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Editorial

EMILY LYLE
Envisioning a Model for Ontological Choice and a Moral Cosmos

STEPHEN KAPLAN

INTRODUCTION

I begin this paper with a problem in comparative religions that will lead me to reflect upon the theme of the moral cosmos. The problem with which I begin is the conflict between religions regarding their different, and allegedly contradictory, views of ultimate reality. In the simplest form, there is the conflict among religious traditions between theists and nondualists. There are some religious traditions that assert that ultimate reality is to be uncovered in an I-Thou relation and there are other religious traditions that contend that ultimate reality can only be realised when one overcomes all subject-object, I-Thou relations.

At the outset, I acknowledge that there is an enormous variety of theists, an enormous variety of nondualists and a wide variety of other positions. This distinction between theists and nondualists is not a divide between “eastern religions” and “western religions”, not a divide between mystics and nonmystics, nor is it a divide between one specific religion and another specific religion. The divide I am speaking of cuts across each of these boundaries and it may be discovered internally within many of the religious traditions. For example, there are Hindu nondualists such as the Advaita Vedānta school and there are Hindu theists such as the qualified nondualists of Viśistādvaita Vedānta. The conflict between these schools is serious, polemical and often acrimonious. The differences and conflicts between Viśistādvaita theists and Christian theists is also serious and cannot be swept aside. Adding to this complexity is the variety of nondualist positions. For example, there is the nondualism of the Advaita and there is the nondualism of Yogācāra Buddhism. Each of these schools believes that it is not only different from the other but that it is also right and that the other is wrong. I take these differences very seriously. Nonetheless, I must state that there are specific
religious traditions that exemplify a theistic point of view and there are specific religious traditions that exemplify a nondualistic point of view and these views of ultimate reality are understood to be in conflict.

In my recent book, *Different Paths, Different Summits: A Model for Religious Pluralism*, I present the view of three specific religious traditions as put forth by three individual thinkers. Specifically, they are Gaudapāda of the Advaita Vedānta school, Vasubandhu of Yogācāra Buddhism and Richard of St Victor, a Roman Catholic. This threefold presentation gives us one theistic position and two nondualist positions. Presented in this fashion, this threefold presentation does not depend on the assumption that all theists or all nondualists are alike but rather it establishes that there are three conflicting views of ultimate reality.

Each of these three views of ultimate reality contends that it alone is true. The other views are at best penultimate or simply wrong. Clearly, nondualists do not believe in the ultimacy of God nor do they believe that the ultimate form of liberation will entail an I-Thou relationship with God. Rather, nondualists want to overcome all such dualities. While we can divide nondualists into ātmavādins – those who maintain that all is the nondual Being of existence – and anātmavādins – those who see ultimate reality as an interrelated flux of becoming – neither of these nondualists longs for an eternity in an I-Thou relationship. On the other hand, theists do not long for some amorphous state of nonduality whether defined as Being or becoming. Theists long for a personal relationship with the ultimate Thou, God.

What the theist wants the nondualist does not want. What the nondualist wants, the theist does not want. Each informs us that there is only one ultimate, only one form of salvation or liberation. Each informs us that there is no choice of ultimate realities. There are no alternative forms of liberation or salvation. From a theistic perspective, the best that a righteous nondualist can hope for is a form of salvation that they do not desire. Likewise, from a nondualist perspective, the best that a righteous theist could hope for is a state of being that violates all that they believe in.

From the perspectives of each of these three systems, one may choose not to seek liberation or salvation. One may choose to dis-
regard moral laws and enter the path to perdition or one may act in such a manner as to be reborn into any number of samsaric states of woe. Each of these religious traditions offers that choice. Each of these traditions affirms a moral universe – a universe in which through the oversight of an all-knowing God or through the workings of the law of karma, individuals exercising their free will/intentionality will receive their moral reward, either positive or negative. In each of these traditions there is a choice between real alternatives – bluntly stated, a choice between heaven and hell, a choice between nirvana and samsara.

These traditional views present a moral cosmos. From these perspectives, individuals can be conceived of as having the moral autonomy to follow the law of the cosmos – the moral law of God or the moral law of karma. I do not wish to deny or debate these visions of a moral cosmos. Nor do I wish to debate whether God or the law of karma is responsible for overseeing the world of moral actions. These are legitimate debates and questions, but they are not the issue that I wish to tackle. In this paper, I want to present a model for a moral cosmos in which an individual has ontological choices. I want to present a view of the cosmos in which there may be more than one ultimate reality and therefore an individual would have the autonomy to choose not only whether the person wanted to follow the moral law but also the autonomy to choose the type of ultimate salvation/liberation that suits that individual.

Before proceeding any further, I must state that I do not know if there is more than one ultimate reality or if there is even one ultimate reality that provides any sort of salvation/liberation. However, different religious traditions have made different truth claims with regard to the issues of soteriology and ultimate reality. Therefore, my only agenda is to create a model by which we can conceptualise how more than one of these truth claims can be simultaneously possible and equal, yet not the same; and furthermore, to explore the implications of such a position for the notion of a moral cosmos.

So long as one presumes that there is only one ultimate reality and hence only one soteriological possibility, I believe that it would be impossible to conceive of a moral cosmos that includes the freedom to choose between ontological natures. Again, if one assumes that all
paths lead to the one summit, then the only notion of a moral cosmos would be one in which individuals are justly rewarded, but the reward – the summit – is predetermined. In this paper, I wish to present a metaphysical model in which different paths lead to different summits. In this model, there are real ontological choices to be made; individuals can strive for that which they want and they can achieve that which they seek. In this model, one’s ultimate “state of existence” is not metaphysically dictated; it is not ontologically imposed. One’s ultimate state of existence is a matter of choice. In this model, the cosmos is moral not only in the sense that it justly rewards the “just”, but also in the sense that it provides an array of ontological possibilities that form the basis for one’s soteriological self-determination.

It must be clear that I am not saying that the choice between these different forms of salvation or liberation is a moral choice. It is not a moral choice – not a choice between good and bad, right and wrong. It is a choice between equal soteriological ends. Rather, I am saying that a cosmos that permits soteriological choice is itself a moral cosmos. A government that allows its citizens the freedom to choose its press or the freedom to choose between opposing candidates is, barring other issues, more moral than a government that denies such choices. While I refuse to label a cosmos that does not offer ontological choices, I want to say that a cosmos that offers ontological choices is itself a moral cosmos. My goal in this paper is to illuminate how there can be such a cosmos.

Simply for the sake of clarity and convenience, I will refer to this ontological pluralistic model of a moral cosmos as moral cosmos No. 2 and refer to the other notion of a moral cosmos wherein moral action receives moral response from either God, karma or some other agent as moral cosmos No. 1. Moral cosmos No. 2 includes a version of moral cosmos No. 1, but, as indicated, I will not adjudicate between the different versions – namely, God, karma, etc. – in this paper.

Due to space constraints, in the following sections, I will only discuss two positions – theism and monistic nondualism – and these positions will be presented without specific reference to the traditions from which each is drawn.
PROBLEMS AND TERMS

Before presenting a model for two simultaneously existing, mutually interpenetrating yet radically different ultimate realities, I should a) frame the proposal within a long established context of those who think that such a proposal is impossible and/or ridiculous and b) clarify a number of terms that are essential to this proposal.

There are two frequently cited reasons why such as a proposal as this is impossible and therefore doomed to failure. First, it is assumed that there can be only one ultimate reality. Ultimate reality is ultimate and what is ultimate cannot be multiple. This position is expressed very well by Professor John Hick. Hick says (1989: 248-9):

Why however use the term “Real” in the singular? Why should there not be a number of ultimate realities? ... [W]hat the traditions severally regard as ultimates are different and therefore cannot all be truly ultimate ... . Since there cannot be a plurality of ultimates, we affirm the true ultimacy of the Real by referring to it in the singular.

Hick (1989: 234) details this point with regard to specific religious positions:

But if the ultimate Reality is the blissful, universal consciousness of Brahman, which at the core of our being we all are, how can it also be the emptiness, non-being, void of Sunyata? ... And if it is any of these, how can it be a personal deity? Surely these reported ultimates, personal and non-personal, are mutually exclusive. Must not any final reality either be personal, with the non-personal aspect of divinity being secondary, or be impersonal, with the worship of personal deities representing a lower level of religious consciousness, destined to be left behind in the state of final enlightenment?

In the preceding, Hick’s two major contentions are 1) that there cannot be more than one ultimate reality and 2) that ultimate reality
cannot be both personal and impersonal. Leaving aside the major accolades for, and criticisms of, Hick’s work, both of these contentions are very widely accepted and therefore I will have to respond to both of these points.

The second major bone of contention concerns the assertion that there can be a model for different ultimate realities. It has been assumed that a model for a plurality of ultimate realities would usurp the ultimacy of each ultimate reality. Professor Pannikar expresses this point rather well in the context of his discussion of religious pluralism. He says (1987: 125):

Pluralism in its ultimate sense is not the tolerance of a diversity of systems under a larger umbrella; it does not allow for any superstructure. It is not a supersystem ... . We have a situation of pluralism only when we are confronted with mutually exclusive and respectively contradictory ultimate systems.

Professor Pannikar’s point must be taken seriously – one cannot propose a model for ultimate realities without showing how that model does not relegate the ultimacy of the ultimate realities to a nonultimate status. I will need to respond to this point as well.

In order to respond to these points, I must immediately clarify my use of two terms – namely, metaphysics and ultimate reality. These terms have been developed and used in non-pluralistic systems. If we continue to use these terms in the same way that they have historically been used, we are condemned to always thinking in non-pluralistic terms. On the other hand, if we distinguish these terms, we will be able to envision how there can be a plurality of ultimate realities within one metaphysical system and therefore we will be able to envision a cosmos that is not only moral in sense No. 1 but also in sense No. 2.

I propose that with regard to the term “metaphysics” we follow the generally accepted understanding of this term. Therefore, I use the phrase “metaphysical system” as the most comprehensive term. It signifies being (or non-being) in all its forms and all the relations between all the forms of being and non-being. There can only be one metaphysical system. On the other hand, I propose using “ultimate reality” to indicate a particular ontological structure capable of
supporting a soteriological conclusion to human existence. It is that ontological structure or nature that allows an individual to achieve the soteriological goal that will release one from those conditions that are associated with the existential dilemma of being born. From this perspective, while there can only be one metaphysical system, that metaphysical system can have a plurality of forms of being/non-being and each of these forms of being/non-being can be an ultimate reality if it can provide an effective soteriological conclusion to an individual’s existence.

From this perspective, the ultimacy of an ultimate reality does not refer to its singularity such as the term metaphysics implies. Its ultimacy also does not imply that it must be *the* highest. Rather, in the metaphysical structure of this proposal, “ultimate reality” means that it is an ontological condition for a soteriological conclusion to existence. Thus, in order for there to be more than one ultimate reality, I must show how there can be more than one ontological nature simultaneously existing, equal and yet distinct within a metaphysical system and how each of those ontological natures could be soteriologically effective. I must also show that this metaphysical model does not usurp the ultimacy of the different ultimate realities because it does not offer a new or more comprehensive soteriology. Needless to say, all of this is extremely abstract and needs to be illuminated by a concrete analogy. Therefore, I turn to a brief overview of holography, which I will use as the basis for this model.

AN OVERVIEW OF HOLOGRAPHY

Holography is the technique by which one can reproduce three-dimensional optical images from an imageless film. Holography is very different from photography. In photography, a point-by-point correspondence exists between the object and the image captured on film. The patterns produced on the film resemble the object. One can look at the photographic negative to see what object was photographed. The photographic image can be printed on paper or flashed on a wall. It is two-dimensional and there is only one perspective from which to view the recorded object.
Holograms are different. They record information about the whole object – the object as three-dimensional. Holography means to write the whole. The hologram refers to the medium on which the information necessary to reproduce a three-dimensional image is recorded.\(^2\)

Holograms are produced with lasers.\(^3\) In order to produce a hologram, the laser is aimed at a device that splits the beam into two separate light waves. One of the waves is directed toward the film; the other is directed toward the object and then, reflecting off the object, toward the film. The former is called the reference beam and the latter is the scene or object beam. At the film, the two beams of light converge. Their convergence creates the interference patterns, which spread across the film. These interference patterns are like waves created in a pool of water into which two stones are thrown. No image of the object is recorded on the film, just the confluence of the waves from the object beam and the scene beam are recorded on the film. The interference patterns do not resemble in any way, shape or form the object that is being filmed.

In order to reconstruct an image of the original object, a laser beam of the same frequency as that which was used to construct the hologram is directed at the holographic film.\(^4\) This procedure of passing a reference beam back through the film will cause that which was originally coded onto the hologram in the form of interference patterns to be decoded from the hologram. This decoding process presents us with the optical conditions that allow us to perceive the image as a three-dimensional object. As a three-dimensional image, a holographic image cannot be displayed on a wall, on a piece of paper or on a computer screen. The holographic image appears suspended in space. You can look at this three-dimensional image from different perspectives. Holograms have the visual characteristics of our everyday visual world. These images have height, width and depth.

In order to begin utilising holography as a model for ontological pluralism, three highly unusual characteristics of the film must be noted. First, since the film is without any images, it does not exhibit the subject-object dichotomies found in our spatial-temporal world. For example, a photographic negative of my two children would exhibit two discrete individuals that stand in subject-object relationship to each other. However, the holographic film does not exhibit
any such subject-object relations corresponding to the object filmed – no son, no daughter. Here, the information about the individuals is enfolded throughout the interference patterns that are spread over the film. When the holographic images are projected from the film, the subject-object dichotomies are re-presented.

Second, the film exhibits redundancy whereby each piece of the hologram can reproduce the entire holographic image yet the whole film only produces one holographic image. Concretely illustrated, one can tear a hologram into four parts, for example, and each part will reproduce the entire holographic image. Recall, the film has no images; rather, only interference patterns are recorded on the film and they are spread throughout the film. The spreading of the interference patterns across the film allows any part of the film to produce a complete holographic image of the original object. Thus, while the sum of the parts of a hologram equals the whole of the hologram, each part also equals the whole.

Finally, one holographic film is able to record multiple scenes. In distinction to photography, in which double exposure of the negative will blur both images, one may record on one holographic film different scenes by changing either the angle at which the laser hits the film or the frequency of the laser used to create the hologram.\(^5\)

This holographic situation presents us with two domains called the explicate domain and the implicate domain.\(^6\) The explicate domain refers to the object or objects filmed and to the holographic images that are reproduced. The implicate domain refers to the film with its unusual characteristics.

The explicate domain refers to our normal spatial-temporal world in which objects are made up of parts and in which objects and parts of objects stand in relation to other objects and parts. Distinctness, difference, duality and relationship are the chief characteristics of the explicate domain.

The second domain – the implicate domain – refers to the film with its unusual characteristics. In this domain in which each part is enfolded into all other parts, one does not talk about subjects or objects, discrete parts, nor the relations between parts. The nonduality of subject and object, and of part and whole, are the appropriate language for the implicate domain.
THREE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE HOLOGRAPHIC MODEL

In order to utilise holography as a model for a moral cosmos sense No. 2, three presuppositions concerning the relationship between the implicate and explicate domains must be proposed. I readily acknowledge that different presuppositions would yield a different interpretive model.\(^7\)

In so far as there is no assumption on my part that this model proves the truth of this metaphysical view but rather only provides us with a way to envision how to resolve the conflict between different religious views of ultimate reality and to present a model for a moral cosmos in sense No. 2, I do not need to prove the truth of these presuppositions, nor could I. It must also be clear that I am not trying to offer a scientific model for the structure of the cosmos. Therefore, this model and these presuppositions in no way need to correspond to the current state of physics; they are only intended to be a responsible description of holography.\(^8\)

The first presupposition is that the implicate and explicate domains logically demand each other. In this model, there would be no implicate domain without something explicate to implicate and there would be no explicate domain without the implicate domain from which it unfolded. Therefore, this model presupposes that neither domain is ontologically prior or more important than the other. Second, this model assumes that the implicate and the explicate domains are simultaneously existing. As indicated, the film represents the implicate domain; the objects that the film records as well as the holographic images it produces comprise the explicate domain. Both sets exist simultaneously. Just as in holography, an explicate holographic image is simultaneously enfolded in the implicate domain of the film as interference patterns, so also this model presupposes that all objects in our spatial-temporal world are somehow simultaneously enfolded in the implicate domain of this metaphysical model. In other words, in this model what manifests as explicate entities in our spatial-temporal world is simultaneously enfolded in the implicate world.
Finally, these two domains are mutually interpenetrating. In this model, there is no spatial separation between the implicate and explicate domains. The assumption here is that the implicate domain is co-extensive with the totality of existence – whether that be Being, Emptiness or both Being and Emptiness. Therefore, the explicate domains could not be unfolded some place separate from the implicate domain since there is no place separate from the implicate domain in this model.

As I begin to correlate holography to the distinct ultimate realities, the implicate domain will be utilised as the focus for understanding the nondualistic positions. The nature of the explicate domains and their relationship to the implicate domain will allow us to envision the theistic positions described below.

THE MONISTIC NONDUALISTIC POSITION

A monistic nondualist, such as an Advaita Vedāntin, maintains that all is one – one Being which is universal, without beginning or end, without measure or end to measure. It is everywhere and everything – all that has been, is and will be. This one Being (Brahman) is the true nature of each individual – the true self, ātman. There is only one ātman and it is Brahman – thou art that (tat tvam asi).

For the monistic nondualist, the distinctions between self and other – subject and object – that normally bind our attention are only an illusion (māyā). These distinctions conceal the one reality – the oneness of reality (Brahman). Until one realises that reality is one, undivided and unborn, one is trapped by the demands of individuality, deluded by the appearance of difference and relationship. However, when one realises that the one’s true self is the one reality, then one realises that one’s being is the one Being. This is liberation from all duality; it is freedom (moksa), their soteriological goal.

The implicate domain of holography can help us imagine such a state of existence – a oneness of Being in which there is no self that stands in opposition to an other, to a world of other beings and things. In the explicate world there is an “I”, the typist, and an “it”, the keyboard; however, in the implicate domain the duality of “I” and the
“keyboard” do not exist. In the implicate domain, both are folded into a oneness of being – into an implicate domain that lacks such distinctions. In this proposal, the implicate domain is a model for that which is coextensive with all that exists and it is without subject and object – without duality. In this model, as in monistic nondualism, the implicate domain is everywhere and everywhere equal – each part can reproduce the whole.

This model can therefore help us picture the claim that knowledge of the true self is knowledge of the One (of Brahman). By analogy, the knowledge of any part of the implicate domain would be the knowledge of all since each part can reproduce the whole and since the implicate domain is coextensive with the being of all. From the perspective of this model, we can also see why these nondualists tell us that consciousness (cit) is Being (sat). Since the implicate domain is everywhere and since the subject-object dichotomies have been eliminated, the consciousness that knows the nonduality of the implicate domain cannot be other than the Being of the implicate domain (Brahman). As the Advaitins tell us, in this realisation there is no knower apart from the known. For them, this knowledge, coextensive with the Being of all, would be liberation – it would allow one to overcome the confines of the duality of subject and object. Freedom from duality – from individuality – would be achieved in the realisation of the nonduality of the implicate domain understood as coextensive with all that exists.

THE TEOISTIC POSITION

While nondualism focuses on the implicate domain, the theistic view of ultimate reality focuses on incorporating the relationship between the implicate domain and the explicate domains. It must be recalled that in this model just as the implicate domain is ultimate so also is, at least, one explicate domain. Remember also, that there may be more than one explicate scene recorded on a single holographic film and these different explicate scenes can each be unfolded. Likewise, in this model it may be assumed that there can be more than one explicate domain enfolded into the metaphysical implicate-like domain. The simultaneous existence of the implicate and explicate domains as
well as the ability of the implicate domain to enfold multiple explic- 
cate domains will be crucial in the understanding of theism.¹¹

Theists find no solace in the obliteration of the subject-object 
dichotomy that so intrigued the nondualists; rather they maintain that 
human identity is defined and fulfilled in relationship to the Other, to 
God. For the theist, individual selves are real, not māyā. However, for 
the theist, the reality of the individual cannot be understood apart 
from God. God may be understood as that particular power, that 
ultimate power, that calls forth individuality. In this sense, God is that 
power that can guarantee individuality and that can ensure that 
individuality is not limited to the ephemerality of the passing 
moment. God as that power that calls forth individuality and that en-
sures that individuality is not a passing fancy can be understood as 
both creator and sustainer of existence.

This God who guarantees the individual’s existence and with 
whom one’s relation is a defining mark of one’s existence would be 
worthy of adoration and devotion. This God, the guarantor of indivi-
duality, would also be individual. As individual, this God must be 
explicate and as such can stand in relation to the individual. Parti-
cularity, individuality and relationship are the essential characteristics 
of a theistic view. They are also essential characteristics of the expli-
cate domain.

In so far as this holographic model has assumed that there can be 
more than one explicate domain enfolded within the implicate 
domain, the locus of God’s explicateness – God’s individualness – 
need not be the locus of our spatiotemporal, explicate world. Like 
different holographic images produced from the same film by diffe-
rent lasers or by tilting the hologram at different angles, so also can 
one envision that God and the world unfold in different ways. God as 
particular and this world as particular may be presumed to be the 
presentation of different explicate domains. The locus of God’s expli-
cateness would not be situated within this spatiotemporal explicate 
domain, but in a different explicate domain; and therefore, God, as 
guarantor of this explicate world, would be transcendent to this 
explicate domain. In so far as God and the world would be enfolded 
in the same implicate domain – understood as either the Oneness, the 
Being or the Nothingness of God – God would be present every-
where. (It should be noted that God’s implicate presence as everywhere would not be the presence of any single explicate thing.) Thus, God’s explicate nature would not be beyond the farthest reaches of the galaxy. It would only be a different explicate order not readily accessible (perceivable) to us who perceive from a “particular angle” or with a “particular frequency”, which is different from the “angle” or “frequency” from which God’s explicateness is perceived. (I must reiterate that I am not offering a scientific model for an understanding of the universe. Rather, I am offering a model within the field of comparative religion for overcoming the apparent contradictoriness of different views of ultimate reality.)

Furthermore, in this model God would be the most fundamental explicate order – that explicate order that was responsible for all other explicate orders and all beings within those orders. The theist maintains that it is God’s love, power and grace that call forth the essence of the individual and the theist longs for a relationship with God that allows the individual to unfold and fulfil its individuality in this explicate domain and in some other explicate domain – namely, heaven – in which God ensures individuality. Theistic salvation is therefore found in one’s relationship with God which ensures the nature of individuality and which nurtures individuality through the powers of love and grace in this domain and in alternative domains.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding sections, I have illustrated how a monistic, nondualistic ultimate reality and a theistic ultimate reality can be envisioned from one holographic model. Both of the holographic situations, which allow us to envision these different ultimate realities, exist simultaneously and therefore, they are not mutually exclusive or contradictory. The nondualism, the nonrelational, nonpersonal nature of the implicate domain, exists simultaneously with the dualistic, relational and personal nature of the various explicate domains. In this model, neither holographic situation is more fundamental and, therefore, each is equal yet different. In this model, one could realise the nonduality of all Being while someone else basked in the glow of an I-Thou relationship with God. This model does not
usurp the ultimacy of each of the ultimate realities that can exist simultaneously nor does it offer a new form of ultimate reality not found within the religions of the world. In this model, different individuals choosing different paths seeking different summits could conceivably attain different final goals. Thus, this model allows us to envision a cosmos that is moral not only in sense No. 1 but also in sense No. 2. In this model, individuals can choose not only to conform to the moral laws of the universe, but also have the ability and the right to choose among different ultimate states of existence.

This model for a moral cosmos allows for ontological freedom – a freedom for “self”-determination.

I will conclude with three brief points and an acknowledgment of one serious problem with this presentation. First, I fully recognise that this is a very speculative proposal and I make no claim to know that any of this is true. I am simply trying to provide a model to understand the conflicting views of ultimate reality found within different religious traditions. Second, this proposal does not demand that all religions are the same or that all religions are different paths to the same nondescript Real an Sich, which corresponds to the ultimate reality of no specific religion. Third, this proposal does not demand that the ultimate truth of one religion demands the falsity of another religion’s ultimate truth. Here, different religions can be ultimately true.

Finally, this proposal raises a variety of problems that I have not addressed in this paper. (Some are addressed in my book.) Let me end with the following critical inquiry of this paper: Is it conceivable that an all-powerful God would not demand or could not demand that all individuals try to achieve one type of salvation – namely, a theistic salvation? Admittedly, the notion that some people can opt out of a theistic salvation sounds strange. But why? We are not talking about individuals getting away with rape or murder. (Please note that I am not implying that people could choose not to be morally judged. As noted above, that discussion raises different issues.) Here, I am talking about individuals who have achieved a means of overcoming all human suffering, all egoistic problems, who, for example, have realised the identity of all Being. Would an alternative form of salvation be an infringement on God’s being, power or grace? Rather
than find this notion so strange, one might want to think that an all-loving, gracious God would want individuals to overcome the limitations of existence in any way possible. Such a loving God may grant some individuals a personal relation with that Being who can guarantee one’s existence while other individuals may uncover the nonduality of Being or the emptiness of all existence. Such would be a God of a moral cosmos No. 1 and a moral cosmos No. 2 – a God who does not impinge upon an individual’s freedom and power in moral or ontological matters.

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Notes

1 This presentation is an outgrowth of my recently published, *Different Paths, Different Summits: A Model for Religious Pluralism*. I am grateful to Rowman and Littlefield for use of selected portions of that work and to Manhattan College for its support, which enabled me to attend the Moral Cosmos Conference, St Andrews University. I would also like to express my appreciation to three colleagues – John Keber, Jeff Horn and Seamus Carey – for their very valuable help in developing this paper.

2 Generally speaking, holograms are made with silver halide film that is similar to regular black and white photographic film but has a much higher resolution. This higher resolution film is used to record the interference patterns that form the basis of the hologram.

3 A laser is a single frequency light source that is in phase – in other words, the light waves are in step with each other. (Light from an ordinary light bulb is neither in phase nor single frequency.) The hologram records not only the varying intensities of the light as it reflects off the object, as does a photograph, but it also records the phase relations of the light reflecting off the object.

4 Actually, it should be noted that a holographic image can be made to appear using any “reasonably coherent” light source as a reference beam. For example, the light from an ordinary light bulb that is not in phase can be used to present a holographic image. The clarity of the image is better with a coherent light source.
In fact, colour holograms are produced by recording the same scene on the same holographic film with lasers of different frequencies.

I am indebted for these terms to David Bohm, the physicist. See, for example, Bohm 1980.

David Bohm developed a different holographic model. His model is a scientific model and it is also a model for the ultimacy of undivided wholeness. In spite of the significant debt that this project owes to Professor Bohm, my project aims at resolving problems in religious thought, not physics, and my project imagines a plurality of ultimate answers, not just one.

I use the phrase “responsible description” and not “complete description” because I am aware that one could emphasise different aspects of holography than those emphasised here and therefore produce a different model.

Furthermore, a realisation of the implicate domain of this metaphysical model could not entail a subject knowing an object since the implicate domain does not contain these characteristics. Such a realisation would be different from viewing a piece of holographic film and noting its lack of subject-object dichotomies. As a model for metaphysics, we are not talking about one object, the viewer, looking at a second object, the film. In the metaphysical situation, the implicate domain like Brahman is everywhere – it is coextensive with all that exists. Therefore, if a realisation of the implicate domain of this model were to occur, the alleged realiser would not be separate from the “object” of this realisation, namely the being of this domain. There are no subjects and objects in this domain.

There are definite epistemological issues that need to be explicated here. These issues are covered in Chapter 3 of Kaplan 2002.

In my book (Kaplan 2000), two views of God’s relation to the world can be highlighted. The first view can be associated with the classical Western theistic view that stresses God’s transcendence. In this view, God is understood to dwell elsewhere, not in the world, nor the world in God. These statements are made in spite of the fact that God is said to be everywhere. God is seen as separate from the world, yet able to interact with the world. Where this separate domain would be – how far beyond the farthest galaxy – and how this interaction would take place has certainly been a puzzle for contemporary theologians. Panentheism is the second theistic view. This view stresses both the transcendence
and the immanence of God. From this perspective, all things are part of God, but God transcends all things as well. Here, one must ponder in what sense God is all things, yet not be limited to the sum total of those things? This notion of an implicate domain containing and manifesting different explicate domains allows us to envision both the position of the classical theist and the panentheist. The former focusses more strongly upon the explicate nature of God and the world. It is through their explicate natures that individuals and God have a relationship; this relationship is the key to the classical theist’s soteriological hope, and therefore the distinctness of their explicate natures is paramount. Thus, this type of theist is only minimally concerned with the fact that God is everywhere; or, by analogy, is only minimally concerned with the all-pervading implicate domain. On the other hand, the panentheist believes that the world is part of the being or body of God, but God transcends the world. Here, one can imagine that the panentheist sees the implicate domain as the body of God that is everywhere yet also understands that the explicate domain of God is different from the explicate domain of the world. It must be noted that neither the classical theist nor the panentheist would find soteriological comfort in the nonduality of the implicate domain. They find salvation in a personal relation with God – in an I-Thou relation in which all parties are explicate. In light of this and for simplicity’s sake, I am treating these two views of theism as offering one soteriological position, but I am certainly not wedded to that perspective.


13 Certainly, the mechanism for such a process would be unclear. However, the mechanism for how human morality is judged is unclear. How does God know every action and intention?

14 I have addressed this problem from the perspective of God’s love and grace. I have not addressed the issues surrounding the notion of God’s power. The latter may be understood in a number of ways from an all-powerful, all-controlling deity to a God of persuasion. These different perspectives on God’s power would certainly impact this model in different ways.

References


Moral Cosmos: A Struggle between True and False Myths

W. DUPRE

Ταύτα δὲ ἐγένετο μέν οὐδέποτε, ἐστὶ δὲ ἀεὶ.
What never happened but is all the time.

Sallustius Serenus, Περὶ υεόν χαὶ χόσμου 4.9

As human beings we exist under conditions which make it necessary to distinguish culture from nature, and morality from ethology. Unlike other animals with which we share a similar physiology, we do not react to motives, needs, and faculties more or less directly, but relate to them by the intervention of consciousness and through various modes of intentional interactions, though drive and habit might shorten the interval. The break of immediacy might vary in extension and intensity but, whatever its precise meaning, in the end it has led to a life in two worlds. On the one hand we continue to live as nature permeates and structures our being. On the other hand, we depend on cultural reality as culture has been brought into being by human deeds, as it is actualised in the continuation of deeds and attitudes, and as it precedes and measures all activities of individual human beings. In being part of nature and the world in which we live as nature expresses itself in us, we stand also apart from nature, with and within our own world, and existing as culture and cultures permit us which have been, and continue to be, established as a result of human efforts. By experiencing ourselves and the world around us in proximity and distance, we realise that human nature needs the means of culture in order to stay alive, and that the thrust of being human is such that it finds completion in modes of cultural existence. Culture appears as transformation of nature in and through the human logos. Though human nature accounts for the emergence of cultural reality, it is culture which reveals and determines the nature of humanity.

The reference to these basic processes is cursory and in need of
further elaboration. But it is sufficient to accept the fact that we cannot think of human beings without a particular culture that defines them in their humanity and as moral beings because and inasmuch as the completion of being human is, in fact, the immanent purpose of all cultural activities. The achievement of cultural reality is in itself an open-ended process. As history and the contemporary world tell us, there are many cultures and traditions with divergent features and ideals, and all sorts of problems and challenges which ask for new or better solutions. But as we think of various situations and are interested in the meaning of morality or its connection with myth, there can be no doubt that we have to focus on the constitution of cultural reality, if we intend to come to terms with the meaning of either one.

With the question about culture and being human in mind, I intend to focus on the struggle between true and false myths as follows: I begin with a brief discussion of the meaning of myth and the perception of mythologies. Next, I intend to discuss the relation between truth and the meaning of being human and cultural. Against this background, I shall concentrate on the relationship between myth and the space of meaning, and in consequence, on the struggle between true and false myths in and with regard to the manifestations of myth. I conclude with a few remarks on myth and the moral cosmos, and on wholeness and integrity as focus of moral reasoning.

In speaking of myth, I make a distinction between myth as factor and dimension of cultural reality, and of myths and mythologies as particular manifestations of myth. What complicates this distinction is the plural meaning of myth as it forms the grid and matrix of various cultures and traditions in which it precedes these manifestations in specific forms. But I hope that the context will be sufficiently clear to show which meaning I have in mind.

THE MEANING OF MYTH AND THE PERCEPTION OF MYTHOLOGIES

Though moral or ethical understanding is heavily entangled in ambiguities, most people would at least be hesitant to connect morality with myth, or to concede to myth a major role in the formation of moral theory. Whether we think of Aristotle and his efforts to gain
insights into the dynamics of the good life and the meaning of virtuous existence, or of Kant’s attempts to develop an ethic of law and obligation, or focus on contemporary theories, in any of these instances one could get the impression that ethical discourse has nothing to do with myth or, if mythical elements happen to interfere, that they should have no place in ethical considerations. Of course, if we think of cannibalism and the practice of human sacrifices, or consider the mind-frames of terrorists and theocratic rulers, or remember the horrors of “the myth of the twentieth century”, we cannot deny that myth is a moral problem. But it seems to be a problem which needs to be solved by eliminating myth rather than by acknowledging its persistence and genuine moral significance.

In drawing attention to theoretical efforts which carry the age-old dichotomy between *logos* and *mythos* into the field of ethical thought, I do not intend to discredit the work of reason, nor do I assume that reason is nothing but another term for *mythos* if we understand it correctly and in conformity with historical changes. On the contrary: as reason relates to itself in the unfolding of its potential, it establishes its own authority which must not be confused with other authorities. But for the same reason that reason has to acknowledge the facts, it should also acknowledge the conditions under which it becomes possible and operative. I think here of its embedment in affective and conative relations, and the many meanings it assumes in the course of their development. But I think also of the cultural context in which reason becomes operative, and where myths and symbols are essential to its operations. Time does not permit to elaborate these points. But as far as myth is concerned I would like to say that the idea of considering and, where necessary, of reconsidering the meaning of myth is definitely no restriction of reason, but an expression of being reasonable, especially if it should turn out, as I assume, that myth is by far more important than we expected it to be before we began our inquiries.

If we check contemporary newspapers and magazines, we might be astonished about the frequency in which the word *myth* occurs. The scale of possible applications covers many subjects from modern heroes and scientific treatises to phenomena like soccer, the internet, the free market, and education. Even the “myth of morality” and that of “the ten commandments” could be mentioned. Most of the time the
usage suggests that the subject addressed by this term appears glamorous and important to some people. But if we take it for what it is, it is in essence a manifestation of irrationality and a delusion rather than an expression of true values and insights. In the background, we might be, or are supposed to be, reminded of the Greek stories about their gods and goddesses. But in many instances one could argue that this background is unimportant because it is “just the feeling that counts”. (A few days ago I watched a documentary of the Amazon River with the beautiful title: “7000 kilometers of myth” – and the explanation that it is a world in itself – a myth.)

The negative implications which are associated with the meaning of the word *myth* have a long history. We can think here of the history of philosophy which, at least since Plato’s *Gorgias*, has been inclined to demythologise traditional mythologies, and to consider the *logos* of rational reasoning as death-blow to mythological thought. But we could also point to St Paul who in his first letter to Timothy admonished his pupil to “refuse profane and old wives’ fables (μῦθοι), and exercise [himself] rather unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4.7). The divestiture of myth in terms of truth and validity had the advantage that it provided a basis for collecting similar and equally empty stories about fictitious beings in all parts of the world, and that it stimulated the preservation of mythological themes in poetry and the fine arts. But if we take the present day usage together with its history, we might wonder whether it would not make sense to accept this usage and to skip all concerns about the proper use of the word instead of trying to recover its authentic meaning in case it has, or ever had, such a meaning.

However, even if we subscribe to the irrational and fictitious character of myths and mythologies, and intend to interpret them as they present themselves in the course of history, we face severe and far-reaching difficulties. To get an idea of these difficulties, one could point to the various theories that have been developed in the course of history from Theagenes of Rhegion to C. G. Jung and C. Lévi-Strauss, or one could think of the obvious asymmetries between myths and the effects they have had and still have on human behaviour and cultural developments, including the murderous deeds of suicidal martyrs and the devastating consequences of economic mythologies. Since I have referred to St Paul, we could add that what
the apostle propagated as true understanding of divine reality has become, at least to many contemporaries, no less empty than the stories against which he warned St Timothy.

In order to find a way out of this labyrinth of theoretical and practical entanglements, it is essential that we start with the beginning; which means that we do not only concentrate on myths and mythologies as we perceive them, but that we scrutinise this perception as well, and ask ourselves how we gain access to our subject and how we relate to it, before and as we try to understand its meaning. The necessity to do so is a question of epistemological considerations. But it is also an issue which we tend to forget when things seem to be obvious and in no need of further precision.

There are two points I would like to bring up in connection with the question about our access to myths and mythologies. The first relates to the Greek origin of the word mythos. The second concerns the role of spontaneity in the perception of myths and mythologies.

As to the first point, we could argue that the term myth derives from the Greek μῦθος, and that this word refers to the many stories about gods and goddesses which have been preserved in the texts of Homer and Hesiod, and in many other documents, and that we follow the Greek example if we speak of myth and apply the term to phenomena in which we sense similar meanings. Such an approach is, no doubt, legitimate. But, if we follow this line of reasoning, we should ask ourselves whether the Greeks meant what we have in mind when we call their stories myths and assume, for instance, that they are fictitious accounts of an otherwise incomprehensible reality. This question is by no means superfluous. For if we study the documents they reveal a different perspective. Instead of confirming our understanding they confront us with what one could call with Laurence Coupe (1997: 9f.) and others the paradox of the myth of mythlessness. In fact, as long as the Greeks connected their stories with truth and took them as sacred words of tradition (see Otto 1955; 1956: 22f.), they did not believe that they themselves were living with myths. For them, these stories were true, and intimations of divine reality. In spite of the fact that Parmenides stresses the need to “judge by reason” … (Kirk and Raven 1962: 271, no. 346), he presents his thoughts as “myth of the way” (273, no. 347); that is, as the only way that is left when others are discarded: μονος δ ετι μυος. And, though
Xenophanes was very critical about Homer and Hesiod because they had “attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other” (Kirk and Raven 1962: 168, no. 169 (fr. 11), he was convinced that decent people should start their day “by worshipping God with pious myths and pure thoughts”.5

Though the setting is different, the second point is closely related to the first one. If we look once more at the contemporary usage of the word *myth*, and consider the fact that historical consciousness is more or less restricted to present events and how the glorious deeds of those in power should be recorded by history, I would say that this usage is in essence a spontaneous reaction which originates in stereotypical perceptions. Myth functions as a label we tend to apply to others where and when they hold (as we believe) to “strange” convictions, but not to ourselves. It is “they” who are engaged in mythological thinking, who are irrational and victims of self-delusion. If they knew what they are doing, they would be liars but, since they do not know, they live with a distorted image of reality.6 The attitude itself is a recurrent pattern in history. We observe this when the gods of others turn out to be fictitious, though not one’s own gods; or when the gods of neighbouring villages are devils in one’s own world (see Pettazzoni 1950). In these and similar instances I do not think that it is simply wrong to use the word *myth* as long as we do not prejudge its meaning. But if we take into consideration that the usage is mutual, and heavily loaded with discriminatory connotations, I wonder whether we have not reached the point where we become aware of myth, albeit in a manner that we have to accept – the fact that we get access to myth by the distortion of myth in spontaneous forms of labelling and inter-subjective, as well as inter-cultural, perceptions with fault-finding and derogatory attitudes. In the light of this experience and its history we have come to call the Greek stories about their gods myths, and consider them most of the time as products of human phantasy, perhaps garnished with aesthetic and psychological values, though in reality without truth and factual validity. But for the same reason that the genesis of an idea needs to be distinguished from the meaning of this idea and judged on its own grounds, we should hesitate, stop and think about the necessity to
make a distinction between an impression and what it truly conveys before a name may be used as the intended object demands.

To the extent that we are confronted with explicit and implicit forms of discrimination, I do not think that we can solve the problem of usage and use by defining the term *myth* as we happen to use it, and then abolish it because of its implications. Since perceptions precede name and label, discrimination itself continues whether we like it or not. To come to terms with the problem of usage and use we have to give credit to the experiences of mutuality, and question the assumption of our own mythlessness. To question this assumption does not mean that the problem has been solved, but the question itself is sufficient to change our attitudes. Even if the problem turns out to be more complicated than expected, we know at least that the myths we perceive could be expressions of the myth by which we perceive them, and that it is necessary to allow for the possibility that the perception and apperception of myths are a dialectical occurrence which becomes understandable if and inasmuch as we succeed in tracing the processes that lead to this occurrence. The main implication of this approach is not the acceptance or rejection of a particular possibility, but the acquisition of a perspective which keeps the option open that the meaning of myth concurs with that of being human, and that it is an implicit necessity to think of myth if we intend to understand the meaning of reality as well as the dynamics of culture history. The question about myth is in this regard as much a question about human beings who possess language as it is a question about language that possesses human beings; or as we could also say: it is as much a question about beings who relate to mind and spirit, as it is a question about spirit and mind inasmuch as they become manifest in human beings.

**TRUTH AND THE MEANING OF BEING HUMAN AND CULTURAL**

The contention that myth could be essential to the meaning of being human is reason enough to inquire whether this contention is true and, if so, what it implies for the understanding of myth, and in consequence, for the understanding of features which are connected
with myth. In thinking about this problem I have come to the conclusion that myth is essential to the constitution of the symbolic space in which we exist as human beings both in the sense that myth provides the decisive symbols of orientation, and that it consists in the configuration of these symbols as well as in the manner in which this configuration connects with thought, behaviour, and language in general and the generation of mythological narratives in particular. But before I discuss this conclusion, I would like to say a few words about truth and its relation to the various aspects of being human and cultural.

As human beings we cannot live without truth. The success of language and communication hinges on the intention to say what we mean, and to mean what we say, and thus, to give reliable as well as understandable accounts of consciousness and reality. Action and activities depend on our assessment of the situation in which they take place and of the means that are available. In either instance we experience reality as it presents itself in many and divergent modes of manifestation, but at the same time we cope with variable reactions to these experiences and whether and how they comply with each other as well as with the whole spectrum of experiences. At the point where this process turns into knowledge and understanding, we realise that, as knowledge and understanding can be more or less adequate, they are marked by the quality of true and untrue which in turn is the mark of propositions that finalise their status for the time being in terms of “yes” or “no” as opposed to synthetic modes of apprehension.

The idea of truth which appears in the quality of true and untrue propositions is one of the forces that impel the mind to improve and expand knowledge and understanding, and to rely on reason as it defines itself in forms of truth-relations. The meaning of truth consists thus in the efforts and transformations it initiates with regard to knowledge and understanding, even if the search for truth will never be completed. But the meaning of truth is not restricted to this feature which is, and has been, essential to the development of philosophical and scientific reasoning. Indeed, as the quality of true and untrue in the forms of judgments and propositions offers itself as focus of reflections, the idea of truth has already been operative in the various ways in which we realise our humanity.
The most obvious though not necessarily the most attractive example of the implicit truth-relation in the unfolding of being human is the way in which we use the idea of truth in order to mislead or deceive ourselves and others. But more important is the fact that the emergence of cultural reality is rooted in principles which find their expression in the constitution of this reality. Process and result prove their validity and truth in the viability of existing traditions as well as in the contrasts they generate through a partial realisation of their potential. And, since the constitution of cultural reality is inter-dependently related to personal becoming, the meaning of truth assumes different features. In an objective sense truth appears in the manner in which particular cultures agree with their own principles as they are expressed in the manifestations of their being, and with the implicit principles of the cultural potential to which they relate selectively under specific, and historically mediated, conditions. From the viewpoint of personal becoming, truth manifests itself in the manner in which persons and communities live in conformity with the principles of their culture, with its norms, values, and the whole range of manifestations which are included in the scope of cultural reality. But to the extent that the web of these relations depends on the awareness and the understanding of decisive principles, the meaning of truth consists also in the manner in which a particular tradition encourages sensitivity to these principles, and in which individuals and communities commit themselves to their recovery.

What connects the different meanings of truth is the idea of conformity and acknowledgment which stretches from the acceptance of, and attunement to, principles to ideational presentations and representations of reality in terms of adequacy, correspondence, and consistency, and with the focus of total identity as far as the conceptual reconstruction of reality and the unfolding of thought-relations are concerned. Moreover, since the distinction between the practical implications of truth-relations and their theoretical development is undeniable, it is not only important that we acknowledge this distinction, but also necessary that we treat these relations as they assume different meanings if we try to cope with them on the level of theoretical reasoning.

If we resume the question about myth at this point, and take the stories about divine beings as collections of propositional statements,
it becomes obvious that these statements do not comply with the standards of theoretical propositions, even if their syntactical form is not different, and though we do not have to exclude the possibility beforehand that they incorporate (what we consider to be) true facts as well as true knowledge and understanding. As these stories and statements are given and can be collected in monographs and handbooks, they are subject to reflection and analysis, but no alternative to scientific and scholarly studies. Whatever the truth-claims might be in forms of mythological narration, they need to be translated in theoretical terms before they can be judged as subject and theory demand.

However, if we assume as I have already indicated that myth is essential to the meaning of being human, then it becomes obvious that the question about myth is also, and a fortiori, a question which concerns the meaning of truth in the correlation between myth and the constitution of cultural reality. This second question does not invalidate the first one about mythological statements and their true meaning. On the contrary: in the anticipation of a possible convergence between the thematisation of the two questions, we could think of a criterion that is important to the validation of either one. But as we ask the second question, the main problem becomes an issue of truth-relations; that is to say, whether it is possible to relate to the truth of being human without myth and, if not, how we have to understand this relation and, in consequence, whether a distinction needs to be made between true and false myths.7

MYTH AND THE SPACE OF MEANING

If we look at the life-communal cultures of gatherers and hunters in which the narration of mythological stories is not entrusted to professional keepers of tradition,8 we observe in one and the same tradition considerable variations in names and events, but discover also enough recurrent similarities which justify the assumption that the same spirit and perception of reality find their expression in variable narratives. From an analytical point of view the evidence is sufficient to distinguish in these cultures their myth from their mythologies, and to take the latter as manifestations of the consciousness
that is formed and informed by the former. This observation might be symptomatic of cultures with a minimum of institutional differentiations. But when we consider the fact that all traditions have evolved from similar beginnings as far as the achievement of cultural existence is concerned, and that their apparent stability and order at a particular time and period in history is in reality a transient phenomenon, then I would say that these cultures (the life-communal cultures of gatherers and hunters) confirm and demonstrate in culturally compressed time what repeats and differentiates itself in the succession of times, with the multiplicity of cultures as exemplifications of this process within the horizon of culture history.

With the variable distinction between mythologies and their myths in mind, we have to think of myth on a level where mythological names and relations come into being and precede the narration of particular stories. Though the word myth covers the whole field of what we consider to be mythological expressions, its meaning is not identical with any them, but exceeds these expressions inasmuch as it concurs with the spirit out of which they originate and through which they are related to each other as members of the same family. Myth is strictly speaking no object in, but a quality and feature of, the semantic space in which they live as human beings, and which marks this space as a space of meaning in terms of ultimacy and totality. In its overall significance the meaning of myth confirms itself in the style or manner in which they realise their humanity. But more specifically, it makes itself known in the thoughts, deeds and attitudes as well as in the narratives in which they cope with their own finitude in conjunction with intimations of infinity. To stress this point, one could also say that it is not the narrative which makes a myth, but myth which attracts narration and finds its expression in narrative forms. Even if a particular story is rightly called a myth, this fact alone does not necessarily imply that stories exhaust the meaning of myths, or that stories are the only medium in which myths are formed and do exist as myth. The word is no doubt important, but even more important are the symbols which attract words and attitudes, and the manner in which they structure their stories as well as the life they demand and sustain.

Since there is no essential difference among human beings with regard to the ability to speak and to cope with basic needs and
experiences, we can take it for granted that the conditions under which people in life-communal cultures realise their humanity are in principle the same for all human beings. When we stress cultural particularities we recognise that one semantic space is not like another one, but experiences of inter-subjective encounters are a clear indication that the principles of being human and cultural are not different. What applies to “them”, applies therefore also to “us” as far as structural similarities in the realisation of humanity are concerned.

By taking the clue of the processes of symbolisation, we can indeed say that myth appears where symbolisation reaches its utmost limit, and relates to first and last questions – or as I have indicated before and would like to specify now: where myth provides the decisive symbols of orientation, and where in doing so it defines itself accordingly. However, if we point to the process of symbolisation and its end, it is not only the emergence of particular symbols which counts, but the configuration of symbols which needs to be considered as well. And, if we pay attention to ourselves and others and the impact of symbolic relations, it becomes obvious that this feature is no less important to the process of symbolisation than the symbols this process generates. In either instance we face thus the same problem from a different angle. The provision of symbols is not complete without their configuration, nor does it accomplish its goal if the configuration of symbols remains without effects on the integration of the elements which are essential to the constitution of cultural reality. Therefore we can say that myth consists in the configuration of the symbols it generates, both as it generates them, and as the configuration itself connects with thought, behaviour, and language in general and, since this is one of the possibilities of the same process, with the generation of mythological narratives in particular.9

Since the process of symbolisation comprises the whole space of meaning in which we live as human beings, myth is no feature which may, or may not, be added to the collection of possible features. On the contrary: as myth presents itself in the configuration of ultimate symbols, it appears with the same necessity by which the process of symbolisation relates to these symbols. In this sense, we can also say that myth begins where the world becomes evident, and that the name myth refers to all those instances in which we relate to basic features
A Struggle Between True and False Myths

and connect them with the most comprehensive dimension of being human as well as of reality. In focusing on the space of meaning, we discover that it is myth which structures human interests, which motivates, and imparts, notions of reality as well as of what it means to be human. But as we think of the space of meaning along these lines, we have to add that it is myth which bundles its various features and, by configuring them in the light of its symbols, turns them into the matrix that forms the basis of cultural existence both in the sense that it applies to all cultures and traditions and that it accounts for the idiosyncrasies of each culture and tradition in particular.\(^\text{10}\)

THE MEANING OF TRUTH IN MYTH AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

The understanding of myth as essential and necessary feature of being human and cultural places its meaning outside the realm of propositional truth, but not of truth in terms of human existence. As myth is a necessary factor in the formation of the semantic space in which we live as human beings, its truth concurs with the truth-potential of the semantic space which can be more or less developed. The meaning of truth does not exclude myth (as if mythologies and myths vacillated only between fiction and delusion) but includes it as a condition of the possibility of truth-relations and as indication of a more or less successful realisation of the semantic potential. In its proper meaning the truth in myth is not a matter of information which may be correct or not, but belongs to myth as adequate or inadequate matrix of orientation on the road to the completion of being human. The truth of myth consists in the function which it has in the formation of the semantic space and appears in the manner in which it optimises (or reduces) the semantic potential. What counts is the world it creates and shapes. The truth of myth correlates with the achievement, the sustenance, and the continuous enactment of humanity as well as with the stability it provides in combination with the promotion and stimulation of spontaneity and creativity. In its ability to restore the presence of timeless beginnings, the truth of myth reveals itself in the peace it brings about, but falsifies itself in the conflicts it endorses and justifies.
In contrast to the meaning of truth in myth as it concurs with the function of myth in and for the constitution of the semantic space, we have to distinguish the meaning of truth as it appears in the manifestations of myth and more specifically in what we could call the struggle between true and false myths. Before I turn to this last point, I have to say a few words about this distinction.

I mention the manifestations of myth inasmuch as they give us an idea of mythic symbols in the context of narratives and in modes of abbreviated and more or less untold stories, but also as they attract and incorporate knowledge and understanding as well as patterns of behaviour and various kinds of activities. It is a wide field of possible investigations which opens up when we take notice of the mythic dimension of the semantic space and the processes in which it reveals itself on the one hand, and by which it is modified and changed on the other hand. The meaning of mythic configurations affects in essence all aspects of human life and the truth that coincides with the difference between a more or a less adequate realisation of humanity under variable conditions. But inasmuch as myth attracts the word, the truth of myth becomes in principle subject to conscious articulations and object of reflective understanding. In focusing on the word as it occurs in myths and mythologies, we become thus free to cope consciously and by reflection, in practice and in theory, with the meaning of myth and the truth of being human and cultural as it originates and ends in mythic relations. This may sound easy, but the task itself is complicated and difficult. For as the word joins myth, the truth of the word is joined by that of myth and becomes thereby part of a synthesis that includes the truth of myth as well. As far as mythic language is concerned, words speak as they always do, but to the extent that the truth they convey concurs with the truth of myth, it is the synthesis of truth-relations which actually speaks in them, and which needs to be accounted for if we intend to take these words as they present themselves.

When I speak in this context of the struggle between true and false myths, I refer to the antagonistic opposition between particular myths which agree with the meaning of mythic relations inasmuch as they give credit to these relations in their specific forms, and myths which deny this meaning by forcing the whole of mythic relations into the shells of their particularity. Though myths and mythologies are
necessarily relative in their truth values because and to the extent that they are more, or less, adequate, it makes a considerable difference whether they support the open-ended movement toward complete truth, or reverse it by finalising its meaning in their own totalitarian claims. It is a difference which distinguishes myths rooted in infinity from myths that claim to encapsulate infinity, or as we could also say: it is a difference which occurs when mythic symbols assume and usurp the meaning of infinity in their own finitude instead of keeping this meaning intact as they are marked by infinity.

To give a few examples one could think of the myth of power and might as ultimate justification of right and wrong; or of progress, instrumental reason, and unlimited production as measure of all activities. Other examples are the already mentioned myth of the twentieth century with its symbols of honour, blood, and destiny; the myth of nationhood as the indisputable value of all values; or the theocratic myth as instrument of total repression and control. These myths are not necessarily false as long as they remain elements of the larger framework of mythical relations and are tamed and limited by the symbolic configuration of the semantic space. But they become false if and inasmuch as they draw the mythic dimension into their narrow forms and claim ultimacy for themselves and their meaning in this form. What they have in common is that they have turned into commodities which have lost their moorings in infinity and comprehension, but preserve the effects of infinity and comprehension in their specific forms and functions. Instead of symbolising ultimacy, they identify themselves with ultimate reality and what it means in terms of open-ended relations.

The transition from true to false myths is not restricted to the examples I have given. Since it is temptingly easier to deal with commodities rather than with open-ended relations, the tendency to commodify mythological accounts can be observed in all traditions, including those of philosophy and scholarship. If we think for instance of the manner in which the myth of the suffering god has been used in the justification of religious wars, or in the trials of the inquisition, we could speak either of a temporary phenomenon in which a true myth prevails because, in the long run, it opposed successfully its transformation into a commodity, or of developments which drained the meaning of this myth because it had already been
replaced by another one like that of total control and fulsome domestication. In paying attention to the processes by which myths turn into commodities, we observe ongoing movements in the background (of which we can say that they result in the formation of more or less adequate myths even though we have no mastery over them) and a continuous clash over false myths in the foreground for which we are responsible as human beings, but of which we have to say that it is necessary to use and rely on reason as well as on true myths if we intend to reject false ones. Since false myths present themselves as commodities, it is possible to recognise them by the imbalances they produce and the alienations they cause, and to contrast them with notions of balance, integrity, and integrality as practical equivalents of truth in the completion of the semantic space. But whether it is possible to fight them depends on the availability of true myths because the tensions and turbulences they bring about are in essence disturbances in the semantic space: which gains its order as this order is shaped by myth, and is confirmed in its truth as order and truth are recovered by the manifestations of myth. In the struggle between true and false myths, we have to rely on the discriminatory power of reason. But because reason alone is not sufficient to oppose totalitarian demands unless it connects with true myths, we remain dependent on true myths as they have been, and still are, provided by culture history if we are to avoid and to overcome the effects of false myths. It is in this sense that I speak of the struggle between true and false myths.

CONCLUSION

As myth outlines the semantic space in the configuration of ultimate symbols it creates and opens a world of meaningful relations in which we live as human beings and for which we are responsible: first, in the sense that we are engaged in the formation of this world, and second, that we are able as well as necessitated to cope with the effects and fragmentations of this event. The process of mythic world formation is in itself an open-ended affair which has its roots in the dimension of ultimacy and totality, and which concerns the meaning
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as well as the picture of reality. However, to the extent that this process is essential to the constitution and confirmation of being human and cultural, its completion mirrors itself in the achievements it produces in terms of wholeness and integrity; that is to say, as wholeness and integrity mark the human person, and appear in the order of communal as well as of cultural and intercultural relations, and not as they are defined by totalitarian commodities.

The correlation between the completion of the semantic space by myth and its equivalent manifestation in the wholeness and integrity of personal beings and the order of communal and cultural reality is important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it accounts for the moral nature of human beings because and inasmuch as the meaning of humanity is mediated and measured by its effectuation. On the other hand, by giving the idea of wholeness and integrity as focus of orientation, it points to reason as the principle which makes it possible to cope and work with this idea in a reflective way. In the first instance, we could also say that the cosmos which comes into being in the process of mythic world formation is above all a moral cosmos before it turns into an image of reality and splits into a series of different and divergent images and frameworks. As a constituent of human nature in a cultural sense, myth is a feature which needs to be acknowledged in the achievement of humanity as well as in the rejection of inhumanity because myths are essential to the success and failure of either one. In the second instance, I would like to repeat once more what has already been indicated: namely, that the truth of myth appears in the quality of its contributions to the semantic space; that myths become true or false in the claims they make and the effects they produce; and that the truth of myths correlates with the use of reason they support or block off in the configuration of evidences, motivations, and objectives.

By focusing on reason we leave the realm of spontaneous and, in principle, not directly controllable processes of mythic world formation, and face the twofold problem of striving for a more adequate myth as well as of recovering the meaning of myth in the fight against false myths and the imbalances and alienations they cause in personal and cultural relations. This problem is in essence a moral problem and concerns, as I have indicated, the struggle between true and false myths. But as we need reason in order to make use of the
idea of wholeness and integrity, and to assess the effects of alienation and the many imbalances which accompany the transition from true to false myths, we are not only confronted with practical reason as it appears in forms of common sense and in the application of the golden rule, but we might also wonder whether and to what extent it is possible to reconstruct mythical processes on a theoretical level, and to use the insights of these efforts in a practical sense. Since contrasts between cultures and traditions are the foremost source of information about mythological processes, this question highlights the inestimable importance of culture history to the moral task of humanity. But it confronts us also with the myth of (instrumental) reason as one of the powers which have caused, and still cause, considerable harm by the distortions of myths and mythologies and its blindness regarding its own mythical origins. Since the meaning of myth changes with the modalities in which myth ties reason to the dynamics of its origination, and in which reason distinguishes itself from myth, the analysis of mythological processes cannot, and must not, content itself with the mere opposition between a subject and its object. This opposition is a necessary requirement. But the problem itself is more comprehensive, especially if we consider the fact that subject and object are players in one and the same truth game. To point to some facets of this game has been the intention and purpose of this paper.

‘O ‘anax, o@u t‘o mante Error!‘ on esti t‘o en Delfo Error! s, o’ute l’egei o’ute kr’uptei all’a shma’inei.

The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither speaks out nor conceals, but gives a sign.

Heraclitus fr. 93 (Kirk and Raven 1962: 211 no. 247)

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Notes
1 With the reference to “the myth of the twentieth century” I allude to A. Rosenberg’s book *Der Mythus des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the Twentieth Century), 1930, in which he developed a “theoretical” framework of the Nazi movement and the doctrine of the “master race”. By 1942 more than a million copies of the book had been sold. (See the website of Simon Wiesenthal: http://motlc.wiesenthal.com – The Museum of Tolerance). It is interesting to note that Hitler refused to give the book a “parteipäpstlichen Charakter” (a party-papal character) – not because he disagreed with its racial tenets, but because he was convinced (as expressed in a table talk of November 1942) that the “national socialist should oppose the myth of the 19th century by the faith and the knowledge of the 20th century”. The quotation can be found in Frank 1988: 108. See also Heine 1966: 201ff.

2 See, for instance, Hübner 1985.

3 In the journal *Change* I read that “we can identify at least five myths about undergraduate education in America”. See Terenzini and Pascarella 1994, and http://aappc.aapc.aap.vt.edu/QIA/QIAJan95 where three more myths have been added. The article lists the results of a research project which took place between 1985 and 1990 and concludes as follows: “John F. Kennedy stated that ‘the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic’ (Schlesinger 1965). It is time we put to use what we know with some confidence about what constitutes effective teaching and learning and put to rest educational myths that have outlived their usefulness.” (p. 32).

4 See *Gorgias* 522e where Socrates remarks: “Hear, then, a very beautiful *logos* which you, I suppose, will think of as a *mythos*, whereas I think of it as a *logos*. For it is on the assumption that they are true that I shall say the things I am going to say.”


6 See Niebuhr 1968: 15. The section to which I refer was written in 1937.

7 See, for instance, Munson 1985, Hatab 1992, Bolle 1993, and Cassirer 1968 (originally published in 1925), 1944 and 1946. The sequence of these publications underlines the growing importance of truth-relations in Cassirer’s thinking about myth.
With the term “life-communal culture” I would like to emphasise the concurrence between culture and (Max Scheler’s idea of) life-communal reality as it can (could) be observed in small-scale communities (like those of African “Pygmies” and “Bushmen” and other pre-tribal groups in various retreats) where the difference between the community and its culture tends to disappear, and where this feature might be taken as a criterion of the elementary significance of these cultures. See Dupré 1975 and Frings 2001.

The configuration of symbols follows the logic of ritual deeds both in the sense that ritual action initiates the process of symbolisation, and that its form is indispensable to the completion of this process – because there is no other way to relate to the ultimate, and to answer first and last questions. In its development, the configuration circles around the confirmation of oppositions, and moves toward the dissolution and the “coincidence of opposites” (Nicholas of Cusa) as the last element in the famous formula of Lévi-Strauss indicates: $f(x) : f(y) \approx f(a) : f(b) = a - 1(Y)$. See Lévi-Strauss 1967: 225: “Here, with two terms, a and b, being given as well as two functions, x and y, of these terms, it is assumed that a relation of equivalence exists between two situations, defined respectively by an inversion of terms and relations, under two conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by its opposite (in the above formula, a and a-1); (2) that an inversion be made between the function value and the term value of two elements (above, y and a).” In terms of the Oedipus-myth one could say: the murderous activities (x) of the Sphinx (a) relate to the liberating deeds (y) of Oedipus (b) as the murderous acts (x) of Oedipus (b) relate to definitive Liberation (Y) through the death of the Sphinx (a-1).

The idea of the space of meaning is a limit concept which formalises the completion of symbolisation as implication of mythic movements. However, as we think of this idea, we relate to it as an occurrence within the semantic space. Therefore, it is necessary to qualify this idea as a limit of which we can think by using this idea, but not as we relate to it in an intentional sense. Since the awareness of infinity is essential to the formation of consciousness, the idea of the semantic space is like the light in which we speak, think, and act before, and after, we have formulated our thoughts, and make sense of actions and attitudes. Because they are nested in the dimension of ultimacy, mythic symbols are capable of configuring the meaning of the semantic space, but the meaning they convey in the form of this configuration is that of symbols.
which, though they cover and hide infinity, present and represent it in
the perception and assessment of reality.

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From Cannibals to Kant: Our Moral Cosmos

ANDREW OLDENQUIST

Is there a single moral system that includes rational or sentient beings everywhere, perhaps with sub-systems of morality embedded in it like genus and species? Does it include ants, plants, everything? Plants and insects can be objects of moral concern, like the trees we hug and gnats to the Jains, but at least we know trees and gnats cannot be moral agents. Can we base membership in our moral cosmos on DNA? We share 95 percent with chimpanzees, more than 90 percent with mice, less with jellyfish. But then we will share none with the brilliant, artistic Betelgeusans, when they visit earth.

Why is there morality at all and where does it come from? What counts as having a morality? Is it feeling obligations, having values, both of these? Does the dog value food, the tree sunlight? In the world of human feelings and sociality, everything shades off into what it is not. We can draw a sharp line, but as Ludwig Wittgenstein said (…………), the line isn’t there until you draw it. I first want to discuss evolutionary grounds for there being morality at all, and then the question of a single moral order. This moral order, we shall see, divides into sometimes conflicting but mutually necessary realms, the realm of loyalties, which at times I call tribal morality and group egoism, and the realm of impartial principles and ideals. My aim is to sketch part of a philosophical anthropology, that is, a naturalistic account of how morality came about and its main features.

By what steps, historically, did our moral cosmos emerge? If we go back far enough we have ancestors without morality. I mean here generically pre-moral, not immoral or egoistic: their hypothesised attitudes do not satisfy criteria for being moral beliefs, quite apart from whether or not we think them acceptable moral beliefs. Pre-scientific moral creation myths tell us the gods or God taught us right from wrong by whispering to religious founders or by implanting a conscience in each of us. But from a scientific and historical perspective, religious founders such as Moses, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus, and Mohammed did not invent morality but sought
to tell us true morality. What we seek occurred much earlier.

Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau offer non-supernatural but still mythic accounts of the origin of society; it is debated whether or not they proposed actual history. According to Hobbes humans originally were solitary wandering beasts, like leopards. One day they came together under an oak tree and agreed that life in the state of nature was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. So they decided to become social beings and appointed a sovereign to enforce moral rules. John Locke, unlike Hobbes, says there are “laws of nature” in the State of Nature, under which we are social and naturally bound to preserve peace and not hurt one another. But since not everyone followed the laws of nature, our ancestors invented society by adopting a social contract, a compact between equally free persons (in contrast to Hobbes’ contract between the people and a sovereign) to enforce the laws of nature and protect themselves not only from each other but also from tyrannical rulers. Locke may come closest to implying the historicity of the State of Nature. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau tells us that pre-social humans were solitary creatures who rarely saw one another, yet were endowed with natural compassion toward their fellows. They then formed family-based primitive societies, of which Rousseau approved, and were not yet corrupt and unfree as in modern society.

These myths, which unfortunately are the *faux* historical foundation of the whole social contract tradition – a tradition that finds its twentieth century flowering in the work of John Rawls – today are no more plausible than physical creation myths, for example that the world was extruded by an ur-spider or rests upon a turtle. What is important about these social contract myths is not their historical falsehood but the idea of human nature they imply. For each of these philosophers, our true nature is revealed in their description of the State of Nature. Society and sociality as we know them now are therefore conventions, varied and arbitrary in form and easily lost, and requiring a political organisation appropriate to their view of our basic nature.

**Humans as Evolved Social Animals**
The consensus of human ethologists is that humans neither decided to be social nor were commanded to be social, but evolved, in the full Darwinian sense, to be social animals, and human sociality requires, among other things, collectively reinforced restraints on disruptive sexual, aggressive, hostile, revengeful, and acquisitive behaviour. The ethologists hypothesise the biological evolution of the emotional equipment – certain wants, fears and anxieties – required for social living, and which then are culturally reinforced. Small clans, consisting of a number of extended families and whose members cooperated in hunting, gathering, defense, and child rearing, could not exist without a combination of innate and cultural restraints on individual behaviour, restraints Hobbes believed could be enforced only by a sovereign.

Numerous aspects of human nature reveal innate sociality, including the prolongation of infancy, the psychological and physiological complex that produces continuous sexual receptiveness, and the felt need to belong to groups. Language – full-fledged language, not just signaling, and including the brain’s speech centre, the voice box, and infant babbling – presupposes a continuing, interacting society of other people to talk to.

Our ancient, pre-moral ancestors had aversions, needs and fears, and then later they had morality. Therefore there was a describable change: we had ancestors that lacked a morality, they had descendants who did have a morality, and so the question is, what happened in between, what accounted for the change? The answer in a nutshell is that we became social animals.

In early society some behaviour was made taboo, the taboos drilled into children and reinforced in rituals and by fear of rejection or banishment. But why should that be morality – perhaps morals requires language and they could do those things before they had language? Let me offer a tentative list of conditions which, when satisfied, make what goes on in a clan a morality. My proposal is that a negative attitude toward something is a moral belief or judgment, not just a dislike, when enough of the following are present:

1. One can communicate it by language.
2. Special words – moral words – come to be used to brand the object of the attitude.
3 Condemnation is often ritualised, thereby indicating that the community and not just an individual is speaking.
4 It is supported by reasons that have a general appeal within the community.
5 It can demand action contrary to self-interest and still tend to motivate.
6 People are willing to universalise the attitude within one’s group, that is, see that if it is bad for one person to do, it is for anybody in the same circumstances, and to see the relevance of the question, “What if everybody did that?”.

Hominids could not have speech before they were social and, if morality requires speech, they could not have morality before they were social. But late hominids could be thoroughly social and strongly conformist before they had speech and therefore before they had morality. The neurological and other requisites of speech took considerable time to evolve, as would loss of estrus and the evolution of sexual-romantic love as a device to keep parents together when children were young and easy prey for predators. Then, as conceptualisation, language, and third party involvement in conflicts developed, aversions began to satisfy the criteria for being moral beliefs.

Contemporary traditional societies are group subservient, intolerant of deviation from established ways, and it seems certain that prehistoric societies were this way too. Individualism and social experimentation began to be tolerated only with increased physical and economic security. The outward extension of who counts as an outsider and hence can be killed at will, the decrease in casual cruelty, and the rejection of slavery occurred only yesterday on the human time-scale. If you had lived 10,000 years ago and precociously favoured individualism, the equality of women, and the moral equality of outsiders, you would have had a hard time of it.

The effectiveness of early traditional morality, and also modern day morality to only a slightly lesser degree, depends on the capacity of group members to feel pride or shame in response to the collective praise or criticism of one’s group. This doesn’t work if one is alienated from the group. Alienation kills pride and shame, on which traditional social control depends. There are three main theories of alienation. The Marxist theory (see Marx in Tucker, ed., 1978: 70-81)
defines alienation as intrinsic to being a wage earner under capitalism; of course, we do not find Marxist alienation in societies without wage-labour. The social-psychological theory derives prominently from the work of Melvin Seeman (1959) and defines alienation in terms of feelings of powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. The communitarian theory, whose preeminent exponent is Emile Durkheim (1951 [1897]: 311, 373-4, 389), says alienation is loss of sense of social identity or Gemeinschaft.

Alienation, pride and shame are borderline normative notions. In the communitarian sense, alienated people do not feel their group – family, tribe, country – is theirs, do not feel they are part of it. Shame depends on having a social identity, on a sense of belonging and fear of collective criticism or ostracism, it is hiding one’s face from disapproving fellows, and hence is a proto-moral motivator. I can be neither proud nor ashamed of something that is not in some sense mine: I cannot be proud or ashamed of an iceberg, unless someone sold it to me. Ritualised shaming (in the absence of alienation) is not only a crucial social constraint but is also a clear sign to the shamed persons that they belong, that they are full fledged members of the clan. No one tries to shame foreign invaders because they are not of us. Today we are ashamed to teach children shame, and thereby often create monsters.

Before they had language, our ancestors “knew” courage, shame, and alienation as surely as they “knew” love, compassion, jealousy, and signs of acceptance and rejection. These sentiments are stages in the evolution of a morality. What seems plausible is that pre-moral social control and cooperation gradually develop into morality along with the development of language, with no bright line to mark the boundary. A clan could ostracise non-conformists and have taboos without having language. Is this morality? Do they have moral beliefs? My suggestion, following the set of conditions I listed, and which we might call the marks of the moral, is, no, not yet.

Morality may require language, but does it require moral words, and what are moral words? Today some people will not use moral language but instead use profanity or psychological jargon; I think it does not really matter. They think moral words are worn out, or associate them with a conventional morality they reject, or they think
morality is an illusion. But if everything else is the same they still have moral beliefs. It is tempting to say that if I don’t think I believe M, I don’t believe M. This may be true of simple beliefs like “the rat is on the mat”, but not of moral beliefs if having one is implied by having certain attitudes, a readiness to offer reasons of a certain kind, and a willingness to make certain logical moves. Having a moral belief is like having an ulcer: it is a fact about oneself, although with vague boundaries, and one can be mistaken about whether that fact obtains. Hence people who will not call actions wrong or people immoral but under the same conditions call them “dysfunctional” or “bastards” have moral beliefs even when they deny it.

There is no uniquely moral idea, moral object, cognition, or perception—no moral essence, no Form of the Good, no moral homunculus, as it were, hidden in the center of the complex that is an action, its circumstances, and its apprehension. Neither goodness, rightness, evil, nor morality itself exist as things or qualities in addition to the physical objects, actions, feelings, and utterances that comprise morality. Morality is like an engine that consists wholly of a thousand parts, no one of which is even remotely like an engine or properly called an engine. Hence morality is as real as engines; there is nothing intrinsically mysterious or “non-natural” about it. Circumstances, features, behaviour, feelings, rituals, utterances, and inhibitions approach certain configurations, and then we just conclude that the tribe (real or hypothesised) has a moral code.

IS MORALITY TRIBAL?

Is all morality tribal? Consider the Nagas of North Eastern India, discussed by Christoff von Führer Haimendorf in *Morals and Merit*. They were – possibly still are when nobody is looking – headhunters. Within Naga society there is a complex social morality of rules, punishments, excuses and distinctions, but it applies fully only within one’s village, in which headhunting was unthinkable, and becomes attenuated (from one’s village point of view) even in the rest of Naga society. It is a matter of insiders and outsiders, with a moral order or cosmos among the insiders that includes fairness, the most fundamental element of social morality. Fairness says that if I have a right
to do something, so may any fellow villager in similar circumstances. So the first thing we must ask, when someone says, “what if everyone did that,” is every what? Every human, every fellow Naga?

Aristotle says the good for man is happiness, but was everyone equally man? There were, in effect, degrees of it, such as being woman and being foreigners like the Germans and others to the north who were natural Untermenschen and hence natural slaves. Right away a distinction beacons: is Aristotle just ignorant and would not think foreigners natural slaves if he knew them better? Very likely. Did Nagas have false ideas about their head supply? No doubt; however, not all insider/outsider bias arises from ignorance, which we shall see when we consider loyalties.

Consider a broader moral cosmos, John Stuart Mill’s principle of utility (1863: chs 1-2), which says the greatest good is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The greatest number of what? Human beings, he says. Mill, and Jeremy Bentham earlier (1789: chs 1-4), said that happiness, measured by pleasure, is good and pain is bad. Mill might wish the hunted fox’s pain to go away, but fox pain does not begin to count as much as human pain. So it is not just a quality such as pain that generates moral obligations, it is pain found in fellow human beings, or for the Nagas, fellow Nagas.

Now so far it seems as though all reasoning about morality – what fairness requires, grounds for exceptions to rules, and so on, hold only within a domain that defines insiders–fellow so-and-so’s; and that the boundary between insiders and outsiders is based on nothing rational. It is simply the idea of one’s own kind stipulated in one out of a very large number of possible ways. Mill’s moral cosmos is larger than that of the Nagas, but seems equally tribal.

Immanuel Kant (1785: second section) appears to rise above this into a realm of pure objectivity. Kant is the Isaac Newton of ethics. His theory is the only one that even comes close to demonstrating a rational, universal moral order, binding on every being capable of being part of a moral cosmos, which to Kant means every rational being. His Categorical Imperative says you can morally accept your doing something only if you are willing to accept a universal law allowing everyone to do the same thing. It aims to explain the logical basis behind the Golden Rule and the Silver Rule, the negative
version of the Golden Rule that says, “Don’t do to others what you
don’t want done to yourself.”

The idea behind the Golden Rule, Silver Rule, Categorical
Imperative, and the theories of twentieth-century neo-Kantians, such
as the British philosopher Richard Hare (1963) and John Rawls
(1971), can be expressed in two simple steps.

First, a rational being must judge similar cases similarly, that is, if
I judge one action right and another wrong, it must be because of
some difference, and if I cannot find a difference I think makes the
moral difference I cannot evaluate them differently. For example, if I
may make false promises for personal gain, so may you, other things
being equal; indeed, everyone is morally permitted to do it, which is
what Kant means by a universal law.

Second, I must be willing that everyone be permitted to do what I
permit myself to do, that is, I must accept a universal permission.
Since my permission to do something logically implies everyone’s
permission to do the same thing, if I allow myself to do something I
want but I am not willing that everyone be permitted to do it, I am in
what Kant calls a “practical contradiction”. And that is the mark of an
incorrect moral permission. My own rational nature requires me to
will what I want (my being morally allowed to make the false
promise for personal gain) and what I do not want (the universal
permission) at the same time. I want an exception for myself,
regarding what I do not want everyone allowed to do, and where I can
produce no good reason for the exception.

It all hangs on the requirement to universalise self interest, of
which reciprocity is a variant. It is irrational to say I but not you
deserve something nice when our situations are identical: saying “it
benefits me” refers to no difference in our situations because saying
“I am me” really says nothing.

John Rawls idea of justice is an interesting variant. He asks you to
choose, out of self interest, principles of justice for the world when
you imagine yourself to be a disembodied spirit floating in hyper-
space who does not know how you will be born – whether rich or
poor, black or white, smart or dumb, healthy or sickly, in Scotland or
in Afghanistan. Choosing principles by which you want the world
guided when you do not know what your needs and abilities will be
requires you, from prudence, to pick principles that protect you in the
worst scenarios. Kant disallows a privileged position for yourself when you cannot accept everyone being allowed the same thing. Rawls disallows a privileged position if you cannot accept it when you do not know whether or not you will be born able to be in it. The Silver Rule and Richard Hare both ask, in effect, whether you can accept what you propose to do if you were in the other person’s shoes.

Kant and the Nagas, they are so different, and so alike. Kant’s moral domain is rational beings, which he calls a kingdom of ends because he believes rational beings are ends-in-themselves, that is, cannot be used as a mere means to some other end or purpose. Is “my fellow rational beings” a tribal concept like “my fellow Nagas” or “my fellow humans”? Yes and no. Each delimits a moral cosmos, a boundary dividing insiders from outsiders and within which there are common rules. Kant’s tribe, rational beings, is bigger, it is based on a more abstract quality – being rational instead of being human or being Naga –, and it must welcome qualifying strangers, such as the Betelgeusans when they get around to visiting our planet. Yet, rationality is just one out of numerous traits that characterise people.

WHAT PREVENTS SOCIAL AGREEMENT?

Is moral disagreement in principle always surmountable? What prevents moral agreement? Suppose we agree about the facts, logic, likely consequences, and we have similar backgrounds. Much moral disagreement would vanish. A detailed working out of this idea is called an ideal observer theory: what is objectively right is whatever a rational, fully informed, empathetic and disinterested observer would think is right. Sometimes we achieve hypothetical agreement when we hypothesise being in the other person’s setting: “If I were spherical and lived in alcohol like the Betelgeusans, I would agree that ...”.

Still, I submit there are three sources of intractable moral disagreement:
1 Inviolable ideals and principles
2 Different loyalties
3 Different comparative judgments.
Ethical relativism, the theory that morality is relative to opinion, is not a fourth item. It is a bad theory about moral truth conditions: there is no useful and intelligible sense in which something is actually right for my society (or my nation, or my whatever) just because most people in the group think it is. Neither is it intelligible that something is actually right, *for me*, just because I think it is right.

We may have different ideals and principles about the good life or the good society. Radical individualists and socialists weigh the very same facts differently. By definition, an inviolable principle is one I never let other considerations count against, and the first thing such a principle usually does is kill somebody because it does not allow compassion or anything else to override it. We call people with inviolable principles we do not share “fanatics”. For example, some people put fairness ahead of everything; if they were in charge of the lifeboats on the Titanic, they would let no one in if there was not space for everyone. If a Nazi believes he should send Jews and Roma to death camps, can he will that one should do that in the hypothetical situation in which he and his daughter are discovered to qualify? He says, “Yes.” He is a fanatic and morality has nothing effective to say to him; true fanatics can only be dealt with by force, not reason.

Loyalties are no more and no less susceptible to fanaticism than are principles. Loyalties are profoundly anti-Kantian, indeed, inconsistent with the very idea of a principle: I value A more than B, though they may be exactly alike, because A is *mine* – it is *my* family, *my* tribe, *my* country, *my* species. The limiting case is egoism, *my* self. Just as egoism puts me ahead of others without showing I am in any way better, loyalty, which I shall also call group egoism, puts my family, city and country ahead of others because they are mine, not because they are better. If a loyalist never admits counter considerations, we have a fanatic loyalty, for example, “my country right or wrong”, and again disagreement about what to do will be intractable. Egoism, when combined with absolute power that obviates the need to compromise, is well illustrated by the early third-century emperor Heliogabalus, who, when he dined *al fresco*, would have slaves slaughtered because he thought red blood on green grass was beautiful. Except for Ayn Rand and, more problematically, Aristotle and Nietzsche, few philosophers call egoism a kind of morality. But most of us do consider loyalties part of morality. They
generate obligations; good parents and patriots, for example Nathan Hale, are praised, neglectful parents and traitors condemned. Egoism only seeks one’s own good, but group egoism seeks the good of what is ours, and therefore is social. Heliogabalus’ moral cosmos did not extend beyond himself, he was a tribe of one.

Sometimes we agree about the facts and logic, and agree that smoking marijuana is wrong, but one person thinks it worse than the other does, warranting criminalisation. Clashing comparative judgments can come from different past experiences, from different ideals of the good life, from heaven knows what. The resulting moral disagreement can be intractable. We may agree that executing the innocent is terrible, Bill Clinton’s sexual antics wrong, someone’s taking the money bad, but disagree violently, and with no basis for resolution, about how terrible, wrong, or bad it is.

**The Necessity of Both Moral Principles and Loyalties**

My thesis is that both moral principles and loyalties are essential to our moral cosmos, and must somehow be fitted together without reducing the one to the other. To ancient tribes, as well as to Nagas and other traditional societies today, the moral cosmos ends with the foreigner. Today, species loyalty defines the container within which most people acknowledge the sway of fairness, justice, and the requisites of a good life. The “tribal” boundary of this humanitarian morality is invisible to most people because they recognise nothing it clashes with, although the animal rights people are busily trying to correct this. But in the realm of politics visibly tribal national loyalties remain, defining a nationalism or patriotism that is ethnic or geographic. And, of course, most people have numerous local loyalties.

One difference between Kant and John Stuart Mill or the Nagas is that the moral cosmoi of the latter two are coextensive with one’s kind as an observed species or linguistic group, whereas Kant’s appears to be more objective because it is based on a quality, rationality. Yet, a morality grounded on species or geographic loyalty can be humane in a way Kantianism cannot. Fellow Naga villagers all count morally. But a moral domain based on the possession of
rationality can be heartless toward those who imperfectly possess this quality, such as retarded persons and various kinds of animals.

Loyalties can be nested and overlapping without necessarily clashing. One can simultaneously be a loyal Scot, Briton, European, featherless biped, and rational being. A classical Athenian was an Athenian first and a Greek second. A contemporary one likely is a Greek first, a European second, and an Athenian third.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1991) sees the great pull of both impartial principles and loyalties, but in trying to unite them he offers us the spectacular oxymoron of Verfassungs-patriotismus, constitutional patriotism, according to which true patriotism is appreciation of the principles of a constitution. But, of course, appreciating constitutional principles, whether in your own constitution or in Peru’s constitution, has nothing to do with patriotism. Principles are not glued to a particular country or its constitution, they float free and can override the particularistic, geographically or ethnically anchored obligations based on patriotism. A morality of principles alone says you are never obliged to serve your country, city, or protect your family because they are yours; you are obliged to do so only if some impartial principle tells you to. But what if it doesn’t? Perhaps Peru better earns Habermas’ constitutional patriotism because it has the better constitution. What we require is a role for both loyalties and impartial principles, not the reduction of one to the other in the way that Habermas attempts.

CONCLUSION

One actually can make a persuasive case for some moral principles and virtues, given some shared assumptions about the value of the ends they serve and some facts about our social nature. Consider first the easy, Aristotelean proof that courage is a virtue. Without courage one will be fearful and intimidated by everything – by officials, new opportunities, an attractive person one wants to meet, difficult tasks, overbearing people, various dangers. To the extent people lack courage they tend to quit, decline, back away, and if they completely lack it have almost no chance to get the things they want and be happy. The minimal requirements for cooperative social living are
demonstrable in much the same way, by appeal to consequences and to very basic shared assumptions. Without socialising the young to be honest, fair, and keep unwanted hands off other people’s bodies and property, a society will have no chance to flourish or protect its members.

Charles Darwin made sophisticated remarks about the origins of morality in *The Descent of Man* (1871: chs 4 and 5). He says that any animal with social instincts would inevitably acquire a moral sense as soon as its intellectual powers become like those of humans, and that natural selection would favour the sympathy and group regard necessary for society.

Fairness and individual rights may seem far removed from evolved needs and fears, yet there seems to be a connection. What I have in mind is this. If humans evolved strong felt needs to belong to groups, because those without these needs were more likely to wander away and perish, our great outrage at unequal treatment and the denial of rights that we see our fellows possess is understandable as terror at being treated like an outsider, like someone who no longer belongs to the community. My suggestion, then, is that outrage at injustice and unfairness derives from fear of clan rejection and banishment.

Konrad Lorenz’s student Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, among others, argues that the sexual bond developed for the care of young children (1972: esp. 155-6). Parents bond to a particular, *their* baby, because doing so tends their DNA, and not to any equally good baby in the clan, and they fear baby swapping. This is perhaps the very earliest form of group egoism. The object of love is a particular, not a kind of thing, which makes obligations based on love and loyalties irreducibly different from obligations based on the repeatable features of things. Every culture has moral codes, taboos, and rituals that control or reinforce species wide tendencies regarding philandering, jealousy, parental love, incest aversion, and child rearing. Basic to all this are two fundamental evolutionary products, sexual romantic love and parental love.

Wider loyalties look down on narrower ones as tribal and atavistic. Thus a city says, don’t just think of your neighborhood, the country says, don’t just think of your city, utilitarians say, don’t just think of your country, and the philosopher Peter Singer says, don’t just think
of your species (1981: esp. 77-8). But as moral domains become broader their moral hold becomes attenuated and weaker, probably because our social evolution was in smallish clans. Utilitarians argue that the wider moral cosmos has greater moral authority than the narrower because more beings are involved, but, of course, appealing to mere numerousness will not by itself persuade anyone: vertebrates, sentient beings and living beings are progressively more numerous, but not more valuable for that reason. The utilitarians’ principle of “the greatest good for the greatest number” clashes with the judgment of nearly everyone who is asked who they ought to save first, their own drowning child or two drowning strangers. The Kantian conception of a moral cosmos based on rational nature can clash with deeply held judgments, as when, for example, we ask ourselves whether firefighters’ first priority is to save a retarded child or the very intelligent family dog from a burning house.

What makes morality so complicated is that group loyalties and the moral domains they define are of unpredictably differing relative importance. Moral principles within these domains clash with each other and with various loyalties. Loyalty-based obligations clash with one another and with moral principles from a wider domain. An adequate philosophical anthropology must try to make sense of all this.

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Notes


2 Rawls 1971: chs 3, 4, 11. See particularly Rawls description of “the original position”, which is his purely hypothetical version of the State of Nature.

3 See, for example, Hamilton’s seminal paper on kin selection altruism (1964), Trivers 1971, Oldenquist 1986 (esp. chs 11 and 12) and 1990, and Wilson 1975.
von Führer Haimendorf 1967: chs 1-5, but see the rest of this fascinating book on the moral characteristics and similarities of very disparate tribes.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (ed. ……..) Book I, chs 1-4 and 7-8 on happiness as the good or end for man; Book II, chs 6-8 on courage and other moral virtues.

A good explanation of the ideal observer theory is Firth 1952. Of course, God perfectly satisfies the conditions for being an ideal observer, but does not satisfy the condition that we can emulate, reasonably closely, the method of the ideal observer. An assumption, of course, is that two ideal observers would not end up quarreling about right and wrong.

For an examination of loyalties and their relation to morality, see Oldenquist 1982.

*Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle says that courage, like the other moral virtues, is a mean between two extremes, cowardice, which is the deficiency, and foolhardiness, which is the excess; the mean is the virtue and both of the extremes are vices. Acting in accordance with the mean is acquired by training and habituation, discerning the mean is accomplished by what he calls practical reason.

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Comparative Anthropology of Wisdom: Buddhism – Paganism – Christianity

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In *L’Occident et la religion* (1998) we showed how the influence of Christian theology was the determining factor in forming and developing the history of religions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This decisive influence helped to mask several archaic schools of thought which drew their inspiration from a much more ancient cultural source. Among these, we can certainly include the various “recipes for wisdom”.

Our comparison will examine the primitive techniques of the body, Buddhist wisdom, the disciplines of yoga, Stoic moral philosophy and the spiritual exercises of antiquity (these last two categories having inspired more than one spiritual adviser in modern times). Profound similarities can be found in these “techniques”: they all aim to achieve a range of beneficial effects (appeasement, peace of mind, serenity, detachment and lucidity) that work towards purifying the consciousness, mastering the emotions, holding insatiable appetites in check and calming mental agitation (aroused by desires, fantasies and the imagination), all of which constitute the sum of life’s mental processes. Acquiring these gains is always dependent upon the application of a harsh agenda consisting of a very strict lifestyle aimed at controlling the flesh (frugal diet, various forms of austerity and even asceticism), coupled with a code of ethics whose main characteristic is detachment, with endurance exercises, and with practices to bring discipline to the thought processes (constant attention, heightened vigilance, frequent examination of conscience, recollection and meditation).

Today, when looking again at Marcel Mauss’s short essay on the techniques of the body (Mauss 1936, rep. 1989), the reader is inevitably struck by his rather naïve observations taken from the most ordinary aspects of everyday life. His comments are full of common sense and his conclusions have become, with time, obvious facts of life. These conclusions, which have been taken up and developed on
numerous occasions since he wrote them, can be summarised in a few words: on completion of a more or less rigorous process of education, our body ends up being a product of a different order than that of nature. Every culture (and, sometimes, every restricted group of individuals within a given society) shapes the human body in its own way. The body is understood to mean the way we act and move, the uses to which we put it, the skills and dexterity we patiently inculcate in it, the care and attention we lavish on it and the pleasure this gives us, the disciplines we impose upon it, and the efforts and suffering we teach it to put up with.

All this explains why Mauss, in a spirit of discovery, accumulates observation and comment. People of certain cultures walk and swim one way, others another way. Women of different cultures give birth in different ways. Young children learn a particular skill in one society, a different skill in another, and so on.

This essay brought the discovery that the body, previously seen as the quintessence of nature and its appetites, was in fact disciplined and shaped by cultural moulds. Mauss showed culture seizing bodies and penetrating them. In a word, thanks to Mauss, the status of the body changed. It became a cultural agency. It developed, moved, acted and reproduced according to the tried and tested formulae and the restrictive rules imposed upon it by each particular tradition. It was inhabited and fashioned by the ideals and values of specific human groups. The creation of this bodily habitus or exis had now to be imputed to education, “where ordinarily one sees only the soul and its faculties for repetition” (Mauss 1989: 369). Taken as a whole, we could say that the body as envisaged by Mauss (and by bracketing with it the word “techniques” he is quite explicit in this regard) may be seen as an instrument, a tool. Wherever they are, individuals must learn how to use it, which they do simply by making choices. They perfect certain physical skills, while neglecting others, thereby revealing the “stamp” of each individual culture and showing how it has adapted to diverse material constraints: the body of a cattle farmer or a warrior living in the African savannah will develop different skills from that of a Breton peasant-woman.

But Mauss’s attachment to this instrumental aspect led him to neglect an immensely important domain: the representations associated with the body. For every society, the body’s organs, its fluids, the life that
animates it, the seat of its moral or intellectual faculties, its states of being, the “spirits” and “souls” society endows it with, the diseases and disorders that threaten it, the passions that lead it astray, are all built into a general theory. Almost always as artificial as it is fantastic, this general theory is nevertheless pivotal in the organisation of the symbolic mechanisms which themselves we know to be the foundation (or the justification, or the illustration) of all social distinctions and cultural practices. The body (be it scarified, well-groomed, wasted away, embalmed, disciplined, lacerated, deformed, sacrificed, tortured, possessed, devoured, exposed, stoned to death, decorated, or suffering) presents in the form of visible marks all the signs allowing us to identify its origin and its status. We live our bodies, their sufferings and their pleasures, in a cultural way, just as what we are (or think we are) is revealed in our bodies.

Mauss’s essay finishes with some unexpected reflections. From these techniques of the body, retained first and foremost for their efficiency or their practical, instrumental qualities, Mauss extracts an important lesson (1989: 385):

I believe that the fundamental education offered by all these techniques consists of adapting the body to the use we put it to. For example, the great tests of Stoicism etc. which constitute the initiation process for the greatest section of humanity aim to teach cool-headedness, resistance, dependability, presence of mind, dignity, etc. (...) I believe that this entire notion of the education of races which make a selection based on a predetermined outcome is one of the fundamental moments in history itself: education of how we see and how we move – climbing up, climbing down and running. It resides most particularly in education in cool-headedness. And this is above all a mechanism for delaying or inhibiting uncoordinated movements: the delay then allows a co-ordinated response that takes the body in the direction of the chosen goal. This resistance to overwhelming agitation is something that resides in social and mental life.

The three phrases highlighted in this extract are of particular interest. Mauss switches abruptly from the body, conceived as somewhat
instrumental, to the personality, and to the control of elements that might affect or disturb it. The aim of training and toughening the body is not merely to achieve greater speed, stamina or agility, but is now seen as transmitting to the individual new mental capacities: cool-headedness, presence of mind, mastery of emotions and moods, resistance to terror, moral endurance, and so on. These new skills will allow the person who acquires them to master fear, in all its forms. The word “agitation”, like the word “emotion”, might raise a smile today, seeming as they do to refer only to mild, vaguely pleasant sensations that a person might actually want to experience. It is unlikely that Mauss was thinking of this type of feeling. The “great tests of Stoicism”, “education in cool-headedness” and “resistance to overwhelming agitation” would seem to be disproportionate measures to take simply in order to limit the effects of sensations that tend to be agreeable. It is more probable that what Mauss had in mind was a kind of stupor or dread, which, like any sudden, brutal seizure, would be likely to shatter the personality to the point of affecting “the fundamental feeling of self”. Education, through demanding techniques of the body, which itself must undergo the painful tests of initiation, seeks to strengthen character and toughen the mind with a view to developing the heroic virtue that will allow the individual to face the perils of existence with a better chance of success. It is also impossible not to evoke here all those disciplines (of the warrior, the athlete, the artist) that have been, and still are, inspired by this archaic model. They also put their trust in rigorous training, often painful and always voluntary, to acquire exceptional capacities. In this context, the Special Forces soldier, the top athlete and the star ballerina often speak the same language.

These “Stoic” virtues, including cool-headedness, self-control, fearlessness, even-temperedness, stamina and imperviousness, which the techniques of the body that Mauss describes were used primarily to obtain, clearly remind us of the virtues that all the philosophical schools of antiquity (not just the Stoic movement in the strict sense) sought to acquire. They were thus schools of actual, practical wisdom, not mere cenacles devoted to pure speculation, even though any teaching of this kind was obviously underpinned by an often very elaborate cosmology. On this last point, once again we find no exceptions to this rule.
The spiritual exercises taught and practised in these schools of antiquity nevertheless fell within a particular intellectual framework. The dominant view of human existence was somewhat pessimistic, even when the cosmology (as in the case of the Stoics) offered a fundamentally more providential background. The ancient Sage did not feed on soothing and altruistic discourse. More probably, one might imagine, he shunned the world and his fellow man. To his eyes, man was weighed down by worry and misfortune, a victim of piercing desires, led astray by his passions, caught between conflicting duties, running endlessly from place to place, making a thousand wishes, none of which were granted in any lasting way. Alienating himself in any number of vain schemes, man watched his fleeting lifetime inexorably running out in a state of dissatisfaction and anxiety. The vision of the Sage was poles apart from this image; more lucid than implacable, he sought persistently to construct a posture regarding his own existence that was distant, detached and impassive, composed of freedom and acquiescence. This approach invariably involved eradicating any fondness for the concupiscent and the insatiable side of human nature, to dispel in the mind all the causes of error or attachment maintained by passion and affection. It meant acquiring a perfect mastery of the self, a total self-reliance, accepting the decrees of destiny or the caprices of fortune with total serenity, a goal attained by isolating inner strength and forging a will of iron. Once these qualities had been acquired for himself, they allowed the Sage to confront the world of other men.

An inventory of the techniques that are supposed to assist the Sage in acquiring these skills was drawn up by Pierre Hadot (1995: 276-352). First, recommendations aiming both to toughen up the character and to subjugate the body: contenting oneself with a frugal diet, choosing various forms of abstinence, withstanding painful and uncomfortable situations, isolating oneself from the world, shunning leisure activities and futile pleasures. Then came various spiritual exercises, whose common denominator was the search for heightened awareness and vigilance. To achieve this condition, where “the philosopher is, at all times, perfectly conscious of what he is and of what he is doing” (p. 295), he must focus all his attention on himself, meditate untiringly on the precepts of wisdom and conduct rigorous examinations of conscience.
These disciplines first and foremost allow the individual personality to achieve a solid foundation and a robust constitution. We should not make the mistake of believing that these “spiritual exercises” pertained only to the ethereal realms of intangible spirituality. Fundamentally, these exercises deal in something much more concrete and immediate, in that they serve the life of man in the material world. It is ultimately difficult to imagine a more lucid and pragmatic attitude. Every aspect of ordinary human existence (food, sexuality, sleep, breathing, desires, relationships, etc.) is examined and assessed for any negative influence it might have if its use were not subject to strict regulation. Such forms of wisdom are under no illusion: there is no place for facile answers, and well-being is never seen as easily accessible. Lucid, and mercilessly so, this wisdom knows that the only real alternative offered to man is the choice between effort and suffering.

To reiterate, these general themes were globally common to all threads of ancient philosophy, notwithstanding the nuances or particular emphasis that may have distinguished one from another. This Stoic lucidity is completely unmoved by all the false vanity that man pursues but which cannot calm in any lasting way his gnawing anxiety. Life is short, our joys are themselves fleeting and flimsy, for “they are not built on strong motives, and are troubled by the very triviality that gives rise to them” (Bréhier 1962: 715, quoting Seneca, On the brevity of life, 17.3, my trans.). In any case, “we are too weak to endure it all; we cannot long tolerate either work or pleasure, or ourselves, or anything at all” (Bréhier 1962: 666, quoting Seneca On the tranquillity of the soul, 2.15, my trans.).

This philosophy is not so far removed from the general orientation of Buddhist thought that a parallel cannot be established. We can often find the same basic preoccupations and the same exercises that, based on the acquisition of heightened self-control, are designed to free the consciousness from the illusions that keep it captive and that, above all, give birth to perpetual frustration and suffering.

This general concept corresponds to the fourth and last noble truth. This truth, and the preceding three, can be seen to represent the quintessence and synopsis of the fundamental teachings of ancient Buddhism. The first truth concerns the universal nature of suffering; the second truth reveals the origin of this universal suffering, known
as trîshnâ, desire; the third truth indicates that suffering can be removed only when desire is extinguished. In logical sequence, the fourth truth describes the eight-fold path that leads to extinguishing desire.

Right speech, right action and right living are self-explanatory terms, since they describe conduct that is virtuous and honest. Right understanding and right motives refer to something far more profound than the two expressions seem to imply. By right understanding, we should understand the capacity to see “things as they really are”, that is to say, freed from all that our passions – covetousness, hate and error – attach to them and whose plaything we become. To understand what is meant by right motives, we need to remember that samkalpa refers to plans, intentions and desires, in other words, the internal process that precedes the act.

Within the three paths of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, each term represents a step forward from the preceding term, in other words, an intensification. Where right effort can only refer to the willingness and perseverance indispensable to any undertaking even when, as is the case here, it concerns inner life, right mindfulness, on the other hand, implies increased vigilance, whose effect is to make us more conscious of each of our movements and mental states. These different choices, measures and exercises, which in many ways resemble those that we find in Stoicism, culminate in the practice of right concentration (samâdhi), a generic term that “applies to all mental discipline, even though within the Buddhist vocabulary it designates, in a more precise manner, a given category of exercises where the mind is fixed, settling into a state that excludes all agitation and all dialectic reflection” (Naudou 1973: 212-3). These disciplines make use of the body (breathing, for example) solely to aid in controlling mental activity in its many forms and manifestations: sensations, emotions, imaginings, reflections, representations, projections, and so on. They are similar to the instructions found in yoga. They have both without doubt inherited the ancient speculations that we can reasonably date from the end of prehistory. The texts that frame the teaching of yoga date from a much later time, as is often the case in India. Nonetheless, traditional yoga as described in the Yoga-Sûtras of Patañjali, the best known and no doubt the most ancient of yoga disciplines, describes the most radical
of systems ever invented in terms of a discipline designed to master all the mental and intellectual processes. This is a discipline that strives not only for detachment, with the goal of protecting what could be called the inner self from all illusion and painful suffering, but also the isolation and even total annihilation of the one who, having succeeded in retreating from the world and eliminating the feeling of self, resides in perfect impassivity.

The goal of yoga, defined in the second aphorism of the Patañjali text, and it could not be any clearer, is the halting, suppression, cessation (nirodha) of all mental (citta) activity, agitation or transformation (vritti). But it should be pointed out that this citta combines spirit, attention, reason and self-awareness, that its modifications possess five possible origins (right reasoning, error – incorrect thinking or knowledge –, imagination, sleep and memory), themselves conditioned by five unfavourable factors (ignorance, desire or passion, hatred or disgust, the desire to live, and attachment to self.)

These five factors all result in suffering. Detachment (vairâgya, derived from raga, meaning passion) and exercise (abhyâsa) make it possible to attain nirodha, the suppression of all mental activity; the “witness”, the pure and impersonal conscious-ness, then resides in itself. Without this attainment, the ego loses its perception of this subtle centre and merges with the vritti it creates; it is therefore preferable to interrupt all mental, emotional and intellec-tual processes. The indispensable prerequisites for doing so are the curbing of desires and imposing of discipline, the choice of “comfortable” postures and the mastery of breathing rhythms. Following the spiritual exercises of emancipation from sensorial activity (pratyâhâra or retraction of the senses into themselves), of concentration (dhâranâ or concentrating the citta on a single point) and absorption (dhyâna, when exclusive attention is the only mental activity that endures) leads to the different types of samâdhi. At this ultimate stage, the act of consciousness, as well as consciousness itself, is liberated from all content, conscious or otherwise. The cessation of cittavritti has been attained.

Primitive techniques of the body, the spiritual exercises of antiquity, Stoic morality, Buddhist wisdom, yoga disciplines: until now, these systems have remained resolutely distinct, and have never been brought together within a common research project. Each of
them tends to be studied separately, in the context of its individual history, and by specialists (ethnologists, classical philologists and orientalists) hailing from disciplines that do not make any attempt to communicate with each other and are even further from trying to define a cooperative research programme. This all too common cumbersome institutional approach added to the unwieldiness of intellectual routines does nothing to encourage the discovery of new objects of study. Despite these obstacles, we felt it would be judicious to attempt to compare these elements in order to highlight their shared status as members of the family of human wisdom.

All historians would nevertheless agree in confirming from the outset, and quite justifiably, that many insurmountable differences exist between these systems and schools of thought: there are indeed unbreachable barriers between the universes of reference, the metaphysical conceptions and the views of life after death held dear by each of them. To take just one example extracted from a single civilisation, the Epicurean, Stoic and Plotinian theses on the origin of the world, the profound nature of the universe and the conception of the soul are different, radically different. It is not an issue worth debating. Just as it would only be with infinite prudence that a comparison could be undertaken of a cenacle of Pythagorean philosophers and a community of Buddhist renouncers.

But it might well also be worth noting that these differences, considerable though they may be, are not the end of the story. Alongside them exists an extensive area that reveals numerous enough points of convergence to warrant listing them.

   a) All these forms of wisdom take a sound medical approach. It is possible that they evolved from the most ancient of speculations about health and well-being. Their departure point is invariably a statement or observation about the status of humankind. This is followed by a diagnostic that in turn calls for a remedy. This aspect is particularly evident in Buddhism.

   b) It is consequently difficult to avoid considering these approaches as materialistic and pragmatic, since their leading objective is invariably the existential situation of humankind and the mental forces that humans are capable of mobilising in order to improve their current status. These practical guidelines are quite deliberately and unequivocally situated in this world, their efficacy
subject to earthly judgement. In other words, they are as far removed as possible from the spheres conventionally known as magico- and mythico-religious. Faith, prayers, rites and gestures of adoration addressed to some transcendent being are absent. There is no mention of entering a state of trance, ecstasy, rapture or wonderment, and no sign of the fantastic or supernatural. Which is no doubt why their precepts remain so accessible to those wishing to read and understand them today. For these precepts, the fruit of close observation and an essentially “sympathetic” attitude, address the condition of humanity in its most essential form, at its most universal.

c) All these forms of wisdom, in varying degrees, look at the ordinary existence of humankind while retaining some distance, without embellishing their observations and avoiding sentimentality. They tell us that this life is at best merely a fragile and fleeting journey, at worst a succession of frustrations, illusions and suffering. And they have no illusions about the capacity of humans to overcome their weaknesses, which is why their programmes, although they may not all make inhuman demands in the manner of yoga, are always exhaustive, encompassing guidelines for lifestyle, health and behaviour as well as mastering the body and the emotions.

d) It is clear that these forms of wisdom are all based most emphatically on voluntary action. There is a lucidity of vision that never lapses into pessimism and discouragement. The moral they preach, actually fairly virile in nature, is based on the notions of effort, patience and perseverance. Nothing could be further from this heroic ethos than the idea of a miracle! And nothing about the reward they offer leads us to believe it easily accessible or universally available. This is a challenge to our democratic ideals and values, for how can we consider that everyone has the inalienable right to such a reward when it can patently only result from, and be acquired by, arduous personal effort?

e) Finally, and most importantly, they all aim for a range of benefits – appeasement, peace of mind, serenity, detachment and lucidity – that work towards cleansing the consciousness, mastering the emotions, curbing insatiable appetites and calming the mental agitation created by desires, fantasies and the imagination. The goal thus being to stabilise the entire range of processes that contribute to the development of inner life. As we have just discussed, acquiring
these benefits depends on the application of a harsh programme encompassing very strict lifestyle rules designed to subdue the flesh (frugal diet, various forms of austerity and even asceticism), a code of ethics characterised principally by detachment, physiological exercises such as those applied to controlling breathing, and practices used to discipline mental activity (constant attention, heightened vigilance, frequent examination of conscience, recollection and meditation). All undertaken in order to acquire perfect mastery of the self, an indispensable but nevertheless extremely Spartan precondition for happiness according to the Sage.

These shared characteristics are remarkable, and notably more significant than those usually and expeditiously evoked to characterise a fact or object as “religious”. They provide an unequivocally coherent picture of a lucid vision of the “miserable” human condition, the diagnostic engendered by this uncompromising observation, the various exercises and practices recommended to individuals anxious to escape their painful condition, and the goal they are striving for. There is no denying that fairly significant differences appear at this point: when we consider the ultimate goal of each system or school, we have no choice but to take into account their individual metaphysical visions. However, the more immediate goals and their concrete benefits are fairly similar. They culminate in the attainment of a sort of impassivity and detachment towards the worldly personality and superficial self, considered as an unstable and fragile abode, constantly under threat from a great many forces and deep-rooted habits, such as greed, covetousness, desire, urges, passions, fantasies, fears and aversions.

All these forms of wisdom, taking paths than we would no doubt now consider austere in the extreme, not to say almost inhuman, appear as energetic responses to a problem that individuals cannot ignore, manifesting itself as it does in the recurring anxieties that come from within. They serve to confirm Mauss’s intuition and the undoubted truth of his conviction that “resistance to overwhelming agitation” is one of the most important challenges that has confronted humanity, whereas we tend to assign the decisive role in human development to material and institutional progress alone. And although it is evidently difficult from a contemporary point of view to assess the relevance and efficacy of these precepts, now that our
diagnostics and remedies concerning the confusion affecting the human personality have relegated these ancient lessons to oblivion, nothing prevents us from considering that they could still, in many cases, offer satisfactory responses.

I would also like to add, in conclusion, that a great many of the principles that underlie these “recipes for wisdom” were to be taken up by Christian spirituality during the classical age, especially by Saint François de Sales.

Notes

1  English translation by Andrew Meehan.
2  According to Dvivedi 1980: 2.
3  The notion of the soul has been too deeply marked by Christian anthropology to be used without a risk of confusion in this context. Nevertheless, we can see what distinguishes yoga, an orthodox Brahminical system, from Buddhism, which denies the existence of such a permanent substratum.
4  Abstaining from killing, stealing, fornicating, lying and avarice while practising purification, serenity, asceticism, giving oneself up to the Lord and study (means of deliverance).

References


On the One Hand and on the Other

EMILY LYLE

“On the one hand and on the other.” We can look at two sides of a question fairly easily but, starting off from this simple image, I mean to elaborate matters to a more than spidery or octopus-like extent and suggest that we will find value in looking at ten sides of a question. As we have only two hands and use them in our imagery, we are constrained to build up complexity by cross-cutting various pairs. It would be of interest simply to explore the possibilities as an intellectual exercise and some may prefer to take my discussion in that way. However, I am suggesting that this level of complexity lies in our past and that linear modes of thought linked to literacy replaced it with a simple dichotomisation which may be seen as a complementary duality but can all too often and too easily be seen as a conflictual duality with good/bad equated with self/other.

To return to the two hands. They are not totally equivalent and right (which is the dominant hand in most though by no means all people) is normally pre-eminent. Psychological studies indicate that, when any pair is set up in our minds, one of the pair will be more highly valued than the other so that there is an inherent hierarchy (Hallpike 1979; Osgood 1980: 140). When the pair is the gender one, the male tends to be regarded as pre-eminent, and it is often more conspicuous – a factor we should keep in mind when there seems danger of losing sight of the female component altogether, a point that may have some applicability to Allen’s theoretical model mentioned below. As far as hands are concerned, as Aristotle put it, right is more honourable than left. We would quite naturally start out by envisaging the area surrounding the body as being in halves with a right half and a left half.

[Figure 1]

However, this is not how Aristotle envisaged it. A fuller statement from him runs: “In front is more honourable than behind, and right than left.”1 Horizontal space is quartered in this way, and there are
correlations to vertical space with above (= front plus right) being “more honourable” than below (= behind plus left), as Aristotle also said.

[Figure 2]

This is not philosophy and I take it that Aristotle is drawing on cosmological tradition here. He gives us access to an ancient “formation cosmographique”, as Professor Dubuisson has called it (2001: 33-4) – a cosmological structure or worldview.

We are the inheritors of an Indo-European structuring and we are indebted to Georges Dumézil for his work on this. His stress on a tripartite division with the sacred (relating to the social group of priests and the colour white), physical force (warriors and red) and fertility and prosperity (cultivators and black) has been invaluable, but, in my view, exclusive attention to this triadic aspect debars us from full understanding of our past. Dumézil comments, in a piece responding to a paper by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie published in Revue des Travaux de l’Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques in 1979:

Certain Greeks before Socrates, réfléchissant à partir des couples tels que chaud et froid, lumière et ténèbres, amour et haine, ont forgé des représentations dualistes du monde, ordonnées par le concours ou le conflit de ces forces. Leurs prédécesseurs Indo-Européens n’avaient pas fait autre chose, mais à partir des trois fonctions ....

Certain Greeks before Socrates, reflecting with a starting-point in such pairs as hot and cold, light and darkness, love and hate, forged dual representations of the world, ordered by the cooperation or conflict of these forces. Their Indo-European predecessors did not do anything different, but with a starting-point in the three functions … . (My translation)

It is apparent from this that Dumézil is seeing the two conceptualisations as separate, with systems of pairings (which readily give rise to fourfold systems) as quite distinct from a triple system. He seems able to set aside the fourfold and fivefold structures found in
the Indo-European area (cf. Kuiper 1961) either as belonging to a worldwide pattern which was overlaid by tripartition or as arising from philosophical speculation posterior to his posited Indo-European tripartite structure. This is particularly clear in *The Destiny of a King* where he mentions the development of his structure in relation to a system of the four world quarters plus a centre set out by Alwyn and Brinley Rees in *Celtic Heritage* (1960: chs 5-8). Dumézil says first in an Indian context (1973: 9): “The division into five probably corresponded to an ancient conception, purely terrestrial, of the five … directions of the world, that is, the four cardinal points and the center, a natural conception found widely on every continent,” and later adds (1973: 11) in relation to the Reeses’ fivefold structure that speculations on this “probably derive from a Druidic doctrine”.

However, it is evident, even in his own terms, that the Dumézilian triad contained dualities and two of the dichotomies discussed by Einar Haugen (1967) can already be found in Dumézil’s own writings. His system can be seen as built up of two dichotomies, as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3](image3.png)

Daniel Dubuisson has worked extensively with the features of the triadic structuring of which this one would be expressed as \((A + B) + C\) for which it will be preferable to use the symbols \((L + M) + N\) in this paper because of other use of the first letters of the alphabet.² It has recently been possible (see Lyle 1997) to propose a social base for this structure where the pair is the generation alternation X and Y and the age-grade divisions are the generation of the mature men in power and the other generation alternation which consists of the old men who are their fathers or social fathers and the young men who are their sons or social sons.

\[(L + M) + N\] (old men + young men) + mature men

![Figure 4](image4.png)

This structure of unequal parts has to be operated by classes of equal size (of which four would be the minimum number) and so three and four can be seen to be compatible. When the fourth component is
activated, an additional colour is helpful to the representation, and, following the Indian system of varnas, yellow is added in Figure 5 between red and black in a fourfold system. And here it may be of interest, to bring out the fundamental nature of these colours, to pick up a statement made by Lévi-Strauss in that same series of discussions in *Revue des Travaux de l’Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* from which I have quoted Dumézil. He comments that, where a society has a general colour term for red, it will also have colour terms for black and white, and that where a society has a term for yellow it will also have one for red, but not vice versa (Lévi-Strauss 1979: 606-7). The colour triad of white, red and black is basic and important and should be retained as such, while yellow, although also fairly basic, develops later as a general colour term and is a fourth, additional colour.

There is some vagueness about the coverage of Dumézil’s third function which is sometimes regarded as a fertile half (corresponding to black and yellow together) and sometimes as a single segment (corresponding to either black or yellow). Redefinition is urgently required here to avoid confusion. The Indian gunas (the strands composing the universe) seem a good guide; they are definitely of the three colours, white, red and black. It is probably whatever is defined as belonging to black that should be regarded as part of the triadic set, and some aspects of what Dumézil called the third function should probably be distinguished from it and identified with the yellow component.

However, for the moment we can return to the positive valuing of right and in front as against left and behind as found in Aristotle. These body directions correspond to the humours and these are made up of the dichotomies hot/cold and dry/wet which are the first two polarities (A and B) in my three-axis system (Lyle 1990: 68-74; 1995: 171-2) of which the overall bright end is called plus and the overall dull end is called minus so that hot and dry are both called plus. Now, as we know, the important thing about the humours is the balance among them and so this could be a means of seeing how the adoption of dualities with inherent hierarchy in a complex system probably includes means to override the hierarchy. A system of “nothing-too-much” is going to have ways of correcting lop-sidedness. The Indian way of doing this worked with a triad of humours, and it has been
pointed out that the Greek set of four humours arose from a triad like this through the subdivision of bile into yellow bile and black bile (Müri 1953: 28; Schöner 1964: 57-8; Lyle 1990: 143-6). The year, similarly, had a triadic structure. In the seasonal sequence, autumn emerged as a fourth season in addition to spring and summer before it and winter after it and I have found harvest (the precursor of autumn) to be associated with the female (Lyle 1990: 16-25). The fourfold set is illustrated in Figure 6 in association with the colours already discussed.

In terms of the elements, yellow and the female as cold and dry are associated with the element earth (which is also a level of the layered cosmos) while black, as cold and wet, would be associated with water and the ocean. This suggests that the female would relate, not only to reproduction, but also to the cultivation of fields or gardens (or to the gathering of plants in a pre-cultivation phase of society) while the male sections might relate to the killing of birds and animals (functions 1 and 2, relating to the upper world) and to fishing (function 3, relating to the below). The widely found division of labour by gender into hunters and gatherers may be latent in the structure. As regards crafts, it seems that weaving goes with the female part and blacksmithing with the male part of this lower productive half.

And now we need to look at supplements to the separate components of the triad. Dubuisson has dealt with two supplements and N. J. Allen has treated one of them. The two in Dubuisson’s terms are as follows, with R standing for roi, “f” for function and Ś for the Indian goddess Śri:

\[ A + B + C + (R3f) \]

and

\[ (Ś3f) > A + B + C \]

or, using K for king, generalising the goddess to the female (F), and employing the same letters for the triad as above, we can call this:

\[ L + M + N + (K3f) \]

and

\[ (F3f) > L + M + N \]
These supplementary components are what Dumézil referred to as the trifunctional king and the trifunctional goddess. Alwyn and Brinley Rees showed that kingship is in the centre of the directional structure in which Dumézil’s three functions can be placed in three of the directions, and N. J. Allen followed them in this so far as to place the positive aspect of kingship here while giving the fourth direction to the negative aspect of kingship. Dubuisson, as I have noted, recognises the role of the female as generator of the three functions (represented by such figures as Sarasvati and Vac) and also as queen (represented by Śri, the wife of Indra). To my mind, kingship as a whole belongs in the centre and the fourth quarter is that of the female. In Allen’s structural model, the female is not just marginalised but is totally absent.

The importance of Allen’s contribution, as I see it, lies not in his model, which appears insufficient, but in the fact that he is aware himself, and has made others aware, that a partitioned mode of thinking about society, like the tripartition identified by Dumézil for the Indo-Europeans, is an instance of primitive classification and that we should seek understanding of it through connections with modes of social organisation at a prehistoric period. Since tetradic systems of kinship are more common than triadic ones, he finds it important to set Dumézil’s three in relation to four and I agree with him here. Where there is sovereignty, however, we anticipate the addition of a centre, as Kenneth Maddock (1989) has shown, and so would expect a fivefold scheme, with or without duplication to arrive at ten (or possibly a duplication of the edges but not the centre to arrive at nine).

By the time the Indo-European peoples entered history, they may have had a strong male bias and a fairly rigid hierarchy, but there are many indications that the cosmological structure that was their inheritance from an earlier past had checks and balances built into it that offered a greater flexibility – and there could well be indications of flexible structure in the historical period too if we choose to look for them.

As for Allen’s recognition of the positive and negative aspects of kingship, it can be said that it has been felt, by Littleton (1998) and Dubuisson among others, that all Dumézil’s functions have two facets. As Dubuisson expresses it, including the trifunctional compo-
In my understanding, the negative component has to do with darkness and death, and is present in all the three functions and the female as well as in the kingship (which Allen refers to as the fourth function). In the terms used previously the Dubuisson (and Lyle) system can be expressed as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\hat{S}_3f &> A + B + C + (R_3f) \\
\hat{S}_3f' &> A' + B' + C' + (R_3f')
\end{align*}
\]

In Allen’s schema, the overt, daylight male components (L, M, N, K_3f) are fully represented while the night-time components have one place (K_3f') and the female none at all. We seem to hear the sound of one hand clapping – the right hand, of course!

To return more directly to the topic, the structure offers three main polarities that can be expressed in terms of handedness, which I shall take in turn.

On the one hand, we have life and light and ordered existence and, on the other hand, we have death and darkness and chaos. This sounds as positive and negative as it is possible to be, and yet it is recognised that death is needed to make room for new births, and chaos in the form of carnival is given a very welcome place in the year. All subverting humour seems to belong to the “chaos” side of the equation and that has a healthy disrespect for hierarchy. This opposition is the one that is expressed most explicitly in terms of the two hands, circling to the right being propitious and circling to the left being ill-omened and associated with death.

Secondly, assuming, as I have argued, that kings come in alternate generations from the first and second of the functions, each of these two functions is supreme in turn. It has been recognised by Lévi-Strauss (1995: 235-9) and Maybury-Lewis (1989) in studies of social duality that the hierarchy inherent in a moiety system can be counteracted by the taking of turns at specific times or in specific contexts, so this alternate rule can be seen in a broad context as one
case in a possible range of ways of ensuring reciprocity. The members of this pair seem equivalent. Each has a period of activity, honour and responsibility and a period of rest and recuperation.

Then, again, on the one hand we have men and on the other women. The males just mentioned from the first and second functions contest for the kingship but, as argued by Margalit Finkelberg for Dark Age Greece (1992) and by myself at the level of the model (1992, 1998), a man can only become king by marrying into a line of queens, so that in this way the female is given value with respect to the male. It should also be noted that the half of the community which provides the queen (the lower half) is the one where its wealth resides. One half brings a king and rule by wisdom or strength and the other half brings a queen and wealth. It is a fair exchange and, as we say, “Fair exchange is no robbery.” The importance of the king’s *hieros gamos* has long been appreciated, but my current work on kinship in relation to cosmology suggests that the structure relies on a double marriage involving the total reciprocity of an immediate exchange – the brother of the queen-goddess marrying into the king’s moiety at the same time as the king marries the queen-goddess. The brother-sister pair, Freyr and Freyja, in the Norse pantheon may be key figures in helping us to understand this exchange from the third-function perspective.

In closing, I would like to move away from the Indo-European sphere and revert to China and the yin-yang dichotomy which is the most famous expression of complementary duality, for this is no more solidly black and white than the structure I have been outlining. In the presentation of the four directions of space in Figure 7, eight of the heavenly stems, or *kan*, are shown. These are either light (yang) or yin (dark) alternately, and this dichotomy corresponds to the C-axis division into light and life versus darkness and death. It is clear, though, that there is another division, with the upper half of the diagram relating to summer and yang and the lower half to winter and yin; this is the division on the A axis. We can divide the diagram also in the other direction with a division on the B axis into dry and wet. These dualities can be related to the trigrams with the bottom line equivalent to A, the middle line to B and the top line to C (Lyle 1990: 135-9; 1995: 180-1).

To envisage yin-yang as a simple dichotomy is much too crude.
We cannot take shortcuts and expect to understand the richness and complexity of preliterate consciousness as found in the Indo-European structure I have been studying and in this Chinese one. There is freedom in the diversity, and much more mental space to explore multiple alternatives. At the social level, it seems too that each individual would be offered a triple identity that would allow different alliances to be struck up depending on individual choice and varying circumstances. In a similar way, when I was studying age-grades in East Africa, I found that Maasai men, when they meet as strangers, may ask each other: Which clan moiety do you belong to? Which of the two age-class streams do you belong to? and What location do you belong to? The chances are high that the strangers will find some common ground among their triple identities.

Hierarchy, which is present in any dual system, needs (in a society that depends on social consent for its survival) to be made tolerable by reciprocal arrangements and a taking of turns. For this reason, it seems as if we cannot possibly understand the workings of a society by looking at a static structure. With the three functions etc. we have the skeleton in the museum. To add flesh to it and give it life we need to add the dimension of time and, interestingly, this is not something we can only hypothesise about in the remote past, but is something that has remained with us in the guise of our folk calendars. On the basis of the three-axis model, and in other ways, it seems that study of the ritual year is likely to be especially fruitful at this stage in the scholarly development of our understanding of our symbolic past.

Dubuisson comments, in his recent study of the field of history of religions, that it is difficult for us in the West to see religion in other than Judaeo-Christian terms and to understand, and give appropriate value to, the thought worlds and activities of a putatively religious nature of cultures that do not have this perspective (Dubuisson 1998). However, it should be said that those of us who have been concerned with ethnology in a European context have necessarily been aware that there are features in Western society that do not accord with the broadly current views of religion found at the state level and that, to understand them, it is necessary to formulate a model based on a pre-Christian symbolic structure. When we do this, we find duality, certainly, but a complex of dualities and a system of alternations that seem to have something to offer to our thoughts and actions at the
present day as well as to a fuller and more accurate understanding of our remote past.

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Notes

1 Aristotle, *Progression of Animals* 706b, 12f. See also Lloyd 1973: 174 and Lyle 1990: 153

2 These are the A, B and C axes of polarity mentioned towards the end of this article.

3 Galaty 1977: 141. Cf. the statement by Århem (1991: 52): “Maasai society is defined by three interconnected and pervasive organizational systems: territorial organization, age-set organization and the descent system. Each individual Maasai belongs to a particular territorial section, a specific descent category and – in the case of a man – a named age-set. Together these systems define the individual’s social identity and behaviour, his or her rights and duties in society.”

References


This paper seeks to explore a facet of the relationship between men and Nature, particularly with respect to the issues of fertility and abundance, in the temporal frame of the ritual year. Working with the perspective of a ‘moral cosmos’ in mind, I will be looking here at the existence, the belief in the existence, of a contract passed between Man and Nature. My sources consist mainly of European ethnographic material, some of which describes practices still going on nowadays.

The establishment of a contract generally entails an exchange of some sort. Paraphrasing the title of this talk, the expectations to be fulfilled are these of men and relate to their dependance on good crops and healthy stocks to survive. That is to say, they rely on Nature to feed them. But of course there is no such thing as a free meal, as the popular expression goes, and these expectations may be fulfilled only if certain obligations are met. The terms of the contract are thus drawn: Nature will provide sustenance, and men for their part will make sure that the natural order is respected by the way of rituals. Incidentally, this ‘business’ relationship, like any other, should be considered to be working both ways: Nature was accountable as well. [A little gloss is perhaps required here: I have been and will be using the word ‘Nature’ as a cover-all term for deities, supernatural agencies, and the Christian God, as we are not concerned here with who grants wealth so much as what the terms of the bargain are.] As an example of the spirit of this relation between men and their environment, and as an illustration of the almost mercantile character of the relation, I am now going to read to you an extract of an article entitled: ‘Traditions, Customs, and Superstitions of the Lewis’, in the Hebrides, which was published in the journal Folklore in 1895:
Mr MacPhail was told that once upon a time (he does not know whether it was a custom or not) the standing corn of a certain township having been destroyed by a severe gale, the old men of the district assembled in council and valued the loss they had sustained on their Maker, believing that he was under obligation to make it up for them as it was caused by the wind. When he heard the story, Mr MacPhail was greatly struck by the ignorance and profanity of such a procedure. His informant, however [about ninety-five years old in 1855], was of a different opinion, said it was anything but that, and to substantiate his views gave the following story as an authentic fact. He said that before the men that were valuing left the place where they had assembled, a shoal of fish came into the bay and did not leave for a whole year. And though most of their corn was gone, they nevertheless had abundance of food owing to the amount of fish they used. To make his point more sure he said that the smith of the district made a small fortune making hooks.\(^1\)

This gives us an idea of how the relation worked, at least as far as Nature was concerned.

As for men, it is possible to retrace what their side of the deal was by looking into, and analysing certain festivals performed during the year. As will become apparent in the course of the paper, I will not be talking about all the important points in the year that have given rise to, or are associated with, specific festivals and rituals. I would probably need the whole year for that, and in any case, they are not all relevant to us here. Therefore, I have chosen to concentrate on two periods within the year, namely New Year and harvest. It should be noted here, especially as far as New Year is concerned, that I am not talking about specific days, but rather I am taking these two terms as loose references that encapsulate the concepts of New Year and of harvest. In fact, in both cases we will be dealing with extended periods of time. As we shall see, the New Year period starts for our purposes on the 26th of December – which is the first of the Twelve Days of Christmas – and ends in some cases in February; while harvest covers pretty much the summer months, from August to the end of September.
I should also point out that even though, for reasons of practicality and clarity, New Year and harvest festivities will be presented separately, I do in fact consider them functioning as a pair, the two halves of one single event. More on that a bit later. In the meantime, and I hope you will bear with me, I need to bring together the various strands of material that will take us to this conclusion.

As for now, what I would like to do, is go back to what directed me on this particular line of research in the first place.

It all more or less started with an article by Sylvie Muller: ‘The Irish Wren Tales and Rituals. To Pay or not to Pay the Debt of Nature’.² In it, she describes and analyses the ritual hunt and sacrifice of the wren, which takes place on the 26th of December, in the light of the wren tales collected by the Irish Folklore Commission – which started its work in the 1930’s. These tales tell of the wren’s ‘debt of Nature’ that is to be repaid with his blood. Muller lists several categories of these tales, in which the wren contracts a debt towards Nature associated principally with his regal status or the borrowing of food/grain. The wren offers himself to clear the debt, with the consequence that his kin is then allowed to survive and breed.

She puts forward that the killing of the wren on St Stephen’s Day corresponded to the yearly sacrifice man had to offer to the forces of nature. Young men, usually bachelors, went in procession round the houses of their village with the dead wren, asking for food and drink and some money to bury the bird, as gifts for having brought the wren to the house. They sang the ‘wren song’ from which it emerges that ‘the wren ritual was understood to ensure fertility and prosperity for the community for the coming year’ (1996-1997: 144).³ In short, she convincingly shows that the wren is a metaphor for Man, and that the hunters of the wren, un-married costumed young men, represent for their part the forces of Nature which conduct the sacrifice of the wren so that his debt is repaid. The allegory is a fairly transparent one, as is the bringing of the wren to every house in exchange generally for foodstuff, which was the household’s participation towards the payment of the debt. Overall, the fertility associations of the ritual are quite clear and I will not dwell further on them. What is a little less clear, however, is the concept of ‘paying the debt of Nature’, especially applied to a festival occurring at this particular time of the year. I will come back on that point shortly. Suffice it to say here that
a debt is something contracted in the past, it is the result of an action prior, by definition, to its being repaid or reciprocated – an aspect that does not entirely tally with New Year celebrations.

To go back to the practice, hunting the wren was observed not only in Ireland, but also, in Wales, in England, on the Isle of Man, in Scotland – in various forms and to various extents. Elsewhere in Europe, other customs linked to St Stephen’s Day generally show a sacrificial aspect, such as the prescription of bleeding horses on that day in order to magically secure their health for the coming year. All these practices can be viewed as sacrifices, and before I give more examples, I would just like to make a point of what it is that a sacrifice is set to achieve.

Sacrifice and ritual are probably on a par with kinship for the number of works published on the topic, mainly by anthropologists (social, cultural or just plain, depending on where they come from!). But fear not: I am not going to go through the theories here. What I am going to give, however, are two definitions, which I find encapsulate well what a sacrifice is set to achieve and how it does it.

First, I would like to draw upon the work of the French Indianist Charles Malamoud. Although his sphere of interest are the *Brahmana*, that is the ancient commentaries on the Vedas, I find that his remark possesses a general validity, and that it can be of help to our particular case. He writes:

In ancient Brahmanism … the order of the world rests upon sacrifice (*yajña*), and more generally, upon the rites of which sacrifice is the supreme form and the model. It is indeed the sacrifice offered by men that confirms the gods in their divine status and that, thus, ensures the harmonious putting into place of the forces that allow the regular succession of the seasons and the formation of the foodstuffs prescribed to each of the classes of beings…, and thus, the whole organisation of society. (1989: 97; my translation)4

We can see how, according to this cosmological view, the order of the world rests both on men and on Nature – in the shape here of the Vedic gods. The responsibility of the world is shared, if you like, between the human and supernatural spheres. So that when the wren,
or horses’ blood, or various foodstuffs are offered in sacrifice to forces of Nature, one part of the contract has been respected. The mechanism of the transaction is given very clearly in the second and last definition concerning sacrifice you will hear in this paper. It comes from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who proposes that the destruction of the object of sacrifice, which is by definition what happens during the process, creates thus a ‘minus’ on the side of men at the same time as it creates a ‘plus’ on the side of the divine – to use his terminology – for which the sacrifice is intended. His conclusion on the results of sacrifice reads thus:

... as [man] had previously established a means of communication between the human container and the divine container, the latter will automatically have to fill up the void [created by the destruction of the victim during the sacrifice], by according the expected blessing. The scheme of sacrifice consists of an irreversible operation (the destruction of the victim) in order to trigger, on another level, an equally irreversible operation (the granting of divine grace) ... (1962: 270; my translation)\(^5\)

Of course, the irreversibility of this series of operations could take on a double-edged quality, for if the sacrifice was not conducted properly, the answer from the otherworld would at best not come, and at worst would consist of further hardship for men. Conversely, if the ritual had been flawless, Nature was seen to be under obligation to reciprocate.

This reciprocal characterisitic of the ritual can be seen in the contents of certain rhymes, which were sung as part of the performance of New Year customs. In some of the Irish wren songs for instance, the positive side of this exchange between men and Nature is given: ‘And may you be seven times better off around this time again’ was one form of blessing contained in these songs.\(^6\) It has been mentioned that St Stephen’s Day customs were found elsewhere in Europe, and an example of the negative side is found in another rhyme, a ballad in fact, from the Swedish-speaking part of Finland. There, also on St Stephen’s Day, groups of young men visited the houses of the community singing a ballad dedicated to St Stephen, in
which they threatened to destroy the house if they were not given what they had come for – namely food and drink.\textsuperscript{7} The last verses of the ballad run thus:

(16) If now in this house St Stephen’s buns are too few,  
Knock your chimney-stack, that is what we’ll do.

(17) And if there’s no trick that we better can play,  
Why then we will carry each stone clean away.

(18) But if of the soup there is enough us to fill,  
– Fast then to him should we hold –  
Then praised be our host, and praised his good will.  
– Let Stephen be our trusted guide and our helmsman bold.

(19) Thanks be to you in this your house,  
Here we have had a fine carouse.  
Join with us, brothers, to make merry here,  
Christmas comes but once in a year.  
Fal-la-la-ral-la-la-ral-lal-lay. (Seeman \textit{et al.}, eds, 1967: 183).\textsuperscript{8}

We can observe the same principle at work in Scotland, in the practices of guising performed a few days later on New Year’s Eve, or Hogmanay as it is called here.\textsuperscript{9} Several instances of the custom were recorded at the end of the nineteenth century in the Highlands and Islands, and, although one can observe slight variations, the general pattern seems to have followed these lines:

Among the young men in the island of Lewis the Hogmanay feast is said to be still popular. A native describes the custom thus:
After it has become dark on Hogmanay night, companies of lads, sometimes as many as a dozen, or a score in one company, set out to gather things for the feast. They usually disguise themselves, by blackening their faces and otherwise. A hard sheepskin is hung on the shoulders of one of them who
becomes their leader, and another comes immediately after him, armed with two wands with which he beats on the skin. They pass from house to house of those they intend honouring with their visit, the beating on the skin being the signal of their approach. When they come into a house, they go round about the fire, in procession, three times, the beating being kept up all the while, and the whole company singing their festive song:

[Gaelic]

Man of the sea, man of the cow  
Out with the bannocks:  
We will take the bread without butter  
We will take the butter without bread  
Why again we will be without anything.  
Man of the house come down  
Do not cut the back of your ring-finger, do not cut the back of your thumb  
Keep your own share and give the boys theirs  
Or you will be driven out of the place, and mention of you will cease in the town.

It is considered a point of honour by those thus intruded upon to give something to the intrusionists, and they are hardly ever sent away from any house without getting something for their Coluinn [their song], and all they get is put in a bag which they carry with them for the purpose. At the wind up of the visiting they betake themselves to some house where they have a splendid feast on their gatherings.10

Another account recalls how, if the guisers felt they had not been given enough, they would express their displeasure not only with words, but also by building a small cairn of stones outside the mean household, which would be a tell-tale and perhaps a kind of warning to the whole community. The informant added that this would act as a powerful threat, as no one would want to start the year thus marked.

And indeed, all these instances of New Year celebrations are geared obviously towards the coming year, that is to say towards the future, towards events that have not yet taken place. This might sound
as so much unnecessary paraphrase, yet I believe that it is important to emphasise that all these customs represent a preparation for the year to come. Thus, the people who do not participate and do not give, or not enough, are bringing on themselves a bad year, as one woman recalled. Just as in the Irish instance, the young lads stand for Nature, and if they are not propitiated, they – that is Nature – will not have to reciprocate. This does not even represent a breach of the contract; rather, none has been established. This is why the notion of debt does not seem entirely satisfactory to qualify what is going on during the festivities described, although, to be fair to Muller, she does mention the twofold quality of the debt, which, she recognises, also acts as an advance payment, as it were, or rather the contribution to the crop to come, and to the animals to be born to the farm (see Muller 1996-1997: 149). Nevertheless, I find that somewhat a contradiction in terms, which blurs what I regard as the principal aim of these practices. When you pay someone in advance the debt is on their side; you are owed, not the reverse.

Having said that, there are, however, other circumstances during the year in which the offerings are given as gratulatory tokens, that is to say as thanks-givings to Nature. These occur, as you will have guessed, at harvest time. I was first made aware of the connection between the two festival periods in a long article published in 1956 by Svale Solheim entitled ‘Horse-Fight and Horse-Race in Norse Tradition’. In it, Solheim develops the customs and beliefs associated, in Sweden, Norway and Iceland, with St Stephen’s Day, customs and beliefs that he compares to these associated to Michaelmas in Scotland, principally because they both feature ritual horse races and the preparation and consumption of special foodstuffs. [Michaelmas is celebrated on the 29th of September] During the Michaelmas celebrations, a cake was specially baked in honour of St Michael – called _struan mhicheill_ – and it was made with a measure of each of the crops of the croft, reaped especially in advance. It was a defining feature of the festival, with some cakes being baked for the family, while others were intended for the poor (see Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 1: 200-201). It was considered extremely important that each and every one received his share of the food prepared for that day. A lamb was also killed and prepared, and was distributed among the family and some was kept to be given to
those who did not have a lamb to spare. There is a strong sense of the repartition of the available wealth at work here. In a sense, it is a consequence of the New Year’s rituals: ideally, every household contributed in advance to the crop now being reaped and it follows that, ideally, every one should partake of it.

These celebrations in turn echo those observed in Ireland around Lammas (the 1st of August), during which ritual races were also held, and in co. Leitrim, the first new potatoes were dug up and eaten prior to the occasion as a symbol for the crops to come (MacNeill 1962: 254). Although this is a clear case of sympathetic magic, this can also be read as the acknowledgement that Nature had done its part, and that the rest, the actual harvesting was down to men.

So far, the harvest practices observed in Ireland and Scotland have been called in the relevant litterature, the offering of the ‘first fruit’, and have been seen as propitiatory rituals performed in order to secure good crops. I do not think that this is the case. In practical, as well as symbolic terms, harvest represents in fact the end of the year – in terms of agricultural labour for instance. By the time these first fruit are offered, or rather eaten in advance, the potatoes are already there, at least that is what every one hopes for, the cereals are getting ready to be reaped but in any event are surely already visible, and the lambs are already a few months old. As I have just said, Nature, celebrated from August to September, has already performed its duty. It is then rather late to try and propitiate it.

I said earlier that I viewed these two yearly occurrences as two halves of a single festival. I came to this view mainly thanks to Solheim’s own rapprochement of Scandinavian and Scottish festivals. This parallel proved in fact to be richer than expected and the figure of the horse started to appear at harvest and at New Year embued with great symbolic and ritual significance.

⇒ special time of the year/liminal period
⇒ liminal animal
⇒ association with water = otherworld

“blood = otherworld

All these associations concur towards indicating the communication between the human world and the other.
On Emily’s advice, I read what Georges Dumézil had written about the festival of the *October equus* during which a horse is sacrificed after a race has been held in the Circus. The possible origins and interpretations of this custom are extremely rich and complex and I will not get into them here. I only mentioned the *October equus* because it led me to another of Dumézil’s works, *Idées romaines* (Paris: Gallimard; 1969), in which he writes about the couple Consus-Ops, whose festival was a duplicate one. One part was held on the 21st and 25th of August, and the other part on the 15th and 19th of December. Now, I am not saying – at least not yet – that the Roman festival was or shared a common origin with the festivals I have been dealing with, all I want to point out here is that there is a precedent…

DUMEZIL – Ops and Consus  
SCANDINAVIA – August/September and St Stephen’s Day  
IRELAND – Lughnasa and St Stephen’s Day  
SCOTLAND – Michaelmas and Hogmanay

**CONCLUSION**

The twofold festival that celebrates the pact or contract established between Man and Nature can be thus summarised: firstly propitiatory offerings are made in the expectation that they will be recognised as such and followed by a response of Nature in the form of good crops and healthy cattle; secondly, gratulatory offerings are again made, this time after Nature has met its obligations by providing food for the coming year, starting at harvest. The preliminary conclusions I would like to make concerning this concern two different areas.  
To start with, the duplication of the sacrificial ritual led by men, when compared to the fact that Nature yields once – albeit at different times and in different capacities – seems to me to indicate a conception of the world and of its functioning in which man, although striving to control Nature, is still very much at its mercy. At the same time, there is a strong sense of communication between the two spheres.
The second observation concerns issues related to the calendar year. I just mentioned harvest as a starting point in the year, and indeed, it can be considered in such a way, at least as far as the storing of food is concerned. Likewise, New Year – what we call New Year – is as its name indicates, the official start of the year, a year that could ritually be started on the 26th of December. Still later in the year, the 1st of May is considered a beginning of the year, for instance with respect to the production of milk; and diametrically opposed, Samhain or Hallowe’en is also, in different respects, a yearly beginning.

What I am trying to convey here, I suppose, is that our understanding of calendar customs could perhaps benefit from not being tied to the model of the year as we know it and use it nowadays, especially when we are dealing with practices that existed before it was instaured. I will end this talk by quoting Dumézil, who perhaps had the key to this dilemma:

In a conception of the year as nebulous as the one I suppose here, what could replace the ‘change of year’ (and contain the seed of the notion) was presumably one moment in time, a seasonal threshold particularly important for the economic, religious and political life of a society. (1929: 5; my translation)\(^{15}\)

According to the various sacrificial texts from Vedic India, the two equinoxes as well as the two solstices shared (or fought against each other for) the honour to start the year. (1929: 110, n.1; my translation)\(^{16}\)

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Notes


3 ‘We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year/ With your pockets full of money and your cellar full of beer!’ Quoted from the Irish Folklore Collection (1088: 69, co. Clare) in Muller (1996-1997: 144).


5 ‘... comme [l’homme] avait préalablement établi une communication entre le réservoir humain et le réservoir divin, ce dernier devra automatiquement remplir le vide [créé par la destruction de la victime durant le sacrifice], en libérant le bienfait escompté. Le schème du sacrifice consiste en une opération irréversible (la destruction de la victime) afin de déclencher, sur un autre plan, une opération également irréversible (l’octroi de la grâce divine)...’. Lévi-Strauss. 1962. \textit{La Pensée sauvage}. Paris: Plon.

6 Quoted from the Irish Folklore Collection (1013: 308, co. Clare) in Muller (1996-1997: 144).

7 These ballads, the so-called ‘Stephen ballads’, are found in Scandinavia, from Denmark to Finland, in the Faroe Islands, in Great Britain, and in Slovenia. Only in Sweden (and Swedish-speaking areas), however, do the ballads involving Stephen as a groom seem to have been recorded. See Seeman \textit{et al.}, eds, 1967: 182-183. See also an article by Dag Strömback in which he rejects the possibility of a pre-Christian origin of the ‘Stephen as a groom’ sub-group of ballads (1968. \textit{St Stephen in the Ballads}. \textit{Arv} 24: 133-147). In the light of all the material that has been discussed so far, this does not represent a defensible position any longer.


9 The SND gives for the word ‘Hogmanay’: 1 – The 31st of December, the last day of the year, New Year’s Eve. ... 2 – A New Year’s gift, esp. a gift of oatcakes, bread or the like, given to or solicited by children on New Year’s Eve; the cry uttered by them; any form of hospitality, esp. a
drink, given to a guest to celebrate the New Year, or a gratuity given to tradesmen and employees on that day. … The origin of the word has been much disputed but the only satisfactory etym. is the derivation from North. French dial. hoginane, with variants hoginono, hoguiinettes, etc. from 16th c. Fr. aguillanneuf, a gift given at the New Year, a children’s cry for such a gift, New Year’s Eve, the second element of which appears to be l’an neuf, the New Year. … In Scot. the word is probably due to the French Alliance and had been borrowed a. 1560.

10 Maclagan Mss: 8805-8806; from Catherine Mathison, Barvas, Lewis.
15 ‘Dans une conception de l’année aussi nébuleuse que celle que je suppose ici, ce qui pouvait remplacer le “changement d’année” (et contenir en germe cette notion) c’était sans doute un moment du temps, un seuil de saison particulièrement important pour la vie économique, religieuse et politique de la société.’ Le Problème des centaures. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
16 ‘d’après les divers textes sarificiels de l’Inde védique, les deux équinoxes ainsi que les deux solstices se partageaient (ou se disputaient) l’honneur de commencer l’année.’ (id.)

References
Anthropology’s Moral Cosmos: Reinventing Heisenberg’s Wheel and the Need for a Postmodern-Materialist Agenda

C. SCOTT LITTLETON

Ever since they burst into the anthropological firmament almost two decades ago, the “posts—” as they have come to be called – that is, postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism, poststructuralism, and postprocessualism in archaeology, together with such closely related approaches as “cultural studies”, “subaltern studies” and “critical theory” – have had a major impact on anthropology’s “moral cosmos”. They have been passionately, indeed, sometimes vitriolically, debated not only in regard to their respective merits as theoretical models, but also as to the extent to which those who espouse them are somehow on higher moral ground – or are at least more “politically correct” – than the rest of us, who are still committed to the idea that anthropology is a science, at least of sorts. Indeed, those of us who still hold that there are deeply embedded patterns in all human communities that serve to distinguish these communities from one another, or who contend that there is more to anthropology than the study of race, class and gender, are frequently charged with being “vulgar materialists”, or, heaven forbid, “essentialists”, which is just about the worst invective that a devotee of one of the “posts” can hurl.

Of these several emergent dimensions of cultural anthropology, by far the most widespread and, at the same time, most widely-debated, is postmodernism.¹ Postmodernism, or “po-mo”, as it has been dubbed in certain circles, has been both praised and damned by some of the most distinguished members of our profession. For example, Stephen A. Tyler (1986: 138), one of “po-mo’s” leading proponents, has argued that

Post-modern ethnography denies the illusion of a self-perfecting discourse. No corrective movements from text to
object and back again in the manner of empiricism, and no supplemental, self-reflexive movements from flawed sublation to a scathless transcendent mark its course. … Each text is akin to a Leibnizian monad, perfect in its imperfectability.

And Dumont (1992 [1978]: 46), a pioneer postmodernist, had occasion to observe that, “Even in those cases where some attempt has been made to notice the impact of the investigator on the behavior of the inves-tigated, nothing has yet really been said about what happened to the investigator – more precisely, nothing about the dialectics of the process, nothing about the way in which it influences, affects, and changes the data collection.”

At the other end of the anthropological spectrum, Sangren (1988: 408, 420-1), an early critic of postmodernism, has labelled the new movement “millenial”, and has deplored both its “anti-scientific” stance and its preoccupation with self-referential “dialogues” between the ethnographer and his or her subject matter, in which we sometimes learn far more about the former than we do about the latter. Leavitt (1991: 39), in an essay on the philosophical roots of modernism in anthropology, points out that in “striving to shift the focus away from cultures as things in themselves and insisting on the importance of hybridizations, personal constructions, immediate situations, a multipli-city of voices” postmodernism “end[s] up espousing something very much like standard transitive-causal world systems theory, in which cultural differences are reduced to ripples from a single causal center” – in other words, an overall cultural matrix that transcends multivocality, etc.

More recently, in his “Distinguished Lecture” to the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, DC, Sidney Mintz took the new movement to task for denying that anthropology can ever be anything other than a narcissistic art form, one that lacks any relevance to serious social science. Indeed, as Bates and Fratkin (1999: 54) observe, “One-half of the audience stood and applau-ded Mintz’s remarks, the other half politely stayed in their seats.” (I was one of those who stood and cheered!) Kunzar (1997) and Harris (1998) have harshly criticised “po-mo” as a threat to the integrity of the discipline. And in a comment made at a session at the same meeting, I heard David Plath,
an eminent Japanologist colleague use the phrase “postmodern proctology” to characterise the approach taken by a member of the panel; his remark was greeted with an equal number of cheers and jeers!

What is at stake here is, of course, as Leavitt clearly recognised, whether culture, as we have conventionally defined it since Sir Edward Tylor articulated his famous definition in the opening paragraph of *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1958 [1871]: 1) – “Culture, or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” – as any intrinsic material reality. The major modernists, from Boas, Kroeber, and Malinowski to Turner, Douglas, and Geertz, have implicitly, if not always explicitly, assumed that it does. The postmodernists, for the most part, have not. To Tyler and the other principal advocates of this dialogical approach to doing ethnography – Clifford (1986), Crapanzano (1986), Paul Rabinow (1986), Rosaldo (1986), et al. – culture, if it exists at all, is inherently multi-vocal. There is necessarily no single voice, including that of the ethnographer, that can legitimately qualify as definitive when it comes to describing a village, neighbourhood, band, tribe, or what have you. As a result, classic modernist ethnographies, like Malinowski’s account of the village of Kiriwina, are seen as flawed attempts to arrive at “hegemonic” interpretations of what are in fact well-nigh infinitely complex and contradictory sets of linked behavioural data that defy any single, over-arching attempt at definitive description.

All well and good. But the question remains: Is there in fact any material, if not wholly objective, reality lurking behind that which we anthropologists observe?

**WERNER HEISENBERG AND THE “UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE”**

Seventy-odd years ago, physics faced a similar dilemma. The breakthroughs that resulted in quantum mechanics and relativity had also raised both philosophical and mathematical questions about the nature of physical reality and how it can be described.
The dilemma was solved in 1927 by a young German physicist named Werner Heisenberg. Heisenberg, who eventually won a Nobel Prize, pointed out (1958, 1977) that all accounts of the physical world are inherently uncertain. This is because it is impossible to measure linked variables with perfect accuracy, the reason being that the act of measuring one of them necessarily changes the other. Rayski and Rayski (1977: 17) characterise what came to be called “the uncertainty principle” in the following terms:

Heisenberg’s uncertainty relations, if correctly understood [are based on] the following two facts: (a) A simultaneous direct measurement of [the] coordinate and momentum of a particle … is impossible. (b) If the two measurements were performed consecutively then only the result of the latter may be used for probabilistic predictions of the future while the result of the former measurement becomes completely disactualized and invalidated due to the uncontrollable disturbance of the particle by the latter measurement.

The net effect, as far as the physical universe is concerned, is that while we are absolutely certain that there is something real “out there”, and that particles have both position and momentum, these linked variables defy absolutely accurate description by the physicist, as the act of measuring more than a single variable necessarily distorts the results of the measurement.

The implications for anthropology, especially postmodern anthropology, should be obvious. Stripped of its fashionable and politically correct, anti-scientific rhetoric, as well as its laudable preoccupation with the evils of “late capitalism”, the postmodern approach to ethnography, with its emphasis on dialogue and vocality, and upon the inherent uncertainty of the anthropological enterprise, has much in common with Heisenberg’s caveat about the impossibility of accurately measuring linked physical variables. Indeed, in their critiques of the “modernist” approach to ethnography and its pretence of absolute authorial authority on the part of a presumably dispassionate, disengaged, and objective ethnographer, the postmodernists have, in effect, re-invented Heisenberg’s wheel.
By definition, the behaviour of human beings everywhere is linked in an almost infinite number of ways. As Geertz (1973: 5), echoing Max Weber, has so eloquently put it, human beings everywhere are “suspended in webs of significance”, and it is to the untangling of these webs that the uncertainty principle can be applied. More often than not, when an ethnographer attempts to take the measure, as it were, of two or more socio-cultural phenomena – for example, a local social hierarchy and a community’s perceptions of its immediate past – he or she ends up skewing the “measurement” of at least one, if not both, of these Geertzian web-strands.

Yet, at the same time, it can be inferred that the materiality of the web-strands themselves transcends the inherent uncertainty and contingency that pervade even the “thickest” ethnographic description – just as physicists are agreed that position and momentum exist in the physical universe, despite the fact that they can never be measured with absolute certainty. This approach, which I provisionally label “post-modern materialism”, can be illustrated by reference to an aspect of my own research in a contemporary Tokyo neighbourhood: Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome.

**UNISEX MIKOSHI TEAMS: BREAKING THE GENDER BARRIER**

Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, which I have studied on and off since 1976 (Littleton 1986, 1989, 1995), is a fairly typical Tokyo neighbourhood that is neither hyper-traditional nor hyper-modern located on the northwest edge of downtown – that is, just outside the Yamanote rail loop that serves to define the central part of the city. My focus in recent years has been on the neighbourhood’s annual matsuri, or festival, which takes place in early September and honours the kami enshrined in the Tenso-Jinja, a tiny neighbourhood Shinto shrine, or jinja, dedicated to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami.

As Sadler (1969, 1975), Bestor (1985, 1989), Ashkenazi (1993), Nelson (1996), myself (Littleton 1986) and a host of others have abundantly demonstrated, such Japanese festivals are more than simply religious rituals; rather, they are cultural constructions that reflect a wide variety of community interests, secular as well as sacred. However, the central event of every matsuri, whether an
“ordinary” festival or a *taisai*, that is, a “major festival”, which, in Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, occurs every third year, is the carrying of a *mikoshi*, or portable shrine, through the streets of the neighbourhood, thereby sanctifying both it and the carriers.

Until 1978, this was an exclusively male prerogative, at least as far as Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, was concerned. However, in that year, reflecting a trend that has swept across much of urban Japan in recent decades, young women gained the right to join the *mikoshi*-carrying teams, even during *taisai*. This change is an objective, visible, and thoroughly material cultural fact. However, when one attempts to understand the cultural rationale behind the change, uncertainty intrudes abruptly into the calculus.

Two years later, in 1980, as I attempted to reconstruct the labyrinthine decision-making process that preceded the change (Littleton [1986]; unfortunately, I was not in Japan in 1978), the more I probed, the more my probing seemed to colour the information I was able to glean. Each neighbourhood constituency that played a major role in the decision – the senior members of the *Chō-kai*, or neighbourhood association, the *Sōdai-kai*, or lay “deacons” who manage the affairs of the Tenso-jinja, and the young women themselves, who, for the most part, were the daughters of local shopkeepers – seemed to have a different rationale. What is more, no two of my “informants” – to use a currently unfashionable but still useful label – agreed completely, either in dialogues with one another in my presence or with me on a one-to-one basis. Indeed, all parties concerned had clearly distinct “voices”, that is, unique points of view, when it came to the matter in question.

This, indeed, was the epitome of the multi-vocality that postmodernists claim is one of the pivotal differences between their own and the more traditional “modernist” approach (cf. Tyler 1986: 125-31) to ethnography. What is more, I am convinced that my own presence skewed these dialogues; despite a decades-long association with the neighbourhood, I am still a *gaijin*, a Western foreigner who is automatically assumed to have “peculiar” – or at least non-Japanese – ideas about proper gender roles. Thus, à la Heisenberg, when I attempted to “measure” the women’s attitudes toward the change and juxtapose that “measurement” to the opinions expressed by a *sōdai*, I inevitably found myself negotiating between two
complementary “takes” on the matter, plus my own ingrained sense of gender equality. While the guji, or head-priest of the Mizu-Inari-jinja, a relatively wealthy nearby shrine, who is regularly retained by the Sōdai-kai to preside over the Tenso-jinja’s annual matsuri, and several sōdai felt compelled to assert that women had played important roles in ancient Shintō, serving as high priestesses at Ise and other major shrines (cf. Kojiki 69.3; Philippi 1968: 212) and that there were other precedents for greater female participation in Shintō ritual, most of the young women I spoke to simply wanted to imitate their counterparts in other Tokyo neighbourhoods and join in on the fun. None of them mentioned any religious justification, at least initially, although several eagerly embraced the sōdai’s rationale when they learned of it.

Other members of the local community, including several Sōdai and the Chō-kai-chō, the president of the Neighbourhood Association, claimed that the girls’ mothers had instigated the change and, while they were happy enough to accommodate them, they emphasised that the change was good for Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome’s image. Several members of the Shōten-kai, or local Shopkeepers Association, concurred, adding that it was also good for business. When I brought up the Misu-Inari guji’s rationalisation, most of them indicated that they were aware of it, but that it was not pivotal to the decision-making process.

In short, while the shift from all-male to mixed mikoshi teams in Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, and elsewhere in the country is a thoroughly material phenomenon, one that is reflected in the content of a recent Japanese television commercial, in which a father proudly ties a hachimaki, or headband, around his teenage daughter’s head (whereupon she gulps down an energy drink and runs off to carry a mikoshi), the cultural rationale for the change is by no means as clear-cut. It shifts from “voice” to “voice” as each account impinges upon and skews the other. The bottom line is that it is impossible to “measure” the complex set of variables here with any degree of certainty.

THE KOISUMI FAMILY AND THE OFFICE OF SEKININ-SŌDAI
Another manifestation of the uncertainty principle in Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, can be seen in my attempts to “measure” a curious local custom wherein the office of sekinin-sōdai, or “chief shrine elder”, should ideally be filled by the head of the senior branch of the Koizumi family, one of the oldest families in the neighbourhood. This custom, although not unique to this neighbourhood, is, as several colleagues have recently assured me via the Internet, is extremely rare, especially in urban Japan. No other nearby sōdai-kai practises it. Neither the Takadanobaba, 1-chome, sekinin-sōdai nor his counterpart who presides over the affairs of the Misu Inari-jinja (see above), are selected according to any hereditary criteria. However, it is important here that a male Koizumi of the right age and competence be available to assume the position. In recent years, this has not been the case, and the role has been filled by another senior member of the sōdai-kai, Hashiba Hideo, the highly respected proprietor of a local sake-ten, or liquor store. Indeed, I was given to understand that this curious custom, the reasons for which seemed to be obscure, was finally dying out.

Over the years, I have explored these matters in some depth with several younger informants who regularly took part in the local matsuri, and soon learned that none of them knew why the office was hereditary in the Koizumi family, although all of them were aware of the custom. The fact that the Koizumis have been around for a long time is widely appreciated, and the family receives a great deal of local respect. But very few residents of the neighbourhood seemed to have any idea as to why this was so – or how this related to the selection of a new sekinin-sōdai.

However, since 1994, my probing of this particular Geertzian web-strand seems to have had a palpable impact on the custom I was attempting to “measure”. Together with the current sekinin-sōdai’s son, Hashiba Shiro, in 1994 I uncovered textual evidence that what is now Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, was once called Gembei-mura. It was also clear that this long-forgotten toponym reflected the name of the farmer who founded the parent-village in 1595, and who later received the surname “Koizumi” from the local shōgunal authorities for provisioning several nearby samurai yashiki, or billets, belonging to the Matsudaira, an important feudal clan. We also learned that Gembei’s son (or grandson) founded the Tenso-jinja circa 1645.
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(Littleton 1997). This information, bits and pieces of which were dimly known by a few long-time neighbourhood residents, was subsequently confirmed by a privately-published book entitled Shimo Totsuka (Nishimura 1977), which came to light in the course of my field work. It was put together by several amateur antiquarians in what is now generally referred to as Chaya-machi, but was originally part of a larger district known as Shimo-Totsuka. Although not directly concerned with Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, the book does mention Gembei in passing and the founding of the mura that took his name, the Matsudaira yashiki that once lined the Kanda River which forms the southern boundary of the neighbourhood, and the origin of the Koizumi family.

In any case, thanks to Shimo Totsuka and the memories it triggered among some elderly, long-time residents of the neighbourhood, persons – including several members of the Koizumi family whose ancestors settled there during the Edo Period (1603-1867) – it eventually became clear why the Koizumis had such local prestige and were expected to provide the sekinin-sōdai, an office that is especially important as far as the Tenso-jinja is concerned, as the shrine is too poor to command the services of a full-time priest, or guji. As I have indicated, the office is not presently occupied by a Koizumi, as there was no male member the right age when the office last became vacant. However, when Hashiba Hideo-san either dies or becomes too infirm to carry out his duties, it is now common knowledge that the position of sekinin-sōdai will once again pass to a Koizumi, as there are several members of the family who are now old enough to assume it.

There is, however, more to it than that. My own intense interest in making sense out of the hereditary dimension of the local matsuri peculiar succession seems to have sparked an increased awareness and appreciation of Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome’s rich heritage, at least among the local movers and shakers, one that necessarily reflected my own periodic presence in the neighbourhood. Indeed, after the contents of Shimo Totsuka were shared among the neighbourhood elite, I was told that the old custom would almost certainly be revived when Hashiba Shiro-san’s father dies or retires.
CONFRONTING THE ESSENTIALIST BOGEYMAN

Thus, Heisenberg’s “wheel” still spins whenever we are faced with situations of these sorts, no matter what kinds of variables we seek to measure. Indeed, the German Nobel laureate’s brilliant insights into the inherent uncertainty of the scientific enterprise are as apt for field ethnography today as they were for quantum mechanics in 1927. To assume that all aspects of culture are contingent upon dialogue is patently absurd; the women have been visibly out there carrying the mikoshi for almost two decades now. But when it comes to understanding why and how this change happened, hegemonic, modernist materialism comes up woefully short. As Dumont (1992 [1978]: 44), who also mentions Heisenberg and the idea of uncertainty (pp. 45-6), so aptly observes in his well-known reassessment of his field work among the Panare of Venezuela: “Clearly, there is indeed an objective reality outside of what I have perceived, but it is not the one I have perceived, nor is it the one – I am sorry to report – my ‘objectivist’ colleagues perceive.” Indeed, in commenting on the relevance of Heisenberg to anthropology, he (1992 [1978]: 46) points out that “…in translating physics to anthropology, a little something has been left out, namely, that it is admittedly difficult to fear, to hate to mourn, to fall in love with … in other words to feel for a light particle.” Here, Dumont has in mind specifically what he calls the “vulgar materialism” of Harris (e.g., 1968, 1977), the “logical positivism” of Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g., 1974 (1955), and the “thick description” of Geertz (1973], which, as Crapanzano (1986: 75) rightly points out, remains thoroughly authorial and hegemonic, despite the former’s brilliant “interpretive virtuosity”. However, like Heisenberg vis-à-vis the physical universe, Dumont remains convinced that there is in fact an “objective reality” – or “there there”, in contradistinction to Gertrude Stein’s oft-quoted remark about Oakland, California – to Panare culture, despite the fact that it cannot be accurately measured. This, of course, brings us face-to-face with one of postmodernism’s worst bêtes noires: essentialism, that is, the assumption that everything has a “there there”, an essential, objective – and thoroughly material – reality that can indeed be measured, if only approximately. It is the recognition that such an essence does exist, despite our inability to fully take its measure that
separates what I propose from the more “orthodox” variety of essentialist-bashing postmodernism, as espoused by Clifford, Marcus, Tyler, and the rest. To be sure, some essentialist assumptions, such as those that link skin colour and other human physical characteristics with behaviour, or that ride roughshod over what are otherwise significant cultural and/or individual differences (e.g., the essentialism embedded in statements like “All Japanese lack a sense of humour.” or “All Americans are intensely individualistic.”), is patent-ly false. But to assume that there is no “there” anywhere, no essential reality whatsoever, and that what we call culture is by definition merely a cacophony of individual “voices”, is equally false, at least when measured against the data I have gathered in Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome. There is indeed a “there there”, an essence, if you will, that, at any given time, serves to define this particular Tokyo neighbourhood, both to outsiders like myself and to those who call it home – despite the fact that anyone who would take its “measure” is necessarily constrained by Heisenberg’s caveat.

It should be emphasised that the postmodern-materialist agenda is by no means limited to the assessment of single cultures, or fragments thereof, like Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome. For example, the five constructs that Appadurai (1990, 1996) brings to bear in his well-known assessment of global culture, that is, “ethnoscapes”, “mediascapes”, “technoscapes”, “finanscapes” and “ideoscapes”, are also, I suggest, implicit examples of this approach. Despite Appadurai’s assertion (1990: 296) that they are not composed of “objectively given relations” and do not “look the same from every angle of vision, but rather are deeply perspectival constructs”, these linked constructs clearly have an objective, material existence – an essence, if you will – that goes beyond perspective and which constrains both thought and action in diverse regions of the globe, transcending traditional national cultures and boundaries. At the same time, the fact that they “do not look the same from every angle of vision”, to say nothing of the serious disjunctions among them, effectively rules out any “hegemonic” ethnographic description. Thus, like the ways the residents of Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, conceive of their identity and express it in the course of their annual matsuri, Appadurai’s globally relevant “scapes” are at once inherently real and inherently uncertain.
In short, I suggest that postmodern-materialism, which recognises both the objective materiality of culture per se and, at the same time, the impossibility of ever factoring out the impact of the investigator on the investigated and vice versa, makes far better sense than either undiluted modernism, of whatever stripe, or full-bore, Tylerian “pomo”, and that it should become an integral part of anthropology’s twenty-first-century “moral cosmos”.

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Notes

1 Kermode (1995: 370) succinctly summarises the essence of postmodernism as follows: “Postmodernism is antifoundationalist, it mistrusts diachronic explanations and those metanarratives it regards as enslavers of modernism. It is suspicious of theory, though dedicated to the idea of interweaving discursive practices in the here and now. … It is interested in fragments and discontinuities, as against totalities and continuities; it asserts the impossibility of diachronic explanations. It denies traditional hierarchies, political or cultural. And it holds that the aspect it is changing, superannuating, is in fact the aspect of modernism, now described as the faith of the official culture, against which postmodernists see themselves in revolt.

2 In ordinary years, the teams carry the empty mikoshi owned by the local chō-kai, or neighbourhood association. The votive image of the local kami (the Sun Goddess Amaterasu) is only carried during taisai, when the priest hired for the occasion places it inside the shrine-owned (or miya-) mikoshi. This is what sets taisai apart from what are sometimes
called “shadow festivals”. The two *mikoshi* are stored in a building that forms part of the Tenso-Jinja complex.

3 Most Shintō shrines of any size have long utilised the services of *miko*: teenage virgins who assist male priests in a variety of ritual functions (Reader 1991: 65; Littleton 1996: 158, 2002: 62). However, unlike the young women who today carry *mikoshi* together with their brothers and husbands, these “altar girls”, as it were, play a subordinate role in the system, one that is consistent with the traditional role of women in Japanese society generally. Ironically, their ancient prototypes were female shamans who *did* play important roles (Blacker 1975: 104-26). None of my informants saw fit to mention this curious aspect of the matter, perhaps because the Tenso-Jinja is too small to support any *miko*.

4 Several young women likened the experience to dressing up in a variety of costumes and dancing to rock music in Tokyo’s Yoyogi Park on a Sunday afternoon (cf. Littleton 1986).

5 There are currently three main branches of the Koisumi family. Two of them, including the senior branch, which, for the last century or so, has owned a prosperous rice shop on Waseda-dōri, a major artery, still live in what is now (see note 8) Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome); the third resides a few blocks away in a neighbourhood affiliated with the nearby Suwa-Jinja.

6 I am indebted to my Japanologist colleague Thomas Hardy, who has studied the Misu-Inari-Jinja extensively since the early 1980s, for this information.

7 See also *Chisu de Miru Shinjuku-ku no Utsuri Kawaikai: Totsuka to Ochai* (1986: 48-49), which clearly indicates the boundaries of Gembei-mura in the late Edo era (c. 1850).

8 The toponym Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, is relatively recent. Until the early seventies, the neighbourhood was officially known as Totsukamachi, 2-chome, and the “Totsuka” designation is still to be found here and there, as in the name of the “Totsuka Ward Market”, a collection of small, individually owned shops in the basement of an older building on Waseda-dōri that struggles to survive in an era increasingly dominated by supermarkets.

9 As the Tenso-Jinja’s *ujiko*, or “parishioners”, are currently spread across two neighbourhoods (the other neighbourhood, Takadanobaba, 1-chome, lies due west of Nishi-Waseda, 3-chome, on the other side of a
main thoroughfare called Meiji-dōri), there are two sōdai-kai and therefore two sekinin-sōdai, who preside jointly over the affairs of the shrine.

10 For an interesting discussion of the links between Frazer’s anthropology and physics at the threshold of modernism, see Herbert (1995). Indeed, Herbert goes so far as to suggest that the *Golden Bough* is predicated in fair measure on something akin to Heisenberg’s Uncertainly Principle (Herbert 1995: 140; see Frazer 1963 [1922]: 65, 823).

11 I.e., “There is no there there” (quoted by Kellner 1988: 5). As Robinson (1991: 1) points out, Stein was a “consummate ethnographer”, and I suspect that, if the famous poet had spent more time in Oakland as an adult, she would have concluded that it did indeed have a “there”: an essence unique to the East Bay city which, in its own way, was as compelling, if not as attractive, as that of her beloved Paris.

References


Archaeology and the Moral Cosmos

CHRIS LYNN

Archaeology is the study of the material remains of the past, most of which, in the popular conception, have been found in the ground or have to be dug up in a process of controlled excavation. The process of archaeology, however, happens in the here and now and its moral concerns belong to the present and are evolving. Since the material studied in archaeology relates to the past it can provide a useful, though incomplete, means to address aspects of the moral cosmoses of past societies. These are not, however, the moral cosmos of archaeology itself, except to the extent that the views of modern archaeologists influence interpretation of ancient data.

Put simply, archaeology is the study of the material culture of ancient peoples. But the cosmological view of the groups studied is a fundamental issue never far from the agenda. Visible monuments are often cosmological structures, built to endure as ancient people’s personal testimonies to important aspects of their world view(s). Sometimes the moral cosmos I mention will be that of the ancient people we are trying to study and sometimes it will be my assessment of present-day archaeologists’ and society’s ethical perspectives. In other words there may be more variations than themes in this paper. There are two interesting collections of studies on the subject of archaeological ethics, one edited by Ernestene L. Green (1984) and the other by Karen Vitelli (1996). These cover most of the issues I propose to address and many others, in more detail.

An archaeologist is not responsible for moral decision-making or theory-developing at the level for example of a legislator, a politician, a military strategist or a theologian. However, the practitioners of any profession seem to take their subject and the material concerned, equally seriously so that some of the debates in archaeology are pursued just as vehemently as in other subjects where the outcome of the process will, from an independent standpoint, have more far-reaching social and moral consequences for modern society than archaeology.
THE VALUE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Why spend considerable time, money and professional talent on a subject which doesn’t produce better food, shelter, health, entertainment or energy? Is it worthwhile or morally acceptable to spend your life at others’ expense, in a pursuit that results in hard-to-measure qualitative benefits? Is public education about past cultures and societies worth the resources that it absorbs? When archaeologists interact with those in business, politics and the media (and government administration) they are asked these things. Charles McGimpsey in a paper only four pages long (1984) presents a simplified outline explaining how to convince almost everyone that archaeology is significant (and therefore morally defensible as a pursuit).

 Anyone who picks up a piece of worked stone or pottery and looks at it will wonder when it was made, what it was used for and who made it. Archaeology has developed theories and procedures for answering these and many other questions about the past.

- There seems to be a deep-seated human need to know about our predecessors and an innate, almost emotional, curiosity about the past.
- Archaeology challenges our ability to think and to solve problems. The archaeologist functions like a detective.
- Archaeology increases the size and scope of the social scientist’s laboratory. There are many questions about human behaviour, relationships and adaptations that are not adequately exemplified in current situations. As the information with the all-important factor of time-depth becomes increasingly available, social scientists will also better understand the nature and direction of current and future human activity.

McGimpsey points out that it is astounding how few facts are actually available to the direct sense awareness of the archaeologist
responsible for excavations. In basic terms only two rather limited classes of facts are available:

1 Artefacts and features and associated environmental data. Artefacts are taken away, features, unless stone walls, are generally destroyed in excavation;

2 The locations of those artefacts and features in the ground absolutely and relatively (to one another and to natural and artificial soil strata). Everything else is hypothesis and theory.

The popular, and sometimes professional view of archaeology as a study of the past is an unnecessarily limiting concept of the discipline. Archaeology is an analysis of the relationships of material culture and non-material human activity which uses data from the former to determine and interpret the latter, with a view to the fullest possible understanding of both. Indeed Pierre Grimal once described archaeology as “that science of so many lacunae [in which], an obstinate drive to prove every point merely destroys the whole structure of reasoning.” (!) (Grimal 1964: 113).

BASIC ETHICAL PROBLEMS

There are some general moral concerns that archaeology shares with other disciplines, for example, probity in the management of funds provided by others. Archaeology is popularly portrayed as a field where there is considerable rivalry over “discoveries” which on their own can enhance the prestige of the discoverer. A field archaeologist could make a lifetime reputation on the basis of a lucky productive excavation whereas years of painstaking written analysis might go unrecognised. The possibility of the archaeologist falsifying results, however, to reach a desired and ground-breaking conclusion assuring him or her of instant fame in the profession would be remote. Sometimes, when an interesting paper is published the reaction can be negative in some quarters; people feel it shows up their lack of publication and sets the benchmark too high. In archaeology sometimes large sums of other people’s money are involved, for example
in paying for rescue excavations or for fieldwork projects. There are ethical and moral issues in making sure that the funds are expended effectively for the purposes that they were allocated. The recovery and publication of archaeological data can be expensive. What may be ethical concerns for an amateur archaeologist surely become more moral for the professional who may personally earn over a million dollars over the course of a long career. He or she may be responsible for the expenditure of a sum many times that amount – all of it coming from the taxpayer or from academic or charitable foundations.

One of the ethical or moral questions that archaeological practitioners ask themselves is “What is the point or relevance of all this?” Why should society pay for it, why should people be interested? Should we not “leave the dead to bury the dead” and move on?

As university students the consuming interest of the material seemed self-evident and by learning some dates, and the names of exotic ceramic styles or flint tool assemblages named after some otherwise little known corner of the world, one quickly seemed to master an esoteric jargon which gave the beginner an academic aura (without having to grapple with anything technically difficult, like a new language or a science).

**JUSTIFICATION**

I recall asking a senior university teacher how he could justify producing dozens of archaeology graduates each year for which there were no jobs in the subject? He retorted that archaeology graduates, whether they ever work at it again or not, are intellectually equipped to reach balanced evaluations on the basis of a wide variety of evidence and that they will have knowledge, experience and technical skills which will be useful in many walks of life, including environmental studies and even administration. This reminded me of a young archaeologist I knew of who graduated with first-class honours but, after several years working on short contracts, couldn’t find a job in the subject which suited her. She reluctantly decided to look elsewhere for employment and, on the strength of computer skills attained to manipulate archaeological data for her thesis, got a job
with an aircraft and missile manufacturer. Unfortunately, I can’t claim that all archaeologists could equally well be rocket scientists!

Scott Littleton in his final note to the second edition of *The New Comparative Mythology* (Littleton 1982: 236), said as long ago as 1973 that there has been a questioning of some of the most cherished assumptions of scholarly endeavour, especially the assumption that the quest for knowledge can be an end in itself. Students also asked him to justify the relevancy of studying the ancient Indo-Europeans, for whom in this context we could substitute the material remains of the past in general. His response was that to study the Indo-Europeans was to study the past of the “Westerners” as a whole, that the past of the Indo-Europeans was “our” past and that this makes it relevant. He quoted the prophet Isaiah (51:1), speaking in a different context, but in words almost tailored for the archaeologist:

> look unto the rock whence ye are hewn
> And to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

This idea that the past was lived in by our ancestors has some appeal. Archaeology becomes a kind of homage to their struggles for survival and their efforts to create an element of civilisation in difficult times and to their efforts in bringing on successive new generations down to our own. Unfortunately, some present-day groups of people regard themselves as exclusively small so that, by restricting their interests to a past which is recognisably “theirs”, they become narrowly focused geographically and culturally. This can sometimes result in a kind of archaeology of nationalism or a parish-pump antiquarianism. We get interested in past societies for a variety of reasons, mine were at the outset purely local. I grew up with a museum round the corner, in a small city dominated by a medieval cathedral with a large prehistoric monument complex a mile away to the west. The “big picture”, as it were, is still gradually dawning in my mind through the work of bodies like the Traditional Cosmology Society. On the other hand, someone educated in the United States might begin with a more detached but broader world view, expanding their choices and opportunities for personal research and career. Most archaeologists would now aspire to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of mankind’s past and present as a whole, and think that, if lucky, they
can contribute to the revelation of transcendent realities (in grandiose terms). They use material which is interesting not only for its local and temporal setting, but because the conclusions from its study are of more widespread interest at present and applicability in the past.

**AN ETHICAL AND MORAL PATH FOR ARCHAEOLOGY**

What issues are peculiar to archaeology which make it different from, say, the related field of anthropology? The main thing seems to be its focus on material culture from the past – objects, structures, things, environmental samples and other materials that form the equivalent of crime-scene forensic evidence. The first thing to flow from this is that there is a finite limit to the quantity of this raw data. At any given place or period the available information is diminishing through the natural effects of time itself, from the diggings of looters or researchers or from unwitting or deliberate human interference in the course of development projects. If the study of past societies is morally justifiable, even worthwhile, then this raw material becomes precious to modern and future societies, even if it has little or no intrinsic value. While I may be accused of taking a narrowly conservationist view, a natural sequence of ethical and moral concerns arises as follows:

- Protection of the resource *in situ* so that it will be there for future generations to research and appreciate
- Proper curation, research, interpretation and display of extant collections
- Careful selection of sites for research (or “mitigation” of destruction)
- Employment of state of the art methodology in carrying out the research
- Proper interpretation of the results
- Publication of the results and interpretation (an archaeologist who doesn’t publish is simply a remunerated looter [*mea culpa!*])
- Curation of the archives and display or public interpretation of the excavated cultural material
• Continuous review of all processes to ensure effective use of resources where most needed.

Government agencies make many of these decisions through the operation of various forms of legislation designed to protect what can be called the “built heritage” (Fig. 1). There are international conventions which are binding on signatory governments, aimed at protecting the resource and preventing illegal trafficking in looted artefacts, for example the Valetta, London and Florence conventions of the Council of Europe. Even the 1954 Hague Convention on the duties of an occupying power in the event of war, requires that power to “preserve and protect all antiquities, sites, and cultural treasures for the benefit of the inhabitants, restrict excavations to necessary digs or salvage work, and remove no cultural property from the occupied territory” (Silberman 1996: 134). Similar policies lie at the core of current state legislation designed to protect sites and antiquities. There are also professional bodies which give thought to, and publish policies on all these issues, for example in Britain the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Archaeologists in professional bodies must demonstrate that they have achieved and can maintain standards in various competencies before they can use the appropriate accreditation of the professional body. These could include, surveying, excavating, publishing, project management and IT applications.

ETHICS OF COLLECTING

Archaeology raises moral questions in collecting the antiquities which sometimes form the raw material on which it is practised. Modern museums and private collectors acquiring antiquities with perceived artistic merit or cultural interest have to be careful that their actions are not fuelling ongoing looting of significant sites. Archaeologists must be careful not to become unwittingly involved in such a process (see Elia 1996 and Renfrew and Bahn 2000: 556). A related problem concerns the popular pastime of metal-detecting. In Ireland it is illegal to search for antiquities or to dig up the ground looking for archaeological remains without a licence from a government department. I recall some twenty years ago visiting the home of two metal detectorists where the study had its walls covered with ancient
metalwork finds and the desk drawers were full of things ranging from medieval basins and horse-trappings to Viking Age silver and Bronze Age weapons. I don’t know whether this material ever made it to a museum, but the collectors appeared to have no ethical misgivings about their activities.

The problem about treasure-hunting and metal-detecting is not simply that antiquities, which arguably should properly belong to the public, are kept in private hands, it is the removal of the artefact from its archaeological context that does the crucial damage. However, as a colleague remarked, it isn’t the metal-detector that does the damage, it is the detectorist’s spade. Very often an archaeologist would be delighted to find a coin or two in contexts that might help date the period of occupation of a complex site. The significance of the site will be greatly lessened if all he finds are a few dark pockets where a detectorist has removed some objects which have little more than curiosity value for him. That is not to say that detectoring is all bad. Some people restrict their activities to the plough soil, thereby doing no damage to sealed deposits of archaeological interest. They report all their finds to the authorities (required by law in Ireland) and draw attention to the existence of hitherto unknown archeological sites which can then be individually protected by law. Sometimes, in the appropriate circumstances archaeologists will work with metal detectorists to achieve insights which would not otherwise be obtained, for example in “battlefield” archaeology where numerous metal debris lie scattered around in the topsoil. If identified and mapped this can provide valuable clues to the course of the struggle.

The Ulster Museum recently arranged to metal-detect deposits dredged from the bed of the river Blackwater, Co. Armagh and to recover the scattered remains of a collection of Early Christian ecclesiastical metalwork, apparently lost in an ancient boating accident. An example of such a mishap, probably a later incident, on this river is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* for the year 1118 (MacAirt and MacNiocaill 1983): “The value of one hundred ounces of mass-vestments of Cellach, successor of Patrick [Abbot of Armagh], was drowned in Dabhall [R. Blackwater] and he himself received a shock.” One of the objects found beside the Blackwater was the “Clonmore Shrine”, or rather its scattered metal plates which had covered a reliquary box a little bigger than a matchbox (Fig. 2).
These were recovered from among tons of gravel scattered along several hundred metres of river bank, by alternate metal detecting and bulldozing layer by layer. The shrine is the oldest piece of ecclesiastical metalwork known from Ireland and is decorated in a style derived from the La Tène style of the Iron Age.

**NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

Archaeology is often funded by national governments because it is felt that an awareness of the archaeological past, hopefully its “glories”, with major elements unique to the territory, will create a sense of national identity and perhaps help the region’s tourism industry. Perhaps the best-known manipulation of concepts of the past was the twentieth-century European dictators’ appeal to a largely imaginary past to symbolise the “greatness” with which they tried to motivate their followers. For example the results of the archaeologists’ work during the fascist regime in Rome remain plain to see (Atkinson 1997) and include opening up parts of the fora of Caesar, Vespasian and Trajan and remains of temples in the Largo de Argentina. The *Ara Pacis Augustae* was excavated and reassembled to celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Augustus in 1938. This is not to criticise specific workers, but with hindsight lessons can be learned and archaeologists would now be more aware of the wider political context of the funding they use.

Archaeologists also sometimes bring their own personal agendas to the interpretation of the subject material; they can be nationalistic, Marxist, or “cognitive post-processualist” for example. It has been suggested that global archaeology in future can take one of two courses, either a narrowly provincial archaeology that would elaborate the current nationalist polemic or, alternatively, a broadly conceived archaeology that would transcend current attitudes and reveal the complexity of human experience without conferring privilege on any particular people or place. Nationalist archaeologies allow developing countries to reclaim a heritage previously accessible only through westerners, often regarded as pioneers or explorers. An archaeology tolerant of local potentialities can thrive only in an atmosphere of mutual respect among nations for the cultural priorities
and beliefs of others. This requires that we refrain from a scientific profanation of the still sacred elements of people’s pasts, for example the inappropriate manipulation of the Hopi Kachinas which upsets their cosmological order (McIntosh et al. 1996: 187). In addition it strikes me that, although the archaeological aspects of these cases are interesting, much more intriguing is the possibility of speaking to people who hold these views and learning from them directly – a minor consequence of which would be the better understanding of the archaeological material. This reminds me of a conference I was at in Santiago, Spain, a few years ago where one of the overseas delegates said that he could never understand why all the pilgrims queued up in the Cathedral to touch the reliquary of St James. I suggested that a few simple questions might have elicited some insights. This also reminds me that commentators can take less and less for granted these days in terms of people’s awareness of “cosmic issues”. I saw an interesting display at Rushen Abbey on the Isle of Man recently in which the first few panels introduced the concept of religion and briefly explained who God is that some people believe in and what the Bible is. I am not making a moral judgement on this, simply noting that professionals attempting to present the heritage have to cater for a wider constituency of visitors, some of whom may be less well informed on these issues than was assumed in earlier times.

The Annual Reports of the agencies responsible for the protection and promotion of the heritage can give clues to the degree of nationalism they feel necessary to present, partly in order to get funds from government and partly to convince the reader that only in that part of the world can the visitor enjoy an experience which is unique to the region. Let us look at a Scottish example.

I thought it would be interesting to find out how well Historic Scotland (the government agency responsible for the curation and presentation to the public of Scotland’s historic sites and monuments) measures up to the ideal of “an archaeology tolerant of local potentialities which can thrive only in an atmosphere of mutual respect among nations for the cultural beliefs of others”. We find in the opening few pages of the 1999-2000 Historic Scotland Annual Report the following:
The most significant event of the year for many Scots was the opening of the Scottish Parliament and Historic Scotland was privileged to be able to play a part ... Our first priority will always be to the built heritage in Scotland, but our work is fast gaining an international reputation for its quality and value.

Historic Scotland joined with Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, business and the Foreign and Commonwealth office to exhibit at the Kunming International Horticultural Exhibition celebrating 50 years of the People’s Republic of China. Historic Scotland’s indoor exhibit, which explored the historic horticultural connections between Scotland and China, won a gold award.

Historic Scotland launched the 10th annual European Heritage Day with bodies representing more than 30 countries at the launch in Glasgow. Neolithic Orkney was added to the list of world heritage sites. Historic Scotland provided one of two UK representatives to the programme of an international body Cooperating in Science and Technology, on Urban Heritage: Building Maintenance. Historic Scotland participated in the North Atlantic Heritage Network. Staff attended a number of meetings in Europe and beyond with a presentation to the National Trust for India, in Delhi.

Ten out of ten? There is nothing inward-looking here and the aim seems to be to put Scotland’s heritage in its proper international context and to seek international recognition for the organisation’s endeavours.

HUMAN REMAINS AND ARCHAEOLOGY

An archaeologist could not speak to a group about archaeology and the moral cosmos without saying something about the treatment of human remains. This controversial topic is best known from the discussions that have taken place in recent decades over the treatment, excavation, storage and re-burial of Native Americans’ remains, and from the case of the African cemetery in New York where it was suggested by public figures that the potential of the site
was inadequately assessed before development and that on excavation the skeletal remains were not curated to the standards normal elsewhere on account of their race (Harrington 1996). My view is that the beliefs of descendent communities in these matters should be respected. There are plenty of anthropological remains in the world untrammeled by controversy which would repay scientific study. I find it hard to accept a coldly scientific point of view that says “I want to study your ancestor’s remains and to do so I will override your beliefs about their spirits.” The situation is complicated further when present-day communities assert the right to speak on behalf of ancient remains with which they can have no real descendant relationship.

Archaeologists usually encounter human remains unexpectedly. There are few research projects which deliberately target cemeteries, because the burials have usually destroyed any earlier features and the bones are costly to store and research. Sometimes human bones are encountered in rescue excavations where their total removal in accordance with careful procedures is unavoidable. Sometimes local churches, if they own the land on which an excavation takes place, will insist on reburial after study and in some church property a legal permission known as a “faculty” is required before examining burials. In all circumstances human remains should be treated with respect and archaeologists should avoid using them as a macabre form of advertising.

OBJECTIVITY IN THE FACE OF DISTURBING EVIDENCE FROM THE PAST

What does the archaeologist do and think when he or she encounters evidence for activities in the past which would be considered immoral or even repugnant by today’s standards? As a publicly responsible professional, one tries to be positive about most things, but in the circumstances of clear evidence for untimely death we have to report objectively on what is found and refrain from rapid judgement. At least we should not let our personal views cloud objectivity. I have found at least one eighteenth-century murder victim and remains of a number of medieval and early seventeenth-century “conflict” victims. A more interesting example in the present context would be the

Most of the bodies in question were found in peat bogs or are fragmentary and casually deposited skeletons showing signs of butchery found in what are interpreted as grain storage pits in hillforts like Danebury, Hants. The remains date from about 500 BC to AD 200 and all those described are believed to represent ritual or human sacrifice. Some documentary evidence exists for human sacrifice in the classical world, for example the rare and not understood sacrifice and burial of Greeks and Gauls in the Roman forum (Dumézil 1996: 2.449-50). At this time in NW Europe outside the classical world the disposal of human remains did not normally involve interment or cremation. It is thought that most bodies were subject to “excarnation”, deliberate removal of flesh or exposure to natural decay above ground and to predators (to account for the lack of evidence for the more usual burial rites). Some bodies were cremated and the charred bones interred and some were inhumed in the ‘normal’ way, but in the Iron Age these rites may have been reserved for special people or purposes. There is, therefore, something at least unusual or “special” about all of the bodies and bones described in Professor Green’s book. I think, however, that each case should be the subject of a form of “inquest” process to try to decide what the motive was for the unusual death/killing or dismemberment. Perhaps some were ordinary clandestine murders or people killed in conflict and buried quickly to hide the evidence?

Professor Green makes the assumption that all of the material (apart from the classical example) is “text free”. There is no religious or belief background to inform interpretation. Her analysis is, therefore, objective and “common sense” based entirely on the evidence of the remains themselves. Members of the Traditional Cosmology Society, however, might take the view that if these sacrifices were carried out by or on behalf of communities, then they might reflect or even demonstrate aspects of ancient beliefs, fragments of which have come down to us in myths. This is a question that Professor Green, probably rightly, in the context of her objective approach to the data, does not address. For example, there are several bog bodies that appear to have been fatally wounded in three different ways – strangulation, cutting and stabbing – reminiscent of the theme
of “the threefold death”. Some of the skeletal remains in the grain silos appear to favour the lower limbs – in one pit the butchered remains of a pelvis were found with parts of thighs attached. This would be appropriate if a sacrificer was attempting to distribute body parts to the appropriate cosmic regions. The pre-Roman ossuary monuments of Picardy contained the disarticulated bones of young men piled up in stacks and associated with weapons. It is possible that some features of these practices might be identified as reflecting Indo-European beliefs. In view of our own recent and ongoing history we must refrain from any moralistic tut-tutting about what happened in the past. We no longer believe that the sky will fall down if a sacrifice does not take place.

Professor Green also draws attention to the combination of evidence from Classical authors and archaeology that the Phoenicians sacrificed children to the gods and interred their cremated remains in urns in special cemeteries called “tophets” (Green 2001: 153–4). The urn cemetery at Carthage was particularly important, containing stone monuments and evidence for sacrificial practice from the eighth century BC down to the Roman destruction of the city in BC 146. In the child cemetery at Motya in Sicily inscriptions on stelae dedicate the children to Baal Mammon and Tanit and later to Kronos or Saturn, the Graeco-Roman names for Baal.

But there is another view. Ribichini (1988: 120-3) discussed the same evidence. According to Diodorus Siculus, when Carthage was besieged in 310 BC, hundreds of children were immolated in a fire in honour of Cronus. The Bible mentions the tophet where the sons and daughters of the idolatrous Israelites were “passed through fire”. Thus when the excavations in the Punic cities revealed sanctuaries with thousands of terracotta urns containing the ashes and bones of young children it was thought to be a “sad and precise archaeological confirmation” of the written information about the tophet and Punic child sacrifice. Ribichini, however, says that none of the written evidence finds exact confirmation in the archaeology of the Punic cemeteries. He interprets the archaeological remains simply as sacred areas used as children’s burial grounds, designed to receive the remains of infants who had died prematurely, perhaps then “offered” to specific deities and destined for a special afterlife. He accepts the evidence of the Classical sources for human sacrifice, but only as an exceptional
rite and points out that Baal Hammon and Tanit appear as benevolent beings with a positive role in the destinies of children.

How is the outsider to make up his or her mind? It would be trite to suggest that if you are trawling the ancient world looking for evidence of human sacrifice you will find a lot of it. On the other hand, if you are interested in Phoenician culture you will want to believe the best about them from today’s viewpoint. Objectivity is desirable but difficult to attain.

CONCLUSION

I have wandered through a small collection of examples, drawn from a much larger range of material, about ethics and archaeology which seems relevant to the existence and practice of the profession within a moral cosmos. In conclusion I would like to sketch out some views which seem to me appropriate for the ethical and moral practice of archaeology in the future.

1 The archaeological resource requires protection from unplanned development. In order to protect and manage the resource it requires to be identified by means of comprehensive surveys and research. This is largely a matter for national governments although international conventions create policy frameworks for legislation.

2 The archaeological resource deserves protection only in so far as it exists to fulfil the needs of present and future societies at individual, local, national, international and global levels. The past does not have an innate right to exist, to dominate or to inconvenience the future forever. In all decision-making, however, a long view should be taken in assessing the heritage impact of development proposals and there should be means to establish the relative interest of archaeological deposits. In circumstances where they would cause extreme expense or inconvenience to preserve such deposits might be excavated and not preserved. Each region should maintain a research strategy for its past in order to fill gaps in knowledge and to identify its most important “heritage assets” for protection. This would also inform the
prioritisation and allocation of resources for archaeological research.

3 Archaeology is nearly always carried out at public expense; few individual practitioners can afford to fund their own research on their own property. Archaeology should, therefore, be approached and practised as a public service. Sometimes this is inevitable, given the way it is set up and managed, for example in state archaeological services and museums. In other circumstance, for example in rescue excavation paid for by a developer, there is a more limited range of immediate “customers”. Nevertheless, many archaeologists manage a healthy degree of “outreach” through lectures, publications and the media. There should be opportunity for public display of archaeological processes, particularly fieldwork, and there should be full and rapid publication and discussion of the results of surveys and excavations.

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References


Figure 1  What excavation in advance of destruction can achieve. The excavation of a figure-of-eight plan wicker house dating from AD 700 found under a rath or earthwork settlement to be destroyed in farm improvement in Glenarm, Co. Antrim. In the larger circle the branches forming a bedding area can be seen in the foreground and beyond them a stone-kerbed central hearth. (Photograph © Environment and Heritage Service)

Figure 2  A find made by licensed metal detecting. Tomb-shaped shrine from Clonmore, Co. Armagh (back); seventh century AD; length 8.2 cms. (Photograph © Ulster Museum)
The Moral Cosmos of Village and Farm: A Case of Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft at Balmaclellan

ALISON CHAPMAN

The battle of ideas revolving round witchcraft in seventeenth-century Scotland can be seen in miniature at Balmaclellan in the south-west of the country. It is exemplified in the case of Elspeth McEwan and the Reverend Thomas Warner, where Elspeth’s world of farm and village collided with the Reverend Warner’s world of educated religious belief, parish, presbytery and the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland.

Thomas Warner or Vernor (1630-1716) was born in Musselburgh, the son of John Warner, baillie of the town. He took his MA at St Andrews in 1655 and was therefore by the standards of his time a highly educated man. Whether he was aware of any of the following pieces of information about Scottish intellectual tradition we cannot tell for certain, but we can assume with some likelihood that he knew that John Mair (1467-1550) taught Loyola, Calvin, George Buchanan and Rabelais in Paris and lived in the same house as Erasmus before returning to St Salvator’s in St Andrews to tutor John Knox, that post-Reformation scholars carrying on the long tradition of Scots scholars travelling abroad and returning home to teach included Duncan Liddel (who knew Tycho Brahe) and John Wedderburn (who was a friend of Kepler), and that the first Professor of Mathematics in the University of Edinburgh, James Gregory, was responsible for reflecting telescopes. We can also assume with some likelihood that he knew the medical work of Thomas Forbes and of Robert Sibbald, the first Professor of Medicine at Edinburgh, co-founder with Andrew Balfour in 1670 of the Royal Botanical Gardens and with Andrew Pitcairne, co-founder of the Royal College of Physicians. Did he know that his correspondent, George Sinclair, the later author of Satan’s Invisible World Discovered (1685), Professor of Philosophy and Mathematics at the University of Glasgow, demoted for
unorthodoxy, had done seminal work on hydrostatics in the tradition of Stevin, the Dutchman who made a windcarriage carrying thirty people outstrip horses galloping along the sand dunes in 1586 (Pledge 1939). As Pledge comments in his book *Science Since 1500* (1939: 59): “It is important to realise that it was not ingenuity which was lacking in those days but a settled habit of finding real uses for its products.”

Warner became minister in Balmaclellan in 1657, but was adversely affected by the Restoration of 1660. He was deprived by Act of Parliament in 1662 and accused before the Privy Council in 1663 of “still labouring to keep the hearts of the people from the present government in Church and State” (Scott, ed., 1917: 2.389).² He accepted an indulgence by the Privy Council on the 3rd of September 1672 but in 1679 he was accused of breaking his confinement and preaching at conventicles. On the 18th of February 1679 the parishioners were prohibited from paying him any stipend until further orders and he was declared fugitive on May 5th 1684, but after the Revolution of 1688-9 he was restored to his charge as minister of Balmaclellan parish.

He gave “a long acompt of witches, in his parish of Balmaclellan” to his niece’s husband, Robert Wodrow, the celebrated chronicler (Wodrow 1842-3: 2.86), in which he told Wodrow that “A little after the Revolution, one of them, Elspey- he gote discovered, and very clear probation of persons that sau her in the shape of an hare; and when taken, she started up in her own shape of *malum minatum* and *damnnum secutum*.” (The Latin can be understood to express the idea that a threat has been uttered which is duly followed up by a nasty event happening.)

Elspeth McEwan was charged in 1696 before the Kirk Session of Dalry, the parish bordering Balmaclellan on the north. She was accused of having a peg in the end rafter of her house (a “pin in her kipple foot”) by means of which she could draw milk from the cows of her neighbours. It was also said that she could interfere with the poultry of others, to increase or diminish the supply of eggs (Maxwell 1896: 259).

The story continues with one McLambroch, the beadle appointed following new rules in 1696 to appoint a parish officer charged with the maintenance of order; he took the minister’s horse to collect
Elspeth from her “solitary house in the farm of Cubbox, called Bogha” (MacKenzie 1841: 2.343). No documentary evidence or visible sign on the ground or traditional information now apparently exists for where exactly she lived, but the manner in which she may have lived will be discussed below. She is described (MacKenzie 1841: 342) as being “of superior education”, which probably implies that she was literate, but it is unlikely that she had access to book learning to anything like the same degree as the Reverend Warner.

Elspeth was confined in the Tolbooth in Kirkcudbright for two years (MacKenzie 1841: 342). According to Wodrow’s report from his uncle:

\[T\]he Judge … observed her inclinable to confess, when of a suddain her eyes being fixed upon a particular part of the room, she sank doun in the place. He lift her up and challenged her, whither her master had not appeared in that place and terrifyed her, when inclining to be ingenuouse. She ouned it was soe and confessed all. (Wodrow 1842-3: 2.86)

The bills are in the town records (KTCM) for her tar barrel, the peat and the coals, her food in prison and the money paid to her executioner for clothes and ale; her executioner, William Kirk, was also maintained in prison until Elspeth was strangled and burned on 24th August 1698. It is a sign of the times that he had to petition for yet more money in 1699 because he was “in great straits in this dear time and lik to sterv for hwnger, and whan I go to the cowntrie and foks many of them has it not and others of them that hes it say they are overburdened with poor folk that they are not able to stand before them, and they will bid me go hom to the town to maintain me and cast stanes at me” (Wood 1911: 80).

There was in the Kirkcudbright Tolbooth also at that time another woman prisoner, Janet Corbie, whose sentence given in July 1698 reads:

[I]t being most palpably and cleirly evident and made appear to ye magistyrates and Consell yt. Janet Corbie, dauter of Wm. Corbie, hath been and as yet continues in a most scandlous carrige, abusing of her neybors by scandlous expressions,
whereffor there hath been ffformer fffines put upon her, and that she is a persoun yt leeves by pyckering and stealing as is most justly suspect yrof, and yet she hath been endeavouering to harden Elspeth M’Keoun, wha in ye laigh sellar as ane wich, in endeavouering to dissuad her to confess and that people sinned ther soul wha said she was a wich, and ffor her constant practis in abuse of ye Lord’s Day emploing herselfy ryn ofthymes in stealing her neybors guids such as unyuns and bowcaill and taking them to ye countrie and makin sale yr of ... (Wood 1911: 81).

Janet Corbie was taken at the beat of the drum to the ferry boat to be “exported in all tyme coming from ye sosiet or convercacioune of all guid Christians” (Wood 1911: 81-2). We may understand why Elspeth McEwan chose to die rather than suffer such a living death if we note the testimony of Sir George Mackenzie (1678: 45):

I went when I was a justice-depute to examine some women who had confessed judicially, and one of them, who was a silly creature, told me under secrsie, that she had not confest because she was guilty, but being a poor creature who wrought for her meat, and being defamed for a witch, she knew she would starve, for no person thereafter would either give her meat or lodging, and that all men would beat her and hound dogs at her, and that therefore she desired to be out of the world; whereupon she wept most bitterly, and upon her knees called God to witness to what she said.

It is difficulf for people with a rationalist, existential sense of lone individual identity to have a real understanding of the ideas that shaped and were shaped by Elspeth’s experience of life at that time and in that place but the first element has to be the sense of communitty and belonging that must have been felt on the sort of fermetoun where she lived and to a large extent in the village and town too. Four out of five people of Scotland’s approximately one million (in the 1690s) lived in the countryside. Edinburgh had a population of about 30,000 and Dumfries only about a thousand. The corollary of this sense of community is the narrowness of one’s circle, the
impossibility of anonymity and perhaps escape. Elspeth did not live in the small village of Balmaclellan which had grown, small as it was, round the kirk and the castle motte and where the minister lived in a fine stonebuilt house. She lived a couple of kilometres away on a “fermetoun”. A fermetoun was a small collection of farms run jointly by tenant farmers who were kin or multiply by tenant farmers who worked together in the common interest each with their own team of cotters, servants and casual labourers over whom they exercised rights of hiring and firing at will. (Donnachie and MacLeod 1974: 20-1, 49-50)

There is a wide conceptual gulf between the early kind of holding that consists of a series of scattered strips among the in-fields and out-fields of a fermetoun and a holding which began to be adopted towards the end of the century composed of a number of separate compact and contiguous enclosed fields. During the later part of the seventeenth century that conceptual gulf was already being leaped by innovators, such as Sir David Dunbar in nearby Baldoon, Wigtown. Such innovators wanted to shake free of the restriction of having always to work with their neighbours, dependants or kin and wanted the opportunity to experiment with new breeding techniques, the latest advances in agricultural thinking such as liming and, above all, to begin turning a profit by gaining a share in the expanding market to England.

That Elspeth was part of the rural farming group in society is clear but what she thought and felt about her life is not. She may have suffered some reversal in fortune, been widowed and forced to fend for herself as best she could by becoming a grasswoman – one of the most dependent members in the hierarchy tending the animals – whose work guaranteed her subsistence, given the goodwill of those who had more. The work of the grasswoman in return for somewhere to sleep and something to eat was to herd the cows, clean the byre etc. Elspeth may have been inclined to Catholicism or interested in traditional lore; less than a half kilometre from her postulated home there is a relic of a “Ladywell” in the name still current and the stream that feeds it running through Balmaclellan on its way due south is known as the “Aqua Vitae”. The Daffin Tree, noted below, was on a hill between Cubbox and Killochy farms and it is possible that as an older
woman she was relied on by younger women for advice about courting or women’s affairs and so angered the “educated” minister.

Elspeth was apparently a representative of some of the most marginalised in the society at a time when there were, as the contemporary writer Alexander Fletcher of Saltoun estimated in 1698, 200,000, i.e. one in five of the population, actively engaged in begging (Whyte 1979:12). There were swingeing laws to curb the sturdy beggars, the sorners, who could be sent to mine lead and coal, transported and denied relief. The Act of 1672 specified that beggars were to be maintained only in the parish of their birth or where they had resided for three years. Beggars, in addition, had to wear badges entitling them to beg in their own parish but nowhere else. There were restrictions on individual travel which extended beyond the lack of communications or means of travel in that people had to be issued with testimonials that they could show to identify them as respectable and in 1696 it was enacted that anyone new being spotted in the district had to be reported to the landowner or minister on pain of a fine of £10 Scots (Whyte 1979:13).

In the old but by now changing model of the fermetoun, the important element was interdependency; it had to be co-operative, sustainable and self-sufficient for survival but its very structure inhibited any great change barring natural catastrophe and its static and perhaps stultifying nature bred among many a mistrust of strangers, intolerance and fear of anything that could not be accounted for or give a good account of itself.

Change in the pattern of agriculture was, of course, going on throughout this period accelerated by the advances that were being made in understanding what the laws of nature and how they might be exploited but at an intellectual level that rarely took on board traditional knowledge, or rather scorned it. It is unlikely that the co-founders of the Royal Botanical Garden, in 1670, Andrew Balfour and Robert Sibbald would have sought out the opinion of someone like Elspeth McEwan or a local “yirbwoman” on the subject of medicinal herbs any more than they would have consulted the local midwife on techniques, though it would be interesting to find documentary evidence one way or the other. Certainly Robert Wodrow, as Librarian at Glasgow University around 1701, was a “snapper-up of unconsidered trifles” on a large scale if we read his
requests for information about all manner of “curiosities” from elf-shot to deformed pigs in his correspondence (Wodrow, ed. Sharp, 1937: 5-7). For “a man of science” he was also very interested in stories of the occult and strange as can be seen in this other “acompt” he got from his uncle, the Reverend Warner, about Balmaclellan: 

[T]here was a corbee [crow] bigged in a tree there. [The Laird of Holme] went up and with danger climed the tree and took out the eggs and boiled them hard and put them again in the nest. A little after this, they observed the corby goe away and was abroad near six or eight weeks. At lenth it comes home and falls a sitting again. When they clamb the nest again they found a stone lying with the eggs which the said gentleman brought away. It was a little round stone about the bigness of a plumb. This stone he keeped for severall years and my informer [the Reverend Warner] did frequently see it. It was helpful to several weemen as was told him in childbirth. After some years my Lord Kenmure had a bitch and she was very ill in lining; he sent for the stone and when it was applied to the bitch, it cracked and fell all in pieces. This he [the Reverend Warner] asserts as an indisputable matter of fact. (Wodrow 1842-3: 2.87)

As indisputable as the fact that Elspeth McEwan was a witch!

Relations among the members of the fermetoun and the estate can perhaps be compared to the composition of a Babouschka doll, in that each segment mirrors the other and slots into it; the fermetoun was headed by the tenants who could discharge cotters and workers at will; the proprietor of the whole estate, the only one with any certain right to the land, with his baillie and chamberlain and powers of pit and gallows in barony and birlay courts – an area which Smout called a place “to come together and interpret custom” (Smout 1969: 115) – and then the national estate headed by the king, whose tenure had been shown in recent times rather more than open to challenge, the king with his instruments of government and finally, in its widest context, god as the proprietor of the whole with his instruments of government, too. In an episcopal system hierarchies of responsibility and authority mirror this basically feudal secular structure and saints
and other supernatural bodies such as angels can mediate between god and mankind; the system can even be described as a kind of mediated barter between mankind and a whole range of other beings, the departed, the especially holy and the non-human at places with particular characteristics of liminality such as wells, trees etc.

The traditions and activities around these sites lingered from pre-Christian tradition often being moulded into a Christian version; for example near the farm of Cubbox until as recently as the OS map of 1854 was marked “The Daffin Tree”; going by its name, daffin, which in Scots means flirting or rather more than that, there may have been some relationship with handfasting rituals traditionally celebrated on Lammas and severed the following year if no child resulted from the union (Rogers 1884-6: 1.103) without blame on either side – a far cry from the denouncing at kirk of couples who had had intercourse before marriage (see Graham 1996). A non-exhaustive list of the restraints imposed by the Kirk through its own channels or through secular discipline may serve to illustrate the Reverend Warner’s upright and firm morality in a world of fleeting compromises. There is no doubt that as minister he would have been closely involved in this moral policing of his parish although Wodrow is keen to point out that his wife’s uncle was a moderate both politically and in religious terms.

To rehearse just a few of the limits on individual freedoms that existed at that time. In 1564 the Sabbath, and therefore the restrictions on activities that could take place on it, was extended beyond the hours of services to sunrise to sundown and then again in 1635 it was extended from midnight to midnight. Fines were imposed for breaking bans such as: no milling, no killing geese, no shooling muck, no watering the kail, no carrying water from the loch, no Sunday drinking or trading; children romping could be flogged; there was to be no playing “catt and dog” or “nyne holles, pennie stane, or any such lyke idle pastymes” and a special person was appointed to watch anyone who went out into the kirkyard during the sermon to check they were not having a gossip with their neighbours. No excuses such as sickness or bad weather were good enough for not “keeping the kirk”. The punishment was to stand at the pillar of the kirk and be rebuked publicly, or to wear a paper hat or sackcloth or, worse, the brank – a kind of metal scold’s bridle and death for
adultery if a child had been born. Accusations of all kinds against someone must have been quite prolific and in an attempt to curb it in Dalry Kirk in 1691 anyone presenting a petition had to put down a deposit of twelve shillings as an earnest of their honesty.

Festival days were frowned on; for example, the keeping of Yule was prohibited and Glasgow bakers in 1683 were warned not to go on making Yule bread. In many ways the working calendar of rural life was at the very least disrupted by attempts to change the nature of the holy days and traditions such as bonfires at Midsummer and Hallowe’en (Graham 1996: 163, 181), maypoles, or dancing on Trinity Sunday. And then there was the continuing saga of the women and their plaids which they tended to use to cover their heads with (perhaps a throwback to earlier conventions) but it was thought they used them to let them go to sleep undetected so in 1621 women were told in Glasgow that they should put their plaids off and they couldn’t lie down on their faces during prayers. This rule was repeated at Kinghorn in 1645 and at Monifieth there was an officer “with ane pynt of tar, to put upon the women that held plaids about their heads”, while by 1694 in St Andrews it had been decided there should be on hand “ane long rod [to] tak doune thair playdes from their heads” (Rogers 1884-6: 2.220-2).

Following the Reformation, the new direct and uncompromising individual relationship between an individual and god had to mean that any mishap or problem is unshared and rather the individual punishment inflicted by a just deity. That justice would be meted out to the individual was guaranteed by the Kirk Session’s weekly deliberations. Questioning the nature and role of supernatural beings, including the diabolical ones, meant that the philosophy so often cited then as now of “If you are not with us you are against us” was considered unanswerable in identifying the enemies of god. In case you forgot the biblical precedent in Adam and Eve it was made clear graphically in permitted public art such as the gravestones of nearby Kells Kirk (see, e.g., Willsher and Hunter 1978: 12-14), representing the role of Satan and calling attention to the vigilance needed, especially among women, against him.

In the older pattern of pre-reformation agricultural life that was slowly changing during the course of the century, the hierarchical structure depended for its success or failure on the “commonty” – the
land held in common by the co-tenants on the fermetoun and the tradition of fair and equal sharing of better and less productive land, following traditional divisions into sunny and shady, upper and lower according to the passage of the sun, effectively the remnants of duality in concept (Dodgshon 1985). Rural life and its philosophy evolved from having to deal with daily encounters that support the Hobbesian thesis that life is nasty, brutish and short but it is a life that sees both the sublime beauty and terror of the natural environment and its unaccountable shifts. Ways of coping with these forces would not unnaturally include trying to make a form of compact; the idea that if you work hard, do your best, then with luck or some kind of propitiatory offering, some form of natural justice will prevail. These elements are epitomised in the stories associated with “the gude neighbours” (the fairies) and their like such as doonies or brownies where kindness and goodheartedness bring rewards; like is returned by like but the wheels of natural justice in the longterm turn in favour of the oppressed. Good farming practice meant also remembering to leave a piece, or even as much as a field, for “the gudeman” (the devil) whether out of real belief or as an act emblematic of a deeper and more permanent truth that we are not at liberty just to use or take from the world as much as we want – a truth that we are only just beginning to understand. It is on record that into the nineteenth century land locally was being left on a systematic basis without real understanding or recollection of purpose or reason (Napier 1879: 140): “I remember a farmer as late as 1825 always leaving a small piece of a field uncropped but then did not know why.” By associating the practice of leaving land aside with the devil a dilemma was set up in minds on both sides: for the landworker it meant that he or she was being pressed by the kirk to stand against tradition and practice as an individual when his or her whole way of living had been interdependent and mutual in outlook.

Similarly, if an oppressed person muttered that “no good would come of it” when a neighbour’s denial of a bit of butter or a bowl of meal threatened his or her wellbeing, he or she was only articulating the philosophy behind a whole tradition of cautionary tales about how people living in a close-knit agricultural community had to behave in order to survive. Following the 1563 Witchcraft Act, however, this became malum minatum and damnum secutum, somehow the force of
the Latin terminology increasing its remoteness now that the Good Book was accessible in the vernacular and no doubt the temptation by whatever means to bring down disaster on the head of an opponent by such imprecation in the heat of the moment was as powerful then as it sometimes is now. In the totality of trials for witchcraft there are a myriad interchanges reported between neighbours that have some element of a benefit denied which rapidly turns into a curse fulfilled. Whether in fermetoun, village or town, change in the nature of the interdependency was shared to a greater or lesser extent by everyone as all were dependent on an agrarian economy at a time of severe climate fluctuation resulting in poor harvests and pestilence. It is possible to argue but not to conclude that the witch crazes mirror times of pestilence and famine (Larner 1979: 82) and it is worth noting that there were two such times in 1695-6 which caused severe hardship.

For the purveyors of the new reformed religious doctrine the intellectual dilemma was diabolically tortuous and its nature is exemplified in the wording of the Witchcraft Act of 1563 itself, which may appear rather sceptical at first reading but, on closer analysis, does not clearly and unequivocally state the case for either the existence or non-existence of that which it purports to be legislating on.

ITEM Forsamekill as the Quenis Maiestie and thre Estatis in this present Parliament being informit that the hauy and abominabill susperstion usit be divers of the liegiis of this Realme be using of Witchcraftis Sorsair and Necromancie and credence geuin thairto in tymes bygane aganis the Law of God. And for auoyding and away putting of all sic vane superstition in tymes tocum. It is statute and ordanit be the Quenis Maiestie and thre Estatis foirsaidis that na maner of persoun nor persounis of quhatsumeuer estate degre or conditioun thay be of tak vpone hand in ony tymes heirefter ti use ony maner of Witchcraftis Sorsarie or Necromancie nor gif thame selsis furth to haue ony sic craft or knawlege thairof thairthrow abusand the pepill. Nor that na persoun seik ony help resonse or cosultatioun at ony sic usaris or abusaris foirsaidis of Witchcraftis Sorsareis or Necromancie vnder the pane of deid alsweill to be execute aganis the vsar abusar as the seikar of the
response or consultatioun …. (Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland 1814: 2.539)

It is nowhere as robust or as insightful as Bacon’s denial: “For witches themselves are imaginative and believe oftimes they do what they do not; and people are credulous in that point and ready to impute accidents and natural operations to witchcraft.” (Bacon 1635: cent x n 903). Or Hobbes (…..: 334): “Demons are but Idols or Phantasms of the brain without any real nature of their own, distinct from human fancy such as are dead men’s ghosts and fairies and other matters of old wives’ tales.”

The horns of the dilemma are neatly expressed by the thinking of Sir George Mackenzie. When he was acting as Advocate in 1661 he was ready to argue:

Consider how much fancy does now labour under any extraordinary disease but it is instantly said to come by witching and then the next old deform’d or envy’d woman is presently charged with it; from this arises a confused noise of her guilt called diffamatio by lawyers who make it a ground of seizure, upon which she, being apprehended or imprisoned, starved and kept from sleep and oftimes tortured: To free themselves from which they must confess and, having confess imagine they dare not thereafter retreat. And then the Judges allow themselves too much liberty in condemning such as are accused of this crime because they conclude they cannot be severe enough to the enemies of God and Assisers are afraid to suffer such to escape as are remitted to them lest they let loose an enraged wizard in their neighbourhood. And thus good innocents die in multitudes by an unworthy martyrdom and burning comes in fashion. (Mackenzie 1672:196)

But later he was prepared to argue:

[T]he word of God hath ordained that no witch shall live. It is very just that the users of these [charms] should be punish’d being guilty at least of apostacy and heresy. ... By the same
reason that we should deny witches we should deny the truth of all history, ecclesiastic and secular. (Mackenzie 1678:8)

Though no sermon preached by the Reverend Warner has yet come to light it is likely he would have agreed with the content of the one which the Reverend James Hutcheson of Killallan preached on the 13th of April 1697 before the judges at the trial of the Paisley witches accused by the eleven-year-old Christian Shaw on the text Exodus 22:18, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” As an educated man he probably knew the translation of *chenaph* is in Latin *veneficus*, a poisoner/diviner but he went on to preach in these words:

We have here as precept of the law of God in reference to a certain sort of malefactors to be found within the visible church, even among the Israelites. These malefactors are called witches. The person to whom this direction is given is not expressed … but may easily be understood by the nature of the precept itself. It is a precept of the Judicial Law given to the judges of the children of Israel that was a national church as having the power of the sword committed to them. (Millar 1809: ….)

In 1698 the Reverend Warner was no doubt concerned to hear from his neighbours reports of a local poltergeist to rival the Devil of Glenluce, the story he had fed, according to Wodrow, to George Sinclair in *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered*, published in 1685 (Wodrow 1842-3: 2.87). We can only wonder what counsel he gave his neighbours and colleagues in the ministry who figure largely in the second and later local poltergeist story which is related in *A True Relation of An Apparition on December 21st 1695* by Alexander Telfair and is “attested by no fewer than five ministers including [all neighbours of the Reverend Warner] the Reverend Andrew Ewart, minister of Kells, the Reverend Spalding, minister of Parton and the Reverend John Macmillan of Balmaghie”24 (Telfair 1695 : 26). This spirit seems to have been very unfriendly towards ministers and particularly disliked prayers, pulling off the Reverend Ewart’s wig. But it did make its point very clearly saying on one occasion: “God gave me a commission and I am sent to warn the land to repent, for a
judgement is to come, if the land do not quickly repent.” (Telfair 1695: 22)

We know little about Elspeth McEwan’s beliefs, other than that other people’s opinions of them caused her to confess their worst imaginings and be burned in a tar barrel for them. What made her such an object of attack to the local minister can only be guessed. The beliefs of the Reverend Warner were not always in the ascendant in national politics and he became an outcast conventicle preacher because of them. These events in his life may have strengthened his tenacity of purpose in bringing about Christ’s kingdom on earth as the end of the century approached and he certainly contributed to the hounding, prosecution and execution of Elspeth McEwan in 1698. He also contributed to the ongoing debate about the nature of reality which was current among the moral philosophers of his time, of whom his son became a prominent member, not least by relaying accounts of events which he from his high moral ground could vouch for: women turning into hares, magic eggs, poltergeists and the rest. His dilemma was that of Sir George Mackenzie, who declared: “By the same reason that we should deny witches, we must deny the truth of all history, ecclesiastic and secular.” (Cited in Millar, ed., 1809: 8). He no doubt shared the viewpoint of Sir George Sinclair, whose book published in 1685, Satan’s Invisible World Uncovered, proved very popular and “well adapted to feed the appetite for the marvellous” (Hewland, ed., 1957: 1325) when he criticised Hobbes, Spinoza and Descartes for the decline in belief in devils, witches and apparitions opining: “If this prevail, farewell all Religion, all Faith, all hope of a life to come.”

With the shift of world view that came about in the eighteenth century and resulted in the repeal of the witchcraft law in 1735, Scotland entered a new political, religious and intellectual climate which was noted by David Hume in the Introduction to his Treatise of Human Nature in 1734 (Hume 1975: xiii-ix): “So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry, and excel us in some other agreeable arts, the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and liberty.” Such reason, toleration and liberty unfortunately came a little late for Elspeth McEwan and, indeed, for the Reverend Warner too and the many
thousands who perished in the cataclysmic religious, social and political upheavals of that century.

_Balmaclellan, Kirkcudbrightshire_

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**Notes**


2. He became tenant of the farm of Lochinvar, returning only at the Revolution. He married Jean Gordon, the daughter of his land-lord, William Gordon of Monybuie, and received the wadset of the land of Nether Moneybuie from him in 1675. This makes a link with another case of witchcraft for, as it happens, and is recounted at length in chapter 10 of _Enemies of God_ by Christina Larner a William Gordon of Moneybuie was one of the accusers of Janet Macmuldroch the wife of James Hendrie, the tenant of Airds, a neighbouring fermetoun. Janet Macmurdoch was execu-ted for witchcraft on the 18th of May 1671 and all her movable goods and “geir” escheat. Without wishing to prejudge the issue it is interesting to note in McKerlie that by 1682 a William Gordon had become the owner of Airds (McKerlie 1870-9: 3.389). This latter evidence would seem to support Larner’s version of events against that of Truckell (1975-6) in placing Janet McMuldoroch/Macmurdoch/Mcmilroch in Airds by Loch Ken rather than Girthon.

“Yirbwives – Old females, skilled in the virtues of plants and yirbs. When a cow takes the Tailill, or is Elfshot, these females are sent for to cure them. The fact is they are a species of witch quack-doctor” (MacTaggart 1824: 500)

“A solitary ash tree of a peculiar shape has long flourished at Killochy. It is seen from every point of the compass at a distance of many miles, and is known by the name of the ‘Daffin-tree.’ Probably it was so called from the natives in former days assembling there for amusement, and, like the inhabitants in Goldsmith’s Deserted Village, ‘leading out their sports beneath the spreading tree.’” (Cullen and Murray 1845: 102)

“Toying with women under night.” (MacTaggart 1824: 157).

“Doonies” (deriving from the colour dun) appears to be a local name for a brownie-like creature while a brownie is known to be quite quick-tempered as well as generous and hard-working, “awful easy huffit” (de Bruce Trotter 1903: 34). The Brownie of Blednoch, perhaps better known as Aiken Drum, is still a popular character; see Temperley 1979: 1-5.

See discussion in McPherson 1927.

All the prohibitions cited here and a few more can be found in Rogers 1884-6: 2.163-255, ch. 12 “Church Discipline”. Cf. Todd 2002.

For interesting light on possible explanations see Coudert 1992 and, for an excellent account of the belief in fairies etc. which Elspeth McEwan may have shared, see Henderson and Cowan 2001.


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The Early Medieval Irish and Indic Polities and the Concept of Righteous Ruler

MAXIM FOMIN

The purpose of this paper is to address the topic of moral cosmos from the viewpoint of early Indic and Irish political thought. What sort of ideas constituted the moral cosmos of the ruler in the early societies of Ireland and India? How close are the ideas of the two societies? Can we establish any connection between them? And, if we can, what kind of connection may it be?

Before we go into a detailed analysis of the Irish and Indic sources on righteous kingship, first let us deal with the following issues: methodology, key terms, structures and ideas. In our opinion, the word “polity” may serve as a clue to a proper understanding of the depictions of kingship presented in the early Irish and Indic documents. We take polity, denoting the political culture of a society, to be distinct from politics, which means the political process as it is in reality. Polity is an ideal notion, encompassing a realm of ideas concerning what the proper ruler should look like, how he should behave, what morality he should personify, and in what form – whether in the form of a fable, or a myth, or an instruction – these ideas should be related to him. It is different from “politics”, which is a realistic concept and stands for the ruler’s political activity in a given historical period. Polity can be seen as the essence of secular power in its transcendental dimension, and politics as the essence of secular power in its pragmatic perspective. In early societies polity is closely related to the theological vision of power; the perception of ideal rule that one may witness in the primary sources is to a great extent dominated by the religious archetype current in the society. This archetype serves as the basis for the subsequent development of political thought.¹
Ideal kingship can be defined in a variety of different ways. Early Greeks – and I refer to the point of view of Aristotle – presented the ideal relationship between a king and his subjects as the one between a father and his children. Early Persians called King Darius a good king on account of his numerous invasions and conquests of foreign lands. In the works of medieval scholiasts, a good king was depicted as a corrector of the wicked and a law-giver. The sources from early Christian Ireland and early medieval India give strikingly similar depictions of ideal kingship, based not only on the universal topics of justice and punishment usually connected with kingship but also on moral themes. Not so long ago, however, there was an extensive amount of controversy about the legitimacy of making any sort of comparisons between the early Irish and early Indian polities. The criticism emerged as a response to the earlier findings of James G. Frazer (1933: 10, 89, 171, 262-3), Georges Dumézil (1973: 98) and Emile Benveniste (1973), who all argued that the early Irish and early Indian societies retained extremely archaic and conservative features inherited from the common Indo-European background. Their ideas are still current among comparativists, and Myth, Cosmos, and Society by Bruce Lincoln (1986) is probably the latest book written from this point of view.

I wish to distance myself from their approach. It should be pointed out that the early medieval Irish ideology of kingship was far from being archaic, but was quite up-to-date with the political doctrine of its time, and the early Irish documents, presenting us with a depiction of kings and royalty, should be looked at from this point of view. This can be proved by looking at the earliest specimen of Irish political thought written in the Irish variant of Latin (called Hiberno-Latin by the medievalists) in the early seventh century by Mo-Chúáróc maccu Neth Sé món (Cronanus sapiens), a pupil of Sinlán of Bangor (see Breen 1988: 229). Chronologically, this composition is the oldest surviving text written in Ireland on the topic of ideal kingship. This extremely important passage is contained in the Hiberno-Latin document De duodecim abusiuis saeculi, “Concerning the twelve abuses of the world” (hereinafter De duodecim) under the rubric Nonus abusionis gradus est rex iniquus, “The ninth abuse of
the world is an unjust king” (Hellmann 1909: 51.3). The introduction to this section of De duodecim, wholly devoted to a depiction of good versus bad kingship, starts with:

Quem cum iniquorum correctorem esse oportuit, licet in semet ipso nominis sui dignitatem non custodit. Nomen enim regis intellectualiter hoc retinet, ut subiectis omnibus rectoris officium procuret. Sed qualiter alios corrigere poterit qui proprios mores ne iniqui sint non corrigit? (Hellmann 1909: 51.3-8; my bold print)

Who, although he ought to be the corrector of the wicked, does not maintain the dignity of his name even as regards himself. For the name of a king implies that he ought to perform the function of director for all those who are subject to him. But how will he be able to correct others if he does not correct his own behaviour, lest it be unjust?  

In the opinion of the author the king (rex) exercises his rule (rectoris officium) by correcting (corrigere) the moral behaviour (proprios mores) of his subjects and of himself. This theme constitutes the main principle of narration built upon the different connotations and the shift in meaning that the range of the nouns rex, rector, corrector, as well as the verb corrigere, imply. This etymology deriving rex, “a king”, from the corresponding regere, “to govern, to lead”, was quite common in medieval literature. There are also many other examples of it in Hiberno-Latin sources from quite an early date; for instance, rex and rectum are linked in one of the passages in Altus Prosator, a late sixth-century poem, attributed to St Columba, in the collocation regis regum rectissimi, “the most righteous King of kings” (Clancy and Márkus, eds, 1995: 50-1). Overall, the etymology rex-rectus/rector was a commonplace of early medieval literature: a collocation reges a regendo vocati, “kings are thus called from (the word) ruling” was employed by Isidore of Seville among his first examples of etymology as such (VII.xii.17).

It is to be noted that vernacular Irish sources have something to offer in this regard. A similar “popular” etymology of the native cognate of Lat. rex, an Old Irish (hereinafter OIr.) noun rí, “a king”,
was afforded by an early eighth century legal tract on status, *Críth Gablach* (Binchy, ed., 1941: ll. 444-5). Its etymology is based upon the similarity between the noun *rí*, “a king”, the simple verb *rigid*, “stretches, extends”, and *cuindrech*, verbal noun of *con-dírig*, “corrects, controls”.

*Rí, cid ara n-eperr? Arindí riges cumachtu(i) chun[d]rig for a thúatha(i).*

King, on what account is it said so? Because he extends the power of control over his people. (Binchy, ed., 1941: 18 §30; my bold print)

It was D. A. Binchy who first drew scholarly attention to the above etymology, trying to connect it with the one established by Benveniste (1973: 311-12) for an Indo-European stem *reg-*, through a Greek verb, *opēγo*, “stretch out”, and Lat. *regere fines*, “trace out limits by straight lines”, paralleled by an OIr. *rigid*, “stretches, extends”, in our source. His inclination was to support Benveniste’s opinion on the archaic character of the royal institution in Ireland, and its close resemblance to the Italic *rex sacrorum* (Binchy 1970: 3, 9).

However, in view of the etymology offered by *De duodecim*, and the correspondence between the passages in terms of ideology and terminology, Binchy’s suggestion seems improbable. The king (Lat. *rex*), in the view of the author of *De duodecim*, has a function of correction (Lat. *corrigere*); similarly, in the Irish legal tract the king (OIr. *rí*) has to extend “the power of control” (OIr. *cumachtu(i) chun[d]rig*). The OIr. word *cundrig* is a verbal noun of the verb *con-dírig*, “controls, checks”, which is etymologically derived from *com-dí-reg* (Pedersen, ed., 1909-13: 2.596). The Irish *chundrig* may be regarded therefore as a calque on the Lat. *corrigere (*cum/regere*), as both words have the prefix *com-* and the stem *reg-* among their components. It is therefore quite legitimate to conclude that *Críth Gablach*’s etymology stemmed from the one in *De duodecim*, which is very likely, or from some other source available, which is less likely, and not from the archaic royal institutions of the Irish.
A TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH

However, when rejecting the traditional approach to the subject, it is important to replace it with a different one, grounded on other reasons and defined from another angle.\textsuperscript{13}

I shall consider the similarities between the Irish and Indian polities from a typological point of view. I shall argue that many of the parallels noted below are to be understood in terms of analogues in their cultural development, and also that the institution of kingship served as a bridge between the old and the new traditions, incorporating elements of both.

What kind of similarities can we thus speak about?

What we know is that, before the advent of Christianity and Buddhism, the religious institutions of Brahmanism and druidism – “powerful colleges of priests who were repositories of sacred traditions, which they maintained with a formalist vigour” (Benveniste 1973: 308) – were exercising their authority in early India and early Ireland.

Brahmanism, as we know from the early Indian legal codes \textit{(dharmaśāstras)}, was primarily concerned with ritual and the performance of religious rites in everyday life. Each male member of society was given his fixed position in society according to his age \textit{(ashrama)} and his rank \textit{(varva)}.\textsuperscript{14} This constituted the essence of personal existence, denoted by the fundamental notion of \textit{dharma}. In contrast to Brahmanism, the religion of Buddhism looked at public life from another angle. For Buddhists, \textit{dharma} was a universal concept, meaning the proper way to behave, based on Buddhist morality.\textsuperscript{15} The performance of ritual as a socially prescribed norm of human existence was not so important for Buddhists as was the practising of certain rules of moral conduct.\textsuperscript{16}

As the comparison between druids and brahmins is a commonplace in comparative studies, let us next deal with the subject of the religious institution of druidism. What do the primary sources tell us about it?

Firstly, there are references to the druids in the works of classical ethnographers, who present them either as moral philosophers and theologians, who “search into secret and sublime things”, or as the legal experts and mentors of the young, or as priests, perFoming
human sacrifices and practices of divination. Still, the classical accounts can not be regarded as based solely on first-hand experience, but rather as drawing on the literary model of describing primitive barbaric peoples and their customs, including their religion. Also the classical authors never had Ireland as the subject of their description. Therefore, we cannot be sure that the picture obtained from the Greek and Latin sources is applicable to pre-Christian Ireland.

Secondly, there are references to druids in the Irish hagiography, where they are mainly presented as magicians, idol-worshippers and sorcerers, and the opinion of Irish hagiographers here is derived from Old Testament models (Mc Cone 1990: 35).

However, I would not be inclined to draw a parallel strictly between druidism and brahmanism. It is another hidden trap of classical historiography and should not be pursued. Moreover, the theories of Dumézil and Benveniste considered from this perspective were not original but were predetermined by the observations of the early Greek historians and philosophers.

Nevertheless, it is tempting to draw a parallel between the early societies of Ireland and India in terms of their cultural development: Buddhism replaced brahmanism in the Northern Indian kingdom of Magadha during the rule of the first royal Buddhist convert Ashoka (floruit 248 BC), and Christianity replaced druidism in Ireland owing to the activity of the missionaries. The overall transfer from one hierophany to another can be described as a socio-religious revolution, when a religious movement of moral teaching transformed a religious institution of ritual and sacrifice.

THE CHRISTIAN AND BUDDHIST POLITIES IN IRELAND AND INDIA

If one were to compare the religious institutions of early Christian Ireland and early medieval India, it is the similarities between the Irish form of Christianity, known as “Irish monasticism” (Hughes 1966; Ryan 1992 [1931]), and Buddhist religious organisation (sangha, or “religious community”) that might attract scholars. However, I shall not be going into detailed discussion of this or other matters such as the parallel developments of the religions (each “planned” as
a religion “for an elite” and turned into one “for the masses”) and the topic of similarities between the Buddhist and Christian ethics.20

Our interest here is to establish a correspondence between the Christian and Buddhist polities, seen in their Irish and Indian dimensions. It is necessary to point out two things in this regard. First, both religions “encouraged the formation of a new two-class society” (Küng et al. 1987: 350), creating the religious dualism of elite and masses, clergy and laity, as opposed to a primitive threefold division of the society into priests, warriors and cultivators (Dumézil 1968: 73). Second, they also associated themselves with monarchical government: “together with a monk as the supreme religious ideal, the ‘just king’ was a guiding figure for the Buddhist society” (Küng et al. 1987: 352). The same can be said of the Christian polity. However, the origin of the concept of the “just king” (or the “righteous ruler” in the terminology proposed above) still raises many questions for historians of Christian and Buddhist political thought.

Comparison between Ireland and India is very promising in this regard; the depictions of ideal kingship in both cultures played a crucial role in the formation of the socio-political doctrines of Christianity and Buddhism. As far as the Irish evidence is concerned, the doctrine of a pious Christian king that prevailed in medieval Europe from Charlemagne to Louis IX owed much to the teachings of the early Irish scholars.21 As regards early medieval India, the conception of Universal Monarch, still current in the Buddhist states of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia, owed much to the teaching of Arthaśāstra, the ancient Indian treatise on the science of government (Tambiah 1976: 19 f.; Gonda 1969: 126-8).

The sources that I will employ in my exposition of the Irish and Indic evidence will therefore be the passages that stood at the basis of the Christian and Buddhist understanding of what the ideal (or, in the terminology of the sources, “righteous”) king ought to be. We have already looked at a piece of evidence from a highly influential composition, De duodecim abusiuis saeculi, in connection with the etymology of the word rex, “a king”, advanced in the text in relation to the topic of the king’s proper functioning. The three passages from the text that we shall be dealing with now are contained in the Collectio Canonum and constitute the core of the Catholic Church’s teaching concerning the good king.22 On the Indian side the most
pertinent comparanda to it, as I think, appear in the doctrinal lecture of Buddha devoted to ideal kingship known as \textit{Cakkavatti-sihanada-sutta}, “The Sutra of the Lion’s Roar of a Universal Monarch”.

\textbf{THE EVIDENCE OF \textit{DE DUODECIM ABUSIUIS Saeculi}}

Let us look at the evidence of \textit{De duodecim} in more detail.

The first part of the section consists of the string of short precepts, enumerating the components of the ruler’s justice, such as:

\begin{quote}
neminem inius in potentiom opprimere,... pauperes elemosynis alere, senes et sapientes et sobrios consiliarios habere, ... furta cohibere, adulteria punire,... parricidas et periurantes vivere non sinere, ante horas congruas non gustare cibum...
\end{quote}

To oppress nobody unjustly by his might, to sustain the poor with alms, to have as counsellors the old, the wise and the moderate, to repress thefts, to punish adultery … not to allow parricides and perjurers to live, not to taste food before the suitable time.

The section finishes off with a famous passage from Ecclesiastes 10:16:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Vae enim terrae, cuius rex est puer et cuius principes mane comedunt.}
\end{quote}

Woe to the land, whose king is a boy and whose governors start eating early in the morning.\textsuperscript{23}

The second part of the section envisages the consequences of unjust rule, and describes the cosmos torn apart by foreign invaders and natural catastrophes.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Multi et vari dolores prosperitatem regni inficiunt: carorum et liberorum mortes tristitiam conferunt, hostium incursus}
\end{quote}
Numerous and various troubles spoil the prosperity of the kingdom: the deaths of dear ones and of children bring sorrow, attacks of enemies from everywhere devastate the provinces, beasts tear into pieces the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, storms of the air and cold weather keep destroying the fecundity of the land and the supplies of the sea, and at times the strokes of lightning strip bare the crops and the flowers and young leaves of the trees.

The third part is a logical continuation of the second, presenting the central principle of just rule, “the justice of the king” (iustitia regis). It is described in short phrases, dependent genitives, many of which are direct opposites of the second part; for example, the misfortunes of unjust rule in the second part are said to be tristitiam, ... tempestatas aeris, “sorrow, ... storms of the air”, while the third part has iustitia regis ... est ... gaudium hominum, temperum aeris, “the justice of the king ... is ... the joy of human beings, mildness of the air”. Here the topic of abundance is involved, expressed by collocations such as iustitia regis est ... terrae fecunditas et maris ministeria, “the justice of the king is ... the fecundity of the land and the supplies of the sea”, as well as of the protective characteristics of the ruler, incorporated as [iustitia regis est...] tutamen patriae, ... munimentum gentis “[the justice of the king is ...] the protection of his native land, ... the protection of the nation”, and some purely ecclesiastical precepts are seen in this part as well: [iustitia regis est ...] cura languorum ... solacium pauperum, “[the justice of the king is ...] the care of the sick ... the relief of the poor”.

All of the ideas listed above would be seen nowadays as common-places of moral advice to kings, but one reason why the advice is so familiar to us is because this very tract was to be copied, and its advice repeated, by the churchmen and political theorists of
Carolingian Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries, and from their works the teaching was transmitted to later medieval writers.²⁴

What can one say about the basis of the ideas?

As far as the first part is concerned, in terms of phraseology and ideology the Irish author relies heavily upon the tradition of patristic and biblical exegesis of his time.²⁵ For instance, the first injunction in this series reads *neminem iniuste per potentiam opprimere*, “to destroy nobody unjustly by might”. I have noted the following thematic parallels with Ps.-Cyprian’s account of the excessive abuse of power in St Gildas’s work *De excidio Britonum*:

*Propter hoc dissipata est lex et non perducitur ad finem iudicium, quia impius per potentiam deprimit iustum.*

For this reason has the law been scattered, and the judgement is not brought to its full end, because an impious man uses his power to oppress the just. (Gildas, ed. and tr. Winterbottom 1978: 113, 46)

A precept for the king not to allow parricides and perjurers to live (*parricidas et periurantes vivere non sinere*) may also go back to the insular writings, such as the *Epistola* of St Patrick and the already mentioned *De excidio Britonum* of Gildas, as “Patrick and Gildas both show concern about rulers swearing false oaths.”²⁶ Gildas also denounces the crime of parricide and other sins mentioned by the author of *De duodecim*, such as adultery.²⁷ As far as other maxims of the first part of the section is concerned, I have shown elsewhere (Fomin forthcoming: ch. 2, sec. 1) that their sources can be encountered without any difficulty throughout the Bible, patristic sources and insular monastic literature.

However, it is not so easy to prove biblical or patristic origin of the second part of the section. In order to find a picture similar to the one in *De duodecim*, we may look at the descriptions of natural catastrophes that punish wicked kings of the Old Testament. I allude to the famous passages from Exodus 7-9, where several types of natural catastrophes falling upon the Egyptians are portrayed. However, one can hardly find any kind of catastrophe to match those exhibited in our text, with the minor exception of the death of the first-born at
Ex. 12:30, which provides a loose parallel to the “deaths of dear ones and of children” (carorum et liberorum mortes) in our text. The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, which was established by Hellmann as among the sources of the first part of De duodecim, provides an extensive list of instances. Among the catastrophes described in it are the devastation of the land, mountains and hills, the depopulation of the cities, a fiery wind, a lion from the forest (leo de silva) and foreign invaders.\(^{28}\) In some respects the catastrophes described are similar to our set of disasters, but the passage forms a complete contrast in terms of phraseology,\(^{29}\) the conceptual resemblance is not very close and there are no direct verbal parallels to our text.\(^{30}\)

If we turn to the Irish sources, first to the sagas describing the reigns of the legendary kings, and second to the vernacular Irish tradition of speculi principibus or wisdom-texts devoted to kings, we may find some passages corresponding to De duodecim’s exposition of disasters. In the narrative literature, the description of the catastrophes that fell upon the prototypical Irish righteous ruler, Conaire, in the tale “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” (Togail Bruidne Da Derga) comes to mind. In the narrative of the saga, his reign was peaceful and abundant until he violated several of his injunctions or taboos, and that is why the peace was no longer in place:

\[\text{Co n-acus íar sin a n-indread anair 7 aníar 7 andeas 7 atuíad 7 co n-accatar na buidne 7 na sluagu mo seach 7 na firu lomnacht 7 rop nem thened tír h-Úa Néill immi.}\]

So that the foray was seen from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north; bands and hosts in turn were seen, and naked men, and the land of the Uí Néill was a “sky of fire” around him. (Togail Bruidne Da Derga, ed. Knott 1975: 8, § 25)

In the oldest surviving, and the most authoritative, Irish wisdom-text, “The Testament of Morand” (Audacht Morainn), the righteousness of the ruler is said to protect the subjects of the righteous ruler from “plagues, numerous (invading)-hosts and great lightnings” (mortlithi mórslog no márlochet) (Kelly 1976: 6, §12).
Though the correspondences between the vernacular texts and *De duodecim* may not seem immediately obvious, on a closer look the descriptions of the disasters due to the injustice of the king in the vernacular sources can be seen to be more prominent than in those from the Bible. *De duodecim* is speaking about three major types of disasters: foreign invaders causing devastation, mortality in flocks and herds, and severe storms destroying the fecundity of the land, and so does *Audacht Morainn* and, to some extent, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.

The most prominent correspondence is the common terminology. Though the author of *De duodecim* was writing in Latin, his *hostium incursus*, lit. “attacks of enemies”, are reminiscent of OIr. *a n-indread ... na buidne 7 na sluagu*, lit. “foray...[of] bands and hosts”, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, and *fulminum ictus*, lit. “the blows of lightnings”, are similar to OIr. *márlochet*, “great lightnings”, in *Audacht Morainn*, or *nem thened*, lit. “sky of fire”, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.

The third part of the ninth section of *De duodecim* is solely dedicated to a concept of *iustitia regis*, “the justice of a king”, which is described as the law (*lex*) for every ruler to follow. It was noted by Breen that the implications of the fact that the concept of *iustitia*, “justice”, pertained throughout the text, are still to be investigated and, in his opinion, the uses of the word are strictly ecclesiastical. However, in our passage the concept is used restrictively with regard to a mundane ruler. When the author is enumerating the consequences of the ruler’s justice he does not refer to the ruler’s “divine grace”, or to any other transcendental characteristics as its cause. Moreover, the Irish author seems to neglect the approach he had already taken to the subject in the first part of the section. This discrepancy in his ideas may serve as an indication of the authentic Irish background of the sources of the second and the third part.

Let us consider the stoic advice to a king to meet both the prosperity and the adversities of his rule regardless of their effects, contained in the first part of the section. It is based on the precepts, found in monastic rules by Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great and other Church Fathers, to treat both good and bad fortune equally. This idea is a commonplace in the patristic literature and for that reason it may have been incorporated into the author’s list of the proper activities of the ruler. On the other hand, in comparison to
the juxtaposed illustrations of the catastrophes of a wicked rule and
the benefits promoted by righteous kingship which follow, the pur-
pose of which is to warn the ruler against wrong-doing, it can be
treated as contrastive. In the latter case, we most likely have what
Máire Herbert (1997: 27) has called mythic ideology: “Cosmos
reflected the manner in which the ruler upheld the principles of truth
and justice.” As we know from the classical sources, for instance
from Livy’s account of the reign of the ideal pagan Celtic monarch
Ambigatus, the theme of abundance constituted the essence of the
archaic Celtic polity.

The evidence of Audacht Morainn may be employed as an
illuminating parallel. About a third of the text is devoted to the
description of different aspects of abundance, such as mesrada mórfheda, lit. “tree-fruits of great forest”, mlechtí márbóis, “milky-
yields of cattle”, imbeth etha, “abundance of corn”, aidble íasc, “abundance of fish”, clanda caini, “lawful progeny”, etc., presented
as the consequences of the ruler’s justice by the introductory formula
Is tre fhír flathemon ..., “It is through the ruler’s truth ...”. In the
manner of presentation the vernacular collocations noted above are
the cognates of dependent genitives from the Hiberno-Latin text.
This indicates a similar background to the sources of Audacht
Morainn and De duodecim.

This observation on two opposing treatments of the topic of
prosperity and abundance points to the conclusion that, in the last
passage of the section, the author of De duodecim was inspired by the
native political imagery, rather than by the one from patristic sources
of the time, which may have had nothing to offer in this regard.

The Evidence of Cakkavatti-sihanada-sutta

Now let us turn to the Buddhist account of righteous rulership,
Cakkavatti-sihanada-sutta, “The Sutra of the Lion’s Roar of a
Universal Monarch”. I shall first provide the reader with an outline of
the sutra.

The first part is dedicated to a description of the rule of an ideal
Buddhist monarch, (Pāli chakkavattin), comprising stories about his
conquest of the earth, about his renunciation of worldly life, and
about the moral instructions given by the former *chakkavattin*, then a royal seer, to his son, then a royal warrior.

The sutra continues with a description of the rule of the royal warrior who failed to fulfil the duties of a *chakkavattin*. Because of that failure the royal warrior experienced the collapse of his rule and a state of anarchy in his kingdom. The righteousness of human beings diminished, resulting in the decrease of the human life-span to ten years, and in the total deterioration of mankind’s appearance. When this happened, people wished to free themselves from this state of inhumanity and immorality and, with the lapse of twelve generations, they progressed by the gradual improvement of their morality as well as of their physical appearance and life-span through the observance of ten patterns of moral conduct, such as “abstention from killing living beings, from stealing wealth, from doing wrong things when taking pleasure, from [uttering] falsehood, from slander”, etc. All of the aforementioned constitute the Buddhist catechism under the title *dasa sīla*, or “ten rules of good conduct”. Having reached a perfect appearance and the life-span of eighty thousand years, people experience the re-establishment of the *chakkavattin*’s rule as the ultimate stage of human progress.

Though the Hiberno-Latin text, considered above, and the Buddhist sutra are so different in terms of style and presentation, there are striking similarities between them.

The first is the idea that the welfare of the state is dependent on the morality of its ruler. As we have seen, an author of *De duodecim* recommended every ruler to follow the guidelines of Christian behaviour in order to gain peace and prosperity in his country. An ideal Buddhist ruler, a *chakkavattin*, by practising principles of Buddhist morality (Pāl. *dasa sīla*) and observing Buddhist teaching (Pāl. *dhammo*) sees his country “flourishing and rich, and abundant in towns, cities, and royal capitals”. An unrighteous ruler, a royal warrior, experienced the collapse of his rule and a state of anarchy in his kingdom when he established the institution of capital punishment, violating the first principle of Buddhist *dhammo*, not to kill living beings.

The second parallel is the picture of cosmic disturbances that destroy peace and prosperity in the domains of the unrighteous ruler. Due to them the domains “are no longer abundant” and are
devastated by marauders.\textsuperscript{46}

The third is the idea of the re-evolving of the cosmos if morality as the basis of human existence is supported and restored. Similarly, the description of the “justice of a king” in *De duodecim* comes after the antithetical account illustrating the cosmic consequences of the ruler’s injustice.

There are several important steps constituting the career of the Universal Monarch (*chakkavattin*) but the most crucial of them is his conquest of the earth for the purpose of establishing the Buddhist over-kingship.

First, let us look at the description of the start of the Universal Conquest campaign. I will argue that the description of the campaign as it stands in the *Cakkavatti-sihanada-sutta* can be treated as a literary fabrication, based upon the motives and stratagems of the native Indian royal inauguration ritual (Skt. *rājasūya*), into which specifically Buddhist elements were incorporated.


The anointed royal warrior, having risen from his royal seat, having fixed his upper mantle across the right shoulder, having taken a bhinkara in his left hand, sprinkled some water onto the wheel’s rim with his right hand [saying],

– Move on, O dearest chakka-jewel, conquer [the world], O dearest chakka-jewel! (Fomin forthcoming: app. II)

In the structure of the *rājāsūya* ritual, the first necessary step is the preparation of the sacrificer, a future king. He is clothed “with special garments and he is equipped with a set of arms, and has to raise them” (Heesterman 1957: 93-4). In the passage from the sutra cited above, metaphorically the “special garments” are to be identified with
the upper mantle of the *chakkavattin*, and the “set of arms” of the *chakkavattin* is represented by his *bhinkara*. The latter is a jug for collecting alms, and has a sacred meaning in Buddhism. It is included among the three objects that the Buddhist monk was entitled to have in his possession, the other two being the robe (*vattha*) and the bundle of medicinal herbs (*kusa*).

Next comes the unction: “while the sacrificer stands with raised arms, the unction is administered to him” (Heesterman 1957: 97). In the sutra the *chakkavattin* sprinkles the rim of the wheel (Pāl. *chakka*), with his jug raised.

After the unction rites are administered, a chariot drive takes place, beginning with the formula, “At the instigation of the Maruts may I conquer.” (Heesterman 1957: 127-9). In the Buddhist sutra, having sent the *chakka* in front of him to conquer the world, the *chakkavattin* accepts its supreme role, and follows it in his royal chariot, accompanied by the whole army. The address of the *chakkavattin* to the *chakka*: “Move on, O dearest *chakka*-jewel, conquer [the world], O dearest *chakka*-jewel!” can be definitely paralleled in the *rājāsūya*’s formula.

The chariot drive symbolically represents the movement of the sun, and the sacrificer is identified with the latter. In the context of the *rājāsūya*, “the chariot drive takes place beginning and ending at a point behind the *cātvāla*, representing the Ocean. The sacrificer goes by the chariot course from the Ocean to heaven and back to the Ocean again, as does the sun. Thus the course of the chariot corresponds to that of the sun, encompassing in its march the whole world.” (Heesterman 1957: 134).

The description of the Universal Conquest by the *chakka* also has certain solar connotations and it should probably be regarded as a derivation from the above *rājāsūya* episode. The following section totally corresponds to the structure of *rājāsūya*’s episode and the parallels between them, such as the solar movement of *chakka*, its diving into the Ocean, and others, are extremely important in this regard:

*Atha kho ta–, bhikkhave, cakkaratava– puratthima– disa– ... dakkhiva– disa– ... pacchima– disa– ... uttara–disa–*
Then, O monks, the divine chakka-jewel started rolling eastwards… southwards … westwards … northwards … There, O monks, the divine chakka-jewel stopped… [Having conquered the region] the chakka-jewel, having dived into the eastern … southern … western … northern sea and jumped onto the shore, started rolling toward the southern … western … northern part(s) of the world … And then, O monks, this chakka-jewel, having conquered the Earth, surrounded by the ocean … stopped in front of the royal palace. (Fomin forthcoming: app. II)

Another crucial element in the depiction of the Universal Conquest, apart from the solar movement of the chakka, is the chakkavattin’s address to the subordinate kings. Having conquered them peacefully with their consent, the chakkavattin instructs them in proper behaviour. This address contains the following moral guidelines:


Living-beings should not be killed; that which is not given, should not be taken;49 wrong things should not be done when taking pleasure; lies should not be uttered; intoxicating liquors should not be drunk and you all should eat that which is suitable for eating. (Fomin forthcoming: app. II)
If we look again briefly at the end of the sutra, it should be recalled that the re-establishment of the rule of a chakkavattin and the progress of human beings is due to the observance of certain rules of behaviour – “ten patterns of conduct” (Pāl. dasa sīla) – by humans. Within the religious system of Buddhism the “ten patterns” present a guideline for the righteous behaviour required of every Buddhist monk. In the above instruction of the chakkavattin to his subordinate kings we are concerned with the primary rules of Buddhist moral ethics, required of every human being, regardless of whether he is a layman or a renouncer of worldly life. These five precepts are usually called pañca sīla, the five rules of good conduct, and are also called pañca dharmā, the five dharmas. Anguttara-nīkaya, a section of the Sutta-piṭaka, the second part of the Pāli canon of Buddhist texts, mentions these precepts in connection with the formula sarava–gata, literally, “[I am] the one, who has attained shelter.” This formula was pronounced by a proselyte who was willing to be converted to Buddhism. Uttering one by one the precepts contained in the formula, the proselyte was supposed to reach the state preliminary to any higher development after conforming to the basic teaching of the Buddha. After pronouncing all of them, the new follower is officially installed and included in the community. Therefore, pañca sīla stands at the heart of Buddhism, and the instruction of the chakkavattin to the subordinate kings is in fact simply an exposition of Buddhist doctrine. The chakkavattin is presented as a preacher of Buddhism; his image, however, can by no means be connected solely with Buddhism.

The chakkavattin is usually seen in the scholarship (Tambiah 1976: 39-53) as the embodiment of dhammo on the plane of society, a righteous ruler of Buddhism. Be that as it may, I am inclined to think that the portrayal of the chakkavattin has a certain non-Buddhist stratum, and stems from the depiction of the ideal Indian king, the conqueror (Skt. vijigi), described in the Indian treatise on political science, Arthaśāstra.

The first evidence in favour of this conjecture is afforded by certain elements in the description of the chakkavattin contained in the first paragraph of the sutra and the corresponding passage in
Arthaśāstra, describing the sphere of activity of the World Conqueror.


The place [of his activity is the whole] earth. The field of the chakravartin’s activity extends northwards up to the 1000 yojanas, from the sea up to Himalaya. [REF. FOR TRANSLATION]

The next piece of evidence is provided by certain elements in the description of the Universal Conquest, considered above. We have been told that the subordinate kings submitted to the chakkavattin with their consent: without fighting or negotiating, but having listened to the latter’s instruction in dhammō. This agrees with the description of the righteous conqueror in Arthaśāstra, who is prescribed as follows:

trayobhiyoktāro dharmalobhāsuravijayina iti || te ṛāmabhavapattyā dharmavijayī tu yati. (Kangle, ed., 1969: XII.1.10; 1.247)

[There are] three types of conquerors: a righteous one, a greedy one and a furious one. 11. The righteous conqueror is satisfied with submission. [REF. FOR TRANSLATION]

The third piece of evidence is the establishment of righteous practices by the conqueror (vījīgī Ṣu) prescribed by the Indian treatise on government,⁵¹ and paralleled by the Buddhist sutra. As we have shown, the latter sees them as the rules of Buddhist moral ethics.

Employing the stratagems of the Arthaśāstra, the Buddhist scribe was devoid of mere quoting or paraphrasing, and sometimes presented them antithetically. Let us deal, for instance, with the description of how the ultimate goal of the righteous ruler seen as the “beneficial state” and the “happiness of all the people”⁵² can be achieved.
According to the sutra, this goal can be attained by following Buddhist dhammo, contained in the five rules of proper conduct.\textsuperscript{53} According to Arthaśāstra, the happiness of the world is achieved only when the king employs the method of punishment (davdā).\textsuperscript{54} However, in the view of the Buddhist author, the ruler who chooses the law of punishment, and thus follows the Brahminic understanding of the duty of a king (interpreted by the Buddhist compiler as unrighteous) does not last long.

The consequences of this rule, depicted in the second part of Cakkavatti-sihanada-sutta are almost identical to the Irish picture of cosmic disturbance. Entering into somewhat more detail, we can recall that the rule of a royal warrior, who had turned from the law of dhammo to the law of davdā by installing the institution of capital punishment in his realms, is destroyed by infertility, poverty and theft, by lack of human confidence in his rule, by the decline of public morals, which go through twelve stages of regress, and by anarchy in his kingdom because of the activity of brigands and marauders.

Contrariwise, the rule of the chakkavattin, which comes as the result of the re-establishment of the proper moral behaviour, is peaceful and is characterised by the abundance of fruit and protection of men.\textsuperscript{55}

There is of course, a difference between the Irish and Indian data. Buddhist texts see the exercise of the law of punishment by the unrighteous ruler as a primary factor in the degradation of human morals and the destruction of humankind. The Irish saga “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” (Togail Bruidne Da Derga), treated above, presents us with the like picture of the destruction of abundance through the injustice of the ruler. Similarly, the impulse for destruction in the Irish saga, as well as in the Buddhist sutra, is the king’s unjust sentence in court.

However, the Irish sources show no mercy for criminals. In Togail Bruidne Da Derga the milk-brothers of the king who had been accused of pillaging were sentenced to death by hanging.\textsuperscript{56} However, the Irish king Conaire changed his decision and sent them out of the
country. The criminals were not punished in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, and that is why the peace of the king’s realm was destroyed.

One may find a like picture in the Indic tradition of political thought. In ancient India the ideal king was supposed to punish a criminal; otherwise, the sin of committing a crime was due to be passed onto the king himself. However, the Buddhist counterpart of the ideal Brahminic king, the royal warrior, is condemned for the death-penalty he imposed on the thief, and here we are dealing with the Buddhist moral of non-violence and non-killing.

**CONCLUSION**

In the course of our exposition we have observed the way Christianity and Buddhism influenced the contents of our texts, and how the subject-matter was organised accordingly. With the advent of Christianity and Buddhism it was inevitable that the depictions of ideal kingship prevailing in pre-Christian Ireland and pre-Buddhist India would change as a result of their exposure to the influence of the new religions, which brought tremendous change into the society on the whole, and, obviously, into the ideology of kingship. However, in order to make their message sound stronger, the new religions used ideological structures already in place, inherited from the old tradition. For the purposes of the fabrication of a new collection of political treatises or texts, the old stratagems were employed by the clerical scribes. This was probably done for the simple reason that ideas expressed by means of an old phraseology would appeal to the audience better than if the terminology was entirely new. But the semantics of the words is now different, and the ethical dimension can be seen as a watershed between the old and the new visions of power.

The conclusions reached in this investigation are important, because for both India and Ireland kingship was the central institution which structured the cosmos of a whole society. Before, it was the cosmos itself that was important in the view of the early ideologists; after the conversion the cosmos acquired an ethical dimension, and that is why it can be described as a moral cosmos.
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Notes

1 For instance, the religious archetype of secular power in the first centuries of Christianity was dominated by the Pauline epistles (esp. Rom. 13: 1-6) and the notion of power was treated as a spiritual entity, implicitly belonging to God; in early medieval Europe a new religious archetype of power was created by St Augustine in his De civitate Dei, where he depicted human society divided into two realms or “cities”, the City of God and the worldly one. Augustine connected secular power with the latter, and so the opinion that human power was a necessary evil prevailed. In the Orient, the religious archetype of power in early Indian society, for instance, was dominated by the ideologems of the Vedas and Brāhmavas (cf. Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, XIII.1.5.1ff., on the performance of aśvamedha), where royal power is portrayed as having a universal aspect; the king is an all-conqueror (viśvajit) and the lord of the Earth (sarvabhauma). Fuller treatment of the notion of “polity” and related problems is contained in Anderson 1972, Bloch 1962, Geertz 1973, esp. pp. 311-15, Taiwan 2001, Tambiah 1976 and Weber 1956.
Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1259b1, ἢ δὲ των ἰκνων ἄρχη βασιλική, “The rule of the father over the children on the other hand is that of a king.” (Tr. Rackham 1932: 58.10-11, 59).

Behistan inscription of Darius I (Kent 1950).

Cf., for instance, Isidore of Seville, ed. Lindsay 1911: L.xxix.3, VII.xii.17, IX.xxx.4, 6, etc.

One may argue that the same picture can be found throughout the Indo-European world (see Benveniste 1973: 321, and cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 19.106-14; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 215-35). Similarly to the Irish and Indic sources, early Scandinavian and Greek evidence portrays the just ruler as producing fertility in the country by his righteous rule. On the one hand, the picture obtained from the latter strikingly matches the one in the Irish texts that will be at the centre of our attention later. It is a commonplace in comparative studies to argue for the similar character of the institution of righteous rulership in ancient Greece and ancient Ireland, based upon their common Indo-European ancestry. The most comprehensive treatment of the subject is contained in Watkins 1979. On the other hand, the Greek, Scandinavian etc. instances may be treated as examples of the mythological, or archaic, consciousness. I shall present my arguments on this question later; at this point it should simply be remarked that the Irish and Indic evidence has a different character, since, in both cases, it depicts the righteousness of the ruler as depending on his observance of certain rules of moral conduct, associated with the religious ethics of Christianity or Buddhism, and can be treated as reflecting the development of the primitive, or archaic, consciousness into the early historical one.

This topic is dealt with by Kim McCon in his *Pagan Past and Christian Present of Early Irish Literature* (1990: 37), where he criticises the traditional approach to the subject, established in the works of Myles Dillon, D. A. Binchy and Proinseas Mac Cana.

In Book 4 (“Royalty and its Privileges”). Benveniste (1973: 308) states that “the survival of terms relating to religion and law at the two extremities of the Indo-European world, in the Indo-Iranian and Italo-Celtic societies [is due to the fact that here] we are concerned with societies of the same archaic structure, of an extremely conservative nature where institutions and their vocabulary persisted long after they had been abolished elsewhere.” His main interest was to establish the original character of the Indo-European institution of kingship, which he regarded as having been preserved in the eastern and western
extremities of the Indo-European world. His ideas were extremely popular at the time, and had a great impact on Irish scholars, among them D. A. Binchy, whose theory of “roi fainéant” (Binchy 1970: 7-10) once obtained great popularity among the Celticists.


9 Despite its continental prominence – *De duodecim* survived mainly in continental manuscripts (see Hellmann 1909; Breen 2002: 78-94, esp. 88-9, 92-3) – its Irish origin (or strong connection, at least) has generally been recognised. Hellmann (1909: 3-4, 15-6) and Anton 1982: 568-617, SS. 569-574) as well as Breen (2002: 79, 83) come to the same conclusion with regard to its origin. Aitchinson’s view (1994) is in broad agreement with the Hellmann and Anton. Breen (2002: 63) assumes that the text had been “written on the continent by an Irish scholar”.

10 All the translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

11 Probably, its antecedent is Virgil’s popular etymology of the word *rex* in the *Aeneid* 7.46: “*Rex arva Latinus et urbes iam senior longa placidas in pace regebat*”. (Ed. Greenough …: …; my bold print)


13 In this paper I will not have enough space to do this, but will present my argument at length in the introduction to my PhD dissertation (Fomin forthcoming).

14 The traditional Indian society was divided into *varnas* – social classes of priests (*brahmins*), warriors (*kshatriyas*), landowners and tradesmen (*vaishyas*) and servants (*shudras*), and *ashramas* – the age-groups of the young students, leading a chaste life (*brahmacharins*), mature laymen (*grihasthas*), aged religious renouncers (*sanyasins*) and the wandering ascetics (*parivrajakas*). Only the members of the first two *varnas* were entitled to go through all of the *ashramas*.


16 Moreover, Buddha considered following Vedic ritual to be useless and harmful. As is always the case in the Pāli canon, this aspect of his teaching is presented in the form of a doctrinal lecture or, employing the terminology of the sources, of a “sutra”. I refer to the *Siṅgālovāda-sutta*, “Story about the speech to Singala” (Carpenter, ed., 1992 [1911]:
180-93) containing moral instruction to the laity: “The young householder Sigala was extremely zealous in observing the Vedic rituals. Being asked by Buddha why he was constantly waking up at dawn and paying homage to different parts of the world, he answered that his father had taught him to do so. Buddha explained to the young man that according to his doctrine everyone should pay homage to the parts of the world, but these parts are completely different: paying homage to the east is equal to showing respect to one’s mother and father, to show respect to one’s mentor is equal to paying homage to the south, paying homage to the west means to treat kindly all members of one’s household, paying homage to the north stands for showing respect to one’s friends and acquaintances. Zenith equals respect to brahmans and shramans, nadir – to one’s servants and slaves. All of the aforementioned constitute the six directions that one should pay homage to, Buddha concluded.” Four out of the six forms of respect are contained in the list of ten patterns of moral conduct (dasa sīla) required of a Buddhist which are discussed below.


18 See, for instance, Orations of Dion Chrysostom, 49, “the Persians, I think, have men called Magi… the Egyptians, their priests … and the Indians, their Brahmins. On the other hand, the Celts have men called Druids, who concern themselves with divination and all branches of wisdom.” (Kenrick 1927: ……; Kenrick’s translation).

19 I am taking the term in the sense “a historical manifestation of the sacred” proposed by Mircea Eliade (1958: 10).

20 These topics are very well treated in Küng, von Stietencron and Bechert 1987: 346-60.

21 See the works of Breen and Anton, especially Breen 2002.

22 See sections CCXXXIV (De eo quod bonorum regum opera aedificent) and CCXXXV (De eo quod malorum regum opera propseritas mundi destruant), in Fornasari, ed., 1970: 142-3.

23 For the Latin text, see Hellmann 1909: 51-2.

24 On the influence of De duodecim on the formation of the medieval genre of “the prince’s mirror” (speculum principis) see Anton 1982.

25 Hellmann (1909: 51-2) has noted the following sources of the passage in his apparatus fontium: Ps. 88: 17, Prov. 16: 12, I Pet. 1: 17, Deut. 24: 20, Jer. 7: 6, I Mcc. 3: 8, IV Reg. 23: 24; Breen is in favour of the
patristic influence (see Breen 1988: 169), and lists among the sources of the section Reg. Mag. 92, 28-32 and St Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, 17: 20, and *De doctrina christiana* 2, 23 (35).

26 Snyder 1998: 86. In his note on page 299, Snyder quotes Patrick’s *Epistola* 18: “As for lying oath-breakers (*mendacibus periuris*), their lot will be in the lake of everlasting fire”, and indicates the source, Rev. 21: 8; and Gildas’s *De excidio Britonum*, 27: “[The reges] constantly swear false oaths, [*crebro iurantes, sed periurantes*], they make vows [*voventes*], but almost at once tell lies [*mentientes*]; ... they hang around the altars swearing oaths [*iurando*] – then shortly afterwards scorn them.” (Winterbottom, ed. and tr., 1978: 99, 29).

27 *Plurimas coniuges habentes, sed scortas et adulterantes... sanquinarios superbos parricidas ... et adulteros Dei inimicos, ... ad sidera... efferentes*, “they have many wives – whores and adulteresses, ... exalt to the stars... bloody, proud and murderous men, ... adulterers and enemies of God” (Gildas, ed. and tr. Winterbottom 1978: 99, 29). I owe this and the previous note to my Russian colleague, N. Chehanadskaya, who is strongly convinced that Gildas’s depiction of British kings exercised a strong impact on the language and ideology of the first part of the *De duodecim* passage in question.

28 Jer 4: 7, 11, 20-29; cf. Jer. 5: 6, which expands the idea of Jer. 4: 7 into the following: *Idcirco percussit eos leo de silva, lupus ad vesperam vastavit eos, pardus vigilans super civitates eorum*, “Therefore, a lion from the forest would slay them, a wolf would ravage them in the evening, a panther guard their cities.”

29 Cf. a loose parallel between *bestiae armentorum et pecorum greges dilacerant* of *De duodecim* (Hellman 1909: 52.16) and *volatilia caeli et bestias terrae ad devorandum* of Jer. 15: 3. [[[ EITHER OMIT OR INCLUDE IN COMMENT: and *consumptum est animal et volucre* of Jer. 12: 4]]]. However, Jeremiah speaks of the birds of heaven and the beasts of earth that devour, while the Irish author speaks only of beasts that tear apart the herds and flocks.

30 However, one may argue that our author was not intending to quote Jer. *verbatim*, but giving a re-ordered citation or paraphrase of it in an exegetical context. As an example of this kind of eschatological exegesis, cf. Paulus Orosius, *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, lib. I, prol. 10.
31 Qui vero regnum secundum hanc legem non dispensat, “Whoever, indeed, does not rule the kingdom according to this law…”; see Hellmann 1909: 52.

32 In his latest treatment of the subject, Breen (2002: 81) states that “the concept of iustitia… means not only moral righteousness”, and the moral righteousness of the ruler in particular, “but the salvific act of God and the grace necessary to respond to it, which is stifled (suffocatur) by the aforementioned twelve abuses. The background in patristic theology to the use of iustitia in this specific context is complex, and further investigation is needed.

33 Iustitia vero regis est … prosperitatibus animum non elevare, cuncta adversaria patienter ferre, “Truly, the justice of the king is … not to lift up his spirit in the prosperity, to withstand all adversities patiently.”

34 Cf. Gregory the Great (ed. ……: …….: …..), Homiliae in Hiezechihelem prophetam, II.7, Si itaque, fratres carissimi, et per praecepta dominica et per sanctorum exempla gradimur, ut nos nec prosperitas eleuet, nec adversitas frangat.

35 Livy, Ab urbe condita (ed. and tr. …….: 1887), V.34.2. Ambigatus is fuit, virtute fortunaque cum sua cum publica praepollens, quod in imperio eius Gallia adeo frugum hominumque fertiles fuit, ut abundans multitudo vix regi videretur posse, “There was [a king] Ambigatus, so distinguished by his personal virtue and public fortune, that in his reign Gaul was so fertile in crops and men that the abundant multitude seemed scarcely able to be ruled.”

36 As well as any other archaic polity. See note 5 above.


38 In the relevant section of my dissertation (Fomin forthcoming) I explore the semantics of the OIr. fir, “truth”, firinne, “justice, righteousness”, and Lat. iustitia. I take firinne as a vernacular cognate of the Latin iustitia, used throughout other OIr. wisdom-texts. Linguistically it is a secondary formation, derived from the noun fir, “truth, justice”, of the above formula. On the Indo-European etymology of fir and related topics see Wagner 1971.

“mildness of the air”, and *terrae fecunditas*, “fertility of land” in the third part of *De duodecim* (see above).

Here we have to leave out the complex question of relationship between the vernacular wisdom-texts and their Hiberno-Latin counterpart. It must be said, however, that chronologically this section of *De duodecim* is the oldest surviving text written in Ireland on the topic of ideal kingship. I refer the reader to the second chapter of my forthcoming thesis where I explore a hypothesis that the relevant section of *De duodecim* should be seen as the forerunner of the vernacular tradition of the “prince’s mirror” genre.

Lit. “the one who is rolling the wheel (of *dharma*, or ‘moral law’),” Skt. *chakravartin*.

Carpenter, ed., 1992: 73-7, §§21-22. *Tesam, bhikkhave, sattānam evam bhavissati:* yannūna māyam pāṇātipātā virameyyāma ... adinnā-dana virameyyām a... kāmesumicchācārā virameyyāma, ... musāvāda virameyyām a... pisuṇāya vācāya virameyyāma. “This thought, O monks, occurred to the human beings: ‘Why should we not abstain from killing living beings … from the stealing of wealth … from doing wrong things when taking pleasure, … from [uttering] falsehood, … from slander.’ ”

This section concludes with exactly the same words with which the sutra began, that is why the following passages, devoted to the description of the Buddha’s birth and the latter’s discourse on the moral practices of the Buddhist monks can be disregarded as a later interpolation.

Carpenter, ed., 1992: 75, §23. *Ayam jambudīpo iddho ceva bhavissati phīto ca, kukku asampātikā gāmanigamarājadhāniyo.* “India will be flourishing and rich, and abundant in towns, cities, and royal capitals.”


Carpenter, ed., 1992: 64, §13. *Te gāmaghātampi upakkamimsu kātum, nigamaghātampi upakkamimsu kātum, nagaraghātampi upakkamimsu kātum, panthadhāhanampi upakkamimsu kātum.* “They came to the village and pillaged it, then they came to the market town and pillaged it, then they came to the city and pillaged it, then they started killing and robbing [people] on the roads.”
47 The reference to the “upper mantle” in the Chakkavatti-sutta is perhaps an allusion to the vattha.

48 This is the most important attribute of the Buddhist chakkavatti. In the narrative of the Chakkavatti-ihanada-sutta, p. 61, §5, the rim of the wheel constitutes the legitimacy of the royal warrior’s claims to be considered a chakkavatti by the fact of its appearance in the sky.

49 Fig. “abstain from theft”.

50 Carpenter, ed., 1992: 59, §2. Bhūtapubba—, bhikkhave, rājā dalhanemi nāma ahosi cakkavatti ... cāturanto: ima—paSa havim sāgarapariyanta—abhivijiya, ajjhāvāsi. “Once upon a time, O monks, there was a king, Dalhanemi by name, a chakkavattin, … ruling over the four ends of the Earth, [who] … having conquered this earth surrounded by the ocean, lived.”


52 Cf. hita sukha, “beneficial state and happiness”, in the Cakkavattisihanada-sutta and sarvabhūtahito “beneficial state of all beings”, in Arthaśāstra, XIII.5.

53 Pāli text contained in Carpenter, ed., 1992: 61, §5. My translation is as follows: “Having dhammo as your lord, being its righteous protector, keeper and guard, establish it among your relations, in your army, among the vassal lords, among the brahmins-householders, in the markets and in the country, among the shramans and brahmans, among the wild animals and birds.”

54 Arthaśāstra, I.4.3, 16. For Sanskrit text and English translation see Kangle 1969: I, 5-6; II, 9-10. I offer an alternative rendering of the passage: “3. Punishment (davōṇā), that is properly applied … leading to the acquisition and to the preservation of wealth, the protector of the preserved, distributing the protected, and establishing in the law and in the profit that which was grown [under its protection]… 16. People, that are divided into four varnas and ashramas, protected by a king and his punishment (davōṇā), enjoying their business and their duties (dharma) dwell in their houses.”
Cf. the “protection” litany in *De duodecim*, III §1 above: [\textit{iustitia regis est…}] \textit{tutamen patriae, … munimentum gentis} “[the justice of the king is …] protection of his native land, … protection of the nation.”

This is an echo of the Christian influence on Irish culture, as the death-penalty was instituted by the Church in opposition to the native Irish law-practice of the fine, or paying off of an \textit{ericc}, the material equivalent of the personal social status. See Kelly 1988: 216-17.

See, for instance, *Narada-dharmaśāstra*, III.19. 47. “If the king has liberated the guilty person, it is a sin, and also, if he has punished the unguilty; for the law (\textit{dharma}) is to punish [the guilty]. 56. The thief is liberated from sin [by the king’s sentence], whether he is punished or set free, but the king receives the sin of a thief if he does not punish the latter.” The translation is from the recent edition of the text by Vigasin and Samozvantsev (1998: 141).

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Rewriting the Moral Cosmos in the Thirteenth-Century *Queste del Saint Graal*

DOLORES WARWICK FRESE

When the Cistercian author of the thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal* (Anon., ed. Sommer, 1913) created his revisionist romance of Arthurian knights searching for mystical bliss, and for the material object that would instantiate such subjective experiences of spiritual *jouissance*, the connection of writing and cosmos had long since assumed the status of an established textual trope. Nearly a century had passed since Bernardus Silvestris composed his *Cosmographia* (Bernardus, ed. Wetherbee, 1973: 20). In this poetic allegory of creation’s origin and animation, a tearful Nature petitions Noys, the Providential Mind of God, to create a more beautiful ordering of the elements than presently exists in Hyle, the unruly primal matter (67-8). Concurrent with its metaphysical meanings, Bernardus’ “treatise on the totality of the universe” as he calls it (65), carries the Platonic shadow of the writer himself, in the process of creating a more orderly text-world.

So we should not be surprised to find in the Old French *Queste* a dramatised continuum of miraculously inscribed objects – swords, ships, seats of danger, stones, thrones, road-signs and cenotaphs – all of which serve as narrative and moral directives for the re-education of characters and readers alike. Both are in need of instruction in this prose fiction whose radically revised expectations Freeman-Regalado (1985: 91) situates “between the generic motifs and the discursive modes of romance, and those of religious or didactic texts”. Indeed, within its putative romance idiom, the *Queste del Saint Graal* likewise seeks to re-order the elements of an extant but often unruly cosmos, a text-world whose constituent elements are comprised of prior Arthurian myths and legends, many of them exhibiting what Pauphilet (1921: 193) has described as “the deformed expression of ancient pagan beliefs”.

One striking example of “ancient pagan belief” translated from the pre-Christian era into this most Christian of romances has been
brilliantly analysed by Grisward (1984: 273-87) in his discussion of tripartite colour symbolism in the *Queste’s* interpolated account of the Legend of the Tree of Life as the Grail adventures near their climax. Grisward focuses on certain post-edenic slips of wood carried out from Paradise by Eve, who in this mythopoetic account inadvertently holds onto a broken branch from the violated white Tree of Knowledge as she leaves the Garden. Taking root where she plants it, the white tree changes to green as Adam and Eve first have intercourse, and later to red when Cain kills Abel, beneath its spreading branches. Millennia later these three praeternaturally tinted woods will furnish material for the white, red and green posts of a magnificent antique bed found aboard a mystical ship by Galahad, Perceval and Bors. Solomon has fashioned this bed, on the advice of his canny wife, as a way of communicating with his lineal descendant Galahad, whose future coming, further millennia later, the Old Testament king has prophetically intuited. On this bed, moreover, the three knights find Solomon’s crown, the sword of his father David, and a plenitude of text embroidered onto the rich coverlet whose letters supplement those inscribed on the sword hilt and scabbard, spelling out the cryptic message of predestination for the perfect knight who is to achieve the Grail and heal the Maimed King, thereby bringing the “adventures of Britain” to a definitive close (Matarasso 1969: 39). Galahad, who makes his literary debut in this fiction, is that hero, designated to take possession of the sumptuous bed and its accompanying artifacts of warfare and kingship conserved on this mystical ship made of “rot-proof” wood (232).

Astute readers have remarked variously on the significance of the three colours – white, green and red – in this episode. Matarasso (1969: 298, n.60), for example, glosses them as “the white of purity, the green of piety and the red of sacrifice”, linking these symbolic colours to “three essential facets of Christ’s life on earth”. Grisward, on the other hand, while noting how these colours had assumed the status of iconographic convention in both poetic and pictorial representations of the Trinity and the Crucifixion, traces a far more archaic genealogy of colour. He explicates in some detail (273-5; 278-3) the symbolic valence and structural deployments of *albati, russati, virides*, those respective white, red and green designators of sovereignty, force and abundance elucidated by Basanoff, de Vries,
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Dumézil, Gerschel, Lyle and others as traditional markers of the functions and respective social classes of rulers, warriors and agrarian cultivators in the Indo-European systems of the ancient world.

Not by chance, then, do we find these three functions (rule, war, sustenance) iconically registered at the outset of the *Queste del Saint Graal* immediately after the departure from Camelot of one hundred and fifty sworn knights, only three of whom – Perceval, Galahad and Bors – will ultimately achieve the adventure of the Grail. When Melias, Galahad’s newly knighted squire, naively attempts to appropriate for himself a “crown of surpassing beauty” positioned on a “magnificent throne” situated in the midst of a meadow surrounded by “tables laden with delicacies” (67), he is chastised immediately by a knight who appears on a “powerful charger”, critically wounding Melias with a lance tip that remains partially embedded in his flank, like some antique relic of prior myths concerning the Maimed King.

Like numerous other adventures in the thirteenth-century prose *Queste*, this one involves an overwriting of earlier themes and scenes familiarised through the twelfth-century verse romance of Chrétien de Troyes’ originary *Perceval, ou le Conte del Graal* (1956). The disabling thigh wound, which theatrically eliminates Galahad’s newly knighted squire from the *Queste* while binding him to the wounded Fisher King in need of healing at Chrétien’s mysterious Grail Castle, simultaneously allows Melias to stand in for Perceval, the earnest but untutored titular hero of Chrétien’s earliest surviving Grail text. For when Chrétien’s uncouth protagonist makes his way from the rural Welsh woods to King Arthur’s court in search of knighthood, his first adventure likewise confronts him with irresistible icons of sovereignty, force and abundance as he comes to a meadow displaying a gorgeous tent crowned by a golden eagle signalling imperial rule, a tent which also houses the food, drink and beautiful damsel of a proud, punishing, knight. Unlike the moral corrector in the *Queste*, however, Chrétien’s pugilist returns to find his wines and pastries already consumed by the Welsh rustic who also has taken possession of the maiden with a series of kisses forced into her mouth and a violent seizure of her emerald ring which he twists from the weeping damsel’s finger before departing (Chrétien 1956: 19-25, ll. 635-833).

These oblique gestures toward Chrétien’s naive Perceval which can be seen to shape Melias’ inaugural adventure become even more
unambiguous in the *Queste* author’s ensuing re-presentation of Perceval’s encounter with the tent damsel (124-30). Now the eroti-cised figure of abundance, presented in the stylised form of a beautiful woman, appears as a latterday devil-in-disguise, one who turns the tables by seducing the hero, presently poised on a lonely mountain crag, depicted in a tableau of Christ-like prayer and fasting in preparation for his quest (114-24). The she-devil arrives at the base of the mountain in a ship clad with conventionally ominous black sails (124) and provides her own “most magnificent silk tent” which she has her servants erect on the strand (127). Under its covering shade the prose romancer’s Perceval is divested of his armour and weapons, stripped of his tunic, and lulled to sleep (128). Later, he wakes and is plied with choice dishes and strong wines in a scenic repetition and reversal of Perceval’s lavish feasting at Chrétien’s Castle of the Fisher King (128). The retrofitted tent-damsel of the *Queste* – an inversion of Chretien’s beautiful Grail-bearer – then leads the bedazzled Perceval to a “beautiful and luxurious bed” where her attempt at reverse rape is aborted at the last moment by the naive hero’s seemingly chance observation of a “red cross which was inlaid in the hilt” of his sword, abandoned on the tent floor: “Directly he saw it he came to his senses. He made the sign of the cross on his forehead and immediately the tent collapsed about him and he was shrouded in a cloud of blinding smoke, while so foul a stench pervaded everything that he thought he must be in hell.” (124-9).

Beneath the subtle humour that constrains these scenic revisions with their knowing exploitation of Chrétien’s courtly romance we can discern important theoretical issues at play in the generic transformations we have been reviewing. They involve “the introduction of a new diction that does not undo but does subdue the force of the received concepts” where conceptual changes involving “epistemo-logical and moral hypotheses” may be signalled by what Cohen (1985: 278) has called the “important indicator” of parody.

The *Queste* author’s parody of Chrétien’s grail romance thus inscribes a revisionist move cognate with those ingenious recontextualisations of passages from the Vulgate Cycle’s *Prose Lancelot* where, as Kennedy (1985: 2) convincingly demonstrates, “the same passage, without a word being changed within it, can be given a new meaning” when re-read in light of later events, once the romance in
which it first appeared becomes incorporated into a cyclic romance that now includes the *Queste del Saint Graal*. Among her exemplary specimen texts Kennedy includes those episodes where Galehot, Lancelot’s friend, dies due to his separation from the hero, with Galehot’s foreboding dreams, interpreted by one of the king’s wise clerks, presenting the love of Lancelot and Guinevere “for the first time in the romance as destructive and sinful” (3). Similarly, in passages dedicated to Lancelot’s winning of his name through the performance of marvellous feats in the cemetery of the Dolorous Guard, soon to be renamed Joyous Guard as the hero “braves the perilous pit and other great dangers to take the keys of enchantment” (5), we learn that Lancelot’s baptismal name had been Galahad (Galaaz). As Kennedy notes, “At this stage, the name Galaaz has no mystic significance in the text” (3) and in neither these nor other of her cited instances are the passages, composed prior to the creation of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, “pointing forward to a Galahad not yet born who will surpass his father” (5). Nevertheless, re-read in light of that latterday romance, we can appreciate the recreative clinamen or “revisionary swerve,” a literary version of Lucretius’ “slight swerve of the atoms” which enables and energises all of nature’s cosmic innovations, and which, in the case of literary innovation, as Bloom has argued (1975: 43-5), “always must be considered as though it were simultaneously intentional and involuntary.”

The infusion of theological orthodoxy that characterises the *Queste* is thus to be understood as a conceptually profound revisionist move. It greatly tempers the mythic substrate smouldering at the heart of the Vulgate Cycle’s manifold tales of Lancelot du Lac, his youthful nurturing in a subaqueous Otherworld by the quasi-divine Lady of the Lake, and his coming to the Arthurian court where supreme displays of prowess, service to the king and devotion to the queen have earned him the undisputed title of “Best Knight in the World”. The swerve or shift of meaning attending the creation of the *Queste*’s moral cosmos necessarily strips Lancelot of this title, reassigning it to his son Galahad, who makes his literary debut in this consummate “retro” fiction.

Whether we view Galahad, as Albert Pauphilet describes him, as “a messianic figure” (144-54), or perceive him, as Matarasso notes that others have done, as a priggish “cardboard saint” who “seems too
rarified a figure” (1969: intro, 17); whether his creation satisfies a fictional need for some “long awaited deliverer and supreme hero of the quest”, or constitutes an “unfortunate burlesque on the conception of another and greater Messiah” – both positions suggested by Frappier as critical possibilities for the *Prose Lancelot*’s culminating event – few would argue with Frappier’s general assertion that “the begetting of Galahad is the hinge on which the whole book turns” (1959: 301-2).

Imagined as a literary rather than a literal “conception”, we must then ask what particular imaginative circumstances govern Galahad’s thirteenth-century creation. For this conception involves a carefully planned pregnancy, a deliberate *felix culpa* whose inventions are tied to needs more textual than sexual. Putting the key questions another way, we might imagine the blessed boy himself as paraphrasing the opening moral interrogations of the old Baltimore Catechism to ask “Who made me?” and “Why did he make me?”

In answering these questions, I propose that this fourth of the five fictions now comprising the Vulgate Cycle can be read productively as a specifically Augustinian confection. The intricate ties to Cistercian spirituality of this thirteenth-century tale of Grail questers have long been attended by a series of scholars ranging from Pauphilet (1921) to Matarasso (1969: intro, 20-1; 1979) and others (see Frappier 1959: 306). Additionally, I am suggesting that this thirteenth-century introduction of Galahad into the Grail story also reveals foundational ley-lines extrapolated directly from the biography, theology, semiotic theory and polemical controversies that shaped much of the Augustinian canon. Nor should this be surprising, since the Cistercian influence of Bernardine mysticism that had emerged in the prior century represented a development that was “nothing if not Augustinian” (Matarasso 1969: intro. 20). In Augustine’s *Confessions* (1960), *City of God* (1950), *On Christian Doctrine* (1958), and in a series of his writings against the Pelagians (The Fathers of the Church, vols. 15, 17, 38, 94), the author of the *Queste del Saint Graal* found prime matter for his belated invention of Galahad.

Many of Galahad’s specific chivalric undertakings as he brings the so-called “adventures of Britain” to their close while restoring the “Maimed King to health” (39) can be seen to carry forward by
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elegant acts of fictional rapprochement the textual agenda of the Augustinian canon. What follows will sketch in an exemplary rather than exhaustive fashion the surprising breadth and depth of the *Queste*’s imaginative debt to Augustine’s writings. This is a debt whose payment lies largely in the hands of Galahad, as the *Queste* repeatedly exposes the glamour of Camelot’s secular heroics as less-than-sufficient. This general trajectory, and the agonised narrative dilations that record the painful confession, tearful repentence and peristaltically slow moral ascent of Lancelot – imagined here, like Augustine, in recovery from decades of sexual addiction (*Queste*, 89-94, 141-5; Bowers 1990: 403-48) – conform the new fictional silhouette of Lancelot to the autobiographical outlines Augustine records in his *Confessions*.

Furthermore, the very act of Lancelot’s begetting of Galahad on the daughter of the Fisher King (described in the cyclical *Prose Lancelot*) when Lancelot, drugged and deceived, believes his amorous tryst to be with Guinevere (Sommer, ed. 1912: 108-11) may now be contextualised, in the manner of Kennedy’s “retrofitted” fictional effects (1986: 1-9), as an Augustinian act of deluded confusion concerning the ultimate object of his love (*Christian Doctrine* I.xxii-xl, pp.18-33; *Confessions* X.xxvii.38, pp. 254-5). Such a reading also supports the strong Augustinian inflection of the *Queste*’s seemingly over-determined conclusion when Lancelot’s specular child is taken from earth by an early death, just as Adeodatus, the boy begotten by Augustine upon his unnamed Carthaginian mistress, was destined to die young (*Queste* 283; *Confessions* IV.ii.2, p. 378, n. 2).

Deliberate Augustinian resonances appear as well in those latterday episodes of the *Queste* where chivalric father and son – first brought together by this author under the auspices of Pentecostal feasting, when both Galahad and the Grail first appear simultaneously at the Arthurian Round Table – now enjoy a final reunion, permitted “more than half a year together” (258). This reunion, dedicated to the pursuit of marvellous adventure and spiritual conversation, takes place on board a boat whose description as “having neither sail nor oar” (254) identifies this singular craft as a vessel of faith as well as the Church itself: *ecclesia est navis*. It is likewise an adventure marked by Galahad’s touching acknowledgement of Lancelot’s natural paternity: “Upon God’s name,” Galahad says, “I have desired to see and be with...
you beyond all men alive. And it is only natural I should, for in you is my beginning.” (257-8). While Lancelot and Galahad dedicate themselves to “living a life wholeheartedly vowed to the service of Our Lord” (258), the *Queste* author thus ingeniously recuperates, for purposes of fictional surplus, that brief but intense post-Pentecostal experience of religious community narrated by Augustine in *Confessions* IX.vi.14, p.214, as that father and son dwelt together in Thagaste from late 388 AD until some time in the following year, when Adeodatus, baptised along with his father in the prior Eastertide (1960: intro, 25) was to die in the flower of his youth.

In similar fashion, when young Galahad is summoned to leave the mystical ship, he parts with Lancelot, kissing his father while lovingly commending him to Christ. When a voice from heaven announces that “neither one shall see the other more until the dread and awful day when Our Lord shall render unto each his due”, Lancelot asks that Galahad petition the Master that he not “let me quit His service”. Readers of the *Queste* will recognise “the Master” as an appellation whose ubiquitous presence typically serves to mark moments of particular doctrinal significance. But the term also recollects Augustine’s own treatise entitled *On the Teacher* [*de Magistro*]. Not surprisingly, then, Galahad, ever an orthodox theologian, answers, “Sir, there is no prayer so efficacious as your own. Be therefore mindful of yourself.” (259).

In this moment of pre-Wordsworthian role reversal, where Galahad-the-child serves as spiritual father to Lancelot-the-man, we are invited to recall Augustine’s own valorisation of Adeodatus as a spiritually precocious son, a “boy ... born of me in the flesh, out of my sin. Well had you made him [O Lord my God] ... and in power of mind he surpassed many grave and learned men. ... Creator of all things, and most powerful to reform our deformities, to you do I confess your gifts. For in that boy I owned nothing but the sin. That he was brought up by us in your discipline, to that you and none other inspired us.” (1960: IX.vi.14 p.214).

Furthermore, Augustine himself supplies an explicit textual precedent from his own writings for a fictionalising of Adeodatus, along with a subtle reading directive to *The Master*; he tells us that “There is one of our books which is entitled *On the Teacher* [*de Magistro*] and in it he [Adeodatus] speaks with me. You know that his are all
the ideas which are inserted there, as from the person of the one talking with me, when he was in his sixteenth year. I had experience of many still more wonderful things in him. To me his power of mind was a source of awe. Who except you [O God] is the worker of such marvels?” (1960: IX.vi.14 p.214).

If the Confessions, then, supplies both a biographical template and a textual precedent for the fictional conception of Galahad, Augustine’s City of God similarly furnishes a model for the Queste’s two cities of Camelot and Sarras. These are the secular and sacred locales that come to circumscribe all of Galahad’s literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical adventuring in the Queste. The two theo-political kingdoms function in the Queste like Augustine’s “City of God” and the secular “City of the World”, detailed throughout City of God (1950). Arthur’s Camelot, accordingly, is a civic enterprise whose time-bound theatre of secular concern centres chiefly on power and glory in this world. Like Augustine’s Rome, Arthur’s Camelot is destined to fall. The sacred city of Sarras, on the other hand, transcends history and geography while incorporating all their temporal phenomena of time and space into its own eternal design.

As such, Sarras serves as a virtual model for the Christian church whose members, according to the moral cosmos articulated in Augustine’s City of God, continuously experience the living reality of Christ’s life in their individual and collective lives (Merton 1950: intro. x-xi). In a number of ways, then, the City of Sarras in the Queste del Saint Graal serves to fictionally instantiate aspects of Augustine’s City of God, a work which Merton (xi) has in fact characterised as “the autobiography of the Church written by the most Catholic of her great saints”.

Church history further constrains fictional imagination as Sarras initially enters the Queste as a vaguely Middle Eastern first-century locale. Here, as we learn from a White Knight (58-60) and from monastic holy men instructing the Grail questers as they offer them hospitality on their journeying (151-5), the infidel King Evelach had undergone Christian conversion through a fortuitous encounter with Josephus, son of Joseph of Arimathea, imagined as moving slowly toward Britain with the relics of Christ’s passion. Evelach will later take Christian baptism, the new name of King Mordrain, and the redemptive identity of the Maimed King, a staple character in prior
pagan grail legends. These fictions are themselves undergoing a process of literary conversion, made cognate to the fictionalised Christian conversion of the King himself.

The anonymous author of the *Queste* thus bears dramatic witness to Augustine’s assertion, in the treatise *On Christian Doctrine* (1958: II.xl.60, pp.75-6), that the “translation” of such “pagan gold” from the pre-Christian textual tradition to the redeemed Christian milieu is not simply an authorised, but a divinely mandated activity. The literary appropriation of pagan and/or secular fiction is thus, for Augustine, to be creatively carried out in a manner analogous to the despoiling of their Egyptian slavemasters by the Israelites; they appropriated their clothing, vases, and ornamental gold and silver, says Augustine, “as if to put them to a better use” (1958: II.xl.60, p. 75). In his discussion of literary precursors from the pagan past, Augustine then adds that, when the Christian separates himself in spirit from the “miserable society” of such pagan culture, “he should take this treasure with him for the just use of teaching the gospel” (II.xl.60, p. 75). This, I suggest, is precisely, and self-consciously, what the thirteenth-century author of the *Queste del Saint Graal* has set out to accomplish with his preservations, recontextualisations and Augustinian amplifications of inherited, often archaic, materials, for purposes of evangelical display.

There is considerable adaptive activity, for example, in his byzantine redeployments of the traditionally Christian insignia associated with the imperial presence of the Emperor Constantine III in Roman Britain, and hence with the proto-Arthurian historical time-frame associated with the early history of Christianity in the British Isles (Jenkins 1975: 18-9). Thus, the Christian sign-of-the-cross – said in legendary accounts to have appeared in the fourth-century sky the night before Constantine’s Battle of Milvian Bridge, accompanied by the famous motto “*In Hoc Signo Vincit*” – is a sign made to reappear proleptically on the shield of the beleagured King Evelach, who, like Constantine, has been promised victory under the sign of the crucified when he goes to battle against the pagan King Tholomer. A cross of sendal, fashioned by Josephus, son of Joseph of Arimathea, for Evelach’s shield metathesises into the image of the bleeding body of Christ. This embodied image, in turn, dissolves on the occasion of Evelach’s baptism, to be replaced later by the rationalised heraldic
device of the Red Cross, traced onto the now-blank shield with the living red blood of the dying Josephus (Queste, 58-60).

This Red Cross, in turn, becomes the blazon for Galahad, even as the shield of the now Christian King Mordrain will become Galahad’s shield, preserved for centuries in the abbey of white monks who are saving it for the knight destined to bring the “adventures of Britain” to an end. The first and last Christian Kings of Sarras – Mordrain and Galahad – are thus made semiotically present to one another, even as the mystical City of God is made to participate in the iconography long associated with mytho-historical legends of Christian conversion in pre-Arthurian Roman Britain. The same aesthetic operation which deliberately collapses historical time for purposes of semiotic representation here and elsewhere in the Queste del Saint Graal thus involves a quintessential feature of Augustine’s own theology of time (Confessions XI, pp.277-304) which accommodates both temporal and eternal realities into the life of the Church.

Construing Sarras as a site that is simultaneously literal and mystical, and hence a textual sign designed to accommodate the Augustinian concept of the “City of God”, we can better appreciate the Queste author’s conjoined image of the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, as these are vested in the single figure of Galahad. Undeniably the book’s best pugilist, Lancelot’s son is nevertheless committed to Augustine’s just-war theory: in one particularly vexing incident which Matarasso deems striking “at the very heart of the author’s method” (1979: 60), Galahad is seen to spare the lives of the Seven Deadly Sins when these combatants, appearing as seven antagonistic brothers, are found besieging a Castle of Maidens. As the Seven flee the scene of their rout, Galahad refuses pursuit, and then eludes detection by Gawain and Owein who are trying, vainly, to catch up with the Good Knight whose company they desire for all the wrong reasons.

When Gawain and Owein, who prize rather than deplore aggression, subsequently come upon the Seven Brothers, they hack away at their bodies in a festivity of violence, leaving them for dead on the field. Their delusional triumph, however, is roundly condemned by a holy hermit who construes this as vicious rather than virtuous behaviour, and explicitly contrasts their aggression with the psychologically and theologically superior model of Galahad: “He whom
you seek, Galahad, the Good Knight, did not act thus: he overcame without destroying them.” (79). Augustine’s explicit deploring of armed combat (*City of God* XIX.vii, pp. 683-4) is made liminal in this episode to an astute allegorical representation of sin’s place in the redemptive scheme, an Augustinian concept reflected in the thirteenth-century meditations of Julian of Norwich, a mystic who learns from Christ’s “Shewings” that “sin is behovabil” (Julian, ed. Crampton, 1993: 72), that is, it “behooves” us in ways that elude ordinary comprehension.

In the *Queste*’s one instance depicting Galahad as having slaughtered a group of knights who wrongfully occupy a castle, the hero chides his companions-in-arms for rejoicing in their death, even as he rejects the post-Albigensian argument of Sir Bors that “Our Lord did not want them to remain alive; and so He sent us hither to destroy them.” “That,” says Sir Galahad, “is a most inadequate explanation.” (240). Galahad thus enacts consistently Augustine’s demanding critique of all wars—even those so-called “just wars”—whose necessity, Augustine insists, the wise man will “rather lament ... if he remembers that he is a man.” (*City of God* XIX.vii, p.683).

In the creation of the two cities of Camelot and Sarras, in Galahad’s pacifism, and most dramatically in the remarkable “Legend of the Tree of Life” which the *Queste* author intrudes into the story of Arthurian adventures, Augustine’s *City of God* and his polemical controversies with Pelagius surrounding the doctrine of Original Sin, continue to cast their long shadow over the *Queste del Saint Graal*. For despite its encyclopaedic inclusiveness, which (like the Arthurian legend itself) includes in its beginning an account of the fall of Troy, the heart of Augustine’s *City of God*, as Thomas Merton notes (xi), can be found in Books 14, 19 and 22. These deal, respectively, with the origins of the City of Man, founded upon the acts and consequences of Original Sin (Book 14); with a laying out of Augustine’s elaborate theology of peace—personal, familial, national, global and cosmic (Book 19); and finally, a treating of the communal vision of the elect in Paradise (Book 22).

Just as Augustine’s *City of God* closes with its teleological vision of Paradise, Galahad experiences a concluding vision in the final Grail Mass, celebrated at Sarras at the end of the *Queste*. In this concluding fictional scenario, where Josephus himself presides over
Galahad’s sublime translation to Heaven, the son of Joseph of Arimathea is described in his episcopal garb as one might, indeed, iconically imagine Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, presiding at the conclusion of his own textual adventures inscribed into *City of God*: “The venerable man who stood in bishop’s robes before the altar ...” (Matarasso 1969: 283).

Equally suggestive of deliberate Augustinian resonance is the *Queste*’s imaginatively engaging, if somewhat bizarre, envisioning of the first post-Edenic act of sexual intercourse – a command performance of copulation divinely decreed and ordered to be carried out, albeit in flaming shame while cloaked with a merciful cover of darkness, beneath the violated Tree of Knowledge. For here we find a fictional distillation of many of those remarkable dilations in *City of God* wherein Augustine hypothesises various models of sexual intercourse as it might have been had there been no Fall, with the male member, which is now “moved in his body only by lust,” then being “moved only at will”, as easily as some now wiggle their ears, move their scalps, sweat, shed tears or musically break wind at will (XIV.xxiv, pp. 472-3), with semen introduced into the woman’s womb then as easily as now “the menstrual flow can be emitted from the womb of a virgin.”(XIV.xxvi, p. 475).

Furthermore, in the divinely designed conception of Galahad, begotten in sin and darkness but perfected by grace building on corrected nature, I believe that we have a neo-natal fiction whose specifically Augustinian intrusions act out with considerable sophistication the theological positions articulated by Augustine’s anti-Pelagian treatises (1992): 22-90 “On Nature and Grace” (22-90), “On the Predestination of the Saints” (218-70), “On the Gift of Perseverence” (271-337) and especially “On the Proceedings of Pelagius” (111-77). In these last writings, the polemical Bishop of Hippo responds to Pelagius’ heretically condemned assertion that “a man can be without sin and easily keep the commandments of God if he wishes” (1992: 96), since “Adam’s sin injured only himself and not the human race” (1992: 106).

I suggest that the creation of Galahad, and the moral cosmos brought into being to support his advent, has been specifically ordered according to Augustine’s refutation of this heretical proposition and its highly nuanced ramifications. Accordingly, Galahad –
who alone among the questers is never depicted as experiencing fear,
fatigue, hunger, thirst, anger or over-mastering sexual impulse – is
not simply the new “Christ-figure” for which Matarasso (1979: 38-
95) has argued with such eloquence and scripturally supported force
and conviction. For Christ, the Incarnate Word, as a consequence of
Adam’s sin, shared fully in the post-lapsarian frailties of human spirit
and flesh. Rather, in a bold excursion of typology-in-reverse, Galahad
represents the Queste author’s innovatively Augustinian construction
of “what might have been the human condition”, had Adam never
sinned (Seelinger 1993: 6-8). Consequently, fallen Lancelot’s peer-
less son depicts a fifth-century version of perfectively redeemed
Adamic man, one whose gratuituously restored “natural” possibilities
include the freedom to schedule his own departure from this world.
In this connection, it is useful to note Augustine’s description in the
City of God of original man, prior to Original Sin: “He lived without
any want,” suffering neither hunger, thirst, age nor disease, and
possessing the power to prolong this felicity for as long as he chose.”
(XIV.xxvi, p.474).

Accordingly, the Queste’s Galahad is given a similar opportunity
to choose his own moment of translation from this life to the next.
During a nocturnal prayer vigil, a magisterial voice speaks to the holy
hero who, as new King of Sarras, now desires nothing but union with
God: “Be not down-hearted, Galahad, for Our Lord will do thy
pleasure in this matter: at whatever hour thou shalt ask to die in the
body it shall be granted to thee, and thou shalt live in the spirit and
have joy everlasting.” (279).

We are not allowed to imagine that Christ-like Galahad’s special
spiritual status is something constructed outside the operations of
human will, free to choose wrongly as well as rightly. We hear a holy
hermit telling Galahad that “Your coming must be compared to the
coming of Jesus Christ, in semblance only, not in sublimity.” (64).
Elsewhere, Lancelot learns that Merlin’s prophecy predicting the
arrival of the Perfect Knight who is to exemplify the “sum of earthly
chivalry” is also a doctrinally constrained prophetic utterance: “None
the less, for all it is true that this knight has now a greater share of
valour and hardihood than any other, you may be sure that if he gave
himself to mortal sin – from which Our Lord preserve him in His pity
– he would get no further in this Quest than any other ordinary knight.” (134).

This Grail quest, whose “final cause” consists of the anagogical achievement of union with God in heaven, is also assigned a “formal cause” which specifies that the newly created Arthurian hero will bring the “adventures of Britain” to a close while healing the Maimed King. Like the apocalyptic figure in medieval legends of the “Last Roman Emperor” (Alexander 1985: 153-84), Galahad’s apotheosis transpires in the Holy Land where he surrenders his royal office to God surrounded by a supernatural aura as the Grail artifacts are translated from their earthly setting, never to return. Galahad’s adventures, as I have been suggesting, repeatedly involve his engagement with appropriations from the errors of Pelagius, condemned as heretical. Commonly designated as “the British heresy” (Rees 1988: 108-17) and bearing the name of Augustine’s own doctrinal opponent at the Synod of Diospolis held in Palestine in 415 AD, Pelagianism thus seems implicated directly in those “adventures of Britain” that dramatise departures from Augustine’s orthodox positions on Christian grace, free will, predestination and wounded human nature.

The “Briton Pelagius” is that same heretic excoriated by Bede in his History of the English Church and People (1968: I.x, pp. 49-50) for having “so presumptuously belittled the grace of God” while having “spread far and wide his noxious and abominable teaching that man had no need of God’s grace”. Bede, in fact, attests to a long-standing literary as well as a religious and historical tradition of Pelagian errors and Augustinian refutations of them, when he cites two heroic verses by Prosper the Rhetorician that satirise the “British heresy” and its founder: “Against the great Augustine see him crawl/This wretched scribbler with his pen of gall!” (I.x, p. 49).

Furthermore, Bede’s specific contextualisation of the introduction of Pelagianism into Britain makes sequent entries of the fifth-century British victories of Ambrosius Aurelianus against the Angles (I.xvi, pp.57-8) and the simultaneous introduction of the Pelagian heresy which had “seriously infected the faith of the British Church” (I.xvii, pp. 58-60). Bede thus rhetorically dramatises the fifth-century time-frame associated with both the historical heresy and the mythical Holy Grail, explicitly naming the collateral ancestor of King Arthur –
Ambrosius Aurelianus— as a prelude to denunciatory accounts of the heresy’s recurrent intrusions into the life of the English church with its perennial claims of human perfectionism that persisted for centuries thereafter, like a wound that refuses to close.

Bede’s subtle featuring of historical dates associating Arthurian legend and the Pelagian heresy calls further attention to the *Queste* author’s notable over-specificity concerning the date of both Galahad’s and the healing Grail’s simultaneous arrival at Camelot on Pentecost (33). Lancelot reads out the “freshly traced” letters on the Siege Perilous, while noting the singularity of the adventure, stating that “this is the first Pentecost to follow the span of four hundred and fifty-four years” since the Passion and Resurrection of Christ (33-4). What are we to make of this inscription of 454 years, a dating which silently requires the addition of the conventional 33 years of Christ’s life on earth prior to the first Pentecost? Why, in short, has the *Queste* author chosen to dramatise the number 454, in the course of invoking the implied date of 487?

Aware of the potential for over-ingeniousy in what follows, but encouraged by Augustine’s own insistence that “no one doubts that things are perceived more readily through similitude,” while “what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure” (Augustine 1958: 38), I venture the suggestion that these convolute rubrics of dating appear to be a deliberate device of temporal similitude, designed to usher readers into an Augustinian fiction of great semiotic sophistication. Discussing the cipher of numbers written into sacred scripture, Augustine notes that “numbers and patterns of numbers are placed by way of similitudes in [the sacred] books as secrets which are often closed to readers because of ignorance of numbers” (Augustine 1980: 52). Accordingly, it is tantalising to observe that the inscription of 454 (+33, or 487 years), written on the *Queste*’s Seige Perilous, supplies the centennial date for Augustine’s baptism as a Christian Catholic in 387 AD (Ryan 1960: 24). At the same time, Lancelot’s explicit noting of the term of 454 years, read as a signal associated with Galahad’s first appearance at Camelot, can be imagined as a simultaneous way of registering the centennial date for Augustine’s birth in 354 AD. In ways that are simultaneously indirect and over-specified, the *Queste* author thus constructs a convolute connection between signal Arthurian and Augustinian dates.
Furthermore, in ciphering these numbers the reader is ingeniously brought to the fact – surely not lost on Augustine – that the span of years between his own birth and baptism numbered 33, initiating him into the Christian life at exactly the age conventionally attached to the completion of Christ’s life on earth.

Whether or not one is persuaded of the involucral signs of recursive number here (Frese 1991: 234-57), it seems clear that the Cistercian author of the thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal* entered deeply into the symbolic chivalric mentality of Bernardine Cistercianism and felt himself to be a textual combatant on behalf of the Bride of Christ as did Bernard himself, seeing his beloved Church “forever in peril, forever forsaken … crying out that she is being strangled in the forest of heresy and among the undergrowth of errors” (Matarasso 1993: 17, 306, n. 3; letters 187 and 189). Centuries earlier, Augustine had taken up his pen as the defensive weapon of choice against his heretical adversary, Pelagius. Centuries later, making his own theologically corrective intervention, the thirteenth-century author of the *Queste* chose to position his own remarkable chivalric fiction squarely within the terms of the original Augustinian polemic, and in the process succeeded in rewriting the moral cosmos for an entire world of pre-existent Arthurian fictions.

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References


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In the sixth and fifth centuries BC, when Greek philosophers of nature began to think about the world in material terms, seeking physical rather than mythological explanations, they were in need not only of new vocabulary, but prior to that they needed a new kind of imagery. In explaining phenomena such as the universe, the elements of matter, or the physiology of the human body, these philosophers, although having some direct access to facts, relied to a large extent on analogy and on imagination and borrowed images from the human spheres of politics, law, warfare and even emotions, to describe the order and function of the universe.1 The Greek word kovsmo~ (cosmos) originally meant “order” (Lloyd 1991: 146), and was used to denote the order of a state or the order of soldiers in battle, before it acquired its well known meaning; Empedocles’ filovth~ (philotes) and neivko~ (neikos), “love” and “strife”, were the two opposite forces governing the cycle of the two processes of the universe, coming together and moving apart. Imagery drawn from the spheres of politics and of law was common,2 as, for example, Anaximander’s image of law and justice in his cosmological picture of equilibrium, to which I will refer later on.

As a philosophic approach to physiology and medicine developed in the fifth century BC, theories relied on imagination no less than on observation (Jones 1931: xxii-v; Jouanna 1998: 56-8) and similar imagery was applied to concepts of the human body and its function. A central idea in Greek medical thought was that of equilibrium of elements in the body, an idea which was often expressed in political terms of equality, and which thus echoes both in content and in image Anaximander’s picture of constant retribution between the elements...
of the universe. Alcmaeon of Croton, a physician and philosopher of around 500 BC, conceived of health as the isonomia, “equal right”, of the powers in the body, as opposed to monarchia, the total control of one power over the rest. Isonomia, it must be said, was the early term for democracy. In Hippocratic medical works the right proportion of elements as opposed to an imbalance between them is expressed more than once in terms of equality and a “just” condition, as opposed to a state of struggle, war, overpowering, and similar political or military images (Grmek 1998: 247).

In this paper I will focus on a passage in the Hippocratic treatise On Regimen that occurs in its fourth book which deals with the medical interpretation of dreams. I will study several aspects of the text, with the sole aim of examining a metaphorical approach in a medical context. This passage in the dream book is an example of the use of war imagery in medical thought, several further examples of which are to be found in other Hippocratic works. Whereas the image of struggle and upheaval in this text signifies an unhealthy state in the body, the opposite condition, that of health, is signified by dreams involving “normal activity”, the word “normal” being denoted by the Greek adjective dikaios, meaning “just”. For a deeper understanding of this expression and its relation to the imagery of war and struggle, I will present an analysis of the different levels of meaning of the adjective dikaios in this context, levels of meaning which can be discerned by means of comparison with the use of this adjective in other Hippocratic texts. An analysis of the adjective dikaios in a physiological context is significant especially in light of the incorporation of the concept of justice in earlier Presocratic cosmologies, which has been studied in the past and compared at certain points to medical thought, though a thorough philological study of the adjective in medical texts is lacking. Before the analysis of the passage in the dream book, I will give a general outline of the medical and physiological theory in the treatise On Regimen, in order to provide a background for understanding the metaphorical terminology. I will specifically refer to some political imagery within the physiological theory and to some of its Presocratic background. I will end this paper by saying a few words generally about the manner in
which analogy and metaphor are woven into the treatise On Regimen, exhibiting an analogical view of nature itself, and on the significance of medical dream interpretation itself for this analogical world picture.

**MEDICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL THEORY IN ON REGIMEN**

The work entitled On Regimen,⁵ in four books, is a detailed system of diet,⁶ the main thesis of which is the following: in order to keep a patient’s health one has to consider both the foods and the types of exercise which he takes, always seeking for the right balance between them. The author stresses the need to identify the component by which the body is “controlled” (Reg. I.2.5). It is made clear that these elements are fire and water, and that regulating them involves the right regimen.

In his dietetic system the author of Regimen takes into account various factors such as the nature and age of the patient, the season of the year, changes of the winds and geographical position (Reg. I.2).⁷ Book 2 deals with such factors, describing the nature of geographic districts and topography, winds, a large range of foods and drinks, baths, ointments and types of exercise, and Book 3 gives detailed profiles of possible cases of imbalance with recommendations for the suitable regimen. Book 4 is the dream book which presents different kinds of dream and a medical interpretation of them. All such factors are made subject to the philosophical theory about the elements of the universe and of the human body, which is expounded in Book 1, and the understanding of almost any passage in this work requires knowledge of the author’s theoretical background. I will now attempt to sketch this theory in general outline.

*Reg.* I.3 begins thus: “All animals, including man, are composed of two things divergent in power but cooperating in function, namely fire and water.” This no doubt echoes *Reg.* I.2: “Food and exercise are opposite powers cooperating to produce health.” Indeed, the main “invention” of the author, as he defines it, the preservation of health and the early diagnosis of disease, is based on this theory of fire and water,⁸ which identifies fire with movement, and water with nourishment: “Fire has the power of moving all things in every respect, water
of nourishing all things in every respect.” (Reg. I.3) Therefore an excess of food would mean an excess of water (and growth), and an excess of exercise or movement an excess of fire (and decline). The combinations of fire and water vary in the proportion between them regarding both the quantity of each element and its qualities, namely just how wet, dry, cold or hot each one is, thus producing a great variety of combinations in nature (Reg. I.4). In the body, as in all things in nature, there is a perpetual relationship of give and take between the two elements, where the increase of one is the decrease of the other (Reg. I.5,6). However, there cannot be a state where one of the two elements is completely eliminated, because there is an interdependence between them. Water is taken to be the nourishment of fire, and therefore fire is dependent on water; water in its turn is dependent on fire for its motion: where there is no fire, water freezes and has no life. Therefore there can be a state where one or other of the two is reduced to a minimum, but neither of the two will ever be completely absent (Reg. I.3). In the body, healthiness is a state in which there is a proportional harmony between fire and water, between intake of food and exercise, between growth and decline. An imbalance occurs when there is a disproportion between these factors.

The increase and decrease of the elements, each at the expense of the other, especially when it has to do with an excess causing disease, is repeatedly spoken of using words such as controlling, over-powering, antagonising, etc., no doubt bringing to mind human affairs of conflict, or of hierarchy. In the philosophical discussion about fire and water it is stated that: ejn mevrei de; ejkavteron kratei` kai; kratei` tai ej~ to; mhvkiston kai; ejlavciston wJ~ ajnustovn. (“in turn each masters or is mastered to the greatest maximum or the least minimum possible.” Reg. I.3). Concerning the human body and its health, among the first things said about the requirements for one who wishes to treat human regimen correctly is the following: ... ei[te mh; gnwvsetai to; ejpikratevon ejn tw`/ swvmati, oujc ijkano;~ e[stai ta; sumfevronta prosenegkei`n tw`/ ajnqrwvpw/. (“... and if one does not recognize the controlling factor in the body, he will not be capable of offering the
patient the what is beneficial”. *Reg.* I.2). In *Reg.* III, too, in which cases of an excess in the body are surveyed, the excess is often spoken of in such terms as “overpowering”, or “mastering”.

Another kind of balance-keeping process spoken of in anthropomorphic terms of struggle and war is the warding off of elements foreign to the body which enter from without: ta; de; xei`na mh; oJmovtropa wjqeitai ejk cwrvrh~ aijllotrivh~. ... ouj ga;r duvnatai to; mh; oJmovtropon ejn toi`sin ajsufovroisi cwrivoisin ejmmevein: plana`tai me;n ga;r aijgnwmona: ... prosivzei ga;r to; suvmsforon tw`/ sumfovwr/, to; de; ajsuvmsforon polemei` kai; mavcetai kai; diallavse ei ajpV aijllhvlwn. ... (“...and things which are foreign, being of different habits, are repelled out of a region which is not theirs ... For what is not of similar habits cannot remain in regions not suitable. They wander randomly. For the suitable joins the suitable,9 but the unsuitable wars and fights and separates off.” *Reg.* I.6).

The idea of the overpowering of an internal element or the intrusion of an external one and the need to restore balance is an important one in Hippocratic medical thought,10 and goes back to Presocratic concepts about the universe and about the human body. Two Presocratic fragments can help us understand the background to this way of thinking.

The first is Anaximander’s idea of “justice” in the universe: ejx w|n de; hJ gevnesiv~ ejst`i toi`~ ou\s{i, kai; th;n fqora;n eij~ tau`ta givnesqai kata; to; crewvn: didovnai ga;r aujta; divkhn kai; tivsin aijllhvloi~ th`~ ajdikiva~ kata; th;n tou` crovnou tavxin. (“And that from which there is coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens, according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice, according to the verdict of time...” DK12A9).11

The fragment of Anaximander depicts the universe as involved in an ongoing process of mutual retaliation, described in terms of a judicial process which takes place between its elements, or perhaps
between the elements and the “indefinite”, the source of all things according to Anaximander. This scheme could have had some influence on what our writer says about disease: ajlla; ga;r eij kai; pavnu mikron ejndeevstera tw`n ejtevwrn givnoito, ajnavgkh krathqh`n ejn pollw`/ crovwnw/ to; sw`ma uJpo; th`~ uJperbolh`~ kai; ej~ nou`son ajfikevsqai. (“but if one of the two (sc. exercise or food) is lesser, even to the very smallest degree, in course of time the body will necessarily be overpowered by the excess and become sick.” Reg. I.2,54). Both the factor of necessity and the significance of time are present here, as in Anaximander’s picture of injustice and recompense.

The idea of equilibrium envisaged in a judicial scene, balance being as it were justice, seems to have had an indirect influence on medical thought, which can be detected in the special development of the adjective divkaio~, as it is used in several Hippocratic texts which I will discuss below.

The second Presocratic precedent is Alcmaeon of Croton who deals with health and disease, using political terms to describe the balance of powers in the body:

jAlkmaivwn th`~ uJgieiva~ ei\nai
sunektikh;n th;n ijsonomivhan tw`n
dunavmewn, uJgrou`, xhrou`, yucrou`,
qermou`, pikrou`, glukevo~ kai; tw`n
loipw`n, th;n d j ejn aujtoi``~ monarcivan
novsou poihtikh;n: fqoropoio;n ga;r
ejKatevrou monarcivan. kai; novson
sumpivptein wJ~ me;n uJf j ou| uJperboplh`/ qermovthto~ h] yucrovthto~,
wJ~ de; ejx ou| dia; plh`qo~ trofh`~ h]
e[ndeian, wJ~ d j ejn oi|~ h] ai\ma h]
muelovn h] ejgkeyfalon. ejggivnesqai de;
touvtoi~ pote; kajk tw`n e[xwgen aijtiw`n,
uJdavtw`n poiw`n h] cwrva~ h] kovpwn h]
ajnavgkh~ h] tw`n touvtoi~ paraplhsivwn.
th;n d j uJgiveian th;n suvmmetron tw`n
poiw`n kra`sin.
Alcmaeon holds the bond of health to be the equal right of the powers: wet, dry, cold, hot, bitter, sweet and the rest, whereas the monarchy within them is a cause of disease; for the monarchy of either is destructive. Disease attacks because of an excess of heat or of cold, caused by surfeit or deficiency of nourishment, and takes place either in the blood or the marrow or the brain. In addition diseases are born also as a result of external causes, the qualities of water, of region, of exhaustion, of force, or of similar causes. Health on the other hand is the proportionate blend of the qualities. (DK 24B4)

This may be described as a metaphoric construction of a physical reality. It is a clear example of a physical model constructed by means of political imagery, “equilibrium” in the body being pictured as political equality, while imbalance is pictured as monarchy. The political image, however, is not merely an illustration or an analogy; it actually signifies something concrete about the body and its harmony in health.

In Alcmaeon’s text the causes of disease are excess or deficiency of elements within the body, or an attack by an external factor from without. This scheme is a typical one in Hippocratic thought and is vital to the author of On Regimen, as in Reg. I.2.54 and in Reg. I.6. quoted above.  

So far I have shown both in cosmological and physiological theories a picture of equilibrium in the universe or in the human body, where the elements of each must be kept in some kind of balance, this balance being illustrated or expressed by a judicial or political concept. This frame of imagery will serve as a background for understanding the set of images which construct the dream interpretation in Reg. IV.88.

Book IV of the treatise On Regimen is a dream book where different dream-images are interpreted in terms of what they signify about the condition of the physical body. I will speak about the first dream, in chapter 88, which is not a specific dream-image, but rather a general characterisation of dreams to the effect that dreams which are in accordance with the patient’s customary reality signify health, while dreams which are at variance with it signify disease. This
chapter involves some imagery of struggle and victory, a dream distorting reality being, as it were, in “conflict” or “struggle” with it, while a dream signifying health is characterised as similar to the person’s daily acts “in normal activity”, using the adjective diverkaio~,”just”, which we may tentatively translate as “normal”.

Such dreams which reflect the patient’s daily actions or intentions to the night, as they occur customarily, just as they were acted or planned during the day in normal activity, these are good for the patient. For they signify health, because the soul remains in its daily disposition, and is not overpowered by surfeit nor by emptiness, nor by any other factor attacking from without. But whenever the dreams are contrary to one’s daily actions, and battle or victory arise, this signifies upheaval in the body. (Reg. IV.88.1-13)

Here we encounter an account of health and disease which involves political or military imagery – battle, victory, upheaval, overpowering, attacking – as opposed to “just” activity, both in the characterisation of the dream and in the physiological description. As in previous instances in On Regimen, some of which I have mentioned above, once again we find verbs of struggling: excess may
“overpower” and a foreign element may “attack” the body or the soul. These verbs strengthen the image of war already implicit in the dream image signifying the unhealthy body, which contains mavch that means “struggle”, or more narrowly “battle”, and nivkh, meaning victory. The corresponding state of the body is one of upheaval – tavraco~ – a word which has an immediate connotation of social or political disorder. It is significant that victory is not conceived of as a positive thing, but means the overcoming of one factor by another, i.e. disproportion, and thus an unhealthy condition. Health would be a balanced state, a compromise.

This picture of the body, of its health as a state of balance and of disease as the “overpowering” of surfeit or emptiness, is typical of Greek medical thought and goes back to Alcmaeon’s account of health and disease, which also involves a political image, though a different one – that of monarchy versus “equal right”. The scheme of surfeit and emptiness or something “attacking” from without as causes of disease, present both in Alcmaeon’s fragment and in Hippocratic medical thought, has been discussed above. Diseases can be caused either by an imbalance of the elements within the body, or by an attack by a “foreign” element. Metaphorically, this twofold picture of nosology brings to mind two possible types of struggle in a state – confrontation with an external enemy, or internal dissension.

So much for the picture of disease in the body. Battle, victory and overpowering indicate an imbalance, and they are somehow happening in the unhealthy body. When, however, we return to the body in a healthy state, the imagery is much more restricted, and all we need to consider is what the author means when he uses the words “divkaion prhvgma” (dikaion pregma – a “just” act).

The adjective divkaio~, stemming from the Greek word for justice divikh (dike), basically means “just”, but it can also simply mean “normal” or “in due order”. So it might have been good enough simply to translate: “actions as were acted or planned during the day in normal activity”, signifying a normal state of the body. However, a look at some other Hippocratic texts using this adjective shows that there are more shades of meaning implicit here. I will give examples from two Hippocratic works.
Prorrhetic II is a Hippocratic medical work which, like On Regimen, deals with the forecasting of disease; ch. 4 shows that a well balanced regimen brings about an “even” (ομαλός) constitution and skin-colour. A person with a balanced regimen is referred to as δικαιών διαιτωμενόν (δικαιος διαιτομενος), “regulating his regimen justly”, and this involves a proportionate balance between food and exercise, and between intake of food and excretion. I will not dwell on the differences between this work and On Regimen. Generally speaking, the latter is far more detailed and displays a much greater subtlety in the equation of health and regimen. However, generally speaking, both show that a balanced regimen brings about balance in the body. In Prorrhetic II.4 the adverb δικαιών indicates this balance.

A few words should be said here about the connection between δικαιών and an “even” condition, denoted by the adjective ομαλός (homalos). δικαιών in this passage denotes the right treatment and the fact that the patient is following a balanced regimen. ομαλός is the resulting condition of the body, which produces an “even” constitution and skin colour. This connection between an “even” and a healthy condition can be seen in other Hippocratic texts such as the surgical treatises which I will discuss next. It can be seen, for example, in the treatise On Airs, Waters, Places, where an “evenness” in nature is assumed to correlate with the condition of the body: a climate of great changes, it is said, affects the topography and vegetation of a region, making them “uneven”, and also affects the constitution and character of the inhabitants.\(^\text{19}\) In Reg. IV.90 a smooth landscape in a dream indicates health, and a rough landscape signifies impurity of the flesh.

On Fractures and On Joints, two of the so called “surgical” works, deal with the treatment of fractures, wounds, dislocations of joints and the like. These use the adjective δικαιών much more often than any other Hippocratic text. The word usually refers to the “right” or “appropriate” treatment, but in most cases this “right” treatment has to do with a straight line, a right angle, an equal balance, or an accurate position.\(^\text{20}\) This means that δικαιών not only signifies a sense of value, but also implies a sense of position and form. Two
passages in the work *On Fractures* carry this formal meaning to its extreme.

*On Fractures* 10 explains how to identify a dislocation of the arm, recommending that the arm of the patient should not be compared with the healthy arm of another person, since the shape of joints varies in different people. One must rather compare it with the other arm of the same person, “since the body of human beings is symmetrical”. The adjective used to convey the attribute of symmetry is in fact *divkaio~*, not at all common in this sense. I have found one other instance of *divkaio~* being used in the sense of “equal”, in Herodotus (II.149), where he simply compares units of measure, 100 “orguiai” being equal to a “stadion” of six “plethra”.

It should be noted that the Greek adjective *suvmmetro~* (*symmetros*), does not mean “symmetrical” in our modern sense, but “proportionate”, and would not be appropriate in such a context. The adjectives *i[so~* (*isos*) and *o{moio~* (*homoios*) which mean “equal” and “similar” could have been used, and the reason for the more unusual choice of the adjective *divkaio~* (*dikaios*) is not trivial. However, the two former adjectives refer rather to two equal or similar objects, not to one symmetrical whole.

Another text with an interesting use of the adjective *divkaio~* is *On Fractures* 37 which speaks of a dislocation of the knee, contrasting it with a dislocation of the elbow. The former, it is claimed, is much simpler than the latter, because of its more regulated shape: it has a “*dikaivh fuvasi~*” (*dikaie physis*), literally: a “just” nature, that is round. Unlike the knee, the elbow is described as having many “bumps” (literally “steps”). The adjective *divkaio~* here would best be translated “even”, which brings to mind the “even” constitution and skin-colour in *Prorr. II* discussed above. Its “even shape” is further explained as round.

These are a few examples which give us a profile of the imagery of *divkaio~*. The adjective *divkaio~* in Hippocratic medical texts, though usually keeping its positive value, attains an abstract and even aesthetic meaning, having to do with spatial relations and with shape. So, when in the characterisation of our dream the author speaks of “a just act”, we might perceive three levels of meaning: 1) the neutral sense of “a normal act”; 2) a moral meaning in a
military/political image, where the “just” suggests peaceful conduct, its opposite being “struggle” and “victory” or “upheaval”; 3) a concrete, physical layer of meaning in the interpretation of the dream, indicating a physical equation or balance of elements in the body. Both in 2) and 3), divkaio~ reveals its meaning of “duly ordered” which I have already mentioned. The order is a social or political one in the dream image and a physical one in the body itself.

As in Alcmaeon’s text cited above, we may speak of a metaphorical construction of a physiological model. On the one hand the writer is dealing with the physical condition of the body in a healthy state and in a state of imbalance, speaking of a surfeit or deficiency of the physical elements relating to an excess or deficiency of food or exercise, but on the other hand this whole complex is moulded as a scene taken from the sphere of society, with military, political and judicial overtones. This, unlike Alcmaeon’s construction, is a dream image. However, as I will show in the concluding part of my paper, I believe this dream imagery to be part of a serious view of the world as a complex of analogous elements echoing each other, so that we might conceive of it as an actual view of the physical body itself.

MEDICAL DREAM INTERPRETATION AND THE ANALOGICAL WORLD PICTURE

In this last part of my paper I would like to say something about the theory of dreams in Reg. IV, and what it can tell us about the status of analogy and metaphor in the physiological theory. This is a significant point, since the manner in which the author of this work conceived of the phenomenon of dreaming gives us an additional insight into his view of nature and of human activities as a complex of reflections and “imitations”, a world picture which is exhibited in the first book of the treatise.

At the beginning of Book 4, the the author has this to say about sleep and dreams:

hJ ga;r yuch; ejgrhgorovti me;n tw`/ swvmati uJphretevousa, ejpi; polla;
merizomevnh, ouj givnetai aujth; eJwuth`, ajll j ajpodivdwsiv ti mevrom eJkavstw/ tou` swvmato~, ajkoh`, o[yei, yauvsei, oJdoiporivh/, prhvxesi panto;~ tou` swvmato~: aujth; de; eJwuth` hJ diavnoia ouj givnetai. o{tan de; to; sw`ma hJsucavsh/, hJ yuch; kineomevnh kai; ejgrhgresvosa dioikei` to;n eJwuth`~ oi`kon, kai; ta;~ tou` swvmato~ prhvxias~ aJpavsa~ aujth; diaprhapssetai. to; me;n ga;r sw`ma kaqeu`don oujk aijsqavnetai, hJ de; ejgrhgresvosa ginwvkei pavnta, kai; oJrh`; te ta; oJrata; kai; ajkouvei ta; ajkoustav, badiuzei, yauvei, lupei`ta, ejnqumei`ta, eJni; lovgw`, oJkovsai tou` swvmato~ uJphresivai h] th`~ yuch`, pavnta tau`ta hJ yuch; ejn tw`/ u{pnw/ diaprhapssetai.

For the soul, being the servant of the body when (the body) is awake, is divided into many capacities, and is not at the service of herself. She dedicates each of her parts to those of the body: to hearing, to sight, to touch, to walking, and to each action of the body. There is no contemplation in herself, of herself. But whenever the body rests, the soul moves and awakens and administers her own household, and performs all of the acts of the body herself. For the body, being asleep, does not perceive, while the soul, being awake, knows everything, and sees what is visible, and hears what is audible, she walks, touches, feels pain, ponders. In one word, in sleep the soul performs all chores of the body and of the soul. (Reg. IV.86.)

As some scholars have noted, this seems to be an Orphic concept of body and soul, where the body is seen as a burden and obstacle for the soul. What I suggest is that this theory ascribes reality to the content of dreams. When the body is awake, the soul is hampered by its duties in the service of the body and it is only when the body sleeps that the soul is independent and free to perceive and act in the
truest way. In this respect, sleep is like a half-way journey to the more complete freedom of the soul in the Orphic picture of death. However, as far as dream images are concerned, this means that they appear as very true realities, perceived by the soul when it is at its most unrestricted and perceptive.

This conception of dreams suggests that when dream images involve physical states or processes in the body, these images are not merely representational, but rather are seriously seen to correspond in some way to actual states and processes taking place in the physical body, a view which agrees well with the strong sense of an analogical view of nature on the whole in the first book of On Regimen: the interaction of give and take within the human body is echoed in the waning and waxing moon and in the changing course of the sun (Reg. I.5); nature is compared in detail to human activities and arts (Reg. I.12-24); parts of the body are compared to parts of the cosmos, to the sea, the earth, the circuits of the moon and of the stars (Reg. I.10). But not only are such analogies drawn, it is also clear that they stem from a deep analogical view of the world, according to which all things are in fact analogous to each other, depending on the same basic principles of fire and water and on the interactions between them: pavnta ga;r o{moia, ajnovmoia ejovnta... (“all things are alike, though different…” Reg. I.11). The author describes a copying of nature by nature, fire “constructing” the body according to a cosmological model: pavnta [note spelling should be di short e not di long e dihkosmhsato] kata; trovpon aujto; ejwutw`/ ta; ejn tw`/ swvmati to; pu`r, ajpomivmhsin tou` o{lou, mikra; pro;~ megavla kai; megavla pro;~ mikrav... (“Fire has arranged all things in the body..., a copy of the whole, the small according to the large, and the large according to the small …” Reg. I.10).

Reg. IV presents dreams with themes which partly correspond to imagery in Reg. I, such as cosmological dreams about the sun, moon, heavens and stars, dreams with landscapes where parts of the topography signify parts of the body, such as earth signifying flesh, fruit and leaves semen, rivers blood, the sea the belly, etc. This dream imagery can therefore be seen as part of the analogical world picture.
To return to the first dream, a look at the way in which the dream and its bodily interpretation seem to intermingle in the text suggests that they are viewed as one interconnected whole. When there is well-ordered activity, it is not the body, but rather the soul itself which is said to be unburdened by surfeit or emptiness (“because the soul remains in its daily disposition, and is not overpowered by surfeit nor by emptiness, nor by any other factor attacking from without”). And when in the dreams there is struggle or victory concerning the daily activities, the image is extended to the physical realm, diagnosing an “upheaval” in the body itself (“... this signifies upheaval in the body”). It seems then that the soul, the physical body and the dream image intermingle in the dream and in its interpretation. This seems to fit the analogical world picture in Reg. I where one finds not only imagery intertwined with reality, but imagery being part of reality, reality in itself echoing and “copying” itself everywhere. Here in Reg. IV the dreams echo and “copy” the world of the dreamer, and there is a general principle whereby a greater resemblance of dreams to reality signifies better health. Therefore, adopting the frame of mind of the author of On Regimen, one might say that, when the soul sees “struggle” or “victory” in a dream as opposed to his everyday life, there is in fact physically an “upheaval” in the body. When it sees a “just/normal/well-ordered” act, one may imagine that there is in the body order, equality and peace.

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Notes


2 Jaeger 1944: 6; Vlastos 1947; Lloyd 1979: 247 (see his note 86 for references on the spheres of law and justice as models of cosmic order).


4 See note 3 above.
Traditionally dated at the end of the fifth century BC though some argue for a later, even a post-Aristotelian date. Kirk 1954: 26-9 surveys this debate.

On Greek dietetics see Edelstein 1931; Temkin 1977: 422-5.

Such considerations as geographical position, winds and seasons are not unique to this work, and may remind us especially of the Hippocratic On Airs, Waters, Places, although the philosophical background is definitely given greater emphasis in On Regimen.

This is how, for example, fire may play an important role in the constitution of the soul and in intelligence, and water may be dominant in the description of the belly.

This echoes Anaxagoras’ theory of growth and nutrition.

As in On Ancient Medicine, On Airs, Waters, Places, and On the Nature of Man.


There is a debate as to what it is exactly which Anaximander referred to in his judicial scene of retribution. See Kahn 1960: 193-6.

The factor of the time it takes for a condition of imbalance to turn into an evident symptom is a recurring motif in Reg. III, in which possible cases of “overpowering” by one element are described. It comes in a fixed formula - “proiovnto~ de; tou` crovnou…” - in chapters 70, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84.

Early fifth century BC, quoted by Aetius v, 30, I.

External factors such as the seasons of the year, the changes of the winds and geographical positions are mentioned in Reg. I.2 and discussed in Reg. II and III. However, such external factors are conceived of as having an effect on the internal balance itself, as is also the case in the Hippocratic work On Airs, Waters, Places.

The central idea in chapter 88, that dreams which are similar to daytime normal conduct signify health, is present throughout the dream book. This idea and its parallels in the Latin translation of the pseudo-Hippocratic On Sevens and in Artemidorus is discussed in Fredrich 1899: 213 and Palm 1933: 69 ff.

The idea of disturbance of the soul caused by an excess in the body and resulting in dreams of struggling is again found in Reg. III.81: ...
taravsssei th;n yuchvn ... ajnavgkh taravsssesqai to;n a[nqrwpon, kai; dokei`n mavcesqai. (“...it disturbs the soul. ...the patient is necessarily disturbed, and imagines himself to be struggling.”)

18 In both Reg. I.2 and in Alcmaeon surfeit or deficiency are involved in an excess of hot or cold. In On Regimen this has to do with the elements of fire and water, while Alcmaeon mentions a list of “powers” reminiscent of those in the Hippocratic work On Ancient Medicine.

19 On Airs, Waters, Places XIII.

20 On Fractures 1-8, 30, 37, 41; On Joints 7, 10, 11, 38, 47, 62, 69, 70.

21 ejpeidh; divkaion e[cousi to; sw`ma oij a[nqrwpoi... (“since humans’ bodies are symmetrical ...”)

22 See Herodotus II.149 with the recent translation of Waterfield (1998: 155):

ou(tw ai( me
\purami/dej ei)s\ e(kato\n o)rguie/wn, ai( d` e(kato\n o)rguiai\

dikaiai\ ei)s\ sta/dion e(ca/pleqron ktl.

So the total height of the pyramids is a hundred fathoms, which is equivalent to a stade of six plethra etc.

23 Cf. In the Surgery 16, a concise version of On Fractures 10, where great pains are taken to capture the concept of simple symmetry. Four different words are strenuously combined: to; oJmwvnunomon, to;

24 Following the English translation of Jones, I have kept the feminine form of “soul” (psyche), which may possibly have an additional, though subtle, overtone of meaning, a feminine entity ruling her own household being perhaps an implicit paradox, suitable to the reverse condition, so to speak, of sleep.

25 A similar view on dreams is found in a brief remark in Reg. III.71: o\jkoi`a gavr tina pavscei to; sw`ma, toiau`ta oJrh`/ hJ yuchv, kruptomevnh~ th~ o[yio~. (“For the kind of things which the body experiences are seen by the soul when vision is veiled.”). On the author’s view on the soul and body in dreams and its parallels and origin see Fredrich 1899: 44ff, 62-9; Dodds 1951: 118ff and n. 104.

References


Ouj kata; kovsmon: Acting “Inappropriately” in Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica* Book Four

MIRJAM PLANTINGA

The character of Medea continues to fascinate. In the third book of the *Argonautica*, Medea gives Jason the drugs he needs to complete the task set for him by her father, the tyrant Aietes; and in the fourth book, she bewitches the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece in order to enable Jason to obtain it. She thus betrays her parents and fellow-Colchians. But why does she do this? It has often been remarked that her motives are complex, and that apparently contradictory impulses exist side by side in her (Hunter 1993b: 133, n. 26).

In this paper I shall analyse Medea’s motivations and moral choices. Why has she acted “inappropriately” and why would she want to draw attention to this? How does Medea defend herself? In antiquity, what was considered to be inappropriate action, and what were the consequences of such behaviour? In order to answer such questions I shall concentrate on two speeches of Medea and explore in detail their ethics and rhetorical strategies. Medea’s first speech to Jason on the Brygean island of Artemis (355-90) and Medea’s supplication of Queen Arete on Scherie, the island of the Phaeacians (1014-28) are interesting for several reasons: for example, both take place when the pursuing Colchians catch up with Medea and the Argonauts, and these scenes show clearly the dilemmas which face all parties; both speeches also occur at the crucial stage before the climax of each scene. Medea’s speech to Jason precedes the killing of her brother Apsyrtus; her plea to Arete leads up to Medea’s “marriage” to Jason.

I shall begin, however, by looking more closely at the proem of book four (1-5). The opening lines have been studied from a number of angles, but a closer analysis of the expressions found there will provide us with valuable background information for our study of the two speeches which are the main focus of this paper.
THE PROEM

In the opening lines of book four, the poet claims that he needs the help of the Muse in order to be able to explain why Medea deserted her fatherland.¹

1 Aujth; nu'n kavmatovn ge, qeav, kai; dhvnea kouvrh" Kolcivdo" e[nnepe, Mou'sa, Dio;" tevko": h\ ga;r e[moige ajmfasivh/ novo" e[ndon eJlivssetai, oJrmaivnonti hjev min a[th" ph'ma dusivmeron h\ tov g∆ ejnivspw fuvzan ajeikelivhn h]/ kavllipen e[qnea Kovlcwn.

You yourself, goddess, tell of the suffering and thoughts of the Colchian girl, you Muse, child of Zeus; within me my mind whirls in silent helplessness, as I ponder whether I should call it the mad, sickening burden of desire or a shameful panic which caused her to abandon the tribes of the Colchians. (4.1-5)²

At the end of the proem (4-5) the poet suggests two possible reasons for Medea’s desertion, but first he asks the Muse to tell him of the kavmato", ‘suffering’, and of the dhvnea, the “plans” or “thoughts”, of Medea (1). Why would the poet have wanted to choose these two nouns rather than the more obvious e[rw", “love”, and e[rga, “deeds”, of lines 212-13?

212 "Hdh d∆ Aijhvth/ uJperhvnnori pa'siv te Kovlcoi" Mhdeivh" perivpusto" e[rw" kai; e[rg∆ ejtevtukto.

Medea’s love and what she had done was already fully known to proud Aietes and all the Colchians. (4.212-13)

A closer look at the meaning of kavmato" reveals its distinct advantage over more general words for love as it focuses the reader’s attention upon the effects of love. Kavmato" is often used with an erotic undertone and emphasises the toil associated with love, the
physical and mental suffering of the victim. Thus in the very first line of the book this noun helps to portray Medea as the passive victim of Eros. The choice of dhvnea is also interesting. Although this is a “word with a wide semantic field” (see Hunter 1989: *ad* 3.661), dhvnea is significantly used of the plans of Circe (*Od*. 10.289; *A.R*. 4.559) and Odysseus (*Il*. 4.360-61; *Od*. 23.82), both exceedingly crafty characters. In addition, in book three of the *Argonautica* dhvnea describes Medea’s own plans concerning the killing of the Earthborn Monsters (3.1168-69). These echoes all suggest that dhvnea is deliberately used here to evoke Medea’s special command of mh'ti", or “cunning intelligence”. This second noun, then, creates an altogether more active picture and anticipates Medea’s deeds during the Argonauts’ return voyage. At the same time, the uncertainty surrounding the exact interpretation of dhvnea coincides with the general ambiguity of the whole proem.

The paradox created by the combination of kavmato" and dhvnea is indicative of the tension inherent in the portrayal of Medea throughout the entire epic. It shows why the poet could consider himself to be in such a state of speechlessness. The opening line thus reveals the difficulties associated with the analysis of Medea’s motivation and actions. It is a very dramatic opening which demonstrates Apollonius’ sophisticated interest in psychology.

A similar paradox seems to be implied by the alternatives mentioned in lines 4-5 of the proem. The first option (“mad, sickening burden of desire”) corresponds to kavmato" and brings to mind a more passive image; a[th is something inflicted upon one, something which one endures, and the entire combination once more refers to the suffering caused by love. At first sight, at least, the second possibility creates a more active picture, until we read that the panic-stricken flight (5: fuvzan) is ultimately caused by Hera (see 11, 21-3). The condemnation attached to the flight option is shown by the poet through the addition of ajeikelivhn (5), “unseemly”. The adjective indicates public disapproval and shows how the flight will be interpreted. Flight in general was considered to be something shameful, but this judgement would apply even more strongly to an elopement of this kind, a flight undertaken by a virgin daughter without the consent of her father in order to be with a foreigner.
Medea herself realises this and refers to it in her plea to the Argonauts.

88 tuvnh de; qeou;" ejni; soi'sin eJtaivroi", xei'ne, tew'n muvqwn ejpiivstora", ou{" moi uJpevsth".

90 poivhsai, mhdΔ e[nqen eJkastevrw oJrhmqeis'an cvtei> khdemovnwn ojnoth;n kai; ajeikeva qeivh".

You stranger, before your companions here call the gods to witness the undertakings which you gave me, and once I have travelled far from my home here do not turn me into an object of scorn and disgrace because I have no one to protect me! (4.88-91)

In order to give more weight to her plea, Medea exaggerates. Although she is indeed without her brother and her father, she is not without any male relative altogether as the sons of Phrixus are fleeing with her. Medea knows how her flight would be looked upon and asks the Argonauts not to turn her into “an object of scorn and disgrace” now that she has fled. In doing so, she attempts the impossible and deliberately separates the two elements (5: “shameful flight”) of the final possibility of the proem.

At the beginning of this book the prevailing mood of secrecy and ignorance of book three gives way to knowledge and rage in the case of Aietes (6-10) and to knowledge and fear in the case of Medea (11-6). The public knowledge of Medea’s deeds creates a sense of urgency at the beginning of the book, for awareness of someone’s deeds crucially determines the reputation of that individual. Medea has made her decision and now has to live with the consequences. At the same time, a response is demanded from all those others whose reputations are also affected by her actions.

Soon we are confronted with Aietes’ perspective on the situation (6-10; 212ff.). Aietes is motivated by his concern for his timhv, his honour. The tyrant’s reputation has been damaged significantly by Medea’s betrayal and Jason’s subsequent success in defeating the Earthborn Monsters. The situation becomes even worse when subsequently Medea decides to flee the palace, and Jason and Medea
manage to obtain the Golden Fleece. Aietes’ most pressing concern is his daughter’s behaviour. In particular such a family problem demands retaliation in order to protect his honour and regain what has been lost. As the vast army of Colchians sets off to pursue Medea and the Argonauts, Aietes calls upon Zeus and Helios to witness the kakw'n ... e[rgwn (229: “evil deeds”) he has suffered. The fact that the deeds are called “bad” not only confirms the tyrant’s point of view, but also discloses the clever paradox underlying everything: what Medea has done is clearly wrong in Colchian as well as Greek culture; thus a manifestly “wrong deed” is needed for the “success” of the expedition. Seen from a Greek perspective Medea’s “evil” deeds are ironically a “good” thing.

The proem thus sets the scene for the book; it asks a number of important questions and highlights the complexity of the situation. The poet’s uncertainty warns the reader about the difficulties that lie ahead. The proem also introduces the key theme of honour and, as we saw in the brief discussion of two of the opening scenes, this is a theme which dominates the characters’ thoughts. The proem has given us the poet’s view. In the following two sections I shall analyse in detail two of Medea’s own speeches and consider how she perceives her situation. Which words does she use to describe her actions? Is the tension which we found in the opening line of the book also present in her speeches?

MEDEA’S SPEECH TO JASON ON THE BRYGEAN ISLAND OF ARTEMIS

The Argonauts and Colchians meet for the first time at the Brygean islands (329ff.). It is significant that these islands are dedicated to the goddess Artemis; Artemis is well known as the protector of maidenhood and in mythology she often oversees the transition from virginity to matrimony. Although the goddess does not intervene at all in this episode, it is still important that the scenes are located on her islands, since it is Medea’s virginity which has become the object of contention.

Both the Argonauts and Colchians are prepared to disregard the past and henceforth to resolve everything according to both divine and human law; this explains the emphasis on both qevmi" (which is
related to divine justice) and divkh (which is related to human justice) in line 347 (dikavsh/si qemistouvcwn; also 343: eujdikivh/). Handing Medea back to her father appears to be a civilised way to resolve the conflict and would be an attractive option to both groups; each would gain something, as Jason would retain the Golden Fleece, and thereby avoid crucial loss of face. No wonder it is such a dangerous time for Medea. Her initial usefulness to the Argonauts is past, for the Argonauts have defeated the Earthborn Monsters and now possess the Golden Fleece. Medea has become a liability. On the one hand, then, Medea fears that once she is isolated from the Argonauts, her fate will be a foregone conclusion.

On the other hand, however, Medea’s position is strong because of the oaths Jason pledged to her earlier when he received her on board the ship. With both things in mind, she begins her speech with reference to his pledges.  

What, son of Aison, is this plan you have devised about me? Has your success made you completely forgetful? Do you care nothing for all you said when hard pressed by necessity? Where are your oaths by Zeus, protector of suppliants? Where have all the sweet promises gone? (4.355-59)

Medea blames Jason, but this does not mean that she does not take any responsibility herself. It is remarkable, though, that she does not blame the gods as well as herself. Usually both gods and humans are blamed simultaneously for the same deed. The absence of any reference to the gods can be explained by the fact that Medea is using reciprocity as her main argument. She has done something for him and now that she is in need he should do something in return. Throughout the speech she points both at the strong bond that should
exist between them and at the actual stark contrast between their respective fates. His splendour shines all around, conspicuous for everyone to see (357), while her reputation has been destroyed publicly (360: ajnai’dhvtw/ ijo’vtiti; 367: ai’sco”; 379: ejukleiv”). His safety has been achieved due to her help (364-65); her safety now depends on his decision. She is full of fear about her future; he thinks that he can be eu[khlo", “free from care” (390).

360  »Hi” ejgw; ouj kata; kovsmon ajnai’dhvtw/ ijo’vtiti pavtrhn te kleva te megavrwn aujtouv” te tokh’a” nosfisavmhn, tav moi h\en uJpevrtata, thlovq\\u03b1 d\a oi[h lugrh’/sin kata; povnton a\men ajlkuovnessi foreu’mai, sw’n e{neken kamavtw, i\na moi sovo” ajmfgiv te bousi;n

365 ajmfgiv te ghgenevessin ajnapjhvseia” ajevqlou”: u\staton au\ka\\u03b1 kw’a”, ejpeiv t\a ejpaviston ejtuvcqh, e\ile” ejmh’/ mativh/, kata; d\a oujlo;\na\sco” e\ceua qhlutevrai”.

It was these which made me abandon my homeland, the reputation of my house, and even my parents, everything which was most important to me! This is not how I should have behaved – from shameless desire! Far from home I drift alone over the sea with the gloomy halcyons, all because of your sufferings, because I wanted you in safety to complete the tasks of the bulls and the Earth-born. Last of all, when my help was no longer a secret, my mad folly even won you the fleece, and I poured deadly shame over all women. (4.360-68)

Medea says in 360 that she has behaved ouj kata; kovsmon, literally “not according to the cosmos”, that is, not according to the whole set of social rules a young girl would be expected to follow.\textsuperscript{15} She admits that her shameless (ajnai’dhvtw/) will has led her to “behave inappropriately” (360). She should have shown \textit{aidos}, or “respect”, to her homeland, her family, and especially her parents.\textsuperscript{16} But this is only a partial admission of guilt. Medea asserts that she is not the only one who has acted inappropriately: Jason’s promises acted as a catalyst
for her actions. As a result, dishonour has come not only upon herself, but also upon her entire family. The close relationship between a lack of *aidos* and the loss of reputation is illustrated by the fact that Medea does not just say that she has left her house, but “the reputation of her house” (361). The unusual combination of words catches the eye and further confirms that honour is the central theme of this speech.

Medea then describes how she perceives her current situation (362ff.). Because Jason has not honoured his promises so far and Medea has failed to achieve the desired wedded status, she portrays herself as being all alone, as a passive, helpless victim at the mercy of forces beyond her control, on a journey with no purpose (362-63). Of course she exaggerates here as she does when she says that she “poured deadly shame (aiścο”) over all women” (367-68). The latter, however, does illustrate again the idea that one’s behaviour does not only reflect upon oneself, but also on a much wider unit. *Aischos*, “disgrace” (367) is closely related to *public* disapproval; it is called “deadly” (oujloo;n) to reflect its essential destructive quality: shamelessness results in the collapse of social rules and structures. Medea says that she has destroyed the reputation of her parents, her family and all the Colchians. The adjective, “deadly”, also provides ominous reinforcement to Medea’s constant association of her deeds with death and destruction. The importance of one’s public persona is further illustrated by Medea’s concern that she had continued to transgress even after everything had been brought out into the open (366: ejpai>sto;n) and everyone knew about the two earlier mistakes she had made.

There is an important allusion to two Homeric models in these lines. Medea’s assertion that she “has poured deadly shame over all women” (367-68) echoes Agamemnon’s verdict on [about] Clytaemnestra in the Underworld (*Od.* 11.432-34). Medea exaggerates when she says that the reputation of all women is affected by her disgrace, but the allusion itself is also an exaggeration of her situation: both Medea and Clytaemnestra have acted inappropriately, but unlike Clytaemnestra Medea has not (yet!) killed anyone. Medea chooses to make this emotional statement about herself in order to emphasise her desperate need, to create pathos for her position, and to stir Jason into action; for the reader the Homeric allusion foreshadows the murder with which this scene will finish by creating a
parallel between the two women. The echo also functions as a transition to the next part of Medea’s speech which focuses on the threat from her father. Things have become “disordered”; now balance needs to be restored (see 375: ejoikovta). Again the parallel with Clytaemnestra is used. For the murder of her husband Clytaemnestra is given her fitting reward and is killed herself. Disgraceful behaviour brings more than just dishonour and Medea argues that, similarly, she will be killed should she be handed back to her father.

A further Homeric echo (368-69) moves us from Clytaemnestra to Andromache, from the archetypal bad woman to the proverbially good one. In Greek mythology Andromache is the model of the ideal loving wife who respects the existing social order.

368 Tw' fhmi teh; kouvrh te davmar te auptokasignhvth te meqΔ ÓEllavda gai'αn e{pesqai.
370 Pavnth/ nun provfrwn uJperivstaso: mhdev me mouvhn
sei'o livph/" ajpavneuqen, ejpoicovmeno" basilh'a", ajllΔ au[tw" ei[ruso: divkh dev toi e[mpedo" e[stw
kai; qevmi" h}n a[mfw sunarevssamen: h] suv gΔ e[peita
fasgavnw/ auptivka tovnde mevson dia; laimo;n
ajmh'sai,
375 o[frΔ ejpivhra fevrwmai ejoikovta margosuvnh/si.

For this I tell you that I follow you to the land of Hellas as your daughter, wife, and sister: in everything now protect me willingly! Do not leave me bereft and far away as you pay court to kings, but defend me come what may. Consider the agreement and the sacred accord, to which we both pledged ourselves, valid for ever. If not, then right now use your sword to slash here, through the centre of my throat, so that my wantonness can receive its fitting reward. (368-75)

Lines 368-69 are an obvious echo of Andromache’s famous words in the Iliad: “Hector, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother, you are my brother, and it is you who are my young
husband” (*Iliad* 6.429-30). Again Medea has exaggerated. Andromache is genuinely alone as her entire family has been killed by Achilles; Medea, despite her claim in line 362, is not. In his response to Medea’s speech, Jason will therefore deliberately refer to Apsyrtus as Medea’s “helper” and brother (407: ajosshthvr te kasivgnhtov" te). Andromache’s use of kinship terms is hyperbolic but still natural as a result of her position as Hector’s wife; Medea easily surpasses Andromache by using these terms while she is not in any official relationship with Jason. Medea uses Andromache’s argument because kinship relations created the greatest bond and the fullest set of reciprocal obligations between individuals. Both women therefore stress their total dependence upon these men. Andromache fears that Hector will be killed on the battlefield, Medea that she herself will die at the hands of her own father. This final difference is also reflected in the change of wording: Medea is consumed by a concern for her own reputation and as a result uses female terms (“daughter, wife, sister”), referring to her side of the relationship, rather than Andromache’s predominantly male ones (“father, mother, brother, young husband”), referring to Hector’s. Within the series there is a clear climax: Medea is of course the kouvrh (368), “the daughter”, a young girl who desperately wants to be a davmar (368), “a wedded wife”, but she concludes the sequence by ominously calling herself Jason’s sister in the very episode in which she is going to plot the killing of her real brother, Apsyrtus. Medea also turns the original neutral Homeric statement into a strong assertion by the addition of tw' fhmi (368), “therefore I say”. She presents her assertive statement as a logical conclusion and one with which Jason will not be able to argue. Medea’s underlying argument is that if Jason would take proper care of her, she would be able to become an Andromache and not a Clytaemnestra. The irony is not wasted on the reader: Jason will indeed choose Medea’s side, but the consequences of their relationship will make Medea into a killer of a close relative just like Clytaemnestra.

Medea has clearly changed her tone in line 368 and tells Jason that she will follow him, thereby portraying herself now as an active agent rather than the passive sufferer she was a few lines ago. There is a clever word-play with the various references to movement in these lines (370-71). For Medea, acquiring the status of a married wife
would give purpose to her voyage: instead of drifting aimlessly over
the sea, she would be travelling to a concrete destination on land.
Jason, on the other hand, ought neither to “go towards kings” (371: ejpoicovmeno") nor to leave her behind, but should stay with her and
support her throughout, just as [like] justice and right stand firm
together (372: e[mpedo"]).

When Medea returns to Jason’s oaths in 372-73, she deliberately
uses the words divkh and qevmi" to refer to his pledges, again stress-
ing that there are prior arrangements to which they both agreed and
which Jason should now honour. Again we note another altered echo.
In 347 divkh and qevmi" were used in relation to the kings dispensing
justice; here they are used in relation to Jason’s oaths. Medea
“simply” (372: au[tw") asks him to protect her and stresses that no
further agreements are necessary. She makes clear that if Jason
should leave her behind, he would be transgressing both divine and
human laws, even if this is done with reference to, and under the
pretext of, the same principles (347). When she refers to the kings,
she significantly does not add an adjective expressing the idea of
righteousness.

Talking about justice leads Medea to consider again the
consequences of her crimes and the various options open to her. She
blames lust for her predicament and the various options open to her. She
blames lust for her predicament and the word used here (375: margosuvnh/si) denotes sexual appetite and uncontrollable greed.
Medea should of course have been in control of her actions and
emotions. Having failed in this respect, Medea asks Jason to slash her
throat. At first this preferred method of dying seems oddly “mascu-
line”, as women more often committed suicide by hanging, by poison,
or by jumping off a cliff. A closer look at tragedy, however, confirms
that in the case of virgins “the sacrificial knife was the preferred
instrument of death”.22 In accordance with such practice in drama,
Medea’s request is not strictly speaking suicide, but murder: Medea
does not plan to kill herself, but invites Jason to kill her (Loraux
1987: 31). However, there would be a real difference between Medea
and tragic heroines like Iphigeneia and Polyxena, who were all
sacrificed at the instigation of others, whereas Medea suggests this
plan herself. There is also a slight variation in the language used to
describe the cutting of the throat. This method of death which
involves copious shedding of blood and has strong sacrificial
overtones, is a violent one. Medea, however, uses particularly graphic language to describe it.\textsuperscript{23} Her “heroic” reasoning demonstrates her concern about her own honour and a determination not to be a helpless, passive victim. Suicide was seen in antiquity as the honourable way out when no other options were left. Her willingness to contemplate such a death also shows the seriousness of her situation. Yet other options are in fact open to Medea and she now continues to discuss two other possible courses of action.

376 Scevtlie, eij < gavr > kevn me kasignhvtoio dikavssh/ e[mmenai ou]to" a[nax tw/ ejpivscete tavsd\Delta ajlegeina;" a[mfw sunxesiva", pw" i{xomai o[mmata patrov"… «H mavl\Delta ejukleihv". Tivna d\Delta ouj tivsin hje; barei’an

380 a[thn ouj smugerw" deinw’n u{per oi|a e[orga ojtlhvs, su; dev ken qumhdeva novston e{loio…

Cruel man! How shall I come into my father’s sight, if this ruler to whom you have both turned over this cursed agreement of yours decides that I belong to my brother? My reputation will be very glorious indeed! What revenge, what grim and horrible fate will I not suffer for the terrible things I have done! You, however, will return safely as your heart desires. (4.376-81)

Medea seems to continue her simple strategy of contrast when she compares her hypothetical home-coming with Jason’s. She immediately rejects a return to her parents on the grounds that it will endanger her life while, crucially, it will not help her to salvage her reputation. Her previous arguments have already made it clear that it is not death itself that she fears but a further loss of honour. She reiterates this idea when she says that because of her disgrace she will not be able to look her father “in the eye” (378); shame and sight are closely linked.\textsuperscript{24} It was thought that shame resided in the eyes. When one is full of shame, the eyes are traditionally downcast. The rapid change of tenses shows Medea’s clever control of her rhetorical strategies. She deliberately uses the perfect first: the terrible things she
has done in the past inevitably have consequences for the future (380: e[orga]). Jason will therefore not be able to pretend that nothing has happened. Medea then moves into the emphatic future, when she states that in the hands of her father her future is certain (381: ojdhvsw);

this is further reinforced by its formulation as a negated rhetorical question. Medea’s next argument is a masterstroke in which she implies that without her Jason’s safe return home is less certain.

She makes this point by the change from the future to the optative (381: e{loio), which makes clear that the success of the expedition depends on future circumstances; it is presently no more than a possibility (Goodwin 1889: 234). Medea does not merely rely on Jason’s love for her or his sense of obligation towards her, but she also appeals to his self-interest. The range of meanings associated with deinw'n (380, see above) appears to be very important: Medea has not just done “terrible” things, but also “clever” and “powerful” ones. Realising that her immediate value is diminished, she is keen to convince the Argonauts that this does not mean that she will no longer be needed for the successful completion of the expedition.

May the all-ruling wife of Zeus, on whom you pride yourself, not bring this to fulfilment! I pray that when you are worn out with your sufferings you will one day remember me, and that fleece of yours will vanish into the darkness like a dream. May
my Furies drive you straight from your homeland, because of what I have suffered through your heartlessness. What I say the gods will not leave unaccomplished – it cannot fall idly on the ground – for you have broken a very solemn oath, pitiless one! But not for much longer will you sit here happily and laugh at me – for all your agreements! (4.382-90)

Continuing her appeal to Jason’s self-interest, Medea reminds him that handing her back to her father will also reflect badly on his own reputation (383: ἐπικυδίατει"'). His concern for his own honour should involve showing pity for her fate. Medea thus places her life and what is left of her reputation in Jason’s hands and connects her fate with his (see also 387). She argues that this is the only real option open to them. What is more, choosing her side would mean that Jason would be doing what is right in the eyes of the gods. The final paragraph of her speech emphasises the requirements of divine law (386-88): if Jason breaks his oaths, he will be the one who has transgressed the rules of the gods (388: ἡ"'). Although he would avoid being pursued by the Colchians if he gave [would give] in to their demands, the alternative of being hunted down by the Erinyes, the goddesses of revenge, is even less attractive. Medea clearly imagines justice to be on her side. She makes the threat personal by stating emphatically that her Furies will haunt him. Her display of anger and her references to the consequences of offending the gods show Jason the dangers of ignoring Medea’s demands. Jason’s dilemma is clear: no matter what he decides to do he will be punished by the gods. Abandoning Medea will mean breaking his oaths, helping her will inevitably lead him to commit even more crimes.

Medea ends this speech with a threat which again reflects her heroic concern for her reputation. In ancient Greek society pleasure is traditionally found in the disgrace of one’s enemies. She imagines Jason casting his eyes mockingly upon her and warns him that his delight will not last. Everything is presented in black and white: if Jason is unwilling to help her, then he must be her enemy rather than her φιλός, her “friend”. Her fears show again the importance of public perception of one’s reputation.

Medea’s arguments have the desired effect: Jason is frightened (394: υΠωδείβασ") and decides to choose Medea’s side. Her success
still does not solve the problem posed by the Colchians. Their vast number means that a battle is not an option. Jason, however, suggests that the solution could lie in the elimination of their leader Apsyrtus, Medea’s brother. The Argonauts should be able to fight the Colchians without their leader. The decision is soon made and together they plot Apsyrtus’ murder. As a result, Medea severs all ties with her family. But nothing has been resolved: Medea has still not obtained what she wanted. She has still not become Jason’s wife.

MEDEA’S SUPPLICATION OF QUEEN ARETE OF THE PHAEACIANS ON SCHERIA

The Argonauts and Colchians meet again on Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians. As we have just seen, an earlier encounter between the two groups led to the murder of Apsyrtus. This time the consequences of such a meeting are, if only for the time being, less disastrous: Medea and Jason marry in a hastily organised ceremony. The purpose of this scene is thus similar to that of its primary model, the Phaeacian episode in the *Odyssey* (which, although composed earlier, is set in a time after the story of the Argonauts): just as Odysseus regains his heroic stature as a result of his visit to Phaeacia, so Medea finally becomes Jason’s wife and receives gifts and an escort of handmaidens as symbols of her newly acquired status.29

993 Tou;" ΔArgw; polevessin ejniscomevnh kamavtoisi Qrinakivh" au[rh/" i{ketΔ ejx aJlov". OiJ dΔ ajghanh/sin
995 ΔAlkivnoo" laoiv te quhpolivh/sin ijovnta" deidevcatΔ ajspasivw", ejpi; dev sfisi kagcalavaske pa'sa povli": faivh" ken eJoi" ejpi; paisi; gavnuqsai. Kai; dΔ aujtoi; h{rwe" ajna; plhqu;n kecavronto, tw'/ i[keloi ojovn te mesaitavth/ ejmbebaw'te"
1000 AiJmonivh/.

After being held back by many wearying adventures, the *Argo* was carried by the winds across the Thrinakian sea to the Phaeacians. Alkinoos and his people welcomed them warmly
with sacrifices pleasing to the gods and the whole city smiled with delight upon them; you would have said that their joy was for their own sons. Amongst the throng the heroes themselves rejoiced as though they had disembarked in the very middle of Haimonia. (4.993-1000)

The initial scene of welcome between Argonauts and Phaeacians is extremely condensed; there is no recording of any formal greeting, and no indication of how the two groups meet. As a result, the focus is completely on Medea’s supplications later on in the episode, but the lack of information about these early stages also hides the complexity of this welcome. We merely get the two standard verbs of arriving (994: ἰκέτα) and receiving (996: δείδεσθαι) in quick succession. In this respect the episode already differs from the Odyssean model where the stages preceding and leading into the hospitality scene received so much attention. The immediate reception of the heroes and sharing of a sacrifice establishes a relationship of reciprocity between Argonauts and Phaeacians and foreshadows their favourable treatment in the rest of the episode, even though Alcinous, very much the god-fearing leader and good host, is at pains to be viewed as impartial.

What is clear from the opening scene in Apollonius is the atmosphere created: the mood is that of unbridled joy and celebration. The image of 996-7, where the whole town is said to laugh aloud in jubilation at the coming of the Argonauts, is particularly bold and clarified in equally bold manner by the poet himself (in 997: ἡμῶν: “you could say that...”). The Phaeacians are said to have welcomed the heroes as if they were their own children coming home from a long voyage. In other words, the Argonauts do not first become χεινοί (“guest-friends”) and later φιλοί (“friends”) but immediately progress to this second stage. Yet more is going on here. Casting the heroes in the role of children highlights the youth of the heroes and, more importantly, sets Alcinous and his wife Arete up as parents. Alcinous, anticipating his future match-making role concerning Odysseus and Nausicaa, fulfils a paternal role with regards to Medea, who has herself severed all ties with her own father and just killed her brother. Jason had always wanted to postpone the wedding till their safe arrival back home and it is therefore appropriate that the
wedding takes place in a setting which is very near home and very much like it.\textsuperscript{33}

Soon, however, they would have to arm for battle, for right close at hand appeared a huge force of Colchians who had travelled down through the mouth of the Pontos and between the dark rocks in search of the heroes. Their unconditional demand was the handing over of Medea to be returned to her father; otherwise with grim determination they threatened a terrible conflict then and there which would later be continued by an expedition led by Aietes. Despite their thirst for war, King Alkinoos held them back, for he wanted to resolve this violent strife without fighting. (4.1000-10)

The illusion of uncomplicated hospitality, something extremely rare in the \textit{Argonautica}, is soon shattered and before the next stages of a hospitality sequence can follow, such as the sharing of a meal and exchange of stories, the Colchians, who have been in pursuit of the Argonauts, suddenly appear (1001: ejxefaavnqh) and the Phaeacians are faced with the arrival of two conflicting groups. As we had not heard anything from the Colchians since the murder of Apsyrtus, their arrival is a surprise not only for the characters but also for the readers. The atmosphere changes completely and the laughter of jubilation and victory threatens to turn into a cry of the battle-field.\textsuperscript{34} The compressed narrative continues. After the earlier disaster with Apsyrtus,
the Colchians understandably want to avoid diplomacy at all costs; however, in order to make their inflexible position clear they must have sent at least a messenger. What we get is a few lines narrated in free indirect discourse and the use of this device has two advantages: first, the whole opening scene serves as a foil for the two direct speeches made by Medea, but, second, the absence of a messenger speech also helps to reinforce the portrayal of the Colchians as an enigmatic group. In sharp contrast to the small band of named Argo-nauts, who like the Phaeacians take their decisions in assemblies narrated in direct discourse, the Colchians are always perceived as a large, anonymous, voiceless mass, who are ruled by one tyrant. Their introduction here is identical to that given in 4.304; they are the Colchians “who travelled down through the mouth of the Pontos and between the Dark Rocks in search of the heroes.” Why is the same introduction repeated, even though the Colchians have long since left the Black Sea behind them? Both Pontus and the Rocks are, of course, important sea marks in the journey to and from Colchis, so their repeated mention both reinforces a sense of distance from the Black Sea area and Aeetes, and also serves to underline the close relationship between the Phaeacians and Greeks. Vian has rightly remarked that the whole episode is set up as an encounter between Barbarians (= Colchians) and Greeks (= Phaeacians and Argonauts). This reference then also implicitly acknowledges that the Colchians have left their territory, and it foreshadows their defeat.

As Hunter has observed, the language used of the Colchians here is strongly reminiscent of that used in wedding ceremonies. For example, note e\[xaiton and e\Jou' ej" patro;" a\[gesqai in 1004, the latter a formula which often refers to leading the bride to her husband’s house (Hunter 1993b: 70). The change to the well-known formula by the crucial addition of father shows how much the fear of a possible marriage is on the Colchians’ minds. Medea herself continues the distorted use of wedding vocabulary poignantly by using ejkdwvh/" w\l patri; komizevmen in 1015. But instead of the loaded a\[gesqai she uses komizevmen, a verb often used for “carrying something off as a booty or prize” or, with a more neutral translation, “to get back, recover”. Both ejxaitevw and ejkdivdwni have secondary meanings which are of importance. The former is also used to demand the surrender of a person, especially a criminal; the latter is
also used of the surrender of refugees. The switch from criminal to fugitive shows different perceptions of Medea’s position. For the Colchians, she is a criminal, an object to be won, a prize to be carried back to her father. Medea, on the other hand, sees herself as a refugee. In the strife between father and suitor she should of course have been confined to an essentially passive role. Medea, however, in the only way open to her tries to influence and force the decision about her fate by supplicating both queen Arete and the Argonauts. In the end the decision about Medea’s ultimate fate will not be reached by either fighting or diplomacy, but by female plotting and divine intervention.

At this juncture I should like to consider Medea’s supplicatory speech to Arete in more detail. This speech is embedded within the hospitality scene (as is its companion speech made to the Argonauts), but although it makes use of this context and its conventions, it is not the typical supplicatory speech expected in such a context. Her appeal to Arete is obviously heavily influenced by Odysseus’ supplication of the queen in *Odyssey* book 7, though, as Hunter observes, Odysseus and Medea are asking for different things: he begs to be sent on his way, whereas Medea wants at all costs to avoid returning to her family.

The speech introduction is a good example of Apollonius’ experimentation with speeches. Although Medea is said to supplicate both Arete and the Argonauts many times, a sign of her desperation and terror, only one of each supplication is given as an example. It is, however, too easy to say that this has been done by Apollonius merely to avoid repetition. In his introductory sentences (1011-13), Apollonius mentions Medea’s supplications of the Argonauts before her supplication...
to Arete; but since the author follows this introduction by giving Medea’s speech to Arete we assume that he has omitted to give us an example of the speech to the Argonauts. This, however, turns out not to be the case. The introductory sentence anticipates the speeches in chiastic order, as often happens in classical literature, and the dramatic advantage of this ordering becomes clear when we reach Medea’s second speech to the Argonauts, in which she uses her earlier supplication of the queen as an extra weapon in her speech to the comrades. The reader does not notice at first that there is no immediate reply from Arete; however, her dramatic silence highlights Medea’s isolation, misery and helplessness, and illustrates the indirect power wielded by the queen.

1047 Scevtlioi ajtropivh" kai; ajnhleve", oujdΔ ejni; qumw/
aijdei'sqai xeivnh" mΔ ejpi; gouvansi cei'ra" ajnavssh"
1049 derkovmenoi teivnousan ajmhvcanon:

Wretched men, without feelings or pity – you do not even feel shame in your hearts when you see me in my helplessness stretching out my arms at the knees of a foreign queen!

(4.1047-49)

It is interesting to note that Medea chooses here to address all the Argonauts and not just Jason. Ironically, this reveals the collapse of their relationship at the very moment of their marriage and foreshadows their bleak future relation. Furthermore, as becomes clear from her petition to Arete, Medea does not want to emphasise her special relationship with Jason, for this would destroy her argument.

1014 Gounou'mai, basivleia: su; dΔ i{laiq, mhdev me Kovlcoi"
ejkdwvh" w]/ patri; komizevmen, ei] nu kai; aujth;
ajnqrwpvn geneh" miva fevrbai, oι|sin ej" a[thn
wjkuvtato" kouvfh/si qeveis novo" ajmplaktivh/sin,
w]" ejmoi; ejk pukinai; e|peson frevne" — ouj me;n
e{khti
“I beg you by your knees, queen! Show kindness to me! Do not give me over to the Colchians to be taken back to my father! You too belong to the mortal race whose minds are very quick to embrace disaster through minor errors; so it was that prudence and reason deserted me – it was not through lust. Be witness the holy light of Helios, be witness the rites of the night-wandering daughter of Perses, against my will did I leave my home in the company of foreign men; it was hateful fear which persuaded me to think of fleeing – I had made a mistake, there was no other possible plan! My virgin’s belt remains unstained and untouched, just as it was in my father’s house. Take pity on me, lady, and try to win over your husband. May the immortals grant you both a life of fulfilment and all splendour, children, and the glory of an unravaged city.”

These were her pleas as she wept at Arete’s knees. (4.1014-29)

Medea’s supplication of Arete is a so-called “full” supplication; the speech is accompanied by gesture, and reference to this is also made in the speech itself (Gould 1973: 76-7). The self-abasement of the supplicant and flattering treatment of the supplicated are traditional in a supplicative context. Medea addresses the queen as if she were a goddess, and the first few lines of her speech are strongly reminiscent
of a prayer. The play with the idiom of prayer is suitable in a supplicatory context, as both share an element of request. Immediately after the elevated opening, Medea changes her approach and appeals to their common *humanity* by the addition of the clause ei[nu kai; ajjth; ajnqrwvpwn geneh" miva fevrbeai (“if you too belong to the mortal race”). After the prayer-like opening an ei[pote (“if ever”) clause would have been expected by the reader in an address to a real divinity, and so it is the combination of content and presentation of the argument that creates this surprise.

Apollonius’ reworking of Odysseus’ supplication to Nausicaa is often noted.41 It is worth stressing the crucial difference between the two speeches. While Odysseus does not know whom he is supplicating, Medea knows the exact identity of the supplicated. Unlike Odysseus, who only used a figurative supplication of the young princess (i.e. he only used a verb referring to the action of the touching of the knees but did not accompany this by the gesture itself), Medea, supplicating a member of the same sex, touches the knees of the queen in extreme desperation. Here the choice of a solemn appeal to the queen to be propitious and of an explicit plea for pity towards the end of the speech show both Medea’s concern for the queen’s sympathy and her desire that Arete will show such sympathy by her actions. Medea deliberately refers to the heroes as ajllodapoi'sin, “foreigners” (1021) when she addresses Arete, as she wants to deny the existence of any reciprocal bond. She wants to be seen to be fully dependent upon the queen for help and stresses that she cannot expect anything from the heroes. Of course Medea will use opposite tactics in the case of the supplication of the Argonauts.42

Supplicatory speeches often include not only an appeal for pity but also for *aidos*, “honour”. To try to regain a sense of *aidos* is by far the more difficult mission for Medea. For young girls like her their reputation in both their own eyes and those of others is extremely important. *Aidos* is something expected of women in general, both in the form of respect towards parents and in the form of a virgin’s shyness or wife’s faithfulness towards her husband. Medea, as has been shown repeatedly, has bitterly failed in these respects.

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Medea tells the queen that, although she indeed took the first step and left her home country in a company of strange men, she did not take the expected second step and go to bed with her lover; therefore her virginity is still intact. In contrast to earlier speeches, she this time emphatically denies lust as a motive. Sexual appetite was often strongly suspected as motive when women abandoned their homes. But even though she has been chaste so far (and this is assuming that just being in the company of strange men would not be enough to impair her sense of *aidos*), she has already forfeited her right to *aidos* by her actions towards her parents. This she counters by blaming her fear of her father as her prime motive for her actions: tàrbov" is a noun used to denote extreme fear, often fear of death, the speech is spoken in deadly fear, and the construction used in the opening line (mhv + aorist subj.) connotes the presence of fear. Medea uses the same tactic in her speech to the Argonauts: she stresses that she is scared out of her wits (1032: ajtuvzomai) and that a return to the *hands* of her father would result in physical maltreatment and a certain death (1043: ej" cei'ra" ijou'san É Aijhvtew lwvbh/poluphvmoni dh/wqh'nai). The closest analogue to Medea’s situation is provided by Helen and throughout this speech to Arete we see Medea deliberately separate herself from this famous heroine. Medea did not leave a husband and commit adultery, persuaded by a seductive lover, but left *unwillingly, persuaded* by the fear of a jealous and frightening father.43

In this first speech Medea uses a variety of rhetorical techniques and adds persuasive power by including an oath in the middle of her speech, thus stressing more forcefully the truth of her account. While limiting her own possible blame and responsibility, she uses the language of transgression and error in h[liton (1023: “I sinned”). Medea only indirectly blames the gods for the state she is in by the attribution of her misery to *ate*, “blind folly”. Contrary to the usual picture of *ate* in the *Argonautica*, where *ate* is the swift active agent, seizing or falling upon someone, here Medea places herself in the active role. Medea certainly intends by this reference to exculpate herself, at least partially. The picture created is wonderful: Medea’s fast mind “runs” on slight mistakes, as if they were feet, towards “blind folly” (1016-7). The errors are of course “light” to fit the metaphor, but simultaneously “slight”.
At first there seems to be a contradiction in the fact that Medea then continues her speech saying that there was no other *metis*, “plan” available for her. *Metis* is very much linked to intelligence and deliberate planning. Medea, however, clearly shows that she believed that she only suffered from a temporary lack of understanding and made just one initial mistake. She is not aware (or does not wish to be regarded as aware) that her *nous*, her rational faculty, has gradually been eroding from the beginning of her infatuation with Jason (cf. also 3.1018). Her speech illustrates how the various speeches in this book are linked: Medea adapts her approach according to each addressee, and she learns from each supplication. Earlier (738) Circe accused her of using *metis* and she was dismissed without being given the opportunity to defend herself; now Medea argues that she could not have acted differently.

Her final words, which are part of a conventional series of good wishes, stress once again Medea’s concern for her status. By wishing all the traditional female trappings of honour to the queen (i.e. 1027-28: children, ajglai?hn), she indirectly appeals to Arete for the same on her own behalf. Arete, a married woman herself, should understand Medea’s plight. Her final wish, that Arete would experience “the glory of an unravaged city”, is calculated as she knows that Alcinous, who will ultimately decide about her fate, wants to avoid a war at all costs. Again Medea appeals to self-interest.

My analysis of two of Medea’s speeches confirms the complexity of her motivation. The speeches have much in common: both show that Medea is fully aware that she has acted inappropriately; both stress the importance of honour. In each speech, however, Medea adopts an approach tailored to the addressee and to the particular needs of the situation. This is why rhetorical strategies are varied each time, and it has been particularly fruitful to study these in detail. The importance of the context is clear, and it is a careful consideration of the context and of the words used in the speeches which often helps us to understand Medea’s apparently contradictory impulses.
Acting “Inappropriately” in Argonautica Book Four

Notes

1 Hunter (1987: 135) discusses the proem’s reworking of Pindar’s *Pythian* 4 and Euripides’ *Medea*.

2 The translations of Apollonius in this paper are from Hunter 1993a.


4 Medea is, for example, panic-stricken at the beginning of the book (11, 23), but fearless when she faces the snake guarding the Golden Fleece (136-38, 149). For a discussion of Medea’s character, see also Hunter (1987: 130).

5 There is an interesting contrast between the poet’s professed uncertainty and the growing certainty of his characters. On the “poet’s mask of uncertainty” and the parallel difficulty for the reader see also Goldhill (1991): 293 and Hunter (1987: 131, 134-5). For a different interpretation see Hutchinson (1988: 122), who considers it to be a parody.

6 See also Hunter (1987: 135). The opening scene emphasises Hera’s all-important role as the controlling force behind everything. Although there is no direct contact between goddess and mortals anywhere, she is the one who moves the plot along and intervenes at all crucial stages by either interfering in the character’s thought processes or by giving a whole series of weather signs. On Hera’s motivation see also Feeney (1991: 62-3).

7 For this interpretation of the adjective see Cairns (1993: 62 and 64). Vian (1996: 147, notes *ad* p. 70, line 5), on the other hand, detects a connotation of commiseration.

8 See also 213: *perivpusto*, “widely known”.

9 Humans and gods alike are motivated by their concern for honour and reputation. For Hera, for example, see 241-3 in which it becomes clear that Medea is merely an instrument used by the goddess to punish Pelias. The tyrant Pelias had omitted to sacrifice to Hera (1.14).

10 The king’s characterisation as a proud man (212: *uJperhvnori*) reinforces the expectation of his likely response.

11 Everything in the first part of this scene prepares the reader for the climax of the episode: the sheer horror of the killing of Apsyrtus. There is, for example, a strong contrast between the Colchians and the Argo-
nauts. Whereas the Colchians display piety by avoiding the two islands out of reverence for the goddess, the Argonauts do decide to disembark on one of them. The sacredness of the temple, the place of Apsyrtus’ murder, is emphasised by the addition of ἱερόν, “holy” to εἴδεχλον, “shrine, precinct” (331). For the “brutality and treachery” of the murder see Bremmer (1997: 84-5). For a discussion of the allusions to Euripides’ Iphigeneia in Tauris, see Sansone (2000: 166).

12 Sunqesiavwn, “agreements” (390), is significantly the very last word of the speech. See also 3.990-1001.

13 See also 367 (mativh) where she uses the language of error and folly.

14 After Jason has agreed to help her, Medea speaks again and this time she blames both herself and the gods.// “So he spoke, trying to soothe her, but her reply was deadly: ‘Listen carefully now. This too we must plan cunningly, after my shameful acts, in view of my first mad folly and the evil plans that a god made me carry out.’” (4.410-13)// The difference between the two speeches is remarkable. It can be explained by looking at the rhetorical strategies behind each speech. In the second speech reciprocity is no longer the key argument. In this speech it is important to show that the murder they are going to commit is a necessary and logical result of the situation they find themselves in. It is worth noting that in this second speech Medea’s knowledge of the influence of the gods is imprecise and uncertain; she only speaks vaguely about “a god”. For a discussion of the difficulties surrounding the characters’ knowledge of the divine in the Argonautica see also Feeney (1991: 84, 89).

15 On this combination, see also Garvie (1994: ad Od. 8.498-90).

16 This is expressed by the addition of αὐτοῦ;” to τόξον'α" (361). Aidos is notoriously difficult to translate and can cover “shame, respect, sense of honour, and modesty” (Cairms 1993: 455).

17 This passive image is reinforced by the use of the passive verb φορεύομαι, “to be borne violently along”, in line 363. Medea emphasises her isolation by portraying herself to be in the company of birds rather than of humans (363). The mournful nature of the halcyons reflects her own mood (cf. ι. 9.563).

18 See, for example, 4.410: “Thus he spoke, trying to soothe her, but her reply was deadly (ουξλοο;ν)” Underlying all this is of course the destructive power of love (see 445-51).
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19 *Od.* 11.432-34, tr. Lattimore: “But she with thoughts surpassingly grisly/ splashed shame on herself and the rest of her sex, on women still to come, even on one whose acts are virtuous.”


21 Vian (1996: 162, notes ad p. 86, line 369), merely points at the judicial connotation of tw’ fhmi.


23 *Amesai* is an unusual word to find in such a context, but it is used by Apollonius of mowing one’s opponent down in battle. *Laimos* is the technical word used to refer to the throat where it is penetrated by the sword (Loraux 1987: 51). In the end it will of course be Apsyrtus rather than Medea who is killed at Artemis’ altar in a murder explicitly compared to the sacrifice of a bull.

24 On this link, see also Cairns (1993: 158).

25 See also the reference to physical suffering in 387: pavqon.

26 This theme is continued later with streugovmeno" kamavtoisi (384).

27 By referring to his inability to feel pity and his unwillingness to yield to her (nhleve” [389] and ajtropivh/ [387]), she indirect appeals to pity and *aidos*, the key principle of any speech of supplication.

28 See Cairn’s discussion (1993: 228-41) of Sophocles’ *Ajax*.

29 Medea is, as was to be expected, no longer called a *koure* or *parthenos* (both terms used for young, unmarried girls) after this episode, but neither is she referred to with terms appropriate to a wedded status, such as *alochos* or *damar*.

30 It is, for example, not clear what exactly the position of Medea is after the sacrifice shared by the Argonauts and Phaeacians.

31 For more changes and differences from the Odyssean episode see Hunter (1993b:68) and Knight (1995: 244-57).

32 On the Nausicaa parallel see also Hunter (1993b: 70).

33 For a slightly different perspective see Knight (1995: 249).

34 1000: boh’; 1005-6: stonovessan ajuth;n ... oJmovkleon.
The situation invites a comparison between Medea and Helen, and the
eager insistence of both parties on fighting shows that a second Trojan
war is threatening to erupt. See also Hunter (1987: 138) and Knight

Vian (1996: 182, notes *ad* p.113, line 1000); also Hunter (1993b: 68)
and Knight (1995: 248). Consider also the words of both queen Arete
(1074–77) and Alcinous (1102-3).

See also 399–400 (*Ihisqeis an ... a[gointo) and 403 (*elwr) which both
refer to booty gained as a result of war.

Apollonius plays here with the well-known debate first raised by
Alexandrian scholars about the prominence of the queen in the Homeric
passage and her lack of response. In Apollonius, Arete will raise the
problem on behalf of Medea at night with her husband. Here the tension
is thus prolonged even further than in the Odyssean passage. See also

She is different from Helen in whose speeches in the *Iliad* we often
On Helen see also Hunter (1987: 139).

The device draws attention to the artificial character of the speeches.

*Od*. 6.149–85. See, for example, Knight (1995: 251).

As the following extract shows, the tone of the two supplications is
completely different.// “From me, however, bitter fate (baru," daivmwn)
has taken all splendours (ajglai?α"), and I must wander with strangers,
an object of hate (stugerh; de; su;n ojqneivoi" ajlavhlmai). Be fearful of
your agreements and oaths, be fearful of the Fury who protects sup-
pliants and of the revenge of the gods, should I fall into Aietes’ hands to
be put to death in the most horrible pain (eij" cei'ra" ijouvsh" Aijhvtew
lwvbh/ poluphvmoni dh/wqh'naï). No temples, no strong tower, no other
means of defence is mine other than you alone.” (1040–47)// Her second
supplication is dominated by anger, sarcasm, and a strong sense of dis-
honour done to her by the Argonauts. She plays on their sense of male
pride and openly uses the threat of divine punishment associated with
the rejection of a supplication. Divine retribution has, of course, just
been experienced by the Argonauts. To them Medea uses a more black
and white approach rather than the delicate shading we see in her speech
to Arete. Reciprocity is again the key theme: she focuses constantly on
what she has done for them and how little she has received in return.
At first it seems as if she is going to claim abduction by using mh... ejqevlousa (1021) at the very beginning, but this would have led her into difficulties because of the frequent pairing of abduction and rape.

References


Lattimore, R., tr. (1951). The Iliad of Homer. Chicago: .................


