

BOOK REVIEW

Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity.
By PETER T. STRUCK. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. Pp. 304.
Hardback, \$45.00. ISBN 978-0-691-16939-2.

Divination,” writes Struck, “gave the ancients a way to talk about surplus knowledge,” that is, “the quantum of knowledge that does not arrive via the discursive thought processes of which we are aware, and over which we have self-conscious control” (15–16). We are in E. R. Dodds territory here. Dodds’ groundbreaking *Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) gave us a more nuanced understanding of the importance of non-rational practices and mental states in Greek culture. Unfortunately, after Dodds, scholars became mired in the question of whether the Greeks were *either* rational *or* irrational. In *Divination and Human Nature*, Struck demonstrates how philosophers from Plato to the Neoplatonists—the quintessence of rational thought in antiquity—reflected seriously on the “irrational” practice of divination and even used the language of divination to lend authority to their own theories. By focusing on *philosophical* views of divination, Struck dodges the problematic *either/or* binary that has dogged studies of esoteric practices in the aftermath of Dodds; furthermore, in likening knowledge obtained through divination to intuition, Struck opens up new avenues for understanding Greek thinking about thinking and for interpreting instances of divination in Greco-Roman literature. This study is not for the intellectually faint of heart. Struck presumes considerable prior knowledge. For anyone interested in how philosophers thought about non-rational ways of knowing, however, this is a remarkable achievement and highly recommended.

In the first three chapters, Struck tackles the views of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, who have in common a material/physiological conception of the way divination works. Plato’s own understanding of divination is complicated by his use of the language of divination both to describe divinatory practices, and to instill his own theories with divine authority. Rather than bypassing these difficulties, Struck carefully untangles Plato’s use of the language of divination as a type of authoritative speech from his use of it to refer to a non-rational insight or intui-

tion as when referring to Socrates' own *daimonion*, which directed Socrates via the occasional, non-rational nudge.

Struck then turns to the *Timaeus* and discusses Plato's understanding of the part divination plays within an individual. Essentially, the three parts of the Platonic soul correspond to three locations within the body: the divine/reasoning part to the head, the courageous part to the heart, and the "beastly" appetitive part to the lower trunk or liver. This lowest part of the soul is a threat to the divine/rational part, but does not itself respond to reason; it speaks instead the language of images or visions. Struck notes that for Plato the marks and coloration of the liver are not the result of the direct intervention of a divinity, but rather of the divine/rational part of the soul trying to "shock" the lower, appetitive part into a less beastly state. When, however, the divine/rational part relaxes its hold on the appetitive part, this lowest part enjoys a calm night experiencing "divination through dreams," which results in surplus knowledge that gives the appetitive part of the soul a share in the good inaccessible to it through reason.

For Aristotle, as for Plato and the Stoics, "natural" divination (as opposed to the "technical" kind that relies on the rational interpretation of signs) depends on the suppression of the rational/sensual part of the individual through sleep or stupidity. In *On Divination during Sleep, et al.*, Aristotle reckons with a world in which the least wise seem to have the most surplus knowledge to gain through predictive dreams. Struck clarifies Aristotle's complex account of predictive dreams using two theories: the sensitive instrument argument and the impulse hypothesis. The sensitive instrument argument suggests that *because* the empty-headed lack reason, they are compensated for that lack by a greater sensitivity to external signs conveyed through dreams. The impulse hypothesis then accounts for the surplus knowledge arising from the predictive dreams of empty-headed dreamers by suggesting that, even the lowest of nature's creatures has an *impulse* toward the good. The lowest part of a human being, the nutritive soul, also has such an impulse, which steers it towards intuitive ways of knowing. That such dreamers occasionally miss the mark and predict events that do not occur does not mean that their sensitive instrument is on the fritz. Rather, nature has set so many potential events in motion that sometimes one movement will meet up with another stronger one and the stronger will prevail. In such cases, the predictive dreamer is not really wrong, but has instead picked up on a potential event that simply could not come to fruition.

For the Stoics, divination depends upon their conception of the cosmos as "the corporeal body of a single creature" (185) connected through the *pneuma*,

an airy substance that gives form to individual bodies and connects and moves all bodies in the cosmos. Referring mainly to the views of Posidonius in Cicero's *On Divination*, Struck explores the implications of the Stoic idea that everything is interconnected "in whole networks of causal chains" (180) for divination. This interconnected aspect of the cosmos is referred to as "sympathy." Sympathy is what makes divination possible, and, when the bodily senses are suppressed in sleep, the soul is more "sympathetic" to the "direct *pneuma-pneuma* transfer of information" (210).

In Struck's reading, the Stoics, like Plato and Aristotle earlier, do not attribute divination to a particular god acting on a specific individual. Instead, for Posidonius and others, "the machineries of the world are just set up such that events unfold with predictable precursors" (188). In other words, an impersonal sort of divine power drives the cosmos according to its will and desire. Posidonius notes that events are, to a certain extent, predictable, because they arise from prior causes, which, in a deterministic universe, means that human beings can make projections about future events based on what has occurred before. A "natural" diviner is capable of conceiving of both the relationships between prior states and future events, and the causes, the inclinations toward future states configured within the *pneuma*.

Given the complexity of Neoplatonic philosophy and the ways Neoplatonists transfigured prior understanding of divination, I was disappointed by the brevity of Struck's final chapter. Nevertheless, primarily utilizing Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*, Struck proffers a lucid account of Neoplatonic views of the material world and makes a convincing case for the points most salient to his study. Most importantly, in contrast to Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, Neoplatonists clearly distinguish between "human" and "true" forms of divination, consider "true" divination dependent on an "entire escape from the material world" (217) and conceive of "true" divination as revealing—not specific future events—but the nature of the cosmos itself.

The distinction Iamblichus makes between "human" and "true" forms of divination, which is applied to dreams, divine possession and oracles, is what sets Neoplatonist thinking about divination apart from that of earlier philosophers. Whereas the "human" forms of these practices depend upon inferring meaning from signs in nature, the "divine" forms are the result of a direct union between our most god-like part and god, in an immaterial encounter far removed from this "debased" material world. Unlike his predecessors, Iamblichus is not at all

bothered by the similarities between second-best “human” forms of divination and other of the observational sciences; for him, they are all inferior ways of knowing within a material world. The knowledge that arises from a union with god is where it’s really at.

And so, we have come full circle. With Neoplatonists more interested in “true” divination via a union with god, and with “human” forms of divination lumped in with the observational sciences, those earlier physiologically-based views of divination will not be of real interest again for centuries. Struck admirably concludes his study by demonstrating the usefulness of thinking about divination as intuition to a simple generalist like myself. In a fascinating reading of the end of Homer’s *Odyssey*, Struck shows how Penelope’s own intuition about Odysseus-as-beggar’s true identity is communicated in the epic through signs traditionally associated with divination. By speaking to each other through the language of divination, Penelope and Odysseus are able to communicate indirectly both what they know about one another and the facts of the situation in which they are both mired. Without a language of cognition that allows Homer to hint at their non-rational knowing, Penelope and Odysseus must instead share their intuitions through the language of dreams, visions and signs.

Studies of divination, as Struck himself points out, have tended to focus too exclusively on divinatory practices as either magical hokum or a tool of political manipulation. By investigating instead what different philosophers thought about divination and by likening divination to intuition, Struck makes an original contribution to the scholarship of divination and the history of cognition. What other vistas will open for us in our readings of ancient texts if we further explore what the Greeks were really talking about when they talked about divination?

SUSANA A. CURRY

University of New Hampshire, Susan.Curry@unh.edu