PARALLELS BETWEEN THE GILGAMESH EPIC AND PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM

GEORGE F. HELD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

A number of scholars have pointed out the formal and thematic parallels between the Gilgamesh Epic and the Homeric poems, but no one, to my knowledge, has observed the existence of such parallels between Gilgamesh and Plato's Symposium. In what follows I will point out these parallels in the hope of demonstrating that at least the seeds of a teleological ethical outlook, similar to that of Plato and Aristotle, can be found in the Akkadian epic. The "seeds" to which I refer are the basic idea, which Gilgamesh seems specifically designed to teach, that man can develop himself, fulfill his nature, and obtain true happiness (a qualitative concept, not to be confused with mere good fortune), only through the pursuit of virtue and knowledge and not of mere pleasure. My discussion should be of interest not only because of the light which it will shed on Gilgamesh, but also because of its relevance to the ongoing debate concerning the originality of Plato's and Aristotle's values and ethical outlook. Adkins has argued that there is a considerable gap between the values of Homer and other early Greek writers on the one hand and those of Plato and Aristotle on the other. A. Parry has argued that it is precisely the teleological aspect of Plato's and Aristotle's values which most distinguishes them from those of Homer. The demonstration of the existence of a teleological ethical outlook in Gilgamesh, that distant ancestor of the Homeric poems, will not do much to resolve the debate in question, but it is a fact which should be called to the attention of those participating in it.

I will not discuss the Symposium in detail since it has been thoroughly analyzed by others, but two points about it, both relevant to its comparison with Gilgamesh, ought to be mentioned: 1) the dialogue is designed to praise Socrates as much as to praise love; the latter in fact is a preliminary step to the former; 2) the method adopted by

---

1 For a recent discussion of this question, see Gerald K. Gresseth, "The Gilgamesh Epic and Homer," CJ 70 (1975): 1-18. For a bibliography of relevant works besides those listed in the notes below, see Gresseth's first footnote.


3 Adam Parry, "A Note on the Origins of Teleology," Journal of the History of Ideas 26 (1965): 259-62. Parry's argument seems to me deficient in many respects, too many to go into here, but one point about his discussion should be noted: he uses the word "teleological" in the same sense as E. A. Havelock gives to this word in his The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics (New Haven, Conn., 1957) and draws the same distinction as does Havelock between "teleological" and "genetic" values. The former are "fixed and absolute, and they exist outside the development of human society; and even, to borrow a late teleological metaphor, outside the flux of this sublunar world altogether... The purpose that men do, or at any rate should, keep before themselves is not the fundamental desire to live and its concomitant, the search for pleasure, but rather excellence" (Parry, "Origins of Teleology," p. 259). Genetic values are just the opposite. The distinction between these two types of values seems to me so oversimplified that the values of no Greek writer can legitimately be classified as one or the other. My own usage of the word "teleological," therefore, will differ considerably from Parry's: under "teleological" I include much that Parry classifies exclusively under "genetic," e.g., the desire to live, grow, and seek pleasure; and the term, as I use it, does not imply that the ends toward which life is directed are necessarily unchanging, absolute, or extraterrestrial.
Agathon and Socrates for the praise of love (195a1–5 and 199c3–d1), i.e., first to explain the nature of the laudandum and then to describe his works, is in fact employed by the dialogue as a whole for the praise of Socrates. This second point is most important and has not been previously observed by any commentator on the dialogue. Alcibiades, despite his warnings not to expect an orderly arrangement of his material from him (215a–3), does roughly follow this two-fold procedure: the first part of his speech (215a–216c) deals with Socrates's nature and the second part (216c–222a) with his works. Yet because Alcibiades does not understand Socrates's nature (to him it seems strange beyond comprehension—atopian: 215a2), the first part of his speech does not really fulfill its proper function. Its function, however, has already been performed by Diotima's explication of the nature of love. As many have noted, there is an obvious similarity between the nature of love as Diotima describes it and the nature of Socrates as it appears in the dialogue. This similarity impresses upon us the fact that love is at the heart of Socrates's nature. Accordingly, the key to understanding his nature is an understanding of the nature of love. Diotima's explication of the nature of love, therefore, is virtually equivalent to an explication of the nature of Socrates and is the first step in the process whereby the dialogue provides him with true praise. It is only because of this first step that Alcibiades's account of Socrates's works, which makes clear that Socrates has gone through the developmental process described by Diotima and graduated from the lower forms of love to the higher, is fully comprehensible to us and provides Socrates with true praise.

It is through Diotima's explication of the nature of love, moreover, that teleology enters the dialogue. Love, Diotima explains, is a desire for the beautiful, or more precisely, the possession of the beautiful. Men desire to possess the beautiful because it is good (204d–e). The good they want because it makes them happy. Why they want to be happy (eudaimon) needs no explanation because “the answer is already final” (άλλα τέλος δοκεῖ ἐχειν ἡ απόκρισις; 205a3)—which is as much as to say that final ends can be known by experience but not logically deduced. In any case, love is clearly here conceived of in teleological terms: it is directed ultimately at the end, happiness, and is the force which leads men to it.

Now let us turn to Gilgamesh. “Like the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and the Nibelungenlied, the Gilgamesh Epic opens with a brief résumé of the deeds and fortunes of the hero whose praises it sings.” The manner of the prologue should be sufficient evidence that Gilgamesh, like the Symposium, has an encomiastic purpose. And, as I will show, its praise of Gilgamesh both in manner and substance is similar to the Symposium's praise of Socrates. In both works, the same two-step procedure is followed for bestowing true praise on the laudandum: first his nature is explicated and secondly his works recounted. (In Gilgamesh, what precedes Gilgamesh's first meeting with Enkidu explicates his nature; what follows it recounts his works.) And in both works, in the first of these two steps, the same two points are made: 1) that love or eros is at the heart of the nature of the laudandum, and 2) that this love or eros is the force which effects the transformation and development of man's nature.


5 Jowett's translation, as are all other translations of the Symposium unless otherwise noted.

The description at the start of the poem of Gilgamesh’s extraordinary sexual demands upon the youthful populace of Uruk makes rather obviously the first of these two points, and the account of Enkidu’s transformation into a man as a result of his affair with the courtesan makes, as I will explain below, the second. Wolff, accordingly, is only superficially right in saying that “the poem . . . separates into two parts, each more concerned with one of the two heroes.” Her statement fails to do justice to the interconnection between the two parts. The first part, ostensibly concerned primarily with Enkidu, is ultimately just as concerned with Gilgamesh, for therein is made very dramatically a point which is a necessary preliminary step to the true praise of Gilgamesh, i.e., that the eros which is at the heart of his nature and is the cause of his asocial behavior is also that which can serve to humanize him and transform him into a better man. This we need to know in order to understand how his encounter with Enkidu has precisely this effect upon him and also to understand and appreciate the account of Gilgamesh’s great works which result from this encounter. Let us consider the relationship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu more closely.

Jacobsen, in an early article, comments on the similarity between Enkidu’s nature and that of Gilgamesh: Enkidu “is from the very first of his appearing upon the stage described as a being of enormous sexual vigor”, and Gilgamesh likewise “possesses superhuman strength and sexual vigor.” It might be objected that the sexual character of Enkidu’s strength and vigor is not “described from the very first” but rather revealed only when he meets the courtesan, but, in any case, it then becomes sufficiently clear. The sexual character of Gilgamesh’s energy is described from the very first, so that the similarity between his nature and Enkidu’s is apparent. Both Gilgamesh and Enkidu are transformed by means of this erotic energy which lies at the heart of their nature, but in the case of Gilgamesh this fact is somewhat less clear because his relationship with Enkidu, which is what brings about his transformation, is not overtly erotic (to this point I will presently return); and it is the erotic type of love which is most commonly thought of as love and sometimes mistakenly as the whole of love. The poet, therefore, in order to help us see that it is Gilgamesh’s erotic energy, previously so much in evidence, which later transforms him via his relationship with Enkidu, prefaces Gilgamesh’s transformation with that of Enkidu himself—which transformation, because it involves an explicitly erotic act, serves quite unambiguously to identify love or eros as the force which causes man’s nature to transform and develop. Enkidu’s encounter with the courtesan, then, is comparable in function with Diotima’s speech in the Symposium: it makes by means of a concrete example the same point which Diotima makes discursively. It is noteworthy that Enkidu in the earlier versions of the story was not originally animal-like in form but only uncivilized in his way of life. In the final version, I surmise, he is represented as originally subhuman and animal-like in order that his transformation be all the more graphic.

---

9 Ibid. Cf. Wolff, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Heroic Life,” p. 397: “Aside from the desire for personal achievement which never leaves Gilgamesh, though its scope and object change, his remarkable characteristic is his capacity for love.”
10 This problem is of course discussed by Plato in Sym. 205, though there the contrast is not explicitly between erotic and non-erotic love but between interpersonal love and all other types.
and dramatic and thus the power of love to transform man’s nature be made all the clearer.

My statement that the relationship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu is not “overtly erotic” may seem contradicted by the sexual overtones of Gilgamesh’s two dreams: of a meteor and of an axe, both of which presage his future relationship with Enkidu. The former Gilgamesh describes as follows:

There appeared stars in the heavens.
[The h]ost of heaven fell down toward me.
I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy for me;
I tried to move it, but I could not move it.
The land of Uruk was gathered around it,
While the heroes kissed its feet.
I put my forehead (firmly) against (it),
And they assisted me. 12

His mother interprets his dream to mean that someone like him has been born on the steppe over whom “thou wilt rejoice [as (over) a woman]. . . . Thou wilt embrace him” (2.1.20–22). Gilgamesh’s description of his second dream runs as follows:

I looked at it [i.e., the axe] and I rejoiced,
Loving it and bending over it
As (over) a woman.
I took it and put it
At my side (2.1.32–36).

Because of the sexual connotations of the imagery employed in these two dreams, Jacobsen in his early article concludes that the gods plan for Gilgamesh and Enkidu to develop a homosexual relationship and that it is by the specifically sexual element in their relationship that the relief of Uruk is to be accomplished: “Aruru hears their prayers and creates Engidu, a being whose sexual vigor is as strong as Gilgame’s, so that they when falling in love with each other may neutralize each other and the inhabitants of Uruk may return to tranquillity.” 13 The sexual overtones of the imagery employed in the two dreams are in fact much more explicit than Jacobsen realized: there is a pun on the word bassinu, “axe,” and assinu, “male prostitute,” and another on the word kisru, “ball” (usually translated “meteorite”) and kezru ‘male with curled (i.e., dressed) hair’, the male counterpart as ‘prostitute’, ‘Bühlknabe’, etc., of kezertu ‘female prostitute’. 14 But, since sexual imagery is sometimes used in ancient and even more modern poetry to describe non-sexual relationships, for example, the Song of Solomon, the poetry of St. John of the Cross, and much Arabic poetry, Jacobsen goes somewhat too far in asserting in his early article that “as the axe is equivalent to

12 Heidel, Gilgamesh Epic, 2.1.6–14. Heidel’s translation, as are also all others from Gilgamesh. The numbers at the beginning of this note refer to tablet, column and line of Gilgamesh, as found in Heidel’s translation.


14 Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh,” published in Zikir Sumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (Leiden, 1982), p. 128. She concludes that “the implication of the double pun is, of course, that the often suspected, much discussed but of late rejected sexual relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is, after all, the correct interpretation” (p. 129).
Engidu, the dream cannot mean anything but that homosexual intercourse is going to take place between Gilgamesh and the newcomer.\(^{15}\)

In his most recent and fullest discussion of the poem, moreover, Jacobsen makes no reference to homosexuality, but rather speaks of Enkidu as Gilgamesh’s “brother” and of the relationship between them as one of “companionship” and “friendship”. “The gods divine with remarkable insight what is at the root of the trouble: Gilgamesh’s superior energy and strength set him apart and make him lonely. He needs a friend, someone who measures up to him and can give him companionship on his own extraordinary level of potential and aspiration.”\(^{16}\) Whether Gilgamesh and Enkidu relate to each other sexually is a question which must ultimately be left open—though very likely they do; but, at least from what we see of their interactions in the poem, sex *per se* is not the important element in their relationship, and, as previously stated, their relationship is not even overtly erotic. This fact alone makes it doubtful that the relief of Uruk comes about in the way in which Jacobsen in his early article had suggested, i.e., that Gilgamesh and Enkidu “neutralize each other” through sexual indulgence. But there is another fact which completely undermines this theory, i.e., that they simply do not “neutralize each other” at all. Their effect on each other is rather just the opposite. They stimulate and inspire each other to practical action. Their former erotic energy is not lost, but, rather, transformed and directed at a different and higher object; and it is thus that Uruk is relieved of the burden of having to satisfy Gilgamesh’s lust.

The nature of their effect on each other can best be conceived in the terms offered by the *Symposium*. Therein, Phaedrus, in praising love, asserts that “the principle which ought to be the guide of men who would nobly live—that principle. I say, neither kindred, nor honour, nor wealth, nor any other motive is able to implant so well as love” (178c3–d1). That principle he defines as (178d1–2): the capacity to feel “shame at base deeds and ambition for noble ones”\(^{17}\) (τὴν ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς οἰκεῖοις ἀισχύνην, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς καλοῖς φιλοτιμίαν). Pausanias criticizes the approach of Phaedrus because he fails to distinguish between types of love. There are two, and only one of them has the desired effect which Phaedrus and the others have mistakenly attributed to both. The first, which is related to Aphrodite Pandemos, has no particular effect on lover or beloved, and is directed indiscriminately at women as well as at boys and at the body more than the soul. Those under its influence actually seek out as objects for their love the most foolish women and boys since they desire nothing more than to achieve coitus (181b). The love related to Aphrodite Ouranos differs from the other in every respect. It has the particular effect described by Phaedrus: it “compels lover and beloved alike to feel a jealous concern for their own virtue” (185b5–c1).\(^{18}\) It is directed exclusively at boys and at only those boys who have begun “to acquire some mind” (181d2). A relationship based on this sort of love does not cease, however, when the beloved loses his youthful bloom, but lasts until death. Because the beloved enters a relationship of this sort “in the belief that his friend will

---

\(^{15}\) Jacobsen, “How did Gilgamesh oppress Uruk,” p. 70.


---

\(^{17}\) My translation.

\(^{18}\) Loeb translation, as also the next two in this paragraph.
make him better in point of wisdom, it may be, or in any of the other parts of virtue" (184c5–6), it is not shameful for him to gratify his lover sexually nor for the lover to be willing to do anything for his beloved.

The effect of Enkidu on Gilgamesh is precisely that which Pausanias tells us heavenly but not common love has on those under its influence. The relief of Uruk is accomplished by Enkidu’s directing Gilgamesh’s erotic drive away from Aphrodite Pandemos to Aphrodite Ouranios, away from the lower forms of love to the higher. Enkidu confronts Gilgamesh with a personal beauty of which he has had no prior experience and which he immediately desires to possess in a lasting relationship. The subsequent change in Gilgamesh’s character is exactly that which Phaedrus and Pausanias would have predicted: Gilgamesh now for the first time begins to live by that “principle which ought to be the guide of men who would nobly live” and to feel the sort of shame and ambition described in the Symposium (178d1–2). He stops abusing his subjects, and begins actively to pursue practical virtue through the performance of great deeds. It is only now that he begins actively to pursue immortal fame. Jacobsen seems to have failed to observe the nature of Enkidu’s effect on Gilgamesh: “As the story begins Gilgamesh shares the heroic values of his times, and his aspirations to immortality take the form of a quest for immortal fame.”19 On the contrary, at the start of the story Gilgamesh seems to have no values whatsoever and to aspire to nothing more than the satisfaction of his lust. It is true that at the start of the story he has already built the walls of Uruk, one of the deeds for which he is lauded in the prologue, and that he is said, in the Hittite version (1.1.6), to have been granted heroism by the god Adad, presumably at birth, but details such as these ought not to be blown up out of proportion: it is clear from his licentious behavior that Gilgamesh at the start of the story has not yet dedicated his life to the performance of great deeds, as he will after meeting Enkidu, and, accordingly, that what heroism he has at this time is largely of a potential rather than actual nature. The “heroic values of his times” he may know prior to his encounter with Enkidu, but it is not until after it that he adopts them and begins actively to pursue immortal fame through the performance of great deeds. Therefore, even if “Huwawa was the servant of Enlil, appointed by him to guard the cedar forest,”20 Jacobsen is mistaken to view Gilgamesh’s attack on Huwawa as a new form of misbehavior by him and further evidence of his intractability and degeneracy. The point is just the opposite: that Gilgamesh’s energy, which previously was wasted on ignoble pursuits, is now directed at noble ends. Furthermore, it is an overstatement to say that “with [Enkidu’s death] all his [Gilgamesh’s] previous values collapse”21 and wrong to imply that with Enkidu’s death Gilgamesh, in terms of his “progress toward the story goals,”22 returns to where he was at the start of the story. If, as Jacobsen says, “the Gilgamesh Epic is a story of growing up,”23 then maturity ought to be the chief “story goal”; and towards that, as I

19 Jacobsen, Treasures of Darkness, pp. 215–17. Wolff, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Heroic Life,” p. 392, goes wrong on this point as well: “If we remember that his active education begins only with Enkidu’s death, midway through the poem, we can see that Enkidu’s influence is static and protective, and that Enkidu’s advance from the primitive to the
does not entail any advance in the moral or intellectual character of Gilgamesh.”
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 215. See also the diagram on p. 216 which expresses this idea graphically.
23 Ibid., p. 219.
see it, Gilgamesh makes continual progress throughout the story. What collapses with Enkidu’s death is not Gilgamesh’s previous values but only their self-sufficiency. Practical virtue and fame through great deeds are shown to be inadequate in face of the stark reality of death—but inadequate only, as the rest of the story will show, if not accompanied by wisdom and knowledge. These Gilgamesh obtains in the course of his journey to and from Utanapishtim and is then able to accept his mortality and return to his place in society. It is not explicitly stated after his journey that he acquired wisdom as a result of it, but that he did seems to me implied in the prologue:

[He who] saw everything within the confines (?) of the land;
[He who] knew all things and was versed (?) in everything;
[. . . .] together [. . . .];
[. . . .] wisdom, who everything [. . . .].
He saw secret thing(s) and revealed hidden thing(s);
He brought intelligence of (the days) before the flood (1.1.1–6).

We are, moreover, explicitly told that he went to Utanapishtim in order both to obtain immortality and to ask him “concerning life and death” (8.3.5). He fails to obtain immortality, but his quest is not entirely in vain: he does learn of life and death and thus acquires the wisdom and knowledge upon which his later fame, to infer from the manner of the prologue, seems primarily to have rested.

That Gilgamesh will lead not only a better but a happier life after his return to Uruk also seems to me implicit in the last events of the story. Gilgamesh’s feelings after his return are not explicitly described for us. Yet as Heidel notes, there is “evident satisfaction” in the manner in which he bids Urshanabi inspect the walls of Uruk. This action seems to me designed to carry even greater significance than Heidel attributes to it. Coming as it does at the climax of the story, I view it as a symbolic act, intended to signify that Gilgamesh, as a result of his experiences described in the poem, experiences from which one might well obtain a degree of wisdom, has acquired not merely a stoical acceptance of life as it is and of the fact of his mortality, but also a kind of happiness, the kind which directly results from the acquisition of wisdom.

The *Gilgamesh Epic* has frequently been interpreted as a negative, pessimistic statement on the vanity of human wishes, but it need not, and in my opinion ought not, be so interpreted. It seems to be designed to make a statement similar to that made by the *Symposium*, that to obtain true happiness in this world, i.e., something more than mere sensual pleasure, man must first acquire virtue and wisdom. The happiness which Gilgamesh obtains and which the epic, as I see it, proffers to those who, like him, acquire virtue and wisdom, is not of the same ecstatic quality as that which many have reached about the poem. I do not agree with his opinion that these negative conclusions about its meaning are due to the “tendency to read the *Gilgamesh Epic* psychologically or in a narrowly esthetic way” rather than in a “historical” and “cultural” way: “the clues to its form, development, and meaning are cultural; they were the product of cultural forces which remained operable into Homeric times and beyond.” The poem seems to me to demand a psychological interpretation, and I believe it can and should be interpreted without pessimism.

---

24 For Jacobsen, however, as is evident from his graphlike diagram on p. 216, physical immortality, not maturity, is the chief “story goal.” Thus, the high point of Gilgamesh’s “progress toward the story goal” is for Jacobsen when Gilgamesh obtains the plant of rejuvenescence. To my mind, the story and its goals can be so viewed only on a superficial level of interpretation.


26 Gresseth, “The Gilgamesh Epic and Homer,” pp. 2–3, gives a brief survey of the negative conclusions which many have reached about the poem. I do not agree with his opinion that these negative conclusions about its meaning are due to the “tendency to read the *Gilgamesh Epic* psychologically or in a narrowly esthetic way” rather than in a “historical” and “cultural” way: “the clues to its form, development, and meaning are cultural; they were the product of cultural forces which remained operable into Homeric times and beyond.” The poem seems to me to demand a psychological interpretation, and I believe it can and should be interpreted without pessimism.
which Diotima describes to Socrates, but happiness of a sort it is, and, therefore, the
analogy which I suggest—and it is only an analogy, not an identity—holds up. The
strongest evidence in support of the existence of this analogy and indeed of my thesis
that the seeds of a teleological ethical outlook can be found in Gilgamesh is the fact
that the tripartite structure of the epic corresponds explicitly to the three-step process
of development described by Diotima in the Symposium. The events of Gilgamesh's
life narrated in the poem, as also the developmental process described by Diotima, fall
into three periods which may be classified respectively in terms of the three basic
categories of Plato's and Aristotle's ethical thought: hedonistic, practical, and philo-
sophical. Gilgamesh at first is leading the hedonistic life and is devoted to the lower
forms of love. Then, after meeting Enkidu and coming, as it were, under the influence
of Aphrodite Ourania, he takes up the practical life and begins to pursue virtue and
seek immortal fame through great deeds. Finally, terrified by Enkidu's death and the
imminence of his own, he takes up a life which, while not philosophical in practice,
does produce in him the desired effects of the philosophical life, i.e., wisdom and
knowledge. At this point he obtains the end or goal toward which the story has been
leading him, a happiness which is possible only for someone who, like Gilgamesh and
Socrates, in the course of his life acquires both virtue and knowledge and by this
means develops the potentiality inherent in his human nature.

I disagree with Jacobsen on several other points of interpretation which I would like
to discuss briefly, since thereby my own reading of the poem and the similarities
between it and the Symposium will be further clarified. Marriage and children are
hardly as essential to the Akkadian poet's concept of maturity as Jacobsen implies in
the following remark: "Throughout the epic Gilgamesh appears as young, as a mere
boy, and he holds on to that status, refusing to exchange it for adulthood as
represented by marriage and parenthood. . . . His first meeting with Enkidu is a
rejection of marriage for a boyhood friendship, and in the episode of the bull of
heaven he refuse-almost unnecessarily violently—Ishtar's proposal of marriage. . . .
So when Enkidu dies, he does not move forward seeking a new companionship in
marriage, but backward in an imaginary flight toward the security of childhood. . . .
In the encounter with the alewife he again firmly rejects marriage and children as an
acceptable goal." 27 Gilgamesh may well become a family man after his return, though
this we must conjecture for ourselves—the poem says nothing of it. But the point of
the story is surely not that Gilgamesh should have adopted the alewife's "breed and be
happy" philosophy right from the start. Moreover, though Gilgamesh and Enkidu may
be unnecessarily violent in rebuffing Ishtar, the point of that episode is not that "their
treatment of Ishtar was the height of arrogance." 28 As Pannwitz rightly observes, 29
Ishtar offers Gilgamesh the same sort of life as he had previously led; his rejection of
her, therefore, is a rejection of his former way of life, and an indication of ethical
progress: specifically, of his having graduated from the lower forms of love. It is, then,
exact comparable in form and in function to Socrates's rejection of Alcibiades in the
Symposium. Gilgamesh's relationship with Enkidu and his pursuit of immortality,

28 Ibid., p. 217.
29 Rudolf Pannwitz, Gilgamesch-Sokrates (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 87–88: "Dann aber rät sie ihm,
verführerisch, ein Leben der Freude und des Genusses, so etwa wie er es gehabt, eh er mit Enkidu zu
ruhmwürdiger Tat aufbrach."
moreover, are not steps “backward.” They are, rather, like his rejection of Ishtar, indications of ethical progress—steps forward toward a kind of happiness which the alevife could never know.

Lastly, I must object to the implications of Jacobsen’s following statement: “Gilgamesh’s first quest for immortality in fame defied the gods and brought their retribution on him; this quest for actual immortality is even more deeply defiant; it defies human nature itself, the very condition of being human, finite, mortal. And in the end it is Gilgamesh’s own human nature that reasserts itself; it is a basic human weakness, a moment of carelessness, that defeats him.”

Gilgamesh’s quest for immortality is in one sense a defiance of his human nature, but it is not so much a defiance of it that his human nature must “reassert itself” by revealing Gilgamesh’s human weakness. Rather, his human nature asserts itself and reveals itself in all that he does, including his quest for immortality. To desire immortality, and to seek to obtain it if that seems possible, is after all not merely not contrary to our nature, but rather perfectly human. The doctrine of the Symposium, that men by nature desire immortality and the eternal possession of the good, including the good of life itself, is emphatically confirmed by the example of Gilgamesh. It is, moreover, in my opinion, the main point of the story that Gilgamesh, far from defying or contradicting human nature by his actions, rather through them succeeds in doing what men by nature tend to do and need to do if they are to fulfill their nature and obtain true happiness.

In attempting to underscore the similarities between the Gilgamesh Epic and the Symposium, I have, I realize, failed to do justice to their dissimilarities, for example, contemplation of the idea of Beauty, so important in the Symposium, has no counterpart in Gilgamesh. My thesis, however, has not been that significant dissimilarities do not exist, but rather that the similarities, in theme, structure, and treatment are so outstanding that they afford sufficient basis for asserting that the seeds of a teleological view of man’s nature can be found in the Gilgamesh Epic. That thesis should now have been adequately documented.

A GREEK INDECENCY AND ITS STUDENTS

\[ \text{LAIKAZEIN} \]

Three words of the Aristophanic lexicon, \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \acute{\alpha} \zeta \epsilon i \), \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \sigma \tau \acute{\iota} \zeta \) and \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \sigma \tau \acute{\iota} r \alpha i a \), are not fully explained by the contexts in which they occur. The remains of ancient learning known to scholars of the sixteenth century contained no clear and unambiguous doctrine about them. A considerable amount of fresh material however has accumulated during recent centuries. The Latinists W. Heracleus and A. E. Housman studied what was available to them around the years 1914 and 1930 respectively and came to firm conclusions\(^3\) but without persuading many students of Aristophanes' comic scripts in particular or of the Greek language in general.\(^3\) G. P. Shipp has recently\(^4\) drawn attention to a third century A.D. document, first published as long ago as 1925, which has the verb in a context leaving little doubt about the user's meaning. This paper attempts to consider systematically the evidence now available and to make clear how Aristophanes and other Athenians of the fifth, fourth and third centuries B.C. used the word group. It is argued that the verb remained alive among some speakers of Greek without change of function until very late and that Housman's explanation of the Aristophanic passages was correct. The course of scholarly discussion since Greek texts began to be printed is elucidated and an ambiguous statement by a Byzantine student of Aristophanes is shown to be the root cause of the widespread inability of modern Hellenists to grasp the truth. A recent attempt to extend the range of slanders anciently Levelled against the inhabitants of Lesbos is refuted. One appendix publishes the text of a letter written about \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \acute{\alpha} \zeta \epsilon i n \) by A. E. Housman to the reviser of Liddell and Scott's \textit{Greek-English Lexicon}. Four other appendices discuss passages of Attic comedy whose general interpretation has been affected by the prevailing uncertainty as to the particular sense of \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \acute{\alpha} \zeta \epsilon i n \) and its derivative nouns. A sixth relates to \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \acute{\alpha} \zeta \epsilon i n \) a number of uses of the name of the grapheme lambda.

ATTIC GREEK

The pattern of occurrence of the words in the literature which survives from the fifth, fourth and third centuries shows that their tone was coarse to educated Athenian ears. The verb \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \acute{\alpha} \zeta \epsilon i n \) is clearly evidenced five times in the remains of comedy, the masculine noun \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \sigma \tau \acute{\iota} \zeta \) once, and the feminine noun \( \lambda \alpha i \kappa \sigma \tau \acute{\iota} r \alpha i a \) four times. I cite the nine passages in question without prejudging any issue textually:

208