Introduction

The anxieties of heredity mirror the fears and conflicts of society at any one time. Stains from the past and questions about the length of collective responsibility through generations currently occupy a prominent place in the national consciousness of many countries. Almost seventy years after the fall of the Third Reich, to take the one clearest example, as the last witnesses of the events are disappearing, Germany and Austria remain firmly set in the grip of its many ghosts and the shadow of the Holocaust. If that is a unique case, with no close parallels, other states also share memories that give an important role to the living presence of the violence 'they' inflicted in the past. The destruction of Native American societies in South, Central, and North America can be mentioned in that regard, or the open wounds of the African slave trade in the Atlantic world. The ambivalent legacies of Empire in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Portugal, in Holland and Belgium, and, in somewhat different guises, in Turkey, Japan, the United States, and Russia, are a source of shame and even disgust for some as much as they are matters of pride for others. While many will disagree on the evaluation of ancient violence and the understanding of its relevance for the various groups of the present, few will ignore the challenges it poses. Who is responsible for the real, tangible suffering that remains when all the executioners are dead? Are their flourishing families to be marked somehow in later times? Where does *that* abundance come from? How long is the case for historical reparations legitimate? Is it ever legitimate? The past can be a source of culpability, menace, and distress. That is as true now as it has ever been.

The dangers of heredity can also play a significant number of roles at the levels of the family and the individual. The effects of the parents' lifestyle on the health of their children are currently heavily emphasised by medical literature, and the risks of genetic predisposition to disease are well-established factors of fear in the lives of many people. Family history, antecedents, are regularly mentioned at the doctor's visit. Behaviour,

moreover, is often linked in part to heredity in the social imagination, especially criminal behaviour, and the child or the grandchild of the war criminal, the murderer, or the rapist will rarely be allowed to forget the weight of that inheritance; it is impossible to keep track of the number of times this has been dramatised in Western popular culture in recent years. Appearing in a large number of different, often unrelated configurations, the hold that the pain and the transgressions of the past have on the course of the present has a remarkable reach in contemporary society.

That is not about to go away. The ever-growing role of genetics is inscribing generational transmission further at the heart of our understanding of risk. The aggressive new rise of nationalism and ethnic identity politics, the predicaments of multiculturalism, the worldwide expansion and hardening of religious fundamentalism, all promise more instrumentalisations of heredity as a threat. The conflict of generations is a key feature of the accelerating ecological disaster, as we are daily reminded that our children and our children's children will pay for the environmental choices we make now, and the systemic crisis of the economic order is putting great strain on the generational solidarity of states. As national debts become unsustainable burdens, the question of inherited liability continues to occupy ever greater space in our minds and in our cities. The old biblical saying that 'the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children to the third or fourth generation' now resonates particularly loudly, with an echo that is distinctive to our time.

This is especially true in the economies of post-industrial financial capitalism, in the social structure of countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. The progressive closing of social mobility, if it is sometimes obscured behind the taboo of class and inspirational popular tales of self-made men and pauper princesses, is a hard fact on the ground. The staggering concentration of wealth in the hands of the few has already reached levels not seen in close to a century, and the oligarchy is fast at work in justifying the divorce of justice and equality with its claims of asymmetrically deserved merit. Inheritance laws are being adapted accordingly, and inherited privilege is institutionalised in society, from the school systems to hiring practices. As the social pyramid continues to grow steeper, being born in poverty is a sentence from which it is becoming harder to escape. While some attempt to contest this order, many others accept or defend it; all, at any rate, are faced with its generational implications. The ominous presence of heredity can take many shapes at the beginning of the twenty-first century, all of them with

profound repercussions on life and imagination. Paths traced before birth, and their legacies of suffering, have rarely been more visible.

That ancient Greece confronted comparable questions and challenges and produced a complex range of responses to them, that the detailed traces of these distant notions can be followed for more than a thousand years, would probably come as a surprise to most non-classicists. That the reception of the same notions spans more than two thousand years, that, century after century, it was highly influential in shaping Western thought on related issues – critical, for instance, in the development of no less a monument of Christian dogma than original sin itself, and instrumental in defining crucial points of early modern political philosophy about the responsibilities of states in time, as we will see – is a fact that has received very little of the attention it deserves. The history of these notions from ancient Greece about the dangers of heredity, both their evolution in antiquity and their many later echoes, is a keystone of Western culture. The present study aims to recover some of its major articulations.

As divine presence plays a determinant role in the relevant record, this book can be described as an essay in the cultural theology of ancient Greece. It is concerned with the many overlapping trajectories of an idea concerning the justice of the gods. Throughout antiquity the notion that individuals and communities could be punished for the crimes of their forebears occupied a central place in Greek assessments of divine action. The common and highly charged Christian term 'inherited guilt' that one usually finds in reference to this idea will be used here only to describe modern scholarship on the question. Translating the Greek term *progonikon hamartēma* (προγονικὸν ἁμάρτημα), I will instead call the ancient idea 'ancestral fault'.[1] This is a concept at the heart of ancient Greek thinking on theodicy, inheritance, privilege, and suffering, the links of wealth and morality, individual responsibility, the bonds that unite generations, and the grand movements of history. It played a major role in some of the most

[1] The term is found in Proclus' *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam* (see pp. 22–9) and his commentary to Plato's *Cratylus* 395c (93, p. 46, 12–21 Pasquali). It is also attested in a scholion to Euripides (*Hipp.* 833). This προγονικὸν ἁμάρτημα obviously continues a long list of equivalent coinages such as πατρὸς ἀτασθαλίαι (Thgn. 736), ὑπερβασίη πατέρων (Thgn. 740), παλαιγενὴς παρβασία (Aesch. *Suppl.* 265), παλαιαὶ ἁμαρτίαι (Aesch. *Ag.* 1197), τὰ ἐκ προτέρων ἀπλακήματα (Aesch. *Eum.* 933), ἄτη πατέρων (Eur. *El.* 1306–7), τὰ τῶν τεκόντων σφάλματα (Eur. F 980 Kannicht), γονέος ἁμαρτάς (Hdt. 1.91), τὰ τῶν προγόνων ἁμαρτήματα (Ps.-Lys. 6.20), ἀδίκημα προγόνων (Pl. *Resp.* 364c), παλαιὰ ἀδικήματα (Pl. *Leg.* 854b), or τὰ τῶν πατέρων ἀδικήματα (schol. to Hes. *Op.* 284). The continuity spans many centuries. From the archaic period to the end of antiquity, the dominant term used to describe the idea of divine punishment through generations in our sources remained an equivalent of 'ancestral fault.'

critical and pressing reflections of Greek culture on divinity, society, and human knowledge. Prominent examples of the idea include the generational misfortunes of the Atridae and Labdacids in tragedy, the programmed fall of the Lydian kingdom of Croesus described by Herodotus, or the hereditary pollution of the powerful Athenian Alcmaeonid clan.[2] Important expressions and echoes of ancestral fault are found in fragments of melic and elegiac poetry, medical texts, forensic speeches, ritual prescriptions, or philosophical treatises.[3] Ancestral fault was seen as a major legacy of Hellenic *paideia* for Plutarch and Pausanias under the Roman Empire.[4] For Celsus, it was a fundamental notion of Greek religion in its opposition to Christianity, and Proclus gave it a methodical, explicit definition in his exhaustive reconfiguration of Hellenism.[5] 'The guiltless will pay for the deeds later: either the man's children, or his descendants thereafter', said Solon at the beginning of the sixth century BC already, a thought echoed throughout the archaic, classical, Hellenistic, and imperial periods.[6] The burning modern preoccupation with collective responsibility through generations has a long, deep antecedent in the classical Greek tradition and its reception.

Far from being confined to tragedy, where it is indeed uniquely prominent, the idea is attested in almost all genres of ancient Greek literature. It plays a major role in some texts, a more discreet one in others, but it never fails to mark a distinctive imprint wherever it is found. Saying that someone is receiving divine punishment for the actions of an ancestor is a statement that involves whole programmes of thought about kinship, self, time, and justice; few texts activate such a radical idea at the margins of their message. Much has been written about the occurrences of ancestral fault in individual texts and genres, and excellent short synthetic overviews have been produced.[7] No extended study, however, has been devoted to the question as a whole since Gustave Glotz's seminal *La solidarité de la famille dans le droit criminel en Grèce*, a book published in 1904.[8]

The material in question is immense and methodologically difficult to handle properly. The transformations of an idea as thoroughly diverse and embedded in the cultural fabric of society as ancestral fault are motivated

[2] See pp. 206–10. [3] See pp. 466–8. [4] See pp. 56–9.
[5] See Chapter 1. [6] See pp. 226–49.
[7] Kakridis 1929: 141–68; Dodds 1951: 28–63; Moulinier 1952: 228–41; Lloyd-Jones 1962; 1983; 2002; Bianchi 1966; Dover 1974: 261–63; Gantz 1982; R. C. T. Parker 1983: 199–206; M. L. West 1999; T. Harrison 2000: 112–13; Sewell-Rutter 2007; Giordano 2009: 245–49; Liapis 2013 and Van den Berg (forthcoming) stand out.
[8] See pp. 134–48.

by a large number of causes that leave no traces in the record and react differently to different contexts. No one work can hope to do proper justice to the massive range of the problem and its many imbrications within larger literary and cultural issues. Exhaustive treatment of all relevant sources and their eventful reception is beyond the reach of any single study. Such a scholarly mammoth of erudition would make for a singularly unreadable book, in fact, without any of this weight necessarily adding much to the value of the research. It would also give an illusion of completeness to a fragmentary record. A leaner, more narrowly circumscribed study focused on a single author or genre will miss the great articulations and the intricacies of the dialogue at play between texts, genres, and institutions. What I propose here instead is a comprehensive approach. The aim is to bring together the various facets of the question in one common investigation of Greek cultural representations. Instead of a complete review of sources, selected material will be presented in detail through case studies. Instead of a sequential narrative with an origin and a plot, the discussion will consist of investigations based on the perspectives of the individual sources. Such a study has to cast a wide net and take into account both diachronic and synchronic aspects of the material. From our fragmentary perspective, any part of the record can make sense only in relation to the whole, a situation that activates the familiar problems of the hermeneutic circle.

Separate parts of that gigantic puzzle are often of little use by themselves. Their significance stands out through combination and contrast with the contours of the big picture and other pieces of the ensemble. The meanings of ancestral fault in Theognis, for instance, are impossible to understand without serious consideration of the Theognidean collection's engagement with contemporary elegy.[9] Narratives of delayed punishment in classical historiography cannot be read properly without reference to this same elegiac tradition, and tragedy's complex involvement with the same idea is thoroughly grounded in a myriad other texts.[10] The list goes on. The trajectory of such an idea in time is a web of criss-crossing paths. Separated from us by millennia, it is still perceivable through the dialogue of texts with each other and the contrasts between their various formulations. Only a comprehensive approach can identify and use the many links of this web of correspondences and rewritings; the overarching trajectory of the idea is an integral part of its individual expressions. Individual texts respond to other texts, but it goes without saying that they mostly follow

[9] See pp. 249–74. [10] See e.g. pp. 373–6.

their own specific logic in adapting the idea to their message. Each relevant passage presents the idea in its own way, as part of a larger framework of meaning. The logic of the text and its relation to other texts need to be considered together, as part of the same enquiry. Part of the difficulty lies in striking the right balance between the individual and the more general, and not reducing the specificity of each expression of the idea to a facet of something else, such as the expression of a belief. Indeed, the texts where ancestral fault is found are usually grouped together in a note or a few pages and referenced as the sources that can be used to reconstruct the composite image of a belief.

But is ancestral fault a belief? Is this book a study in the history of belief? It would be easy to answer affirmatively. A recent anthropological article defines belief as 'the state of a cognitive system holding information (not necessarily in propositional or explicit form) as true in the generation of further thought and behaviour'.[11] In line with that agenda, the great expansion of cognitive research on religion in recent years has placed the social and cultural study of belief on a new footing.[12] No longer reduced to function or structure, dismissed as epiphenomenological noise, or treated as an ancillary to doctrinal theology, the substance of religious belief has come to receive much more sustained attention from scholars in the humanities and social sciences, and it is returning with some force in the study of Greek religion.[13] The dialogues of literature, anthropology, and history have long moved beyond the brief, isolated, and provocative exchanges of earlier generations in Classics. A broadly defined interest in the theology and the religious world-view of antiquity is replacing the earlier insistence on ritual, function, and social practice in the study of Greek religion, and the research programmes based on the promises of the cognitive grid could easily generate a shared enthusiasm not seen since the heady days of structuralism.

An approach grounded in the cognitive science of religion might present a concept such as ancestral fault as an ideal object of study. Its terms of analysis would easily be deployed to ground novel research on the

[11] J. L. Barrett and Lanman 2008: 110.

[12] Prominent examples of this rapidly expanding field of study are J. L. Barrett 1999; 2000; 2004; 2007; Boyer 1994; 2001; E. Cohen 2007; Geertz 2004; Lawson 2000; Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley 2000; McCauley and Lawson 2002; Pyysiäinen and Anttonen 2002; Pyysiäinen 2003; Slone 2004; 2006; Sperber 1996; and Whitehouse 1995; 2000; 2004. The *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion*, published by the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion (IACSR), was just launched in February 2012.

[13] The two recent and splendid books of R. C. T. Parker (2011) and Versnel (2011) well illustrate the point.

question. Ancestral fault could thus be defined as a 'Minimally Counter-intuitive (MCI) Concept', a view that derives its appeal and its specificity from the fact that it stands out from the implicit logic of the 'maturation-ally natural' expectations of Greek culture and captures the imagination of individuals and collectives with its vast potential for the explanation of misfortune as punishment.[14] The high memorability of the concept and its enormously rich inferential potential, the many applications of its wide relevance for giving meaning to adversity, trace a distinctive imprint around its expressions and evolution through time that make a perfect fit for the kind of analysis developed by the cognitive school. A cognitivist would see ancestral fault as a textbook example of a 'Hyperactive Agency Detection Device' (HADD) at work, for instance, the cognitive system through which hidden causes are perceived and ascribed to a supernatural agency with dispositions and intentions.[15] He would chart its progression as an object of cultural elaboration and its eventual anchoring in the 'practised naturalness' of reflective belief. The cultural scaffolding needed to develop the reflective belief and the 'imaginistic' and 'doctrinal' modes of religiosity that shape its history could be mapped out in detail using these tools, and the other facets of the cognitivist programme similarly applied to the equation.[16] In other words, a ready model is in place that would allow for the study of ancestral fault as a belief along the lines of a currently thriving programme of research with wind in its sails.

Although there is much to be learned from this model for anyone interested in the history of religious ideas, it is in the end a perfectly inadequate tool for the study of a question like Greek ancestral fault. The old criticism of the analytical value of the term belief levelled by scholars such as Evans-Pritchard and Needham is as pertinent now as it was in the 1950s and it cannot be dismissed as easily as it sometimes is with scientistic syllogisms.[17] The vast semantic range of the word 'belief', its fundamental ties to conviction and devotion and so many other heirs of the Christian *credo* in the Western imagination make it difficult to limit the connotations of the term to the aseptically neutral definition of belief quoted above. The synchronic and diachronic complexity of culture in movement, moreover, the dynamic rhythms of transformation constantly at work at

[14] For the notion of 'Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts', see J. L. Barrett and Nyhof 2001; Boyer and Ramble 2001.
[15] See J. L. Barrett 2004.
[16] The terms were designed by Whitehouse in his two groundbreaking monographs (2000 and 2004) with historical investigation in mind.
[17] Evans-Pritchard 1956; Needham 1973; cf. Pouillon 1979.

the seams of social life, make the study of collective belief a rather different proposition from the study of individual belief on which the cognitive definition of the term is so often based. The traces it leaves in distant historical records, more importantly, especially ones so fragmentary as those of ancient Greece, where the *ars nesciendi* must keep pride of place, hardly allows for the kind of precision and generalising scope sought by this type of study. And the literary deployment of an idea, with its many levels of perspective and complex games of representation, usually leaves little hold for the efficient assessment of belief. The schematic reductionism applied to the data of much research in the cognitive science of religion ultimately aims for the uncovering of universal categories with cross-cultural relevance; belief is handled there as a broadly defined object of comparison in the search for the general characteristics and the common tendencies of human nature. This book, on the contrary, is interested in the particulars of Greek culture, the forces at play in the many variations of ancestral fault, and the specific characteristics of the messages that express it: the work that the texts do. Belief can be defined differently, of course, but the force of its connotations ultimately remains the same, and I have found it preferable to devise this research without relying on it.

The ancestral fault that the present work sets out to investigate is a Greek cultural concept: 'cultural', in the sense that it was grounded in shared references, symbols and codes enmeshed in language and ritual, political institutions, and literary genres. 'Concept' is used here heuristically. Ancestral fault is an umbrella term used to describe comparable expressions that are often related, but rarely equivalent. Its extant, often elusive expressions are preserved in different forms and different types of texts spread over many centuries. How does one proceed to write the history of such a cultural concept? There is, obviously, more than one valid answer to that question. I should first state that this book is not a study in intellectual history, the social function of 'doctrine', structures of thought, linguistic conceptual history, or political *Begriffsgeschichte*.[18] Neither is it a lexicographical analysis. All these approaches have provided fruitful insights and many useful tools, but the present research follows different aims. It will be concerned with the poetics of ancestral fault, the precise articulations of its pragmatic formulations and adaptations in literature; how the idea is represented; what use it has in this particular text, in that

[18] For prominent examples of linguistic conceptual history, see e.g. J. G. A. Pocock 1971; Dunn 1972; Skinner 1978; cf. M. Richter 1995; for *Begriffsgeschichte,* see M. Richter and Lehmann 1996; Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans, and Van Vrees 1998; Koselleck 1985; 2006.

genre; what role it plays in this or that occasion; what its thematic echoes are, or its aesthetic value. This is a study in the literary and cultural history of representations. It consists of situated, interconnected interpretations of distinctive passages. In what follows, literary texts are not used as sources to be mined for the reconstruction of a separate cultural artefact. They are the direct objects of this study. Literary interpretation forms the core of the book, not the historical reconstruction of belief. In other words, rather than trying to ascertain what people did or what they thought, the discussion will look at what they said. What does ancestral fault specifically express in each individual passage, and how? What are its implications within the text? How does it differ from other similar passages? If literary interpretation can hardly aim for proof or demonstration, the fact remains that literary texts are what we have as evidence for this question, and a positivistic refusal to assess their meaning on their own terms and dismiss the investigation of their echoes and imagery as mere speculation is to condemn our understanding of the ancient Greek imagination to platitudes and impotence. Individual readings of texts are here conceived as open presentations of the material and invitations for further reinterpretation, rather than a search for (rhetorically) safe, buttressed results.

Writing the poetics of such a cultural concept requires an eclectic methodology able to combine many complementary approaches in one account. In this case, the research programme will be essentially concerned with five related issues: (1) the semantic extension of the concept and its grounding in vocabulary, theme, and imagery; (2) the roles and meanings of the idea in the economy of the individual texts where it appears; (3) the significance of these individual expressions in the larger social and cultural contexts that produced them; (4) the continuities and ruptures of the idea's progression over time and genres; (5) the intertextual links coursing through the recurrent expressions of the concept. All these issues will be considered together in each single chapter, and as a whole in the greater architecture of the book. Close readings are combined with generic and chronological synthesis. The goal is to open new perspectives on this one central question of ancient Greek culture. As successive expressions of the idea accumulated in the written record, some formulations stood out from others (each with its own logic), other notable formulations were written over them, and a distinctive series of related texts was progressively constituted in the literary archive.[19] Even millennia later, and with the less than fragmentary record at our disposal, it is possible to identify clear

[19] For the meaning of archive as used here, see A. Assmann 2012 [1999]: 327–32.

trajectories through this archive and recognise patterns of change with a remarkable degree of precision. An intertextual web unites the various expressions of the idea at the restricted level of individual reference, and the more diffuse, open renegotiations of language and culture in movement.[20] The gradual expansion of the archive of references upon which later expressions of the idea were written is a process that can be observed to a remarkable degree of detail. The aim is not to make that archive some unlikely key to Greek culture, or to read all of Greek literature through the idea of ancestral fault, but to understand the idea of ancestral fault where it appears in Greek literature. A surprisingly rich record of the seams that link the various expressions of ancestral fault in the textual record is discernible and can be uncovered if we take the time to look for it. Tracking the witnesses of these trajectories through genres and centuries is a vertiginous proposition. Done properly, it can provide a glimpse into the ancient dynamics of Greek culture in movement.

Before we proceed further, however, the major issue of definition must be addressed. How does one circumscribe an idea like ancestral fault or inherited guilt? Where does it begin, and, more importantly, where does it end? This is a question with no easy answer. It is possible to give this or that precise definition, but the distribution of what this definition places at its core, on the one hand, and what it excludes beyond its boundaries lands us back in the middle of the hermeneutic circle. How does the etic precision of the modern analyst escape the accusation of arbitrariness? How does the etic definition reconcile itself with the emic categories of the Greek material? How does the emic configuration of one individual source relate to the different emic configurations of other sources?[21] The problem of coherence and inconsistency is at the heart of any attempt to understand the Greek religious imagination, as Henk Versnel's 'wayward readings' in Greek theology have reminded us recently.[22]

One particularly influential strategy of definition in the scholarship on ancestral fault in recent decades has been to deny that there is actually

[20] To which could be added the median horizon of the constellation of other texts activated by the individual statement – the ensemble in which it situates itself. Genette 1982 remains the classical exposition of restricted intertextuality, the study of 'la présence effective d'un texte dans un autre'. Riffaterre 1979 and 1982 influentially redefined the 'Intertexte' as the relevant *corpus* of other texts solicited by the individual passage (cf. Genette's *hypertexte*), and Kristeva 1969 notoriously forged the open notion of intertextuality as the link between the text and 'l'ensemble social considéré comme un ensemble textuel'. As has often been noted, these three models of restricted, median, and open intertextuality are not incompatible with each other, and often impossible to disentangle.

[21] For 'emic' and 'etic', see p. 22. [22] Versnel 2011.