

Chiara Thumiger/Peter N. Singer (eds.): *Mental Illness in Ancient Medicine. From Celsus to Paul of Aegina*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2018 (Studies in Ancient Medicine 50). xv, 479 p. € 143.00/\$ 172.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-36272-7.

In *Mental Illness in Ancient Medicine*, Thumiger and Singer have curated research by some of the foremost scholars in the field of ancient medicine and philosophy, including a range of senior figures and new voices. The contribution of this volume to the study of mental illness in ancient and late antique medicine is significant, both in its articulation of problems and methods within the field, and in its timely attention to under-studied authors, such as Caelius Aurelianus, Aëtius of Amida, and Archigenes of Apamea. Each of the individual contributions offers a compelling and finely-detailed excursus into an author, theme, or school of thought, and the volume as a whole is clearly structured around a shared set of questions and arguments.

The introduction by Thumiger and Singer (1–32) lays out the central argument of the volume, which is that a distinct and consistent concept of “mental illness” emerges in the Roman imperial period, finding its earliest extant articulation in the encyclopaedic work of Celsus (first century BCE/CE), and gradually acquires ethical and normative content, in part through its ambiguous relationship to the ethical passions targeted by philosophical therapeutics, and in part through the investment of Christian theologians and preachers in a medical paradigm. In this introduction, Thumiger and Singer point to some of the key interpretive problems in the study of mental illness in ancient medicine, in particular the lack of any straightforward relationship between the Greek *psychē* and its common English translations, “soul” and “mind.”

The remaining chapters are divided into three sections, of which the middle is the most substantial: *Part 1: Broader Reflections on Mental Illness: Medical Theories in Their Socio-intellectual Context* (chapters 1–2), *Part 2: Individual Authors and Themes* (chapters 3–11), and *Part 3: Philosophy and Mental Illness* (chapters 12–14). Central themes that run throughout include the integration (albeit with internal tensions) of psychological and physiological accounts of mental illness, as well as a concomitant blurring between philosophical and medical therapeutics; the importance of the brain to late ancient conceptions of mental illness; the normative valence of mental illness, whether conceived of in ethical or medical terms.

The chapters in Part 1 examine different ways of construing behaviours that might be deemed symptomatic of mental illness: George Kazantzidis (35–78) re-evaluates the “madness” of Democritus as narrated in the pseudo-Hippocratic letters, which conclude that Democritus was not insane (as his fellow citizens believed) but simply hyper-aware of human folly, and argues that Democritus may well have been considered to have suffered from *melancholia*, based on the pseudo-Aristotelian sketch of the disease. Nadin Metzger (79–106) demonstrates that, contrary to received scholarly opinion, there is no evidence for a consistent split between “pagans” and Christians regarding demonological explanations for epilepsy – rather, Christian authors incorporate medical explanations, and medical accounts attend to the presence and possibility of demons. Metzger’s argument is of particular relevance for the growing body of scholarship on medicine and religion in late antiquity, as indicated by the claim that the “interpretation of madness is the area in which classical medicine clashes most severely with the Christian interpretation of the world” (85).

Part 2 offers up varied studies of the concept of mental illness in the work of different authors, some of whom are better known than others. Sean Coughlin (109–142) argues that the Pneumatist physician Athenaeus of Attalia, believing that psychological training benefits the body, blurred the boundaries between philosophy and medicine, and in so doing instigated disputes with other medical authors.

Orly Lewis (143–175) examines and debunks Galen’s famous criticism of Archigenes of Apamea: whereas Galen argues that the contradiction between Archigenes’ treatment of the head in cases of mental illness and his belief that the heart was the organ of the *hēgemonikon* reveals a fundamental contradiction, Lewis suggests that it was common at the time for the head to be treated in cases of mental disorder, regardless of the physician’s theories about the organization and animation of the body; therapeutic methods, Lewis argues, were shaped as much by authoritative tradition and empirical experience as by physiological theories, and Galen’s criticism was likely in bad faith, being motivated above all by his desire to undermine Archigenes’ authority.

Melinda Letts (176–197) argues innovatively that, despite the somatic focus of much ancient discussion of mental illness (as revealed across the other chapters in the volume), we might find “what we would define as a partly

psychological explanation of mental illness and therefore closer to our modern understanding of such ailments” (197) in the work of the physician Rufus of Ephesus, through his emphasis on the importance of listening to the patient’s self-account.

There are two chapters on the influential medical author Galen of Pergamum. Julien Devinant (198–221) suggests that Galen does not work with a distinct concept of “mental disorder.” As Devinant incisively notes, the phrase “illness of the soul” typically denotes ethical/emotional disorder, rather than (what we would call) organic mental illness, such as phrenitis; yet, Galen regularly uses the adjective *psychikos* (“belonging to the soul”) to refer to brain functions. If phrenitis is not an illness of the soul, then what is it? Devinant suggests that physiological and ethical illness converge when the patient is not in control of his own actions. Focusing more tightly on concepts of memory and memory loss in Galen, Ricardo Julião (222–244) demonstrates similarly close connections between cognitive capacity and physiological apparatus.

The two chapters that follow are both by Chiara Thumiger, and are the only chapters in this section that are not devoted to a specific author: first, a discussion of eating disturbances (245–268), and, second, an account of sexual disorders (269–284). Each chapter provides a wealth of information about these conditions, and each also advances the conversation about the accrual of ethical import to late ancient conceptions of mental illness. The first demonstrates the increasing attention paid to food-related behavioral pathologies in late antiquity, and argues that this is part of a wider shift toward “themes of voluntariness, self-control and the management of needs and desires” (245). The second suggests that, in order to fully understand the transformation of bodily management in late antiquity, we must shift our attention from the philosophical “care of the self” highlighted by Foucault to the integration of ethical strategies and themes into medical discourse.

The final two chapters in this section each deal with late antique medical texts that have traditionally been dismissed as derivative or unoriginal. Anna Maria Urso (285–314) demonstrates that Caelius Aurelianus paid close and systematic attention to mental illness, incorporating a coherent and methodological symptomatology. Ricarda Gäbel (315–340) takes Aëtius of Amida as a case study, in order to demonstrate the urgency of considering late ancient medical compilations in the study of mental illness in late antiquity. Through close study of Aëtius’s discussion of phrenitis, in comparison with

other late antique compilers, Gäbel notes that mental illness was a core topic in late antique medical writings, although each author dealt with it differently, and that the brain was central to late antique medical accounts of mental illness.

Part 3 considers the connectivity between medical and philosophical conceptions of, and therapies for, mental illness. Marke Ahonen (343–364) explores the Stoic distinction between everyday madness (that is, the insanity of all human beings except the sage) and mental illness, and concludes that this distinction was not as stable as might be assumed on the basis of Caelius Aurelianus (our key witness), but that it did play an important role in philosophical discussions of madness in antiquity. Christopher Gill (365–380) examines the question of whether and to what extent ancient physicians incorporated philosophical therapeutic methods, and concludes that they did not (in part because philosophical therapeutics required adherence to – and doctrinal training within – a philosophical school), but instead absorbed some aspects of philosophical therapeutics as a component of regular dietetics.

Peter Singer wraps up the volume with a detailed discussion of Galen's categorization and treatment of psychic *pathē*. He concludes that Galen's categorization and treatment of psychic *pathē* is complex and contradictory because his theoretical model of the *psychē* is in conversation with a variety of traditions and types of intervention, and also because Galen writes across several different genres. As Singer notes – and echoing Devinant – Galen does not provide us with a clear and consistent reconciliation between ethical/emotional disorders and organic mental illnesses, which Singer names “medical psychic impairments.” In fact, Singer observes, Galen dedicates no work to medical psychic impairments, and, when he does talk about them, his focus is on diagnosis, rather than treatment. Dietetic, preventative, and ethical approaches are far more fully developed in Galen's “ethical” works (e.g. *On the Passions and Errors of the Soul*), which also describe a fuller theoretical model in relation to mental illness than do Galen's medical texts.

*Mental Illness in Ancient Medicine* makes an outstanding contribution to the study of mental illness in ancient medicine, especially at its intersection with philosophy. Not only does each individual chapter provide a wealth of information and argumentation, but the whole advances an important argument about the emergence and development of the concept of mental illness

that has not yet been so thoroughly examined in published form. This volume deserves to become a touchstone text within the field.

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