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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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## PART TWO

Epidaurus reveals: "Pure must be he who enters the fragrant temple; purity means to think nothing but holy thought."<sup>68</sup>

## II. THE TREATMENT OF DISEASES

The myth of the god Asclepius says that of "those whosoever came suffering from the sores of nature, or with their limbs wounded either by grey bronze or by far-hurled stone, or with bodies wasting away with summer's heat or winter's cold, he loosed and delivered divers of them from diverse pains, tending some of them with kindly songs, giving to others a soothing potion, or, haply, swathing their limbs with simples, or restoring others by the knife."<sup>69</sup> The god in his treatment of diseases resorts to music, to drugs applied either internally or externally and to the use of the knife. The human physician is a surgeon and a pharmacologist, he invents the regulation of diet, in rare cases he has recourse to music. The therapy of Greek as well as of Roman physicians, is, then, throughout the centuries a scientific and natural one. But again it is necessary to determine the principles underlying the scientific and natural method of healing.

It is the aim of surgery and dietetics to influence the disease by the action and understanding of the physician. So far no other than human power is involved, yet, there is the problem to what extent the body can be helped at all from the outside, how much the healing-process as such depends not on what is done by the physician but on what is achieved by the bodily forces themselves. In other words, what value can be attributed to the medical art? The various physicians answer this question in different ways, depending on their different metaphysical standpoints. Plato remarks that all those who understand nature as a power of its own devoid of god at the same time deprive the different arts of their efficacy. Like heaven and the stars and the seasons, they

<sup>68</sup> Porphyry, *De abstinence Animae*, II, 19: ἀγνὸν χρῆ νοσίο θυώδες ἐντὸς ἰόντα / ἔμμεναι. ἀγνεία δ' ἔστι φρονεῖν οἷα. I shall not discuss whether Asclepius was originally a chthonic Hero or not. There is no doubt that he came to be generally accepted by the ancient world as an Olympian.

<sup>69</sup> Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, III, 47-53 (The Odes of Pindar with an English translation by Sir John Sandys, Loeb Class. Library, 1927, p. 189): τοὺς μὲν ὦν, ὅσοι μόνον αὐτοφύτων ἐλκείων ξυνάοντες, ἢ πολὺ χαλκῷ μέλη τετρωμένοι ἢ χειρμάδι τηλεβόλῳ, ἢ θερυνῶ πυρὶ περβόμενοι δέμας ἢ χειμῶνι, λύσαις ἄλλων ἀλλοίων ἀχέων ἔξαγεν, τοὺς μὲν μαλακαῖς ἐπαιδαῖς ἀμφίπτων, τοὺς δὲ προσανεία πίνοντας, ἢ γυίοις περάπτων πάντοθεν φάρμακα τοὺς δὲ τομαῖς ἵστασεν ὀρθούς. The translation of *μαλακαῖς ἐπαιδαῖς* differs from the usual one, for the explanation thereof cf. n. 103, below.

## GREEK MEDICINE—RELIGION AND MAGIC

say, animals and plants have been produced by the elements. "Not through reason nor through any god or art, but . . . through nature and chance. Art, however, later arising therefrom, comes into being later and is itself mortal since it is born from mortal things. Later on it creates some playthings which do not much partake of truth. . . . Arts which create something serious also are those which join their power with nature—like medicine, agriculture, and gymnastics."<sup>70</sup> Medicine, according to such an atheistic theory, undoubtedly belongs to those arts which accomplish something real, but medical art considered in this light is no longer a factor of its own. The result of its action derives from a source outside the art; the artist becomes simply the helpmate of nature. This is the theory expressed also by one of the *Epidemiae*: "Nature is the physician of diseases."<sup>71</sup> Thus, the power of nature is raised to its highest level, but in that case the physician must abdicate. If nature heals diseases then the physician ceases to do so. Such a theory is destructive of medical art.

No one will deny that "if nature be in opposition, everything is vain."<sup>72</sup> For "if a man demand from an art a power over what does not belong to the art, or for nature a power over what does not belong to nature, his ignorance is more alike to madness than to lack of knowledge."<sup>73</sup> These exaggerations aside, however, the reality of the art as a force which need not be derived from another force cannot be doubted. Neither chance nor spontaneous healing can contradict the proper value of medicine. Moreover, "if the medical art and medical men brought about a cure only by means of medicines, purgative or astringent, my argument would be weak. As it is, the physicians of greatest repute obviously cure by regimen and by other substances, which nobody—not only a physician but also an unlearned layman, if he heard of them—

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Laws*, X, 889c-d: οὐδὲ διὰ τινα θεὸν οὐδὲ διὰ τέχνην ἀλλὰ . . . φύσει καὶ τύχῃ. τέχνην δὲ ὕστερον ἐκ τούτων ὑστέραν γενομένην, αὐτὴν θνητὴν ἐκ θνητῶν ὕστερα γεγεννηκέναι παιδίᾳ τινι, ἀληθείας οὐ σφόδρα μετεχούσας . . . αἱ δὲ τι καὶ σπουδαῖον ἔρα γεννώσι τῶν τεχνῶν, εἶναι ταύτας ὁπόσαι τῇ φύσει ἐκοίνωσαν τὴν αὐτῶν δύναμιν, οἷον αὐτῇ ἰατρικῇ καὶ γεωργικῇ καὶ γυμναστικῇ.

<sup>71</sup> Hippocrates, ed. Littré, V, p. 314, *νόσων φύσεις ἰητροί*. The author expressly says that to him nature is devoid of thinking and accomplishes everything without having learned it. This corresponds to the Platonic characterization of natural and irreligious philosophy and shows that the statement of the Hippocratic book can be linked with this theory. (Contrary to Deichgräber's reading S B Berl. 1933, 3, 52.)

<sup>72</sup> Jones, I. c., II, p. 263: φύσις γὰρ ἀντιπρῆσσοῦσης κενὰ πάντα. Although these words are used in regard to education, they are certainly valid in a wider sense too.

<sup>73</sup> Jones, I. c., II, p. 203: εἰ γὰρ τις ἡ τέχνην ἐς ἃ μὴ τέχνη, ἡ φύσιν ἐς ἃ μὴ φύσις πέφυκεν, ἀξιώσειε δύνασθαι, ἀγνοεῖ ἀγνοίαν ἀρμόζουσαν μανίῃ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀμαθίῃ.

