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## ORIGINAL

### HEALTH FROM THE HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE OF BLAS ÁLVAREZ DE MIRAVAL

### LA SALUD DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA HUMANISTA DE BLAS ÁLVAREZ DE MIRAVAL

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#### ABSTRACT

In spite of the fact that there are different studies in the Sciences of the Sport on humanist authors, the aim of the present work is to put of relevancy the work of one of the most important figures of the Spanish humanism, Blas Álvarez de Miraval, celebrated doctor and theologian, with regard to the Sciences of the Physical Activity and of the Sport by means of the study detailed of his greatest work, "Of the conservation of the health of the body and the soul", which results throw an only and different vision from what has to be the conservation of the health from the integral care of the individual.

**KEY WORDS:** Health, physical activity, humanism, integral care, Blas Álvarez de Miraval

## RESUMEN

A pesar de que existen diferentes estudios en las Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte sobre autores humanistas, el objetivo del presente trabajo es poner en valor la obra de una de las figuras más importantes del humanismo español, Blas Álvarez de Miraval, insigne médico y teólogo, a través del análisis pormenorizado de su obra cumbre, titulada *De la conservación de la salud del cuerpo y el alma*, cuyos resultados arrojan una visión única y diferente de lo que ha de ser la conservación de la salud desde una perspectiva integral por parte del individuo.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Salud, actividad física, humanismo, cuidado integral, Blas Álvarez de Miraval

## INTRODUCTION

It is sometimes the case that specialists in Medicine do not set much value on the shared origin that Physical Activity and Sport Studies have with their discipline. Nevertheless, it is of interest to see how to a great degree this common origin unites them in a single core. At the present day, nobody would deny that both these disciplines have the mission of studying the human body as a whole. Medicine does this from the viewpoint of taking care of its health, especially from the moment at which this is lost and it becomes necessary to find a way of restoring it. This, at least, is what has always been held by traditional Medicine.

It is necessary to nuance the statement, since at the present day preventive Medicine is not merely at the cutting edge, but is more than ever one of the most important fields of research. It is no longer a question of acting exclusively after an ailment has appeared, but rather when health is good, with an eye to finding the means of keeping it so. At this time of upheaval in world economies, this sort of action implies valuable savings in the cost of health provision, as well as following the proverbial advice that prevention is better than cure. It is in this context that physical activity takes centre stage. It would seem obvious that physical exercise is a highly recommended route to attain good health, to stay healthy once it is achieved, and to restore health if it is lost.

Physical Activity Studies concentrate on the study of movement applied to the human body. This is an objective that has not changed over the course of centuries, and is the rationale for such studies. This is true to such an extent that the principal Humanist treatises do not differ too much from what would be in a good manual on healthy habits from the present day. In fact, it was during the Renaissance, and in particular thanks to the Humanist line of thought, that a large number of treatises appeared relating medical hygiene to the study of physical activity along a single path: health. This shared route led the two disciplines to travel in tandem for centuries, indeed down to the present day, and caused each to be a complement to the other. This all grew out of the return to the principles of Classical Greek and Roman knowledge, especially in respect of philosophy, art and medicine.

Sánchez Granjel said (1981), The Humanist treatises in question were mostly written by physicians whose training in that way of thinking led them to study methods for staying healthy. They followed the lines traced out by the principal thinkers of earlier periods: Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Avicenna, Maimonides, Averroes, Saint Isidore, or Arnau de Vilanova, to cite just those figures of greatest influence in the field of hygiene and medicine. In the case of the Classical authors mentioned, and in particular Galen of Pergamum himself, their works were prefixed to mediaeval medical treatises, which likewise attempted to inform and train the noble classes with regard to the principles which would render it easier to care for one's health. Some of these were written at the direct request of a king, or of some young prince or rich noble in the royal court; others were produced at the initiative of one or another of the doctors enjoying prestige at the time.

Hence, perhaps moved by a desire to create authentic health manuals, well-known Humanist physicians (López Piñero y Bujosa Homar, 1978) produced works of the sort in the period mentioned. These included *El vergel de sanidad* ["The Oasis of Health"] (1542), by Luis Lobera de Ávila; *El aviso de sanidad* ["Advice on Health"] (1569), by Francisco Núñez de Coria; *el Libro del ejercicio corporal y de sus provechos* ["The Book of Bodily Exercise and its Benefits"] (1553), by Cristóbal Méndez, which was the first work to be given over specifically to physical exercise. There is also the book entitled *La conservación de la salud del cuerpo y del alma* ["On the Preservation of the Health of Body and Soul"] (1597), by Blas Álvarez de Miraval, and, slightly later, in the early years of the seventeenth century, the treatise bearing the title *Medicina Española contenida en proverbios vulgares de nuestra lengua* ["Spanish Medicine Contained in Common Sayings of our Tongue"] (Madrid, 1616), by Juan Sorapán de Rieros.

Galen was to play a major part in all these publications as the true father of Medicine. Indeed, the physician from Pergamum became a clear benchmark for Humanist writers. The return to Classical values did no more than highlight those topics which a true Humanist doctor ought to have to his credit. These comprised extensive and profound training, together with a precise knowledge of Greek and Roman authors, which would allow them to get back to the principles of medical gymnastics, although from a more detailed and systematic viewpoint than hitherto. Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle were studied in depth, although, for Humanist physicians, there was no doubt that the gold standard was Galen.

The original Classical concept of the term "health" (Esteban, García y Cabellos, 1989) was taken on board by the Humanists, so that for them the idea of health as a whole would equate to lifestyle. Its origin was to be sought in the idea of integrated development of the human being, based on the achievement of a harmonious balance between intellectual education (grammar and music) and bodily training. Hence, motor skills were to have a leading role in the training of individuals, especially in the early years of life.

Humanist medicine was grounded in a knowledge of the Classical sources, but this came through four clearly differentiated channels. The first involved those who remained wedded to the Arabized late-mediaeval version of Galenism, so-called Avicennists, because they relied mainly on the Latin translation of Avicenna's *Canon*. The second was based on the well-known Humanist Galenism, the central thinking of which was a return to Galen's ideas as they appeared in the Greek texts that had now been cleared of extraneous matter from a philological point of view. The third was a trend that had as its starting point this Humanist Galenism and that retained its same objectives, but gave pride of place to the writings of Hippocrates as models of observation: this is termed "Hippocratic Galenism". The fourth and final tendency was rooted in Integrist Galenism, associated with the ideology of the Counter-Reformation, and its followers stuck to traditional medical doctrines, with all innovations expurgated from them.



All this led a number of authors to attempt to give grounds for their treatises on hygiene from different perspectives. They were, however, in all cases motivated by an interest in publicizing preventive health habits that would allow the attainment of good levels of such healthy practices in the general population. Among these works one of the outstanding examples was the study that is the subject of this research, the treatise by Blas Álvarez de Miraval entitled *De la conservación de la salud del cuerpo y el alma* ["On the Preservation of the Health of Body and Soul"]. This was a work that aimed at achieving excellence in matters of health: its very title implied a declaration of intentions. The concept of health was raised to new heights thanks to constant consideration of questions relating to the soul, a combination of topics that had to do with aspects of health that nowadays would be termed psycho-somatic or psycho-physical.

The author was born in the town of Carmona in the Province of Seville in the year 1556, the child of a well-to-do family owning large amounts of farmland, olive groves and other properties. When he was still just a boy he moved to Salamanca, where he undertook primary and secondary studies before taking degrees in Medicine and Theology. He went on to complete a doctorate in Medicine, and lectured in the Faculties both of Medicine and of Theology at the

University of Salamanca, which gives an undoubted confirmation of his high academic achievements.

He represented a pinnacle of the two disciplines, having had a double training both as a physician and as a theologian. To put it in another way, when it came to studying health, he was aware of the need to keep the body in good shape, but also the soul. This point is vitally important, as it involved a step forward that had hitherto not been taken, the view that true health and harmony would not be attained unless there was a complementary approach to two facets, whether called mind and body, or body and spirit. This posed him with quite a few problems as the work developed. As may be imagined, the sixteenth century suffered from considerable limitations from the point of view of science and morality. Society had numerous barriers impeding complete freedom to study and research. Very often the level of knowledge of the period meant that medical explanations were not merely limited but also inconclusive, or even sometimes just led to a large vacuum, all the more so in view of the shortcomings of the traditions inherited from the Middle Ages.

## OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the treatise in question by the Humanist Blas Álvarez de Miraval, this being one of the works on hygiene and medicine that were fundamental to the transmission of knowledge of this discipline.
- To gain familiarity with, and set a true value on, this treatise from the angle of knowledge of Physical Activity and Sport Studies.
- To get closer to the importance in the Galenic scheme of the six necessary factors or causes, known as the *sex res non naturales* ["the six non-naturals"] as the basis of the physical health and emotional equilibrium of human beings.
- To contribute to the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Sport and Physical Activity Studies.

## ANALYSIS OF MIRAVAL'S WORK

*De la conservación de la salud del cuerpo y del alma* (1601), was one long poem to health. It was a detailed study of all the aspects that Miraval considered needful to achieve an overall level of health. It was to this end that he wrote its one hundred and twelve chapters, practically all of them given over to how to care for one's health. By way of prologue, there were two striking chapters that gave an idea of the general lines upon which the work was to be based. The first is the opening chapter of the book, which bears the title "*Wherein is treated of what great Value and Excellence be Man's Health, and how among the most efficacious Means to have and to procure it is Virtue*". The second is Chapter Three, with the heading "*Wherein is treated of the Excellence of Man*". Both were to occupy a major place in the book, since it was upon these ideas that two of the author's most important principles were based,

these, moreover, being also those of the principal Humanist writers. The first related to virtue, a topic which will be considered in more detail below. This was the highest ideal to be achieved in the view of the Humanists, because through moderation there is regulation of all the aspects necessary to reach the state of perfection which is true virtue. Secondly, Chapter Three contained the foundation of the work, this being a view of men as special, supreme, beings in whom was to be found what is being sought, health. It was men who lose, recover and enjoy it. In other words, the health of individuals is the central and constant axis of the treatise. There is not one single chapter where the concept of health is not to be found, whether seen from a physical or from a spiritual angle.

It is indeed true that a close scrutiny shows that in general terms it is health from a physical point of view that is the aspect given most weight over the course of the whole treatise. It must be kept in mind that the great majority of such books were intended to be training guides for the nobility, monarchs or courtiers. These classes evinced a preoccupation for maintaining their health, obtaining what money or power could not give them, and a lack of which would deprive them of the enjoyment of the comforts, pleasures and privileges reserved for them. These were very different worries from those of the common people, whose daily struggles were merely to get enough to eat and to survive.

Of the one hundred and twelve chapters composing the treatise, thirty-five specifically use the term health and a further two the term healthy. Nevertheless, the remaining chapters are also directly related to health. It should be noted that in numerous instances the specific word “health” does not appear because of a need to provide continuity with the previous chapter, whilst in others the word health is replaced by a pronoun.



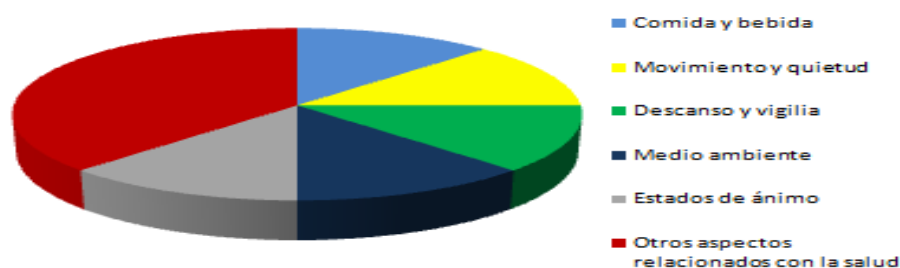
Work entitled "On the Preservation of the Health of Body and Soul"  
112 Chapters

Another crucial fact is that Galen of Pergamum is present directly or indirectly throughout the work. In fact, the Galenic scheme of the *sex res non naturales* [the "six non-naturals"] is presented in a somewhat disordered fashion. These referred to the maintaining of health, and related to the air breathed, to food and drink, to movement and rest, to sleeping and waking, to filling and voiding, and to psychic states. This Galenic scheme laid the bases at a conceptual level for the ordering of hygiene and medicine developed by the physician from

Pergamum. It was the starting point for all the Humanist treatises given over to a study of these themes.

This concept of the *six non-naturals* referred to the achievement of a perfect balance of these factors and the view that excesses and deficiencies in them would reveal disease and problems of health in general. This scheme, upon which the main Humanist works were based, had as its aim to point out the matters relating to bodily health over which individuals could have a direct influence, so that they could themselves modify them with an eye to maintaining and improving their state of well-being.

### Esquema galénico: "sex res no naturales"



Galenic Scheme: "Sex res non naturales"  
Food and drink  
Movement and rest  
Sleeping and waking  
Surrounding air  
States of mind  
Other aspects relating to health

As previously noted, for Miraval the way to attain the wished-for health was none other than virtue, referring to moderation, a golden mean of things and balance among them. This was because he saw ailments as occurring whenever any hint of imbalance appeared. This should be the aim of those who seek health, moderation, the virtue of the middle way in things. This is a clear reference to the Aristotelian *mesotes* or mean, noted in the first book of Galen's *De differentiis februm*, and also the first book of his *De sanitate tuenda*, where it is also claimed that health is the middle term between cold and heat. The same was asserted by Aristotle in his work the *Problemata* (Zagal Arreguín, 2005), or Plato in the *Timaeus* (Pérez Martel, 2003), which established that the body is composed of four elements: *heat, cold, humidity* and *dryness*. Balance was always the key factor, because illnesses cropped up when there is an excess of one or a lack of another, since they were all necessary in the right proportions and in moderation. Aristotle interpreted this as meaning that an over-large amount of any of these elements caused a superabundance that in the end must lead to the appearance of pestilences, an unmistakable sign of

illness. These principles are to be found in all the Humanist treatises on health that were mentioned above.

As for the general themes relating to health, aspects are covered that include the way to recognize the pointers to a good state of health, what should be done to achieve good health, how to keep the body fit so as to have better health, the excellence of health, how to have a better life through being healthy, preventive measures to ensure health and even topics relating to sleep as a key factor in which a good state of health has its beginnings. On the other hand, there is coverage of factors that are prejudicial in themselves, among which are mentioned idleness as a source of damage to health, the danger of excesses with alcohol (the gift of Bacchus), pride, and excessive eating and drinking.

The integrated concept of health goes way beyond these fundamental aspects, generally of a physical nature. Álvarez de Miraval also raised other questions relating to health which were linked to his general themes, but were difficult to fit into his main set of contents, because they were aspects only indirectly related to them. Thus, there was a chapter dedicated to music and another on wisdom. Yet others looked at questions having to do with the present, past and future, with heavenly bodies, the stars and the microcosm, with how fools and the ignorant cannot attain good health, with envy and its relationship to health, with the links to money or wealth, with good fortune, and with the relationship of health to honour.

Nonetheless, for the doctor born in Carmona there were further questions of vital importance that he dealt with in great depth and detail. These related to the crucial nature of nourishment, specifically food and drink, since for him aspects relating to diet were absolutely vital in preserving or recovering health. He saw many points connected to this topic, as can be judged from the numerous chapters in which he touched on these points. The author's preoccupations, like the similar views of other Humanists, can be judged by the stress he put on the quantities of food and drink that should be taken and the correct times for doing this. In Chapter XVIII the author considered how food and drink alter the human body and thus bring benefits or disadvantages. Among these latter, he laid special emphasis on the fact that eating large quantities would lead to stomach troubles, which he said include heartburn, belching, nausea, vomiting, even obstructions of the liver and what he termed putrid fevers. He suggested that such excesses also cause a blunting of the powers of comprehension, loss of memory and failing strength.

It is important to point out that throughout his treatise he consistently refuted a classic stereotype of the period which saw fat people as enjoying the best state of health. This physician had seen patients with serious pathologies and health complications due to overweight. However, the commonplace view of those times should not come as a surprise, if it is kept in mind that the poorer classes often did not have enough to eat, and that this would necessarily be reflected in their body shapes. Thus, the habit of compulsive excessive eating among the upper classes led to a stereotype that linked overweight to the highest social status. Álvarez de Miraval criticized this attitude very severely and stated that such habits arose more from ignorance than from any real need on the part of a



decadent noble class and a burgeoning bourgeoisie obsessed with showing off its financial clout.

As a doctor, he looked at an equally vital question, that of the most appropriate times and ways of eating, or in other words the various meals that people should take in order to preserve their health and how they should eat them. Hence, for instance, Chapter XX bears the title *“Wherein is shewn whether the Supper should be greater than the Dinner, or otherwise, and whether a Diversity of Meats be harmful and what should be the Order of Meals”*.

It is known from various Humanist authors that there were differences of opinion as to which meals should be more copious than others. However, while some claimed, in accordance with the Hippocratic criteria from the *De diaeta*, that is the treatise *On Regimen*, that the evening meal should be less abundant than the midday repast, Miraval held the opposite view. He nevertheless stated that such medical precepts required people to exercise at suitable times and in adequate ways, incorporating sufficient rest, so as to be able in this fashion to establish an appropriate routine for eating and taking physical exercise.

On the lines defended by the author, the advice about limiting the midday meal found its justification in the virtual necessity for rest if the meal taken were to be very abundant. This linked in with a very Spanish cultural phenomenon, siestas, and the controversies about whether they were a good or bad thing, on the basis of questions both of physical and mental rest and of the physiological needs that will ensure better digestion. The author makes reference to this in the following passage:

*“... the Reasons which we have given of Sleep and of Rest and of the long While that there is between Dinner and Supper. And confirmed likewise by the Experience of those Athletes that were in Rome, the which it is said by Reason and Experience had found this to be the best Usage in their Meals.”*

However, Miraval's preoccupations regarding health began, but were far from ending, with taking care about one's diet. His ideas on health also reached out to another of the Galenic *sex res non naturales*, sleeping and waking. This he saw as one of the underlying supports for correctly maintaining or re-establishing health. This was true to such an extent that for him the crucial point was to ensure sleep was always taken at the same times, for if this was not done the change might be the origin of serious imbalances in the organism. Hence, one of the most vital facets in preserving good health would be to lead an orderly life, but above all in regard to sleep, always attempting to stick to timetables for rest. Certain ailments were intimately linked to this aspect, as was the case for most instances of insomnia, chronic tiredness, headaches or a reduced attention span. Indeed, it is very true that if individuals take only a few hours of rest or rest outside their normal times, on occasion they suffer certain disturbances in their body that are linked to such disorders.

As for the best time for sleep, he reflects as follows:

*“And whereas it is said that a Man should sleep so much as the third Part of the day, of this it must be understood for the Length of four Hours or of five. For the*

*Day signifieth the Time in the which the Sun passeth our Hemisphere, and thus is it distinguished from the Night.”*

*“It is of great Note in this Matter that for the better Preservation of Health, none should sleep overmuch, nor excessively remain waking, for overmuch Sleep consumeth and diminisheth the natural Heat and doth much weaken the Body.”*

At the present day, the culture of well-being and enjoyment of life leads people to value night-time entertainment and staying up late as an essential part of leisure. If to this is added the consumption of alcohol and of other narcotic substances, it will be seen to lead to the physiognomic features already described by the author: *“Pallor of the Visage, Loss of good Humour, Lack of Appetite and of Will, Loss of Strength of the Muscles and of Vigour for bodily Exercise, sunken Eyes and vacant Look, and indeed great Hunger in Hours of Wakefulness from the Wear upon the Body at the said Times, as also no Hunger in later Hours, are visible Signs of Disorder in the Times of Sleep”*. It may easily be seen how this state of affairs can be recognized at the present day

Álvarez de Miraval stated that sleep is not to be exactly the same at all ages. With regard to this, he commented that it should be longer in the more elderly, which he said would favour *“the Humidification of the Body of which Age has brought about the Loss”*.

Another point that would round out the list of good advice about health is the therapeutic value of music, which he claimed to be *“a sovereign Remedy that bringeth Sleep”*. To bring these ideas down to the present day, it should be noted that there are currently numerous therapies with different aims that have as their main strand the use of music. Among them, emphasis should be put upon all those disciplines that employ it as their fundamental support for relaxation, which is often the first step in inducing sleep in a range of treatment programmes. Disciplines like yoga are strongly advised two or three hours before going to sleep as a means of slowing down the high pace of the organism. Music is also used for children with hyperactivity, pregnant women and people suffering from stress or general anxiety, all employed to the single end of enhancing the propensity to rest.

One of Miraval's main preoccupations in his treatise was to highlight a series of environmental factors in order to decide which most and best influenced the health of humans. Hence, he gave Chapter XII the title *“Wherein is treated of the Nature, Number and Properties of Winds. And which may be the Lands of most Import and good for Habitation”*. This chapter evinced a complete declaration of intent, as there was already on the part of numerous Humanist writers a great interest in elements such as winds, distinguishing to a good degree between their characteristics and their consequent influence upon health. The author picked out a considerable number of different winds, assigning each a set of connotations for health that can be summarized into four basic types.

In relation to health he referred to the following winds as indicated below:

*“Zephyr or Favonian [westerly] (...) the Vulturnus or the Eurus [easterly]. All these Winds are healthful and it is said that they are hot and dry. These Winds come in the last Part of the Night and at the Break of the Day, of Airs that are already temperate by Reason of the Sun’s Warmth; the which furthermore at the End of the Day and at the Beginning of the Night will be more humid and thicker.”*

*“The western wind Zephyr, the Caurus or the Argestes. The Favonian or the African wind. All these are healthful at the Setting of the Sun, for they are purged and cleansed by its Rays.”*

*“The Auster wind [south]. All such southerly Winds are hot and humid, they weaken our Bodies, render the Brain swollen, blur the Sight, move Humours and Rheums, soften the Belly, blunt the Appetite, opening the Pores of the Skin, and destroy the natural Heat and engender putrid Fevers.”*

It is true that the influence of climatic factors, and specifically of air or winds, does determine bodily sensations and the dampness or dryness of a climate often makes a difference. This is a conditioning element in the development of respiratory illnesses such as bronchitis or asthma. Dry climates with little wind, and those in which the majority of winds are dry, are favourable for avoiding such ailments. In contrast, damp climates tend to be environments in which the winds are more prejudicial for disorders of the respiratory tract.

In the second part of this same chapter the author highlighted which zones are best for living in, a question to which Miraval paid much attention. In this instance his theories were based on the work entitled *Descriptio mundi*, a book added to by Ptolemy’s *Geographia*. This stated that the world is divided into five zones, of which only two were truly habitable: from the Tropic of Cancer northwards to the Arctic Circle and from the Tropic of Capricorn southwards to the Antarctic. The remaining areas would not be habitable, the two Polar Circles because of their extreme cold and the area between the two Tropics because of excessive heat. The best zones would be sited in the two temperate parts, but not close to either of their boundaries, which would suffer from excesses either of cold or of heat. The author concluded that these areas would provide an abundance of nutritious foods and would be healthy for human bodies. He noted that such lands lie between the Antarctic Circle and the Tropic of Capricorn.

A different concept from what has been discussed up to this point was the influence of air on health, this being seen as differing from winds (López Férrez y García Novo, 1986). The various elements, air, fire, earth and water, were factors which Miraval kept firmly in mind, evaluating them from the viewpoint of their actions upon health. Chapter XIII, which bore the title *“Wherein is treated of Airs, and how it behoveth for the Preservation of Health to chose those which are temperate”*, mentioned these topics and added air as one more feature of the *six non-naturals* upon which an individual’s health depends, although always within the concept of environment. Indeed, for Miraval air was in addition one of the elements with greatest influence, as he considered it to be in constant contact with the body. Specifically, it was an element that is in continuous movement because of breathing in and out, and its quality to a large

extent determined health. This was because at different moments it can be hot, cold, damp or dry, sometimes thick and sometimes thin, carrying with it at times good odours, at times stench. He therefore stated that it had “*the Capability to enlighten the Mind if it be calm, thin, pure and well tempered, and it even purgeth superfluous Humours, thinneth the Blood, maketh cheerful the Heart, calmeth the Understanding, awakeneth the Appetite and aideth the Digestion and Maintenance*”. If, on the other hand, the air was dense “*it maketh the Body heavy, the Blood thicker, for the Humours it is harmful, as also for the Digestion, in general it bringeth Sadness*”. This was a description of the consequences for health of the various zones where people might find themselves as a function of the place in which they lived, and hence this would be the positive or negative effect of the air.

Several key ideas emerge from what is set out by Miraval. For him the temperate zones were the best places to live, as in these there were no alterations to human bodies. Dry zones were somewhat similar, since not only did they not produce humours, they actually consumed them, making bodies harder and more humid.

This did not occur in regions that are more extreme in their temperatures. In hot zones in particular the body's natural heat was eroded, so that it became inflamed and weakened, which was without doubt prejudicial for health, owing to the appearance of certain chronic ailments. Likewise, damp areas were harmful, as they were inclined to develop humours and make bodies softer and looser. For their part, cold zones were injurious, not so much because of acute diseases as because of chronic ailments. However, the author's reasoning is somewhat confused, as he concluded by saying that cold could be a cause of long life. Yet he stated that in chilly areas, the cold was damaging to parts of the body as crucial as the brain, since it affected its operability and functionality, rendering it less efficient, and in addition low temperatures led to coughs, colds and nerve ailments. These views were based on the opinions stated by Galen and Averroes, in Chapter Seven of Book Five of the first's *De accidenti et morbo*, and in Chapter Fourteen of Book Six of the second's encyclopaedia of medicine known as the *Colliget* or *Collectorium*, respectively.

One final comment that the author made was that sudden changes and moves from one region to another were not good for the health, because the air might be unfavourable, which would be harmful. On this point different interpretations are possible, but these would be related not so much with air itself but with other features of the atmosphere that in the past were not known about, such as air pressure and altitude, both of which do have links with health.

There are indeed certain sudden changes in location that can have noteworthy effects. For instance, a move to a place at a higher altitude, if this is great enough, may, in the absence of prior adaptation, lead to a series of symptoms such as vomiting, dizziness, headaches, problems with vision and nausea. Such a change to an altitude with thinner air might also lead to difficulties in breathing. It has been usual for mountaineers to need a period of acclimatization at high altitude in order to continue at full performance. However, once this period has been completed, with appropriately planned training, it is known that better performance than was initially possible can be

achieved thanks to adaptations in the body. Thus, in order to attain the best results many elite sportspeople who have a considerable aerobic component in their specific exercises spend long periods at high altitudes so as to enhance performance and reduce fatigue through increasing the number of red cells and improving the transport of oxygen to the muscles. When it comes to increased atmospheric pressure at a lower altitude than usual, changes are slighter. They involve a certain feeling of hunger and giddiness, occurring when there is a move from a place with a high altitude to areas at or near sea level. Both of these sets of reactions are instances of the effects upon health of changes in the environment. There were further remarks on air and health in the chapter entitled "*Wherein is shewn how it may be determined whether Air be good. And whether Air may become putrid*".

The author gave over further chapters to the remaining principal elements, for example earth in Chapter XV, which had the title "*Wherein is treated which of the Elements be most necessary for human Life and of their Excellence and Virtues and wherein is particularly treated of Earth and of Water*". Chapter XVI has the title "*On the great Excellence of Water and on its marvellous Virtues*" and in it the author reviewed the great importance of this element (López Férez y García Novo, 1986), which was clearly essential for the life of all living things. Fire was considered in Chapter XVII, entitled "*On the admirable Nature of Fire and on its exalted and near divine Effects*". The world was looked at in Chapter XVIII, bearing the title "*Wherein is shewn which be the principal Part of the Earth, the best and most healthful, and whether the Region or Climate produce sharp Wits*".

At the present day, nobody would deny that environmental factors to a large extent determine the sort of life individuals lead, and consequently their future prospects and their health. Running from the earliest childhood years down to the lifestyle of the end of old age, the development of patterns of pathology, mental disequilibrium, or later illnesses can often be picked out as triggered by the climate. The ambiance in which children grow in the earliest days of life to a great degree shapes their characters, their future way of facing up to problems, family stability or balance of emotions. At later stages, the environment is crucial in intellectual, academic or professional development, being one of the factors upon which the greatest value is set by adults when choosing a job. All of this affects the balance, not merely of mental health, which would be the first problem that might appear as the consequence of a given environment, but also of later ailments that may emerge with the passage of time.

Finally, it may be noted that the mental health of individuals was also a question that Blas Álvarez de Miraval considers. Nowadays, such views are generally accepted, but only a few decades ago a reference to health was essentially understood as referring basically to physical aspects, with psychological and emotional matters being somewhat left to one side. For the Andalusian physician whose work is being investigated here, states of mind and other matters having to do with what are today called mental, psychological and affective factors were the culmination of the "perfect circle" known as health. He differed from other writers in that his concept of health made sense only as an integrated vision, in which there could be no dualism, handling body and mind separately. Up until his day, previous writers had distinguished these

sharply when speaking of health, their main focus being upon questions related solely to the physical. Indeed, some scholars later than Miraval, for example René Descartes, also concurred with the separation of body and mind. However, for this author matters linked to states of mind, cardinal virtues, and happiness, or even topics relating to the soul, were a fundamental part of understanding an integrated concept of health in the human being.

To go no further, the concept of happiness, the achieving of it, one's self-perception, all are strongly linked to emotional stability. In some sense, the complexity of the inner emotional world of individuals was a question that had enjoyed a certain prominence ever since the time of Hippocrates, with a recognition that without it the circle of complete health could not be closed, however exceptionally good an individual's physical health might be. The well-known quotation from the poet Juvenal, "*mens sana in corpore sano*", made the need for it very clear. At the present day, numerous scholars write of the importance of biorhythms and the need for emotional stability as the keys to achieve and maintain happiness in the context of the changeable society of modern times. The author dedicated to this topic his Chapter LXXI, which was entitled "*Wherein is shewn how, for living a more contented Life and for more felicitous Outcomes in great and difficult Enterprises, the Strength of the Spirit be more essential than that of the Body*".

In this case, whilst it is true that bodily strength is very important, the forces of the spirit are even more so, to the extent that they are equally able to affect health. Hence, the main enemy are individuals themselves, since they have to struggle against their own nature, as in most instances the spirits are to be located in the mind. Miraval made frequent reference to the cardinal virtues, especially prudence. According to the author, a person who was prudent would tend to make fewer mistakes and thus would have less to regret, which would help in achieving happiness, and indirectly influence the health of those who enjoy this.

With regard to temperance, the author established that it is one of the virtues that were necessary if one wished to enjoy full health, and so he declared in Chapter LVII, which had the title "*Wherein is shewn how Temperance in all Things maketh Life happier and longer*". For Miraval, temperance was intimately linked with other virtues, particularly moderation and reason, in matters of the body and of the soul. Moreover, he made an effort to demonstrate how the deadly sins, especially envy, and how a bad conscience prevented the attainment of health.

The Andalusian doctor also considered matters of faith as an aspect affecting health. The explanation for this view must lie, as was noted at the start of this paper, in the difficulties that he would have faced in any attempt to separate his two trainings, as a physician and as a theologian.

For the good doctor from Carmona, the body was no more than a temporary medium for the soul which was characterized by being limited and imperfect within what grandeur it did possess in itself. He saw it as the "house" of the soul during earthly life, in which, because of it, humans must suffer endless calamities and wretchedness. This idea differs to a greater or lesser degree

from most of the views regarding this topic that are held at the present day. On the one hand there continue to be Christian opinions that coincide very well with Miraval's thoughts, in which death was seen as an essential and necessary step towards eternal life, in which the body was finally abandoned. However, there are very different lines of thought, lay, atheistic or agnostic, that see life only in the here and now, tied exclusively to earthly existence, and with death is the ultimate end.

The soul was without a doubt a protagonist in this work, to such an extent that it was named in the book's title. As previously mentioned, Miraval's theological training took him beyond the boundaries of health. Health could not be understood as an integrated concept unless there was balance in the physical body but also balance in the soul. This was the reason that the book included chapters of such a nature. However, they did not stand alone, since other chapters may be mentioned that referred to the presence of sins (Chapter LVIII) as an integral part of health, to the consequences of sinning or to the presence of God as the Creator of life and Judge of the decisions that would affect the health of the individual. According to Miraval, a correlation might be established between the integrating views of body and of soul, since in some chapters he described the body as "glorified" (Chapters LXXVI and LXXVII), raising it from a purely earthly category into a mystical conception. This was in contraposition to a much more human, more "tangible" idea of the body as something that must perish. Proof of this are the two chapters directly related to the bodily senses. Hence, the soul was considered by the author to be an intangible good, probably our most precious treasure, given by God and acting as a memory store in which was deposited all of a person's inner world. It was defined (Chapter LXXXVIII) as "*of so noble and immortal a Nature*" and compared in this instance with the body: it was "*lodged in so wretched and crumbling an Habitation*". Hence, it was necessary to strive to maintain the health of the body so that while the soul was accommodated within it its life would be one of the greatest calm and serenity feasible.

The presence of God in this context was not just to show Him as the Creator who gave people souls but rather as entrusting people with the power to care for them while they were living out their earthly lives. Miraval believed that as He was the Lord and Master of the soul, when people needed a cure, whether for the body or for the soul, they should first turn to Him, and only then to a physician, who must see in Him a model to be emulated. This was shown in Chapter LXXXI. Nonetheless, people should be aware that they were at all times protected by the Creator, as there was a figure to whom the author appealed, that of the guardian angel, who would not merely keep people out of danger, but would also have a direct action upon their ailments of body and soul. (Chapter LXXXI).

In short, it could be stated that in the search for human excellence health must be an unchallenged fact. Body and soul were both of them part of a unit in which the soul plays a fundamental role (Chapter LXIII). There were further chapters where the importance of the soul was stressed, as the noblest and most powerful part existing in men (Chapter LXXXV), and where it was made clear that if any part, thing, or being was to govern humans, it must be the soul (Chapter LXXXII). This chapter may be summed up with the comments made

up to this point: in brief, all the theories on this topic are oriented to the search for health by means of perfection and of making earthly life happier and more content as a first step towards what will be the eternal life of the soul (Chapter LXXXIII and Chapter LXXXVIII).

## CONCLUSION

As has been observed, the work analysed here is an interesting treatise, written by a leading Humanist intellectual, both a physician and a theologian, a lecturer in the Faculties of Medicine and Theology of the University of Salamanca. On the basis of its contents, it falls within the literature on hygiene and medicine of its era that was known as “*regimina sanitatis*” or “*health regimes*”, writings that Humanist doctors aimed at the nobility, clergy, and rich bourgeoisie, with the aim of helping them to maintain their health.

Other Humanist treatises were oriented along these same lines, such as the work published by another Andalusian physician, Cristóbal Méndez, in Seville in 1553, the contents of which cover the benefits that are to be derived from continual, balanced and harmonious physical exercise. The book *De Arte Gymnastica*, by the Italian Girolamo Mercuriale, published sixteen years after Cristóbal Méndez’s work, is a further important example of the literature on hygiene and medicine of this period. In it, too, stress is laid upon the value of bodily exercise and undertaking it as a basic means of maintaining health.

However, Álvarez de Miraval treated health as an integrated concept, foreshadowing already, five hundred years ago, the current approach taken by the W.H.O. when stating the ideas that should govern its principles for programmes and actions. Moreover, the physician from Carmona established a close link between two ideas sometimes seen as contradictory, physical health and mental health (as he saw them, the health of the body and of the soul), when in reality the two together formed the foundation of emotional balance in human beings. Thus, this work must be seen as constituting an important contribution to the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Physical Activity and Sport Studies. In consequence, this paper is an attempt to recover it from oblivion and make it more widely known among professionals in this discipline.

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