



Study Guide on Plutarch's *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*

QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. As far as you can tell, who is Plutarch's intended audience? What is he preparing them for?
2. What are the key similarities and essential differences between flatterers and friends? What is the single most important sign of a flatterer?
3. Plutarch says that great people are flattered most. Are only those in power or can everyone be flattered?
4. What role does self-knowledge play in detecting flatterers and friends?
5. Plutarch uses many metaphors and examples from history and literature. What kind of metaphors tend to illustrate flatterers and friends? What is he trying to do in these examples?
6. Plutarch says that one should make excuses and offer good motives for the bad actions you correct. Is that just lying? What is the essential difference between the art of the flatterer and the art of candor?

QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

1. Introduction
 - §1. **Self-love & self-knowledge:** *What is the basis of flattery? Who is one's greatest enemy? What impedes self-knowledge?*
 - §2. **Thesis:** avoid flatterers & seek friends: *Who are flattered the most? Why should one prepare for flattery?*
2. The Nature of Flattery
 - §3. **Artless Flatterer:** *Which kind of flatterer is easiest to catch?*
 - §4. **Artful Flatterer:** *Why is it difficult to discern whether someone is a flatterer or a friend?*
 - §5. **Difficulty of detecting a flatterer:** *What is the flatterer's most clever tactic?*
 - §6. **Flatterer's tactics of flattering:** *What is the flatterer's method of flattering? What metaphor illustrates this method?*
3. Discerning a Flatterer's Tactics in Liberal (seemingly for their own sake) Actions by...
 - §7. **Looking for inconsistency in their principles and behavior**
 - §8. **Changing what you praise and censure and see if they follow:** *How can this means be licit?*
 - §9. **Checking if they imitate and praise you indiscriminately:** *What qualities do flatters tend to imitate?*
 - §10. **Seeing if they fall behind in imitating your virtues and outstrip you in imitating your vices**
4. Discerning a Flatterer's Tactics in Pleasant Actions by...
 - §11. **Listening if they please just for the sake of pleasing, not benefiting:** *How do you please in order to benefit?*
 - §12. **Listening if they praise character for just a deed, not the deed itself:** *Why can praising character corrupt?*
 - §13. **Listening if they praise on a third party's account:** *What striking metaphor illustrates this advice?*
 - §14. **Listening if they praise vice and censure virtue:** *What new tactic does a flatterer take towards a counselor?*



- §15. Seeing if they take important places or things only to relinquish them to you: *Can service be selfish?*
- §16. Listening if they praise qualities that you do not have: *Does detecting a flatter depend upon self-knowledge?*
- §17. Listening if they are outspoken about things that give no pain to you: *Why is outspokenness attractive?*
- §18. Listening if they are outspoken about things that only give you pleasure
- §19. Listening if they accuse your virtues as vice or vices as virtue
- §20. **Seeing what part of your soul they work upon** *What powers of soul do friends and flatterers work upon?*
- 5. Discerning a Flatterer's Tactics in Useful Actions by
 - §21. **Seeing if their service is ostentatious** *What virtue characterizes a friend's service and vice a flatter's service?*
 - §22. Listening if their promises are hasty, facile, and unqualified: *What role does modesty play in service?*
 - §23. Seeing if the services they render are unhonorable: *What aim should services to friends have?*
 - §24. Seeing if they get envious of other friends' services: *How does the flatterer destroy friendships with others?*
- 6. Introduction on the Art of Candor
 - §25. **Friends with the art of candor in the quest for self-knowledge** *Do corrections need tact?*
 - §26. Candor's need to be free from self-love or self-interest: *Why is appealing about genuine goodwill?*
 - §27. Candor's need to be free from ridicule: *Should one correct jokingly or seriously?*
 - §28. **The need for friends in prosperity and adversity:** *What can friends offer in prosperity? In adversity?*
- 7. Times and Places for Candor
 - §29. **General occasions one should vehemently correct:** *When should friends be emphatic in their candor?*
 - §30. Particular occasions one should vehemently correct: *What can signal a particular moment for candor?*
 - §31. Using others' accusations as an opportunity to correct: *What is the value of indirect correction?*
 - §32. **Candor in places:** *Should one correct in public or in private? When should you correct in public, if at all?*
- 8. Guidelines for Candor
 - §33. Include yourself as guilty of the same fault you are correcting: *What role does sympathy play in candor?*
 - §34. Do not respond to a rebuke with a rebuke but listen patiently: *What is the "flame" that he speaks of here?*
 - §35. Do not look for or correct every fault, just the big ones: *How do you then address the little faults?*
 - §36. **Do not only correct but also praise; offer excuses and good motives for bad actions:** *What medical metaphors does he use to illustrate the art of candor?*
- 9. Conclusion
 - §37. **Do not immediately leave the one you correct, but smooth your correction by following up and doing something different together:** *How does this section serve as a conclusion?*

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Plutarch's *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.