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Hippocrates in Quotes

So far in this book we have seen that there are common views of what Hippocrates is supposed to be about which form part of many people's tacit knowledge. Some have links to the traditional stories told about his character or to specific texts of the Corpus: others, not. In the previous chapter, we saw how writers of news stories still think it is worth invoking his name and tapping into this knowledge, and how such stories move between praising Hippocrates as one of us and distancing us from the weirdnesses of the ancient world, while suggesting 'science' can solve all history's 'mysteries'. In this chapter, I shall start to investigate a range of claims for Hippocrates as an authority, and for the Hippocratic lifestyle and its virtues, through the medium of some of the many 'quotes' going under the name of the Father of Medicine, shared through websites and social media, often independent of what is happening in the news. The next chapter will focus on the food-related quotes which currently dominate online references to Hippocrates.

Sharing such quotes is often the main way in which people become aware of 'Hippocrates' today. They may simply tweet or post on Instagram the alleged words of Hippocrates, complete with his name; their followers, and their own followers, will then retweet the words, perhaps interpreting them very differently from the original tweeter. They may attach to their message an image which moves the meaning of the words in another direction; for example, if someone tweets 'Let food be thy medicine. Hippocrates' and attaches a picture of raw foods, this will have a different meaning from the same tweet accompanied by a picture of one specific food. Throughout, the theme of 'Hippocrates was right' pervades discussions of the Hippocratic lifestyle; the thing about Hippocrates is almost inevitably that 'He knew his stuff'.¹ Words attributed to the historical Hippocrates . . . are intended to carry greater weight precisely because of that association.²

First, an example. ‘ChefMD’ Dr John La Puma promotes ‘healthy eating’ as ‘Both a board-certified practicing internist and professionally trained chef’. Typically pictured at food markets in a white coat with a stethoscope round his neck, La Puma teaches ‘culinary medicine’ to medical students, presents on PBS and Lifetime TV, blogs, writes for several newspapers and is a YouTube influencer.³ A striking image combines his logo with three pictures. In one, food is contained in a medical capsule; in the others, raw foods are shaped to resemble the brain and the heart. The use of the multi-coloured capsule reminds me of a point made by medical anthropologists about the symbolic value of capsules over pills within Western biomedicine; patient perception is that ‘Capsules are more powerful than tablets, and multicolored capsules are more powerful than single colored ones.’⁴ On a ‘functional medicine’ site, and in other locations online, the power of these images is increased by the addition of a set of four ‘quotes’ to the right of the image.⁵

These ‘quotes’ include Thomas Edison, ‘The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest her or his patients in the care of the human frame, in a proper diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease.’ Is this authentic? Snopes.com found that – other than the ‘her or his’, and the insertion of ‘a proper’ – this was indeed something he said in 1902; the context is important, however, as ‘He was speaking at a time when very little effective “medicine” existed.’⁶ Another quote is from Mark Hyman, a medical doctor, founder of The UltraWellness Center, and best-selling author of the *Eat Fat, Get Thin Cookbook*: ‘The fork is your most powerful tool to change your health and the planet; food is the most powerful medicine to heal chronic illness.’ Hyman uses a variant of this statement as his banner online, where it is followed by an endorsement from Bill Clinton for one of his books.⁷ *Whole Living* magazine is the source of another quote: ‘While you can’t shut out illness entirely, you CAN make your body a place where health thrives.’⁸ Finally, there are two Hippocrates quotes, presented as two sections of the same unnamed text. One, ‘Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food’ – or, to give it that patina of antiquity, ‘Let food be thy medicine’ – is probably the most commonly-repeated Hippocrates ‘quote’ today.⁹ The other is ‘Leave your drugs in the chemist’s pot if you can cure the patient with food.’ Neither is authentic. Before examining these and other such quotes, I first want to consider how the culture of quotes works online.

Flitting like a bee: Becoming a quote

What does it mean for Hippocrates to have ‘become a quote’? Ann Blair drew attention to Descartes’ view that reference books should only be used to refresh one’s memory, rather than in isolation from their original sources.¹⁰ Yet books of quotations have always existed. Their roots lie in the early modern commonplace book, in which people copied down anything that took their fancy, arranging the phrases and passages under headings.¹¹ This way of interacting with what one read was originally personal: Erasmus emphasized that the user should ‘draw up a list of virtues and vices to suit himself’ and when the headings had been fixed should ‘arrange them as you please.’¹² Erasmus commented, on the subject of the reading habits of the daughters of his friend Thomas More,

As they flit like so many little bees between Greek and Latin authors of every species, here noting down something to imitate, here culling some notable saying to put into practice in their behaviour, there getting by heart some witty anecdote to relate among their friends, you would swear you were watching the Muses at graceful play in the lovely pastures of Mount Helicon, gathering flowers and marjoram to make well-woven garlands.¹³

The imagery of the garland recalls the ancient origins of this way of reading: the ‘*florilegium*’. The text could be presented ‘as a garden whose elements could be collected, displayed and used’.¹⁴ While its origins were personal, the commonplace book could also enter print, where it told the reader how to think by ‘extracting wisdom from classical texts’; the text became a source of such wisdom rather than the reader focusing on the context in which the author had used the extracted phrase, and the phrases then became cultural capital.¹⁵ Collections of *sententiae*, wise sayings of figures of authority, also existed from an early date.

Quotations give the impression of knowledge without the hard work of reading the rest of the text from which they are taken. Early printed books of quotations do not necessarily include anything attributed to Hippocrates; medical texts were far less likely than works of literature to be sampled and shared in this way. John Bartlett’s *A Collection of Familiar Quotations* (revised edition, 1856) included just one (abbreviated) Hippocratic quotation, ‘Life is

short, and the art long,' and that only as a footnote to Longfellow's 'Art is long, and Time is fleeting.'¹⁶ As Ann Blair has observed, in its Senecan version of *ars longa, vita brevis*, this has 'proved an especially versatile tag, invoked by both optimists and pessimists about the accumulation of knowledge'.¹⁷

Quotes can also act simply as decoration. They may be intended to be 'inspirational', as in the title of M. Prefontaine's *The Big Book of Quotes: Funny, inspirational and motivational quotes on life, love and much else*, a book arranged by categories under the subsections of power, relationships, spiritual, fact and fiction, intelligence, the arts, sport, pets, countries, occupations – including 'doctors and medicine' – and the human condition.¹⁸ This extensive collection is described in its marketing material as 'Ideal for peppering up speeches, letters or just for empowering you to live life'.¹⁹ The section on 'Doctors and medicine' includes such gems as 'Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died', attributed to Erma Bombeck (1927–96). Some books of quotes are aimed at an even narrower clientele; there are books for writers, lawyers, and veterinary caregivers, and those aimed at people preparing a speech.²⁰ This process of using and perhaps transforming the words of others is part of the creation of a sense of self, but also of making a book of 'identity-soothing words' for a particular community.²¹

How has the internet changed the culture of quotation? It is perhaps significant that recent scholarly interest in commonplace books, as a way of organizing and then interacting with knowledge, grew at the same time as the internet became the main source for modern knowledge. Kate Eichhorn linked the commonplace book and the blog as what she called 'archival genres'.²² Concerns about the difficulty not only of accessing but also remembering all the information available are not new; as discussed by Ann Blair, certainly since the Renaissance there has been too much knowledge for any one person to manage.²³ However, the internet provides the illusion of access to all this knowledge through search engines. What is different is not only that, as we saw in Chapter 3, 'Like a verbal virus, any error committed on one website is quickly replicated on hundreds',²⁴ but also that information exists in a state of continual flux, enabled by its interactive nature. As David Crystal has argued, 'People have more power to influence the language of the Web than in any other medium, because they operate on both sides of the communication divide, reception and production. They not only read a text, they can add to it. The

distinction between creator and receiver thus becomes blurred.²⁵ This clearly has important ramifications for the reception of Hippocrates, as quotes are taken out of context, altered or even created by their receivers.

The difference between a quote and a quotation is no longer the dictionary one in which the first is a verb and the second a noun. An internet quote has various features, some of which are more or less specific to the electronic medium; the quote is usually presented as something someone 'said' rather than 'wrote', it is noteworthy and repeatable, and it has an implicit meaning that is largely taken for granted, so it needs no explanation or commentary. Rather than being the product of a deliberate 'contextomy', in which the snippet is severed from its original text in order to alter its meaning,²⁶ it requires no context, as the very concept of there being a greater text is absent; Hippocrates quotes commonly give no date and no title of the text from which they are supposed to originate. As an example of how quotes lose context, Garber cites Shakespeare's Polonius saying 'to thine own self be true': a book of quotations would give you this adage, but would lose entirely the significance of the contextual point that it was 'the least self-aware of men' who was originally presented as saying it.²⁷ Some sites make more effort than others to trace the name of the Hippocratic text from which their Hippocratic quotes originate.²⁸ The Wikiquote site gives a range of quotes from him, organized by their claimed text of origin, but these are sometimes listed 'as quoted in' another text rather than giving the name or edition of an actual Hippocratic text.²⁹

Quotes are repeated and traded between bloggers, tweeters, and participants in chat rooms, used to advertise businesses, and are collected on sites created solely for the purpose of supplying choice phrases, an extension of the tradition of printed collections of sayings.³⁰ Often, words are left out to make a quote pithier, a process known as 'bumper-stickering'.³¹ Quotes hover in cyberspace, offering wisdom in a form that takes only seconds to read, understand, and repeat, and in the case of those I am exploring here often come with a backdrop of an image of Hippocrates or of an inspiring landscape. They can be used in a ritualized fashion to create and maintain relations between social and political groups, to express common interests, enthusiasms, heartbreaks or annoyances.³² As Clark and Gerrig noted of quotations generally, an online adage can be seen as 'a demonstration of what a person did in saying something,' and the act of

quotation paradoxically both separates the quoter from the sentiment and connects them to it.³³

Ascribing the quote to a historical figure is both a measure of its reliability, and a demonstration of that figure's importance, wisdom and relevance. In a Hippocrates quote, his name as alleged creator becomes part of the quote, while users of the quote somehow incorporate into themselves his authority: Marjorie Garber, who used the term 'cultural ventriloquism' here, noted that the quote 'imparts that authority, temporarily, to the speaker or the writer.' This, she pointed out, contrasts with the use of 'quote-unquote' around words from we wish to distance ourselves or which we want to challenge.³⁴ Ruth Finnegan quoted David Comins' comment, 'People will accept your ideas much more readily if you tell them Benjamin Franklin said it first.'³⁵

It is well-established that many of the most famous quotes are not accurate. In Prefontaine's *The Big Book of Quotes*, Hippocrates (his dates given as '460–370 BC') features with just one quote, the same one as in Bartlett's *A Collection of Familiar Quotations*: 'The life so short, the craft so long to learn.'³⁶ That is a truncated version of the original, 'Life is short, the art long, the moment fleeting', and Prefontaine's version is correctly identified on Wikiquote not specifically as Hippocratic but as the first line of Chaucer's *The Assembly of Fowles*.³⁷ Examples of quotes which are not just inaccurate, but imaginary, include Edmund Burke, 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.'³⁸ Another example would be "'The more I study science the more I believe in God," Albert Einstein once remarked.'³⁹ Only he didn't. In 2012, Quentin Schultze and Randall Bytwerk demonstrated that a quote attributed to Joseph Goebbels, beginning 'If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it', then found on over half a million pages of the internet, was never said by him. They used the term 'referential credibility' for when a quotation is believed by the community using it to have been correctly attributed to a person important to that community.⁴⁰

Gary Saul Morson has analysed the movement 'from quotations to culture'. He describes the process by which words become a quote by using the example of Isaac Newton's 'If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.' While he was not the first to say something very much like this and, at the time of writing, even Wikipedia is now very clear indeed that

the wording existed before his time, on quotes sites the quote is attributed solely to him.⁴¹ Morson writes, ‘the quotation is now Newton’s because the fact that the words are his has long been part of their meaning. The same words said by anyone but Newton, regarded for centuries as the greatest scientist who ever lived, would not be the same.’⁴² Morson compares quotation to the use of found art, in which the object is not made by the artist, but the artist presents it in a different form.⁴³

What happens when ‘Hippocrates’ is quoted online is a more extreme version of what happens when he is quoted in printed sources. A quotation may be an attempt to show that one has mastered the text from which it is taken, in ‘a process thought to resemble separating wheat from chaff or selecting gems from stones.’⁴⁴ In addition to possible bumper-stickering, the quotation does not have to reproduce the original precisely; quotations, like oral poetry, ‘pass from mouth to mouth as well as from text to text. They are frequently spoken, altered, written, and quoted aloud again. Cherished as texts, they also live in their oral use.’⁴⁵ The phenomenon of the ‘Hippocrates quote’ differs from citing proverbs, in which anonymity as well as the absence of a firm date contribute to the sense of ‘great age’ and to the impression of ‘timeless essence and wisdom.’⁴⁶ To me, Hippocrates quotes seem to rest somewhere between the quotation and the proverb; what is stated both gains authority from its connection to Hippocrates and presents something which is supposed to be true for all time. I shall now examine some of the most popular Hippocrates quotes today.

First do no harm

In Chapter 4, I explored how, as well as being used by the public as an ideal of how doctors should behave, the *Oath* has been used to create a sense of continuity and an identity for those practising medicine, and I stressed that this is an emotional process as well as a historical one. In the USA, ObamaCare led to a new range of claims for the content and meaning of the *Oath*; for example, from the *Washington Times*, ‘When I became a doctor almost 40 years ago, I swore to uphold the Hippocratic Oath — “do no harm.” Never has this solemn promise been more difficult to keep.’⁴⁷

This is one of many examples in which one of the most-repeated Hippocrates quotes, ‘First, do no harm’, is wrongly attributed to the *Oath*, or even regarded as a summary of it: ‘The Oath is commonly cited in brief as “first do no harm”, but it is actually more involved than that.’⁴⁸ Answers.com asks ‘What did the Hippocrates [sic] do?’ The first answer is ‘Nothing!’ and the second, ‘Rather than nothing, he did say “first do no harm” (primum non nocere, in Latin). This enabled physicians to observe conditions first, rather than prescribe potions, which could be potentially toxic, and even life-threatening.’⁴⁹ Once more, the focus is on ‘saying’ rather than ‘writing’. ‘Potions’, with its hints of magic and poison, is a significant choice of word here, and again the theme is that treatment carries risk.

While the original Hippocratic *Oath* includes ‘I will use those dietary regimens which will benefit my patients according to my greatest ability and judgement, and I will do no harm or injustice to them,’ this is not quite ‘First do no harm.’⁵⁰ The nearest wording in the Corpus comes not from the *Oath* but from *Epidemics* 1.11, which includes the injunction ‘As to diseases, make a habit of two things – to help, or at least to do no harm.’⁵¹ Like answers.com, many websites telling you that Hippocrates wrote ‘First, do no harm’ will elaborate that ‘originally’ this was *primum non nocere*, without necessarily noticing that this is Latin while Hippocrates was a Greek. In Kelly Parsons’ thriller *Doing Harm*, the central character Steven first hears this in his first year of medical school from ‘one of my older professors who had a proclivity for bowties and Grecian Formula.’⁵² Steven ‘wondered if Latin really would have been [Hippocrates’] idiom of choice for solemn ethical declarations’ but concluded that ‘Doctors like to say stuff in Latin because it makes us sound smart.’⁵³ Elizabeth Vandiver has argued that the classics can lend gravity even to banal sentiments; translated into Latin tags, everyday sentiments about valour and patriotism in the Great War could attain a grandeur they otherwise lacked amongst both those who could read Latin and those who could not.⁵⁴ In terms of the familiarity of this phrase to a wider public, a two-part episode of the UK hospital drama *Holby City* broadcast in June 2018 used the Latin as its title and, as I have already mentioned, a few months later the *Assassin’s Creed* game section set in ancient Greece included a quest called ‘First do no harm’, featuring Hippocrates.⁵⁵

Within the medical profession, and for a wider audience, there is now far more awareness that this phrase does not feature in its supposed source, the

Oath, ‘just as nobody says “Play it again, Sam” in “Casablanca”’.⁵⁶ In 2005, the *Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* published a piece in which Cedric Smith tried to trace the origins of the Latin version.⁵⁷ As a pharmacologist, Smith was keen to consider the phrase in terms of its relevance to potential adverse drug interactions. One of his key findings was ‘Who was the author? Not Hippocrates.’⁵⁸ He surveyed earlier literature, trying to pin the phrase on Galen, Ambroise Paré, Thomas Sydenham, Oliver Wendell Holmes or William Osler, but was unable to locate it in any of their writings; the earliest date he found it in use was 1860. He noted that ‘like a proverb . . . it is a crystallized bit of wisdom . . . this maxim has several levels of meaning and can be applied to a wide range of situations.’⁵⁹ Importantly, ‘It also *sounds* true, especially with its combination with the Latin.’⁶⁰ Smith was not the first to observe this: in 1997, the blogger Susan Richards published a piece noting that the words do not come from the *Oath* (and ‘nor was [the *Oath*] actually written by Hippocrates, according to many sources’).⁶¹ But Smith’s findings were significant because they have been shared widely, for example in an online piece by N.S. Gill on thoughtco.com (a site offering ‘expert-created education content’) in which she offered a balanced reading of the history of the phrase; however, she did not go far enough, suggesting with regard to the *Epidemics* origin that ‘Hippocrates was never proven to be the author of any of these works, but the theories do follow closely with Hippocrates’ teachings.’⁶² This wording suggests that there is firm independent evidence of ‘Hippocrates’ teachings’ which, as we have seen, there is not. In 2013, Daniel Sokol located 393 articles in the online PubMed database with ‘do no harm’ in their title and followed Smith in dating the first use in print to 1860; his conclusion was that it is an unhelpful axiom for today, when ‘Clinicians inflict harm all the time, whether it is by inserting a cannula, administering chemotherapy, performing a tracheotomy . . .’⁶³

I suspect that it is precisely because of the invasive nature of much of medicine today that ‘First do no harm’ plays out so well with the public. The quote is sometimes abbreviated to ‘Do No Harm’, as in the title of a 2014 memoir by a neurosurgeon, Henry Marsh; a reviewer commented ‘But many medical treatments do cause harm: learning how to navigate the risks of drug therapies, as well as the catastrophic consequences of botched or inadvised surgical operations, is a big part of why training doctors takes so long. Even the simplest of therapies carries the risk of making things worse.’⁶⁴ A common

comment on conventional medicine today is that ‘All therapies entail risks’ (something nobody has yet, to my knowledge, attributed to Hippocrates!); another example, from the Harvard Health Blog, is ‘But if physicians took “first, do no harm” literally, no one would have surgery, even if it was lifesaving.’⁶⁵ Steven Miles concluded that the full line of *Epidemics*, with its sense of a calculation of the likelihood of benefits against the risk of damage, was ‘worthier of Hippocratic medicine than “Do no harm”’.⁶⁶

The ‘harm’ envisaged by users of this quote can however extend beyond being a side-effect of attempts to heal. As well as the *Holby City* episodes, a film using the phrase as its title was made for American television in 1997.⁶⁷ This told the story of a family using the ketogenic diet on their severely epileptic son; this high-fat diet has been used for some epileptic conditions for the past fifty years or so, and came back into prominence in the mid-1990s. In the film, the diet was contrasted with the invasive procedures carried out to diagnose the boy’s condition and the various treatments used, which included the rectal administration of a drug seen to melt a plastic cup.⁶⁸ Discussion of the film on IMDb included the comment that the title ‘comes from the Hippocratic oath which doctors take as part of their vocation’, the reviewer adding that the film ‘presents a blistering attack on the rigidity and insensitivity of the medical establishment’.⁶⁹

Again, the claimed connection with the *Oath* was important here. The film opens with what are presumably students repeating a very short version of the *Oath* word for word after an older man reads it out: this version, taking lines from various medical oaths, is ‘I do solemnly swear that I will be loyal to the profession of medicine and just and generous to its members, that I will prescribe regimen for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and above all else first do no harm.’ It thus begins with a line which could be read as doctors looking after their own, and ends with ‘first do no harm’. Certainly, the original *Oath* contained clauses which would increase the solidarity of the medical community, teaching each other’s children and caring for their own teachers; however, the wording of ‘loyal to the profession’ here prepares the viewer for a story in which the medical establishment is the enemy, closing ranks to protect its members.⁷⁰ While these words are spoken, we see on the screen a well-known image of Hippocrates – the Rubens bust discussed in the Introduction – which is then expanded to show it is taken

from an encyclopaedia entry on the *Oath*, thus giving the words even more authority.⁷¹ This recalls the 1937 film *Green Light*, in which one scene sees the entire screen filled with the *Oath*, as a surgeon who made an error in the operating theatre lets a younger colleague take the blame for the death of a patient, finally focusing on the injunction in the *Oath* to keep silent about what one hears both in the context of treating a patient, and beyond.⁷²

‘Do no harm’ also keeps company with ‘Let food be thy medicine,’ to which I shall turn in the next chapter. As the author of a recent article on how orthodox medicine disadvantages women as patients puts it: ‘Hippocrates would be turning over in his grave. A man who admonished caregivers to do no harm, and to use food as our medicine as well to exercise regularly, has to be rather displeased with modern medicine.’⁷³ It also appeared recently in a setting based around food, in an article promoting Giles Coren’s *Truth, Love & Clean Cutlery* – a manifesto for restaurants which produce ethical food. Coren asks that those selling food and drink should give ‘an assurance that every possible effort has been made to – in the words of the Hippocratic Oath – “do no harm”’.⁷⁴ Here, the words are used to suggest a meaning that goes beyond medical practice into an approach to the planet.

Walking is the best medicine

‘First do no harm’ is not in the *Oath*, but does at least have a Hippocratic text behind it. This is not always true of the Hippocratic quotes popular today. According to many sites on the internet, Hippocrates is supposed to have written – although more often to have ‘said’ – that ‘Walking is the best medicine’, ‘Walking is [a] man’s best medicine’ or even the excited ‘Walking is man’s best medicine!’, used as the title of a 2012 article in the journal *Occupational Medicine*.⁷⁵ This quote has been taken up as the slogan for schemes in orthodox medicine aimed at improving cardiovascular health, such as ‘Walk Nebraska’ and MacEwan University’s Sport and Wellness site, and as a marketing slogan for gyms such as Geneva Fit in Geneva, Illinois.⁷⁶ It also features in memes, often accompanied by spectacular scenery of oceans and mountains, or happy couples on the beach.⁷⁷ Its users present it as ‘a timeless non-pharmacological prescription for well-being and longevity’ and as yet more evidence that

‘Hippocrates was right’, here not least in suggesting something realistic rather than setting an unachievable goal; the article in which these comments feature also recommends parking the car and then walking into the takeaway rather than ordering your food at the drive-up window, or chopping your own vegetables rather than buying them pre-sliced.⁷⁸

Where does this claim about walking originate? In 2017, user Brownturkey wrote on the talk page for the Wikipedia Hippocrates page, ‘I can’t find any evidence that Hippocrates actually said this (and the citation is not persuasive). Can anyone help?’⁷⁹ Before looking at the problems of this particular quote, we can set it within some of the wider claims for Hippocrates and exercise being made today. For example, one of the many Hippocrates exercise memes includes the words: ‘Even when all is known, the care of a man is not yet complete. . . . Because *eating alone will not keep a man well*; he must also take exercise. For *food and exercise*, while possessing opposite qualities, yet *work together to produce health* [italics in original].’ In this meme, the words are attributed to the Loeb translation of *Regimen* ‘Vol.4, 229’.⁸⁰ This is not the treatise *Regimen* 4 (also known as *On Dreams*); the passage is found in *Regimen* 1, and the ‘Vol.’ is a Loeb volume rather than a section of the Hippocratic treatise (*Regimen* 1.2; Loeb, *Hippocrates* IV, 227–9). In the Roman Empire, Galen considered that those who attributed the first book of *Regimen* to Hippocrates were probably wrong, although the second book ‘might perhaps with good reason be thought worthy of Hippocrates.’⁸¹ The balance between food and exercise is the cornerstone of the *Regimen* books, as expressed in *Regimen* 3.69 (Loeb, *Hippocrates* IV, 383): ‘whether food overpowers exercise, whether exercise overpowers food, or whether the two are duly proportioned. For it is from the overpowering of one or the other that diseases arise, while from their being evenly balanced comes good health.’ The concept of balance translates all too easily to modern culture, but the immediate sense of recognition and the superficial similarity cover over many important differences in what is being ‘balanced’.

While it features on general health sites and in alternative medicine, the idea that health is a balance between food and exercise also plays a key role in sports medicine. It has been used as part of the attempt to create a history of the EIM (Exercise Is Medicine) movement – a health initiative launched by the American College of Sports Medicine in 2007 and which has since spread

across the world. One example of this creation is Charles Tipton's 2014 article, 'The history of "Exercise Is Medicine" in ancient civilizations.'⁸² Tipton was not the first to try to provide a history for EIM; in 2010 Jack Berryman wrote 'Exercise is Medicine: A Historical Perspective' for *Current Sports Medicine Reports*.⁸³

Tipton's piece in particular provides yet another example of the impulse to find a history for a new initiative, and he ranges widely across ancient civilizations seeking to identify their 'contributions . . . to the emergence and acceptance of EIM'. He credits the Indian Susruta with being 'the first "recorded" physician to prescribe moderate daily exercise' although Hippocrates was the first 'recorded' 'to provide a written exercise prescription for a patient'; I will examine this claim shortly.⁸⁴ Tipton considers that Hippocrates deserves recognition for providing the centrality of exercise in EIM from the following statement in *Regimen in Acute Diseases* (25, p. 62):

I say then, that this question [regimen] is a most excellent one and allied to many others, some of the most vital importance in the art [medicine], for that it can contribute much to the recovery of the sick, and to the preservation of health in case of those gymnastic [athletic] exercises, and is useful to whatever one wish to apply it.⁸⁵

'25' here is not a Loeb volume, which is what Tipton used elsewhere for his Hippocratic quotations, but the Francis Adams translation. Nor is that translation quoted accurately: the final phrase as given here makes no sense, and part of the passage is missed out. Adams gives ' . . . and to the preservation of health in the case of those who are well; and that it promotes the strength of those who use gymnastic exercises, and is useful to whatever one may wish to apply it'.⁸⁶ The Loeb translates instead:

But I am confident that this inquiry is wholly profitable, being bound up with most, and the most important, of the things embraced by the art. In fact, it has great power to bring health in all cases of sickness, preservation of health to those who are well, good condition to athletes in training, and in fact realization of each man's particular desire.⁸⁷

As to whether the Loeb's 'inquiry' is the same as Adams' 'question', glossed by Tipton here as 'regimen', the context of the opening section of the treatise is indeed that previous physicians have not given regimen the attention it

deserves. The section immediately before this one focuses on how ordinary people find it difficult to take the medical art seriously, because different practitioners treat acute diseases with such different remedies.

Tipton, then, has missed out the full range of benefits described in the passage, presumably to focus on its relevance to his audience. He suggests that Hippocrates has even more to contribute to modern society, commenting that ‘it is surprising that the current crusade against obesity has not invoked Hippocratic views in its efforts’, bearing in mind that *Regimen* 1 talks about how food can overpower exercise. As for his plea for Hippocrates to be recognized as having provided ‘a written exercise prescription for a patient with a disease (consumption)’, while this is supposed to be a reference to *Diseases* 3 (using Potter’s translation, Loeb VI), I have not been able to identify it there. There are certainly references to exercise as a remedy for what is usually translated into English as ‘consumption’ (in Greek, variations of *phthisis*), but there is no idea of a single disease entity behind this label; instead, there are descriptions of various severe lung conditions. So, in *Diseases* 2, a ‘consumption’ patient ‘takes walks out of the wind and sun’, and in another variant of consumption the advice includes ‘have him do a few exercises, take walks.’⁸⁸ In *Internal Affections*, in a variant of *phthisis*, the advice is ‘Have the patient take walks in conjunction with his meals . . . If walks are beneficial to the patient, let him take them; if they are not, he must keep his body as quiet as possible’; here, then, walking is not a blanket recommendation.⁸⁹ For another type of *phthisis*, the patient is given a pattern of diet and exercise lasting for a year. In the first month, for example, ‘On arising from his sleep, have him walk at least twenty stades that day; on the days that follow, let him walk an additional five stades each day until he reaches one hundred stades.’⁹⁰ Nothing here matches Tipton’s ‘written prescription’, which anachronistically suggests an individual patient being given words on papyrus.

Food and exercise thus appear as the two features of a healthy life which balance each other. But this is still not as specific as ‘Walking is the *best* medicine’. At the end of 2016, a Greek team led by Nikitas Nomikos and consisting of two members of a faculty of Physical Education and Sports Science, a medical historian working in a Faculty of Medicine, and an orthopaedic specialist, published ‘The Role of Exercise in Hippocratic Medicine’ in the peer-reviewed *American Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*.⁹¹ They identified *Regimen* in

Health as the source of Hippocratic exercise theory, although their quotations come from *Regimen* 1, 2 and 3 as well.⁹² For all of these, they use the 1931 Loeb translation by W.H.S. Jones, although – for reasons I do not understand – they attribute it throughout to ‘E.J. James’. For them, Hippocrates is ‘the great physician of antiquity’, ‘the founder of Greek and global medicine’ and ‘the father of modern Medicine.’⁹³ Their method is to summarize the text (there is no doubt in their minds that all these treatises are by Hippocrates) and to intersperse some references to modern medical studies with comments on what Hippocrates ‘means’ in modern terms. Thus he is presented as understanding the importance of a warm-up, the dangers of overtraining syndrome and the value of post-exercise recovery. His observations are invariably ‘confirmed’ by modern research; for example, the advice that running in a cloak heats the body and so is good for weight loss leads the authors to reflect on the benefits of exercise kit designed to increase sweating.⁹⁴

Hippocrates, once again, was right: of course. However, the insistence in modern sports medicine that Hippocrates is the origin of exercise in medicine (or even Exercise Is Medicine) is misplaced. As Lesley Dean-Jones has shown, athletics trainers and medical experts in classical Greece had very different aims.⁹⁵ The treatise *On Places in Man* (35) presents gymnastics and medicine as opposites, and *Regimen* (1.24, Loeb IV, 261–3) is hardly flattering about the exercise trainer, whose art is ‘how to transgress the law according to law, to be unjust justly, to deceive, to trick, to rob, to do the foulest violence most fairly.’⁹⁶

Nomikos and his co-writers correctly quote the Loeb as saying that ‘Walking is a natural exercise, much more so than the other exercises’, so it is possible that this passage should be seen as the best match for this particular Hippocratic quote.⁹⁷ However, that is not the whole of this *Regimen* sentence; on walking, it continues ‘... but there is something violent about it.’ In *Regimen* 2, not only does the author go on to distinguish different types of walking – its effects depend on the time of day – but also the statement needs to be read alongside the previous chapter which distinguishes between ‘natural’ (*kata physin*) and ‘violent’ (*dia biês*) exercises.⁹⁸ The natural exercises here are not walking, but sight, hearing, voice and thought, all of which ‘move the soul’. This is clearly not the world of sports medicine or of any other simple statements today that ‘Walking is the best exercise’.

In the next chapter, I shall turn to the food-related Hippocrates quotes which dominate the internet today. Many of these come from a range of

different alternative forms of medicine; for example, Jensen's *Foods That Heal* opens with the epigraph 'Let food be thy medicine', attributing it to 'Hippocrates circa 431 B.C.' and he claims to 'use many of Hippocrates' practices and principles in my own work' because 'he believed in foods and natural cure' and 'the power of positive thinking'.⁹⁹ He claims that 'Curiously, however, Hippocrates' writings on foods have been all but ignored by the American medical mainstream.'¹⁰⁰ As we shall see, this is not the case: mainstream medical writing, too, repeats this quote. What, however, does it mean? Where are the boundaries drawn between food, and medicine? Sometimes it refers to a general principle of rejecting drugs – playing into the opposition to Big Pharma – but in other cases, as we shall see, it is used to support using specific foods to cure specific conditions.