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## II

G. S. KIRK

### SOME METHODOLOGICAL PITFALLS IN THE STUDY OF ANCIENT GREEK SACRIFICE (IN PARTICULAR)

Few would be likely to dispute that the understanding of sacrifice is a difficult business; but many might also agree that the multifarious efforts to achieve it in the past have been not only broadly unsuccessful but also open to criticism on the score of method. The whole study not only of sacrifice but also of other ritual acts has been bedevilled by a lack of system; in particular by the failure to establish, and to assign reasonable and agreed terms to a system of categories. The great exponents of the 'philological' approach in the past, Stengel, Eitrem and Ziehen in particular, began promisingly enough, over ritual details at least, in the first half of the century; but then the effort seemed to peter out, partly because the theoreticians and comparatists (Pfister and Schwenn among others) diverted attention from some of the basic and preliminary needs of research<sup>1</sup>. The consequent lack of adequate and agreed terms,

<sup>1</sup> P. STENGEL, *Opferbräuche der Griechen* (Leipzig 1910); S. EITREM, *Opferritus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer* (Kristiania 1915; repr. Hildesheim 1977); L. ZIEHEN, in *RE* XVIII 1 (1939), s.v. « Opfer »; Fr. PFISTER, in *RE* XI 2 (1922), s.v. « Kultus »; Fr. SCHWENN, *Gebet und Opfer* (Heidelberg 1927). J. RUDHARDT, *Notions fondamentales de la pensée religieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce classique* (Genève 1958), is an important exception, as his excellent index of terms and analytical index clearly show.

categories and aims has led to both special and general faults. As an example of the former I instance the idea of the gift, on which even Marcel Mauss's contribution (on which see further pp. 72 f. below), intended as provisional to be sure, was curiously one-sided and incomplete. There are many different kinds of gift with many different possible motives, and yet phrases like *do ut des* or terms like *le don* itself are often now used as though they were self-explanatory and needed no further discrimination; more on this topic later. As for the more general consequences, they are no less severe, and I would like to begin by identifying two of them in outline.

First, the failures and inconsistencies over categorization have encouraged the formation of ambitious general theories and monolithic exegetical attitudes that tend to be accepted for a time simply because there is no immediate logic—or will?—available for disproving them. I happen to have become quite familiar with a closely comparable position in the study of myths, in which psychology, historicism and structuralism (to name no more) have all offered panaceas which in the end appear as partial at best. The study of rituals has suffered no less, though the diseases have sometimes been harder to name; but we shall see that functionalism can be one of them, and that others are over-simple assumptions like that which maintains that all sacrifices are a kind of gift, or alternatively a kind of communion or common meal. Many of these failings may be most charitably seen as misapplications or exaggerations of a good idea; but often, too, they are distorted by unconscious attitudes or principles that are really those of method—for example that a ritual act must be the result of a single motive or state of mind.

Another general consequence of the lack of systematic categories and procedures is that even the most serious and sensible writers on religion and ritual are prone to be arbitrary and even whimsical in their use of established theories. That is, because structuralism (for instance) is regarded by most

critics nowadays as sometimes helpful and sometimes not, they feel free to apply it whenever the fancy takes them, whenever it seems temporarily convenient to do so or whenever other approaches seem to fail. The same is so with psychological interpretations, Freudian, Adlerian, Jungian or whatever—generally speaking such interpretations, applied overall, are no longer in favour, but that does not prevent us from using aspects of them, from applying them piecemeal and in an arbitrary fashion, when other kinds of explanation run into difficulties.

Sacrifice has been especially exposed both to the particular and to the general failures of method outlined above; not so much in the setting out of different occasions for sacrifice and different sequences of ritual action—obviously the examination of many of its detailed actions (purification, butchery and so on) has been extremely thorough—as in the establishment of possible or plausible motives and combinations of motives; on which I shall, of course, have more to say later.

To begin with, however, and to provide a certain perspective, I want to see how modern social anthropologists have avoided some of the pitfalls I have delineated; or rather, in the three cases I have chosen for the sake of illustration, how they have failed to avoid them. The three social anthropologists are all British and all very well known; I do not, needless to say, mean to cast any reflexion on their enormous contributions to their subject as a whole—it just happens that they have, in my opinion, slipped for a moment at least into one kind of methodological error with which I am particularly concerned. The first of them is not directly concerned with sacrifice, but rather with the kindred topic of pollution; the other two are directly confronting the problems of animal sacrifice. In each case the assumption that a single exegetical principle can and should be applied leads to a demonstrably faulty analysis. The underlying reason for such interpretations is that “the modern treatment of ethnographic evidence is always functionalist.



Today, every detail of custom is seen as part of a complex <sup>1</sup>...". There is no reason why that in itself should lead to unacceptable generalizations, but in the result it often seems to do so.

My first example, Professor Mary Douglas, states her position with exemplary frankness on p. vii of her important book *Purity and Danger* (London 1966): "I...discovered in myself a prejudice against piecemeal explanations. I count as piecemeal any explanations of ritual pollution which are limited to one kind of dirt or one kind of context." This prejudice finds its most positive expression in her third chapter, which is devoted to a holistic interpretation of the dietary rules against 'abominations' that are set out in *Leviticus* 11 and *Deuteronomy* 14. Why are some kinds of four-footed animals unclean and not others? All those, in fact, that do not "part the foot and are cloven-hooved and chew the cud"? And some kinds of birds, including (apparently) eagles, falcons, ravens, gulls, owls? And all water-creatures that do not have scale or fin? R. S. Driver wrote as far back as 1899, and is quoted by Mary Douglas on p. 45 of her book, that "No single principle, embracing all the cases, seems yet to have been found, and not improbably more principles than one cooperated"—an apparently innocuous and indeed reasonable statement for which he is knocked firmly on the head by Professor Douglas: "Needless to say such interpretations are not interpretations at all, since they deny all significance to the rules"; and elsewhere she writes that such interpretations fail because "they are neither consistent nor comprehensive" (*op. cit.*, 48), and "Any interpretations will fail which take the Do-nots of the Old Testament in a piecemeal fashion" (49).

Functionalist doctrine aside, it is hard to see why such a list of prohibitions, dietary or otherwise, should not combine more than one different concept of impurity or impracticality—in response, perhaps, to different regional or tribal traditions and

<sup>1</sup> E. R. LEACH, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge 1976), 1.

taboos that have become amalgamated as well as to different criteria within the same tradition. If a single interpretative principle can be divined and legitimately applied, so much the better; but ritual and religious rules do not necessarily work in that perfectly organized way. In this particular case Professor Douglas makes an impressive shot at achieving such a principle. The 'abominations', she claims, are ambiguous species which muddle up the clear-cut categories: land-animals ought to be four-footed, cud-chewing ones ought to be cloven-footed like cows, flying creatures should have two wings, the proper kind of sea-creatures consists of fish with scales and fins—so that lobsters and the like, every kind of creepy-crawly in fact, are unnatural, an abomination.

The idea works remarkably well—except for one important part of the evidence. This is how *Leviticus* 11, 13-19 lists the unclean flying creatures (in the Revised Standard Version): "And these ye shall have in abomination among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the ossifrage, the osprey, the kite, the falcon according to its kind, every raven according to its kind, the ostrich and the night-hawk, the seagull, the hawk according to its kind, the owl, the cormorant, the ibis, the water hen, the pelican, the vulture, the stork, the heron according to its kind, the hoopoe and the bat". It is obvious that some of these could be excluded from the category-type on the grounds of odd characteristics: ostrich, ibis, pelican, stork, bat, at least. But it is also obvious that many of the list *do* conform fully to their class—that is, in having two wings and so on. Eagles, ospreys, hawks, falcons are archetypal flying creatures and, far from having strange habitats or limbs or modes of progression, seem exemplary of their class. But it stands out a mile that *their* particular common quality, and that of owls, vultures, sea-gulls and cormorants also, and that which renders them 'abominable', is their being carnivorous—that is, they feed rather indiscriminately on other creatures which may themselves transgress the category-rules

or be unclean in other ways. If the contents of their stomachs are abominable, so are they themselves. In short, we have not one but two principles at work here: on the one hand creatures like bats and ostriches are unclean because although they have wings they cross the category-boundaries in too many other respects, just as "swarming creatures in the waters" do in their particular realm; on the other hand creatures like falcons and eagles are unclean, despite their being typically bird-like in other respects, because they sometimes feed on unclean food. Therefore Mary Douglas's explicative principle breaks down in this second respect. How does she attempt to ward off this obvious criticism? Virtually by ignoring it and pleading possible mistranslation: "Birds I can say nothing about, because . . . they are named but not described and the translation of the names is open to doubt" (55)—but not to much doubt, surely, at least in relation to hawks, falcons and so on which are crucial to the argument?

It seems that a degree of 'piecemeal explanation' is, after all, necessary in this case. Mary Douglas's principle that "holiness means wholeness" works very well for most of the time, and her discussion of other types of explanation throughout the whole chapter is something of a *tour de force*; but the awkward facts remain that there is at least one important exception to the neat scheme, and that there are other aspects of impurity than those that can be subsumed under the heading of wholeness or the avoidance of ambiguity. Eating filth, including cadavers, is one of them. Multiple motivation is often a fact<sup>1</sup>; therefore piecemeal interpretation *can* be right,

<sup>1</sup> Additional confirmation in the present case is provided by a neat piece of evidence to which Professor Kenneth Kitchell of Louisiana State University drew my attention (at the Mellon Colloquium at Tulane University, New Orleans, where I first had the opportunity of developing some of the ideas in this first part of my paper): for here is the corresponding dietary inhibition from the Koran, 5, 3-5: "forbidden to you are the dead beast, blood, the flesh of swine, that of animals sacrificed in the name of another deity than God, the smothered beast and

and no amount of 'prejudice' or devotion to the severer side of structuralism or functionalism should be allowed to disguise the fact.

There is a coda to be added to the present account, not only in fairness to Professor Douglas but also because it underlines the invulnerability of basic functionalist principles for those who profess them. In a review of a book by V. W. Turner in *MAN* for 1970, p. 303, she retracts her ingenious idea in the following terms: "It should never again be possible to provide an analysis of an interlocking system of thought which has no relation to the social life of the people who think in these terms. For example, my own discussion of animal categories in the Old Testament, an analysis of Leviticus XI in *Purity and Danger* (1966), cannot be acceptable on the standards laid down". In short, it was the failure to link the unitary principle to the details of society as a whole, and not the idea that 'piecemeal explanations' are necessarily wrong, which caused Professor Douglas to think again<sup>1</sup>.

The second test-case (which has certainly influenced the third) brings us directly to sacrifice and its motives; not among the Greeks but among the Nuer, a Nilotic people whose life centres on their herds of cattle and for whom the sacrifice of an ox is their main religious act. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's three books on the Nuer are a classic of ethnography; his *Nuer Religion*, the last of the three, was first published in 1956. The Nuer are not, he writes on p. 212, "a highly ritualistic people", by comparison for example with their neighbours the Dinka, and their sacrifices are rather informal. Even so, different kinds can be clearly distinguished; for example the victim may

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the felled and the gored and the victim of a fall; the animal partly eaten by a wild beast (unless you have slaughtered it), and what is sacrificed in the name of idols". It is plain that there are at least three principles operating here: do not eat meat from an animal that has not been freshly killed; do not eat meat from an animal slaughtered in the wrong way, or in the name of the wrong deity; do not eat pig.

<sup>1</sup> As is confirmed in chs. 16 and 17 of her *Implicit Meanings* (London 1975).



exceptionally be left to rot, either before an advancing enemy or when the intention is to stop a disease of the cattle (219). The author also notes that attempts to explain sacrifice by picking out a single characteristic psychological state, "awe, religious thrill and so on", are clearly fallacious in the case of the Nuer, since their feelings manifestly differ on different occasions and at different parts of the same ceremony (207).

One would have thought, after this, that Evans-Pritchard would favour the positing of a complex network of assumptions and motives for Nuer sacrifices of the piacular kind with which he is chiefly concerned. Many of his detailed observations of their ritual practices point clearly in that direction. Yet what we find as we read through *Nuer Religion* is that a unitary interpretation gradually makes its way to the surface almost despite the unfolding evidence. Thus on p. 228 he summarizes an analysis of various terms used to describe sacrificial attitudes as follows: "we have seen that the *lor* concept adds the idea of honouring to that of an exchange or bargain in the general meaning of sacrifice. The *kier* concept [implying something like expiation] adds something more." On p. 229 he concludes that "in our examination of these words we have found that they do indeed express rather different conceptions". But now comes the surprise: "What all of them express, however, is the central piacular idea of lives of cattle for lives of men" (230)—an idea that he claims will have a single "interior meaning".

Why does Evans-Pritchard state that *no doubt* these conceptions are all variations of a single general meaning? Nothing in the lexical argument justifies that conclusion, which he derives mainly from the ritual action of rubbing ashes on the back of the intended animal victim. It is an act, he admits on p. 279, of consecration; "but it is also, to a greater or lesser degree, of identification. Identification of sacrificer with victim is a common interpretation by ancient and modern writers on the subject. Indeed, it is quite explicit in some religions, in particular in certain Vedic, Hebrew and Muslim rites, that



what one consecrates and sacrifices is always oneself". He goes on to claim that such an interpretation (which I do not believe he expounds at greater length elsewhere) "makes good sense for Nuer piacular sacrifices... I do not think that their piacular sacrifices, where the life of an animal is substituted for the life of a man, are intelligible unless this [*sc.* the identification of sacrificer with victim] is granted" (279 ff.). But his whole formulation of "substituting the life of an animal for that of a man" is tendentious; all he means is that an animal is sacrificed to avert danger to a man's life, whether it arises from sin, from sickness or from other misfortune (198).

What Professor Evans-Pritchard seems to be saying in this rather loose argument, is that, although rubbing the back of the victim with ashes is undeniably undertaken partly to consecrate it to God, it must also be intended to symbolize the identity of victim and sacrificer, and thus make the sacrifice an act of self-immolation, because that is what sacrifices can imply in some other religions. Such an argument has no value, since it can be demonstrated that the motivation of animal sacrifice, complex as it is, varies enormously from people to people even within the special category of expiatory rituals; so that no comparatist manoeuvre of this kind could be more than worthless. It was only belatedly that the author attempted to obtain any confirmation from the tribesmen themselves; he asked Dr Mary Smith, a missionary, to enquire what the rubbing on of ashes meant to them. "Nuer told her that it was done to show God his animal and also so that the bad or evil would go out of them into the ox—they said it was 'exchanging life' (life of man for life of beast)" (280 n. 1). Both Dr Smith and Professor Evans-Pritchard found this three-fold statement (of which even the last element says nothing about identity of sacrificer and victim) to be adequate confirmation of his theory; on the contrary, it seems to me to suggest precisely the multiple motivation to which the author himself had drawn attention earlier in his book, and to provide no justification for setting one motive

above the others with the implication that it subsumes all the rest. Be that as it may, the author himself became more and more convinced: "Fundamentally", he wrote on pp. 281 ff., "... if we have to sum up the meaning of Nuer sacrifice in a single word or idea",—a procedure about which he himself rightly expresses some doubt—"I would say that it is a substitution, *vita pro vita*". At this point, at least, his holistic prejudice seems to be the result not so much of any functionalist view of society as of a feeling that, in religion at least, even complex phenomena must have single underlying causes.

The third test-case is drawn from Sir Edmund Leach's *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge 1976). The book (which is prescribed reading for students) is described as "An introduction to the use of structuralist analysis in social anthropology"; his kind of structuralism turns out to be an applied form of the theories of Durkheim, van Gennep and the functionalists, not unlike that of Mary Douglas. It is, in Leach's own term, "empiricist structuralism" as distinct from the "rationalist structuralism" of the Lévi-Straussians (4 f.). On p. 77 he re-asserts (after p. 35) that "most ritual occasions are concerned with movement across boundaries from one social status to another". Here at once is a questionable generalization; for the truth is that, although many rituals are of that kind, many others are not—and in many societies these are the majority. Sacrifice, obviously one of the most important kinds of ritual, is dealt with in Leach's very next section, and provides indeed the one example (of the consecration of Aaron as high priest) that is offered of the working of the whole 'theory'; and yet sacrifice, for the ancient Greeks and many others, was not primarily concerned with rites of passage. It was a focal point of most public rituals in Greece, and in these transition from one social condition to another was only occasionally in question. The same was so with many domestic sacrifices also. There seems, therefore, to be an initial over-simplification. Let us nevertheless examine the 'logic of sacrifice' in more

detail, as Leach and his kind of structuralism counsel us to see it.

The 'theory' turns out to be based on two models of how religious ritual expresses a relationship between this world and "the other world of metaphysical imagination" (81). In the first model, represented by two intersecting circles standing for the two worlds, with the overlap as a liminal zone, "'power' . . . is located in the other world and the purpose of religious performance is to provide a bridge, or channel of communication, through which the power of the gods may be made available to otherwise impotent men". Leach offers a rather restricted description of this liminal zone and the persons who frequent it, typically regarded as "ancestors, saints or incarnate deities"—a description which finds little support (beyond the heroes, who do not come into most divine rituals) among ancient Greek ideas at least. His second model, which is complementary, is the van Gennepian one of a marginal interlude, or interruption in the sequence of secular time and action, being introduced by a "rite of separation" and terminated by a "rite of aggregation" (83). The purpose of rituals, including sacrifices, is to bring about transitions from and to normal time.

Let us now see how the author uses these complementary models—whose validity is strongly bound up with the 'theory' itself, even if they do not absolutely constitute it—to explicate the motives of sacrifice. He begins with 'one view' of sacrifice whereby it is a gift of some kind (he does not distinguish gift, tribute or fine paid to the gods, from the point of view of possible motive). The implication is judged to be that "By making a gift to the gods, the gods are compelled to give back benefits to men" (83); and the first model is used to identify part of the logic whereby the slaughtering of an animal might constitute an especially appropriate gift of this kind. The souls of dead men, he claims, pass through the liminal zone and become immortal ancestor-deities in the Other World (again, he is

clearly not talking about Greek, Judaic or many other ancient Near-eastern beliefs); so "If we want to make a gift to a Being in the Other World, the 'soul', that is the metaphysical essence, of the gift must be transmitted along the same route as is travelled by the soul of the dead man" (83). Power, or a return gift, can come back along the same route. Well, that is certainly one kind of motive for slaughtering an animal, and an interesting one; I do not doubt that societies exist in which such a motive can be established, although I suspect that in many tribal societies even (and not to speak of the Greeks) the motive is not exactly that. But how is it that other gifts, such as libations or votive offerings, do not require or sometimes even allow that view of 'metaphysical essence'? I believe there is far more to the issue than Leach suggests; moreover I doubt whether the author's interpretation depends in any serious way on his first model of overlapping circles, except in the idea of a liminal zone. All the rest, about the metaphysical essence of the gift, is extraneous.

In any case Leach himself proceeds immediately to point out some of the drawbacks of the sacrifice-as-gift idea, and to re-define what matters in sacrifice as "an expression of reciprocal relationship rather than material exchange". That is a familiar view (not, again, particularly dependent on liminal zones) which may well be true. But now an additional concept is introduced: "In any event, the animal or object sacrificed is a metonymic sign for the donor of the sacrifice" (84). This is an assumption quite commonly held among anthropologists, occurring also in Evans-Pritchard's account of the Nuer as we saw (pp. 48 f. above); and once again I merely comment that although some sacrifices in some societies may have that implication, others do not. The point for Leach is this: that "By arranging for a liminal priest to perform the sacrifice in the liminal zone, the donor provides a bridge across which the potency of the gods can flow (toward himself)" (84). This is something rather different from the reciprocal relationship



established by a gift-sacrifice as symbol; and the circle of interpretations and conjectures is widened still further as Leach proceeds to his second model. Close study of the crucial p. 84 reveals that what the 'metaphors' of Model II amount to are doctrinaire assumptions about mortuary ritual, the fate of the soul and the relation between sacrificer and victim<sup>1</sup> which have nothing directly to do either with sacrifices or with Model II as such.

Leach has clearly had serious difficulties in relating what he terms 'the theory' to the act of animal sacrifice in any productive way; and indeed in maintaining any single principle or way of looking at things that can justify the name of a theory. He, too, seems committed to the idea of a *single* interpretative principle, of avoidance of the piecemeal. In the end, however, he can be seen to be playing with little more than the familiar idea of rites of passage and of marginality and its consequences, elaborated by a few special intuitions or interpretations (sacrifice as gift, identity of sacrificer and victim, sacrificer as initiate in a *rite de passage*), some familiar and others less so, but all of them requiring justification for a particular social nexus and none automatically applicable to any particular sacrificial act. One must freely concede that the general insights associated with the idea of marginality and rites of passage are applied at several points in a typically interesting and enlightening way. If anything, however, the exercise is an argument for piecemeal explanation rather than for any holistic theory; and it might have been better to omit the tortuous attempt to define such a theory in the first place.

I submit that a provisional conclusion to be drawn from the examination of these three test-cases is this: that any view of

<sup>1</sup> Later, on p. 89 (in the course of the extended illustration concerned with Aaron), it is categorically stated that "the donor of the offering invariably establishes a metonymic relationship between himself and the victim by touching the victim on the head. The plain implication is that, in some metaphysical sense, the victim is a vicarious substitution for the donor himself"—a wonderful example of the kind of logic that has bedevilled the study of sacrifice both ancient and modern.



society and its institutions, whether it be termed functionalist or structuralist of something else, which insists on society as a bounded and self-consistent organism, is wrong. No society in human history has ever worked like that. Functionalism may provide a useful model for anthropologists, but it is surely a mistake to confuse theoretical models with practical realities—realities which, in the case of religion and rituals, are complex and shifting. The realization that different parts and aspects of social behaviour are determined, to a large extent, by commonly shared structures in human physiology, mentality and environment is an important one. It has brought valuable new insights into the study of society and its institutions; but if it is to be used as the unconscious justification for monolithic principles of exegesis (principles which can be seen in effect to cover some but not all of the facts), then it is time to think again. What I am arguing for is not, of course, the total rejection of functionalist attitudes or the necessary promotion of 'piecemeal explanation' as the order of the day; but rather the careful re-statement of functionalism in relation to those accidents, confusions, syncretisms and historical changes that make religion in particular, including its rituals and the practice of animal sacrifice not least of all, such a multifarious and often contradictory affair.

That is one kind of difficulty in the understanding of ritual behaviour within society. But 'understanding' here has its own dangers, and something needs to be said by way of preliminary about the attempted reconstruction of motive as a part of the history of religion. For I am aware that there are complications here, and that some scholars believe that ritual can only be understood in terms of performance, not of belief. That view has its attractions, although it can lead to its own kind of arbitrariness over the relating of different stages of ritual practice. For my own part I find it more productive to accept, with due caution, the need to reconstruct some, at least, of the beliefs that coincide with rituals, and to do so quite openly.

For the crucial fact is that *no* ritual, for all practical purposes, is performed without some kind of underlying motive and belief. The very least that it is reasonable to assume is the idea that "this is what the ancestors did, and so we must do it too"; yet comparison of various different societies would probably show that special motives or interpretations for the traditional actions are soon introduced. Either the ritual is related to current needs and interests, or it is interpreted as explaining something about the traditional past itself. Heavily ritualized peoples like the aboriginal Australians or Malinowski's Trobrianders tend to be full of proclaimed motives; their understanding of the reasons for certain kinds of ritual behaviour may not coincide with that of the anthropologist, but reasons, whatever they may be, are known to be there in any case. The concept of people performing rituals (that is, repeated actions at set times) without any concern for why they do it is probably an offshoot of the Lévy-Bruhl kind of 'primitive mentality' assumption; now that it is known that tribal peoples, and *a fortiori* more 'advanced' ones, are no less interested in their own actions than we are, the idea of religious and other rituals being simply unthinking atavistic performances has clearly lost much of its attraction.

One reason for showing an interest in the motives for ritual performance is simply that, despite strongly conservative elements in all ritual, there is also a tendency to development and change no less than in other social behaviour. Such change can be brought about by more or less extraneous factors, for example changes in the environment, the economy or the tribal organization; but it can also be determined by the particular view that is held at any one time about the ritual itself and the reasons for its enactment in such and such a form. On the assumption that participants in rituals *are*, after all, interested to some degree in what they are doing, and why, there will always be a tendency to adjust the ritual to the particular conception that is held, at any time, about its underlying purpose.

The simpler the ritual, the less opportunity there may be for such adjustments; but in complex rituals there are almost bound to be some elements that seem less well designed than others to fulfil the motives that are assigned, overall, to the whole performance. These will then be under-stressed, or will tend to be so; whereas elements that are most fully consonant with the contemporary idea of what is going on will tend, over a period of time, to be more strongly emphasized. That in itself can lead to serious re-casting of the whole complex, in a process that the historian must be prepared to detect and understand, at least as far as the available evidence allows.

I ask for indulgence over one further delay before we consider directly some of the methodological difficulties of ancient Greek sacrifice itself. It is useful to look first at both ancient and modern interpretations of a particular non-sacrificial ritual, the Amphidromia; for they illustrate in a very clear form the kinds of exegetical problem that can arise with the more complex and difficult case of sacrifice. The ritual was held on the fifth day after birth according to the *Suda*, or within seven days according to Hesychius; I am not concerned here with that difference, nor with whether it was a naming ceremony or not. The three main ancient testimonies are as follows:

(1) *Suda*, s.v. ἀμφιδρόμια: τὴν πέμπτην ἄγουσιν ἐπὶ τοῖς βρέφεσιν, ἐν ᾗ ἀποκαθαίρονται τὰς χεῖρας αἱ συναψάμεναι τῆς μαιώσεως, τὸ δὲ βρέφος περιφέρουσι τὴν ἐστίαν τρέχοντες καὶ δῶρα πέμπουσιν οἱ προσήκοντες, ὡς ἐπὶ πλεῖστον πολυπόδας καὶ σηπίας.

(2) Hesychius, s.v. δρομιάμφιον ἡμαρ: ἀμφιδρόμια· ἔστι δὲ ἡμερῶν ἑπτα ἀπὸ τῆς γεννήσεως, ἐν ᾗ τὸ βρέφος βαστάζοντες περὶ τὴν ἐστίαν γυμνοὶ τρέχουσιν. — Cf. s.v. ἀμφιδρόμια: ἡμέρα ἀγομένη τοῖς παιδίοις, ἐν ᾗ τὸ βρέφος περὶ τὴν ἐστίαν ἔφερον τρέχοντες κύκλῳ καὶ ἐπετίθησαν αὐτῷ ὄνομα.

(3) Plato *Theaetetus* 160 e: τοῦτο μὲν δὴ, ὡς εἰκεν, μόλις ποτὲ ἐγγενήσαμεν, ὃ τι δῆποτε καὶ τυγχάνει ὄν· μετὰ δὲ τὸν τόκον τὰ ἀμφιδρόμια

αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐν κύκλῳ περιθρεκτέον τῷ λόγῳ, σκοπούμενους μὴ λάθῃ ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἄξιον ὄν τροφῆς τὸ γιγνόμενον...

The problem I am concerned with is the obvious one: what is the motive or probable complex of motives for running round the hearth with the new-born child? There have been four main lines of interpretation: that this is intended as some kind of purification-ritual; that it symbolizes and effects the reception and integration of the child into the οἶκος represented by the hearth; that it is a test or ordeal to determine genuineness as a precondition of acceptance; and (not so commonly) that it implies some kind of 'cooking' or maturation of the infant.

The catalogue of arbitrariness, selectivity and incompleteness in the urging of one or other of these views is extensive, and I will not take time to consider it in detail; suffice to say that we still cannot begin to reconstruct the mentality of participants in the Amphidromia at any period. But at least some of the following points need to be taken into account, and in so doing a semblance at least of method might be introduced into the matter.

Perhaps it is unfair to assign a probably cathartic purpose to the account in the *Suda*, which after all merely lists two stages in the proceedings: first the hand-washing by those concerned with delivery, then the carrying round the hearth (not to speak of the fascinating third detail, of presenting octopuses and cuttlefish). But modern interpreters like P. Stengel (in *RE* I 2, s.v. «Amphidromia») and E. Samter (*Familienfeste der Griechen und Römer* (Berlin 1901), 59 f.) have accepted the purification element, whether as primary or (in the case of Samter) as secondary motive. Probably they are persuaded not so much by the *Suda*'s hand-washing detail as by the implications of the hearth, and the fire it contains, itself. It is obvious that purgation and purification are among the several possible connotations and functions of fire, and clearly



the idea of exposing the infant, in some sense and at some distance, to the household hearth cannot necessarily be dissociated from purification. There are, of course, difficulties: it is strange that the physical cleansing of those defiled by the birth itself should be postponed for at least five days after the event—but that might merely stress the symbolical aspect of the whole proceeding, and therefore increase the probability of a purgative intention in carrying the child round the fire (by decreasing the literal need for very close exposure to it). But even so there are further possibilities to be considered: the purpose of the fire could be to consume the defilements implicit in birth, or alternatively to burn away as far as possible the mortal elements in the infant itself, as Demeter tried to do with Demophon in the *Hymn to Demeter* and as Thetis tried to do with Achilles and his brothers. Should we also consider that those who carry the child round at the run are also being purified? Surely that is the clearly implication of the first Hesychius testimony, where we are told that they are naked as they run? Actually I do not propose to waste time on this possibility, because I am clear that the reading should not be γυμνοί (as is generally accepted) but γυμνόν—that is, it is the *child* that is naked, not surprisingly. Comparison with the wording both of the other Hesychian entry and with the *Suda*'s entry shows that γυμνόν <φέρουσι> τρέχοντες should probably be restored. Finally there is an altogether different possibility within the general field of purification-interpretations: that the intention is apotropaic (in one of the several senses of that convenient term), in order to keep pollution outside the circle. One compares here the circle that is drawn, actually or figuratively, around the inner group at a sacrifice; measuring out the sacred area is one intention, but who can say how far the motive is also that of keeping unfavourable substances and influences at bay?

The second general line of interpretation, as reception into the οἶκος, has much in its favour provided it is not put forward



as complete and necessarily exclusive, or as self-evident in its specific implications. In marriage-ceremonies the bride was led *to* the hearth, to symbolize her incorporation in the new household; but in the Amphidromia it is important that the child is not merely led to the hearth, but actually round it. That is emphasized not only in the name of the ritual itself, but also by the emphatic method of encompassment: not only several times (that is a guess, but a reasonable one on the evidence) but also at a run. But encircling could also be part of the fourth kind of interpretation, as cooking or maturation; or it could be a by-product of the running element, if that is conceived (as is possible, after all) as having any agonistic component. Perhaps the most important consideration to arise here is that the reception of the new-born child differs in certain ways from that of the new bride, and that the encircling of the hearth in the former case, as distinct from the mere approach to it in the latter, is significant: for although there are occasional testimonies to leading the bride round the hearth, as in the Amphidromia, most content themselves with a simple leading *to*.

It is in the assessment of the third line of interpretation, which arises exclusively from Plato's famous reference in the *Theaetetus*, that modern criticism has been most ineffectual. Most of the trouble depends, of course, on the conflict between Plato's relatively early date, and great authority in many matters, and the flippancy and exaggeration that he often assigns to Socrates even over factual statements. Anyone who has worked with Heraclitus will be familiar with the difficulty; I am certainly one of those who think that Socratic irony often includes an element of comical distortion. Over the Amphidromia, at least, Socrates' profession is quite clear: that a newly-born argument must be subjected to a metaphorical "running around in a circle", like a new-born child in the Amphidromia, to see whether it deserves to be nourished—which implies, obviously, to be accepted as a real argument

(or member of the household). Therefore Socrates, here, is being made to interpret the Amphidromia as some sort of test which the new-born child has to pass before it is accepted. What is at issue, therefore, is acceptance *based upon* test; and the test is part of the process of being carried round the hearth, naked, at a run. There are various possibilities here; the running, and draught created thereby, might cause a weakly child to catch cold and subsequently die; but all our other testimonies suggest that the Amphidromia is a self-contained ritual, and that acceptance (or in this case rejection) is achieved in the course of it and not later. Another possibility is that whether the child cries or not is part of the test or ordeal; but this is really too arbitrary and would hardly be acceptable to the families themselves. Or again, there could be some kind of correspondence with, and memory of, mythical events like the Demophon burning or Medea's excuse for cooking Pelias; although there is no positive evidence whatsoever to suggest this. On the whole the test or ordeal interpretation seems unlikely, and is specifically excluded by the religious-historical tradition represented in Hesychius and the *Suda*, who are relatively rich in sheer facts at least. Perhaps Plato was aware of something about motives which escaped the more concrete and factual tradition? That is a possibility, but it seems more likely to me that Plato was making his character Socrates extend the undeniable motive of *acceptance*, for the Amphidromia, into a possibly associated motive, or relic of one, that suited his particular philosophical argument. It is not, in any event, my purpose here to solve this problem, but rather to point out some of the considerations that have been inaccurately distinguished and weighted so far.

There are of course other complications and possibilities, for example the probably confused statement of the Ravenna scholium on Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 757 according to which children were placed on the ground and the family ran round them there (περιδραμόντες κειμένοις (-ους R)); or the manifold impli-

cations of running itself—perhaps to intensify the encircling movement by the speed and effort involved, perhaps to create a wind, with possible purgative effects, or fertile ones as suggested by Frazer and others for swinging in the Aiora. One need hardly recall at this point Meuli's suggested motive for encircling the altar in sacrifice, namely as a relic of smoking the participants so as to put their prey off the scent in the Palaeolithic hunt—but at least this exotic possibility can serve as a transition back to sacrifice itself! <sup>1</sup>

The material considered so far has disclosed at least three kinds of methodological danger or weakness: (i) inadequate analysis of the whole range of evidence; (ii) premature resort to general theories; (iii) needlessly arbitrary or random selection of motive, stemming from the failure properly to set out and categorize the various possibilities. Each of these failings has been conspicuous in the handling of ancient Greek sacrifice, and I now propose to consider certain specific cases under each heading. Many aspects of the problem—or complex of problems, rather—will obviously remain untouched, and I repeat that the main purpose of this paper is methodological and preliminary.

Over the first failing, in the handling of the ancient evidence itself, I confine myself to one minor and one major matter. It is a relatively minor point that a persistent theme in comic writers, namely that men are behaving both impiously and absurdly in offering only the inedible parts of the animal to the gods, is taken seriously by modern writers as proof of a real and profound paradox in the procedures of animal sacrifice in Homeric and classical times. This is an example of

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 264 f. of the work cited in n. 1 on p. 70 below. I owe some more serious points to my former pupil Dr. W. G. Furley, who has an interesting discussion of the *Amphidromia* in his 1980 Cambridge dissertation on aspects of fire in ancient Greek myth and ritual. At this point I should mention another student, Mr Nicholas Lowe of Jesus College, Cambridge, with whom I have had many helpful conversations on ritual matters.

the inadequate assessment of the likely values and drawbacks of a particular kind of evidence. For the motif is already implicit in Hesiod's account in the *Theogony* of Zeus and Prometheus at Mecone, and could easily have been derived therefrom by Old Comedy and become a stock joke. But the Hesiodic treatment of the theme (which has responded fruitfully to pressure by Vernant in particular) need not by any means imply that there was serious and widespread concern about current sacrificial practice; for, as is well known, apparently similar aetiological tales are applied in many different societies to cosmogonical or physiological phenomena with a similarly irresolvable mixture of seriousness and flippancy—combined, for the most part, with that special interest in ingenious explanations, however trivial, that is also an essential part of folktale. My complaint in methodological terms, therefore, is that, as with the Plato evidence for the Amphidromia, the special *genre* characteristics and consequent probable truth-value of a well-defined class of literary evidence have not been properly considered and assessed.

The more important point concerns details of the ritual actions of sacrifice itself. Here the Homeric evidence is of very great importance; many of the actions described in later, post-Homeric sources (from Aristophanes on) can be traced here, but the usual critical practice has been to amalgamate the Homeric and the post-Homeric accounts into a glorified 'classical' amalgam which can be seriously misleading. Too little consideration is given in the process to the self-consistency or otherwise of the Homeric picture, and to possible motives for the addition of new ritual acts or the revaluation of old ones.

The Homeric picture has a certain obvious consistency produced by the formular nature of 'typical scenes' of which sacrifice is one. Verses and sequences of verses tend to be repeated, especially for the latter stages of sacrifice, those that



follow the act of slaughter. Cutting out the thigh-bones, covering them with a double layer of fat, putting on bits of raw meat, burning the fat-encased bones on wooden spits as the divine portion, roasting and partaking of the σπλάγχνα (especially heart and liver), cutting up the remainder, spitting and roasting it and then eating it at the meal—these are typical actions of the *Iliad* especially<sup>1</sup>. Sacrifices on special occasions or for special purposes (for example Eumaeus' slightly eccentric and rustic sacrifice of a boar for dinner at *Od.* XIV 419 ff. or the oath-sacrifice at *Il.* III 270 ff., where the victims are sheep) emphasize different parts of the possible sequence of ritual actions; Eumaeus carves a special portion of the meat to be set aside for Hermes and the nymphs, an otherwise unparalleled idea in Homer, and Agamemnon produces his knife to cut hair from the victims' heads which he then has distributed to the chief participants rather than throwing it directly into the fire himself, as in an ordinary meal-sacrifice. That is because all concerned must be directly involved in the oath, just as they all take part in the act of libation, and in a special way—not just as an accompaniment of the prayer but also as part of a curse (“may the brains of whoever breaks the oath flow like this wine”).

In spite of some good detailed treatment of the various acts and phases of Greek animal sacrifice by Stengel, Eitrem, Ziehen and Rudhardt in particular, the important Homeric evidence has still not been set out with the fullness and objectivity (and lack of conflation with later evidence) that it clearly deserves. I have found it useful to prepare the accompanying brief Table (which could clearly be expanded and extended) as a basis for further discussion; all the passages are concerned

<sup>1</sup> As shows up from the Table on p. 64. Notably *Il.* I 458-68 is identical with *Il.* II 421-31 except for two verses (I 462 f. and II 425 f.) which have variations; *Od.* III 456-63 too shows many similarities, and even *Od.* XIV 426-32, in spite of its rustic colouring, has noticeable connexions in vocabulary and phrasing. *Il.* VII 316-23 and XXIV 621-8 are not sacrifices but descriptions of preparing a secular meal, but the language is again similar and largely formulaic.



TABLE : The acts of sacrifice in six main Homeric scenes

	<i>Il.</i> I 447 ff.	<i>Il.</i> II 410 ff.	<i>Il.</i> III 268 ff.	<i>Od.</i> III 5 ff.	<i>Od.</i> III 419 ff.	<i>Od.</i> XIV 419 ff.
they send for animal(s)			×		×	
gild horns			×			
lead forward			×		×	
station round altar	×					
stand round animal		×				
knife (axe) is described			×		×	
they mix wine			×			
hair distributed			×			
hair thrown on fire					×	×
they wash hands	×		×		×	
take up barley grain	×	×				
sacrificer prays	×	×	×	(×)	×	×
makes libation				×		
they throw grain	×	×			×	(×)
victim is stunned					×	×
<i>ololuge</i>					×	
they hold back neck	×	×			(×)	
throat is cut	×	×	×		×	×
blood flows, spirit leaves			(×)		×	
there is a bowl					×	
they skin victim	×	×				
they singe victim						×
cut out thigh-bones	×	×			×	
cover with double-fat	×	×			×	(×)
put on raw meat	×	×			×	×
burn thighs on wooden spits	×	×			×	
sacrificer pours wine	×		(×)		×	
they roast <i>splanchna</i>	(×)	×				
spitting them		×				
thighs burned, they eat						
<i>splanchna</i>	×	×		×	×	
they cut up the rest, roast on spits	×	×		(×)	×	×
draw it off	×	×			(×)	×
eat and drink	×	×		×	×	(×)
divide into portions, one for god						×
victims carried away			×			

with meal-sacrifices except for the oath-sacrifice already cited from *Iliad* III, in which the victims were not subsequently butchered but were carried away for disposal elsewhere.

There is nothing in Homer about special clothes or garlands, which were *de rigueur* in both private and public sacrifices in classical times; purification is confined to χέρνιβες, water sprinkled over the hands (and neither sprinkling nor garlanding the victim, as later, is mentioned). There is nothing about persuading the victim to assent to the killing (as Delphi specifically prescribed <sup>1</sup>), or inducing it to move into place voluntarily, as for example in the Attic Bouphonia. There is a kind of procession, with both victim and ritual implements, in Nestor's sacrifice at Pylos at *Od.* III 430-46, and a trace of one in the oath-sacrifice at *Il.* III 264-70, but not elsewhere in Homer—probably there was no time and opportunity in the normal conditions of campaign life, where flute-players and so on (another concomitant of classical sacrifices) would be even further out of the question. More important, there is nothing in Homer about concealing the instrument of ritual slaughter in the basket that contained the barley-corn, though that could easily have been done; it begins to look as though the deceiving of the victim, or the winning of its consent, was not an epic idea—which has important implications for the Meuli-theory to be discussed shortly. Incense of course is not yet in use; the marking out of a sacred circle is strange to Homer, though a possible variant or forerunner of the practice is suggested when the victims are stationed round the altar at *Il.* I 447-8; and the sacrificers stand round the victim at *Il.* II 410. The throwing of the barley-corn (οὔλαί, οὔλοχύται) directly follows or accompanies the prayer, and is itself immediately followed by the drawing-back of the victim's head and the ritual throat-slitting. There are two interesting and important exceptions

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Walter BURKERT, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) [hereafter *Gr. Rel.*], 102 and n. 8.

to this sequence in the two major Odyssean scenes of sacrifice; for at III 448-50 Nestor's son Thrasymedes first stuns the ox with an axe (which also severs the tendons of its neck), and it is *subsequently* lifted up, has its throat cut and dies (453-5); and at XIV 425-6 Eumaeus hits the boar victim with an oak branch or plank—it dies immediately, and *then* its throat is slit. Collecting the blood in a bowl was an essential part of sacrifice in post-Homeric descriptions, but is only once indirectly hinted at in Homer through the special ἀμύλον that is brought at *Od.* III 444; and there is nothing about the blood-sprinkling that was regular and important in later accounts as well as in vase-paintings of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. Even more important, the ὀλολυγή or ritual shriek is only mentioned once in the Homeric epics in direct connexion with sacrifice, at *Od.* III 450; otherwise it precedes or accompanies prayer at *Il.* VI 301 and *Od.* IV 767, or greets triumphant human bloodshed of the suitors at *Od.* XXII 408 and 411. Moreover—and how often nowadays is due credit given to this, even for example by Walter Burkert?<sup>1</sup>—on that single occasion the shriek accompanies not the slaughter, the death, the blood-letting, but the stunning that preceded them! The rarity of the ὀλολυγή in Homer is presumably due to its being a contribution from women participants, who are absent from the *Iliad* (for concubines would not participate, in any case); but it is none the less significant that when they *are* present at a sacrifice, as at Pylos in *Odyssey* book III, they give the ritual shriek at a preliminary stage of the process of slaughter and not in special association with the actual spilling of blood—or necessarily the moment of death itself. That is an observation which must cast serious suspicion on many a dramatic modern account of the nature and psychological impact of ritual bloodshed as associated with animal sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> *Gr. Rel.*, 102; *Homo necans* (Berlin 1972), *passim*.

The later stages of the sacrificial process, after the act of slaughter itself, are less divergent and more formular, as we saw, in Homeric accounts. Once again it is important to be aware precisely how self-consistent or otherwise the Homeric versions are—and, where they differ, either among themselves or from later practice, how significant that may be. There is no evidence in Homer, to begin with, for what Walter Burkert describes (*Gr. Rel.*, 102) as the placing of the burned thigh-bones on the pyre «in rechten Ordnung». Homer does not mention the bones at all, once they are committed to the flames—though of course they would not be entirely consumed. Burkert's intuition is based primarily on that interpretation of εὐθετίσας at Hesiod, *Theogony* 541 which he shares with Karl Meuli, namely that Prometheus' "placing the bones well" refers to some sort of quasi-magical reconstitution of the animal's body in a relic of prehistoric hunters' practice, rather than to what I regard as an almost infinitely more probable interpretation: that the intention was to arrange the bones within their deceptive covering of fat so that they did not stick out and give the game away to Zeus. Burkert also seeks some support (if I understand him correctly) in the regular Homeric detail whereby the participants ὠμοθέτησαν, or put bits of lean meat (specifically explained as coming from "all the limbs" at *Od.* XIV 427-8) on the fat-encased bones that were held in the flames on wooden spits. But once again the Meuli interpretation is a little arbitrary, for it is perfectly possible that the underlying intention, in Homeric times at least, was not to reconstitute the victim symbolically but rather to indicate symbolically that the whole animal, and not just the useless bits, was being given to the gods<sup>1</sup>. Properly interpreted, the Homeric silence about any special treatment of the bones after

<sup>1</sup> As Eustathius comments on *Od.* III 470; though it would be bad method to attach weight to this, in view of the wildness of the comment that immediately follows.



burning, especially when seen in relation to the careful sequence of details in this part of the ritual, seems to me significant, not least because it casts further doubt on one assumed part of the dubious process of 'desacralization'. Once again, however, it must be noted that most Homeric sacrifices, at least, do not occur in regular sacred places (though there are, of course, occasional references to altars, βωμοί); and therefore that there is no question of disposing of the unconsumed parts of the divine portion on permanent and hallowed ash-heaps or the like, as was the case with public sacrifices in classical times.

The second methodological fault examined in the wider context was the tendency to resort to general theories, new or old. The study of Greek sacrifice has naturally suffered from this failing, too, though not perhaps so drastically as tribal rites over which anthropologists (in particular) have felt freer to apply functionalist—or structuralist—preconceptions. It is true that structuralism in its most benign and least extreme form has been usefully applied to the division at Mecone, and I have no criticisms of method to make there; and I notice that Walter Burkert resorts to the nature/culture opposition when in difficulties over desacralization, on which comment will be made shortly. For I wish to concentrate for the sake of example on two theories that are by now very widely, perhaps almost universally, accepted, and to which resort is frequently made when considering the details of Greek sacrificial practice. The first is precisely the concept so brilliantly defined by Hubert and Mauss in their classic essay on Sacrifice in *L'Année Sociologique* of 1898 (and to which I shall refer through the accurate English translation by W. D. Halls, *Sacrifice: its Nature and Function* (London, Cohen and West, 1964)), of sacralization and desacralization. Further developed by Durkheim and van Gennep, this has become the basis of what E. R. Leach has called "empiricist structuralism" (see p. 50 above); but it is not only he that applies the idea of sacral

symmetry too closely for the good of much of the evidence<sup>1</sup>. It is undeniable that in the Hindu rites that were the main basis of the analysis by Hubert and Mauss (and which are indeed a rich source of comparison for the less well recorded Hebrew and Greek rituals—a source which needs, none the less, to be used with care) the rites of ‘exit’ are the exact counterpart of those of ‘entry’, as the learned authors claim (46). But the same does not seem to be at all the case with Greek sacrificial ritual, especially in its Homeric form; and it is in my submission, expanding Rudhardt, a serious error—and a strong example of the methodological failing under discussion—to assume that it is, and consequently to force the evidence into that pattern. A glance at the Table on p. 64 shows that sacralization is elaborate and complex: cutting the hair, throwing it in the flames, washing the hands, prayer accompanied by libation, throwing the barley grains. Then comes the act of slaughter itself; but in what does the subsequent and corresponding desacralization consist? After killing, and possibly the collecting of blood in a bowl, come the skinning and the careful butchery both of the sacred and of the profane portions. The former are disposed of (thigh-bones burnt, σπλάγχνα eaten), but the rest of the standard description is concerned exclusively with the preparation of the secular meal. There is no counterbalancing washing and purification, as in the Hindu rites; no special treatment of the equipment, the site, or the residue of the sacrificial burning itself. Once the animal’s corpse is available for ordinary butchery, after the preliminaries with the divine portion, it is treated in a wholly profane way—the proceedings move from sacred to secular without any marked ritual process of desacralization. The sacred part of the rite as a whole, according to Burkert, *Gr. Rel.*, 103, is “das ‘Anfangen’ auf der einen, das nachträgliche Zurechtmachen auf der anderen Seite: Sakralisierung und Desakral-

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand J. RUDHARDT, *op. cit.*, 296, states the matter correctly.

isierung um ein Zentrum, in dem das Töten steht...". But he does not say in what this 'Desakralisierung' consists, beyond the not very whole-hearted suggestion (*ibid.*, 105) that the pouring of the wine (on the fire, presumably), after the killing, corresponds to the throwing of barley-grain before it, and that both are boundary-marks of ordinary 'tame' life. But the fact is surely that the Homeric heroes are described as getting down to the secular business of meat-eating with almost indecent speed, with almost *no* ritual transition from the 'sacred centre' except for the treatment of the divine portion itself—and that is not at all what Hubert and Mauss meant by desacralization, nor is it in any sense a counterbalancing act to any of the careful rites of sacralization which preceded the slaughter. What we should be doing, therefore, is asking *why* the Greeks, in the composite Homeric picture at least, were so casual over this, especially in relation to other Indo-Europeans in particular—and not pretending that the opposite is the case.

The second theory to which recourse is sometimes too readily taken is again that of Karl Meuli in his important *Phyllobolia* article<sup>1</sup>, which develops the idea first sketched by Ada Thomsen that much of the detailed ritual behaviour in a Greek sacrifice is indirectly derived from that of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic hunters. The argument is a complex one which is presented with great skill by Meuli. More recent investigations have altered the assessment of some of the Prehistoric material (but not of the ethnographic material concerning the practices and beliefs of tribal hunters, especially in Arctic regions), but the conclusions have not been significantly changed: that prehistoric hunters (and their modern tribal successors) *did* reconstitute the bones of their animal victims, *did* give them special treatment by burying, burning or setting them up in trees, *did* place pieces from other limbs on them,

<sup>1</sup> « Griechische Opferbräuche », *Phyllobolia für P. Von der Mühl* (Basel 1946), 185 ff.

*did* remove certain internal organs and treat them in a special way; and that Neolithic herdsmen maintained many of these practices and, in particular, increased the tendency to throw the specially-treated bones on to a fire. These are significant facts, and their relevance to the origins of certain ritual acts in ancient Greek animal sacrifice (especially over ὠμοθέτησαν, treatment of σπλάγχνα, and βουκράνια) is undeniable. But the possible pitfall comes when one moves from this illuminating piece of archaeological *Quellenkritik* to the premature conclusion that this discovery is all that matters, really, in the quest to *understand* Greek sacrificial procedure; and more particularly that since the devotion of parts of the victim to gods is evidently a secondary development, we need not really bother to understand what the 'divine' motives and implications were or became. Meuli's sharp dismissal (*op. cit.*, 267 n. 8) of Nilsson's attempt to infer something about Hera from the sacrifice of goats to her at Corinth, or the scorn he pours on those who see agrarian antecedents in the *Bouphonia* (263 f.), encourage the conclusion that everything of importance about Greek sacrifice has been said, even in relation to its Olympian developments, once the hunting analogies have been fully set out.

Meuli's successes are indeed astonishing; apart from substantially explaining the burning of the thigh-bones, the application of bits from other limbs and the eating of certain innards, he rescued the χέρνιβες from some very improbable interpretations by Eitrem, Stengel and others, and pointed out prehistoric precedents for (even if he could not explain) the throwing of barley-meal. Above all he showed that the 'divine portion' was not devised as a gift: « der Götterteil war keine Gabe, sondern das, was dem Tier zurückgegeben werden musste, damit es lebe » (282). But his further conclusion (*ibid.*) that "die Gottheit kam hier ... zu spät" is developed in the following terms: "die Entwicklungsgeschichte des olympischen Opfers über das Werden des Gottesglaubens keinen Aufschluss geben



könne". This, I believe, is the point at which Meuli himself crossed the boundaries of legitimate inference.

For it seems to me that, when carefully considered, the hunter-derived details of Greek sacrificial procedure *can* have something important to tell us about the nature of Olympian gods; that the idea of those gods, probably at a specially critical stage, was partly shaped by the traditional religious (yes, religious) hunting ritual to which they had to be applied, in which it was natural to incorporate them somehow; and that the various manipulations in myths of the new concept of the animal-victim as somehow an offering to the gods are important in themselves for the history of religious ideas, and not simply neutralized or obliterated by recognizing the 'real' origin of many of these ritual actions. Finally I would suggest once again that what matters most to us is the understanding, as far as possible, of Greek religious concepts and attitudes in the main periods to which we have access, those from Homer onwards not least of all. Meuli's perceptions reveal that the idea of anthropomorphic gods was amalgamated with traditional hunting rituals, lightly adapted already by the herdsmen of the Neolithic age, and that the concept of ritual slaughter was altered in order to accommodate them; but how that was done, what ideas and attitudes it produced in the new class of participants, and what theological problems it posed, are all of extreme importance. They are considerations that are sharpened, not made irrelevant, by the reconstruction of the practices and motives of prehistoric hunter-ancestors.

The third methodological failing was the needlessly arbitrary or random selection of motive. That was illustrated by the *Amphidromia*, and I now want to adduce an example from Greek sacrifice. It concerns the view of sacrifice as a gift to the gods (in which the first failing is represented as well). The old disjunction between sacrifice as gift and as common meal is excessively crude in itself, and was already discounted by Hubert and Mauss in their *Sacrifice: its Nature and Function*.

Meuli's claim to have rejected the gift possibility has been noted above as misleading; but how far this notion of gift or offering should be deployed in assessing different kinds of sacrifice (for example prayer- or oath-sacrifices, piacular holocausts, *pharmakos* rituals, or routine meal-preceding affairs) can only be judged against the background of a complete and reasonable theoretical framework of types of gift and reasons for giving—and such, as far as I know, does not exist. Half-hearted attempts in this direction were made in early days by Tylor and Robertson Smith; Marcel Mauss's *Le Don* (1925; Engl. tr. by I. Cunnison, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) includes some quite elaborate but ultimately confusing divisions of *prestations* into total and otherwise, to men and to gods, alms, and so on (8-16). Its value is in its demonstration, now become orthodoxy, that the giving and receiving of gifts can be a major mechanism of social relations. That had been implicit in Malinowski's account of the amazing Trobriander *kula*-ring in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London 1922), but Mauss generalized and refined the concept and showed in addition how it was related on occasion to the competitive gift-system of the potlatch, most clearly seen among Indian tribes of the north-west Pacific coast of America and most fully described by Franz Boas. Even so, the analysis and categorisation of different aspects of the gift could and should have been carried further; at the very least exaggerations in the status of *kula* and potlatch would have been avoided thereby. Yet there is much to be grateful for, and Mauss well expresses the possible variety of motive and function when he writes of a *vaygu'a*, a *kula*-gift, that "It is at the same time property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust" (22). Even that degree of discrimination might have prevented some of the unnecessary complications that have arisen over the concept of sacrifice as in some respect an offering to a god or gods.

In considering the nature and intentions of gifts, the prudent interpreter of Greek religion might begin by reminding himself of the multiplicity of purposes that 'making a gift' can have even between human beings; much of this range is applicable to divine offerings, too, and they may also have additional motives that go beyond the ordinary rules of human gift-giving. Thus one might offer someone a present in order to propitiate him (or her), because he is angry or hostile; or to put him in an especially good frame of mind so that one can persuade him to do something—a rather different kind of propitiation. Or one might wish to show gratitude, whether as a result of a prior commitment (in which case we have something akin to a votive offering) or not; or to show respect. In a religious context this might entail either admiration of the deity (expressed in various ways, for example by a rehearsal of his titles, functions or cult-places), or stress on the inferiority of the worshipper, or both; the classical Greeks never, of course, allowed admiration to take on the Christian overtones of *ἀγάπη*, nor the expression of human inferiority and independence to approximate the abject servility displayed in some Mesopotamian rituals. It is very important to remember, also, that Greek gift-giving among men often had special implications because of the traditional relationship of *ξενία*, implying a set of obligations between host and guest, that was an important focus for the exchange of gifts and that imposed a special colouring upon them. Gifts were offered to a visitor for the express purpose of defining a guest-friend relationship for the future or maintaining one already in existence, perhaps through parents or ancestors. That relationship conferred the obligation, among others, of counter-gifts, hospitality and protection on both sides, and it was of course an important element of the loose inter-state social nexus illustrated in the Homeric poems and historically operative, as we may judge, in the late Bronze Age. Clearly the offering of gifts to the gods drew many of its symbolic overtones from that familiar model—yet scholars

are usually content to reduce the whole business of such gifts to the over-simple and much-distorted legal principle of *do ut des*, a tag which serious discussions of divine ritual could well do without.

The Greek use of gifts as a means of establishing a system of social and political relationships outside the immediate limits of kin-groups and communities was not, as we have seen, unique. It had, in any case, been greatly attenuated by the beginning of the historical period, when the aristocratic structures that underlay the partly fictionalized 'heroic age' of the Homeric poems were in decay. Yet it is probable that, not least because of the persistent cultural domination of Homer, it continued to colour ideas of offering within the context of religious rituals, even outside explicitly-named *θεοξένια* and the like. Clearly the idea of the offering as inducement or bribe had its place also, as when the Trojan priestess Theano offers to sacrifice twelve unsullied cattle to Athena (in a holocaust, presumably) if she will only bring Diomedes to destruction before the gates of Troy (*Il.* VI 305-10). Athena on this occasion refuses; presumably the conditional bribe was not given, and it might have been prudent in such a case not to have pressed the matter so far (actually Theano was going beyond her instructions from the 'sacrifier'), but simply to have made a lesser, less contractual offering as reinforcement of guest-friend obligations. For it remains true that every time a worshipper makes an offering, whether by libation, by animal sacrifice, by the gift of a cake or token of the deity like a cock for Asclepius or an ear of corn for Demeter, or in some other way, he is among other things re-asserting and therefore confirming the relationship of *ξένοι*. In some cases, even, there was a conscious or unconscious reminiscence of the time when, in the Golden Age or something like it, men were lesser partners of the gods and fellow-banqueters with them. But the main emphasis is on food and sustenance, on that kind of gift; and here different motives assuredly overlap. For when the offering is a share of



the sacrificial animal, and in particular the smoke and savour that is sent skyward from the burning fat and the more significant entrails, or when it is wine poured into the flames on the altar or blood poured into the earth in the cult of chthonic daimons, then the worshipper is not merely maintaining a symbolic bond of guest-friendship, however distant; he is also, and in a slightly contradictory way, acting as a provider, a servant, much as he does when he (or the priest) sweeps out the temple or re-furbishes a cult-image in an annual ritual like the *Plynteria*. Here are certain traces of that attitude, Mesopotamian rather than Greek, whereby men were created specifically to be the slaves of the gods, to build and maintain their houses and prepare their food day by day.

Walter Burkert has argued, most clearly in his splendid Sather Lectures, that since according to the Meuli theory most of the ritual actions associated with animal sacrifice go back to prehistoric hunters at least, then identifying the psycho-biological motives which are most likely to persist through change may be the most useful thing we can do; for example the deliberate creating and then dispelling of anxiety continue to be the main stimulus, according to him, of first-fruit offerings. That may be so, although the identifications of such instinctual feelings by the armchair scholar (or for that matter by the anthropologist in the field) must always be a precarious business, often liable to Evans-Pritchard's 'If-I-were-a-horse' objection. Burkert has also made some bold and typically imaginative suggestions about the historical development of religious cult, especially over sacrifice, in the Greek area<sup>1</sup>. I would like to end by commenting on some of his conclusions and adding some further suggestions of my own about the

<sup>1</sup> Most clearly in his contribution to *Der Religionswandel unserer Zeit im Spiegel der Religionswissenschaft* (Darmstadt 1976); but also in ch. II of the Sather Lectures (*Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979)), which also deals with the psycho-biological possibilities.

development of the idea of the Olympian gods, with special relation to their role in sacrifices. Here I confess that I am moving beyond the methodological considerations that have provided the framework for this paper so far—if only to provide others with an opportunity to attack my own failings in this direction!

One of the remarkable facts about Greek divine cult in the late Bronze Age is that, judging from the archaeological evidence, burnt animal sacrifices were comparatively rare, and the regular means of worship was through libation and the presentation of vegetable substances (cereals, honey and the like) on stone 'tables of offering'. Altars for burnt offerings as the major cult act become important in Greece only after the end of the Bronze Age, and the form of cult they presuppose seems to have been introduced, perhaps by way of Cyprus, from the West Semitic area of Syria and Palestine: so Burkert in the contribution to *Religionswandel* already cited. That makes it difficult to maintain, what otherwise would occur as a probability from Homeric references (especially *Il.* XXII 170-2, where Hector is said to have sacrificed frequently to Zeus not only on the acropolis of Ilios but also on the peaks of Ida), that Zeus is the god particularly associated with animal sacrifice. For Zeus is Indo-European; if there is to be a Semitic-influenced medium one would have to turn to Artemis or Apollo rather (for whom there is little special Homeric evidence)—that is, to gods particularly connected with Asia Minor. In any event the Semitic influence should not be pressed too hard. It may be true, for example, that at Çatal Hüyük animal sacrifice was re-modelled in the Neolithic period to imply re-birth for humans (so W. Burkert, *Structure and History...*, 55), but there is no evidence that such a change occurred also in Greece; on the contrary, the fact that a specifically agrarian ritual in which animal sacrifice played no central part was the regular source of this kind of revelation, at Eleusis, is a serious difficulty to Burkert's suggestion here.

What happened to Greek religion at the end of the Mycenaean period remains deeply problematic; but I believe we can detect more clearly some of the developments that occurred within the probable range of the epic tradition itself—developments that can be inferred from different and sometimes inconsistent views about the gods and their *modus operandi* within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and that were probably in progress during the three centuries or so over which that *poetical* tradition presumably developed.

The Homeric picture of the Olympians, in respect of their diet and their relation to men through sacrifice, might be summarized somewhat as follows: (i) In the past they regularly banqueted with men (so also Hesiod Fr. 1 Merkelbach-West). (ii) They still do banquet occasionally with exotic groups especially close to them: the Aithiopes (*Il.* I 423-4, cf. *Od.* I 26) and the Phaeacians (*Od.* VII 201-3). (iii) Their diet on those occasions, and also at famous parties in the recent past like the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, was the same as that of their mortal co-banqueters, namely roast meat; which is also confirmed by the mythical theme of their eating human flesh (for example Pelops' shoulder) by mistake. (iv) Where Homer has anything *specific* to say about their regular diet, it is that they feed entirely on ambrosia and nectar. At the same time they still enjoy and require animal fat, *κνίση*, in its least concrete form; that is, its savour as it is burned. (v) They also like the whole animal to be dedicated to them (by throwing its hair in the flames, by *ῥυθιέτησαν*, by burning the thigh-bones) in meal-sacrifices, or to be burned in their honour in holocausts. (vi) Only at *Il.* V 340 and 416, in the wounding-of-Aphrodite episode in the Diomedea, do we learn that the gods have a special fluid, *ἰχώρα*, instead of blood in their veins, and that this is associated with their diet of ambrosia and nectar. It is that which makes them immortal, and blood which makes men mortal. (vii) In post-Homeric literature it appears that the separation of men and gods—that is the abandonment of

commensality, coinciding with the end of the Golden Age—is due to men's propensity for shedding their own (rather than animals') blood; this looks like a development of the polarity between *ἰχώρ* and *αἷμα* that completes the change to a bloodless, meat-less diet. (viii) The use of incense in sacrifice, regular from the Archaic period on, is not mentioned in Homer (for the *βωμὸς τε θυήεις* is the burnt-offering altar, not the perfumed one), probably because adequate supplies were not available before the seventh century B.C.; but the disguising of the fatty smell of *κνίσση* is fully in accord with the developments suggested in Homer.

Clearly I have slightly simplified some of the problems, which are not helped by the difficulty of identifying a plausible date of composition for critical formulas and episodes—though I dare say that the *ἰχώρ* references belong late in the tradition, that is, belong to the generation of Homer himself. Close study of the texts is required here—and will produce significant results <sup>1</sup>.

But the general conclusion I am considering is this—a hypothetical one, to be sure: that a progressive *de-incarnation* of the Olympian gods can be detected through the complex diachronic aspects of the Homeric formular apparatus itself. On the one hand such a process might be envisaged as designed to avoid what Burkert has termed *Götterburleske*; on the other hand, and more importantly, it may well have been part of a long-operating tendency whereby the almost embarrassingly

<sup>1</sup> For example that there are only *two* incontrovertible references in the *Iliad* to *κνίσση* = savour for the gods (rather than actual fat), and none in the *Odyssey*. There are three cases in *Il.* (and five in *Od.*) where *κνίσση* = fat, and five where it could be *either* fat *or* savour of fat for the gods; and there are two or perhaps three cases in *Od.* where it is savour, but for men not gods. That is, *κνίσση* = savour which the gods enjoy is probably only a rare use of the term. And *θύος* *θύω*, though firmly established in the vocabulary of burnt offering to the gods (e.g. *Il.* IX 219 f., 499 f.) seem to be almost deliberately confused in the *Odyssey* by *θυώδης*, from a different root, meaning 'fragrant' (three times, twice of clothes, once of a room).



anthropomorphic Olympians were not exactly withdrawn from animal sacrifice (for that could not be), but were associated rather with its less concrete and more symbolic or honorific aspects—a process which might have led to a drastic de-anthropomorphization of the gods by the classical age had it not been for the successful development of realistic sculpture.

If something like that process of quasi-spiritualization existed, then it would reveal much of importance about attitudes to the gods within the epic tradition, about the historical development of sacrificial practices and interpretations, about the intellectual conflicts over traditional religion in the three centuries after Homer, and, at a different level, about the degree to which adjustments to ritual may find their reflection in myths. That would not be a bad harvest from a procedure to which there may well be methodological objections among others—though not such crude ones, I hope, as some of those I have discussed in the main part of my paper.

## DISCUSSION

*M. Burkert*: Wir danken Professor Kirk für seine gründliche und überaus vernünftige Kritik. In manchem würde ich vielleicht sogar noch darüber hinausgehen, was insbesondere die Möglichkeit von 'Erklärung' überhaupt und die Ermittlung von Motiven und 'Glauben' betrifft. Wie oft bedeutet 'Erklärung' nicht mehr als Einordnung in ein jeweils subjektives eigenes System! « If we have to sum up the meaning... in a single word or idea » (Evans-Pritchard): diese Aufgabe stellt sich doch eher dem Lehrer, der ein Merkwort braucht, als der Wissenschaft. Für die Frage nach den Motiven, z.B. den 'Motiven fürs Tieropfer', scheint es mir einen ganz wesentlichen Unterschied zu machen, ob man damit fragt, warum Menschen das Opfer erfanden, oder warum sie in konkreten Fällen einer etablierten Form sich bedienen.

Nun zu Einzelheiten. Was das Knochen-Verbrennen betrifft, so greifen die Komiker in den konkreten Einzelheiten, die sie nennen, gerade nicht auf Hesiod zurück; dann aber zeigt die Übereinstimmung von Hesiod und Komikern, dass wir es nicht mit 'special genre characteristics' allein zu tun haben.

Homer und die späteren Beschreibungen divergieren, gewiss; hätten wir mehr Zeugnisse aus der archaischen Zeit, wäre das Bild, wie Ausgrabungen ahnen lassen, noch viel verwirrender. Doch sind die Divergenzen nicht gleich gewichtig. Die οὐλοχύται sind doch wohl auch bei Homer in einem κανοῦν gebracht worden. Dass *Od.* III 450 die ὀλολυγή beim Niederschlagen, nicht erst beim Durchschneiden der Kehle ertönt, scheint mir psychologisch einleuchtend; auch Aeschyl. *Ag.* 1128 scheint τύπτει-πίτνει der Höhepunkt.

Dem εὐθετίζειν ist kein starkes Argument zu entnehmen — Ada Thomsen konnte immerhin auf Hippokrates, *Fract.* 8; 16 (III pp. 446 und 478 Littré) verweisen. Im ὁμοθετεῖν wird die Idee der 'Ganzheit' immerhin ausgesprochen, und der Unterschied zwi-

schen «to reconstitute the victim symbolically» und «to indicate that the whole animal was being given» scheint mir gering, wenn wir uns nicht auf die angebliche magische Wiedergeburt versteifen. Das Fehlen der 'désacralisation' scheint paradox. Wenn überliefert ist, dass man, um Zeus zu opfern, auf einen Berg steigt, muss man auch wieder herabgestiegen sein, ohne dass dies bezeugt ist; wenn ein Ausnahme-Zustand durch 'sacralisation' geschaffen wird, müsste dieser auch wieder zu Ende gehen. Aber die Markierung, die Signalisierung scheint zu fehlen. Vielleicht spielen *de facto* zusätzliche Opfer diese Rolle: Weinspende, πόπανα, Weihrauch «als letztes von allem» (Antiphanes Fr. 164, *CAF* II p. 78, bei Porph. *Abst.* II 17, 3). Mir scheint auch ὅτι κρεάων (*h. Hom. Merc.* 130) eine geradezu terminologische Bedeutung zu haben: «jetzt ist Essen erlaubt». Von «almost indecent speed» würde ich im Bezug auf die homerischen Schilderungen doch nicht sprechen: αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατὰ μῆρ' ἐκάη καὶ σπλάγχνα πάσαντο (*Il.* I 464), dann erst geht's an die Zubereitung des Essens, das Verbrennen braucht seine Zeit.

*M. Kirk*: To take Burkert's detailed issues a little further, the matter of *stress* or *marked quality* in a literary description (or even, for that matter, a physical representation) of a ritual sequence is surely important. Certainly the οὐλοχύται in Homer presuppose a containing vessel, probably a basket; but the concealing of the knife in a basket is so marked and purposive an action in the classical form of sacrifice that the Homeric *silentium* (particularly in a carefully developed oral-formulaic description) on the subject of baskets casts genuine doubt on the importance of concealing the knife, for these singers at least. Similarly the lack of stress on elements of désacralisation is significant, and the 'coming down the mountain' argument, though it has its own force, is not perhaps totally compelling.

*M. Rudhardt*: Les difficultés que nous rencontrons à ce sujet ne proviennent-elles pas de ce que les catégories du sacré et du profane ne conviennent pas à l'analyse des faits helléniques ? Le grec utilise

une pluralité de mots ἱερός, ἄγνός, ἅγιος, ὅσιος, dont aucun ne correspond exactement ni à sacré, ni à profane; ils signifient des notions qui n'ont pas d'équivalent dans la conscience moderne.

*M. Scholz*: Herr Kirk, Sie haben die homerischen Epen befragt, was sie über die Opferpraxis der epischen Zeit berichten und wie sie dies tun; Sie suchen sozusagen einen Fixpunkt, von dem aus Sie die Thesen zur Vorgeschichte der griechischen Opferbräuche (Meuli) überprüfen können, aber auch um festzustellen, welche Unterschiede sich zu späteren Zeugnissen der Opferpraxis und Glaubenswelt der Griechen andeuten. Dafür haben Sie aus *Ilias* und *Odyssee* sechs Opferbeschreibungen ausgewertet und deren Aussagen zu einem Bericht über das Opfer von etwa 850 bis 750 v. Chr. zusammengefügt. Ich halte diesen methodischen Ansatz der Zeugenbefragung für fundamental wichtig, möchte aber Ihre Schlussfolgerungen in einem Punkt einschränken. Die Opferberichte der Epen gehören in z.T. unterschiedliche Handlungszusammenhänge, benennen verschiedene Anlässe und sprechen verschiedene Götter an und sind zudem noch von unterschiedlicher Ausführlichkeit, die bei aller Formelhaftigkeit im Einzelnen auf Bedingungen und Ziele des Kontextes abgestimmt ist. Ist es da möglich, das *argumentum e silentio* zu Rückschlüssen auf Vorgeschichte und auf spätere Entwicklungen anzuwenden?

*M. Kirk*: There are indeed difficulties in treating a conventionalized oral tradition, developed over several generations at least, as a historical document; some of the gaps may be determined by chance or by unknown motives on the part of ἀοιδοί. But the resulting description of θυσία was rather complete in most of the details that we should expect; therefore I feel that the absence of specific acts of desacralisation is unlikely to be entirely accidental. As for ὀλοθυγή, I continue to feel that the Homeric evidence, examined carefully, is highly relevant to our assessment (if we have to undertake one) of the possible psychological reactions, in say the 5th c. B.C., to the act of bloodshed in itself.



*M. Henrichs*: The Homeric epic is notoriously selective in its presentation of Greek religion and rituals including the Olympian sacrifice. A glance at Professor Kirk's tabulation reveals that the liberty with which subordinate aspects of the ritual (such as the basket and the ὀλοθυγή) are omitted or deemphasized is outweighed by the remarkable consistency with which the ritual culmination of the sacrifice, and the starting point for Meuli's theory, is repeated in four separate passages: the burning of the thigh bones and σπλάγχνα, and the subsequent meal fellowship.

*M<sup>me</sup> Piccaluga*: Sembra indispensabile specificare le aree culturali da cui derivano i concetti di 'desacralizzazione' e 'sacralizzazione'. Il primo è legato ad una fase di caccia-raccolta in cui l'uomo è ben cosciente di non produrre dei beni alimentari che strappa alla natura e agli esseri sovrumani che la dominano: prima di usufruire di tali beni deve renderli 'profani' lasciando una parte di essi, sovente la meno importante, a uso di riscatto, alle entità che si crede li posseggano. Il secondo è ormai espressione di un tipo di civiltà che — ben consapevole di produrre i propri alimenti (coltivandoli, o allevandoli) — si può permettere di donarli agli esseri sovrumani (A. Brelich).

La civiltà greca conserva entrambe le forme. Sono frequenti gli esempi di *offerte primiziali* così come è ben noto il concetto di *dono* agli dèi. Nel primo caso la tendenza ad operare un distacco tra gli uomini (che devono restare padroni del prodotto) e le entità sovrumane (che si devono accontentare di una parte di questo) è più accentuata. Nel secondo caso (cf. la θυσία), occorre invece, pur nell'ambito della necessaria distinzione tra la sfera umana e quella sovrumana, stabilire un contatto con gli dèi (altrimenti non sarebbero possibili il dono e l'obbligazione che esso comporta). Sulla base di questo contatto, appunto, si presentano il problema della commensalità, della ξενία uomo/dio (nel tempo mitico), della comunione del gruppo sociale sotto la garanzia del sacro (nel rito). Un contatto inesistente o insufficiente non obbligherebbe gli dèi nei confronti degli uomini (impossibilità del culto = disattivazione della divinità divenuta, perciò, inutile), un contatto eccessivo (come nel tempo del mito,

cfr. gli esempi ben noti di Lykaon, Tantalos, nozze sul Pelion, etc.) farebbe saltare l'ordine delle cose consistente, *in primis*, nella distinzione di dèi e uomini su piani differenti; un contatto di 'giusta misura' è quello che si realizza nella θυσία, allorchè:

- gli dèi partecipano al rito;
- godono, in qualche modo, di parte della vittima (parte non troppo importante, grazie a Prometheus e al suo trucco);
- gli uomini hanno stretto con gli dèi un rapporto che *li obbliga* in qualche maniera nei riguardi della umanità;
- nello stesso tempo utilizzano per sè la parte migliore dell'offerta.

*M. Kirk*: I welcome M<sup>me</sup> Piccaluga's comments on the cultural conditions that might determine the relative emphasis/lack of emphasis on sacralisation and desacralisation; it is an attractive hypothesis that a property-owning, gift-giving society is likely to stress the former, and understress the latter, in comparison with a hunter-society. Whether the Homeric bias is so explained is not so clear to me.

*M. Burkert*: Die Bemerkungen von Professor Piccaluga machen darauf aufmerksam, dass wir *sacralisation/désacralisation* in ganz verschiedenen Bedeutungen gebrauchen. Die Sakralisation oder auch Desakralisation des Opfertieres ist nicht dasselbe wie die Status-Veränderung der Gruppe, die das Opfer vollzieht und dabei ihrerseits den Übergang zum Heiligen und wieder zum Profanen vollzieht. Zeichen für den Sonderstatus des Opfernden war im übrigen in nachhomerischer Zeit bekanntlich der Kranz — den man zum Schluss auch wieder ablegt.

*M. Versnel*: May I return for a moment to the general issue broached by Professor Burkert in his first intervention? I think this might help to clarify positions.

I hope I am right in assuming that no one of us will refuse to accept the essential objections made by Professor Kirk against some of the existing holistic theories on the nature and function of sacrifice, particularly e. g. concerning sacrifice as a gift.

Kirk's observations, however, only affect existing theories containing terms and definitions that can be proved to be too confined, too limited to bear the total structure of sacrifice. This does not necessarily deny, of course, that a highest common denominator—in a purely phenomenological sense—might exist.

Suppose now that, instead of *le don*, we provisionally suggest *l'abandon*—«refraining from, giving up, abandoning, putting outside of communal use», etc., of (parts of) property—as a general *trait commun* to all or most of the acts we are accustomed to label 'sacrifice'. This would—if valid—provide an important gain: it would save us from an all too hectic search for the divine beneficiary of the sacrificial act.

Suppose, further, that we follow this direction and go in search of a common human factor that may have been the psychological incentive, *not* on the conscious level of professed motives or causes 'explained' by the actual belief-system, still less in order to create an overall theory of sacrifice (its origin, its forms, its functions), but on a deeper level. I am thinking of possibly general reactions of the human mind to omnipresent natural and social *stimuli* of fear, awe, danger, and so on.

How would you, Professor Kirk, react to these suggestions? Would you allow for such a search or would you condemn it out of hand together with the existing *prima facie* theories you so rightly censured?

*M. Kirk*: I would not condemn it out of hand, any more than I do existing theories. It is the unscientific generality of theories that profess to be universal, yet do not fit many of the facts, that worries me; together with the tendency to resort to such theories when in doubt. If we discover that many instances of sacrifice include an

element of *abandon*, so much the better; but that would not in itself constitute a 'theory', except in a rather diminished sense.

*M. Vernant*: Dans le *Théétète*, Platon présente la course circulaire autour du foyer, dans les amphidromies, comme une des deux solutions possibles à l'égard de l'enfant nouveau-né. L'autre pôle de l'alternative, c'est le rejet de l'enfant, son exposition. Le même dilemme se retrouve dans la pratique lacédémonienne, où le foyer familial est remplacé par le foyer commun, le père par des magistrats.

Est-il possible de comprendre la signification — ou les significations multiples — des amphidromies sans prendre en compte ce qui constitue leur contrepartie: le refus de l'enfant, son exclusion de l'espace domestique, son abandon en des lieux sauvages, pour qu'il y meure?

Pourriez-vous, d'autre part, développer vos remarques finales sur ce que vous appelez la 'désincarnation' progressive des dieux dont témoignerait, dans ses diverses strates, l'appareil formulaire homérique? Comment interprétez-vous cette accentuation de la distance — de vie, de régime, de nature — entre les dieux et les hommes, et cette opposition qui se ferait plus nette entre l'ἰχώρ, pour les premiers, et l'αἶμα, pour les seconds?

*M. Kirk*: Plato does indeed continue by saying that the alternative to accepting (τρέφειν) the argument (child) is to reject (expose) it (ἀποτιθέναι): *Theaet.* 161 a (and I am certainly guilty of the well-known methodological error of quoting less than the whole of a relevant text). That broadens the possibilities, and I am grateful to M. Vernant for pointing this out: perhaps Plato is referring to a traditional (but surely not contemporary) connexion of the *Amphidromia* with the exposing of children—if the baby is naked, could that have been envisaged as demonstrating its wholeness in public? But there is still a strong possibility, I believe, that Plato (or his Socrates) is speaking very loosely and playfully, and giving the *Amphidromia* an emphasis that did not necessarily represent all of its implications,



or those that were most prominent for participants in the ritual in Classical times.

*M. Henrichs*: Speculation on the diet of the Olympian gods is rarely found outside myth and poetry. Among the exceptions are Epicurus and his School, who held refined food and special digestion responsible for the quasi-bodies and quasi-blood of their anthropomorphic gods (H. Diels (ed.), *Philodemos, Über die Götter, Drittes Buch*, Abh. Kgl. Preuss. Akad. d. Wiss. zu Berlin, Philos.-hist. Kl., Jhrg. 1916 Nr. 4, Kol. 13, 5 ff. and Fr. 77; Cic. *Nat. deor.* I 18, 49).

*M. Versnel*: I wonder whether it is advisable to handle these various approaches to the diet of the gods in terms of 'stage' and 'development'. It is perfectly possible that the ambiguity of feasting gods was tackled by varying, according to context or position of the *ego*, emphasis on the more anthropomorphic side of deity or on his divine qualities. Even in later times nothing like a *communis opinio* had developed on this issue. When in the 4th c. B.C. the medical man Menecrates, who wrongly considered himself to be a god, i.e. Zeus, visited Philip II, the sardonic king invited him for a copious dinner at which Menecrates had to be content with a meal consisting of *θυμῆμα*. Menecrates was not amused, Philip was, and it all illustrates that the problem was not solved and that, at any time, it could be called back to actuality. In this context one might also refer to the *θεοξενία* and the Roman *daps*.

*M. Kirk*: I agree with you and with M. Vernant that the hypothesis of development in stages, rather than selection from coexisting and sometimes inconsistent attitudes, is debatable. My reason for making the suggestion is mainly that meat-eating gods belong to (probably quite ancient) myths, and hardly appear in Homer; that the opposite idea of bloodless, *ἵχῳρ*-possessing gods appears in an apparently relatively late episode in the epic tradition; that it presupposes the idea of *ἀμβροσία* as food which is erratic in the tradition; and that *κνίστη*-sniffing gods, although not as prominent in the

*Iliad* and *Odyssey* as many discussions would suggest, may be somewhat more firmly established in formular terms. The possibility admittedly needs further consideration, and I believe deserves it.

*M. Burkert*: Professor Kirk legt eine interessante und im Prinzip einleuchtende Entwicklungshypothese vor. Grundsätzlich freilich ist auch mit widersprüchlichen Vorstellungen im 'ererbten Konglomerat' zu rechnen. Es wäre darum besonders wichtig, wenn die Analyse der homerischen Formelsprache eine Bestätigung der Hypothese im einzelnen erbringen könnte. Eine Schwierigkeit: ἰχῶρ ist mit einer hethitischen Etymologie versehen und damit in die Nähe der Bronzezeit gerückt worden (P. Kretschmer, in *Kleinasiat. Forschungen* I (1927), 9 ff.; A. Heubeck, in *Würzburger Jahrb. für die Altertumsw.* 4 (1949/50), 213); doch beweist dies vielleicht nicht mehr als der Eberzahnhelm fürs Alter der *Dolmie*.

*M. Kirk*: ἰχῶρ: « étymologie inconnue », P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Etymologique* II, s.v.: d'accord! (I have Burkert to thank for this reference).

*M. Vernant*: Le problème de la 'nourriture des dieux' ne doit pas être abordé de façon trop simple; le type d'aliment qui leur est réservé est certes significatif, mais à condition de ne pas prendre les choses à la lettre. Quand on dépose sur la tombe de parents des fleurs ou même de la nourriture, on sait bien que les morts n'en font pas même usage que nous: ils ne respirent ni ne mangent. Mais par cette pratique symbolique, régulièrement renouvelée, on affirme et on assure du même coup, entre morts et vivants, le maintien d'une communauté. En est-il autrement dans le cas des dieux? Quand on raconte qu'aux temps anciens les dieux venaient s'asseoir à la table des hommes pour y partager leur repas, cela ne signifie pas que ces dieux mangeaient du gigot et se régalaient de farine, mais qu'en leur réservant chez soi une part des mets dont on se nourrissait soi-même (part d'honneur, qui demeurerait intacte, bien sûr, mais dont on ne pouvait plus dès lors disposer), les humains traitaient

les dieux en convives et en hôtes, établissant par là même avec eux, à travers la commensalité symbolique, un lien direct et personnel, une *ξενία*.

Le mode d'alimentation attribué aux dieux est donc un moyen de dire (et de réaliser symboliquement) le type de rapport qui les unit aux hommes, leur distance ou proximité plus ou moins grande. Il nous renseigne, non sur leur appétit ou leur digestion, mais sur les modalités de leur relation au monde des hommes.

*M. Kirk* : I welcome these remarks and entirely agree.