p233persons we may retort with the remark of Philotimus[21] to the man who was dying of consumption. When he had addressed the physician, asking him for something to cure a sore finger, Philotimus, perceiving his condition from his colour and respiration, said, "My dear sir, your concern is not about a sore finger." And so for you, young man, it is not the time to be inquiring about such questions, but how you may be rid of self-opinion and pretension, love affairs and nonsense, and settle down to a modest and wholesome mode of living.

11 1 It is quite necessary that in formulating questions the questioner should accommodate himself to the proficiency or natural capacity of the speaker, to those matters "in which he is at his best";[22] cnot forcibly to

divert one who is more concerned with the ethical side of philosophy, by plying him with questions in natural science or mathematics, or to drag the man who poses as an authority on natural science into passing judgement on the hypothetical propositions[23] of logic or solutions of quibbles like the Liar Problem.[24] For just as one who should go about to split wood with a key, or to open his door with an axe, would not be thought to offer an indignity to those instruments but to deprive himself of the proper use and function of each, so those persons who ask of a speaker something for which he is not apt by nature or by practice, and do not gather and take what he has to offer, Dnot only suffer harm thereby, but also incur the name and blame of malice and hostility as well.

12 1 A man must also guard against proposing many problems or proposing them often himself. For this p235is, in a way, the mark of a man who is taking occasion to show himself off. But to listen good-naturedly when another advances them, marks the considerate gentleman and the scholar. The only exception is in case some matter of his own is troublesome and urgent, some emotion requiring repression, or a disorder requiring relief. For perhaps it may not even be "better to conceal ignorance," as Heracleitus[25] puts it, but to set it forth in public, and cure it. And if some fit of temper, or attack of superstition, or an intense disagreement with members of our own household, or a mad desire born of love,

EStirring the heart-strings never stirred before,[26]

brings confusion to our thoughts, we must not run away to other kinds of discourse to escape being taken to task, but we must listen to the discussion of these very matters both at the formal exercises, and after the exercises, when we approach the men privately and question them further. But save us from the contrary course, followed by the majority, who are delighted with the philosophers and admire them when they are discoursing about other people; but if the philosopher leaves the other people alone, and addresses himself frankly and freely to them, and sets them in mind of matters that much concern them, they are annoyed and

think him officious. FFor, as a rule, they imagine that they ought to listen to the philosophers in the schools as they listen to the tragedians in the theatres; but in matters out of school they think the philosophers are no better men than themselves. Now there is some reason that they should feel thus towards the popular lecturers; for when these get up from the speaker's chair, and p237put away their books and lecture notes, it is apparent that in the real pursuits of life they are small men and rank lower than the average; but towards philosophers of the real sort it is not right that they have such a feeling, not realizing that seriousness and jest in them, nod, or smile, or frown, 44and, above all, what they say to each person apart, may yield a return which is profitable for those who have acquired the habit of patient attention.

13 1 The proprieties in regard to bestowing commendation also require some caution and moderation, for the reason that neither deficiency nor excess therein befits the free man. An offensive and tiresome listener is the man who is not to be touched or moved by anything that is said, full of festering presumption and ingrained self-assertion, as though convinced that he could say something better than what is being said, who neither moves his brow nor utters a single word to bear witness that he is glad to listen, Bbut by means of silence and an affected gravity and pose, seeks to gain a reputation for poise and profundity; as though commendation were money, he feels that he is robbing himself of every bit that he bestows on another. For there are many who take that saying of Pythagoras wrongly and out of harmony with his meaning. He declared that he had gained this advantage from philosophy, to wonder at nothing;[27] but these men think that their advantage gained is to commend nothing, to show respect for nothing, holding that immunity from wonder lies in disdain, and seeking to attain to dignity by means of contempt. Now it is true that philosophic reasoning, through knowledge and acquaintance with the cause in every case, does away p239with the wonder and amazement that spring from blindness and ignorance, Cbut at the same time it does not destroy our serenity, moderation, or human interest. For to persons who are truly and consistently good it is the highest credit to bestow credit upon someone deserving of credit, and the

most conspicuous honour to honour such a man, since this argues a superabundant and generous store of repute; whereas those who are niggardly in their commendation of others give the impression of being pinched and starving for their own.

On the other hand, however, the opposite type of person, light-minded and flighty, who uses no judgement, but hangs intent on every word and syllable with an ejaculation ready on his lips, Dis frequently no satisfaction to the disputants themselves, and is always a painful affliction for the audience, startling them as he does and exciting them to join him contrary to their judgement, as though they for shame could not help being dragged into the applause. He gets no benefit from the lecture because for him it has been made full of confusion and fluttering excitement by his continual applaudings, and he departs with the name of being one of three things: a dissembler, a flatterer, or a boor in all that relates to discourse.

ENow a man sitting as a judge in court is bound to listen without regard either to enmity or favour, but in sober judgement with regard to justice; but at scholarly lectures no law and no oath prohibits us from receiving the lecturer with goodwill. Indeed, the ancients gave Hermes a place beside the Graces from a feeling that discourse demands, above all, graciousness and friendliness. For it is not possible p241for a speaker to be a failure so abject and complete that he does not afford something meriting commendation, an original thought, a reminiscence from others, the very subject and purpose of his discourse, or at least the style and arrangement of his remarks,

> FJust as amid urchin's foot and the rough rest-harrow
> Flowering snowdrops grow, delicate in their bloom.[28]

For when some have declaimed a panegyric upon vomiting or fever, nay I vow, even upon a kitchen-pot, not without a certain amount of plausibility, how could it be that a discourse delivered by a man who in some sort bears the repute and name of philosopher, should not offer, at some point, to benevolent and humane hearers some respite and

opportunity for commendation? We know, at any rate, that all persons in the bloom of youth do somehow or other, as Plato[29] says, act as a stimulus upon the man inclined to love; the fair ones he names "children of the gods," 45the dark "manly," while the hook-nosed he endearingly terms "kingly," the snub-nosed "fetching," the sallow "honey-hued," and so welcomes and likes them all; for love, like ivy, is clever in attaching itself to any support. Much more, then, will the scholar and diligent hearer always be ready to discover some cause for which he may openly bestow on every speaker some commendation not inappropriate. So Plato,[30] although he cannot commend Lysias's speech for invention, and although he condemns its arrangement as disorderly, nevertheless commends the style, and that "each word was clearly and roundly turned." One p243might find fault with Archilochus for his subject matter, BParmenides for his versification, Phocylides as commonplace, Euripides for his loquacity, and Sophocles for his unevenness; and it is equally true of the orators that one of them has no power to portray character, another is slow to rouse emotion, another is lacking in grace; yet it is a fact that each one of them is commended for the special faculty with which Nature has taught him to move us and draw us on. It follows, then, that there is ample and abundant opportunity for hearers to show friendliness toward those who are speaking. For some it is quite enough, even if we do not attest this by voice, that we vouchsafe to them a gentleness of glance, a serenity of countenance, and a disposition kindly and free from annoyance.

CFinally, the following matters, even with speakers who make a complete failure, are, as it were, general and common requirements at every lecture: to sit upright without any lounging or sprawling, to look directly at the speaker, to maintain a pose of active attention, and a sedateness of countenance free from any expression, not merely of arrogance or displeasure, but even of other thoughts and preoccupations. Now in every piece of work, beauty is achieved through the congruence of numerous factors, so to speak, brought into union under the rule of a certain due proportion and harmony, whereas ugliness is ready to spring into being if only a single chance element be omitted or added out of

place. DAnd so in the particular case of a lecture, not only frowning, a sour face, a roving glance, twisting the body about, and crossing the legs, are unbecoming, but even nodding, whispering to another, smiling, sleepy p245yawns, bowing down the head, and all like actions, are culpable and need to be carefully avoided.

14 1 There are others who think that the speaker has a function to perform, and the hearer none. They think it only right that the speaker shall come with his discourse carefully thought out and prepared, while they, without consideration or thought of their obligations, rush in and take their seats exactly as though they had come to dinner, to have a good time while others toil. EAnd yet even a well-bred guest at dinner has a function to perform, much more a hearer; for he is a participant in the discourse and a fellow-worker with the speaker, and he ought not rigorously to examine the speaker's little slips, applying his criticism to every word and action, while he himself, without being subject to any criticism, acts unhandsomely and commits many gross improprieties in the matter of listening. On the contrary, just as in playing ball it is necessary for the catcher to adapt his movements to those of the thrower and to be actively in accord with him, so with discourses, there is a certain accord between the speaker and the hearer, Fif each is heedful of his obligation.

15 1 Then also the terms used in commendations must not be indiscriminate. For Epicurus[31] himself is displeasing when he says of his friends' letters that they give rise to hullabaloos. And those persons who nowadays introduce into our lecture-rooms outlandish expressions, who are wont to exclaim over a lecture "Divine," and "Inspired," and "Unapproachable," as though it were no longer enough to say "Hear, Hear!" and "Good!" and "Right!" as Plato and Socrates and Hypereides and their friends used to do to show their commendation, p247behave in a most unseemly manner, and traduce the speakers, as though these desired such high-flown and excessive commendations.46Exceedingly displeasing also are those who use an oath in testifying to their approval of the speakers as though in a law court. No less so are those who fail to

respect the quality of persons, and cry aloud to a philosopher "Smart!" or to an aged man "Clever!" or "Flowery!", thus transferring to the philosophers the expressions of those who make a sport and an opportunity to show off out of their scholastic exercises, and applying meretricious commendation to sober discourse, Bas though they should put on an athlete's head a crown of lilies or roses instead of laurel or wild olive! Once when Euripides the poet was going over for the members of his chorus a lyric passage set to music one of them burst out laughing; whereat Euripides remarked, "If you were not so stupid and ignorant, you would not have laughed while I was singing in most solemn measure."[32]And so, as I think, one who is a philosopher and statesman might repress the exuberance of a graceless hearer by saying, "You seem to me to be an ill-bred fool; else, while I am giving instruction or admonition, or discoursing upon the gods or the State or its government, you would not be whistling and dancing a jig to my words." CJust consider what it really means, if, when a philosopher is speaking, the people outside, by reason of the clamour and shouting of those within, are unable to make out whether the applause is for some flute-player, or harper, or dancer.

16 1 Moreover, admonitions and rebukes must be p249listened to neither with stolid indifference nor with unseemly emotion. For those who can submit to being reproved by philosophers so light-heartedly and heedlessly as to laugh when being taken to task and to commend those who take them to task, as parasites do when abused by those at whose expense they live, are utterly froward and bold, and they give no good or genuine proof of manliness by their shameless behaviour. DAs for a pleasant scoff, wittily delivered and in pure fun, if a man know how to take it cheerfully and without offence, his conduct argues no ignoble or uncultured mind, but one altogether generous and Spartan. On the other hand, to hear a reprehension or admonition to reform character, delivered in words that penetrate like a biting drug, and not to be humbled at hearing it, not to run into a sweating and dizziness, not to burn with shame in the soul, but, on the contrary to listen unmoved, grinning, dissembling in the face of it all, is a notable sign of an illiberal

nature in the young, dead to all modesty because of an habitual and continued acquaintance with wrongdoing, with a soul like hard and calloused flesh, upon which no lash can leave a weal.

EDSuch is the behaviour of those who belong to this class. But young men of the opposite temperament, if they ever hear a single word directed against themselves, run away without looking back, and try to desert philosophy; and, although the sense of modesty which Nature has bestowed upon them is an admirable beginning for their salvation, they lose it through effeminacy and weakness, since they display no firmness under reproof, nor do they accept corrections with the proper spirit, but they turn away their ears toward the agreeable and gentle converse p251of sundry flatterers or voluble talkers, who enchant them with useless and unprofitable but nevertheless pleasant utterances. Just as one who runs away from the physician after an operation, and will not submit to be bandaged, sustains all the pain of the treatment, Fbut waits not for its benefits: so when the word has cut and wounded a man's foolishness, if he give it no chance to heal and quiet the wound, he comes away from philosophy with a smart and pain but with no benefit. For not only the wound of Telephus, as Euripides[33] says,

Is soothed by fine-rasped filings from the spear,

47but the smart from philosophy which sinks deep in young men of good parts is healed by the very words which inflicted the hurt. For this reason he who is taken to task must feel and suffer some smart, yet he should not be crushed or dispirited, but, as though at a solemn rite of novitiate which consecrates him to philosophy, he should submit to the initial purifications and commotions, in the expectation that something delectable and splendid will follow upon his present distress and perturbation. Indeed, even if the reproof seems to be given unjustly, it is an admirable thing to endure it with continued patience while the man is speaking; and when he has come to the end, to go to him with an explanation, Band beg him to reserve for some real misconduct the frankness and earnestness that he has employed in the present instance.

17 1 Moreover, just as in learning to read and write, or in taking up music or physical training, the first lessons are attended with much confusion, hard work, and uncertainty, but later, as the learner makes progress, by slow degrees, just as in his p253relations with human beings, a full familiarity is engendered and knowledge which renders everything attractive, feasible, and easy, both to say and to do, so also is it with philosophy, which undoubtedly has something knotty and unfamiliar in its terms and subject matter at the outset; yet one ought not to take fright at its beginnings, and to abandon it in timorous and craven fashion; Crather should he examine each point, and persist and stick to the task of getting on, while awaiting that familiarity which makes every noble thing a pleasure. For come it will without long delay, bringing with it abundant light for the subject of study; it will inspire also a passionate love for virtue; and anyone who could endure to pass the rest of his life without this passion, because he has exiled himself from philosophy for want of true manliness, brands himself either as a very presumptuous man or else a coward.

It is quite possible that the subject of philosophy contains some matter which is difficult for young and inexperienced students to apprehend at the outset. But, at the same time, they must hold themselves responsible for most of the uncertainty and misunderstanding in which they find themselves involved, since quite opposite characters come to fall into the same error. DSome, because of a feeling of shame and a desire to spare the speaker, hesitate to ask questions and to get the argument firmly fixed in their minds, nodding their heads in assent as though they comprehended it; others, led by an unseasonable ambition and inane rivalry with their fellow students, to show off their acuteness and their ability to learn easily, avow that they have the meaning before they have grasped it, and so do not p255grasp it at all. Then the result is that those modest and silent persons, after leaving the lecture, distress themselves over their difficulties, and finally, driven by necessity, with even greater shame this time, they trouble the lecturers with questions which they should have asked before, and try to catch up; but with the ambitious and self-

confident young men, the result is that they are all the time trying to cover up and conceal the ignorance that abides with them.

18 1 ELet us therefore put from us all such foolishness and pretension, and, as we go onward to the task of learning, let us take pains thoroughly to comprehend all profitable discourses; let us submit with patience to the laughter of those reputed to be clever, as did Cleanthes and Xenocrates, who, although they seemed to be slower than their schoolmates, yet did not try to escape learning or give it up in despair, but were the first to make jokes at themselves by comparing themselves to narrow-necked bottles and bronze tablets, as much as to say that they found great difficulty in taking in what was said, yet they kept it safely and securely. For not only is one bound, as Phocylides says,

Many a time to be cheated of hope when he seeks to be noble,[34]

Fbut he is bound also many a time to be laughed at and to be in disrepute, and to put up with joking and buffoonery as he struggles with might and main against his ignorance and overthrows it.

On the other hand, however, we certainly must not neglect the mistake that leads to the opposite extreme, which some persons are led to commit by laziness, thus making themselves unpleasant and p257irksome. 48For when they are by themselves they are not willing to give themselves any trouble, but they give trouble to the speaker by repeatedly asking questions about the same things, like unfledged nestlings always agape toward the mouth of another, and desirous of receiving everything ready prepared and predigested. There is another class, who, eager to be thought astute and attentive out of due place, wear out the speakers and loquacity and officiousness, by continually propounding some extraneous and unessential difficulty and asking for demonstrations of matters that need no demonstration, and so, as Sophocles[35] puts it,

Much time it takes to go a little way,

Bnot only for themselves but for the rest of the company too. For holding back the speaker on every possible occasion by their inane and superfluous questions, as in a company of persons travelling together, they impede the regular course of the lecture, which has to put up with halts and delays. Now such persons are, according to Hieronymus, like cowardly and persistent puppies which, at home, bite at the skins of wild animals, and tear off what bits they can, but never touch the animals themselves. But after those lazy persons whom we have mentioned, let us urge them that, when their intelligence has comprehended the main points, they put the rest together by their own efforts, and use their memory as a guide in thinking for themselves, and, Ctaking the discourse of another as a germ and seed, develop and expand it. For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the p259truth. Imagine, then, that a man should need to get fire from a neighbour, and, upon finding a big bright fire there, should stay there continually warming himself; just so it is if a man comes to another to share the benefit of a discourse, and does not think it necessary to kindle from it some illumination for himself and some thinking of his own, but, delighting in the discourse, sits enchanted; Dhe gets, as it were, a bright and ruddy glow in the form of opinion imparted to him by what is said, but the mouldiness and darkness of his inner mind he has not dissipated nor banished by the warm glow of philosophy.

Finally, if there be need of any other instruction in regard to listening to a lecture, it is that it is necessary to keep in mind what has here been said, and to cultivate independent thinking along with our learning, so that we may acquire a habit of mind that is not sophistic or bent on acquiring mere information, but one that is deeply ingrained and philosophic, as we may do if we believe that right listening is the beginning of right living.

The Loeb Editor's Notes:

[1] Herodotus, I.8; again referred to in *Moralia*, 139C.

[2] The statement is not elsewhere preserved.

[3] Again referred to by Plutarch, *Moralia*, 706C.

[4] *Ibid.* 146F.

[5] *Cf.* Plato, *Laws*, 808D.

[6] *Cf.* Aristotle, *Hist. Animal.* VI.2.

[7] Author unknown; possibly Empedocles.

[8] *Cf.* Plutarch, *Moralia*, 592F.

[9] There is something like this in Aeschines, *De falsa legatione* § 7, but more likely the reference is to a lost oration.

[10] Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, I.15.

[11] *Cf.* Plutarch, *Moralia*, 88E, 129D, and 463E.

[12] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237B ff.

[13] Agesipolis; *cf.* Plutarch, *Moralia*, 215B and 458B.

[14] *Cf.* the note on 28D *supra*.

[15] Again referred to by Plutarch, *Moralia*, 233Fº and 801B.

[16] Again referred to by Plutarch, *Moralia*, 333F.

[17] From Simonides, as Plutarch tells us, *Moralia*, 79C (*cf.* also 494C). *Cf.* Bergk, *Poet. Lyr. Gr.* III p411.

[18] Homer, *Odyssey*, XVII.222.

[19] Apparently a quibble in logic: "Man lives and breathes"; which man lives and which man breathes?

[20] When a body moves are its various positions determined by the position of its diagonal (*i.e.* interior lines) or of its exterior lines?

[21] Again referred to by Plutarch, *Moralia*, 73B.

[22] An adaptation of a line from the *Antiope* of Euripides. (Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.*, *Eurip*, No. 183).

[23] Such as: "If Plato walks, Plato moves." "If it is daytime, the sun is in the sky."

[24] "If I say that I lie when I am lying, do I lie or tell the truth?"

[25] Again referred to by Plutarch, *Moralia*, 439D and 644F. *Cf.* Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, I.99.

[26] Again quoted, *Moralia*, 456C, 501A, 502D, and 657D; *cf.* Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.*, *Adesp.* No. 361.

[27] *Cf.* the "nil admirari" of Horace. *Epistles*, I.6.1.

[28] Source unknown: *cf.* Plutarch, *Moralia*, 485A and 621E.

Thayer's Note: Also Athenaeus, 97D, in a very different translation.

[29] Plato, *Republic*, 474D.

[30] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 234E.

[31] *Cf.* Diogenes Laertius, X.5.

[32] The mixed Lydian. See Plutarch, *Moralia*, 1136CD(Greek, French).

[33] Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, *Euripides*, No. 724; *cf.* Plutarch, *Moralia*, 89C.

[34] Bergk, *Poet. Lyr. Gr.* II p448, *Phocyl.* No. 14.

[35] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 237.