

Galen's Aesthetics of Health

The state of the body is critical in most Greek medical thinking to determining both a person's current health and their risks of future disease. Not only must an ill patient be treated differently if he is naturally hot or naturally moist than if he is naturally cold or naturally dry, but he must live his life in perpetual awareness of any imbalance inherent to his constitution, in order to prevent himself from slipping still farther in the direction of that imbalance and precipitating himself headlong into disease. For a modern reader, accustomed to modern diagnostic technology, a persistent tension underlying all of the ancient advice for regimens along these lines is how anyone can know whether their internal constitution inclines more to the dry or to the moist, more to the hot or to the cold. Ancient doctors looked to an array of indications including bodily excretions and the patient's lived experience, but there was also a vibrant aesthetic element to the evaluation of constitution and of health more broadly. These aesthetics are visible already in texts of the Hippocratic Corpus, but Galen is the author who most clearly articulates his own understanding and use of this diagnostic tool.¹ Galen's aesthetics reveal a worldview in which predispositions to disease are visible in normal outward appearance—something as fundamental as the abundance, color, or texture of person's hair, for example—and in which perfect health is inextricably entangled with perfect beauty. In this paper, I will lay out the parameters and theoretical underpinnings of Galen's medical aesthetics and explore their relation to the equally aesthetic fields of ancient physiognomy and racial stereotyping.

¹ *Airs, Waters, Places* is the paradigmatic example of this sort of thinking in the Hippocratic Corpus, but it is apparent in other texts as well. For instance, in Hippocratic *Salubr.* 2 we learn that people who are “fleshy, soft, and ruddy” (σαρκώδεσι καὶ μαλθακοῖσι καὶ ἐρυθροῖσι) are constitutionally moist, whereas those who are “firm-bodied, lean, and brown- or black-haired” (στιφροῦς καὶ προσεσταλμένους καὶ πυρροῦς καὶ μέλανας) are dry.

Galenic Beauty

Galen is upfront about his aesthetic ideal, and it has not just a concrete shape, but also a name: the Canon of Polycleitus, which is today commonly conceptualized by means of the multiple surviving Roman copies of Polycleitus' Doryphoros.² He returns to this sculpture again and again as the epitome of the perfectly proportional body, a perfection which he also characterizes as the most beautiful:

τὸ δὲ κάλλος οὐκ ἐν τῇ τῶν στοιχείων ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ τῶν μορίων συμμετρία συνίστασθαι νομίζει ... καθάπερ ἐν τῷ Πολυκλείτου κανόνι γέγραπται. πάσας γὰρ ἐκδιδάξας ἡμᾶς ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ συγγράμματι τὰς συμμετρίας τοῦ σώματος ὁ Πολύκλειτος ἔργῳ τὸν λόγον ἐβεβαίωσε δημιουργήσας ἀνδριάντα κατὰ τὰ τοῦ λόγου προστάγματα καὶ καλέσας δὴ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν ἀνδριάντα, καθάπερ καὶ τὸ σύγγραμμα, κανόνα. τὸ μὲν δὴ κάλλος τοῦ σώματος ἐν τῇ τῶν μορίων συμμετρία κατὰ πάντας ἰατροὺς καὶ φιλοσόφους ἐστίν, ἡ δ' ὑγίεια τῶν στοιχείων αὖ πάλιν...

[Chrysippus] believes that beauty does not consist in the proportionality of the elements but in that of the parts ... just as is written in the *Canon* of Polycleitus. For, having thoroughly instructed us on all the proportions of the body in that text, Polycleitus reinforced his theory with his deeds by crafting a statue following the instructions in his theory, and he called this statue *Canon*, too, just like the text. According to all doctors and philosophers, the beauty of the body is in the proportionality of the parts, but health, in contrast, in that of the elements...³

Galen draws a contrast in the last line here, where he sees his peers as defining beauty as the result of the mathematically perfect proportionality of the external, organic elements of the body (finger to wrist to forearm to arm, etc.) and health as an internal balance, less capturable in a statue. But Galen himself elsewhere expresses a more exacting definition of beauty. It is not sufficient to merely have wrists proportionate to one's waist, in addition the appearance as a whole must be completely neutral in all respects:

καὶ δὴ καὶ σῶμα τὸ μὲν μῆτε πυκνὸν ἐπιδήλως μῆτ' ἀραιὸν μῆτε σκληρὸν μῆτε μαλακὸν μῆτε λάσιον μῆτε ψιλὸν τριχῶν εὐκρατότατόν ἐστιν, ὀπηλικὸν ἂν ἧ μεγέθει. εἰ δὲ καὶ τὰς συμμετρίας τῶν ὀργανικῶν μορίων τὰς πρὸς ἄλληλα σώζοι,

² On Polycleitus' Canon, see Stewart 1978 and the essays in Moon 1995. On sculpture as a general medium for exploring Greek theories of proportionality and beauty, see Stocking 2014.

³ Galen, *PHP* 5.3.15-17 (V.449K).

κάλλιστόν τ' ἂν οὕτως ιδέσθαι καὶ κατωρθωμένον ἐν τῇ κατασκευῇ τελέως ὑπάρχοι.

the body that is neither noticeably dense nor loose, hard nor soft, hairy nor hairless is the best mixed one, regardless of what size it is. And if it *also* maintains proportionality among the organic parts, it would thus be the most beautiful to behold and perfectly correct in its constitution.⁴

Thus, the texture and appearance of the flesh as well the level of hairiness of the body are necessary elements in bringing the proportionally pleasing frame to the full apex of beauty. Specifically, the perfect body should be at the exact middle with respect to all characteristics: neither too dense nor too loose, neither too hairy nor too bare, neither too hard nor too soft, but, as Goldilocks would say, “just right.” While the bronze surface of Polycleitus’ statue would not have allowed for nuance in many of these directions, Galen still conceives of its perfection in terms of its median status:

ἐκείνω παραβάλλοντες τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνδριάντας ἀδρούς, ἢ ἰσχνούς, ἢ πλατεῖς, ἢ στενοὺς, ἢ τι τῶν ἄλλων ἀμετριῶν ὄνομα προσαγορεύομεν...

comparing other statues to it, we call them fat or thin or broad or narrow or some other term for disproportion...⁵

Indeed, he suggests that all artists, when striving to represent the perfect, aim (knowingly or not) for the precise median:

οὕτω γοῦν καὶ πλάσται καὶ γραφεῖς ἀνδριαντοποιοὶ τε καὶ ὅλως ἀγαλματοποιοὶ τὰ κάλλιστα γράφουσι καὶ πλάττουσι καθ’ ἕκαστον εἶδος, οἷον ἄνθρωπον εὐμορφότατον ἢ ἵππον ἢ βοῦν ἢ λέοντα, τὸ μέσον ἐν ἐκείνω τῷ γένει σκοποῦντες. καὶ πού τις ἀνδριάς ἐπαινεῖται Πολυκλείτου κανὼν ὀνομαζόμενος, ἐκ τοῦ πάντων τῶν μορίων ἀκριβῆ τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα συμμετρίαν ἔχειν ὀνόματος τοιοῦτου τυχόν.

thus, clay modelers and painters and sculptors and makers of any kind of image draw and sculpt each species in the most beautiful way—for example, the most excellently formed man or horse or cow or lion—by setting their sights on the middle in each genus. There is a certain statue by Polycleitus somewhere called the Canon that people praise, and it has such a name because it maintains a precise proportionality in all its parts.⁶

⁴ Galen, *Opt.Corp.Const.* 4 (IV.748K); my emphasis.

⁵ Galen, *Caus.Puls.* 2.13 (IX.92K).

⁶ Galen, *Temp.* 1.9 (I.566K).

Thus, the most beautiful person—or horse or cow—is, paradoxically, the least remarkable. Or, rather, is remarkable in that no part of it has markedly describable characteristics.

As it turns out, the animals that have wandered into the picture here are not merely superfluous albeit charming examples. Rather, in the text from which this final quote is drawn—*On Temperaments*—Galen is concerned precisely with situating the human body within the matrix of all animal species. He is focused on the mixture of elements that make a body a body and that inform all of its characteristics, both internal and external: namely, the mixture of hot, cold, wet, and dry. A perfectly balanced proportion of these qualities, in Galen’s view, will yield a perfectly balanced animal and, therefore, a perfectly beautiful one. The fact that a perfectly balanced dog looks nothing like a perfectly balanced human is not a flaw in this argument, but, rather, underscores it. Galen takes the dog specifically as an example of the way in which each of these four elements must be understood in relative rather than absolute terms: the perfectly balanced dog is perfectly balanced *for a dog*. That is to say, there is a point on the spectrum from hot to cold and from moist to dry that perfectly suits doggishness, but this point is not at the exact middle between extreme hot and extreme cold. Specifically, a paradigmatic dog “is dry compared to a human, wet compared to an ant; hot compared to a human, cold compared to a lion.”⁷ Similarly, while worms are a distinctly wet species, any individual worm might be considered wet or dry *for a worm*.⁸

However, though Galen and I have both insisted on the relevance of animals to this narrative, Galen’s is nevertheless an unabashedly anthropocentric worldview. Indeed, it is anthropocentric in the most literal possible sense: he believes that the human species lies at the

⁷ Galen, *Temp.* 1.5 (I.538K).

⁸ Galen, *Temp.* 1.6 (I.540K): “an ant is dry and a worm is wet, insofar as they are animals; but then, among worms themselves, this one is drier and this one is wetter, either absolutely, for a worm, or in comparison to some other specific worm” (μύρμηξ δὲ ξηρόν καὶ σκώληξ ὑγρὸν ὡς ζῷα καὶ πάλιν ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς σκώληξιν ὁδὶ μὲν ξηρότερος, ὁδὶ δ’ ὑγρότερος ἢ ἀπλῶς ὡς σκώληξ ἢ τῷδέ τι παραβαλλόμενος ἑτέρῳ).

exact center point in the balance in between extreme heat and extreme cold, extreme moistness and extreme dryness. Thus, the most perfect—and therefore perfectly beautiful—person is also perfectly medium in all respects:

καὶ δὴ καὶ μέσον μὲν ἐστὶ τῆ κρᾶσει καθ' ὅλον τὸ γένος τῶν ζῴων ὁ ἄνθρωπος... μέσος δ' ὡς ἐν ἀνθρώποις κατ' εἶδος ὁ καλούμενος εὐσαρκος· οὗτος δ' ἐστίν, ὃν οὔτε παχὺν οὔτε λεπτὸν ἔχομεν εἰπεῖν οὔτε θερμὸν οὔτε ψυχρὸν οὔτ' ἄλλω τινὶ τῶν ἀμετρίας ἐνδεικνυμένων ὀνομάτων προσαγορεύσαι.

the middle point in mixture for the whole genus of animals is the human ... And the middle among humans as a species is the one called “well-fleshed.” This sort of person is one whom we would not be able to call thick or thin, nor hot or cold, nor be able to apply any of the other words that indicate imbalance.⁹

We have come a far way now from discussing purely external beauty. As the introduction of the elemental qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry will have no doubt already signaled, the perfectly balanced person is not just perfectly beautiful, but also perfectly healthy. These are, indeed, in Galen’s view, tantamount to the same thing:

ἀρίστη τις ὑγίεια ἢ εὐεξία, καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' ἐν τοῖς ἄριστα κατασκευασμένοις γίνεται σώμασιν. εἰ γὰρ τι μὴ τοιοῦτον, οὐκ ἂν δέξαιτο τὴν ἀρίστην ὑγίειαν, ὥστ' οὐδὲ τὴν εὐεξίαν.

“good condition” is the best kind of health, and, accordingly, it is found in the bodies with the best constitution. For if a body were not of this sort, it would not accommodate the best health (and thus could not have “good condition”).¹⁰

Not only does perfect health exist exclusively in perfect bodies, the reverse also holds true: perfectly balanced bodies, so long as they remain perfect, will be perfectly healthy. Further, as an added bonus that will become more relevant later on the paper, since rational thought is the characteristic activity of the human species, this most perfectly balanced human body will necessarily also support the most perfect intelligence and, more broadly, the most perfect soul.¹¹

⁹ Galen, *Temp.* 1.6 (I.541K).

¹⁰ Galen, *Bon.Hab.* (IV.751K).

¹¹ Galen, *Temp.* 1.9 (I.565-6K) for the intelligence and 2.1 (I.576K) for the soul, which will be “exactly at the midpoint of boldness and fear, indecision and hastiness, mercy and malice. Such a person would be kind, affectionate,

Galen, however, is living in the same imperfect world that we are. He recognizes that there are very few statuesque Doryphori walking amongst us. He therefore degrades his working definition of functional perfection in order to encompass a more realistic circle:

δοκεῖ μοι καλῶς ἔχειν ... μὴ μόνον τὸ σπάνιον ἐν αὐτῇ σῶμα καὶ οἷον παράδειγμά τι τοῦ Πολυκλείτου κανόνος ἐν τῷ λόγῳ πλάττειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἀπολειπομένων μὲν αὐτῆς κατὰ τι, μὴ μέντοι κατάφωρον ἤδη καὶ μέγα τὸ σφάλμα κεκτημένων ἀναμνησθῆναι. τό τε γὰρ ἐτοίμως γνωρίζειν τὴν ἀρίστην κατασκευὴν τοῦ σώματος, εἰ καὶ σπάνιος ἢ γένεσις αὐτῆς, καὶ τὸ τὰς ἄλλας ἀπάσας, αἷς ὁμιλοῦμεν ὁσημέραι, διαγινώσκειν ῥαδίως οὕτως ἂν μάλισθ' ἡμῖν ὑπάρξαι.

it seems to me to be a good idea not to imagine in this treatise only the body type that is rare to come across in the art [of medicine] and like a sort of model for the Canon of Polycleitus, but rather to also include mention of those that fall short of that in some way (but not in an immediately obvious way or having any large defect). For we would thus be most able to readily recognize the best constitution of the body (even if it rarely appears) and to easily identify all the others, which we deal with every day.¹²

Thus, for Galen the healthiest constitutions of the body are the ones that come closest to achieving a perfect balance of hot, cold, wet, and dry, and these bodies will be more or less unexceptionable in appearance. That is, they will have no seriously remarkable imbalance in any aspect and, assuming their organic parts are as proportionally balanced as their homoeomerous ones, will accordingly be more or less beautiful by Galen's definition.

As Galen points out, however, the perfectly balanced constitution is a rare one, even allowing for this bit of latitude. Most people in his diagnostic experience fall closer to one of the other eight temperaments: the four uniform divergent temperaments (the perfectly hot, cold, wet, or dry) and the four mixed ones (hot and dry, hot and wet, cold and wet, and cold and dry).¹³ And,

benevolent, intelligent" (μέσος ἀκριβῶς ἐστὶ θρασυτήτος τε καὶ δειλίας, μελλησμοῦ τε καὶ προπετείας, ἐλέου τε καὶ φθόνου. εἴη δ' ἂν ὁ τοιοῦτος εὐθυμος, φιλόστοργος, φιλόστροφος, συνετός). See also *San.Tue.* 1.8 (VI.139K), where the perfectly balanced child necessarily also has a perfectly balanced soul, though its natural perfection can easily be squandered by improper education.

¹² Galen, *Opt.Corp.Cons.* 3 (IV.744-5K).

¹³ Galen articulates his own vision of the nine temperaments at length in the first book of *On Temperaments*. At *San.Tue.* 1.5 (VI.13-29K) he offers an extensive argument for the necessity of a capacious working definition of health.

of course, even those who approximate these nine named temperaments do so with varying degrees of divergence in any direction—two people of the uniformly hot temperament will differ from the perfect temperament by different degrees of heat. A person with any of these temperaments can enjoy a healthy life, provided their lifestyle is properly managed; however, the more extremely anyone diverges from the perfect balance, the closer they are to the boundary between health and disease.¹⁴ The result is that the more one diverges from the perfect ideal, the more predisposed one is to the various diseases characteristic of that direction of divergence. And, just as the perfect condition is mirrored by perfect corporeal appearance, the imperfect conditions also have recognizable physical signs.

Physiognomy: The Science of Interpreting Appearance

It was already a natural thing in the Greco-Roman world to assume that physical appearance was indicative of vital truths about the inner life of a person, in particular about the person's innate character. The practice of physiognomy had long roots and multiple strands, but the basic premise was that outward appearance, if properly scrutinized, was a window into the inner soul. Our clearest insight into the practice derives from three surviving physiognomical texts from antiquity: a pseudo-Aristotelian Greek text, the *Physiognomy* of the sophist Polemon, which survives via Arabic translations and Greek epitomization, and an anonymous Latin text, which draws on Polemon, the Peripatetic tradition, and another lost text.¹⁵ As a group, they do not dwell very long on the theoretical bases for the practice, but launch off of the premise that small variations in appearance can support larger-scale inferences: the basis of these inferences is not

¹⁴ Galen, *Temp.* 2.4 (I.609K).

¹⁵ For editions and translations of all these texts, as well as an overview of the practice of physiognomy in antiquity, see Swain 2007; see also the overview and analysis in Barton 1994, 95-131.

always spelled out, but similarities to gendered norms and to various animal species (and, accordingly, to those animals' stereotypical characters) are recurrent. The pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomy*, for example, encourages you to consider the implications of a person's nose shape along the following rubric:

οἱ δὲ τὴν ῥῖνα ἄκραν παχεῖαν ἔχοντες ῥάθυμοι· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βοῦς. οἱ δὲ τὴν ῥῖνα ἀκρόθεν παχεῖαν ἔχοντες ἀναίσθητοι· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς ὄς. οἱ τὴν ῥῖνα ἄκραν ὀξεῖαν ἔχοντες δυσόργητοι· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς κύνας. οἱ δὲ τὴν ῥῖνα περιφερῆ ἔχοντες ἄκραν, ἀμβλεῖαν δέ, μεγαλόψυχοι· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς λέοντας...

those who have a nose that is thick at the end are care-free; the reference is from cattle. Those who have a nose that is thick leading up from the end are wanting in sensitivity; the reference is from pigs. Those who have a nose that is pointy at the end are quick to anger; the reference is from dogs. Those who have a nose that is blunt and rounded at the end are noble-souled; the reference is from lions...¹⁶

Galen engages directly with the tradition behind these texts. His fittingly named work *That the Capacities of the Soul Depend on the Mixtures of the Body* offers a theoretical vindication of the underlying premise: namely, that body and soul are intimately connected, and, therefore, that the tangible appearance of the one can give some insight into the intangible nature of the other. He remains determinedly agnostic about the nature of the soul itself, repeatedly making space for both a Platonic theory of a non-bodily, immortal soul and for Aristotle's hylomorphic understanding of soul as form.¹⁷ He offers multiple citations from the *Timaeus* to demonstrate that even the incorporeal Platonic soul is "enslaved" to the body and therefore susceptible to changes in its

¹⁶ Ps.-Aristotle, *Physiogn.* 6 (811a28-33).

¹⁷ In Galen's reading—and, despite his protestations, one gets the sense, in this text at least, that he is more sympathetic to this view than the Platonic one—the form in question for Aristotle is the form of the homoeomerous parts. In which case, "it is necessary to regard [Aristotle's] form as a mixture of these things, so that somehow the substance of the soul will also be some mixture of these four qualities (if you want to call them that), i.e. the hot, cold, wet, and dry..." (τὴν ἐκ τούτων κρᾶσιν ἀναγκαῖον αὐτοῦ τίθεσθαι τὸ εἶδος, ὥστε πως καὶ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς οὐσία κρᾶσις τις ἔσται τῶν τεττάρων εἴτε ποιότητων ἐθέλεις λέγειν, θερμότητος τε καὶ ψυχρότητος ζηρότητος τε καὶ ὑγρότητος...) (Galen, *QAM* 3 (IV.774K).

bodily mixtures.¹⁸ He engages still more closely with relevant passages in Aristotle. In addition to quoting several passages from *History of Animals* which are concerned with “physiognomical signs,” he also reproduces at length the paragraphs in *Parts of Animals* that lay out some of the blood-based theory that underlies Aristotle’s attraction to the possibilities of physiognomy.¹⁹

Galen basically endorses Aristotle’s views, as he understands them. For him, the Aristotelian model of embryogenesis and nutrition necessitates that just about all aspects of a living organism are ultimately entangled with the qualities of its material mixture. Indeed, he offers a fairly radical interpretation of Aristotelian doctrine, claiming that “Aristotle, too, believes that the soul’s faculties depend upon the mixture of the mother’s blood, from which, in his opinion, our blood derives.”²⁰ Nevertheless, Galen highlights that some give more immediate information than others:

ἔνια δὲ τῶν φυσιγνωμονικῶν ἀντικρὺς τε καὶ δι’ οὐδενὸς μέσου τὴν κρᾶσιν ἐνδείκνυται. τοιαῦτα δ’ ἐστὶ κατὰ τὰς χροῖας καὶ τρίχας, ἔτι δὲ τὰς φωνὰς καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας τῶν μορίων.

some of the physiognomic signs indicate mixture outright, without any intermediary step. These are the ones resulting from complexion and hair, as well as the voice and the functions of the parts.²¹

Interestingly, it is precisely the complexion and the hair that will dominate but also complicate Galen’s ideas about the aesthetics of healthfulness.

¹⁸ Galen, *QAM* 3-6 (IV.772-91K); the soul’s “enslavement” to the body in the Platonic model occurs specifically at IV.779 (δουλεύειν) and 787K (δεσπόζεσθαι καὶ δουλεύειν).

¹⁹ Galen, *QAM* 7 (IV.795K) (τῶν φυσιγνωμονικῶν σημείων). In *QAM* 7 (IV.791-8K), he directly quotes *PA* 2.2 (648a2-13), 2.4 (650b14-651a17), and a series of extracts from *HA* 1.8-11 (491b11-492b3). Interestingly, he does not engage with Aristotle’s discussion of the logical underpinnings of physiognomy at *Prior Analytics* 2.27 (70b6-38), but instead leans in to the more biologically nuanced arguments that appear in the zoological works.

²⁰ Galen, *QAM* 7 (IV.791K) (καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης τῇ κρᾶσει τοῦ τῆς μητρὸς αἵματος, ἐξ οὗ τὴν γένεσιν ἔχειν ἡμῶν φησι τὸ αἷμα, τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις ἀκολουθεῖν οἶεται).

²¹ Galen, *QAM* 7 (IV.795-6K).

In his text *On Temperaments*, Galen engages once again with physiognomists, this time with a mixture of blame and affirmation.²² On the one hand, they are generally correct in their assertions that someone with an extremely hairy chest will be spirited, while someone with extremely hairy thighs will be lustful. Nor are they wrong to cite the hairiness of the lion’s chest and the goat’s legs as evidence supporting their assertions. However, Galen indicates that they have failed to dig down to the root cause of these parallel features, and therefore do not understand the exquisite detail, complexity, and therapeutic potential of what they are describing. For, he explains, the characteristics of hair and skin tone in any given part of the body are indicative of the precise elemental blend of that part, and therefore informative not just about their spiritual character but also about their physical health. Thus, prior even to any information about the soul, the logical foundations of scientific physiognomy open the door to a medical use case, which is essentially what is at stake in Galen’s aesthetics of health.

Aesthetics of Health and Disease

As we have already seen, the perfectly healthy human will have all elements of their body in a perfectly median state. More specifically, Galen describes the details of such a person several times. We have already seen the features highlighted in *On the Best Constitution of the Body*, where the perfectly balanced body is described as “the midpoint of soft and hard, shaggy and hairless, broad- and narrow-veined.”²³ In *Art of Medicine*, he adds more details:

ἡ χροιά μὲν ἐξ ἐρυθροῦ καὶ λευκοῦ συμμιγῆς· αἱ τρίχες δὲ ξανθαὶ μετρίως καὶ οὐλαὶ τὰ πολλὰ· συμμετρία δὲ σαρκώσεως ἐν ποσότητι καὶ ποιότητι. μέσον γὰρ ἀκριβῶς ἐστὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον σῶμα πασῶν τῶν ὑπερβολῶν...

²² Galen, *Temp.* 2.6 (I.624-5K).

²³ Galen, *Opt. Corp. Cons.* 4 (IV.745K) (μέσον ἐστὶν ἀπαλοῦ τε καὶ σκληροῦ καὶ δασέος καὶ ψιλοῦ τριχῶν καὶ φλέβας εὐρείας ἔχοντος ἢ στενὰς...).

the complexion is a blend of red and white; the hair is moderately fair and quite close curled; there is a balance in the flesh in terms of both quantity and quality. For this kind of body is exactly in the middle of all extremes...²⁴

In *On Temperament*, we get still more:

καὶ γὰρ καὶ ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν ἄριστα διάκειται καὶ ταῖς τῶν κώλων κινήσεσιν εὐχρους τ' ἐστὶ καὶ εὐπνους ἀεὶ καὶ μέσος ὑπνώδους τε καὶ ἀγρύπνου καὶ ψιλοῦ τριχῶν καὶ δασέος καὶ μέλανος τὴν χροῖαν καὶ λευκοῦ καὶ τρίχας ἔχει παῖς μὲν ὢν πυρροτέρας μᾶλλον ἢ μελαντέρας, ἀκμάζων δ' ἔμπαλιν.

he is optimally disposed in terms of all his senses and the movement of his limbs; he is well-complexioned and never has irregular breathing; he is at the midpoint between drowsiness and insomnia, hairlessness and shagginess, dark and light color; as a child, he has hair that is more brown than dark, but in his prime it is the opposite.²⁵

Most healthy people will deviate from this perfect median in one respect or another, and these deviations—gauged through the same medium of hair, complexion, and build—offer visible diagnostics of their underlying temperaments and, therefore, of the diseases they are constitutionally prone to.

In his treatise *Art of Medicine*, he gives an overview of these signs: the perfectly hot temperament will be “rather hairy ... but with less fat, very red complexioned and black-haired,” while the perfectly cold will be hairless and fat and “both their complexion and their hair will be brown”; the dry mixture looks much like the well-balanced one, but thinner and harder, while the moist is fleshier and softer.²⁶ The corresponding portrait of the hot/dry mixture in *On Temperaments* is therefore pretty predictable. In addition to a broad chest,

καὶ τρίχες πολλὰ καθ' ὅλον τὸ σῶμα καὶ αἰ τῆς κεφαλῆς εὐαυξέσταται μὲν καὶ μέλαινα καὶ οὖλαι κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἡλικίαν, ἐπὶ δὲ προήκοντι τῷ χρόνῳ φαλάκρωσις ἀκολουθήσει. καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ σύντονον καὶ διηρθρωμένον καὶ

²⁴ Galen, *Ars* 14 (I.342K).

²⁵ Galen, *Temp.* 2.1 (I.577K). See also *San. Tue.* 1.6 (VI.30K), where characterizes the perfect body in a more general way as a median of fleshiness, hairiness, skin color, vein size, passion, sleep patterns, craftiness, and sex drive.

²⁶ Galen, *Ars* 15 (I.343-4K) (λασιώτερα δὲ...πιμελῆς ἦττον ἔχοντα, τῇ χροῖᾳ δὲ ἐξέρυθρα, καὶ μελανότριχα εἶναι ... ἢ χροῖα δ' αὐτοῖς ἅμα ταῖς θριξὶ πυρρότερα).

μυῶδες... ὄλον ἔσται τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἀνθρώποις τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὸ δέρμα σκληρότερον τε καὶ μελάντερον ὥσπερ καὶ δασύτερον.

he will have much hair over his whole body and that on his head will be extremely quick-growing and black and curly while he is young, but as time passes baldness will follow. The whole body of these sorts of people will be taut, articulated, and muscular; and the skin will tend to be drier and darker, likewise also hairier.²⁷

The cold/wet temperament will present the complete opposite appearance:

ὁ μὲν θώραξ αὐτοῖς στενὸς καὶ ἄτριχος ἔσται, καθάπερ οὖν καὶ σύμπαν τὸ σῶμα ψιλὸν τριχῶν ἀπαλὸν τε καὶ λευκὸν τὸ δέρμα καὶ ὑπόπυρρον ταῖς θριξὶ καὶ μάλιστ' ἐν νεότητι καὶ οὐ φαλακροῦνται γηρῶντες... καὶ πιμελώδεις καὶ νεύροις καὶ μυσὶν ἄρρωστοὶ καὶ ἀδιάρθρωτοι τὰ κῶλα καὶ βλαιοὶ γίνονται.

the chest in these people will be thin and hairless; likewise also the entire body will be smooth of hair, and the skin will be soft and pale; they are brownish when it comes to their hair, especially in their youth and they do not go bald as they age ... They are fatty, feeble in their nerves and muscles, and unarticulated and twisted in their limbs.²⁸

A predictable set of diseases will tend to befall each of the various constitutions, with the result that aesthetic cues could trigger the medically-oriented viewer to see different predispositions and possible future diseases lurking under the surface.

Galen's disease theory is extremely organized and, unsurprisingly, forms a perfect complement to the aspects of his physiological theories that we have so far been exploring. His text *On the Differentiae of Diseases* seeks to create a framework in which to understand all the possible ways that the body might become ill.²⁹ His primary division of diseases is into those affecting the organs quā organs and those affecting the homoeomerous parts themselves.³⁰ The

²⁷ Galen, *Temp.* 2.6 (I.625-6K).

²⁸ Galen, *Temp.* 2.6 (I.626K).

²⁹ Indeed, the text is remarkably non-partisan and, unlike most other Galenic texts, offers a big-tent approach that can accommodate even atomist theories of disease, though this tolerant attitude does not endure into the companion text *On the Causes of Disease*.

³⁰ In *On the Elements According to Hippocrates* and *On the Differences between the Homoeomerous Parts*, he goes into more detail on the hierarchy of substances that form the living body. At *Diff.Morb.* 3.1 (VI.841K) he offers a simple summary giving arteries, veins, nerves, bones, cartilages, ligaments, membranes, and flesh as examples of homoeomeres and brain, heart, lung, liver, stomach, spleen, eyes, and kidneys as examples of organs. He goes on to explain that "each of these organic parts is composed out of some others that are simple as far as the sense can perceive,

former include issues of form, magnitude, position, excess, and deficiency—swellings, blockages, inflammations, dislocations, etc.—while the latter stem from issues of elemental imbalance and result in functional problems without obviously visible antecedent causes.³¹ Thus, the diseases of homoeomerous parts are pathological imbalances of the natural temperamental mixture of hot, cold, wet, and dry. Accordingly, diseases are categorizable in terms of which quality or pair of qualities dominate the imbalance. In the companion text *On the Causes of Diseases*, he dilates on diseases caused by immoderate heat as an example for how to approach all of the other variations. An imbalance of heat can arise from five basic root causes: 1) excessive movement, whether physical or emotional, which leads to fatigue and fever; 2) putrefaction somewhere in the body, which leads to *erysipelas*, *herpes*, pustules, inflammations, glandular swelling, and fever; 3) excessive exposure to heat, which leads to heat stroke and fever; 4) constriction of the skin, for example from submersion in extremely cold or astringent water, which cuts off the innate heat from proper temperature regulation, causing fever; and 5) food that is excessively hot in quality, which also causes fever. He goes on to explain that the same causal agents will not have the same impact on every body. The preexisting constitution of the body will ultimately dictate how easily any of these causes will result in a fully-fledged disease: “for what is already hot is more readily heated further, just as what is cold is more readily further cooled, whereas what is disposed in an opposite way is unsuited [to so change].”³² In other words, people with a naturally hot temperament are much more likely to get fevers than those with a cold one; they would therefore be wise to avoid excessive exercise, emotional stress, polar bear plunges, spicy food, and sun bathing.

and each of those is composed out of the primary elements” (ἕκαστον γὰρ τῶν ὀργανικῶν τούτων μορίων ἔκ τινων ἐτέρων ἀπλῶν ὡς πρὸς τὴν αἴσθησιν σύγκειται, κακείνων ἕκαστον ἐκ τῶν πρώτων στοιχείων).

³¹ On the inscrutability of diseases of the homoeomerous parts, see Galen, *Diff.Morb.* 5.6 (VI.854K).

³² Galen, *Caus.Morb.* 2.4 (VII.9K) (τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἤδη θερμὸν ἐτοιμότερον ὑπερθερμανθῆναι, καθάπερ οὖν τὸ ψυχρὸν ὑπερψυχθῆναι, τὸ δ’ ἐναντίως ἔχον ἀνεπιτήδειον).

As one delves deeper into Galen's theories of nosology, little deduction would be necessary to compile all the specific disease predispositions of each of the main temperamental variations, but Galen also spells some of them out for his readers from time to time. The perfectly hot temperament, for example, is also especially susceptible to diseases caused by yellow bile, and people of this nature (those with abundant dark hair and skinny builds) must be on guard against habits that will encourage diseases of the liver and caustic fevers.³³ Those who are moist and hot (also with thick dark hair, but with softer, fleshier bodies) are particularly susceptible to sore throats, catarrhs, blood behaving in variously ill-regulated ways (hemorrhoids, bloody noses, blood in the sputum), gout, joint issues, eye inflammations, lung ailments, and rheumatism.³⁴ The cold and moist are also prone to rheumatic diseases and must care for themselves accordingly.³⁵ In general, the dry, with their firmer flesh, are less susceptible to diseases that manifest on the exterior of the body, while the moist are less susceptible to internal ones.³⁶

However, Galen immediately complicates this picture. If it were that simple, no one would ever be surprised by a disease again! The complications unfold in two ways: first, not everyone's constitution is as straightforward as the ones dealt with here. The descriptions we just went through depict people with *evenly distributed* temperaments. Not to be confused with the well-balanced temperament, which lies at the midpoint between hot, cold, wet, and dry, the evenly distributed temperament can fall anywhere on the hot/cold/wet/dry spectrum but is uniformly present throughout the body. Many people diverge from this straightforward model and instead have different constitutional blends in different areas of their body. This can, unsurprisingly, lead to complicated diagnostic cues. For example, if someone has a brain that trends to the cold side, they

³³ Galen, *San.Tue.* 6.3 (VI.390, 392, 398K).

³⁴ Galen, *San.Tue.* 5.12 (VI.374-5K).

³⁵ Galen, *San.Tue.* 6.3 (VI.402K).

³⁶ Galen, *Opt.Corp.Const.* 4 (IV.745K).

will have “straight, brown hair that does not go thin and that starts to grow a long time after birth, being at first fine and wispy.”³⁷ People with hair of this description can expect to fall prey to head colds and mucus and are prone to the ill-effects of cold temperatures. However, they should not immediately assume that they are of a uniformly cold constitution. If one such person also had a moderately hairy chest, this would suggest an unevenly distributed temperament with a cold brain, but a moist and hot heart, rendering him also liable to diseases of putrefaction.

The basic take-way, as Galen sums it up himself, is that it is not good practice to extrapolate generalities about a person’s health from observations of a single part. Nevertheless, he gives us a great deal of insight into just such a medical sort of physiognomy popular in his time, by offering a rebuttal of this practice as an active one:

κατὰ τοῦτον οὖν τὸν τρόπον ἀεὶ χρὴ σκοπεῖσθαι περὶ κράσεως, ἕκαστον ἰδίᾳ μόνιον ἐξετάζοντα, καὶ μὴ περὶ πάντων ἀποφαίνεσθαι τολμᾶν ἐξ ἑνός, ὥσπερ ἐποίησαν ἔνιοι, τοὺς μὲν σιμοὺς ὑγροὺς εἶναι φάμενοι, τοὺς δὲ γρυποὺς ξηροὺς καὶ οἷς μὲν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ μικροί, ξηροὺς, οἷς δὲ μεγάλοι, ὑγρούς.

it is always necessary to approach the consideration of mixture in this way: taking account of each part on its own, and not daring to make declarations about all of them based on one, like some people do, saying that people with snub-noses are wet and those with hooked noses are dry and that those with small eyes are dry, while those with large ones are wet.³⁸

Thus, the uncritical practitioner of these aesthetics of health and disease would be guilty of the same simplistic reasoning as the physiognomist who repeats piecemeal correlations without understanding root cause. Such an uncritical viewer might make the quick summation of a hooked nose that it would translate to both “a noble soul (the reference is from eagles)” and a dry constitution prone to internal diseases, while a snub nose would mean “lustfulness (the reference

³⁷ Galen, *Ars* 7 (I.325K) (αἱ τρίχες εὐθεῖαί τε καὶ πυρρᾶι, καὶ μόνιμοι, καὶ μετὰ πολὺν χρόνον τοῦ γεννηθῆναι φυόμεναι, λεπταὶ καὶ ἄτροφοι τὸ πρῶτον).

³⁸ Galen, *Temp.* 2.6 (I.635K).

is from stags)”) and a moist predisposition towards putrefaction.³⁹ Galen, with his more subtle and complicated view of the origins of the shaping of body parts in embryogenesis, would have put very little stock at all in indications drawn from the shape of the nose, and would generally have had no patience with such glib diagnoses.⁴⁰

Aesthetics of Race

The second complication that Galen introduces to his basic picture also has echoes in the physiognomical literature, and it highlights the uncomfortable possibilities inherent in a worldview of this sort—and, indeed, the evil uses to which the pseudo-scientific racist ideologies developed in the eighteenth century subsequently put it. Obviously, the aesthetic diagnoses that Galen is promoting could be used to paint whole groups of people as physiologically othered. Indeed, an entire strand of Greco-Roman physiognomy was premised on exactly this approach. The pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomy* explains that there are three prevalent methods for approaching the practice. One—the most widely exhibited in the surviving sources—is by drawing parallels between the subject’s appearance and the appearances of animals; another—which this author dismisses as implausible—is by comparing subjects’ faces to the facial expressions characteristic of different emotions; the remaining one is explicitly racializing:

³⁹ Ps-Aristotle, *Physiogn.* 6 (μεγαλόψυχοι· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀετούς...λάγνοι· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐλάφους).

⁴⁰ Galen differentiates the qualities of the homoeomerous parts from the form of body (both of its parts and of its whole). The former is directly dependent upon the material mixture of the body; the latter, however, is the result of what Galen calls “the shaping faculty” (ἡ διαπλαστική δύναμις). Galen describes this as the most artistic of the natural faculties at *Nat.Fac.* 1.6 (I.15K) and compares it to the artists Phidias and Praxiteles (*Nat.Fac.* 2.3 (I.82K)) and to none other than Polycleitus at *UP* 17.1 (IV.352-3K = II.441-2 Helmreich). At *Temp.* 2.6 (I.636K) he points out that “even Aristotle has some doubts whether it might not have some more divine source, and not be a result of the hot, cold, dry, and wet” (καὶ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ἠπόρησε, μὴ ποτ’ ἄρα θειοτέρας τινὸς ἀρχῆς εἶη καὶ οὐ κατὰ τὸ θερμὸν καὶ ψυχρὸν καὶ ξηρὸν καὶ ὑγρὸν.); cf. 1.9 (I.567K) where he proposes that shaping might be an emergent property of temperamental mixture, but it is also possible that it has “some other more divine source from above” (τάχα δέ τινα θειοτέραν ἀρχὴν ἐτέραν ἐχούσης ἄνωθεν). For more discussion of these passages, and especially Galen’s reading of Aristotle here, see Singer 1997, 536-40 and 2014, 29-32, van der Eijk 2014, Havrda 2017, and Singer and van der Eijk 2018, 13 and *ad loc.* This question of shaping as an extrinsic power also drives the aporia at the heart of Galen’s *On the Formation of the Fetus*.

οὐκ ἐξ ἀπάντων δὲ τῶν ζώων ἐδοκίμαζον, ἀλλ' ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους, διελόμενοι κατὰ τὰ ἔθνη, ὅσα διέφερε τὰς ὄψεις καὶ τὰ ἦθη, οἷον Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ Θρᾶκες καὶ Σκύθαι, ὁμοίως τὴν ἐκλογὴν τῶν σημείων ἐποιοῦντο.

[practitioners of this method] did not scrutinize physiognomy by means of all the animals, but just by means of the human species: having divided humans by *ethnos*, according to differences with respect to appearance and character (for example Egyptians and Thracians and Scythians), they made their choice of signs accordingly.⁴¹

While none of the treatises that survive explicitly endorse this method, it infiltrates them all, especially in the sections on the hair.

Galen's conceptions of perfect beauty and perfect health are also part and parcel of a committedly Hellenophilic worldview, and he is clearly bringing prejudicial preconceptions to the table. Take, for example, his comment in the first book of *Preserving Health*:

παρὰ μὲν γε τοῖς Γερμανοῖς οὐ καλῶς τρέφεται τὰ παιδιά. ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς γε νῦν οὔτε Γερμανοῖς οὔτε ἄλλοις τισὶν ἀγρίοις ἢ βαρβάροις ἀνθρώποις ταῦτα γράφομεν, οὐ μᾶλλον ἢ ἄρκτοις ἢ λέουσιν ἢ κάπροις ἢ τισὶ τῶν ἄλλων θηρίων, ἀλλ' Ἑλλησι καὶ ὅσοι τῷ γένει μὲν ἔφυσαν βάρβαροι, ζηλοῦσι δὲ τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπιτηδεύματα.

among the Germans, children are not well reared. But I am certainly not writing this treatise for Germans or for any other savage or barbaric peoples, any more than for bears or lions or wild boars or any other wild beasts, but for Greeks and for any who were born barbarian by race (*genos*) but strive for the Greek way of life.⁴²

Notably, even in this most callous dismissal of “barbarians” as quasi-animals, he differentiates between the concepts of race and ethnicity: Greekness—and the pursuit of Greek health—is an aspirational possibility regardless of one’s ancestry or homeland.⁴³ Indeed, he is explicit that racial

⁴¹ Ps.-Aristotle, *Physiogn.* 1 (805a24-28); cf. Anonymus Latinus, *Physiogn.* 9 for a similar account with some detailed examples.

⁴² *San. Tue.* 1.10 (VI.51K).

⁴³ Mac Sweeney 2022 offers a thoughtful essay on the importance of maintaining a critical awareness of the different entanglements between the categories of race and ethnicity in modern and in ancient conceptions; I similarly found engaging with the approaches in Isaac 2004 and 2009, McCoskey 2012 and 2022, Dench 2019, and Derbew 2022 to be helpful for thinking about the idea of race in Greco-Roman antiquity. My use of the term “racial” in this essay aims to capture these ancient authors’ generalizations about groups of people according to the characteristics they believed to be contingent on location and *genos* rather than cultural *ethnos*. Indeed, considerably complicating any ancient account of race—and especially so for authors from the medical or philosophical spheres—is the question of how it incorporated concepts of heredity. Unfortunately, there is not space here to go into the interesting and complicated

stereotyping is neither the point of (nor, in his view, a logical product of) his own project in these texts: he ultimately sees the ancient aesthetics of race as not just unhelpful but actually in many ways counterproductive to his medical aesthetics.

Galen ascribes to the view prevalent in antiquity that the physical differences that distinguish groups of people living in different parts of the world are the direct result of their geographical locations, primarily in terms of their proximity to or distance from the sun.⁴⁴

Vitruvius, for example, offers a paradigmatic version of the widespread belief:

Namque sol quibus locis mediocriter profundit vapores, in his conservat corpora temperata; quaeque proxime currendo deflagrant, eripit exurendo temperaturam umoris; contra vero refrigeratis regionibus, quod absunt a meridie longe, non exhauritur a coloribus umor, sed ex caelo roscidus aer in corpora fundens umorem efficit ampliores corporaturas vocisque sonitus graviore. Ex eo quoque, <quae> sub septentrionibus nutriuntur gentes, inmanibus corporibus, candidis coloribus, derecto capillo et rufo, oculis caesis, sanguine multo ab umoris plenitate caelique refrigerationibus sunt conformati; qui autem sunt proximi ad axem meridianum subiectique solis cursui, brevioribus corporibus, colore fusco, crispo capillo, oculis nigris, cruribus validis, sanguine exiguo solis impetu perficiuntur.

for in those regions where the sun pours forth a moderate heat, it keeps the body duly tempered; where it comes near and the earth scorches, it burns out and removes the moisture; whereas in the cold regions, because they are far distant from the south, the moisture is not drawn out from their complexions, but the dewy air from the sky pours moisture into the body, enlarges the physique and deepens the voice. Hence, also, the peoples of the north receive nourishment, and are characterized by tall stature, fair complexion, straight red hair, blue eyes, fullness of blood, owing to the abundance of moisture and the cool climate. Those, however, who are nearest to the southern climes and under the sun's orbit, owing to his violence, have a smaller stature, dark complexion, curly hair, black eyes, strong legs, and thinness of blood.⁴⁵

ramifications of Galen's concept of seed and generation for his concept of geographically determined physical characteristics and vice versa.

⁴⁴ Isaac 2004, 55-109 offers an extensive catalogue of authors ascribing to variations on this view across Greco-Roman antiquity; cf. Kaufman 2022 on the science of race in antiquity. While I primarily focus my examples on Galen's nearer contemporaries, theories of geographical influence on human development and appearance were already well established in the fifth century BCE, most notably in the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*, which considers the effects not just of temperature but also of water quality, available produce, and prevailing winds.

⁴⁵ Vitruvius, 6.1.3-4; Granger translation, lightly edited.

Further, for Vitruvius and for others ascribing to similar theories, the effects of climate on a people's character are equally—often more—salient than the effects on their bodies. Vitruvius goes on to explain that people from the southern hemisphere are intelligent, crafty, and cowardly whereas their counterparts to the north have fearless but sluggish minds: all this as an explanation for why the (in this case, Roman) inhabitants of the temperate central zone have the perfect balance of intelligence and courage.⁴⁶

Galen endorses this standard view up to a point. In *That the Soul is Dependent on the Mixtures of the Body* he echoes precisely the same sentiments:

τίς γὰρ οὐχ ὀρᾷ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπάντων τῶν ὑπὸ τοῖς ἄρκτοις <ἀνθρώπων> ἐναντιώτατα διακεείμενα τοῖς ἐγγύς τῆς διακεκαυμένης ζώνης; ἢ τίς οὐκ οἶδε τοὺς ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τούτων, ὅσοι τὴν εὐκρατον οἰκοῦσι χώραν, ἀμείνους τὰ τε σώματα καὶ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἦθη καὶ σύνεσιν καὶ φρόνησιν ἐκείνων τῶν ἀνθρώπων;

who does not observe that the body and the soul of all people dwelling in the north are disposed exactly opposite to those near the tropic zone? Who does not know that those dwelling in between these places, inhabitants of a well-mixed land, are superior to those other peoples in respect to their bodies, the characters of their souls, their intelligence, and their judgement?⁴⁷

Certainly, as we saw earlier, Galen believes that a perfect soul will naturally correlate to a perfect body and, therefore, that we can expect conditions that deteriorate physical perfection to have an equally deleterious tendency for the soul. That said, there is significantly more nuance to Galen's picture than this short passage would suggest. First, the uniformity of geographic effects does not dictate a uniformity of internal characteristics. He points out that there is enormous variability in character among children brought up in the same circumstances: “many children, raised in the same way, by the same parents or teachers or caretakers, are diametrically different in their

⁴⁶ Vitruvius, 6.1.8-11.

⁴⁷ Galen, *QAM* 9 (IV.805K). Interestingly, this is something of a different take than the theory in the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* 24 that a temperate uniformity of climate leads to complacency of character, whereas geographical adversity builds strength.

natures.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless, a Galenically perfect boy, if born in an inhospitable climate and raised in a culture with a lifestyle that does not align to Galen’s advice and that therefore, in his view, further compounds the problems caused by problematic geography, has the deck stacked against him. Galen believes that even a naturally well-disposed mixture will struggle against such circumstances, reinforcing geographical stereotypes.⁴⁹

Indeed, this leads in to the second major nuance: the entire premise behind Galen’s aesthetics of health is that the information derived from it can be used to inform behavior. While innate temperament will always be a factor in a person’s health, it is also subject to significant malleability and can be radically altered by careful intervention. This is true for the body, which adapts (for better or for worse) to persistent changes in diet and exercise, but it is all the more true for the soul, which is exceptionally receptive to training and equally vulnerable to neglect and poor management.⁵⁰ Certainly, Galen maintains that character is innate and directly dependent on bodily mixture, but he still sees it as highly mutable: indeed, though his main emphasis is on training, teaching, and the promotion of self-discipline, he also promises to be able to improve both the character and the intellectual faculties through diet alone.⁵¹ Thus, a person’s character and appearance will end up being a diagnostic patchwork, with some parts reflecting innate and others acquired mixtures.⁵²

⁴⁸ Galen, *QAM* II (IV.816-17K) (πολλὰ ἄμα μὲν τρεφόμενα τὴν αὐτὴν τροφήν ὑπὸ τοῖς αὐτοῖς γονεῦσιν ἢ διδασκάλοις ἢ παιδαγωγοῖς, ἐναντιώτατα δὲ ταῖς φύσεσιν).

⁴⁹ Hence the regrettable conclusion to *QAM* on the almost complete lack of philosophers in Scythia and the preponderance of stupid people in Abdera, in contrast to intellectually glittering Athens (11, IV.821K). Interestingly, Galen’s near contemporary Apuleius, who had a personal stake in the question as a North African, argues hotly for the position that all places have the potential to bring forth talented individuals, but even he still trots out the exact same line about the Scythians having only one philosopher (*Apol.* 24).

⁵⁰ The power of habit and regimen to change natural mixture is a thesis that runs throughout Galen; see articulations of this belief, at, for example, *Temp.* 2.4 (I.604K), on mixtures acquired contrary to natural disposition due to “long-standing habit” (ἐξ ἔθους μακροῦ), *San.Tue.* 2.7 (VI.133K), and *Alim.Fac.* 1.1 (VI.470K).

⁵¹ Galen, *QAM* 9 (IV.807-8K). His texts *On Character* and *On the Affections and Errors of the Soul* focus more on the effects of training.

⁵² At *Temp.* 2.4 (I.604-7K) he offers a preliminary sketch of how one might go about distinguishing between the two. This is important because some of the more immutable markers, like hair color and texture, might lead a doctor to

Ultimately, therefore, Galen considers geographically contingent environmental changes, though real and carrying real consequences, to be confounding to the use of an aesthetics of health. Individuals from the far north and the far south are subject to the same range of innate temperaments as the Greeks, but the extreme effects of climate on their external appearance masks and distorts them. Thus,

κατὰ δὲ τὰς ὑπὸ ταῖς ἄρκτοις τε καὶ τῇ μεσημβρία χώρας, ἐπειδὴ τῶν μὲν εἰς τὸ βάθος ἀπελήλαται τὸ θερμὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ περιέχοντος ἕξωθεν κρύου νικώμενον, τῶν δ' εἰς τὸ δέρμα προελήλυθεν ὑπὸ τοῦ περιέχοντος θάλπου ἐλκόμενον, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς κατὰ τὸ δέρμα διαθέσεως οἷόν τε γινῶναι σαφῶς ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν ἐντὸς μορίων κράσεως. ἀνώμαλος γὰρ ἢ τοῦ σώματος κρᾶσις ἐν ταῖς δυσκράτοις χώραις οὐχ ὡσαύτως ἐχόντων τῶν τ' ἕξωθεν μορίων καὶ τῶν ἐντὸς.

as far as the lands to the north and to the south: in the former, the heat is driven into the depths, being overpowered by the surrounding frost; in the latter, it is driven into the skin, being drawn out by the surrounding warmth. Because of this, we are not able to clearly form a judgment about the mixture of the internal parts from the disposition of the skin. For the mixture of the body is uneven in badly mixed lands, not being similarly disposed in the outer parts as in the inner ones.⁵³

Here we recognize again the unevenly-distributed temperament, in this case caused by external, environmental factors rather than innate imbalances. The result is that,

Κελτοῖς μὲν γὰρ καὶ Γερμανοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ Θρακίῳ τε καὶ Σκυθικῷ γένει ψυχρὸν καὶ ὑγρὸν τὸ δέρμα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μαλακὸν τε καὶ λευκὸν καὶ ψιλὸν τριχῶν ... Αἰθίοψι δὲ καὶ Ἄραβι καὶ ὅλοις τοῖς κατὰ μεσημβρίαν ἢ μὲν τοῦ δέρματος φύσις, ὡς ἂν ὑπὸ τε τοῦ περιέχοντος θάλπου καὶ τῆς ἐμφύτου θερμοσίας ἕξω φερομένης διακεκαυμένη, σκληρὰ καὶ ξηρὰ καὶ μέλαινα.

the Celts and the Germans and all the Thracian and Scythian peoples have cold, wet skin and for this reason are soft and white and hairless ... The Ethiopians and Arabs and everyone in the south have a skin whose nature is hard and dry and black, as if it had been baked both by the surrounding warmth and by the inner heat that is drawn outwards.⁵⁴

overlook and mistreat an over-riding acquired mixture, whereas attention to only the more mutable aspects might lead him to miss a therapeutically relevant immutable aspect, like the natural wideness of the veins. Accordingly, at *San.Tue.* 2.7 (VI.125K) he finds both a person's childhood home and his current dwelling place to be equally relevant information for the physician.

⁵³ Galen, *Temp.* 2.6 (I.627K). See also *San.Tue.* 2.7 (IV.126K) for irregular mixtures resulting from living in extreme climate, as well as for the idea that perfect health is impossible in an imperfect place.

⁵⁴ Galen, *Temp.* 2.6 (I.627-8K).

In other words, the final take-away should not be that Scythians are inherently or uniformly cold and wet nor that Ethiopians are unvaryingly hot and dry. Rather Galen's conclusion is that climactic extremes (compounded further by both the diet and the customs of those who live in such regions) not only ruin perfect health, but also scramble the effectiveness of aesthetics as a diagnostic tool.

When Galen says, in *On Preserving Health* that

διάθεσις γάρ τις ἐστι κατὰ φύσιν ἢ τε τῶν Αἰγυπτίων μελανότης ἢ τε τῶν Κελτῶν λευκότης ἢ τε τῶν Σκυθῶν πυρρότης· ἀλλ' οὐδὲν τῶν τοιούτων ὑγείας δηλωτικόν, διότι μηδ' ἐν χρώμασιν ὄλως ἡ ὑγεία.

the blackness of Egyptians, the whiteness of Celts, and the ruddiness of Scythians are natural conditions, but none of these sorts of things is an indicator of health, since health does not reside exclusively in color,⁵⁵

he does not mean to negate diagnostic potential of skin color as a whole, but rather to restrict its use to those who understand its meaning and limitations.⁵⁶ In short, he concludes that skin color is ultimately a highly complex and finicky index for judging the internal mixture, and the more it is affected by environment, the less value it has as an index. Similarly, hair is subject to the same external interference, rendering it suitable for contrasting a Greek with a Greek, but more or less useless for transcultural healthcare evaluations.⁵⁷

The result of these environmental complications is that it is only within a narrow geographical band and largely homogenous population that Galen's system can function as intended. One could imagine a Celtic Galen recentering the Canon towards the cold and moist in order to accommodate a system of signs of perfect health among the Gauls, with the same kinds of deviations from this new central norm indicating comparative temperaments. Indeed, about a

⁵⁵ Galen, *San.Tue.* 1.5 (VI.21K).

⁵⁶ Indeed, Galen indicates that precisely the same diagnostic conundrum is true at a more transient level: at *Temp.* 2.6 (I.629K) he warns against being misled by a summer suntan into thinking that a naturally pale (and, therefore, cold) person is naturally hot; cf. *San.Tue.* 1.5 (VI.21K).

⁵⁷ Galen, *Temp.* 2.5 (I.618K).

millennium later, authors to the Islamic east will make exactly such a shift, repurposing Galen's description of the perfect human to fit their own cultural milieu within the new framework of Prophetic Medicine.⁵⁸ Here we start with the familiar framing of man as having the most even temperament of all animals, but then escalate from there to further degrees of perfection, from the Muslim believer all the way to the Prophet Muhammad, who replaces Polycleitus' Canon as the exactly perfect center point.⁵⁹ But Galen's own system is focused on the temperate Mediterranean zone, and that is accordingly the only region in the world where his specific diagnostic criteria will hold true (and, unfortunately for everyone else, the only place in the world where it is actually possible to achieve that perfect balance required for Galen's brand of perfect health and, therefore, beauty). In other words, Galen's system of aesthetics is not built for making sweeping ethnographic claims, but rather for trying to make sense of the endless small varieties to be found within his own comparatively homogenous population.

I will end somewhat speculatively, with a look beyond Galen into a broader field of medicalized aesthetics. Galen regards the body through a lens of health and disease, seeing all elements of natural appearance as potentially informative of both current temperamental state and predisposition towards future ailments. Indeed, for him, physical beauty is inextricable from wellness and exists on a rigidly demarcated scale: there is one single aspect of perfect beauty, and every other variation falls short of it. Galen's views, though rigid in this regard, were also complex, and his system demanded careful scrutiny and the rigorous collection of all relevant data in order to avoid facile conclusions. However, he acknowledges that his own brand of medical aesthetics falls within a wider and much less critical world of aesthetic judgments. He is, I think, talking back

⁵⁸ On Prophetic Medicine, see Perho 1995.

⁵⁹ Al-Dhahabi, *Medicine of the Prophet* 1.2. For modern translations (where it is, however, misattributed to As-Suyuti), see Elgood 1962 and as-Suyuti 2018; for a discussion of the correct authorship, see https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/prophetic_med2.html).

to a system that often dispensed with careful theoretical backing, and merged the aesthetics of health with those of physiognomy and racial stereotyping—practices which he struggles to simultaneously justify and disentangle himself from. We are familiar with the ancient physiognomists' snap judgements about a man's character from the shape of his eyes. I wonder whether there was an equally facile form of physiognomic diagnostics: should we imagine a group of ancient viewers who made equally summary judgements about his susceptibility to sinus infections from the color and texture of his hair or about his predisposition to bilious illnesses from the shape of his nose?

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