

Anthony A. Long

Greek Models of Mind



Born 1937 in Manchester. BA in Classics, University College London 1960; PhD 1964. Began university teaching at Otago, New Zealand, in 1961. Held various positions in British universities 1964-1983. Moved to University of California at Berkeley 1983, where he is now Irving Stone Professor of Literature in the Department of Classics. His Books include *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (1968); *Problems in Stoicism* (1971); *Hellenistic Philosophy* (1974; 2nd ed. 1986); with David Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols, 1987); co-editor with John Dillon, *The Question of Eclecticism* (1988). Most recently, in collaboration with Guido Bastianini, he has edited the papyrus text of the Stoic philosopher, Hierocles (1992). —Address: Dept. of Classics, University of California, Berkeley, Ca 94720, USA.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg with a plan to work on a book entitled *Greek Models of Mind*. My chief task, as I saw it, was to find an idiom for presenting the material that would be both historically responsible and at the same time relevant to readers with interests outside Classics. In specialized articles I had already studied a number of the psychological theories advanced by Greek philosophers. This book, however, was to be a fresh start — an attempt to interpret Greek psychology in ways that would make use of interdisciplinary research on concepts of the self.

Before Greek philosophy was Greek poetry, and I was convinced that the poets too incorporated models of mind in their verse. These differ from those of the philosophers in being implicit rather than theoretical. However, Homer and the Greek tragedians have a rich language for describing mental events. They are also adept at showing what it is like to be a self or person, especially in situations where an individual is faced with critical decisions, assessment of motivations and conflict of interests. The poets' implicit psychology can be construed as a model of mind, comparable in its explanatory scope to the explicit theories of the Greek philosophers. One of the aims of my project was to make such a comparison possible.

Another of my tasks was to develop analytical categories that would be appropriate for discussing the material. The Greek philosophers' distinc-

tion between body and *psyche* is an ancestor of the modern distinction between body and mind. But *psyche* is not strictly commensurable with mind, as mind has been generally construed in post-Cartesian philosophy. On the other hand, no interpretation of the ancient material is possible without testing it against our own conceptual scheme. Recent work on concepts of the self convinced me that it should be possible to analyse the Greek texts by means of categories which have cross-cultural application, thus facilitating a dialogue between ancient and modern.

An additional aim of the project was to resist the influential book by Bruno Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*. Snell argues that the Greek poets, especially Homer, are conceptually primitive because they lack the concept of a unitary mind as the centre of agency. I find Snell's overtly Hegelian approach to intellectual history inappropriate, especially for assessing the Greek poets' implicit psychology. Their construal of the self is interesting precisely because it is not premised upon a dualistic distinction between body and mind. The troubled history of that distinction should be a reason for asking what the poets' accounts of mental life can explain, and not what they lack. Unlike Snell, who traces a development from the supposedly naive to the supposedly sophisticated, I assume that Greek authors from Homer onward were able to conceptualize mental phenomena in ways that are adequate to their purposes. Mind, as I construe, is not an entity amenable to being "discovered" such as the nervous-system. It is, rather, a generic term for the language and thought-patterns that shape the consciousness and behaviour of human agents. Hence my use of the term "models", which seeks to register the fact that the mind is something that can be conceptualized in many different ways.

Before I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg, this book was little more than an idea. It has now acquired the substance of three essays — on Plato, Sophocles, and Homer respectively. Each of these went through many drafts, as I struggled to discover what I wanted to say. I often wished I had chosen a simpler project, one where the guidelines were clearer or safely confined to a single discipline. Yet, in retrospect, I can say that the struggle was worthwhile. It forced me to think more creatively, or at least more intensely, than I had ever done before. What is particularly distinctive, I think, about each essay is its methodology. In all three cases I approach the material by asking how well it responds to such notions as person, personality, social self, intentionality, consistency through time, autonomous agency. I use modern work in philosophy, anthropology and literary theory as heuristic devices which can help to show what is familiar to us in Greek models of mind and what is alien. I also show how an author's perspective (e.g. Homer's interest in the heroic action of individuals, or

Plato's concern to prove that reason should control the passions) influences his particular psychological model.

The interdisciplinary ethos of the Wissenschaftskolleg was ideal for my enterprise. It helped me not only by enlarging my vision, but also by the way it challenged me to think about the Greeks in ways that could be made relevant to anyone concerned with basic questions about human identity and cultural differences. Because many of the fellows of the 1991/92 year shared those interests, I organized a discussion group around the theme of "human identity". This proved to be a most stimulating forum, which influenced my own work very directly. As a result of it, I wrote a paper entitled "Questions of Identity: Sophocles' Ajax", which I delivered in German as a lecture at the *Freie Universität*. Thanks to the "Identity Group" (whose activities are described elsewhere in this volume), I found myself going well beyond the Greeks in my thinking about concepts of mind and self. This unplanned extension of my work was one of the most fruitful aspects of my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg.

For the first six months of my stay I worked on *Greek Models of Mind*. During this period I never left Berlin for a day. The fellowship of the Kolleg and the culture of Berlin were a constant delight. I participated in numerous political discussions, and valued the opportunity of being in this part of Europe at a period of radical change. At times I felt as if I were back at high-school, improving my German, learning a great deal about another culture, rethinking numerous assumptions relevant both to my work and to daily life.

Those happy experiences continued during the summer, but my last four months were also interspersed with travel and lecturing elsewhere. I presented my new work on Plato in a lecture at the University of Rethymnon in Crete. My study of Homer was given its first public airing as a seminar at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C. Other universities invited me to give lectures on various aspects of Hellenistic philosophy, the main field of my research prior to Berlin. At the Humboldt University, and at Munich and Erlangen I read a paper entitled "Hellenistische Ethik als gesellschaftliche Macht". At the University of Krakov I lectured on "Cicero's Plato and Aristotle". For symposia in San Marino and London, I wrote two new papers, one on Stoic semiotics, and the other on the Stoic concept of self-perception. At the time of typing this report I am preparing a third paper, on Cicero's *De officiis*, for the August meeting of the Symposium Hellenisticum in Cambridge.

Work on these papers took up most of my time from May to July. Although I regret the hiatus this caused to *Greek Model of Mind*, the capital I have built up in Berlin will be a precious resource when I get back to the book on my return to Berkeley. For some years I had been attempting

to give myself an identity other than Hellenistic philosopher, but the patterns of academic life make it difficult to discard a familiar role and try out something new. That is what the Wissenschaftskolleg made possible. I benefited greatly from the weekly colloquia, and still more from regular discussion with such colleagues as Hinderk Emrich, Menachem Fisch, and Michael Lackner. Fisch and Lackner have both invited me to collaborate on projects that will constitute a development of ideas we began to explore together here. I also benefited from the expertise of the three fellows in linguistics, Manfred Bierwisch, Dieter Wunderlich and Paul Kiparsky. If I were to register all my gratitude, I would find myself naming just about every fellow and every member of the staff. It was a stroke of genius, on the part of the administrators of the Kolleg, to combine academics with creative writers and artists. The community this policy generated in my year was magnificent. For intellectual stimulus, fullness of life and friendship I can liken it to nothing I have experienced elsewhere.