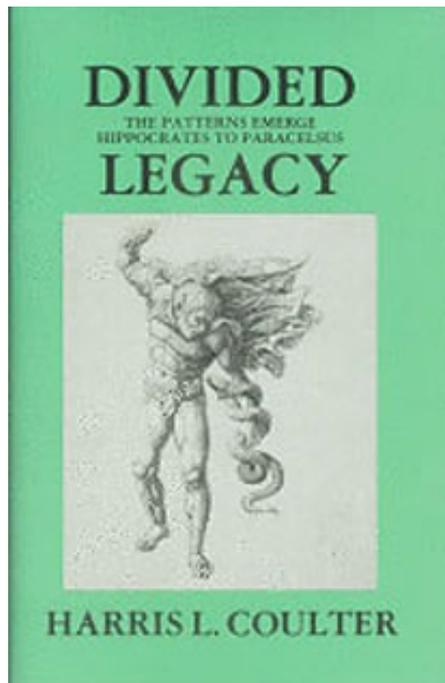


Harris L. Coulter

Divided Legacy, Volume I

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THE PATTERNS EMERGE:
HIPPOCRATES TO PARACELSUS

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CHAPTER I

THE HIPPOCRATIC CORPUS: STRUCTURE

The Hippocratic Corpus is the greatest puzzle of medical history. It is a heterogeneous collection of about seventy writings of varying length, covering all areas of medical thought and practice: surgery, gynecology, internal medicine, diet, hygiene, and therapeutic method. Philological and other evidence indicates that the works in the Corpus were written over a period of several centuries, and even the older part of the collection, dating from about 450-400 B.C., is seen from stylistic evidence to be the work of several authors.

For many centuries the whole Corpus was ascribed to Hippocrates—a historical figure mentioned by both Plato and Aristotle as the foremost physician of their time. As scholars came to realize, however, that the Corpus is full of doctrinal inconsistencies, they were forced to conclude that it was not the work of a single man. This, in turn, gave rise to the "Hippocratic problem"—which of the works are "genuine" and which are not, or, in other words, how one is to view the doctrinal structure of the Hippocratic Corpus as a whole and its ties to earlier and later medical thought. Several scholars have attempted a coherent doctrinal analysis of all or most of the works of the Hippocratic Corpus and have reached conclusions as to the "genuineness" of the various writings.¹

Without belittling these efforts, which in many cases have clarified our understanding of the Hippocratic Corpus and embodied new insights into its various works, we are nonetheless proposing a different approach.

Our analysis accepts the results of the philological investigations of the Hippocratic Corpus and seeks to build upon them by invoking a new criterion—the criterion of the

therapeutic systems contained in these works. We maintain that the guide to the affinities and distinctions among the Hippocratic works is to be found in the authors' views of the nature of the therapeutic process and, furthermore, that two distinctly contrasted views of the therapeutic process can be traced in the early works of the Hippocratic Corpus.

In a word, we hypothesize the existence of the Empirical-Rationalist polarity in the Greek medical thought of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Our investigation of the Hippocratic Corpus is designed to demonstrate the existence of this polarity—which is seen to be identical with the later ideologies of the Empirical and Rationalist schools.

Our analysis does not cover the whole of the Hippocratic Corpus. We have selected about twenty of the earliest writings—those dating from the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.² If examined from the standpoint of their assumptions about the nature of therapeutic method, these works are seen to fall into the following groups:

Group I: Prorrhetic 7,^a Coan Prognosis, Epidemics I and III, Prognosis, Aphorisms, and Regimen in Acute Diseases (RAD I). The doctrine of this group is that the organism is composed of an undefined number of humors, that disease consists in the isolation of one of these humors within the organism, and that cure is through coction of this humor by the organism and its evacuation as urine, sweat, sputum, or stool. The physician can follow and comprehend this process through observation of the patient's symptoms and inspection of his *secreta* and *excreta*. This information, and his prognosis of the future course of the disease, indicate the appropriate form of therapy. There is no discussion of internal (proximate) causes or of physiological mechanisms. The therapeutic techniques employed consist almost entirely of diet, exercise, hot baths and applications (to promote coction), and laxatives (to promote evacuation).

^aSince *Prorrhetic I* is almost entirely incorporated in *Coan Prognosis*, no specific reference is made to it below.

CHAPTER

III

ARISTOTLE

After the Hippocratic Corpus itself the most important influence on Western medical thought, ancient and modern, has been the philosophy of Aristotle. In the ancient world this influence was manifested in the Rationalist ideology, and, to the extent that Rationalist elements have remained embedded in the medical speculation of more modern times, Aristotle's influence remains potent to this day.

Aristotelian philosophy is hence of primordial importance for the history of therapeutic method. Since he was not primarily a medical thinker, however, and since whole libraries have been written on all aspects of his thought, we can only indicate briefly the general outline of this philosophy, emphasizing the elements which are of particular significance for medicine.

Our first task is to trace the parallels between Aristotelianism and Rationalist medical thought. These parallels are found in two areas: (1) the observation and analysis of the phenomena of health and disease, and (2) the structure of the medical *tekhne*. In both of these areas the Rationalist physicians leaned heavily on Aristotle.

In a sense our task will be complete when we have indicated Aristotle's influence on the Rationalists, since this medical tradition was the vehicle of his influence on later generations. However, this would not be doing justice to Aristotle himself, since his own views on medical subjects differ considerably from those of the Rationalists. To summarize a great part of the ensuing discussion, we may note that Rationalist medicine stems primarily from

Aristotle's metaphysical analysis of reality but that Aristotle's specifically medical views have little in common with his metaphysics (and are, in fact, closer to Empiricism).

Like any philosophy, that of Aristotle is an effort to reconcile *logos* and experience. The polarity seen in the Hippocratic Corpus—the stress on experience in Groups I and IV vs. emphasis on the *logos* in group III—is fundamental also to Aristotelianism. In his early writings, when he was still under the influence of Plato, he gravitated toward the pole of *logos*, while the works of his maturity reveal an increasingly high evaluation of experience.¹ But the conflict is inherent in all of his writings.

It is particularly significant for his discussion of medicine. For he was the son of a physician and had himself received medical training. Therefore, although his medical doctrine contains a large theoretical component, he is fully aware of the importance of experience for medical practice. This awareness leads him to support the therapeutic principles of the Hippocratic works of Groups I and IV. The concept of coction is fundamental to his medical views, and he even broadens it to cover new areas of physiology.

Since his analytical and metaphysical doctrines are in the tradition of Plato and Greek Idealism, and thus continue the trends reflected in the Hippocratic works of Group III, we may state that there is a dichotomy between Aristotle's metaphysics and his views on the practice of medicine.

We will discuss this dichotomy in connection with Aristotle's physiology, his theory of disease and health, and his doctrine of the medical *tekhne*.

Aspects of Aristotle's Philosophical System

The starting-point of Aristotle's philosophy is the conviction, inherited from Plato, that the visible world is merely the reflection and the evanescent embodiment of another world. Like his great predecessor he takes a dualistic view of physical reality, and in the light of this assumption of a

division between the visible external world and another world lying above or beyond it we may understand both his principal philosophical doctrines and the relevance of his philosophy to Rationalist medicine.³

Plato had called this other world the abode of the Ideas. To him the Ideas were eternal and unchanging, while the visible world represented their shifting and distorted reflection. Plato's philosophy, however, failed to explain how the Ideas were able to generate matter, and this was the problem which Aristotle set out to resolve.

How was a connection to be established between the Idea and the visible object? Aristotle's solution was to abolish the separate world of the Ideas and to convert the Ideas into "forms" potentially present beneath the visible surface of matter. The sense-perceptible was thereby hypothesized as a battlefield between "form" and matter. The "forms" endeavor to assert or realize themselves against the drag and inertia of matter, and Aristotle's philosophy is an analysis of this interaction.

The components of Aristotle's metaphysical universe are bound together by cause-and-effect relations. The physical objects are "caused" or produced by the underlying forms. Within the hierarchy of forms—running from the more universal to the less universal, the particular—there are relations of cause and effect, as the more universal generate the less universal. And, finally, knowing itself is a causal process: the forms or causes operating behind the sense-perceptible surface of the physical world generate or cause

³It will be noted that, although we hope to give Aristotle's "intellectual love for the objects of experience" its due, we nonetheless take the position that the effect of his thought on medicine was to strengthen the existing Platonic tendencies. The dualism which he shares with Plato is the most significant aspect of his philosophy for medical thought. Thus we follow those authors who take a somewhat "platonizing" view of Aristotle. Glenn Morrow writes in *Journal of Philosophy*, LIX (1962), p. 151: "Call it a remnant of Platonism or what you will, we find Aristotle eventually asserting that Being is more fundamental than Becoming and grounding his naturalism in a higher order of eternals and unchangeables".

CHAPTER IX

GALEN AND THE CLOSE OF GREEK MEDICAL SPECULATION

"Exhausted by centuries of endeavor, often moving in a circle, Greek medicine looked at last for a definitive system which should collect the scattered stones of thought and experience and incorporate them into a single edifice."³ The man who accomplished this task was Galen, a Greek physician residing in Rome and, after Hippocrates and Aristotle, the most important figure in the history of ancient medical thought.

Galen was one of the most influential intellectuals the world has ever produced, as his system lasted, unchanged in any essential respect, for more than 1400 years. The reason lies not in the author's originality or scientific capacity, but in his ability to crystallize in logical form the inchoate strivings of ancient Rationalism and to structure the resulting doctrine in a way which exactly suited the practical needs of the physicians of his own and later generations. He was an ingenious and encyclopedic thinker rather than a profound one, and his many writings provided an acceptable explanation of every theoretical problem which the practitioner was likely to encounter.

Acceptable metaphysical explanations of disease and reasons for particular modes of therapy are indispensable to the practicing physician, and these the Galenic system supplied in abundance. Hence the continuing popularity of his name and doctrines for a millenium and a half after his death.

Galen claimed to follow the dictates of none of the schools: "I call slaves those who designate themselves

³Max Neuburger, *History of Medicine* (London: Frowde, 1910), p. 240.

followers of Hippocrates or of Praxagoras or generally speaking of any man . . .⁵¹ He viewed his own writings as a crystallization of the best from the corpus of Greek medical thought.

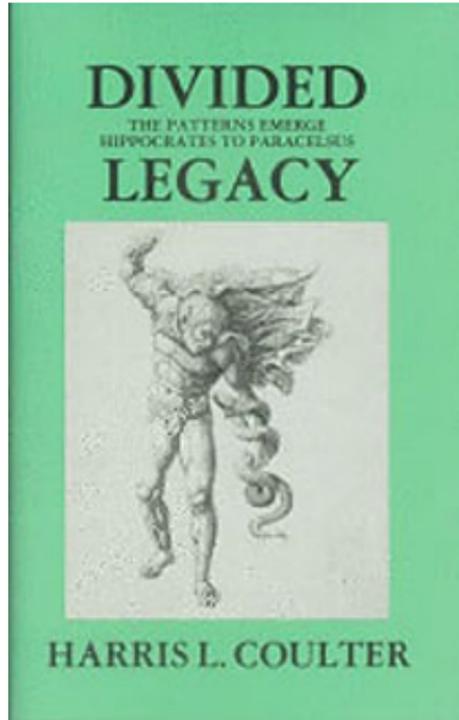
For he was extremely learned in the doctrines of his own and earlier times. He knew the Hippocratic writings thoroughly and wrote commentaries on very many of them. He had studied with Empirics and was well versed in their ideas.² He set himself the task of reconciling the conflict between this school and Rationalism, of extracting from the medical thought of his predecessors and contemporaries a single universal architectonic structure which should serve as a guide to physicians in perpetuity.

Biography

Galen was born to one of the richest families of Pergamon, in Asia Minor, in the year 129 A.D.³ His father, a mathematician and architect whom Galen admired extravagantly, saw to it that he received a complete philosophical education.⁴ At the age of fourteen he was sent to study with representatives of all the philosophical schools—Platonic, Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian. He commenced the study of medicine at sixteen and was trained thoroughly in both the Empirical and Rationalist methods.⁵ "By the age of seventeen I was as learned in philosophy as in medicine."⁶

At twenty, after his father's death, Galen went away to Alexandria for more study, returning eight years later to a job as physician to the Pergamon gladiators. He later boasted of losing only two of his charges, whereas his predecessor had lost twenty-eight.⁷

He eventually grew tired of the provinces and at age thirty-two came to seek his fortune in Rome. His quarrelsome nature, boastfulness, and disdain for all other physicians immediately made him a host of enemies, but despite these defects of character—or perhaps because of them—he rapidly forged his way to the top of Roman medicine and Roman society, becoming the physician and confidant of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and Septimius Severus.⁸



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