

## VI. CONCLUSION

I close this survey by highlighting two themes that have recurred in several chapters. One relates to the question of development within the history of Greek thought, and also to the relationship between Greek and modern thought. Discussing recent scholarship on Greek models of mind and ethics, I have given prominence to criticism of specific types of developmental approach.<sup>1</sup> On all four topics discussed, I have underlined ways in which Greek thinking can be seen as closer to contemporary thinking (though not necessarily to earlier stages of Western thought) than is often supposed.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, I have focused especially on the work of Bernard Williams, coupled on some points with that of Alasdair MacIntyre. In pursuing this line, I am not advocating a return to the (sometimes naively) idealizing view of Greek culture and thought that was relatively common in the Victorian Age.<sup>3</sup> Nor am I denying the substantive achievements of the anthropological approach in helping us to place Greek thought in its social context and in promoting an appropriate historical and critical distance between ourselves and the Greeks.<sup>4</sup> But I think that Williams is right to insist that, in setting out to explore the relationship between our thought and that of the Greeks, we should not import an unexamined body of assumptions about what precisely 'we' (moderns) do believe about psychology, ethics, politics, and other such subjects. Ideally, the examination of Greek thought should go hand in hand with the *re*-examination of our own ideas. If it does so, there are reasons to think that, despite important differences in culture and era, Greek thought may emerge as less remote from current concerns and positions than it has sometimes seemed in studies based on the anthropological approach.<sup>5</sup> It may be that, as this work of re-examination continues, rather different types of anthropological accounts (including developmental ones) will emerge. But it is important that they should be based on a more up-to-date picture of current thinking than has sometimes been assumed by developmental accounts.

A second general point is this. In this survey, I have offered a personal account of certain scholarly issues that have arisen in four related areas of Greek thought. It would be foolish, on this limited basis, to try to provide here a general characterization of Greek patterns of thinking, particularly as, on most topics, I have referred to Greek philosophical thinking over a broad time-period, as well as to some parallel features in the thought of

Homeric epic and Greek tragedy. However, it may be worth outlining here a concept that I have used in a forthcoming study of Greek thinking about psychology and ethics.<sup>6</sup> This is the idea that Greek thinking can be characterized as 'objective-participant', rather than 'subjective-individualist' (or 'objective-individualist'), a characterization associated with the image of human beings as 'interlocutors' in three connected types of dialogue.

Three aspects of this idea are relevant here. One, relevant to Chapter II, is the idea that, in Greek thought, human psychology is typically conceived in 'objective' terms (those of the relationship between 'parts' or functions), rather than in terms of the (subjective) self-conscious 'I'.<sup>7</sup> Another, relevant to Chapters III and IV, is the idea that human beings are naturally adapted to form their ethical and political beliefs, attitudes, and motives in and through participation in interpersonal and communal interchange. There is little room in Greek thought, I have suggested, for the various kinds of ethical and political 'individualism' that have played such an important role in modern Western thought.<sup>8</sup> Third, there is the idea that, in seeking the foundations for their psychological, ethical, and political lives, human beings do so through shared, systematic debate with the goal of determining objective principles. This can be contrasted with certain modern conceptions of what is involved in determining normative principles. The aim, in Greek thought, is neither a search for a purely individualistic (or 'subjective-individualist') ethic nor for one which relies merely on inter-subjective agreement. Greek thinking about the idea of 'nature' as a norm (Ch. V) can be taken as one example of this pattern of thought: the ethical significance of 'nature' is a matter of shared, reasoned debate about common truths bearing on the best life for human beings in general.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the issues which have recurred in this book can be understood as arising out of the interplay between the three aspects of this model and the three types of 'discourse' (psychological, social, and dialectical) involved. This is the case, for instance, with the question of the respective roles of participation in interpersonal or communal relationships and of reflective or dialectical debate in shaping virtuous character and in providing the basis for the understanding of normative principles. This issue has arisen in connection with ethical education, and the question of the socio-political context in which proper ethical life and development can occur.<sup>10</sup> A related question, emphasized in Chapter V, is that of the respective roles of these factors in shaping the kind of ethical character that corresponds to what the theories present as the best or 'natural' type of human condition.<sup>11</sup> Readers may or may not find the idea of an 'objective-participant' pattern of thinking illuminating as a way of defining certain salient features of

Greek thought (and also of highlighting certain points of contact with contemporary thought). But, if they do, they may find it a pattern which applies to areas of Greek thought other than those discussed here, such as Greek thinking about the functions of dialectic, and about moral (and other types of) knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, I would like to emphasize (what may be already obvious) the limited nature of what I have tried to do in this book. My aim has been to discuss recent scholarship in Greek thought in sufficient detail to highlight some of the issues that scholars have found interesting and important and to indicate why they have done so. I have not attempted to provide a comprehensive survey of Greek philosophy as a whole (an ambitious project in itself), let alone one of *both* Greek philosophy *and* related features of Greek poetry. But I hope that those readers for whom this book has served as an introduction to Greek philosophy may be motivated to pursue some of these other areas. I add a bibliographical note which focuses on general works which may be useful for this purpose as well as noting some new editions and translations. I give emphasis to the areas of Greek philosophy covered in this survey but also include some important recent studies in other areas.

## NOTES

1. See Ch. II, text to nn. 7–15; Ch. III, text to nn. 10–30.
2. See Ch. IV, text to nn. 7–8; Ch. V, text to nn. 15, 102; also refs. in n. 1 above. For some (brief) suggestions why Greek thought may be closer to contemporary thought than to that of some earlier periods of Western history, see C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford, 1996), 6, 7, text to nn. 247–54.
3. See e.g. R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1980), esp. chs. 5, 9, 10.
4. A further relevant modern discipline is that of ‘reception-theory’, which studies the interplay between text and audience (including audiences in different cultural contexts): see e.g. R. C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1984); C. Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge, 1992).
5. See further B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, 1993), ch. 1.
6. *Personality* (full ref in n. 2 above), esp. Introd., and 6, 7; see also Ch. III above, text to nn. 36–8.
7. See esp. Ch. II, text to nn. 10–17, 27–8, 32–4.
8. See esp. Ch. III, text to nn. 24–30, 38; Ch. IV, *passim*. This point applies both to the kind of ‘objective-individualism’ associated with Kant (on which, see Ch. III, text to nn. 5–6) and the more radical ‘subjective-individualism’ associated with Nietzsche and Sartre, see further Gill, *Personality*, esp. Introd. and 6, 7; also refs. in Ch. IV, nn. 2, 92.
9. Examples of thinkers adopting a ‘subjective-individualistic’ attitude to the determination of moral norms include, again, Nietzsche and Sartre (refs. in n. 8 above); see further (esp. on the relevance of such ideas to the interpretation of Homer’s Achilles), Gill, *Personality*, 2,3,5. For one version of a modern theory based on the idea that truth is ‘intersubjective’, see D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1984). On the contrast between Davidson and Plato in this respect, see T. Scaltsas, ‘Socratic Moral Realism: An Alternative Justification’, *OSAP* 7 (1989), 129–50.
10. See Ch. III, text to n. 38, also section 4; Ch. IV, text to nn. 10–11, 50–2, 57–62, 79–83, 88–100.

See further Gill, *Personality*, 4.7, 5.7. For related questions about what should count as a 'reasonable' emotional response, see Ch. II, text to nn. 19–25, 29–34, 37–40.

11. See esp. Ch. V, nn. 59, 101.

12. Some related questions are explored in C. Gill, 'Afterword: Dialectic and the Dialogue Form in Late Plato', in C. Gill and M. M. McCabe, ed., *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, forthcoming).