of Crates' *Theria* (including the fish who announce that they have not been properly fried), the parrot of Ctesias' *Indica*, who can be taught either Indian or Greek, embodies much the same insight as the displaced children of the sophistic *Dissoi Logoi* (a Greek child speaks Persian when transplanted to Persia, and vice versa). Perhaps the most poignant example of this experimentation with language is the figure of Cratylus, the straight man of one of the most aporetic of Platonic dialogues. Plato's Cratylus famously argues the case for the natural appropriateness of names; the Aristotelian Cratylus, by contrast, has given up speech altogether (Gera suggests through disenchantment in later life) and chosen to communicate solely through moving a single finger.

What I occasionally missed in this enormously rich discussion was a keener focus on power. The wife of Ischomachus in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* has been trained before her marriage — in keeping with the famous words of the Periclean funeral oration — to speak as little as possible; only after she has been tamed by her husband can she carry on a conversation. Though it would require a broader treatment which integrated ideas of language with the *representation* of women's speech, the 'gendering' of language is surely a topic that could be further explored. So also is the association of (the Greek) language with distinctly *Greek* virtues, for example freedom or self-control (qualities which the incontinently chattering barbarian slaves of the Attic stage notably lack). Gera concludes with an optimistic parable of how the 'boundaries of language and culture can be respected — and yet superseded' — a moral for our times certainly — but it is a story of 'two companions of different species' rather than ethnicities: Androcles and the lion.

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Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, Eng.: Princeton University Press, 2004. xiv + 563 pp. ISBN 0 691 11691 1.

In this book Benjamin Isaac has a double aim, which he states on the first page: to show that 'early forms of racism, to be called proto-racism, were common in the Graeco-Roman world', and that 'these early forms served as prototype for modern racism, which developed in the eighteenth century'.

The book also is twofold, in that it has two just about equal parts. In a long introduction (1-51) Isaac defines what he means by racism, as opposed to related concepts like ethnic prejudice and ethnic stereotyping. The rest of this part (55-251) concerns the various phenomena that led to ancient racism, such as imperialism and the anxieties engendered by contact between self-supposedly superior peoples and inferior ones. The second part (255-500) reviews these concepts in practice both from the angle of the 'superior' or conquering people, whether Greek or Roman, and then from that of the 'inferior', Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Syrians, Egyptians, Parthians, Greeks as seen by Romans, Gauls, Germans and finally Jews. Isaac summarizes his view in a final chapter, 'Ethnic Prejudice, Proto-Racism, and Imperialism in Antiquity'. There are ten plates, ample footnotes, and indexes of sources and of topics discussed.

Even a short summary indicates the richness of this book. Isaac uses scrupulous care and enormous erudition to define his terms, set out his aims, and examine his cases. His discussion is also very personal: he explains his own involvement in the subject as that of one 'who grew up as a Jew in Amsterdam after World War II' and who has 'witnessed forms of ethnic and social tension relevant to many of the topics considered in this study' (51). At the same time, Isaac treats his ticklish topic not with bitterness but with even a wry humor, especially in the footnotes. Thus 'It is hard to achieve clarity by asserting that an author says one thing, but really means another' (61 n. 23); 'Is this Herodotus's opinion according to Flory or Flory himself?' (273 n. 71).

This book will undoubtedly become, as it deserves, the starting-point for future studies of racism in classical antiquity. Anyone who wants to find the essential passages of classical authors

on this subject or related ones, from Herodotus to Procopius, will come here first, and they will usually find the passage given in the original and in translation, the relevant bibliography, and a fair and balanced discussion. There is a difference, however, between a useful, even an indispensable, book and a fully convincing one. We still turn to Rostovtzeff's two great social and economic histories as treasuries of information, but not many of us also carry away a belief in the Roman senate as a parliament of the urban *bourgeoisie*, for example. A reviewer of Isaac's book who is not content just to enumerate the contents and praise its comprehensiveness is bound to ask: Does it convince? Does Isaac succeed in showing that classical antiquity 'invented' racism, and (as the book-jacket claims) in 'tracing the intellectual origins of racism back to classical antiquity'?

Isaac's conception of racism is closely linked to the idea of immutability. In his sixty-word definition of the concept, the phrase that stands out is 'collective traits... which are constant and unalterable by human will' (23). For Isaac racism is inseparable from genetic or other types of determinism, and the abiding criterion is whether one group considers itself superior to another because the inferiority of the other is biologically immutable: this leads to the somewhat surprising inclusion of mountain-dwelling people as subjects of racism when viewed by plainsmen (ch. 10).

In the event, Isaac's Greek and Roman authors are more refractory than he would like them to be. Thus he takes the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* as 'the most important ancient text for clarifying ideas regarding the relationship between man and his physical environment' (60), since the author holds that 'the physical, spiritual, and moral qualities are all *determined* [my emphasis] by the climate in which they live' (63). But as Isaac notes, the author does not in fact consider climate to be determinative, but makes considerable allowance for the contingent effects of monarchic rule: 'all Greeks and barbarians in Asia that are not governed by masters, but are autonomous and undergo hardship on their own account, are the most warlike of all' (*Aër.* 16: the author does not indicate whether he means of 'all people' or 'of all people in Asia'). So also with those ancient authors who accept the heredity of acquired characteristics, as when Cicero calls Syrians and Jews 'born to be slaves'. For Isaac this 'must be called racism' if we accept the idea of a 'causal link between inherent physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or culture' (81-2). But if subjection begins by being involuntary, and engenders a tendency to servility only by transmission between generations, it can hardly be called 'constant and unalterable by human will'.

In Isaac's argument, a concept almost as important as racism, but not subjected to a formal definition, is 'proto-racism'. In his words, 'As modern racism has been shaped by its eighteenth-century roots, so the Enlightenment adapted ideas and modes of thinking developed and accepted in the ancient world. It will be argued here that this continuity is sufficient to allow us to speak of Graeco-Roman forms of proto-racism' (13). It is of course beyond doubt that classical authors and thinkers exercised an immense influence on their counterparts in the Middle Ages and later. But influence is not continuity, and the expression 'proto-' only serves to obfuscate the difference between the two. Any dictionary will tell you that the 'proto-' suffix denotes both the earliest example in a classifiable series ('proto-martyr') and the earliest postulated form of a definite entity ('proto-Hittite'). The expression 'proto-racism' as used by Isaac leaves unclear the relationship between ancient views of race, for example Aristotle's supposed advice to Alexander to act towards the Greeks as a general but towards barbarians as a master (Plut. *De fort. Alex.* 329 B), and such modern ideas as that of a 'master-race'. E. R. Dodds wrote of Nietzsche that he was 'in certain aspects of his thought, the illegitimate and undesired offspring of Plato, as the Nazis were to be in turn the illegitimate and undesired offspring of Nietzsche'.[1] That seems exactly right: the indirect influence of Plato on Nazi ideology does not make Plato a 'proto-Nazi'.

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1 E. R. Dodds, Plato: *Gorgias*, Oxford, 1959, 390-91.

Isaac's evocation of his own experience as a young Jew in post-war Amsterdam, and his leaving the issue of ancient attitudes to Jews to the end of his survey, raise the difficult subject of ancient anti-Semitism. Here he seems curiously reluctant to see Greeks and Romans as 'racist'. He dismisses the question of Hellenistic attitudes as 'a large topic which falls outside the scope of this book' (442): but a book that can treat attitudes towards mountain-peoples as a sort of racism might surely have found room for this. And what of the Greeks of the imperial period? The Homeric scholar Apion of Alexandria, one of Josephus' *bêtes noires*, seems absent from the book. So also is a passage of the Epicurean Diogenes of Oenoanda published in 1998: 'A clear indication of the complete inability of the gods to prevent wrongful acts is proved by the nations of the Jews and Egyptians, who, while being the most superstitious of all peoples, are the most degraded (μιαρώτατοι) of all peoples'.[2]

As for the Romans, Isaac hesitates whether to categorize their attitudes and actions towards the Jews under the heading of 'proto-racism' or 'ethnic prejudice', but comes down on the side of the second: 'Roman hostility towards the Jews did not resemble later anti-semitism ... It was not racist in character' (481). This is presumably because it did not presume that Jewishness was 'constant and unalterable by human will', unlike the genetic view propagated by modern anti-Semites such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain. But by defining Roman hostility towards the Jews merely as 'ethnic prejudice', Isaac comes close to obliterating the difference between that and what most of us understand by racism.

A related question that Isaac sidesteps, possibly because it is too incendiary, is whether modern anti-Semitism has at least some of its roots in a movement that began as a splinter-movement within Judaism itself, namely Christianity. If we are looking for 'continuity' of thought, there is a straight line from Stephen's chilling speech in Acts 7, especially the charge of deicide with which it ends (vv. 52-53), to Eusebius' justification of anti-Semitic measures taken by the first Christian emperor, Constantine.[3] Isaac would presumably defend this omission on the grounds that he is only concerned with 'classical antiquity'; but this defense rings rather hollow if he discounts two ancient religions that have survived into the modern world and strongly influenced its beliefs.

That leads to what Isaac calls 'an omission that will strike many readers as eccentric, [specifically,] systematic discussion of the attitudes towards black Africans'. He justifies the omission on the ground that 'Blacks... did not form much of an actual presence in the Greek and Roman worlds' (49). But since the book is concerned with the intellectual roots of modern racism, the important question is not where blacks were in antiquity, but whether treatment of blacks after antiquity was influenced by ancient thinking: this after all is exactly the criterion that Isaac observes in discussing post-classical attitudes towards other minorities. Much scholarly study has gone into ideas deriving from Judaism and Christianity that were used to justify the practice of slavery. A notorious example is the idea that blacks were descendants of Ham, the son of Noah who 'saw the nakedness of his father' (Genesis 9.22). 'No other doctrine of enslavement', it has been said, 'could be made so clearly to single out Africans: the Bible itself, while not mentioning colour, makes it clear that Ham's descendants peopled the lands Europeans have known as Africa'.[4] True, 'U.S. blacks were never forced to wear the equivalent of a Star of David for the sake of identification' (Isaac 51), but it might be argued that their identifiability was precisely the problem: skin-pigmentation served the same purpose just as well. Nor would anyone nowadays dismiss such signifiers as 'Negro head' vases, many of them made in democratic Athens, as harmless knick-knacks.[5] Like the golliwogs and the 'Little Black Sambo' books given to white

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2 Martin F. Smith, *Anatolian Studies* 48, 1998, 132, III 8 – IV 2.

3 Eus. *Vita Constantini* 4.27.1, προφητοφόνται καὶ κυριοκτόνοι.

4 Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, London, 1997, 74. Cf. also William McKee Evans, 'From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the Sons of Ham', American Historical Review 85, no. 1 (February 1980), 15-43.

5 Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, 24-5.

children (myself among them) until well into the twentieth century, these objects reinforced and perpetuated stereotypes of superiority and essential otherness. The problem of ancient attitudes towards blackness involves much more than the U.S. after 1776, and untold millions of lost or wasted lives.

To summarize, this is a hugely learned and provocative book. It is stronger perhaps in its assembling, reviewing and weighing of evidence than in its assumptions. Isaac is a classical scholar, and his experience of twentieth-century anti-Semitism has both made him uniquely alive to his topic, and led him to look for the 'roots' of one particular type of racism in classical antiquity. That type of racism, more prevalent or at least destructive in Europe, has left an indelible stain on modern history, but Greeks and Romans were not the only people in the ancient world, and (sad to say) there are other types of racism too.[6]

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A. Mayor, *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs. Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World.* Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., 2003. 319 pp. ISBN 1 58567 348 X.

The ancient world dealt with in this book, as explained in the introduction, includes Europe and the Mediterranean, North Africa, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, the Asian steppes, India, and China, and extends from the 17th century BCE to the 14th century CE (25). According to Mayor, accounts gathered from fifty ancient authors provide evidence that 'biological and chemical weapons saw action in historical battles' that took place during that period of almost three thousand years. Chemical warfare is defined as 'the military use of poisonous gases and incendiary material, and includes blistering, blinding, asphyxiating agents and mineral poisons'. Biological weapons include infectious bacteria, viruses and parasites, as well as plant toxins and venomous substances derived from a variety of insects, animals, reptiles, amphibians and marine creatures. Both in modern times and in antiquity the creators of these weapons 'weaponize nature, according to the best understanding of the day'. The author admits that the examples presented do not all fit the strict definitions of modern biological or chemical weapons, 'but they do represent the earliest evidence of the intentions, principles, and practices that evolved into modern biological and chemical warfare' (28). Mayor specifically contests the view of those scholars who maintain that there is very little ancient evidence for biological and chemical strategies, claiming that the numerous cases and pieces of evidence she has collected and analyzed belie this view (24, 29, 260 n.1 etc.).

The first chapter surveys ancient Greek and Roman myths, as preserved in written literature and works of art, that testify to the mythic invention of poison weapons and to ancient attitudes towards their use. The various stories concerning the fight of Hercules with the venomous Hydra and the Trojan War (including such tales as Hercules, Nessus and Deianeira, the plague delivered by Apollo's bolts and the poisonous arrows of Philoctetes and Odysseus) are taken to provide the crucial information about the origins of biological warfare. The evidence presented in chapter two, culled mostly from Greek and Roman historiographical, medical and poetical works but also from ancient Indian writings, and examined in the light of modern botanical and zoological information, leads the author to conclude that poisoned arrows were the most popular and most used

6 I am grateful for the comments and advice of David Armitage, Glen Bowersock, Kathleen Coleman, and the Workshop on Religions and Cultures in Mediterranean Antiquity, Harvard University.