



GALEN AND THE QUESTION OF METABOLISM

27
MAY
2025
5.00 pm CET

BODY AND ENVIRONMENT IN ANCIENT MEDICINE

CHIARA THUMIGER • Christian Albrecht University of Kiel, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

In current medical-biological understanding, metabolism can be briefly defined as the combination of chemical reactions within the body's cells which are aimed at changing food into energy. In this sense ancient medicine was cognisant of metabolism (despite devoid of any concept of cellular physiology), and intended it as the challenging process of transforming food and drink into 'body'. Focusing on Galen, in this talk I intend to explore metabolism

as concept of history of biology, using that datum as starting point for the exploration of a wider metaphorical level: the regulation of the relationship, material as much as conceptual, between self and non-self, and between human and environment (consumption and dietetics, processing, travel, trade, analogy and similarity). These are equally important in the tradition of Hellenic medicine, and in the writings of Galen of Perga-

mum, who was fond of environmental imagery in his rhetorical presentation of medical doctrines.