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Perceiving the coherence of the perceiving body
Is there such a thing as a “Hippocratic” approach to perception?

How appropriately can we discern between “Hippocratic” and “non-Hippocratic” - and then between medical and philosophical - approaches to sense-perception and cognition, seen in the context of the scientific debate flourished in Greece in the fifth century B.C.? It is from this specific question that the argument of this paper stems, aiming to discuss the old-raised issue of the (philological, historical, epistemological) unity of the *Hippocratic Corpus*, and to investigate how plausible are the attempts to trace a system of shared patterns by which a cluster of theories, doctrines and mentalities, collected in the same *Corpus* in spite of their heterogeneity and thus traditionally labelled as “Hippocratic”, may be effectively linked and correlated.

Actually, whoever intends to shed light on representations of cognition and sense-perception as found in the Hippocratic treatises has to face the greatest variety of theories, which range from the *On the Sacred Disease*'s encephalocentrism and the theory of ψυχή as expounded in *On Regimen* to the haemocentrism approach of the treatise *On Breaths*. Being these doctrines openly conflicting, they differ not only in terms of rationale, but also for achieving highly unhomogeneous levels of conceptualization and expository coherence. Besides, the authors of some of these treatises (that is the case of *On the Sacred Disease*, for example) show a strong polemical attitude towards adversaries, so to confirm – at a first sight, at least - how controversial and hazardous may result any unitary approach to the *Corpus*.

Each of the “Hippocratic” treatises just mentioned seems rather to share a common ground made of questions, theoretical interests and epistemological issues with the early philosophical investigations into nature, the nature of man and his cognitive processes (*physiologiai*) by the so-called “Presocratic” thinkers. Sometimes these commonalities may prove rough and maintained at a superficial level of interaction; sometimes they can originate in a profound and original effort made by the “Hippocratic” authors to mix, remodel and rethink “Presocratic” issues and doctrines in order to make them consistent with their own theoretical and medical aims.

Now, if we consider, on the one hand, that some *physiologoï* used to practise as physicians while many “Hippocratic” doctors clearly displayed philosophical attitudes, and, on the other hand, that the use of the term “Presocratic” as generalizing historical and philosophical category is not less strongly questioned than the use of the term “Hippocratic” as doctrinaire label, both these facts make it much harder to establish 1) if we can speak of a Hippocratic specificity in representing sense-perception and human cognition, and if so, in which terms; 2) if we can rather draw a sort of boundary line between a mainly medical/observative and a mainly philosophical/conjectural approach to these issues, overpassing the conventional classification in the two distinct fields of “Hippocratic” and “Presocratic”; 3) if, otherwise, the only things we can do is to denounce how aleatory and fragile may prove, when arbitrarily hypostatized, any chain of commonalities between cluster of treatises, and consequently to admit the

impossibility of grasping any “Hippocratic” or, at least, “medical” specificity about theories on cognition.

In this paper I shall pass a number of remarks on the relations between (the so-called) “Hippocratic” and (the so-called) “Presocratic” theories and representations of sense-perception and cognition.

I shall aim to investigate which degree of originality this representation of the body may have had in medical terms (as well as the observative circumstances in answer to which it presumably took shape) and eventually, in the light of such investigation, to address some provisional remarks and suggestions on the effectiveness of the term “Hippocratic”.