

Adamantios Corais, an Hippocratic scholar, neurophilosopher, and patriot

In the memory of my father

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Editorial

Adamantios Corais in the last years of his life, with plenty of knowledge, experience, visions, expectations, and much valuable social work, wrote his autobiography¹ in 1829, four years before his death, opening his soul, describing in simplicity, sincerity, and authenticity all the conditions of his life, his achievements, emotions, perspectives, and expectations offering an open view of his interior life and his gifted personality.²

Adamantios Corais was a doctor. He studied Medicine at one of the most famous universities in Europe of his Era.³ Besides, he was an editor of ancient greek authors, writing many commentaries on Hippocrates, and other ancient physicians, and philosophers. In his brief autobiography of 24 pages,¹ Corais stated that he was born in Smyrna in 1748. His grandfather Adamantios Rysios was one of the most well-educated men in Smyrna, a real scholar who possessed a library of plenty of greek and Latin authors and including also a large number of books on philosophy, medicine, and religion. Corais was the only inheritor of this considerable library and started even from his childhood to spend long hours contemplating the knowledge and the multi-dimensional wisdom. He started also learning many foreign languages, such as Latin, French, Italian, Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish and Dutch. Initially he went in Amsterdam, as representative of his father's commercial enterprises.⁴ After a six-year stay in Holland, where Corais studied Logic, Modern Philosophy, and Mathematics he returned home, deciding in 1782 to go to France, in Montpellier, to study Medicine.

The School of Medicine in Montpellier⁵ was the successor of the famous school of Salerno in Poulgia of south Italy, which was considered as the first well-organized medical school in Europe.⁶ The School of medicine in Montpellier was founded in 1196, by Pope Urbanus the fifth.^{7,8} The official language of medical studies at that time was Latin, which according to trilingual dogma was one of the three accepted languages for teaching, along with Greek and Hebrew, in European academic institutions.

The spirit and the scientific philosophy of the Medical School in Montpellier were almost exclusive Hippocratic. Among the many famous professors of Medicine at that time was the surgeon François de La Peyronie, who was the personal physician to Louis the XV, and the main founder of the Royal Society of Surgery in 1731. In addition, professors Grimaud, Chaptal, and Broussonet were very well-known in academic circles and very respectable in all European Universities for their valuable contributions to Medicine and Medical philosophy, attracting in Montpellier a large number of students from Germany, England, and Russia.⁹

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Corais has studied medicine in Montpellier for six years and at that time he was deeply inspired by the philosophy of "vitalism",¹⁰ which combined Medicine with Ancient Greek Philosophy and was also characterized by the profound respect for human life and personality, recognizing also the psychosomatic unity of the human being. The main supporters of vitalism in Montpellier at the time of Corais' studies were the professors Paul-Joseph Barthez (1734-1806), and Théophile de Bordeu (1722-1776) who were doctors, philosophers, and poets, proposing vitalism as the main doctrine of the Medical School in Montpellier, which has had as a further extension the metaphysical vitalism introduced by Bergson.

Corais' Medical studies in Montpellier were splendid. In 1786 he submitted a Thesis (Thèse de baccalauréat) with the title in Latin "Pyretologiae Synopsis" (Synopsis of Pyretology).¹¹ He supported his Thesis in public, in Latin, in front of his professors and more than two hundred fifty audiences from the most well-educated and experienced wise doctors of the academic community of the city.¹²

The Thesis was deeply inspired by the Hippocratic and Galenic spirit as well as by the theory of vitalism.¹⁰ Besides, all the current theories, concerning fever, its diagnostic value and treatment were extensively analyzed. The thesis was accepted as "maxima cum laude". Corais gained genuine respect and profound recognition in the academic circles of Montpellier.¹² Consequently it was expectable that Corais was elected as a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, which was a highly respected academic institution, including, as regular members, the most important and eminent scientists in France.¹³

At the same time, in 1787, Corais decided to submit one more Thesis (thèse de doctorat), on the Hippocratic Aphorisms, with the title *Medicus Hippocraticus* (Hippocratic Medicine).¹⁴ In his Thesis, Corais described all the valuable principles of medical ethics, according to the Hippocratic theories, with special emphasis in the respect of the human personality and the beneficial role of the physician in healing the compact psychosomatic entity of the suffering people.

The philosophical atmosphere in Montpellier at that time was in favor of the Neo-Hippocratic doctrines. It was reasonable, therefore that Corais started to study, in depth, the Hippocratic scrolls and to translate them into French, interpreting with extensive commentaries all the Hippocratic principles and doctrines.¹⁵ In his Thesis, Corais insisted that the main duty of the physician is the respect of the psychosomatic homeostasis of the patient. To achieve his duty he has to increase continuously his knowledge and experience and to culture the virtues

and the worths of his profession. He has to respect and benefit all the patients no matter their age, ethnic background, ancestry, social or economic condition, culture, education, or religion.¹⁴

The Thesis on Hippocratic medicine is a real hymn for the Medicine and the Neurophilosophy and offers a perfect compendium of medical ethics, underlining the important role of the physician, who should be kind, responsible, self-controlled, merciful, knowledgeable, and always beneficent^{14,16}. The doctor has also to proceed to frequent estimation and evaluation of his work, improving himself scientifically, morally, and spiritually. Studying the Hippocratic collections, Corais increased his admiration for Hippocrates and encouraged the young doctors to study the Hippocratic works for getting a high scientific sense and responsibility in the practice of Medicine and for ameliorating their social performance.¹⁷

As a Neurophilosopher, Corais accepted the Hippocratic encephalocentric theory of the functional organization of the human body, claiming that improving the function of the brain (the hegemonicon), would also improve the function of the other vital organs of the body, restoring the homeostasis and the interior harmony of the human being.¹⁷ In 1788, Corais established himself in Paris “the New Athens”, where he observed the dramatic events of the French Revolution,¹⁸ with serious emotional and social consequences, resulting in temporal depression and social isolation. However after some time, Corais in Paris enlarged his horizons and increased his creativity, erudition, enthusiasm, and the admiration for the ancient greek philosophy. He started publishing many works of the ancient greek authors and a large number of books concerning education, which were addressed to the young generation of his country and abroad¹⁹.

During the years 1805 and 1827, he published 32 volumes with 2.000 pages including the most important and influential works of the Greek doctors, historians, and philosophers.²⁰ In 1800 he published the Hippocratic work on the air, the waters, and the places (*Traité d’Hippocrate des airs, des eaux et des lieux*) based on the codex of the Parisien Library, which was characterized by Littré, who published the Hippocratic collections, as one of the best analytical publications.²¹

In Paris, Corais expressed and demonstrated openly all his productivity, intelligence, mental strength, and patriotism. He founded the philhellenic society, supporting the Greek struggle for independence,²² inspiring also in the European intellectuals the sacrificial love for liberty.²³ He attempted continuously to clarify the necessity of the love of the knowledge, virtue, and moral values. In 1830 he founded the Greek- French lyceum in Paris, which would have offered a high education to Greek, French and other European students. Corais developed a crucial correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, the President of USA, expressing his profound desire for the independence of his country and describing his high ideals for democracy and education.²⁴ The human society according to Corais should be a large and stable field of a continuous cultivation of virtues, truth, and justice.²⁵

Corais died on 6th of April in 1833 in his home in Paris, where he was living in simplicity, leading an ascetic way of life, and working for the knowledge, the freedom, and the moral values.²⁶ He was characterized as *vir incomparabilis, vir doctissimus, vir summus* (man unique, very well educated and entirely authentic).²⁷

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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