

In the first sentence of *On listening* Plutarch tells his addressee, a young Nikander, who is about to begin studies in philosophy, that he is sending him a written version of his speech ὅπως εἰδῆς τοῦ πείθοντος ὀρθῶς ἀκούειν (“so that you may know how to listen to one who is trying to persuade you”, 37c). In my presentation I will argue that the appearance of the motif of persuasion in the opening line of the text dealing with philosophical training implies that *On listening* should be read against the broader background of ancient dispute about the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. I will suggest that Plutarch's text is not a mere piece of advice about how to behave in lecture room, but that it grows out of a reflection on his contemporary sophistic and philosophic milieu and contains a response to Plato's criticism of persuasion and rhetoric.

The dispute concerning the value of rhetoric was particularly pertinent to the culture of the Second Sophistic in which speech and oral performance became a main medium not only of self-advertisement and exchange of ideas, but also of philosophical education. Plutarch was well aware that Plato's outright condemnation of oratory posed a challenge to the highly rhetorized format of philosophical training. For Plato, the search for truth can be realized through dialectic, not through attending or delivering speeches. Sokrates, the paradigm of a philosopher, can not benefit from listening: as Olympiodoros in his commentary on the *Gorgias* observes, Plato makes Sokrates come *after* the performance of Gorgias, because otherwise “one of the two things would have happened. Either it would have been necessary for him to keep silent, putting up with Gorgias' bare assertions – but this is alien to one who knows. Or, if he were not to remain silent, he would have been the cause of impediment and irritation, forever interrupting and seeking to converse” (1.3.). Olympiodoros' comment articulates the difficulty which Plutarch, as a Platonist and a pedagogue, is facing: what profit can a philosopher or student of philosophy gain from attending speeches?

In my presentation I will argue that Plutarch answers this challenge by developing the concept of “proper listening”, τὸ ὀρθῶς ἀκούειν. He establishes a link between the art of proper speech-listening and the virtues, in particular temperance and manliness, and presents silent and attentive listening as an exercise in curbing one's emotions and desires; from this perspective, proper listening is in itself a philosophical practice. Also, as the well-mannered listener should not impede and interrupt the speaker (*vide* the comment of Olympiodoros), Plutarch encourages internalization of Socratic elenchus; the cross-examination is removed from the public sphere and moved into an individual's soul.