

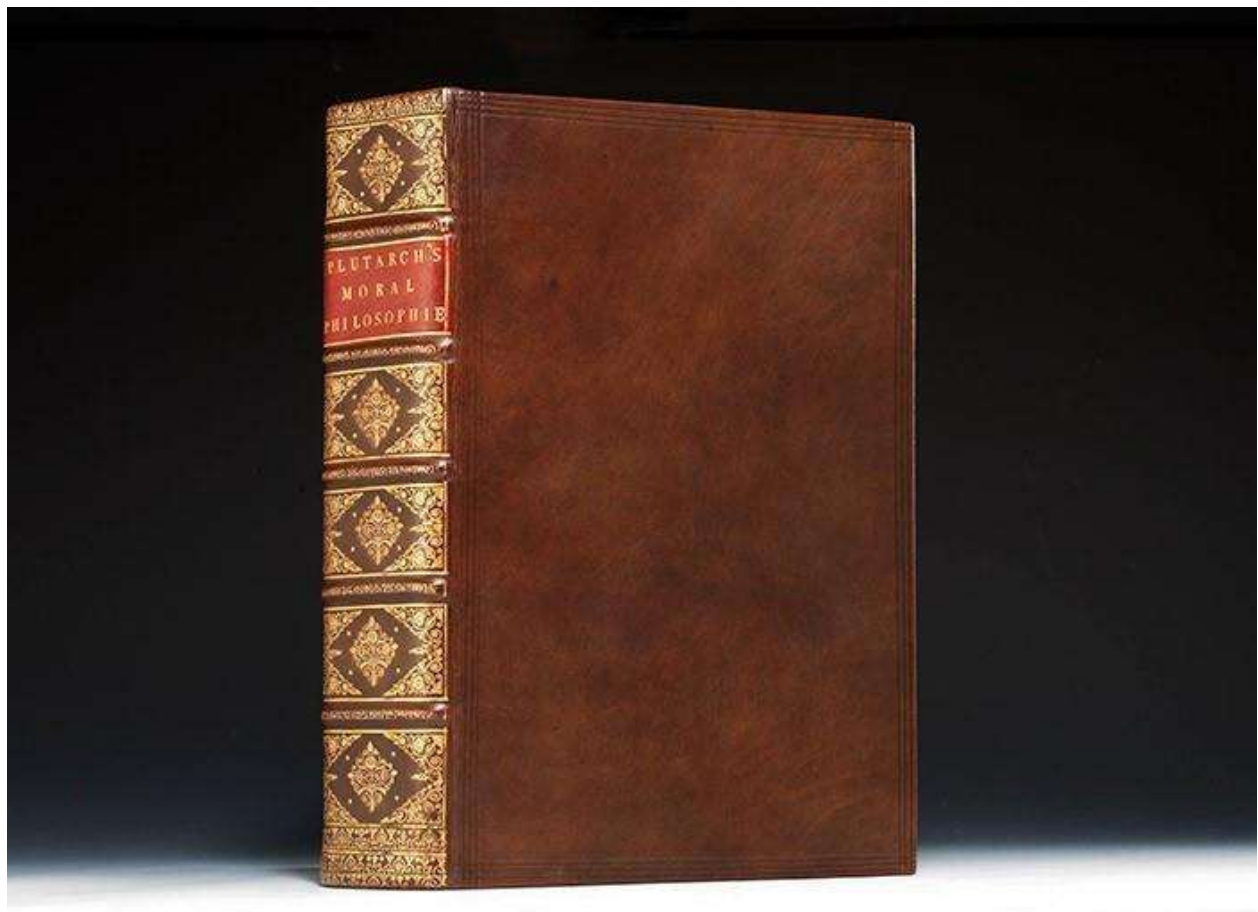
"The Philosophie commonlie called 'The Morals'" by Plutarch, translated (1603) out of Greeke into English... by Philemon Holland....: A Canonical Book

First English edition curated by Stephen A Batman

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Summary of this Particular Rare First Edition

Plutarch, The Philosophie; commonlie called, The Morals... Translated out of Greeke into English... by Philemon Holland...., 1603





THE
PHILOSOPHIE,
commonlie called,
THE
MORALS

WRITTEN BY
the learned Philosopher
PLUTARCH
of *Cheronea*.

Translated out of Greeke into English, and conferred
with the *Latine translations and the French*,
by PHILEMON HOLLAND of
Coventrie, Doctor in
Physicke.

*Wherunto are annexed the Summaries necessary to be
read before every Treatise.*

Doctus. Gaudet.



AT LONDON
Printed by *Arnold Hatsfield*.
1603 206.

“A PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON RENAISSANCE THINKING”: IMPORTANT 1603 FIRST EDITION IN ENGLISH OF PLUTARCH’S *MORALS*

First edition in English of Plutarch’s complete Moralia, containing all of the famous philosopher’s surviving writings on ethical, religious, physical, political, and literary topics.

The ideas Plutarch expressed in the *Morals* exerted a profound influence on Renaissance thinking. They revived the rational moral philosophy of the ancients while providing an indispensable contemporary account of Greek political life. This important first English language edition, "a most accurate translation" by Holland, contains over 70 essays, primarily in dialogue form (Lowndes, 1891). "Holland's translations are faithful and readable.

Fuller designates him the 'translator general in his age' (DNB). This translation greatly influenced the 1612 edition of Bacon's *Essays*, which contain counsels on public morality and private virtue recognizably derived from Plutarch. Most of Holland's translations were issued in heavy folios such as this, leading Pope to describe the "groaning shelves" bending under the weight of Holland's works. Includes "Of the Nouriture and Education of Children," "Of Brotherly Love," "Of Superstition," "Instructions for them that manage affaires of State," "Whether an aged man ought to manage publike affaires" and "The vertuous deeds of Women." With decorative woodcut head- and tailpieces and historiated initials. With errata. STC 20063. Brueggemann, 320. Old owner signature to title page, scattered marginalia.

PLUTARCH. The Philosophie; commonlie called, The Morals... Translated out of Greeke into English... by Philemon Holland.... London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603. Thick folio (8-1/2 by 13 inches), period style full brown calf gilt, red Morocco spine label, raised bands. Housed in a custom clamshell box.

Occasional minor marginal closed tears. A near-fine copy in a beautiful period style binding.

Introduction

"The Philosophie commonlie called, The Morals" by Plutarch, translated into English by Philemon Holland in 1603, represents a seminal work in the transmission of classical wisdom to the English-speaking world. This monumental translation, published during the reign of James I, marked a significant milestone in the accessibility of Plutarch's ethical writings to a broader audience beyond the confines of Greek and Latin scholarship[6].

The book emerged during a period of intellectual ferment in England, coinciding with the transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean era. This was a time of expanding horizons, both geographically and intellectually, as England sought to establish itself as a major European power. The publication of Holland's translation reflected the growing appetite for classical learning among the English gentry and educated classes, who saw in ancient wisdom a guide for contemporary moral and political conduct[6].

Holland's motivation for undertaking this massive translation project was multifaceted. As a physician and scholar, he was deeply committed to making classical knowledge accessible to his countrymen. His dedication to King James I in the preface of the book suggests a desire to align this work with the new monarch's own scholarly interests and to contribute to the intellectual prestige of the English court[6].

The cultural climate of early 17th century England was ripe for such a work. The Renaissance had kindled a renewed interest in classical learning, and Plutarch's moral essays offered practical wisdom on a wide range of topics relevant to the educated classes of the time. Economically, the growth of printing and literacy was creating new markets for vernacular translations of classical texts. Politically, Plutarch's emphasis on virtue and good governance resonated with the ideals of civic humanism that were gaining currency among England's ruling elite[5].

The Author

Plutarch, the original author of "The Morals," was a Greek philosopher, biographer, and essayist who lived from approximately 46 to 120 CE. Born in the small town of Chaeronea in central Greece, Plutarch's life spanned a period of relative peace and prosperity under the Roman Empire, known as the Pax Romana[3].

Plutarch's education was extensive, including studies in Athens under the philosopher Ammonius. He traveled widely throughout the Roman world, including visits to Egypt and Italy. In Rome, he lectured on philosophical topics and formed connections with prominent Roman citizens, eventually gaining Roman citizenship himself[3].

Despite his travels and connections in Rome, Plutarch remained deeply committed to his hometown of Chaeronea, where he held various civic positions, including archon (magistrate) and priest of Apollo at nearby Delphi. This blend of local commitment and cosmopolitan experience informed his writings, which often drew parallels between Greek and Roman culture[3].

Plutarch was a prolific writer, producing works on a wide range of topics including ethics, religion, politics, and natural phenomena. His most famous works are the "Parallel Lives," biographies of famous Greeks and Romans, and the "Moralia," a collection of essays and dialogues on ethical, political, and literary subjects[4].

The "Moralia," which forms the basis of Holland's translation, showcases Plutarch's broad learning and his practical approach to philosophy. These essays reflect Plutarch's belief in the importance of virtue, education, and civic responsibility, themes that would later resonate strongly with Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers[9].

Why this is a Canonical Book

"The Philosophie commonlie called, The Morals" by Plutarch, as translated by Philemon Holland, is unquestionably a canonical book that has profoundly influenced American politics, governance, economics, and culture. Its inclusion in the canon is justified by several key factors:

Firstly, Plutarch's work, particularly as presented in Holland's accessible English translation, played a crucial role in shaping the moral and political thought of America's Founding Fathers. The ethical principles and examples of civic virtue expounded in "The Morals" deeply influenced the architects of American democracy[10]. Plutarch's emphasis on moral character, civic duty, and the responsibilities of leadership resonated strongly with the Founders' vision for the new republic[12].

Secondly, the book's exploration of virtue, both personal and civic, aligns closely with core American values. Plutarch's discussions on courage, justice, temperance, and prudence provided a philosophical foundation for the concept of republican virtue that became central to American political discourse. This emphasis on character and moral integrity in public life continues to shape expectations of leadership in American politics[11].

Thirdly, Plutarch's method of using historical examples to illustrate moral principles had a profound impact on American political rhetoric and education. The use of classical allusions and historical analogies, drawn often from Plutarch's works, became a hallmark of American political discourse, influencing everything from the Federalist Papers to presidential speeches[5].

Fourthly, the book's emphasis on education as a cornerstone of good citizenship aligns closely with the American ideal of an informed and engaged citizenry. Plutarch's belief in the importance of moral and intellectual development for effective participation in public life echoes through American educational philosophy[10].

Lastly, the comparative approach employed by Plutarch in examining Greek and Roman figures provided a model for cross-cultural understanding that has been valuable in America's multicultural context. This approach encouraged a broader, more inclusive view of history and human achievement, which has been important in shaping America's self-conception as a diverse nation[11].

In sum, "The Morals" stands as a canonical work because it provided a moral and philosophical framework that has been integral to the development of American political thought, civic culture, and educational ideals. Its influence, both direct and indirect, continues to be felt in contemporary American discourse on leadership, citizenship, and public virtue.

Five Timeless Quotes

1. "Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstaining from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of soul or mind the first man did so, touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, he who set forth tables of dead, stale bodies and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived."[7]

This quote from Plutarch's essay on vegetarianism remains strikingly relevant in our current times. It challenges us to reflect on our dietary choices and their ethical implications, a topic of increasing importance in the face of climate change and animal welfare concerns. Plutarch's words invite us to question long-held practices and consider the moral dimensions of our relationship with other living beings.

2. "By the aid of philosophy you will live not unpleasantly, for you will learn to extract pleasure from all places and things: wealth will make you happy, because it will enable you to benefit many; and poverty, as you will not then have many anxieties; and glory, for it will make you honoured; and obscurity, for you will then be safe from envy."[7]

This quote encapsulates Plutarch's practical approach to philosophy as a guide for living well. It speaks to our contemporary struggles with work-life balance, the pursuit of happiness, and the pressures of social status. Plutarch's wisdom suggests that true contentment comes not from external circumstances, but from our internal perspective and how we choose to engage with the world around us.

3. "For good natural parts are impaired by sloth; while inferior ability is mended by training; and while simple things escape the eyes of the careless, difficult things are reached by painstaking."[7]

This insight into the value of education and perseverance resonates strongly in our meritocratic society. It challenges the notion of innate talent as the sole determinant of success and emphasizes the importance of effort and continuous learning. In an era of rapid technological change and economic uncertainty, Plutarch's words remind us of the transformative power of dedicated study and practice.

4. "Friends and kindred should be the good and virtuous [of all mankind], and that the vicious only should be accounted foreigners. Nor ... Greeks and barbarians should be distinguished by long garments, targets, scimitars, or turbans; but that the Grecians should be known by their virtue and courage, and the barbarians by their vices and their cowardice."[7]

This quote is remarkably pertinent to our globalized world, challenging notions of nationalism and xenophobia. Plutarch advocates for a universal ethic based on virtue rather than nationality

or culture. In an age of increasing international tensions and cultural conflicts, this perspective offers a powerful alternative, emphasizing our shared humanity and the importance of moral character over superficial differences.

5. "For just as in farming the first requisite is good soil, next a good farmer, next good seed, so also here: the soil corresponds to natural ability, the training to the farmer, the seed to precepts and instruction." [7]

This analogy between education and agriculture provides a holistic view of human development that remains relevant today. It acknowledges the interplay between innate abilities, environmental factors, and formal instruction in shaping an individual's growth. In our ongoing debates about education reform and equality of opportunity, Plutarch's insight reminds us of the complex, multifaceted nature of learning and personal development.

Five Major Ideas

1. The Importance of Moral Education

Plutarch emphasizes the crucial role of education in shaping moral character. He argues that virtue is not innate but can be cultivated through proper instruction and practice. This idea has profound implications for educational philosophy, suggesting that schools should focus not just on imparting knowledge, but on developing ethical reasoning and moral behavior [9].

2. The Unity of Virtue

Plutarch presents the concept that virtues are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. He suggests that cultivating one virtue naturally leads to the development of others. This holistic view of moral character challenges compartmentalized approaches to ethics and encourages a more integrated understanding of personal development [9].

3. The Relationship Between Individual and Society

Plutarch explores the tension between personal ambition and civic duty. He argues that true excellence (arete) involves not just personal achievement, but also contribution to the common good. This idea remains central to debates about citizenship and social responsibility in modern democracies [11].

4. The Power of Historical Example

Plutarch's method of using historical figures to illustrate moral principles is a key feature of his work. He believed that studying the lives of great individuals could provide practical guidance for ethical behavior. This approach to moral education through biography has had a lasting impact on how we understand and teach history and ethics [11].

5. The Importance of Self-Reflection

Throughout "The Morals," Plutarch emphasizes the value of self-examination and self-improvement. He encourages readers to critically assess their own behavior and motivations, arguing that such introspection is essential for moral growth. This focus on self-awareness and personal responsibility remains a key theme in modern psychology and self-help literature[9].

Three Major Controversies

1. Plutarch's Views on Women

While Plutarch was in some ways progressive for his time in his treatment of women, his views still reflect the patriarchal norms of ancient society. His essay "Advice to the Bride and Groom," for instance, contains recommendations that modern readers might find restrictive or even misogynistic. This has led to debates about how to interpret and apply Plutarch's moral teachings in a contemporary context that values gender equality[3].

2. Cultural Bias

Plutarch's work, rooted in Greco-Roman culture, has been criticized for its Eurocentric perspective. His comparisons between Greek and Roman figures, while innovative for his time, often neglect or downplay the achievements of other civilizations. This has sparked discussions about the limitations of classical education and the need for more diverse, global perspectives in moral and political philosophy[11].

3. Idealization of the Past

Plutarch's tendency to idealize certain historical figures and past societies has been a point of contention. Critics argue that this romanticization of history can lead to an oversimplified understanding of complex historical realities and potentially reinforce conservative or reactionary political ideologies. This criticism touches on broader debates about the use and misuse of history in political discourse[10].

In Closing

Civic-minded Americans should read "The Philosophie commonlie called, The Morals" by Plutarch for several compelling reasons. Firstly, this work provides invaluable insights into the philosophical foundations of American democracy. Many of the moral and political ideas expounded by Plutarch deeply influenced the Founding Fathers and continue to shape American political thought[10]. By engaging with this text, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the classical roots of American civic ideals.

Secondly, Plutarch's emphasis on civic virtue and moral character in leadership remains highly relevant in today's political climate. His explorations of ethical decision-making, the responsibilities of power, and the importance of education for good citizenship offer timeless wisdom that can inform contemporary debates about governance and public service[12].

Thirdly, the comparative approach employed by Plutarch, examining both Greek and Roman examples, provides a model for cross-cultural understanding that is particularly valuable in America's diverse society. This approach encourages readers to think beyond cultural boundaries and consider universal principles of good governance and ethical behavior[11].

Furthermore, Plutarch's accessible style and use of historical examples make complex philosophical ideas more approachable. This can help readers develop critical thinking skills and ethical reasoning abilities that are essential for active citizenship in a democracy[10].

Lastly, by engaging with this canonical text, civic-minded Americans can participate in a centuries-long dialogue about virtue, leadership, and the common good. This connection to a broader intellectual tradition can enrich public discourse and foster a deeper appreciation for the ongoing project of American democracy.

In conclusion, reading "The Morals" offers civic-minded Americans an opportunity to engage with foundational ideas that have shaped their nation's political and moral landscape. It provides historical perspective, ethical guidance, and intellectual stimulation that can inform and inspire active citizenship in the contemporary world.

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