

The importance of the figure of the physician to Hellenistic philosophy has been demonstrated convincingly by Martha Nussbaum in *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton:1993). Attention has also been paid to the use of medicine within the Platonic dialogues, where it functions both as the *technê par excellence* and as a practice of caring for the body, albeit one that risks distracting one from the proper care of the soul. In this paper, I am interested in briefly examining two earlier instances of the so-called “medical analogy” with the aim of beginning to delineate what is at stake when a care of the *psychê* and an account of its diseases borrows from the secular, “Hippocratic” medicine emerging in the fifth century. Democritus’ ethical fragments and Gorgias’ *Encomium to Helen*, in which *logos* is compared to a *pharmakon* capable of supporting life or destroying it, recommend themselves some of our most detailed extant examples of fifth-century uses of a medical analogy. By gaining an understanding of what of the medical imagination about bodies “travels” via analogy, we may better evaluate the provocative claim of D.B. Claus that “_____ is to be seen as something influenced, if not created, by analogy to scientific or medical notions of the body” (*Towards the Soul*, Yale University Press 1981,109).

The affinity of Democritus’ ethics and description of the *psychê* with Hippocratic claims about the nature of the body and disease in a world of deanthropomorphized or secular causes was at the heart of an influential article by Gregory Vlastos on Democritean ethics (*PhR* 54:578-92; 55:43-64), although these observations have been obscured by debates about the atomistic underpinnings of this ethics. My reexamination of Vlastos’ position will begin by arguing that a *technê* of the *psychê* is driven in part by the attempt to reduce all aspects of human nature to a humoral economy within the medical writers. Both Democritus and Gorgias understand the *psychê* as a discrete, parallel economy of forces, responsive to particular stimuli (image-effluences, words), which can either cause disease or bring about a cure. For Democritus, education becomes a crucial way of fortifying oneself against the chance encounters that may trigger a series of disturbances in the *psychê* that can cause pain and destroy autarchy. Education on such a model resembles Hippocratic regimen, which aims to prepare the body for encounters with the outside world, encounters governed by *tychê*, rather than a god. The possibility of sustaining these without adverse effects opens up the space to evaluate ostensibly compelled forms of behavior from an ethical perspective, which is latent, although not exploited in medical writing.

I will argue that it is precisely the potential for control that the secularized *psychê* seems to promise that makes Gorgias’ attempt to introduce materialist explanations of Helen’s going to Troy problematic. By attending closely to the description of how fear works in that speech, I hope to show how the language of probability—what some people do rather than what is necessary—inscribes Gorgias’ mechanistic explanations into the tradition of Hippocratic aetiology, which focuses on small instances of cause and effect that snowball into disease. This will return us to the question of whether things could have been otherwise, and the implications for the distribution of blame and the place of a *technê*.

