

Persons, gods, and law: the person's legal status within the ontological debate*

Personas, dioses y ley: El estatus jurídico de la persona en el debate ontológico

Pessoas, deuses e lei: O estatuto jurídico da pessoa no debate ontológico


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Abstract

It was not until Thomas Aquinas that the status of personhood was attributed to human beings, and specifically, to man in the masculine sense. During the 19th and 20th centuries, it was also attributed to the human race and even to certain entities created by humans, such as companies and organizations.

However, by examining ancient cultures, one can find a different conception of person, in which ideas and objects acquired personality through the kind of relationship they established with the human being—a communicative relationship rather than a juridical one. Such relationships assigned traits of egalitarian treatment, as is the case today with natural and juridical

persons. Within these relationships, it is observable that in Ancient Greece the gods were represented as persons, not so much because of their anthropomorphic image, but because reciprocal relationships could be established between humans and gods. These forms of relationship help us understand the way personality was attributed to them, even though they did not dwell in the material world.

This article does not aim to analyze the concept of personhood from the perspective of current legal conceptions, but rather to return to its foundations before it was absorbed by law and transformed into a title granted by the political-juridical agreement of a nation. The foundations of personhood, in a holistic sense, are found in writings that describe the relationships between humans and gods in Greece, with the sole aim of restoring the notion of the person as a relationship rather than merely a legal attribution. That is, to find for it an ontological and historical foundation that attests to its powerful meaning beyond its normative recognition.

Keywords:

person, ontology of the person, the person in Greece, human being.

Resumen

No fue hasta Santo Tomás que la condición de persona fue adscrita al ser humano y, específicamente, al hombre en sentido masculino. Durante los siglos XIX y XX el concepto de ser humano como persona se universalizó hasta atraer y absorber ante sí a todos los miembros de la raza humana y a ciertas entidades creadas por ella, como las

empresas y organizaciones.

Sin embargo, revisando culturas antiguas, es posible encontrar una concepción distinta sobre la persona, dado que había ideas y cosas que adquirirían personalidad por el tipo de relación que entablaban con el ser humano, una relación comunicacional más que jurídica. En esta relación se asignaban rasgos de trato igualitario, como sucede en la actualidad con las personas naturales y jurídicas. Dentro de esas relaciones, se puede observar que en la Grecia antigua había una representación de los dioses como personas, no tanto por la imagen antropomórfica que los describía, sino porque era posible establecer relaciones de reciprocidad entre humanos y dioses. Estas formas de relación pueden hacernos conocer las maneras en que se les adscribía personalidad, aunque no habitasen el mundo material.

Este artículo no tiene la intención de analizar a la persona desde las concepciones legales actuales, sino volver a los fundamentos de ella antes de que hubiera sido captada por el derecho, convirtiéndola en un título adscrito por el acuerdo jurídico político de una nación; los fundamentos de la persona en un sentido holístico se encuentran en los escritos que dan cuenta de las relaciones entre humanos y dioses en Grecia, con el único fin de volver a la persona como relación y no como mera adscripción jurídica. Esto es, de encontrarle un fundamento ontológico e histórico que da cuenta de su poderosa significación, superior a su reconocimiento normativo.

Palabras clave:

persona, ontología de la persona, la persona en Grecia, ser humano.

Resumo

Foi somente com Santo Tomás que a condição de pessoa foi atribuída ao ser humano e, especificamente, ao homem no sentido masculino. Durante os séculos XIX e XX, o conceito de ser humano como pessoa se universalizou até atrair e absorver todos os membros da raça humana e certas entidades criadas por ela, como empresas e organizações.

No entanto, ao revisar culturas antigas, é possível encontrar uma concepção diferente sobre a pessoa, uma vez que havia ideias e coisas que adquiriam personalidade pelo tipo de relação que estabeleciam com o ser humano, uma relação comunicacional mais do que jurídica. Nessa relação, eram atribuídos traços de tratamento igualitário, como acontece atualmente com pessoas físicas e jurídicas. Dentro dessas relações, pode-se observar que na Grécia antiga havia uma representação dos deuses como pessoas, não tanto pela imagem antropomórfica que os descrevia, mas porque era possível estabelecer relações de reciprocidade entre humanos e deuses. Essas formas de relação podem nos fazer conhecer as maneiras pelas quais lhes era atribuída personalidade, embora não habitassem o mundo material.

Este artigo não tem a intenção de analisar a pessoa a partir das concepções jurídicas atuais, mas sim voltar aos fundamentos da pessoa antes de ela ter sido capturada pelo direito, transformando-a em um título atribuído pelo acordo jurídico político de uma nação; os fundamentos da pessoa em um sentido holístico encontram-se nos escritos que relatam as relações entre humanos e deuses na Grécia, com o único objetivo de

voltar à pessoa como relação e não como mera atribuição jurídica. Ou seja, encontrar um fundamento ontológico e histórico que explique seu poderoso significado, superior ao seu reconhecimento normativo.

Palavras-chave:

Pessoa, ontologia da pessoa, a pessoa na Grécia, ser humano.

Introduction

It is common to presume categories without questioning their ontological meaning, as it happens with the concept of person. The Colombian Civil Code of 1887, in Article 33, recognizes that every man and human being is a person, and the Colombian Constitutional Court declared this article constitutional, under the understanding that it includes women within the concept (Ruling C-804 of 2016).

This reduction of the human to the legal institution of the person implies limits in human relations with other forms or entities that also exist, whether material or immaterial, and constructs a univocal meaning of the person as man, human, or entity with human interests. This is significant, since on the other side of the binary system things are placed representing beings as either one thing or another (Hattenhauer, 1987; Kelsen, 2009).

This outcome is manifested through law, the instrument by which human beings assign categories. This phenomenon has emerged with more force since the 19th century with the advent of modernity in law, wherein the human being assigns himself the role

of the world's configurator. In this way, he becomes a god with the capacity to name, distribute, and create being; a new creator, who with a finger and a word signifies, indicates, and names (Derrida, 2008); a King Midas who now turns not things into gold but into anything valid, legitimate, and just, according to his pronouncement. This deification legitimizes him to assign irreducible rights and guarantees and to endow them with a metaphysics that appears as an immutable and irrefutable truth.

Thus, for this article, the person is analyzed as something distinct from the human, breaking the structure proposed in certain legal bodies that define person as a natural entity. On the other hand, the person should return to being a human utterance through which certain essential traits of subjects can be identified, regardless of their belonging to one or another biological category.

This assignment fulfills pragmatic functions, such as serving as a source of benefit to human interests through the conception of rights as legally protected human interests, contrary to an ethical sense of the person as one that enables dialogue between entities. The human no longer needs another god besides himself to reconstruct and understand his world, for he has detached from the need for an intermediary to point out the surrounding phenomena.

Currently, not only humans are considered persons (Colombian Civil Code), but also entities representing human associative interests (civil and commercial codes), and even money and fixed assets constituted in trusts were once considered persons; that

is, a thing/property at the service of the human as a transaction mechanism, as seen in trusts acting as plaintiff or defendant in legal processes. Although nowadays the doctrine of legal personality of trusts is denied, in the Kuhnian sense of historical worlds as material realities (Kuhn, 2013), this recognition as agents capable of judicial representation granted them legal personhood (Álvarez Gómez, n.d., p. 27).

The person (in moral or natural sense, as identified by law to differentiate human and non-human persons) is now a material being that lives for itself and turns what was another into a mere good, a thing. A thing that, as such, is convertible into a good (Arendt, 2005). In the midst of this historical development, there was a struggle for recognition as an unquestionable truth that responded to the question: why are they persons and we are not? And with the emergence of the person came citizenship, belonging to a nation, and the attribution of universal and inviolable rights.

It is quite probable that "persona" comes from two terms that may explain why today we use this word in certain ways. On one hand, it seems that "persona" derives from "prosopon" and then from "*per sonare*," which refers to Greek tragedy (Betancur García, 2011, p. 130). Taking these terms as explanations of the person, we can assign it a double meaning: to personify and to sound, the latter meaning to have a voice, to speak, a consequence of the former (Pacheco *et al.*, 2018), since to personify we need to give voice to the other within the reality of the self. The person, then, in its cultural meaning, implies the idea of becoming another, one who, like

Plato, represents the well-being of the city, or who like Haraway, communicates (Haraway, 2019).

In Greece, the person is relativized from relationships and allows dialogue between these two forms or beings. The person is the one who can have a (public) voice and be another (in public) different from the private or family being (Arendt, 2005). Speaking implies dialogue and idea, and representing being another, and therefore, only while some men—and not women, nor all humans—seem to be persons. However, in this sense, he too must be that or whom with whom dialogue is possible, as long as there is a response—that is, communication in the public sphere. The person is not born as a criterion of exclusivity and biological privilege: it is he who can have a voice and represent others. Within the polis, for example, Aristotle's political person becomes a being whose interests, through the use of voice and speech, are public interests representing the political role (Betancur García, 2011).

If we doubt that the person, distinct from man and human, was born in the polis, we could debate whether man, as a political being, is born with the polis, although his academic existence is based on it. If we go back in time, we find an epistemological solution in the narrative of god and man, in the existence of the person among the Hebrews and Indo-American cultures, which established different ways of relating among themselves and with non-human entities.

Nonetheless, focusing on the Greek myth as a narrative and description of ancient thought helps us find a specific description and identification of the person as a concept

from a worldview through the existence of superior beings. At the same time, it offers a conceptualization and analysis of the person applicable not only to man but to anything that has a voice and can represent private or public interests, such as the Olympian gods.

If the gods have interests and can also dialogue with humans, the idea defended here is reinforced: that the person can be the one who relates to public or external interests and can communicate them, and therefore, the narratives indeed assign characteristics to the Greek gods that allow us to attribute to them the status of person.

To reach the desired point, we ask: How is a conception of the person grounded in the relationships between humans and gods in ancient Greece, as presented in the narratives of Homer and Hesiod? Based on the above, the objective of this paper is to deduce evidence of the relationships and personality traits that humans assigned to the gods, specifically in Greece, from ancient narratives such as *The Iliad* and the writings of Hesiod, in order to explore the concept of person as a form of reciprocal relationship between gods and humans.

Let us clarify an important point: person and god are not mutually exclusive, as might be the case with god and man (human), god and animal, or human and animal, as it is today (although suspecting this exclusion, we may deduce it is due to the parallelism between some men turned into gods and gods with animal form). Person is a title assigned by human deliberative will and inscribed in normative texts and codes as a recognition mechanism. However, this political conception of the person does not

contradict the possibility of assigning it to whatever the human wishes. Personhood has been attributed to human organizations (the state being the main juridical person in a society, but also to companies, foundations, etc.) and to certain things (until recently, the Supreme Court of Colombia ruled that money, when placed in a trust account, did not acquire legal personality distinct from that of the account holder, although this was long the case).

Through a bibliographic review using a descriptive technique and hermeneutics, we will affirm that the person, at least in antiquity, when it emerged as a political concept in Greece, is more than a legal decision to include only that which is human or tinged with human interest. In this way, we investigate and uphold the need to reincorporate an ontological sense into law that recognizes that the person may unfold into new meanings.

1. The problem of the person

If being a person is not merely being human or a man, but rather a category encompassing all entities that possess a voice and can, therefore, participate in public affairs, then the assignment of personhood must be relativized to include other subjects or beings. Hans Hattenhauer, in his historical and theoretical-ideological account of the concept of the person, concludes that it has a material and historical foundation in which the dualism of person-thing and natural person (human)- legal person (artificial) is reaffirmed. He thus emphasizes that it has never been a univocal or static concept, since the term “person” has referred to the human

being, provided that the individual was born with a human form and from a human woman; this attribution—of possessing personhood—was also granted to material entities (animals and nature) and immaterial ones (gods and again nature as mother). The identification and categorization of human being and person as identical and interchangeable is a relatively recent creation, stemming from Thomas Aquinas and Renaissance philosophy (Hattenhauer, 1987, p. 14), although this criterion was universalized following the nineteenth-century revolutions, which could no longer deny the equivalence of human and person.

[I]n archaic cultures, and also from the earliest forms of thought to the present day, personhood has always been sought in other objects. The Germanic peasant would speak with his animals on New Year’s Eve and call them by their names. (Hattenhauer, 1987, p. 13)

Likewise, this is acknowledged as a cultural concept by Valencia Zea, who affirms that in the universalization of the person there is a material condition determined by legal norms that assign this status to all human beings (Valencia Zea & Ortiz Monsalve, 2016). An example of the separation between person and human can be found in the relationships humans establish with things and the intentionality involved in those relationships. It is precisely this intentionality or relation that constitutes the principal matter through which something may become a person. In this sense, we question the assertion that human beings are the only ones capable of becoming persons,

considering that “person” is an artificial concept, in contrast to “human,” which is a biological one. Since person is an artificial and legal concept, its purpose is to designate something relevant to public affairs (Aristotle, 2011).

Therefore, as personhood entails a legal title or assignment, it must be established through a positive normative act, which implies a form of recognition that is positive rather than natural. This suggests that other beings may also be granted such status, as was the case with the Greek gods. For this reason, the idea is supported by the fact that, prior to this legal assignment, the category of personhood was determined by custom and social practices, by collective consciousness, and by the relationship between humans and their environment. There are historical, mythological, and literary examples of such forms of relationships that conferred the status of personhood, as will be discussed below.

A god possesses personhood when he becomes a subject with individual interests distinct from those of humans—when he speaks about and negotiates those interests. The god ceases to be merely the source of existence and the giver of knowledge and becomes a dialogical subject who exhibits traits of personality. Within that relationship, two paths may emerge: either the god acquires human attributes, or the human acquires attributes of the deity. However, particularly when it is a speaking god with his own interests—public interests that require engagement with mortals in order to be realized—we see the emergence of personality.

It is worth exploring personhood as a

relational form involving the alignment of interests between humans and gods who, by virtue of this interaction, become persons: they speak and negotiate, and within each lies a desire that may be fulfilled through the cooperation of the other. In this way, we address the question of how personality is attributed to ideas and things, and not only to members of the species. This may appear to be a metaphysical notion rejected by formalist and positivist schools of thought, yet we must not forget that today corporations are considered persons whose existence is confined to documents, registries, and contracts. From this perspective, we may therefore defend the idea of personality in the Greek gods, finding supporting examples in various texts, such as Homer’s *Iliad*, which will be analyzed below.

2. Myth and the person. The god above the human

Homer speaks to us of the gods. In the *Iliad*, some reasons and examples illustrate the way in which the gods possess human attributes and, more importantly, exhibit legal personality. The gods experience hunger and sleepiness, they feel fatigue, but also compassion, jealousy, and wrath. In earthly battles, it is common for them to express preferences for one side over the other. This is evident in the following passages from Homer’s *Iliad*: “Throughout the day until nightfall, [the gods] remained at the feast, and in their hearts there was no complaint about the food” (Homer, 2008, p. 56, translation mine), and later: “But when the bright light of the sun sank into the horizon, the gods, eager for rest, withdrew to their respective

mansions built for them by Hephaestus” (Homer, 2008, p. 57, translation mine).

As both Homer and Hesiod show, the poet serves as the conduit of knowledge between gods and humans: “They [the Muses] once taught Hesiod a beautiful song while he tended his sheep at the foot of divine Helicon” (Hesiod, 1978, p. 70). Homer is inspired by the gods; he does not sing by his own will, but through divine grace, which makes him an interpreter: “Sing, O goddess, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus” (Homer, 2008, p. 36, translation mine). The gods inspire, and man is their instrument. Thus, the artist is truly a translator of the divine. The gods are the source of knowledge, and it is by their grace that we can understand the nature of things. Human beings are what they are because of the gods.

Up to this point, knowledge, inspiration, and truth are vertical and unidirectional, and poets serve as the medium of transmission—they are the teachers who convey the gift granted by Olympus (von der Walde Uribe, 2006). The gods, for their part, created the world and allowed human beings to access and understand it. Therefore, through the poets—entrusted with preserving myth and history—the world endures, and the gods endure as well. Humanity explains itself in divine and artistic terms, for through their words, knowledge survives via the messengers of the gods, who offer a vision of the world (Medina et al., 2016). This chain of speech is passed down from generation to generation. Such is the initial vision we glean from the writings of Homer and Hesiod, where divine and human behavior is portrayed as a form of imposed relationship.

All knowledge, inspiration, and speech—that is, the world—comes from the gods, who divide among themselves the natural phenomena and strive to bestow upon humanity what they consider essential for survival, worship, and learning, like fire (Hesiod, 1978): “Then the soul of high-thundering Zeus was again stirred, and his heart was angered when he saw among men the distant glow of fire. And immediately, in exchange for fire, he prepared a bane for mankind” (p. 95). They also teach war tactics, which is essential for civic autonomy and freedom (Herodotus, 2011), and they transmit values and culture. This passage from Hesiod will be revisited due to its importance.

Among their gifts is law. Here we find an example of how Zeus speaks through judges, kings, or persons. Zeus alone is capable of understanding law and justice, which is why it must be he who is spoken to. The judge becomes Zeus, and the verdict and sentence are delivered by the gods through the human path.

All fix their gaze upon him as he interprets the divine laws with just rulings (on Zeus), and with firm words he wisely resolves even the greatest of disputes in an instant. For herein lies the reason why kings are wise: because in the assembly they carry out acts of reparation for the wronged with persuasive and gracious words. (Hesiod, 1978, p. 74)

The gods grant the word to comprehend and describe the world, but not only the word—they also provide the interpretation of

those words, which is likewise divine work. They are knowledge, the source of knowledge, and the interpretation of knowledge. Man is an empty vessel that must be filled with gifts by the will of Olympus. It is not the human who interprets, but the god through him; it is the poets, such as Homer, who transmit divine knowledge, and the kings who convey justice. Man, up to this point, is a person alone in the world, and to achieve a higher status, he must emancipate himself to establish equitable relations with the gods of Olympus.

On the other hand, although there is evidence in the narrative that the gods in Greek mythology are capable of hearing and representing (Bengston, 2019), this is insufficient to affirm that they are persons, since there are no accounts suggesting that the human condition itself enables divine agency. The god, until this moment, is independent and free from the human, autonomous. The gods hear and act; the human, or man, must plead to earn divine favor. For this reason, in this first stage, we do not yet find clear ideas in the dialogue to support the personhood of the gods. This changes at the moment Apollo casts a curse upon the Greeks in response to the plea Crises makes to recover Chryseis, and later, when Thetis attentively hears Achilles's request and intercedes on his behalf before Zeus.

The opening of Homer's *Iliad* describes the call of the mortal to the immortal, of the human to the god. The narrative presents a plea for attention, and subsequently a demand for intervention: "Hear me, you who bear the silver bow, who guard Chrysa and holy Cilla, and rule mightily over Tenedos!"

(Homer, 2008, p. 36, traslation mine) The glorification is evident: "Oh Smintheus," followed by the request, which is also a grievance: "If ever I built you a temple and burned rich thigh bones of bulls or goats in your honor, grant my prayer: let the Danaans pay for my tears with your arrows" (Homer, 2008, p. 38, translation mine). The god responds immediately, enraged by the dishonor, and the ensuing events confirm that the god has indeed spoken. He hears the human lament and acts upon the man's request. However, it is not yet clear that a true dialogue exists, since Apollo listens only in accordance with his divine autonomy—just as Pallas Athena chooses not to respond to the pleas of the Trojan women following the hymns to Diomedes: "Thus prayed the wife of Antenor in the temple, but Pallas Athena did not heed her prayer" (Homer, 2008, p. 165). Nevertheless, Crises's demand does contain a command that is answered by the god.

From this moment on, a rupture occurs in the way humans and gods relate. The change comes when man begins to enter into dialogue with the gods; thus, the role of the gods shifts, and they become dialogical subjects. The god responds to the human not as a supreme authority but as an equal. Humans have begun the path toward liberation, transforming the unidirectional relationship into a genuine dialogue and turning the gods into persons. The myth transforms. Man has transformed the myth.

3. Myth and the person: A dialogue between humans and gods

Let us move to the second scene, where the relationship transforms and becomes a

dialogue. In doing so, we enter the form in which the god begins to be personified and, now seen as persons, they come to have interests similar to those of human beings. Zeus sees his fear materialized when he helplessly watches the fire being given to humankind, and Apollo laments the sacrilege of considering gods and humans as equals: “Beware, son of Tydeus, and withdraw! Do not seek to equate yourself with the gods, for the immortals and mortals who walk the earth shall always be two distinct races” (Homer, 2008, p. 139, *traslatin mine*).

Human beings are no longer helpless; they now hold power over the gods, an emancipatory power granted to humans through the knowledge gifted by the gods. The former and the latter are destined to transcend their differences and grow apart, as it will happen centuries later. The gods fear the actions of those who once prayed and offered tributes to them to satisfy their divine desires. After his defeat in battle, Ares tells Zeus: “Siempre los dioses hemos padecido males horribles que recíprocamente nos causamos para complacer a los mortales” [We gods have always suffered horrible afflictions, which we inflict upon each other to please mortals] (Homer, 2008, p. 139, *translation mine*).

Zeus, the mightiest among all the Olympians, revered by gods and mortals alike, knows that his power is limited when dealing with humans. Fate is more powerful than he is, and he is aware of it, as he himself is a hero thanks to the words of a prophecy. Thus, when fire was stolen, he punished humans with the miseries of mortality, thereby reminding them that immortality is

beyond the reach of any man, at least as a form of existence. Gradually, Zeus and the other Olympians come to be considered equal to humans, and a reciprocal exchange in the form of dialogue begins, as testified by Homeric narratives. In this way, the interests of the gods are fulfilled by mortals, given that both parties rely on one another for their subsistence.

This leveling between gods and humans is not the work of the divine entities, who are trying to stop human emancipation. They punish mortals through nature, reminding them of their underworld fate, and urge them into war to serve the gods’ interests (the Trojan War was brought about by the egos of the gods). Zeus hurls thunderbolts, Poseidon sends sea storms, Aphrodite punishes with love, and Hades punishes with the underworld. Yet none of these strategies can halt the path that humans have taken toward emancipation. The first step in that direction has been the equalization of gods and humans through reciprocal communication.

The Iliad illustrates the points discussed above. A clear example is the dialogue—also a negotiation—between Achilles and Athena when Agamemnon offends the former at the beginning of the tragedy. There is a negotiation because Athena, a goddess, ultimately permits a purely mortal act in order to fulfill her divine plan. She needs Achilles, as fate has foretold, and thus she grants him autonomy to insult, with one condition: Achilles may insult only if he refrains from physically attacking Agamemnon. If he breaks the pact, Athena’s plan will be lost. This dialogue is not a command—as might be expected from a deity

of order and authority—but a negotiation in which reciprocal obligations emerge:

Mientras tales pensamientos revolvían en su mente y en su corazón, cuando sacaba ya de la vaina la gran espada, llegó Atenea desde el cielo, porque Hera, la diosa de los níveos brazos, que amaba y protegía por igual a ambos, había la enviado. Situóse detrás del Pelida, y colocando su mano sobre su rubia cabellera, se hizo visible solo para él; ninguno de los demás la podía ver. Aquiles, sorprendido, volvióse y al instante reconoció a Palas Atenea; sus ojos centellearon de un modo terrible, y, dirigiéndose a ella, pronunció estas aladas palabras (...) [While such thoughts stirred his heart and soul, and as he drew his great sword from its sheath, Athena descended from heaven, for white-armed Hera, who loved and protected both alike, had sent her. She stood behind the son of Peleus and seized him by his golden hair, visible only to him; none other could see her. Achilles turned and instantly recognized Pallas Athena; his eyes flashed terribly, and he addressed her in winged words...] (Homer, 2008, p. 43, translation mine).

Achilles has a voice because he is a person. But the goddess becomes a person as well when she enters into dialogue with him, hears Achilles's grievance, and accepts the negotiation. She does not merely command; she engages in dialogue, allows Achilles

to speak, grants him autonomous speech, and a pact is reached between them. This exchange reveals a conflict between Achilles's personal interests and the political interests of Olympus—i.e., Athena's—which makes the pact possible.

Moreover, the gods have stakes in human affairs and cities. Rhea and Apollo protect them, and Athena has a special interest in the Achaeans, who come from a city that venerates her. Divinity, nature, and even animals—many of which are themselves gods or gods with animalistic traits (Hesiod, 1978, p. 84)—fulfill divine roles. They are gods, but they also have a persona. They are dialogical beings who establish reciprocal relationships with humans. In this way, personhood grants a quality to any entity capable of it—not by positive law, but by social practice. The Olympians, the sea, the rain, the sun, and animals now converge with humanity. The Olympians engage in human affairs, such as battles that have ceased to be divine and are now mundane, as when Aphrodite is wounded by Diomedes and Ares meets a similar fate: “allí donde se abrocha el cinturón interior. Allí Diómedes le alcanzó y le hirió, y desgarró su hermosa piel. Y cuando el héroe retiró el arma, Ares emitió un grito” [where the inner belt fastens, there Diomedes struck and tore his lovely flesh. When the hero withdrew his weapon, Ares cried out in pain] (Homer, 2008, translation mine). Ares has felt human pain; he has been answered.

Yet there is something greater than the gods' own will: fate. That is why Zeus fears humans, and Athena must yield to Achilles—because fate is more powerful than the gods. Let us remember Athena's negotiation:

she permits insult and humiliation—offering Achilles emotional release—so long as he refrains from violence. Athena knows she must concede some margin of flexibility to Achilles. Hence, the negotiation between goddess and mortal is grounded in a degree of equality, a reciprocal relationship. Fate must speak: “ningún hombre, cobarde o esforzado, puede librarse del sino que tiene trazado desde el día en que nació” [No man, whether coward or brave, can escape the fate that is assigned to him from the day of his birth] (Homer, 2008, p. 170, translation mine).

Why attribute personhood to the gods—specifically, legal personhood? Because Zeus, the god of justice who empowers human judges to administer law in his name, must be brought down to earth. Thus, his will—expressed through signs or messengers who enforce justice on his behalf—quickly becomes a matter between persons.

Aphrodite and Ares have suffered disgrace at the hands of a mortal, and Thetis feels compelled to intervene to fulfill her need to satisfy her son. The gods gradually come to be regarded as persons who respond on equal terms to human beings. They resist, of course, because possessing personhood makes the gods subject to human will, and thus the dominance between gods and humans is reversed.

The discussion above reminds us of, and takes us back to, the moment when myth materializes the ontological concept of the person linked to sonare: to dialogue and representation. *The Iliad* illustrates how two-way communication and the negotiation of interests through discourse modify human status and elevate it to personhood, allowing

contact with the divine. This stands in stark contrast to the modern legal ascription of personhood and the erosion of its ethical justification. The renaming of the person as an assignable attribute follows a political and biological procedure, reducing and ontologically replacing “ ” with “personhood.”

Conclusions

The person is an artificial concept and a category through which human beings assign rights based on formal criteria designed to protect certain interests. This attribution is essentially derived from political dialogue. Since personhood became universalized, the terms person, human being, and man have been used interchangeably. Hence, in seeking the ontological foundation of the concept, one may find various forms of personhood, as seen in Ancient Greece, as described by Hesiod and Homer.

The human being first, and later the person, began a path toward discovering freedom—divine emancipation—through what the Greeks teach us a person is: a communicative entity capable of asserting interests in the public sphere. But before this happened, a relational path with the gods had begun, in which equal treatment was possible. Such a model is found when the Greek gods cease to be autonomous and supreme and become equal to the worldly condition of humans.

Greek myth and history, as told by poets, show how gods and humans relate. Through this relationship, humans become gods and persons, and gods become human and persons. This reinterpretation of myth and poetry

helps us understand that there must have been an ontological rupture when the person supplanted the human being, and not only within the legal framework.

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