



AARHUS UNIVERSITY



# Cover sheet

---

**This is the accepted manuscript (post-print version) of the article.**

The content in the accepted manuscript version is identical to the final published version, although typography and layout may differ.

## How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Mortensen, J. P. B. (2019). THE QUESTION OF GENRE IN PLUTARCH'S *MAXIME CVM PRINCIPIBVS PHILOSOPHO ESSE DISSERENDVM*. *Classical Quarterly*, 69(2), 815-824.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S000983881900096X>

## Publication metadata

**Title:** THE QUESTION OF GENRE IN PLUTARCH'S *MAXIME CVM PRINCIPIBVS PHILOSOPHO ESSE DISSERENDVM*  
**Author(s):** Jacob P.B. Mortensen  
**Journal:** *Classical Quarterly*  
**DOI/Link:** [10.1017/S000983881900096X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S000983881900096X)  
**Document version:** Accepted manuscript (post-print)

*This article has been published in a revised form in Classical Quarterly*  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S000983881900096X>. *This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution or re-use. © copyright holder.*

### General Rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

If the document is published under a Creative Commons license, this applies instead of the general rights.

## THE QUESTION OF GENRE IN PLUTARCH'S *MAXIME CUM PRINCIPIBUS* PHILOSOPHO ESSE DISSERENDUM

### INTRODUCTION

In his book on Plutarch's *Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum* from 2009, Geert Roskam takes up the question of the genre of the work.<sup>1</sup> Few scholars have approached this question and they have had little to say. Hence, Roskam's treatment of the question is much appreciated. Among the suggestions previously put forth is the one by F.H. Sandbach, who argued that the work should be regarded as a treatise,<sup>2</sup> while H.N. Fowler stated in the 'Introduction' to the LCL translation that the work is an essay.<sup>3</sup> Other suggestions regarding the genre of *Maxime cum principibus* include the notion that it is a diatribe and a *parva disputatio e magisterio orta*.<sup>4</sup> Of course, although all four suggestions have something to say for themselves, they are rather imprecise and not actual genres in a specific sense. The diatribe often surfaces as a convenient label for ancient philosophical discourses, but it is a misleading label since what it picks out was not recognised as a distinctive form or stylistic level in antiquity.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the technical and literary uses of the Greek word διατριβή were entirely different.

In his book, Roskam argues that *Maxime cum principibus* should be regarded as a philosophical discourse, a philosophical διάλεξις.<sup>6</sup> Even though this conclusion may not be entirely incorrect, it is possible to be more precise regarding the specific genre of the work. Coming from the work of Aelius Theon's (mid to end of the first century A.D.)<sup>7</sup> *Progymnasmata*,<sup>8</sup> I would argue,

---

<sup>1</sup> G. Roskam, *Plutarch's Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum* (Leuven, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> F.H. Sandbach, 'Some textual notes on Plutarch's *Moralia*', *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1941), 110–118, at 113; cf. A. Barigazzi, 'Note critiche ed esegetiche agli scritti politici di Plutarco', *Prometheus* 7 (1981), 193–214, at 194; I. Gallo, 'Forma letteraria nei "Moralia" di Plutarco: Aspetti e problem', *ANRW* II, 34, 4, (1998), 3511–40, at 3524.

<sup>3</sup> H.N. Fowler, *Plutarch's Moralia in sixteen volumes, X, 771E – 854D, with an English Translation*, Cambridge, LCL (1969), 27.

<sup>4</sup> J.J. Hartman, *De Plutarcho scriptore e philosopho* (Lugduni Batavorum, 1916), 472; M. Pohlenz in C. Hubert, *Plutarchi Moralia*, vol. V, fasc. I, rev. H. Drexler (Lipsiae, 1960), vi.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M.B. Trapp, *Maximus of Tyre. The Philosophical Orations* (Oxford, 1997), xxxv n. 70; H. Throm, *Die Thesis* (Paderborn, 1932), 62–71. For a more affirmative use of the diatribe as a genre cf. S. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Chico, Calif. 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding the life and writings of Aelius Theon, cf. R.F. Hock and E.N. O'Neil, 'Aelius Theon of Alexandria', in R.F. Hock & E.N. O'Neil (eds.), *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric Volume I: The Progymnasmata* (Atlanta, 1986), 63–78, at 63–6; R. Webb, 'The *Progymnasmata* as practice', in Y.-L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden, 2001), 289–316, at 293–94; R. Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind* (Princeton, 2001), 185–219.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the translation by G.A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta, 2003) and the translation with notes by J.R. Butts in his Dissertation, 'The "Progymnasmata" of Theon: A New Text with Translation and Commentary' (Claremont

instead, that the genre Plutarch makes use of in *Maxime cum principibus* is the thesis (θέσις). In the following, I will go through Roskam's analysis, since it is the most comprehensive discussion of the question of genre, and I will point out the essential features which make him conclude that *Maxime cum principibus* is a διάλεξις. Afterwards, I will turn to the guidelines provided by Aelius Theon in his *Progymnasmata* regarding the genre of the θέσις. Before discussing and concluding on these matters, I will incorporate observations on the structure and composition of the work in order to state that *Maxime cum principibus* most suitably fits the genre of the θέσις. Hence, I am not aiming for a comprehensive philosophical interpretation of *Maxime cum principibus*, but for a decision on the question of its genre.

### ROSKAM'S ANALYSIS

Roskam initiates his analysis by stating that it is not easy to classify a short and mutilated text such as *Maxime cum principibus* under a specific literary genre.<sup>9</sup> He further states that few authors have expressed their opinion on this matter. However, he moves on to argue that a key passage at the beginning of *De unius* can solve the problem. He points out that Plutarch in *De unius* refers to a discourse (διάλεξις) he held the previous day before his students. This discourse dealt with politics.<sup>10</sup> Roskam further states that various scholars have identified the protreptic or hortatory lecture on politics with the Προτρεπτικός πρὸς νέον πλούσιον (n. 27 in the Lamprias catalogue) and the Ὑποθετικός ἢ περὶ ἀρχῆς (n. 153 in the Lamprias catalogue). Roskam argues that this identification seems unlikely. Instead, he goes on to argue that the protreptic discourse referred to in *De unius* should be identified with *Maxime cum principibus*.<sup>11</sup>

Roskam only lines up one argument in favour of the claim that the protreptic discourse referred to in *De unius* should be identified with *Maxime cum principibus*. The argument is that the protreptic character of *Maxime cum principibus* is perfectly clear. Having stated this, he concedes that Plutarch does not actually advise the philosopher to become a politician himself, but merely to become the latter's adviser. However, because of the rather vague conceptual distinction in *Maxime cum principibus* between the public-spirited philosopher and the politician, Roskam regards this objection as meaningless. He further points out that Plutarch in *Maxime cum principibus* is critical of the philosopher who has withdrawn from public affairs. Hence, the conclusion seems obvious to Roskam: In *De unius*, Plutarch refers to *Maxime cum principibus*.<sup>12</sup>

Roskam moves on to state that if he indeed is right, we can also accept the following implications: First, that *Maxime cum principibus* is entirely rooted in Plutarch's teaching activities. Second, that Plutarch's primary target audience is his own students. And third, that the genre of *Maxime cum principibus* is finally clear: Plutarch himself regards it as a philosophical discourse,

---

Graduate School, 1987). For a critical edition cf. M. Patillon and G. Bolognesi, *Aelius Theon: Progymnasmata* (Paris, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 25. In the following, I paraphrase Roskam's text.

<sup>10</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 27.

<sup>12</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 28.

a διάλεξις.<sup>13</sup> Roskam states that the philosophical orientation of the work is evident in the formal definition of philosophy in chapter 1, in the emphasis on the philosopher's interest in character rather than in external advantages (chapter 2), and in the importance attached to consistency (chapter 4). Roskam concludes that even apart from the evidence provided by *De unius*, a careful analysis of *Maxime cum principibus* results in the conclusion that 'the work should be regarded as a philosophical διάλεξις.'<sup>14</sup>

Now, if Roskam is right in these assumptions it should be possible to work through the treatise and confirm these conclusions. And to some extent I agree that this is possible. The treatise could be read as a philosophical discourse. However, to designate something as 'a philosophical discourse' is not a specific indication of its genre. A more precise designation of genre, which could also be used philosophically by an author, would be to call the text a dialogue,<sup>15</sup> a Menippean Satire (or Comedy),<sup>16</sup> poetry<sup>17</sup> and biography.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, I would argue that it is possible to incorporate many more structural and intra-textual observations about essential features in the treatise, which make it stand out as something more specific than a 'mere' discourse.

#### GUIDELINES FROM THEON'S *PROGYMNASMATA*

In the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon, the exercise in thesis (θέσις) is presented as the eleventh and, hence, one of the last exercises of the *Progymnasmata*.<sup>19</sup> There are twelve 'actual' exercises (handed down to us in Greek), and five 'follow-up' or 'elaborating' exercises, which we only have in the Armenian translation of the Greek original.<sup>20</sup> The way Theon works through each exercise

---

<sup>13</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Roskam (n. 1), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the dialogues of Plato and Cicero.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the *Apocolocyntosis (divi) Claudii* by Seneca the Younger or the *Satyricon* by Petronius.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the *Hymn to Zeus* by Cleanthes or Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. On Homer as a philosopher cf. Oration 26 of Maximus of Tyre (Maximus (n. 5), 213–22) and the lost treatise of Favorinus: *On Homer's Philosophy*,

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the biographies of Plutarch and Lucian.

<sup>19</sup> The exercises were increasingly difficult. The first exercise would merely consist of repeating or rephrasing a very short story (διήγημά/διήγησις, μῦθος) or exchange in action/words (χρεία) between two persons. However, the further on the student went with these 'preliminary exercises,' the more advanced and disputative the exercises became. There is a difference of opinion between ancient rhetoricians as to whether the exercise in thesis belonged to the secondary stage of school with the *grammateus* or the tertiary stage of school with the actual rhetor (for the discussion cf. A.D. Booth, 'Elementary and secondary education in the Roman Empire', *Florilegium* 1 (1979), 1–14; A.D. Booth, 'The schooling of slaves in first century Rome', *TAPA* 109 (1979), 11–19; R.A. Kaster, 'Notes on "primary" and "secondary" schools in late antiquity', *TAPA* 113 (1983), 323–46).

<sup>20</sup> The other four extant *Progymnasmata* gathered in Kennedy's translation (the *Progymnasmata* of Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolaus and John of Sardis (with fragments from Sopatros)) basically stick to the twelve exercises with minor variations.

makes them stand out as minor definitions of separate genres on a macro and micro level.<sup>21</sup> By describing and analysing all the various features, elements and characteristics of the exercises, each exercise stands out as a minor genre with defining features. The actualisation of these features in a specific text determines whether the text can be said to participate in a specific genre or whether it falls outside the defining characteristics.

Theon opens the chapter on thesis by defining the concept: ‘Thesis is a reasoned (or verbal) inquiry<sup>22</sup> admitting controversy without specifying any persons and circumstance’ (Θέσις ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα λογικὴν ἀμφισβήτησιν ἐπιδεχόμενον ἄνευ προσώπων καὶ πάσης περιστάσεως).<sup>23</sup> Theon further provides some examples of theses: Whether one should marry, whether one should have children, whether the gods exist. Hence, to conclude on these introductory remarks we can state that a thesis inquires about something in doubt and that it reveals some kind of controversy without specifying any persons or circumstances.

Theon goes on to explain that the student who performs the exercise in thesis can provide prooemia for his theses either from a maxim supporting the thesis or from a proverb or a chreia or a useful saying or a historical report, or from encomion or invective against the thing which is in question. This means that there is often some kind of introduction to a thesis, and that it is possible to draw from a variety of material in the introduction.<sup>24</sup> Theon further states the quite important fact that there is no narration in theses, since there are no circumstances to explain. Hence, from the opening lines of Theon’s passage on thesis we get the impression that a thesis is like a verbal discussion *pro et contra* about something in doubt without any narration. There is simply some proposition being discussed – whether one should marry, whether the gods exist, whether one should engage in politics. But the boundary of the genre is sketched out by the intentional absence of narrative elements.

---

<sup>21</sup> A thesis can be a macro genre in the sense that an entire work can be regarded as a thesis – as is the case with the *Philosophical Orations* by Maximus of Tyre or *De aeternitate mundi* by Philo. A thesis can also be a micro genre in the sense that it constitutes a minor element in a text, cf. for instance the inquiry ‘whether Charicles should marry’ in Achilles Tatius *Leucippe and Clitophon* (1.8) or ‘whether Dorcon or Daphnis is the most beautiful’ in Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* (1.16).

<sup>22</sup> Patillon translates ‘une controverse en parole’ (πρᾶγμα λογικὴν ἀμφισβήτησιν), whereas Kennedy translates ‘a verbal inquiry’ following the Greek manuscripts which read ἐπίσκεψις λογικὴ (cf. Patillon (n. 7), 82; Kennedy (n. 7), 55 n174).

<sup>23</sup> Theon in Patillon (n. 7), 82 ([120]). References by scholars to Theon’s text ordinarily make use of page numbers in volume 2 of Spengel’s *Rhetores Graeci* in square brackets [] (L. Spengel (ed.), *Rhetores Graeci*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1854–6).

<sup>24</sup> For examples of this cf. *Oration* 1, 2, 5, 12, 13 or 25 of Maximus of Tyre (Maximus (n. 5), 5; 17; 42; 108; 116; 207). In order to understand a thesis, it is important to understand what the main proposition being discussed is. Most often, the topic being investigated has been formulated explicitly well before the half-way point, but seldom in the very first sentence. The strategy of opening the thesis with a maxim, a proverb, a myth or a striking image was to sharpen the focus of the addressee. Once this was done, the author had secured the attention and good-will of the reader.

Before introducing the various topics (κεφάλαια) and arguments (ἐπιχειρήματα) constituting the essential features of a thesis, and before providing examples of how to write a thesis, Theon makes a quite important distinction. There are theoretical theses and practical theses. The theoretical theses are for the sake of understanding and knowledge, while the practical theses are more political and have a rhetorical character. Theon states that the theoretical theses are more appropriate for philosophers, whereas the practical theses are more appropriate for students of rhetoric (who are to become lawyers and politicians). This distinction should be understood as part of the conceptual division between a theoretical life (βίος θεωρητικός) and a practical life (βίος πρακτικός), where the theoretical life focuses on abstract λόγος and the practical life focuses on concrete πράξεις. However, Theon does not at this point place more emphasis on the distinction since he adds the notion that students of rhetoric can also write theoretical theses if they start from topics for practical theses [121]. To some extent, then, the one bleeds into the other – theory into praxis and praxis into theory.

The distinction between a theoretical thesis and a practical thesis goes closely together with a previous statement Theon made, which concerns the fact that the end or aim of a thesis is to persuade (τέλος ἐστὶ τὸ πείσαι) [120]. Hence, the aim of a thesis is protreptic or hortatory. Additionally, Theon points out that a thesis is normally spoken in an assembly and a lecture room (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἀκροάσει). This means that the people listening to a thesis are citizens in general or the audience in a lecture room. This information is very important with regard to the observations made by Roskam concerning the genre and the addressees of the *Maxime cum principibus*. And it has a decisive influence in relation to the theme of the work, since *Maxime cum principibus* inquires about the possibility (or obligation) of the philosopher to associate with and influence politicians and men in power – that is, citizens attending the assembly. To sum up on this distinction, then, Theon explains that the theoretical thesis is more appropriate for philosophers, while the practical thesis is more political in character. With regard to *Maxime cum principibus* it is obvious that it draws from both the theoretical and the practical, since it inquires about a philosopher who approaches politics (or men in power). And it is obvious from the argument in *Maxime cum principibus* that the theoretical insight Plutarch addresses to the philosopher-addressee should be translated into concrete action. This means that *Maxime cum principibus* would participate in both the theoretical and the practical life, just as a theoretical thesis could be written by both philosophers and future politicians.

Another defining feature of a thesis is that it does not reveal a personality.<sup>25</sup> Hence, a thesis does not enact a ‘speech-in-character’ or an ‘impersonation’ (προσωποποιία). This is an important and essential feature of a thesis, and it has direct relevance for *Maxime cum principibus* since it specifically points out a genre-defining element of the text. There is no specific person speaking in *Maxime cum principibus*, and neither is any specific person characterised and presenting a point-of-view. The author (Plutarch) and ‘someone else’ (ἕνιοι, 776B) may be said to feature in the text, but ‘Plutarch’ may just as well be substituted with ‘the implied author,’ and ‘someone else’ easily presents itself as a simple rhetorical strategy of the text. So no actual προσωποποιία takes place,

---

<sup>25</sup> Cicero emphasises the same in *De Inventione* 1.1.8: *sine certarum personarum interpositione*.

and this is a decisive factor in the definition of the genre of the thesis. The fact that these ‘literary personas’ are difficult to pin down in *Maxime cum principibus* has made scholars consider it abrupt and mutilated. But there may be a perfectly rational reason for this which aligns itself according to the guidelines of Theon’s *Progymnasmata*: The lack of impersonation is a genre-defining element of a thesis and, hence, is banned from the account.

Theon goes on to explain the most general headings and arguments for a practical thesis. After having explained these, he provides two examples of a thesis, first a practical and then a theoretical thesis. In order to run through the various headings and arguments constituting a thesis, I shall paraphrase Theon’s example of a practical thesis. This example seems extremely suitable since the proposition Theon expounds upon is whether a wise man should engage in politics. This may not be precisely the same theme as the theme of *Maxime cum principibus*, but it is very similar. So some of the content from Theon’s example may actually bleed in to our investigation of *Maxime cum principibus*.

If a student undertakes the assignment of writing a thesis on the question of whether a wise man should engage in politics, Theon explains that he should argue, firstly, that it is *possible* (δυνατὸν).<sup>26</sup> Then he should move on to argue that it is *in accordance with nature and according to the common manners and customs of all mankind* (κατὰ φύσιν καὶ κατὰ τὰ κοινὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἔθνη). Next he should argue that it is *easy* (ῥάδιος) for a wise man to engage in politics, that he is *not the first to have done it and that others have done it before us* (μὴ πρῶτοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλοι πρὸ ἡμῶν). Then he should argue that it is *appropriate* (ἀρμόττει), that it is *just* (δίκαιον) and that it is *reverent* or pleasing to the gods (ὄσιον). He should also argue from what is *necessary* (ἐκ τοῦ ἀναγκαίου), and he should argue that it is *honourable, profitable* and that it contributes to *security* (ἔνδοξον, λυσιτελές, ἀσφάλειαν). He should furthermore argue that it is the start of greater and more beautiful things. Theon then explains that in order to strengthen the case, the student could present the opposite (and bad) perspective, for example that a neglected government suffers a change for the worse. All the arguments presented above can thus be reversed. Finally, Theon points to the headings which concern arguments *from the like or similar* (ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου), *from the lesser* (ἐκ τοῦ ἐλάττονος), *from the greater* (ἐκ τοῦ μείζονος), *from the part* (ἐκ τοῦ μέρους), *from the whole* (ἐκ τοῦ ὅλου), *from the end or the goal* (ἐκ τοῦ τέλους) and *from what is implicit* (ἐκ τῆς

---

<sup>26</sup> It is not absolutely necessary to follow the sequence of headings provided by Theon, since he does not even pass on the same sequence himself in the formal list of the chapter on the thesis and the two examples he provides. Each student should work through the overall line of his own argument and construct it in such a way that it stands as strong as possible. To further add to this point, it should be observed that Theon provides lists of headings and arguments for most of the exercises, and these lists often overlap from exercise to exercise. He also states that it is possible to use headings and arguments from other exercises, even if they are not mentioned in the present exercise. In the exercise on the chreia, Theon states near the end [105] that we can follow the same order of arguments and headings in both refutation and confirmation of the chreia and the maxim, but the advanced student can also go straight to the exercise of the thesis in order to get headings and arguments for the exercise (Τοῖς δὲ ἤδε τελειότεροις προσήκει τὰς ἀφορμὰς λαμβάνειν καὶ ἐκ τῶν πρὸς τὰς θέσεις ἡμῖν παραθησομένων [105]).

περιοχῆς). In sum, these headings and arguments constitute the defining features of the argument of a thesis, and presented in this way – together with the other defining features – they actualise the genre and make it materialise. When I analyse the arguments of *Maxime cum principibus* further down, I refer to the headings and arguments as presented here.

Theon has another important remark which should be mentioned, before we turn to the text in order to identify these features. He states that a more advanced student should include – in each of the topics mentioned – the evidence of famous men, poets and statesmen and philosophers [122]. The advanced student should also include any histories that agree with what is being argued from the proposition. The advanced student should furthermore amplify the examples from what has been done by an individual, by a private man, by those in authority or a king, next by those in the city, and finally from what has been done in certain lands and by foreigners. Hence, the advanced student should not just put forth arguments in a simple way; he should include examples and amplify these examples in order to create a persuasive argument. The question now is if the elements described above can be identified in *Maxime cum principibus*.

#### WHAT IS PLUTARCH ARGUING IN *MAXIME CUM PRINCIPIBUS*?

What is the argument and its basic structure in *Maxime cum principibus*? From an overall perspective, Plutarch argues that a philosopher should not isolate himself from the world but should exert himself to influence the thought and conduct of men in power. Hence, the overall proposition – which someone may doubt – is expressed in the title of the work: A philosopher ought to converse especially with men in power. Plutarch elaborates on this proposition in four minor chapters, each with a different take on the overall proposition. Additionally, the fundamental structure of the work, which cuts across the division into the four chapters, is constituted by a *pro et contra* composition, where Plutarch presents, respectively, his own position and the position of someone else (the ἔνιοι). Whether Plutarch actually has real opponents in view (for instance Epicureans) regarding the ἔνιοι (776B), or if these ἔνιοι merely serve a rhetorical purpose within the work, is unimportant for a decision on the genre of the work. Obviously, this is an important question to decide on for an informed understanding and interpretation of the work and for a historical contextualisation, but it merely plays a minor role with regard to a decision on the genre. Another reason for us not to spend time on it here is that scholars do not agree on it and various solutions have been proposed.<sup>27</sup> Here, however, it is enough for us to establish the point that in the rhetorical strategy of the work the ἔνιοι serves the purpose and function of the ‘*contra*’ in the *pro et contra* sequence of a thesis. I will now work through the four chapters of *Maxime cum principibus* in order to justify the claim that (the majority of) the features of a thesis presented above can be identified in the treatise. I will go through all four chapters in order to show that ‘the plum is in the pudding,’ and in order to render my claim about the genre probable.

Chapter 1: Plutarch opens the argument by presenting his own position in 776A–B, the *pro*: One should act like a man who loves what is noble, who is public-spirited and is a friend of mankind (φιλοκάλων ἐστὶ καὶ πολιτικῶν καὶ φιλανθρώπων). He then moves on to the opponent’s

---

<sup>27</sup> For various positions cf. Roskam (n. 1), 76ff.

position, the *contra*, represented by the ἔνιοι in 776B. The ἔνιοι states that the philosopher merely associates with the ruler because of ambition (φιλοδοξία). However, Plutarch refutes this objection and accuses the ἔνιοι of being ambitious themselves. First, he makes an argument according to common manners in 776B–C (from his point of view), and then he brings in evidence from a famous man, Ariston of Chios (776C). He then moves on to argue his own position, the *pro*, and further amplifies this argument by bringing in evidence from a poet with the quotation from Pindar (776C). From this quotation he moves on to argue from what is pleasant or noble, then he introduces an argument from nature, from what is possible, and again from what is noble (776C). In 776D he moves on to argue from the analogy between a physician and a philosopher, and he further develops this analogy with an argument from the lesser to the greater. When moving into the next paragraph (776E), he brings evidence from a famous man (Heracles) and amplifies this from what others have done before. Then he introduces evidence from a poet and a philosopher in 776E (Homer and Plato) and argues from what is pleasing to the gods. In 776F, he provides an analogy with the plant *eryngium* and from geometry. In 777A, he provides three examples from philosophers (Anaxagoras, Plato, Pythagoras) and two examples from statesmen (Cato the Younger, Scipio). Towards the end of the first chapter, Plutarch once again refutes the position of the ἔνιοι and ends on an open note with a question (777B).

Chapter 2: Plutarch opens chapter 2 by stating that the final end of human speech/reason (λόγος) is friendship (φιλία τέλος ἐστί, 777C). This constitutes both an argument from the end or goal and from what is noble. And it further elaborates on what is appropriate and pleasant – for oneself and the other. This furthermore constitutes an amplification by emotion (πάθος) which develops into the next *pro et contra* regarding the importance of money (777D). Plutarch's position (that money is not the final goal) is supported with evidence from a poet (Pindar) and an argument about what is reverent towards the gods (777D–E). Plutarch further develops the argument by stating that the final end of friendship is not fame. Fame is only a means of gaining trust. This argument is developed from the opposites of the pleasant and the easy and with an analogy to light (777F). More evidence is brought in from a myth (778A) and developed into an argument from the false. Chapter 2 ends with the conclusion that if the right circumstances are present, the philosopher will not hold back from making the man in power his friend (778A), and this is supported with evidence from a poet (Euripides) and with an argument from the lesser to the greater (778B).

Chapter 3: Plutarch opens chapter 3 with a quotation from Aeschylus' *Niobe*. This point of departure sets forth the *pro* position, with Plutarch arguing from what is more pleasant (ἥδιον) and introducing evidence from a famous man (Tantalus) (778C). This position is further developed with evidence from a philosopher (Epicurus) and an argument from the noble and the pleasant. This argument is further developed from what is profitable and beneficial (778D) and with arguments from the opposite. Plutarch thus argues that by associating with the ruler, the philosopher bestows benefits upon many. And he supports this with evidence from a statesman (Apollodorus), with an argument from lesser to greater, from what is noble, beneficial, just and honourable, and also from what is pleasing to the gods (778E–F). Hence, the philosopher who

associates with rulers makes them more just, more moderate, and more eager to do good, so that it is very likely that they are also happier.

Chapter 4: In chapter 4, Plutarch brings in various analogies and examples, basically arguing from the whole, from the goal, from what is noble, just and honourable (779B). The final evidence he puts forth (779B–C) is the story of how Plato went to Sicily in order to fashion and father the true philosopher-king, Dionysius. Even though Plato failed in his effort, because Dionysius was already polluted, Plutarch is confident in his conclusion that philosophy will become law if the philosopher instructs men who are still pure. On this protreptic or hortatory note, Plutarch ends the treatise.

From this analysis it is obvious that the fundamental compositional strategy of *Maxime cum principibus* is the *pro et contra*. As taken from the definition of the thesis, Plutarch presents a reasoned (or verbal) inquiry where he admits controversy without specifying any persons and circumstances. He argues from his own position why it should not be doubted that a philosopher ought to converse especially with men in power – as the headline indicates.<sup>28</sup> It is also quite clear that Plutarch incorporates the majority of headings and arguments described by Theon. Two fundamental features of the treatise should be emphasised: First, that Plutarch does not present any person ‘speaking-in-character’; and second, that any narration takes place, since there are no circumstances to explain in a reasoned inquiry where controversy is admitted. Additionally, Plutarch provides plenty of evidence from famous men, poets, statesmen and philosophers. And he also amplifies the examples. In sum, the majority of genre-defining elements of the thesis are present in *Maxime cum principibus*.

## DISCUSSION

Before concluding on my analysis I want, shortly, to return to some of the arguments put forth by Roskam concerning the genre of *Maxime cum principibus*. Obviously, I agree with him that the treatise can be identified as a philosophical discourse, since Theon states that a theoretical thesis is about understanding and knowledge, and is most suited for philosophers. To some extent, then, this is what *Maxime cum principibus* is. However, Theon does not state anywhere that the philosophical discourse is a genre, and neither does Roskam point to the genre of the thesis in order to claim that *Maxime cum principibus* is a thesis. Neither does Roskam develop any of the features constituting (the argument of) the thesis. Hence, even though a theoretical thesis indeed should be regarded as a philosophical discourse, it is not sufficient for the question of the genre of *Maxime cum principibus* to state that it is a philosophical discourse. We need to be more specific and point out the genre-defining characteristics of the thesis in order, first, to identify *Maxime cum principibus* as a thesis, and then, afterwards, to confirm that it is a philosophical discourse.

I find it problematic that Roskam argues for the definition of the genre of *Maxime cum principibus* from *De unius* for two reasons: First of all, it is problematic that the authenticity of *De unius* is disputed. This circumstance removes or loosens the closeness of *De unius* from the other Plutarchan writings and, hence, also from *Maxime cum principibus*. Roskam is aware of this

---

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Throm points this out regarding the headline, cf. Throm (n. 5), 79.

problem and points to it himself.<sup>29</sup> However, this problem cannot be regarded as essential to the decision on the genre of *Maxime cum principibus*, so we may move on to the next reason. The second reason concerns the fact that it is problematic to argue for the literary genre of a work from text-external evidence. Even if Roskam is right in his conjecture, first of all that *De unius* is authentic, and secondly that the reference in *De unius* actually concerns *Maxime cum principibus*, it would be a stronger case to argue from text-internal evidence within the work itself. No matter what *De unius* (or any other text) may claim about *Maxime cum principibus*, the text would have to perform its own genre in order to participate, actively, in the proposed class of texts belonging to the specific genre. Hence, if *Maxime cum principibus* cannot be categorized as a certain and specific genre, it becomes irrelevant what *De unius* or any other text claims about it.

A final point I want to bring into the discussion of the genre of *Maxime cum principibus* is the plausibility in arguing from Theon's *Progymnasmata*. Why should we consider using Theon's *Progymnasmata* when deciding on the literary genre of Plutarch's treatise? First of all, Theon and Plutarch are roughly contemporaries, and they both kept themselves occupied with literary and rhetorical matters. Obviously, Plutarch went through the system of ancient Greco-Roman literate education and spent time with a grammarian. This makes it extremely plausible that he was introduced to the exercises of the *Progymnasmata*. And since very little variation has been found in the surviving *Progymnasmata*,<sup>30</sup> it can be stated with reasonable plausibility that the *Progymnasmata* Plutarch was trained in looked very similar to the *Progymnasmata* of Theon. Another observation which supports this argument comes from another progymnastic exercise and literary genre: the comparison (σύγκρισις). It is widely acknowledged among scholars of the *parallel lives* that the guidelines of Theon on comparison (σύγκρισις) correspond to what Plutarch performs in the *parallel lives*.<sup>31</sup> Hence, since Plutarch follows the guidelines of the comparison (σύγκρισις), which aligns with the guidelines provided by Theon in his *Progymnasmata*, it is very plausible that he also knew the genre of the thesis and, in consequence, used the same guidelines to compose his theses.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis exhibits the perfect characteristics for Plutarch to express his viewpoints in a specific genre. It is almost as if it fits too well. With the distinction between the theoretical and the practical thesis, Plutarch has the possibility of combining within one genre the βίος θεωρητικός of the philosopher and the βίος πρακτικός of the politician. In this way, the thesis provides him with an opportunity to argue for the consistency between words and deeds in both philosopher and

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Roskam (n. 1), 25 n52.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Webb (n. 6), 289; G.A. Kennedy, 'Introduction' in Kennedy (n. 7), ix–xvi, at ix–xiii; T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 1998), 159.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. D.H.J. Larmour, 'The *Synkrisis*', in M. Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch* (Oxford, 2014), 405–16, at 407; S. Swain, 'Plutarchan *Synkrisis*', *Eranos* 90 (1992), 101–11; D.H.J. Larmour, 'Plutarch's compositional methods in the *Theseus* and *Romulus*', *TAPA* 118 (1988), 361–75, at 364.

politician. The true philosopher is a πολιτικός φιλόσοφος, and the true politician is a philosopher-king as Plato describes him. Consequently, Plutarch can argue that the theoretical life realises and justifies itself in the practical life when the necessary requirements are fulfilled. Because some requirements *are* necessary, which is obvious from the conclusion of the work: The teachings of the philosophers acquire the force of laws and will be accepted *if* they are firmly engraved in and control the souls of the rulers and statesmen (καὶ μὴν οἱ λόγοι τῶν φιλοσόφων ἐὰν ψυχᾶς ἡγεμονικῶν καὶ πολιτικῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐγγραφῶσι βεβαίως καὶ κρατήσωσι νόμων δύναμιν λαμβάνουσιν, 779B). Hence, only if the rulers and the statesmen are attentive and sympathetic to the words of the philosopher will they succeed – and that is why Plato failed. On this note we can end the examination of the genre of *Maxime cum principibus* by pointing to another Plutarchan thesis which wonders about the question of ‘whether virtue can be taught’?