

Nature, Nurture, and the Harmful Effects of Stoic Teaching in Plutarch's *Life of Cleomenes*

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THE UNIQUE DOUBLE PAIR of the *Lives of Agis and Cleomenes* and *Tiberius and Gaius Gracchi* constitutes a vast treasure trove of insights into Plutarch's biographical project. Studies by G. Roskam and M. de Pourcq have shed new light on the dynamics of Plutarch's moralizing approach in these *Lives*, as well as on how the principles of character and comparison influence their formal construction.¹ Although those analyses have also explored how the form and content of these four *Lives* harmonize with Plutarch's moral philosophy, it remains to be examined in what way his conception of personality and its development are put to work in the individual biographies forming the double pair.²

¹ G. Roskam, "Ambition and Love of Fame in Plutarch's *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi*," *CP* 106 (2011) 208–225; M. De Pourcq and G. Roskam, "Mirroring Virtues in Plutarch's *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes and the Gracchi*," in K. De Temmerman et al. (eds.), *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization* (Cambridge 2016) 163–180. See also G. Marasco, *Commento alle biografie plutarchee di Agide e di Cleomene I–II* (Rome 1981); H. G. Ingenkamp, "Plutarchs 'Leben der Gracchen'. Eine Analyse," *ANRW* II 33.6 (1992) 4298–4346; A. Powell, "Spartan Women Assertive in Politics? Plutarch's Lives of Agis and Kleomenes," in *Sparta: New Perspectives* (London 1999) 393–419; L. Thommen, "Agis und Kleomenes als Vorläufer der Gracchen," *MusHelv* 74 (2017) 54–65; D. G. Shipley, "Agis IV, Kleomenes III, and Spartan Landscapes," *Historia* 66 (2017) 281–297.

² Plutarch's ethical psychology in the *Lives* has received interesting treat-

This paper focuses on Plutarch's depiction of the development, structure, and manifestations of Cleomenes' personality in the *Life of Cleomenes*. My goal is twofold. First, I aim to dissect Plutarch's understanding of the king's personality and its chief determinants. Second, I intend to enquire into how Plutarch conceived the influence of Stoic teaching on Cleomenes' emotional and behavioral patterns.

1. *Young Cleomenes encounters Sphaerus*

A good starting point is Plutarch's mention of the relation between the Stoic philosopher Sphaerus of Borysthenes and Cleomenes in the latter's early years (*Cleom.* 2.2–3).³ While the question of the philosopher's influence on Cleomenes has been noted, it is Sphaerus' alleged involvement in the political reforms introduced by the king, rather than the possible impact of philosophical instruction on his personality, that has received more scholarly attention.⁴ This poorly understood passage is,

ment in, e.g., C. Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford 2006) 412–421; T. E. Duff, "Models of Education in Plutarch," *JHS* 128 (2008) 1–26. In this paper I prefer to use the term "personality" rather than "character," on the grounds that the former stresses understanding and explaining a person psychologically while the latter appraises them as a moral agent. To be sure, Plutarch is also concerned with "character," but he arguably had a deeper interest in "personality" structure and development apart from moral judgment; cf. C. Gill, "The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus," *CQ* 33 (1983) 469–487, at 472–473. For interconnections of themes and concepts between the *Moralia* and the *Lives* see esp. A. G. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'* (Berlin 2008).

³ Plutarch also mentions an interaction between Sphaerus and king Cleomenes III at *Cleom.* 11.4. Sphaerus was first a student of Zeno of Citium and afterwards of Cleanthes of Assos. On Sphaerus' life and writings in general see Diog. Laert. 7.177–178 = SVF I F 620; Diog. Laert. 185 = F 621; Plut. *Cleom.* 2.11 = FF 622–623; Ath. 8.354E = F 624; and P. Steinmetz, "Die Stoa," in H. Flashar (ed.), *Die Philosophie der Antike IV* (Basel 1994) 579–581; T. Dorandi, "Chronology," in K. Algra et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge 1999) 40.

⁴ Some scholars have been convinced that Sphaerus was the *primus motor* of

arguably, the key to understanding Plutarch's view on the king's specific natural predispositions and their interaction with external factors. Plutarch writes (*Cleom.* 2.2):⁵

λέγεται δὲ καὶ λόγων φιλοσόφων τὸν Κλεομένη μετασχεῖν ἔτι μαιράκιον ὄντα, Σφαίρου τοῦ Βορυσθενίτου παραβάλλοντος εἰς τὴν Λακεδαίμονα καὶ περὶ τοὺς νέους καὶ τοὺς ἐφήβους οὐκ ἀμελῶς διατρίβοντος. ὁ δὲ Σφαῖρος ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις ἐγεγόνει τῶν Ζήνωνος τοῦ Κιτιέως μαθητῶν, καὶ τοῦ Κλεομένου εἶκεν ἀγαπήσασαί τε τῆς φύσεως τὸ ἀνδρῶδες καὶ προσεκκαῦσαι τὴν φιλοτιμίαν.

It is said also that Cleomenes studied philosophy when he was still a stripling, after Sphaerus of Borysthene had made a voyage to Sparta and busied himself sedulously there with the youth and young men. Sphaerus had become one of the leading disciples of Zeno of Citium, and it would appear that he admired the manly nature of Cleomenes and increased the fires of his high ambition.

The first aspect of this passage that requires comment is the very way that the information about Sphaerus is introduced: λέγεται δὲ καὶ, “it is also said that...” This has been read by some prominent Plutarchan scholars as implying that Plutarch doubts whether that information is true.⁶ However, this interpretation

Cleomenes' reforms: F. Ollier, “Le philosophe stoïcien Sphaeros et l'oeuvre réformatrice des rois de Sparte Agis IV et Cléomène III,” *REG* 49 (1936) 536–570, at 546; Marasco, *Commento alle biografie* 361–363; A. Banfi, “La Stoa Antica ed i tentativi di riforma costituzionale a Sparta nel terzo secolo,” in D. Ambaglio (ed.), *Syngraphe: materiali e appunti per lo studio della storia e della letteratura antica* II (Como 2000) 93–105; Thommen, *MusHelv* 74 (2017) 57. In contrast, E. N. Tigerstedt, *The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity* II (Lund 1974) 70 with nn.156–158, and R. Martínez Lacy, “Esfero en Esparta,” *Nova tellus* 21 (2003) 19–22, are more skeptical about Sphaerus' actual role. G. Hoffmann, “*Anaplerōsis* et *agōgē* au temps des rois Agis IV (244–241) et Cléomène III (235–222),” in J. Christien et al. (eds.), *Sparte hellénistique: IV^e–III^e siècles avant notre ère* (Besançon 2014) 115, 123, seems to assume Sphaerus' influence on the king's psychological development, but offers no elaboration of the specifics.

⁵ Text: R. Flacelière and É. Chambry, *Plutarque. Vies* XI (Paris 1976); transl.: B. Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives* X (London 1921).

⁶ E. Gabba, “Studi su Filarco. Le biografie plutarchee di Agide e di Cleo-

of Plutarch's λέγεται has been disproved in the careful study of Cook, who has made a compelling case that Plutarch uses λέγεται when he adduces information that actually substantiates the truth about the hero's character.⁷ The verb therefore does not exclude that Plutarch believed that Sphaerus' influence on Cleomenes' personality was considerable; actually the opposite seems more plausible.⁸

Now, Plutarch indicates that Cleomenes attended philosophical lectures of Sphaerus in adolescence or early adulthood, thus within the period of the early development of his per-

mene," *Athenaeum* 35 (1957) 3–55, at 36; Marasco, *Commento alle biografie* 359, "il λέγεται è indicativo proprio di un dubbio." The introductory formula has also been taken to indicate a switch to a different source rather than Plutarch's main authority in the *Life*, Phylarchus. Tigerstedt, *The Legend of Sparta* II 69–70, suggested that Sphaerus himself could be identified as that other source; similarly, W. Africa, *Phylarchus and the Spartan Revolution* (Berkeley 1961) 18. For Phylarchus' *Histories* as a primary source for these *Lives* see Flacelière and Chambry, *Plutarque. Vies* XI 2–19; Marasco, *Commento alle biografie* 24–42.

⁷ B. L. Cook, "Plutarch's Use of λέγεται: Narrative Design and Source in *Alexander*," *GRBS* 42 (2001) 331–359. E. Badian, "Plutarch's Unconfessed Skill: The Biographer as a Critical Historian," in T. Hantos (ed.), *Laurea internationalis. Festschrift für Jochen Bleicken* (Stuttgart 2003) 28–29, also analysing the *Alexander*, still treated the formula as implying Plutarch's doubt, but his claims, in contrast to Cook's, were not supported by arguments based on Plutarch's text. On Plutarch's quotations see W. C. Helmbold and E. N. O'Neil, *Plutarch's Quotations* (Oxford 1959); J. M. Dillon, "Plutarch's Use of Unidentified Quotations," in M. Jufresa (ed.), *Plutarc a la seva època: paideia i societat* (Barcelona 2005) 273–281; E. Bowie, "Plutarch's Habits of Citation: Aspects of Difference," in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work* 143–157. On his handling of sources see C. B. R. Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation of his Source Material," *JHS* 100 (1980) 127–140; A. G. Nikolaidis, "Plutarch's Criteria for Judging his Historical Sources," in C. Schrader et al. (eds.), *Plutarco y la Historia, Actas del V simposio español sobre Plutarco* (Zaragoza 1997) 329–341.

⁸ We can adduce further examples of Plutarch's use of λέγεται that do not imply negation or rejection of thus introduced information, e.g. at *Cleom.* 22.7, where λέγεται is used in a passage that perfectly matches and supports Plutarch's account; cf. *Cleom.* 6.1, *Lyc.* 8.9.

sonality.⁹ The statement that he noticed Cleomenes’ “natural manliness” seems to highlight the fact that the king by then demonstrated some raw inborn personal qualities, but not yet a fully developed personality. This may imply that, according to Plutarch, Cleomenes had the potential to be courageous, or serious in his attitude.¹⁰ This is directly connected with the idea that Sphaerus “enflamed” Cleomenes’ φιλοτιμία. Excessive φιλοτιμία is, to Plutarch, obviously detrimental.¹¹ But in the immediately following comment on Leonidas and Tyrtaeus’ influence on young men, Plutarch seems to say that enflaming Cleomenes’ φιλοτιμία was not in itself a bad thing (*Cleom.* 2.3):

Λεωνίδα μὲν γὰρ τὸν παλαιὸν λέγουσιν ἐπερωτηθέντα, ποιὸς τις αὐτῷ φαίνεται ποιητῆς γεγονέναι Τυρταίως, εἰπεῖν· “ἀγαθὸς νέων ψυχὰς κακκανῆν.” ἐμπιπλάμενοι γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιημάτων ἐνθουσιασμοῦ παρὰ τὰς μάχας ἠφείδουν ἑαυτῶν.

For Leonidas of old, as we are told, when asked what manner of poet he thought Tyrtaeus to be, replied; “A good one to inflame the souls of young men.” And indeed they were filled with divine inspiration by his poems, and in battle were prodigal of their lives.

Plutarch is fairly clear here that, just as “enflaming” or encouraging young men through Tyrtaeus’ poems had a positive effect on the battlefield, strengthening the φιλοτιμία of Cleomenes was also potentially beneficial. It is thus not plainly stated here that Sphaerus made Cleomenes’ φιλοτιμία excessive.¹²

⁹ For Plutarch a μερᾶκιον is a person under twenty-one: *Brut.* 27.3.

¹⁰ *CGL* (2021) s.v. ἀνδρῶδης: “of manly character,” “of a true man”; as a noun: “quality of manliness.” Cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1171b6, *Rh.* 1391a22 which pairs φιλοτιμία with manliness.

¹¹ On φιλοτιμία in Plutarch see A. E. Wardman, *Plutarch’s Lives* (London 1974) 115–124; B. Bucher-Isler, *Norm und Individualität in den Biographien Plutarchs* (Bern 1972) 12–13; F. Frazier, “À propos de la ‘philotimia’ dans les ‘Vies’: quelques jalons dans l’histoire d’une notion,” *RPh* 62 (1988) 109–127; T. E. Duff, *Plutarch’s Lives. Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford 1999) 83–89; G. Roskam et al. (eds.), *The Lash of Ambition. Plutarch, Imperial Greek Literature and the Dynamics of Philotimia* (Leuven 2012). See the discussion at 486–487 below.

¹² *Pace* Roskam, *CP* 106 (2011) 213, who seems to read the passage as already thematizing excessive (and thus negative) φιλοτιμία.

However, Plutarch continues by adding that other factors need to be taken into account (2.3):

ὁ δὲ Στωϊκὸς λόγος ἔχει τι πρὸς τὰς μεγάλας φύσεις καὶ ὀξεΐας ἐπισφαλὲς καὶ παράβολον, βαθεῖ δὲ καὶ πρᾶφ κεραννύμενος ἦθει μάλιστ' εἰς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιδίδωσιν.

However, for great and impetuous natures the Stoic doctrines are somewhat misleading and dangerous, although when they permeate a deep and gentle character, they redound most to its proper good.

This comment seems to highlight two main elements: first, the king's φύσις, which is described as μεγάλη and ὀξεΐα; and second the Stoic teaching of Sphaerus, in which that φύσις played a role. Cleomenes is counted here among the μεγάλοι/ὀξεῖαι φύσεις and, as we can see from Plutarch's statement in the preceding chapter,¹³ he does not qualify as having the deep and gentle character mentioned here. It is important to ask what is so peculiar to Cleomenes' μεγάλη/ὀξεῖα φύσις—what could produce “something hazardous and precarious” through its interaction with the Stoic λόγος,¹⁴ or how this interaction relates to, or possibly aggravates, the effects of φιλοτιμία.

To understand what, in Plutarch's view, these factors implied for the king's personality and attitudes, we need to begin by considering the basic elements of Plutarch's conception of human personality and its development, with particular attention to the notion of μεγάλη φύσις.

¹³ *Cleom.* 1.3: “He [Cleomenes] had not, however, the scrupulous and gentle nature (τὸ δ' εὐλαβὲς ἄγαν ἐκεῖνο καὶ πρᾶον) for which Agis was remarkable.” Cf. further at 480–481 below.

¹⁴ S.-T. Teodorsson, “The Education of Rulers in Theory (*Mor.*) and Practice (*Vitae*),” in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work* 339–350, at 346, is, to the best of my knowledge, the only scholar who has noted this exact problem, but he merely rephrases the statement of Plutarch: “Cleomenes received some Stoic instruction by Sphaerus of Borysthenes, which Plutarch however regards as detrimental rather than useful to great natures (2.2–6).”

2. *Plutarch's conception of personality*

2.1. *The basic structure and development of personality*

To consider Plutarch's theory of the structure of personality and its development relevant to the interests in this paper, we should first review his concept of the human ψυχή.¹⁵ The soul for Plutarch divides into two main components. The first is τὸ παθητικόν, the non-rational part, which is subdivided into τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν "appetitive" and τὸ θυμοειδές "spirited."¹⁶ While τὸ θυμοειδές is the more active part, responsible especially for such emotions or affective states as anger, indignation, shame, and ambition, τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν responds primarily to bodily instincts and thereby produces desires and appetites.¹⁷

Second, there is the rational part, τὸ λογιστικόν, which is supposed to regulate the non-rational components (*De virt. mor.* 442C–443C, 444B–445B). Plutarch operates with Platonic-Aristotelian concepts in this area.¹⁸ From this classification

¹⁵ For an overview see Gill, *CQ* 33 (1983) 469–487, and *The Structured Self* 229–238; Duff, *Plutarch's Lives* 74–78; F. Frazier, *Histoire et morale dans les Vies parallèles de Plutarque* (Paris 2016) 108–128; S. Xenophontos, *Ethical Education in Plutarch. Moralizing Agents and Contexts* (Berlin 2016) 22–37; F. Ferrari, "Plutarch von Chaironeia," in C. Riedweg et al. (eds.), *Die Philosophie der Antike* V.1 (Basel 2018) 576–579.

¹⁶ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 441F–442C. On the division of the soul in Plutarch, most instructive are Duff, *Plutarch's Lives* 72–78; B. Castelnérac, "Plutarch's Psychology of Moral Virtue: 'Pathos', 'Logos', and the Unity of the Soul," *AncPhil* 27 (2007) 141–163; P. Volpe Cacciatore, "Psyche in Plutarch's Works," in J. Opsomer et al. (eds.), *A Versatile Gentleman: Consistency in Plutarch's Writing: Studies Offered to Luc Van der Stockt* (Leuven 2016) 59–68.

¹⁷ On these two sub-components see Duff, *Plutarch's Lives* 73; Ferrari, in *Die Philosophie* V.1 577. On the root word θυμός, which in its basic physical sense means "breath," but also "temper," or "the heart, as the seat of the emotions," see D. Cairns, "Thymos," in *OCD* online (2019).

¹⁸ θυμοειδές as opposed to τὸ λογιστικόν and τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν: Pl. *Resp.* 440E. Cf. Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1102b30 and Pl. *Phd.* 108A for τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν. On Plutarch's Platonism see F. Ferrari, "Platone in Plutarco," in I. Gallo (ed.), *La biblioteca di Plutarco* (Naples 2004) 225–235. On its blending with Aristotle's concepts: D. Babut, "Plutarque, Aristote, et l'aristotélisme," in L. Van der

emerges the concept of ἡθός as the quality that the irrational part takes from the rational as a result of long-term habituation (ἔξις).¹⁹ Thus, in terms of structure, ἡθός basically denotes the complex of interrelations between the rational and irrational parts of the soul developed by an individual, which ultimately translates into an individual's unique interests, values, drives, and emotional patterns.²⁰ Plutarch seems to lay particular stress on the latter two components in his moral assessment in the *Lives*, i.e. on finding a balance between the total elimination of appetites and passions and complete indulgence.²¹

Before ἡθός even develops, each individual starts with a φύσις, i.e. his innate endowment, which marks a person's individuality early in their development. While innate predispositions are not always necessarily expressed in the ἡθός that is eventually developed,²² they can be either constantly at work or activated in certain circumstances, particularly if the ethical training received has not been sufficient.²³ In such a case, a stable ἡθός cannot be achieved, and a certain lack of cohesion in the personality may result.²⁴ Moreover, natural predispositions are fairly constant

Stockt (ed.), *Plutarchea Lovaniensia* (Leuven 1996) 1–28; P. Donini, “Plutarco e Aristotele,” in *La biblioteca* 255–273.

¹⁹ ἔξις denotes a settled condition of the capacity, becoming either virtue or vice, depending on whether the non-rational component has been educated by reason: Plut. *De virt. mor.* 443D. πάθος is basically a state of mind and was typically rendered in Latin as “affectus” (cf. Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.8); it seems thus adequate to render it in English as “affective state” (B. Inwood, “Stoic Ethics,” in K. Algra et al. [eds.], *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* [Cambridge 1999] 700).

²⁰ Ferrari, in *Die Philosophie* V.1 578.

²¹ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 451C; Gill, *CQ* 33 (1983) 475 with n.39. Whether and how a hero controls his passions by reason is one of the crucial themes in the *Lives*: Duff, *Plutarch's Lives* 75–82.

²² Plut. *De sera* 551D, 562B; Gill, *CQ* 33 (1983) 474.

²³ See e.g. Plut. *Sert.* 10.5–6; Xenophonos, *Ethical Education* 34–35; Gill, *CQ* 33 (1983) 478–479.

²⁴ Plut. *Mor.* 52A–B, 52F–53A, 97A; *Alc.* 16.1–6; *Demetr.* 1.7; Gill, *CQ* 33 (1983) 475.

and important,²⁵ but the final shape of one's personality depends on the nurture and education (ethical training) received, of which the highest form is philosophical παιδεία.²⁶ In terms of development, therefore, Plutarch's model of personality may be defined as psychobiological, insofar as major personality traits are shaped by temperament (natural endowment), learning, and environmental factors.²⁷

2.2. *The μεγάλη/ὄξεια φύσις*

In the passage about Sphaerus (*Cleom.* 2), Plutarch seems to single out a particular instance of natural endowment—*μεγάλη/ὄξεια φύσις*—but there only fleetingly. Since he implies that this was the core component of Cleomenes' predisposition, it is essential to enquire exactly what it means. Possessing a "great nature" is expounded in greater detail in *De sera numinis vindicta* 552C–D:²⁸

οὐδὲν γὰρ αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις μικρὸν ἐκφέρουσιν οὐδ' ἀργεῖ δι' ὄξύτητα τὸ σφοδρὸν ἐν αὐταῖς καὶ δραστήριον, ἀλλ' ἐν σάλῳ διαφέρονται, πρὶν εἰς τὸ μόνιμον καὶ καθεσθηκὸς ἦθος ἐλθεῖν. ὥσπερ οὖν ὁ γεωργίας ἄπειρος οὐκ ἂν ἀσπάσαιτο χῶραν ἰδῶν

²⁵ In some cases Plutarch seems to imply a change of φύσις, but there the word φύσις is actually used in a rare meaning of long-established character (see *Sull.* 30.4–6 with Gill, *CQ* 33 [1983] 478 n.61; Xenophontos, *Ethical Education* 35).

²⁶ Xenophontos, *Ethical Education* 22–28; Gill, *CQ* 33 (1983) 474, 477; F. Becchi, "Plutarco tra platonismo e aristotelismo: la filosofia come παιδεία dell'anima," in A. P. Jiménez et al. (eds.), *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles* (Madrid 1999) 25–43. See also, on παιδεία in the Roman *Lives*, C. B. R. Pelling, "Plutarch: Roman Heroes and Greek Culture," in M. Griffin et al. (eds.), *Philosophia Togata. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford 1989) 199–232; S. C. R. Swain, "Hellenic Culture and the Roman Heroes of Plutarch," *JHS* 110 (1990) 126–145.

²⁷ Cf. "Cloninger's Psychobiological Model of Personality," *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2018): <https://dictionary.apa.org/cloningers-psychobiological-model-of-personality>.

²⁸ Text: W. R. Paton, M. Pohlenz, W. Sieveking, *Plutarchi Moralia* III (Leipzig 1929); transl. P. De Lacy, B. Einarson, *Plutarch's Moralia* VII (Cambridge [Mass.] 1959), with slight alterations.

λόχμης ἔμπλεω δασείας καὶ φυτῶν ἀγρίων καὶ θηρία πολλὰ καὶ ῥεύματα καὶ πολλὴν ἔχουσαν πηλόν, ἀλλὰ τῷ μεμαθηκότι διαισθάνεσθαι καὶ κρίνειν αὐτὰ ταῦτα τὴν ἰσχὺν καὶ τὸ πλήθος ὑποδείκνυσι καὶ τὴν μαλακότητα τῆς γῆς, οὕτως ἄτοπα πολλὰ καὶ φαῦλα προεξανθοῦσιν αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις, ὧν ἡμεῖς μὲν εὐθύς τὸ τραχὺ καὶ νύττον οὐ φέροντες ἀποκόπτειν οἴομεθα δεῖν καὶ κολούειν, ὁ δὲ βελτίων κριτῆς καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων τὸ χρηστὸν ἐνορῶν καὶ γενναῖον περιμένει λόγου καὶ ἀρετῆς συνεργὸν ἡλικίαν καὶ ὥραν, ἧ τὸν οἰκεῖον ἡ φύσις καρπὸν ἀποδίδωσι.

For great natures bring forth nothing trivial, and the vigor and enterprise in them is too keen to remain inert; nay, they drift about on heavy seas before coming to rest in their abiding and settled character. And so, as one ignorant of agriculture, on seeing a piece of ground overgrown with dense thickets and weeds, overrun with wild animals and water-courses, and covered with mud, would not find it to his liking, while to him who has learned to discriminate and judge these very circumstances reveal the vigor, depth, and looseness of the soil, so great natures put forth at first many strange and villainous shoots, and we, at once impatient of their rough and thorny quality, fancy that we should clear them away and cut them short; whereas the better judge discerns even in this their good and noble strain, and waits for them to reach the maturity that lends support to reason and virtue and the season when their nature yields her proper fruit.

This passage has been interpreted as stating that naturally well-endowed men may turn out badly if they are not given proper nurture.²⁹ Such a reading has been advanced in connection with the mention of *μεγάλη φύσις* in *Demetr.* 1.7, where Plutarch adduces Plato and writes that a *μεγάλη φύσις* can de-

²⁹ Cf. T. E. Duff, “Plutarch, Plato and ‘Great Natures’,” in *Plutarcho, Platon* 313–332, at 318–319, who also treats passages from several *Lives* (but not the passage about Cleomenes and Sphaerus from the *Cleomenes*) by applying that notion; so also Xenophonos, *Ethical Education* 27. F. Frazier and L. R. Lanzillotta, *Quelques aspects du platonisme de Plutarque* (Leiden 2019) 187–222, is the most recent, thorough analysis of *De sera*, but they focus on its overarching themes and do not address in detail the passage where *μεγάλη φύσις* is discussed.

velop either great vices or great virtues.³⁰ We can, however, dig deeper and ask what psychological qualities Plutarch meant to be inherent in such an endowment, i.e. what would be those qualities of “greatness” that can be either destructive or productive. In *Demetr.* 1.7 Plutarch does not indicate a particular work of Plato, and the passages proposed by scholars as being possibly alluded to³¹ do not actually discuss φύσις with the qualifier μεγάλη; they either specify well-predisposed individuals, and those in very specific areas (esp. philosophy),³² or refer to greatness in rather vague terms.³³ μέγας can be an epithet of gods or men (“great/mighty”), but, rather than implying generally positive moral potential, when combined with φύσις it usually stands for intensity or a great degree of its qualities.³⁴ This is

³⁰ Plut. *Demetr.* 1.7: περιέξει δὴ τοῦτο τὸ βιβλίον τὸν Δημητρίου τοῦ Πολιορκητοῦ βίον καὶ τὸν Ἀντωνίου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα δὴ τῶ Πλάτωνι μαρτυρησάντων, ὅτι καὶ κακίας μεγάλας ὡσπερ ἀρετὰς αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις ἐκφέρουσι, “This book will therefore contain the Lives of Demetrius the City-besieger and Antony the Emperor, men who bore most ample testimony to the truth of Plato’s saying that great natures exhibit great vices also, as well as great virtues” (transl. B. Perrin, *Plutarch’s Lives IX* [Cambridge [Mass.] 1920).

³¹ Duff, in *Plutarco, Platón* 325–330, and Xenophontos, *Ethical Education* 27.

³² Pl. *Resp.* 491E–492A, esp. τὴν ἀρίστην φύσιν (491D7), τὰς ψυχὰς οὕτω φῶμεν τὰς εὐφροεστάτας (491E1–2), ἐκ νεανικῆς φύσεως (E4–5), ἀσθενῆ δὲ φύσιν (E5–6), τοῦ φιλοσόφου φύσιν (492A1–5).

³³ In Pl. *Grg.* 525E1–526B4 it is the position of great power, not natural endowment, that makes individuals likely to become morally wrong (ἐκ τῶν δυναμένων ... κακοὶ γίνονται τῶν δυναστῶν); φύσις is not even mentioned there. Similarly, in *Hp.Mi.* 375E the topic is strong ψυχὴ due to its prudence. *Cri.* 44D discusses what οἱ πολλοὶ are capable of in terms of right or wrong. Cf. Duff, in *Plutarco, Platón* 319, who discusses the notion of μεγάλη φύσις in *De sera*, and then reads *Cor.* 1.1–2 in this light, where, however, Plutarch mentions γενναία καὶ ἀγαθὴ φύσις, and *Ale.* 6.1, which has δι’ εὐφύϊαν ἀπομένων τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ.

³⁴ LSJ s.v. μέγας “big, of bodily size” (A.I.1a); “vast, high” (A.I.2); “great, mighty,” of gods and men (A.II.1); “strong, of the elements, etc. ... of properties, passions, qualities, feelings, etc., of men” (A.II.2); “with a bad sense, over-great” (A.II.5).

specified in the passage of *De sera* quoted above: ἡ ὀξύτης, which can denote cleverness, but also rapidity or quickness to anger;³⁵ τὸ σφοδρὸν, excess, violence, or vehemence, also in connection with anger,³⁶ and τὸ δραστήριον, which denotes activity, efficacy, or energy.³⁷

The φύσις described by Plutarch thus seems to entail a kind of strong affective and impulsive potential, and decreased ability to control or self-regulate behavior. To gain an even better understanding of this notion, we can adduce Plutarch's reference to μεγάλη φύσις in a passage of the *Lysander*, where he quotes Aristotle (*Lys.* 2.3):

Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ τὰς μεγάλας φύσεις ἀποφαίνων μελαγχολικάς, ὡς τὴν Σωκράτους καὶ Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἡρακλέους, ἱστορεῖ καὶ Λύσανδρον οὐκ εὐθύς, ἀλλὰ πρῆβύτερον ὄντα τῇ μελαγχολίᾳ περιπεσεῖν.

And Aristotle, when he sets forth that great natures, like those of Socrates and Plato and Heracles, have a tendency to melancholy, writes also that Lysander, not immediately, but when well on in years, was a prey to melancholy.³⁸

There seems to be little doubt that Plutarch quotes the identification of μεγάλαι φύσεις with μελαγχολικοί approvingly, i.e. he assumes that it is accurate. He is here probably referring to an extensive section of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, in particular the passage where the author writes that those who are

³⁵ See Plut. *De coh. ira* 453A–B, connected with τὸ θυμοειδές. LSJ s.v. ὀξύς, from which the abstract noun ἡ ὀξύτης derives, has “sharp, keen” (I.1); “in reference to the senses” (II); “hasty ... esp. quick to anger, passionate” (III.1); cf. its links with irascibility in Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1126a18. *CGL* s.v. ὀξύς: “(of feelings, unstable or dangerous events and circumstances) rapid in onset or acute in intensity.”

³⁶ Plut. *De coh. ira* 453B; cf. LSJ s.v. σφοδρός “vehement, violent, excessive”; it appears together with φιλότιμοι in Pl. *Ap.* 23E.

³⁷ See Frazier, *Histoire et morale* 268–269, for the neuter substantive τὸ δραστήριον as “la tendance active de la personnalité,” and its combination with τὸ σφοδρὸν in other *Lives*.

³⁸ Transl. B. Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives* IV (London 1916).

outstanding (περιττοί) in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry, or arts, are all likely to be μελαγχολικοί.³⁹ In this passage, the melancholic disposition is determined by an excess of black bile that can be either cold or hot: in the former case individuals are obtuse, while in the latter they are μανικοί, astute but also prone to mood changes ([Pr.] 954a22–23, 28–30). The μελαγχολικοί are also discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the context of ἀκρασία, “weakness of will,” indicating a deprivation of consideration before acting.⁴⁰ Plutarch thus seems to draw on the notion that φύσις in the sense of a natural predisposition affects the personality of men. Moreover, he applies this notion in explaining the behavior of Lysander in a later passage of the *Life*, where he connects the melancholic disposition with a tendency to vehement anger (παντάπασι χαλεπὸς ὢν ὀργὴν διὰ τὴν μελαγχολίαν ἐπιτείνουσιν, *Lys.* 28.1).⁴¹ We can also add a passage from the *Alexander* in which Plutarch cites Theophrastus on the physiological constitution of the king, esp. his warmth of bodily humors, as producing a tendency to drinking and to be θυμοειδής; the quality of σφοδρός is also mentioned (*Alex.* 4.3.7).⁴²

³⁹ [Pr.] 953a10–29. The treatise, quoted by Plutarch as being of Aristotle’s authorship is, however, likely a summary or revised version of Theophrastus’ lost *On Melancholy*. See the thorough analysis by P. J. van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge 2005) 139–168, and J. Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy. From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford 2000) 55–60. Cf. M. Protopapas-Marnelli, “The Affections of the Soul according to Aristotle, the Stoics and Galen: On Melancholy,” *Peitho* 11 (2020) 121–141, at 133–136.

⁴⁰ Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1150b25, 1152a18–19. Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy* 160–168, has shown that the theory of [Pr.] 30.1 harmonizes with the concept of melancholy in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁴¹ That Lysander in Plutarch’s account was affected by melancholy-induced anger in his late years is entirely consistent with Plutarch’s view that one’s natural endowment can be latent in adulthood and activate itself in some circumstances, see 473–474 above. On χολή and anger see also *De coh. ira* 457D–E.

⁴² D. Bosman, “Plutarch’s Alexander,” in D. Ogden (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 2024) 348–363, at 362, seems thus

Overall, understanding Plutarch's references to *μεγάλη/ὄξεια φύσις* as denoting a psychological constitution which is rooted in physiological processes seems to find considerable support across Plutarch's texts.⁴³ This kind of *φύσις* implies a particularly active *τὸ θυμοειδές* part of the *ψυχή*, and hence a tendency to vehement *πάθη*, especially anger, but also impulsiveness, high motor activity, and (as a result) a decreased ability to control behavior. Such a psychological constitution overlaps with the modern concept of novelty-seeking temperament.⁴⁴ While modern researchers tend to explain such a predisposition by neurological factors, ancient thinkers looked to physiological processes in the body.⁴⁵

It seems therefore that substantial inferences about Cleomenes' natural endowment can be drawn from Plutarch's brief mention of *μεγάλη/ὄξεια φύσις* in reference to the king. Let us see now whether and how it ties in with Plutarch's other remarks on Cleomenes' natural endowment and the nurture that he received in his youth.

3. *Cleomenes' natural endowment and the question of external influences*

The preceding section investigated what kind of predisposition can be implied by *μεγάλη* and *ὄξεια φύσις*, which is ascribed to

to be correct in reading this passage in the *Alexander* in direct connection with the *μεγάλη φύσις* from the quoted section of *De sera*.

⁴³ Plutarch adopts Aristotelian/Peripatetic concepts where he considers them useful to express or interpret what he sees as being in line with Plato, see the positions cited in n.18 above.

⁴⁴ In C. R. Cloninger's model of personality, novelty-seeking temperament is a major predictor of impulsive behaviors and activities associated with personal risk, and, if extreme, may develop into bipolar disorder, which has been shown to correspond in many aspects to the Peripatetic concept of melancholy; see M. ter Borg, "Aristotle and DSM on 'Bipolar' Melancholy: Symptoms, Medication, Link to Creativity," *Medical Research Archives* 9 (2021) 1–18.

⁴⁵ J. A. Gray's model has proposed a link between certain temperaments and specific neurotransmitters; novelty-seeking would be linked with dopamine flow, cf. n.27 above.

Cleomenes at *Cleom.* 2. His natural endowment is also discussed before the mention of his interactions with Sphaerus (*Cleom.* 1.3):

ἦν δὲ καὶ φιλότιμος μὲν καὶ μεγαλόφρων ὁ Κλεομένης καὶ πρὸς ἐγκράτειαν καὶ ἀφέλειαν οὐχ ἦττον τοῦ Ἄγιδος εὖ πεφυκώς, τὸ δ' εὐλαβὲς ἄγαν ἐκεῖνο καὶ πρᾶον οὐκ εἶχεν, ἀλλὰ κέντρον τι θυμοῦ τῇ φύσει προσέκειτο καὶ μετὰ σφοδρότητος ὀρμῆ πρὸς τὸ φαινόμενον ἀεὶ καλόν. ἐφαίνετο δὲ κάλλιστον μὲν αὐτῷ κρατεῖν ἐκόντων, καλὸν δὲ καὶ μὴ πειθομένων περιεῖναι, πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ἐκβιαζόμενον.

And, besides, Cleomenes was aspiring and magnanimous, and no less prone by nature than Agis to self-restraint and simplicity. He had not, however, the scrupulous and gentle nature for which Agis was remarkable, and his natural courage was always goading him on, as it were, and fiercely impelling him towards that which in any case appeared to be the honorable course. He thought it a most excellent thing to rule over willing subjects, but a good thing also to subdue such subjects as were disobedient, and force them towards the better goal.

We can see that Plutarch describes Cleomenes' natural endowment by applying the conceptual framework of the subdivision of the non-rational part of the soul (472–473 above). First, he highlights that Cleomenes was naturally well predisposed (εὖ πεφυκώς) to ἀφέλεια, “simplicity,” and ἐγκράτεια, “self-restraint,” in relation to sensual desires and appetites; these pertain to the appetitive part of the soul, τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν. Second, he specifies Cleomenes' θυμοῦ τῇ φύσει, thus invoking the θυμοειδές; in this sphere, Cleomenes had a predisposition for excess.⁴⁶ This is opposed to τὸ εὐλαβές, control or ability to maintain prudence, and τὸ πρᾶον, mildness (related particularly to emotions).⁴⁷ This characterization is fully consistent with the understanding of

⁴⁶ See a similar gap between the two components of the non-rational part of the soul in the disposition of Alexander (self-restraint in relation to sensual pleasures vs tendency to anger, impulsiveness etc.): Plut. *Alex.* 4.4–5, 5.3, 21.4, 23.1, 22.4; cf. *Cor.* 1.3–4.

⁴⁷ For πρᾶότης in the *Lives* see H. Martin, “The Concept of Prᾶotēs in Plutarch's *Lives*,” *GRBS* 3 (1960) 65–73; Frazier, *Histoire et morale* 312–315. Cf. J. de Romilly, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque* (Paris 1979) 275–307.

μεγάλη φύσις advanced in the previous section of this paper.

Further, Plutarch also highlights as part of Cleomenes' natural disposition his tendency to be φιλότιμος, along the predisposition to be high-minded. Following Plato, Plutarch defined φιλοτιμία as arising from, or having its basis in, the τὸ θυμοειδές, as the latter is particularly connected to the sense of right and wrong.⁴⁸ This is consistent with the way Plutarch links the exceptional activity of Cleomenes' θυμός with impulses towards what seemed morally right to him (πρὸς τὸ φαινόμενον ἀεὶ καλόν, *Cleom.* 1.3). Cleomenes' inborn φιλοτιμία thus denotes a tendency towards affective engagement in moral values and judgments.

As for proper nurture or παιδεία, Cleomenes, like Agis, did not receive it (in contrast to the Gracchi).⁴⁹ His environment was generally permeated by ἡδονή, "pleasure," τρυφή, "luxury," and there was no ἄσκησις, "exercise," or training towards σωφροσύνη, "moderation," or καρτερία ("endurance").⁵⁰ The only possible instance of psychological/ethical instruction mentioned by Plutarch was thus Sphaerus. But Plutarch seems to exclude the role of any external influences on the appetitive component of Cleomenes' disposition; the king, as highlighted above, had the natural capability to master the appetites and drives connected to the ἐπιθυμητικόν. Moreover, he relates that the king truly

⁴⁸ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 452D; Duff, *Plutarch's Lives* 83–84. See Pl. *Resp.* 440E for θυμοειδές as a part that reacts emotionally to a sense of right and wrong, causing anger, indignation, shame, etc. For φιλοτιμία as inextricably connected with anger see *De coh. ira* 457B.

⁴⁹ Plut. *Comp. Agis Cleom. et Gracch.* 1.2: ἡ δ' Ἄγιδος καὶ Κλεομένους φύσις ἐρρωμενεστέρα φαίνεται τῆς ἐκείνων γενομένη, παρ' ὅσον οὔτε παιδείας μεταλαβόντες ὀρθῆς, ἔθεσί τε καὶ διαίταις ἐντραφέντες ὑφ' ὧν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι πάσαι διεφθόρεισαν, αὐτοὺς ἡγεμόνας εὐτελείας καὶ σωφροσύνης παρέσχον, "But Agis and Cleomenes would appear to have had even sturdier natural gifts than theirs, in so far as though they did not receive a correct training, and were reared in those customs and ways of living by which their elders had long ago been corrupted, they nevertheless made themselves leaders in simplicity and self-restraint."

⁵⁰ Plut. *Cleom.* 2.1, 3.1.

remained simple and moderate in respect to sensual pleasures.⁵¹ We find no explicit statement that Cleomenes' simplicity and moderation were somehow fostered or adjusted by teachers, family, or any other factors. Even though Sphaerus is associated with the reinstatement of the traditional Spartan regime of self-restraint, when mentioning his personal interaction with Cleomenes Plutarch seems to focus exclusively on the impact on Cleomenes' affective side, the θυμοειδής.⁵² And this, we have seen, included extraordinary activity, impulsiveness, and ambitiousness.

How could Cleomenes' interaction with Stoic teachings negatively influence his personality? This question will be first approached by shedding light on Plutarch's account of the Stoic views on personality, the regulation of affective states and behavior, and then by applying them to Cleomenes' biography.

4. *Plutarch on the fallacies of early Stoic ethical psychology*

Plutarch's negative view on Stoic ethical psychology was primarily aimed at the early Stoa which frequently took issue with Platonic-Aristotelian theories; this inevitably includes Zeno and his disciple Sphaerus.⁵³ Plutarch does not discuss Sphaerus' teachings specifically, probably as a result of the identification of

⁵¹ This is particularly underscored by the characterization in *Cleom.* 13.

⁵² For such neat distinguishing and possible separate functioning and treatment by Plutarch of the two parts in practical ethics see *De coh. ira* 453B–C.

⁵³ On Plutarch and Stoicism in general see D. Babut, *Plutarque et le stoïcisme* (Paris 1969); J. Opsomer, "Plutarch and the Stoics," in M. Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch* (Malden 2014) 88–103. G. Roskam, *Plutarch* (Cambridge 2021) 33–39. Already A. Grilli, "Aspetti del rapporto tra Plutarco e lo stoicismo," in I. Gallo (ed.), *Aspetti dello stoicismo e dell'epicureismo in Plutarco* (Ferrara 1988) 7–19, convincingly argued that Plutarch did not criticize the Stoa beyond Panaetius. Cf. G. Boys-Stones, "Thyrsus-Bearer of the Academy or Enthusiast for Plato? Plutarch's *de Stoicorum repugnantiis*," in J. Mossmann (ed.), *Plutarch and his Intellectual World* (Swansea 1997) 41–59; Becchi, in *Plutarco, Platón* 25–43; M. R. Niehoff, "Philo and Plutarch as Biographers: Parallel Responses to Roman Stoicism," *GRBS* 52 (2012) 361–392.

his doctrines with those of his teachers,⁵⁴ and Plutarch's criticism of those doctrines, at least when it comes to theory, is well studied. The extant fragments or *reliquiae* of Sphaerus are very scarce, but the titles of certain works ascribed to him suggest that he wrote especially on psychology and ethics; we know of a longer work *Περὶ παθῶν δύο* (*On Passions*) in two books, *Περὶ ὀρμῆς* (*On Impulse*), and *Περὶ ἕξεως* (*On Habits*).⁵⁵

One of Plutarch's essential points in his critiques is the early Stoics' position on the structure of the human soul, namely their choice not to recognize the separate existence and agency of the non-rational component, τὸ παθητικόν.⁵⁶ In particular, he criticizes the Stoic approach to πάθη, viz. their definition of a πάθος as either a result of a mistaken opinion (κρίσις) on a relevant matter or as itself being a mistaken opinion, which results from an assent to an impression (φαντασία).⁵⁷ On this view, the agent may judge whether his affective response is appropriate or not: when the thing he believes to be good is not actually good, then the state is not defensible; but when it is appropriate, the result is a "good affective response," εὐπάθεια. One is thus supposed to eliminate psychological instability by correcting one's beliefs.⁵⁸

In Plutarch's view this is fundamentally erroneous, since only by assuming the existence of two distinct psychic parts can we

⁵⁴ Plutarch underlines Sphaerus' close connection with Zeno, *Cleom.* 2.2: ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις ἐγγένοι τῶν Ζήνωνος τοῦ Κιτιέως μαθητῶν. See Steinmetz, in *Die Philosophie* V.1 576.

⁵⁵ Diog. Laert. 7.177–178 = *SVF* I F 620; cf. n.3 above.

⁵⁶ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 441C–442C. H. G. Ingenkamp, "De virtute morali. Plutarchs Scheingefecht gegen die stoische Lehre von der Seele," in *Plutarco, Platón* 79–86; Gill, *The Structured Self* 207–229; Ferrari, in *Die Philosophie* V.1 577.

⁵⁷ Diog. Laert. 7.110–111 and *SVF* I FF 205–206, 208–209; A. A. Long, "Stoic Psychology," in *The Cambridge History* 560–584; Inwood, in *The Cambridge History* 699–705. Steinmetz, in *Die Philosophie* V.1 546–548, is particularly useful for Zeno's qualification of the basic πάθη.

⁵⁸ M. C. Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," *Apeiron* 20 (1987) 129–177.

provide the contribution of reason.⁵⁹ If there was no psychic function detached from reason, it would be impossible to speak of ἦθος as conditioning the affective part by repeated processes of habituation and there would be only cognitive processes directed towards the formation of opinions/beliefs.⁶⁰ For Plutarch, the Stoics were also wrong in holding that one should completely eliminate “wrong” πάθη (ἀπάθεια), instead of moderating them by λόγος (μετριοπάθεια). He thus criticizes the Stoic doctrine of εὐπάθεια as a mere game of finding euphemisms for passions, which actually imply the twofold structure of the soul.⁶¹ What is more, since Plutarch defines virtue as a kind of μέτρον in relation to πάθος,⁶² πάθη are necessary material for virtue, important in ethical training.⁶³ Even more crucially, Plutarch notes that calling these different names offers nothing in terms of the actual control of them, not to mention permanent habituating; it actually leaves them as they are with no change in the mental state of the agent.⁶⁴ If they persist and thus become repeated and unrestrained, they create a bad habit (e.g. repeated anger becoming irascibility: *De coh. ira* 454D).

What could the Stoic doctrine thus conceived mean for an

⁵⁹ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 447B–C; Gill, *The Structured Self* 221–223. Plutarch also argues that numerous Stoic doctrines are at odds with common convictions: *De comm. not.* 1058E–1086B.

⁶⁰ Inwood, in *The Cambridge History* 705.

⁶¹ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 447B–449C; Gill, *The Structured Self* 226–228, 233–234. Cf. J. Dillon, “Plutarch the Philosopher and Plutarch the Historian on *Apatheia*,” in *A Versatile Gentleman* 9–15. For Stoics’ self-contradictions see also Plutarch’s discussion in *De Stoic. rep.* 1033A–1057C. For implied criticism of the Stoics’ radical approach to passions and virtue in general see *De prof. virt.* 76C–84B.

⁶² Plut. *De virt. mor.* 444F; F. Ferrari, “Moderatismo etico e controllo delle passioni in Plutarco,” in G. Giardina (ed.), *Le emozioni secondo i filosofi antichi* (Catania 2008) 135–162.

⁶³ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 449F, 451D–452A, esp. 451D–E; Gill, *The Structured Self* 234 with n.125: e.g. emotions are useful in “standing by reasoning” and “intensifying” the virtues.

⁶⁴ Plut. *De coh. ira* 462F–463A, calling out specifically Zeno.

individual with the natural endowment defined as in the case of Cleomenes? First, even if such a person endeavored to eliminate *πάθη*, as the early Stoics postulated (in Plutarch's account), they would constantly combat, and—should the impossible mission of reducing *πάθη* to near-zero be successful—lose the necessary resource for ethical training. Second, and more practically, given the Stoic notion that emotion based on correct judgment does not need to be modified, it would be crucial to establish whether the agent is able to properly evaluate the matter and the circumstances in order to produce correct beliefs (and thus appropriate, “innocent” emotions). But if an impulsive person, who has a tendency to intense affective states, is erroneous in their judgment, and nevertheless undertakes a course of action, they will not be willing to question their state as inadequate. Rather, they will identify their state exactly as correct judgments about reality and as grounds for taking appropriately vigorous action. This, if repeated, may lead to a pattern of overconfidence rather than questioning one's beliefs. For such an individual it would rather be commendable to treat one's passions based on detailed analysis and diagnosis of the experienced state, the ensuing realization of how harmful one's condition is, and further steps which gradually alleviate the affections.⁶⁵ For Plutarch, self-questioning is essential to the path of ethical progress, which should be continuously pursued.⁶⁶

In sum, Stoic ethical teaching, as Plutarch tends to conceive it, may either disorganize one's management of the different components of the soul or reinforce the natural affective-cognitive tendencies of the agent, rather than manage or modify them. In effect, such instruction would likely impair the development of a proper *ἦθος* as a settled and coherent character.

To be sure, Stoic ethical theory may be viewed as too abstract and sophisticated to be transmitted to the king by the philosopher, or to be actually applied by the king to his actions.

⁶⁵ *De garr.* 510C–D, 513D–514C; *De coh. ira* 453D.

⁶⁶ *De prof. virt.* 85E–86A; *De coh. ira* 453D; cf. Roskam, *Plutarch* 65–66.

Although there are indications elsewhere that Plutarch was ready to accept statesmen's or kings' familiarity with advanced philosophical teachings, it is still debatable whether he thought that such figures were likely to live according to those teachings.⁶⁷ Thus, I would not venture to assert that Cleomenes studied and absorbed all the Stoic ethical principles in their complexity; I would only maintain that, in Plutarch's mind, Sphaerus' teachings could have exerted some effect on the young king's approach and behavior.

Let us now proceed to investigate whether this described impact of the Stoic ethical teaching on individual predispositions is reflected in Plutarch's description and general assessment of Cleomenes' adult behavior and personality traits.

5. *Cleomenes' personality in adulthood and the traces of Stoic influence*

5.1. *The problem with Cleomenes' φιλοτιμία*

In the passage that served as the point of departure of this paper, Plutarch states that Cleomenes' φιλοτιμία, which is part of his natural endowment, was enflamed by Sphaerus (*Cleom.* 2.2 προσεκκαῦσαι τὴν φιλοτιμίαν). Without doubt, excessive φιλοτιμία was viewed by Plutarch as dangerous (ἐπισφαλές), and it is important to understand why. Plutarch answers this question by saying that it (*Agis* 2.2):

⁶⁷ Plutarch writes that Alexander was well acquainted with the ethical and political λόγος of Aristotle (*Alex.* 7.3–4, 8.4), and even with the “secret and more profound teachings” (τῶν ἀπορρήτων καὶ βαθυτέρων διδασκαλιῶν), but he also seems to imply that the impact on the king was not effective (8.4, 55.7–8, 74.5, 77.3; see also *De Alex. fort.* 329B–D). Cf. Socrates' ethical instructions for Alcibiades, who nevertheless turned out to be an unrewarding disciple (*Alc.* 4–6). A less disputable instance is that of Dion, whose character and actions are described as influenced by Plato (*Dion* 1.2–4, 4.3–7, 6.4, 11.1; cf. 2.5, in which Dion is called an ἀνὴρ φιλόσοφος alongside Brutus). Cato the Younger's close acquaintance with the Stoic Antipater of Tyre, and in particular the former's devotion to Stoic ethical and political doctrines, is another example (*Cat. Min.* 4.1, cf. 10.1–2 for Cato's relationship with Cordyilion of Pergamum, who was learned in the Stoic doctrines). Several passages suggest that the philosophical learning was put to work in Cato's actions and attitudes (8.1, 9.4, 11.3–4, 14.2).

ἐκφέρει γὰρ εἰς μανίαν καὶ παραφροσύνην ὑπαιθρον ἐξουσίας μεγάλης ἐπιλαβομένους, ὅταν μὴ τὸ καλὸν ἔνδοξον εἶναι θέλωσιν, ἀλλ' ἀγαθὸν ἠγῶνται τὸ ἔνδοξον εἶναι.

sweeps them away into manifest folly and madness as they grasp after great power, when they refuse to regard what is honorable as glorious, but consider that what is glorious is good.

Plutarch thus suggests that excessive φιλοτιμία is basically an uncontrolled affective state which drives incorrect identification of what is morally good; under such a μανία one tends to interpret the glorious for the morally good, not the other way round.⁶⁸ Strong affective engagement impairs one's ability to properly distinguish what is really morally good from what should rather be considered as glorious.

Hence, if Cleomenes had the κέντρον τι θυμοῦ urging him to impulsively pursue what seemed morally right to him, and enflaming φιλοτιμία meant increased risk of misidentifying the ἔνδοξον as the καλόν, the result would necessarily be excessive affective engagement in the (“objectively”) glorious rather than the good. In other words, given Cleomenes' naturally overactive τὸ θυμοειδές, one should be particularly cautious with political ambition, as it by itself can lead to μανία, especially in a person who was prone to impulsiveness and vehement affective states. It seems that Sphaerus' impact on Cleomenes can be blamed for this tendency becoming the king's personal trait. Moreover, this trait was not simply too rigid a political course,⁶⁹ but rather led to a set of impulsive, affective reactions connected to the sense of the morally good. This seems to be confirmed and exemplified by the anecdote about the stories about Agis told to Cleomenes by Xenares, which, Plutarch says, caused his excessive eagerness or elation (ἐμπαθέστερον προσέχων καὶ κινούμενος ὑπερφυῶς πρὸς

⁶⁸ Cf. Frazier, *Histoire et morale* 268–269, who distinguishes between military and civil, or political, φιλοτιμία in Plutarch.

⁶⁹ Roskam, *CP* 106 (2011) 213, notes this aspect of Sphaerus' possible impact on Cleomenes, “Quite remarkably, this risk [of excessive ambition] is here connected directly with philosophical instruction,” but does not elaborate on the affective nature and consequences of φιλοτιμία.

τὴν καινοτομίαν τοῦ Ἁγίδος, *Cleom.* 3.3). This anecdote comes after the remarks about Cleomenes' interactions with Sphaerus, which may further suggest a causal relationship between those and the king's reactions.

5.2. *Cleomenes' recklessness and overconfidence*

Nevertheless, as argued in the first section of this paper, Plutarch strongly suggests that Sphaerus' influence on Cleomenes was even deeper than just enflaming his φιλοτιμία, identifying as the key to this influence the specificity of the Stoic teaching in combination with Cleomenes' natural predispositions. More concretely, a μεγάλη φύσις impacted by Stoic λόγος was likely to produce τι ἐπισφαλές, "something precarious," and παράβολον, "hazardous."⁷⁰ These two words point to instability, uncertainty, and recklessness, and thus can lead us to the traits of Cleomenes' adult personality: τόλμα, "recklessness," and θρασύτης, "overconfidence."⁷¹ In the σύγκρισις, the most reflective part of the biographies, in which the heroes are compared "from a distance" and thus in a more generalizing way,⁷² Plutarch recapitulates Cleomenes' behavior and attitudes (*Sync.* 4.1):

⁷⁰ LSJ s.v. ἐπισφαλής has "prone to fall, unstable, precarious" (I), "making to fall, misleading" (II.1, citing Plut. *Quaest.conv.* 653D); "dangerous" (II.2); s.v. παράβολος "with a side-meaning, deceitful" (I); "exposing oneself or what belongs to one: hence, of persons, venturesome, reckless" (II.1), "of things and actions, hazardous, perilous" (II.2).

⁷¹ Thus the associations in Plut. *Num.* 8.1–2: συστάσα μὲν εὐθὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς τόλμη τινὴ καὶ παραβόλῳ θρασύτητι τῶν θρασυτάτων καὶ μαχιμοτάτων ἐκεῖ πανταχόθεν ὠσαμένων, "It was brought into being at the very outset by the excessive daring and reckless courage of the boldest and most warlike spirits, who forced their way thither from all parts" (transl. B. Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives* I [London 1914]). Cf. *Reg. et imper. apophth.* 206B, τῶν δὲ τολμημάτων τὰ παράβολα καὶ μεγάλα.

⁷² See H. Erbse, "Die Bedeutung der Synkrisis in den Parallelbiographien Plutarchs," *Hermes* 84 (1956) 398–424; Duff, *Plutarch's Lives* 243–309, and "Plutarchan *Synkrisis*: Comparisons and Contradictions," in L. Van der Stockt (ed.), *Rhetorical Theory and Praxis in Plutarch* (Leuven 2000) 141–161; C. B. R. Pelling, "*Synkrisis* Revisited," in A. Pérez Jiménez et al. (eds.), *Historical and Biographical Values of Plutarch's Works: Studies Devoted to Professor Philip A. Stadter* (Malaga 2005) 325–340; Roskam, *CP* 106 (2011) 221–222.

ὁ δὲ Κλεομένης τὸναντίον θρασύτερον καὶ βιαιότερον ἐπὶ τὴν μεταβολὴν ἦλθε τῆς πολιτείας, ἀποκτείνας τοὺς ἐφόρους παρὰ νόμῳ, οὐς καὶ προσαγαγέσθαι τοῖς ὅπλοις κρατοῦντα καὶ μεταστήσαι ῥάδιον ἦν, ὥσπερ οὐκ ὀλίγους ἄλλους μετέστησεν ἐκ τῆς πόλεως.

Cleomenes, on the contrary, undertook his change of the constitution with too much rashness and violence, killing the ephors in unlawful fashion, when it would have been easier to win them over to his views or remove them by superiority in arms, just as he removed many others from the city.

Cleomenes thus approached the political changes with rashness or confidence (θρασύτερον) and brutal violence (cf. *Sync.* 4.2), while, in contrast, the Gracchi avoided civil bloodshed, showing caution, εὐλάβεια (*Sync.* 4.3). We also witness Cleomenes' excessive boldness in the crucial moment of the *Life*, namely in the account of his coup against the ephors and the exiling of some citizens; θρασύτης is here underlined as the main driver of his actions.⁷³ In addition, the king approaches the deposing of the ephors "being greatly elated and persuaded" (μέγα φρονῶν ἤδη καὶ πεπεισμένος, *Cleom.* 7.1). His annihilation of Archidamus is another case in point (*Sync.* 5.1–2). Further, Cleomenes' exceptional confidence is also recognized by the Achaeans in the course of his military actions against them.⁷⁴ Plutarch thus seems to have viewed it as a persistent trait in Cleomenes' attitude and behavior.

Plutarch concludes the comparison with the Gracchi by stressing Cleomenes' τόλμα, which was great as measured against that of Gaius (*Sync.* 5.6):

⁷³ Plutarch implies that Cleomenes' courage persisted through the whole process, weakening only for a moment, but was then revived (ἐθάρρησε, *Cleom.* 7.3). As Frazier has shown, *Histoire et morale* 273, verbal forms stemming from θρασ/θαρσ- are frequent in the *Lives* as the concept involves strict connection of the mental state to the action based on it.

⁷⁴ *Cleom.* 16.2: ὡς δ' οὐ προσεῖχον αὐτῷ, τοῦ Κλεομένου ἐκπεληγμένοι τὸ θράσος, ἀλλὰ καὶ δικαίαν ἐποιοῦντο τὴν ἀξίωσιν τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων, "when they paid no heed to him in their consternation at the daring spirit of Cleomenes, but actually saw justice in the demands of the Lacedaemonians."

εἰ δὲ δεῖ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ἀποφήνασθαι, Τιβέριον μὲν ἀρετῇ πεπρωτευκέναι τίθημι πάντων, ἐλάχιστα δ' ἡμαρτηκέναι τὸ μειράκιον Ἄγιν, πράξει δὲ καὶ τόλμη Γάϊον οὐκ ὀλίγῳ Κλεομένουσ ὕστερον γεγονέναι.

But if I am to express my opinion of them individually, I should say that Tiberius led them all in exemplary virtues, that the youthful Agis committed the fewest errors, and that in achievement and courage Gaius fell far short of Cleomenes.

Thus, when Plutarch arrives at the most synthesizing description of Cleomenes, he focuses on his τόλμα, which in particular determined his way of introducing political change (cf. *Sync.* 2.1). This trait, when seen across the *Lives*, refers to a particularly eager attitude towards risky action with little calculation, which was dangerous for public order and stability when applied to the internal affairs of the polis. Although it can be valued by Plutarch positively if combined with sound reason, it is essentially different from praiseworthy courage, ἀνδρεία.⁷⁵ While θράσος/θρασύτης seems to imply the feeling of confidence activated in the face of action, τόλμα can be understood as a permanent personal quality determining a tendency to certain types of action.⁷⁶ For Cleomenes, it indeed persisted until, and actually contributed to, his very end, as he committed suicide “with good courage” (αὐτὸν εὐτόλμως ἀνεῖλε, *Sync.* 3.1). Overall, τόλμα and θράσος/θρασύτης occur, first, in Plutarch’s summarizing characterization and contrast between the king and the other three figures, and, second, as active factors driving some of Cleomenes’ most consequential actions. It is crucial that, in Cleomenes’ biography, the two elements are combined and interrelated: overconfidence can lead to excessive risk-taking, and the ex-

⁷⁵ True ἀνδρεία, Plutarch says elsewhere, does not need bile or anger but can be mild: *De coh. ira* 458D–E. See Frazier, *Histoire et morale* 270–272; cf. J. Pinheiro, “La valeur de la *tolma* dans les *Moralia* de Plutarque,” in R. Hirsch-Luipold et al. (eds.), *Plutarch’s Religious Landscapes* (Leiden 2021) 208–225.

⁷⁶ In the account of the operations against the Achaeans Cleomenes is said, first, to “boldly challenge” them, *τολμηρῶς δὲ προκαλούμενος* (*Cleom.* 14.2), and in connection with this was admired for his θράσος (16.2); cf. the combination in *Cic.* 42.2. See also Frazier, *Histoire et morale* 272–275.

perience of success achieved in a risky situation may bolster the over-confidence even further, and aggravate a loss of behavioral control. It seems that such a combination is particularly negative for Plutarch, being elsewhere associated with criminals and wrongdoers.⁷⁷

Such a development is consistent with Cleomenes' natural predisposition as we have explored it in the previous sections: an excessive tendency to risk-taking and a weakness to engage in activities that are dangerous or highly subject to chance can be seen as developed, especially in unfavorable conditions, from a novelty-seeking and impulsive temperament (478–479 above). The Stoic instruction, which locates impulses in the chain of mental states rather than in the body or the non-rational part of the soul, could well—from Plutarch's perspective—cause serious mishandling, if not aggravation, of Cleomenes' impulses. Over-confidence, in turn, is essentially an overestimation of one's actual ability to perform tasks successfully, excessive certainty in the accuracy of one's beliefs, and failure to distinguish inferences from assertions.⁷⁸ This is precisely one of the consequences of Stoic ethical-psychological teaching for a person who is already predisposed to intense affective states (485 above). Plutarch seems to have reasoned that, if an impulsive and ambitious person is supposed to regulate passions with reason, rather than see the affective states as something separate and from a distance, they will land in the very same place from which they started, probably with a strengthened state and perhaps with a different name given to that state.

In sum, while Cleomenes' σωφροσύνη and related traits are explained by Plutarch as expressions of Cleomenes' φύσις, despite the degenerate *milieu* in which he lived and his lack of ethical

⁷⁷ Plut. *De sera* 548E: delayed punishment “strengthens the wrongdoer in confidence and boldness,” αὔξει δὲ θρασύτητι καὶ τόλμῃ τὸν μοχθηρόν; cf. Pinheiro, in *Plutarch's Religious Landscapes* 220.

⁷⁸ Cf. the definition in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2018), <https://dictionary.apa.org/overconfidence>.

education, his over-confidence and tendency to risk-taking seem to have emerged from the interaction between Cleomenes' natural endowment and external factors—and no factors are spelled out or implied by Plutarch other than the teachings of Sphaerus. In other words, Plutarch's mention of Sphaerus' influence on Cleomenes seems to possess an explanatory significance; it highlights and provides a necessary factor that needs to be introduced if Cleomenes' attitudes and behavior are to be understood. By portraying Cleomenes' personality as testified to by his deeds, Plutarch sought to define the factors that made the king what he was, and his Academic view on early Stoic ethical psychology seems to have offered a likely explanation. Ultimately, for Plutarch, Stoic instruction represented a deeply problematic and inadequate kind of ethical training.

6. *Conclusion*

In this paper I have explored how, in Plutarch's account, Cleomenes' natural predispositions combined with the nurture that he received resulted in the specific traits of the king's personality and attitudes. In particular, I have combined an analysis of Plutarch's notions of personality development and structure with close reading of the relevant sections of the *Cleomenes*. I have endeavored to shed new light on the poorly explored notion of *μεγάλη φύσις* that features in the passage about Sphaerus, as well as on Plutarch's thinking about the specificity of *φιλοτιμία* in connection with Stoic teachings. As I hope to have shown, the information provided by Plutarch on Cleomenes' contact with Sphaerus represents an integral and necessary part of the explanation of the king's personality and actions. In addition, I have highlighted how coherent and systematic Plutarch is in his application of his theory of the soul and personality structure and development to the presentation and analysis of Cleomenes' personality. My enquiry has also revealed how Plutarch's negative view of the Stoic doctrine expounded in the *Moralia* is put to operative work in the *Life*, and translates into a description of the development of an actual psychic apparatus of a specific individual. In doing so, I hope to have advanced our understanding

of Plutarch's characterization of Cleomenes, as well as the various nuances in his conception of the development of the human personality in general.⁷⁹

September, 2025

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⁷⁹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments and suggestions, which have greatly improved this paper.