



# HERAKLES

— WORLD PREMIERE —

TODMORDEN CHORAL SOCIETY • TODMORDEN ORCHESTRA

SUNDAY APRIL 30<sup>TH</sup> 2017

## The Choice of Hercules

The Story before Dio Chrysostom: First telling .....	2
The Story before Dio Chrysostom: Roman re-tellings .....	3
The Story by Dio Chrysostom .....	4
The Story after Dio Chrysostom .....	6
The Visual Element of the Story.....	6
Why Hercules' Choice?.....	11
Acknowledgements.....	11
Full text of the story in Xenophon's <i>Memorabilia</i> 2.1.1-34.....	11
Full text of the story in Dio Chrysostom's <i>Discourses</i> 10.48-83 .....	13

The popular image of the classical hero Hercules (known to the Greeks as Herakles) is as a quintessentially male super-hero, whose mission is to rid the world of monsters and villains. However, that is only one side of the story. He also has a passive, contemplative incarnation, and stars as the hero in an overtly didactic tale: this is Hercules at the crossroads, faced with a choice between two alternative ways of life, which are embodied by female figures.

The version of Hercules' choice upon which this performance is based is by Dio Chrysostom (c.40CE-c.115CE) and in it the two female figures are Tyranny and Kingship, but in earlier (and other later) versions they are Virtue and Vice, although *Aretē* and *Virtus*, which are the Greek and Roman qualities usually translated as 'Virtue' carry the broader meaning of 'all-round excellence', bringing in physical manliness as well as the moral dimension we expect of Virtue.

### The Story before Dio Chrysostom: First telling

The story of Hercules' Choice is supposed first to have been told by the fifth-century BC sophist Prodikos (fr. 2 DK), who performed his 'speech on Herakles' to very large audiences (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21) and because of his popularity as an entertainer (e.g. Aristophanes *Clouds* 361) it became well-known. It is preserved for us by a re-telling in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.1.21-2) or *Memoirs of Socrates*, where it appears at the end of a conversation in which the philosopher Socrates is debating the matter of education and self-control with Aristippos. The argument goes that self-indulgence in any of these areas saps the strength of mind and body, making one unfit to rule, and it is those who rule who have the better life – therefore one should cultivate self-control and work hard; those who do this not only enjoy life, but are praised and envied by others. Socrates supports his position that 'strenuous application enables us to achieve good and honourable results' (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.20) by appeal to Hesiod (*Works and Days* 287-92) and Epicharmos (fr. 37 DK), then concludes with the Prodikos story. Thus, the story of Hercules' Choice is an example of Socrates' general tendency to encourage his associates 'to practise self-control with regard to food, drink, sex, sleep, heat, cold and physical exertion', in which respects Aristippos was apparently 'rather undisciplined' (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.1).

*They say that when Herakles was setting out from childhood into his prime [i.e. aged 15-16], a time when the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will take the path of virtue (aretē) in life or the path of vice (kakia), he went out to a quiet place and sat not knowing which of the roads to take. There appeared two tall women approaching him, one pretty to look at and of free-born nature, her body adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty, her figure with reserve, and with white clothes. The other was grown into plumpness and softness, her face was made up so that it looked whiter and rosier in appearance than it actually was, her figure so that it looked straighter than it was by nature, and she had wide-open eyes, and clothes, so that her charms would shine right through. Often she looked herself over, and looked to see whether anyone was watching her, and she often took a glance at her own shadow.*

The two women personify Virtue (Aretē) and Vice (Kakia) and each outlines to Herakles a different road he might take in life. The way offered by Vice is suitably appealing (Xen. Mem. 2.1.23-4):

*If you make me your friend, I shall lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road, and you will not miss the taste of a single pleasure, but you will go through life without knowing hardship. In the first place you will not be concerned with wars or responsibilities, but you will always be considering what tasty food or drink you can find, what sight or sound may please you, what scent or touch you may enjoy, which boyfriend's society will gratify you most, how you can sleep most comfortably, and how you can come by all these with the least trouble.*

Whereas the road of Virtue is predictably more like hard work (Xen. Mem. 2.1.27-8):

*I shall not deceive you with a pleasant preamble, but I shall explain the facts truthfully as the gods have ordained them. For the gods grant men nothing of the things that are really good and admirable without effort and application...*

Most of Virtue's speech takes it for granted that the audience will actually agree that the things she says require hard work are desirable (Xen. Mem. 2.1.28):

*If you want the gods to be gracious to you, you must worship the gods; if you wish to be loved by your friends, you must do your friends good deeds; if you desire to be honoured by any state, you must be of assistance to that state; if you expect to be admired for your virtue (aretē) by the whole of Greece, you must strive to benefit Greece; if you want your land to bear abundant crops, you must cultivate your land; if you think you should make money from your flocks, you must take care of your flocks; if you have an impulse to grow great through war, and want to be able to liberate your friends and subdue your enemies, you must learn the actual arts of war from those who understand them and practise how you should apply them. And if you want to be physically able, you must accustom your body to be subject to your mind, and train it with hard work and sweat.*

The rest of the scene is taken up by Virtue's deconstruction of Vice's tempting offers, as all being ultimately empty and self-destructive. Throughout the scene Herakles' only speech is a brief enquiry as to Vice's identity (Xen. Mem. 2.1.26), and we are not given his reaction to either of his interlocutor's speeches. The narrator simply concludes 'such, as Prodikos tells it, was virtue's education of Herakles' (Xen. Mem. 2.1.34) – we are left to assume that Herakles chooses to heed Virtue's lesson and follow the path of *aretē*.

### The Story before Dio Chrysostom: Roman re-tellings

The moral of the story, if not its more picturesque details, clearly appealed to Cicero, who cites Xenophon's version specifically in *De Officiis (On Duties)* 1.118, in the course of advising his son on career choices.

Silius Italicus (*Punica* 15.18-128) casts the young Scipio as Hercules, faced with the choice between Virtue (*Virtus*) and the specific vice of Pleasure (*Voluptas*).

## The Story by Dio Chrysostom

Dio Chrysostom wrote four of his *Discourses* on the topic of kingship, the first of these (*Discourse* 10) was first delivered before Trajan in Rome, immediately after Trajan became Emperor in January 98CE. (For the dating and how the *Discourses* may have played to Trajan himself, see J.L. Moles, 1990, 'The Kingship Orations of Dio Chrysostom', *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar* 6, 297-375) Dio's idea of the nature of the true king is influenced by Homer and Plato: his true king fears the gods and watches over his subjects even as Zeus/Jupiter, the supreme god, watches over all mankind. Dio concludes his arguments (10.48-83) by substituting a description of the Choice of Hercules for a discussion of Zeus and the nature of the universe (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.49):

*But if you would like to hear a myth, or rather a sacred and withal edifying parable told under the guise of a myth, perhaps a story which I once heard an old woman of Elis or Arcadia relate about Herakles will not appear to you out of place, either now or hereafter when you come to ponder it alone.*

By framing it as a story told to him during his wanderings in exile, Dio is able to overtly state the moral the tale is meant to carry, which is clearly intended for the Emperor. As Trajan is about to embark upon a reign, the hope must be that he will not only choose to emulate Hercules by choosing Kingship over Tyranny, potentially following in the footsteps of the previous Emperor, Nerva, rather than reverting to the type of autocratic rule seen under Domitian, but also in restraining impulses towards violence.

In order to increase the weight of the tale and its appeal as an exemplar for emulation, Dio firstly has the tale told by 'an old woman of Elis or Arcadia', who is also a seer (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.54) who makes true prophecies, including the prophecy that Dio will 'meet a mighty man, the ruler of very many lands and peoples' to whom he should not hesitate to retell the story (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.55) because 'the words of men and all their subtleties are as naught in comparison with the inspiration and speech due to the promptings of the gods' (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.57).

Dio lends the meeting further veracity by having it take place in a clear geographical location: in the Peloponnese, between Herea and Pisa, at a grove sacred to Herakles, where Herakles is worshipped (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.51-4) and by having the old woman reveal, alongside commonly held truths about Herakles (his parentage and attire, which is mentioned as supporting evidence for his disdain for wealth and generosity to others, Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.59 and 61-2), little-known truths about Herakles, for example (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.59-61, for a further example, see 63):

*Most people do not know that Herakles was continually absent from Argos because he was engaged in making expeditions and defending his kingdom, instead they assert that Eurystheus was king at this time. These, however, are but their idle tales. And Herakles was not only king of Greece, but also held empire over every land from the rising to the setting sun, aye, over all peoples where there are found shrines of Herakles.*

Having introduced the topic of Herakles' education, Dio's old woman then presents Herakles' youth with Zeus as a caring father, 'implanting in [Herakles] noble impulses and bringing him into the fellowship of good men' (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.64) and stepping in when (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.65-66):

*...he saw that the lad wished to be a ruler, not through desire for pleasure and personal gain, which leads most men to love power, but so that he might be able to do the greatest good to the greatest number. He*

*recognized that his son was naturally of noble parts, and yet suspected how much in him was mortal and thought of the many baneful examples of luxurious and licentious living among mankind, and of the many men there were to entice a youth of fine natural qualities away from his true nature and his principles even against his will.*

This concern leads Zeus to send Hermes to Thebes in order for Herakles to be exposed to the different forms of rule, Kingship and Tyranny, which are built into the landscape as the higher, sunlit, and lower, cloud-masked, peaks of a mountain (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.66-68). On arrival, Herakles wants to explore within the peaks and is taken first – by an easy path, as he has Zeus’ goodwill – to meet Zeus’ daughter, Kingship. She is seated on a throne, dressed in white and presides over the produce of the earth: fruits, animals, and metals (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.70-72). She is flanked by the beautiful female personifications of Justice, Civic Order and Peace and a grey-haired male, who is named Law but personifies Right Reason, Good Counsel and Good Judgement (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.75), a clear indication of the virtues it is necessary to cultivate and maintain on choosing to emulate Kingship.

While Herakles is, understandably, impressed, as they stand at the entrance to Tyranny Hermes insists that he should meet ‘the other woman’ (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.76):

*‘It is with her that the majority of men are infatuated and to win her they give themselves much trouble of every kind, committing murder, wretches that they are, son often conspiring against father, father against son, and brother against brother, since they covet and count as felicity that which is the greatest evil — power conjoined with folly.’*

There are many paths that lead to Tyranny, a visible one on the edge of a precipice and many hidden tunnels, blood-smeared and corpse-filled; it is the former, specifically as an observer, along which Herakles is taken (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 10.77). The difficulty of the path indicates not that Tyranny is worth striving for, but rather that the determination and effort required to survive travelling it is thought necessary to deter rulers from its pursuit; Tyranny cannot be easily slipped into but instead requires either concentrated effort or the secretive and murderous acts hidden in the tunnels.

Tyranny is found seated on a raised throne, explicitly imitating Kingship, but in an overly ostentatious manner: her throne is not just carved but also inlaid with coloured materials. That this imitation is unsuccessful is emphasised because the throne ‘was not secure upon its foundation nor firmly settled, but shook and slouched upon its legs’ (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.78). Tyranny’s attempt to imitate Kingship through her demeanour is similarly unsuccessful, Kingship’s friendly smile becomes a leer of false humility, her dignity becomes an ugly, forbidding, scowl, her pride becomes disdain, with the result that Tyranny alienates her visitors (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.80). Her attendant court also contrasts with Kingship’s, the role of Cruelty, Lawlessness, Faction and Flattery is not to advise, but to corrupt (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.82).

The sights described are obviously deemed sufficient evidence upon which to make a judgement between the two options because neither Kingship nor Tyranny speaks to put their case to Herakles. This adds to the plausibility of the story because neither Kingship nor Tyranny, as abstracts, would speak to mortals, but they would show their trappings. When Herakles has seen both courts, Hermes asks him to make a choice (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.83):

*Hermes asked him which of the two scenes pleased him and which of the two women.*

So, in this story, we are presented with a clear choice from Herakles, which he puts in terms of actions (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.83):

*‘Why, it is the other one,’ said he, ‘whom I admire and love, and she seems to me a veritable goddess, enviable and worthy to be accounted blest; this second woman, on the other hand, I consider so utterly odious and abominable that I would gladly thrust her down from this peak and thus put an end to her.’*

This decision is commended by Hermes, who passes it on to Zeus, who endorses it (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.83):

*...[Zeus] entrusted him with the kingship over all mankind as he considered him equal to the trust.*

Hence, Zeus does not impose his will on Herakles, but Herakles' choice ensures that Zeus' will – that mankind be ruled over by kings rather than tyrants. This is emphasised when Dio Chrysostom concludes his telling of the story by presenting Herakles as a slayer of both Greek and barbarian tyrants and has his old woman interpret this action even more broadly (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.83):

*This, she maintained, was what made him Deliverer of the earth and of the human race, not the fact that he defended them from the savage beasts — for how little damage could a lion or a wild bear inflict? — nay, it was the fact that he chastised savage and wicked men, and crushed and destroyed the power of overweening tyrants.*

The conclusion, however, is Dio Chrysostom's own voice (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.83):

*And even to this day Herakles continues this work and you have in him a helper and protector of your government as long as it is vouchsafed you to reign.*

Hence, 'Herakles alone controls the moral decision he faces, he is active in intention and deed. Throughout his life he demonstrates his sincerity in the principle he voices' (J. Long, 2006, "Kill all the dogs!" or "Apollonius Says!": Two Stories against Putative Violence' in H. A. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, 225-40: 227).

## The Story after Dio Chrysostom

Lucian takes up the structure of the Choice story rather than its moral content, in what purports to be an autobiographical reminiscence, *The Dream, or Lucian's Life* (6-9), set c. AD 135. In his youth, he tells us, he was contemplating becoming a sculptor, but he had a dream in which two women appeared to him, each trying to win him over to her side by speeches. The women this time are not Vice and Virtue but Sculpture and Education.

In an ethical context similar to Cicero's citation, the Prodikos story appears in an essay by St Basil, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, addressed to his young nephews on the possible moral value to be extracted from pagan literature (*On the value of Greek Literature* 5.55-77):

*And indeed the sophist from Keos somewhere in his writings taught philosophy concerning virtue and vice just like these men... When Herakles was quite a young man and close to being in his very prime, as you are now, as he was deliberating which road to turn his steps to, the one leading through toil towards virtue, or the much easier path, two women approached him, and these were Virtue and Vice...*

## The Visual Element of the Story

The visual element is very much emphasised in Xenophon's version of the story. The scene has a physical setting, at a deserted crossroads, as a kind of 'visual aid' to the metaphorical crossroads in life at which Herakles finds himself. The visual representation of choice is elaborated upon because rather than a single advisor outlining the alternatives two personifications are introduced. Virtue and Vice are represented as women because the nouns they personify are grammatically feminine, but the elaboration of their appearance owes much to social conventions about 'good' and 'bad' women. Virtue is 'good-looking', but her prettiness is natural, her whole body expressive of 'purity', 'modesty' and 'reserve', virtues of the citizen wife, all set off by her 'white clothes'. Vice, on the other hand, is described in terms one would expect to be applied to the *hetaira* [courtesan] – her face is made up and her figure made 'straighter than it was by nature', while her clothes reveal rather than cover a body which shows signs of an over-indulgent lifestyle.

Though it is not explicitly stated that Vice is beautiful, it is to be assumed that her appearance is superficially attractive, to reflect the superficial attractions of the way of life she offers.

Silius Italicus' figures are close to their models in appearance, Virtue again modest and dressed in white, Pleasure smelling of Persian perfume and attired in extravagant Tyrian purple and gold (*Punica* 15.23-31). By contrast, St Basil describes vice as 'withered up', 'squalid' and 'severe' to look at (*On the Value of Greek Literature* 5.71-2).

Dio Chrysostom's retelling recognises the visual aspect of the story and goes to considerable lengths to describe not just the personifications but their setting and the landscape itself.

His description of the figures associates Kingship with Virtue not only through her white robe but through the court of personified virtues attendant upon her. That such virtues lead to prosperity is made concrete through the fruits of the earth and animals by which Kingship is surrounded (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.70-75). More details of Kingship's appearance are provided during the description of Tyranny in order to differentiate the two through contrast (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.78-81):

*When they entered, they discovered Tyranny seated aloft, of set purpose counterfeiting and making herself like to Royalty, but, as she imagined, on a far loftier and more splendid throne, since it was not only adorned with innumerable carvings, but embellished besides with inlaid patterns of gold, ivory, amber, ebony, and substances of every colour. Her throne, however, was not secure upon its foundation nor firmly settled, but shook and slouched upon its legs. And in general things were in disorder, everything suggesting vainglory, ostentation, and luxury — many sceptres, many tiaras and diadems for the head. Furthermore, in her zeal to imitate the character of the other woman, instead of the friendly smile Tyranny wore a leer of false humility, and instead of a glance of dignity she had an ugly and forbidding scowl. But in order to assume the appearance of pride, she would not glance at those whom came into her presence but looked over their heads disdainfully. And so everybody hated her, and she herself ignored everybody. She was unable to sit with composure, but would cast her eyes incessantly in every direction, frequently springing up from her throne. She hugged her gold to her bosom in a disgusting manner and then in terror would fling it from her in a heap, then she would forthwith snatch at whatever any passer-by might have, were it never so little. Her raiment was of many colours, purple, scarlet and saffron, with patches of white, too, showing here and there from her skirts, since her cloak was torn in many places. From her countenance glowed all manners of colours according to whether she felt terror or anguish or suspicion or anger; while at one moment she seemed prostrate with grief, at another she appeared to be in an exaltation of joy. At one time a quite wanton smile would come over her face, but at the next moment she would be in tears.*

Like previous examples of Vice, Tyranny, has an expensive but torn colourful cloak dyed with purple, scarlet and saffron which overlays a white robe, similar to that of Kingship's (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 10.81); the colours purple and scarlet are associated with the Emperor and saffron with bridal veils. However, Dio Chrysostom's Tyranny is further surrounded by the trappings of wealth, which are displayed ostentatiously, and give a strong impression of the 'dowry' with which she comes. His Tyranny also continues to be superficially attractive, but rather than using foundation garments and make-up to imitate health, she goes further in her imitation, seeking to impersonate Kingship. However, this impersonation is only superficially successful, Tyranny clearly lacks Kingship's underlying stability. This theme of superficial imitation is extended to Tyranny's court, especially its final member, Flattery (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.82):

*There was also a throng of women about her, but they resembled in no respect those whom I have described as in attendance upon Royalty. These were Cruelty, Insolence, Lawlessness, and Faction, all of whom were bent upon corrupting her and bringing her to ignoble ruin. And instead of Friendship, Flattery*

*was there, servile and avaricious and no less ready for treachery than any of the others, nay rather, zealous above all things to destroy.*

Dio Chrysostom's setting is similarly detailed. Rather than a crossroads symbolising a choice to be made, he has two divergent paths in a very real landscape leading to the two personifications. Kingship and Tyranny exist within a real world and are also built into the landscape as the higher, sunlit, and lower, cloud-masked, peaks of what is, at its base, a single mountain symbolising Rule (Dio Chrs. *Or.* 10.66-68):

*Then, taking [Herakles] in charge, [Hermes] led him over a secret path untrodden of man till he came to a conspicuous and very lofty mountain-peak whose sides were dreadfully steep with sheer precipices and with the deep gorge of a river that encompassed it, whence issued a mighty rumbling and roaring. Now to anyone looking up from below the crest above seemed single; but it was in fact double, rising from a single base; and the two peaks were far indeed from each other. The one of them bore the name Peak Royal and was sacred to Zeus the King; the other, Peak Tyrannous, was named after the giant Typhon. There were two approaches to them from without, each having one. The path that led to Peak Royal was safe and broad, so that a person mounted on a chariot might enter thereby without peril or mishap, if he had the permission of the greatest of the gods. The other was narrow, crooked, and difficult, so that most of those who attempted it were lost over the cliffs and in the flood below, the reason being, I think, that they transgressed justice in taking that path. Now, as I have said, to most persons the two peaks appear to be practically one and undivided, inasmuch as they see them from a distance; but in fact Peak Royal towers so high above the other that it stands above the clouds in the pure and serene ether itself, whereas the other is much lower, lying in the very thick of the clouds, wrapped in darkness and fog.*

The expectation from previous retellings of the story is that the path to Kingship, as the virtue worth attaining, should be difficult, but it is not. It has been suggested that this reversal of the usual motif is because the addressee, Trajan, has been constitutionally set in place (e.g. S. Swain, 2000, *Dio Chrysostom: Politics, Letters, and Philosophy*, 151 during a discussion of storytelling in Dio Chrysostom). This suggestion is supported by the fact that Herakles travels from Kingship to Tyranny, which is possible because the second path, towards Tyranny, along the edge of the precipice is, however, is not the only path to Tyranny and this path too is described in visual terms (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 10.77):

*[Hermes] then began by showing Herakles the nature of the entrance, explaining that whereas only one pathway appeared to view, that being about as described above — perilous and skirting the very edge of the precipice — yet there were many unseen and hidden corridors, and that the entire region was undermined on every side and tunnelled, no doubt up to the very throne, and that all the passages and bypaths were smeared with blood and strewn with corpses. Through none, however, of these passages did Hermes lead him, but along the outside one that was less befouled, because, I think, Herakles was to be a mere observer.*

The visual element of the story as embodied in the central element of the contrast between the two female personifications embodying a choice comes to be seen as a key component of the 'Herakles *topos*', as discussed with reference to further examples, including in Christian authors and the Jewish tradition, by Barbara R. Rossing, 2005, 'City Visions, Feminine Figures, and Economic Critique: A Sapiential *Topos* in the Apocalypse' in L.M. Wills and B. G. Wright (eds.), *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, 181-196: 183-85.

The figure faced with the choice in all these scenes, however, is scarcely described at all. Xenophon's Herakles and Cicero's and St Basil's Hercules are all simply represented as being on the point of attaining manhood. For in Xenophon this suggests the physical appearance of an *ephebe*, a guise in which Herakles does occasionally appear in Greek art (see, e.g. *Figs.* 1 and 2, below), although he is more often depicted as

a bearded mature man. Silius Italicus' Scipio and Lucian's former self are likewise merely described in terms of their youth. Dio Chrysostom's Herakles is similarly described, in terms of his youth and ambition, other than that the reader is left to imagine him. The lack of any extended physical description of the hero in each case rather helps to subordinate his individuality, allowing the reader or listener to view the scene through his eyes and generalising the didactic impact of the message.



Figure 1 (left): Herakles (centre) in the Garden of the Hesperides; Attic red-figure hydria by the Meidias Painter, London E224, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum. Figure 2 (right): Zeus (top left) and Herakles (far right) watch as a statue of Herakles is painted; Apulian red-figure column-krater, Group of Boston 00.348, New York 50.11.4 (Rogers Fund, 1950). © New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, full image at <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/50.11.4/>

Despite the visual potential of the scene, we know of no representations of Hercules' Choice in the visual arts of Greece and Rome. It did, however, become a popular theme for paintings and engravings in the Renaissance and beyond, as amply documented in E. Panofsky, 1930, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg* 18, Leipzig and the renaissance of 'Hercules Prodicus' ('Prodikos' Hercules) is discussed briefly by G. K. Galinsky, 1972, *The Herakles Theme: the adaptations of the hero in literature from Homer to the twentieth century*, Oxford: 198-201 and 213-14.

The many variations in these post-Classical versions highlight the issue of how the two personifications can be characterised by their appearance. In Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Hercules at the Crossroads* (c. 1500), for example, Virtue is dressed (albeit scantily) and has her hair decently arranged and covered in a veil, whereas Vice is completely naked and dishevelled, looking out of the picture with a most immodest gaze straight at the viewer, see Fig. 3. Virtue bears comparison with the title figure of Cranach's *Charity*, Vice with his many provocative-eyed Aphrodites (see, Panofsky, 1930, 83-103, pl. 27; M. J. Friedländer and J. Rosenberg, 1978, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, London, nos. 408, 405 (Charity) and, e.g., 24-8 (Aphrodite)).

In Dürer's more or less contemporary engraving, *Der Hercules* (Fig.4), the contemplative mood has vanished – theoretical dispute between the two personifications has turned into an actual fight, drawing on the contest tradition as developed by Prudentius. Virtue, fully clothed, her head modestly covered, wields a sword against a suitably naked and voluptuous Vice, caught in an act of debauchery with a satyr (see, Panofsky 1930, 166-73 and 181-6, pl. 69; W. L. Strauss, 1976, *The Intaglio Prints of Albrecht Dürer: engravings, etchings and dry-points*, New York: 77-80, no. 24).



Figure 3 (left): Hercules between Virtue and Vice on a panel from Lucas Cranach's workshop from the late 1530s, sold at Sotheby's London, 17 December 1998, lot 15. Image from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2014/old-master-british-paintings-evening-114036/lot.13.html>. Figure 4 (centre): Hercules at the crossroads by Albrecht Dürer, c.1498. Image courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/8503/>.

The contrast between the two figures is developed further in the seventeenth century as Virtue assumes Athene's armour, its hard surfaces contrasting magnificently with the voluptuous naked flesh of Rubens' *Choice of Hercules* (see, Panofsky, 1930, 113-14, pl. 33, and cf. Battoni's version, pl. 55. On the influence of Athene's image on representation of the virtues, see M. Warner, 1985, *Monuments and Maidens: the allegory of the female form*, London: 81-100).



Choice of Hercules by Rubens (or perhaps Jan van den Hoecke), c.1635, Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Image from <http://muddycolors.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/rubens-giant.html>

For more images of this story, including the one by Paolo di Matteis (1712) at Temple Newsam, please access the podcast by Emma Stafford on the Hercules Project website (<http://herculesproject.leeds.ac.uk/resources/art/#Choice>) or look at our Pinterest board, <https://uk.pinterest.com/herculesstaffor/choice-of-hercules/>.

## Why Hercules' Choice?

The story of Hercules' Choice became a popular theme in later literature and art, but the questions remains as to why this uplifting moral tale is centred on his character. Many of the stories about him with which we are familiar hardly portray him as a paragon of self-control – indeed, Vice's attractive offer of non-stop indulgence in food, drink and sex immediately calls to mind Herakles' standard portrayal on the Athenian comic stage as a drunken gluttonous libertine. (For a survey of satyr-play and comedy, see Galinsky 1972, 81-100). One explanation sees Herakles functioning here as a kind of 'everyman' – despite his extraordinary qualities, Virtue begins her address to him 'I know your parents...', cutting him down to mortal size (e.g., M. Fox, 1998, 'The constrained man', in L. Foxhall, and J. Salmon, (eds.) *Thinking Men: masculinity and its self-representation in the classical tradition*, London and New York, 6-22: 14-15; Galinsky 1972, 254 and cf. 102-3). Thus, Prodikos' Herakles is part of a tradition in which Herakles is an ideal exemplar rather than an individual character (Galinsky 1972, 101-3 and 296):

*Prodikos chose Herakles as the protagonist not out of any particular concern for Herakles, but because Herakles was the most suitable mythological personification of the point Prodicus wished to make, i.e. man's progress from physis [nature] to nomos [law] by means of voluntary deliberation.*

We can presume that Dio Chrysostom did the same, but in his case we are in a position to judge the effect of choosing Hercules as an everyman *exemplum virtutis* on his intended audience. During his reign Trajan went to considerable trouble to associate himself with Hercules through literature, statues and coins. He is not the only Roman emperor to do this, although Nero earlier and Commodus later are more popularly recognised as Hercules, the most recent before him being Domitian, whose type of rule Dio Chrysostom was trying to persuade Trajan against, seemingly with great success as Trajan chooses Hercules as his supporter in his iconography. Trajan's Hercules imagery is focused on presenting a strong warrior and philosophical ruler, using Hercules as a paradigm for a proven general who had come to the throne. Pliny's *Panegyric* (14.5) notably backdates Trajan's association with Hercules to Domitian's reign, recasting Trajan as the Labouring Hercules under Domitian's Eurystheus, rendering Domitian a false Hercules and an evil tyrant in one masterful stroke. (For a full discussion of Trajan's use of Hercules, see O. Hekster, 2005, 'Propagating Power: Hercules as an Example for Second-Century Emperors' in L. Rawlings and H. Bowden, *Herakles and Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, 205-22: Trajan, 205-207 and 209-10.)

## Acknowledgements

The above, except for the sections on Dio Chrysostom's version, is lightly adapted from E. J. Stafford, 2005, 'Vice or Virtue? Herakles and the art of allegory' in L. Rawlings and H. Bowden (eds.), *Herakles and Hercules: exploring a Graeco-Roman divinity*, Swansea: 71-96: 71-76. For more on Herakles, in antiquity and in more recent incarnations, see Emma Stafford, 2012, *Herakles*, in the series *Gods and Heroes in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge).

This leaflet is intended for educational use, and was designed for Todmorden Choral Society and Orchestra, and other performers as part of their preparation to sing the new musical drama *Herakles*, which is based on this story and is composed by Tim Benjamin. See, <http://herculesproject.leeds.ac.uk/musical-drama/>

## Full text of the story in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2.1.1-34

From the Loeb Classical Library translated by Carlson L. Brownson (Xenophon, Volume 4: *Memorabilia* and *Oeconomicus*, *Symposium* and *Apology*, published 1918, by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA), courtesy of the Internet archive, with some modifications, <https://archive.org/details/xenophon04xeno>:

"Yes, and Prodikos the wise expresses himself to the like effect concerning Virtue in the essay 'On Herakles' that he recites to throngs of listeners. This, so far as I remember, is how he puts it:

"When Herakles was passing from boyhood to youth's estate, wherein the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will approach life by the path of virtue or the path of vice, he went out into a quiet place, and sat pondering which road to take. And there appeared two women of great stature making towards him. The one was fair to see and of high bearing; and her limbs were adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty; sober was her figure, and her robe was white. The other was plump and soft, with high feeding. Her face was made up to heighten its natural white and pink, her figure to exaggerate her height. Open-eyed was she; and dressed so as to disclose all her charms. Now she eyed herself; anon looked whether any noticed her; and often stole a glance at her own shadow.

"When they drew nigh to Herakles, the first pursued the even tenor of her way: but the other, all eager to outdo her, ran to meet him, crying: 'Herakles, I see that you are in doubt which path to take towards life. Make me your friend; follow me, and I will lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road. You shall taste all the sweets of life; and hardship you shall never know. First, of wars and worries you shall not think, but shall ever be considering what choice food or drink you can find, what sight or sound will delight you, what touch or perfume; what tender love can give you most joy, what bed the softest slumbers; and how to come by all these pleasures with least trouble. And should there arise misgiving that lack of means may stint your enjoyments, never fear that I may lead you into winning them by toil and anguish of body and soul. Nay; you shall have the fruits of others' toil, and refrain from nothing that can bring you gain. For to my companions I give authority to pluck advantage where they will.'

"Now when Herakles heard this, he asked, 'Lady, pray what is your name?'

'My friends call me Happiness,' she said, 'but among those that hate me I am nicknamed Vice.'

"Meantime the other had drawn near, and she said: 'I, too, am come to you, Herakles: I know your parents and I have taken note of your character during the time of your education. Therefore, I hope that, if you take the road that leads to me, you will turn out a right good doer of high and noble deeds, and I shall be yet more highly honoured and more illustrious for the blessings I bestow. But I will not deceive you by a pleasant prelude: I will rather tell you truly the things that are, as the gods have ordained them. For of all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort. If you want the favour of the gods, you must worship the gods: if you desire the love of friends, you must do good to your friends: if you covet honour from a city, you must aid that city: if you are fain to win the admiration of all Greece for virtue, you must strive to do good to Greece: if you want land to yield you fruits in abundance, you must cultivate that land: if you are resolved to get wealth from flocks, you must care for those flocks: if you essay to grow great through war and want power to liberate your friends and subdue your foes, you must learn the arts of war from those who know them and must practise their right use: and if you want your body to be strong, you must accustom your body to be the servant of your mind, and train it with toil and sweat.'

"And Vice, as Prodikos tells, answered and said: 'Herakles, mark you how hard and long is that road to joy, of which this woman tells? But I will lead you by a short and easy road to happiness.'

"And Virtue said: 'What good thing is yours, poor wretch, or what pleasant thing do you know, if you will do nothing to win them? You do not even tarry for the desire of pleasant things, but fill yourself with all things before you desire them, eating before you art hungry, drinking before you art thirsty, getting yourself cooks, to give zest to eating, buying yourself costly wines and running to and fro in search of snow in summer, to give zest to drinking; to soothe your slumbers it is not enough for you to buy soft coverlets, but you must have frames for your beds. For not toil, but the tedium of having nothing to do, makes you long for sleep. You rouse lust by many a trick, when there is no need,

using men as women: thus you train your friends, waxing wanton by night, consuming in sleep the best hours of day. You are Immortal, yet the outcast of the gods, the scorn of good men.

Praise, sweetest of all things to hear, you do not hear: the sweetest of all sights you do not behold not, for never yet have you beheld a good work that you have wrought. Who will believe what say? Who will grant what you ask? Or what sane man will dare join your throng? While your votaries are young their bodies are weak, when they wax old, their souls are without sense; idle and sleek they thrive in youth, withered and weary they journey through old age, and their past deeds bring them shame, their present deeds distress. Pleasure they ran through in their youth: hardship they laid up for their old age. But I company with gods and good men, and no fair deed of god or man is done without my aid. I am first in honour among the gods and among men that are akin to me: to crafts-men a beloved fellow-worker, to masters a faithful guardian of the house, to servants a kindly protector: good helpmate in the toils of peace, staunch ally in the deeds of war, best partner in friendship. To my friends meat and drink bring sweet and simple enjoyment because they wait till they crave them. And a sweeter sleep falls on them than on idle folk: they are not vexed at awaking from it, nor for its sake do they neglect to do their duties. The young rejoice to win the praise of the old; the elders are glad to be honoured by the young; with joy they recall their deeds past, and their present well-doing is joy to them, for through me they are dear to the gods, lovely to friends, precious to their native land.

And when comes the appointed end, they lie not forgotten and dishonoured, but live on, sung and remembered for all time. O Herakles, son of goodly parents, if you will labour earnestly in this way, you may have for your own the most blessed happiness.'

"Such, in outline, is Prodikos' story of the training of Herakles by Virtue; only he has clothed the thoughts in even finer phrases than I have done now. But anyhow, Aristippus, it were well that you should think on these things and try to show some regard for the life that lies before you."

### Full text of the story in Dio Chrysostom's *Discourses* 10.48-83

From the Loeb Classical Library translated by J. W. Cohoon (Dio Chrysostom, Volume 1: *Discourses 1-11*, published 1932, by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA), courtesy of Lacus Curtius, with some modifications, [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio\\_Chrysostom/Discourses/1\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/1*.html):

For my part, I should be most happy and eager, as I have said, to speak on this subject — on Zeus and the nature of the universe. But since it is altogether too vast a theme for the time now at my command and requires a somewhat careful demonstration, perhaps in the future there may be leisure for its presentation. But if you would like to hear a myth, or rather a sacred and withal edifying parable told under the guise of a myth, perhaps a story which I once heard an old woman of Elis or Arcadia relate about Herakles will not appear to you out of place, either now or hereafter when you come to ponder it alone.

Once when I chanced to be wandering in exile — and great is my gratitude to the gods that they thus prevented my becoming an eye-witness of many an act of injustice — I visited as many lands as possible, at one time going among the Greeks, at another among barbarians, assuming the guise and dress of a vagabond beggar, "Demanding crusts, not fine cauldrons or swords."

At last, I arrived in the Peloponnese, and keeping quite aloof from the cities, spent my time in the country, as being quite well worth study, mingling with herdsmen and hunters, an honest folk of simple habits. As I walked along the Alpheus on my way from Heraea to Pisa, I succeeded in finding the road for some distance, but all at once I got into some woodland and rough country, where a number of trails led to sundry herds and flocks, without meeting anybody or being able to inquire my way. So I lost my direction, and at high noon was quite astray. But noticing on a high knoll a clump of oaks that looked like a sacred grove, I made my way thither in the hope of discovering from it some roadway or house. There I found blocks of stone set roughly together, hanging pelts of animals that had been sacrificed, and a number of clubs and staves — all evidently being dedications of herdsmen. At a little distance I saw a woman sitting, strong and tall though rather advanced in years, dressed like a rustic and with some braids of grey hair falling about her shoulders. Of her I made full inquiry about the place, and she most graciously and kindly, speaking in

the Dorian dialect, informed me that it was sacred to Herakles and, regarding herself, that she had a son, a shepherd, whose sheep she often tendered herself. She also said that the Mother of the Gods had given her the gift of divination and that all the herdsmen and farmers around about consulted her on the raising and preservation of their crops and cattle. "And you too," she continued, "have come into this place by no mere human chance, for I shall not let you depart unblest." Thereupon she at once began to prophesy, saying that the period of my wandering and tribulation would not be long, nay, nor that of mankind at large. p3156 The manner of her prophesying was not that of most men and women who are said to be inspired; she did not gasp for breath, whirl her head about, or try to terrify with her glances, but spoke with entire self-control and moderation.

"One day," she said, "you will meet a mighty man, the ruler of very many lands and peoples. Do not hesitate to tell him this tale of mine even if there be those who will ridicule you for a prating vagabond. For the words of men and all their subtleties are as naught in comparison with the inspiration and speech due to the promptings of the gods. Indeed, of all the words of wisdom and truth current among men about the gods and the universe, none have ever found lodgement in the souls of men except by the will and ordering of heaven and through the lips of the prophets and holy men of old. For instance, they say there once lived in Thrace a certain Orpheus, a Muse's son; and on a certain mountain of Boeotia another, a shepherd who heard the voices of the Muses themselves. Those teachers, on the other hand, who without divine possession and inspiration have circulated as true stories born of their own imaginings are presumptuous and wicked.

"Hear, therefore, the following tale and listen with vigilance and attention that you may remember it clearly and pass it on to that man whom I say you will meet. It has to do with this god in whose presence we now are. Herakles was, as all men agree, the son of Zeus and Alkmene, and he was king not only of Argos but of all Greece. (Most people, however, do not know that Herakles was continually absent from Argos because he was engaged in making expeditions and defending his kingdom, but they assert that Eurystheus was king at this time. These, however, are but their idle tales.) And he was not only king of Greece, but also held empire over every land from the rising of the sun to the setting thereof, aye, over all peoples where are found shrines of Herakles. He had a simple education too, with none of the elaboration and superfluity devised by the unscrupulous cleverness of contemptible men.

"This, also, is told of Herakles: that he went unclothed and unarmed except for a lion's skin and a club, and they add that he did not set great store by gold or silver or fine raiment, but considered all such things worth nothing save to be given away and bestowed upon others. At any rate he made presents to many men, not only of money without limit and lands and herds of horses and cattle, but also of whole kingdoms and cities. For he fully believed that everything belonged to him exclusively and that gifts bestowed would call out the good-will of the recipients. Another story which men tell is untrue: that he actually went about alone without an army. For it is not possible to overturn cities, cast down tyrants, and to dictate to the whole world without armed forces. It is only because, being self-reliant, zealous of soul, and competent in body, he surpassed all men in labour, that the story arose that he travelled alone and accomplished single-handed whatsoever he desired.

"Moreover, his father took great pains with him, implanting in him noble impulses and bringing him into the fellowship of good men. He would also give him guidance for each and every enterprise through birds and burnt offerings and every other kind of divination. And when he saw that the lad wished to be a ruler, not through desire for pleasure and personal gain, which leads most men to love power, but that he might be able to do the greatest good to the greatest number, he recognized that his son was naturally of noble parts, and yet suspected how much in him was mortal and thought of the many baneful examples of luxurious and licentious living among mankind, and of the many men there were to entice a youth of fine natural qualities away from his true nature and his principles even against his will. So with these considerations in mind he despatched Hermes after instructing him as to what he should do. Hermes therefore came to Thebes, where the lad Herakles was being reared, and told him who he was and who had sent him. Then, taking him in charge, he led him over a secret path untrudged of man till he came to a conspicuous and very lofty mountain-peak whose sides were dreadfully steep with sheer precipices and with the deep gorge of a river that encompassed it, whence issued a mighty rumbling and roaring. Now to anyone looking up from below the crest above seemed single; but it was in fact double, rising from a single base; and the two peaks were far indeed from each other. The one of them bore the name Peak Royal and was sacred to Zeus the King; the other, Peak Tyrannous, was named after the giant Typhon. There were two approaches to them from without, each having one. The path that led to Peak Royal was safe and broad, so that a person mounted on a car might enter thereby without peril or mishap, if he had the permission of the greatest of the gods. The other was narrow, crooked, and difficult, so that most of those who attempted it were lost over the cliffs and in the flood below, the reason

being, methinks, that they transgressed justice in taking that path. Now, as I have said, to most persons the two peaks appear to be practically one and undivided, inasmuch as they see them from a distance; but in fact Peak Royal towers so high above the other that it stands above the clouds in the pure and serene ether itself, whereas the other is much lower, lying in the very thick of the clouds, wrapped in darkness and fog.

"Hermes then explained the nature of the place to Herakles as he led him thither. But when Herakles, ambitious youth that he was, longed to see what was within, he said, 'Follow, then, that you may see with your own eyes the difference in all other respects also, things hidden from the foolish.' He therefore took him first to the loftier peak and showed him a woman seated upon a resplendent throne. She was beautiful and stately, clothed in white raiment, and held in her hand a sceptre, not of gold or silver, but of a different substance, pure and much brighter — a figure for all the world like the pictures of Hera. Her countenance was at once radiant and full of dignity, so that all the good could behold it without fear, but no evil person could gaze upon it any more than a man with weak eyes can look up at the orb of the sun; composed and steadfast was her mien, and her glance did not waver. A profound stillness and unbroken quiet pervaded the place; everywhere were fruits in abundance and thriving animals of every species. And immense heaps of gold and silver were there, and of bronze and iron; yet she heeded not at all the gold, nor did she take delight in it, but rather in the fruits and living creatures.

"Now when Herakles beheld the woman, he was abashed and blushes mantled his cheeks, for he felt that respect and reverence for her which a good son feels for a noble mother. Then he asked Hermes which of the deities she was, and he replied, 'Lo, that is the blessed Lady Kingship, child of King Zeus.' And Herakles rejoiced and took courage in her presence. And again he asked about the women who were with her. 'Who are they?' said he; 'how decorous and stately, like men in countenance!' 'Behold,' he replied, 'she who sits there at her right hand, whose glance is both fierce and gentle, is Justice, aglow with a surpassing and resplendent beauty. Beside her sits Civic Order, who is very much like her and differs but slightly in appearance. On the other side is a woman exceeding beautiful, daintily attired, and smiling benignly; they call her Peace. But he who stands near Royalty, just beside the sceptre and somewhat in front of it, a strong man, grey-haired and proud, has the name of Law; but he has also been called Right Reason, Counsellor, Coadjutor, without whom these women are not permitted to take any action or even to purpose one.'

"With all that he heard and saw Herakles was delighted, and he paid close attention, determined never to forget it. But when they had come down from the higher peak and were at the entrance to Tyranny, Hermes said, 'Look this way and behold the other woman. It is with her that the majority of men are infatuated and to win her they give themselves much trouble of every kind, committing murder, wretches that they are, son often conspiring against father, father against son, and brother against brother, since they covet and count as felicity that which is the greatest evil — power conjoined with folly.' He then began by showing Herakles the nature of the entrance, explaining that whereas only one pathway appeared to view, that being about as described above — perilous and skirting the very edge of the precipice — yet there were many unseen and hidden corridors, and that the entire region was undermined on every side and tunnelled, no doubt up to the very throne, and that all the passages and bypaths were smeared with blood and strewn with corpses. Through none, however, of these passages did Hermes lead him, but along the outside one that was less befouled, because, I think, Herakles was to be a mere observer.

"When they entered, they discovered Tyranny seated aloft, of set purpose counterfeiting and making herself like to Kingship, but, as she imagined, on a far loftier and more splendid throne, since it was not only adorned with innumerable carvings, but embellished besides with inlaid patterns of gold, ivory, amber, ebony, and substances of every colour. Her throne, however, was not secure upon its foundation nor firmly settled, but shook and slouched upon its legs. And in general things were in disorder, everything suggesting vainglory, ostentation, and luxury — many sceptres, many tiaras and diadems for the head. Furthermore, in her zeal to imitate the character of the other woman, instead of the friendly smile Tyranny wore a leer of false humility, and instead of a glance of dignity she had an ugly and forbidding scowl. But in order to assume the appearance of pride, she would not glance at those whom came into her presence but looked over their heads disdainfully. And so everybody hated her, and she herself ignored everybody. She was unable to sit with composure, but would cast her eyes incessantly in every direction, frequently springing up from her throne. She hugged her gold to her bosom in a disgusting manner and then in terror would fling it from her in a heap, then she would forthwith snatch at whatever any passer-by might have, were it never so little. Her raiment was of many colours, purple, scarlet and saffron, with patches of white, too, showing here and there from her skirts, since her cloak was torn in many places. From her countenance glowed all manners of colours according to whether she felt terror or anguish or suspicion or anger; while at one moment she seemed prostrate

with grief, at another she appeared to be in an exaltation of joy. At one time a quite wanton smile would come over her face, but at the next moment she would be in tears. There was also a throng of women about her, but they resembled in no respect those whom I have described as in attendance upon Royalty. These were Cruelty, Insolence, Lawlessness, and Faction, all of whom were bent upon corrupting her and bringing her to ignoble ruin. And instead of Friendship, Flattery was there, servile and avaricious and no less ready for treachery than any of the others, nay rather, zealous above all things to destroy.

"Now when Herakles had viewed all this also to his heart's content, Hermes asked him which of the two scenes pleased him and which of the two women. 'Why, it is the other one,' said he, 'whom I admire and love, and she seems to me a veritable goddess, enviable and worthy to be accounted blest; this second woman, on the other hand, I consider so utterly odious and abominable that I would gladly thrust her down from this peak and thus put an end to her.' Whereupon Hermes commended Herakles for this utterance and repeated it to Zeus, who entrusted him with the kingship over all mankind as he considered him equal to the trust. And so wherever Herakles discovered a tyranny and a tyrant, he chastised and destroyed them, among Greeks and barbarians alike; but wherever he found a kingdom and a king, he would give honour and protection."

This, she maintained, was what made him Deliverer of the earth and of the human race, not the fact that he defended them from the savage beasts — for how little damage could a lion or a wild bear inflict? — nay, it was the fact that he chastised savage and wicked men, and crushed and destroyed the power of overweening tyrants. And even to this day Herakles continues this work and you have in him a helper and protector of your government as long as it is vouchsafed you to reign.