Forty years ago little was known about Galen the philosopher. None of his writings on philosophy had been edited in Greek for a generation, and translations into any modern language were few and far between, and, like the editions, difficult to find even in major libraries. His reputation as a windbag, a damning indictment by the young Wilamowitz, discouraged further study by classicists, while doctors were equally deterred by the knowledge that almost all of his theories had been superseded. His wide-ranging interests in philosophy were dismissed as superficial or as irrelevant to his medicine, despite his constant reiteration of their close and mutually beneficial relationship.

By the 1980s things had begun to change. Senior figures, notably Hans Diller and Paul Moraux, saw in Galen a thinker who developed ideas from Plato and Aristotle in independent ways, and revealed a detailed acquaintance with many aspects of Hellenistic philosophy. Philip De Lacy’s edition of The opinions of Hippocrates and Plato also placed in the hands of scholars a sound text and an accurate English translation of a major work by Galen that united his medicine and philosophy. Not all were impressed with what was termed his eclecticism—Pier Luigi Donini called it ‘fudge’—but others, like Jonathan Barnes and James Hankinson, focussing primarily on Galen’s logic, appreciated his skill in argument, even if they were aware of some of the weak foundations on which he based his carefully crafted analyses. Translations of philosophical material preserved only in Arabic also began to be used by classicists as a way of supplementing Greek material and of exploring Galen’s wider legacy. Regular meetings devoted to Galen also encouraged collaboration between philosophers and historians, looking not only at Galen’s own ideas, but also at their interpretation across the centuries.

The situation today is very different. The rediscovery in the Vlatadon codex of Avoiding distress and the lost Greek portions of My own opinions (first made accessible largely in medieval Latin in 1999), My own books and The order of my own books, as well as substantial new fragments in Arabic, have added important new material for the understanding of Galen the philosopher. The 2008 Cambridge Companion to Galen provided an excellent overview of many recent developments, to which this collection of essays, the fruit of a London lecture series in 2008-9, adds many new ideas.

Peter Singer opens by raising a big question, the extent to which Galen can be considered a philosopher. Galen, of course, classified many of his writings
as philosophical, and all the contributors show that his treatises contain much of importance for students of ancient philosophy. But he was more than a doctor who dabbled in philosophy. He believed that his medical experience, and not least his dissections, gave him insights that would help to resolve questions of interest to philosophers, exemplified in *Problematical movements*, while at the same time stressing the need for the medical practitioner to utilise many aspects of philosophy in the course of his work. He had little time for some of the standard topics of the schools because he considered them incapable of proof, or even of plausible or persuasive solutions, in the absence of solid foundations, a theme taken up by Riccardo Chiaradonna in part on the basis of new fragments of Galen’s lost *Demonstration*. Todd Curtis also shows his acquaintance with, and use of, many of the genres found among philosophical writers, concentrating on protreptic and consolatory themes. One might also note a work not included in his *My own books* but known from fragments preserved in Arabic, *How to profit from one’s enemies*, which shares the title with a work of Plutarch. The range of his writings easily compares with others whose reputation as philosophers is considered among classicists far more secure.

As *Avoiding distress* reveals his philosophical engagement was based on a substantial acquaintance with the writings of many philosophers, from Plato to his contemporaries. In the second of half of this volume, Irena Kupreeva, Peter Adamson, Katerina Ierodiakonou, and James Wilberding show how he created his own theories on, respectively, elements, void, vision and vegetative life in part from his knowledge of earlier writings, but also from applying his own intelligence and his own experiences to create theories that were far from contemptible. His ability to sense weaknesses in others’ arguments, however, as David Leith points out in his discussion of Galen’s reactions to atomism, although often effective in demolition, far too often depended upon a tendentious reading of their writings. Nonetheless, many of his philosophical ideas continued to be discussed, and sometimes followed, for centuries. It is to the Arabs that we owe the preservation of many philosophical treatises, as the recent English translation of *Character Traits* exemplifies.

If Galen believed that his medical career aided his understanding of philosophical problems, he was equally convinced that the reverse was true, nowhere more so than in his anthropology. Philosophy, as Philip Van de Eijk convincingly demonstrates, provided him with a key for understanding what human nature was about, something that Glenda McDonald argues applies also to mental illness, a speciality of Galen’s. A convinced adherent of the unity of body and soul, he struggled to reconcile the varied opinions of philosophers with the evidence he had gained from his patients and his dissections of animals, as well as from his reading of Hippocratic writings. Some views he
rejected completely, others, principally those of Plato and Aristotle, he tried to assimilate as far as possible. This volume shows how much he took over from Aristotle in the problems he tried to solve and in the conclusions he adopted. If the result is termed, somewhat pejoratively, ‘eclectic’, that is less a condemnation than an appreciation of the breadth of Galen’s enquiry.

The final paper by Caroline Petit raises a further question. Her examination of the notion of medical sects or schools proposed by the author of a pseudo-Galenic tract, the Introduction to medicine, reveals another author with similar interests to those of Galen. Both epigraphic and literary testimony confirm that Galen was far from unique in his use of, and interest in, philosophy, although no other doctor seems to show his sophistication in the way in which he interlinks it with his medicine. But much still needs to be done to provide an appropriate context for such a judgment.

This volume offers an excellent overview of trends and possibilities in the understanding of Galen’s philosophy. It applies some standard methodologies to some unfamiliar texts, not least Avoiding distress and On my own opinions—Problematical movements was published too late after the date of the original conferences—but also points the way towards future developments, not least in its integration of material not preserved in the original Greek, and in its willingness to raise wider questions of meaning and context.

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