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SOMMARIO

RE-THINKING HOMERIC PSYCHOLOGY: SNELL, DODDS AND THEIR CRITICS*

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ABSTRACT

Homeric Psychology has been much discussed since Snell and Dodds published their influential interpretations. Their views, and those of their critics, need some correction. We need greater awareness of the fictional nature of Homer's creation, of the relation of language to thought as revealed in recent research in linguistics, and of the differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the portrayal of thinking and decision-making. I have addressed all these aspects of the topic and offer a new assessment of the problems involved.

1.

MORE than three decades ago, Bennett Simon[1] and I wrote 'Homeric Psychology and the Oral Epic Tradition', an Italian version of which appeared in this journal.[2] Our purpose was to examine certain aspects of Homer's model of mind; that is, the way he depicts his characters' thinking at critical moments and the "psychic intervention" that often seems to interfere with their capacity for autonomous action. Much influenced by the seminal studies of Bruno Snell and E. R. Dodds, we attempted to explain the phenomena emphasized by these two scholars by arguing that they were ideally suited to the live performance of traditional oral epic and in some way owed their origin, and continued use, to such conditions of performance.

Since the appearance of that essay, what we may call the Snell-Dodds view of Homeric psychology has been frequently criticized. While Simon and I did not accept all that Snell and Dodds said, we found much of it illuminating. The area where we most disagreed – rejecting the idea, more

[1] Bennet Simon is a practicing psychoanalyst with a classical training, whose subsequent publications include *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece*, Ithaca N.Y. 1978, and *Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies from Aeschylus to Beckett*, New Haven 1988.

[2] 'Homeric Psychology and the Oral Epic Tradition', *Journ. Hist. Ideas* 29, 1968, pp. 43-58, reprinted as 'Psicologia omerica e la tradizione epica orale', *Quad. Urb.* 12, 1971, pp. 40-61, and again in J. Wright (ed.), *Essays on the Iliad*, Bloomington 1978.

strongly espoused by Snell than by Dodds, that the absence of a word nec-
essarily means the absence of the concept – is one where subsequent critics
have made their strongest counter-argument. Moreover, neither we nor
most readers of Homer agree with Snell that Homeric characters are inca-
pable of making genuine decisions; and many today do not share Dodds's
estimate of the large distance between Homeric and later Greek culture.
None the less, I believe that the critics of Snell and Dodds sometimes over-
state their case, and, more important, failing to understand the full com-
plexity of the problems involved they leave crucial aspects unexplored.

   Bruno Snell's contention that Homeric man lacks a unified self was fun-
damentally misguided; but the phenomena of language to which he called
attention are unusual and need further explanation. The explanation that I
and my co-author proposed can now be combined with important new lin-
guistic research on the relation of language to thought and its effect upon
world-view. The purpose of present essay, therefore, is to revisit this com-
plex topic and extend the discussion with new suggestions for understand-
ing Homer's portrayal of mental activity.

                                    2.

Snell and Dodds expounded their influential ideas in books that are still re-
quired reading for anyone interested in Homer's portrayal of the human
mind and human behavior.[1] Writing in the mid-twentieth century and
drawing on earlier scholars' work, they considered it significant that Homer
had an extensive vocabulary for individual components of the self or psy-
che, and for specific parts of the human body, but never employed the more
encompassing, abstract terms "self" or "body". They also emphasized how
often Homeric characters' decisions were influenced by external forces, typ-
ically gods or divinely sent portents. There seemed an obvious connection
between a weakly integrated self and a tendency for this self to be subject
to external manipulation. Hermann Fränkel, writing in the same intellectu-
al tradition, sums this up succinctly saying "das Ich ist nich abgekapselt, son-
dern ein offenes Kraftfeld".[2] This presentation of the person as not as fully
integrated, in either his psychic or physical self, as he would be in later Greek
and Western thought, was part of an "evolutionary" or "progressivist" vi-
sion. Snell, Fränkel, and others represented a tradition in scholarship that

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   [1] B. Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*, Hamburg 1955³, ch. 1 'Die Auffassung des Menschen
bei Homer' (in English, *The Discovery of the Mind*, tr. by T. Rosenmeyer, New York 1960); and
see further 'Das Bewusstsein von eigenen Entscheidungen im frühen Griechentum', in
Gesammelte Schriften, Göttingen 1966, pp. 18-31. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational,*
Berkeley-Los Angeles 1963, ch. 1 'Agamemnon's Apology'.
   [2] *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*, München 1962², p. 89.

believed the development of consciousness in Western Man could be documented in comparing the relatively primitive conception offered by Homer to increasingly complex subsequent models.

Clearly this approach exaggerates Homer's primitivism and the evolution of the concept of selfhood. Subsequent scholars have sought to refute Snell's and Dodds's arguments by noting the obvious fact that Homer's heroes do at times make autonomous choices without divine interference; and by affirming that the absence of a word for "self", "body", or "free will" need not imply an incapacity to understand these important concepts.[1] While these critics are correct to complain that Snell's evolutionary approach over-simplifies the relation of language to thought, they have never offered an explanation for the striking predominance of particularized vocabulary for mind and body to which Snell called attention. As for Dodds, his demonstration that both Homer as narrator and the characters in his story often attribute decisions to strong prompting from either a divinity or a part of the psychic apparatus separate from the deciding conscious self, highlights a characteristic aspect of Homer's world whose importance must not be lost sight of in the more recent tendency to re-affirm his heroes' capacity for free choice.

My proposed re-evaluation begins by calling attention to several important issues not adequately addressed by the critics. One of them is the difference between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the way decision-making is conceived as either autonomous or divinely or externally directed. Because of significant differences between the two poems, framing the issue simply in terms of "Homeric" decision-making is inadequate to the task at hand: we must specify in which Homeric poem we are making such judgments. We shall return below to a detailed examination of this difference.

Another distinction inadequately addressed is that between formal scenes of decision-making framed in formulaic language, where the character is shown to "ponder" (the verb is μερμηρίζειν, which suggests anxious or troubled deliberation) possible action and then make a choice to act, and decisions to act that grow out of the movement of the plot without the poet drawing attention to any specific moment of decision, i.e., without isolating the decision as a highlighted narrative moment. A prime example of the latter is Achilles' decision, made in gradual steps, not to leave but to remain at Troy and finally to return to battle. The scenes where decision is high-

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[1] It should be noted that Dodds differs from Snell on this point. He finds the idea that Homeric man lacks consciousness of autonomous choice "misleadingly expressed", and makes clear that the absence of a concept of "free will" does not prevent a Homeric character from distinguishing "between actions originated by the ego and those which he attributes to divine intervention" (Dodds, *op. cit*. p. 20 n. 31).

lighted as a specific moment of choice were identified long ago as formal elements of Homer's narrative technique; indeed the 1934 monograph on this subject by Christian Voigt offered Snell important material for his analysis, as well as support for his claim that Homeric heroes do not make "real" decisions in the modern sense.[1] There are notable differences between formally structured scenes of decision and those not formally presented as such, and these must be appreciated for an adequate assessment of the autonomy of choice in Homer.

A third and vital distinction, ignored by Snell and Dodds as well as by their critics, is that between fiction and historical reality. When arguing about whether "Homeric man" has less developed consciousness than modern man, both the progressivists and their critics seem to treat the mental life of fictional characters as evidence for or against the claim that the archaic Greek mind was less developed than that of later historical periods. But we must remind ourselves that Homer is not depicting real people at some early stage of human consciousness,[2] but giving us artistic constructs of figures for narrative presentation. It is not real people that are divided into mind, heart, spirit, etc., all having power to represent the acting self, or real people subject to divine influence in their decision-making, but vividly created *personae* acting in an epic recitation before an audience. The only critic who seems to have recognized the importance of this distinction is Darcus S. Sullivan, who warns us: "Such expressions [ˈHomeric psychology' and 'Homeric man'] involve conclusions drawn specifically from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* … They should not be extended to include assumptions about the Greeks in general … We can speak only of what applies to the persons involved in these particular pieces of literature".[3]

Sullivan goes on to note that Homer's formulaic tradition required him to use an archaic language with "distinctive features". These features, I would argue, include not only the specialized vocabulary for describing mental activity, which is the focus of Sullivan's book, but also the manner in which internal pondering and decisions are represented – a manner that externalizes what is internal and gives the appearance of a self easily influenced by outside forces. This is the central point of the essay I co-authored

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[1] C. Voigt, *Ueberlegung und Entscheidung: Studien zur Selbstauffassung bei Homer,* Berlin 1934 (repr. 1972). Formally structured pondering scenes were also collected and analyzed by W. Arend, *Die Typischen Szenen bei Homer*, Berlin 1933, pp. 106-115.

[2] An extreme adherent of this view is J. Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bi-Cameral Mind*, Boston 1976 (repr. with additions 1980). Jaynes's claim, that the brain was "bi-cameral" until about 700 B.C. and functioned differently from the modern brain, aroused much controversy and has left many scientists and scholars unconvinced.

[3] D. S. Sullivan, *Psychological Activity in Homer: a Study of* Phren, Ottawa 1988, p. 1.

with Bennett Simon, an idea that tends to be overlooked in the critiques of Snell and Dodds. Let me re-state our argument and expand it, since our view of Homer's distinctive mode of depicting mental activity offers an alternative to Snell's and is complementary to Dodds's.

<div align="center">3.</div>

Literary characters, as constructions set up for public viewing, perform as simplified versions of real people. When Homer describes hesitation, divided desire, and eventual choice, the process is rendered more vivid and unforgettable if depicted in concrete and dramatic terms, with larger and bolder brushstrokes, than happens in the more complex processes of real life. In 'Homeric Psychology and the Oral Epic Tradition' we made use of the then recent studies of Albert Lord, following in Milman Parry's footsteps, of the actual conditions of epic performance of traditional heroic narrative before live audiences. Our claim was that the dynamics of performer-audience rapport and emotional interchange were a significant factor in shaping the model of the human mind and its decision-making apparatus that Homer and his bardic predecessors developed over centuries of performance. The depiction of the thinking mind as more open to external influence, and to dialogue with subordinate components of the conscious self, than is the case in real life situations, can be explained as a set of preferences developed within the oral performing tradition for *externalizing what is internal and making hidden processes visible, lively, and entertaining* – all in the service of seizing the attention of an audience and bringing it, as it were, *inside* the narrative rather than remaining distanced spectators of the unfolding story.

To illustrate our theory we developed a set of homologies between the structure and function of the actual performance situation and the structure and function of the mind imagined by the poetic tradition. I offer them again, in revised form, as follows.

PERFORMANCE SITUATION	MODEL OF MIND
Poem is created in a continuous interchange between poet, audience, and tradition.	Mental activity takes the form of dialogue between parts of the "self".
Bard receives the poem from outside source, inspired by a god or Muse.	Mental activity often initiated from "outside" the center of consciousness.
No distinction between the "gift of song" and the song itself: composition and performance are one.	Weak differentiation between the organs of mental activity, the activity itself, and the products of the activity.

PERFORMANCE SITUATION	MODEL OF MIND
Poem emphasizes traditional, common material, restricts the idiosyncratic.	Mental activity is rendered common, visible, easily intelligible, not idiosyncratic.
The poem is not a unique, reproducible entity but is fluid, exists in a "field of forces".	The individual or self exists in a "field of forces" and a series of interchanges with others.

If this schema has some validity, it gives a distinct value to the emphasis Snell and Dodds placed upon the concreteness and externalization – as well as the occasional "irrationality" – of mental processes depicted by Homer. It is worth noting that our argument takes a synchronic rather than diachronic approach, and does not pursue the unanswerable question whether Homer's portrayal of mental life represents a survival from a historically "primitive" stage of conceptualization about consciousness. We limit ourselves to describing a synchronic system in which unusual details of language are perfectly suited to the context and emotional dynamics of audience reception. This theory of "ideal fit" between language and culture will be expanded from another perspective, later in this essay, by bringing what linguists would call revised Whorfian theory into our discussion.[1]

<center>4.</center>

Before proceeding to that point, however, we can clarify the discussion by separating Snell from Dodds.

Bruno Snell, as already noted, has been justly faulted for resorting to a developmental-evolutionary framework to explain some very curious habits of Homeric language. His first important critic was Albin Lesky. In his *Göttliche und Menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos*,[2] published not long after Snell's book, Lesky emphasizes that the lack of a word for "self" does not mean the concept of personal identity doesn't exist. On the contrary, he notes, the personal name "Achilles" or "Agamemnon" is sufficient to denote a self. This Homeric self can act autonomously, for there are numerous instances where characters make choices without divine interference. Lesky

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[1] Named for Benjamin Lee Whorf, a linguist who studied Native American languages and, emphasizing their enormous difference from English in vocabulary and grammar, drew the conclusion that people who must describe reality so differently must also perceive it differently. The linguist Edward Sapir had earlier made similar observations, so this claim is sometimes called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.   [2] Heidelberg 1961.

also notes cases where an action is said to come from both a divine and a human impulse and the two cannot really be separated.[1] When human actions are doubly determined, the divine influence, Lesky says, is not so much the cause of the human decision as a reflection or reduplication of it on a higher level. (This comes close to seeing the gods as symbolic, externalized versions of human desires, a position Lesky stops short of espousing).[2] Lesky's critique was followed by other scholars writing in German;[3] but I will focus here on the two best developed arguments in English, Richard Gaskin's essay 'Do Homeric Characters Make Real Decisions?'[4] and Bernard Williams's book *Shame and Necessity*.[5]

Gaskin, justly critical of Snell's "lexical" argument, shows persuasively how a culture may possess an abstract concept without having a lexical term with which to label it. He also sees no restriction on autonomy for Homer's characters, citing, among other examples, Achilles gradual decision to stay at Troy and eventually return to fight with his fellow Greeks. This argument was previously made by W. Schadewaldt, and Gaskin cites it approvingly.[6] It is apparent that Achilles feels he is in charge of his own decisions, can modify his choices according to changing circumstances, and in this sense behaves much like a modern man. Hence Gaskin concludes that the idea that Homeric heroes do not make their own decisions is a false one. In the case

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[1] Lesky, *op. cit*. p. 14, cites, as instances of reasoned consideration of alternatives leading to decision without divine interference, *Il*. 11, 404; 13, 458; 14, 23; *Od*. 5, 474; 6, 145; 15, 204; 18, 93; 22, 338; 24, 239. Examples of doubly determined action are numerous, and described on pp. 22 ff.

[2] Dodds parallels Lesky in noting that the divine machinery often seems to duplicate natural psychological causation. But when discussing Athena's intervention to check Achilles' impulse to kill Agamemnon in *Il*. 1, 188 ff., he goes further than Lesky by suggesting we may view Athena as the externalization, or "projection", of Achilles' capacity for restraint (*op. cit*. p. 14).

[3] Of particular importance is A. Schmitt's *Selbstständigkeit und Abhängigkeit menschlichen Handelns bei Homer,* Stuttgart 1990 (see p. 22 n. 1).

[4] *Class. Quart.* 40, 1990, pp. 1-16, reprinted with minor revision in D. L. Cairns (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad*, Oxford 2001, pp. 147-169 (my quotations will cite both paginations). See also R. W. Sharples, 'But Why has my Spirit Spoken to Me Thus? Homeric Decision-Making', *Greece&Rome* 30, 1983, pp. 1-7, who anticipates Gaskin and Williams in arguing for a unified and autonomous self in Homer.

[5] *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford 1993, ch. 2 'Centres of Agency'. For other important criticism see Sullivan, *op. cit*. pp. 1-19, with extensive citation of anti-Snell scholarship on p. 18 n. 46; and H. Pelliccia, *Mind, Body, and Speech in Homer and Pindar*, Göttingen 1995, pp. 16-27. A more sympathetic critique of Snell and the Whorfian assumptions underlying his approach is R. Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, Princeton 1992, pp. 44-48, and ch. 2, 'Innards', *passim*.

[6] W. Schadewaldt, 'Die Entscheidung des Achilleus', in *Von Homers Werk und Welt*, Leipzig 1944, pp. 162-195, cited by Gaskin, *art. cit*. p. 9 [161].

of Achilles' gradual shift of position to the point where he accepts Agamem-
non's apology and rejoins the Greek army, we must agree with Schadewaldt
and Gaskin that the decision-making seems to come from a freely choosing
self – even though the process of reflection or introspection is never de-
scribed. Indeed, one might fairly state that Homer has no vocabulary with
which to name such processes; and yet this lack of lexicon need not commit
us to the view that Homer's heroes do not reflect.

In addition to the case of Achilles eventually deciding to remain and return
to battle, defenders of autonomy cite three Iliadic scenes framed in formal
decision-making language – either monologue beginning with ὤ μοι ἐγώ or
pondering expressed by μερμηρίζω or a close equivalent – where Homer has
heroes ponder alternative courses of action and make their own decision.[1]
These are in fact the only such scenes in the *Iliad*, but because many are found
in the *Odyssey*, one can say they are frequent enough to support the claim that
Homer's characters can have full autonomy. The *Odyssey* offer several scenes
where weighing a decision is introduced with the pondering verb μερμηρίζω,
or presented as a monologue spoken aloud with ὤ μοι ἐγώ, and addressed to
the hero's θυμός by the formula ὀχθήσας δ᾿ ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα
θυμόν, where the speaker names two alternatives and most often decides on
his own – although in some cases it is clear that actions unfolding around him
prompt his choice.[2] Yet despite these instances of free or partly constrained
choice, we cannot ignore those many situations where action is not freely
chosen but determined by divine intervention, or seems to be spurred by a
piece of the psychic apparatus impelling the self to act. In view of this variety,
one wonders why an argument for autonomy needs to be an all-or-nothing
argument. Critics like Gaskin tend to frame the issue as between two oppos-
ing views: either Homer's characters operate with genuine autonomy or they
do not. But in reality we find a mix of the two.

Such a mixture is clear in the distinction already mentioned, between de-
cisions in formal structures using the formulaic language of pondering and
those that emerge more gradually from the flow of the narrative. Voigt's
analysis focuses on the formal ponderings, in whose highly formalized
structures *mermerizo*-pondering is most often followed by the alternatives
"whether … or", ἤ … ἤ, less often by "how", ὅπως or ὡς, and rarely by a

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[1] These are at *Il.* 11, 404 (monologue), 13, 455 (expressed with μερμηρίζω) and 14, 20
(where δαιζόμενος κατὰ θυμὸν διχθάδια replaces μερμηρίζω. These formal patterns will be
discussed below.

[2] Decisions featuring monologues with ὤ μοι ἐγώ begin at *Il.* 11, 401; 17, 90; 21, 552; 22,
97; *Od.* 5, 354; 407; 464; 6, 118. Only the last Odyssean passage is not spoken directly to the
thumos, because the formulaic line has been replaced with the near-equivalent ἑζόμενος δ᾿
ὥρμαινε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν.

complementary infinitive. Another type of pondering employs the verb ὁρμαίνω ("turn over in one's mind") followed by either ὅπως or ὡς indicating the goal that the deliberating person is seeking to attain. Monologues sometimes employ ὁρμαίνω + ὡς to conclude what was begun with ὤ μοι ἐγώ. All of these formally framed decisions come at narrative high points where the character is facing an important choice, in the battlefield or a similarly dangerous situation, and considers his choices using the stock formulaic language for pondering and deciding. Such decisions are far more often guided by divine intervention in the *Iliad*, but almost always autonomous in the *Odyssey* – another distinction overlooked by Snell, Dodds, and their critics, with the partial exception of Lesky.

Albin Lesky was well aware of significant differences between the two poems in the area of divine intervention. He notes that divine interference in the *Iliad* is often negative, impeding action, taking away characters' wits, subjecting them to *ate*, and so on; whereas in the *Odyssey*, interventions are usually positive, giving sensible guidance and helpful inspiration. Of course Lesky is not speaking solely of scenes of decision-making but of the whole range of divine interventions into human thought processes. Lesky is not sure how to explain this. Finding it inconceivable that the Greek conception of mind and divine influence on decision-making has evolved with such rapidity between the earlier poem and the later, he suggests a different poet may be at work, who prefers different modes of narration.[1] I would agree, adding that the poet composing the *Odyssey* felt less constrained by the inheritance of traditional diction and schemata when describing his characters' mental activity, and found new language to express the "interiority" of thought.[2]

We see this in the fact that in the *Iliad*, formal scenes of pondering two alternatives with μερμηρίζειν ἤ ... ἤ are resolved by divine intervention in 5 of 7 occurrences;[3] but in the *Odyssey* they are resolved autonomously in 7 of 8 instances,[4] and the eighth offers an odd hybrid of intervention and

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[1] Lesky, *op. cit.* pp. 12-13, 34-37.

[2] See my Odyssey commentary *ad* 17, 27 (*Omero. Odissea* v, Milano 2004[7], pp. 159-160), on expressions for mental operations like κακὰ (φόνον, κῆρα) φυτεύειν and βυσσοδομεύω, which appear for the first time in the *Odyssey*.

[3] Divine intervention in 1, 188; 5, 670; 8, 167; 10, 503; 16, 713; autonomous decision in 13, 455 and 14, 20. In *Il.* 8, 167, Diomedes' pondering, διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν, is followed by an infinitive instead of ἤ ... ἤ, but the presence of two alternatives is made clear by διάνδιχα. In 14, 20 Nestor's pondering does not use μερμηρίζω but replaces it with the equivalent ὥρμαινε δαιζόμενος ... διχθάδια followed by ἤ ... ἤ.

[4] These are 6, 141; 10, 50; 10, 151 (without ἤ ... ἤ, and using an infinitive to describe the single action being pondered), 17, 237; 18, 90; 22, 333, and 24, 235 (with two infinitives and only one ἤ).

autonomy.[1] I called attention to this significant difference between the two poems in 1968, and also described how the *Odyssey* poet adheres less strictly to the *Iliad*'s formal pattern for decision scenes based on monologue beginning with ὤ μοι ἐγώ (Russo, *art. cit.* n. 1 below). For the other type of pondering "how to" (μερμηρίζειν … ὡς / ὅπως), all Iliadic instances describe the pondering of divinities; but in the *Odyssey* this is a familiar activity of mortals, always concluded without divine intervention except for the singular case already referred to. This is the extended pondering of Odysseus at 20, 10 ff., where μερμηρίζειν ἤ … ἤ is eventually supplemented with μερμηρίζειν ὅπως and Athena intervenes not to move the hero towards a decision but to reassure him and allow him to sleep.

The monologues beginning with the phrase ὤ μοι ἐγώ sometimes introduce decision-making, but just as often are externalized reflection on the challenging situation facing the speaker, leading to no conclusion. Of those that do conclude with a decision to act, the *Iliad* contains 4 and the *Odyssey* 5. They normally result in autonomous decisions, sometimes signaled by the verse ὧδε δέ οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι, and sometimes indicated by the speaker using the phrase ἀλλ' ἄγε to indicate that he will forge ahead.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two epics is the sheer numerical prevalence of μερμηρίζω in the *Odyssey* 27 uses of this verb compared to only 11 in the *Iliad*, which is the longer poem. Some of this increase is due to the new expanded use of the verb to mean not just "ponder" but "consider", "think about", "conceive of". This is one of several indications that the *Odyssey* is expanding the language for deep mental operation beyond what is customary in the *Iliad*, as already noted (p. 19 n. 2).

These several quantitative contrasts between the two poems were not noted as such by Lesky, and have been neglected by those who seek to determine the degree of autonomous decision-making in Homer. Williams, for example, arguing against the emphasis that Snell and Dodds place on divine intervention, says "sometimes … the gods do intervene … but very often they do not". The evidence suggests that the reverse is closer to the truth. In the *Odyssey*, Athena is continually intervening, although a majority of decision-making scenes, when they are cast in the traditional μερμηρίζω mould, or as monologues introduced by ὤ μοι ἐγώ, are resolved

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[1] This is the unusual scene beginning 20, 10 ff. that follows μερμηρίζω "whether/or" with μερμηρίζω "how to" and combines personal choice with divine intervention. I discuss its formal unorthodoxy and psychological complexity in 'Homer Against his Tradition', *Arion* 1968, pp. 290-292 (reprinted as 'Homer Gegen seiner Tradition', in J. Latacz (ed.), *Homer: Tradition und Neuerung*, Darmstadt 1979, pp. 420-421), and *ad loc.* in my *Commentary to the Odyssey* (both English and Italian editions).

with no divine intervention. In the *Iliad* the gods do intervene "very often" and autonomous choice, as we have seen, is infrequent. Williams tries to support his claim by collecting examples of decision-making that concludes with the formula that signals free choice: ὧδε δέ οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι; but he makes the mistake of citing two cases where the characters deciding are Hera and Zeus! – hardly evidence for human free choice.[1] The Iliadic instances where human free choice comes after pondering formulas are, as noted earlier, only two: Deiphobus in 13, 458 (after διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν) and Nestor in 14, 23 (after the innovative combination ὥρμαινε δαιζόμενος κατὰ θυμὸν / διχθάδια.

It is evident, then, that any discussion of autonomy of choice in Homer must not simply take "Homer" *en bloc* but distinguish between the earlier and later poem, and so avoid oversimplified claims that Homeric characters do or do not operate free of divine interference.

5.

Let us now examine other aspects of Williams's argument. Apart from failure to distinguish between *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, his critique is generally persuasive, confronting Snell's linguistic arguments head-on and revealing their shortcomings. He notes that Homer's preference for describing psychological and deciding processes in terms of parts of the psychic apparatus, such as θυμός, φρήν, ἦτορ, κραδίη, etc., does not mean they are in charge of the action, since they belong to a larger whole, a "someone" (not named as "self" but adequately named as Achilles, Odysseus, etc.) who is the actual decider – the same point made by Lesky and Gaskin. Finally, Williams identifies Snell's weakness as deriving from his firm espousal of the "progressivist" idea of European intellectual development: the belief that Homer represents an early, more primitive stage of philosophical and ethical consciousness, and that as we progress through the tragedians of the fifth century and the philosophers of the fourth, we can see the human mind growing in its capacity for complete selfhood, with this self as autonomous subject able to fully weigh choices for ethical behavior. Williams is strongly critical of progressivism, and indeed the main tenor of his book is to demonstrate that many Hellenists have exaggerated the extent to which the Greeks were less "evolved" than we moderns in their concepts of value, autonomy and personal responsibility.

Some of Williams' argument is directed at Arthur Adkins,[2] who fully acknowledges the influence of Dodds and whose 1970 book is in fact dedicat-

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[1] Williams, *op. cit*. p. 29 with n. 23 (p. 178).
[2] A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, Oxford 1960, and *From the Many to the One*, Ithaca NY 1970.

ed to him. There is a point to William's corrective, to the extent that Adkins's claims about evolving mentality would refer to genuine historical changes and not just poetic fictions. Yet Adkins, whose purpose is to analyze the development of Greek thought and who speaks of historical development, acknowledges briefly in his Preface that he is reconstructing his history of thought from its literary representation. He seems unaware of the methodological difficulty involved: that the distinctive qualities of a literary genre, in both style and content, may make it unreliable evidence for what its creators and audience really believed about mental life. Raising this question also leads us to ask whether Gaskin and Williams, along with Snell and Adkins, may not all be liable to the same criticism: that they are using literary fictions as genuine evidence for how people really thought, oblivious to the distortions of "normal" reality imposed by requirements of genre in the realms of language and storytelling. We noted that this problem was raised by Sullivan, and we shall consider it further in section 6. below.

But first, we must confront still another problem with seeing Snell's position and its criticism by Gaskin and Williams as a straightforward opposition of erroneous versus correct interpretation. Underlying the conflict of interpretations is a philosophical complexity recently emphasized by Christopher Gill.[1]

Gill notes that Snell's underlying assumptions about human consciousness and selfhood are modern and post-Cartesian, meaning that they take as their starting point Descartes' definition of the self as one whose thinking process is entirely conscious and aware of its own volition when it acts. When such a self decides, it is with full consciousness, at the moment of decision, that it is exercising its power to choose. Snell's assumptions are also post-Kantian, in that they view moral decisions as the highest form of fully self-conscious decision-making, and Snell finds such decisions lacking in epic but emergent centuries later in Greek tragedy. If such is the standard of consciousness Homer's characters must meet in their decision-making, then of course they can never choose as autonomous selves, because they inhabit too early a period of history. Snell's judgment that they are not "really" choosing freely is correct, but only in the limited sense that Snell's stan-

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[1] C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Drama, and Philosophy*, Oxford 1996, pp. 29-93 *passim* and, on Gaskin and Williams, pp. 45-50, 65-68. At the very same time that Gill wrote, a parallel critique of Snell was made within the German tradition by Arbogast Schmitt (above, p. 17 n. 3). Schmitt demonstrates how deeply Snell's concept of mind and consciousness was steeped in the German philosophical tradition. Schmitt emphasizes twentieth century theories of the will more than the Cartesian-Kantian tradition singled out by Gill, but his criticism follows analogous lines, showing that Snell approached Homeric psychology with assumptions that inevitably led to the conclusion that Homeric man lacked a full sense of self and true autonomy.

dard for consciousness has not been met. Because Snell fails to realize that, for historical reasons, his standard could never be met by Homer's characters, his analysis remains flawed.

Gaskin and Williams are correct to criticize Snell for holding Homeric heroes to an unreasonable standard of self-aware volition, and thereby judging their decisions to be not truly their own. But while they are aware that Snell is using assumptions about consciousness radically different from theirs, and in fact post-Cartesian and post-Kantian, they never fully acknowledge the role of this underlying assumption in creating the radical difference between his interpretation and theirs. Had they done so, they might have conceded that by his own (admittedly narrow) standards Snell does make sense. When they differ in finding Homeric decisions to be autonomous, it is not so much that they are interpreting them more correctly than Snell did, as that they are bringing a different yardstick to the measurement; and in addition they are choosing to emphasize certain decisions and pay less attention to others. Gill's critique helps clarify the problem by allowing us to see that Snell and his critics are in a sense speaking different languages; and so their difference in evaluation may be seen not so much as disagreement over interpreting the same phenomena, as disagreement over which language (in this case, philosophic assumption) it is correct to use, and also which phenomena to highlight. As Gill says, after reviewing the four Iliadic monologues we have referred to in n. 18, "an initial response may be that Snell and Adkins, on the one hand, and Gaskin and Williams, on the other, have (from very different standpoints) described correctly the character of Homeric deliberation".[1]

One clear example of this non-commensurability of viewpoints is their divergent interpretation of the famous scene in *Iliad* 11, 403 ff., where Odysseus ponders in monologue whether to stay in battle or retreat. When the hero quotes to himself the aristocratic precept that only cowards retreat, and thereby gives himself a compelling reason to remain and fight, Snell's analysis presents Odysseus as not making a free choice but rather being compelled by external forces, in this case the imagined voice of community values. Adkins takes a similar view, minimizing the role played by a self who is deciding. In Adkins's view such a choice is best analyzed as a balance or scale upon which two competing options are placed, and the weightier one sinks down. The role of the holder of the scale, the hero making the choice, is minimized: the decision-making is seen as a process in which the deciding agent is only one force among several. While Adkins's model has the merit of giving full value to the power of social constraints, it reduces the deciding self to too weak a presence in the equation. Here, Gaskin and

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[1] Gill, *op. cit.* p. 49.

Williams are more persuasive in crediting Odysseus with the capacity for personal choice.

In another famous scene, however, Gaskin and Williams go too far in reading free choice into a moment of decision where divine power essentially controls the outcome. In the first book of the *Iliad* (188 ff.), when Athena descends from Olympos, seizes Achilles by the hair, and with eyes flashing (either with anger or merely with divine energy) tells him what to do, and he answers that he will do it because "one must obey the gods' word, it is more profitable (for mortals)", Gaskin and Williams see Achilles as rationally weighing alternatives and making a pragmatic choice for the better. Gaskin in fact insists that Achilles is fully free to disobey Athena, because she speaks the phrase "if you would obey (me)", *ai ke pitheai*.[1] But this is reading the politeness formula too literally, as if it offered a real option to disobey; and it views as reasoned weighing of alternatives what is in fact the imposition of superior power. Williams interprets in similar vein: Athena gives Achilles "a decisive reason for obeying" and he chooses the best course. The coercion inherent in the scene is overlooked. Drama is turned into philosophy, as the vivid confrontation of unequal forces is abstracted into a philosophical weighing of equally valid alternatives. And yet some sense of coercion comes through in Williams's paraphrase, "she tells him that Hera has sent her, and asks for obedience, and he yields".[2] Yielding is not quite the same as choosing.

The problem we are facing is again that of failing to appreciate gradations of difference. Homer offers some cases where a deity literally compels a certain act or choice; others where choice is made entirely on one's own; and others where the choosing self acts under some degree of pressure from a god or surrounding circumstances. The latter are the cases one may argue over, readers like Adkins seeing a balance that inclines because of the heavier weight on one side and readers like Williams seeing an ego making an autonomous choice because of good reasons. The latter interpretation would maintain that even pressured or manipulated choice still counts as choice, and is *ipso facto* autonomous or "free". My argument has been that some choices are less free than others. Perhaps what best serves our understanding of Homeric psychology is not to attempt to measure the degree of autonomy in various choices, but to acknowledge the great extent to which

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[1] He adds (pp. 6-7 [p. 155]) what he considers a parallel situation, where the hero freely makes the *opposite* choice, not to obey: Odysseus initially refuses the local sea-divinity Leukothea's directions to abandon his raft and rely on her scarf for safety (*Od.* 5, 333 ff.). But to see these two situations as offering parallel possibilities for disobeying divine power is to misjudge seriously the different degree of compulsion in each case.

[2] Williams, *op. cit.* p. 30 f.

external forces influence human thinking. The frequency of divine influence on the human mind and its operation, and specifically its decision-making process, surely lend some credence to the general idea that characters in Homer, particularly in the *Iliad*, are not as fully free agents as are characters in later Greek literature.

<div align="center">6.</div>

It remains now to consider Homer's language for mental processes from the perspective of linguists and anthropologists who study the relation of language to culture. Linguists have often argued the question, is language more a "natural" product or a "cultural" product? Recent research increasingly confirms the predominance of culture. This means that Homer's language describing the psychic apparatus should not be taken, as Snell and Williams both seem to do, as an historical and *natural* product and hence as literal "evidence" for assessing early Greek concepts of mind and selfhood. Instead, it is a *cultural* product of the oral epic tradition. Just as this tradition made its own specialized language, distinct from that of everyday speech, so it made its own imaginary construct of how the psychic apparatus functioned. How daily prose speech, and intelligent Greeks contemporary with Homer, might have described their psychic apparatus and its decision-making we will never know; but it was most likely not in the language of the frequent proddings of *thumos, kradie, menos, etor*, etc., the intervention of Athena, Ares, Aphrodite, Artemis and their kin, and Zeus intervening regularly to take away people's wits and/or send them omens.

Recent evidence concerning language and culture is set forth by University of Manchester linguist Guy Deutscher. Drawing on recent research on language and perception, Deutscher argues for a new, more moderate and persuasive version of the old Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which stimulated decades-long debate among linguists and anthropologists.[1] That hypothesis claimed that the linguistic tools we have for talking about the world condition our perceptions of that world in important ways.[2] It made the strong claim that we are *blocked* from perceiving or conceiving what we lack the language tools to perceive and conceive, and *compelled* to perceive it through

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[1] G. Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass*: *Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*, New York 2010. See also the article of cognitive psychologist L. Boroditsky, 'How Language Shapes Thought', *Scientific American*, February 2011, pp. 63-65, with recent bibliography from cognitive psychology.

[2] Adkins, interestingly, shows a glimpse of this insight but does not develop it, when he states (*From the Many to the One*, *cit.* p. 22 f.) "it is as true to say that the psychological vocabulary a society uses moulds the manner in which it experiences as that its experiences mould its psychological vocabulary".

the restrictive lens of the language we speak. Such a theory underlies Snell's claim that because Homeric man lacks any expression for the body or the self as a whole, he must lack those concepts. And similarly for free will: the lack of a word for "decide" or "intend" would, in Snell's view, signal the absence of an autonomous self. Strong Whorfism of this ilk was eventually found unpersuasive and is now generally rejected by linguists. More persuasive, however, is the weaker, revised version of Whorfism that Deutscher extracts from the work of Franz Boas and Roman Jakobson: our linguistic tools *incline* us toward certain ways of seeing and conceiving the world and away from certain others.[1] It is not that we can or cannot see or name things in a certain way because of the language we speak – there are always periphrases and compounded expressions for making up for what is not available in a single word – but that certain ways of seeing and conceptualizing the world come more readily to us than they would if we spoke a different language. In Deutscher's words, "if different languages influence our minds in different ways, this is not because of what our language *allows* us to think but rather because of what it habitually *obliges* us to think about".[2] Deutscher's basic point is that language is not a natural product serving equally, wherever it is found, as a transparent screen through which its speakers see an identical reality; rather, language is a cultural product, which constrains its speakers, to some extent, in how they experience and describe the world.

To illustrate how this revised Whorfism helps us understand the connection between Homeric language and world-view, we may draw an example from one of several interesting languages Deutscher describes.

The Matses tribe of the Amazon speak a language which requires many subtle differentiations regarding how certain is the knowledge that the speaker claims to have. They distinguish between knowledge of what is verifiable at sight to the speaker, knowledge that was verifiable a few minutes ago, knowledge that derives from confirmation some hours or a day ago, knowledge in recent past time, middle distance past time, and remote past time.[3] By the standards of the modern European languages we speak, such attention to distinctions of verifiability would seem to make these people master epistemologists. They would seem to be thinking constantly about what they know and how surely they know it. The degree to which this habit of speech, however, truly reflects a mind that would be much more concerned than ours about degrees of certainty, and anxious to not gauge in-

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[1] This argument runs through Deutscher's entire book, but see especially pp. 148-156 for a clear description of how the Sapir-Whorf view of language should be replaced by the more moderate Boas-Jakobson view.   [2] Deutscher, *op. cit.* p. 152.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 153-155 for further details.

correctly the accuracy of statements made, is debatable. The truth, judging from Deutscher's observations about other languages he describes, is probably that these distinctions amount to less than a full-scale Whorfian creation of a world-view different from ours, but express more than a superficial *façon de parler*. They indicate a distinct cultural feeling, or style, for apprehending reality.

Homer's poetic language, developed over centuries by generations of oral bards, may be viewed as a similar example of a language whose cultural construction endows it with a peculiar specificity of detail in certain areas, in this case the expression of internal emotion and mental life generally. Because there is a rich vocabulary for the organs of thought and emotion, and because some of these words describe simultaneously a physical organ and an emotional or cognitive capacity, Homeric language habitually obliges the poet to present thinking, pondering, and decision-making in terms of bodily and psychic forces pushing the self to perform in a certain way, rather than presenting, as modern language would, a self-conscious ego fully in charge of its thoughts and actions. Because, analogously, the Homeric pantheon of gods is both numerous and actively involved in the human scene, the poet's theology obliges him to conceive much human thought and action as divinely motivated, or "doubly determined", as Lesky would say. It is not that Homeric heroes do not make "real" decisions; it is rather that the reality of their decision-making is often stylized to conform to a narrative mode that achieves vividness by its tendency to present personal choice as reaction to stimuli. These stimuli are both external, coming from divine sources, and internal, coming from components of the psyche. It all makes for dramatic storytelling, even if it does tend to under-represent, much of the time, the decision-making capacity of the conscious self.

<p style="text-align:center">7.</p>

Let me conclude by consolidating the several points of revision I have proposed to the debate over the Snell-Dodds view of Homeric mental life.

First, I would fault Snell, Dodds, and their critics with failing to acknowledge the fictive nature of Homer's characters. Thus our reply to the question, "Can Homeric characters make 'real' decisions?" is that fictional characters can make only fictional decisions. And the content and form of these fictions derive from the linguistic and stylistic requirements of the genres they appear in. Perhaps the scholars in question assume all along that they are examining literature and not reality, and that literature is close enough to reality to substitute for it. If so, they should openly state that this is their method, and should acknowledge the very real problems inherent in such a method.

From this follows my second point. What appears as a non-integrated presentation of the reflecting and deciding self – including psychic intervention from within and without – is a fictional creation with the specific artistic purpose of enhancing the vividness and emotional impact of the scenes narrated in live performance before an audience. And this leads directly to my third point, based on the revised Whorfism deriving from Boas and Jakobson.

This linguistic perspective shows that Homer, required to speak not normal Greek but the specialized dialect "Homerese", is obliged to use this dialect's habits of expression that inevitably portray the human mind as harboring a multiplicity of components, not always fully integrated or under the control of a strongly focused self, and easily influenced by internal and external forces directing one's choices. When we enter Homer's linguistic universe, a certain degree of "Whorfian" influence is inevitably at work.

As a fourth point I would again emphasize the significant difference between mental life as presented in the *Odyssey* as compared to the *Iliad*, and discourage interpreters of Homer from generalizing about what is "Homeric" without taking both poems into account.

In conclusion, a balanced assessment must credit Snell and Dodds for calling attention to some remarkable aspects of Homer's language and narration; and also credit the critics, Lesky, Gaskin, Williams, and others whom I have not found space to discuss, for calling attention to, and attempting to remedy, shortcomings in the work of their predecessors. The importance and complexity of all that the term Homeric psychology encompasses is evident in the extent to which the subject has been re-examined and debated in the half-century since Snell and Dodds wrote. As classical philology draws increasingly on insights from other disciplines, continued illumination is certain to come from linguistics, philosophy, and cognitive psychology. With the present essay, I hope to have widened the discussion among classical philologists to include fruitful ideas to be found in these other disciplines.

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