

**PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE
AND SCIENCE
PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES**

Compiled by

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INTRODUCTION

THE ISSUE whether medicine was a science or an art that persisted for centuries and was fiercely debated has almost died down. When one considers that other much older issues are still being discussed by thinkers and philosophers, it becomes pertinent to ask why this issue has been set aside. It looks as if the futility of this controversy that was once apparent only to a few medical thinkers has now dawned on all. The ever-increasing pace of the progress of medicine and the proliferation of its branches and their ramifications have brought into limelight the fact that medicine is inextricably bound with man who possesses not merely a physical structure but a soul or psyche as well. Psychological sciences, however, which could not exist independent of physical body, have so interlinked psyche and body and mass and energy that often it becomes difficult to distinguish the one from the other. The deep impact of psychological sciences on medicine has brought the latter face to face with the same danger that it has faced so often in the course of its history—the danger of leaning towards extremes and excesses.

To keep pace with the times, particularly during this transitional period it is imperative for the medical men to step forward and lay down the true objective and generalised principles of medicine and the basis and laws of treatment.

Undoubtedly this is an uphill task. In spite of all the tremendous progress medicine has made it still suffers from lack of comprehensive and well-defined aims. How sad it is that till now it has not been possible to give a comprehensive and conclusive definition of disease though books of history and theories of medicine offer numerous definitions (see pp. 20-23).

Though a definition of disease which may be acceptable in its entirety seems nowhere in sight, the progress of medicine has been so quick and vast that even the best brains can hardly grasp the expanse of its numerous branches. The Pegasus of medicine, so to speak, flies so fast that a medical man cannot maintain his feet in the stirrups nor his hands fast on the reins, and both the physician and the patient stand bewildered. How to get out of this chaos? The scientific spirit which is an invaluable asset of our age cannot allow that the eyes be shut to the logical consequences of this state of affairs and the Pegasus of medicine left to run amuck. We should turn the tide before medicine and its followers, passing through the present commercial phase, go back once again to the age when magicians, spiritual healers, hypnotists, faith-curers and wonder-workers wielded absolute authority.

medicine this *physis* along with the exposition of its *modus operandi* assumed the form and name of *tabiat mudabbara badan* (*physis*—the inherent physical faculty of defence and adjustment) which was somewhat incorrectly translated into Latin as *vis medicatrix naturae*. A study of the theories and history of Arab medicine reveals that the Arab physicians adopted this *tabiat* (*physis*) as their basis of treatment. In this compilation you will find some thought-provoking material under the heading *Vis Medicatrix Naturae* which, of course, needs further study and investigation.

(iv) *Laws of treatment*. Some readers may think that the heading 'laws of treatment' is superfluous. But in view of the present and future requirements of medicine and the necessity of systemisation and high standards for medical practitioners, the subject deserves a fair treatment.

By 'laws of treatment' I mean the temperament and that aspect of it which gives a distinct position to Arab medicine by virtue of its treating each patient as an individual unit. *Physis* is concerned with the general problems of the basis of treatment.

A discussion on 'temperament' is found in the writings of Hippocrates under such headings as Constitution, Diathesis, Catastasis, etc. Galen has, while discussing it at length, given new dimensions to it. The Arab medical authors worked on the theory of temperament most assiduously and finally established it as a principle or norm of treatment. With their penetration they succeeded in locating the relationship between diseases, various humours and the disturbance of temperament. They emphasised that the true objective of treatment was the rectification of this disturbance of temperament.

Not long ago many modern physicians ridiculed the theory of temperament. They put it aside as an irrelevant offshoot of ancient medicine. But now various branches of medicine, notably immunology, genetics, cytology, haematology, and psychosomatic medicine, etc. have begun to support the theory. These branches have unearthed the eternal truth that, as there are differences in the appearances and features of individuals, there is also a specific temperament having its own individual characteristics. Evidently, in order to deal with the problems of health of a person some specific treatment is necessary. I think the day is not far off when cards of patients will also contain notings about their temperament and laws of treatment in addition to the record of their sensitivity to antibiotics and chemotherapeutic drugs. When this happens the method of mass treatment will have to be discarded. I hope the matter on temperament appearing on pp. 105 to 195 of this compilation will be of interest to the research workers. This matter contains ancient views on temperament as well as hints on the findings of modern medical researches on temperament.

My introduction has taken much more space than I intended to give it but I hope it will serve to elucidate the main issues that confront medicine today. There are other issues appearing in the coming pages which I leave to the readers to study.

These issues include also the laws of medicine, humours in medicine, and elements and medicine. When I began my preliminary study on the laws of medicine, I was struck to find that medical thinkers had not paid adequate attention to this fundamental issue, even though its results, as far as I can see, are far-reaching. I have given my views in the introductory part of the article appearing under this head.

I have included humours and fluids in medicine in this compilation because I think an attempt to classify or group them might result in a much more sound base for pathology and therapeutics. In the ancient medicine, humours occupied a distinct place. The material given under *Elements and Medicine* and the lines of investigation and research that have been hinted at will be found very useful in creating greater awareness and help finding a durable solution of the basic problems of medicine explained above. The medical thinkers of old built up a medical system on the pillars of only four elements. These elements are still of great importance so far as medicine is concerned, as a study of the article on the subject will show.

Keeping the objects of this compilation in view, it has become inevitable for me to include here pertinent dictionary material. This material has been incorporated subject-wise under various headings where I have given suggestions for research. To begin with, I have classified this material under *Laws of Medicine*. Under other headings, like *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*, *Temperaments*, etc., the relevant material has been reproduced from dictionaries so as to bring together for the consideration of research scholars the necessary material at one place. This would undoubtedly give them clues to further their research.

The need for investigating and eliminating the aberrations and dispersions which have overtaken modern medicine will become evident as one gives serious attention to the facts underlined above. We have to discover the treatment of present ills of the profession that will not be temporary as has been the case till now, but will bring about cures that will be radical, purposive, methodical and effective in the real sense. Only then medicine will break loose from the cycle of excesses and extremes and be better equipped to serve ailing humanity. Sporadic or half-hearted reforms will not humanise medicine.

If in this compilation certain portions appear disjointed, it is due to our attempt to be as brief and compact as possible. The matter presented under certain headings, e.g., *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*, *Temperaments*, *Laws of Medicine*, etc. does not purport to be a complete survey of the subject, but serves only as illustration or elucidation.

I hope that those who are concerned with medicine, directly or indirectly, will find it worthwhile to devote some attention to these problems and their solutions, so that eventually it may be possible to sit around a table for fruitful discussions.

The Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research is vested with a permanent Department of Philosophy of Medicine and Science. This Department will serve as the nucleus of a movement of reformation. It will

document individual opinions on specific problems taken up in this publication or on allied problems, and shall coordinate the efforts of individual research scholars, groups and institutions now engaged, or to be engaged in future, on these problems, and shall publish their views as well as the reports of discussions in seminars which will be held throughout the world on these problems, through its quarterly journal, the first issue of which is expected to be out by the end of 1972. The Department is also planning to hold an international seminar as soon as it receives substantial papers that may prove conducive to it.

French and German, besides English, can be used for articles, reports and correspondence.

I have received much assistance in this compilation from Mr S.A. Ali, Secretary of Indian Institute of Islamic Studies, and my Secretary, Mr Tazimuddin Siddiqui. The latter has devoted much of his time in comparing the manuscript, reading proofs and looking after the publication. Prof. Vahiduddin, Head of the Department of Philosophy, Delhi University, was quick in responding to my request for the article on Crisis in Science. I owe a deep debt to all of them.

Abdul Hameed
President

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