I. Introduction: an unfamiliar view of ‘philosophizing’

The Greek mythographer Herodorus of Pontic Heraclea, who flourished in the half-century around 400 BCE, wrote a comprehensive study of the hero Heracles. It was in this book, presumably, that Herodorus made the stunning claim that Heracles—known to us neither for his intellectual reflection nor love of wisdom, but for his patience and toil, his courage and strength, and his adventures both geographic and sexual—“philosophized until death” (φιλοσοφήσας μέχρι θανάτου F 14 Jacoby). His remark thereby provides among the earliest extant instances of “philosophy” cognates outside of Plato, Xenophon, or Isocrates. Paying little attention to this passage, scholars have generally assumed that “philosophy” group words first meant “intellectual cultivation,” “love of wisdom,” “zeal for learning or understanding,” or “propensity to abstraction.” If Heracles exemplifies for Herodorus something besides these, however, then we must reconsider the meaning of “philosophy” in the first generations of its use.

This paper argues that, for Herodorus, “philosophizing” did mean something other than recent scholars have suggested. I come to this conclusion by studying the fragment containing the claim that Heracles “philosophized until death.” This fragment suggests that philosophizing means engaging in rigorous practices of self-discipline that contribute to living, and proceeding into death, excellently. These are the practices most readily linked with Antisthenes’ recommended way of life. Herodorus leaves open whether such self-discipline could depend on those activities we now associate with philosophy—the acquisition of fundamental knowledge, following productive modes of reason, recognizing one’s desire or need for self-improvement—but seems not to treat these auxiliary practices as themselves “philosophizing.”

Thus I argue that Herodorus understood philosophy differently than current scholars think his contemporaries would have understood it. In one respect, this is not surprising. Herodorus’ understanding is not the only one in the century before Aristotle. By the decades around Socrates’ death, we in fact see a plurality of meanings. This is a key datum for making sense of the early career of the “philosophy” cognates. The word’s application seems to have diffused, tracking distinct if overlapping patterns of external behaviors or group membership linked to earlier groups called “philosophers.” This dividing lineage of “philosopher” cognates

---

1 Herodorus’ book on Heracles was at least 17 books long (F3 Jacoby).
2 On what Heracles is most known for, see Höistad 1948, 22-50, Galinsky 1972, 1-107. See in particular Euripides fr. 473 Nauck (= DL 3.63): φαύλον ἄκομψον, τά μέγιστ' ἀγαθών, / πάσαν ἐν ἔργῳ περιτεμνόμενον / σοφίαν, λέσης ἀτριβόνα (“Plain, unaccomplished, staunch to do great deeds, unversed in talk, with all his store of wisdom curtailed to action,” tr. Hicks).
3 Personal noun: φιλοσοφός; verb: φιλοσοφέω; abstract noun: φιλοσοφία.
4 Überweg 1875, 1-2: “striving after intellectual and... scientific culture,” being “educated above the mass of men,” “love of wisdom”; Havelock 1963, 280-8, 306-7: “intellectuals,” concerned for abstraction; Nightingale 1995, 14-15; Frede 2000, 4-8: a philosopher is someone “who, in what he does and how he lives, to an unusual degree is influenced by a concern for wisdom”; Laks 2002, 29: “faire preuve de curiosité intellectuelle” or “cultiver son esprit”; Cooper 2007, 23-24n7, “intellectual and general culture” as well as “someone engaged in logical argument and trusting to reason in pursuit of the truth about how things actually are, while, if that pursuit of the truth requires it, disregarding experience and convention.” LSJ s.v. φιλοσοφέω defines it as loving or pursuing knowledge, or, in the orators, study or contrive; s.v. φιλόσοφος adds “systematic, methodical treatment of a subject”; s.v. φιλόσοφος adds “all men of education and learning” and “one who speculates on truth and reality.”
may have gone back to the Pythagoreans. This means that a study of the meaning of “philosopher” group words cannot depend only on notions derived from putatively etymological explanation (as, e.g., “lover of wisdom”). We find out what a person means by “philosopher” not principally by finding out what he means by “lover” and by “wisdom,” but by finding out the actions and associations that link the present so-called “philosopher” to historically-earlier people also called “philosophers.”

I start the paper by translating the fragment and discussing the parts of the fragment that might be safely attributed to Herodorus. I then review earlier uses of “philosophy” cognates, and in so doing show the weakness of one prominent unifying definition, Andrea Nightingale’s, a weakness in her view even without the Herodorus evidence. The Herodorus evidence puts further pressure on that definition, as we see that by “philosophizing” he means something having to do with extinguishing one’s desire over the long term. This view, I show, withstands the counterclaim that Herodorus treats Heracles as educated, and as therefore “philosophical” in the familiar way. I then turn to Herodorus’ interpretative goals and the possibility that he depends on Antisthenes for his perspective on Heracles. The conclusion reinforces my claim that we must modify the scholarly consensus about the original meanings of “philosophy” cognates.

II. Translation and structure of Herodorus fragment 14

Our text, following Jacoby and most recently edited by Robert Fowler, comes from several digests of chronicles, at least one historically connected to (Pseudo-) John of Antioch. The indexing numbers are my own, to be discussed below.

[1] And Zeus brought about another son, Heracles by name, with Alcmena of Thebes, who was called “three-evening” (τριέσπερον). [2] This Heracles showed how to do the following: to philosophize in the evening places, or, really, the sun-setting [western] ones. [3] Those kin of his who apotheosized him after his end called a celestial star “the {star} clad (ἀστροφόρον)”10 Heracles,” using his name. [4] It they depict wearing not a chiton11 but a lion hide and bearing a club and seizing three apples. [5] These three apples he grabbed, they relate, once he slew the dragon with the club, that is, triumphing over the impoverished and variegated12 calculation of sharp desire through the club of philosophy, having as wrapping a noble mind, like the lion hide. And thus he grabbed the

---

7 See Cipriano 1990, in response to Landfester 1966, on the difficulties in providing etymological accounts of phil-prefixed terms. Obviously there is some etymological story at some early stage, on which see the remark at Kahn 1979, 105.
8 This is approximately the approach of Rossetti 2011, though he focuses on the use the Socratics made of the term “philosopher,” and does not mention the Herodorus evidence.
9 See Fowler 2000, 237-8 for apparatus, following—with changes—Jacoby 31 F 14 for the passage. The sources are Müller’s FHG 4.454 fr. 6.6 (= Suda η 475 s.v. Ἡρακλῆς), from cod. Par. 1630 (= Ecloga Historiarum); Georgius Cedrenus 1.33 Bekker (which starts at “Heracles was the first to make known…”); Anecd. Par. 2.380.22 Cramer (= cod. Par. gr. 854 fol. 236); Constantine Porphyrogenitus ed. Bütter-Wobst, Excerpta de virtutibus et vitis 1 (1906), 164. See Mariev 2008, 1*-26*, on the history of the disputes about John of Antioch’s authorship of the relevant digest-histories.
10 Fowler brackets this term, omitted by Cedrenus; the presence of this term, which some recent scholars judge to be very late, influences the degree to which some feel confident that Herodorus wrote even this.
11 Jacoby does not print ὁ μήθεις ἥσσον; it is possible that Herodorus wrote this or something similar, and later authors filled in ἀστροφόρον.
12 Jacoby prints πολυποίκιλος καὶ πολυτριέσπερος ἀστροφόρον, “much-variegated.”
three apples, which are three virtues: not getting angry, not being avaricious, and not being indulgent. [6a] For, through the club of a steadfast soul and the hide of the boldest sound-minded calculation, he triumphed in the earthly contest of base desire, [6b] philosophizing until death, as wisest Herodorus\textsuperscript{13} wrote down, [7] and who discovers (ιστορεῖ) there to have been seven other Heracleses.\textsuperscript{14}

Both Jacoby and Fowler acknowledge the difficulty in deciding which parts of this fragment either quote, excerpt, or paraphrase Herodorus, and which parts are ancillary.\textsuperscript{15} Deciding whether Herodorus did in fact use at least one “philosophy” cognate here, and which parts of the fragment could provide his own gloss of that word, is, however, essential for this paper. The passage contains, after all, three distinct uses of “philosophy” cognates, and a range of types of context for explaining those uses. Before proceeding further, then, we must decide with what confidence we can attribute parts of this fragment to Herodorus.

Sentence [1] is surely not Herodorus’, for in such a long work about Heracles, Herodorus would have long before described the hero’s origins. Even the mention of Heracles’ nickname “three-evening” seems explained only by the later chronicler’s interest in reminding the reader of Zeus’ three-night dalliance with Alcmene. Still, there is the odd reflection on “evening” in the following sentence, suggesting some unity between the first two sentences.

Sentence [2] says that Heracles is responsible for initiating something called “philosophizing in the evening places.” This might be an old commonplace that lost its currency; the gloss (ἐτοίμως, “that is,” “which is”) of “evening places” with “sun-setting places” (ἐν τοῖς δυστικοῖς) suggests that the chronicler feels the need both to quote and to explain. Perhaps the evening (ἐσπερίως) is the land of the Hesperides. Given that the fragment addresses Heracles’ winning of the apples from the Hesperides, and some aspect of the activity is called “philosophizing,” perhaps an abbreviated and clever name for the ensuing (Herodoran) account is “philosophizing in the evening places.” It is possible that Herodorus summarized his own account as “philosophizing in the evening places,” but it is just as possible that this summary came later. After all, the account must have been famous enough to survive many centuries. All the same, the source of [2] has little relevance to the current project, since it gives almost no content to the meaning of “philosophizing,” saying only that Heracles showed how to do it and that he now provides, somehow, a model for the activity.

Sentence [3] commences this fragment’s rationalizing program. Mythology says that Zeus transformed Heracles, having become divine, into a constellation. Our author attributes the tale of apotheosis to Heracles’ kin, and accounts for the astronomical feature by appeal to the

\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, all versions of this story that attribute the account to someone attribute it to “Herodotus”; Wesseling first determined that they meant Herodorus. This determination seems unavoidable.

\textsuperscript{14} ἐγένετο δὲ Ζεὺς καὶ ἔτερον νιῶν ὀνόματι Ἡσακλῆς μετὰ Ἀλκμήνης τῆς Θηβαίας, ὡς ἐκλήθη τρέσπερος, οὗτος Ἡσακλῆς κατέσειξε τούτων ἤλεγχοιν ἐν τοῖς ἐσπερίωσις μέρεσιν ἤτοι τοῖς δυστικοῖς, τούτου ἀποθεώσαντες οἱ ἐν τῷ γένεσιν αὐτοῦ μετὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ τελευτήν ἐκάλεσαν ἀστέρα οὐράνιον ἐπ᾽ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ (τὸν ἀριστοχίτων) Ἡεκλέα. ὃν γράφουσιν ἀντὶ χίτωνος δοράν λέοντος φοροῦντα καὶ ὀσμάλον φέροντα καὶ τρία μήλα χρατοῦντα. ἀπερ ἀφελεύθαι αὐτὸν ἐμφανίζοντα τὸ ὀσμάλον φοροῦσάν αὐτῷ τὸ δρόσκοντα, τούτοσι νικήμαντα τὸν πονηρὸν καὶ ποικὸν τῆς πυκνῆς ἐπιθυμίας λογισμὸν διὰ τοῦ ὄσμαλον τῆς φιλοσοφίας, ἐξοντα περιβόλαμα γενναίον φοροῦν τῷ δοράν λέοντος καὶ οὕτως ἀφελεύτα τὰ τρία μήλα, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τρεῖς ἀρετὰς· τῷ μὴ ὀργίζοντα, τῷ μὴ φιλαργυρεῖν, τῷ μὴ φιλοδονέν. διὰ γὰρ τοῦ ὀσμάλον τῆς καρδιώρας ψυχῆς καὶ τῆς δοράς τοῦ θρασυτάτου καὶ ὀσφύνος λογισμοῦ ἐνέκυψε τὸν γῆτον τῆς φαύλης ἐπιθυμίας ἁγάνω, φιλοσοφήσας μέχρι ἄναστο, καθὼς Ἡρόδωρος ὁ σοφότατος συνεγράφατο, ὡς καὶ ἄλλως Ἡσακλῆς ἱστορεῖ γεγονήθαι ἔττα.

\textsuperscript{15} Jacoby 1923, Fowler 2013, 328.
fact of naming, not to actual becoming (or some other divine memorialization). This passage suggests that the author does not think that Heracles was actually divine or actually immortal; philosophizing, therefore, need not be vindicated only in a good afterlife. Some readers doubt that Herodorus would have known the word ἀστροχιτῶνα, and so doubt his authorship here. But Cedrenus excludes it from his version, having in its place, in the next line, ἀντὶ χιτῶνος, and the grammar is simpler with its exclusion; this suggests that Herodorus may not have been responsible for its presence in the version of Pseudo-John of Antioch.

Sentence [4] presents the view of Heracles depicted in the constellation to be explained. Hyginus (*De Astronomia* 2.6) records debate throughout the Greek period about the proper identification of the constellation. The author overcomes that debate by positing the relevant picture.

Sentence [5] provides the core of the allegory, introduced by “that is” (τούτεστι). Actually, it is an allegory—the more valuable and less literal meaning—if there is no claim about the truth of either the story or its allegory. It is more properly called a rationalization, however, if some story is replaced by something more likely true, even if the truer rationalization has no more value. Both sentence [3] and [7] provide rationalization; the earlier replacing actual apotheosis with apotheosis asserted by kin, the latter replacing an impossible set of actions attributed to one Heracles with those actions distributed across eight distinct Heraclees. In the present section, it is unclear whether the author offers allegory or rationalization—that is, whether he discards the dragon-slaying story as simply too literal and inadequately meaningful (allegory), or as simply false (rationalization). Whichever it is, I will call this section “the allegory.”

The author simply provides the important parallels between the image and the morally-significant lesson or factually-more-likely event. Given the references to “philosophize” at [2] and [6b], and [6b]’s certain attribution of “philosophize” to Herodorus, it is possible that this sentence provides the substance, even if not the precise language, of Herodorus’ interpretation. Of course, [5] might not be Herodorus’; [6a] seems to provide a new start, one more properly attributable to Herodorus, and the trio of negative virtues in [5] may postdate Herodorus. All the same, the analysis is consistent enough with Herodorus’ account [in 6] as to make their juxtaposition reasonable.

I call sentence [6a] the summary of the allegory. Oddly, the summary is presented as an explanation (γάρ), as though the summary—presumably thanks to “wisest Herodorus”—justifies the longer version. Later we will determine whether the summary successfully summarizes the allegory, given the apparent change in language; I will argue that it does. But the existence of a justifying summary might seem to imply that Herodorus, if he is responsible for [6a], is not responsible for [5]. He might in fact be responsible for neither, but the existence of the summary

---

17 Detienne 1960, 30-32?
18 Fowler 2013, 328 (and 697n4), expresses doubt by observing that the declared apotheosis and star-naming differs from the idea, current during Aristophanes’ life, that souls become stars, and that humans earned posthumous divinity for great deeds is an idea related most to Euhemerus (late 4th-century), though admittedly also by Prodicus and Hecataeus.
19 See discussion in Condos 1997, 115-118.
21 Fowler 2013, 328, offers the idea that if sentence [3] is not from Herodorus, then [5] may not be either; but he does admit that a view like [5] is plausible for a person who wrote fragment 13.
does not warrant positing two authors. After all, Herodorus, as author of a very long book, is very likely to summarize his own remarks. It is possible that, if Herodorus allegorized Heracles in the way fragment 14 presents, his original version of the allegory was much longer, and a chronicler, at some point, condensed it. With such condensation, it may be hard to see then why a summary would be necessary. The summary looks, in fact, to be a direct quotation: it is written with greater verve, color, and efficiency than the relatively longer allegory.

The participial clause [6b] is directly attributed to Herodorus (καθὼς... συνεγράψατο); the fact that “philosophy” cognates were used twice above suggests that the chronicler wanted to gloss, and capture, this arresting and memorable claim about Heracles’ “philosophizing.”

Clause [7] serves, with ὁ σοφώτατος, to give information about Herodorus (ὁς καὶ... ἱστορεῖ): he is the one who not only shocked us with Heracles’ philosophizing, but further rationalized the stories of the hero by dividing them into eight lives. It would have seemed impossible to Herodorus for one Heracles to have undertaken or undergone the labors, journeys, and dalliances attributed to him. Better to accuse earlier propounders of these myths with erroneously conflating diverse stories than to call any particular story into question. Careful analysis both of the tales and of human psychology allows a certain preserving of the appearances, sacrificing only the least essential features. This careful reassessment of evidence and sources was the job of the mythographer. The activity the fragment attributes to Herodorus—ἱστορεῖν—is the term that typically names the activity of the historian, the one who must solicit, collate, sift through, and sometimes pronounce judgments on alternative accounts of history, ethnography, or politics.

Overall, then, we can easily attribute the summary and the participial clause ([6]) to Herodorus, and barring some difficulties to be addressed below, the allegory itself ([4]-[5]) and the introductory bit of rationalization ([3]).

III. Looking to contemporary usage

Despite its being in the aorist, philosophizing (φιλοσοφήσας) is treated here as a continuous activity, one that a person may continue for many years, in Heracles’ case between his eleventh labor and his death. This passage does not state that Heracles’ “philosophizing until death” contributes to his being apotheosized either in word or in deed; all the same, the memorably pithy phrase suggests an activity quite extraordinary and heroic (a parallel being Apol. 28b2-29c10). The association between philosophy and heroism is important; it certainly dignifies the activity, treating it as a life-changing matter. Still, this gives little content to the activity. We ought then to investigate the contemporaneous meaning of “philosophizing.”

Most information about Herodorus’ date comes from contemporaneous and later remarks about his son Bryson. The Platonic Epistle 13 (360c), purporting to be from the 350s, treats Bryson as by then famous enough to have followers. Aristotle critiques Bryson’s famed squaring the circle (APo 75b40, SE 171b16, 172a3) and refutes his claim that putatively vulgar words cannot actually be vulgar (Rhet. 1405b9). In History of Animals 6.5.563a5 [=31T3, 31F22], Aristotle invokes Bryson “the sophist” to identify his father, Herodorus, whose remarks about vultures interest him. That Aristotle mentions Bryson suggests mostly that the son is rather

22 Indeed, the Suda η 475 s.v. Ἡρακλῆς starts by calling Heracles “this philosopher” (Ἡρακλῆς, Ἀλκμήνης υἱός. τοῦτον φιλοσοφήσας ἱστοροῦσι…) and ends with the catchy three-word claim, though using a variant preposition (φιλοσοφήσας ἄχρι θανάτου).


24 Fowler 2013, 328, reads this as instead claiming that Heracles philosophized for his whole life.
familiar to his auditors, or rather more familiar than the historian and mythographer is; it could of course also mean, however, that Herodorus is long gone. Diogenes Laertius (1.16, 6.85, 9.61) records Bryson as a teacher of the Cynic Crates (c.365-c.285) and the skeptic Pyrrho (c.360-c.270; cf. Suda π 3238), and puts him at the end of a chronologically uninformative list of philosophoi who did not write—“Socrates, Stilpo, Phillipus, Menedemus, Pyrrho, Theodorus, Carneades, Bryson.” The Suda (ο 829 s. v. Sokrates) mentions the tradition that Bryson studied with Socrates, but also records a counterview that Bryson studied instead with Euclides (and at π 3238, that he studied with Clinomachus). The Suda claims further that Theodorus studied with Bryson (θ 150). If we accept the claim that Bryson studied with Socrates, then Bryson must have been born by 420 (and thus must have been older than seventy, or dead, during Aristotle’s writing career), and his father must have been born by 450. On this accounting, Herodorus could have written his book before Socrates’ execution. But given the Suda’s uncertainty that Bryson did study with Socrates—an uncertainty amplified by the absence of other evidence for this partnership—we may prefer to ignore it. Our other evidence unanimously suggests that Bryson would have been in his pedagogical maturity by the end of the first half of the fourth century. This puts his birth no later than Aristotle’s, and perhaps more likely by 400.25 This earlier date would put his father’s birth as late as Plato’s, but perhaps more likely in the preceding few decades. On this more likely accounting, Herodorus could have written his book as early as the decade or so before Socrates’ execution, or as late, theoretically, as Aristotle’s History of Animals. I thus take a position between Wipprecht 1902, 38, who suggests a flourishing around 420 BCE, and Döring 2002, s. v. Bryson, who dates Herodorus’ work much later, anytime between 400 and 340.26

Thus Herodorus could easily have written before Plato wrote his dialogues, and certainly at a time before Plato’s usages became dominant. I will call this a pre-Platonic sense of the “philosophy” cognates, though it may not be temporally before, and there may not be any unified “Platonic sense.” Andrea Nightingale gives the standard view of this pre-Platonic sense. She claims that in the fifth century, the verb “certainly did not have a technical sense that indicated a specific group of thinkers practicing a distinct discipline or profession.” It instead “was used to designate ‘intellectual cultivation’ in a broad and unspecified sense.”27 Nightingale makes these remarks to show that the meaning of “philosophy” we know now depends on Plato’s appropriative efforts. “Philosophizing” as a disciplinary-circumscribed activity, self-consciously distinct from sophistry, rhetoric, and history, Nightingale argues, arises only in dialogues like the Republic, in Plato’s contestation with Isocrates.28 Therefore Nightingale does not spend much time on the details of the word’s earliest uses. For example, though she cites the Herodoran evidence in support of her view that “philosophizing” meant intellectual cultivation, she does not show how it supports her view. That problem aside, the view even has difficulties reflecting the evidence to which it does give closer attention.29

Nightingale observes that Thucydides’ recreation of Pericles’ Funeral Oration says that we Athenians “philosophize without weakness” (φιλοσοφούμεν ἄνευ μάλακίας, 2.40.1). This,

25 Fowler 2013, 696, gives without evidence a date for Bryson of “about 400 to 340.”
26 For more on Bryson, see Döring 1972, 158-161
28 For more on this contest, see Wareh 2012, Murphy 2013.
29 Nightingale 1995, 15n3, claims that there is a usage of φιλοσοφός at Critias 88 DK B20 (from the Pirithous), and while it is to be expected that Critias (or Euripides, to whom this fragment has also been attributed) would know the word, here the word there seems obviously to come from Plutarch’s context (in On Friendships 96c).
she says, makes philosophein something “virtually all Athenians were practicing.” But she notes that in an epideixis of Gorgias, the term refers to “those people whom make a practice of verbal disputation… distinguished from both astronomers and rhetoricians” (“On Helen,” 13). She does not address the obvious distinction between the care all citizens might have had for intellectual improvement and the explicit practice of public and stereotyped debate. Thucydides’ usage refers to a necessarily non-expert, presumably non-rigorous commitment to thinking ahead of time, to preparing for all eventualities, either privately (as self-improvement) or publicly (as deliberation). Thucydides pairs it with φιλοσυλλογεῖν, which in the context means building up one’s city, in Pericles’ view, also from concern for the future. This is again something everybody, either severally or jointly, could care about. Gorgias’ usage, by contrast, refers to a tightly-defined practice of stepwise argumentation. It is done before an audience and has wondrous effects on the listeners’ beliefs. It is as specialized as, but distinct from, astronomy and forensic pleading.

As we think about Thucydides’ and Gorgias’ usages, we may find connections between them. But these connections are to be discovered. The term “philosophizing” cannot simply mean “intellectual cultivation.” Either it would be too broad to make sense of Gorgias’ almost technical use of it, or too narrow to incorporate all Athenians even flatteringly into its practice. It would be better to say that by Gorgias’ and Thucydides’ usage—Gorgias could have written his epideixis between 440 and 380; Thucydides may have published in 393 this speech purportedly from 431—it had at least two distinct, at most only vaguely related, meanings.

The misleading vagueness of the “intellectual cultivation” definition becomes clearer when we consider Herodotus’ account of Solon (1.30.11), written by 415. Nightingale treats it as a core instance of “intellectual cultivation,” but the instance requires a closer look. Croesus says that Solon has become well-known for his wisdom and wandering; “philosophizing,” he has traveled much of the world for the sake of theoria (I.30). Because this is Herodotus’ only use of a “philosophy” cognate, we might suspect that this cannot be just any sort of “intellectual cultivation.” Its uniqueness here suggests some some special meaning. Philosophizing may, on the surface, seem to involve traveling for the purpose of informative sight-seeing and getting wisdom, where that wisdom comes either from travel itself or sources that are akin to those sought out in travel. In this respect, philosophizing for Herodotus means touristic or broad-reaching research, a kind of research that, even in this superficial sense, must not be so very common. It is possible, however, that the term has an even narrower and more pointed use. In this passage, Croesus is condescending to Solon, treating him as an impractical, naïve person. Croesus recognizes his own great power, and expects Solon to recognize it as well. Croesus goes on to ask Solon about the happiest man. This is the question one stereotypically asks of a sage, a sophos (or in Herodotus, a sophistēs); and yet Croesus is not actually asking the question of a sage; he thinks he knows the answer already. Croesus is treating Solon as a person merely working toward becoming a sage. It would is plausible, then, that, for Herodotus’ Croesus, philosophizing means appearing to want to become sophos or a sophistēs. Putting these together, we see Herodotean “philosophizing” as traveling and researching and striving to become sophos, a person with excellent knowledge concerning the fundamentals of human life. Solon’s odd behavior, and Croesus’ ulterior motives, suggest that philosophizing is not a commonplace or


31 ἕως ἡλικίας, ἀνά καὶ διά πολλά ἐπιστήμων, καὶ ψυχῆς εἶναι τὴν σωτηρίαν ἐπιστήμην ἐπιστῆμον ἐπελήνυθα.
broadly distributed or named activity. Thus Herodotean philosophizing seems neither what Thucydides’ Pericles defends (since it is not the case that most Athenians travel for this purpose) nor what Gorgias identifies (since his practiced disputants might be unconcerned with research, specutation, and wisdom).

The uses of “philosophizing” by Thucydides, Gorgias, and Herodotus show that a broad definition of “philosophizing” as engaging in intellectual cultivation quite broadly does not suffice. Even if it did, as we will see, it would not easily explain Herodorus’ usage. After all, we have no reason to think that Herodorus allegorized or rationalized Heracles as engaged in Gorgianic disputation, Herodotan journeying and wisdom-accumulation, or Thucydidean civic-intellectual development.

IV. The summary of the allegory

If we are to understand Herodorus’ claim that Heracles “philosophized before death” with any detail beyond the remarks made earlier, we cannot turn to contemporary usage: as we have just seen, it is too inconsistent. A more reliable place to turn is the summary of the allegorical reading in fragment 14, which could very well be Herodorus’. Even were it not from Herodorus, some chronicler presumably sets “philosophizing with death” apposite the correct gloss.

The story we see is that Heracles, wielding a club and protected by a lion hide, killed the dragon Ladon (son of Typhon) and got the three apples (that the dragon guarded for the Hesperides, in the west). After the longer allegorical interpretation, the fragment includes the more compact summary about Heracles’ success:

For, through the club of a steadfast (καρτερικός) soul and the hide of the boldest sound-minded calculation (θρασυτάτου και οὐφρονος λογισμοῦ), he triumphed in the earthly contest of base desire (ἐνίκησε τὸν γῆν τῆς φαύλης ἐπιθυμίας ἀγώνα)…

In this interpretation of the Heraclean myth, the dragon is “base desire,” the wielded club is “a steadfast soul,” the protective hide is “boldest sound-minded calculation,” and the slaying is “triumph in an earthly contest.” We may be tempted to think the club—the business end of the contest, as it were—should be something more active than a “steadfast soul.” The “boldest sound-minded calculation” might seem a more appropriate slaying mace. But this tendency reveals a Gorgianic debt, as though Herodorus is speaking about public verbal contests. It is unnecessary to think this way; to assume Herodorus speaks in terms of debate risks begging the question against the person trying to define “philosophy” here. If the dragon stands in for a violent force—Heracles’ base desire—it may depend mainly on a steadfast, unmoved, self-supporting soul. That soul does not particularly protect anything; it is better seen as eliminating or quenching those desires. What we might have thought to be more active, “boldest sound-minded calculation,” would serve instead, like the lion hide, as defensive protection. Should Heracles’ steadfast soul fail to lay desire low, such that the desire starts to convince him to act in some vulgar way, he could deploy his reason to hold the desire at bay. I speculate that

32 This argument is contra Chroust 1947, 22; Morrison 1958, 208; Hadot 2004, 16; Frede 2004, 23.
33 The other usages of “philosophy” cognates in the period of these three examples would amplify my thesis but their assessment is not needed here.
34 This summary seems to distinguish “desire” from “soul.” Both psychic elements, in the course of the fragment, are said to have logismos, calculation. The Suda η 454 s.v. Heracles’ Statue, which calls Heracles the “best philosopher” (φιλόσοφος ἠμιστος), and replicates approximately sentences [4]-[5] (but nothing from [1]-[3] or [6]-[8], the
calculation would show that the payoff of any vulgar desire-satisfaction would be too low to justify succumbing to it; sound-mindedness would bind his goals together; and boldness would allow Heracles to trump the expectation that he would give in to his desire. This is indeed as we would expect from the successful person, the master of himself: ratiocination about one’s impulses is the backup plan; his everyday strength comes without effort.\textsuperscript{35} This is a view familiar from Herodorus’ contemporary Antisthenes, as we will see below.

The summary of the allegory has one frustrating aspect: while it relates many psychic elements to mythic elements, it does not relate “philosophizing until death” to any particular element of the myth. The phrase’s circumstantial position makes it free-floating. Given the structure of the summary, it must refer to something, however, and indeed there are three possibilities.

1. The first formulation of the allegorical interpretation said that the club is philosophy; in the summary, the club means having a steadfast soul; philosophizing is having a steadfast soul.
2. The summary has not mentioned getting the three apples; perhaps philosophizing is getting the three apples; and since in the first formulation the three apples were the virtues of avoiding anger, avarice, and indulgence, philosophizing is avoiding anger, avarice, and indulgence.
3. The circumstantial clause could be the background for or meta-summary of the triumph; in this case, philosophizing would be triumphing in the earthly contest through a steadfast soul and boldest sound-minded calculation.

As I mentioned above, I believe that the allegorical interpretation (sentence [5]) and its summary (sentence [6a]) match well.\textsuperscript{36} In the first, the dragon is the “impoverished and variegated calculation of sharp desire”; in the second, the dragon is, more simply, “base desire.” The summary’s φαύλης (“base”) simplifies the ideas that the “dragon” desire is intrusive (“sharp”), clever (“calculating”), polymorphic (“variegated”), and undignified (“impoverished”). Again, in the allegory, the hide is “noble mind” (γενναίου φρόνημα), and in the summary, “the boldest sound-minded calculation.” Both φρόνημα and σώφρονος share the root φρήν, and self-assurance is signified by both “noble” and “boldest.” These successful parallels justify taking the other elements as parallels. This would tell in favor of either possibility 1. or 2. above. In possibility 1, philosophizing as a steadfast soul amounts not just to defending oneself against rude desire—this defensive role is played by “mind”—but actively quashing it; the steadfast soul is the soul that has abolished such risks. In possibility 2, philosophizing as the avoidance of anger, avarice (φιλαργυρεῖν), and indulgence (φιληδονεῖν) is the result of having extinguished such desire. This is akin to possibility 1, but differs in treating philosophizing as a result of the extinction of desire, not simply a means to it. It also specifies the three desires that are bad for Heracles: being indignant at others, wanting more money, and seeking after pleasures. There is

---

\textsuperscript{35} Kosman 1983.

\textsuperscript{36} This is in contrast with Ogden 2013a, I.vi.33, who thinks the “summary of Herodorus’ allegory is somewhat inconsistent,” and Detienne 1960, 30-32.
some authorial cleverness in the thought that φιλοσοφήσας, a phil- prefixed term, would replace two other phil- prefixed terms, φιλαργυρεῖν and φιληδονεῖν; such playful attention to phil-prefixed terms characterized the intellectual movements of the decades around Socrates’ death. Possibility 3, by contrast with possibilities 1 and 2, does not rely on the longer allegorical interpretation for making sense of “philosophizing.” It treats philosophizing as a continuous activity that involves triumphing over desire with the steadfast soul and the boldest sound-minded calculation. In this case, philosophizing involves both offense and defense with respect to desires, whatever that might mean.

I do not see how we might decide between these three possibilities. The least precise and textually conservative possibility is the third, which implies that philosophizing applies generally to the triumph with a steadfast soul and boldest sound-minded calculation over base desire. This third possibility is also consistent with the other two, since we might imagine that for Heracles, a steadfast soul—the leading element of philosophizing—is characterized or epitomized by peacefulness and patience, indifference to the accumulation of money, and abstention from sex. From this perspective, Herodorus presents a picture of philosophy concerned principally with self-discipline, where active thinking plays at most an incidental, accidental, or derivative role. If this is so, the picture differs from the pictures appealed to in Herodotus (philosophy as traveling, probably for the sake of aspiring to sagacity) and Gorgias (philosophy as quick-witted dialectical exchange). If Heraclean philosophizing has a heroic, even apotheotic aspect, it differs from Thucydides’ (philosophy as preparation for mundane eventualities) as well. It seems even to contrast with Nightingale’s unified account (philosophizing as “intellectual cultivation”). After all, this fragment mentions neither knowledge nor truth, learning nor wisdom, debating nor studying.

Of course, because Nightingale and other scholars do not really define “intellectual cultivation,” I may have misunderstood her, and their, point. I can think of one way to understand Nightingale’s position that may make another Herodoran conducive her view.

V. Heracles as physicist

In fragment 13, Clement records that Herodorus set out (ἰστορεῖ) the following:

Heracles became a prophet (μάντιν) and physicist (φυσικόν), having had passed down (διαδέχεσθαι) to him from the barbarian Atlas from Phrygia the pillars of the cosmos, this story meaning (αἰνιττομένου τοῦ μύθου) having had passed down, by instruction (μαθήσει), knowledge of the celestial things.

Heracles is thereby said to know astronomy and perhaps astrology; he has the ability to understand the stars and to predict events on their basis. (It is possible Herodorus really used the word φυσικόν; the word is attested in Xenophon’s Memorabilia 3.9.1, and the meaning is attested throughout Aristotle, as, e.g., at PA 640a2.) The question for us is whether this astronomical knowledge has anything to do with Heracles’ philosophizing. Servius, at a very late date, claims that astronomy allowed Heracles—who he also calls “philosophical”—to defeat his monsters (ad Aeneidem 1.741). Even were Servius’ remark to have any evidentiary or

37 Cipriano 1990.
38 nec enim istum docere potuit, qui Didonis erat temporibus, sed docuit Herculem: unde et dicitur ab Atlante caelum sustinuisse susceptum propter caeli scientiam traditam. constat enim Herculem fuisse philosophum, et haec est ratio, cur illa omnia monstra uidicit Nilum Melonem vocari, Atlantem vero Telamonem.
explanatory value, it would still not determine whether astronomy helped Heracles defeat his “allegorical” dragon—i.e., his desires—and thereby whether it contributed to his philosophizing.

All we can say is that Herodorus treated at least one of his Heracleses as a learned person. Besides knowing astronomy, he may have discovered of alimos, the appetite-suppressing drug favored by philosophers (fragment 1). He got an education from Amphitrion’s cowherds (fragment 17), though Herodorus would also have known about his education from the centaur Cheiron and the musician Linos (whom Heracles killed for insulting his slow learning). Thus it is possible that one of these Heracleses practiced intellectual cultivation. Yet despite some readers’ attempts to associate being a prophet and physicist with being a philosopher, there is no evidence that Herodorus himself made that connection. Fragments 13 and 14 are making rather different points (and could even refer to distinct Heracleses). Fragment 13 refers to learning celestial things. Fragment 14 refers to mastering inner dragons. There is no certain reason to believe that “philosophizing” refers to both activities, or that it refers to the connection between the two. It is of course not implausible that Heracles’ cosmological, botanical, or educational knowledge contributed to his capacity for self-discipline. But the intellectual cultivation that the discovery of such knowledge might denote does not mean that for Herodorus, philosophizing involves such cultivation. For Herodorus, philosophizing seems to mean only being courageous and strong within oneself.

VI. Antisthenes and Herodorus

Herodorus’ account of Heracles comes in the midst of Greek intellectual reflection on Heracles. The best-preserved prose account is Prodicus’ speech on the cross-roads of virtue, recited by Socrates in Xenophon’s Memorabilia (2.1.21-34) and presumably written before Socrates’ death. In that speech, young Heracles sits wondering about the life to adopt, when two women present to himself his real choice, between a pleasure-lined life of ease, and a toilsome, rigorous life of virtue. This life of virtue is not one of intellectual reflection or dialectical exchange, but of pain and effort (πόνου καὶ ἐπιμελείας), care and benefaction (θεραπευτέον... εὐεργετήσθαι), and helpfulness and good deeds (ὠφελήσθαι... πιστεύειν). If Heracles wishes to perform well in war, he must learn martial skill from teachers, and practice it in the field (28). In general, if he would live well, he must give up the desire for instant gratification, for money with which to satisfy every whim, and for whatever frustration he might feel toward friends. How he is to adopt this life, Prodicus’ tale does not say; perhaps the implication is that the good life demands a conscious choice, a commitment to challenging activity, and a belief that such activity will redeem itself.

Prodicus’ account of Heracles presages, or parallels, that of Antisthenes (c. 445-365), who wrote at least one work on Heracles (DL 6.16, 18). Antisthenes, a student of Socrates’, was likely a near-contemporary of Herodorus’. Our best information about Antisthenes comes from Diogenes Laertius. Diogenes sums up Antisthenes’ conception of the good life by observing that happiness requires virtue alone with Socratic strength (Σωκρατικῆς ἰσχύος), and manifests itself in deeds, needing neither much talk nor learning (μήτε λόγων πλείστων δεομένην μήτε μαθημάτων, 6.11). Antisthenes used martial language in his theorizing. He called virtue “an irremovable armor” (ἀναφαίρετον ὑπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς), reasoning “a strongest wall” (τεῖχος

39 Antisthenes, and his later commentators, did seem intrigued by the relationship between Heracles’ possession or ignorance of cosmological and human types of knowledge; see Luz 1994 and Luz 1996.

40 Sansone 2004 argues that Xenophon quotes Prodicus directly; Gray 2006 denies it. Most scholars agree that Prodicus died by 395.
ἀσφαλέστατον φρόνησιν), and calculation “an indissoluble wall we must prepare” (τείχη κατασκευαστέον ἐν τοῖς αὐτῶν ἀναλώτοις λογισμοῖς, 6.12-13). Antisthenes used the example of Heracles to prove that hardship (πόνος) is a good thing (6.2), and took a strong anti-hedonist line (6.3). From his experience hiking many miles daily to visit Socrates, he learned to be steadfast and unmoved (τὸ γαρτερικὸν… καὶ τὸ ἀπαθές, 6.2). He thought that virtue could be acquired (6.10). Some information about Antisthenes comes also from Xenophon’s Symposium. The character Antisthenes argues against the desire for money, about self-reliance for pleasure, and the benefit in being generous and congenial to others (4.33-44).

As should be clear, Herodorus’ fragment 14 shares much with the theses attributed to Antisthenes. The siege language is the most remarkable similarity. In both authors, thinking and mind is defensive, a “hide” or a “wall.” In both, Heracles stands for effort in opposition to desire-satisfaction. And in both, the key to the good life is giving only due consideration to pleasures, wealth, and irascibility. Besides these strong parallels between fragment 14 and the testimony about Antisthenes, we have no evidence for influence, either direct or indirect. But Antisthenes’ fame and vast publication (DL 6.18) makes it entirely possible that Herodorus would have read or heard about his work. Herodorus certainly read extremely broadly, to fill out at least seventeen books on Heracles, and to satisfy his interest in allegory and rationalization. It might even seem plausible that Antisthenes’ work—or work in close parallel to Antisthenes’—influenced Herodorus’.

One especially interesting possibility arises from this possible trace of Antisthenic influence in Herodorus’ fragments. None of Antisthenes’ extremely fragmentary extant work includes a philosophy-cognate word. Might Herodorus follow Antisthenes’ usage? We might suspect that the Socratics were early adopters of philosophy-group words, and so we might suspect that Antisthenes would have used the word. It seems plausible he would have used it in the way Herodorus does.

VII. Why does Herodorus use the word “philosophizing”?

In none of the earliest authors who used “philosophy” group words do we retain more than a single use. (Dissoi Logoi is an exception, with two; but we cannot even be sure it is from 400 BC, as it is usually assumed.) The paucity of its use may come simply from our loss of literature. But other words have not suffered such losses. Nor can we say that people were simply unfamiliar with the term; at least for those using it once, this argument does not hold. The evidence suggests instead that “philosophy” group words had some funny resonance that prevented its being used commonly. (Since “intellectual cultivation” is a common idea, if the word simply meant that, one might expect its broader use.) Each author uses the term, once, with some sort of displacement of seriousness. Heraclitus uses it once in his remaining fragments (fr. 35 DK), and there he seems to be making a reference to Pythagoreans, or at least to those others he has called ὶπτωκες or polymaths. Herodotus, as we have seen, uses it once, in Croesus’ remarks to Solon. Thucydides uses it once, in a jingly and defensive remark by Pericles. Gorgias uses it once, in parallel to attorneys and astronomers, to denote a tricky kind of speaker. Aristophanes has it once (in his extant plays), in the chorus’ hope for a totally novel idea.

41 For bibliography on skepticism about what we can learn from this connection, see Decleva Caizza 1966, 95.
42 At 6.6, DL states that when Antisthenes was asked what he gained from philosophy, he said that it was the ability to converse with himself (ἐρωτηθεὶς τί αὐτῷ περεγέγονεν ἐν φιλοσοφία, ἔφη, τὸ δύνασθαι ἑαυτῷ ὁμιλεῖν); but this anecdote sounds Socratic, even Theaetetan, and reconstructive.
The word, it seems, points to more than any practice itself; it would seem to capture, as well, some history of its use to which authors might be hesitant to assimilate themselves.

I think that the term became used around the time of Pythagoras. How it did so is a matter of some uncertainty. But let us assume it came to be directed toward, and assimilated by, the Pythagoreans. Heraclitus and Zeno (Suda s.v. Zenon) may provide contemporary evidence for this; Plato’s assimilation of Evenus to Pythagorean philosophy is somewhat later evidence; Heraclides’ recounting, both in his own voice and in Aristotle’s *Protreptikos*, provide even more, if decades later, evidence. The name would pertain to the activities of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans. These activities might have comprised worldly travel, accumulation of wisdom literature from diverse sources, studious reading, memorizing, and discussing or defending those writings or the master’s reports, and belief in immortality and in aspirations to it. In the earliest uses of the word *philosophos*, then, the name would refer to those acting in characteristically Pythagorean ways. In time, however, as the term and attitudes about Pythagoreans diffused and developed, the name could have acquired circumscribed denotations. For Ionians like Herodotus, the travel and accumulation of knowledge might have been central. For those in Gorgias’ midst, the discipleship, especially as argument and analysis go, could be key. By the mid-390s, when we see Thucydides and Aristophanes use the term—both apparently in response to ironic or bemused usage—the term seems to mean “overthinking” or “coming up with original, even radical or absurd, ideas.” We do not need to see an essential semantic commonality between these usages, or a technicalizing evolution, from broad-to-narrow connotation. We may see instead an origin in an external description of a specific group, and contingent development as the term spread.

I have suggested that Herodorus may have been influenced by Antisthenes. But he may also have been influenced by the Pythagoreans. This does not mean that he is himself Pythagorean. But it suggests that his use of “philosophizing” could, potentially, follow the Pythagorean use (once, that is, they assimilated the word to themselves). The Pythagoreans themselves seemed not to use the term to highlight rational argument or dialectical skill, or even the self-enlightening that Thucydides says is Athens’ special way. They seemed instead to see themselves as concerned to live with great self-discipline and exactitude, affected not by whim or taste but by rule alone. Such a life would allow one’s immortal soul to transfer to a new body successfully. From this perspective, “philosophizing” is living with enough self-discipline as to become, in effect, immortal. There may be some way in which it is fair to call this “intellectual cultivation,” but if so, then this kind of “intellectual cultivation” seems simply much too broad to merit, or occasion, its own frisson-filled word, “philosophizing.”

VIII. Conclusion

Once else in classical literature is Heracles explicitly connected to philosophy. In Alexis’ comic play *Linos*, Linos shows Heracles his extensive library of excellent literature, and says that the book he picks will reveal his nature. Heracles picks a cookbook. “You’re some philosopher,”

---

44 See Riedweg 2004.
45 Borin 1995, Detienne 1960. The term ἱστορεῖν refers not only to the historian’s practice. It also named Pythagoras’ practice. Aristotle recorded that Pythagoras’ broadly-scoped “geometry” was called ἱστορία (Iamblichus, *DCM* 78.5). Heraclitus explicitly linked Pythagoras to ἱστορία, probably implying that others by then did too (129 DK). Heraclitus also links the practice of the ἱστωρ with the practice of the φιλόσοφος (35 DK), and it is probable that the Pythagoreans were called, and by then called themselves, φιλόσοφοι.
Linos responds, “it’s clear, who having passed over so many books, grab the Art of Simus” (fr. 140K-A, 10-12). The joke implies that philosophers have wide interests in literature but generally reject the indulgence of gluttony. It also implies that Heracles is among the least appropriately categorized as a learned, reflective philosopher. This suggests that Herodorus’ equation of Heracles with philosophy would be memorably counterintuitive, or paradoxical. But it does not mean that it is impossible, or a joke. It means that on a good understanding of philosophy—as the way of life concerned with virtue, self-control, and the proper estimation of values—Heracles is as model a life as any.

Bibliography


