In antiquity polemic played a valuable role in the construction of one’s philosophical standpoint or identity. The doctrine of the other thinker or tradition challenged the philosopher to formulate and consolidate his own doctrine vis-à-vis alternative views. Philosophical polemics are thus a dialogical process, often resulting in the adoption and integration of elements derived from opposing viewpoints, from specific terminology to larger philosophical issues and interrogations. Although there is no question about the need to study the content of philosophical polemics, less attention has been paid to their forms and mechanisms. Yet, the attitude towards a rival philosopher or tradition embraced multiple forms. From dialogue to systematic refutation, from doxographical exposition to correspondence, a wide repertory of genres and rhetorical devices present themselves to the polemicist. Thus, for example, in Cicero’s *Moral Ends*, the staged dialogue between three philosophers and himself, in which each acts as the spokesman of one of the important philosophical traditions of his time, enables the philosopher to highlight the argumentative flaws in each of the doctrines, and to prompt his reader to adhere to his own method. The synthetic exposition of the different views formulated on a specific topic, or in other words, the doxographical sequence, which often opens a philosophical work, allows the philosopher to inscribe his discussion into past and present philosophical debates, and turns his own treatment of the subject into an approval or rejection of the aforementioned doctrines. Likewise, letters can also be invested with controversy. Thus, Seneca uses the writing of a letter of consolation as an opportunity to criticise the philosophical assumptions and consolatory strategy of the

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1 I would like to thank Maren Niehoff for her valuable suggestions as well as the anonymous reviewer for his very helpful comments.
2 On this topic see, for instance, Dillon 1982.
3 That is the method developed by the New Academy. See Annas 2001: ix–xxvii.
4 See for example, the first book of Aristotle’s *On the Soul*; Plutarch, *On Ethical Virtue* 440E–442C. or Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1 18–22.
Epicurean philosopher Metrodorus. These examples are not exhaustive, nor do they take into account the various aspects (epistemological, traditional, methodological, etc.) of these genres, but they serve to stress the fact that multiple and diverse options were available to a polemicist in antiquity.

Another genre of philosophical polemic which has not received due scholarly attention should be added to this list, which I shall call exegetical polemic. Exegetical polemic does not only engage with ideas, but also, and mainly, with the modality of constructing a specific discourse. The object of criticism does not directly aim at the philosophical content, but is directed towards the sources, that is, towards the manner in which they are treated and interpreted. Exegetical polemic positions itself on another level of philosophical debate, namely that of the correct use and understanding of the sources. Such sources can either be philosophical (e.g. the text of a precursor) or literary (e.g. Homer and the poets). It is the latter instance which is the subject of this paper.

Galen’s dispute with the third century B.C. Stoic philosopher, Chrysippus of Soli, in his *On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (*PHP*), provides us with a valuable example of this genre of polemic. The first part of this paper is focused on Galen’s strategy in refuting Chrysippus’ readings of Homer. In the second part, the question of how Galen’s contempt for “arguments from the poets” is compatible with his indulgence in exegetical polemic will be addressed.

Although Galen’s independent and critical mind led numerous scholars to question his adherence to any of the philosophical schools of his time and milieu, it is beyond any doubt that it is as a follower of Plato and as a fervent defender of the Platonic concept of soul that he rejects

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5 *Letters to Lucilius* 99.

6 Therefore, a difference is to be drawn between exegetical philosophy understood as the interpretative reading of the texts of the founders of a philosophical school, which blossoms from roughly the first century B.C. onwards (on this subject, see Hadot 1987: 13–64) and a philosophical discourse which uses and interprets Homer and the poets.

7 In the *De proprietarium animi cuiuslibet affectuum dignitione et curatione* (CMG 5.4.1.1) Galen claims that he does not belong to any of the philosophical schools. On Galen’s criticism of wrongly motivated adherence to a philosophical school, see *On the Order of his Own Books* 4; on Galen’s criticism of contemporary philosophers, see *On his Own Books* XIV 3–7; and for expression of his freedom of mind, even from Plato, “the first of all philosophers,” in the *PHP*, see III 4.30–32. As Moraux states concerning Galen’s attitude as a philosopher “Elle n’a rien de celle d’un homme d’école qui croit à un système et entend le défendre contre d’autres. Quelles que soient sa sympathie pour Platon et son admiration pour Aristote, il se garde bien de se rallier sans réserve à tout ce qu’ils ont écrit.” (1981: 105).