Belief, Make-Believe, and the Religious Imagination

Budelmann, Felix

Belief, Make-Believe, and the Religious Imagination
The Case of the Deus Ex Machina in Greek Tragedy

Felix Budelmann

The foundational move of the cognitive science of religion is the adoption of a naturalist stance. Religion is examined as a psychological phenomenon, and religious beliefs and practices explained as a by-product of human mental predispositions. It is our cognitive make-up that leads us to detect agents, divine and otherwise, even where there are none, and makes us create, remember, and pass on 'minimally counterintuitive concepts' like that of the supernatural hero.[1] Hypotheses such as these have considerable explanatory force. At a transhistorical and transcultural level, they open our eyes to patterns that link different forms of religion and provide psychologically grounded explanations for these patterns. At the level of the particular religion in its particular time and place, they account for seemingly inexplicable or strange beliefs, encourage properly founded consideration of the intuitive and emotional appeal of religious practice, and enhance our understanding of synchronic phenomena by placing them against the backdrop of long, often evolutionary, timescales. Even though classicists have started to explore this approach only recently, its potential for the study of ancient religions is already beginning to become clear, and the field is likely to develop apace in the coming years.[2]

The challenge, however, when looking for cognitive models of religious *experience*, as this volume sets out to do, is to go beyond origins, causes, and biases, and to try to construct the broadest possible account of the religious imagination. The term 'imagination' appears frequently in the cognitive science of religion, but it usually describes a mental function that

[1] For discussion of agency detection, see also McGlashan, Chapter 6, in this volume; for discussion of minimally counterintuitive concepts, see also Eidinow Chapter 3, and Sandwell, Chapter 11, in this volume.

[2] This volume itself is of course part of this development. Probably the most high-profile publication to date is Larson 2016; cf. Panagiotidou and Beck 2017, which is comparable in its methodology.

misleads us into (e.g.) imagining faces in the clouds rather than, as we require here, one that engages in imaginative visualization, productive counterfactual thinking, or artistic creativity. It is the desirability (as I see it) of developing a thicker account of the religious imagination that prompts two methodological choices made in this chapter.[3]

The first is to move beyond the well-rehearsed canon of psychological mechanisms that dominate research in the cognitive science of religion. Psychologists outside this field have long-standing and wide-ranging interests in the imagination, and many of those interests have the potential to expand our understanding of the religious imagination, not least so for a culture such as ancient Greece where religion suffused all aspects of life, mental and otherwise. The particular psychological capacity that I shall focus on in this chapter is the human propensity for make-believe – for consciously constructing and entering temporary imaginary worlds, be it as children by engaging in pretend-play or as adults by reading novels and going to the cinema or theatre.[4]

The second methodological choice is to put culture in the driver's seat: cultural and religious practices will be looked at not as driven by mental mechanisms but as exploiting those mental mechanisms to generate particular forms of experience.[5] The issue is in part rhetorical – everybody agrees that nature and culture operate in concert – but it seems to me that as interpreters of a particular culture we gain a fuller picture of that culture if we study individuals and communities as religious actors who in a meaningful way understand and shape what they think and do than if we treat them as wholly at the mercy of physiological mechanisms of which they are unaware. In so far as this position may seem to echo the concerns of historians and literary critics who are altogether wary of cognitive approaches (which at least in principle I am not), the point to emphasize is that we should certainly view those religious actors as drawing on, and indeed constrained by, mental capacities and predispositions when they individually and collectively shape religious practices, beliefs, and environments. However, this research agenda is most likely to have a broad impact, I believe, and most likely to be capable of productive interaction with 'traditional' work in classics, if it adopts a maximally capacious and

---

[3] Neither, it should be emphasized, is it unprecedented in the study of ancient religion. See in particular the work of Esther Eidinow (e.g. Eidinow 2015, 2016) and Peter T. Struck (Struck 2016).

[4] Pretend-play features as a part of an evolutionary account of the religious imagination in Lieberoth 2013.

[5] See also the Introduction to this volume.

generous account of the ancient Greek (and Roman) religious imagination, and one that looks to the whole range of disciplines interested in human cognition, rather than exclusively the cognitive science of religion with its diachronic and evolutionary priorities.

My particular subject in this chapter, the *deus ex machina* of Attic tragedy, is chosen as a case in point. Created by individual poets, the epiphanic stage deities of Euripides and his peers are very obviously the products of self-conscious artistry and thus call for a different set of approaches than, say, questions about the cross-cultural ubiquity of anthropomorphic gods.[6] At the same time, they are also a form of religious practice, and it is in order to do them justice as such that I will discuss them alongside enactments of divinity in more narrowly ritual contexts.

The first section ('Belief and Make-believe') draws on work in psychology and anthropology to set out a persistent characteristic of make-believe: from cinema-going and children's pretend-play to evangelical practices of conversing with God, most forms of make-believe intertwine self-conscious awareness of fictionality with emotional commitment. I suggest that a similarly complex experience, combining an understanding that the actors are human with a sense of divine presence, characterized divine performances in Greek antiquity. Because of the nature of our sources such an argument is inevitably speculative – for the *deus ex machina* specifically we have no testimony of audience response – but I hope that it is nevertheless suggestive and worthwhile. The second section ('Variation: *Deus Ex Machina* and Ritual Impersonation of the Divine Compared') asks how the *deus ex machina* compares in this respect to other, non-dramatic, practices of enacting divinity. The differences, it is suggested, are ones of degree rather than kind, and among the continuities, going back to the first section, is the importance of the worshippers' 'willing suspension of disbelief'. The third and final section ('Faith, Obedience, Trust') analyzes the text of the *deus* scenes and especially the human characters' responses. What is at stake in the dialogues between the *deus* and the characters is not just what the gods are like (their justice, authority, power, understanding, and so on), but also what relationships humans can form with them and what attitudes they should adopt towards them: in response to the *deus'* speech, the characters articulate their faith, compliance, and trust, and even undergo emotional transformation, despite all that is unsatisfactory in the deity's words and behaviour. Both externally, then, as a form of make-believe, and internally through their

---

[6] On these questions, see Eidinow, Chapter 3 in this volume.

dialogue, *deus ex machina* scenes pull systematically in two directions. The religious experience they enable is one in which there is room for belief as well as disbelief, faith as well as distrust, acceptance as well as distance.

Belief and Make-believe

Divine impersonation, like epiphany in general, is very obviously grounded in an anthropomorphic conception of the divine, and would therefore lend itself to analysis in terms of theory of mind, agency detection, and minimally counterintuitive concepts.[7] This chapter nevertheless takes a different approach and focuses, more specifically, on the feature that sets divine performances apart from other forms of anthropomorphic representation, such as myths and statues: the impersonation of a god by a human. The actor playing the *deus ex machina*, the priestesses involved in the 'sacred drama' of Kore and Persephone at Eleusis,[8] and (in a later period) the all-male Athenian *Iobakchoi*, who used sortition to distribute among themselves the roles of Dionysus, Kore, Palaemon, Aphrodite, and Proteurhythmos, all pretended to be something that they were not – deities.[9] Comparable practices, while by no means a routine feature of Greek rituals and festivals, are documented for various Greek cities.[10]

Discussion of the cognitive dimension of such divine enactments goes back to, and still often centres on, Herodotus' account of Pisistratus and Phye. When relaying how Pisistratus fitted out the human Phye as Athena for his processional entry into Athens, Herodotus famously complains that the allegedly clever Athenians should not have been taken in by what was blatant play-acting (Hdt.1.60). In view of the reasonably well-attested tactical use of staged battlefield epiphanies in later periods,[11] the possibility that Pisistratus did indeed aim to deceive cannot be dismissed out of hand, but the majority view now, going back to an influential 1987 article by W. R. Connor, is that Herodotus (in error or out of mischief) misrepresents what was going on.[12] Comparing Xenophon of Ephesus' description of a

---

[7] See Larson 2016: 67–73.

[8] If 'drama' is the right word: the evidence is uncertain. See Clinton 2004 and Petridou 2015: 265–266, with further references.

[9] *Iobakchoi*: *IG* II², 1368.121–127 (second century CE).

[10] The evidence for rituals enacting epiphanies (in many cases relatively late) is collected and discussed by Petridou 2015: 43–49. Many of them involve a single figure enacted by the deity's priest. See also below, p. 108.

[11] See Platt 2011: 14–20, Petridou 2015: 142–168.

[12] Connor 1987, quotations from pp. 44 and 46.

divine impersonation in a procession in honour of Artemis, Connor argued that the Athenians knowingly went along with Pisistratus' make-believe Athena: 'The crowds might have chosen to express coolness, disinterest or downright hostility. Instead, it appears that they delighted in the shared drama and let their enthusiasm be known.'

The suggestion that the Athenians played along rather than being outwitted has much going for it and must be at least part of the explanation. More difficult to decide, however, and arguably more important for the *deus ex machina* (whose nature as a pretend rather than real god was obvious to all), is how we should conceptualize the belief or disbelief involved in this playing along. Can we, in some way, say that the Athenians felt that they were worshipping Athena? Did they, in some way, feel that they were in the presence of a deity even though they knew that they were watching a costumed woman? Connor himself does not explicitly address such questions, but the language he uses is certainly not religious: to understand the Phye episode, he suggests, we need to 'enter into the playful and mimetic mentality of what Gerald Else has called "the histrionic period" of Greek history'. For a rather different view one might compare Rebecca Sinos, who, again on the basis of Xenophon's novel, argues that the play-acting will not always have been transparent and posits a rather less ludic mind-set: 'When they see this girl in costume they honor her as a goddess, as if the ritual transcends reality by the symbolic power of the procession. This must be the ideal and expected reaction to the ritual representation of a god. It suggests a blurring of the boundaries between actor and god, thus uniting mortals and gods, a goal of many rituals of worship.'[13]

This is hardly an area in which certainty is attainable, and in any case Jennifer Larson must be right to emphasize individual variation – differing 'degrees of openness to the symbolic statement', as she puts it[14] – but there is a general observation to be made, and one that opens out from Phye to other forms of divine enactment, including the *deus ex machina*: engagement with pretence can, at the same time, be characterized by both clear-headed awareness of the pretence and emotional investment. To understand better how this is so, I shall in the remainder of this section briefly compare work in other fields (child psychology, the study of narrative fiction, and the psychology and anthropology of religion); such

---

[13] Sinos 1993: 84. Recent treatments that broadly follow Connor include Petridou 2015: 147–170 and Larson 2016: 89–91; see also Koch Piettre 2018.
[14] Larson 2016: 90.

comparison cannot recover ancient Greek religious experience, but it helps us to set out parameters and possible patterns. My aims are generalizing in the first instance: this section will discuss the dynamic of emotional-commitment-cum-conscious-complicity in its relevance to all divine performance in Classical Greece; differences and similarities between 'ritual' and 'literary' performances will be the subject of the next section.

Pretend-play is the subject of an established research programme in developmental psychology. The first point that stands out with reference to the interests of this chapter is that – even where children are concerned – there is nothing naive about make-believe, and that pretend-play involves no loss of reality: a number of studies have shown that even young children take their knowledge of the real world with them into the make-believe world, and do not on the whole confuse the two. This view has been developed in particular by Paul L. Harris, who argues that make-believe is not an isolated capacity but enables essential functions such as counter-factual reasoning and the mental engagement with persons and things that are not currently seen.[15] In an argument that for classicists recalls the debate over whether Greeks of the Archaic period entertained concepts of fiction and myth, Harris positions himself against older assumptions, associated with Jean Piaget, according to which children retreat into fantasy worlds and lose their grasp of the fantasy/reality distinction when they engage in pretend-play. Any attempt to map modern child psychology neatly onto ancient make-believe in religious contexts is bound to go astray, but what we may usefully take away is a reminder that make-believe involves complicity and self-consciousness, and with this reminder a warning against assuming too readily naivety, confusion, or loss of reality.

Next, and coming as it were from the other end, there is the observation, familiar to every reader of novels and every cinema- or theatre-goer, that fiction has the power to move even if its status as fiction is well understood (as it usually is). Philosophers call this the 'paradox of fiction' and continue to debate its solution.[16] Is it that the emotions elicited by fiction are not real? Or is it possible to have real emotions in response to something that is not real? Or do we, in some relevant sense, get ourselves to believe that the fictional world is real? Whatever is the most promising way of tackling the paradox, the essential observation for our purposes here is simply that the experience of engagement with fiction supports the notion that it is perfectly possible for divine impersonators of all sorts to

---

[15] See most conveniently his monograph *The Work of the Imagination* (Harris 2000).
[16] For a recent overview with references see Friend 2016.

involve their audiences without deceiving them. Or, to put it differently, onlookers at Pisistratus' procession, participants in ritual divine enactments, and spectators watching a *deus ex machina* scene do not need to forget that they are watching a costumed human in order to find the display affecting.[17] The nature and strength of their response will depend on their individually and culturally varied attitudes, the particular context, and the nature of the performance (more on this in the next section) but the basic principle seems beyond doubt.

Crucially, the two modalities often operate in concert. Even though we are always conscious, at one level, that we are reading a book or watching a play, this awareness will only rarely interfere with our immersion in the fictional world. In fact, it is not just that, on the whole, we fail to perceive a tension between immersion and awareness, but it is this very 'double vision' that affords the kind of engagement that is characteristic of fictional narratives, not least so those of Greek tragedy. Spectators can allow themselves to be moved by Philoctetes' pain or be gripped by the lead-up to the murder of Agamemnon without having to run on stage to alleviate or prevent the suffering. Self-conscious make-believe and emotional involvement can form a package.[18]

In its own way, the same integrated dual response comes into its own in (modern) religious practice. In *When God Talks Back*, psychological anthropologist T. M. Luhrmann explores how evangelical Christians relate to God. A recurring theme in her study, which is the product of a sustained period as a participant-observer in a US church, is the value of pretence.[19] For evangelical Christians, maintaining belief is not a given but takes effort, and one dimension of this effort is a form of pretence. Members of the church teach themselves, alone and in groups, to talk to God like with a good friend, asking him about things large and small, and even laying a place for him at their dinner table. At the same time, they are perfectly aware that despite this practice of familiarity God does not have the same status as a real friend. (Luhrmann compares the attitude of young children who have an 'imaginary companion' that they talk to in their heads.)

This is itself suggestive, but Luhrmann goes further and observes that knowing pretence is not just a necessary staging-post on the road to belief

---

[17] For Phye a similar suggestion is made by Larson 2016: 90–91.
[18] The psychological dimension of this observation is expanded by Polvinen 2017.
[19] Luhrmann 2012, esp. 72–100, 320–322. Comparison with children's imaginary companions is made on pp. 79–80.

but becomes part of the experience of belief and of what God means to evangelical Christians. Here is an extract:[20]

> There was a sense of in-betweenness in these experiences of God. These congregants were clear that God was real, but they were not always clear that God was present in specific playlike practices the way they were pretending that he was. When I asked Stacy whether she believed that God was truly present when she imagined him in front of her, she said, "I can sit here and have a conversation with God as if he's in that chair. I know that I experience God. I know that I hear him. But how do I know that it's different than, you know, my imaginary friend Harold? I don't." The ambiguity simply became part of the nature of God.

The practice of imagining God as present and talking to me, which in the first instance is the effort necessary to form a relationship with him, ends up shaping the nature of religious experience. God inhabits a place in the imagination that is consciously created by the believer, yet, in a very specific way, real nevertheless.

Inward and often repeated, the routines of evangelical Christians can only ever provide a loose comparandum for the annual or occasional, but in any case infrequent, staged epiphanies of Classical Greece, be it the *deus ex machina*, the *Iobakchoi*, or the 'sacred drama' at Eleusis. In their different ways, divine impersonation in ancient Greece and faith practices in the United States in the early twenty-first century both intertwine self-conscious recourse to the imagination with emotional and cognitive arousal so as to create divine encounters. Both give the divine a presence that is consciously fictional but in its conscious fictionality has the potential to acquire a particular sense of reality.

For the divine performances of ancient Greece, two contextual considerations add flesh to the bone. The first is Verity Platt's observation that Graeco-Roman visual and textual representations of epiphanies tend to combine the manifestation of the god's presence with high levels of artificiality. For example, she writes as follows about votive reliefs:[21]

> First, they illustrate the mutually reinforcing relationship between deities and their visual representations. ... Images ... can simultaneously symbolise and *constitute* divine presence. ... Second, however, these votive reliefs demonstrate how a ready engagement with the phenomenological verities

---

[20] Luhrmann 2012: 95.
[21] Platt 2011: 47–49, similarly Platt 2015 and 2018. On epiphany in general see, apart from Platt's work: Versnel 1987, Koch Piettre 2001, Petridou 2015, and the articles in Marinatos and Shanzer 2004 and Petridou and Platt 2018. See also McGlashan, Chapter 6, and Eidinow, Chapter 3, in this volume.

of the divine in Greek culture existed side by side – and in constant
dialogue – with an experimental, conceptualising approach to the possibil-
ities offered by different strategies of representation, so generating a rich
tradition of cultural commentary, both visual and literary, upon ritual and
artistic means of apprehending the gods.

All epiphany, Platt and others have shown, is epistemologically challeng-
ing. To believe in the existence of the gods is one thing; to be confident
that the figure before one is (or is not) a god is quite another (cf. Phye and
the Athenians).[22] In this context, the properties of divine enactment that
I have been discussing are a heightened version of what is true for epiphany
in general. The suffusion of divine presence and mediated representation
that Platt draws out is particularly pronounced here: enacted gods are
manifested in the flesh, yet this manifestation is overtly manufactured by
human pretence.

The second relevant context, broader and potentially more significant,
concerns make-believe in Greek religion more widely. In a substantive
chapter of *Coping with the Gods*, H. S. Versnel argues that what he
variously calls 'honest pretence', 'suspension of disbelief', and 'as if' is
the cognitive mechanism that forms the basis of Hellenistic ruler cult:
when Greeks worshipped human rulers as gods, he suggests, they adopted
a form of sincere make-believe. The evidence Versnel amasses is strong,
but what is most important for our purposes here is his less systematically
developed suggestion that similar cognitive modes are at work much more
widely: '*As if*, as we will note in several chapters of this book, is perhaps the
most productive and promising strategy in religion.'[23] Along similar lines,
albeit more briefly, Thomas Harrison suggests that 'a kind of "suspension
of disbelief" is in operation' in Greek attitudes to the mythical past.[24]

This is not the place to evaluate just how prevalent such make-believe
stances were in Greek religion, but it certainly stands to reason that the
enacted gods that are my topic are an embodied variant not just of
representations of divine epiphany in general but also of a broader mode
of belief. There is of course a nagging question here as to whether the
suspension of disbelief about, say, the reality of a mythical story involves

---

[22] Cf. Versnel 1987: 46 'The result [of the divine habit of appearing in human guise] was that ancient
man could never be sure whether the person he was talking to was not actually a god in disguise.'
[23] Versnel 2011; he discusses ruler cult in ch. 6, and the quotation is from p. 279 (his italics). One of
Versnel's most explicit pieces of evidence is Philemon fr. 118.3–4 Kock (considered spurious by
Kassel/Austin): 'Don't try to learn whether god exists or not, worship him as if he exists and is
present forever' (εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτ' οὐκ ἔστι μὴ βούλου μαθεῖν, | ὡς ὄντα τοῦτον καὶ παρόντ' ἀεὶ σέβου).
[24] Harrison 2017: 33.

the same cognitive process as the suspension of disbelief about the reality of the Apollo figure that appears on top of the stage building at the end of *Orestes*, but a significant connection is hard to deny – much the same connection, in fact, as obtains between the make-believe involved in reading novels and watching plays, two forms that are routinely discussed side by side by psychologists. An advantage of treating all these phenomena as related is that Luhrmann's telling analysis of how the pretence of conversing with (an unembodied) God becomes part of the experience of God is brought firmly within remit.

My general suggestion, then, is as follows. Enactments of divinity draw on make-believe capacities that are practised since childhood and that in a less embodied form were probably a regular aspect of Greek religious experience. They involve conscious investment – Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief', or more accurately the willing maintenance of belief – rather than confusion or magical thinking. There is no reason to believe that the Greeks who watched divine impersonation doubted that they were seeing priests or actors. It is this knowing type of investment, as Luhrmann shows so well, that is central to certain forms of religious belief and experience. Anthropomorphic gods may be a cognitive by-product of the human mentalizing apparatus as the cognitive science of religion argues, but cultural tools and practices are required to maintain and shape the belief in these gods and to make them part of a person's life. Divine enactment is one of many such tools, in that it allows participants and onlookers to negotiate, knowingly and with varying degrees of hope, certainty, ambivalence, and distance, encounters with the divine.

Variation: *Deus Ex Machina* and Ritual Impersonation of the Divine Compared

The nature of these encounters varies greatly, not just from individual to individual, but also from enactment to enactment. To introduce some vital specificity, this section asks how the tragic *deus ex machina* and self-standing ritual impersonation of the divine (both versatile forms in their own right) overlap and differ in the way they employ make-believe. The case for such a comparative treatment is evident; the reason it is not often made is no doubt the peculiarity of the *deus ex machina* when viewed as a religious practice. Speaking at length and saying many questionable things, as well as integrated into an intricately crafted dramatic plot that is set in a place and time other than the here and now, the *deus ex machina* has long been the domain primarily of literary scholarship, where it is discussed

with a view to issues such as closure, meta-theatre, artificiality, irony, morality, and authority.[25] Non-dramatic rituals, by contrast, are typically studied by historians of religion and have their place in treatments of epiphany.[26] My aim in looking at both types in conjunction is to highlight both similarities and differences.

First, then, the *deus ex machina*. No recent scholar goes further in situating the *deus* within the context of mythological and ritual epiphany than Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, who argues strongly for continuities with lived religion in general and ritual epiphany in particular, and concludes that 'far from diluting, or subverting, the religious content of tragedy, Euripidean tragedies with a deity *ex machina* gave it a new and powerful injection of religious significance and resonance'.[27] This is surely right. Despite everything that is problematic about the *deus*, it is still a type of divine enactment and as such cannot be cleanly divorced from other forms of reflective and pre-reflective engagement with the divine. The more difficult question, as ever, is exactly how we should think of this 'religious significance and resonance' in the context of what is not simply the human enactment of a god with all the artifice that any such enactment entails but, what is more, is an enactment in the context of a dramatic competition, and one that gives the god-character words that raise profound questions about divine action, causation, and motivation.

The answer, I suggest, or at least part of it, is that the *deus ex machina* confronts its audience with a maximally heightened version of the 'as if'. Compared to other representations of epiphany, including ritual enactment, *deus* scenes *both* do more to coax spectators into the world of the fiction *and* give them greater cause to maintain a self-conscious distance. On the one hand, the *deus* is multiply framed as human rather than divine. The deity is embodied by an actor who earlier in the tragedy played a human character and who competes for the prize as best actor. A frequent theme of the dialogue, explicitly or implicitly, is the all-too-human behaviour of the gods. In performance as well as text, therefore, the *deus ex machina* self-consciously highlights the contradictions inherent in

---

[25] On the *deus ex machina* see in particular Spira 1960, Mikalson 1991: 64–68, Easterling 1993, Dunn 1996, Mastronarde 2010: 181–195. The discussion that goes furthest in analyzing the connection to ritual enactments is Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 ch. III.4.1; see next paragraph. I limit my remit here to gods appearing at the end of tragedies (irrespective of whether they use the *mêchanê*). Divine appearances at the beginning of tragedies, or in comedy, raise related but different issues.

[26] See esp. Petridou 2015: 43–49. For a discussion of epiphany that includes the *deus ex machina* see Koch Piettre 2018. For brief references to the *deus* in discussions of epiphany see e.g. Platt 2011: 17, Petridou 2015: 47.

[27] Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 492.

anthropomorphism. On the other hand, the tragedians marshal all means at their disposal to endow the divine performances with the power to persuade and impress. The deity typically appears on top of the stage building, visibly out of human reach. Often, moreover, he or she flies through the air by means of the crane.[28] The artificiality of that contraption is evident – a further dose of in-your-face make-believe – but artificial though it is, the crane is doubtless the most exciting piece of stage-machinery that the Theatre of Dionysus had to offer, and it is surely significant that this stage-machinery was invented and primarily used for gods. (One might compare the automata, among them machines conjuring mechanical epiphanies, which came to be employed in cult in the Hellenistic period.[29]) In short, the dramatists pulled out all the stops for their divine performances at the same time as marking them as exactly that – performances.

The *deus ex machina*, then, encourages spectators to suspend disbelief while giving them every reason not to. One consequence may well be a greater variation of response from one spectator to the next: what Larson argues with relation to the responses to Pisistratus' Phye holds also for the contradictory incentives created by the *deus ex machina* scenes.[30] Even so, we should not overestimate the likelihood that spectators refused to go along altogether. Drama relies on the audience's willingness to entertain the fiction, and while the *deus ex machina*, as a god, will not prompt quite the same response as the Oedipuses, Medeas, and Agamemnons, to posit a complete rupture in the final scene of the play would be to throw out the baby with the bathwater.[31]

So much for the *deus ex machina*. What, in turn, about ritual enactments of epiphanies outside plays, at Eleusis for example? One thing to note is that, so far as we can tell, they were not overwhelmingly frequent.[32] Whereas staged gods remained a common feature of Greek and Roman drama, passed on from tragedy to Greek and subsequently Roman New Comedy (after making appearances already in Old Comedy), non-dramatic impersonation of the divine, while firmly attested in various

---

[28] The use of the crane (assumed in the conventional term *deus ex machina*) is certain for some plays and debated for others; see Mastronarde 1990.

[29] Mechanical epiphanies: Fragaki 2012: 57–59.   [30] Cf. p. 100, above.

[31] One difference may well be that audiences are more willing to construct mind-states for human than divine characters: in so far as the *deus* cannot be fully understood in human terms, there is presumably a limit to any 'mentalizing' that the *deus* solicits. This distinction deserves proper exploration but is of limited significance for the sense of divine presence under discussion here.

[32] See Petridou's work cited in n. 10 for full documentation.

cities, does not seem to have been a standard feature of Greek festivals, and it is worth contemplating potential reasons.[33] Is it possible that embodiment has drawbacks as a representational strategy for the divine? Compared to evangelical Christians who listen out for God's voice, to epiphanic dreams at Epidaurus, to Harrison's suggestion that acceptance of the mythical past was a matter of suspension of disbelief, and even to cult statues, divine impersonation leaves rather little to the imagination. Human enactment creates vividness, no doubt, but perhaps this vividness comes at the expense of credibility. Agency too may be a factor. Epiphany is a spontaneous divine act: you can pray for it, but you will never be certain that the god will indeed appear, and the other way round many epiphanies are spontaneous and unexpected. Perhaps enacting divine presence in what is an evidently human-controlled performance risks striking a jarring note. It can be no accident that such rituals usually are enacted by a priest, who acts as the deity's agent, but there is still considerable human control. Maybe we need to reckon with a variant of the 'uncanny valley'. Creators of humanoid robots, animations, and such like have learned that we often respond better to machines and other representations that are *either* very persuasively human-like *or* fairly evidently artificial, but can be repulsed or have an eerie sensation when confronting those that resemble humans nearly but imperfectly (the 'valley' in between).[34] In a similar way, one might tentatively conjecture, representations of epiphany were perhaps most effective *either* if, as in deceptive battlefield epiphanies, it was impossible to exclude the possibility that the human-looking figure is a god, *or* if the fictionality was clearly marked, be it through the frame of a drama or through the lifeless materiality of a statue, whereas the space in between, human enactments that are less overtly fictional, may have been more problematic.

That said, non-dramatic practices of divine enactment did exist, and we should ask what there is to be learned from comparing them to the *deus ex machina*. If comparison with non-dramatic divine impersonation prevents us from denying *deus ex machina* scenes *all* sense of divine presence, the *deus*, vice versa, can serve as a reminder that for its part the experience afforded by ritual divine impersonation will have been characterized by at least *some* complicity and knowing suspension of disbelief. This specific

---

[33] Both McGlashan and Patzelt in this volume consider this topic in terms of mimicry.
[34] The 'uncanny valley' goes back to a short, and in various ways now dated, 1970 article by Masahiro Mori, translated into English as Mori 2012. The concept has been much discussed and is more difficult than my one-sentence summary can convey.

point about complicity in ritual divine impersonation leads to a more general consideration. One significant benefit of the *deus ex machina* for thinking about religious experience more widely is that it serves as a reminder to pay due attention to volition, consent, and even effort as integral components of belief as well as practice. The *deus* points up a path that goes some way, perhaps, towards taking us beyond the unsatisfactory binary of intuition and reflection with which both religious and literary scholars struggle. The suggestion would be that we should add as a third element volition and attitudinal stance, which straddle the division between intuition and reflection and thus allow us to construct a more organic model. This suggestion will be developed in the next section.

Faith, Obedience, Trust

The discussion so far has been concerned with the spectators' and worshippers' relationship to divine enactment. In this final part of the argument, I shall turn to the relationships between humans and gods on stage to ask how the dramatists present the characters' response to the *deus ex machina*. My focus will be on modes of belief.

After several decades in which historians of Greek religion have treated the notion of belief with suspicion, relegating it to a rather distant second place behind practice, recent years have seen a comeback.[35] Not least because of its Judeo-Christian associations, the term continues to prove challenging, and will remain so, but there is an increasing willingness to confront those challenges. One thing that has become clear in the course of this welcome development is that belief is best understood as a manifold phenomenon: rather than just asking *whether* the Greeks believed in their gods or their stories we should also explore *how* they believed. The contribution the *deus ex machina* can make to these discussions is that it presents, on stage, one particular mode of belief – a form of compliance and trust that foreshadows the notion of faith, which comes to prominence in later periods and above all in Christianity, but which, in a rather different guise and with less prominence, may have existed already in the fifth century BCE.

One of the most stable patterns in the varied corpus of *deus ex machina* scenes is the characters' ready acquiescence to the divine commands, an

---

[35] See esp. Versnel 2011: 539–559, Kindt 2012: 30–32, Harrison 2015, Petrovic and Petrovic 2016, Ambasciano and Pachis 2017: 11–13, Davies 2018, Eidinow 2019, Bremmer 2020. Along with this interest in belief goes renewed engagement with scepticism and 'atheism', e.g. Whitmarsh 2016 and Edelmann-Singer et al. 2020.

acquiescence moreover that often constitutes a 180-degree turn. In *Helen* Theoclymenus releases Helen, in *Iphigenia in Tauris* Thoas gives up his pursuit of Iphigenia and Orestes, in *Philoctetes* Philoctetes goes to Troy, in *Hippolytus* Hippolytus makes peace with Theseus, as does Orestes with Menelaus (marrying Hermione into the bargain) in *Orestes*, and so on. Some plays introduce complications – in *Bacchae* either Cadmus or Agave remonstrates with Dionysus, in *Hippolytus* the title character complains about the gods, in Euripides' *Electra*, Electra and Orestes ask difficult questions about divine behaviour – but the characters' acceptance of the *deus*' ordinances is never in doubt.[36]

In several plays this obedience is thematized by the word *peithesthai*. Both Orestes in *Orestes* and Theseus in Euripides' *Supplices* affirm that 'I shall obey/trust (*peisomai*) your words', and Philoctetes similarly declares that 'I shall not fail to obey/trust (*ouk apithêsô*) your words'. Connecting current and former behaviour, Hippolytus states 'for in the past too I obeyed/trusted (*epeithomên*) your words', while Menelaus, expressing himself more generally, pronounces in the *Orestes* that 'it is necessary to obey/trust (*peithesthai*)'.[37] It is difficult to be certain whether such expressions retain the notion of persuasion that is at the root of the verb ('I shall have myself persuaded', 'I shall trust') or whether they convey obedient compliance without any indication of attitude, but in any case a willingness to trust the *deus* certainly enters the scene in other ways.

Most explicitly so, Ion uses three expressions of belief and trust in as many lines:[38]

> Pallas, daughter of the greatest Zeus, it is not with distrust (*ouk apisitiai*) that I received your words. I believe you (*peithomai*) that I am the son of Apollo and this woman. Even previously this was not unbelievable (*ouk apiston*).

Apistos appears also in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where Thoas responds to Athena's speech by pronouncing that 'whoever is *apistos* upon hearing the gods' words is not in their right mind'.[39] The majority of translators and commentators opt for a translation such as 'disobedient', and indeed this is an established meaning where *apistos* as here has an active sense, but the more frequent active meaning is 'mistrustful, incredulous' and the

---

[36] Eur. *Ba.* 1344–1349 (speaker uncertain), *Hipp.* 1415, *El.* 1298–1304.

[37] Eur. *Or.* 1670, *Suppl.* 1227, Soph. *Phil.* 1447 (cf. nn. 44 and 49 below), Eur. *Hipp.* 1443, *Or.* 1679.

[38] Eur. *Ion* 1606–1608: ὦ Διὸς Παλλὰς μεγίστου θύγατερ, οὐκ ἀπιστίαι | σοὺς λόγους ἐδεξάμεσθα· πείθομαι δ᾽ εἶναι πατρὸς | Λοξίου καὶ τῆσδε· καὶ πρὶν τοῦτο δ᾽ οὐκ ἄπιστον ἦν.

[39] Eur. *IT* 1475–1476 τοῖσι τῶν θεῶν λόγοις | ὅστις κλυὼν ἄπιστος, οὐκ ὀρθῶς φρονεῖ.

notion of distrust and incredulity will at the very least remain present in the background. In other plays, where characters just use the thinner *peisomai* ('I shall obey/trust) or the other similarly thin phrases cited in the previous paragraph, the context is usually more forthcoming. Hippolytus' declaration of obedience follows on from a statement about his 'long-standing companionship' with Artemis, and Philoctetes' comes straight after he has expressed his delight at hearing Heracles' voice: 'oh you who has appeared at long last and is sending me the voice that I have longed for'. Orestes has just pronounced that Apollo is a truthful prophet after all, while Theseus goes on to say to Athena that 'you put me right so that I do not make mistakes'.[40]

A further factor that militates against a bleak interpretation of coerced obedience straight and simple is the emotional transformation effected by some of the divine epiphanies. In *Andromache* Peleus stops grieving for Neoptolemus, in *Iphigenia in Tauris* Thoas is no longer angry with Iphigenia and Orestes, in *Hippolytus* and *Helen* Hippolytus and Theoclymenus bury their respective grudges, in *Orestes* Orestes 'makes his peace with what has happened' in response to Menelaus' starker 'one must obey', in *Ion* Creusa now looks upon Apollo's temple with joy, a change that draws approving comment from Athena.[41] The suddenness of these transformations can seem suspect (more on this shortly), but for now the thing to note is that the change brought about by the *deus ex machina* is often an emotional and attitudinal as much as a behavioural one.

Finally, it is important that the *deus ex machina* is in many plays a deity with whom the characters have a prior connection.[42] Thetis is Peleus' former wife (*Andromache*), Dionysus is Cadmus' grandson (*Bacchae*), Castor and Polydeuces are not just the epiphanic deities *par excellence* but also Helen's brothers (*Helen*), Electra's and Orestes' uncles (*Electra*) and Electra's former suitors (*Electra* again). Artemis is the goddess Hippolytus favours above all others (*Hippolytus*) and Apollo the god who led Orestes to kill his mother (*Orestes*), while Heracles was Philoctetes' great friend when alive (*Philoctetes*). In the overwhelming majority of cases the *deus* holds a particular meaning for the characters. In so far as many *deus ex machina* scenes raise doubts about divine behaviour, sometimes explicitly so through the characters' own statements, we should note that the particular god who in fact appears tends to be on the characters' side,

---

[40] Eur. *Hipp.* 1441, Soph. *Phil.* 1445–1446, Eur. *Or.* 1667, Eur. *Suppl.* 1228.
[41] Eur. *Andr.* 1276, *IT* 1477–1478, *Hipp.* 1442, *Hel.* 1680–1681, *Or.* 1679–1680, *Ion* 1611–1614.
[42] Cf. Mastronarde 2010: 188.

and that it is often the absent gods who are criticized.[43] In trying to establish what *deus ex machina* scenes say about the gods in general we risk missing the nature of the interaction with the humans of the epiphanic *deus* in particular.

Taking all this together, I suggest that the great majority of *deus ex machina* scenes present us not simply with examples of human submission to the divine, rendered inevitable by the enormous gulf in power and knowledge (though divine power is certainly on display). Often, they also enact human relationships with particular gods and a willingness of humans to have themselves affected by deities they trust and to act on their requests. Such relationships of course go back to epic,[44] and in that sense *deus ex machina* scenes, like the plays as a whole, stage a mythical past in which humans and gods interacted more easily, but at the same time, again like the plays as a whole, they are firmly rooted in the late fifth century. By way of *mise-en-abyme* of this contemporary significance it is worth returning briefly to the appearance of the root *peith-/pist-* in so many of the *deus* scenes. The modern debate about belief has typically homed in on the term *nomizein*: does it denote 'believe in' or 'worship' or something in between?[45] The *deus* scenes suggest that the root *peith-/pist-* deserves similar attention. Language of credence, trust, obedience, and faith, arguably, is no less important to the phenomenology of Greek belief, complementing as it does belief in the sense of conviction that a god exists with belief as a relationship with, and attitude towards, a god. The huge religious significance of the term *pistis* – 'faith' – in both Christian and pagan religions of antiquity developed considerably later,[46] but it has antecedents in the Classical period as Dennis R. Lindsay has pointed out.[47] Already in the fifth century, *pistis*, *pisteuein*, and other cognates are used for faith in oracles, sometimes with the gods themselves as the

---

[43] Particularly pronounced examples are Euripides' *Electra* (Castor and Pollux rather than Apollo), *Hippolytus* (Artemis rather than Aphrodite), and *Ion* (Athena rather than Apollo). The most notable exception is *Bacchae* (where the unforgiving Dionysus appears himself).

[44] The reprise of epic is certainly not without changes. Philoctetes' 'I shall not fail to obey/trust your words' (*Phil.* 1447 οὐκ ἀπιθήσω τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις) looks back to the epic formula οὐδ' ἀπίθησε(ν), which however is normally used for interactions among just gods or just humans (see *LfgrE* s.v. ἀπιθήσω, where the formula is glossed as 'willig, gerne bereit sein'). Sophocles transfers it to a relation between a god and a human.

[45] The most thorough treatment is Fahr 1969, the best recent discussion, with references to other accounts, Versnel 2011: 542–545, 554–558.

[46] See the large-scale treatment of Morgan 2015 and the collection Frey, Schliesser, and Ueberschaer 2017.

[47] Lindsay 1993: 7–15; he does not discuss the *deus ex machina*. On the use of *pistis* and *peithô* in early philosophy (esp. political philosophy), see Bontempi 2013.

dative object, for example Creon's 'now you will believe (*pistin pheros*) the god' in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, alluding to Oedipus' difficult relationship with Apollo,[48] or Neoptolemus' 'trusting (*pisteusanta*) the gods and my words', addressed to Philoctetes and subsequently resonating in Philoctetes' own words to Heracles that I quoted earlier on.[49] A fourth-century inscription from Epidaurus reports the case of a man who was at first unbelieving (*apistei*) when he read of Asclepius' past cures only soon to be cured himself,[50] and Thucydides' Pagondas asks the Boeotians to 'trust (*pisteusantas*) god that he will be on our side'.[51] Perhaps the single most interesting phrase is one Xenophon uses when arguing that Socrates, contrary to the charge on which he was convicted, did believe in the existence of the gods. Xenophon interprets Socrates' habit of saying that he received signs from the *daimonion* as a form of 'trusting the gods' and asks rhetorically: 'if he trusted (*pisteuôn*) the gods, how could it be that he didn't believe (*enomize*) they existed?'[52] Trust in the gods and belief in their existence are here explicitly linked as well as distinguished.

The *pist*-lexicon is drawn on only in two *deus ex machina* scenes, those of *Ion* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (quoted in notes 38 and 39), and the precise nuance of *peithesthai*, which characterizes the response to so many other *dei*, is difficult to establish,[53] but even so, the *deus* scenes are surely part of the same broad trend. They explore a willingness to put one's faith in the gods and to let oneself be affected by them, to listen out for their messages, and to maintain individual relationships with them.

Conclusion

From the audience's perspective of course, certainly so far as modern critics are concerned, many Euripidean gods are rather problematic figures. Their accounts of what has happened, and equally their stipulations for the future, can be worryingly incomplete. Their benign attitude, such as it is, is often out of keeping with what the rest of the play suggests. While their power is rarely in dispute (though Zeus to whom several *dei* appeal as

---

[48] Soph. *OT* 1445, καὶ γὰρ σὺ νῦν γ᾽ ἂν τῶι θεῶι πίστιν φέροις, possibly an interpolation.

[49] Soph. *Phil.* 1373–1374 θεοῖς τε πιστεύσαντα τοῖς τ᾽ ἐμοῖς λόγοις, (Neoptolemus) echoed at 1447 (Philoctetes, cited in n. 44 above).

[50] *IG* IV², 1 212 [= RO 102], l. 24, ἀπίστει τοῖς ἰάμασιν, 'he did not believe the cures'.

[51] Thuc. 4.92.7, πιστεύσαντας ... τῶι θεῶι πρὸς ἡμῶν ἔσεσθαι.

[52] Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.5, πιστεύων δὲ θεοῖς πῶς οὐκ εἶναι θεοὺς ἐνόμιζεν.

[53] The (later) material discussed by Morgan 2015 shows that *pist*- and *peith*- expressions are not strongly connected but co-occur in some passages; see esp. pp. 250–251, 511.

the ultimate authority remains off stage, just as he stayed away from Homer's battlefields), the justice of what they say and do is often doubtful, sometimes severely so.[54] There is a discrepancy, in other words, between on the one hand the emotional transformation and ready compliance demonstrated by the characters, and on the other the more churlish questions that audiences may find themselves asking as they watch the proceedings. As a result, the spectators' stance towards the *deus ex machina* will frequently be a complex one (as of course is that of modern critics). Will they refuse to join in the characters' acceptance of, and in several plays joy at, the resolution brought about by the god? Or will they knowingly allow themselves to go along with the characters' faith in the divine arrangement of their affairs, even though they would have good reason not to? Ultimately, attitudinal questions of trust and emotional investment are not confined to the stage, but at one remove affect the spectators.[55]

Here the play-external and play-internal perspectives, the dynamics of make-believe (the first two sections) and the on-stage interactions (the third section), finally come together. Both through the combination of artifice and immersive force in the staged impersonation and through the characters' accepting encounters with problematic gods, the *deus ex machina* adumbrates the promise and fragility of divine presence in the lives of individuals and communities.[56] At more than one level and in more than one way, the audience has to negotiate a pull both towards and away from acceptance. Such a combination of trust, doubt, confidence, hesitation, and knowing going-along is, in one permutation or other, bound to have been a recurring quality of interactions with the divine in Classical Athens and beyond, and is what, more than anything else, makes the *deus ex machina* a tool for exploring and indeed generating (a specific kind of) religious experience.

I began this chapter by stating the case for a maximally capacious and generous account of the religious imagination, one in which the imagination is enabling as much as constraining and controlling.[57] In their different ways, the different disciplines studying the human imagination

---

[54] Cf. n. 25.

[55] I have explored related issues with a focus on one whole play (*Iphigenia in Tauris*) rather than one feature in multiple plays (the *deus ex machina*) in Budelmann 2019.

[56] It is worth noting that *peithesthai* is also the verb that Herodotus uses when complaining about the Athenians' gullibility in relation to Phye: 'believing (*peithomenoi*) that the woman was the goddess herself, they prayed to this human woman and welcomed Pisistratus' (1.60.5).

[57] Cf. the broad conception of the *literary* imagination from a cognitive perspective in Richardson 2015.

all confront the apparent paradox that the imagination conjures unreal worlds, yet by conjuring such worlds achieves something important for the way we navigate reality. Philosophers ask how the imagination is capable of yielding knowledge, child psychologists ponder the contribution pretend-play, imaginary companions, and role-playing make to a child's development, evolutionary psychologists and evolutionary literary theorists form hypotheses about the adaptive benefits of story-telling for human communities.[58] We do not need to follow them in adopting a similarly functionalist perspective to find it productive to consider what the imagination allows us to do across all aspects of life. The *deus ex machina*, drawing as it does on the imagination's capacity for make-believe to create a particular kind of encounter with the divine, has provided material, I hope, for thinking about one such aspect.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambasciano, L. and P. Pachis. 2017. 'Strangers in a Strange Land No More: Introducing the Book Review Symposium Section and Jennifer Larson's Understanding Greek Religion (2016)', *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 4: 10–23.

Bontempi, M. 2013. *La fiducia secondo gli antichi: 'pistis' in Gorgia tra Parmenide e Platone*. Naples.

Boyd, B. 2009. *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Cambridge, MA.

Bremmer, J. N. 2020. 'Youth, Atheism, and (Un)Belief in Late Fifth-Century Athens', in B. Edelmann-Singer, T. Nicklas, and J. E. Spittler, eds. *Sceptic and Believer in Ancient Mediterranean Religions*, 53–68. Tübingen.

Budelmann, F. 2019. 'Dare to Believe: Wonder, Trust and the Limitations of Cognition in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*', in D. Braund, E. Hall, and R. Wyles, eds. *Ancient Theatre and Performance Culture around the Black Sea*, 289–303. Cambridge.

Clinton, K. 2004. 'Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries', *Illinois Classical Studies* 29: 85–109.

Connor, W. R. 1987. 'Tribes, Festivals and Processions: Civic Ceremonial and Political Manipulation in Archaic Greece', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107: 40–50.

Davies, J. P. 2018. 'The Value(s) of Belief: Ancient Religion, Cognitive Scence, and Interdisciplinarity', in N. P. Roubekas, ed. *Theorizing 'Religion' in Antiquity*, 32–58. Sheffield.

---

[58] One example each: for the puzzle of knowledge through imagination see Kind and Kung 2016, for developmental psychology (again) Harris 2000: esp. ch. 9, for storytelling Boyd 2009.

Dunn, F. M. 1996. *Tragedy's End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama*. New York, NY, and Oxford.

Easterling, P. E. 1993. 'Gods on Stage in Greek Tragedy', in J. Dalfen, G. Petersmann, and F. F. Schwarz, eds. *Religio Graeco-Romana: Festschrift für Walter Pötscher*, 77–86. Graz.

Edelmann-Singer, B., T. Nicklas, J. Spittler and L. Walt, eds. 2020. *Sceptic and Believer in Ancient Mediterranean Religions*. Tübingen.

Eidinow, E. 2015. 'Φανερὰν ποιήσει τὴν αὑτοῦ διάνοιαν τοῖς θεοῖς: Some Ancient Greek Theories of (Divine and Mortal) Mind', in C. Ando and J. Rüpke, eds. *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion*, 53–73. Berlin.

2016. *Envy, Poison, and Death: Women on Trial in Classical Athens*. Oxford.

2019. 'The (Ancient Greek) Subject Supposed to Believe', *Numen* 66: 56–88.

Fahr, W. 1969. *Θεοὺς νομίζειν: Zum Problem der Anfänge des Atheismus bei den Griechen*. Hildesheim.

Fragaki, H. 2012. 'Automates et statues merveilleuses dans l'Alexandrie antique', *Journal des Savants*: 29–67.

Frey, J., B. Schliesser, and N. Ueberschaer. 2017. *Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*. Tübingen.

Friend, S. 2016. 'Fiction and Emotion', in A. Kind, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*. London.

Harris, P. L. 2000. *The Work of the Imagination*. Oxford.

Harrison, T. 2015. 'Belief vs. Practice', in E. Eidinow and J. Kindt, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*, 21–28. Oxford.

2017. 'Cognitive Science of Religion As Challenge to Prevailing Models of Greek Religion?', *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 4: 30–35.

Kind, A. and Kung, P. eds. 2016. *Knowledge through Imagination*. Oxford.

Kindt, J. 2012. *Rethinking Greek Religion*. Cambridge.

Koch Piettre, R. 2001. 'Images et perceptions de la présence divine en Grèce ancienne', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité* 113: 211–224.

2018. 'Anthropomorphism, Theatre, Epiphany: From Herodotus to Hellenistic Historians', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 20: 189–209.

Larson, J. 2016. *Understanding Greek Religion: A Cognitive Approach*. London.

Lieberoth, A. 2013. 'Religion and the Emergence of Human Imagination', in A. W. Geertz, ed. *Origins of Religion, Cognition and Culture*, 160–177. Durham.

Lindsay, D. R. 1993. *Josephus and Faith: Πίστις and Πιστεύειν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the New Testament*. Leiden.

Luhrmann, T. M. 2012. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York, NY.

Marinatos, N. and D. Shanzer, eds. 2004. Divine Epiphanies in the Ancient World [Special issue]. *Illinois Classical Studies* 29.

Mastronarde, D. J. 1990. 'Actors on High: The Skene Roof, the Crane, and the Gods in Attic Drama', *Classical Antiquity* 9: 247–294.

2010. *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context*. Cambridge.

Mikalson, J. D. 1991. *Honor Thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy*. Chapel Hill, NC, and London.

Morgan, T. 2015. *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches*. Oxford.

Mori, M. 2012. 'The Uncanny Valley', trans. K. F. MacDorman and N. Kageki, *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine* 19(2): 98–100.

Panagiotidou, O. and R. Beck. 2017. *The Roman Mithras Cult: A Cognitive Approach*. London.

Petridou, G. 2015. *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture*. Oxford.

Petridou, G. and V. Platt, eds. 2018. 'Making Contact with the Divine Other. Means and Meanings' [Special issue], *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 20(1): 185–274.

Petrovic, A. and I. Petrovic. 2016. *Inner Purity and Pollution in Greek Religion. Volume 1: Early Greek Religion*. Oxford.

Platt, V. 2011. *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion.* Cambridge.

2015. 'Epiphany', in E. Eidinow and J. Kindt, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*, 491–504. Oxford.

Platt, V. J. 2018. "Double Vision: Epiphanies of the Dioscuri in Classical Antiquity", *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 20: 229–256.

Polvinen, M. 2017. 'Cognitive Science and the Double Vision of Fiction', in M. Burke and E. T. Troscianko, eds. *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues between Literature and Cognition*, 135–150. Oxford.

Richardson, A. 2015. 'Imagination: Literary and Cognitive Intersections', in L. Zunshine, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, 225–245. New York, NY.

Sinos, R. H. 1993. 'Divine Selection: Epiphany and Politics in Archaic Greece', in C. Doughery and L. Kurke, eds. *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*, 73–91. Cambridge.

Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 2003. *Tragedy and Athenian Religion*. Lanham, MD.

Spira, A. 1960. *Untersuchungen zum deus ex machina bei Sophokles und Euripides*. Kallmünz.

Struck, P. T. 2016. *Divination and Human Culture: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ.

Versnel, H. S. 1987. 'What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany', in D. van der Plas, ed. *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, 42–55. Leiden.

2011. *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology*. Leiden.

Whitmarsh, T. 2016. *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*. London.