Book Reviews

Geoffrey Lloyd and **Nathan Sivin,** *The way and the word: science and medicine in early China and Greece*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002, pp. xvii, 348, £25.00 (hardback 0-300-09297-0).

Although the subtitle of this book explains that it deals with "science and medicine in early China and Greece", the work contains as much discussion of ancient philosophy in both Greece and China as ancient medicine or science. However, a question constantly lurks in the background: is there really any connection at all between medicine or science or philosophy in these two societies? The answer, it seems, is mostly "no". So why pose the question in the first place?

In the first chapter, on the "historical setting", the authors define their methodology by stating that they are not "comparing things or concepts but whole processes" (p. 9). In so doing they rely upon the fact that the sources of information from both Greece and China were roughly contemporary, but this is, in fact, the most striking common feature of the data coming from these two societies. What ensues in this book are two fascinating and readable discussions of philosophy, science, and medicine in China and Greece, without trying to argue that either society influenced the other in any way.

One impression which the reader is left with is how very different these two societies were in general and how the social differences affected their respective views of science and philosophy. In Greece, for instance, scholars and philosophers tended to be amateurs or private individuals, while in China such scholars strove to become court officials under the patronage of the ruler. The social conditions under which philosophies were conceived and constructed could hardly have been more different. Furthermore, much Chinese scientific and philosophical literature can be ascribed to scholars known to us by name and position, while much Greek lore, particularly within the Hippocratic corpus, is anonymous. In Greece, on the other hand, even slaves could function as doctors, along with both private citizens and aliens.

Another example of difference between Greek and Chinese scientific literature is the way in which the texts were recorded and transmitted. In China, early examples of treatises consisted of relatively brief texts on silk which were buried with their owners in tombs, and recently excavated fragments indicate how these texts differed considerably from each other. These fragments were later compiled, in the late first century BC, into canonized editions of treatises in the form of longer compositions. Hence, the transmission of classical texts is quite different from the way in which texts were composed and studied in the Greek world.

Many basic concepts in philosophy and cosmology differ considerably between Greek and Chinese thought, such as the fact that Chinese thinkers had no term corresponding to Greek *phusis* or "nature", a concept central to the Greek view of the universe. The Chinese had no atomic theory or idea of basic elements forming all matter. Furthermore, the basic Chinese conception of the cosmos was that of order imposed by a benevolent ruler, modelled upon their own political structures, while Greek thought was essentially anarchistic and devoted to aggressive dispute and rival theories. As the authors themselves openly admit, "the fundamental concepts in play in China and in Greece were strikingly dissimilar" (p. 241). The basis for comparisons between Greek and Chinese thought are actually more complex than the authors have admitted. For one thing, Greek language, a lingua franca, was widely spoken and used by non-Greeks throughout the Mediterranean world. Hence, what we consider to be Greek philosophy or cosmology or science may have, in some cases at least, been influenced by other societies, such as Persia and even Mesopotamia. For example, the Stoic philosopher, Diogenes of Babylon, may have been steeped in his own local traditions although he wrote in Greek, or at least his works are

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300008000 Published online by Cambridge University Press

preserved only in Greek. Furthermore, examples can be cited of parallels between the early Hippocratic (or so-called "Cnidian") medicine and contemporary Babylonian medicine, such as the absence of a theory of humours and reliance upon *materia medica* as a primary form of therapy. In fact, the problem with trying to compare Greece and China is that geographically intervening societies—such as Mesopotamia and India—have been catapulted over without much notice. The authors, in fact, make a single reference to this omission in their argument: "The cosmic order that Chinese imagined also differed greatly from that of the Greeks. Like the functionaries of Mesopotamia before them, those of early China believed that irregularities were ominous, meant by heaven to warn rulers. The Greeks did not build their astronomical models atop this conviction, although they borrowed much else from the Middle East" (p. 215).

Nevertheless, although one can take issue with the basic conceptual framework, there is much of value in this book. Each individual essay on Greek and Chinese science (and philosophy) is succinct and clear in its own right, without reference to comparisons. There is much that will engage the reader interested in ancient medicine, both Greek and Chinese. The Hippocratic Oath is described with its primary purpose—not as an ethical code for physicians in general—but to specify that the relationship of a pupil towards his teacher resembles that of son to father, with all the obligations this implied as well. In fact, the exclusive nature of this relationship is cited from the Oath, that the pupil pledges to pass on medical knowledge only to his own sons, his teacher's sons, or to pupils who are also bound by oath, but to no one else. It is worth adding that similar oaths between teacher and pupil, prohibiting revealing professional knowledge to the uninitiated, were known in both Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and that the intention of the oath was to define the obligations of a pupil towards his master as well as to render professional knowledge inaccessible to the general public.

Furthermore, there is a clear discussion of differences between the medical philosophies of the Dogmatists, Empiricists, and Methodists, and the intellectual rivalries between these groups. There is an important discussion regarding attempts to model medicine on the more exact sciences of astronomy or mathematics. On the Chinese side, one finds helpful explanations of difficult terminology, such *ch'i* (or *xi*), which can mean "air, breath, smoke, mist", etc., as well as physical vitalities derived from food and breath and climactic influences. The authors do not assume much prior knowledge in trying to explain the philosophical bases for medicine and healing. Nevertheless, it must be said that even readers well versed in Greek medicine may find corresponding Chinese terminology and concepts difficult to comprehend.

One admires this book for its breadth, scope, and for demonstrating the courage to try and adopt a new approach to discussions of ancient science. It does, however, turn out to be a graft of two separate studies of essentially different corpori, although the same questions have been asked in both cases. In the end, this stimulating and thought-provoking volume shows that a comparision is not necessarily a similarity.

Mark Geller,
University College London

Sumit Guha, *Health and population in South Asia from earliest times to the present*, London, Hurst, 2001, pp. vii, 178, £25.00 (hardback 1-85065578-2).

This is an interesting book, written by one of India's most highly regarded economic historians. Apart from a persuasive introduction, the book contains six chapters, which, in keeping with its title, deal with a wide range of themes. The first is, to use Guha's words, an exploration of the population history of South Asia, from the first to the twentieth centuries. Setting a trend for the rest of the book, it provides us with a detailed, critical analysis of the existing literature, followed by Guha's own postulations. His concluding comments, dealing with the nature and effects of population rise in the sub-continent, encourage us to consider the environmental effects of the levels of this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300008000 Published online by Cambridge University Press