This book is a work of historical scholarship which also touches on a highly fraught scientific, and also social, mega-problem—the conceptualization, diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. It attempts to span both history and psychiatry, though not in equal depth. Its authors, whether scholars or scientists, operate with contemporary concepts and knowledge, but they concern themselves with the background and the foundations of those concepts and that knowledge. Starting with the Greeks, they raise far-reaching questions about ways of detecting, classifying and treating mental disorders, and about the nature of mental illness and madness.

No one suggests here that the ancients devised more accurate or more serviceable diagnostic categories than the ones that are used now. It may be salutary, however, for all who are concerned with the history or the practice of psychiatry to consider how some of the best ancient minds perceived mental illness and madness (and the ancients’ avoidance of what has been called ‘nosologorrhea’, the tendency to multiply to excess the number of recognized syndromes, has something to recommend it).¹ All the more so, since modern medicine, though it displaced the medicine of Hippocrates and Galen, also grew out of it. The aim is to speak intelligibly—and indeed persuasively—to mental health professionals concerned about the foundations and current state of modern psychiatry as well as to historians and classicists.

¹ Greek has a profusion of words to refer to abnormal mental states and the behaviour that goes with them (Padel 1995, 22; Thumiger this volume), but until at least the second century AD quite a small number of names for actual mental disorders. Some medical writers were aware that their terminology had to cover multiple phenomena: Aretaeus of Cappadocia begins his discussion of mania by saying that ‘the ways of madness are myriad in form, though they all belong to a single genos’ (On Chronic Diseases 1.6). Aetius also wrote (Iatrika 6.8) that ‘the forms of mania are myriad, but few modern people would agree with his opinion that ‘it would be excessive to describe them all.‘
Fundamental questions about what constitutes mental illness and mental disorders more generally, and how to treat their victims, have never been more pressing. The whole edifice of modern psychiatric medicine, while not built on sand, stands in a highly seismic zone. Definition and diagnosis are a large part of the problem. The current strife surrounding the not-yet-completed fifth edition of the DSM—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association—an\n\n---

2 Much can be learned about the new edition at www.dsm5.org (now itself in its third edition). DSM-5 is currently scheduled for publication in May 2013.

3 Insel et al. 2010. See also www.nimh.nih.gov.

4 Insel et al. 748.

5 Cf. Petsko 2012.