

Walter F. Otto

Walter Friedrich Otto was born in 1874 in Heckingen, Germany. He received his primary and secondary school education in Stuttgart. In 1892 he enrolled at the University of Tübingen, first to study theology, then in 1893 transferring to classical studies under Otto Crusius, Ludwig Schwabe and Wilhelm Schmidt. He pursued these studies at the University of Bonn with Hermann Usener and Franz Bücheler. In 1897 W.F. Otto obtained his Ph.D. degree with a dissertation on Roman proper names. After having passed a teacher's examination, he became assistant to the 'Thesaurus Linguae Latinae' in 1898, and he was editor of the 'Onomasticum Latinum' in Munich until 1911. In 1905 Otto passed his *Habilitation* for classical studies with Otto Crusius at the University of Tübingen. He became *Extraordinarius* at the University of Vienna in 1911, professor at the University of Basel in 1913, and thereupon at the University of Frankfurt am Main in 1914. In 1934 he was obliged to transfer to Königsberg, from where he had to leave in 1944. In 1945 Otto taught Greek language and literature at the University of Munich, in 1946 for a while at the University of Göttingen and in the same year he became professor of Greek at the University of Tübingen. He died at Tübingen in 1958.

The only book of W.F. Otto which is available in English translation is: 1954 *The Homeric Gods: the Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*.

The following fragments have been chosen from *The Homeric Gods*, and from *Theophania*, published in German in 1956. They show the way in which W.F. Otto strove after an understanding of Greek religion in its religious apprehensions, and this in opposition to current views on religion and to psychological explanations.

ON THE STUDY OF GREEK RELIGION: 'THE HOMERIC GODS'

'Introduction'

I. For modern man it is no easy task to attain a true understanding of ancient Greek religion. Before the images of the gods from the great period he is filled with awe and admiration, and he feels that the majesty of these figures is incomparable and can never be equalled. Their presence may indeed thrill him with a sense of the eternal, but what he hears of these gods and of their relations with mankind evokes no response in his soul. The somber religious reverberation, that melody of ineffable exaltation and consecration familiar and revered from childhood, seems to be wanting. If we examine this impression further we perceive what it is we miss. This religion is so natural

that holiness seems to have no place in it. Such stirring of the soul, of the world itself, as is proclaimed by the words 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts' or '*Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth*' the presence of no Greek god can provoke. In these gods too, as in the temper of their votaries, we miss the moral earnestness which we regard as the inseparable concomitant of true religion: we cannot call them amoral, but they are much too natural and joyous to reckon morality as the supreme value. And finally, we can only be estranged by the realization that no cordial intimacy can subsist between man and these gods. That he loves and honors them there can be no doubt: but where can we find soulful devotion, sacrifice of what is most precious, even of self, communion of heart with heart, the bliss of oneness? Always the interval between man and deity remains, even when deity loves man and favors him. Indeed the delimitations are purposefully accentuated. The gods retain their own existence, from which man is by his nature forever kept apart. The effect is almost cruel when at a feast of the gods the poet represents the Muses as delighting the immortals by singing of their majesty and of the sorrows and afflictions of mankind.¹ We must not infer that the gods delighted in mischief or were consciously indifferent, but of this there can be no doubt: that such gods could have no thought of redeeming man from the world and raising him to themselves. And if religion does not hold out this promise, what meaning can it have for us?

To be sure, this remoteness does not apply equally to all periods of Greek civilization. The mysteries and Orphism are in many respects a closer approach to our own sensibilities. And if we descend to the post-classical centuries, traits which strike us as familiar multiply. It is for this reason that religious scholarship bestows particular attention on these movements and eras. Yet in essentials it must be acknowledged that the impression of strangeness persists. It is most striking for the observer who looks not at the centuries of waning creativity but rather at the early age of genius whose first and greatest monument is the body of Homeric poems. This is the period where belief in the gods was maintained with the liveliest conviction; and it is precisely here that conceptions of the divine have so little capacity to touch the heart of modern man directly that many critics have denied them any religious content whatever.

This is understandable, and yet most extraordinary. Consider Homer, who is the prime object of the charge. We admire not only the art of his poems but also the richness and depth and grandeur of his thought. Who could think of attributing superficial views on cosmic issues to a work which can still thrill us after nearly three thousand years? And yet upon his belief in gods we bestow an indulgent smile at best, or we explain him as a primitive — as if in a world so spiritually mature a primitive belief would not be the greatest paradox of all. Is not the fault to be found in the prejudi-

ces of the critics themselves? One may truly wonder at the assurance with which judgment is passed upon a nation's most inspired ideas on matters of supreme import without testing whether the position assumed produces valid insights into an alien realm of thought.

II. The properties which we miss in ancient Greek religion are the specific attributes of Christianity and kindred religions which derive from Asia. It is by the gauge of these religions that the Greek has regularly been assayed, usually, to be sure, unconsciously, but therefore with all the greater assurance. Wherever religion has been defined in a higher sense, it is these religions, and they alone, that have furnished the paradigm. Hence in the Greek realm of belief men unconsciously searched for oriental religiosity under the illusion that they were seeking religiosity in general. But since astonishingly little could be discovered, especially in the centuries of Greek culture freshest in vitality and spirit, the conclusion that no truly religious content was present seemed inescapable. The early Christian explanation that heathen beliefs were a work of the devil could no longer apply. And yet the early Christians were more competent judges. They did not take paganism lightly, as if it were puerile or superficial, but recognized it with horror as the opposite pole to the Christian viewpoint. A man's soul was not to grow and mature when he accepted the Christian faith, but must be renewed from its very roots. Such was the impression evoked by paganism in its decline; how much stronger would it have been in the presence of the ancient Greek religion, still genuine and unadulterated! But if Greek religion stands diametrically opposed to that which has to this day constituted the gauge for religion in general, we can realize that a true understanding was impossible. Where shall we find a new and better viewpoint?

Where else than in Hellenism itself? Religion is not a possession added on to a people's other belongings which might just as well be different or lacking altogether. In religion what is most venerable to man finds expression. Love and existence are rooted in the same ground and are in spirit one. Everything truly essential is being confronted with the vital ideas of its contents, its power, and its goal, and these ideas are regarded as divine entities. It is therefore inevitable that the eternal should have been revealed to the ancient Greek in a form quite different from that of the Hebrew, the Persian, or the Hindu. And in his religion the eternal could only be reflected in the measure that this creative and discerning race was capable of seeking, beholding, and revering it.

III. The worldliness and naturalness with which the religion of the Greeks is reproached is encountered in their plastic art also. Here too the difference from the oriental is immeasurable. Organic structure takes the place of

monstrosity; instead of symbolism and denotation we have what we have learned – through the Greeks – to understand as forms of nature. And yet all of these works breathe a loftiness and nobility which lifts us above the transitory and earthbound world of facts. Before our eyes a miracle takes place: the natural has become one with the spiritual and eternal, without surrendering a whit of its abundance, warmth, and immediacy in the amalgam. Should not the spirit for which exact observance of the natural led to the vision of the eternal and infinite have made the religion of the Greeks the very thing it was?

There has never been a religion in which the miraculous, in the literal sense of transcending the natural order, has played so slight a rôle as in the ancient Greek. The reader of Homer must find it remarkable that despite frequent reference to the gods and their power the narrative contains virtually no miracles. To appreciate how remarkable this circumstance is, we may draw a comparison with the Old Testament. Here Yahweh fights for his people, and without making any defense they are delivered from the pursuing Egyptians. The sea divides so that the children of Israel can pass dry-shod, but the waves close over the Egyptians so that none escapes. Or God permits his people to conquer a city whose walls collapse of themselves at the trumpet blasts and shouts of the Israelites who parade around it, so that they need only to march in. In Homer, of course, nothing happens without the god concerned manifesting himself. But despite this remarkable proximity of the divine, everything takes its natural course. We hear, indeed we see in lifelike imagery, how a god whispers a saving device to a baffled warrior at the right instant, we hear that he rouses spirit and kindles courage, that he makes limbs supple and nimble and gives a right arm accuracy and strength. But if we look more closely at the occasions when these divine interventions take place, we find that they always come at the critical moment when human powers suddenly converge, as if charged by electric contact, on some insight, some resolution, some deed. These decisive turns which, as every attentive observer knows, are regularly experienced in an active life, the Greeks regarded as manifestations of the gods. Not only the flow of events with its critical moments, however, but also duration itself indicated the divine. In all larger forms and conditions of life and existence the Greek perceived the eternal visage of divinity. Taken all together these essences constituted the holiness of the world. Hence the Homeric poems are filled with divine proximity and presence as are those of no other people or age. In their world the divine is not superimposed as a sovereign power over natural events; it is revealed in the forms of the natural, as their very essence and being. For other peoples miracles take place; but a greater miracle takes place in the spirit of the Greek, for he is capable of so regarding the objects of daily experience

that they can display the awesome lineaments of the divine without losing a whit of their natural reality.

Here we perceive the spiritual tendency of the people destined to teach mankind to investigate nature, – both within and around man; the Greek approach, that is to say, first gave mankind the idea of nature which is so familiar to modern man.

IV. From experience, history, and anthropology we learn that the world may present itself to man's mind and emotion in manifold guises. Among possible modes of perceiving and thinking, two in particular stand out and claim our attention because neither is wholly wanting in any place or age, diverse as their apparent significance may be. The one we may call the objective or – if the word be not limited to the sense of the calculating intellect – the rational. Its object is the reality of nature, and its aim is to apprehend the substance of nature in all directions and to regard its forms and laws with reverence.

The other mode of thought is the magical. It always has to do with the dynamic; power and action are its basic categories, and therefore it seeks and reveres the extraordinary. Certain primitive peoples have special names for the wonder-working aspect in man himself or in objects in the world. This feeling for the miraculous derives from a peculiar composition of human emotions, which in some indescribable manner become aware of a power out of which limitless, which is to say supernatural, effects may emanate. Hence we are justified in speaking of a magical mode of thought. To the human consciousness of power significant phenomena of the outer world present themselves as events and manifestations of power. Natural experience of the regular or normal obviously takes place here also, but passionate interest in the extraordinary denotes a very narrow conception of what is natural. The domain of nature is interrupted by the intervention of the tremendous, at which point the sphere of limitless powers and effects, the domain of quivering dread or joy, takes its inception. The matter which is here offered for admiration and worship is unintelligible and formless. It is completely sovereign in its opposition to the world of experience, and its only correspondence lies in the magic power of human emotions. From this point of view nothing in the natural world is firmly fixed. The properties of things undergo limitless change; anything may turn into anything.

This mode of thought seems to be associated with primitive civilizations; but in itself it is by no means primitive. It is capable of attaining grandeur and sublimity. It is so deeply rooted in human nature that no people and no age can wholly deny it, though differences in its effects are very considerable. In higher religions it gives rise to belief in a deity who faces the natural world with infinite power and whom it is impossible to comprehend. The

greatest expansion of this power is to be observed in the spiritual development of ancient India. Here the mysterious omnipotent, the 'truth of the truth' (Brahman), is made positively equal to the psychic power within man (Atman); and it was inevitable that the world of experience should be relegated from the rank of a lesser reality to the nothingness of mere appearance.²

The thing here designated and characterized as magical thought was naturally not wholly alien to the Greeks. But anyone with an eye for the basic traits of various conceptions of the world must realize that the Greek attitude was hostile to magical thought to a quite marked degree. Its position is at the opposite pole, and is the most magnificent objectivation of the rational mode of thought. Instead of a narrow concept of the natural, here we have the broadest possible. Indeed, when we today utter the word *nature* in the large and vital sense in which Goethe used it, we are in the debt of the Greek spirit. The natural can therefore of itself stand in the glory of the sublime and divine. To be sure, upon the intervention of Greek gods also, extraordinary and thrilling events took place. This does not, however, mean the appearance of a force with limitless power; it does mean that existence manifests itself in infinitely various living expressions as the essence of our world. First and highest is not the power that acts, but the being that is manifested in the form of the act. And the holiest shudder comes not from the tremendous and infinitely powerful, but rather from the depths of natural experience.

This concept of the world which we call specifically Greek found its first and greatest expression in the age whose monuments are the Homeric poems. It is recognizable at once by the almost complete absence of the magical element. Goethe represents Faust as uttering a wish at the end of his life:

*All magic – from my path if I could spurn it,
All incantation – once for all unlearn it,
To face you, Nature, as one man of men –
It would be worth it to be human then.*³

Nowhere but in the Greek world is this wish fulfilled; it is in the Greek spirit that nature, before which Faust wished to stand with nothing foreign interposed, was transformed into idea.

The Greek genius must have received the figures of its religion and its worship in pre-Homeric times, for in Homer they are fixed, and this book proposes to show that they remained basically what they were for Homer. To find one's world is tantamount – whether for a people or an individual – to finding one's self, to attaining realization of one's own character. The period whose concept of the world we learn from Homer is therefore the

period of genius in Hellenism. Whatever notions earlier generations may have associated with the names of the Homeric gods are of slight significance in comparison. The specifically Greek idea which made them what they were was originated in and belonged to the age for which Homer is our witness.

It is often said that it is the needs of human nature, and their growth and change that are expressed in the formulation of the gods. True enough, but surely among these needs are the requirements of thought and perception. The most significant event in the life of a people – whether or not we detect a connection with external vicissitudes – is the emergence of the mode of thought that is peculiar to it, as if designed for it from the beginning of time, by which it is henceforward distinguishable in the world's history. This process took place when the prehistoric view was transformed into the view which we first find in Homer and which we never thereafter encounter with comparable clarity and grandeur. However much we may ascribe to the poet's own rich thought and taste in his presentation of divine manifestations, the natural idealism or ideal naturalism which astonishes and enchants us in these manifestations remains the basic character of this new and in a true sense Greek religion.

V. The ancient Greek religion comprehended the things of this world with the most powerful sense of reality possible, and nevertheless – nay, for that very reason – recognized in them the marvellous delineations of the divine. It does not revolve upon the anxieties, longings, and spiritual broodings of the human soul: its temple is the world, from whose vitality and movement emanates its knowledge of the divine. It alone has no need to seclude itself from the evidence of experiences, for only by all the rich gamut of their tints, light and dark, do they crystallize on the large images of the divinities.

We shall not let ourselves be deterred by the officious judgments of zealots and pedants who charge Homeric religion with immorality or primitive crudeness because its gods are partial and at odds and sometimes indulge in conduct that is outlawed in bourgeois ethics. To be sure, Greek philosophers also engaged in this kind of criticism, but the fact that the pious sense of nature could fade even in Hellenism does not justify such criticism. For pious naturalism many things are true and important which may seem foolish and wicked to theorists and moralizers. But once we have apprehended what it is that this piety reveres we shall no longer venture to condemn the things it tolerates and condones.

In ancient Greek worship there is revealed to us one of humanity's greatest religious ideas – we make bold to say *the religious idea of the European spirit*. It is very different from the religious idea of other civilizations, and

particularly of those which customarily supply our religious scholarship and philosophy with examples for the origin of religion. But it is essentially related to all genuine thoughts and creations of Hellenism, and is conceived in the same spirit. Like other eternal achievements of the Greeks it stands before humanity large and imperishable. The faculty which in other religions is constantly being thwarted and inhibited here flowers forth with the admirable assurance of genius – the faculty of seeing the world in the light of the divine, not a world yearned for, aspired to, or mystically present in rare ecstatic experiences, but the world into which we were born, part of which we are, interwoven with it through our senses and, through our minds, obligated to it for all its abundance and vitality. And the figures in which this world was divinely revealed to the Greeks – do they not demonstrate their truth by the fact that they are still alive today, that we still encounter them when we raise ourselves out of petty constraints to an enlarged vision? Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Artemis, Dionysus, Aphrodite – wherever the ideas of the Greek spirit are honored, there we must never forget that these were its greatest ideas, indeed in a sense the totality of its ideas in general; and they will endure as long as the European spirit, which in them has attained its most significant objectivation, is not wholly subjugated to the spirit of the Orient or to that of utilitarian rationality.

Note. The birth of the spirit, of which we have here spoken in anticipation, is premised in the Homeric poems in which it finds its most definitive as well as its earliest expression. Our account is therefore based upon Homeric evidence. Evidence adduced from other sources is intended as complement and commentary for the picture of Homeric beliefs.

We can disregard wholly any difference of date between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and also any diversity between individual portions of the epic, because in all essentials the religious outlook is consistent throughout.

Objections should not be taken to such expressions as 'Homeric Age', which are not infrequently used for the sake of convenience. They mean nothing more than the time during which the views of the world documented by Homer were matured and established. There is no intention to delimit the scope of their validity and force either in spatial or in societal sense.

It is an unfortunate superstition of our age that thoughts concerning the world arise out of the necessities of the many, only to attain solitary heights in the minds of the few. It is rather among rare and spiritually gifted men – whether in groups or individuals – that they are born, only to be abased and to sink to the point where they become meager, dull, and crude, and are finally rigidified. Only an age spiritually poor could believe that popular religious usages and ideas have never had meaning beyond the

capacities of a simple man's thought and experience. To find their living source one must ascend into the higher regions.

Every religion and every world view is entitled to be judged not by the levels where it is flattened, coarsened, and, for want of character, is like any other, but by the clear and large contours of its heights. It is only there that it is what it truly is and what others are not.

'Conclusion'

We have reached the end, and glance backward once more.

Much that is important has doubtless been passed over and must await some future interpreter to place it in its proper light. But very soon we come to a barrier at which we must acknowledge that there is a great deal which cannot be spoken. The Greek conception of the divine is as broad as the world and therefore, like the world itself, in the last analysis ineffable. It presents itself to us candidly, without obfuscation and without pathos. In its mystery does not occupy the foreground, and hence it requires no creed or confession of faith: it abides serene in the depths and allows all thoughts upon it to issue in the inexpressible. Out of it we recognize a cosmic feeling of unexampled strength and abundance which, as unerringly as nature, always finds the right images. What possesses substance must be consistent, and so it comes about that despite the absence of creed we find agreement and unity; indeed we can discover a system of ideas which has never been conceptually apprehended. But behind the clarity of view stands the enigma of being, and here all is inexplicable.

Despite its admirable transparency the enigma is greater and weightier than in any other religion. Greek thought overwhelms us by its uniqueness. Other religions cannot help us here, because the Greek cannot be compared with any of them. Hence it has seldom been appreciated and almost always it has been misunderstood; indeed it has not even been noticed, for we have learned to seek the holy in other religions, from which the Greek stands isolated in solitary grandeur.

Thus the belief of the most perceptive of all peoples has remained unheeded and unpraised – this wonderful and admirable belief which arose out of the riches and depths of life, not out of its anxieties and yearnings – this meteor of a religion which could not only see the brilliance of life with an eye more luminous than the rest of mankind but is also unique in that its lucid gaze confronted the insoluble conflict of life with candor and out of its most terrifying darkness conceived the majestic achievement of tragedy.

ON THE GREEK GODS AND ON MYTH

Are the Ancient Greek Gods no longer of concern to us? We admire the great achievements of the ancient Greeks, their architecture, their sculpture, their poetry, philosophy and contributions to science. We are well aware that they have laid the foundations of European thought. So many generations have always turned to them again in more or less decisive revivals. We realize that the Greeks have created values in practically every field that are unsurpassed and perhaps even infinitely valid and exemplary. Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus and Sophocles, Phidias and Praxiteles, to mention only a few, are still names of first importance to us. We read Homer as if he had written precisely for us; we stand deeply impressed before statues of Greek deities and Greek temples; we follow, deeply moved, the mighty unfolding of dramatic events in a Greek tragedy.

But the gods themselves to whose existence the statues and temples bear witness, the gods whose spirit permeates the entire Homeric epic, the gods whom Pindar glorifies in his hymns and who in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles hold human existence in check and control it – are they really no longer of any concern to us? And if so, to whose failure should this be attributed? To the Greeks or to us?

Should we not confess that these eternal works of art would never have become what they are without the influence of the gods, and even specifically without those Greek gods who seem no longer of any concern to us? Has it not been their spirit, and none else, that awakened creative powers, which produced fruits which continue to edify the human mind and which even today may engender a religious mood?

How, therefore, can we remain indifferent to them! How can we acquiesce in the prevalent view that they were the product of a primitive delusion and that they are of interest only when they seem to coincide with our own religious conceptions, but are incapable of awakening any creative powers in us as they did in the past?

This, actually, has been the attitude of classical scholarship up to the present day. Doctrines of Salvation, ideas of immortality, initiation mysteries and similar phenomena which strongly appeal to the modern religious mind, are being studied with supreme interest, though it cannot be denied that they were alien to the representatives of ancient Greek religion from Homer to Pindar and the Greek dramatists. But prejudice is so strong that the absence of religious ideas is regarded as a regrettable defect, whereas that which is characteristic of the religious attitude of these authors is considered to be an expression of immature thought, the errors of which must be explained from the history of the development of the human mind.

So it happens that the admirer of Greek poetry and art deprives himself

of an experience that is not less valuable, but perhaps even the most valuable element of aesthetic enjoyment. He sees the figures created by man, but is not at all aware of the lofty figure that stood behind them and called them into being: divine inspiration!

The Divine can be understood by experience only. In this essay we intend to travel by the opposite road.

The merits of scholarly research of the past generations are unquestionable. By the industrious collection and sifting of facts they have amassed material that was unprecedented in previous periods. Yet, despite all efforts of scholarship and acumen, the results are extremely insignificant. We have not learnt more of the essence of ancient Greek religious thought than what we knew already before, namely what it was *not*. It was not akin to Jewish-Christian religiosity, but was rather abhorred by the latter, which considered it to be polytheist, anthropomorphic, close to nature, not exactly ethical, or in one word 'pagan'. Yet, in contrast to all other pagan religions it was *Greek*. What this means has hardly ever been seriously asked. On account of the outstanding beauty of the divine statues it was believed permissible to regard Greek religion as a 'religion of art', therefore a religion which actually was no religion at all. And a sense of astonishment was felt that such great ages as the Homeric age and those following it could be satisfied with a faith that so completely failed the human soul in its deepest needs and yearnings. For, what could these deities mean, as none of them was God in the true sense of the word?

We on our part wish to oppose to this current prejudice another and less superficial theory, viz. that deities cannot be invented or thought out or imagined, but can only be experienced.

To every human tribe the divine presents itself in its own way, giving shape to its existence and giving form to the purpose for which it was made. This is the way in which the Greeks must have conceived their own experience of the divine. And if we value their works, it is all the more incumbent on us to ask how the divine presented itself to them in particular.

The affairs of Heaven and earth, Goethe writes to Jacobi, constitute such a vast realm, that only the organs of all beings together may comprehend it. How, therefore, could in the great choir of humanity the voice of the most spiritual and most productive of all nations fail to be heard? It can be perceived very well if we are only prepared to hear what the great witnesses from Homer onwards have to say.

Before we start, one other observation on the current bias must be made. We must give a brief analysis of the attitudes and theories that still always stand in the way of a real understanding of Greek religion.

What is the cause of this disdain for the world of the Greek Gods? Why is it that the pantheon of the ancient Greeks is held in such disregard that, though it is studied as an object of antiquarian interest with scholarly zeal, nobody realizes that above and beyond this it has a meaning and a value of its own and, like all important achievements of the past, may also have some relevance to us?

The first reason is of course the victory of a faith which – in contrast to the tolerance of all previous religions – claims to represent universal and exclusive truth. Consequently, all other religions and in particular Greek and Roman religion which had been prevalent in Europe before the advent of Christianity could be nothing but untrue and reprehensible. Moreover, the eloquent champions of the Christian faith have always been in the habit of judging the religions of Antiquity on the basis of their most objectionable manifestations.

We have already pointed to the incomparable creative power of Greek religious thought. In this context we may observe, contrary to the Christian damnatory judgment of ancient religion, that the great periods of Greek, and also Roman, paganism were undoubtedly more deeply religious than in the Christian era. In other words: the idea of the divine, and what man owes to it and what is due to it, was far more closely interwoven with human existence. The sacred and the profane were not so much separated that only certain days or hours were given to religion, whereas secular affairs could lead a life of their own, according to their own laws.

The interpretation of myths and psychoanalysis. In conclusion some observations may be made on the modern fashion of interpreting myths by psychoanalytical methods – the methods of depth psychology. Its name already implies that here the alleged depth of the human soul must take the place of the depth of the reality of the world. This is a most dangerous aberration. The psychoanalytical method answers the suicidal tendency towards self-contemplation of modern man in a most seducing manner.

Psychoanalysis is no longer interested in different patterns of thought, but in psychological experiences and visions, which might not have existed among prehistoric man, but which can be observed at present in great detail. Thus psychoanalysis teaches its adherents to turn their eyes from the world around them and to direct them towards their own soul where, according to this school, all mythical events really occur. In this way psychoanalysis contributes piteously to the spiritual impoverishment of modern man who, because of his scientific and technical achievements is on the way to losing the world completely and becoming concerned with his own self exclusively.

Psychoanalysis alleges that, by analyzing dreams and dreamlike situations of persons who are of unsound mind or ill, it arrives at real mythical con-

cepts which may therefore inform us about the origin and essence of Myth. Moreover, these dreamlike visions, according to the psychoanalysts, are so similar to the mythical concepts that have come down to us from remote Antiquity, that one must unescapably conclude that they have mysteriously returned. They are therefore called *archetypes*, i.e. original images, and are assumed to have preserved themselves, without the awareness of the waking mind, in the so-called unconscious soul throughout the millennia, only to emerge in dreams at moments when the soul is in need of them. In order to make us understand this strange process we are asked to assume the existence of a 'collective soul', capable of preserving with astonishing faithfulness all that has been thought or seen from times immemorial.

If this is true, then even at the first appearance of myths they must have been somewhat akin to the active consciousness, but later they sank into the unconscious where they have been resting until now. The modern psychotherapist sees them emerging in dreams and he then makes them conscious to his patients.

Let us assume for the moment that these dreamlike visions are so akin to the original conception of the gods, that the conclusion of a direct connection is unavoidable. Even so the hypothesis of an unconscious mind in which concepts of a primeval age have been preserved should be the very last conclusion to be drawn. Apart from the demands which such a hypothesis in itself makes on logical thinking, it is based on the silent supposition that original myth does not contain any existential reality. If it did, the possibility should have to be taken into account that its truth, in certain circumstances, might be experienced even today as objective reality being still the same as it presented itself in the original myth. But it would be highly improbable that this would happen in the dreams of any ordinary individual.

For real myth – to state this right from the start – is always highly spiritual, i.e. it takes its origin not in any dream of the soul but in the clear observation of the spiritual eye to which the essence of things has been disclosed. Therefore, it is not only unrelated to dreamlike visions, but is their exact opposite. True, there are people who have the faculty of being 'of a clear mind' (*ἐμφορονες*) also in their dreams. But, in general, man when sleeping or dreaming is only open to what happens within him or is of his personal concern, but not to essential truths. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus has said:

'In sleep, when the channels of observation are closed, reason in us is severed from the link with its surroundings . . . but when awakening it looks out once again through the channels of observation, as if through window openings, and when meeting with its surroundings, reassumes its spiritual faculties.'⁴

But now the main point. It is not true at all that the dreamlike visions here discussed are comparable to or even identical with the figures of mythology. The psychoanalytical interpretation of myths moves around in a circle: it presupposes what it means to prove. It starts from a preconceived idea of the mythical in order to find it confirmed in the dreamlike visions. And this concept of the mythical is based on a misunderstanding.

It is possible that someone in great psychological distress may feel reassured when his dreams comfort him with a mother image and the security it seems to offer. But this mother image has nothing in common with the ancient divine concept of a 'Great Mother'.

In any original myth a god reveals himself within his immediate living surroundings. This god, by whatever name he may be called and distinguished from his equals, is never a single power, but always the whole essence of the world in his own characteristic manifestation. We call those powers demons or spirits, whose area of operation is restricted. But it is a gratuitous assertion of the theory of evolution that ever any of them should have developed into a god.

Thus also the Mother Goddess – to keep to this example – is as a deity a living original divine figure, in whom the unmeasurable inexpressible essence of the world manifests itself. How could she otherwise have taken such possession of human beings and have dragged them out of their own insignificant being, body and soul into the awesomeness of divinity, as we are able to watch in the partly horrifying and cruel cults dedicated to her? Only the original ground of all existence, become visible, has been able to do this to man, when, with full conscious senses and completely prepared for what Goethe calls 'the breadth of the Deity', he directs himself to it.

Compare the images found by the psychotherapist in the dreams of his patients with the primeval divine figures, and the similarities which even at a first glance seemed questionable will dissolve themselves in nothingness. However illuminating dreams may be as to the individual psychological conditions and situations of those dreaming, they say nothing of the 'common divine Logos' (*κοινος και θελος*).⁵ Any reference to them will therefore only serve to obscure the essence of myth.

The primeval manifestation of myth. Even though many still expect psychoanalysis to deliver the decisive word on the concept of myth, its entire system of reasoning is incompatible to the very thing it attempts to define. It throws man back onto himself and bars him from being receptive to the divine element looming large in the visible world. In this, psychoanalysis is entirely a child of the present era of 'demythologization', which speaks of 'nature' when it means logical ideas and experiments, and of 'being' when analyzing psychological attitudes. Thus the terms 'myth' and 'the

eternal return of the primeval images' are used for situations in which the diseased human mind, severed from the light and secluded, dreams its own dreams.

But the time has arrived to speak of myth not only in negative terms, but to interrogate it about its own essence. We have become accustomed to conceive myth as a report that cannot be literally true, but which probably contains a deeper meaning. In this sense the word *μῦθος* was already used by the Greeks themselves. Socrates, according to Platon, composed such 'myths' about the Hereafter and about the adventures of the human soul, and stated explicitly that it would be unwise to assume that everything had occurred exactly as told by these myths. However, he dared to assert that matters transcending our own understanding had happened more or less as told by these myths.

However, the men during the era of the great myths must have thought in a very different manner. Apart from any other consideration, the term *μῦθος* – which means nothing but 'word' – denoted originally not a word, a report, on what was imagined, but on what existed. But these ancient myths must have seemed so untrustworthy to later generations, that they could only chose either to declare them absurd or, as was done by certain philosophers, to regard them as the product of imagination with a deeper meaning.

This is the way in which we ourselves are likewise accustomed to think. We call any narrative which is seriously meant but which runs counter to our own knowledge of natural processes – including therefore any belief in miracles –, 'mythical'. When in the Old Testament the sun stands still at the request of Joshua, or when the walls of Jericho collapse at the blowing of the trumpets of the Israelites, when the Gospels mention the resurrection of dead people and the expulsion of demons, then all this is today called 'mythical', because 'we know' that there are no demons, as was recently stated by the main representative of the school of demythologization.

But the belief in miracles in itself is not mythical. A quite different element distinguishes mythical concepts from those that are considered correct by us. The problem of whether all statements said to be mythical are of the same order has been neglected. Much confusion has already arisen from the proposition that one should distinguish only one group with specific, essential qualities as being 'mythical' in the true sense of the word, the other so-called myths being only superficially similar.

Ancient civilizations, like primitive cultures of today, distinguish among their fabulous narratives a special category to which supreme awe is due not because they are miraculous in the highest degree but because they possess the character of *holiness*. This distinction is not based on mere tradition or on the apparent value of an archaic pattern of thought. This myth in the proper sense of the word has an incomparable character indeed: it is dynamic,

it has acting power, it intervenes in life. This is a quite different matter than when, according to experience, superstitious ideas exercise a certain influence. Here is real productivity, here non-transitory figures are formed, here man is created anew.

Original and true myth cannot be conceived without its connection with cult, i.e. a solemn attitude and action lifting man into a higher sphere. The relation between *myth* and *cult* has been seen in a different light in different periods. At first it was thought a matter of course that myth had come first, and that cult had associated itself with it at a later stage as a kind of visualization. In the era of rational and technical methods of interpretation the order was reversed. Cult was believed to have preceded myth because of its archaic rites whereas myth is often only found in a more recent tradition. It was believed that cult could be explained from magic, and myth was then regarded as a fictional interpretation of the various rites of the cult whose original meaning was no longer understood. But when, some decades ago, more painstaking research led to the conviction that there is not and has never been any cult without myth, the problem had to be posed again.

It was impossible to return to the earlier concept of cult as a mere visualization of myth. Cult, as cult acts that are preserved to this day show, is by no means a visual reflection of mythical events but these events themselves, in the full meaning of the word. Otherwise it would hardly be possible to expect salvational effects from it. The error must be sought in the manner in which the problem is posed, in the question as to their mutual dependence. Not only is no real cult possible without myth, but conversely real myth is impossible without cult. Both are in the last instance one and the same. This is of decisive importance for the correct understanding of both concepts.

That they are in the last instance one is easily understood as soon as one frees oneself from the erroneous presupposition that myth is only capable of bringing something to light which can be expressed in words and not, perhaps in an even more original way, through the attitudes and activities of man in a living and productive creative process. Just remember the highly impressive solemnity of cultic gestures, of attitudes, of movements, the majestic language of the temples and of the statues of deities. These are manifestations of the divine truth of myth that are no less direct than the literal proclamations which alone are often regarded as Revelations.

We are here confronted with a primeval phenomenon of the religious attitude. This itself – whether as a gesture, an act or a word – is *the manifestation of the sacred character of the deity*.

In verbal myths it appears as a figure – and with an unfathomable sense of mystery as a human-like figure –. In this way it is in the center of any real myth. It is an element that cannot be arrived at by reasoning, but only by experience. Therefore, with all its paraphernalia in myth, it is not mira-

culous or the miracle par excellence because it is not in keeping with the laws of nature. But it belongs to another existential area than what is part of the products of thought and logic.

We may distinguish three different stages in the self-manifestation of the divine which, however, does not imply a chronological order:

a) The attitude of man, which is upright, directed towards heaven, and which is proper to man alone. This is the first evidence of the myth of Heavens, the Sun and the Stars, which here manifests itself not in words, but in the upright attitude of the body. We are no longer aware of its religious meaning, but we are still conscious of this religious meaning in other attitudes that have been familiar to us from time immemorial. For example the pious or ecstatic standing still (Latin *superstitio*), the lifting of arms and hands, or conversely the bowing down or even kneeling down, the folding of hands, etc. These attitudes are originally not the expression of a belief: they are the revelation of the divine to man, in themselves they are revealed myth.

b) The manifestation of myth as an element in the movements and actions of man. Solemn procession, rhythm and the harmony of dancing, etc., are all self-manifestations of a mythical truth that wants to come to light.

The same applies to man-made objects. A stone is placed, a column erected, a temple built, a statue sculpted. It is left to the unilluminated to brand the veneration of these objects as 'fetishism'. Nor are they monuments of something that has to be brought to mind, felt or remembered. They are myth itself, i.e. the obvious manifestation of truth, which in its divine nature wants to dwell in a visible form.

More easily understandable to us are cultic acts. The myth of salvationist experience is less susceptible to misunderstanding, when appearing as an act in solemn practices than when announced in the form of a proclamation. In the latter case it may seem as if reference is made only to a specific event of the past. Nothing is a greater adulteration of myth than this view. The real meaning of such myths has been understood far better by the bright-minded friend of the Emperor Julian when he said: 'This has never happened, but *is* forever'. Our church rites have likewise preserved the awareness that they are not merely commemorative ceremonies. They are divine action itself, regularly repeated. And finally:

c) Myth as the Word, as its original name indicates. That the divine is willing to reveal itself in the word is the most important achievement of myth. And just like cultic attitudes, activities and shapes are themselves myth, so also the holy word itself is the direct manifestation of the divine presence and its actions.

Objection to the fact that this Divine Presence assumes a human form was made already in Antiquity by those misunderstanding myth, and their

objection is even greater today. They object to the lack of transparency of myth and do not realize at all that their own premises are anything but transparent. If they consider it necessary that the divine itself must be without any corporality, is it then not necessary for it to assume a human form when wanting to reveal itself to man? It is really no superstition but rather the earmark of true Revelation when the Deity approaches Man with a human face.

Summarizing this section we can conclude that the primeval manifestations of Myth, that what has been done and that what has been said, cult and myth in a narrower sense, are related in such a way that in cult man lifts himself up to the divine sphere and lives and acts together with the gods, but that in myth the Divine descends and becomes human.

NOTES

1. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, pp. 189 ff.
2. Cf. H. Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus*. Göttingen 1915.
3. Goethe, *Faust*. Translated by L. MacNeice.
4. Heraclitus, *Vorsokratiker*. 6th edition, I, p. 148.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 147 ff.