

Dodds and the Irrational: Papers in Memory of Martin Ostwald

Introduction

The papers included in the second part of volume XXXI of *Scripta Classica Israelica* were delivered at a conference which took place on March 30-31, 2011, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The conference was dedicated to the memory of the outstanding ancient historian and Classical scholar Martin Ostwald. Martin maintained excellent relations, both professional and personal, with most of the classicists and ancient historians of the Israeli Classical establishment, frequented the meetings of the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies for many years, and contributed articles to *Scripta Classica Israelica*.

Prima facie, Martin and the subject of this conference did not fit together well. Martin Ostwald was intensely rational. He admired Thucydides, that most rational of ancient historians, and translated into English some of the writings of Aristotle, that most rational of ancient philosophers. The papers delivered at the conference dealt with subjects such as sacrifice, emotional displays, gods, madness, epiphanies, illnesses, mental states, paradoxes and magic, in conformity with the dichotomy drawn by E.R. Dodds as early as 1951. However, as all the speakers approached the irrational from a rational point of view, it is likely that Martin would not have disapproved. After all, as pointed out by his son Mordecai in the biography that follows, the subordination in Greek culture of ever more irrational aspects of human nature to the rule of reason was a central theme in his thought.

Gabriel Herman

Martin Ostwald

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Martin Ostwald, my father, was born in Dortmund Westphalia to Max Ostwald, a prominent lawyer, and his wife Hedwig née Strauss, on January 15, 1922. The happy family seemed to be relatively well assimilated into the Weimar Republic in Germany, absorbing the great achievements of High German civilization, while at the same time identifying with and participating in the moderate Reform Jewish community. Many of my father's childhood memories were filled with weekend visits to his paternal grandmother in the nearby village of Sichtigvor, where she was the only Jewish resident. My father and uncle played with non-Jewish neighbours there, who treated them as part of the village's life.

From the age of six, my father and his brother attended a Jewish elementary school in Dortmund. My grandparents sent them to the Jewish school even though many families held a prejudice against the significant number of Jewish émigrés from Eastern Europe attending. After four years they were sent to the Municipal Gymnasium. My father's favorite teacher was his Latin teacher, August Niemeyer. Looking back on his school years, my father claimed that the most humane teachers were for the most part those who taught Latin and Greek, and attributed that as one of the reasons for his deep love for the Classics. With the change in the situation of Jews under the rise of the Nazis, conditions in the Gymnasium became progressively oppressive.

On Kristallnacht (November 9, 1938), the family was arrested and taken to the local police station, and a few hours later to the concentration camp Sachsenhausen. It was there that he made the acquaintance of the rabbi Manfred Swarzensky, who would conduct my parent's marriage years later. My father and uncle were released on December 3 and sent off to join the Kindertransport leaving Germany for Holland, then on to England. They saw their father for the last time that day; he blessed them, quoting two dramatic lines from Homer's *Iliad* (VII. 448-49): ἔσσειται ἡμᾶρ ὅτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλη Ἴλιος ἱρὴ καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς ἐϋμμελίῳ Πριάμοιο. ('The day will come, when sacred Troy will perish, Priam himself, and the people of Priam of the ashen spear'). They parted from their mother, who had organized their escape, at the railroad station, on December 13, 1938.

After a week in an orphanage in de Steeg, Holland, they were transferred to a camp near Rotterdam and, a few weeks later, to a youth hostel in Gorssel near Deventer. In February 1939, they received their visas to join the Kindertransport and they soon left by boat from Flushing to Harwich.

In England they moved to a boy's hostel in Ramsgate, Kent, where they had English lessons. However, war was declared on January 15, 1914, and they had to appear before a special court which granted them friendly alien status without restrictions. They were soon transferred to a camp near Wallingford in Oxfordshire, but they weren't very happy there; their aunts, who had been able to leave Germany to work as domestic servants in

Bournemouth, managed to find my father a position as an apprentice waiter at a hotel. Two things bothered my father at that time. He wanted to complete his education (he hadn't finished high school in Germany), and he wanted to become a Rabbi. Accordingly, he changed his job to work at a kosher hotel. However, the county where the city of Bournemouth is located was soon declared to be a 'protected area', and all holders of German passports had to be interned. This was the first time in my father's life when he was separated from his brother. He was taken first to Southampton, then to Huyton near Liverpool, and finally to the Isle of Man. There was a lively intellectual life in the camp with many interesting people giving lectures; the most memorable, Professor Ernest Neustadt, had brought a volume of Greek lyric poetry with him, and my father enjoyed reading with him and benefiting from his commentary. A few weeks later, as a result of the increasing food shortage, the British requested that Canada and Australia take the 'most dangerous element', and my father was sent on a Polish passenger ship *Sobieski* to Canada; it was there my father met his life-long friend, Tom Rosenmeyer for the first time.

The internees on the ship, and later in the camp, were an impossible mix of German-Jewish refugees similar in background to my father, together with non-Jewish anti-Nazis, orthodox yeshiva *bochurim*, and their exact opposites: Nazi-German prisoners of war, including Ernst (Putsi) Hanfstaengl, who was responsible for imprisoning my grandparents and ultimately for their deaths.

The locals jeered as they marched from the train to the camp in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and earlier inmates, Nazi prisoners of war, greeted them with vicious anti-Jewish songs when they arrived at the camp. They were given an opportunity to volunteer for the British Army: to dig, unarmed, in the rubble of bombed cities; my father refused to enlist just to be treated as an unarmed slave. Instead, McGill University in Montreal set up a high-school diploma program for those who hadn't finished High School. My father was not only one of the students, but also a teacher and assistant principal. He taught Greek, Latin and English Literature. The head principal was William Sebastian Hekscher, later a distinguished art historian at Princeton, with whom he renewed his friendship in 1981-2. In June 1941, while in Camp B, my father passed his Junior Matriculation and a year later his Senior Matriculation in Sherbrooke, Quebec (Camp N). Meanwhile, in June 1941, the group was divided into those who insisted on kosher food and sent to Camp I, and those who did not, who were sent to Camp A in Farnham, Quebec. An attempt by the authorities to bring Nazi prisoners into the camp provoked a hunger-strike, with a successful outcome.

The Jewish fraternity *Beta Sigma Rho* sponsored my father's release to begin his studies at the University of Toronto. In 1942, the Board of Governors decided that my father's group should be refused admission, since, in their thinking, enemy aliens would be filling places of Canadians serving the country overseas. The main spokesman in their defense was Professor of Ancient History, C.B. Sissons, and he succeeded in having them admitted to the University.

My father chose the Honours programs, which took four years and involved a prescribed course of study in a special discipline. He opted, of course, for Classics. Since his class (1946) had only four students in all the colleges of the University, they all took Greek Tragedy at Trinity, Greek Philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, at University College,

Pre-Socratics at Victoria and Stoics and Epicureans at Trinity. In their freshman year, they studied Homer's *Iliad* in Greek and Roman Comedy in Latin; sophomore year, Greek Tragedy and Comedy and Roman Republic Literature; junior year, Greek Historians and Literature of the early Roman Empire; senior year, Greek Philosophy and Roman Historians. Toronto emphasized good teaching above great scholarship and my father didn't remember any really bad teacher. His favorite teacher was E.T. Owen, who taught him Homer in his freshman year and Aeschylus in his sophomore year. My father described him as 'something like a priest of the Muses'. Other teachers included Gilbert Norwood, G.M.A. Grube, and Charles Norris Cochrane, and above all Homer and Dorothy Thompson who gave my father the only instruction he ever received in Classical Archaeology. Homer was absent for the first three years working in British Naval Intelligence because of his intimate knowledge of Greece. Dorothy taught Greek and Hellenistic Archaeology sophomore and junior years (1943/4) and (1944/5). Both the Thompsons became close personal friends with my father. In 1960 my father was invited to the American Academy in Athens as a result of Homer's position as Director of the Agora Excavations there.

Also through Homer's initiative, my father was first invited to be a member of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, NJ, and continued to be a member up to the late 1980's. A friend of the Thompsons was Mary E. White, who never taught him, yet influenced my father's love for Greek History. She also facilitated my father's close friendship with Anthony Andrewes of Oxford University.

Shortly before the end of his freshman year, my father developed a serious health problem that required hospitalization for three months, forcing him to miss his first year exams. The Department of Classics thought he deserved an 'aegrotat', credit given to a student who was too sick to take the required exams. He was lucky to have many visitors: fellow students, professors and fellows of the Jewish fraternity. The most caring of all was a Jewish social worker responsible for the welfare of the Jewish patients. While hospitalized, my father's English relatives sent him his remaining possessions from England, but the ship was torpedoed by the Germans. The fraternity recovered \$600.00 in insurance and that was just enough to foot the hospital bill. My father received his first scholarship at the end of his sophomore year, and another in his junior year. In that year, September 1944 to May 1945, he made friends with two remarkable graduate students, both of whom he knew from internment: Tom Rosenmeyer and Emil Fackenheim, who was taking his Ph.D. in Arabic philosophy. In his senior year, my father wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Classics Department at Hebrew University inquiring about the possibility of doing graduate work with financial support. He received a very warm letter from Professor Moshe Schwabe in Hebrew, encouraging him to come, but as no financial support was offered, he looked elsewhere. On May 8th 1945, the day Victory in Europe was declared, my father wrote his final exams on Pindar, famed for his Victory Odes to the winners of the Pan-Hellenic games. In the middle of his final exams, our uncle Ernest in England sent my father a letter written by his grandmother and smuggled out of Auschwitz, telling him that his father had died in Theresienstadt and his mother had been murdered in Auschwitz. He decided to persevere, letting his professors know only indirectly of the stress he was under; despite it all, he passed with highest honours.

With the end of the war, it was much easier for my father to visit his relatives in Chicago, whom he hadn't seen since 1938. He also visited someone he had been corresponding with since December 1944, at the suggestion of my Uncle Ernest who had met her in England: Lore Weinberg, my mother-to-be, who was a student at the School of Social Work at the University of Chicago.

My father decided to continue his graduate work at the University of Chicago, which offered him a larger fellowship than any other institution. This involved taking on a project that straddled at least two university departments, and my father was thrilled at some breadth after four years of studying nothing but Classics. His proposed project was to apply psychological approaches to Greek myth. Professor Norwood encouraged him to look up a young, fascinating new member of the Committee on Social Thought, David Grene. Grene had done undergraduate work at Trinity College, Dublin, despite being an Irish Protestant, and graduate work in Vienna under Ludwig Rademacher. Grene convinced my father to narrow his project, so my father made the subject of his Master's thesis the comparison of the treatments of the Electra story by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The Grene farm (run by Prof. Grene and his wife at that time, Marjorie, an outstanding philosopher) was a center of intellectual life; my parents met a wide circle of academics, including the art historian Otto von Simpson and his wife Lulix, and the historian Daniel Boorstin. My parents' friends included many of my father's fellow students: Charles Kahn, Michael and Virginia Jameson, Miriam Lichtheim, Tanya Cizevska, and Etienne Bloch, son of the great French-Jewish mediaeval historian Marc Bloch who, as a member of the French Resistance, had been killed by the Nazis.

Although my father had great admiration for David Grene, his personality so overwhelmed him that in writing his Master's thesis he found himself wondering not what he thought about any issue, but whether David would approve of what he said. He felt a need to escape. Sitting in on a Goethe seminar given by Prof. Arnold Bergstrasser, he was advised to consult an acquaintance of his at Columbia University, Professor Kurt von Fritz. My father did write to von Fritz, and was invited to do his doctoral work there. The fellowship money he was awarded helped my parents decide to get married that year.

On a bicycle trip from Chicago to Madison, Wisconsin, they stopped at a "Fellowship Farm" run by the Uphoffs, devout Christian Socialists. In a local newspaper they saw an advert for Sabbath services conducted at Temple Beth-El by Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky, whom my father had briefly met at Sachsenhausen. Walter Uphoff just happened to know him and set up a meeting. Swarsensky remembered not only my father but my grandfather and uncle as well from that single encounter. My parents enthusiastically invited him to conduct their wedding ceremony. On December 27, 1948, my parents were married in Chicago. Dr. Swarsensky performed the ceremony and my Aunt Lilo (my mother's step-sister) hosted a most glamorous affair. My father's and my mother's relatives, friends and teachers from the Committee for Social Thought attended.

Almost immediately, the newlyweds moved into an apartment on New York's West Side. My father felt intellectually more at home in the Department of Greek and Latin; it was made particularly excellent by the presence of two brilliant non-Jewish German refugee professors. One was Prof. von Fritz, who supervised my father's Ph.D.

dissertation, suggesting the subject: *The Unwritten Laws and the Ancestral Constitution of Ancient Athens*. The dissertation was accepted in 1952, shortly before I was born.

The second professor who lent distinction to the department was Ernst Kapp. He was a staunch anti-Nazi and student of the great Classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. In 1912, he published a trail-blazing dissertation that established a methodology for arranging Aristotle's writings in chronological order. With that he attained a position at University of Hamburg, a seat of very liberal activity with a faculty that included the art historian, Erwin Panofsky, the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer, and the Classicist Bruno Snell. Another teacher my father had at Columbia was Gilbert Highet, a Scotsman who studied under Russell Meiggs; he had a different approach from the two German professors: less rigorous scholarship and more popularizing.

Another teacher was Moses Hadas, who had rabbinic training from the Jewish Theological Seminary as well as a Ph.D. in Classics from Columbia. His closest associates in other departments were Jaques Barzun and Lionell Trilling, who was quite friendly to my father and invited him and my mother to a Seder at his house.

My father recalled one last, very interesting incident. My father, as all may remember, liked to get to the Classics Reading Room in Butler Library as early as possible. But one day in 1949, he noticed an elderly man who had arrived even earlier and left later. When he asked the librarian who it was, he was told the man was a visiting scholar from Israel. My father plucked up courage and asked him if he was by any chance Professor Moshe Schwabe. He and my father became very good friends, and he told my father much about life at Hebrew University, mentioning one of his favorites, Ranana Meridor, member of a prominent family in the movement following Menahem Begin, and now the party of the current Prime Minister of Israel.

In early 1950, my father received his first job offer: a one-year teaching position at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, but it was bettered by Wesleyan University in Middleton, Connecticut, with a longer term proposition. There were some interesting colleagues at Wesleyan: the classicist, Norman O. Brown and the historian Carl Schorske. It was the first time that my father had to teach 'Humanities'. His experience with the Committee on Social Thought, along with his Classics studies, had prepared him for handling different periods and literatures.

Both my parents encountered some immigration problems: once my father had accepted a teaching job, he was forced to discontinue his student status and apply for immigration to the U. S. However, the quota on German immigrants was filled, so my father had to rely on my mother's naturalization. She was a professional social worker and had to join the union, which in her case was dominated by Communists. Despite her antipathy to the Communist party, she had to distribute pamphlets in her office, making her a 'functionary' of the Communists and almost subject to deportation. My father, as her spouse, was also threatened with the same prospect. Wesleyan University came to the rescue and Connecticut Senator William Benson helped clear up all the problems. Nevertheless, even though they had enjoyed much generosity from Wesleyan, my father accepted an offer to join the faculty at Columbia under von Fritz and to complete his dissertation.

My parents moved to Kew Gardens, Queens where they lived until 1958. It was an apartment complex full of German-Jewish friends whom they had known since childhood, in both Dortmund and Hannover, including former teachers from the elementary school that my father attended as a child. They also maintained a close tie with the Schockens, who had moved to Scarsdale. Dora had been a friend of my mother's in Chicago; the Schocken family has remained a friend till today. One major change to my parents' lives was that I was born in 1952, followed three years later by my brother, David. My father taught undergraduates almost exclusively, and was soon invited to teach an undergraduate seminar on an advanced level, known as the Colloquium (admission by invitation only); among his students were Erich Gruen, who later took a post in Roman history at Berkeley and Jay Neugeboren, a well-known writer, who has since become friendly with my brother, David. My father was offered a position as Assistant Professor in 1954, but he declined. One source of income, however, was a job with the Liberal Arts Press as an advisor on translations of Greek and Roman literature; he was asked to revise the Jowett translation of Plato's *Protagoras* and Skemp's translation of Plato's *Statesman*.

My father told Mr. Piest that a new annotated translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was needed, because the one used at Columbia was incomprehensible to the students. He got that job, and has received royalties ever since, even after the sale of the Liberal Arts Press.

The situation at Columbia became less to my father's liking with the departure of von Fritz to Germany in 1954, followed by the retirement of Kapp, who also returned to Germany, joining his sisters in Munich. The Department was now being run by those who didn't share his view of Classics, which stressed meticulous scholarship.

My father was very glad when early in 1958 he received an offer by Helen North to accept a position at Swarthmore. He had met her at Columbia several years before when she held a Visiting Professorship; the offer was attractive because there was an emphasis on both teaching and on productive scholarship, despite the lack of graduate students. My father accepted the offer for the following year; and over the summer took the entire family on a first-time tour of Europe: my mother, brother and I, which included a reunion with my uncle, Ernest, his wife and two daughters, whom we hadn't ever met. My parents continued on to Italy: Milan, Pisa, Florence, Rome, Naples, Pompeii and Paestum, and from there to Athens.

The move to Swarthmore would be my parents' last (in terms of professional location). They surrounded themselves there with new friends, fellow academics, and also a good number of refugees with whom they shared a common cultural background.

My father was very happy with the spirit of the College; the students took their studies very seriously, and not simply to acquire credits towards a B.A. My father liked the institution of the Honors seminar, in which he felt the students could develop a closer relation with their teachers, but in 1968, when the University of Pennsylvania offered him an opportunity to supervise graduate students, he readily accepted. My father was very fortunate to come to an agreement between the two institutions so that he had the best of all possible worlds. Michael Jameson, the dean at that time, initiated a new graduate program in Ancient History, in which a dissertation would bridge any two ancient civilizations. This was one of the pioneering interdisciplinary projects, now fairly

common. My father credited this arrangement with his interests being more toward the historical side.

The other important advantage of this situation was that we were able to go on leave every 4 years. My father's first grant was a Fulbright to spend a year at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. We took a relaxed tour of Europe on the way there. Some of the highlights of that trip were: a stay at the American Academy in Rome, the excavations at Pompeii and the Greek temples at Paestum. Once in Athens, my father was surrounded with colleagues, including Thomas Rosenmeyer, who surprised my father by accepting a position as Visiting Professor at the American School. We had chance to visit much of the environs of Athens: Sounion, Eleusis and Marathon; and, of course, we walked a lot in Athens visiting the sites on the Acropolis and the Plaka. We spent a great deal of time at the excavations of the Agora, the ancient center of civic activity. Under the expert guidance of Professor Eugene Vanderpool of the American School, who was intimately acquainted with every corner of Greece, and was familiar with Greek culture from antiquity to the present, we visited Corinth, Perachora, Mycene, Tiryns, Epidauros and Delphi. In addition we toured the island of Crete by car.

For the winter vacation of 1961/2, we visited Israel for the first time. My parents took trips around the country, with a special emphasis on Jerusalem, where my father made the acquaintance of Ranana Meridor. She has remained a very close family friend ever since.

A few months after that, we made a trip with Geoffrey (G.E.M.) de Ste Croix, a most important ancient historian. He was visiting the British School at Athens, situated next door to the American one. After the trip with de Ste Croix, we enjoyed a beautiful drive through Europe on our way back to Swarthmore.

In Swarthmore, in an attempt to upgrade the Department, my father invited Russell Meiggs, a most distinguished Ancient Historian at Balliol College, Oxford, for the fall semester of 1963. A legendary eccentric whose activities included rolls in the snow in his swimming trunks, he was known for his magisterial studies on the Athenian Empire, the port of Ostia, and *Trees and Timber in the Ancient Mediterranean World*. He was a very charismatic teacher and visited Swarthmore two more times.

The close relationship my father developed with both de Ste Croix and Meiggs facilitated an invitation to spend his leave in Oxford. Before we left for the year, I celebrated my Bar Mitzvah in 1965, a great occasion in my parents' lives. We made a tour of France, spending a month in Provence and Languedoc.

Once in Oxford, my father became very friendly with Richard and Sophie Walzer, a distinguished scholar who taught Greek and Arabic philosophy at St. Catherine's and later accepted a visiting appointment at the University of Pennsylvania. Before going back to the U. S., we returned to Greece for a quick visit.

In 1967, my uncle developed a brain tumor and passed away soon after; losing his only brother was a most traumatic blow for my father.

My brother's Bar Mitzvah in 1968 was a memorable occasion for my parents, as was my father's appointment to the Graduate School at the University of Pennsylvania.

That summer, my parents went alone to the University of California at Berkeley at the invitation of Thomas Rosenmeyer, along with Alain Renoir, a specialist on Beowulf. They hoped to entice my father to accept a permanent position in the innovative

Comparative Literature program there, but he declined because it would mean teaching Greek less than he would have liked. That summer, my parents were introduced to the current events of the late 60's and 70's: my mother was caught up in a tear gas attack by the police.

Meanwhile, Swarthmore experienced its share of the turmoil of that time with the lamentable, untimely death of the President of the College, Courtney Smith, of a heart attack, while waiting to meet an unruly student delegation. One memory my father had of that year was that one of his students refused to take her exams and would have wasted four years of undergraduate work, but he managed to persuade her to do an oral exam. The question was 'What was the single most relevant subject you have studied.' Her reply was 'That's easy: Greece in the 5th century B.C. E.'

In 1986, my father published his book *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of the Law* with the University of California Press. He was awarded the *Goodwin Award of Merit* of the American Philological Association for this book in 1990. My father was elected President of said Association in 1987. In 1991 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 1993 he was inducted into the American Philosophical Society. He was awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and the University of Dortmund, Germany, his native city.

The last Pesach Seder my father celebrated was at the home of a family friend (both mine and his), and former student of his, Donna Kirschenbaum. She took the opportunity to ask him why, with his strong, committed interest in Hebrew and Jewish Studies, he had opted to invest all his scholarly activity in the Greeks (Classical). He answered without hesitation: 'That is simple: the Greeks; they were rational'.

When we were searching for a topic around which to organize this conference, we had to avoid certain subjects which were very central to my father's work: democracy, oligarchy and so on, as they had already been covered in previous international conferences at the Hebrew University. Professor Herman proposed: 'The Greeks and the Irrational (of Dodds), Revisited.' At first, I was disappointed and concerned that this subject would not really reflect my father's interest. Yet, on second thought, I came to realize how very much we could, and hopefully have, explored aspects of the Greeks that provide a reflection on how close my father came to understanding their 'rationality'.

At the risk of deconstructing this entire question somewhat, it would appear that the question of what determines whether a civilization is rational or irrational becomes more difficult to pin down. In that case, I would go so far as to add a thought borrowed from the anthropology of Clifford Geertz: the distinction between normal and abnormal legal discourse; that is to say, normal interaction within the accepted rules of a culture and abnormal, where extraneous factors are brought into the discussion. It would be more helpful not to ask either rational or irrational, but instead: how rational? Probably all civilizations have some sort of rationalism in their normal style of discourse.

So, Papa, as you were continually in the habit of doing, you have taught us how much we have to appreciate from the Greeks; however rational they were or were not.

May it all be a fitting memorial to my great father.

ז"ל יהי זכרו ברוך
Mordechai Ostwald

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