Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle distinguished themselves as the earliest scholars of the mind, speculating about and debating the existence and location of the mind (Eckroth-Bucher, 2001). Examining their philosophical tenets and applying their philosophical principles helps nurses understand the contemporary relevance of the concept and practice of self-awareness in psychiatric nursing as a tool to facilitate mental health in patients (Eckroth-Bucher, 2001).

In ancient Greece, philosophers, poets, and tragedians, as well as physicians, influenced the population. Therefore, individuals often turned to philosophers to find relief for their various psychological problems or to improve their relationships with others. This article discusses the influence of ancient Greek philosophers, poets, and tragedians on contemporary psychiatric nursing.
INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT GREEK THEATER
Greek Tragedy

According to Tsolis (1985), in ancient Greece, theater exerted a similar influence on the population and physicians and philosophers. Ancient Greek tragedies offer ample ground for identification with several of the characters depicted, sometimes even with contradictory ones. Nurses recognize that during psychotherapy, a similar process is in operation, whereby a continuous rearrangement and reassessment of patients' libidinal and aggressive impulses occurs, as patients' egos gradually broaden with the incorporation of unconscious material.

Tragedy may present a new perspective on the impression people hold of themselves in conjunction with those around them (Tsolis, 1985). Similarly, in psychotherapy, nurses expect patients to find an enlarged picture of the possibilities being offered in the interaction between themselves and others. A good play and a well-conducted psychotherapy have as their common characteristic the active working-through process that takes place within the individual (Tsolis, 1985).

What the dramas reflect is the manner in which mental disorders were empirically handled in ancient Greece. For example, in the play Orestia by Aeschylus (5th century B.C.E.), Orestes killed his mother and her lover in revenge for their murder of his father. In this play, a socially acceptable solution was found to put an end to the compulsive killing (Miris, 2000).

Orestes endured a 3-year punishment by his remorse (the Erinyes), after which the Gods of Olympus deemed this time to be adequate and they judged him innocent. A similar long-term process occurs in psychotherapy, during which patients confront and solve their problems. Nursing staff know that in modern psychotherapy, solutions are provided through interpretation and transference of a patient's emotions to the therapist.

Greek Comedy
In Nefelees (The Clouds) by Aristophanes, an Athenian playwright (5th century B.C.E.), a certain flexibility in therapy is observed. The patient is unable to understand the causes for his denial to meet his obligations. Another member of the family is called on to help (Mandilaras, 1992). In psychotherapy today, nurses do the same when patients are not able to describe the condition of their health. In Sfikes (The Wasps), also written by Aristophanes, a complete picture is provided of the therapeutic methods used at the time in connection with a person who suffered from mental disorders (Roussos, 1992).

INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

The sophist philosopher Gorgias (5th century B.C.E.) said:

Speech bears the same relation to the mind as drugs to the body. As drugs draw off different humours from the body, so words can induce joy or grief, fear or confidence, or by evil persuasions drug and bewitch the mind (Guthrie, 1989, p. 211).

This theory was put into practice by Antiphon, an Athenian sophist of the 5th century B.C.E., in his "psychiatric clinic." He could cure the distressed by words.

Antiphon had invented a technique to avoid sorrows (technè alpiaia), something similar to the treatment of disease by the physicians. He outfitted a room in Corinth near the center of the city (the Agora, or the open market) and declared he possessed the power to cure all patients suffering from depression by talking to them and finding the cause of their illness (Skouteropoulos, 1991). Antiphon was very convincing, and the surname Nestor was given to him. He advertised a course of lectures on the transgression of sorrow, insisting that no one could tell him something so sad he would be unable to take it out of his mind (Skouteropoulos, 1991).

Antiphon provided consolation to those in trouble by questioning them as to the causes of the trouble. Bignone (1938) justly compared this state of calm content (alpiaia) with the gaiety (euthymia) of Democritus and the tranquility (ataraxia) of Epicurus. A utilitarian hedonism, Bignone adds, was undoubtedly the basis of Antiphon's ethics, but in the moderate form upheld by these two other philosophers, Democritus and Epicurus.

Antiphon was convinced the roots of physical illness were to be sought in the mind. He said that for all men, the mind controlled the body on matters of health and disease as well as everything else (Skouteropoulos, 1991). For Antiphon, illness sometimes could be explained as an escape route from active life, such that illness was a holiday for those who did not like to work (Guthrie, 1989).

According to Garthias (1992), this reminds us of T.S. Eliot's words in his play The Cocktail Party, when
the psychiatrist says to the patient, "Your illness offers you a double advantage" (Eliot, 1950, p. 95). Antiphon was a considerable psychologist and a precursor to what today we call supportive psychotherapy.

EARLY GREEK PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

Hippocrates (5th century B.C.E.) is also a well-known example of a psychotherapist in ancient Greece. From the collection of Hippocrates' works, it is apparent physicians addressed patients as a psychosomatic whole, and in addition to treating patients' illnesses, physicians also gave them psychological support (Tsolis, 1985).

Moreover, writers of all ancient Greek philosophical creeds gave a prominent place to the analogy of body and soul. According to them, like the body, which must be made healthy, the soul, sick by nature, needs purging or treatment, to be healthy. Only in this manner can virtue be achieved, that state of eudaemonism that philosophers never tired of celebrating as "the health of the soul" (Edelstein, 1987).

Another well-known psychotherapist in ancient Greece was Melampus. He was invited to cure the king of Megara, Alkathus, who had committed infanticide and suffered from depression as a result of his guilt. Melampus treated him with baths, which, from a psychological point of view, could signify a catharsis (Tsolis, 1985).

In the Aesculapian centers, patients followed a strict and involved program of psychotherapeutic activities in accordance to their specific needs. Patients stayed in the Aesculapian centers for an extended period of time or for as long as it was necessary for their ailment to subside (Georgiou, 1972).

SUMMARY

Ancient Greek physicians as well as philosophers were fully cognizant of a human being's psychological function and used their particular art to influence individual or social behavior in accordance with their pursuit. This art or technique favorably compares with several of the methods currently called supportive psychotherapy. This psychotherapy was the first form of care for people with mental health problems.

Nurses who base their practice on ancient Greek psychotherapy see the patient as a whole, a person who creates meaning in life. Applying the philosophical principles of ancient Greeks helps nurses understand the behavior of people with mental health problems and recognize and facilitate adaptive satisfaction of these psychological needs.

In addition, psychiatric nurses are able to help distressed individuals understand their fears and anxieties, so they are freed from the causes of their symptoms that led them to seek therapy in the first place. Consequently, this understanding can make psychiatric nurses' work a living experience and add meaning to their work.

REFERENCES


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