

Plutarchan Synkrisis

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In this paper I shall be concerned mainly with external synkrisis in Plutarch, that is with the synkriseis or comparisons which follow most pairs of the *Parallel Lives*, and not with the thoroughgoing internal synkrisis within pairs; this has been studied well enough in recent articles.¹

1. It is fashionable these days to defend the integrity—if not the style—of Plutarch's comparisons. This favourable verdict reflects that of Plutarch's greatest admirer in the early modern period, Michel de Montaigne, who defended then against the charge of bad faith brought by his contemporary, Jean Bodin, by declaring that, 'en ses comparaisons (qui est la piece plus admirable de ses œuvres et en laquelle, à mon avis, il s'est autant pleu), la fidelité et syncerité de ses jugements égale leur profondeur et leur pois.'² Such praise has not always been forthcoming. In this century Hirzel condemned the comparisons wholly: they were as suitable 'wie die Faust aufs Auge'.³ Wilamowitz estimated them to be of no importance.⁴ Konrat Ziegler talked disparagingly of 'öde rhetorische Antithesendrescherei'.⁵ The tide turned fully with Erbse, followed by Bucher-Isler, Russell, and others, who have affirmed the close connexion between the epilogues and the preceding narratives.⁶ This enlightenment was pioneered, of course, by Focke in his great article on syn-

¹ H. Erbse, *Die Bedeutung der Synkrisis*, *Hermes* 84 (1956) 398-424; P.A. Stadter, *Plutarch's Comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus*, *GRBS* 16 (1975) 77-85; J. Geiger, *Plutarch's Parallel Lives: the Choice of Heroes*, *Hermes* 109 (1981) 85-104; C.B.R. Pelling, *Synkrisis in Plutarch's Lives*, in *Miscellanea Plutarchea* (Ferrara 1986) 83-96; F. Frazier, *A propos de la composition des couples dans les 'Vies parallèles' de Plutarque*, *RPh* 61 (1987) 65-75; S. Swain, *Plutarch's Philopoemen and Flamininus*, *ICS* 13.2 (1988) 335-47; id., *Plutarch's Aemilius and Timoleon*, *Historia* 38 (1989) 314-34; D.H.J. Larmour, *Plutarch's Compositional Methods in the Theseus and Romulus*, *TAPA* 118 (1988) 361-75.

² M. de Montaigne, *Essais* 2.32, CUF ed. vol. 2 (Paris 1947) 180 f.; J. Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (Strasbourg 1627) 80.

³ R. Hirzel, *Plutarch* (Leipzig 1912) 71 f.

⁴ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, in *Die griechische Literatur und Sprache* ed. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff et alii (Leipzig-Berlin 1912) 242; id., *Reden und Vorträge* 2⁴ (Berlin 1926) 261.

⁵ K. Ziegler, *RE* 21.1 (1951) 909.

⁶ B. Bucher-Isler, *Norm und Individualität in den Biographien Plutarchs* (Bern 1972) 74-8; D.A. Russel, *Plutarch* (London 1973) 110-13.

krisis in 1923.⁷ Focke's thorough treatment of the various genres that came together in Plutarchan synkrisis remains fundamental. He traced the origin of the figure from 'Agonmotiv' (e.g. Demosthenes on Aeschines in *De corona*), encomium (e.g. Xenophon's *Agésilas*), literary contests (e.g. the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*), and the judgements of historians (e.g. Polybius 24.11–13 on Philopoemen and Aristaenus). The long evolution of synkrisis culminated in the prescriptions of the rhetorical writers. One of the most important ideas expressed by them was the need of equality between the subjects to be compared. Theon of Alexandria, writing about the time of Plutarch, put it like this: 'Comparisons come about between things which do not have any major differences between them' (*Progymn.* 2.112.20 ff. Sp.).⁸ Synkrisis can only take place, he says, 'by there being no visible superiority of the one over the other' (ib.).⁹ A hundred years or so later Hermogenes divided the process of synkrisis into three basic types (*Progymn.* 19.14–19 Rabe): 'Sometimes our treatment is equal ... in all or in most respects; sometimes we prefer one side ... sometimes we blame the one entirely and praise the other'.¹⁰ These precepts can be applied without too much strain to Plutarchan synkrisis, where a greater or lesser equality prevails, but praise or censure is attributed to one or other of a pair on particular points.¹¹

2. To illustrate synkrisis in the comparisons of Plutarch's *Lives* I want first to consider some general criteria. At *Alex* 1.2 Plutarch tells us that a 'small detail' (πράγμα βραχύ) can often give us a particular insight into the character of a man, but that the overall picture can only be gained from the study of great actions.¹² This approach is what we find in the comparisons. At *Demosth.-Cic. synk.* 3.2 we are told, 'What is thought and said most of all to reveal and test the character of a man [is] power and office'.¹³ There is a similar remark at *Ages.-Pomp. synk.* 3.4: 'preeminence of virtue in a leader is found rather in the greatest and most far-reaching military actions and decisions'.¹⁴ Plutarch is careful to distinguish between virtues (or the lack of them) which are native in the hero and those virtues or attributes which are his by contact with a particular society or by the influence of contemporaries.¹⁵

⁷ F. Focke, *Synkrisis*, *Hermes* 58 (1923) 327–68.

⁸ αἱ συγκρίσεις γίνονται οὐ τῶν μεγάλῃν πρὸς ἄλληλα διαφορὰν ἐχόντων.

⁹ διὰ τὸ μηδεμίαν ὄραν τοῦ ἑτέρου πρὸς τὸ ἕτερον ὑπεροχὴν.

¹⁰ ἐνίοτε μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὸ ἴσον προάγομεν ... ἢ διὰ πάντων ἢ διὰ πλειόνων· ἐνίοτε δὲ θάτερον προτίθεμεν ... ἐνίοτε δὲ τὸ μὲν ψέγομεν ὅλως, τὸ δὲ ἐκαινούμεν.

¹¹ Cf. Focke (n. 7) 357 f.

¹² *Alex.* 1.2; cf. *Demetr.* 1.5.8; *Pomp.* 8.7; *Nic.* 1.5 nature is revealed ὑπὸ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων παθῶν.

¹³ ὁ δὲ δοκεῖ μάλιστα καὶ λέγεται τρόπον ἀνδρὸς ἐπιδεικνύσαι καὶ βασιανίζειν, ἐξουσία καὶ ἀρχή.

¹⁴ εἰ μέντοι τοῖς μέγιστοις καὶ κυριωτάτοις εἰς τὰ ὄπλα πράγμασι καὶ λογισμοῖς προστίθεται πρωτεῖον ἀρετῆς ἀνδρὸς ἡγεμόνος.

¹⁵ Cf. *Dion-Brut. synk.* 2.1, 4.1; *Pel.-Marc. synk.* 1.6; *Lyc.-Numa synk.* 2.2; *Lys.-Sulla synk.* 1.4–6.

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Theon recommends the same course with regard to actions, and prefers (2.113.11–12 Sp.) 'those which follow from choice rather than from necessity or chance.¹⁶ Plutarch is fully aware of the different eras in which heroes lived. As he puts it at *Sol.-Publ. synk.* 4.4, 'one must examine actions in the light of the times which were behind them.'¹⁷ He regularly asks whether a hero did what he did on his own or with aid. At *Phil.-Flam. synk.* 2.3 he notes that, 'where other things are the same, they win who prevail through their own virtue.'¹⁸ At *Aem.-Tim. synk.* 1.5 we read that, 'equal successes which depend on unequal preparation are to the credit of the commander.'¹⁹ This is a common pattern. Solon did it his way and 'not with others' (*Sol.-Publ. synk.* 3.3). Demetrius was ἀντουργός unlike Antony, who worked διὰ τῶν στρατηγῶν (*Demetr.-Ant. synk.* 5.5). Sulla had no help from home, whereas Lysander did (*Lys.-Sulla synk.* 5.1–2). Aemilius had regular soldiers unlike Timoleon with his motley crew (*Aem.-Tim. synk.* 1.4).

An interesting variation on this question is the provenance of a hero, in particular, the enormous support that might be afforded him from Rome. Clearly this could distort the truth about his own talents. Thus Aemilius almost had no choice but to be virtuous, since 'he was, it seems, so prepared right from the start by the laws of his country' (*Aem.-Tim. synk.* 2.1).²⁰ Likewise the Gracchi had the advantage of 'an excellent upbringing and education' (*Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi synk.* 1.2), presumably because Rome then had 'the greatest and most brilliant reputation and a zeal for noble deeds' (ib. 1.4).²¹ Lucullus had leadership conferred on him by his country, while it was Cimon himself who conferred it upon his (*Cim.-Luc. synk.* 2.2). Even Sertorius had the advantage of a senatorial career over Eumenes (*Sert.-Eum. synk.* 1.3). At *Arist.-Cato Maj. synk.* 1.3–4 the great size of Rome is, by contrast, to Cato's credit, because he came originally from a πόλις which was comparable, Plutarch says, to the Athens of Aristides' day, and so Cato mastered Rome by his own efforts. The relative strength of heroes' opponents is also a factor which had to be considered. Plutarch notes the difference between the Syracuse taken by Marcus and the Sparta which Pelopidas failed to take (*Pel.-Marc. synk.* 2.2). Here he does not decide between the heroes, unlike at *Nic.-Crass. synk.* 2.4 where he recognises that Crassus is ὑψηλός and μεγαλόφρων to have contended against Caesar and Pompey as Nicias was not in taking on Cleon and Hyperbolus.

It is this kind of treatment which led Focke to declare that Plutarch's

¹⁶ τὰς ἐκ προαιρέσεως μᾶλλον τῶν δι' ἀνάγκην ἢ τύχην. For *proairesis* in Plutarch see A. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (London 1974) esp. 107–15.

¹⁷ δεῖ δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ὑποκειμένους καιροὺς τὰς πράξεις θεωρεῖν.

¹⁸ οἷς γὰρ ὁμοία τάλλα, τῷ προύχῃν ἀρετῇ κρατοῦσι.

¹⁹ τὰ γὰρ ἅπ' οὐκ ἴσης παρασκευῆς ἴσα κατορθώματα τῷ στρατηγῷ τὴν αἰτίαν περιτίθησι.

²⁰ ὑπὸ τῶν νόμων καὶ τῆς πατρίδος οὕτως εὐθὺς ἀφικέσθαι παρεσκευασμένος.

²¹ τροφῆς τε καὶ παιδείσεως ἐκπρεποῦς ἔτυχον ... ὅτε λαμπρότατον εἶχεν ἡ Ῥώμη καὶ μέγιστον ἀξίωμα, [καὶ] καλῶν ἔργων ζῆλον.

remarks in the comparisons amounted to 'nicht eine vertiefte Erkenntnis seiner Personen, sondern lediglich die Bewertung ihrer Leistungen.'²² But all the comparisons have a section on morals distinct from military and political acts, with the exception of *Demosth.-Cic.*, *Dion-Brut.*, *Pel.-Marc.*, and *Sert.-Eum.* In the first of these it may be that the section on writings and manner of Speech (*Demosth.-Cic. synk.* 1–2) counts as moral comment (note especially 1.4 τοῦ ἤθους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἐκατέρου δίοψις); in the others the comparisons are concerned with political and military activity, but as in *Demosth.-Cic.* there is a programmatic statement in the first *Life* which is concerned with ethics.²³ We should always bear in mind, of course, that the main source for moral example and comment is in the narratives themselves. Plutarch makes this plain in a passage like *Per.* 2.5, where he says of Pericles' and Fabius Maximus' virtues that, 'it is possible to judge from their stories, if I have successfully aimed at what is needed.'²⁴ There are a number of parallels for this.²⁵

3. I want now to come to a particular set of criteria, whose importance for understanding the comparisons has not perhaps been fully appreciated. In the comparisons Plutarch often seems to evaluate the status of his heroes relative to one another by means of ὁμοιότητες, 'similarities', and διαφοραί, 'differences'. This requires explication, for the methodology employed is not simply commonsensical. It is Plutarch's way of suggesting to us that we compare heroes by reflecting how particular qualities are expressed differently in them. The approach may best be explained by considering one or two works of the *Moralia*, as so often the treasury of Plutarch's thought. Take first *De sollertia animalium*. This piece is concerned with differences between land animals and the creatures of the sea. It is a dialogue (of sorts) and is conducted like a moot trial (cf. 965e, 975c, 985c). When the differences between the opposing sides have been catalogued by their respective advocates and the jurors are asked to vote (985c),²⁶ we read, 'if you combine the arguments you have been using against one another, both of you will have an excellent and joint case against those [the Stoics] who seek to deprive animals of sense and intelligence.'²⁷ *De soll. anim.* has little in common with supremacy contests like that between the olive and the laurel in Callimachus *Iambus* IV or the *certamen* between 'a mushroom and a beccafico and an oyster and a thrush', which Suetonius tells us was delivered before Tiberius (*Tib.* 42.2). In *De soll. anim.* it is shown that the two groups have equal intelligence: the listing of διαφοραί has been necessary to state their essential ὁμοιότης.

This procedure applies also to people. We find it used not where there are

²² Focke (n. 7) 358.

²³ *Demosth.* 3.1; *Dion* 1; *Pel.* 2.9–12; *Sert.* 1.11.

²⁴ εἰ δ' ὀρθῶς στοχαζόμεθα τοῦ δέοντος, ἔξεστι κρίνειν ἐκ τῶν γραφομένων.

²⁵ *Cim.* 3.3; *Ag./Cleom.* 2.9; *Phoc.* 3.9; *Marius* 2.4; *Arat.* 10.5; *Quaest. conviv.* 697e.

²⁶ For 'votes' cf. *Cim.-Luc. synk.* 3.6; *Thes.-Rom. synk.* 3.3.

²⁷ ταυτὶ γάρ, ἃ πρὸς ἀλλήλους εἰρήκατε, συνθέντες εἰς ταῦτόν ἀμφοτέροι καλῶς ἀγωνισθεῖσθε κοινῇ πρὸς τὰ ζῷα λόγου καὶ συνέσεως ἀποστεροῦντας.

wide differences ality is difficult Plutarch's appro *moralis*.²⁸ In this character that lez individual: since and *pathē* and air ger of homogene rational and the i ἔθος, meaning ne extent to which a different societie: lives now. At *De* irrational part of this quality and t

The idea of qu the *Moralia*. Qua *latore et amico* : order to isolate th which discusses : odio, we are told make for distinct ter' (536f).³⁰ The they are there. A *vales* 8.9, 732ε (μεταβολαὶ ποιοι and vinegar or ha is that, if these ite juice or water—v done in the *Para* sider the introduc lection of biograp stand the similarit comparing lives v that there is a virt may compare, but

²⁸ See D. Babut, *Plutarch*, Phoenix 43

²⁹ ποιότης τοῦ ἀλόγου λαμβάνει τὸ ἀλογον ἰ

³⁰ ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐχ οὕτω : ζητούμενον μεταδιώξ

³¹ καὶ μὴν οὐκ ἐστὶ καταμαθεῖν μᾶλλον, ἰ τας.

wide differences, but where there are large areas of similarity and individuality is difficult to determine. This point ties in with our understanding of Plutarch's approach to character, especially as we see it in the *De virtute morali*.²⁸ In this essay Plutarch, building on Aristotle, outlines a theory of character that leaves us with some problem as to what in fact constitutes the individual: since we are all formed of the same basic building blocks of *aretai* and *pathê* and aim for a harmonious balance of these within us, there is a danger of homogeneity. For Plutarch character (ἦθος) is the balance between the rational and the irrational sides of the soul, a balance which is determined by ἔθος, meaning not simply 'habit', but also 'usage', 'custom', 'norm', etc. The extent to which *aretai* prevail over *pathê* (and *vice versa*) is dependent on the different societies we live in and on how we have been brought up and live our lives now. At *De virt. mor.* 443c-d we are told that character is a quality of the irrational part of the soul, and that 'the irrational, moulded by reason, takes on this quality and this difference by habit'.²⁹

The idea of qualitative differentiation may be illustrated from elsewhere in the *Moralia*. Qualitative differences can make for real distinctions. At *De adulate et amico* 51d Plutarch says that we must look for such differences in order to isolate the flatterer from the true friend. At the beginning of the essay which discusses the close relationship between envy and hate, *De invidia et odio*, we are told that, 'similarities do not make for sameness as differences make for distinction, and so we shall settle the question by examining the latter' (536f).³⁰ The differences between these related things are not major: but they are there. A clear statement of the matter is found at *Quaestiones convivales* 8.9, 732b-c. Here Plutarch affirms that qualitative differences (μεταβολαὶ ποιοτήτων) between things which have a similar basis like wine and vinegar or hail and rain do not make for real differences. The implication is that, if these items were closely compared, their essential ὁμοιότης—grape-juice or water—would emerge. This close comparison is, of course, what is done in the *Parallel Lives*. If we stay with the *Moralia* for the moment, consider the introduction to the *Mulierum virtutes*, a work which is largely a collection of biographies. At 243b-d Plutarch says that, 'you cannot better understand the similarity and the difference between female and male *aretê* than by comparing lives with lives and actions with actions'.³¹ Plutarch does not mean that there is a virtue known as ἀρετὴ γυναικεῖα or ἀρετὴ ἀνδρεῖα, which we may compare, but rather that men and women as people share the same virtues

²⁸ See D. Babut, *Plutarque. De la vertu éthique* (Paris 1969). Cf. S. Swain, *Character Change in Plutarch*, *Phoenix* 43 (1989) 62-8.

²⁹ ποιότης τοῦ ἀλόγου τὸ ἦθος ἀνόμασται δ' ὅτι τὴν ποιότητα ταύτην καὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἔθει λαμβάνει τὸ ἀλογον ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου πλαττόμενον.

³⁰ ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐχ οὕτω ταῦτ' αἰ ὁμοιότητες ὡς ἕτερον αἰ διαφορὰ ποιούσιν, κατὰ ταύτας τὸ ζητούμενον μεταδιώξωμεν.

³¹ καὶ μὴν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρετῆς γυναικεῖας καὶ ἀνδρεῖας ὁμοιότητα καὶ διαφορὰν ἄλλοθεν καταμαθεῖν μᾶλλον, ἢ βίους βίους καὶ πράξεσι πράξεις ὡσπερ ἔργα μεγάλης τέχνης παρατιθέντας.

(and vices). Hence we may profitably enquire whether the intelligence of Tanaquil is of the same 'stamp and type' (χαρακτήρα καὶ τύπον) as that of Servius, or the 'spiritedness' (φρόνημα) of Pelopidas is the same as that of his fellow-Theban, Timocleia, and so on. The reason we can do this is that, 'the virtues acquire certain other differences, their own colours as it were, because of the natures [i.e. of individuals], and they assimilate themselves to the habits which underlie these [natures], the temperaments of the bodies, the manners of upbringing and of living'.³² Plutarch's terminology here is quite Platonic—the metaphors of shape and colour are drawn from the *Meno*, but the stress on *ethos* ('habit') is of course Aristotelian. As examples for his remarks Plutarch offers not only pairs from the same age and society, like Ajax and Achilles (a type of *synkrisis* straight out of the schools), but also pairs from different eras and places, like Cato and Agesilaus, Cornelia and Olympias. That all of this is relevant to the *Lives* is shown clearly by the introduction to the *Phoc.-Cato Min.* (*Phoc.* 3.6–9). There is, we are told there, a *diaphora* between the bravery of Alcibiades and Epaminondas, between the wisdom of Themistocles and Aristeides, etc., and even the virtues of Cato and Phocion, which have the same 'stamp, shape and colour', have 'ultimate and minute differences'. Identifying these differences, says Plutarch, 'will require a very subtle instrument of reasoning', but it clearly must be done, if we are to discover the precise ethical virtues in each hero and to derive ethical benefit from the parallelisation.

4. Keeping these remarks in mind I turn now to Plutarch's comparisons themselves. I wish to look at the ideas of Anton Stiefenhofer.³³ Both Erbse and Bucher-Isler pay tribute to Stiefenhofer's article on Plutarchan *synkrisis*, and they are right to do so, for he was the first to resurrect the comparisons after the damning judgement of Hirzel. Stiefenhofer aimed to link the introductions which are attached to most of the *Parallel Lives* with the comparisons that follow them. According to him, 'Dass übrigens Einleitung und Schluss in wechselseitige Beziehung zu setzen sind, geht schon aus der Tatsache hervor, dass die angehängte Vergleichung nur die Verschiedenheiten (διαφοραί) hervorhebt, wenn bereits in einem Prooemium der ähnlichen Züge Erwähnung geschehen, dass sie hingegen ὁμοιότητες und διαφοραί bringt, wenn kein dergartiges Prooemium vorhanden ist.'³⁴ The *Lives*, then, fall into two groups. The first comprises *Thes.-Rom.*, *Per.-Fab.*, *Pel.-Marc.*, *Cim.-Luc.*, *Aem.-Tim.*, *Nic.-Crass.*, *Sert.-Eum.*, *Demosth.-Cic.*, *Demetr.-Ant.*, *Dion-Brut.*, *Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi* (eleven pairs).³⁵ In the second group are *Lyc.-Numa*, *Cor.-Alcib.*, *Arist.-Cato Maj.*, *Lys.-Sulla*, *Solon-Publ.*, *Phil.-Flam.*, *Ages.-Pomp.*

³² ἐπειδὴ διαφορὰς γέ τινας ἑτέρας, ὡσπερ χροιάς ἰδίας, αἱ ἀρεταὶ διὰ τὰς φύσεις λαμβάνουσι καὶ συνεξομοιοῦνται τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἔθεσι καὶ κράσεσι σαμάτων καὶ τροφῆς καὶ διαίτης.

³³ A. Stiefenhofer, *Zur Echtheitsfrage der biographischen Synkrisis Plutarchs*, *Philologus* 73 (1914) 462–503.

³⁴ Stiefenhofer (n. 33) 468 f.

³⁵ Stiefenhofer (n. 33) 470–2.

(seven pairs
Phocion-Cato)

When Stiefenhofer is not only in the prologue that he fails to use the word 'Take Stiefenhofer similarities differences clear that the fact the treatise approach of the das and *Marc. diaphora* by speaking noology—of a *Marc. synkrisis* enemies; the stance (the *Cleom.-Gracchi* been said by *Cleom.-Gracchi* referring circuit the contort 4. When Plutarch certainly speaking value-judgement suggested that Plutarch does being too general Plutarch Stiefenhofer *Sert.-Eum.* differences as fine tuning applied. This a common be though group. Plu

³⁶ Stiefenhofer

³⁷ ὅθλον ὡς

³⁸ συνοράς,

(seven pairs).³⁶ Four pairs—*Them.-Cam.*, *Pyrrh.-Marius*, *Alex.-Caes.*, *Phocion-Cato Min.*—do not, of course, have appended comparisons.

When Stiefenhofer talks of similarities and differences he seems to be talking not only of ethical but also of circumstantial factors, both areas featuring in the prologues and in the comparisons. It is indeed a flaw in his argument that he fails to distinguish ethics from circumstances, for Plutarch appears to use the words *διαφοραί* and *ὁμοιότητες* explicitly only in ethical contexts. Take Stiefenhofer's first group, where programmatic statements identify the similarities of the paired subjects. The comparisons are supposed to speak of differences between the heroes. At *Aem.-Tim. synk.* 1.1 Plutarch says, 'it is clear that the synkrisis will not show many differences or dissimilarities.'³⁷ In fact the treatment is of similarities (and only minor differences) in the ethical approach of the two heroes. At *Pel.-Marc. synk.* 1.1 Plutarch says that Pelopidas and Marcellus have a *diaphora* in one point only. When Plutarch notes a *diaphora* between two subjects which are closely compared, he is likely to be speaking not of an absolute difference, but—to keep to his chosen terminology—of a different shade of the same colour of virtue. The *diaphora* at *Pel.-Marc. synk.* 1.1 is of this type and refers to the heroes' attitude to killing their enemies; the rest of the comparison distinguishes only differences of circumstance (the word *diaphora* is not used). Much the same is true of the *Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi*, where we read at the end of the comparison, 'from what has been said you can see yourself the difference' (5.6).³⁸ The comparison of *Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi* is a complex mixture of different moral approaches and differing circumstances, and to be frank it does not work well; one may compare the contorted comparisons between poets, painters, and generals at *Tim.* 36.3–4. When Plutarch speaks of a *diaphora* at the end of the comparison, he is certainly speaking of moral differences, for he continues immediately by making value-judgements on each hero individually (*καθ' ἕκαστον*). It may be suggested that, despite the quite different circumstances of the two sets of heroes, Plutarch does not intend us to see the *diaphora* in their ethical approach as being too great.

Plutarch does not name ethical *diaphorai* explicitly in the other pairings of Stiefenhofer's first group (*Thes.-Rom.*, *Per.-Fab.*, *Cim.-Luc.*, *Nic.-Crass.*, *Sert.-Eum.*, *Demosth.-Cic.*, *Demetr.-Ant.*, *Dion-Brut.*). Naturally ethical differences are discussed (e.g. *Thes.-Rom. synk.* 2.1 *ἐναντίων παθῶν*). But the fine tuning that he speaks of in *Mul. virt.*, *De virt. mor.*, and elsewhere is not applied. That does not mean that he thought these heroes were too far apart for a common ethical deduction to be drawn. Take Dion and Brutus. They might be thought to have the most in common of the *Lives* in Stiefenhofer's first group. Plutarch emphasises their 'many like and sibling actions' at *Dion* 1.3,

³⁶ Stiefenhofer (n. 33) 473.

³⁷ ὁῦλον ὡς οὐκ ἔχει πολλὰς διαφορὰς οὐδ' ἀνομοιότητας ἢ σύγκριστις.

³⁸ συνορὰς μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων τὴν διαφορὰν.

which stem from their adherence to Plato. In the comparison there is no explicit mention of ethical differences, though again there is a good deal of differentiation by circumstance. Perhaps Plutarch felt after all that Dion and Brutus had diverged too much for him to point out the differences in their virtues. But, given the theoretical model of character with which he worked, we will probably want to say that he thought their essential *aretê* was very close. This is at least suggested by *synk.* 1.1: 'both men had many good points [in common]'.³⁹

Perhaps Plutarch did not think that the *aretê* of Dion and Brutus required closer definition. We should also remember that he is not systematic or predictable. *Nic.-Crass.* is a case in point. These two heroes might be thought to have the least in common of the *Lives* in Stiefenhofer's first group—both for us and for Plutarch. To be sure, the programmatic reason for the pairing at *Nic.* 1.1 is very briefly stated: 'I thought it would not be odd to compare Nicias with Crassus and the Sicilian Disaster with the Parthian Disaster'.⁴⁰ Here circumstances loom large in the basis for the comparison; but the narratives of *Nic.* and *Crass.* are linked together by similar motifs and interests in the usual way, focussing especially on the heroes' love of glory, ambition, and money. However, in the end Plutarch may have decided that there was not enough between the heroes to show how their shared qualities were distinguished individually. Indeed, in one respect—Nicias' 'love of peace'—Crassus 'was unworthy to be compared with him' (*synk.* 2.7). Here, then, we may be farther away from Plutarch's normal faith in his heroes' comparability.

I turn now to Stiefenhofer's second group, the *Lives* where there is no programmatic statement and which should have comparisons containing 'ὁμοιότητες und διαφοραί'. Differences are mentioned in five pairs. At *Arist.-Cato Maj. synk.* 1.1 we read, 'if one compares the entire life of the one with that of the other, the *diaphora*, which is obscured by many great similarities, is not easy to discern.'⁴¹ At *Lyc.-Numa synk.* 1.1 we are told, 'although it is a difficult task, we must not hesitate to assemble their *diaphorai*.'⁴² At *Ages.-Pomp. synk.* 1.1 we read, 'let us briefly run over the points which make a *diaphora*, assembling them in parallel.'⁴³ At the end of the *synkrisis* of the *Phil.-Flam.* the difference between Philopoemen and Flamininus is said to be 'hard to discern' (3.5).⁴⁴ At *Cor.-Alcib. synk.* 2.8 the heroes 'differed' in their reasons for collaborating with their enemies.⁴⁵

³⁹ πολλῶν τοίνυν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ὑπαρξάντων καλῶν.

⁴⁰ δοκοῦμεν οὐκ ἀτόπως τῷ Νικίᾳ τὸν Κράσσον παραβάλλειν καὶ τὰ Παρθικὰ κατήματα τοῖς Σικελικοῖς.

⁴¹ ὁλος ὁ τοῦτου βίος ὄλε τῷ θατέρου παρατεθείς οὐκ εὐθεώρητον ἔχει τὴν διαφορὰν, ἐναφανίζομένην πολλαῖς καὶ μεγάλαις ὁμοίωσιν.

⁴² εἰ καὶ χαλεπὸν ἔργον, οὐκ ἀποκνητέον συναγαγεῖν τὰς διαφορὰς.

⁴³ ἐπιδράμωμεν τῷ λόγῳ ταχέως τὰ ποιοῦντα τὰς διαφορὰς, παρ' ἄλληλα συνάγοντες.

⁴⁴ ἐπεὶ δὲ οὕτως ἐξεταζομένων δυσθεώρητος ἡ διαφορὰ.

⁴⁵ (καίτοι) τοῦτό γε φήσει τις διαφέρειν.

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In the first pair here, *Arist.-Cato Maj.*, it is clear that Plutarch repeats an inherited picture of the heroes as identikit men of virtue. When he says that the difference between them is hard to discern because it is 'obscured by many great similarities', he is using *diaphora* as an instrument for investigating the meaning of ethical virtue, for the comparison proceeds then to thoroughly differentiate the two heroes by circumstance. In the second pair, *Lyc.-Numa*, the heroes are again traditionally famed for justice and for lawgiving. The differences outlined in this comparison are concerned far more obviously than in *Arist.-Cato Maj.* with ethical and moral perspectives (there is much on legislation and education). Hence Plutarch states that he will be looking at *diaphorai*, which will enable the reader to be precise about what sort of virtue the heroes displayed. In the third pair, *Ages.-Pomp.*, Plutarch's approach is similar: by assembling the differences between Agesilaus and Pompey 'in parallel' we shall be enabled to get at their common virtues. This is also the case in *Phil.-Flam.*: the *diaphora* which is 'hard to discern' refers not to differing circumstances of the heroes' lives, although these are in fact distinguished in the comparison, but rather to their shared ethical trait, *philotimia*, which Plutarch has strongly emphasised in the narratives. Coriolanus and Alcibiades are more like Nicias and Crassus. Plutarch stresses a common love of ambition and strife in both *Lives*; whereas in the comparison there is a good deal of differentiation of moral attitudes, not of similarity. We will compare *Nic.-Crass.* again when Plutarch says at the end of the comparison with regard to their views on money that Coriolanus 'was worthy of comparison with the best and purest of the Greeks, not with Alcibiades, who in this respect was completely unscrupulous and had no regard for good.'⁴⁶

According to Stiefenhofer we should look for a list of *homoiotêtes* in the *Lives* which lack introductions. There are in fact only two pairs where this is the case. At *Lyc.-Numa synk.* 1.2 we are told that, 'their common factors are clear from their careers: the wisdom of the men, their piety, their policy in government and education, the fact that both had one source for their legislation in the gods'.⁴⁷ At *Arist.-Cato Maj. synk.* 1.2 we read, 'the rise to political power and glory in consequence of their own virtue and strength rather than of inherited advantage is common to both'.⁴⁸ I have said that similarities and differences occur in the comparisons of both groups of *Lives*, and it is no surprise that a pair in Stiefenhofer's first group, *Pel.-Marc.*, has a clear list of similarities: 'the common factors in their natures and characters as it were rival one another, for the men were valiant, hard-working, passionate, and magnani-

⁴⁶ τοῖς ἀρίστοις καὶ καθαρωτάτοις τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀξίον αὐτὸν παραβάλλειν, οὐκ Ἀλκιβιάδῃ μὰ Δία τῷ θραυσντάτῳ περὶ ταῦτα καὶ ὀλιγοροτάτῳ τοῦ καλοῦ γενομένῳ.

⁴⁷ αἱ μὲν γὰρ κοινότητες ἐπιφαίνονται ταῖς πράξεσιν, ὅσον ἡ σωφροσύνη τῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἡ εὐσέβεια, τὸ πολιτικόν, τὸ παιδευτικόν, τὸ μίαν ἀρχὴν (τὴν) παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ἀμφοτέρους λαβεῖν τῆς νομοθεσίας.

⁴⁸ τὸ μὲν ἐξ οὐχ ὑπαρχούσης ἀφορμῆς εἰς πολιτείαν καὶ δόξαν ἀρετῆ καὶ δυνάμει παρελθεῖν ἀμφοτέροις κοινόν ἐστι.

mous both' (*synk.* 1.2).⁴⁹ Erbse considered this passage to be no more than a résumé.⁵⁰ But, since in the usual way no mention is made in the narratives of *Pel.-Marc.* of the other hero, it is no more a résumé to list similarities than it is to record the differences and so the list is significant.

Stiefenhofer's taxonomy is far too crude (as he recognised himself):⁵¹ he failed to distinguish between similarities and differences of ethics and those of circumstances (and both groups of course distinguish heroes' circumstances in the comparisons); but he was onto something. The second grouping, with no programmatic statement, does seem to bring out ethical similarities more than the first, where a programmatic statement—particularly strong in *Demosth.-Cic.* and *Demetr.-Ant.*—fulfills this function.

5. Plutarch defines the parameters of the *synkrisis* according to his awareness of external factors such as society, strength of enemies, and so on. His theory of character development and of the nature of the individual is central to an understanding of his methods in the comparisons. In character analysis it is the qualitative difference in shared virtues which distinguishes one person from another. It is also the case that the use of *diaphora* (and *homoiotês*) in the comparisons alerts us to judgements on ethical virtues rather than to purely external factors. He no doubt thought that the majority of his heroes could be paired satisfactorily on an ethical basis, whether or not the comparisons were inevitable on the basis of external likenesses; facile external similarities are indeed derided in the first chapter of *Sert.* (1.1–8). It is interesting to observe that his theory of character make-up could accommodate different pairings from those we find in the existing *Parallels*. Consider *Ages.-Pomp.* and *Phocion-Cato Min.* At the beginning of the *Mul. virt.* Plutarch compares Agesilaus not with Pompey but with Cato the Younger for the quality of justice.⁵² Yet in the introduction to the *Phoc.-Cato Min.* Plutarch very strongly underlines Cato's ethical compatibility with Phocion. He clearly saw the possibility of a comparison between Cato and Agesilaus, and the profitability of deriving ethical benefit from examining what sort of justice they displayed. Other ethical combinations different from those which have come down to us may well have occurred to him.⁵³ Indeed, it seems probable that Plutarch thought there were enough ethical similarities in most people to make comparisons between them possible. If ethical likenesses could be combined with

⁴⁹ τῶν δὲ κατὰ τὰς φύσεις καὶ τὰ ἦθη κοινοτήτων ὡς περ ἐφαμιλλῶν οὐσῶν (καὶ γὰρ ἀνδρεῖοι καὶ φιλόπονοι καὶ θυμοειδεῖς καὶ μεγαλόφρονες ἀμφότεροι γεγόνασιν).

⁵⁰ Erbse (n. 1) 403.

⁵¹ Stiefenhofer (n. 33) 469: 'Allerdings geht die Rechnung nicht überall so reinlich auf.'

⁵² The stress on Cato the Younger's *dikaiosunê* in the *Cato Min.*—especially 44.12–14—guarantees that Cato the Younger is the Cato in question in *Mul. virt.*

⁵³ Plutarch does of course make comparisons in the *Lives* between heroes not directly paired (for example Pompey and Alexander at *Pomp.* 2.2–4, 34.7–8, 46.1–2); but these are of a more informal type less concerned with ethical questions (and so Alexander functions within *Ages.-Pomp.* as an indicator of Agesilaus' and Pompey's ability: cf. *Ages.* 15.4–5, *synk.* 2.6).

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plausible external similarities, so much the better. There are, of course, pairs of *Lives* where ethical and circumstantial comparability is maintained badly or even given up by Plutarch. But in most of the *Parallels* we will say that his care over ethical synkrisis in both narratives and comparisons is for more important for the successful pairing than his attention to external consistencies in the heroes' real lives.

Synkrisis is for Plutarch the crucial tool in his analysis of human character and virtue. I shall therefore express finally my opinion that pairs of *Lives* which now lack a comparison did have one originally.⁵⁴ I shall not go as far as the great 17th/18th century French scholar, André Dacier, who in his French translation of the *Lives*, which appeared in 1721, took it upon himself to supply the missing comparisons, seeing himself in relation to Plutarch as Hirtius was to Caesar.⁵⁵ But I cannot resist quoting with approval the first [Dryden] translation to incorporate the comparisons, which commented on those written by Dacier as follows: 'We have ventured to translate Them likewise into English, from a Persuasion that it wou'd not be unacceptable to the Reader to behold a Modern, such as Dacier, seat himself in his Master's Chair, and personate that great Philosopher and Historian.'⁵⁶

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⁵⁴ Cf. esp. S. Costanza, *La synkrisis nello schema biografico di Plutarco*, *Messana* 4 (1956) 127–56; against—Erbse (n. 1) 403–6 ('Alle vier Syzygien [i.e. *Them.-Cam.*, *Pyrrh.-Marius*, *Alex.-Caes.*, *Phocion-Cato Min.*] sind Grenzfälle').

⁵⁵ *Les vies des hommes illustres* (Paris 1721) xlii–xliii 'Je me suis cru obligé de les suppléer'.

⁵⁶ *Plutarch's Lives* (London 1727) iii.



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