Genres and Their Implications:
Meddlesomeness in *On Curiosity* versus the *Lives*[1]

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obviously, the *Moralia*, or at least the group of writings within that corpus which Ziegler (col. 637) labelled Plutarch's "popularphilosophisch-ethischen Schriften." It is often interesting and instructive to compare Plutarch's treatment of one and the same virtue or vice in both groups of works, as has recently been done, for example, concerning anger.[2] Yet on the other hand some of the vices Plutarch dedicated a whole work of the *Moralia* to do not recur in the *Lives* at all. Ἀδολεσχία, for instance, is mentioned only regarding Alexander in the *Lives*,[3] and then does not have the same, negative sense it has in *On Talkativeness*. Or again, it is said only once of a protagonist that he is subject to compliance (δυσωπία),[4] on which Plutarch wrote a work as well. Why, then, did Plutarch find these vices important enough to write a whole treatise about them, and why do they receive little to no attention in the *Lives*?[5]

The current paper focuses on πολυπραγμοσύνη. This case is somewhat more complicated, in that the word πολυπραγμοσύνη does occur in the *Lives*, yet it is never, as will be shown, applied to a protagonist in the sense it has in *On Curiosity*.[6] In a first part, this paper therefore analyses what exactly Plutarch

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2   See, for example, Nikolaidis 1991, 172; Alexiou, 101−113; Duff, 87−89 and 210−215.
3   *Life of Alexander* 23.7.
4   Viz. *Solon* 14.7. Note that in *Brutus* 6.9, Plutarch has the protagonist deem nothing more disgraceful than to be subject to compliancy.
5   The *terminus post quem* for *On Curiosity* is Domitian's death in 96. See Jones, 72. Dumortier − Defradas, 263 assign the work to "l'époque de Trajan", Inglese 1996, 29− 30 talks about "tra il 100 e il 120", taking into account the relative chronology. Although it therefore cannot be counted among the early works of Plutarch, many of the *Lives* were written still after *On Curiosity*, so Plutarch did 'know' πολυπραγμοσύνη as intended in *On Curiosity* when writing at least some of the *Lives*.
6   The work, number 97 in the *Catalogue of Lamprias*, has not been treated often or extensively by scholars in the past. Known to me are, except for the − mostly short − introductions accompanying the editions of Helmbold, Dumortier − Defradas, Pettine,

had in mind when adhibiting the word πολυπραγμοσύνη in *On Curiosity* and the *Lives*. In the second part, it explores some of the implications of the fact that *On Curiosity* and the *Lives* belong to different genres in an attempt to explain why none of the protagonists of the *Lives* is represented as subject to πολυπραγμοσύνη in the way that word is understood in *On Curiosity*.

1.1 At the beginning of *On Curiosity*, Plutarch defines πολυπραγμοσύνη as follows:

> ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη φιλομάθειά τίς ἐστιν ἀλλοτρίων κακῶν (515D)[7]

Πολυπραγμοσύνη is here defined as "a desire to learn (φιλομάθεια) other people's (ἀλλοτρίων) evils (κακῶν)". The three constituting elements of this definition are given further attention in the rest of the work. In a first part (§1b–3a)[8], the stress is on the *polypragmōn's* interest in *other people's* affairs: *polypragmones* cannot bear to look into their own souls. After that, the focus is shifted towards the *polypragmōn's* preference for *evil* things (§3b–6, esp. 516D–F, 517F, and 518A). Dubious genealogies, seduced virgins, adulterous wives, indicted processes, internecine struggles: these are the topics that carry away his interest. The third, and longest part of the work (§7–16) shows the *polypragmōn's desire to learn* 'at work': his life is completely dominated by *polypragmosynē*, in that he neglects his duties, is obsessively busy with searching out other people's evils, reacts impulsively or mechanically to whatever he happens to notice, and, consequently, has no control over his life.[9] This last part of the work also contains the most elaborate therapy for *polypragmosynē*:

> μέγιστον […] πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πάθους ἀποτροπὴν ὁ ἐθισμός, ἐὰν πόρρωθεν ἀρξάμενοι γυμνάζωμεν ἑαυτοὺς καὶ διδάσκωμεν ἐπὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐγκράτειαν· καὶ γὰρ ἡ αὔξησις ἔθει γέγονε τοῦ νοσήματος κατὰ μικρὸν εἰς τὸ πρόσω χωροῦντος. ὃν δὲ τρόπον, εἰσόμεθα περὶ τῆς ἀσκήσεως ὁμοῦ διαλεγόμενοι (520D).

> the greatest factor […] to avert this affection is habituation: starting from its beginnings, to train and teach ourselves to acquire that self-control. It is, in fact, through habit that the disease has come to increase, advancing, as it did, little by

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and Inglese (1996), studies by Hense, Ingenkamp, Volpe-Cacciatore, Walsh, and Inglese (1995). None of these studies, however, gave attention to the difference in use of the word πολυπραγμοσύνη in the *Moralia* versus the *Lives*.

7 Unless indicated differently, for *On Curiosity*, all text quotations are taken from the edition of Pohlenz, all translations from Helmbold, whereas for all other ancient works, both texts and translations are taken from the *Loeb Classical Library*.

8 §3a ends in 516D5 after the words βόσκουσα καὶ πιαίνουσα τὸ κακόηθες.

9 This is not only elaborated theoretically – the *polypragmōn*, Plutarch states (§12), is guided not by his reason but by his senses –, but also shines through gramatically, when Plutarch uses verbs in the passive mode. See, for example, τραχηλιζομένους καὶ περιαγομένους (521B), and διαφορουμένης (521C).

little. How this habit is acquired, we shall learn when we discuss the proper training (520D).[10]

From this passage, it is clear that what Plutarch has in view is not so much a concrete act of curiosity, but rather a 'disease' developed (αὔξησις ἔ9ει γέγονε τοῦ νοσήματος) over a longer period of time. In a first stage, the *polypragmōn* reads every inscription he encounters. Then he starts prying into other people's houses. When the disease develops further, the *polypragmōn* wants to be around when something happens on the marketplace, is unable to resist when a successful show takes place at the theatre, when there is excitement in the stadium or the hippodrome, or when a friend invites him to come and see a (pantomimic)[11] dancer or a comedian. Finally, he demands to hear and see everything that concerns himself as soon as possible.

The overall impression, then, is of a man who is 'hanging around' in town, and will stop people just in order to learn the latest news (519A), irritated if there is none.

On a more abstract level, Plutarch interprets *polypragmosynē* as an affection (πά9ος, 520D, 522B−C), and more specifically as a bad affection, related to envy (φ9όνος, 515D and 518C) and *Schadenfreude* (ἐπιχαιρεκακία, 518C). As such, Plutarch vehemently pleads against it as being shameful (αἰσχρόν), harmful (βλαβερόν), and painful (λυπηρόν) − what Aristotle saw as the criteria for avoidance.[12] As has been shown by Ingenkamp, these criteria are of primary importance in Plutarch's *Seelenheilungsschriften* as well: the demonstration that the reader's behaviour meets the criteria of avoidance instead of choice, showing the danger and shame resulting from it, are to make the reader feel distressed, and thus incite him to change his behaviour. What Plutarch offers the reader with his work *On Curiosity*, is a therapy against *polypragmosynē*, comprising three stages. The first step (§1b−3a) directly urges the reader to actively examine and ameliorate his own soul. Yet as some people do not dare (οὐχ ὑπομένουσιν, 516C) to look into their own souls, the second remedy (§3b−6) proposes nature and history as more interesting topics to direct one's attention to. Nevertheless, as nature is not bad and history not recent enough for the *polypragmōn*, this remedy is bound to fail as well. The conclusion must be that *polypragmosynē* should be done away with quite radically, by thoroughly

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10 I modified Helmbold's, 501 translation. See also the following note.
11 Liddell − Scott − Jones s.v. ὀρχηστής give "later esp. *pantomimic dancer*", the specific word for this kind of dancer being παντόμιμος. Plutarch, however, never uses παντόμιμος, and apart from that, the sequence of highly popular forms of entertainment in which ὀρχηστής appears here, makes it likely that it denotes a *pantomimic* dancer. On the popularity of pantomime, see Seneca, *On Anger* 1.20.8.
12 See Ingenkamp, 74−5. Note that the same criteria, albeit much less systematically, are already mentioned by Plato, *Republic* II 363e−364a.

changing one's behaviour. The remedy proposed last in *On Curiosity* (§7–16) therefore contains some very concrete advice for real-life situations in which people reveal their being subject to *polypragmosynē*.

1.2 In the *Lives*, πολυπραγμονεῖν/πολυπράγμων/πολυπραγμοσύνη occur no more than thirty-two times (on a total of some 115 occurences in all of Plutarch's works).

Of these already few occurences, only two apply directly to the hero of the life in question. In the first case, Camillus, asked by the Romans to come back from Ardea, says to be ready to do so if they elect him as their general, while being careful not to meddle (πολυπραγμονήσειν, 24.3) with anything without a command.[13] In the other instance, Eumenes does not openly take up a standpoint in the quarrel between the soldiers and the officers after Alexander's death, explaining that it is none of his business since he is no Macedonian (ὡς οὐδὲν αὐτῷ προσῆκον ξένῳ ὄντι πολυπραγμονεῖν ἐν ταῖς Μακεδόνων διαφοραῖς, 3.1).[14] In both cases, the hero explicitly rejects a πολυπραγμοσύνη which would take him to carry out or meddle in something which he has no (institutional, respectively natural) reason to busy himself with.

On the other hand, the heroes of the *Lives* often curtail other people's πολυπραγμοσύνη. Aemilius (*Aemilius* 13.6) tells his soldiers not to meddle (πολυπραγμονεῖν) but to leave the war to him, and so does Pompey (*Caesar* 33.5) tell the people. Demetrius, on the other hand, starts a war against the Aetolians because he notices that his people obey him on expedition, but are turbulent and meddlesome (πολυπράγμονας ὄντας, *Demetrius* 41.1) at home. Antony gets involved in a war because of his wife Fulvia's proclivity to intrigues (φύσει μὲν οὖσαν πολυπράγμονα, *Antony* 30.4). Alexander grapples with the same problem in a better way: he honours his mother but does not allow her to meddle in affairs (οὐκ εἴα δὲ πολυπραγμονεῖν, *Alexander* 39.12).[15] Sulla addresses the senate in order to prevent the senators from concerning themselves (μὴ πολυπραγμονεῖν, *Sulla* 30.4) with a slaughter taking place simultaneously at his command. Pompey simply bribes the people with a distribution of lands so as to make them tame and indistinctively (οὐδὲν

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13 A very similar case is *Agis* 12.3, where Plutarch talks about the limits of the ephors' power in Sparta: when both kings are in agreement, it would be unlawful (παρανόμως) for the ephors to meddle (πολυπραγμονεῖν) disobliging the kings.

14 Cf. also *Eumenes* 3.14: Perdiccas is there said not to interfere (μηδὲν… πολυπραγμονοῦντος) in Eumenes' arrangements of the affairs of Cappadocia.

15 Πολυπραγμοσύνη and related words are repeatedly used by Plutarch to refer to women meddling in men's affairs. See *Pyrrhus* 29.12, *Agis* 7.5, and *Comparison Lycurgus-Numa* 3.10.

πολυπραγμονῶν, *Pompey* 48.3) approve of the decisions he proposed to be voted.

More generally, the mob is repeatedly characterised as meddlesome. Pericles, for example, takes measures in order to lighten the city of this idle and meddlesome mass (πολυπράγμονος ὄχλου, *Pericles* 11.6).[16] Hand in hand with this meddlesomeness goes a tendency for revolutionary ideas, as is clear from the combination of the verbs πολυπραγμονεῖν and νεωτερίζειν, which occurs twice in the *Lives* (*Phocion* 29.5, and *Artaxerxes* 6.1).

What Pericles also tries to restrict, at a certain point, is the Athenians' imperialism (περιέκοπτε τὴν πολυπραγμοσύνην, *Pericles* 21.1), urging them towards a more defensive policy: he foresaw that they would ruin themselves by undertaking too much (πολυπραγμονοῦντες, *Comparison Pericles-Fabius* 2.3), as it indeed turned out. In other *Lives* as well, Plutarch uses πολυπραγμοσύνη and related words to refer to imperialistic policies of various people.[17]

In the *Life of Crassus*, Vibius sends out a slave to provide Crassus with food when the latter had hidden himself in a cave. He orders the slave to put the food nearby without investigating anything, threatening to kill him in case he does (προειπὼν πολυπραγμονοῦντι θάνατον, 4.4). Πολυπραγμονεῖν here refers to wondering about things one should simply accept.[18] Finally, there are two passages in the *Lives* where people are eavesdropping and purposely over-hearing things which do not regard them. One of them is Caesar's barber, who thus finds out about a plot against his master (ὠτακουστῶν καὶ πολυπραγμονῶν, *Caesar* 49.4). The other passage is about the traitors who moved among the Syracusans in order to overhear other people's talks (πολυπραγμονοῦντες, *Dion* 28.1) and report the news to the tyrants.[19]

1.3 Plutarch, then, uses πολυπραγμονεῖν/πολυπράγμων/πολυπραγμοσύνη, in both *On Curiosity* and the *Lives*. Etymologically, the words point to busying oneself (-πραγμονεῖν) a lot (πολυ-).[20] 'Busying oneself' refers primarily to a physical activity, but by extension also to a mental one. 'A lot' means with

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16 A similar characterisation of the mob is to be found in *Coriolanus* 20.3.

17 See *Cimon* 16.2, *Sulla* 5.6, and also *Phocion* 27.8.

18 So do the people in *Pericles* 23.1: although Pericles presented the people with a bill containing dubious expenses, they make no problems (μὴ πολυπραγμονήσας) and carry out no investigation. In the case of Rome, the nobles do not allow the multitude to inquire about or busy themselves with (οὐδὲ πολυπραγμονεῖν, *Romulus* 27.8) Romulus' disappearance during a storm at the end of his life.

19 In a positive variant, Lycurgus encourages the young Spartans to exert social control (πολυπραγμονεῖν, *Lycurgus* 18.4) by making them observe and comment on their fellow citizens. Also, the inquiry (πολυπραγμονοῦντες, 19.6) by the Achaean horsemen under Philopoemen's command after they had abandoned him to the enemy, is presented as justified.

20 For a short survey of its possible meanings, see also Demont, 28.

more than one's own things or more than one is supposed to busy oneself with – antonymous to τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν. For indeed, the common denominator behind all uses of the word seems to be the opposition of self and others: carrying out one's own versus someone else's tasks, ruling oneself versus ruling others, self-scrutiny versus 'scientific' research or versus meddlesomeness, etc.

Yet the uses and meanings of the word in *On Curiosity* and the *Lives* differ quite thoroughly. In *On Curiosity*, Plutarch adhibits the words in a particular, ethical–philosophical sense: the *polypragmōn* is a man frequenting public places in order to get and give information about others; a man with a preference for evils, which connects his πολυπραγμοσύνη with bad affections as envy and *Schadenfreude*; a man who slanders and reveals secrets. Such πολυπραγμοσύνη is a mental inquiry into the wrong object.

The *Lives* present a wholly different picture. Here πολυπραγμονεῖν /πολυπράγμων/πολυπραγμοσύνη are used mainly with political implications: carrying out someone else's tasks, imperialism, meddling with political decisions by people who ought not to, sycophantism – these are what πολυπραγμονεῖν refers to in the *Lives*. Conversely, references to πολυπραγμοσύνη as a mental inquiry are rather scarce. Vibius' slave, and Caesar's barber are two examples.[21] What also catches the eye, is that none of the heroes of the *Lives* is a πολυπράγμων: Camillus and Eumenes explicitly refuse to undertake an action which could be interpreted as political πολυπραγμοσύνη, and in many cases, as we have seen, heroes (try to) restrict other people's πολυπραγμοσύνη as well.

The word πολυπραγμοσύνη, then, does occur in the *Lives* as well, but is never applied to the protagonists in the sense it has in *On Curiosity*. Conversely, to my knowledge, none of these protagonists is described in another terminology to exhibit the characteristics of *On Curiosity*'s *polypragmōn*.[22]

2. The difference in the use of 'πολυπραγμοσύνη', then, is too clear-cut to be the result of pure chance. All the more so, as it is striking how few[23] –

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21 The only other instances of πολυπραγμοσύνη as a mental inquiry in the *Lives* are quoted in note 18 above. Note, however, that Plutarch here uses the verb πολυπραγμονέω, which, much better than the adjective πολυπράγμων, can denote a once-only instance of *polypragmosynē*.

22 Περιεργία, which is sometimes used as a synonym for πολυπραγμοσύνη in *On Curiosity*, occurs but four times in the *Lives*, and is said about someone else than the protagonist (*Pompey* 55.3 and *Alexander* 2.9), or used in another sense (*Gracchi* 2.4), or, once, explicitly denied for the protagonist (*Demetrius* 12.8). For Plutarch's lost treatise Περὶ περιεργίας, see Volpe-Cacciatore, 143, n. 60.

23 Apart from Odysseus and Socrates, Cyrus and Alexander are the only ones. Rusticus, on the other hand, is a contemporary example.

compared, that is, to Plutarch's usual practice in most of the popular–philosophical writings of the *Moralia* – are the historical examples of either bad or good attitudes concerning the vice under discussion given in *On Curiosity*.[24] All this begs for an explanation. More specifically, one wonders why none of the protagonists of the *Lives* is (represented as) a *polypragmōn*, although Plutarch on the one hand apparently found *polypragmosynē* important enough to dedicate a whole work to it, and, on the other hand, did have an eye for the vices of the protagonists of the *Lives*. This is the question the next pages will try to answer.

2.1 *On Curiosity* and the *Lives* are clearly different kinds of writings. In line with this, they are the heirs of different traditions. It is noteworthy that these traditions apparently tended to conceive of πολυπραγμοσύνη in different ways as well.

Thus, the senses that πολυπραγμοσύνη takes in the *Lives* recur in historiographical works. Herodotus (*Histories* 3.15.5), for example,[25] applies the word to the behaviour of Psammenitus, the Egyptian king who was captured by Cambyses but, having gained admiration, enjoyed a good regime. Herodotus says of him that "had he but been wise enough to mind his own business (μὴ πολυπρηγμονέειν), he would have so far won back Egypt as to be governor of it". Instead, he raised a revolt among the Egyptians, and was therefore sentenced to death. The word was also used in historiographical works to denote the interfering of one city or state in another city's or state's affairs.[26] Thus, the opponents, both internal and external, of Athens' imperialism could use πολυπραγμοσύνη to denote that policy.[27]

The implementation of πολυπραγμοσύνη in *On Curiosity*, on the other hand, may have its roots in comedy. Several new comedies now lost had Πολυπράγμων as their titles,[28] and among the verses ascribed to Menander is the following:

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24 See also Nikolaidis (forthcoming), 4.
25 Another example can be found in Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.6.3.2.
26 Although Athens is the case in point par excellence, other examples can be given as well: Polybius (e. g. *Histories* 2.13.3) applied the word to Rome's foreign policy, and Isocrates (*Areopagiticus* 80.4) to the barbarians.
27 See for example Thucydides 6.87.3, Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 833, and Isocrates, *On Peace* 26.4, 30.2, 58.7, and 108.1. Allison pointed to the fact that the word πολυπραγμοσύνη occurs only a few times in fifth century literature. Although this is correct, the question of whether cities and people ought to interfere with others seems to have been a vexed one at the time. As a result, many scholars have discussed it. See esp. Ehrenberg, Adkins, 311−317, and Demont, esp. 191−252.
28 Inglese 1996, 16 n. 23, lists the authors. Note also that Plutarch himself in 515D inserts a comic verse reproaching the *polypragmōn*.

πολυπραγμονεῖν μὴ βούλου ἀλλότρια κακά.

Don't inquire into other people's evils! (*Monostichoi* 1.583/703).[29]

The clearest parallel for *polypragmosynē* as intended in *On Curiosity*, however, is to be found in a passage of Philo – in an ethical passage of a philosophical work, that is. For indeed, Philo describes the worthless man (ὁ φαῦλος) as hurrying (μετατρέχει) to every possible meeting of people, and exhibiting a meddlesome curiosity (πολυπράγμονος περιεργίας) about other people's (ἑτέρων) affairs, envious (φθονεῖν) if they are good, joyful (ἥδεσθαι) if bad.[30]

   Although Plutarch, as all authors, certainly has been influenced by his own reading, to propose this as the only, or even the main, reason why he used the word πολυπραγμοσύνη in *On Curiosity* and the *Lives* in the way he did, would be to go back to 19th and early 20th century *Quellenforschung*, reducing Plutarch to and explaining him from his 'sources'. Fortunately, scholarship has gone a long way since, showing Plutarch to be much more original and autonomous than had often been assumed.

   Yet on the other hand, it is true that Plutarch, to my knowledge at least,[31] does not 'invent' qualities for his heroes. Theoretically, it *is* therefore possible that the only reason why Plutarch does not characterize any of the heroes of his *Lives* as a *polypragmōn*, is that they had not been characterized as such before him. This, however, does not resolve, but only defer the problem: the question remains why they had not been represented as such before – if not by early authors, who wrote at times when πολυπραγμοσύνη was not yet being used in an ethical sense, then at least since Menander. Moreover, even if authors before him did not label it so, Plutarch could have interpreted the behaviour they ascribed to certain historical figures as *polypragmosynē*.

2.2 If, thus, the 'sources' offer at best a partial explanation, what else can be said that matters to our question? Why is none of the protagonists of the *Lives* subject to the affection (πάθος) *polypragmosynē*, although they all *are* so to other affections? What, in other words, distinguishes *polypragmosynē* from, say,

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29 My translation. On curiosity in Menander, see Mette.

30 *On Abraham*, 20–21. Like Plutarch in his *On Curiosity*, Philo here interprets πολυπραγμοσύνη in an ethical sense: he opposes the worthless man to the man of worth (ὁ δ ' ἀστεῖος), stresses the importance of learning to draw distinctions, and explains the interest in evil things by reference to affections. Notwithstanding, Philo did not dedicate an entire writing to the subject, nor propose any concrete solution for it, let alone a therapy enabling and teaching his readers to come to that solution.

31 Cf. Pelling 1980, and idem 1988, 284 and n. 5.

ambition or anger[32] in a way so as to make the former, contrarily to the other affections, unfit for a hero?

In *On Curiosity*, as was shown above, Plutarch presents the *polypragmōn* as a man who, for want of better things to do, loiters about in town nosing into other people's affairs, and rejoicing when these are evil. The picture Plutarch draws is not only one-sided, focussing exclusively on *polypragmosynē* at the expense of any other characteristics, but even caricatural.[33] For indeed, the *polypragmōn* staged in *On Curiosity* is worse than any really existing person:[34] continuously and exclusively focussed on other people's evils, he has no business of his own to take care of at all. As such, the *polypragmōn* is not realistic, does not exist. And what is more, part of *On Curiosity*'s effectiveness depends upon this fact:[35] the reader, who exhibits some of the behaviour of the *polypragmōn* but is, on the other hand, his better, is encouraged to distance himself even further from a figure presented in so repulsive a way. If, then, the readers of *On Curiosity* estimate themselves 'above' the *polypragmōn*, then they definitely estimate the heroes of the *Lives* to be so, as these are not only (at least supposed to be)[36] real human beings, but eminent ones.

For indeed, the fact that Plutarch wrote their *Life* implies that they were historically important enough to make it to the annals of history, and therefore, they would have made it to the top. In order to do so, they would

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32 Note that Plutarch does not term the imperialism of, say, Alexander, πολυπραγμοσύνη – a meaning that word could easily have in a political or military context –, but sees it as part of his φιλονικία or φιλοτιμία – which implies self- instead of other-centredness. In line with what will be said in a moment about πολυπραγμοσύνη and narrative, this confirms that Plutarch conceives of his protagonists' imperial ambitions as (part of) their goal in life, and not as yet another aim. On ambition in the *Lives*, see, e.g., Frazier, Duff, 83–89, and Stadter (forthcoming).

33 Compare also the fact that Plutarch implemented πολυπραγμοσύνη in a quite idiosyncratic way. For indeed, apart from the fact that he was the first author to dedicate a whole treatise to πολυπραγμοσύνη, he was the only one to lay so much stress on, for example, the duration of πολυπραγμοσύνη and the fact that it is an affection. Πολυπραγμοσύνη as conceived of by Plutarch in *On Curiosity* appears nowhere else in Greek literature in so elaborate a way.

34 Precisely this may have made the *polypragmōn* such an interesting character for comedy (cf. above, n. 28), especially if one takes into account Aristotle's comments in *Poetics* 2, 1448a16–18 on the difference between comedy and tragedy regarding the imitated object. On this passage, see Else, 82–89.

35 What Pelling 1995 wrote in another context regarding Plutarch's ethics thus applies here as well: "There is evidently a two-way process here, with audience ready for the text, and the text affecting the audience." (p. 247).

36 For *Theseus and Romulus*, see Pelling 1999.

have needed so much time and energy as to leave none for trivialities as the ones the *polypragmōn* goes after. This is confirmed in *On Curiosity*:[37]

> καθάπερ γὰρ ὁ Σωκράτης παρήνει φυλάττεσθαι τῶν βρωμάτων ὅσα μὴ πεινῶντας ἐσθίειν ἀναπείθει καὶ τῶν πομάτων ὅσα πίνειν μὴ διψῶντας, οὕτω χρὴ καὶ ἡμᾶς τῶν θεαμάτων καὶ ἀκουσμάτων φυλάττεσθαι καὶ φεύγειν ὅσα κρατεῖ καὶ προσάγεται τοὺς μηδὲν δεομένους. ὁ γοῦν Κῦρος οὐκ ἐβούλετο τὴν Πάνθειαν ἰδεῖν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ Ἀράσπου λέγοντος ὡς ἄξιον θέας εἴη τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς εἶδος, οὐκοῦν, ἔφη, διὰ τοῦτο μᾶλλον αὐτῆς ἀφεκτέον· εἰ γὰρ ὑπὸ σοῦ πεισθεὶς ἀφικοίμην πρὸς αὐτήν, ἴσως ἄν με πάλιν ἀναπείσειεν αὐτὴ καὶ μὴ σχολάζοντα φοιτᾶν καὶ θεᾶσθαι καὶ παρακαθῆσθαι προέμενον πολλὰ τῶν σπουδῆς ἀξίων. ὁμοίως οὐδ ' ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος εἰς ὄψιν ἦλθε τῆς Δαρείου γυναικὸς ἐκπρεπεστάτης εἶναι λεγομένης, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὴν μητέρα φοιτῶν αὐτῆς πρεσβῦτιν οὖσαν, οὐχ ὑπέμεινε τὴν νέαν καὶ καλὴν ἰδεῖν. (*On Curiosity* 522A)

> For as Socrates used to advise the avoidance of such foods as tempt us to eat when we are not hungry and such drinks as tempt us to imbibe when we are not thirsty, so we also should avoid and guard against such sights and sounds as master and attract us without fulfilling any need of ours. Thus Cyrus was unwilling to see Pantheia; and when Araspes declared that the woman's beauty was worth seeing, Cyrus said, "Then this is all the more reason for keeping away from her. For if, persuaded by you, I should go to her, perhaps she herself might tempt me, when I couldn't spare the time, to go to see her again and sit by her, to the neglect of many important matters." So too Alexander would not go to see Darius' wife who was said to be very beautiful, but although he visited her mother, an elderly woman, he could not bring himself to see the young and beautiful daughter.

Cyrus and Alexander did not go to see a beautiful woman, for fear they might be tempted to do so again when they had no time (μὴ σχολάζοντα),[38] and thereby neglect matters worthy of attention. Cyrus' words and Alexander's deeds reveal not only that they have more important things to do,[39] but also that they are aware of this fact and live accordingly.[40] The *polypragmōn*, on the contrary, is not taken by any serious activity. Yet the process is double-edged, and the disease self-reinforcing: from being distracted by inscriptions on one's

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37 Cf. also the *Comparison of Aristides and Cato*, 4.2, where Plutarch, talking about poverty because of soberness, industriousness, righteousness, and braveness, writes that "it is impossible for a man to do great things when his thoughts are busy with little things" (οὐ γὰρ ἔστι πράττειν μεγάλα φροντίζοντα μικρῶν).

38 On Cyrus' self-control regarding pleasure (ἡδοναί), see Xenophon, *Cyropaideia* 8.1.32, and on this passage and the importance of timing in matters of pleasure, Foucault, 69.
   In his essay *How to Study Poetry* 31C, Plutarch gives Cyrus' behaviour towards Pantheia as an example to be followed by those who are easily enamoured. There, the stress is more on avoiding one's passions to be kindled, here, on spending time – which one may not have – at things one does not need.

39 For σχολάζειν/σχολή, see Stocks, Mikkola, Solmsen, and Demont, passim.

40 Odysseus, whom many readers might think to be a *polypragmōn*, is another example: he does indeed ask the women he sees in Hades after all kinds of things, but never forgets the aim of his descent into the underworld, nor his ultimate aim, to reach Ithaca. As a result, Plutarch presents him as an example not of a *polypragmōn*, but of the contrary.

way, the *polypragmōn*, over reacting to all stimuli indifferently, ends up having no time for better things,[41] absorbed as he is by his *polypragmosynē*.[42] *polypragmosynē* stands in the way of the great achievements[43] reached by men whose biography Plutarch would therefore want to write. The activities of the *polypragmōn* on the one hand and of the protagonists of the *Lives* on the other, then, are in a certain way mutually exclusive.

2.3 On a more technical level, the narrative character – typically telling the story of a series of logically/chronologically related events[44] – of Plutarch's *Lives* makes *polypragmosynē* not so suited as an affection for the protagonists. For indeed, whereas the *Lives* largely have a linear progression between their protagonists' birth and death, *polypragmosynē* as understood in *On Curiosity*[45] by definition implies the absence of a (more or less) straight line, the *polypragmōn* always being distracted from what he was heading for. Plutarch indeed describes the *polypragmōn* as so fussy about whatever he happens to encounter, that he appears as a person loitering around without *any* aim, just waiting for anything (bad, preferably) to happen.[46] Quite the contrary goes for the protagonists of the *Lives*: they have high aspirations, well-defined objectives, clear goals – as is typical not only for people who made it to the top, but also, more technically speaking, for narratives.[47]

The narrative of the *Lives*, then, supposes progression, and this progression is largely dependent on their protagonists' strivings. Whereas other affections

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41 διατριβαί, 515D, 515E, 519F, and 521D.
42 διατρίβειν, 517E; οὔτ' ἀσχολεῖται, 518A; ἀσχολούμενοι, 518E; πολυπραγμονῶν […] περιπατεῖ, 519A.
43 See, for a very clear example, Plutarch's advice to the *polypragmōn* to list all his achievements in § 10.
44 For a discussion of narrativity, see Van Gorp – Delabastita – Ghesquiere, 295–296, and Baldick, 165–166.
45 *On Curiosity* is clearly not a narrative work. Notwithstanding, it does contain some narrative anecdotes. The historical ones, as has been noted, are much less frequent, however, than in other, kindlike works of the *Moralia*. On the use of narrative anecdotes in non-narrative literature, see Nash. See also the next note.
46 This is not in contradiction to what was said above about Plutarch sketching the *development* of *polypragmosynē*: Plutarch does not tell the story of (part of the life of) a *polypragmōn*, he proposes different steps of a therapy which correspond to certain acts that are typical for *polypragmones* in general. For example, Plutarch does not say that "after and/or because of having read inscriptions on walls, *polypragmōn* X turned to nosing into people's houses, and was ruined in such and such way as a result of it", but that "it is not difficult to accustom oneself to not nosing into people's houses, as that generally brings no advantages".
47 See Propp, esp. 80, Greimas, esp. 172–191, Toolan, 93–96, and Rosenboom, 25–42.

may cross the heroes' main ambitions,[48] *polypragmosynē* does not merely cross, but ends them: the *polypragmōn* does not act, but merely re-act.[49] As the end of ambition would, in the *Lives*, imply the end of progression, *polypragmosynē* is not suited as an affection for the narrative texts that the *Lives* are.

3. A double conclusion can be drawn from the foregoing. On the one hand, asking the question of why none of the protagonists of the *Lives* is represented as subject to πολυπραγμοσύνη as that word is understood in *On Curiosity* has led to a better understanding of what exactly that word does mean in the latter work. More specifically, it has become clear that the *polypragmōn* as sketched in *On Curiosity* is a caricature, and, moreover, that the effectiveness of the work at least partly depends upon this. Furthermore, the present study has also shown *polypragmosynē* to be something both 'below' the heroes of the *Lives* and unfit for the narrative genre that the *Lives* are.

On the other hand, this implies that genres may play a – sometimes major – role in determining how certain words are used, how certain ideas are evoked: making the *polypragmōn* a caricature was useful in order for the treatise *On Curiosity* to affect its readers' behaviour. The fact that certain affections can whereas other ones cannot be discussed in certain kinds of texts should, conversely, be a warning for the interpretation of 'historical truth' about people's characters: even if a protagonist of the *Lives* would have exhibited an aspect of the *polypragmōn*'s behaviour, *polypragmosynē* was not an interesting affection to be discussed in a narrative text. In case Plutarch has, in this matter, undergone heavy influence from his sources, this warning extends to these sources as well.

In line with this, it would be interesting to examine the degree up to which the fact that the *Moralia* and the *Lives* are different kinds of texts had a bearing on the ethical programme Plutarch treats and promotes, and if, for example, what has been said here about *polypragmosynē* goes for affections such as talkativeness and compliance as well. Do the *Moralia* and the *Lives* present the same canon of virtues? If so, to what extent did genre-conventions

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48 For indeed, the fact the protagonists of the *Lives* are guided by their goals, does not mean that they (all) actually reach their goals, or that they cannot be deflected from pursuing it by certain affections. In fact, it is this very fact that makes them into interesting subjects for Plutarch's ethical project. Plutarch indeed renders negative characteristics as well, without, however, being malicious. See also Duff, 58–59, and Swain, 146, about Plutarch's own practice in the *Lives*. Anger, conversely, is an example of an affection well suited for narrative: something happens to the protagonist; the protagonist gets angry and strives for revenge; he either punishes his wrongdoer or tragically meets with disaster heroically – but in any case, there is a strong causal and temporal progression.

49 Many verbs are indeed in the passive mode.

influence the concrete implementations in both groups of works? Or if not: what role did genres play in this? Yet not only are these different questions, answering them would also exceed by far the scope of this paper. With my contribution, however, I hope to have given an example concerning one affection, and shown what results can be expected.

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