

Scholarship on Plutarch's political ideas rarely includes the *Quaestiones Convivales*. This oversight is largely because of the text's unique literary texture. As a miscellany which is fictionalized as a 'symposium', the *Quaestiones Convivales* does not, at first sight, share the explicitly political-educational function of the *Lives* or the political treatises of the *Moralia*. In this paper I will demonstrate that, contrary to such an impression, philosophical political discourse does feature centrally in the text's educational content, especially in those chapters which discuss the theme of sympotic *koinonia*. Secondly, I will argue that the scientific and medical chapters, which comprise another major thematic cluster, contain perceptions of the microcosm and macrocosm that parallel the key ideas of political and social organization that are found in the chapters that discuss the symposium. Finally, I will show that these parallels are carefully chosen so as to highlight certain philosophical and political notions that the text valorizes, and which are crucial for our evaluation of Plutarch's broader political and ethical thought.

The paper will begin with a markedly political chapter: *Quaestiones Convivales* I.2, which explores issues of hierarchy and arbitration in the placement of guests at a symposium. The political concepts that emerge in this chapter, for which Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* are crucial intertexts, are of critical importance for our understanding of the socially and politically charged terms in which the text conceives sympotic community. The debate in I.2 concludes with the suggestion that the optimal form of sympotic *koinonia* be achieved through a carefully studied placement of guests with opposite qualities next to each other (618D-619A). This concept of mixture (*mixis*) of diverse or opposing elements features prominently in the text's aesthetic, ethical and political theory, and is a direct extrapolation from the cosmological schema of Empedocles, as I.2 expressly admits (618B). Furthermore, *mixis* proves to be a central theme of the larger work, with parallels in Plutarch's discussion of the scientific and medical theories that explain physical and physiological phenomena. These theories comprise the heart of the scientific content of the *Quaestiones Convivales*. They are: 1) the Aristotelian theory of *pepsis* 2) the theory of the two opposing pairs of primary qualities (hot and cold, wet and dry) in all elements 3) the concept of *krasis* as a physiological condition. The analogies that the text suggests between the structures of the cosmos, human society, and the body, underline the pluralist character of all types of cosmic structure and elevate *mixis* to a universal structural principle that embraces all forms (and levels) of organization.

The paper will conclude by offering an interpretive analysis of the centrality of *mixis* in the text's political discourse. In the pluralist schema of organization that the text envisages, each element retains its individuality within the ensuing whole. In social and political terms, this is a vision that gives priority to the community, while maintaining the importance of the individual as an independent unit. The achievement of this crucial equilibrium between individuality and social coherence is, as I will point out, a political desideratum not unique to the *Quaestiones Convivales*, but characteristic of Plutarch's broader philosophical, political and ethical reflection in the *Lives* and *Moralia*. I will close by emphasizing its importance for illuminating Plutarch's views on the interaction of personal ethics with politics and society, a core consideration throughout his works.