

On the Art of Teaching Medicine

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Overview

- Who was Galen?
- What did he teach?
- How did he teach it?
- Lasting effects
- Conclusions

Who was Galen?

- Galen of Pergamon
- Born in c. 130 CE
- Studied in Pergamum, then in Alexandria in Egypt
- In 162 moved to Rome, quickly gained notoriety for his success.
- Served as physician to Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and Septimius Severus.
- Died in c. 216 CE



Illustration of Galen with predecessor Hippocrates on cover of 1677 medical text *Lipsiae* by Georgii Frommani (National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland)

What did Galen teach?

- Built on the works of Hippocrates
- Advocated medicine as a science above all – something to study and practice.
- Advocated dissection as both a means of practicing surgery and understanding anatomy.
- Taught and fully developed the field of humorism

Humorism

- Galen popularized the belief in the four humors
- Symptoms manifest because of these imbalances
- In treatment, opposites resolve imbalances (Kleisiaris 2014)
- Every individual had a unique “correct” balance – peculiar only to them (Johnston 2016, p.2)

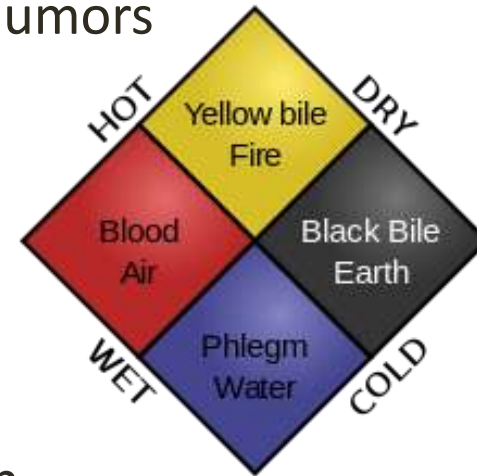


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Medicine as an Art

- In all of Galen's works he establishes medicine as a form of art. One need only look at the titles of so many of his works for reference.
- Medicine was a "productive" art because "you can in fact show the result of the art when the practice of it stops." (Johnston 2016, p.21)
- Considered to be practical and concrete - in the same vein as woodwork and painting, rather than in philosophy.

Medicine as a Philosophy

- Galen believed his study of medicine to be the guiding, shaping role in his life – a rarity among his peers. As he writes in the opening of his Method of Medicine:

... People strive after money, political power, and an insatiable enjoyment of pleasures to such an extent that they would consider someone mad if he were to gain expertise in any area whatsoever. They think the **truly primary form of wisdom**, which is knowledge of matters divine and human, doesn't exist at all.

Medicine as a Science

It is beautifully summarized in the opening of his Art of Medicine.

Medicine is the knowledge of those things that are healthy, those that are diseased, and those that are neither (neutral)—it would make no difference if someone were to say sickly. It is necessary to understand the term “knowledge” generally and not specifically. ... There is also some ambiguity surrounding the statement of the definition as a whole and this must be resolved. Thus, in saying that medicine is knowledge of what is healthy, diseased and neither, this also signifies all such things individually, or some things, or the kinds of things.

Teaching from the End

All teachings have an order in which there are three components. The first is from the concept of the end and arises from analysis. The second is from the synthesis of those things discovered by analysis. The third is from dialysis of a definition.

(Johnston 2016, p.157)

Conclusions

- While we now understand that the Hippocratic philosophies and humorism are outdated theories, they were the best that the ancient world had seen. His methods were preserved and widely taught and accepted until the mid seventeenth century, and traces of them can still be found in homeopathic, herbal, and other “nontraditional” medical theories today. While those of us in the modern sciences may consider the practices barbaric, it was the best that the ancient world had heard of and – as is seen in Galen’s own case studies – was effective. Whether this is a placebo effect or these efforts actually did have some scientific basis is entirely a different topic.

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