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The Andreia of the Hippocratic Physician and the Problem of Incurables

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Abstract
One of the most enduring metaphors of Western medicine has been its conception of illness as an invasive enemy against which the patient and doctor must join forces to do battle. Indeed, the more invisible and mysterious the processes of disease, the more vividly do people seem to invoke the metaphor. So it is not surprising to find that in antiquity, when the etiology and control of disease was considerably more elusive than it is today, the notion of the body as a battlefield pervaded the medical treatises both implicitly and explicitly.¹

Comments
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The Andreia of the Hippocratic Physician and the Problem of Incurables
Ralph M. Rosen and H. F. J. Horstmanshoff

One of the most enduring metaphors of Western medicine has been its conception of illness as an invasive enemy against which the patient and doctor must join forces to do battle. Indeed, the more invisible and mysterious the processes of disease, the more vividly do people seem to invoke the metaphor. So it is not surprising to find that in antiquity, when the etiology and control of disease was considerably more elusive than it is today, the notion of the body as a battlefield pervaded the medical treatises both implicitly and explicitly.¹ As the other essays in this collection make abundantly clear, when it came to real-life warfare in ancient Greece, the principal virtue was andreia, a term which, despite its many semantic nuances, became generally synonymous with military prowess and an almost heroic capacity for bravery. We might expect, therefore, that the Hippocratic physician, engaged as he was in his peculiarly relentless battle against disease, would be readily characterized in the treatises as andreios. In fact,

¹ See, for example, Hipp. Epid. 1.11: ἡ τέχνη διὰ τριῶν, τὸ νοσήμα, ὁ νοσέων, καὶ ὁ ἰητρός· ὁ ἰητρός ὑπηρέτης τῆς τέχνης· ὑπεναντιούσθαι τῷ νουσήματι τὸν νοσεύντα μετὰ τοῦ ἢτροῦ χρή. (“The art is composed of three things: the sickness, the patient, and the physician. The physician is the servant of the art, and the patient must join forces with the doctor against the disease.”). Parry 1969, 115-16 notes the prevalence of military metaphors in Thucydides’ description of the plague at Athens (2.47-54).
however, there seem to be no instances in all of the Hippocratic corpus where this happens. *Andreia* certainly occurs in contexts where an individual’s moral character is discussed as a function of bodily constitution, nutrition or environment, but it does not happen to be singled out as a virtue particularly associated with the medical profession. Even the deontological works, which self-consciously address matters of professional demeanor and business ethics, never actually use the term in the context of how the Hippocratic doctor ought to behave. Do we conclude, then, that *andreia* was simply not felt to be especially applicable to this type of ancient “warrior”? If so, when the ancient physician behaved with what we might call “courage” or “steadfastness,” did they themselves, and the non-professional public, conceptualize these qualities differently from more traditional forms of *andreia*?

2 E.g., *De Diaeta* 1.28: (on what conditions at conception are necessary for a man to turn out ἀνδρεῖοι); *De aere aquis et locis*, passim, but cf., e.g., sec. 16, which notes that even a man who is ἀνδρεῖος καὶ εὖψυχος can be undone by unfavorable cultural conditions; cf. also sec. 23: καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν ἡσυχίας καὶ ἰσχυμης ἢ δειλίη αὐξέται, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ταλαιπωρίης καὶ τῶν πόνων αἰ ἀνδρεῖαι. Although we are chiefly concerned in this chapter with Hippocratic texts, it is noteworthy that Galen too seems not to have used the term ἀνδρεία to refer explicitly to a physician’s virtue. But see below note [15], where Galen uses the adverbial form, ἀνδρείως, ironically of certain misguided physicians. On the courage of patients in enduring pain (and its philosophical associations), see Schrijvers 1990.
It may be that in an age when illnesses were generally thought to arise from the
disequilibrium of the body’s physiology, the notion of the disease as “enemy” was, in
fact, so abstract and metaphorical that andreia seemed just a little too grounded in
cotidian reality to serve as *le mot juste* for a physician’s primary virtue. Bodies became
ill, in other words, not so much because specifically identifiable “agents” attacked them,
but because certain, sometimes nebulously construed, forces—nutrition, climate, self-
eglect, and so on—altered their internal constitutions in destructive ways. It is useful in
this regard to consider how powerfully microbiology has changed our own conceptions of
disease. Ever since we could actually *see* the way “germs” can cause pathology, the
notion of a “fight” against disease has become much less a metaphor than an accurate
description of prevailing Western approaches to medicine. \(^3\) But for the ancient doctor, the
battle against disease may have been less “personlized” than it often is today, and this
may explain why andreia, which could so readily conjure up vivid images of human
combat, was felt to be less appropriate as a description of his particular battles. It is
somewhat easier, after all, to anthropomorphize microbial entities as human enemies than
the natural forces that loom so large in ancient etiologies of disease.

Despite the fact that the lexical term, andreia, was not explicitly used to describe
the idiosyncratic virtues of the Hippocratic physician, however, we would like to argue in

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\(^3\) For metaphors of warfare, invasion, victory and defeat in modern culture, see Sontag
1977, 62-66. She speaks, for example, of “the American cancer establishment, tirelessly
hailing the imminent victory over cancer; the professional pessimism of a large number
of cancer specialists, talking like battle-weary officers mired down in an interminable
colonial war…”
this chapter both that they conceptualized their activity as a form of andreia, and that, in general, patients and the public at large expected from their doctors behavior which in other contexts would allow them to be considered andreioi. We propose to make this case by focusing on the Hippocratic discussions of a particularly troubling point of medical ethics, namely, how a doctor should behave in the face of obviously incurable patients. Here, as we shall find, a classic dilemma arises when a profession ostensibly dedicated to healing disease and the relief of human suffering confronts a kind of battle it can never hope to win. As the treatises show, opinions were divided about the proper way to handle such cases, and rationality was not always their main criterion. Personal ego and the reputation of the profession itself were often at stake in this controversy, and questions of duty, honor and integrity evidently came into play on both sides. The treatises reveal, we believe, that the accusations and apologies on this issue fundamentally concerned what can only be regarded as the andreia of the physician: was the refusal to treat incurables a dereliction of duty? did it imply a form of cowardice, like that of the proverbial rhipsaspis, who tosses away his armor and flees a terrifying enemy?4 Or, on the other hand, did such a physician justify his position by applying a more nuanced calculus of knowledge and reason to the notion of courageous behavior in medicine?

Even allowing for the substantive and chronological diversity of the Hippocratic corpus, it is reasonably clear that, as we will see in greater detail below, the “Hippocratic

4 Jouanna 1999, 110, uses the term “noble flight” to describe how people might perceive a physician who refused to treat an incurable patient: “…a gesture so at variance with the heroic ideal, [that] the physician may seem to have fled from the battle against illness, throwing down his arms in the face of danger and uncertainty.”
position” on this issue was that in some cases it was indeed best not to take on incurable cases. In responding to anonymous or hypothetical detractors, these treatises, once again, never invoke andreia as such, but the arguments they deploy bear a remarkable resemblance to the famous discussion of the term in Plato’s Laches. In fact, all the interlocutors in the dialogue at one point or another invoke medicine (iatrikê) or physicians (iatroi) in their attempts to articulate a definition of andreia. Insofar as the dialogue ends aporetically, it is difficult to glean from it a definitive Platonic stance on whether physicians could or should possess andreia, but the discussion nevertheless clearly suggests that an association between andreia and iatrikê was commonly made, even if some people found it unconvincing. As we shall argue, the discussion in Laches not only clarifies the Hippocratic arguments defending their position on incurables, but also suggests that at the core of this defense lay the fundamental assumption that something akin to andreia ought to be seen as the primary virtue of the Hippocratic physician.

It is often noted that ancient medicine was a very “public” activity. Since the profession was unregulated and there were probably as many incompetent as competent physicians, the public was often understandably wary of a physician’s claims to expertise. Hence we continually hear of public debates between rival practitioners or schools, and both the Hippocratic treatises, and later, Galen, depict a climate in which physicians seemed constantly engaged in some form of debate, squabbling or even downright abuse. It is no wonder that when they actually saw sick patients, they would doubtless have felt
scrutinized by a wider public,\(^5\) interested in assessing not only their skill at healing, but their demeanor and attitude along the way. Their metaphorical battle against disease was as much a spectacle as any real battle, and the physician’s virtues as a soldier in this battle were every bit as public as those of a real soldier.\(^6\) One can see, therefore, why a Hippocratic physician’s decision to withhold treatment from certain cases would have been a matter of concern that extended far beyond his private dealings with the unfortunate patient. For just as the soldier who shirks his responsibilities on the battlefield is in danger of being branded *anandreios* (unless he can offer a persuasive explanation for behavior that on the surface will always appear reprehensible), so the physician, whose duty to heal the sick and relieve human suffering is professed time and again in the treatises with an almost heroic fervor, can easily give the appearance of repudiating his own principles of combat.

The rather cantankerous author of the treatise *De Arte* (*Περὶ Τέχνης*) was clearly reacting to such accusations from critics who regarded the Hippocratic refusal to treat incurables as evidence that medicine was a sham “art” to begin with. Indeed, this author regards his rhetorical mission as battle against ignorance, which seems to require as much courage and bravery as the battle against disease itself:

\[
\text{ό δὲ παρεὼν λόγος τοῖς ἰητρικῆς ὀὔτως ἐμπορευομένοις ἐναντίωσεται, θρασυνόμενος μὲν διὰ τούτους οὐς ψέγει, εὐπορέων δὲ}
\]

\(^5\) See Jouanna 1999, 75-80 for a discussion of the “public” aspects of Hippocratic medicine.

...but the treatise at hand will oppose those who attack medicine thus, emboldening itself through those it blames, well supplied by the art which it defends, and powerful in the knowledge in which it has been educated.

When the author offers a definition of medicine in the third chapter, it is striking that he includes a statement about incurable patients:

...τὸ δὴ πάμπαν ἀπαλλάσσειν τῶν νοσεόντων τοὺς καμάτους, καὶ τῶν νοσημάτων τὰς σφαδρότητας ἀμβλύνειν, καὶ τὸ μὴ ἔχειρέειν τοῖς κεκρατημένοις ὑπὸ τῶν νοσημάτων, εἰδότας ὅτι ταῦτα οὐ δύναται ἵηρική. (3.5-8)

[medicine is]...broadly speaking to relieve the sufferings of the sick, to mitigate the severity of diseases, and not to attempt to treat those who are overpowered by disease, knowing that medicine has no power over these cases.

The last phrase about incurables reads almost as a deliberate provocation to potential detractors, especially given the phrasing of the first part of his definition, which stresses the relief of suffering (ἀπαλλάσσειν τῶν νοσεόντων τοὺς καμάτους), rather than the actual curing of disease.\(^7\) Why, one might ask, should one withhold relief from an

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\(^7\) Presumably the phrase ἀπαλλάσσειν τῶν νοσεόντων τοὺς καμάτους would imply that a sick patient is not only relieved of his suffering, but also *reovers* from his illness, but this author seems somewhat evasive on this point. A clearer statement that the Hippocratic physician aimed both to cure his patients and to make him as comfortable as possible can be seen in *De Articulis* 78: χρῆ δὲ περὶ πλείστου μὲν ποιέσθαι ἐν πάσῃ τῇ τέχνῃ, ὡκὼς ύγιὲς μὲν ποιήσεις τὸ νοσέον· εἰ δὲ πολλοῖς τρόποις οἶον τε εἶ ὑγιέας ποιέων· τὸν ἀσχλότατον χρῆ αἱρέσθαι: ("You should chiefly aim in every aspect of medical practice to make the sick person healthy. And if you can produce
obviously incurable patient? But the author is either insensitive to this apparent paradox (i.e., claiming an art of relief, but withholding it from some patients) or more interested in addressing what he regards as the fundamental charge against medicine, that it just does not “work.” As he says in chapter 4, people are unhappy because medicine cannot cure everyone. When people are cured, according to the detractors, it is merely because they would have been lucky enough to survive even without the intervention of a physician:

...ὅτι δὲ οὐ πάντες [ἐξυγιαίνονται], ἐν τούτῳ ἦδη ψέγεται ἡ τέχνη, καὶ φασίν οἱ τὰ χεῖρω λέγοντες, διὰ τοὺς ἀλισκομένους ύπὸ τῶν νοσημάτων, τοὺς ἀποφεύγοντας αὐτὰ τὺχη ἀποφεύγειν καὶ οὐ διὰ τὴν τέχνην.

...but the art [of medicine] is blamed because not everyone [is restored to health], and those who repudiate [the art], because there are some who are defeated by diseases, say that those who manage to escape them, do so because they’re simply lucky and not because of the art.

Our author does not deny the force of luck, but argues, as one might expect, that the technē of the physician demonstrably abets whatever fortune might hold for a patient (Chs. 5-7). Since most people, he argues, even those who never seek a doctor, would health in a variety of ways, you should choose the method that causes the least discomfort”.

8 For a full treatment of the question of “incurable” diseases and patients in the Hippocratic corpus, see von Staden 1987. Von Staden discusses at length the many ways “incurability” could be expressed in the corpus (cf. esp. 75-84), and notes that two approaches seemed current—a binary one (patients and diseases were deemed either curable or non-cur able), and a gradational one (they might be curable or incurable depending on external contingencies or an idiosyncratic array of symptoms).
agree that some sort of intervention is called for in the face of a disease (changing a diet or climate, for example), it is difficult to deny that a technē that rationalizes and systematizes such intervention would be even more useful to humanity than simply stumbling upon effective treatments haphazardly.

But one can see the trap that the author is unwittingly setting for himself with every step of his argument, and, ironically, we can anticipate the objection to a position advocating non-intervention in incurable cases. If the author, after all, has just finished arguing that one is generally better off not leaving the course of an illness up to chance and fortune, but rather should seek medical advice, why in the case of incurables, should one refuse to intervene, if only to alleviate suffering and (one might argue) make the body possibly more receptive to a chance recovery? The specific charge laid against the Hippocratic position, according to the author in Ch. 8, is that physicians limit themselves to cases which would “cure themselves” (αὐτὰ ύπ’ ἐαυτῶν ἄν ἔξυγιάζοιτο), while avoiding those where “there is a need of great assistance” (ἐπικουρίας δεῖται μεγάλης):

9 De Arte 5.9-11πολλὴ γὰρ ἀνάγκη καὶ τούς μὴ χρωμένους ἰητροίς, νοσήσαντας δὲ καὶ ύγιασθέντας εἰδέναι, ὅτι ἦ δρῶντες τί ἦ μὴ δρῶντες ύγιάσθησαν: “For there is no denying that even those who don’t use doctors, but who recover from illness, realize that they have been cured because of something that they’ve done or not done.”

10 I take it that this really means something like this: “in cases where patients do recover, they would have recovered on their own, without the medical art” rather than that “physicians only take on cases which would otherwise cure themselves,” since obviously physicians routinely treat patients who end up not being cured. The phrasing is elliptical
And there are some who also blame medicine because of those who are unwilling to take on patients who have been defeated by their disease; they say that the cases which they attempt to cure are those which would be cured on their own anyway, but that they don’t touch the cases where there is need of great assistance. But (they say), if medicine is in fact an art, then it ought to cure all cases alike.

The detractors maintain that if medicine were really a technê, it would at least attempt to cure all patients,¹² not just the “easy” cases which would be cured anyway. This objection here, but seems to assume that the physician will prognosticate about the patient’s condition, and only decide to treat him if he calculates that there is a good chance of recovery. On Hippocratic prognostication and andreia, see below pp. [000].

¹¹ Cicero seems to be translating this expression in De Att. 16.15.5, when he turns in his letter from public affairs to his domestic troubles: sed me, mi Attice, non sane hoc quidem tempore movet res publica, non quo aut sit mihi quicquam carius aut esse debeat, sed desperatis etiam Hippocrates vetat adhibere medicinam.

¹² I understand there to be an ellipse of ἐγχειρέουσιν with the second ἰησθαι. What they want is for a physician to take on any sick patient, regardless of the chances of recovery; they certainly would not assume that a physician would successfully cure every patient. In point of fact, there is plenty of evidence outside of this treatise that Hippocratic physicians did treat hopeless cases, and it seems clear that the matter was one of perennial debate. For discussion and references, see Wittern 1979, von Staden 1987, 76 n.1, 102-12, Jouanna 1999, 109-11; see also van der Eijk 1999.
seems simple enough, but it has several revealing implications. First, it clearly assumes a normative model of medicine: if one is going to make the claim that medicine is a *technē*, then one will assume that a *technē* will behave according to certain protocols, that there are certain things it *should* do if it can legitimately be considered a *technē*. So if one claims that the *technē* of medicine is to do one thing (e.g., minister to the sick), you cannot then claim that it also does *not* do that very thing (e.g., when it says it will not treat the incurably sick). In other words, the refusal to treat incurables is here essentially portrayed by the detractors as a repudiation of the stated principles of the *technē* of medicine. Thus, the physician who takes such a position is put in a terrible bind, for he is exposed as either an unethical hypocrite or a simple charlatan who conspires with his colleagues to take on only those cases which will make their empty profession look good.

It is clear that the author of *De Arte* deeply resented the implication that the refusal to treat incurables constituted an ethical breach, and he spends the rest of Chapter 8 attempting to explain the position.\(^\text{13}\) The core of his explanation lies in an appeal to the proper knowledge of what medicine is and is not capable of doing, and the rational application of this knowledge. Simply put, he says in so many words that medicine has no business trying to fight a battle it cannot hope to win; and it is the *technē* itself which provides the knowledge necessary to determine when this might be the case:

\[
ο\tau\alpha\nu\ ο\υ\nu\ τι \ πά\θη \ αν\θρω\πος \ κα\κόν \ ο \ κρέ\σσον \ έστι \ τό\υ \ \epsilon\nu \ ι\η\τρική \ ο\ργά\νων, \ ο\υ\δέ \ προ\σδο\κά\θαι \ το\υτό \ που \ δε\ι \ υπό \ ι\η\τρι \ κής \ κρα\τη\θή\ναι \ α\υν.
\]

\(^{13}\) See Cordes 1994, 122-24; for further bibliography on *De Arte*, see Cordes, p. 101, n. 63.
So whenever a person suffers from something bad which is stronger than the tools available to medicine, then one can hardly expect that it can be defeated by medicine.

This leads him to conclude that some cases are simply “inappropriate” for the physician to take on, because he has no means strong enough to defeat the disease:

οἱ μὲν οὖν μεμφόμενοι τοὺς τοῖς κεκρατημένοις μὴ ἐγχειρέοντας παρακελεύονται καὶ ὃν μὴ προσήκει ἀπτεσθαί οὐδὲν ἦσον ἢ ὃν προσήκει παρακελευόμενοι δὲ ταῦτα, ὑπὸ μὲν τῶν οὐνόματι ἱητρῶν θαυμάζονται, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν καὶ τέχνη καταγελώνται.

Those who blame physicians who don’t take on incurable cases, urge them to treat inappropriate cases no less than appropriate ones. In urging this, they may be admired by people who call themselves physicians, but they are ridiculed by “real” physicians [lit.: physicians versed in technē].

Behind this curious statement about “inappropriate” and “appropriate” cases, it seems, lies a contemporary clash between people who expect from their physicians an engaged compassion for the sick patient regardless of the illness, and physicians whose cool, rational attitude towards the nature of illness allows them to keep their distance from patients they deem incurable. This author, in fact, turns the tables and practically accuses any physician who takes on a desperate case of charlatanism (“physicians in name only”).

Yet, from the second sentence quoted above, many people admired such a physician and presumably found his behavior ethically correct, if not plainly heroic. The author of De Arte stands his ground, however, maintaining that praise or blame emanating from such people is “foolish” (aphrones), and that the real physician should heed only those who have “rationally calculated at what point the activities of craftsmen become finally complete” (λελογισμένων πρὸς ὃ τι αἱ ἐργασίαι τῶν δημιουργῶν τελευτῶμεναι πλήρεις εἰσὶ). The author’s disdain for the opinions of anyone but an initiated
professional, indeed for any unphilosophized position on a medical subject, is palpable. It is easy to see from this little vignette that the Hippocratic physician who refused certain cases as a matter of principle might run counter to popular notions of medical ethics, and risked appearing not only arrogant, but also cowardly.

This controversy, then, between Hippocratic professionals and certain unspecified antagonists ultimately rests on two opposing ways of conceptualizing medicine as a form of combat. On the one hand, some (presumably non-Hippocratic) physicians, considered “foolish” by our author, plunge headlong into the battle against disease, indiscriminately taking on all cases, and evidently reaping great renown for it (θαυμάζονται). Patients may die, and these physicians may well expect such an outcome from the start, but people admired the fact alone that they would take on even the most desperate cases,\(^\text{14}\) just as in other contexts the same people might admire a soldier whose andreia emboldened him against even the most insurmountable enemy.\(^\text{15}\) To the Hippocratic

\(^\text{14}\) On the “public”, performative aspects of ancient medicine, see Jouanna 1999, 75-76.

\(^\text{15}\) Galen notes that in his time some physicians (whom he regards as disingenuous—προσποιομένοι) resorted to extreme, even self-sacrificial, forms of showmanship in the name of andreia; cf. his remarks in De Meth. Med. 10 about physicians who, when ill themselves, tried to withstand their pain καρτερῶς τε καὶ ἀνδρείως: οἶδα γὰρ ἐνίὁς τῶν γενναίων εἶναι προσποιομένων ἰατρῶν τε καὶ καμνόντων ἀπολλυμένους δι’ αὐτὸ τούτο τὸ καρτερῶς τε καὶ ἀνδρείως ὁμόσε χωρεῖν οἱ ταῖς ὀδύναις, οὐδὲν τῶν παρηγορικῶν ἐλομένους, ἀλλὰ ἐν τοῖς τραχέοι καὶ ὡς ἑλεγον αὐτοὶ τὴν διάθεσιν ἀνασκευάζουσι διαγιγνομένους βοηθήμασιν, οὐς ἐν χρόνῳ πλείονι θεραπεύοις βέλτιον ἢν ἢ τοὺς σπεύδοντας ἀνδρείως
physician, however, such behavior was merely reckless and irresponsible. If, through technical knowledge and practical experience, one has rationally determined that a patient is incurable, the only conceivable reasons for treating him would be crass showmanship and self-promotion, which, he would of course argue, have nothing to do with proper medicine. At least the real soldier who fights against a more powerful enemy might get some satisfaction from the idea of martyrdom; whatever kudos a physician reaps from joining forces with an incurable patient against an undefeatable disease, however, is indecorously won, in the eyes of the Hippocratic physician, at the expense of his patient’s life. It is, as the passage implies, a cheap victory that turns out upon closer examination to be more cowardly than heroic.

The author of *De Arte* bristles at the insinuation that Hippocratic physicians are morally negligent in refusing to treat incurables, and even though he does not explicitly articulate the debate in terms of *andreia*, it seems that it is something very much akin to ἀποθανεῖν. [“For I know that some physicians put on a show of acting nobly, who, when sick themselves, perish by actually plowing headlong into their pain with fortitude and courage. They refuse to take any painkillers, but treat themselves with harsh remedies, which, as they themselves say, reverses their condition, when it would have been better for them to apply a longer therapy than to die courageously in their zeal.”] Clearly, this is a crowd-pleasing form of *andreia*, not the kind Galen would recommend for true physicians. On the charges of cowardice against Galen himself in the biographical tradition (that he fled an uprising in Pergamum on one occasion, and on another that he fled from Rome to avoid the *pestis Antoniniana* of 166 AD), see Walsh, 1931.
this virtue which he feels called upon to defend in the case of this particular Hippocratic practice. This becomes especially clear, we believe, when we read De Arte in the light of the discussion of andreia in Plato’s Laches. There, the specific discussion of andreia is framed by the characteristically Socratic question of whether or not truly virtuous behavior requires knowledge and reason; likewise, in De Arte, the author defends his position on incurables by arguing that it is the only rational position to take, and the contrary position (of treating all cases regardless of the nature of their affliction) stems from ignorance and, by implication, vanity. As in De Arte, the discussion in Laches centers on a discontinuity between popular conceptions of a particular social value and a more philosophized conception of it. When Socrates asks at 190e how his interlocutors, Laches and Nicias, would define andreia, Laches cannot believe he would ask such a simple, easily answered question. His response, that andreia consists in “remaining at one’s post, fighting off the enemy and not fleeing” (ἐν τῇ τάξει μένων ἁμένεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ μὴ φεύγοι) seems obvious enough to him, as it would to most people, even though Socrates predictably finds it inadequate as a definition. A similar notion of “endurance” at any cost in the face of the enemy seems to be what informs the popular belief intimated in De Arte that physicians should take on even the most

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16 See 197b, where Nicias, in a final flourish, distinguishes a popular conception of courage from his own more rigorous conception, which requires the application of knowledge: “And so the things that you and the many call ‘courageous,’ I call ‘bold’, whereas the acts performed with intelligence are the ones I call ‘courageous.’” (ταύτ’ oún ἃ σὺ καλεῖς ἀνδρεία καὶ οἱ πολλοί, ἐγὼ θρασέα καλῶ, ἀνδρεία δὲ τὰ φρόνιμα περὶ ὧν λέγω.)
desperate patients. We can see, therefore, why the Hippocratic author of the treatise
might feel rather defensive, since if the ethic of “remaining at one’s post and not fleeing”
was commonly transferred to the realm of medicine, those who did not do so, even for
principled reasons, could easily be branded cowards.

In Laches, however, as in De Arte, the prudence of such unreflective engagement
with an enemy is questioned. Socrates asks Laches at 193a3 to consider which of two
men he would consider the more andreios:

ΣΩ. ἄλλι ἐν πολέμῳ καρτεροῦντα ἄνδρα καὶ ἐθέλοντα μάχεσθαι,
φρονίμως λογιζόμενον, εἴδοτα μὲν ὧν βοηθήσουσιν ἄλλοι αὐτῷ,
πρὸς ἐλάττους δὲ καὶ φανταστέρους μαχεῖται ἢ μεθ’ ὧν αὐτὸς ἐστίν,
ἐτὶ δὲ χωρία ἔχει κρείττω, τούτων τὸν μετὰ τῆς τοιαύτης φρονήσεως καὶ
παρασκευῆς καρτεροῦντα ἄνδρειότερον ἄν φαίης ἢ τὸν ἐν τῶ ἐναντίῳ
στρατοπέδῳ ἐθέλοντα υπομένειν τε καὶ καρτερεῖν;

Well, suppose a man endures in battle, and his willingness to fight is based on
wise calculation because he knows that others are coming to his aid, and that he
will be fighting men who are fewer than those on his side, and inferior to them,
and in addition his position is stronger: would you say that this man, with his kind
of wisdom and preparation, endures more courageously or a man in the opposite
camp who is willing to remain and hold out? [tr. Sprague]

Laches’ first response is that the man in the “opposite camp” is the more brave; he is not
given time to expatiated, but he doubtless reflects the attitude of most of his
contemporaries. The first man might be admirable in his own way, but his endurance is
safer and more predictable, and, Laches might say, it is less easy to describe him as
“courageous,” at least according to common usage, than the weaker opponent who holds
out against him even to the point of his own defeat. Socrates, however, presses his point
with similar examples, and Laches must agree with him at 193c9 that “people like this
take risks and endure more foolishly than those who do it with techne” (καὶ μὴν ποιοῦ
ἀφρονεστέρως γε...οἱ τοιοῦτοι κινδυνεύουσιν τε καὶ καρτεροῦσιν ἢ οἱ μετὰ
And since they had earlier agreed (192d) that “foolish daring and endurance is both shameful and injurious” (...αἰσχρὰ ἢ ἄφρων τόλμα τε καὶ καρτέρησις. ἔφαν ἧμιν οὖσα καὶ βλαβερὰ, 193d1), Laches realizes that he seems to have contradicted himself.

The connections between this section of Laches and the position of De Arte should be strikingly clear. Socrates’ hypothetical “knowledgeable” soldier is precisely analogous to the Hippocratic physician in De Arte who undertakes only those cases which make sense for him based on his knowledge of the medical technē, while the valiant and tenacious, but weak and ignorant soldier, who endures in the name of an ill-understood notion of andreia, parallels the physician willing to take on even the most hopeless patient in the hope of reaping popular thauma. Both Socrates and the author of De Arte are working to refine popular conceptions of “courageous” behavior by

17 The closing paragraph of de Arte reiterates the connection between the knowledge that comes with a technē and proper ethical behavior—in this case, the refusal to treat very problematic cases: ὅτι μὲν οὖν καὶ λόγους ἐν ἐωστῇ εὐπόροις ἐς τὰς ἐπικουρίας ἔχει ἢ ἰητρική, καὶ οὐκ εὐδιορθώτοις δικαίως οὐκ ἀν ἐγχειρέοι τῇς νούσοις, ἢ ἐγχειρεύμενας ἀναμαρτήτους ἀν παρέχοι, οἴ τε νῖν λεγόμενοι λόγοι δηλοῦσιν οἳ τῷ οἶδότων τὴν τέχνην ἐπιδείξεις... [“that medicine is well stocked with rational arguments in itself to come to its aid, and that it would justly not attempt to treat illnesses which are difficult to cure, or would make those who did take them on error-free, both the discussions of this treatise, and the demonstrations of those who understand the craft, make clear.”]
emphasizing the importance of knowledge and rationality for evaluating the outcome of our actions.

The argument in *Laches* proceeds even further, as Nicias takes over as Socrates’ interlocutor and presses the notion, which he attributes ultimately to Socrates (194d), that courage is a kind of wisdom (δοκεῖ ἀνήρ σοφίαν τινά τὴν ἀνδρείαν λέγειν)—specifically the knowledge of “what is terrible and what is to be dared in war, and all other situations” (τὴν τῶν δεινῶν καὶ θαρραλέων ἐπιστήμην καὶ ἐν πολέμῳ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀπασιν, 195a). This line of argument takes the participants along a rocky path towards eventual aporia, but there are several significant ramifications for the ideas in *De Arte* along the way. In particular, physicians and the technē of medicine figure in this section as a veritable leitmotif, as the interlocutors wrestle with the problem of whether a physician’s technical knowledge qualifies them to be considered andreioi. At first Laches brings up the example of physicians at 195b1 as a ploy to repudiate Nicias’ equation of andreia and knowledge. Physicians certainly know what things are “terrible” (*deina*), but who would consider them “courageous,” he asks sarcastically? Nicias agrees definitively he would not either (195b6). Now, this is just the beginning of a rather convoluted section in which the two keep returning to the example of physicians, and it will be useful to analyze their positions in some detail.

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18 At 199c-e, it becomes clear that the argument has led them to conclude that courage implies all the virtues and a knowledge of all goods and evils, even though they had previously agreed that it was only a part of virtue. At that point, the argument is dropped and the dialogue draws to a close.
The two agree that they would not consider doctors to be “courageous,” although Laches thinks that Nicias’ argument equating knowledge with *andreia ought* to lead him to think so. Further, he places physicians in the same company as farmers and all other craftsmen (195b6), and suggests that it would be equally absurd to consider all of these courageous simply because they have some sort of technical knowledge. Nicias does not dispute the absurdity, but he dismisses Laches’ example of the physician on the grounds that he inflates what they are actually capable of doing. Here, we have what amounts to a normative summary of the limits of contemporary medicine:

> ὃτι οἶσαι τοὺς ἰατροὺς πλέον τι εἰδέναι περὶ τοὺς κάμνοντας ἢ τὸ υγιεῖνον τειπεῖν οἶνον τε καὶ νοσώδες. οἱ δὲ δήπου τοσούτοι μόνον ἱσασίν· εἰ δὲ δεινὸν τὸ τούτο έστιν τὸ υγιαίνειν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ κάμνειν, ἡγῆ οὐ τούτι, ὦ Λάχης, τοὺς ἰατροὺς ἑπίστασθαι; ἢ ὁ οὖ πολλοῖς οἶει ἐκ τῆς νόσου ἀμεινὸν εἶναι μὴ ἄναστήναι ἢ ἄναστήναι; τοῦτο γάρ εἶπη· οὐ πᾶσι φῆς ἀμεινὸν εἶναι ζῆν καὶ οὐ πολλοῖς κρείττον τεθνᾶναι; (195c7-d2).

[Laches says what’s not true...] Because he supposes that physicians know something more about the sick than how to say what is healthy and what is sick. But surely that’s all they really know; and if recovery for a patient is more terrible than being sick, do you think, Laches, that doctors know this? Or do you not suppose that for many people it’s better not to recover from an illness than to recover? I mean, tell me this: do you say that it’s better in all cases for patients to live, and that it’s not better for many of them to die?

Behind this line of questioning lies a debate about what sort of knowledge one could expect from a physician, and Nicias implies that popular opinion would not expect much. It is indeed curious that he asks Laches specifically about a doctor’s ability to decide whether all patients are necessarily worth treating or not, and they end up agreeing that this is beyond his normal purview. The physician’s job, according to this formulation, is only to articulate what is or is not illness, although he essentially implies that an “ideal” physician (who would be able to discern what is truly “fearful” [*deina*] and “to be dared”
[tharralea]) would be able to prognosticate more accurately about a given disease, and decide whether treatment was even indicated. Nicias does not seem especially hopeful that physicians—or any craftsman, for that matter—would ever display this skill, but several times in the discussion, they assume that it is hypothetically possible. At 195d7, for example, Nicias claims that a physician cannot really distinguish whether a patient is better off dead, and what things would be fearful to which sort of patient, “except the one who knows the difference between what is and is not fearful, whom I call courageous” (πλὴν τῶν δεινῶν καὶ μὴ δεινῶν ἐπιστήμων, δὲν ἔγω ἀνδρείου καλῶ). And later, at 196d4, Socrates notes that few would be able to possess Nicias’ criterion for courage (knowledge of the fearful and what should be dared): “neither the physician nor the seer will understand this, and won’t be courageous, unless he can actually apply this knowledge (ἐὰν μὴ συνήτην ταύτην τὴν ἐπιστήμην προσλάβη). The possibility, in other words, that physicians might in fact possess a genuinely informed technē about the prognosis of diseases and the appropriateness of treatment (or non-treatment) is clearly entertained, even if these interlocutors might be hard pressed to think of any good examples. Nevertheless, we may remember that such a physician, however hypothetical in their minds, would, according to Nicias’ definition, possess true andreia.

Socrates, for his part, fundamentally endorses Nicias’ notion of andreia, but adds that the courageous man will have knowledge of past and present deina and tharralea as well as of future ones. Again, medicine serves as an illustrative example:

οἶνον περὶ τὸ ύψιειόν ἐν ἀπαντάς τοὺς χρόνους οὐκ ἄλλη τις ἣ ἰατρική, μία οὔσα, ἐφορᾷ καὶ γιγνόμενα καί γεγονότα καί γενησόμενα ὑπὲρ γενήσεται'
For example, when it comes to health, there is no art other than medicine directed at all periods of time, which, though a single art, surveys present, past and future, how things will happen.

He proceeds with a similar argument for farming and generalship, concluding that in all such cases andreia consists in the knowledge of past, present and future goods and evils idiosyncratic to each field. In part, this argument is intended to echo Nicias’ earlier assertion at 196a2 that the seer’s art, despite its ability to describe fearful or hopeful future events, is not necessarily courageous, since the seer need not comment on whether such events are beneficial to a person. At the same time, however, Socrates wants to retain the notion that andreia does imply at least some prognosticatory skill—one needs a full and genuine understanding of how events will turn out in order to act prudently and courageously.\(^\text{19}\) Without this, one’s behavior is little more than some form of recklessness or madness.\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^\text{19}\) If courage was felt to require knowledge of when a person can successfully fight and when he must withdraw, one wonders what exactly Thucydides thought of the physicians at 2.47.4, who lost their lives in droves trying to minister to the sick: “…Nor were the doctors, at first trying to practice their therapy in ignorance, strong enough [against it]. But they especially died inasmuch as they were around it the most.” (οὔτε γὰρ ἱερκοὺ τὸ πρῶτον θεραπεύοντες ἁγνοία, ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ μάλιστα ἐθνησκον ὅσω καὶ μάλιστα προσήχαν, οὔτε ἄλλη ἀνθρωπεία τέχνη οὐδεμία.) The implication seems to be that it was essentially ignorance that killed these poor doctors, and that if they had understood the real power of the plague, they would (and should) have acted differently. This was no real courage, but lack of experience and insight, much as Socrates holds in Laches. See Horstmanshoff 1989, 1992 and 1993.
It should be clear by this point that the Hippocratic author of *De Arte* was trying to make exactly this point about his own *technē*, even if he did not focus on *andreia* as such. Indeed, his entire argument defending the Hippocratic refusal to treat incurables privileges the same prognosticatory skills that Nicias regards as essential for the *andreios* man. The physician’s ability to make a cogent decision about whether or not to take on a case, after all, presupposes an understanding both of what a patient should fear and not fear, and of what would be the most beneficial course of action for him. In the opening paragraph of the Hippocratic *Prognostic*, in fact, we find a clearly articulated programmatic rationale of the role of forecasting in medicine, which attests not only the practical but the moral advantages of prognosticatory skill:

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20 See Nicias’ formulation at 197b-c, which Socrates would almost certainly endorse, as far as it goes: “By no means, Laches, do I call courageous wild beasts or anything else that, for lack of understanding, does not fear what should be feared. Rather I would call them rash and mad…My view is that very few have a share of courage and foresight, but that a great many, men and women and children and wild animals, partake in boldness and audacity and rashness and lack of foresight. These cases, which you and the man in the street call courageous, I call rash, whereas the courageous ones are the sensible people I was talking about.” [Tr. Sprague]. See also the similar discussion in Plato *Prt.* 349b-51b, and Protagoras’ conclusion, 351a5-b3: οὖτω δὲ κάκει ὅτι ταύτον εἶναι θάρσος τε καὶ ἀνδρείαν· ὡστε συμβαίνει τούς μὲν ἀνδρείους θαρραλέους εἶναι, μὴ μὲντοι τούς γε θαρραλέους ἀνδρείους πάντας· θάρσος μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἀπὸ τέχνης γίγνεται ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἀπὸ θυμοῦ γε καὶ ἀπὸ μανίας, ὡσπερ ἣ δύναμις, ἀνδρεία δὲ ἀπὸ φύσεως καὶ εὐτροφίας τῶν ψυχῶν γίγνεται.
I hold that it is an excellent thing for a physician to practice forecasting. For if he discover and declare unaided by the side of his patients the present, the past and the future, and fill in the gaps in the account given by the sick, he will be the more believed to understand the cases, so that men will confidently entrust themselves to him for treatment. Furthermore, he will carry out the treatment best if he know beforehand from the present symptoms what will take place later. Now to restore every patient to health is impossible. To do so indeed would have been better even than forecasting the future. But as a matter of fact men do die, some owing to the severity of the disease before they summon the physician, others expiring immediately after calling him in—living one day or a little longer—before the physician by his art can combat each disease. It is necessary, therefore, to learn the nature of such diseases, how much they exceed the strength of men’s bodies, and to learn how to forecast them. For in this way you will justly win respect and be an able physician. For the longer time you plan to meet each emergency the greater your power to save those who have a chance of recovery, while you will be blameless if you learn and declare beforehand those who will die and those who will get better. (Tr. Jones)

The emphasis on the physician’s knowledge of “past, present and future” in the first sentence is strikingly reminiscent of the description of medical prognosis in Laches, as is
the importance given to an intellectual understanding of the entire course of a disease.\textsuperscript{21} Further, both passages hold that the best physicians will display the best skills in prognosis; proper technical knowledge, in short, is the \textit{sine qua non} of an ethically appropriate medical practice. Once again, this passage shows just how “public” medicine was: the physician is fighting a battle (ἡ τὸν ἱητρόν τῇ τέχνῃ πρὸς ἕκαστον νοῦσημα ἀνταγωνίσασθαι) and all eyes are watching his performance. He aims to be admired for his skills, but he wants this admiration to be won with integrity. As the author states, if a physician can prognosticate well, he will be “justly admired” (...ἀν θαυμάζοιτό τε δικαίως) and will be shown to be a “good doctor” (ἰητρός ἄγαθός ἂν εἴη). We may contrast this remark with the passage in \textit{De Arte} we discussed earlier (see above 000) where the author complains about unscrupulous physicians who take on inappropriate cases in order to secure the admiration of charlatan physicians (and presumably the public at large), ύπο μὲν τῶν συνόματι ἱητρῶν θαυμάζονται (\textit{De Arte} 8).\textsuperscript{22} This author, as we have seen, chastises such physicians as part of his explicit defence of the principle of not treating incurable patients.

\textsuperscript{21} The passage is replete with verbs of “knowing”: προγιγνώσκων (twice), γιγνώσκειν, προείδως, προγιγνώσκειν, γνῶναι, ἐκμαθάνειν.

\textsuperscript{22} Not much had apparently changed even by the early seventeenth century, when the narrator of Jonathan Swift’s \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} (part 4, ch. 6; Landa 1960, 205) in describing English culture to the equine Houyhnhnms, reserves this barb for the contemporary physician: “One great Excellency in this Tribe is their Skill at Prognostics, wherein they seldom fail; their Predictions in real Diseases, when they rise to any Degree
In *Prognostic*, the problem of incurables is likewise at issue, except in a more positive, and slightly more oblique, way. The author’s point in the final sentence of the quoted passage is that proper prognosis will allow the physician to treat his patients more effectively and to “declare beforehand those who will die and those who will get better” (τοὺς ἀποθανομένους τε καὶ σωθησομένους προγνώσκων καὶ προαγορεύων), and, most significantly, that if he demonstrates good prognostic skills, he will be held blameless (ἀναίτιος ἂν εἶη) for his judgments about recovery and non-recovery. Behind this statement lie clear traces of the contemporary debate about incurable patients, for we can assume that when the author speaks of a physician forecasting a patient’s death (τοὺς ἀποθανομένους), he is also thinking of that physician’s refusal to take on such a case. Someone at some time was evidently always “blaming” physicians for their stance on whom to treat, but, the author claims, if one can show genuine skill in prognostics, the refusal to treat certain patients is not only rationally defensible but morally justified.

Like most of the Hippocratic treatises, *De Arte* and *Prognostic* cannot be dated with any precision, but there is general agreement, both in antiquity and now,\(^{23}\) that they were each composed some time in the late fifth century BC. By the time Plato wrote his

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\(^{23}\) On the dating of *De Arte*, see Gomperz (1910, 2nd ed.) [xx] with more recent bibliography in Cordes (1994) 101, n. 63. For *Prognostic*, see Alexanderson (1963) [xx].
Laches in the next century, then, the debates about the treatment of incurables must have been well delineated, especially as “Hippocratic medicine”—both as an abstract construct and a practical methodology—became more clearly articulated in contrast to other therapeutic approaches. It is unclear whether Plato himself first made the connection between andreia and medical prognosis, but if he did, it seems to me, he was only expressing ideas already latent within Hippocratic deontological discourse. From the passages we have discussed, it is apparent that, at least in the matter of incurable patients, these physicians felt continually called upon to defend a point of view that clashed with popular conceptions of proper medical conduct, just as in Laches, Plato’s Socrates, in concert with Nicias, is clearly struggling towards a more rarefied conception of andreia than what most people would presumably have endorsed. As such, the debate between those physicians who unreflectively took on all cases regardless of their prospects for recovery, and those who refused incurable patients was fundamentally a debate between two conceptions of heroism, each with its own criteria for andreia. The one we might characterize as the traditional and popular version, which valued daring and endurance regardless of the chances of victory (and sometimes all the more in direct proportion to decreasing odds for survival!). The other examined a given situation in which such qualities as daring and endurance might be called for, assessed the risks, and considered what the benefits of “courageous” action were likely to be. The criterion in these cases was reason and knowledge, rather than reflexive emotion or a penchant for martyrdom, but the result looked quite different from what one commonly considered andreia. Indeed, although it may seem rather alien to us, the Hippocratic insistence on a rational
foundation for their methods must have been a minority view that required its own kind of *andreia* to pursue.
Works Cited

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