Plutarch is not an uncritical biographer. Not only do his “rogue-heroes” come in for severe criticism—one thinks of the couples Demetrius & Antonius, and Lysander & Sulla—there are quite a few others who receive a rap on their knuckles. But his *Lives* of Flamininus and Aemilius Paullus come close to hagiography. A clear sign of this is that he selected two admirable Greek heroes as their “parallels”: Philopoimen as counterpart of Flamininus, and Timoleon of Aemilius Paullus.

One would have expected Plutarch to mark more distance from these two Roman commanders as it was they who prepared the way for the complete domination of Greece by the Romans. When he composed these *Lives* he had a profound knowledge of the history of Greece in relation to Rome. He knew better than most Greeks of his day that their forefathers had had a very hard time under the Romans from 146 BC onwards; Roman proconsuls had filled their coffers and their villas with the treasures of Greece, Roman tax-farmers (*publicani*) had exploited the economic resources of the Greek cities and countryside, Roman armies had fought their battles on Greek soil, the most catastrophic for the Greeks being Sulla’s campaign against the troops of Mithridates in 97–96 BC. It is true that in Plutarch’s own day the Greeks had learned to live with the reality of Roman domination which was not unpleasant in so far as it guaranteed them peace and prosperity. But Plutarch knew that the magistrate of a Greek *polis* did not wield any real power. As every Greek city was subject to the Roman *proconsul*, the local magistrate had simply to act the part written for him.

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1 Christopher Pelling has helpfully given a critical reading to this paper and suggested some improvements. By sending me her paper Suzanne Said helped me to relate the last part of mine to hers.

2 Plutarch composed his series of *Parallel Lives* between AD 95–120, the last twenty-five years of his long life: see Jones (1966) 74.

3 Plutarch reports Sulla’s impudent robberies of the sanctuaries in Olympia, Epidaurus and especially Delphi (*Sulla* 12.5–9), and his sack of Athens (*ibidem* 14.5–7). About the rapacity of Roman governors in general he is explicit in *Cato Maior* 6.2–4 and *Cic.* 52.3.
by the powers-that-be, and to imitate actors who act their part listening to the prompter. Why, then, was Plutarch so full of admiration for these two Roman commanders who had established Roman power in and over Greece? To this question I present four answers, of which the first, second and third, although not new, are nevertheless worth repeating here; the fourth has not been suggested earlier. Plutarch himself would certainly agree with the first three. Perhaps he would be surprised by the fourth and agree with it in the end.

They were men of high moral standing

A first reason for his admiration is certainly that Plutarch considered both Roman commanders to be men of high moral standing. Participants of this conference do not need to be reminded that his intention in composing biographies is in the first place an ethical one. In his proemium to Aemilius Paullus and Timoleon he makes this intention even more clear than elsewhere:

By concentrating upon this kind of inquiry and engaging ourselves in the writing of it we instruct ourselves as we store in our souls the memories of the most excellent and famous men. If the engagement with the past confronts us with something vile, immoral or less than noble, we can shake that off and direct our minds to the noblest paradigms of virtue. From this group of eminent men I now have selected for you the lives of Timoleon the Corinthian and of Aemilius Paullus, men who by the moral choices they made, as well as by the happy outcome of their actions, will bring us to ask ourselves whether their splendid results may have been reached by their good luck more than by their moral wisdom.

Plutarch admires Aemilius’ restraint as he never touched any of the Macedonian treasures (28), he praises his independence of mind, as he

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4 *Praec.* 813E–F. See the discussion by Lukas de Blois in vol. I, pp. 30–34.
5 Plutarch insists on the moral purposes of his biographical activity also in *Alexander* 1.1–3, *Nicias* 1.5, *Pericles* 1.4–2.4. For a thorough discussion of these (and some other) passages see Duff (1999) 14–42.
6 *Proem.* 5–6: ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ περὶ τὴν ἱστορίαν διατριβή καὶ τῆς γραφῆς τῇ συνηθείᾳ παρασκευάζομεν ἕναντι τὰς τῶν ἁριστῶν καὶ δυσκοιμιάστων μνήμας ὑπωδεχομένους ἂν ταῖς πνευματικαῖς, εἰ τι φαίλον ἢ κακοίης ἢ ἀγεννές ὄλος ὑμῶν συνόντων ἣν ἄναγκης ὑμῶν προσβαλόντων, ἐκχυροῦσιν καὶ διωθεῖσθαι, πρὸς τὰ κάλλιστα τῶν παραδειγμάτων ὑποστηρίζοντες τὴν διανοιαν, ὅτι τὸ παρόντι προσεχειμεθέντα σοι τὸν Τιμολέοντος τοῦ Κορινθίου καὶ τὸν Αἰμιλίου Παύλου βίον, ἀνήδων οὐ μόνον ταῖς αἱρέσεσιν ἄλλα καὶ ταῖς τύχαις ἀγαθαῖς ὄριοις κεχρημένοιν ἐπὶ τὰ πρόχειμα καὶ διηματιβήτησιν παρεξέντον, πότερον εὐποτίμα μᾶλλον ἢ φρόνησιν τὰ μέγιστα τῶν πεπραγμένων κατορθοθοι.