CHAPTER FOUR

COSMOLOGY IN ACTION:
AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ODES

In Chapter 3 the cosmology on which Pindar’s work is founded is reviewed on the basis of the gnomic statements found throughout the work. In this chapter the focus changes from a broad outline derived from one element of all the poems to a consideration of particular poems as a whole to investigate how Pindar applies cosmological ideas for encomiastic purposes. Analyses of *Olympian* 12, *Isthmian* 4 and *Olympian* 13 follow on some general remarks on cosmology and praise and a brief discussion of *Pythian* 7 and *Nemean* 2 as examples of the ubiquity of cosmological concerns in Pindar’s poetry.

The overview of cosmological ideas presents a world in which man has to recognize both his frailty when confronted with the divine order and the expectations and obligations attached to his position in human society. In such a world the position of the successful man can be a precarious one. While his success is proof of the goodwill of the gods, the danger is that it may lure him into trespassing on their terrain. His pre-eminence makes it all the more important that he should remember his mortality and the limits it imposes on him. In the social sphere success can also be a mixed blessing. Although it provides the satisfaction of being admired and praised by one’s fellow men, their goodwill cannot be taken for granted and there is always the danger of attracting envy and slander. Therefore it is important to fit into the accepted patterns of society and conform to the norms it holds dear.

For the poet called in to praise the achievements of successful men these realities can pose tough challenges. The justified desire for recognition of athletic and other achievements must be balanced with the claims of the divine and the sensitivities of society. An awareness of this broader context can be found in even the shortest of the odes. *Pythian* 7 and *Nemean* 2 may serve as examples.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) See also Chapter 5, pp. 171–177 passim on the expression of cosmological concerns in these poems.
In *Pythian* 7 the chariot race victory of Megakles of Athens is presented as the latest achievement of a great city (αἰ μεγαλοπόλεις Ἀθηναῖα, 1) and a powerful family (Ἀλκμαινίδων εὐφυσενεὶ γενεᾷ, 2–3). They are the preeminent city and house in Greece (5–8), and the latter is known everywhere for its brilliant restoration of Apollo’s temple at Pytho as well as its athletic successes (9–17a). Nevertheless Megakles is not exempt from social disapprobation and suffers as a result of the envy of his fellow citizens (φθόνον ἀμειβόμενον τὰ καλὰ ἔργα, 19). Instead of being reciprocated with the honour the poet implies he deserves, he celebrates his victory in exile after having been ostracised.2 A closing gnome interprets this vexing situation in terms of a broader outlook on life: ἥντι γε μίν / οὗτω κτί / ἀνδρὶ παραμίαν / θάλλοσαν εὖ-δαμονίαν τὰ καὶ τὰ φέρεσθαι (“Yet they say that in this way happiness which abides and flourishes brings a man now this, now that,” 19–21). Megakles’ recent experiences are seen as a manifestation of the vicissitudes to which all men are subject, even if they are from a great family such as his. In fact, as Theunissen points out, the gnome indicates that “beständig blühendes Glück,” such as that experienced by the Alkmaionidai, is bound to attract more than its fair share of negative reaction.3 Enduring happiness is of course only possible through the continuing goodwill of the gods.4 As restorers of Apollo’s temple the piety of the Alkmaionidai cannot be doubted, nor that the gods support them. In the long run, therefore, their εὐδαιμονία is assured, something of which Megakles’ victory is a sign.

In *Nemean* 2 (the only ode in which no gnomai occur) the cosmological context is provided by framing references to Zeus.5 The opening strophe not only compares Timodemos’ victory to the prelude to Zeus (Διὸς ἐξ προομίου, 3) with which Homeric hymns often begin, but also links it emphatically to Zeus’ sanctuary at Nemea (ἵτις Ἀνήρ κατὰ θιέρων ἱερῶν ἀγώνων νικαῖς δέδεκται πρῶτον, Νεμεαί / ἐν πολυμνίτῳ Διὸς ἀλοιποιμένῳ, 3–5). The penultimate line again refers to Nemea as “Zeus’ contest” (Διὸς ἀγῶνι) and calls on the citizens to celebrate the god with a victory procession for Timodemos (τὸν, ὦ πολῖται, κωμάζετε Τιμοδήμῳ σὺν εὐχλεία νόστῳ, 24).6 By these references the poet establishes a

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4 Theunissen 2000:263.
5 On the careful ring composition of this poem, see Krischer 1965:37.
6 Instone 1989:116 n. 29 reads τὸν as referring to Διὸς ἀγῶνι, not just Διὸς. The