Kenneth Dover and the Greeks
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[The following is the text, as delivered, of the memorial lecture 'Kenneth Dover and the Greeks' given under the auspices of the Hellenic Society on April 4th 2011 in the Chancellor's Hall, Senate House, London, and attended by members of Sir Kenneth's family, by former colleagues, students, and friends, and by a wider audience. SH]

It's a privilege but also rather daunting to have the opportunity to present this lecture. I find it hard to believe that it is only a few months short of thirty-five years since I made my way across Oxford one day in 1976 to the President's lodgings of Corpus Christi College to meet Kenneth Dover for the first time. He had returned to Oxford that summer to become a Head of house at the very time when I was about to embark on a D.Phil. thesis on Aristophanes; it was my exceptional good fortune that he had been assigned to me as my supervisor. I was already aware of his work as perhaps the greatest Aristophanic scholar in the world and one of the world's great Hellenists tout court. I also knew that I could never hope to satisfy his own exacting standards. So it was with a mixture of excitement and some trepidation that I approached that first meeting.

Given that I was young, headstrong, and somewhat addicted to disagreeing with people whose knowledge and expertise were far superior to mine (and only my age has changed in the meantime), the relationship could have proved disastrous. That it turned out not to be so was wholly due to Kenneth's patience, attentiveness, and, above all, his inspiring example. I can still vividly remember coming away from every supervision imbued with a feeling that nothing could be more exhilarating than trying to study the Greeks as uncompromisingly and brilliantly as he did, with his superb blend of philological meticulousness and probing historical imagination. Having regular, close-range access during those four years to the penetrating ways in which he thought about Greek literature, language, and culture was undoubtedly the single most important influence on my own development as a Classicist – though I should add that being deeply influenced by Kenneth was compatible with (it was even in some ways conducive to) arriving at different views from his on many issues, both large and small. (I can only dissent from the misplaced assumptions of the reviewer of Marginal Comment who complained of Dover's silence about what she called the 'intellectual descent group' of those he had influenced – as though influence ought to generate discipleship.) If I can accomplish nothing else in this lecture, I would at least like to pay my own tribute to the remarkable qualities of mind which taught me so much as a doctoral student and from which I continued to learn for decades thereafter, including the last fifteen years of Kenneth's life during which I lived close to him, and enjoyed his friendship, in St Andrews.
It is entirely fitting that the Hellenic Society should celebrate the memory of someone who, among his many other honours, was its President from 1971 to 1974 and subsequently a Vice-President for life, and whose contributions to Greek studies can rival those of any other Hellenist of the twentieth century, or for that matter of the two hundred years since Classics became a fully professionalised academic discipline. What's more, the larger profile Kenneth Dover acquired in the course of his long career (including his presidencies of an Oxford College, the British Academy, and three national bodies for the promotion of Classics; his knighthood; his chancellorship of St Andrews University) made him one of a select group of figures who were able to stand as the public face of Classics on the educational and cultural scene more generally in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century.

But how exactly should one set about reflecting in just a single lecture on the achievements and legacy of such an outstanding scholar? Any attempt to give individual attention to all of Kenneth Dover's projects and publications is, of course, out of the question; it would certainly expose the limitations of my own competence to appraise the full scope of his scholarship. What I'm going to offer cannot claim to be more than selective and (in both senses of the word) partial: a first sketch, if you like, of an intellectual portrait – but seen from my own indebted perspective, not from a judiciously detached historical viewpoint. If there is a unifying theme to my observations, it is the continuity of vision and values between the personality of the man and the goals of his scholarship.

I would like to start with a pair of extracts from Dover's own writings (and from now on I shall mostly confine myself to the bare surname). I've chosen these extracts in part to draw attention to attributes which are, as I see it, fundamental to his mode of scholarship and his patterns of thought, but also to try to conjure up at the outset something of the distinctive tone of utterance and the stylistic stamp (the χαρακτήρ, as some ancient critics would have called it) which will be familiar to anyone who either heard him speak or has read much of his work. The nature of linguistic style, both literary and sub-literary, was always a prime interest of Dover's (it forms a thread of connection, for one thing, between his first book, Greek Word Order, and his last, The Evolution of Greek Prose Style); from early in his career, moreover, he became a self-conscious yet unfailingly polished stylist in his own right, constantly attuned, as he explained in print, to the sounds, rhythms and structures of his writing. By starting from some of his own words I hope to supply evidence for my conviction that the way in which Dover both spoke and wrote was a manifestation of a markedly individual cast of mind: style and substance are closely related in the operations of his scholarly intellect – though I would not be able to say that they are 'inseparable' without contradicting a principle of analysis to which he himself came to attach great importance.
The first of my two quotations dates from 1975. (You'll find all the main passages cited in this lecture referenced on the handout [see pp. 15-16 below].) It is taken from his Presidential Address of that year to the Classical Association, under the title 'On Writing for the General Reader'. (I suppose it's conceivable that there are people in this room who actually heard that address delivered.) The passage in question forms part of a set of reflections on the peculiar sensitivity to language which Dover recognised in himself but also thought typical, as he said, of 'a strikingly high proportion of professional Classicists'. Here is the quotation.

To value linguistic phenomena not for their utility as means to a non-linguistic end, but precisely for their self-sufficient particularity, as one might value a tropical beetle or the movement of a bear, is one way of loving life..., but it is not most people's way, and there is no good reason why it should be...

If I ask myself whence, in forty-three years of studying Greek (years in which I have not undergone so much as thirty seconds of boredom), I have derived the most powerful excitement, stimulus and – well, let us make good use of the word 'joy' before it starts to travel the same road as 'gay' – the answer which comes into my head is: syntax, textual criticism, palaeography, dialectology and lyric metre. The first answer that comes into one's head is not always or necessarily the truthful answer; the question, after all, is historical in so far as it concerns events in one's past life, and historians are justified in treating immediate answers with caution. Nevertheless, the fact of its being the first answer is a fact of a kind which has a claim to be taken seriously, and, if possible, to be explained.

The lecture to which that passage belongs was written at a time of major shifts on the intellectual and educational landscape, a time when the relationship between Classics and the wider culture in Britain was becoming an issue of growing urgency. Dover himself, for all his great gifts as a communicator, was made somewhat uncomfortable by a conflict between the demands of specialised scholarship and the desirability of maintaining a presence for classical antiquity in the discourse and imagination of a general educated public. Much, of course, has changed since the mid-70s, both within and outside the profession. Dover's insistence on the inevitable gap between the Classicist's linguistic bent and the interests of the general reader might now be thought (by some) to reflect the priorities of a previous era of scholarship, an era which has given way in the meantime to the blurring of older demarcations between academic and non-academic genres of writing. Yet he himself did much, in works which he wrote or edited, to bridge that gap between specialist and general public: at least four of his own books were designed to be accessible to those with no knowledge
of Greek: *Aristophanic Comedy, Greek Popular Morality, Greek Homosexuality,* and *The Greeks* – the last, despite having been written in conjunction with the ill-fated tv programmes of 1980, nonetheless an excellent précis of Dover's values as Hellenist.

But since I'm concerned here principally with the mind of the individual scholar, not with the evolution of the discipline, the more direct interest for my purposes of the passage I've quoted lies in its intricately crafted expression of a characteristic kind of intellectual self-monitoring on Dover's part. The author's intense love of language is eloquently avowed, but it is almost immediately held at a slight distance and turned into something that itself calls for historical understanding – the kind of understanding Dover believed was necessary to make sense of all the particulars of the human world, including the historian's own assumptions and point of view.

The main reason, I think, why the confession of a fascination with linguistic phenomena for their own sake seems to carry with it a degree of anxious qualification is that Dover was aware of a possible tension between what one might call, with slight simplification, the philological and the cultural elements in the historical study of language. From his early teens onwards (when he not only fell in love with Greek, as he puts himself, at St Paul's, but also developed a precocious interest in the grammar of several languages of the islands of the Western Pacific), Dover found the workings of language utterly absorbing in their own right – so much so that he would have applied for a first degree in linguistics if such a degree had been available at that time at either Oxford or Cambridge. But what he himself described in an interview as the 'scientific, essentially wissenschaftlich' nature of this interest gradually matured into a conception of language as central to, as well as paradigmatic of, the entire study of history – the study of the totality of what people were capable of thinking, saying, and doing. With the passage of time, Dover became very clear in his own mind that he did not want to be the kind of figure (and he had encountered such individuals) whom he described, in that same Classical Association address, as 'the good grammarian to whom a text, once accurately translated, has no more to say'.

That last point can be reinforced and extended by turning to the second of my programmatic excerpts. This one comes from the article entitled 'The Portrayal of Moral Evaluation in Greek Poetry', published in this society's own journal in 1983. The piece, as some of you will surely remember, was conceived as a response (a penetrating and, in my view, quietly devastating response) to criticisms made by Professor Arthur Adkins of Dover's 1974 book *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*. The passage I've chosen occurs in the article's epilogue, one of whose strands – for which, interestingly (given Dover's anti-Platonic inclinations), some Platonic support is invoked – is the claim that a distinction between moral and
aesthetic reactions to life may sometimes be hard to draw at the level of experience itself. The passage runs as follows.

Sloppy table manners can create more implacable enmities than pride or callousness; if we cause the death of a bird by accident, a pretty bird that sings is a more grievous burden on our conscience than an ugly bird that croaks; and 'nauseating' as a term of moral disapproval is not just a metaphor. The determinants of the moral values of an individual or a society are remarkably heterogeneous. That is why I stressed in Greek Popular Morality...the inconsistent, incoherent and unsystematic nature of Greek (or any other) popular morality. In criticising me for this Adkins points out that 'a functional structure may exist in the absence of rational design' and that the grammar of a language is an example of systems which 'exhibit coherent structures in the absence of grammarians...to design them'. I welcome this analogy, but employ it differently. The generalisations ('rules') which constitute a descriptive grammar of a language include some of very wide application, but a great number each one of which applies to a single word or to a group of words definable only by enumeration. Few rules cohere in the sense that one is predictable from another or explicable in the light of others. During the continuous process of change which characterises a living language, rules contract and extend their domains, some perish and others are born. The determinants of linguistic change, as of morality, are heterogeneous.

That passage – itself a fine specimen of Doverian prose (notice, among other things, the cultivated avoidance of sentence connectives) – highlights a number of significant traits of his way of thinking. The contrast with Adkins himself is salient and instructive. Adkins believed that Greek ethical ideas could be treated as more or less systematic; that different periods of Greek culture were definable by structural changes in the system; that the system functioned above all, and in a publicly objective manner, through the power of key evaluative terms; and that even non-philosophical Greeks thought in ways which could best be analysed with quasi-philosophical categories and frames of reference. Dover, by contrast, as the passage just quoted indicates, constructed a picture of a more unsystematic and untidy state of affairs; he stressed the importance of situating and interpreting ethical judgements in individual, concrete contexts, and in building up generalisations very cautiously on the basis of particular cases; he saw perpetual scope for clashes of value-judgements (he spoke elsewhere of humans as 'a social species...beset by conflict because every single member of it has so extraordinary a range of possible responses to any given situation'); he thought that ethical or moral forces operated through far more than
individual evaluative terms; and, finally, he placed far greater weight than Adkins and others on non- and even anti-philosophical habits of mind, the habits of a kind of 'folk psychology'. (Philosophers, he liked to insist, were not typical Greeks.)

The contrast with Adkins can stand more generally as an illustration of something characteristic of Dover’s intellectual and scholarly convictions. While it is impossible here to attempt a detailed appraisal of his relationship to other Hellenists in the second half of the twentieth century, it is worth stressing that he was always an individualist as a scholar, resistant to anything like a school of thought, a master-methodology, a highly schematised view of historical processes, or belief in what he called 'underlying structures' (though admittedly in this last regard he could be said to have made a partial exception – intermittently and ambivalently – for the psychoanalytical ideas of Freud, whom he had started reading in his teens). In that general resistance to various kinds of theory-building, one could also contrast him with Adkins’ own teacher, the influential figure of E. R. Dodds – someone Dover knew in Oxford in the late 40s and early 50s, whose scholarship he greatly respected (and the respect was mutual), but whose preoccupation with one dimension of Greek culture (namely the psychology of the irrational and non-rational) gave much of his work the kind of dominant orientation to which Dover himself was instinctively averse.

What is at stake here, in the contrast between Dover and scholars like Adkins and Dodds, is on one level the question of how far it is possible and desirable to ascribe to (large segments of) Greek culture something like an integrated worldview. Both Adkins and Dodds, in their selected areas of interest, are examples of scholars who believed it was both feasible and fruitful to do so. Dover, I submit, consistently supposed otherwise. At least as early as a review published in 1957, in JHS as it happens, he expressed strong reservations about the practice (associated not least with the work of Bruno Snell) of extrapolating from the language, sensibility, and modes of perception found in an individual text, author, or genre to the mentality of a whole society or cultural epoch. Dover accepted, for sure, that in the archaic and classical periods there were identifiable tendencies of thought and behaviour which became hallmarks of Greek culture; some of them he took to be among the best reasons for continuing to study the culture. But those tendencies were, for him, less a matter of a substantive body of beliefs or a stable Weltanschauung than of dynamic attitudes – of sceptical questioning, rational inquiry, artistic experiment and innovation – which influenced many areas of Greek life and could only be made sense of, according to Dover’s principles, by working outwards from a close interpretation of historical particulars, not by imposing a conceptual template on the evidence.

In order to clarify the underpinnings of this Doverian assessment of Greek culture and its connections with his own scheme of values, I think it may be helpful at
this point to make a few observations on the genesis and formation of his core interests as a Hellenist. Needless to say, time does not permit anything like a full account of the various influences which impinged on Dover's early intellectual development and which he discussed himself in *Marginal Comment* and elsewhere. Those influences undoubtedly involved a mixture of the personal and the academic. Wartime service was obviously salient in the first of those respects, leaving its mark as it did not only on his views of Thucydides as military historian, but also on the way he came to think about such things as the workings of popular morality and even the sexual language of Aristophanic comedy. It's also worth pausing long enough to recall briefly the early influence on him of three individual scholars in particular. One was his undergraduate tutor at Balliol, Russell Meiggs, who inculcated in him both the habit of employing inscriptions wherever possible (an epigraphic habit Dover himself would apply assiduously, and throughout his career, to linguistic as well as political and other questions) and also a kind of tough historical realism, rather than more rationalistic modes of interpretation, in formulating and addressing questions about the past: Dover always professed that it was 'real life' – by which he meant concrete experience rather than bloodless abstractions – that motivated him as a historian. Another scholarly influence was the formidable figure of Eduard Fraenkel, an unavoidable challenge for any aspiring Hellenist in post-war Oxford: for Dover, it was Fraenkel's intense, Germanic seriousness in both literary-historical and philological analysis which provided at this stage a model of scholarship to emulate. But also of substantial importance were the few months in 1948 which Dover spent working on an envisaged D.Phil. thesis under the supervision of the great historian of ideas, Arnaldo Momigliano. (What a thought it is to picture those two extraordinarily subtle yet so very different intellects in dialogue with one another). It's worth stressing, though, that for all the acute qualities Dover found in Momigliano ('for learning, accuracy of recall, speed of absorption and breadth of historical interests he was a man whose like I have not known', we read in *Marginal Comment*), the choice of research topic for the D.Phil. (Athens in the two decades immediately after the Peloponnesian War), together with the initial focus on both oratory and the fragmentary comedy of the period, were Dover's own choices. I once heard Momigliano himself (no doubt with rhetorical self-deprecation) say there was nothing at all he could teach Dover. I am confident Dover would not have agreed.

The lines of influence which ran between his various teachers and Dover could clearly be pursued much further. But what I want to emphasise myself here is a different kind of consideration: namely, how early in Dover's career certain fundamentals established themselves in ways which were to remain of lasting importance, and how early we can see a significant pattern emerging between the subjects on which his work concentrated itself. Dover's principal interests as a
Hellenist cluster in six main areas: Old Comedy, and therefore of course Aristophanes; Thucydides’ *Histories* (and to some extent fifth-century historiography more generally – one shouldn’t forget that he loved Herodotus as well, even if he wrote about him less often); fourth-century Attic oratory (both as a rhetorical-cum-literary and as a social phenomenon); Greek popular morality (studied above all through the lenses of comedy and oratory); Greek sexual mores and psychology, especially homosexuality; and, last but evidently not least, the Greek language itself, chiefly in the archaic and classical periods and particularly from the point of view of historical stylistics, but with sustained attention (which I’ve already mentioned) to documentary as well as literary texts. There is a whole network of connections and intersections between these domains, as Dover’s work cumulatively and powerfully demonstrated. And it looks, in retrospect at any rate, as though the authors and topics in question were already starting to form a constellation in his mind even in the late 1940s, in the years immediately after his completion of Greats in 1947, and then increasingly so in the course of the 1950s.

We can observe the configuration taking shape not only in some of his early publications but also, during this same period, in inchoate and proleptic ideas for larger projects which he would return to and carry out at later stages. Consider briefly how this is borne out for each of the six areas I listed. Old Comedy (blurring into so-called Middle Comedy) was part, as I’ve mentioned, of the abortive D.Phil. project on early-fourth-century Athens; it belonged there because its contemporary references could contribute to a detailed, chronologically careful reconstruction of events in Athens in the postwar period: one of the products of this work was an early article (1950) on Plato comicus. But it was not just comic fragments which interested Dover; Old Comedy in its Aristophanic incarnation clearly attracted him from the outset, not least for its combination of earthy realism and poetic virtuosity (two aspects of human behaviour which appealed to him equally). From around 1950 he was contemplating an edition of *Frogs* for a new Oxford series of commentaries, though he switched to *Clouds* in 1955. A characteristically perspicacious review of Ehrenberg’s *The People of Aristophanes* appeared in 1952, and in the mid-50s he produced two substantial and still useful works – the chapter on comedy in Platnauer’s *Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship* and a *Lustrum* survey of publications on Aristophanes from 1938 to 1955 – both of which attest to the concentration of thought he was giving to comedy at that time.

As for oratory, that other strand of (in both senses) the post-war Athenian project, Antiphon and Lysias in particular figured prominently in the work of these early years. When, two decades later, Dover gave the Sather lectures on Lysias at Berkeley in 1967, he was, as he put it himself, ‘reviving a project which had attracted [him] in 1948 but was set aside in 1949’: in other words, the Sathers, which turned of
course into the 1968 book *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum*, were in effect a belated fulfilment of one component of the original D.Phil. conception.

Alongside oratory, which like comedy served multiple purposes in studying the dynamics of classical Athenian culture, the austere but inescapable work of Thucydides exercised a strong fascination on Dover from the period of Greats onwards. He spoke of the 'intellectual excitement' he derived from studying Athenian history with the help of the first volume of Gomme's new commentary, published in 1945; and early in his Fellowship of Balliol he started lecturing for Mods on Thucydides Books 6-7, texts he would make his own in the following years, publishing on them from 1953 onwards and eventually writing the bulk of the commentary on them in the continuation of Gomme's commentary on which he collaborated with Andrewes after Gomme's death at the start of 1959. There can be little doubt that throughout his life Dover felt a special affinity with Thucydides' fastidiously rational and self-conscious intelligence, though he never idolised him (any more than he did any other Greek) and could identify blindspots in him, including the conviction (from which Dover himself never suffered) that he had said the last word that needed to be said on certain events. Thucydides sometimes reminded Dover of things he had experienced himself during the war, which may help to explain why he could not read the account of the Athenians' retreat from Syracuse in Book 7, even when he had done so more than a hundred times before, 'without feeling the hair on the back of [his] neck stand on end'.

If one asks where the larger spheres of social, behavioural, and moral subjects which issued in two of the major books of the 1970s find a place in the genesis of Dover's interests, here too there is evidence that their gestation goes far back. While his earliest work on oratory was channelled mostly into technical questions of chronology, authorship, and stylometrics, we know from his own record that already in the intellectual ferment of the late 1940s he had toyed with the idea of a project that would use the orators, alongside comedy, as a window on the moral and religious values current in Athenian society – the sort of project, then, which later materialised in *Greek Popular Morality*. As regards the specific topic of homosexuality, the first seeds of a new approach to this subject were planted as early as 1952-4: in giving undergraduate lectures in Oxford on iambic and elegiac poetry in those years, his thoughts on the homoerotic verses in the Theognidean collection led him to form the view that almost nothing of historical value had ever been written on Greek homosexuality in general. Much further thought and work, stimulated in part by a new interest in Plato's *Symposium* in the early 1960s, would of course enlarge and transform his ambitions to reinterpret the history of homosexuality. But once again I find it notable that the original impulse can be traced back to the cluster of ideas and questions generated in the early post-war period.
As, finally, for language (including the ancillary disciplines of epigraphy and textual criticism), well a scrupulous attention to that infused everything, as it would always continue to do: the study of language in a manner both meticulous and nuanced was Dover’s master-passion and his greatest asset. The use of oratory and inscriptions for historical purposes had led in each case to an interest in linguistic and stylistic features; Dover even pondered the possibility of writing a new grammar of Attic inscriptions. From 1949 he worked for several years on preparing the second edition of Denniston’s Greek Particles for the press. And during that same period he started to give sustained thought to the elusive question of Greek word order, an interest he would carry right through the decade and bring to fruition in his first book, published in 1960 after the material had been worked up for the Gray lectures in Cambridge the previous year.

I’ve drawn attention, then, to a selection of details which bear out the claim that Dover’s interests in comedy, historiography, oratory, popular morality, sexual mores, and the workings of language (including stylistics) amount to a strikingly stable, long-standing grouping which was already taking shape in the late 1940s and early 1950s and which continued to be central to his concerns as a Hellenist right through to the final publications. At the same time, this configuration is complex: its internal relationships and the emphasis placed on individual components shift over time, and other factors enter into or fade from the picture at different stages. How far is it legitimate, then, to see here a genuine unity of interests rather than a bundle of things which held together over time but were the result as much of the contingencies of an individual life as of a coherently formulated agenda? Dover was unusual for a scholar in the degree to which he reflected on the shape and determinants of his own career. The autobiography, together with a number of interviews and other pieces that followed in its wake, was obviously the culmination of this process, but in fact it was always part-and-parcel of his cast of mind, in ways I touched on earlier, to ponder the relationship between his own values and motivations, on the one hand, and the aims of his scholarship, on the other. The question, therefore, how far Dover’s career embodies a uniform approach to Greek culture is one for which an unusual amount of supplementary first-person evidence is available. But that does not make it an altogether easy question to answer.

At this point I’d like to glance at one particular piece of evidence for Dover’s own retrospective attempt to make sense of his career and indeed of the life of his mind more generally. The diagram on the second side of the handout [see p. 16 below] was produced by Dover himself to accompany a talk about his own intellectual formation which he gave in Italy in the early 1990s, at a time when the autobiography itself was underway and perhaps even close to completion.
The first thing which should strike a classicist's eye about this diagram, I think, is its partial resemblance to the stemma of a manuscript tradition. The resemblance can hardly be accidental: it is as though Dover is contemplating the formation and evolution of his interests as an analogue to textual transmission – though admittedly it is more like the transmission and entanglement of a plurality of texts than of a single work. The diagram, which as you can see is in Italian (no doubt the talk itself was too: Italian was the modern language Dover spoke and wrote best, partly because he had acquired a liking for it during his wartime service there), lends itself to interpretation in more than one way. It tracks developments over time, marking continuities and discontinuities, as well as various degrees of intensity in the cultivation of particular interests. In doing so it simultaneously suggests a large element of contingency but also exposes something like the aggregative structure of an individual intellect. From left to right it falls roughly into three zones: first (filling the whole left-hand side), the classical (with subdisciplines, individual authors, and topics such as stylometrics – and with the Greek language running down the middle as the only subject which merits a double line uninterrupted except by the war years); then a group of cultural categories and topics which includes morality, religion, homosexuality, anthropology, and animal behaviour; finally, a set of interests in the natural world which begins with apes and insects at the age of 3 (!), up in the right-hand corner, and eventually branches in mid-life into birds and plants. (You see, by the way, even at this side of the diagram that we’re not dealing with discrete, entirely non-academic interests: apes and birds lead on to a more sustained concern with ethology, which in turn has connections with work on morality, religion, and homosexuality.)

For all its intricacy, the diagram remains selective; its details could be added to and complicated further. But it nonetheless brings out, I submit, three points of wider significance: first, that Dover’s mind, in its range of interests, was the reverse of narrowly specialised; secondly, that it was a mind which was open to links between multiple spheres of thought and experience; finally and most importantly, that as an exercise in condensing processes of historical understanding (and applying them to himself) the diagram exemplifies a typical feature of Dover's ways of working, since it brings the maximum precision possible to bear on the analysis of something which is at the same time recognised to be irreducible to principles of systematic order.

It’s that last point – the combination of analytical precision with a recognition of the resistance of human experience to unified explanation – which I want to emphasise, because it is, I believe, a key trait of Dover's cast of mind and his frame of reference as a historian. One can find examples of it throughout his work, but it is most obviously present in what he thought of himself as his most valuable achievement, the studies of syntactic and stylistic phenomena in language, where a strong attraction to quantitative methods sits alongside an always pragmatic
awareness of the plurality of factors which affect the choices facing individual writers and speakers. (‘[M]y approach to all utterance is pragmatic and resolutely intentionalist’, as he put it in *The Evolution of Greek Prose Style*). In a characteristic statement (this one from the article ‘Greek Homosexuality and Initiation’), he writes: ‘The historian has to reckon all the time with heterogeneity of causal processes.’ It is very telling that he then adds: ‘That is particularly true if he is a student of the history of linguistic behaviour, a topic from which the student of other kinds of human behaviour can learn much.’ Whereas some historians might be tempted to think of language as among the more stable and consistent of human phenomena, Dover’s hard-won sense of the limitations of analytical rigour in historical linguistics made him regard the conditions of language (which we’ve already seen that he took to be a matter of ‘constant change and the instability of rules’) as a paradigm of the challenge facing historical understanding and interpretation in general.

It was Dover’s ingrained pragmatism where both language and other forms of behaviour are concerned which made him averse to anything like a systematically integrated view of Greek culture. I contrasted him earlier with scholars like Adkins and Dodds who were inclined to conceptualise Greek culture in terms of ‘worldviews’: both these scholars, like many others, actually used that category in their accounts of Greek mentalities, though Dodds at any rate was too sophisticated not to realise that there was a price to be paid for doing so. Dover never posited anything as substantial as a Greek worldview (or a series of worldviews). He attempted to explain both individual and collective patterns of behaviour, employing explanatory principles which made frequent use of ‘hypotheses’ (a term of which he was fond) but always stopping short of more ambitious levels of theoretical formalisation, mindful as he was that (I quote again from the response to Adkins) ‘the few Greeks whom we know through surviving literature are only samples drawn from a population whose days were as fully occupied by action and speech as ours’.

In addition, he held a modified version of an appraisal of Greek history which antiquity itself had invented, seeing the archaic and classical periods as powerfully innovative and experimental in the intellectual, artistic, political and social domains (he regarded even overtly celebrated homosexuality as an act of cultural innovation on the part of the Greeks), and sticking to the conviction, which would now provoke many into sharp disagreement, that the post-classical era, though far from simply derivative or uncreative, witnessed a gradual diminution in Greek creativity, with the result that, as he put it rather trenchantly, ‘the one fatal weakness of Greek civilization itself [was] its inability, after a certain point in time, to comprehend and develop genuine innovation in the arts’.
There is so much more, of course, that could and should be said about these ideas. I’ve only scratched the surface of some of the questions which seem to me worth about Dover’s mind and scholarship. But I must move to a few concluding thoughts.

Dover’s career coincided with an age of transition as regards the place of Classics in British education and in the wider culture. He formulated the nature of that transition himself in the following terms, during the discussion which followed his paper on ‘Expurgation of Greek literature’ at the 1979 Fondation Hardt colloquium: ‘I suppose that up to the first World War British upper-class and middle-class society was extraordinarily confident of its own values. It knew what it wanted from the Classics, and it exploited them in order to sustain its values. Now, especially since the Second World War, this self-assurance has given way to self-doubt, humility and guilt; we do not now ‘exploit’ the Classics, because we are not agreed on the ends to which the study of Classics is a means.’ Dover never argued for the perpetuation of a privileged position for Classics; in fact, he explicitly rejected as bad arguments most of the claims which had once underpinned that privilege (claims such as those for the special value of learning Greek and Latin, or for the canonical authority of ancient literature and art).

What he did argue for, and gave exemplary embodiment to in his own writing and teaching, was the validity of keeping a substantial Classical presence in the larger study of the humanities. And he defended the study of the humanities as a whole, in an increasingly technological world, as an educational and cultural enrichment of a society’s collective stock of experience, and with that an expansion of what he always saw as the continuum between historical research and everyday experience in the present. That certainly doesn’t mean that he naively collapsed the differences between cultures in the past and the present. Here too he was a pragmatist: he saw both constants and variables, continuities and discontinuities, mixed together in the total fabric of human experience across time. A number of times in his work he faces the question whether the ancient Greeks could or should now be considered ‘alien’ to us – a question prompted, at root, by mid-twentieth century influences of anthropology on Classics (and, incidentally, Dover himself regularly cited real anthropological data in his work, more so than some scholars who think of themselves as anthropologically à la page). He gave an answer which is bound to disappoint those who prefer polarised extremes, but one which was in keeping with his entire conception of history, namely: it all depends which phenomena are under consideration, and, equally, who is doing the considering. As he put it in a talk given in St Andrews on the occasion of his 80th birthday, ‘Personally I find Ajax much more familiar and more intelligible than, say, Cardinal Newman.’ Actually, he went on immediately to qualify that by saying that he found some things about Ajax ‘unimaginably alien’ (in Louis MacNeice’s phrase), and others all too intelligible. The Greeks, like the rest of the human record, he saw as
inevitably a composite (to the eye of any individual observer) of the alien and the recognisably similar. And he took the resulting problems of interpretation to form one of the unending tasks both of history and of life.
Some references:
(i) 'To value linguistic phenomena...': Presidential Address to the Classical Association 1975, 'On Writing for the General Reader', publ. 1976, rpr. in The Greeks and their Legacy (GL) 311.
(ii) Early interest in language 'scientific, essentially wissenschaftlich': interview with Naim Attallah, http://quartetbooks.wordpress.com/2010/03/10/insights-sir-kenneth-dover/
(iv) Human beings as 'a social species...beset by conflict because every single member of it has so extraordinary a range of possible responses to any given situation': 'Speaking Volumes: Kenneth Dover on Fabre's Book of Insects', Times Higher Education Supplement 5th May 1995.
(v) Scepticism about 'underlying structures': 'Greek Homosexuality and Initiation', GL 132.
Reading Freud in his teens: Marginal Comment (MC) 7. Mixed feelings about Freudian psychoanalysis: cf. e.g. MC 106, 123-5, Greek Homosexuality 179 n. 24.
(vi) Resistance to Snellan tendencis in reconstructing Greek mentalities: review of M. Treu, Von Homer zur Lyrik, JHS 77 pt. II (1957) 322-3; cf. e.g. GG 106-7, MC 78 with n. 5.
(viii) Sather lectures 'reviving a project which had attracted me in 1948': MC 137.
(ix) Thucydides prompting personal memories of war: MC 53. Reading the retreat from Syracuse made 'the hair on the back of my neck stand on end': The Greeks 41.
(x) Thinking behind Greek Popular Morality goes back as far as 1948: MC 155.
(xi) 'M]y approach to all utterance is pragmatic and resolutely intentionalist': The Evolution of Greek Prose Style 13 n. 15; cf. GL 62, MC 258-9.
(xii) 'The historian has to reckon all the time with heterogeneity of causal processes': GL 132.
(xiii) 'The few Greeks whom we know...': JHS 103 (1983) 48 = GG 96.
(xiv) 'The one fatal weakness of Greek civilisation...': 'What are the "Two Cultures"?', GL 316.
(xv) 'I suppose that up to the first World War...': 'Expurgation of Greek Literature', GL 290.
(xvi) 'Personally I find Ajax much more familiar and more intelligible than, say, Cardinal Newman': 80th birthday talk, St Andrews, March 2000; unpublished ms.
Diagram used for lecture in Italy on 8th formation.