

Who Fired Prometheus? Pt. 3. The Historical Nexus: Our Fearful Phylogenetic Ethic and its Origins

In the third part of this series of articles detailing the sources and archetypal reflections of conscience/super-ego, I am left with a daunting disconnect between the elevated conscious perception of our moral facility, and its unconscious aspect. Indeed, I was so very surprised to discover the source and dynamic implications of my own conscience, that I wrote the following in my book, *The Tangible Self*:

"Although castration is big in psychology, it seems absurd to the ordinary healthy person. I never thought about it. A non-topic. Perhaps once a decade there would be talk of gelding a bull and the word would come up. No one ever spends even a single moment concerned with the idea. It seems nothing short of asinine to make so much of it as they do in psychology. Castration? Nonsense! Imagine my surprise to be presented with the contents of my unconscious and to observe thousands and thousands of scenes, so many scenes from every period of my life, and what do I see?—acres and acres of unbelievable super-energetic fantasies about or involving only one thing: Castration!" [Norman, *The Tangible Self*, pp. 77-78.]

We have seen in parts one and two of this series, the mythological imprint of this punitive aspect of human archetype and ontology:

<http://blog.theultranet.com/2013/06/who-fired-prometheus-part-1-our-barbaric-mystery.html>

<http://blog.theultranet.com/2013/06/who-fired-prometheus-pt-2-analysis-the-archetypal-mutilationour-masochistic-inheritance.html>

One can read of the purpose of these images, and how they serve to form the super-ego, which is inheritor of our Oedipal complex:

". . .we can tell what lies hidden behind the ego's dread of the super-ego, its fear of conscience. The higher being which later becomes the ego-ideal once threatened the ego with castration, and this dread of castration is probably the kernel round which the subsequent fear of conscience has gathered; it is this dread that persists as the fear of conscience." [Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id" in *A General Selection From The Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 233.]

And we can see the masochistic/passive /feminine implications revealed in the analysis of *Prometheus Bound* offered in part two of this series:

" . . .the castration complex always operates in the sense implied in its subject-matter: it inhibits and limits masculinity and encourages femininity." [Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the

Sexes,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (vol. 19), p. 256.]

So the question presents itself, from whence comes this ugly dread, this internalized punitive barbarism with which we are all threatened, and how did it come to find purchase within each of us? The answer is to be found in the record of human history, and the trail of laws and myths which follow in its train. This image is now a part of our inherited phylogenetic and instinctual template: Its aspect now a ripe possibility waiting to be brought to ontological fruition, a masochism as ripe fruit, swollen and turgid, an ugly fruit in need of but a tender breeze to fall to earth and disperse its poison. In his most worthy book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, E. R. Dodds, a superb Greek scholar and philologist par excellence, draws the strings of history and psychology together for us. This ugly imprint has been nurtured over thousands and thousands of years. Its exact source is clear to discern with Dodds's careful examination of the historical record.

"The head of the household is its king . . . and his position is described by Aristotle as analogous to that of a king. Over his children his authority is in early times unlimited: he is free to expose them in infancy, and in manhood to expel an erring or rebellious son from the community . . . as Zeus himself cast out Hephaestos from Olympus for siding with his mother." [Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp. 45-46.]

However, as early as the 6th century BC, the situation had begun to change, and as social conditions began to improve, and the father's authority became less and less *absolute* in the face of these new social conditions leading to increased personal freedom, the strict authoritarian structure of family life began to loosen. Now, what was a *shame* based dynamic, one based on *external* threat from the father, becomes a *guilt* based dynamism, one based on an internalized threat, an *internalized* moral structure in the true modern sense of the word emerges: super-ego. This is demonstrated by the need for laws introduced by Solon, and later, by Plato, to safeguard the now threatened patriarchal family structure. [Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 46.]

Super-ego uses severe repressions to create by *internal* means, what were behaviors, inhibitions and restrictions previously brought about by *external* patriarchal threat. Dodds fleshes the idea out as follows:

"The peculiar horror with which Greeks viewed offenses against a father, and the peculiar religious sanctions to which the offender was thought to be exposed, are in themselves suggestive of strong repressions. So are the many stories in which a father's curse produces terrible consequences—stories like those of Phoenix, of Hippolytus, of Pelops and his sons, of Oedipus and his sons—all of them, it would seem, products of a relatively late period where the position of the father was no longer entirely secure. Suggestive in a different way, is the barbarous tale of Kronos and Ouranos . . . the mythological projection of unconscious desires is surely transparent—as Plato perhaps felt when he declared that this story was fit to be communicated only to a very few . . . and should at all costs be kept from

the young." [Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp. 46-47.]

Here is a synopsis of that myth. Please note the Oedipal and castration themes.

From, <http://www.deathreference.com/Ke-Ma/Kronos.html>:

"According to the Greek poet Hesiod, in his *Theogony* (c. 750 B.C.E.), Ouranos ("Sky") mated nightly with Gaia ("Earth"). When their children were born, Ouranos hid them in Gaia's inward places. Painfully swollen with offspring, she wrought a huge sickle and asked her children, six brothers and six sisters (the Titans), to punish Ouranos. Only her youngest son, Kronos, agreed. Giving him the sickle, she told him where to hide. When Ouranos next lay on Gaia, Kronos grasped him with his left hand, the sickle in his right, and cut off his genitals. From the drops of blood that shed on her, Gaia conceived among others the Giants, and from the severed genitals, which fell into the sea, a white foam arose from which was born the love goddess Aphrodite.

Now followed the rule of Kronos. He married his sister Rhea, who bore him three daughters and three sons: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus (the Olympian gods). But Gaia and Ouranos had foretold that Kronos would be overthrown by a son, so he swallowed his children as each emerged from the womb. About to bear her sixth child, Zeus, Rhea asked her parents how to save him. They sent her to Crete, where she hid him in a cave on Mount Aegaeon. She presented Kronos instead with a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he thrust in his belly. Zeus grew apace and in time forced Kronos to yield up his children. Once reborn, the gods waged war on the Titans, whom they overthrew, and Zeus replaced Kronos as ruler."

(Please note also, that some versions of the myth repeat the reversed wishful castration theme, and Zeus also castrates his father in turn).

Now from the Dodds:

"And when Plato wants to illustrate what happens when rational controls are not functioning, his typical example is the Oedipus dream. . . it seems not unreasonable to argue from identical symptoms to some similarity in the cause, and conclude that the family situation in ancient Greece, like the family situation today, gave rise to infantile conflicts whose echoes lingered in the unconscious mind of the adult." [Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 47.]

And lastly Dodds assembles the entire picture for us in these words:

"The psychologists have taught us, how potent a source of guilt feelings is the pressure of unacknowledged desires. . . the human father had from the earliest times his heavenly counterpart: *Zeus pater*. . . Zeus appears as a Supernatural

Head of the Household. . . it was natural to project onto the heavenly Father those curious mixed feelings about the human one the child dare not acknowledge. . . that would explain very nicely why the Archaic Age Zeus appears by turns to be the inscrutable source of good and evil gifts alike. . . as the awful judge. . . who punishes inexorably the capitol sin of self-assertion, the sin of *hubris*. (This last aspect corresponds to that phase in the development of family relations when the authority of the father is felt to need the support of a moral sanction; when "You will do it because I say so" gives place to "You will do it because it is right.")
[Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 48.]

Here in this historical transition from an external shame based ethical structure, to an internalized guilt based structure, in this *internalization* of the patriarchal threat (introjection), we see the creation of our modern ethic, our conscience, our masochistic capitulation: our super-ego. This historical basis for our phylogenetic inheritance can be brought to light and assessed as to its healthy or pathogenic contribution by way of economic analysis, and clinical example.

I will provide that analysis in the next installment of this series. Once we clearly see the way the phylogenetic impression is brought to bear and made to resonate by current situational developments in upbringing, and, a precise account of the economic effects of this ugly historical precipitate are made manifest in specific example, the dismal, current picture of modern personality and ethical structure will be complete. Then, it will be my happy task to reveal the healthy alternative, the wondrous answer! For "the thing" can be removed, do be sure of that! Particular formative impressions can be brought up from under repression so as to disband, weaken and eliminate super-ego... permanently! Then, other healthy structures can be energized and used in a new and novel way, to free our energies and allow even the worst of Life's abuses to be reclaimed, and those energies used to healthy result, unbound from fixation. Ethics are a function of Empathy. Ethical structure, real ethics, are not a function of threat! We will soon see how much intelligence and happiness has been ruined, how much of ourselves and our potential has been maligned and wasted for this barbaric abuse, which we have so foolishly inculcated into our very being, and in the height of sheer idiocy, proclaimed in our ignorance, not to be sadism and waste, but, to be none other than the very height of human achievement, as if capitulation before a tyrant were the essence of truth, as if obedience before this ugly lie were in fact: virtue.

Rich Norman

References:

Dodds, E. R. (1973). *The greeks and the irrational*.
Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Freud, S. (1926). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud volume nineteen: The ego and the id, and other works*.

London: Hogarth Press.

Norman, R. (2011). *The tangible self*.
O'Brien, OR.: Standing Dead Publications.

Rickman, J. (Ed.) (1957).
*A General Selection from the
Works of Sigmund Freud*.
New York, NY: Doubleday.

Oregon resident Rich Norman, is a writer and musician with degrees in philosophy and music. Known as "The Laughing Recluse," he is the author of books spanning philosophy, psychology, and novels, with topics ranging from psychoanalytic theory to existential philosophy, verse and fiction. All text in this column is printed with the permission of, and remains the sole property of, the author, Rich Norman. Contact: rich@richnorman.com