T. B. L. Webster

Die Entdeckung des Geistes

BY BRUNO SNELL

Hamburg: Claassen & Goverts, 1948. Pp. 300.

Principium Sapientiae

BY F. M. CORNFORD

Cambridge: University Press, 1952. Pp. 270. 25s.

The Greeks and the Irrational

BY E. R. DODDS

Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951. Pp. 327. $5.

The forthcoming publication of an English edition of Bruno Snell's *Entdeckung des Geistes*, with the title *Discovery of the Mind* (Blackwell, Oxford) is the reason of the present review. The book was planned in the twenties, and different chapters have appeared in various periodicals since 1929. The first edition appeared immediately after the war, and the second edition with additional chapters in 1948. The English edition is further extended. The English title, *Discovery of the Mind*, does not indicate the contents as clearly as the German title because no English word translates the German *Geist*, but it picks out an essential and extremely important strand in the book, and this strand particularly may claim the attention of readers of *Diogenes*. But there are other strands—the classical scholar finds here interpretation of many passages of Greek literature with carefully selected references to modern scholars; he finds also new arguments for the continuation of classical scholarship in the modern world; the non-classic finds a well-written and well-informed interpretation of much ancient literature, in which the author frequently makes comparisons with modern European literature and the intellectual problems of our own day.

Professor Snell starts with Homer, and in the surviving Homeric poems examines particularly the words used for intellectual processes and the words used for mind. The interesting point

here is that although Homeric heroes appear to be self-conscious, self-determining and predictable individuals, Homer constantly speaks of them as determined by outside forces (gods, personified emotions, and the like) and has no single word either for the living human body or for the soul in lifetime. We can therefore watch the growth of the conception of the soul and of the conception of the body as something parallel and opposed to it. Succeeding chapters discuss the belief in the Olympian gods, the awakening of personality in early Greek lyric poetry, myth and reality in Greek tragedy, Aristophanes and æsthetic theory, Socrates and virtue, the development from mythical to logical thinking, the formation of scientific concepts, the discovery of humanity, Callimachus and Arcadia. This brief description of contents shows the range of the author and widely different intellectual discoveries which he describes.

A problem of peculiar interest today in view of modern research in linguistics, in the techniques of communication, and in the structure and workings of the brain is the development of logical thought and the formation of scientific concepts. There has been much work done in recent years on the analogy between the working of the brain and the working of calculating machines and other communication devices. The analogy has proved fruitful for understanding memory and other mental phenomena. There are however difficulties and differences which are obvious to the layman. Somebody works the calculating machine and what is the analogy to this operator? When the calculating machine is given a new problem it carries no recollection of the old problem over into the new one and it can be completely reset so that every reaction is the reaction demanded by the new set of premisses; but the brain cannot be made a *tabula rasa* and cannot be completely reset. Many scholars, when, for instance, they make a chronological series of a man's works out of what is in fact a series in which certain characteristics of his style or thought increase or decrease in strength, assume that with each stylistic change a complete resetting of the machine is made which permanently erases all other settings. Such a confusion of a stylistic with a chronological series has recently been indicated by the publication of a papyrus fragment which dates Aeschylus' *Supplices* later than his *Persæ* and *Septem*. However useful the analogy of the calculating machine may be, the human brain is not completely reset when a new and far reaching idea is conceived or a new style put into use; consciously or unconsciously the old ideas and the old methods still recur in later works. This gradual change of thought with its brilliant jumps forward, its fumbling, backslidings, and inconsistencies can only be detected by such careful analysis of texts as Professor Snell gives us, and the ancient Greeks who made an immense intellectual advance in a very short time seem an ideal field of study.

But apart from the scrappiness of the surviving material, there are other formidable difficulties. We rightly think of the Greeks as pioneers, but recent suggestions that Hesiod, who has by some scholars been claimed as

the father of Greek philosophy, took over not only his succession of divine rulers but also his account of the creation of the world from Oriental sources seem at first sight not only to invalidate the claim that the Greeks were pioneers of thought but also to minimise their use as a guide to the development of human thought. If however Hesiod's indebtedness to Oriental thought can be established (and perhaps Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes should be added to Hesiod) we have evidence which may help in solving another problem. This second question is a generalised version of the first. How far do advances in any one line of thought depend on stimuli from another line of thought? This is a question of immediate practical importance for the organisation of research today. The obvious later points of contact between philosophy and other disciplines in ancient Greece are with mathematics, medicine, and biology, and it is a matter of great delicacy to determine priorities and extent of influence, to decide, for instance, whether the first thinker to express his thought in the form a: b: c owed the impulse to mathematics. For the most exciting revolution of Greek thought, which Snell calls the development from mythical to rational thinking, it is perhaps impossible to decide where the priority lay. In the century between 550 and 450 B. C. the soul as distinct from the body becomes the centre of personality and is localised in the brain by the doctors; belief in personal immortality increases; the world is governed as well as generated by what may be called a world *psyche*; human conduct becomes the responsibility of the individual, whatever outside influences affect him; sculptors start to represent the human body as governed by the reflective human soul; painters begin to show nature as a coherent system of spatial relations; thinkers begin to tell us how they are thinking and to distinguish different kinds of thought; they become concerned both with the validity of their demonstrations and with the choice of language which will make explicit the development of their thought. These developments must be interrelated. Should we seek for a priority here or should we say that a priority cannot always be determined in a small and progressive society where the practitioners of different arts and disciplines are in contact with each other? Some such fusion of Greek intellectuals was produced in this period under the pressure of Oriental aggression.

Other difficulties in the way of such an inquiry concern the tools of thought. Professor Snell prefaces his account of the development of Greek thought with a highly individual account of language, which he has developed more fully in a recent book, *Aufbau der Sprache*; there he extends his theories to languages other than Greek, and it is obviously outside the scope of the present review to discuss them. The difficulties are difficulties which arise in dealing with any language which is not contemporary or nearly contemporary. A great many of the linguistic phenomena of thought can be traced in their growth. We can show for instance the development from co-ordinate sentences to main sentences with subordinate clauses

which stand in an expressed relation to it. We can trace the occurrence of abstract nouns in different authors and see the frequency of different forms at different times in different contexts. We can discover how the Homeric simile is transformed into analogical argument, inductive argument, and experimental argument. We can list the metaphors which are the spectacles through which the thinker views the objects of his thought. The two major difficulties are how to assess the meaning of each word in its context and how to assess the relationship of the thinker to his audience.

A metaphor may be alive, in which case it tells us something of a man's thought; it tells us nothing if it is dead; but it may (as Snell shows well) have become a technical term because the particular operation can only be expressed metaphorically; in that case it has become a new word, and the birth of such technical terms is part of the inquiry. An abstract noun may denote a process or the agent of a process (conceived as a god or a person or as otherwise having some sort of independent reality) or a concrete thing (consider, for instance, the meanings of 'constitution' in English). The exact determination of meaning in each passage is a task of nice scholarship.

The thinker may be giving an accurate account of his thought in order to explain it to someone else whom he regards as his equal. But other relations between thinker and audience are known in ancient Greece; he may be a traditional wise man who seeks to impress as much as to explain; he may be a preacher who seeks to convert as much as to explain. In either case his language will be more emotional than if he were addressing his equals; more emotional means more highly coloured, nearer the mythical and further from the logical; here we may have to try to assess the terms in which he thinks as distinct from the terms of his utterance.

The above lines perhaps will show, while not professing to be a detailed commentary on Snell's book, one line of thought which Snell's book suggests. One final word about the further prosecution of such an inquiry. For whatever civilisation it is pursued, it needs the help of professionals from other disciplines, particularly philosophy, psychology, and linguistics but also mathematics and the natural sciences. But the detailed work has to be done by scholars in the language, because ultimately it is a question of words and the meaning of words at a particular place and time, and only they have the equipment for that.

Cornford's and Dodds' books are complementary to each other and supplementary to Bruno Snell's *Discovery of the Mind*. Snell emphasises the development of rational thinking; in these books the emphasis is rather on irrational elements in Greek thought. Cornford's book has been edited posthumously by Prof. W. K. C. Guthrie, who has added a final summing-up chapter based on notes left by the author. Dodds' book consists of his Sather lectures expanded by full bibliographical notes. Both books are brilliantly written and make good reading, and both are works of first-rate scholarship based on detailed interpretation of Greek texts coupled

with a knowledge of contemporary and earlier non-Greek literature and in the case of Dodds with modern psychological theory. Dodds surveys the irrational elements in Greek literature from Homer to Plato, the irrationality in Homeric pyschology, the change from a shame-culture to a guilt-culture, madness, dreams, puritanism, the reaction against rationalism in the classical age, Plato's proposals for reforming and stabilising inherited irrational beliefs, and the causes of the breakdown of rationalism. Cornford's subtitle is *A Study in the Origins of the Greek Philosophical Thought*, and his general position is that the origin of early Greek speculation about the world is to be found in Oriental myths (Dodds supplies a note on the Hittite-Hurrian Epic of Kumarbi and its connexion with Hesiod; Cornford did not see this text before he died), that their thinking has more to do with the shaman than the scientist, that the tradition of the shaman can still be traced in Plato and Epicurus, that scientific observation and experiment grew up among the doctors who distinguished themselves sharply from the philosophers. The two books have therefore a large amount of common ground, which may be termed boldly 'Shamanism and Greek philosophy from Pythagoras to Plato', and certain separate problems such as Dodds' use of modern psychology and Cornford's concern with the relation between science and philosophy. These are the three main new approaches of interest in the two books.

Dodds in his very moving last chapter suggests that the breakdown of rationalism or the fear of freedom was partly due to the fact that the Greeks 'had no instrument for understanding the irrational, still less for controlling it . . . Modern man, on the other hand, is beginning to acquire such an instrument.' This is a statement of faith and hope, but it shows also how essential for Dodds is the use of psychology in interpreting the ancient world. He uses the new tool with extreme caution. For instance, he describes the change of ideas between the Homeric age and the archaic age as a change from a shame-culture, in which everything that 'exposes a man to the contempt and ridicule of his fellows' is felt as unbearable and is projected on to a divine agency, to a guilt-culture, in which the Furies become ministers of vengeance and Zeus an embodiment of cosmic justice. The change has been widely recognised, and Dodds is careful in noting that the roots of the guilt-culture are to be found in the shame-culture and the fruits of the shame-culture in the guilt-culture. He also gives a psychological explanation: 'with the relaxation of the family bond, with the growing claim of the individual to personal rights and personal responsibility, we should expect those internal tensions to develop which have so long characterised family life in Western societies'; the repression of these unacknowledged stirrings of individualism found an outlet in the forms of the guilt-culture. I cannot do justice to the argument here nor to the admirable restraint which Dodds shows in suggesting it as a supplement to other explanations. Another recent book (*Annals of Tacitus*, by Miss B. Walker) has gone some way in using Jung to interpret the character

drawing in Tacitus. It is clear that interpretation of classical civilisation in terms of modern psychology may throw light on individual authors and, what is perhaps more important, when used, as by Dodds, in conjunction with comparative anthropology, on the development of civilisation, a light which may be useful to us at the present day. The work can only be done by classical scholars, because they alone can test the detailed evidence, and they have to familiarise themselves with another discipline, which is itself changing very fast; but it is undoubtedly worth while.

Both Dodds and Cornford emphasise the likeness between the early Greek thinker and the shaman. The modern shaman is both poet and seer and has further curious powers of living several lives and being in different places at the same time. Let us be clear from the outset that shaman is a useful technical term (like its predecessor, the Year God). The wise man who is both poet and seer, who knows about the past as well as the future, and whose knowledge comes from a divine revelation, is a type whom we must recognise in Greek literature. Hesiod—consecrated by the Muses, poet of the *Theogony*, poet of agriculture and justice, epic poet—is the obvious early example (and if he borrowed some of the *Theogony* from contemporary Oriental poetry, that is no doubt a commonplace of shaman technique). Another scholar, J. S. Morrison, has suggested that Solon owed his political ascendancy to his poetical powers, and this also fits the picture. We may grant also that the early philosophers speak with the certainty of the prophet rather than the hesitancy of the researcher, that Pythagoras and Empedocles had several lives, that Parmenides had a revelation, and that even Epicurus with all his insistence on empiricism uses a shamanistic term to describe his method of apprehending the atoms and the void. We can grant all this and be grateful for a useful label for many rather difficult aspects of Greek philosophy, including Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* and rebirth. But it is not so clear to me that it is right to conclude with Dodds that 'the opening of the Black Sea to Greek trade and colonisation in the seventh century, which introduced the Greeks for the first time to a culture based on shamanism, at any rate enriched with some remarkable new traits the traditional Greek picture of the Man of God'.

The case for direct influence depends on what Herodotus tells us about Scythian sweat-baths, the Enarees (who change their sex), Aristeas, and Abaris. Details from the different stories are found united in the modern shaman. It may be that Scythian proto-shamans were really known to some Ionian Greeks in the mid-sixth century and thus influenced Pythagoras, who is the key figure for later Greek philosophy. But we can scarcely say more than it is highly probable that Pythagoras knew the *Arimaspeia* of Aristeas. Meuli, who first connected the shamans and the Greeks, suggested also that the modern shaman preserves in a comparatively undeveloped form the kind of poetry which lies somewhere far behind the Argonaut story and the *Odyssey*. Except for puritanism, rebirth, etc. (which are Dodds' chief concern) Hesiod seems to me to show the essential elements of

inspiration, wisdom, and poetry; but his wisdom is a purely Greek adaptation of Oriental sources. If we admit both an I.E. heritage of 'shamanism' and a mid-sixth century contact with Scythian proto-shamans, the question still remains, why do Greek shamans differ so far from other shamans and how do they become philosophers?

This brings us to Cornford's discussion of the relation between philosophy and science. He emphasises the gulf between the empirical science of medicine and the *a priori* doctrines of the philosophers, and he further says that 'the "experiments" recorded as having been made by natural philosophers are very few, and they hardly deserve the name'. The relation between the earlier writers in the Hippocratic corpus and the Greek philosophers is extremely difficult to determine, especially as there is little agreement in the dating of such essential texts as *Airs, Waters and Places* and *Ancient Medicine*; but it is probably true to say that the debt of the doctors to the philosophers is considerable and that the empirical method of the doctors did not affect the philosophers much before Aristotle. In so far as Cornford is refuting the extravagant claims which have been made for the scientific achievements of the pre-Socratics and Epicurus, his position is entirely justified. But the question remains, how do Greek shamans become philosophers? Anaximander according to Cornford took over a scheme of cosmogony already provided by Hesiod and other poetical cosmogonies: 'He took the final step in the process of rationalisation, divesting the scheme of the last traces of mythical imagery.' To think oneself entirely out of the picture of the world which one has inherited is probably impossible, and there have been plenty of instances in the history of science of impediments presented to new ideas by the continued use of old models. Some scientists would probably agree that the scientist has a preliminary feeling where the solution of a problem must lie and then demonstrates his solution by the experimental method. The procedure of the early Greek philosophers seems to me to have been of this kind. Anaximander had an idea that it was somehow truer to talk of an impersonal Boundless than of a personal Ocean. Parmenides felt the need to give, as Cornford says, a geometrical demonstration of the necessary properties of a One Being. Empedocles described the action of the pipette as a working model of respiration. Anaxagoras demonstrated the solidity of air by jumping on a wineskin. This combination of preliminary idea with need for demonstration perhaps justifies the title of proto-scientist and certainly is the peculiar equipment which distinguishes Greek from other shamans and converts them into philosophers. The study of the impact of the new idea on the old ideas and of the development of the technique of demonstration is a chapter in the history of the working of the human brain besides being the first chapter in the history of Western thought. To this study the two books here noticed make a contribution of great importance.