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EDITORIAL

MEDICINE AND CULTURE

Hippocrates is considered the 'father of medicine' because in the fourth century BC he founded 'technê iatrikê' on experience and reason together. He conceptualized medicine as an independent science with its particular object and its characteristic methods. According to Pedro Lain Entralgo, in his work on the doctor-patient relationship, this conception originated from a change in attitude towards nature. The Hippocratic physician could be the friend of his patient because he was, even more fundamentally, the friend of nature.

However, precisely this 'naturalism' was the fundamental characteristic of Greek culture. Medicine originated within a specific cultural setting which at the same time gave birth not only to philosophy but also to several modern sciences, such as biology, astronomy, geometry and mathematics. Therefore, from its very origin, medicine is deeply embedded in culture. It is clear that modern medicine used to be identified with western medicine. That is why Hippocrates is recognized as its father, and not Imhotep from Egypt or Susruta from India.

The interrelation between medicine and culture is the theme of the forthcoming conference of our Society on the island of Kos in Greece. More than 100 members will participate in a scholarly exchange of thoughts and ideas. The theme is so rich that it can be elaborated into various directions. First, culture has a specific influence on the concepts, methods, procedures, organization and practice of medicine. Far from being universal, notions of disease and health have varied considerably among continents, countries, and regions. Second, medicine itself has particular influences on cultures. Western culture nowadays is extremely medicalised; every aspect of human life is colonized with medical approaches, views and interpretations. Some philosophers have argued that in fact medicine in our times has taken over the role religion used to play in

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earlier millennia. Third, medicine can be considered not so much as an entity that is independent from culture, and thus in various ways interrelated with culture, but as an expression and articulation of culture itself. Medicine is a human activity. Human beings are brought up in a culture; they are 'beings-in-the-world'. But at the same time, human beings are also natural entities, not merely cultural products. Medicine as human, cultural enterprise is always concerned with nature, natural events, the natural lottery, etc. Reflection upon medicine can therefore activate us to think about the fundamental relation between culture and nature.

The richness of the abstracts of the presentations for the Kos meeting testify that the theme of the conference will indeed stimulate reflection on fundamental philosophical queries.

Henk ten Have