Justification and Explanation in Ancient Thought

The GANPH ('Gesellschaft für antike Philosophie') conference, which will take place in Marburg from 4–7 October 2022, will adress the question of which forms of justification and explanation we find in the thought of Greco-Roman antiquity. The aim is to analyze these different forms and to put them in relation to each another. A wide range of literary genres will be taken into account. This incorporates the fact that philosophical reflection, which explicitly considers forms of justification and explanation, has developed in its engagement with other approaches, including literary tradition.

Even at the very beginning of Greek literature we find an effort to establish and explain connections between things and events. An early example is the proem of the Homeric *Iliad* with its request formulated to the muse to begin the narrative with the development of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles (*ex hou ta prota*). The subsequent narration of Apollo's wrath and the conflict between the two men provides an explanation for the process that results in the sufferings of the Greeks that the proem mentions. The likewise early Greek *Theogony* by Hesiod represents as a whole an explanation for the *status quo* as shaped by the rule of Zeus. His epic *Works and Days* reasons that the pursuit of material prosperity is what accounts for human misconduct. The divine punishment that sanctions this and extends to the entire community and its descendants offers in turn the explanation for why individual people and entire cities fare badly.

Mythical and religious explanations that use divine interventions or the behavior of early heroes to explain certain developments and that can also be regarded as political legitimations – for example 'founding sagas' or cult etiology – continued to play an important role in ancient thought until late antiquity. Even where events and situations can be explained by human factors such as the thirst for power, material greed, envy, vindictiveness, etc., religious parameters can continue to serve as explanatory models. Solon's poems demonstrate this model and also the negotiation of human suffering on the stage of tragedy. The historian Herodotus also combines both, whereas Thucydides focuses on human motifs in order to explain historical events. In dealing with these pioneers, the historiography of the succeeding centuries up until late antiquity came up with different explanatory models and also discussed its own approach theoretically (such as Polybius).

The literary genres of historiography and tragedy are to be viewed in the context of rhetoric, which was used as *technê* in the 5th century BC as well as within a growing theoretical access to various areas of knowledge, which the causality discourse of the 5th century BC shapes: the effort to explain 'physical' phenomena can be seen in the fragments of the so-called pre-Socratics and also in medical literature. For the corpus of the Hippocratic writings testifies to an intensive discussion about the question of whether and to what extent there is at all the possibility of general explanations that can be extended to all people in the field of medicine.

In later medicine, it is above all Galen who grapples with this theoretical side and somewhat contrary to philosophical approaches emphasizes the importance of 'empiricism'.

Galen can readily include the tradition of reflection and argument about forms of explanation, because with the philosophy of the 4th century BC a differentiation of the discussion about the different forms of explanation takes place, within which, in the Platonic Dialogues and in the Aristotelian *Pragmateiai*, the different forms of explanation and the correct approach to scientific evidence are reflected upon. At the same time, the literary design demonstrates what a scientific argumentation or demonstration of evidence can look like, be it in the manner in which Plato has his character Socrates argue, or in the way in which Aristotelian *Pragmateiai* are presented. The Aristotelian philosophy of science, by distinguishing methodically different forms of explanation and by assigning different degrees of accuracy to different areas of knowledge, constitutes a high point of meta-reflection.

In this process of philosophical differentiation, the examination of other forms of justification and the discussion with them play an important role. This applies both to the philosophical critics of contemporary rhetoric and rhetoric theory (Isocrates) aimed at plausibility arguments, as well as to the abandonment of explanations such as those offered by myth (that myth, on the other hand, is granted a certain potential for explanation show the use of myths in Plato and Aristotle's occasional recourse to myths as forms of pre-scientific knowledge). But criticism of his predecessors and contemporaries also comes into play when Aristotle for example denounces Empedocles' use of metaphors as 'unscientific'. Aristotle also dealt extensively with the role of *endoxa*.

The different forms of explanation as well as their juxtaposition continue to exist in the periods that followed. The Hellenistic schools of philosophy take up the attempt at physical explanation and ethical justification (although with differing emphasis; for example, the interest in biological explanations is declining). Etiologies, which offer myths of origin of recent cults, flourish in contemporary poetry.

In religion, monotheistically inspired explanatory models are added through contact with Jewish culture and the Septuagint. This phenomenon is intensified by the influence of Christianity in imperial times and late antiquity, and Christian writers endeavor to prove the explanations of pagan science to be false, to trivialize them or to 'use' them for their own intentions (see the term '*chrêsis*').

It is characteristic of the entire epoch of Greco-Roman antiquity that different forms of justification persist side by side. A 'scientific' form of explanation does not replace mythical and narrative forms, but rather these continue to endure, as in politics and cult, with the simultaneous further development of scientific approaches such as in medicine, or they emerge – as in the case of biblical faith and pagan science – in competition with one another.

The aim of the conference is to explore the different forms of justification and explanation and thus to invite papers from different fields. The aim is further not only to investigate the variety of forms of justification in ancient thought, but also to make it clear whether and in

what context they exist – be it that they set themselves apart from each other, integrate one another or compete with each other.

Research perspectives can be: How do narrative forms provide explanations? How do narrative forms of explanation and performative interpretations (like tragedy) differ? How do arguments proceed in the scientific evidence of the texts to be examined? Where and why do 'scientific authors' integrate forms of non-scientific explanation? And vice versa: where and why were non-religious explanations and justifications resorted to in religious texts? How is the Aristotelian philosophy of science received? What role do comparisons, analogies, and metaphors play? Where is reference made to human or divine authority?

Since one focus will be the question of which types of scientific explanations emerged in antiquity and how they were discussed, a topic area of the conference will also be devoted to the inquiry of how modern philosophy of science discusses explanatory patterns in the sciences (especially the natural sciences) and what considerations there are for the explanatory potential of narrative models.

The conference is intended for the following subject areas:
1) Explanatory patterns in myth and religion
2) Narrative 'explanations of the world' in epic
3) Explanatory rationales from psychology and religion in tragedy
4) Historiography / Political causal analysis
5) Explanatory models in medicine (Hippocratics, Galen)
6) Reasoning and explanation in Ancient Philosophy

      Pre-Socratics

      Plato

      Aristotle

      Stoa

      Epicureanism

      Roman philosophy

      Neoplatonism

7) Modern philosophy of science