

Chapter 2

'Lives' as parameter: the privileging of ancient lives as a category of research, c. 1900

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In their 'Orientation', Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher speak of ancient biographies as 'telling receptions of creative work' that reward close analysis as finely wrought items in their own right. They do so with a view to the consequences that this ought to have for our own attitude towards the biographical, as ancient sources and modern tool alike. This 'we' behind 'our attitude' presumably refers not only to the modern reader, artist and writer but also to the classical scholar, and the scholarly literature on ancient biography itself thus warrants equal attention as an act of reception, no less telling or finely wrought.

For those in need of an introduction to ancient biography, Momigliano's *The Development of Greek Biography* (1976; 1993) remains in many ways the reliable and deserved go-to work. A close look at Momigliano's careful historiography and bibliography suggests that there was in fact a whole cluster of German works roughly around 1900 that signalled particular interest in the nature of *bioi* as a genre, a cluster represented for example by the studies of Bruns 1896, Leo 1901, or Misch 1907. German academic fashions can have a long life themselves, and this group of work is even now regularly referred to in the literature on ancient biography. This peak, at the turn of the century, of interest in biography and the biographical as a form of interpretation of ancient works is a story that is itself revealing about the parameters of classical scholarship and its relationship to creative practices.

Allowing for reservations and modifications, Momigliano's work engages closely with the question about the importance of an Aristotelian and Peripatetic model for the development of Hellenistic and ultimately Roman-era biographical writing, essentially the argument of Friedrich Leo's *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (1901). For Leo, the teleological thinking about character that distinguished the Peripatos was at the root of a subsequent forking into two 'traditions': on the one hand that of the Alexandrian grammarians and their compilations of lives, an attitude that later still gave Suetonius a grid of categories on which information could be variably distributed; and on the other hand the narrative elaboration of a Plutarch who aimed at presenting the 'overall image of a personality'.¹

¹ Leo (1901) 187.

Momigliano shrewdly picks up that Leo's Alexandrians, set on compilation, on classification and on a 'scientific form that disregards beauty and rhetorical strategies of representation,'² bear a touching or ironic resemblance to Leo's own generation of scholars as workers in the vineyard of positivist history. His Alexandrians could be students of a Mommsen-like Aristotle-figure, who had left to them the details of data-collecting that still needed completing, and Momigliano even goes to the length to quote an 1884 article by Hermann Usener on the 'organization of scientific work' in the Academy and Peripatos, where Usener made the parallels with current scholarly practice explicit.³

This shared scholarly ethos could be said to extend to subject matter as well. William Clark has shown in his recent *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (2006) that classical scholarship, as the rising star of institutionalization, came with a measurable fashion, which peaked at mid-nineteenth century, for a type of dissertation that would take a little-known writer, and collate his fragments, biographical sources, and testimonia as fully as possible: a type, in other words, that generated a veritable industry in prosopography as a qualifying disciplinary practice.⁴ Clark links this suggestively, though all too briefly, with contemporary Romantic notions of authorship and individuality, but also with the cultivation of an institutionalized individualism that was tamed, cumulative and collective, and thus not unlike the ethos which Leo, too, suggests in his view of the scientific biographers of antiquity.⁵

That modern scholars like to hint at affinities with their Alexandrian counterparts is not unusual (though it is often glossed over). F.A. Wolf in his *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795) had put an 'original' text of Homer in doubt, or at any rate beyond recovery, and had instead made the ancient scholars of Homer our actual first recoverable point of contact with the Homeric poems. For Wolf, the ancient scholar thus stands at the point of our intersection with all earlier sources, invested with similar interests as that of Wolf's own time, when classical philology had begun to rise to the top of the hierarchy of disciplines.⁶ Yet Leo's typology of ancient biographical writers does something in

² Leo (1901) 178.

³ 'There are enough indications that the early Peripatetics collected biographical material, wrote definite biographies, and generally stimulated what we call Alexandrian scholarship. But anyone who reads Leo's chapters on the Peripatos carefully will have to admit that Leo sees Aristotle as an ancient Mommsen urging his pupils to do what he had no time to do himself and creating the conditions for new branches of learning to develop', Momigliano (1993) 20, with reference to Usener (1884) on the Academy and the Peripatos.

⁴ Clark (2006) 227.

⁵ Clark (2006) 210-11.

⁶ On Wolf's relative 'invention' and the undoubted rise of *Altertumswissenschaft* as a discipline, see

addition, which is no less important for the engagement of classical scholars with the biographical: his division into the scientific, no-frills accounts of the grammarians versus the extended narrative of Plutarch's *Lives* where aesthetic effect is one of the chief structuring principles, is a distinction that pits *Wissenschaft* against art (*Kunst*), and the scholar (*Wissenschaftler*) against the writer (*Schriftsteller*). Scholarship on biography is then ultimately also a form of commentary on the role and identity of the scholar, a role that could easily come into conflict, or at least tension with that of the artist. Clark has recognized the strong biographical focus that was reflected in the practices of classical scholarship and exemplified in the standard format of a doctoral thesis that collated the works, fragments, and testimonia of individual authors. Clark rightly suggests that this could be linked to external, non-academic notions of artistic individuality, too, but he does not spell out the particular tensions that would result, tensions over the status of the scholar vis-à-vis the creative energy that Hanink and Fletcher see mobilised in the engagement with the biographical, ancient and modern. As I hope to show, some of the research around 1900 on ancient lives as a genre, does itself address these issues of fictionality, historiography, and self-perception quite explicitly.

One of the key operative terms for the content and the constitution of the discipline of classical scholarship had been that of *Bildung*, the notion of education, development, cultivation, or formation of the self. This notion had given the study of antiquity much of its conceptual traction in the academic and cultural landscape since the late eighteenth century, and might help to articulate some of the priorities and structural assumptions of the field.⁷ The *Bildung* of the scholar and the modern individual, as much as the *Bildung* of antiquity as a whole and of its own individuals, operated as mirror concepts. *Bildung* was thus integrated as the *raison d'être* of classical scholarship, as the object of study and as the effect of studying alike. In the logic of a new educational model, inflected by a developing historicism, charting history meant charting *Bildung* as it manifested itself in individual epochs and with regard to individual nations and societies. To define the character of antiquity, therefore, was to describe its biography, and to understand and comprehend its *Wesen* (its essence, character, or being). Wilhelm von Humboldt articulates this as a programmatic goal in his essay *On the Study of Antiquity, and of Greek Antiquity in Particular* (1793):

The study of a nation offers all the advantages which history has in general, namely to increase our knowledge of human beings by examples of actions and events, to sharpen our power of judgement, and to improve and raise our character. Yet it

most recently Harloe (2013).

⁷ It is, of course, arguable that *Bildung* as a part of neo-Humanist rhetoric became an increasingly empty placeholder as academic specialization and research culture took over; for a literature review and an argument for the staying power of the concept of *Bildung*, see Güthenke (2014).

does more. In trying not only to unravel the thread of successive events, but rather to explore the condition and the state of the nation altogether, this kind of study gives us a *biography*, as it were [italics Humboldt].⁸

Humboldt's mirroring of *Bildung* and biography is symptomatic for the central role given to the biographical, and it suggests that Classics as a discipline was lastingly indebted to making a biographical, developmental model significant for disciplinary self-understanding. As a rhetorical model, this meant a focus on an organic and developmental narrative arch, rather than simply on 'people' and their context.⁹ In other words, this German version of and investment in 'lives' is less like the micro-histories and recovered daily lives of the Annales School or the Miller's cosmos in Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), but would have sounded more like 'The Miller as a Manifestation of *Geist* and Progress'. In any case, by 1900 literary criticism, scholarly practice, and the disciplinary world were all invested in the biographical as a heuristic model of historical consciousness.

1900 is of course not 1800. What defines the later period is that in addition to a relatively stable and by now institutionalized discourse of *Bildung* there was strong momentum to define the Humanities as such vis-à-vis the Sciences. The end of the nineteenth century is the period that sees the arrival of the (particularly German) terminology of *Geisteswissenschaften*, the human sciences, as opposed to the natural sciences – a terminological split particularly elaborated in the work of the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who, while not a classicist in the strict sense, had enjoyed a traditional classical training and had also been a student of August Boeckh. His first large-scale publication in 1870, not coincidentally, was a biographical project, an extensive (and unfinished) *Life of Schleiermacher*, the philosopher, theologian and translator of Plato, a work that was widely read and well received, including by classical scholars.¹⁰

⁸ 'Das Studium einer Nation gewährt schlechterdings alle diejenigen Vortheile, welche die Geschichte überhaupt darbietet, indem dieselbe durch Beispiele von Handlungen und Begebenheiten die Menschenkenntniss erweitert, die Beurtheilungskraft schärft, den Charakter erhöht und verbessert; aber es thut noch mehr. Indem es nicht sowohl dem Faden auf einander folgender Begebenheiten nachspürt, als vielmehr den Zustand und die gänzliche Lage der Nation zu erforschen versucht, liefert es gleichsam eine *Biographie* derselben'; Humboldt (1968), 257.

⁹ For the strong presence of organic imagery in academic and non-academic writing of that foundational period, see also Vick (2002).

¹⁰ For readership and reception see Lessing (1988). This intellectual biography of a thinker and his age was intended to be published in at least two volumes, of which, as so often with Dilthey's works, only the first was published in complete form. Late in life, he tried (unsuccessfully) to finish both the

Dilthey's Human Sciences inhabit their own domain compared to other sciences, and within them biography and autobiographical sources carry most strongly what Laura Marcus has called the promise of a 'self-transparency of consciousness'.¹¹ Dilthey thus found a place for autobiography and biography as an explicit tool of *Wissenschaft* and as the quintessential example for the relationship between historiography, lived experience and interpretation. Dilthey worked towards an analysis of those branches of historical scholarship that are not or seem not to be covered by the same methodological precepts as the natural sciences. Their aim, ultimately, is the understanding of the meaning of human action and interaction, which amounts to an understanding of individuals in relation to each other and to an understanding of life in the sense of *lived experience*. This hermeneutic approach that emphasized *Erlebnis* (lived experience) stressed immediacy and the role of empathy as much as it acknowledged that interpretation and understanding rest on historical distance; in fact, it operated with a very paradoxical and complex relationship between the two.¹² What this means for Dilthey's understanding of historiography, most importantly, is that the individual of the past is the evident unit of historical study, and that lived experience is the element bridging past and present that enables scientific interpretation specific to the 'Humanities' in the first place. What this implied for historiography, including the history of literature, was an understanding of historical and artistic events that followed a (modified Hegelian) model of *Geistesgeschichte*: the spirit of the age was thought to manifest and crystallize itself in strong personalities, and the biographical description of such characters and their *Nachleben* was thus the appropriate method of interpreting literary works, since those formed part of the same manifestation – an outlook articulated, for example, in Dilthey's widely received works *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883) and *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (1905).¹³

Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften and the second volume of the Schleiermacher biography, as respective summaries of his overall theoretical and historical thought; see Makkreel (1994) 49-51. The drafts to the second volume (running to almost 800 print pages!) have now been published as volume 14 of Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*.

¹¹ Marcus (1994) 147. For the importance of Dilthey's comments on autobiography, see also Popkin (2005), 17-19.

¹² See, for example, Morat (2008), 101-118.

¹³ A little later, works such as the Goethe biography (1920) by Friedrich Gundolf, professor of German literature and member of the circle around the poet Stefan George, as well as his works on Shakespeare and Caesar, would be representative of this notion of *Geistesgeschichte* as scientific method (and work of art, in the case of the George circle in particular), as much as of the success of historical biography as an extraordinarily successful genre of popular literature in the decade(s)

Dilthey's voice, though influential, was not a lonely one. If we look at the national philologies of the time and their notion of literature as a field of scientific inquiry, the 'author biography' had become a normative exercise already before Dilthey, and across Europe.¹⁴ Saint-Beuve's parameter of *l'homme et l'oeuvre*, for example, is a popular formula that makes clear how intimately the terms of biography and literature were connected (as modern terms);¹⁵ but Dilthey's stress on the *Wissenschaft* of the human spirit also exacerbated the underlying tension between the scholar and the creative writer. This was not only because of the comprehensive theory-making on his part; but also because once the distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences rested on the assumption that the Humanities' mode of interpretation is different from the rational standards of scientific proof, emphasising a cognitive and psychological leap in order to interpret art and the artist, then the relation between scholar and artist was implicitly also opened up for debate. This is the frame in which the Humanities scholar, the *Geisteswissenschaftler*, is both emphatically unlike the creative writer or artist and at the same time linked to the creative acts of writers across historical distance through the pursuit of human interpretation that is qualitatively different from the epistemological conditions and practices of the natural sciences. Identifying as a professional scholar, the philologist and historian of the turn of the century could have his scientific cake and eat it with an acknowledged, even if ambivalent sense of its creative value. Biography, as method and content, could in this context map perfectly onto the task of the *Geisteswissenschaftler*.

MISCH'S HISTORY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY (1907)

The first part of Georg Misch's *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, published in 1907, dealt specifically with antiquity. Misch, by institutional appointment a philosopher, had written his *Habilitation* under the supervision of Dilthey, who also (not untypically for German academic filiation) became his

around 1900. Dilthey focused mostly on artists and thinkers, unlike the members of the George circle, who expressly include statesmen (Barbarossa, Caesar etc.) in their purview.

Gundolf in turn had considerable impact on the classicist Albrecht Dihle's work on biography in the 1950s, who reprises the theme of Socrates as a charismatic personality and model for the auto/biographical tradition; on contextualizing the latter, Momigliano (1993), 16-21.

¹⁴ For the biographical in German literary studies, see Kruckis (1994).

¹⁵ Jefferson (2007) argues in detail that the terminology of biography and literature would, from the mid-late eighteenth century develop as critical terms in corrective dialogue with each other. She treats both as quintessentially modern notions, with ramifications for disciplinary development as much as for concepts of authorship.

father-in-law.¹⁶ According to Misch's emphatic belief, his was an academic age of auto/biography, making his work a timely one: 'The renewal of the *Geisteswissenschaften* in the nineteenth century also brought a specialization of the scientific interest in autobiography' (4).¹⁷ Misch identifies the term autobiography as a modern parameter that carries in its wake specific standards and expectations about a developed sense of self. Assuming a quasi-Aristotelian human tendency towards expressiveness (*Lebensäusserung*), a desire which describes its own historical trajectory as the 'great spectacle of a continuous development of spirit/mind' (*grosse[s] Schauspiel einer kontinuierlichen geistigen Entwicklung*) (66), Misch sees this tendency reflecting the narrative of a path of Western civilization from Egypt to the Ancient Near East, to Greece and Rome. Autobiographical writings thus are the sources for tracing the 'sense of individuality of western humankind' (*Persönlichkeitsbewusstsein der abendländischen Menschheit*) (5), and on this point Misch explicitly quotes Dilthey: 'Autobiography is the highest and most instructive form in which we encounter an understanding of life'.¹⁸ In the third, heavily revised and expanded edition of 1949, Misch extends his praise of autobiography as a tool of historical empathy and hence understanding to the usefulness of biography as its second-in-command, and as the mode that is properly situated in the realm of *Wissenschaft*:

In remembering facts, the autobiographer experiences a spontaneous resurgence of emotions and tendencies that were part of the original experience; the heterobiographer by contrast needs to bring a high degree of imagination and empathy in order to offer a re-presentation of such feelings stimulated by the telling of past events, in a way that is not artificial. After all, he who writes the history of his own life sees its totality before him and the meaning it contains.¹⁹

¹⁶ For a detailed, yet succinct, account of the impact of Dilthey on Misch, see Mezzananza (1999-2000).

¹⁷ 'Mit der Erneuerung der Geisteswissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert spezialisierte sich das wissenschaftliche Interesse an der Selbstbiographie'.

¹⁸ 'Die Selbstbiographie ist die höchste und am meisten instruktive Form, in welcher uns das Verstehen des Lebens entgegentritt', Dilthey (1910) 10.

¹⁹ 'Im Autobiographen steigen zugleich mit den Tatsachen in der Erinnerung spontan die Gefühle und Strebungen wieder auf, die zu dem einstigen vollen Erlebnis gehörten, wogegen der Heterobiograph einen hohen Grad von Phantasie und Einfühlungsvermögen haben muss, um in seiner Darstellung solche Regungen unverkünstelt zu vergegen-wärtigen, die durch die geschilderten Ereignisse ausgelöst wurden. Schliesslich hat, wer es unternimmt, die Geschichte seines eigenen Lebens zu schreiben, dieses als ein Ganzes vor sich, das seine Bedeutung in sich trägt', Misch (1949) 9-10.

And yet, Misch's monumental study also reveals a tension: on the one hand there is his insight that ancient biography is in many ways radically different from his or for that matter our expectations of the biographical as a narrative unfolding of character development; on the other hand, there is his desire to see Greek writing as a highly developed stage of accounting for the individual self in the modern sense. The solution which he proposes to resolve this tension is a strategy that had been used by scholars since the late eighteenth century and one which he would continue to share with some of his successors, too. This was to treat *bioi* as a genre whose roots were in philosophy – and to stress Socrates and Plato as the figures who could somehow guarantee that modern parameters of individuality and of the biographical would remain applicable to ancient materials.

The Socratic example seemed to put a narrative of personal development and the reflective, examined life centre-stage, linking the individual with the universal. The relation of the soul with a higher order of things is imagined as an ultimate moment of empathy and understanding writ large – in short, a historical hermeneutic based on lived experience is rediscovered and rewritten as a philosophical *eros*, that leaves a text such as Plato's *Symposium* as the basic expression of an individually representative 'history of the soul' (*Seelengeschichte*) – and that imagines such a lived experience, reflected in autobiographical-philosophical discourse, as an 'effect of love' (*Liebeseffekt*), in which rational thought is transcended by way of the power of intuition.²⁰

Another example shows even more strongly how Misch's insight into the difference of ancient biographical materials struggles with his overarching paradigm – even in the case of Plato and Socrates. This is the case of Plato's *Seventh Letter*, which is allotted a remarkable forty-four pages in the third, expanded edition of the *History*.²¹ The authenticity of the letter, one of a good dozen transmitted in the Platonic corpus, has been and continues to be a bone of contention, though Misch is representative of his time when he treats its authenticity as a matter of (recent) contemporary academic consensus (even though not a unanimous one).²² The orientation of the letter, which Mary Lefkowitz discusses later in this volume from the perspective of Plato's own

²⁰ Misch (1907) 82.

²¹ Misch (1949) 114-158. That Misch should give so much room to Plato's letter indicates his continuing engagement with this particular author and the role of Plato as a central figure for intellectual history in classical scholarship.

²² The consensus Misch speaks of is a question of majority opinion rather than absolute consensus, though; for an overview of the (mostly German) literature before the 1910s, see Hackforth (1913), esp. 84-131. Hackforth himself defends the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter*. The discussion is on-going.

intellectual development, is strongly biographical: it is organized around Plato's ostensibly autobiographical account of his visits to the court of Dionysius II, tyrant of Syracuse, and his entanglement there with political intrigue as much as his educational effort at making Dionysius a philosopher-king on behalf of his peer and rival Dion, who in turn becomes an important reference and friendship figure for Plato. (The fact that Plutarch's *Dion* seemed to complement the letter by offering similar biographical materials only cemented the place of that epistle in the gallery of texts treated as essentially biographical in tone and content.) That we appear to be dealing here with a Plato drawn between the spheres of public, political life and the intellectual world of the academy might well have given the text extra urgency for a scholarly readership preoccupied with the standing and role of the institutionalized academic, bringing into even greater focus how attractive the figure of the (Platonic) philosopher seems to have been as a model of identification and projection for the modern scholar.

When we read carefully, though, it becomes clear that Misch is himself critically aware that the material cannot simply be used for a biography of the philosopher 'as some eminent classical scholars want it to be' (126). Misch himself leaves open the question of authorship, and he is sceptical about what constitutes true 'biographical' or autobiographical elements:

That Plato does not fashion himself as the philosopher the same way he fashions Dionysius as the tyrant and Dion as the ideal statesman may seem quite true to life to the modern reader, who considers himself closest to the reality of life when he sees a man in all his inconsistencies. But to approach this apologia with such a positivist understanding of realism means to misunderstand altogether its literary character and to sever its link with the realm of Platonic philosophy. Analysis shows that the material is deliberately shaped: just not out of the entirety of Plato's personality, but instead in pieces, according to the stances he takes and the roles he plays. We are handed parts of an image of Plato, yet without the intellectual and spiritual bond that unites them. [...] All together this suggests to us that self-representation has a different function than the one we are familiar with: it does not include the autobiographical intention which to us gives a certain philosophical dignity to self-presentation, namely to understand life from life itself.²³

²³ 'Einem modernen Leser, der der Wirklichkeit des Lebens am nächsten zu sein glaubt, wenn er den Menschen mit all seinen Widersprüchen sieht, mag es lebenswahr erscheinen, dass Plato sich nicht als den Philosophen stilisiert wie Dionys als den Tyrannen und Dio als den idealen Staatsmann. Aber mit diesem positivistischen Begriff von Wirklichkeit an die Rechtfertigungsschrift heranzugehen, bedeutet, ihren literarischen Charakter in sein Gegenteil verkehren und ihre Verbindung mit der platonischen Gedankenwelt zerreißen. Wie die Analyse gezeigt hat, ist der Stoff bewusst geformt:

Misch, for sure, acknowledges that the *Seventh Letter* may show a Plato whose complexity we can understand as a modern phenomenon, but that the *Letter* does not fit his own, modern, categories as it ought to. Misch sees in the *Letter* material that seems disconnected and constructed with a clear agenda in mind, yet no real 'spiritual link' or narrative-reflective cohesion. His diagnosis, though, is not that which might now be ours, namely that ancient biography has its own rationale that might explain what to us looks disjointed. While Misch comes close enough to this position, he does conclude that the gulf between ancient and modern biography is not one of degree, to be bridged by the Socratic or Platonic narrative of the self, but that instead it is one of quality and of a historically differentiated functionality, which may render the grand arch of the development of the biographical, self-reflective account of Misch and others an inappropriate parameter. Rather, Misch's conclusion is that the claim of authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* must – unfortunately, for him, that much he admits – be wrong. The modern notion of auto/biography as a hermeneutic method of the kind Misch imagines it to be thus turns out to be dominant enough to shape the data, rather than let itself and its assumptions be worried by it. The modern expectations about individuality and its reflection in the biographical process override interpretation shaped solely by the textual record of antiquity, not so much because of an unreflected reliance on modern parameters or an unwillingness to acknowledge historical difference (quite the contrary in Misch's case), but rather because the biographical moment has come to enjoy a particular place within the method of philological interpretation (as modern) itself.

WILAMOWITZ' PLATO (1919)

One of the 'eminent scholars who want [the Seventh Letter] to be [authentic]' was certainly Wilamowitz, who offered his own 500-page strong biography of Plato in 1919 (and whom Misch might therefore have had very much in mind when he devoted this long section to the *Letter* in the 1949 edition). Wilamowitz' biographical study puts Plato the individual centre-stage and offers essentially a reflection of the identity of the modern scientist. His Plato is in some (or rather in many) ways an extreme; still, he seems to be symptomatic of the tensions and expectations that were invested in biography as a tool of interpretation. Wilamowitz's is also another such attempt, like that

nur nicht aus dem Ganzen von Platos Persönlichkeit heraus, sondern stückweis, je nach den Haltungen, in denen er sich vorführt oder den Rollen, die er spielt. Wir bekommen Teile eines Plato-Bildes in die Hand ohne ein geistiges Band [...] *Alles weist darauf hin, dass die Selbstdarstellung hier eine andere Funktion hat als die uns geläufige: sie schliesst nicht die autobiographische Intention in sich, die für uns der Selbstdarstellung eine philosophische Würde gibt, das Leben aus dem Leben selbst zu verstehen*', Misch (1949), 157-58 (italics mine).

of Misch and others before him, to establish Plato as the axis around which ancient biography can be made to fit a modern definition. In the process, Wilamowitz' Plato also turns out to be strongly characterized as a figure of the *Wissenschaftler* overcoming the desire to be an artist.²⁴

Wilamowitz reviewed Misch's *History* the same year it was published, and he fully acknowledged Dilthey's influence on it.²⁵ Following Misch, and in turn following Leo, he, too, commented on the strand of scholarly-scientific life writing of the Alexandrian kind – and he, even more explicitly, finds it surprisingly wanting. His criticism, in fact, amounts to the strongly worded and remarkably far-reaching claim that the Greeks simply never understood real individualism:

Learned/scholarly biography collects separate character traits, arranges them into categories and makes no real effort to connect them into a whole. The school of Aristotle, which knows so well how to observe and classify plants and animals, attempts the same for human beings. It perceives the particular, the character (it gave us the term itself), and traces them through an entire life as it is lived. But there is never enough attention to what is individual. ... Hellenistic scholarship knows how to see what is typical; but there is no progress in that. ... We must not deny that Greeks have never truly understood how to understand and grasp a man, just as they have not been able to produce true historiography. *The observer always remains aloof, instead of putting himself into the place of the other's soul* [my italics]. Instead of understanding, he praises or criticizes. What is more, another man is always treated as something finished, or whole, never as something in the process of Becoming. Where is there ever an insight into the complexities and tensions that are part of a rich soul and that together make up its true individuality?²⁶

²⁴ Wilamowitz is well aware of the anecdote of Plato's early aspirations as a dramatist, burning all his tragedies after his encounter with Socrates, recounted in Diogenes Laertius III.5.

²⁵ The review was published as 'Die Autobiographie im Altertum', in *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 1 (1907), reprinted in Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1972). In the scant literature on Wilamowitz and Dilthey, for example Oehler (1979), Wilamowitz is usually portrayed as entirely disconnected from the contemporary debate about the Geisteswissenschaften – unjustifiable so. For evidence to the contrary, Landfester (1979); Calder and Rugullis (1992).

²⁶ 'Die gelehrte Biographie sammelt Einzelzüge, ordnet sie nach bestimmten Kategorien und versucht kaum ihre Zusammenfassung zur Einheit. Die Schule des Aristoteles, die so vortrefflich Pflanze und Tier zu beobachten und zu beschreiben weiss, tut es auch für die Menschen. Sie erfasst die Kennzeichen, die Charaktere (sie hat dies Wort für uns umgeprägt) und verfolgt das Spezifische durch die ganze Lebensführung. Aber das Individuelle kommt dabei selten in Betracht, immer zu kurz. ... [124] Die Fähigkeit, das Typische zu sehen, bleibt der hellenistischen Wissenschaft; aber ein

There are two exceptions, though: tragedy, and, of course, Plato. For tragedy created 'entire human beings who let us experience how they became who they are' (*ganze Menschen, bei denen wir empfinden, wie sie so werden mussten*).²⁷

Wilamowitz' belief in Plato as a true and rare representative of individuality was only intensified in his biography of the philosopher, the main aim of which was to show Plato 'the man' (*den Menschen*). The focus is explicitly not on philosophical content or the details and system of Plato's philosophy; it is on the 'thinker' (*Denker*), not the 'thought' (*Gedanken*), thus echoing one basic form of the hermeneutic task since the early nineteenth century, namely that of understanding the author, rather than the work. Moreover, unlike the ancients' aloofness in their own biographical writings, Wilamowitz' method is emphatically to 'see the poet, with whose soul I try to empathize' (*So sehe ich den Dichter, in dessen Seele ich mich einzufühlen versuche*).²⁸ Wilamowitz grudgingly acknowledges that Plato himself may still display a remarkable lack of belief in individuality (meaning in strongly individual psychological developments), though he then counters this insight by appeal to the 'strong feeling' that is evident in Plato's writings, 'because Plato himself had such a strongly individual soul' (*weil Platon selbst eine so stark individuelle Seele besass*).²⁹ In other words, in spite of himself, Plato's own individuality cannot but break through.

By interpreting Plato as someone motivated by a desire for *Wissen*, Wilamowitz reformulates his, that is Plato's, *Wissenschaft* as the ultimate practice of knowledge: in turn, our own (and Wilamowitz') *Wissenschaft* is to understand Plato's *Wissenschaft* as inseparable from his biography: 'It is my task to show this Plato and this philosophy. The path he takes and prescribes for us is that of strict science'.³⁰ The 'highest and ultimate' (*Allerletztes und Höchstes*), however, cannot be scientifically proven (*ist wissenschaftlich nicht beweisbar*), but can be intuited, in a language that

Fortschritt wird nicht gemacht. ... Wir dürfen nicht verschleiern, dass die Hellenen, ebensowenig wie sie eine wirkliche Geschichtsforschung erzeugt haben, einen Menschen ganz wirklich aufzufassen nicht verstanden haben. Immer bleibt der Betrachter draussen stehen, wo er sich doch in die fremde Seele versetzen sollte. Statt zu verstehen, lobt oder tadelt er. Und immer ist ihm der Mensch etwas Fertiges, Ganzes, niemals wird er als etwas Werdendes betrachtet. Wo hätten sie je die Widersprüche erfasst, die sich in jeder reicheren Seele finden, und deren Vereinigung erst ihre Individualität macht?', Wilamowitz (1972) 123-24.

²⁷ Wilamowitz (1972) 124.

²⁸ Wilamowitz (1919) 454.

²⁹ Wilamowitz (1919) 470.

³⁰ 'Diesen Platon und diese Philosophie zu zeigen, ist meine Aufgabe. Der Weg, den er geht und den er weist, ist die strenge Wissenschaft', Wilamowitz (1919) 1.

is not accidentally Platonic itself, through inner experience (*angeschaut durch inneres Erleben*).³¹ At the same time, the Plato whose development Wilamowitz so painstakingly outlines, is the young man torn between the personal aspiration to become a poet, and the insight of his vocation as a teacher and thinker, which ultimately forces him to renounce the life of the poet. In a fundamental way, we are left again with the triad of *Wissenschaft – Erlebnis – Dichtung* popularized by Dilthey, simultaneously as method and object of study. The method discovers itself completely in the material it is applied to.

Platonic philosophy, the scholar's work, and the modern scholar's identity are thus all interdependent in Wilamowitz' late work, united in their focus on the trajectory of the life of the modern scholar, the ancient philosopher and of culture writ large. As Wilamowitz puts his imperative at the end of the opening chapter of the Plato biography: 'If a work of art is a piece of life, viewed through a temperament, or better through an individual human soul, then the correct interpretation of a whole work of art must be the same, and even more so the correct interpretation of a whole human life. However much we strive for scientific objectivity, nothing can change this'.³² It is easy enough to treat Wilamowitz' *Platon* as an atypical work: a work, as he himself readily admits, that breaks with the conventions or expectations of scholarship on ancient philosophy, and instead a deeply personal work that reflects a life-time of reading and growing with Plato, written during the upheavals of World War I and seen by Wilamowitz as both a form of consolation and an appeal for humanistic learning.³³ And yet, however much one wants to allow special pleading for the shape of the work as an outlier, Wilamowitz, who sees this work as a culmination, is explicit in his desire to maintain the claim of this art of interpretation for the side of *science*, that is to say the world of the regulated academy, and trying to keep it contained there:

Nobody will invest a good part of his life and his energy into a task of this kind if he did not love the man and his work; [...] The philologist is an interpreter, a translator, though not merely of words: he will not understand them fully unless he also understands the soul from which they spring. He has to be the interpreter of this

³¹ Wilamowitz (1919) 1.

³² 'Wenn ein Kunstwerk ein Stück Leben ist, gesehen durch ein Temperament, besser durch eine individuelle Menschenseele, so muss die rechte Interpretation eines ganzen Kunstwerkes dasselbe sein, und die Interpretation eines ganzen Menschenlebens erst recht. Daran ändert alles Streben nach wissenschaftlicher Objektivität nichts', Wilamowitz (1919) 9.

³³ Wilamowitz (1919) 9. For the context of Wilamowitz' attitude to the War and his implication in both nationalist fervour and internationalist disappointment, see Norton (2008).

soul, too. For that reason, biography is the true work of the philologist, raised to a higher level: it is a hermeneutic art.³⁴

Paradigmatically, Wilamowitz insists on the particularity of *Wissenschaft* as sharing in both the accountability of scientific method and the necessity for artistic energy, however different the latter looks from the world of poetic and artistic creativity beyond the academy. And, paradigmatically, this plea is prompted by the work of biography.

CODA

The person who more than anyone else had provoked Wilamowitz's outrage over the collapsing boundaries of science and art, or inside and outside of the academy, was, of course, Friedrich Nietzsche. If one runs the numbers (as Jonathan Barnes has done), then it becomes clear that the bulk of Nietzsche's own philological scholarship before the publication of the *Birth of Tragedy* and his decision to abandon the world of academia, was on ancient biographical materials of just the kind which Wilamowitz found so disappointingly lacking in a real sense of individuality.³⁵ That Nietzsche produced three substantial publications on the sources of Diogenes Laertius, dating from 1869 and 1870 and together making up one half of all his published *Philologische Schriften*, is more than coincidence: it shows instead that the concerns thrown up by making the individual life a meaningful and representative category for the interpretation of antiquity could, when they were retrojected onto the ancient materials available, lay bare tensions that reached across the whole spectrum of classical scholarship –including Nietzsche as much as Wilamowitz, whom we tend to cast as opposites (following their own lead), rather than see as part of a shared scholarly world.

Nietzsche's scholarship on Diogenes Laertius centred around a basic hypothesis: that Diogenes, writing his *Lives of the Philosophers* at the end of the third century AD, relied on the work of Diocles of Magnesia (whom he dates late to the first century AD), and in fact offered largely an *epitome* of his work, supplemented with a few other sources and with Diogenes' own epigrams. Importantly, the hypothesis also included, as Barnes points out, the notion that Diogenes' agenda was in fact that of a *poet* who felt the need to construct a scholarly frame in which to embed his real

³⁴ 'Niemand wird ein gut Teil seines Lebens und seiner Kraft an eine solche Aufgabe setzen, wenn er nicht den Menschen und seine Philosophie liebt; ... Der Philologe ist nun einmal Interpret, Dolmetsch, aber nicht nur der Worte; die wird er nicht voll verstehen, wenn er nicht die Seele versteht, aus der sie kommen. Er muss auch der Interpret dieser Seele sein. Denn weil sie ihre ganze Kunst im Interpretieren bewährt, ist die Biographie recht eigentlich Philologenarbeit, nur in höherer Potenz', Wilamowitz (1919) 4.

³⁵ For much of the following see Barnes (1986), with further references.

focus: his poetic epigrams on a range of philosophers – and that it was this that could be unpeeled as the true motivation for the narrative and analytical frame of the *Lives* (see also the contribution by Richard Fletcher, this volume).

Nietzsche himself would go on to follow some of his Classics colleagues in battling with an ambivalent image of Socrates as an 'academic'. His early scholarship is a good reminder, though, that at this intersecting point of the extremes of classical research around 1900 lies a preoccupation with the biographical: as a functional element in determining what classical scholars are meant to do, who they are, and what they are not. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, in *The Legend of the Artist* (1934), make reference to what they call 'enacted biography' – the effect of biographical, narrative expectation on the actual practices and self-imagination of artists.³⁶ To examine the attitude of scholars towards ancient biography might eventually lead us also to ask what our own generic conventions of scholars' lives are, how much they shaped and were shaped by ancient precedent, and how they might have been and still are interacting with disciplinary practices and expectations.

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³⁶ Kris and Kurz (1979) 132. Kris and Kurz only preview this field in the final paragraph of their essay, and they frame the issue of interdependency mainly in the language of psychology, rather than historical sociology or representation (not coincidentally, given Kris' experience and secondary career as a psychoanalyst and later as a researcher in that field): 'Biographical formula and life appear to be linked in two ways. Biographies record typical events, on the one hand, and thereby shape the typical fate of a particular professional class, on the other hand. The practitioner of the vocation to some extent submits to this typical fate or destiny. This effect relates by no means exclusively, or indeed primarily, to the conscious thought and behavior of the individual – in whom it may take the form of a particular 'code of professional ethics' – but rather to the unconscious. The area of psychology to which we point may be circumscribed by the label 'enacted psychology' (132).

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