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Pre-philosophical Concepts of Truth in Ancient Greece

Contents

History of Truth in Western Philosophy

This part of the section [History of Truth in Western Philosophy](#) includes of the following pages:

History of Truth in Ancient Greece

[Aletheia in the Ancient Greek Thought. General Introduction](#)

[Pre-Philosophical Concepts of Truth \(Current page\)](#)

[Selected bibliography on the Concept of Truth in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy](#)

[Selected bibliography on Ancient Greek Authors from Homer to the Hellenistic Period](#)

[Aletheia dans la Pensée Grecque d'Homère à l'Âge Hellenistique](#)

Pages under construction:

Parmenides

Sophists

Plato's Doctrine of Truth

Aristotle's Definition of Truth

Epicureanism

Stoicism

Skepticism

Neoplatonism

The prephilosophical usage of *Aletheia*

Homer

Texts:

Studies:

"As scholars have often pointed out, the word *Aletheia* only occurs in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in connection with verbs of saying, and its opposite is a lie or deception. Someone always tells the truth to another. Of the seventeen occurrences, (a) this triadic pattern is explicit in all but six, and in those few cases the reference to a hearer is clearly implied. Truth has to do with the reliability of what is said by one person to another.

What is not so often pointed out are some quite distinctive features of the Homeric use of *Aletheia*. This is not the only word Homer uses to mean truth; he has a number of other words which mean 'true', 'genuine', 'accurate', and 'precise' (*atrekes, eteos, etetumos, etumos*). These words, as adjectives or adverbs, occur freely in the midst of stories and speeches. By contrast, *Aletheia* occurs almost always as a noun or neuter adjective (once the cognate adverb *alethes* is used). It is the word Homer uses when he wishes to signify 'the truth'.

Furthermore, it is very revealing that the sentence, 'Then verily, child, I will tell you the truth', occurs five times in the *Odyssey* with but minor variations. (b) It is a high-sounding formula used to introduce a speech. The repetition of lines and formulaic phrases-sometimes, indeed, a number of lines-is a feature of the Homeric style. That *Aletheia* should occur in such a context suggests that the sentence is one that has come down in the tradition as a ready-made formula which Homer inherited.

Again, significantly, the word often occurs in the phrase 'the whole truth' (*pasan alétheien*). (c) To tell the truth in this sense is not just to utter some sentence which is true-that is a much more modern conception. It is to give a whole account, to tell the entire narrative. So, for example, at *Iliad* 23.361, Achilles sets Phoenix as umpire to watch a chariot-race and to report back the truth. The same meaning underlies *Odyssey* 13.254, where Odysseus is about to address Athena, the daughter of Zeus, in a very fulsome account 'yet he spoke not the truth but checked the word ere it was uttered'. In many other occurrences one of the characters is entreated to tell the truth, or undertakes to do so, in relation to certain questions which have been asked. Here again, the notion is that the account given has to be complete and accurate, with nothing held back and with no deception. The Homeric notion of *Aletheia* which emerges from examining its uses is precisely the same, with the same force and flavour, as that enshrined in the traditional oath or solemn affirmation required of a witness in court proceedings: to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Given this use in Homer, it appears that *Aletheia* is a matter of being truthful and open in one person's dealings with another, so that what is said can be taken by hearers as reliable and trustworthy. That being so, the meaning discernible in its use coincides with the etymology of the word given by most scholars, both ancient and modern. The word is generally taken to be derived from a root meaning 'to escape notice, detection'. The same root, with much the same meaning, underlies the Latin *lateo*, 'am hidden', 'remain unnoticed', from which English derives 'latent'. The word *lethe* in Greek means 'forgetfulness'. How prominent the nuance of not forgetting is taken to be in *Aletheia* is debatable. But from the evidence it does appear that in Homer the nuance of not hiding is strong. People speak the truth if they hide or conceal nothing from their hearers. (d)" (pp. 32-33)

Notes

- (a) That is, excluding the occurrence of *aléthes* at *Iliad* 12.433, which is probably a corruption of *aletis* -- see H. J. Mette, 'Aléthes', in Bruno Snell (ed.), *Lexicon des frühgriechischen Epos* (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1955-).
- (b) *Odyssey* 3.354, 16.61, 16.226, 17.108, 22.420.
- (c) e.g. in the *Odyssey* 3.354 and 16.6, (already cited) and in 11.507, 17.297, and *Iliad* 24.407.
- (d) See Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides*, 64 ff., and C. H. Kahn, *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek* (Foundations of language Suppl. Series, 16; Reidel, Dordrecht, 1973), 364 ff.

From: Richard Campbell, *Truth and Historicity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992.

"The result is that the epic texts entertain an endless dialogue and conversation on all the topics of archaic Greek thought. To begin with the notion of truth in relation to the language of poetry, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and Hesiod eavesdrop on each other, the *Odyssey* teasing slightly the notion of *kleos* [glory] in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* providing the foil for Hesiod's attack on the poets, *gasteres oion*, "mere bellies." In the age of writers, a man as wise as Xenophanes is not content with attacking by name, author to author, the hexametric poetry of Homer and Hesiod: he goes on to quote, and he quotes by alluding to a line of the poet he is condemning. So Xenophanes fragment 36, which reads *tauta dedoxastho men eoikota tois elumoisin*, "let these things be considered to resemble truth," cannot be separated either from Hesiod *Theogony* 27 or from *Odyssey* 19.203. (10) The textual parallels between Parmenides and the *Odyssey*, as Alexander Mourelatos writes, "have been commonplace for almost a century," and several incorporations of Odyssean phrases by Parmenides' text have in recent years been shown to contain a specific set of allusive interactions.

(11)

The perception that the poetic language maintains a difficult and problematic relation with truth belongs to all the texts in question, but the economy of this relation and the strategies that are devised to save the notion of truth from the contiguity of falsity are as different as are the texts. The question of truth (*aletheia*) in relation to being (*to on*) and to language (*logos*) remains fundamental. Heidegger has elaborated these questions in the Greek context beginning with *Iliad* 1.70, *ta t'eonta, ta t'essomena pro t'eonta*, in a famous essay, (12) where he defines being of *einai* as presencing and connects the Iliadic *ta eonta* with Anaximander's *ta eonta*. (pp. 242-243)"

Notes

(10) The resemblance between Xenophanes frag. 36 and Hesiod *Theogony* 27 is evident to some critics: see André Rivier, "Rémarques sur les fragments 34 et 35 de Xénophane," *Revue de Philologie* 30 (1956): 37-61.

(11) See Eric A. Havelock, "Parmenides and Odysseus," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 133-43; and Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 17-34.

(12) Martin Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment," in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 36 ff.

From: Pietro Pucci, *Odysseus Polutropos. Intertextual readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1987.

"*Truth* beginning with the presocratic Parmenides assumed some kind of at least proto-eidetic, non-immediate and reflected status in the Greek culture. This was not the case in Homer's texts, where how a statement "rang true" depended to a much greater extent on its traditional linguistic power than on the idiosyncratic, individual behavior of a specific character or some universalized sense of character that Aristotle was yet to create in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Homeric truth lay in a factual *mythos* ("myth'), not a fictive *logos* ("argument"). The archaic *mythos* was defined in its factual, even artifactual, relationship to an immediately recognizable "deed" (*ergon*), not to an *ergon* that Aristotle might wish to judge, through a problematically narrated *logos*, "certainly" (*akribes*), "decorously" (*to prepon*), and ultimately universally or "absolutely" (*haplos*). Consequently, as Vico perceived in his *De Antiquissima*, for Homer fact implied truth (*verum-factum*). Vico was to attribute to the ancient Latins the different Aristotelian notion that only certainty implies truth (*verum-certum*). So arises yet another difference linked to a common source, in this instance "truth.

Again, it suggests a shift or skew that is central to our rhetoric and its powers of interpretation, that is, its hermeneutics". (p. 64)

"*Der Weg* (*) is an important collection of those Essays that most clearly reveal Snell's insights into the idiosyncratic properties of Homeric experience. Chapter 5 ("The Development of the Notion of Truth among the Greeks") was written specifically against Heidegger's false notion of archaic "Truth" and, as such, succeeds in dismissing any putative "onto-theological" essence of "Truth" from the Homeric treasure house of nonrepresentational mental activity. The chapter is a shortened version of an earlier essay entitled "ALETHEIA" (*Festschrift Ernst Siegmann* [Würzburg: Schöningh 1975], 9-17) which should be read by those interested in more Homeric examples to bolster the argument. In both pieces, as is the case in Snell's most popular work, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*, 4th ed. (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), there lies an Aristotelian differentiation that too easily skews the cultural continuity of Homeric experience, with which we all must deal. If indeed, as Snell argues generally, mental activity moves from the concrete sense of Homeric experience to an abstract reflection of the philosophical sort, two reservations must always apply to any statement about how the Greeks or we "think": (1) the opposition concrete/abstract is purely an Aristotelian formulation designed by him, along with his notion of particulars and universals to arrive at a "proper judgment", and (2) the philosophical penchant for an abstract lexis does not in any way minimize the continual operation of Homeric perception to the present day. Snell defines "the three significant aspects, under which Homer sees what one later named the truth." Here, too, it is necessary to identify the Aristotelian, philosophical lexis that tends to creep into Snell's modern German prose:

alethes is that consistent, solid surety in memory (that in its fullness can be enumerated), ["Memory" in any functional sense is not found in the Homeric texts; *mnemosyne* appears as hapaxlegomenon at *Iliad* 8.181, with an imperative: *mneomomyne tis epeita pyros deioio genestho* ("then let some memory of blazing fire come about") "Fullness" and "enumeration" are, however, characteristically Homeric perceptions of experience, especially when linked to "cataloguing".]

eteon is the factual [*Tatsächliche*], an objective Being, [*ein objektiv Seiendes*] (that as such draws necessarily specific consequences, in sharp antithesis [*Gegensatz*] to Not-Being [*Nichtseienden*]). ["Objective Being" suggests too strongly the *De Anima*, and Snell's argument is not convincing that at *Iliad* 2.299-300, when Odysseus asks the host to wait *ophra daomen / e eteon Kalchas manteuetai, ee kai ouki* ("that we may learn whether what Calchas foretells is true, or whether indeed it is not"), there arises the question of Being and Not-Being (Snell, *Der Weg*, 95-96). "Antithesis" or "opposition," moreover, too easily falls into some Aristotelian readings of a pre-Socratic, not entirely Homeric structure of thought. It is the relationship between *eteon* and the factual that is the insight here.]

nemertes is the Not-Falling [*Nicht-Verfehlende*] in especially the replying word (the "*Ant-Wort*"), that something factual [*ein Tatsächliches*] (*eteon*), at last come about [*trifft*], when one makes inquiries about him. (Snell, *Der Weg*, 100)

It is Snell's understanding of *nemertes* as "truth" that forms a common definition of all lexical choices in Homer that attempt to express the force of the human experience. Snell's attempt to color *alethés* with a "subjective" tone over an "objective" one (*Der Weg*, 109) is probably explained by a zeal to crush Heidegger's "objective" fiction. Unfortunately, the philosophical debate tends to blur the central issue of language and human discourse that the root sense of all "truth" in Homer suggests (Cole "Archaic Truth", 27). (For distinctions among *nemertes*, *atrekes*, and *alethes* that Snell is unwilling to draw [*Der Weg*, 98], see Cole "Archaic Truth", 17)." (pp. 79-80)

References

- Thomas Cole (1983). "Archaic Truth", *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, Nuova Serie, 13, pp. 7-28.
- Bruno Snell (1978). *Der Weg zum Denken und zur Wahrheit. Studien zur frühgriechischen Sprache*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

From: Raymond A. Prier, *Achilles Rhetor? Homer and proto-rhetorical truth* in: Brenda Deen Schildgen (ed.), *The Rhetoric Canon*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1997.

"As we look beyond Homeric diction, however, at later stages in the history of Greek poetics, we can find evidence for the emergence of yet another word that marks speech as special -- so special that it is set apart even from *múthos*, which in such contexts then becomes in its own turn "ordinary." I mean "ordinary" only to the extent that the given opposing word becomes even more special. The word in question is *aléthés* 'true' or *alétheia* 'truth'. In the diction of a fifth-century poet like Pindar, for example, this word is used in explicit opposition to the word *múthos* in contexts where true speech is being contrasted to other forms of speech that are discredited, that cannot be trusted (*αλαθῆ λόγον*) versus *μύθοι* at *Olympian* 1.29-30, *μύθοις* versus *αλαθειαν* at *Nemean* 7.23-25)." (42)

There is, to be sure, nothing post-Homeric about the actual word *aléthés* 'true' or *alétheia* 'truth', or even about the concept inherent in the formation of the word, which expresses an explicit denial, by way of the negative element *a-*, of forgetting, *leth-*, and thereby an implicit affirmation of remembering, *mné-*. (43) As Martin has shown convincingly, the Homeric word *múthos* is associated with narrating from memory, (44) which he describes as the rhetorical act of recollection. (45) This speech-act of recollection, which qualifies explicitly as a *múthos* (as at *Iliad* 1.273), is the act of *mné-* 'remembering'. An ideal example is the wording of Phoenix in *Iliad* 9.527 as he introduces the story of the hero Meleagros to Achilles and the rest of the audience: *μῆμνημαι* 'I remember [*mné-*]'. (46) The failure of any such speech-act is marked by the act of *léth-* 'forgetting' (as with *λήθεαι* at *Iliad* 9.259). (47)

The very concept of *aléthés* 'true' or *alétheia* 'truth' expresses the need to avoid such failure in the speech-act, the *múthos*, of recollection or narrating from memory, and Homeric diction can actually combine *aléthés* 'true' with a derivative of *múthos*, the verb *muthéomai* 'make a *múthos*', as in the expression *aléthea muthésasthai* 'speak true things' at *Iliad* 6.382 (the whole speech in question is introduced as a *múthos* at 6.381). The Homeric meaning of *muthéomai* 'make a *múthos*' has all the force of *múthos* itself, as we see from this description by Martin: "When this word for speech occurs, the accompanying discourse has a formal nature, often religious or legal; full detail is laid out for the audience, or is expected by the interlocutor in the poem; at times, a character comments on the formal qualities of the discourse labelled with this verb." (48)

Granted, then, that there is nothing post-Homeric about the actual word *aléthés* 'true' or *alétheia* 'truth'; also, that this word does not enter into opposition with *múthos* in Homeric diction. In post-Homeric traditions, however, as we have seen, for example, in the diction of Pindar, *múthos* has indeed become an opposite of *aléthés* 'true' or *alétheia* 'truth', which is now marked as being distinct from *múthos*. In the Pindaric examples that we have already considered, the word *múthos* has defaulted into a vague plural (*μύθοι* at *Olympian* 1.30, *μύθοις* at *Nemean* 7.23), representing a murky multiplicity of discredited versions against which backdrop the singular truth of *alétheia* is being highlighted in shining contrast. (49) In brief, as I have argued at length in my earlier work on such post-contexts, the meaning of *múthos* as a speech-act has thus become marginalized. (50)

There are traces of this marginalization at even earlier stages. Let us consider the expression *aléthea gerúsasthai* 'announce true things' in Hesiod *Theogony* 28, which is a formulaic variant of *aléthea muthésasthai* 'speak true things', as attested at *Iliad* 6.382. (51) It appears from such variations that *gerúomai* 'announce' has become the marked member in opposition to *muthéomai* 'speak', which then becomes unmarked. (52) Similarly with *aléthea muthé sasthai* 'speak true things', as attested at *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 121, as also at *Iliad* 6.382: this formula is in turn a variant of *etéuma muthésasthai* 'speak genuine things', as attested at *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 44. Just as *gerúomai* 'announce' has become the marked member in opposition to *muthéomai* 'speak', so also *aléthea* 'true things' has become the marked member in opposition to *etéuma* or *étuma* 'genuine things'. (53) The latter opposition is made explicit in the quoted words of the Muses themselves in Hesiod *Theogony* 27-28, where the unique truth-value of the *Theogony* itself is heralded by the goddesses as *aléthea* 'true things' (28) in opposition to a multiplicity of versions that look like *étuma* 'genuine things' but are in reality *pseúdeia* 'fallacies' ('many fallacies that look like genuine things' 27). (54)

In my earlier work, I have argued at length that such variations result from a chain of differentiations setting off a single marked pan-Hellenic version from a multiplicity of unmarked versions that are perceived as local or at least more local. (55) For now I need only emphasize that this newer concept is marked as distinct from earlier concepts that thereby default into an unmarked

category. As the word *aléthes* 'true' or *alétheia* 'truth' becomes marked in opposition to *mûthos*, which in turn becomes unmarked in the context of such opposition, the meaning of *mûthos* becomes marginalized to mean something like 'myth' in the popular sense of the word as it is used today in referring to the opposite of 'truth'. (pp. 122-124)

(...)

In short, the expression *aléthea gerúsasthai* 'to herald true things' in *Theogony* 28 designates not just the process of speaking something that is privileged: it explicitly marks a speech-act, an utterance with special authority. It seems to me not enough to establish that the adjective *aléthes* can be interpreted as 'verifiable', in the etymological sense that it negates the idea of "escape one's consciousness," as implicit in the root from which it is derived, *léth-* as in *léthe* 'oblivion' and *lantháno* 'escape the consciousness of'.(57) Yes, *aléthes* conveys the idea of seeing something "for real," but there is more to it: the negation of *leth-* serves as the equivalent of the positive concept *mne-*, which as we have seen means not just 'remember' but something like 'narrate from memory'. We may recall the intuitive formulation of Jean-Pierre Vernant, who defines *mne-* as 'recover the essence of being'.(58) In ancient Greek mythical thought, such an essence is beyond sensible reality, beyond time.(59) Even more important, as Marcel Detienne has shown, ancient Greek tradition claims that this essence is controlled by the poet, master of "truth" or *alétheia*.(60)

A problem remains: *aléthea* in *Theogony* 28 is opposed not to *lethe* but to *pseúdea* 'fallacies' in the previous line. It has been argued that such an antithesis represents "a later, more rational way of thinking, where *alétheia* means 'truth'.(61) It is as if a new rationalistic opposition of *aléthea* 'true things' versus *pseúdea* 'fallacies' were superimposed on an older myth-centered opposition of *alétheia* in the sense of 'no lapse of consciousness' versus *lethe* 'lapse of consciousness', with the result that the two oppositions overlap and in fact coexist.(62) Further, it has been argued that there is overlap even between *alétheia* and *lethe*, as also between *aléthea* and *pseúdea*, to the extent that no act of remembering is free of some kind of forgetting, no telling of the truth is free of some deception.(63) I agree that there is a thought-pattern where *mne-* in the sense of 'remember' includes an aspect of *leth-* 'forget'.(64). I disagree, however, with the notion that the adjective *aléthes* and the noun *alétheia* are similarly inclusive; rather, as I have argued at length elsewhere, *aléthes* and *alétheia* explicitly exclude a lapse of the mind.(65) The non-ambiguity or even absolutism of the words *aléthes* and *alétheia* is a key to their denotation of a speech- act endowed with a distinctly authoritative and authorizing force." (pp. 125-127)

Notes

(42) See extensive discussion of the relevant passages in Nagy *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric possession of an Epic Past* Baltimore 1990 (revised paperback edition 1994): 65-68, 134, 203 n. 17, 423-424.

(43) There is a detailed discussion at Nagy *Pindar's Homer* 58-61.

(44) Richard P. Martin *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* Ithaca, N.Y. 1989 44.

(45) *Ibid.*, 80. Martin adds: "As a general rule, characters in the *Iliad* do not remember anything simply for the pleasure of memory. Recall has an exterior goal." (...)

(46) On the function of the myth of Meleagros as retold by Phoenix to Achilles and the rest of the audience, see Nagy *Pindar's Homer*:196-197, 205, 253, 310 n. 164 (...)

(47) See the extensive discussion in Martin *The Language of Heroes*: 77-88; of special interest is p. 78.

(48) *Ibid.*, 40.

(49) Nagy *Pindar's Homer*: 65-66.

(50) *Ibid.*, 66-68.

(51) In fact, *aléthea muthésasthai* 'speak true things' is attested as a *textual* variant of *aléthea gerúsasthai* 'announce true things' in Hesiod *Theogony* 28: see Nagy *Pindar's Homer*: 68 n. 84.

(52) *Ibid.*

(53) *Ibid.*

(54) *Ibid.*

(55) *Ibid.*, 52-81. (...)

(56) Nagy *Greek Mythology and Poetics* Ithaca, N.Y., 1990 66.

(57) There is an admirable survey of the semantics of *alethés*, and of various interpretations, in Cole *Archaic Truth* (1983), who resists Heidegger's formulation of an "objective" truth-value inherent in the word (the truth not "hidden" in what is perceived). Cole's own interpretation is a reformulation of earlier solutions insisting on a "subjective" truth-value (the truth not "forgotten" by the one who perceives). He suggests (p. 12) that "the forgetting excluded by *alétheia* involves primarily the process of transmission -- not the mental apprehension on which the transmission is based." Thus *alétheia* refers "not simply to non-omission of pieces of information through forgetting or failure to take notice or ignoring, but also to not forgetting from one minute to the next what was said a few minutes before, and not letting anything, said or unsaid, slip by without being mindful of its consequences and implications" (ibid.).

(58) Vernant *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* Paris 1985:108-136 (from a chapter first published in 1965).

(59) Cf. Thalmann *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry*, Baltimore 1984:147, paraphrasing Vernant. I have adopted his translation of Vernant's "le fond de l' être" as "the essence of being," described as the reality that lies beyond the sensible world" (ibid.).

(60) Detienne *Les maître de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*, Paris 1973:9-27.

(61) Thalmann 1984:148 (also p. 230 n. 31), following Detienne 1973:75-79.

(62) Thalmann 1984: 148.

(63) Ibid., following Detienne 1973 and Pucci *Odysseus Polyropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and Iliad* Ithaca, N. Y. 1987.

(64) Nagy 1990:58, following Detienne 1973:22-27.

(65) Nagy 1990:59-61.

From: Gregory Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, Austin: University of Texas Press 1996.

Hesiod

Texts:

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,

ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.

"we [*the Muses*] know how to say many lies as if they where true,
and when we want, we know how to speak the truth"

Hesiod's Theogony, 27-28, Translated, with introduction, commentary, and interpretive essay by Richard S. Caldwell, Cambridge: Focus Information Group 1987, p. 29.

Studies:

"It was customary for a Greek singer to preface his recitation with a hymn to a god, of the kind represented by the extant 'Homeric hymns'. When the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written down, no introductory hymn was attached to them. This might indicate that they were not at that time intended for continuous recitation, though there might be other explanations. The *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, on the other hand, both had hymns attached from the first. The *Works and Days* is introduced by a short invocation of Zeus, the *Theogony* by a much fuller hymn to the Muses. Both types are paralleled in the Homeric collection.

(...)

The hymn to the Muses begins with a description of some of their characteristic activities (dancing and singing on Helicon by night) (1-21). This leads to an account of a particular occurrence in which they were involved -- their epiphany to Hesiod himself (22-34). Then we return to their habitual activities (singing to Zeus on Olympus) (35-52)."

From: Hesiod, *Theogony*, edited with Prolegomena and Commentary by Morris L. West, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1966, p. 150.

"The cryptic words that follow have provoked floods of controversy:

We know how to compose many lies indistinguishable from things that are real;

And we know, when we wish, to pronounce things that are true.

Theogony 27-28.

Commentators have traditionally interpreted these enigmatic lines as Hesiod's proclamation of the truth of his song as opposed to the songs of other poets who only pronounce *pseudea polla*.

Accordingly, the Muses' declaration should be understood as a polemic directed at Homer or perhaps at heroic epic in general.(38) Svenbro views Hesiod's polemic in social terms as an attack on those poets who depend on their aristocratic patrons, as opposed to Hesiod himself, who prides himself on his autonomy.(39) According to Nagy, on the other hand, Hesiod's targets are the poets who perform theogonies of only local interest, whereas his own is Panhellenic in its scope.(40) Recently, Arrighetti has proposed another interpretation of the Muses' mysterious statement: the object of Hesiod's polemics is not Homer, but his character, Odysseus, or indeed anyone like him, who may possess the ability to persuade and even enchant his audience, but who has not received from the Muses the gift of truthful song. (41)

To offer an exhaustive doxography of the Muses' enigmatic statement would lead too far afield.(42) Nevertheless, the importance of these verses for any reading of the *Theogony* requires us to grapple with their implications." (p. 58)

(...)

Aletheia, then, consists of "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth".(50) The legal terminology readily springs to mind, since *aletheia* involves a complete and veracious account of what one has witnessed. If the archaic Greek conception of *aletheia* has a far narrower range than our "truth," then the Greek *pseudos* has a wider range of meaning -- to which the Muses' assertion of the multiplicity of lies (*pseudea polla*) draws attention -- in comparison to our notion of falsehood. (51) *Pseudea* embrace not only consciously misleading statements intended to deceive, but also unwitting errors, omissions, and inaccuracies, as well as additions, embroideries, and even figurative speech. While the Muses would seem to be immune from simple mistakes, they seem quite proud to lay claim to all other kinds of *pseudea*. (52)." (pp. 61-62)

Notes

(38) Cf Puelma (1989) 75.

(39) Svenbro (1976) 46-73. For a critique of Svenbro, see Judet de la Combe (1993) 26-28.

(40) Nagy (1990) 45 Neitzel (1980) believes lines 27 and 28 refer to other poets who composed competing but inferior accounts of the gods. Otto (1952) 51-52, while regarding the lines as Hesiod's claim for the veracity of his song, detects in the *pseudea polla* not polemic, but the "Bezauberung durch die lebensvollen Bilder der Phantasie" which are also part of the Muses domain.

(41) Arrighetti (1996) 53-60.

(42) For a summary of views, see Svenbro (1976) 46-49; Stroh (1976) 90-97; and Neitzel (1980).

(...)

(50) Cf. Cole (1983) 12: "What is involved is strict (or strict and scrupulous) rendering or reporting - something as exclusive of bluster, invention or irrelevance as it is of omission or understatement." Also Krischer (1965) 167 for the distinction between ἀληθής and ἔτυμος relevant to the Hesiodic passage: "der Anwendungsbereich von ἀληθής ist im wesentlichen auf den Augenzeugenbericht beschränkt, also den Fall, in dem der Sprecher aus genauer Kenntnis spricht und nur darauf zu achten braucht, dass ihm kein Lapsus unterläuft, wird hingegen eine Aussage als ἔτυμος bezeichnet, sie ist es ganz gleichgültig, woher der Sprecher seine Information hat: er mag Vermutungen angestellt haben, geträumt haben, er mag Wahrheiten in eine Lüge streuen, was zutrifft, ist ἔτυμος". Cf. Pratt (1993) 96 defines *aletheia* as "an accurate account of what really happened provided to a reliable reporter by honest eyewitnesses."

(51) Cf. Luther (1935) 80-90 for the wider range of Greek *pseudos*, also Levet (1976) 201-14.

(52) For a clearly positive valuation of the ability to make ψεύδεα ... ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, see Theognis 713, where after listing various kinds of human excellence -- the *sophrosyne* of Rhadamanthus and the cleverness of Sisyphus -- Theognis ascribes this skill to Nestor.

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From: Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003.

"The beginning of the *Works and Days* with its prayerful attitude clearly differs from the hymnic note struck at the opening of the *Theogony*. Hymns can be sung even on Olympus, but prayers originate on earth. The Muses further emphasize the distance separating gods and men in the *Works and Days* by concluding their celebration of their father with the phrase: "high-thundering Zeus, who inhabits the most exalted halls" (Ζῶς ὑψιβρεμέτης, ὅς ὑπέρτατα δῶματα ναίει, 8). Now suddenly, and even more abruptly, Hesiod breaks off a second time, without even the usual hymnic salutation (χαίρε) to Zeus:

δίκη δ' ἴθουε θέμιστας τύνη· ἐγὼ δέ κε, Πέρση, ἐτήτυμα μυθησαίμην .

Yours to make straight the decrees with justice,

But, as for me, I would declare to Perses the way things are.

Works and Days 9-10 (103)

Here again a significant difference between the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. In the former, Hesiod could indeed transmit the words of the Muses, but he could not guarantee the truth of those words, because of his inevitable mortal incapacity to distinguish *aletheia* from *pseudos*, that is, to ascertain the correspondence between the words of the Muses and reality. But in the *Works and Days*, where he speaks of human things whose knowledge is granted to men through their own experience, Hesiod can declare to Perses his intention to tell him *etetuma*, "things as they are." (104) Hesiod will immediately offer an illustration of the differences between the human and divine perspectives that inform the two compositions. In speaking about Eris, he revises the earlier teaching of the Muses by telling us that "on earth, it turns out that there are two Erides" -- not one, as claimed in the *Theogony*. What this means is that from the point of view of the gods, there is only one Eris, whereas for mankind, there are two.

"To summarize the complex scenario of the proem to the *Works and Days*: the Muses are to celebrate, i.e. praise their father Zeus and his power over mankind, more specifically, his power to

punish. Zeus is to listen, observe and act. Zeus's actions, it becomes clear, affect specifically those who would pronounce crooked decrees, i.e. the kings; Hesiod, for his part, will tell *etetuma* to his brother.(105) This cooperative undertaking and its division of labor, outlined in the proem, will structure the poem that follows. If in the *Theogony* Hesiod takes up the Muses' instructions to celebrate, i.e. praise the gods, here he pointedly does not praise; he tells things as they are.""

"Both the formal elements and the contents of the opening lines of the two Hesiodic poems reveal their respective orientations. On the basis of our foregoing analysis of the two proems, we can now offer an admittedly schematic but perhaps still useful diagram that plots the coordinates of the two compositions and demonstrates their complementarities (see the table)." (pp. 77-78)

Poem	<i>Theogony</i>	<i>Works and Days</i>
Authorization	Super-human authorization	Authorized by human experience
Proem form	Hymnic	Prayer
Subject-matter	Genesis of the gods; Zeus's order	Human life within Zeus's order
Register	Celebratory	Non-celebratory (telling it like it is)
Truth claim	Mixture of lies and truth	Things as they are (<i>etetuma</i>)
Emblematic gift	<i>thespis aude</i> : Muse-inspired song	<i>skeptron daphnes</i> : Muse-inspired eloquence
Role of the poet	Servant of the Muses: <i>aidos</i> (Hesiod in <i>Theog.</i>)	Muse-honored king – or his surrogate (Hesiod in <i>W&D</i>)
Function	Pleasure Diversion from human pain Forgetfulness of human condition	Resolving quarrels Alleviation of human pain Reminding of human condition

To conclude: from its beginning, the *Works and Days* characterizes itself in opposition to the *Theogony*: the latter, through the mediation of the Muses, offers an Olympian perspective on the cosmos; the *Works and Days*, by contrast, directly and without the need for a divine intermediary, presents the human viewpoint. The task these two poems set for us entails highlighting these two visions and, while respecting their differences, integrating their perspectives into a larger whole. The best way to accomplish this goal would appear to be to examine the presentation of human beings in the *Theogony* and, conversely, the role of the gods in the *Works and Days*. But we must admit right at the outset to a certain lack of symmetry between the two compositions. That the gods should play an important role in human affairs is not surprising; their crucial presence in the *Works and Days* is hence predictable. But given the announced subject-matter of the *Theogony*, to sing the immortal gods and the "race of those that are forever," the γένος αἰέν ἔόνι ων, seems rather to exclude mention of the mortal race of men, which is, by definition, ephemeral. But if mankind is doomed to die and inevitably evanescent, the human condition, as established by Zeus through his eternal decrees, is nevertheless eternal. Consequently, we may nevertheless discover within the confines of the *Theogony* an exploration of those eternal laws that determine the human condition." (p. 80)

Notes

(103) Rousseau (1996) 106-10 notes the urgent tone here and understands the phrase as "straighten the decrees which are crooked."

(104) Cf. Rousseau (1996) 113-13. Nagy (1990) 68, n. 84 and (1996) 50-52 conceives of ἐρήτυμαμυθήσασθαι as an earlier expression, which becomes an unmarked member as opposed to the newer, marked ἀληθέα γηρύσσοθαι. This diachronic interpretation would blur the important distinction Hesiod makes between the contents of the two poems.

(105) Cf. Mazon (1914) 36.

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From: Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, pp. 58-62

"When the Muses come to the shepherds on Helicon and confer upon the intrepid Hesiod the letters patent for his poetic mission, they formally declare their authority by means of an opposition. They inform their audience (at *Theogony* 27-8) that they know how to say 'many false things that are like the genuine' (*pseudea polta etymoisin homoia*), but also, when they wish, how to 'speak true' (*alethea gerysasthai*). (2) Which said, they give Hesiod a sceptre of laurel and invest in him the power to celebrate the gods in song (29-34). Pietro Pucci finds in the Muses' declaration a general thesis about the medium of their power, language (or, as he puts it, 'the logos'): namely, that 'the logos signifies things by imitating them with some obliquity, distortion, and addition', because 'the "original" signified is always absent'; a thesis he explicitly labels as Derridean, comparing 'Derrida's insight that the . . . "signified" is always caught in the web of the differential, deferring, negative relationships that allow the emergence of meaning and can never appear as present hic et nunc'. (3) Pucci's Derridean interpretation has been followed as such and developed by Marilyn Arthur. Summarizing Pucci's position, she asserts that in Hesiod's formulation 'both the true discourse and the false one are "imitations", but the true logos ... imitates "things as they are", while "the concept of false discourse derives from the idea of imitation as difference from things, simulation of identity with things" '; and declares on her own account that 'in order to understand what Hesiod says' we must bring to bear 'the recognition that language itself -- the logos -- is a form of fiction, that representation itself is always, in some sense, a "lie" (4)

Both interpretations of the Muses' words have the merit of appreciating that in so generally phrased a statement, and one put on the lips of poetry's presiding spirits at the moment when the poet is confirmed in his craft, we would do well to look for an insight into how Hesiod conceived of the very workings of language -- the mastery of which he here accepts as the Muses' gift. Alternative interpretations of these much-contested lines, by contrast, have long sought to make the allusion more specific and locate the truth and falsehood to which the Muses refer in particular poems or bodies of poetry, Hesiodic and Homeric. Of course, the two lines of interpretation are not mutually exclusive; Hesiod could perfectly well be putting out a general statement about poetic language with particular targets in mind, or he could be conducting a special polemic which nevertheless through its phrasing reveals how he conceives of poetic languages as such. And any attempt to settle for one or the other of these latter alternatives would swiftly be reduced to mere speculation. The important point is that the possibility of these lines having a particular target should not be allowed to block exploration of what they reveal, directly or indirectly, about Hesiod's more general conception of language. (5)

That the line of interpretation inspired by Derrida has vaulted this block is a significant achievement. However, the actual thesis that it distils from this passage of Hesiod seems to me to miss what is special -- and especially interesting -- about Hesiod's view of language. What I find striking in these two lines of the *Theogony* is that only of falsehoods, and precisely not of language in general, do the Muses say that they are 'like the genuine'. In expressing their capacity for truth-saying, the Muses make no reference to a relation of likeness or a talent for imitation, but simply state that they know how to 'speak true' (or 'truths'). Pucci and Arthur, invoking Derrida, generalize the 'obliquity' of likeness or imitation to describe the metaphysical relation between words and world; but for Hesiod's Muses such indirectness seems to characterize only the false things we say about the world, not the true things.

In effect, Pucci and Arthur read the couplet as if the line in which the Muses mention their ability to imitate the genuine (or 'real' or 'true') were in fact a general statement of their mastery of language, of which the following line describes a special case: to wit, when the result of their imitation is itself something true. They treat the second line as subordinate to the first, rather than coordinate with it. This is no straightforward misreading on their part. I have reproduced in this section only their

conclusions, and have not yet considered the steps by which they come to their opinion. Before I do so, however, I will fill out what I take to be the widespread and philosophically intriguing pattern of archaic Greek thought which shows through this text on my reading of it, and which I feel their reliance on Derrida has led them to miss. I can then appeal to the distinctive character of this material in order to resist their attempted assimilation of it to the Derridean model." pp. 45-47.

Notes

(2) The use of polar opposition to express a god's power is frequent in archaic texts. A famous example is that of the two jars of Zeus at *Iliad* XXIV 527, one containing good, the other bad fortune; so too in Hesiod's *Works and Days* we read that a safe time for sailing is fifty days after the summer solstice, unless Poseidon or Zeus are set against it, 'for in them lies the determination of both good and evil' (669); and cf. *Theognidea* 157-8 (West -- to whose edition of the work I refer throughout this paper). These examples set a positive against a negative value; but this is not invariably the case: e.g. *Odyssey* v 47-8 (Hermes uses his staff both to put mortals to sleep and to wake them from sleep, as he chooses); and x 22 (Aelus has the power to calm and to stir the winds, whichever he wishes). Thus we cannot tell simply from their use of the motif whether Hesiod's Muses in the *Theogony*, by setting lies against truth, are opposing something bad to something good. I have tried to make my translation of their words broad enough to reflect the fact that the Greek terms rendered as 'true', 'false', 'genuine' do not distinguish 'truth' -- a linguistic property applicable only to propositions -- from 'reality', said of things in general.

(3) The quotations are from P. Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, pp. 12, 13 and 13-14 respectively.

(4) I take the quotations from M. Arthur, 'The dream of a world without women: poetics and the circles of order in the *Theogony prooemium*', *Arethusa* XVI 1, 2, p. 105 (citing Pucci, op. cit., p. 16) and p. 106. Henceforth in this chapter I will refer to these two articles simply by author's name and page number.

(5) The variety of non-Derridean interpretations of the Muses' message is considerable, and beyond my brief to consider here. A good conspectus of the range can be extracted from the following sources: W. Stroh, 'Hesiods lügende Musen', in H. Gorgemanns and E. A. Schmidt (eds.) *Studien zum antiken Epos*, Meisenheim am Glan, Anton Hain, 1976; H. Neitzel, 'Hesiod und die Lügenden Musen', *Hermes* CVIII, 5, 1980, pp. 387-401; G. Nagy, 'Hesiod', in T. J. Luce (ed.) *Ancient Writers*, vol. I, New York, Scribner's, 1982, pp. 43-73; E. Belfiore, "'Lies unlike the truth": Plato on Hesiod, *Theogony* 27', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Association* CXV, 1985, pp. 47-57.

From: Giovanni Ferrari, *Hesiod's mimetic Muses and the strategies of deconstruction* - in: Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Post-structuralist Classics*, New York: Routledge 1988, pp. 45-78.

"In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod seems to offer us not only a different model of narrative reference through the *ainos* and its relatives but, in the word *etetuma*, an entirely different model of poetic truth from that suggested by the *Iliad* 2 [484-87] and *Odyssey* 8 [487-91] passages, a notion compatible with fiction in a way that those passages are not. Like *alethes*, *etetumos* is normally translated 'true.' This has encouraged many interpreters to assimilate Hesiod's claim to speak *etetuma* to Homer's claim in *Iliad* 2 and to a larger conception of archaic poetry as committed to *aletheia*. Nonetheless, several scholars who have examined the archaic vocabulary of truth in detail have argued that *etetumos* actually represents a notion of truth distinct from that represented by *aletheia*.(a) I will not discuss that work in detail here, some of which I do not perfectly understand, but I will discuss a few distinctions I think most easily defined.

Aletheia has a subjective component that *etetumos* does not.(b) The speaker of *aletheia* has fully in mind what really happened and wishes to speak it forth honestly and fully; the speaker's knowledge and good intentions are equally essential. A speaker of *etetuma* (or of *etuma*, I do not believe the two are distinguishable) need have no such knowledge or intention. The word merely describes a correspondence between the speaker's words and the reality he or she describes. For example, one may speak *etumon* (singular form) in conjecture, as Nestor does at *Iliad* 10.534, when he wonders if the sounds of approaching horses might signal the return of Odysseus and Diomedes, or as Helen does at *Odyssey* 4.140, where she ventures to identify Telemachus as Odysseus' son. Both ask before they speak, 'Will I say something true (*etumon*), or will I speak a falsehood (*pseusomai*)?'

Likewise, dreams may come 'true' (*etuma*). In this case, truth has nothing to do with a knowledgeable or honest speaker; *etuma* describes the correspondence between reality and the description of reality in the dream. The etymologies of the two words seem to bear this distinction out: *aletheia* entails an absence of deception (*lethe*) that could only be possible in an account given by a knowledgeable and well-intentioned speaker, *etuma* is related to the verb 'to be' and thus reflects only conformity with 'what is.' Though both words may be opposed to *pseudos* (falsehood), *etumos* is used when that falsehood is of an unintentional kind, and *aletheia* is used when the falsehood is a deliberate fiction. (c) There is a certain amount of overlap between the two concepts. Though all examples of *etuma* are not *aletheia* -- some are not spoken by a knowledgeable speaker with the desire to reveal what he or she knows -- some clearly are. Moreover, I find it difficult to think of an example of *aletheia* that would not also be *etuma*. Nonetheless, the two words have different emphases: *aletheia* places a much greater emphasis on the speaker's intentions. Thus, it is virtually always used in promises. In fact, Hesiod deviates rather strikingly from a familiar Homeric formula of promises (*alethea muthesthai*) when he uses the metrically equivalent expression *etuma muthesaimen*."

Notes

(a) See Krischer 1965 and Levet 1976 on *etumos* and *alethes*.

(b) My conclusions are based on two sets of comparisons: between the use of the adjectives *alethes* and *et(et)umos*, and between the use of the neuter substantive *et(et)uma* and the neuter substantive *alethea* plus the noun *aletheia*. I can see no obvious distinction between *etetus* and *etumos* or between *alethea* and *aletheia*. It should be noted that *etuma* and *alethea* are metrically equivalent, so their differing uses can not be explained by metrical exigencies.

(c) See *Odyssey* 14.125, *Theogony* 27-28, and *Hymn to Hermes* 560-63 for the contrast *aletheia* / *pseudos*. All three passages explicitly mention desire as a necessary criterion for the speaking forth of *aletheia*.

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From: Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar: Falsehood and Deception in Archaic Greek Poetics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1993 pp. 100-101.

Pindar

Texts:

Studies:

"Pindar makes only two overt claims to truth (*aletheia*). Both occur in association with oaths and therefore seem intended to vouch for the sincerity of the poet's claims and for his personal knowledge of their validity. In *Olympian* 2, Pindar introduces his praise of Theron with the line 'I will speak forth a sworn report with truthful [*alatheia*] intention' (O. 2.92). With truthful (*alatheia*), Pindar seems to state his intention to reveal fully and honestly what he knows. Pindar also juxtaposes truth and oaths at *Olympian* 13.98-100. Here the voice of the herald, which is said to be both true (*alathes*) and made under oath, 'vouches for' (Nisetich, Frank - *Pindar's Victory Songs* - Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1980) or 'lends weight to' (Slater, William J. *Lexicon to Pindar* - Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1969) Pindar's claims that the victor's family has won sixty victories at the games. There can be little question that Pindar is here using a notion of truth that is

both referential and non-fictional. Indeed, Pindar can not acknowledge that in transferring such information, he is making things up or lying. At Nemean 7.63, Pindar claims to speak true (*etatumon*) praise. Here the focus may be more on validity than on the speaker's intent. The net effect of all three claims is, however, the same: to suggest a correspondence between the victor's worth and the praise offered, to insist on the validity of the poet's praise. Again, all of these passages discuss a specific responsibility of the epinician poet and therefore tell us little about the poet's appreciation of fictional narrative.

In two related passages, Pindar not only demands *aletheia* of his poetry, but asks the goddess Truth, *Alatheia*, to fend off lies (*pseudea*; fr. 205). The characterization of Alatheia in this passage as the 'font of great excellence' suggests that we are again in a context where the correspondence between praise and true worth, the evaluation of character, is essential. In a similar way, when Pindar calls on Olympia as the mistress of truth (*alatheias*; *Olympian* 8.2), he seems to have in mind the Olympic games as a testing ground for a man's true worth (Slater 1969).

In the opening lines to *Olympian* 10, Pindar calls on the Muse and *Alatheia*:

Read out for me the Olympian victor, son of Arcestratos, where he is written on my heart. For owing him a sweet song, I forgot [*epilelath*] O Muse, you and Alatheia, the daughter of Zeus, with straight hand, fend off the reproach that I mislead my friends with lies. (*Olympian* 10.1-6)

Here Pindar clearly plays on a notion of *aletheia* as a kind of unforgetting. (a) But this passage does not make truth synonymous with memory, for Pindar also opposes lies (*pseudea*) to truth here.

Having made a promise, Pindar forgot; his promise thus turns out to be an invalid kind of speech. In Greek terms, because intentions are not an essential component of the *pseudos*, this makes the initial promise a falsehood (*pseudos*). (b) Pindar now wishes to bring his earlier promise to fulfillment and thereby to make it true. Consequently, he calls on Alatheia. (c) She may also be present to vouch for Pindar's original sincere intention."

Notes

(a) I tend to see this more as deliberate word play than as reflecting a mythical notion of truth.

(b) See also *Iliad* 19.107, 7.351, where the unintentional breaking of a promise and an oath makes the speakers of the oath / promise liar.

(c) The Muses probably represent the presence of memory that can counter Pindar's forgetfulness.

From: Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar. Falsehood and deception in Archaic Greek poetics*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1993 pp. 118-119.

"In portraying himself as an interpreter of the Muse's oracle, Pindar draws attention to himself as master of an ambiguous code that transmits some divinely certified truth. (5) But he does not mean to suggest, even in the most oblique way, that his interpretations constitute or "construct" a realm of truth. That would imply an interpreter who does not discover truth, but fashions it himself through the persuasive power of poetic language. His use of oracle imagery to set forth his poetics goes out of its way to discourage any view that credits the poet with constructing the truths he communicates. It promotes instead the suggestion that he discovers them. Oracles utter coded messages of which interpretations are either correct or incorrect; oracular utterances have a determinate meaning, a right interpretation. In likening the poet to the specially skilled interpreter of an oracle, then, Pindar claims that he is able to give the correct interpretation, one that discovers (does not construct) its true meaning. To suppose that Pindar's interpretations aim to provide merely a reading or a theory would be to neglect his model of poetry as interpretation that captures a divinely authoritative message." pp. 63-64 (notes abbreviated)

"We are now in a position to draw some conclusions about Pindar's place in place in the development of early Greek conceptions of literary fiction. Recent criticism emphasizes Pindar's role in a developing awareness of poetic language's persuasive power. Truth is not a matter that pits fact over fiction, but solely a matter of what poetry has the power to make appear convincing through its particular charm. According to this account, Hesiodic poetics began to question the Homeric assumption of poetry's truth by admitting the possibility that the Muses can fashion "lies similar to true things." Pindar pushes things a step closer to Simonides' more blatant claim that "appearance forces even truth." (fr. 598 *Poetae Melici Graeci*) Simonides' remark implies that there is no such thing as truth, but merely appearance; telling the "truth" is simply a matter of saying

something persuasive. (25) Pindar is thought to move toward the Simonidean perspective by recognizing the "authenticating power of poetic language" in his own poetry. The power of language to create the appearance of truth is, according to this view, displayed not only by the poetry Pindar criticizes as "deceptive," but, together with a certain amount of self-consciousness, by his own poetry. In his highly self-conscious revision of the Tantalus story, for example, Pindar describes the deceitful versions as "embellished" and "intricate." (*Olympian* 1. 29) But elsewhere he applies the same terms to his own poetry with no negative connotation. (*Nemean* 8. 15 fr. 94b)

(...)

This account of the development of conceptions of truth confuses several issues and must be adjusted. Hesiod's poetics retains the idea of factual truth and holds to assumptions inconsistent with Simonides' radical view. In adopting the possibility that Muses deceive, Hesiod assumes that there is some reality about which the Muses are either truthful or deceptive. For the Muses to exercise their powers to deceive by conveying falsehoods, there must be some truths about which they can deceive mortals. Hesiod does not, then, question the idea of factual truth. Unlike Homer, however, he does deny that poetry provides men with knowledge of that truth. Hesiod's innovation is epistemological rather than metaphysical: the audience is no longer provided a knower's master of any truths that Hesiod's poetry may convey. That there are truths to be shared or deceived about remains beyond question for Hesiod. In contrast, Simonides' view leaves no room for Hesiod's deception because for him there is no falsehood of which an audience can be persuaded.

Like Hesiod's, Pindar's poetics assumes that there are facts for poetry to convey. We have seen how, in his version of the Tantalus myth, Pindar promises to provide factual accuracy. Furthermore, in claiming that other versions of the tale are deceptive, he shares Hesiod's assumption that there is something about which to be truthful or deceptive. Pindar renders human access to truth problematic, but in a way very much milder than Hesiod. Pindar's Muse is not a potential deceiver like Hesiod's; in this respect Hesiod's is the more radical, and Pindar's the more traditional, view. But as the interpreter of the Muse's "oracle," Pindar admits the possibility that the poet may misinterpret the Muse. For example, in fragment 205 he prays to avoid stumbling into falsehood. For Pindar, then, human shortcomings rather than divine deception can break the audience's epistemological connection to the truth that poetry can convey. Although he admits the possibility of conveying falsehood, the focus in Pindar is on his poetry's truth.³³ It is not the authenticating power of poetic language that lies at the root of that truth, although Pindar indeed advertises the nearly magical power of poetic language and suggests that the particular charm of that language contributes to the persuasiveness of his poetry. But the truth his poetry conveys holds independently of charm or persuasion. As we have seen, the truths that are particularly of interest to Pindar praise his subjects. The Muse reveals such truths to him in a cryptic form that the poet must interpret. If Pindar interprets the Muse correctly and conveys such truths to his audience, then he conveys the moral reality behind the gods' evaluation of the victory, the victor, and his kinsmen. Provided that Pindar's poems interpret their inspiration accurately, they convey the god's evaluation, not the poet's or not only the poet's. From a Socratic perspective, Pindar's poetics command no authority. Pindar will be vulnerable to the charge of promoting moral authoritarianism, adhering to moral evaluations grounded only in avowed divine authority. Socrates will expose the poet's claim to enjoy a natural, god-given knowledge as more often than not efforts to allow Pindar and others to uphold conventional, aristocratic values without defending them on any grounds more substantial than an appeal to divine decree. pp. 72-74 (notes omitted)

Notes

(5) Pindar explicitly connects the Muse with Truth at *Olympian* 10. 1-6: ("Read me the name of the Olympic victor, / the son of Archestratos, where it is written / in my mind, for I owe him a sweet song and have forgotten. O Muse, but you and Zeus' daughter, / Truth, with a correcting hand / ward off from me the charge of harming a guest friend / with false promises.") See also *Olympian* 4. 17-18; 6. 20-21; 7. 20-21; 13. 52; 10. 3-4; *Pythian* 1. 86-87; fr. 205.

From: Grace M. Ledbetter, *Poetics before Plato. Interpretation and authority in early Greek theories of poetry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003, p 63 n. 5.

"As Marcel Detienne has documented in his survey of Archaic Greek poetics, the poetic power of *mnemosune* 'remembering' is traditionally associated with light, which is in conflict with the darkness of *Léthé* 'forgetting'. (32) What is illuminated or obscured by poetry is what is respectively preserved or lost in the tradition.

The concept of *léthé* 'forgetting', however, is not only negative. As Detienne points out, *léthé* is not only the opposite of *mnemosune* 'remembering': it can also be an aspect of *mnemosune*. (33) For example, the goddess Mnemosune is described in the *Theogony* of Hesiod as giving birth to the Muses, divine personifications of the poet's power, so that they, through their poetry, may provide *mnemosune* 'forgetting' of sadnesses and of worries for humankind (53-55); whoever hears the Muses no longer *memnetai* 'remembers' his own ills (*Theogony* 98-103). By implication the highlighting of the glory of poetry is achieved by shading over anything that detracts from it. A bright light needs a background of darkness.

Such a concept of *mnemosune* can be achieved only through an ever-present awareness of its opposite, *léthé*. Without the obliteration of what need not be remembered, there cannot be memory - - at least, from the standpoint of Archaic Greek poetics.

Let us reformulate these thought patterns in terms of an opposition between unmarked and marked categories. (34) In an opposition of *mne-* 'remember' vs. *leth-* 'forget', *mne-* would be the unmarked member and *leth-*, the marked, in that *leth-* can be included by *mne-* as an aspect of *mne-*. Besides the passage just considered from the *Theogony*, I cite another striking illustration, from a different source: in the ritual of incubation connected with the cult of Trophonios, the initiate drinks from the springs of both *Lethe* and *Mnemosune*; this way the undesired mental state can be shaded over while the desired mental state is highlighted (Pausanias 9.39.8). (35)

To pursue the subject of these thought patterns even further, I cite an example of unmarked and marked opposition in the English language. In an opposition of the pronouns he and she, he is the unmarked member and she, the marked, in that she is included by he as the feminine aspect of being he. The masculine aspect of being he, by contrast, has to be achieved through an ever-present negation of the feminine. We may say something like: this is not a she, this is a he. Otherwise he does not, of and by itself, convey a masculine aspect. In generalizing statements, for example, he can stand for both he and she, as in "everyone may interpret as he chooses." (36)

Where the unmarked member excludes the marked member through a negation of the marked, the unmarked member receives a minus interpretation; where the unmarked member includes the marked, it receives a zero interpretation. (37) The minus interpretation of the unmarked member is ever-present in the context of a given Archaic Greek poem's references to itself as absolute truth, conveyed by a specialized *mnemosune* 'remembering' that excludes *lethe* instead of including it. These relationships can be visualized as a larger circle of *mnemosune* 'remembering' that includes an inner area of *lethe* 'forgetting' surrounding a smaller circle of specialized *mnemosune* 'remembering' that excludes the outer area of *lethe* 'forgetting'. The area of forgetting is visualized as the ongoing erasure of things not worth remembering, erasure by way of *lethe* 'forgetting'; the smaller circle of remembering, within the larger circle, is highlighted by the area of darkness surrounding it, the area of forgetting. In fact, a special word in the diction of Archaic Greek poetry formalizes this specialized and exclusive kind of remembering: that word is the negation of *lethe* 'forgetting', namely *a-letheia*, normally glossed in English as 'truth'. A comparable case of minus interpretation in English can be seen in the word unforgettable. The *aletheia* 'truth' of the poet is the nonerasure of the poetic glory that is his to confer.³⁸ The same concept is evident in the periphrastic expression *oude me/se/he lethei* 'it does not escape my/your/his-her mind', which conventionally reinforces injunctions to be *memnemenos* 'mindful, remembering'. (39)

Besides contrasting with negative thoughts about human ills, (40) or erroneous thoughts that lead to injustice, (41) the *aletheia* of Greek poetry tends to contrast with the divergence of local poetic versions in the overarching process of achieving a convergent version acceptable to all Hellenes. (42) This argument brings us back to the observation of Levi-Strauss that the latest performance of myth is in principle an occasion for selecting from and thereby potentially erasing versions available from countless previous performances. (43) In what survives of Archaic Greek poetry -- and now I am using the word poetry in the broadest sense -- what we keep finding is the ultimate extension of this principle, to the point where the latest version becomes the last version, a canonization that brings to a final state of crystallization what had been becoming an ever-less fluid state of variation in performance. (44) I attribute this canonization not so much to the phenomenon of incipient literacy as to the broader social phenomenon of Panhellenization. (45) I reiterate that this phenomenon is relative from the standpoint of an outsider to the tradition, in that some

compositions are more Panhellenic in scope than others. From the standpoint of the insider to the tradition, however, in the here and now of performance, the Panhellenic perspective is the absolutist perspective of *aletheia* 'truth'. (46)"

Notes

- (32) Detienne *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*, Paris 1973 22-27. For example, Lété or 'Forgetting' personified is descended from Night in Hesiod *Theogony* 227/224; Mnemosune 'Remembering' is contrasted with darkness in Pindar *Nemean* 7.12-16.
- (33) Detienne, pp. 69-80.
- (34) For these terms, see the *Introduction*, p. 5: The second of the two basic concepts of linguistics that I use throughout this book is the distinction, from a synchronic perspective, between the marked and unmarked members of any opposition within the system of language. These terms are defined as follows by Roman Jakobson: "The general meaning of a marked category states the presence of a certain (whether positive or negative) property A; the general meaning of the corresponding unmarked category states nothing about the presence of A." (R. Jakobson *Shifters, Verbal categories, and the Russian verb* Cambridge, Mass. 1957; reprinted in *Selected writings* The Hague, Mouton, 1971 pp. 130-147). The unmarked category is the general category, which can include the marked category, whereas the reverse situation cannot hold.
- (35) See the discussion by Detienne, p. 74.
- (36) Waugh 1982 compares the French usage of the masculine gender as the unmarked member of an opposition with the feminine, in that the masculine can stand for the category as a whole: thus an adjective describing both masculine and feminine categories will be put into the masculine: *des hommes et des femmes intelligents*.
- (37) (omitted)
- (38) Given that the smaller circle within the larger circle symbolizes the specialized sort of *mné*, that is, *a-letheia*, I would say that the larger circle that contains *leth-* would correspond to the function of the Muses, who help humans forget some things so that they may remember others. The root * *mna-* of *mne-* 'remember' may in fact be related to the root * *mon-t-* (or * *mon-th-*) of Mousa 'Muse' (Hesiod *Theogony* 53-55, 98-103). The etymological connection is certain if Mousa is to be derived from the root * *men-*, expanded as * *mon-t-* (or * *mon-th-*), which is one of several possibilities entertained by Chantraine *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque* 716. The relationship of the root * *men-* with the expanded form * *mna-*, as in *mne-*, is clear: Chantraine, p. 703.
- (39) The pertinent passages are discussed in Nagy *Sema and Noesis: some illustrations* Arethusa (1983 16:35-55) 44. This expression *oude me/se/he lethei* 'it does not escape my/your/his-her mind' implies a synchronic understanding of the word *aletheia* as a compound consisting of privative *a-* and the root *leth-*. In the formulation of Cole 1983 12, the reference of *aletheia* is "not simply to non-omission of pieces of information ... but also to not forgetting from one minute to the next what was said a few minutes before, and not letting anything, said or unsaid, slip by without being mindful of its consequences and implications." (For a critique of Heidegger's celebrated explanation of *aletheia*, see Cole, pp. 7-8.) Cf. also Detienne 1973 48n107.
- (40) I cite again Hesiod *Theogony* 53-55, 98-103.
- (41) On this theme, see Detienne 1973, 29-50.
- (42) This is not to say, of course, that the convergent version may not be complex, containing multiformities within its overarching uniformity.
- (43) Cf. p. 57; cf. also p. 80.
- (44) A. P. Royce *The anthropology of dance* Bloomington 1977 104 points out, with reference to traditions of dance, that various structures of performance, as they become progressively more rigid, can suffer "abrupt confrontation and loss."
- (45) The threat of "abrupt confrontation and loss," to use the expression quoted immediately above, could help promote an impetus for recording by way of writing. But a critical attitude toward myth is caused not by the technology of writing but rather, more fundamentally, by the between variants of myth. See p. 57.
- (46) We may well ask: how does the local perspective contribute to the Panhellenic, and to what degree does the Panhellenic perspective recognize the local? From the standpoint of the local tradition, the best chance for self-assertion is a process of self-selection that accommodates the Panhellenic tradition. Note the discussion by Royce 1977 164 of the repertory of some 90 *sones*

(dances) among the Zapotec of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec: in asserting their identity to outsiders, the Zapotec tend to select just three of these 90 *sones*. Royce notes (ibid.) that "these three are the dances that any non-Zapotec would name if asked about 'typical' dances of the Isthmus," and that it is these three dances that are synthesized by the Ballet Folklórico in its suite "Wedding in Tehuantepec."

From: Gregory Nagy, *Pindar's Homer. The lyric possession of an epic past*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990 pp. 58-61

Poets of Alexandrine Age: Callimachus, Theocritus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Herondas

Texts:

Studies:

"This study aims at identifying and clarifying the meaning carried by the noun *ἀλήθεια*, the adjectives *ἀληθής*, *ἀληθινός*, and their synonyms in the works of the four most representative authors of the Alexandrine age: Callimachus, Theocritus, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Herondas.

The study breaks down into five chapters.

The first chapter analyses all passages of Callimachus' works featuring the adjectives *ἀληθής* and *ἀληθινός*.

Similarly, all excerpts including the lexemes *ἀλάθεια*, *ἀλαθής*, and *ἀλαθινός* in Theocritus, and the lexemes *ἀληθειή*, *ἀληθής*, *ἀληθινός* in Herondas, are examined in the second and third chapters, respectively.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Apollonius' *Argonautica*. As no record of either the noun *ἀλήθεια* or the adjectives *ἀληθής* and *ἀληθινός* is available in the four books of the *Argonautica*, the study concentrates on the synonyms of *ἀληθής* and *ἀληθινός* used by Apollonius: *έτεός*, *έτήτνμος*, *νημερτής*, *άτρεκής*.

The fifth chapter focuses on the synonyms of *ἀληθής* and *ἀληθινός* which can be found in the works of Callimachus: *έτεός*, *έτήτνμος*, *έτυμος*, *άτρεκής*; Theocritus: *έτεός*, *έτήτνμος*, *έτυμος*, *άτρεκής*; and Herondas: *έτυμος*.

An introductory essay provides a detailed account of the study's general objective and specific aims. The results of the research are summarised in the conclusions, which offer an overview of the analogies and differences of the authors under consideration with respect to their specific understanding of the notion of 'truth'.

The study also contains a bibliography and an index."

Abstract of the Thesis by Barbara Giubilo: *L'Aletheia e i suoi sinonimi nella poesia alessandrina (Callimaco, Teocrito, Apollonio Rodio, Eronda)* Roma, Università "Tor Vergata", 2007.

Thucydides

Texts:

Studies:

History of the Peloponnesian War: Chapter 1.1 - 1.23 ("Thucydides' Archaeology")

"Because the means by which a world is disclosed are hidden and, indeed, withdraw from view, there are several issues in the key programmatic sections of 1.21-3 that I believe have been consistently misunderstood. There is no better way further to illustrate the subtle workings of Thucydides's *Archaeology* than to dissolve some of the errors that surround it. The issues I will discuss relate to "unconcealedness" (*aletheia*), "what is appropriate" (*ta deonta*), "pre-text" (*prophasis*), "compulsion" (*ananke*), and "kind" (*toioutos*).

Unconcealedness (*Aletheia*)

Thucydides does seem interested in *aletheia*, which is usually translated as "truth." Truth is understood conventionally as positing a correspondence between word and world, and so, this interpretation maintains, when Thucydides discusses the importance of *aletheia*, he is emphasizing the importance of matching up his language to events (*logos to ergon*). Yet Thucydides uses neither *aletheia* nor *to alethes* particularly often in these opening sections (or generally, especially not in his own voice). He does, as we have seen, employ numerous visual words, such as *to saphes*, at crucial places. These words are in turn often translated in terms of "truth," even "historical truth," (1) but such translations put the cart before the horse. The converse seems far more apt; that is, *aletheia* should be understood in terms of *to saphes* and other visual terms rather than the other way around. In Thucydides's *Archaeology* visual metaphors dominate *vis-a-vis* truth claims. (2) Further, in specific contexts, Thucydides is quite able to assert that a claim or description is true in the sense that it corresponds to reality,³ but Thucydides does not do this often, and he does not do it in the *Archaeology*. And thus we should not efface the explicit visual language as somehow "primitive" (i.e., aspiring to real truth) or metaphorical, especially when there is a sophisticated philosophical tradition both before and after Thucydides that takes the priority of vision seriously -- see the preceding discussion of the Presocratics, *eros* in both Gorgias's *Helen* and Plato's *Phaedrus* (also the allegories in the *Republic*), and *sophia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And it is not just the philosophical tradition, there is also the tragic tradition, which, as we have seen, relies upon and dramatizes the human situation as bounded by vision of a complex sort. Human vision is further complicated by its tendency not to see that which it has most need of seeing.

The word *aletheia* is generally, though not uniformly, believed to retain the visual force of its etymology -- "as that which is not concealed." (4) If this is true, then we have all the more reason for associating claims concerning *aletheia* with the dominant visual imagery. Thomas Cole has maintained (*contra* Friedlander) that *aletheia* does retain a connection with *lethe* (oblivion) and that this connection is exploited as late as Plato's *Phaedrus*. (5) Hence the significance of the words *aletheia* and *akribeia* in the key sections of Thucydides's *Archaeology*. These two related alpha privative words convey the difficulty of using *logos* in a manner that does not cover up as much as, if not more than, it succeeds in bringing to light. (6) In fact, Cole observes that *akribeia* is a characteristic especially associated with written texts, and it is in Thucydides that for the first time *aletheia* too is claimed to be the product of the type of precise method seemingly possible only through writing. (7)

It can be argued that there is a *prima facie* distinction between "not-not-noticed" and "unconcealed." (8) I must admit that I have a hard time grasping this distinction because in both cases *aletheia* is a visual accomplishment related to *logos*. I presume that somehow not-not-noticed is more reasonable. (9) Heidegger's notion of unconcealedness sounds as if the objects of *aletheia* are glowing, demanding to be seen, (10) whereas what a *logos* can do is merely to keep a hero mentioned among human subjects again and again -- no glowing is required. Heidegger does employ visual vocabulary to illustrate his point about *aletheia*, but in so doing, he sees himself as following a tradition (which he is), and it appears dubious to object to his position merely on account of the violence with which he brings vision to the fore. After all, Heidegger plausibly rejects the whole subject-object distinction upon which Cole (following Snell) would seem to rely. If it is nonsense to say that truth lights up objects, it is, arguably, at least as nonsensical (though very modern) to claim that to be true is to be kept in the minds of human subjects.

Finally, it is procrustean to read the bulk of Thucydides's narrative as something that corresponds to reality. Correspondence presupposes exactly that separation between *logos* and the world that I believe Thucydides's text is remarkable for constantly challenging. Indeed, Thucydides's success in opening a world through *logos* is a decisive argument against reifying this distinction." (pp. 155-157)

Notes

- (1) Macleod (1983) in C. Macleod, *Collected Essays*, Oxford (1983), "Reason and Necessity," 64.
- (2) See previous readings of 1.22.4 and of 1.23.6, as well as the general concern with clarity and vision (e.g., 1.1.3). There is also Thucydides's concern with the visual impression made by Athens and Sparta in connection with his thought experiment (1.10) and his general contempt for hearsay (1.20.1) and pleasing hearers (1.21.1, 1.22.4).
- (3) See, e.g., 3.20.3, 4.122.6.
- (4) See, e.g., Heidegger (1962), 262/219.
- (5) Cole (1983), 7-10. Cole's discussion is only one of many treatments. See also Bernasconi (1985), 15-27; Allison (1997), 232; Shrimpton (1997), 7. 24. 6.90 2-4.
- (6) Cole (1983), 25-7; Heidegger (1997), 47. 25. 7.66.2.
- (7) Cole (1983), 27 n.48.
- (8) This has been argued by many, including not only Cole and Snell, but also Mark Griffith (in conversation).
- (9) Cole (1983), 8-9.
- (10) For an account of what it might mean for a phenomenon to demand to be seen, see Appendix III.

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