



Thinking and Willing in Mythological Form

by

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Once we have lived awhile with the Northern Germanic mythology and then approach the mythology of Ancient Greece, it is like entering a totally new world. A new room opens and we experience a new situation in life. Here the entire world speaks differently to us and the human beings are quite different.

Parallels are not hard to find. We can look for the “God of Thunder” and the “God of Love.” We can find the “God of War” and the “Dragon Killer.” We find twelve fortresses in Asgard and twelve gods on Olympus. Are they the same?

We may answer both yes and no. Both mythologies serve the same functions. This is objective. But we notice great differences at first sight. The styles are very different. The feelings for life and the experience of space are also very different. There are no figures in Greek mythology that are the same in Northern Germanic mythology—not one single god or goddess, not one single nymph, nor any events are the same. What are the peculiarities of these separate worlds?

In Norse mythology the gods are in a continual battle for their existence. Their enemies are in their midst and are preparing to bring them down. The largest, final battle is approaching from the future. The great downfall, Ragnarok, lies ahead, i.e., a complete world revolution wherein the old ways are destroyed forever. The forces of good are victorious while a new and transformed world arises. In the present and future battle human beings appear as very small, but important beings. Human beings take

part in the battles. They are the gods' irreplaceable helpers. When a brave hero dies, he continues to fight and he continually practices for the global downfall. There is a weapon noise in Valhalla during life after death. What a world of will! What a display of courage in battle that goes through bone and marrow. They storm forward in the Valkyries' ride and challenge to battle for the victory of goodness in the future.

This is very different in Hellas. Do not the Olympic gods fight? Yes, they do but only in certain situations. They have completed their great battle for existence. The Titans and the Giants are defeated for a long time to come. The great, dangerous battle lies in the past. In glorious, majestic peace the Olympic gods look upon a world of clear, sun-filled beauty.

And what do people in Hellas do after death? Do they fight on? After death people are partially reduced to helpless shadows that can do nothing. They would be a liability in a global war. Like bats they fly around the dark shadows of Hades. Only the initiated in the mysteries of Hellas pass through the world of shadows after death to an enlightened life in the godly light of knowledge upon the fields of Elysium, where they take part in the harmonious existence of the Olympic gods, facing no threatening global catastrophes. For them it would be completely alien to take part in the rides of the Valkyries.

To get there the initiates go through the most difficult trials and battles, much like Hercules and other heroes. But these trials are purifications on the path to the heights of Olympus.

A people's mythology is a powerful tapestry of pictures at its "birth," at its entrance into "history." In these pictures we recognize the entire situation of the people.

For the Germanic-Norse people, culture becomes a continual battle for existence. In Hellas, culture unfolds after the battles for existence. I will not provide a superficial, "cause and effect explanation." It is not so simple. It is more accurate to say that we find the entire people's being and uniqueness in their history, their cultural life and in the mythical world of their gods. The style is the same. The being is the same. The opportunities for human beings are the same.

The style of the Germanic-Norse world is the eternal expansion of will power, the Faustian person's journey to new knowledge, new inventions, new discoveries and conquests, in never-ending battles for existence and

in continual confrontation with evil powers with which they have forged an alliance. It is a battle of willpower for future possibilities.

After a final battle for existence, the world according to the Greeks appears in its beauty and abundance, with art and science. Like never before, summarized observations of the riddles of the world appear in philosophy as clear, plentiful thoughts. It is the mature fruit of wisdom and beauty in harmonious peace.

In the Norse mythology wolves chase and threaten to swallow the sun and the moon: uncertain existence. In Hellas the sun-wagon's journey may be problematic if an immature and arrogant being (Phaeton) holds the reins. But Helios is safe.

In the Germanic-Norse world nature is filled with seductive, borderless, secretive, ugly and clinging beings: nixies, sea monsters, mermaids, nymphs and trolls. They live in nature and act beyond it. In Hellas nature is also filled with beings but in a totally different way. Streams, springs, trees and bushes are physical and super-physical forms with harmonious identity. While the Norse nixie lives in the river, the Greek god of rivers is the river itself. It merely depends whether or not he appears in his true form. Nature is close and well known. There is nothing foreign. The Greeks prefer geometry and whole numbers. They have an indestructible fear and scorn for the irrational, for whatever does not result in clear and observable proportions. Therefore the Greeks portrayed their gods in accurate clarity with sculptural, beautiful completion. So appears Pallas Athena. So is Father Zeus.

In the Norse-Germanic world there is an obvious preference for what is not "complete," for the unclarified and non-observable picture. Everything that points to the endless future awakens an intense interest. With red-hot glow they throw themselves into studies of the irrational numbers, of the tremendously minute and the endlessly large. Passion for analyzing the infinite is just as characteristic of the Nordic human being as the simple, clear and beautiful proportions are characteristic for the Greeks. The Nordic human beings always aspire further. They would like to drop the search for "truth in knowledge" if it demands a clear, observable picture and if there is an advantage for the roaring dynamics of will, where something shall be conquered by power and where something shall happen. There is something reckless over the obvious with which

they take on the most terrible damage for the sake of moving forward. They are aligned with evil. Here there is no possibility for a “solution in thinking.” The solution must take place in willful actions that overcome evil and transform in the future. In summary:

- The entire Norse-Germanic mythology is WILL condensed in dramatic pictures.
- The entire Greek mythology is THINKING in clarified harmony and within full but multiple forms.

If a teacher is clear concerning these styles and the forces of being in the human soul, he has the key to use these mythological worlds of pictures at the best time possible in primary school education. In the first three grades, individual children pass so well into the life and rhythm of the class that they prosper within a “group-soul.” Naturally there are children who stick out and “do not want to get involved.” But in those cases there is always something in the way. Either the teaching is unsuccessful or the child is struggling.

The fourth grade is very different. Here it is just the opposite. If the children do not stick out, one after the other, then there is something wrong. This happens in numerous ways. The strongest child may now appear as the gentlest. All of the children want to feel individual, totally alone and to meet the adults and the whole world one-on-one rather than as part of a group. The child’s personal will sparkles forth from its innermost depth. The child wants to be acknowledged as the individual human being he or she truly is. He or she makes plans and takes on new tasks rather than following the others. From a general sphere of feelings, where the child is one with nature and the grownups’ world, young Vikings appear with personal swords of will. And they not only do good deeds. They are drawn to try out bad ways, at least a little. For them it is very understandable that Odin and Thor create a mutual alignment with the impish Loki. The element of dramatic willpower in Norse mythology is inevitable. Evil shall be conquered. Yet evil is not a distant and foreign power. It is close to home and demands personal efforts of will.

If the children step powerfully into this flaming zone of willpower in the fourth grade, the teacher can observe that their soul abilities appear in a new way. They awaken to a new day. It is now possible to observe and understand forms with clarification.

Earlier content had to be wrapped inside a series of actions in order to be understood. Now the content can appear on its own. For example, we can approach botany with all of the plant's changes in form in relation to the earth and the environment. Plants can be ordered in groups to further understanding. Soon afterwards we begin with geometric constructions within its strict laws.

During the fifth grade, Greek mythology is excellent for storytelling at any time. From there we enter Greek history, where mythology disappears and individual personalities appear: Themistokles, Aristeides, Perikles and Alkibiades. As thoughts are clarified, they arise from rich life forces that are forced aside, behind and below the child. If the head is to be ready to understand clear thoughts, it must be lifted out of the purely vegetative digestion processes. So it is in the Greek myths as well.

While the Olympic, "clear thoughts" gods rule above in the atmosphere's light and air, the "lower" gods rule below, within the earth's richness, in the field's sprouting life, in the animals' and human beings' births and growth, nutrition and prosperity. It is Demeter and Persephone and all the other "lower" gods. Being lower does not mean that they are less important. It relates to direct orientation in space. The Greek wanders across the Earth with sprouting life and his own digestion "down below." And he looks up to the mountains and clouds and feels within his own head a certain relationship with the heavenly, Olympic gods. There is no static, dead separation. It streams continually from the bottom up (*ano*), and it continually streams from above to down below (*kato*). These two gestures are fundamental. The "lower" gods can reach to the Olympic mountaintops, and the Olympic gods can climb down to the Earth.

Pallas Athena was born by springing out of the forehead of Zeus. The goddess of wisdom, the virgin that had no children can enter at any time practically and proficiently into all situations in life, combining wisdom with sharp observations and quick thoughts here and now. At the same time she is the goddess of technique and craftsmanship. Even though she represents the "upper" Olympic gods more than any other, she has a darker past as the "lower" goddess of fertility. Her clear human face came later after spending a long time in the shape of an animal—the owl. The owl became her symbol. She left the dark of night and was transformed as free and moving wisdom, to be completely accepted by the Olympic gods.

This harmonious, balanced foundation between the upper and the lower, between heaven and earth, between the head's thoughts and the stomach's digestion may be found again in the style of Greek temples. There is no tower striving to reach heaven. There is equilibrium between the supporting and the resting, between the lower and the higher: The columns support the architrave with a slightly sloping gable. The triangle rests above the rectangle. Heaven and earth are in a golden equilibrium. And the Greek experienced himself within both the equilibrium and the column's supporting power. In the Temple of Erechtheon on the Acropolis we see the Karyatides, beautiful female figures that are the supporting columns of the temple.

Greek mythology is the "thinking mythology," the birth of thinking and liberation. And that means that the mystical pictures in the consciousness of the Greek people rapidly transformed into thought forms. Each god has his area, his function, and his unique qualities. And soon we see how their interest changes from the being to the activity of the being. Poseidon, the ruler of the waters, becomes the flowing function of water, the water itself. Hades becomes the hard earth. Kronos becomes the all-encompassing fire or the all-encompassing time (chronometer). And Father Zeus, the god of thinking, light and air, who allows lightning to strike, lights up the heavens, allows people to become conscious, upright, thinking beings, eventually transforms into the air's function as well as the function of thinking. He allows everything to become visible, he becomes the space-creating function.

But where is the uniting force between all of these figures? In Greek mythology there is not a single unitary form, but it is hidden within the harmonious collaboration among the multiple figures. Just as thinking works in all specific thoughts, the godly "unity" lives in all of the godly figures. It is typical of the Greek people that they are interested in multiple forms, in the specific figures that are autonomous in their own areas. They are satisfied with one quality and have no need to return to the original form or a unified goal.

This is very different from the Jewish monotheism where all interest is directed to the One. The multiple forms in Jewish mythology are in the Old Testament: angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. But these are messengers and subordinate servants in relation to the One Who was so

holy you should not say His name. In Hellas the monotheistic tendency is in the background. It appears occasionally. Without the multiple, different, beautiful and visible gods, all thinking is reduced to repetition of a single postulate. Nothing particular appears.

The Greek gods have the same all-sided differences as the human senses. What is the point of thinking if you do not have eyes, ears, taste, the sense of warmth, the sense of movement, and so forth? Just as different as sight and hearing are Pallas Athena's sharp sight and Phoebus Apollo's harmonizing, sweet-sounding lyre. Just as different as the sense of warmth and the sense of movement (the sense for your own body's movements) are the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and the wild, war-dancing Ares.

Just as all of the qualities of senses can be reduced conceptually to the general, that which is sensed, so all of the gods can be reduced to the "godly" or to "God." If you do not do this, they disappear in the totality. If you do only this, they become lost in the multiple figures.

Greek philosophy is also multi-sided. Most of the thoughts that have appeared in the history of philosophy may be found in one or another Greek philosopher. That is how rich and differentiated Greek thinking became. And if we turn to the greatest Greek philosopher of all, Aristotle, we find this to be particularly strong. Of course he knew of the thinking activity that lives in all thoughts. Yes, he tried to link our attention to this core activity in thinking, *noesis* (*noeseos*). Yet most of all he sought, with the fresh enthusiasm of an explorer, all of the multiple differences within areas. That brought him to the ten main categories: substance, quality, quantity, place, time, active, passive, relations, habits, position. These are the Aristotelian philosophy's Mount Olympus.

These categories are just as sovereign and different as the Olympic gods' distinctive characters and their areas of activity. Yet they work together. None can exist without the other. Father Zeus is the most powerful, the father of many other gods and goddesses. And these, in turn, have sons and daughters that are likewise independent and sovereign within their areas. So it is also with the substance category as the most important, king and ruler among categories, Father Zeus himself. A number of the other categories can be directly "drawn" from the substance category. Once substance occurs or displays itself, the category of place immediately springs from its forehead. But they are not totally alike. The

category of place is nothing without substance, yet once substance appears the entire place orientation appears as a special area. You can concentrate on a single category and experience everything from that one “area.” Then you are involuntarily moved to one of the other areas. Just as you can wander upon the Greek Olympus to different gods and also experience them together with Ares, Pallas Athena, Artemis or Phoebus Apollo, so can you also wander around the Aristotelian world of thought to the various categories’ areas and peculiarities, and experience the world from each area: active, place, time, relation, and so forth.

The people of Greece’s childhood had the Olympic gods. The people of Greece’s adult age have the categories of Aristotle. And the entire world-historic development brings together the Greek people’s mythology, history and philosophy in a higher unity, as part of mankind’s evolution.

