

relatives (22. 4) are characteristic of a man who, in true Socratic fashion, would prefer to suffer rather than inflict injustice (32. 6<sup>32</sup>) and who was recognised after his death by the people as a patron and guardian of moderation and justice (38. 1). Phocion rejected all attempts to be bribed or influenced by money (21. 3-4; 18. 1; 30. 1), and it is Plutarch's belief that to attack Cato for ἀπίστροκέρδεια is like accusing Heracles of cowardice (52. 8).

Thus on the whole Plutarch was successful in demonstrating the similarities of character between Phocion and Cato. Few will lament the absence of a formal *synkrisis* at the end of the book, which would hardly add significantly either to our historical knowledge or to our psychological understanding of Plutarch's characters by pointing out in antithetical form the minute differences of the fortunes and fates of the two heroes. On the other hand the transition between the two Lives of the book, making use of a μέν... δέ—clause, is a most skilful structural device. The last sentence of the *Phocion* draws the parallel between the deaths of Phocion and Socrates: it is left to the reader to draw the parallel between the deaths of Socrates and Cato, so often alluded to, but never expressly stated in the Life.

I think it should be clear by now that Plutarch's art of comparison is sometimes most dominant where it is only implied rather than given a separate section in the book. Most importantly for our subject, it is here that his relation to *Nepos* seems to be most typical: possibly he owed the idea of comparison to *Nepos*, but it was his literary genius that brought it to full fruition.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Plato, *Gorg.* 469c.

## Aspects of Plutarch's Characterisation

CHRISTOPHER PELLING

### 1. Childhood and Development

Immediately we consider Plutarch's treatment of his heroes' childhood, we find ourselves confronting a strange paradox.<sup>1</sup> He is clearly most interested in childhood and education; indeed, it is the exclusive concern of several of his moral essays.<sup>2</sup> He has a quite elaborate theory of youthful development, drawing heavily on the Aristotelian ethic: our initial δυνάμεις render us capable of feeling and responding to specific πάθη, and our responses gradually constitute particular ἔξεις of habitual activity; these eventually evolve into settled ἤθη which inform our moral choices. All that comes out particularly clearly in the *De uirtute morali*. Naturally enough, he insists that moral development of character is the norm for all human beings, and that education has a peculiar value in moulding character and restraining passions.<sup>3</sup> Naturally enough, too, in the *Lives* he makes a good deal of whatever childhood material he finds in his sources, often straining uncomfortably to extract unreasonably large consequences from slight anecdotes (*Sulla* is a good example of that). He also gives extensive space

<sup>1</sup> This paper overlaps closely with my essay on "Childhood and Personality in Greek Biography" (henceforth "Childhood"), to appear in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, a collection of essays which I am editing for the Oxford University Press (1989): but the scope of that essay did not allow any extended treatment of individual *Lives*, nor any discussion of the distinguished analysis of Dihle. Some of the points are also treated in an essay on "Plutarch: Roman heroes and Greek Culture" (henceforth "Roman heroes"), to appear in *Philosophia Togata* (ed. J. Barnes and M. T. Griffin [Oxford 1989]). The present article is lightly annotated: further argument and exemplification of several points may be found in those papers. I apologise for this immodest ring of self-reference, and hope readers will not find the circle too vicious.

<sup>2</sup> Especially *De profectibus in uirtute, An uirtus doceri possit?, and De audiendis poetis*.

<sup>3</sup> *Mor.* 392b-e, cf. e. g. 28d-e, 37d-e, 76d-e, 82b-c, 83e-f, 450f, 453a, 551c-552d, 584e. Inherited nature was of course important too, as those passages show. Cf. esp. C. J. Gill, "The Question of Character-development: Plutarch and Tacitus," *CQ* 33 (1983) 469-87. For education as a civilising and restraining force in the *Lives*, cf. esp. *Cor.* 1. 4-5, *Mar.* 2. 2-4, *Them.* 2. 7, *Numa* 26 (4), 10-12; B. Bucher-Isler, *Norm und Individualität in den Biographien Plutarchs* (Noctes Romanae 13 [Bern and Stuttgart 1972]) 21, 24, 49, 67-8.

to education—to isolating the teachers of Pericles, for instance, or stressing Lucullus' or Cicero's early intellectual prowess. And there are times when he shrewdly points to the importance of *influences*, sometimes in ways which involve quite extensive psychological reconstruction: the effect on the young Cleomenes of his marriage to Agis' widow, for instance, when she would constantly describe to him those stirring events (*Ag.—Cl.* 22 [1]. 3); the influence on Marcellus of being brought up at a time when Rome was constantly at war, so that he had no time to indulge his supposed taste for Hellenic culture (*Marc.* 1); the impact on Theseus of the heroics of his kinsman Heracles (esp. *Thes.* 6. 8–8. 2, 11. 2); the effect on Coriolanus of his close and dominant mother (*Cor.* 4. 5–8). All this seems to bring Plutarch surprisingly close to the themes and interests of modern biography, with its taste for tracing influences and psychological development, and for bringing out and explaining individual differences.

And yet so often these interests of Plutarch seem to lead to peculiarly shallow and disappointing results. So often his treatment of childhood itself is banal and unpenetrating; so often we are left with very little idea of any evolution of the grown man; and, despite those few cases where he does go in for psychological reconstruction, so often he seems to regard *understanding* the development of his heroes as a surprisingly low priority. Why? It is not a shortage of material; true, he is reluctant to supplement it irresponsibly—but we can also often see him failing to analyse the material he does have, or to carry through the sort of reconstruction of which he was capable. Why *doesn't* he reconstruct how the elder Cato or Marius must have felt, when they first came from the country to join in smart city life? Or what it must have been like for an Artaxerxes or a Timoleon in the nursery, with such dominant and powerful brothers? Or what Agesilaus must have felt about his lameness, or Themistocles about his dubious parentage? Plutarch has the resources to make such reconstructions, and the interest in youthful development to encourage them: *Cleomenes* shows that, or *Theseus*, or *Coriolanus*; and in each case the *theme* is stressed enough—rusticity, or the brothers, or the physical disability, or the bastardy. Yet the psychological capital made of it is curiously disappointing, and we are not really led to any deeper *understanding* of the heroes or their development.

Albrecht Dihle offers a most interesting explanation in his *Studien zur griechischen Biographie* (Göttingen 1956), when he points to a difference between modern and ancient ideas of the personality.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that modern writers postulate a large number of varied predispositions (*Anlagen*) in a personality: some are aroused and fostered by specific experiences, especially in childhood; others become stunted or atrophied; and we place especial weight on the *irrational* in describing these distinctive experiences,

<sup>4</sup> Ch. 4, esp. pp. 76–81.

and the psychic drives which they encourage or deflect. Such an analysis need not put especial weight on the development of “the moral will” or “moral consciousness” (though it certainly need not deny that such a will or consciousness exists, with the function of ethically assessing and censoring a person's *Anlagen* and accommodating them with life's demands): still, a figure can often be represented as passive, a locus for the various predispositions and stimuli to fight it out. This modern picture does clearly posit a complex process of the development of personality, even if it finds little to say about the development of the moral will or consciousness. Plutarch, by contrast, is firmly in the Peripatetic tradition in stressing the moral will. It is that which controls the way in which one's original *δυνάμεις* respond to particular *πάθη*, ensuring that these are controlled and guided in such a way that a pattern of ethical conduct (*ἔξις*) is followed, which is gradually strengthened into a stable aspect of a person's character (*ἦθος*).<sup>5</sup> The irrational is relevant to the portrait, but only in defining the quality of the *πάθη* and the *δυνάμεις* that enable us to respond to them; and it will be natural to concentrate less on the *δυνάμεις* or the *πάθη* themselves than on the rational moral will or consciousness that masters them, something that (again in Aristotelian fashion) will be visible in the adult's moral choices which those settled *ἦθη* inform. Thus the irrational typically remains at a level below that of the literary presentation, assumed as part of the individual's development but not explicitly traced. “It is evident,” concludes Dihle, “that in so narrow a biographical psychology the modern conception of development has no place.”

There is much to admire in this extremely subtle analysis.<sup>6</sup> Dihle is certainly right to draw attention to our view of a person's complex blend of varied *Anlagen*, and his stress on Plutarch's conception of moral will is also illuminating: the development of such an undifferentiated moral will is very much the register in which education is treated, at least when it is successful—in the cases of *Aemilius*, for example, or *Brutus*, or even (with some qualifications) *Pericles*.<sup>7</sup> Such a will should give one control of the *πάθη* (cf. esp. *Mor.* 77d–78e, 82b–c); and Dihle is right to suggest that there is more interest in emphasising the will than in the differentiated analysis of the *πάθη* themselves, even in cases where those *πάθη* are important to Plutarch's view of his central figure. But some qualifications should still be made.

First, Dihle's analysis of modern assumptions is closer to theoretical psychology than biographical practice. With some exceptions, especially

<sup>5</sup> Cf. esp. *Mor.* 31b–c, 443d, 451b ff., 467b.

<sup>6</sup> And reviewers of Dihle have been properly admiring: cf. esp. K. von Fritz, *Gnom.* 28 (1956) 329–31.

<sup>7</sup> On *Aemilius* cf. “Roman heroes,” pp. 215–16 and “Childhood,” n. 60; on *Brutus*, “Roman heroes,” pp. 222–28; on *Pericles*, “Childhood,” section II.

the psychoanalytic school,<sup>8</sup> modern biography does not especially concentrate on these *irrational* elements in childhood; it may include them, but the early display or development of rational traits tends to be much more stressed—particularly in political biography, where the comparison with Plutarch is sharpest, and where a certain gravity and respect for the subject normally inhibits too strong a stress on the irrational.<sup>9</sup> Dihle's analysis is in fact as redolent of Proust as it is of Freud, and in many ways it suits the biographical or autobiographical novel better than biography itself: it is suggestive that Dihle's sole example is not a biography at all but the *Entwicklungsroman* "Grüne Heinrich."<sup>10</sup> And even such novels do not characteristically analyse the predispositions which remain stunted or undeveloped, only those which prefigure important later traits; such an analysis is not far removed from the Peripatetic treatment of *δυνάμεις* and *πάθη* which interact to produce later characteristics. (Dihle reasonably observes that the interaction is now described rather differently. We tend to speak of a constant mutual interaction, with *Anlagen* refined and remoulded as a result of experiences; whereas the Peripatetic analysis would regard the *δυνάμεις* as a constant given, and the interaction as producing distinct *ἔξεις* and eventually *ἦθη*. But the difference is at least in part semantic).

Indeed, in many ways Plutarch stresses irrational *πάθη* more, not less, than his modern counterparts, at least when he is describing adult figures. This is particularly clear in cases such as *Marius*, *Coriolanus*, *Demetrius*, or *Antony*, where heroes are clearly bad at controlling their passions; but the phenomenon is in fact much more widespread. Time and again we find Plutarch analysing heroes' self-control, and finding them lacking: and we find this particularly frequently in cases where Hellenic education is in point.<sup>11</sup> Marcellus, for instance, had Hellenic tastes, and did his best to indulge them in a warlike period: but he was eventually destroyed by his inability to control his natural bellicosity. Cicero was extraordinarily educated, yet so often he showed himself unable to match up to the emotional demands of the political choices he had to make, and unworthily followed the instincts of his *πάθη* rather than his reason: in his poor showing in exile, for instance, or in his choice of sides in the civil war, or in his extravagant reaction to his daughter's death. Some people did better, for instance Aemilius, again a man with educated and Hellenic tastes, or Brutus and the younger Cato, both followers of Greek philosophy; others worse, particularly those whose education was lacking—Marius,

<sup>8</sup> Most influentially Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (New York 1958), though ironically his book was published two years after Dihle's.

<sup>9</sup> This emerges from the examples I discuss in "Childhood," section III.

<sup>10</sup> Dihle, p. 76: this is also noted by Gill, art. cit. (above, n. 3), 471 n. 16.

<sup>11</sup> This point is extensively argued in "Roman heroes," whence the following examples are drawn, and in Part II of Simon Swain's Oxford D. Phil. thesis, "Plutarch and Rome: three studies" (1987).

Coriolanus—or whose Hellenism was defective, like the elder Cato. This link of the *πάθη* with education is unsurprising, given Plutarch's stress on education as the vital prerequisite for self-control: but this leads us back to the original paradox. Plutarch stresses these *πάθη* in later life, but does very little to trace the development of a hero's self-control in the crucial years of his youth. Admittedly, we do sometimes find something of the kind: Coriolanus' mother stimulating his pride, for instance, or Heracles setting Theseus alight with ambition. Nothing precluded such analysis; but the oddity is that it is so rare, when it is precisely what the interest in the *πάθη* and their linkage with youth and education would seem to demand. We still need an explanation, and the attitude to the irrational does not offer it: it instead makes the problem more pressing.

In fact it is questionable how far the Peripatetic *theory* of character illuminates this question. Indeed, that theory would seem to encourage treatment of character-development, with its emphasis on that development of *ἔξεις* and that gradual formation of *ἦθη*. Aristotle himself is very clear that both intellectual and moral virtues require development, though it is of a different kind in each case (*N. E.* 2. 1103a14 ff.); and children have their distinctive pleasures, which everyone likes to grow out of, and their distinctive values (*N. E.* 10. 117a1–4, 1176b21–33, cf. 3. 1119b5–7). It is utterly appropriate that he should end Book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by giving us advice on how to manage our own development, and Book 10 by a more general treatment of education and its importance. If anything, it is Peripatetic *practice* that goes the other way—the failure of Theophrastus, for instance, to generate much interest in the background or development of individual figures: and indeed the same goes for Aristotle himself, in his typed sketches in *N. E.* 4 and in his stray biographical comments elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Aristotle and Theophrastus seem to provide their own version of the paradox we have already noticed with Plutarch: a theory which implies a considerable preoccupation with education and development, but a curious absence of that preoccupation in practice.

But in their cases it is easier to see why; and this may give a hint for Plutarch too. Dihle himself very properly brings out what Theophrastus and Aristotle are trying to do in producing such stereotyped portraits.<sup>13</sup> They are not suggesting that such types exhaust the definition of any individual human's personality, but rather providing a convenient shorthand portrait of a particular *ἦθος* which an individual may show, along, doubtless, with many other such *ἦθη*. And those typed figures need not even preclude a measure of development.<sup>14</sup> It is simply that in such cases the development would not be very complex or interesting. Plutarch's figures, as again Dihle stresses, are much more individuated, even if (say) his Nicias owes

<sup>12</sup> For these cf. G. L. Huxley, "Aristotle's Interest in Biography," *GRBS* 15 (1974) 203–13.

<sup>13</sup> Dihle, 71–73.

<sup>14</sup> For Theophrastus cf. Gill, art. cit. (n. 3), 469 n. 4.

something to a Peripatetic typed *δαισιδαίμων*. His biographical insight is so much richer than anything we can confidently ascribe to the Peripatetics, and if he uses their categories he does so with much more discrimination and human insight. In these more complex cases we might consequently expect development to be more complex too, and at first sight it is still surprising that, in this most obvious area, we seem to have no advance at all. But something like the same explanation may still be the right one. Plutarch's figures may be more complex, but not, perhaps, in a way which needs to posit a particularly singular or interesting process of development.

Here we should follow a different hint of Dihle's account. So far we have been talking only of the complexity of the varied "predispositions" of a child: but just as important is the differing degree of complexity of traits in the formed, *adult* character, a point which Dihle has made a few pages earlier (72). Moderns love complex characters, and particularly love the idiosyncratic, paradoxical combination of unexpected traits—in Wilamowitz' words, "the contradictions that are found in every soul of any richness, and whose unification alone creates a person's individuality."<sup>15</sup> Ancient authors were less wedded to such quiriness. Critics often warn us not to expect the idiosyncratic in the characters of Greek Tragedy: the individuality of a Clytemnestra or a Philoctetes certainly remains, but it is an individuality of a different sort from ours.<sup>16</sup> The same applies to Plutarch. His characters too are individuated, but they are what I have elsewhere called "integrated" characters:<sup>17</sup> a man's qualities are brought into some sort of relation with one another, and every trait goes closely with the next. We are unsurprised if Antony is simple, passive, ingenuous, susceptible, soldierly, boisterous, yet also noble and often brilliant; or the younger Cato is high-principled and determined, rigid in his philosophy, scruffy (as philosophical beings often are), strange but bizarrely logical in the way he treats his women, and disabblingly inflexible and insensitive in public life. These are not stereotypes, but the different qualities cluster very naturally: Wilamowitz would hardly speak of such combinations as "the contradictions . . . whose unification alone creates a person's individuality." Even an Alcibiades is not

<sup>15</sup> *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 1 (1907), 1109 (= *Kleine Schriften VI* [Berlin and Amsterdam 1972] 124)—a fine, provocative passage, which is subjected to an extended critique in the concluding chapter to *Characterization and Individuality* (as in n. 1, above).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. e. g. P. E. Easterling, "Character in Sophocles," *G & R* 24 (1977) 121, 124 (= E. Segal [ed.], *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* [Oxford 1983] 138, 140–41); S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1986) 174. Exactly how that residual individuality is to be defined is a challenging question, addressed by several of the contributors to *Characterization and Individuality*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "Childhood," section III, where I give an extended comparison with the more elaborate way in which Lytton Strachey treats childhood. For similar remarks cf. R. B. Rutherford, "The Philosophy of the *Odyssey*," *JHS* 106 (1986) 149–50 and n. 31; for a contrary view, N. Rudd, *Lines of Enquiry* (Cambridge 1976) 160–62.

manysided in a modern sense, any more than Homer's Odysseus: both can be described swiftly and adequately, and even in such cases every trait really predicts the next. One could even talk meaningfully of "a sort of person like" Antony, or Alexander, or even Alcibiades: one might not meet that "sort of person" very often, but at least their qualities group together so naturally that they *could* conceivably recur again in the same blend in another human being. Talk of "a sort of person like" Hamlet, or Prince André, or Hedda Gabler would seem distinctly more peculiar.

Such "integrated" characters leave distinctly less to be explained than, in the world of the idiosyncratic, we have come to expect. Today writers have to foreshadow or explain a considerable multiplicity of divergent traits, and are often striving to explain why such a *unique* combination could possibly have come about. With idiosyncratic characters, development is typically *problematic*. For Plutarch it is much simpler. A few childhood traits, broadly sketched, can suffice, not because the adult personality is going to show only those traits, but because any new adult traits will naturally complement the ones we know from childhood. The infant Cato is determined, humourless, and intense, and it is not difficult to see how these early traits group naturally with those which develop later, the political inflexibility, the philosophy, the bizarre treatment of his women. Nothing is surprising as the characterisation deepens, and nothing requires any particularly refined explanation. It is not that his characters are "static,"<sup>18</sup> but their development is, for our tastes, curiously straightforward. Even in the cases of the uneducated or ill-controlled, he can allow the points to come out gradually throughout the *Life*, as he will be painting them with a very broad brush. If we wish, we will not find it difficult to infer what their childhood must have been like—but, however important their development may have been, it will not have been especially differentiated, or necessarily very arresting. Plutarch does not need to strain from the outset to extract every ounce of understanding, as so many of his modern counterparts do. There is so much less to understand.

Nor, finally, should we relate this "integration" to distinctively Peripatetic thought. Aristotle's ethical theory can leave it open for a character to show any number of distinct *ἦθη*, in any sort of relation to one another (though it is true that his virtuous man will not vary over so large a range). The assumptions in fact go much deeper: this integration is an almost universal ancient habit, and indeed one shown by many more recent civilisations as well as the Greek. It is very much our post-Romantic nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture which is the odd one out, with our particular taste for the idiosyncratic and the quirky.

<sup>18</sup> On this see the thoughtful treatment of Gill, *art. cit.* (n. 3).

2. *Aratus* and "integrated" characters

It is still possible to claim that some ancient authors integrated more fully than others, and that Plutarch's integration was particularly thoroughgoing. The comparison with his contemporary Suetonius already suggests as much: Suetonius' style of presentation by categories is much better suited to bringing out a modern style of manysidedness, and the protean complexities of a Julius Caesar emerge more clearly from Suetonius' *Life* than from Plutarch's. Suetonius' *Augustus*, his *Claudius*, even his *Vespasian* are rather in the same mould. But a more telling comparison can be drawn from the case of Plutarch's *Aratus*. Polybius had commented on the man's varied character:

He had in general all the qualities that go to make a perfect man of affairs. He was a powerful speaker and a clear thinker and had the faculty of keeping his own counsel. In his power of dealing suavely with political opponents, of attaching friends to himself and forming fresh alliances he was second to none. He also had a marvellous gift for devising *coups de main*, stratagems, and ruses against the enemy, and for executing such with the utmost personal courage and endurance . . . . But this very same man, when he undertook field operations, was slow in conception, timid in performance, and devoid of personal courage. The consequence was that he filled the Peloponnese with trophies commemorating his defeats, and in this respect the enemy could always get the better of him. So true it is that there is something multifiform (πολυειδές) in the nature not only of men's bodies, but of their minds, so that not merely in pursuits of a different class the same man has a talent for some and none for others, but often in the case of such pursuits as are similar the same man may be most intelligent and most dull, or most audacious and most cowardly. For instance some men are most bold in facing the charge of savage beasts in the chase but are poltroons when they meet an armed enemy . . . I say this in order that my readers may not refuse to trust my judgement, because in some cases I make contrary pronouncements regarding the conduct of the same men even when engaged in pursuits of a like nature.

(Polybius 4. 8. 1-9, 12, trans. Paton.)

That was a passage Plutarch knew;<sup>19</sup> but, when he gave his own summary of the man's character at *Arat.* 10, the emphasis was subtly different.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Some influence of Polybius on *Aratus* is anyway clear (especially at 38. 12 and 47-48): cf. the commentaries of W. H. Porter (Dublin and Cork 1937), xv, xviii, and A. J. Koster (Leiden 1937), xvi-xvii, xxvi, li-liii. But in this case we also find some odd verbal echoes, with Polybius' vocabulary or conceits transferred to Plutarch's own summary in *Arat.* 10 but exploited in slightly different contexts: ὑπαίθρος, for instance (Plb. 4. 8. 5 = *Arat.* 10. 4), or ἐπιβολαίς (Plb. 4. 8. 5) = ἐπιβολώτατος (*Arat.* 10. 2), or ἐν ὄψει (Plb. 4. 8. 5) = ὄψεις (*Arat.* 10. 4), as well as the odd emphasis on πραότης (Plb. 4. 8. 2, *Arat.* 10. 2) and the more natural one on εὐφροσύνη (Plb. 4. 8. 7 = *Arat.* 10. 5) or τόλμη (Plb. 4. 8. 3, 7 = *Arat.* 10. 3); the

*Aratus* was a natural politician, great-spirited, more attentive to the commonwealth than his own affairs, bitterly hating tyranny, and developing friendships and enmities to suit the public good. For this reason he seems to have been less consistent as a friend than generous and merciful as an enemy: he changed his tack in both directions according to his statesmanship, and the needs of the moment. His ambition was to bring states together into alliances; he was eager for a union, a theatre speaking with one voice—as eager for this as for any noble ideal. He was lacking in confidence and pessimistic about open warfare, but the sharpest of men when it came to guileful initiatives, or secret negotiations to bring cities and tyrants to his side. For this reason his enterprise brought many unexpected successes, but he also seems to have failed to gain many possible successes because of his caution. The sight of certain wild beasts, it seems, is acute at night but dulled in the day, with the moisture of the eye turning dry and insubstantial as it cannot bear contact with the light; and in just the same way there is a sort of human cleverness (δαινότης) and understanding (σύνεσις) which by its nature is easily perturbed in open and public encounters, but gains courage when it comes to secret, undercover initiatives. This sort of inconsistency is created in gifted people by a lack of philosophical training, for they produce virtue without knowledge as if it were a self-seeded fruit, with no cultivation . . .

Plutarch's *Aratus* is more clearly guided by his state's shifting needs, which prepares us for an underlying rationality that explains some of the surface inconsistencies: Polybius began the chapter on that note, but put it less sharply and pressed it less insistently. Plutarch's *Aratus* shows "caution" rather than Polybius' "cowardice" in open warfare (and the point recurs in Plutarch's later narrative, especially at 31. 2-4 and 35-36):<sup>21</sup> that too sits more comfortably with the initiatives he *did* undertake, and the contrast becomes a more explicable one, the politician who prefers guile to the dangers of open fighting, who shows daring in one sphere but not in a *different one*. Polybius' formulation in fact captures the difference very clearly: his *Aratus* shows inconsistency in, explicitly, *the same sort of pursuits*; Plutarch's two spheres are more distinct. Polybius consequently

wild-beast image of *Arat.* 10. 4 also recalls the hunting parallel of Plb. 4. 8. 9. D. A. Russell observed a similar phenomenon in Plutarch's use of Dionysius in *Coriolanus*, and fairly concluded that "it is perfectly possible that, when he came to his own writing, whole stretches of Dionysius' not very memorable prose were running in his head" (*JRS* 53 [1963] 22 and n. 7): the same goes for Polybius' rather more memorable phrases here.

<sup>20</sup> Koster (as n. 19), xxxiv, is enthusiastic but perhaps a little over-simple: "at nobis . . . profitemur est, cum eadem fere de *Arati* moribus uterque scripserit (my italics), suavitatem quandam orationis et brevitatem nos magis delectare quam loquacitatem Polybii."

<sup>21</sup> For the dispute cf. also 29. 7-8: but even there Plutarch notes only that others derided *Aratus*' cowardice, without explicitly endorsing the criticisms. The contrast of *Arat.* 35. 6 and the parallel narrative at *Ag.-Cl.* 25 (4). 9 is particularly suggestive. *Aratus*' caution is at least explicable, probably even approved, in *Arat.*, but derided in *Cleomenes*: such aspects as the smallness of *Cleomenes*' force are suppressed in the *Arat.* version.



directs more attention to Aratus' demeanour in covert *action*, stressing his endurance (κακοπάθεια) as well as his daring, and that sharpens the contrast with the battlefield cowardice, which is inexplicably so different: Plutarch concentrates more on the planning than the action, and the spheres are again more widely separate, one much more mental, one more physical. And the inconsistency that remains is also dealt with differently. Polybius regards it as an individual quirk of Aratus, and makes it a general truth of human nature that such quirks are often found—a very unusual emphasis for an ancient author. Plutarch rather stresses that the combination of such traits is a *regular* one, that this sort of differentiated δεινότης is not at all unnatural, and could easily recur. That, in the terms discussed above, is “integration”: Plutarch is stressing how regular the cluster of traits really is. We could readily find the cluster recurring in another person, and hence it would be natural to talk of “a sort of person like Aratus”: but like Plutarch's Aratus, not Polybius'.

The end of Plutarch's chapter confirms the relevance of childhood: “this sort of inconsistency is created in gifted people by a lack of philosophical training, for they produce virtue without knowledge as if it were a self-seeded fruit, with no cultivation.” The first point to notice is simply that Plutarch *can* generalise in that way: “this sort of inconsistency is produced . . .” It evidently happens all the time, and regularly for the same reasons. Polybius' generalisation rather took the form that “any sort of inconsistency can happen,” because humans are like that: if such inconsistency is to be explained, then different explanations will be needed in each case. Secondly, the sort of explanation Plutarch favours turns so very naturally to childhood; but, once again, for our tastes it is so shallow. What is there, or what is good, comes from education: what is absent or bad comes from the lack of it. He does not feel the need to differentiate exactly what Aratus learnt from any particular school or tutor; indeed, it is striking that in the chapters on Aratus' youth he said virtually nothing about education, leaving the point for this later development. As in Marius and even Marcellus, defective education seems important to understanding the hero: but in the early chapters of all these *Lives* Plutarch does not feel the need to trace the theme in any detail. For him, the phenomenon of this sort of δεινότης is so regular, and comes about for such uniform educational reasons, just like Marcellus' bellicosity or Marius' lack of self-control. It is so easy to work out what the crucial education must have been like, and there is so little that is individual to say. There is no problem in understanding how this Aratus became “the sort of person” he is. Had Polybius grasped the nettle of explaining his quirkiest, more irregular blend of traits, the analysis of development would have had to be distinctly more differentiated.

That concluding stress on education may still seem surprisingly intrusive and unsubtle; but it is less surprising specifically in *Aratus*, where the moralism is often rather cruder and more explicit than in the *Parallel Lives* (cf. e.g. 9. 7, 19. 4, 25. 7, 26. 4–5, 30. 2, 38. 5–12, 44. 6). It is

indeed a very pedagogic *Life*, as the introduction makes clear: Plutarch is providing Polycrates with a model for his own two sons to imitate (1. 5–6), hoping that they will be inspired to emulate the virtues of their ancestor. But first they need to sit at their books: the emphasis on education suits the youthful audience, and indeed a similar point is made a few chapters later, when Antigonus' pleasures are sadly lacking in λογισμός, that distinctive attribute of the rational, educated man (17. 7). Not, of course, that Plutarch would wish the sons of Polycrates to go out and try to rebuild the Achaean League; or assert the independence of Hellas; or even emulate Aratus' peculiar knack for getting on with foreign kings—though the relevance of *that* to the present time might, in a cruder author, seem more immediate. But Plutarch is not so crude; and his political sense is much too acute for the assumption of such unsophisticated parallels between past and present. But there are still lessons of virtue and vice for history to teach to public men.<sup>22</sup>

This peculiarly insistent moralism may prompt further suspicions about the “integration.” One effect of this form of characterisation is to reduce Aratus to more of a type; and it is natural to wonder if the typical nature of such a hero goes along with a certain sort of moralism, and certain taste for the exemplary. After all, Plutarch's Aratus has a much clearer paradigmatic relevance than Polybius': his brand of δεινότης and σύνεσις are represented as familiar human traits, familiar enough for us to be on the look out for them in ourselves and others, and to draw conclusions. Polycrates' sons could indeed find, or themselves develop into, “a sort of person like Aratus”: the more regular the combination of traits, the easier it is to extract morals, and the more generally applicable those morals will be. It would doubtless be a mistake to assume that the search for exemplariness is necessarily *primary*—that Plutarch consciously reduced a character's singularity in order to make it more straightforward to extract his morals for everyday life: integration came more naturally to him than so coldblooded an analysis would suggest. But one can at least suspect that the two tendencies reinforced one another, that integration encouraged or facilitated the extraction of morals, and the taste for morals reinforced the assumption of integration. And in the case of *Aratus* the moral can indeed be a straightforward, protreptic one. The sons of Polycrates should try to be like Aratus in some ways but not in others; and if they set to their education like good boys, they may prove worthy of their ancestral model, and in some way may even improve on him. The moral, like the character, is very straightforward.

<sup>22</sup> *Mor.* 457a ff., 814a–c clarify his view on the moral lessons which history can teach contemporary politicians.

3. *Lysander*

*Lysander* is less straightforward, both in its characterisation and in its moralism: the character is much less clearly a type, and the extraction of morals becomes a more delicate business. But there are similarities too, for here again we have an "integrated" character, even if a more singular and elaborate one; here too we have an interest in childhood and childhood influences, but one which might seem curiously shallow; and here again this is largely because even so complex a character is not too difficult to understand. Plutarch was not straining all the time to penetrate a problematic character, as a modern biographer might. Other things mattered more.

The interest in childhood influences is immediately clear, and so is the concern to relate *Lysander* to the norms of Spartan behaviour:

2. 1 It is said that *Lysander's* father, Aristocleitus, did not belong to the royal family, though he was descended from the children of Heracles.
- 2 *Lysander* himself was brought up in poverty, and showed himself as amenable as any Spartan to training in the customs of his country: he showed too that he had a manly spirit and was indifferent to all pleasures, except for those which honoured and successful men win by their own glorious exploits—and indeed it is no disgrace for a young Spartan to yield to these. The Spartans expect their boys from the very first to be conscious of public opinion, to take any censure deeply to heart as well as to exult in praise, and anyone who remains indifferent or fails to respond to these sentiments is despised as an idle clod, utterly lacking in any ambition to excel. This kind of ambition and contentiousness (φιλότιμον . . . καὶ φιλόνηκον), then, had been implanted in *Lysander* by his Spartan training, and it would be unfair to blame his natural disposition too much in this respect. On the other hand he seems to have displayed a gift for paying court to the powerful such as one would not expect in a Spartan, and to have been able to bear the arrogance of those in authority when it was necessary: that is a quality which some people regard as an important element in political shrewdness.
- 5 Aristotle, when he observes that great natures, such as those of Socrates, Plato, and Heracles, are especially prone to melancholy, notes that *Lysander* also became a prey to melancholy, not at first, but in his later years.
- 6 The most distinctive fact about his character, however, is that although he himself endured poverty honourably, and was never enslaved or even momentarily corrupted by money, he nevertheless filled his own country not merely with riches but with the craving for them, and he deprived Sparta of the admiration she had always enjoyed for her indifference to wealth. This came about because he brought immense quantities of gold and silver into Sparta after the war with Athens, although he did not keep a single drachma for himself.
- 7 On another occasion, when Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, sent *Lysander's* daughters some luxurious Sicilian tunics, he refused them,

saying that he was afraid they would make his daughters look uglier.

- 8 A little later an ambassador was sent from the same city, Sparta, to the same ruler.<sup>23</sup> Dionysius presented the ambassador with two dresses and told him to choose whichever he preferred and take it back to his daughter: the ambassador answered that she could choose better herself, and took both dresses away with him.

(*Lysander* 2, translated Scott-Kilvert [adapted]).

One typical feature of Plutarch's technique is his progressive redefinition of character.<sup>24</sup> He tends to begin by presenting traits or themes rather crudely and bluntly, only later complementing and refining and adding the subtleties, and a character tends to become more singular as his *Life* progresses. The same technique is used here to define *Lysander's* relation to the conventions of his city. At first he is not an especially singular figure: indeed, his "ambition and contentiousness" (2. 4) are two of the most regular traits in Plutarch's repertoire;<sup>25</sup> and, for the moment, it is these characteristics which—perhaps surprisingly, at least in the case of "contentiousness"<sup>26</sup>—are related to his Spartan education (2. 2–4). At this point the explicitly unspartan qualities are only his capacity to pay court to the powerful, and his curious attitude to money: Plutarch points the paradox that he was impervious to greed himself, but eventually filled Sparta with wealth, to her ultimate catastrophe. But the *Life* goes on to stress how the "ambition and contentiousness"—the Spartan traits—gave rise to a much wider range of unspartan behaviour, not just in paying court to foreign potentates, but also in *Lysander's* deviousness, his versatility and enterprise, his religious unscrupulousness (explicitly "unspartan" at 8. 5), and his shrewd but bloody exploitation of party divisions in foreign states in the interest of his own followers. *Lysander* understands and exploits unspartan qualities in others, whether enterprise or greed (3, 4. 6–7, 5. 5 ff., 13. 5 ff., 19. 4),<sup>27</sup> and ends as a very individual figure himself, vitally

<sup>23</sup> On the interpretation of this passage see D. Sansone and R. Renehan, *CP* 76 (1981) 202–07. Both rightly insist that *Lysander* must here be contrasted with a separate "ambassador." The text had hitherto been read as if *Lysander* himself was the ambassador, so that Plutarch would be contrasting his earlier and later behaviour: that would be clumsy Greek, leaving ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως particularly pointless, and incoherent in view of *Lysander's* later characterisation. I follow Renehan in assuming that no textual alteration is necessary to support the reinterpretation.

<sup>24</sup> On this technique cf. my commentary on *Aniomy* (Cambridge 1988) 12–13, 25, 42–43; and "Childhood," section II.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bucher-Isler (as n. 3), 11–13, 31, 41, and especially 58–59; D. A. Russell, "Plutarch, 'Alcibiades' 1–16," *PCPS* 12 (1966) 38.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. below, p. 272.

<sup>27</sup> There are times when close comparison with other sources reveals Plutarch's distinctive emphases. For instance, in ch. 3 he affords much more space than Xenophon or Diodorus to the seething entrepôt Epheus, a very unspartan milieu which *Lysander* knows how to exploit; and at 4. 6–7 he puts more weight than his source Xenophon on the consequences of extracting the extra obol from Cyrus—the extensive desertions from the enemy fleet, seduced by that greed

different from the norms of his country—indeed, so unspartan that he even tries to subvert the whole constitution (24. 3–6, cf. 30. 3–5, *Sulla* 40[2]). He is contrasted with a series of foils who are much more predictable in their Spartan ways:<sup>28</sup> first the avaricious ambassador of 2. 8; then, more elaborately, the conventional Callicratidas at 5. 7–7. 1, with his simplicity, pride, and justice, “worthy of Sparta” as they are (7. 1); then the boorish Callibius, who does not know how to rule free men (15. 7–8); then Gylippus, who disgraces himself with his avarice (16–17. 1), and fits a different but equally familiar type, the Spartan abroad who *cannot* resist wealth; and finally Pausanias, with his lack of enterprise, style, or success.

In several ways, then, Plutarch gradually brings out the singular and paradoxical features of Lysander's character; it is central to his point to bring out how *un*stereotyped a Spartan this is, how he belies the normal expectations which are pointed by those stereotyped foils; and he ends as much less Spartan than that introduction at ch. 2 would suggest. And yet his traits still cluster very naturally, the resourcefulness, the capacity to exploit others, the deviousness, the unscrupulousness, and the bloodiness; and we can see how readily all these traits complement those which were introduced in the first chapter. The crucial ambition, φιλοτιμία, remains, and he duly rejoices in the honours (τιμαί) he is paid at 18. 4–19. 1; but that ambition comes to go closely with a rising contempt for others (at 19. 1 Plutarch explicitly connects the two qualities). This megalomaniac arrogance becomes a disabling weakness, especially at 22. 1–5; and—when it is crossed—it develops into the eventual melancholic wrathfulness which that early chapter had foreshadowed (2. 5, cf. 28. 1). The melancholia, wrath, and megalomania might have come as more of a surprise if the φιλοτιμία had not served as a linking theme: that, surely, is why he is at such pains to reintroduce the theme of the ambition in ch. 18, just before the contempt and wrath become so important to the narrative. With that firmly in our minds, nothing now seems too difficult or idiosyncratic; and we again see how even an unsterotyped, singular figure shows traits which cluster in a very “integrated,” unmodern way, and how Plutarch carefully controls his narrative in order to make the grouping more natural.<sup>29</sup>

which Lysander so shrewdly knows how to generate. But only a very full commentary could pursue such points through the whole *Life*. Some of the necessary material, but little of the interpretation, is furnished in J. Smits' largely linguistic commentary (Amsterdam 1939).

<sup>28</sup> On this technique in *Lysander* cf. D. A. Russell, “On reading Plutarch's *Lives*,” *G & R* 13 (1966) 152–54.

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting here to note a slightly different emphasis in the *Synkrisis* (*Sulla* 40 [2]. 6), where Lysander is said to commit his outrages “on behalf of his friends,” to secure their power in the allied states. One can see how that interpretation *could* fit the facts as the *Lysander* narrative presents them: but it was not the tenor of the *Life* itself, where Lysander rather installs his friends in power in the ruthless interest of his own, and Sparta's, power. The narrative emphasis sits better with Lysander's other traits, whereas that of the *Synkrisis* would have left

Whether we quite have the psychological *understanding* we expect from a modern author is a different point. How far do we really grasp what turns Lysander into so individual a Spartan? It would be wrong, surely, to think that Plutarch traces much *development* in his character, except for that late growth of arrogance and melancholia. Ch. 2 certainly links the “ambition and contentiousness” to his education, and so posits a process of development in his youth; but we do not see that development in any depth, and thereafter Lysander does not really change from a Spartan into an unspartan, nor do we see how those initial Spartan traits change into counterparts which are less traditional and more subversive (interesting though such a portrayal might have been). After that general introduction in ch. 2, Lysander is fairly unspartan from the moment we see him, and the conventional Callicratidas is his foil as early as 5. 7–7. 6. This is not development, though this is equally a more unconventional figure than the introduction had led us to expect: it is rather the same technique of progressive redefinition, the use of an initial description which is deliberately inadequate and then gradually refined. And yet the only *explanations* of his character are given precisely in that initial description, where we are given only the faintest suggestions of the character we are later to see.

Even the attitude to wealth, explicitly marked at 2. 6–8 as an individual and unspartan trait, is explained rather disappointingly. It simply seems to be related to the poverty of his family background (a view which was clearly controversial, and one which Plutarch can only support by straining the slight evidence he had).<sup>30</sup> But that penury, as Plutarch presents it, only explains Lysander's capacity to do without wealth himself: it does not help us to understand why he developed so shrewd an ability to exploit the avarice of others, or why he so catastrophically kept sending wealth back home to Sparta. Given Plutarch's capacity for imaginative reconstruction, he might so easily have built a picture of Lysander's first reaction to seeing foreign luxury, a mixture perhaps of inner contempt and ruthless determination to exploit it for Sparta's interests.<sup>31</sup> Plutarch could even have gone further: had he wanted to prefigure Lysander's later insensitivity, he

his character less “integrated”; ironically, the *Synkrisis* point is closer to the treatment afforded Agesilaus in his *Life*, where susceptibility to friends is an important theme. So too Lysander's λακωνική δίαίτια is more stressed in the *Synkrisis* (*Sulla* 41[3]. 2) than in the narrative: in the narrative we might have inferred it from his attitude to wealth, but too insistent a stress would have sat uneasily with the emphasis on his style in courting wealthy luxurious potentates, so different from that of a Callicratidas (5. 5–7. 1).

<sup>30</sup> For the controversy cf. e. g. 18. 3, Athen. 12. 543b, Nep. *Lys.* 4. Plutarch's presentation may be influenced by the comparison with the poor but noble Sulla, as Dr. O. D. Watkins has suggested to me.

<sup>31</sup> Twentieth-century treatments of Russian moles in the British establishment offer suggestive parallels.



might have linked the contempt for wealth with a failure to grasp what it would really mean for Sparta; had he preferred to stress the self-seeking, he might rather have suggested a shrewd perception of exactly what wealth might mean, and of the possibilities of power it might leave for a person who remained impervious to its charms. Yet this style of reconstruction was not what he was here interested in, though other *Lives* suggest that it was well within his range: this peculiarly rich *Life* already had enough paradoxes and contrasts to satisfy his taste.

And what tasty paradoxes and contrasts were these? A further oddity of ch. 2 gives one clue. It might be natural enough to regard "ambition" or "love of honour," φιλοτιμία, as a product of the Spartan educational training; "contentiousness" certainly clusters closely with "ambition," but is a less expected Spartan trait. The beginning of *Agésilau*s is suggestive here, for the qualities Agésilau>s inherits from the Spartan ἀγωγή are there his "common touch and kindness of manner" (1. 5), while his contentiousness is made a more individual feature (2. 1): that too is not a wholly cogent treatment ("kindness of manner," τὸ φιλόανθρωπον, does not really convince as a Spartan trait), but it certainly suggests a rather different view of the ἀγωγή from that of *Lysander*. Perhaps the reason is that in *Lysander* it will indeed be important to find these traits of ambition and contentiousness recurring in other Spartans, especially in Agésilau>s himself, men who had presumably suffered the same training. What is more, this will contribute decisively to Lysander's final reverses: for, singular though Lysander may be, it is a peculiar irony that he is finally destroyed when he encounters the same traits in others. His capacity to court (θεραπεύειν) foreign dynasts was always a strength, as 2. 4 stressed and as was immediately clear in his dealings with Cyrus (4. 1–6): but, when he returns to Asia Minor at 19. 1–2, he himself comes to play the dynast, and it is those who pay court to him (οἱ θεραπεύοντες, 19. 2) who inflame his ambition and his contempt. That is just the point where the reversals in his fortune begin to become important, and Plutarch stresses the distaste he aroused among conventional Spartans (19. 3, 19. 7 ff., though cf. already 14. 3).<sup>32</sup> Then these same θεραπεύοντες are instrumental in provoking the discord between Lysander and Agésilau>s, when Agésilau>s is so irritated that no court is paid to him; Lysander himself has eventually to advise them to go and θεραπεύειν Agésilau>s instead (23. 5–11). Here of course it is Agésilau>s' own φιλοτιμία and contentiousness which is at play (cf. 23. 3); Lysander cannot control his own φιλοτιμία in response (23. 7); but by now, clearly, he is meeting his match. He similarly is outdone in deviousness by Pharnabazus (20: cf. especially 20. 2, πρὸς Κρήτα δ' ἄρα

<sup>32</sup> The placing of the digressions on Spartan wealth, 17, and the *skualiz*, 19. 8–12, is thought-provoking. The length of both may seem clumsy, but both in different ways stress elements of distinctive Spartan *tradition*: and it is precisely now that Lysander's unconventional traits are leaving him dangerously at odds with traditional Spartan sentiment.

... κρητίζων, and 20. 5, "οὐκ ἄρ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐστὶν αἰμόλος μόνος"); and ephors and kings are showing themselves able to meddle in local party politics as well (21. 2–7). Lysander was unspartan enough; but, when he sets the tone, others can readily follow, and combine to generate his catastrophe. He duly dies, in battle: and in that battle a crucial role is played by 300 Thebans who had been accused of Laconising and were eager to prove their loyalty (28. 12). The local feudings which Lysander had always exploited so deftly come to play a strange role at the end.

The reversals combine to generate a *peripeteia* of peculiar neatness. It is indeed highly reminiscent of tragedy, where so often a figure's peculiar characteristics or strengths unleash forces which eventually destroy him, frequently with a chilling symmetry: one thinks of Oedipus, or Clytemnestra, or Ajax, or Hippolytus, or the Creon of *Antigone*.<sup>33</sup> It is no surprise, indeed, to find a fitting dominance of tragic imagery in the closing chapters of the *Life*. With Agésilau>s in Asia, for instance, it is "like a tragedy," with Lysander as a chief actor playing a subordinate social role (23. 6); when Lysander begins his plot to subvert the constitution, he is ὡς περ ἐν τραγωδίᾳ μηχανὴν αἴρων ἐπὶ τοὺς πολίτας (25. 2), adducing for his case a series of *prophecies and oracles*—themselves of course the stuff of tragedy; and finally "Lysander's part in the drama came to an end through the cowardice of one of his actors and accomplices" (26. 6), men who had earlier been described as his "fellow actors in the dramatic plot" (τοῦ μύθου συναγωνισταί, 26. 2).<sup>34</sup> After that, what more suitable setting for Lysander's death could there be than the birthplace of Dionysus, the god of tragedy himself (28. 7)? For indeed, as often in tragedy, we are surely aware of numinous powers at play as he meets his death, and that is particularly appropriate for one who had so often taken the names of the gods in vain: it is not, for instance, a casual coincidence that his death miraculously and paradoxically proves some ancient oracles true (29. 5–12). One final irony is that Lysander, for all his deviousness and megalomania, has usually promoted Sparta's interest with some sureness of touch: many for instance had been eager to see his return to Asia, rather than more of the virtuous Callicratidas (5. 7–8, 7. 2). Even as the rift with his country grows deeper, he is still alert to performing what service he can (23. 13); it is his domestic enemies whose meddling comes to endanger the city (21. 2–7). The charge was laid against Pausanias that he had taken the Athenian people when they were bridled by an oligarchy, and loosed them for further violence and arrogance: that increased Lysander's reputation as a man who had ruled in a powerful and individual style, but not to gratify others *nor*

<sup>33</sup> For the influence of tragedy on Plutarch see now J. M. Mossman, "Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's *Alexander*," *JHS* 108 (1988) 83–93.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Smits (as n. 27) ad loc. συναγωνιστής can itself be used more generally (cf. *LSJ* s.v. and Wyttendbach's index), but hardly with τοῦ μύθου, or in this context of extended theatrical imagery.

*theatrically* (οὐδὲ θεατρικῶς), but in pursuit of Sparta's interests" (21. 7). Clearly, Lysander is not the only actor in this drama, nor is it only his tragedy. Torn by discord and corrupted by wealth, Sparta is a victim too.

This is a very fine and tightly structured *Life*, and its moralism is thought-provoking and profound. But few of its themes really depend on *understanding* Lysander's psychology, and one can see why Plutarch did not make this his priority. What is more, this is a different moralism from that of *Aratus*, and one which combines with an "integrated" character in a rather different way. Polycrates' children might be able to draw simple morals from *Aratus*' history for their own experience; but none of Plutarch's audience were likely to find themselves in any remotely similar circumstances to Lysander's, or feel tempted to behave in any remotely similar way. True, none would feel tempted to go and assert Greece's independence in the style of *Aratus* or *Philopoemen* either, but in those cases latter-day analogies could be found, and Polycrates' sons could still feel inspired to behave with circumspect worthiness of their Greek past. In the case of *Lysander* it is hard to see what even these latter-day analogies would be: after all, no reader would find his temperament chafing against Spartan discipline in any remotely parallel style, nor be tempted to turn himself into any equivalent of a melancholic or megalomaniac dynast. The moralism in such a case is of a different sort, rather closer to that of tragedy: this is a more descriptive moralism, pointing a truth of human experience rather than building a model for crude imitation or avoidance. Human nature can produce a figure like Lysander, even or especially in a city like Sparta; and figures like that tend to generate their own destruction, in tragically appropriate ways. For an audience brought up on "integrated" characters, the more tightly Lysander's traits would cluster, the more convincing they might find him: to that extent, the integration of his characterisation once again reinforces the moralism, though not in the sense that Plutarch's audience might really fear growing into Lysanders themselves, or finding one in other people. Indeed, Plutarch's readers might not find themselves behaving very differently at all after understanding Lysander's story. But they would find their grasp of the human experience enhanced: and, if a moralist could achieve that, he was achieving something very worthwhile.

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## 5

The Proems of Plutarch's *Lives*

PHILIP A. STADTER

According to the proverb, "Well begun is half done." Plutarch certainly accepted this principle, for he lavished special care on the openings of his *Parallel Lives*. In this he was not unusual. Ever since Homer, artists had taken pains with the beginnings of their works. When rhetorical theory became the principal means of discussing literary organization, detailed rules were established governing the proper treatment of formal beginnings, or proems (προοίμια, Latin *exordia*). Other prose writers—philosophers, historians, technical writers—borrowed and adapted these theories for their own works. No writer, however, excels Plutarch in the variety, charm, and technical skill of his proems.

The very number of the proems in the *Parallel Lives*<sup>1</sup>—more than twenty—makes them a proper subject for study for anyone interested in the form of ancient prose or its use of rhetorical principles. But they are of more than formal interest, since they also reveal the expectations and assumptions of Plutarch and his readers. In them Plutarch expresses his motivations and purposes, and several contain major statements on method. In addition, since proems are especially directed at gaining the interest of the reader, they implicitly reveal the nature of his audience: their social status, leisure activities, and intellectual interests. The proems to the *Lives* do not follow the model of other biographical proems, or of historical proems, although there are similarities of topic. In their variety and techniques they often remind one, as might be expected, of the essays of the *Moralia*. This study, after a summary account of earlier biographical proems, will explore the principal themes and techniques which Plutarch employs in the proems to the *Parallel Lives*, their relation to rhetorical theory, and some of the features which distinguish them from those of other writers.

<sup>1</sup> The appendix contains a brief discussion of the proems to the *Aratus*, *Artaxerxes*, and *Galba* (the *Otho* does not have one, being part of the same work as the *Galba*), which are not part of the *Parallel Lives*.



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