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AMBITION AND LOVE OF FAME IN PLUTARCH'S *LIVES OF AGIS, CLEOMENES, AND THE GRACCHI*

GEERT ROSKAM

1. A TYPICAL OBSESSION IN AN ATYPICAL PAIR OF *LIVES*

IF PLUTARCH HAD many obsessions, certainly the problem of great ambition and love of fame was one of them. One of the recurrent leitmotifs in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is indeed the protagonist's excessive pursuit of a great reputation. The sheer variety of terms denoting such ambition (φιλοτιμία, φιλοδοξία, δοξομανία, δοξοκοπία, φιλονικία, τὸ φιλόπρωτον, etc.) does not merely illustrate Plutarch's *copia verborum* but also shows his sincere interest in different aspects of this issue. In nearly all of the *Lives*, the topic is at least alluded to or mentioned, and in several of them (e.g., the *Life of Flamininus* or the *Life of Themistocles*) it emerges as a key theme.¹ Usually, ambition appears in a fairly negative light:² more often than not, the protagonists' eagerness for glory sooner or later incites them to commit injustice, and in general, history often appears as a battlefield of empty ambitions that bring about wickedness rather than tranquility of mind.

This does not imply, however, that Plutarch would be inclined to draw Epicurean conclusions from his work on the *Lives*.³ On the contrary, he sharply attacks those philosophers who run away from every activity that implies ambition (*De tuenda* 135C–D) and devotes a whole work to the refutation of Epicurus' notorious advice to "live unnoticed" (λάθε βιώσας).⁴ His own alternative involves a reinterpretation of ambition in order to channel it into a noble philosophical project. In Plutarch's view, a great reputation should never be pursued for its own sake, but only in order to realize an honorable political purpose.⁵ This is an intelligent view, to be sure, and well in line with

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1. Cf. Duff 1999b, 83: "Of all the passions which the hero must control, that of ambition receives the most consistent attention." On ambition in Plutarch, see further Wardman 1974, 115–24; Frazier 1988; Pelling 2002, *passim* (see his index of topics). On the importance of the issue of φιλοτιμία in the *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi*, see most recently Pelling 2010, 8–10.

2. Although Plutarch never calls φιλοτιμία a vice; cf. *De Pyth. or.* 403F (οὐ πονηρὸς ἀλλὰ φιλότιμος) and Frazier 1988, 123. And in fact, in the *Moralia*, the concept of φιλοτιμία often appears in a more positive light.

3. On the Epicurean apolitical point of view, see Roskam 2007b.

4. A detailed discussion of Plutarch's *De latenter vivendo* can be found in Roskam 2007a. For Plutarch's other attacks against the Epicurean apolitical philosophy, see Roskam 2005a.

5. Cf. n. 10 below.

Platonic political philosophy, but as a Platonist Plutarch no doubt realized that the matter of concrete political life all too often remains recalcitrant and interferes with the success of the intellectual project. Even when there can hardly be any doubt about the honorable nature of the politician's motivations, philosophical problems are far from being solved. In fact, the opposite is rather true. At such occasions, the clash between philosophical ideals and political pragmatism often raises much more difficult questions. It is this kind of problem that is discussed in the *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi*.

This pair of *Lives* differs from the others in that it opens with a proem that is entirely devoted to the question of love of fame (φιλοδοξία). Moreover, since Plutarch explicitly emphasizes the relevance of these observations for the career of the Gracchi (*Agis* 2.7), they seem to introduce the general criteria that the author himself uses in order to evaluate his account. It remains to be seen, however, whether these criteria can easily and without problem be applied to the account of the lives of the four protagonists themselves. In fact, Plutarch's *Lives* are usually characterized by a problematizing approach⁶ that shows a remarkable interest in ethical dilemmas and prefers raising questions to answering them.

This moral problematization is further developed by the compositional principle of *synkrisis*. Indeed, the importance of comparative reading for a correct understanding of the *Lives* has long been known.⁷ In this respect, however, the *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi* are somewhat atypical in that they are actually a *double* pair. This, indeed, is the only pair in which two Greeks are compared with two Romans. This double juxtaposition obviously yields particularly interesting opportunities, which remain largely unexplored in contemporary research. More precisely, Plutarch can exploit the problem of φιλοδοξία and its relation to philosophical ideals and pragmatic means in four different historical circumstances. To the extent that this will entail a problematizing account, the question remains as to whether the programmatic proem can still be considered programmatic after all.

In what follows, Plutarch's treatment of the shady borderline between honorable and excessive ambition will be analyzed in detail. First, I will provide a brief discussion of the proem (section 2), then a systematic interpretation of the four *Lives* (sections 3–6), and finally a short analysis of the concluding *synkrisis* (section 7). The whole study will reveal interesting aspects of Plutarch's nuanced (way of) thinking about ambition and love of honor in this pair and cast further light on the dynamics of his moralizing comparative approach.

2. THE PROEM

The double pair opens with an elaborate and carefully written proem, which contains a few general reflections on love of fame (φιλοδοξία). In Plutarch's view, politicians who, in their eagerness for a great reputation, are generally

6. See esp. the important study of Duff (1999b).

7. See Erbse 1956 and Stadter 1975, and more recently Larmour 1992; Duff 1999b; Beck 2002; Pelling 2002, 349–63 (with much further bibliography), and 2005.

prepared to give in to the desires of crowds, actually enslave themselves and retain only the name of ruler (*Agis* 1.1–4).⁸ As a rule, experienced and virtuous statesmen only need fame in order to gain the confidence of their fellow citizens. Ambitious younger politicians, on the other hand, may be allowed to take pride in their fame, provided that this fame rests on honorable deeds (*ἀπὸ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων*, 2.1). Excessive dependence on the multitude, however, is to be avoided, since it soon yields destructive results (2.3–6).

At first sight, these opening chapters hardly, if at all, illustrate the moral problematization that I introduced above as one of the typical characteristics of Plutarch's *Lives*. The general perspective is no doubt a moral one, to be sure, but this section of the proem contains rather straightforward moral doctrines. Heinz-Gerd Ingenkamp has argued convincingly that the proem is characterized by the perspective of Plutarch's treatises on *Seelenheilung*. More specifically, it can be compared to the κρίσις of such a psychotherapeutic treatise, dealing as it does with the harmful (βλάβαι) and shameful (αἰσχύναι) consequences of the passion of φιλοδοξία.⁹ We may add that the doctrine of fame that is mentioned at the beginning of the *Life of Agis* is also part and parcel of Plutarch's political philosophy.¹⁰ This is no cause for surprise, since both domains can easily be reconciled. For as a matter of fact, Plutarch's Platonic political philosophy basically aims at *Seelenheilung* on a more general level: the politician, that is, should educate his fellow citizens toward virtue.

Near the end of the proem, this general philosophical perspective is finally connected with the subject of these *Lives*, through a short proleptic summary of the political career of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. From then on, however, the straightforward exposition of moral doctrines has to yield to a much more problematizing account. Indeed, in view of the fact that the previous general reflections on φιλοδοξία suggest a fairly negative evaluation of the political careers of the Gracchi, Plutarch's explicit application is remarkably positive. He strongly emphasizes their excellent nature and education and the honorable character of their political project,¹¹ and explains their downfall not by their excessive desire for fame (ἐπιθυμία δόξης ἄμετρος), but by their fear of obscurity (φόβος ἄδοξίας), which, moreover, had a noble origin (2.7).¹² No less significant is the reference to the goodwill that they received from their "fellow citizens" (παρὰ τῶν πολιτῶν, 2.8): the rabble of the introductory section¹³ apparently turned into a respectable citizenry. Even in his proem, then, Plutarch thus seems to suggest that his account of the careers of his

8. On Plutarch's attitude toward the problem of the politician's independence, see the interesting study of Beck (2004).

9. Ingenkamp 1992, 4299, 4336. Plutarch's psychotherapeutic method is discussed in more detail in Ingenkamp 1971.

10. See, e.g., *De se ipsum laud.* 539F; *Maxime cum principibus* 777E–F (with the analysis of Roskam 2009, 108–13); *Praec. ger. reip.* 820F–821D; *De lat. viv.* 1129C; Roskam 2004–5.

11. *Agis* 2.7: οὓς κάλλιστα μὲν φύντας, κάλλιστα δὲ τραφέντας, καλλίστην δὲ τῆς πολιτείας ὑπόθεσιν λαβόντας.

12. Ingenkamp 1992, 4303: "Nichts ist typischer für den Lehrstil Plutarchs als diese Art der versöhnlichen Abschwächung."

13. Cf. *Agis* 1.3 (ὄχλων), 1.4 (τῶν πολλῶν), 2.4 (τοὺς πολλούς), 2.6 (ὄχλων), 2.7 (τῶν πολλῶν); cf. also Magnino 1991, 60.

heroes should not be regarded as a mere uncomplicated illustration of the few general moral insights with which the *Life* begins. Instead he will raise problems that resist oversimplifying conclusions, and rather ask for cautious qualification and nuanced reflection. Needless to say, the evaluative conclusion οὐκέτ' ἦν τὸ ἐπιμεῖναι καλόν, αἰσχρὸν δ' ἤδη τὸ παύσασθαι ("it was no longer honorable to persist and already disgraceful to stop," 2.8)¹⁴ adds considerably to this problematizing approach.

The principle of *synkrisis*, on the other hand, which already worked as a latent structuring element in the first, moralizing section of the proem¹⁵ and in the unquestioning juxtaposition of the Gracchi (2.7–8), definitively comes to the fore when Plutarch turns to the parallel pair of Agis and Cleomenes. In this short section (2.9–11), which concludes the proem, the emphasis is entirely on the *synkrisis* of the Spartan pair and the Roman brothers: both tried to exalt the people, both attempted to restore a valuable old tradition, both incurred the hatred of the nobles, and both adopted "fraternal courses." The aspect of moral problematization, on the other hand, for a moment fades into the background.¹⁶

As a whole, then, the proem introduces both the problematizing moralism and the principle of *synkrisis*, and thus provides the reader with an important interpretative key: this will be a comparative story of ambitious politicians favoring their people excessively while pursuing honorable goals. Since this perspective is placed emphatically at the very outset and comes from the author himself,¹⁷ it obviously conditions the readers' expectations and their actual reading of what follows. Nevertheless, the proem does not necessarily contain the only possible perspective that has to determine the interpretation of the whole double pair. We already saw how Plutarch's own application of his moral reflections to the career of his heroes raised interesting questions, and moreover, Plutarch explicitly appeals to his reader and invites him to form his own judgment (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐπικρινεῖς αὐτὸς ἐκ τῆς διηγήσεως, *Agis* 2.9).¹⁸ The analysis of the four *Lives*, and of the final *synkrisis*, will throw further light on the relevance of the proem for the overall interpretation of the pair.

3. THE *LIFE* OF AGIS

There can be no doubt that Plutarch regarded the political project of the young Spartan king Agis as honorable.¹⁹ The young king's noble purpose is reflected in the virtuous character of his ambitions, which are all about self-restraint,

14. I accept the conjecture of Schoemann; the Teubner edition sticks to the text of the manuscripts (οὐκέτ' ἦν ἐπεὶ τὸ μὴ καλὸν αἰσχρὸν ἤδη τὸ παύσασθαι), which expresses the problem somewhat less clearly.

15. Cf. *Agis* 1.1 (συγχεῖσθαι πρὸς τοὺς φιλοδόξους), 1.2 (ὥσπερ εἰδόλω τινί), 1.4 (καθάπερ γὰρ οἱ πρῶεῖς . . . οὕτως οἱ πολιτενόμενοι), 2.4 (ἔπερ οὖν . . . τοῦτο λεκτέον ἢ ὁμιόν τι τούτῳ), 2.5 (συμβαίνει γε καὶ οὕτως τὸ τοῦ δράκοντος).

16. As appears from the black-and-white opposition between the honorable and just purpose of the Spartan kings and the πλεονεξία of their rich opponents. For the presence of *synkrisis* in this passage, see 2.9 (παραβάλλωμεν), 2.10 (καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι . . . ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνοι . . . ὁμοίως), 2.11 (the concluding remark on the fraternal policy of the Spartan pair).

17. On the identity of author and narrator in Plutarch's *Lives*, see Verdegem 2010, 82.

18. Cf. Pelling 2004, 413–14.

19. See esp. the authorial commentary in *Agis* 6.1: διὰ ταῦτα δὴ καλὸν ὁ ἄγις, ὥσπερ ἦν, ποιούμενος κτλ.

simplicity, and magnanimity, rather than wealth (*Agis* 7.2–3). If *Agis* indeed strives for a great reputation, his fame should only rest on moral excellence. No trace can be found here of the slavish dependence on the multitude that was introduced in the proem as the obvious consequence of φιλοδοξία (1.3–4). Moreover, *Agis*' high-spirited ambition proves inspiring, since it persuades his mother and her entourage (7.4) and it is adopted by his soldiers (14.1). Also, it enables him to remain consistent to the very end, without any repentance (19.7–8)—contrary to Cleombrotus, who was corrupted by empty fame (διεφθαρμένος ἦν ὑπὸ κενῆς δόξης, 18.3) and could only keep silent toward the bitter reproaches of his father-in-law Leonidas (17.1). All this sounds remarkably positive, and this is confirmed by Plutarch's final evaluation, at the very end of the concluding *synkrisis*, that *Agis* committed the fewest faults (*Comp. Ag., Cleom. et Gracch.* 5.7).

Agis' opponents, on the other hand, usually appear in a negative light. Leonidas characterizes *Agis*' project as an attempt to pursue a tyranny and buy a large bodyguard, but this interpretation is rejected by Plutarch himself as slander (διαβάλλων, 7.8). Leonidas' own motivations are obviously selfish (10.2), and he is apparently driven by φιλονικία rather than φιλοτιμία (10.1). No wonder, then, that he was hated by the Spartan people (3.8, 21.1).

This first *Life*, then, shows a remarkably black-and-white characterization. *Agis*' project is honorable and his ambitions are perfectly justified, but he is overcome by the greedy depravity of his enemies. Plutarch's account cannot be regarded as a straightforward illustration of the moral perspective of the proem, to be sure, but it does not really raise difficult moral questions either. A few general moral criteria taken from Plutarch's political philosophy indeed suffice to evaluate the whole of *Agis*' career and identify without problem his right and wrong decisions: he had a correct and high-minded political motivation, admirably coupled moral virtue with rhetorical talents and pragmatic caution, and was able to win the goodwill of his people, but he was wrong in his choice of friends and in his too-tolerant attitude toward enemies.²⁰ This fully confirms the interesting suggestion of Christopher Pelling that “the first *Life* often reflects an important *normal* pattern, [whereas] the second *Life* exploits it with an interesting variation.”²¹ In this particular case, however, the normal pattern will be followed by three variations instead of one.²² For although the *Life of Agis* is not particularly problematizing itself, it still has much potential for a more problematizing approach, raising as it does a whole series of interesting but difficult questions. Was *Agis* too mild (cf. 20.5 and 21.5)? Should he have been more radical in imposing his reforms? When does an honorable motivation become excessive and thus blameworthy? And what

20. See Roskam 2005b on the significant parallels between Plutarch's *Life of Agis* and his *Political Precepts*.

21. Pelling 2002, 357. As far as the *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi* are concerned, Pelling continues, “*Agis* and *Cleomenes* are more straightforward radical idealists than the *Gracchi*, whose motives are complicated by their ambition; but *Ag.—Cl.* does provide a straightforward model of the opposition which such radical programmes will inspire, and the extreme measures to which the idealist is forced: in *Gracch.* we see a subtler version of the same sequence.”

22. In that sense, the remaining part of this article will provide a more complicated alternative to Pelling's own view quoted in the previous note.

is still a justifiable price for the success of a noble project?²³ These are some very fundamental issues that receive ample attention in the next three *Lives*.

4. THE *LIFE OF CLEOMENES*

Cleomenes' policy was no less honorable than that of his predecessor,²⁴ and his nature was equally ambitious (*Cleom.* 1.4). In this case, however, Plutarch's account is more nuanced and far less dominated by a black-and-white approach. First of all, he points to the influence of the Stoic Sphaerus, who admired the young king and kindled his ambition (2.3), and immediately adds that Stoic doctrines can exert a positive influence on a mild character, but "are somewhat misleading and dangerous for great and impetuous natures"²⁵—such as that of Cleomenes. Already in the second chapter of the *Life*, Plutarch thus points to the risks of excessive ambition. Quite remarkably, this risk is here connected directly with philosophical instruction. This is rather exceptional in Plutarch, who is usually sympathetic toward the idea of collaboration between ruler and philosopher, which belongs to the core of his Platonic political philosophy.²⁶ But if the philosopher is a Stoic, such a collaboration is only to be welcomed *cum exceptione*, as it entails the danger of too rigid a political course.

The next chapter contains a further warning. When Cleomenes eagerly asked Xenares about all the details of Agis' life, Xenares at first "was quite glad to recall those matters, and rehearsed the events at length and in detail; but when it was apparent that Cleomenes took an unusual interest in the story, and was profoundly stirred by the innovations of Agis, and wished to hear about him over and over again, Xenares rebuked him angrily, calling him unsound in mind, and finally stopped visiting and conversing with him" (3.3–4). Again, the danger of excessive conduct is real and growing. Cleomenes' interest is no longer healthy (οὐχ ὑγιαίνοντι). The people's complete lack of ambition to maintain their ancestral tradition (3.1) thus meets its counterpart in Cleomenes' excessive ambition to return to it. More and more, this risks being a story of deficiency and excess, rather than the correct mean.

Yet the sequel of the events soon proves this expectation to be wrong. Cleomenes succeeds in realizing his ambitious projects with a minimum of violence (8.4) and actually shows an impressive reasonableness and moderation (10.10, 11.2, 11.5), even in spite of being assisted by Sphaerus (11.4).²⁷ His reforms thus turn out to be a complete success, even in military matters, as his former opponents have to acknowledge (18.2). These chapters of the *Life of Cleomenes* thus provide interesting answers to different questions that were raised in the *Life of Agis*. More precisely, they illustrate a harmonious

23. On Plutarch's answer to the question as to whether the end justifies the means, see Nikolaidis 1995.

24. In fact, Plutarch more than once underlines that Cleomenes closely imitates Agis (*Cleom.* 1.3, 3.2–4; cf. 10.6 and 22.1–2 on Agiatis).

25. *Cleom.* 2.6 (all translations are from Perrin 1921). On the Platonic doctrine of great natures and its influence on Plutarch, see esp. Duff 1999a; cf. also Bucher-Isler 1972, 80–81; Duff 1999b, *passim*.

26. Much has been written about Plutarch's political views. Good (recent) discussions include Aalders 1982; Mueller-Goldingen 1993; Stadter and Van der Stockt 2002; de Blois et al. 2004 and 2005.

27. Cf. also Cleomenes' conviction that in entertaining guest-friends, one should avoid λίαν ἀκριβῶς λακωνίζειν (13.5).

and laudable balance between energetic decisiveness and respect for philosophical principles. Possible dangers are discussed, boundaries explored, and in the end, the successful outcome shows that such honorable ambitions are not necessarily doomed to failure, provided they avoid excessive radicalness and take into account the demands of the circumstances.

The success of Cleomenes' reforms, however, is only the beginning of other projects and ambitions. Two crucial moments in his later career show that Cleomenes' military campaigns in the Peloponnesus indeed have important implications for, and raise new questions concerning, his ambition and love of honor. After the capture of Megalopolis, two famous citizens urge Cleomenes to gain the greatest fame (ἐνδοξοτάτῳ γενέσθαι, 24.3) by giving back the city and thus winning their friendship (24.2–5). Cleomenes' reply illustrates that φιλοδοξία continues to be one of his principal motivations: "it is difficult to believe that all this will happen, but with us let what makes for good repute (τὸ πρὸς δόξαν) always carry the day, rather than what brings gain (τὸ λυσιτελέες)" (24.6). The outcome, however, is quite disappointing. Philopoemen opposes the deal, arguing that Cleomenes would "not so much give their city back to its citizens, but rather take the citizens with their city" (24.8). As a result, Cleomenes angrily sacks the city (25.1).

This interesting passage is a typical example of Plutarch's generally problematizing approach in the *Lives*. First of all, it strikingly illustrates the problems that a pure concern for honor may entail. Cleomenes is far from naive (χαλεπὸν μὲν τὸ πιστεῦσαι ταῦτα, 24.6), to be sure, but nevertheless decides to follow only the criterion of honor. His decision yields no positive results at all, yet Plutarch evaluates it in particularly positive terms as reasonable and humane (εὐγνώμονα καὶ φιλόανθρωπα, 24.8).²⁸ On the other hand, Cleomenes' cruel reaction to Philopoemen's refusal is told without authorial comment. Only later in the *Life*, a meaningful analepsis provides an indirect moral evaluation of the event: the king himself sees that his excessive reaction rested on anger rather than on his concern for what is honorable (26.2). Secondly, the passage contains an interesting discussion of the precise meaning of true honor and its implications for concrete action. The protagonists, as Plutarch explicitly makes clear, are all distinguished men who have acquired, or will acquire, a great reputation,²⁹ and their views on this issue are diametrically opposed. It is difficult to deny that Cleomenes' offer is indeed humane, yet Philopoemen's conviction is not silly either (and actually seems to be confirmed by what follows). Simplified answers are no longer possible, and the reader is indirectly invited to decide for himself.

A similar conflict occurs after Cleomenes' final defeat at Sellasia. When the king has decided to escape to Egypt and is about to depart, Therycion, one of his friends, urges him to commit suicide. His argument basically rests

28. For the well-known importance of φιλοδοξία in Plutarch, see now Ribeiro Ferreira et al. 2009, where earlier literature can be found.

29. See 24.2 on Lysandridas and Thearidas (ἄνδρες ἐνδοξοὶ καὶ δυνατοὶ μάλιστα τῶν Μεγαλοπολιτῶν; cf. Marasco 1981, 539, who traces this phrase back to Phylarchus—which is possible, although it cannot be ruled out that Plutarch himself has added this significant detail), and 24.9 on Philopoemen (ὁ πρωτεύσας ὕστερον Ἀχαιῶν καὶ μεγίστην κτησάμενος ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλήσι δόξαν).

on the element of honor: since they are no longer able to die the most honorable death, on the battlefield, they should opt for a self-inflicted death that is second in virtue and glory (ὁ δὲ δεύτερος δόξῃ καὶ ἀρετῇ) (31.3–4). Fleeing to Egypt, on the other hand, will imply “sitting idly down in Egypt and asking every now and then whom Antigonos has left as satrap of Lacedaemon” (31.7). This is a particularly sharp image, which underlines Therycion’s conviction that Cleomenes’ decision is unworthy of a Spartan king. The reader may at first be inclined to agree, yet he soon has to reconsider the matter. Cleomenes indeed rejects Therycion’s alternative as shameful and selfish: suicide will entail nothing honorable or useful, and in fact neglects the public interest (31.8–11).

In this case, it is Therycion who is concerned only for honor, whereas Cleomenes also takes other criteria into account.³⁰ His argument may imply a tacit modification or reinterpretation of his above-mentioned generalizing creed at Megalopolis (“with us let what makes for good repute *always* carry the day, rather than what brings gain,” 24.6). Self-concerned φιλοτιμία apparently has its limits and should be overruled by the good of the state. And indeed, this point of view proves to be fruitful. Cleomenes avoids compromising himself in Egypt, can stick to his Spartan simplicity and manliness (32.3, 33.4–6, 33.8), and even commands respect (32.4). Yet the sequel of events soon brings out the value of Therycion’s position too. For in fact, Cleomenes indeed ends up by “sitting idly down in Egypt” (see esp. 36.7) and has no real alternative other than to commit suicide. Even then, it is open to him to pursue a death that is worthy of Sparta (36.6), to be sure, but one wonders whether Therycion’s δεύτερος πλοῦς is ultimately not equally honorable as Cleomenes’ τρίτος πλοῦς, if not more so. Again, there are no easy answers: both have reasonable claims to the truth, both are consistent, and neither seems to be completely wrong.

The *Life of Cleomenes* thus shows a much more problematizing approach than that of Agis. At different moments of his life, and in different circumstances, the Spartan king has to look for a correct orientation of his love of honor. He knows how to overcome various difficulties and succeeds in adopting a well-balanced conduct, certainly at the beginning of his career, but he occasionally also makes mistakes, or has to deal with interpretations that radically challenge his own point of view. In any case, we have definitively left behind the simple patterns of the *Life of Agis*.

5. THE *LIFE OF TIBERIUS GRACCHUS*

The conflict between diametrically opposed interpretations of honor is further developed in the *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*. At the outset, however, there is nothing that really points in this direction. Tiberius’ high birth (*T. Gracch.*

30. Marasco (1981, 599–600) may be basically correct that Cleomenes’ argument against Therycion can be reconciled with Plutarch’s own philosophical convictions, but his final argument that “l’osservazione della misura di Cleomene, in contrapposizione con l’eccesso di Tericione, che, pur essendo uomo valoroso ed istruito, è tratto ad una risoluzione estrema dall’eccessivo rigorismo etico, costituisce un ulteriore documento dell’umanità di Cleomene, e come tale è ammirato dal biografo” (p. 600) is in need of some qualification, as will appear from what follows.

1.2–7) and his excellent education (cf. φιλοτίμως [!] ἐξέθρεψεν, 1.7) gave him access to the highest circles, and he is even asked to marry the daughter of the then *princeps senatus* Appius Claudius (4.2–3). No less significant is that Plutarch omits any reference to Tiberius' φιλοδοξία or φιλοτιμία in the lengthy discussion of his character (2.1–3.1). This is quite remarkable indeed, in view of the proem, where Plutarch emphasizes the paramount importance of love of honor for the career of the Gracchi. The first picture, then, is a strikingly positive one.

But soon dark shades appear, and from that moment on, problems follow one another in quick succession. It is no coincidence that the issue of φιλοτιμία then comes to the fore as well. After the campaign against Numantia, in which thirty thousand Roman citizens had been saved through the intervention of Tiberius, the people decided to follow ancestral tradition by sending the commander Gaius Mancinus back in bonds to the Numantines, but to follow Tiberius in sparing all the other officers (7.2–4). Although this was a reasonable compromise, which also received the support of Scipio (7.5), Tiberius was not satisfied, and his resistance was inspired by his φιλοτιμία (7.6). This is the first occurrence of the term in this *Life*, and it immediately receives a negative connotation. Tiberius' ambition indeed entails an inflexible and excessively rigid course and shows a willingness to abandon important aspects of the *mos maiorum*. His attitude was hardly more than a footnote in history, perhaps, but it also prefigures greater problems in the future. And these will come quickly indeed.

The next chapter contains a much greater warning. When discussing the background of Tiberius' agrarian law, Plutarch recalls that Laelius previously tried to deal with the problems, but since the powerful were opposed to it and he feared possible disturbances, he gave up his attempt . . . and received the surname of *sapiens* (πανσάμενος ἐπεκλήθη σοφὸς ἢ φρόνιμος, 8.5). This anecdote has more than one important implication. First of all, it shows that the project is an honorable one. If a man such as Laelius is prepared to take it up, it cannot be bad. At the same time, however, it suggests that the noble project is unfeasible and that it is unwise to persist. If Laelius is called wise and prudent precisely because he desisted, then Tiberius cannot be called wise if he decides to go on. Yet a certain ambiguity remains. It is not clear, in fact, whose perspective lurks behind the (causal?) relation between the participle πανσάμενος and the verb ἐπεκλήθη. Does this reflect the *communis opinio* of that moment? Or only the perspective of the powerful and rich aristocracy? Or that of Plutarch himself? However that may be, Laelius' policy in any case casts a shadow on Tiberius' decision to solve the problem. Plutarch then goes on to discuss Tiberius' motivation and again, φιλοτιμία appears as the most important aspect (implicitly in 8.7–8, explicitly in 8.10). It is not by mere accident that the δῆμος here appears as the subject, kindling Tiberius' ambition and calling upon him (αὐτόν, the direct object) to recover the public land for the poor (8.10). To the extent that this passage at last recalls the general perspective of the proem, it again suggests the imminence of future problems.

At first sight, however, these repeated warnings seem unjustified, as they were in the *Life of Cleomenes*. Plutarch's account of Tiberius' agrarian law

rather recalls features of Agis' reforms. His project was honorable and just (καλὴν ὑπόθεσιν καὶ δικαίαν, 9.4), and his law was a model of mildness (9.2) and humanity (10.4). His opponents again try to slander his intentions, but they are obviously motivated by base passions (9.3). And yet, what follows is much more complex than the clear-cut dichotomy between virtue and vice that can be found in the *Life of Agis*. For Tiberius' principal opponent is not an effeminate scoundrel such as Leonidas, but Marcus Octavius, a noble, virtuous young man who is not corrupted by πλεονεξία (10.7–8) and who is even a friend of Tiberius (10.1). This has some very important consequences, the first of which is that a new, no less honorable perspective is now involved. As a result, oversimplified black-and-white characterization again has to yield to a much more differentiating account. Moreover, Octavius' opposition will entail a radicalization on Tiberius' part (10.4). In that sense as well, this is a key moment in the whole *Life*: from now on, the theme of Tiberius' excessive conduct, coupled with his greater indulgence toward the people (ἡδίω τοῖς πολλοῖς, 10.4), will be developed and the relevance of the above-mentioned earlier warnings in the *Life* will become increasingly clear. More and more, the question will arise as to what extent Tiberius' ambition can still be called honorable.

The next chapters about the conflict between Tiberius and Octavius are particularly interesting in this respect. First of all, Plutarch underlines that the excellence of both protagonists makes its influence felt on their ambitious debates (10.5–6).³¹ In spite of his radicalness, Tiberius always shows his respect for his opponents (11.2–3, 11.7, 12.2), yet in the end, he is forced to depose Octavius. This measure is, remarkably enough, called ἔργον οὐ νόμιμον οὐδ' ἐπιεικές (11.4). Unlawful it may have been—although even that is not perfectly clear—but unseemly? The phrase suggests that this is Plutarch's evaluation, but this is not evident. For in his *Political Precepts*, he argues that the politician can break the law “when he has necessity as his defense, or the greatness and glory of the action as a consolation for the risk” (817F). If Tiberius' general project can still be called honorable, this rule may apply. In that sense, the addition of οὐδ' ἐπιεικές seems to reflect the point of view of Tiberius' opponents,³² and Plutarch's sympathy at least for the moment seems to lie with Marcus Octavius.

This impression gains additional support from the next chapter. At the *moment suprême*, just before Octavius will become a *privatus*, Tiberius again makes a pathetic appeal to his colleague. This does not remain without effect: Octavius indeed hesitates for a while, but the decisive moment comes when he looks at the group of rich aristocrats. His respect for them and his fear of ill repute among them (φοβηθεὶς τὴν παρ' ἐκείνοις ἀδοξίαν, 12.4) are the

31. This, however, may well be a biased representation of the events. Cf. Bernstein 1978, 170: “Plutarch assures us that both the young men observed a dignified decorum throughout the proceedings by refraining from personal attacks on each other. His description of the debates, however, belies his assertion. Tiberius offered to compensate Octavius from his own private funds for the public land the vetoer would lose as a prominent offender. The remark surely was intended to show Octavius in the worst possible light.”

32. Cf., however, Scardigli 1979, 68.

deciding factors that urge him on to reject once again Tiberius' proposal.³³ At this crucial moment, two different conceptions of honor are radically opposed to one another.³⁴ Octavius prefers the honor among the rich and influential citizens, and his decision is qualified by the phrase οὐκ ἄγεννῶς—yet another hint that Plutarch was not unsympathetic toward Octavius' point of view?

It is interesting to note in passing that this whole conflict between two radically different interpretations of honor remains completely absent from Appian's account (*B Civ.* 1.12).³⁵ It would be tedious to list here all the obvious differences between Plutarch's account and that of Appian. In this context, the general observation above suffices as a further illustration of the moralizing and problematizing approach that is so typical of Plutarch's *Lives*. Events are not described with the eyes of a neutral observer, but presented in such a way as to raise interesting moral questions.

The remaining part of the *Life* can be discussed more briefly. Tiberius more and more behaves as a demagogue (13.6, 14.1, 16.1, 16.3) and appears gradually to lose his independence (17.5–6). Moreover, he is no longer motivated by a noble calculation of what is just and useful but by anger and contentiousness (16.1), and his aristocratic opponents are keen enough to underline the great differences between his conduct and that of his distinguished father (14.4).³⁶ The conclusion seems obvious: Tiberius' project may have been perfectly honorable at first, but he ends up as a troublesome demagogue, and the whole sequence of events ultimately illustrates once again the wisdom of Laelius.

This conclusion, however, is only possible through a subtle and gradual shift of perspective. Indeed, what about the greed of the rich? Their base πλεονεξία, which is after all the initial cause of the whole problem, has for a while been pushed into the background. Plutarch seems to have forgotten his indignation and joined their side. At the very end, however, he retraces his steps. The treatment of Tiberius' dead body by the rich is called savage and lawless (ὠμῶς καὶ παρανόμως, 20.3) and inspired by hatred and anger, which clearly shows that they no less failed to adopt a middle course. Tiberius' policy, on the other hand, is posthumously justified by Blossius, who argues that everything has been done out of concern for the public interest (cf. 20.6). There is no trace of excessive ambition here. And finally, Nasica, who broke the law and caused Tiberius' death, ends up wandering in foreign countries, ignominiously (ἄδόξως, 21.6). While this obviously marks a return to the other, pro-Gracchan point of view, simplifying black-and-white conclusions are no longer possible. Both sides apparently have justified claims for honor,

33. It is interesting to note, as one of the referees pointed out to me, that Octavius' response could easily be characterized as the sort of δυσωπία that Plutarch argues against in the moral essay. It is significant indeed that he does not explicitly characterize it in such terms here. The focus is mainly on the problem of honor.

34. One may recall Sen. *Ep.* 102.17, where basically the same opposition returns: *quid intersit inter claritatem et gloriam dicam: gloria multorum iudiciis constat, claritas bonorum*.

35. For the much-discussed relation between Appian's account of the reforms of the Gracchi and that of Plutarch, see Pelling 2002, 214–16; 2010, 11–12; and Scardigli 1979, 63–65 (where many references to earlier literature can conveniently be found).

36. The same opposition between Tiberius Gracchus and his father often returns in Cicero and apparently reflects the point of view of the *optimates*; cf., on Cicero's position, Béranger 1972, esp. 757–58.

both can blame the opposite side for excessive and illegal conduct, and neither is immune to the influence of passions. The reader remains puzzled.

6. THE *LIFE OF GAIUS GRACCHUS*

The blurring of clear criteria is developed even more in the *Life of Gaius Gracchus*, which is in this respect by far the most complex *Life* of this double pair. Throughout Plutarch's account, Gaius Gracchus shows himself to be a gifted demagogue, capable of stirring up the people and offending the senate (see, e.g., *C. Gracch.* 3.5–7, 4.1–4, 5.1–4, 8.1–3, 9.1–5, 11.5, 12.1, 12.5–7). It is not even clear that his political goals are noble. He proposed his laws “by way of gratifying the people and overthrowing the senate” (τῷ δήμῳ χαρίζομενος καὶ καταλύων τὴν σύγκλητον, 5.1). This has little to do with concern for the public interest and seems in the first place related to the fate of his brother Tiberius,³⁷ whose career reverberates in the background throughout this *Life*.³⁸ This impression is confirmed by Gaius' introduction of two laws that attacked respectively Marcus Octavius (Tiberius' noble opponent) and Popillius (who had exiled Tiberius' friends) (4.1–2).³⁹ Most interestingly, the law against Octavius was withdrawn by Gaius himself, at his mother's request (4.3).⁴⁰ Here too, Octavius thus escapes ἀτιμία, and the passage provides an interesting addendum to the discussion about the two different kinds of honor in the *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*.

Gaius' career thus seems to show that he was “a demagogue pure and simple, and far more eager than Tiberius to win the favor of the multitude”—yet, quite paradoxically, it is precisely this conclusion that is quite emphatically denied by Plutarch himself (οὐκ ἔχει δ' οὕτω τὸ ἀληθές, 1.6). His argument is that Gaius entered into public life *à contre-coeur* and not by a well-considered choice.⁴¹ But there is more to it than this. Several chapters indeed offer a completely different picture of Gaius. At the height of his power, he even gives fitting advice to the senate, which is willing to follow it (6.1). On such occasions, he can inspire a most moderate and honorable decree (6.2). In dealing with the most diverse kinds of people—craftsmen as well as magistrates, soldiers and scholars, and so on—, he succeeded in maintaining his dignity in his humanity (τὸ σεμνὸν ἐν τῷ φιλανθρώπῳ διαφυλάττων, 6.4). This is an

37. For the importance of the theme of fraternity in the *Lives of the Gracchi*, see Bannon 1995.

38. See esp. Ingenkamp (1992), who has pointed to the paramount importance of the key passage about Gaius' dream (*C. Gracch.* 1.7); cf. also Späth 2001, 413–26. Plutarch, however, here modifies his source on one very important point: Plutarch refers explicitly to Cicero (ἱστορεῖ δὲ καὶ Κικέρων ὁ ῥήτωρ, 1.7). The latter reports Tiberius' message in Gaius' dream as follows: *quam vellet cunctaretur, tamen eodem sibi leto, quo ipse interisset, esse pereundum* (*Div.* 1.56). Basically the same tradition occurs in Valerius Maximus (1.7.6): *nullo ratione eum vitare posse ne eo facto periret quo ipse occidisset*. Plutarch's version, on the other hand, is as follows: τί δῆτα Γάιος βραδύνει; οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπόδρασις, ἀλλ' εἰς μὲν ἡμῶν ἀμφοτέροις βίος, εἰς δὲ θάνατος ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου πολυτενομένοις πέπρωται. In this version, the parallelism between the two brothers far extends their “common death” and also applies to their whole lives. This is more than just a rhetorical *amplificatio*. By adding the element of εἰς μὲν ἡμῶν ἀμφοτέροις βίος, Plutarch creatively reinterprets the previous tradition for the sake of his comparative biographical project. Cf. Pelling 2010, 499.

39. Both laws are discussed in detail in Stockton 1979, 115–21.

40. On Cornelia's political influence, see Dixon 2007, 18–32 (esp. 21 and 28 on this passage).

41. *C. Gracch.* 1.6. In *Præc. ger. reip.* 798F–799A, Plutarch relates how Gaius indeed withdrew from public life, but suddenly returned to politics out of anger, because he had been insulted by certain persons. Contrast Stockton 1979, 179: “That Gaius was politically ambitious goes without saying.”

important passage that aptly illustrates the ambivalence of Gaius' conduct. A quality such as σεμνότης is not readily expected from a demagogue. It is rather a typical characteristic of great statesmen such as Pericles (*Per.* 5.3, 39.3; cf. 7.6), Cimon (*Cim.* 10.2), Cato the Elder (*Cat. Mai.* 6.4), and Cato the Younger (*Cat. Min.* 5.3; cf. 19.9). Nevertheless, Plutarch indeed believed that such σεμνότης could perfectly be combined with social affability and humanity. This appears from a celebrated passage near the end of his *Political Precepts*, where he enthusiastically describes the virtuous politician who enjoys the goodwill of his people (822F–823E). If Gaius meets this high ideal, that can only mean that he far surpasses the level of an ordinary demagogue.⁴² Yet in precisely this passage, he is called δεινότερος . . . δημαγωγός (6.5). And until the very end of his life, Gaius continues to show his moral excellence, as is illustrated by the opposition between his behavior and that of the wicked Fulvius (14.4–15.2, 16.5). In that sense, Gaius Gracchus is, as it were, an oxymoron. He is the dignified demagogue who succeeds in combining the two different kinds of honor that were diametrically opposed in the *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*.

Gaius' opponent is Livius Drusus, a man who combines a high birth with many talents (8.5) and political integrity (10.1). Livius is the counterpart of Marcus Octavius in the *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, but he follows a completely different strategy. With the approval of the senate, he plays the demagogue who is only interested in courting the favor of the people. He does not aim at what is honorable or useful but is only concerned with the people's pleasure (8.6, 9.1). His project, in short, consists in ἀντιδημαγωγεῖν παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον (8.4). The addition of παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον reflects the point of view of the senate and in spite of all his flattery of the people Livius Drusus will always remain loyal to that (cf. 9.6–7). In that sense, Livius is no less an oxymoron than Gaius Gracchus: he is the opportunistic demagogue in the service of the senate.

The further course of events need not detain us much longer. We may here ignore Opimius, the oligarchical (11.4) consul who knows how to stir up the people (13.5), or Antyllus, who claims to know the difference between good and bad citizens but is killed on the spot (13.3–4), and turn to the end of the *Life*. After the death of Gaius Gracchus and his partisans, Plutarch adds a few comments on the later career of Opimius. The latter was convicted of bribery and spent his old age in infamy (ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ), hated and abused by the people (18.2). This obviously recalls the ignoble end of Nasicus in the *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, but there are also important differences. This chapter does not show the same shift of perspective but consequently develops a fundamental pattern of the whole *Life*, that is, its more or less systematic effacement of all clear-cut distinctions. Opimius, "the first consul to exercise the power of a dictator" (18.1), turns out to be an ordinary corrupt fraud. Fulvius Flaccus, who

42. One may note that the passage from the *Political Precepts* has more than once been regarded as Plutarch's view of the ideal politician (although it would be more correct to say that he there discusses several important characteristics of such a politician, rather than providing a comprehensive view); cf. Weber 1959, 60 n. 194: "Hier spricht Plutarch sicherlich aus ureigenstem Erleben und tiefster Überzeugung. In dieser Weise wird er selbst in seiner Heimatstadt Chaironeia gewirkt haben"; cf. also Renoirte 1951, 40.

throughout the *Life* always appears in the most negative light, is now introduced as an ex-consul who had celebrated a triumph (ὑπατικός καὶ θριαμβικός, 18.1). Gaius Gracchus, finally, is called “the foremost man of his generation in virtue and reputation” (τῆς καθ’ αὐτὸν ἡλικίας ἀρετῇ καὶ δόξῃ πεπρωτευκώς, 18.1). The juxtaposition of ἀρετῇ καὶ δόξῃ, unproblematic in itself, recalls for the last time the amalgam of diametrically opposed perspectives that are reconciled in the person of Gaius Gracchus. At this point, Plutarch’s exploration of this theme has reached its final boundaries. It is time for a final evaluation in the *synkrisis*.

7. THE *SYNKRISIS*

“Now that I have brought this story of the Gracchi also to an end, it remains for me to take a survey (τὴν ἀποθεώρησιν) of all four lives in parallel.” Thus Plutarch begins the formal *synkrisis* that concludes this double pair. Since Plutarch’s *synkriseis* have often been criticized as quite trivial and inconsistent,⁴³ but have also been defended as interesting, subtle reassessments of the previous account,⁴⁴ the safest course is perhaps to suspend judgment, the most generous to decide *in dubio pro reo*. Neither will be followed here. I prefer to focus on this comparison and see what sense can be made of it.

In my view, an important key to a better understanding of this *synkrisis* (and, by extension, of all the *synkriseis*) can be found in the word ἀποθεώρησιν. This is a remarkably rare term, which only occurs in the *Corpus Plutarcheum* (three times) and in Diodorus Siculus (once). The translation in LSJ (“serious contemplation,” “wide view”) is rather misleading. The clearest passage is that of Diodorus, about “a place in the higher ground that faced toward the desert and was well situated to be clearly visible from every direction.”⁴⁵ As the context shows, Diodorus’ point is that the place should be visible *from afar*. In other words, the prefix ἀπο- denotes a certain distance. This holds true for the passages in Plutarch as well. In this particular passage, he suggests that he will now stand back, as it were, in order to look back (θεώρησιν) from a distance (ἀπο-) on what he has written.⁴⁶ This implies a transition toward a new perspective: not the historical narrative one, nor a rhetorical⁴⁷ or a pro-treptic one,⁴⁸ but a perspective of retrospective comparative moral evaluation. Indeed, on closer inspection, the two fundamental principles of moral problematization and (of course) *synkrisis* return in this final formal comparison.

On the one hand, the view from a distance (ἀποθεώρησις) entails a new interpretation and application of the principle of *synkrisis*, in that it conditions

43. See, e.g., Pelling 2002, 360: “some of these epilogues disquietingly gear down rather than up, trivializing the narrative’s suggestions on both an ethical and an interpretative level, thought-diminishing rather than thought-provoking.”

44. Duff 1999b, 252–86.

45. Diod. Sic. 19.38.3: τῆς μετεώρου χώρας τόπον ἐστραμμένον ἐπὶ τὴν ἔρημον καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀποθεώρησιν πανταχόθεν εὐφυῆ.

46. The same connotation of distance can be found in the two other passages as well. In *De Stoic. rep.* 1045B, the term reflects the distance between human beings and animals; in *Pel.* 25.15, it may refer to the digressive character of the story about Menecleidas.

47. Pace Duff 1999b, 259–60 (although Duff is right in pointing to the general influence of rhetoric in the *synkriseis*).

48. Pace Boulogne 2000, 43.

the way in which the different items will be compared with one another. The (careers of the) heroes are no longer fashioned after each other (as in the *Lives* themselves), but are compared “from a distance” and thus in a more generalizing way. On the other hand, Plutarch’s ἀποθεώρησις enables him to introduce a series of (moral) parameters (such as the heroes’ natures and education, their attitudes toward money, their military and political accomplishments, etc.), and to use them in order to evaluate important aspects of his heroes’ careers “from afar.” Although this is obviously not the place for a systematic and detailed discussion of all these parameters, I would like to point to a few interesting aspects of Plutarch’s approach in this particular *synkrisis*.

Often, Plutarch’s general evaluation is broadly in line with his account in the *Life*. Some elements are (re)introduced in a somewhat more explicit way, are slightly modified or differently emphasized, but in general there are but few instances of remarkable dissonance. The most obvious are perhaps the different evaluation of Cleomenes’ attitude toward the death of Archidamus (much more critical in *Comp. Ag., Cleom. et Gracch.* 5.2 than in *Cleom.* 5.3–4) and the different emphasis on the military achievements of the Gracchi.⁴⁹ That these dissonances should not merely be traced back to the general difference in perspective between the *Life* and the concluding *synkrisis*, but are also part and parcel of the *synkrisis* itself, appears from Plutarch’s evaluation of the deaths of the Gracchi. First the Roman brothers are criticized for having died on their flight (*Comp. Ag., Cleom. et Gracch.* 3.1), then this flight is regarded as an indication of caution rather than cowardice (4.6). To the extent that all these examples can be regarded as an implicit invitation to reconsider the previous account and ponder for a while the moral value of the heroes’ actions, moral problematization indeed belongs to the core business of the *synkrisis*.

One may wonder, however, what relevance the above-mentioned attention to military campaigns can have in such a project of moral problematization. The same holds true for Plutarch’s remark that Rome did not advance in greatness through the political activities of the Gracchi, whereas Sparta soon gained the leading position in the Peloponnesus thanks to Cleomenes’ accomplishments (2.5). Although this consequentialistic evaluation was anticipated in a few passages in the *Life*,⁵⁰ it is especially typical of an approach of ἀποθεώρησις in that it requires an *a posteriori* judgment, “from a distance.” No doubt it provides an interesting problematization of the heroes’ projects in terms of the outcome, but the question remains as to what extent it is also a moral problematization. The question becomes even more urgent in view of the paramount importance that Plutarch seems to attach to precisely these considerations (ὁ δὲ μέγιστον, 2.5). The answer may well be that Plutarch’s moral standard of τὸ καλὸν also includes the component of usefulness. Honorable behavior can never be reduced to a mere concern for the useful course,

49. These achievements received relatively little attention in the *Life* (*T. Gracch.* 4.6, 5.5–6; *C. Gracch.* 2.1) but are here (*Comp. Ag., Cleom. et Gracch.* 3.2–3) placed on a level with the great successes of Cleomenes, which are described at length and with enthusiasm throughout the *Life of Cleomenes*.

50. See *Cleom.* 18.2–4; cf. also *Agis* 7.2 and the concern of several characters for the good of the state (e.g., *Agis* 20.7; *Cleom.* 22.5, 31.10–11; *C. Gracch.* 15.3).

to be sure, since it also involves political and social virtues,⁵¹ but a pragmatic reflex is part and parcel of Plutarch's moral philosophy. If that is true, such consequentialistic evaluation is fully in line with the general perspective of the *synkrisis*.

What, however, is said about the theme of ambition and love of honor, which, as we saw, was a fundamental motif in the proem and was explored throughout the four *Lives*? Since the final *synkrisis* shares the ἀποθεώρησις approach with the proem, one could expect that both also contain basically similar evaluations of the heroes' career. This, however, is strikingly not the case. The love of fame of the Gracchi is nowhere alluded to, whereas their excessive ambition (φιλοτιμίας ἀμετρίαν) is mentioned only once, and moreover, this evaluation does not come directly from Plutarch himself but is ascribed to those who criticize (οἱ ψέγοντες) the brothers' character. Plutarch adds, moreover, that this was the only element for which the Gracchi could be blamed (5.5). The obvious difference between this passage and the proem casts a new light on the precise value of ambition and love of honor as key notions for the evaluation of the previous *Lives*. New perspectives entail new questions and different answers, and once again, the reader is explicitly invited to form his own opinion (5.7). Surely it is no coincidence that the comparative moral problematization connected with the ἀποθεώρησις approach yields different interpretations in the proem and the final *synkrisis*, yet entails in both places the same strong emphasis on the reader's responsibility and independence.

CONCLUSION

Plutarch's *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi* contain a fascinating discussion of the complex interaction of high-minded philosophical ideals, the means to realize them, and the motivating force of ambition and love of honor. The proem provides the reader with a clear and general perspective, which may be called programmatic in the sense that it both introduces the theme and raises several interesting questions. Its simplifying distinctions, however, will be developed and nuanced in the following *Lives*. The *Life of Agis* reflects a fairly simple pattern, which will become increasingly complex in the next *Lives*. Notions such as honor or τὸ καλόν are understood in different ways and interpreted from diametrically opposed perspectives, until finally *les extrêmes se touchent* in the *Life of Gaius Gracchus*.

The *synkrisis* brings no definitive solution, and in a way, it would be naive to expect that the certainty of the proem can be regained after the many subtle discussions in the four *Lives*. Several elements can be reconsidered "from a distance," to be sure, and this can stimulate further thinking, but easy answers have long been abandoned. The theme of φιλοδοξία and φιλοτιμία is not even discussed in the *synkrisis*, and one can see why: it is simply no longer possible to do justice to the complexity of this issue in a few sentences. As far as this problem is concerned, the four *Lives* themselves constitute a *synkrisis* on their own.

51. Roskam 2009, 73–76.

Of course the reader is free to make up his own mind and to form his own opinion (cf. *Comp. Ag., Cleom. et Gracch.* 5.7). He can try to go systematically through all the points once again, although I doubt whether that would be the best way to realize the goals of Plutarch's biographical project. A reader who looks for fixed rules that can easily be applied to everyday life should turn to Aesop's *Fables* rather than Plutarch's *Lives*. These *Lives* do not want to shut up history within a static and sterile casuistry, but rather show a special interest in the many difficult moral problems that the famous statesmen of the past had to face. These are the lessons that may be learned from history. They are far from easy, no doubt, but precisely for that reason the challenge is much more interesting, not only for Plutarch's contemporaries but for so many later generations of readers as well.

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