

The embarrassment of imperfection: Galen's assessment of Hippocrates' linguistic merits

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Summary In antiquity the 'higher' study of medicine shared with many other disciplines a pronounced philological character. Galen both exploited this 'philological paradigm' and underwent its influence. He exploited it in that it enabled him to invest the *Corpus Hippocraticum* with a dignity comparable to that of Homer only. But his philological instrumentarium, originally designed for the study of literary texts, also forced him to pose and answer certain questions that shed no light whatsoever on the informational content of Hippocrates' writings, questions about Hippocrates' language and style. Galen disentangles himself from the ensuing embarrassment by claiming that Hippocrates' style was ideal for the specific didactic genre he was involved in. This special style necessitates a reassessment of customary grammatical and rhetorical values: correctness recedes into the background, clarity and brevity become the predominant virtues of style.

Introduction

When Galen set out to develop his own particular brand of Hippocratism, bolstering the second-century-AD medical state of the art with all the authority of the ancient master,¹ there could be no serious question as to how he was to set about this task: the obvious and traditional way to study Hippocrates was through philology. As a matter of fact, for several hundred years the 'higher', scientific type of ancient medicine had had a quite pronounced philological character.² Editions of the *Corpus Hippocraticum* had been and still were being prepared, lexicographical work had been going on at least since Herophilus and Bacchius³ and exegetical questions had been tackled at least

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¹ Cf. Temkin (1973) 33, Smith (1979) 91, 96, 106, 175 f., Manuli (1983) 474 f., *contra* Kollesch (1981) 9, I do not believe the difference between Hippocratic and Galenic medicine was quantitative only.

² Cf. Vegetti (1981) 48-52.

³ Ilberg (1890) 111 ff., Wellmann (1931) 1 ff., cf. Gal. *Linguarum seu dictionum exoletarum Hippocratus explicatio*, Prooem. (19 65 K).

from the days of Herophilus.⁴ Indeed, there was no ancient writer – except for Homer – who could boast an equally impressive amount of philological attention. Only Biblical philology was to outstrip both Homer and Hippocrates in this respect. All in all, technical philology, as developed for the study of Homer and other ancient literary paragons, seemed the perfect instrument to unravel the complex knots of the Hippocratic tradition, for the tradition of the works ascribed to Hippocrates posed problems very similar to the ones encountered in Homeric studies.⁵

When the poems of Homer, Hesiod and the Orphic cosmogonies first elicited comment (from the sixth century BC onwards), they were judged and valued for their cognitive contents at least as much as for their literary merits, and their first commentators were philosophers. However, as grammarians and rhetoricians claimed an increasingly large role in linguistic studies, the emphasis shifted to purely grammatical and stylistic matters, although ‘Realienforschung’ never ceased to form part of the grammarians’ work, and there was a continuing strong influence from philosophical quarters. But, nevertheless, technical philology as developed by the great Homeric scholars of Alexandria and passed on to the ancient doctor-grammarians, was primarily an instrument for the study of literary and/or poetic texts from a literary and/or poetic point of view.

Poets like Homer were studied by grammarians and rhetoricians alike – in fact, their disciplines not only had a considerable mutual influence on each other, but are often rather hard to distinguish from each other in practice. There is no clear-cut borderline between the work of the grammarian and that of the rhetorician. The more strictly grammatical approach would concentrate on two sets of problems: providing reliable texts was the ‘diorthotic’ or text-critical part of the grammarians’ job, studying grammatical correctness in general (*Hellénismos* or *Latinitas*) would constitute their main other topic. For the proper execution of both tasks they would rely heavily on the so-called ‘Kriterien der Sprachrichtigkeit’,⁶ implemented differently for *diorthôsis* and for the study of *Hellénismos*. In both cases they would tackle problems by applying a rational principle, either their common sense or a set of acknowledged grammatical rules (*ratio* or *analogia*). Further they would use an empirical criterion, viz. their knowledge of the specific idiom of the author they were dealing with (in *diorthôsis*), or their knowledge of contemporary educated usage (for studies of *Hellénismos*). This criterion is usually referred to as *sunêthêta* (*consuetudo*, ‘ordinary usage’). The third main criterion is called *paradosis*, (*traditio*, ‘tradition’). For diorthotic purposes this means previous editions of

⁴ Mewaldt (1909) 129, Deichgraber (1965) 320 f.

⁵ Mewaldt (1909) 131 ff.

⁶ Siebenborn (1976), Sluiter (1990) 54-61.

⁷ For the connection between *historia* and *paradosis*, cf. Deichgraber (1965) 126 ff., 298 f.

the work of the author in question, with the learned comments, if any, by earlier scholars. In the studies of grammatical correctness, this criterion would encompass the literary tradition at large. The results of *historia* could be relevant here, too.⁷ The authority of great writers from the past, Homer most prominent among them, was used to legitimize the use of certain locutions. In a sense, 'tradition' is, of course, no more than 'everyday educated usage from the past', so that it is quite closely related to the empirical criterion of *sunêtheia*. But the *palαιοi* (*veteres*, the 'ancients') were regarded with special respect. Incidentally, these sets of criteria need not be mutually exclusive: some grammarians (e.g. Apollonius Dyscolus) combined both in their linguistic studies.⁸

Thus, the 'grammatical' approach concentrated on textual criticism and the study of grammatical correctness. Rhetoricians, on the other hand, focused on a stylistic analysis, gravitating around the theory of the virtues and vices of style. And their results, too, would leave traces in (predominantly grammatical) scholia and other ancient literary studies. Especially in the case of Homer – although this holds good for other poets as well – we find that the status of being a poet warranted an almost reverential circumspection: what would constitute a fault or a mistake in a lesser author would be styled a figure of speech in Homer and was held to contribute to his stylistic superiority. In the case of deviations from normal linguistic usage an appeal could also be made to poetic licence, as well as to the ultimate (and related) expedient of *metri causa*. And Homer's authority would be enough to uphold the claims of any such deviant usage against (or alongside) the normal colloquial one.

All in all, there were strongly literary and purely linguistic elements in the technical instrumentarium Galen inherited when he started his impressive *œuvre* – which can essentially be described as the result of a continuous process of intertextuality *vis-à-vis* the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. Instead of simply going its own way, Hippocratic philology never ceased to undergo the influence of contemporary developments in its literary counterpart. Galen himself was a very accomplished philologist.⁹ He shows great acumen and a steady hand in applying the tools of this trade. But the very nature of these tools, primarily

⁸ Blank (1982, 12 ff.) has pointed out that there is a marked similarity in the epistemological position of the contemporaries Galen, Claudius Ptolemy and Apollonius Dyscolus. All three combine rational and empirical elements in their theory of knowledge. Galen, of course, projects this attitude (with all three criteria) backwards to Hippocrates (*In Hippocratis Prorrheticum I commentarii* 1.15 [16.550 K.]) '() adding rational judgement to his results obtained by research of the sources and his own observations' (οἷς ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας ἐμάθε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐθεάσατο τὴν λογικὴν κρίσιν προσθεῖς), cf. Deichgraber (1965) 49. For Galen's epistemological position, see further Frede (1981). For a more exclusive concentration on the two main ingredients (rational and empirical) of this epistemology, see *De methodo medendi* 4.4 (10.272 K.), Frede (1981) 77.

⁹ Cf. von Müller (1891), I have been unable to see von Müller (1892).

designed for the analysis of literary texts, entails certain consequences for the questions Galen tends to ask. He is almost obliged to pass a verdict on Hippocrates' literary merits, his style, and even the purity of his language. This corresponds to the more rhetorical and the more grammatical approaches distinguished above. In commenting on these aspects, however, Galen does show an awareness of the incongruity of his linguistic strategy with the mainly cognitive interest the Hippocratic texts provoke. The ensuing tension is the topic of this paper. In the remainder of this article I will investigate Galen's linguistic report on Hippocrates, encompassing some of his comments on grammatical, stylistic and literary characteristics found in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, his defence of what he found, and the consequences for his personal stylistic ideal. My findings may be seen as an illustration of the way in which medical studies conformed to an essentially language-oriented scientific paradigm of antiquity.

1 *Galen on Hippocrates' language and style*

On a number of occasions Galen comments fairly explicitly on the purity of language and the style of 'the great Hippocrates () who was considered the best doctor and prosaist among the Greeks themselves'¹⁰ Where lexical and syntactical purity are concerned, Hippocrates' record may not be altogether impeccable, but Galen stages a very determined defence, even to the point of declaring that a particular instance of inaccuracy was contrived on purpose to stimulate the alertness of his readers!¹¹ Moreover, he uses the frequent occurrence of linguistic mistakes or faulty constructions in any work as an argument against its authenticity.¹² In accordance with normal grammatical theory, Galen distinguishes three major kinds of 'grammatical' mistakes: barbarisms (mistakes on a phonological level), solecisms (mistakes affecting the meaning and construction), and *akurologia*, the improper or inaccurate use of single words.¹³ To the best of my knowledge he never accuses Hippocrates of com-

¹⁰ *In Hippocratis librum De fracturis commentarii* 1 1 (18B 324 K), on Galen's account of Hippocrates' style, see Manuli (1983) 473.

¹¹ *In Hippocratis De articulis librum commentarii* 1 24 (18A 352 f K), cf *In Hippocratis librum De medici officina commentarii* 1 5 (18B 665 K).

¹² E.g. *In Hipp Prorrhēt comment* 1 4 (16 511 ff K), *ibid* (16 514 K), *In Hippocratis Aphorismos commentarii* 5 62 (17B 865 K), *ibid* 7 69 (18A 183 f K). 'well, this inaccurate use of nouns and verbs is an indication that this aphorism, too, is a false addition' (αὐτὴ τοῖνυν ἢ περὶ τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ τὰ ῥήματα χρῆσις ἄκυρος ἐνδείκνυται παρεγκέισθαι καὶ τοῦτον τὸν ἀφορισμὸν). Cf for many examples of this kind of argument in textual criticism, Broucker (1885) 421 ff.

¹³ Sluiter (1990) 23 n 91, cf Gal *De pulsuum differentis* 2 5 (8 587 K) βαρβαρίζεις () σολοικίζεις () κακῶς καὶ οὐ κυρίως ὀνόμασας. For these three types of faults, cf e.g. Polybius of Sardes, *De barbarismo et solecismo* (ed A. Nauck, *Lexicon Vindobonense*, Hildesheim 1965 [repr. of Petersburg 1867], 283 1 ff), Ps-Herodianus, *De solecismo et barbarismo*, *ibid* 295 5 ff.

mitting a barbarism,¹⁴ and the occasional solecism in a work of undisputed authenticity is waved aside because Galen feels it does not at all affect our understanding of what is intended.¹⁵ A good example is the indifferent use of the feminine or masculine gender for the word *lithos*, 'stone'. Galen ridicules the exaggerated reaction of purists, who cry out at each allegedly misconstrued 'stone', as if they had been knocked on the head with it. In fact, the masculine gender is normal in both ancient and medical practice, and the word itself is perfectly understandable in whichever gender it is being used.¹⁶ Generally speaking, Hippocrates may use extremely concise expressions, but he does not normally misconstrue his sentences.¹⁷ Admittedly, Hippocrates is not all that precise in the use of technical terminology, but on the other hand, Marinus' attempt to explain one of the Aphorisms by assuming an inaccurate choice of words on the part of Hippocrates is rejected.¹⁸ In fact, such inaccuracy may again be used as an argument against the authenticity of an aphorism.¹⁹ Galen prefers to claim that Hippocrates is not fussy or pedantic about his choice of words, a characteristic the latter shares with the other ancients. Galen even manages to turn it into a definite asset, as we shall see.

Hippocrates' choice of words brings us to his stylistic characteristics. With the other ancient authors he shares a strong and impressive, if somewhat rough and ready style. This judgement is summed up in the qualification *deinotês*, 'rhetorical power, forcefulness'.²⁰ His rhetorical power manifests itself in extreme conciseness or rapidity.²¹ We may connect this with his use of

¹⁴ Although his distinction between barbarism and solecism does not seem to be altogether clear-cut.

¹⁵ Cf. for this relative indifference to linguistic expression *In Hippocratis Epidemiarum librum I commentari* 56 (18A 167 K). The usual reading is *σολοικοφανές*, 'solecistic', but in fact it makes no material difference which reading one prefers (read *ἀδιαφορεῖ*, or *οὐ διαφορεῖ* for *διαφέρεῖ*), cf. *ibid.* 58 (18A 170 K).

¹⁶ *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* 9 2 (12 193 f K).

¹⁷ Cf. *In Hipp. Prorrhbet. comment.* 1 4 (16 511 K), a nice example is Galen's discussion of the opening sentence of Hippocrates' *Epidemics* III Πυθίων, ὃς ἔκει παρὰ Γῆς ἱερὸν, ἤρξατο τρόμος ἀπὸ χειρῶν, ('Pythion, who lived by the temple of Earth – a trembling began from his hands'). Galen suggests that the nominative *Pythion* and the following relative clause can be explained as the label of the case, as it were. Hence, Hippocrates would be making a fresh start from ἤρξατο. Galen proceeds with the words 'It is better to explain his words in this way, than to be forced to assume that Hippocrates committed an error of construction on purpose, right at the beginning of this work. The more so, since it would be the only one in the whole work' (*In Hipp. Epid. III comment.* 1 1 (17A 480 K)).

¹⁸ *In Hipp. Aph. comment.* 7 54 (18A 163 f K) ἄκυρος κατάχρησις.

¹⁹ *In Hipp. Aph. comment.* 7 69 (18A 183 f K), cf. Brocker (1885) 422, 427.

²⁰ *Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus* (1 55 K), cf. the use of ἰσχυρῶς in *De elementis secundum Hippocratem* 1 3 (1 434 K).

²¹ Τὸ τάχος τῆς ἐρμηνείας, *De elem. sec. Hipp.* 1 3 (1 434 K), *De puls. differ.* 4 2 (8 706 K), *De sanitate tuenda* 2 4 (6 105 f K) βραχεῖα ῥῆσις, *De difficultate respirationis* 2 7 (7 851 K), *De crisi* 1 9 (9 584 K), *De meth. med.* 4 4 (10 274 f

asyndeton, for instance, although Galen does not explicitly make this link²² Hippocrates is entirely free from *kakozêlia*, 'affectation', the very opposite of forcefulness 'Affected' speech falls flat for trying too hard to be brilliant and daring,²³ where Hippocrates is concerned, it is a sure sign of inauthenticity or corruption²⁴ The unfortunate Archigenes, Galen's arch-enemy, is inevitably charged with this stylistic defect²⁵ In the *Commentary on Epidemics III*,²⁶ a certain variant is rejected, because it would be the only case of bad affectation in a book that is otherwise written *politikôs*, in ordinary educated language 'Political' is a typical prose-style qualification,²⁷ referring to normal proper usage, as opposed to 'rhetorical' language²⁸ Galen perceives a stylistic resemblance between Hippocrates and Xenophon in this respect²⁹ Although Hippocrates does employ 'difficult words', or words in a pregnant sense,³⁰ he would nevertheless usually stick to ordinary colloquial usage,³¹ or at least to the ordinary medical usage of his day,³² eschewing the far-fetched and artificial technical vocabulary that the younger generation of doctors relished³³ Hippocrates and his generation want to make themselves understood, no mat-

K), *ibid* 9 8 (10 632 K) συντομία e.g. *De elem sec Hipp* 2 3 (1 501 K) Cf for the connection between forcefulness and brevity/rapidity, Ps-Demetrius, *De elocutione* 242, 253

²² *In Hipp Epid I comment* 3 2 (17A 224 K), cf for the connection between asyndeton and brevity, Ps-Demetrius, *De eloc* 269, 271

²³ Lausberg (1960) § 1073, cf Brocker (1885) 417

²⁴ *In Hipp Aph comment* 7 67 (18A 179 K), *In Hipp Epid III comment* 2 13 (17A 639 K), cf *In Hipp Epid VI comment* 2 9 (17A 909 K), *ibid* 5 21 (17B 282 K), for which cf Palladius, *In Hippocratis librum sextum De morbis popularibus commentariu* 2 142 3 (Dietz)

²⁵ *De locis affectis* 2 8 (8 100 K)

²⁶ 3 73 (17A 751 K)

²⁷ Cf Isocrates 9 10 poetry is metrical, rhythmical and has a wide range in its choice of words, including foreign ones, neologisms and metaphors Prose on the other hand is more abrupt and *qua* vocabulary it uses τὰ πολιτικά only

²⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450 b 7

²⁹ *In Hipp Artic comment* 1 68 (18A 414 f K)

³⁰ *Ibid* γλωσσηματικά καὶ τροπικά Cf for his use of metaphor, e.g. *In Hipp Artic comment* 4 50 (18A 750 K) For another comparison between Hippocrates and Xenophon, see *In Hipp Artic comment* 1 praef (18A 301 K)

³¹ *De meth med* 6 5 (10 424 K)

³² Cf *Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus* (1 55 K), *De alimentorum facultatibus* 3 39 (6 742 K)

³³ Cf *In Hipp Epid I comment* 3 2 (17A 219 ff K) (λεπτολογία), *In Hipp Artic comment* 3 104 (18A 646 f K) (ἀκριβολογία, λεπτολογία), *ibid* 4 15 (18A 685 f K) (μικρολογία, associated with the sophists, and particularly with Prodicus) Galen shows an awareness of the fact that language and terminology may change over time Even though Hippocrates keeps to the normal usage of his own day, there may still be a discrepancy between his terminology and that of Galen's contemporaries

ter how They display a superior indifference to stylistic niceties³⁴ It is easy to see that this is the pivotal point of Galen's overall judgement Hippocrates' preference for normal words, for the *sunêtheia* (and thus his 'political' style), implies an aversion to everything far-fetched and over-sophisticated (*kakozêlon*) And in turn this produces the kind of straightforward, concise style that makes an impression of impetus and rhetorical power

If we compare the stylistic characteristics attributed to Hippocrates by Galen with the 'standard' rhetorical list of the virtues of style, we find that he does not do too badly By the time of Galen, rhetorical handbooks would suggest quite a sophisticated array of such virtues However, the four virtues distinguished by Theophrastus were still at the basis of them all These were 'hellenism', or purity of language, clarity, ornament and propriety The last two were often more or less merged,³⁵ while brevity might be added as a fifth (or fourth) positive qualification This was the particular contribution of the Stoics, who regarded it as a desirable characteristic of discourse under all circumstances³⁶

Now, Galen claims that Hippocrates' language tends to be correct, as we have seen above Brevity reigns supreme throughout his works,³⁷ and usually he is clear,³⁸ although Galen does feel compelled to qualify this judgement, as we shall see shortly Ornament, however, in the sense of an ample use of figures and tropes, is hardly ever referred to in analyses of his texts, and indeed the emphasis on straightforwardness suggests that there hardly was any On the other hand, rhetorical power or forcefulness may be subsumed under the general caption of ornament,³⁹ so that Hippocrates scores again

The virtues of brevity and clarity bear a somewhat strained relationship to each other, as Galen realizes Ideally, they should go hand in hand to effect a perfect style Galen quite explicitly declares that he regards a combination of clarity and brevity as ideal⁴⁰ However, brevity involves the danger of obscurity, and in fact people do tend to misunderstand Hippocrates because of it,⁴¹

³⁴ *In Hippocratis librum De fracturis commentarij* 2 73 (18B 526 f K) (esp τὴν τῶν πολλοῦν ἀμέλειαν)

³⁵ Cf Lausberg (1960) § 458 ff

³⁶ Percy (1983) does not mention this at all See Atherton (1988) 411 f Traditionally, brevity would be recommended for the *narratio* and the summary only, cf Lausberg (1960) § 297

³⁷ Galen is no friend of the Stoics, but as so often, it is probable that here, too, Stoic ideas have become common good in educated circles Cf Frede (1981) 70

³⁸ Cf *In Hipp Fract comment* 3 29 (18B 576 f K)

³⁹ Lausberg (1960) § 540

⁴⁰ E.g. *De puls differ* 4 2 (8 717 f K), *De anatomicis administrationibus* 1 2 (2 220 K), *et saep*

⁴¹ Cf *De san tuenda* 2 4 (6 105 f K), *De cris* 1 9 (9 584 K), *De meth med* 6 5 (10 425 K), *In Hipp Fract comment* 1 1 (18B 326 K)

which is the main reason why a commentary is required in the first place⁴² – fortunately Galen seems to have had no problems at all. I will return to this point in section three.

2 Authority and defective literary merit

Galen had obviously been working hard to make his linguistic report on Hippocrates as favourable as possible. In section three we shall look more closely at the theory he uses to back up his claims. But in anticipation of my results there, I would like to draw attention to an interesting parallel. For, apart from students of medicine, there was yet another group of scholars who used philology as their technical equipment, although their interests were not primarily linguistic at all. I am referring to the early Christian authors working on the text of the Bible.

From a very early date onwards, early Christian authors had felt some uneasiness about the stylistic level of the text they otherwise looked upon as the summit of wisdom and the ultimate authority for human conduct.⁴³ In other words, here, too, it was the cognitive (or rather religious) contents for which these texts were studied, and again technical philology was the framework within which this was mostly done. From the very start, Christian apologists felt the need to defend the extreme stylistic simplicity of the language of the Bible, which seemed to lack any of the sophistication inherent in classical literature, and so formed an easy target for pagan mockery. And later, when more and more philological efforts were made to provide editions and translations of, and commentaries on, these texts, the linguistic framework would inevitably bring along questions of its own about the literary value of the Bible – the same kind of questions Galen had to face about Hippocrates. All educated Christians would work within this linguistic framework. For they would all have enjoyed a thorough pagan linguistic training in the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric and logic. Their solution to the dilemma is remarkably similar to what we will find in Galen: they claimed the superiority of their *lingua piscatoria*, 'the language of the fishermen', over the sham-embellishments of empty rhetoric.⁴⁴ They announced that in their eyes there could be only one vital virtue of speech, namely clarity, even if this was attained at the cost of flawed grammar: the truth of Scripture could not be bothered with the straight-jacket of the 'rules of Donatus'.⁴⁵ Simplicity was equated with truthfulness and nothing was allowed to stand in the way of comprehensibility.

⁴² *De meth. med.* 9.8 (10.632 K)

⁴³ Cf. Auerbach (1958) 39 ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. Norden (1909²) 512 ff., esp. 516, Auerbach (1958) 22 ff., Hagendahl (1959) *passim*, Fuchs (1971) 38.

⁴⁵ See Gregory of Tours, *In gloria confessorum* (preface).

Augustine gave up the traditional idea that style should correspond to subject-matter – there could be no doubt about the solemn sublimity of the contents of the Bible. Yet, when one's aim was to teach or to explain, one's style should be simple.⁴⁶ The stylistic ideal following from these principles was summed up by Augustine's motto of *diligens negligentia*, 'a careful indifference', which recalls Galen's remark on the stylistic 'superior indifference' of the ancient doctors.⁴⁷ Of course, early Christian authors would claim that they adapted their own style to the norms set by the Bible – even if they did not.⁴⁸ Augustine provides a nice example of the internal struggle that this stylistic norm could cause.⁴⁹

Incidentally, the same line of defence was used in the case of (pagan) philosophers. They, too, could not be bothered with minute linguistic distinctions – their philosophical ideas were all that counted, and as long as they succeeded in making themselves understood, linguistic criticism was uncalled for. Remarks to this effect can be found about Chrysippus – right alongside complimentary statements about his remarkable contributions to the study of linguistics –, Plotinus and Epictetus.⁵⁰ The argument used here consists of the opposition of *pragmata*, 'contents', and *rhêmata*, '(mere) words', and it recurs in the context of philosophical discussion, the Bible and medicine alike. Epicurus, too, could be mentioned in this context – according to Diogenes Laertius 'the terms he used for things were the ordinary terms () He was so lucid a writer that in the work *On Rhetoric* he makes clarity the sole requisite'.⁵¹ And although for Aristotle linguistic purity is an absolute prerequisite, the first real *virtue* is clarity.⁵²

3 Galen's defence of Hippocrates

Returning to ancient medicine, we observe that Galen employed two slightly different tactics to achieve one goal, viz. to justify Hippocrates' style. The first

⁴⁶ Aug. *De doctrina christiana* 4.10.24, 4.12.27. Cf. Auerbach (1958) 32 f. In itself this latter idea was sound classical rhetorical theory, cf. Cicero, *Orator* 69 ff. If Cicero allows an unadorned style now and then, it is never irrespective of the subject-matter, cf. *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 3.19.

⁴⁷ See note 34. Cf. Aug. *Doctr. chr.* 4.10.24, cf. *De beata vita* 31.

⁴⁸ Cf. the examples of highly rhetorically phrased disclaimers of rhetoric collected by Norden (1909²) 512-534.

⁴⁹ Cf. Aug. *Confessiones* 3.5.9 and *Doctr. chr.* 4.6.9 ff., see Fuchs (1971) 43 ff.

⁵⁰ Chrysippus: cf. Hulser (1987-1988), fr. 601E (and references), Gal. *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 2.5 (5.253 K), Diogenes Laertius 7.180, Epictetus *Diatribae* 3.9.13-14, Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 8, 13.

⁵¹ Diog. Laert. 10.13-14 (transl. Hicks, *LCL*).

⁵² Purity: Arist. *Rhetoric* 3.5 (1407 a 19), clarity: *ibid.* 3.2 (1404 b 1-3). If language is unclear, in a way it fails to be language. This idea is picked up by Galen in his *De captiōibus* 2 (96,13 f. Edlow, 14.589 K).

consists of the claim that Hippocrates' style is actually identical to the ideal style – and, incidentally, to Galen's own. The second consists of putting Hippocrates' stylistic performance in a special kind of context, and claiming its perfect suitability to that context. Galen discusses the genre of 'scientific instruction' in connection with this.

3.1 *The proclamation of a stylistic ideal*

Galen's linguistic ideals, too, may be studied from both a grammatical and a rhetorical point of view. Grammatically speaking, Galen maintains a permissive attitude. As long as one makes oneself understood, it does not matter whether one's speech is full of barbarisms.⁵³ And as he puts it elsewhere, 'it is better to commit solecisms and barbarisms in one's language than in one's life'.⁵⁴ He even wrote a pamphlet against people who tried to fight solecism.⁵⁵ He is quite explicit about the fact that it is absolutely imperative to stick to normal usage, and to prevent causing unnecessary confusion by introducing obscure technical terminology (which might take the form of seemingly normal words being used in an unexpected sense).⁵⁶ And, of course, he can adduce a very pertinent reason why this should be so: the communication with one's patients.⁵⁷ Earlier doctors never used other words than the ones they might hear from their patients themselves. If a patient's description of his own symptoms is clear and understandable, why introduce impressionist and baroque expressions for different types of pain? And conversely, if no patient would ever use the terminology of an Archigenes to explain what is ailing him, what is the purpose of its introduction? Galen hates all disputes about mere words and emphatically refuses to take part in what he regarded as a perverted sophistic whim, exhorting his readers to concentrate instead on the issues themselves, the *pragmata*.⁵⁸ After all, it is Hippocrates' superior medical knowledge, his knowledge of *ta pragmata*, that makes us forgive him his deficiencies in disposition and style.⁵⁹ However, the balance is pretty delicate.

⁵³ *De puls. differ.* 2.2 (8.567 f. K.)

⁵⁴ *De ordine librorum suorum ad Eugenianum* (19.60 K.)

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, cf. *De libris propriis* 18 (19.48 K.)

⁵⁶ Examples are legion, e.g. *De alim. fac.* 2.4 (6.565 f. K.), *De puls. differ.* 3.7 (8.690 ff. K.), *Synopsis librorum suorum de pulsibus* 6 (9.446 K.), *De diff. resp.* 1.2 (7.758 ff. K.), *In Hippocratis Prognosticum commentarius* 1.4 (18B.15 K.)

⁵⁷ *De loc. aff.* 2.9 (8.116 ff. K.), esp. the conclusion (8.118 K.) 'no patient expresses what is wrong with him through the words of Archigenes', cf. *ibid.* 2.5 (8.83 K.) and *De plenitudine* 2 (7.518 K.)

⁵⁸ E.g. *De optima nostri corporis constitutione* 1 (4.738 f. K.), *De marcore* 6 (7.690 K.), *De tumoribus praeter naturam* 3 (7.716 K.)

⁵⁹ *In Hippocratis librum De acutorum victu commentarius* 3.1 (15.626 ff. K.) The criticism exercised here is in itself a normal feature of the Peripatetic commentary tradition, cf. Geffcken (1932) 409. The apologetic tone is not (*ibid.* 410 n. 3).

inaccuracy, or an inadequate command of the facts, combined with stylistic defects may again lead to a denial of authenticity of (parts of) a treatise.⁶⁰

Galen's insistence on the overruling importance of facts over words and on the need for clear and normal language has its consequences for his 'Kriterien der Sprachrichtigkeit' They are, in fact, nothing other than three forms of *sunêtheia* that of Hippocrates, as the authority *par excellence*, that of the other ancient doctors, and that of Galen's own day⁶¹ It is this aspect of 'normal usage' rather than that of 'correctness' that Galen emphasizes when he uses the word *hellênizein*⁶² If Galen uses *sunêtheia* in both technical grammatical applications distinguished above (see Introduction above), this is because he actually combines his exegesis of Hippocrates (*diorthôsis*-type) with criticism of contemporary medical usage and advice about the ideal form it should take (*Hellênismos*-type)⁶³

The consequences for Galen's rhetorical and stylistic ideals are clear he advocates a shift in the relative importance of the virtues of style, claiming that his own style is in accordance with this new assessment Galen's permissiveness on the point of grammatical correctness makes the virtue of *Hellênismos* recede into the background Contrary to common rhetorical theory, Galen submits that clarity, achieved on the basis of factual accuracy, is the only really important stylistic factor.⁶⁴ If possible, it should be accompanied by brevity⁶⁵ On the other hand, ornament plays no role at all in the way he describes his own style

The only way to maintain a clear style is to conform to normal usage as described above Galen claims this characteristic both for his own style and that of Hippocrates⁶⁶ Transparency of meaning is seriously impaired by randomly attributing new meanings to existing words, or by unnecessarily coining new ones Language is a conventional system understanding others and making oneself understood is entirely dependent on whether or not one is prepared to comply with existing consensus about what words mean⁶⁷ As long as one does not unilaterally change this agreement, basically nothing can go wrong in the process of communication Errors in the grammatical construction of the sentence or the formation of individual words will not be fatal In this respect, Galen, like the early Christian authors and the philoso-

⁶⁰ *In Hipp Acut comment* 4, prooem (15 732 K) See section 1 (above)

⁶¹ *De diff resp* 1 2 (7 758 ff K)

⁶² Cf *De meth med* 1 9 (10 71 K)

⁶³ Cf note 33 above

⁶⁴ Cf *De facultatibus naturalibus* 1 1 (*Scripta minora* 3 101, 2 1 f K), cf section 2 *in fine*

⁶⁵ *De anat admin* 1 (2 220 K), *De puls differ* 4 2 (8 717 f K)

⁶⁶ *In Hipp Progn comment* 3 18 (18B 267 K)

⁶⁷ *Ad Thrasybulum* 32 (5 867 ff K), esp 5 868 K 'it is impossible to find out what a word refers to, unless one is taught by the ones who imposed it'

phers mentioned in section two, finds himself in complete agreement with the leading grammarians of his day. Although originally this distinction between words (as physical things), reference in the outside world and (incorporeal) meaning was of Stoic provenance, by the second century AD it belonged to the common stock of grammatical assumptions.⁶⁸

It is interesting to see that Galen realizes that language develops. Words may become obsolete, even if they were quite normal in ancient times. This is one of the reasons why he does not insist on Atticistic language: in his eyes the classical Attic dialect was a *sunêtheia* like any other. It cannot therefore claim more authority than Galen's contemporary *sunêtheia*.⁶⁹

In short, Galen's stylistic ideal coincides with his view of both Hippocrates' and his own style. Although in practice his own Greek is fairly Atticistic and well-groomed, he denies that that is at all important in theory. His only professed aim is to write a 'normal', clear and concise Greek. The degree of conciseness depends on the type of treatise: a commentary should be more expansive than an independent treatise.⁷⁰ In other words, one should aim for a 'proportional' style.⁷¹ It is stressed throughout that linguistic expression is, in all respects, less important than a clear grasp of factual content.

3.2 *The genre of the epistêmônîkê didaskalia*

The framework Galen provides for his view of the ideal style, is that of genre and function. Traditionally, ancient rhetorical theory would link up stylistic characteristics with specific literary genres. Epic and tragedy would be associated with an elevated style, history would combine elements of a narrative style with poetical overtones, and forensic oratory should be more straightforward, since here it was necessary to get across a message. Of course, this did not preclude stylistic variation within any genre. On the contrary, the different parts of a forensic speech required different levels of style in order to be maximally effective. On a theoretical level this was connected with the notion of function. Of the three basic functions of rhetoric, to instruct, to move and to delight, the first was best fulfilled by means of the simple style,⁷² the second by the elevated and the third by an intermediate level of speech. As we saw, Augustine made use of this rhetorical doctrine, and so did Galen.

⁶⁸ Sluiter (1990) 26 ff., 64 f., cf. for the influence of the Stoa, Frede (1981) 70. Percy (1983, 261) wrongly opposes Galen's indifference in matters of vocabulary to the Stoic theory of the natural correspondence between words and things. In fact, Galen's view that meaning cannot really be damaged by deficient words, is remarkably similar to the Stoics', whether Galen would have liked it or not.

⁶⁹ Cf. *De compositione medicamentorum per genera* 1.10 (13.408 K), see Kollesch (1981) 5.

⁷⁰ *In Hipp. Aph. comment* 7, prooem (18A.102 K).

⁷¹ τὸ συμμετρὸν, *In Hipp. Artic. comment* 3.55 (18A.567 K), cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Isaicus* 20.3, Ps-Dion. Hal. *Ars rhetorica* 10.4.1.

⁷² Cf. Lausberg (1960) § 1079.

On various occasions, Galen mentions the so-called *epistêmonikê didaskalia*, 'scientific instruction', which he apparently regarded as a specific type of writing, which required very specific stylistic features. I would suggest that in this type of writing the notions of genre and function merge. Like the early Christian authors, Galen has no doubt about the relevance and sublimity of his subject-matter, but he still advocates a simple style in view of the general didactic purpose of medical writings.⁷³ Unsurprisingly, the characteristics of this style show a marked resemblance to that of Hippocrates as analysed by Galen: authors of this type of work should use words in their proper sense without resorting to unnecessary metaphors, if the proper terms are lacking, they should rather take recourse to circumscription.⁷⁴ Furthermore, they should concentrate on content, not on words.⁷⁵ In an *epistêmonikê didaskalia* 'it suffices to mention a word, to indicate its meaning as the instructor intends to use it, and then to proceed to the explanation of whatever is the issue'.⁷⁶ This is again to insist on the conventional character of any terminology, which, in turn, implies that any use of language that is helpful to the audience is permitted.⁷⁷ Obscurity should be avoided at all costs, for 'unclear language does not teach anything' – again Augustine offers a striking parallel when he says 'Anyone who teaches shall avoid all words that do not teach anything'.⁷⁸ Galen does make a distinction, however, between works intended for beginners and those intended for advanced students. If one is addressing an advanced student, metaphors, or words used in an improper sense, may be allowed for the sake of brevity.⁷⁹ But when instructing beginners, optimal clarity is essential. A teacher should use the most natural language possible in order to achieve maximal clarity.⁸⁰

3.3 *The difference between Galen and Hippocrates*

This distinction of intended audiences helps Galen to come to grips with a remaining nettling problem: he had to explain why a commentary on Hippocrates was necessary at all and to give an indication of how he himself could be of help in that respect. How could he be expected to explain Hippocrates, if their styles were identical, while that of Hippocrates was ideal to begin with?⁸¹

⁷³ Cf. section 2 and note 46 above.

⁷⁴ *De puls. differ.* 3.6 (8.675 K), cf. *De loc. aff.* 2.6 (8.87 K).

⁷⁵ *De meth. med.* 14.9 (10.972 K).

⁷⁶ *De loc. aff.* 1.3 (8.32 K).

⁷⁷ *De meth. med.* 1.6 (10.47 K).

⁷⁸ Cf. Gal. *In Hipp. Acut. comment.* 4.16 (15.761 K), and *In Hipp. Prorrh. comment.* 1.15 (16.546 K) with Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 4.10.24.

⁷⁹ *De puls. differ.* 3.6 (8.675 K), cf. *ibid.* 4.2 (8.717 f. K).

⁸⁰ *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* 9.2 (12.194 K), cf. on the relationship between style and intended audience, Manuli (1983) 473, 476, *In Hipp. Fract. comment.* 1, praef. (18B.321 K).

⁸¹ Cf. Manuli (1983) on the problem of the justification of Galen's commentaries.

In order to solve this dilemma, Galen points out a number of characteristics peculiar to Hippocrates' style of teaching and perfectly acceptable in the context in which the latter worked. He also refers to the particular exigencies of his own day, and firmly puts his exegetical work in a different didactic context from that of Hippocrates.

Hippocratic succinctness has been mentioned several times already, it is the main reason any explanation at all is required. Hippocrates is in the habit of teaching complete theories through one or two incidents.⁸² His theoretical doctrines come more or less as a by-product of his writings,⁸³ as when he remarks in passing on the absence of certain symptoms. The attentive reader may deduce from this that according to Hippocrates such symptoms would usually occur. However, Hippocrates refrains from making this explicit.⁸⁴

Moreover, Hippocrates' language is not that of a contemporary doctor even though he sticks to his own *sunêtheia*, words may have changed or become obsolete over time.⁸⁵ This makes Hippocrates a difficult author for an untrained reader. However, to anyone who has received any training and who is used to reading older literature, his style is perfectly clear.⁸⁶ Since meaning depends on convention, Galen is very impatient about using etymology in a scientific context,⁸⁷ another linguistic topic to which he dedicated a separate treatise.⁸⁸ If he mentions an etymology at all, he usually does so in a somewhat apologetic or derisive way, referring for instance to 'those people who enjoy etymologies'.⁸⁹ The widely accepted claim of the Stoics that etymology can teach us the true meaning of a word is clearly not one Galen would readily approve of.⁹⁰ The context will usually prove sufficient to provide a clear understanding of the meaning of any uncommon words. Grammarians successfully apply this technique to both Homer and other ancients, and Galen propagates it for the study of Hippocrates.⁹¹ However, since Galen envisages a wider audience for the works of Hippocrates than just the specialist, he sets himself the task of eliminating even the smallest obscurities – and this is one

⁸² *In Hipp Off med comment* 3 18 (18B 845 K)

⁸³ *In Hipp Epid I comment* 2 17 (17A 110 K)

⁸⁴ *In Hipp Epid I comment* 2 17 (17A 110 K), *De comate secundum Hippocratem* 2 (7 650 K), *De diff resp* 2 7 (7 851 K)

⁸⁵ *De comp med per gen* 1 10 (13 408 K), *Linguarum seu dictionum exoletarum Hippocratis explicatio* (19 63 K)

⁸⁶ *In Hipp Artic comment* 1 1 (18A 303 f K)

⁸⁷ Cf De Lacy (1966) 264, e.g. *De plac Hipp et Plat* 2 2 (5 213 f K)

⁸⁸ Cf *De plac Hipp et Plat* 2 2 (5 214 K)

⁸⁹ *In Hipp Artic comment* 1 27 (18A 359 K), *In Hipp Fract comment* 1 20 (18B 364 K)

⁹⁰ Sluiter (1990) 18 ff

⁹¹ *De puls differ* 4 2 (8 715 f K), cf *In Hipp Prorrheth comment* 3 115 (16 706 K)

raison d'être of his commentaries. This same distinction between beginners and advanced students recurs elsewhere, as an excuse for what might be considered excessive explanation.⁹²

4 *The philological paradigm and the embarrassment of imperfection*

We have come to the end of this brief survey and may sum up as follows: In Galen's day the combination of current schoolpractice – which had an essentially linguistic orientation – with a generally positive attitude to authority favoured a philological approach to technical problems: Not only in literature were authoritative ancient texts being put on a pedestal as touchstones of grammatical correctness and stylistic beauty, but in other areas, too, people looked back to a remote past in which remarkable achievements had been realized, if only *in nuce*. In any disciplines in which a text or corpus of texts assumed such a place of prominence, philology claimed its due as the most suitable technical method to tackle such a subject. The most outstanding examples of this phenomenon are ancient medicine and ancient Biblical exegesis.

From Origen onwards, early Christian authors applied all the technical tools of pagan classical philology to the study of their most authoritative texts, the Bible. The sheer quantity of early Christian literature helps us to acquire an idea of how inescapable the 'philological paradigm' was and of the tensions it caused. The clash between a linguistic approach that automatically took the form of a text as point of attack and the unique value attached to the informational contents of these texts did not escape any of the practitioners of this method. When forced by their instrumentarium to judge the grammatical correctness and the rhetorical qualities of these texts, early Christian exegetes did not refuse to do so, but they propagated new norms.

Approximately half a century before Origen we can witness this same struggle in Galen, who anticipates the Christian answers. On the one hand Galen exploits the 'philological paradigm' for his own purposes, promoting as he did Hippocrates' status of the ultimate source of medical knowledge, by telescoping the second-century state of the art into Hippocratic medicine. On the other hand he has to face the problem that Hippocrates does not live up to the literary standards inherent in the philological model.

His solution to this dilemma was to declare that a master-doctor cannot be measured by literary norms without qualification. In teaching, content takes precedence over form, and clarity over grammatical correctness. In Christian eyes, only pagans would insist on verbal precision; Galen reproaches the

⁹² *In Hipp. Fract. comment.* 1, proœm. (18B.320 K.).

'younger doctors' with exactly the same pettiness. This is contrasted with the superior indifference of the ancients – or the Bible – towards trifling linguistic details. The *epistêmonikê didaskalia* has its own stylistic requirements and these are easily met by both Hippocrates and Galen himself. If exegesis is necessary at all, this is due to a difference in didactic context. Galen tries to find a basis and confirmation for contemporary medicine in Hippocrates – a strictly medical and technical project, but all the while he foots his argument on a philological basis, following his convictions of what is truly Hippocratic writing and language,⁹³ and asking questions which are forced on him by his critical instrumentarium. At the same time, however, the heart of grammatical studies, the concern for correctness, is watered down, if not given up altogether. This was the price for a way out of the embarrassment of imperfection.

⁹³ Cf. Bröcker (1885) 432; 438.

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