

*The philosophical and medical background of Aulus Cornelius Celsus' views on the healthy body*

There was little agreement among the ancients about what a healthy body is. Where and how does one draw the boundary between a healthy body and one that is not healthy? Is a healthy body defined by being free of disease? Or can a healthy body be impaired in some respect? Can it be sickly or weak? The struggle of the Roman encyclopaedist Aulus Cornelius Celsus to answer these and related questions in the eight books of his remarkable *Medicina* (i.e., books VI to XIII of his *Artes*) reflects a larger debate, in part of classical and Hellenistic origin, about what a healthy body is and how to evaluate health. From the first sentence of his *Medicina* to the last, 'health', 'healthy body' and related concepts play a central yet often problematic role in his text. Celsus' opening sentence has been understood to suggest that 'healthy bodies' do not even belong to the subject matter of the *ars medica* but to *agricultura*, inasmuch as *agricultura* promises nourishment for healthy bodies, whereas medicine promises health to ill bodies (*ut alimenta sanis corporibus agricultura, sic sanitatem aegris medicina promittit*). Yet he introduces 'the healthy body', 'health', 'the healthy human being', and 'the intact body' throughout the eight books of his *Medicina*, repeatedly problematizing the notion of 'health', while deploying a wide range of differently nuanced terms to refer to the 'healthy'. This paper attempts to address four questions prompted by Celsus' numerous remarks about the healthy body. First, what is Celsus' conception of the healthy body? Second, does he show awareness of earlier philosophical and medical debates about the healthy body? Third, is there a single norm of 'healthy body' by which all healthy bodies can be identified as such, or does Celsus' approach leave room for many diverse kinds of 'healthy bodies'? Fourth, are there epistemological criteria, physical characteristics, and methodological procedures by which a healthy body could be identified?