

Diving Deep Into The History of The Tetrpharmakon / Tetrpharmakos

Post by “Don” of November 7, 2025 at 7:51 AM

Today, I came across this section of Diogenes of Oenoanda (emphasis added):

Quote

But, as I have said before, the majority of people suffer from a common disease, as in a plague, with their false notions about things, and their number is increasing (for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another, like sheep) moreover, [it is] right to help [also] generations to come (for they too belong to us, though they are still unborn) and, besides, love of humanity prompts us to aid also the foreigners who come here. Now, since the remedies of the inscription reach a larger number of people, I wished to use this stoa to advertise publicly the [medicines] that bring salvation. These **medicines** we have put [fully] to the test; for we have dispelled the fears [that grip] us without justification, and, as for pains, those that are groundless we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute.

And the last part in Greek, emphasis added...

[Quote from Diogenes of O](#)

column 6

ρίας προθεῖν[αι φάρμα-]
κα, ὧν δὴ φαρμ[άκων]
πεῖραν ἡμε[ῖς] π[άντως]
εἰλήφασμεν. [τούς]
γὰρ ματαίως [κ]ατ[έχον-]
τας ἡμᾶς φόβους [ἀ-]
πελυσάμεθα, □ vac. 1□ τῶν τε
λυπῶν τὰς μὲν κενῶς
ἐξεκόψασμεν εἰς τέ-
λειον, □ vac. 1□ τὰς δὲ φυσικὰς
εἰς μεικρὸν κομιδῇ
συνεστείλαμεν, ἐλα-
χιστιαῖον αὐτῶν τ[ὸ]
μέγεθος ποιήσα[ντες]

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Diogenes specifically used φαρμακος (6.1 & 2) "[pharmakos] medicine." This medicine metaphor is in keeping with U221 and VS54. It's not a stretch for me to see this extrapolated to use in the Tetrpharmakos.

Diogenes' wording is also interesting in that I see it being a perfect encapsulation and summary of ataraxia and aponia:

These medicines we have put [fully] to the test; for we have dispelled the fears [that grip] us without justification ([τούς] γὰρ ματαίως [κ]ατ[έχον]τας ἡμᾶς φόβους [ἀ]πελυσάμεθα) and, as for pains (λυπῶν), those that are groundless (κενᾶς "empty") we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute.

The "fears [that grip] us without justification" are fears of the gods and death. Dispelling those fears that have no justification is what calms the troubles in the mind. That is, by definition and etymology, is *ataraxia*. These are also the first two lines of the tetrpharmakos.

Λυπων , genitive of λύπη (lupē) is grief, sadness; pain (of mind or body), suffering, affliction, distress.

These musings hit me this morning, so I'm placing them in this thread for thoughts and comments.