

Book Reviews

Once the Nazi scientists convinced each other that the results of their racial “investigations” were correct, then both the ability and the need to apply moral, subjective criteria lessened. After all, when one is dealing with sub-humans the ground rules change; no need for compassion, for concern, for human suffering, when the sufferers are not human.

Everyone who attempts to understand the butchery of Nazism ultimately locates, somewhere in the flow of time from 1933 to 1945, an explanation or excuse for the Holocaust. No explanation, no excuse, is sufficient, but eventually the mind needs to effect closure on all topics, even this. For me, the operative explanation has been that there were, of course, a few monsters, but for the average German, who probably was no worse a person than you or I, the predicament was stark: follow orders or become, yourself, a victim. If the explicit motto, Sin or Die, fits, it explains a great deal. One of the mental tests one submits oneself to, one of life’s countless “what ifs”, is, “What if I were faced with a demand either to do an amoral act or to suffer dire consequences?” At 2.00 a.m., in the dark, the honest answer is usually that one doesn’t know. But it is not difficult to envisage decent people, including perhaps even oneself, who will fail the test and carry out the amoral act. Now, at least for certain groups of scientists in Nazi Germany, Müller-Hill suggests that the motto was actually, Sin or let someone else do the sinning. The relevant passage states: “As documents and my interviews show, anyone who wanted to do so succeeded in escaping the ‘honourable’ task of participating in the extermination process. This was possible because there were other experts pushing forward to take their places” (p. 89). This alters completely one’s judgement of the sinners.

Müller-Hill’s book is profoundly distressing and convincing, because it displays believable people behaving in believable though abhorrent ways. It has, however, one serious deficiency. He knows it well and identifies it in his Introduction. The work is not a finished study, but rather a preliminary work. He has made a sound beginning, but either he or some other historian must finish the task so that we will have “the comprehensive book which is still lacking” (p. 4).

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GALEN, *On examination by which the best physicians are recognized*, edition of the Arabic version with English translation and commentary by Albert Z. Iskandar, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum Supplementum Orientale IV*, Berlin, DDR, Akademie Verlag, 1988, 8vo, pp. 213, DM 98.00.

It is not every day that a classical text so full of interest is published for the first time. *Kitāb miḥnat al-ṭabīb* is an Arabic translation, made in the ninth century by Ḥunain, of an otherwise lost work of Galen on how to choose one’s physician. The answer is obvious: choose Galen, but in giving this advice Galen ranges widely over many aspects of medicine, education, and society, from quacks to Asclepius cult, and from problems of urbanization to reminiscences of the good and great. For the social historian, this is a wonderful new source of information; for the Galenist, an opportunity to see the hero at his most vituperative; and for the medical man, a chance to glimpse how doctors in antiquity ought to have been trained, and, occasionally, were. In its abundance of new information on the workings of Roman society in the Antonine period (c. AD 177, although the editor would prefer 175), this is potentially the single most important text to have appeared since the seventeenth century. Dr Iskandar must be thanked most heartily for making this work available at last, and for providing the non-Arabist with a translation into English. He bases his Arabic text on two manuscripts, one in Alexandria, the other in Bursa, supplemented by quotations and allusions in other Arabic authors, not least in Rhazes, whose use of this work he shows to have been far more extensive than Ullmann, for example, had suggested.

But inevitably, as with any *editio princeps*, difficulties still remain. It is best to regard the English translation as representing Ḥunain’s version rather than Galen’s Greek original, for a comparison between Dr Iskandar’s English and the Greek of Thucydides at 8,4 shows what a gulf may lie between. So, for example, the inconcinnities of syntax at 1,3 may be attributed to Ḥunain’s attempts to render into Arabic a complicated Greek sentence. But at times the English

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version goes dangerously astray: in ch.9, the Elders (*sic*) are not a specific group but merely older physicians as contrasted with the youthful Galen. Yet, given the editor's unfamiliarity with Greek and with the institutions of the Greek world, such errors of English translation are remarkably few, and the alert Galenist will be able with a little thought to work out the words of Galen that lie behind the double translation. The editor would, however, have been better advised not to attempt a commentary single-handed, for his notes are full of error and rarely deal with the major problems raised by this new text: e.g. p. 143, the kings are not the Asclepiads, but such as Attalus III; 144, Hippocratic texts from the fifth century BC hardly attest the decline of medicine in Rome; 161, the note on 84.13, taken over from De Lacy's commentary on CMG V.4,1,2,282, is irrelevant since the Greek word elucidated does not appear in the Hippocratic quotation under discussion. In place of this weak commentary, it would have been better to have had a more detailed discussion of the role of this and similar treatises in the Arabic world: cf. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam*, p. 53, for a late allusion in the *hisba* literature. Yet, in the final analysis, these criticisms are more than counterbalanced by Dr Iskandar's great services in bringing this important text to light, and in making it accessible to those students of Galen who lack Arabic. Without his labours, they would not be able to take issue once more with Galen at his most infuriating.

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PAUL POTTER, *A short handbook of Hippocratic medicine*, Sillery, Québec, Les Éditions du Sphinx, 1988, 8vo, pp. 60, illus., [no price stated], (paperback).

In this student guide, Potter provides brief English summaries and even shorter bibliographies of the individual works in the Hippocratic Corpus, and an exposition of the most notable features of Hippocratic medicine. He passes quickly over questions of authenticity, adopting the view that the Corpus is an accumulation of varied material. His order of analysis goes back ultimately to Erotian in the first century AD, and thus reflects an ancient classification. One may wonder what Galen had to say about this in his *On the genuine and spurious writings of Hippocrates*, which is now lost but which was translated in the ninth century by Ḥunain ibn Ishāq and by his son Ishāq.

Limitations of space in the second part prevent Professor Potter from making more than an allusion to the contemporary background of the Corpus, and to medical ideas and terminology in authors such as Homer or Euripides. His outlines of the fundamentals of Hippocratic "scientific" (better, "rational") medicine deal with theory, practice, and the medical profession, and show clearly the interaction between medicine (health and disease) and man (patient and practitioner). Where space is so evidently at a premium, it is curious to find, in a work avowedly for students, two pages reproducing texts in Greek, a Renaissance Latin chart of the constituents of the body, and the title-page of the first Greek edition (1526). More of Professor Potter's own ideas, or a more generous bibliography, would have been preferable.

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F. ROSNER (trans. and ed.), *Maimonides' Commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates*, vol. 2, *Maimonides' medical writings*, Haifa, The Maimonides Research Institute, 1987, 8vo, pp. xv, 218, \$14.95 + \$2.00 p&p from the North American distributor, Israel Book Shop, Inc., 410 Harvard St., Brookline MA 02146, USA.

This translation provides the first rendering into English of Maimonides' commentary on the *Aphorisms of Hippocrates* and is based on Muntner's Hebrew edition published in Jerusalem in 1961. This edition is itself based on the translation of Moses ibn Tibbon, preserved in Munich Ms. 275, translated from the original Arabic in 1268 and transcribed in 1583. The two extant Arabic manuscripts, various Hebrew translations of Moses ibn Tibbon and an anonymous translator, whose identity is suggested, and various printed editions are discussed in a short but useful bibliographical section which is followed by notes on the content and an analysis of the commentary.