

ARTS OF THINKING AND ARTS OF HEALING IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE: PHILOSOPHY, MEDICINE AND POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

ARTS, SCIENCES AND THE MEDICINE OF THE MIND: METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

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Francis Bacon's famous division of the 'arts intellectual'¹ gives pride of place to inquiry or 'invention' over judgment, memory or transmission. It is especially the 'invention' or 'arts and sciences' that Bacon had in mind and set to find, claiming that no knowledge can be 'real', or proper knowledge, unless one can explain how it was obtained and predict its results.² The art of invention preceded and supplemented the reconfiguration of the new logic (or the *novum organum*) and together, they were seen as constituting the necessary corrective for the innate and intrinsic deficiencies and distempers of the human mind. When describing his arts of thinking, Bacon talks about "improving and perfecting the use of reason" and "rising up" the intellect in such a way that its faculties become 'fit' "for overcoming the dark and difficult tracts of nature".³ The discipline that would achieve such results is not, however, a 'science' properly speaking (*scientia*). It is also not a fully developed 'art' but more on the level of "thoughtful prudence,"⁴ a "kind of sagacity"⁵ etc. It is also a long-term enterprise, a permanent discipline of the mind, a 'regimen' for preserving the health of the mind and improving its powers. No wonder, therefore, that one finds in Bacon's writings so many analogies between the arts of thinking and medicine, or various 'arts of healing' so popular in sixteenth century Europe. In many ways, his plan for reforming the human mind can be seen as belonging to a larger intellectual context of cultivating, disciplining or 'medicining' the mind.⁶

At the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century phrases such as "medicine of the mind," "spiritual physicke", "cultivation of the mind/soul" etc. were widespread and sometimes belonged to very popular writings. One can find them everywhere: in discourses of consolation, in moral philosophy, in medical contexts, in answering epistemological or theological questions and so forth. In many ways, they were too popular and too widespread to be of any historical use, since they transcend disciplinary and methodological boundaries. On the other hand, disciplinary borders aside, one can perhaps see in the widespread occurrences of medical terms an interesting feature of early modern attempts to deal with important and 'trans-disciplinary' questions such as the nature of the (embodied) mind and the limits of knowledge, the relation between natural and moral knowledge and between knowledge and salvation. After all, in the post-Reformation Europe, the age old analogy between philosophy/wisdom and a *medicina mentis*⁷ had to be rewritten in a new theological context stressing the irremediably corrupt nature of the mind, nature and history and the permanence of the sectarian war. It is a common occurrence in sixteenth-century literature to claim that philosophers (ancients and moderns) have betrayed the noble task of being 'true' doctors of the soul and have sunk in inventing fictitious

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dogmas and dangerous idols.⁸ In consequence, many books dealing, one way or another, with cultivating the mind, proposed to replace philosophy and the philosophers with better doctors, less prone to vain speculations and disputations. There were various candidates: doctors, divines, humanists, natural historians claimed, in turns, that they can do the job better than the ancients. They talked rather indistinctly about *medicining the mind*, giving spiritual physic to the diseased intellect, *cultura animi*, “georgics of the mind”, *emendation intellectus*, *expurgation mentis* or other medical phrases. The excess of medical labels is not accidental. Medicine offered a powerful model for philosophers, rhetoricians or divines interested in extending the range of knowledge, moulding the moral person and inculcating virtue. A number of studies have recently shown that the end of the sixteenth century coincides in England with a marked Galenic revival,⁹ a moment that affected and influenced not only the medical profession but much larger intellectual circles. Among its features there was an emphasis upon a patient-centred methodical medicine: the physician was seen as collaborating with the patient in devising therapies that would bring about a general health of the body and soul.¹⁰ One result of such a tendency was the explosion of books on regimens: advice books on how to live a “proper life”, mostly the product of the learned medicine.¹¹ By insisting on method, therapies and the patient-doctor collaboration, the Galenic practitioners of the sixteenth century were distinguishing themselves from the mere “empiric”. Such a general shift from theory to practice produced interesting changes within and outside the medical profession, to such an extent that Deborah Harkness thought fit to describe the situation in terms of a *culture of therapeutics* replacing the more traditional *culture of dissection*.¹² Among the characteristic features of this *culture of therapeutics* there was an insistence on observation, diagnosis and semiology, a growing interest in the individual life of the patient and the emphasis on finding forms of collaboration between the “doctor” and the patient both at the level of observation and diagnosis, where the patient was asked to exercise his capacities of self-knowledge, and at the level of devising therapies, where the patient was strongly encouraged to collaborate in choosing the right regimen and following the prescriptions.

The model of an active-formative relation between the doctor and the patient propagated outside medicine, in the realm of theology and moral philosophy. In this, it was helped by the more general discussions concerning the corrupt state of the mind in the general scenario of the Fall and Salvation. In view of the irremediably depravity of the human beings, all the disciplines claiming to provide therapies of the body and soul acquired a new status. They cannot claim to cure anymore; they merely prescribed carefully devised regimens of life. Following the regimen, however, was the patient’s duty and hard work.

The model of *medicina mentis* promoted by this culture of therapeutics heavily permeated moral philosophy as well. Jeremy Schmidt has shown how questions relating with the nature and treatment of melancholy developed into moral therapies¹³ at the end of sixteenth and the beginning of seventeenth century, the medicine of the mind supplementing the medicine of the body. However, the melancholic disease was just one of the cases where moral therapies were available. Moral therapies, very much like the spiritual physicke of the divine, presupposed self-introspection and self-knowledge and a sane regimen of life devoted to achieving a natural (as opposed to human, passionate, internal) perspective upon one’s own self and its place within the world.

Practical books on the regimen of life were often constructed upon a serious theoretical core: a theory of the nature and functions of the “passionate mind”, sometimes with an anatomical basis too, as in the famous treatise of Juan Huarte, *Los examen des ingenios*.¹⁴ The theory was highly eclectic, drawing freely from Aristotelian and Stoic sources, quoting (or not) Seneca, Cicero, sometimes even Lucretius. However, there was a certain unity behind diversity. Such works were constructed upon a roughly constant theory of the mind, a theory seeing the human

understanding as engaged in a permanent inner struggle to preserve the grip over the lower faculties of the soul. They shared a common interest on the mechanism and physiology of passions, seen as a common root of all evil. They advocated self-knowledge and the empirical study of nature (at least in the functioning of the human mind, body and the mechanism of the passions).

However, the *medicine of the mind* was not only occurring in books of regimen, therapy and self-help, but was also permeating proper philosophical and epistemological discussions. In this way, the 'arts of thinking' and the 'arts of healing' are intrinsically related in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Any student of the early modern intellectual landscape cannot fail to notice the recurrence of medical terms and metaphors in describing various important epistemological questions. For many sixteenth- and seventeenth- century thinkers, the problem of error is almost universally portrayed in terms of symptoms and diseases. The Fallen human mind is seen as distempered, in a permanent state of disarray and unrest, 'distorted', 'ill', subject to 'perturbations', filled with 'idols'¹⁵ and badly in need of therapeutic procedures to discipline it and treat it.

The problem of truth is similarly pictured in medical terms: like proper health, truth is an 'ideal state' of the mind, never to be properly reached as long as the mind is in this piteous fallen state, but always to be pursued out of a sense of 'duty'. Similarly, the problem of the growth of knowledge had also been discussed in 'medical terms': early modern philosophers often speak of amending the 'character of the mind', they prescribe 'regimens' that would lead to the advancement or to the healing of the mind, they talk about 'tincturing' the mind and so on.

A number of recent researches have attempted to shown that perhaps one can find in this pervasiveness of the medical language in discussing methodological and epistemological issues a useful hermeneutic tool with which one can unearth important and less well known aspects of the early modern thought. In addition to the direction of research proposing a medical 'paradigm' and discussed above, a good number of investigations began by assuming what has been called the emergence of a 'disciplinary society'¹⁶ or, even larger, the 'culpabilisation' of the Western culture.¹⁷ In this wider social and intellectual context, Stoic and Neo-Stoic ideals of disciplining and cultivating the mind found a fertile soil and evolved, using rich medical imagery to discuss a mixture of the unattainable Stoic ideal of the wise with the Christian anthropology of Fall and Salvation.¹⁸ Last but not least, another direction of research has proposed to see the medical vocabulary and the medical imagery as signs of a proto-disciplinary aggregation, drawing attention in this way to a disciplinary 'cluster' or to a group of disciplines permeated by this medical imagery and dealing specifically (but not from a proper disciplinary perspective) with techniques of improving, cultivating or doctoring the mind: a modern *cultura animi* or *medicine of the mind*.¹⁹

Such directions of research are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they can all provide useful insights into the rich interplay of questions and puzzles still insufficiently explored and so characteristic of the Early Modern Europe.

In view of the increased interest in the 'medicine of the mind' or, more generally, in various arts of 'healing' the mind in the Early Modern Europe, this special issue groups together articles coming from various fields and disciplines but dealing with such arts of healing/arts of thinking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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References

- ¹ See Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. M. Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), IV, 107 (hereafter OFB).
- ² OFB IV, 107-109. See Jalobeanu, D., "Core Experiments, Natural Histories, and the Art of *experientia literata*: the Meaning of Baconian Experimentation", *Societate și politică*, 10 (2011): 88-103; Jalobeanu, D., "The Philosophy of Francis Bacon's Natural History: A Research Program", *Studii de știință și cultură*, 23 (2010): 18-37.
- ³ Bacon, F., *Plan of the Work (Distributio operis)*, in Bacon, F., *The Instauration magna Part II. Novum organum and Associated texts*, ed. G. Rees and M. Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.
- ⁴ "The doctrine of idols cannot be reduced to an art; all that can be done is to use a kind of thoughtful prudence to guard against them." Bacon, F., *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon* ed. J. Spedding, R. Ellis, and D. Heath (New York: Garrett Press, 1968), IV, 432.
- ⁵ See Lewis, R., "A Kind of Sagacity: Francis Bacon, the *ars memoriae* and the Pursuit of Natural Knowledge", *Intellectual History Review* 19 (2009): 155-177.
- ⁶ See Corneanu, S., Giglioni, G., Jalobeanu, D., "Introduction", *Early Science and Medicine* 1-2 (2012); Corneanu, S., *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern "Cultura Animi" Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Jalobeanu, D., "Francis Bacon and Justus Lipsius. Natural Philosophy, Natural Theology, and the Stoic Discipline of the Mind", in *Justus Lipsius and Natural Philosophy*, eds. H. Hirai and J. Papy (Wetteren: Universal Press, 2011), 107-121; Jalobeanu, D., "Experimental Philosophers and Doctors of the Mind: The Appropriation of a Philosophical Tradition", in *Naturel et surnaturel. Philosophies de la nature et métaphysique aux XVI-XVII siècles*, eds. V. Alexandrescu et R. Theis (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2010), 37-63.
- ⁷ Democritus was probably the first to develop the analogy in philosophical context. Socrates' *Charmides* is a locus classicus for the whole tradition. The development of a fully fledged doctrine equating philosophy with a medicine of the mind is, however, the mark of the Hellenistic schools, and especially of the Stoics. The Stoics supplement the doctrine with a powerful account of emotions; using the medical vocabulary for building a new understanding of the practical philosophy seen as an art of healing the mind. Chrysippus, PHP 5.2.22, 298D, SVF 3. 471 "It is not true that there exists an art (techne) that we call medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul. Nor is it true that the latter is inferior to the former, in its theoretical grasp and therapeutic treatment of individual cases."
- ⁸ See Jalobeanu, D., "Idolatry, Natural History, and Spiritual Medicine: Francis Bacon and the Neo-Stoic Protestantism of the Neo-Stoic Protestantism of the Late Sixteenth-Century", *Perspectives on Science* (2012) (forthcoming).
- ⁹ McLean, I., *Logic, signs and nature in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Gowland, A., *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38 ff.
- ¹⁰ Wear, A., *Health and Healing in Early Modern England: Studies in Social and Intellectual History* (Variorum: Ashgate, 1998).
- ¹¹ Wear, A. (1998), 157. A couple of examples of books on regimen: Thomas Elyot, *Castel of Helthe*, 1536, reprinted 16 times until 1595, Thomas Paynell's translation of *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum*, London, 1528, John Harrington, a version of the same, *The Governance of Good Helthe*, Plutarch treatise, 1530, Andrew Boorde, *A compendious Regyment or a Dyetary of Health*, London, 1542, Thomas Phayre, *The Regument of Life*, London, 1545, William Bullein, *The Regimen of Life*, 1558, Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health*, 1584.
- ¹² Harkness, D., "Nosce teipsum: Curiosity, the humoural body and the culture of therapeutics in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England", in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, eds. R. J. Evans, A. Marr (Adelshot: Ashgate, 2006), 171-193.
- ¹³ Schmidt, J., "Melancholy and the Language of Moral Philosophy in Seventeenth Century Thought", *JHI* (2005): 583-601.

¹⁴ Huarte discusses at length the Galenic doctrine of the ventricles of the brain and argues in favour of the faculties having seats in the first three frontal ventricles. Huarte, *Examen de Ingenios, The Examination of mens Wits* (London, 1596) (translated from Italian by Richard Carew), esp. 52-60.

¹⁵ Idolatry is given a proper philosophical treatment of the famous book I of Francis Bacon's *Novum organum*. Before that, however, it is a theological and epistemological problem for all the reformers. See Eire, C., *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁶ See for example Taylor, Ch., *A Secular age* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007) and Harrison, P., "Francis Bacon, natural philosophy and the cultivation of the mind", *Perspectives on Science* (2012) (forthcoming).

¹⁷ Delumeau, J., *Le Pêché et la peur : La culpabilisation en Occident, XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).

¹⁸ Harrison, P., (2012) (forthcoming).

¹⁹ For recent discussions see Corneanu, S., (2011) and Corneanu, S., Giglioni, G., Jalobeanu, D., (2012).