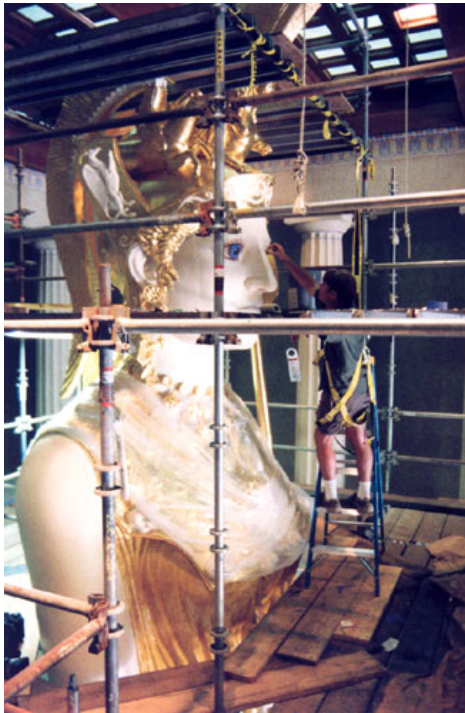


Classics 191: The Immortal Experience
Capstone Seminar Winter Quarter 2009
Professor Alex Purves



Syllabus

In this course we will consider the question “what is a god?” by attempting to make sense of the Greeks’ portrayal of divinities as embodied beings who not only move from childhood to adulthood but also undergo a range of emotions and experiences. Although the Greek gods live forever, their anthropomorphism binds them closely to humans and the human experience of time. So too do their bodies drive them to human action and experience – to eat, make love, give birth, suffer physical pleasure and pain – in a manner that sometimes undermines their status as immortals. On the one hand these gods are explicitly not like us; on the other they are too much like us. How did the Greeks reconcile these two contradictory impulses?

We will ponder this issue from a number of different angles, moving through the literary genres of archaic epic, classical tragedy and comedy, and comparing them to a range of other sources from material culture, philosophy, history, ending with Lucian’s *Dialogue of the Gods*.

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Homer’s gods I

Week 3: Homer’s gods II

Week 4: The Homeric Hymns to Apollo and Hermes

Week 5: The Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite and Demeter

Week 6: Hesiod’s *Theogony* & *Works and Days* (1-205)

Week 7: Euripides' Hippolytus

Week 8: Euripides' Bacchae

Week 9: Aristophanes' Birds

Week 10: Aristophanes' Frogs

Classical scholarship is an important component of this course and at least two works of criticism will be assigned each week (usually posted on the course website). This is a research seminar, and as such you will be developing your skills in a) reading and analyzing primary material b) engaging with current scholarship c) bibliographic searches d) discussion of your own ideas and those of your peers e) formulating original research. Each of these five components is crucial to a successful outcome in this course.

You are required to present two reports (1 group, 1 individual), and to write a research paper of 10-15 pp. You will also be graded on your participation in class discussion. Students who attend class insufficiently prepared, or who do not attend, will have points deducted from their final grade. There will be no final exam. Papers must be turned in by Friday March 20th or they will receive a grade of zero. Participation: 15%; Report 1: 10%; Report 2: 25%; Paper: 50%.

Paper Topics and Abstracts

BRIDGMAN, Geoffrey

"Limb by Limb"

In line with what Bruno Snell calls their extensive vocabulary for "sense perceptions", the Greeks have less "abstracted" and "sophisticated" vocabularies but are more equipped with "descriptive language". For example, they are more specific as to which part of the human body they are referring to, when they do refer there. Snell proposes that they may have been without an understanding of the body as a whole, not grasping that their fingers were at the tips of the hands or halfway under their own control at all - like children, maybe. So that would explain why they had characterized the body into pieces. But I do not think this is the presumption we should start with. For this research project, the argument is basically informed by the intuition - that context is more important than anything else, for describing or understanding things - and that Bruno Snell is incapable of thinking that way. The main thrust of the argument is that ancient Greek tragedies were experienced as a sort of exercise in trance. It was the ritual reenactment of violence stylized to move its audience emotionally - on the stage.

CHARAEVA, Barbie

"The Wrath of a God is Hard to Deal With: The Gods' Anger as Social Cohesion"

Anger is the famous beginning and a prominent theme in Homer's Iliad. Throughout the epic, the controlling emotion transgresses boundaries of gender, race, and mortality, distinctively influencing the events of the Trojan War. Achilles, of whose anger the muses sing, caused devastation and extreme difficulties for his comrades when he withdrew from battle to nurse his wounded pride and nurture his anger. Achilles' anger, however, was not alone in notably affecting the battles between the Trojans and the Achaians. The Olympian gods also caused devastation and extreme difficulties, but they chose to nurture their own angers on the battlefield rather than away from it. Extreme wrath and desire for revenge, unexpected emotions for deities, play a very prominent and intricate role in the Homeric epics and hymns. The deities in these poems are not composed or unprejudiced as would be expected. Instead, the gods and goddesses involve themselves in the mortal conflicts and become personally invested in the victory of their favored side.

Throughout the poems, the deities become irrational, enraged, and merciless as a result of their involvement. Such conduct, unrespectable even for a mortal, reduces the gods to mere exaggerated humans, plagued by the same faults but exaggerated to an even greater extent! The illogical and self-indulgent behavior of the gods is not worthy of worship or esteem by the mortals. The fickleness of the easily angered god, however, is also a powerful tool.

CHOI, Hae Jung

"Learning from Hippolytus: A Lesson in Boundaries and Gender"

It is clearly apparent that Euripides's Hippolytus possesses a fatal flaw that arouses Aphrodite's anger. But this flaw, however, is obscure. While one may be tempted to label it as impiety, one look at his treatment of the goddess Artemis reveals Hippolytus' quite pious nature. This paper explores and reveals this unique and devastating flaw: Hippolytus's misinterpretation of the goddesses Artemis and Aphrodite as first and foremost female entities. Centering himself around a life of chastity, he worships Artemis based upon her virgin nature alone (apparent in his completely ignoring her other timê, including that of marriage and childbirth) and spurns Aphrodite based upon her sexually promiscuous behavior. As is readily apparent, these traits upon which he justifies his religious worship are very much linked to the female identity, not the divine identity. Thus, Hippolytus's flaw lies in the fact that he is unable to recognize the supremacy of the female goddesses' divine nature. His treatment of especially the goddess Aphrodite as a contemptuous woman earns him the fatal punishment at the end, and Artemis's gentle rejection of Hippolytus at the end of the play also serves to highlight his tragic misinterpretation of the difference between divine and mortal status.

DEMIANY, Chelsea

"Divine Hagneia and the Immortal Experience: A New Look at Hippolytus' Destruction"

This paper explores the issues of purity and pollution in Euripides' Hippolytus and offers a new interpretation behind the fundamental cause of Hippolytus' downfall. In this paper, I examine Hippolytus' destruction through the lens of divine hagneia. The Greek word hagneia means "pure", and has different meanings when applied to humans and gods. Based on the argument of scholar Robert Parker, there is human hagneia, meaning "pure" or "chaste" and divine hagneia, which not only means "chaste", but "demanding respect". In the concept of divine hagneia, the gods define their purity by the actions of humans - by being given the proper respect. In order to show respect and reverence, humans must ritually purify themselves before divine interaction and perform other reverent actions which honor and acknowledge their divine hagneia. In Euripides' play, Hippolytus lacks full understanding of divine hagneia, and this leads to disrespectful actions towards Aphrodite. This, in turn, triggers Aphrodite's vengeance. Within this vengeance, the goddess manipulates human hagneia and wreaks havoc on issues of purity and pollution and all who experience them. This, I will argue, is the direct cause of Hippolytus' destruction. In addition, my examination clarifies divine hagneia as only existing in human interaction with the divine. The gods themselves do not recognize one another's divine hagneia. Lastly, this paper explores the significance of the final scene in Hippolytus, which illustrates that internal purity is beyond divine understanding and only practiced in the human realm.

HO, Nina

"Epiphany in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite"

The Homeric Hymns are songs that celebrate and praise the gods and goddesses. Clay, however, correctly points out that the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite "celebrates neither the birth of the goddess nor the founding

of her cult, but instead recounts Aphrodite's seduction of the mortal Anchises" (Clay, 154-155). Rather than narrate a story to praise Aphrodite's powers, the hymn curiously sets out to explore "the deeds of golden Aphrodite" (H Hymn A, 1) or the endeavors of her seduction. This shift in focus gives way to a paradoxical composition, which evidently omits the goddess' expected praise and substitutes it with her epiphany to Anchises (Breitenberger, 45). This narrative "produces a complex and ambiguous cause that both praises and blames its goddess" (Bergren, 161) and thereby, undermines its own poetic genre. In this paper, I argue that the epiphany to Anchises and its consequent subversion deliberately emphasize the duality of Aphrodite's reception so as to call attention to the complexities of the goddess and her powers as brought on by gender.

KENSON, Lauren

"Human and Divine Interaction: Deception and Reverence"

The question of why gods lie to their mortal counterparts, whether merely in appearance or further in speech, is an omnipresent and multifaceted issue in ancient Greek poetry and tragedy. Typically lying is something done out of necessity to hide one's true intentions. Under this motivation, the weaving of lies and donning of disguises is more appropriate for humans to employ against the gods than for the gods to practice against mankind. However, there are numerous instances of gods not only deceiving humans but also deceiving one another. When done to deceive and to achieve a purpose of subverting a superior foe by means of cunning, such deception is shown as inappropriate for the gods to employ. Scott Richardson refers to this human dependency on perfecting and practicing the art of lying, stating that, "the survival of father and son depends on this particular education" (2007, 135). In the *Bacchae*, Cadmus advises Pentheus to "lie for a good cause". He advocates that he choose the safer pathway to protect himself and his family from the wrath of a god and to feign reverence for this reason (lines 334-35). While the ability of Odysseus and Telemachos to survive is dependent on telling lies, the gods' existence in and of itself cannot be described as survival. Lying, therefore, is not behavior that the gods utilize out of necessity, as men are already lower than them by virtue of the fact that they are mortal.

KIM, Young

"Hope in Pages: The Interpretation of Hesiod's Myth"

In his moral epistles, Seneca the Younger writes, "Desines timere, si sperare desieris," roughly translated as: if you stop hoping, you will stop fearing. But what does it mean to hope? And why must we fear in order to hope? Hundreds of years before Seneca was born, Hesiod pondered just such a question: what is the purpose of Hope? In my paper, I attempt to address this question by building upon the current interpretations of Hesiod in order to reveal that Hope cannot be simply categorized or labeled. But rather, as regarded and retold by Hesiod, our understanding of Hope needs to be able to encompass the inevitable conditions of a mortal life, life that is at once both joyous and tragic. I will argue that such dual nature of Hope is what Hesiod alludes to within his work, both explicitly and implicitly.

KUTTER, Mara

"Hector and the Human Condition: Tragic Effect as Created by Divine Perspectives"

The Greeks and the Trojans both pray to the same set of gods in the *Iliad*, making it impossible for the gods to grant victory to all their supplicants, and thus compelling them to choose sides. Some deities make their decision based on personal affronts, while others base their decisions on their children's loyalties, but regardless of the reasons, no mortal hero can count on their continuous favor and support. Aphrodite

completely forgets about her son Aeneas when she herself is wounded; Zeus looks on as his son Sarpedon dies in battle; Apollo abandons Hector when he faces Achilles, and the list goes on. The fluctuation in divine support to men stems from the fact that ultimately, the gods care more about themselves and their own interests than those of mortals, and this relative disregard casts a tragic light onto humanity as a whole. While both humans and gods are necessary to maintaining the status quo in the Iliad—for the gods rely on human agents to achieve their own agendas—there can be no question as to which of the two is predominant, and the example of Hector in the Iliad illustrates this clearly. The greatest of the Trojans warriors and a great man apart from battle as well, Hector is bound by his fate, and has no control over being used as a tool to enhance the glory of his fearsome foe, the demi-god Achilles. Zeus uses Hector first as bait to lure Achilles back into battle and then as a suitable rival for him, and Achilles gains glory by killing the magnificent Trojan prince. Although the marked attention the gods pay to Hector designates him as a character worthy of our sympathy, Zeus does not grant Hector immunity, and he encounters injury, failure, and an untimely death. Hector stands out as being particularly tragic among the heroes of the Iliad, as a result of both this close attention from the gods and the way in which Zeus uses him as a mere instrument. The human realm is the playground of the gods: they use human beings as pawns within that realm and they invest emotions in it until a certain point, but at the end of the day they retreat into their own world, where their own interests come first.

MORA, Robert

"*Philotes* and *Philos*: An Examination of Friendship and Love Among Greek Gods"

The Olympian gods, atop their snowy mountain peak, exist as an extended family under –in a manner of speaking- one roof. History shows us mere mortals that they interact with one another in physical and emotional ways, in seduction, in anger, in hatred, in supplication, and always they remain a tight knit family of twelve (sometimes, thirteen), plus their more distant relatives. Yet, despite their familial dynamic, their close proximity to one another and, more often than not, their sexual and marital connections there is little to no discussion of their happiness, their love, and most importantly, their idea of friendship. *Philotes* and *philos*, by definition, are the Greek words that encompass the idea of friendship and love, *philotes* meaning friendship, love and affection, *philos* meaning beloved, dear, loved, and friend. While their definitions appear clear-cut and constant, ancient texts utilize these words with different aims and at times render different translations. In this essay I will examine the use of the words *philotes* and *philos*, specifically in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, commenting on how their use and translation characterizes a unique brotherhood of love and friendship established between Apollo and Hermes, in comparison with their use in the Hymn to Aphrodite and selections of Homer's Iliad.

OLIVER, Jason

"Hesiod: The Man of the Ages"

Is the value of one's life determined by the way we live it or how we end it? Most people's ideas about life, death, and the afterlife change frequently during their lifetime, and thus it is not surprising that the ancient Greek poets present differing viewpoints on the matter. While Homer, through his epics, emphasizes the immortal glory of short-lived war heroes, Hesiod spends his effort on teaching how effort through strife will lead to a long peaceful life in a troublesome world. Through the course of Archaic Greek history, one would guess that the average Greek connected more with the farmer subjects of Hesiod rather than the tragic war heroes of Homer as the development of the polis promoted intellectual, political, and socio-economic changes. Using Aries' terms on the two basic ideal Deaths, I will show how the general Greek poet's view of death moved from the Tame Death to the Death of the Self as I venture through the works of Homer, Tyrtaeus, and Mimernus, and Pindar. Furthermore, I will show that although Hesiod's Works and Days emphasizes the necessity of endurance through strife, its inclusion of the age of heroes in its "Ages of Men" myth shows that Hesiod embraced the importance of the *kleos*, or immortal fame, of Homer's heroes in guiding the average human to excellence.

SCHMIDT, Hillary

"Dionysus: The Transgressor of Boundaries and Liberator of Greeks"

The Greek god Dionysus is the quintessential enigma. He is simultaneously mortal and immortal, man and beast, foreign and yet innately Greek. Dionysus has existed in the Greek Pantheon since at least 1250 BCE. His name is catalogued on some of the oldest surviving written records from the Greek mainland. He is the embodiment of transgression and the physical manifestation of the escape from social boundaries. It is by means of wine that Dionysus is able to reaffirm social boundaries by temporarily dissolving them. He uses the theater masks in particular and the cultic experience including epiphany to accomplish this. Euripides' play, *The Bacchae*, is the best surviving primary source for Dionysiac cultic behavior. It is also the only extant primary tragedy in which Dionysus serves as a character. This paper will detail the role of Dionysus as a transgressor himself and the effects of that role on the Greek population.

TREADWAY, Michael

"A Brief Exploration of Divine Shame"

My paper explores the use of the Greek words, *aidos*, *aiskhos*, and *oneidos*, as well as their nominal and verbal derivatives, and their relation to divine figures experiencing shame within Homer, Pindar and Lucian. Shame is evaluated in two categories - the external aspect of shame and the internal aspect of shame - and the divine are explored in light of each.