

# Double Standards in the Ancient and Medieval World

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— DUEHRKOHF & RADICKE —

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## Introduction

Treatises dedicated to double standards in a broad variety of fields are easily found on the internet, especially from the early Eighties of the twentieth century onwards. They include themes as diverse as: different pay for the same work of men and women; Thatcher's British health care; when bad men get good press; treatment of aging actresses, and so on. The increasing interest in the phenomenon, which was described well before the actual term "double standards" was used,<sup>1</sup> is documented in a wide variety of writings, which focus on contemporary issues like politics,<sup>2</sup> racism,<sup>3</sup> gender,<sup>4</sup> economic injustice,<sup>5</sup> religious differences,<sup>6</sup> and ethnic minorities.<sup>7</sup>

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "double standard" (under *double* A. 6.) as "a rule, principle, judgment, etc., viewed as applying more strictly to one group of people, set of circumstances, etc., than to another; applied specifically to a code of sexual behaviour that is more rigid for women than for men". The term is relatively recent and was coined (or rather: used in written form) only after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> This is also true for the German near-equivalent *Doppelmoral*.<sup>9</sup> As is clear from the above examples, the application of the term "double standard(s)" has now widened considerably, and belongs to the larger area of moral hypocrisy. It denotes

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., in Guy de Maupassant's short fiction, where he illuminates the fate of women in a male-dominated world, cf. C.J. Stivale, *The Art of Rupture. Narrative Desire and Duplicity in the Tales of Guy de Maupassant* (Ann Arbor 1994).

<sup>2</sup> See P. Dittmar, *Ost gut, West schlecht: Über Doppelmoral und gespaltenes Bewußtsein* (Cologne 1977); J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York 1982).

<sup>3</sup> See P. Bardis, *South Africa and the Marxist Movement. A Study in Double Standards* (Lewiston 1989).

<sup>4</sup> I.L. Reiss, *Premarital Sexual Standards in America. A Sociological Integration of American Sexual Standards* (Glencoe [Ill.] 1960; German translation Hamburg 1970); M. Eichler, *The Double Standard. A Feminist Critique of Feminist Social Science* (London 1980); C.L. Muehlenhard, "Nice Women" Don't Say Yes and "Real Men" Don't Say No: How Miscommunication and the Double Standard Can Cause Sexual Problems, *Women and Therapy: A Feminist Quarterly* 7 (1988) 95-108.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kerton, *Double Standards: Consumer and Worker Protection in an Unequal World* (Ottawa 1990).

<sup>6</sup> See H. Goddard, *Christians and Muslims: from Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (Richmond 1995).

<sup>7</sup> R. Whitaker, *Double Standard: the Secret History of Canadian Immigration* (Toronto 1987).

<sup>8</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the first time in 1951.

<sup>9</sup> According to *Grimm Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Neubearbeitung Leipzig 1983), vol. 6, 1258 the term was first used in writing in the magazine *Der Spiegel* 22 (1977) 177.

a phenomenon in a given society where certain rights or privileges are conceded to one group of society, but not to another, and the criterion for distinguishing these groups can be, for example, gender, race, ethnicity, wealth, age or social status. Generally, this kind of behaviour is viewed as unfair and unjust and has negative connotations, with some possible exceptions like the special treatment of children due to their immature state, or the concession of special rights to people with a special task which is normally limited in time.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, "moral duplicity" has attracted the attention of modern political philosophy and social theory.<sup>11</sup> They emphasize that such duplicity is often due to rapid and unassimilated changes in a society; this makes it more difficult for individuals to orient themselves in such a society due to its lack of reliably applicable norms or rules: this has recently been described as a "morality without foundations".<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon of double standards is thus recognized as a persistent danger and temptation for every society, which has to be fought against constantly, as it could otherwise eventually destroy that society.

Applied to Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the term "double standards" is strictly speaking an anachronism, as there is no exact equivalent for it either in Greek or Latin; the nearest would be the Greek term *hypokrisis* ('hypocrisy') and its Latin equivalent *simulatio* ('simulation').<sup>13</sup> However, as a concrete phenomenon double standards existed already. This can be demonstrated by analysing various literary genres, ancient documents, and philosophical treatises. Interestingly, the vice of double standard behaviour or *hypokrisis* does not figure among Theophrastus' *Characters*. But moral duplicity was always condemned as a most inhumane and totally unacceptable quality. This negative characterization reaches its climax in the sermons of Petrus Chrysologus, the Bishop of Ravenna who died around 450. Here

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<sup>10</sup> Cases like this are left aside in this volume, though of course sometimes groups within societies try to argue that they have analogous 'pragmatic' reasons for splitting morality.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. especially the stream-liner M. Nordau, *Die conventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit* (Leipzig <sup>2</sup>1884); see also A. Vierkandt, *Gesellschaftslehre. Hauptprobleme der philosophischen Soziologie* (Stuttgart <sup>2</sup>1928) 405ff., and Th. Geiger, *Vorstudien zu einer Soziologie des Rechts* (Copenhagen 1947) 38-41.

<sup>12</sup> See M. Timmons, *Morality without Foundations. A Defense of Ethical Contextualism* (Oxford 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Eucherius, *instr.* 2 p. 160,10 "the Greek 'hypocrite' is in Latin 'simulator'" (*ex Graeco ... hypocrita simulator*) and Augustine, *enarr. in psalm. 7,9 hypocrisis, id est simulatio*. Of course, these terms do not coincide completely with "double standards": see the contributions by Buddensiek and Pollmann in this volume.



'hypocrisy' is described as "a subtle evil, a secret virus, a hidden poison, the deceit of virtues, a worm gnawing at holiness [...]. With cruel cunning, hypocrisy mutilates the virtues with a sword that consists of the virtues themselves. It destroys fasting by fasting, it makes speech meaningless by speech, it throws mercy to the ground by means of commiseration [...]. What dropsy is for the body, hypocrisy is for the soul, that is, dropsy thirsts when drinking, hypocrisy thirsts when already drunk" (*sermo* 7, CCL 24,49f.).

Its concealed danger is also clearly expressed in various depictions of the personification of Hypocrisy, popular from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period. Hypocrisy could be represented by a woman in a nun's habit with a rosary, who carries her tongue in front of her and trails her heart behind her on the floor.<sup>14</sup> In another tradition the personification of Hypocrisy is a lean and pallid female, her head covered and lowered, dressed in a ragged garment, who reads from a prayer book which she holds. With her other hand she ostentatiously offers alms to a lame and ragged young beggar crouching at her feet. Her feet, however, are not those of a human, but of a wolf (following *Mt* 7,15, where it says that hypocrites are like lambs outside, but ravening wolves inside).<sup>15</sup>

For Antiquity and the Middle Ages, to date virtually no secondary literature exists that deals specifically with these issues.<sup>16</sup> This collection of articles accordingly attempts to present a first major investigation of the phenomenon in its various facets, in which the modern concept of "double standards" has been taken as a frame of reference, but without using too narrow a definition. Though in questions of moral duplicity the boundary between the unconscious and the conscious is sometimes blurred, for the purposes of this volume consciousness is seen as the necessary precondition for talking about double standards: the generally acknowledged validity

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., A. Henkel/A. Schöne (edd.), *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1967) 1545, reproduced on the title page of this volume.

<sup>15</sup> See C. Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery. The 1758-60 Hertel Edition of Ripa's 'Iconologia' with 200 Engraved Illustrations. Introduction, Translations and 200 Commentaries by E.A. Maser* (New York 1991) no. 90.

<sup>16</sup> I only know of R.A.H. Waterfield, *Double Standards in Euripides' Troades, Maia* 34 (1982) 139-142. E.g., K. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley/Oxford 1974 and reprints) and D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society. The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 1991 and reprints) do not discuss the phenomenon separately. The moral notion of double standards, however, should not be confused with the identical term in numismatics, where it denotes a coin-type, see C.W.A. Carlson, *Double Standard. The Double Sestertius of Trajan Decius and Its Significance in the Changing Roman Economy, San* 8 (1976) 20f.

of one moral norm or standard is deliberately split.<sup>17</sup> Self-ignorant inconsistency and theoretical confusion or contradiction, or even self-deception, are left aside. Moreover, double standards are only possible within a group where several human beings interact. A partial overlap between double standards and ‘hypocrisy’ has been accepted, but whereas, for instance, hypocrisy is generally thought of as being a hidden vice, double standards can be proclaimed openly, even if they sometimes pass without criticism. Because of the range of disciplines involved (literary sciences; classical, religious, and medieval studies; philosophy; epigraphy; history of law; patristics) experts from all these fields – both new and established scholars – were invited to contribute to this topic from their perspective.

The etymology of *hypokrisis* is difficult and not entirely clear.<sup>18</sup> In connection with the ancient term *hypokrisis*, two different traditions and contexts in particular can be observed: first, the pagan-hellenistic one, in which the term is originally connected with acting or performing a role; secondly, the Jewish-Christian tradition, where the term is linked with error of judgment (*krisis*) and sin.<sup>19</sup> Later, these two traditions amalgamated. Therefore, two modes of splitting morality have to be considered: first the different treatment (‘judgment’) of various groups in equal circumstances (part I in this volume), and secondly the disguise of one’s true standard by pretending to follow another (part II in this volume). These issues have also been subject to theoretical or satirical treatment (part III in this volume). Aspects of each of these three parts can sometimes overlap.

## Part I

Double standards may operate when there is a discrepancy between how a certain rule is applied to one group as opposed to another, when both are in the same situation, mirrored in the quotation from G. Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (used as the heading for part I). This potential danger of moral and/or legal injustice is reflected in various basic principles of democratic declarations in modern states which seek to prevent preeminence by birth, inequality before the law, and so on. The mechanism

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<sup>17</sup> But see the critical remarks in the contributions by Buddensiek and Hennecke in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> See literature in my contribution for this volume (n. 7).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, in Isidore of Seville, *Orig.* 10,118, where we find the etymology for *hypokrisis* ‘false judgment’ (*falsum iudicium*).

of splitting vertically, as it were, is found between different social groups or classes within a society or between societies and it is normally accompanied by differences in power, wealth, prestige, and the like. Here the act of judgment is vital, that is, the conscious decision that one group deserves a different treatment from another group. To illustrate how this may (or may not) work in detail, the first pair of contributors concentrate on myth (chapters 1 and 2), then follows an exemplary investigation of historical legal issues in Greece (chapter 3) and Rome (chapter 4) and of narrative fiction (chapters 5 and 6).

With special emphasis on the Ancient Greeks, Dover outlines how different cultures at various times tried to cope with the fact that gods were more powerful than humans and therefore required a special standard for themselves. Respected narratives and generalized beliefs attributed to deities behaviour which among humans was rejected and punished. Moreover, philosophers found their supposed goodness and justice irreconcilable with human suffering and pain. To solve these dilemmas, humanity came up with various 'solutions', like hatred and fear of the gods, agnosticism, atheism, ridicule of gods in pagan myth, philosophical sublimation, and in Christianity the postulate of unshakable faith even (or specifically) in the face of theodicy. The myth of Kore seems to contain such objectionable behaviour, as here a god is obviously allowed to abduct a young woman without getting punished. Kledt investigates whether this should be defined as a double standard, that is, as a behaviour that, though not acceptable in the case of humans, is suddenly approved of because the protagonist is divine. Kledt denies this by interpreting the myth of Kore as a paradigm of initiation (or *rite de passage*) that is bound to explain and to make bearable the painful emotional consequences of separation of a young woman from her family after her marriage. If the results of chapters 1 and 2 are put together, it follows that the 'differential' conditions of the human and the divine cannot be judged in moral terms.

Turning to the historical Athens of the fifth century BC, Hartmann analyses the uneven treatment of illegitimate offspring of Athenian citizens, as testified by forensic speeches and other sources. She concludes that moral tensions and legal conflicts arise because of the discrepancy between people's duties as citizens and their private affections and desires on the one hand, and on the other hand because of the difficulty the Athenian community had in adjusting itself to social change. Paulus looks into a case of Roman hereditary law, where a testator intended to secure the well-being of his (later freed) slave and the son he had from her. Despite problems

with the literal interpretation of the will, the jurists were willing to follow the intended meaning of its text, which, Paulus suggests, should not be labelled as a double standard.

Awareness of moral duplicity can be observed in the realm of narrative fiction as well. Harder claims that the criterion of double standards is intrinsically attached to the plot of the ancient novel as such, because its protagonists are 'different' from their environment, and their morality is put to a special test. Geographical space is relevant for morality, since the (genre-specific) separation of the protagonists from their original home leads to their moral standards becoming more relative. This is true even in instances of gender-specific morality noticeable in several romances of the Roman Principate. According to Bethlehem, the link between double standards and the dynamics of a text is even stronger in the case of medieval Arthurian literature. The original plot of the story contained moral contradictions that were felt to be so provocative as to generate a whole strain of different versions. In these the story was reinterpreted over and over again, with the intention of reconciling it in a satisfactory way with a clear-cut moral code. The productiveness of Arthurian literature only stops when a society emerges in which the clear-cut moral code has yielded to a more individual-focussed morality in the Renaissance.

## Part II

Another facet of double standards is displayed by the discrepancy between an inner attitude or true standard followed and an outer performance or pretended guiding standard. This comes close to the modern notion of 'hypocrisy'. It can also be linked with the ancient Greek understanding of *hypokrisis* as disguising oneself and performing a part like an actor, that is, deceiving people by assuming a mask in a kind of conscious (not pathological!) splitting of one's personality into external appearance versus internal being. This displays a lack of integrity and such behaviour (mostly motivated by the intention of gaining some considerable advantage by dishonest means that exploit the moral single standard of one's social environment) is often difficult to recognize. This, and the fact that it will eventually mean the destruction of all morality in a society, has led to the charge that hypocrisy is the vice

of vices.<sup>20</sup> In Antiquity, such issues were partly discussed in connection with outstanding individuals in Athens (chapter 7) and Rome (chapter 8), but can also be observed when the self-definition of a whole group is concerned, be it pagan (chapter 9) or Christian (chapters 10 to 12).

Already in antiquity, Socrates was considered to be the ‘inventor’ of ethics and a perfect representative of a consistent morality. By analysing Plato’s *Apology* Bud-densiek shows that Plato portrays Socrates’ enemies as agents of double standards. They intentionally abuse the submission of society to certain standards in order to secure their own privileged positions. Such behaviour is particularly reprehensible, as it is surreptitious and exploits the ignorance of the victims. Socrates tries to defend himself in court against the charges made against him by means of "casting the accusation back at his accusers" (*retorsio*), that is, he claims that his enemies themselves commit the offenses he is accused of. Thus he unmasks the double standards of their behaviour which lead them to condemn somebody else for something they do not find culpable in themselves. Socrates’ strategy is doomed to fail because by unmasking the secretive strategies of the powerful and by revealing their unjust usurpation of power he makes it impossible for them to let him go.

Cato the Elder was considered an ideal of Roman virtue and was notorious for his moral rigour. But already Antiquity was quick to notice that (in sharp contrast to, for example, Socrates) even he displayed contradictions between his proclaimed ideals and his actual behaviour, which can only be partly excused as political manoeuvre or as part of Rome’s dramatic process of acculturation. As Vogt-Spira shows, the moral tensions in Cato’s personality were also exploited both in comedy and satire.

Following the principles of a model Roman like Cato, pagan Roman society praised the ideal of the agriculturist as the perfect lifestyle, especially for the senatorial rank. This sharply contradicts the economic reality that clearly shows that the wealth of this social class is based on trade that was officially despised, as Niquet illustrates by looking at the epigraphic evidence. The reason for maintaining this ideal that became even more praiseworthy with its increasing impracticability can

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<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Cic. *off.* 1,13.41. A relatively recent example would be H. Arendt, *On Revolution* ch. 2: "What makes it so plausible to assume that hypocrisy is the vice of vices is that integrity can indeed exist under the cover of all other vices except this one. Only crime and the criminal, it is true, confront us with the perplexity of radical evil; but only the hypocrite is really rotten to the core."

be seen in the need to create uniform values that provide a sense of community, stability and duration for the senatorial class. Society found ways of smoothing this contradiction between claim and reality by accepting trade in connection with agriculture and investments in landed property.

As has already several times become obvious, double standards and hypocrisy are particularly dominant in societies or groups of society that cannot (or do not want to) adjust to social, economic and/or political change. Early and medieval Christianity is no exception to this. In a time of rapid change in socio-historical conditions Gregory of Tours aims at creating an absolute morality as a stabilizing factor. His axiom that the Christian God rewards his followers and visibly punishes his enemies in human history often clashes with the historical evidence (something against which Augustine had already cautioned his fellow-Christians in his *City of God*). Hennecke explains that in order to maintain his moral standard and preserve an (unjust) stability, Gregory is forced to apply double standards in his interpretation of evil deeds depending on whether they were committed by followers or enemies of the Christian God.

A different kind of 'compromise' can be observed in the adoption of the originally pagan practice of burying grave-goods with the deceased. Whereas strict Christians despised this as being contrary to a true Christian orientation towards the afterlife, others managed to adopt this custom without compromising their Christian faith. Marzinzik argues that this is to be understood rather as a successful form of amalgamation of two cultures than as religious double standards. In the high Middle Ages, when the Church was an established organization with considerable political power, the conflict between secular and ecclesiastical power lead to instability and insecurity within the clergy. Using the evidence in the correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen, El Kholi illustrates how the influential visionary reminded her (sometimes very powerful) clerical addressees that their behaviour did not always coincide with the Christian values they represent. The set of vices attacked by Hildegard, who is determined to maintain one single Christian standard, is remarkably timeless.

### Part III

Awareness of moral duplicity is old, and soon became the object of more or less satirical or polemical criticism and theoretical reflection. Behaviour with double standards is characteristic of inflexible, static societies where it is otherwise difficult for individuals to move upwards, or it serves to confirm a (potentially out-dated or threatened) status quo, that is, as a defence mechanism in a society or a group which refuses to undergo change. Structures with double standards permit either justification of privileges for certain groups of people or they help individuals to cope with a situation that is perceived as otherwise disadvantageous to them. The crucial condition in which double standards flourish is public emphasis on the one 'good' morality that must not be questioned at all, but is claimed to be perpetual, eternal, given by god or whatever. A society like this or certain individuals in it may prefer to change the rules for themselves in a parasitic way rather than look at the overall interest of a group or society. Both pagan-philosophical (chapters 13 to 16) and Christian (chapters 17 and 18) thinkers have been aware of this.

Halliwell reminds us that descriptive versus normative concepts of nature have a crucial bearing on theories of ethics. Thus, Thrasymachus' definition of justice via nature and law in Plato's *Republic* book 1 has less to do with biology than with ethics. Plato aims to reveal that a solipsistic, 'natural' egoism (as proclaimed by Thrasymachus) is in danger of collapsing into an acute case of double standards. For individuals living in a community have to share their moral convictions on mutual and equal terms, as unity and society are necessarily linked with justice.

In a careful analysis of the argument in Seneca's *De Vita Beata* Fuhrer expounds how Seneca uses the Stoic doctrine of the highest good (that is, *virtus*) in order to justify the possibility that the perfect Stoic sage can possess wealth without being accused of a double standard or hypocrisy. As wealth is a matter of indifference, the true Stoic sage does not crave for it, and is able to endure its loss without being moved, but he or she is also able to make good use of wealth, thus using the opportunity of applying his or her moral perfection. Moreover, Seneca emphasizes that the moral challenge of practical failure in the face of a philosophical ideal is at the core of Stoic ethics, which raises this problem over and over again.

In a critical dissection of some writings of the philosopher Musonius, Nussbaum manages to demonstrate convincingly that, for instance, by demanding marital fidelity for both men and women he only seems to plead for the equality of the sexes.

Whereas he insists that no double standards should be implied when it comes to following the philosophical standard of self-control (which includes marital fidelity), his argument is embedded in and reinforces a social structure that treats men and women differently. For him, the elimination of the sexual double standard does not jeopardize the overall male-over-female-hierarchy, especially, as Musonius claims that male sexual self-control is a further justification for male dominance. This represents a classic (and unfortunately timeless) example of how the removal of one double standard can happily take place while others remain unquestioned. Männlein illustrates in her contribution how Lucian uses the established literary genre of the philosophical symposium in a satirical manner, in order to unmask philosophy as a trendy fashion of his time that has no true foundation in people's values, attitudes, or actual behaviour. Taken together, the contributions of chapters 13 to 16 illustrate how philosophy can be used both to expose double standards and also itself serve as a vehicle for double standards.

Jesus' speech against the Scribes and Pharisees in *Matthew 23* can be called the Magna Charta of double standards in the New Testament. The speech portrays how religiosity can go wrong, by promoting social inequality, abusing authority and applying religious laws against their intended meaning. Jesus' vehement (moral and eschatological) verdict against such religious double standards was not without impact on later commentators. Pollmann documents how from Origen up to the *Opus imperfectum* (fifth century?) commentaries focus predominantly in their interpretation of this passage on human conscience and the irreconcilable contrast between sincere and hypocritical morality. In practice, however, things were not always so easy. In early Christianity there was, for example, the question of whether lying was allowed under certain circumstances. From the second century onwards, a difficulty existed as to whether concealment of the Christian faith was permissible in times of persecution, and whether this could be justified with a somewhat internalized or inward Christianity. In order to establish a line between right and wrong 'orthodoxy' had to define 'heresy' as the other they wished to exclude. Löhr shows that the Christian claim for religious truth as both exclusive and universal means that double standards are by necessity built into Christianity's concept of religious truth.

To sum up: as a whole, the authors argue for a remarkable continuity in this phenomenon of moral perversion, and offer a contribution to the history of mentalities which concentrates on the analysis of conscious or unconscious guidelines that influence people's behaviour. By looking both at practical examples and the theoriz-



ing concerning double standards it is hoped that this volume will to some extent fill a gap in our understanding of morality in Antiquity and (to a far lesser degree) the Middle Ages. It has to be emphasized that the selective nature of this volume precludes a complete or fully systematized picture of the phenomenon. It is rather intended to highlight some of its crucial facets. This could stimulate further research, especially at a comparative level as regards later times and other disciplines. Quotations from the Greek and Latin are normally translated; the bibliographies that follow each contribution only contain literature quoted by each individual author. As well as the academic reader it is hoped that the volume will appeal to a wider readership with a general interest in the history of morality.

St Andrews/Oxford

K.P.

Kenneth Dover

### **Are Gods Forgivable?**

In 1944 Randolph Churchill, with two other colleagues, was in Yugoslavia on a military mission to Tito. His colleagues, growing tired of his loquacity, bet him that he could not read the whole Bible in two weeks. He accepted the bet and set to work, but frequently burst out laughing and sometimes exclaimed indignantly "God! Isn't God a *shi!*"<sup>1</sup> He was giving crude expression to a moral reaction experienced by countless members of cultures in which inherited narratives and doctrines portray gods as behaving in ways which in human societies are resented, blamed and commonly punished (though they may occasionally be forgiven).

The belief that gods behave worse than humans, however uncomfortable, is not irrational. Power, after all, does not entail virtue. We simply have to add gods to the long list of phenomena that beset humanity: earthquakes, floods and droughts, for example, or the hosts of creatures that compete with us for the food we grow. That view of gods is held, for instance, by the Sedang-Moi of South-east Asia.<sup>2</sup> They accept the existence of some well-meaning but ineffectual and uninterested gods, but attribute malevolence to the main category of supernatural beings with whom humans normally interact.

Such a situation calls for counteraction. To punish a god and so deter him from wrongdoing in the future is neither practicable nor prudent, though maltreatment of his cult-statue as if it were a sentient being is not unknown in the Mediterranean, modern as well as ancient.<sup>3</sup> One of two alternative defensive measures is magic, by which I mean procedures which, if performed correctly, are regarded as operating mechanically and imposing constraints even on gods – unlike prayer, which is addressed to a person who may decide not to heed it. So, for instance, the Anatolian city Syedra, plagued by pirates in the first century BC, was told by an oracle to erect a group of statues portraying War (Ares), bound in chains, brought by Hermes

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<sup>1</sup> Waugh 591.

<sup>2</sup> Devereux in Ogburn and Nimkoff 666f.

<sup>3</sup> Gow on Theocritus 2.106-8.

before Right (Dike) for sentence.<sup>4</sup> The other alternative is appeasement, especially favoured if it takes the form of a sacrifice or festival which is enjoyable for the human community.

Mere acceptance of the idea that one category of persons commonly behaves worse than another does not always or necessarily entail adoption of a double *standard*. When we find in Attic literature acknowledgement of the observable fact that in certain respects young men behave much worse than their elders, and that fact is invoked as a plea in mitigation – "Well, after all, it's forgivable; he's only a kid"<sup>5</sup> – that does indeed display a double standard. But the Sedang-Moi do not say "Well after all, he's only a god; he doesn't know any better". They judge their gods by a single standard, the standard of human society, and consequently do not forgive them, but hate them. Such an attitude seems rather bleak to those brought up in a culture which, however erroneously, treats morality as founded upon religion. In studying the history of morality in ancient Greece and the conflict between single standard and double standard we encounter much subtlety, ambivalence and contradiction.

Let us begin with a strand of religious thinking which is discernible in certain passages of Herodotus. The most famous of these occurs in the story of Solon's meeting with Croesus. Croesus expects Solon to regard him as the most fortunate of mankind, but Solon reminds him (1,32,1) that "the divine, all of it, is resentful and disruptive" (*phthoneron kai tarachodes*). Neither of those two adjectives denotes an attribute of which a mortal Greek would wish to boast; *phthoneron* covers 'grudging', 'spiteful', 'resentful' and 'jealous', and *tarachodes* 'confus-ed/-ing', 'disturb-ed/ing'. Similarly in 3,40 Amasis of Egypt writes to his friend Polycrates of Samos "I am not happy about your great fortune, because I know that the divine is jealous (*phthoneron*)". It might be possible to depersonalize these utterances by treating "the divine" as denoting simply that ingredient of our lives which we cannot foresee or predetermine. Solon's dictum would then amount to the banal observation that we are sometimes cast down from felicity by unforeseen events (as indeed we are) and that any attempt to take all hypothetical outcomes into account would only make our heads spin (as indeed it would). It is a little less easy, though, to depersonalize the warning of Artabanus to Xerxes (7,10 ε) that "it is the way of

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<sup>4</sup> Bean and Mitford 21f.

<sup>5</sup> Dover 102-6.

the god to abase whatever rises high", and still less the implication of the words of the chorus in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 750-762, referring to "an old tradition" that great prosperity necessarily begets "insatiable grief". The chorus claims to stand alone in rejecting that tradition and asserting that the prosperity of a *righteous* house endures through generations. While Herodotus, in the quarter-century after Aeschylus, assumes that one's future is unpredictable, Aeschylus's chorus predicts, with all the confidence of the author of *Psalms* 37,25, that the righteous *will* prosper.

Such a prediction implies divine concern with human morality, entailing reward for virtue and punishment for wrongdoing. Hesiod (*Works and Days* 274-285) asserts that Zeus gave humanity a principle (Dike) which distinguishes humans from animals; it is "the right way of doing things", manifested in equity, honesty and veracity, and in the fairness and integrity of the settlement of conflicts by people who hold power. The gods rule, and rulers make laws for the governance of their subjects; not necessarily, but they observably do so, and the Greeks modelled the relation of gods to humans on the relation of mortal kings and chiefs to their inferiors.<sup>6</sup> We know from experience that those who have enough power do not always consider themselves bound by the laws which they impose on others. We know also that they sometimes quarrel among themselves, and that people who get in the way are hurt. Greek gods and goddesses had distinct individual characters, just as mortals have, and this often entailed a network of relationships with mortals, favouritism at one end of the scale and persecution at the other. Gods notoriously had a very low threshold of resistance to lust, both heterosexual and homosexual, and their abductions and rapes were of a kind which within a human city-state would have had very serious legal consequences for the perpetrators. It was widely believed in the Greek world that the common man's conception of the height of felicity was to enjoy the absolute power of a tyrant, accountable to no one. Solon (fr. 33,5-7) imagines a man as saying "If I could be tyrant of Athens for just one day, after that you could flay me for a wineskin" – a view of humanity shared, though expressed in less vivid terms, by Socrates' interlocutor Glaucon in Plato, *Republic* 360BC (note, however, the caveat of Adeimantus, 366C). Well, gods do have great power, and are accountable to no mortals; it is not, therefore, surprising if they sometimes act like tyrants.

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<sup>6</sup> Lloyd-Jones 3f.; 27; 162.

Divinely inflicted punishments tended to be extravagant and indiscriminating, rather like wrecking the dining-room in order to kill a fly. Homer (*Iliad* 16,384-392) says that the anger of Zeus at the "crooked judgements" of humans is manifested in torrential rain which sweeps away the farmers' terraces, thereby (though Homer does not say so) adding a further burden to the burden of corrupt rule which those farmers had had to bear. Hesiod (*Works and Days* 240-7) warns that the wrongdoing of one citizen may provoke Zeus to create famine, plague and shipwreck, all of which afflict the innocent as well as the guilty. Half a millennium before Hesiod a Hittite king, hoping to mitigate a plague which was destroying his people, prays "Let not the good perish with the wicked! If it is one town or one house or one man, O gods, let that one perish alone!"<sup>7</sup> That is simply a prayer, but in *Genesis* 18,20-32 we find a dialogue between Abraham and God, in which Abraham, pitting human sensibility against divine ferocity, persuades God, humbly but pertinaciously, to spare Sodom if just ten righteous people are to be found in it. The implication is that if there were only nine, those nine would perish under God's broad and blunt instrument. Greeks, even in the Classical period, were uncomfortable about travelling on board ship with a perjurer, lest a god attach more importance to the punishment of the perjurer than to the security of his innocent fellow-passengers.

This indiscriminating enforcement of divine laws was accompanied by a belief – also explicitly acknowledged, in an earlier epoch, by the Hittite king's prayer for the staying of a plague<sup>8</sup> – that the punishment of a sinner might be deferred and inflicted on his children or descendants. This doctrine is most fully expounded by Solon fr. 13,25-32, describing the victims as blameless (*anaitioi*). It is hard to think of anything more unjust than leaving the guilty undisturbed and harming the innocent for what was no fault of theirs. That is precisely the point of a striking passage of Theognis (by which name I mean that body of poetry which combines the work of Theognis himself with material from other elegiac poets). Theognis 731-752 reproaches Zeus directly and in strong terms, declaring that it cannot be just to punish the innocent for the sins of someone else. It is important to remember that Theognis does not reject the doctrine of deferred punishment as *untrue*; he simply says that Zeus is *wrong*. It might seem that this sentiment was not influential

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<sup>7</sup> Pritchard 396.

<sup>8</sup> Pritchard 395,9.

or widely shared, because the deferment of punishment to a later generation plays an important part in fifth-century tragedy; that, however, is at least in part attributable to the contribution which it makes to dramatic effect, creating an atmosphere of menace and suspense. Certainly the idea remained available for forensic use, as in Ps.-Lysias 6,20, but in the fifth century – offstage – it was largely replaced by the alternative belief that the guilty individual himself is judged and punished in the afterlife. Both ideas served to give emotional satisfaction to those who had been wronged and wanted revenge, but belief in punishment after death prevailed, not surprisingly; since it was beyond the reach of proof and disproof, it could be asserted by anyone who so wished.

There did not exist in Greek society any central religious authority that could determine, propagate and enforce any creed or doctrine; consequently, except for the universal assumption that the gods wish to be honoured by mortals, one cannot speak of ‘orthodoxy’ in Greek religion. It was always possible for an individual to say "Well, for my part, *I* think ..." and to defend what he or she thought by some degree of reasoning. Moreover, although there were respected texts, texts which carried great weight, none were accorded the privileged status of divine inspiration or revelation (as Hesiod observes in *Theogony* 27, the Muses know how to tell fiction which resembles truth). Hence Herodotus 2,120,lf., while not doubting that there was a Trojan War, treats the actual presence of Helen in Troy during the war as an unrealistic poetic invention. Such freedom of choice is of the highest importance when it comes to the moral aspect of myths. In 476 BC Pindar, a poet firmly wedded to traditional values, explicitly rejects a certain inherited myth on the grounds that it convicts gods of gluttony, and substitutes for it a new story in which the god Poseidon abducts a good-looking boy for his own homosexual enjoyment (*Olympian Odes* 1,35-53). Gluttony disgusting, rape romantic.

A far more radical rejection of myth was urged at least a generation earlier by Xenophanes, who declared (B 11; cf. B 12) that "Homer and Hesiod attributed to gods all that is shameful and blameworthy among humans: theft, adultery and deceit". As he also (B 1,21f.) dismissed stories about battles against Giants and Titans as "inventions of our forebears", ridiculed anthropomorphism (B 14-16), and spoke of a supreme God who did not resemble mortals "in body or mind" (B 23), it is clear that he ‘solved’ the problem of divine immorality by simply discarding everything, doctrine and narrative alike, which was incompatible with his own axioms. In the first half of the fourth century BC Plato integrated a similar rejection

into his own theology, cosmology, metaphysics and ethics. His 'Timaeus' in *Timaeus* 29E-30A asserts dogmatically that the creator of the cosmos, being good (*agathos*) wished all that he made to be good and was absolutely free from envy (*phthonos*) – a striking contrast with the Herodotean sentiments of which I spoke earlier. In keeping with that, Plato's Socrates in *Republic* 378BC discards, and bans from the ideal community, all inherited myths which speak of conflict within the realm of gods and heroes; equally he discards (378E-380C) any which imply that a god ever harms mortals except by way of chastisement from which the victims benefit.

It happens that Plato mentions Xenophanes only once, in passing, and that is without reference to theology (*Sophist* 242D), but he had no need to make any such reference. It is evident from Euripides alone that in the second half of the fifth century BC there was a good measure of agreement with the theology that we find in the *Republic*. I do not claim to know what Euripides himself thought, nor do I suggest that he wrote tragedies with a didactic purpose; rather that he utilised, when plot and characters made it appropriate, ideas which were available in the culture of his time and place. In *Bacchae* 1348, for instance, Cadmus protests (ineffectively) that the vengeance of Dionysus has been excessive; "Gods", he says, "should not be like mortals in temper", that is, they should show more self-restraint. In *Herakles* 1341 Herakles himself declares that he has never believed, and never will believe, the "miserable stories of poets" about the wrongdoing of the gods<sup>9</sup>. It should be added that the Hippocratic treatise on epilepsy (*On the Sacred Disease*), far from anti-religious in tone, begins with a sustained attack on the notion that diseases are caused by gods; and allegorical interpretation of Homeric narratives, designed to absolve the poet of offence, may go back to Xenophanes' own time.<sup>10</sup> Plato was riding on a tide that had long gathered strength.

It was easy enough for Greeks to pick and choose; it is very much harder for adherents of any religion which both privileges certain texts as divinely inspired, or even as composed by God, and also finds in those texts explicit assurance of the infinite goodness of God. Believing that bad things never come from God, Maimonides (265-7) struggles to explain *Isaiah* 45,7, where God is represented as declaring that he is the creator of darkness as well as light and of ills as well as

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<sup>9</sup> Bond 398-400.

<sup>10</sup> Pfeiffer 9-11.

well-being. The utterance need not have perplexed anyone if periodicity had been recognised as an essential attribute of light, and 'ills' as inflicted by God to thwart or punish the enemies of Israel. There are stronger grounds for perplexity in a statement frequently made in the Koran (for example, 7,178; 13,33) that God "guides aright whomsoever he chooses and leads astray whomsoever he chooses". "Lead astray" is the causative verb *adalla*, so the Koran appears to say that God may choose to direct on the path of sin (and thus the path to hell) someone who, left to himself, might have chosen the path of righteousness. Theological discussion of this uncomfortable text turns in part on a philological question: does causative form always carry strictly causative meaning? (The ambiguity of Greek *apollynai* and German *lassen* is marginally relevant).

The issue between Erasmus and Luther in their controversy over the freedom of the will was not open to settlement on the philological level. Damnation was, of course, the sticking-point. Belief in punishment after death was certainly widespread among the Greeks by Plato's time, but so too was the belief that the punishment could be averted – at least by those who had not committed offences against the honour of a god or crimes which by human standards too were monstrous – through propitiatory rituals which it is fair to call 'magical' or by initiation into a mystery-cult, escape-routes which are treated with contempt in *Republic* 364B-365A.<sup>11</sup> It is a matter for astonishment among a great many people nowadays that during the Christian centuries orthodoxy taught *both* that God is never less than just, tempering justice only with mercy, and *also* that he ordained infinite pain in retribution for finite sin, retribution with no associated element of deterrence or correction. The notion of justice cannot be separated from assessment of what is deserved, and no one, however horrible his crimes, can deserve to be hurt for ever.

Luther (138) said that "God hides his eternal goodness and mercy under eternal wrath, his righteousness under iniquity", and that since we cannot comprehend *how* the fact of his goodness can be reconciled with the abundant evidence of his badness, it requires "the highest degree of faith" to accept and assert that it simply *is* so. Luther does not mean that human values and moral reactions are mistaken, only that if we could (as we cannot) penetrate the mystery of the divine will precisely those values and reactions would lead us to recognise God's "eternal goodness". Luther, therefore, is not applying a double standard.

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<sup>11</sup> I take *kai poleis* in 364 E as a reference to the Eleusinian Mysteries.



In the mid-nineteenth century Newman, from an orthodox Catholic standpoint, went as far as one can go to the sanctification of a double standard when he declared (1,240) that "it were better" for the whole world to perish "in extremest agony" than that "one single venial sin" should be committed: an utterance which becomes intelligible only if 'better' (and therefore 'good') is taken in so special and technical a sense that it would be helpful if some quite different term were used. In our own time Zaehner, an impassioned partisan of Tertullian's line of thought against Marcion's, seemed to find some satisfaction, fortified by misanthropy (for example, 232; and I remember his appetite for malicious gossip), in what he called the 'savagery' of God (236-240). The classic manifesto of the single standard is that of J.S. Mill, a contemporary of Newman: "I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures" (103). In this respect, thought not in all, Mill is Xenophanes *redivivus*, given the plain implication of Xenophanes B 11. To call either of them 'anthropocentric' is fair enough, but hardly censure, because morality is *about* the interactions of social animals, and for most practical purposes about human beings and their reactions, expressible as (for example) "I hope I could never do such a thing!" or "I wish I were good enough to do that!"

The alternatives are a purely consequentialist ethic, in which bad means are praised because they are assumed to serve good ends, or a cold double-standard ethic which drains human morality of its life-blood. Although the axioms on which Plato's philosophy is founded have something of the character of faith, 'faith' in Luther's sense of the word, insistent belief not just without adequate evidence but actually in conflict with the evidence, has little appeal in our own day to philosophers or to those engaged in scientific or historical investigation. Richard Robinson, for instance, who champions reason and love equally, declares outright (118-123) that faith is a 'vice', an "evil habit" which we have "a duty to undermine". The theology of Protestant cultures in our own time bears a striking resemblance to that of the Greek world, in so far as individuals believe what they find congenial. Hell is swept under the carpet. I have heard an Anglican bishop voice the idiosyncratic opinion that "we all get a second chance", and the most joyously devout Christian I have known, a Baptist pastor, told me shortly before he died that he could no longer believe that the pains of hell were everlasting. I am also interested, sometimes amused, to be told by members of the Catholic laity how many items in their own creed they choose not to believe; but that may not be an entirely modern phenomenon.

Greek eclecticism in religion was one aspect of the general self-reliant eclecticism and experiment which were so striking a feature of the Late Archaic and Classical periods, manifest in the visual arts, in scientific speculation, and in political structures, where arbitrary, monarchical authority was almost everywhere – though from a variety of standpoints – rejected. Plato was no democrat, but at one point in *Laws* (777DE) he puts into the mouth of his Athenian speaker an observation which has not attracted the attention it deserves. The treatment of slaves is under discussion, and the speaker says that a man's propensity to justice is shown best in his dealings with those whom it is easy for him to wrong; and this, adds the speaker, is valid for anyone in a position of power in relation to one who is "weaker than himself". This view, so rarely articulated, yet so intimately involved in any moral judgement on a political or administrative measure, seems to me to lie at the heart of our moral responses. It explains why so many are repelled by chapters 38-41 of the *Book of Job*, where God boasts of his power (rather like an Assyrian or Persian king) but offers no reason why he should be thought just. Paul in *Romans* 9,20, adapting *Isaiah* 29,16 and 45,9 and speaking very much in the spirit of Job's God, asks indignantly "Is the artefact to say to its maker 'why did you make me thus?'" The Presocratics, I suspect, would have answered that rhetorical question with a cheerful affirmative. But, of course, neither they nor we could be unaware that *if* there is a God, then, whether he is good or bad, his *modus operandi* may not be in all circumstances immediately intelligible. And if it were assumed that he is good, they and we could fall back on the dictum of Einstein which is engraved over the fireplace in the School of Mathematics at Princeton: *Der Herr Gott ist raffiniert, aber boshaft ist er nicht.*

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### **Double Standards in the Myth of Kore?**

"Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among people, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other." With these words Xenophanes is expressing his disapproval of the portrayal of gods in Greek myth.<sup>1</sup> Indeed we can ask if the Greeks judged gods differently from mortals. Does the description of gods belong to the category of double standards?<sup>2</sup> But the gods would have been bad examples to the humans, if the sense of such stories was just to describe the free, carefree lives of the immortals. In the end they would lose their authority by this. Therefore, these myths must be based on other considerations. What, then, made the Greeks assign crimes to their gods which were frowned at or even an offence among men? In this paper I am investigating this problem by means of the example of the myth of the abduction of Demeter's daughter Kore, who is also called Persephone. The oldest and most influential version of this myth will serve as the basis of my study: the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.<sup>3</sup>

There are several things happening which are not compatible with our idea of morality — and certainly not with the ancient, too: a girl is stolen by her uncle, the father has allowed the abduction.<sup>4</sup> In this case the question of double standards seems to be particularly justified. But the hymn contains further violations of morality: Demeter risks the life of human beings, and that way forces Zeus to restore her daughter — an action not allowed to any human being. After her return Kore tells her mother a lie saying that Hades had forced her to eat a pomegranate seed which ensured her connection to him and to the underworld. In order to understand why the Greeks created such a myth we have to look first at Persephone's lie. It takes 405 lines of the Hymn, which is not quite 500 lines long, before Persephone speaks

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<sup>1</sup> Xenophanes DK 21 B 11 (= Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 9,193), cf. B 12 (= Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 1,289).

<sup>2</sup> As it is reflected in the saying *quod licet Iovi non licet bovi* which is well known in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> The most important literature on the *Hymn to Demeter*: Richardson; Clay 202-66; Foley.

<sup>4</sup> The two male gods are blamed especially in works by feminist authors, for example Foley; Arthur.

for the first and only time.<sup>5</sup> That is immediately after her return from the underworld. The poet gives her a speech of twenty-eight hexameters, the longest of the whole hymn. Her words are an important clue for the understanding of the myth, since Persephone there tells about two actions from her point of view that the poet has already described from the author's point of view in the narrative. Both versions differ from each other in some details.

In the second half of her speech Persephone depicts the circumstances of her abduction at Demeter's request: "We were all playing in the lovely meadow". Thereupon she lists the names of twenty-one nymphs as well as Athene and Artemis as her companions who were collecting flowers together with her when Hades approached. In the beginning of the Hymn, however, the poet just mentions them as the Oceanids.<sup>6</sup> This difference could be considered to be accidental — in epic poetry one can find numerous catalogues —, if Persephone had not given her mother a wrong information about her relationship to Hades little earlier. Her words are the following: "When the fast-running Slayer of Argos came to me as a messenger from my father Zeus, the son of Kronos, and the other gods [to tell me] that I could leave the underworld so that seeing me with your eyes you would desist from your anger and terrible wrath at the gods, I leapt up for joy, but he [sc. Hades] gave me secretly a pomegranate seed to eat, a sweet food, and with force he compelled me against my will to eat it."<sup>7</sup> In the narrative version of this passage, however, we heard nothing of the use of violence.

Let us have a closer look on the differences. At the beginning of the hymn Persephone is clearly depicted as a child: she is playing with other girls and collecting flowers; the narcissus, that is her undoing, is called a "lovely toy".<sup>8</sup> If, on the other hand, Persephone's maturity is especially emphasised, that evokes an age of about thirteen or fourteen years — just the age when girls were given into marriage in ancient Greece.<sup>9</sup> A few verses later it becomes clear that this assumption is correct: Helios informs Demeter that Hades had stolen her daughter because Zeus had given her to him as his wife. To what effect does Persephone enumerate her twenty-three companions one by one? Women in antiquity spent most of the time inside the

<sup>5</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 406-33.

<sup>6</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 416-32; cf. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 406-13; cf. 371-74.

<sup>8</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 16.

<sup>9</sup> For the description of Persephone during the hymn cf. Lincoln. For marriage in ancient Athens see e.g. Oakley/Sinos. The betrothal was an arrangement between the bride's father and the bridegroom only, whereas the bride herself was not even asked.

house. This was mainly an act of caution, for there their protection could be ensured best. Only for an old woman it was possible to go outside on her own. Young women, however, normally were accompanied by a group of women of the same age when they had to do something outside the house.<sup>10</sup> The example known best is Nausikaa, the Princess of the Phaeacians, in *Odyssey* book 6. The catalogue of Persephone's companions has to be seen in the light of this observation. The enumeration informs her mother about the large number of companions, that should have ensured her own safety. Thus she avoids the suspicion of having been so careless to play outside without her parents.

To understand Persephone's lie we have to look back once more. After Demeter knows why Persephone was abducted she tries to force Zeus to restore her daughter. First she enters service as a nurse in Eleusis without being recognised and tries to immortalise Prince Demophon. He could have grown up into an opponent and become dangerous to Zeus' reign.<sup>11</sup> But this attempt failed. Now Demeter withdraws into a temple and from this moment onwards she prevents the corn from growing. This results in a terrible famine for the humans, and the gods are deprived of their sacrifices. In this way she affects the Olympians strongly.<sup>12</sup> In vain Zeus tries to calm down his sister. In the end, he has to give in. He sends Hermes to the underworld and instructs Hades to let Persephone return to her mother.<sup>13</sup> When Hades hears his brother's order he obeys smilingly. He asks Persephone to return to her angry mother, but to keep a kind and benevolent attitude. He, the brother of her father Zeus, would not be an unworthy husband for her.<sup>14</sup> After that he promises her *timai* (special honours or realm of divine power) if she returns to him: Persephone would reign over all living things and possess the greatest honours among the immortals. Her responsibility would be to punish wrongdoers on earth, while the good ones were making sacrifices and due offerings to her.<sup>15</sup>

It follows from Hades' speech that the marriage between himself and Persephone is not yet consummated, for declaring himself as a worthy husband he uses the future.

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<sup>10</sup> Bremmer stresses the bigger freedom of movement of older women. On the role of women in ancient Greece cf. Carson; Demand; Blundell.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Clay 202-66 *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 300-12. I do not want to deal with this problem here, but Demeter's action clearly has a ritual background. Auffarth gives detailed information on the topic "Opferstreik" in Greek literature and its Near Eastern forerunners.

<sup>13</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 334-56.

<sup>14</sup> With the same argument Helios has already tried to console Demeter (82-87).

<sup>15</sup> Hades' reaction in *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 357-69; his promise to Persephone in 364-69.