Galen on the brain and soul

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Galen lived in the philosophical atmosphere of the Hellenistic era, under the influence of the syncretism, the Aristotelian and Platonic doctrines, the new tendencies of stoicism, skepticism, neo-Platonism and in the mainstream of policy for a unilingual universal man. He attempted to associate the Hippocratic medical pragmatism with the stoicism and Neo-Platonic idealism. Galen based his medical principles on superb anatomical studies and detailed observations of the functions of the viscera and systems of the body in animals. According to Galen the body is the instrument of the soul. The use and function of the various organs depends on the soul. The soul on the other hand is the realization of the human body. The functions of the soul are continuously renewed, since it is generated and grow by the steady production of the cerebral spirit (pneuma) under the influence of the respiration and blood flow. The human soul grows until death, when it is consumed by the fever. The reasoning faculty of the soul is mortal since it is created by the mixture of various humors of the brain. Galen claimed that the anterior part of the brain is softer than the other areas and particular able to form imaginations and to apprehend any kind of thoughts. Galen attributed great importance in the posterior part, particularly the brain stem and the fourth ventricle for the maintenance of life. The sensus communis is perceptive to new impressions and able to support the creation of new thoughts by the association of the current perceptions with those of the past. The coordinating action of the sensus communis depends upon the impressions. Abnormal sense perception may result to illusions and hallucinations. When the thinking faculty is paralyzed the patient suffers from anoia (dementia), whereas if the thinking movements are defective he suffers from moria or morosis. Galen emphasizes the importance of the psychosomatic integration of the human being. Memory is the retention and conservation of those impressions, which soul discerned at an earlier time. Memory can operate only at high levels of consciousness. Virtue seems to require an act of good will. Reason must be trained in order to control the erroneous thoughts and the inappropriate behaviour. Emotional and rational activities are mutually related. Anger and desire are regarded as afflictions of the soul. They may be restrained and controlled by the judgment of the reason. Galen considered that body and soul are in continuous and ceaseless mutual interaction. He attempted to correlate psychological traits with the humoral doctrine, claiming that the faculties of the soul correspond to the humoral composition of the body. Depression and anxiety are the foremost manifestations of the toxic effect of black bile on the human brain. Galen in addition to pharmaceutical treatment introduced psychotherapy, physical therapy and proper education, claiming that lifetime training of the reasoning power will eventually lead to a state of mental and physical health.