

Culture and Society in Ancient Greece

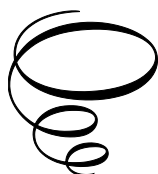
Culture and Society in Ancient Greece:

On the Edge of Everyday Life

By

Juan A. Roche Cárcel

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INTRODUCTION

Greek society and culture border on life and plunge into death

As will be seen in this book, Greek society and culture navigate the edge of everyday life, while simultaneously being aware of the chaos of death. This is what happens, for example, with all Greek poetry, which emerges from lived events and only on very rare occasions, during the decline of Athenian greatness, attempts to escape reality (Bowra 1983, 124). Greek poetry, says Bruno Gentili, is a phenomenon diametrically distinct from modern poetry in its content, its forms, and its modes of communication, since it is closely related to social and political reality and to the concrete behavior of individuals within the community; that is, it is rooted in phenomenal reality (Gentili 1996, 19). Likewise, philosophy was closely tied to the concepts of life and death, and it was later, in the Hellenistic Period and during the Roman Empire, that it would become what Bertrand Russell called "the philosophy of withdrawal" (Russell 1994, 269). Art and theater, for their part, were also produced at the "edge of daily life" and not for the exclusive enjoyment or leisure of wealthy collectors and aesthetes (Finley 1975, 156).

The polis was situated on the edge of the sea and surrounded by Nature. Likewise, the boundaries of the Greek city-state were imbued with the sacred, such that human life was situated on the threshold between Nature and Divinity. Something similar could be said of institutions, economics, war, politics, and democracy, a great Athenian invention.

Consequently, the Greeks did not withdraw from life; they lived it intensely because they were aware of their great limitation: death. At the edge of their sea, they built a dense network of socio-cultural meanings with which to give meaning to their existence. Thus, only to wage war, trade, colonize, or simply to expand their thirst for knowledge, like Odysseus, they left their home and ventured into unknown lands. At the end of their lives, the Greeks made their final journey. They traveled the Ocean River that led them to Hades, the realm of the dead, deep, subterranean, and hidden from the earth, the light of the sun, and the Mediterranean Sea.

For the Hellenes, life was, therefore, luminous and limited, death dark and abysmal. It was considered all the darker and more abysmal the more luminous and limited life was, and vice versa. Both, however, are very present in Greek society and culture, which border on life and plunge into death. However, this does not mean that the culture of Ancient Greece remained static, as it was marked by profound changes that led to its disengagement from the polis and democracy, while also retreating from philosophy and its traditional conception of art. Ultimately, the Greeks became estranged from themselves and embarked on a path of abstraction, which has not yet been fully realized in the Western world.

CHAPTER 1

ORDER AND UNITY IN GREEK CULTURE

Order and Unity in Myth

The unstable order of Greek origin myths

Myths possess “life” insofar as they provide models for human conduct, give meaning and value to existence, and perform the primary function of revealing the exemplary types of any meaningful ritual or activity. Thus, they relate the world's origin -and the prodigious outbreak of energy, life and fertility that took place at that moment- and all the primordial events that led mortals to be what they are (Eliade 2000, 14-36). Not only do they express what is at the beginning of everything, but they also contain the double sense of origin and flight from it, and, consequently, they express “the fear of being uprooted and the comforting sigh of escape” (Beriaín 1990b, 142). Perhaps for this reason, they try to unveil the hidden (Buxton 2000, 129) and understand the present reality in order to control or predict the future, something they achieve by limiting the objective world. In this sense, they are interested in finding what is fixed and lasting in the universal flux, stability and order and in warding off the fear of chaos. Hence, their structure is based on the periodic reiteration of what was done *in illo tempore*, on the return to the same thing that offers certainty, on the certainty that something exists in an absolute way. Therefore, myths pursue order in the face of chaos and, for this purpose, establish a time of eternal or cyclical return rather than indeterminate linear time (Eliade 2000, 123; Blumenberg 2004, 57-62 and 82).

The myths of origin are particularly well suited to achieve these aims, and there are many of them left to us from Ancient Greece, as Aristotle reports, who summarises the various ancient theogonies and especially the Pythagoreans (*Metaphysics*, 1091a-1092a). Homer's, for example, although it does not seem to be interested in the beginning of the world as it focuses more on human adventures and anthropomorphic gods (Boorstin 2008, 35), considers Oceanus and Tethys as the primordial beings from which everything arises. That of Orpheus -as the Derveni Papyrus shows-

presents Night, an eternal and unborn entity, as the mother of Heaven, the first ruler. From this Heaven comes Zeus, who, after ingesting the penis of the universe, impregnates his progenitor and returns to gestate the totality of beings (Bernabé 1999, 320-6).

However, Hesiod's *Theogony* is, because of its authenticity and high mythological, historical, literary, and social value, the main, or one of the most influential, sources for understanding the peculiar way the Greeks conceived the formation of their society. The poet recounts, in summary, the process by which the world was created and organised from *Chaos* to the establishment of order by *Zeus*, the father of gods and humans. This process is shown, episodically, through the successive dynastic struggles for the rule of heaven and their corresponding pacifications that express all the forces and manifestations of the *kosmos* and the transition from chaos to order, and vice versa. This does not mean that Hesiod's *Theogony* is primarily devoted to the exploits of the gods but to the genesis of the world (Arendt 2005, 92) which is shown to the four primordial beings: *Chaos*, *Gaia*, *Tartarus* and *Eros*; they constitute, simultaneously, natural forces and divinities (Vernant 2003, 18) and represent the first forms of the apparent world that “emerge” from the “Chaos-Mystery”, the Mother-Matter and the Father-Spirit, the Earth-*Gaia* -and the Heaven- *Uranus*:

Verily at the first *Chaos* came to be, but next wide-bosomed *Gaia*, the ever-sure foundations of all the deathless ones who hold the peaks of snowy Olympus, and dim *Tartarus* in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth, and *Eros* (Love), fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them. From *Chaos* came forth *Erebus* and black Night; but of Night were born Aether and Day, whom she conceived and bare from union in love with *Erebus*. And *Gaia* first bare starry *Uranus*, equal to herself, to cover her on every side, and to be an ever-sure abiding-place for the blessed gods. And she brought forth long Hills, graceful haunts of the goddess-Nymphs who dwell amongst the glens of the hills. She bare also the fruitless deep with his raging swell, *Pontos*, without sweet union of love. (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 117-132).

“Chaos” is a term of which he notes that “Note that although grammatically neuter, Chaos is treated as female”, so it should not be surprising that it means “void that occupies a hollow”, “yawning”, “space that opens”, “fissure”, “to open a wound”, “to open from a cavern” or “to open wide” (West 1966, 192-3). In various Greek authors, it also represents an “infinite space”, the “infernal darkness”, the “abyss”, and the “void” (Chantraine 1999, 1246). For C. G. Jung, the void is a non-entity, a great feminine mystery, the primordial strange, the hollow, the abysmally deep other (Jung

2015, 141). Although some believe that Chaos is the cleft or hiatus that separates an original unity in the two generative principles -Uranus and Gaia, Heaven and Earth- (West 1966, 193), here I understand *Chaos* to be the matrix of all creation, the origin of all things, a bottomless void, vast and dark, confused and shadowy and a formless and undifferentiated place from which the first deity, *Gaia* “the broad-breasted”, the Mother Earth, the “ever secure seat”, “the ground of the world” (the goddess of “solid foundations”, as stated in the *Homeric Hymn to the Earth*, 1), arose. Hesiod thus contrasts *Chaos* with *Gaia*, firstly because one is unstable and the other is stable. Secondly, because they contrast the undifferentiation of *Chaos* with the diversity of the world to which it gives rise. Thirdly, because they contrast the primordial unity of *Chaos*, in whose bosom the opposites are formed, with the dualisation, polarisation and confrontation between opposing forces that bring about the birth and formalisation of the world. Fourthly, because they intensify the individual character of the children they have: those of *Chaos* and his descendants alternate with those of *Gaia* and *Uranus*, who are personal gods born by sexual generation. Fifth, because they oppose two ways of being born into the world: by division -*Gaia*- or by mating -*Aether* and *Day* or *Uranus*, for example; and, finally, because they represent feminine chaos and the successor masculine order in their combat. In the last analysis, all these contrasts seem to refer to the original ambivalence characteristic of the world, that is to say, that nothing in it assumes an absolute character but is haunted by its opposite. Thus, *Gaia* has as its subsoil *Tartarus* (Vernant 1993, 204; Vernant 2003, 16), a dark and gloomy hell that is further away than *Hades* and which, like *Erebus* - the “covered abyss”- constitutes a kind of recreation of *Chaos*. Hence, *Tartarus*, as the subsoil of *Gaia*, becomes a premonitory image of the permanent threat of chaos on earth, stability and order.

Corroboration of this idea is also found throughout the development of *Theogony*, both in the description of the earth's shape at its origin and in the successive wars between the generations of gods (Vernant 2003, 32 ff.). For Hesiod (*Theogony*, 726 ff.) -as for Homer (*Iliad*, Book XXI, 195; Book XVIII, 607)-, the earth is a more or less flat disc surrounded by a circular river, *Oceanus*, which has neither origin nor end (Martín García 1998, 112). The drying up of the land, which slowly emerges from the waters surrounding it, generates and orders the world. Above the earth, resting on the edges of the *Oceanus*, is the sky, which has the shape of an inverted bowl and is made of bronze, indicating that it is the property of the gods and that it is solid, unalterable and indestructible. The earth, too, is described as having a “solid and secure base”, and there seems to be no risk of it falling. In this sense, Hesiod imagines that, from the narrow neck

of the immense jar that makes up the earth, the roots of the world beneath it sprout, apparently guaranteeing stability. However, as in the conception of Xenophanes, who believes that the static and secure earth sinks its roots in the limitless and therefore chaotic infinite, in Hesiod, the mouth of the jar is directed towards Tartarus, the power of Night, that enormous gorge that resembles the primordial Chaos that contains in its bosom the origin and limits of the existing. Moreover, as this constitutes a space not yet oriented, the world of disorder, an inextricable chaos, according to Hesiod's vision, instability once again constitutes the true subsoil of the earth. This is reinforced by the fact that, inside the jar, whirlwinds of wind blow in all directions so that orientations are mixed up in this space, and the high and the low, the right and the left, are confused. Moreover, Hesiod concludes, so that the underworld of disorder cannot emerge, Zeus will close the neck of the jar 'forever', once he has defeated his opponents. However, the truth is that the god's victory does not seem final; consequently, it is not sure that the chaos has been eternally sealed.

As Jean-Pierre Vernant (2003, 15 ff.) brilliantly reminds us, the battle of Zeus represents only one link in a long chain of conflicts that seem to have no end. The first is between *Uranus* -the sky-, son of *Gaia*, and the Titans, who are the descendants of both; then between *Cronus*, a minor Titan who is the god of time, and *Zeus*, his son, or between the Titans and the Olympians; and, later, between *Zeus* and *Typhon* or between the Olympians and the Giants. These wars, which seem immanent to the very process of the generation of gods, entail universal suffering and are unleashed to combat the forces of disorder and to find, each time and in a definitive way, the order and unity that have broken the differentiation and individuality of the divinities (Vernant 2001, 41).

When Athena, defender of the father, is born from Zeus, the order of heaven seems irreversible, while Typhon and the Giants are the last attempts of Mother Earth to regain the power lost to the Olympians. However, while this is true, the establishment of the celestial order also has an earthly dimension that is fraught with a certain fragility. Therefore, there is no total victory of unity over diversity, as seen in three aspects. The first is in the last of the battles between the gods because at the moment when *Zeus* and the Olympians appear to definitively defeat *Typhon*, *son of Gaia and Tartarus*, with a hybrid nature of human and beast and a force of chaos, we know that it is not a radical victory. Although *Typhon* has been alienated from the gods, he is sent into the human world, where he runs into discord, war, and death, inferring that the Greeks thought of disorder as a hopeless evil. The second aspect is found in the episode in which *Khronos*, the symbol of the instability of destructive time (Durand 1992,

92), castrates his father *Uranus* because he then institutes two complementary forces: *Eris* -Discord at the heart of what was united- and *Eros* -Love, concord and unity (Vernant 2003, 25-6 and 41-57). The third aspect is that *Chaos* represents not only the world of disorder but also the world of primordial unity; it composes an idea prior to distinction, separation, and opposition, and, in short, a concept of confusion between order and disorder, between destruction and creation. Hence, chaos forms the infrastructure of human *physis* (Morin 1981, 76 ff.); that Parmenides -see Chapter 4-, Sextus Empiricus -*Outlines of Pyrrhonism.*, III, 121- and Plutarch -*Moralia, On Isis and Osiris*, 374 C- define it as that space or place which underlies what comes to be; that it persists as the continent, source and end of all things (Mondolfo 1969, 18); and that we can explain, on the one hand, that it emerges from its own bosom *Gaia*, stability, and, on the other, that it represents its subsoil.

Consequently, this old mythical awareness of the absence of a solution to the world's disorder will be present, time and again, in every social and cultural manifestation and throughout Hellenic history. As C. Castoriadis (2006, 10 and 45-358) argues, what makes Greece not so much measure and harmony is meaninglessness and non-being, and, in the end, it is futile to conceal this profound truth. Indeed -according to the Greek- born philosopher -the starting point of myth, of the Homeric poems, of philosophy, of tragedy, of architecture and of democracy itself -see Chapter 4- is the understanding of the world as created from a background of chaos and, therefore, as a-sensate, as not reducible to rationality and, in short, as incomprehensible. More specifically, this chaos has two meanings in the myth: it is equal to the void, the abyss, from which the world emerges out of nothing, and it is a formless and terrifying mixture that floods and nourishes everything.

Well, this second sense of a chaos-abyss, of a formless mixture where all future forms coexist, fundamentally sustains the development of philosophical thought. However, another important raw material of the same is the impersonal law of *moira*, of destiny that inexorably devastates gods and humans, which is also related because they are children of the abyss. We must not forget that, in any case, any Hellenic philosophy or creation attempts to exorcise, to confront, to conceal that chaos from which the world springs, metamorphosing it partially into a *Kosmos*, into an ordered universe or, what amounts to the same thing, instituting a form that supposes, in the end, a way of coexisting with the Abyss. Of course, this human universe, which is manifested through the laws -the *nomoi*- always contains a relative, contingent, incomplete, arbitrary and conventional

component that contrasts with the immutable and unshakeable *physis* - nature.

In short, recognising the Abyss is as essential to the Greek way of doing things as is the decision and the will to fight it.

***Eros* and unity and *Polemos* and diversity**



Fig. 1-1 Winged Eros

This dialectic is present in the Hellenistic contrast between *Eros* and *Polemos*. *Eros* (Fig. 1-1), in Hesiod's *Theogony* (1210-123), equates gods and humans whom he “loosens the limbs and captivates...the heart and the sensible will in their breasts” and is implicitly behind all the births that arise from Chaos and the Earth: Erebus, the black Night, Aether and Day, the starry Uranus, the great Mountains, the Nymphs and the sterile, wave-tossed that is *Pontos*. *Eros* thus becomes an intermediary divinity between *Chaos* and *Kosmos*, between order and Darkness, and between Erebus and light, and shows that without love there would be no unity in the world and an unfathomable abyss between the universe of the gods and that of humans. This is the view shared by agrarian religion, which considers human life and the life of nature as equivalent concepts and blurs the differences between the human, the natural and the divine; it is also the idea of Plato, who in *Symposium* (189d-193d. 202e-203a) assigns to *Eros* the role of mediator between the gods (Reale 2004, 178 ss; Esteban 2010, 120-1, 130-135), on the one hand, and the universe and human beings, on the other, or, in other words, the guarantor of merged unity between humans, the Gods and Nature.

In the latter, *Eros* is present as a concrete force, insofar as he is a being with such abundance that from him springs forth, with naturalness and spirited impulse, the movement outwards, towards generation and original growth, which is why he symbolises the creative and generative principle of the whole universe and the god of flowering meadows, of vegetation, of fertility and life. However, the germination inspired by *Eros* develops over time, and transformation and *Thanatos*, death, are irremediably linked. Death and life constitute the domain of *Eros*, for they embody two aspects of the same power and express the fear of the human being in the face of natural chaos. Hence, *Eros* and *Thanatos* constitute the two limits of human existence that shape it, that try to exorcise chaos, and that function as locks through which the “dangerous” Nature can enter and overflow and disrupt the human world at any moment. It is understandable, then, that love and death have been highly guarded by society and were powerfully reinforced by rites, taboos, norms and prohibitions that tried to keep human space confined. However, death, like disorder, can never be totally conquered. Again and again, it rears its black and dark face on the face of the earth, which explains why *Eros* is a concept that incorporates, alternatively or simultaneously, features of life and destruction, beneficent and maleficent, and cannot be separated from death. This can be seen in the myth of *Persephone*, where dying can be a painful or pleasurable act of love. The bittersweet taste of love also appears in the poet Sappho: “Once again *Eros* who unties my limbs makes me shudder, that sweet and bitter little beast, against which there is no one who can defend himself” (Rodríguez Adrados 1980, 377). Whereas in the *Boston Throne*, on the top of a 5th century BC sculpted altar from southern Italy, the central figure, instead of Zeus or Hermes as would have been customary, is a boy holding a balance, apparently an evident fusion of *Eros* and *Thanatos*. This iconographic mixture shows that, in this century, the two divinities seem inseparable (Vermeule 1984, 268-286) and will still be so with Plato, in the 4th century BC, when in the *Phaedo*, he confronts Socrates with death and, in the *Symposium*, with life (Plato, *Dialogues III* 2000, introduction García Gual, Martínez Hernández and Lledó Íñigo, 146).

In Greece, however, *Eros* is possibly more closely linked to war, to *Polemos*, than to *Thanatos*, as suggested by numerous myths and works of thought, art and literature. Aphrodite and Ares represent, respectively, love and war, but if the former is also a goddess close to hatred and warlike confrontation, the latter can be dominated by amorous passion. Thus, for the Greeks, the existence of eroticism in war and violence in marriage is possible. This joint manifestation of love and war expressed by the gods Ares and Aphrodite is also evident in the *Iliad*, as the two divinities drive

Paris and Helen to fall in love, and Achaeans and Trojans to engage in war, which is a precedent for what would later become the cosmic forces of “love” and “hate” (Fränkel 1993, 70). We also find it in lyric poetry, in Sappho, for example, who in the first ode adjusts a love language to a paramilitary one, and in one of her poems presents a lover calling Aphrodite to help her in the combat of love (Rodríguez Adrados 1980, 355); and in Ibycus, who writes that “for the sake of golden-haired Aphrodite destruction rose up to suffering Pergamon” (Navarro and Rodríguez 1990, 77).

These antecedents result in Empedocles, who already clearly contrasts *Eros* with *Polemos*: “...in *Rancour* they all look different and are divided, but in *Friendship* they march together and desire each other...” (Cordero et al. 1985, 262). Moreover, for this same pre-Socratic philosopher, *Eros* is the driving force of unity and, on the contrary, war is what produces diversity, both representing the essential processes of the universe insofar as Discordial (*Ares*) and Friendship (*Aphrodite*) form the primordial factors of both cosmogenesis or the formation of the *kosmos* and cosmic apocatastasis, i.e. the differentiation of the One by Discord and the unification of the Multiple by Friendship. Therefore, *Eros* and *Polemos* do not only symbolise, respectively, the forces of unity or diversity, or rather; they do not manifest them in a solitary way, but in conjunction with their opposite, with the duality and multiplicity that are comprised in unity and with the undifferentiation that is part of diversity (Vernant 2001, 150-4).

This dialectic matures in the tragedy of the 5th century BC, which, as will be seen, relates war and love and is kept alive in Plato's *Phaedo* (66c), which again pits *Eros* against *Polemos*, this time within the human body: “(Socrates)...For, indeed, wars and battles are caused by no other than the body and the desires of the body...” (Plato 2000, 66c).

In war, the human beast roams free and unchecked. The invention of *Eros* thus means an attempt to counteract the devastating power of *Polemos*, for it should not be forgotten that, although the whole of Hellenic history cannot be reduced to war, war does determine its development (Bowra 1983, 9 and 59 ff.), especially with the two main conflicts in which the Greeks were engaged: the *Greco-Persian Wars*, which pitted them against the barbarians, and the *Peloponnesian War*, which pitted the Spartans against the Athenians (Onians 1996, 26). No wonder that its power is omnipresent in the reflections of thinkers: “War is the father of all, king of all: some he has accredited as gods, others as men; some he has made slaves, others free”, says Heraclitus (Eggers and Juliá 1981, 387); also in Anaximander war is considered the mother and ruler of the social order itself and any other (Mondolfo 1960, 60). This leading role of the social order is also fulfilled by war because violence is important for the

sacred world of the human being and for the shaping of its most fundamental cultural forms, as the myths of origin affirm that, from the dead divinity, come not only the rites but also the marriage rules, the prohibitions and all the cultural forms that give the beings of one day their humanity. The original violence, which is unique and spontaneous, tends to be regulated by the rite, which tries to obtain from it a kind of technique of cathartic appeasement. However, over the centuries, we move from the spontaneous funding violence to the systematisation of war and the division it brings with it, as shown in the *Iliad*, which, although it associates the warrior function with cosmic, human and animal forces, at the same time recognises that it involves a *hybris*, an excess of energy that endangers social harmony and the supposed cultural order that it represents (Wulff 2000, 5).

War thus reveals how the order of culture passes from the order of culture to the order of nature and, ultimately, shows that beneath the order of the former, the chaos of the latter continues to lurk.

The evolution of *Eros*

This same idea is to be found in the development that *Eros* has followed in Greece, which corresponds to the gradual humanisation of love that has transformed the old cosmic conception from the Cosmogonies through tragedy and the philosophical thought of the Enlightenment, to the period of Alexander. Throughout this process, which has not been entirely linear, which has had advances and setbacks and which has sometimes combined contradictory meanings of *Eros* at the same time, *Eros* has generally passed through the following phases: first, it was a cosmic force, then a god or a demon, then it became humanised or became a pedagogical impulse within the human being and, finally, a small child.

Indeed, initially in the Cosmogonies, *Eros* personifies the being of the one, perfection, summit or eternity, which are the exclusive attributes of a fully united being, and constitutes the primordial impulse of life, one of the four primordial forces, and in short, an exclusively cosmic and beneficent entity existing in a united world. However, from the most ancient Greek accounts, it becomes either a God or a demon, that is, an immortal and most beautiful young divinity that populates the heavens (Hamilton 1976, 32-3) or a demon that, according to the lyrical Alcman and Plato, generates in the human a kind of divine madness (García Castillo 2007, 108; Rodríguez Adrados 1980, 406).

The love of peace is very present in Greek literature. The *Iliad*, for example, although it is a poem that sings of the Trojan War and sometimes

even of the fury of battle and the cruelty it entails, nevertheless ends with a resolute condemnation of the fighting. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, ends with a rhapsody dedicated to “Peace”, and in the lyric, Stesichorus, Xenophanes, Theognis and Anacreon similarly reject the war.

Plato inherits from tragedy the love of the word - we will see this at the end of the chapter - and the peace it represents. In all his works, and especially in the *Protagoras*, he presents characters who, in dialogue, seem to be engaged in an *agon* in which they dispute the prize of victory over their opponent. In other words, Plato, like tragedy, replaces violence and the sword with dialectics, dialogue and words, which he explicitly points out in the *Gorgias*, where this character comments to Socrates on the similarity he finds between rhetoric and combat: “...Such is the power of rhetoric and to such an extent it reaches; nevertheless, Socrates, rhetoric must be used in the same way as the other means of combat” (Plato 2000, 38). Moreover, Plato transforms *Eros* into a pedagogical instrument for the human being, insofar as Platonic love represents the path that climbs by degrees of ecstasy towards the unique origin of all that exists, far from bodies and matter, far from that which divides and distinguishes (De Rougemont 1986, 61). Now, in this conception, matter is no longer part of this desired unity; Nature has been split from the concept of *Eros*, and the latter has been reduced from a cosmic force to an educational impulse that acts within the individual (Lasso de la Vega 1985, 106 ff).

In the Hellenistic period, *Eros*, receiving increasing importance, is still depicted as an old man. However, he also appears as a small child (Bataille 2013, 86), which seems to express that his power is mysterious and not physical as with the other gods or higher mortals, especially Hercules and Alexander (Onians 1996, 185). Indeed, this metamorphosis begins earlier, when Anacreonte defines *Eros* as a playful child: “Once again, golden-haired *Eros* reaches me with his purple ball and invites me to play with a girl in multicoloured sandals...” and it continues with Ibycus and Alcman: “It is not *Aphrodite*, it is the mad *Eros* who plays like a child...” (Rodríguez Adrados 1980, 406). However, it is in the Hellenistic period that this type is consolidated, at the moment when his physical evolution is accompanied by a decrease in his age, when he goes from being a young man and adolescent to being a child.

This development has, in my view, had at least five profound consequences:

1st) *Eros* has reduced his sphere of action because if initially it was made up of the entire *kosmos*, that is, the natural, divine and human worlds, later the first two worlds were taken away from him, and he remained located exclusively in the human world. However, in this process,

by assimilating *Eros* to childhood, humans, far from being enlarged, have been dwarfed.

2nd) *Eros* has diminished its power, since from being one of the primordial forces that promote cosmogenesis and cosmic apocatastasis, the fundamental processes of the universe, it is transformed first into a god or a demon who dominates all the celestial and telluric forces and elements, and later into an educational method for the *anthropos* and into a ludic and erotic activity.

3rd) *Eros* has been moving away from unity since the genesis of the *kosmos* in which he constitutes the being of the one, the mediator between life and death and between the natural, divine and human worlds, detaching himself from the first two worlds, enclosing himself in a human mind far from everything that separates him, that is, from the natural and political exterior and from the rest of human beings, and ending up as a child that symbolises the nostalgia for unity.

4th) *Eros* has been rejuvenated step by step, for if at first he represents one of the original and therefore most ancient beings, then he becomes an ever-young god, then a procedure that acts throughout the cycle of a human life, and finally a young child.

5th) *Eros* has removed death from his bosom, for if at first he is inseparably linked to it, later he is transformed into an immortal god or demon, then into a human being who can achieve transcendence but only with his spirit and not with his body and, finally, into an infant possessing the age most distant from death -childhood- and who, impotent to understand the unfathomable mystery that this entails, prefers to play.

In short, *Eros* has seen his power and influence diminished, his body reduced, and he has been castrated by the linear time unleashed by *Khronos*. Thus he who was the great unifier of the universe and of life and death, he who had managed to overcome borders and split natures, he who with cyclical, eternal and irrepressible force had driven bud, growth and fecundity and he who, in short, symbolised the meadows full of flowers that, year after year, emerged with renewed power, has ended up constructing in his place new entities that only take fugitive, ephemeral and always unfinished forms. It has thus ended up incarnating a flower of an instant, just as human beings are the "beings of a day" (Pindar, *Pythian Ode VIII*, 95-97). Nevertheless, if one thinks about it, it could not be otherwise because *Eros* is the son of *Chaos*. *Chaos* is the origin and the subsoil of the world, which does not allow anything to take the form of a perfect, stable and perpetual order, but, on the contrary, that of an unfinished, unstable and fluid one. Moreover -and this is a profound lesson of the Greek myths- the unstable order that is accompanied by suffering, evil,

misfortune, and negativity comes from the development of individualisation that gave birth to separate, isolated and singular beings.

This is precisely what has also happened to *Eros* himself, the victim of a process of gradual splitting and singularisation that has distanced him from the primordial unity and brought him ever closer to humans, to the world in which the gods exiled *Typhon*, the disorder, along with all the disasters and especially *Polemos*, war, to which *Eros* ends up keeping company.

Order and Unity in the Greek Worldview

A *kosmos* organised and united by Nature, the gods and human beings

Precisely because of the existence of disorder, the best of Hellenic culture has been forged in the desire to find the being of the *anthropos*, the essence of things and social order, and in the effort the Greeks put into finding the right instrument, a means that was not itself determined by chaos, chance, appearance and transience, and that was more truthful and stable than the things of the world. Consequently, the Hellenic people ardently sought an order that would be good for human life, affecting the whole universe, i.e., the *kosmos*, nature, the gods, society, and the human being, manifesting itself in all cultural and social activities. For a long time, the Greeks thought they would find the way through myth, geometry and numbers, aesthetics, the *Logos* - of the word, of reason - and theatre.

Consequently, from the beginning, the Hellenes understood the *kosmos* as ordered and created, one and various, aesthetic, beautiful and clean (Rico 1988, 12-3) and as removed from infinity by a limited space-time within which they placed human existence. This *kosmos* is also permeated by principles of harmony and balance (Glacken 1996, 51-2), by a strong feeling for the formal and by a kind of proportional arrangement that is either imposed by a divine mind or the automatic result of natural processes. This is, at least, what emerges from the myths, which design an idea of the civilised *kosmos* with precise limits and confines and, therefore, confronted with a previous state of unlimited, formless and savage chaos. A similar idea of the *kosmos* is also present in the Ionian philosophers, since for them, it means that all things are arranged in an orderly way and compose, despite their diversity, a systematic unity; furthermore, and in a natural way, it is assigned a function and limits. Towards the end of the 5th century BC, this proportional arrangement will also be applied to the human being, understood socially and individually. Although researchers

disagree as to whether the universe is the model or the reflection of society, democracy constantly seeks balance, just like the human body, with its structure, form and functioning.

On the other hand, the search for social and cultural order was always associated with the search for unity, which manifests itself in the natural world and the divine and human worlds. For example, the Greeks' idea of Nature reflects this aspiration, insofar as Nature is conceived as the basis of unity and as a whole (Glacken 1996, 352), which is particularly evident in their conception of the sea. The sea represents the unification of the peculiar Hellenic geographical enclave, a highly fragmented and dispersed territory, containing areas with very different forms of life at its edges, the mountains and the desert, while intimately associating the land with the sea, the two natural elements that the Greeks feel as indissoluble. Indeed, in Hesiod's *Works and Days* or in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, the love of the land is palpating; however, the harsh conditions of the soil and other factors, such as the difficulties of land transport and the imbalance between their demographic situation and their economic structures, lead the Greeks to seek their needs outside their lands, across the sea. These causes pushed them to become maritime people so that their culture developed and flourished at the seashore rather than inland, and consequently, their colonisation was strictly coastal and port-based. One example is the *Odyssey*, whose central theme is the protagonist's desire to return to his homeland, the island of Ithaca, which is significantly surrounded by the sea. Moreover, the Greeks intuited its mediating capacity and its usefulness in harmonising the opposing spatial qualities of left and right, of above and below. This is what happens with the same Greek word that refers to the sea, *pontos*, and its etymologically related meaning of "bridge" (which is not of Hellenic origin) and which encompasses two meanings: the horizontal, as it links the sea and the land at the moment when the ships manage to reach safe harbour, and the vertical, as it connects life and death, the kingdom of light and that of the shadows of Hades, when the bodies of the dead at sea are thrown overboard and submerged in the dark seabed.

If Nature is the root of unity, divinity is another of its bases, for the essence and beauty of everything ultimately refer to the gods who dwell in it. Of course, religion could not be left out of the general unifying and ordering impulse, as seen in its profound unity, the decrease in the number of archaic gods, and its grouping into a family and a family council (Kitto 1979, 270). This process, which culminates in Plato's monotheism of the transcendent deity, goes from Homer and Hesiod to Xenophanes, as the former describes an atomised mythical world, the second produces a mythological synthesis following the laws of genealogy, i.e. of love (Lé-

vêque 1993, 46), and the third rejects the polytheism of Homer and Hesiod and says that “the One is God”, that is, he makes God into the One, into a tremendous transcendent principle of being.

The concept of the human was also marked by a basic sense of unity, which is perhaps explained by the fact that the Greek self was more outwardly oriented towards its connection with other beings and the world than inwardly. This is shown in the Platonic immortal soul, which is not the translation of the singular psychology of the human being but, instead, of the aspiration of the individual subject to merge into the whole, to reintegrate into the general cosmic order.

It is not surprising, then, that any cultural and social activity is marked by the yearning for unity. Greek philosophy, for example, makes unity one of its significant problems, and, as María Zambrano (1973, 76) writes, by never doubting reality - as we tend to do today - the Greek individual can ask himself about the principle of all things and about how the human being and the world are linked. And this, without forgetting that he tries to reach the inner reality, the essence, the being of beings and things, which connects with a sense of totality and a disdain for what is on the surface, transitory appearances, and multiplicity and variety. Linguistic uniformity distinguishes the Athenian polis from other polities in the ancient Near East. At the same time, the economy - as M. I. Finley suggests - did not become, as it is in the contemporary world, an independent or autonomous human activity but deeply bound up with political and religious factors and with life itself. Likewise, art, which the Greeks did not define with a specific term (Shiner 2004, 45 ff.), and poetry developed, as has been happily expressed, “on the edge of everyday life”, that is, deeply connected to the Hellenic pulse of life.

The whole of culture in Athens, in Pericles' time, was imbued with the desire for unity, for by being the synthesis of two opposing forces, the Ionian and the Dorian, it was able to achieve the harmonisation of Ionian freedom and individual shine with the Dorian sense of discipline and coherence (Kitto 1979, 122). The same happened with the Athenian democracy, which lived the ideal, made explicit by Solon and still in force in the time of Pericles, that each citizen should live together with the other in *eunomia*, harmony, control and good order, or, in other words, keeping political tensions in equilibrium. This took the form, during successive political reforms, of the incessant struggle to achieve social peace and equilibrium between the two traditionally opposing groups that make up the polis, the aristocracy and the *dēmos* -the people- and, above all, the creation of democracy, the political form that grants *isonomia* or equality to all citizens. Once these postulates have been conquered, the socio-

cultural order can unify the natural, divine and human worlds, perhaps the most important goal of Greek civilisation, and find the appropriate hinge for this in the *anthropos*, the *mikrokosmos* in which the universal order is reflected.

War, the greatest of social tensions, is also inspired by the desire for unity and order since, like peace, it has no conceptual autonomy but is seen as a way of being, as a practice, and a way of behaving that is consubstantial to the human community. Therefore, war can only be made with reference to cultural, religious, and institutional totality, and a citizen is, by definition, a soldier. Since citizenship is based on the land and the family, which are the guarantors of social cohesion and relations with gods and humans, the soldier-citizen possesses a social ethic consubstantial to both. This ethic was the product of social development insofar as the singular battles and individual courage of the archaic heroes were replaced, in the Classical period, by group manoeuvres led by a flute player (Gille 1985, 17). This group is the phalanx of the hoplites, the Hellenic battalion, which fights in close formation and which is based on the sense of close solidarity, on the advance at the identical pace of all its components and on the spirit of obedience to the same discipline, all related to the rise of the civic body contemporary to the movement of the polis (Garlan 2003, 86-9).

**The essential instability of human existence,
the continuity of primitive stages, the nostalgia for the
origins and diversity of the world: causes of unity**

Unity thus consubstantially characterises nature, gods and humans, but why does it do so? As I have already indicated, the Greeks are well aware that human life is marked by an essential instability, and on this, ultimately, rests the force towards order and unity. But it may also rest, as the psychologist Jean Piaget points out, on the fact that human thought acquires an understanding of the world through a series of evolutionary stages, but in such a way that the most primitive ones survive alongside the new ones and therefore do not disappear. The Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías (1997, 33) agrees when he argues that in ancient cultures, there is a canonical sequence formed by revelation, *mythos*, and reflection, *logos*, with the latter having its basis and foundation in the former, which is prior, and from which it cannot be separated.

It is also possible that unity is sustained by the ideology of the rural world based on agriculture and the peasant and aristocratic ideal of “the return to the seed” (Gallego 2003, 379), that is, of the nostalgia for the

origin, of the return to the good old days that imply a utopia and a renewal. What is certain is that this nostalgia for a periodic return to the mythical age of the origins is manifested, above all, in Hesiod's myth of the ages and remains valid throughout Greek history, as shown, in the *Odyssey*, by Alcinous' island of the Phaeacians or Ulysses' longed-for Ithaca and, in the *Iliad*, Troy, which represents the ideal of the lost nobility. These old utopias were replaced in Athens by the ideal of real life and the perfect polis, as imagined by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Thucydides and Plato, the latter in his works, the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Finally, in the Hellenistic period and in Pergamon under the Attalids, nostalgia for origins resurfaces as the city and its leaders become the guardians of classical Athenian culture, particularly its sculpture and architecture.

However, it is probably the awareness of the existence of a tenacious plural, polyphonic, diverse, dual, ambiguous, ambivalent, changing, transitory and apparent world that most decisively drives the Greek people to seek the ideal of totality (Kitto 1979, 82 ff.). Indeed, the Greeks see the natural, divine and human worlds as characterised by all these multiple aspects, and many examples illustrate this perception. Greek geography, for example, is more marked by antagonisms and landscape contrasts between continent and islands, sea and land, plain and mountain, marsh and dry land and cape and gulf, than by harmony or balance. The gods, on their part, are numerous and have different powers and functions, and even the Greek conception of the same god is plural, as is the case with the myths of Dionysus and Prometheus, of which different versions have survived. The Greek polis is also characterised by territorial, social and political plurality because the city and the village are part of it, because there are numerous tribes in it, because there are at least two different social groups in it, and because the status of citizenship and the roles it adopts are diverse.

Along with plurality, there is also a strong awareness of the polarisation of dualism, which leads the Greeks to classify all beings and things in a series of oppositions. This way of opposing is characteristic of a military-type society that conceives everything in terms of active and passive, of swords and wounds and *phalloi* (phalluses) and clefts. But it is also characteristic of a society with two historical traditions as contrasting as the Dorian and the Ionian, the former defined by the dynamic, the individualistic, and the centrifugal, and the latter by the static, the communal, and the centripetal. In this explanation of dualistic thinking, we cannot forget that, in Athenian society, there are two socially, culturally, and politically opposing groups: the *dēmos* and the aristocracy.

This polarisation is manifested in thought and action and, thus, in all manifestations of Hellenistic life. For example, Aristotle (*Politics* 1333a) considers that reason is divided into two, practical and theoretical; that life, taken as a whole, is divided into work and leisure and war and peace; that actions are necessary and valuable and others noble; and that the human being has a body and a soul and that the latter has two parts, rational and irrational, and two states for each of these parts, desire and intelligence. Time is also perceived, in a polar way, insofar as it is both quotidian and historical, which translates into four aspects (Gentili 1996):

1st) In the sense of diversity and the awareness of continuity, the two fundamental components of historical thought are already present in Homer and Hesiod.

2nd) In the assimilation, by culture, of the existence of two great epochs of the human race: that of the heroes or demigods and that of humans.

3rd) In the double perception of time: the mythical dimension of cyclical time and the profane-linear one of an irreversible time that meets death. Concretely, individual life is distinguished from other things because it moves in a straight line and cuts off the circular movement of biological life. Mortality, therefore, consists precisely of following a straight line in a universe in which everything that moves does so in cyclical order (Arendt 2005, 44).

4th) In the close correlation in the human experience of a double experience: the everyday (*hypar*) and the oneiric (*onar*).

All this is reflected in the Hellenic people's conception of myth, which is considered both fiction and truth, as it presents an indissoluble interweaving of history and imagination. Moreover, the distinctive feature of myth lies above all in its function in social life, which is paradigmatic and exemplary. The Greeks were well aware of this relationship, as they were of the link between myth and reality or myth and the world.

Polarisation was accompanied by a profound fear of the Other that transformed every corner of society and culture into a space of otherness that served as a mirror in which citizens could look at and reflect on the city, its democratic institutions and its affairs, but at the cost of constructing the different, the opposite and the hostile and, consequently, of seeing enemies everywhere. This is what happens with Dionysus himself who, despite the spread throughout Greece and the deep and intense assimilation of his rites and cults, will never cease to be seen as a foreign god. This is also the case with the different peoples who are considered barbarians, or with women, to whom the irrational, emotional and terrifying aspects are attributed and who will never attain the status of citizens. It is also

what takes place in the decorative programme of the *Parthenon*, which is the voice of the polis, where the rejection of the other takes place in a particular way, since it presents a whole series of variants of the conflict between antagonistic groups, the Lapiths and the Centaurs, the Greeks and the Amazons and the gods and the giants, to express, with them, the exercises of self-definition: of the human against the beast, of the Greek against the non-Greek and of the civilised against the savage.

This last contrast between the civilised and the savage is associated with what is perhaps the ultimate polarisation, that between life and death, which, for me, constitutes the basic root on which the search for unity is based. Amidst so much contingency, transience and appearance, amidst so much death, what, in the end, the Greeks deeply longed for was to *be*, that is, to live. However, living, in itself, is a process, a continuous change, and this in Greece is determined by permanence, by a pattern driven by the dialectical interrelation between necessity and freedom. Both reside in the human being himself, but it is freedom which presupposes the perfection of being and which, conditioned by the obstacles that necessity imposes on it, also reveals its insufficiency. That is why, as soon as the Greek seemed to find unity in life, unity, like unity, slipped through his fingers, for his free spirit impelled him to question the unity he had achieved and, later, to break it down, that is to say, to transform it into diversity, which in turn led him back to the demand for unity.

From the *ideal* of unity to the *utopian dream* of unity

I have just pointed out that the struggle against death is perhaps the most profound force that draws the Greek people towards unity, to which they return time and again. However, the weight of historical experience also gradually modulates the intensity of this struggle and alters the concept of unity. In the beginning, from the first human settlements to the appearance of agriculture, cities, social hierarchy and civilisation, there was a universal state characterised by the intimacy between the human being and the world, immediately and immanently linked to each other in such a way that the human being could feel in the world, in the beautiful expression of George Bataille (1991, 21), “like a drop of water in water”. After this first stage, with the beginning of History, perhaps even before, the fracture between the human being and the world arose, the loss of the primordial unity and the nostalgia for it. In fact, the Archaic period is, in both political-social and religious history, a time of lack of equilibrium in which opposing and centrifugal tendencies struggle and, at the end of it, manage