

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



GALEN

Selected Works



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
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AN EXHORTATION TO STUDY
THE ARTS*

1. [K 1] It is not clear whether so-called 'dumb animals' are, in fact, entirely devoid of reason. Perhaps, though they are not endowed with that form of reason which achieves verbal expression, and which is known as 'external', they all none the less possess at least that form of reason within the soul which is called 'internal';* although some to a more advanced degree than others. The crucial difference between them and man, though, is seen in the great variety of arts which this latter animal performs, and from the fact that man alone has the capacity for knowledge: he can learn whichever art he wishes. All other animals, with a very few exceptions, are practically without the capacity for Art; and these few acquire it by nature rather than by choice.

But it is not just that man is practised in all *their* arts—mimicking the spider in weaving, moulding as does the bee, demonstrating considerable skill, too, in spite of being a land animal, in swimming. No: man also follows the divine arts. He emulates Asclepius in the art of medicine, Apollo in this same art and in all the others which that god possesses—archery, music, and prophecy—and each one of the Muses in her particular art. Man is not ignorant of geometry, nor of astronomy; moreover he examines (as Pindar* has it) 'the realm beneath the earth, the realm beyond the sky'. He has also by conscientious labour acquired that greatest of divine goods: philosophy. So, even if other animals perhaps have some share in reason, it is man alone among them who is called 'rational' *par excellence*.

2. Is it not vile, then, to neglect the one part of us which we share with the gods, while squandering our energies on some other matter; to disregard the acquisition of Art, and give ourselves over to Fortune? To put in graphic form how miserable a creature Fortune is, the ancients portrayed her, not just as a woman—as if this were not a sufficient sign of inanity—

but also with a rudder in her hands, with a spherical support for her feet, and without eyes. All this was intended to indicate the instability of Fortune.

On a ship that is fiercely tossed by a storm and flooded by waves that threaten to sink her, you would be a fool to hand the rudder to a blind helmsman. But it seems to me that in life, too—where greater shipwrecks frequently befall a house than befall ships at sea—it is unintelligent, in such circumstances, to entrust oneself to a blind spirit, and one who is unstable into the bargain. She is so impressionable and stupid that she frequently overlooks men of merit and enriches the worthless. But even these she does not enrich consistently: she frequently reappropriates what she has given them. But this spirit is followed by a considerable crowd of uneducated men, though she is unable to remain in one place because of the rolling of the base she stands on, which carries her this way and that, sometimes over cliffs and into the sea. And there all her followers go under together, while she alone emerges unscathed, laughing at their pointless laments and accusations. Such are the deeds of Fortune.

3. Consider, by contrast, Hermes, and how differently the ancients (both painters and sculptors) have adorned his image: the lord of the Word and the practitioner of all Art. A fine young man he is, and his beauty is not an acquired, superficial beauty. It is natural, and the excellence of his soul immediately shines through it. He has brilliant eyes, and a sharp gaze, and he stands on the firmest and most stable of all bases: the cube. Sometimes, in fact, the god himself is depicted in this shape. And you will see that his worshippers, too, shine as bright as the god who leads them, never blaming him (as Fortune's followers do her), never giving way nor retreating, but following and perpetually reaping the fruits of his providence.

4. Those who follow Fortune you will find to be idle and ignorant of the arts; they are borne up by hopes, they run with the spirit as she runs, some near her and some further away, and some even clinging on to her hand. You will find among

them, too, the famous Croesus, the Lydian; and Polycrates of Samos;* and perhaps it will amaze you to see the River Pactolus flowing with gold from the former, the fish of the sea serving the latter. With them you will also see Cyrus and Priam and Dionysius; a little later, Polycrates being impaled, and Croesus executed by Cyrus, and Cyrus himself by some others. You will also see Priam deposed, and, in Corinth, Dionysius. And if you examine the others, those who are rushing after the running spirit from further away, but not succeeding, you will despise the whole band of them. There are demagogues aplenty, courtesans and catamites and betrayers of friends; and there are also murderers, gravebreakers and robbers; quite a few of them have not spared even the gods, but have pillaged their altars too.

5. The other band is a band of fine men: the practitioners of the arts. They do not run, nor do they shout, nor fight each other. In their midst is the god, and about him they are all ranged in order, never leaving the place he has assigned them. Those nearest the god, forming a circle about him, are geometers, mathematicians, philosophers, doctors, astronomers, and scholars. After them the second band: painters, sculptors, grammarians, carpenters, architects;* and after them the third order: all the other arts. Each is drawn up in his individual place; but they all fix the god with the same constant look, obedient to his bidding. You will find here, too, many who stand actually with the god—a sort of fourth rank, picked out from the others—but not like those who accompanied Fortune. For political reputation, noble family, and wealth are not the criteria for this god. Rather, he honours those who lead a good life, excel in their arts, and follow his injunctions, practising the art correctly. These above all others he keeps about him always. The contemplation of this band and of its character will, I fancy, conduce to emulation and, indeed, adoration.

Socrates is among them, and Homer, Hippocrates, and Plato, as well as their lovers; these are people to be revered like gods, as they are the god's deputies and attendants. The others too, though, without exception receive the god's attention. He

not only cares for those about him; he goes to sea with the seafarers, and does not abandon the shipwrecks. Think of Aristippus' first reaction when his ship was destroyed and he was washed up on the coast of Syracuse. It was a reaction of joy to see a geometrical diagram on the sand; he deduced that he had arrived among Greeks, people of education, not among barbarians. Later, on reaching the Syracusan *gymnasion*,* he uttered the following words:

Who will receive the outcast Oedipus
Upon this day, with gifts of any kind?*

9 As he stood there, people came up to him and, realizing who he was, immediately gave him all he needed. And when he was asked by some people who were about to set sail for Cyrene, his own homeland, if there were any order he wished to give to his family, he said: 'Tell them to acquire such possessions as would float with them in the case of a shipwreck.'

6. In similar situations mean-spirited men, obsessed with wealth, have frequently seized gold or silver to gird their bodies, and, in so doing, have lost not only these possessions but also their lives. Such people are guilty of inconsistency, for they are the first to prefer the skilled to the unskilled, even in the case of dumb animals. They prize horses trained for war, and dogs for hunting, more than any other kind; and they usually have their household staff trained in some skill, often at considerable expense. None the less they neglect their own education. But is it not disgraceful that the slave should be worth as much as 10,000 drachmas, while the master is not worth one? One drachma? No one would take such a fellow even as a gift.

Can it be, then, that their own persons are the *only* thing that these people neglect—such is their failure to learn a single skill from anyone? We have seen that these men give training to brute beasts, and despise household staff who are lazy or untrained; and they even take care that their land and other possessions achieve their full potential. But meanwhile they pay no attention to themselves: they are unaware even that they have a soul. They are, clearly, equivalent to the reject servants. One might reasonably say to such a man: 'Sir, your

house, all your slaves, your horses, dogs, land and other possessions are in a fine state; but you yourself are sadly neglected.'

I am put in mind of two splendid observations, that of Aristhenes,* who referred to the uneducated rich as 'golden sheep', and that of Diogenes,* who likened them to the figs that grow on cliff-tops. The fruit of this tree is eaten not by men but by ravens and jackdaws; the former item, meanwhile, is of no use to people of taste, but is enjoyed by flatterers—the people who, once they have spent everything, will pass you in the street pretending not to recognize you. So perhaps even the comparison of such men to wells is not inapposite: when a well which once provided them with water dries up, people hitch up their clothes and urinate in it. And it is logical that those whose sole concern has been money should be deprived of that money, and at the same time deprived of everything that they have got by means of it. What else should they suffer, when they have achieved no good of their own, but have always been borne along on other people's—and on that of Lady Fortune?

7. In a similar case are those who set great store by their noble birth, and boast about it. They, too, are suffering from a dearth of goods which they can call their own, and so they hit on the notion of race. They fail to understand that this nobility on which they pride themselves is like the coinage of a particular state, which only has currency with the inhabitants of that state; to everyone else it is counterfeit. 12

—Your good birth then did you no benefit?

—Bad to have nothing: birth did not feed me.

(Euripides, *Phoenissae* 404-5)

The virtues of our fathers are, as Plato says, a fine treasure; but how much finer to be able to reply, with Sthenelus:

Greater by far than our fathers it is our boast to be.

(Homer, *Iliad* iv, 405)

If noble birth has a function, it is surely just this: that it may produce the desire to emulate our ancestors' example. It will cause distress if we fall far short of their standards of virtue—

not least to our forebears themselves, if we assume that they have some kind of consciousness. And the shame it will cause to us is greater in proportion to the distinction of the family. Stupid people who come from an insignificant family derive a benefit from their birth: namely that most people will take no notice of their character. Those whose high, illustrious lineage allows them no such opportunity for obscurity necessarily suffer all the more openly. Moreover, a special disdain is reserved for those who fail to measure up to their breeding. If a fool makes reference to his illustrious lineage, his failing seems the less forgivable. For we do not judge or test ordinary men by the same yardstick as the high-born. The former are accepted even if they are quite mediocre, allowance being made for their poor birth; the latter will not gain admiration just for being much better than others, unless they also measure up to their forebears.

So it is sensible to proceed to the practice of Art—that Art which will make you appear worthy of your family if it is a noble one; and, if not, will enable you to adorn it. Remember the great Themistocles* of old, who, when someone mocked him for his lowly birth, replied, 'But I shall begin a line. My family will begin with me; yours will end with you.' We see, too, that even the Scythian, Anacharsis,* succeeded in being admired for his wisdom, in spite of his barbarian race. Anacharsis was once mocked as a barbarian and a Scythian. 'My fatherland', he said, 'disgraces me. But you disgrace your fatherland.' A very fine response to a worthless person who regarded country as the only source of honour. If you consider the facts, you will realize that citizens do not achieve renown by coming from such-and-such a city; in fact, the situation is exactly the opposite. It is good men—men who practise the arts—who cause their cities to be remembered. Whoever had heard of *Stagira* before Aristotle? Or of *Soloi*, before Aratos* and *Chrysiptus*? The fame of Athens herself has spread so far, not through some virtue inherent in her soil, but because of the people who were born there: a great number of outstanding men, who then shared their fame with their native land. You can see the truth of this best from a consideration of
 15 *Hyperbolos* and *Kleon*:* did they not gain more from Athens

than they could have from anywhere else, in terms of the fame of their ill-deeds?

Once their name was swine, the Boeotians

says Pindar. And again,

If we escape the Boeotian

Swine!

(*Olympians* 6. 90)

Meaning that the whole nation's reputation for philistinism is destroyed by his lyric poetry.

8. How praiseworthy, too, was that Athenian lawgiver who forbade anyone not teaching an art to be supported by his son. For all Art must be studied precisely at the time when the body is at its peak of beauty. But it often happens that the young gain so much attention because of their good looks that they take no care of their souls. Then, when it is too late, they say:

I wish this beauty that destroyed me so
 Had been destroyed.

16

At that point, too, *Solon*'* saying comes to mind, that one should have a special regard for the end of one's life. Then they curse old age, as well they might, and value Euripides' words:

To have more beauty than the average
 It is not safe

It would be better to realize that a young man's prime is like the flower of spring, a short-lived pleasure, and to agree with the poetess of Lesbos:

The one is beautiful to eyes alone;
 The other, virtuous, has beauty too.

Solon, too, is persuasive when he says, in support of the same opinion, that one should prepare oneself for old age as for a hard winter, fitting oneself out with shoes and clothes, with shelter, and with many other things besides. That is how a good helmsman would prepare, a long time ahead, for the bad weather. How wretched to have to say:

The deed once done, the fool saw it.

(Homer, *Iliad* xx: 198)

What use could a young man possibly be who was pretty but had no training? Would he be any use in war? It might well be said to him:

But you—go back to the soft delights of the bedroom!

(Homer, *Iliad* v: 429)

OR

Home with you now and do your own work there!

(Homer, *Iliad* vi: 490)

And what about Nireus?

He was the prettiest of all there at Troy,

But feeble.

(Homer, *Iliad* ii: 673, 675)

That is the reason, it seems to me, that Homer mentions him only once, in the Catalogue of the Ships: to show that the prettiest men are useless if they have no other accomplishment.

Beauty is not even useful for the acquisition of money, as some wretches maintain. All free, respectable, reliable money-making comes about by Art: that which derives from bodily charm is disgusting, and universally despised. The young ¹⁸ should follow the old maxim: they should look at themselves in a mirror and, if they are physically beautiful, take pains to make their soul so too, on the grounds that it would be absurd to have a bad soul in a fine body. If, though, the sight of the body is unpleasant, they should care for their soul all the more, so that they may say with Homer:

That man then might be more feeble of body;

But when God bestows on him words, all around

Delight as they see him. Surely he speaks,

And softly, with grace, and wins out among them.

As he goes through the town they think him a god.

(Homer, *Odyssey* viii: 169–73)

From all this it should be quite clear to all but the utterly stupid that neither distinction of family, nor wealth, nor beauty gives grounds for a confidence which might allow one to despise the practice of Art.

The argument as it stands is sufficient. But it might be apposite to add, as a coda, a story about Diogenes. Diogenes was once the guest of someone who lavished the greatest care on every aspect of his household—with the sole exception that he neglected himself completely. It happened that Diogenes had cleared his throat, needing to spit. He looked all around him for a place to do so, then proceeded to spit, not at any of the surrounding objects, but directly at the master of the house. The man was incensed and asked him the reason for his action. Diogenes replied that he could see nothing else in the room that was in an equally bad condition. The walls were all decorated with splendid pictures; the floor was covered with the finest of mosaics, which formed depictions of the gods; all the vessels were sparklingly clean; the couches and their covers were beautifully adorned—he alone was uncared-for. And it was the custom of all men to spit into the unworthiest place to hand. So, young man, do not allow it to happen that while everything else about you is quite splendid in appearance, you yourself are worthy to be spat at. Rarely do all these qualities co-exist in one person: nobility, wealth, and beauty. If they do come together in one person, how terrible if he should be, among all the objects he possesses, the one that deserves to be spat at.

9. Come then, my children, you have heard my words: dedicate yourselves at once to Art! And you must guard against those charlatans and mountebanks who would deceive you by teaching 'arts' which are useless or wicked. You must understand that any practice whose end is not beneficial to life is not an art. In the case of acrobatic activities, such as tightrope-walking, or spinning in a circle without becoming dizzy (feats of the sort performed by Myrmekides of Athens or Kallikrates of Sparta), I am sure that you are quite well aware that none of *these* is an art. The only one that worries me is athletics. Athletics holds out the promise of strength, brings

with it popular fame, and is rewarded by our elders with financial payments—as if the athletes were some kind of public heroes. There is a danger that it may deceive some young men into supposing it an art. We had best investigate it, then; deception is always easy in any subject of which one has made no previous investigation.

The human race, my children, has something in common with the gods, and something in common with the brute beasts: with the former, to the extent that it is possessed of reason, and with the latter to the extent that it is mortal. Better, then, to realize our kinship with the greater, and to procure a training by which we may attain the greatest of goods, if we apply it successfully—and, if unsuccessfully, at least we shall not suffer the shame of being inferior to beasts without reason. Now the athletic training of the body is, when it fails, the ugliest thing imaginable; its successful application, meanwhile, still makes us no better than dumb animals. Who is stronger than a lion or an elephant? Who faster than a hare? And surely everyone knows that, even as the gods are praised above all for artistic accomplishments, so too among men, the most excellent are thought worthy of divine honour, not for running well in a competition, or for throwing a discus or wrestling, but for the benefits they confer by virtue of their art. Whether Asclepius and Dionysus were originally men or gods, the reason they deserve the greatest respect is the art of medicine, in the former case, and, in the latter, the fact that he taught us the art of the grape. If you do not believe me, at least have some respect for the Pythian Apollo. It was this god who called Socrates the wisest of all mankind, and who addressed Lycurgus* in these words:

You come, Lycurgus, to my goodly home,
Beloved of Zeus and all the gods on high.
I doubt whether to call you man or god;
But god, Lycurgus, do I rather choose.

(Quoted in Herodotus, *Histories* i. 65. 3)

The same god, the Pythian Apollo, also displayed his extraordinary respect for Archilochus* when he died. Archilochus*

murderer tried to enter his temple, but was prevented by the words:

O slayer of the Muses' friend, depart!

23

10. Tell me, then, what titles are conferred on athletes. Do not say that you have no reply to this—unless you reject evidence from this source as unreliable. That is indeed the conclusion that seems to be indicated by your appeal to popular opinion, and your drumming-up of popular support. And yet I am quite sure that if you were sick you would not put yourself in the hands of the common masses. You would turn to a very select few, namely those with the best medical training—just as, on board ship, you would trust one man, the pilot, rather than all your fellow travellers. The same applies in small matters. If you were building something, you would trust a carpenter; a shoemaker, if you needed shoes. So how is it that in this matter of prime importance you allow yourself to be arbiter of the debate, and deny judgement to men wiser than you (not to mention the gods)? Consider Euripides' opinion of athletes.

Of every evil in this land of Greece,
There is none worse than the athletic tribe.
First, they are ignorant of how to live,
Unable, too—for how could such a man,
The slave of jaw, the victim of his paunch,
Attain a living to sustain his line?
Yet ill prepared for chance and penury,
Trained in bad habits from the first, such men
Are lost and helpless when they suffer change.*

24

He has something to say, too, about the uselessness of their individual practices. Listen to this:

What wrestler, or what man of nimble foot,
What discus-thrower, striker of the jaw,
Defends his city with his laurel crown?

Or consider, if you will, this even subtler pronouncement:

Will they then fight the enemy so armed
With discus, or will running on the shields

Scatter the country's mortal enemies?
None when he sees the iron close at hand
Will rave so.

Well, perhaps the testimony of Euripides and his kind is not to be taken too seriously; we should rely rather on the philosophers for judgement. But they too are absolutely unanimous against this practice. Even the doctors—none of them has ever been in favour. You can take Hippocrates—'The athletic state is not natural; better the healthy condition'*—or any of his best contemporaries. But I should not like to rely entirely on arguments from authority: that is a rhetorical trick unbecoming a man who respects the truth. It is only because of the arguments of some who take refuge in the vacuities of popular opinion and reputation, and attempt to obscure objective judgement on the practice itself, that I am forced to meet them on their own terms and appeal to the voice of authority, so that these people will realize that they have no advantage in this field either.

This might be a good moment to mention the story of Phrynē. This woman was at a drinking party once; and they started playing one of those games where everyone takes it in turn to give a command to his drinking companions. Phrynē had noticed that there were women present who had made themselves up with alkanet, white lead, and seaweed [or: orchella weed]. She ordered water to be brought; the women had to take some in their hands and dip their faces in it once, then immediately wipe them with a napkin. Phrynē herself went first. The other women's faces were of course covered with slime, and they looked perfectly monstrous. But Phrynē looked better than before: she alone had used no make-up, but relied on her natural beauty, without recourse to cosmetic tricks.

Of true beauty, then, one can only make an accurate test when it is seen as it is, stripped clear of all extrinsic adornments. It is the same with athletics: you can only reasonably examine its worth by seeing whether it is of any benefit to the state as a whole or to the private individuals who practise it.

11. Of natural goods, some belong to the soul, some to the body, and some are external. There are no others apart from these three types.

Now, that athletes have never, even in a dream, enjoyed the goods of the soul is clear to everyone. To begin with, they are unaware that they *have* a soul, so far are they from understanding its rational nature. Because they are always occupied in the business of amassing flesh and blood, their souls are as it were extinguished in a heap of mire, unable to contemplate anything clearly, mindless as beasts without reason. There might be some dispute as to whether they possess bodily goods. But in fact there exists no more dangerous bodily state, if Hippocrates is to be believed. He describes the 'peak of good condition' which these people pursue as 'dangerous'.* And he says: 'Practice for health: moderation in food, confidence in labour' (*Epidemics* vi. 4. 18). This is a very fine saying of Hippocrates, and universally respected. But athletes do quite the opposite. They over-exert themselves, overfill themselves with food, and completely ignore the great man's advice, just like drunken revellers. Hippocrates' prescription for the healthy life was: 'Labour, food, drink, sleep, sex—moderation in all' (*Epidemics* vi. 6. 2). These people daily exceed the proper measure in exertions, and force themselves to eat; and they frequently carry on eating into the middle of the night. In fact, it might reasonably be said of them:

Mortal warlords and gods were all sleeping soundly,
Bound in the softness of dreamland all night long;
But sleep came not to the wretched souls of the athletes.*

The pattern of their sleep itself is also immoderate. At the hour when ordinary men return from their labours and require food, athletes are just getting up from their sleep. Their life is thus like that of pigs—except that pigs do not over-exert or force-feed themselves. Athletes do both these things and in some cases even scrape their backs with oleander.

The old master, Hippocrates, apart from the lines already quoted, also says this: 'Great and sudden changes are dangerous: filling or emptying, heating or cooling, or moving the body in any other way. For'—he adds—'all large quantities

are inimical to Nature' (*Aphorisms* ii. 51). Athletes pay no heed to these words, nor to the others; every one of Hippocrates' fine sayings passes them by. Their every activity contravenes the dictates of health. I would say, in fact, that athletics is the cultivation, not of health, but of disease. And I think Hippocrates is of this opinion too, as shown by his statement: 'The athletic state is not natural; better the healthy condition.' By this he does not just mean that athletic practice destroys what is natural; he even uses the word 'state', refusing it the name of 'condition', which is always applied by the ancients to the truly healthy. A condition is a stable state, which is not readily changed; that of athletes is a peak, and is dangerous and liable to change. Further, it admits of no improvement precisely because it is a peak, and, since it cannot remain the same, it is bound to succumb to deterioration. Such is the state of the practising athlete's body; when he gives up, it is even worse. Some die after a short time, some live for a little longer; but none actually reach old age. Or, if they do, they are as bad as Homer's Prayers:

Limping, all shrivelled up, deprived of sight

(Homer, *Iliad* ix. 503)

at the end.

When walls have been shaken violently by siege-engines, the remains are easily swept away by any slight accident; they will not survive an earthquake, let alone some heavier attack. It is the same with the bodies of athletes: they have become weak and unsound because of the blows sustained in this regime, and are ready to succumb at the slightest provocation. Often hollow spaces have developed around their eyes, and, as their strength subsequently diminishes, these spaces fill with fluid. The teeth have been shaken up so much that when their power weakens a little, they tend to fall out. The joints which have been twisted become too weak for the exigencies of life, and wherever there has been a breakage or rupture, it readily reopens. In terms of health of the body, then, it is clear that no other breed of men is as badly off as that of the athletes. One might, in fact, surmise that athletes had been well named—from the word *athlios*—or that this word for 'miserable' had derived from the word 'athlete'; or perhaps that

both take their name from a common source, the term *athliotês* ('misery').

12. We have been considering the greatest good of the body, that is, health; let us turn to other bodily goods. As regards beauty, athletics is very far from contributing to it. Indeed, men have frequently started off with very well-proportioned bodies, been taken by athletic trainers, fattened excessively and filled with blood and flesh, and ended up in quite the opposite state. Some have also had their faces quite distorted and disfigured, particularly the practitioners of all-in wrestling or of boxing.

It is when they get a limb completely broken or twisted, or lose an eye, that the full beauty of the sport appears in all its clarity. These are the adornments their beauty enjoys so long as their health endures; when they come to give up athletics, their remaining organs of sense go too, and all their limbs, as I said, are distorted and cause every kind of deformation.

13. Well, perhaps athletes lay no claim to health or beauty, but only to strength. For one thing is sure: they say that they are the strongest men in the world. Now just what kind of strength are they talking about, and what on earth is its point? Is it useful for agriculture? I should certainly like to see them digging or harvesting or sowing or doing anything of practical value on a farm. Is it useful for war? Again I refer to Euripides, and his words of praise:

Will they then fight the enemy so armed

With discus?

For indeed:

None when he sees the iron close at hand

Will rave so.

Does their strength then consist in a resistance to extremes of weather, enabling them—true followers of Heracles—to bare their bodies in winter and summer alike, to walk barfoot, to sleep in the open, to lie on the ground? Not at all: newborn babies are better than them at all these things. Where is it then

that they can show off this strength? What is the source of their self-esteem? Surely not a capacity to beat shoemakers, carpenters, or masons in the gymnasium or on the track? (It may be that they pride themselves on the ability to spend the whole day rolling in dust; but this they share with quails and partridges. And if it is an accomplishment to be boasted of, so too, I suppose, is the ability to spend all day washing in muck.)

But what about the story of Milo of Kroton? He once did a lap of the stadium with a sacrificed bull on his shoulders. What incredible stupidity that was! Not to realize that just a little earlier, while it was alive, the animal's body was lifted up by a soul which drove it and made it run with much less effort than Milo's. But, of course, that soul counted for nothing in comparison with Milo's. Milo's death, too, bore witness to his stupidity. One day he saw a youth chopping wood lengthwise by the application of wedges. He laughed at the fellow and pushed him aside, reckoning to split it with his bare hands. He expended all his energy on his first attempt, by which he pushed apart the two connected legs of the piece of wood. In the process the wedges fell away. Milo was unable to part the remainder of the piece, in spite of a huge effort; in the end he succumbed and, failing to move quickly enough, got his hands stuck as the two parts of the wood came together again. First of all his hands were crushed; later they were the cause of Milo's own miserable end.* Much good his lifting of the dead bull in the stadium did to prevent his suffering! Or perhaps you think that it was efforts such as that which Milo expended on the bull which saved Greece in the war against the barbarians? It could not rather have been Themistocles' good judgment,* could it—first of all in interpreting the oracle correctly, and then in conducting an exemplary campaign?

It has been shown beyond all doubt that athletic training is of no use in any practical context; but it is possible to show too that even in their own field of endeavour they are worthless. Let me recount a story which was once turned into an epic by a man of great talent.* It goes like this.

If by Zeus' will it happened that there should be harmony and concord among the animals, with the result that the

herald in Olympia* could call on all kinds of animals, as well as men, to enter the stadium, not a single man would win a crown. For, he says,

Best at long-distance racing is the horse;
The hare will win the sprint quite easily;
First in the double-course is the gazelle;
No mortal man could win a prize for running,
O wretched race of men, who train for naught!

Nor would even a child of Heracles turn out stronger than an elephant or lion. Even a bull would win, I suppose—in the boxing. And the ass (he goes on to point out), if he so wishes, can use his foot as a weapon, and carry off the crown for fighting.

In the vast chronicle the ass will be
Set down: he once beat men in the all-in.
The twenty-first Olympiad saw the triumph
Of brayer.

This delightful tale demonstrates that athletic power is not one of the human accomplishments. And yet, if athletes do not hold the field over animals in strength, what good do they partake of?

14. You may say that bodily pleasure is a good; but they do not enjoy this either—not while they are training, certainly, nor afterwards. During their athletic activity they are in miserable pain, whether from their exercises or from the enforced eating. When they stop, most parts of their bodies become deformed. Again, you may say that they are respected for their money-making ability; in reality you will find that they are all in debt, both the practising athletes and the retired ones. One never comes across an athlete who is better off than the average well-to-do householder. Besides, making money by one's own efforts is not in itself admirable; it is only admirable if one has true understanding of an art—the kind of art which will 'float with one in the case of a shipwreck'. This is not something which belongs to those who manage other people's financial affairs, nor to tax-farmers or merchants. Such people get more money from their activities than anyone; but, if they

lose their money, they are also unable to perform these activities, since they require a certain minimum financial outlay; without this they are unable to return to their former practices. And no one will lend them money without some pledge or security.

So, if what is required is a training that will lead to a secure livelihood which is at the same time honourable, the answer is a lifelong dedication to Art. Now, there is a basic distinction in kinds of Art: there are the high arts, which are associated with reason, and there are the less-respected arts, which are performed by bodily labour—the arts generally known as banal or manual. Clearly the former kind is the more desirable accomplishment. The latter tends to give out when its practitioner reaches old age. The former includes medicine, rhetoric, music, geometry, mathematics, arithmetic, astronomy, grammar, and jurisprudence. The arts of sculpture and drawing may also be included: though they are manual in their performance, they do not require the strength of a young man in his prime.

Unless, then, his soul is completely bestial, a young man should take up and practise one of these arts. And best of all would be the finest of them, which in my opinion is medicine. But this point will be demonstrated in my next book.*

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