

Plutarch's Comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus

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THE PURPOSE of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* was to make clear the moral qualities of the heroes who are being described. Two fundamental practices distinguish Plutarch's method: he used the heroes' deeds and words as evidence for their moral qualities or virtues, and he compared two people with the same or similar qualities to determine the exact nature of those qualities in the individual. The comparative method is essential to Plutarch's technique. Plutarch's parallel lives are indeed *parallel*. Plutarch designed his pairs of lives to be read together: he regularly called them βίοι παράλληλοι, and in his prefaces he speaks of each pair as being united in one book. He tells us, for instance, that the lives of Pericles and Fabius Maximus, with which I will be concerned here, form the tenth book or βιβλίον of his *Lives* (*Per.* 2.5).

The fundamental design has been frequently misunderstood. The authenticity of the *συγκρίσεις* found at the end of most pairs of lives was attacked in the nineteenth century, especially because they seemed to point out the differences between the heroes rather than the similarities. Yet the importance of comparisons in contemporary rhetorical theory and practice provided Plutarch with a conceptual background for comparing heroes. Further investigation revealed, in fact, that the *συγκρίσεις* are balanced by the introductions, so that the introductions usually stress the congruences, the conclusions the differences of the heroes.¹ Harmut Erbse more recently demonstrated on the basis of the *Demosthenes* and *Cicero* that Plutarch does not limit his comparison to the introduction and conclusion but makes much of the various events of his heroes' lives which parallel each

¹ See F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (Leipzig 1901) 149–52; A. Stiefenhofer, "Die Echtheitsfrage der biographischen Synkrisis Plutarchs," *Philologus* 73 (1914–16) 462–503; F. Focke, "Synkrisis," *Hermes* 58 (1923) 327–68. The integrity of the *σύγκρισις* as a part of each pair is also clear from the mss., as was first brought out by the Lindskog-Ziegler edition by printing the *σύγκρισις* continuously with the text of the second life, as the introduction is printed with the first.

other.² This insight, that Plutarch's comparative method is used throughout the pair of lives and not just at the beginning and end, needs further consideration, especially in the case of lives which, unlike the *Demosthenes-Cicero* pair, are not obviously similar.

Plutarch's purpose in using the comparative method is nowhere better explained than in the introduction to his short treatise *De mulierum virtutibus*, 243 B-D:

In fact, there is no better way of learning the similarity and difference of male and female virtue than by putting lives beside lives and deeds beside deeds, just as if they were works of art, and considering whether the *μεγαλοπραγμοσύνη* of Semiramis has the same mark and character as that of Sesostris, or the *εὐνεκία* of Tanaquil as that of King Servius, or the *φρόνημα* of Porcia and Timocleia as that of Brutus and Pelopidas, according to the most important common feature and faculty. The virtues take on certain differences—peculiar colors, so to speak—because of the underlying habits, bodily constitution, food and way of life. For in fact Achilles was courageous in a different way from Ajax, and Odysseus' *φρόνησις* was different from Nestor's. Cato and Agesilaus were not just in the same way; Eirene was not like Alcestis in her love for her husband, nor was Cornelia like Olympias in her highmindedness.

Although Plutarch in this treatise is interested in comparing women with men, in this paragraph we have, *mutatis mutandis*, a kind of program for the parallel lives, suggesting how each book, each pair of lives will explore a virtue or group of virtues and how it manifests itself in two men and by comparison and contrast reveals its peculiar presence in each.³ In the process, we might expect each life to be influenced and subtly shaped by its mate, as Plutarch searches to bring out the similarities and differences of his heroes. A proper evaluation of these reciprocal influences thus becomes essential for the true understanding of any life.

² H. Erbse, "Die Bedeutung der Synkrisis in den Parallelbiographien Plutarchs," *Hermes* 84 (1956) 398–424. Erbse rightly sees that Plutarch attempts to base his comparisons not on externals but on important similarities in *Charakter* and *Lebenslauf*. Cf. also B. Bucher-Isler, *Norm und Individualität in den Biographien Plutarchs* (Bern-Stuttgart 1972 = *Noctes Romanae* 13) 74–78.

³ Plutarch's theory of virtue as taking different forms in different people is framed in opposition to Stoic ethical theory. For Plutarch's contrast with the Stoics on this point see D. Babut, *Plutarque et le Stoïcisme* (Paris 1969) 318–66. For his use of Peripatetic terminology, see A. Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie* (*AbhGött* 3 Folge 37, 1956) 60–87.

Unfortunately, because of our division of Greek and Roman history, each life of a pair is regularly studied and analyzed separately with little or no regard for the life which is parallel to it, and usually without even mentioning the comparisons set after both. In this essay I will consider some aspects of the relation between the *Pericles* and its parallel life, the *Fabius Maximus*.⁴

There is no need to point out the basic differences between the situation of the two heroes.⁵ Pericles was leading statesman in a democracy when Athenian imperialism was at its height; Fabius, just one member of a ruling senatorial oligarchy at a time when Rome was facing the greatest crisis of its history. The structure of the two lives is also radically different. The *Fabius* very early comes to the zenith of Fabius' career, in chapters 4–13, which describe how Fabius by his delaying tactics successfully kept Hannibal at bay in 217 B.C. The rest of the life moves summarily through the remaining years of the war, though there is a secondary peak at the conquest of Tarentum in 209 (cc.21–22), and concludes with Fabius' difficulties with Scipio and his eventual death. The *Pericles*, on the other hand, recites a long history of the Athenian statesman's education (cc.4–6), his struggle for power against first Cimon (cc.9–10) and then Thucydides (cc.11–14), and only arrives—almost at the end of the life—to the moral height of Pericles' career in his conduct of the first years of the Peloponnesian War (cc.29–35). His death, of course, follows immediately. However, despite these obvious differences, there are a large number of similarities. A study of these will show how Plutarch used the comparative method in this pair of lives.

First of all, the nicknames of the two leaders. In chapter 1 of the *Fabius* that hero was called Ovicula, 'Little Sheep'. The regular *agnomen* of Fabius, used by Cicero, Pliny and the *Fasti Capitolini*, was *Verrucosus*. Plutarch, however, has encountered Ovicula⁶ and reports it to us, explaining that Fabius was given the name because of his self-control (*πρᾶότης*) and his general dignity (*βαρύτης*).⁷ Pericles also was given a nickname, *Ἰολύμπιος*, which the biographer ascribes

⁴ Thus, in a sense, answering the question of K. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia* (Stuttgart 1949) 262 (= *RE s.v. PLUTARCHOS*, 21 [1951] 899), "was haben . . . Perikles und Fabius Maximus . . . in Wahrheit miteinander gemein?"

⁵ Several distinctions are brought out in the *σύγκρισις*, *Fab.* 28–30.

⁶ Known to us otherwise only from *De vir. ill.* 43.1.

⁷ I prefer *βαρύτητα* of the mss. (= *gravitas*) to Cobet's emendation, *βραδυτήτα*.

especially to his style of speaking (*Per.* 8.3–4).⁸ At the end of the life, Plutarch reconsiders the name and decides that although it sounded affected and pompous, the name was especially appropriate to Pericles because he shared in that calmness and quiet which we properly associate with the home of the gods. By drawing attention to these two distinctive nicknames, Plutarch has been able to comment on a similar quality in the two men, a calm and dignified self-control.

A second similarity between the two lives is found in the emphasis on one-man rule. Plutarch goes to some lengths to bring out the fact that both men acted as monarchs in politics, despite the great difference of the constitutions under which they lived. Fabius, of course, was made a dictator. "The times needed an unrestrained *monarchy*, which they called a dictatorship" (*Fab.* 3.7). The powers of the office were tyrannical (*Fab.* 4.2), and in fact the tribune Metellus accused Fabius of trying to overthrow the populace and set up an unrestrained monarchy and of exercising a tyranny (*Fab.* 8.4 and 9.2). Pericles also struck many as being a monarch. From the beginning he was suspected of tyrannical inclinations because of his resemblance to Peisistratus (*Per.* 7.1) and had to avoid suspicion on this account (*ὑποψία τυραννίδος*, *Per.* 7.3). His adviser Damon was ostracized for being *φιλοτύραννος* (*Per.* 4.3). After his last great opponent Thucydides son of Melesias was expelled, the chorus of 'tyrant' was heard on all sides, especially from the comic poets (see *Per.* 16.1 and 3.5). The historian's dictum was true: "it was a democracy in name, but in fact rule by the leading man" (*Per.* 9.1). This condition was not limited to one year, as was Fabius', but lasted almost to his death. Only after he died did the citizens realize that what had been called *μοναρχία* and *τυραννίς* was really the bulwark, *σωτήριον ἔργμα*, of the state (*Per.* 39.4). Here Plutarch bring out certain similarities between the position and way of acting of his two statesmen.

A third case concerns the respective heroes' handling of their fellow citizens. In chapter 33 of the *Pericles* we are told, following Thucydides (2.13.1), how the foresighted statesman warned the Athenians that Archidamus might decide to spare his (Pericles') land, thus laying him open to slander and sowing division in the city. Pericles therefore promised that any land which should be spared by Archidamus he

⁸ On the traditional opinion of Pericles' oratory, see W. R. Connor, "Vim quamdam incredibilem: a Tradition concerning the Oratory of Pericles," *ClMed* 23 (1962) 23–33.

himself would give over to the city. The difficulty is surmounted before it arises, and we hear nothing more of it. The same problem presents itself in the *Fabius* but with a different outcome. In chapter 7 Hannibal carefully spares the lands of Fabius while he is ravaging the other farms near Rome so as to influence the passions of the Romans against Fabius. His plan proves successful, and the resulting outcry in the city was one of the causes of the continuing attacks on Fabius' policies. Plutarch has found two incidents of basically similar nature, which were handled differently by his two heroes, and presented them to us in such a way that we can see the differences which can exist between two men who share basically the same virtues. In this case, Plutarch has brought out Pericles' greater foresight.

Plutarch draws attention to various other resemblances or parallels between Pericles and Fabius: their lack of superstition in religious matters,⁹ their honesty (*δικαιοσύνη*),¹⁰ their use of oratory as an *ὄργανον πειθοῦς*,¹¹ their caution in war,¹² their strength in facing deaths in their family,¹³ etc. But for Plutarch the great similarity between the two statesmen, that which subsumes all the others, was their ability to endure the stupidities of the mass of common citizens and their own colleagues,¹⁴ that is, the virtue of *πραότης*. This virtue is defined by Aristotle (*Eth.Nic.* 1125b26ff) as a mean with regard to feeling (*ὄργη*). The man who is *πρᾶος* controls his emotions, being neither without feeling nor carried away by feeling. Rather, all is subject to *λόγος*. Plutarch used the term in much the same sense, as has been shown by Hubert Martin,¹⁵ to describe "a self-restraint which avoids excess of every kind, whether physical or emotional,

⁹ Pericles was *καθυπέρτερος δεισιδαιμονίας* (*Per.* 6.1, cf. the anecdote of the eclipse, *Per.* 35.2, and his shame at wearing a charm when mortally ill, *Per.* 38.2). Fabius on being made dictator performs religious rites *οὐ δεισιδαιμονίαν ἐνεργαζόμενος, ἀλλ' ἠαρρύνων εὐσεβεία τὴν ἀρετὴν* (*Fab.* 4.4, cf. 5.1). Fabius, of course, shows much more respect for religious obligations than Pericles: cf. *Fab.* 4 and 18.

¹⁰ The honesty of Pericles: *Per.* 15.3, 16.3; of Fabius: *Fab.* 7.5–8; of both: *Per.* 2.5, *Fab.* 30.5–6.

¹¹ *Per.* 8.1–4, 15.2–3; *Fab.* 1.7–9.

¹² The leading quality of both as generals was *ἀσφάλεια*. See *Per.* 18.1: *ἐν δὲ ταῖς στρατηγίαις εὐδοκίμει μάλιστα διὰ τὴν ἀσφάλειαν*. The idea lies behind *Per.* 18, 19.3, 20.3–4, 21, 38.4. Fabius' cautiousness does not need to be emphasized, but see *Fab.* 5.3 (*ἄτολμος*), 5.4, 10.7, 19.3, 25.3, 26.3–4.

¹³ *Per.* 36.6–9, *Fab.* 24.6.

¹⁴ See *Per.* 2.5: *τῷ δύνασθαι φέρειν δήμων καὶ συναρχόντων ἀγνωμοσύνας*.

¹⁵ "The Concept of Praotes in Plutarch's *Lives*," *GRBS* 3 (1960) 65–73; this quotation is from p.73.

whether within the individual or in his relations with other people.” It is of the essence of the concept of *πραότης* that one be under pressure from feeling, *ὀργή*, whether in oneself or outside, and be able to resist it and control it by the use of reason. Plutarch saw this quality as being exemplified in different ways by both Pericles and Fabius Maximus. He notes its manifestation in many aspects of their lives; their nicknames, as we have seen, their way of walking,¹⁶ their caution in war,¹⁷ and so on. The word *πραότης* and its cognates are used more frequently in this than in any other pair of lives.¹⁸

Both Pericles and Fabius are presented throughout especially as men who control themselves and thus can control the state in difficult times. Anaxagoras lifted up Pericles' thoughts and taught him dignity and self-control, inward and outward, including a proper attitude toward superstition, and a lofty oratory (*Per.* 4–6, 8). His rivalry with Cimon and Thucydides son of Melesias forced Pericles to cater more to the people (*Per.* 9–14), but afterward he asserted his natural aristocratic temperament (*Per.* 15). When on his own he emerges as doctor to the ills of the state (*Per.* 15.1, 34.5), using his rhetoric as a Platonic *ψυχαγωγία* (*Per.* 15.2). As monarch he encourages the city to *μέγα φρονεῖν* through initiatives like the Congress Decree (*Per.* 17), but he also checks it when it inclines to excess in the years before the Peloponnesian War.¹⁹ His great moment comes at the time of the first Peloponnesian invasion of Attica. In this passage in chapter 33 we find that Plutarch, following the example of Thucydides, describes the contest as one between reason and emotion, *γνώμη* and *ὀργή*.²⁰ Pericles kept calming them (*κατεπραΐννε*), and he would not call them into assembly from fear that he might be forced to do something against his judgement (*παρὰ γνώμην*). Like the helmsman of a ship who resists the anguished cries of the passengers and exercises his skill (*τέχνη*), Pericles kept the city closed up for safety and exercised his own judgement (*λογισμοῖς*). Pericles' ability

¹⁶ *Per.* 5.1, *πραότης πορείας* (this chapter is devoted to demonstrating Pericles' general self-control); *Fab.* 17.7, *πρῶτω βαδίσματι*.

¹⁷ See *supra* n.12.

¹⁸ Sixteen times. The next highest appears to be the Gracchi-Agis and Cleomenes set, with six.

¹⁹ *κατέχειν ἐπειράτο*, 18.2; *οὐ συνεχάρει . . . οὐδὲ συνεξέπιπτεν*, 20.3; *κατεῖχε*, 21.1; *ἔργον ἦν κατασχεῖν*, 27.2.

²⁰ *Thuc.* 2.22.1: *ἐκκλησίαν οὐκ ἐποίει αὐτῶν οὐδὲ ξύλλογον οὐδένα, τοῦ μὴ ὀργῆ τι μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμη ξυελθόντας ἐξαμαρτεῖν*.

to exercise control over the Athenians is emphasized by his words contrasting trees and men, by the helmsman-simile reminiscent of Plato²¹ and by the account of the attacks made on Pericles at this time, by friends, foes and comic poets. The whole is rounded off forcefully: *πλὴν ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἐκινήθη τῶν τοιούτων ὁ Περικλῆς, ἀλλὰ πράως καὶ σιωπῇ τὴν ἀδοξίαν καὶ τὴν ἀπέχθειαν ὑφιστάμενος . . . ἔμεινεν οἰκουρῶν καὶ διὰ χειρὸς ἔχων τὴν πόλιν* (*Per.* 34.1). Pericles is presented as truly *πρᾶος*, able to endure the outcry of the people in silence and self-control, as he had endured the taunts of the boor in the anecdote recounted at the beginning of the life (*Per.* 5.2).

Using a simile from medical practice, Plutarch describes Pericles as a doctor who is blamed by his patients for the disease (*Per.* 34.5) after the outbreak of the plague causes new frustration. By sending out expeditions against the Peloponnese he attempts to heal, calm and encourage the Athenians.²² He was deprived of his office but almost at once called back because no other general was equal to the task: *οὐδεὶς βάρος ἔχων ἰσόρροπον οὐδ' ἀξίωμα πρὸς τοσαύτην ἐχέγγυον ἡγεμονίαν ἐφαίνετο* (*Per.* 37.1).

Fabius' great moment comes after the disaster of Flaminius at Trasimene, when he is chosen dictator, as *ἰσόρροπον ἔχοντα τῷ μεγέθει τῆς ἀρχῆς τὸ φρόνημα καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἥθους*.²³ Fabius' policy of delay, although feared by Hannibal, is mocked by the Romans, who like the Athenians under Pericles wish to fight their enemies at once. The account of Fabius' firmness in controlling the Romans and especially his colleague Minucius is told at some length and reinforced by anecdotes such as that in 5.6–8, where Fabius when informed of Minucius' taunts replies that he would indeed be a coward if he abandoned his own judgement from fear of mocking and insults.²⁴ Hannibal's success in using the trick of the cattle to get out of a difficult position and his refusal to ravage Fabius' fields increased the opposition of the Romans so that they would not honor Fabius' agreement ransoming prisoners. But *ὁ Φάβιος τὴν μὲν ὀργὴν ἔφερε πράως τῶν πολιτῶν* (*Fab.* 7.7) and freed the prisoners with his own money. The apophthegm of Diogenes, *ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐ καταγελωμαί, is used by Plutarch to put in relief Fabius' ability to endure the insulting*

²¹ Cf. *Resp.* 488, especially the stress on the need for *τέχνη* in a helmsman.

²² *Per.* 35.1 *ἰᾶσθαι*, 35.4 *παρηγορεῖν καὶ ἀναθαρρύνειν*.

²³ Cf. *Per.* 37.1 quoted above.

²⁴ *ἐκπέσοιμι τῶν ἐμαντοῦ λογισμῶν, cf. ἐχρήτο τοῖς αὐτοῦ λογισμοῖς at Per.* 33.6.

treatment of Minucius: ἔφερεν ἀπαθῶς καὶ ῥαδίως (*Fab.* 10.2). This self-control is shown finally when, after Minucius had fallen into Hannibal's trap and been saved by Fabius, the latter did not remonstrate: οὐδὲν ὑπερήφανον οὐδ' ἐπαχθὲς εἰπὼν περὶ τοῦ συνάρχοντος (*Fab.* 13.1). Throughout Fabius' legendary cautiousness is united with his ability to control himself and others: ἀσφάλεια is seen as one aspect of his *πράοτης*.

Fabius' first dictatorship was the chief occasion for demonstrating his *πράοτης*, but references to this leading characteristic continue in the rest of the life. It is apparent after Cannae (*Fab.* 17.7), when he shared management of the war with Marcellus (*Fab.* 19.4), and in his treatment of the allies (*Fab.* 20). The anecdotes and personal comments in chapter 20 emphasize the importance of the virtue of *πράοτης* in the leader.

Unlike Pericles, however, to Plutarch's mind the Roman shows a shift away from *πράοτης* to less admirable virtues, especially *φιλοτιμία*. After the conquest of Tarentum, he erred in having the Bruttians slain: δοκεῖ φιλοτιμίας ἥττων γενέσθαι (*Fab.* 22.5);²⁵ the same quality reappears in his opposition to Scipio: what began as ἀσφάλεια and *πρόνοια* continued as *φιλοτιμία* and *φιλονικία* (*Fab.* 25.3). Plutarch at any rate seems to think that his sense of caution overwhelmed his judgement, and *πράοτης* is no longer apparent.²⁶

In his *βιβλίον* of the lives of Pericles and Fabius Maximus, Plutarch developed the similarities and differences he saw between two men in whom the quality of *πράοτης* was outstanding. The concept of comparison was ever present in his selection of incident and anecdote, as well as in the overall development of the lives. When the biographer discourses at length on Pericles' philosophical education or his caution as a general, or dilates on Fabius' dealings with Minucius while skimping the details of his confrontation with Hannibal, the reason lies in his desire to illustrate the *πράοτης* of each. A peculiar feature of the *Pericles* which has often puzzled commentators may be explained in the same way. Plutarch chooses to follow the comic poets and later historians in treating the attacks against Pericles and his friends, despite Thucydides' silence on the subject. Yet this is not

²⁵ Plutarch also criticizes his decision to remove a colossal statue of Heracles from Tarentum, which seemed out of place and made even Marcellus seem a man *πράοτητι καὶ φιλανθρωπία θαυμαστόν* (*Fab.* 22.8).

²⁶ Note the repetition of *ἐπιφαλές* at *Fab.* 26.3,4.

strange if we think that Plutarch saw these attacks as strengthening the picture—which he had received from Thucydides—of Pericles as a man who was always able by the cool skill of reason to dominate the tempestuous passion of his critics. In fact Plutarch must have thought that the stronger the criticism to which Pericles was subjected, the greater his *πραότης* in being able to rise above it. In a similar way our biographer is at pains to develop as vividly as possible the opposition of Minucius, the Senate and the tribunes to Fabius. One life strengthens and explains the other, as we understand one hero by comparison with the other. The two lives were written as a unit, and the reader—whether historian, student of biography or amateur—should never forget the fact.

Finally, if *Pericles* emerges from Plutarch's life immeasurably a greater man than Fabius, it is in no small part due to this same juxtaposition, which while illuminating the *πραότης* of each, reveals that only Pericles possessed that sense of greatness—*φρόνημα* or *μεγαλοφροσύνη*—which could envision and build the Acropolis temples and make Athens the leading city of Greece.²⁷

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²⁷ The *φρόνημα* of Pericles is a secondary theme in the *Life*, and it or its compounds appears frequently: *φρονέω μέγα* 13.3, 17.1, 28.7; *φρόνημα* 4.6, 5.1, 8.1, 10.7, 17.4, 31.1, 36.8, 38.1, 39.1; *μεγαλοφροσύνη* 14.2, 16.7, 17.4. *φρόνημα* is associated with Pericles in Thucydides: Thuc. 2.43.6, 2.61.3, 2.62.3. The word appears rarely in the *Fabius*: 3.7, 18.4 (applied to Rome); *φρόνιμος*: 24.6.