

PHI 515: Topics in the History of Philosophy
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Galen's *Outline of Empiricism*

In this short treatise, Galen provides a fairly detailed presentation of the views of an ancient medical school according to which medical knowledge, the knowledge by possessing which one is a medical doctor, is just a matter of experience, without reason, conceived of as a power to grasp imperceptible essences or natures of things, playing any role either in the constitution or in the formation of such knowledge.

We want to understand this way of thinking about medical knowledge in its own right by carefully studying Galen's treatise. But we also want to study it in the broader context of ancient theories and debates about the nature of expert knowledge. Medical Empiricism needs to be understood in part as a reaction to the high-powered theoretical conceptions of reason introduced or relied on by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, to the effect that reason is a power to grasp imperceptible natures of things and to grasp imperceptible relations such as logical consequence and incompatibility.

But it also needs to be understood as presupposing and building on a tradition of thinkers who held that expert knowledge was just a matter of observation, memory, and experience, like Polus (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 1, 981a3-5) and Alcmaeon of Croton (?) (*Phaedo* 96 b). In fact, Medical Empiricism is the most fully articulated or anyhow the best-preserved example of this tradition that is available to us.

Another kind of context that is relevant background to a study of Medical Empiricism is the context of debates among it and its rival medical schools, namely various forms of Rationalism, and Methodism. Finally, it is worth noting that the philosopher Sextus Empiricus, about whose ideas we have a good deal of evidence, was also an Empirical doctor, as is indicated by his name. There are important and interesting connections between Sextus' Skepticism and Medical Empiricism which are worth exploring, but it is also clear that Sextus means to distance himself from Medical Empiricism, when he says, rather surprisingly, that his form of Skepticism is more akin to Methodism than to Empiricism (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 236).

Syllabus:

1. February 6. Introductory comments and guiding questions: the concept of experience in the pre-Platonic background; Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of expert knowledge; Epicurean *epilogismos* as an everyday, non-Rationalist concept of reflection. Can Sextus take himself to know things, or even to have expert knowledge of some domain, e.g. medicine, consistently with his Skepticism? What are the key doctrines of Medical Empiricism, and do they enable Empiricist doctors to offer a conception of the formation and constitution of medical expertise that does justice to medical practice?

2. February 13. Expert knowledge, reason, and experience in Platonic dialogues (*Republic*, *Gorgias*, *Laws*)

3. February 20. Aristotle on expert knowledge, reason, and experience (*Posterior Analytics* II 19, *Metaphysics* A 1, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6)

4. February 27. Stoic and Epicurean epistemology

5. March 6. The ancient medical schools: Rationalism, Empiricism, Methodism

6. March 13. Sextus Empiricus: Pyrrhonism, Empiricism, and Methodism

Spring Recess

From Session 7 (March 27) onwards, we will read and discuss Galen's treatise, aiming to cover about two chapters per session.

Literature

Plato: *Republic* 5-7, *Gorgias*, *Laws* 720 a-c and 857 c-d, *Phaedo* 96 b

Aristotle: *Posterior Analytics* II 19, *Metaphysics* A 1, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI

Stoicism: Michael Frede, "Stoic Epistemology," in Algra, Barnes, Mansfeld, and Schofield, *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (2005), 295-322

Epicurus: Long & Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, sections 15-18; M. Schofield, "Epilogismos: An Appraisal," in Frede and Striker, *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Oxford (1996), 221-238

Ancient medical schools: "Introduction," in M. Frede and R. Walzer, *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*, Hackett, 1985

Medical Empiricism: M. Frede, "The Ancient Empiricists," in his *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (1987), 243-260

Sextus Empiricus: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I

Galen, *Outline of Empiricism*: English translation in Frede/Walzer, *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*. Latin and reverse translation into ancient Greek: K. Deichgräber, *Die Griechische Empirikerschule*, Bern-Zurich, 1965