CHAPTER 12

Training athletes and interpreting the past in Philostratus’ Gymnasticus

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INTRODUCTION: PHILOSTRATUS’ GYMNASTICUS
AND THE ATHLETICS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The human body, and especially the male, athletic body, was an object of specialised care in the Roman empire (as it had been for hundreds of years before), care which was masked by competition between rival specialisms. On the one hand, educational experts of many sorts wielded their influence over the bodies of young men of the elite in the gymnasium, teaching them how to perform in competition, and how to carry themselves in life. On the other, medical men taught the best ways of caring for the body, for the achievement of physical, and sometimes philosophical, well-being. Philostratus’ Gymnasticus – a defence of the art of the athletic trainer – is as near as we get to a full instruction book for specialists in the first, athletic, type of care.1 It is also interested, however, in constructing a discipline which to some extent unifies these two spheres, combining athletic and physiological expertise. In this sense it is in line with the use of the word gymnastēs (trainer), as far back as Plato, to describe men whose knowledge of bodies was on a more theoretical, medical plane than the paidotribai who did most of the practical instruction in the gymnasium.2

1 For a longer discussion of Gymnasticus, see König (2005) 301–44; some of the material in this chapter is adapted from there, see also König (2007b). I assume, following de Lannoy (1997), esp. 2.404–10 (and also Finnerman (1999) 1–14 and others), that the author of Gymnasticus is the same as the author of Lives of the Sophists (VS), Life of Apollonius of Tyana and Nero, and probably also of Heriocus and the first Imagines. The repeated interest in athletic subject matter which all of these works share (see de Lannoy (1997) 2.407–8), is one convincing argument for common authorship (or at the very least for deliberate correspondance between the work of different authors, especially between Gymnasticus and Heriocus, whose subject matter is often strikingly close). Certainly about that is impossible, however, and I have therefore aimed for a reading of Gymnasticus which is valid independently of any precise connections with other Philostranean texts, which I will discuss towards the end of this chapter. The precise date of Gymnasticus is unclear, but it is likely to have been written in the AD 225 or 230; for a summary of debate, see de Lannoy (1997) 2.405–7; Müller (1995) 317.

2 See Jothner (1909) 3–8.
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Philostatus also makes a bolder connection, I will argue, in juxtaposing analysis of the human body with analysis of developments in athletic history as they are reflected in contemporary institutions and rituals. Both topics are subjected similarly to his searching and entertaining interpretative gaze. He attempts a rehabilitation of the art of the gymnastēs against the criticisms of men like Galen, the dominating voice of second-century AD medicine. That rehabilitation is founded on the idea that gymnastēs (the art of training) can compete with the most prestigious intellectual disciplines; that it requires, in its most developed form, precisely the skills of logical analysis and ingeniously presentation which are central to rhetorical expertise, and central to gaining and displaying understanding of one’s own culture and heritage. Analysing the athletic body, seeing beneath the surface of it, requires – at least in the world of the Philostatian training-ground – many of the same techniques as analysing the Greek past, through the traces it leaves in the present.

Philostatus’ ingenious re-imagining of the art of athletic training in Gymnasticus can reveal a great deal about the controversies surrounding educational practice in the Roman empire. Traditional Greek culture, and the elite, Hellenic identity which was so closely founded upon it in this period, were constantly contested, despite the impression of stability and self-evident legitimacy which so many individuals attached to their own interpretations of these things. The dominance of rhetoric and philosophy as the most important elements of elite education was far from secure, despite the contrary impression we often receive from surviving literary and rhetorical texts from the period. For example, Galen’s vitriolic attacks on athletic traitorēs, who fall so far short of his own discipline of philosophical medicine, seem at first sight a world away from the extravagant praise given to athletes and their educators in the many thousands of inscriptions which survive from all over the Greek East. Both of these positions, however, represent (equally confident but diametrically opposed) reactions to the same institutional heritage. Philostatus, in turn, contests and rewrites the Galenic vision of cultural ideals and disciplinary hierarchies, although he does so in a relatively conciliatory way which makes it clear that his own vision is founded on many of the same principles as Galen’s, in much the same way as Galen himself constantly sifts through and rewrites his philosophical and medical heritage.

Gymnasticus thus participates in contests over proper interpretation of the Hellenic heritage, via controversies about what is the best way to care for the male body. Such controversies required individuals to engage in the process of transforming and refashioning the traditions of the Greek past, while at the same time signalling their close attachment to those traditions. Philostatus, I will argue, is unusually self-conscious about the process of reshaping and reinterpreting tradition. Often, for example, he seems to be offering a variety of explanations for individual problems and puzzles in order to prompt his readers to participate in interpretation, to respond with their own speculations, in a way which implies that there is no single correct or authoritative explanation for many of the features of the athletic tradition he discusses. In the process, he also implies that these ingenious skills of argumentation can be learned. At the same time, however, that vision is in tension with a sense that these are restricted skills, just as Galen’s medical skills, for all his interest in prompting the qualified reader to self-learning, are available in full only to those readers who can meet his very stringent demands. The ignorant majority is vehemently excluded. In Gymnasticus, that restriction is signalled not least by the fact that there is very little sense of the athlete himself being empowered to self-analysis within the scheme Philostatus sets up. The athletic body is always a passive one, the object of analysis rather than the active subject.

There is little mention of the athlete speaking or responding, Philostatus himself, and his ideal trainer, in contrast with the many who follow those modern, degenerate forms of the art which Philostatus sets out to correct, are the only ones who can do the job, who can see how the method he teaches can be applied to everything, to the physical body as much as to the traces of history. Analysis of athletes is the first step in transformation of them, just as analysis of the past can transform it, recreate it for the

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1 For examples of work on this period which emphasis that see, among other examples, Goldhill (2000); Whimster (2002a); König (2005) 8–20; Gleason (1999) is particularly good at revealing the ways in which Polemo and Favorinus constantly struggle against negative representations through their competition for the same prestigious cultural position.

2 Both Gleason (1999) (e.g. 119) and Schmitt (1987) (e.g. 108–12 in his discussion of elite competition in schools and festivals) seem to me to under-estimate the extent to which physical education and competition still mattered for the elite of the Greek East. In particular, the prominence of physiognomy in Gymnasticus serves as a reminder that the skills which underpinned Polemo’s sophistc persona, as Gleason presents it, were themselves open to applications in which Polemo would have shown little interest; my emphasis on athletic education. I hope, also broadens Gleason’s focus on the way in which identity was experienced and performed in a highly physical way through shaping and display of the body.

3 See Roberts (1984) for a synaptic picture of epigraphical evidence for athletic festivals within the Roman empire, along with the huge number of more specific studies elsewhere in his work; cf. van Nijf (2000); König (2005); Newby (2005).

4 See, e.g., Thamus.4.
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present. Philostratus himself draws attention to those processes and to
that similarity. In doing so, he also portrays those transformative skills of
paideia as ones which bestow great authority, over individuals as over the
past.\footnote{Cf. Billault (1999) 156-7 and 161 on the conspicuous and authoritative position of the author within
the text.}

Philostratus is also, however, constantly aware of the danger of using
these techniques of Hellenic analysis wrongly, irresponsibly, or superfi-
cially. In that, he is in line with a tendency among many of the Greek
writers of the first-third centuries AD to be interested in the difficulties
and challenges of maintaining a constant Hellenic front, of living up to
the standards of their Hellenic heritage. The concept of his own project as
something which delves into the central places of Greek culture resurfaces
repeatedly. For example, he takes Olympia, the original and most presti-
gious gathering place for the Greek world, as his main source for athletic
history, and on several occasions compares his ideal trainers with the hell-
ánodíkai, the Olympic arbiters of Greek identity.\footnote{Gymnasticus 18 (discussed further below), 21 and 54. A specific interest in the boundaries of Hellenism
is also consistent with his concerns in other works, as I will argue further below: see, e.g., Swain (1996) 380-400; Swain (1999) on V4 and Hellenism within the early third century AD; Whitmarsh
(1999) on Nero.} This Hellenic heritage is
to be interpreted flexibly, but always responsibly. The true gymnásites, for
Philostratus, must keep in training.

The invitation to compare historical and physiognomical analysis is sig-
nalled immediately in the text's structuring.\footnote{Philostratus’ Gymnasticus is cited from Jähner (1999), who also provides the most detailed available
commentary (for less detailed comment, see Coretta (1995). I have used Jähner’s numbering of
the text, but have combined that with page and line numbers from volume 1 of Kayser (1870-7), where
that has seemed necessary for clarity.} The opening of the work
(paragraphs 1-2) asserts the prestigious position held by the trainer’s art
(gymnástikê) within the hierarchy of professional skills. We might expect,
following on from this, an involved analysis of those categories, and a robust
presentation of the technical complexities on which gymnástikê relies. Philo-
stratus, however, launches at once (paragraphs 3-19) into a long account of
the origins of the various athletic events, which for the most part have no
close connection with techniques of training. Only then does the figure of
the trainer return to the limelight. The rest of the work (paragraphs 20-58)
focuses on the skills required by the gymnástikê, presenting famous exam-
pies of encouragement given by trainers to their athletes, and illustrating –
often very entertainingly – some of the techniques of physiognomical
analysis required for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of aspiring
competitors. The initial foray into athletic history looks at first sight like

an own goal for Philostratus, a move which is only likely to increase the
suspicion that we are dealing with a discipline which cannot hold its own
against Galen’s heavyweight philosophical medicine. Many modern comment-
ators on Gymnasticus have certainly felt that to be the case, no doubt
influenced by a tendency to under-value athletic ‘antiquarianism’, without
acknowledging the prestige attached to the project of anchoring contem-
porary festival life within a long historical framework. I want to suggest
here, by contrast, that Philostratus’ juxtaposition of the physical and the
historical is a deliberate and bold attempt to give gymnástikê a central space
within the contours of contemporary paideia, as something which draws
on and exemplifies processes on which all educated men must rely. It also
suggests, perhaps more importantly, that Philostratus’ own transformative
skills of cultural analysis have a kind of universal application, signalled by
their capacity to inspire a discipline whose value is far from self-evident, a
discipline which in the world of the second and third centuries AD attracted
widespread devotion, but nevertheless still hovered on the edges of social
and intellectual prestige.

My aim is thus partly to suggest that Gymnasticus is a work of much
greater sophistication than has usually been acknowledged. It has often been
criticised as a ‘sophistic’ text, a playful reworking of a traditional ‘textbook’
topic, linked with rhetorical traditions of adoxography, the exercise of
defending activities which cannot easily be defended.\footnote{See, e.g., Jähner (1999) 97-107; Anderson (1986) 269; Müller (1991) 328.} Certainly this kind of
exercise is one which resurfaces frequently in the literature of this period.
However, it is usually very far from being a sterile, purely ‘rhetorical’
exercise. Lucian’s De Salvatione et De Parasito are good examples, defences
of pantomime dancing and parsimony, respectively.\footnote{Jähner (1999) 98-100 discuss similarities between Gymnasticus and Lucian’s De Salvatione.} Both of these works are entertainingly paradoxical, but Lucian also uses them, characteristically,
to challenge the assumptions which govern conventional hierarchies of
the sort on which Galen and others rely, reflecting humorously on the
internal contradictions of classical tradition. How are we to judge the
respectability of any single discipline? Can we really trust what the self-
proclaimed cultural arbiters of Hellenism tell us, when we discover that
conventional techniques of rhetorical praise can be applied so fluently to
conventionally derided arts like these?

Gymnasticus has also been derided as an incoherent, ‘encyclope-
dic’ piece of writing.\footnote{See, e.g., Reidson (1971) 191-8.} Even Alain Billault, who attempts a rehabilita-
tion of Gymnasticus, seems unable to escape from a terminology of
in one first- or second-century AD papyrus fragment), but in a sense that is exactly the point, since the cultured trainer (gymnastēs), for Philostratus, must be able to see very far beyond the technical details of the more lowly athletics teacher (paideirēs).

It is ultimately difficult, in other words, to know how much of the technical detail of this work corresponded with actual practice (although much of what Philostratus says can be confirmed or contradicted through other sources), or how much 'personal' experience Philostratus had of athletics, and answering those questions will not be my main concern here. I will focus instead on the wider aims and effects of Gymnastēs, and on the variety of ways in which this text explores and asserts the broad cultural significance of the activities and skills and stories it presents. Philostratus offers us— with the humour and ingenuity which his own rhetorical skills demand—a paradoxical picture of the trainer as a figure who stands as an iconic representative not only of Greek civic, agonistic practice, but also of Greek paideia. As such, the Philostratian gymnastēs is quite deliberately at one remove from commonly perceived realities, quite deliberately offered to us as a figure who embodies surprising depths and surprising connections.

PHILOSTRATUS AND GALEN

Several of Galen's many works are primarily concerned with the criticism of athletic trainers. I discuss them here partly to illustrate some of the currents of criticism which run through Greek literary tradition, and to which Philostratus is responding.27 Galen aligns himself with Hippocrates,

17 For an account of some of the traditions of Greek athletic writing to which Philostratus responds, see Jüther (1909) 2–31, who focuses especially on medical, philosophical, and historiographical works. Muller (1995) 255–57, 265–70, and König (2002) discuss some of the most important imperial literary texts on athletics, with their highly varied valuations of athletic activity. For a programmatically ambivalent representation of athleticism from roughly the same period, which draws on many of the same classical sources, see Lucian's Anabasis, discussed by Brubaker (1989) 81–104 and König (2002) 80–96. Brubaker analyses well the way in which Lucian humorously juxtaposes the positive and negative assessments of athletics which are embroiled in Greek tradition, although he underemphasizes the degree to which this work acts as a comment on contemporary athletic practice. Many writers from the first and second centuries are interested in exploring the significance of the relationship between Greek traditions of criticism and approval on the one hand, and stereotypically Roman remarks about athletics on the other (e.g. see the impassiveness of athletics for warfare, the association of athletics with Greek effeminacy); see König (2002) 205–12. There is no particular sign that Philostratus has stereotypically Roman opinions specifically in mind in Gymnastēs, but his interest in (for example) the link between military and athletic activity may owe something to their prominence in this period. See, among many other examples, Plut. Quaest. Rom. 40. Jan. 1.68, Luc. 3.770–4, all of which exploit but also question stereotypes of Roman anti-athletic sentiment (cf. Rawson (1997) 4–7).
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Nevertheless the most unfortunate of them, all the ones who have never won anything, immediately start to call themselves trainers, and then they begin screeching, just like pigs, in a discordant and barbarous voice. (Thrasyboulos 40 [K5.894])

Despite Galen’s insistent disparagement of athletic training, however, he does find positive uses for physical exercise elsewhere, most notably (and humorously) in his work On exercise with the small ball. Even the most anti-athletic and vehemently philosophical of authors, it seems, is interested in finding ways of appropriating physical training to his own expertise. In this, he actually has a great deal in common with Philostratus, in the sense that both of them reshape athletics in order to make it compatible with other techniques which they value highly. They also share an interest in seeing beneath the surface of the body, getting to the truth behind superficial appearance. Galen portrays his own medical skill as the embodiment of physical training and analysis in its most refined form, a kind of philosophical, elevated equivalent of the debased skills of the trainer, especially in Prorepticus, where athletic vicissitudes are systematically contrasted with the virtues the good technei bring. Moreover, as Rebecca Flemming has suggested, Galen’s medical knowledge is represented as an essentially masculine expertise, and the active readers he envisages are male readers. That may be one additional reason why the false manliness of athletes and their trainers plays such a central role in Galen’s self-representation, as a counter-image to his own professional skills.

Philostratus is clearly writing with many of the same traditions and sources as Galen in mind, although interpreting them very differently. I will focus here especially on their divergent interpretations of Plato, and on the similarities and differences between their categorisations of the different arts, with reference especially to two passages (Gymnasticus 1–2 and 14–15) which play a conspicuous role in structuring Philostratus’ argument. One of Philostratus’ characteristic strategies is to sidestep Galenic criticisms by emphasising the fact that they share many of the same assumptions, but that Galen and/or others have simply misapplied them.

12 ὡς δὲ τοὺς ζυγούς καὶ ὄψιν τῆς καρδιᾶς τῆς καρδιᾶς ἐξαταλλότατος ἀνθρώπου ὁμοιότατος κάτωθι τῆς φύσεως, τέλος χριστιανικὸς καὶ καθαρός ἄνθρωπος ἄνθρωπος τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου καὶ τὴν φύσιν φυλάττει. Ἀκολουθείς ταύτας ὁμοιότατας τῶν μορφῶν, ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ. Διότι οἱ τρία ἡμέρες τῆς Πολυμερίας ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ. Προς τὸν τρίτον ἡμέραν τῆς Πολυμερίας ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ. Προς τὸν τέταρτον ἡμέραν τῆς Πολυμερίας ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ. Προς τὸν πέμπτον ἡμέραν τῆς Πολυμερίας ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ. Προς τὸν ἑβδόμον ἡμέραν τῆς Πολυμερίας ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ. Προς τὸν ἑνοίηδεν ἡμέραν τῆς Πολυμερίας ἐν μεγαλομετρίας ἐν ψυχής ἐν μαστιχαρίας, ἐν ἀκροβατικός ἐν τεχνέτοις ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκείνοις καὶ τῇ Πολυμερίᾳ.


14 In this, I argue for a more direct link than Jüthner (1909) 118–20, who claims that Philostratus’ knowledge of medical texts is probably not direct, but rather mediated through the treatises of trainers (see below, n. 48 for a different interpretation of one his main pieces of evidence). Brophy and Brophy (1989) point to a number of signs that Philostratus is parodying Galen closely, although the parallels they identify are often less conclusive than they seem to think, and they certainly go too far in assuming that Galen and Philostratus were ‘friendly rivals at court’ (137).

15 K1.t.19. Galen’s Prorepticus is cited from Boudon (2000), his Thrasyboulos from Marquardt, Müller and Helsereich (1884–93). Quotations from both texts are also numbered by volume and page number from Kühn (1821–31) [w. K], where that has seemed necessary for clarity. For English translation of both texts, see Singer (1997).

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Gymnasticus opens with the claim that gymnastike is a form of sophia (wisdom) equal to any. The passage recalls Galen's Protrepticus, and constitutes a very blunt challenge to Galen's categorization there of good and bad technai, including many of the skills Galen had identified as worthy of admiration in Protrepticus 9 and 14. The closing paragraph of that work (or at least as much of it as survives) gives us the classification:

Given that there is a distinction between two different types of art (technai) - some of them are rational and highly respected, whereas others are contemptible, and centred around bodily labour, in other words the ones we refer to as banausic or manual - it is better to take up one of the first category. In the first category are medicine, rhetoric, music, geometry, arithmetic, logic, astronomy, grammar and law; and you can also add sculpting and drawing if you wish. (Protrepticus 14)

The best of all, Galen tells us finally, is medicine. Athletic training, meanwhile, has already been ejected from the categorization altogether, counted along with acrobatics and tight-rope walking as a bad art (κούτσουκα) (Protrepticus 9).

Phirostratus begins his work in similar vein, identifying a number of sophiai. He generously includes iatrike, as if he is trying to avoid the impression of disdaining with Galen outright, but nevertheless conspicuously lists it as separate from philosophy:

Let us consider the following things as examples of wisdom - things like poetry and speaking artfully and undertaking poetry and music and geometry (ποιητικης τε λογικης και μουσικης και γεωμετριας), and even astronomy, as long as you don't overdo it (οπσεη μη περιττοτε), and also the art of organizing armies, and even things like the following (και ητα τα τοιοτα): the whole of medicine and painting and modelling, and all types of sculpting and gem-cutting and metal-engraving. (Gymnasticus 1 36.1-7)

The exclusion of astronomy in its more extreme forms advertises the caution and discrimination with which Philostratus has compiled his list. It also introduces immediately the idea that the disciplines which make the grade

16 See Bouche (2000) 146 on the incomplete nature of the surviving text.
17 Τα νανιτας ταις διακορυφας της πρωτης της τεχνης - ενηα μη γαρ αυτης λογικης 'ετος και εμεις, της δ' ειδοτορπος και δια των των σωματικων των, δι' αυτον εντονον ται και χειρωνακτικης δυσμονον - δενηπαν δεν ει τα τη τη πρωτης γεννη των τεκνων μεταξηδεσμενον την...  'ετος. Ε'η τα την πρωτης γεννη λογικη ται και γηγονος και μουσικη, γεωμετρια ται και δραματικη και λογικη, και αστρονομια και γραφοματικη και νομικη, προςεσι τε'. ε' ει ημεις, ταυταν πλαστασταν ται και γραφοντα... 18 Σοφιαν γυμνασια και τα τσακουδια μη ειχε χαλκουρακι και επειν ενηλικη ποιητικη τε λογικη τε και μουσικη τε και γεωμετρια τε και δια βασικων εις η δε περιττος, σωφια δε και τη κοινατης εστατατι και τη τα τσακουδια ιατρικη πεσε και ογκοματα και παλαιαν και δαγκλωματα εις και κοινοι λιθον και κοινης εις
19 πορι δε χειρωνακτικης, σοφιαν γυμνασιας οδοιμων λειτουργης τεχνης, άνετο εις υπομνηματα ουδενος τωυμωνος γυμνατον. 20 See Juhner (1939) 116-18.
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often represented as compatible with each other, and equally important for
the construction of a male, upper-class identity.47

Often, moreover, trainers and doctors were directly associated with each
other. There were famous examples of men who had combined both careers,
not least Herodicus of Megara, who influenced Galen’s hero Hippocrates.38
Doctors were also linked with trainers and with festival culture in the day-
to-day civic life of the Greek East, as we glimpse it through the epigraphical
record. We hear, for example, of doctors lecturing in gymnasia,39 or listed
among the instructors honoured in end-of-year ephoric lists.40 Others
are recorded as holding important positions within athletic guilds,41 and
attending in an official capacity at public festivals.42 Louis Robert gives an
example of an inscription from Lydia, set up in honour of a young man
who has died. It contains a long list of the young man’s admirers, including,
towards the end, a doctor and a trainer:

Antoninos o epistatês, Tattianos o iktros ton mahtyron (etym. aor.).43

Antoninos the trainer and Tattianos the doctor honour their pupil.

This juxtaposition does not necessarily imply equality between these two
instructors, but it does conjure up an idealised commemorative image of
shared responsibility for a bright pupil, as if his education had attained a
degree of completeness through the combination of their complementary
disciplines.

Still others are honoured for funding local festivals. Heraclitus of Rhodi-
apolis, for example, was a prolific medical writer of the second century
AD. One surviving inscription, from a statue base set up in his home
town, praises him in language closely reminiscent of the inscribed boasts
of athletes and musicians. He is honoured, for example, as:

48 See, e.g., Jüttner (1909) 9–16; Harris (1964) 178; however, Pl. R. 3.406a–b is very critical of Herodicas’
combination of the two professions: for other examples of the harmonization of medicine and
philosophy within philosophical texts, see Pl. Cr. 472a–b Ar. EN 10.9.15 (190b).
50 For doctors on ephoric lists, see Jüttner (1909) 4, who refers to IG III 1199, line 36 and 1520, line
38; cf. Oliver (1942), no. 37 (pp. 71–4), line 48 for a late third-century Athenian ephoric list; van Nijff
(1997) 183 (on Πριμεν ιμι, 112 and 118) for doctors and trainers listed with athletes and ephors on an
inscription commemorating the benefaction of festival banquers; Robert (1967) 31, n. 3 on Πριμεν
111, lines 175–6.
51 For examples of doctors, many of them very distinguished, involved with athletic guilds, see Forbes
(1955) 249; cf. Robert (1950) 25–7 (for the title αρχιτρωτος του συμπουτους θυσιοτο, with loss of
elements of doctors and trainers working together).
who cured shrews sent to Cos for a festival.
The phrase ‘first of all time’ (πρῶτον ἂν αἰώνων) is used regularly by agonistic victors, to separate their own achievements from those of their predecessors. The inscription lists the games he has funded in honour of Asclepius in parallel with his medical benefactions, which include free service as a doctor, and donation of his works to the library of his home town and of several others. Heracleitus is very far from the ignorant, false practitioners of debased medicine with whom Galen contrasts his own expertise, in fact he is represented in terms which are closely reminiscent of Galen’s own self-portrayal, as one who combines philosophy and medicine. There is evidence, too, for doctors taking part in public contests – for example, in inscriptions which record medical contests at the Great Asclepeia at Ephesus. Evidence like this illustrates the way in which doctors were closely involved with agonistic institutions which lay at the heart of ancient city life, and the way in which they – like men from many other professions – were fundamentally affected by the ideology of competitive self-presentation which ancient athletics both reflected and perpetuated. No doubt this, too, goes some way towards explaining the important role athletic trainers play within Galen’s presentation of his own medical ideals. Galen separates himself vigorously from the brash self-promotion of the athletic trainers, but in many ways he also shares their concern with competition, proclaiming his own victory over his rivals in a contest which is much more elevated than the degraded spectacle they devote themselves to. He participates in competitive processes, while also distancing himself from them.

The separation Galen posits between the two professions is thus a highly tendentious one. Of course, none of this evidence necessarily contradicts his criticism of athletics. In a sense, it is precisely this prestigious valuation of training, along with its ability to masquerade successfully as a pseudo-medical art, which worries him. Neither would it be right to suggest that Philostratus’ text offers us an unproblematic reflection of the prestige of athletic training, since his vision of gymnastike is a very personal one, based as it is so firmly on rhetorical ingenuity and historical learning.


distances himself from many forms of actual contemporary practice through his depreciation of athletic decline, aligning himself rather with an idealised vision of the profession, just as Galen idealises in ignoring the close real-life links between the two disciplines. What this evidence can give us is an indication of the kinds of contexts Philostratus has in mind when he asks us to imagine training as a technē capable of occupying a prestigious position within Greek society and education, benefiting from rhetorical expertise and able to hold its own beside the medical profession; and when he asks us to imagine the art of medicine actually interfering with gymnastike and contributing to its decline.

The opening of Gymnastike, with its vigorous proclamation of a positive view of the athletic trainer’s work, is followed immediately by a section of athletic history, to which I will return on p. 267. After that, in 14–15, before focusing on the figure of the trainer in more detail, Philostratus returns again to the problem of how the technē of gymnastike should be categorised. This section responds closely to Galen’s complex categorisations in Thrasyboulos, in particular to Galen’s argument that the art of the trainer is only one tiny subdivision of the overarching technē of the doctor. Philostratus tells us, for example:

How then should one understand gymnastike? How else should one think of it than as a form of wisdom composed of medicine and of the art of the paidistorbei, being more perfect than the latter, and a part of the former? (Gymnastike 14 [268.30–269.11])

Ancient scientific writers often responded to what they saw as faulty categorisation by setting up even more complex schemes, and claiming greater precision for their own work, and Thrasyboulos exemplifies that tendency well. Philostratus himself engages in similar complexity at other points in Gymnastike, especially in his detailed physiognomical advice. Here, however, he takes the opposite approach, sidestepping Galen’s philosophical complexities and arguing for a common-sense view of training as a technē which takes elements from both the art of the paidistorbei and the art of the

46 Galen’s argument in Thrasyboulos is developed at great length and not conveniently summarised at any point, but relies most importantly on the claim that all activities associated with care of the body – and thus having the same final aim – must be the province of a single overriding technē (that is the technē of iatrike, which is the art of care for the body); see, for example, Thrasyboulos 44 [K.8.1]; ‘And yet we saw that healthiness is one part of this art of care for the body, and is in turn divided into four parts, and that gymnastics is a part of one of those parts’ (ὅλη τε ἰατρεία τῆς περὶ τὸ ὑγιεῖνον ἡμῶν καὶ ταύτης τετραχοῦς ταξινομεῖται ἐν τοῖς τέσσαρις τοῖς τεχνοτρόποις). 47 Τίνος χρή παρὰ γυμναστικῆς γνώσεως; τί δ’ ἢλλα ἢ σοφόν οὕτως αὐτὴν ἐγκατέστηκεν μην ἔστω ἰατρείας τε καὶ παιδικής ἐν ἐνόπλως τίς μυρίας τοίς μιλεῖται, τίς μιλεῖται. 48 See esp. Barton (1994) 112 and 224–231 for Galen on the works of athletic trainers.
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Well be doing so with Galen’s work specifically in mind. He also emphasises through parody the difficulties of distinguishing between reliable and unreliable physiological knowledge, suggesting that medicine can go astray as easily as gymnastike can, in order to break down Galen’s distinctions between the athlete and the trainer.

Interpreting the past in gymnasticus

What kind of positive picture does Philostratus offer to replace Galen’s portrayal of philosophical medicine as the only valid basis for bodily training?

Clearly the rooting of contemporary athletic custom in long tradition is important for Philostratus, and one implication of the text’s long sections of athletic history may be that he expects the ideal trainer to have some historical knowledge of the development of the discipline, although that is not stated explicitly at any stage. His statements about recent athletic decline also suggest a certain amount of admiration for the athletes and trainers of the past. None of that means, however, that his interest in training is a nostalgic antiquarian one. Rather, I will argue, he sets out a vision of present-day gymnastike as something which is capable of continually reshaping the traditions of the past in a dynamic and inventive way, as many of his contemporaries of course also do in their presentations of the Greek cultural heritage more generally. 10

At the beginning of Gymnasticus, for example, immediately after his categorisation of gymnastike as a sophia, Philostratus proclaims the ancient glory of the art of training, listing heroic and classical examples of great athletes, but he then explains that that art has degenerated:

Present-day gymnastike has so much changed the condition of athletes that the majority (τούς πολλούς) are irritated even by lovers of athletics.

But my aim is to teach the causes of this degeneration, and to contribute (ευβολεῖσθαι) for trainers and their subjects alike everything I know, and to defend nature, which has gained a bad reputation ... (Gymnasticus 1–2 [161.21–162.6]) 11

The phrase τούς πολλούς (the majority) conspicuously ignores the huge popular admiration for athletic spectacle in this period, and in doing so ingenuously hints at an equation between anti-athletic philosophical writers

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10 Brophy and Brophy (1994) 161–4 are perhaps too confident in claiming to have detected precise echoes of Galen’s own work in this passage of Gymnasticus.

11 For this point see, among many others, Whiteman (2002a).

12 Α ή δέ νοι καθεστήκατο μεταβλητής όσο τά τῶν ἀθλητῶν ὡς καὶ τοῖς φιλοσοφοῦσαί τούς πολλούς ἀδιέξοθεν. δει για να μιλάμε μεν τὴν αὐτήν, δε δέ ὡστόσο τοῦτο, ευ-

colēsēte de για να μιλάμε τα και γνωσμένα, πολλά αἰσθα, ἀπολογητικά τα ὑπὲρ τῆς

③ φύσεως ἀνακοινώσεις καθότι...
like Galen, whose opinions carry great weight within literary tradition, and the ignorant masses, setting up Philostratus’ own version of learned gymnastike as a refined, sophisticated activity.

He goes on to explain that the physical specimens nature produces, among men as among animals and plants and minerals, are in no way inferior to those of the past, only less well trained.\(^{13}\) In the light of this proclamation of decline, Gymnasticus has sometimes been taken (with Galen’s work) as evidence for the idea that athletics declined after the classical period because of the influence of professionalisation.\(^{14}\) Even now, despite the fact that this wider scheme of athletic degeneration – from golden-age amateurism to professionalised corruption – has been widely discredited,\(^{15}\) it has not generally been recognised that Gymnasticus is very far from being nostalgic. This vision of deterioration does not necessarily imply that Philostratus takes a despairing view of the gymnastic profession. He embraces this picture partly because it allows him to dodge the most commonly made criticisms of athletics, by representing them as valid only for degenerate forms of training which no serious gymnastike would treat with any respect. The forward-looking nature of the text is made immediately apparent by the fact that this opening passage presents itself as a contribution to athletic revival, as does Philostratus’ final statement of intent at the end of 54:

following these principles we will show that gymnastike is a form of sophia, and we will strengthen the athletes, and the stadia will regain their youth (δυνηθησαι) through good training practices. (54 [591.17–19]).\(^{16}\)

The word δυνηθησαι implies a link between Philostratus’ own treatment of his subject – gymnastike – and the trainer’s treatment of his – the young athlete – both of which are to (re)gain youthful vigour.

On closer inspection, moreover, it becomes clear that Philostratus’ attitude to the heroic past is highly ambivalent. In 43–4, for example, in the middle of his discussion of physiognomical principles, he gives a long account of the athletic and military prowess of the ancient heroes, before returning to the topic of decline. At first sight his admiration of these warrior-heroes seems to be at its most explicit here. The opening sentence of 43, however, throws doubt on that assumption by foregrounding the lack of any scientific basis for heroic training:

That is all I wish to say about the mixture of humours as modern gymnastike describes them. The old gymnastike did not even recognise these mixtures, but trained only strength. By gymnastike the men of the past meant any exercise whatsoever. Some trained themselves by carrying weights which were hard to lift, some by competing for speed with horses and hares, others by straightening or bending pieces of wrought iron, while some yoked themselves with powerful, wagon-drawing oxen, and others wrestled bulls and even lions by the throat. (43 [284.19–27])\(^{17}\)

This immediately follows a long discussion of the benefits for the trainer of understanding the theory of humours, which is represented so basic as to be entirely uncontroversial:

As far as the topic of bodily proportions is concerned, and the question of whether one kind is best, or another kind, there are some slight disagreements among those who have not examined the matter rationally. But as far as the mixture of the humours is concerned, it has never been disputed, nor would it ever be disputed, that the best type of mixture is the warm and moist one. (42 [283.30–284.2]).\(^{18}\)

His emphasis on the fact that the heroes trained only for strength, rather than for competition (echoed in his dismissive reference to the strength-based exercises of the Spartans at the very end of the work),\(^{19}\) and without the benefit of even the most basic scientific principles, thus problematises the status of the heroic way of life as a direct model for the Greek athletic culture of the present.

The past cannot be imitated incanately, then. Instead, Philostratus emphasises the need to interpret it flexibly, with the needs of the mind in mind. For one thing, gymnastike is represented as a technē which has always

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\(^{13}\) Taéta elēthéo kai peri kradía ἐκ τῆς νύν γυμναστικῆς, ὡς ἡ ἀρχαία γε ὀδόν ἐγγυμνασμένα κράδαν, ἀλλὰ μόνον τὴν λογικὴν ἐγγυμνασίαν. Γυμναστικῆν δὲ οἱ παλαίκες καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπόκτον γυμνασμένον: ἐγγυμνασμένον δὲ οἱ μόνοις φέροντες οὐ κόροις, οἱ δ’ ἔτη τῆς ὕπαρξεως ἀπαλλάσσει θόρυβος πρὸς παγιδί καὶ πτῶσις, οἱ δ’ ἐργασίας ἐργασίαν καταφέρουσας καὶ δυναμίας, οἱ δ’ ἔτων τῷ παρακρατοῦσαν οὐδ’ ἀναταρακτοῦσαν.

\(^{14}\) Περὶ μὲν οὖν τῆς συνήθους ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὰ τοιούτα παλαιά, εὕρεται καὶ παλαιότερα ἀναγεννησίας, πατέρων, ἀπό αὐτήν παρελθόντων, ἣν ἄκριτη νόμοι, εὑρετώσας ταύτα, ἀνιεκτάτων τε τὴν ἀνθρώπου ἀρχὴν, τοιοῦτον τόσον αὐτάρκη ἀνδραγαθίον δε τὸ μὲν ὁδόν διαμετρῆσαι τὴν ἅμα τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι. I Justinus (999) 120–121 takes this as evidence for Philostratus’ ignorance of Lysias whose own work prominently contradicts Philostratus’ claim, but his argument seems to me highly inconclusive, and it seems just as likely, given the close correspondence with Galen’s interests elsewhere in Gymnasticus, that Philostratus is here deliberately disregarding, perhaps even mocking, his conclusions. Certain ignorance of this particular principle of Galen cannot be taken as proof of Philostratus’ ignorance of his work more widely.

\(^{15}\) Gymnastike 58; cf. below, p. 70.
been keen to look to the future, as a catalyst for progress beyond heroic practices. At the end of his account of the different Olympic events, for example, he tells us that it is the art of the athletic trainer which has been responsible for the development of modern festival culture:

These things were not introduced into the festivals all at once, but rather were discovered and refined one at a time by gymnasiikè. (12 [267,6–8])

The text also shows a repeated interest in speculating about the precise origin of these events and customs. Between 3 and 13, for example, Philostratus discusses the origins of the pentathlon, the delichos, the stadion, the diaulos, the hoplite race and all three combat events, focusing especially on religious and military explanations. In doing so, he seems to be constantly aware of the possibility of multiple explanations for these phenomena, and also of the possibility that this variety of explanations may be partly the consequence of the self-representation of the various cities which make them. In 7 [263,32–264,11], for example, he tells us that the Eleans include the hoplite race in the Olympic program in order to commemorate the arrival of an armed hoplite from the field of battle during the festival, with news of victory in the war with Dyme. He also tells us, however, that he has heard similar stories told by the inhabitants of a number of different cities with reference to their own wars. Finally he gives his own explanation, suggesting that the hoplite race is included, at the end of festivals, to signal a return to war after truce. One of the effects of offering more than one explanation is presumably to invite the reader to judge the matter for herself. The techniques of ingenious, often multiple, explanation held an important place within scientific and religious analysis, and also within literary records of learned and entertaining conversation, within the Greek culture of the Roman empire and before. Philostratus seems to

60 Παραλήθην δὲ τοῦτο ὑπὸ όνομα πάντα ἐν τοῖς δικαίωσις, ἐν τῷ δὲ ἄλλῳ δὲ ἀρχαίοις καὶ ἀρχαίους τε ὑπὸ τῆς γνωριμίας καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κανόνων τε. Cf. Gymnasticon 13 [268,24–27]; 'these things would not have been introduced and become popular among the Eleans and the rest of the Greeks if gymnasiikè had not improved them and refined them' (τοῦτο ὑπὸ όνομα πάντα καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κανόνων τε). The gymnastic imagery of δικαίωσις characteristically equates the day-to-day skills of training with the more theoretical and – presumably – rhetorical skills required to develop the discipline as a whole.

61 See, e.g., Burton (1992) on scientific explanation: e.g. on the agonistic context of scientific analysis in the Roman empire: 'it seems that (in my period at least) the δικαίωσεν, far from narrowing down the options in any direction, encourages the proliferation of answers to questions', and 177 on 'the way the principle of noncontradiction loses its privilege to the ideal of completeness' in ancient scientific writing: cf. Feeney (1998), 53–56 esp. 127–31, on analysis of Roman religious ritual, although he is wrong to confine this tendency to Roman culture (139), and his distinction between the multiple style of explanation of Plutarch's Roman questions and the more unitary explanations of

value such techniques highly in this work; in fact he draws attention quite self-consciously to their usefulness.

His analysis of customs connected specifically with athletic trainers has a similar focus, in paragraph 18 most strikingly so. There, Philostratus sets out to explain why the coach at Olympia must carry a stirigl. He offers two explanations, both of which, as often, he seems equally satisfied with. The first is that it reminds the athlete to care for his body properly by using oil. As an alternative, however, he tells the story of a trainer who killed an under-performing athlete with a sharpened stirigl, and explains that the stirigl is therefore a symbol of the trainer’s power, and a reminder to the athlete always to exert himself. He says, remarkably, of the second explanation:

And I agree with the story; for it is better for it to be believed than not. Indeed let the stirigl be a sword against bad athletes, and may the trainer have some authority above that of the hellanodikè in Olympia. (18 [271,19–22])

This is Philostratus’ clearest statement of the principle that the criterion for judging whether or not a story is to be accepted may not be its accuracy, but rather its usefulness. He also hints at the idea that any retelling of the past will necessarily involve recreation of it, shaped by the needs of the present. His reference to the hellanodikè, as I suggested earlier, reinforces the impression that the trainer will ideally play an archetypally Hellenic role. It may even be a more important role, with its duty of moral guardianship, than the superficial judgments about ancestry for which the Olympic officials are responsible. 63

Some of these themes are continued, finally, in the stories of paragraphs 20–24, where we are presented with famous examples of advice and encouragement given to athletes by their trainers, all of which foreground the way in which the telling of stories and the right use of words can provide inspiration. For example, we hear that the boxer Glaukos was inspired (20) when his coach reminded him of the way in which he had straightened

his Greek questions ignores the fact that Plutarch often treats Greek tradition with varied explanation elsewhere. Plutarch’s Quaestiones Convivales, for example, illustrates the potentially important role of multiple explanation within both scientific and religious analysis, at least as they are to be performed in the context of playful symposia conversation: see, e.g., König (2007a); and Hardie (1995), esp. 471–61 on interpretative pluralism in the Quaestiones Convivales in the context of Plutarch’s treatment of myth.

63 καὶ ἐκεῖνο τὸ πέραν τῶν ἐφόσον γὰρ πιστεύετο ἢ ἀποτελοῦσα. ἠφανίζεται ἤ ἔτη τοῦ παρουσίας τῶν διπλῶν στηλεῖς ἠντραὶ καὶ ἡρωεῖν ἢ τοῦ ἐνδιάβολον ἡ γνωστική ἢ τὸ ὅρας

64 This point is made much more forcefully at Gymnasticon 25, where we hear that the hellanodikè judges ancestry, but the gymnasiikè must judge moral character.
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a ploughshare in his youth with his bare hands. Similarly Promachos was spurred on to victory when his trainer discovered that he was in love, and invented a note of encouragement from his beloved:

... a note (λόγον) which was not true, but very valuable to one in love. (22 [272.21–21])

These stories between them again seem to recommend a flexible, improvisatory attitude to retellings of the past.

What relevance does all of this have, however, to the apparently more technical details of the second half of Gymnasticus? For one thing, Philostratus' historical style of analysis is shown to be in many ways very close to that of his ideal trainer; in fact the stories in 20–24 in themselves point towards that conclusion, since here we begin to get a more specific illustration of how an athletic trainer, like Philostratus himself, may benefit from using words effectively and ingeniously. Often, moreover, we find gymnastic language used of Philostratus' own strategies in Gymnasticus, or rhetorical language used for the skills of the gymnastês, in ways which strengthen the connection between them. In 20, for example, Philostratus introduces these stories as follows:

Of the many things which trainers have communicated to help their athletes (ξυνέβαλοντο τοις ἁληταῖς), either by rebukes or threats or by their ingravity (σοφιστάμενοι) – and there are many such things, more than can be expressed – let us put down those which are held in more esteem (τὰ ἐλεγχομένη). (20 [271.31–272.2])

The word ἐλεγχομένη suggests a tricky speech, but also the practice of a sophia or technê, precisely the category in which Philostratus has been so careful to locate gymnastêkê, and perhaps also with overtones of rhetorical, 'sophistic' skill. The word ξυνέβαλοντο echoes Philostratus' claim in his first paragraph that he will contribute (ξυμβάλεσθαι) for trainers and their subjects alike everything I know. Both of these words imply parallels between Philostratus' task and that of the trainer.

There are many other examples of this effect within the text. Some of the most prominent of them come, like the one quoted above, at the point of transition between the historical half of Gymnasticus and its more technical material. In 25–6, for example, Philostratus introduces the turn to physiognomy, which will dominate the rest of the work, as follows:

Since a crowd of such examples comes pouring over us, and I am mixing ancient and modern stories together, let us have a look at the trainer himself (οἰκεψάμεθα τὸν γυμναστήν οὐκετί), to see what sort of man will supervise the athlete, and what sort of knowledge he must have. Let the trainer be neither garrulous, nor untrained in speech (ἀγώναστοι τὸν γυμναστήν), so that the effectiveness of his speech may not be lessened by talkativeness, nor his actions appear unsophisticated (ἀγώοικοτέροι) through being performed without correct speech (μὴ ἔχει λόγῳ δρόμου). (25 [273.15–21])

Training requires action which is governed by rational principles (ξὺν λόγῳ δρόμου), and perhaps even by words – the ability to talk well – in a more concrete sense. The development of the powers of reasoning and persuasive speech is itself equated with athletic training by the word ἐγώοστος, as if the two are inextricably connected with each other. Philostratus' desire to look at the trainer recalls the processes of inspecting potential athletes, and he thus sets himself up as a trainer to the gymnastês, with the authority to supervise and judge, just as the gymnastês is able to supervise and judge between potential athletes. The process of rational consideration (οἰκεψάμεθα) is equated as before with processes which are essential to the workings of physical education. Both Philostratus and the ideal trainer, it seems, share the capacity of being able to see beneath the surface of things, to extract the truth from surface appearance, a requirement which often similarly preoccupies Galen in his medical writing, as I have suggested.

This effect is reinforced by what we find in the following paragraph, where Philostratus similarly announces his intention to inspect (metaphorically) the many different types of athlete:

At the close of these remarks, we should not get the impression that the topic of exercises is coming next, but the person to take the exercises is to strip now and submit to an examination of his natural qualifications, that is, what they are, and of what use. (26 [274.15–18])

64 οἷον δὲ αὐτῆς τῶν τοιούτων ὁδός ἰσχύσασθαι ἐρρώση, οἰκεψάμεθα τοῦ γυμναστήν οὐκετί, ὥσπερ ὁ γυμναστής μὴ διδαχὴς, μήτε ἐγώοστος τὴν γαρίδα, ἦσαν, μὴ τὸν ἐνεργοὶ τῆς τέχνης διδαχὴν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀδιδακτῆς, μήτε ἐγώοικοτέροις φαινότατο μὴ ἔχει λόγῳ δρόμου.

65 ὡσπερ δὲ αὐτῆς τῶν τοιούτων ὁδός ἰσχύσασθαι ἐρρώση, οἰκεψάμεθα τοῦ γυμναστήν οὐκετί, ὥσπερ ὁ γυμναστής μὴ διδαχὴς, μήτε ἐγώοστος τὴν γαρίδα, ἦσαν, μὴ τὸν ἐνεργοὶ τῆς τέχνης διδαχὴν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀδιδακτῆς, μήτε ἐγώοικοτέροις φαινότατο μὴ ἔχει λόγῳ δρόμου.

66 See Flinterman (1991) 39–32 on the value Philostratus attaches to sophist rhetoric in VS; he rejects the arguments of Brauczi (1986), who claims that Philostratus dissociates himself from popular sophistic rhetoric.
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Philostratus himself stripping his imaginary athletes. The order the trainer must impose on his work, beginning from analysis of his subject, coincides, by this metaphor, with Philostratus' own ordering of his text.

In what follows we hear first of all (27–30) about the way in which the state of the athletes' parents at conception affects his appearance and his performance; and then (31–41) about the differences of physical appearance between different types of athletes. Finally, after discussion of the best combination of humours (42), and the analysis of decline from heroic athletics which I have mentioned already, and which I will return to shortly (43–7), there is a series of paragraphs focused on specific techniques and problems: the dangers and cures of over-indulgence and anxiety (48–54); the use of jumping weights (55); dust (56); punch bags (57); and sun-bathing (58). All of this material broadly speaking shares the concern with origins, and with getting to the truth behind surface appearance, which I have pointed to elsewhere in the text. In particular, it seems significant that establishing the 'origin' of each athlete is presented as the first task for the trainer (58), just as Philostratus himself began his treatise on athletic training by reference to its origins and developments.

This section as a whole relies on rhetorical techniques of argument, which are used for detailed categorisation of athletes by physical appearance, but must also, as Philostratus sometimes emphasises, be applied flexibly, according to the individual circumstances of each case. Often his examples threaten to spill over into humour and absurdity. For Philostratus, it seems, the art of the trainer must always make room for inventive and entertaining speech. The problem that presents us with is that it is sometimes hard to see where to draw the line between plausible, morally useful improvisation and frivolous invention. Partly, no doubt, that problem comes for modern readers from lack of familiarity with the idiom of ancient science. I will also argue, however, that it is a problem which this text in particular poses for us quite conspicuously, although without ever offering an unequivocal solution.

In order to illustrate some of these general points I take just one example of Philostratus' instructions – that is, the claim that athletes born to old parents will resemble old people:

It has often been assumed, e.g. by Harris (1964) 16 and Golden (1998) 49, that the dialogue is unfinished, but the final mention of the Spartan whipping ceremony (Gymnasticus 38) may perhaps points in the other direction. It shifts the discussion from specific instruction back to the wider theme of acknowledging diversity within contemporary Hellenism and education. It may even be a deliberate echo of Lucian's Anacharis (38–40), which similarly closes with consideration of the implications of the Spartan custom for more conventional athletics.

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I have shown what kind of children good stock and youthful parentage will produce; what is produced by parents more advanced in years can be detected in the following way: the skin of such persons is soft, the collar bones shaped like ladies, and the veins are prominent as in people who have worked hard, their hips are poorly built, and the muscular system is weak... or are they able to do any lifting but require pauses for rest, and they are exhausted by their efforts out of proportion to their achievements. (29 [276.4–16])

The reasoning here is typical of the passages surrounding it, and of other medical and physiognomical writing, from both the Roman empire and before, in the sense that it uses surface similarities to interpret physical signs as indicators of inner reality, arguing from what is superficially likely, much as Philostratus does in his discussion of athletic custom. It is also, however, very hard to know whether this idea — that children of old parents will look like old people — is to be taken seriously. The impression of absurd humour is hard to suppress. Presumably this is the kind of argument which has worried so many of the modern scholars who have written about Gymnasticus, and led to the assumption that the work is somehow 'frivolous'.

One answer to the problem is that 'entertainment' was in many ways compatible with the techniques of ancient science, which grew out of the need for speaking persuasively and engagingly in specific contexts. However, the text itself also seems interested in exploring the boundaries of acceptable ingenuity. Through explicitly characterising certain forms of analysis as unsuitable, Philostratus suggests that there are ways of drawing a line between acceptable humour, which adds rhetorical force through entertainment, and unacceptable absurdities, which deserve only the laughter of mockery. Gymnasticus tends to represent rhetorical manipulation which is applied for immoral ends, or else too rigidly, without adaptation to individual circumstances, as the main problem. At the same time it enacts the difficulty of making this kind of distinction in practice, between good and bad forms of analysis. If the seriousness or otherwise of the example quoted above is — like many others in the text — hard to judge, that may in part be a deliberately destabilising effect.

To illustrate Philostratus' rejection of unacceptable uses of reason, I return to his criticism of medicine for its contribution to the degeneration
of modern training in 43–44. One particular sign of medically inspired degeneracy is said to be the habit of distinguishing between different types of fish, and also different types of pig flesh, as harmful or beneficial according to where they have come from:

unlawfully, they stuffed themselves with fish, deciding on the nature of the fish from their habitat in the sea; saying that those from swampy places are fat; the soft ones come from near cliffs, fleshy ones from the deep sea; that seaweed produces thin ones and other kinds of sea-moss produce a tasteless kind. (44 [285.25–30])

Clearly one of the problems with this process is the way in which it introduces luxurious fussiness into athletic diets, not to mention unheroic fish-eating habits. Philostratus’ mockery also seems to be directed specifically at the kinds of arguments these people use, as well as mocking the aims they are used to achieve, and it is striking, and at first sight perhaps worrying, that the forms of analysis he mocks are in many ways close to those he has been recommending in previous paragraphs, in particular the technique of linking outward appearance and inner nature with origins. Perhaps the thing which worries him here is the application of categories which are excessively rigid. If that is the case it would imply that one of the things the gymnastés must always avoid is over-schematisation. Hence Philostratus’ parodic version of medical categorisations of fish is strikingly brief, in contrast with his own exhaustive account of physiognomical signs.

That reading seems to me to be reinforced by his denigration of the tetrad system of training, which comes soon afterwards, whereby athletes are exercised on a dangerously inflexible four-day cycle:

in this way do they all their training harmoniously, and thus, rotating these tetrads, they deprive gymnastiké of the ability to understand the bare athlete (τὸ γυμνὰ τοῦ ἄθλητος τοῦ γυμνοῦ). (47 [288.5–6])

This final phrase ingeniously equates understanding of the naked athlete with sensitivity to the specificity of each individual case — in other words the ability, again, to look beneath the surface, to see the naked truth of each ‘subject’. Later, in 54, Philostratus mocks the absurdity of the tetrad system by the story of the wrestler Generus, whose trainer, following this scheme, forced him to undertake heavy exercise despite the fact that he

73 Ισχυροὺς παρακομισίας πρώτοις εἰσερχόμενοι καὶ φιλοσοφοῦσαν τοὺς ἱερὰς ἀκτῶν τῆς παλαιστής ἀθλητικοῦς — ὡς παρακι βίῳ οἱ ἱερῶν, ἀστείοι δὲ οἱ ἱερῶν, ἀμφιχρήδως ὑποθέλων, τοὺς τε βάσκοντας βασιλέα, τὰ δικά εἰς ἱστήλους . . .
74 καὶ τὴν τοιαύτην ἱδέαν πᾶσαν ἐμφάνισεν γνωστύναιντα καὶ τὰς τετράδοις γυμνῶς διδὰς ἀνακολούθησαν ἐφάνος ἐκ τῆς ῥηματικῆς τοῦ ἀθλητῶν τοῦ γυμνοῦ.

76 See de Lannoy (1997) 4.407–9, who deals with a number of parallels other than those discussed below.
Gymnasticus

athletes. Instead of distancing them from the techniques of modern training, however, as he does in Gymnasticus, Philostratus chooses to describe them in great physical detail, which the long passages of physiognomical advice in Gymnasticus might help us to interpret. He also repeatedly compares the different heroes in terms of their athletic as well as military prowess. At one point, for example, we hear a long description of Palamedes, which includes the observation that he was halfway between a heavy athlete and a light athlete in physique, when seen naked. This is reminiscent of the tendency to categorise athletes as light or heavy, to different degrees, throughout Gymnasticus. More specifically, it is reminiscent of the characterisation of the ideal pentathlete in Gymnasticus 31 as half-way between the two. Philostratus thus brings Homer humorously up to date, although it is never quite clear who is responsible for this modernisation. Were all the Greek heroes sophisticated followers of the art of gymnastikè? Or is it only Proteus, looking back with the benefit of what he has learned from modern science? Or is the vinedresser himself — the character who tells the story within the dialogue — wholly responsible for refashioning the words of Proteus, and/or of Homer, in telling the story to an interlocutor who seems to have trouble finding the balance between gullibility and scepticism? One way of dealing with the strangeness of the past is to reshape it ingeniously, to make it fit in with the modern world, as Philostratus has done here, but the degree of authenticity of that reshaping will always be hard to identify.

There are similar effects in Imagines, which are full of detailed descriptions of beautiful, male athletic bodies, which Philostratus takes as promising starting points for rhetorical display. Often the epheboi antennas which such bodies prompt echo the physiognomical language of Gymnastikè and Heroici. In Imagines 2.2, for example, we are given a glimpse of Achilles as a child undergoing his education at the hands of Cheiron. His athletic potential is as yet unfilled, but unmistakeable to the practised eye:

77 Her. p. 48. Hermes here is referred to by page number from volume 1 of Kayser (1870–4), which also forms the basis for one of the sets of numbering in the more recent edition by de Lannoy (1977). For other athletic material, see, for example, Her. 141–2, for a description of Proteus, admirable for his physical beauty and athletic prowess; Por. 167 on Nestor's ears disfigured by wrestling, and on Antilochus' superiority to Nestor in running; and Her. 264 on Parcaeus' athletic neck.
78 See Anderson (1986) 244, 246; cf. Schmitt (1997) 43–6 on Homeric heroes portrayed as sophists in sophistric texts. By contrast, we hear that the athletic knowledge of the Trojans was underdeveloped (Hes. 168).
79 He regularly gives advice to the athletic champions of the present day (Her. 146–7).
80 For examples other than those mentioned below, see Imagines 1.24.3, 1.28.8, 2.6, 2.19, 2.21 and 2.32. The second Imagines, usually not ascribed to the same author as the first Imagines and Gymnasticus, contains very little athletic description.
81 δόθη τινι γυναικι την πραξιν, ἵνα ἔχως ἀκαθιστῶς ἅγαθοι γυναικεῖοι τοῖς στένοις του βρόμου.
82 κόροις ἢ κορήσῳ καὶ τοῦ σύναψε σύμμαχον ἢ μεταπθείρε συμβόλων τοῦ βρώμου.
Training athletes and interpreting the past

common themes and images, and traditional language; she also points out, however, his insistence on going beyond such things in order to achieve a morally good way of life.89 The demands of Apollonius here fit in with her scheme well, with their insistence on learned and precise knowledge of the past, which must sometimes be manipulated in an original way, as we shall see more clearly below, but which must nevertheless always keep in sight moral considerations. That emphasis is clearly particular if we compare this passage with the Letters preserved under the name of Apollonius, on which Phirolusus draws.90 They emphasise moral condemnation of luxury, whereas V4 tends to combine moral concerns with an interest in the ingenious display of paideia, and in outward adherence to Greek tradition. Here the speed of the Spartan recovery suggests an optimistic attitude to the possibility of rescuing degenerate Hellenic culture (much more so than the Letters),91 although the phrase ξανθή ωμος characteristically leaves some doubt about the depth and moral effectiveness of the cure, as if to warn us against assuming that outward adherence is in itself sufficient.

Later we hear about Apollonius’ comments in Olympia, in particular about his ingenious reinterpretation of a statue of the athlete Milo (4.28), which supplements received wisdom with an explanation based on Apollonius’ own knowledge of traditional ritual and art history.92 And finally he compliments the Eleans intriguingly on their running of the festival, praising them for the care and accuracy of their organisation: ‘Whether they are wise (σοφοίς),’ he said, ‘I do not know, but I am sure that they are sophists (σοφιστοί).’ (4.29)93

The word σοφιστοί not only connotes ‘skill’, but also equates the Eleans with the representatives of rhetorical culture to whom Phirolusus devotes so much attention in V5, and thus once again suggests a link between athletics and learned interpretation and performance of tradition. It also sounds, however, as though Phirolusus is holding back from full approval,

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84 δεκινον, ἐκι, κατακαλοῦν μᾶλλον ὅροι τούτων ἀνθρώπους διαγωγομενοὺς ἀνάλλοις παγκοσμίως
85 καὶ παγκόσμιοι καὶ πόλεις καὶ πόλεις καὶ σταγειρικούς ὑπέρ τούτων. σταγειρικούς θείοι δὲ καὶ ὑποτετελεῖσθαι τοὺς παράκλητος ἢ τοὺς παράκλητος, τοὺς παράκλητος δὲ καὶ τοὺς παράκλητος τούς παράκλητος τούς συμπληροῦν θανάτου τούς συμπληροῦν ἢ τούς συμπληροῦν. ιδίοι δὲ έγενος ὅπερ μέρη πράσινα...
87 Ιδίοι παλαιών οι άνθρωποι καὶ σπουδαίοι, καὶ τά φύλατα ἐπανήλθαν, καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ
90 Sparta is, of course, far from typical of Hellenic culture at large, but this anecdote is consistent with Phirolusus’ interest in the diversity of Hellenism, often illustrated precisely through discussion of Sparta; cf. above, n. 70, and V4 6.20.
91 This has a great deal in common with the speculative etiology of Gymnasiai; Apollonius (or Phirolusus) here puts greater emphasis on knowledge and interpretation of religious and sculptural tradition than on moralising. philosophical spectrums – in contrast, for example, with Dio.
93 καὶ μᾶλλον σοφοί, ἐκι, σοφιστοί, μέντοι.
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in expressing his uncertainty about their *sophia*, as if being sophists is not
the most important thing of all.94 Preoccupation with tradition, it seems,
must never be divorced from philosophy. In this sense, the story has a
great deal in common with the positive valuation of rhetorical skills in
*Gymnasticus*, but also with the warnings that text presents us with about
the dangers of using rhetoric irresponsibly and luxuriously.

CONCLUSION

I have argued, then, that Philostratus' *Gymnasticus* is a text which participates
very self-consciously in processes of debating educational practice. Images of universal Hellenic education, projected confidently within so
many literary and epigraphical texts in this period, were always to some
extent a pasting-over of varied opinion. Philostratus' work is no exception, navigating as it does through a great range of competing claims about
the right way to educate. I have tried to give some idea of the controversial
intellectual background to *Gymnasticus*, on the one hand through discus-
sion of Galen, who constructs a medical *tecnē* capable of exercising the body
with philosophical principles always in mind, and in turn denigrates
the physical education associated with athletic trainers; and on the other
hand through discussion of the rather different picture which emerges from
more positive inscriptive representations of athletic activity. Philostratus
finds ways of reconciling Galenic requirements for intellectual rigour with
perspectives which see the trainer as a valued representative of a long and
prestigious heritage. Philostratus draws on many of the same philoso-
phical authorities as Galen, but repeatedly interprets them differently. He
also sidesteps the negative opinions of athletics which are enshrined within
Hellenic literary tradition, by claiming that the ideal *gymnastikē* he portrays
here is very different from its degenerate, modern descendants.

The work as a whole, I have argued, is thus very much more complex
and coherent than has usually been recognised. Particularly significant, I
have suggested, is the link between the historical analysis of the first half
and the physiognomical analysis of the second, which sets up *gymnastikē*
as a discipline parallel with Philostratus' own analytical skills. Philostratus
seems to be aware of the way in which envisaging the body and caring for it
may often be closely related to other forms of intellectual and social activity.
As so often in this period, thinking about the proper way to do athletics is

94 See Swain (1986) 97–100 on the variety of meanings, many of them uncomplimentary, attached to
the word 'sophist'.

made part of a wider project of thinking about what elite Hellenic cultural
accomplishment ideally involves.

The text is self-conscious about the fact that this kind of interpretation
(of the body, as of traditional culture) always involves reinterpretation
and reshaping. In that sense, *Gymnasticus* has much in common with
Philostratus' other works. It advertises Philostratus' own ingenious, often
humorous, ability to refashion the art of *gymnastikē*, which is equivalent to
the trainer's interpretation and refashioning of his charges. That analytical
ability is one which bestows great authority, and is open only to a restricted
field. Philostratus signals this restriction by the fact that the athlete is rarely
represented as an active partner in gymnastic interpretation. At the same
time, as we saw with reference to his scorn of medical categorisations of fish,
he is keen to foreground the risk of falling into techniques of interpretation
which have a superficial resemblance to those which he recommends, but
which ultimately fall down because they are directed towards immoral goals.
In other cases, as for the inflexible modern tetrad system, interpretation
is ridiculed for excessive rigidity, which fails to acknowledge that *paideia*
is a never-completed process, rather than a clearly defined and simply
applicable set of principles. The skills of the *gymnastēs*, like Philostratus'
own, are thus prestigious ones, but they also require constant attention if
they are to maintain their integrity.

Questions about how 'useful' this text is thus seem to me to be of limited
value, unless we acknowledge the fact that it aims at a much wider con-
ception of athletic training than modern sports historians have tended to
assume. *Gymnasticus* is anchored in the realities of contemporary *gymnasion*
practice, but it also deliberately goes beyond those realities, combining the
practical skill of athletic training with interpretative techniques of much
broader value. The true *gymnastēs*, by Philostratus' standards, can offer
training on a much higher level than the lowly *paodothrēs* ever could.
Philostratean *gymnastikē* has space for both moral instruction and enter-
tainment, with all the interpretative licence which those aims potentially
require. Philostratus' athletic trainer, like Philostratus himself, is thus a
representative of Hellenic tradition in the broadest sense, constantly con-
cerned with mediating between the heritage of the Greek past and the
realities of the Greek present.