

Michael C. MASCIO Aristippus, Ulysses, and the Philosophus Polutropos in Horace Epistles I

Horace is well known as a poet of obfuscation and this is, at first glance, particularly true of his presentation of his moral meanderings in his first book of Epistles. But where initially Horace seems to veil his purposes in conflicting terms closer inspection reveals both a unity and clarity in his approach. The intent of this paper is to highlight how the carefully constructed binding together of Aristippus and Ulysses, both figures renowned for their adaptability and *autarkeia*, acts as a key to unlocking Epistle I's ethical and aesthetic character.

Mayer(1986) was sensitive to Aristippus' importance as an exemplary figure and Gigante(1993) saw some initial links in philosophy of life between Aristippus, Ulysses, and Horace himself. These works both focus on what Aristippus meant to Horace. While this is important to my work as well, I am focused more upon the structural and verbal linkages Horace utilizes to make us see how Aristippus and Ulysses together help to define Horace's own ethical perspective.

The opening sections of the initial two poems seem to present competing models to follow. In the first poem Horace, in turning away from lyric('nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono')(I.1.10), imagines a poetry of ethics in the epistolary verse form('quid verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum')(I.1.11), imitative of Epicurus and others who found the letter suited to ethical encouragement. The figure he adopts as his model in this first epistle is drawn from the world of the Greek philosophers. It is Aristippus, not *qua* Cyrenaic hedonist but rather as the remarkably adaptable and resourceful biographical figure Diogenes Laertius portrays him as, whom Horace mostly readily identifies with(I.1.14-19). However, in the very next epistle, Horace tells us that a poet, namely Homer, is to be preferred to any philosopher as an instructor on morals(I.2.1-4). It is now Ulysses, Homer's character, who comes to the fore as moral exemplar(I.2.17-31). Horace claimed to be giving up poetry for ethics only to turn around and claim poetry as a superior form of moral instruction. But the seeming conflict between the pursuits of philosophy and poetry yields in the course of Epistles I to a mutually-beneficial symbiosis exemplified in the shared ethical approach of Aristippus, Ulysses, and Horace himself.

The links between the three are very carefully forged. Horace portrays himself and Aristippus, who considered himself everywhere a *xenos*(Xen. Mem. II.1.13, Mannebach 84), as *hospes* figures in philosophical terms(I.1.15). Ulysses is, of course, the central *xenos* figure in the Graeco-Roman literary world. All three then are philosophical journeyman, adaptable to place and circumstance. Structurally speaking it can be no accident that each of the two central figures of the first two programmatic poems appear by name for the first time in the eighteenth lines of their respective poems, a subtle but very Horatian way of hinting at the crucial similarity of the two. But most importantly it is through the careful verbal reminiscences and echoes that Aristippus and Ulysses are matched with Horace and each other. Hopefully a few examples from the numerous ones available will suffice. In I.2.29 the Phaeacian youths at Alcinoos' court are described as 'in cute curanda plus aequo operata iuventus'. The figure contrasted to these hyper-luxuriant youths is Ulysses, the *contemptor voluptatis* himself. In the famous fourth epistle Horace mocks himself as 'me pinguem et nitidum bene curate cute'(I.4.15). He has fallen into luxurious habits and finds himself not the Ulysses he set forth as a model to measure himself against but rather one of those Phaeacians in contrast to whom he set up Ulysses as his moral 'exemplar'(I.2.18). In I.17.23 Horace claims that 'omnis Aristippum decuit color et status et res', the most succinct statement of the polutropic adaptability and *autarkeia* that Horace espouses so highly in these letters. This line is Horace's translation of Diogenes Laertius(D.L. II 66, Mannebach 29); but it also necessarily recalls Aristippus' own adoption of Odysseus as a model for his 'way of life'(Ps.-Plut. De vita et poesi Hom. II 250, Mannebach 30). In turn Horace makes the analogy between himself and Aristippus in mode of life very clear with the first person pronoun repetitions used of himself in I.1.19 'mihi res, non me rebus subiungere', I.1.27 'restat ut his ego me ipse regam solerque elementis' and the matching 'scurror ego me ipse mihi, populo tu' used of Aristippus at I.17.19, a point recognized by Mayer(1994).

Select Bibliography

- Gigante, Marcello. 'Quel che Aristippo non aveva detto' *RDSA* 48(1993) 267-80
- Johnson, W.R. *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom: Readings in Epistles I*(Cornell, 1983)
- Kilpatrick, R.S. *The Poetry of Friendship: Horace, Epistles I*(Edmonton, 1986)
- La Penna, A. 'Towards a History of the Poetic Catalogue of Philosophical Themes' in S.J. Harrison(ed.) *Homage to Horace*(Oxford, 1995) 314-328
- Macleod, C.W. 'The Poetry of Ethics: Horace, Epistles I, in *Collected Essays*(Oxford 1983) 280-91
- Maguiness, W.S. 'The eclecticism of Horace' *Hermathena* 52(1938) 27-46
- Mannebach, Erich. *Aristippi et Cyrenaicorum Fragmenta*. (Leiden, 1961)
- Mayer, R.G. 'Horace's Epistles I and philosophy' *AJP* 107(1986) 55-73
- *Horace: Epistles Book I*(Commentary)(Cambridge, 1994)
- 'Horace's Moyon de Parvenir', in S.J. Harrison(ed.) *Homage to Horace*(Oxford 1995) 279-95
- McGann, M.J.C. *Studies in Horace's First Book of Epistles*(Brussels, 1969)
- Moles, John. 'Cynicism in Horace, Epistles I' *PLLS* 5:33-60(1985)
- Rudd, N. 'Horace as a Moralist', in N. Rudd(Ed.) *Horace 2000: a celebration*(Essays for the bimillennium) (London 1993)
- Traina, A. 'Orazio e Aristippo – Le Epistole e l'arte di convivere' *RFIC* 119(1991) 285-305