

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE MASKS OF HERACLES

Courtney J. P. Friesen – University of Arizona
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With few competitors, Heracles was one of the most popular and widely revered heroes of Greco-Roman antiquity. Though occupying a marginal place in the Homeric epics, he developed in complex directions within archaic Greek poetry and in Classical Athens he became a favorite protagonist among playwrights, both of tragedy and comedy. From a famed monster-killer, to the troubled murderer of his own children, to the comic buffoon of prolific appetites, Heracles remained fixed in the imagination of ancient Greeks and Romans. Moreover, the son of Zeus was treated as a paradigm for the virtuous statesmen, and even claimed as an ancestor by several at both Alexandria and Rome. He was honored at cult sites around the Mediterranean, even at the heart of the Roman Empire itself on the Ara Maxima.

Jews living around the Greek and Roman world will inevitably have encountered the mythologies and cults of Heracles in various forms.¹ In the context of the communities where he lived and traveled, Philo's knowledge of Heracles would have been informed by literature, theater, artistic representation, and ritual practice. This presentation explores the two instances

¹ For instance, some Jewish writers, reflecting on this hero in light of their own traditions, integrated him within the context of biblical genealogies. Cleomedus Malchus has Heracles marry the granddaughter of Abraham (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.240–41); and according to unspecified sources, Heracles was the father of Melchizedek (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 55.2.1). On these, see Bloch (2011) 215–18. Recently, René Bloch has provided a useful survey of references to Heracles in the writings of Josephus in conjunction with the Jewish historian's wider engagement with Greek mythology (Bloch (2011) 214–19).

For early Christianity, scholarship on the influence of Heracles is much more developed, not least because Jesus and Heracles have been viewed as parallel divine heroes; see, e.g., Pfister (1937); Rose (1938); Simon (1955); Malherbe (2014); Aune (1990).

In addition, a natural correlation existed between Samson and Heracles, and already in antiquity their extraordinary physical might was seen as comparable (Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 10.9.7; Augustine, *Civ.* 18.19). More detailed parallels are proposed by Margalith (1987) who argues that the Israelites would have encountered the shared legendary material through contacts with their Philistine neighbors. Philonenko (1970) notes that the author of the *Testament of Judah* attributes achievements to the patriarch which seem to derive from the labors of Heracles (2:2–7).

in Philo's corpus in which he evokes Heracles—in both cases, the son of Zeus is cited as a model whose achievements in virtue humans might emulate. In his *Embassy to Gaius*, Heracles is a paradigm for how a truly praiseworthy emperor would act; and in *That Every Good Person Is Free*, the hero embodies the freedom of soul experienced by a virtuous person, even one who finds himself in a temporary condition of slavery. I argue that Philo subtly downgrades the status of the demigod, and that he achieves this, in both cases, albeit in different ways, by emphasizing the theatricality of Heracleian actions.

1 – UNMASKING EMPEROR GAIUS

In his *Embassy to Gaius*, Philo offers an extended narrative of the emperor's moral decline after the death of Tiberius; a turning point came, in Philo's judgment, with a grave illness brought on by Gaius' own excessive eating and drinking and debauched sexuality (*Legat.* 14). The fullest culmination of the emperor's madness came, he argues, in his claim not to be a mere human:

καὶ μὲ τῆς ἀρίστης ἀνθρώπων γένους ἀγέλης νομιστέον διαφέρειν καὶ μὴ κατ' ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, μείζονος δὲ καὶ θειοτέρας μοίρας τετυχηκέναι.

also it is necessary to regard me as superior to the best herd of the race of humans, and not to be of human nature, but to have obtained a better and more divine lot. (*Legat.* 76)²

He impressed this “fabricated story” (μυθικὸν πλάσμα) within his own mind “as the most un-false truth” (ὡς ἀψευδεστάτην ἀλήθειαν, 77), and endeavored, moreover, to require the masses (οἱ πολλοί) to accept “his own most godless deification” (τὴν ἀθεωτάτην ἐκθέωσιν αὐτοῦ). “As through stairs” (οἶα δι' ἀναβαθμῶν) he advanced in this “little by little upward” (κατ' ὀλίγον εἰς τὸ ἄνω, 77). In what follows, Philo outlines this upward progress as starting with demigods then

² All translations mine throughout.

moving on to full deities: “for first he began to liken himself to the so-called demigods, Dionysus, Heracles, and the Dioscuri” (ἤρχετο γὰρ ἐξομοιοῦν τὸ πρῶτον τοῖς λεγομένοις ἡμιθέοις ἑαυτὸν, Διονύσῳ καὶ Ἡρακλεῖ καὶ Διοσκούροις, 78). Sometime thereafter, Gaius added Hermes, Apollo, and Ares (93–113).³

Importantly, Philo emphasizes that the emperor’s relationship with these divinities is merely theatrical and thus limited to the superficiality of a costume: “as in a theater, he took up different apparel at different times, sometimes a lion skin and a club, both gold-gilded, adorning himself as Heracles” (ὥσπερ ἐν θεάτρῳ σκευὴν ἄλλοτε ἀλλοίαν ἀνελάμβανε, τοτὲ μὲν λεοντῆν καὶ ῥόπαλον, ἀμφοτέρα ἐπίχρυσα, διακοσμούμενος εἰς Ἡρακλέα, 79).⁴ As Philo points out, however, costuming oneself with the external attributes of a deity falls far short of establishing one’s genuine likeness. To be truly worthy of the honors of these deities, something much more is required: “it is necessary to emulate their virtues. Heracles purged land and sea, having undertaken labors most necessary and useful for all people for the sake of destroying the harmful and destructive aspects of each nature” (ἐχρῆν γὰρ ζηλοῦν τὰς ἐκείνων ἀρετάς. Ἡρακλεῖς ἐκάθηρε γῆν καὶ θάλατταν ἄθλους ἀναγκαιοτάτους καὶ ὠφελιμωτάτους ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις ὑποστὰς ἔνεκα τοῦ τὰ βλαβερὰ καὶ κακωτικὰ φύσεως ἐκατέρας ἀνελεῖν 91). It is “because of the genuine benefactions” that Heracles and the other demigods “have been marveled at and are still now marveled at and deemed worthy of reverence and the highest honors” (διὰ τὰς ὑπηργμένας

³ This two-fold structure seems to have been an invention of Philo. Nevertheless, that Gaius impersonated deities and aspired to their honors is attested elsewhere; see Suetonius, *Cal.* 22; Cassius Dio 59.26.5–27.2; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4.148d. For relevant discussion, see Price (1984) 68–69, 184; Pollini (2012) 377–90; Simpson (1981); Barrett (1989) 140–53; Niehoff (2018) 63–65.

⁴ Cassius Dio similarly notes that Gaius adorned himself on occasion with these attributes of Heracles (59.26.7). He was apparently not the only emperor to do so; Alexander and Commodus are said to have done likewise (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12.537f). Suetonius reports that Nero acted the role of the “mad Hercules” (*Herculem insanum*, *Nero* 21.1). According to Plutarch, Mark Antony, who also claimed Heracles as an ancestor, imitated the hero’s excessive and vulgar behaviors (*Ant.* 4.2). For this kinship, see also Appian, *Bell. civ.* 3.16; and Anderson (1928) 42–44.

εὐεργεσίας ἐθαυμάσθησαν καὶ ἔτι νῦν θαυμάζονται καὶ σεβασμοῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἀνωτάτω τιμῶν ἠξιώθησαν, 86). To emphasize that Gaius had fallen short of this he asks: “but indeed, did you emulate Heracles with your own tireless labors and unceasing acts of courage, having filled mainlands and islands with good law and justice, plenty and thriving, and the abundance of all other good things?” (ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἡρακλέα ἐζήλωσας τοῖς ἀκαμάτοις σαυτοῦ πόνοις καὶ ταῖς ἀτρύτοις ἀνδραγαθίαις, εὐνομίας καὶ εὐδικίας εὐθηνίας τε καὶ εὐετηρίας καὶ τῆς τῶν ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν ἀφθονίας, ὧν ἡ βαθεῖα εἰρήνη δημιουργός, ἀναπλήσας ἠπείρους τε καὶ νήσους, 90).

The application of Heracleian labors as models of just and effective governance has an established precedent. As early as the fourth century BCE, Isocrates exhorts Philip of Macedon to follow the example of Heracles, “the first ancestor of his family” (τὸν τοῦ γένους ἀρχηγόν), by leaving the Hellenes free to rule themselves (*Or.* 5.105–14). Heracleian lineages would subsequently be cited for both Alexander and Ptolemy (Theocritus, *Id.* 17.26–27). At Rome, likewise, Mark Antony was supposed to have been a descendant of the demigod (Plutarch, *Ant.* 4.2; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 3.16). As Philo does in the *Embassy*, others would deploy Heracles as a measure of successful statesmanship: in his eulogy of Augustus, for example, Tiberius apparently claimed that Augustus outdid the son of Zeus (Cassius Dio 56.36.5); and Dio Chrysostom holds him up as a model for the recently ascendant emperor Trajan, encouraging him to embrace justice rather than tyranny (*Or.* 1.51–84). By contrast, Philo’s comparisons between Heracles and Gaius are completely negative, where the hero functions as a foil for the emperor’s failures.

It is striking, however, that Philo does not reject outright the possibility that a Roman emperor could transcend mere human nature. Indeed, he later remarks that Augustus “exceeded human nature in all the virtues” (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν ὑπερβαλὼν ἐν ἀπάσαις ταῖς ἀρεταῖς,

143), demonstrated through the excellence of his reign (143–54). But in the case of Gaius, Philo asserts: “if indeed you think you have become a god, you would have entirely transformed back into mortal nature because of your wicked ways; for, if virtues make one immortal, vices corrupt entirely” (εἰ καὶ τις ἔδοξας γεγενῆσθαι θεός, πάντως ἂν σε μεταβαλεῖν ἔνεκα τῶν πονηρῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων εἰς θνητὴν φύσιν· εἰ γὰρ ἀθανατίζουσιν ἀρεταί, πάντως φθείρουσι κακίαι, 91). This hypothetical instability in the immortal nature—that it could be not merely be earned by virtue but also forfeited through vice—does not reflect conventional Greek and Roman theology. It is strikingly in common with the theater, however, especially comedy and satyr drama. On the comic stage, the ability to shift back and forth between a divine, Heracleian identity is well attested.

Perhaps the best-known instance of this theme of the Heracleian costume and its interchangeability occurs in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where Dionysus undertakes a journey to the underworld carrying a club and wearing a lion skin in the hopes of retaking the recently-deceased Euripides to the land of the living. Heracles is, of course, an expert in such endeavors, so Dionysus visits his home in order to learn the most effective route. Seeing him at the door, Heracles declares,

ἀλλ’ οὐχ οἶός τ’ εἴμ’ ἀποσοβῆσαι τὸν γέλων,
 ὀρῶν λεοντῆν ἐπὶ κροκωτῶ κειμένην.
 τίς ὁ νοῦς; τί κόθορνος καὶ ῥόπαλον ξυνηλθέτην;

Indeed, I am unable to keep from laughter seeing a lion skin resting upon a saffron robe. What’s the idea? Why have a buskin and club joined together? (*Frogs* 45–47)

Dionysus’ characteristically effeminate appearance, here represented in his robe (κροκωτός) and boots (κόθορνος), is incongruent with the hyper-masculinity of the Heracleian disguise, much to the latter’s amusement. The function of the heroic costume and its interchangeability underlie

much of the comic action in the subsequent scenes. Having arrived in the underworld, when Dionysus approaches the abode of Aeacus, his slave Xanthias, sensing his master's fear, wonders whether he has merely "the form as Heracles" (καθ' Ἡρακλέα τὸ σχῆμα) and not also "the resolve" (τὸ λῆμ', 463). Upon learning that Heracles had made numerous enemies who were all now eager to exact vengeance, Dionysus immediately insists that Xanthias take over the disguise, while conversely he assumes the role of slave (495–97). Later, however, when it appears that the lion skin and club would provide admittance to the inn where there was a feast and dancing girls, Dionysus demands to trade back (522–28), only to reverse course again when he learns that Heracles had racked up debts that would result in severe punishment (579–88).

Whereas in the *Frogs* it is Dionysus who makes a failing effort to dress as Heracles, elsewhere comic action focalizes on Heracles taking on other costumes, as e.g. in a fragmentary satyr play by Ion, *Omphale*, where the queen orders the Lydian women to "adorn our guest" (τὸν ξένον κοσμήσατε), insisting that on his body there should be "ointment, perfume, and a garment of Sardis" (βακκάρης δὲ καὶ μύρα καὶ Σαρδιανὸν κόσμον), and "dark kohl powder as eye-liner" (τὴν μέλαιναν στίμμιν ὀμματογράφον, *TrGF* 1.22, 24–25).⁵ And in other sources, she, conversely, takes up his lion skin and club.

This feminized, enslaved, and often inebriated, Heracles became a regular comic character, and according to Dio Chrysostom, was a distinctly Alexandrian obsession. For them, the drunken slave—by now a stock character of comic theater—produced minimal laughter, whereas, "they think it hilarious when they see such a Heracles carried about and, as customary,

⁵ For discussion, see Cyrino (1998) esp. 218–19.

dressed in saffron” (τὸν δὲ Ἡρακλέα τοιοῦτον ὀρᾷσι γελοῖον δοκεῖ, παραφερόμενον, καὶ καθάπερ εἰώθασιν, ἐν κροκωτῷ, *Or.* 32.94).⁶

2 – VIEWING THE MASK ON STAGE

Thus, in the *Embassy*, Philo deploys the theatricality of Heracles in his polemic against Gaius, observing that the emperor had merely put on the divine attributes as a theatrical costume, but that his vices demonstrated that he was a mere mortal. In another work of a very different genre and with very different aims, Philo again evokes Heracles as a potential model for human virtue. In *That Every Good Person is Free* he takes up the Stoic paradox that the virtuous person is free, even if they should find themselves in temporary, corporeal slavery. This is because genuine freedom concerns the soul in relation to the passions. Numerous exempla are furnished in support; prominent among them is Heracles, whose actions in the Euripidean satyr play, the *Syleus* are discussed at length, with five fragments totaling 17 lines (4 fragments and 13 lines of which are attested only in Philo).

I have written elsewhere on Philo’s use of the *Syleus*; here, I wish to emphasize the extent to which Philo visualizes the costume of Heracles, apparently as a means of evoking a theatrical experience for his readers. He introduces the play as follows.⁷

ἴδε γοῦν οἷα παρ’ Εὐριπίδη φησὶν ὁ Ἡρακλῆς·
πίμπρα, κάταιθε σάρκας, ἐμπλήσθητί μου
πίνων κελαινὸν αἷμα· πρόσθε γὰρ κάτω
γῆς εἴσιν ἄστρα γῆ τ’ ἄνεισ’ εἰς αἰθέρα,
πρὶν ἐξ ἐμοῦ σοι θῶπ’ ἀπαντῆσαι λόγον.

See, then, what kinds of things Heracles says in Euripides:

⁶ That saffron was associated with women is especially well attested in comedy; see Aristophanes, *Ran.* 46 (above); also *Lys.* 44, 47; *Thesm.* 138; *Eccl.* 879.

⁷ On the *Syleus*, see Pechstein (1998) 243–83.

Ignite and burn up my flesh, be filled with drinking my dark blood; for the stars will come down to earth, and the earth ascend to the sky before a flattering word from me meets you. (99; *TrGF* 5.687)

Philo first invites his readers to “see” (ἴδε), then follows on with a gnomic quotation.⁸ After a brief comment on how flattering speech befits a slave, whereas a noble, well-born person speaks freely, he again invites his readers to view, or see the hero on stage:

πάλιν τὸν αὐτὸν σπουδαῖον οὐχ ὀρᾶς, ὅτι οὐδὲ πωλούμενος θεράπων εἶναι δοκεῖ,
καταπλήττων τοὺς ὀρῶντας, ὡς οὐ μόνον ἐλεύθερος ὦν ἀλλὰ καὶ δεσπότης ἐσόμενος τοῦ
πριαμένου;

You see, do you not, the same noble man, that not even while being sold does he appear to be a slave, and he strikes the observers with amazement, because he is not merely free but will also become master of his purchaser.

He asks the reader whether they see (ὀρᾶς), and describes the hero’s effect on the onlookers (ὀρῶντας), which implies both characters in the play and the audience in the theater. Having thus visualized the dramatic scene, Philo quotes again from the play, this time highlighting the hero’s difficulty with costuming:

ὁ γοῦν Ἑρμῆς πυνθανομένω μὲν, εἰ φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἀποκρίνεται·
ἦκιστα φαῦλος, ἀλλὰ πᾶν τούναντίον
πρὸς σχῆμα σεμνὸς καὶ ταπεινὸς οὐδ’ ἄγαν
εὐογκος ὡς ἂν δοῦλος, ἀλλὰ καὶ στολὴν
ιδόντι λαμπρὸς καὶ ξύλω δραστήριος.

Hermes answers the one inquiring whether [Heracles] is base:
Is he most base? Rather, quite the opposite, he is honorable and not humble in form, nor overly bulky as a slave would be, but to an observer he is sharply dressed and effective with a club. (*Prob.* 101; *TrGF* 5.688)

Here it is Heracles’ “form,” his σχῆμα, that betrays his true divine identity. This calls to mind a comparable scenario in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* where Dionysus, though sporting the lion skin

⁸ That these lines exist as a gnomic excerpt is suggested by the fact that Philo quotes them on three other occasions, each time without reference to the dramatic context (*Leg.* 3,202; *Ios.* 78; *Prob.* 25); and they are deployed likewise by Artemidorus (4.59), Eusebius (*Praep. evang.* 6.6.2), and Michael Psellus (*Poemata* 21.275–76).

and club, proves to be considerably less courageous when faced with threats in the underworld, and his slave wonders whether Dionysus will have both the σχῆμα and the λῆμα (will and courage) of Heracles (see above). In the *Syleus*, Heracles, now in the slave market attempting to pass himself off as servile, proves unable. And again the speaker uses ὀράω: “to an observer (ιδόντι) he is sharply dressed”—possibly because the lion skin is still visible—“and effective with a club”—apparently because it is still in his hand. The next two fragments further emphasize the point:

οὐδεὶς δ' ἐς οἴκους δεσπότης ἀμείνονας
 αὐτοῦ πρίασθαι βούλεται· σὲ δ' εἰσορῶν
 πᾶς τις δέδοικεν· ὄμμα γὰρ πυρὸς γέμεις,
 ταῦρος λέοντος ὡς βλέπων πρὸς ἐμβολήν.
 [...] τὸ εἶδος αὐτό σου κατηγορεῖ
 σιγῶντος, ὡς εἴης ἂν οὐχ ὑπήκοος,
 τάσσειν δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ ἰτιάσσεσθαι θέλοις.

No one wishes to purchase masters for his house that are stronger than himself. Every person seeing you is afraid. For you are full of fire in the eyes, as a bull looking at the attack of a lion. [...] Though you are silent, your form itself indicates that you would not be obedient, but that you would rather give orders than take them. (*Prob.* 101; *TrGF* 5.689–90).

The emphasis on the hero's appearance on stage continues: σὲ δ' εἰσορῶν πᾶς τις... and τὸ εἶδος αὐτό σου.

Later, after Heracles had been purchased, with his master off in the fields, the hero persists in his stereotypical comic behaviors of excessive eating and drinking, by sacrificing his master's bull and getting into his wine. And Philo adds a final fragment:

Συλεῖ δὲ ἀφικομένῳ καὶ δυσανασχετοῦντι ἐπὶ τε τῇ βλάβῃ καὶ τῇ τοῦ θεράποντος
 ῥαθυμῖα καὶ τῇ περιττῇ καταφρονήσει μηδὲν μήτε τῆς χροᾶς μήτε ὧν ἔπραττε μεταβαλὼν
 εὐτολμώτατά φησι·

κλίθητι καὶ πῖωμεν, ἐν τούτῳ δέ μου
 τὴν πεῖραν εὐθύς λάμβαν', εἰ κρείσσων ἔση.

When Syleus arrived and was indignant at the destruction and the laziness of his slave, and his excessive disdain, [Heracles] changed nothing that he was doing, not even his color, but said most boldly,

Lie down, and let us drink; take the test at once to see whether in this you are stronger than I. (*Prob.* 103; *TrGF* 5.691).

What is striking here—leaving aside for now the amusing observation that the culmination of Heracles’ heroic virtue and freedom amidst slavery is expressed in excessive consumption of meat and wine—is Philo’s emphasis that Heracles did not change his color (μήτε τῆς χροᾶς... μεταβαλῶν). This trope of unchanging expression and complexion in circumstances of adversity is especially common in drama. This seems to be in part due to the fixity of the theatrical mask. When events occurring off stage are being described, of course, facial appearance can change; e.g., in describing the effects of Medea’s poison on the Corinthian princess and bride of Jason, the messenger reports that she changed her color (*Med.* 1168). By contrast, in a memorable exchange in the *Bacchae* when the disguised Dionysus is captured by Pentheus’ servant, the latter is surprised that “he did not change his ruddy cheek” (οὐδ’ ἥλλαξεν οἰνωπὸν γένυν) but was in fact “laughing” (γελῶν δέ) even as he was arrested (338–40). What within the drama represents his transcendent attitude toward his circumstances, the audience recognizes is also a function of the limitations of his costume.⁹ Likewise, for Philo’s Heracles, the color of his face remains unchanged, undaunted as he is by the threat of Syleus, bringing to the reader’s attention the theatrical context of the comic performance.

Thus, in his evocation of the heroic actions of Heracles, Philo goes well beyond merely repeating gnomic poetic fragments. He has endeavored to recreate the experience of an audience

⁹ On the “laughing” mask of Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, see Foley (1985) 246–54.

in the theater who might join in the comic delight at Heracles' failed attempts conceal his identity.¹⁰

The comic excesses of Heracles evident in the *Syleus* and apparently popular in Alexandria, were not universally celebrated. In fact, some moralists detracted from Heracleian hedonism;¹¹ and at Rome in particular, as Karl Galinsky notes, within a context of Stoicism, religion and philosophy “worked hand in hand to shape an image of Herakles whose *gravitas* has been a distinctive trait to our day.”¹² As noted above, this made Heracles a popular model for the noble ruler. Unlike Greece, Heracles did not feature in Roman comedy, because, so it seems, he was “idealized [...] as the perfect embodiment of Stoic wisdom and virtue.”¹³ A Stoic valorization of the hero is evident in Dio Chrysostom's interpretation of the destruction of a mythological beast at Libya. Dio notes that the “metaphorical” (μετενεχθείς) meaning concerns “the nature of the passions, how they are irrational and beastly—they deploy pleasure, and lead astray the ignorant with deception and sorcery” (τὸ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν γένος, ὅτι ἄλογοι οὔσαι καὶ θηριώδεις, ἔπειτα ἡδονὴν τινα παραδεικνύουσαι, προσαγόμεναι τοὺς ἀνοήτους ἀπάτη καὶ γοητεία, *Or.* 5.16). This is what Heracles ultimately destroyed. By contrast, most people who endeavor “to purify their own soul” (καθῆραι τὴν αὐτοῦ ψυχὴν) fall short and are “destroyed by the remaining desires” (ὑπὸ τῶν λειπομένων ἐπιθυμιῶν ἀπολέσθαι, 5.22). Above all, Heracles

¹⁰ In a similar regard, later in the treatise Philo reports that he had attended a play of Euripides, and recites two lines that he had heard (*Prob.* 141, *TrGF* 5.275.3–4). His focus, however, is not merely on the content of the play, but also on the experience and response of the audience: “I saw all the audience members standing up on their tip-toes from amazement, and with great voices and responsive shouts jointly declaring their praise of the maxim and praise also of the poet, who revered not only freedom in actions but also its very name” (τοὺς θεατὰς ἅπαντας εἶδον ἐπ’ ἄκρων ποδῶν ὑπ’ ἐκπλήξεως ἀναστάντας καὶ φωναῖς μείζουσι καὶ ἐκβοήσεσιν ἐπαλλήλοις ἔπαινον μὲν τῆς γνώμης, ἔπαινον δὲ καὶ τοῦ ποιητοῦ συνείροντας, ὅς οὐ μόνον τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἔργοις ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦνομα αὐτῆς ἐσέμνυνεν, *Prob.* 141).)

¹¹ For this debate, see Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12.512d–f.

¹² Galinsky (1972) 127.

¹³ Galinsky (1972) 128.

“showed his own mind to be pure and civilized” (ἀποφῆναι καθαρὰν καὶ ἡμερον τὴν αὐτοῦ δianoian, 5.23).

When placed alongside this Stoic ideal, the Heracles of Philo taken from the *Syleus* is clearly positioned on the side of hedonism. This incongruity is striking in view of the treatise’s underlying Stoicism which emphasizes that true freedom resides in mastery over “desires” (ἐπιθυμίαι) and “pleasures” (ἡδοναί). Of all the legendary material with philosophical applications from which Philo might have drawn, this comic depiction of Heracles’ excessive eating and drinking stands out.¹⁴

CONCLUSIONS

As a multifaceted and complex persona, Heracles captivated ancient Greeks and Romans as an object of cult worship, a subject for poetry and oratory, and a dramatic protagonist in tragedy and comedy. He remained an aspiration for emulation, and his heroism was pursued by a wide range of individuals from philosophers to statesmen. Within this context, Philo will have encountered Heracles through various means, and direct and indirect references appear across his corpus, from early to late works, within works of biblical interpretation as well as treatises on historical and philosophical topics.

In the two treatises where the hero is explicitly evoked, Philo holds him up as a potential model for emulation, for an emperor in the *Embassy* and the philosophical sage in *Good Person*. At the same time, I have argued that in both cases Philo deflates the status of Heracles and those who would associate themselves with him. In the *Embassy*, he emphasizes that Gaius’ likeness

¹⁴ It is not clear that Philo would have regarded Heracles’ drunkenness as a vice. On the one hand, in *De plantatione* 140–77 he argues that the true sage may get drunk and retain the virtue; on the other, he idealizes the Therapeutae for the sobriety of their communal meals (*Contempl.* 84–89).

to the demigod was merely theatrical, as the emperor was known to have donned a lion skin and club. The costume highlighted the superficiality of the emperor's divine claims, and, Philo proposes, to whatever extent Gaius imagined himself as having transformed himself into a deity through costume, his actions would change him back again to be a human. Such interchangeability of Heraclean guise was a stock trope of Greek comedy and satyr drama, and in *Good Person*, Philo deploys a play by Euripides in order to illustrate how true virtue cannot be eliminated merely through a disguise. Philo re-creates the dramatic situation in which Heracles is presented as a slave, though apparently unwilling to set aside his club; and later, his actions and appearance remain fixed in spite of the threats of his new master.

Maren Niehoff has recently demonstrated persuasively that Philo's *Good Person* participates in a distinctly Rome mode of ethical discourse.¹⁵ If this is the case, then Philo's comic hero is all the more striking. At Rome, Heracles was absent from comic theater; rather, he represented *gravitas* and became a fixture in imperial propaganda. Thus, even in celebrating the son of Zeus as exemplifying genuine freedom, Philo undermines his Roman persona by staging him as a buffoon, obsessed with eating and drinking.

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¹⁵ Niehoff (2018) 81–88.

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