

So-called Possession in Pre-Christian Greece

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In 1909 Julius Tambornino published what has remained the standard collection of material relevant to the belief in demonic possession in pagan and Christian antiquity.¹ The views advanced by Tambornino have been generally accepted. As H. J. Rose puts it: "That a human being might become possessed by a supernatural power was a fairly common ancient belief. The effect might be a prophetic frenzy, as in the case of the Pythia; such a person was *ἐνθεος*. It might also be some terrifying disease, as epilepsy. . . . Later, under Oriental influence (cf., e.g., the numerous references to demoniacs in the *New Testament*), the belief grew stronger and commoner, and mentions of magical cures and the activity of exorcists, pagan and Christian, are extremely frequent."²

"Possessed" (like *besessen*, *possédé*) is used by extension to describe one who is mad, or even under unusual compulsion from an idea or passion, but in the strict sense it refers to a person who has been entered by an alien being who assumes control of him, as we know the phenomenon from late antiquity and the Middle Ages.³ It has been generally agreed that, although a belief in possession in the strict sense was not common among the enlightened in Greek antiquity, the belief itself was ancient, and persisted as a folk belief either from pre-Greek times or from its introduction in the seventh century B.C. or thereabouts.⁴

¹ The following works will be cited by author's name: Pierre **Amandry**, *La Man-tique Apollinienne à Delphes* (Paris 1950); E. R. **Dodds**, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951); W. R. **Halliday**, "Some Notes on the Treatment of Disease in Antiquity," *Greek Poetry and Life* (Oxford 1936); H. W. **Parke** and D. E. W. **Wormell**, *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford 1956); F. **Pfister**, *RE* Suppl. 7 (1940) 100-114, s.v. "Daimonismos"; E. **Rohde**, *Psyche* (Eng. trans., London 1925); J. **Tambornino**, *De antiquorum daemonismo*=*RGVV* Vol. 7, No. 3 (Giessen 1909).

² H. J. Rose, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s. v. "Possession."

³ On the subject in general, T. K. Oesterreich, *Possession* (Eng. trans., London 1930). For the difference between shamanism and possession, Dodds, 88, note 43.

⁴ L. R. Farnell tended to date belief in possession to pre-Greek times: *Cults of the Greek States* 4.191-92, 3.11; cf. *Greece and Babylon* (Edinburgh 1911) 303; E. Rohde (255 ff.) to the hypothetical post-Homeric period of religious intensity.

Relating as it does to the background and context of Greek intellectual developments, the assumption of the antiquity and persistence of the belief has produced various ramifications, three of which are particularly in question here: first, in the history of Greek medicine, the assumption that the physical theories of the Ionian physicians, introduced into the "old fashioned Greek world of Pindar," were brought into competition with a magical medicine pointed toward the exorcism of disease demons;⁵ secondly, that the original and persistent belief about ecstatic prophecy was that the god entered into the prophet and spoke through his organs, although that belief cannot be attributed to anyone before the Christian era who has left writings;⁶ and finally that the later widespread belief in possession under Oriental influence was an extension and revival of Greek beliefs.⁷

This essay will examine the evidence for the phenomena which have been subsumed under possession in an attempt to outline more precisely Greek popular beliefs about the ways in which gods and *daimones* affected mortals. It will be proposed here that later forms of demonology have been erroneously read back into the earlier period, with the result that connections between popular and educated thought have been obscured, and the gap between them magnified. To the popular mind the world did contain a multitude of gods and *daimones* who affected human life, but the evidence will suggest that they affect and control humans from without, and that the affections they were thought to cause were very much the same as those from which rationalistic theories began—not only in general symptoms, but in the essential physiological processes involved. While rationalism focuses on those processes to develop consistent theories while discounting or denying special interventions by divinity, religion and magic attempt to influence the processes indirectly by invoking the gods or other extraordinary forces. Literature, especially tragedy and comedy, straddles the viewpoints of populace and intellectuals. When the intrusive hypothesis of belief in possession is discarded, literary descriptions of gods acting on mortals can be seen in relation to the beliefs of the populace without assuming

⁵ W. Jaeger in *Paideia* 3 (Eng. trans., London 1945) p. 5; cf. Halliday, 277–94.

⁶ References below, note 32.

⁷ H. A. Moellering, *Plutarch On Superstition* (Rev. ed., Boston 1963) 119 ff.; Pfister, 100–114.

that one area of belief is suppressed or ignored. Similarly, in the light of the popular notions from which they began, medical and philosophical theories about psychological phenomena seem less miraculous than they otherwise might. It will be suggested that *Volks Glaube* and rationalism share what might be called a common existential model of man, in terms of which his relation to the natural world, the gods, and magical powers was conceived. That model will prove to be inconsistent with later beliefs in demonic possession, which will then appear to be new phenomena, indications of changed culture.

DISEASE AND INSANITY

The medical treatise on the *Sacred Disease* is the classic description of popular superstitions about pernicious activities of gods and *daimones* which has been taken as the strongest evidence of the belief in possession.⁸ Particularly telling is the description in Chap. 4 of the seers' diagnosis of the responsible god: if it is Poseidon the sufferer sounds like a horse, if the mother of the gods, he sounds like a goat, and so on. Interpreters of the passage remind us that it is necessary to know the name of a possessing demon to exorcize him: hence the diagnosis.⁹ The *katharmoi* and incantations ridiculed by the *Sacred Disease* are therefore taken to be the processes of exorcism.¹⁰ Certainly if rites of exorcism were in competition with rational medicine in the fifth century we would expect notice of them in the *Sacred Disease*, but the argument of the treatise will not support that interpretation of it, as I shall try to show.

The distinctive character of the sacred disease, which has caused it to be singled out as sacred, is that it is unique and marvelous. The author argues that in that case there are many sacred diseases (ch. 1):

For instance, quotidian fevers, tertians and quartans seem to me to be no less sacred and god-sent than this disease, but nobody wonders at them. Then again one can see men who are mad and delirious for no obvious reason, and committing many

⁸ W. H. S. Jones, *Philosophy and Medicine in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore 1946), 24-25; Rose, *loc. cit.* (above, note 2); Halliday, 282. Rohde, 294.

⁹ Dodds, 98-99, Pfister, 111; cf. C. Bonner, "Techniques of Exorcism," *HTR* 36 (1943) 41-47.

¹⁰ Halliday, 283-84; Pfister, 111; Andres, *RE* Suppl. 3 (1918) 278, 286, s.v. "Daimon"; Tambornino, 75 ff., 90-91, 99.

strange acts; while in their sleep, to my knowledge, many groan and shriek, others choke, others dart up and rush out of doors, being delirious until they wake, when they become as healthy and rational as they were before, though pale and weak.

The common criterion for the marvelous nature of the ailments cited is suddenness and intermittence: the fevers and delirium come for no apparent reason and they pass again, as do epileptic seizures. Hence one might suspect a god, or the charlatan might suggest one. This in itself does not tell us how the gods caused disease and sudden odd behavior.

In the section describing diagnosis by *magoi* and *agyrtaí* the frequent descriptive term is the non-committal *aitios*, "responsible," whose implications must be deduced from the context generally: in what manner, for example, is the mother of the gods responsible if the sick man sounds like a goat, or has convulsions on the right side? More immediately revealing are the terms *ephodoi* and *epibolai*, "attacks": "When fears, terrors, ravings, and leaping out of bed and rushing out of doors occur at night, they say it is the attacks of Hecate or the Heroes" (ch. 4). Such attacks by *daimones* are frequently mentioned in Greek sources. They involve either physical violence, like that offered by the Orestes who used to attack people and steal their clothes outside Athens, or more often the emotional counterpart of physical violence, *phobos*.¹¹ Could such attacks and frights cause sudden illness and delirium, or could they be believed to do so? Yes. The brief medical treatise *Peri Partheniôn*, which deals with depression and hysteria in pubescent girls, offers some particulars. At the beginning of the treatise its author invokes the principles laid down in the *Sacred Disease*, and indicates that he is dealing with similar phenomena and beliefs. What he proceeds to describe is not "possession," but attacks by *daimones*: the terror of seeing a hostile *daimôn* approach can make one want to hang himself or drown in a well; the fearfuls (*phobera*, scil. *phantasmata*) appear, night and day, to whisper that suicide is the only relief. This suggests that the experience of Orestes in the *Choephoroe* and in the *Orestes* is not so far from everyday life as one might imagine.¹²

¹¹ Cf. Ar. *Birds* 1488 ff. Plutarch, centuries later, is still using the same language: blows from the gods, attacks by *daimones*: *On Superstition*, 166A, 168c. Note also the language of the Scholiast at Eur. *Med.* 1172.

¹² Aesch. *Cho.* 1048 ff.; Eur. *Orestes* 264 ff.

In fact the attacking furies of literature probably suggested to the Greeks the forms their hysteria should take.

We shall see below that physical and mental traumata inflicted by the gods are commonly described in literature as the source of disease or madness. I propose that the notions behind such descriptions, as behind the belief that the attack of a *daimôn* could cause illness, are similar to the unquestioned assumptions of the medical writings about the precipitating causes of disease. If one asked a Greek what could cause disease, he would get a list like the one at the opening of the treatise on *Affections* (*Peri Pathôn*): "foods, drinks, strains (*ponoi*), wounds (*trômata*), smells, sounds, sights, sexual intercourse, and heat and cold: when these are unusual, either more or stronger, or else less and weaker." Whatever the doctrinal peculiarities and methods of treatment in the medical writings, these general assumptions remain the same: health is order, disease is disorder (commonly *taraxis*) in the person.¹³ When the gods cause illness and madness, what they do is disrupt the person, and they do so with smells, sounds, sights, *ponoi*, and the like, or most generally with *phoboi*. This hypothesis will, I suggest, explain the facts in the *Sacred Disease* and the rest of the materials from Greece, while "possession" will not.

The diagnoses by *magoi* and *agyrtai* identify the "responsible" or the "attacking" deity. What are the superstitious cures aimed at curing, that is, what assumptions about disease are behind them? The treatments (ch. 2) are purifications, incantations, uses of foods with special properties, and prohibitions of whatever would cause "blockage" (*kôlymata*). To begin with the last, the "blockage" that might be caused by sleeping on goat-skin or by putting hand on hand or foot on foot, is a matter of sympathetic magic: the matter of the disease must be passed off, and one can hinder or induce the process with special foods and ceremonies, and by using or avoiding what is associated with binding qualities.¹⁴ One may compare the action of the childbirth *daimôn* or goddess Eilithyia, who aids childbirth by unclenching her hands and

¹³ *Peri Pathôn*, for example, relates all diseases to the effects of causal factors on bile and phlegm, likely a Cnidian characteristic (cf. I. M. Lonie, *CQ* n.s. 15 [1965] 1-29); the same range of precipitating causes is shown in the case histories of the *Epidemics*, generally considered of Coan origin.

¹⁴ Cf. Wilamowitz, *Griechisches Lesebuch* (Berlin 1902), *Erl.* 2.168-69.

spreading her knees, but hinders it by the opposite.¹⁵ Praying to Eilithya is part of normal religious practice, but her activity is none the less magical. Here the magic is practiced by the sick person and the seer. The author of the *Sacred Disease* also believes that the disease is caused by blockage, of the veins by phlegm (ch. 9–10), but he does not think magic will work in dealing with it, and the magical foods are too strong. He further argues that prescribing such things gives the lie to the term sacred: if such magical procedures can cause or cure disease, divine beings are not involved (ch. 3). This argument would be nonsense if possession and exorcism were under discussion.

The incantations, *epaoidai*, discussed in the *Sacred Disease*, are compared by the author to other magical charms: attempts to bring down the moon, eclipse the sun, and change the weather, claims which the author says are impious because they imply that the power of the gods can be brought under human control (ch. 3). Magic claims to exert an influence over divinity as well as over other things. The magic described forces the gods to do the bidding of the practitioner, to heal the patient or to withdraw their baneful influence. What these claims mean is illustrated by Plato's description in *Republic* II (346B–C) of the wandering *magoi* and *agyrtaí*: they come to the doors of the rich and persuade them that they have power from the gods given by sacrifices and incantations. They will perform purificatory rites to cure the results of transgressions by a man or his ancestors, or if the man wishes to harm someone they can persuade the gods to serve them in doing so with certain charms and binding spells. Their claims are simply flamboyant assertions of the ability to deal in those things that orthodox religious practices also deal in: they are quacks, but not demonological quacks. Magic, like other quackery, follows along with the conceptual scheme of its society: in the Middle Ages magic involved a Satanology; Greek magical papyri from Roman Egypt give the formulae of exorcism of demons using the power of the names of Hebrew, Christian and pagan deities.¹⁶ Babylonian magic works on and through

¹⁵ See L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* 2.613–14; Wilamowitz *loc. cit.* (above, note 14).

¹⁶ Cf. M. Summers, *Geography of Witchcraft* (London 1927). For exorcisms in the papyri see, for example, K. Preisendanz, *Pap. Graec. Mag.* I (Leipzig 1928) 114, 170.

demons.¹⁷ Early Greek magicians exert their power on the gods they know and understand, and the magic is virtually a parody of current beliefs.

The *katharmoi* of the *Sacred Disease*, like those of *Republic II*, are similarly to be interpreted as versions or parodies of normal practice (ch. 4).

For the sufferers from the disease they purify with blood and the like, as though they had a *miasma* or *alastores*, or were enchanted by men, or had committed some unholy act, when they ought to do the opposite of this: sacrifice and pray, and bring them to the temples to supplicate the gods. But they do none of that. They purify and bury the off-scourings in the ground, throw them into the sea, or carry them to the mountains where nobody will see or walk on them.

One might see here a coincidence with Babylonian exorcism, practiced by calling a possessing demon from the sufferer into an idol which is then disposed of, but the similarity is superficial. The *Sacred Disease* is describing the normal rites practiced by private persons and states regularly and on special occasions to get rid of pollution or *miasma*, which like a poison infects its object, or like the blood on a murderer's hands may attract *alastores* to the attack.

However, interpreters who find demonic possession in the *Sacred Disease* have here called *catharsis* exorcism, and have thereby filled a rather striking gap: there is no description of exorcism in pagan literature before Lucian, who in the *Philopseudes* describes a Syrian exorcist from Palestine (ch. 16). Where exorcism is described, in pagan and in Christian literature, *catharsis* and related words are not used of it, so far as I can discover. Lucian's term is ἀπελαύνειν, others are ἐξορκίζειν and ἐκβάλλειν.¹⁸ The processes of exorcism are to call to the demon, order him to get out, and swear an oath in the nature of a curse. Confusion may have arisen because what is exorcized is frequently, in Christian literature, an unclean spirit. But after he is exorcized he remains an unclean spirit, and the person freed from the spirit is called

¹⁷ L. R. Farnell, *Greece and Babylon*, 291–301; E. Langton, *Essentials of Demonology* (London 1949) 10 ff.

¹⁸ See Lucian, *Philopseudes* 16; Matt. 12:22 ff., *Anth. Pal.* 11.427, *Pap. Graec. Mag.* I, 114, 170, and the material in Tambornino, 78 ff.

“healed” or “of sound mind.”¹⁹ Only the healing of lepers is called cleansing, but lepers are not possessed, and what is cleansed away is the lepra, the scaly symptoms of the disease.²⁰

In sum, the superstitious healing which is described in the *Sacred Disease* involves a mixture of magic and normal religious practice. The author of the treatise is not concerned to sort out the relative degrees of orthodoxy involved, but calls the practice of the quacks a travesty on piety, and deprecates it for its medically unsound or harmful procedures. The same picture of superstition as parodic excess in normal beliefs and practices is what we find in other pagan authors, including Theophrastus and Plutarch on *deisidaimonia*.²¹ An argument from silence cannot be conclusive, but one would expect these authors to criticize ideas of demonic entry and possession if they were current, and exorcism as well—yet none mentions it. By way of contrast, when Plotinus takes up the cudgel against the magical medicine of the Gnostics he, like the author of *Sacred Disease*, ridicules its logic, but quite differently, since the superstition is different:

Privation sometimes cures. Is it that the *daimôn* gets hungry and wastes away, and leaves suddenly, or else stays within? If he stays, how is it that one is no longer ill? But if he goes, why has he gone? What has he suffered? Or is it that he fed on the disease? In that case the disease is different from the *daimôn*. . . .²²

Besides the authors who describe popular superstition, we may seek for hints of popular belief in literary allusions and comparisons and in some few direct descriptions of the phenomena in question. A small number of uses of the words *δαίμονων*, *ἐνθεος*, *θεοφορητός* and the like have been cited frequently as evidence for a belief in possession.²³ But the terms by themselves cannot

¹⁹ See Matt. 17:18, Luke 7:21, 8:2, Mark 5:17.

²⁰ Cf. Matt. 8:2-4, 10:8, 11:5, etc.

²¹ Theophrastus, *Characters* 16: *Superstition*; Plutarch, *Mor.* 164E ff., *On Superstition*.

²² Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.14, quoted and discussed by L. Edelstein, “Greek Medicine in its Relation to Religion and Magic,” *Bull. Inst. Hist. Med.* 5 (1937) 218 f.

²³ See Tambornino, 3-7, Pfister, 101-107; Waser, *RE* 4 (1901) 2010, s.v. “Daimon,” for the collected evidence. For all their love of etymological play the Greeks did not speak of this supposed “original” meaning of *entheos*. Euripides seems to be playing with the word at *Bacch.* 298 ff., where he says that much of the god (=wine) inside one will cause prophecy. Bacchylides may play on the word by calling the godsent madness of Proetus’ daughters *atheos* (11.109 Snell).

assure us what mechanism of divine action they implied for the people who used them. Meanwhile many passages in which the mechanism by which gods or *daimones* cause disease or madness is made explicit have been neglected as not fitting the theory. It will be useful, therefore, to survey what the poets mean when they say gods or *daimones* cause disease or madness, on the assumption that the audience will respond to the concepts involved. I cannot claim to have found all such passages, but I have found none in Greek literature or cited in secondary sources which contradict the tendencies shown by the passages I will cite.

Nosos and similar terms are frequently employed by themselves as metaphors for malfunction and disturbance generally, in societies and persons. But by convention in literature, and particularly in tragedy, diseases worth mention are sent by deities, and madness is the most frequent. Wherever the literary material goes beyond the vague "godsent" or the like in describing diseases, including madness, and speaks of the mechanism involved in the sending, what is conceived is not entering and possession, but direct or indirect influence from the outside, on the pattern that we find in the *Odyssey*, "a hateful *daimôn* touched him" (5.395-96) and in the *Iliad* where Apollo's arrows cause the plague. The gods' power was exerted not in a single way, but in any manner which could cause the *taraxis* which was disease for the Greeks.

Athena "drives Ajax on with a maddening disease," directs his mind toward the beasts, and "teaches him" the insane things he says (Soph. *Ajax* 58-59, 243-44). The furies madden Orestes by sending a *taragmos* (Aesch. *Cho.* 1056). As in the medical writings a sudden fright can cause convulsions and delirium on the analogy of a physical blow, so Dionysus, like Pan, is described as maddening men with a sudden fright (Eur. *Bacch.* 304-5, cf. *Rhesus* 36-37). Just as disease and attendant delirium is brought on by grief or anxiety in the medical writings, so Euripides describes the godsent disease of Orestes as induced and prolonged by *lypê*.²⁴ The furies and other divinities madden their victims with stings which presumably have poison on them, or simply with a blow or kick.²⁵ Io in the *Prometheus* is described as maddened by a godsent *nosos*, the fly, which "withers her with the poison of its sting and sends

²⁴ *Orestes* 396 ff., cf. *Epidemics* 3, case 11.

²⁵ Aesch. *Sept.* 591, *Cho.* 286, 290. Eur. *Hippol.* 38-39, *Med.* 632-33, 639, *Bacch.* 32-33. The word *oistros* came to be used for madness.

her wandering madly.”²⁶ Furies may also drip poison on their victims, or madden them with a binding song.²⁷ Music can induce or heal disease, and the gods use it.²⁸ Bacchylides describes Hera as maddening the daughters of Proetus by “frightening them from their homes, smiting their minds, and yoking them to a cruel necessity,” and “casting into their breasts distorted thoughts.”²⁹ The nurse in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* is certain that a god has smitten Phaedra and put a bridle on her.³⁰ Fever *daimones* in Aristophanes “choke father and strangle grandfather in the night” (*Wasps* 1037–42).

Such descriptions always contain an element of metaphor. The mystery of the divinity’s action is imaged in descriptions of concrete physical action: in Aristotle’s terms (*Poetics* 1457B) there is an analogy from species to species where the fourth term has no proper word, as in the sun “scattering the divine fire,” where Greek has no proper term for the way the sun sends forth his rays. The means the gods use to cause and cure disease and madness are superior to but of the same kind as “natural” causes. The meanings and associations of *nosos* and *mania* remain constant from the period before scientific medicine, and do not vary from author to author. Beside this eloquent unanimity stands one possible description of possession in Lyssa’s words in Euripides’ *Heracles*. She will, she says, run races in Heracles’ breast (862–64).³¹ She says this in sight of the audience, and then still in sight of the audience she describes Heracles already going mad inside the house: his eyes roll, he foams at the mouth,

²⁶ 595 ff., 878 ff. Io also speaks of the breath that causes madness (883–84), a concept to be discussed below. Zeus’ gentle touch soothes and heals her (848–49).

²⁷ Aesch. *Cho.* 812 ff., *Eumen.* 329–33, cf. 782–87.

²⁸ Pind. *Pyth.* 3.51, Theog. 531, Eur. *Her.* 871, Soph. *Ajax* 582; cf. Eur. *Med.* 195 ff. The lion in *Anth. Pal.* 6.218 is made *entheos* by the rhythm of the tambourine. Plato, *Laws* 7.790D–E, often surprisingly cited to illustrate exorcism, describes the cure of children’s malaise by rhythmic shaking of the cradle, a procedure which he compares to the curative power of Corybantic dancing.

²⁹ Bacchyl. 11.43–46, 53–54 Snell; cf. *Odyssey* 20.346.

³⁰ Eur. *Hippol.* 237–38, cf. Ar. *Wasps* 1022. By contrast, Eur. *Hippol.* 141 ff., often cited as evidence of the concept of possession, does not indicate the means by which Pan, Hecate, etc., cause madness. Hence we should properly assume that they do so by the means specified elsewhere: fright, physical attack, etc.

³¹ Philostratus, *Imagines* 2.73.4 (378 K) describes a painting of Heracles’ madness whose symptoms he finds vividly portrayed. But, he wonders, why is Lyssa not in the picture? He concludes she must be inside Heracles and quotes the Euripides passage.

etc., the normal literary and medical list of symptoms (867–70). Then Lyssa says that she will madden Heracles further with her song and dance of fear (871), and she exits to “go unseen into the house” (873). If demonic entry and possession were current, we could interpret this as a mingling of that idea with description of external influence by a deity. But as it is, it is better to read it as the mingling of the abstract idea madness, which races in the breast, with the concrete character, the *daimôn* Lyssa who exerts her power over Heracles through sight, sound, and direct physical force.

In summary, one may say that madness conceived as divine visitation and punishment, whether by *daimones* or gods, is not conceived or described as entry and possession by the hostile spirit, but is imaged as a physical and psychic disturbance caused by any of a number of means of attack—from chemical means like poison to simple physical shock. Hence the entire absence of exorcism, but the common use of apotropaic measures and prayers to the gods for help and relief. There is positive gain from discarding an unnecessary hypothesis, from seeing the relation between popular and professional notions of disease, and from seeing that literary use of the gods and *daimones* is not unrelated to beliefs about them.

ENTHOUSIASMOS

Besides madness which the gods cause as punishment there is other divinely sent madness that has its blessings, as Dodds has nicely shown. Here the standard terms are *katochos* and *entheos*, rather than *theopлектos* or the like, and “possession,” in the loose sense at least, is the common translation. It is commonly argued, especially in relation to the Pythia, that entry of the god into the priestess was the original belief which was in time vitiated by rationalism. “Auch nach griechischen Glauben geht der Gott in die Priesterin ein, erfüllt sie mit seinem Geiste.”³²

³² K. Latte, *RE* 18 (1939) 840, s.v. “Orakel”; cf. W. Fauth, *RE* 24 (1963), 534–35, 545–46, s.v. “Pythia”; Parke and Wormell, 2.xxii–xxiii. In “The Coming of the Pythia,” *HTR* 33 (1940) 9–18, Latte proposes that the power of ecstatic prophecy, like that of the Pythia, is originally (in Asia Minor) associated with sexual union with the god, but that it lost its original character at Delphi. Amandry, 234 ff., concludes that the Pythia’s inspiration was less violent than that of the Sibyls and Cassandra, and the two were brought into association only after Plato. He describes the Pythia’s state of grace after the performance of the rites in these terms: “She did not doubt for an instant that the god would descend on her, inspire her.”

Evidence for the beliefs about the mantic process at Delphi has proved difficult to assess because there are no writings on the subject from the oracle's great period, and those that do remain belong to a philosophical tradition. Though Plutarch's treatises should be mines of information, scholars have rightly stressed their dependence on the arguments of the Hellenistic schools for and against the validity of divination.³³ As Cicero tells us, the Stoics and Peripatetics defended various types of divination, but in the process adopted descriptions of the mechanism which fit their own metaphysics and psychology.³⁴ Hence it has been argued that the "materialistic" or "naturalistic" theory of exhalations elaborated in Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum* can have little to do with popular beliefs about how the oracle worked.³⁵

Our argument here will be that positing a contrast between the materialism of the intellectuals and its presumed opposite in popular religious beliefs prejudices the investigation of those popular beliefs. Approaching the subject from the point of view of the individual and the means by which the gods affected him, we will see that in inspiration as in madness generally the phenomena from which intellectuals derive their theories are similar to those that are active in popular thought as well, and were so long before the philosophical elaborations. Popular views cannot be "materialistic" or the opposite before that distinction is conceived and applied to the subject. While belief in "possession" is absent, belief in direct divine intervention in ecstatic prophecy and other inspiration is common.

To begin with the evidence for "possession": the Christian fathers offer a vivid picture of the oracle's mechanism: Apollo, an evil spirit, entered through the genitals of the Pythia as she squatted over the tripod, and in her womb he maddened her and controlled her speech and activities.³⁶ It has been argued that

³³ See, for example, Konrat Ziegler, *RE* 21.1 (1951) 837, s. v. "Plutarchos," and Amandry, esp. 221-24.

³⁴ Cicero, *De Div.* 1.5-7, 82-83, 118, 125 ff., etc.

³⁵ R. Flacelière, *REG* 56 (1943), 99-101; Amandry, 215-39.

³⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.3; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinth.* 29, 12.1. Cf. Oesterreich (above, note 3) 315. The frequently cited Scholium on Ar. *Plutus* 39, which gives the Christian explanation, is late. It was first printed in the Junta ed. of 1525, and its source is probably Tho. Magister; see Dindorf, praef. ix, and J. H. White, *CP* 1 (1906) 257. Longinus (*Peri Hypsous* 13) speaks of exhalations impregnating the Pythia with divine power. He may show awareness of "possession," but more likely, since he is discussing Plato, he alludes to Plato's fancy of being "pregnant in the soul" (*Symposium* 209).

the Christian interpretation must have had its basis in the original strong Greek tradition which persisted in spite of rationalism. As Dodds (70–71) puts it:

At Delphi, and apparently at most of his oracles, Apollo relied . . . on “enthusiasm” in its original and literal sense. The Pythia became *entheos*, *plena deo*: the god entered into her and used her vocal organs as if they were his own, exactly as the so-called “control” does in modern spirit-mediumship; that is why Apollo’s Delphic utterances are always couched in the first person, never in the third. There were, indeed, in later times, those who held that it was beneath the dignity of a divine being to enter into a mortal body . . .; there can be little doubt that her gifts were originally attributed to possession, and that this remained the usual view throughout antiquity—it did not occur even to the Christian fathers to question it.

For the time sequence it is important to notice that Plutarch is the first to give notice of such a theory as well as the first to say that it is beneath the dignity of the god (*De def. orac.* 414E): “It is very simple-minded and childish to think that the god enters into the bodies of prophets and speaks from inside, using their mouths and voices as instruments, as in the case of the belly-talkers who used to be called Eurycleis, and now Pythones.” Following Rohde (312–13), it has been assumed that Plutarch is rejecting offhand “the ordinary and deep-seated view.” Yet Plutarch, who is the first to mention the view, does not speak of it as the ordinary belief. Plutarch lived in the period in which demonology and “possession” became prominent in Jewish as in Christian works, when Solomon, like Christ, is presented as a great exorcist, and when all the Greek deities began to be explained by the Christians as demonic beings as opposed to the true god.³⁷ That Plutarch is aware of ideas of possession and exorcism, and identifies them with the non-Greek east, may be shown by his suggestion that “just as the *magoi* instruct those who are beset by demons (*δαιμονιζόμενοι*) to read the Ephesian letters,” so Greeks can cure cultural insanity by having people read good classical

³⁷ For Solomon as an exorcist see Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2.5; cf. Langton (above, note 17) 31, 107–44. Langton finds no “possession” in Jewish literature, for all its demonology, before the book of Tobit, ca. 175 B.C. For the Christians’ description of pagan deities cf. M. Pohlenz, *Vom Zorne Gottes* (Göttingen 1909) 139 ff.

models.³⁸ Plutarch insists that it is necessary to cling to pious ancestral beliefs, and among them the ancestral beliefs in the power of *daimones*, even their power to interfere perniciously in human affairs.³⁹ Yet he casually rejects "possession" as a childish notion not worthy of consideration, and ignores it in his search for understanding of how the oracle works.

It is doubtful that Plutarch is ignorant of or dismisses offhand the usual view, while Origen and Chrysostom reflect it more truly. What the usual view was in Plutarch's time, and what the Pythia herself believed about the way the god inspired her, will, I suggest, be closely related to the assumptions from which Plutarch's speculations on the subject begin. Two dialogues are significant for Plutarch's views. In the *Obsolescence of Oracles* (*De defectu oraculorum*) he offers through Lamprias a theory that the abandonment of oracles is the result of changes in the exhalations from the earth which are instrumental in causing a prophetic ecstasy, while in the *Oracles at Delphi* (*De Pythiae oraculis*) he presents through Theon an explanation that changes in the form of oracular responses are due to a decline in culture generally, and specifically that of the Pythia. There has been some controversy as to whether the two treatises represent two stages in Plutarch's beliefs about the process of inspiration, and to what extent they can be reconciled with each other.⁴⁰ Our concern here is with assumptions about the mantic process common to the two treatises, and the ways in which they are complementary.

Behind the theorizing of the *De defectu* lies the assumption that the exhalations from the earth are there, and have something to do with the Pythia's inspiration, an assumption that emerged from the Hellenistic period as a commonplace, not only for Stoics, but for all who accepted the reality of divination. As Parke and Wormell suggest (1.20), "In its earliest form the account of the chasm was evidently a rationalistic theory based on some features of Delphic procedure." Its general currency in the absence of any such chasm is surprising, but is understandable if the ministers

³⁸ Plutarch, *Quaest. conviv.* 7.5 (706D-E).

³⁹ Plutarch, *Dio* 2.3; *De def. orac.* 416C. See Flacelière (above, note 35) 107, for other passages.

⁴⁰ The well-known dispute between G. Soury, *REG* 55 (1942) 50-69, and R. Flacelière (above, note 35) 72-111, has been continued by K. Ziegler (above, note 33), who argues that the treatises are near together in time, and irreconcilable, and hence that the leaders of the discussions do not express Plutarch's own views.

of the oracle themselves propagated the myth. Ammonius suggests this in his criticism of Lamprias' presentation: he objects that the argument in the *De defectu* has first interposed demigods between gods and men (following Xenocrates and Poseidonius), and then removed even them from the process of inspiration, which now seems to come of itself through vapors and the innate capacities of the soul (434F–435E). He proceeds to criticize the "empty fabrication" related by Delphians about the discovery of the oracle by the shepherd Coretas, who "fell in" and so realized the powers of the place (435D):⁴¹ the story implies that the exhalations are impersonal and work the same for everyone, although the presence and choice of the deity is implied by the preliminary ceremony which determines his will by his effect on the victim (435C). Ammonius objects that the discovery and functioning of the oracle are reduced by the Delphians' story, as by the argument, to chance and the automatic (435E). Lamprias, embarrassed to have implied such conclusions, ends the dialogue by drawing the distinction, which he says is Plato's, between the immediate material cause and the mediate cause in the divine will (435F): the breaths are not always the same; they change and the priestess changes (438C). In the preliminary sacrifice the god gives a sign through the victim that conditions are right or wrong (437C).

What is in question throughout the discussion is the immediacy of the god's presence and expression of will in the process of the oracle, but the process itself remains unquestioned. The belief of the "Delphians," who must include the priestess, was that Apollo worked through the "breaths" (indifferently *anathymiaseis*, *pneumata*, *rheumata*) at the oracular site. The story of the discovery of the site was told at Delphi. This much may be distinguished from the philosophical and theological questions of direct or indirect action by the god, and whether he wills that oracles be abandoned. Plutarch does not dismiss the Pythia's beliefs in possession as "childish and silly" while pursuing alternative assumptions made only by philosophers.

When breaths from a chasm in the earth became the standard explanation at Delphi did it replace a more vulgar belief in possession? One would look for evidence of such a change in the

⁴¹ The story is told similarly in Pausanias 10.5.7, Diodorus Siculus 16.26, and elsewhere. Cf. Parke and Wormell, 1.20 and 41, note 7.

Hellenistic period when the myth of vapors was institutionalized. Cicero's *De divinatione*, while it mentions and in turn ridicules the vapors (1.38, 1.79, 2.117), treats them as *the* process of inspiration at Delphi, if there is such a thing as divination. There is no reference to possession in the ridicule of divination by Marcus, or in the defense of its reality by Quintus, including his disavowal of various types of charlatanry. This strongly implies that Cicero's source for the arguments from Carneades, as well as the works of Poseidonius, Cratippus, Dicaearchus, and whatever else he used for *De divinatione*, did not deal with the subject. One sentence from Quintus' description of "natural divination" is often quoted erroneously, out of context, to illustrate the belief in possession: *Nunc non Cassandra loquitur, sed deus inclusus corpore humano* (1.67). As the context shows, the comment is a simple overstatement of what is carefully explained immediately before: *Inest in animis praesagitio extrinsecus iniecta atque inclusa divinitus* (1.66).⁴² "Not Cassandra but the god enclosed within her speaks" means only that her divine *praesagitio* is the source of the prophecy she next utters, because she has received a divine impulse: *a corpore animus abstractus divino instinctu concitatur*, which in turn interprets the line quoted from the ancient tragedy: *nam me Apollo fatis fandis dementem invitam ciet* (1.66). Unless they attempted to do so by treating it with a conspiracy of silence, it seems unlikely that Hellenistic philosophers tried to replace "possession" with their rationalistic theories. At least ripples from such arguments should have reached us.

If the tales of breaths from a chasm at Delphi did not gain currency there by driving out a competing belief, they may well have been institutionalized as an interpretation of beliefs already current, which is what I believe to have happened. The belief that "the prophetic current or breath is very divine and holy, whether it is sent through the air by itself or out of flowing water," is very old in Greece.⁴³ It cannot be considered in isolation from

⁴² For comparable uses, see *TLL*, s. v. "Deus" 1.4.

⁴³ Lamprias at *De def. orac.* 324b. Wilamowitz (*Glaube* 2.30-31) suggests that first the voice, then the spirit (*Geist*) of the god was thought to come from water over which the tripod was placed; similarly Amandry, 230. Parke and Wormell (1.30) propose that the notion of "breath" belongs to the old oracle of *Gē*, and that the Hellenistic rationalists were reviving it in a "materialistic" form. Evidence for such specific origins is lacking. There is evidence, however, for a general belief that breaths are a medium of contact between god and man. Some remarks on the subject of breaths are offered by Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig

a wide range of beliefs about communication of influence through breath or wind.

Homeric usage provides the prototype for various developments. In Elysium "there is no snow, no excess of wind or rain, but constantly Zephyrus blows from the Ocean to enliven (*anapsychein*) men."⁴⁴ The gods are said to "breathe might into men," and Penelope speaks of a *daimôn* "breathing into her mind" the idea of weaving the shroud.⁴⁵ Persistence and elaboration of these usages show that they are not simply mannerisms of speech, but they point to the way men thought they worked, and the gods worked on them.

The notion of a constitution, a benign or pernicious environment created by winds, is developed by philosophers and medical writers, and persists in the poets. Thus a wind from the displeased gods can cause plague, or the gods can change the wind and cure it.⁴⁶ A breath from the gods determines luck, a place exudes an influence, and the influence of a *daimôn* on a house is figured as a breath.⁴⁷ Demeter, as she cherishes the infant Demophon, breathes her sweet breath on him as part of her program to make him immortal.⁴⁸ The ladies of the *Lysistrata* hope that Eros and Aphrodite will breathe desirableness into their breasts and thighs.⁴⁹ There is no clear line between literal and figurative in such expressions. Philosophers and medical writers in developing the idea that health and intelligence are conditioned by the quality of the nourishing breath one receives, and searching for the cause of epidemic disease in the prevailing winds, draw the line between *Volksgläuberei* and science by playing down or dropping the idea of immediate divine intervention, and falling back on such statements as "cold, sun, and changing winds that never cease: these things are divine."⁵⁰ They draw the same distinction

1890) 345-46, G. Verbeke's introduction to *L'Évolution de la Doctrine du Pneuma* (Paris 1945) 1-6, and W. Fauth (above, note 32) 534-35, but the subject remains to be studied systematically.

⁴⁴ *Od.* 4.560 ff. Besides good weather it is the gods' food that will make one immortal: *Od.* 5.135-36, 209-10, 23.335-36.

⁴⁵ *Il.* 19.159, 20.110, etc.; *Od.* 19.138-39.

⁴⁶ Apollonius, *Arg.* 2.500-527; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 87.8.

⁴⁷ Eur. *Her.* 216, Aesch. *Sup.* 27, *Sept.* 705 ff.

⁴⁸ *Hom. Hymn to Dem.* 237.

⁴⁹ Ar. *Lys.* 551-54; cf. Apol. *Arg.* 3.932.

⁵⁰ *Sacred Disease* 21. Cf. the discussion of this and similar passages by L. Edelstein (above, note 22) 202 ff. For theories of intelligence depending on the quality of

between mediate and immediate divine influence later drawn by Plutarch, but their theories do not go beyond what had always been believed about breaths as causes of health and disturbance. Medical theory was limited as well as stimulated by popular beliefs.

Directly relevant to "prophetic breaths" are poetic descriptions of breaths as communicating specific emotions and knowledge, similar to the might breathed into men by the gods and the idea into Penelope. Thus the gods are said to breathe into men courage, persuasion, *charis*, and madness.⁵¹ When a man changes morally his breath comes different, and men also breathe out their might or their love.⁵² Men can inspire one another by breathing their might or love into one another, and even a poem may be said to "breathe of the graces, breathe of the loves," as Anacreon's did.⁵³ Also, the muses breathe song into the poet.⁵⁴ Hence one may presume that Democritus did not invent the dictum that "good writing must be done with enthusiasm and divine *pneuma*."⁵⁵ And it is likely that it was not Democritus' dictum alone that influenced Plato, Longinus, Cicero, and Horace in their frequent use of the notion of "inspiration," but the common tradition with which Democritus expresses his agreement, and for which, presumably, his philosophy offered a physical explanation.⁵⁶ It is no surprise, then, that a divine breath was described as a source for prophetic inspiration,⁵⁷ and one need not look behind it for an original idea of an entering, possessing spirit. Only evidence that all primitive beliefs begin thence could justify it.

Philosophical elaborations and defenses of the Delphian myth depart from popular belief in that they can no longer attribute to

breath received see H. W. Miller, "A Medical Theory of Cognition," *TAPA* 79 (1948) 168-83. The treatise on *Breaths*, surprisingly, attributes intelligence solely to the quality of the blood (ch. 14).

⁵¹ Eur. *Rhes.* 387; Aesch. *Agam.* 105, *Sept.* 343, *Pro.* 883-84; Soph. *Ant.* 929-30; Eur. *Bacch.* 1094.

⁵² Aesch. *Agam.* 218 ff., Soph. *Ant.* 136-37, *O. C.* 613 ff. and Jebb *ad loc.*

⁵³ Pind. *Olym.* 8.70-71, Theoc. 18.54-55, Simon. *Anth. Pal.* 7.25.3-4.

⁵⁴ Hes. *Theog.* 31.

⁵⁵ Democritus, Frag. B 18 (D-K).

⁵⁶ A. Delatte, *Les Conceptions de l'Enthousiasme chez les Philosophes Présocratiques* (Paris 1934) 28-79. Delatte traces later uses of the notion to Democritus' influence, and relates the notion to Democritus' psychological theory.

⁵⁷ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 265B.

the breaths the power of communicating both the enthusiasm and the substance of the prophetic utterance. In Cicero's and Plutarch's accounts the breath is merely an instrument that makes the soul able to exercise its mantic faculties.

Although breaths are the most frequent medium of inspiration alluded to from early times, and although breaths were apparently institutionalized by degrees at Delphi, one would expect on the analogy of divine influence in disease and madness that the gods were thought to exert their power in a variety of ways. The evidence bears out that expectation. Contact with the god's holy tree seems to have been efficacious, and hence "Apollo himself shakes the Pythian laurel," and "prophesies out of the laurel."⁵⁸ The Pythia at the opening of the *Eumenides* (39) is about to enter the "many-wreathed sanctum," and Cassandra, when she breaks contact with the god's accoutrements, of which the wreath especially is called "prophetic," breaks contact with the god (*Agam.* 1264 ff.). Ancient sources allude to the power of various sacred objects. Parke and Wormell (1.24 ff.) have developed the evidence for the special importance of the tripod to prophecy at Delphi, although they accept the conclusion that "possession" was the normal belief. Amandry collects the evidence for the efficacy of the Castalian Spring, though how it was thought to work cannot be determined.⁵⁹ One may conclude that what was most constant was the ritual. Because there was no dogma it was possible for anyone to offer a reasonable interpretation of the beliefs the ritual implied, but of course any interpretation could be accused of impiety if it failed to honor the god sufficiently, as Ammonius berates what became the standard Delphian myth of the oracle's discovery. The "common view" is thus to be sought not in a particular doctrine, most particularly not in possession, but in general tendencies or in a spectrum of ideas closely related to common notions of what man is and how he works.

For many reasons it is understandable that explanations are rare, and those who allude to the way the god works generally

⁵⁸ Ar. *Plutus* 213; *Hymn to Apollo* 395-96. Cf. Amandry, 126-34.

⁵⁹ Amandry, 135-39. The winged virgins, whose valid prophecy Apollo recognizes in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, 560-61, are moved to tell the truth when they eat honey (cf. Amandry, 62-63). Dionysus inspires prophecy through wine (Eur. *Bacch.* 298 ff.).

avoid explicitness, like the Pythia in the *Eumenides*, who says only "I prophesy as the god leads me" (33). But there do remain three interpretations of the way the god inspires knowledge in his prophet, interpretations of widely different ages and intentions which offer remarkable confirmation of one another and of the consistency of Greek attitudes on the subject: Aeschylus' dramatic presentation of Cassandra, Plato's ironic commentary on the absence of critical intelligence in the inspired one, and Plutarch's theory that the form of oracles depends on the recipient of inspiration as well as on the god. We will consider their common elements briefly, beginning with the latest in time: in the *De Pythiae oraculis* Plutarch deals with the communication of prophetic knowledge itself, a subject he dismisses in the *De defectu oraculorum* with general references to memory and non-verbal communication (431c, 432b). He mentions the breaths from the earth which release the prophetic faculty,⁶⁰ but leaves them aside as he poses the question how, if the inspiration is effective, does the power of the god exerted on the prophetess cause different results in his own time than it did in antiquity, at least in the form the responses take. The answer is sought in the relation between god and prophetess, which is described as an invisible, controlling grip of the god on the mortal, his use of the soul which was molded to be his instrument. For clarity Plutarch uses the image of a whirlpool which imparts its motion to a chip of wood which in turn resists sinking: "Thus, what we call *enthousiasmos* is a combining of two motive forces, the one to which the soul submits in being moved, and the other which is inherent in the soul itself" (404f). The figure of the whirlpool comes out of time-honored conceptions of *mania* as a whirling of the soul or mind. The god's grasp is what is elsewhere described as bridling, carrying along, etc. Compare Plutarch's concept of communication as induced motion with Plato's explanation of "possession" as Ion, the average man though inspired Homerist, would understand it. Poetry's effect,

⁶⁰ 402b. The Exhalations which are treated with disdain at 400b-c are not, as Amandry implies (221, note), the ones involved in prophecy, but the vapors which supposedly created the sun. Serapion who leans to Stoicism is ridiculed, but Diogenianus, who is a pious traditionalist (cf. Flacelière's edition, p. 18), is the one who mentions the prophetic breaths at 402. Amandry also calls Lamprias a Stoic, and infers that the belief in the breaths stands or falls with Stoic doctrine (p. 217), but Lamprias dissociates himself from Stoic views of cosmology within the dialogue (425-26).

says Socrates, is the result of a divine power (*theia dynamis*) which moves the poet and enables him to move others, like the power of the magnet which not only causes iron rings to move, but transmits its power to them so that they can move others (*Ion* 533D-E). Socrates explains the mechanism involved by appealing to the well known enthusiasm of corybants, bacchants, and prophets, who are inspired and controlled (*entheoi kai katechomenoi*) by the god: "God takes away the poet's mind and uses him as his minister, as he uses soothsayers and divine seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who speak worthy things, since their intelligence is not there, but the god himself is the speaker, and he speaks to us through them." *Ion* does not reply that the common notion is that the god is within the seer, for that reason the seer uses the first person, and hence the argument would require a god or *daimôn* inside *Ion* during recitation: that is a modern inference. The point of the argument in the *Ion*, and its effectiveness as a critique of poetry as education, is that Socrates accepts for the argument the normal notions of inspiration and carries them to their logical conclusions. To extrapolate the normal use of *katochos* and *entheos* Plato looks for an image of subtle force from the outside which, like madness, "removes the mind," but unlike it causes meaningful reorganization and direction: the god thus speaks through the prophet as the muse speaks through Homer and thence through *Ion*, and as the magnet expresses itself through the rings.

To look back from Plutarch and Plato to Aeschylus is to see the same conceptions at an earlier stage. Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* puts the experience of prophecy before the audience, and, without philosophizing about it, indicates what it involves for inspired one and spectator. Of the influence of oracular language on the scene, Parke and Wormell (2.xxx f.) observe: "[Aeschylus] depicts Cassandra possessed by Apollo gazing fascinated at the palace, and seeing the past horrors of the house of Atreus, the imminent murder of Agamemnon, and her own future doom. In this, the most terrifying and moving episode in Greek tragedy, Cassandra's language is modelled on that of the Delphic responses, and there can be little doubt that she herself is in part the dramatic representation of the Pythia in ecstasy." Distinctions must be drawn. As has been observed, Cassandra, like Bacis and the Sibyls, is in tradition more phrenetic as well as less willing in her

submission to the god's power of inspiration than the Pythia.⁶¹ It should also be noted that what stimulates the Pythia immediately is the questioner, while Cassandra suddenly sees the meaning of an event, person, or thing, always painful, and weaves her prophecy out of a vision of the truth about it. But Aeschylus suggests that the two are comparable (1255). Apollo inspires both and his power is the guarantee of truth (1204–14). Our concern is with how Aeschylus' Cassandra and the Greek audience thought Apollo's power was exerted.

When Cassandra begins to prophesy, the chorus, who have heard of her reputation and would prefer not to be subjected to prophecy (1098–99, 1130–35), recognize the symptoms. They are soon offended by her ambiguity and propose that her symptoms are caused by the attack of a hostile *daimôn* (1173–76). When she describes the house's past and her own relationship with Apollo, they are convinced that she is a true prophet (1213), but find her unintelligible. "But I speak Greek," she says. "So do the Pythian pronouncements, but they are hard to learn" (1254–55). Cassandra is then quite unambiguous about the coming murders, but they cannot see how her prophecies could come true (1295–98).

Cassandra's inspiration comes in three waves, each with visions of the past and/or future (1136 ff., 1214 ff., 1256 ff.), each followed by explanations to the chorus. Of the coming of the first she gives no sign except the cry to Apollo. The second time she describes what is happening to her: a dreadful *ponos* of true prophecy sets her whirling, and disorders her (*tarassôn*) with preludes (1215–16); the third time she cries, "Like a fire it is coming on me" (1256). Apollo led her there (1087); Apollo, she says, is stripping her of her prophetic garb when she throws it on the ground (1269–70): it is Apollo who touches her with those burning, whirling pangs which precede her clarity of vision. The change from the normal mortal to the true prophet happens in an instant when the god takes away her mind and gives her divine powers.

Aeschylus, Plato, and Plutarch all seek metaphors to express what they understand to be the god's contact with the prophetess.

⁶¹ Cf. note 32 above. The ancients did not distinguish between clairvoyance and mediumship nor imply that different sorts of inspiration were involved.

In common they view his power as external, powerfully disturbing, but producing superhuman powers or insights while it lasts. The common view in Greece tended in the same direction, but, one may assume, without such subtlety.

CONCLUSIONS

The remains against which we must test the hypothesis of an early and persistent vulgar belief in possession do not support the hypothesis. The considerable tensions between sophisticated and vulgar do not extend to basic assumptions about the events referred to by the terms *nosos*, *mania*, *enthousiasmos*, *theophoria*, etc. That notions of possession persisted like a cultural subconscious to assert themselves in after time is therefore unlikely. If there are universal primitive beliefs or attitudes, such as the notions of *mana* and of the influence of disembodied spirits on the lives of men,⁶² then at least the entry of those spirits into the bodies of men to assume control is not a necessary aspect or development of primitive beliefs. On the contrary, the widespread and growing belief in possession around the beginning of the Christian era may have been a new development.

The name Eurycles and the phenomenon of *engastrimythoi* may suggest something of the history. Eurycles lived in the fifth century B.C., and a *daimôn*, also called Eurycles, prophesied from his belly.⁶³ Plato and Aristophanes mention him as a freak, certainly not as representative of a phenomenon similar to the Pythia and other inspired prophets: Aristophanes (*Wasps* 1019–20) says that he published his early plays like Eurycles' prophecies, through someone else's belly; Plato (*Sophist* 252c) compares the language of an inept sophist to Eurycles—it is something he carries inside him which refutes whatever he says. Scholia on these passages confirm the tradition that Eurycles had a *daimôn* in his belly. Plutarch and the *Suda* tell us that the name Eurycles later became generic for prophesying demons and those whom they possessed.⁶⁴ The witch of Endor is called *engastrimythos* in

⁶² Cf. M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* 1.34–58.

⁶³ The evidence is collected by A. C. Pearson on Sophocles' Fragment 59, whose interpretation I follow here.

⁶⁴ Plutarch, *De def. orac.* 414E, *Suda* s. v. *Εὐρυκλῆς*.

the Septuagint.⁶⁵ In time, as Plutarch scornfully observes, proposals were advanced that Apollo was an *engastrimythos*. The possessing demons came to be called *pythones* in Plutarch's time, and the words *python* and *pythonissa* were taken over in the Latin of the Vulgate.

Eurycles was not an ecstatic prophet in the Greek sense. His type stands outside Greek ways of thought, but becomes commoner in the period of the mingling of Greek with eastern culture—when the Greeks take his name for a generic description. First ecstatic prophecy was associated with the “belly talkers,” and then ideas of possession and exorcism were added to the repertory of magical medicine. The process indicates a change in attitudes about gods and *daimones*, and about the person as well, a change to which intellectual developments which can be seen in the philosophers may have contributed, as in the parallel case of the spread of astrology.⁶⁶ In itself the emphasis put by Xenocrates, Poseidonius, and others on *daimones* as intermediaries between gods and men, and as the source of evil, had nothing to do with possession. Neither, in itself, does the characterization of the human soul as a *daimôn*. But those tendencies, along with the “demonizing of religion” as Nilsson calls it,⁶⁷ may have helped to lay the groundwork for a view that was inconceivable to an earlier period. Whatever the process of the change, Apollonius, Theocritus, and the other Hellenistic writers are free from the new demonology. One can predict confidently that if Menander's *Hiereia* comes to light the slave who pretends to be beset by a *daimôn* will pretend to experiences like those of the girls described in the Hippocratic *Peri Partheniôn*: he will suffer from delirium, depression and hallucinations. He will be seeking from the priestess not exorcism, as has been said,⁶⁸ but advice as to who the attacking god or *daimôn* is, and what are the proper sacrifices and purifications to placate him.

⁶⁵ 1 Samuel 28:3-9. The word is used here and elsewhere to translate the Hebrew *'ôb*: “a familiar spirit, or sometimes, it may be, an image through which such a spirit speaks,” Langton (above, note 17) 178. Cf. R. B. Onians, *Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge 1954), 489-90.

⁶⁶ M. P. Nilsson, “The Origin of Belief among the Greeks in the Divinity of Heavenly Bodies,” *HTR* 33 (1940) 1-8.

⁶⁷ M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* 2.516-20.

⁶⁸ Fragments of the hypothesis: Ox. Pap. 1235; also, with bibliography, in A. Koerte, *Menander* (Leipzig 1959) 1.146 ff., 2.82-83.