

## Galen of Pergamum on the Limits of Practical Philosophy

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### Abstract

This article provides an analysis of Galen’s attitude towards philosophy and philosophers as manifested in two of his moral writings, namely, the letter-essay entitled *Avoiding Distress (De indolentia)* and the treatise on *The Diagnosis and Treatment of the Affections and Errors Peculiar to Each Person’s Soul (De animi cuiuslibet affectuum et peccatorum dignotione et curatione)*. While Galen’s engagement with various philosophical schools of his time has been extensively explored in the literature of the past few decades, with an emphasis on his Platonic and Aristotelian affiliations, his critique of philosophy and philosophers has only occasionally been discussed. However, a closer look at the polemical intent of the works referred to above can help us not only to illuminate more fully their content and purposes but also to locate them more accurately within the cultural milieu in which they were written. Along with an attempt to understand the reasons underlying Galen’s criticism of philosophy and philosophers, and the sources of his critique, particular attention will be given to the self-image Galen projects in these two writings. As I intend to show, by critically reviewing some philosophical therapeutic techniques (mostly Stoic and Epicurean), Galen seeks not only to debunk the philosophers’ claim of being an authoritative voice in matters pertaining to practical ethics but also to cast himself in the role of a true *moral adviser* or physician of the soul, one that actually has expertise in treating moral distress, anguish or anxiety.

**Keywords:** Galen of Pergamum, ancient philosophy, psychotherapy, polemics, ancient medicine, practical philosophy

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In one of his autobiographical works, entitled *On My Own Books* (*De propriis libris*), Galen provides a comprehensive catalogue of his texts, organizing his massive and wide-ranging literary output into different categories of works, based on their content and purposes. In this catalogue, a number of twenty-three texts have been classified under the head of “moral philosophy” (ἠθικὴ φιλοσοφία), from which only two survived.<sup>1</sup> The first one is the treatise on *The Diagnosis and Treatment of the Affections and Errors Peculiar to Each Person’s Soul* (*De animi cuiuslibet affectuum et peccatorum dignotione et curatione*, commonly abbreviated as *Aff. Pecc. Dig.*), in two books, dealing, mainly, with various philosophical theories of emotions and their therapy.<sup>2</sup> The second work is the moral essay entitled *Avoiding Distress* (Περὶ ἀλυπίας or *De indolentia*), the Greek original of which has been thought for centuries to be definitively lost, until a French researcher, Antoine Pietrobelli, discovered it in a Byzantine manuscript preserved in the library of the Vlatadon Monastery in Thessaloniki, in 2005.<sup>3</sup> *De indolentia* is of great importance for the study of Greco-Roman antiquity as it provides substantial information about Galen’s interest in collecting and editing literary and scientific books, the reign of Commodus, the holdings of Imperial libraries, and, especially, the great fire of 192 AD, which destroyed the Temple of Peace together with many other storehouses in the *Via Sacra*.<sup>4</sup> Vivian Nutton, a leading figure in Galenic studies, is probably right in characterizing the discovery of this text as “one of the most spectacular finds ever of ancient literature” (Nutton 2010, 276). Both *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* and *De indolentia* betray a great influence of the Greek philosophical tradition, showing Galen’s deep engagement with various topics falling within the sphere of ethics or practical philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

Galen’s relationship with different ancient philosophical schools has been extensively discussed in the literature of the past few decades, with an emphasis on his public role as “moral adviser” and “physician of the soul” (Maróth 1993); (Gill 2013); (Gill 2019); (Kaufman 2014); (Xenophontos 2014); (White 2014); (Singer 2018). As expected, particular attention has been paid to the newly discovered *De indolentia*, a text that allowed scholars

to gain a deeper insight into Galen's relation to, and appraisal of the moral doctrines developed before him. Due to its focus on various therapeutic techniques, *De indolentia* has commonly been read as an "essay with moralising intent" (Xenophontos 2014, 588), aiming to provide a "therapy of emotions" (ibid. 589), as a piece of "practical moral instruction" (Curtis 2014, 51), as an exercise in "preventive psychological medicine" (Gill 2013, 339), or as a text designed to offer a "therapy of distress" (Kaufman 2014, 276).

In this paper, I intend to take a rather different approach and situate *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* and *De indolentia* in the context of ancient polemics against philosophy and philosophers. More exactly, I will try to highlight the polemical stance of Galen's engagement with philosophy throughout these texts, an aspect which, in my opinion, has not yet received its due attention. As we shall see, on various occasions, Galen develops a critique against different philosophical tenets and therapeutic strategies, which echoes the long "quarrel" between ancient medicine and philosophy in matters concerning bodily and spiritual health, well-being, and freedom from distress. As I intend to argue, Galen's critical appraisal of philosophy may be seen as part of an overall rhetorical strategy, by which he aims not only to delegitimize the competing therapeutic techniques recommended by the philosophers of his time, but also to establish himself as an authoritative voice in the field of practical ethics and psychotherapy.

Before delving into the analysis of Galen's engagement with philosophical themes and concepts in *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* and *De indolentia*, it may be useful to remind that "the therapy of emotions" constituted one of the major streams of ancient moral philosophy.<sup>6</sup> This philosophical tradition goes back at least to the V<sup>th</sup> century BC, when Antiphon the Sophist invented a method of curing distress (τέχνη ἀλυπίας) similar to that of the physicians who provide treatments for those who suffer from bodily illness.<sup>7</sup> The same theme is found in Plato's dialogues, where philosophy is frequently conceived as a path leading to happiness (e.g., *Euthydemus*, 282A-D) or as an instrument in controlling τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, that is, "the part of the soul which is the seat of the desires and affections", as the term is defined

in the LSJ dictionary (*cf. Rep.* 439E). Socrates himself is several times portrayed as a skilful physician, able to diagnose and treat the maladies of the soul (*e.g., Charmides*, 155B; *Gorg.* 521A; *Prot.* 340E). Taking up a similar approach, Aristotle states that only philosophy can secure the conditions of well-being and asserts that philosophers alone enjoy “the good life” (τὸ ζῆν εὐδαιμόνως) (see *Protr.* fr. 95-96 Düring).

In the Hellenistic and Roman period, philosophy took an even greater turn towards ethics. How to cope with suffering, injustice, disasters, and, in short, with “any turn of events” became a central theme in the writings of the philosophers of that period. To Epicurus, for example, the practice of philosophy (φιλοσοφεῖν) is a condition for the healthy state of the soul – πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ψυχὴν ὑγιαῖνον (see Diogenes Laertius, X, 122). The genre of writings devoted to the therapy of emotions probably owes much to Chrysippus’ Θεραπευτικόν, the fourth book of his treatise *On Passions* (Περὶ παθῶν), written in the third century BC, from which only fragments survived (Tieleman 2003, 140-197). Cicero is another author who conceives of philosophy as a “medicine of the soul” (*medicina animi – Tusc. Disp.*, III, 6)<sup>8</sup>, and as “the only help against the misfortunes of this life” (*contra miseriae huius vitae unicum auxilium – Hort.*, fr. 111 Grilli = Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, XXII, 22). Similarly, Seneca states that “one who studies with a philosopher should have some benefit to take home with him every day, either better health or a mind more open to healing” (*Ep.* 108, 4). To Musonius Rufus, a leading Roman Stoic of the first century AD, the philosopher is the only one who knows what leads to people’s happiness or unhappiness (εἰδέναι τί φέρει πρὸς ἀνθρώπου εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ κακοδαιμονίαν) (*Regi philosophandum esse*, ed. Lutz 1947, 60, 19-20). Musonius’ disciple Epictetus went even further and maintained that the philosopher’s school is like a hospital (ἰατρεῖον), where people come when they are sick in their souls (*Discourses* III, 23, 30). A similar approach may also be found throughout the *Meditations* of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, to whom Galen served as personal physician.

To summarize, in Galen’s time, there was a long-established tradition of philosophy conceived as the most

important activity whereby people can attain happiness and achieve moral progress (Gill 1985), (Nussbaum 1994), (Sorabji 2000). As we have seen, various philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Cicero, and others, claimed that no one could live uprightly and attain *eudaimonia* without having studied philosophy. As expected, such claims of authoritative knowledge in matters pertaining to happiness and the good life (τὸ εὖ ζῆν) gave rise to polemical exchanges between philosophers and exponents of other fields of knowledge, including rhetoric, sophistry, and medicine. It is against this competitive and polemical background that Galen's engagement with the philosophical tradition before him should be considered. The "quarrel" between medicine and philosophy which we referred to above goes back at least to the time of Plato, whose dialogues often show a critique against several tenets held by the Hippocratic authors (Van der Eijk 2005), (Levin 2014), (Mihai 2021). By the second century AD, when Galen made his way into the cultural arena and wrote his works, the polemical exchanges between philosophers and physicians were no less intense. As Singer (2014b, 11) has rightly stressed, Galen lived and wrote in a "social context where philosophy had – at least traditionally and at least in some people's eyes – a higher, more educated status than medicine" (Lloyd 2008), (Hankinson 2008). There was a vivid and competitive cultural milieu, which Galen was well familiar with.

At times, Galen's polemical attitude towards the philosophers and the philosophical schools partially echoes the long-lasting debate between medicine and philosophy. However, as I intend to demonstrate in the following, Galen's negative appraisal of contemporary philosophers is also nourished by his appeal to a tradition of criticism of philosophy, largely attested in non-medical texts from Greco-Roman antiquity. This can be demonstrated by paying close attention to some passages from both *De indolentia* and *Aff. Pecc. Dig.*, who share the same intent of providing a therapy of emotions and a program of moral self-improvement. Their practical outlook is closely interwoven with a critical assessment on the part of Galen of his contemporary philosophers, whose shortcomings and moral inconsistency are overtly criticized.

In an autobiographical section of his treatise on *The Diagnosis and Treatment of the Affections and Errors Peculiar to Each Person's Soul*, Galen provides an account of his intellectual formation, insisting on the philosophical lectures he attended in his youth. As he recounts, he studied philosophy with adherents of all major philosophical schools – Stoic, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Epicurean (*Aff. Dig.*, 28, 10-19 De Boer), but he was far from being satisfied with their arguments and methods of demonstration.<sup>9</sup> He is eager to note that the philosophers often disagree with each other and even with themselves, maintaining various conflicting beliefs (ἀλλήλαις μαχομέναι δόξαι, *Pecc. Dig.*, 42, 19-20 De Boer), and making pointless quarrels between them (φιλονεικοῦντες ἀλλήλοις, *ibid.* 62, 23-24). Their unfounded arguments and contradictory answers on questions such as “How ought we to live?” or “What good and bad is?” clearly show that their moral teachings are far from the truth. As one can see, Galen here rehearses a central *topos* of the ancient polemic against philosophy, namely that of the disagreement (διαφωνία) between various philosophical schools, which hold different opinions on one the same matter. We find this *topos*, for example, in a fragment from the *Exhortations* written by Posidonius of Apamea (= Diogenes Laertius VII, 129)<sup>10</sup>, in Cicero's *Hortensius*, fr. 40 Grilli<sup>11</sup>, as well as in many Christian authors, including Justin the Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, who made appeal to this tradition of criticism towards philosophy in their debates with the adherents of the classical culture.<sup>12</sup>

This is not the only point Galen insists upon in his negative appraisal of contemporary philosophers. He also sharply criticizes those who make “rash declarations regarding matters of good and bad in human life”, condemning their “self-love (φιλαυτία), self-regard (ἀλαζονεία), conceitedness (δοξοσοφία), and love of esteem” (φιλοτιμία) (*Pecc. Dig.* 44, 13-14 De Boer, transl. Singer 2014a, 287). At *Pecc. Dig.*, 66, 1 – 68, 4, Galen stages an *agōn* between an architect and two philosophers, with the clear intent of mocking the latter two. The philosophers are ridiculed and criticized for boasting of their alleged ability (ἀλαζονεία) to offer scientific demonstration on matters that are far beyond human knowledge. As the

architect is made to say, the philosophers believe that they “know what happens beyond the cosmos – a subject which admits of conjecture, but on which there can be no scientific knowledge” (66, 16-18 De Boer, transl. by Singer 2014a, 311). Conversely, when it comes to matters of daily life, “which are sometimes known even by the man in the street”, they show themselves to be “completely ignorant” (ibid. 66, 18-19 De Boer). The philosophers are thus refuted as “devoid of understanding in matters which can be known and conceited (δοξόσοφοι) in those which cannot” (ibid. 66, 27 – 67, 1 De Boer, transl. by Singer 2014a, 312).<sup>13</sup>

At close examination, the critique developed here roughly echoes the discussion in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, 174A-B, where Thales of Miletus is said to have been mocked by a Thracian maidservant for having tumbled down a well while looking up to study the stars. Indeed, it was this inquiry into things that are beyond human knowledge that gave rise to such mocking and scornful attitudes towards philosophy and the philosophers. Interesting enough, we find the same topos in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, 225-226, with reference to Socrates’ ἀλαζονεία, that made him investigate “the things in heaven and beneath the earth”. As one can notice, Galen’s disparaging attitude towards contemporary philosophers draws on a literary tradition of mockery and criticism towards philosophy and the philosophers, which he seems to have been well familiar with.

Let us turn now to the second text under discussion here, namely, *De indolentia*. This moral essay is written as a response to a request made by an anonymous friend of Galen who wants to know “what kind of training, what arguments or what doctrines”<sup>14</sup> prepared him to react with equanimity in the face of the disaster produced by the great fire of 192, that destroyed, among other things, much of Galen’s professional equipment and library. The text can be divided into two main parts. In the first part (paragraphs 1-37), Galen provides substantial information about what exactly he lost in the fire, mentioning a great number of books written by himself, “valuable and hard to replace”, rare manuscripts of ancient authors, as well as a lot of medical recipes and instruments.

Despite the great loss, and against all odds, Galen repeatedly states that he felt no distress, showing an attitude that clearly distinguished himself from his fellow citizens.<sup>15</sup> In the second half of *De indolentia* (§§ 38-84), Galen describes the therapeutic techniques and strategies that helped him avoiding distress. The discussion here focuses on topics such as grief, pain, peace of mind or magnanimity, frequently discussed in the Greco-Roman tradition of moral and practical philosophy.

At close examination, we find that, much like in *Aff. Pecc. Dig.*, Galen's overall attitude towards philosophy in *De indolentia* is not so much an attitude of acceptance or dialogue, but rather an attitude of reluctance, disapproval, and critique towards different philosophical schools. Particularly telling is that throughout the text Galen does not endorse, nor advocate, any particular philosophical doctrine<sup>16</sup>, and he is even less willing to praise philosophers before him for having developed arguments or techniques for controlling emotions and avoiding distress. In fact, he is much more prone to criticize them.

In trying to respond to his friend's request, Galen explains the mechanisms that enabled him to avoid distress, insisting on a special method of training (ἄσκησις), namely that of anticipating future evils. To explain this, he quotes some lines from a play by Euripides (fr. 964 Nauck) in which Theseus – one of the *dramatis personae* – says that he learned from a wise man (παρὰ σοφοῦ τινος) to imagine constantly misfortunes that might come in the future, so that if one were to occur, he might be better prepared to endure it. The text reads as follows: “As I once learned from a wise man, / I fell to considering disasters constantly, / Adding for myself exile from my native land, / Untimely deaths and other ways of misfortune, / So that, should I ever suffer any of what I was imagining, / It might not gnaw at my soul because it was a novel arrival” (*De indolentia*, 17, 4-9 BJP, transl. by Nutton, in Singer 2014a, 93).

According to Galen, “the wise man (ὁ σοφὸς ἀνὴρ) constantly reminds himself of everything that he might possibly suffer” (ibid. 93, 10-11 BJP), so that he could prepare in advance against any misfortune. This spiritual exercise

seems to have been of considerable importance to Galen since he quotes the same passage towards the end of his text, where he explicitly says that the practice of anticipating evils is the only training he finds “helpful against painful bad turns” (ibid. 23, 5-14 BJP ).<sup>17</sup> As pointed out by Tieleman (2019, 203), the technique of “dwelling in advance” was a well-known exercise in Stoic psychotherapy. In Cicero’s *Tusculanae disputationes*, III, 29, this spiritual technique is ascribed to the Cyrenaics, but a little further on, at III, 52, Cicero mentions that Chrysippus the Stoic advocated the same exercise. Plutarch, Seneca, and other moral philosophers also made extensive use of this topos in several of their writings.<sup>18</sup> Galen himself, in his *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 282, 11-14 (De Lacy 2005), attributes this technique to Posidonius of Apamea. For the present study, however, it is important to note that, in *De indolentia*, when mentioning the practice of *praemeditatio malorum*, Galen does not make any direct reference to the philosophers who recommended or practised it. It seems that he simply does not wish to recognize the philosophers before him as inventors of this spiritual exercise. As we have seen, in *De indolentia*, this therapeutic technique is ascribed not to a particular philosophical school, but simply to a poet, namely Euripides. While scholars have commonly neglected this point, I think that it deserves more attention, as it can provide a first evidence of Galen’s concern to delimitate himself from the philosophical therapies of emotions in use by his time. Additional evidence for such a reading can be found in the subsequent paragraphs of Galen’s text, where the polemical stance is further developed and more explicitly articulated.

Thus, at 18, 20 – 19, 1-10 BJP, Galen provides an autobiographical account, insisting on the influence that his father had on his moral and intellectual formation. As Galen says, “every time I remember him, I feel my soul improved (βελτιῶν). For there was no other man like him who honoured justice and self-control so much, indeed, they came naturally to him *without the need for philosophical arguments*. He did not consort with philosophers in his youth, being trained from childhood in virtue as well as in architecture by his father, my

grandfather, in both of which he was himself supreme.” (Transl. by Nutton, in Singer 2014a, 93-94; emphasis mine).<sup>19</sup>

As the passage above makes clear, to Galen, the memory of his father functions as an instrument that helps him improve his soul. Galen’s moral progress appears thus supported not by certain philosophical doctrines (δόγματα), but merely by the memory and the example offered by a man who, moreover, had not received any philosophical training. As one can notice, what Galen insists upon when portraying his father as an example of moral perfection and integrity is that virtues such as justice and self-control can well be attained without spending time with philosophers (ὄν γὰρ ὠμίλησε φιλοσόφους ἐν νεότητι – 19, 3 BJP). It thus seems that, by making appeal to the example of his father, Galen aims to challenge the philosophers’ claim that people can achieve moral progress only through philosophical instruction. In my opinion, Galen is dealing here with another *topos* used in ancient polemics against philosophy: to refute the claim that philosophy alone can offer moral instruction, one could provide the example of people who lived a life of virtue without practicing philosophy (as Galen’s father did). Support for this interpretation may be drawn from a surviving fragment of Cicero’s *Hortensius*, in which one of the critiques levelled against philosophy is based on the very same argument. Thus, in fr. 50 Grilli, we have the character Hortensius – an opponent and a critic of philosophy – saying: *vidi in dolore podagrae nihilo illum vel omnium maximum Stoicorum, Posidonium, quam Nicomachum Tyrium hospitem meum, fortiozem* (Nonius, 527, 30 M.) (“I saw that neither the famous Posidonius, the greatest of all the Stoics, in pain with gout was not a whit braver than my host, Nicomachus of Tyre.” (Transl. by Kidd 1999, 39-40, modified).<sup>20</sup> The meaning of the fragment is that the moral strength (*fortitudo animi*) is not necessary depending on moral instruction or philosophical arguments. The anonymous Nicomachus of Tyre, most probably a simple man without any philosophical instruction, was able to show the same attitude in the face of suffering as did “the famous Posidonius”, a teacher of moral virtue and an expert in the therapy of distress. Therefore, in Galen’s view, it is simply mistaken to suppose that in order to achieve virtue one should first become a skilful

moral philosopher: it is not necessary at all that everyone engage in a philosophical inquiry on how we should live.<sup>21</sup>

By using the example of his father, Galen aims to deny the necessary character of the practice of philosophy (φιλοσοφητέον), as well as its alleged cognitive and spiritual supremacy in controlling emotions and curing distress. In a manner similar to what we find in Cicero's *Hortensius*, Galen aims to show that philosophy is not entirely necessary for those striving to live a moral and virtuous life. Also worth noting is that throughout the text of *De indolentia* Galen does not make any reference to his philosophical instruction, nor does he advocate taking refuge in philosophical books, as other authors of consolatory treatises used to do.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, by maintaining the same polemical attitude, Galen launches into an open critique of some Stoic and Epicurean therapeutic techniques.

Thus, at *De Indolentia* 19, 19-22 BJP, he mentions that his father “never praised those who were simply satisfied with being free from pain or distress in their souls” (transl. Nutton, in Singer 2014a, 94) – which should be seen as a critical appraisal of the Epicurean ideal of ἀταραξία, which usually involved withdrawal from public affairs (Tieleman 2019, 209). As Galen further explains, “some people consider that remaining undisturbed is something good, although I know that neither I nor any other human being (...) supports this, for I see all of them wishing to be actively engaged in both mind and body.” (ibid. 21, 5-8 BJP, transl. by Nutton, in Singer 2014a, 95). The Epicurean method of keeping the soul free from emotions and distress is thus rejected in just a few words. For a more extensive discussion on this topic, Galen refers the reader to another one of his books, entitled Κατ’ Ἐπίκουρον – *Against* (or *On*) *Epicurus*, which, unfortunately, did not come down to us. (ibid. 21, 10 BJP).

Towards the end of his essay on *Avoiding Distress*, Galen returns to the Stoic discussion of emotions just to reaffirm his disapproval and give more weight to his previous critique. What he condemns here is the Stoic ideal of total impassivity (ἀπάθεια). Although he recommends the contempt of material possession and, in general, of all human affairs, as

another technique to fortify the soul (e.g. *De indol.* 19, 13-16; 20, 19-22 BJP), Galen sharply disapproves of the idea that people – be they philosophers or not – could become free of all emotions. He knows well that the human capacity of enduring misfortune, pain and other forms of distress is limited. This is why he does not boast himself of being prepared to endure any adversity, nor does he pray the gods to be tested by any possible misfortune (περίστασις), as the Stoic Musonius Rufus was said to have done (ibid. 22, 7-9 BJP). Likewise, he does not endorse the opinion that one can be happy even when he is roasted alive in the bull of Phalaris, as the Stoics and the Epicureans thought their sages would do (ibid. 21, 17 – 22, 2 BJP).<sup>23</sup> What he recommends instead is a daily training (ἄσκησις), by means of which one could fortify the soul, along with raising prayers to the gods for a healthy condition, both mental and physical (ibid. 22, 9 – 23, 5 BJP).

It is now time to ask why Galen depicted such a negative image of philosophy and of philosophers in *De indolentia* and *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* In my opinion, an adequate answer can be given if we read the two texts against the backdrop of the ancient quarrel between medicine and philosophy, evidence of which is to be found in the *Hippocratic Corpus*, as well as in Plato, Aristotle, and many other ancient writers from both Greek and Latin literature. In Plato's *Alcibiades I*, for instance, medicine is counted among the “sordid *technai*” (βαναυσοὶ αὐτὰ αἱ τέχναι, 131A-B), “unworthy of being pursued by a good man”, a point which Galen would hardly agree with. It is worth mentioning that Galen himself operates with a hierarchy of various *technai* in his *Protrepticus*, establishing two main classes: the first one is that of the arts (τέχναι) which are “rational” and “worthy of respect” (λογικαὶ τ' εἰσὶ καὶ σεμναί), while the second class is that of the “sordid arts”, which people commonly call “handicrafts” (ἀγ δὴ βαναύσοις τε καὶ χειρωνακτικῶς ὀνομάζουσι). In the first series, Galen includes medicine, rhetoric, music, geometry, arithmetic, dialectic, astronomy, grammar, and legislation. What is curious in this classification is that Galen refrains from explicitly mentioning philosophy in this group, although elsewhere in the *Protrepticus* he makes several direct references to it. What is more, in the last sentence that we have from the

*Protrepticus*, Galen portrays medicine as the *technē* most worth cultivating, stating thus overtly its superiority over all other *technai*, here included philosophy (ἀρίστη ... ἰατρικῆ) (14, 17-18, ed. Boudon 2000).<sup>24</sup>

In classical antiquity, medicine and philosophy competed for cognitive and moral supremacy (cf. Van der Eijk, 2005), and the same was true in Galen's time, when philosophical currents such as Stoicism and Epicureanism enjoyed a large circulation and popularity. As *De indolentia* suggests, the example of the Stoic sage, embodied by public heroes like Musonius Rufus, was held in high esteem. It was against these philosophical movements and their methods of therapy that Galen developed his arguments in *De indolentia* and *Aff. Pecc. Dig.*, seeking to challenge and debunk the philosophers' claim of having a moral and intellectual authority in matters concerning psychotherapy, spiritual health, and happiness. The critique of, and the rivalry with other sources of moral instruction and therapy is a central theme of Galen's texts, that should not be overlooked when discussing their content and aims. As scholars have noted, there is much evidence that *De indolentia* and *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* were written with a large, non-specialist audience in mind (Xenophontos 2014, 588). Both texts can thus be seen as part of a wider literary project by which Galen sought to establish himself as a moral adviser and physician of the soul, at the expense of other competing moral authorities of his time (Kaufman 2014, 276-277).

The passages referred to above make it clear that, when writing on topics of moral philosophy, Galen pursued a polemical agenda, critically reviewing and refuting some major tenets of various philosophical schools. As I have tried to argue, Galen's negative appraisal of philosophy and philosophers can be better illuminated if we read it against the backdrop of the competitive and polemical context in which various *technai* disputed their cognitive authority in defining the conditions of the best way of living. Galen's polemical attitude might have been motivated by his desire to challenge philosophy's increasing authority in matters pertaining to mental and physical health, human happiness, and freedom from distress.

Both *De indolentia* and *Aff. Pecc. Dig.* provide substantial evidence not only of Galen's active engagement in the philosophical debates of his time, but also of his concern for gaining the public recognition as a therapist of emotions and physician of the soul.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *De Prop. Lib.*, 169, 13-20 – 170, 1-13, ed. Boudon-Millot (2007).

<sup>2</sup> The text was edited by De Boer (1937) in the series *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*, V, 4, 1, 1, as two independent treatises: *De propriorum animi cuiuslibet affectuum dignotione et curatione* (*Aff. Dig.*), respectively, *De animi cuiuslibet peccatorum dignotione et curatione* (*Pecc. Dig.*). Passages quoted in translation throughout this paper are taken from Singer (2014a, 237-314).

<sup>3</sup> For the Greek text of *De indolentia* I follow the French edition published by Boudon-Millot, Jacques Jouanna, and Antoine Pietrobelli (abbreviated BJP 2010). The Greek text is cited by page number and line number of that edition. English translations are by Vivian Nutton, in Singer (2014a, 77-99).

<sup>4</sup> Scholarly consensus has established the first months of 193 as the most probable date of composition, shortly after the assassination of the emperor Commodus on the last day of 192. On this aspect, see BJP (2010, LVII-LXIII); Singer (2014a, 45); Nicholls (2019, 247). As expected, the text has generated a great deal of discussion and debate since its discovery, on several controversial issues. See the collective volumes by Manetti (2012), Rothschild & Thompson (2014), and Petit (2019).

<sup>5</sup> As Singer (2018, 412) has stressed, the two texts “clearly belong, broadly speaking, within a well-established existing tradition of works of popular moral philosophy—works which one might also term ‘practical ethics’ or ‘self-improvement’, and which are exemplified in the surviving literature especially by Plutarch, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, and in Latin by Seneca.”

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gill (2013, 365): “[T]he philosophical therapy of the emotions constituted a well-established genre of writings, to which Galen himself contributed in two surviving essays.” See also Jouanna (2009, 190-191).

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *Vitae decem oratorum*, 833C-D: „But while he [*scil.* Antiphon] was still busy with poetry, he invented a method of curing distress, just as physicians have a treatment for those who are ill; and, at Corinth, fitting up a room near the market-place, he wrote on the door that he could cure by words those who were in distress; and by asking questions and finding out the causes of their condition he consoled those in trouble.” (Transl. by Fowler 1960, 351).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Tusc. Disp.*, IV, 84, and *Acad. Post.*, I, 11: *Nunc vero et fortunae gravissimo percussus vulnere et administratione reipublicae liberatus, doloris medicinam a philosophia peto, et otii oblectationem hanc, honestissimam iudico.*

<sup>9</sup> Galen also provides a sketch of his philosophical pedigree in *Ord. Lib. Prop.* 99, 21-24 – 100, 1-4 Boudon-Millot 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Diogenes Laertius, VII, 129: “Neither do they think [*scil.* the Stoics] that the divergence of opinion between philosophers is any reason for abandoning the study of philosophy, since at that rate we should have to give up life altogether, as Posidonius states in his *Exhortations*.” (Transl. by Hicks 1925, 233, slightly altered).

<sup>11</sup> Cicero, *Hort.*, fr. 40 Grilli: *quantum inter se homines studentes moribus omni vitae ratione different.*

<sup>12</sup> Justin the Martyr, *Apology*, I, 4, 8; II, 10, 2; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 3, 3; 25, 2; Athenagoras, *Legatio*, 7, 2; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, III, 3; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I, 13, 57; Pseudo-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, 4, 2; 6, 1; 7, 2; Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, V, 3, 1; Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem*, 158-159.

<sup>13</sup> See also the discussion by Singer (2014b, 14-15)

<sup>14</sup> The Greek text reads as follows: [...] παρεκάλες μοι δηλώσαι σοι τίς ἄσκησις ἢ λόγοι τίνες ἢ δόγματα <τίνα> παρεσκεύασάν με μηδέποτε λυπεῖσθαι. (*De indol.*, 2, 4-5 BJP).

<sup>15</sup> *De indolentia*, 10, 24-25 BJP: τούτων οὖν οὐδὲν ἠνίασέ με. Ibid. 11, 7: ἄλλ’ οὐδὲ ταῦτα ἐλύπησαν.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Aff. Dig.*, 29, 14-15 and, especially, *Pecc. Dig.*, 51, 22-23 De Boer: “Among those who claim to practise philosophy there are many with whom I do not even consider it worth conversing.” (Transl. by Singer 2014a, 296). As pointed out by Singer (2014b, 9), on many occasions in his works, Galen “rejects the profession of philosophy, and sees himself as standing outside it”.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *De indolentia*, 17, 2 BJP, where Galen qualifies the words put in the mouth of Theseus to be “true above all else” (παντὸς μάλλον ἀληθές ἐστιν).

<sup>18</sup> Seneca, *Marc.*, 9; *Helv.*, 5, 3; *Ep.* 91; 99, 32; *Tranq. An.*, 11, 6; Plutarch, *Coh. Ira*, 463D; *Tranq. An.*, 474E; Ps.-Plutarch, *Cons. Apoll.* 112D.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Aff. Dig.*, 27-29 De Boer.

<sup>20</sup> See also the discussion by Grilli (2010, 175). Cf. Cicero, *De Fin.* III, 3, 11: *quos bonos viros, fortes, iustos, moderatos aut audivimus in re publica fuisse aut ipsi vidimus, qui sine ulla doctrina naturam ipsam secuti multa laudabilia fecerunt, eos melius a natura institutos fuisse, quam institui potuissent a philosophia.*

<sup>21</sup> As noted by Lévy (2011, 207), Galen “s’inscrit dans une tradition de pensée hors les murs de la philosophie, qui exalte la sagesse naturelle de gens dépourvus de toute culture philosophique.”

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Seneca, *Helv.*, 17, 3-5; Marcus Aurelius, I, 7.

<sup>23</sup> See Xenophontos (2014, 597), who points out to Galen's "general hostility to Stoic psychology". Cf. Boudon-Millot (2013, 143); Rosen (2014, 162), Tieleman (2019, 200-201).

<sup>24</sup> As Gill (2013, 347) has stressed, in Galen's view "medicine, and specifically regimen, is more effective at making people psychologically better than philosophical guidance".

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