1 Brief Introduction to Galen and the Two Works

This brief introduction seeks to familiarise the unacquainted reader with the author and the two works under examination, and to provide them with a basic window into the key scholarly debates pertaining to the content and context of the two treatises. It has no claims to being thorough or exhaustive and it is not meant to replace Singer (2013: 1–41) and Nutton (2013: 45–76) for *On Avoiding Distress* or Nutton's 1999 introduction and commentary for *On My Own Opinions*.

1.1 Galen: Life and Career

Galen's life, work and entire worldview come across as exceptional in the context of both the ancient world and later history. As far as the former is concerned, Galen (129 – ca. 216 AD) is antiquity's most powerful representative of the renovation and development of medicine, someone who responded in a critical fashion to earlier – sometimes remote – medical traditions, like the one professed by his hero Hippocrates, the father of medicine, in the Classical era (5th– 4th c. BC). Galen was also a constant explorer of the various philosophical trends that were fashionable in his day (although once again they had deep roots in the past), which he embraced or contested with notable acumen. The substantial philosophical background with which he infused his theory and praxis in many branches of medicine, e.g. anatomy and physiology, accounts to a large extent for the robustly scientific system he came up with to look into the workings of the human body and the origins and treatment of disease.

This dynamic wedding of medicine and philosophy, coupled with Galen's generally inquisitive spirit, produced, in turn, a vast array of writings on almost every area of the intellect that could be anticipated by ancient standards: anatomical, physiological, therapeutic and prognostic works, and Hippocratic commentaries, to be sure, but also works on Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy as well as specialised texts on popular ethics, demonstration, lexicography, philology and literary criticism. What is perhaps not so widely known about Galen in that respect is that he is by far the most prolific author of the ancient world: his output surviving in Greek (there is more in Latin, Arabic, Syriac and Hebrew) fills twenty-two massive volumes in Karl Gottlob Kühn's nineteenth-century edition. This amounts to around 20,000 pages of printed text, suggesting a remarkable level of productivity that had impressed even Galen's contemporaries in his lifetime. For example, Athenaeus in his *The Sophists at Dinner* (1.1e) (early third c.

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AD) refers to Galen as the person 'who has published more works on philosophy and medicine than all his predecessors'.

Galen's ambitious relationship with the past that so often seems to be cementing his peculiar place in history in fact extended into the future as well, though Galen could not have anticipated this nor did he perhaps ever intend it. His medical legacy enthralled later scholars and audiences to such a degree that its survival was assured across time and space in both East and West up to the early modern period. Suffices it to mention that during the Renaissance Galen was the most authoritative model in medical education, being conscientiously studied by prospective medics in several European universities.[1]

Such a success story demands a detailed account of the early years, education and public life of this influential man. Born in AD 129 in Pergamum, a prosperous province of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Galen received his early training there under the close supervision of his father, Nicon, a wealthy architect. Galen's numerous references to his father across his writings show that Nicon was much more than a nurturer: he was an intellectual guide and a moral model, who decisively influenced Galen's formation and later progress, leading him to become a medical practitioner. From 148 to 157 Galen travelled abroad, notably in Smyrna, Alexandria and Corinth, to pursue higher philosophical and medical studies; in 157 he returned to his home town to take up the position of chief physician to the gladiators; and in the summer of 162 he headed to Rome, after travelling extensively in Syria, Cyprus, Palestine, Lycia and Lemnos to collect herbal and mineral drugs. In the capital of the empire Galen soon managed to become a big name in elite and imperial circles both as a practising physician who successfully diagnosed and treated his high-level clientele in bed-side consultations, and as a startling participant in anatomical demonstrations – popular urban spectacles at the time. He also gained popularity by giving public lectures, taking part in disputations and excelling in the area of authoring medical works, which he addressed to prominent physicians and philosophers as well as powerful public men, such as the Roman senator, consul and governor Flavius Boethus. The highpoint in Galen's professional career was no doubt being invited to treat key members of the imperial family, notably the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180) and his son, Commodus (r. 180–192).[2]

1 See the relevant individual studies in the volume by Bouras-Vallianatos and Zipser (2019).

2 There are three dedicated biographies of Galen by Nutton (2020), Mattern (2013) and Boudon-Millot (2012). Cf. Schlange-Schöningen (2003). For a concise overview of Galen's life and career, see Hankinson (2008).

1.2 *On Avoiding Distress*

1.2.1 Date, Topic and Genre

The long-lost text *On Avoiding Distress* is a short treatise catalogued in Galen's autobibliographical work *On My Own Books* under the group of texts on moral philosophy.[3] It is mentioned, again only by its title, in a ninth-century inventory of Galen's works provided by the Nestorian Christian scholar and physician Ḥunayn ibn ʾIsḥāq.[4] Although it was translated into Syriac and Arabic in the medieval period, none of these translations survive today. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries some authors quoted some passages from *On Avoiding Distress* in Arabic and Hebrew,[5] but there was no trace of the Greek original, which seemed to have vanished for ever. It was not until 2005, when the treatise was unexpectedly found in a fifteenth-century codex kept in the Vlatadon monastery in Thessaloniki, Greece, that such fears were laid to rest.[6] The discovery brought to light a magnificent testimony to the treatment of distress in antiquity.

On Avoiding Distress deals with the immediate aftermath of the great fire that broke out on the Palatine Hill in Rome in the spring of AD 192.[7] In addition, it includes some critical remarks on the reign of Commodus, which Galen could only have articulated so unreservedly once the eccentric emperor was assumed to be dead. This points to a date of composition in the early months of AD 193, following the assassination of Commodus on 31 December 192.[8]

The work is written in epistolary form in response to a request from an anonymous friend, who seeks to discover the philosophical processes that made Galen immune to distress, despite his significant losses in the fire. Letter writing was

3 περὶ τῶν τῆς ἠθικῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐζητημένων, *On My Own Books*, 169.13 Boudon-Millot(b) = XIX.45.10–11 Kühn. The other two extant ethical works, namely *Affections and Errors of the Soul* (περὶ τῶν ἰδίων ἑκάστῳ παθῶν καὶ ἁμαρτημάτων τῆς διαγνώσεως) in Greek and *Character Traits* (περὶ ἠθῶν) in Arabic summary, belong to this same category.

4 See Ḥunayn ibn ʾIsḥāq, *Epistle*, Bergsträsser (1925: 40) no. 120 = Lamoreaux (2016: 122) §130.

5 E.g. Joseph Ibn Aknīn, student of Maimonides, quoted *On Avoiding Distress* in his Arabic *Hygiene of the Soul*; see Halkin (1944: 60–147). See also Zonta (1995: 113–123) and Boudon-Millot-Jouanna-Pietrobelli (2010: LXX–LXXIV) for additional information.

6 This significant discovery was made by A. Pietrobelli. *On Avoiding Distress* occupies ff. 10v–14v of MS Vlatadon 14. For a description of the manuscript, see Pietrobelli (2010). See also 2.1.2 The Manuscript.

7 'at the end of winter', as the text suggests (ch. 5).

8 There is consensus over the date of the essay's composition. See, e.g. Boudon-Millot (2007a: 76), Boudon-Millot-Jouanna-Pietrobelli (2010: LVIII–LIX) and Nutton (2013: 45–48). Overall, Galen's ethical treatises seem to have been written towards the end of his life, possibly after AD 192.

a conventional form used in works on the 'therapy of emotions' in antiquity,[9] as shown by similar formats in Plutarch and Seneca; and composing a treatise particularly at the behest of friends, named or unnamed, constituted a trope of considerable rhetorical potential in the tradition of ethical writing in general.[10]

There is a more common generic identification for *On Avoiding Distress* though: it is deemed a work of popular philosophy or practical ethics. This was a fashionable philosophical product by Galen's time, though the genre harks back to the Hellenistic period,[11] where it can be seen in the cynic diatribe of Bion of Borysthenes (325–250 BC). Popular philosophical works sought to furnish practical advice on how to think about the world and behave in it, so as to deal effectively with a variety of everyday adversities. They also offered guidance on how to take care of one's body and soul, so as to maximise one's chances of having a successful position in social, political and professional life. While theoretical moral philosophy appealed to a restricted group of philosophical specialists, practical ethics spoke to every educated, thinking person who cared about developing or refining their character.

As is obvious primarily from his book classifications but also other parts of his corpus, Galen was deeply sensitive to the importance of practical philosophy and its social role, which led him to produce a distinct body of ethical works, as seen above. Although only three out of twenty-three such pieces by Galen have come down to us, the surviving headings of those that have been lost allow us to get some insights into their main themes and aims. Some texts concern the appropriate behaviour for when participating in everyday cultural practices, such as rhetorical demonstrations in the forum or private discussions in aristocratic villas.[12] Others deal with the management of negative emotions, such as slander, flattery and desire for fame.[13] And yet others promote moral uprightness,

9 See Stirewalt (1991).

10 See König (2009: 40–58).

11 See Gill (2003: 40–44).

12 *The Interaction between Someone making Public Demonstrations and their Audience* (περὶ τῆς τῶν ἐπιδεικνυμένων ⟨πρὸς⟩ τοὺς ἀκούοντας συνουσίας), *To Orators in the Forum* (πρὸς τοὺς ἀγοραίους ῥήτορας), *The Interaction between the Parties to a Dialogue* (περὶ τῆς ἐν τοῖς διαλόγοις συνουσίας), *The Discourse with Bacchides and Cyrus in the Villa of Menarchus* (περὶ τῆς ἐν αὐλῇ Μενάρχου διατριβῆς πρὸς Βακχίδην καὶ Κῦρον). Galen's *Kroniskoi* could also come under this category, being reminiscent of the literary symposium as in Plutarch's *Table Talk*.

13 E.g. *On Slander* (περὶ τῆς διαβολῆς), *Things said in Public against Flatterers* (περὶ τῶν δημοσίᾳ ῥηθέντων κατὰ κολάκων), *To what Extent the Esteem and Opinion of the Public is to be taken into Account* (μέχρι πόσου τῆς παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς τιμῆς καὶ δόξης φροντιστέον ἐστίν). Love of riches (*philoploutia*) is also explored by Galen: at the very end of his *On Avoiding Distress*, he refers to

decorum and affability.[14] *On Avoiding Distress* fits the second category of Galen's practical ethical production, and is a gem among Imperial-period disquisitions on *moralia*, as we will see below.

1.2.2 Importance to Popular Philosophy

Accounts of the destructive fire of 192 are also given by the contemporary historians Cassius Dio (72.24) and Herodian (1.14.2–6), but in the form of a factual reportage, so Galen's *On Avoiding Distress* is the only extant *philosophical* account of this historical incident. Moreover, Eratosthenes of Cyrene (third century BC), Diogenes of Babylon (second century BC) and Plutarch (AD ca. 45 – ca. 120, 'The catalogue of Lamprias' no. 172) were all said to have written an essay entitled *Περὶ ἀλυπίας*. However, Galen's own is the only one to survive. It also resembles Plutarch's *Tranquillity of the Soul* and Seneca's homonymous work, which were already in circulation at the time together with other (now lost) essays on emotional resilience, for instance one by Panaetius (185 BC – 110 BC). Still Galen's *On Avoiding Distress* introduces fresh elements to the genre in that it depicts an intrinsically collaborative rapport between author and addressee, unlike the more distant relationship between teacher and student conjured up in the works by Plutarch and Seneca. It is also distinctive in that the moral instruction that is on offer is enhanced with snapshots of moments from the author's own life that result in a lively sort of moralising.[15]

1.2.3 Addressee

The narrative of *On Avoiding Distress* makes it clear at several junctures that Galen and his anonymous addressee share many common characteristics, experiences and beliefs: they both come from Pergamum, they have the same social standing (upper class), moral qualities (e.g. being restrained) and age (now in their mid-sixties), they have known each other from childhood, were educated together and have kept in touch through face-to-face interaction and correspondence for many years thereafter (e.g. ch. 12). The two men even appear to be like-

a now lost work he had produced entitled *On Rich People infatuated with Money* (περὶ τῶν φιλοχρημάτων πλουσίων).

14 E.g. *Agreement* (περὶ ὁμονοίας), *Modesty* (περὶ αἰδοῦς).

15 Xenophontos (2014).

minded with regard to Commodus' capricious politics (ch. 12), while the friend has, according to Galen, some of the latter's compositions at his disposal (ch. 15). Exchanging ideas and knowledge therefore is an important index of their friendship. Their close bond is also evident through references in the text that show that the friend is well aware of the misfortunes that have afflicted Galen in the course of his life, some of which he witnessed himself, such as the slaves Galen lost to the plague or his financial setbacks (ch. 1). The friend seems to show a genuine concern for Galen's problems, since he immediately seeks news about him through informants after he learns about the fire; he is also not content with second-hand accounts, which explains why he is determined to request a description of the incident from Galen himself (ch. 1–2).

The anonymous recipient of the work cannot be identified with certainty, and it is hard to confirm that he is a historical person. In the *Affections and Errors of the Soul*, Galen's most extensive surviving moral work, the author relates an incident involving a young man from his intimate circle, who impatiently visited him early one morning to find out whether Galen's resistance to distress was due to training, philosophical doctrines or nature (*Affections and Errors of the Soul*, 25.16–24 De Boer = V.37.6–14 Kühn). This enquiry is quite similar to the one made by Galen's anonymous friend at the beginning of *On Avoiding Distress* (although in this case nature is replaced by philosophical arguments in the educational triad). It is unlikely that the two men are one and the same, because in the near-contemporary *Affections and Errors of the Soul* the man asking the question is young and this does not align with the advanced age of Galen's friend in *On Avoiding Distress*. However, the fact that the question is phrased in a similar way raises some suspicions: is Galen simply misremembering who had asked the question? Or are the two anonymous men fictional personas, serving the needs of Galen's rhetorical exposition in each work after some necessary reshuffling of their credentials? In the absence of any secure evidence, no conclusions can be drawn.

1.2.4 Structure and Summary

The text of *On Avoiding Distress* may be divided into two main parts. The first one (chapters 1–9) focuses on the destructive consequences of the fire for other people, but mostly for Galen, which are described at length. This is constantly accompanied by the friend's determination to understand why Galen was not emotionally affected by the impact of the fire and how he managed this. The second part (chapters 10–18) includes Galen's response to the inquirer, which encompasses the strategies he had used to maintain his emotional serenity. Each part can be further subdivided as follows:

Part I: Chapter 1–Chapter 9	Detailed account of the numerous personal and public losses. 'How could Galen remain calm in the face of such disaster?', the friend asks in his letter
Chapter 1	Loss of Galen's silver and gold, silver vessels and documents; of his works; of his simple and compound medicines; and of his instruments
Chapter 2	Public loss of autograph copies of ancient grammarians, orators, physicians and philosophers stored in the libraries on the Palatine Hill
Chapter 3	Loss of Galen's carefully-prepared editions of ancient authors Public loss of authentic works not included in the Catalogues
Chapter 4	Public loss of what was included in the storehouses on the Sacred Way, those at the Temple of Peace and those at the House of Tiberius, in addition to the destruction of the libraries on the Palatine Hill
Chapters 5–6	Loss of Galen's treatise on Attic nouns and collections of everyday language
Chapter 7	Loss of Galen's writings produced for others and the writings produced for himself, and of his epitomes of medical and philosophical works
Chapters 8–9	Loss of Galen's medical recipes
Part II: Chapter 10–Chapter 18	Galen's reply to the addressee's question. He supplies practical advice by means of:
Chapters 10–11	Moral anecdotes involving Aristippus (ch. 10), Crates and Diogenes (ch. 10) and Zeno (ch. 11), all of which warn against insatiability and promote self-sufficiency
Chapters 12–13	Moral-didactic lines from Euripides, which encourage the use of the technique of premeditation of future calamities
Chapters 13–15	The moral exemplum of Galen's father, which still inspires Galen to seek self-sufficiency and emphasises the importance of combining appropriate nature and nurture for achieving virtue in the soul

Chapter 16	Galen's philosophical opposition to *apatheia* (complete freedom from affection) and his advocation of *metriopatheia* (moderation of emotions) for all people, including himself; this makes him an accessible model for his readers
Chapters 17–18	Social commentary on the despicable behaviour of greedy people, which functions as a distancing strategy

1.2.5 Psychotherapeutic Strategies

On Avoiding Distress is of particular importance for the new evidence it brings regarding Galen's role as a practical ethicist. This is an aspect of his intellectual profile that still awaits comprehensive treatment.[16] In the second part of the treatise Galen recounts brief didactic stories from the lives of righteous philosophers, in order to encourage readers to imitate their admirable qualities, notably self-control. The moral anecdotes featuring in the Galenic treatise are standard features of the literature on *moralia*, where they are commonly employed by other authors, such as Plutarch, as a way of exhorting readers to virtue in an impersonal manner. In Galen the same anecdotes are customised to fit his own moral trajectory towards combating distress (ch. 10–11): the point they help make in the text is that Galen had developed a rationalising approach to endure the loss of his material goods, following Aristippus, who had despised his superfluous possessions as unnecessary for his survival, and had frowned on the avaricious as people eternally compelled to suffer as a result of their countless desires.

Galen also proposes enhancing one's moral condition by interpreting gloomy incidents in life as opportunities for development and prosperity. The anecdote about Zeno of Citium (ch. 11) enables Galen to put across his point, once again by personalising it specifically in terms of his own circumstances: the devastating shipwreck that left Zeno bereft of everything led to his becoming the founder of the Stoa. So, asks Galen, bearing that in mind, would it not be odd and potentially counter-productive, if he were agitated by his own losses? Furthermore, Zeno disdained external blessings because, like the other Stoics, he considered them moral 'indifferents', factors that do not affect individual flourishing. Embracing Zeno's stance, Galen was similarly unmoved not just by the destruction of his

16 Xenophontos (forthcoming).

books and drugs in the fire, but also by his missed opportunities for a medical career in the imperial court. While appropriating the gist of the relevant moral anecdote and adapting it to his personal situation, Galen also problematises the meaning or implications of concepts firmly established in his audience's mind. For example, he is blunt about the fact that serving as a court physician was not entirely a positive course of action, as most people would think; he supports this claim by suggesting that an imperial career has been, for many, a cause of insanity (ch. 11).

Galen supplies other mind-control techniques that ensure moral fortitude: by visualising future evils, one is in a better position to withstand them when they actually arise. This method, known as the premeditation of future calamities (*praemeditatio futurorum malorum*), is presented in the text as an ability only available to thinking beings, i.e. men, and not to animals who spend their lives in passivity, unable to tap into the knowledge of day-to-day affairs that comes from experience. Galen cites the poetic lines that Euripides puts into the mouth of Theseus as the latter prepares himself to endure exile, untimely deaths and other manifestations of misfortune (ch. 12; cf. ch. 16). And he explains how he himself has tested the efficiency of this moral device by proactively imagining his own banishment under Commodus, advising his anonymous friend to do the same.

Moral progress in Galen is never possible without a familiar exemplum to live up to. For Galen that exemplum had always been his father, whom he mentions here as the avatar of moral goodness resulting from a combination of innate and developed virtue (ch. 13–15). This idea is, in fact, a staple of Galen's moral thought, which he emphasises or elaborates on elsewhere in his moral and morally-themed works. In the context of his practical ethics, a role model in Galen is key to helping the moral learner adopt a route that prioritises righteousness and philosophy over worldly benefits. By bearing in mind his father's beliefs therefore Galen finds another way to bear the pain that losing his possessions in the fire caused him. In other parts of his corpus, Galen advises members of his audience to find a moral monitor, a person from their social circle who normally acts as a candid critic of their moral failings and helps to rectify them. Hence, in addition to earlier, long-dead models, like Aristippus or Zeno, real-life models are also important in Galen's practical philosophy, showing the pragmatic nature of his moral didacticism.

This correlates with the fact that Galen's utterances in his works of practical ethics are not meant merely to communicate a piece of abstract theory or flag up his philosophical allegiances; rather, they reflect the practical application of ethical advice in the daily lives of his readers, taking into account the limits of human nature. For example, Galen's support for the moderation of emotions (rather than their total elimination, ch. 16) is tied up with his self-presentation as

a man with human weaknesses and limitations: he can disregard the loss of his belongings as long as he is not left destitute or in exile, and he is prepared to defy physical pain as long as he is not severely brutalised or hindered from performing ordinary activities (e.g. talking to a friend or making sense of a book) due to his suffering. Galen's ethics is addressed to normal people, not unapproachable saints like the Stoic sage.

Finally, one of the structural pillars of the Galenic moral discourse, not just in *On Avoiding Distress* but also elsewhere, is the use of assimilation and distancing strategies to incite or discourage particular courses of action or conduct. The presentation of greedy agents is negatively loaded particularly through the use of terms of disparagement, so as to induce readers to dissociate themselves from this group of people and avoid their bad manners (ch. 15–16): greedy men are enslaved to their passions, they constantly complain, lamenting and groaning day and night, they can barely sleep, they are wicked and wretched, and they live on the verge of abnormality.[17] By delineating insatiable people as social outcasts, Galen, playing on his ideal readers' sense of social honour, leads them to distance himself from them.

1.2.6 Books, Editions and Libraries

The new text also enhances our understanding of the composition and publication of ancient books, and the holdings of public libraries in the Roman Imperial period.[18] For one thing, the work informs us about Galen's usual practices in putting his works together: it seems he was often invited to write down his thoughts on an event or his response to a query raised by a friend, acquaintance or follower. The final product could take two forms: a) an informal version very close or identical to the text he had originally written down or dictated to his scribes to the same effect, b) a revised, more polished, version thereof. The informal variant was often intended for private use, for instance to assist Galen's memory or that of his close circle of friends or peers, while the formal one was, at least theoretically speaking, targeted at others, in the context of a wider circulation (ch. 7).[19] Many

17 On the ideas developed in this section and Galen's practical ethics in general, see the forthcoming monograph by Xenophontos.

18 E.g. Tucci (2008), Jones (2009), Nutton (2009), Roselli (2010), Nicholls (2011), Dorandi (2014), Singer (2019), Salas (2020: 16–22).

19 This distinction is also made in *On My Own Opinions*, ch. 3: 'So when I composed the book *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, first for personal use against "the forgetfulness of old age", as Plato says, and then so as to share it with friends who asked for it…'.

of Galen's surviving works belong to the first group and possibly never made it to the second, which could explain the occurrence of internal inconsistencies, awkward repetitions, infelicities of style and the generally loose syntax in them. *On Avoiding Distress* is an example of this category.

The decision as to whether or how to distribute his writings (*ekdosis*) always rested with Galen. This is an important point, because in his works of autobibliography Galen repeatedly complains that scammers had attempted to sell forgeries as authentic Galenic texts or to appropriate copies of his works by passing them off as their own.[20] Yet, in *On Avoiding Distress* we also learn that some responsibility for the fate of Galen's writings also lay with the recipients of his books in Asia Minor, who often took the initiative in depositing them in local public libraries for wider consultation (ch. 5). That Galen displays no annoyance at this practice shows that he found it acceptable. Copies were also made for personal reasons, as for instance when Galen states in *On Avoiding Distress* that he had planned to produce copies of all of his works so as to have them at his disposal in his country home in Campania, where he spent some months of each year (ch. 5).

The form taken by ancient books has also been at the heart of discussions around *On Avoiding Distress*. We learn that one of Galen's sources for his medical recipes, the physician Eumenes, kept his recipes in two parchment codices (ch. 8), and not in papyrus rolls, the most widespread medium for recording written works at the time. These parchment codices (called *diphtherae*), anticipating the later codex that approximates the modern paginated book, were easier to consult, which could be why they were used for collections of drug recipes at such an early period.

Perhaps the most personal element running through *On Avoiding Distress* is Galen's account of his own editions. The relevant passages offer a wholly new set of information on the topic, which exceeds the briefer references gathered from his other works. Galen enlarges upon his working methodology as a textual critic of ancient works, particularly those by Theophrastus, Aristotle, Eudemus, Clytus and Phaenias: he corrected scribal errors and made efforts to revise mistaken readings accurately so as to form new editions. He also lays great stress on how he improved the punctuation of texts, which he understands as significantly affecting the meaning and interpretation of edited works (ch. 3). Galen is also self-portrayed as a competent researcher into the treasures of ancient libraries. He describes his activities in locating authentic works that were not recorded in the library catalogues and, conversely, his spotting miscatalogued items (ch. 3). The way in which Galen had assembled his collections of pharmacological

20 *On My Own Books*, 134.1–136.22 Boudon-Millot(b) = XIX.8.1–11.11 Kühn.

recipes is also interesting. His main means of supply was by inheritance from previous collectors who had put together their own collections through extensive travelling and the purchase of valuable recipes (ch. 8).

1.2.7 Modern Translations

The discovery of *On Avoiding Distress* in 2005 sparked the production of many critical editions and translations within a relatively short time-span.[21] We currently have seven translations in modern languages: a) V. Boudon-Millot's French translation of 2007 accompanying the *editio princeps* of the work, b) a modern Greek translation by P. Kotzia and P. Sotiroudis, which appeared in 2010, c) a revised French translation for the Les Belles Lettres series published in the same year, and d) I. Garofalo's and A. Lami's Italian translation of 2012. e) In 2013 V. Nutton published the first English translation of *On Avoiding Distress* based on his own emendations and improvements on the Les Belles Lettres text, while f) in 2015 K. Brodersen offered a German rendering of *On Avoiding Distress* relying on the Les Belles Lettres text and to a large extent Nutton's readings. Finally, g) another English translation by C. K. Rothschild and T. W. Thompson was published in 2011, also relying on the text by V. Boudon-Millot, J. Jouanna and A. Pietrobelli. Due to the lack of an authoritative critical text, these translations sometimes differ radically from one another. The translation of *On Avoiding Distress* (as well as that of *On My Own Opinions*) in the present volume is based on a much-improved version of the two texts and it thus seeks to replace previous translations.

1.2.8 Studies on *On Avoiding Distress*

The last decade has seen an enormous amount of learned commentary on Galen's recently discovered treatise. To start with, there are three edited volumes specifically devoted to this work: Manetti (2012), Rothschild and Thompson (2013) and Petit (2019). The topics dealt with in the papers included in these collective works as well as in other studies published elsewhere disclose the main areas of interest arising from this fascinating document. These may be structured around the following headings:

a) history of scholarship, history of texts and history of the book;

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21 See also 2.1.1 The Discovery of the Treatise and its Previous Editions.

b) the location, contents and function of Roman libraries and storehouses;
c) history of Imperial Rome: the great fire of 192, the Antonine plague, the reign of Commodus and the conditions at the imperial court;
d) Galen's biography, autobiography and self-characterisation;
e) Galen's moral philosophical positions and arguments, particularly in connection with the tradition of ethical writing;
f) philological observations on the manuscript transmission and textual condition of the work.

1.3 *On My Own Opinions*

1.3.1 Topic and Date

On My Own Opinions maps some of Galen's fundamental views on the structure and function of body and soul and summarises his most important conclusions that draw upon a long and diverse medical and philosophical career. As a sort of intellectual consignment, it has been unanimously considered the very last piece by Galen, particularly given the absence of any mention of it in his autobibliographical works *On My Own Books* and *On the Order of My Own Books*, which were also written late in life. If it was indeed written towards the end of Galen's life, it must be dated in the early 200s (possibly between 209 and 216). The Arabic tradition reinforces this hypothesis: al-Rāzī (d. ca. 925) confidently states that *On My Own Opinions* was the last Galenic work, while the tenth-century philosopher al-Sijistānī reports that in response to the composition of *On My Own Opinions* Alexander of Aphrodisias criticised Galen for taking eighty years to acknowledge his ignorance on certain medico-philosophical issues.[22]

1.3.2 Overview and Structure

Although *On My Own Opinions* encompasses some key medical beliefs and problems, it can hardly be considered a technical tract of medical theory or practice. Rather, it should be best seen as a doctrinal piece, which combines Galen's 'philosophical testament'[23] with the scientific methodology he espoused. Indeed, one of its major characteristics is that the medical material is consistently subsumed

22 Nutton (1999: 37–38).
23 A term coined by Nutton (1987: 51).

under Galen's avowed purpose of projecting the epistemological limits of medicine and fostering useful principles for surmounting them or, at least, acknowledging them; building sound arguments and using consistent terminology are the two main principles advocated by Galen. The deficient knowledge of humans *qua* psychosomatic entities and of the cosmos that surrounds them concerns Galen much more here than providing a comprehensive account of his scientific achievements.

Chapter 1 of the work forms a preface, which stresses Galen's personal quandary at the time of composition: his contemporaries, especially those lacking training, tended to misconstrue his work, despite (according to Galen) its clarity. To substantiate this point, Galen adduces the anecdote concerning the poet Parthenius, which relates the latter's agonising attempt to persuade one of his readers of the true meaning of his poetry, which the reader did not quite grasp. The guiding principle behind both stories, that of Parthenius and Galen's own, is the notion of misinterpretation (a recurring theme in the work), which Galen sets against the backdrop of the intellectual decadence of his day, a familiar topic in other writings by him as well. The only solution Galen can see to this sad situation is to write his opinions down. *On My Own Opinions* is thus positioned as an 'occasional' or context-specific writing intended to validate Galen's authority in the world of medicine and philosophy.

After dividing his opinions into the things he knows with certainty, what he knows with some degree of plausibility and those things of which he professes total ignorance, Galen embarks upon topics that come under the latter category. So in chapter 2, he declares his agnosticism regarding the generation of the universe and the nature of the creator. He is careful, however, to distance himself from Protagoras' radical atheism by acknowledging the existence of the gods because of incidents of divine power and providence he has experienced himself: being cured of a disease owing to the intervention of Asclepius and being saved from the Dioscuri when in danger at sea. This section closes with reference to Galen's affiliation with Socrates, who advocated respect for traditional religion.

In chapter 3 Galen shifts from his position on divine matters to his position on men, and more specifically he touches on his theory of the human soul. His main point here is that he is confident that we all have a soul and that the soul is responsible for human voluntary motion and sensation, though he declares himself unable to give a definitive answer as regards the soul's substance and mortality or immortality. One of the most defining principles of Galen's scientific procedure, which also features in *On My Own Opinions*, is the tendency to declare secure knowledge only when this comes from proofs assembled through personal investigation or experiments. Hence here the statement that the three sources of motion are situated in the brain, the heart and the liver, accrues from robust

anatomical evidence, as initially set out in his early work *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*. Then reference is made to Galen's firm belief that plants too have a source of motion and specific capacities (the attractive, the alterative, the expulsive and the retentive), which are explained in his *On Natural Capacities*. In this context, there is also mention of embryology, this time with reference to *On the Formation of the Foetus*, to show that Galen has still not been able to make up his mind regarding the capacity that forms embryos.

Chapter 4 focuses on the theory of the elements, which holds that bodies in this world are made up of a combination of fire, earth, water and air. After emphasising that he is unaware of how things stand as regards the composition of celestial bodies, Galen declares himself in agreement with Hippocrates both on the above and in refuting thinkers who advocated that the elements are not subject to change. Galen cites his *On the Elements According to Hippocrates*, his commentary on the Hippocratic *On the Nature of Man* and other similar works. Emphasis is also laid on the importance of precise denotation – a regular notion in the work –, in this case in connection with the meaning of 'hot' and 'the most'. Some discussion on innate heat is also provided, which segues into a brief checklist of varieties of fevers (*On the Different Kinds of Fevers*) and varieties of mixtures (*On Mixtures*) in conjunction with a brief exposition on the theory of mixtures (*eukrasia*, various kinds of *dyskrasiai*).

Chapter 5 starts with a succinct account of the importance of eliminating superficial misconceptions, but then returns to the subject of the brain to posit that sensation and voluntary motion flow to all parts of the body through the nerves. There follows some discussion on the sensitivity of the nerves compared to flesh, which is supported by empirical evidence gathered from venesections and observation of the inflammation of the nerves. Such concrete proof leads Galen to criticise Asclepiades, who developed the opposing view that the nerves have no sensation.

In chapter 6 Galen picks up on the topic, first raised in ch. 3, of his ignorance regarding the substance of the soul and now advances his belief that the body is capable of sensation, since it is inhabited by a soul which is the source of sensation. Here the main topic is the relationship between body and soul, and so Galen also points out that the bodily parts, just like the soul, are generated from a mixture of the four elements, and that the preservation of the body ensures that the soul does not depart from it as long as the body performs its activities (the conditions leading up to physical death and the departure of the soul from the body is taken up again in chapter 15).

Different philosophical approaches to the substance of the soul are assembled in chapter 7, which culminates in Galen's repeating that he is sceptical about the topic. This rounds off the broader topic of Galen's inability to know about

some human matters and especially those regarding the human soul, a subject that goes back to the beginning of chapter 3. This marks the end of the first part of the treatise.

Chapter 8 is a transitional section, which offers a neat account of methodological value regarding the proper manner of scientific investigation: the need to assess the validity of the premises of an argument and not the conclusions in isolation, and more generally, the need not be driven by contentiousness in pursuing scientific research. Galen's ideal audience is here glossed as people who love the truth and are not motivated by egotism. Galen also builds a picture of the ideal author. It is important, he suggests, for the author to understand what needs to be covered in each work depending on its particular purpose. The treatment of the tripartition-cum-trilocation, namely that each part of the soul is located in a different part of the body, is referenced as an example of how Plato got this right: the *Republic*, being an ethical treatise advising on how to achieve virtue, did not require any mention of trilocation, whereas the *Timaeus*, with its focus on natural theory, did need some reference to it. The usefulness of the knowledge provided by an author is also key. This is where Chrysippus and the Stoics got it wrong, according to Galen: they talked about the location of the hegemonic part, but were not concerned with showing how this is profitable for practical philosophy, just as they did not justify the knowledge of meteorological theory, which they had elaborated on to such an extent. Chapter 8 is a programmatic nexus situated at the very heart of the work.

Bodily alterations are the main topic of chapter 9, which is accompanied by a description of how drugs work in the body with reference to *On the Capacities of Simple Drugs*. The role of the liver is also dealt with. Chapter 10 returns to the three principles that govern human beings in order to reiterate the fact that Galen is still uncertain as to the capacity that forms embryos or which of all the bodily parts is formed first in gestation. The author notes a shift of opinion in maturity and remarks on how a piece of secure knowledge acquired at an early stage could progress into the category of plausible knowledge in old age on the basis of anatomical evidence.

Humoral theory is the focus of chapter 11, where Galen contrasts Hippocrates' view that all four humours (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile) are natural, with the view of other theorists who thought that only blood was. Galen discusses the action of drugs in relation to bodily humours to support the Hippocratic view.

Chapter 12 focuses on some methodological considerations as regards the value of long-term study and then re-emphasises the need to cope efficiently with homonymy using the example of the term μελαγχολικός, which could mean both 'black bile' and a kind of blood sediment. Galen also believes that attention

should be drawn to the level of detail to be provided depending on different contexts of exposition, and so he refers to how the notion of the existence of heat in plants should be formulated depending on whether these issues are discussed in passing or in detail. The same idea is developed in chapter 13 in connection with specialised and less specialised works by Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus. There is a link here back to the three epistemological levels mentioned at the end of chapter 1 and Galen's certainty that we have a soul (beginning of chapter 2), which this time evolves into a statement of Galen's determinism. In chapter 14 Galen talks about different approaches to the substance of the soul. And again he looks back to the three epistemic layers of secure knowledge, plausible knowledge and absence of knowledge to repeat in chapter 15 that he is sure that bodies are made up of a mixture of the four elements but he is not sure about the soul's substance and mortality/immortality. He also reiterates his certainty about the soul being subservient to the nature of the body and about the function of the attractive and the expelling capacities.

In light of the above, the treatise could be helpfully divided as follows:

Part 1: Chapters 1–7
Transition: Chapter 8
Part 2: Chapters 9–15

With the exception of the discussion on the function of drugs, the majority of the other subjects dealt with in the second part of the work are replicated from Part 1 with no significant degree of elaboration or variation. Hence, the possibility that the work did not undergo any revision is a reasonable one, since, in a more polished version, Galen would have dispensed with so much repeated material.

The repetitive style of the treatise and its occasionally rambling line of thought and lack of cohesion (particularly in the second half) are some of the factors that might obstruct a smooth reading of the work, which could also explain its limited afterlife in later centuries. It has generally been agreed that this is not one of Galen's most original or distinctive works, and that it does not present its author at his best. A caveat is in order though. Modern scholars have been inclined to marginalise the work in the light of its disjointed and verbose Latin version. Examination of the Greek original shows that *On My Own Opinions* is in fact no more disorganised than other unrevised works by Galen.

1.3.3 Audience

The frequent use of the second-person singular 'you' throughout does not seem to be attached to any specific individual. Rather, it stands for a generic addressee that most likely represents a class of physicians. This follows from consideration of the level of technicality involved in sections that talk about anatomical operations or the restoration of the humoral balance through adopting an appropriate regimen. Regarding the former, in chapter 5 the author goes into some detail on venesections:

> And you can learn this, in the case of any living being you like, by exposing a nerve and then pricking it with needles or styluses; because you will hear it cry out much more than it would when the flesh or the skin was pricked, since it experiences more pain... If you cut the entire nerve, therefore, no danger ensues, since the source is no longer affected through sympathy by the inflammation that affects the nerve.

As regards the latter, in chapter 11 dietary advice is given in relation to the evacuation of humours:

> ...you should clearly take care to evacuate the excess of the [two] biles and the phlegm in line with a healthy diet, so that we do not increase these humours by using an excess of phlegm-producing or bile-producing foods.

Furthermore, there is some expectation that the ideal addressee is familiar with the capacities of foodstuffs, medicines (ch. 9, ch. 13) and even of humoral theory, which is deliberately set out only partially (ch. 5) presupposing the reader's prior acquaintance with the topic. Finally, Galen twice refers to medicine as 'our art', suggesting a sense of community among fellow physicians.

One of the strategies which Galen employs in approaching his audience is the use of the imperative: 'Pay attention when I say "form" as opposed to matter, which we understand to be without quality as regards itself' (ch. 6). Another is the use of examples to elucidate specific points: 'Thus, for example, we all concur that scammony has a cathartic capacity, just as the medlar has the ability to suppress the stomach' (ch. 13); and yet another the use of guidance such as: 'if you consider the matter closely...' (ch. 15), 'you can learn this...' (ch. 5), 'I am now going to describe to you...' (ch. 3), all of which gives the text a didactic aspect too.

1.3.4 Other Points of Interest

Despite being mainly an assemblage of Galen's judgments and accomplishments, *On My Own Opinions* also accommodates a number of other interesting themes or

elements. These are: cross-references to earlier Galenic works, self-authority and Galen's relation to and critique of the past, the adaptation of material to different audiences and circumstances, the usefulness of knowledge, misinterpretation and the salience of precise denotation, the connection between medicine and moral philosophy or the place of the work within the doxographical tradition. Some of these strands are briefly explored below.

(a) Cross-References to Other Works by Galen

A quick perusal of the work makes clear how often Galen refers to his previous writings in this short text (18 works are mentioned, some of them more than once). Unlike what happens in Galen's autobibliographical tracts, there are no obvious claims to authenticity here. Rather, Galen's targets are somewhat different. First of all, on some rare occasions, Galen provides supplementary information on the reasons behind the production of some of his earlier books, as, for example, when he identifies his *On the Soul* as a polemic against Chrysippus (ch. 7) or when he clarifies that *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* was composed initially as an aide-memoire and later on for distribution among a circle of intimates who had requested it (ch. 3). In other cases, works of the earlier period and of maturity are intertwined to highlight the fact that Galen remained noncommittal on some important subjects, in particular the mortality or immortality of the soul (ch. 3). By reviewing his previous ideas and potentially assessing them in the light of his current views, Galen both unifies his output and constructs for himself the image of a careful thinker, who either maintains valid views or accepts his mistakes and amends them where necessary (see ch. 10). Even when he is reluctant to be dogmatic, his suspension of judgment is equated with prudence rather than scholarly cowardice. However, by far the commonest purpose that these cross-references serve throughout is to back up Galen's claims, and place his works within a meaningful whole, a framework that is shown to encompass a considerable input to medicine and philosophy. *On My Own Opinions* is a compendium of Galen's authoritative legacy.

(b) Self-Authority

To put together one's entire legacy is, to say the least, to advertise one's profile and competencies. *On My Own Opinions* builds on Galen's usual attempts at self-validation, as known from his other writings. For one thing, his relationship to Hippocrates (whom he mentions more often than any other author in *On My Own Opinions*) typically involves agreement on basic doctrines (e.g. ch. 4: 'I showed in the first place that it was Hippocrates who declared this, and second that he was correct to do so…'), corroboration of Galen's authority (e.g. end of ch. 4), and admiration (ch. 11: 'Well, this opinion is also plausible, but Hippocrates' is much

more truthful than this'). The same sentiments hold for Galen's overall approach to his favourite philosopher Plato, whom Galen defends against potential detractors, justifying his opinions (ch. 15: 'Therefore Plato seems to me to be right to say that plants have perception…') and unequivocally praising them (all in ch. 15).

But he also takes a more provocative approach to Plato, which has no parallel in Galen's attitude towards Hippocrates: in chapter 13, Galen takes issue with Plato's discussion of plants (their principle of motion and perception), criticising him for treating the matter inopportunely and not as carefully as Galen himself has done. At the same time, Galen's approbation of Plato is offset by conflict with him on certain points:

> But when it becomes necessary for me to explain the individual character of the natural part of moral philosophy according to Plato's view, I praise some of his doctrines straightaway and declare myself in agreement with this man, but for other doctrines I only endorse them to the point of plausibility, just as I am left in complete uncertainty about certain other issues, having no inclination [to declare] regarding such controversial matters that there is another opinion more plausible than these. (ch. 13)

This judgmental note also applies to some cases of opposition to Chrysippus, Galen's bête noire in *On My Own Opinions* (but elsewhere too): the allegation of obscurity twice in the same chapter (beginning and end of ch. 7) is a weighty one, if one considers that 'clarity of exposition/instruction' (σαφὴς διδασκαλία) is a basic trait of Galen's scientific practice and medical writing in general. In ch. 8 Galen levels another accusation against Chrysippus, this time for failing to discuss the practical-ethical dimensions of the soul's location in the heart. Galen accuses Asclepiades too, of advancing a doctrine 'to a greater extent than necessary' (ch. 5). It is interesting in that respect that, compared to Galen's vitriolic rhetoric in earlier works, in *On My Own Opinions* his hostile language is significantly more moderate. This is in tune with the generally accepted view among modern scholars that there is a softening of Galen's polemical tone in his later works. Still, he continues to highlight his imposing role in the history of medicine and philosophy, heralded by the way in which his abandonment of Protagoras and his siding with Socrates is so heavily stressed at the very beginning of the work. One could see this as a thundering vindication of his place in ancient thought taking the form of a programmatic positioning, so to speak.

(c) Advice on the Teaching and Learning of Medicine

At the start of chapter 13 Galen explains why some of Plato's readers may have had real issues with him: how, after all, is one to justify the internal inconsistencies within different works of the Platonic corpus? The simple answer Galen provides is that one should not hastily categorise them as self-contradictions.

They are rather to be explained in terms of the different backgrounds of the audience to which they were variously addressed. It is interesting that in order to defend other writers too who similarly adjusted their material to suit an expert or non-expert readership (Aristotle and Theophrastus come into the discussion at this point), Galen twice stresses the reaction of an audience when supplied with material they cannot digest or make sense of. This reaction ranges from serious displeasure to crude rebuke of the author in question. The above framework enables Galen to launch into self-praise and promote his own ability to adapt his ideas and corresponding phrasing.[24] Indirectly, he also advises his colleagues on how they should best teach medicine and compose medical works, encouraging them to follow his example and express themselves as lucidly as possible, always bearing in mind the background of their recipients. Galen even allows some flexibility in the use of terms,[25] yet only in as far as the disciplines he is serving are not harmed by this. The usefulness of knowledge suggested here is a theme that crops up quite frequently in *On My Own Opinions*. Galen distinguishes between three classes of knowledge: knowledge which is useful for the physician to possess in order to better perform his profession (ch. 6), unnecessary knowledge which does not affect his art if the physician ignores it (e.g. substance of the soul, ch. 6, or empsychosis and metempsychosis, ch. 15; also ch. 14), and knowledge which, were it possessed, would enhance the physician's conceptual toolkit, being in Galen's words 'an additional ornament' (ch. 14). The same concerns revolving around useful or useless questions in different areas of study and research feature in Galen's *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (e.g. 588.7–29 De Lacy(b) = V.779.16–781.10 Kühn), a work, which, as has recently been shown, reflects Galen's acquaintance with the doxographical (or *Placita*, i.e. 'tenets', 'doctrines') tradition and its typical characteristics.[26] At this point it may be worth exploring the affiliation of *On My Own Opinions* with the *Placita* literature, a topic which, to the best of my knowledge, has been largely overlooked or at best misinterpreted.[27]

24 By the same token, elsewhere in *On My Own Opinions* (ch. 3), Galen states that he uses different terms to denote the same thing depending on whether he is addressing Platonist philosophers, Stoic philosophers or ordinary people.

25 E.g. ch. 12 where Galen says that the notion of the existence of heat in plants could be expressed in a slightly different way depending on whether the discussion is couched in general terms or something more specific. See also end of ch. 5.

26 Tieleman (2018: esp. 454–459).

27 Nutton (1999: 47–49), for example, sees Epicurus' *Principal Doctrines* as a prototype for Galen's *On My Own Opinions*, and although Nutton's general position was that 'there are no convincingly close parallels to what Galen is attempting here' (p. 48), he did to some extent associate the work with the genre of ancient autobiography, considering it a forerunner to St Augustine's

(d) *On My Own Opinions* and Doxography

In a seminal study on ancient doxography J. Mansfeld has pointed out that the two intrinsic elements of the 'writing of opinions' is the opposition (*diaphōnia*) and juxtaposition (*diairesis*) of tenets and their proponents.[28] *On My Own Opinions* is shown to make extensive use of both these elements.[29] The term *diaphōnia* and its cognates appears five times in the text (twice in ch. 5, once in ch. 12 and twice in ch. 13), always pointing to some sort of doctrinal incongruity, while on other occasions, though the specific term is not used, the notion of distinction or deviation is distinctly evoked. Much more pervasive in *On My Own Opinions* is the diairetic mode of presentation conventionally used in *Placita*, namely the type of arrangement that makes use of division and subdivision of the subject-matter.[30] An illustrative example is found in ch. 1 – ch. 2:

> ...whereas I provide as witnesses my written views, regarding which I declared that I have secure knowledge or at least a plausible one, just as I also say about [other] matters that I know nothing certain of, due to having no scientific acquaintance with them.
>
> 2. Of the latter sort are the following (for I decided to talk about these issues first): whether the universe is ungenerated or generated, or if there is anything after it outside of it or nothing at all. Since I say that I am ignorant of such things, namely of what the nature of the creator of everything in the world is, whether he is incorporeal or in fact corporeal, and yet more in which place he lives.

Here the broader idea of views divided into those securely known, those plausibly known, and those not known at all is narrowed down by Galen's decision to talk about the latter group.[31] Then the data in the latter group (things not known) is subdivided into two questions, each of which includes a binary antithesis: (a) is the universe ungenerated or generated? And (b) is there anything beyond it or

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Confessions and even linking it with Diogenes of Oenoanda's publicly displayed Epicurean opinions. As has already been noted, neither of these connections is persuasive (Perilli 2004: 76). The first scholar to associate *On My Own Opinions* with the doxographical genre was Tieleman (2018) in a study on Galen and doxography, though his treatment of *On My Own Opinions* is only a perfunctory one, overshadowed by his emphasis on Galen's *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*. The place of *On My Own Opinions* in the doxographical tradition is a topic I will explore in more detail in a future study.

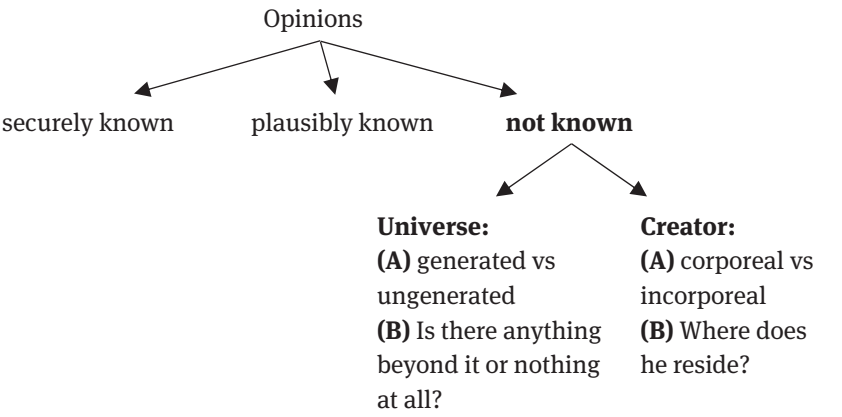
28 Mansfeld (1990).

29 A concise and illuminating discussion of tenet-writing in antiquity is provided by Mansfeld (2020). Sadly, Galen's *On My Own Opinions* is not mentioned in Mansfeld's overview of representative doxographies either in the broader or the narrower sense.

30 For the method of division in Galenic works, see also Boulogne (1997); cf. Tieleman (2015).

31 For the notion of plausibility in Galen, see the study by Debru (1991).

nothing at all? The same group of things not known comprises other controversial *doxai*: a general one on the nature of the creator, and two more specific ones: (a) whether the creator is corporeal or incorporeal and (b) where he resides.[32] The following schema in the form of a branch diagram visualises how Galen arranges his material by means of divisions and categories:



The material throughout *On My Own Opinions* is conveniently structured in line with the doxographical schema of *diairesis* on literally every page. This type of 'checklist' ordering goes back to the Aristotelian categories and later on infiltrated into the dialectical and rhetorical traditions, which strongly inspired doxography.

Other defining characteristics of doxographical pieces in antiquity is that they offered short accounts of convictions which may or may not have been accompanied by name-labels, their style was by default compact, sweeping and descriptive (eschewing detailed argumentation), and that they maintained a profound interest in how the researcher should organise his inquiry through a methodical, rationally-driven procedure. All these aspects are also present in *On My Own Opinions* (on the latter, e.g. see ch. 13, also discussed above). Even the mainstream themes of doxographies are also discussed in *On My Own Opinions*: natural philosophy, metaphysics, cosmology, epistemology, religion and notably issues such as the constitution of the soul, its (in)corporeality and (im)mortality, to mention only a few. Among the stock of physical doctrines were also spermatology, embryology and health/disease, which again occur in *On My Own Opin-*

32 All these questions recall the so-called 'question-types' of the *Placita* literature. See Mansfeld (1990); and Tieleman (2015: 94–96) on question-types in Galen's *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*.

ions on a smaller or larger scale.[33] Galen also seems to be exploiting the *Placita* conventions in that he tends to provide: a) a plurality of traditions (e.g. ch. 14: '...whether this comes from the mixture of the four elements or from some combination of primary bodies, which some say are atoms, others unjointed, others indivisible, others homogenous particles ⟨and yet others non-homogenous particles⟩'), b) alternatives or variants of interpretations (e.g. end of ch. 3) or c) arithmetic arrangement of subject-matter, e.g. that there are four natural capacities, nine mixtures, four elements, four qualities and four humours, three kinds of fever, two kinds of drugs and so on. When Galen mentions the absurd opinion of some men who posit that foetal limbs are formed by the heart (ch. 10), he appears to be tapping into the use of the paradoxical conception familiar from the *Placita* literature. Likewise his statement about taking a position somewhere in the middle in the debate on the soul's substance (ch. 14) is reminiscent of the so-called 'intermediate or compromise view' that is part of the doxographical genre. Finally, the text is infused with 'yes or no questions' introduced by *ei*, *eite* ('if') or even *poteron* ('whether'),[34] another stock trait of the collections of tenets.

1.3.5 Modern Translations

The medieval Latin paraphrase and the extant Greek fragments were translated in English by V. Nutton in his 1999 edition. A French translation accompanies the *editio princeps* of the whole Greek text made by V. Boudon-Millot and A. Pietrobelli in 2005, while an Italian rendering by I. Garofalo and A. Lami features in their 2012 edition of the work. The text is given its first English translation here based on the Greek text as established by Polemis and Xenophontos. See '3. This Translation' below for more information on the state of the text, the trans-

33 It is interesting, for instance, that Galen's *On My Own Opinions* shares many themes with the pseudo-Plutarchan *Opinions of the Philosophers*, an epitome of the lost *Placita* of a certain Aëtius (edited as the left column in the reconstructed Aëtius in Diels 1879). Such common themes are, for example, whether the universe was created, whether there is an extra-cosmic void, whether the demiurge is corporeal, whether the soul is (or is not) corporeal or mortal, what its substance is, discussion of the halo, the size of the earth, divination and dreams, the causes of death, plants etc.

34 εἰ θνητή τίς ἐστιν ἢ ἀθάνατος (ch. 6); Εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἀθάνατός ἐστι καὶ ἀσώματος (ch. 6); εἴτε πνεῦμα μόνον εἴη φερόμενον ἐκ τῆς κυούσης ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν, εἴτε σὺν αὐτῷ τι καὶ τὸ αἷμα (ch. 10); πότερον αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ κατά τινος κοιλότητος ἐν τῷ τοῦ ζῴου σώματι περιέχεται τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ψυχικὸν ἢ δι' ὅλων διελήλυθε τῶν στερεῶν σωμάτων, καὶ πότερον κατατεθραυσμένον (ch. 7).

lating practices followed and the symbols used e.g. where the text is elliptical or requires conceptual supplementation.

1.3.6 Studies on *On My Own Opinions*

The work has so far attracted scholarly attention mainly on account of its philological quandaries.[35] Some papers have been published on Galen's religion, agnosticism and his understanding of the limits and function of knowledge.[36] But overall a substantial amount of interpretative work remains to be done to analyse and contextualise the work's importance to many fields, including theories on the soul's dependence on the body, epistemology and knowability, the work's doxographical roots or its place in the history of ideas, especially as regards religion and agnosticism.

35 E.g. Lami (2010), Lucarini (2010).

36 E.g. Einarson (1959), Donini (1992: 3498–3502), Frede (2010: 75–81), Pietrobelli (2013), Tieleman (2018).