



Balancing Empathy with Authority in Health Regulation

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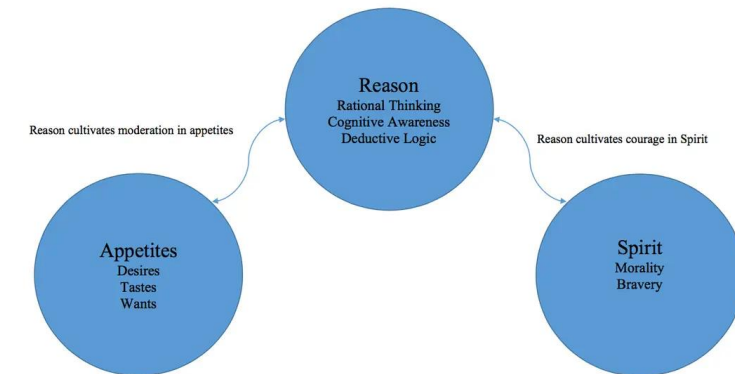
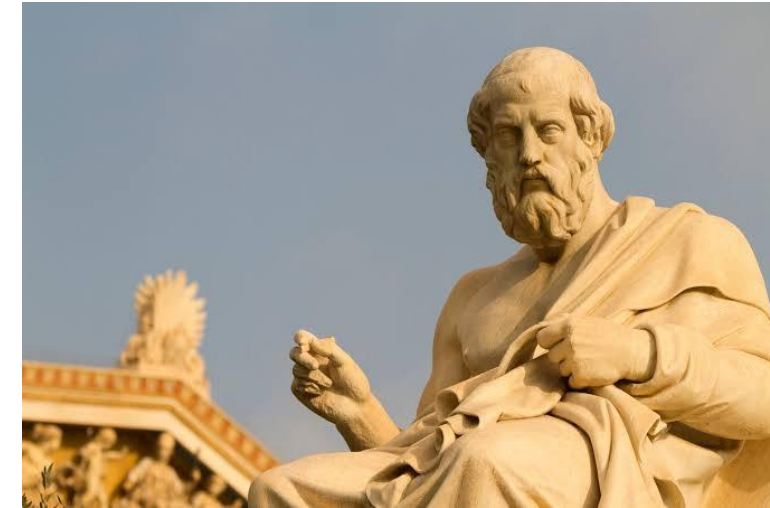


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Lessons from Plato (c. 427-347 BCE)

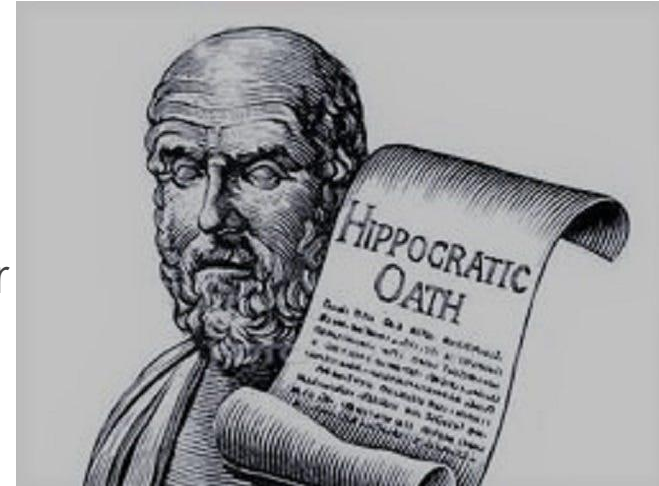


- Justice & the Soul:
 - In the Republic, Plato defines justice as each part of the soul (reason, spirit and appetite) performing its proper function.
 - For medicine, this could translate to **balancing reason** (medical expertise) with **compassion** (a form of spirited concern for others) to avoid being overly detached or overly emotional.
 - Empathy aligns with the **harmonious soul** that considers others' well-being, a trait valuable for physicians.
- The Philosopher's empathy:
 - Plato's philosopher-rulers, who govern with wisdom and justice, are expected to **understand the needs of the those they govern**.
- Limits of empathy:
 - Plato warns against **excessive emotional involvement**, as seen in his critique of poetry's emotional influence.
 - Suggestion of a **need for controlled empathy** – caring enough to understand individual needs but maintaining rational detachment to make sound regulatory decisions.
 - Empathy, a **tool for effective governance**, but subordinate to reason and the greater good of the individual and society.



Lessons from Hippocrates (c. 460-370 BCE)

- Hippocrates' works **do not describe a formal regulator**—the physician's character was a form of internal regulation.
- The Hippocratic Oath **voluntary** commitments to beneficence, non-maleficence, confidentiality, and non-exploitation set a moral baseline for professional behavior.
- Regulation was informal, enforced through **reputation, peer scrutiny and patient trust**.
- Doctors were to be trustworthy, modest, and compassionate, cultivating public trust.
- A physician's success depended on **public perception** of their skills and ethics...medicine was a disciplined practice.
- Discipline was **self-imposed**, regulating behavior by aligning it with **societal and ethical expectations**.



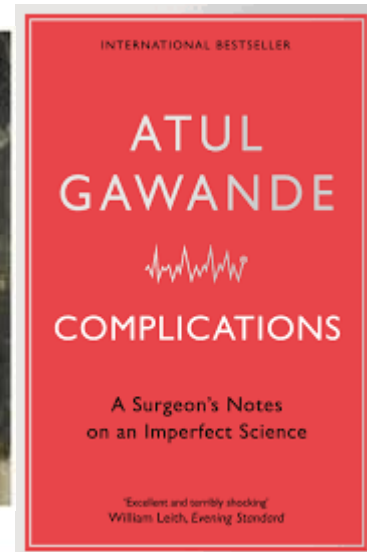
How modern regulators can show empathy

- Mentorship and supportive training:
 - Mentorship implies empathy by recognizing the challenges of learning medicine.
 - Regulators need to offer mentorship and continuing education to support professional growth.
 - Regular supportive supervision ensuring rigorous training and skill acquisition.
- Fairness in Judging Competence:
 - Fairness in evaluating competence reflects empathy by acknowledging the effort required to master medicine.
 - Regulators should assess practitioners based on their skills and ethics, not arbitrary or punitive measures.
 - Regulators need to provide clear, fair guidelines that respect practitioners' expertise and challenges.



How regulators can show empathy

- Fairness contd...
 - Defend professionals against unfair criticism, recognizing that medicine itself is an **imperfect science**.
 - Show empathy by considering the **inherent uncertainties, complexities and pressures** practitioners face, avoiding overly harsh judgments for honest mistakes.
- Compassion for the practitioner's burden:
 - Show an awareness of the **emotional and intellectual demands of medicine** (e.g., dealing with suffering, uncertainty, and death).
 - Physicians are expected to **maintain composure** in very **emotionally difficult** and challenging situations...emotional labor!
 - Demonstrate empathy by **recognizing these burdens** and **supporting** practitioners' well-being...
 - Set reasonable expectations
 - Provide resources for coping with stress, etc.
 - Create conditions that allow practitioners to balance **professional duties with personal health**.



Practitioners are part of the community

- Community and shared humanity:
 - Physicians are part of a broader healing community, implying the need for mutual support among practitioners.
 - The community expects that every doctor will do his duty.
 - A regulator, as an extension of this community, could show empathy by:
 - Educating public about its duty, and realistic expectations
 - Fostering collegiality
 - Encourage peer support, and
 - Addressing systemic issues (e.g., excessive workloads) that affect practitioners' ability to practice ethically.
 - Ensure regulations balance patient safety with practitioners' mental health and workload.
 - Could it be true that “a profession without a regulator is like a fish without a bicycle”?

Conclusion

1. Medicine has evolved over millennia, since Hippocratic era.
2. There is need for a sincere consciousness that the task of caring for patients is above the talents of any single individual.
3. Regulation is needed. Regulators need to inculcate competence, honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude and the love of fellow human being—acknowledging an overruling Providence.
4. Empathy toward practitioners would involve fair evaluations, supportive training, and recognition of the emotional and intellectual challenges of medicine.
5. This aligns with his broader ethic of compassion and balance, applied to both patients and physicians.

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THE END

Thank you for your attention