

Book Reviews

G. E. R. LLOYD, *Demystifying mentalities*, Themes in the Social Sciences, Cambridge University Press, 1990, 8vo, pp. viii, 174, £27.50/\$49.50, £10.95/\$14.95 (paperback).

This latest book by Geoffrey Lloyd continues his exploration into the origins of Greek scientific thought. In it he examines the concept of “mentalities” as an explanation for the peculiar development of medicine, mathematics, and science in early Greece, as well as a description of the thought-processes of primitive and less primitive societies. In both respects he finds it seriously flawed. In its place he suggests a greater attention to the social contexts of communication as the main determinants of new forms of thought.

Such a banal summary does not do justice to the complexity of the argument or the wide range of Lloyd’s examples. As a check on Greek science, mathematics, and logic, he introduces his readers to Indian and Chinese texts, carefully pointing out their similarities and, still more, their differences, even when, at first sight, these might appear insignificant. His differentiation between logic and rationality, and between Greek logic before and after Aristotle, is illuminating. Rather more opaque is his chapter on magic and science, where the argument would have been helped by more examples, and perhaps carried more deeply into the medical texts. Lloyd’s social explanation for the differences between medicine and magic in early Greece can be usefully compared with that of Peter Brown for late Antiquity. But, as the Preface makes clear, these are preliminary suggestions, challenges to our thinking rather than fully established positions.

What is clear is the variety of approaches to healing even within the Hippocratic Corpus (and, in passing, the odd way in which medical historians have failed to focus on more than a handful of “mainstream” and “scientific” texts). This complexity Lloyd links to political changes, even to democracy, which encouraged speculative innovation. Not all have been convinced by his earlier attempts, in *Magic, reason, and experience* (1979), to tie in democracy so closely, and his position seems to have shifted slightly, away from a focus on Athens. One can agree with his suggestions about proof and confrontational style developing out of public debate in assemblies and law courts, but, as can be seen from the *Iliad*, such arguments were not confined to democratic states. For all his subsequent maltreatment, Thersites was permitted to speak in opposition to Agamemnon, and even legal argument can take place under a tyranny.

This is not an easy book. Its subject is complex, and its exposition demands a close attention to every detail of its propositions to appreciate the nuances Lloyd gives to some of the major suppositions of anthropologists and sociologists. But the reader who responds to Lloyd’s promptings will have learnt a great deal about the Greeks and their peculiarities, and will have been incited to further thought about the whole western tradition of medicine and science.

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FRANZ ROSENTHAL, *Science and medicine in Islam: a collection of essays*, Aldershot, Hants, Variorum, 1990, pp. xxviii, 219, £39.50 (0–86078–282–4).

For more than fifty years, Franz Rosenthal has been investigating the intellectual relationships between Islam and the classical world. This selection of papers devoted to medicine and science displays the whole range of his remarkable scholarship. He is as much at home in editing and translating a text as in setting it in context, and his synopses of the role of the physician and of the place of medicine within Muslim society are justly famous. No medico-historical library should be without this volume, for merely to read Rosenthal on the Arabic interpretations of the first Aphorism of Hippocrates or on Iṣḥāq ibn Ḥunain’s *History of the physicians* is to gain a lesson in historical methodology. His cautious formulations of his hypotheses always demand respect, even when, as in his reluctance to accept a Galenic origin for the *Commentary on the Hippocratic Oath*, some might think him over-scrupulous. This academic