

Concretizing the Abstract: The Medical Metaphor in Horace's Poetry

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This paper aims to explore the medical metaphors in Horace's corpus, as such analysis can offer interesting new perspectives on Horace as a poet, the transmission of scientific knowledge through non-technical texts, and the status of medical knowledge in his time. An analytical approach to Horace's verses suggests that the function of his medical imagery is to concretize his abstract philosophical teachings into tangible terms, by portraying the effects of an imbalanced and immoral lifestyle as symptoms of a physical disease. In Horace's poetry, in fact, mental and physical disorders are indissolubly linked and dependent on one another. With this in mind, Horace explores moral and psychological diseases caused by excess, in contrast with the Aristotelian μεσότης and his idea of balance, *modus*, that he proposes in his corpus as the solution to a happy life. The poet discusses *avaritia* as a mental disease in *Satires* I.1, II.3; *Epodes* I.1; *Odes* II.2; *Epistles* I.1, I.2 and II.2. In particular, Horace explains and concretizes avarice, a moral vice brought on by an insatiable desire that Galen identifies as the worst passion of the soul (*Περί Ψυχῆς Παθῶν καὶ Ἀμαρτημάτων*, IX), through the effects of dropsy on the body of the greedy in *Odes* II.2.13-16 and *Epistles* II.2.146-147. Finally, it will be discussed how, following Cicero's idea that the individual can heal their own mind through philosophy (*Tusculanae Disputationes*, III.6), Horace adopts a pharmacological approach, proposing his own poetry as a self-sufficient cure towards mental and physical health. While the medical language is present and vivid in the entire corpus, it is mostly in his later work such as the *Epistles* that his strong dedication to the philosophical approach comes to life, showing a definite shift in his propaedeutic role. Horace directly assumes the character of the physician, assigning his poetry as treatment for his readers' illnesses.