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HOMERIC EXCUSES

I. EXCUSING BEHAVIOUR

'It's not my fault!', Agamemnon insists in the Achaean assembly of *Iliad* 19. He has been much criticized, as he freely admits, for his conduct toward Achilles, which has resulted in a general slaughter of the Greeks, and it is clearly incumbent upon him to offer some defence, not only to Achilles but to the army in general. This is his plea:

> ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι,
> ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς,
> οἵ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην,
> ἤματι τῷ ὅτ' Ἀχιλλῆος γέρας αὐτὸς ἀπηύρων.
> ἀλλὰ τί κεν ῥέξαιμι; θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.
>
> I am not to blame
> but Zeus and Moira and Erinys the mist-walker.
> They it was who cast wild Atê on my wits in the assembly
> on that day when I arbitrarily took away Achilles' prize.
> What was I to do? It is god that brings all things to pass. (*Il.* 19.86–90)

This disclaimer is followed by a brief parable of Atê, which serves as preamble to a lengthy *paradeigma* recounting her role in deceiving Zeus in the matter of the birth of Heracles. The message is clear: If Atê can have such a devastating effect on the wits of the supreme deity, what might a poor mortal hope to do when smitten by her?

When Agamemnon enters this elaborate plea in defence of his ill-fated conduct toward Achilles, what are we to understand his intention to be? Is his lengthy and dramatic story merely a picturesque diversion, a face-saving fiction, not taken seriously by anyone, not even the pleader himself? Are we in a position to infer the intention of the claimant and to judge the effect of such a claim on those to whom it is directed? Above all, what might we learn, from reflecting on Homeric excuses, about notions of individual responsibility for action implicit in early Greek epic?

In the extensive discussion of 'Homeric psychology',[1] the issue of the excusing of

[1] The fundamental work is B. Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* (Hamburg, 1946, 1948²) = *The Discovery of the Mind*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, MA, 1953). The views set forth there were first adumbrated and later continued (and defended) in, among other works, *Aischylos und das Handeln im Drama*, *Philologus* Suppl. 20 (Leipzig, 1928); 'Das Bewusstsein von eigenen Entscheidungen in frühen Griechentum', *Philologus* 85 (1930), 141ff.; review of J. Böhme, *Die Seele und das Ich im Homerischen Epos* (Leipzig, 1929), *Gnomon* 7 (1931), 74–86; *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley, 1964). Opposition to Snell was led by A. Lesky (*Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* [Heidelberg, 1961], 1–52) and H. Lloyd-Jones (*The Justice of Zeus* [Berkeley, 1971, 1983²; Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 41, 1969]). For additional references see below. Recent works with extensive bibliographies are T. Jahn, *Zum Wortfeld 'Seele-Geist' in der Sprache Homers* (Munich, 1987); A. Schmitt, *Selbständigkeit und Abhängigkeit menschlichen Handelns bei Homer, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Psychologie Homers* (Mainz, 1990); H. Pelliccia, *Mind, Body, and Speech in Homer and Pindar* (Göttingen, 1995) and C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford, 1996).

behaviour has not been directly addressed,[2] in marked contrast to the question of decision-making, which has been from the outset of the debate the main focus of investigation and contention.[3] And yet it would seem that we might gain even greater insight into certain aspects of the Homeric model of human action from excuses offered for conduct (the speaker's own or that of others) than from depictions of decision-making, since Homeric characters rarely reflect on the actual act of deciding a course of action, nor, indeed, does the poet on their behalf, whereas the *excusing* of action is precisely a *meta*-level response: excuses *are*—or are predicated upon—reflection on moral choices.[4]

In assessing Agamemnon's claim and similar passages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, I refer to the analysis of the defence of conduct presented by Austin in his 1956 Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society, entitled 'A Plea for Excuses'.[5] Here Austin observes that a defence of conduct is offered in situations where 'someone is *accused* of having done something . . . which is bad, wrong, inept, unwelcome, or in some other of the numerous possible ways untoward. Thereupon he, or someone on his behalf, will try to defend his conduct or to get him out of it.'[6] This defence may take one of two forms: excuse or justification. In Austin's formulation of the distinction, when we *justify* an action, 'we accept responsibility but deny that it was bad'; we may argue 'that it was a good thing, or the right or sensible thing, or a permissible thing to do, either in general or at least in the special circumstances of the occasion'. On the other hand, when we excuse an action, 'we admit that it was bad but don't accept full, or even any, responsibility';[7] we may plead some degree of coercion or influence, or that it was accidental or unintentional, or merely incidental to some quite different action. We do not of course deny that we did in fact perform the action in question, but we maintain that it is not fair to say simply that we did it; we plead extenuating circumstances.

Both types of defence—justification and excuse—are to be found in Homer; I will concentrate here on the latter since it is the more problematic and the more illuminating for the question of Homeric attitudes to responsibility.[8]

[2] Although see the brief but insightful remarks of K. J. Dover, 'The portrayal of moral evaluation in Greek poetry', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 103 (1983), 35–48, at 46, and B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, 1993; Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 57, 1989), 52–8, in his discussion of Telemachus' 'mistake' (*Od.* 22.154–6) versus Agamemnon's 'delusion' (*Il.* 19.89ff.); Oliver Taplin's views ('Agamemnon's role in the *Iliad*', in C. Pelling [ed.], *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* [Oxford, 1990], 60–82; *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* [Oxford, 1992]) are more problematic: see below p. 18 and n. 13.

[3] See especially Snell (n. 1) and C. Voigt, *Überlegung und Entscheidung* (Berlin, 1933) for one side of the debate; for the other, Lesky (n. 1); Lloyd-Jones (n. 1); R. W. Sharples, '"But why has my spirit spoken with me thus?": Homeric decision-making', *G&R* 30 (1983); 1–7; R. Gaskin ('Do Homeric heroes make real decisions?', *CQ* 40 [1990], 1–15); Schmitt (n. 1); Williams (n. 2); Pelliccia (n. 1); and Gill (n. 1) (the latter increasingly detailed and useful studies, but all working out the implications of basic insights *contra* Snell already articulated, briefly but incisively, in Lloyd-Jones's 1969 Sather lectures).

[4] Even so, while excuses give us valuable insight into the characters' (and the poet-narrator's) perspective on the action and on moral choices, they do not illuminate the implicit 'mechanism' of decision-making, an understanding of which is manifestly indispensible to an adequate reading of the Homeric model of action.

[5] J. L. Austin, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1956–7; reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, 1961), 123–52.

[6] Ibid., 123–4. [7] Ibid., 124.

[8] This is not to dismiss the subject of Homeric justification as intrinsically uninteresting; far from it. Among other things, efforts at justifying action tell us something about what the pleader considers (or professes to consider) to be justifiable or at least what he expects some one or ones to whom the plea is addressed to consider (or profess to consider) justifiable. And this schema

Both types of plea are tried by Agamemnon, at different points, in an effort to defend his seizure of Briseis. When he first demands a replacement for Chryseis, he tries to justify his demand on the ground that it would not be fitting (ἔοικε) for him alone of the Argives to be without a prize of honour, a γέρας (*Il.* 1.118–19); as his anger focuses on Achilles, he determines to take Achilles' prize in retaliation for what he chooses to perceive as an affront to his authority (*Il.* 1.185–7) and although he acknowledges the judiciousness of Nestor's appeal, it does not alter his intention or his perception of the justice of his position.

By the time of the council of Book 9, however, events have obliged him to reassess the matter;[9] he recognizes in retrospect how ill-advised was his high-handed treatment of Achilles and puts it down to ἄτη (*Il.* 9.115–20) (which may be, for the sake of convenience, translated as 'delusion'),[10] a plea he elaborates in the Reconciliation of Book 19, when he assigns the ἄτη to Zeus and Moira and Erinys, stating expressly that these deities and not he are to be held accountable for his part in the Quarrel and the consequences of it, and he adds a classic *paradeigma* in support of his contention of helplessness at the hands of deity, the story of the Delusion of Zeus in the matter of the birth of Heracles.

Agamemnon's defence here depends upon two key terms; with the first he expresses the claim itself: 'I am not αἴτιος', and with the second the grounds on which the claim rests: he acted under the influence of ἄτη, an irresistible force, sent by Zeus and Moira and Erinys. (It is worthy of note that Agamemnon does *not* say, 'ἄτη is αἰτίη'; ἄτη may be personified in this passage and elsewhere but ἄτη is still a force too little humanized to be credited with ultimate responsibility for action.)

It is evident on contextual grounds that αἴτιος is used in Homer of a person who is considered 'to blame' for some action or state of affairs that is perceived as undesirable from the speaker's point of view; that is, αἴτιος is used in *ethical* contexts, and, moreover, in *negative* ethical contexts (the use of the abstract noun αἰτία to mean 'cause' *tout court* is a later development).[11] The derivative verb αἰτιάασθαι means 'to hold someone αἴτιος', that is, 'to blame' him for something. αἴτιος most often occurs in a statement of the form 'x is not αἴτιος; y is', in which it is denied that a person who

applies within a work of literature to what the author intends his audience to understand of the beliefs of the pleader; the oral poet, in particular (given the poet–audience interaction inherent in oral composition/performance), will attribute to his characters beliefs that his audience can find plausible (on the poet/performer–audience interaction central to the Indo-European poetic tradition, see C. Watkins, 'How to kill a dragon in Indo-European', in *Studies in Memory of Warren Cowgill* [Berlin, 1987], 270–1: the poetry encodes 'the traditional conceptualizations, the perception of man and the universe, the values and expectations of the society'). Despite Williams's caveat ([n. 2], 22), this assumption is a necessary condition for any meaningful discussion of 'Homeric psychology' (for a salutary reminder, however, that literary characters are not 'real' people, and that 'real people', in any case, are not easily defined, see the references to Goldhill and Easterling in n. 53 below, and cf. the discussion in the text, pp. 27–30).

[9] A change of heart adumbrated in Book 2 (375–80). Interestingly, while Agamemnon moves from justification to excuse, Achilles relies throughout on justification (despite, e.g., M. W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, V: *Books 17–20* [Cambridge, 1991], 235 and 244), never at any point admitting that he was wrong in his actions (however unfortunate their consequences). Cf. N. Yamagata, *Homeric Morality* (Leiden, 1994), 60.

[10] ἄτη impairs the judgement; hence its frequent (and useful) translation as 'delusion'; in the post-Homeric period the range of ἄτη is extended to encompass also the 'ruin' that ensues as a result of the delusion. Cf. Edwards (n. 9), 246–7; R. E. Doyle, *ATH: Its Use and Meaning* (New York, 1984); Yamagata (n. 9), 50–60.

[11] Cf. Williams (n. 2), 58; L. S. Wilson, '*Prophasis* and *Aitia* and its cognates in pre-Platonic Greek', Ph.D. diss. (University of Toronto, 1979); cf. Aristotle, *Physica* B198.

might reasonably be thought to be responsible for some undesirable act or state of affairs is not so in fact, whereas another is. This sort of judgement is applied by the speaker to himself, to the person addressed or to a third party, human or divine. Grounds for the claim are generally expressed or at least implied. And finally, the claim may be made absolutely or with specific reference to the speaker: 'x is not αἴτιος *to me las far as I am concerned* (μοι).

As we have seen, Agamemnon denies that he is to blame for the Quarrel and the consequences of it; those who are to blame, he claims, are Zeus and Moira and Erinys by virtue of the fact that they cast delusion on his wits with the result that he took away Achilles' prize. It might be thought that Agamemnon does not by his claim attempt to evade responsibility since he ends by offering Achilles compensation.[12] But here we must make a distinction between moral and practical, that is, legal or quasi-legal, responsibility. Agamemnon accepts practical responsibility for his action in so far as he does not deny that he did in fact take Achilles' prize, and accordingly he offers Achilles compensation. But he rejects moral responsibility and the blame that attaches to it.[13]

[12] W. Donlan ('Duelling with gifts in the *Iliad*: as the audience saw it', *Colby Quarterly* 29 [1993], 155–72) discusses the *agôn* between Achilles and Agamemnon within the context of comparative anthropological perspectives on the widespread cultural phenomenon of 'fighting with property'. He thus sees Agamemnon's (excessively) splendid offer not as genuine compensation for a wrong, however grudgingly admitted, but rather as a 'gift-attack' on Achilles (164). There is unquestionably merit in this view, as had earlier been recognized (cf. e.g. J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* [Chicago, 1975], 15–16, 105, and M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* [Baltimore, 1987], 235), but Donlan overstates his case, both in detail (the offer does not entail reducing Achilles to the status of a 'service-groom' [166]; Achilles' prayer to Zeus [*Il.* 19.270–5] is not a 'mocking . . . paraphrase' [169] of Agamemnon's reference to Atê, nor does Achilles 'snub' Agamemnon by addressing Zeus instead of him [169, n. 32]) and in the main thrust of his argument; he does not deal with the critical discrepancy between what he sees as the audience's necessarily unequivocal response to the offer of compensation, on the one hand ('an offer [Achilles] *must* refuse', 167), and, on the other hand, the fact that, as he concedes, in the narrator's presentation of the story, 'the council of elders is impressed' (165), and seasoned counselors such as Nestor and Odysseus, who have no blind commitment to Agamemnon and who clearly recognize the imperative of persuading Achilles to return to battle, commend the gifts, and insist on having them displayed in the midst of the army. That is to say, the gift-duel, like so much else in this poem, is presented from multiple perspectives. There is, indeed, clearly a subtext in which the gifts are the next volley in an ongoing duel but, for Homer's original audience as for us, the primary reading, if coherency in the narrative is to be maintained, must be that Agamemnon's offer is expected by him and others to be taken by Achilles (and others) as a real attempt (albeit heavy-handed and, indeed, ambiguous) at reconciliation.

[13] Cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951; Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 25, 1949); Lloyd-Jones (n. 1), 23; Edwards, *Commentary* (n. 9), 247. Taplin's account of Agamemnon's 'apology' and similar passages, while it contains much of interest, suffers, in my view, from a lack of certain category distinctions which seem to me essential to an adequate understanding of the issues involved in the assigning of responsibility for action in the Homeric epic. For instance, his characterization of the view of 'Dodds and others' as implying 'that in Homer's Greece ethical (or moral) responsibility is *as yet* separate from issues of reward and punishment, credit and blame' [n. 2, 1992], 206, emphasis added; cf. id. [n. 2, 1990], 75) would site this view on the 'primitive' end of an assumed developmental continuum. But Athenian homicide law, as fifth- and fourth-century documents show, recognized the category of *unintentional* homicide and yet provided a penalty for it (*IG* i^2.115; cf. Dem. 23.28, 23.37, 43.57; D. M. MacDowell, *Athenian Homicide Law in the Age of the Orators* [Manchester, 1963], 117–25). And the modern judicial categories of culpable versus non-culpable homicide, the former including criminal negligence and manslaughter, which are by definition unintentional but nonetheless criminal, bear witness to our enduring acknowledgement of the necessity of recognizing distinctions of the kind assumed by 'Dodds and others' (including the present author) with regard to Agamemnon's 'apology'.

What Agamemnon attempts to do with this excuse is to shift his culpability from an egregious moral fault with which no one can feel sympathy to a lesser, inescapably 'human' fault with which everyone can feel sympathy. (After all, as Austin remarks, few excuses get us out of it *completely*.)[14] Agamemnon's claim is that his action was caused not by unbridled greed but by an unfortunate susceptibility to ἄτη, which indeed he shares with Zeus himself. And in any case, who can resist the will of the gods?

In other contexts, αἴτιος functions in much the same way. For instance, in response to Poseidon's implied criticism of the Achaeans' performance in battle, Idomeneus replies that no man is to blame as far as he knows: they all know how to fight, they are not panic-stricken or fleeing in terror; it must be Zeus' doing. Xanthus declares that Achilles' horses are not to blame for his coming doom but 'a great god and strong Moira'. Telemachus observes that minstrels are not to blame for the troubles they sing of but Zeus who dispenses as he will. Odysseus pleads with the shade of Aias to forgo his wrath in the matter of the arms of Achilles; no one else is to blame, he says, in veiled reference to himself; it was Zeus, from hatred of the Danaans. Priam assures Helen that he holds the gods, not her, to blame for the war. Zeus turns the tables on this sort of plea when he laments the tendency of men to blame the gods for their troubles whereas they are themselves to blame for the worst of their ills.[15] (Interestingly, Zeus does not deny that *some* ills are simply visited upon men; his point is, rather, that their *excessive* troubles are likely to be of their own causing.[16])

On occasion, responsibility is attributed to another mortal, as when Achilles assures the hesitant heralds that he does not blame them for his dishonouring but Agamemnon, who sent them. And in a nice touch of sophistry, Antinous tells Telemachus that it is not the Suitors who are to blame for his troubles but his own mother, since she is responsible for prolonging the situation.[17]

All of these passages show the same pattern: there is a tacit admission of the undesirability of some state of affairs, with reference to which the claim is made, 'It's not my fault—or yours, or his.' These are classic instances of denial of responsibility.

What sorts of plea, then, are entered in support of such denials? In the Homeric representation of action, it is recognized that one can be *compelled* to perform an action which one would not, of one's own accord, choose to do; a clear example is Phemius' plea of *force majeure*, a plea corroborated not only by Telemachus but by the poet-narrator himself. Phemius begs not to be dispatched in the general slaughter on the grounds that he did not sing for the Suitors willingly or through his own desire but that they, being more numerous and stronger, led him there perforce (ἀνάγκῃ)—Phemius, Homer says, who sang for the Suitors ἀνάγκῃ; and Telemachus judges him to be ἀναίτιος, *not* to blame. We may compare Helen's submission to Aphrodite under threat, her fierce rebellion swiftly quelled by the goddess's anger, or the situation of the heralds sent for Briseis and Achilles' sympathetic acknowledgement of their plight.[18]

It is characteristic of action performed under coercion that the person is aware at the time he performs the action that it is not his own choice. Actions performed under

[14] Austin (n. 5), 125.

[15] Idomeneus: *Il.* 13.222–7; Xanthus: *Il.* 19.409–10; Telemachus: *Od.* 1.347–9; Odysseus: *Od.* 11.558–60; Priam: *Il.* 3.164–5; Zeus: *Od.* 1.32–4.

[16] One is reminded of Lady Bracknell's uncompromising judgement: 'To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose both looks like carelessness' (Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1.539–40).

[17] Achilles: *Il.* 1.334–6; Antinous: *Od.* 2.87–90.

[18] Phemius: *Od.* 22.351–5; Telemachus: *Od.* 22.356; Homer on Phemius: *Od.* 22.331; Helen: *Il.* 3.413–20; heralds: *Il.* 1.326–36.

various types of influence, on the other hand, appear at the time to the person acting to result from his own choice, although he would not normally or in retrospect have chosen to act in such a way; he is on that occasion misled or persuaded or simply befuddled into undertaking some action which he would not otherwise have undertaken.[19]

This type of action is described by Homer in various ways: a man's φρένες may be 'destroyed' or 'taken away', or his νόος or θυμός 'bewitched' by a god; his νόος may be 'led astray' or his φρένες 'persuaded' by another man and so on.[20] Frequently the person (or his φρένες or θυμός specifically) is said to have been seized by ἄτη, the implication being that his judgement is clouded; he is not, as we might say, in full possession of his faculties.[21]

So Patroclus, stunned by Apollo's blow, stands dazed, his limbs loosed beneath him and his φρένες seized by ἄτη, an easy target for Euphorbus' spear. Indeed it was ἄτη that led him to his fate through his disregard for Achilles' advice, and behind it all is Zeus, as Patroclus himself recognizes.[22]

A man who kills a fellow countryman does so in the grip of ἄτη. Melampus' plight at the hands of Neleus resulted from the heavy ἄτη which the goddess Erinys put upon his φρένες. Homer's oblique reference to the Judgement of Paris explains his unfortunate choice as ἄτη-induced.[23]

[19] Cf. Aristotle's discussion of voluntary and involuntary actions and passions, *Nic. Eth.* 3.1.

[20] Reference to the 'destruction' or 'removal' of φρένες and the like is, of course, hyperbole; obvious as this may appear, it is not in fact an unchallenged claim. Recent studies by Michael Clarke (*Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer* [Oxford, 1999]) and Ruth Padel (*In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* [Princeton, 1992]) provide an elaborate set of variations on the theme of the primitive alterity of Homeric mentality initiated by Snell (n. 1) and R. B. Onians (*The Origins of European Thought* [Cambridge, 1951]), a view that can be imposed on the Homeric terminological and conceptual systems for mental and emotional life only by denying to the epic poets and their contemporary audiences any use of language beyond the most literal and concrete. Thus ἐϋφρονέων, for Clarke, means not 'well-intentioned' or the like, but rather 'that the speaker's lungs are filled with the breath of thought, ἐϋφρονέων, when he projects his voice' (84); τῷ δὲ φρένας ἄφρονι πείθεν (*Il.* 4.104) is judged a 'difficult expression' (101, n. 104; cf. 83, n. 53) because an unremittingly literal reading does not allow for this sort of rhetorical paradox. In a welcome departure from this trend, Pelliccia's (n. 1) discussion shows a clear and subtle grasp of the complexities—and the possibilities—of metaphor (see esp. 27–37 and 108–10) (and a corresponding recognition of the perils of 'excessive literalmindedness', 31). A detailed study of the role of metaphor in early Greek poetry cannot be undertaken here, but for an illuminating study of a cognitive metaphor not unlike the conceptual schema for Homeric mental and emotional life, see G. Lakoff and Z. Kövecses, 'The cognitive model of anger inherent in American English', in D. Holland and N. Quinn (edd.), *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (Cambridge, 1987), 195–221; cf. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980). See also G. E. R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom* (Berkeley, 1987; Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 52, 1984), 172–214, esp. 172–3 and nn. 1–4 for recent theoretical challenges to the literal/metaphorical dichotomy; id., *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge, 1966), 192ff.; and id., *Demystifying Mentalities* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. 14–38.

[21] Pelliccia ([n. 1], 208) maintains that the θυμός, functioning 'normally', that is, even when not 'bewitched' by a god or 'seized by ἄτη', 'can be . . . used to justify and excuse the behavior of oneself or of others'. He sees this circumstance, following J. Russo and B. Simon ('Homeric psychology and the oral epic tradition', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 [1968], 483–98), as a consequence of 'Homer's habitual externalization of psychology' (206). For my objections to this general view of the Homeric model of human psychology see below, pp. 27–30. Pelliccia's view of the θυμός as an external agent rests on notions of a 'divided-self' which I do not see operating in the Homeric model; I address this issue directly in a forthcoming study.

[22] Patroclus stands dazed: *Il.* 16.805–6; Zeus: *Il.* 16.684–91; Patroclus' recognition: *Il.* 16.844–47.

[23] Murder: *Il.* 24.480–1; Melampus: *Od.* 15.232–4; Judgement of Paris: *Il.* 24.28–30.

It is significant that these reports of the effects of ἄτη are presented in the narrative proper, that is, in the voice of the poet himself, not in the speeches of his characters; they cannot therefore be dismissed as 'weak excuses' for unfortunate conduct on the part of someone with a stake in the action, desperately seeking to clear himself or his friend. Elsewhere the poet provides similar explanations for actions which appear unpropitious or in some way unaccountable. Thus the Trojans, massed on the plain, reject Polydamas' advice of retreat within the city walls in favour of Hector's bold plan to stay and fight by the ships. Fools! the poet says, in a rare instance of explicit evaluation; they approved the worse plan because Pallas Athene took away their φρένες. Another bad judgement, Glaucus' exchange of gold armour for bronze, is explained on the same grounds: Zeus took away his φρένες. Uncharacteristically poor performance in battle is explained as resulting from a 'spell' cast on the νόος or θυμός by a god: Zeus roused a dust-storm against the ships and 'bewitched' the νόος of the Achaeans. Like ravening lions, the Trojans rushed upon the ships and Zeus roused great μένος in them but he 'bewitched' the θυμός of the Argives and took away their glory. While Apollo held the aegis unmoving in his hands the battle was evenly fought; but when he looked in the face of the Danaans and shook the aegis and gave a mighty shout, he bewitched the θυμός in their breasts and they forgot their impetuous valour. Poseidon subdues Alcathous, bewitching his bright eyes and ensnaring his gleaming limbs, so that he stands bewildered, as Patroclus will do, to be struck down by his foe.[24]

The fact that the poet himself, in his narrative, provides explanations of this sort for uncharacteristic or unaccountable behaviour lends credence to similar explanations offered by his characters on behalf of themselves and others; these are evidently intended, and expected, on the part of the poet, to be viewed by the audience as (at least potentially) valid explanations for otherwise unaccountable conduct.[25] Thus when Idomeneus, in response to Poseidon's implied criticism, attributes the Achaeans' losses to Zeus, he is not inventing an alibi; the audience *knows* what Idomeneus *supposes*, that, in the world of the poem as recounted by the narrator, it is indeed Zeus' doing. We saw this situation foreshadowed at the beginning of the poem when Zeus consented to Thetis' plea that he give κράτος to the Trojans, and in Hera's bitter surmise that Zeus would destroy many men beside the ships of the Achaeans. And at the beginning of the battle, the poet made Zeus' part explicit by telling us that he roused a dust-storm against the ships and bewitched the νόος of the Achaeans but bestowed κῦδος upon Hector and the Trojans.[26]

Of course, people (and gods) are not always obliging with excuses. Helen says that Zeus placed on her and Paris an evil doom so that there might be a song for men to come. Aphrodite might have said much the same of the comic theme she and Ares provided for Demodocus but Hephaestus locates the blame unequivocally with her: she is not, he says, ἐχέθυμος and the matter ends there. We are reminded that the critical issue of the importance of point of view must not be overlooked. But the fact that a

[24] Athene: *Il.* 18.310–13; Glaucus: *Il.* 6.234–6; dust-storm: *Il.* 12.252–5; Zeus 'bewitched' Argives: *Il.* 15.592–5; Apollo 'bewitched' Danaans: *Il* 15.320–2; Alcathous: *Il.* 13.434–5.

[25] It is, however, interesting that, as Lloyd-Jones notes ([n. 1], 29), the poet of the *Odyssey*, 'unlike the poet of the *Iliad*, never in his own person blames the gods' for human misfortune. (On Homeric narrative techniques, see I. J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* [Amsterdam, 1987]; id., 'Homer and narratology', in I. Morris and B. Powell [edd.], *A New Companion to Homer* [Leiden, 1997], 305–35; S. Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator* [Nashville, 1990]; for a brief but lucid account of narratological perspectives relative to Homeric epic, see Edwards [n. 12] and id. [n. 9], 1–10, with references.)

[26] Idomeneus: *Il.* 13.225–7; Zeus–Thetis: *Il.* 1.508–30; Hera: *Il.* 1.559; dust-storm: *Il.* 12.252–5.

given claim is rejected by one or more persons does not in itself invalidate the claim; such a claim may be (potentially) valid within the set (or some subset) of values operating in the moral order of the group in question regardless of its actual acceptance or rejection by a particular individual in a particular circumstance.[27] Odysseus' plea to the shade of Aias that Zeus alone is to blame for his fate may well be his sincere view of the matter (and not an unreasonable view in the moral universe both he and Aias inhabit), but Aias rejects it in silent scorn.[28]

Moreover, the surmise that the gods have destroyed a person's φρένες or afflicted someone with ἄτη, and similar judgements, can function as an accusation rather than an excuse,[29] as when Hector at last reaches the ships, exulting in Zeus' aid and complaining that the Trojan elders had previously prevented him from pressing the attack because Zeus had impaired their φρένες. Similarly, Achilles, in his magnificent diatribe against Agamemnon, can account for Agamemnon's outrageous behaviour only by saying that Zeus took away his φρένες. Paris, again, vehemently opposes Antenor's proposal to return Helen, saying that the gods themselves have destroyed his φρένες. The same charge is repeated by Hector of Polydamas, who has counselled retreat on the strength of a portent. The value of such a claim in a given context depends upon the intention of the claimant and this in turn upon his viewpoint on the situation. When Paris says to Antenor, or Hector to Polydamas, that the gods have destroyed his φρένες, it is clearly intended as an accusation, not a sympathetic defence, and doubtless accepted as such by the recipient and anyone else who overhears it. The same force applies to Achilles' remark about Agamemnon, and to Alcimedon's query of Automedon, 'Which of the gods has put in your breast an unprofitable plan and taken away your good φρένες?'; this is a reproof and is accepted as such.[30]

[27] As Lloyd-Jones ([n. 1], 30 with n. 27), with reference to Reinhardt ('Tradition und Geist in Homerischen Epos', *Studium Generale* 4 [1951], 334–5), perceptively observes: 'All characters and actions of the *Iliad* can be regarded from more than one point of view; not even Henry James is more sensible of the complexity of moral situations than the author of this poem.'

[28] Helen: *Il.* 6.357–8; Aphrodite: *Od.* 8.320; Odysseus: *Od.* 11.558–64.

[29] Compare our contemporary hyperbolical charges of madness in instances of perceived irrationality or inexplicable behaviour (e.g. 'you're insane!'), as opposed to our judicial defence plea of 'temporary insanity', which absolves the perpetrator of (moral) responsibility for the act in question.

[30] Hector's complaint: *Il.* 15.719–25; Achilles: *Il.* 9.377; Paris: *Il.* 7.360; Hector of Polydamas: *Il.* 12.234; Alcimedon: *Il.* 17.469–70. 'Madness' terms such as μαίνομαι and λύσσα must be kept distinct from the terms examined here; failure to do so has diminished the value of D. Hershkowitz's discussion of madness in Homeric epic (*The Madness of Epic: Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius* [Oxford, 1998], 125–60). Imputation of impairment of φρένες, νόος, or θυμός, or of seizure by ἄτη, is used, as we have seen, as an accusation of, or excuse for, bad judgement; μαίνομαι, λύσσα, and related words are used in the description of frenzied action, predominantly of battle-frenzy, often in a neutral sense, but not excluding a certain (sometimes grudging) admiration (despite Hershkowitz, 145 and elsewhere); see e.g. *Il.* 2.5, the narrator of Hector's *aristeia*; 9.236–9, Odysseus of Hector, relying on the support of Zeus, made manifest to both armies in favourable omens; 5.185, Pandarus, assuming Diomedes to be championed by some god (if not indeed a god in disguise): οὐχ ὅ γ' ἄνευθε θεοῦ τάδε μαίνεται; 6.99–101, Helenus: not even the goddess-born Achilles was ever so feared as Diomedes is now; 'he rages prodigiously and no one can match him in μένος'. The difficulties in Hershkowitz's discussion of μένος are too convoluted to be unravelled here, but it should be noted that they arise from her reliance on the unconvincing views of Anne [Carson] Giacomelli ('Aphrodite and after', *Phoenix* 34 [1980], 1–19), whose denial of metaphorical usage in Archilochus' notorious reference to semen as λευκ]ὸν μένος in the Cologne Epode (196a.52 West) led her to posit this use as primary in the semantics of the word, disregarding all indications to the contrary provided by the transparent etymology and morphology of μένος, as well as its use throughout early Greek poetry.

It is only from the privileged perspective of poet and audience that any objective certainty is possible with respect to judgements such as these. Just as we *know* what Idomeneus supposes regarding the sway of battle, and therefore know that—within the world of the poem—his supposition is correct, so too we know that no god has destroyed Antenor's φρένες or Polydamas'; their advice is sound and the Trojans will suffer for disregarding it. If the charge were indeed valid, it would be available to them to use as an excuse for poor counsel; as things are, it is merely an unfounded accusation.

The point bears repeating. The evaluation of motive in the explanation of behaviour is an entirely subjective matter; thus the force of a given claim and its admissibility are wholly dependent upon the possibly differing points of view of claimant and respondents. 'You were thoughtless' may be a bitter accusation on my part but it may be your best defence against a more damning charge: 'It wasn't malice; it was just thoughtlessness.'[31] So also with 'You were afflicted with ἄτη' and 'I was afflicted with ἄτη'; there is a delicate—and often ironic—balance in these systematically ambiguous explanations. Whereas Agamemnon's appeal to ἄτη is a defence, Achilles' reference to ἄτη with regard to Agamemnon is always an accusation, up to the point at which Agamemnon publicly acknowledges his mistake; only then is Achilles willing to refer responsibility for the Quarrel from Agamemnon to Zeus.[32]

We must recognize the absence of objective certainty and the crucial importance of subjectiveness in point of view when we attempt any judgement of the claims of characters. We may, from our standpoint, reject even the point of view of the poet-narrator (for example, certain actions we would be likely to assign to psychological causes not to divine intervention) but within the context of the poem (and from the perspective of his contemporary audience) we must allow an objective certainty to the pronouncements of the poet that is not to be assumed for the subjective and necessarily suppositional judgements of his characters.[33] Nevertheless, with regard to these judgements, it may indeed be the case that a position which appears untenable to us—and perhaps to other characters in the drama—should be read as a sincere belief on the part of its claimant. When Priam assures Helen that he holds the gods, not her, αἴτιοι for the war (*Il.* 3.164–5), it is generally assumed by modern readers that his statement is to be taken as a mere courtesy. But is it as simple as that? If he does in fact consider her to blame for his misfortunes, is his obvious civility to her then feigned? Or is he so charmed by her, as the Trojan elders are, that even though he considers her to blame, in whole or in part, he still feels a genuine regard and affection for her? Or, indeed, does his statement reflect his actual view of the matter, the detached view of venerable wisdom? Helen reproaches herself, it is true, but she can still see the situation as the result of an evil doom placed on her and Paris by Zeus so that there might be a song for men to come—the same detached view that leads her to depict the war as a work of art in her weaving.[34] And are we to say that her poet does not share her view? Priam, for his honour, cannot attribute the fall of Troy to a woman's lust; he *needs* the gods. But beyond that, from the audience's perspective as well, is this not presented by the poet as the truth of the matter?

Achilles' assurances to the heralds that he does not blame them for the seizure of

[31] Cf. Austin (n. 5), 125, and 142–3 on 'standards of the unacceptable'.

[32] In the process, implicitly absolving himself, as well, of guilt for the suffering and death he has brought on his comrades: *Il.* 19.270–5.

[33] See n. 8 above.

[34] Weaving: *Il.* 3.125–8; song: *Il.* 6.357–8.

Briseis (*Il.* 1.355) can be seen as just as much a courtesy as Priam's assurance of Helen; he has already made it clear that he considers all the Achaeans to be implicated in the affair by virtue of their acquiescence (*Il.* 1.231–2, 299). The heralds, one might say, are just doing their job, but the admissibility of this sort of defence is notoriously subject to individual judgement, and both the attitude of the heralds and Achilles' recognition of the need to reassure them attest to an assumption on both sides that he might well be within his rights to hold them to account. In the event, he chooses not to single out the heralds for retribution but to take into consideration their circumstances and reserve his wrath for the one who directs them.

Penelope's objection to Phemius' choice of theme, noted above, is surely not an unreasonable one; given her circumstances, she could hardly be expected to appreciate his song of the Return of the Achaeans. But Telemachus rebukes her, pointing out that it is a minstrel's task to please his audience and that is best done with the latest song; and in any case minstrels are not to blame for the events they sing of, but Zeus who dispenses as he will (*Od.* 1.346–9).

Here indeed lies the crux of the problem: Zeus who dispenses as he will. In the Homeric world-view there is always the option of tracing responsibility ultimately back to the divine plan of Zeus. But this does not mean that human beings are thereby absolved of responsibility any more than they are in the Christian world-view, or in that of the behavioural psychologist, in which heredity and environment replace deity as determining factors in human life. The radical behaviourists have not abolished the penal system, and free will and the problem of evil are still debated within the context of Christianity. So, too, in the Homeric world-view human beings are held responsible for their actions. This responsibility is on the whole taken for granted and is tacitly assumed, time and again, in what Harrison called the 'general pattern of Homeric behaviour'.[35] But on occasion it is focused on and put at issue, the most striking instance being the famous 'Programme of Zeus' at the begining of the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 1.32–43, esp. 32–4), which reveals a degree of reflective awareness on the part of the poet of the (potentially) problematical nature of the assigning of responsibility.

Passages in which responsibility for human action is assigned to deity have sometimes been cited in support of the view that Homer's characters do not recognize themselves (nor indeed are they recognized by the poet) as the source of their own impulses and actions, a view propounded most notoriously by Snell, whose misplaced Hegelian notions of the evolutionary development of mind committed him to finding a linear development reflected in Greek literature, at the beginning of which stood a thought-world lacking those achievements of intellectual and moral concepts which were to characterize later stages of the tradition. Thus Snell saw in Homer no conception of an integrated personality, of anything resembling what we call 'soul', no recognition of the power of personal decision, no human agents acting of their own volition.[36]

Perceptive critics, beginning with Lesky and Lloyd-Jones, have long since demolished Snell's simplistic view of Greek literary development as progressing from the conceptual *naïveté* of epic to the individualistic concerns of lyric to the moral complexities of tragedy.[37] Nevertheless, Snell's view of Homer's conceptual simple-

[35] E. L. Harrison, 'Notes on Homeric psychology', *Phoenix* 14 (1960), 63–80, at 80.

[36] See references in n. 1 above.

[37] See n. 1 above. Snell's view of the development of 'self'-awareness in this progression is neatly epitomized by Gill ([n. 1], 36, n. 22): 'The point seems to be that man grasps himself as an "it" in epic (an aggregate of passive forces), a "you" in lyric (an object of self-address), and only in tragedy as an "I" (a subject of self-consciousness, will, and action).'

mindedness had so great an impact on the perception of early epic (both within and without the classical community) that the reverberations have not yet entirely died away.[38]

At the same time it is widely recognized, even if only on an intuitive level, that Homeric men and women are indeed depicted as making decisions and holding themselves and others responsible for their actions.[39] And yet divine intervention in human affairs is an inescapable fact of the Homeric world; not only do Homer's characters acknowledge the role of the gods in their lives, the poet himself depicts the gods as characters in his drama, who frequently determine, directly or indirectly, events in the world of mortals.

In an effort to reconcile these two forces at work in the poems—human responsibility and divine intervention—early critics of Snell proposed the notion of 'double motivation', by which it is held that the Homeric view of causation in human action assumed parallel forces at work in the divine and human spheres.[40] A given action is thus credited equally to the mortal and to the god, as in Diomedes' classic statement that Achilles will fight again when his θυμός bids him and a god rouses him (*Il.* 9.702–3).

One may readily find other instances in the Homeric text in which this sort of 'double credit' is expressed. Nestor, for instance, recounts how, following the victory of the Pyleans over the Epeians, 'all praised Zeus among the gods and Nestor among men'. Trusting in Zeus' portents and in their own might, the Trojans seek to break the Achaean wall. Patroclus denies Hector the glory of his slaying: 'It was baneful Moira and Leto's son that slew me, and of men Euphorbus.' Phemius declares that he is self-taught and that a god implanted in his φρένες all sorts of song. Nestor pleads with Patroclus to entreat Achilles: 'Who knows but that σὺν δαίμονι you might rouse his θυμός with your persuading?'[41]

But 'double motivation', however frequently expressed, is not the only scheme that

[38] See especially the remarkable claims of Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston, 1976), esp. 67–83, in which Jaynes characterizes the Homeric heroes as non-conscious beings subject to the control of hallucinatory voices to which they give the name of god; and Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London, 1975, rev. edn 1988), esp. 176–95 and 209–12, where the Homeric hero is described as a piecemeal puppet worked by the gods, an inhabitant of a world which is on every level nothing more than a mere paratactic aggregate. A reductive model is also espoused by Russo and Simon (the latter a behavioural psychologist) in their study of 'Homeric psychology and the oral epic tradition' (n. 21), a spinoff from an earlier paper by B. Simon and H. Weiner, entitled 'Models of mind and mental illness in Ancient Greece: I. The Homeric model of mind', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 2 (1966), 303–14, an effort that lacks the dazzle of Feyerabend's construction but shares its irrelevance to Homer.

[39] And, indeed, their character. In a brilliantly astute characterization, the poet provides Agamemnon with the patently unfair but amusingly true-to-life jibe directed at Achilles: 'What's good about you (your god-given strength), you can't take credit for, but what's bad about you (your quarrelsomeness) is all your own fault!'

[40] Dodds (n. 13); cf. Lesky, Lloyd-Jones (n. 1). It should be noted, however, that there are subtle but important differences between Dodds's 'overdetermination' and Lesky's 'double aspect', and that Dodds, while objecting to Snell's radically reductive views on the locus of action in Homeric depictions, nevertheless essentially shares Snell's views on the incoherence of the Homeric 'self' (see below; cf. the similarly contradictory views of H. Fränkel, 'Eine Stileigen heit der frühgriechischen Literatur', *Gött. Nachr.* [1924], 63–127 = *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* [Munich, 1968³], 40–96; *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums* [Munich, 1950, 1968³] = *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, trans. M. Hadas and J. Willis [Oxford, 1975]).

[41] Nestor–Pyleans: *Il.* 11.761; Trojans: *Il.* 12.256–7; Patroclus: *Il.* 16.849–50; Phemius: *Od.* 22.347–8; Nestor–Patroclus: *Il.* 11.792.

is conceptually available to Homer; indeed the assigning of equal credit to deity for human endeavour seems to be to some extent a function of piety. Thus the commendably pious Eumaeus declares his motives for succouring the Stranger to be twofold: fear of Zeus the stranger's god and his own pity for the man, while the pitiless and irreverent Cyclops scorns Odysseus' appeal to Zeus Xenios; he will not be swayed by fear of Zeus' wrath but will follow the dictates of his own θυμός.[42]

This flagrant contempt for the gods is, significantly, voiced by a non-mortal, dehumanized being. But the recognition of the power of men to act against the will of the gods (whether in ignorance or knowledge) is evident in the existence of the phrase ἀέκητι θεῶν, used by the poet himself of the Achaeans' building of the wall and by Hector in hopeful surmise about the coming of the ships, and elsewhere; and Zeus' remarks about Aigisthus provide further testimony for the view that mortal will can be set against the will of the gods.[43]

Elsewhere we find other evidence (unemphasized and therefore indicative of the pervasiveness of the view) of a dichotomous view of human and divine motivation. When Athene as Mentor encourages the nervous Telemachus to approach Nestor: 'You will yourself, on the one hand, take thought in your φρένες, and, on the other, a δαίμων will prompt you', this may be seen as a classic instance of 'double motivation', but a similarly worded piece of advice addressed to Achilles by Phoenix relies on a clear distinction between human and divine motivation: 'Do not think these things in your φρένες, nor may a δαίμων turn you in that direction.' Medon speculates about the two possible sources of motivation for Telemachus' journey: 'I do not know whether some god impelled him or whether his own θυμός was moved to go to Pylos.' Odysseus says that Calypso sent him on his way in the eighth year 'either because of a message from Zeus or because her own νόος was turned'.[44]

While the notion of double motivation is clearly a subtle and important recognition of a view of human action frequently expressed in Homer, and most certainly a great improvement on a position that simplistically assigns all responsibility for human action to deity, the fact remains that the Homeric account of human action is more complicated still. In the Homeric poems gods are considered to be entirely responsible for some human actions, both in the narrative and in characters' accounts of themselves and others. On occasion joint responsibility, human and divine, is referred to, by the poet as well as by his characters. But mortals are entirely responsible for most human action, both in the poet's depiction of events and in his characters' assumptions. Indeed, the very passages in which men and women offer excuses for their behaviour guarantee the general notion of human responsibility to be found in the Homeric poems, *for only self-consciously responsible agents can make an issue of their responsibility.* If Homeric mortals attempt on occasion to evade responsibility for particular actions by assigning them to the gods, this proves not only that they have a notion of responsibility but also that in the ordinary course of things they assume responsibility for their own actions. Elsewhere this conception of moral responsibility is seen in depictions of the decision-making process[45] and in value judgements made by

[42] Eumaeus: *Od.* 14.387–9; Cyclops: *Od.* 9.277–8.

[43] Wall: *Il.* 12.8; Hector: *Il.* 15.720; Zeus: *Od.* 1.32–43. (The fate of Aias, son of Oïleus, however, proves the dangers of a false claim: *Od.* 4.499–511.).

[44] Athene–Mentor: *Od.* 3.26–7; Phoenix: *Il.* 9.600–1; Medon: *Od.* 4.712–13; Odysseus: *Od.* 7.263. That is, conjunction indicates 'double' motivation, disjunction (*pace* Lesky) indicates (or, at the very least, allows for) dichotomous motivation.

[45] As when, for example, Menelaus and Odysseus fret about the blame that will attach to them if they make the wrong decision: *Il.* 11.404–10; 17.91–105.

the characters of one another, as by the poet-narrator as well, in his use of morally charged epithets and in his dramatic depiction of character. Indeed the very existence of epic attests to a notion of moral responsibility in so far as the traditions of praise- and blame-poetry presuppose a conception of human beings as praiseworthy and blameworthy—and therefore responsible—agents of action.

The inescapable question is: 'How could it ever have seemed otherwise?' And the answer, surely, is: 'Because of the gods.' In the Homeric world gods loom so large in the life of mortals that they can seem to eclipse that life altogether. How are we to account for this situation? Perhaps Homeric excuses can tell us something about Homeric gods.

II. MODELLING EXTRAORDINARY BEHAVIOUR

As we have seen, excuses are efforts to explain behaviour in cases where there has been some abnormality or failure. *Homeric* excuses, more often than not, take the form of blaming the gods for the regrettable action. But if Homeric characters blame the gods for their failures, they also credit them with their more notable successes.

Perhaps, then, the notion of 'excusing' behaviour should be extended to include its positive counterpart—the explanation of abnormally or unaccountably successful or advantageous conduct—and a more comprehensive category established, which we might call 'the explanation of *extraordinary* behaviour'.[46] For it is clear that what is felt to require explanation, on the Homeric model as on our own, is not ordinary, rational action but extraordinary or arational behaviour (whether irrational or preconscious[47]). The non-theorist, now as then, is content with tacit assumptions about the provenance of action that is perceived as rational; it is behaviour that is perceived as arational which is felt to require explanation as being somehow foreign to our 'selves' and so is assigned by various models to various external agencies, whether the quasi-external Freudian 'id', the religious fundamentalist's God and Devil, responsible, respectively, for (perceived) positive and negative arational impulses, or the appeal of the common run of humanity to the behaviour-altering substances of alcohol and drugs (or—when all else fails—simply the last-resort, vague assertion that one is somehow 'not oneself'). What is common to all these cases is that the arational is given an explanation and is thereby rationalized. This is the purpose served by the Homeric gods. On the Homeric model, (perceived) arational behaviour on the part of mortals is explained in terms of the behaviour of a specific deity or an unnamed *daimon*, and, moreover, that behaviour is uncritically assumed to be itself rational.

In *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Dodds pointed out that it was Nilsson who first made a serious effort to explain the Homeric divine machinery in psychological terms, but Dodds rejected on excellent grounds Nilsson's view that it all stemmed from an exceptional mental instability on the part of the Homeric heroes, observing with justice that, while Homeric men may be more emotionally *expressive* than men of other cultures, they are not more emotionally unstable.[48]

Dodds himself offered as an explanation for the Homeric belief in divine intervention two features that he considered peculiar to the culture: first, following Snell,

[46] As opposed to the theorist's (philosopher's or psychologist's) concern with behaviour generally; cf. e.g. Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (New York, 1964).

[47] 'Preconscious' referring to mental events of the 'sudden insight' type, showing as they do a 'rational', as opposed to 'irrational' structure; cf. Williams (n. 2), 32.

[48] Dodds (n. 13), 13–15.

Dodds maintains that 'Homeric man' lacks a unified concept of *self* ('soul' or 'personality'), a situation which he sees as entailing the objectifying of emotional drives, treating them as not-self;[49] and, secondly, he points to the 'habit' of explaining character or behaviour in terms of knowledge, which also results, in his view, in a tendency to exclude from the self and ascribe to an alien origin unsystematized, arational impulses and the acts resulting from them.[50]

With regard to Dodds's first point, it is true that the Homeric concept of the self may well appear to be lacking in coherence when compared with highly coherent theoretical models, but when compared, as it must be, with other non-theoretical (implicit or underlying) models, it proves no less coherent than our own.[51] And even if comparison with theoretical models were justified, insuperable problems would remain for the Snell–Dodds view, since it is by no means clear what would legitimately constitute a concept of the self. The contemporary philosophical debate on the issues of personal identity and action theory is fundamentally concerned with the question of whether or to what extent we are in fact justified in postulating a 'self' as the agent of action, with some theorists denying the existence—or the coherence of the concept—of a 'self' as a separate agent over and above action viewed as pure activity, with any number of intermediate positions along the range of the spectrum.[52]

It is evident that Snell and his followers subscribe implicitly to a self-as-agent theory of action; although the debate on 'Homeric psychology' has not generally been conducted in the language of the philosophy of mind,[53] what Snell and others remark as

[49] Ibid., 15–16; cf. Fränkel (n. 40, 1975), 80. While they explicitly share Snell's view of the Homeric psyche as a fragmented target for external influences, both Dodds ([n. 13], 20, n. 31) and Fränkel (79) nevertheless see in the Homeric representation of mental life some awareness of an 'ego' which can initiate action and to which the various 'organs' are subservient. A key text here is *Il.* 4.43: Zeus explicitly states that he chooses to act against the promptings of his θυμός (ἐγὼ σοὶ δῶκα ἑκὼν ἀέκοντί γε θυμῷ. (As Williams [n. 2, 31] observes, the point at issue is whether the Homeric poems reveal certain *concepts,* irrespective of their application to mortals on the one hand or deities on the other.) It has sometimes been claimed on the basis of *Il.* 1.3–4, where αὐτός refers to the physical body in contrast to the ψυχή, that the body, as opposed to the 'soul' or 'spirit', is identified with the 'self' in Homer (e.g. G. Nagy, 'Patroklos, concepts of afterlife, and the Indic triple fire', *Arethusa* 13 [1980], 161–95, at 162; R. Renehan, 'On the Greek origins of the concepts of incorporeality and immateriality', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21 [1980], 105–38, at 106). But αὐτός in this passage serves merely to designate the unmarked (dominant) member of a contrasted pair, the two members of which together form a larger unit with the 'αὐτός'-member subsuming the marked component: the heroes' ψυχαί were sent to Hades, but they 'themselves' (i.e. what in each case was left on the battlefield after the departure of the ψυχή) were made prey for dogs; cf. *Od.* 11.602: Heracles' εἴδωλον contrasted with 'himself'; *Il.* 6.243: the colonnades of Priam's palace contrasted with 'itself'.

[50] Dodds (n. 13), 16–18.

[51] Indeed, Padel (n. 20) sees a greater incoherence in our contemporary references to mental and emotional life than in those of fifth-century Athenians (and earlier Greek thought), since what for us is metaphor, she maintains, was for them *explanation*: 'We tolerate extraordinary dissociations between what we think is inside us [based on medical investigation and philosophical theorizing] and what we imply is inside us when we speak of our feelings [in metaphorical terms, borrowing language filtered through many centuries of cultural mediation]. We, not they, are the cultural oddity.' (I cite this observation as an interesting and illuminating perspective diametrically opposed to the 'progressivist' position; the distinction made here, however, assigns too simple a role to metaphor in human language and thought [see n. 20 above]. Perhaps in any case it is better to use Williams's [n. 2, 7] distinction between 'what we think' and 'what we think we think'.)

[52] For a recent discussion with bibliography, see Gill (n. 1).

[53] Although a recent trend in this direction has been established by Gaskin (n. 3), Williams (n. 2), and Gill (n. 1). Cf. P. E. Easterling's discussion of 'Constructing character in Greek

noteworthy and unique in the Homeric representation of action is precisely the absence of such an underlying theory of agency. But recent commentators question their presuppositions. Gaskin, for example, maintains that Snell's view

> read[s] too much into the modern concept of selfhood. . . . Talk of the self is no more than talk about the coherence of the mental activities of a single person. . . . There is accordingly no more to a self than that which is referred to using a personal pronoun or proper name . . .[54]

Gaskin cites Sharples as having 'correctly point[ed] out that the occurrence of the first-person pronoun is itself enough to equip Homer with a concept of selfhood',[55] a point that had been made earlier by Lloyd-Jones, quoting Devereux.[56]

Indeed, much recent work in the philosophy of mind, as recently discussed at length by Gill,[57] rejects the 'I'-centered, 'subjective', and 'individualist' Cartesian and Kantian models of mental and ethical activity which were uncritically presupposed by Snell and his followers. Thus Gill points out that 'those concepts whose absence [Snell and Adkins] note in Homer are precisely those whose validity is widely questioned by many contemporary theorists'.[58] Citing the work of Wilkes and the position advanced by Smith and Jones,[59] Gill notes that 'these contemporary writers are critical of the idea that the first-personal viewpoint has the kind of privileged and authoritative status claimed for it in the post-Cartesian theory of mind and of personal identity'.[60] Following their lead, Gill suggests that the Greek 'mode of interpretation [of "thought as an internal dialogue"] conveys the idea of the mind as a complex of functions (engaged in "dialogue", or communication, with each other) rather than as a unitary and self-conscious "I" '. Gill sees a 'kind of coherence' in 'the interplay of parts' and dubs this conception of the self 'objective-participant': 'The psychological model that seems to be presupposed, in Greek as in some modern thought, is that of someone who

tragedy', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1990), 83–99: noting (84) Simon Goldhill's reminder that 'literary characters cannot be treated simply as individual, real, psychologically endowed people' ('Goldhill on Molehills', *LCM* 11/10 [1986], 163), Easterling well remarks the more fundamental difficulties encountered by philosophers and psychologists in defining what 'real people' are; cf. further Goldhill, 'Character and action, representation and reading: Greek tragedy and its critics', in the same volume, 100–27.

[54] Gaskin (n. 3), 2. [55] Gaskin (n. 3), 7; Sharples (n. 3).

[56] Lloyd-Jones (n. 1), 9, n. 42 (188). But in fact neither a proper name nor a personal pronoun is required to satisfy the criterion in question; this role is filled minimally but sufficiently by personal reference in the Greek (and Indo-European) finite verb: the indication by first-person verbal categories of the locus not only of 'personalness' (along with the second person) but also—uniquely—of subjectivity was already pointed out by E. Benveniste in his 1946 study, 'Structure des relations de personne dans le verbe', *Bulletin de la société linguistique* 43 (1946), 1–12; cf. id., 'La nature des pronoms', in *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of the Sixtieth Birthday*, compiled by M. Halle et al. (The Hague, 1956), 34–37; id., 'De la subjectivité dans le langage', *Journal de psychologie* 51 (1958), 257–65. Indeed, Snell would have done well to reflect on the implications of the existence, not just in Greek but in Proto-Indo-European, of the middle voice in the verb; cf. E. Benveniste 'Actif et moyen dans le verbe', *Journal de psychologie* 43 (1950), 121–9; H. Rix, 'The PIE Middle: content, forms and origin', *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 49 (1988), 101–20 (although the weight attached to the concept of 'selfhood' indicated by pronominal reference [and, *a fortiori*, personal reference conveyed by the verbal morphology] varies widely from one theorist to another [as briefly indicated in the following text], the extreme position holding that our notion of a 'self' based on pronominal reference is at best a grammatical fiction, at worst a grammatical mistake).

[57] Gill (n. 1). [58] Ibid., 41.

[59] K. V. Wilkes, *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments* (Oxford, 1988); P. Smith and O. R. Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1986).

[60] Gill (n. 1), 42.

acts on the basis of reasons, and of reasoning, rather than of a self-conscious 'I' who is a source of (conscious) volitions.'[61]

Williams, too, favours a reason-based model rather than a self-conscious Cartesian 'I' and sees precisely this model operating in Homeric epic:

> The interventions of the gods, then, operate within a system that ascribes action to human beings; and deliberation, as a result of which they act; and, therefore, reasons on which they act. In ascribing reasons to people, it also ascribes to them desires, beliefs, and purposes. If we are looking for a theory of action in Homer, this system is itself the best candidate for that theory. . . . And if it is a theory of action at all, then it is the same as ours.[62]

Indeed, in Williams's view, 'what the critics find lacking [in Homer] are not so much the benefits of moral maturity as the accretions of misleading philosophy'.[63]

We cannot, then, attribute the role assigned to the Homeric gods in human life to an alleged (and allegedly unique, at least in comparison with modern Western cultures) lack of an appropriate concept of 'self'. Either we must agree with contemporary theorists that the Homeric model lacks only what the right kind of model ought not to include in any case, or, at the very least, we must admit that the Homeric concept of the 'self' is not uniquely incoherent and cannot therefore serve as the cause of a unique relation to deity. Thus Dodds's first point will not stand.

Dodds's second point was effectively addressed by O'Brien, whose study of *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* offers a compelling argument that 'the supposed intellectualist bias of the Greek mind . . . does not exit'.[64] O'Brien argues convincingly against the view held by Dodds and others that the Socratic paradoxes represent a traditional Greek tendency to explain action by reference to cognitive conditions alone, demonstrating, through an examination of the pre-Platonic use of some Greek terms expressing intellectual activity, the fusion of concepts covering both cognitive and affective conditions in pre-Platonic Greek thought.[65] And no doubt even after Plato the unregenerate man-in-the-street went on happily fusing his cognitive and affective concepts, just as we do today. Objecting that the theory espoused by Dodds and others 'applies to nonphilosophical Greek, and in particular to early poetic Greek,

[61] Ibid., 59. That Gill's extensively elaborated theoretical model, built on the most up-to-date anti-Cartesian and anti-Kantian framework, should provide the clean match he claims for it with the Homeric depiction of mental and ethical life appears intuitively unlikely for what was merely a pre-theoretical folk model underlying a literary representation, and so it proves on closer examination. While his discussion is deeply illuminating and extremely valuable in many respects, it nevertheless ultimately offers another Procrustean bed for Homer, whose dramatic account of human action in fact does not, and ought not to be expected to (and indeed was offered in sublime disregard for whether it would), meet the standards of conceptual rigour espoused by late-twentieth-century anti-Cartesians. Regardless of whether or not it is theoretically justified, a version of the conception of a 'self-conscious 'I'' clearly underlies the Homeric model of human action. Where Snell indiscriminately chopped, one fears that Gill does a bit of stretching.

[62] Williams (n. 2), 33.

[63] Ibid. On the issues of personal identity and action theory, see references in Williams; C. Gill (ed.), *The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990); and Gill (n. 1). On the Homeric concept of the 'self', see further the references in n. 3 above. For a cross-cultural perspective on concepts of the 'self', see *Indigenous Psychologies: The Anthropology of the Self*, ed. P. Heelas and A. Lock (London, 1981). For Near Eastern parallels of some Greek terms for mental and emotional states, see M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997), 231–5.

[64] M. J. O'Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 53 (O'Brien is also illuminating on the question of the 'self'); cf. Williams (n. 2), 28.

[65] O'Brien (n. 64), 22–55.

rigid definitions and categories which are appropriate only to later Greek, or only to prose, or only to philosophical prose', O'Brien very properly insists that if Homeric usage is to be contrasted with English usage in order to gauge the 'latent intellectualism' in each, it must be contrasted with 'the plain man's English', in which many words referring to notions of intellect also refer to the will and the emotions just as do their Greek counterparts. So Dodds's second point will not stand as an explanation either.

But if not Dodds's reasons (or Nilsson's), what reasons can we suggest for the Homeric belief in divine intervention? We must begin by recognizing that this is not one question but two. The first is: 'Why, in the Homeric depiction of behaviour, are arational impulses attributed to an external source at all?' And the second is: 'Why is that source the gods?' It is actually the first question for which Dodds and Nilsson offered answers, apparently taking the externalizing of the arational to be a peculiarity of Homeric behaviour. But it would seem, rather, that *Homeric* people do this because *people* do this; it is an observable fact that there is a natural human tendency to exclude from our 'selves' behaviour that is felt to be unaccountable given our conception of our selves; hence the phenomenon of excusing our exceptional behaviour. Indeed, the distancing from the self of irrational behaviour is entailed by the logic of the concept of an excuse.

The question that is peculiarly pertinent to the *Homeric* model is: 'Why is the assumed external source of arational impulses consistently identified with the gods?' And for an answer to this question we must look to the intentional model of causation implicit in the Homeric poems. It is widely recognized that, as Dodds observed, 'for Homer, as for early thought in general, there is no such thing as accident'.[66] In Austin's formulation of this type of model, 'every event is an action done by somebody—if not by a man, then by a quasi-man, a spirit'.[67] In the Homeric world-view, then, every event, whether the breaking of a bowstring or the unaccountable conduct of a human being, has a cause rooted in anthropocentric volition. On such a model if an event is *not* caused by a human being, then it is caused by a higher order of anthropomorphic being, a god. And gods always have their reasons even if they are inscrutable to mortal minds. We are left with the question, Which came first, the gods or this use of them?[68]

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[66] Dodds (n. 13), 6. [67] Austin (n. 5), 150.

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