ORACULAR CONSULTATION, FATE, AND THE CONCEPT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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'... a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background'[1]

'Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.'[2]

Introduction

Anthropologists have observed that in the modern West, 'the "self" is conceived of as more autonomous from other people and outside influences… than in other times and places.'[3] The quotation from Clifford Geertz's work, set at the beginning of this chapter, neatly summarises a number of characteristics of that understanding of the autonomous self, and the perception of each individual as being cognitively integrated and organised. As Geertz goes on to observe, 'however incorrigible it may seem to us, [this is] a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures'.[4]

This paper sets out to reflect on the usefulness, or otherwise, of that 'peculiar idea' in the context of the remit of this conference – the exploration of 'religious individualisation within the medium of religion'.[5] Specifically, it will examine the significance of this conception of the self, among others, for our understanding of the ritual practice of oracular consultation in ancient Greece, focusing primarily on the evidence of the question tablets from the sanctuary at Dodona, augmented by related literary material for oracular consultation. As I have argued elsewhere, the material from Dodona offers insights into the social construction of risk in ancient Greek culture.[6]

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1   GEERTZ 1983, 59.
2   BUTLER 2003, 13.
3   STRAUSS/QUINN 1997, 28.
4   GEERTZ 1983, 59.
5   The conference flyer describes how the Erfurt working group examines the 'presence and extent of individual scope for religious action, the resulting embodiment of religious traditions and religious reflections on individuality prior to and external to occidental modernity.'
6   EIDINOW 2007.

This paper builds on that work to consider how those who consulted the Oracle conceptualised themselves as individuals. It argues, first, that it is important to be aware of the implicit model that we bring to this exploration, and then asks whether and how other models of the self, both modern and ancient, may offer useful challenges or nuances.

Among these alternatives are relational models of the self, and this paper suggests that for an ancient Greek, a relational model of the self included a sense of interdependence not only with other mortals, but also with supernatural forces. This can be seen most clearly, and perhaps most puzzlingly, in the ancient Greek conception of an individual's fate, luck and fortune, in which mortal and divine were inextricably linked. This, in turn, provides a crucial aspect of the conceptual context of oracular consultation – and for understanding the sense of self that the evidence for this activity suggests.

The paper begins with a very brief overview of some of the ways in which conceptions of the self have developed in modern Western thought – and then introduces some alternatives to those conceptions, ancient and modern.

1. Constructions of the Individual

1.1 Modern Constructions: Risk and Reflexivity

There is, of course, a multiplicity of theories about the self in modern sociological theory, and it is impossible to cover them all here: my intention is to stimulate debate and further work, rather than to be comprehensive. What follows is a necessarily partial sketch of a small selection of theorists that I hope will help to make explicit some of our current understandings of the nature of the self, and thus illustrate the argument of this paper most clearly.

One of the most influential modern theories of the self has emerged from the work of Antony Giddens, whose work on the individual in a context of risk is par-ticularly relevant to the considerations of this paper. Giddens himself picks out the key elements of the self by analysing a work of self-help: *Self-Therapy: a guide to becoming your own therapist* by Janette Rainwater.[7] There he finds evidence for the conception of the self as a self-making project – dominated by the day-to-day plethora of choices that confront each person in the 'post-traditional social universe'.[8]

Although in some ways this reinforces the ideas expressed in Geertz's quotation above, it adds important nuances. Indeed, far from saying that the self is conceived of as more distant from outside influences, Giddens focuses on the re-lationship between the self and social structure: the integrated self emerges as a conscious response to the events and social forces with which people must constantly interact. Individuals construct a coherent self-identity, engaged in a

7   RAINWATER 1989; analysed in GIDDENS, 1991, ch. 3.
8   GIDDENS 1991, 81.

constant process of monitoring and negotiating lifestyle choices, and this 'reflexive project of the self' is key to Giddens's analysis.[9] This dynamic, ongoing process emerges from our modern context, where the breakdown of tradition results in a 'pluralisation of contexts of actions and the diversity of "authorities"'.[10] Self-identity is not to be found in our body or our traits, our behaviour or the reactions of others.[11] Rather it is '*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*': identity is located in 'the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going.*'[12]

This process of creating the self is one that encompasses a comprehensive chronology. It involves not only our particular actions in the present, but also our interpretation of past and future events. The idea of strategic life-planning becomes particularly important – and individuals must learn to 'colonise the future', that is, to exercise control over what is to come. They do this in a world that is leaving behind traditional ways of thought and action, and comprises instead a realm of (constantly) new possibilities – and new fears. As a result, people develop an increasing awareness of risks in every aspect of their lives – from local to global, from individual to institutional'.[13] As they seek opportunities for themselves, as they strive to achieve 'self-actualisation', they must learn to identify and assess these risks.[14]

Unsurprisingly, this emerging concept of the self, and the need for self-actualisation and self-fulfilment in a changing context also shapes the nature of relationships, which transform intimacy: 'the formation of personal and erotic ties' are 'guided by the *mutuality of self-disclosure.*'[15] Giddens draws attention to what

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9   GIDDENS 1991, 5.
10   GIDDENS 1991, 5&7.
11   GIDDENS 1991, 53–54.
12   GIDDENS 1991, 53, 54; italics in original.
13   GIDDENS 1991, 85, and see p. 111 for a useful concise description of the colonization of the future.
14   BECK 1994a. Many of the ideas that GIDDENS proposes are close to the 'individualisation theory' of Ulrich Beck, whose work also places emphasis on risk. He argues (14) that 'Individualisation is a compulsion… for the manufacture, self-design and self-staging of not just one's own biography but also its commitments and networks as preferences and life phases change, but, of course, under the overall conditions and models of the welfare state, such as the educational system (acquiring certificates) the labour market, labour and social law, the housing market and so on.' All of these choices bring risks–but they also encourage (20) 'an emigration to new niches of activity and identity'. However, in a number of ways Beck's approach to modernity and its risks is importantly different from that of Giddens: Beck's 'reflexivity' is the 'autonomous, undesired and unseen, transition from industrial to risk society', and his risk society is one in which 'the threats produced so far on the path of industrial society begin to predominate' (see BECK 1994a, 6). Unlike Giddens, he argues that 'it is not knowledge, but rather non-knowledge which is the medium of "reflexive" modernization' (Beck 1994b, 175) and opens up the possibility that it may not result in 'new and better possibilities for action' (ibid., 177) but rather unconscious self-endangerment, and even self-dissolution. See also BRYANT/JARY 2001, 3–42, esp. 28.
15   GIDDENS 1990, 124.

he calls the 'pure relationship', which focuses on intimacy, achieved through the development of mutual trust that cannot be taken for granted, must be worked at, needs to be won.[16] Its acquisition turns on communication, equal emotional give and take, and the notion of 'confluent love', that is, a love that is contingent on reciprocal sexual pleasure, in a society in which most people have 'the chance to become sexually accomplished.'[17] This kind of relationship is sought only for what it brings those involved in it. Thus reflexive questioning lies at its core: those involved are looking for 'the rewards the relationship delivers' that will aid the reflexive project of the self.[18]

This notion of the coherent self has been criticised for its emphasis on individual self-mastery, and in particular for overlooking the part played by what we might call more personal aspects of the individual: for example, daily interactions with others, memory of past experiences, the sub-conscious shaping of our psyche.[19] The conception of self that Giddens depicts is, for some, over-rationalized and oversocialized.[20] For example, the notion that intimate relationships are about self-actualisation and explicit communication has been criticised for ignoring the 'sweaty, heaving and breathless bodies, animalistic urges and sexual fluids which might colonize the mind and interfere, however temporarily, with the reflexive and democratic processes of talk work central to "confluent love"'.[21]

Other attempts to analyse or describe the modern Western conception of the self draw attention to aspects not included in Giddens's approach. For example, some theorists focus on the multiplicity of identities that, they argue, we create in different situations. Perhaps most famously, Erving Goffman depicted the self-as-character, or rather characters, 'staged' in different social situations.[22] Goffman's theory alludes to a central self, behind the multiple identities, who makes the particular choices about self-presentation and who is, crucially, aware of the risks involved in these social performances: 'given to having fantasies and dreams, some that pleasurably unfold a triumphant performance, others full of anxiety and dread that nervously deal with vital discreditings in a public front region'[23] The concept of the self here is famously puzzling, with some arguing that the self is reduced simply to 'role-playing performances' and others that it either portrays the individual's struggle against the forces of society, or, more recently, evokes the postmodern state.[24] However, what Goffman's approach does emphasise is a

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16   GIDDENS 1991, 97.
17   GIDDENS 1992, 61 and 63.
18   GIDDENS 1991, 91.
19   See ELLIOTT 2008, 50–52; CRAIB 2011, 124–125.
20   SHILLING/MELLOR 2001, 130–146, formulation from 137, drawing on CRAIB 1992.
21   SHILLING/MELLOR 2001, 138.
22   GOFFMAN 1959, 252–255.
23   GOFFMAN 1959, 253.
24   Role-playing: e.g., MACINTYRE 1969. For discussion of views of Goffman, see BRANAMAN 2001, 100–101.

crucial interdependence between individuals, that is, between the self and those before whom it performs.[25]

A similar focus is found in Harrison White's work, which also draws attention to the ways in which different social interactions forge individuals, which he describes as 'bundles of identities', constantly created as we move between contexts and relations.[26] He distinguishes between 'identity', which he defines as 'any source of action, any entity to which observers can attribute meaning not explicable from biophysical regularities' and 'our everyday notion of the self, which takes for granted consciousness and integration, and presupposes personality'.[27] Whereas Goffman emphasises the ways in which role-players support each other in playing their particular role and maintaining their particular identity, White's analysis turns on the struggle for control-both between people and within people – as we move between different social settings.[28] He describes four particular senses or dynamics of identity, which describe the different ways in which an individual relates to himself and others, and he argues that it is the role of narrative to weave these different senses of identity together.[29] Both Goffman and White explore notions of interdependence in their approaches to the development and presentation of the self. This aspect is even more explicit in some approaches – and we turn to those next.

1. 2 Modern Constructions: Dividuality and Dispossession

A very different conception of the self, which contrasts markedly with the more bounded ideas prevalent in modern Western societies can be found, for example, in societies in the Pacific Islands.[30] Marilyn Strathern, drawing on her fieldwork in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, uses the idea of the 'dividual' rather than the 'individual' to describe the self-conception of Melanesians. She argues that the people she studied conceive of both their body and their self as comprising a 'microcosm of relations'.[31] Turning to Micronesia, Catherine Lutz has argued somewhat similarly for the idea that Ifaluk islanders conceive of themselves 'only secondarily, and in a limited way' as autonomous individuals.[32] This seems to provide a strong contrast with the Western ideology of personhood – or at least with the aspects that receive most emphasis in Western culture. As others have

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25 See discussion SRINIVASAN 1990, 141–162.
26 WHITE 2008, 2.
27 WHITE 2008, 2–3.
28 GOFFMAN 1959, 77 and WHITE 2008, 2–3.
29 WHITE 2008, 10.
30 LINDSTROM 1999, 195–207.
31 STRATHERN 1988, 131. See LIPUMA 1998, on 58–59 he provides a clear set of contrasting characteristics of 'Western and Melanesian Personhood' – the contrast is between 'the West's own self-understanding, which exists both ideologically and normatively…and an account of the foregrounded elements of peronhood in traditional, nonencompassed Melanesia'.
32 LUTZ 1988, 81.

argued, constructing a strong opposition between cultures overlooks the ways in which both individual and dividual characteristics of personhood exist and emerge in different cultures, so Edward LiPuma has suggested: 'It would seem rather that *persons emerge precisely from that tension between dividual and individual aspects/relations.*'[33] The Western person is also, in reality, interdependent, although these characteristics may not be recognised or valued.[34] As the quotation at the beginning of the chapter illustrates, Judith Butler has explored the notion of the dividuated self in her examination of 'our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows'.[35] Our current understanding of the bounded conception of self may be essential to ensure our legal status, but is insufficient if we want to describe 'what we are about'.[36] She argues instead that we are 'constituted by our relations' – and beyond this, that, in turn, our relationality with others creates a primary vulnerability, an exposure to others, which places us at risk of being 'dispossessed'.[37] She roots this vulnerability in our physical selves, arguing that it develops from 'bodily life' – not only the more obvious potential dangers of gaze, touch and violence that a body creates, but ways in which the body is forged in the 'crucible of social life'.[38] This process of formation means that the self includes 'the enigmatic traces of others', creating a foreignness that means an individual is never fully in control or even in full knowledge of her self.

Butler's work is a manifesto on the topic, arguing that recognizing this relational conception of self, arising from and in the practice of mourning, may lead to an ethics of nonviolence, and a new humanized approach to community and international relations, and politics. For the purposes of this paper, her argument turns our attention to a number of important themes about the nature and role of conceptions of the self, including their political and ethical significance. If we conceive of the individual as inherently interconnected with others, then this evokes an individual whose own constitution creates inescapable affiliations and vulnerabilities, because of the nature of the physical and social self.

In this section I have tried to give a very brief overview of different conceptions of the self, drawing attention to the possibility of a conception that emphasises relationality and interdependence. In what follows, I will raise the possibility that an ancient Greek conception of the self as interdependent may be traced in the evidence for the behaviour of individuals generally in episodes of deliberation and decision making, and specifically in their approach to, and expectations of, oracular sanctuaries.

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33   LiPuma 1998, 56–61, and quotation 57 (his italics).
34   LiPuma 1998, 60–61.
35   Butler 2003, 9.
36   Butler 2003, 15.
37   Butler 2003, 14.
38   Butler 2003, 15.

1.3 Ancient Constructions: Divided Deliberations

When we turn to evidence for the representation of the individual in ancient Greek literature, we find that the idea of the dividuated self appears explicitly with regard to processes of deliberation, and also implicitly with regard to beliefs about fate.

First, the explicit: in descriptions of processes of individual deliberation we see not so much a relational self, at least at first sight, but rather a complex 'inner' self. Of the multitude of words used to describe the organs responsible for/the location of psychological processes, the *thymos* in particular appears to participate, almost as a separate entity, in the deliberations of an individual. In the Homeric epics it appears involved before, during and after processes of deliberation. For example, in the *Odyssey,* Athena, in disguise, debates with Telemachus about the future of Odysseus' house, and says of Penelope (1.275–1.276) 'if her thymos urges her to be married, let her return to the great hall of her mighty father'; Alcinous (8.27) begins a speech to the Phaeacians saying 'what his *thymos* bids'; in the cave of the Cyclops Odysseus' initial impulse to escape is checked by *heteros thymos* (9.302) – we might translate this as 'a second thought'.[39] We often find an individual debating *kata thymon*, and, when this process is elaborated, it appears to mean a debate *with* one's *thymos*: for example, we find Odysseus, isolated in battle, speaking to his proud *thymos* about what is to become of him (*Iliad* 11.403), and at the end of his considerations, asking why his *thymos* is arguing with him in this way (*Iliad* 11.407); the process is described (l.411) as him debating *kata phrena kai kata thymon*. The same sequence is used to describe a number of deliberations, usually in the heat of battle.[40] This is not to argue that Homeric man was fragmented, but to observe how, in situations that involve making a decision, we see the complexity of the deliberative process depicted by means of these descriptions of the *thymos*, and its role in presenting convincing arguments and/or needing to be persuaded.[41]

In his analysis of the nature of the soul, Jan Bremmer suggests that the *thymos* may indicate the notion of an ancient Greek conception of the 'ego soul', that is, an aspect or version of the soul that refers to individual living consciousness – their inner life.[42] It may be that this divided inner self has its roots in an

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39 In contrast, in the underworld (*Od*. 11. 105) Tiresias instructs him to restrain his *thymos* and that of his companions.

40 Menelaos' deliberations (*Iliad* 17.90, 97, 17.107); Agenor (*Iliad* 21.552, 562, without the final summary); Hector (*Iliad* 22.98, 22.122, again the summary of his thought process does not include mention of his *thymos*); and finally Achilles (*Iliad* 22.385).

41 See in particular Williams 1993, ch.2 especially his arguments against Bruno Snell (1975) and the idea that Homeric man lacked a complete conception of the self.

42 Bremmer 1983. He draws the term 'ego soul' from the work of Ernst Arbman on Vedic soul belief in India. Arbman identified body souls (which give the body life and consciousness) and free souls ('an unencumbered soul representing the individual personality'). The ego soul is a subdivision of the body soul, along with the life soul (usually identified with the breath) it represents an individual's inner life; for this description, quotation and more detail, see

external relationality: Christopher Gill notes the depiction in archaic and classical Greek thought of the inner person as divided – and he has explored how this fits into a larger conception of the person, which combines an objective psychological standpoint with a participant and objectivist ethical standpoint.[43] Instead of our more modern conception of the person, which emphasises first-personal experience or subjective criteria as offering a privileged locus of knowledge or autonomous judgment, the 'objective-participant' conception highlights the idea of participation in relationships as 'central to one's selfhood or personality', and emphasises a third-personal point of view.[44]

Gill has set out this approach in two key volumes: in the first, he shows how the objective-participant model can be illustrated with examples from Homeric epic and Attic tragedy, as well as fourth-century philosophical writing; the second follows the development of conceptions of selfhood and personality into Hellenistic philosophical thought. In both volumes, we see the essential role played by oral dialogue in Greek culture, as Gill himself emphasises.[45] Thus, in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy and philosophical writing of the fourth century we find characters working out what is right, what they should do, or what is knowledge, using shared enquiry and debate.'[46] The fact that sometimes these characters are alone, and experiencing an internal debate between different parts of their *psyche*, shows that the process of deliberation and decision-making could be depicted as occurring as a dialogue or even a discussion – even when the process took place for a lone individual.

Turning to more implicit expressions of personhood, we find an essential interconnection, even integration, between mortal and supernatural is a key part of the ancient Greek 'folk model' of fate, luck and fortune.[47] Just as an individual's mind and body were perceived as open to being shaped by supernatural forces, in the same way, their life course was understood as being a result of interwoven mortal and supernatural elements. We see this in the way in which fate and character are seemingly identified across a range of sources: implicitly, for example, in Herodotus's account of the behaviour and bad ending of Polykrates – whose character drives him on towards his fated end;[48] to Thucydides' descriptions, in his own voice and those of the fighting men he gives voice to, of

BREMMER 1983, 9.

43 GILL 2006, 341.
44 GILL 2006, 340, and GILL 1996. A full overview of the characteristics of these two conceptions is provided in the latter volume, 11. In particular, he examines (405) how modern ideas of personhood have been fundamentally shaped by the Cartesian conception of the self as a fundamentally integrated subject – whether one takes that narrowly, as indicating a consciousness of oneself, or more broadly, as informing one's larger understanding of, and ethical judgment about, the world.
45 GILL 1996, 16 and GILL 2006, 341.
46 GILL 2006, 403.
47 EIDINOW 2011.
48 Herodotus 3.142.3, with Eidinow 2011, 93–116.

the nature of *tyche*;[49] to the debate between Demosthenes and Aeschines about the nature of a single man's *tyche* and the threat it may pose to the city.[50] In these examples we see how one's fate was perceived as being both in one's own hands, and yet, at the same time, to be granted by supernatural powers. For the ancient Greeks, the problem of individual free will did not arise because each individual's choices about how to act were fundamentally inseparable from supernatural influence: as Heraclitus observes 'a man's character is his *daimon*'.[51]

There is other evidence, too, that, at the divine level, there was further deliberation to be made. As numerous examples suggest, the supernatural hierarchy of fate was far from straightforward. We see this in the Homeric epics, in which the relationship between Zeus, the others gods, and Moira, is never conclusively delineated.[52] Herodotus's *Histories* provides examples that are explicitly related to oracular consultation. In Croesus' discussion with Apollo, the god explains both how Croesus' life-course was fixed before his birth, and how limited was his opportunity for intercession (with the Fates).[53] In the second oracle given to the Athenians as they consult about the Persian invasion, the text appears to suggest that Athene had attempted to intercede (with Zeus) on their behalf.[54] This literary conception of the self-in-deliberation, and the way in which it involved the divine and other supernatural forces, may in turn shed light on the process of oracular consultation.

2. Constructions of Oracular Consultation

2.1 Contests and Consensus

In a recent volume exploring ancient divination, Walter Burkert has described the process of oracular consultation as evolving into 'a contest of intelligence' between Oracle and consultant(s). As the ambiguity of oracular responses increased, so the debates about their meaning became more ingenious.[55] This provides a neat example of the way in which modern analysis of the role of Oracles in the ancient world has tended to depend, implicitly, on the ideological model of individual personhood found in modern Western culture. Based on that set of conceptions of the individual, modern academic approaches tend to view Oracle consultation as part of a project of self-realisation in which information is integrated into the decision-making processes of a fundamentally integrated and

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49   For example Thucydides 6.17.1. Where Thucydides describes the fortunate character of Nicias'; for more examples, see discussion Eidinow 2011, 126 ff.
50   Aeschines (*Against Ctesiphon*) 3.157; Demosthenes (*On the Crown)* 18.252–75, with Eidinow 2011, 143 ff.
51   Heraclitus DK 22 B 119.
52   See discussion Eidinow 2011, 32–35.
53   Herodotus 1.191.2.
54   Herodotus 7.141.3.
55   Burkert 2005, 29–49; the quotation is from p. 39.

autonomous individual. In Gill's terms, we may describe this as being based on a subjective-individualist model of the self. In this conception, the individual and Oracle are set in opposition to each other: the Oracle has the information needed, which must be extracted and then processed by the person.[56]

Burkert gives as the best-known case of the evolving contest: he describes the oracle from Delphi to the Athenians concerning the 'wooden walls' to which I have already alluded. This particular example famously includes a debate about the meaning of an oracle. Burkert quotes Robert Parker 'Apollo referred the problem back to [the Athenians]' and the problem becomes the linguistic puzzle set by Apollo, 'no longer a problem of tactics or politics, but of philology'.[57] At first sight, this seems to emphasise a dialogic approach to oracular consultation, deliberation and decision-making. But in fact modern scholars have seen this episode in a very different light, as emphasising the role of the individual: notably, the Athenians as a group are unable to resolve the oracle; into the *aporia* steps Themistocles, who is shown 'correctly interpreting the oracle, and confounding the chresmologues'.[58] Indeed, this episode has been compared to the traditional competitions between diviners (e.g., Onomacritus and Lasus, or Trygaeus and Hierocles). However, the details of Herodotus's account suggest that this is too stark a portrayal.[59] As Evans has pointed out, scholars seldom draw attention to the limits of Themistocles' correct interpretation: although he provides the insight

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56   I have also argued with this model in mind, describing the oracle questions at Dodona as, to a certain extent, offering evidence for individuals seeking to further their personal goals – or at least to control the environment in which they are pursuing them, and the factors that might inhibit their achievement. My argument here does not deny that this is part of what an oracular consultation concerns, but seeks to explore the potential for nuancing our conception of the process taking place, the roles of those involved, and the model of personhood involved.

57   BURKERT 2005, 29–50, at p. 39, citing PARKER 2000, 80.

58   As BOWDEN 2005, 107 describes the scene.

59   As DILLERY 2005, who finds in this episode evidence for Themistocles in 'the role of the clairvoyant religious expert who can see what other experts and authorities cannot.' (212). But the argument he makes concerning the mantic character of Themistocles is confusing: for example, in support of his argument that Themistocles is portrayed as having mantic powers he cites Plutarch 10.1, and the description of Themistocles using 'divine signs and oracles'. He omits to say that Plutarch's description includes Themistocles arranging for a particular interpretation to be given by the priests of the sacred enclosure of the Acropolis. Rather than showing any mantic propensity, this seems to be another example of Themistocles' manipulative, if not downright deceitful behaviour. Moreover, it conforms more to the description of a *chresmologos* than a *mantis* according to Dillery's description (195) of how *chresmologoi* were being characterized in Aristophanic comedy: 'When Trygaeus corrects his slave at the beginning of the scene and declares that Hierocles is no *mantis* but rather a *chresmologos*, I think we are meant to understand precisely an unscrupulous diviner who functions in ways that further the state's interests, but who is in fact completely motivated by self-interest.' It may be that there was a historiographical tradition that cast Themistocles as a diviner, as Dillery argues, but, equally, Plutarch's anecdote (alongside Herodotus' own stories of Themistocles' later deceitful activities) suggests a competing tradition, in which Themistocles was, rather, characterized as both far-sighted and manipulative.

that 'divine Salamis' foretells the defeat of the Persians, it is the chresmologues who come up with the idea that the 'wooden wall' is the fleet – although this leads them to the notion that the oracle foretells an Athenian defeat.[60] Moreover, Herodotus does not state that Themistocles competed with the chresmologues and beat them: he uses a more circuitous phrase to argue that the Athenians perceived his interpretation as something literally 'more to be chosen': ταύτῃ Θεμιστοκλέος ἀποφαινομένου Ἀθηναῖοι ταῦτα σφίσι ἔγνωσαν αἱρετώτερα εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ τῶν χρησμολόγων. So, in the end, their choice may not have been because they were convinced Themistocles was right, but based on other considerations – perhaps because it seemed a better political option to follow the politician than the chresmologues. There is a competitive element to this story, but the emphasis seems to be on the process of deliberation – and this includes the role of the Athenians, whose decision to accept Themistocles' version appears to be as essential as the giving of it. This suggests that rather than seeing this as man vs. Oracle, another way to depict this episode would be in terms of a collective effort to work out the most appropriate action to be taken – and, importantly, this would encompass (not oppose) the role of the Pythia, who provides a second oracle.

Such an approach to oracular consultation differs from that usually found in modern scholarship, which, as the quotation from Burkert's description above vividly illustrates, tends to represent Oracles, especially Delphi, as knowing the answer, and yet (wilfully) concealing it.[61] And yet, a growing understanding of the complex ways in which divination, in its diverse forms across different cultures, seems to function, suggests that the ambiguity of Delphic responses may have been neither a way of concealing the truth from consultants, nor simply a method by which oracular responses could be 'controlled'.[62] Rather, we need to find an explanation that encompasses the cognitive processes of deliberation involved in this engagement with the supernatural.[63] In terms of the cognitive processes,

60   EVANS 1982, 24–29.
61   For example, PARKER 1985, 301–302. Although there is recognition of the need and opportunity for 'semantic gaps', which allow the client to insert his or her personal context into the answer provided in an oracular consultation (see JOHNSTON 2005, 14).
62   Controlling responses from Oracles: see PARKER 2000, 301–302 who discusses first how 'forms of divination …can be controlled (unconsciously, of course) by the choice of questions so that a socially unacceptable verdict cannot emerge'. His comparison with Tiv divination suggests that divination is no more than 'a distracting device' (Parker quoting BOHANNON 1975, 166), but he then compares the riddling oracles of Delphi to Ifa divination, 'forcing the client to construct by interpretation his own response.'
63   For the idea that such discussion, sometimes with the Oracle, may have been a part of the process of divination (both the resolution of meaning, and emerging decision for action) see for example KLINGSHIRN 2005 and FRANKFURTER 2005. Both essays focus on the human side of this interaction, and emphasise this point with particular reference to written lot oracle books: KLINGSHIRN draws attention to the ways in which a diviner using the *Sortes Sangallenses* could not only offer advice, but also help to enact it, either making referrals to various other practitioners or providing spiritual support (110–11); Frankfurter's essay explores the role of shrine professionals who interpreted dreams, and then draws particular attention to the role of the shrine attendants (at the shrine of St. Colluthus in late antique

recent scholarship on ancient oracular consultation draws on research on divination in central and West African cultures that highlights the collaborative nature of the decision-making that takes place during an oracular consultation. It suggests that a process of discussion may be as important as (if not more important than), producing a right answer.[64] Although this approach has largely focused on the use of lot oracles, it can be taken further. Following the model of divinatory processes in other cultures, both ancient and modern, it appears that the imagery and metaphor of, for example, Delphic pronouncements may have drawn on shared cultural ideas and associations of meaning, and been used to help consultants negotiate a greater understanding of their problematic situation.[65] In terms of the cognitive process taking place, the perception of a relationship was inseparable from the mechanics of deliberation: those who consulted Oracles perceived themselves to be engaged in working out their circumstances in communion with supernatural forces.

2.2 Divinity and Divination

Building on this idea, can we suggest that the collective effort of deliberation that comprised an oracular consultation should also, crucially, be considered to include the Oracle itself, and the supernatural response – or responses? Serial consultations clearly suggest oracular involvement in an ongoing process of deliberation. One of the most well-known is Xenophon's consultation of Delphi – or rather Socrates's suggested amendment to that consultation – in the *Anabasis* (3.1.6). Burkert talks of this as a 'well-known trick', a description that fits the idea that if a consultant wants a particular answer from the Oracle, in order to further his own agenda, then it is important to limit the responses the Oracle might make to his question. However, it is also possible to view it in another light, that is, as offering some indication of the expected process of decision-making, as a collaborative process. The process that Socrates seems to suggest – of involving an Oracle in a series of questions and answers – would promote greater scrutiny of the decisions that the consultant was contemplating; it seems likely that this was not an unknown practice, as we will see.[66] In fact, it appears that it was possible to involve more than one supernatural interlocutor in such a process of deliberation. So, for example, in 388 BCE, according to Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.7.2), the Spartan

      Egypt) who would have used a *Sortes* book in 'helping people to negotiate misfortune and uncertainty through this captivating, textual form of divine speech' (248).

64   See Peek 2000, 26 (also cited by Klingshirn 2005, 99).
65   For example: Bascom 1969; Shaughnessy 2010, 61–76; Mutia/Mecaly 2011, 37–57.
66   We might also bear this anecdote in mind when analysing the 'Wooden Walls' oracle, and the apparent problem (often cited by scholars concerned with demonstrating that the consultation process described here is unrealistic) of presenting the Pythia with several questions. In this particular context, where the oracular response is unwelcome, we might compare the practise of the serial consultation of the entrails of sacrificed animals, see discussion Naiden 2013, 175–181.

king Agesipolis when leading a campaign against Argos was offered a truce. He consults first Zeus at Olympia and then Apollo. He phrases his second question as follows: if 'on this question of the truce Apollo held the same opinion as his father …' This trope appears again in Plutarch's account of how Agesilaus, before setting out for Asia to free the Greeks from Persian rule (c. 396/5 BCE), consulted Dodona and then, on the instruction of the ephors, also consulted Delphi.[67] Indeed, in this context, the story of Lysander's attempts to bribe, in turn, Delphi, Dodona and Ammon, could be viewed as the negative version of a familiar theme of multiple oracular consultations.[68]

Finally, turning from literary to epigraphic evidence, we find indications of an oracular consultation that involved serial oracles in a question tablet from Dodona. It appears, the consultant, Archephon, had been to a sanctuary of Apollo, before visiting this Oracle of Zeus.[69]

Ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ Θέμι καὶ Διώνα Νάϊοι | Ἀρχεφῶν τὰν νᾶ | ἅν ἐναυπαγησατο<ν>, κελομένο το Ἀπόλλωνος, ἔχω κατὰ χώραν· καὶ σωτηρία μοι ἔσσεται καὶ ἐμὶν καὶ τᾶι ναΐ, αἴκα καὶ τὰ χρέα ἀποδ(ώ)σω
(να = Dorian form of ναῦν)

O Zeus, and Themis and Dione Naios, Archephon built his ship according to Apollo's order. I have it in its place. Will there be security for me and my ship if I repay my debt?

Archephon's consultations of the two gods do not concern the same question (as with the examples above), but they do suggest that he employed an ongoing process of deliberation, in which he perceived himself to be closely engaging with supernatural powers. His question offers a very specific example of the perception, by the consultant, of ongoing involvement by the divine in his life and daily decisions. But, in fact, even the less explicit oracle tablets from Dodona suggest something similar about an ancient Greek individual's approach to oracular consultation and his or her relationship with the gods. This, in turn, suggests a particular conception of the self.

2.3 Phrasing and Posing

Gill argues that the participant-objective conception of the person means not only that a shared deliberation is looked for, but that it is explored on the basis of third-person principles: 'the normal approach (displayed in the Platonic dialogues, for instance) is that of seeking through shared enquiry and debate to establish what should be universally recognised as common standards of knowledge of truth'[70]

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67 Plut. *Mor.* 191B and 209A. It is possible that it indicates some kind of Spartan policy.
68 Diod. 14.13.3–8; Plut. *Lys.* 25. There are other such examples of multiple Oracle consultations-both literary and historical. See further, Eidinow "A 'Market' in Futures: Oracles and Competition", in Press.
69 Eidinow 2007, 113; dated to the first half of the third century by Dakaris (*PAE* 1967) and to the first half of the fourth century by Lhôte 2006, 94.
70 Gill 2006, 403.

Turning to the questions from Dodona we can see that this is the principle that characterises their formulation. Approximately 1400 lead tablets, dating from the sixth century to around the end of the second century BCE have been found at Dodona – each tablet inscribed with at least one question to the god(s). A number have been published, but many more remain unseen: Professor Anastasios-Ph. Christidis of Thessaloniki University was editing this material for publication, but died before he completed the work. He kindly allowed me to include in my research some of these unpublished tablets – for which I am indebted to him. I also include here, where relevant, his observations about material from the un-published texts.

By far the majority of questions posed at Dodona begin with the phrase 'is it better and/or more good'. The phrasing of these questions has been widely noted, and, in general, commentators observe how such a question allows for a 'yes' or 'no' response, of the kind that could be supplied by a lot Oracle.[71] However, there is another aspect of this phrasing we can note, which reveals something about the kind of decision-making process it was perceived to involve. A question formulated in this way is asking its recipient to make an objective judgment about the future potential of his possible action, and the use of comparatives highlights this aspect. The god is not asked simply to provide information, but to make a judgment. (It is crucially important that the phrasing does not make explicit the basis for the judgment to be made, and so leaves some cognitive room to create an explanation when events proceed in a way that may seem less than 'better and more good' to the mortal consultant.)

These inquiries were frequently phrased in the third-person. Numerous reasons for this formulation can be suggested: simple lack of grammatical know-ledge among consultants is one explanation, but the least plausible; more probable is the suggestion that it reveals a procedure in which a third party wrote down the consultant's question; this would fit with the claim that many of these oracle questions originated far away, and were being supplied by an intermediary.[72] But we should take seriously the possibility that the third-person phrasing of the question reflects the attitude of the consultant: that, although he or she was the person writing the question, for him- or herself, the inquiry was set up in the text as if it was being made objectively about a third party.[73] This would align the

71 See for example, PARKE 1985, 62, observes that it was a conventional formula and constructed so that it could be answered using some 'mechanical means', and in PARKE 1988, 7, he argues that this 'traditional formula' was used by those posing questions to Apolline shrines, and comments that rather than foretelling the future, this response was intended to communicate divine approval or disapproval.

72 FRANKFURTER 2005, 240 notes how the Oracle of Bes at Abydos received 'as it were, mail in quiries', citing Ammianus 19.3–4.

73 GRAF 2005. Not only at Dodona: many of the answers found among the texts related to the dice Oracles in south-western Anatolia (dating to the second century CE) turn on the idea that an objective judgment has been made about the potential outcome of some possible activity. For example, from Graf (67) III 2: πρᾶξιν ἣν πράσσεις μὴ πρᾶσσε· οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον, that is, Do not do the business that you are engaged in; it will not be better'. Graf translates as 'it will

approach of those who wrote questions for the Oracle at Dodona with Gill's suggestion about the deliberative processes visible in other ancient evidence – and indicate something of their underlying conception of the self.

3. Conceptions of the Self

The oracular question tablets from Dodona illuminate a number of aspects of the ancient Greek conception of the self. First of all, they reveal something of the mental processes of the people who wrote these texts: the consultants are exercising choice and demonstrating intentionality. Specifically, the questions suggest that the individuals concerned have what some psychologists have dubbed 'a dialectical mental process' or self-reflexive agency. Essentially, this is the capacity for some degree of self-consciousness with regard to action, and the appreciation of the possibility of there being alternative ways of engaging with the world.[74] The questions asked at Dodona can add to this understanding of individuality, since they seem to indicate that the consultants possessed a sense of individuality where this is taken to mean 'the self-awareness essential to each distinctive individual', which offers the individual 'the opportunity… to develop his or her own particular talents or character'.[75] And this suggests, in turn, that we may be able to locate here some of the characteristics that Giddens ascribes to the modern Western self, and the process of self-actualization that he describes. It can be argued that these texts show individual Greek men and women perceived their potential activities to involve risks; their visits to the Oracle were attempts to maximise their opportunities within this context.

And yet, what these tablets do not suggest is individuals that place self-assertion and individual rights above all else, or who think of themselves as self-contained and indivisible. Quite the opposite, in fact: the very act of consulting an Oracle suggests individuals who have an interdependent sense of self. We can describe this from a number of different angles: there is the (admittedly implicit) need to find agreement among those whom the particular issue of consultation effects. This may include the members of a state, of a group, of a family or even, as suggested above, an individual. We see this perhaps most clearly in the material that relates to slaves: as I have argued elsewhere, these texts may suggest that these individuals are thinking about themselves, and their own hopes and fears for the future; but they are also thinking of their owners and their associated obligations.[76] This suggests an interdependence that arises from the nexus of

not turn out well' which removes the sense that an objective comparative judgment has been made.
74 See JENKINS 2011; GARDNER 2004; STREMMEL 1997.
75 FOWLER 2004, 9.
76 EIDINOW 2012, 244–278.

relationships of a social context, so that one's sense of self and behaviour is contingent on/organized by other human beings.[77]

But this nexus of relationships does not stop with one's fellow mortals: the inquiries made at Dodona reveal a further level of interdependence. The questions reveal profound concern among consultants about divine reflection on and judgments about their behaviour, and this suggests that consultants also perceived themselves to have a crucial interdependence with the divine. This suggests, in turn, a conception of the self, and one's own self-mastery, which was concerned not only with mortal networks, but extended to the immortal realm.[78] We might expect this to raise explicit problems of the 'ambiguity of agency' and free will.[79] Instead, as discussed above, a man's character and his actions were perceived to be both his own and not his own, simultaneously supernatural and mortal: consultation of a god was not consultation of a disinterested bystander. It was perceived as the engagement in a process of deliberation of a force that was inherently involved in and affected by the outcome.

4. Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate some of the ways in which the implicit models of 'the self' that we bring to our analysis of ancient Greek evidence for oracular consultation necessarily affect our interpretations of the evidence. It has attempted, albeit briefly and partially, to make the implicit explicit, suggest some alternative models of the self, and explore how this may recast our analysis. It has drawn attention to evidence that ancient Greek men and women conceived of the self in relational terms, and that this relationality included interdependence with supernatural forces (and, in turn, their inter-relations) with regard to both individual character and life-course.

This understanding of the complex production of an individual's fate provides the conceptual context within which an oracular consultation took place. It suggests that the consultation of an Oracle was not, or not only, perceived to be a linear process of question and answer conducted by an individual who was attempting to extract a concealed answer about a potential action. It was also a field of shared enquiry, negotiation and potential collaboration with – and, importantly, among – myriad unseen supernatural forces. Such a conception both shaped and was shaped by an individual's interdependent sense of self.

This has, necessarily, been a brief examination of only some material relevant for re-understanding ancient Greek conceptions of the self, and it makes no claims to be comprehensive, or to present a decisive conclusion. More importantly, there

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77   GARDNER 2001.

78   As numerous cognitive theories about the formulation of conceptions of gods suggest, they are usually based on natural-kind concepts of agents, see, for example MCCAULEY/LAWSON 2002.

79   SLONE 2005, 188–195.

is no room here to discuss changes over time – changes which are undoubtedly crucial for such a discussion. However, I hope that it offers some useful and provocative ideas, at least about the assumptions that we as modern scholars bring to our study of ancient Greek culture and to the role, activities and conceptions/perceptions of the nature of the individual and his fate.

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