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Présentation de la fiche

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the average physicians abandoned the old inherited belief in the divine character of sun and air and seasons. Their mental attitude was still nearer to that of the people who, unable to endure the atheistic philosophers, expelled them even from Athens,²¹ and who were always suspicious of the natural explanation of phenomena if it excluded the recognition of divine power. It is true that "it was not until later times that the radiant repute of Plato, because of the life the man led, and because he subjected the compulsions of the physical world to divine and more sovereign principles, took away the obloquy of such doctrines as these, and gave their science free course among all men."²² For even in later centuries Epicureans were banished from the cities because of their atheism; throughout antiquity, the natural explanation of the world remained a bold venture. The average man recognized God's ways in the movements of heavenly bodies and so, ordinarily, did the physician.²³ It is evident then that all the external influences which are held responsible for the origin of diseases are in general not understood as merely natural. Sun and moon and stars and seasons are material to the modern mind, but to the ancients they are gods.

Now the question arises as to how the explanation of illnesses by inner factors, by the nature of man or of diseases, an explanation very common in antiquity too, must be interpreted. In answering it a certain difficulty, noticeable, I think, in the whole discussion of the subject of my inquiry, will become even more striking. The Greeks speak of nature as do the moderns. But what they mean by it, as what they mean by all their notions of natural phenomena, is different from the modern conceptions which in their definite form always arise in the modern mind at the mention of the terms.²⁴ Nevertheless, only these words can be used; step by step the distinct features of the ancient thought must

²¹ Anaxagoras (Plutarch, Pericles ch. 32, The Law of Diopithea); Protagoras (Sextus Empiricus, adv. mathematicos IX, 56); Diagoras (Aristophanes, Birds, iv. 1073).

²² Plutarch, Nicias, ch. 23, l. c.: ὅπερ δ' ἡ Πλάτωνος ἐκλάψασα δόξα διὰ τὸν βίον τοῦ ἀνδρός, καὶ οὐ τοῖς θεαῖς καὶ κυριωτέραις ἀρχαῖς ὑπέταξε τὰς φυσικὰς ἀνάγκας, ἀφείλε τὴν τῶν λόγων τούτων διαβολὴν, καὶ τοῖς μαθήμασιν εἰς ἅπαντας δόδον ἐπέδωκεν.

²³ Cf. Jakob Burckhardt, Griech. Kulturgeschichte⁴, III, pp. 324 sq.; II, p. 216, and Plato (Laws, X, 888b-e) who contends that nobody is able to continue in his disbelief "till old age."

²⁴ Not to mention the various meanings which the conception of nature had for the Greeks themselves; this problem cannot be dealt with here, cf. Heidel, l. c., pp. 95 sq.

be described in these same terms. In order to avoid any misunderstanding of the statements, it is necessary therefore always to remain cognizant of this difference between ancient and modern terminology.

From the fifth century B.C. on nature was conceived as a mechanical or dynamic power of its own without any divine manifestation. It was defined in this way by the followers of the physiologists in the pre-Socratic centuries and in Plato's time. Strato thought that nature, without the help of the gods, creates everything. The Epicureans, although believing in the existence of God, did not let him take part in the worldly processes. In the Academic philosophy nature was considered to be the necessity of movement; it was just in regard to diseases that such a conception was worked out most clearly.²⁵ Physicians imbued with those doctrines, then, cannot but contemplate the nature of man as devoid of God. Among the Hippocratic writers a few undoubtedly share such an opinion, the same ones who do not believe in the divinity of the elements. And the later Empiricists and Methodists do not recognize the divine impress of God either.

But certain as this is, the opinion that nature cannot be thought otherwise than as created and permeated by God is also to be found throughout antiquity. So it is said in the book on Airs, Waters, and Places: "I too think that these diseases are divine, and so are all others, no one being more divine or more human than any other; all are alike, and all divine, but each of them has a nature of its own, and none arises without its nature."²⁶ To this man, the distinction between divine and human and the different estimation of these two powers become meaningless because everything is equally divine. This does not imply that God acts directly and is responsible, by reason of His personal interference, for the single event. Such a possibility is expressly excluded. The individual disease has a nature of its own, but by this term its divine character is only expressed in another form; it is not done away with by being explained through nature. Individual nature therefore, since it does not contradict God, but is rather His essence, must be apprehended as created by God and as divine in itself. This conviction

²⁵ Concerning the physiologists cf. Plato, Laws, X, 889b; Sophistes 265c and Plutarch, De defectu oraculorum, 436d. Concerning Strato, cf. Cicero, Academica, II, 38, 121; De natura deorum, I, 13, 35; concerning the Academy cf. De natura deorum, III, 25, 65; II, 27, 10, 24.

²⁶ Jones, l. c., I, p. 127 (slightly altered): ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτῷ δοκεῖ ταῦτα τὰ πάθη θεῖα εἶναι καὶ τὰλλα πάντα καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἐτέρου θεϊότερον οὐδὲ ἀνθρωπινώτερον, ἀλλὰ πάντα ὁμοῖα καὶ πάντα θεῖα. ἕκαστον δὲ αὐτῶν ἔχει φύσιν τὴν ἑωυτοῦ καὶ οὐδὲν ἄνευ φύσιος γίνεται.

