

## PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF HEALTH

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**Abstract:** *The study discusses the beginnings of European medicine in ancient Greece. It examines the links between the development of philosophy and medicine. Medical mythology is present already in the cult of Asclepius. The theory combining medicine and philosophy may be traced to the Homeric epic Iliad. Later on, Ionic natural philosophy becomes the basis of all known sciences, including medicine. The doctrine of catharsis as a way of internal cleansing pervaded the entire ancient philosophy. Another frequent term in the old-Greek way of thinking was kalokagathia, an ideal of beautiful and healthy life. The idea of harmony, perceived to be a unity in diversity, played an important part as well. Some particularly insightful studies on kalobiotics appeared during the Czech Biedermeier period, showing how to live correctly, beautifully and harmoniously. They could become a source of timeless inspiration for any reflection on the quality of life.*

**Key words:** *antiquity, catharsis, harmony, kalokagathia, medicine, mythology, philosophy, quality of life.*

### Introduction

**We Europeans** are proud of our achievements in medicine and surgery, although we have come to understand the limitations of mass medicine based on chemistry and sharp scalpels, the medicine that cures the disease rather than the patient, the organ rather than the organism. And we are beginning to pay the price of doing this kind of medicine, be it organic resistance to drugs or harmful side effects. So we look to other cultures and civilizations for medical wisdom, or to the ancient roots of European medicine in classical Greece, where we seek inspiration for our times.

### Medical Mythology in Ancient Greece

**The beginning of European medicine** may be found in Hellas (ancient Greece), where it first appeared cloaked in mythology, like everywhere else in the world. In the initial period of what is called **Homeric medicine**, the power over illness and health was summarily attributed to gods. The ancient Greeks “started to worship the individual deities as sustainers and saviors of the sick. The **three greatest divine healers** were: **Apollo**, the inventor of medicine and a physician to gods (Paieon), who not only cures, but whose

arrows (rays of sun) also sow disease and death; Apollo's sister **Artemis** as a female counterpart of the god of muses, the protector of women and children, helper of mothers in childbirth, but also an unforgiving goddess of death; **Pallas Athena**, the healer (*Hygiene*) and the guardian of eyesight, who strikes philanderers with insanity and infuses her favorites with combativeness. **Centaur Chiron**, who taught the Hellenic heroes how to hunt and heal, is likewise considered to be the founder of the healing arts."<sup>1</sup>

Greek **medical mythology** is extraordinarily multi-faceted, as evident already in the **myth of Asclepius** (Latin **Aeskulap**), who was originally a Thessalian ground demon accompanied by a grass-snake, the oldest symbol of religious bonds with the depths of the Earth.<sup>2</sup>

The Greeks at first worshipped Asclepius as a hero, but the reports of his miraculous curing of the sick resulted in an apotheosis. Asclepius was supposedly the son of god Apollo himself, born via a "Caesarian section". After the death of his mother Koronis, who was Apollo's lover, the boy's education was entrusted to centaur Chiron, who initiated him in the medical arts. Thus Asclepius the demigod turned into a renowned physician. Blinded by his power, he used it to bring the dead back to life. Zeus punished this arrogance with a lightning. However, after his death, Asclepius ascended to Mount Olympus.

The **cult of Asclepius** spread rapidly in the 5th century BCE and many temples, called asclepiions, were built in honor of this god. The most prominent **asclepion** stood at Epidaurus in Argolis. The individual shrines of Asclepius could be predominantly **mystical in orientation**, with priests dispensing divine treatments to their patients, or conversely of a **secular orientation**. A divine "treatment in a dream" was practiced at Epidaurus, unlike the well-known spas of Kos and Knid where the treatment was natural and rational. The **priestly medicine** with the cult of Asclepius, as opposed to the **medical schools of Asclepius' followers**, were merely representative of **two different approaches to medicine**.

The **asclepion of Kos** was discovered relatively late, in 1902, and subsequently excavated by German archaeologist Rudolf Herzog. Only then the local inhabitants started to commemorate Hippocrates, their great native son.

**Hippocrates of Kos** (460-377 BCE) was the most important figure of the old Greek medicine. He postulated a so-called humoral theory, that defines the relationship of the basic bodily fluids. But only a few inhabitants had the right idea about Hippocrates, about his stature in ancient medicine, and about the hippocratic collection. The **statue of Hippocrates at the Museum of Kos**, found in the odeion on Kos in 1929, is impressive by its excellent portrayal of humanistic spiritual values of his times: love for the fellow man, a sense of duty, that special blend of scientific thoughtfulness and human kindness -- the qualities that every physician should possess.

<sup>1</sup> See Pollak, K.: *Medicína dávnych časů (The Medicine of Old Times)*. Prague, Orbis, 1973, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> The Asklepius' staff-entwining serpent is not a snake of some kind as is generally believed. The symbol came from Near Asia and Egypt, where the most common disease was dracunculiasis, caused by a long thin roundworm (*Dracunculus Medinensis*). The old physicians used to help the afflicted patient by winding the worm slowly and carefully on a splinter of wood. In time, this act became symbolic of the physicians' and healers' vocation. It was adopted by the Greek and Roman physicians, but not knowing the procedure, or not wanting to confuse the patients in Europe where dracunculiasis luckily does not occur, they substituted the roundworm with an elegant grass-snake and the splinter or a stick with a staff. The Greek tales about the serpent as a life-renewing symbol were made up afterwards.

However, **the cult of Asclepius**, with its oriental mysticism, was somewhat foreign to the Greek temperament. The more educated segments of the population did not take it very seriously, even at the time of Hippocrates. For example, Aristophanes, the famous playwright of comedies, even dared to ridicule the cult and lampoon the priests as greedy impostors. Their therapeutic temples were nevertheless well attended by patients, mostly from the lower social classes. It was only after the arrival of Christianity that Asclepius was gradually overshadowed by saints that were able to protect health.

## Origins of the Philosophical-Medical Theory

**The first insight into Greek medicine** may be found in **Homer's Iliad**. In this epic, Homer mentions some fairly advanced medical knowledge that existed in his times. **The first references** to human affairs which could be called **philosophical-medical** appear already in the Homeric period, or roughly in the 9th-8th century BCE. They contain **words like psyche and soma**, although used a little differently than today, namely to describe human destiny after death. Here the dead human body (soma) stands in contrast to life (psyche). The psyche, which leaves the body at the time of death, represents human mortality. The humans, limited by their mortal fate, are juxtaposed with the immortal Homeric gods, who have no psyche. As Homer sees it, the psyche, characteristic of a mortal life, has no connection with the man's psychic abilities as was believed later on. Instead, the Homeric epics are replete with organs called psychic (such as noos, thymos, frenes, and ker), which might refer to various aspects of human corporality, but there is no unifying or general term for body or soul among them.

**The Homeric concept of man** still does not differentiate between the body and soul, nor does it recognize a precise boundary between the physical and the spiritual. The term psyche, in Homer's way of thinking, is used to distinguish mortal men from immortal gods.<sup>3</sup>

In the 7th-6th century BCE, the **Ionic natural philosophy** becomes the foundation of all science inclusive of medicine. *"Many of the ancient natural philosophers were also physicians: Empedokles, Alkmaion, Anaxagoras, along with a number of Pythagoras' disciples. The philosophical-medical doctrine of illness that gradually emerged was to remain the predominant theory in antiquity, throughout the Middle Ages until the modern era. At first, it recognized four elements (principles): air, water, fire, and earth, to which four properties were attributed: dry, wet, hot, and cold. Correspondingly, there were four juices: blood, mucus, yellow bile, and black bile, which originated in four organs: heart, brain, liver, and spleen. A balance in the bodily juices constituted health, an imbalance invited disease. The cure was effected by medications of opposite qualities: a mucus-type disease characterized by coldness and wetness had to be fought with something hot and dry."*<sup>4</sup>

**In the period** represented by natural philosophers of the **Miletus (Ionian) school**, new ideas about physis blurs the boundary between the human and the divine, and likewise between the animate and the inanimate. The world began to be seen as a variable order

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bartoš, H.: *Očima lékaře (Through the Eyes of a Physician)*. A study of the beginnings of Greek thinking about human nature in terms of body-soul differentiation. Červený Kostelec: Department of Philosophy and Natural Science History, Faculty of Natural Sciences at Charles University in Prague, in cooperation with Pavel Mervart Publishing House, 2006, ISBN: 80-86818-35-7.

<sup>4</sup> See Pollak, K.: *Medicina dávnych časů (The Medicine of Old Times)*. Prague, Orbis, 1973, p. 267.

of physis, where the psyche emerges as a principle of life and its manifestations. The term psyche gradually acquires a psychological dimension that later would become typical.

In the so-called Heraclitus' Fragments of Greek philosopher **Heraclitus of Ephesus** (535-475 BCE), we find the first explicit expression of the relationship between the soul and *logos* (world order) that would become the underlying assumption in a therapeutic approach based on **psycho-somatic difference**. The soul is one of the main themes for Heraclitus. He believes that the psyche participates in some fundamental cosmic processes. Although mortal, it is connected with an eternally live cosmic fire and its ability to change and transform everything. The soul belongs to a universal and inexhaustible principle which is immortal, but, in an individual human situation, always limited by birth and death.<sup>5</sup>

At that time, the reasoning of natural philosophers is already anchored in everyday experiences and observations of natural processes. These philosophers talk about the natural phenomena as elements or antagonists who may *pay a fine to each other or do penance for their lawlessness* (Anaximandros), the air *embraces* the whole world (Anaximenes), the lightning *governs* all that exists (Heraclitus), the incoming fire *sorts or consumes* everything.

The phases of a cosmic cycle are described as either *saturation* or *insufficiency*. The descriptions of macroscopic structures in natural phenomena borrow expressions from human or social activities. The soul is said to be either *dry* or *wet*, or that it *evaporates*, or that it is like *sunshine*. Soul depictions use the vocabulary of gastronomy or meteorology. The soul is identified with a cosmic fire which changes and governs everything. The soul itself is a fire whose intellectual abilities are diminished by dampness, and wetness might extinguish it completely. However, some other philosophers associated such a soul with an airy disposition.

The **later philosophical interpretations** often point to a deeper similarity between the soul and the cosmic fire. They speak of the human soul as an "inner world", or an analogy of "microcosm and macrocosm", in an effort to comprehend man and nature as an integral whole. And yet, starting with Heraclitus, the internal "spiritual" life is categorically different from the external, observable, tangible world.

**The analogy between a man and the sun**, wherein the life-giving warmth of the sun is compared to a soul, may be found in the **Heraclitus' "river" fractions**. Wading into a river is perceived by him as a macroscopic process, which is mirrored microscopically as wetting of the soul and its subsequent evaporation. Similar analogies apply to other human activities, such as ingestion and digestion of food. The intake of food involves blood, which distributes nutrition throughout the body like a river.<sup>6</sup> Since blood is wet and warm, the saturation of blood by nutrients brings about an energy deficit, cooling, and sleep. The influx of new waters may be viewed as "spiritual nutrition" in the broadest sense of the word, as stimuli "feeding" the soul. **Heraclitus' image** of rolling waves of water can be understood on several levels without the interpretation losing

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bartoš, H.: *Očima lékaře (Through the Eyes of a Physician)*. A study of the beginnings of Greek thinking about human nature in terms of body-soul differentiation. Červený Kostelec: Department of Philosophy and Natural Science History, Faculty of Natural Sciences at Charles University in Prague, in cooperation with Pavel Mervart Publishing House, 2006, ISBN: 80-86818-35-7. As already Homer believed, blood itself comes from vine and bread.

<sup>6</sup> As already Homer believed, blood itself comes from vine and bread.

its internal logic. Heraclitus appears to be deliberately equivocal (metaphorical) in his speech, but he makes sense on all possible interpretive levels.

Interesting is the example of **Heraclitus' famous utterance quoted by Plutarch**: "*It is not possible to enter the same river twice, nor to touch a mortal creatures twice in the same condition, as it disperses and comes together again in a nimble and rapid transformation.*"<sup>7</sup> The soul is conceived here as a sort of integrating environment.<sup>8</sup> Figuratively (metaphorically) speaking, if we enter the river we are, if we don't, we are not.... So at any moment we are, and at the same time we are not.

Even later, **at the turn of the archaic and classical periods of ancient Greece** in the first half of the 5th century BCE, we do not find any direct evidence of a clear contrast (difference) between the body and the soul.

**Hippocrates of Kos (460-377 BCE) epitomizes the first phase of Greek medicine.** Although almost two and a half thousand years separates us from Hippocrates, he remains a paragon of physicians all over the world to this very day. His concept of a physician having a mission, his principles of medical thought and action, they are all of enduring validity. Even the fact that tradition wrongly gave him the authorship of all Hippocratic Papers (Corpus Hippocraticum) does not detract from his greatness.

**Hippocratic Papers** are in fact the work of many physicians spanning about one hundred years. These anonymous treatises were written by scholars in the 3rd century BCE for Alexandrian Library on the orders of the knowledge-seeking Ptolemies. The medicinal principles of Kos (Hippocrates' birthplace) predominate, but the views of the Knid and Sicilian schools are also discussed.

The medical papers of the Hippocratic Corpus provide the first evidence of using the psycho-somatic difference in a sense other than the Homeric one. Hippocrates started to be perceived as "The Father of Medicine" already in the Middle Ages. However, of his contemporaries, it is only **Plato**, thirty years his junior, who compares Hippocrates with Polykleitos and Phidias, the most famous sculptors of his time. Hippocrates became known as a physician, and a teacher as well. He was a servant of Asklepius, which means that he was a member of the medical guild that descended from this patron saint of physicians and the divine founder of medicine.

**The Asklepians** were the physicians who had almost no connection with the cult of Asklepius, as opposed to the Asklepiian priests, who interpreted dreams. Initially, the Asklepians were actually a community of blood relatives who guarded the medical arts as a family legacy. Later, under certain conditions, non-related physicians started to be admitted to this guild as well, so that the original blood-related association eventually became a medical school. The Asklepians liked to settle near the temples of their god. Although secular as physicians, they were not unbelievers. However, as thinkers trained in natural philosophy, they strictly separated knowledge from faith and science from religion. "**The Great Hippocrates**", whose life coincides with the Peloponnesian War period (431-404 BCE), is said to have belonged to the twentieth generation of the Asklepians.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bartoš, H.: *Očima lékaře (Through the Eyes of a Physician)*. A study of the beginnings of Greek thinking about human nature in terms of body-soul differentiation. Červený Kostelec: Department of Philosophy and Natural Science History, Faculty of Natural Sciences at Charles University in Prague, in cooperation with Pavel Mervart Publishing House, 2006, ISBN: 80-86818-35-7, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> As opposed to the Plato's concept of a soul, wherein an immortal, i.e. divine, soul is placed into a human body only temporarily from the outside.

The physicians in those days, besides healing, devoted time to teaching. Medical practice at that time was considered a craft open to everyone, so the **quality of physicians varied widely**. While some were experienced practitioners steeped in philosophy, others were dilettantes or fraudulent charlatans. Following a training period, the students were admitted into the Asklepiian guild. Prior to that however, they took an oath preserved in the collection of Hippocratic Papers. In taking it, they swore to the gods, especially to Apollo, Asklepius and others, that they would honor the medical art as their mother and father, and even dedicate to it a portion of their life, that they will safeguard their life and their art to keep it pure and untainted. And that they will, to the best of their knowledge and ability, apply the principles of life for the benefit of the patient, never to his detriment or demise.

**Corpus Hippocraticum** was first printed in Venice, in 1526. Its subsequent ten-volume edition of the French philosopher and linguist Emil Littré in the years 1839-1861 is not up to today's standards, but as a whole it has never been surpassed. What kind of insights do we owe the Hippocratic medicine?

Let us recount at least a few of the **basic principles of the Hippocratic doctrine**: *Illness arises as a reaction to a wrong way of living, being caused by a disturbance in the balance of bodily juices. Every organism has a natural healing power that tries to restore the imbalance. More important than a diagnosis is the classification of the disease, its prognosis, and the patient's fate. The medical interest centers on his recovery. Thus the main task of a physician is to influence the natural reactions and processes, which tend to be effective but not always are, so as to succeed in saving the organism.*"<sup>9</sup>

Even after such a long time, we must admire the lofty approach to the medical profession in the Asklepiian Oath as well as in many other papers in *Corpus Hippocraticum*. For example: *"A physician who is also a philosopher is on a par with gods. (...) To love people is to love the art of medicine. (...) Physician is a servant of nature. (...) Comprehension and vanity are mutually exclusive. The former leads to knowledge, the latter to ignorance. (...) The art of medicine is the most noble among the various arts."*<sup>10</sup>

**The Hippocrates' concept of life** is thus based on a notion that creation and enhancement of values should be intentionally left to nature for the maximum benefit of the whole. This is why the modern scientific medicine still draws on the Hippocratic teaching, and why the majority of today's medical expressions come from the Greek.

*"The Hippocratic doctrine leads to a conclusion that a physician cannot be only a health technician to individuals and societies, but that he must follow the moral precepts of the Hippocratic Oath. Otherwise he would fail to carry out his mission. The entire Hippocratic medicine -- technically and ethically -- appears to inspire a new humanism that resurrects a moral goal in our technical civilization."*<sup>11</sup>

Related to all this is the legendary Greek passion for debate. Thus the physician had to converse with the patient, answer questions, and engage in frequent public discourses.

*The medical papers of Hippocratic Corpus finally reveal the first evidence of psycho-somatic difference being used in other than the Homeric sense. Hippocrates'*

<sup>9</sup> See Pollak, K.: *Medicina dávných časů (The Medicine of Old Times)*. Prague: Orbis, 1973, p. 274.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275

contribution in the area of caring for people in sickness and health, and precisely the physiologically based body-and-soul relationship evident especially in the treatise *On Lifestyle*, were helpful in the design of some modern diagnostic tools.<sup>12</sup> However, this “diagnostic” form needs to be differentiated from the “therapeutic” form.

For example, philosopher **Democritus of Abdera** (470-360 BCE) recognizes therapy of the body and therapy of the soul, and presents arguments why the soul should get a preferential treatment. Democritus is thus the first author to make a distinction between medicine as a physical therapy and philosophy as a psychotherapy. In this way, he posits philosophy as a soul-caring *techne* (art). By tending to the soul’s “health”, Democritus also seeks a road to happiness. The **Democritus’ fractions** are probably the earliest **evidence of a new psychotherapeutic speciality**, later called **philosophy**.

While a **Hippocratic healer** still does not see a difference in the treatment of body or soul, **Democritus** already holds a divergent view when he says “*Medical art cures the bodily diseases (somas), while wisdom (sofe) relieves the soul (psyche) of passions.*”<sup>13</sup> Or elsewhere: “*People should care more for the soul (psyche) than for the body (soma), because a perfect soul corrects the body condition, whereas physical strength without rationality does not improve the soul in any way.*”<sup>14</sup>

**Democritus continues** the tradition of Ionian philosophical thinking, such as that of **Heraclitus of Ephesus** (ca 535-475 BCE). This has to do especially with the **analogy of soul and fire** when asserting that the atoms of soul are very similar to those of fire. The most striking idea of Heraclitus, and the basis of Democritus’ psychological reasoning, is the conviction that **everything around and within us is in a perpetual state of flux**. And the Democritus’ atoms, just like the waters of the Heraclitus’ river, are in an incessant motion and change. This is of course reflected on the psychic plane as well.

While Heraclitus, seemingly in vain, seeks *logos* (assessment) for the soul in his doctrine and cannot find its boundaries, Democritus holds a conviction that a good soul does not get lost in the world and that the boundaries do not even exist for it. Asked “where should a man look for happiness and what is the essence of it?” Democritus replies: “*Happiness (eudaimonia) does not exist in a herd, nor in gold; the soul is the dwelling (oiketerion) of daimon* (which resides in human nature).”<sup>15</sup>

Another idea of Heraclitus, which plays an important part in Democritus’ doctrine, is the belief that *struggle is the father and the king of everything*. This is best exemplified by the idea of a struggle between the senses and the mind, or a court of law where the body accuses the soul of injustice. When **comparing the two thinkers**, it is apparent that Heraclitus sees struggle as the main driver of all cosmic processes (macrocosmic and microcosmic), whereas that conflict has only a microscopic dimension for Democritus when he declares: “*The fight against a desire (thymos) is difficult. However, winning it attests to a well-balanced man.*”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bartoš, H.: *Očima lékaře (Through the Eyes of a Physician)*. A study of the beginnings of Greek thinking about human nature in terms of body-soul differentiation. Červený Kostelec: Department of Philosophy and Natural Science History, Faculty of Natural Sciences at Charles’ University in Prague, in cooperation with Pavel Mervart Publishing House, 2006, ISBN: 80-86818-35-7, p. 259.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

**Democritus**, for the most part, offers solutions that accentuate the necessity of learning and training, as in the statement: “*Brave is he who overcomes not only his enemies, but also indulgence. Some may rule cities, but are enslaved by women.*”<sup>17</sup> Only good training makes it possible to resist the dangerous enemy of man, which are his own passions, as illustrated by another of his statements: “*Learning brings good things only through effort, whereas bad things bring their own fruit with no effort.*”<sup>18</sup> Only a continuous, strenuous learning, and fighting one’s own passions can lead to a satisfying life and happiness. Plus the effort to understand oneself and the world around. The road to enlightenment does not require a multiplicity of learning, but a recognition of underlying relationships (philosophy). As Democritus says: “*It is not necessary for us to know a lot of things, but to do a lot of thinking.*”<sup>19</sup> In other words: “**wisdom**” does not consist in knowing much about the details, but in the quality of thinking and the ability to uncover hidden relationships. Democritus’ belief in **rational thinking** thus replaces the earlier **intuitive type of thinking**.

A typical characteristic of the old-Greek thinking is **moderation**, the ability to do things that are rationally justified and in the right measure. The **traditional dictum** therefore is: “**Not too much of anything!**”

At the end of the 5th century BCE, a juxtaposition of body and soul begins to be discussed in a philosophical context. From that time on, the psyche is considered to be something more important than, and superior to, the body. An idea emerges that the soul must rule over the body and control it. That proposition would be impossible to find in the writings of Hippocratic authors.

**Plato** (427-347 BCE) already considered the **superiority of spirit over body** self-evident, as may be seen in his Constitution. **Socrates**, according to Plato, was already admonishing his fellow citizens to care more for their soul than for their material comfort. **Philosophy, as conceived by Plato**, now becomes a **psychotherapeutic technique** analogous to medicine. Since that time, **philosophy** began to be seen as a **method of separating the soul from the body**, and referred to as “**dying alive**”.

The reason why the originally medical, or more precisely therapeutic, subject matter evolved into a strictly philosophical or moral/political discourse where evil and injustice were considered diseases of the soul, was perhaps a plethora of bad physicians in his times, when medicine was still a profession open to anybody. In those days, bad physicians did not suffer any punishment other than contempt. Quite a few physicians became targets of public ridicule for their arrogance or incompetence. **Plato** held these **pseudo-doctors** in such low esteem that he even counted medicine among the professions unworthy of an honest man.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bartoš, H.: *Očima lékařů (Through the Eyes of a Physician)*. A study of the beginnings of Greek thinking about human nature in terms of body-soul differentiation. Červený Kostelec: Department of Philosophy and Natural Science History, Faculty of Natural Sciences at Charles’ University in Prague, in cooperation with Pavel Mervart Publishing House, 2006, ISBN: 80-86818-35-7, p. 162.

## Catharsis As a Method of Internal Cleansing

The word **katharsis** (catharsis), which means cleaning, became a very broad category in all ancient philosophy. It is a flexible term applicable to religion, philosophy and medicine, in fact to the entire human being. **Aristotle** was the first to use it in psychotherapy and psychology of art. The cleansing function of art had been known in antiquity for a long time though, for example **Hesiodos**, in his work *The Birth of Gods*, wrote that a singer's voice calms disturbed souls. And the **Pythagorians** claimed that art cleanses the human mind of destructive passions, cures diseases, and contributes to an overall spiritual well-being.<sup>20</sup>

**Plato** also elaborated on the doctrine of catharsis in his works, when he proposed to eliminate ignorance and moral deficiencies from human soul by means of art. His catharsis was based on isolating a perfect idea from everything "unclean", physical, sensuous. The soul is associated with beauty and purity while it sheds everything sensuous, and experiences everything in a "pure" form. To do that, the soul has to detach itself from the body, join reason as closely as possible and let it be totally permeated by it. In the *Filebos* dialog, Plato connects cleansing with the idea of selectivity, clarity, and perfect rendering. He holds that virtues, and in fact all things, should be brought to an utmost perfection, thereby attaining the greatest purity.

**Aristotle of Abdera** (384-322) finally gave catharsis the most important part in a comprehensive doctrine. **Catharsis** or the cleansing of human soul by compassion, empathy and the feelings of fear or anxiety, was entrusted to art, primarily to tragedy. In his treatise entitled *Poetics*, Aristotle points out that art, and above all the tragedy, has an important function: to move a sensitive viewer emotionally toward goodness combined with rationality and high-mindedness, thereby relieving his mental stresses and worries.

Aristotle believed that catharsis can cure maladies of the soul, which -- just like the diseases of the body -- arise from the organism's disturbed balance, from too much or too little energy, from exhaustion after a day of monotonous labor. The energy invested into a work of art by the artist does not dissipate but engenders more energy, which is a source of emotional strength and agility in people whose souls are receptive to beautiful (i.e. esthetically pleasing) forms. This emotional experience, primarily pity and fear, affect the man's psycho-physical constitution as some soothing and purging drugs.

Aristotle argued that drama and music are good for the soul only if they renew and preserve the body/soul equilibrium (eliminate shortages or surpluses of energy). The drama and music should gently induce a normal (harmonious) state in the organism and bring the disturbed (unbalanced) condition to a golden mean or harmony. This **cathartic treatment** is actually a "homeopathic" healing, where pity is cured by pity, fear by fear, madness by madness, etc. But of course the pity that cures and the pity to be cured are not identical.<sup>20</sup>

The **viewer** of a vividly and artistically portrayed sorrow in a certain tragedy will succumb to its effects, he will identify with it, and gradually acquire a sense of rebirth, purification, joy, as if given a healing balm. Jumbled emotions (like excessive pity)

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Buchtová, M.: *Pojetí krásy v antice (The Concept of Beauty in Antiquity)*. Brno: CERM, 2000, ISBN: 80-7204-184-3.

will transmute into a perfect substance. Aristotle therefore wants the author of a good tragedy to fashion the main character so that he resembles most people in many ways. The viewer has to identify with the protagonist at least on some level, feel affinity and potential similarity of fate, but, at the same time, the protagonist has to behave and act substantially better than the viewer.

The **plot of the drama** had to be structured so as to invoke the right form of compassion, trepidation, etc. and permit plausible reasoning, so that the viewer would find the tragic and terrifying spectacle esthetically pleasing. The fear that destroys a person, robs him of his tranquility and drains his energy must be conquered by a “reasonable” (appropriate) degree of fear. It was therefore necessary for the viewer to understand what the characters were guilty of, why they fell into misfortune, and allow him to “re-hearse” it with them so to speak. Only then the viewer could regain his mental balance and find some peace of mind. The author must allow the viewer to figure out the causes of such tragic events, and transform his nonsensical fear into an esthetically pleasing artistic experience.

**Aristotle** likewise **studied musical catharsis**. Given the ability of music to liberate the soul from all sorts of passions and charm it quickly with its rhythm and melody, Aristotle believes that it is predisposed to be one of the means for citizens’ edification. Aside from soothing and purifying the soul, music has one other pleasing aspect: it is the act of reason. Music is an inherently “good” and desirable activity. Per Aristotle, everything that has internal “goodness”, integrity, and displays a proper form or charm, is also reasonable.

A **work of art** helps to open an inner valve allowing the person to get rid of emotions considered “bad”, those that people want to avoid. Having experienced an artistic work, people return to reality with more relaxed feelings.

The last ancient philosopher of some prominence that studied catharsis in Hellenistic times was **Plotinus**, who pointed out that the old religious ceremonies and rituals were also instrumental in man’s inner purification.<sup>21</sup>

## **Kalokagathia: The Ideal of Good, Esthetic and Healthy Life**

**Another common term in the old-Greek thinking** with significance for the therapy of the soul, was “**kalokagathia**”, a word composed of “kalos” (beautiful) and “agathos” (good). The **first interpretations** of kalokagathia are to be found in the **sources** from the sphere of **seven sages** and the **Pythagorians**. For example **Solon** is credited with the statement “*Uphold the kalokagathia of morals more faithfully than an oath*”. For **Socrates** (ca 469-399 BCE) “kalokagathia” is the essence of all virtues, all good deeds. He argued that only a wise man can be kalokagathic and equates kalokagathia with wisdom. By contrast, **Plato** understood “kalokagathia” to be the symmetry of body and soul. Kalokagathic man is the one who has ennobled not only his sense of beauty, music and art, but also his body; a man who can also detect all imperfections of life. For

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Buchtová, M.: *Pojetí krásy v antice (The Concept of Beauty in Antiquity)*. Brno: CERM, 2000, ISBN: 80-7204-184-3.

**Aristotle**, “kalokagathia” is the overall virtue, all partial virtues mutually intertwined. In his interpretation, “kalokagathia” is the state of integrity in a man’s spiritual life.

For the **ancient Greeks**, “kalokagathia” meant the harmony of body and soul, the ultimate goal of every human pursuit of “goodness”. For them, beauty was inseparable from virtue. And every virtue implied wealth, health, strength and power. The classic “kalokagathia” was peculiar in that it was perceived as an in-born quality, an idiosyncrasy of the socially privileged, those of noble origin, well brought up and educated.

**At the very end of the ancient era**, during its crisis, an opinion emerged that “kalokagathia” was the result of an uncompromising moral training accessible practically to everyone. This vision of “kalokagathia” was held by the Greek orator **Isocrates**. He defines “kalokagathia” solely in the moral sense, as a result of man’s inner spiritual quest. That also required an abstemious way of living and rejection of the mundane pleasures (e.g. stoic asceticism). This idea used to crop up in the speeches of **Clement of Alexandria**: “*Not nature (fysis), but the result of learning (mathesis) brings forth beautiful and good people.*”<sup>22</sup>

**The idea of “kalokagathia” survived into the present**, although today it usually has a little different content. It could be the influence of **Miroslav Tyrš**, for whom “kalokagathia” was the **ideal of humanistic education** toward physical and mental fitness, as well as beauty.<sup>23</sup>

## Harmony: A Unified Diversity

The idea of **harmony** had a significant role in the ancient Greek thinking (harmonia means connection, accord, consonance, agreement). This **idea** testified to the regularity and integrity of all things and all beings, along with their content and importance. The **ancient thinkers** applied this expression to a variety of diverse phenomena in nature and in social life, mixing its philosophical sense (ethical and esthetic) with social and cosmological implications. **The original meaning of the word harmony** is crack, joint, clamp, or wedge. This is still the content of the word harmony in Homer’s Odyssey. But he, too, began to use it **in the sense** of agreement, peace, consent.

**The philosophy of pre-Socrates thinkers** looked at harmony cosmologically, as a general principle and a universal law. The first **systematic doctrine of harmony was postulated by the Pythagorians**. To them, harmony meant syntonization, unification, the unity of components in a cosmological sense. It was also something positive and beautiful to them. This harmony was not a property of any one thing, but an inherent characteristic of the world as cosmos.

The word “**cosmos**” in Greek means order, arrangement, decoration, world, universe. To the philosophers of the Ionian school, and later the atomists, the term signified a harmoniously structured world governed by a system of laws, therefore perceived by man as beautiful. The **opposite** of the word cosmos is **chaos** or disorderly space. Tradition has it that **Pythagoras** was the first to call the universe cosmos.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Buchtová, M.: *Pojetí krásy v antice (The Concept of Beauty in Antiquity)*. Brno: CERM, 2000, ISBN: 80-7204-184-3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Pythagoras and his disciples worked from the assumption that **the entire universe is built harmoniously**. This harmony exists between heavenly bodies that move in celestial orbits, setting off vibration in the ether that produce the most exquisite music. Unfortunately, the human ear registers this unfathomable singing as nothing but silence. The regular movement of celestial bodies excites harmonious sounds that resonate throughout the universe, hence the well-known phrase **“harmony of the spheres”**.

The **notion of harmony of the soul** appears in the same context. The soul is also a certain harmony, a consonance based on a definite numerical ratio like the whole universe. This concept of human soul explains the peculiar delight it derives from **music**. According to the saying that similarity means affinity, the **soul** joyfully responds to those harmonic vibrations that impinge on, and resonate with, the related elements within the sphere of orbiting heavenly bodies. Spiritual consonance is like striking a chord on lute strings. The soul has the ability to perfect itself by exposure to music. This is because music is an approximation of, and a conduit for, a divine melody. It can put the soul in tune with the eternal harmony that musicians are supposed to bring from heaven to Earth. Music imprints the soul with a stamp of its divine origin. That was why Pythagoras and his disciples utilized music in treating human diseases.

**Music in Greece** was generally seen as an **important tool in influencing a person**. Pythagoras is therefore the founder of **musical therapy**. He was the first to introduce education by music, by certain rhythms and tunes. That led to a treatment of human morals and passions intended to restore the mental harmony to what it was before in a healthy person. Pythagoras used to **prescribe musical curing sessions**, a sort of musical tune-up. He tried to convert the obsessions that well up within men and surface in irrational ways (profound grief, anger, sorrow, morbid jealousy, fear, childishness, etc.), in fact all human problems, into virtues by appropriate melodies as if they were medications.

**The idea of music as an effective therapy for the soul may be encountered in the so-called orphic cults**. Their basic idea was a belief that human soul is imprisoned in the body for previous misdeeds. The soul can free itself only by washing away those sins. This cleaning was done through the so-called **orphic mysteries**, which involved music and dancing.

The **Pythagorians** thought that “bad”, i.e. discordant and disorderly, mixture can never produce anything complete and harmonious, therefore beautiful and healthy. That explains their constant search for harmony in all human doing. The **sophists** were the first who began to think that harmony (beauty), as well as the right approach to life and the world, are the problems of human consciousness.

**Harmony** ceases to be a strictly cosmological problem and it becomes a purely human issue, not a question of virtue or morality but largely a matter of hedonism and sensuality. The **sophists** came up with an **idea** that it is necessary to concentrate on the details and their relativity, and abandon the search for the universal. The relativistic notions of the sophists, especially in the area of morality, were criticized by **Socrates**. He began to extoll the spiritual harmony for its inner, ethical beauty, beneficial to the whole. His disciple **Plato** then shifted the concept of harmony into a spiritual arena. He reverts to a general viewpoint even in his approach to harmony.

Harmony thus becomes the expression of appropriateness and restraint, while being pleasant to our senses. Harmony is an objective quality of things and of the world.

It reflects the properties of an ideal world structure outside of our physical reality. The archetype of this essentially ideal harmony forms the basis of spiritual beauty and morality in general. Such a harmony consists of beauty, truth and goodness, mutually intertwined. Harmony finds its expression in moral deeds, in the constancy of standards and values, in something permanent, unchanging, independent of time and decay, rather than in shapelessness, temporality, ugliness and chaos.<sup>24</sup>

**Harmony may be approached in several steps. The first step is the ability to generalize** the things and phenomena around us. **The second step consists in a transition** from all corporality (materialism) **to spiritual values**, such as the beauty of morals and social laws, the beauty of learning and knowledge. **The third step is a direct contact with the divine harmony** that gives meaning and beauty of all lower levels of reality. This is actually a **mystic ceremony** involving something like extrasensory vision in a quest for absolute values. It cannot be described in words because it exists outside the realm of normal human being and knowing.

**Aristotle**, too, searches for harmony as a mutual conformity of body and mind, a concept called “kalokagathia”. The combination of health and beauty was very important to him. He perceives harmony as the quintessence of beauty, therefore also as a unity in diversity, a beauty that encompasses everything.

**In the period of stoicism, harmony** (beauty) is once again seen in nature and in the universe. Its essence is in the measure and proportion, in symmetry, in the agreement of opinions, actions and virtues. Stoics also adhere to the idea of beauty being ubiquitous in the world. To them, nothing is more beautiful than the world because it is ruled by order and harmony. The world was created purposefully and orderly. It is flawless, perfect in all respects, therefore also beautiful.

**In Hellenism**, the last period of antiquity infused with **neoplatonism**, harmony is again viewed mythologically as various speculative constructs in the tradition of Plato.<sup>25</sup>

## **Kalobiotics: Making Life Beautiful**

**In the period of the Czech Biedermeier**, a distinct lifestyle of people in the Czech territory in the period between the Congress of Vienna and the revolutionary year 1848, an extremely insightful study appeared in the Habsburg monarchy on “**kalobiotics**”, or how to live beautifully, harmoniously, and correctly in modern times. The credit for its publication goes mostly to Viennese Professor of Anatomy **Wilhelm Bronn**, whose works (such as *Kalobiotik: Kunst schön zu leben, wissenschaftlich aufgefaßt*, 1839) proclaimed that man should not live merely by the rules of practical reason, but also by the principles of beauty. Man should not only strive to live long (healthily), but also beautifully (meaningfully).

**Historical examples of practical kalobiotics in this country** were: “*center for beautiful living of Antonín Veith, the enlightened owner of Liběchov, with the commingling of art, politic and science, Czechs and Germans; also the cemetery in Albrechtice*”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Buchtová, M.: *Pojetí krásy v antice (The Concept of Beauty in Antiquity)*. Brno: CERM, 2000, ISBN: 80-7204-184-3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

*nad Vltavou, which, thanks to father Ciza, acquired the form of a significant Biedermeier artistic and literary artifact (Ciza had eighty chapels built at the cemetery, decorated with paintings of František Mikule and his own poems). These examples may be perceived as a certain fulfillment of ideals of the kalobiotic way of life, in the latter case carried to an extreme.*"<sup>26</sup>

To some, the requirements of kalobiotics may appear idealistic, romantic, etc. And it may be true that the majority of people today are too pragmatic. Perhaps the most important thing to them is what can be counted, what can be seen with one's own eyes, what can be touched.

**The aim of kalobiotics** is to beautify human life, to empower reason and fantasy in their mutual concord and harmony. **Kalobiotics** endeavors to arrange life following the laws of beauty. A **kalobiotic person** faces **two choices**: 1) he can **make the extant beauty visible** (to open people's eyes to a sense of beauty), or 2) he can **create beauty himself** through his natural creativity, without being necessarily an artist.

**Unlike esthetics**, the core subject of kalobiotics is not art, but real life, or more precisely the quality of life. That is the point. Because **kalobiotics** means to behold and cultivate true beauty within ourselves and everywhere around us. Kalobiotics also builds on the philosophical and cultural traditions of antiquity, on its teaching about harmony, kalokagathia, catharsis and others ideas, which it tries to develop in different times and by somewhat different means.

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## FILOZOFICKÉ SOUVISLOSTI ZDRAVÍ

**Abstrakt:** Studie pojednává o počátcích evropského lékařství v antickém Řecku. Ukazuje souvislost mezi vývojem filosofie a medicíny. Lékařská mytologie je obsažena již v Asklépiově kultu. Počátky filozoficko-medicínské teorie nacházíme už homérském

<sup>26</sup> *Estetika 4/2006*. Praha: Academia Publishing House, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. ISSN: 0014-1291.

eposu Ilias. O něco později iónská přírodní filosofie se stává základem všech tehdejších věd i medicíny. V celé antické filosofii se velmi rozšířeným termínem stalo učení o katarzi jako cestě vnitřní očisty. Dalším frekventovaným pojmem ve starořeckém myšlení stal pojem kalokagathia jako ideál krásného a zdravého života. Velmi důležitou roli hrál také pojem harmonie, chápaný jako jednota v rozmanitosti. V období českého biedermeieru se objevují mimořádně objevné studie o kalobiotice, jak krásně, harmonicky a správně žít, které se mohou stát nadčasovým inspirativním zdrojem všech úvah o kvalitě života.

**Klíčová slova:** antika, katarze, harmonie, kalokagathie, medicína, mytologie, filosofie, kvalita života