

The Development of Scientific Thought

IDEAS OF PRIMITIVE MAN

Early man did use many effective remedies but when he came across something he did not understand he would probably think that a god or a spirit was responsible. These ideas on supernatural causes for illness carried on for a long time. It is only comparatively recently that the idea of witches being responsible has been abandoned.

EGYPTIAN IDEAS ON NATURAL CAUSES

Egyptian medicine was a mixture of superstition and common sense. A class of doctors, not connected with religion, did appear. These doctors made a careful note of the patient's symptoms. Many doctors believed that diseases had natural causes. It was thought that some diseases were caused when the body's natural channels became blocked. Medicines were given to unblock these channels.

GREEKS AND THE 4 HUMOUR THEORY

The Greeks picked up many of their ideas from the Egyptians. They too came to believe that disease had natural causes. They thought that the body was made up of 4 fluids - BLOOD, YELLOW BILE, BLACK BILE and PHLEGM. A person was ill when there was too much or too little of one of these fluids. Hippocrates believed that fresh air, good food and exercise were the best way of restoring the balance of the liquids.

Hippocrates is also remembered for extending the Egyptian practice of careful observation. He said that doctors should observe symptoms, take notes and records and use these to see what the illness was and predict how it would develop.

WHY GALEN'S INFLUENCE LASTED 1500 YEARS

Galen was a Greek doctor in Rome. He wrote down the ideas of his time so well that they were believed for over 1500 years. He believed in the Greek idea of the four humours but took it further in prescribing the use of opposites e.g. pepper for cold diseases; lettuce for hot ones. His beliefs led to the use of bleeding, emetics (to produce sickness), purges (to empty the bowels) in an attempt to remove any excess humour.

WAYS IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY STOPPED PROGRESS

The church did not believe in new ideas. It believed in the ideas of Hippocrates and Galen. There was a return to the belief that illnesses were sent by God. There was a return to a belief in "magic charms" and the chanting of words. It was believed that certain Saints were responsible for certain cures. Holy objects which were supposed to have been owned or touched by Christ or the Saints were thought to have special curative powers. Saying prayers to the Virgin Mary and the Saints was also thought to help.

ASTROLOGY: THE POWER OF THE PLANETS AND THE STARS

The idea that heavenly bodies like the sun and the stars affected people was an old one. The Greeks believed in this and the Arabs later picked up this idea and developed it still further. Epidemics like the Plague could be caused when the planets were in a certain position

THE RENAISSANCE AND NEW WAYS OF THINKING

About the year 1500 there was a renewed interest in learning. The development of printing and the discoveries in the Americas helped to stimulate it. Doctors were encouraged to find out more about the human body.

BAD AIR AND DISEASE

This is an understandable belief. It was clear that many epidemics broke out in hot weather when rubbish would quickly decompose and smell. This belief explains carrying flowers to sweeten the air and drive away illness.

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