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The mind-body-relationship in Kant's *De Medicina Corporis* and its consequences for his late moral philosophy¹

The foundation, explanation or clarification of the mind-body-relationship is, to all evidence, one of the most complex problems faced by the post-Cartesian philosophical tradition. Competing metaphysical models, e.g. the theory of physical influence and the doctrine of pre-established harmony, were developed in the attempt to investigate how soul and body, two different and independent “things”, could be united in a *nexus reciprocus*, a mutual and necessary relationship of exchange. From Christian Wolff onwards² this reciprocal interaction – on the one hand, material forces influencing the states of the spirit; on the other, movements of the soul co-causing the activities of the body – has been called *commercium*³: the Latin term, which originally indicates a commercial relationship between individuals, institutions or communities, evokes by analogy a dynamic communion between intellectual faculties and physiological processes⁴.

¹ Kant's works are quoted with acronym, volume and page number referring to the *Akademie-Ausgabe*. At the end of the article, readers will find the complete references and English translations I have used.

² C. Wolff, *Psychologia empirica*, Part. II, Sect. II, Chap. III: *De commercio inter mentem & corpus*, in particular §§ 962 and following. See also A. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, Editio VII, Sectio XXII: *Commercium animae et corporis*, §§ 73-739.

³ On the use of *commercium* in the 17th and 18th centuries see W. Kersting, *Kants Gemeinschaftsphilosophie vom commercium der Substanzen bis zum ethischen Staat*, in «LOGOS. Anales del Seminario de Metafísica», 42 (2009), pp. 73-88, in particular pp. 75-79.

⁴ See KrV A 213/B 260 (transl. p. 318). As Kant will recall in the *Transcendental Analytic* (*Third Analogy of Experience*), the “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) between body and soul can be understood in two ways: as *commercium*, i.e. as a “dynamic” relationship between the two substances based on mutual influence, or as *communio*, a community of spatial nature understood as the location of the soul in the body.

At the end of the 18th century, the enigma of *commercium mentis et corporis* conditioned the relationship between medicine, the science responsible for the health of the body, and philosophy, a discipline dedicated to the investigation of the spirit, uniting them in the shared ambition of attaining physical and spiritual perfection of the human being. This cooperation required a consensual and mutual extension of technical and professional skills as well as a division of labor based on a clear demarcation of the limits of both disciplines. At the center of this dispute, we find the question of man and, therefore, the birth of anthropology as a new scientific discipline, developing from a medical-physiological perspective on the one hand, and a philosophical-psychological one on the other⁵.

Only by starting from this historical-philosophical horizon, it is possible to understand Immanuel Kant's preoccupation with the medical art⁶. Almost all of Kant's works contain notes, observations and brief essays, not only on concrete practices, but also on methodological questions concerning the role of medicine and its place within the system of sciences. Kant's interest in medicine, which is also evident from his rich correspondence with various physicians, stems from the factual, empirical observation of the mutual influence between physical and mental disorders that makes the cooperation between physician and philosopher necessary. The thesis I will therefore be defending in this work is that Kant's philosophy of medicine is guided not only by a theoretical interest, but also – indeed, perhaps primarily – by a fundamentally practical one, linked to moral philosophy, and especially the doctrine of virtues. In the works following his critical phase, Kant develops a set of rules for the care of the body which aims at the preservation of the balance between body and soul: this regimen or “dietetics”, as Kant himself defines it, has the fundamental purpose of exercising virtue and self-control through the dominion of passions in order to lead an existence in conformity with the moral law. In the following pages, I will

⁵ See G. Stiening, *Ein ‚Sistem‘ für den ‚ganzen Menschen‘. Die Suche nach einer ‚anthropologischen Wende‘ der Aufklärung und das anthropologische Argument bei Johann Karl Wezel*, in D. Hüning, K. Michel, A. Thomas (eds.), *Aufklärung durch Kritik. Festschrift für Manfred Baum zum Geburtstag*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 2004, pp. 113-139, especially p. 118, p. 121, p. 127. On the relationship between medicine and philosophy in the 18th century, see L.J. Rather, *Mind and body in eighteenth century medicine: A Study Based on Jerome Gaub's De Regimine Mentis*, University of California Press, Los Angeles-London 1965.

⁶ For an in-depth reconstruction of Kant's readings as well as Kant's personal relationship with several of his contemporaries, see W. Euler, *Commercium mentis et corporis? Ernst Platners medizinische Anthropologie in der Kritik von Marcus Herz und Immanuel Kant*, in «Aufklärung», 19 (2007), pp. 21-68.

first reconstruct Kant's theses on medicine, as proposed in *De Medicina Corporis quae Philosophorum est*, the so-called *Rektoratsrede* of 1786; I will then locate these theses, on the one hand, in the broader context of his late practical philosophy – with particular reference to the second part of *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797), *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798) and the third section of the essay *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798) – and, on the other hand, in the background of the diatribe around the medical methodology of the 18th century. Finally, I will summarize the Kantian position on *commercium corporis et mentis*, with particular regard to the Third analogy of the experience presented in the *Transcendental Analytic* of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.

I. In a letter addressed to his pupil Marcus Herz, at the time the personal physician of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Kant recommends that Herz administer to his friend «eine diätetische Beobachtung», a dietary observation, which he has applied to himself⁷. Kant firmly believes that a different schedule, with a different distribution of workload as well as frequent moments of rest throughout the day, would aid Mendelssohn's fragile health. Mendelssohn would die on 4th January 1786 in unclear circumstances⁸; in October of the same year, in his inaugural speech of the academic year as rector of the Königsberg's University, Kant addressed the death of his friend, blaming it on starvation due to excessive fasting⁹. Mendelssohn's death gave

⁷ Letter to Marcus Herz (11.5. 1781), AA X, 270.

⁸ See Brandt's introduction to his translation of the *Rektoratsrede* in German. R. Brandt, *Immanuel Kant: "Über die Heilung des Körpers, soweit sie Sachen des Philosophen ist" Und: Woran starb Moses Mendelssohn?*, in «Kant-Studien» 90 (1999), 3, pp. 354-366, in particular pp. 355-356. As it was associated with the question of his alleged Spinozism (which boils down to atheism), Mendelssohn's sudden death on 4th January 1786 was met with much public to-do. The *Rektoratsrede* does not address the "Mendelssohn case" as a philosophical dispute, but rather as the result of bad eating habits.

⁹ Refl 1526, AA XV, 939-953. The speech is based on the manuscript entitled *De Medicina Corporis quae Philosophorum est*. That Kant was not given to official academic speeches is clear from the rarity of the occasions on which he delivered them. Two of these occasions were the ceremonies at the fulfilment of his mandate as Rector of the University of Königsberg, on the 10th October 1786 and the 4th October 1788: it was on one of these dates that Kant pronounced the *De Medicina Corporis*. Although it is not entirely certain whether the speech was given in 1786 or 1788, thanks to an annotation on one of the four sheets of the manuscript referring to a letter from Hutten to Erasmus in 1787 we can date the manuscript to the following year. The fact that we do not have the *Rede* itself but only the sketch of the manuscript is unfortunate for *Kant-Forschung*. Johannes Reicke, who claims to have found the manuscript among the papers of his father, Rudolf Reicke, the well-known archivist of the Kantian *Nachlass* who was the first to publish the manuscript, notes that its content is «only an idea» (R. Reicke, *Kant's Rede "De Me-*

Kant his cue to address the dispute between two faculties, the medical and the philosophical. He thus takes up the complex topic of psychosomatics and attempts to define the boundaries of soul and body with respect to the different competencies of philosophy and medicine. The rectoral speech thus revisits the theme, already familiar to Plato, of the relationship between the physician (the specialist of the body) and the philosopher (the specialist of the soul) and the problem of the unity between body and soul, as developed by the empirical observation of a mutual influence between psychic activities and corporeal functions¹⁰.

If it is the physician's task «to help the sick spirit through the care of the body», the philosopher will have to «help the distressed body through the control of the soul»¹¹, prescribing – to borrow an annotation from the essay *Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes* of 1764 – a «Diät des Gemüths»¹². In both texts, Kant sketches the project of a diet of the spirit – or dietetics (*Diätetik*), as he will later define it – which will be developed in *Von der Macht des Gemüths, durch den bloßen Vorsatz seiner krankhaften Gefühle Meister zu sein*, an essay commissioned and published by the pioneer of medical journalism, Christian Wilhelm Hufeland, which eventually became the third section of the essay *Der Streit der Fakultäten*¹³. In a letter to Hufeland, dated 19th April 1797, Kant announced his intention «to design and address to [him] a dietetics which is simply intended to show the power of the mind over its pathological physical sensations from one's own experience»¹⁴; Kant considers this «an experiment not to be disregarded», which as «psychological

dicina corporis quae Philosophorum est”, in «Altpreussische Monatsschrift», XVIII (1831), pp. 293-300; p. 293). The theme of the speech is not systematically developed, and the manuscript, although it has introduced a new subject, breaks off so abruptly that Reinicke questions whether the last sheet really belongs to it. Adickes, who edited the first edition of the manuscript for the Prussian Academy, suggests that the last paragraph, together with some notations in German on the same page, represent the introduction or conclusion of the *lectio magistralis*, perhaps organised around the topic of a conflict between the claims and responsibilities of the four faculties of the university, to which Kant dedicated *Der Streit der Fakultäten*.

¹⁰ The question of the unity of body and spirit, although formulated in an aporetic form, opens the *Vorrede* to the *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* of 1798. See Anth, AA VII 119 (transl., p. 3).

¹¹ Refl 1526, AA XV, 939-940. [Translation: Nicola Zambon]

¹² VKK, AA II, 271. The paper, similar to the *Anthropologie* of 1798, also contains an outline of classification of mental disorders.

¹³ SF, AA VII, 97-116. Previous publication in Hufeland's *Journal der practischen Arzneykunde und Wundarzneykunst*, 5 (1798) 4, pp. 701-751.

¹⁴ Letter to Hufeland (15.3.1797), AA XII, 148: «eine Diätetik zu entwerfen und solche an Sie zu adressiren, die blos' die Macht des Gemüths über seine krankhafte körperliche Empfindungen' aus eigener Erfahrung vorstellig machen soll». [Translation: Nicola Zambon]

remedy [would] deserve to be included in the doctrine of medicine»¹⁵.

Dietetics, a “psychological remedy” with which to integrate the medical art, is presented as a set of rules that are not normative, prescriptive or prohibitive: As result of an inductive process of self-observation, they are individually applicable; therefore they have an empirical and factual, rather than, universal, character, since the physical constitution is by definition contingent on the individual, and varies from person to person. Dietetics is a *Lebensführung*, a way of life-conduct based on practical advice as to how, for example, to combat anxiety or obsessive-compulsive thinking, but also prescribing temperance in sleep, maintenance of good eating habits, and recreation after intense spiritual activity¹⁶. In general, the ultimate goal of dietetics is to master, through the exercise of the volitional faculties, not so much the disease itself, as its pathological effects on the spirit.

Many disorders of the soul, according to Kant, find their cause in the body. Fanaticism, melancholia, hypochondria «move the spirit from its natural seat»: whoever suffers from these conditions is unaware of them, and is therefore not «in control of himself», nor receptive to rational arguments¹⁷. Instead, it will be necessary to act directly on the patient's body through drugs, bloodlettings and laxatives: precisely because the causes are organic, «to use common sense as a physician» would be useless¹⁸.

The division of roles between doctor and philosopher is clear: in general, the doctor should avoid acting on the patient's psychology to cure physical ailments; the philosopher, on the other hand, as the therapist of the spirit, is responsible for strengthening the patient's health by acting on the volitional faculty¹⁹. Kant continues:

Since the doctor and the philosopher obviously take different views of the nature of things and act accordingly, I think it is essential that neither of them cross over the limits of his competence: Seized with a certain meddlesome attitude, the philosopher would seem to wish to play the doctor, and the doctor the philosopher. There is no doubt as to what constitutes their respective limits: the doctor is qualified to treat the disordered mind by measures applied to the body; the philosopher,

¹⁵ *Ibidem*: «ein nicht zu verachtendes Experiment[, das] als psychologisches Arzneimittel, doch in die Lehre der Medicin aufgenommen zu werden verdiente». [Translation: Nicola Zambon]

¹⁶ On the last point see also Anth, AA VII, 207-208 (transl., pp. 101-102).

¹⁷ Refl 1526, AA XV, 942: «atrocissima quae genus humanum circumveniunt mala vel quae ipsam mentem vel sede sua movent [...] vel in affectus praecipites agunt». [Translation: Nicola Zambon]

¹⁸ Refl 1526, AA XV, 942. [Translation: Nicola Zambon]

¹⁹ Refl 1526, AA XV, 946: «toties Medicus agit Philosophum». [Translation: Nicola Zambon]

to treat the body through the influence of the mind. [...] The doctor's service concerns the body directly and never the mind unless it is affected through the care of the body. If the doctor tries to cure the body through the mind's energy, he is playing the philosopher²⁰.

Only a doctor with the appropriate knowledge of both mind and body should take care of the soul. Such a physician-philosopher is not, however, a separate professional category, but rather a practitioner whose shoes can be filled by both physician and philosopher, provided they possess the necessary knowledge and skills. Like the physician, the philosopher, too, acts on the body; unlike him, however, he acts in a mediated way, teaching the control of volitional faculties through obedience to prescribed practices. This is not merely a matter of preventing psychosomatic disorders or physical disorders that originate in the mind; rather, physical and spiritual wellness are linked by a double thread to Kant's moral philosophy.

II. Guided by his knowledge of good and his obedience to the moral law, the philosopher must be able to exercise control over affections, emotions and passions. For Kant, therefore, both mental and physical health are *conditiones sine qua non* of moral health. In the second part of the *Metaphysik der Sitten*, in particular in the pages of the *Tugendlehre* dedicated to one's duties towards oneself²¹, we therefore find the factual and moral background for Kant's specific medical writings. These two writings largely overlap, yet their intentions somehow differ, and this difference reveals in the *Rektoratsrede* a new – and perhaps innovative – aspect of Kant's thinking. While the third part of the *Streitsschrift* seems to confirm Wasianski's thesis that Kant's interest in medicine arose from his hypochondriac concern with preserving his own precarious health²², *De Medicina Corporis*, in which we see Kant dwelling on the assumptions and

²⁰ Refl 1526, AA XV, 943, 948 (note): «Quaestio est, utrum in homine medicina facienda sit eadem ratione ac in pecore servo ars, quam vocant veterinariam. Qui medicinam solum mechanicam sectantur, quales e Hoffmanni schola prodierunt, posterius contendunt, quantum nempe licet per fabricam corporis in utroque animantium genere similem. Qui posterius statuunt, quos vocant Stahlianos, mentis vim insignem in morbis sanandis aut acuendis celebrant. Philosophi est ad posterius advertere mentem»; «Munus medici immediate corpus concernit, nunquam animam, nisi mediante corpore et cura ipsius. Si corpori subvenire studet medicus per vim aliquam animae, tunc agit Philosophum». [Translation Nicola Zambon]

²¹ On the duties towards oneself, see MS, AA VI, 391-392 (transl., pp. 194-196), 421-47 (transl., pp. 218-242); on passions, affects and moral apathy, see MS, AA VI, 404-409 (transl., pp. 204-209).

²² E.A.C. Wasianski, *Immanuel Kant. Ein Lebensbild*, Halle 1907, p. 274.

methodology of eighteenth-century medical theories, offers space for a different interpretation.

Before considering the differences between these two writings, it is useful to reconstruct their shared assumptions and background in Kantian material ethics. In the *Streitsschrift*, Kant states that the philosopher – the man intent on directing his life according to reason – has his own way of practicing medicine, which is not that of the medical doctor as such. It is an obvious fact that our states of mind affect our health, and all the philosopher requires is the garden-variety experience of what states produce desirable or undesirable effects. His preventive measures and remedies consist in self-control, not only in moderation of satisfying his physical needs, but more especially in control of his imagination and his affective states. He will not, of course, attempt to perform surgery or prescribe drugs (though the medical doctor, insofar as he is also a philosopher, will prescribe the philosopher's remedy for such physical ailments as are amenable to it).

To direct one's life by reason is, ultimately, to fulfil one's duties, and it is the relation of health to duties to oneself that involves the philosopher into the practice of medicine. Among the obligatory ends the philosopher recognizes and adopts in his "natural perfection" is the preservation of such physical and mental powers and capacities, as will enable him to act efficiently as a rational agent, i.e., to realize his ends²³. More fundamentally, the philosopher strives for «inner freedom»: *ex positivo*, inner freedom relies on "virtue", «moral strength of the will»²⁴; *ex negativo*, he is free from domination by his inclinations and feelings. To strengthen his virtue, the philosopher has to master himself through "asceticism", exercising his control over affections and passions²⁵.

For Kant, passion (*Leidenschaft*, *passio*) and affection (*Affekt*, *affectus*) are technical terms. Affection belongs to the feelings, the capacity for pleasure and pain, and it connotes a spontaneous and transitory feeling; passion (*Leidenschaft*) belongs to the appetitive power, and is a «sensuous desire that has become a lasting inclination»²⁶. Kant, however, does not claim that one should liberate oneself from the passions, but rather insists on the necessity of not letting them dominate one: Affections must be domesticated and

²³ MS, AA VI, 391-392 (transl., pp. 194-195).

²⁴ MS, AA VI, 405 (transl., p. 206).

²⁵ On the definition and role of the ascetic and asceticism in Kant, the reader is referred to N. Zambon, *Sull'esercizio della virtù. Un commento alla Tugendlehre di Immanuel Kant*, in «diánoia. Rivista di filosofia», XXX (2020), pp. 127-144.

²⁶ MS, AA VI, 408 (transl., p. 208).

disciplined, in order to achieve, exercise and preserve self-government, the «autocracy of practical reason», i.e. the «capacity to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the [moral] law»²⁷. Self-mastery must, therefore, have a limiting character: inclinations must be contained and tamed until they cease to be an obstacle to self-control and, ultimately, to morality. Here, the stoic and ascetic *leitmotifs* of cultivation of emotions and purification of affections toward self-discipline emerge overwhelmingly. In his *Lessons on Ethics* of 1778, Kant states:

Those who want to discipline themselves morally have to take care of themselves, and they often have to account for their actions before their internal judge; through long exercise, they have to strengthen the principle of moral action and, cultivating it [*durch Kultur*], acquire a habit [...]. Thus, a moral sentiment is cultivated, and morality is attained through strength and motivation²⁸.

A passion is not in itself incompatible with morality, nor is it in itself an obstacle to a life guided by reason²⁹. On the contrary: Passions are often essential to building relationships with others. Affections, on the other hand, are feelings that precede reflection and make discernment difficult, if not impossible, since the mind is taken unaware by feelings, and self-control (*animus sui compos*) is momentarily lost. Precisely because affections can be beneficial or deleterious, depending on whether reason maintains control over them, the philosopher will see to it that his inclinations do not become obsessions. Hence the duty to cultivate «moral apathy», which, as distinguished from indifference, is a state of mastery over one's inclinations and affections. Thus, «ascetic» and «dietetics» converge, for virtue keeps a man morally healthy through the discipline of character, shaping the specific conditions of his existence³⁰.

Citing the stoic-ascetic principle *substine et abstine*, Kant reminds us that it is necessary to «accustom yourself to *put up with* the misfortunes of life that may happen and *to do without* its superfluous pleasures (*assuesce incommodis et desuesce commoditatibus vitae*)»³¹. The imperative *substine et abstine* has as its object duties of omission which belong to the sphere of «moral health»³² and which are constitutive in the formation and strengthening of character.

²⁷ MS, AA VI, 383 (transl., p. 188).

²⁸ Eth., 174. [Translation Nicola Zambon]

²⁹ MS, AA VI 407-408 (transl., pp. 207-209).

³⁰ MS, AA VI, 485 (transl., p. 273).

³¹ MS, AA VI, 484 (transl., p. 273).

³² MS, AA VI, 419 (transl., p. 216).

Whoever cultivates reason will follow the principle *substine et abstine* in order to live up to his aspirations: As Kant states in *Streitsschrift*, this principle «belongs, as the principle of a regimen, to practical *philosophy* not only as the *doctrine of virtue* but also as the *science of medicine*», which becomes «philosophical when the sheer power of man's reason to master his sensuous feelings by a self-imposed principle determines his manner of living»³³.

Despite their common presuppositions, however, the *De Medicina Corporis* and the third part of *Der Streit der Fakultäten* move in different directions. Both bear the distinctive stamp of Kant's thought, but in the *Rektoratsrede* (and in his reflections on medicine) Kant's interest in the empirical study of medicine and in the relation of contemporary theories to problems in theoretical philosophy is far more apparent than in the essay he wrote for Hufeland and re-issued in *Streitsschrift*. Given the context of that essay and its autobiographical character, its orientation was bound to be essentially practical. The essay is an account of the mental regimen thanks to which Kant had managed to live a long, productive, and sociable life despite his constitutional tendency to hypochondria and the ailments of his advancing years; he offers his account of these things to Hufeland for publication in one of his medical journals, in the hope that it will be helpful to others. His full regimen, he concedes, is not for everyone: the ability to control certain convulsive (cramp-like) seizures cannot be expected from women or children, «who do not have the necessary strength of resolution»³⁴.

Nevertheless, aren't women also, presumably, moral agents? Not for Kant, who states that women have a mimetic relationship to morality: Their behaviour may be in accordance with moral law, but only as the result of imitation, not as a consequence of moral autonomy³⁵. In the *Anthropologie*, Kant calls women «reasonable animals» (*vernünftige Thiere*), but nevertheless «reasonable beings» (*vernünftige Wesen*)³⁶, while in the *Metaphysik*

³³ SF, AA VII, 100 (transl., pp. 181, 183).

³⁴ SF, AA VII, 107 (transl., p. 195).

³⁵ Regarding Kant's misogyny, see the *Vorlesung-Parow* as well as the passages from *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*: Men need women; in the raw natural state, women serve as a «domestic animal» (Anth, AA VII, 304; transl., p. 205) and for reproduction. Nature has made women garrulous (*geschwätzig*) so that children will soon learn to speak (V-Anth/Parow, 51). The young man, who by nature aims at the immediate fulfilment of his desires, is preserved from discouragement at the fulfilment of his impulses by the obligation to approach the woman with respect. This respect, however, is a kind of preliminary exercise in view of the true objective, which only the man can seek: to act out of respect before the law (Anth, AA VII, 305-306; transl., pp. 205-207).

³⁶ Anth, AA VII, 303 (transl., p. 204).

der Sitten, written more or less in the same period, he differentiates the «(natural) reasonable beings» (*vernünftige Wesen* or *vernünftige Naturwesen*) from the «beings of reason» (*Vernunftwesen*)³⁷. The difference depends on whether one possesses character or not, which means whether one is able to bind oneself to certain practical principles that one has given oneself (or, following Kant's argument: *himself*) through reason. Therefore, even though both, he and she, are *Menschen*, human beings, a reasonable being who lacks character, is destined to remain a passive citizen of the realm of morality (*im Reich der Sitten*); the active *citoyen*, the white, male, morally autonomous man, is, instead, the descendant of the Stoic, of the *tenax propositi*, but also of the Aristotelian Greek, designated by nature to teach the barbarians³⁸. It seems no coincidence that in the *Anthropologie*, at the end of the disquisition on the character and its definition, Kant replaces *Mensch* with *Mann*: the most excellent value is «to be a man (*Mann*) of principles»³⁹.

III. The idea of bringing three of his essays together into a single book dealing with the conflict between the Philosophy Faculty and the three higher faculties of Theology, Law and Medicine occurred to Kant only after the essay for Hufeland had been written. Nevertheless, Kant's letter to Hufeland, thanking him for a copy of his book *Makrobiotik oder Die Kunst, das menschliche Leben zu verlängern*, as well as the compliment to him with which the essay opens, both relate it to the theme of a conflict between the empirically based teachings of the higher faculties and the purely rational (ultimately moral) principles that the lower faculty teaches regarding theology, juridical law, and medicine. In a letter addressed to Hufeland, he mentions that his dietetic is the result of Hufeland's own «bold but elevating idea of the power man's moral disposition has to animate even

³⁷ MS, AA VI, 418 (transl., p. 215).

³⁸ Anth, AA VII, 292 (transl., pp. 191-192): «Although these principles may sometimes indeed be false and incorrect, nevertheless the formal element of the will in general, to act according to firm principles (not to fly off hither and yon, like a swarm of gnats), has something precious and admirable in it; for it is also something rare». Only the white man acts according to principles, and the students of his lessons of the 1770s on anthropology learned that even a criminal who acts in an evil way, following however an autonomous, self-given principle, is to be preferred to one who has no principles at all. See R. Brandt, *D'Artagnan und die Urteilstafel: über ein Ordnungsprinzip der europäischen Kulturgeschichte*, Dtv, München 1991, pp. 133-136. In the *Anthropologie*, Kant is far more circumspect than in the lessons. It is not easy to determine whether he has actually changed his opinion or whether, in general, Kant uses different views towards a wider public in publication, than he would do in the comparative privacy of his lessons. The lessons were mainly attended by male students, so Kant was mainly addressing them.

³⁹ Anth, AA VII 295 (transl., p. 195).

the physical element in him»⁴⁰. The essay is addressed to Hufeland as a physician

...who is also a legislative member of the body of doctors drawn from pure reason and has, along with the skill to prescribe what cures, the wisdom to prescribe what is also duty in itself, so that moral and practical philosophy at the same time provide a universal medicine which does not help everyone for everything, but cannot be lacking in any recipe⁴¹.

It is true that the Faculty of Philosophy is not really in conflict with the Faculty of Medicine, as it is with the other two higher faculties⁴²; it is instead «the people», with their childish demands for drugs and surgery to cure the ailments they have brought on themselves, who resist enlightenment and tempt doctors to assume the role of magicians⁴³. Here, we see Kant the moral philosopher reprimanding the people for their «superstitious» reliance on the theologian, the lawyer and the doctor to get them out of their trouble, when all they need do to keep clear of it is to behave rationally, i.e., to fulfil their duties. Although Kant admits that the remedies of «empirical medicine» are sometimes necessary, the ideal doctor – who is a philosopher as well – knows when to use them and when to prescribe self-control instead. Although, as Borowski remarks⁴⁴, Kant sought no gratuitous help from doctors for himself, he was partial to medical science and concerned himself with its progress. When Samuel Thomas Soemmering, the physician and anatomist, requested Kant's comments on his work *Über das Organ der Seele*, Kant took the request to be directed to him as someone «not entirely unversed» in the biological sciences. His self-appraisal seems unduly modest, if not ironical. After all, he was the author of the *Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes*, and though not a *Fachmann*, an “expert”, he was, as the *Rektorsrede* suggests, very well-acquainted with the theories and controversies of the day, which presented the sort of problems that would appeal to him.

The eighteenth century is known as the age of theorists and system-makers in medicine⁴⁵. It was an era of philosophizing doctors searching for

⁴⁰ Letter to Hufeland (15.3.1797), AA XII, 148: «...kühne aber zugleich seelenerhebende Idee, von der selbst den physischen Menschen belebenden Kraft der moralischen Anlage in ihm». [Translation Nicola Zambon]

⁴¹ SF, AA VII, 97-98 (transl., p. 175).

⁴² SF, AA VII, 26-27 (transl., pp. 41-43).

⁴³ SF, AA VII, 29-32 (transl., pp. 47-51).

⁴⁴ L.E. Borowski, *Immanuel Kant. A life picture*, ed. Hermann Schwarz, Halle 1907, p. 38.

⁴⁵ See J.L. Rather, *Mind and Body*, cit., and in particular the “Introduction”.

a unifying principle that would account for health and yield a systematic classification of both physical and mental diseases. The Hippocratic notion of *enormon*, some unexplained power underlying the observable forces of nature, gave rise to the controversies concerning this *incitans* or *impetum faciens* that figured so prominently in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treatises on medicine. Is the “vital force” or “life principle”, which is the source of all involuntary motions in the body, the mind itself or something other than the mind? This was the issue that divided the “animists” from the “mechanists”. In terms of the content of the *Rektorsrede*, it is the issue standing between the followers of Stahl and those of Hoffmann⁴⁶.

Georg Ernst Stahl (1660-1754) and Friedrich Hoffmann (1660-1742) shared, for a time, the Chair of Medicine at Halle; but they shared little else. As Kant reports, according to Stahl’s *Theoria medica vera*, the human body is in itself a motionless and lifeless machine. Its vital principle is the soul, which constitutes the organism, maintains, moves and controls it, preserving it from disintegration, decay and deterioration⁴⁷. The soul, which Stahl identified with the Hippocratic *physis*, works directly on the body by causing the nerves to vibrate. A disease is a disturbance of the vital functions caused by misguided activities of the soul, which in turn spontaneously tries to correct the disturbance by producing, e.g., fever, bleeding, or sweating. Hence, according to Stahl, the doctor should not interfere with the soul, but only assist it when its efforts are not entirely successful. Although Stahl attracted relatively few followers, his “animism” was the basis of the later movement known as “vitalism”, and histories of medicine take note of him as a precursor to modern psychotherapy. «Had he lived today», Guthrie suggests, «he would probably have become a distinguished psychiatrist»⁴⁸.

Hoffmann, the author of *Medicina rationales systematica* and *Philosophia corporis humani vivi et sani*, disagreed with Stahl on the nature of the vital principle. Our knowledge is based on what we perceive, and what we perceive is movement, contraction and extension. Vital functions depend on the movement of the cardiovascular system: Therefore, health is a normal

⁴⁶ For a more extensive account of Kant’s position in the dispute concerning the medical theories of his century, see Euler, *Commercium mentis et corporis?*, cit.; U. Wiesing, *Kunst oder Wissenschaft? Konzeptionen der Medizin in der deutschen Romantik*, Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart 1995; E. König, *Arzt und Ärztliches bei Kant*, in «Jahrbuch der Albertus-Universität zu Königsberg», 5 (1954), pp. 113-154.

⁴⁷ See Refl 1526, AA XV, 943. [Translation Nicola Zambon]

⁴⁸ D. Guthrie, *A History of Medicine*, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., London-New York 1960, p. 217.

movement, which produces a state of partial tone contraction. Death is the cessation of movement, and disease is an abnormal movement. Hoffmann compared the body to a hydraulic machine which uses an ether-like fluid, finer than all other matter, but not precisely spirit, soul, or mind; This fluid is secreted by the brain and distributed in the muscles through the nerves. If too much fluid flows to a part of the body, the result is a spasm, which accounts for acute diseases; if too little, atony, which accounts for chronic diseases. The physician has to decide whether the patient's disease is of the spasmodic or atonic type, and administer relaxants or stimulants accordingly⁴⁹.

Who is right, the animists or the mechanists? «Let the experts decide»⁵⁰, says Kant. Of course, he agrees with Stahl and his followers regarding the remarkable power of the mind to cure or aggravate diseases: This is presupposed by the dietetic regime upon which the material ethics of the *Tugendlehre* relies⁵¹. Nevertheless, on empirical grounds, he is unwilling to say (neither here, nor in the *Anthropologie* and *Der Streit der Fakultät*) that all diseases originate in the mind, or can be cured through dietetic measures. Significantly, the question the experts must decide is *how* their remedies work. However, if the experts are to decide how remedies work, the Stahlists would be well advised to keep themselves to the medical doctor's business of physiological explanations. It is, perhaps, worth noting that both Hoffmann and Boerhaave, unlike Stahl, were considered excellent clinicians. How, then, are we to account for Kant's partiality, expressed elsewhere, towards the system of John Brown (1735-1788), the Scottish doctor whose methods are said to have killed more people than the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars combined (including in the end its founder, who died of an overdose of his favourite remedies, opium and whiskey)⁵²? By means of the fact that Brunonian theory was «as far as it went, [...] absolutely consistent and complete in all its parts»⁵³. Brown's one-time patron and employer, William Cullen (1710-1790), taught a version of the "irritability" theory which, like Hoffmann's, considered life itself a function of nervous energy.

⁴⁹ Refl 1526, AA XV, 944. The other "mechanicist" whose name Kant mentions is Hermann Boerhaave (1668-1738), who stated in his *Institutione medicae* that life is the normal movement of solids and fluids in the body, and disease is a disturbance of the same.

⁵⁰ Refl 1526, AA XV, 944.

⁵¹ Hence he could not approve of the mechanists' belief that human medicine and veterinary medicine fall into the same category.

⁵² On Brown's influence on Kant see Wiesing, *Kunst oder Wissenschaft?*, cit., which is the first study dedicated to exploring the influence of Brunonian medicine in Kant's philosophy.

⁵³ F.H. Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine*, W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia-London 1929, p. 314.

In his *Elementa medicinae* of 1780, Brown presented a rival system. Living tissue is «excitable», but life is a «forced state» resulting from the presence of «exciting powers»⁵⁴. These stimuli are either external (heat, diet and other substances taken into the body) or internal (muscular contraction, sense or perception, and the energy of the brain in thinking and exciting passion and emotion), and, again, either general or local: «If the exciting powers are withdrawn, death ensues as certainly as when the excitability is gone»⁵⁵. There are, then, two factors to be taken into account: the organism's predisposition to greater or less excitability, and the presence of the exciting agent. Diseases can therefore be classified as “sthenic” (due to excess excitement) or “asthenic” (due to deficient excitement), and the physician shall prescribe sedatives for the first and stimulants for the second⁵⁶.

It would have been virtually impossible for Kant, with his interest in medical theories, not to be familiar with Brown's system, which polarised the medical profession for a quarter of a century. Among the students at the University of Edinburgh, controversies between the followers of Cullen and the Brunonians so frequently ended in duels that the University finally had to decree expulsion for duelling; and when the system found its second home in Germany, the Hanoverian cavalry was called in to put down a two-day brawl at the University of Göttingen, during which a group of Brunonian students revolted against the authorities and, led by a professor, seized the town hall. However, what explains the high regard for Brown's theory evidenced in the *Metaphysik der Sitten* is not only, or even primarily, its applicability to the affects, but its systematic procedure in classifying diseases. Brown's theory was, Kant notes⁵⁷, irreproachable as far as its form was concerned, since Brown conceived of a system of moving forces whose equilibrium – or, to use a more modern term, homeostasis – comprises health. Despite numerous errors of empirical observation, his principle of division is the guiding thread connecting his theory to reason. Of all the “systematisers” in eighteenth-century medical theory, Brown came closest to achieving the form of a system, as far as this is possible in empirical science. Perhaps Brown, with his system of moving forces that maintain life as long as their antagonism is balanced, was to have figured in Kant's conclusion to the *Rektoratsrede*:

⁵⁴ T. Fullford, *Romanticism and Science, 1773-1833*, Routledge, London-New York 2000, vol. 1, p. 82.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ The entire system, with all its divisions, is presented in a chart reprinted in R.H. Major, *A History of Medicine*, Charles G. Thomas, Springfield 1954, vol. II, p. 595.

⁵⁷ MS, AA VI, 207 (transl., p. 36); Refl 1539, AA XV, 963.

The sciences [will] finally come together into a society, first a small and then a larger one, until they finally form a system, within which each supports the others, while the boundaries of each are precisely determined and no part mixes with any other. In this respect they are like states, which will finally be united, not in a universal kingdom, but in a great federation. Within this federation, each succeeds in becoming productive and well-ordered within, and each is a center which the others are concerned to preserve, and no state can grow at the expense of another, rather than having now dialectic, now theology, now moral philosophy, now legislation swallowing everything⁵⁸.

IV. Following the principle of caution in interpretation, we should beware of extrapolating too much from the *Rektoratsrede*. After all, it is only Kant's rough draft for a speech, and in any case the ceremony for which it was intended would hardly have been an occasion for expounding critical philosophy. In his pre-critical writing *Träume eines Geistersehers*, Kant reviews the Aristotelian notion of three kinds of soul or vital principle and, having noted that theories of immaterial principles are no substitute for explanations in terms of mechanics, he adds:

Nevertheless, I am convinced that Stahl, who likes to explain animal processes organically, is often nearer to the truth than Hofmann, Boerhave, and others, who leave immaterial forces out of their plan and keep the mechanical reasons. Yet these follow a more philosophical method, which sometimes perhaps fails, but oftener proves right, and which alone can be applied to advantage in science. For the influence of beings of incorporeal nature can only be said to exist, but it can never be shown how it proceeds, nor how far its efficiency extends⁵⁹.

After the first *Kritik*, we cannot determine the influence of immaterial beings, or of the *anima* as an immaterial substance, as is supposed in the characterisation of mind-body-relationship as *commercium corporis et mentis*. In the *Transcendental Analytic*, Kant will demonstrate that such a definition of *commercium* is based on illegitimate premises. In fact, it provides for reci-

⁵⁸ Refl 1526, AA XV, 953 (note written in German): «Die Wissenschaften [werden] endlich ein System bilden, darin ein jeder Theil dem anderen behülflich ist, ohne sich doch zu vermischen, sondern ihre Grenzen genau von einander zu unterscheiden, wie Staaten, die nicht in eine Universalmonarchie, sondern zuletzt in einen großen Volkerbund vereinigt werden, da eine jede sich innerlich fruchtbar und wohlgeordnet macht und jede jede ein Centrum ist, auf dessen Erhaltung sich die übrige beziehen und keine mit Abbruch der anderen wachsen kann. Bald verschlakte die dialectic, bald die Theologie, bald moral, bald Gesetzgebung alles». [Translation Nicola Zambon]

⁵⁹ TG, AA XI, 331 (transl., p. 59).

procity, which implies a relationship of homogeneous commonality between its members; this homogeneity, however, in the case of the relationship between soul and body, is introduced surreptitiously, through the attribution to the two instances of the character of substance with its classical marks. In this way, matter and spirit, body and mind, are set against each other as two *res*, one material and one immaterial⁶⁰. The concept of substance belongs to the categories of the intellect and calls, as such, for form and function of thought: “substance” is, in short, a condition of the possibility of experience, not an object thereof⁶¹. The denial of this premise leads to a paralogism⁶²: the question of the relationship between body and soul – as it has been posed by the philosophical tradition, not least by the metaphysics of Wolff and Baumgarten – turns out to be a false problem, in which erroneous premises lead to necessarily fallacious conclusions⁶³. If, on the other hand, the predicate of substance is rejected in body and soul, then the founding of the «community of the soul with an organic body»⁶⁴ (*Gemeinschaft der Seele mit einem organischen Körper*) is shunned by any empirical investigation.

In 1773, in a letter to Marcus Herz, Kant wrote that the research about «the way the organs of the body relate to thoughts» would remain an «eternally futile investigation»⁶⁵; the same position is extensively reiterated in the *Anthropology* of 1798:

He who ponders natural phenomena, for example, what the causes of the faculty of memory may rest on, can speculate back and forth [...] over the traces of impressions remaining in the brain, but in doing so he must admit that in this play of his representations he is a mere observer and must let nature run its course, for he does not know the cranial nerves and fibers, nor does he understand how to put them to use for his purposes. Therefore all theoretical speculation about this is a pure waste of time⁶⁶.

⁶⁰ The considerable differences in the different definitions of “substantiality” in post-Cartesian philosophies (e.g. Spinoza, Leibniz, Malebranche, Wolff) play a secondary role with respect to the solution of the question regarding *commercium mentis et corporis*.

⁶¹ KrV, A 356-357 (transl., pp. 419-420).

⁶² In particular, see the second paralogism of simplicity, KrV, A 351-361 (transl., pp. 417-422).

⁶³ KrV, A 292 (transl., p. 383).

⁶⁴ KrV, A 384 (transl., p. 433).

⁶⁵ Brief to Marcus Herz (towards end 1773), AA X, 145: «Daher die subtile u. in meinen Augen auf ewig vergebliche Untersuchung über die Art wie die organe des Körper mit den Gedanken in Verbindung stehen».

⁶⁶ Anth, AA VII, 119 (transl. p. 3).

As we have seen, Kant does not deny, of course, *that* there is a relationship between mind and body, and that this relationship is harmonious; instead, he is sceptical about the possibility of clarifying the origin and nature of this relationship. Although it is probable that Kant implicitly supported a parallelism between the psychic and the physical, as well as a relationship of mutual influence between brain and mind, the *mind-body-relationship* cannot be the object of psychology or anthropology, since transcendental philosophy excludes *a priori* the possibility of any causal determination between body and soul. Already in 1766, therefore, Kant seems to suggest a solution to the animistic-mechanistic controversy that, at the same time, precludes the elaboration of the concept of finality in the critique of the teleological judgement. There are certain natural phenomena, the effects of mental states on the health of the body, which we can render comprehensible only through the idea of a soul, and this idea can serve as a regulating principle in our investigation of these phenomena; however, the idea has no explanatory function: the “virtual relationship” between mind and body is itself inexplicable.

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Abstract

Beginning with the interpretation of a little-known manuscript, De Medicina Corporis quae Philosophorum est, this essay explores the mind-body-relationship in the practical philosophy of the late Kant. We will show that his interest in medicine, far from being merely theoretical, has profound implications for his anthropology as well as for his doctrine of virtue. The philosopher must be able to exercise control over the body, that is to say over affections, emotions and passions: for Kant, therefore, both mental and physical health are necessary conditions for a moral life.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant; Mind-Body-Relationship; Doctrine of virtues; Philosophy of Medicine; Anthropology.

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