

Brooke Holmes  
Princeton University

What is medical about medicine? The problem of pleasure.

Scholars of early philosophical ethics and popular morality in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE have long known that pleasure was a serious matter of concern in the Greek world of this period. Pleasure often appears as the predominant threat to the masculine ideal of being master of oneself, and the question of the relationship between pleasure and the good proves an enduring dilemma in the ethical tradition. As Lesley Dean-Jones has observed, the texts in the Hippocratic Corpus, while primarily interested in the functional aspect of sexual activity (and other forms of pleasure), are largely compatible with this general cultural context insofar as they accept that pleasure requires the exercise of *sophrosynê*, while denying the capacity for choice and restraint to women.<sup>i</sup>

Dean-Jones' arguments about the different treatment of male and female pleasure in the medical writers are convincing. In this paper, I wish to inquire further into the question of male desire and motivation. I hope to use the problem of (masculine) pleasure to introduce a point of divergence between medical literature and nascent philosophical ethics. In so doing, I aim to probe the question, if not of what is Hippocratic about the Hippocratic Corpus, at least of what is "medical" about the texts gathered therein.

Excessive eating, drinking, and sexual indulgence—the triad of "consuming passions" identified by James Davidson—appear as causes of disease in a number of our extant Hippocratic treatises.<sup>ii</sup> What is interesting, however, is that despite the role played by these behaviors, the medical writers tend to adopt a quasi-Socratic approach to the control of these behaviors if they deal with the issue at all. By this I mean that the important thing for these writers is knowledge of what to eat or drink, whether this knowledge is held by an expert physician or acquired by the patient himself. The idea that the patient's desires or motivations may require therapy is not entertained. Thus, despite the remarkably physicalist approach of many medical writers to cognition and emotion, the springs of a patient's conscious behaviors appear largely outside the scope of their therapy (with the possible exception of *On Regimen* I 35-36). It is their reticence about motivation and desire that clears space for a therapy of the soul in writers like Democritus, Plato (particularly in the middle and late dialogues), and Aristotle.

My paper will focus primarily on analyzing several instances in the Hippocratic treatises where questions of desire (for food and drink, as well as for sex) and pleasure arise, including the relationship between humoral depletion and *himeros* discussed in *On Diseases* IV, the rather oblique references to *hêdonê* in *On Ancient Medicine*, and the references to qualities of the *psuchê* in *Airs, Waters, Places*; I will touch, too, on the contribution in *On Generation/On the Nature of Child* to the physiology of pleasure. I close with a necessarily cursory

look at the crucial role played by pleasure and the desire for pleasure in a few early examples of philosophical ethics that take the soul as an object of therapy. These examples show that the site of pleasure was not clearly located in either the body or the soul in this period, an ambiguity that may have contributed to the gradual strengthening of divisions between medicine and ethics.

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<sup>i</sup> L. Dean-Jones, "The politics of pleasure: female sexual appetite in the Hippocratic Corpus," *Helios* 19 (1992), 77-8.

<sup>ii</sup> J. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes. The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. (New York: 1998).