

Dialogues

Volume V

Compiled by
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Three essays delivered to:

**THE SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION
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Cover Photo:

Logic and Dialectic Personified by Plato and Aristotle, Marble bas-relief by Lucca della Robbia from the Florence campanile, c. 1437-9. Museo Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy

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Preface

Dialogues

...is meant to foster discussion between individuals and groups on the myriad ways the ancients continue to shape and affect modern life. The papers included here cover many disparate topics, but they all reflect the central question we pose to each of our speakers: how does the particular topic illuminate the continuing relevance of the classical heritage to society in the twenty first century? Our lives in the modern world are increasingly hectic, fragmented, and driven by impersonal technology, we believe that it is ever more important—and comforting—to remember and reflect upon the common foundation that the classics provide.

Thus, the following essays are designed to demonstrate the ways in which the thoughts, myths and achievements of thousands of years ago can help us understand how we live today. It is our belief that communication about these topics can help to create something whole with which to stabilize our often-overwhelming world.

It is our sincere hope that these papers will encourage further discussion on the important historical and contemporary issues they raise, foster a sense of connection among long-time classicists (both amateur and professional), and inspire new ones to carry on their work.

Contributors

Paul Cartledge is one of the world's foremost classicists and an internationally renowned authority on both Athens and Sparta. He has been a fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, since 1981, and has held the position of A.G. Leventis Professor of Greek Culture since 2008. In addition, he has been Visiting Hellenic Parliament Global Distinguished Professor at New York University since 2006. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles on Greek and Roman history and historiography, which have been translated into many languages including Greek, Spanish, Finnish and Hebrew. He previously addressed SPGH in October of 2005, on "The Heritage of Thermopylae: What the Spartans have done for us."

David Konstan received his B.A. in mathematics from Columbia College and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Greek and Latin from Columbia University. He has held visiting appointments at the Universities of Otago, Edinburgh, São Paulo, La Plata, Natal, Sydney, and Monash, and at the American University in Cairo. He serves on the editorial board of journals and publications in fourteen different countries and has been a Senior Fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies and president of the American Philological Association. His more than 16 books and almost 300 articles have focused on analysis of ancient Greek and Roman attitudes towards love, friendship, comedy and ethics. The *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* was published by the University of Toronto press in 2006.

Greg Nagy was born in Budapest, Hungary, and educated at Indiana and Harvard Universities, where he studied Classical Philology and Linguistics, receiving his Ph.D. in 1966. Since 1975, he has been at Harvard, where he was named the Francis Jones Professor of Classical Greek Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature. He is also currently the Curator of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature and, since August of 2000, the Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies.

Professor Nagy is a renowned authority in the field of Homeric and related Greek studies. His numerous honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Goodwin Award of Merit of the American Philological Association for his book, The Best of the Achaeans (1979). Professor Nagy has lectured widely in North America and Europe on a great range of topics, especially concentrated in Homeric and Archaic Greek questions..

Herodotus: A Pluralist Polymath for Our Own Times

By Paul Cartledge

September 23, 2009

Introduction

That Herodotus, the historian of the Greco-Persian Wars of 490 and 480-479 BCE (and much, much else), did not succumb to Hellenocentric triumphalism is one of the many glories that commend him more and more to scholars in the field.¹ And not only to scholars, but also to historically minded journalists.^{2 3} For Herodotus the “Father of History” (*pater historiae*, Cicero’s original phrase) was also the Father of Comparative Ethnography. He was a generally fair-minded and balanced ethnographer not only of non-Greek “others” but of the Greeks too (see esp. 3.38).

However, popular (in which I include the non-scholarly serious as well as the fluffily airheaded) reception of Herodotus has been more mixed. As early as Plutarch’s essay *On the Meanspiritedness of Herodotus* (c. AD 100) ⁴, the seeming tallness of his traveler’s tales and the depth of his alleged political prejudices attracted bad media copy. So, as well as “Father of History” and “Father of Comparative Ethnography,” Herodotus has to labor also under the moniker “Father of Lies.”

Father of Ethnography

Herodotus begins his *apodexis* (“revelation”) with some comparative folklore studies, asking who started the series of Greek-Barbarian conflicts that culminated in the

Greco-Persian Wars of 480-479 BCE.⁵ Was it the Barbarian Easterners, or the Greeks? “Learned” Persian and Phoenician “authorities” are cited, to no very clear effect. But his tongue, it would appear, is pretty firmly lodged in his cheek: women don’t just get “raped” willy-nilly, in his view, so Helen [of Troy, but originally Sparta] must bear some share of the blame or responsibility for her abduction by the Trojan prince Paris.

This introduction of distant antiquity – not so distant for his hearers/listeners fed on a daily diet of Homer, of course – is intended to place what follows in a broad ethnographic context embracing not just the eastern Mediterranean but also a good chunk of what we call the Middle East. For he then describes the ethnicity, customs and beliefs of many “barbarian” peoples in explicit and elaborate – if not always entirely accurate – detail, beginning with those of the Lydians and Persians in Book 2, going on to dwell in huge detail on those of the Egyptians in Book 3, and in only slightly less detail on those of the various groups of Scythians in Book 4 (to name only his main subjects).

The *locus classicus* is an invented scene, in which the Persian king Darius (reigned 522-486 BCE) invites some Greeks at his capital city of Susa to consider adopting the funeral customs of some Indians who are also present, and vice versa. Both ethnic groups express horror at the very thought and say they could not possibly abandon their ancestral customs. At this point, Herodotus, instead of condemning the Indians’ funerary cannibalism as barbarous and barbaric, comments that all human groups, not just these two, habitually consider their own customs to be not just relatively the best for them, but absolutely the best in the whole world, since “custom is king of all.” This is not in itself a relativist position, but a pluralist one, since we can be quite sure that Herodotus himself, as a good Greek, did not positively approve morally of any form of cannibalism whatsoever.⁶

By contrast, his discourse on Greek ethnicity, customs and beliefs is for the most part implicit. He usually reveals his own views of Greek mores and practices only indirectly, as when, for example, at the beginning of Book 8, he allows his exasperation with the Greeks' tendency to fight against each other rather than fight together with their fellow-Greeks against an external enemy to show through the surface of his complex text: "a war within an ethnic group is as much worse than united war against an external enemy as war is worse than peace."⁷

But there is one large and important exception to this general rule of implicit indirection – namely, his treatment of the Spartans. In Book 6, between the description of the Ionian Revolt (499-494) and before the account of the Battle of Marathon (490), Herodotus includes a long excursus on the prerogatives of the odd dual kingship of the Spartans.⁸ This is followed not long after by a story of the birth of a Spartan king who was later to play a key role in Herodotus's version of Xerxes's invasion of Greece. Moreover, the story of King – or rather ex-King, since he'd been deposed for alleged illegitimacy – Damaratos is told teasingly from the point of view of a woman: Damaratos's anonymous mother.⁹

These two extended passages in Book 6 convey, as forcefully as narrative skill can, two important messages: first, that the Spartans also are, in some vital respects, "other" – that is, they depart significantly from Greek norms; and second, that not the least way in which they differ from other Greeks is in the role allocated to or assumed by women in Sparta, at any rate by royal women (readers will remember that Helen of Troy was originally Helen of Sparta). There is a growing consensus among scholars that Herodotus was a master of the art of historiography as embedded narrative. Multiple viewpoints and interpretations coexist within his narrative, the relations between the different strands are shifting, and

explanations are cumulative rather than competing. Herodotus's account – or rather multiple accounts – of Sparta and Spartans excellently illustrate his narrative mastery.

Chronology

The chronological starting-point of the *Histories* is about 550 BCE in our terms, when, Herodotus says, the two most powerful mainland Greek cities were Sparta and Athens. But he starts there also because three generations constitute the rough limit of useful human memory, and Herodotus was gathering his oral information around 450, a century or (as he once puts it) three generations later. The Spartans owed their position of pre-eminence in the first instance to Lycurgus, their famed lawgiver. Herodotus is quite conventional in ascribing to the reforms of Lycurgus most of the Spartans' basic political and military institutions.¹⁰ When he comes to describe the two kings' prerogatives in detail in Book 6, however, he does not mention Lycurgus again, though he does comment sharply on the Spartans' own local tradition about their original settlement of Laconia, saying that in one respect they contradicted "all the poets." From this we would have been likely to infer that Herodotus not only was very learned (that surely was his intention) but also that he had direct access to local Spartan genealogical and mythical history. In fact, he later tells us himself that he had personally visited Sparta and names one of his informants there, the leading Spartan Archias.¹¹ This is one of only three cases in the entire *Histories* where he cites an individual informant by name.

The particular history he wanted to talk to Archias about involved the expansion of Sparta in the eastern Mediterranean about 525 BCE. Already, as he had stated earlier (1.68), the Spartans had most of the Peloponnese under their control. This was part of the process that many

of us refer to as the establishment of the Peloponnesian League. That multi-state military alliance, which was to be the core of the Greeks' successful resistance to Persia in 480-479, took a new turn in the reign of King Cleomenes I (c. 520-490 BCE). But Herodotus's account of Cleomenes and his reign is one of the more puzzling, even contradictory, in the whole *Histories*. On the one hand, Cleomenes was a great and powerful king, who – in the late 490s at any rate – had for Herodotus the best interests of Hellas at heart. On the other hand, Cleomenes was at least a bit of a madman, who died horribly by self-mutilation – in justly divine retribution, according to Herodotus, for an act of sacrilege, where again Herodotus explicitly contradicts the official local Spartan explanation of Cleomenes's end.¹² The explanation of the narrative dissonance is probably the contradictory nature of his sources, emanating ultimately from the two royal houses that were (often) at loggerheads with each other – on the one side, those who supported the anti-Persian line taken by Cleomenes; on the other, descendants of the “traitor” king Demaratus, deposed through Cleomenes's machinations and later a favored courtier of Xerxes. To this mixture, Herodotus stirred in his own dose of conventional piety.

Herodotus the Intellectual?

There is as yet no scholarly consensus on whether Herodotus was a cutting-edge intellectual, with perhaps a residual old-fashioned fondness for spotting the hand of god – or rather gods – at work in history; or a conventional religious believer (especially in the truth and power of oracles)¹³ and practitioner, but with an unusually enlarged vision and open mind towards naturalistic explanations of human and natural phenomena. At any rate, his treatment of the Spartans' religious beliefs and practices is evenhanded. He makes it quite clear that the Spartans were exceptionally religious. On several occasions – not

least, the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae – he reports without comment that the Spartans felt unable to respond immediately because they had prior religious obligations to perform. The Spartans, as he twice puts it, “considered the things of the gods more weighty than the things of men.”¹⁴ More skeptical or secular modern historians have, however, judged that the Spartans were merely using religion as a self-serving pretext. But Herodotus, in accordance with his usual stated method of reporting what his sources told him, does not take, or at least does not express, that view.¹⁵

Herodotus’s Judgement(s)

On the other hand, when it came to choosing between Athens and Sparta as to which of those two leading states contributed the most to saving mainland Greece from total Persian conquest in 480-479, he delivers what he knows will be to many an objectionable judgment, but the one that he considers to be true: namely, that it was the Athenians who – above all by their conduct at the Battle of Salamis – were the principal “saviors of Greece.”¹⁶ His by no means stupid point was that, had the Greeks lost there, the victorious Persian navy would have sailed on into the Spartans’ Peloponnesian backyard and wrapped up the final victory soon enough. Yet that does not at all mean that Herodotus (unlike some modern historians, I might say...) in any way slights or downplays the no less critical and indeed more decisive contribution of the Spartans to the Persians’ eventual defeat – which came on land, in pitched battle, at Plataea in Boeotia in 479. Even so, the precise mechanics of that victory remain in his hands – as possibly they would have in any hands – desperately obscure.

Likewise, Herodotus’s political attitudes are balanced or, put another way, hard to pin down. Pretty clearly, he

thought absolute, non-responsible monarchy – whether hereditary kingship or usurped tyranny – not a good thing in itself. He is rather scathing towards the Egyptians, in this regard, since they seemed congenitally unable to live without kings!

But what sort of a “republican” was he, then? Though not specially interested in the finer points of constitutional government or revolutionary change, he clearly brings out the major significance of Athens’s turn to democracy under Cleisthenes in 508-7. Indeed, he states unequivocally that it was Cleisthenes who founded “the democracy” at Athens.¹⁷ Yet the manner in which Cleisthenes is said to have achieved this result is bathed in a sharply opportunistic light. Moreover, when Herodotus had earlier related the decision by the (now democratic) Athenians to support a major revolt of eastern, Asia-dwelling Greeks against Persia in 500, he says that this merely showed it was much easier to fool 30,000 than a single man (that one man being the Spartan king Cleomenes, who with the help of his daughter Gorgo had rejected the Ionian Greeks’ request for help).¹⁸

So was Herodotus in any sense himself a “democrat?” Probably. He did after all consent in the 440s to join the new foundation of Thouria in south Italy (on the site of Sybaris), the constitution of which (drafted by the Sophist Protagoras) was democratic. But democracy had moved on between 508-7 and 462-1, and did so even more thereafter, and probably he was not a post-Periclean “extreme” democrat – that is, in favor of the unfettered rule of the masses over the elite.

The Spartan who led the Greeks to victory at Plataea in 479, Regent Pausanias, was a hugely controversial character, both in Sparta and outside, and both in his own lifetime and after his death. Like Cleomenes, he came to a bad end – which for Herodotus, like many Greeks, would

have been a clear sign that he was fundamentally a bad or at least ill-fated person (1.32). But unlike Cleomenes, Pausanias predominantly earns plaudits from Herodotus, so key was his role in securing Greek freedom.

After victory has been won at Plataia, the historian tellingly uses the Pausanias character twice as an exemplar of the best Spartan – and so Greek – values.¹⁹ A hotheaded Greek from the island-state of Aigina (which in 490 had revolted, but in 480-479 remained true to the Greek cause) urges Pausanias to mutilate the corpse of Persian commander Mardonius in revenge for the mutilation of the corpse of Leonidas by the Persians at Thermopylae the previous year. Pausanias sharply rebukes the man and tells him that such barbarity is not the Greek way. Then, when Pausanias is shown the rampant luxuriousness of Mardonius's tent and the vast amounts of lavish food prepared for him and his bloated entourage, Pausanias quietly orders his Helot attendants to prepare a Spartan – indeed, as we say, a “Spartan,” i.e. frugal – meal in order to demonstrate the superior virtue of Greek self-restraint.

That message is also exactly the one with which Herodotus chooses to end his whole work, though here it is the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus the Great, who is credited with delivering it, to his own Persians. Here a pensive and reflective Cyrus advises his Persians that tough lands produce tough peoples and so, if they wish to retain the empire he has enabled them so spectacularly to gain, they must not even think about removing to some softer, enervating environment.²⁰

Clearly, Herodotus was both attributing the Greeks' victory over the Persians significantly to environmental factors but at the same time issuing a warning about the difficulty, indeed unlikelihood, of maintaining imperial power. Coupled with that warning was a warning to remember that one was merely human, that over and above the seemingly limitless optionality and potentiality of

human choices there rose a divine constraint, an inexorable power of fate. So, here in conclusion to my lecture, I want to cite a characteristically philosophical notion which Herodotus typically places in the mouth of a wise, or at least wised-up, barbarian (non-Greek) potentate.²¹ The notion is the perhaps rather pessimistic one of a perpetual cycle in human fortunes:

“My suffering”, says ex-King Croesus of Lydia, “though joyless for me, has taught me many lessons [...] If you [Cyrus] realize that you are human[...], consider first that there is a cycle in human affairs, and as it goes around it does not permit the same person to enjoy good fortune for ever ...” [trans. Andrea Purvis]

Fallen investment-banker lords of the universe, mark, learn and inwardly digest - and even better act upon!

Or, looking even further forward, as far forward indeed as is possible to do in this life on earth, let me quote what one of Herodotus’s Greek characters, wiseacre Solon of Athens, sagely recommends to the aforementioned oriental plutocrat Croesus, then still in his pomp: “look to the end” (the end in the sense both of terminus and of goal). For it is, Solon argues, in light of that end, and only in that light, that it will be known finally whether one has not just lived but lived well.²² Living well, the condition of *eudaimonia*, was the final aim of the very best reflection produced by the greatest exemplars of ancient Greek culture, figures such as perhaps the master of them all, Aristotle, whose name, accidentally but not incidentally, means just that: “best end” (*ariston telos*).

In short, as Edward Gibbon once perceptively observed, Herodotus “sometimes writes for children, and sometimes for philosophers”²³ – i.e., he both tells rattling yarns *and* has something valuable to say to enlightened people of the world who, like me, believe – perhaps naively – that it is both desirable and possible to learn from history.

And the last of Herodotus's "lessons" that I'd like to leave you with is this. You'll remember that it was his view that *stasis emphulios* – civil war within a single people – is as much worse than united war against a foreign enemy as war is worse than peace. When I quoted this before, I emphasised his anti-war mindset, his pacifism. But he was also a realist – all too well aware that the Hellenic "tribe" was all too prone to fighting among and against itself. And it was in that spirit that he wrote a ringing declaration of "Hellenism" and placed it in the mouth of the Athenians, at a critical juncture of the Persian Wars during the winter of 480-79.²⁴ Hellenism, his "Athenians" declare, is a compound of common blood, language and customs – or culture. Not, it is important to note, a common political system – politics served more often to divide than to unite the ancient Greeks, and not only, rumour has it, the ancient Greeks either. But a common *culture* – that notion for Herodotus united not only Athenians with Spartans but also both with Macedonians.

Herodotus, an Eastern Greek who became a Western one, and who travelled both the length and breadth of the Hellenic world, and huge distances outside it too, knew whereof he spoke.

Afterword: Herodotus or Thucydides?

Ever since their lives and works overlapped in the fifth century BCE, the twin fathers of Western historiography, Herodotus (c.484-425 BC) and Thucydides (c. 460-400), have been judged in the light of – and more usually against – each other. There is even a conjoined back-to-back herm from the Roman period, now in the Naples Museum, that shows idealised depictions of them, duly labelled – facing, fixedly and for ever, in opposite directions! The aim of this brief Afterword is not to explore the comparisons and contrasts between them in great detail, but rather to

explain why over the past twenty years the balance has tilted quite so sharply away from Thucydides and toward Herodotus, so far as their both scholarly and more general reception is concerned. I think the answer is basically twofold. One of the reasons is internal to the practice of historiography by specialists; the other a direct reflection of and response to the way the world outside has changed since 1989 or 1990.

First, within the last twenty years, the very profession of History has experienced a kind of internal crisis and regrouping of forces. Subjected to a barrage from the Postmodernists, who claimed in essence that there is no such thing as historical objectivity and truth, that History is what any historian cares to make of it, and how any historian cares to represent it, more traditional historians have fought back by calling attention to the historian's absolute dependence on sources and commitment in principle to telling it how it actually was, within the limits set by the available, reliable source-material. The outcome has been a greater liberalization of historiographical norms, and a wider acceptance that even the strictest adherence to conventional protocols regarding sources is compatible with a certain inevitable subjectivity of perception and a certain individual freedom in retelling any story about any significant past. Hence, the extremely individualist and pioneering historiographical mode of Herodotus, who claims only to "tell what is told,"²⁵ though he tells it the way he sees fit, is now found more congenial than Thucydides's severe – and somewhat self-deluding – claim to tell objectively only the actual facts of the past, and moreover those of a very narrowly defined past consisting of significant political, diplomatic and military events and processes.

Second, and directly connected to the former, the ending of the old East-West, Communist vs. “Free World” Cold War in 1990 has lessened Thucydides’s seemingly paradigmatic authority as an analyst of power relations in a bipolar world divided resolutely along ideological lines. Thucydides is still acknowledged as one of the most powerful such analysts there has ever been, but there is now seen to be more scope and greater need for historians like Herodotus who see their remit as going well beyond political history to the history of society, culture, gender, religion, and so forth. Herodotus may be more fanciful, less factually reliable, and certainly less politically motivated, than Thucydides, but these are not now seen necessarily as irremediable defects – and besides, as I have myself tried to indicate briefly above, it is at least arguable that Herodotus was in his distinctive way every bit as much a “philosophical” historian as Thucydides.

* I must thank the Society, and especially Mrs Anna Lee, most warmly for their very kind (second) invitation, Ms Adele Uphaus for her unobtrusive efficiency in smoothing my passage to the Hellenic Embassy from N.Y.U. *via* the wondrous Cosmos Club, and, not least, my old friend Dr Brook Manville, who so generously introduced me and my talk. It was also Brook who kindly suggested I might add what I have written as an Afterword, which is a version of my oral response to his own question following the Lecture itself.

WORK CITED IN LECTURE [H. = Herodotus]

1. Andrea Purvis, translator, in *The Landmark Herodotus*, ed. R. Strassler (2007). Recent scholarship is usefully canvassed in the Appendixes to this brand-new translation.
2. R. Kapuscinski *Travels With Herodotus* (2007).
3. Justin Marozzi *The Man Who Invented History. Travels With Herodotus* (2008). In the US it has been retitled: *The Way of Herodotus: Travels With the Man Who Invented History* (2009).
4. Plutarch *On the Meanspiritedness of Herodotus* (c. 100 CE), ed. A. Bowen as *The Malice of Herodotus* (1992): rev. J. Marincola *Ploutarchos* 10.2 (May 1994).
5. Herodotus *Histories* Preface and Prologue Book 1 chs 1-5
6. 3(Book).38 (Chapter) (Darius I, Greeks, Indians compare funeral customs). S. Lukes *Moral Relativism* (2008) is wrong to describe Herodotus's stance as "relativist."
7. 8.3.1 Civil war
8. 6.51-60 (Spartan kings). 6.63-69 (paternity of ex-King Demaratus)
9. 6.63-69.
10. 1.65 (Lycurgus of Sparta)
11. 3.55 (Archias of Sparta)
12. 6.84 (death of King Cleomenes I of Sparta)
13. 8.77 (oracles tell the truth)
14. 5.63, 9.7 (Spartans' extreme piety)
15. 7.152 (H.'s method – "telling what is told")
16. 7.139 (Athenians as "saviors of Greece")
17. 6.131 (Cleisthenes as "founder of the democracy" at Athens)

18. 5.97 (democracy responsible for disastrous Athenian decision to aid Ionian Revolt)
19. 9.82 (Pausanias the Greek exemplar)
20. 9.122 (advice of Cyrus the Great)
21. 1.207 (Croesus ex-king of Lydia advises Cyrus)
22. 1.32 (Solon of Athens advises Croesus)
23. Edward Gibbon *Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1776-1788)
24. 8.144.2 (Hellenism defined)

FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

- *The Greeks. A Portrait of Self and Others* (2nd edn., Oxford, 2002).
- *Ancient Greece. A History in Eleven Cities* (2009).
- Derow, P. and R. Parker eds. *Herodotus and His World* (Oxford, 2003).
- Dewald, C., and Marincola, J., 'A Selective Introduction to Herodotean Studies', *Arethusa* 20 (1987), 9-40.
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“Feeling and Thinking: Are they Really Different? The View from Ancient Greece.”

By David Konstan

October 29, 2009

I wish to explore with you this evening the nature of the emotions in ancient Greece. Now, some of you may be thinking: what's to explore? Surely, their emotions were the same as ours. After all, we enjoy their brilliant literature, from Homer to Sophocles, from Sappho to Aristophanes and Herodotus: if our emotions were not like theirs, how could we respond to their poetry, their art, indeed their philosophy, which is at the source of our own speculative thinking? Besides, is it not the case that emotions are, broadly speaking, uniform across cultures, and that we all feel the same ones and in more or less the same way? And even if this is not true for absolutely every society (I'll mention one example in a moment), surely it is true for Greece, where people speak a language so close to that of the ancient Athenians. Can anger or love in ancient Greece have really been different from what they are for us? Before I go any further, let me take a quick poll: how many of you believe that the emotions – fear, shame, love, pity – are uniform across different human communities? [*Several hands were raised.*] And now, how many think they vary from one time and place to another? [*Rather more hands rose.*]

The difference of views among you reflects, as it happens, those among students of the emotions today, where a fierce debate rages over whether emotions are innate and universal, or, on the contrary, dependent on

culture and so vary from one society to the next. On one side, there are the schools of thought that derive ultimately from the work of Charles Darwin. In his last book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, published in 1872, Darwin took a step beyond his original work on evolution – controversial even today, you may know, in certain backward parts of this country – and argued that even the emotional life of human beings was related to that of the more primitive species from which mankind had descended. Darwin supposed that certain expressive features in humans are as innate and universal as snarling is to dogs. Thus, Darwin treated the human smile, frown, and other expressive behaviors as invariants over different populations and cultures: “With all the races of man the expression of good spirits appears to be the same, and is easily recognized” (Darwin 1998, p. 211). Darwin confirmed his hypotheses by examining descriptions of human responses drawn from several cultures, particularly those that he and his contemporaries regarded as primitive.

Over the past thirty years, Paul Ekman and his associates have continued Darwin’s work, developing experiments designed to demonstrate that the basic emotions are universally recognized from facial expressions, irrespective of differences in language and culture. Another current of thought indebted to Darwin now goes under the name of evolutionary psychology. This discipline seeks to explain the origin of human emotions as adaptations to the environment, both physical and social. We are all subject to jealousy, for example, because the men who were disposed, back in prehistoric times, to control the sex life of their women were those whose genes succeeded in reproducing themselves. This explanation does not work for women, as it happens; but then, the evolutionary psychologists maintain that women are less given to jealousy than men are. I guess they never read Euripides’s *Medea*.

Now, opposition to the universalist thesis has come principally from two other areas. On the one hand, cultural historians and anthropologists have called attention to the way in which our conceptions of the emotions, like other value terms, are conditioned by the social world in which we live. Thus, Catherine Lutz, in her book with the fascinating title, *Unnatural Emotions* (1988), explains that when she was conducting her research among the Ifaluk, a people who dwell on a tiny atoll in the South Pacific, she had enormous difficulty understanding the meaning of the term “fago,” which, she says, can only be expressed by the combined formula “compassion/ love/ sadness.” Lutz concludes from this that emotions and the meanings attached to them are “an emergent product of social life.”

The linguist Anna Wierzbicka (1999, p. 168), in turn, points to a subtle inconsistency in Paul Ekman’s program. Ekman wrote (1980, pp. 137-38): “Regardless of the language, of whether the culture is Western or Eastern, industrialized or preliterate, these facial expressions are labeled with the same emotion terms: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise.” As Wierzbicka points out, these labels are hardly indifferent to language. Ancient Greeks did not use the terms “happiness, sadness, anger” and the like when they identified facial expression; they used Greek words!

The second line of attack derives from the cognitive interpretation of the emotions. On this view, emotions are not simply raw, unprocessed responses to stimuli, like the pain that accompanies a pin prick. Rather, they involve a large measure of judgment and evaluation, and so are deeply rational in character. The old contrast between reason and emotion simply does not hold up. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that emotions are

nothing but intellectual appraisals of a situation. For example, Robert Solomon (1993: viii) asserts simply that “emotions are judgments.” Now, if this seems like a curious idea, let me try briefly to motivate it by appealing to a fact about anger that Aristotle himself notices. Suppose that someone pushes you while you are standing on the street. You might well respond with anger, if you think that this was a careless or deliberate act of aggression. But your reaction would change if you realized that it was unintentional, and even more so if you discovered, for example, that you were in the path of an oncoming car, and that the shove actually saved your life. In other words, the intention of the other person crucially affects the emotion that we experience. And evaluating the intentions of others is clearly a highly intellectual process. We shall see that Aristotle too recognized the role of cognition in emotion. In fact, Richard Lazarus, one of the founders of modern appraisal theory, observes (2001: 40) that the psychologists who today favor a cognitive analysis “must also recognize that Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* more than two thousand years ago applied this kind of approach to a number of emotions in terms that seem remarkably modern.” If emotions depend to a large degree on judgment and the appraisal of other people’s actions and intentions, is it not reasonable to suppose that they might vary from one culture to another?

Okay, all very well, in theory. But leaving aside the Ifaluk, whoever they might be, was anger really different for the ancient Greeks than it is for us? Let us consult Aristotle, who has bequeathed to us the most detailed and brilliant analysis of the emotions of any writer in classical antiquity. Here are some things that Aristotle has to say about anger. First, he claims that we cannot be angry with people who are afraid of us. All right, a show of hands: how many of you think that he is right – that you cannot be

angry at a person who is afraid of you? [*Most members of the audience thought Aristotle was wrong.*] If that remark of Aristotle's seems odd, try this one: Aristotle affirms that "it is impossible to be afraid of and angry with someone at the same time." What? Is he serious? Is it not rather the most normal thing in the world to feel anger at people who inspire fear in you? One more claim: according to Aristotle, it is impossible to return anger for anger: if I am angry at you, you cannot be angry at me. What in the world was Aristotle thinking?

Now, most scholars have paid rather little attention to these statements of Aristotle's, treating them as the odd opinions of a philosopher – and we all know that philosophers are strange birds, and their ideas may not conform to those of the average person. Luckily, Aristotle was of a particularly practical cast of mind, more interested in the world as it is than in utopian societies ruled by god-like sages, like his teacher Plato. Furthermore, he discusses the emotions not in his books on the soul (psychology in the ancient sense) but in the *Rhetoric*, since orators needed to know how to rouse or assuage the emotions of their audiences. Thus, he had to consider the emotions of the ordinary people who made up the juries and assemblies of ancient Athens. He cannot have wanted to go off on a speculative tangent of his own in this context. Bearing all this in mind, I undertook to try to understand what Aristotle might really have meant by anger, that is, what kind of emotion it was for him – and why he might have drawn the conclusions that he did about how it works. I reflected too that Aristotle did not use, and was not defining, the English word "anger," and not even the modern Greek word *thymos*, but rather his own word *orgê* – a term that still exists in Greek, of course, but could well have had a somewhat different meaning for him.

Luckily, Aristotle provides us with a careful definition of *orgê*, so we can see how he might have reasoned about it. Here, then, is what Aristotle says: “let anger [*orgê*] be a desire, accompanied by pain, for a perceived revenge, on account of a perceived slight on the part of people who are not fit to slight one or one’s own.” Now, there are several remarkable features in this definition of anger: first, that anger is basically a desire for revenge – as opposed, say, to some kind of feeling; second, that this desire is provoked by a slight or belittlement – and only by that; and third, that some people are not fit to slight another, while others are. Clearly, evaluation or appraisal is central to Aristotle’s approach. A slight is a complex social transaction, and it requires a highly cognitive judgment to recognize it; among other things, you have to be conscious of social roles, in order to know who is and is not fit to insult you. There are two further consequences of Aristotle’s definition that we should notice. First, in this description, anger cannot be aroused by inanimate objects, since they are not capable of insulting you, nor is it possible to take revenge on them. Aristotle defines anger, I remind you, as a desire for revenge, and he adds that where revenge is impossible, we cannot feel anger. And second, only a creature that is capable of recognizing an insult or mark of disrespect can be angry. An animal, for example, is incapable of feeling an emotion such as anger in the full sense of the term.

Anger, then, is a response to a slight, and nothing but a slight. What is a slight? Aristotle defines it as “the active belief that something seems worthless.” To see how severe a restriction this is, let us consider the three classes of slight that Aristotle enumerates. The first is contempt, which he defines as the belief that a thing is of no value. Second comes “spite,” which Aristotle defines as “blocking the wishes of another not in order to have something for oneself but rather so that the other not have it.” In this case, the slight, Aristotle explains, lies precisely in that the

offender seeks no personal advantage: the only explanation for such arbitrary interference with another person's wishes is that you neither fear him nor desire his friendship; he is thus useless whether for good or ill – in other words, he is worthless.

So too with Aristotle's third category of slighting, namely *hubris* or arrogant abuse, which is defined as speaking or acting in ways that cause shame to another just for the pleasure of it. If the abuse is in return for an injury, it does not count as *hubris* but rather as revenge. (I love Aristotle, and the ancient Greeks generally, for their utter lack of hypocrisy: they knew the kinds of petty sentiments we are sometimes subject to, and they spelled them out in plain language.) It is evident, then, that the causes of anger, in Aristotle's view, are far more limited than in English or Greek usage. We often identify such stimuli as frustration, noise, and crowds as productive of anger (Tavris 1989, pp. 164-77): clearly, intention is irrelevant to some of these cases. But let us not leap to the conclusion that Aristotle was wrong, or misguided: he was talking about his world, not ours, and he knew the patterns of ancient Greek thought and feeling much better than we do.

Let us return, then, to those conundrums I set out in the beginning, and see if we can make better sense of them, now that we have seen what Aristotle takes anger to be. To begin with, we cannot be angry with people who are afraid of us. Why not? This one is simple. The reason is that their fear shows that they respect us, that is, they do not regard us as worthless but rather as potentially dangerous. Now, if they are in awe of us, then they cannot slight us or put us down – for a slight, you recall, is precisely the belief that another person is worthless. And so they cannot make us angry. One down.

What about why it is impossible to return anger for anger? Well, someone who is angry at us is reacting to our contempt for him or her – that is what produces anger, according to Aristotle. Their reaction, then, is not an insult, but a sign that they feel diminished by us. Far from putting us down, they are showing, by their anger, that *we* have put *them* down. So we have no reason to be angry at all. You see, Aristotle makes very good sense.

Let us tackle, finally, Aristotle's claim that "it is impossible to be afraid of and angry with someone at the same time." This is a little trickier. I think the point is that we acknowledge, by our fear, that the other person is our superior, and we would not dare insult him. On the contrary, that person is one of those who are in a position to slight *us*. I remind you that, according to Aristotle, we only get angry at a slight on the part of those people who are not fit to insult us. Slaves, for example, do not get angry when their masters treat them as inferiors, although fellow citizens certainly would; slaves know that their masters belong to a different class: they fear their masters, and fear is incompatible with anger.

Let us review the way Aristotle thinks of anger. Anger results from a slight, which we then seek to avenge. If someone is angry at me, the reason is that that person feels diminished, whether in my eyes or those of others or his own; as Aristotle puts it, a belief in his worthlessness is active, precisely as a consequence of my gesture of contempt. In order to turn the tables and make me angry in return, that person must first restore the original equilibrium by getting even. Until that happens, that person is not in a position to show contempt for me, and he or she cannot make me angry. For anger is just the desire for revenge that is aroused by a slight that makes me appear worthless.

If this account still seems strange, we can perhaps better appreciate Aristotle's treatment of anger if we consider its social character. For Aristotle, anger is not simply a private feeling, as I have said, but a response to what we would call a loss of face or social standing: an objective recognition that you have been treated as an inferior by someone else. Now, one option that you have is to accept your depreciated status in respect to the other; if you do, then you will not be angry, because you have, in effect, recognized that the other person is fit to slight you. In other words, you are afraid of the other, and fear is incompatible with anger, according to Aristotle. On the other hand, you may form the intention of avenging the insult, that is, restoring your position in the group, thus proving that you are not afraid of or weaker than the one who insulted you. This is just what anger is. But until you have avenged it and equaled the score, you are not in a position to put the other person down and hence rouse that person's anger in return. Slights are not simply a private business, but have public effects or consequences in a world where one's esteem and recognition are constantly at stake.

Oddly enough, this concern with status explains why Aristotle's approach has so much in common with modern cognitive or appraisal theories of the emotions. Aristotle focuses on the cause of the emotion in the behavior of others – the insult, for example, that another person offers – and this requires interpretation and an awareness of its social implications. This is why Aristotle pays so little attention to the inward feeling or expressions of anger, whether facial or otherwise. Anger, for Aristotle, is always a function of social interactions – a question of image, as we might say, or more precisely, of honor.

Let look briefly at a couple of other emotions that Aristotle discusses, in order to see whether they too differ from our own ideas. I begin with love. In the *Rhetoric*,

Aristotle defines “loving” (*philein*) as follows: “Let loving be wishing for someone the things that he thinks are good, for the sake of that person and not oneself, and the accomplishment of these things to the best of one’s ability.” Note how bare this definition seems: there is nothing in it about feelings of intimacy. Contrast the definition in the second edition of Webster’s New International Dictionary (1959), where love is described as “a feeling of strong personal attachment” and “ardent affection.” Or again, in a recent handbook on emotion, where the authors (Hatfield and Rapson 2000: 654-55) write that love “combines feelings of deep attachment, commitment, and intimacy.” Love, for Aristotle, is simply an altruistic sentiment in regard to another person that includes the desire or intention to provide that person with what she or he values.

Now, why do we love another? In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle specifies three reasons: we feel affection for those who are pleasing to us, or useful to us, or whom we admire for their traits of character or virtue. Aristotle insists that the highest form of friendship, moreover, is the last kind, that based on character. Now, you may be thinking that Aristotle’s definition of love is not so remote from our own. But consider this: do you believe that animals, or infant children, are capable of love? Do mother cats love their kittens? Does your pet puppy love you? Many of you no doubt believe that they do (I promise not to take any more informal polls.) But let us ask ourselves: does your dog wish for you the things that you think are good, for your sake and not its own? And does it feel this way because it appreciates your virtue – your justice, moderation, wisdom, and courage?

Of course, we smile at this way of putting it. But if love were just “ardent affection,” as the modern dictionary puts it, then we would have no difficulty in ascribing such a sentiment to animals. My point is that Aristotle’s

conception of love, like his idea of anger, is not simply an instinctive feeling, although he did recognize a natural type of maternal affection among animals and human beings. But this is not the fully developed, human love that he analyzes in his rhetorical and ethical treatises. Rather than focus on mere feelings, Aristotle once again attends to the social causes of emotion, and this requires a measure of intellect, not just passion. I love you because I understand that you are a good person, and as a result I want you to prosper.

Of all the emotions, fear might seem to be the one that least depends on cognition or moral appraisal, and thus the one that we are most likely to ascribe to animals as well as to human beings. And yet, consider this claim by Aristotle: “fear makes people deliberative (*bouleutikos*)” (*Rhetoric* 2.5, 1382a5). Aristotle notes further: “fear makes people more attentive, more obedient, and more orderly. You can judge this by what happens on ships: whenever the sailors fear nothing, they are bursting with disorder, but when they fear a storm or enemies, they not only do all that they are commanded but silently await instructions.” Aristotle does not mean that the sailors are afraid of the pilot or admiral; no, they are afraid of danger, and this makes them behave more responsibly. This is not the way moderns typically think about fear. On the contrary, it is often treated as an instinctive desire to flee or run away, with a minimum of reflection. Thus, two psychologists write: “The unique function of fear is to motivate escape from dangerous situations” (Izard and Ackerman 2000: 260), and an authority on courage observes: “It is usually supposed that fear leads to flight” (Miller 1997: 25). For Aristotle, fear stimulates thinking.

Once again, we can see why, if we take a look at how Aristotle defines fear, or rather, *phobos*: “let fear be a kind of pain or disturbance deriving from an impression of a future evil that is destructive or painful; for not all evils are

feared, for example whether one will be unjust or slow, but as many as are productive of great pain or destruction.” We feel fear, according to Aristotle, when we understand that a thing is dangerous and can lead to harm. We have to be able to recognize the relationship between the object we fear and the harm it can produce.

But, you will say: animals too must be able to recognize this connection – otherwise, why do they run away from dangerous predators? Let me offer an example. The Roman poet Lucretius, who wrote a long poem expounding Epicurus’s atomic theory, pauses at one point to explain an odd fact, namely that lions cannot bear the sight of roosters but instantly take to flight – a superstition similar to the idea, common when I was a child, that elephants are afraid of mice. Lucretius writes (4.714-21): “It is no wonder, since in the body of roosters there are certain constituents, which when they are introduced into the eyes of lions, dig into their pupils and produce a sharp pain, so that, fierce as they are, they cannot withstand it, although these [constituents] cannot harm our eyes.” The lion shuns roosters, then, because the sight of them hurts. They do not believe that roosters are a threat to them; if they did, they would quickly learn otherwise. What looks like fear in animals is really just the avoidance of pain; certainly, the lion does not become more deliberative when it sees a rooster, any more than a deer does when it sees a lion. Fear in the full sense of the word, like other emotions, is a human trait, and it involves not just feeling, but an intelligent response to things in the world. And this attitude toward the emotions is part of what differentiates ancient Greek ideas of emotion from our own.

If Aristotle’s view of the emotions – and that of the Greeks generally – was so different from ours, can we learn anything useful from his analyses? I believe that we can. Today, we tend to regard emotions as something to be controlled, suppressed, and neutralized. If we are angry, we

count to ten; if we feel fear, we try breathing exercises; if we feel hatred, we are ashamed of it and try to rid ourselves of such an antisocial sentiment. For Aristotle, if you wished to modify your own emotions or those of others, you had to work on the beliefs or judgments that support them. Was the insult deliberate? Is what you fear truly capable of doing you harm? Socrates was not afraid of being condemned to death by the Athenians because he did not believe that death was an evil, and he did his best to persuade his contemporaries of this. Instinctive responses were a different matter, and did not count as genuine emotions.

Of course, the Greeks knew that a mouse fled in panic from a hungry cat. But it did not do so because it believed that death was an evil – there would be no point in engaging it in a Socratic dialogue – and hence it was not really fear in the full sense of the word. The ancient Greeks did think differently about the emotions, and we cannot simply adopt their ideas about them. But their way of thinking about the emotions has much to teach us, all the same. Indeed, as the psychologist said, Aristotle approached the emotions “more than two thousand years ago ... in terms that seem remarkably modern.”

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The Subjectivity of Fear as Reflected in Ancient Greek Wording¹

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In the first part of this essay, I will speak about ancient Greek wording relevant to what we translate as “fear.” In the second part, I will speak about the subjectivity of such fear, defining subjectivity in four different ways.

Part 1. Fear

I start, then, by considering the emotion that we call “fear.” There is no single word in ancient Greek that matches the modern English word “fear” in all its comprehensiveness. In the ancient Greek language as it comes down to us in surviving texts, there are several different ways of talking about “fear” as we understand that word. In this essay, I will concentrate on three of these different Greek words translated as “fear”:

- (1) noun δέος (deos), verb δείδω;
- (2) noun φόβος (phobos), verb φόβω;
- (3) noun ἔκπληξις (ekplexis), verb ἐκπλησσομαι

Let us take a closer look at each of these three words:

(1) The noun δέος (deos) and the corresponding verb δείδω derive from the root *dw- / *du-, meaning “two,” which is also attested in the Latin noun *dubium*, meaning “doubt.” For a parallel relationship in meaning, we may compare the German noun *Zweifel*, meaning “doubt,”

which is derived from *zwei*, meaning “two.” For the relationship between the meanings “fear” and “doubt” we may compare the French words *douter*, meaning “doubt,” and *redouter*, meaning “fear” (and we may note the English derivative *redoubtable*). So why are “fear” and “doubt” derived from the meaning “two”? It is because you feel two ways about something when you are in doubt, when you are afraid. In the language of Homeric Greek, for example, to be “afraid” (δείδιμεν) is to feel “in a double way” (ἐν δοιῆ) ...

δείδιμεν· ἐν δοιῆ δὲ σθωσέμεν ἢ ἀπολέσθαι
νῆας,

We are afraid. It can go either way, whether we can
save or lose the ships with their fair benches.

(*Iliad* 9.230-231)

It is a primal feeling, such fear, as when a deer is caught in the headlights of a speeding car. You can just see the deer’s two fearful eyes reflecting the two “suns” radiating from the two headlights. What will happen? It can go either way for the deer, fight or flight.

(2) φόβος (*phobos*), φοβέομαι, from the root *bhegh- “run,” as in the Russian verb *begù*, meaning “I run.” I note that φέβεται (*phobetai*) means “runs away” while φοβέω (*phobeō*) means literally “I cause to run away.” The relationship of φέβεται (*phobetai*) / φοβέω (*phobeō*) is parallel to the relationship of σέβεται (*sebetai*) / σοβέω (*sobeō*). Now, the Greek verb σέβεται (*sebetai*) means “worships [a god],” and it is cognate with the Sanskrit verb *tyájate*, which refers to such sacred moments as when birds flutter away at the approach of a god. What, then, does the Greek verb σοβέω (*sobeō*) mean? On the basis of the available comparative evidence, we would expect that the subject of σοβέω (*sobeō*) is an

overpowering divine force that is rushing toward you. Such a subject can be reconstructed from the three alternative meanings of σοβέω (*sobeō*) as given in the dictionary of Liddell, Scott, and Jones. I paraphrase here those three meanings:

- A. “I scare away birds” (as in Aristophanes *Birds* 34, οὐδενὸς σοβοῦντος.
- B. “I move rapidly or violently.”
- C. “I walk in a superior way.”

Put these three meanings together for σοβέω (*sobeō*), and you can see clearly the close parallel with φοβέω (*phobeō*), which means literally “I cause to run away.” This parallel matches the parallel between σέβεται (*sebetai*) “worships [a god]” and φέβεται (*phebetai*) “runs away.” And the meaning of σέβεται (*sebetai*) “worships [a god]” matches the meaning of the cognate Sanskrit *tyájate* “flutters away at the approach of a god.”

3) ἔκπληξις (*ekplexis*), ἐκπλήσσομαι, means literally “shock” or “astonishment.” Here are some examples, all taken from the prose of Thucydides:

- (a) Thucydides τὸ δὲ ἀντίπαλον δέος μόνον πιστὸν ἐς ξυμμαχίαν: “commensurate mutual fear [deos] is the only sure thing as a basis for an alliance.” (From the speech of the people of Mytilene at Olympia, addressed to the people of Sparta.)
- (b) Thucydides 6.78.2 εἴ τέ τις φθονεῖ μὲν ἢ καὶ φοβεῖται: “And if someone is envious or is even afraid [phobeisthai] (for it is inevitable that great powers have these things happen to them [= to be envied and feared]...)” (From the speech of Hermocrates addressed to the people of Camarina, warning them that Athens

will attack them too if they conquer Syracuse)

(c) Thucydides 4.125.1 νυκτός τε ἐπιγενομένης, οἱ μὲν Μακεδόνες καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν βαρβάρων εὐθύς φοβηθέντες ὅπερ φιλεῖ μέγала στρατόπεδα ἄσαφώς ἐκπλνίγνυσθαι, καίνομίσατες πολλαπασίονς μὲ ἢ ἦλθον ἐπιέαι, ὅσον δὲ οὔπω παρεῖναι, καταστάντάτες ἐσαίφνιδιον φυγὴν ἐχώρουν ἐπ’ οἴκου: “When night came on, the Macedonians and the mass of barbarians suddenly became frightened [*phobeísthai*], which often happens to great armies, that they become panic-stricken [*ekplegnusthai*]. And, thinking that an army many times more numerous than the number that had really arrived was advancing and was about to attack them, they suddenly broke and fled in the direction of home.” (The defection of the Illyrian allies panics the Macedonians allied with Brasidas.)

So here we see the mentality of *ekplexis* as ‘panic’. Here are two further examples:

(d) Thucydides 2.96.1 καὶ ἔκπληξις ἐγένετο οὐδεμιᾶς τῶν κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἐλάσσων:” and a panic [*ekplexis*] ensued as great as any that occurred during the war.” (The Athenians panic about the safety of Piraeus when they see fire-signals lit on the island of Salamis.)

(e) Thucydides ἦν τε ἐν τῷ παραυτίκα οὐδεμιᾶς δὴ τῶν ξυμπῶν ἐλάσσων ἔκπληξις: And the panic [*ekplexis*] of the present moment was as great as any of all the other cases [of panic in the war].” (The Athenian panic when they are trapped in the battle of Syracuse).

In the narrative of Thucydides, we can see here a crescendo of panic. Each instance of great panic that defies

the imagination leads to another instance of even greater panic that defies the imagination all the more. But the ultimate panic is yet to come:

Thucydides 8.96.1-2 : τοῖς δὲ Ἀθηναίοις ὡς ἦλθε τὰ περὶ τὴν Εὐβοίαν γεγενημένα, ἔκπληξις μεγίστη σὴ πρὶν παρέστη. οὔτε γὰρ ἢ ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ ξυμφορά, καίπερ μεγάλη τότε δόξασα εἶναι, οὔτε ἄλλο οὐδὲν πω οὕτως ἐφόβησεν: “When the news of what had happened in Euboea reached the Athenians, there was the greatest panic [*ekplexis*] of them all, greater than any of the previous cases [of panic in the war]. Neither the disaster is Sicily, however great it had seemed at the time, nor any other thing ever had so frightened [*phobēin*] them.”

This same word *ekplexis*, which can be translated as “panic” in moments when a whole community experiences fear, is used also in situations where the community is understood to be the audience in a theatrical performance. The audience of Athenian State Theater, as a notional community, can experience such *ekplexis* vicariously by way of collectively reacting to a primal fear experienced by one single person who is larger than life, the hero. That is what Aristotle has in mind in the *Poetics* (1455a17) when he speaks of the *ekplexis* experienced by the audience in reacting to the primal fear experienced by Oedipus as acted by an actor in the tragedy of Sophocles that bears the hero’s name, *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

In using the word *ekplexis* in this context, Aristotle has in mind the moment when Oedipus recognizes who he really is – a moment of primal fear is for the hero. In this context, Aristotle does not have to mention fear as the defining emotion of Oedipus at the moment of recognition. He mentions instead the *ekplexis* experienced by

the audience in collectively reacting to the primal fear experienced by Oedipus, which is for the hero his own *ekplexis*. The emotion of fear as experienced by Oedipus, which is his primal *ekplexis*, transcends any single emotion for the audience experiencing their collective *ekplexis*. For the audience, their *ekplexis* comes from the shock and awe of experiencing the full impact of primal emotions experienced by the hero - emotions that are larger than life because the hero is larger than life. When that full impact becomes weakened, however, then the original shock and awe can become merely awe. That is what happens to an English word like "terrific," which has lost its power to express the sense of shock that still resides in a word like "terrible."

A sense of awe, even without the primal fear, makes for powerful theater. A case in point is a passage in Plato's *Ion* (535b) where the word *ekplexis* captures the awe experienced by an audience of 20,000 when Ion the rhapsode re-enacts scenes of fear and pity in his performances of Homeric poetry.

By now we have seen that the primal emotion of collective fear, as conveyed by the word *ekplexis*, transcends other emotions in the realm of theatrical performance. And now we will see that the divine force behind this collective fear is the god of theater himself, Dionysus.²

Part 2. The Subjectivity of Fear

I proceed to consider the word subjectivity, and I have four things to say about it:

1. In the usage of everyday people, *subjectivity* is simply the opposite of *objectivity*.
2. In the usage of philosophers, *subjectivity* is a key word

for debating questions about the nature of the human *self* and about the ways in which that self operates in the context of historical contingencies. Even in this kind of usage, the word *subjectivity* is normally treated as the opposite of *objectivity*.

3. In the usage of linguists, *subjectivity* can be analyzed grammatically in terms of *person*. When I say “person” here, I mean the first, second, and third persons of personal pronouns and verbs. The classic study of grammatical persons is by Émile Benveniste.³

As Benveniste shows, the grammatical first person singular or the “I” is the basis of subjectivity in its distinctness from the second person or the “you” with whom the “I” engages in what can best be described as a dialogue. Further, the “I and you” dialogue of the first and the second persons is subjective in its distinctness from the third person, which can be a “he” or a “she” or an “it” or a “they,” as well as a zero person who is neither a first nor a second person, as when we use the pronoun “it” in making a statement like “it is raining.”

To what extent, though, is the third person objective? In terms of linguistics, we can say that even the objectivity of the third person depends on the subjectivity of the first and the second persons. When I speak with you and I say “he or she” or “it” or “they,” the identity that is marked by these pronouns in the third person depends on whom or what we mean when we use these third-person pronouns “he or she” or “it” or “they.” In our dialogue, we may also use nouns for identifying the various persons that mark what we are speaking about. For example, “he” may be the king of Thebes and “she” may be his mother, while “it” may be the sun that shines and “they” may be the mother

and the aunts of the king. But the objectivity of these identifications of personal pronouns in the third person with corresponding nouns still depends on the subjectivity of the dialogue between the first and the second persons.

In the use of personal pronouns, we can say that all three persons are subjective, in that the making of references by way of all three persons can *shift*, depending on the subjectivity of the speaker who owns the personal pronoun “I” at the moment of speaking. When I say “I” or “you” to you, the “I” is I and the “you” is you, but when you say “I” or “you” to me, then the “I” is you and the “you” is I. These usages of “I” and “you” will shift depending on who is speaking to whom. Likewise, in the third person, “he” and “she” and “it” and “they” will shift identities depending on who is speaking about whom or what.⁴ There can even be shifts in inclusiveness and exclusiveness in what we say in an “I and you” dialogue. For example, when I say “we” in English I can include you if I mean “I and you” or exclude you if I mean “I and he” or “I and she” or “I and they.”

What makes it possible to study the subjective uses of shifting personal pronouns objectively is the fact that every occasion of speech where a speaker uses the pronoun “I” is a historical contingency that is located in the context of the time and the place when the speaker spoke. When I or you study such a historical contingency, our own speaking about it may be ultimately subjective, but we can be objective about the contingency to the extent that we can keep ourselves aware of our own historical contingencies.

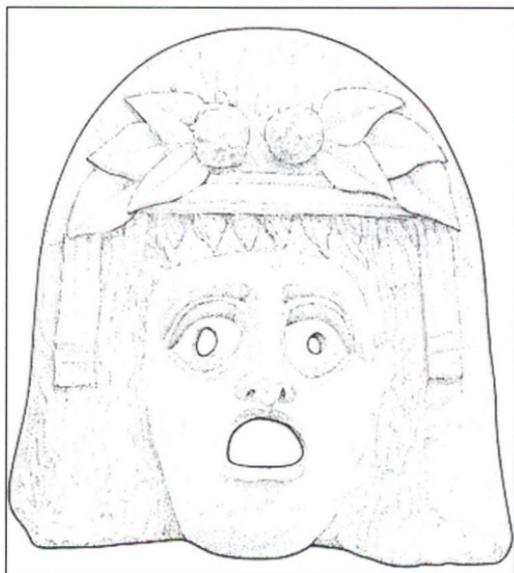
So far, I have said three of the four things I wanted to say about subjectivity with reference to the emotion of fear as reflected in ancient Greek wording and syntax. Now I come to the fourth.

4. Just as subjectivity can be analyzed in terms of the person in grammar, it can also be analyzed in terms of the persona in theater. When I say “persona,” I mean not only a dramatic character like the young man Pentheus who is king of Thebes in the tragedy *The Bacchic Women* (or *Bacchae*) composed by Euripides. I mean also the mask worn by the actor who represented Pentheus at the premiere of the drama in the late fifth century – as well as the corresponding masks worn by countless actors who represented Pentheus in later performances of the drama. In Latin the noun *persona* actually means “theatrical mask.” And in Greek, the noun πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*) likewise means “theatrical mask.” More than that, Greek πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*) refers not only to the “persona” in theater but also to the “person” in grammar, whether it be the first, second or the third person. And the Greek theatrical mask, as indicated by the word πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*), is a subjective agent, an “I” who is looking for a dialogue with a “you”.

The subjectivity of the πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*) as a mask used in theater is evident in the components of the word, which derive from the syntax of expressing the mutuality of looking straight at another person who is looking straight back at you. But the mutuality of this act of looking at each other is uneven in the ritualized setting of ancient Greek theater. That is because the ultimate model for this mutuality of looking at each other in theater is the god of ancient Greek theater himself, Dionysus, who is seen as the ultimate subjective agent. As the god of *theatron*, which means literally “the instrument for looking” (this noun combines the root of the verb *theâsthai*, which means “look,” with the suffix of instrumentality, *-tron*), Dionysus is the god of the instrumentality of looking, and the actual instrument for looking is the mask or πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*).

In the interaction of ancient Greek myth and ritual, the god in the myth is the model for the ritual in which his human worshippers engage - and that is how Dionysus becomes the role model for the ritualized use of masks in Greek theater. The god shows the way. As the role model, he is the absolute model for all the roles, all the *personae*, all the persons of ancient Greek theater. And he is also the absolute model for every *pathos* or “emotion” experienced by every person, as enacted through the *mimesis* or “re-enactment” achieved by way of theater. Yes, the god shows the way, and he can do so by wearing a mask himself.

By wearing a mask, Dionysus becomes the ultimate agent of subjectivity, the ultimate model for all other agents of subjectivity. That is why Dionysus can be represented in the ancient Greek visual arts as wearing a mask that must be recognized as the ultimate mask, the mask that ends all masks, which is the face of the god himself.



Mask of Dionysus, found in Myrina (now in Turkey). Terracotta, 2nd–1st centuries BCE. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities (Myr 347). Line drawing by Valerie Woelfel.

Here, I give an example. It is a line drawing of a terracotta representation of the god Dionysus wearing a mask:

The terracotta representation is housed in the Louvre; its provenience is Myrina, and it is dated to the second century BCE.

What we see is the god Dionysus wearing a mask, or, better, wearing a face that is his mask, and this mask is the ultimate mask because it shows the looks of his own face. That is the point of such a representation of the god of masks, who is the god of theater. I see here a fusion of emotions: there is fear, and there is also sorrow and anger and hate and love and happiness. But the dominant emotion that I see here is fear, in the sense of the shock and awe induced by the feeling of *ekplexis*. Dionysus fuses all emotions into one single primal emotion.

What happens, then, when “you” look at such a mask? In other words, what happens when the “I” who is looking for a dialogue with you is the ultimate agent of subjectivity, even the god of subjectivity? My answer, and this is the first of two conclusions, is that “you” experience the emotion of primal fear, because “you” are looking at the god of absolute subjectivity, looking him in the face, looking back at him as he is looking at “you.” This kind of primal fear is an emotion that transcends all other human emotions.

Which brings me to the second of the two conclusions, and it is this: this transcendent emotion of primal fear is the primary emotion of ancient Greek theater, and the emotions of sorrow and anger and hate and love and even of happiness are all secondary to it. It is the *ekplexis* experienced in theater.

To make this point come alive, I close with the confrontation of Pentheus the king of Thebes with Dionysus the god of theater, from Euripides' *Bacchae* (912-944, 971-976).

- {Δι.} σὲ τὸν πρόθυμον ὄνθ' ἅ μὴ χρεῶν ὄρα̃ν
 σπεύδοντά τ' ἀσπούδαστα, Πενθέα λέλω,
 ἔξιθι πάροιθε δωμάτων, ὄφθητι μοι,
 915 σκευὴν γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκκης ἔχων,
 μητρός τε τῆς σῆς θυγατέρων μορφήν μιᾷ.
πρέπεις δέ Κάδμου θυγατέρων μορφήν μιᾷ.
 {Πε.} καὶ μὴν ὄρα̃ν μοι σύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλισμ' ἐπτάστομον·
 920 καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἡγεῖσθαι δοκεῖς
 καὶ σῶι κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.
 ἀλλ' ἢ ποτ' ἦσθα θήρ; τεταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν.
 {Δι.} ὁ θεὸς ὀμαρτεῖ, πρόσθεν ὣν οὐκ εὐμενῆς,
 ἔνσπονδος ἡμῖν· νῦν δ' ὄρα̃ις ἅ χρή σ' ὄρα̃ν.
 925 {Πε.} τί φαίνομαι δῆτ'; οὐχὶ τὴν Ἰνου μῆς στάσι
 ἢ τὴν Ἀγαυῆς ἐστάναι, μητρός γ' ἐμῆς;
 {Δι.} αὐτὰς ἐκείνας εἰσορᾶν δοκῶ σ' ὄρων.
 ἀλλ' ἐξ ἔδρας σοι πλόκαμος ἐξέστηχ' ὄδε,
 οὐχ ὡς ἐγώ νιν ὑπὸ μίτραι καθήρμωσα.
 930 {Πε.} ἔνδον προσείων αὐτὸν ἀνασειῶν τ' ἐγώ
 καὶ βακχιαζώ ἐξ ἔδρας μεθώρμωσα.
 {Δι.} ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἡμεῖς, σε θεραπεύειν μέλει,
 πάλιν καταστελοῦμεν· ἀλλ' ὄρθου κάρα.
 {Πε.} ἰδοῦ, σύ κόσμα· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνακείμεσθα δῆ.
 935 {Δι.} ζῶναί τέ σοι χαλῶσι κούχ ἐξῆς πέπλων
 στολίσεις ὑπὸ σφυροῖσι τείουοιν σέθεν.
 {Πε.} κάμοι δοκοῦσι παρὰ γε δεξτὸν πόδα·
 τάνθ' ἔδε δ' ὄρθῶς παρὰ τένοντ' ἔχει πέπλος.
 {Δι.} ἦ πού με τῶν σῶν πρῶτον ἠγήσῃ φίλων,
 940 ὅταν παρὰ λόγον σῶφρονας βάκχας ἴδῃς.
 {Πε.} πότερα δὲ θύρον δεξτᾶτ λάβων χερὶ
 ἢ τῆιδε βάκχηι μᾶλλον εἰκασθήσομαι;
 {Δι.} ἐν δεξιᾷ χερὶ χᾶμα δεξιῶι ἠοδὶ
 αἴρειν νιν· αἰνῶ δ' ὅτι μεθέστηκας, φρενῶν.
 ...

- 971 {Δι.} δεινος οὐ δεινὸς καπὶ δείν' ἔρχηι πάθη,
 ὥστ' οὐρανῶι στηρίζον εὐρήσεις, κλέος.
 ἔκτειν', 'Αγαυή, χεῖρας κ' ἦ θ' ὁμόσποροι
 Κάδμου θυγατέες τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω
 971 τὸδ' εἰς ἀγῶνα μέγαν, ὁ νικήσων δ' ἐγὼ
 καὶ Βρόμιος ἔσται. τᾶλλα δ' αὐτὸ σημανεῖ.

{Dionysus:}

You there! Yes, I'm talking to you, to the one who is so eager to see the things that should not be seen and who hurries to accomplish things that cannot be hurried. I'm talking to you, Pentheus.

Come out from inside the palace. Let me have a good look at you

- 915 wearing the costume of a woman who is a Maenad Bacchant,
 spying on your mother and her company. The way you are shaped, you look just like one of the daughters of Kadmos.

{Pentheus:}

What is this? I think I see two suns,⁵ and two images of Thebes, the seven-gated *polis*.

- 920 And you seem to lead us like a bull, and horns seem to have sprouted on your head. Were you ever before a beast? You have certainly now become a bull.

{Dionysus:}

The god accompanies us, now at truce with us, though formerly not propitious. Now you see what it is right for you to see.

{Pentheus:}

925 So what do I look like? Don't I strike the dancing pose [*stasis*] of Ino or the pose struck by my mother Agaue? {Dionysus:} Looking at you I think I see them right now.

Oh, but look: this strand of hair [*plokamos*] here is out of place. It stands out, not the way I had secured it underneath the headband [*mitra*].

{Pentheus:}

930 While I was inside, I was shaking it [= the strand of hair] forward and backward, and, in the Bacchic spirit, I displaced it [= the strand of hair], moving it out of place. {Dionysus:}

Then I, whose concern it is to attend to you, will

arrange it [= the strand of hair] all over again. Come on, hold your head straight.

{Pentheus:}

You see it [= the strand of hair]? There it is! You arrange [*kosmeîn*] it for me. I can see I'm really depending on you.

{Dionysus:}

935 And your waistband has come loose. And those things are not in the right order. I mean, the pleats of your peplos, the way they extend down around your ankles.

{Pentheus:}

That's the way I see it from my angle as well. At least, that's the way it is down around my right foot, but, on this other side, the peplos does extend in a straight line down around the calf.

- {Dionysus:}
 I really do think you will consider me the
 foremost among those dear to you
 940 when, contrary to your expectations, you
 see the Bacchants in full control of
themselves [= *sōphrones*].
 {Pentheus:}
 So which will it be? I mean, shall I hold
 the thyrsus with my right hand
 or with this other one? Which is the way I
will look more like a Bacchant?
 {Dionysus:}
 You must hold it in your right hand and, at
 the same time, with your right foot
 you must make an upward motion. I
 approve of the way you have shifted in your
 thinking...⁶
- {Dionysus:}
 971 You are terrifying [*deimos*], terrifying
 [*deimos*], and you go to terrifying [*deina*]
sufferings [*pathos* plural],⁷
 with the result that you will attain a glory
 [*kleos*] that reaches the heavens.
 Extend your hands, Agave, and you too,
 her sisters,
 daughters of Kadmos. I lead the youth
 975 to this great ordeal [*agōn*] and the victors
 will be I and Bromios.⁸ The rest the affair
 itself will signal [*semainein*].

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¹ This informal essay, which I plan to republish later in a more formal context, is based on two informal talks I gave at two separate events. The first event took place on November 14, 2009, at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and the second, on April 15, 2010, at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington. At the first event, organized by Professors Andrew Wolpert and Victoria Pagán, I was part of a small group of professors who were challenged to confront this question: why is fear such a misunderstood emotion in today's world, and what can we learn about it from the ancient world? At the second event, organized by the Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage, I was asked to say something about the human need for the divine. I am grateful to Anna Lea, President of the SPGH, who inspired me to see a connection between such a need and what I call in this essay the subjectivity of fear. I am also grateful to Adele Uphaus-Conner for helping me prepare my text for publication in *Dialogues*.

² On Dionysus as god of theater and as god of all forms of *mimēsis*: Nagy 2007 / 2009.

³ Benveniste 1958. See the Bibliography.

⁴ On the linguistic concept of the shifter, I refer to the work of Jakobson 1957. See again the Bibliography.

⁵ The two suns *are* Bromios and I. That delusional diplopia is humored, as it were, by Dionysus.

⁶ Just before the wording that follows this point, Pentheus speaks of luxuriance.

⁷ To be *deinos* is to be stunning.

⁸ The diplopia of Pentheus is reflected in the way Dionysos speaks, as if his role as a *bakkhos* or ritual participant were distinct from his role as the *Bakkhos* or god.

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