

ΜΙΝΩΟΣ Μ. ΚΟΚΟΛΑΚΗ

Τακτικού Καθηγητοῦ

τῆς Ἀρχαίας Ἑλληνικῆς Φιλολογίας

ΕΠΙΣΠΑΣΤΟΝ ΚΑΚΟΝ:

AN ASPECT OF THE 'TRAGIC' NOTION.

In the third book of the Iliad Paris is overwhelmed with terror when he sees Menelaus taking up his challenge for a single combat and leaping down from his chariot. He slinks back for cover among the Trojan ranks. Hector castigates the cowardice of his brother who, however, sailed overseas to carry off the beautiful bride of a warlike family (*νυὸν ἀνδρῶν αἰχμητάων*, Γ 49) and thus brought about not only a curse upon his father, to the city and to the whole people, but also — and this is relevant to the present subject — shame upon himself: *κατηφείην δέ σοι αὐτῷ* (Γ 51).

During the fight narrated in the fifth book Meriones overtakes Phereclus and wounds him fatally. The Trojan drops on his knees with a scream, and "death enveloped him". By tracing back Phereclus' family tree and his craftsmanship, the epic poet indicates the Trojan's culpability for his eventual doom; for he had been the carpenter "who built for Paris those trim ships that started all the trouble and proved a curse to all Trojans and to himself (E 62-64)":

ὃς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τεκτῆνατο νῆας εἰσας
ἀρχεκάκους, αἳ πᾶσι κακὸν Τρώεσσι γένοντο
οἱ τ' αὐτῷ.

* Ἀνεκοινώθη στὸ International Research Seminar in Classics (1978), Birkbeck College, University of London.

His initial error is attributed to his ignorance of the divine decrees:

ἐπεὶ οὐ τι θεῶν ἐκ θέσφατα ἦδη.

In the *Patrocleia* (Bk. XVI) Patroclus beseeches his superior to lend him his armour so that he may take the place of Achilles in leading the Myrmidons to battle and thus relieve the Achaean allies. In the light of subsequent developments the poet anticipates the true significance of Patroclus' request: "in his folly he was praying for his own evil death":

ὥς φάτο λισσόμενος μέγα νήπιος· ἦ γὰρ ἐμελλεν
οἱ αὐτῷ θάνατόν τε κακὸν καὶ κῆρα λιτέσθαι (Π 46-47).

One could add further evidence from Homer to demonstrate the fact that the sequel of events gives in retrospect a quite different value to past actions, in particular the irony of deliberate or unconscious deeds recoiling to strike back the unsuspecting performers; when, for instance, Polydamas' charioteer Cleitus exceeds his duties, anxious to parade his zeal by driving into the thick of the fight instead of waiting out of range, *he* is to blame, when he eventually becomes a target for Teucer's arrow:

Ἐκτορι καὶ Τρώεσσι χαριζόμενος· τάχα δ' αὐτῷ
ἦλθε κακόν, τό οἱ οὐ τις ἐρύκακεν ἱεμένων περ (Ο 449-450).

Again when Lycaon, once the prisoner of Achilles sold on the island of Lemnos, manages to cross the Aegean and finally to slip away from his own protectors in Arisbe and reach his Trojan home, so far from finding security there he hastens to his doom. For now he is in the hands of an inexorable Achilles (Φ 46ff.). Here we have a remote foretaste of the infatuated course to misfortune in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

I have cited Homeric instances to introduce the present enquiry, because Homer provides not only the component elements of this particular form of the "tragic" but also the very term applied to an injury or an evil unwittingly inflicted by an individual upon himself: 'Επίσπαστον κακόν. This term occurs in the *Odyssey* twice: a) In book XVIII the hero, challenged by Irus, tucks up his rags round his waist and bares his muscular

thighs, arms and broad shoulders; as the suitors are lost in amazement at the unknown beggar's strength and size, one of them utters a prophecy to his neighbour:

ἢ τάχα Ἴρος ἄϊρος ἐπίσπαστον κακόν ἔξει (σ 73) (=Irus will earn what he has brought upon himself.) This prediction is soon fulfilled. b) After the slaughter of the Suitors in the last book of the poem and when the Ithacans, stirred to pity for the dead, are urged by Antinous' father to avenge themselves on the killers, the aged seer Halitherses holds the fathers responsible for not restraining their sons when they kept plundering Odysseus' estate and insulting his wife. He, therefore, warns them once more to take no action lest some of them bring their doom upon their own heads:

μὴ ἴομεν, μὴ πού τις ἐπίσπαστον κακόν εὖρη (ω 462).

I venture to assume that the term — whether constructed with verbs such as ἔξει or μὴ εὖρη — was a colloquialism at the time of the composition of the *Odyssey*. Its metaphorical sense is, however, preserved unaltered in ἐπέσπασεν (πήματα) which Aeschylus employs in the *Persians*. In Atossa's words her royal son τοσόνδε πλῆθος πημάτων ἐπέσπασεν (Pers. 477) (=drew upon himself such a multitude of calamities) though hoping to exact the penalty from the Athenians for the heavy casualties suffered at Marathon.

The Persian monarch admits his own guilt for the military disaster and for his own degradation:

ὃδ' ἐγὼν οἰοῖ αἰακτὸς
μέλεος γέννα γὰ πατρώα
κακὸν ἄρ' ἐγενόμαν (Pers. 931-934)

It is not easy to prove that Aeschylus' ἐπέσπασεν is transferred from the hauling in of a net nor that, since ἐπισπᾶν is commonly constructed with such accusatives as κέρδος, κλέος etc., the tragedian linked it ironically with πλῆθος πημάτων — it is even less easy to ascertain that such metaphor is meant by the Homeric cognate ἐπίσπαστον. What is clear, however, is that ignorance of the consequences motivates both actions, expressed by ἐπίσπαστον-ἐπέσπασεν, for neither Irus nor Xerxes really intended to harm themselves in the end. It is, therefore, a mistake to equate the Homeric

adjective with either *αὐθαίρετον* (meaning “self-chosen”, “self-elected” or “due to one’s choice”) or *ἐκούσιον* (“voluntary”) as the Scholiast on σ 73 and ω 462, Hesychius and other lexicographers do — though it is fair to mention that they add to it: *ὁ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἐπεσπάσατο* (or *ἐπισπᾶται*). Eustathius repeats the rendering *αὐθαίρετον*, yet he apparently differentiates it from, or classifies it under, the neutral description of *καὶ ὁ τις καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπισπᾶται, καθ’ ὁμοιότητα, ὡς φασι, ζῶων δελεαζομένων καὶ ἐπισπωμένων ἑαυτοῖς ὀλεθρον* (Eust. Comm. on *Odyss.* σ 73).

The Scholiast on *Soph. Oed. Tyr.* 1231 explains the *πημοναὶ αὐθαίρετοι* of the line as *τὰ μὴ ἐκ τύχης συμβάντα ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἐπισπαστὰ καὶ αὐτάγρετα γινόμενα*. For the reason quoted earlier *αὐτάγρετα* cannot be identical with *ἐπίσπαστα* either, since the Homeric *αὐτάγρετον* (*Odyss.* π 148), which is later taken up by Semonides (I, 19) and archaic and Hellenistic epic poetry (cf. *Hom. hymn Merc.* 474; *Apoll. Rhod. Arg.* II 326 and IV 231; *Opp. Hal.* V 588), whether in the active or the passive sense, normally implies “self-chosen”, “left to one’s choice or “choosing freely”. Perhaps only in line II 326 of the *Argonautica* does it approximate to the neutral usage of the Homeric *ἐπίσπαστον*: *μηδ’ αὐτως αὐτάγρετον οἶτον ὀλέσθαι ἀφραδέως ἰθύνετ’ ἐπισπόμενοι νεότητι*.

A synonym in classical literature is the adjective *ἐπακτός* with the meaning it has in *Soph. Trach.* 491: *κοῦτοι νόσον γ’ ἐπακτὸν ἐξαρούμεθα* (“self-incurred affliction”). Another word *οἰκεῖος* as used in Sophocles is slightly different since it qualifies voluntary and self-chosen *πάθη*. Acts performed through ignorance, though in Aristotelian terms² not voluntary (*οὐχ ἐκούσιοι*), can still be termed *ἀκούσιοι*, when they cause the doer pain and regret. The ignorance which generates involuntary acts concerns the circumstances as well as the person affected by the acts: In particular the *μετ’ ἀγνοίας ἀμαρτήματα* occur whenever “the person affected or the act or the instrument or the result is not that which the agent supposed³”. In such cases, blameworthy actions can be pitied and forgiven⁴. Characteristic

1) *Aj.* 260: *οἰκεῖα πάθη, μηδενὸς ἄλλου παραπράξαντος*.

2) *Nicom. Eth.* III, I, 13.

3) *Ibid.* V, 8,6: *ὅταν μήτε ὃν μήτε ὁ μήτε ᾧ μήτε οὐ ἔνεκα ὑπέλαβε πράξει*. On this passage and its context see P.v. Braam: *Aristotle’s use of Ἀμαρτία*, *Class. Quart.* 6 (1912) p. 269.

4) *Ibid.* III, I, 15: *οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἀγνοία αἰτία τοῦ ἀκούσιου..., οὐδ’ ἡ καθόλου ...,*

examples of such errors, committed in ignorance and recoiling upon the doer or indirectly affecting him, are compiled here from the surviving Attic tragedies. Culpability is either confessed by the agent, following a "recognition" scene, or voiced by other characters in the plays or by the chorus. Involuntary guilt is also attested by self-destruction and the suicide of the doer when realizing the unhappy reversal of his well meant exertions.

Responsibility for a person's woe is occasionally shared by a god; in Aeschylus' *Persians* Atossa argues that some deity helped Xerxes' judgement go astray⁵; the ghost of Dareius, however, using the same verb (συνάπτεσθαι) amends her explanation of the disaster by adding that when somebody is striving for his ruin, the god then lends a hand towards it: ὅταν σπεύδῃ τις αὐτός, χῶ θεὸς συνάπτεται (Pers. 742). Such a sinister conception of divinity, consigning men to destruction under certain circumstances reaches its full dramatic development in Euripides' *Bacchae*, as we shall see later.

In the *Septem* Amphiaraus' initial *hamartia* lies outside the action proper of the play, yet we can follow its implications in the messenger's narrative vv. 568-590 and in Eteocles' ominous comments in vv. 597-625: The "modest, brave, upright, pious man and powerful seer" unknowingly bound himself to join an abominable expedition (in which he was doomed to perish) by a formal agreement with Adrastus to the effect that differences between them should be settled through Eriphyle. But, as Eteocles threatens, "when folly ploughs, the crop is death"⁶, and the innocent man will pay for his inability to visualize what harmful effects such a commitment might produce in the future. Thus, this man "allied, against his judgement (βία φρενῶν⁷), with the wicked shall be dragged down to earth".

Basic features in *Amphiaraus'* drama, notably: a) the agreement concluded by him in good faith and through ignorance of its real weight,

ἀλλ' ἢ καθ' ἕκαστα, ἐν οἷς καὶ περὶ αὐτῆς πρῶτις ἐν τούτοις γὰρ καὶ ἔλεος καὶ συγγνώμη; cf. *ibid.* III, I, I: ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς ἑκουσίοις ἐπαίνων καὶ ψόγων γινομένων, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ἀκουσίοις συγγνώμης, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἔλεος.

5) Pers. 724: γνώμης δὲ πού τις δαιμόνων ξυνήματο.

6) Sept. 601: αἴτης ἀρουρα θάνατον ἐκκαρπίζεται.

7) *Ibid.* 612.

b) his eventual entanglement in unforeseeable consequences and c) his ultimate ruin, which he himself brought about through his initial error of judgement, can be seen again in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, in which a) Phaedra's nurse binds the unconscious hero by oath to keep a secret, b) the oath prevents the pious youth from disclosing the truth and proving his innocence, and c) by keeping to the oath he subjects himself to Theseus' curses and falls a victim to Aphrodite's revengeful plan.

An epic prototype of self-incurred injury springing from a fatal oath may be recognized in Zeus' episode with Ate, as told by Agamemnon in the Reconciliation Scene (T 95ff.). The Father of gods and men was robbed by Ate of the ability to notice Hera's intrigue⁸ and so was lured into taking a solemn oath to the effect that the child who was to be born on that day should rule over all his neighbours. He saw no harm in this at that time, but when Hera brought him the news of Eurystheus' premature birth, he became conscious of the deceit and in his rage cast Ate down from heaven, as the alleged originator of his mental blindness and failure to perceive the trick.

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* Clytaemnestra claims her husband's murder has been the due retribution for their daughter's sacrifice as well as for Agamemnon's affairs with Chryseis and Cassandra. Agamemnon's crime engendered his own punishment, in accordance with Zeus' established law: τὸν ἔρξαντα παθεῖν.

But perhaps the most gruesome illustration of Agamemnon's self-provoked ruin is provided by Clytaemnestra's metaphor in vv. 1397-1398 of the play:

τοσῶνδε κρατῆρ' ἐν δόμοις κακῶν ὁδε
πλήσας ἀραίῳν αὐτὸς ἐκπίνει μολῶν,

i.e. after Agamemnon has filled a mixing bowl with countless accursed evils, on his return he drains the bowl himself.

8) T 95: καὶ γὰρ δὴ νῦν ποτε Ζῆν' ἄσατο (scil. Hera);

Ibid. 96ff.: ἀλλ' ἄρα καὶ τὸν Ἥρῃ θήλυν ἐοῦσα δολοφροσύνης ἀπάτησεν;

Ibid. 112-113: Ζεὺς δ' οὐ τι δολοφροσύνην ἐνόησεν,

ἀλλ' ὁμοσεν μέγαν ὄρκον, ἔπειτα δὲ πολλὸν ἀάσθη

According to Leaf (*Iliad*, II², 1900-2, p. 327) ἔπειτα means *therein* rather than *thereafter*.

In the strict sense the offences which entailed Agamemnon's penalty do not come within the scope of the present study, which deals solely with cases of μετ' ἀγνοίας ἀμαρτήματα recoiling upon the doer. Iphigeneia's slaughter belongs to the painful actions performed in full consciousness under compulsion (τὰ θία γινόμενα⁹) when "it is difficult to decide how far we ought to go in choosing an act or enduring an injury"¹⁰, for "the penalty threatened was painful and the deed forced upon Iphigeneia's father dishonourable", if we may apply Aristotelian terminology to Agamemnon's vexing dilemma, so vividly described by the chorus of the tragedy¹¹. Consequently, this act might be regarded as of a "mixed¹² nature" approximating rather to the voluntary class, as "at the time it was done it was chosen"

Conversely, Agamemnon's conduct in the carpet scene falls within our scope. Disregarding his earlier misgivings to set foot upon the embroidered purples "lest some envious deity glances on him from afar¹³", the king finally yields to his wife's pressure, either thinking it futile to resist or subconsciously beguiled by the temptation to be welcomed in this manner. In either case the treading on the πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος prepared for him on Clytaemnestra's orders, signals symbolically his irrevocable submission to the latent executioner.

In the *Choephoroi* again the tragic process of τῷ δράσαντι παθεῖν is at work. We should note, however, particular instances in that play which meet the requirements of ἐπίσπαστον κακόν: Clytaemnestra points out to Orestes that the act he is about to commit is matricide (v. 922 κτενεῖν ἑοικας, ὦ τέκνον, τὴν μητέρα), but the son retorts that it will be her own hand that strikes her dead, and not her son's: σύ τοι σεαυτήν, οὐκ ἐγώ, κατακτενεῖς (Choeph. 923). At the conclusion of the same stichomythia

9) Arist. Nicom. Eth. III, I, 2-3.

10) Ibid. III, I, 9: χαλεπὸν ἐνίστε διακρίναι ποῖον ἀντὶ ποῖου αἰρετέον καὶ τί ἀντὶ τίνος ὑπομενέτον.

11) Agam. 205-217.

12) Arist. Nic. Eth. III, 1, 6: μεικταὶ μὲν οὖν εἰσὶν αἱ τοιαῦται πράξεις, ἑοικασὶ δὲ μᾶλλον ἑκουσίοις, αἰρεταὶ γάρ εἰσι τότε ὅτε πράττονται.

13) Agam. 946-947: καὶ τοῖσδ' ἐμ' ἐμβαίνονθ' ἄλουργέσιν θεῶν μή τις πρόσωθεν ὀμματος βάλοι φθόνος.

the queen grasps the meaning of her portentous dream, namely that *she* bore and suckled a snake, that is now identified with Orestes, who will kill her:

οἱ γὼ, τέκοῦσα τὸν δ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην

At this moment of *anagnorisis* she blames herself for her involuntary "hamartia" of giving birth to and nursing her future avenger.

Previously in the play the queen welcomed the two unknown wayfarers allegedly coming from Phocis and incautiously offered them a night's lodging. She repeated the offer even more eagerly after hearing the tale about Orestes' death and gave strict orders to the servant to be diligent in entertaining the guests, as he would be held responsible for it. Aegisthus too brings about his own death through his "hamartia", for—though his entrance is due to the queen's bidding—he is himself keen to question the messenger's reliability. He boasts his wits have "wide-open eyes" and cannot be deceived (οὐ τοι φρέν' ἄν κλέψειεν ὠματωμένην (Choeph. 854)).

His presumption is ill-founded as the ensuing assassination will demonstrate.

In handling the same story of the *Oresteia* in his *Electra* Euripides interchanges the tasks to be assigned to the plotters: Electra in cold blood lures her mother to the country cottage by pretending child-birth, for she is in no doubt of her mother's affection and readiness to come as soon as she is informed of her daughter's confinement.¹⁵ Moreover Clytaemnestra will weep over her grandchild's low birth¹⁶.

The queen is indeed betrayed by her humanity and on arrival she pays the debt for her unconscious rashness.

In the case of Aegisthus it appears that Euripides took real pleasure in treating man's inadvertent play with Death in a manner arousing

14) Choeph. 928. Similarly, Clytaemnestra in Euripides (El. 27-30) saves Electra, who in return will contrive her mother's murder (Ibid. 647); and Hecuba's refusal to obey Cassandra's warnings and put the infant Paris to death (Androm. 293-300) recoils as an *ἐπίσπαστον κακόν* upon the pitiful mother and her whole country.

15) El. 656; ἤξει κλύουσα λόγιά μου νοσήματα.

16) Ibid. 658: καὶ δακρύσει γ' ἀζίωμ' ἐμῶν τόκων.

fluctuating suspense¹⁷. Aegisthus' own courtesy and absence of any suspicion account for his killing:

He is the first to greet the travellers on their way to Olympia (El. 779). He then cordially invites them to join in the sacrifice and banquet providing them with lodging in his own house for the night. He obligingly takes them by the hand and leads them to his premises. In the course of the ceremony to the Nymphs—as if to spur on his avenger even more—he prays for the royal couple's welfare and his enemies' misfortune. The king himself hands the sacrificial knife¹⁸ to Orestes suggesting that his guest should give an exhibition of bull-flaying technique to justify the Thessalians' fame in the art.

Lastly, when the guest asks for a chopper to split the bull's breast-bone, the king again provides him with one. It never occurs to him that he thus challenges a latent assassin to smite him in the back while he is bending over the victim's entrails¹⁹.

Of Sophocles' surviving plays *Oedipus Tyrannus* brings out in full the irony of unwitting self-annihilation, although other sides of the tragic process can also be detected in that play. To begin with, concerning the antecedents of the plot, Laius' death too is occasioned by the old king's temperamental deportment in the incident. According to Oedipus' account of the "cross-roads" encounter the old man, sitting in the carriage, together with the driver attempted to push him off the road; he then waited for Oedipus to pass by the carriage in order to strike him treacherously on the head with the drivers's two-pronged goad²⁰. Therefore "he paid a much heavier penalty for his temerity"²¹.

As for Oedipus, the two, seemingly unrelated events, namely a) the killing of Laius on his way to Delphi by an unknown traveller or brigands, and b) Oedipus' marriage with the widow and his crowning as a king of

17) Cf. W. G. Arnott., 'Η διατήρηση τοῦ ἐνδιαφέροντος τῶν θεατῶν: Μερικά τεχνάσματα τοῦ Εὐριπίδη, in Δωδώνη VI (1977) p. 41-43.

18) El. 815-818 λαβὲ σίδηρον, ὡς ξένη, δεῖξόν τε φήμην....

19) El. 838-843.

20) Soph. Oed. Tyr. 807-809.

21) Ibid. 810ff; οὐ μὲν ἴσῃν γ' ἔτεισεν etc.

Thebes would never have been linked in his own person, had he not himself inadvertently effected such conjunction. Granted malignant, though likely, circumstances in the myth, his own initiatives are governed by ignorance, and yet extreme self-confidence and mistrust of others, moral consistency and untiring resolve to attain his ends. He turns his back on Corinth in the firm belief that he is escaping the fulfilment of the oracles. In fact, he departs from the safest place, he could ever find, in order to settle unwittingly in his own fatal home. Drawn by the poet as a responsible ruler he regards his own interests as identical with his people's welfare. The sequel of events, however, makes it manifest that such equation is erroneous; in fact the two sides prove diametrically opposed to each other, for the city's deliverance from the plague requires Oedipus' extermination as the polluted outcast. Right from the beginning of the play the hero's actions form a succession of "errors": In the presence of Zeus' priest and the band of suppliants he makes Creon report about the Delphic oracle enjoining that the slayer (or slayers) of Laius must be driven away²². He later declares publicly²³ that the guilty shall be banished and pronounces a solemn curse against the killer and people sheltering him—not exempting himself from the imprecations, "if, with his knowledge, he allows the culprit to share his house or hearth"²⁴. Such solemn proclamation has already trapped the king. Teiresias angered will tell him later to obey his own edict, as he is his land's defiler²⁵, and in vv. 744-745

22) Oed. Tyr. 95ff. The motif of a public announcement binding the pledger is taken up in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, though considerably weakened in that play by the poet reducing the status of the earwitnesses: Creon, almost forcing Teiresias (cf. v. 896: μή πῖλαμθάνου) to stay, makes him reveal his oracle in the presence of the Phoenician women and his own son. But after hearing the news he retracts his solemn pledges (v. 898 φράσον πολίταις καὶ πόλει σωτηρίαν, cf. vv. 900, 902, 910) by first attempting to pretend that he never heard anything from the seer, then imploring him to keep silence and, failing this, by telling Menoeceus to escape to Dodona before Teiresias informs the authorities and the citizens of Apollo's commandment.

23) Ibid. 223 ff. (ὁμῖν προφωνῶ πᾶσι Καδμείοις τάδε...)

24) Ibid. 249-251.

25) Ibid. 350-351: ἐννέπω σὲ τῷ κηρύγματι

ὅπερ προείπας ἐμμένειν....

the hero voices his fears that he may have exposed himself to his own curses²⁶.

Again, when the seer insists on keeping silence, as he forbears to pain either the king or himself²⁷, Oedipus reacts by slandering Teiresias and forcing him to reveal the unbelievable truth. A further "error" is committed when he defies Iocasta's entreaties to call off the investigation, though she assures him she is speaking for his own benefit²⁸. Finally he overcomes the last obstacle in his way—the unwillingness of Laius' slave to answer the crucial question—and achieves his objective of Discovery, which results in his utter shame and self-blinding.

Minor instances of well-meant acts proving treacherous to their performers concern other characters in the play; Iocasta enters to settle the quarrel between Creon and the king and hastens to reassure her husband that no trust should be placed in the oracles. This—she argues—is made obvious by Laius' death. Her casual reference to "cross-roads" produces the opposite effect in Oedipus' mind and thus initiates his enquiries, which eventually cause her suicide.

Again, the good intentions of the Corinthian shepherd bringing the news of Polybus' death, who intervenes²⁹ to inform the king of his real parentage, though not earning him deadly deserts like Iocasta's, effect an undesirable repercussion against himself: no reward for the good message but utter dismay³⁰—not to mention the harm done to the recipients of the message.

In the *Trachiniae* Heracles' moral violence no doubt carries with it the need of a requital. The ravaging of a city and all its sorry implications, mostly involving innocent people, do not escape the gods' watchful eyes³¹.

26) Ibid. 744-745: *ἔοικ' ἔμαντὸν εἰς ἀράς
δεινὰς προβάλλων ἀρτίως οὐκ εἰδέναι.*

27) Ibid. 332: *ἐγὼ οὐτ' ἔμαντὸν οὔτε σ' ἀλγυνῶ.*

28) Ibid. 1066: *καὶ μὴν φρονοῦσα γ' εὖ τὰ λῆστά σοι λέγω.*

29) Cf. H.O.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, London 1966³, p. 294: "a typically Hellenic opportunist, who sees and takes the chance of doing himself a good turn".

30) Ibid. p. 141.

31) Cf. Aesch. *Agam.* 461 ff.: *τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ
ἄσκοποι θεοί,... κελαινὰ δ' Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ....*

The offence is still more outrageous when indiscriminate destruction of lives is caused solely for the capture of a girl whom Eurytus, her father, refused to hand over to Heracles as his concubine. Morally, then, the hero's punishment is justified; what is tragic, however, in that play too is that the implementation of the divine law results from human motives and autonomous actions aiming at Heracles' own good. Dejanaira's mistaken action not only dooms her husband, whose love she is trying to recover, but it inevitably comes home to herself too. She first urges Lichas to disclose the truth about the beautiful and noble captive. She reassures him that, though Heracles has hitherto had many women, she would be a fool if she blamed her husband for catching this νόσος³². Lichas yields to her entreaty and after disclosing the whole affair he advises her to bear with the young girl, thus abiding by her previous assertions. She reaffirms her resolve not to create additional afflictions herself by taking arms against the gods³³; yet the knowledge of the truth, she has asked for, is too painful to endure passively. Her next major error consists of recklessly using the envenomed charm. As in the case of Oedipus, "Discovery" begins with forebodings:

ἀθυμῶ δ' εἰ φανήσομαι τάχα
κακὸν μέγ' ἐκπράξας' ἀπ' ἐλπίδος καλῆς³⁴

which gradually turn to the conviction that "her own act alone will have caused Heracles' utter destruction"³⁵. Accordingly, her good intentions³⁶

32) Trach. 445-446.

33) Ibid. 491-492: κοῦτοι νόσον ἐπακτὸν ἐξαρούμεθα,

θεοῖσι δυσμαχοῦντες.

The unusual meaning of ἐπακτός in this passage has been noted already.

34) Ibid. 667. Her act, then, should be labelled, in Aristotelian terms (Nic. Eth. 5, 8, 7), as an ἀμάρτημα committed μὴ παρὰ λόγως ἀνευ δὲ κακίας, and whose ἀρχὴ τῆς αἰτίας lies in herself.

35) Ibid. 712-713.

36) Cf. Hyllus' characteristic vocabulary: v. 1123 ἤμαρτεν οὐχ ἔκονσία, v. 1136: ἤμαρτε χρηστὰ μοιμένη, v. 1138-1139: στέργημα γὰρ δοκοῦσα προσβαλεῖν σέθεν ἀπήμπλαχ' ... On the conflict of goodwill and mistaken judgement cf. Eurip. Hipp. 596-597: ἀπώλεσέν μ' φίλως, καλῶς δ' οὐ... In a previous scene Phaedra states vaguely that φίλος μ' ἀπόλλυσ' οὐχ ἔκοῦσαν οὐχ ἔκων (v. 319) to which the nurse retorts by asking (v. 320) if Theseus τιν' ἡμάρτηκεν ἐς σ'

coupled with ignorance of likely consequences account for Heracles' martyrdom and her own defamation and suicide. Enlightenment has come too late when it is useless³⁷ and tormenting. Incidentally, the idea of belated "recognition", which took its proverbial form in Hesiod's verse: *παθὼν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω*³⁸ (the simpleton learns through suffering), can already be traced in Homer; apart from the line ρ 32=Y 198: *ῥεχθέν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω*, remodelled by Hesiod, an elaborate development occurs in Iliad Bk IX (I) vv. 249-251, when Odysseus warns Achilles:

αὐτῷ τοι μετόπισθ' ἄχος ἔσσεται, οὐδὲ τι μῆχος
ῥεχθέντος κακοῦ ἔστ' ἄκος εὐρεῖν· ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρὶν
φράζεσθαι.

In addition to Deianeira's self-inflicted mischief one may cite two more relevant instances from the *Trachiniae*:

a) Lichas' good service in taking the ceremonial robe to his master costs him his life: he is dashed upon the cliffs by the hero, who is convinced of his herald's complicity.

b) Hyllus binds himself by oath to carry out his father's commands without knowing what these will be. He is, therefore, seized with horror when he learns that he must 1) place his father, still alive, on a pyre and burn him and 2) marry Iole, whom he regards as being responsible for his parents' loss. We see here again the tragic workings of an unconscious and irrevocable commitment.³⁹

Reference has been made already to Darius' statement in Aeschylus' *Persae* (v. 742) that a god contributes to human misery when man himself is heading for his disaster. The idea has an epic ancestry⁴⁰ and is dramatic-

ἁμαρτίαν, which shows that *hamartia*, in this context at least, has nothing to do with either awareness or moral motives.

37) Trach. 710-711: *ὦν ἐγὼ μεθύστερον*

ὄτ' οὐκέτ' ἄρκεϊ, τὴν μάθησιν ἄρνυμαι.

38) Works and Days 218. For later adaptations see M.L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days*, Oxford 1978, p. 211.

39) Soph. Trach. 1175ff.

40) Cf. the Ate concept in the Iliad and Hom. Odyss. XVI (π) 194-195:

οὐ σύ γ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι πατὴρ ἐμός, ἀλλὰ με δαίμων

ally developed in Euripides' *Bacchae*, but a mundane usage of guile, involving solely human characters, occurs in the so-called "luring scenes", par excellence in Euripidean plays.

Medea's vengeance would never have materialized had not Creon granted her a day's respite. The aged ruler, moved by her pleading for the children, makes this concession to show that he is not a tyrant by nature. But as he has had a bitter experience from being compassionate, he feels conscious that this gesture is wrong (v. 350):

καὶ νῦν ὁρῶ μὲν ἐξαμαρτάνων

His *hamartia*, which is presently mocked by Medea as mere folly (*μωρία*)⁴¹, does, indeed, occasion his own death and the deaths of his daughter and Medea's children. Glauce's end, on the other hand, is literally an *ἐπίσπαστον κακόν*, for "no sooner had Medea's sons with their father gone than she took the envenomed gown and put it round her and the coronet over her curls"⁴². This ignorance of the real circumstances coupled with coquetry and recklessness takes its heavy toll.

In *Hecuba* Polymestor a) summoned by the stricken mother, arrives with his children at her quarters; b) he inadvertently sends his guards outside, and, c) tempted by the news of treasures hidden in Troy, he enters the women's tent to look for more gold promised him.

His greed, weakening his judgement, accounts for the subsequent blinding inflicted on him and for the slaughtering of his children.

In *Hercules Furens* Lycos bids Amphitryon fetch Megara and the children out. The old man refuses to carry out the order alleging he would be part-guilty of their blood if he obeyed. Whereupon Lycos enters the palace himself to show his contempt for such superstitions and is instantly killed by Heracles lying in wait for him.

θέλγει, ὅφρ' ἔτι μᾶλλον ὀδυρόμενος στεναχίζω.

41) Med. 371: ὁ δ' ἐς τοσοῦτον μωρίας ἀφίκετο. Creon errs owing to his respect (*αἰδούμενος*, v. 349) for Medea's request; likewise, it is *αἰδώς* that makes Phaedra take the first false step towards her ruin by yielding to the nurse's supplication: δάσω· σέβας γὰρ χειρὸς αἰδοῦμαι τὸ σὸν (Hippol. 335).

42) Ibid. 1156ff λαβοῦσα πέπλους... ἡμπείχετο χρυσοῦν τε θεῖσα στέφανον ἀμφὶ βοστρύχους.

In the two "tragi-comedies", i.e. the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* and *Helena* the victims of ignorance and treachery do not pay with their lives, as elsewhere. Thoas is deceived by his priestess' assertions that she hates all Greeks, for she remembers what Greece has done to her⁴³, and by the fact that she enjoined that the two captives must be bound, for "Greeks cannot be trusted"⁴⁴.

In the *Helena* the enamoured Theoclymenus consents to help Helen with performing the funeral rites to the allegedly dead Menelaus in expectation of the promised marriage. Besides allowing a ship to be prepared, he foolishly confers full command on the stranger, and by repeating his orders to the Egyptian oarsmen⁴⁵ he baffles in advance any possible reaction on the part of the crew. That the young king is to blame for his misadventure is tersely stressed by the messenger⁴⁶: ἦν γε (i. e. ναυκληρίαν) ξένω δίδως σὺ τοὺς τε σοὺς ἔχων ναύτας θέθηκεν.

The lesson to be drawn from this affliction⁴⁷ is summed up again by the messenger to the effect that "nothing is more useful to mortals than prudent distrust"⁴⁸—a stock phrase of popular morality recalling the gnomic line attributed to Epicharmus⁴⁹.

Pentheus in the *Bacchae* while challenging Dionysus' revenge helps the god with carrying out his punishment. The young tyrant takes no serious notice of the messenger's account of the miracles worked by the Maenads on Mt. Cithaeron and orders his army out to attack them. But the Lydian stranger dissuades him from such an operation by offering to take him to the very place, where he will be able to spy on the revelling women. To attain this end the king submits to dressing as a maenad⁵⁰.

43) Iph. Taur. 1187.

44) Ibid. 1205: πιστὸν Ἑλλὰς οἶδεν οὐδέν.

45) Hel. 1415 and 1417-1418

46) Ibid. 1521-1522

47) The πάθει μάθος of Aeschylus. On the tag see: H. Dörrie: Leid und Erfahrung (Akad. d. Wissensch. u. Literatur, Abhandlung., 1956 Wiesbaden, pp. 307-344.

48) Hel. 1616-1618 σώφρονος δ' ἀπιστίας οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδέν χρησιμώτερον θροτοῖς.

49) Νᾶφε καὶ μέμας' ἀπιστεῖν ἄρθρα ταῦτα τᾶν φρενῶν.

50) On the presumption and rashness of people in power cf. Arist. Rhet. 2, -5, 14 (1383a): οὐκ οἶονται δὲ παθεῖν ἂν οὔτε οἱ ἐν εὐτυχίαις μεγάλας ὄντες καὶ δοκοῦντες, διὸ ὕβρισται καὶ ὀλίγωροι καὶ θρασεῖς...

After arriving among the ridges of the mountain and, from the spot where he is standing, being unable to see the women, he proposes to climb a towering fir-tree to get "a proper view of the revellers' shameful behaviour"⁵¹. Dionysus, in his human guise, feigning eagerness to help, bends a huge tree, sets Pentheus on the top branches and lets the tree spring upright. As in Oedipus' case and many others, success is the deceitful appearance of calamity: securing his favourable observation post Pentheus "became more plainly visible to the Maenads than *they* to him"⁵². By the time he is thrown on the ground, and is on the threshold of Death, he has recovered his sanity—too late, since he will be instantly torn to pieces by his mother and her sisters.

Assuming that by *ἐπίσπαστον* one must strictly understand the *θλάβη* "quod quis sibi ipse contraxit" in ignorance—to amend Ebeling's interpretation of the Homeric epithet—we have also to include in the present list Admetus' self-deception in Euripides' *Alcestis*. It little matters that the Thessalian ruler does not actually *perform* a (faulty) act, which unexpectedly turns out to be ruinous to himself, but selfishly acquiesces in his young wife's self-sacrifice for his sake. His enlightenment⁵⁴, or "Discovery" in the Aristotelian terminology, to the effect that life is not unconditionally preferable to anything else, but it may become an unbearable shame, comes to him belatedly when, as the chorus tell him afterwards, "he will not raise the dead to life"⁵⁵.

In his Commentary on Il. Π (XIV) vv. 46-47 Eustathius notes: *Σημείωσαι δὲ ὅτι ἐπὶ παντὸς λισσομένον ἐπὶ κακῷ οἰκείῳ λεχθῆναι δύναται τό, ὥς φάτο λισσόμενος μέγα νήπιος· ἥ γὰρ ἔμελλεν οἱ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐξῆς... καὶ*

51) Ibid. 1061-1062:

*ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα
ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς μαινάδων αἰσχρουργίαν.*

52) Ibid. 1075: *ὦφθη δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ κατεῖδε μαινάδας.*

53) Ibid. 1113: *κακοῦ γὰρ ἐγγὺς ὧν ἐμάνθανεν.*

54) Alc. 940: *λυπρὸν διάζω βίοντον ἄρτι μανθάνω.* The verb *μανθάνω* and its cognates (cf. Bacch. 1113: *ἐμάνθανεν*; Soph. Trach. 711: *τὴν μάθησιν ἄρνευμαι* etc.) corresponds to the Aristotelian *anagnorisis* in a broader sense.

55) Alc. 985-986: *οὐ γὰρ ἀνάξεις ποτ' ἐνερθεν κλαίων τοὺς φθιμένους ἄνω.*

56) Il. Ζ (VI) 155ff.

Βελλεροφόντης μὲν γράμματα κομίσαι λέγεται καθ' ἑαυτοῦ, Πάτροκλος δὲ λιτέσθαι καθ' ἑαυτοῦ.

The two Homeric instances matched by the Byzantine scholar are not identical; they have, however, an important element in common, i.e. the lack of insight into the real value of either action and its future effects. The Homeric story of the noble-hearted (v. 162: ἀγαθὰ φρονέοντα) Belleophon, who unwittingly takes the σήματα λυγρὰ from Proetus to his eventual executioner in Lycia contains a tragic core which later effected its dramatization in Sophocles *Iobates*⁵⁷ and Euripides' *Stheneboea*⁵⁸.

A similar tragic emotion was no doubt caused by a particular scene in the *Phoenissae* (834ff): young Menoeceus has been summoned by Eteocles and is escorting the aged Teiresias to Creon's quarters without knowing that the seer is carrying with him his death sentence ordained by Apollo.

A few words need to be added to explain why the actions or incidents discussed in this paper are labelled as "tragic". In its specific usage in Aristotle's *Poetics* the term is related to the primary function of Tragedy, i.e. to arouse pity and fear⁵⁹. Furthermore, it is argued⁶⁰ that "pity is awakened by undeserved misfortune", or—to put it more plainly⁶¹—by misfortune that is out of proportion to the faults of a man. This argument is later repeated in the *Rhetoric*⁶², where it is also stated⁶³ that we feel pity when an ill result follows from what might have been expected to lead to good: καὶ ὅθεν προσῆκεν ἀγαθόν τι πράξαι, κακόν τι συμβῆναι.

57) See TrGF, vol. 4, Sophocles (St. Radt), Göttingen 1977, p. 268.

58) T.B.L. Webster, The tragedies of Euripides, London 1967, pp. 80-84.

59) Cf. Poet. 13 (1452 b 31-33): δεῖ τὴν σύνθεσιν εἶναι τῆς καλλίστης τραγῳδίας... καὶ ταύτην φοθερῶν καὶ ἔλκειν ὄντων εἶναι μιμητικὴν (τοῦτο γὰρ ἴδιον τῆς τοιαύτης μιμήσεώς ἐστιν) and elsewhere.

60) Poet. 13 (1453a 4-5): ὁ μὲν (scil. ἔλεος) περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον ἐστὶν δυστυχοῦντα..., ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, Rhet. 2,9, 1 (1386b 10): (ἐλεεῖν)... λυπεῖσθαι ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀναξίαις κακοπραγίαις.

61) Cf. Lane Cooper, Aristotle On the Art of Poetry, New York 1967, p. 39.

62) Rhet. 2,8 (1385b 13): ἔστω δὴ ἔλεος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινομένῳ κακῷ φθαρτικῷ ἢ λυπηρῷ τοῦ ἀναξίου τυγχάνειν.

63) Ibid. 2,8 (1386 a 12-13).

Such a reversal of things contrary to one's expectations or purpose is the more pitiable when it affects directly or indirectly the agent himself, no matter how disinterested his motives may have been.

Pity as well as fear are heightened when misery is the outcome of the good intentions and efforts of the hero, who is too self-reliant to question his false convictions or ignorance.

Even in cases where ruin arrives as a well-merited retribution (e.g. affecting Aegisthus, Clytaemnestra, Polymestor), the tragic function is still at work; for it is fulfilled through the irony of the wrongdoer falling victim to his own humane feelings, which he wants to manifest at the wrong moment, when Dike is lurking in wait for an «error».

64) Cf. Soph. Oed. Tyr. 1230-1231: τῶν πημονῶν μάλιστα λυποῦσ' αἶ φανῶσ' αὐθαίρετοι (where, however, the messenger is referring to "self-chosen" (αὐθαίρετοι) miseries, i.e. the suicide of Iocasta and Oedipus' self-blinding); Soph. *Creusa* (TrGF, vol. 4 (St. Radt), Göttingen 1977, fr. 350:

ταῦτ' ἐστὶν ἄλγιστ', ἣν παρὸν θέσθαι καλῶς
αὐτός τις αὐτῷ τὴν βλάβην προσθῇ φέρων.

But, perhaps, in both passages the deep grief is referred to the victim rather than to the other characters of the plays or the audience.