

C O N T E N T S

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I. THE WORD *ZEUS* AND ITS SYNONYMS, *THEOS* AND *DAIMON*

AFTER World War I, in a period when an intellectual expansion was expected in and from classical studies, the two most famous Greek scholars in Germany were invited to lecture on Zeus: Hermann Diels and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. Their lectures summarized what was known at the time about the supreme god of the Greeks. The historical exploration of antiquity had reached its highest point. The two lectures are characterized as much by their mutual contradictions (and that of Diels also by an internal contradiction) as by a common limitation. They are limited by a narrowness of attitude toward religion, or in this case toward genuine religious possibilities among the early Greeks.

Diels, who gave his lecture in Copenhagen in 1922,¹ was himself to some extent aware of the contradictions in his conception, yet not enough to recognize all the illogicalities in his thoughts about Zeus. He began by observing that the comparative study of ancient religion and mythology on the analogy of comparative philology had not been successful. Yet he gave his opinion that there was a deity who can be assumed as a “common object of faith with the primitive Indo-European people.” This deity, he says, is Zeus, the father of gods and men. Zeus is also the only one of the Olympic deities whose name is transparent and clearly reveals his original nature. “The language of our Indo-

1 H. Diels, “Zeus,” pp. 1–15.

European forebears denoted by *djeus*, accusative *djem*, the light of heaven.”

Diels did not take account of a discovery made at about the same time by philology, not yet “language content analysis” but still a strict exploration of word forms that refused to be satisfied with the simplifying etymologies of earlier comparative studies. This discovery was that the Indo-European stem *djeu-* belonged to a verb *div-* of “perfective” aspect. “Thus, the meaning of *djeu-* which should serve as the basis of the study is that which comes closest to that of the verb.” This is, according to the philologist Herbert Zimmermann, whom I quote, *djeu-* in a physical sense, that is, *aufflammen* (to flame up) “‘of the sun at daybreak’ or—its result—‘the bright sky of day.’”² With this addition, however, the linguist jumped out of language as it were and left the *content* of the stem *djeu-*—and thus also of the word *Zeus*—behind him. His choice of “flame up” for the content is in fact the crudest meaning, taken from fire, and this is not necessary. We can leave it at *aufleuchten* (to light up)³ and indeed we do not know that there is any closer expression than this. With the meaning “the bright sky of day . . . its result,” Zimmermann departed even further from the grammatical content. He could not substantiate it from Greek. He wrote, “This meaning of a location is preserved above all in the Veda.”

When Diels was preparing his lecture, linguistics had not yet advanced very far, or else its latest refinements were not known to Diels. It remained outside his field of study that the actual content of the

2 H. Zimmermann, “Das ursprüngliche Geschlecht von *dies*,” p. 95.

3 See H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I, 611: “*scheinen, hell glänzen, leuchten*” (shine, gleam brightly, lighten). See further J. Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen über Syntax*, p. 116; P. Kretschmer, “*Dyaus, Ζεύς, Diespiter und die Abstrakta im Indogermanischen*,” p. 113. / For Zimmermann’s appeal to the Veda, see his “Zeus,” pp. 95–96.

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word *Zeus* is the *moment* of lighting up. The great philologist, who was at home principally with the Greek philosophers, was not disturbed by the fact that none of the *static* meanings, like sky, day, brilliancy, brightness, which go beyond the actual decisive, *dynamic* moment of becoming light, could be found in Greek but had to be brought in from related languages. He made the observation—and did not see its contradiction with his method, which he believed to be exact—that “in the Greek the original meaning of sky, daylight, has almost completely disappeared.”⁴ The “almost” in this statement is an appeal to clues that must be regarded as highly hypothetical.

In Diels’s view, however, it followed that Zeus must have been most closely identified with the sky in that place where the Greeks first constituted themselves Hellenes: in northern Greece, that is, in Dodona, where Zeus possessed an oracle that both was ancient and always remained archaic. At this spot, so Diels had to go on then to observe, Zeus had the epithet “*Naios*” or “*Naos*,” “him of the spring.” “Not in the canopy of the oak tree, the whispering of whose leaves passed for the voice of Zeus, did the god dwell but on its floor [*en pythmeni p hegou*] as Hesiod expressly says.”⁵ So none other than the Dodonaean Zeus was originally not a sky god at all! If he had any characteristic trait it was this alone, that he was the god of the Hellenes, who there connected him with an older oracle. But why with an oracle? Diels does not ask this question. A lighting up, not in a physical sense, but as can happen through an oracle *humanly*, as an experience of the questioner, this must be the explanation here, often no doubt in the Greek meaning of *phos*, “light”: “rescue.”⁶ For it must be remembered that in primitive

4 Diels, “Zeus,” p. 2.

5 Ibid., p. 4. For the allusion to Hesiod, see *Fragmenta Hesiodica*, p. 117, fr. 240.

6 For this meaning, see *Iliad* VI 6, XVII 615.

languages no distinction need be expected between “physical sense” and human sense. Lighting up is lighting up whether this experience is caused by a material source of light or not.

From everything observed by Diels—the early presence in Dodona of the Hellenic Zeus as an oracle god who does not give his revelations from the sky—it could have been concluded that Zeus controlled not only the scene of meteorological phenomena but also the domain of consciousness in which he could be called “Panhellenios,” the “god common to all the Greeks.” This epithet is given prominence by Diels but in connection with the highest mountain of Aigina and its Zeus cult,⁷ as if it meant a common weather god who had his abode *here* for the whole of Hellas, which the Greeks clearly could not have believed. “Panhellenios” means the god of all the Hellenes and nothing else: a god of at least as much spiritual and moral content as the consciousness of community is a spiritual and moral fact.

This simplest of all inferences, which does not even require a closer study of the language, Diels failed to make. The further historical inference would have been that the Hellenes generally made their first appearance in correlation with Zeus, and that this god, “who from Homer down to the end of antiquity stood at the head of the heavenly company,”⁸ can be thought of *only* in correlation with the Hellenes. This inference was not made, in his 1923 lecture, by Wilamowitz either. He was more consequential than Diels in that he did not choose the quality of a sky god in Zeus for his starting point. “Roughly the first thing learnt by anyone who wants to understand Homer is that Zeus does not dwell in the sky but on the Macedonian Mount Olympos, whereas later poets, even the late Homeric poets, did equate Olympos

⁷ Diels, “Zeus,” p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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with the sky.”⁹ Let that be proof that Zeus only *became* a sky god. “He was the lord of the lightning”—that, according to Wilamowitz, was the original nature of Zeus. This seems a more dynamic view, yet it rested on very static foundations: on those ancient Olympian bronzes, which represent Zeus with the lightning in his hand. Only in recognizing the plasticity of attitude—a plasticity, however, which came rather late to the Greeks—did Wilamowitz advance further than Diels. Yet, the spiritual preconceptions that made it impossible to accept a spiritual and moral content in the Hellenic Zeus of the archaic period were common to the two men. They had in common, too, a certain fear of a scholarly kind, which was referred to by Wilamowitz at the beginning of his lecture.

He felt it necessary to dissociate himself from Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker, the author of the *Griechische Götterlehre* (“Study of Greek Religion”) which appeared in 1857 and gave a systematic account of the religion of the Greeks. Influenced by notions of the Goethe period, this work had followed a long exchange of ideas between Welcker and Wilhelm von Humboldt and paid regard also to comparative philology. Wilamowitz devoted his opening words to the origination of this work: “In the year 1808 in Heidelberg the young Fr. G. Welcker waited on the then famous Professor Creuzer. He was on his way home from Rome, where he had become intimate with the Humboldts, husband and wife, as the tutor to their children, and had been much in the company of the great Danish scholar Zoega. Creuzer, who found in all religions the echo of a deep Oriental wisdom, was overcome with astonishment when the young man told him he intended to write a history of Greek religion. This plan of the young man’s involved a much greater task than the old man had performed in his study of Greek religion. For

9 Wilamowitz, “Zeus,” p. 2.

Welcker did give the world of scholarship a correct definition of its terms, though it is true the task is unlikely in a foreseeable time to find a solution that will satisfy religion and history alike, however vigorous the present traffic in what is called the history of religion.

“When Welcker published his *Götterlehre* it pained him deeply that his main theme was not believed. He had tried to show that the welter of innumerable deities had been preceded by a certain form of monotheism, and that the exalted primordial god was Zeus. This view is to be explained only by the fact that Welcker was still dominated by ideas that had become obsolete, drawn from the nature religion of the enlightenment and from Creuzer’s symbolism. A further point was that the primordial relationship which had meanwhile been discovered among the Indo-European languages led to the assumption of a primordial Indo-European religion. . . .”¹⁰

Diels and Wilamowitz were guided in their view of Zeus by the fear that they would otherwise have to assume a monotheism of the same kind and the same origin among the ancient Greeks, or at the very least to assume an Indo-European primordial religion according to the ideas of the older philologists. Neither assumption was one they could have defended scientifically. It was strangely limited of them to believe that in Greek studies such a step into the unsure and unknown must be the only alternative to starting out from the crudest ideas about the supreme Greek god. Welcker’s younger contemporary, Karl Otfried Müller, thought otherwise. In 1825, in his *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (“Prolegomena to a Scientific Mythology”), he made it a principle “in the investigation of myths not to close our minds to anything—not even to thoughts of original beauty and purity—and especially not to begin explaining them with a one-sided slant

10 Ibid., p. 1.

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towards a limited class of concepts.”¹¹ If “beauty and purity” can be qualities of a language, then they are probably to be attributed to every primitive language, including that in which the Zeus religion makes its appearance.

The sentence with which Welcker in his *Götterlehre* began to discuss Zeus may well stand at the beginning of a scientific account. “At the furthest bounds of Greek antiquity we encounter the words *theos* and *daimon* and the names *Zeus* and *Kronion*: nothing more ancient exists for us in Greek religion.”¹² What is scientific about this is the way in which Welcker restricted himself by marking out the particular science appropriate for the next step. As I have already indicated, this is the science of language, not only with reference to word forms but also as the investigation of content. It became possible to define the content of the stem *djeu-* exactly—in terms of a “perfective” action—as the event of lighting up. An investigator who wants to keep his mind open to any result, even if it should turn out closer to Welcker’s views than to those of Diels and Wilamowitz, must start here.

A treatise of Paul Kretschmer, a sequel to that of Herbert Zimmermann, confirmed the exact content of the word *Zeus* but was less precise on the perfective aspect. It also offered an amplification that went beyond the linguistic data. “So we reach the conclusion that the fundamental meaning of the stem *djeu-*, in its weaker form *div-*, was that of ‘lightening,’ ‘illuminating.’ According to what has been said, therefore, *djeus* originally meant the ‘illuminator’ or ‘illuminatrix,’ the *daimon* of ‘lightening,’ of heavenly light.”¹³

The introduction of a *daimon* as the agent of “lightening” and of a

11 K. O. Müller, *Prolegomena*, p. 80. (In the 1970 edn., see p. 24.)

12 F. G. Welcker, *Griechische Götterlehre*, I, 129.

13 Kretschmer, “Dyaus, Ζεύς, Diespiter,” p. 113.

“demonic stage,” which Kretschmer claims to recognize in the Rig-Veda in its ideas about Dyaus, are assumptions not justified by language. They cannot be based on Sanskrit any more than on Greek. What the Greek *daimon* is remains to be discussed in connection with Zeus. With the ancient Indians a demon was associated with evil, which lighting up and the bright light of day are not. “Lighting up” or “lightening” is *for the man to whom it happens itself* also the “illuminator”—whether simultaneous with the happening in nature or only in it. It is something altogether concrete, not it is true like a body bounded and substantial, nor yet like anything abstract either. Among the linguists as among the philologists, it was a restriction of thought not to bring under consideration the *concrete happening*.

It was also false and superfluous, in the case of the so-called “Indo-European weather impersonals,” to deny that the subjectival expression “*Zeus hyei*,” “Zeus rains,” was preceded by the impersonal expression *hyei*, “it rains.”¹⁴ In all probability the opposite is true.¹⁵ Apart from Wilamowitz in his Zeus lecture,¹⁶ two great philologists have expressed themselves affirmatively. Karl Brugmann wrote, in 1925: “For such natural phenomena, phrases would already have existed before the mythological viewpoint found expression in them.”¹⁷ And Jacob Wackernagel, in 1926, stated: “We have no right to assume that the religious viewpoint is automatically older than one according to which people were content to state the event without asking about the agent.”¹⁸

14 W. Havers, “Primitive Weltanschauung und Witterungsimpersonalia,” p. 105.

15 T. Siebs, “Die sogenannten subjektlosen Sätze,” p. 266.

16 Wilamowitz, “Zeus,” p. 3.

17 K. Brugmann, “Die Syntax des einfachen Satzes im Indogermanischen,” p. 17.

18 Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen über Syntax*, p. 116.

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What the philologists did not consider was the possibility that the religious view of a natural event or even of an event occurring uniquely in man does not necessarily require an agent apart from and outside the action. Such a division of experience into action and agent is excluded by the immediacy of the experience, at any rate in its first actual moment. In the second moment language comes on the scene. But it is an unproved and improbable assumption that there was also a third moment, that of abstraction. For the correlation called religion, event and man are enough.

The exact linguistic view of the word *theos* proves this. By the linguistic observations of two such Greek experts as Wilamowitz¹⁹ and Wackernagel,²⁰ it is established that the substantive *theos*, with masculine ending, always retained part of its original predicative character, the character of a statement that can refer to something suggesting predication. There are examples even in the relatively late language, in Euripides and Menander, where *theos* is said of an event, or in Sophokles' *Ichneutae* where "Theos!" is called out four times in the sense of the Virgilian "Deus, ecce deus!"²¹ On the other hand, in the whole Greek language, so far as it is not spoken by Jews or Christians, *theos* has no vocative²²—for one does not address an event. The word *theos* is a precultic word and it proves that the correlation which religion is, even without cult, could appear at any moment of Greek existence.

Compared with its nearest relative in another Indo-European language, *theos* is the word specially characteristic of Greek religious ex-

19 Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, I, 17.

20 Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen*, p. 297.

21 See further Kerényi, *Griechische Grundbegriffe*, p. 17.

22 Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen*, p. 297.

perience. The most nearly related word is the Hittite *teshas*, “sleep” and “dream.”²³ The correspondence of sound between *teshas* and *theos* is regular and complete. From the strictly phonetic point of view, a mathematical equation can be set up. The Hittite word is, moreover, a noun of the same declension as *theos*. Yet in sense, on the other hand, the correspondence is between *teshas* and *thes-*, a shorter form of the same word. This form survived only in compounds—*thes-* in the Homeric words *thesphatos*, *thespesios*, *theskelos*. In *thesphatos*, which means unmistakably “that which is uttered by an oracle,” *thes-* is equivalent to *teshas* with the meaning “truth-dream.” The second half of these three compound words has the sense of “saying” (the roots *pha-* and *sep-*) or of “impelling” (the root *kel-*).

The characteristic which here distinguishes Hittites from Greeks consists in this, that in Hittite the truth-dream is itself a masculine, like *oneiros*, “dream,” which in the Greek can also appear as a person.²⁴ Phonetically *teshas* can be equated with *theos* but semantically only with *oneiros*, and *thes-*. The *theos* of the Greeks is not limited to appearing in sleep. If a dream, then it can be a daydream that enriches the dimensions of sense experience with a further non-sensuous dimension. It is more than the indefinite *thes-*, which in Greek could only have been a neuter word. *Theos* with masculine ending had already taken for the Greeks a step in the direction of personal appearance. *Theos*, moreover, was experienced not only in dreams but also in the waking condition. The demarcation of the dream experience from what was always and everywhere a possible event fell away the moment the step was taken to personal appearance.

With the Greeks the event at which “Theos!” could be called out

²³ See further J. Friedrich, *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*, p. 222.

²⁴ See Iliad II 6, 8, and 22.

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could happen not only in dreams but also in nature and in history and *simultaneously* in the additional dimension of spirit. Thence is understood the slogan attributed in the literature to Thales, the first philosopher: *Panta theon plere*, "Everything is full of gods!"²⁵ There was for the Greeks no moment and no place where men could not be confronted by a god. In clarity, sharpness of outline, and plasticity he could vary, according to the capacity of whoever was having the experience for seeing and fixing shapes. It can be presumed that this capacity with the Greeks was highly developed. But if we ask about the *Greeks*, ask at what (chronologically not absolutely definable) moment—a moment of prehistory with the greatest historical effects—there were Greeks in existence, the most probable hypothesis is this. There were Greeks, we may say, from the moment of that great event when lighting up, outside and in, was comprehended as a special experience in the word *Zeus*. No god is *historically* thinkable without that correlation in which he affected men and to which men also belonged, to experience him and take him over and receive him from earlier experience. Yet, equally, no men are any longer thinkable without their god or gods once the correlation has come about. Correlation with several gods was possible. In this respect the Zeus religion is not comparable to the relation of the people of Israel to their god. And yet it *is* after all comparable. (Indeed, the historical analogy—independent of the content of Zeus and that of the god of the Israelites—is so evident that it must now become a subject of general scrutiny among scholars.)

All the more important is it to assess what is specifically Greek in the correlation "Greekhood and Zeus," insofar as its nucleus, the Zeus-experience of the Greeks, actually admits of any assessment. The word

²⁵ H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 11 [1] A 22 (vol. I, p. 79, line 27).

Zeus contains two elements: experience of light and the modality of this experience, of which the Greek light is an essential precondition. There is no excluding it. Another precondition was the perceptual and spiritual sensibility that never left the Greeks as long as they remained spiritually creative. The transition to the “Greek light,” from a region where the light is less intense, is the experience of everyone who comes to Greece from the north and possesses a certain degree of the same sensibility.²⁶ “A light the like of which the eye has never beheld and in which it feels blissful, as if it were awaking for the first time to the sense of seeing” is how Hofmannsthal describes it.²⁷ This light is ineffably sharp and at the same time mild. It brings out the finest details, so Hofmannsthal continues, finding beautiful words for the clarity of the light. For the Greeks, light was the element of truth, as night was the element of thieves.²⁸

Yet, if *Zeus* is considered with linguistic precision—which here means to reach the extreme limits of scientific contemplation but not step over them—then the word makes it impossible to take as its content this actual light and the experience of it. All the same, the experience is not far off from that which was *Zeus*. The modality contained in the word is that of an *actio perfectiva*. Thus, the word *Zeus* stood in opposition to an *actio inchoativa*, in which nothing is produced, but in no kind of opposition to an *actio iterativa*, a self-repeating event. An event that repeats itself automatically causes the same “agent” to appear again and again. A highly dramatic appearance this actor made, in the person of *Zeus*, on the stage of nature and the whole universe. There is, on the other hand, a distinction to be noted

26 See further “Auf Spuren des Mythos,” in Kerényi, *Werke*, II, 182 ff.

27 See Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Preface to Hanns Holdt, *Griechenland*, pp. v ff.

28 See, for example, Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1026.

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between Zeus's appearance and the function of Helios. The sun shines down on us from the sky, looks on from a distance, and thus consumes days and years.²⁹ An event made visible to men by Zeus and at the same time absorbed into their spirit is not separated from him by any distance. To him who in his essence is *consummating event*, that which happens, again and again another event, spontaneously returns, whether from the movement of the clouds or on to tranquil brightness, the *eudia*. The element *eu-* in this compound word asserts that it is now "good," but at the same time that it has once been less good and can be less good again. *Eudia* happens no less as rain or a snowstorm. Not the sky or the light, in themselves, are Zeus. Events are evidence of him, like the drama of light to which shadow also belongs, and like lightning and thunder, not only by day but also at night. The sky black with clouds was quite especially *his* place (as alluded to by Homer with the epithet *nephelegereta*), the place of lighting up.

Welcker stated at the beginning of his account of Zeus an idea which he called the "greatest fact when we go back into the remotest Greek antiquity." We must hold fast to this "greatest fact" and also to the contradictory picture that emerged from it. This initial fact according to Welcker was the "idea of god as the supreme being, combined with a worship of nature which had never entirely been submerged but out of which early on a family of deities, sprung from Zeus and outside nature, had begun to take shape."³⁰ In place of Welcker's idea of god, Zeus must be put, as a concrete experience. Still, the difficulty remains as indicated by Welcker. There were three realities—the initially "greatest fact," the "worship of nature," and the "family of deities"—and yet one of the three always seems to exclude the others.

29 Kerényi, *Töchter der Sonne*, pp. 23, 60–61.

30 Welcker, *Griechische Götterlehre*, I, 129.

Here, then, in preliminary sketch is the task of a historical treatment, of which the linguistic principles were indicated by Welcker. We already see that *theos* and *Zeus* in fact do belong together in sense.

In the historical Greek religion, *Zeus*, *theos*, *daimon* denote the pole to which man corresponds as antipole. Linguistic scrutiny of these words leads us to the extreme bounds of what can be counted as “Greek religious studies”; indeed, they themselves form these bounds. Of the three words, paradoxically, it is *Zeus* which is at once the most impersonal and the most singular—almost as impersonal as *thes*-. It is a masculine, like other Greek words ending in *-eus*. Yet, the words *dyaus* and *dies* in Sanskrit and Latin respectively, which exactly correspond to *Zeus* phonetically, testify to a wavering of the gender between feminine and masculine, that is to say, to the absence of a necessary gender,³¹ which in the case of an agent would be rather masculine than feminine. In the case of *Zeus* this impersonality is combined with a striking singularity. Though plurals of *Zeus* have come down, the examples show that they are mere grammatical possibilities which have a much more complicated relation to *Zeus* than *theoi* to *theos*. The plurals are no longer situated at the level at which *Zeus* as *actio perfectiva* (perfective aspect) was originally situated and which he finally reached as highest god.³²

In contrast to *Zeus*, *daimon* is the most personal and at the same time the least singular of the three. Whenever the word occurs in the singular, it is a special *daimon*. Its ending alone makes the *daimon* personal; the formative *-mon* most decidedly expresses an agent. A “dispenser” is the meaning of *daimon*, but not a human one. In the

³¹ See further Zimmermann, “Das ursprüngliche Geschlecht von *dies*,” pp. 79 ff.

³² Diels, “*Zeus*,” p. 2; E. Fehrle, “*Zeus*,” col. 575; Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, I, 215–16.

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plural, in the language of Homer, *daimones* is completely equivalent to *theoi*, “gods.”³³ *Daimon* in the singular also is personal in sense. It appears in a personal occurrence, in a personal fate, we might say, although we must not understand “fate” here as a being existent on its own.³⁴ The “dispenser” occurred only in a personal case; it was a personal dispensation each time it happened. It had to be seen from the point of view of the person to whom it occurred and in this respect the *daimon* was the most personal of the three. Yet the word *daimon* was at the same time the most general expression, the word in the mouth of all unknowing persons.

Who was it who knew the name appropriate to whatever *theos* occurred there? Only a person familiar with the gods, *such as a poet*, could know. (It can almost be laid down as a rule that where Homer is himself narrating he can give the name of the god who appears, but that where we find an unnamed god in Homer it is one of his characters who is speaking.³⁵) For people to say “The Dispenser!” was the most obvious thing in cases that seemed like an individual fate characteristic of a person. A further step was to assign the *daimon* as an individual deity of a lower order to people as individuals.³⁶ This, too, is a phenomenon of Greek religious history, but not until a relatively late date.

Zeus can be *daimon*, in the old original sense of the word, for a mortal.³⁷ The *daimon* reaches as far as the human being has his fate,

33 Iliad I 222, VI 115, XXIII 595.

34 Fate is understood as “that aspect of the divine in which it appears to man as destiny”; see Kerényi, *Die antike Religion*, p. 103 (in *Werke*, VII, 75). See also Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, I, 362 ff.

35 This disposition has been verified by O. Jørgensen, “*Das Auftreten der Götter in den Büchern 1–μ der Odyssee*,” p. 366.

36 See Hesiod, *Works and Days* 122.

37 E. Heden, *Homerische Götterstudien*, p. 86.

in the words of the German poet Hölderlin, “to the abyss.”³⁸ The *daimon* can be apostrophized; *daimon* has its vocative. The vocative form is also possessed by Zeus. The vocative makes sense where man experiences god in himself. To “father Zeus” he addressed himself from a greater distance. The *daimon* he experienced as the “dispenser.” In tragedy, where it was later found possible to recognize “fate,” the *daimon* reigned like an almighty god. There are instructive parallels in related languages. In Old Persian *baga-* and in Old Church Slavic *bogŭ* is the word for god, while in Avestan and Sanskrit the same word means “share,” “lot,” “destiny,” “dispenser,” “lord.”³⁹ In the same way *daimon* can stand for Zeus.

Beside Zeus, *theos*, and *daimon* Welcker put the name Kronion, a patronymic, “son of Kronos.” This was correct inasmuch as the succession, the connection with a new epoch after that of Kronos, was characteristic of Zeus. By the original content of his name, “lighting up,” Zeus was connected for the Greeks not with the beginning of the world but with the time of which they themselves had historical consciousness, a “new” time contrasted with an “old” time not yet ruled by Zeus. The dithyrambic poet Timotheos of Miletos testifies to the quality of “newness” attached to Zeus. In the words quoted as a motto at the front of this book, Timotheos justifies his own modernity, a renovation of Greek music. His appeal to Zeus may have been a dithyrambic audacity. Yet, he must have been able to count on its finding a resonance in fourth-century Athens.

The time of the Persian Wars, and of the greatest spiritual brightness experienced by the Greek world since Homer, had gone before, in

38 The expression appears in both the first and second versions of the poem “Mnemosyne.” See F. Hölderlin, *Werke*, p. 393.

39 See Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I, 341.

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the sixth and fifth centuries. The emergence of a consciousness of common history went further than the consciousness of a comprehensive community. The scene of menace and rescue was no longer primarily the sky and nature but the earth and its seas, on which Greeks lived and died. It was not a “physical” but rather a “moral” event when in the sixth century B.C. the Greeks first saw in Zeus the god of their history. There are evidences from the time in which this history occurred—evidences not of contemplation but of the Zeus religion.

Herodotos reports the utterance of a Greek at the Hellespont, a witness of the great operation by which Xerxes brought his army across the Straits. He cried out: “O Zeus, why have you taken the shape and the name of Xerxes in place of Zeus if you wanted to overthrow Greece with all these people? You could have done it without that!”⁴⁰ And Herodotos also quotes an utterance of the Delphic oracle about a certain Spartan—Leonidas understood it to refer to him—who would resist the Persians, saying that he had the “courage of Zeus,” *Zenos gar echei menos*.⁴¹

From the tragedians a single verse—the last line of Sophokles’ *Trachiniae*—may be quoted here, for with it this view of history is transposed to heroic myth. After all the horror that has happened in the tragedy, down to the self-burning of Herakles, the son of Zeus, indeed *of this very event*, the poet says,

κούδὲν τούτων ὅτι μὴ Ζεύς

and nothing of all this is not Zeus—

a saying of the Zeus religion that makes you catch your breath. And yet it is a quite plain, outspoken utterance of Sophokles, who does not

40 Herodotos VII 56.

41 Ibid. VII 220.

philosophize like the other tragedians. Behind what his chorus declares here with such immediacy is the assumption that for the normal Athenian of the Classical period, of whom Sophokles himself counted as one, and without doubt also for the normal Greek, Zeus was the “meaning” that lighted up more or less in every great happening.

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