

Explanation of failure or success in tragic philosopher who collides with fate, and in good luck, although he is not, more tangible, interpretations

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PLUTARCH'S CONCEPT OF HISTORY: PHILOSOPHY FROM EXAMPLES

Plutarch's interest in historiography is apparent from his polemic *On the Malice of Herodotus* which, together with Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *On Thucydides* and Lucian of Samosata's *How to Write History*, is one of the three full-length treatises on the writing of history to survive from the Graeco-Roman world¹. According to the so-called Lamprias Catalogue, Plutarch also wrote Πῶς κρινοῦμεν τὴν ἀληθῆ ἱστορίαν (no. 124 in the Catalogue) which may be connected with another lost essay of his, Πῶς κρινοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (no. 225 of the Catalogue)². Perhaps as Konrat Ziegler has suggested, these works stood in a relationship of the particular to the general («im Verhältnis des Speziellen zum Allgemeinen»)³. But even though Plutarch had a great interest in historiography, he is usually not considered a historian⁴, and that he did not regard himself as such, seems clear from his introduction to the parallel lives *Alexander-Caesar* (1.2-3):

For it is not histories (ἱστορίας) that I am writing, but lives (βίους)⁵; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of

¹ For recent assessments of Plutarch's treatise on Herodotus, see A.J. BOWEN, *Plutarch. The Malice of Herodotus*, Warminster 1992; J.P. HERSHBELL, *Plutarch and Herodotus. The Beetle In The Rose*, *RhM* 136 (1993), p. 143-163; and J.M. MARINCOLA, *Plutarch's Refutation of Herodotus*, *AncW* 25 (1994), p. 191-203. For further study of Lucian's *How to Write History*, see G. AVERNARIUS, *Lukians Schrift zur Geschichtsschreibung*, Meisenheim/Glan 1956. Treatises on history (περὶ ἱστορίας) were also attributed to Theophrastus and Praxiphanes, both Peripatetics. Theophrastus' work is listed at Diogenes Laertius V 47. F.W. WALBANK rejected Averniarius' claim that Theophrastus' treatise could not have been about historical writing; see *Gnomon* 29 (1957), p. 416-419.

² See K. ZIEGLER's discussion of the Catalogue in *RE* XXI (1951), cols. 696-702 s.v. *Plutarchos*.

³ For Ziegler's brief remarks, see *ibid.*, col. 903.

⁴ When introducing *Essays on Plutarch's Lives*, Oxford 1995, p. 17, B. SCARDIGLI writes: «one must conclude that Plutarch's Greek *Lives* occupy a fluid and intermediate position in the history of biography. If anything, they approximate more closely to the work of a historian».

⁵ As D.A. RUSSELL, *Plutarch*, London 1973, p. 102, observed, «*bios* means roughly, 'way of life,' whether in an individual or in a society... It also has some connotations of ordinary life, and is associated with the realm of comedy rather than with the grand topics of epic or, for that matter, history... Thus to describe the *bios* of a great man was to say 'what sort of man he was' (*ποιος τίς ἐστιν*) and to regard him, in a sense, as one of ourselves».

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virtue or vice (δήλωσις ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας), nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments or sieges of cities⁶.

Much as portrait painters focus on their subjects' eyes in which the character (τὸ ἦθος) shows itself, so Plutarch claims to be concerned with the manifestations or signs of the human psyche (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα), leaving it to others to describe great contests or struggles (ἀγῶνας)⁷.

Character (τὸ ἦθος) remains a focal point of Plutarch's *Lives*, and in *Nicias* where he relies much on Thucydides and Philistus for their accounts of Nicias' deeds (πράξεις), he declares that these deeds reveal Nicias' temperament and disposition (τὸν τρόπον καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν, l.5). Besides the works of Thucydides and Philistus, Plutarch also claims to have examined votive offerings and public decrees, not gathering this information as useless research or history (ἄχρηστος ἱστορία), but as material for insight into character and temperament (πρὸς κατανόησιν ἥθους καὶ τρόπου)⁸. Moreover, at the very beginning of *Nicias*, Plutarch comments on Timaeus of Tauromenium's attempt to surpass the matchless (ἀμιμήτως) Thucydides, and from his remarks about Timaeus' affected and pedantic style, there is every reason to conclude that Plutarch read Timaeus' *Histories* as well. Without doubt Plutarch had a vast knowledge of Greek historiography, and drew much from it when writing his *Lives*⁹. An especially good example of Plutarch's use of Greek historians is his *Coriolanus* which, according to Donald Russell, is a «transposition into biographical form of the historical narrative» found in Books V to VII of the *Roman Antiquities* of

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Plutarch's works are from the Loeb Classical Library. Bernadotte Perrin's first volume of the *Lives* was published in 1914, and this and his subsequent translations of the *Lives* have often been reprinted in the Loeb Classical Library. Translations of the *Moralia* are also from the Loeb Classical Library.

⁷ For another of Plutarch's comparisons of painter and biographer, see *Cimon* 2.3. See also N.J. BARBU, *Les procédés de la peinture des caractères et la vérité historique dans les biographies de Plutarque*, diss., Strasbourg 1933.

⁸ By ἄχρηστος ἱστορία Plutarch probably did not mean that history is useless, but that material important for a historian does not concern him as a biographer. See J.R. HAMILTON, *Plutarch. Alexander. A Commentary*, Oxford 1969, p. xxxviii. As Hamilton noted, Plutarch did not always exclude the «stuff of history», and at *Fabius* 16, he gives a description of Carthaginian battle tactics, seemingly irrelevant to Fabius' character. For further discussion, see p. 241-242 below.

⁹ A good survey of Plutarch's sources for his *Lives* is that of K. ZIEGLER, *RE*. XXI (1951), cols. 911-914. Ziegler's discussion of Plutarch's education in cols. 923-925 also provides an overview of Plutarch's tremendous knowledge of ancient Greek historians.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus¹⁰. Plutarch's Greek *Lives* have been well examined, and his Latin proficiency seems to have been excellent. In his works of Livy, Cornelius Nepos, and others, Plutarch's Latin in composing his Roman *Lives*¹¹.

In brief, Plutarch's knowledge of history is considerable, and ἱστορεῖν, ἱστορία is a central concept in his *Lives* and *Moralia*. But what was his concept of history and what was his concept of history? For different thinkers, and sometimes for different writings considered «historical», much admired by Plutarch, and what was his concept of history in his *Lives*, never called his work «history» not occur in Thucydides' work. It is largely a modern construct. As RUSSELL, *Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus*, the «philosophy of history» of the eighteenth century by Voltaire was called «critical history», some kind of writer drew conclusions without books¹³. Hegel and other nineteenth-century writers called «philosophy of history» to mean

¹⁰ D.A. RUSSELL, *Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus*, B. SCARDIGLI [ed.], *Essays* [n. 4], p. 357-367, is a good study of his study.

¹¹ See, for example, C.B.R. PELLING, *Plutarch's Lives*, *JHS* 99 (1979), p. 74-96 (reprinted in *Plutarch*). According to Pelling, the «soundest treatment of Plutarch's Latin» is in R. ROSE, *The Roman Questions of Plutarch*. Plutarch had a «rough, practical knowledge of Latin, some facility, if not with much exactness».

¹² J.L. MOLES, *Plutarch. The Life of Coriolanus*, insights into Plutarch's concept of history and historiography. He distinguishes between «big things», e.g. battles and sieges, whereas Plutarch is concerned with «small things». And yet as M. MOLES, *Plutarch's Lives*, however, consider the meanings that Plutarch gave to ἱστορία. For a useful study of this and related words, see R. G. COLLINGWOOD, *The Idea of History in Antiquity*, Kingston-Montreal 1956, and *passim*.

¹³ See R.G. COLLINGWOOD, *The Idea of History*, Oxford 1933, p. 1ff.

είας), nay, a slight thing like a revelation of character than battlements or sieges of cities⁶.

subjects' eyes in which the character claims to be concerned with the psyche (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα), contests or struggles (ἀγῶνας)⁷. The point of Plutarch's *Lives*, and in Thucydides and Philistus for their character declares that these deeds reveal the ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν, as Thucydides and Philistus. Plutarch also writes of laws and public decrees, not gathered from history (ἄχρηστος ἱστορία), but from character and temperament (πρὸς τὸν χαρακτήρα). Moreover, at the very beginning of his account of Tauromenium's attempt to free itself from Thucydides, and from his remarks on the style, there is every reason to consider his *Historiography* as well. Without doubt Plutarch was a historiographer, and drew much from especially good examples of historiography, such as *Coriolanus* which, according to Plutarch, is in the biographical form of the historiography of the *Roman Antiquities* of

of Plutarch's works are from the Loeb edition of the *Lives* was published in 1914, and has often been reprinted in the Loeb edition also from the Loeb Classical Library. For the character and biographer, see *Cimon* 2.3. See *caractères et la vérité historique dans* 133.

did not mean that history is useless, but that it should concern him as a biographer. See J.R. Hamilton, *Oxford* 1969, p. XXXVIII. As Hamilton says of history», and at *Fabius* 16, he gives a highly irrelevant to Fabius' character. For

of *Lives* is that of K. ZIEGLER, *RE*. XXI. Plutarch's education in cols. 923-925 also shows his knowledge of ancient Greek historians.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus¹⁰. Plutarch's sources for many of his other Greek *Lives* have been well examined elsewhere. And even though his Latin proficiency seems to have been weak, he drew much from the works of Livy, Cornelius Nepos, Asinius Pollio, and other Latin authors in composing his Roman *Lives*¹¹.

In brief, Plutarch's knowledge of Greek and Latin historians was considerable, and ἱστορεῖν, ἱστορία and ἱστορικός occur with frequency in his *Lives* and *Moralia*. But what did these words mean for Plutarch, and what was his concept of history?¹² When posing these and related questions, it must be observed that «history» has had different meanings for different thinkers, and sometimes the word does not even appear in writings considered «historical». Thucydides, for example, an author much admired by Plutarch, and whose narrative he adapted for some of his *Lives*, never called his work «history»: ἱστορία and ἱστορεῖν do not occur in Thucydides' work. Moreover, the philosophy of history is largely a modern construct. As Robin Collingwood observed in *The Idea of History*, the «philosophy of history» was probably introduced in the eighteenth century by Voltaire who seems to have meant by it no more than «critical history,» some kind of historical reflection in which a writer drew conclusions without repeating what was found in «old books»¹³. Hegel and other nineteenth-century thinkers understood the «philosophy of history» to mean universal or world history, and this his-

¹⁰ D.A. RUSSELL, *Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus*, *JRS* 33 (1963), p. 21-28 (reprinted in B. SCARDIGLI [ed.], *Essays* [n. 4], p. 357-372). Russell's remark is at the very beginning of his study.

¹¹ See, for example, C.B.R. PELLING, *Plutarch's Method of Work in the Roman Lives*, *JHS* 99 (1979), p. 74-96 (reprinted in B. SCARDIGLI [ed.], *Essays* [n. 4], p. 265-318). According to Pelling, the «soundest treatment» of Plutarch's Latinity remains that of H.J. ROSE, *The Roman Questions of Plutarch*, Oxford 1924, p. 11-19. According to Rose, Plutarch had a «rough, practical knowledge of Latin» (p. 11), and could read it «with some facility, if not with much exactness» (p. 14).

¹² J.L. MOLES, *Plutarch. The Life of Cicero*, Warminster 1988, p. 32-36, has good insights into Plutarch's concept of history, and on the similarities and differences between ancient biography and historiography. Historiography, for example, focused on «great things», e.g. battles and sieges, whereas biography concentrated on individuals and character, or «small things». And yet as Moles observed, ancient historiography also gave great prominence to various individuals, and even had a moral purpose. Moles does not, however, consider the meanings that ἱστορία had for Plutarch and his contemporaries. For a useful study of this and related words, see G.A. PRESS, *The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity*, Kingston-Montreal 1982. Press discusses Plutarch on p. 71-74 and *passim*.

¹³ See R.G. COLLINGWOOD, *The Idea of History* (revised and edited by J. van der Dussen), Oxford 1993, p. 11f.

tory often involved attempts to discover the laws or principles governing human events. As will be seen, chance and providence have importance in Plutarch's reflections about the past. But whether his remarks on these forces constitute a philosophy of history, deserves later attention in the present study.

From the *Alexander* passage quoted earlier, it seems clear that Plutarch distinguished his *Lives* from «histories». But what considerations led Plutarch to make this distinction, and how can apparent inconsistencies between his remarks in *Alexander* and in other *Lives* be explained? For example, at the beginning of *Tiberius Gracchus*, Plutarch writes:

having finished the first history (τὴν πρώτην ἱστορίαν), we have to look at sufferings no less tragic than those of Agis and Cleomenes in the lives of the Roman couple (συζυγία), Tiberius and Gaius, which we set in parallel¹⁴.

At the beginning of *Fabius Maximus*, Plutarch refers to his preceding life of Pericles, and encourages readers to go on to his «history» (ἱστορίαν) of Fabius. At *Aemilius Paulus* 5.10, after a description of Aemilius' modest and virtuous life, Plutarch states that his «history» (ἱστορία) provides examples for those willing to profit by them. It is still unclear, however, what Plutarch meant by «history,» or how he distinguished «histories» from «lives» which seem to be, all things considered, historical biographies.

Before proceeding further, it is helpful to refer to Gerald Press' study. According to Press, «history» came to have at least three related meanings in antiquity: inquiry or research, literary genre, and narrative or story¹⁵. The basic meaning of ἱστορία remained that of inquiry or research, research after the facts, and attempting to discriminate between often different accounts and opinions. Certainly when writing his *Lives* Plutarch engaged in research, and he sometimes preferred, for example, Thucydides' account to that of other historians. Plutarch's research was, moreover, purposeful, and he tended to interpret almost everything from

¹⁴ For the form of Plutarch's *Lives*, see, for example, K. ZIEGLER, *RE*. XXI (1951), cols. 905-911, and more recently, C.F. KONRAD, *Plutarch's Sertorius. A Historical Commentary*. Chapel Hill 1994, p. xxvi-xxx.

¹⁵ G.A. PRESS's classification of the meanings of «history» in antiquity is quite informative. See his *Idea of History in Antiquity* (n. 12), p. 23ff. See also C.W. FURNARA, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Berkeley 1983. Other recent studies of ancient historiography are, for example, A.J. WOODMAN, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, Beckenham 1988, and the essays collected in S. HORNBLLOWER (ed.), *Greek Historiography*, Oxford 1994.

an ethical perspective. And when F at *Nicias* 1.5, he perhaps meant re some manifestation of human vi κακίας). In any case, Plutarch's re are a clear statement of his purp statement and to the phrase ἄχρη given later.

For now, it is useful to survey which Plutarch was familiar. He Plutarch knew well, thought of his although ἱστορία involved exami hand investigation, it also involved The famous opening line: Ἦρο ἀπόδειξις ἦδε probably means Herodotus' inquiry (or research) at the line at *De exilio* 604F. Given l as ἱστορία, research and inquiry, came to mean a literary genre. Fc Aristotle states that «the histories (αἱ τῶν περὶ πράξεις γραφόντων cussions¹⁶. And a few centuries l *viris illustribus* Plutarch was fami

was already an old man when he left seven books. The first conta the Roman people; the second : Italy...

¹⁶ For Aristotle ἱστορία also involve wrote his ἱστορία περὶ τῶν ζώων. An attributes ἱστορία and although this usag «history» continued to mean inquiry after involved natural phenomena, or past event *res gestae*. Moreover, as A. MOMIGLIANO *phy*, Cambridge (MA) 1971, p. 13, some erudition, or between history, and what understood by the Romans as *antiquitates*). Π that history «dealt mainly with political logical order, whereas erudition dealt wit to religious ceremonies — and preferred

¹⁷ See the remarks of J. GEIGER, *Plu Hermes* 109 (1091), p. 85-104 (reprinted esp. Pt. II on «Nepos, Plutarch, and the §

for the laws or principles governing and providence have importance. But whether his remarks on these, or whether his remarks on history, deserves later attention in the

earlier, it seems clear that Plutarch is concerned with «history». But what considerations led to this? How can apparent inconsistencies in other *Lives* be explained? For *Cracchus*, Plutarch writes:

πρώτην ἱστορίαν), we have to do with those of Agis and Cleomenes in *Lives* (1.1), Tiberius and Gaius, which

Plutarch refers to his preceding *Lives* to go on to his «history» in *Lives* 5.10, after a description of *Lives*. Plutarch states that his «history» is not willing to profit by them. It is meant by «history», or how he distinguishes which seem to be, all things con-

cerned with history. It is difficult to refer to Gerald Press' study, which have at least three related meanings: literary genre, and narrative or inquiry. It remained that of inquiry or research. It is tempting to discriminate between *Lives*. Certainly when writing his *Lives* sometimes preferred, for example, *Lives*. Plutarch's research was, in fact, to interpret almost everything from

for example, K. ZIEGLER, *RE*. XXI (1951), *Plutarch's Sertorius. A Historical Com-*

ment of «history» in antiquity is quite informative (1972), p. 23ff. See also C.W. FURNER, *The History of Rhetoric*, Berkeley 1983. Other recent studies of *Rhetoric* in *Classical Historiography* in S. HORNBLLOWER (ed.), *Greek Histo-*

an ethical perspective. And when Plutarch refers to ἄχρηστος ἱστορία at *Nicias* 1.5, he perhaps meant research undertaken without regard for some manifestation of human virtue or vice (δήλωσις ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας). In any case, Plutarch's remarks at the beginning of *Alexander* are a clear statement of his purpose in composing the *Lives*. To this statement and to the phrase ἄχρηστος ἱστορία, more attention will be given later.

For now, it is useful to survey some meanings of «history» with which Plutarch was familiar. Herodotus, for example, whose work Plutarch knew well, thought of his endeavors as inquiry or research, and although ἱστορία involved examining witnesses and αὐτοψία or first hand investigation, it also involved recording the results of his research. The famous opening line: Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνήσσεος ἱστορίας ἀπόδειξις ἦδε probably means something like: «the results of Herodotus' inquiry (or research) are here set forth», and Plutarch quotes the line at *De exilio* 604F. Given Herodotus' description of his writings as ἱστορία, research and inquiry, it is no surprise that the word also came to mean a literary genre. For example, at *Rhetoric* 1360a 33-37, Aristotle states that «the histories of those writing about human deeds» (αἱ τῶν περὶ πράξεις γραφόντων ἱστορίαι) are useful for political discussions¹⁶. And a few centuries later, Cornelius Nepos with whose *De viris illustribus* Plutarch was familiar¹⁷, reports that Cato

was already an old man when he began to write a *historia* of which he left seven books. The first contains accomplishments of the Kings of the Roman people; the second and third, the origins of all states of Italy...

(*Cato* 3.3; see also *Att.* 10.3).

¹⁶ For Aristotle ἱστορία also involved investigations of natural phenomena, and he wrote his ἱστορία περὶ τῶν ζῴων. Aristotle also called a description of an object's attributes ἱστορία and although this usage may be somewhat idiosyncratic, it shows that «history» continued to mean inquiry after the facts of a case irrespective of whether these involved natural phenomena, or past events, τὰ προγεγόνата, or what the Romans called *res gestae*. Moreover, as A. MOMIGLIANO observed in *The Development of Greek Biography*, Cambridge (MA) 1971, p. 13, some ancients saw a distinction between history and erudition, or between history, and what was called *archaeologia* and *philologia* (understood by the Romans as *antiquitates*). The basic distinction between these subjects was that history «dealt mainly with political and military events and was written in chronological order, whereas erudition dealt with almost anything else — from personal names to religious ceremonies — and preferred systematic survey to chronological order».

¹⁷ See the remarks of J. GEIGER, *Plutarch's 'Parallel Lives': the Choice of Heroes*, *Hermes* 109 (1091), p. 85-104 (reprinted in B. SCARDIGLI [ed.], *Essays* [n. 4], p. 165-190, esp. Pt. II on «Nepos, Plutarch, and the Subjects of the Roman Lives», p. 177ff.

For Nepos *historia* largely involved political events, the deeds of kings and the rise of cities, but *historia*, whatever its subjects, was a written account for Nepos and his contemporaries.

There remains, then, no doubt that Plutarch understood history as research or inquiry after the facts. He could also think of «history» as «story,» what is told or narrated. For example, Plutarch writes about what is «reported» concerning the gods, and discusses what the «mythographers relate» (οἱ μυθολογοῦντες ἱστοροῦσι) while ignoring the factuality of what is reported (*Quaestiones Romanae* 268D). And perhaps thinking of ἱστορία as story, Plutarch discusses in *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* (1092F–1095A) the pleasure that ἱστορία gives. He even suggests that the pleasure of fiction and poetry arise from their similarity to history in respect to truth. And when the «story» (ἱστορία) and its telling involves «no harm or pain, and to its splendid and great actions be added the power and charm of elegance», it gives great and abundant joy. As Glen Bowersock observed in *Fiction as History*:

There was much truth or falsehood in fiction as in history itself. Fiction must necessarily include not only overt works of the imagination, such as novels and Lucian's *True Stories*, but also the rewriting of the mythic and legendary past as part of the creation of a new and miraculous present¹⁸.

History could include mythical stories, and so in his *Theseus*, Plutarch writes about the difficulties of distinguishing between history based on facts and probable reasoning (1.1), and the need for purifying the fabulous or mythical (τὸ μυθῶδες), making it «submit to reason and take on the semblance of history» (ἱστορίας ὄψιν, 1.3).

«History» could also involve for Plutarch a catalogue of opinions and ideas, and at the beginning of *De virtute morali* (440E) he writes:

it is better, however, to run summarily through the opinions of the philosophers holding opposing views, not so much for the sake of inquiring into them (οὐχ ἱστορίας ἔνεκα) as that my own opinions may become clearer and more fairly established when those of the philosophers in question have been presented.

To be sure, this understanding of history as a factual account is not new. Doxographies or recordings of opinions go back at least to Aristotle, but what seems new is Plutarch's suggestion that such an account is «history.»

¹⁸ G.W. BOWERSOCK, *Fiction as History. Nero to Julian*, Berkeley 1994, p. 13.

In brief, by Plutarch's time, the ἱστορία referred not only to inquiry and discerned with battles and great deeds, opinions, or a detailed investigation. ἱστορία also meant a story, and historical writings. And, as Press observed not that it be accurate, but that it be

Certainly Plutarch's *Lives* are heroes, and from his ethical or moral be *exempla* or paradigms for his Senecio, the consular friend of Trajan. While providing παραδείγματα to readers to become imitators (μὴ *Demetrius* 1,6). Even he himself at the beginning of the paired *Lives* Plutarch writes:

I began the writing of my *Lives* I am continuing the work and do also, using history (ἱστορία) as a mirror to fashion and adorn my life depicted²⁰.

Plutarch goes on to state:

But in my own case, the study of history with it which my writing cherishes in my soul the records of actors, to repel and put far from me the suggestion my enforced assiduity and dispassionately turning my thoughts to my examples (παραδείγματα)

Not only does «history» involve the telling of stories, but the telling of them may encourage «imitation». At the beginning of *Pericles* where Plutarch must be applied to objects which

¹⁹ G.A. PRESS, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 76 *Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's 'Lives'* Oxford 1990, p. 19-52. In regard to truth, he behaves as we would, certainly; he tidies up what is known he was being historically inaccurate and tidying and improving is never very extensive.

²⁰ The italics are mine.

political events, the deeds of kings whatever its subjects, was a written series.

That Plutarch understood history as we could also think of «history» as an example. Plutarch writes about what and discusses what the «mythographer» (ἱστοροποιῶν) while ignoring the factuality (see *De eximia* 268D). And perhaps think of the pleasure that ἱστορία gives. He knows that history and poetry arise from their similarity when the «story» (ἱστορία) and its actions are great and abundant. In *Fiction as History*:

...in fiction as in history itself. Fiction is not overt works of the imagination, but also the rewriting of the past, the creation of a new and mirac-

...and so in his *Theseus*, Plutarch distinguishes between history based on fact and the need for purifying the fabulous. He «submit to reason and take on the burden» (ὄψιν, 1.3).

Plutarch a catalogue of opinions and in *Vita morali* (440E) he writes:

...truly through the opinions of the wise, not so much for the sake of the facts (ἔνεκα) as that my own opinions are firmly established when those of the wise are presented.

History as a factual account is not new. Its roots go back at least to Aristotle, but the notion that such an account is «his-

In brief, by Plutarch's time, the meaning of ἱστορία was fairly broad. It referred not only to inquiry and research, but also to literature concerned with battles and great deeds. It might involve surveys of past opinions, or a detailed investigation of human and natural phenomena. ἱστορία also meant a story, and stories were very much a part of historical writings. And, as Press observed, «what is important to a story is not that it be accurate, but that it be entertaining or edifying»¹⁹.

Certainly Plutarch's *Lives* are stories of famous Greek and Roman heroes, and from his ethical or moral perspective, they were intended to be *exempla* or paradigms for his often influential readers, e.g., Sosius Senecio, the consular friend of Trajan, to whom the *Lives* are addressed. While providing παραδείγματα τῶν βίων, Plutarch also expected his readers to become imitators μιμηταί of the «better lives» (see *Demetrius* 1,6). Even he himself tried to follow the better examples, and at the beginning of the paired *Lives of Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus*, Plutarch writes:

I began the writing of my *Lives* for the sake of others, but I find that I am continuing the work and delighting in it now for my own sake also, using history (ἱστορία) as a mirror, and endeavoring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life in conformity with the virtues therein depicted²⁰.

Plutarch goes on to state:

But in my own case, the study of history (ἱστορία) and the familiarity with it which my writing produces, enables me, since I always cherish in my soul the records of the noblest and most estimable characters, to repel and put far from me whatever base, malicious, or ignominious suggestion my enforced associations may intrude upon me, calmly and dispassionately turning my thoughts away from them to the fairest of my examples (παραδείγματα).

Not only does «history» involve research and narrative, but the stories told may encourage «imitation». Similar sentiments are expressed at the beginning of *Pericles* where Plutarch claims that our intellect (διάνοια) must be applied to objects which draw it toward its proper good (τὸ

¹⁹ G.A. PRESS, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 76. See also C.B.R. PELLING's valuable study of *Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's 'Lives'*, in D.A. RUSSELL (ed.), *Antonine Literature*, Oxford 1990, p. 19-52. In regard to truth, Pelling notes that Plutarch «does not always behave as we would, certainly; he tidies and improves, and in some cases he must have known he was being historically inaccurate. But the process has limits, and the untruthful tidying and improving is never very extensive» (p. 41).

²⁰ The italics are mine.

οικεῖον αὐτὴν ἀγαθόν, 1.3). Such objects, Plutarch goes on to mention, are to be found in virtuous deeds, and

these implant in those who search them out a great and zealous eagerness which leads them to imitation (μίμησιν)²¹.

And at *Pericles* 2.2, Plutarch remarks that

virtuous action straightway so disposes a man that he no sooner admires the works of virtue than he strives to emulate those who wrought them.

Similar sentiments are expressed in the *Moralia* where Plutarch states his belief that many lessons can be learned from the past. At 814B of *Praecepta gerendae republicae*, for example, he claims that by recounting the deeds of Greeks of former times, one can mould and temper character (ἡθιοποιεῖν καὶ σωφρονίζεῖν). Plutarch gives several instances: the decree of amnesty after the downfall of the Thirty Tyrants, Phrynicus' fine for his play on the sack of Miletus; the joy of the Theban people (*demos*) when Cassander restored order and its horror at a massacre in Argos. These and other examples show how citizens ought to behave.

The *Lives* were thus meant to be useful for developing and understanding character²². Plutarch's emphasis on character in the *Lives* is not, however, without philosophical antecedents. As Vincenzo Cilento observed, «the *Lives* are the daughters not of history, but of philosophy — above all the *Nicomachean Ethics*»²³. Plutarch's indebtedness to Aristotle's views on ἦθος have been much discussed by scholars, but this is not the occasion to review them. Suffice it to note that Plutarch shares Aristotle's conviction that a person's character or ἦθος reveals itself in πράξεις, actions or deeds, and in the management of πάθη, emotions or strong feelings, which have helped to form it. But character is not the only element in the *Lives*. For example, in his preface to the paired *Lives of Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus*, Plutarch remarks that chance or fortune (τύχη) so vied with character that it is uncertain whether their greatest achievements resulted from good luck, or from practical wisdom (φρονήσις). He also writes about the pair Demos-

²¹ On Plutarch's concept of imitation, see A. WARDMAN, *Plutarch's Lives*, London 1974, p. 21ff.

²² For an analysis of the concept of 'character' in Plutarch's *Lives*, *ibid.*, p. 105-152.

²³ Quoted by D.A. RUSSELL, *On Reading Plutarch's 'Lives'*, » *G&R* 13 (1966), p. 130-154 (reprinted in B. SCARDIGLI [ed.], *Essays* [n. 4], p. 74-94; see p. 81).

thenes and Cicero, stating at *Dem* whether nature (φύσις) made the (τύχη) in the conditions of their I in Plutarch's thought, and deserve on the course of human events ar

In view of the previous obser for Plutarch the difference betw between a study of past events, a has no concern with ethical judg sions would be quite wrong, esp often moralized about the past. F foolishness of those who, taking to trade in their own marketplace, experience from history» (ἐκ ἐμπειρίαν, V 75.5-6). Other anc more directly about the value c Halicarnassus wrote in his *Art of*

And Plato says this too, that the of the ancients, educates thos (παιδεία) is the conjoining of c Thucydides seems to say t ιστορίας): that history is p ιστορία φιλοσοφία ἐστὶν ἐκ:

These words could well have bee tion remains: what was Plutarch' it differ from biography?

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], p. 74-94; see p. 81).

thenes and Cicero, stating at *Demosthenes* 3.5 that it cannot be decided whether nature (φύσις) made them more alike in character, or fortune (τύχη) in the conditions of their lives. Fortune (τύχη) plays a great role in Plutarch's thought, and deserves further attention when his reflections on the course of human events are considered.

In view of the previous observations, it is tempting to conclude that for Plutarch the difference between history and biography was that between a study of past events, and a study of human character. History has no concern with ethical judgments; biography does. Such conclusions would be quite wrong, especially since ancient Greek historians often moralized about the past. Polybius, for example, writes about the foolishness of those who, taking no precautions, allowed their enemies to trade in their own marketplace, even though they might acquire «such experience from history» (ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας ... τὴν τοιαύτην ἐμπειρίαν, V 75.5-6). Other ancient authors expressed themselves even more directly about the value of history. For example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote in his *Art of Rhetoric* (11.2):

And Plato says this too, that the poetic, by beautifying the many deeds of the ancients, educates those who are born later. For education (παιδεία) is the conjoining of oneself (ἑντευξίς) with character. And Thucydides seems to say this, speaking about history (περὶ ἱστορίας): that history is philosophy from examples (ὅτι καὶ ἱστορία φιλοσοφία ἐστὶν ἐκ παραδειγμάτων).

These words could well have been written by Plutarch, but a basic question remains: what was Plutarch's own concept of history, and how did it differ from biography?

Thus far it has been seen that «history» had different meanings for Plutarch and his contemporaries, but when not thinking of history as inquiry or research, Plutarch often regarded it as literature, works written about the deeds of famous individuals. In *Nicias*, for example, he relies on Thucydides and Philistus for their accounts of Nicias' deeds πράξεις, and at 345C of *De gloria Atheniensium*, probably a youthful declamation, Plutarch comments somewhat negatively about historical writings: «if you take away the men of action (τοὺς πράττοντας) you will have no men of letters (τοὺς γράφοντας)». And shortly thereafter at 345D, Plutarch remarks that if one omits the deeds of great individuals as recorded by Thucydides, this historian is longer on «the list of writers». Historians depend on heroes and significant events for their works, and without these, they have no subject matter. In a further depreciation of

historians, Plutarch likens them to goatherds or shepherds who view battles at a distance, report these to their communities, and expect the same honors given to those who fought in the battles (347D):

And indeed the compilers of history (οἱ συγγράφωντες) are, as it were reporters of great exploits who are gifted with the faculty of felicitous speech, and active success in their writing through the beauty and force of their narration; and to them those who first encountered and recorded the events are indebted for a pleasing retelling of them. We may be sure that such writers are lauded also merely through being remembered and read because of the men who won success; for the words do not create the deeds, but because of the deeds they are also deemed worth of being read.

And as previously noted, Plutarch's *Lives* are very much indebted to Greek and Roman historians. According to Alan Wardman, «over half the biographer's capital has been borrowed from those whose prime interest was in historical writing»²⁴. And in much of this historical writing, character appears as largely incidental to other concerns. As Ernesto Valgiglio remarked, «la grande storia fa, sì, anche emergere il carattere dell'uomo, ma in linea subordinata e marginale; in linea primaria stanno le πράξεις in riferimento alle nazioni, ai popoli, agli stati, e non in relazione agli individui che sono oggetto specifico della biografia»²⁵. Xenophon, for example, whom Plutarch much admired, wrote about Clearchus and Menon in his *Anabasis*, and yet his discussion of Menon's character does not appear in the main narrative, but in what Wardman called «a kind of moral appendix»²⁶. And however much interest later historians such as Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus may have had in character, they tended to treat it incidentally. Moreover, when at *Alexander* 1.2 Plutarch mentions «slight» things like phrases or jests as more revelatory of character than battles or sieges, he has a focus quite unlike that of many ancient historians²⁷. A good example of a

²⁴ A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 21), p. 3.

²⁵ E. VALGIGLIO, *Ἱστορία e βίος in Plutarco*, *Orpheus* 8 (1987), p. 54-55. A. MOMIGLIANO, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 39, earlier expressed a similar view: «Greek historians were concerned with political and military events. Their subject matter was states, not individuals».

²⁶ A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 6.

²⁷ Interest in anecdotes can be traced back to Aristotle and his pupils. A. MOMIGLIANO, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 76, remarks: «I suspect we owe to Aristoxenus the notion that a good biography is full of good anecdotes». Plutarch's own interest in anecdotes has been much discussed. See, for example, A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 7, to whose discussion I am much indebted.

«slight» thing, a minor event, is a woman, found in *Alexander* 13. I was assaulted by a Macedonian soldier questioned by Alexander, she stated who organized the troops in fighting Chaironeia! The incident reveals, virtue (ἀρετή) and her boldness of treating her as an enemy, Alexander what she had done. Alexander's remark is narrated as a response to his own view of the space Plutarch devotes to what was not especially significant to the biographer.

To be sure, Plutarch does not fill his *Lives* with minor events. Often he finds them in his historical sources. For example, in *Alexander* 1.2, concerned with this hero's involvement in the emperor's brief reign, Plutarch is not so much a biography or «living history» as a history of the emperor's reign. Plutarch himself normally attracts historians. For example, he uses digression in *Alexander* 1.2. For example, he uses digression in *Herodotus* 1.2. For example, he uses digression in *Coriolanus* 11. Plutarch discourses on names, and concludes that «this to be found elsewhere». Such a remark suggests that Plutarch's digressions in his historical writing, and there are of course many, are not so much a digression as a part of his story like an historian.

In general, contrary to Plutarch as quoted earlier, his *Lives* seem more concerned with sometimes acknowledged. Historians of the «mother of biography» and their comments on history's importance

Just as geographers, O Sosius Seneca, their maps the parts of the earth and explanatory notes... so in the world we have traversed those periods of time and reasoning (εἰκότι λόγῳ) and with

herds or shepherds who view battles as communities, and expect the same in battles (347D):

(οἱ συγγράφοντες) are, as it were, gifted with the faculty of writing; in their writing through the medium of the pen, and to them those who first begin to write are indebted for a pleasing and useful reading. At such writers are lauded also those who are read because of the men who wrote the deeds, but because of the writing read.

Lives are very much indebted to Alan Wardman. «over half of the space devoted to those whose prime concern is in much of this historical writing is devoted to other concerns. As Ernesto Ferrero, si, anche emerge il carattere originale; in linea primaria stanno le storie, ai popoli, agli stati, e non in merito specifico della biografia»²⁵. Plutarch much admired, wrote about the lives of his subjects, and yet his discussion of the main narrative, but in what is a «pendix»²⁶. And however much Plutarch and Dionysius of Halicarnassus tried to treat it incidentally. Moreover, Plutarch is «slight» things like phrases or events in battles or sieges, he has a focus on the characters»²⁷. A good example of a

Wardman, *Orpheus* 8 (1987), p. 54-55. A. Ferrero expressed a similar view: «Greek historians wrote about states. Their subject matter was states, not

Aristotle and his pupils. A. MOMIGLIANO, *Plutarch*, p. 10. He referred to Aristoxenus the notion that a good historian's own interest in anecdotes has been much greater than that of his subject (n. 20), p. 7. to whose discussion I am

«slight» thing, a minor event, is the story of Timocleia, a Theban woman, found in *Alexander* 13. During the siege of Thebes, she was assaulted by a Macedonian soldier whom she killed in retaliation. When questioned by Alexander, she stated that she was the sister of Theagenes who organized the troops in fighting against Philip at the battle of Chaironeia! The incident reveals, according to Plutarch, the woman's virtue (ἀρετή) and her boldness of speech (παρρησία). And instead of treating her as an enemy, Alexander admired her courage in telling him what she had done. Alexander's response to the woman's virtue is thus narrated as a response to his own virtue, and the incident occupies about half of the space Plutarch devotes to Thebes' fall. It shows, in brief, that what was not especially significant for the historian could be for the biographer.

To be sure, Plutarch does not fill his *Lives* with narrations of «slight» things or minor events. Often he seems to follow emphases already found in his historical sources. For example, his *Aristides* is mainly concerned with this hero's involvement in the battle of Plataea, and *Galba* is not so much a biography or «life» as an account of episodes involving the emperor's brief reign and sudden downfall, episodes which might normally attract historians. And even though Plutarch distances himself from historiography, he shows some closeness to past historians. For example, he uses digressions which allowed historians such as Herodotus some scope for straying from their main subjects. And so in *Coriolanus* 11, Plutarch discourses on the moral significance of proper names, and concludes that «this topic would be more fittingly discussed elsewhere». Such a remark suggests that Plutarch is still influenced by historical writing, and there are other passages in the *Lives* such as *Dion* 21 where Plutarch's digressions perhaps show even more that he relates his story like an historian.

In general, contrary to Plutarch's statement in the *Alexander* passage quoted earlier, his *Lives* seem much closer to historiography than is sometimes acknowledged. Historical research and writing may well be the «mother of biography,» and at the beginning of *Theseus*, Plutarch comments on history's importance, and its connections with biography:

Just as geographers, O Sosius Senecio, crowd on to the outer edges of their maps the parts of the earth which elude their knowledge, with explanatory notes... so in the writing of my *Parallel Lives*, now that I have traversed those periods of time which are accessible to probable reasoning (εἰκότι λόγῳ) and which afford basis for a history dealing

with facts (βάσιμον ἱστορία πραγμάτων ἐχομένη, I might well say of the earlier periods: «what lies beyond is full of marvels and unreality, a land of poets and fabulists, of doubt and obscurity».

Plutarch goes on to remark:

may I therefore succeed in purifying Fable (τὸ μυθῶδες) making her submit to reason and take on the semblance of History. But where she obstinately disdains to make herself credible, and refuses to admit any element of probability (τὸ εἰκόζ), I shall pray for kindly readers, and such as receive with indulgence the tales of antiquity (ἀρχαιολογίαν).

Reflection on these passages strongly suggests that the criteria for history and historiography, the probable (τὸ εἰκόζ) and a firm basis in «facts» (βάσιμος πραγμάτων)²⁸, are also the criteria for Plutarch's *Lives*. The limits of historical biography are like those of geography: beyond a certain point geographical research cannot go, and this is true of history and biography as well. In other words, when writing his *Lives* Plutarch tried to adhere to the criteria used in historical writing. To be sure, the boundaries between biography and historiography are not always easy to define. As John Moles observed in his study of *Cicero*²⁹, Plutarch weighs historical matters by appeal to his sources, and shows knowledge of Roman political life near the end of the Republic. And in the *Cicero*, *Theseus*, and other *Lives*, biography is put within the realm of history. And, according to the opening remarks of *Theseus*, Plutarch even claims that the fabulous or mythical (τὸ μυθῶδες) when tied to reason, is able to assume the semblance of history (ἱστορίας ὄψιν, *Theseus* 1).

Moreover, in *Theseus* and other *Lives*, Plutarch observes a practice common among ancient historians, that is, choosing between divergent, or even contradictory accounts of the same events by appealing to probability. He also seems to distinguish between mythical and historical periods, and so *Theseus* and *Romulus* are put, for example, in the mythical period. And in *Romulus* 2-3 he contrasts at some length the mythical version of *Romulus*' birth with the more credible stories of *Diocles*

²⁸ For further discussion of the probable, see A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 161-168. I am much indebted to Wardman's discussion. See also A.G. NIKOLAIDIS's valuable comments on Plutarch's view of probability in his *Plutarch's Criteria for Judging his Historical Sources*, in C. SCHRADER - V. RAMON - J. VELA (eds.), *Plutarco y la Historia. Actas del V Simposio español sobre Plutarco*, Zaragoza 1997, p. 336-339.

²⁹ J.L. MOLES, *op. cit.* (n. 12), p. 34.

and *Fabius Pictor*. According to the king of Alba Longa, found a phallus. An oracle then prophesied that a virgin would give birth to a very virtuous object, and give birth to a very virtuous child. She refused the phallus, and a maid was left to die by a river where they were tured them until their rescue by a river. They killed Tarchetius. But a more credible story to Plutarch, is the story of Amulius. In this version, Amulius wanted to prevent Numitor's daughter, Rhea, from giving birth to twins who were rescued. Rhea gave birth to twins who were rescued. Rhea seems more credible to Plutarch because of her intercourse with the phallus, and Graeco-Roman politics. But Plutarch found improbable about the story of the sages do raise some questions about probability.

Suffice it to observe that Plutarch, about his sources without taking sides, does not choose sides, he seems guided by the story is in keeping with someone's forms to what is generally known. *Numa* 4 where there is a complicated had intercourse with a *daimon* called such a seemingly improbable tale about virtue (ἀρετή), and the good. In other words, whether something whether it illustrates a philosophical *Lives* Plutarch's Platonic conviction.

An especially important Platonic μίμησις, or imitation. As noted in the purpose of offering moral lessons *Lives* provide paradigms for behavior. *Lives*, the preface to *Pericles* (1-2)

³⁰ A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 11

³¹ See especially K. ZIEGLER's discussion, XXI (1951), col. 904. Plutarch's Platonism recognized.

ἴτων ἐχομένη, I might well say
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Fable (τὸ μυθῶδες) making her
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 tory (τὸ εἰκός) and a firm basis in
 fact are also the criteria for Plutarch's
 biographies are like those of geography:
 research cannot go, and this is true
 in her words, when writing his *Lives*
 as used in historical writing. To be
 precise, geography and historiography are not
 observed in his study of *Cicero*²⁹,
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 study in his *Plutarch's Criteria for Judging his-
 tory* - J. VELA (eds.), *Plutarco y la Historia*.
 Zaragoza 1997, p. 336-339.

and Fabius Pictor. According to the mythical version, Tarchetius, a cruel
 king of Alba Longa, found a phallus on the central hearth of his palace.
 An oracle then prophesied that a virgin would have intercourse with the
 object, and give birth to a very virtuous child. But Tarchetius' daughter
 refused the phallus, and a maid took her place. She then bore twins who
 were left to die by a river where they were found by a she-wolf. She nur-
 tured them until their rescue by a herdsman, and on reaching maturity,
 they killed Tarchetius. But a more likely or probable version, according
 to Plutarch, is the story of Amulius and Numitor (with some variants):
 in this version, Amulius wanted to keep his family in power, and so tried
 to prevent Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, from marrying. And yet she
 gave birth to twins who were rescued after their exposure. This account
 seems more credible to Plutarch because it excludes the improbability of
 intercourse with the phallus, and puts Romulus' birth in the context of
 Graeco-Roman politics. But Plutarch does not wholly explain what he
 found improbable about the story of the phallus, and the *Romulus* pas-
 sages do raise some questions about Plutarch's understanding of proba-
 bility.

Suffice it to observe that Plutarch often reports divergent opinions
 about his sources without taking sides. And in some instances where he
 does choose sides, he seems guided by considerations about whether a
 story is in keeping with someone's political activity, or whether it con-
 forms to what is generally known of human behavior. Sometimes, as in
Numa 4 where there is a complicated discussion of the story that Numa
 had intercourse with a *daimon* called Egeria, Plutarch makes it clear that
 such a seemingly improbable tale can be accommodated to his views
 about virtue (ἀρετή), and the gods' attitude to mortals who have virtue.
 In other words, whether something happened or not «can be decided by
 whether it illustrates a philosophical truth or not»³⁰, and certainly in the
Lives Plutarch's Platonic convictions are very much in evidence³¹.

An especially important Platonic concept for Plutarch was that of
 μίμησις, or imitation. As noted previously, Plutarch wrote his *Lives* for
 the purpose of offering moral lessons to his readers and to himself. The
Lives provide paradigms for behavior, and to review a passage cited ear-
 lier, the preface to *Pericles* (1-2) very much shows Plutarch's emphasis

³⁰ A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 165.

³¹ See especially K. ZIEGLER's discussion of the goal of Plutarch's biographies, *RE*.
 XXI (1951), col. 904. Plutarch's Platonism in both the *Lives* and *Moralia* has long been
 recognized.

on imitation: we must «bring our minds to spectacles that tempt them to their own proper good by way of enjoyment. We find this in the actions of virtue». These actions produce admiration and enthusiasm which result in imitation. Yet, according to Plutarch, the pleasure or delight in looking at sculpture or reading lyric poetry does not bring about imitation. Virtue, however,

instantly produces by her actions a frame of mind in which the deed is admired and the doer rivaled at one and the same moment... Nobility (τὸ καλόν) exercises an active attraction and immediately creates an active impulse, but producing a settled moral choice (προαίρεσις) from the simple historical knowledge of the action. This is why I have made up my mind to spend my time writing biographies...

(D.A. Russell's translation)³²

At *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat* 26A, Plutarch makes similar claims for poetry which is an «imitation of characters and lives (μίμησις ἠθῶν καὶ βίων), and of individuals who are not perfect or flawless in all respects». But even though pervaded «by emotions, false opinions, and various forms of ignorance», through inborn goodness (εὐφροσύνη), they change «their ways for the better». In brief, for Plutarch, good Platonist that he was, poetry and other forms of «imitation» such as historical and biographical writings, exercised strong psychological effects on their readers, and could be used for educational purposes, especially for moral improvement.

History and poetry both involve imitation, and it is here worthwhile to comment on Plutarch's views about «tragic history»³³. Suffice it to note that tragic poetry is not well regarded by Plutarch, and he writes disparagingly about it both in the *Lives* and *Moralia*. Tragedy's content is false, and its plots are taken from fiction, not real life; the actors lie by pretending to be persons other than they really are (see *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat* 15D ff.). Plutarch's harsh judgments about tragedy in general, also extend to what he calls «tragic history». At *Demosthenes* 21.2, for example, he accuses Theopompus of writing tragic history by misrepresenting public opinion at Athens after the battle of Chaironeia in 338 BC when Alexander's victory ended Demosthenes' policy of resistance. Theopompus depicted the Athenian *demos*

³² D.A. RUSSELL, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 100-101.

³³ My comments on tragic history are indebted to A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 168-179, and to J.M. MOSSMAN, *Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's 'Alexander'*, *JHS* 108 (1988), p. 83-93 (reprinted in B. SCARDIGLI [ed.], *Essays* [n. 4], p. 209-228).

as humiliated, and wrote «tragic history which was probably to support Demosthenes. But, according to Plutarch, Demosthenes: they asked him to show their adherence to Demosthenes. Theopompus, in other words, did and similar accusations are made. Theopompus claims that Pericles was guilty of Samos, a claim which Plutarch rejects».

In brief, tragic history was used to exaggerate pathos. Like tragedy, it had its pathos and theatricality characteristic of tragedies. But as Judith Mossman has argued, a distinction must be made between the sensationalist tragic patterning and imagery within both biography and history³⁵. A characterizing feature of some of his subjects is the use of tragic imagery, and in *Alexander* Plutarch uses tragic colouring to delineate the darker aspects of his subjects.

Plutarch thus seems to have preferred tragic history. They preferred the dramatic strong emotions (πάθη), to the less known as πραγματική ιστορία, which is more familiar. At *Galba* 2.5, for example, Plutarch states that events belong to «pragmatic history» and not omit the deeds and unfortunate events of the Caesars. In other words, with knowledge of tragic history, one understands pragmatic history as well. *Biography*, however, deals with «adventure personali»³⁷.

In brief, Plutarch's distinctions between tragic history and pragmatic history are further evidence that he gave

³⁴ Theopompus has recently received a new study by G.S. SHRIMPTON, *Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric*, and the earlier study of G.S. SHRIMPTON, *Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric*.

³⁵ J.M. MOSSMAN in B. SCARDIGLI (ed.), *Essays* (n. 4), p. 209-228.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³⁷ For brief discussion of «pragmatic history», see also E. ORPHEUS 8 (1987), p. 87.

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 niration and enthusiasm which
 Plutarch, the pleasure or delight in
 istory does not bring about imita-

of mind in which the deed is
 the same moment... Nobility
 n and immediately creates an
 I moral choice (προαίρεσις)
 the action. This is why I have
 iting biographies...
 (D.A. Russell's translation)³²

re defeat 26A, Plutarch make
 imitation of characters and lives
 individuals who are not perfect or
 h pervaded «by emotions, false
 ice», through inborn goodness
 for the better». In brief, for
 istory and other forms of «imita-
 -writings, exercised strong psy-
 could be used for educational
 ent.

ion, and it is here worthwhile to
 gic history»³³. Suffice it to note
 y Plutarch, and he writes dis-
 l *Moralia*. Tragedy's content is
 , not real life; the actors lie by
 really are (see *Quomodo ado-*
utarch's harsh judgments about
 he calls «tragic history». At
 cuses Theopompus of writing
 opinion at Athens after the bat-
 ander's victory ended Demos-
 s depicted the Athenian *demos*

ed to A. WARDMAN, *op. cit.* (n. 20),
vic in Plutarch's 'Alexander'. *JHS* 108
Essays [n. 4], p. 209-228).

as humiliated, and wrote «tragically» (τραγωδεῖ) about it, an account
 which was probably to support Theopompus' hostile views about
 Demosthenes. But, according to Plutarch, the people did not turn against
 Demosthenes: they asked him to speak in honor of those who died, and
 showed their adherence to Demosthenes' policy even though it failed.
 Theopompus, in other words, did not present an accurate or true account,
 and similar accusations are made about Duris at *Pericles* 27.2 where
 Duris claims that Pericles was guilty of atrocities against the people of
 Samos, a claim which Plutarch rejects³⁴.

In brief, tragic history was unreliable, and seems to have involved an
 exaggerated pathos. Like tragedy, it had many false views, and perhaps
 its pathos and theatricality came to resemble scenes from Greek
 tragedies. But as Judith Mossman has well argued, a distinction needs to
 be made between the sensationalism of tragic history and the «sustained
 tragic patterning and imagery which is perfectly respectable feature of
 both biography and history»³⁵. As Mossman observed, Plutarch chose to
 characterize some of his subjects and their actions in the *Lives* by using
 tragic imagery, and in *Alexander* Plutarch especially used «tragic
 colouring to delineate the darker side of Alexander's character»³⁶.

Plutarch thus seems to have borrowed from the historians of the
 tragic. They preferred the dramatic aspects, unfortunate incidents and
 strong emotions (πάθη), to the history of political events or what was
 known as πραγματική ιστορία, a concept with which Plutarch was also
 familiar. At *Galba* 2.5, for example, he states that accurate accounts of
 events belong to «pragmatic history», and goes on to say that he must
 not omit the deeds and unfortunate incidents (ἔργα καὶ πάθη) of the
 Caesars. In other words, with knowledge of Polybius (I 2.8), Plutarch
 understands pragmatic history as dealing with πράγματα and πράξεις.
 Biography, however, deals with παθή, or what Valgiglio rendered as
 «sventure personali»³⁷.

In brief, Plutarch's distinctions between pragmatic and tragic histories
 are further evidence that he gave thought to the nature of history and his-

³⁴ Theopompus has recently received much scholarly attention. See M.A. FLOWER,
Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric in the Fourth Century B.C., Oxford 1994,
 and the earlier study of G.S. SHRIMPTON, *Theopompus the Historian*, Montreal 1991.

³⁵ J.M. MOSSMAN in B. SCARDIGLI (ed.), *Essays* (n. 4), p. 212.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³⁷ For brief discussion of «pragmatic history» and a bibliography, see B. SCARDIGLI
 (ed.), *Essays* (n. 4), p. 16. See also E. VALGIGLIO's remarks on pragmatic history in
Orpheus 8 (1987), p. 87.

torigraphy. His concern with historiography is especially clear from his often discussed *On the Malice of Herodotus*. Near its beginning, Plutarch presents characteristics of an author's malice (855B f.), well summarized by Russell. The malicious historian uses (1) «needlessly pejorative terms»; (2) gives irrelevant and discreditable facts even when creditable ones are available; (3) «damns with faint praise»; (4) chooses the less creditable of alternative accounts; (5) assigns less reputable motives when others are possible; (6) disparages achievements, either assigning them to luck, or minimizing their importance; (7) denounces a «discreditable version, but records it all the same»; (8) mixes praise and blame so «as to cast doubt even on the praise»³⁸. To be sure, Christopher Pelling has shown that Plutarch does not always avoid these characteristics in some of his own *Lives*. According to Pelling, the *Cato minor* and *Anthony*, for example, flout the characteristics of *On the Malice of Herodotus*, but then «the *Lives* are sometimes a little removed from historiography, sometimes closer; and the *De malignitate* was giving precepts for historians»³⁹. To be sure, calling attention to these characteristics in another author was a rhetorical technique («innuendo and disparagement»), and a part of ancient historiography. But, according to Russell, Plutarch often «opposes and refutes» this malicious tendency in the «controversies and *problemata*» included in his *Lives*. For Russell, Plutarch's views on how to write biography, or biographical history, are well expressed at *Cimon* 2. 4-5:

Since it is difficult, or rather perhaps impossible to display a man's life as pure and blameless, we should fill out the truth to give a likeness where the good points lie, but regard the errors and follies with which emotion or political necessity sullies virtue rather than displays of viciousness, and therefore not make any special effort to draw attention to them in record. Our attitude should be one of modest shame on behalf of human nature, which never produces unmixed good or a character of undisputed excellence.

(D.A. Russell's translation)⁴⁰

Separating Plutarch's views of history and «lives» (biography) from one another, has not been easy. So far the discussion has shown the complexity of Plutarch's views on history. For him, history involved inquiry and research, written works concerned with great deeds and past

³⁸ D.A. RUSSELL, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 61.

³⁹ C.B.R. PELLING, *art. cit.* (n. 19), p. 35.

⁴⁰ D.A. RUSSELL, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 61-62.

events, and even the mythical. Not for what the ancients considered find Plutarch discussing criteria relative, e.g. probability and a lack of interest in historiography, did Plutarch (προγεγόνουτα)? Was history or into the past, great deeds and revealed in them? Although the much a modern construct, it is views on the course of history. non-human powers operative in Plutarch, in other words, have a

In *In Mist Apparelled*, Frederic Maitland writes as though he believed in a cyclic theory of history. At *Bruce* then the Xanthians, after long period set by fate (εἰμαρμένον calamity of their ancestors). But their self-destruction as the Perseus and does not show that Plutarch as Brenk and other scholars observed cycle, play an important role argued that Plutarch believed that and that Rome's rise to power providence⁴². Hence, before a concept of history, some reflection seems in order.

Earlier it was noted that Plutarch at *Nicias* 1.5. According to Ziegler ballast» («unnützen geschichtliche his translation of the phrase⁴³. But in mind? In an unpublished study tin Jr. has suggested that Plutarch's history: one generated by human

⁴¹ F.E. BRENK, *In Mist Apparelled*. R. Leiden 1977, p. 168f.

⁴² I am indebted to S. SWAIN's study *AJPh* 110 (1989), p. 272-302.

⁴³ K. ZIEGLER, in *RE*. XXI (1951), c

Why is especially clear from his *rodotus*. Near its beginning, Plutarch's malice (855B f.), well the historian uses (1) «needlessly discredit facts even when with faint praise»; (4) chooses its; (5) assigns less reputable disparages achievements, either in importance; (7) denounces a «the same»; (8) mixes praise and «praise»³⁸. To be sure, Christians not always avoid these characteristics according to Pelling, the *Cato* characteristics of *On the Malice* sometimes a little removed and the *De malignitate* was sure, calling attention to these rhetorical technique («innuendo in historiography. But, according refutes» this malicious tenor «ita» included in his *Lives*. For the biography, or biographical 5:

It is possible to display a man's life without the truth to give a likelihood of the errors and follies with his virtue rather than displays any special effort to draw attention should be one of modesty which never produces unmixed success.

(D.A. Russell's translation)⁴⁰

and «lives» (biography) from the discussion has shown the way. For him, history involved mixed with great deeds and past

events, and even the mythical. Narrative or story was very much a basis for what the ancients considered history, and so it is not surprising to find Plutarch discussing criteria for what he regarded as acceptable narrative, e.g. probability and a lack of malice. But, in addition to his interest in historiography, did Plutarch perceive any pattern in past events (προγεγόνοντα)? Was history or historical biography merely research into the past, great deeds and battles, and the character which was revealed in them? Although the history of philosophy seems to be very much a modern construct, it is still worth inquiring about Plutarch's views on the course of history. Did he see, for example, any forces or non-human powers operative in the world and in past events? Did Plutarch, in other words, have a philosophy of history?

In *In Mist Apparelled*, Frederick Brenk noted that Plutarch sometimes writes as though he believed in what might be considered a cyclic theory of history. At *Brutus* 31.7, for instance, he remarks: «so then the Xanthians, after long lapse of time, as though fulfilling a period set by fate (εἰμαρμένην) had the boldness to renew the calamity of their ancestors». But for Brenk this remark simply refers to their self-destruction as the Persians drew near (see Herodotus I 176), and does not show that Plutarch had a cyclical theory of history⁴¹. And as Brenk and other scholars observed, chance or τύχη, not any cosmic cycle, play an important role in history. Indeed, Simon Swain has argued that Plutarch believed that the past was largely predetermined, and that Rome's rise to power and continuing success, were due to providence⁴². Hence, before concluding investigation of Plutarch's concept of history, some reflection on his views of chance and providence seems in order.

Earlier it was noted that Plutarch uses the phrase ἄχρηστος ἱστορία at *Nicias* 1.5. According to Ziegler, the phrase meant «useless historical ballast» («unnützen geschichtlichen Ballast»), and he may be correct in his translation of the phrase⁴³. But what useless history did Plutarch have in mind? In an unpublished study of Plutarchan biography, Hubert Martin Jr. has suggested that Plutarch discerned two kinds or «types» of history: one generated by human deeds, and another in which human

⁴¹ F.E. BRENK, *In Mist Apparelled. Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives*, Leiden 1977, p. 168f.

⁴² I am indebted to S. SWAIN's study, *Plutarch, Chance, Providence, and History*, *AJPh* 110 (1989), p. 272-302.

⁴³ K. ZIEGLER, in *RE*. XXI (1951), col. 903.

beings had no control⁴⁴. This second kind of history only reported the circumstances in which human beings performed their deeds, circumstances such as their family status or the political milieu in which they lived. And this kind of history Plutarch attributed to a force he called *τύχη*, chance or fortune. Although Plutarch nowhere specifically states his belief in these two kinds of history, at *Timoleon* 1.6 ff., for example, he remarks that in the case of Timoleon and Aemilius chance so vied with character that it is unclear whether their greatest accomplishments were the result of good fortune, or of their practical wisdom. In other paired lives such as *Demosthenes* and *Cicero* or *Phocion* and *Cato the Younger*, Plutarch presents the virtues and virtuous deeds of his heroes against the circumstances that chance forces on them. Given that Plutarch wrote his *Lives* primarily from a moral perspective, it is likely, according to Martin, that by *ἄχρηστος ἱστορία*, he meant history that was generated by *τύχη*. This history was amoral, and had no meaning or value except for serving to clarify the circumstances in which human beings accomplished their deeds, deeds which manifested their virtues and vices.

Martin's interpretation of Plutarch's «useless history» draws attention to *τύχη*, though this concept is more complex than he perhaps indicates. As Swain has shown, *τύχη* is often made into a guiding force, and in contexts where God or providence might be expected. In the *Lives*, for example, there are many passages where Plutarch begins by referring to *τύχη* and ends by writing about a *daimon* which he usually thought of as some kind of divine being under God's control. And for Plutarch, the involvement of superhuman power in human lives often functions as a moral factor in how a person fares in particular circumstances. Returning briefly to *Timoleon-Aemilius*: in the life of Aemilius, *τύχη* means something more than fortune. His good fortune is the result of divine favor (cf. 12.1, *εὐτυχία* and *δαίμων*, and 24.4, *θειότης* and *τύχη*). But if *τύχη* and the divine are closely connected, and if *τύχη* refers to the course of providence at *Rom.* 8.9, *Tim.* 16.10, and *Phil.* 17.2, and elsewhere, it was an easy step for Plutarch to find God operative in the world. And Swain provides numerous examples of how Plutarch in his *Lives* attributes significant changes in the past to divine power, e.g. the

⁴⁴ I am indebted to Hubert MARTIN, JR. for sharing with me an unpublished lecture on *Plutarch and Pericles*, given as part of a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on Periclean Athens in the summer of 1991. His remarks appear on p. 17 of the *Plutarch and Pericles* lecture.

liberation of Sicily, Greece's loss the world. Divine power whether providence (and *τύχη* meant all principate, and to Rome's domin for Plutarch an instrument of *Γορ rum*, the Roman empire is a «cos

In sum, Plutarch had philosophical providence at work in significant *Lives* (and *Moralia*) do not repeat for him involved research and deeds. Sometimes he went beyond he is especially interested in the d virtue and vice. Plutarch's «lives I, have similarities to «histories Roman histories, especially those circumstances in which they were needed to avoid malice or persons able and accurate. Above all, his moral perspective, and for Plutarch perspective⁴⁵.

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⁴⁵ Versions of this paper were read at Crete. I am especially indebted to Dr. Jer

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liberation of Sicily, Greece's loss of freedom, and Rome's conquest of the world. Divine power whether conceived of as chance, fortune, or providence (and τύχη meant all three) led to the establishment of the principate, and to Rome's domination of the world. Indeed, Rome was for Plutarch an instrument of God's power, and in *De fortuna Romanorum*, the Roman empire is a «cosmos of peace» (317C).

In sum, Plutarch had philosophical views about the past, and he saw providence at work in significant events of human history. Clearly his *Lives* (and *Moralia*) do not repeat what was found in «old books.» History for him involved research and reliance on written narratives of past deeds. Sometimes he went beyond his literary sources, and in the *Lives* he is especially interested in the deeds of his heroes as manifestations of virtue and vice. Plutarch's «lives», despite his disclaimer in *Alexander I*, have similarities to «histories». But he was critical of Greek and Roman histories, especially those which focused only on deeds or the circumstances in which they were performed. Historians, moreover, needed to avoid malice or personal bias, and to deal with what was probable and accurate. Above all, history was meant to be viewed from a moral perspective, and for Plutarch this was ultimately a Platonic perspective⁴⁵.

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⁴⁵ Versions of this paper were read at the University of Utrecht and the University of Crete. I am especially indebted to Dr. Jeroen Bons for his critique.