

Dodds – The Greeks and the Irrational

1. Agamemnon's Apology

Agamemnon's blaming fate for his lapses is not an excuse, but a legitimate explanation, which Achilles accepts. Throughout the Iliad, fate is a rashness or error, usually sent by the Gods. It is not the result of an error, nor punishment for one, nor a kind of guilt. Similar are concepts such as *menos*, which is a sort of adrenaline surge that comes from outside the person. These concepts recur throughout the poems, and are presumably recognizable by the Homeric audience. It's a sort of psychic intervention that influences a man's conduct.

2. From Shame-culture to Guilt-culture

During the archaic age of Greece we see not the Homeric shame culture but a guilt culture. Fate is not used as an external force, but as an actual disaster. There is now inherited guilt that needs to be cleansed. The gods envy success, especially by the over-proud. Fate is more of a punishment, a moral justice. This doubtlessly existed in the time of Homer, but was glossed over in the epics, perhaps to please the aristocrats for whom they were performed. Aeschylus tries to move past this with a more formal justice in *Eumenides*.

3. The Blessings of Madness

There seem to be three types of madness – oracular, Dionysiac, and poetic. Oracular – Sybil, Delphi, priestess of Zeus. Usually associated with Apollo, probably entered trances much like a modern séance. No sign of drugs or anything like that. Greeks really believed the oracles, even when Apollo wasn't so hot, so deep, long-term basis for this. Essentially for upper class. Dionysiac – through wine and dancing, a way of releasing pent up emotion and stuff. Healing aspects. Later, Chorybantēs even more oriented towards healing, and probably used music to determine what god was behind a malady. Poetic – poet draws power of true speech from the Muse.

4. Dream-pattern and Culture-pattern

Greeks always "saw" dreams. Most common type is oracular – vision appears, sometimes behind the sleeper's bed, and gives instruction. Occasionally dreams need some interpretation – a friend must really be a god. Sometimes Greeks did special things, like sleep at shrines, to cultivate dreams, and in the cult of Asclepius you slept and hopefully the god came to you. Later, people tried to relate dreams to the physical state of the body. Plato says mantic dreams originate in the irrational part of the soul.

5. The Greek-shamans and Puritanism

Growing thought that the soul/psyche was something special or divine, that outlasted the body. In fifth century Athens, was a synonym for life,

especially the emotional self (not rational). Similar to Homeric Thumos. When the Greeks began crediting the soul with being something divine or at odds with the body they move towards puritanism. In the Black sea area Greeks came into contact with shamans. Certain Greek philosophers, like Pythagoras, show many similarities with shamans. Empedocles too. Maybe even Orphism. This emphasizes the otherworldliness, rebirth, punishment after death. Idea of “original sin” shows up – myth of Titans and Dionysus, and humans rising from that.

6. Rationalism and Reaction in the Classical Age

The Greek Enlightenment begins with Heraclitus and Co., and reaches its peak with the Sophists. Traditional religion begins to unravel in their eyes. Things picked up in late 5th century Athens, when whole Nomos/Phusis thing came up. Sophists dismiss emotion in human behavior, probably ordinary Greeks did not. Euripides has his characters confront bad emotions coming from within, not from external sources like Homeric ate. Euripides seems to reject rationality governing the world (closer to phusis than nomos). Strong reaction against this enlightenment, lots of prosecutions. Furthered by Peloponnesian War, superstition based on solidarity of polis. By the fourth century traditional religion made a major comeback, and later philosophers saw themselves outside mainstream. More magic, more foreign cults imported.

7 Plato and the Irrational Soul

Plato attempts to save the “Inherited Conglomerate” by incorporating certain traditional aspects into his ideal societies to service the masses. These were carefully selected and controlled by the people who had the knowledge. Plato’s ruling classes incorporate some of the shamanistic stuff. Later, virtue is to be conditioned by laws. For Plato, it isn’t clear how he views the pure psyche in relation to the body and all the impure desires that go with it. In the Laws, he wants to stabilize the Conglomerate by having religion based on the old cults built into the state and taught to everyone. Dangerous thinking was to be removed to protect the society (apparently he didn’t learn from Socrates).

8. Fear of Freedom

After Plato, rationalism reached its height with Aristotle. Science was rigorously cataloged. Everything seemed rational with the diffusion of Hellenistic culture. But then science and philosophy gradually diverged, and increasingly philosophies began to fall back on older superstitions and themes. Newer irrationalities like astrology became very popular. Dodds thinks this might all be from a fear of the freedom that rational thought brings, and the reaction to this freedom.