

*José Ángel García Cuadrado*

## SUAREZ ON GENIUS AND MELANCHOLY

Aristotle in the *Problems* (Section XXX, q. 1), states that excessive black bile (*atrabilis* or melancholy) can be a disease; but, the *atrabilis* in moderate doses, it can be the organic foundation of genius. This is the doctrine also maintained by Galen and the Aristotelian medieval interpreters. This text was widely discussed by Renaissance physicians and philosophers (Juan de Aviñón, Bernardino Montaña, Bartolomé Felipe, Pedro Mercado, Francisco Valleriola, and Juan Huarte de San Juan). In the Baroque period, it was a recurring theme in psychology, medicine, art, theology and literature. Some physicians attribute diabolic traits to melancholy associated with astral movements (Andrés Velázquez, Francisco Vallés, Alfonso de Santa Cruz). In the romanticism the figure of the genius picks up the features developed by the medicine of the baroque period. Suarez could not ignore the question and briefly addressed it in his commentary on *De anima* with a physiological or “naturalistic” interpretation of genius: Physiology determined the conditions and phenomena of genius. Other theologians, such as Báñez, maintain a more flexible interpretation: Intellectual habits (e.g., study and work) incline to the acquisition of a melancholic character. But neither Suárez nor Báñez attribute to melancholy either devilish or astral traits. Refs 24.

*Keywords:* Aristotle, Galen, Báñez, Juan Huarte de San Juan, black bile, melancholy.

*Хосе Анхель Гарсиа Куадрадо*

## СУАРЕС О ГЕНИИ И МЕЛАНХОЛИИ

В своей книге «Проблемы» (раздел XXX, д. 1) Аристотель утверждает, что избыток черной желчи (меланхолии) является источником болезни, но в умеренных дозах это может стать органической предпосылкой гениальности. Этот текст широко обсуждался ренессансными врачами и философами (Хуан де Авиньон, Бернардино Монтанья, Бартоломео Фелипе, Педро Меркадо, Франсиско Валериола и Хуан Уарте). В эпоху барокко этот аристотелевский сюжет был повторяющейся темой в психологии, искусстве и литературе. Некоторые врачи приписывали меланхолии демонические черты, связанные с астральными движениями (Андреас Веласкес, Франсиско Вальес, Альфонсо де Санта Крус). В эпоху романтизма фигура гения вобрала в себя черты, разработанные в медицине барокко. Ф. Суарес не мог игнорировать этот вопрос и кратко осветил его в своем комментарии к трактату «О душе» Аристотеля, предложив физиологическую интерпретацию гениальности. Другие богословы, например Д. Баньес, придерживались более гибкого толкования. Но оба мыслителя поставили под сомнение интерпретацию некоторых врачей, которые относились к меланхолии как к астральному или вредящему человеку фактору. Библиогр. 24 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* Аристотель, Гален, Доминго Баньес, Хуан Уарте, черная желчь, меланхолия.

The study of melancholy had a prominent place in Renaissance medicine and also extended to art and literature in baroque culture<sup>1</sup>, which explains why philosophy and theology at the time sometimes engaged in the controversies that arose around the “black bile.” In general, medical debates on melancholy played out around Galen’s humoral theory in all its varied forms. However, there is an Aristotelian text that came to be foundational and widely discussed throughout the period. It centers on Section XXX of the book *Problems* that begins as follows:

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*José Ángel García Cuadrado* — School of Ecclesiastical Philosophy University of Navarra, 31009, Pamplona, Spain; jagarcia@unav.es

<sup>1</sup> Literature on melancholy in this period abounds: [1–10].

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Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes? [11, XXX, 1, 953a, 10–14].

With these words, Aristotle introduces a topic of keen interest on the relationship between melancholy and genius, which reached its peak in modern philosophy and, more specifically, in German Romanticism<sup>2</sup>.

### 1. Aristotle's text

Aristotle's book *Problems* is a disjointed text that raises questions on natural philosophy and, more specifically, on medicine. This comes as no surprise since Aristotle's father was a doctor and he was likely familiar with Hippocratic doctrines. However, this book was later reworked and therefore its authorship remains in doubt; many believe that his disciple, Theophrastus, wrote it<sup>3</sup>. In any case, it is certainly an "Aristotelian" text because its contents are very much in tune with the rest of Aristotle's thought.

In Greek medicine, health was seen as the result of proper harmony between the body's various elements. It seems that this idea of natural harmony came from Alcmaeon of Croton, who was a contemporary of Protagoras; the same idea was assumed by Hippocrates and later by Galen until it joined up with the medical tradition of the humors, which remained almost unchanged until the beginning of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The humoral doctrine contains the idea that every living being has four liquids (or humors) within their organism, each of which supports a pair of opposing qualities that characterize them. Thus, *blood* is hot and humid, *phlegm* is cold and humid, yellow bile (or *cholera*) is hot and dry, and black bile (*atrabilis* or *melancholy*) is cold and dry. When these qualities are balanced, the subject is healthy and in a state of *eucrasia*; when one of them, or a couple of them, predominates over the other(s), an imbalance — *discrasia* — takes over, which the attending doctor must try to correct.

Black bile seems to be endowed with negative qualities — coldness and dryness ostensibly contradict life, which requires heat and humidity. In addition the color black suggests ugliness, darkness, and death. However, black bile, which is preserved in the spleen, has an important role in humoral balance and propels various functions, for example, stimulating appetite in the stomach or sharpening ingenuity in the brain. For this reason, when black bile is found in moderate proportions, it has a certain positive value: instead of producing disease, moderate doses of black bile produce exceptional human beings, including poets, philosophers and heroes. Aristotle compares it to drinking wine, which in moderation awakens reason, while in excess reduces it<sup>4</sup>. It is true that a predominance of black bile (melancholy) destabilizes, making one prone to insanity and other mental or physical diseases (such as ulcers)<sup>5</sup>. Ultimately, however, melancholic people are extraordi-

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<sup>2</sup> This Aristotelian text has been autonomously published in several languages with extensive introductory studies, for example: [2; 12; 13].

<sup>3</sup> On melancholy in Aristotle, cf. [14, p. 139–168; 15].

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [11, 954a 30–953b 10].

<sup>5</sup> "For, if their condition is quite complete, they are very atrabilious; but, if they possess a mixed temperament, they are men of genius. If they neglect their health, they have a tendency towards the atrabilious diseases, the part of the body affected varying in different people; in some persons epileptic

nary not because of disease, but rather by nature<sup>6</sup>. Aristotle gives several historical examples of people who were paradigms of genius melancholy, as well as other tragic examples.

From a philosophical point of view, this question is of interest because the medical tradition that followed the Aristotelian text attributes the exceptionality that poets, for example, possess to physiological causes. If for Plato, “a man is extraordinary and possesses genius because God has elevated him to a sacred state outside of himself <...> the melancholikós eucrásico of the Aristotelian-Theophrastian tradition is remarkable for its natural determination” [16, p. 26–27], which is why “this view is far from the ‘enthusiasm’ that Plato ascribes to poets. Divine inspiration was turned into a mere bodily humor. Poets and prophets are not possessed by divinity, but rather by black bile” [17, p. 37]. This interpretation seems quite naturalistic with genius unduly linked to physiological factors. Thus, “melancholy shows itself in dark skin (because of the amount of black humor), in thinness, in protruding veins and in abundant, dark hair — as if superabundant black humor were about to emerge to the surface of the skin and become perceptible in a characteristically sad and thoughtful external gaze. Melancholy is depicted by a man with his hand on his cheek and his face looking toward the ground, which is also its element of choice. Its planet is Saturn” [7, p. 72].

## 2. The reception of the Aristotelian tradition

During the Middle Ages, the theory of melancholic genius was quite forgotten, though some Arab commentators, such as Avicenna<sup>7</sup> and Averroes, remarked on the Aristotelian doctrine. Henry of Ghent linked this kind of melancholy to the subject whose imaginative representations do not transcend the metaphysical plane<sup>8</sup>. Hildegard of Bingen also wrote about remedies for melancholy<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, Arnau de Vilanova described melancholy with negative traits, including heart conditions, shrinking, etc. [13, p. 76].

Renaissance doctors, such as Francisco Vallés, Juan de Avignon, Bernardino Mountains, Felipe Bartolomé, similarly characterized melancholy, associating it with sadness and evil in the soul and body that obfuscates the mind. In this line, we can see Renaissance medicine’s critical move toward melancholic genius<sup>10</sup>. However, “despite an eminently critical vision, sadness continues to show some ambiguity; as a passion, it blinds understanding, disturbs the soul, and corrupts judgment, but, because it favors recollection and reflection, it also represents a path toward wisdom. Melancholy can lead to reason and madness, order and disorder, or light and darkness. It appears as one of the clearest examples of the contradictions and possibilities that human nature presents” [13, p. 86].

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symptoms declare themselves, in others apoplectic, in others violent despondency or terrors, in others overconfidence, as happened to Archelaus, King of Macedonia.” [Ibid, 954b, 27–30].

<sup>6</sup> “And since it is possible for a variable state to be well tempered and in a sense a favorable condition, and since it is possible for the condition to be hotter and then again cold, when it should be so, or to change to the contrary owing to excess, the result is that all atrabilious persons have remarkable gifts, not owing to disease but from natural causes.” [11, 955a 36–41].

<sup>7</sup> Cf. [13, p. 75–78].

<sup>8</sup> Cf. [16, p. 29–31].

<sup>9</sup> Cf. [13, p. 79–85].

<sup>10</sup> Cf. [9, p. 31–108].

Thus, given melancholy's ambiguity in the Renaissance and Baroque eras, a positive assessment of it is also possible. For example, Marsilio Ficino<sup>11</sup>, Juan Luis Vives<sup>12</sup>, Philip Melancthon and the doctors Pedro Mercado (with the 1558 publication of *Diálogos de philosophia natural y moral*)<sup>13</sup> and Francisco Valleriola, among others, continued Aristotle's theory by affirming the relationship between melancholy and genius, noting that melancholy as a temperament is associated with prudence, wit and poetic inspiration. In Spain, Juan Huarte de San Juan was the most ardent defender of melancholic genius. In his well-known *Examen de ingenios* (1575), he frequently cited texts from *Problems XXX* and associated melancholy with exceptional qualities like intelligence, talent for study and a great imagination, as well as with supernatural manifestations like knowing languages without having studied them or being able to prophesy<sup>14</sup>.

In his book, *Libro sobre la melancolía* (1585), the doctor Andrés Velázquez reacted to these excesses noting that these extraordinary gifts come from diabolical power rather than great genius<sup>15</sup>. In addition, Francisco Vallés, in *De sacra philosophia* (1595) attributed them to evil spirits<sup>16</sup>. Before that, Alfonso de Santa Cruz, doctor to Felipe II and a professor at Valladolid, in his text *Dignotio et cura affectuum melancholicorum* (written around 1569, but published in 1622), collected the opinions of some who thought that melancholic persons are possessed by evil demons<sup>17</sup>. This is the controversial context in which Francisco Suarez briefly commented on melancholy.

### 3. Melancholy in Suarez's commentary on *De anima*

While in Segovia, between 1572 and 1575, Francisco Suarez began to explain the Aristotelian text *De anima* during rising controversy over genius melancholy. It is no wonder that, through his study of medical treatises, he found the text from *Problems XXX*, q. 1. In fact, his *De anima* commentary introduced this text in the Disputation VII (q. 16). The context in which it appears — his treatment of the perfection of the external senses — is, however, somewhat surprising.

Suarez wonders which of the external senses is most perfect because, according to Aristotle, touch outstrips the others in perfection. But a difficulty arises:

In section 30 of *Problematum*, q. 1, Aristotle affirms that every talented person that has gained recognition in philosophy has been melancholic. This also applies to those who have shone brightly in the administration of the state, in poetic creation, or in the exercise of the arts. Thus, the melancholic complexion is ideal for talent. However, it is not suitable for touch because this earthly mood rather produces a hardening of the body. And it makes the sense of touch an inappropriate organ<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. [13, p. 87–93].

<sup>12</sup> Cf. [6, p. 63–68].

<sup>13</sup> Cf. [Ibid, p. 75–106].

<sup>14</sup> Cf. [5, p. 131–175].

<sup>15</sup> Cf. [6, p. 177–212].

<sup>16</sup> Cf. [4, p. 19–150; 7, p. 91–93].

<sup>17</sup> [18, diálogo I], Cf. [6, p. 107–129].

<sup>18</sup> “Sed contra, nam sect 30 *Problematum*, q. 1, ait Aristoteles eos omnes, qui ingenio claruere, vel in studiis Philosophiae, vel in Republica administranda, vel in carmine pangendo, vel in artibus exercitandis, fuisse melancholicos; ergo complexio melancholica est apta ad ingenium; talis autem non est apta ad tactum, quia ille humor terrestris potius indurat carnes, et organum tactus ineptum reddit” [19, d. VII, q. 16, n. 9, p. 777].

As we can see, the objection rises from Galenic medicine; black bile (or *atrabilis*) is harmful to the body because of its dryness and hardness, which prevents sensible touch, a manifestation of awakened intelligence. Aristotle's authority seems to contradict itself. Suarez responds by going to the text of *Problems*, which states that those with an excess of black bile and cold "become dull and stupid" [11,954a31]. However, moderate black bile that is hot and spread all over the body...

<...> takes advantage of talent because it springs from nature itself and determines an optimum arrangement in the body for the dissemination of spirits. It also moderates the excessive energy of blood: it makes man more careful and thus reduces him to a moderate level, making him more prudent. Of these, Aristotle himself rightly says that 'If, in some matters, they are surpassed by others, they outshine them in many other ways — some in science, some in the arts, and others in matters of the state'; and an elevated amount of humor that is heated turns man into a loquacious person and poet<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, Suarez explains the objection within the paradigm of Galenic medicine. However, the Galenic paradigm also has its weaknesses. Thus, when Suarez addresses the relationship between the sensitive appetites and the passions, he recognizes that the passions greatly depend on the somatic complexion because the passions stimulate a certain humor, but they are also stimulated by the humors. And in this context, he cites the example of melancholy:

<...> which possess some affinity with sadness, fear and despair. According to Galen, in 3 *De locis patientibus*, chap. 7, the reason for this phenomenon seems to be found in its black color: melancholy, with its external darkness, instills fear. The same explanation is found in the last chapter of *De causis symptomatum*<sup>20</sup>.

Suarez finds Galen's explanation overly superficial, which is why he cites Averroes' critique with the claim "that the color black is not active and, on the other hand, cannot objectively be the cause of sadness since it is not visually perceivable"<sup>21</sup>. The relationship between sadness and black bile cannot be attributed to its color because said color is not visible to the naked eye. Suarez strives to rid galenic theories of their false, pseudo-

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<sup>19</sup> "<...> huiusmodi ergo melancholia, quae non est nimia et calefieri potest, conducit ad ingenium, nam extrahitur a propria natura, et disponit corpus optime ad diffusionem spirituum, et praeterea temperat nimiam vivacitatem sanguinis, et facit hominem studiosiorem, et sic ad mediocritatem redacta facit prudentiorem. Unde de huiusmodi dicit Aristoteles quod 'licet aliqua ex parte excedantur ab aliis, tamen in multis rebus caeteris hominibus sunt praestantiores, alii in studiis litterarum, alii in artibus, alii in Republica'; et si hic in excessu humor calefiat, facit hominem loquacem et poetam. Multa dicit de hoc humore ibi" [19, d. VII, q. 16, n. 9, p. 777-779].

<sup>20</sup> "Ultimo, circa has passiones nota quod pendent plurimum ex complexionem corporis, ex abundantia alicuius humoris quem excitant et a quibus excitantur, ut melancholia habet quamdam affinitatem cum tristitia, timore et desperatione. Cuius rationem Galenus, 3 *De locis patientibus*, cap. 7, videtur reddere, quia est nigri coloris, nam sicut tenebrae exteriores metum incutiunt, ita melancholia. Idem ait lib. 2 *De causis symptomatum*, cap. Ultimo" [20, d. XI, q. 2, n. 15, p. 355].

<sup>21</sup> "<...> licet haec ratio frivola est, ut notavit Averroes, 3 *Collectaneorum*, cap 40, nam color niger non est activus. Obiective autem non potest interius causare tristitiam, quia non videtur." F. Suárez, *Commentaria una cum quaestionibus in libros Aristotelis De anima*, d. XI, q. 2, n. 15, p. 357. Suarez knew of this objection through F. Vallés' *Controversias* (1556). Cfr. [21, p. 330-331].

scientific beliefs. However, his argument still moves within the paradigm of Galen's four humors:

The reason for all these facts seems to be the following: since the sensitive appetite is found in the bodily organ, it needs various combinations to carry out various acts and, therefore, different moods collaborate with various acts. Perhaps the different moods also cause the differentiation of somatic complexions, and are responsible for the way in which animal spirits spread around the body and for the various ways in which the communication of vital energy is carried out<sup>22</sup>.

As Suarez claims, a bodily organ is needed for sensitive knowledge, the operation of which requires the right combination of the four humors. Consequently, the emergence of a sensitive passion (in this case, sadness) follows sensitive apprehension. The predominance of black bile tinges our perception of reality with this black humor, which lets in a tone of sadness into our perceptions.

And hence said humors are also extremely important for, in one way or another, the apprehension of objects<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, subjective dispositions somehow seem to condition our encounters with perceived reality. In any case, Suarez seems to favor a conventional interpretation of Aristotelian and Galenic psychology, with the addition of a certain naturalistic bent. The diversity of temperaments seems to obey physiological reasons, which tend to perceive reality with particular hues. While acknowledging that the passions of the soul can influence humoral secretions, Suarez seems to be inclined in the opposite direction, concluding that the humors configure one kind of temperament or another.

#### 4. Other perspectives on melancholy

The theologians of the time were connoisseurs of Aristotelian psychology — it was not in vain that they studied and explained the text of *De anima* within the Faculty of Arts. Certainly, they knew the problems associated with Aristotle's interpretation of melancholy, but they interpreted it from different perspectives. Such is the case of the Dominican Domingo Báñez, professor at the University of Salamanca, who commented on Aristotle's *De Anima* in Salamanca around 1555. His commentary was collected years later in a text on the *Summa Theologica* (1588) at a time when there was growing controversy over melancholic genius. A cursory comparison with Suarez's commentary is enough to confirm that they moved within the same scholastic tradition<sup>24</sup>.

Báñez makes it clear that he was familiar with the main medical treatises of the time; without elaborating, he presents a synthesis of the digestion process where black bile

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<sup>22</sup> "Ratio autem omnium haec esse videtur: Quia cum appetitus sensitivus sit in corporali organo, indiget diversis temperamentis ad diversos actus efficiendos, et ideo diversi humores ad diversos actus iuvant. Forte etiam diversi humores causant distinctionem complexionum in corpore et efficiunt ut spiritus animales alio vel alio modo diffundantur per corpus, et diversimode communicetur animalis virtus" [20, d. XI, q. 2, n. 15, p. 357].

<sup>23</sup> "Et hinc etiam est quod isti etiam humores maxime conducunt ad rerum apprehensionem uno vel alio modo faciendas" [Ibid.].

<sup>24</sup> Cf. [22, p. 617–642].

occurs<sup>25</sup>. Later on, he refers to the Aristotelian text *Problems*. Báñez and Suarez shared a similar context, i.e., the highest perfection of touch against the other external senses. His answer contains the same ingredients as the one found in Suarez's commentary, that is, the authority of Aristotle (reinforced by St. Thomas) in a context of Galenic medicine on the four humors<sup>26</sup>.

Man surpasses all other animals in touch, thus showing that he is the most prudent of all animals. Aristotle sustains this conclusion in *De anima II* (text 94) and, in the same place, St. Thomas claims two reasons for which the goodness of touch cooperates with the goodness of reasoning over the goodness of the other senses: because the organ associated with touch is spread throughout the body, those who have a superior sense of touch also have better senses and a higher sensitive nature and, therefore, better intellect since the goodness of sense is a disposition toward the goodness of the intellect. The second reason is because the goodness of touch follows from a proper complexion or temperament, while nobility of the soul follows from the proper complexion of the body because each form is proportional to its material. Therefore, those who have a better sense of touch also have a better soul and a more intelligent mind: St. Thomas also sustains this in q. 76 (a. 5).

As seen, this argument palpably contains substantial soul-body unity: the right organic complexion inclines one toward the proper exercise of reason. However, Báñez adds a distinction between the role of serving the intellect (which is common to all the senses) and the manifestation of the perfection of the intellect, something that only touch has:

<...> It is one thing that sense serves the intellect and quite another that sense exhibits the goodness of the intellect: the former is common to all senses, while the latter is special to touch, which, among all the senses, manifests the goodness of the mind, even though it serves the intellect less than the other senses, as Aristotle teaches... It follows that men who have a superior sense of touch will also display superior ingenuity [23, q. 78, a. 3, Duda 2<sup>a</sup>, 682e–683b].

The goodness of touch manifests the goodness of the mind, but the correlation between the two is not obvious. Báñez's response departs not only from Suarez, but also from the entire Aristotelian and Galenic tradition:

Aristotle does not intend to claim that those who are born with a melancholic complexion have a sharper and wiser genius, but rather that those who dedicate themselves to study become melancholic through their dedication to studies and meditation. Thus, this condition of the body does not lead to ingenuity or wisdom, but rather is a sign or effect of it<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. [23, q. 78, a. 2, Duda 2<sup>a</sup>, 579a–579e].

<sup>26</sup> Cf. [Ibid, q. 78, a. 3, Duda 2<sup>a</sup>, 682e–683b].

<sup>27</sup> "Sed contra hanc conclusionem est argumentum commune. Aristot. in problematibus, sectione 30, q. 1, docet omnes sapientes regulariter fuisse melancholicos, se dista affectio significat deteriorem complexionem et temperamentum, ergo. Ad hoc respondetur, quod Arist. non intendit docere, quod illi qui a principio sortiti sunt complexionem melancholicam, fuerint acutiores ingenii et sapientiores, sed quod illi, qui sunt studiis magis dediti, ex frequentia studiorum et meditationis redduntur melancholici. Quapropter haec affectio corporis non inducitur tanquam causa maioris ingenii aut sapientiae, sed potius tanquam signum vel effectus illius." D. Báñez, *Scholastica Commentaria supra Primam Partem* [Ibid, q. 78, a. 3, Duda 2<sup>a</sup>, 683b–c].

In short, a melancholic temperament is not due to physiological causes inherited at birth, but rather is configured through acquired habits related to study and work. Thus, the Dominican professor seems to go outside of the naturalist Aristotelian interpretive current. Indeed, an inclination toward study and meditation eventually leads to a melancholic character. Báñez begins with the same empirical observation (the melancholic temperament), but believes that psychic or psychological factors, rather than physiological ones, cause it. While for Suarez and the Galenic tradition a melancholic temperament is rooted in biological causes, for Báñez it is a sign or effect of study and reflection, which produces ingenuity and wisdom. Accordingly, genius does not emerge with a somatic predisposition, but rather is developed through reflection and study.

## 5. Conclusion

Jackie Pigeaud, one of the most knowledgeable scholars in the history of melancholy, recognizes that it is unclear whether the sentiments trigger black bile or vice-versa [24, p. 122–138; 12, p. 60]. In short, the question is whether melancholy is a disease of the body that affects the soul or, on the contrary, if it is a disease of the soul with somatic consequences. Something similar could be said of the relationship between genius and melancholy. The Galenic tradition seems to lean toward a physiological explanation: hot black bile in moderate proportions inclines one toward genius. Suarez, along with other medical treatises of the time, seems to also assume this. But Báñez's interpretive line seems to indicate that acquired habits cause the production of black bile.

Today it is clear that, in general terms, both explanations are valid since melancholic or depressive disorders have both somatic and psychological causes. In any case, the most revealing part of this discussion on the psychosomatic unity of man is found in how mid-twentieth-century medicine shed light on the topic once again. The Cartesian image that splits man between two juxtaposed substances is rebutted by scholastic psychology and the medicine at the time that highlights the profound unity of man.

In any case, scholastic psychology (and theology) seems unlikely to take up astral or supernatural explanations to explain genius: neither divine delirium, nor astral movements, nor demonic powers are responsible for the uniqueness of genius. It is either temperamental dispositions or intellectual habits that give rise to genius, which is either born of a certain temperamental configuration or arrived at through human effort.

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