

"THE ANCIENT GREEKS' AWARENESS OF THEIR UNCONSCIOUS"¹

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This paper represents some psychoanalytic efforts to deepen our understanding of the miracle of the Greek classic time. It seems unquestioned that the Greeks had an intuitive awareness of their unconscious, and their literature is filled with deep psychoanalytic insights.

Greek society emphasized truth, beauty, democracy and individualism. An effort was made to apply rational thinking to all aspects of the universe and to life itself. As Socrates said, "A life unanalyzed is not worth living."

The Greeks saw their Gods as beautiful youths, which was related to the narcissism of the Greek people. Narcissism in this context is a self-admiration developing out of a guilt-free oedipal solution. The Greeks lived after the matriarchy of past ages and the patriarchal single ruler system of the Egyptians. The Greeks had no Pharaoh, no single God, and no organized priesthood. Their Gods were human, in contrast to the partially animal Gods of the past. The Greeks were without dogma, and their heroes were good and perfect, not their Gods. Poets and philosophers were looked up to as the knowledgeable ones in Greek society.

In the matriarchy preceding the Greeks, the queen's

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royal consort was ritually killed and the queen was free to choose her annually changing consorts. This sacrificial ritual persisted in the mythology of the Greeks, in what might be called their "generic" unconscious. The Oedipus story can be seen as a cautionary tale to demonstrate what could happen if a return to the patriarchy occurred. Analytically speaking, the Greek person lived guilt-free after the liberation from mother and father.

One aspect of Greek society is their failure to mechanize human functions when they had the technical ability to do so. It is as though the Greeks admired their own bodies and minds too much to allow them to be replaced by machines. The mottoes at the oracle of Delphi are particularly descriptive of Greek civilization: "Know yourself" and "Nothing in excess."

The Greeks succeeded in interweaving unconscious elements into their everyday life, and this freedom contributed greatly to the Greek miracle on which so much of our western culture is based. It may be that our present civilization must develop more of this ability in order to persevere through the critical crossroads at which we stand at the present time.

The paper was discussed by George Fruntes, M. D., who pointed out that the main value of the Greeks is the way in which they took unconscious themes, developed them, and correlated them with themes of everyday living.

Plato felt that learning was primarily a process

of recalling internal information, similar to the psycho-analytic emphasis on internal knowledge. In some ways, Aristotle can be seen as having contributed to the Libido theory with his concept of higher orders of organization which contain lower levels of organization within them. The idea of over-determinism can be seen in Aristotle's principle of four causes.

The organization of Greek society in city-states, no one of which was dominant, is an important factor in the freedom of the Greeks. There was competition between different philosophies and a free expression of all of them.

The Oedipal story can be interpreted as a rebellion within a patriarchal family, and the marriage to the mother as only one symbol of the son's victory in the conflict between father and son. It is worth noting that the conflict between father and son occurs in all three plays of the Oedipus trilogy. The Oedipus myth can be seen as a cautionary tale against the patriarchy as well as the matriarchy.

Dr. S. L. Foner pointed out that it should be remembered that we see Greece through the eyes of the Renaissance, which in turn saw Greece through the eyes of the Romans.

Dr. Franz Alexander pointed out that ideological changes cannot be explained strictly from the standpoint of internal psychological changes. It may well be that Greek narcissism was the result of Greek history and civilization,

rather than the cause of it, and could simply be called self-confidence, following the development of a rational approach to the understanding of natural phenomena and internal psychology.

The evolution of social and economic institutions may be very important in cultural changes. Even a genius remains unheard in the wrong social climate.

Dr. Frederick Hacher related Dr. Grotjahn's concept of the ritual of yesterday becoming the myth of today to his previously described paper about myth and reality. This pattern is not specific for the Greeks but for myths in general.

It may be that Socrates' execution was necessitated by his questioning of established social institutions, which raises the question of how much analyzing is compatible with naive happiness.

In closing, Dr. Grotjahn emphasized how he hopes, in the future, to deal with the integration of symbolic and intellectual thinking, which may be a necessary step towards further development of our civilization.

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