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ΠΡΟΕΔΡΙΑ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ ΚΟΝΟΜΗ

Ε Π Ι Σ Η Μ Η Υ Π Ο Δ Ο Χ Η
ΤΟΥ ΞΕΝΟΥ ΕΤΑΙΡΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ
SIR HUGH LLOYD-JONES

ΧΑΙΡΕΤΙΣΜΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΣΦΩΝΗΣΗ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΝ ΠΡΟΕΔΡΟ κ. ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟ ΚΟΝΟΜΗ

Dear Sir Hugh,

I am very happy indeed to welcome you today at this session of the Academy of Athens as its new fellow. Before I ask you to deliver your talk I am going to say a few words in Greek about your contribution to classical philology so that your audience may be aware that they are attending the lecture of an exceptional personality among those who are still working for the Greek education and its ideals.

Κύριοι Συνάδελφοι,

Κυρίες και Κύριοι,

Σήμερα έχω τὸ προνόμιο νὰ σᾶς παρουσιάσω τὸν Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones, συνταξιούχο βασιλικὸ καθηγητὴ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν τοῦ ὀνομαστοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τῆς Ὁξφόρδης. Ὁ Sir Hugh εἶναι ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς πιὸ διακεκριμένους σοφοὺς στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς ἀρχαιογνωσίας καὶ εἰδικότερα τῆ μελέτῃ τῆς ἀρχαίας ἐλληνικῆς ποίησης καὶ θρησκείας τῶν κλασικῶν χρόνων. Μποροῦμε νὰ ὑποδεχτοῦμε τὸν διαπρεπή μας ξένο ὡς Ἐλληνα, ἀφοῦ ὅπως διακήρυξε καὶ ὁ Ἴσοκράτης Ἐλληνες εἶναι ὅλοι ὅσοι μετέχουν τῆς ἀήμετέρας παιδείσεως». Καὶ κάτι παραπάνω: ὁ Sir Hugh ἔχει ἀφιερῶσει τὴ ζωὴ του στὴ σπουδὴ τῆς ἐλληνικῆς ἀρχαιότητος σὲ βαθμὸ πὺ κανεὶς ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς τοὺς Ἐλληνες φιλόλογους δὲν τὸ ἔχει πραγματοποιήσει.

Ὁ Sir Hugh, M. A., F.B.A., γεννήθηκε τὸ 1922 στὸ St. Peter Port στὸ νησί Guernsey. Ἐκπαιδεύτηκε στὸ γαλλικὸ Λύκειο τοῦ Λονδίνου, στὸ Westminster καὶ στὸ ὄνομαστὸ γιὰ τὴ σπουδὴ τῶν κλασικῶν γραμμάτων κολλέγιο Christ Church τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τῆς Ὁξφόρδης.

Τὸ 1948-54 ἦταν ἐταῖρος τοῦ Jesus College τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τοῦ Καίμπριτζ· τὸ 1954-60 ἦταν ἐταῖρος καὶ Warren Praelector στὸ Corpus Christi College τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τῆς Ὁξφόρδης. Ἀπὸ τὸ 1960-89 ἐπὶ 29 δηλ. συναπτὰ ἔτη ὑπῆρξε ὁ Regius Professor of Greek καὶ ταυτόχρονα Student τοῦ Christ Church τῆς Ὁξφόρδης.

Στὴ λαμπρὴ σταδιοδρομία του ὁ Sir Hugh ἔτυχε πολλῶν βραβεύσεων, ὑποτροφιῶν καὶ ὑπῆρξε ἐπισκέπτης καθηγητῆς σὲ μεγάλα ἀμερικανικὰ Πανεπιστήμια περιωπῆς, ὅπως τὸ Yale, τὸ Chicago καὶ τὸ Harvard. Τὸ 1970 διετέλεσε Sather Professor of Classical Literature στὸ Πανεπιστήμιο τῆς Καλιφόρνιας στὸ Berkeley. Ἀπὸ τὸ 1978 εἶναι ἀντεπιστέλλον μέλος τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν· εἶναι ἐπίσης μέλος τῆς Ἀμερικανικῆς Ἀκαδημίας Τεχνῶν καὶ Ἐπιστημῶν καὶ εἶναι ἐπίτιμος διδάκτωρ διαφόρων Πανεπιστημίων ἀνάμεσα στὰ ὅποια ἀπὸ τὴ χώρα μας τὸ Α.Π.Θ.

Ὁ Sir Hugh διήνυσε μιὰ λαμπρὴ σταδιοδρομία ὡς δάσκαλος καὶ ἐπιτήρησε τὶς διατριβὲς μιᾶς λαμπρῆς πλειάδας μαθητῶν του οἱ ὅποιοι ἐπανδρώνουν σήμερα ὑψηλὰ ἀκαδημαϊκὰ θέσεις στὰ σημαντικότερα πανεπιστήμια τοῦ ἀγγλο-σαξονικοῦ κόσμου. Τὰ δημοσιεύματά του ἐξάλλου εἶναι καὶ πολλὰ καὶ τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἐξαιρετικῆς ποιότητος. Θεματικὰ περιορίζονται, ὅπως συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ ἄλλους διάσημους φιλολόγους, στὴν ποίηση κυρίως τῆς κλασικῆς ἐποχῆς ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἑλληνιστικῆς. Τὸ προσωπικὸ του ὕφος εἶναι χυμῶδες χωρὶς νὰ εἶναι ἐξεζητημένο. Χαρακτηριστικὸ τῶν ἐργασιῶν του εἶναι ὅτι ἐπιχειρηματολογεῖ ἀφοῦ πρῶτα δώσει μὲ τρόπο σαφῆ τὶς ἀπόψεις τῶν προγενέστερων μελετητῶν· στὴ συνέχεια μὲ μεγάλη πάντοτε σαφήνεια διατυπώνει τὴν προσωπικὴ του ἄποψη.

Ὁ Sir Hugh ἔχει νὰ παρουσιάσει πολλὰ δημοσιεύματα. Τὰ περισσότερα περιστρέφονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐρμηνευτικὴ καὶ τὴν κριτικὴ τοῦ ποιητικοῦ κειμένου. Θὰ ἀναφέρω τὰ κυριότερα τῆς κατηγορίας αὐτῆς:

(1957) Στὸ Παράρτημα τῆς ἔκδοσης Smyth τοῦ Αἰσχύλου στὴ Loeb Classical Library ἐκδίδει τὰ πιὸ ἀξιόλογα ἀποσπάσματα τοῦ Αἰσχύλου, αὐτὰ ποὺ δημοσιεύτηκαν μετὰ τὸ 1930 καὶ προέρχονται κυρίως ἀπὸ Παπύρους.

(1960) Ἐκδίδει τὸν Δύσκολο τοῦ Μενάνδρου σὲ μιὰ πολὺ φροντισμένη ἔκδοση ἣ ὅποια ἔγινε καὶ ἡ καθιερωμένη ἔκδοση τοῦ ἔργου αὐτοῦ.

(1970) Ἐκδίδει σὲ μετάφραση τὴν τριλογία τοῦ Αἰσχύλου: Ἀγαμέμνων, Χοηφόροι, Εὐμενίδες.

(1975) με τὸν τίτλο *Females of the species: Simonides on Women*, δημοσιεύει σὲ μετάφραση τὸ σατιρικό ἔργο τοῦ Σιμωνίδη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἄμωργό γιὰ τὶς γυναῖκες μετὰ φιλολογικὸ σχολιασμό.

(1983) Μαζί μετὰ τὸ διάδοχό του στὴν Ὁξφόρδη καθηγητὴ Peter Parsons, ἐκδίδει τὸ *Supplement Hellenisticum* ὡς συμπλήρωμα στὸ ἔργο *Collectanea Alexandrina* τοῦ Enoch Powell (1925).

Μετὰ κείμενα μετὰξὺ τοῦ 300 π.Χ. - 300 μ.Χ. καὶ μετὰ διευρυμένη βάζση ἢ νέα συλλογὴ πού ἀριθμεῖ 1185 ἀποσπάσματα χωρὶς νὰ περιλαμβάνει ἐπιγραφικά κείμενα ἀποτελεῖ ὄροσημο γιὰ τὴ μελέτη τῆς ἑλληνιστικῆς ποίησης. Ὁ μεγάλος ἀριθμὸς κειμένων πού εἶναι τῶρα διαθέσιμα ἀλλὰ προπαντὸς ἡ ἀκρίβεια καὶ ἡ σαφήνεια τῆς ἐκδοτικῆς τέχνης μαζί μετὰ τὴ βαθειὰ φιλολογικὴ καὶ παπυρολογικὴ μάθηση τῶν ἐκδοτῶν κατέστησε τὸν τόμο αὐτὸ γιὰ πολὺ ἀνεξάντλητη πηγὴ ἐγγυημένων πληροφοριῶν.

(1990) Μαζί μετὰ τὸν Nigel Wilson τοῦ Lincoln College τῆς Ὁξφόρδης ἐκδίδει τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Σοφοκλῆ στὴ σειρὰ OCT σὲ δύο τόμους. Τὸ κείμενο αὐτὸ πού ἔγινε εὐνοϊκὰ δεκτὸ ἀπὸ τὴ φιλολογικὴ κοινότητα συνοδεύτηκε ἀπὸ τὸν τόμο *Sofoclea* πάντοτε σὲ συνεργασία μετὰ τὸν Nigel Wilson. Σὲ αὐτὸ σὲ σύντομα κριτικὰ σημειώματα στὸ κείμενο τοῦ Σοφοκλῆ οἱ δύο ἐκδότες δικαιολογοῦν τὶς γραφὲς πού υἱοθέτησαν στὴν ἐκδόσή τους.

(1997) Ἐκδίδεται ὁ τόμος *Sophocles: Second Thoughts*, πάλι σὲ συνεργασία μετὰ τὸν Nigel Wilson· σ' αὐτὸν συζητοῦνται ἀρκετὰ χωρία τοῦ Σοφοκλῆ καὶ οἱ δύο ἐκδότες ἀξιοποιοῦν καὶ εἰσηγήσεις κριτῶν τους στὶς σχετικὲς βιβλιοκρισίες.

Ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλλα ἔργα τοῦ Sir Hugh ἀναφέρω τὴ «Δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Δία» (1971), ἓνα βιβλίον ὅπου ὁ συγγραφέας προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὴ συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ Δία. Στὸ βιβλίον αὐτὸ ὁ Sir Hugh τροποποιεῖ μερικὲς ἀπὸ τὶς ἀπόψεις του πού ἐξέφρασε σὲ ἄρθρο του τοῦ 1956.

Δύο ὀγκώδεις τόμοι περιέχουν ἓνα μέρος ἀπὸ τὶς ἀκαδημαϊκὲς μελέτες τοῦ Sir Hugh συγκεκριμένα 53 ἀπὸ τὶς 90 μελέτες του καὶ 24 ἀπὸ τὶς 142 βιβλιοκρισίες του. Μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ ἄρθρα αὐτὰ εἶναι σχεδὸν τέλεια καὶ γιὰ τὸ φιλόλογο χρήστη τους εἶναι ὅπως οἱ μόνιμοι ἀξίας. Τὰ σημαντικότερα ἄρθρα ἀναφέρονται στὸν Πίνδαρο, τὴν τραγωδίαν, τὴ Νέα Κωμωδία, τὸν Καλλιμάχο καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ θρησκείαν.

Θὰ παραλείψω μερικὰ ἄλλα ἔργα τοῦ Sir Hugh καθὼς καὶ τὰ βιβλία πού μετέφρασε ἢ ἐξέδωκε ἀπὸ τὰ γερμανικά. Θὰ ἀναφερθῶ μόνο σὲ τρία βιβλία πού ἀναφέρονται κυρίως σὲ ἐκπροσώπους τῆς σύγχρονης φιλολογίας. Στὴ διάλεξή του «Ἑλληνικὲς Σπουδὲς στὴ νεώτερη Ὁξφόρδη» μετὰ τὴν ὁποία ἐγκαινίασε τὴ σταδιοδρομίαν του ὡς *regius professor of Greek* δίνει μιὰ ζωηρὴ εἰκόνα τῶν ἑλληνικῶν σπουδῶν στὴν Ὁξφόρδη καὶ σκιαγραφεῖ μετὰ συμπάθειαν —πλὴν τοῦ Jowett— τὸ ἔργο πέντε

προκατόχων του. Στην ίδια κατηγορία ανήκουν τὰ ἔργα του «Blood for the Ghosts· κλασικὲς ἐπιδράσεις στὸ 19ο καὶ 20ο αἶ.» (1982) καὶ «Classical Survivals· Ἐπιβιώσεις» (1982), ὅπου ἐξετάζει τὶς κλασικὲς σπουδὲς στὸ νεώτερο κόσμο. Τελευταῖο ἀναφέρω τὸ βιβλίο «Ἑλληνικὰ σὲ ψυχρὸ κλίμα» (1991) ποῦ περιλαμβάνει σύντομα ἄρθρα καὶ βιβλιοκρισίες. Ἐδῶ ἡ σαφήνεια τῆς παρουσίας καὶ ἡ ἐνημερωμένη κρίση ἐναρμονίζονται μὲ τὸ συνδυασμὸ θαυμαστῆς ἐπιδεξιότητος σύνθεσης, ἀρετὲς ποῦ καθιστοῦν τὴν ἀνάγνωσι τοῦ βιβλίου πραγματικὴ ἀπόλαυσι. Ἄλλωστε ὅλες οἱ ἐργασίες τοῦ Sir Hugh καὶ αὐτὲς ἀκόμη οἱ πιὸ τεχνικὲς εἶναι ἐπαγωγικὰ γραμμένες καὶ σὲ γλαφυρότατο ὕφος.

Δὲν μπορεῖ κανεὶς παρὰ νὰ μείνει ἐκπληκτικὸς σὲ τέτοια ἐπιστημονικὰ ἐπιτεύγματα γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ πολλαπλὲς τιμὲς ποῦ τοῦ ἐπιδαψιλεύτηκαν ὄχι μόνον στὴν πατρίδα του ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἐπιστημονικὰ ἰδρύματα τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ. Ἐνας τέτοιος ἐπιστήμονας εἶναι προῖον μιᾶς μορφῆς ἐκπαίδευσης στὰ ἀρχαῖα Ἑλληνικὰ καὶ Λατινικὰ, μοναδικὸ χαρακτηριστικὸ τῶν καλύτερων ἀγγλικῶν σχολείων. Σύμφωνα μ' αὐτὴ ἀπὸ τὰ πρῶτα χρόνια στὸ σχολεῖο ὁ σπουδαστὴς ἀσκεῖται συχνὰ στὴ μετάφρασι ἀπὸ τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ στὰ Λατινικὰ καὶ στὰ Ἑλληνικὰ, πρῶτα σὲ πεζὸ καὶ ὕστερα σὲ ποιητικὲς συνθέσεις σὲ διάφορα μέτρα, ἓνα πρόγραμμα ποῦ συνεχίζεται καὶ ἐντατικοποιεῖται στὸ Πανεπιστήμιο. Εἶναι μιὰ μεθοδικὴ προσέγγισι ποῦ παρήγαγε ἐπιστήμονες ἐξαιρετικὰ ἐφοδιασμένους γιὰ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν πολὺπλοκα μετρικὰ, γραμματικὰ καὶ πραγματολογικὰ προβλήματα τῆς ἀρχαίας ἑλληνικῆς καὶ λατινικῆς φιλολογίας. Μιὰ μορφή μάθησης τὴν ὁποία ὁ Wilamowitz συνιστοῦσε ἐκθύμως καὶ στοὺς συμπατριῶτες του.

Greece, Sir Hugh, with which you have close ties, since you devoted your life to the study of its classical and post-classical poetry, welcomes you very warmly at this memorable visit of yours, and the Academy of Athens is proud to have you tonight as its guest. And now I am very happy, to invest you with the insignia of the fellow of our Academy and to ask you to deliver your entrance-speech on «Ancient Greek Religion».

ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION

ΟΜΙΛΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΞΕΝΟΥ ΕΤΑΙΡΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ SIR HUGH LLOYD-JONES

Much as the literature and art of early Greece have been and still are admired, the notion that the ethics of that period might have much to teach us would have seemed bizarre to most people until well inside the twentieth century. Nietzsche, indeed, shocked the public by his criticisms of Socrates and Plato and his advocacy of an ethical outlook clearly indebted to the ethics of pre-Platonic Greece; but in his time and until lately, most people found Nietzsche hopelessly eccentric. As late as the 1970's, when I published an article about Nietzsche and the use he made of classical antiquity¹, the Canadian philosopher George Grant wrote that 'one looks with fear as well as with pleasure, at praise of Nietzsche from the Regius Professor of Greek'. But in recent times the influence of Nietzsche has been growing, and now one of the most distinguished philosophers of the western world, Sir Bernard Williams, has displayed, with much persuasive power, an attitude to early Greek ethics which has much in common with that of Nietzsche. In his book *Shame and Necessity*, published in 1993, he has argued that modern ethics has much to learn from the ethics of pre-Platonic Greece. The same opinion may be deduced, it seems to me, from the work of another important modern philosopher, Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997).

The eastern neighbours of the Greeks were for the most part ruled by absolute monarchs. Indo-European societies, of which the Greeks were one, usually, in the words of R. Sealey, *The Justice of the Greeks* (1994), 24, started from 'a belief in the inherent worth which distinguished each member of the community from all other members, but they proceeded to develop a concept of a community in which a goodly number of men though distinguished by superiority from the rest of the population, were equal among themselves'. That equality, Sealey continues, was the root of law, and in a sense it was the root of Greek religion. Oriental societies had for the most part monotheistic religions, corresponding with their absolute monarchies.

However, doubtless under the influence of the monotheistic religions of

1. See my book, *Blood for the Ghosts* (1982), 165 f.

the east, Greek philosophy from its beginnings was critical of the traditional religion and of the ethics that accompanied it. As early as the sixth century, Xenophanes of Colophon wrote (fr. 15 Diels) that if animals were to worship gods, they would worship gods that had the shape of animals, and complained of the immoral behaviour, such as theft, adultery and cheating ascribed to the gods by the Olympian religion. Plato, most notably in the second, third and fourth books of the *Republic*, took up a similar position. He rejected not only the traditional religion, but also the ethics that accompanied it. Plato revolted against the traditional view that a man proved his manhood by his ability to benefit his friends and harm his enemies. He put forward a doctrine of the tripartite soul, whose three parts were the rational (*to logistikon*), the appetitive (*to epithumetikon*) and the spirited (*to thumoeides*), in effect reason, appetite and the passions. Reason knew what was right, and had to discipline the passions in order to control appetite. Reason, Plato believed, led the mind to decide on action which was morally right; he did not allow for the possibility that reason might be used in the service of an action that was wrong. This is a psychology, Williams argues, that incorporates ethical assumptions. His interpretation of Plato's doctrine, we must note, is by no means uncontested. It can be and has been argued that Plato held that a virtuous disposition exists only when reason rules or dominates, that is, determines decisions and actions, but that a person can deliberate in the service of a morally wrong decision even when reason is enclaved to the passions. But for the most part that is not how Plato's doctrine has been interpreted.

Plato did not wish to suppress the worship of the traditional gods, but it played no part in his philosophy. The ethics of Aristotle had more in common with traditional Greek views than those of Plato, but even to Aristotle the traditional gods meant little more than they meant later to the sceptical philosopher Epicurus.

During the Hellenistic period the old religion was defended by the Stoics, but only because they adopted an allegorical interpretation of it that made it congruent with Stoic ethics; the Academy continued in the critical attitude of Plato, and Cynics and Epicureans were still more hostile to it. For highly educated people, philosophy came to take very much the kind of place that religion occupied for such people during the nineteenth century. Such people treated the traditional religion with a gently tolerant respect, and the worship of the gods and the maintenance of their cults continued for eight centu-

ries after Plato, and were terminated only by the barbarous Christian emperor Theodosius at the end of the fourth century after Christ.

As early as the third century of our era, fathers of the church like Clement of Alexandria and later Origen had seen that Plato's doctrine of the soul harmonised with Christianity. They created a Christian religious philosophy that owed much to Plato, and their critics, such as Celsus, could defend the old religion only by means of a use of allegory similar to that of the Stoics. Much of modern philosophy is still influenced by Plato. Kantian and Hegelian ethics are deeply influenced by Christianity; the Kantian categorical imperative, resting upon the concept of duty and the modern notion of the will, depend upon the Christian conception of the soul. As Sir Isaiah Berlin puts it (*Against the Current*, 1980, 67), 'one of the deepest assumptions of western political thought is the doctrine, scarcely questioned during its long ascendancy, that there exists some single principle which not only regulates the course of the sun and the stars, but prescribes their proper behaviour to all animate creature. The idea of the world and of human society as a single intelligible structure is at the root of all the many various versions of natural law — the mathematical harmonies of the Pythagoreans, the logical ladder of Platonic Forms, the genetic-logical pattern of Aristotle, the divine Logos of the Stoics and of the Christian churches and of their secularised offshoots... This unifying pattern is at the very heart of traditional rationalism, religious and atheistic, metaphysical and scientific, transcendental and naturalistic, that has been characteristic of western civilisation'.

The first modern ethical thinker who challenged what Berlin calls the 'monistic pattern' was Machiavelli, in the first half of the sixteenth century. He contrasted with the Christian morality, whose ideals are charity, mercy, sacrifice, love of God, forgiveness of enemies, belief in the salvation of the soul, a pagan morality, whose values are courage, vigour, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order, discipline, happiness, strength, justice, above all assertion of one's proper claims and the knowledge and power needed to secure their satisfaction. That, he said, had been the morality of Periclean Athens and of Rome in the great days of the republic. Machiavelli did not attack Christianity, but he argued that strict adherence to Christian morality could not enable the Italian communities of his time to achieve security and good government. This led him to what Berlin has called 'his most uncomfortable assumption', which is that 'certain virtues and, even more, certain ideals

may not be compatible'. Such a point of view had already been accepted in practice by many Christian governments, but Machiavelli was the first to argue for it in print. He was deeply disapproved of, and was credited with almost diabolical wickedness. However, his influence perceptibly changed the intellectual atmosphere. Could the tragedy of such poets as Shakespeare have been what it is without the influence of Machiavelli? 'By breaking the original unity', Berlin writes in the brilliant essay about him in his book *Against the Current* (p. 79), 'he helped to cause men to become aware of the necessity of having to make agonising choices between incompatible alternatives in public and in private life (for the two could not, it became obvious, be genuinely kept distinct)'.

In practice even the most Christian rulers and statesmen have found it impossible to govern in strict accordance with Christian moral standards. An interesting sidelight is thrown on Machiavelli by the career of the English liberal statesman of the nineteenth century, William Ewart Gladstone. He will be remembered as a devoted philhellene, having been responsible for handing over the Ionian Islands to the Greek kingdom. Gladstone was a devout Christian, but he was also a passionate admirer of Homer. Reading the Bible, he thought, was all a man needed to attain salvation, but it gave insufficient guidance to those entrusted with government. God had made a double revelation of himself through the Jews and through the Greeks, and people who aspired to take a part in government needed to supplement the Bible with a study of classical literature, and particularly of Homer. Despite the immense burdens of the high offices which he held for many years, Gladstone managed to discharge what he felt to be a sacred duty by writing seven books and many articles about Homer.

Williams oddly fails to remark on the influence of Machiavelli on the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679); it is significant that Hobbes published a translation of Thucydides, a Greek author who particularly brings out the features of Greek ethics with which Williams is concerned. Hobbes, like Machiavelli, shocked many of his contemporaries.

A further advance towards the proper understanding of the ethics of early Greece was made during the eighteenth century. During the first half of that century the Neapolitan Giambattista Vico and later during its second half of the century, when Western knowledge of other societies and the ancient east had been enormously extended, the German clergyman Johann

Gottfried Herder stressed the cultural autonomy of different societies and the incommensurability of their systems of values. They were contesting the then popular view of the Encyclopedists that mankind had made a linear progress from darkness into light.

Does that mean that Vico and Herder were relativists, persons who believed that all truth is relative to the individual and to the time and place at which he is located? Berlin, in controversy with the eminent ancient historian Arnaldo Momigliano (*The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 1992, 10 f.), has argued that it is wrong to describe them by that term. He argues that they are in fact pluralists, arguing that though different civilisations and different cultures may aim at ends that are incompatible, they are not cut off from each other, but are capable of understanding the mental outlooks of other worlds very different from their own.

Nietzsche started his career as a professor of Greek, and the origins of his philosophy cannot be understood without taking account of his acquaintance with the ancient world. Nietzsche took the motive force of all human activities to be the will to power, and saw the only hope of improvement in the future in the production of a superior type of human being, the *Uebermensch* (the Superman). During the Nazi period in Germany, Nietzsche's sister ingratiated herself with Hitler by telling him that her brother's philosophy was congruous with Nazi doctrines; that was a disgusting lie. When Nietzsche spoke of power, he meant much more than the strength that can achieve physical or political domination; his favourite example of the *Uebermensch* was not Napoleon, but Goethe. Unlike the Greeks, Nietzsche did not believe that gods control the universe; but the Greek gods had no special partiality for men, whom they had not created, and none of the gods, not even Zeus, was all-powerful or all-good. Williams writes (op. cit., 10) that 'he uses the idea that the Greeks, or at least the Greeks before Socrates, openly lived manifestations of the will to power that later outlooks, above all Christianity and its offspring liberalism, in their increased self-consciousness, have had to conceal'. By 'power', Nietzsche meant the power to live happily and to achieve good things.

Nietzsche's treatment of Greek religion, like the rest of his philosophy, was most unfavourably received by the public in his own time. His first important work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was bitterly attacked soon after its publication by a young scholar four years Nietzsche's junior, Ulrich von

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, who was destined to become the most celebrated Greek scholar of his time².

Even after the turn of the century, when the approach to early Greece began to be influenced by anthropology, the new trend did not cause Greek religion to be more highly regarded. The religion of the Homeric poems was treated from the same attitudes and by the same methods as that of savage tribes. This approach had certain advantages, but it did not help scholars to arrive at a fair estimate of Homeric ways of thinking. Even in the middle of the twentieth century the German scholars Hermann Fränkel and Bruno Snell and their many followers believed that they could show that since certain words did not appear in Homer's poems their author or authors lacked various concepts indispensable to modern ways of thought. In particular, they held that Homer had no coherent, articulated concept of the self, and was therefore incapable of showing how a character made a decision. For many years these views, and those of such followers as the late Arthur Adkins, were generally accepted, and many people were scandalized when although on friendly terms with both their authors I attacked their opinions in a book published in 1971, *The Justice of Zeus*. But nowadays these theories seem to have gone out of fashion, and after Williams' convincing refutation they can scarcely again be taken seriously.

Williams questions the common assumption that progress has been made in ethics since ancient times; in his vocabulary 'progressivist' is a pejorative term. Much of modern ethical thinking, he argues, depends upon a psychology that incorporates ethical assumptions. Such a psychology, he thinks, was devised by Plato, and later formed part of Christianity. In turn, Christianity has exercised a powerful effect on Kantian and Hegelian ethics; the Kantian doctrine of the categorical imperative resting on the concept of duty and the modern notion of the will depend upon the Christian conception of the soul. People have missed in Homer 'a will that revolves around a distinction between moral and non-moral motivations'. But the early Greeks, who had their belief in Zeus and the gods and also assumed social expectations to support them, could do without a conception of the soul that drew its support from

2. These and the contributions to the controversy of Erwin Rohde and Richard Wagner have been usefully reprinted by the firm of Olms (*Der Streit um Nietzsches "Geburt der Tragödie"*, ed. K. Gründer, 1969).

ethical categories. If we examine our own behaviour, we shall find that, at least for a good deal of the time, we do the same.

It is the same, Williams argues, with the notion of responsibility. The four basic elements of responsibility are cause, intention, state of mind, and response. These are not always related to each other in the same way, but in the early Greek notion of responsibility all are present; there may be no word for 'intention', but the idea of intentionality is there. The belief that the early Greek notion of responsibility differed greatly from our own is an illusion generated by thinking only about the criminal law and forgetting about the law of torts. Torts are defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as 'any wrongful act, damage or injury done wilfully, negligently, or in circumstances involving strict liability, not involving breach of contract, for which a civil suit can be brought', so that in effect the law of torts means the law that provides or denies recourse or remedy for a person who suffers damage or injury at the hands of another. In general, Sir Henry Maine in his famous study of ancient law (1861) was right in thinking that ancient Greek law is a law of torts rather than a law of crimes. Williams shows that we have a different conception of law, but not a different conception of responsibility. However, the early Greeks were less confident about assigning moral responsibility than we are.

Williams, like me in *The Justice of Zeus*, has no truck with the too simple notion that early Greek culture was what the anthropologist Erik Erikson called a 'shame-culture', whereas our own culture is a 'guilt-culture'. He argues convincingly that for the early Greeks, for whom honour is of prime importance, the concept of shame does much of the work done for us by the concept of guilt.

Williams takes his examples of the Greek treatment by modern issues not from real life, as it is reported in historians and orators, but from the poets, especially from Homer and from Sophocles. Certainly the evidence from the poets is of great importance, but it seems to me that this is a surprising limitation. Historians and orators could furnish valuable evidence, most especially Thucydides, as Williams himself recognises. Williams regards Thucydides as a sceptic in religion; in fact Nanno Marinatos (*Thucydides and Religion*, 1981) has given good reasons for seeing nothing in Thucydides inconsistent with an acceptance of the traditional religion.

It might seem that a great difference between the notion of responsibility

entertained by the poets and our own is created by the belief of the poets that a man can be punished, as Oedipus for example is, for something that he has not done. However, the difference seems less great if we remember that the Greek gods stood for forces which can be seen working in the world. Although we do not believe in the interference of demonic powers, we are aware that we may find ourselves in situations in which no amount of rational planning and moral intention can save us from disaster.

As a rule the ethics of a people are closely bound up with its religion, and if one wishes to understand early Greek ethics it is necessary to take a look at the religion in which they had their origin. The religion of the early Greeks is startlingly different from Christianity and other monotheistic religions; it has often been and still is misinterpreted both by people who assume that since it is a religion it must resemble Christianity, and by people who think that because it is not like Christianity or other monotheistic religions it is not really a religion at all.

While few people have disputed the beauty of the early Greek religion and the mythology that goes with it and their value for art and literature, sharply brought out by a comparison with Byzantine art, until comparatively recent times most people looked down on it, for the reasons I have tried to explain, as a superstition which no thinking person could take seriously. And yet the importance of the early Greeks in the history of culture can scarcely be contested. They played a central part in the early development of not only of philosophy, but of science and mathematics, and their literature can still make a powerful appeal to readers, even though, because its language and its metre are very different from those of other literatures, not even the best of the many translations can give an adequate notion of the impact of the original.

Why then, has early Greek religion been denied respect? First, it is polytheistic, and believers in monotheistic religions seldom have much regard for polytheism. Next, its gods were by no means all good; their distinguishing quality was not goodness, but power. They had certain mortal favourites, but they governed the universe in the first place for themselves, and not for mortals.

Much of our knowledge of the gods comes from literature, starting with Homer and Hesiod. The Greeks had many gods, but certain principal ones stood out; these were portrayed in literature as dwelling on Mount Olympus, under the presidency of Zeus, whose name shows that he derived ultimately from the old Indo-European sky-god Dyaus Pitar. Zeus had not always been

the ruler of the gods; Ouranos (the word means 'heaven'), had been displaced by his son Kronos, under whose rule men had been far more kindly treated by the gods than they were later. Kronos had been displaced by his son Zeus, who with his brothers, sisters, sons and daughters was in historic times held to be supreme.

The gods are distinguished from one another by their attributes and functions, but they had come to form a coherent system in which each deity has his or her special place and relation to the others. There were many gods, but only a few major gods; it became customary to speak of 'the twelve gods', meaning the twelve principal divinities. Hera is the consort of Zeus and the patroness of marriage; myth portrays her as a jealous wife, resentful of the many unions with goddesses and mortal women which the need for gods and heroes to trace descent from Zeus compelled him to contract. There are certain places, notably Samos and Argos, where the cult of Hera was more important than that of any other god, and at Olympia her temple was far older than that of Zeus; it would appear that two deities originally distinct were brought together by the invention of their marriage. Hera is the mother of the craftsman god Hephaestus and of the war-god Ares, but these two, the one because of his deformity and the other because of his violence and stupidity, were not as highly regarded as other gods, and Hera was not the mother of her husband's two most important children, Athena and Apollo.

The virgin Athena is the goddess of wisdom and the patroness of women's work and other crafts, but also a war-goddess more effective than Ares; she was produced by Zeus without a mother. She was the special patroness of Athens, which probably derived its name from her, but she was important in other cities also, including Sparta. Apollo, with his sister Artemis, the virgin huntress, is the son of Zeus by Leto, who has no function except that of being their mother; both are archers, but Apollo, lord of the great Panhellenic shrines of Delphi and Delos, is a god of prophecy and a patron of poetry, music and healing. Only on rare occasions is he called a sun god; the sun and moon belong to minor deities, Helios and Selene. Apollo seems to have originated as a fusion between a native and an oriental deity. At first the cult of Delos was a cult of the mother and daughter goddesses; Apollo was brought in later. When Artemis became his sister, she acquired Apolline qualities. Artemis acquired some of his characteristics, but her origins lie further back; she, more than any other deity, inherited some of the qualities of the early goddess

known as the Mistress of Animals. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is son of Zeus by a minor goddess, the nymph Maia. Aphrodite, the love-goddess, is daughter of Zeus by an obscure deity, Dione; the cult of Aphrodite seems to have come in from the east through Cyprus, and she bears a strong resemblance to the Semitic love-goddess Ishtar and the Sumerian Inanna. Poseidon, brother of Zeus, is lord of the sea, though he originated as an earth-god and was the cause of earthquakes; he was the patron of the horse, an animal which appeared among the Greeks and their neighbours only at a comparatively late date. Another brother, Hades or Pluto, is lord of the underworld; sometimes he is called a second Zeus, and he may have originated as a doublet of Zeus. Hades remained a shadowy figure; it seems that originally the consort of the earth-goddess Demeter was Poseidon. Demeter is sister to Zeus, but she is an underworld goddess, and is responsible for an event that changed the whole course of human life, the introduction of agriculture. Her daughter Persephone is the wife of Hades, spending one half of the year with her husband in the world of darkness and the other half with her mother in the world of light, and the mother and daughter preside over the great shrine of Eleusis, the home of the Eleusinian mysteries. The most complicated of the immortals is Dionysus, who was the son of Zeus by a mortal princess, Semele; to start with he had difficulty in establishing his claim to be a major god. He is the god of wine and of ecstasy and the patron of drama. In cult and in myth he is always represented as coming from outside; in consequence his cult was thought to be of comparatively late origin until his name turned up on one of the tablets with writing in the second-millennium Mycenaean script called Linear B, which showed that people had mistaken the cult's legend of its origin for its actual history.

During the fourth century the cult of the healing god Asclepius, a son of Apollo by a mortal woman, became important. At his shrines and those of other healing divinities the patient might sleep in the precinct and then have a dream which helped him to recover. His shrines, notably the great ones in the island of Cos and at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, were also centres of scientific medicine.

When the Greeks encountered foreign gods, they did not fly into a fury and denounce their worshippers. Sometimes they identified them with gods of their own; in some cases foreign cults made their way into Greek lands, as

did the worship of Cybele, the Anatolian Mother of the Gods and that of the Egyptian goddess Isis.

It was wise to pay all gods some honour, and to try not to offend any god; a god might take offence against a mortal, often for a trivial reason. In the *Odysey* Odysseus offends Poseidon, having in order to save the lives of himself and his men blinded his son, the monstrous Cyclops. In consequence he gets home to Ithaca only after having lost all his crew, and then has to fight for his life against his wife's suitors; he survives only because of the special favour of Athena, a deity even more powerful than Poseidon. In Euripides' play *Hippolytus*, the hero is a young man who is a keen hunter and is devoted to the hunting goddess Artemis and like her uninterested in the opposite sex. He slights the love-goddess Aphrodite, who in revenge destroys him, and his own goddess cannot save him, though she can and will take revenge on Aphrodite by destroying her favourite Adonis, who as a hunter is dangerously exposed to the enemy of his goddess.

This religion lacked the concept of sin, though certain acts that offended the gods might cause pollution, which could be removed by purification. Purification might involve the punishment of offenders, or might be attained by sacrifice, which played a central part in the life of every Greek community. But any man might be the unconscious victim of a guilt inherited from an ancestor; the most obvious example is that of Oedipus. This religion kept one always in mind of the dangers that are always possible in human life; and before we patronize the Greek gods on the ground that they did not exist, we should observe that they stood for forces which can be seen working in the world.

In Homer there is very little about the earth goddess Demeter or about Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy; the gods of earth were often distinguished from the gods of heaven, and offerings to them took a different form. Demeter's temple at Eleusis was the centre of the earliest and most important mystery cult; those who were initiated into the mysteries of the goddess were thought to obtain certain privileges both in this world and in the world of the dead. Dionysus also had his mysteries.

During the sixth century B. C. we hear for the first time the name of Orpheus, the mythical singer thought to be the author of poems that told a strange story about the birth of Dionysus. He was originally the child not of the mortal princess Semele but of Demeter's daughter Persephone by her

father Zeus, and was captured and devoured by evil deities belonging to an earlier generation of the gods, the Titans. But his heart was rescued by Athena and brought to Zeus, who finally gave Dionysus a second birth through Semele. The Titans were consumed by fire, and men sprang from their ashes; men were thus a mixture of the evil nature of the Titans and the divine nature of Dionysus. Through Dionysus initiates in his mysteries could attain not indeed eternal life, but a privileged existence in the next world. But it is important to remember that this kind of belief was current only in restricted circles, and its theology never became generally accepted. Nor is there any evidence for the once prevalent belief that the worship of the deities of earth came into being earlier than that of the deities of heaven, any more than there is for the notion that a matriarchal preceded a patriarchal phase of history.

Greek religion contained an element of monotheism, in that although the gods might and often did dispute with one another, in the last resort it was always the will of Zeus that prevailed. It is important to remember that the attitude of the Homeric hero who wished to excel others and to win honour during life and fame after death continued to be maintained, after a fashion, by any person of self-respect, even in the age of Athenian democracy. Burckhardt together with Nietzsche, who was for a time his colleague at Basel, rightly stressed the importance of contests and competitions in Greek life. So far from turning the other cheek, the ordinary Greek wished to benefit his friends and to harm his enemies. However, the rule of Zeus had an ethical element, in that he was believed to punish men for their crimes. But since the Greeks like the ancient Hebrews had observed that the wicked often flourish like green bay trees, they believed that his punishment often fell not upon the criminal but upon his descendants after him. The gods, having eternal life, could easily observe the workings of his justice; mortals did not understand enough and did not live long enough to do this.

Men had not been created by Zeus. Their creator, or at any rate their great champion among the gods and their instructor in the arts of civilization, was not Zeus or any of the gods closely allied to him, but Prometheus, a minor divinity belonging to the earlier divine generation. A myth was created to explain the origins of Zeus's interest in maintaining justice among men. Prometheus stole fire to give it to men, and was punished by Zeus by being nailed to a desolate rock. But he possessed a precious secret, for he knew the name of a female deity who was destined to bear a son stronger than his

father, so that if Zeus had a son by her he like his father would be dethroned by his son. By the possession of this secret, Prometheus was able not only to secure his own release, but to compel Zeus to make men the priceless gift of maintaining justice among them by punishing their crimes. Of course, men did not pray to Prometheus, but to Zeus and the other great gods, who had the power, and governed the universe for themselves and not for men, who had only a minor share of their attention and consideration. Our main source, apart from the work of Hesiod, for the important myth of Prometheus is the tragedy *Prometheus Bound*. The language and style of this drama have been shown to be markedly different from those of the other surviving plays of Aeschylus, and a number of scholars deny its Aeschylean authorship. In an article now awaiting publication in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, I have argued that although it is possible that Aeschylus was not its writer, it is not certain. The play may well have been produced while Aeschylus was in Sicily as the guest of the tyrant Hieron, and for a Sicilian production the poet may have modified his usual practices.

The early poet Hesiod explains that Zeus gave to kings the *themistes*, the principles of justice by which they ruled. Zeus was thought to protect strangers, and also suppliants, persons who by an act of submission placed themselves under his protection. However, his will was inscrutable to mortals, who did not live long enough to observe the workings of his justice. Through oracles, particularly Apollo's oracle at Delphi, and through seers, men might get particles of knowledge from the gods, but these were known to be often misinterpreted by men. Seers always accompanied armies, and took the auspices before a battle. Like mortal heroes, the gods cared intensely about honour, and they demanded that men should honour them. But the gods had certain favourites among mortals, who in myth were usually descended from the liaisons of the gods with mortal men or women, and they had also favourites among mortal communities.

The early Greeks had nothing like the Platonic and the Christian conception of the soul; for them the spirit that left the dying human and travelled to the underworld was a pathetic creature, less than half alive. There was no heaven to which the departed spirits of the good might find admittance. After death all men except a few privileged heroes descended from the gods led the shadowy half-life below the earth; those who had been initiated had certain privileges, whose nature because of the insistence on secrecy about the

mysteries is by no means clear. It will be noticed that this religion makes it easier to understand why the world is as it is than does a monotheistic religion whose god is altogether good and who is thought to care deeply about men, a religion which for its authority must depend on revelation.

But the Greeks had no church with divine authority to explain a system of ethics resting on its belief. They had indeed priests, but these were simply the persons in charge of the care of temples and the administration of their cults; in early times a priesthood was usually an appanage of a noble family. They had exegetes, official expounders of cult regulations, and they had oracles and seers, but they had no sacred books that communicated a divine revelation or pronounced dogmas in the authoritative tones of those who claim divine authority for their statements. In consequence, they had none of the theological disputes, schisms and religious wars which have been so noticeable a feature of the history of Christianity. People learned about the gods, and about the justice of Zeus, not from sacred books but from the poets, notably from the early poets, Homer and Hesiod.

Poetry and art are therefore an important source of our knowledge of Greek religion. Another is the evidence available regarding cult and worship in historic times, which comes not only from literary texts such as the writings of historians and orators but from the numerous documents relating to cult observances which have been preserved on stone. At first these two kinds of evidence may seem to present different pictures, but after careful consideration one sees that this is not the case.

This kind of evidence takes us nearer to the religion's origins. The origin of religion is always an obscure subject, and its investigation must be to a certain extent speculative. But I suspect that it began with the fear of ghosts. After the fear of ghosts will have come the fear of powerful spirits, needing to be placated by offerings, and above all by sacrifice. In the time before the introduction of pasturage and agriculture, a time which has so far been by far the longest period of human history, the life of a community depended on the group of male hunters, who disappeared for long stays in the jungle, the abode not only of their game, but of dangerous animals and formidable spirits. Such a spirit will have been the goddess known to students of the earliest period of Greek religion as the Mistress of Animals (*potnia theron*); in the historic period some of her functions were taken over by other gods, most notably by the hunting goddess Artemis. To get the food of their community the

hunters had to plunge deeply into the realm which she dominated, and to kill creatures that belonged to her, so that they had to placate her by giving back part of its body. Here we seem to have the origin of the sacrifices that were a central feature of the Greek religion of historical times. Greek armies always made a divinatory sacrifice before going into battle, and the general took the omens after a sacrifice before deciding to go into action. Sacrifices regularly formed part of the festivals in honour of gods and the many heroes, great men of legend who at their tomb received a somewhat different kind of worship; these festivals were joyous occasions, marked by banquets and processions. After a sacrifice meat, a comparatively rare luxury, was distributed; the thigh-bones of the victim were burned, and the gods were supposed to derive satisfaction from the resulting odour. During the historical period it was domestic animals, creatures precious to the human community, that were sacrificed to the gods. The grandest kind of sacrifice was that of an ox, and especially a bull; next came the goat and pig, and also poultry. Not all sacrifices were blood sacrifices; many took the form of libations of various liquids, a few were holocausts; but blood sacrifice was the most important, and it continued to be offered to the gods of the community right through the history of Greek religion, before the imposition of Christianity.

In the beginning the cults centred upon the sanctuaries of the gods were under private control, in the hands of certain families; but in historic times they belonged to the communities, whose welfare was thought to depend upon them. It would appear that to begin with each community had its special deity. But gradually certain gods acquired an importance that went beyond the localities in which their cults had first developed; cities of any size had shrines of several gods, and the cults of minor gods often came to be taken over by the major gods. Gods were usually worshipped under particular cult-titles associated with the various localities, sometimes designations of the locality and sometimes descriptive epithets, so that the Zeus the Accomplisher of one town is not quite the same as the Zeus the Kindly of another; one remembers how in some parts of Italy in comparatively recent times villagers have been known to stone the Madonna of their neighbours. Often the gods were worshipped in splendid temples, some of which, like those at Olympia and Delphi as well as Athens, have left notable remains. Inside the temple would be the cult statue; outside it would be the altar at which sacrifices took place. The four great meetings at which athletes from all Greek cities competed were ce-

celebrated every four years at Olympia and Delphi and every two years at the shrine of Zeus at Nemea in the Argolid and that of Poseidon at the Isthmus of Corinth.

As I have said already religious dissent found expression as early as the sixth century B. C., and under the influence, it would seem, of the monotheistic religions of Asia Minor, Greek philosophers from the beginning tended towards monotheism. But prosecution for blasphemy was rare. True, alleged atheists were sometimes prosecuted on the ground that they might alienate the gods on whom a city's welfare depended, but such prosecutions seem to have taken place only when the persons accused had given offense in other ways. Epic, lyric and tragic poets treated the gods with deep solemnity, but in Athenian comedy they could be made gentle fun of them without anyone taking offense; the Greek gods, unlike some other gods, could take a joke. Poets occasionally scolded the gods, and Zeus in particular, for their injustice in failing to reward good and to punish evil. But men did not blame the gods for ruling the universe in their own interest and not in men's, which was what they would have done themselves, had their positions been reversed. They credited the gods with terrible power, yet felt that if one did them honour and did nothing to provoke them they could maintain a friendly, though in most cases, distant relationship.

If one bears in mind the nature of this religion, one can see why the ethics of pre-Platonic Greece lacked the concept of sin and the notions of the will, of duty, and of obligation. In Greek tragedy, a human being may be faced with a choice between two decisions, either of which must have disastrous consequences. In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, Agamemnon must either sacrifice his daughter or betray his allies and fail to inflict upon the Trojans the punishment which justice commands. At the end of the play we learn that this situation is the result of guilt incurred by Agamemnon's father. In the remaining plays of the *Oresteia* and in the *Electra* of Sophocles, Orestes and his sister Electra must either fail to avenge their father or must commit the awful act of matricide; it is a great mistake to suppose that the audience is meant to feel that all will be well with them once Apollo's command to kill their mother has been carried out. In the *Seven Against Thebes*, Eteocles must fight in single combat against his brother, risking a grave pollution, or he will fail to defend his city against the foreign invaders. Again, Eteocles is the victim of a curse arising from the earlier history of his family. In the *Suppliants*,

must the Argive king Pelasgos reject the supplication of the daughters of Danaos, who are indeed his kindred, or must he plunge his city into war?

Let us turn to Sophocles. In the *Ajax*, can Ajax listen to Tecmessa's appeal and submit to the Atreidae, or must he preserve his heroic honour by committing suicide? In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, nothing can shake Oedipus' determination to save the city from the plague, which leads him to clash in his ignorance with Tiresias and with Creon, and later when he knows that he himself is the accursed person to do execution upon himself. In the second play about Oedipus, he has come to regret his violence against himself, but he is unable to forgive the treatment he has received from his sons, and their conflict will lead not only to their deaths but to the death of the daughters whom he loves. Yet he is now privileged by the gods to reward Athens for having given him shelter by means of the power which he will exercise from the grave. In the *Philoctetes*, is the young Neoptolemos to disobey the chiefs of the army who are to give him the opportunity to prove his heroic status, or is he to betray a person whom from the first moment he has recognised as a hero of the kind that he aspires to be? In this case Neoptolemos makes the decision which would certainly be dictated by modern ethics, but he is saved from what threaten to be disastrous consequences by a direct intervention of the gods. In the *Women of Trachis*, Heracles is justly punished for his atrocious treatment of the house of Eurytos with an agonising death, but it is made clear that in spite of this the great hero's spirit will be transported to Olympus.

Since the beginning of the Christian era, the ethical thinking of the West has been dominated by the assumption that there is one right answer to every ethical problem, that there can be no conflict between two moral considerations of equal power, that there are certain answers to the central problems of life.

Berlin has written (*The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 208) that 'the notion that One is good, Many —diversity— is bad is deeply rooted in the Platonic tradition'. 'Even Aristotle', he continues, 'who accepts that human types differ from each other, and that therefore elasticity in social arrangements is called for, accepts this as a fact, without regret, but without any sign of approval; and with very few exceptions, this view seems to prevail in the classical and medieval worlds, and is not seriously questioned till, say, the sixteenth century'.

If we reject this monistic principle, do we become relativists? Berlin, you

will recall, has argued that Vico and Herder were not relativists, but pluralists. 'Members of one culture', he has written (op. cit., 10), 'can, by the force of imaginative insight, understand (what Vico called *entrare*) the values, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time or space. They may find these values unacceptable, but if they open their minds sufficiently they can grasp how there might be a full human being, with whom one could communicate, who would at the same time live in the light of values widely different from one's own, but which nevertheless one can see to be values, ends of life, by the realisation of which men could be fulfilled'.

It seems to me fortunate that thanks to their religion the Greeks before Plato were free from the monistic principle. The eminent Roman historian Sir Ronald Syme once remarked to me that the most important problem for the student of antiquity is that of explaining why a small country, mountainous and for the most part infertile, should within a comparatively short space of time have laid the foundations of European art and science. Any attempt at an answer to that problem requires one to understand the advantage which the early Greeks derived from their religion.