

Don't Call Me in the Morning: The Classical Roots of Modern Medicine

The roots of modern medicine in the classical world do not run through an Athenian medicine cabinet. A Boethian peasant or Spartan legislator with a headache would not visit a “doctor” whose office walls were lined with Hippocrates, Galen and remedies based on the four humours or the ill humour of Zeus. And rightly not or they’d have been unable to call anyone in the morning, not even an undertaker. The process of free and rational inquiry would eventually lead via chemistry and physics to penicillin and open-heart surgery. But meanwhile Hippocrates took pains not to kill his patients with weird unsound interventions, instead telling them to lie down, drink plenty of fluids and hope for the best.

A Pill for Every Ill: Where Modern Medicine Went Wrong

Only in the 20th century did the process of technological and scientific advancement really reach the world of medicine. But just as we were developing some really impressive techniques we forgot what we were doing, and went from treating human beings to fiddling with a machine while banishing its ghost. There is much that medicine still cannot do because it’s genuinely hard or impossible. But there is much that it has done that Hippocrates would have avoided as unreasonably arrogant, plainly misguided, and often both.