

## “Everything is Full of Gods”; Theologia - Muthologia and the Beginning of the Ancient Greek Political Thought

Mahdi Fayyaz<sup>✉1</sup> | Rouhollah Eslami<sup>2</sup>  | Hossein Athari<sup>3</sup>  | MohammadAli Taghavi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author, Ph.D. Candidate of Political Science, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Email: [mehfayaz@gmail.com](mailto:mehfayaz@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of Political Science Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Email: [eslami.r@um.ac.ir](mailto:eslami.r@um.ac.ir)

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor of Political Science Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Email: [athari@um.ac.ir](mailto:athari@um.ac.ir)

<sup>4</sup> Associate Professor of Political Science Department, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. Email: [sma.taghavi@atu.ac.ir](mailto:sma.taghavi@atu.ac.ir)

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### ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this article is to elucidate that a comprehensive understanding of Greek political thought necessitates an examination of its origins in Ancient Greece. Traditional scholarship in Greek political thought has typically assumed that it originated concurrently with philosophy and the establishment of the polis. In this research, drawing upon the visions of Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss, we endeavor to establish a refined definition of political thought while challenging the aforementioned conventional assumption. It is argued that political reflection remains intimately intertwined with the theological-mythological beginning of thought in Greece. This theological-mythological mode of thinking initially found expression in the works of Homer and Hesiod, with these poets serving as the foremost intellectual authorities and initial educators of the Greeks. The Greeks, in their self-perception, viewed themselves through a lens of religion and in the mirror of gods and divine forces. Consequently, any exploration into Greek political thought must acknowledge the works of these poets as the seminal intellectual foundations of Greek thought. It is imperative to recognize that political thought in Ancient Greece did not commence with philosophy or the emergence of the polis, but rather with poetry and a distinct form of religious-mythical experience, namely theologia-muthologia.

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## Introduction

Reflection, in its most expansive sense, has taken root in the realm of myth, and inherently carries within it a spiritual or divine essence. As eloquently conveyed by Mircea Eliade, an erudite mythology scholar and historian of religion, " myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence.... Myth is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be. The actors in myths are Supernatural beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the "beginnings"" (Eliade, 1963, 5-6). For the ancient man, myth stands as the elucidation of the cosmos and a reflection of their own existential presence within it. Myth affords them a profound communion with the deeds of deities, revered heroes, and ancestral figures, allowing them to perpetually revive such experiences in the present time through sacred customs and ceremonial rites (Eliade, 1963, 13). Myths extend beyond mere chronicles of the past; they are deeply related with the contemporary human condition. Embracing myths engenders a profound departure from the mundane realities of everyday existence, imbuing life with an essence both sacred and transcendental. The experience of reliving and reenacting timeless mythical events requires disentangling oneself from the mundane world and forging a profound bond with a timeless sphere, a realm of otherworldly powers such as gods and immortals. To put it succinctly, the religious-mythical experience means finding unity between the present and the beginning, between the fleeting and the everlasting (Eliade, 1963, 18). According to Eliade, through the gateway of myth/religion, humanity gains profound insights into his own mode of being in the world looking at itself through the reflective prism of gods, heroes, and immortals who are superior to the mortals. As such, religion/mythology serves as the initial manifestation of human introspection and the beginning of his intellectual adventure.

The Greek civilization is no exception, as its intellectual heritage finds its roots firmly embedded in religion. The beginning of Greek thought exerts an overarching influence on all aspects of their culture and intellectual endeavors, rendering an appreciation of any facet of Greek philosophy incomplete without recourse to its religion/mythology. Within this extensive framework, political thought emerges as a particularly intricate and significant facet of Greek culture. The term "Greek political thought" encapsulates two fundamental and intertwined elements: first, the political, and secondly, the distinctive Greek manner of contemplating it. The prevailing interpretation posits that the understanding of the political in ancient Greece is inseparable from the concept of the polis (πόλις); the city-state, a shared political entity, possessed a significance for its citizens far surpassing than a mere dwelling place. This profound meaning finds notable expression in the first book of Aristotle's *Politics*. According to Aristotle, an individual cannot be deemed truly human unless they engage in the affairs of the polis (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a 2). The very term "politics"

itself originates from what was called *ta politika* in Greek, denoting matters related to the polis (Balot, 2006, 2). These observations elucidate the indisputable significance of the polis within Greek culture. Nevertheless, this does not imply that political reflection in ancient Greece originated solely with the advent of the polis. Similarly, the inception of philosophy is frequently regarded as intertwined with the emergence of political thought within the Greek polis. Texts and treatises that delve into the history of political thought often consider Socrates as the pivotal moment and figure for contemplation on the political and human nature, as if individuals prior to the advent of philosophy lacked any understanding of human and societal relationships.

The present research aims to challenge the prevailing view on the origins of political thought and the historiography of political thought. Drawing upon the insightful reflections of prominent intellectuals such as Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, the authors claim that the essence of political community and contemplation on the ideal political order in ancient Greece has taken shape in a timeless moment and within the realm of a theological-mythological thought. This theological-mythological thought takes poetic forms, and finds expression through the pens of poets. In the beginning, Greek thought is inseparable from poetry and the esteemed position of the poet. The Greeks revered poets as their foremost thinkers and revered them as educators of their own community. It is within the poetic artistry that the seeds of philosophical wisdom were sown, shaping the very fabric of Greek intellectual heritage. A profound grasp of this beginning is necessary, as here lies the birthplace of political thought. Such a study confers upon the poet a political stature as the foremost intellectual, the educator of the entire Greece, and the narrator of a timeless realm beyond. Thus, any endeavor to explore political thought, devoid of a connection to the theological-mythological narratives woven by the poets, would be fruitless. The current research serves as a preliminary exposition, illuminating the intricacies of theological-mythological beginning. Such an understanding stands as an indispensable prerequisite for delving into the study of Greek political thought. Without a comprehensive depiction of the multiple facets of this theological-mythological cogitation – namely, the mythical beginning – one cannot attain a reliable and effective comprehension of the intricate framework underlying Greek political thought and its fundamental principles.

In this paper, we begin with a definition of political thought. This definition serves to elucidate the foundational grounds upon which the essence of political thought is conceived, thereby enabling a profound discourse on its theological-mythological beginning. In the following sections, the development of Greek thought and its roots in theology and mythology is explored.

### **1. What is Political Thought?**

In the illustrious writings of Leo Strauss, a crucial point comes to light – the elucidation of political thought necessitates an endeavor to present a definition of another term that is often used as a surrogate to political thought in written works, namely political philosophy. There are subtle

distinctions between political thought and political philosophy, and meticulous comprehension of these distinctions will significantly influence one's outlook on the history of political thought and its origins. To delineate the essence of political philosophy, one must commence by recognizing its place as a branch of philosophy itself, for apprehension of its true nature necessitates an explication of philosophy. The subject matter of philosophy is universal, encompassing "all things," and philosophy is an unending pursuit to comprehend everything: God, humanity, and the world. The philosopher's endeavor aims to supplant "belief" with "knowledge" concerning the universal (or all things) (Strauss, 1988, 9-10). The utilization of the knowledge-belief dichotomy in Leo Strauss's explication of philosophy finds its origin in an epistemological discourse within *Plato's Republic* (Abouie Mehrizi, 2016, 15). According to Plato, belief or *doxa* represents an inferior cognition rooted in perception, fixated upon the mere outward manifestation of the sensible things (Peters, 1967, 40). In contrast to *doxa*, there is *episteme*, which originates from human reason, relies on reasoning, and is the true knowledge of forms or the nature of things (Peters, 1967, 60). From this vintage point, knowledge or *episteme* emerges as true understanding and holds a superior stance to *doxa* owing to its capacity to apprehend the nature of things. Henceforth, the task of philosophy is to inquire about the nature of things, and the philosopher strives to elucidate the "nature" of things or objects (Strauss & Cropsey, 1987, 3). Building upon this elucidation of philosophy, Strauss provides his own definition of political philosophy. In his view, political philosophy is "the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things" (Strauss, 1988, 11).

According to this definition, the demarcation between political philosophy and political thought becomes clear. Political thought pertains to the "reflection on or the exposition of political ideas", and political idea encompasses a broad spectrum of notions, or anything of that sort that the mind employs in thinking on the foundations of politics (Strauss, 1988, 12). Thus, all political philosophy is political thought, but not all political thought is political philosophy. Strauss endeavors to expound upon the distinguishing features of political thought and underscore its differences from political philosophy by offering this expansive definition. The paramount dissimilarity between political thought and political philosophy resides in their temporal origins, a facet to which Strauss dedicates particular scrutiny. He asserts that political thought is "coeval with political life," while political philosophy took root in ancient Greece and emerged within a distinct milieu of political life (Strauss & Cropsey, 1987, 1). Furthermore, he alludes to the parallel between the agelessness of political thought and the timeless essence of human nature, stating that the first person to use the word "father" or the phrase "you should not..." was the first political thinker. However, political philosophy appeared at a specific time recorded in the past (Strauss, 1988, 13). An aspect of Strauss's elucidation is pivotal: the interplay between thought and action. According to him, thinking assumes precedence over action and possesses an ontological primacy over it (Jung, 1967,

495). His conviction that political thought shares an ancient pedigree as old as the existence of humankind signifies that political life and the intricate dynamics between those in power and those under their rule have been deeply ingrained in the very genesis of human speculation. Therefore, reflecting on the political is unbounded by place and time, intimately intertwined with the beginning.

## **2. In the Beginning**

In Strauss's discerning observations, he acknowledged the birth of philosophy within the recorded history, precisely taking root in the Greek polis. However, it is regrettable that he remained silent when it came to reflecting on the realm of political thought prior to the advent of philosophical inquiry. In the words of Lawrence Lampert, a protégé of Strauss, he had said in a private conversation in his final years of life, "Homer Started it all" (Lampert, 2013, 156). Strauss's statement exhibits a nuanced indication of the theological – mythological origin of Greek thought as well as the crucial significance of the early poets. It is evident that Strauss acknowledged the necessity of directing scholarly attention towards the nascent stages of Greek thought. Unfortunately, his passing thwarted his ability to allocate the necessary time and effort needed to embark upon this scholarly endeavor. The insights offered by Eric Voegelin, a contemporary German political philosophy scholar, can serve as a valuable supplement to Strauss's ideas. Voegelin's notable contribution lies in his utilization of the notion of symbol. He contends that humans, through the creation of symbols, has persistently strived to reflect upon their position. In his seminal work, *The New Science of Politics*, he argues that the human community cannot be apprehended as an external reality, but rather as a "little world or cosmos" that creates meaning and self-illuminates through meaning creation, facilitated by the medium of symbolization. The comprehension of one's own being and the expression of one's existence are realized through active involvement in the process of symbol creation, which epitomizes the essence of human existence and represents the most fundamental mode of collective participation. Symbols encompass an intricate amalgamation of rituals, myths, and theoretical reflections. According to Voegelin, human beings, by partaking in the creation of symbols, achieve a profound understanding of their humanity and transcend their particular existence (Voegelin, 1952, 27).

Voegelin proceeds to delve into the realm of political thought. According to his exposition, every human society obtains its understanding of its own essence by means of an ongoing process of symbol creation. This symbolic understanding, which predates the contribution of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher of the 4th century BC, has long formed the bedrock of political knowledge (episteme politike) and the construction of conceptual frameworks as a form of knowledge. Consequently, the exploration of collective identity and its associated symbolizations predates political philosophy, and, as Voegelin interprets, it has a "primacy over political knowledge." Political philosophy (or political science in Voegelin's words) does not encounter a "tabula rasa"

at its beginning, upon which it can inscribe its concepts, but rather it confronts the rich body of self-interpretation of a human society. The political philosopher is thus compelled to employ pre-existing symbols, examine the multitude of meanings associated with them, and methodically elucidate these meanings, bringing forth a sense of order and clarity (Voegelin, 1952, 28).

Voegelin's discourse serves as a complement to Strauss's reflections. In a manner akin to Strauss, who equates the lifespan of political thought with that of the collective existence of humanity, Voegelin argues that throughout history, humans have pondered their social identity and constructed this collective self-understanding through the creation of symbols. In fact, Voegelin delves into aspects that Strauss left unexplored, shedding light on the existence of a diverse array of symbols that predate the advent of philosophy (or, in Voegelin's terminology, theoretical reflection). However, Voegelin adopts a critical stance towards the Straussian perspective. According to his viewpoint, linguistic symbols are not solely products of thought; they also emanate from action, such as myths, rituals, and customs. He argues that the primary objective of early symbolic endeavors by humans was to present a portrayal of the intricate relationship between humanity and the divine. Religious experiences constitute an intertwined fusion of thought and action, and linguistic symbols emerging from such experiences cannot be subjected to analyses within the confines of thought or action alone. Rituals and thoughts are inseparable from one another (Rhodes, 1987, 1052). Voegelin specifically discusses Greek thought, highlighting the significant role of religious-mythical experiences in shaping early Greek reflections that deeply affected pre-Socratic thought. He notes that the foundation of Greek philosophy lies in the cosmological expressions of the pre-Socratic philosophers, which subsequently pave the way for the emergence of abstract-philosophical contemplation. As a result, the ancient Greek political thought begins within the symbolic mythical-theological framework, making it imperative to possess a comprehensive understanding of that when engaging in a discussion concerning the extent of political thought. This mythical-theological thinking within the poems of the early Greek poets, however, remains a subject yet to be fully explored.

### **3. A Critique of contextualist and Christianocentric readings of Greek Muthologia-Theologia**

Kurt A. Raaflaub is one of the most renowned scholars of classical studies who has made significant contributions to the study of Greek political thought. Raaflaub is known for his interdisciplinary approach, combining history, political theory, and anthropology to study the political ideas and practices of ancient Greece. He explores how political thought in ancient Greece was shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. He argues that Greek political thought was not a unified or homogeneous system, but rather a diverse and evolving body of ideas that varied across different city-states and historical periods. He emphasizes the importance of understanding Greek political thought in its historical and cultural context, recognizing the plurality of perspectives and the

influence of local traditions and institutions. In addition, he embarks on an exploration of the intricate interplay between political thought and practice in ancient Greece. Raaflaub scrutinizes the implementation of political ideas and their influence on the functioning of political institutions and citizen behavior.

Raaflaub places considerable emphasis on distinguishing Greek political thought from political philosophy. Through this delineation, Raaflaub argues that political thought extends beyond philosophical texts and treatises, and manifests itself in a myriad of forms, including epics, poems, fragments and historical accounts (Raaflaub, 2001, 72). Another salient aspect of Raaflaub's observations concerning Greek political thought is its broad scope, extending beyond the confines of the polis. His contention is that the manifestation of Greek political thought reveals itself through assumed social relations and the conventional conception of a virtuous communal life, transcending specific institutional arrangements or collective decision-making processes (Raaflaub, 2001, 73-4). Based on these observations, Raaflaub considers the Homeric epics to be the starting point of Greek thought, interpreting selected passages from the Iliad and Odyssey as the earliest recorded reflections of the Greeks on politics.

However, his arguments are not devoid of controversial elements. Throughout his works, Raaflaub underscores the political dimension of the Greek mode of thinking. However, his emphasis on the political aspect and the historical-social context overshadows other significant facets of thought, especially the profound theological aspect. This issue becomes notably apparent in Raaflaub's analysis of Homer, as he strives to offer an interpretation of the epics that leans toward an overly secular and this-worldly perspective. To underscore the worldly origins of Greek political thought, he claims that the presence of human images of the gods in the verses indicates the human factor's influence in determining the fate and the limited and diminished role of transcendental power in worldly affairs (Raaflaub, 2005, 255-258). Subsequent sections of the present article will delve into the role and nature of divine power, shedding light on limitations encountered when attempting to provide a solely worldly interpretation of the origins of Greek thought. While Greek thought undeniably possesses inherent political dimensions, it is crucial not to underestimate or disregard the intricate and profound divine essence found in Homeric and Hesiodic verses.

It can be argued that Eric Voegelin's research stands out as the foremost investigation into the origins of Greek political thought. Voegelin was a prominent political philosopher and historian of ideas who explored various aspects of political thought, including its origins in ancient civilizations. Voegelin's notable work, "Order and History", comprises multiple volumes, meticulously exploring the history of political ideas from antiquity to the Renaissance. Throughout this voluminous work, Voegelin argues that political thought in ancient civilizations emerged as a response to the human search for order and transcendence. He believes that humans, driven by their

existential experiences and the desire to make sense of the world, created mythologies, rituals, and political units to establish order and connect with the transcendent. In the second volume of his work titled "Order and History: The World of Polis," while discussing the pre-polis society, he conducts an examination of Homeric epics and explains how these epics depict the Greek experience of the divine. Voegelin believes that the poetic symbolism of the divine within Homer's works positions him at a distinguished and unparalleled standing in Greek thought. Voegelin's analysis of the origins of thought in ancient Greece is profoundly insightful. One of its key contributions lies in its emphasis on liberating thought from the confines of philosophy and recognizing the significance of other sources in shaping ideas.

Notwithstanding its merits, Voegelin's work also incorporates certain contentious and disputable elements. Firstly, it is worth noting that Voegelin cannot be categorized as a classical scholar in the strictest sense of the term. His exploration of Greek thought and civilization constitutes a relatively confined part of his overall research. Consequently, his contribution to the historiography of Greek thought is perceived as a relatively minor component within his broader and more extensive project in the history of ideas. As a result, scholars specializing in classical studies have voiced criticism and occasionally disregarded his work. Another contentious and particularly noteworthy aspect pertains to the Christocentric nature evident in Voegelin's works. His explorations on religion are notably imbued with the influence of Christian wisdom, leading him to predominantly examine the religious experience from a Christian perspective. This inclination becomes apparent in his portrayal of the divine and the Greek religious experience. Another important drawback of Voegelin's work lies in the absence of a clear and well-defined definition of political thought. While he undoubtedly is a historian of ideas, particularly focusing on political thought, readers have to extract his understanding of the essence of political thought from his extensive text. The absence of such a well-defined and precise delineation has led to Voegelin's use of terminology sometimes appearing elusive or indistinct. Of particular significance is the ambiguity surrounding the term "political theory". Voegelin seems to employ it at times in a broad sense, encompassing any form of reflection on the political (political thought), and at other times, it is used interchangeably with philosophical reflection on the political (political philosophy). The present research aims to address this recent observation by employing Voegelin's framework to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of Greek political thought and its connection to theological thinking. This will be achieved by drawing upon the definitions and concepts of political thought, according to Leo Strauss.

#### **4. Homer and Hesiod: The Beginning**

Leo Strauss argues that Homer's significance, as expressed in the phrase "Homer Started it all", lies in his role as the foundational source from which all aspects of Greek civilization sprouted,



with poetry serving as the primary origin. Prior to the latter half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Greek world lacked any manifestation of prose literature<sup>1</sup>. Classical scholars agree that the earliest written texts in the Greek alphabet find their roots in an ancient oral tradition, embodied in the poetic works of Homer. This perspective elevates poets beyond their conventional role as mere “the legislators of the words”, recognizing them as the initiators of the very fabric of Greek thought (Cartledge, 2009, 2). Homer’s profound and extensive influence on Greek thought and spiritual consciousness is evident in Socrates’s declaration in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. According to Socrates, many of the Greeks believe that Homer is the paramount educator of Hellas and everyone must study his poems and that lives should be ordered by the guidance of him (Plato, *Republic*, 606e). Apart from Homer, Hesiod (also known as Hesiodos) holds a preeminent status among the Greeks, and his name frequently coexist with Homer’s in various literary contexts. Differing from Homer, Hesiod identifies himself in his poems and offers a succinct account of his personal life, leading most scholars to concur on the authorship of *Theogony* and *Works and Days* to Hesiod (Farnoudfar, 2008, 1). The most remarkable parallel between Homer and Hesiod lies in their perceived roles as poetic luminaries and educators within ancient Greek culture. In various literary works, particularly evident in Plato's *Republic*, both poets’ names are intertwined, with Hesiod, like Homer, being hailed as an influential authority on Greek thought (Most, 2010, 56-58). Herodotus in Book II of *The Histories* explicitly affirms that Homer and Hesiod played a pivotal role in acquainting the Greeks with the gods as they perceived in his era. Herodotus' assertion implies that without the contributions of Homer and Hesiod, a considerable portion, if not the entirety, of the Greek knowledge of the gods would not have existed (Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.53). The role of Homer and Hesiod as educators, therefore, revolve around two intrinsic qualities they possess: firstly, their elevated standing as poets and educators, and secondly, their profound knowledge of the divine realm. Analyzing the Homeric epics and the Hesiod’s poems reveals an inherent inseparability between these two attributes, bestowed upon them as divine gifts.

*The Iliad* commences with the following invocation: " Sing, Goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians, hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades<sup>2</sup> strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of dogs, of all bird..." (Homer, *The Iliad*, 1.1-5). Notably, the poet remains unnamed in this passage, with only a reference to an unspecified goddess as the intended audience for the epic. Presumably, the speaker is the anonymous poet, calling for the enigmatic goddess to sing of destructive fury of Achilles, the valorous warrior of the Achaeans. It appears that the speaker has assigned this unknown goddess as the addressee. In a parallel fashion, the *Odyssey* also commences with a comparable invocation, bringing some uncertainties to resolution: " Tell me, Muse, of the

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<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the scattered writings in the Greek alphabet on stones and metals do not convey the desired meaning.

<sup>2</sup> The world of the dead

man of many ways, who was driven far journeys, after he had sacked Troy’s sacred citadel” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, 1.1-2). In this instance too, the poet’s identity remains undisclosed; However, it is revealed that the unnamed goddess alluded to at the outset of the *Iliad* is, in fact, Muse. It becomes evident that within this particular setting, Muse engages in a conversation with the poet (Kirk, 1985, 51). Similarly, the narrative introduces us to the adventurous figure of Odysseus, albeit in the absence of any overt reference to the poet’s identity or the nature of the engagement with the Muses. As previously noted, Homer’s epics refrain from disclosing the poet’s identity, with the first occurrence of an author’s name found in Greek literature being in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Consequently, to delve into the intricacies of the poet’s persona and the poetic realm, a valuable and illuminating resource is Hesiod’s Work.

The opening section of Hesiod's *Theogony* is approached from diverse perspectives. Although the poet’s identity is not revealed until the twentieth line, unlike the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a discernible presence of a composer or author is evident throughout each verse. Despite this distinction, *Theogony* shares similarity with *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey* in terms of its opening. It, too, acknowledges the Muses, the celestial beings: " From the Muses of Helicon let us begin our singing, that haunt Helicon's great and holy mountain, and dance on their soft feet round the violet-dark spring and the altar of the mighty son of Kronos<sup>1</sup> ... then on the highest slope of Helicon, they make their dances, fair and lovely, stepping lively in time..." (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 1-12). The poet subsequently states that the Muses are involved in the worship of the gods and proceeds to enumerate the names of these gods and the Muses one by one. As the glorification of the gods concludes, the poet recounts his encounter with the Muses: "And once they taught Hesiod fine singing, as he tended his lambs below holy Helicon... they gave me a branch of springing bay to pluck for staff, a handsome one, and they breathed into me wondrous voice, so that I should celebrate things of the future and things that were aforesaid. And they told me to sing of the family of blessed ones who are forever, and first and last always to sing of themselves...." (*Theogony*, 21-23 and 30-38).

In this context, in contrast to the initial portions of both *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*, the poet proclaims his identity and engages in an open discourse regarding his communion with the Muses. The poet explicitly asserts that it is the Muses who bestowed upon him the craft of poetry. A diligent examination of the etymological provenance and semantic essence of the name “*Hesiodos*”, signifying 'one who sends forth the voice (odos)', proves to be of significance. The epithet ‘Hesiodos’ can be indicative of the manner in which he engaged the Muses (Nagy, 1989, 32). The elucidation of the term 'heavenly chant' conspicuously unveils that the poet, under the inspiration of a divine presence, has assimilated the art of poetic narration and has been anointed to the exalted

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<sup>1</sup> Zeus, the ruler of the Olympian gods and son of Cronus

stature of a bard (Farnoudfar, 2008, 40). In light of the content delineated within the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and *Theogony*, it becomes evident that the deities who insinuated ethereal melodies into the poet's psyche, thereby saturating him with inspiration, are none other than the Muses themselves.

The Muses an assembly of nine ethereal goddesses, bear the sacred responsibility for the domains encompassing poetry, music, dance, poetic inspiration and the broader realm of 'mousikê', from which the contemporary term 'music' derives. According to the myths, the Muses trace their lineage to the divine union of *Zeus*, the supreme ruler of the gods, and Mnemosyne, the patroness of memory. A facet of the divine essence ascribed to the Muses emanates from their association with Mnemosyne, memory, and recollection. The name Muse (*Μοῦσαι*) bears etymological kinship to Mnemosyne and the verb signifying recollection (*μνησάμαι*). This point elucidates the Muses as celestial beings who instill pertinent material in the mind of the poet (West, 2007, 34). As illustrated in the second Book of *the Iliad*, when the poet undertakes to enumerate the multitude of ships and commanders entering the Troy, he implores the mediation of the Muses (Murray P., 2020, 18). He distinguishes between his constrained knowledge derived from tradition, narratives, and hearsays and the divine and all-encompassing knowledge of the Muses. He says, "Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympus. For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things ..." (Homer, *The Iliad*, 2.484-6). Within the realm of Greek theology, the Muses hold a unique and elevated status, prompting heartfelt praises from a myriad of musicians and poets. These divine entities assume the role of illuminators and Poets, with a deep sense of reverence, perceive themselves as dedicated followers and messengers of the Muses (Otto, 2017, 45-47). The poet's bond to the Muses is twofold: firstly, through their illumination, he recollects and chronicles the feats of the great and glorious bygone figures, and secondly, by virtue of the Muses' inspiration, he conveys "tidings from the divine realm."

### **5. Theologia – Muthologia: The Divine Realm and the Human World**

Homer and Hesiod are both luminaries of poetic expression and storytelling. Yet, the tales they unfold surpass the limitations of the specific temporal and spatial framework defined within their narratives. This aptly encapsulates the essence of the term "muthos". The Greek term "muthos" (*Μῦθος*), in its original essence, carried the connotations of verbal expression inclusive of words and phrases, or put differently, it signified "that which is spoken" (Naddaf, 2005, 176). Importantly, muthos did not imply any associations with delusions, vacuous narratives, or groundless verbiage; rather, its fundamental denotation pertained to the spoken language that found its articulation through oral means. Especially within discussions concerning religion, rituals, and ceremonial observance, this definition included the elements of vocal expression or oral presentation of a statement (legomenon- λεγομενον) in conjunction with performing an action (dromenon- δρωμενον) (Harrison, 1912, 328-329). In the second book of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates engages in

a discussion regarding Homer, Hesiod, and other poets (poietes- ποιητής) as the composers of “muthologos” and forges a link between poetry and “muthologia” (Plato, Republic, 377d)<sup>1</sup>. The term muthologia is itself a composite of two Greek words: "legein," meaning to say, and "muthos," signifying story and traditional narratives.

Alternatively, Aristotle, in the third book of the *Metaphysics*, includes Hesiod within the category of theologians (theologoi) (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1000a). Furthermore, in the twelfth book, Aristotle makes a clear distinction between theologians and the natural philosophers, referred to as physiologi or physikoi (*Metaphysics*, 1075b). The term “*theology*” can be dissected etymologically as the fusion of "legein," which signifies speaking and informing, and "theos" (θεός), which denotes God thus implying discourse concerning divine matters. Within the Greek lexicon, the most prevalent and widely utilized term to denote gods is theos. Essentially, theos signifies a being whose authority looms prominently over the human sphere. From this standpoint, elements such as the sea, rivers, love, death, and similar phenomena are regarded as manifestations of theos. Notably, the usage of theos in written works sometimes alludes to a specific deity such as Zeus or others, or it may encompass the entirety of God, particularly when the speaker or writer opts not to specify the deity’s name for a particular reason (Price & Kearns, 2003, 547).

As can be discerned, muthos portrays a domain that extends beyond our immediate present reality. This realm, in a profound and all-encompassing manner, not only influence and establishes connections with the human sphere but also exerts authority over it. Given these insights, it appears that within the works of Plato and Aristotle, theologia and muthologia have been employed to denote a unified idea (Peters, 1967, 193). Nonetheless, upon delving into Hesiod’s *Theogony*, a notable additional dimension unveils itself.

The Greek term for truth, *aletheia*<sup>2</sup> (ἀλήθεια) finds its earliest appearance in Hesiod's *Theogony*, where he asserts that the Muses imparted to him the essence of truth through this utterance: "shepherds that camp in the wild, disgraces, merest bellies: we know to tell many lies that sound like truth, but we know to sing reality, when we will." (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 24-29). As discernible from this section, aletheia, theos, and muthos are inextricably intertwined, with the Muses (theos) serving as the conveyors to Hesiod of an authentic and unadulterated narrative (muthos).

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<sup>1</sup> When relying solely on this passage, one grapples with the challenge of deciphering a Plato's intricate stance on poetry, poets, and the Muses. In a broader sense, Plato’s multifaceted relationship with the Muses and his involvement with poetry reveal profound complexity. This complexity is evident in various dialogues, often entwined with mythological allusions, a realm traditionally associated with the Muses in Greek culture. It is notable that Plato skillfully employs mythological narratives to ignite reader’s imagination. This infusion of myth into his philosophical works introduces a dimension surpassing mere rational exposition and argumentation. This multifaceted engagement with the Muses and poetry stands as a defining feature of his contribution to philosophical discourse and philosophical education (Press, 2007: 92-97).

<sup>2</sup> In the Greek language, the verb λήθω means to be concealed and hidden, and ἀλήθεια means that which is not concealed and is unveiled.

Consequently, the poet emerges as the one who narrates the truths about the divine realm. In light of the recent exposition, it becomes evident why Aristotle considers Hesiod and other poets as the originators of theological reflection. He believes that theologians, much like philosophers, are illustrious contemplators. However, in contrast to philosophers who employ a discourse characterized by demonstrative reasoning, theologians, represented here by poets, convey ideas through the narrative artistry of storytelling, known as *muthikos* (μυθικός) (Jaeger, 1948,9-10).

These observations underscore that the poet serves as a conveyer of truth, a truth conveyed through *muthos* in relation to the divine (*theos*). The intellectual journey in ancient Greece commences with *muthologia-theologia*, and the pursuit of uncovering and articulating philosophical truth emanates from the very core of a divine and mythological-theological encounter. This encounter, first embodied by Homer and Hesiod in their role as poets, lays the foundation for the evolution of poetry. From this standpoint, poetry with its distinctive character rooted in the perception of duality between the material world and the transcendent realm, inherently encompassing elements of a religious experience. The poet becomes the intermediary between these two worlds through the narration of *muthos* (Brisson, 2004, 4). While not every aspect of Homer and Hesiod's narratives explicitly revolves around the realm of gods, the divine presence permeates every facet of their storytelling, imparting a distinctive and nuanced comprehension of the divine across the entirety of these works. To put it differently, comprehending the narratives of Homer and Hesiod necessitates an examination of their particular depiction of the divine. Greek intellectual tradition commences by expressing the experience of the divine, an experience that conceives the world as a domain replete with potent divine forces (Hatab, 1990, 21).

The prevailing current among scholars in the field of classical studies acknowledges two primary attributes as central to the Greek perception of the divine: polytheism and anthropomorphism. Werner Jaeger, a renowned German authority in classical studies, argues that the anthropomorphic feature of Greek *muthologia-theologia* originates from the deep significance given to humanity in Greek thought. According to Jaeger, all aspects of Greek culture and intellectual tradition mirror this human-centric viewpoint: Greek sculpture and artistic expression, reaching its zenith in the precise representation of the human form; Greek philosophy, transitioning from its earlier pre-Socratic exploration of the cosmos to the subsequent Socratic, Platonic, and Aristotelian emphasis on understanding human nature; Greek literature and poetry, where human beings and their destinies have perennially constituted the principal themes, dating back to Homer; Greek political structures and the concept of the polis, revolving around the cultivation and governance of the Greek citizenry; and finally, Greek mythology and its pantheon of deities, all of whom exhibit human form and characteristics (Jaeger, 1946, xxxiii). The pivotal role that humans occupy in the context of Greek tradition is undeniable. Yet, we must exercise caution against

oversimplification; instead, it calls for deep inquiry and thorough examination. Indeed, the Greek viewpoint on humanity is intricately interwoven with their understanding of the divine, and it is imperative to observe that this does not imply that the Greeks regarded humans as superior or on par with the divine. A significant element that underscores a connection, rather than parity, between the human and divine spheres, is the portrayal of the hero in epic narratives, particularly exemplified in the Homeric epics. Heroes occupied a unique status distinct from ordinary individuals, yet they remained distinct from the gods. According to the Greek worldview, ultimate power and the prospect of eternal life were deemed beyond the grasp of mortals, reserved exclusively for the gods. A more detailed examination of specific passages from *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey* serves to elucidate the intricate relationship between gods and heroes, shedding light on the Greek conception of the divine.

In the 22<sup>nd</sup> book of *the Iliad*, we encounter the pivotal confrontation between Achilles, the valorous hero of the Achaeans, and Hector, the Trojan heroic figure. Athene, the goddess who aligns herself with Achilles and the Achaeans in the Trojan war, assumes the guise of Deiphobus, Hector's own brother, and approaches him in disguise. Following their conversation, Hector, under the illusion that his brother stands by his side, resolves to rejoin the battle, blissfully ignorant of the fact that the entity guiding him towards his inexorable destiny -death- is none other than the goddess Athene. Within the tumultuous battleground, as Hector loses his weapon and clamors for the assistance of Deiphobus, he finds no one at his side. It is in the moment that Hector experiences a stark revelation. He cries out, "No use. Here at last the gods have summoned me deathward. I thought Deiphobos the hero was here close beside me, but he is behind the wall and it was Athene cheating me, and now evil death is close to me, and no longer far away, and there is no way out. So it must long since have been pleasing to Zeus, and Zeus' son<sup>1</sup> who strikes from afar, this way; though before this they defended me gladly. But now my death is upon me. Let me at least not die without a struggle, inglorious, but do some big thing first, that men to come shall know of it" (Homer, *The Iliad*, 22.225-305).

In the Greek worldview, the gods were linked with a realm beyond the mortal, transcending the boundaries of human existence. Yet, among all living beings, humans were regarded as the ones nearest to divine status. As argued by Walter Friedrich Otto, the depiction of gods in human form within Greek belief does not indicate a lowering of their divine dignity; instead, it symbolizes the elevation of humanity to a level akin to that of the divine. This portrayal embodies the Greek understanding of humanity and their subtle separation from the domain of the gods (Otto, 2017, 81-82). Undoubtedly, the works of Homer and Hesiod depict gods in a distinctly human manner. However, this portrayal does not signify a debasement of the divine realm or a leveling of gods

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to Apollo, who is the patron god of the Trojans in the *Iliad*

with the human sphere. Rather, it underscores that it is not the gods who are understood as human by the Greeks, but instead, it is humans who are perceived as possessing god-like qualities. This aspiration for godhood, this profound yearning, becomes manifest in the conduct and expressions of Hector. Despite the appearance of deception by the goddess Athene, Hector voices no grievances and embraces his destiny. His acceptance is nothing short of magnificent and god-like, marked by an act that leaves an indelible imprint on subsequent generations, immortalizing his name. Immortality, as an exclusive attribute of the gods, becomes the hero's quest as he seeks to achieve a divine semblance by eternally enshrining his name and reputation (Otto, 2017, 72). Walter Otto cites the eminent German poet Wolfgang Goethe, who postulates, "The ultimate aspiration of the Greeks is for humanity to attain god-like qualities, rather than for the Divine to assume human form. We are discussing theomorphism here, not anthropomorphism." Otto contends that the pinnacle achievement of this theomorphism lies in the portrayal of sublime and exalted depiction of humanity, coupled with an authentic comprehension of the divine (Otto, 1954, 236). Friedrich Schiller, another great German poet, eloquently and meaningfully elucidated the relationship between humans and gods: "When the gods were more human, men were more divine" (Zwi Werblowsky, 2005, 389). Nevertheless, this portrayal encompasses diverse aspects and embodiments of the divine (*theophanic*) encounter, and it is this attribute that is known as polytheism.

In the nineteenth book of *the Odyssey*, Odysseus, in the guise of a beggar, returns home after a long, strenuous and adventurous journey. He is accompanied by his son Telemachus, and together they decide to discreetly relocate their armaments to a distant place, far removed from the prying eyes of the suitors who have assumed control over Odysseus' house during his absence. In their presence, the goddess Athene, holding a radiant golden lamp, graciously provides them with brilliant illumination. Meanwhile, Telemachus abruptly exclaims " Father, here is a great wonder that my eyes look on. Always it seems that the chamber walls, the handsome bases and roof timbers of fit and tall columns sustaining them, Shine in my eyes as if a fire were blazing. There must be surely a god here, one of those who hold the high heaven." In response, the resourceful Odysseus advises: "Hush, and keep it in your own mind, and do not ask questions. For this is the very way of the gods, who hold Olympos." (Homer, *The Odyssey*, 19.1-43).

The provided passage presents a depiction of the appearance of deities- an abrupt and profoundly impressive manifestation, that to some extent carries an air of trepidation. As Odysseus, tells his son, this is the customary manner in which the gods reveal themselves. Theos, an ever present yet elusive presence, discloses itself in a manner that might not always be readily discernible. This all-encompassing presence represents a commanding and overwhelming manifestation of the gods, prompting Odysseus to advise his son against probing or expressing judgements about it (Burkert, 1985, 272). An important point is the omnipresence and multifaceted nature of the gods. In *the*

*Iliad*, for instance, the goddess Athene adopted the guise of Deiphobus, Hector's brother. In that context, the radiant light assumes the role of a magnificent embodiment of the divine for both Odysseus and his son. Across the works of Homer and Hesiod, a recurring theme emerges where the influence of the gods is acknowledged after every significant event. Whether it be victory, defeat, or other momentous occurrences, the presence and intervention of the gods are woven into the narrative, and the heroes are acutely conscious of this divine involvement. Within these passages, there is a profound recognition of the enduring and ever-present nature of the divine, which persists even in later epochs subsequent to the era of Homer and Hesiod. This perspective endures within the viewpoints of pre-Socratic philosophers, some of whom offered some of the most rigorous critiques of the mythological and theological ideas put forth by Homer and Hesiod.

According to Greek beliefs, all the constituents of the world serve as reflections of the divine magnificence. The gods are perceivable not only within the realm of humanity but also within the remarkable and potent forces of nature, including the oceans, rivers, mountains, beasts, and plants. Throughout the cosmos, there exists an unceasing exhibition of divine presence in every passing moment (Otto, 2017, 114). The divine domain represents a harmonious yet multifaceted existence, and comprehending its unity necessitates a grasp of its multiplicity. This intricate relationship between unity and multiplicity emerged as a significant subject of philosophical inquiry in Greek thought (Touchard & Lauxerois, 2018, 51). While Greek religion is commonly described as polytheistic, a more appropriate interpretation of the Greek religious worldview might be characterized as pantheism. This perspective also found its roots in pre-Socratic expressions and took on a philosophical dimension. A renowned saying attributed to Thales, frequently cited by eminent philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, declares: "All things are full of gods" (Πάντα πλήρη θεῶν) (Jaeger, 1948, 22). This assertion by Thales, often regarded as the pioneer of Western philosophy (Mahboobi Arani, 2021, 350), stands as a threshold to philosophical thought and casts a lasting influence over the entirety of Greek philosophy: the presence of gods permeates every facet of existence.

To grasp the trajectory of intellectual development in Greece and its progression toward philosophical inquiry, one cannot and should not disregard the significance of Greek muthologia-theologia. Werner Jaeger underscores that excluding any form of conceptualization and reception of the divine from the domain of pure reason and rational thinking represents merely “another instance of that most unfortunate lack of integration in human life which is characteristic of our modern civilization and which we try to impose on former ages in our historical interpretation of their products. In so doing, we often deprive ourselves of the insight into their true nature.



## Conclusion

As previously articulated, the foundation of human thought lies deeply entrenched in the realms of myth and spiritual encounters, bearing an intrinsic religious character. The majority of symbols created by ancient civilizations are steeped in some form of mythological or divine association. It is within this context that political thought also takes root, persisting throughout humanity's collective existence. To comprehensively grasp the entirety of political thought within a specific cultural context, it is imperative to delve into its foundational roots and nascent moments. Greek intellectual tradition, encompassing Greek political thought, is no exception. The earliest written expressions of Greek thought manifest in poetic compositions, firmly rooted in an ancient oral tradition, concurrently unveiling the poet's profound encounters with the divine.

The central theme of our discussion, referred to as the "muthologia-theologia of Homer and Hesiod", constitutes a subject within the history of Greek thought. It serves as a groundwork upon which discussions regarding the emergence of political thought can be constructed. Over the ages, the mythological symbols employed in the works of Homer and Hesiod have evolved in meaning within the context of Greek intellectual tradition. The foundational basis of what we recognize as ancient Greek political thought has been resolutely structured and molded around the intricate symbolism rooted in muthologia-theologia. Following the current exploration of the theological-mythological aspect of Greek thought, a subsequent investigation could center on the transformation of religious-mythical symbols into foundational elements of Greek political thought – an inquiry that merits thorough and reflective scrutiny in a separate article.

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