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## [Greek medecine in its relation to religion and magic - suite]

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### Présentation de la fiche

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that the Gnostic philosophy did accept such a doctrine of causation, a philosophy which combined Greek ideas with Christian religion. It is the Christians and the Jews who propagated these ideas at the end of Greek and Roman history as the Persians and Chaldeans had done in the very beginning.<sup>53</sup>

It is certain that philosophers and physicians do not believe demons to be the cause of disease. Not only is the scientific theory hostile to such an opinion,—this would explain only the attitude of the trained physicians, of the followers of the various medical schools—even the average educated man did not believe in the demonic character of diseases; his behavior as a patient was conditioned by this attitude. Modern interpretation is inclined more and more to claim that Greeks and Romans, in general, traced back the origin of diseases to possession by demons.<sup>54</sup> If this were correct, a queer contradiction of the data would arise. For these men are supposed to be the patients of physicians who apparently do not believe in demons, who do not even try to prove that in a special case it is the body and not a demon which has brought about the illness. Or did people call in only those unknown practitioners who did themselves believe in demons? But no physician could afford to do this. If the illness was caused by a demon, nothing could be done by the doctor. He must retire and give way to the magician. In such a case "he is expelled from the house" and the patient will say: "Oh, sir, leave

<sup>53</sup> Concerning the early Christian attitude toward diseases, cf. A. Harnack, *Medizinisches aus der ältesten Kirchengeschichte*, 1892, pp. 71 sq. The Jewish belief is most clearly formulated by Josephus, *Antiquitates*, VIII, 2, 5. Already Pliny traces the origin of magic back to Persians and Chaldeans on the one hand, to the Jews on the other. (*Natural History*, introduction to book XXX). The modern attempt to find magic in all centuries of Greek history is not convincing. Hopfner, (*Realenzyklopädie d. klass. Altertumswiss.*, XIV, 1, pp. 301 sq., s. v. *Mageia*) collects the whole material; his survey only serves to prove that before the third century B.C. magic is not an important factor in Greek life. I do not presume to decide whether the situation was always different from that which is to be found in other countries and in primitive men, as Ed. Meyer assumes (*Gesch. d. Altertums*, I, 1<sup>6</sup>, pp. 93 sq.). So much is certain, that in Greece magic is revived only under foreign influences in later times (cf. Ed. Meyer, l. c., p. 98). Cf. Lucian's *Tragopodagra*, v. 265 sq. *Σύροι μὲν ἔσμεν, ἐκ Δαμασκού τῷ γένει.*

<sup>54</sup> The modern interpretation is to be found in the article on Demons, RE, Supplement III, p. 267 sq.; p. 272, 38; cf. also Halliday, l. c., p. 281; E. Stemplinger, *Sympathiegläub u. Sympathiekuren in Altertum u. Neuzeit*, 1919, p. 5: "So ist das ganze Griechisch-Römische Altertum trotz Hippokrates erfüllt von dem Glauben an den Krankheitsdämon." The argument in these books is usually based on passages taken from poetry which cannot be acknowledged as the only and adequate instance in this problem. Moreover, it is again the mental diseases to which those passages mostly refer, and here the problem is a peculiar one, cf. p. 219, above.

me to pay my penalty, impious wretch that I am, accursed and hateful to the gods and all the heavenly host."<sup>55</sup> After all, the physicians had patients; people must have thought them able to do something. The natural explanation of diseases must have been generally accepted.

The reasons for this acceptance can be ascertained by inquiring into the causes for the rejection of a demonological interpretation of disease. It is the author of the book on the Sacred Disease who says of the assumptions of the magicians that they "show, not piety, as they think, but impiety rather, implying that the gods do not exist, and what they call piety and the divine is, as I shall prove, impious and unholy."<sup>56</sup> The physicians then not only believe that they can explain diseases in another and more scientific way. They rely also on religious argumentation. For they hold "that a man's body is not defiled by God, the one being utterly corrupt, the other perfectly holy."<sup>57</sup> In slightly different terms Posidonius says the same thing in the fourth century A.D.: "men do not become ill through the affliction of demons . . . for it is not at all in the power of the demons to afflict the nature of men."<sup>58</sup> A god cannot pollute or possess the human body. The physicians apparently subscribe to the Platonic saying: "It is good since it comes into being by divine destiny."<sup>59</sup> In this way they adopt the Olympian religion and reject the chthonic cults; they adopt the pious reverence of the gods and reject purifications.

From the aspect of such a belief in antiquity, too, all magical rites are superstitious, as is revealed by Plutarch's discussion of superstition: "In the estimation of the superstitious man, [all the indispositions] of his body . . . are classed as afflictions of God or attacks of an evil spirit. For this reason he has no heart to relieve the situation or undo its effects, or to find some remedy for it, or to take a strong stand against it lest he

<sup>55</sup> Plutarch, *On Superstition* (Plutarch's *Moralia*, with an English Translation by F. C. Babbitt, Loeb Class. Library, II, 1928, p. 475): *ἔα με, ἄνθρωπε, δίδόναι δίκην, τὸν ἀσεβῆ, τὸν ἐπάρατον, τὸν θεοῖς καὶ δαίμοσι μεμισμημένον.* Cf. also Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Jones, l. c., II, p. 145: *καίτοι ἔμοιγε οὐ περὶ εὐσεβείας τοὺς λόγους δοκέουσι ποιῆσθαι, ὡς οἴονται, ἀλλὰ περὶ ἀσεβείας μάλλον, καὶ ὡς οἱ θεοὶ οὐκ εἰσὶ, τὸ δὲ εὐσεβὲς αὐτῶν καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀσεβὲς ἔστι καὶ ἀνόσιον, ὡς ἐγὼ διδάξω.*

<sup>57</sup> Jones, l. c., II, p. 149, cf. n. 44, above.

<sup>58</sup> Philostorgius, l. c.: *θεάσασθαι δὲ τὸν Ποσειδώνιον ἐν ἱατρικῇ διαπρέποντα. λέγειν δ' αὐτὸν ὅμως οὐκ ὀρθῶς οὐχὶ δαιμόνων ἐπιθεῖναι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐκβακχεύεσθαι, ὑγρῶν δὲ τινῶν κακοχυμίων τὸ πάθος ἐργάζεσθαι: μηδὲ γὰρ εἶναι τὸ παράπαν ἰσχὴν δαιμόνων ἀνθρώπων φύσιν ἐτηρεάζουσιν.*

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 244 c.: *ὡς καλοῦ ὄντος, ὅταν θεῖα μοῖρα γίγνηται.*

