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THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RELIGIOUS VIEW OF MAN IN ANCIENT GREECE

The history of religion has long and with some justification been under the tutelage of the positivists who have been content to line up witnesses, to catalogue rites and to compile an index of divine epithets—all this with great patience. But it is now being taken away from them, for it seems that it can no longer be confined to description; it must also make an effort to understand.

The subject is therefore evolving along several lines. Sometimes "the religious" is treated as a separate category and subjected to a kind of morphological analysis; sometimes it is viewed in the perspective of other social sciences like psychology and sociology. Each of these points of view is justified by itself to the extent that it agrees with the facts of the matter. But it also exposes the student of religion to the dangers of systematic exclusiveness and excessive generalization.

One of the most interesting approaches is that of religious

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anthropology. Is it not natural and even indispensable to ask, on the one hand, what place men occupy in a given system of belief and, on the other hand, who the men are who adhere to the system? The two problems are of course connected: Man as an object of belief is to a large extent the projection of man as a believing subject.

The present essay is not intended to dispute the claim that the anthropological approach can make a major contribution to the understanding of a given religion. Nor does it call in question the view that the study of religious phenomena has a part to play in general anthropology. It is confined to asking a preliminary question: Given a certain religion, in this case, Greek religion, can we be sure in advance that the anthropological approach will be a fruitful one. Do we not expect more from it that it has to offer, and should it not give precedence to other methods of approach?

To answer at once, as far as the classical period in Greece is concerned, a purely anthropological point of view owes more to philosophical than to religious considerations. It cannot be adopted unless we are willing to make important adjustments, and the following pages try modestly to redress the balance by wiping out the deficit we seem to incur at the outset.

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Among the Greeks, no commonplace was uttered more persistently than the one that underscores the limits of human nature. To recognize these limits and to act accordingly is a virtue, *sophrosyne*, no doubt the most highly lauded of them all, and its opposite—to exceed one's measure, *hubris*—is a sin for which there is no remission. A man lapses into *hubris* through excessive pride, arrogant behavior, unusual success and wealth, even if the latter were acquired by pure chance and carried no moral stigma. Cresus' opulence implied a hidden menace and Priam's gold called for the ruin of Troy.

These conceptions are evidently not peculiar to the Greeks: In the primitive stage of our mentality, everything which is "too perfec" or "too efficacious" falls under the same heading as the monstrous and reveals the play of subterranean forces with their formidable ambivalence. What is more peculiarly Greek

is the rational awareness of this feeling and its expression in their earliest literature, especially in the maxims and parables of the Seven Wise Men. "To know oneself" is to know that one is a human being and nothing more, that one must "avoid excess" and "have mortal thoughts and hopes becoming to man."

Thus in the most familiar current of Greek thought, man occupies a decidedly negative position. The term *anthropos* serves to recall the individual to modesty. It was only in Rome and under the influence of the stoics that the term *humanitas* was to acquire a positive content.

This humiliating notion of the littleness of man enters into all religious conceptions, for it is one of the poles of the God-man axis. For a mortal to exceed his measure is to trespass on divine territory. "What we must ask of the gods is what befits a human heart—to know in its very depths that such is our lot. Do not go out, my dear soul, and dream of immortal life, but finish the task that is in your power" (Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, III, 106 ff.).

Following their anthropomorphist principles, the Greeks often expressed this dialectic of the human and the divine in terms of human psychology: The gods are jealous of the man who appears to usurp their privileges. Think of the lessons which the Wise Men taught the kings—those men who were most tempted to place themselves above humanity. Solon reminds Cresus that he must not believe himself to be the master of his arrogant fortune, and the events bear out the sage's warning (cf. Herodotus, I, esp. ch. 32).

All religious thought among the Greeks, at least in the classical period, is characterized by the feeling of a neat division between men and gods—those gods with human faces who nevertheless transcend men. This break is expressed in such antitheses as mortal-immortal, strong-weak, happy-unhappy, but not in moral dichotomies like good-evil. Above all, the gods are the *Others*: They exist in a different way, in another space and in another time. Their possible relations with men exclude union and assimilation.

To begin with, no well-defined and generally accepted Greek myth describes the creation of man by the gods. Witness Ovid's hesitation in the beginning of his *Metamorphoses*. No Hesiod

composed an *Anthropogony*, and the only timid approaches in this direction are marginal comments in the legends of Prometheus and Pandora. We thus search in vain for this bridge between gods and men which figures in the opening pages of almost every genesis, even though Greek mythology is one of the richest in the world and supplies divine archetypes for practically every aspect of the world. For the Greeks generally, man is born of the Earth; he has no divine origin, and from his first appearance he belongs to an order of things very different from that of the Uranians and severed from it by a frontier he cannot cross.

In their metaphysical speculations, the Greeks lacked the belief in an immaterial soul and could not therefore make use of this device to get closer to their gods. With minor exceptions to which we shall have to return, the dualism between spirit and matter was foreign to the main current of ancient thought before Plato. It is useless to ask whether the Ionians, Eleatics or atomists were spiritualists or materialists. Water, air, fire and *apeiron*, *nous*, *logos* had not yet been located on either side of the dividing line beween spirit and matter because no one had yet thought of tracing that line.

Greek psychology did not isolate an immaterial soul either. The *psyche* was the principle of life and escaped from the body at the moment of death. It could be represented either as a winged creature of non-human appearance or, just as well, as a double, an *eidolon.* In more advanced speculations, it became also the completely indeterminate substratum of mental activities, but far from being deprived of all attachments to the bodily organs, it was often located in one of them, the *phren.* In short, the soul in no way resembled a spiritual entity, and since the gods were no more spiritual than the soul, Greek religion lacked the resources of the spiritualist religions which enable these to despise the body with impunity because the hope for a beatific union is reserved by them for the soul.

The act of worship was never claimed to raise the devout worshipper to the level of the gods. There are only apparent exceptions. Thus the oracles seem to have been designed to make man share in the knowledge possessed by the gods when the gods were willing to communicate it to him. But it is clear

that, apart from the ritual precepts which any priestly authority could have dispensed just as well, the pronouncements of the oracles are invariably reported to us as a kind of game in which the gods warned a man without enlightening him and made sure that they would triumph over him after the event. It is of little consequence that most of their prophesies were false; for this is how the Greeks saw things, and through a certain bitterness and a certain irony towards those of their fellows who had been carried away by *hubris*, they expressed their inability to see through the designs of the gods.

The "miraculous cures" of Epidaurus call for a more subtle explanation. The only sentiment they betray is a belief which is found everywhere and at the most primitive levels—the belief in the immediate efficacy of certain places and of certain rites, as well as in the veracity of dreams. Only thirty years ago, the existence of such cures had seemed inexplicable. Modern psycho-somatic medicine has done much to clear up the matter.

In any case, this faith which effected an occasional cure all by itself was not accompanied by any religious fervor in the modern sense of the term. Nothing should be further from our thoughts than Lourdes. We should rather think of the watering-places whose virtues, though therapeutically effective, are largely mythical. Madame de Sévigné spoke of Vichy as if the place itself were a healing power.

It is possible that Aesculapius, a native of northern Greece, came to supplant some established rites at Epidaurus. But however this may be, the place had very little of a religious atmosphere, a clear proof that the Greeks could believe in the immediate efficacy of a rite without believing that they were obliged to show respect for the divine person whom they supposed to be at the center of it. Without insisting on the limited scope of the "miracles," discounting the exaggerations of priestly propaganda, we can say that it was a matter, not of religion in the proper sense of the word, but of folklore.

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It is in connection with the problem of evil that the Greek view of the solitude of man finds its most emphatic expression. Their lyric and tragic poetry abounds in cries of despair at the

impotence of the individual in the face of overwhelming misfortune, in which the gods take no interest even when they are themselves responsible for it. "The gods do with men as they please," say certain characters in Euripides (*Orestes*, 1545; *Supplices*, 735). Homer's heroes already share the same attitude. This is how Achilles addresses Priam who has come to reclaim the body of his son (*Iliad*, XXIV, 523 ff.):

"Nothing is gained by lamentation to chill every heart, for such is the fate the gods have spun for us unfortunate mortals—to live in sorrow while they themselves are exempt from every care. Two jars were placed by Zeus on the earth: The one contains all the evils, the other all the blessings we receive from him as his gift. He whom Zeus the thunderer gives a mixture of these gifts will find misfortune today and good fortune tomorrow. But he on whom he bestows nothing but misery is made wretched indeed: A consuming hunger chases him across the wide earth, and he wanders despised by men and gods alike."

Not only does the poet allow misfortune to play a larger part than pure chance would have it, for he does not even mention the possibility of a destiny picked entirely out of the beneficent jar; he also lets his listeners draw the logical and inescapable conclusion that the gods are indifferent, amoral, irresponsible and mean.

When a god acts, in this epic, in the way that human piety demands, it is because his caprice coincides for once with the moral aspirations of men. When Priam learns that Hector's corpse has remained intact, he remarks that his son has been rewarded for his persevering piety (*Ibid.*, 425 ff.). He is trying to forget that the reward is a mockery, coming much too late, and that it will no doubt be taken back the following day.

It will be clear that Nietzsche's pessimism fed on the metaphysical despair of the Greeks, just as the pessimism of his master Schopenhauer drew its nourishment from Indian nihilism. There is nevertheless a crucial difference: The pessimism of the Greeks was of a purely cognitive and emotional order and did not interfere with the sphere of action. To such lucidity in the face of distant gods, inaccessible and arbitrary, corresponded a will to subdue nature and to stake human pride on a victory whose limitations, far from diminishing it, conferred on it its

true nobility. Man must respect his limits but will not stop short of them. Up to that point, it is after all he who is making history. Greek tragedy contains not only elegies lamenting a life in the grip of misfortune, but also hymns extolling the power of man. In a celebrated passage in Sophocles' *Antigone* (332 ff.), the chorus sings of the human will which has subdued the elements and created civilization. The last few verses recall the limit—death. As the only concession to the higher powers (which incidentally remain impersonal), the limit appears, not as a reason for resignation, but as a line which cannot be crossed and which, when clearly accepted as such, enhances the merits of human action.

Thus a depressing pessimism on the level of opinion is paradoxical combined with a resolute optimism on the level of action. This paradox takes us into the heart of the problem which anthropology faces when it is to be applied to this concrete instance. Must we believe that Greek religion had no functional justification—that the Greeks worked out their system of values aside from their religious conceptions or even in spite of them? To believe this would be to ignore the obvious fact that, for centuries, they were able to satisfy and even inspire their followers.

Before the irreducible resistance of the facts, we are reduced to revising our methods.

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When applied to philosophical systems, the anthropological approach will always find a way out. This is because these systems are individual creations, whereas a religion is necessarily addressed to a group of believers, though from one civilization to another, the individual and the collective ingredients, as well as their interrelations, are almost infinitely variable. Among the Greeks (and it is with respect to them that any investigation must find its bearings), the dialogue between the divine world and the human was carried on, not by a god and the individual, but by a god and the group.

Suffice it to recall a few historical facts. In the beginning, religion rested on a succession of social groups, on the family in the narrow sense, on such extensions of the family as *genos*,

phratrie and *demos*, and on agrarian and professional societies. In the classical period, the role of these groups had been reduced, and this corresponded to a fixation of religious attitudes in their primitive stage—in fairly impersonal gods and in practices which were often nothing but surviving folklore. These groupings were in fact gradually being replaced by another, inclusive, group—by the city-state, the *polis*.

The city had its own gods, sanctuaries and cults. The priests were almost always public functionaries who were either nominated or elected. The state managed the temporal goods of the temples and occasionally disposed of them. There were, properly speaking, as many religions as there were political units: Each state contained within its territorial limits a determinate quantity of sacred phenomena, and its citizens were indistinguishable from the faithful, for only citizens had the right and the duty to take an active part in the national cult. The Athenian festivities provide the best-known illustration, and it was in Athens that the complex relations between religion and the state were regulated and sanctioned in the most logical manner: The rich were obliged to finance the great festivities, and the poor were allowed an indemnity to compensate them for the unemployment occasioned by their obligatory participation in the ceremonies.

Even the "panhellenic" cults, like that of Delos, like the oracles at Delphi and Dodona and the great Olympian and Isthmic games, remained a government monopoly. Though they were open to participants from other cities and even to barbarians, one was nevertheless forced to rely on the good offices of the local citizenry. And finally, the state fixed the calendar which regulated both religious and political activities. All these facts are known and it would be superfluous to insist on them as it would be useless to bring out, conversely, the role which religion played in political, administrative, judicial and military affairs.

Outside true theocracies (which is not what the Greek cities were) it would be difficult to find examples of such far-reaching correlation between political and religious institutions. It is therefore *prima facie* plausible to suppose that the relations between men and men and between men and gods were based on the same collective structures, even though many modern

historians seem to tacitly reject this hypothesis. It is therefore appropriate to examine from the same point of view certain facts concerning the very basis of the religious attitude.

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The religious morality of the Greeks showed, since its first stirrings, the importance of the collective point of view. From the moment it became disengaged from a purely ritual point of view, it was distinguished by principles regulating the lives of men in a group.

In Hesiod, Zeus appears as a guardian of morality, but not of the whole of the good-evil dichotomy. He is the guarantor of justice, *Dike*, and of the first expression of it—respect for the given word. This theme recurs several times in the *Works and Days*, but one quotation will do: "Him who knowingly gives his word as justice demands, Zeus the all-seeing, presents with prosperity. But he who deliberately affixes an oath to a lying declaration thereby violates justice and commits the inexpiable crime; he will see the issue he leaves decrease in the future, while the issue of a man faithful to his oath will enjoy future growth" (280 ff.).

The term "inexpiable" is used here with all its force. The ritual stage has been left behind; no ceremony can efface the perjury. As to the name for an oath, *Horkos*, it must have stood originally for a specialized divinity invoked as a witness—a function inherited by Zeus who, in this as in other similar passages, is nothing but a moral symbol detached from his mythological figure. Hesiod could not, of course, in his time refer to the laws of the *polis*, but we can trace in his work the evolution of the principle behind the indissoluble union of religious morality and public law.

A striking example of this connection is provided by the question of homicide. It should be remembered that this crime was at first a pollution (*miasma*) which excluded the murderer from worship and from the religious community; it could be effaced by a purification (*catharnos*) which was just as ritual in character and was not yet distinguished from punishment. Neither the intention nor the circumstances were taken into account. The problem of *Oedipus Rex* lies on this primitive level.

Such a point of view soon turned out to be incompatible with the demands of an organized community.

The *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, which date from 458, appear to reflect the preoccupations of the period and to capture them in all their actuality. It is no longer simply a matter of purifying Orestes who had murdered his mother but of justifying his act, and this task is incumbent on a tribunal. To speak of a secularization of morals would be to go beyond the thought of the poet and to introduce into Greek thought a distinction which is foreign to it. The religious element remains essential and pervades the judicial process, but there is henceforth a connecting link between the gods and men, namely the state.

In the resolution of the tragedy, when the Erinyes are appeased they offer their "good will" to the Athenian state:

"Yes, I want to live with Pallas and not disdain the city which almighty Zeus and Ares make by their presence the abode of the gods, the shining ramparts of the sacred shrines of Greece. To it I extend my wishes through propitious oracles...May no pestilent breeze ever blast your trees. This will be my good deed: The fire that consumes the young buds will never cross your frontiers..." (916 ff.).

The whole piece is much less concerned with the personal fate of Orestes, who disappears as soon as he is acquitted, than with the possibility of, on the one hand, reinstating the guilty individual in the collective life and, on the other hand, subjecting to the Athenian state all the powers of vengeance with their ill-defined and implacable demands—demands incompatible with all civilized life.

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There is a very telling linguistic fact known to every Greek scholar from the years of his apprenticeship but, paradoxically, not accorded its proper significance: The Greeks had no term with the same extension as our noun "religion." Their vocabulary only enabled them to express either the various but, alas, frequently transitory manifestations of the sacred or else the subjective attitude of the subject, the man of whom we would say that he "had religion."

This latter notion is conveyed especially by words containing the root *sebas*, like *eusebeia* which is generally translated as "piety" and *asebeia*, translated as "impiety." For the sake of completeness, we must take still other terms into account, like *hosios* and its derivatives. But differences remain indistinct and the variations considerable even where the same vocabulary is employed.

We must first of all rid ourselves of the Christian notion of "piety"—that of a movement of the soul which engages the whole personality, constitutes a proper merit and assures a man in return the hope of individual salvation. If we fail to free our minds of the influence this notion has on us unawares and simply through association, the judgments of the ancients will appear incomprehensible to us.

We can, no doubt, understand in any case why Euripides should have acquired the reputation of impiety. But we find it confusing that Sophocles should have remained to his fellow citizens "the pious Sophocles," for though he does not explicitly criticize the gods, he shows nevertheless that they deceive and mislead men. We know also, and from a reliable source, that Sophocles belonged to the brotherhood of a famous healer and played a major part in introducing the cult of Aesculapius into Athens. On the other hand, we find it scandalous that Socrates, who was eminently "pious" as we understand the word, should have paid with his life for his "impiety."

Now Plato put the problem of Socrates on that plane in his *Euthyphro.* Ancient scholars were right to give this work the subtitle *On Piety*, the term thus rendered here being *hosios* or a derivative of it while its negation is *asebeia.* This brief dialogue is at once enigmatic and irritating: The discussion remains inconclusive and Plato's value judgments accord ill with the facts of the debate. Let us try to disengage these facts and in doing so feel free to shock traditional scholarship which long ago canonized Socrates and Plato.

The *Euthyphro* is a masterpiece of dramatic presentation. Socrates is on the way to the tribunal to answer a charge of impiety brough against him by Meletus. On the way he encounters a diviner, Euthyphro, who is himself about to file a suit of homicide against his own father. The affair is very com-

plicated: A free domestic, a *pelates*, in the service of Euthyphro had, in a state of drunkenness, killed a slave belonging to the family. The father, intending to bring the murderer to justice, had him thrown into a ditch where he succumbed to hunger, cold and fetters (*Euthyphro*, 4 b-e). To sum up, a "beautiful case" worthy of Lysias and the schools of rhetoric.

A modern reader will feel at the outset that Euthyphro has some reason for incriminating his father. Without directly asserting the contrary, Plato brings in anything that might make the diviner appear ridiculous. Two afterthoughts make us aware of the poignant irony: We know what fate awaits Socrates and, unlike Socrates, we do not manage to find the scruples and indignation of the diviner a laughing matter. Unable to take our thoughts off the philosopher's death, we are obsessed with the death of the two poor devils.

Let us try at least to put the facts back in their context. On the legal plane, the affair would lead us automatically to apply an article of the penal code: Beatings and voluntarily inflicted wounds had brought on death but without the intention to kill. However, Greek legislation did not attain this level of abstraction. Let us first recall that Athenian law by-passed the office of the prosecutor in matters of homicide. It was up to the victim's family to bring suit, and it was obliged to do so on religious grounds. In the case of a slave, it was the master who assumed this duty, and in that of a resident foreigner (*metoikos*), it was the legal representative (*prostates*). Euthyphro's father had then a legal claim to his slave and not only the right, but the duty, to bring the murderer to justice. Was Euthyphro in an analogous position with respect to his domestic? We know unfortunately too little about the legal status of a *pelates* to settle the question conclusively, especially since the events took place, not in Athens, but in Naxos. In any case, and here the argument from silence carries some weight, Socrates does not reproach the diviner with an illegal action.

If Euthyphro's action was disputed by his fellow citizens, it was primarily on the ground that it was contrary to filial piety. On the other hand, what constituted homicide for a Greek was the act that caused the death. From this point of view, a man who kills in a state of drunkenness and is almost innocent

according to our penal system is guilty of murder. Conversely, he is no murderer who places the victim under conditions which bring on his death: There is no such thing as indirect homicide.

Euthyphro is therefore an innovator on two points—in putting forward the notion of responsibility and in upholding the universality of legal punishment, even against paternal authority. It is on this second point that Socrates contradicts him through his irony, thus adopting the same attitude as the prophet's family and sharing with them implicitly their prejudices concerning the worthlessness of the victim (4 b, d). May I be permitted to say that we find these arguments shocking?

Thus it is the prophet who, as against the philosopher, embodies the principle of legal punishment for homicide as such: "The only question that you have to ask is whether or not the killer acted justly" (4 b). He recognizes only a single standard—*dike*. This point of view appears to us both moral and rational and, moreover, modern, for we have delegated the duty to dispose of such problems to a secular authority representing the state.

For an Athenian, this authority is built into the religious system. This is why Euthyphro feels that, since his action conforms at least to the spirit of the law, the question whether or not it conforms to piety is thereby already settled (5 d-e). This is where the true debate begins. Socrates wants his interlocutor to define piety. Euthyphro knows that the common run of people find the action he is bringing against his father impious and will try to show that it is the very opposite. Laying claim to a superior piety, he proposes several criteria for it one after the other—to follow the example of the gods, to do what is pleasing to them, to do what is agreeable to them. Every time Socrates rejects the definition. Euthyphro finally loses his foothold and declares: "Let me simply say that piety is learning how to please the gods in word and deed, by prayers and sacrifices. That is piety, which is the salvation of families and states, just as the impious, which is unpleasing to the gods, is their ruin and destruction" (14 b).

Naturally, Socrates cannot be content with this, but we wait in vain for the philosopher's reply. The dialogue ends with a pirouette: Euthyphro in his embarrassment pretends urgent bu-

siness to escape the barrage of questions, and Socrates contents himself with an ironic expression of disappointment: He had so much counted on the divine's help in arming himself with arguments against Meletus!

In brief, the sum total of the work is negative. We guess more than we see what the philosopher opposes to the pragmatic attitude of his interlocutor—a demand for rigor and universality and, for this reason, the need to base "piety" on an inner, a spiritual, disposition.

Otherwise put, while our social and political system upholds Euthyphro, our religious conceptions will naturally incline us nowadays to take the side of Socrates. It is these opposite tendencies which, psychologically speaking, make us feel ill at ease. It may perhaps be added that, in any case, Socrates' manifest intention of ridiculing his adversary weakens our loyalty to him. On humanitarian grounds, it is Euthyphro who has our sympathy.

On the historical level at any rate, Euthyphro's opinion represents that of the average Athenian in matters of piety. His attempts at definition, no matter how provisional, allow us to disengage several traits which reveal the collective and national character of this virtue. We thus find the notion of a consensus among the gods—a consensus which is not susceptible to human influence; an attitude both formal and traditional which can only be expressed in external and codified, and hence social, ways—in ritual words and actions; the view that the power of positive or negative sanctions is entirely confined to the group—to family or city; and last but far from least, the view that whatever conforms to *dike*, to the kind of justice demanded by the political group, is *ipso facto* in accord with piety.

It is really not surprising that Euthyphro should have stumbled when asked to state a principle whose practical applications were familiar to him as well as to his fellow citizens. When a principle is self-evident, when it governs one's life by force of habit, one does not feel the need to define it. The Greeks had no catechism because they had no revelation. It is because Christianity rests on revelation that it has always had to be reinterpreted. The catechism acquired its crucial importance at the time of the reformation, which is to say, at the moment

when a body of traditional interpretations ceased to be self-evident.

Yet we must not forget that Euthyphro is a diviner and thus, by definition, a man up to date on divine matters. Even in a religion without dogmas, his advice constitutes a kind of official source. This is what makes us attach some weight to what he thinks even if he says it badly. This is also what gives Socrates' critique its polemic value (4 e). Although this critique is altogether negative and partly spoiled by a somewhat too facile dialectical victory, it raises a question calling for an anthropological answer: Does piety, which is necessarily connected with morality, resemble morality in being concerned with the individual? But Socrates' testimony is unacceptable for an anthropology of Greek religion; it marks the point where Plato's anthropology is injected into a religion re-thought by a philosopher.

Judged by the common religion of the time, Socrates' views are impious; By denying all value to what is not the absolute apprehended by the soul of man, they constitute not only a critique of existing institutions, but endanger "the old gods," that is, the gods of the city (3 b).

It would be presumptuous to take up again at this point the general problem of prosecutions for impiety in ancient Greece: They were both numerous and irregular, and it is hard to say what is more surprising—whether the intolerance or else the incoherence and omissions in what were only sporadic attempts at repression. By eliminating everything connected with proceedings against sacrilege and by restricting oneself to trials of opinion (Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Socrates, Aristotle), one could bring out, in spite of our dearth of information, the common will of all to defend the monopoly of the state in matters of piety and to condemn those who would found a religion of which the individual was both the creator and the beneficiary.

Such a repressive attitude was affected neither by the moral criticism of the tragedians, at least in so far as it remained implicit, nor by the jestings of the comedians, nor by the agnosticism of the philosophers. In the Orestes trilogy, Aeschylus implicates the god of Delphi who had incited Orestes to kill his mother and then declared himself powerless to defend him.

Such an imputation seems to us blasphemous. But this is not how it appeared to an Athenian who was satisfied if the Areopagus, the tribunal of the state, restored in the name of the entire community, the bond between the matricide and the gods who had been offended by his crime.

The function of the state as an indispensable intermediary in the intercourse between gods and men is also borne out by the testimony of the orators, the clearest exponents of a vulgarized religiousness which must have stared their audiences in their faces. Whether they speak of the gods in general, of a particular divinity or a depersonalized "destiny," the devotion they express is always founded on the civic virtues and always crowned with them.

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It will be objected that one of the greatest works of Greek literature seems to express the opposite attitude. In *Antigone*, Sophocles takes the side of the heroine, and our sympathy, like that of the Athenian audiences, agrees with the poet's. We feel at one with all the personages (Antigone, Hemon, Tiresias) who are opposed to Creon, and it is with relief that we see the chorus, at the end of the piece, free themselves of their senile platitudes and their servility—the servility of too submissive subjects.

It is nevertheless to oversimplify the problem presented in the tragedy to think that Antigone is right because she embodies a piety infinitely superior to the exigencies of practical politics. Even more serious, it is to interpolate into Greek thought an element extrapolated from Christian morality to sum up the conflict in the formula: "It is better to obey the gods than men." Antigone does not in fact take this stance in the scene (450 ff.) in which she faces the king. She intends to carry out her pious duty to satisfy, not her individual, but her family, piety. As for Creon, what he wants to enforce is certainly what civic piety demands—what is required by one's membership in a much more important group than the family—much more important at least in the fifth century and as measured by its religious value. Those who oppose him only dispute the claim that the

measures he decrees constitute a legitimate application of this principle. Let us listen to what his son Hemon tells him to his face (733 ff.):

HEMON: This is not what all the people of Thebes say.
CREON: Then Thebes would have the right to give me orders?
HEMON: You see, you answer just like a child.
CREON: Then I would have to rule this country for others' sake.
HEMON: There is no city which belongs to a single man.
CREON: Then a city is no longer the property of its ruler?
HEMON: Oh, you would rule well all alone in an empty city!

Far from disputing the claim that religious duty is set within a political framework, Hemon meets his father on his own ground. The word *polis* occurs three times in the dialogue without counting the references to country or Thebes. The young man raises the real problem, which is that of *hubris*. Creon lacks wisdom (*phronein*), as Tiresias tells him and as the chorus repeats after him—after the catastrophe.

The right of the state to lay down the norms of piety and to control its manifestations is never called in question. To deny the legitimacy of this principle would have seemed to the Greeks to threaten the order of the world. If Creon is condemned, it is not for having embodied this principle but for having betrayed it.

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This rapid survey is only meant to apply (do I still have to insist on this?) to the religious life of the *polis* in the classical period. Moreover, I have deliberately set aside the opposite tendencies which, though very distinct, remain in the minority. Such tendencies come to light in the religious brotherhoods, in the cult of Dionysus, in the mysteries and in the ensemble of beliefs to which we have given the collective name "Orphic." The notions of individual piety and salvation intervene here in varying degrees, undoubtedly by way of compensation, and certain thinkers, especially Plato, have given these aspirations a philosophical expression.

My remarks are not, *a fortiori*, valid for the other types of

society which have succeeded one another throughout the long history of Greece. The dialectic of the human and the divine followed a very different course in the Homeric age—an age of feudal clans in which the individual was more prominent. But it is especially in the large monarchies of the Hellenistic era that we find a sudden break with the conceptions of the classical period.

A recent book devoted to "personal religion among the Greeks" has shed much light into the theological depths of certain manifestations of Greek piety in the modern, individualistic, sense of the term. If we examine the source material of the book, we shall find that it is chronologically divided into unequal parts, the larger part being later in origin. The material is, moreover, very diverse in content; it is only from the time of Alexander that it can be said to reflect a religion effectively practiced by the entire population. The material from the fifth and fourth centuries is borrowed either from the minor current of mysticism or from the works of poets and philosophers. A historian owes it to himself to distinguish these two kinds of sources. Even though there is continuity in the order of thought, there is a break in the order of facts. Hellenistic religion, under the abundant variety of its forms, constitutes a true revolution with respect to the preceding centuries, in the sense that it realized generally in a historical setting what had hitherto remained an occasional aspiration—a doctrine of individual salvation.

Besides, there is a kind of counter-argument which helps to support a corollary of the views expressed here: The relation between men and gods is a function of a given social and political structure. The Hellenistic monarchies could no longer assume the role of messengers in this dialogue because of their excessive size and the inaccessibility of their power centers. The classical conception presupposes a *polis*, a small-town state where everybody knows everybody else and where the institutions can only function when there is a close and continuous contact between governors and governed. Only under these conditions can a kind of piety, requiring the mediation of the political unit to attain its divine objects, remain both concrete and stimulating.

Here at last do we find the solution to the problem which confronted us at the beginning when we observed the profile of Greek religion from a purely anthropological point of view. Though man is separated from the gods, condemned to face alone the problem of evil and in no position to hope for any favors from the gods except by sheer caprice on their part, he can at least approach them through the medium of his national cult and hope to share in the benefits which the gods will grant in return to the community. Although Greek religion was depressing for man as an individual, it did not fail him as a citizen.

If we consider this religion as a whole, we shall find that it appears most clearly from a sociological point of view. For the kind of man it presupposes is always a member of a group and especially of the state. *Anthropos* as such is relegated by it to the lowest level, to the most insignificant order of existence.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

It is clear that works conceived in a purely descriptive spirit can be infinitely valuable as sources of material. Nobody can do without M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (2 vols., Munich, 1941-50), which may be considered the most perfect example in this category. The current tendency to go beyond a sterile positivist approach is to be found especially in certain monographs. As an example of this synthetic approach, I will only cite one penetrating work: L. Gernet and A. Boulanger, *Le génie grec dans la religion* (in the collection *L'Evolution de l'Humanité*, Paris, 1932). One of the authors, L. Gernet, has devoted a study to the Greek religious view of man, which was published in an anthology edited by C. J. Bleeker, *Anthropologie religieuse* (Leyden, 1955, pp. 49-59). It does not seem possible to me to distill, as he does, a view of man in the strict sense of the term from the Greek classical context. My essay will perhaps have shown why. As to Father Festugière, *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (*Sather Classical Lectures*, vol. 26, University of California at Berkeley, 1954), we have already seen that its scope must be restricted to a clearly defined historical context.