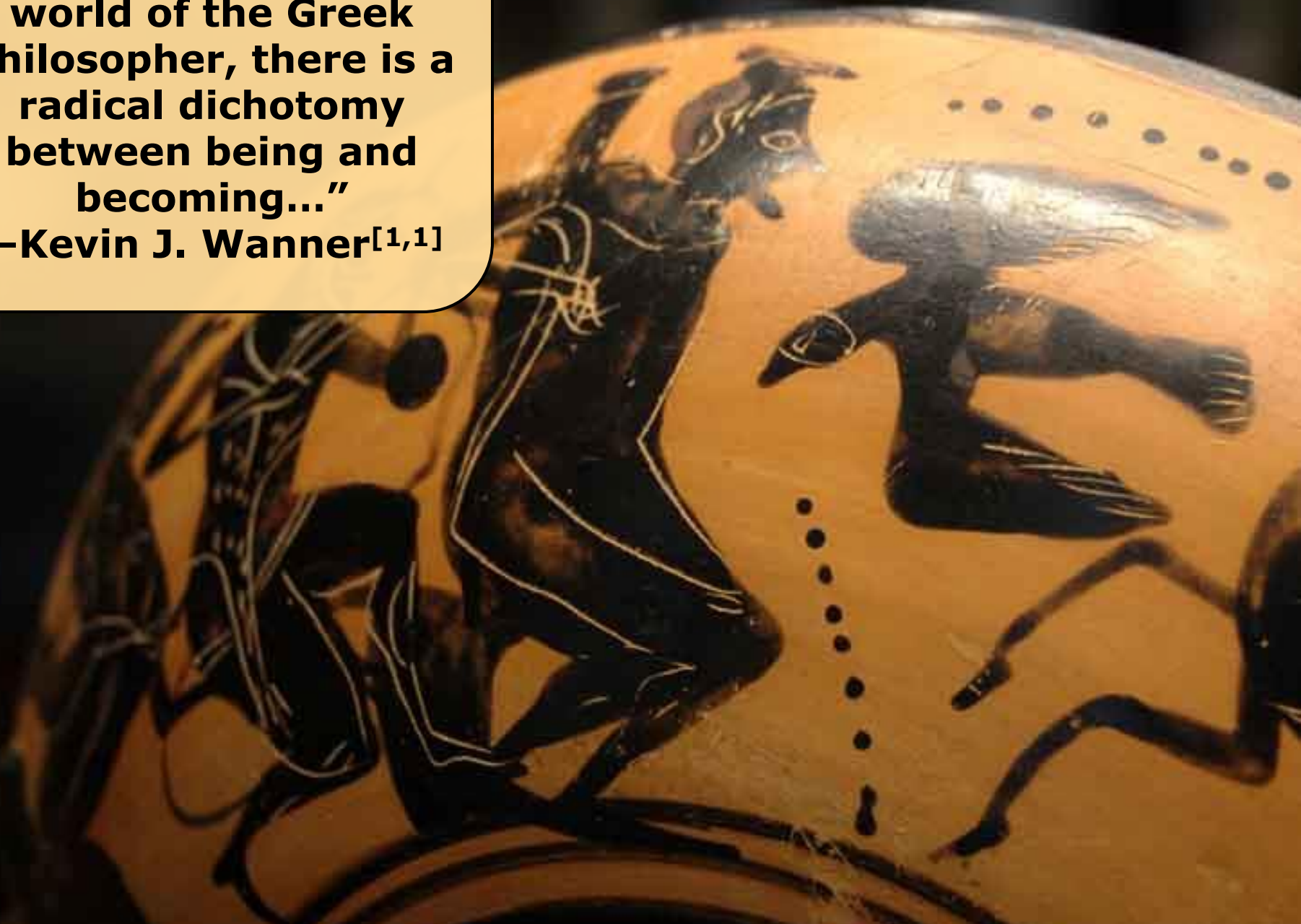


Loki and Prometheus: The Curse of Cunning- Intelligence

Laura Clesi

“In the intellectual world of the Greek philosopher, there is a radical dichotomy between being and becoming...”

—Kevin J. Wanner^[1,1]



The “intellectual world”^[1]

World of Being

- Intelligent
- Unchanging
- Limited
- True and Definite Knowledge
- “Crystallized intelligence”

World of Becoming

- Sensible
- Unstable
- Unlimited
- Oblique and Changeable Opinion
- “Fluid intelligence”

Cunning-intelligence: the fusion of being and becoming

- Adaptability:
 - Manipulation of the situation to find the solution to a seemingly impossible problem
- Wisdom:
 - Being able to discern the best course of action without having experienced it beforehand
 - "...[Zeus] put her down / Into his belly, so that the goddess [Metis] could / Counsel him in both good and evil plans."^[2]

Cunning-intelligence: Loki

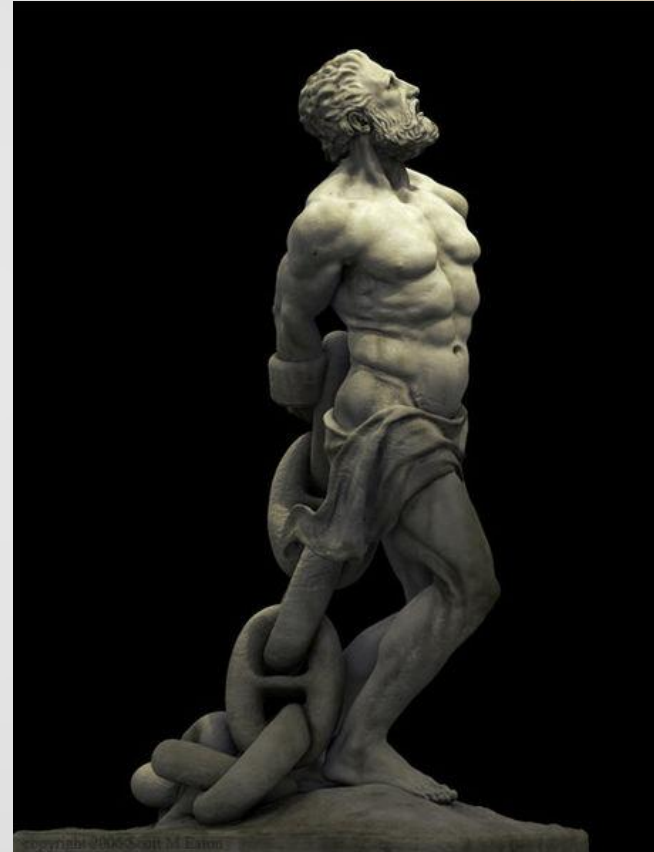
- Adaptability in seemingly impossible situations:
- Besting Thor in a contest of physical feats
- Sabotaging the Aesir's promise of the sun, moon, and Freyja (birth of Sleipnir)
- Death of Baldr



[2]

Cunning-Intelligence: Prometheus

- Seemingly impossible situations:
- Deception of Zeus
- Bringing fire to man
- Unflattering portions of a sacrifice



Best course of action?

- Loki brings about "...the greatest misfortune ever to befall gods and men."^[3]
- Prometheus deceives the god who swallowed his own wife in order to assimilate her cunning-intelligence into himself.



Liminal Characters, not Tricksters?

- What if a character is what's necessary in order for change to occur?
- Those who are best able to adapt and manipulate unexpected situations when thrust upon them also bring about change for the rest of us.
- Society changes course through characters that instigate unexpected events.
- Whether ethical or amoral, we see great changes come about through great, ambitious actions.

Ritual Theory Application

Prometheus

- Humans are dumb worshippers for the gods' vanity.
- Zeus the untrickable is tricked and the weak are championed. **Sovereignty of Zeus** is questioned.
- Humans now have an elevated status, although they also inherit the negative consequences.

Loki

- Fear over the death of a beloved god.
- The attempts of the Aesir—Frigg's oaths and bartering with Hel—were in vain. **Immortality** is questioned.
- The gods eventually resign themselves to accept past and future deaths of their own.

References

Pictures

1. Heracles freeing the bound Prometheus. Musée du Louvre in Paris, France. Artist unknown. Side A of a Boeotian black-figured cup made in Athens, ca. 500 BC.
2. "Death of a Viking Warrior" Oil on canvas by Charles Edward Butler, 1909.
3. "Prometheus Bound." Sculpted by Scott Eaton, 1996.
4. "The Punishment of Loki." from Keary's *The Heroes of Asgard: Scandinavian Mythology*. ca. 1800

Literature

1. Wanner, Kevin. "Cunning Intelligence in Norse Myth: Loki, Odinn, and the Limits of Sovereignty," *History of Religions* 48 (2009) 211-46.
2. Hesiod. "Theogony." tr .Dorothea Wender. Penguin Classics, 1973. (p. 52 : 33-34)
3. Sturluson, Snorri. "The Prose Edda." tr. Jean I. Young. University of California Press, 1954. (p. 81.)