

CHAPTER 1

Why Believe without Revelation?

The Evidences of Greek Religion

The great fourteenth-century philosopher of history Ibn Khaldûn, arguing against the view of “the philosophers” that prophecy is a natural human quality, observed that “people who have a (divinely revealed) book and who follow the prophets are few in number in comparison with the Magians [i.e., pagans] who have none.”¹ The Greeks, it is a commonplace to observe, were among the many peoples who lacked a book and prophets in Ibn Khaldûn’s sense. The Greeks will not have perceived this “lack” as anything of the kind, and to that extent the negative characterization is a bad starting point. But it can be taken as a stepping-stone toward investigating those positive features of their religious system on account of which there was, indeed, no lack. Three questions naturally arise. First, if the basis for sacrifice, dedications, processions, festivals, and all the other apparatus of Greek worship² was not a book or prophecy, then what was it? What reason had the Greeks, unenlightened by revelation, to believe in their gods? The second question follows closely from the first. Given,

1. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. F. Rosenthal (abridged edition by N. J. Dawood, reissued with new introduction by B. B. Lawrence, Princeton, 2005), 47–48. The concept of “People of the Book” goes back to the Qur’an, 5.14–15.

2. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.18.2 has a useful list of the components of “religion”: ἱερά, τεμένη, βωμοί, ξοανών ἰδρύσεις... ἑορταί, θυσίαι, ἐκεχειρίαι, πανηγύρεις, πόνων ἀναπαύλαι; cf. 2.63.2, which adds ἀγνεῖαι, θρησκείαι, καθαρμοὶ καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι θεραπείαι καὶ τιμαί.

again, the absence of revelation, how could the Greeks know what was pious or impious, what pleasing or displeasing to the gods? And third, if Greek religion was not a religion of the book, then what was the role of all those texts that, beginning as Herodotus noted (2.53) with Homer and Hesiod, evidently played some part in it, without which indeed we moderns could scarcely approach the subject at all?

This chapter will treat those three questions in turn. I will then address two further issues that follow from them. The Greeks lacked sacred books, but they certainly did not lack myths; the role of those myths in religious life needs to be considered. Second, myths imply certain conceptions of the gods' capacities and attitudes, what we might be tempted to term "beliefs" about the gods, were "belief" not a term that has often been declared inapplicable to ritual-centered ancient religions. Yet surely even a ritual is performed in the belief that there is some purpose in doing so. . . . Some way needs to be found of reconciling the evident truths that, on the one hand, the fixed and regulated elements of Greek religion were ritual acts, and on the other that volumes could be filled with Greek stories about the gods, speculations about them, appeals to them, criticisms of them. One way of mediating between those for whom Greek religion is a matter of things done at or near an altar, and those for whom it is rather the sum of the stories, speculations, and appeals just mentioned, is to argue that, though beliefs were held, only acts were subject to control. That mediating proposal, however, calls for two footnotes or riders: philosophers laid claim not to mere belief but to sure knowledge about the divine, on the basis of a priori postulates as to what a god should be like; and a few incidents, chief among them the prosecution of Socrates, may bring into doubt the notion that thought was free and only action policed. The chapter will therefore move a considerable distance from its starting point. But all the topics discussed are consequences, or qualifications, of the central absence noted by Ibn Khaldûn.

Evidences

Two of the most influential books in the nineteenth century, still in print, were William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, of 1794, and his *Natural Theology; or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, of 1802. The first question posed above could be reformulated anachronistically as an attempt to establish what Sophocles' or Pindar's "Evidences" might have looked like. In a sense there is a single, simple answer to that question, and one evidence that easily outweighs all

others, even if Greeks did not often formulate the matter in quite this way. When Nicomachus was charged in 399 with impiety for altering the traditional sacrificial calendar of Athens, the prosecutor argued: “Our ancestors, who only made the sacrifices prescribed in Solon’s code, bequeathed to us a city which was the greatest and happiest in all Greece; and so we ought to make the same sacrifices as them if for no other reason, for the good luck that they brought.” In the past, when sacrifices were performed more regularly, the weather too was more regular, says Isocrates.³ Every dedication set up by a Greek in fulfillment of a vow is testimony that the prayer accompanying the vow has been fulfilled. The greatest evidence then for the existence of the gods is that piety works: the reward for worshipping the gods in ways hal- lowed by tradition is prosperity. The converse is that impiety leads to disaster; and, though the piety-prosperity nexus is not often used as a proof of the existence of the gods, the afflictions of the wicked are indeed a much-cited evidence. “Father Zeus, you gods still exist on high Olympus, if the suitors have really paid the penalty for their reckless insolence,” says Laertes in the *Odyssey*; “The gods exist,” delightedly exclaims the chef in Menander’s *Dys- kolos* when his enemy, whom he regards as impious, falls down a well. We seem to catch here the tones of excited colloquial speech.⁴

When fair weather and flourishing crops are seen as a reward of piety, the argument rests implicitly on the assumption that the natural environ- ment is under divine control. Here then potentially is another evidence: if every shower of rain comes from Zeus—and “Zeus” or “god” “is raining” was used more or less interchangeably in Greek with an impersonal “it is raining”—then direct contact with divine power is an everyday experience. It surely will not have felt like that, even for the pious: rain for them was rain, part of normality, as it is for us, not an epiphany. But when rain declined to fall, it could be prayed for; thunderbolts were embodiments of “Zeus who descends,” storms could be caused by human pollution, winds could be summoned or averted by sacrifice, an untimely earthquake or eclipse could cause a general to be replaced, military activity to be abandoned or delayed. According to the messenger in Aeschylus’s *Persai*, when an unseasonable storm froze the Strymon in the face of the retreating Persian army, “people who hitherto paid no regard to the gods (θεοὺς δὲ τις / τὸ πρὶν νομίζων

3. Lys. 30.18; Isoc. *Areopagiticus* 29–30. Pindar often attributes an athlete’s success to piety, e.g., *Ol.* 3.38–41, 6.77–81, 8.8.

4. Hom. *Od.* 24.351–52; Men. *Dysk.* 639. There was a proverb “Now the gods are blessed” or “Now the blessed gods [exist]” (νῦν θεοὶ μάκαρες) used “of those who received deserved punish- ment for what they have done” (Diogenianus 6.88). Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1578–79; Eur. *Supp.* 731–32, *El.* 583–84, *HF* 841–42.

οὐδαμοῦ)” then turned to prayers; though ascribed to Persians, the psychology is also perfectly Greek.⁵

This was the level at which pre-Socratic philosophy, with the premise of a rule-bound natural order, came into conflict with popular religious assumptions; and, for those educated in the philosophical schools, storms and eclipses ceased necessarily to convey any message about the divine. (But there was always the possibility of a both and/or “double determination” explanation, whereby god worked through the natural order.)⁶ Even for the less educated, such messages were only intermittently audible; this was the religion of crisis situations. Nature was a great mechanism for the transmission of communications from, and about, the divine, but the mechanism was only recognized as operating occasionally. The vaguer proposition, however, that piety is the soil in which good crops grow was a permanent if unemphatic presumption.

The “rewards of piety” argument is in principle empirical: the gods’ concern for humanity is confirmed by their differential treatment of the good and bad. The pragmatism of this approach leads to the theoretical possibility of abusing the gods when they maltreat the good just as one praises them when they punish the bad. Complaints and even threats against unjust gods are raised by characters in literature, but there are no early Greek parallels for the popular response to the tragic early death of the Roman prince Germanicus, when temples were stoned.⁷ Perhaps our sources have censored such incidents; more probably there was a tendency in such circumstances to seek out ritual omissions and so exculpate the gods. The Rewards of Piety is in reality a pseudoempirical argument, deriving its force from selective vision, inertia, and traditionalism. Yet psychologically it doubtless remained for most Greeks among the most potent of all evidences.

5. Aesch. *Pers.* 495–99. Rain and winds: cf. pp. 74 and 77; “Zeus who descends”: NGS 1.10 with Lupu’s note; storms and pollution: Lhôte, *Lamelles oraculaires*, 14 (SEG 19.427); earthquake/eclipse: e.g., Hdt. 9.10.3; Thuc. 3.89.1, 6.95.1, 8.6.5; Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.24 (all Spartan); Thuc. 7.50.4 (Athenian). On more complicated ways in which the gods were seen as guarantors of an order that was not necessarily moral, see E. Kearns, “Order, Interaction, Authority: Ways of Looking at Greek Religion,” in *The Greek World*, ed. A. Powell, 511–29 (London, 1995), at 515–19.

6. See Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience*, chap. 1; for the conflict: Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 209. Double determination: see, e.g., Plut. *Per.* 6.

7. Suet., *Calig.* 5. Complaints and threats: e.g., Eur. *Hec.* 488–91; Hom. *Il.* 22.20; cf. R. Parker in *Greek Tragedy and the Historian*, ed. C. Pelling (Oxford, 1997), 159 n. 60 [+]. The claim of Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 2.22.17 that Alexander instructed the Asklepieia to be burned when Hephaestion died generalizes a story told, but not believed, by Arrian about one particular Asklepieion (*Anab.* 7.14.5). It is difficult to do much with Theocritus’s playful allusion to the whipping of Pan by Arcadian boys when portions of meat are small (*Theoc. Id.* 7.106–8).

Can others be found? Paley's second book, the *Natural Theology; or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, is a presentation of the argument from design. It begins with a famous comparison:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there: I might possibly answer, that for any thing I know to the contrary, it had lain there for ever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch, as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz., that when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose. . . . The inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker.

And exactly the same reasoning applies to the universe as a whole. The ancients had no watches, but from a certain point they certainly had the argument from design: its origins are uncertain, but the phenomenon of providential design is alluded to in several passages in the late fifth century, and the reverse argument (because the world is providentially designed, therefore a provident designer exists) is fully worked out by Socrates in two passages in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.⁸ Thenceforth, "intelligent design" is taken for granted by all philosophers from Plato onward except the Epicureans, who struggle hard to argue against it, and perhaps the Cynics; it forms the core of the Stoic case in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, where a quite close anticipation of the modern image of a "monkey on a typewriter producing the works of Shakespeare" can be found ("If an enormous number of letters were thrown on the ground, could they ever form themselves into the *Annals* of

8. Hdt. 3.108.2; Eur. *Supp.* 195–215; Ar. *Thesm.* 13–18; Antiph. *Tetralogy* 3 α 2; ? cf. Critias *TGrF* 43 F 4; Pl. *Prot.* 320C–322E; Xen. *Mem.* 1.4, 4.3. See now D. Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2007), chaps. 1–3, who argues, *contra mundum*, that (a) intelligent creation is taken for granted in the pre-Socratic tradition and becomes visible in Anaxagoras and Empedocles (but not, as often assumed, in Diogenes of Apollonia); and (b) it was the historical Socrates who effected the transformation from scientific postulate to theological argument.

Ennius?”).⁹ In the early mythological cosmogonies, however, the world is not made, but simply happens, and, though in passing allusions the gods may be said to have “made” this or that, there is no elaborated concept of a creator god.¹⁰ One of the central arguments of David Hume’s *The Natural History of Religion* is that natural man is not alert to those features of the universe that seem to bespeak designedness; philosophical reflection is required to create such an awareness.¹¹ That caution is certainly applicable to the Greek case. We cannot allow the argument any very wide diffusion before the fourth century.

Alongside the argument from design, the reality of certain kinds of divination had an important place in Stoic theology, commonly in the form that “since πρόνοια, divine preplanning or care for mankind, exists, the gods must also have granted mortals the possibility of foreknowledge of the future.” The reverse form of this argument—since divination exists, so do the gods—may earlier have been an evidence of paganism of some power. A speaker in Xenophon’s *Symposium* illustrates the gods’ care for him from the guidance they provide through signs of various kinds:

The gods, whose knowledge and power are absolute, are such friends to me that, because they take care of me, they notice all my doings by both night and day—where I am about to go, what I am about to do; and because they know how every one of these things will turn out, they give me signs, sending as messengers sayings and dreams and omens [literally “birds”], about what I ought to do and what not.¹²

Conversely, when in *Oedipus Tyrannus* Queen Jocasta questions the validity of oracles proceeding from Apollo of Delphi himself (those emanating from human seers are treated as a different matter), the chorus react with horror, and declare, “Religion is perishing” (ἔρρει δὲ τὰ θεῖα). The oracle that finds fulfillment, often in paradoxical ways, despite all human attempts to elude it, is a storytelling motif that was popular throughout antiquity. Such stories were as many proofs that there is a pattern in events visible to

9. 2.93. In Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 11, 399E, the Κύρτια Δόξα of Epicurus are named instead.

10. C. J. Classen, “The Creator in Greek Thought from Homer to Plato,” *ClMed* 23 (1962): 1–22.

11. Pp. 27–28 in the edition by A. W. Colver (Oxford, 1976; original 1757). Sedley (2007) argues that it took atomism’s explicit postulate of randomness to call forth an explicit statement of the case for design (86).

12. Xen. *Symp.* 4.48; on divination as a benefit, cf. *Mem.* 1.4.14–16, 4.3.12; *Eq. mag.* 9.8–9; *Cyr.* 1.6.46, 8.7.3. Stoics: *SVF* 2.1187–1216. But in Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.7–12 the Stoic Balbus argues from divination to the existence of the gods; cf. Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.132 (*SVF* 2.1018).

divine intelligence in advance, but to human intelligence only in retrospect.¹³ The wise centaur Chiron in Pindar ringingly assures the god of prophecy, Apollo, that:

You know the appointed end
of each thing and the ways they are brought to pass;
and the number of the spring leaves earth blossoms, the number
of the sands in the seas and the rivers,
shaken by the waves and the streaming winds; and things to be
and whence they shall come to pass. All this you know.

And Herodotus stresses that “it is common for there to be signs in advance, when great evils impend for a city or people.”¹⁴

Paley in his *Evidences* was seeking to prove a case. Most of the proofs that I have quoted thus far from Greek authors did not have that function; their authors take the existence of the gods for granted, and the proofs arise unselfconsciously within narratives that have a different purpose. But there are two interesting passages in Herodotus where he explicitly notes that such and such a phenomenon attests the divine thread in events. These passages will help to extend the repertory of evidences.

The first concerns the wrath of Talthybius. When Darius sent heralds to Sparta requesting earth and water, the customary tokens of submission, the Spartans threw them into a well and told them to fetch the earth and water from there. This spirited violation of international law in respect of heralds earned the Spartans the wrath of their own Talthybius, the herald of king Agamemnon who was still honored as a hero in his Spartan homeland and whose descendants still served as heralds in Sparta. Persistent ill omens revealed the hero’s anger, and the Spartans appealed for two volunteers to go up to Susa and “pay the penalty to Xerxes for the heralds of Darius who perished in Sparta.” But when the two rich and noble volunteers arrived in Susa, Xerxes refused to repay crime with crime or “by killing them release the Spartans from their guilt”; instead he sent them home unharmed. The wrath

13. See, e.g., Fontenrose, *Delphic Oracle*, 58–70. Religion perishing: Soph. *OT* 897–910, responding to 707–25, 851–58. Contrast the dismissal of prophecy by human seers at 498–511 (on this distinction cf. Hdt. 2.83).

14. Pind. *Pyth.* 9.44–49, trans. R. Lattimore; Hdt. 6.27.1; cf. 6.98.1, where he infers that a hitherto unexampled earthquake on Delos was a portent of forthcoming evils (Καὶ τοῦτο μὲν κου τέρας ἀνθρώποισι τῶν μελλόντων ἔσσεσθαι κακῶν ἔφηνε ὁ θεός, where κου is a fine instance of the idiomatic use of that word to make statements about the divine suitably tentative, “doubtless”: see J. Wackernagel as cited by Fraenkel in his note on Aesch. *Ag.* 182–83, p. 112).

of Talthybius was allayed for the moment, but “woke up” during the Peloponnesian War. At that time the sons of the two Spartans sent up to Xerxes and released by him were dispatched in their turn to Asia as public messengers, but were betrayed and captured on the way and executed by the Athenians. “This is what seems to me most to show the mark of the gods in the affair. The fact that the wrath of Talthybius struck messengers and did not cease before it found fulfillment is simply what justice required. But the fact that it fell upon the sons of the men who journeyed up to the king because of the wrath makes it clear to me that the event was god-influenced.”¹⁵

What Herodotus here dismisses as “simply what justice required” might in another context have counted as evidence of the efficacy of divine vengeance. But what really reveals the hand of the gods to him in this case is the paradoxical extra twist, the “strange but true” (if not in human terms very obviously just) or “too extraordinary to be coincidental” choice of victims. What is divine is a kind of meaning or pattern, very like that revealed when an oracle finds a paradoxical fulfillment. “SPLENDOR, IT ALL COHERES,” says Heracles (as freely rendered by Ezra Pound) in Sophocles, confronted, fatally, by such a fulfillment.¹⁶

Herodotus also finds explicit marks of the divine in the circumstances of the battle of Mycale in 479. The battle occurred on the afternoon of the day, the morning of which had seen the victory of Plataea on the other side of the Aegean. Nonetheless, a rumor of the victory at Plataea spread through the Greeks as they advanced at Mycale, bringing them courage, and “a herald’s staff was found lying [on the beach] at the tideline.” Herodotus takes the heartening (and accurate) rumor as one of “many indicators of the divine element in events,” and goes on immediately to note (“it happened that this too was the case”) that both battles took place next to sanctuaries of Eleusinian Demeter.¹⁷ Significant coincidence, as seen in the proximity of two sanctuaries of the same goddess, seems here to be one indicator of the divine; another is the spread of news with a speed impossible by ordinary human communication.

15. Hdt. 7.133–37; the quotations 7.137.1–2. The phrases rendered above respectively “to show the mark of the gods” and “god-influenced” replace simple forms of θεῖος, the adjective formed from θεός, god; literal renderings would be “This is what seems to me most godly/divine in the affair” and “makes it clear to me that the event was godly/divine.” The artificiality of the connection seen by Herodotus (for six Peloponnesian messengers died in all, Thuc. 2.67, and at the hands of the Athenians, not the Persians) is irrelevant to its theological implications.

16. Soph. Tr. 1174. “This is the key phrase, for which the play exists,” Pound added in a note: *Sophocles: Women of Trachis; A Version by Ezra Pound* (London, 1956), 50.

17. Hdt. 9.100–101.

“A speed impossible by ordinary human communication”: Did “miracles” then function for the Greeks, as so significantly for the early Christians, among the evidences for belief? The question requires delicate handling. The text of Herodotus abounds in events that fall outside the humdrum level of everyday causality in a way that suggests to him or at least to a character in his text the involvement of the gods.¹⁸ Some of these events must have represented for Herodotus impossibilities in normal physical terms: fish that come back to life, a great cry emerging from an empty landscape, weapons that move out of a sanctuary of their own accord. Others are merely improbabilities: when the Cnidian workers attempting to channel through their isthmus suffered an abnormal number of eye injuries from chips of stone, they consulted an oracle, and learned that Zeus would have made Cnidus an island had he wished it to be one. The Cnidians judged the level of injury “beyond what was to be expected,” and the oracle confirmed their view; but the criterion here is a fuzzy one, not a rigorously defined law of nature.¹⁹ Alongside these physically impossible or implausible events we find what one might term the morally implausible occurrence in which the wrath of Talhybius was embodied. It was not a breach or even a bending of the laws of nature that the two men sent up into Asia and killed were the sons of the two men earlier sent up into Asia and released; it was a meaningful event that revealed the slow and oblique working of divine justice.

Three elements stand out in the language Herodotus uses in these contexts. Sometimes he describes such occurrences as a “wonder,” *θαῦμα*,²⁰ sometimes as a “portent,” *τέρας* (but he would scarcely have described, for instance, the events relating to Talhybius’s wrath as a portent); sometimes, as we have seen, he speaks of there being “something divine” about them. But they are not brought together into a single class of “miracles.” There is no Greek word for “miracle,” and the word is absent because the concept is absent. Instead of miracles, we have a range of unusual occurrences that may have a divine origin.

The closest equivalent to a catalog of miracles surviving from classical Greece is the late fourth-century temple record of Epidaurus.²¹ Here we

18. See Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 64–101; for the kind of everyday, untheorized conception of natural laws that is relevant here, cf. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience*, 50–51. J. Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (New Haven, 2006) is a lively introduction to later debate.

19. 9.120.1–2 (fish); 8.65.1 (cry); 8.37.1–2 (weapons); 1.174.3–5 (Cnidians).

20. 6.117.2, 8.37.2, 8.135.1, 9.65.2; for *τέρας* see the entry in J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938).

21. *IG* 4² 1.121–24; for trans. see RO 102 (*stèle* 1 only); Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius*, vol. 1, T 423 (*stelai* 1 and 2 only); L. R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Atlanta, 1995). Other sanctuaries displayed similar inscriptions: Strabo 8.6.15, 374

read, for instance, how Asclepius restored sight to a person so blind that the organ of sight itself, the eye, was missing; we are told that skeptical bystanders had initially shared our assumption that such a cure was not merely unlikely but impossible. Like many miracle stories, this story and others similar to it in the same inscription have the specific function of demonstrating the power of the wonder-worker; they are a product of the fervid special atmosphere of a healing cult. But even the most miraculous cures worked by Asclepius are not “miracles”; they are simply some among his many “cures” (the title of the inscription), of very varied character.

In contrast to “miracle,” a concept that the Greeks were certainly familiar with is “epiphany.” From the third century BC onward there existed as a minor literary genre the collected Epiphanies of a god or goddess.²² The noun “epiphany” first appears in the relevant sense in the third century, when the minor literary genre too emerges, and quickly becomes common and important; it can indicate not merely a visible or audible epiphany (whether in the light of day or through a dream; whether of the god in its own form or in human form or through its statue—the modalities are extremely numerous²³) but also any clear expression of a god’s favor such as weather conditions hampering an enemy, a miraculous escape, or a cure; it may also be used of the continuing disposition or capacity of a god or goddess to offer manifest assistance. But epiphanies as a phenomenon antedated the creation of the noun “epiphany,” the most famous perhaps being that of the god Pan to the message runner Philippides in Arcadia in 490 BC; what happened in the third century was a formal recognition of the concept, which so acquired new potential and importance,²⁴ but not its creation *ex nihilo*.

Many stories of sightings of supernatural powers circulated before that: to take only a handful from Herodotus, giant warriors might lend aid in a battle line, the “phantom of a woman” might by contrast reproach mortal warriors

testifies it for Cos and Tricca, and a fragment survives from Lebena in Crete (*IC* 1.17.7, 9–16; Melfi, *Lebena*, appendix 1, nos. 10–19; an extract at Edelstein and Edelstein, vol. 1, T 426); cf. M. Gironi, *Ἰάματα: Guarigioni miracolose di Asclepio in testi epigrafici* (Bari, 1998; non vidi). Fervid atmosphere: R. Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros* (Leipzig, 1931), 59–64, rightly denying that the phenomenon is primarily one of priestly propaganda.

22. Istros *FGrH* 334 F 50–52, *Epiphanies of Apollo*; *ibid.* 53, *Epiphanies of Heracles*; *IPE* 1² 344 = Syriskos *FGrH* 807 F 1, *Epiphanies of the Maiden of the Cherronesos* (for a later epiphany of this goddess see *Syll.*³ 709.23–25); later, a section of the Lindian Chronicle is headed “epiphanies” (*FGrH* 532 D).

23. See H. S. Versnel, “What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God?” in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, ed. D. van der Plas, 42–55 (Leiden, 1987).

24. Cf. H. S. Versnel, *Tēr Unus* (Leiden, 1990), 190–91: “miracles” and epiphanies had always been noted, but only came to be systematically deployed as proofs of divine power from the late fourth century. Philippides: *Hdt.* 6.105.

for their cowardly behavior, a hero might assume the form of a mortal in order to impregnate a mortal woman, a goddess disguised as a woman might transform an ugly little girl into a radiant beauty. . . .²⁵ For most individuals, epiphanies were a matter of report, which they might or not believe, rather than of personal experience, but the same is true of many religious phenomena, such as exemplary stories of wickedness punished. Herodotus believes that the Athenians accepted the reality of Philippides' experience, and founded a cult on its basis. An inscription of 39 BC from Stratonicea in Caria records the interventions of Zeus Panamaros (through mist, thunder, and the like) that repelled an invading force without a single Stratonicean life being lost. What is most remarkable about this text is that the pious narrative is embedded within a decree of the assembly (though the actual decision is lost): since the god gave aid in all these ways, therefore. . . .²⁶

Have we really got to the bottom of the matter with the four or five evidences so far identified? At a psychological level a further motive must have been powerful, though only with difficulty could it be formulated as an explicit argument. Put explicitly in its simplest form, it becomes absurd: "the gods exist because we worship them." But in an outburst of majestic indignation in the *Laws*, rumbling throughout a sentence that lasts more than 175 words, Plato says something very similar.

How one can argue that the gods exist without getting angry? It's inevitable to resent and hate the people who have forced us and still force us to make this argument, people who will not accept the stories which from the time they were little children at the breast they heard from nurses and mothers, stories told both playfully and seriously as a kind of soothing charm—stories which they also heard in prayers accompanying sacrifices, while at the same time seeing sights accompanying them such as a child most loves to see and hear being

25. Hdt. 8.38–39, 8.84.2, 6.69.1–3, 6.61. For epiphany as an argument for the existence of gods see Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.6 *praesentes saepe di vim suam declarant*. On epiphany see F. Pfister, *RE Supp.* 4 (1924): 277–323; W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (Berkeley, 1979), 3:11–46 (military epiphanies—a huge category); Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 102–67; Versnel, 1987 in n. 23; Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 82–92; F. Graf, *ICS* 29 (2004): 111–27, and M. Dickie, *ibid.*, 159–82. Graf argues that, whereas individuals see gods in person, epiphanies experienced by a group tend, as first identified, to occur through natural processes (such as the incident at Stratonicea mentioned in the text), though narrative elaboration may follow. Dickie analyzes culturally prescribed responses to supposed epiphanies (some already seen in Hom. *Od.* 3.371–84).

26. *IStraton.* 10. Philippides: Hdt. 6. 105. For the possibility that the Athenians' belief was reinforced by a second, military intervention of Pan, see S. Hornblower, "Epic and Epiphanies," in *The New Simonides*, ed. D. Boedeker and D. Sider, 135–47 (Oxford, 2001), at 143–45.

performed at a sacrifice—and their own parents showing the most intense earnestness for their well-being and their children’s, addressing the gods with prayers and supplications as beings who most certainly exist, and seeing and hearing the prostrations and supplications as sun and moon rise and set of Greeks and barbarians without exception both in crises of all kinds and in good times, not as if the gods don’t exist but as if they most certainly do and allow not even a hint of a suspicion that they don’t: when dealing with people who scorn all this for no good reason at all—as people with even a grain of good sense would say—and force us to argue as we are now arguing, how can one adopt a gentle tone in correcting these people and teaching them, first of all, that the gods exist?²⁷

The Stoics too tried to use the reality of “piety” (εὐσέβεια), “respectful behavior” (ὀσιότης), and cult practice as an argument for the reality of “gods”; in its most concrete (perhaps parodied?) form, “because there are altars, the gods exist,” this argument proved a ready target for Cynic scorn.²⁸ But the motive may have been effective psychologically however weak it was logically. The thought can have two forms, one more inert, one more dynamic. The inert form is that the endless rituals, with whatever indifference they are performed, carve a channel in the mind, like water in a rock. Cult is too omnipresent a feature of how things are for the possibility that it has no object to make sense. The more dynamic form is that some rituals for some worshippers created a sense of contact with the divine. One knows that the gods exist because one feels their presence during the drama of the mysteries or the elation of the choral dance.

These evidences have been garnered from a variety of remarks made en passant by writers with different concerns. But the attempt to prove the existence of gods eventually entered the philosophical agenda and brought with

27. Pl. *Leg.* 887C–888A. One might compare Polybius’s description (4.20.8) of Arcadians performing hymns and paeans to their local gods and heroes from earliest childhood.

28. Sext. Emp. *Adv. Math.* 9.123–24 = *SVF* 2.1017 (εὐσέβεια and ὀσιότης; cf. Zeno’s argument that gods can be “reasonably” [εὐλόγως] honored, *ibid.* 133, *SVF* 1 152); *SVF* 2.1019 (altars, an argument attributed to Chrysippus by the Aristotelian commentator Themistius); Cynic mockery: Lucian *Hermotimos* 70, *Zeus Tragoedus* 51. The argument from the facts of cult plays a multiple role in Carneades’ soritic arguments against Stoic rationalized theology in Sext. Emp. *Adv. Math.* 9.182–90 and, still more, Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.43–52 (cf. chap. 3 n. 84), in a way that might seem to suggest that Stoics had deployed it not only to show that gods exist but also to determine their character. But the unacceptable consequences extracted from it by Carneades (unhealthy passions such as love and pity are gods; barbarian theriomorphic gods are gods) are so obvious that it is hard to believe the Stoics would not have anticipated them.

it the attempt to analyze the origins of human belief in the gods. The Stoic Cleanthes identified four such sources: the reality of divination; the “greatness of the benefits which derive from the balance of the climate, the fertility of the earth, and the abundance of numerous other advantages”; the fear caused by thunderbolts, storms, plagues, portents, and like phenomena; and fourth and greatest, the splendor of the cosmic order. (The first, second, and fourth of these sources of belief would also have constituted for a Stoic valid grounds for belief; most philosophical theologians would have added the agreement of mankind, throughout time and space, that gods exist.)²⁹

The emphasis in Cleanthes’ list differs somewhat from the one attempted above. The argument from cosmic order and design has a prominence that, we have noted, it acquired only in the fourth century. Cleanthes’ mortals are very passive vis-à-vis the gods, mere recipients of benefits conferred or terrors inflicted by them; he neglects the way in which cult practice, the mortal’s relation with the divine, the answered prayer, might reinforce belief. His mortals experience gratitude and fear, but not the moral satisfaction of seeing piety rewarded and villainy brought low. (But perhaps he does well to give fear its place.)³⁰ We can, however, surely endorse his founding assumption that any Greek challenged to adduce evidences for divinity would have looked for them in experience (his own, and the reported experience of others), in the workings of the world in the here and now. The Greeks traced the origins of most of their rituals to the distant past. But the point was that the efficacy acquired then was still operating in the present.

Oracular Revelation

None of these evidences was of a character to reveal very much about the nature, wishes, or disposition of the gods: they display their power, but beyond that they show little more than that the gods reward the pious, chastise the impious, and protect communities that pay them due honors. How then could Greeks acquire more accurate information? At a global level, one embracing the totality of potential divine powers as laid out, for instance, in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the answer is, rather simply, that they could not. Hesiod claims that he is inspired

29. Cleanthes: Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.13–15 (*SVF* 1.528). Agreement of mankind: e.g., Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.43–44 (space); *ibid.* 2.5 (time).

30. *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, “Fear first created gods in the world” (opening of a poem of Petronius, xxvii Buecheler = *Anth. Lat.* 466 Riese, 464 Shackleton Bailey; quoted in *Stat. Theb.* 3.661): one-sided, but not wholly wrong.

by the Muses, but, even if we believe his claim, he also tells us that the Muses themselves admit to “knowing how to speak many lies that resemble the truth,” as well as the truth itself.³¹ Every listener could observe that different poets claiming inspiration from the Muses might give differing accounts. But the impossibility of acquiring a dependable *summa theologiae* led to no epistemological crisis. “Ancestral traditions, coeval with time”³² prescribed in a general way the forms of cult with which individual gods were honored. Particular problems thrown up by changing circumstances could be dealt with by consultation of an oracle; many examples will be cited in appendix 1.

Such ad hoc consultation of oracles about cultic matters was of fundamental importance for the whole Greek religious system. It is a seldom-noted exception to the proposition that revelation has no place in Greek religion: revelation of the divine will is precisely what an oracular response provides, though only in relation to the very specific question presented to the god. One of the earliest sacred laws prefaces its prescriptions with “(the) god decreed” (θεὸς ἐπέειπεν): in answer, we can safely assume, to an inquiry.³³ It was possible to check that particular cultic innovations were satisfactory to the gods, or that they were being adequately tended in other ways. After the Greek victory in 480, the Greeks asked Apollo of Delphi whether the spoils sent to him “were full and pleasing”; the god was generally satisfied but requested a little more from the Aeginetans. Communities could also pose rather vague questions such as “by sacrificing and praying to what god or hero they might inhabit their city best and most safely and have fair harvests and abundant harvests and enjoyment of the good harvest.”³⁴ Inquiries of this kind invited, and often received, the instruction to introduce the cult of a new god or an existing god under a new epithet; gods introduced in these circumstances might bear the epithet “ordained at Delphi.” Such advice to a community provided a reassurance that its cultic arrangements would be, that adjustment having been made, in good order.

31. Hes. *Theog.* 26–28.

32. Eur. *Bacch.* 201; cf. Hes. fr. 322 M/W ap. Porph. *Abst.* 2.18.3, νομὸς δ’ ἀρχαῖος ἄριστος. On tradition see, e.g., the texts cited by Rudhardt, *Essai*, 99, or Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion*, 95–98.

33. *LSA* 42, Miletus, c. 500. Seldom-noted: see, however, Rudhardt, *Essai*, 66; the point is also stressed in J. D. Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford 2010), 139–39. Rudhardt (*Essai* and *RHR* 209 [1992]: 231–32) contrasts Greek religion as based on “inspiration” (poets, oracles)—an inspiration that is partial and can always be supplemented—with religions based on revelation, which is final and total. The point about the partiality of Greek revelation is well-taken, but he overvalues poets by assimilating their authority to that of oracles.

34. Lhôte, *Lamelles oraculaires*, 2; cf. 1, 4, 5, 7; there are many similar private inquiries, e.g., 8. “Ordained at Delphi” (πυθόχρηστος): p. 265 n. 2 below. 480: Hdt. 8.122.

Psychologically, it is hard to imagine how the Greeks could have lived their religion without this control, this narrow window of revelation. No human body was empowered to provide reassurance or to legitimate change in the same way. But the window was narrow, and no attempts were made to broaden it until the second century AD. Perhaps around the year 200 Apollo of Claros was asked, “Who or what is god?” or something similar (another version, or perhaps another question, runs delightfully, “Are you god or is someone else?”); his answer or part of it survives written on a wall in Oenoanda.³⁵ To anyone who has perused the records of oracular consultation of the previous eight hundred or so years, that question and others like it from the same period mark an astonishing break with tradition. By inviting the oracular god to pronounce on the very nature of godhead, they violate one of the unwritten laws of consultation. Oracles as traditionally understood were not there for that, but to adjudicate particular problems of cult practice. One needed to know how to worship the gods in ways pleasing to them; one did not need to know precisely what those gods were like. The ability to carry on without such knowledge was a defining characteristic of this untheological religion.³⁶ But the Greeks believed that their practices had a secure foundation and were even in a certain sense based on revelation. In a remarkable passage of *Laws* Plato writes that

whether one is founding a new city from scratch or restoring a corrupted old one, in the matter of what gods and shrines should be established by each group and what gods or spirits (δαίμονες) the shrines should be named in honor of, no one with any sense will alter what has come from Delphi or Dodona or Ammon, or been occasioned by stories of old—however these stories convinced people, whether on the basis of apparitions or a report of divine inspiration; since they were convincing, men established blends of sacrifices and rites whether

35. See Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 168–77, 191–96, building on L. Robert, *CRAI* (1968): 568–99 and (the Oenoanda inscription) *CRAI* (1971): 597–619 (together = Robert, *OMS* 5, 584–639); the text is now *Steinepigramme*, vol. 4, 17/06/01; cf. R. Merkelbach and J. Stauber, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 27 (1996): 41–45 (arguing for multiple questions and responses). The supposed inquiry of Apollophanes the Arcadian (otherwise unknown) to Apollo whether Asclepius was a son of Arsinoe and so a fellow citizen of the Messenians (Paus. 2.26.7) is very unusual, even if a forgery (so Fontenrose, *Delphic Oracle*, 324, dating it “c. 350–300”: *LGPN* 3A has Apollophanes “? 370 B.C.”). The question put to Sarapis by Nicocreon, king of Cyprus, as to “which god he was” (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.20.16–17) is surely not genuine.

36. A religious psychologist, J. H. Leuba, quoted by W. R. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London, 1902), 506, maintained that, in religious experience in general, “God is not known, he is not understood; he is used.”

native or Etruscan or Cypriot or from any other source whatsoever, and on the strength of these reports they consecrated oracles (?) and statues and altars and temples, and furnished each of these with precincts.³⁷

None of all this, Plato insists, should be altered in the slightest. For Plato, then, tradition ultimately rests on communication from the gods, whether that came through oracles or through visual or auditory epiphany. This may be an exaggeration of popular assumptions, but it is not a travesty of them.

The Role of Books

This chapter started from Ibn Khaldûn's distinction between religions that are guided by a sacred book and those that are not. What is at issue is not the book as an item in the technology of communication, but the specific authority assigned to certain books, their power to validate religious practice and belief. For the Greeks, as we have just seen, such validation came partly from tradition, partly from the limited revelation provided by specific oracular responses. But texts that spoke of the gods of course existed in Greece—the poems of Homer and Hesiod, for instance; and, in addition to specific texts with a more or less fixed form, there were all the stories that we bundle together under the rubric of “myth.” The relevance to Greek religion of all these texts and stories must now be addressed.

A first observation is easily made.³⁸ The religion of the Greek cities derived its authority from tradition; one function of written texts was as an alternative source of authority for religious practices that could not appeal to “the custom of the city” for their validation. The classic illustration of this point is a passage in *Republic* where Plato speaks disapprovingly of begging priests and seers (ἀγύρται καὶ μάντιες) who go to the doors of the rich and “present a hubbub of books of Musaeus and Orpheus, offspring of the Moon and the Muses, as they say, in accord with which they conduct sacrifice” (364E). Plato's phrase “by which they conduct sacrifice” is helpful because it isolates

37. Pl. *Leg.* 738B–C (cf. *Epin.* 985C). “Oracles”: φῆμαι of the mss. is so taken by editors and translators and now by the 1996 supplement to LSJ, but in the one parallel quoted, Eur. *Hel.* 820, the word can comfortably be understood as “voice.” I suspect corruption.

38. See Burkert, *Mystery Cults*, 70–72; R. Baumgarten, *Heiliges Wort und heilige Schrift bei den Griechen* (Tübingen, 1998); A. Henrichs, “*Hieroi Logoi* and *Hierai Bibloi*: The (Un) Written Margin of the Sacred in Ancient Greece,” *HSCP* 101 (2003): 207–66; Henrichs in *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece*, ed. H. Yunis, 38–58 (Cambridge, 2003); Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts*, 175–84.

so precisely a form of ritual unknown in public cult: sacrifices there were never conducted “in accord with” any book. The “books” of Orpheus and Musaeus (but “books” of what scale?—we would perhaps call them booklets or pamphlets) are pseudonymous poems ascribed to them, and the claim of the “collectors and seers” will have been that these, the greatest singers of the legendary period, did indeed possess inspired insight into divine matters.

Euripides’ Theseus, too, in *Hippolytus* contemptuously accuses his stepson Hippolytus of a hypocritical involvement with Orphic rites that involved “honoring the smoke of many books.” Similarly, Demosthenes paints a scornful picture of the young Aeschines acting as assistant to his mother in her shady ritual activities and “reading out the books for her as she performed initiations.” The attempt to reconstruct real ritual activities from Demosthenes’ description is a hopeless task, because we have no control on the extent to which he has exaggerated, combined, and distorted; but for our purposes the central point remains that he is making these rites out to be as disreputable as possible, and so gives the book a prominent place. The question “what was this book?” is unanswerable for the reason just given, but, if one asks what kind of thought Demosthenes was seeking to implant in his hearers’ minds, the answer will doubtless be not “Rituals for Sabazius: A Practical Guide” but, again, a supposedly inspired writing by some ancient sage: the book’s function will have been to provide not instruction, but authentication.³⁹

There survives a papyrus decree issued by one of the Ptolemies, probably Ptolemy IV, ordering all those who performed initiations for Dionysus in Egypt to present their “sacred accounts,” ἱεροὶ λόγοι, to an official in Alexandria for control and authentication. The text is as problematic as it is important, and it is not even agreed that these “sacred accounts” are religious texts at all, as opposed to accounts in the financial sense relating to the cult. But the majority view is that they are sacred writings, and the remarkable implication follows that in Egypt any Dionysus-initiator owned such a sacred account as an indispensable part of his equipment. Our ignorance of these rites of Dionysus is very deep, but again we are clearly not dealing with civic cult but with wandering initiators. Only disreputable priests need books. We may assume that the contents of all such books were jealously guarded by their owners.⁴⁰

39. Eur. *Hipp.* 952–54; Dem. 18.259. For the oddity in Greek eyes of book-guided rituals, see Paus. 5.27.6; a sacrifice over which a “theogony” is recited is odd too, Hdt. 1.132.3.

40. BGU 1211 (= the Loeb *Select Papyri*, vol. 2, ed. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, no. 208; Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts*, 189–90), on which see A. Henrichs, *HSCP* 101 (2003): 224–31.

A similar contrast applies in relation to divination. Apollo's priestess at Delphi pronounced the god's will orally in answer to an oral question, though in public inquiries the answer was often then written down in order to be transmitted back to the city reliably. At Dodona writing intruded into the consultative process, because questions were often written and apparently answered on lead tablets, of which many survive; but the answer was deemed to derive directly from the mind of the god, not from a book.⁴¹ Another popular form of divination in cities was that provided by *chrēsmologoi*, oracle-speakers or oracle-collectors. They seem mostly to have worked with collections of oracles ascribed to ancient figures such as Musaeus or Bakis or Glanis, and the "book" was fundamental to their practice. A delightful scene in Aristophanes' *Birds* shows a *chrēsmologos* reciting impossibly self-serving oracles to the hero, and urging him repeatedly when he expresses doubt to "take the book" and see for himself. The *chrēsmologoi* are a good example of the inseparability of written and oral, because they did not merely read out but actually performed their oracles: "oracle-singers," *chrēsmōdoi*, is another word for them. The written text was a fallback, but an essential one: the authority of these oracles was that of Musaeus and Bakis who supposedly first uttered them, and it was the written text that permitted the claim that the actual words of these ancient seers were still accessible. It is a traditional mistake to apply the derogatory mistranslation "oracle-mongers" to the *chrēsmologoi* and to treat them as inherently disreputable or marginal. They had much more of a role in Athenian public life than, say, Orpheus initiators did, and the *chrēsmologos* Hierocles was an influential figure. All the same, an oracle specially sought out and brought back from Zeus or Apollo at Dodona or Delphi had an authority that an oracle sung by a *chrēsmologos* lacked: the latter might or might not influence opinion, whereas the former was truly authoritative. The book shored up the authority of *chrēsmologoi*, but with imperfect success.⁴²

Books are never mentioned in connection with the Eleusinian Mysteries, and this absence seems to have been the norm for mystery cults that had fixed locations. Two exceptions, however, must be noted, one certainly falling into the class of "exceptions that prove the rule," the other perhaps an authentic exception. (Of a third too little is known to invite discussion.⁴³) The exception

41. Delphic responses written: e.g., Hdt. 7.142.1, and evidently at Sparta, Hdt. 6.57.4. Dodona: Lhôte, *Lamelles oraculaires*, passim.

42. On *chrēsmologoi* see references given p. 47 n. 20 below. The scene in Ar. *Au.* is 959–91.

43. In connection with the Mysteries of Demeter and Dionysus at Lerna, Pausanias reports (2.37.3) the brilliant proof by his contemporary Arriphon that the "writings on the heart of oreichalc" were not written by the supposed founder, Philammon. That gives no clue as to their content or actual date. On the pretension refuted by Arriphon, see Pirenne-Delforge, *Pausanias*, 300–301.

that proves the rule concerns the Mysteries of the Great Gods (or Goddesses) at Andania in Messenia. The rites still practiced in Pausanias's day were supposedly those brought thither from Eleusis in mythical time by Caucon. But the problem was to explain how there could be continuity between the rites of the Hellenistic period and those established by Caucon, given that for much of the intervening period Messenian culture had been blotted out by the Spartan conquest. The answer was that, with defeat in the second Messenian war impending, the national hero Aristomenes had recorded the rites on tin tablets and buried them; these tablets were rediscovered, with divine aid, at the liberation of Messene in the fourth century and transcribed by priests into books.⁴⁴ Writing is here an indispensable postulate in order to preserve the fiction of continuity. And, as usual, its function is not practical, but one of validation.

The exception that may be a true one is that of the Mysteries of Demeter Eleusinia at Pheneai in Arcadia. Pausanias writes:

Beside the shrine of Demeter Eleusinia is the so-called "Stone building," two big stones fitted against one another. Every second year when they celebrate what they call the Great Rite they open these stones. They remove certain writings that relate to the rite and read them in the hearing of the initiates; then they deposit them again the same night. (Paus. 8.15.1–2)

What the books contained we are not told. The mundane view that they listed rules to be observed by the initiates would render them unremarkable—they would become merely a sacred law of familiar type in an unusual medium—but scarcely seems to fit the ceremonial solemnity with which they are treated.⁴⁵ They should have contained either a secret myth or instructions for the conduct

44. Paus. 4.1.5 (Caucon); 4.20.1–4 (burial); 4.26 (recovery); cf. N. Deshours, *Les Mystères d'Andania* (Bordeaux, 2006), 191–95. The books mentioned in the long inscription of 91 BC relating to these mysteries (*LSCG* 65.12) are very likely to be the same: so Baumgarten, 1998, 128, and Deshours, 2006, 73–75, 121. Cf. in general W. Speyer, *Bücherfindung in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike* (Göttingen, 1970).

45. So Jost, *Arcadie*, 319. Note, however, the "written tablet, containing matters relating to the rite" (πινάκιον γεγραμμένον, ἔχον τὰ ἐς τὴν τελετὴν, Paus. 8.37.2) on public display in the sanctuary of Despoina at Lycosoura and perhaps identical (but Jost, *Arcadie*, 329, has doubts) with the sacred law *LSCG* 68. Pausanias's language in the two cases is very similar. A. Henrichs, *HSCP* 101 (2003): 243, raises the possibility that the book "contained the *hieros logos* that explained the bean prohibition" attested in the cult (Paus. 8.15.4). Nilsson, *Griechische Feste*, 344, treats a written text used in mysteries as proof of a (Hellenistic or later?) reform. Note, however, that an Oscan ritual text relating to the cult of Ceres was found between two large stones as in the installation described by Pausanias: H. Rix, *Sabellische Texte: Die Texte des Oskischen, Umbrischen, und Südpikenischen* (Heidelberg, 2002), 82, Sa 1; for the find context, F. S. Cremonese, *Bullettino dell' Istituto* (1848): 145–51 (*non vidi*: I owe the reference to Michael Crawford).

of a ritual of very unusual kind. Perhaps here, exceptionally, the fixity of a written text was held to out-trump oral tradition in prestige even in a cult that professed to go straight back uninterruptedly to mythical times. But the Pheneates maintained, according to Pausanias, that their mysteries were a replica of those of Eleusis, introduced by one Naos, a descendant in the third generation of the primeval Eleusinian Eumolpos. Possibly, then, the writings claimed to be the mechanism by which sacred lore was transferred by Naos from Eleusis to Pheneai. They would then be an equivalent, *mutatis mutandis*, to the tin tablets of Aristomenes.

Whatever the truth about that particular case, the general proposition that texts had no direct place in the conduct of the vast majority of Greek rituals is unaffected. When, in the Hellenistic period, the city of Priene established a public cult of Sarapis, there was no question of conducting the ritual in accord with books: the priest had to supply a live Egyptian to perform the rites with the proper expertise. We do not know whether the most famous of all Greek priestesses, that Lysimache who conducted the rites of Athena Polias on the acropolis at Athens for sixty-four years, was able to read: what is clear is that she had no need of that skill to discharge her high function—except possibly to deal with temple accounts.⁴⁶ In the rare cases where an inscribed “sacred law” gives instructions for the conduct of a ritual, a special explanation is usually available. As far as we can see, it is not that the traditional guardians of sacred lore, like Caesar’s Druids and the early Roman aristocracy, actively resisted the use of writing in order to keep their special knowledge exclusive.⁴⁷ The cultural convention simply followed a different channel.

Where Myths Were Told

A further wedge can be driven between texts and religious practice. Poems that described the doings of the gods were, it is not in doubt, extremely common in Greece: the lack of sacred texts by no means entails a lack of

46. Egyptian: *LSA* 36 (*RICIS* 304/0802). Accounts: Lycurgus fr. 31 Blass (6.4 Conomis), from “On the Priestess,” reveals that the priestess in question was required by decree to “join in sealing the account-books (?)” (συσσημαίνεσθαι τὰ γραμματεῖα). The probable priestess Menophila of Sardis was praised on her funerary inscription for her literacy (*Steinepigramme* vol. 1, 04/02/11, late second century BC?; Connelly, Portrait of a *Priestess*, 251–52), but without any connection being drawn with priestly functions.

47. Special explanation: cf. R. Parker, “Epigraphy and Greek Religion,” in *Epigraphy and the Historical Sciences*, ed. J. K. Davies and J. J. Wilkes, forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*. Traditional guardians: Livy 9.46.5, with the commentary of S. P. Oakley (2005, 609–13); Caes. *Bell. Gall.* 6.14.3–4.

texts treating sacred matters. Hesiod's *Theogony* and the Homeric Hymns are the most tangible representatives of the whole large class. But the context in which such poems were recited needs to be noted. It is widely accepted that Hesiod's *Theogony* is the poem that he himself in *Works and Days* (654–57) says that he performed at the funeral games for King Amphidamas in Chalkis. The performance context of the Homeric Hymns is uncertain, but it is not at all clear that we can assign the *Hymn to Hermes*, for instance, to a festival of Hermes, the *Hymn to Apollo* to a festival of Apollo, and so on systematically; some at least seem to belong in the kind of rhapsodic contests where epic was performed.⁴⁸ So here we have religious poetry performed in a festival context but without any direct relation to ritual; tragedy too is a genre shot through with religious content and performed at a festival, but not in immediate association with the cult acts.

As for the telling of myths as part of the ritual activity at festivals, the only regular mechanism that can be identified is the choral performance of hymns, paeans, and the like. This was indeed both common and important; its significance, as the central point of intersection between myth and ritual, has been greatly underestimated in the debate on the relation between those two things.⁴⁹ But not all festivals included choral performances. At one, the Attic Oschophoria, we happen to be told that at a certain stage in the proceedings the participants told each other myths.⁵⁰ The detail is isolated, and even here it is not priests or priestesses who do the telling. The idea of an Attic priest or priestess recounting myths to the faithful is just as unfamiliar as the idea of their using books in the conduct of ritual. At the Panathenaea a robe was presented to Athena on which was depicted that Battle of the Gods and Giants in which she played a conspicuous role.⁵¹ But parallels are not easy to find for such an active deployment of visually depicted mythology in ritual.

Mysteries perhaps represent a special case; for one of their distinctive features seems to have been that communication of some kind took place between initiators and initiates; and though, at Eleusis at least, the central medium of

48. On this problem see my comments in *GaR* 38 (1991): 1–2.

49. Cf. W. D. Furley, "Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns," *JHS* 115 (1995): 29–46, at p. 46: "Hieratic texts point to the unity of purpose between tales about the gods and worship of the gods through ritual which the myth-and-ritual school of religious interpretation has always assumed." This is a central argument of Kowalzig, *Singing*.

50. Plut. *Thes.* 23.4. Whether the statement of Σ Lucian p. 280.25–29 Rabe that at the Attic Haloa the magistrates spend time "displaying (ἐπιδεικνύμενοι) to all the visitors that civilized food was first discovered among them and shared out to all mankind from them" implies a formal speech (on myth?) is very doubtful: Parker, *Polytheism*, 167, n. 45 (citing Lowe).

51. Cf. p. 201 n. 104.

communication was “showing,” not “telling,” some element of telling can perhaps not be ruled out. On the one occasion where Herodotus speaks of a “sacred story” or “sacred account” (ἱερὸς λόγος) in relation to a Greek cult,⁵² he says, rather ambiguously, that a ἱερὸς λόγος that was “told by the Pelasgians” is now “revealed” in the Samothracian Mysteries (2.51.4). We hear of “sacred stories” or similar things in relation to mysteries rather than to ordinary cults simply, it has been suggested, because in these cases rules of secrecy applied: stories about origins were regularly told in relation to all cults, but could normally be mentioned freely.⁵³ The point is true, but its correlate seems to be that the myths attached to ordinary cults were not formally recounted by priests as a part of the ceremony. It was the special secrecy attaching to mysteries that required associated myths (or some of the associated myths, for not all were secret) to be sucked in and incorporated in the ceremony itself.

There is a sense then in which myth and ritual occupied a different *Sitz im Leben*. There were many festivals at which no space was available for the explicit evocation of myth;⁵⁴ equally, many of the most important contexts in which myths were re-performed, the theater above all, were not directly connected to ritual. Many of the words that were most relevant to Greek festivals and Greek rituals were spoken outside the festival and ritual context.

Myth and Religion

Few subjects have been more contested than the relation of Greek myth to Greek religion.⁵⁵ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many scholars saw myth as the main medium through which Greek religious ideas were expressed: the study of Greek religion was therefore the study of the gods

52. He mentions Egyptian ἱεροὶ λόγοι in 2.48.3, 2.62.2, and 2.81.2, and the plain λόγος of 2.47.2 is clearly no different. He never recounts them, not apparently because they were told him as secrets, but perhaps as Harrison suggests (*Divinity and History*, 189; see *ibid.*, 184–86 for other religious silences in book 2) because these stories were comparable to those recounted in Greek mysteries. Pausanias twice borrows the concept: the Phleisians (2.13.4) have a ἱερὸς λόγος as to why their cult of Hebe lacks a statue, and the Pheneatai (8.15.4) as to why they regard the bean as impure. The context of this last reference is one of Mysteries of Demeter; the Phleisian λογός is the only usage relating to a Greek nonmystic cult.

53. W. Burkert, in *Oxford Readings*, 228, n. 5. Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts*, 182, argue that ἱεροὶ λόγοι were normally standard myths with added elements, not wholly new myths.

54. “La Grecia antica non ci ha lasciato un solo mito in un contesto rituale”: Brelich, *Eroi*, 35.

55. See especially Versnel, *Transition and Reversal*, 15–88; E. Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Oxford, 2005), 132–80. The extent to which the Greeks ever recognized a distinctive class of myths comparable to the “Greek myths” familiar to us is controversial (for a denial see, e.g., C. Calame, *Myth and History in Ancient Greece*, trans. D. W. Berman [Princeton, 2003], 12–27; R. L. Fowler will argue the other case in a forthcoming article, “Mythos, Logos, Herodotos”); the point is irrelevant to my concerns here.

as represented in mythology. With growing interest in ritual, the pendulum swung from myth to cult at the end of the nineteenth century. Myth reclaimed some of its rights with the argument of the “myth and ritual” school that rituals were reflected or interpreted or paralleled in myths, even if in this conception ritual tended to be the master and myth the servant. A compromise position was that myths and rituals were distinct but parallel phenomena, fulfilling comparable functions in different media.⁵⁶ One stepping-stone within the quagmire is to recognize that “Greek myths” are not a unified category about which we have any reason to expect that general statements can be made. We are not confronted by all-or-nothing choices; by allowing that some myths have religious content or relate to ritual in some way, one is not required to argue the same for all. All the same, it may seem that the argument above about the largely different contexts of myth and ritual must lead to a rather extreme downplaying of the importance of myth within religion.

The conclusion would be quite wrong, however. Myths, or some myths, were of fundamental importance to the Greeks, whether or not they were recited during the rituals they performed, whether or not they mirrored or echoed or derived from those rituals in whatever way. The preoccupation with particular connections has obscured the more fundamental relation between the two spheres. Let us take a counterexample to illustrate the point. In his celebrated study of the Alpine cult of St. Besse, Robert Hertz stated:

If you ask local people who St Besse was, when he lived and what he did, you will usually obtain from them only vague and incoherent replies. However, as far as the status of the saint at present is concerned, they will answer you with unanimity and precision: St Besse is a saint who has ‘great powers’ and who performs ‘many miracles’. His name arouses in them above all, not intellectual curiosity, but feelings of tender veneration, gratitude and hope.⁵⁷

The possibility that Hertz here presents to us is that of a cult without myth, one based exclusively on the belief in the presence of an active power for good. One can certainly conceive that some cults have been in large measure of that type, including some Greek cults (those of anonymous Attic heroes,

56. On this *pari passu* (Jane Harrison’s term) approach as developed in particular by Burkert, see Versnel, *Transition and Reversal*, 74–79; Csapo, 2005, 180.

57. “St. Besse: A Study of an Alpine Cult,” in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. and trans. Stephen Wilson, 55–100 (Cambridge, 1983), at p. 59 (first published in *RHR* 67 (1913): 115–80, subsequently in R. Hertz, *Sociologie religieuse et folklore*, Paris, 1928 and 1970, 110–60).

for instance). In the Hellenistic period, admirers of the Egyptian gods boasted that their divinity was revealed not through myths but through manifest present power.⁵⁸ But it is not at all plausible that a worshipper of Heracles, say, approached the hero with a mind wiped clean of all recollection of the labors recounted in so many poems and plays, depicted in so many works of painted and plastic art. Nor is it credible that the various demesmen of Attica who performed sacrifices to the Herakleidai did so without thinking of the good services done by their ancestors to those victims of oppression and so frequently evoked in the state funeral orations and on the tragic stage.

The argument is particularly potent in relation to heroes (for all that there may have been a few sunk in anonymity), since their title to worship rested on the events of their lives. In their case, it is often plausible that myth came first and cult followed afterward; we recently learned, for instance, that a sanctuary of the Seven against Thebes was founded by Argos in the sixth century, well after the first attestation of the myth.⁵⁹ Asclepius too was a doctor in story long, as far as we can see, before he became the greatest of healers in cult. But it is not credible either that a worshipper of any of the major gods was ignorant of their parentage and powers. Even in the case of St. Besse, Hertz modifies his own position later in his study when he contrasts “the glorious career of St Besse as it is told from the pulpit by the curés” with the much homelier versions that he heard “among the simple faithful of Cogne.”⁶⁰ “The simple faithful of Cogne” were not then, after all, exempt from the human impulse to tell stories about the things that matter. Nor certainly were the Greeks.

The simple but basic truth about the relation of myth to ritual in Greek religion is that, without myth, the rituals would be addressed to powers without histories or attributes and even at the extreme without names. Herodotus wrote that:

Not till the day before yesterday, so to speak, did the Greeks know the origin of each of the gods, or whether they had all existed always,

58. Diod. Sic. 1.25.4; Aristid. *Or.* 45.15; cf. O. Weinreich, *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Amsterdam, 1969), 1:418–19. Cf. the pre-personal, pre-mythological “Sondergötter” postulated by H. Usener, *Götternamen* (3rd ed., Frankfurt, 1948, ed. 1 1896), 279.

59. *SEG* 37.283 (cf. 52. 312). Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 62, mentions the cult of the Agamemnonidai at Tarentum (*Mir. ausc.* 106, 840 a 6–10), at which women were forbidden to eat of the sacrifices, as a clear, if unusual, example of direct influence of myth on cult. Lovers made oaths on the tomb of Iolaos, lover of Heracles (Plut. *Amat.* 17, 761D). Heraclidae: M. H. Jameson, “The Family of Herakles in Attica,” in *Herakles and Hercules*, ed. L. Rawlings and H. Bowden, 15–36 (Swansea, 2005), argues that the cults celebrated an ideal image of the Athenians’ humanity toward the oppressed.

60. Hertz, 1983, 73.

and what they were like in appearance. . . . It was Homer and Hesiod who created a theology for the Greeks, gave the gods their epithets, divided out offices and functions among them, and described their appearance. (2.53)

If for “Homer and Hesiod” we substitute “the myths, as told or represented in whatever medium,” Herodotus’s statement is perfectly correct. It is not that myths explain rituals in detail but that, without myths, the gods and heroes lose shape and attributes and differentiation. They cease to be the gods known to us, or to the Greeks. Not all myths, to repeat a point, reveal the gods in this way. Why should they? Real progress has been made in the last two decades or so in appreciating how myths gave a sense of identity to human groups, rooted them in a landscape, placed them in history, mapped out their interrelationships with other such groups.⁶¹ The tragedies based on myths of a different type retain their appeal because of their stark depiction of the horrors of family life. And one could identify many further functions little related to religion.

But some myths dealt specifically with the history of the gods. Enormous weight was borne by a limited number of myths, those “archmyths” as they have been called,⁶² narrated, for us, in Hesiod and the *Homeric Hymns* and telling how gods were born, acquired their powers, and arrived at their principal sites of cult. Such were the core themes of poems sung by choruses in actual cult contexts. Songs sung at Delphi told how Apollo arrived at the site and how he slew the dragon Pytho; more recherché variants told how Neoptolemus too acquired a place in the cult, or detailed the history of Apollo’s four temples. Songs sung on Delos told, again and again, of the events culminating in the birth of Apollo on the island. Dithyrambs for Dionysus reserved a place of privilege for the god’s mother, Semele.⁶³ What was at issue was not primarily the particular ritual about to be performed. It was the sanctity of the god and of the cult site. Many of the surviving cult songs were written for choruses dispatched by their cities to the great religious centers such as Delphi and Delos. The myths they sang explained why it was indeed appropriate to make the journey.

61. I am thinking of such works as I. Malkin, *The Wanderings of Odysseus* (Berkeley, 1998); C. P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), and many studies by C. Calame. The one criticism one might make of Csapo’s superb *Theories of Mythology* (n. 55 above) is a relative neglect of this trend in studies and the “charter” role of myth that makes it possible.

62. J. S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus* (Princeton, 1989), 13.

63. See, e.g., Rutherford, *Paeans*, and Kowalzig, *Singing*, passim; for sources, J. N. Bremer and W. D. Furley, *Greek Hymns*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 2001).

Another class of myth concerned the relations between particular gods and particular cities. The point was to establish a city's "dearness to the gods" by grounding through myth the affection for it of an individual god. The best-known instance is the story of Athena's and Poseidon's competition for Attica, depicted on the west pediment of the Parthenon, but most cities had something equivalent. Plato in *Menexenus* (237c–d) draws out the obvious implication: "All men should praise our land . . . first and above all because it is dear to the gods. The quarrel and trial of the gods who disputed for it bear witness to what I say." These were, one might say, "comfort myths." Mortals needed to know not only who the gods were, but why they might hope for their favor.⁶⁴

There is another very general level at which myth underlay religion. Again it is so familiar to any reader of Greek texts that its importance can easily be overlooked. Festivals, cult titles, unusual practices, topographical features, place-names, and many other phenomena have explanations of origin attached to them, and these explanations typically derive from incidents that occurred in the period that the Greeks themselves by the fifth century distinguished from "the age of men."⁶⁵ Not all such aitia (to use the Greek term) relate to cult and religion, but a clear majority do. A few rituals had, it was said, been established by the gods themselves present in person on earth. (These revelations of rites by—typically—Dionysus and Demeter are a further exception to the generalization that Greek religion was a religion without revelation.) Other rituals commemorated events in divine biography; the Delphic Septerion, for instance, supposedly mimicked Apollo's flight to Thessaly after the killing of the dragon Pytho. Others were simply associated with incidents in the myths of heroes. A passage in Apollonius's *Argonautica* deploys a single mythological incident to explain the name of the island Anaphe, the cult title Aigletes borne by Apollo on the island, and the custom whereby women and men exchange insults at Apollo Aigletes' annual festival; they all had their origin in the stay of the Argonauts on the island on the return voyage from Colchis.⁶⁶

For various reasons, scholarship is disposed to be tentative in its dealings with such aitia. Often the link between aition and practice seems slight and artificial, a similarity of mood⁶⁷ (and not always even of that), not of detail. Normally the mythological event is not an intrinsic part of a larger

64. See Sourvinou-Inwood, "Polis Religion," 23–24, on what she calls "guarantee myths."

65. Hdt. 3.122.2; cf. for Pausanias, Pirenne-Delforge, *Pausanias*, 43–47. The distinction exists, even if, as Harrison argues, *Divinity and History*, 198–207, Herodotus in many respects ignores it.

66. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1711–30, based on Callim. *Aet.* fr. 7–21 Pfeiffer; cf. Conon *FGH* 26 F 1 (49). Septerion: n. 68 below.

67. F. Graf, *Greek Mythology* (Baltimore, 1993), 115.

myth but has been added to it ad hoc to generate an explanation; these are branchlines leading off from the great routes of myth. Aitia are very unstable: incompatible explanations for a single rite compete,⁶⁸ or replace one another over time. And the simple question as to how many of those who participated in a particular rite would have heard a particular account of its origin, and in what context, is one that we are usually not in a position to answer. Despite all this, the central point remains that tracing the origins of their religious practices to the heroic period had an instinctive rightness for Greeks; it was the default setting of their mind, and any Greek with a modicum of ritual knowledge would have been familiar and comfortable with explanations of this kind. Even if the contexts in which aitia were repeated are often uncertain, in cults that hosted choral performances the relevant aitia will surely have been heard in association with the rituals that they explained. What this default setting of the mind, this general familiarity, said was “in their broadest outlines, our religious practices date back to the generation of heroes.” This is, once again, tradition or antiquity substituting for revelation as a source of legitimacy for those religious practices. It did not matter that particular aitia were unpersuasive or unstable. What mattered was the rooting of the whole system in heroic time.

Even the myths that had a primarily human focus—and this is the case with many of the best known, those of Oedipus and Orestes, for instance, or the Trojan and Theban cycles—reinforced the underlying conception of a heroic generation. (So a limited modification is needed to the assertion that no generalizations about “Greek myths” are possible.) The “compromise position” mentioned above in the myth-and-ritual debate also has its relevance here. According to this, myths and rituals are distinct media that may nonetheless deal with the same human problems. “Growing up,” for instance, is a common theme of stories, and the transition from childhood to adulthood is a central concern of many ceremonies. The mythical theme that Walter Burkert terms “the maiden’s tragedy” can be juxtaposed with what we know of girls’ maturation rituals in Greece.⁶⁹ There is no need to suppose (a common fallacy) that growing-up stories in some sense derive from growing-up rituals. But through etiology the two strands could be-

68. See, e.g., Callim. *Aet.* fr. 79, where three possible reasons are offered why women in childbirth invoke a virgin helper (Artemis). In *De def. or.* 15, 418A Plutarch points out that the received aition for the Delphic Septerion (cf. p. 191) fails to fit the ritual practices; in *Quaest. Graec.* 12, 293C he had casually spoken of the rite as imitating events relating to the killing of the dragon (the received version) “or something of the kind.” On the progressive “Theseus-ization” of Attic etiology (the consequences of which are displayed throughout *Plut. Thes.*), see n. 70 below.

69. *Structure and History*, 6–7, and on the comparison with initiation rituals, p. 16.

come entangled and influence one another in complicated ways. The myths of Theseus and Perseus, for instance, are, among other things, instances of the story pattern identified by Otto Rank as “the myth of the birth of the hero”: the story of a young man of noble birth oppressed and deprived of his rights in early years who wins through to kingship. Perhaps the story pattern appeals to a general childhood fantasy (to which adults still respond) that one is oneself an unrecognized prince or princess. It is, then, a story, fulfilling imaginative and emotional needs. But it is certain in the case of Theseus and plausible in that of Perseus⁷⁰ that the myths became associated etiologically with growing-up rituals, and in such a situation the participants will not have perceived the link between myth and rite as trivial. On the contrary, Theseus and his companions became role models for their successors. The Athenian youths who traveled annually to Delos to sing for Apollo were explicitly identified with the youths who made the same journey in company with Theseus in mythological time: the same specialized term, ἥθροισι, was applied to both.

If contemporary performers and mythological models can blend into one another in this way, it is evidently a mistake to separate myth from ritual too sharply. This phenomenon of “blending” will be discussed in another chapter. In a few cases (particularly in the cults of Demeter and Dionysus) the participant’s experience of the ritual must have been so shaped by knowledge of the myth that the myth was close to constituting the plot of the ritual.⁷¹ But for the moment I turn instead to a different issue concerning etiologies, which may seem to lead in a different direction. Though most explanations of the origin of festivals related to the generation of heroes, some did not. Herodotus (3.48) tells, for instance, how the tyrant of Corinth Periander dispatched three hundred Corcyraean children to the Lydian king Alyattes to be castrated. The good people of Samos, where the ship touched en route, told the children to take sanctuary in the temple of Artemis, and in order to feed them “they established a festival that they observe even now in the same way. At nightfall, throughout the period the children were suppliants, they organized choruses of maids and youths, and when they did so they made a

70. O. Rank, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1909). Theseus: Kearns, *Heroes of Attica*, 120–24; C. Calame, *Thésée et l’imaginaire athénien* (Lausanne, 1990), chap. 3; on ἥθροισι p. 200 below. Perseus: see the study of the Mycenaean inscription IG 4.493 (*LSAG*² p. 174 no. 1) by M. H. Jameson, in R. Hägg and G. Nordquist, eds., *Celebration of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid* (Stockholm, 1990), 213–23 (summarized by Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 62).

71. But these cases are the exceptions: there is a real gap between the loose myth–ritual relation characteristic of Greek religion and the deliberate reenactment of myth in rites found in Christianity and, it has been argued (R. Beck, *JRS* 90 (2000): 172–75), in Mithraism. Blending: p. 200 below.

rule that the choruses should carry honey and sesame cakes, which the Corcyraean children could snatch and so be fed.”⁷²

Herodotus’s explanation of the origin of the festival is most unlikely to be true, yet the “mythical” explanation chosen dates not from the age of heroes but from a few generations before his own birth. Do such cases subvert the claim that, for the Greeks, the rightness of their festival system lay in its grounding in the generation of heroes? They introduce a complication, rather. There never either was, or was felt to be, a ban on the introduction of new rituals. Additions could be made either on the basis of remarkable events, such as epiphanies, or on the instruction of an oracle. But taken in the round the ritual system was still felt to be traditional. The mixture of mythological and post-mythological aitia is simply a reflection at the etiological level of the general perception that a city’s ritual calendar was a blend of “ancestral” rites and others added in particular, remarkable circumstances. Mythological aitia were qualified for their function by the mere fact of belonging to that special time. The Samian ritual mentioned above traced its origin to a humane intervention against a monstrous and un-Hellenic act of cruelty by a tyrant. Post-mythological aitia probably demanded a strong relation of this kind either to accepted values or to a city’s safety.⁷³

The Instability of Myth

Myth is integral to religion, therefore; it is not a fancy wrapping paper which must be taken off in order to get down to the realities of cult. Yet the role of Greek myths, it need scarcely be stressed, is very different from that of sacred books. At the most drastic, intellectuals felt able to dismiss the whole mythic representation of deity as what came to be called *theologia fabularis*, “mythical theology,” an invention of poets, while still treating the cults as a valid mode of access to the divine. For them the myths were indeed just a wrapping, and a very deceptive one. The only alternative to rejection, for the

72. Hdt. 3.48, on which see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *OpAth* 17 (1988): 167–82 = “Reading” *Greek Culture*, 244–84, and now Ducat, *Spartan Education*, 256–58.

73. The famous whipping ritual of ephebes at the altar of Artemis Orthia in Sparta, and the otherwise unknown “procession of Lydians that followed it,” are explained by Plut. *Aristid.* 17.10 as deriving from an incident during the battle of Plataea, a heroic moment in Spartan history. (The whipping also had a mythological aition, Paus. 3.16.7–11; cf. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte*, 87–88). A stealing custom on Samos is explained by a period when the islanders had to live by pillage on the mainland, followed by a triumphant return (Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 55, 303D). The greatest Phocidian festival was said to commemorate the great victory that saved the ethnos from destruction by the Thessalians: Plut. *De mul. vir.* 2, 244D, *Non posse* 18, 1099E–F. Cf. pp. 219–220 below.

philosophically trained, was allegorical reinterpretation.⁷⁴ But even for those outside those very restricted circles there was little about the myths that was stable or dependable, or so at least it appears to an outside observer. Stories about the birth of deities, we have seen, were fundamental, the staple of cult hymns. But the poet of the early *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* already contrasts what he declares to be his own true account of the god's birth with no fewer than five "lying" counterclaims.

That was one way to navigate the currents of endless variants without being swept into skepticism: one account is true, all others false. To a large extent the variants are regional, and we can suppose that worshippers accepted the version of the myth that they were born to; the claim that Apollo was born in Lycia will not often have been heard on Delos. Similarly, though we may be aware that the myths associated with a particular sanctuary change over time, we should not necessarily project that awareness onto those who frequented it. But it is very uncertain to what extent we can postulate mythological consensus, an agreed local version, even at a particular place and time. Since priests did not recount myths, there was no obvious mechanism by which even a powerful cult could communicate a standardized account from the center. Temple sculpture, where it existed, could scarcely alone carry such narrative weight. In some cults, as we have seen, foundational myths were repeated again and again by pious choruses. If the same hymn was rendered on all occasions year in, year out, its version could indeed establish itself as standard. But at great sites such as Delphi and Delos, frequented by sacred missions from afar, different choruses sang different hymns. Stability is likely to have been the exception rather than the rule.⁷⁵

Myths lacked fixed form; nor was there anything resembling a canon of myths known to everybody even if in divergent forms. Two consequences follow from the absence of a canon. On the one hand, the question of what myths were known to whom is always an open one. One can guess at a core of "archmyths" that were very generally familiar, because often alluded to or depicted. But that criterion can produce surprising results. At Greek sacrifices, mortals received the best meat, and the gods had to be content with

74. *Theologia fabularis*: see, e.g., W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford, 1947), 2–4; Babut, *Religion des philosophes*, 195; G. Lieberg, *Rh. Mus.* 125 (1982): 25–32 [+]; Plut. *Amat.* 18, 763C–E is a clear presentation in Greek. On allegory most recently, L. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, trans. C. Tihanyi (Chicago, 2004).

75. Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts*, 176: "'Canonical' sacred histories were therefore unlikely to exist even at the local level." Note, e.g., that "Pindar consistently makes Apollo and Artemis twins, but elsewhere this detail is rare": Rutherford, *Paeans*, 368. We cannot, it is true, prove that all the variants on this central Delian myth were to be heard on Delos itself.

fat and bones. Hesiod explained that the unequal division had its origin in a deception exercised by Prometheus “at the time when the gods and mortal men had a dispute” (or “were separated”—the force of ἐκρίνοντο is unclear) “at Mekone” (*Theogony* 535–36). Hesiod’s myth relates the practice, satisfyingly, to a time of interaction and perhaps of division between gods and mortals, a time therefore when the order of the universe is being constituted; he also links it to Prometheus, the central figure in other myths that concern dealings between mortals en masse and gods. But though allusions to the unequal division are quite common,⁷⁶ no other source of the classical period appears to relate it to Prometheus or Mekone or a dispute/division between gods and men.⁷⁷ Are we then entitled to say that “the Greeks” explained the division of meat at sacrifice by reference to the trick of Prometheus? The core of myths universally or all-but-universally known may be very small. But if the core is small, the periphery is uncontrollably large. Any story about gods and heroes that any Greek heard or saw and remembered on any occasion was a part of their conception of the gods. Many Greeks from very early on rejected many stories about the gods as untrue, because unworthy of divine dignity or morality, and they were free to do so; but there was no mechanism whereby stories of “gods in sundry shapes, committing heady riots, incest, rapes” could be put under a ban as uncanonical. Since there was no canon, it was equally possible for moralists to reject such stories, and for unreclaimed man to revel in them.

Ritual and Belief

An ancient debate, older even than that on the relation between myth and ritual, concerns the relation between cult-act and belief in ancient religion. Bernard de Fontenelle wrote in *Histoire des oracles* in 1686: “Il y a lieu de croire que chez les payens le religion n’ estoit qu’ une pratique, dont la speculation estoit indifferente. Faites comme les autres, et croyez ce qu’ il vous plaira. . . . Aussi voit-on que toute la religion payenne ne demandoit que des ceremonies, et nuls sentimens du cœur.”⁷⁸ If Fontenelle’s position has been

76. Cf. p. 136 n. 53.

77. Callim. *Ait.* fr. 119 refers to a different incident from primeval time set at Mekone; later allusions (see M. L. West’s notes on Hes. *Theog.* 538 and 551) simply derive from book knowledge of Hesiod.

78. Première dissertation, chap. 7 (pp. 69–70 in the critical edition by L. Maigrion, Paris, 1934). Cf. W. v. Humboldt, “Über das Studium des Alterthums und des griechischen insbesondre” (1793), in A. Leitzmann, ed., *Wilhelm von Humboldts Werke, 1785–1795* (Berlin, 1903), 1:255–81, at 274 (32),

much more influential among students of Roman than of Greek religion, that is perhaps largely a consequence of the notorious scarcity of Roman mythology: one needs to put the *Iliad*, say, or Euripides' *Troades* rather firmly out of mind in order to envisage Greek religion as purely a matter of the performance of cult acts. A religion whose principal rule is "Faites comme les autres, et croyez ce qu'il vous plaira" may sound a poor kind of thing: external conformity to social convention while one's mind is on other things (or on nothing at all). Fontenelle's tone is, indeed, rather dismissive. But it can be supplemented and glossed in a way that makes it applicable to Greece too.

First, a supplement. In its subtlest form, a neo-Fontenellian approach allows that pagan cult is grounded in a belief in its own efficacy: one worships the gods because, experience shows, benefit derives from doing so. The gods are there. At this very basic level there is indeed belief, a belief very generally shared, or at least feigned, and in social terms not wholly safe to repudiate. (But perhaps this foundational belief should rather be treated as certainty or knowledge.)⁷⁹ Without acknowledging this level of belief one cannot make sense of the innumerable literary texts and inscriptions in which individuals turn to the gods with requests, apologies, expressions of hope and gratitude (or conversely, doubt and disappointment). Second, a gloss. Fontenelle did not deny, it should be noted, that a pagan might hold beliefs or indulge in speculation about the gods. Again, it would be absurd to do so; the whole of Greek literature proves the contrary. Many Greek worshippers no doubt approached the altars with their heads full of notions, fears, hopes, and stories

"Die Religion übte schlechterdings keine Herrschaft über den Glauben und die Gesinnungen aus, sondern schränkte sich auf Cärimonien ein, die jeder Bürger zugleich immer von der politischen Seite betrachtete"; Burckhardt, *Kulturgeschichte*, 390: "Endlich würden die Griechen mit einer lehrenden Religion schon frühe Streit angefangen haben, die ihrige aber war lauter Dienst, lehrte nichts und war deshalb auch nicht zu widerlegen"; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 19: "Belief in a certain series of myths was neither obligatory as part of true religion nor was it supposed that, by believing, a man acquired religious merit or conciliated the favour of the gods. What was obligatory or meritorious was the exact performance of certain sacred acts prescribed by religious tradition." Contrast the similar but significantly broader formulation of A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford, 1933), 161: "To the ancients the essence of religion was the rite, which was thought of as a process for securing and maintaining correct relations with the world of uncharted forces around man, and the myth, which gave the traditional reason for the rite and the traditional (but changing) view of those forces." This adds both belief in the efficacy of the rite, and myth.

79. Neo-Fontenellian approach: see M. Linder and J. Scheid, "Quand croire c'est faire: Le problème de la croyance dans la Rome ancienne," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 81 (1993): 47–62; J. Scheid, *Quand faire, c'est croire* (Paris, 2005), 275–84; J. Scheid, "Le sens des rites: L'exemple romain," in *Rites et croyances dans les religions du monde romain* (*Entretiens Hardt* 53, Vandoeuvres, 2007), 39–63; cf. I. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 23–25. Knowledge, not belief: Linder and Scheid, 1993, 54; C. Ando, *Roman Religion* (Edinburgh, 2003), 11; C. Ando, *The Matter of the Gods* (Berkeley, 2008), 13–15.

about the divine. Fontenelle's point was that no attempt was made to control or police the contents of those mental lumber rooms.

Finally and crucially, the epistemological underpinning of the Greek attitude needs to be brought out. Early in book 2, Herodotus says that, of the various accounts he heard from Egyptian priests, he proposes to omit as much as possible those concerning the divine (τὰ θεῖα τῶν ἀπηγημάτων) because he believes all men to have equal knowledge of these matters, that is to say, no knowledge. Rituals he describes; it is the accompanying myths that he chooses to omit. The impossibility for mortals of making confident statements about the intentions or nature of the gods is a commonplace in Greek texts; where a claim is made, it will often be introduced with a formula such as "if one may speculate about the affairs of the gods," "if a mortal may guess about the intention of the gods."⁸⁰ Myth, we have seen, was unstable, and in many aspects for many worshippers incredible. Oracles revealed the proper ritual conduct to adopt in particular situations, not the nature of the gods. The correct way to sacrifice one could know. But as to the attributes and histories of particular gods, the origins of particular cults, the purpose of particular festivals, the very nature of deity, there was nothing but a flux of opinions, stories, speculations. All that was firm and established and secure, all therefore that it made sense to regulate, was the ritual act. The hubbub of conflicting claims did not arise when old certainties broke down, but was the permanent and inevitable consequence of the lack of a basis for such certainties.⁸¹

Does this mean that Greek religion was merely ritualist? The pejorative connotations of "merely ritualist" demand challenge.⁸² As we have seen, this ritualism understands itself as empiricism and has an epistemological basis. It may also be appropriate to evoke here the often-repeated truth that there was no Greek word for "religion." The answer to the question whether Greek religion was "merely ritualist" will depend on what selection from things said and done by the Greeks in relation to the gods one chooses to include within the term "religion." We can agree that "sacred laws" posted outside sanctuaries told worshippers what to do, not what to think. But it does not

80. *And. Myst.* 139: εἴπερ οὖν δεῖ τὰ τῶν θεῶν ὑπονοεῖν; *Isoc.* 1 (Demonicus) 50: εἰ δὲ δεῖ θνητὸν ὄντα τῆς τῶν θεῶν στοχάσασθαι διανοίας; cf. the texts cited by Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 191 nn. 31 and 33; 258 n. 29. On Hdt. as a reporter of rites, not beliefs, see J. Gould, "Herodotus and Religion," in his *Myth, Ritual, Memory and Exchange* (Oxford, 2001), 359–77 (first in S. Hornblower, ed., *Greek Historiography* [Oxford, 1994], 91–106).

81. Cf. E. Kearns, "Order, Interaction, Authority" (in n. 5 above), 525.

82. On the tradition of deprecating "mere ritualism," which he traces back to the sixteenth century, see J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago, 1987), 96–103; he says that this tradition "marked the study of religion as, essentially, a protestant exercise" (98).

follow that opinions about the divine were not held and were not important to those who held them. (As for the vocabulary with which these opinions should be described—opinion, belief, faith—this too is largely a question of the meaning we choose to ascribe to English words.)

Because the gods are unknowable, myths concerning them are inevitably unreliable. But in a paradoxical way they are also, for the same reason, essential. Myth for Plato was a way of talking about that which could not be talked about in analytic language but which was too important to be passed over in silence. Myth had always been used, if in a less self-conscious way, as a means of representing in word and image what was unrepresentable and, in a strict sense, unknowable. Its lack of binding force was essential to its role. It was not a description of the observable but a figuration of what was imprecisely but powerfully felt. Without it, on the most important matters, there was silence.⁸³

Moral Intuition as Revelation: How God Ought to Be

Two complications need to be introduced in conclusion. There is no shortage of texts in which Greeks make just the kind of confident claims about divine matters that, as we have just seen, in other contexts they declare to be impossible. In particular, the fragment of Euripides that runs “If gods do anything base, they are not gods”⁸⁴ is an example of a very common form of argument: the gods are no worse than they ought to be; we can use a definition of what is necessarily inherent in a god to judge and make claims about how gods have behaved or will behave. The argument is particularly at home in philosophy, where it underlies the moral critique of traditional myth; and philosophers who saw the regularity of the natural order as divine had an external underpinning for the attempt to stipulate how “the divine” might or might not comport itself.⁸⁵ But the unphilosophical Greek who expressed confidence that, because his cause was just, it would be supported by the gods,

83. So J. Rudhardt in many writings, e.g., *Thémis*, 159: “Le mythe est en effet un langage particulier: il ne définit pas ce dont il parle, il ne l’enferme dans nul concept; il ne le décrit pas d’une manière contraignante, il le suggère. Il joue d’images qui évoquent leur objet sans exactement le représenter.”

84. Fr. 286b.7 Kannicht; within Eur. cf., e.g., *Hipp.* 120, *Bacch.* 1348, *Ion* 436–51. An argument of this form is central to much Christian apologetic; so, e.g., Arnobius contrasts the gods of pagan mythology with gods worthy of the name (*nomini huius appellatione dicendi*, *Adv. nat.* 7.2), “gods such as, if they exist, they ought to be” (*dei quales, si sunt, debent esse*, *ibid.* 7.15).

85. Cf. G. Betegh in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, ed. M. L. Gill and P. Pellegrin, 625–39 (Oxford, 2006), at 631–32; on p. 628 he observes that “in the absence of a separate clerical class the

was arguing in the same way. So there was a kind of third, a priori source of knowledge about the gods, alongside tradition and oracular responses.

This possibility of reimagining the divine as the divine ought to be was crucially important in one way, largely irrelevant in another. It was important for the scope for free thought that it allowed; from it emerged the god of the philosophers. But it was irrelevant in the sense that the morally reconstructed god was just one image of the divine in competition with others; it entered the vortex of opinions and speculations, and, though for its adherents it may have had the status of certainty, it had no power of constraint over the attitudes of others. And this a priori moral knowledge of the divine largely related to different areas from those covered by oracular responses and tradition. It adjudicated what stories should be believed about the gods, not, in the main, what forms of worship might please them.

Philosophers, it is true, to some extent deployed it even in relation to cult. Thus they often insisted that the gods “took no pleasure” in expensive offerings (how did they know?) and cared much more for the attitude of mind with which an offering was brought.⁸⁶ Theophrastus in *On Piety* even presented a vegetarian critique of animal sacrifice. But such arguments were intended to adjust the attitude of individual worshippers, not to reform the traditional practices of cities. It had always been a matter of choice for individuals whether to sacrifice modestly or ostentatiously, with animal or with vegetarian offerings. The dominant philosophical tradition on cult might be crudely summarized in two propositions: sacrifice modestly, for the gods care nothing for show; observe the traditions of the city, for we know too little about the nature of the gods to change what in the past has pleased them.⁸⁷ Thus the third source of knowledge about the divine, a priori moral knowledge, failed to prove a lever with which to shift that which was fixed and established by the other two.

Surprisingly, there was one current within Stoicism that might seem to have challenged the philosophical consensus in favor of traditional cult; it

philosophers were confident that it was *their* special competence to inquire into the nature of the divine and to define the correct human attitude to the gods.”

86. Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.3; Porph. *Abst.* 2.14–20 (largely from Theophr. *On Piety*: cf. fr. 523 Fortenbaugh); Crates *Suppl. Hell.* 358. 10–11; Lucr. 5.1198–1203; Seneca fr. 123 Haase ap. Lact. *Inst. Div.* 6.25.3. Closely connected is the insistence going back to Plato that the unjust cannot bribe the gods by offerings: Pl. *Resp.* 365E; *Leg.* 905D–907B, and often.

87. On respect for tradition see, e.g., Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.1, 4.3.16; Pl. *Epin.* 985D; Babut, *Religion des philosophes*, 157, 165, 181 (Epicureans and Stoics); Sext. *Emp. Pyr.* 3.2; *Math.* 9.49 (Pyrrhonists); above all Plut. *Amat.* 13, 756B–D, where inquiry into religious matters (in this case the motives of those who first declared Eros a god) is deprecated in favor of adherence to “inherited and ancient belief” (ἡ πατριος καὶ παλαιὰ πίστις).

derived from Cynicism, the most drastic of all the philosophical schools in its attitude to religion. Zeno in his *Politeia* argued that there was no need in the ideal city for sanctuaries and divine images, since they were the work of human hands and, as such, of little value and not sacred. Chrysippus pointed out that the bans on having sexual intercourse in temples and on approaching them after contact with birth or death were unnatural, since not observed by animals. But the Cynic-influenced radicalism of Zeno's *Politeia* was an embarrassment to later Stoics and abandoned by them.⁸⁸ As for Chrysippus's observation, it is unlikely that he drew any conclusions for conduct from his observation; we know it only because Plutarch juxtaposes it, as a "Stoic self-contradiction," with a different remark of Chrysippus' that in fact enjoined respect for sanctuaries. So the argument from nature did not provide a lever to upset traditional usages either.

How Free Was Speech about the Gods?

The second complication concerns the often-repeated claim that the Greeks insisted on orthopraxy, "right doing," in relation to the gods, whereas orthodoxy, "right belief," did not exist even as a concept—a claim that is just a translation into a more modern idiom of what Fontenelle stated long ago. Anyone who has ever lectured on Greek religion and has veered toward that position will have been asked, "But what about the trial of Socrates?" Even if one believes that Socrates was convicted for political reasons, the fact will remain that the indictment was that "Socrates does wrong by not acknowledging (νομίζειν) the gods the city acknowledges, and introducing other, new powers (*daimonia*). He also does wrong by corrupting the young." "Acknowledge" is designed to catch the ambiguity of νομίζειν, which is on the cusp between "believe in" and "habitually pay cult to." A possible answer to the question is to stress the just-mentioned ambiguity of νομίζειν, and to note that Xenophon thought that the accusation could be met by emphasizing that Socrates could regularly be seen making sacrifice on the public altars. The issue would then come down to one of behavior after all. But we do not know that jurors would have been satisfied by Xenophon's counter; and there

88. Zeno: *SVF* 1.264–67; cf. Babut, *Religion des philosophes*, 178 n. 3; M. Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Chicago, 1991), 17. Chrysippus: Plut. *De Stoic. repugn.* 22, 1044F (*SVF* III 753). On Zeno's *Politeia* and its reception, see O. Murray, "Zeno and the Art of Polis Maintenance," in *The Imaginary Polis*, ed. M. H. Hansen, 202–21 (Copenhagen, 2005); on the Cynics and religion, cf. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, "Religion and the Early Cynics," in *The Cynics*, ed. R. Bracht Branham and Goulet-Cazé, 47–80 (Berkeley, 1996).

is a long list of claims in sources that the supposed teachings, not the doings, of natural philosophers in relation to the gods came under attack in Athens in the second half of the fifth century. Every item in that list (such as the trial of Anaxagoras for impiety, or the decree of Diopiteus rendering teaching of astronomy illegal) is controversial, but the cumulative evidence for suspicion and resentment, if not actual legal action, is very strong.⁸⁹

Probably then, just as the neo-Fontenellian position acknowledges a single bedrock belief in the existence of the gods and the efficacy of the cultic system, so it should be acknowledged that perceived challenges to that bedrock belief by influential teachers were not a matter of indifference. Public action against philosophers deemed atheistical is occasionally reported after the fifth century too, though never very reliably. In a general way, there are occasional allusions to philosophers declining to discuss religious matters “in the street.” There are also anecdotes, if of the most unreliable kind, telling how Stilpon the Megarian and Theodorus “the atheist” of Cyrene were expelled from Athens by the Areopagus.⁹⁰ The position of the Epicureans is intriguing. Epicurus taught that gods existed and should be honored in traditional ways, but simply as a mark of respect: cult made no difference. Their philosophical enemies charged Epicureans with being closet atheists. Two cities (Messene; Lyttos in Crete) are said to have expelled them with obloquy, though the objection was as much their “effeminate,” i.e., pleasure-oriented, value system as their godlessness.

Also relevant is the tenor of permissible public discourse about the gods. The only systematic censoring of speech about the gods that occurred or that could occur (for there were no mechanisms to sustain anything else) was that of social convention, the codes governing the very different things that could appropriately be said in different contexts. No competent speaker in a courtroom or before an assembly would dream, for instance, of questioning the gods’ existence, justice, or care for the city, whatever doubts he might nourish

89. See Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 207–10 [+]; on the trial of Socrates, *ibid.*, 199–207, and on the exploitation of impiety charges against later philosophers who were unpopular for political reasons, *ibid.*, 276–78. It is not clear how seriously Cleanthes meant his claim that Aristarchus of Samos should have been prosecuted for impiety for his astronomical views: Plut. *De fac.* 6, 923A (*SVF* 1.500; cf. *ibid.* 481 p. 107.2). The charge against Socrates: Favorinus ap. D.L. 2.40. Xenophon’s defense: *Mem.* 1.1.2. Ambiguity of *νομιζειν*: see W. Fahr, *ΘΕΟΥΣ ΝΟΜΙΖΕΙΝ* (Hildesheim, 1969); H. Yunis, *A New Creed* (Meisenheim, 1988), 62–66; for cases where the sense “customary practice” prevails over belief, see, e.g., Hdt. 2.50.3, 4.59.2; Paus. 9.22.2.

90. “In the street”: D.L. 2.117, with J. F. Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes* (Uppsala, 1976), 225. Stilpon and Theodorus: see Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 277–78. Epicureans expelled: Aelian fr. 39, p. 201.13–202.9 Hercher (from Suda ε 2405 s.v. Epikouros). Closet atheists: Posidonius fr. 22 Kidd; cf. Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.85 with A. S. Pease’s note.

and reveal in private.⁹¹ The nuances of this social censorship of speech about the gods are difficult for us to become attuned to. Plato makes Socrates raise the possibility that he has been prosecuted for impiety for criticizing myths that told of conflict among gods. How whimsical is this suggestion? Such criticism already had a long history by Socrates' day, and surely never formed the sole grounds for a prosecution; but one can see that it might have been tactless to talk in these terms during the Panathenaea, as the splendid *peplos* embroidered with the victory of the gods over the giants was carried past. It is hard to know what to make of "Aristodemos the small," a man who, as presented to us by Xenophon, deemed cult to be unnecessary because the gods were too magnificent to concern themselves with mortal affairs.⁹² He is an instance not just of an unmolested freethinker but also, which complicates the picture, a free-doer: he "neither sacrificed to the gods nor engaged in divination and laughed at those who did." Perhaps he was docketed as a fairly harmless eccentric, the kind of person who only became a source of anxiety if one found oneself on a ship with him in a storm.

Where does all this leave us? The view that it mattered not at all what one said about the gods or was believed to think about them, provided one paid them cult, is too extreme: prosecution of an individual for impiety could occur, as could (probably) legislation against a group such as astronomers or Epicureans. But these were very drastic measures, employed, it seems, and then only occasionally, against persons suspected not just of entertaining but also of propagating views that threatened the bedrock belief in the efficacy of cult. One should remember that if two cities supposedly expelled Epicureans, all the others put up with them; Zeno was not attacked for declaring sanctuaries unnecessary, nor Euhemerus for reducing the traditional gods to deified mortals, nor the later Cynics for their remorseless critique of divination in all its forms.⁹³ More pervasive as a form of control than spasmodic prosecutions were the norms of acceptable speech about the gods. But opinions

91. Cf. R. Parker "Gods Cruel and Kind: Tragic and Civic Theology," in *Greek Tragedy and the Historian*, ed. C.B.R. Pelling (Oxford, 1997), 143–44, 155–56.

92. Pl. *Euthyph.* 6A; Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.2, 10–11.

93. Several Epicureans holding priesthoods are attested under the Roman Empire, though the anomaly of their position might attract comment (Lucian *Symp.* 9, 32), and images of Epicureans were dedicated in Athenian sanctuaries in the first century BC: R. Koch Piettre, "Des Épicuriens entre la vie retirée et les honneurs publics," in *Ἰδίαι καὶ δημοσίαι*, 259–72. The views of Euhemerus were by some perceived as impious (so already Callim. *Ia.* 1.9–11: cf. T 14–23 in Winiarczyk's edition), rightly or wrongly (cf. M. Winiarczyk, *Euhemerios von Messene* [Munich, 2002], 107–18), but had enormous influence (Winiarczyk, *ibid.*, 136–67). Cynics: J. Hammerstaedt, "Der Kyniker Oenomaus von Gadara," *ANRW* 2.36.4 (1990): 2834–65, at 2853–62 (whether early Cynics were so severe on, e.g., Apollo of Delphi, is unclear).

unthinkable in a public speech could be aired not only behind closed doors but also in a work of philosophy or even on the tragic stage.

As was noted earlier, all the topics treated in this chapter emanate out, like spokes of a wheel, from the absence, noted by Ibn Khaldûn, of authoritative sacred texts. A close correlate is the absence of a priestly class entrusted with the exegesis of such texts, and more generally of anything resembling a church. The next chapter will consider why this “absence” too was one that the Greeks had no reason to feel as such.