Plutarch on the Statesman: Stability and Change in the *Lives*

The proposed paper examines Plutarch’s views of consistent and inconsistent behavior, suggesting that he finds the latter deeply problematic and worthy of more explanation than the former. After a brief overview of what Plutarch says directly about fixity and instability of character in the *Moralia*, and an examination of Plutarch’s treatment of characters who display opposing virtues (e.g. Aristides and Themistocles), I treat several *Lives* in which the protagonist is portrayed as inconsistent in some way (Coriolanus, Themistocles, Demosthenes, Cicero, and Alcibiades), showing Plutarch’s different strategies for compensating for what he sees as a character flaw. These include explaining it away as preventing a greater flaw, ignoring it, either by focusing attention on other characteristics, or by omitting certain incidents, displacing it onto other characters within the *Life* or onto the subject of the *Life* with which it is paralleled, and bringing in other, more constant characters to serve as character witnesses. These techniques, and especially their range, suggest that Plutarch finds the issue both important and troublesome.

My aims in giving this paper are both to explore Plutarch’s views on constancy and consistency of behavior for their own intrinsic interest and to contribute to the numerous studies of how Plutarch structures his narrative in order to cohere with his understanding of heroic virtue and leadership.

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