

DOUBTS ABOUT OTHER MINDS AND THE SCIENCE OF PHYSIOGNOMICS

Most ancient philosophers found access to the mental states of people other than the perceiver less problematic than the moderns did. But there is evidence, however scarce, that some groups of ancient sceptics raised questions which I shall call, for brevity's sake, doubts about other minds.¹

In this paper, first, I shall try to clarify the nature of these questions by focusing on two representative cases: a tenet of the Cyrenaics, one of the so-called Minor Socratic schools, active in the fourth and third centuries B.C.; and an observation by Theodosius, a neo-Pyrrhonian Sceptic about whom very little is known. Second, I shall indicate why Physiognomy might be taken to be related to the epistemological attitudes of the sceptics about other minds and I shall outline the origins, principles, and methods of that science. Third, I shall point out some respects in which there is interaction between physiognomists and philosophers, concentrating on humoral psychology and on physiognomical typology. Fourth, I shall argue that, despite this interaction, Physiognomy cannot be considered as providing an answer to the philosophical thesis that we cannot know other people's internal states. In concluding, I shall add a few observations concerning the general purposes of the science.

I

There are two fundamental sets of problems that one may ask with regard to other minds,² the one ontological, the other epistemological. The ontological question is whether people other than myself who have bodies like mine have mental states similar to mine or, indeed, whether they have mental states at all. The main epistemological question is whether we can ever come to know the content of other

¹ I borrow this term from modern philosophy, but I must warn the reader that the ancient doubts about other people's mental or psychological states should not be confused with the so-called problem of Other Minds as it appears in post-Cartesian philosophy. The formulation of the problem of Other Minds relies on the Cartesian assumption that physical things and mental entities belong to different ontological realms and that the latter may exist and be conceived independently from the former. It consists primarily in the ontological problem whether there exist minds other than my own. In its classical version it asks the question whether bodies other than my own, but resembling my own, which I perceive to move, make intelligible noises, change facial expressions, and, in brief, behave in the way I perceive myself behaving, are each animated by a mind and experience mental states. A host of epistemological and semantic issues are appended to the ontological question. Predominant among them are arguments purporting to show or to refute the validity of the inference from the behaviour of a body, which is public, to the existence or to the content of mental or psychological states, which, were it the case that other bodies are animated by minds, would be private. The whole modern issue of Other Minds rests on the presupposition that there is something mysterious and peculiar about mental states, as opposed to bodily or physical states, which guarantees to the percipient direct cognitive access to their content. Although there are similarities between the ancient doubts about our access to other people's mental states and the modern issue described above, the differences between them are crucial and parallels between the two involve risks of misunderstanding.

² For adequate ways of speaking about the mind and mental states in the context of a philosophical discussion of Hellenistic texts see the comprehensive study of J. Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford, 1992).

people's mental states. Both cases that we shall examine focus on the epistemological issue and do not discuss the ontological problem at all.

The Cyrenaics raised doubts about other minds in connection with their central epistemological thesis that we are infallibly aware of our own experiences (*pathē*) but cannot know anything about the nature of objects in the world. Sextus Empiricus reports their position as follows:

They say that no criterion is common (*κοινόν*) to mankind, but that common names (*ὀνόματα κοινά*) are assigned to the objects. For all people call something white or sweet in common (*κοινῶς*), but in fact they do not have anything in common (*κοινόν τι*) that is white or sweet. For one person is aware of one's own private affection (*ἰδίου πάθους*), but whether this affection is produced by a white object both in oneself and in one's neighbour one cannot tell oneself, since one does not experience the affection of the neighbour, and the neighbour cannot tell either, since he does not experience the affections of that other person. And since no affection is common to us all, it is hasty to declare that what appears to me of a certain kind appears of this same kind to my neighbour as well; for perhaps I am constituted in such a way as to be whitened by the external object when it meets with my senses, while another person has the senses constructed so as to have been disposed differently. (Sext. Emp. *M.* 7.195–6)³

The Cyrenaics clearly presuppose the existence of persons other than the perceiver, whose affections (*pathē*) are similar in structure, if not in content, to the perceiver's. What they question is not whether the neighbour *has* any such states, but whether it is possible to apprehend their content. The answer is negative. They argue that the faculties of the soul are too weak to discern the nature of real objects (Sext. Emp. *M.* 7.195), and this leaves us with no cognitive access to the external world and with no shared affections which might stand as common criteria; we have incorrigible knowledge of our own experiences, but no knowledge of the manner in which other persons are affected.⁴

A similar thesis was held by Theodosius the Sceptic, who has even—wrongly, I think⁵—been claimed as a Cyrenaic because he too considered internal states private and incommunicable:

In his book *Chapters of Scepticism*, Theodosius says that Scepticism should not be called Pyrrhonism. For if the movement of the mind in either direction (*sc.* towards affirming or denying something) cannot be grasped, we shall not know what was Pyrrho's disposition. And since we cannot know that, we should not be called Pyrrhonians. (D.L. 9.70)

In this passage, scepticism is expressed about apprehending the thoughts of somebody other than oneself, namely of Pyrrho, at a given moment. Theodosius' argument is that, in identifying himself as a Pyrrhonian, the Sceptic assumes that he is in the same state of mind as Pyrrho; but there are no grounds for this assumption, since the Sceptic has no access to the movements related to Pyrrho's thoughts. In this case too, the Sceptic questions the possibility of *knowing* Pyrrho's thoughts, but does not ask whether Pyrrho *had* any thoughts. Similar remarks also

³ The translations of Greek and Latin passages cited in this paper are my own, unless it is indicated otherwise.

⁴ For a philosophical interpretation of that claim, see Voula Tsouna-McKirahan, 'The Cyrenaic theory of knowledge', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1992), 161–92 (henceforth cited as Tsouna 1992).

⁵ See F. Caujolle-Zaslowsky, *Qu'est-ce que la méthode sceptique?* (Paris, 1982), Thèse de Doctorat d'État, vol. 1, p. 196.

hold for the few other ancient texts which could be said to contain remarks about other minds.⁶

II

The thesis that it is impossible to gain cognitive access to other minds entails that a person's appearance, behaviour, and discourse can give no indication as to what that person may truly perceive, feel, or think. The science of Physiognomy and the disciplines influenced by it might appear to be an answer to that thesis in so far as they assert precisely the opposite, namely that one's physique and comportment are reliable guides to the interpretation of one's feelings and character. But before I examine whether such a relation can be established, I need to say a few things about the development, sources, principles, and methods of that science.

Ancient Physiognomy is identified as a separate field of enquiry well before Plato.⁷ Its origin is traced back to Pythagoras (Hippol. *refut. haeres.* 1.2; Porphyry. *vit. Pythag.* 13) and it has an early affiliation with scientific thought, especially with Hippocratic medicine, zoology, and psychology (Gal. *Quod animi mores* 797–8). Aside from Aristotle's remarks, the first systematic treatment of physiognomic material that survives to our day is a third-century B.C. handbook entitled *Physiognomics*, probably composed by two Peripatetic authors and spuriously ascribed to Aristotle.⁸ Further information on the subject comes from a fourth-century A.D. anonymous Latin handbook reporting the views of Loxus, physician and physiognomist of the early Hellenistic period,⁹ and also from a Greek paraphrase¹⁰ and an Arabic translation of the work of Polemo, rhetor of the city of Laodicea and contemporary of Hadrian.¹¹

According to these authors, Physiognomy has as its province those natural and acquired affections that produce changes in the bodily features that can be treated as characterological signs (*sēmeia*).¹² Its governing principle is that body and soul interact with each other and that they change simultaneously in all natural affections.

⁶ An interesting argument to that effect might be made regarding the first part of Plato's *Theaetetus*, which discusses the definition of knowledge as perception (see, especially, 153e–154a, 159e–160a, 166c), and I am grateful to A. Hobbs for pointing this out to me. However, it seems to me that, rather than raising questions about other minds, Protagorean relativism implies that such questions are meaningless. If whatever I perceive is true for me and if this kind of truth (i.e. truth relative to a particular perceiver at a particular time) is the only truth there is, it makes no sense to ask how I know that another perceiver who says that he perceives something red really perceives something red. For if it appears to him that he perceives something red, it is true for him that he perceives something red, and this is all the truth there is about his perception. And if it appears to me that it appears to some other perceiver that he sees something red, this appearance is true for me—although not true for any other perceiver at a given time, including the person whom I perceive as seeing something red. I discuss this topic in detail in an essay entitled 'Remarks about other minds in Greek philosophy', *Phronesis* (forthcoming).

⁷ The evidence about ancient Physiognomy is collected in R. Foerster, *Scriptores Physiognomonici* (Leipzig, 1893).

⁸ This treatise will be often cited as ps.-Arist.

⁹ On Loxus' date and doctrine, see G. Misener, 'Loxus: physician and physiognomist', *Classical Philology* 18 (1923), 1–22.

¹⁰ The Greek paraphrase of Polemo's work was composed by Adamantius of Alexandria in the fourth century.

¹¹ For a brief discussion of the nature and contents of these treatises, see E. Evans, 'Physiognomics in the ancient world', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* N.S. 59 (1969), 6–17 (henceforth cited as Evans).

¹² See ps.-Arist. 806a, which stresses that not all affections (*pathēmata*) are of interest to the physiognomist, and that not all bodily characteristics can be used as physiognomic signs.

This is explicitly stated at the beginning of the pseudo-Aristotelian handbook and again at the outset of the analysis in the second part of the same work.

Dispositions follow bodily characteristics and are not in themselves unaffected by bodily motions. This is evident in drunkenness and in illnesses; for it is clear that dispositions (*dianoiai*) change considerably under the influence of bodily affections. Conversely, that the body suffers sympathetically with the affections of the soul is evident in love, fear, grief, and pleasure. But it is especially in natural creatures that one can see how body and soul interact with each other, so that each is the main cause of the other's affections. For no animal has ever existed such that it has the form of one animal and the disposition of another, but the body and the soul of the same animal are always such that a given disposition must accompany a given bodily form.

(ps.-Arist. 805a1–19)

Or, as the second peripatetic author puts it:

It seems to me that body and soul react sympathetically to each other; when the character of the soul (*ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς ἕξις*) is altered, it alters also the appearance of the body (*ἡ τοῦ σώματος μορφή*), and conversely, when the form of the body is changed, it also changes the character of the soul. (808b12–30)

As Aristotle observes (*An. pr.* 70b7–16), if the validity of this principle is granted, and further, if it is granted that each affection or trait of character corresponds to a specific bodily characteristic and that we can recognize it, then we shall be able to judge mental disposition by observing physical appearance.

This reasoning underlies the characterological analysis of the earlier groups of physiognomists. These are the zoologists who inferred the mental disposition corresponding to various human types by establishing analogies between humans and animals; the ethnologists, who distinguished between different ethnic groups and selected the physical and mental characteristics of each group; and the pathognomists, who established detailed lists of mental and physical characteristics corresponding to ethical types: the passionate person, the fearful person, and so on.

The same fundamental ideas also appear in later physiognomical treatises, and notably in the eclectic methods of the pseudo-Aristotelian handbook.¹³ And they condition the so-called 'philosophical approach' in Physiognomy, according to which, if there are no signs for a given mental characteristic, for example jealousy, so that it cannot be diagnosed *directly*, it might still be possible to infer it *indirectly*, by recognizing other mental characteristics of the jealous person, whose joint presence entails jealousy, for example quickness to anger and small-mindedness (ps.-Arist. 807a4–14). The 'philosophical' stamp of this method appears to consist in the ability to trace logical connections among mental traits, which is likely to produce results different from the inferences of the traditional physiognomists.¹⁴

¹³ On the zoological method, see ps.-Arist. 809aff.: the characteristics of the main animal types reappear in the list of qualities related to physiognomic signs in human beings. On the ethnological method, see ps.-Arist. 808a30ff., where the Corinthians and the Leucadians are taken to exemplify the marks of the small-minded or petty man; see also ps.-Arist. 806b4ff., where the ethnological observation that men living in the North are brave and stiff-haired while men living in the South are cowardly and soft-haired is preceded by zoological observations supporting the thesis that soft hair is a sign of timidity, while stiff hair signifies courage. On the methods of the pathognomists, see e.g. ps.-Arist. 805a19ff.

¹⁴ It has been suggested that the 'philosophical' method of physiognomical analysis presented in the first part of the pseudo-Aristotelian handbook may be related to the method described in Arist. *An. pr.* 70b6–39. On this, see Evans, p. 8. However, I do not think that this is plausible, for it is explicitly stated in the pseudo-Aristotelian handbook that nobody has practised the 'philosophical' method of Physiognomy; on the other hand, the method that Aristotle describes and the problems that he raises clearly concern the traditional ways of engaging in Physiognomy.

Notice that the ontological presupposition that people other than the perceiver exist and have mental states similar to the states of the perceiver is absolutely crucial to all the types of physiognomical analysis mentioned above, including the 'philosophical' approach: in order to posit that bodily features are signs or manifestations of inner conditions, one must presuppose that animal and human bodies are animated by emotional or mental states (whether animals and humans are examined as groups, types, or individuals).

III

The reference of the pseudo-Aristotelian handbook to the 'philosophical' way of practising Physiognomy constitutes evidence that the physiognomists, at least from the third century onwards, were aware of philosophical doctrines and methods. But also, it is amply attested that several philosophers were familiar with physiognomical thinking and had access to the content of physiognomical treatises.

I shall not dwell much on the point of the relations between philosophers and physiognomists, for this should be the subject of a separate study. I shall only sketch out two separate lines along which this relation may be further explored.¹⁵

Two features of physiognomical thinking are particularly noticeable in the doctrines of philosophers: humoral psychology, which operates on the principle that conditions in the mind are connected with states in the body and which is often combined with theories concerning the influence of the environment (in particular, of the climate and of the seasons) on human physique; and physiognomical typology, which is used by philosophers for various purposes.

The importance that humoral psychology would acquire for physiognomical thinking is apparent as early as in the fifth century, in the doctrines of Empedocles and of Alcmaeon. Empedocles claimed that the particular capacities and skills that a person develops have to do with the mixture of the elements in a particular area of the body: the successful mixture (*krasis*) of the elements on the tongue produces clever speakers, their balanced mixture on the hands produces skilful craftsmen, and the same goes for other capacities as well (Theoph. *De sens.* 11); this implies that the observable skills of a good rhetor are signs of an inward condition, the balance of the elements in the blood at the region of the tongue. A similar idea of successful distribution of the elements in the body is represented by Alcmaeon's doctrine of balance between the dry and the wet, the hot and the cold. This idea was associated with a proper theory of humours in the writings of the Hippocratic doctors who also developed the so-called theories of climates and seasons: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile are constituent elements of the body whose delicate balance is particularly susceptible to changes, especially to those brought about by the influence of climates and seasons.¹⁶

Both the impact of the physical environment on the humours of the body and its influence on character were reiterated by Plato (*Tim.* 24c, *Laws* 747d ff.) who may also have espoused some version of the theory of humours. For he acknowledges the interaction between the soul and the body and connects physical conditions, such as the spreading of bitter and bilious humours in the body, to mental states, such as ill-temper and cowardice (*Tim.* 86a–87a). Similar positions are frequently stated by

¹⁵ Some of the philosophical doctrines mentioned below are briefly discussed in Evans, pp. 17–28.

¹⁶ See especially the treatises *On the Nature of Man* and *Airs, Waters, Places*.

Aristotle, especially in his biological works. For example, he relates the activities of the soul to the condition of the blood and maintains that the size of the heart affects the condition of the blood, which in turn affects both nature and disposition (*Part. Anim.* 648a ff., *Hist. Anim.* 667a ff.). Both Plato and Aristotle appear aware of the zoological and ethnological approaches of the physiognomists¹⁸ and occasionally use pathognomic classifications.

Perhaps no other thinker succeeded in integrating Physiognomy to the broad aims of medical and philosophical enquiries better than Galen. Early in his training as a medical doctor, Galen came into contact both with a powerful rhetorical tradition that owed much to Physiognomy¹⁹ and with practitioners of the physiognomical art and their writings (*Mixt.* 2.6). His take on physiognomical material recalls rationalistic criticisms aimed at the empirical nature of various arts, and especially at the empirical method of medicine. Galen notices that Physiognomy does assert that body and soul are sympathetically related to each other but that it does not explain why this is so; it does describe what can be observed, namely outward signs bearing physiognomical significance, but it does not give an account of the reasons why each sign signifies a particular feature of disposition (*Mixt.* 2.6). What Galen undertook was to move above the practical character of physiognomical handbooks and to give an account of underlying causes by relating the humours of the body to disposition and temperament. To mention some features of his approach, he reviews the tradition of the mixture of the elements, stresses the importance of the humours in the body, revises lists of physiognomical signs, analyses individual signs following Aristotle and Polemo, relates the balance of humours to climates and seasons, and discusses their influence on temperament. Galen appears to see himself as the last important link in the chain of ancient doctors who amalgamated medical material with humoral psychology and physiognomical ideas, and who contributed not only to a person's health, but also to his moral excellence—a chain that he traces directly back to 'the divine Hippocrates' (*Quod animi mores* 804–8).²⁰ And he sees himself as belonging to the tradition of philosophers such as Plato (a philosopher whom Galen distinguishes above all others), on account of his efforts to provide a theoretical explanation of physiognomical correspondences between physical and mental characteristics.

A second feature of Physiognomy that seems to be of interest to philosophers is lists of physiognomical signs. These lists were usually composed in purely empirical ways and by employing one or more of the physiognomical methods. Signs are drawn

¹⁷ However, Plato does not defend or discuss these doctrines in detail.

¹⁸ On this, see Evans, pp. 21ff.

¹⁹ Galen studied under the physician Pelops in Smyrna, a centre for rhetoric and a city that held Polemo of Laodicea in high regard. Apparently, one of Polemo's compositions was a handbook on Physiognomy intended mainly for professors of rhetoric. In relating the rules of oratorical delivery with physiognomical principles, Polemo moves within a tradition that can be considered to start with Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1404aff.).

²⁰ On Galen's appeal to Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle in *Quod animi mores* in support of the thesis that the faculties of the soul follow the mixtures of elements in the body, see G. E. R. Lloyd, 'Scholarship, authority and argument in Galen's *Quod animi mores*', in P. Manuli and M. Vegetti (edd.), *Opere psicologiche di Galeno* (Napoli, 1989), pp. 11–42; see also G. E. R. Lloyd, 'Galen on Hellenistics and Hippocrateans: contemporary battles and past authorities', in *Methods and Problems in Greek Science* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 398–416. As Lloyd points out, there are obvious weaknesses in Galen's arguments. Many of them are caused by his concern to present himself as a faithful follower of Hippocrates and to trace his own doctrine and medical art back to that ideal.

from sources as varied as eyes, ears, facial expressions, the shape of the head, complexion, hair, individual parts of the body (especially the so-called major parts), the build of the body as a whole, its carriage and movements, the colour and firmness of the flesh, and so on.

A main use of physiognomical signs was diagnostic and is traced back to Pythagoras.²¹ According to Aulus Gellius, he physiognomized the young men that presented themselves for enrolment in his school: he inferred their characters and dispositions, as well as their capacity for learning, by observing their facial features and expressions, and the build and bearing of their bodies (*Noct. Att.* 1.9).

Before its codification by the Peripatetics, the diagnostic importance of physical appearance was emphasized by some Sophists and was very much exploited by thinkers related to the Socratic circle. Some examples are Prodicus' myth which contains the descriptions of Virtue and Vice, and its narration by Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.1.22),²² Plato's and Xenophon's descriptions of Socrates (Plato *Men.* 80a, *Rep.* 313a, *Phaed.* 103a, *Symp.* 215b, *Theaet.* 143e and 209b; Xenophon *Mem.* 3.10.4–5, *Symp.* 4.19), and Plato's and Antisthenes' portraits of Alcibiades. Also, Phaedo's dialogue *Zopyrus* apparently discussed the physiognomical diagnosis of Socrates by Zopyrus, a practitioner of the Periclean age after whom the dialogue is named; and Antisthenes' work *Physiognomikos* probably attacked the physiognomical diagnoses attempted by the Sophists. On the level of philosophical argumentation, Plato's description of the steed-like parts of the soul (*Phdr.* 253d–e) and the hypothesis that souls tainted by particular vices are reincarnated into the particular sorts of animal natures that they have developed during previous lives (*Phd.* 81d–f) establish physiognomical correspondences that anticipate later lists.

As mentioned above, the Peripatetics, and especially Theophrastus, contributed to systematizing the physiognomical signs and defined the so-called human 'types'.²³ Typology turned out to be of primary importance for the ethical interpretation of bodily signs and influenced considerably the uses of iconistic portraiture by the philosophers of the Hellenistic period. It will suffice to mention in that connection Zeno's proficiency in physiognomy and his portrait of the ideal youth (*Clem. Alex. Paedag.* 3.11.74); Cleanthes' espousal of the doctrine that only the wise man can have physical excellence (*Cic. De fin.* 3.75); the references of Posidonius and Seneca to the varieties of human types²⁴ and their attempts to explain it; and the iconographic correspondences that can be observed in the statues of Epicurus and of his followers, which were related to the school's physiognomical theories (*Cic. De nat. deor.* 1.49,

²¹ According to several sources, it was Pythagoras, not Hippocrates, who was the father of Physiognomy.

²² Evans stresses that Xenophon differs from other historians of the fifth and fourth centuries in that in his historical works he uses descriptions of physical appearance for purposes of characterization, while they habitually do not (see Evans, p. 46). Xenophon's emphasis on the characterological significance of iconistic portraiture may be partly due, I suggest, to his awareness of the works of other Socratics as well as to his ethical interests.

²³ Polemo concentrated on their study and probably added some 'types' to the standard Peripatetic lists. See chapters 53–70 of his treatise, comprising studies of the daring man, the timid man, the intellectual, the man close to the end of his life without being ill, and so on.

²⁴ One may recall Seneca's description of the angry man in his treatise *De ira* and the way in which he exploits physiognomical elements for ethical purposes. See the remarkable analysis of Seneca's discussion of anger by W. S. Anderson, 'Anger in Juvenal and Seneca', *University of California Publications in Classical Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), pp. 127–95, and especially pp. 149–73.

D.L. 10.117) and which were arguably crucial to the Epicurean policies of recruitment and propaganda.²⁵

This interaction between philosophers and physiognomists is particularly important for my subject. For at first glance, it appears to make likely the hypotheses that the physiognomists (especially from the fourth century onwards) intended to address philosophical doubts about other minds, perhaps expressed for the first time at about the same period;²⁶ or that somebody other than the physiognomists, e.g. a Stoic, might think that Physiognomy provided a good answer to these doubts. More specifically, one might argue that humoural psychology, combined with the theories of climates and seasons, offers theoretical and scientific ways of explaining mental phenomena in objective, physical terms; and further that the lists of physiognomical signs and their grouping together in complex 'types' are intended to secure cognitive access to the content of mental states through the observation of physical features.

The considerations which I shall present against this hypothesis derive from examining parts of the evidence in which the physiognomists *could* have shown awareness of the philosophical problems concerning other minds but in which, in fact, they *do not*.

First, although the Cyrenaics appear to have described the affections (*pathē*) both in objective and in subjective terms,²⁷ their thesis that the affections are private (*idia*) to the perceiver, incorrigible and incommunicable, indicates that they were primarily concerned with the subjective aspects of the affections rather than with their physical concomitants.²⁸ A similar remark seems to hold for Theodosius: while he associates thought with the occurrence of a movement of the *dianoia*, he does not focus on the physical movement itself, but on the apprehension of it. If so, the arguments undermining belief in the knowledge of other minds hint towards the idea that there is something peculiar about internal states, such as affections and thoughts: no matter what my neighbour does or says about them, I cannot have access to them in the privileged way in which I have access to my own affections or thoughts.

If the physiognomists had addressed that issue, they would have found it necessary, I think, to justify the knowability of subjective states. However, the materials that we have do not seem directed to that kind of argument. Instead, it is taken for granted that subjective or mental states, as much as physical traits, constitute objects of scientific enquiry and can be known, if the right methods of investigation are applied. From a philosophical point of view, then, physiognomical accounts of the knowledge of mental states are subject to a similar type of criticism that modern reductionist accounts of mental states may be: they fail to capture what is considered

²⁵ See B. Frischer's stimulating (although controversial) discussion in *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1982). For the evidential value of statues see also Cameron.

²⁶ The epistemological doctrine of the Cyrenaics was probably developed by Aristippus the Younger, who may have been born around 380–370 B.C. If so, the doubts of the Cyrenaics concerning the knowledge of other minds may be placed towards the middle of the fourth century B.C. Theodosius' argument about other minds was probably formulated much later, after the revival of the Pyrrhonist movement by Aenesidemus in the first century B.C.

²⁷ The sources attest that, according to the Cyrenaics, the *pathē* are related to motions in the flesh or in the soul (Cic. *De fin.* 2.39; Sext. *Emp. P.H.* 1.215; D.L. 2.90). Some authors appear to construe this relation as an identity (D.L. II 86, *Suda* II 553, 4f.). However, there is reliable evidence that the Cyrenaics in fact distinguished between the physical motions associated with the *pathē* and experiences, such as individual feelings of pleasure and pain (D.L. 2.85, Euseb. *Prep. Evang.* 14.18.32).

²⁸ On this point, see Tsouna 1992.

the private and subjective character of mental phenomena, which is precisely what is supposed to make them inaccessible to any person other than oneself.²⁹

Further, the physiognomists never appeal to subjectivity in order to justify errors in diagnosing one's mental disposition. Instead, they explain such mistakes in empirical terms. For example, they point out that the physical signs of character may be misleading;³⁰ some parts of the body (e.g. eyes, forehead, head, and face) provide clear signs while others may not;³¹ within the same category, some signs are clearer than others;³² the selection of bodily and mental characteristics may have been effected inappropriately, and psychic qualities may have been wrongly attached to the corresponding physical types;³³ the physiognomical diagnosis was effected on the basis of a single sign, whereas in fact it should have been based on a combination of signs;³⁴ certain bodily features may have been considered to have characterological significance, while in fact they have none;³⁵ and so on.

Second, the physiognomists often do not seem to recognize the necessities of demonstration from the less evident to the more evident, as these would apply to the problem of other minds; and besides, they occasionally fail to distinguish between physiognomic inferences and lists. For example, in the typological physiognomy of the pseudo-Aristotelian handbook, the features demarcating the disposition of the female sex are grouped together without reference to bodily traits; and after the bodily characteristics of the female type are established, the author remarks that *they too* are obvious—which entails that the *mental* features of the female type are evident as well.

It seems to me that the female sex has a more even disposition than the male, and is more forward and less courageous. Women and female animals that we breed are evidently so; and all shepherds and hunters admit that they are such as we have already described in their natural

²⁹ Some examples of reductionist positions are D. K. Lewis, 'An argument for the identity theory', *Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966), 17–25; J. J. C. Smart, *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (London, 1963); D. M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London, 1968); and D. C. Dennet, *Content and Consciousness* (London, 1968). A forceful argument to the effect that reductionist theories miss what makes mental phenomena unique and uniquely difficult to account for is presented by T. Nagel in his widely influential article 'What it is like to be a bat?', *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), 435–50.

³⁰ Aside from the physiognomical handbooks, such comments also occur in historical and literary writings. On misleading physiognomical signs, see e.g. Suet. *Tib.* 68.3: Augustus points out that Tiberius' arrogant features are a fault of nature, not of mind, and that they belie the reality within. See also the satirists, e.g. Juvenal 2.8–16; 9.1.

³¹ See e.g. ps.-Arist. 814b: generally speaking, clearest are the signs that appear in the most favourable position and that occur in those regions of the body (*topoi*) in which there is greatest evidence of the intelligence (*phronēsis*) of the individual.

³² See e.g. Loxus' views concerning the colours of the eyes: 'Loxus says that three colours of the eyes are best. The first kind of eyes that he mentions are very light blue (*charōpoi*), which, he claims, fall between black eyes and grey eyes. The second kind he identifies as goat-eyes (*aigōpoi*), which, he says, are closer to grey but whiter, and the third kind he identifies as nearly black. He says that greasy eyes are gentle and prone to lust and tears. He proclaims dry eyes to be shameless; and he says that excessively grey eyes lack courage, but are marked by shamelessness' (Anonym. *Physiog.* ch. 81).

³³ See Aristotle's remarks in *An. pr.* 70b and the criticisms in ps.-Arist. 805a–806a.

³⁴ See Adamantius, *Physiogn.* A, ch. 3 (reporting the views of Polemo): 'the combinations of signs make a very big difference to the art. For the majority of the dispositions and thoughts of people are understood from the combination of signs.'

³⁵ See e.g. Aristotle's discussion of the physiognomic clarity of the eyes (*Hist. anim.* 491b) and his remark concerning the hairy ears: although moderately hairy ears are the best for hearing, they carry no physiognomic significance (*Hist. anim.* 492a). These statements anticipate remarks in the physiognomical handbooks from the third century B.C. onwards.

state. Moreover, *this also* [my italics] is obvious, that in each class each female has a smaller head, a narrower face and a more slender neck than the male, as well as a weaker chest and smaller ribs, and that the loins and thighs are more covered with flesh than the males, that the female has knock-knees and spindly calves, neater feet, and the whole shape of the body built for charm rather than for nobility, with less strong sinews and with softer, moister flesh.

(809a–b; based on the Loeb translation)

Third, not only do the physiognomists not appear to have any cognizance of the specific problem of other minds, but the methods of reasoning that they use *are not* the kinds of methods that would be appropriate to employ in response to the sceptics. On the one hand, if the sceptics were willing to admit that mental states could be known inferentially, they would be bound to define mental states always in terms of non-observable entities signified by observable signs. On the other hand, the physiognomists do not always identify what is supposed to be serving as sign as *something physical* and what is supposed to be signified as *something mental*. For example, the writings in which the theory of humours is amalgamated with physiognomical ideas often suggest that both mental and bodily states are signs or manifestations of a physical constitution: we know the particular mixture that obtains in the body of a person by observing either the appearance *or the mental features* of that person, or both.³⁶

Finally, philosophical doubts about other minds seem to concern short-lived mental states. The Cyrenaics described each affection as *monochronos*, short-lived (Athen. *Deipnos*. 12, p. 544a–b Kaibel), on the grounds that the physical movement related to each affection disappears with time (D.L. 2.90). It seems likely that Theodosius too conceived of thoughts as short-lived, since he emphasizes the kinetic nature of the conditions of the *dianoia*. But short-lived mental states may not be relevant to character: a temporary affection of grief may, but need not, indicate that one is prone to melancholy. This last point is brought out by the remark of one of the authors of the Peripatetic handbook, that it is a methodological error to physiognomize by relying entirely on single external characteristics: people may have the same facial expression and yet differ greatly in disposition, and persons who have the same disposition do not always wear the same expression on their faces but may assume expressions habitually characterizing persons with the opposite disposition (ps.-Arist. 805b 1–10).

In contrast with the Cyrenaics and with Theodosius, the physiognomists focus on permanent features of character, such as courage, sensitivity, modesty, orderliness, high spirits, good temper, sensuality, generosity, liberality, and justice. They appear interested in momentary mental conditions only derivatively, when these might indicate permanent or long-term characterological features. In this respect, too, there is a disparity suggesting that the physiognomists did not aim (and could not be taken) to respond to the epistemological doubts about other minds raised by philosophers.

³⁶ The freedom with which physiognomical ideas allow the move from the physical to the mental, and also from the mental to the physical, is well illustrated in areas marked by the influence of physiognomical principles. Take an example from Hellenistic art (which owes much to Physiognomy and to Peripatetic typology). The spectator of a portrait is expected to move from the body to the mind and to read on the external features of a portrait the character of the person depicted. But in creating the portrait, the artist often follows the opposite procedure: the Elder Philostratus attests that a painter who had never seen the beautiful Pantheia but had only read Xenophon's description of her character depicted her 'as from her soul he divined her to be'.

At this point, one may ask why the physiognomists showed a relative indifference to the analysis of short-lived mental states and concentrated on the study of permanent characterological features. The answer lies, I suggest, in the way in which some physiognomists conceived of the overall purpose of their art.

IV

As mentioned above, tradition associates the appearance of Physiognomy with medicine and philosophy, by claiming Hippocrates or Pythagoras as its founder. In so far as it remained part of medical and philosophical doctrines, Physiognomy seems to be an auxiliary art, whose goals are determined in relation to the particular context in which it is used.

For example, several Socratics explored the theme of the satyr-like appearance of Socrates and of his own admission that he was naturally inclined to the vices that Zopyrus diagnosed him to have (Cic. *Tusc. disp.* 4.37.80),³⁷ in order to emphasize the reformatory power of philosophy and to overthrow the physical determinism that physiognomical ideas might seem to imply.³⁸ The early Stoics included proficiency in physiognomical analysis among the characteristics of the sage's wisdom: the anecdote according to which Cleanthes detected somebody's sexual habits from his sneezing (D.L. 7.173) is intended, I think, to convey the wise man's capacity to apprehend the deeper nature of things through signs unrecognized by the layman. And Galen often employs physiognomical ideas for the purposes of medical diagnosis (*Ars med.* 10) and integrates them into the broader context of his own kind of rationalism.

I shall not go further into the variety of applications of physiognomic analysis. I shall only point out that, aside from these particular goals, Physiognomy is often claimed to have a more general purpose and utility. Polemo's analysis of physiognomic signs is prefaced as follows.

Physiognomy is one more discovery of divine men which can benefit in many respects and greatly those who have learnt it. For to those who carry on their outward appearance the beaming signs of treachery, wantonness or malice, one would not entrust any money or valuables, or one's wife or children, nor would one even bestow any friendship whatever upon them. For the physiognomist knows the character and intentions, so to say, of all people, as if by a god-sent and unmistakable prophecy. And so, he chooses only the friendship of people who are good and true, but shuns the wickedness of the evil before experiencing it. This is why it befits the wise to work with all seriousness on the principles of this art.

(Adamantius, *Physiogn.* A ch. 2)

A similar way of thinking is often used to account for the practices of those physiognomists who engaged in metoposcopy and who predicted both people's characters and their future primarily by the shape of their forehead.³⁹ This evidence suggests that the overall purpose of Physiognomy was practical and ethical. It aimed to provide a short cut to ascertaining the dispositions of persons that could make a real difference in one's life; it taught one what to expect of them and of oneself; and

³⁷ This is not the only physiognomical angle from which the bodily features of Socrates have been examined. According to Aristoxenus, a contemporary of Socrates attested that the figure, lips, and voice of Socrates reveal his superb power of persuasion. On this, see Evans, p. 51.

³⁸ This seems to have been the central theme of Phaedo's dialogue *Zopyrus*. See my article on Phaedo in the *Encyclopedia of Classical Philosophy*.

³⁹ On predictions concerning the duration of one's life, see Plin. *Nat.* 11.274. On metoposcopy, see Plin. *Nat.* 35.88.

therefore it could claim that it enabled people to protect themselves better against the turns of fortune.⁴⁰

This perspective explains, at least partly, why the physiognomists would primarily focus on the diagnosis of permanent characterological features rather than on temporary atypical mental states. What can significantly affect us are usually not momentary impulses or thoughts on which better judgement is likely to prevail, but the fundamental character and behaviour of people who enter our lives and who have a claim to our happiness.⁴¹

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust. (*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene iv, 11–14)

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⁴⁰ This is the predominant goal of Physiognomy in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. See C. Camden, 'The mind's construction in the face', *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hardin Craig* (Palo Alto, 1941), pp. 208–20. Camden aptly connects the influence of Physiognomy in that period with the belief of the average Elisabethan in the results of the new learning and with the craving to acquire 'short cuts to the absolute, back-stairs approaches to certainty, get-rich-quick methods of acquiring the truth' about the people that one deals with in everyday life.

⁴¹ My discussion of the Cyrenaic doubts about other minds and of the ways in which they differ from the modern problem of Other Minds owes much to the comments of Myles Burnyeat. I presented earlier versions of this paper at the meetings of the American Philological Association in Atlanta (December 1994) and at the University of Warwick, and I learnt much from the audience's remarks on both occasions. David Blank's suggestions forced me to rethink the arguments in section III of the paper and to give them a tighter focus. Richard McKirahan's comments on the 'philosophical' way of practising Physiognomy and on several Aristotelian passages helped me clarify methodological issues. I should like to warmly thank them all.