Moralia in the Lives:
The Charge of Rashness in *Pelopidas*/Marcellus*

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At the end of his dialogue *Politicus*, Plato tells his reader what the greatest achievement of statecraft is. Bravery (ἄνδρεία) is a virtue, he says, and self-possession (σωφροσύνη) is a virtue as well, but in many cases they will be at variance. This is because the brave deal with many situations differently from how do the self-possessed, for each of the two virtues represents a different character (φύσις). It is no good if either of them gets the upper hand in the state. So, for the statesman, the greatest achievement is to entwine these φύσεις.¹

Epameinondas the self-possessed and Pelopidas the brave, who were statesmen in the same polis at the same time and who fought for the same causes during their life-time and were good friends, represent the two φύσεις so exactly as to make us think that, in his *Politicus*, one of his late dialogues, Plato, who in his old age was their contemporary, has modelled his theory on them. However, for Plutarch, who loves and admires both his fellow-Boeotans, Epameinondas is not so much part of an ideal couple of statesmen than an ideal statesman himself. His self-possession is undisputed, but Plutarch is also interested in demonstrating that Epameinondas’ bravery is bravery as it should be while Pelopidas’ bravery tends to be rashness. When both were tried because they had stuck to their official position of Βοιωτάρχαι for too long a time and were threatened with the death penalty, Epameinondas took it calmly, “because he was of the opinion that, in politics, a great part of bravery and highmindedness consisted in forbearance” (*Pelop.* 25.4). I think that we are allowed to connect these words with what Plato taught in his *Politicus* and interpret them as meaning that self-possession is not contrary to bravery but part of it (cp. particularly *Num.* 3.5). This was certainly Plutarch’s concept of

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* I would like to thank Susanne Gippert for looking through the manuscript.
1 As to rulers, if there is only one ruler, this person should be both brave and self-possessed; if there are more than one rulers, there should be a balance of the two φύσεις within the group of the rulers. As to citizens, the government should mesh the characters accordingly (*Politicus* 305Eff.). Plutarch himself, in his *Life of Pelopidas*, recommends this policy, though without a reference to Plato (19.1–2). A clear parallel is in *Marcellus* 9.4–7, with Fabius Maximus representing the σωφρον φύσις. In Marcellus there were both φύσεις, but they were unmixed (Marc. 1.2 f.).
bravery. He remarkably often mentions ἀνδρεία in combination with virtues as φρονησις, δικαιοσύνη, εὐθυλια, σωφροσύνη etc., all of them attitudes and qualities that would soften the impact of a full-scale-ἀνδρεία.²

After an introduction with which we will have to deal later on, Plutarch begins his account of Pelopidas’ and Marcellus’ life with establishing a criterion that will guide his judgment on his heroes’ death. Almost immediately after having given the criterion, he passes his judgment. The place of the verdict and the determination with which it is uttered will lead Plutarch’s reader to the expectation, that this judgment is final. He will begin reading the two Lives as a story that leads inevitably to the conclusion he already knows. Now, the judgment is severe. The heroes are blamed for reckless behaviour. It is this wrong and reckless behaviour that makes them similar, and so Plutarch dedicates one book of his Parallel Lives to them.

Readers acquainted with Plutarch’s ways of thinking and writing would be surprised if the author adhered to the principles he has laid out, particularly because they are so intransigent. Plutarch mostly is not a deductive writer who reasons from general principles, but an author who makes his judgments evolve, never being afraid of modifying them when they have been too harsh at the beginning. Life and most of the situations that occur during life-time are too complicated to be judged according to one simple criterion. So it is no surprise when Plutarch begins wavering about what he said at the beginning and, at the end, says quite the contrary of it.³ Such a contradictory exposition of merits would be, for a biography, neither helpful nor usual, and so we will not find many parallels for the procedure in the history of biographical literature. On the other hand, it is usual as well as helpful in treatises that reflect upon moral issues. Such issues are used to be very complicated, and a sensible author will often present himself looking for answers instead of teaching an established truth. A biography written in this manner would be halfway between a Life and an ethical essay, and what follows here is to prove that, as far as the two Lives deal with the heroes’ deaths, Pelopidas-Marcellus is, in a way, such a hybrid.

(1) The criterion that underlies the seemingly final judgment is the following: If the personal risk a commander-in-chief takes is of decisive influence on the whole task that has been undertaken, he should not spare himself; if not or if the whole task is in danger if the commander dies, nobody will ask him to perform the duty of a simple soldier (i. e. to sacrifice his life in battle) (Pelop. 2.7). The judgment runs: Pelopidas and Marcellus were lavish

² Cp. Rom. 28.3, Lyc. 28.1, Num. 8.10, Sol. 30.4, Them. 7.4, Fab. 13.7, Comp. Per. et Fab. 2.2 f., Cor. 1.6 etc.; Mor. 30 E, 32 C, 261 D, 319 E, 457 D, 471 B etc.; ἀνδρεία is even rebuked Praec. ger. reip. 819C.
with their lives without any consideration. They even threw it away at a time when men of their kind were most needed. 4

The criterion helps us assess acts that belong to a τέχνη. In this case, it is the τέχνη στρατηγική. A person that one day will be a στρατηγός, has to learn this rule, as a person who learns Latin has to learn certain grammatical rules. If this person will not act according to the rule, he or she will be rebuked.

Life would be simple if everything could be judged like this. But even most τέχνα are not so uncomplicated. Not a rule, but the good, the perfect τεχνίτης teaches us what should be done. This is what some of the best treatises of the Corpus Hippocraticum, Isocrates and Aristotle teach us, and Plutarch’s judgements in his Lives are proof of his being imbued with this knowledge. Themistocles is a good τεχνίτης and Aristides is a good τεχνίτης, and everyone knows how different their approach to the same problem used to be.

Nevertheless, there is a thread running through the two Lives that confirms both the “technical” criterion and the corresponding judgment. The formulation of the criterion is introduced by a lengthy argument to the same effect (Pelop. 1.10fin-2.7). Especially, the death-scene itself is written under its influence and so are the retrospective remarks in the syncrisis (Comp. Pelop. et Marc. 3.1 f.). The repetition of the condemning judgment at these crucial places induces readers and commentators to take them for Plutarch’s last words.

(2) But this is not the case. We can conclude that from a clear modification of both this criterion and the corresponding judgment. We find that in the syncrisis. Plutarch here says that Pelopidas’ behaviour is pardonable, because his Σωμός, which we may translate as “zeal” as well as “anger”, made him, who was already heated from the battle, not ignobly rush to take revenge. The modified criterion follows at once: For the best that can happen is, Plutarch now says, if the commander is victorious and stays alive; the next best is, if he dies making his death an act of virtue, for, in this case, according to Euripides, his death will be not a πάθος (a suffering), but a πράξεις (a free action) (Comp. Pelop. et Marc. 3.3 f.).
Both the first criterion and the first judgment remain valid, but they are modified in as far as they now admit what Plato would call a δεύτερος πλοῦς, a second best way. The result of the modification is that Pelopidas is no more sentenced but rather understood, defended, and even praised according to the criterion, that, coming as a kind of afterthought after the judgment, goes a step further in the friendlier direction, which is non untypical for Plutarchan afterthoughts.

The formulation of a criterion before or after laying out one’s judgment is in most cases viewed as pedantry. Usually we give our judgment hoping that the inherent criterion will be clear. Plutarch has two additional criteria that are not formulated but can be easily understood from the corresponding judgments.

When Plutarch informs us about the honours bestowed on Pelopidas after his death he states that the praise of his happiness could not be increased. For, he goes on, according to Aesopus, the death of the fortunate is not the most miserable, but the most blessed, because now all their noble deeds are in a safe haven. As to Pelopidas, he had lived most time of his life renowned and honoured, and now, when he was boiotarches for the 13th time, he had died for the freedom of the Thessalians exhibiting an ἀριστεία (i.e. a deed or deeds of special prowess) linked with the honourable killing of a tyrant (Pelop. 34.4–7).

Pelopidas is credited here with the killing of Alexander of Pherai, while in reality Alexander flew and Pelopidas was killed by Alexander’s soldiers. But the very narrative of Pelopidas’ death may, at its end, suggest that his death was the beginning of the tyrant’s death (Pelop. 32.11 ἔως <…>). Afterwards Plutarch tells us, that Pelopidas’ conversation during his captivity with Alexander’s wife who hated and despised her husband led to her taking the initiative of killing the tyrant.

The judgment could not be more flattering. ἀριστεία of Diomedes, Menelaus, Agamemnon are the titles of whole books of the Iliad dealing with the excellence of the respective hero. So Pelopidas is solemnly elevated to epic rank. The underlying criterion is that to be a deed of excellence it has to display κάλλος. Pelopidas is a great hero, because he died when performing an ἀριστεία – and what people is celebrating is not only his death undergone for the freedom of the Thessalians, it is the ἀριστεία that consisted in his whole life, for Plutarch, when giving a reason for the general reverence for the dead hero, speaks of his “many combats” (Pelop. 34.7).

In the synkrisis, Plutarch repeats the word ἀριστεία. This time, he combines the criterion κάλλος with the criterion τέχνη, beginning with the criterion τέχνη and modifying it by the divergent criterion, recommending to our consideration that what Pelopidas did was of unsurpassable beauty and nobility, and so substituting one criterion by the other one, τέχνη by κάλλος. Certainly it was anger that led Pelopidas to try to kill Alexander, Plutarch says:
but the purpose of his action was the fall of the tyrant. This makes his attack not altogether unreasonable (here we have a modification of, perhaps even a contradiction to the first judgment that sentenced Pelopidas’ mere rashness), for it would be difficult to find another occasion for an ἀριστεία that would have been so honourable (καλήν) and so splendid (λαμπράν) (Comp. Pelop. et Marc. 3.5.). This honourable purpose had been mentioned already before the report of Pelopidas’s death (Pelop. 31.5.).

Plutarch here says that Pelopidas was in a rage because of having being abused, during his previous captivity, by the abominable tyrant, but that, in addition to his anger, he hoped to overthrow him because of the confidential conversations between himself and Alexander’s wife. In this case, however, Plutarch is not speaking of the very decision to attack Alexander personally but of Pelopidas’ general decision to wage war against him at this moment, inspite of the forebodings. This is different in the quoted passage of the συνκρίσεις, where the death-scene itself is analysed. When Plutarch says that Pelopidas combined anger with a reflection on the consequences of a probable victory, he once more makes use of the new criterion. According to this one Pelopidas’s action is judged as a combination of πάθος (anger) and strategic deliberation. We are free to take his anger as blameworthy as before and so find a twofold judgment: “He acted unfortunately in an rage but nevertheless with a clear and sensible strategic aim”, or to think of the good effects of θυμός on bravery, as they are seen in Academic and Peripatetic ethics. I think the first option is the better one, because it seems to be Plutarch’s intention to attack inconsiderate anger. In this case, anger is sentenced on the basis of the criterion κάλλος: Pelopidas acts morally ὡς ὦ δεῖ but technically well.

At the very end of the συνκρίσεις there is one more criterion (33.8.). This one reminds the reader directly of Plato’s Politicus. Plutarch, while ensuring his reader that he is not accusing the two men, but that he only is speaking frankly and venting his displeasure, says that, in Pelopidas and Marcellus, the virtue of ἄνδρεία absorbed all other virtues, as if their deaths were a private matter and not concerning their countries, their friends and their allies.

To make the difference of the criteria clear, I will try to attribute them to different forms of knowledge. The first one belongs to the τέχναι, as I have said before. There are rules for a commander; Pelopidas and Marcellus have not acted according to the rules: so they have to be blamed. The second and the third one are ethical criteria. The second one, κάλλος, is to be found in practical, educational ethics, and in educational poetry. It defines what makes a “good” accomplishment “good” or what makes a virtue a virtue. Τὸ καλὸν is the standard that a praiseworthy deed or behaviour has to meet; otherwise it will not be praiseworthy. But if Pelopidas’ deeds are καλὰ or ἀριστείαι, they cannot be blamed. The third criterion is narrower insofar as it has to do not with virtue in general but with the system of virtues after the philosopher has
decided which attitudes are virtues and which not. Having done this, he will find out that there are higher and lesser virtues and that there is a rule according to which virtues have to interact. According to Plato, the “strong” virtues have to be in harmony with the “weak” virtues. They should not overwhelm them. But of course a virtue remains what it is, a virtue. So if a deed is brave, it will not be not-brave, if it lacks self-possession. But it is less praiseworthy than a deed that comes up to that demand. We would say: “You are an excellent warrior and what you did is great, but how could you forget <…>!” So, using three criteria, Plutarch gives the last actions of Pelopidas five quite diverging and even contradictory marks using the criterion τέχνη once in order to blame him and once to praise him. Here are the judgments together with their criteria:5 Pelopidas’ action is (1: criterion τέχνη) blameworthy, (2: criterion τέχνη and κάλλος) blameworthy but pardonable because of the beauty of the action, (3: criterion κάλλος and τέχνη) blameworthy because without self-control but at the same time strategically deliberate, (4: criterion κάλλος) praiseworthy and (5: criterion “system of virtues”) praiseworthy in a qualified sense. But he never distinguishes between his standpoints.6 So his reader will decide if he prefers to be confused or to combine the marks by making all the other ones disappear into the victorious one, which in most cases will be the “technical” assessment, because it had been read as a headline at the beginning of the Lives, is repeated when Pelopidas’ death is reported and is not forgotten at the end of the book.

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Until now, I have treated the judgments according to their contents without considering their place in the book. Now, besides the introduction, there are two passages were they are accumulated, first, the death-scene of Pelopidas, its introduction and the obituary (Pelop. 31.5–32.9 and 34) and the last chapter (3) of the synkrisis. I think it is interesting to observe the shift of perspective inside very short sections. In the passage of the Life of Pelopidas dealing with the hero’s death we have three divergent judgments: judgm. 3 (provided we take the remark as including the death-scene: Pelopidas acts from anger but nevertheless reflects on the good consequences of a probable victory), judgm. 1 (blameworthy, because he acts in a rage and thoughtless), judgm. 4 praiseworthy (he fought an ἀριστεία joined with the murder of a tyrant). In

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5 According to Georgiadou 1997, 216, the criteria used by Plutarch seem to be “inability to subject his anger to his judgment” and “heroism”.

6 As to his other works, he calls the death of Pelopidas once, in a rhetorical context, virtuous (De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute 344 C), and once, in a psychotherapeutic essay on anger, he attributes it to the hero’s intemperate anger (De coh. ira 458 E). That Marcellus died by an ambush is mentioned without any moral or strategic comment Flamin. 1.4.
the 3rd chapter of the synkrisis we come across the following judgments:
judgm. 2 (blameworthy but pardonable), judgm. 3 (blameworthy but strategically deliberate), judgm. 5 (praiseworthy in a qualified sense). As may be noticed, the last word in both cases is “praiseworthy”; in the synkrisis the judgments even develop in that direction.

The first and the last of the judgments are valid for both Pelopidas and Marcellus, the first one being a headline for both Lives, the last one showing Plutarch’s remorse for having judged a little too severely at the end of the synkrisis, where, after having praised Pelopidas for his choice of the occasion for his ἐρείπιον, he rebukes Marcellus so much the more. After that, he seems to remember not so much his praise just given to his other hero but his harsh sentence against both heroes at the beginning of the book, and with reference to it he now explains that his harsh judgment on both of them should not be understood as an accusation. So, according to the first judgment, Marcellus’ death is blameworthy because Marcellus made a major mistake as a commander and consequently died heedlessly, and, according to the last one, it is praiseworthy in a qualified sense because his bravery swallowed up his other virtues. The other assessments (“pardonable”, “blameworthy but strategically deliberate” and “praiseworthy without qualification”) refer to Pelopidas alone. But when dealing with Marcellus’ decision to reconnoitre the enemy lines himself, i.e. the inconsiderate act that led to his death, he quotes Pindar saying that neither fire nor an iron wall can hold up fate. This may not be more than an expressive sigh; but whoever has not forgotten the strong condemnation of the behaviour to be related in a moment cannot help thinking that this behaviour is, to a degree, excused by a reminder of the conditio humana. If Plutarch were a Stoic, reducing one and the same act to fate and at the same time condemning it would make sense, but Plutarch does not share this intellectually demanding creed. Perhaps we may not be entitled to take the quote as a sixth judgment on the couple’s heedless acting. But I think most readers will feel that the harshness of the first judgment has been

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7 But I do not think, as Georgiadou 1997, 31, seems to do, that Plutarch intentionally is partial towards Pelopidas “while he is clearly less generous <…> with Marcellus”. Even stronger ib., p. 30. She repeats her opinion on this matter 1998, 115: “La temerarietà dei due uomini <…> degenera infine in un’ ingiusta contrapposizione sulla base di motivi non particolarmente convincenti <…>.” Cp. also Georgiadou 1992, esp. p. 4250–4252. This chapter, that from its title, “Assessment of Pelopidas’ and Marcellus’ deaths”, should be close to the present treatise, has not been helpful. In the next chapter, “Marcellus and Alexander of Pherai”, p. 4252 f., Georgiadou even tries to relate the deaths of the abominable tyrant Alexander of Pherai and Marcellus to each other so as to throw a shadow on the latter, which is certainly erroneous. Finally, she thinks that Plutarch advocates the first of the two stories of the fate of Marcellus’ ashes, p. 4252, an interpretation that will not be accepted by most readers. Bocci 305 ff., 328 with n. 146, has it all right.
moderated by the author’s sympathetic remark. So, in a way, we have a sixth judgment, a qualified condemnation. But I will not dwell on this here. The point is too weak.

This is what Plutarch usually does when trying to put an end to bad habits: He will begin with strong wording, gloomy threats and harsh condemnations only to modify them soon, sometimes even in the same sentence. This is an old and proved method of education. But it is not so usual in biographies that are expected to give an unequivocal picture of a person and its values – except for the fact that the author is Plutarch who for the moment switches to his Moralia-style argumentation.

The most direct connection between an essay of the Moralia and the narrative of Pelopidas’ and Marcellus’ deaths occurs in the last paragraph but one of the synkrisis. Let me begin with the parallel from the Moralia.

After having attacked loquacity from different angles, after many exaggerations (and softening modifications) concerning the risky life of a talkative person, he begins giving a short discours de la méthode, whose first words are the following: Taúta δ’ οὐ κατηγορίαν ἤγητέον ἄλλ’ ἰατρείαν τῆς ἀδολεσχίας: τῶν γὰρ παθῶν κρίσει καὶ ἀσκήσει περιγιγνόμεθα, προτέρα δ’ ἢ κρίσις ἐστίν. In Helmbold’s translation (p. 443): “But these remarks are not to be regarded as an accusation against garrulity, but an attempt to cure it; for we get well by the diagnosis and treatment of our ailments, but the diagnosis must come first”. The harsh words of the first part of the essay were a “cure”: the garrulous person should be motivated to stop his intemperate talking. The cure consisting of two parts, what had been read up to that point was the κρίσις, in Helmbold’s translation the “diagnosis”. I doubt if the translation is correct. “diagnosis” in Greek is simply διάγνωσις, and, taken as an art, νοσογνωσική. κρίσις seems not to be used in that sense. Instead, it is, according to Liddell and Scott, besides other meanings that are not relevant here, decision, judgment, esp. of a court, and condemnation. Plutarch seems to say, that we get well first by the physician’s judgment on our ailment. This judgment may imply the estimation that the ailment is dangerous. διάγνωσις is a merely scientific procedure, while κρίσις seems to imply that measures have to be taken. So Plutarch may say, that the first step of getting well is the judgment that from what we are suffering is dangerous, and so, in a way, condemn it.

In the synkrisis of Pelopidas/Marcellus Plutarch says, in quite similar words: Χρή δὲ ταύτα μὴ κατηγορίαν εἶναι τῶν ἀνδρῶν νομίζειν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀγανάκτησιν τινα καὶ παρρησίαν ὑπὲρ ἐκείνων πρὸς αὐτούς καὶ τὴν ἀνδρείαν αὐτῶν, εἰς ἣν τὰς ἄλλας κατανάλωσαν ἀρετὰς <…>. “We must not take this as an accusation / a condemnation of the two men, but as an indication of my vexation and frankness for the benefit of the two men towards them and their bravery into which they have absorbed their other virtues <…>”. The wording suggests that Plutarch is speaking directly to Pelopidas and Marcellus.
through his biography (πρὸς σύντομος) and tries to convince them for their benefit (ὑπὲρ ἐκείνων) that they should not have let their prowess gain the upper hand. This impression would hold even if I had overinterpreted the phrase ὑπὲρ ἐκείνων (which could simply mean “concerning them”). The situation, which is of course illusory in this case, is the same as in De garrulitate, where the chatterer, for his benefit, should feel he was directly addressed. The mistake Pelopidas and Marcellus made consisted in giving their prowess the upper hand, and now they should be cured of this tendency, that characterized a lot of their other actions as well. So, what Plutarch calls ἀγωνάκτησις και παρφησία here seems to be what κρίσις is in De garrulitate, a judgment implying that measures have to be taken, or even a condemnation. The reader may refer the advice to himself and in future time restrain his/her bravery. When re-reading the two Lives, he/she will understand them also as λόγος συμβουλευτικός, a hortatory treatise.

Such a treatise, especially if it is to cure the reader from an “ailment” or from a bad habit, may vary in his judgments. This is because the aim of the advice is getting rid of the ailment or the bad habit, and every means that seems useful to achieve this aim may be applied. Beginning with a strong condemnation and then softening one’s tone is a normal educational device (“You are a bad boy! Am I really bad? No, of course not, you are a good boy, but you should stop pilfering Mr Pomeroy’s apples”), even if it seems contradictory to a not-involved bystander.

It is not only the last passage of the synkrisis that gives the reader the impression to read a Moralia-piece. It is the beginning of the whole book as well.

The three introductory anecdotes are far-fetched and, with regard to the two heroes, unjust and offending. Now Plutarch is the last biographer to insult his heroes. And if one of them is one of the greatest and bravest statemen and soldiers of his native Boeotia, such an absurd intention would be so much the less probable. But in some of his Moralia-essays, Plutarch, in order to amuse the hearer or reader or to simply attract his/her attention, is fond of introducing an argument with ideas only superficially suited to the purpose. He calls this device “οὐκ ἀφός δεύρο μετενεγκεῖν (an idea, an anecdote, a quote)” (De tranq. animi 469 B). Here, at the beginning of the book on Pelopidas and Marcellus, the introduction that may seem out of place to a reader seems to be induced by Plutarch’s indignation at the two great men’s inconsiderate last

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8 παρφησία / παρφησίαζεθαι πρός (towards s. o.) Camill. 4.1, Cat. Ma. 3.5., Eum. 2.4, e.g.; παρφησία / παρφησίαζεθαι ὑπὲρ (on s. o.’s behalf) Comp. Aristid. / Cat. Ma. 1.4, Mor. 71 E, 340 E, 483 C, 678 B. ἀγωνάκτησις ὑπὲρ (on s. o.’s behalf) Marc. 23.2; ἀγωνάκτω πρός (to be vexed at) Camill. 28.5, Mor. 577 E.

9 This is seen differently by Georgiadou, 1997, 45. I think she is wrong.
actions. He surely is not in a jocular mood but is preparing his reader for the harsh judgment to come some paragraphs later. So he begins with exposing the contemptible behaviour of a seemingly brave man who in reality is a coward. The anecdote itself is introduced by a remark of the elder Cato who said about a man who was rash and thoughtless in war, that there is a difference between genuine virtue and scorn for life. This may be an appropriate introduction to the judgment of the heroes’ heedless deaths, but the following story surely is not. Antigonos (it does not matter if Monophthalmos or Gonatas is meant) sent a physician to a particularly brave soldier who looked not very healthy and who had told him on request that he suffered from one of those ailments about that one must not speak. The physician who had been told to do what was in his power to make the soldier well, was successful, but after his recovery the soldier would not fight as bravely as before. When Antigonos asked for the reason, the man said that the king himself had made him less brave, because he had freed him from the motives that made him think poorly of life.10 Quite of the same kind was what a Sybarite said about the Spartan defiance of death: “That is understandable considering Spartan conditions of life.” After a strong rebuke of the man who was a Sybarite and spoke as such, and the praise of the Lacedaemonian attitude to life and death, the argument concentrates on commanders-in-chief and their duty of self-preservation.

Pelopidas and Marcellus are reproached because they died heedlessly, Pelopidas, because he forgot himself when he saw Alexander who had so badly abused him, Marcellus, because he thoughtlessly undertook a mission that usually should be fulfilled by a common soldier. In contrast to what the soldier of Antigonos and the Sybarite think, there is no cynical pragmatism in what

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10 Georgiadou 1997, 48 f., compares Aristotle, EN 1116a13–16. What Aristotle has in mind there is suicide because of poverty, love or other λυπηρά (cp. Dirlmeier 1956, 341). Aristotle’s example implies that most people, who are afraid of death, may deem a frustrated lover who commits suicide to be courageous, but the philosopher teaches that he is not. When Georgiadou says “In the hope of escaping his suffering permanently, the soldier chose to expose himself to danger”, her soldier is going to commit suicide in a way, indeed. But the point of Plutarch’s anecdote is that the soldier fights bravely in all respects. However, his reason to do so has nothing to do with τὸ κολόν. Either the soldier says to himself: “Because I have to die anyway before long, why not die heroically, when fate calls me?”. Or he says to himself: “Because I am incurably ill, why not die heroically, all the more so as such a life is worthless.” Plutarch’s commentary (Pelop. 1.8) supports the second version. Both versions are pragmatic calculations quite different from suicide, because the hero does not want to die, he only is putting up with death (Plutarch speaks about ὑπομονή σε τοῦ θεαντοῦ). In reality, he is interested in staying alive. He wants to be celebrated for his bravery. Only if he has to die, he will accept it willingly. Both attitudes are far from virtue, because they depend on the worthlessness of what is at stake, although they make it seem, to the ignorant onlookers, as if they were instigated by τὸ κολόν.
they do. The only common denominator of what we hear there and the deaths of the heroes is lack in taking care of self-preservation. But the motives could not be more divergent. How the soldier of Antigonos and the Spartans, according to the opinion of the Sybarite, felt and argued would have been the very last to occur to Pelopidas and Marcellus.

Thus, taken seriously, the anecdotes would be utterly misleading. But if we take them not for serious, they cannot be part of a serious biographical argumentation. So what are they? They are a *Moralia*-style introduction, setting the educational, excited tune for the over-rigorous judgment and its following modifications, which are *Moralia*-style as well.

The readers of the *Parallel Lives* of Pelopidas and Marcellus may read the book as only interspersed with *Moralia*-style sections in it, namely, not surprisingly, first the preface and the *synkrasis*, then, at least understandably, the narrative of the death of one of the heroes. But the book’s closing words, that try to revoke what, since the beginning of the narrative, must have been seen as an accusation of the heroes, may lead others, who are more philosophically minded, particularly when re-reading the book, to take the whole volume as a treatise that could belong to the *Moralia*. Whoever reads the *Life* as a *Moralia*-treatise when re-reading it, will find some support for his perspective among other passages that have not to do with the heroes’ deaths.\(^\text{11}\) But it is clear that this decision is up to individual impression.

\(^{11}\) When Pelopidas went to war against Kleombrotos, and his wife asked him to spare himself, he answered: “You should recommend this to common soldiers, to commanders you should recommend instead to bring the others home safe.” This *might* be taken as a principle different from that one put forward at the beginning (2.7 f., criterion 1).– Because Pelopidas would not allow of his strategical expertise laying idle, he was ready to fight for the Thessalians – an attitude that may demonstrate how much he was led by the principle of καλλος. – Also significant is that Pelopidas sometimes is not blamed when he has acted heedlessly. So there is not a word of reproach when Pelopidas set out for his second diplomatic mission to the tyrant of Pherai that ended with his captivity (27). It is this action that had been censured so severely by Polybius. When Pelopidas, as Alexander’s captive, behaves haughtily, so giving the tyrant the opportunity to aggravate the conditions of his confinement, there is again no comment (28.2–4). – In the case of Marcellus, there is the general praise 24.9 for his never being caught in the traps set for him by Hannibal and the additional remark that he was admired therefore. So why, may the reader ask himself/herself, condemn him so harshly for mishandling one situation? – A serious strategic mistake of Marcellus’ and his following harsh words of reproof towards his soldiers go uncriticized 25.6–9. – In the case of Pelopidas, the reader may come to the conclusion that what really upset Plutarch was the hero’s death, i.e. the fact that he was no more. Couldn’t he have taken better care of the precious possession of such a life? As to Marcellus, there is a hint of rare ironic amusement about the man’s boyish fanaticism at the end of ch. 28.
There are two texts that include the contents of Plutarch’s main judgments on the heroes’ deaths, and in one case even the criterion of the first judgment, i.e. the strong condemnation of their behaviour. The condemnation and its criterion, together with a hint at the contrasting criterion, κάλλος, appear in the Polybius-passage on the death of Marcellus. The text is Polybios 10.32.1 ff. The consuls Claudius Marcellus and T. Quinctius Crispinus meant to explore the enemy camp σαφῶς, were trapped and lost their lives (1–6).


12 Pelopidas’ behaviour that led to his captivity (not to his death; Polybius does not deal with this situation) is dealt with earlier (Polybios 8.35.6 ff.). Here, too, the historian judges according to the “technical” criterion: <…> καὶ μὲν Πελοπίδας οὖν θηβαῖος, εἰδὼς τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ τυράννου παρανομίαν καὶ σαφῶς γινώσκων ὅτι πᾶς τύραννος πολεμιστάτους αὐτῷ νομίζει τῶν τῆς ἐλευθερίας προστῶτας, αὐτὸς οὖν μόνον τῆς θηβαίων ἄλλα καὶ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων δημοκρατίας ἔπειθεν Ἑπαμενώνδα προστάσαι, καὶ παρὼν εἰς Θεσσαλίαν πολέμοιο ἐπὶ καταλύσει τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου μοναρχίας προσβείνει πρὸς τοῦτον ὑπέμεινε δεύτερον. τοιγαροῦν γενόμενον ὑποχείριον τοῖς ἐξήρησε ἔβλαιν μὲν θηβαίοις μεγάλα, κατέλυε δὲ τὴν αὐτῷ προγεγενεμένην δοξάν, εἰκῆ καὶ ἀκρίτως (judgment) πιστεύσας οἷς ἤκιστ’ ἔχρην. παραπλησία δὲ τούτους καὶ Γανίας δ’ Ῥωμαίον στρατηγός ἔσπειρε κατὰ τῶν Σικελίκων πόλεων, ἀλλόγως αὐτὸν ἐχειρίσας τοῖς πολεμίοις ἄμοιος δὲ καὶ πλείους ἔστεροι. Διὸ καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἀσκέτοις ἐστοῦτοι ἐχειρίζοντο τοὺς ὑπενεντύνοις ἐπιτιμητέοιν, (criterion; the context is about statesmen and commanders) τοίς δὲ τὴν ἐνδεχομένην πρόνοιαν ποιομενοὺς οὐκ ἐγκλητέον τὸ μὲν γὰρ μηδενὶ πιστεύει εἰς τέλος ἀπρακτόν, τὸ δὲ λαβώνα τὸν ἐνδεχομένην πίστεις πράττειν τὸ κατὰ λόγον ἀνεπίτιμον. Fragment 158 | Εὐσυμψαίος καθάπερ γὰρ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑπαμενώνδου καὶ Πελοπίδου καὶ Βρασιδοῦ καὶ Κλεομήρου τελευτητὸς καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ ξιν ἀρετήν καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ τελευταῖς εὐσυμψαίοις ἀδυνατοῦσιν οἱ συγγραφεῖς δέσιμοι εὐρίσκουν λόγους τῆς προκαθηγομένης τῶν ὀνόματος ἐννοίας is certainly spurious.— Livy’s rebuke is no less severe than that of Polybius (nec pro aetate <…> neque pro veteris prudentia ducis tam impovride <…>), but it is not consistent with what he told before. For according to his description Marcellus’ decision to explore the area himself was strategically sound. The Romans killed by Hannibal at the hill Petelia (which incident made Marcellus furious
The other text is from Diodorus 15, 80. It gives us the main characteristics of the main divergent criterion (κόλλος) and judgment:

τοῦ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρου διὰ τὰς ύπεροχὰς τῶν τόπων πλεονεκτοῦντος, ὁ Πελοπίδας σπεύδων διὰ τῆς ἱδίας ἀνδρείας κρίνει τὴν μάχην ἐπὶ αὐτὸν ὑστῆρα τόν Ἀλέξανδρον. τοῦ δὲ δυνάστου μετὰ τῶν ἐπιλέκτων ὑποστάντος, ἑγένετο μάχῃ καρτερά, καὶ ἢ ὁ Πελοπίδας ἀριστεύον πάντα τὸν πεί αὐτὸν τόπον νεκρῶν κατέστρωσε, τέλος δὲ ἐπιθεὶς τῷ κυβύνιο καὶ τοὺς πολεμίους πρεμάνεος τὴν μὲν νίκην περιποίησατο, τὸν δὲ αὐτοῦ βίον ἀπέβαλε, πολλοῖς περιπεσοῦν τραύμασαι καὶ τὸ ἐζῆν ἡρωικός προέμενος <…….>.

Immediately before the quoted passage, Diodorus speaks about the forebodings before Pelopidas rushed to fight. Pelopidas neglected them, and did so, according to Diodorus, ὑπὸ τοῦ χρεῶν ἀγόμενος. There is nothing of this kind in Plutarch’s report of the omina here; instead he mentions as his motives a) his anger and b) his hope that Alexander’s entourage may already be alienated from him after he, Pelopidas, had opened the eyes of the tyrant’s wife. But we have just that remark in Plutarch’s Marcellus, when he, after ignoring what the seers said, undertook the reconnoissance mission that led to his death.

Plutarch may have used these texts or, particularly in the case of Diodorus, their source. If he did not, they nevertheless help us to interpret his report. It is the differences between them and what we read in Plutarch that make us understand what one way of Plutarchan writing is. In Polybius and Diodorus, we have facts that are touching enough. But in Plutarch’s text they are part of a therapeutic or educational discussion that is to demonstrate to the persons in question that what they did was not morally bad, no, on the contrary, that it was praiseworthy, but that it was nevertheless subject to reproach. Noble passion and consciousness of one’s duty are praiseworthy in themselves; but if they are not accompanied by reasoning and professional calculation they may cause more damage than benefit. So Plutarch has to take care not to abolish the

and so eager to fight) were caught in Hannibal’s trap inexplorato. If thereupon he concluded that reconnoitring was a matter of highest priority and so did it himself together with his colleague (in order to share the responsibility), he acted as a responsible leader. The fight itself, as far as Livy tells us, was not hopeless, but the Etruscans began to flee infecting the others with their fear. This is not unheard-of (37.26.1–11).

13 There is a passage that could have induced Plutarch’s rebuke additionally to his “technically” motivated objections. The implied idea, that underlines the loss the Thebans suffered by Pelopidas’s death, do not appear in Plutarch’s Life: Οἱ δὲ Θηβαίοι περιβόθονν νίκην ἄπειναγμένοι, πρὸς ἀπανταὶ ἔφασαν ἐκαυτὸς ἡττηθέατι διὰ τὴν Πελοπίδου τελευτὴν ἀξίλογον γὰρ ἀπολλακότες ἀνδρὰ, κατὰ λόγου ἔκρινεν τὴν νίκην ἣττονα ὑπάρχειν τῆς Πελοπίδου ζωῆς. Afterwards, Diodorus repeats his praise: ἐπὶ τελευτὴς δὲ διαχωνισμένοι πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον ἔχοντα πολλαπλασίαν δύναμιν οὐ μόνον ἐπιφανῶς ἐνίκησεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Σάντανον ἔσχεν ἐπὶ ἀρετὴ περιβόθονν. <…….> Πελοπίδας μὲν οὖν, διὰ τὴν ἱδίαι ἄρετὴν ὑπὸ πάντων ἀποδοχῆς ἤξιωμένοι, ἔξετο καὶ παρ’ ἡμῶν τὸν διὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ἐπαινοῦ (ib. 81).
good when trying to teach the better. He does not fight πάθη as in a “Seelenheilungsschrift”, he is dealing with a situation Aristotle speaks about when presenting the μέσον or the ὣς δεῖ that makes a virtue. Here is the passage that gives the underlying theory to what Plutarch is trying to say to Pelopidas and Marcellus:

EN 1116b23 ff.: καὶ τὸν θυμὸν δ’ ἐπὶ τὴν ἄνδρείαν φέρουσιν ἄνδρεῖοι γὰρ εἶναι δοκοῦσι καὶ οἱ διὰ θυμοῦ ὀστέρ τὰ θηρία ἐπὶ τοὺς πρῶσαντας φερόμενα, ὅτι καὶ οἱ ἄνδρεῖοι θυμοειδεῖς ἰτητικῶτατον γὰρ ὁ θυμὸς πρὸς τοὺς κινδύνους, ὅθεν καὶ Ὅμηρος “σκένος ἐμβαλε θυμῶν” καὶ “μένος καὶ θυμὸν ἔγειρε” καὶ “δριμὸν δ’ ἀνὰ βίνας μένος” καὶ ἑξεσεν αἷμα”. πάντα γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἔστε σημεῖαι τὴν τοῦ θυμοῦ ἔγερσιν καὶ ὄρμην. οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄνδρεῖοι διὰ τὸ καλὸν πράττουσιν, ὁ δὲ θυμὸς συνεργεῖ αὐτός...

For a friend who cures a man like Pelopidas while using παρρησία ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν, the problem lies here. If we replace the πάθος of anger with wrong sense of one’s duty, we have the case of Marcellus.

Bibliography


