

## EINSTEIN CENTER CHRONOI

### Time and Awareness of Time in Antiquity

Workshop “Kairos, Krisis, Rhythmos:  
Time and Time Awareness in Ancient Medicine”

### The Pneumatists on Time, Body, Vitality

Sean Coughlin (HU Berlin; Einstein Center Chronoi)

The Pneumatist School of medicine (first century BCE–third century CE) is an understudied movement in ancient medicine, a missing link between the philosophy and medicine of the classical period and the imposing system of medicine found in the works of Galen. This presentation will provide, for the first time, a discussion of the intricate web of analogies the Pneumatists saw between the cycles of the cosmos and living body, which they used in order to explain the periodicity of human life and to diagnose disease. This synoptic discussion of time in Pneumatist thought will focus on three themes:

#### *(1) Temporal Physiology*

Macro- and microcosmos were traditionally understood to be analogous in Greek philosophy and medicine. Call the analogue of cosmic time, ‘bodily time’. What specific cycles of bodily time did the Pneumatists recognize? How did they understand the relationship between cosmic and bodily time? What kinds of influences could lead to the disruption of bodily time? And why did they believe disruptions of bodily cycles were harmful rather than benign?

#### *(2) Measuring Bodily Time*

Some of the body’s periods, like gestation and aging, or cycles of sleep and wakefulness, were more or less apparent; others, like the pulse, were more problematic; still the Pneumatists emphasized the fact that bodily cycles must be evident. How did they understand such evidence and what kinds of observations did they make?

#### *(3) Zooming in: Pulse, Time and Perception*

Within the physiology and measurement of bodily time, there were nevertheless debates among the Pneumatists. The presentation will conclude with debates of the Pneumatists concerning how to recognize, explain, and measure the pulse; and how to understand the rhythmic movements of the pulse in relation to other life-cycles and rhythmic movements of the body.