

Plutarch

Biography / Overview

Plutarch (Greek: Πλούταρχος, Latin: Plutarchus) was a Greek Middle Platonist philosopher, historian, biographer, essayist, and priest at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. Born around 46 CE in Chaeronea, Boeotia (central Greece), he came from a prominent local family and received an education, studying philosophy, rhetoric, and ethics in Athens. Plutarch traveled widely, including at least one visit to Rome, where he met officials and scholars, yet remained deeply attached to his Greek heritage and home city, serving as a priest at Delphi for much of his life. His works, especially the *Parallel Lives* and *Moralia*, influenced essay, biography, and historical writing in Europe from the Renaissance onward. [1](#) [2](#) [3](#)

Bibliography / Primary Sources

Major Published Works

Parallel Lives (Bioi Paralleloi, ca. 100–120 CE): Paired biographies of Greek and Roman figures, exploring their virtues, flaws, and ethical lessons.

Moralia (Ethica, ca. 100–120 CE): A collection of over 70 essays and dialogues on ethics, religion, politics, education, and philosophy.

Other notable works include:

On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander the Great

On the Worship of Isis and Osiris

On the Face Which Appears in the Orb of the Moon

On the Decline of the Oracles

Key Manuscript and Archaeological Sources

Original Greek manuscripts of *Parallel Lives* and *Moralia* survive in various forms, with major editions and translations available through university libraries and digital archives. [2](#) [3](#) [4](#)

Birth Date / Death Date

Born: ca. 46 CE, Chaeronea, Boeotia, Greece

Died: After 119 CE (most likely between 120–125 CE) [1](#) [2](#) [5](#)

Notable / Best-Known For

Author of *Parallel Lives*, a foundational work of comparative biography.

Author of *Moralia*, a vast collection of philosophical and ethical essays.

Bridging Greek and Roman intellectual traditions during the early Roman Empire.

Influencing Western literature, philosophy, and historical writing for nearly two millennia. 1 3 6

Famous Quotes

“The whole life of man is but a point of time; let us enjoy it.” (*Moralia*)

<https://quotefancy.com/plutarch-quotes/page/2>

“Nature without learning is blind, learning apart from nature is fractional, and practice in the absence of both is aimless.” (*Moralia*)

<https://quotefancy.com/plutarch-quotes/page/2>

“Not by lamentations and mournful chants ought we to celebrate the funeral of a good man, but by hymns, for in ceasing to be numbered with mortals he enters upon the heritage of a diviner life.” (*Moralia*)

<https://quotefancy.com/plutarch-quotes/page/2>

Major Works / Textual Contents

Parallel Lives (ca. 100–120 CE)

Paired biographies of Greek and Roman figures (e.g., Alexander the Great & Julius Caesar, Theseus & Romulus).

Each pair is followed by a comparison essay.

Focuses on moral character, decision-making, and the impact of virtue on public life.

Surviving *Lives* include Solon, Themistocles, Pericles, Alcibiades, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Cicero, and many more. 2 3

Moralia (ca. 100–120 CE)

Over 70 essays and dialogues.

Topics: ethics, politics, education, religion, superstition, friendship, cosmology, theology.

Notable essays: *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance*, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, *On the Face in the Moon*, *On the Worship of Isis and Osiris*. 2 3

Influences / Intellectual Context

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Legacy and Modern Significance

Parallel Lives and *Moralia* have shaped the genres of biography, historical narrative, and moral philosophy.

Plutarch's works were central to Renaissance humanism and influenced major figures such as Shakespeare (who drew on Plutarch for *Julius Caesar*), Montaigne, and Emerson.

His approach to character and virtue remains a model for biographers and historians.

Ongoing debates focus on the reliability of his sources, his blending of fact and moral reflection, and his impact on Western ideas of leadership and virtue. 1 6 8

Modern Moments / Impact on 21st Century

Parallel Lives and *Moralia* remain widely available in print and digital editions (e.g., Loeb Classical Library, Perseus Digital Library, Project Gutenberg).

Plutarch's works are core reading in classical studies, philosophy, and literature courses at universities worldwide (evidence: publicly available syllabi).

2001–Present: Annual conferences and scholarly societies (e.g., International Plutarch Society) continue to promote research and debate on his legacy.

2020s: New annotated translations and critical editions published by major academic presses.

Plutarch's influence is visible in modern leadership studies, ethics curricula, and popular culture references. 6

Suggested Reading and Resources

A. Secondary Literature (Scholarship)

Duff, Timothy E. *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Pelling, Christopher. *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies*. Classical Press of Wales, 2002.

Stadter, Philip A. *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*. Routledge, 1992.

Nikolaïdis, Anastasios G., ed. *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: Moralia, Themes, and Techniques*.

Walter de Gruyter, 2008.

B. Archival or Online Sources

“Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*,” Perseus Digital Library (public domain).

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman>

“Plutarch Archive,” University of Oxford, digital collection of manuscripts and correspondence.

<https://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/plutarch>

“Plutarch’s *Moralia* PDF Edition,” Loeb Classical Library (freely downloadable).

<https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL222/1927/volume.xml>