

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF A.W.H. ADKINS

## “Virtue” and “Goodness” in Ancient Greece

Michael Boylan  
Arthur Adkins



# The Philosophy of A.W.H. Adkins



# The Philosophy of A.W.H. Adkins:

*“Virtue” and “Goodness”  
in Ancient Greece*

By

Michael Boylan and Arthur Adkins

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



The Philosophy of A.W.H. Adkins:  
“Virtue” and “Goodness” in Ancient Greece

By Michael Boylan and Arthur Adkins

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2022 by Michael Boylan and Arthur Adkins

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7670-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7670-4

**For Arthur William Hope Adkins**

*in memoriam*

*My Teacher and my Friend*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	ix
Acknowledgments .....	x
Introduction .....	1
Justification in Ethics: Bottom-up versus Top-Down Approaches <i>Michael Boylan</i>	
Chapter One.....	22
“‘Friendship’ and ‘Self-Sufficiency’ in the Homeric Poems and in Aristotle.” <i>Classical Quarterly</i> , n.s.13 (1963): 30-45.	
Chapter Two .....	46
“Aristotle and the Best Kind of Tragedy.” <i>Classical Quarterly</i> , n.s. 16 (1966): 78-102.	
Chapter Three .....	82
“Basic Greek Values in Euripides’ <i>Hecuba</i> and <i>Hercules Furens</i> .” <i>Classical Quarterly</i> , n.s.16 (1966): 193-219.	
Chapter Four .....	120
“Threatening, Abusing and Feeling Angry in the Homeric Poems.” <i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> 89 (1969): 7-21.	
Chapter Five .....	140
“Truth, <i>Kosmos</i> , and <i>Arete</i> in the Homeric Poems.” <i>Classical Quarterly</i> 22 (1972): 5-18.	
Chapter Six .....	160
“ <i>Arete</i> , <i>Techne</i> , Democracy, and Sophists: <i>Protagoras</i> 316b-328d” <i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> 93 (1973): 3-12.	
Chapter Seven.....	178
“ <i>Polupragmousune</i> and ‘Minding One’s Own Business’: A Study in Greek Social and Political Values.” <i>Classical Philology</i> 71 (1976): 301-27.	



Chapter Eight.....	213
“ <i>Theoria versus Praxis in the Nichomachean Ethics and the Republic.</i> ” <i>Classical Philology</i> 73 (1978): 297-313.	
Chapter Nine.....	238
“The Connection between Aristotle’s <i>Ethics</i> and <i>Politics.</i> ” <i>Political Theory</i> 12 (1984): 29-49.	
Appendix A .....	261
The Complete Logical Outlines from <i>Merit and Responsibility</i>	
Appendix B.....	301
The CV and Bibliography of Arthur William Hope Adkins	
Select Glossary .....	311

## PREFACE

Arthur William Hope Adkins was a classicist and philosopher of the highest caliber. It is this writer's opinion that all of his published works will reward continued, careful study.<sup>1</sup> In the introductory essay to the volume and the short introductions to each essay I have sought to make the text that I have edited as useful as possible to a variety of readers. The principal focus of this volume is the development of ethical and political theory beginning in the Homeric era<sup>2</sup> to the mid-fourth century B.C.E.

Some care has been taken to select essays that “talk to each other.” Adkins was an evolving systematic thinker so that distinctions he makes earlier in his career were used and developed so that other insights could be formulated later on. Because of this, it would be best to address the essays in this volume in the order presented (with some dipping into Appendix A—the complete rendering of the principal arguments in *Merit and Responsibility*).

Also, in order to ensure the widest possible audience, all Greek words and phrases in the body of the essays have been transliterated and all extensive quotations in the main text have been translated (after a style that supports Adkins' general argument). Greek words and quotations in the footnotes remain in their original form.

With this in mind, off we go!

---

<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix B for a complete listing of his published works.

<sup>2</sup> Though Herodotus put Homer as being 400 years earlier (*Herodotus* 2.53); thus around 850 B.C.E., I will date him on the later side of the general agreement of seventh to eighth century.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the support of Elizabeth Adkins in this project. She has read the entire manuscript and given very useful suggestions for its presentation. All remaining errors are mine alone. I'd also like to thank my research team at Marymount: Tanya Lanuzo and Lynn McLaughlin, who assisted me in getting a wide search of relevant literature.

I am also appreciative of the anonymous reviewers of the press and their comments.

As always, I must cite my own family: Rebecca (my wife), Arianne, Seán, and Éamon (my children) who have supported me in my academic endeavors.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for kindly allowing me to reprint the essays in this volume.

### **Cambridge University Press**

“Friendship and ‘Self-Sufficiency’ in Homer and Aristotle” *The Classical Quarterly*. New Series. 13.1 (May, 1963): 30-45.

“Aristotle and the Best Kind of Tragedy” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series. 16.1 (May, 1966): 78-102.

“Basic Greek Values in Euripides’ Hecuba and Hercules *Furens*” *The Classical Quarterly*. New Series. 16.2 (November, 1966): 193-219.

“Truth, *KOSMOS* and *ARETE* in the Homeric Poems” *The Classical Quarterly*. New Series. 22.1 (May 1972): 5-18.

### **The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies**

“Threatening, Abusing and Feeling Angry in the Homeric Poems” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*. 89 (1969): 7-21.

“*Arete*, *Techne*, Democracy and Sophists: Protagoras 316b-328d” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*. 93 (1973): 3-12.

### **The University of Chicago Press**

“Polu pragmosune and ‘Minding One’s Own Business’” *Classical Philology*. 71.4 (October, 1976): 301-327.

“Theoria versus Praxis in the Nicomachean Ethics and the Republic”  
*Classical Philology*. 73.4 (October 1978): 297-313.

**Sage Publications, Inc.**

“The Connection between Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics” *Political Theory*. 12.1 (February, 1984): 29-49.



# INTRODUCTION

## JUSTIFICATION IN ETHICS: “BOTTOM-UP” VERSUS “TOP-DOWN” APPROACHES

BY MICHAEL BOYLAN

There are at least two ways that people might consider classical texts: (a) in the context of the period in which they were written so that authorial intent might be maintained,<sup>1</sup> and (b) in the context of a timeless history of ideas.<sup>2</sup> To be perfectly clear, Adkins falls into the former methodology. Though his readings of Greek values can be brought forward to understand conditions today, it is done through an intent to offer an accurate historical rendering that is situationally oriented to the time and place of the Greek civilization (eventually centered in Athens) from around 700 to the mid-fourth century B.C.E. This essay will examine the significance of Adkins' claims from this perspective in ethical and political theory understood both historically and ahistorically.

### **What is the Significance of a Bottom-Up versus a Top-Down Approach in Ethics and Social/Political Philosophy?**

There are two further points of view that are at stake in addressing this basic question. The first is how socially accepted norms actually are

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the standard position among classicists. It is historically rooted and any comparison to modern times is made from the original model without modification.

<sup>2</sup> This is often the position of ethical and political philosophers who see texts apart from authorial intent or historical contexts. For a defense of this position see: Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp.142-48.

accepted. Under this account, the practical process of accepting rights and duties tells the story of how people acquire rights and duties.

The second is whether there is a deontic *ought* that is logically prior to the historical recognition of rights and duties. Under this account the logical strength of an ethical claim is what *should* always be primary in any story about rights and duties.

In general, the **first question** is one of philosophical anthropology/sociology. In this case the “bottom-up approach” is concerned with analyzing how social attitudes change over time and why some values come to be accepted as *correct* as opposed to others. To take a rather modern example, let’s consider women’s suffrage in the United States. In the Constitution of the United States only white male landholders could vote. This followed a tradition that marginalized women, non-white males, and poor people (who couldn’t afford to own land).

From this perspective, one inquires as an observer of history *how* public opinion changed attitudes of the ruling class. In a democracy, this is evidenced via voting patterns. In authoritarian regimes there are other venues to affect public policy.<sup>3</sup> In either case, public opinion has an effect in some time frame. There is a story behind the changing of public opinion that is not materially different from the story that says why one computer company can sell more than its competitors. There is no fundamental, *a priori* reason why Company X sells more than Company Y. It’s rather the result of luck and successful marketing. To say that X’s computer is better than Y’s means (in this context) that Company X had a better marketing plan and events in history went their way (luck). This is one form of the “bottom-up” approach. Women in the United States got the vote because they united with advocates for temperance and together, they were able to make their case to the United States Congress, and later to the states for ratification.<sup>4</sup>

This particular approach is called the legal justification for human rights. One influential advocate for this approach was H.L.A. Hart. For clarification in understanding this dynamic let us agree on a distinction between first- and second-order rules and meta-foundational rules.<sup>5</sup> A

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Boylan, *Morality and Global Justice: Justifications and Applications* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2011, rpt. Routledge, 2020), ch. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Boylan, *Natural Human Rights: A Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 107-09.

<sup>5</sup> H.L.A. Hart makes a similar distinction in *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 208-31, 255-57. I have changed the terms from primary and secondary rules to first and second order rules to try to alleviate

first-order rule is the rule-making function. It concerns the process of making rules in the society and the scope of the intended obligations. A second-order rule address shortcomings in first- order rules considered by themselves: uncertainty, static character, and inefficiency. By employing rule-remedies to these shortcomings, second-order rules create a richer sense of a legal system. They answer the uncertainty defect with a rule of recognition. The static character is handled by rules of change. Finally, the inefficiency problem is addressed by rules of adjudication (and the creation of a court system).<sup>6</sup>

A meta-foundational rule concerns the higher order authority that the legislators or sovereign use to justify the rules that are set out.<sup>7</sup> This justification can be an abstract moral principle or an appeal to a historical community worldview with its attendant institutions and the procedures that can bring about rational understanding and consensual acceptance of first- and second-order rules in the given domain (e.g., the state or the world). In cases where the statute is ambiguous, those who advocate a positivist understanding of law on the model of John Austin will take rules (such as those dealing with rights) to be answered, in cases where the statute is ambiguous, first from British common law, and then in cases in which the answer is still undetermined, to Britain’s adopted parent, The Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> Like Hegel, Austin holds that meta-foundational authority lies in history: precedent.

Whether one grounds law in morality or in the historical community (shared community worldview, authoritative texts, past legislative enactment, or judicial precedent), it is assumed that meta-foundational rules exhibit more authority than first order rules. This is because meta-foundational rules condition first order rules and not *vice versa*. Observance must be maintained via specified sanctions (including moral suasion administered socially).

With respect to first and second-order rules, in democracies the people, in principle, can change the laws through the political process. The way they do it sets out the statute itself, and the way it is brought about enhances rule recognition (the most important second-order rule). In autocracies the people, in principle, can change the law through violent or

---

confusion. Though there is some overlap in Hart’s and my distinctions, I have modified his distinctions substantially for my own purposes.

<sup>6</sup> Here I am following Hart closely.

<sup>7</sup> My understanding of foundational rules departs radically from Hart.

<sup>8</sup> John Austin, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Robert Campbell (London: John Murray, 1885).



nonviolent revolution. Rule recognition comes from putting people into jail or killing them.

For the most part (in democracies) popular movements ground their desires for first-order rule change in morality-based appeals. But this need not be the case. One might say that he wants a rule changed from advocating A to advocating B from a principle of personal self-interest or because it fits in with the group self-interest in some way construed. In either event, first-order rules are only changed on the basis of arguments from a meta-foundational rule vantage point and this is determined via social *données* either with reference to history or to advertising (marketing to the present population) to sway popular opinion.<sup>9</sup>

There is another variety of the “bottom-up” approach. This is modeled upon empirical science. We can see this working in the advocates of utilitarianism. One of the proponents of modern utilitarianism was Jeremy Bentham. He begins his work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain and pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, still serves but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality, he will remain subject to it all the while.”<sup>10</sup>

Bentham makes the argument that “pleasure” is a clearly identifiable end to which all humans strive. This is set in the context of modern “science” versus antiquated notions of philosophy (non-empirical, “top-down” notions of “right and wrong”). Natural science demonstrates from an examination of animal behavior that only pain and pleasure are efficacious in causing conduct of one sort or another. The fascination with this idea has endured to the present day. In experimental psychology various modes of conditioning employing “positive” and “negative” reinforcement have been the basis of psychological behaviorism. One of the most prominent of the experimental psychological behaviorists, B.F. Skinner, writes, “Almost all living things act to free themselves from

---

<sup>9</sup> In the United States, for example, at the writing of this book it is an open question whether Internet “marketing” and “fake news” swayed the 2016 election. There is also some discussion in the UK on whether the “Brexit” vote was similarly maneuvered.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1789), p.1.

harmful contacts . . . . Man’s struggle for freedom is not due to a will to be free, but to certain behavioral processes characteristic of the human organism, the chief effect of which is the avoidance of or escape from so-called “aversive” features of the environment.”<sup>11</sup>

Like Bentham, Skinner sees a conflict between science and the illusory philosophical literature that asserts metaphysical freedom is an open, principle-based choice between “right” and “wrong.” What is real is pain and pleasure. If we examine the *explanandum* of the entire animal kingdom, and if humans are within that kingdom, then by logical induction we move *up* from this large sample space and posit general principles: thus “bottom-up.”

No one would doubt that pleasure and pain *do* influence and/or determine many (if not most) of our day-to-day decisions. One does not go into a restaurant and order something on the menu that he/she believes to be nauseating. One does not ask the barber to cut his hair in a way that seems repulsive. Certainly, pleasure and pain are the basis of these sorts of decisions.

The first question is whether *all* decisions are governed by the principles of pleasure and pain. One way to examine this is by the following thought experiment: “Is there ever a case in which we can conceive of a person acting for some reason *other* than for his own pleasure or the avoidance of pain?”

It is in addressing this sort of question one might consider *altruism*: the possibility that some agent can act for an abstract reason that is not to his/her perceived self-interest. This is a principle-driven account that would be “top-down” and contrary to Bentham’s and Skinner’s inductive “bottom-up” application.

The second question leads one to a different source for ethics and social/political philosophy. It can be termed the “top-down” approach. The top-down approach selects a small number of primitive principles and uses them with a rule of inference to create derivative theorems that prescribe deontic commands. This approach is very much axiomatic in its orientation. There are two principal ways in which “top-down” ethical theories have been justified: 1. by intuition, and 2. by some sort of logical argument (that generally reduces to a justification via the creation of a tight systematic structure).<sup>12</sup> Intuition is a rather slippery form of

---

<sup>11</sup> B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 26, 48.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of these modes of argumentation see Michael Boylan, *Basic Ethics* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2009; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Routledge 2021), chs. 2-4.

justification. It is widely used, and may stand as the ultimate ground for many unprovable postulates.<sup>13</sup> However, most of the attention in contemporary ethics has been upon rational justification for normative systems. The paradigm for such rationally justified systems can be found in axiomatics (that I have termed as a "supreme principle theory" or SPT). The initial appeal of a theory of morality, or of any other theory that employs a supreme principle as its driving force, arises from the paradigm of Euclid's or Hilbert's axiomatic geometry.<sup>14</sup> These authors seek to mechanize what, at first, seems to be an unruly discipline.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the lure of such theories seems to be that: (a) one is presented with a system that contains only a few generating principles (the fewer initial axioms one must defend lessens one's "burden of proof"); (b) the theorems that are proven from the axioms and the primitive rule(s) of inference are true due to "heritability," that is, traits of the "progenitor" that transfer to the "offspring"; (c) the "closed nature" of the system dictates that indeed there are theorems that cannot be proven (thus, on one level, insuring its coherence),<sup>16</sup> and therefore, clear, robust boundaries are created around the theory. There is a sense of what is "inside" and "outside" the theory.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> One prominent, recent practitioner who used intuition to ground his approach to the plausibility of primitive terms was John Rawls, in his original-position thought experiment. See: *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), ch. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Euclid, *Die Elemente* trans. C.Thauer (Rpt.Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchges, 1969); D. Hilbert, *Grundlagen der Geometrie*, 10th ed., with revisions and additions by P. Bernays (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> The point being made here is a general one. Obviously, there are other disputes such as the difference between mechanizing elementary geometry versus mathematical reasoning with mechanical theorem proving. For a discussion of these finer points see H. Poincaré, review of D. Hilbert, *Grundlagen der Geometrie*, *Bulletin des sciences mathématiques*, 2nd series, 26 (1902): 249-72.

<sup>16</sup> Kurt Gödel spells out these implications in "Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia Mathematica und verwandter System I" *Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik* 38 (1931): 173-98; trans. J. van Heijenoort, in *From Frege to Gödel, Sourcebook on Mathematical Logic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> The literature on boundary conditions is rather more in philosophy of science. For some of the central issues see: Rudolf Carnap, "The Logical Foundations of the Unity of Science" in *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science: Volume I*, ed. O. Neurath, R. Carnap, and C. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 42-62; and Paul Oppenheim and Hilary Putnam, "Unity of Science as a Working Hypothesis" *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. II, ed. H. Feigl, M. Scriven, and G. Maxwell (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1958), 3-36. These two essays set the logical empiricist position from which most of the

This strategy demarcates the realm of the theory. If one were faced with competing theories in mathematics or logic one might appreciate such a clearly demarcated theory. It would resemble theories of science (in the modern sense) as presented to us in reconstruction by contemporary philosophers of science.<sup>18</sup>

This work is important. There is no getting around the fact that the logical empiricists, in twentieth century-philosophy of science, have framed the dialogue for contemporary discussions on the structure of scientific theories. Even the detractors of the logical empiricists (who seem to include just about everyone these days) feel inclined to react *against* the way the logical empiricists parsed the scientific landscape. Thus, even though they reject the solutions of the logical empiricists, these detractors begin with many of those basic assumptions. The reason for this influence lies in our desire for certainty. Something as important as ethics should be based upon more than a whim. Axiomatic theories create a self-contained, "law-governed" universe that is finite and can be tested.<sup>19</sup> One aspect of our rational natures is supremely satisfied with the logical necessity derived from such an exercise.

The attraction to axiomatic theories has spawned “tree-structured” systems that resemble axiomatic theories but are nonetheless different in their approach.<sup>20</sup> Most moral theories that are generated from a supreme

---

"reactions" have been from biology. See especially: Alan Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 49-74; and J. Sterelny and Philip Kitcher "The Return of the Gene," *Journal of Philosophy* 85.7 (July, 1988), 339-61. In philosophy of biology (as in the logical empiricist account) boundary conditions are important. However, in biology the standard contention is that there is causation from "top" to "bottom" and *vice versa* as opposed to the logical empiricists who claim only "bottom" to "top" causation.

<sup>18</sup> It is my contention that the literature in philosophy of science is very useful to this question from the point of view of the axiomatic approach --given that the logical empiricists were greatly influenced by the mechanized-application models that aspired to the design of Euclid or Hilbert as a perfect end.

<sup>19</sup> Onora O'Neill would contend that Kant's SPT (see fn. 20) offers not only the supreme principle of morality, but of reason, itself--see: "Reason and Politics in the Kantian Enterprise" in *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). This is typical of the attraction of SPT advocates--though O'Neill would also contend that the first form of the categorical imperative, by itself, does not properly describe Kant.

<sup>20</sup> For simplicity these quasi-axiomatic structures will be called "SPTs" (or supreme-principle-theories). SPTs are *not* fully axiomatic. The number of differences varies in each practitioner, but the principal distinction is that the

principle or limited number of principles, and primitive rules of inference are of this latter type. Supreme principle theories or SPTs are not strictly speaking axiomatic theories—though they resemble them, and some of the same basic impulses that led to fully axiomatized theories probably engendered SPTs as well. The logical empiricists employed SPTs and quasi-axiomatic theories. They were first and foremost interested in physics with its close connection to mathematics (ergo, their choice in system design). In a similar way, Kant was very much influenced by physics—particularly by Newton. In Newton one finds an SPT system of natural philosophy that is generated from a few primitive laws and expressed through a mathematics that has its own parallel justification.

In the preface to the *Grundlegung*,<sup>21</sup> Kant says: "Logic can have no empirical part. . . . Against this, both natural and moral philosophy can each have an empirical part, since the former has to formulate its laws for nature as an object of experience, and the latter for the will of man so far as affected by nature--the first set of laws being those in accordance with which everything happens, the second being those in accordance with which everything *ought* to happen, although they also take into account the conditions under which what ought to happen very often does not happen . . . . Thus, physics will have its empirical part, but it will also have a rational one; and likewise ethics—although here the empirical part might be called specifically practical *anthropology*, while the rational part might be properly called *morals*."<sup>22</sup>

This quotation illustrates Kant's inclination to link his enterprise in moral theory to that of natural science via the axiomatic (top-down) approach. Both types of discipline are formally guided by logic. Just as Newton uses mathematics to structure and create a closed system of

---

primitive terms in axiomatic theories remain uninterpreted until the end whereas most supreme principle moral theories seek to provide justification for the supreme principle. Also, the status of application, i.e., proving theorems is generally quite different. What remains the same is the general *gestalt* of its structure.

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1st ed. 1785, 2nd ed. 1786, vol. 4 of the Prussian Academy's edition of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902-42). I am using the translation of H.J. Paton, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd ed. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1956). Page numbers are given first to Paton and then to the Prussian Academy edition. It should be clear from the remarks in this chapter that for the sake of examining single-principle theories (SPTs), I will highlight the role of the *Grundlegung* in the whole of Kant's moral philosophy. Note the slight (though important) differences in my translation of Kant in *Teaching Ethics with Three Philosophical Novels*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cham, Switzerland, 2019): 63-74.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* Paton. 55-6/387-88.

physics, Kant intends to do the same for the science of right and wrong in human action: ethics. This is because empirical studies require this sort of methodology.<sup>23</sup>

In physics, the payoff is understanding the way things actually *are*, while in ethics we discover how we *ought* to determine our will in order to make it good. Kant chooses a tree structured SPT (in the sense outlined above). From the categorical imperative one can test the formal structure of various generic types of action, for example, murder, lying, developing one's natural talents, rescuing others, and exploitation.<sup>24</sup> Once this occurs, one is in a position progressively to add empirical elements until a richer, fuller theory has been formulated.

The supreme principle of morality for Kant (first formulation) is a purely formal principle.<sup>25</sup> The reason for this follows from his distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. A categorical imperative, to be *categorical*, can depend upon no empirical content and must be true in virtue of its deductive coherence that reflects the nature of human reason when applied to the possibility of action. Because it is an *imperative* the question of moving from fact to value is finessed (perhaps unjustifiably).<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, "I confine myself to asking whether the nature of science does not always require that the empirical part should be scrupulously separated from the rational one, and that (empirical) physics proper should be prefaced by a metaphysic of nature, while practical anthropology should be preface by a metaphysic of morals--each metaphysic having to be scrupulously cleansed of everything empirical."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90/421-23; 95/427-28.

<sup>25</sup> The way one understands this is the source of some controversy. I am following Paton, *The Categorical imperative* (London: Hutchinson, 1947), with some emendations by Manley Thompson. For a range of opinion on this issue see Paul Dietrichson, "Kant's Criteria of Universalizability," in *Kant: Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals: Text and Critical Essays*. ed. Robert Paul Wolff (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs Merrill, 1969), 163-207; J. Kemp, "Kant's Examples of the Categorical Imperative" in *ibid.*, 230-244; Allen Wood, "Kant on False Promises," *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress* ed. Lewis White Beck (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972), 614-19; Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1975), ch. 5; and *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Barbara Herman, "The Practice of Moral Judgment," *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985), 414-36.

<sup>26</sup> Kant simply assumes that such imperatives exist, but this may be too facile. It may be the case that if one allows that categorical imperatives exist (i.e., can be properly applied to rational beings living in the world), *then* such imperatives can be shown to be true upon the principle of deductive coherence. But this begs the question of whether such imperatives properly exist.

So, from the point of view of the “top-down” advocates, one seeks this sort of axiomatic SPT structure, and because this structure is so deductively tight, its application to the world gives advocates confidence. This approach tends to attract those who aspire to the deductive certainty of logic and mathematics.

For those who advocate the “bottom-up” approach, the appeal is to induction rather than to deduction. One begins with a sample space of people living within a particular society and then one searches for common areas of agreement so that concord might be attained. This approach tends to attract those who see the realm of ethics and politics as rather messy. Because of this messiness the only *practical* way forward is to begin with what people actually believe to be true and valuable in the world. Arthur Adkins fits into this category.

## **The Personal and Shared Community Worldview in Homeric Greece**

One essential component of Arthur Adkins’ work is his connection to the community worldview of ancient Greece. For the purposes of this book this means from the time of the Homeric writers around the early seventh century B.C.E to the middle of the fourth century B.C.E. For purposes of simplicity, let us call this temporal/sociological unit *the target group*. What made this particular segment of history important is that the Greek-speaking peoples (from Macedonia and points south to what is modern-day Turkey in the east and to many islands in-between and to parts of southern Italy and Sicily in the west) created a literate culture and a powerful military presence. And of course, it doesn’t hurt that two key empires adopted these cultural standards: the empire of Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander, and then, later the longer-standing empire of Rome (that appropriated this heritage as an ethos by which community worldview facts and values might interpret meaning in life).<sup>27</sup>

---

Others may view the question differently. They may see this less as a fact/value problem, than one of freedom. If there is human freedom, then it is calculated into the formula before the rest of the apparatus begins its operation. In this way we are not talking about subsumption, but about the way we make our decisions. For an account of this viewpoint see: Thomas Hill, "Kant's Argument in the Rationality of Moral Conduct," and in "Kant's Theory of Practical Reason," in *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), chpts. 6 & 7.

<sup>27</sup> I have written a good deal on the concept of worldview, both personal and community. For a brief overview see: Michael Boylan, *Basic Ethics*, 2nd. ed.

So, what is the starting point? It begins with *agathos*. *Agathos* is a rather wide-ranging term. It is the positive beginning of the adjectival group “good, better, best.” This linguistic description might seem to diminish it to some as mere sociological description.<sup>28</sup> But *au contraire, mon ami!* It becomes a standard for the aspirational level that all people seek, but is available only to a certain subset of humanity. Within the shared community worldview of the target group, to be *agathos* is to be male and a warrior chieftain. This man has wealth and leisure. He is strong and can fight to protect his household, *oikos*. This position is always at risk. There are forces outside one’s household that wish to take it over (such as Penelope’s suitors). So long as one is viral and strong, he can protect his own. However, sometimes outside threats require the addition of other allies to do the job. These allies, *philoï*, can assist the warrior chieftain in protecting his *oikos* against exterior threats.

This worldview position highlights the position of “might makes right,” which I have termed kraterism.<sup>29</sup> The kraterist views all problems prudentially. Whatever outcome works for the kraterist is taken, *ceteris paribus*. The self-interest of the agent can be expanded to include his household. All other interests are subject to this selfish calculus. Thus, the five arguments on justice in Plato’s *Republic I*,<sup>30</sup> in which Socrates and Thrasymachus debate whether justice (*dikaïosune*) is always the rule of the

---

(Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2009; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Routledge, 2021), ch. 1; Michael Boylan, *A Just Society* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), chaps. 1 & 2 with commentary given in John-Steward Gordon, ed. *Morality and Justice: Reading Boylan’s “A Just Society”* (New York and London: Lexington Press, 2009); Boylan *Morality and Global Justice*: ch. 2; and Michael Boylan, *Natural Human Rights: A Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 6. For a broader assessment of the Personal Worldview Imperative and the Shared Community Worldview Imperative in the broader context of “lived experience” as depicted in fictive narrative see: Wanda Teays, ed. *Reshaping Philosophy: Boylan’s Fictive Narrative Philosophy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> This will represent the crux of the argument that will lean toward the “top-down” or the “bottom-up.”

<sup>29</sup> The standard example from Plato is Thrasymachus in *Republic I*. Thrasymachus just does not comprehend why anyone would be against the “might makes right” position. It is Adkins’ point that this was the standard position in the period under analysis. For a contrary view from the modern perspective see Boylan, *A Just Society*: chaps. 2, 7; Boylan, *Morality and Global Justice*, part 2; and Boylan, *Natural Human Rights: A Theory*, ch. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Argument 1= 339c-339e; Argument 2= 340c-342c; Argument 3= 343b-346e; Argument 4= 348b-350d; Argument 5= 351b-354a



strongest (interpreted as all actions that are prudential to a figure of power) speak directly to this point. On Adkins' account, the contemporary Greek reader in ancient Athens would find Thrasymachus' position quite plausible. Socrates' position of trying to assert *dikaiosune* as a cooperative virtue (*arete*) would seem like the aberrant stance. Surely, Thrasymachus contends, life is all about maximizing prudential outcomes for one's self and one's household, (*oikos*). This essay will accept Adkins' characterization of the popularly accepted model (bottom-up-kraterist) within the competitive Homeric ethic.

Plato, in his mature thought, tries to address the alternative to the competitive Homeric ethic via ethical egoism in which one extends the time parameters such that, in the long run, a person who practices the cooperative, quiet behaviors (*erga*) will be blessed (*makarios*).<sup>31</sup> This position would accept the general given that one should always act prudentially, but spins it by saying that in the long run it is in one's prudential best interest to be ethical (here understood as exhibiting the cooperative, quiet values).<sup>32</sup> This is because the common attitude<sup>33</sup> (*endoxa*) of this era is that there is no other meaningful driving force in life except the prudential and that the prudential is best achieved when one is powerful and adept in the social skills (*erga*) that will allow him to succeed (become *arete*; and *kalos*).

Therefore, one *donnée* that Adkins has established in describing classical Greek value theory is a personal worldview that strives after the prudential and a shared community worldview that also accepts the prudential as primary. Such a combination, as Adkins notes, gives rise to antidemocratic, aristocratic<sup>34</sup> systems in which there is a leisure class that alone can claim to be *agathos*.

---

<sup>31</sup> I discuss this in *Basic Ethics*, 41-4.

<sup>32</sup> Adkins uses the terms "cooperative" and "quiet" to contrast with the "competitive" skills of the Homeric chieftain, who is characterized as at the top of the social scale in power and respect, *agathos*. See Appendix A on the argument outlines from *Merit and Responsibility*.

<sup>33</sup> What I call the shared community worldview.

<sup>34</sup> "Aristocratic" where *aristos* means being the most wealthy and powerful: a successful man of leisure who has earned these privileges.

## The Transition from Homeric Kratersim to Cooperative Morality: A Case Study in “Bottom-Up” Ethical Justification

In the three hundred or so years that Adkins analyzes, there is some “bottom-up” movement away from the *purely* competitive value system where “might makes right” (kraterism) to one in which at least some quiet, cooperative behaviors such as “acting justly” are recognized to be good and valuable traits that will also (along with the competitive traits) lead to *arete* and *agathos*.

We begin in “‘Friendship’ and ‘Self-Sufficiency’ in Homer and Aristotle” (Chapter 1) by setting out the base-line whereby all change will be judged. This is the Homeric ethic of seeing *philia* used instrumentally by a chieftain to maintain and extend power. The only check on this is religion.<sup>35</sup> The gods are put into a realm in which (to some extent) what is right, *dike*, has a part to play in the story of life. If the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are taken to be representative of social usage of their era, then an examination of these texts will support Adkins’ conclusions. What people think about issues will be represented in their art. Why else would it have been transmitted over hundreds of years? Though these authors are one bookend on this explanatory journey, there is some resolution via the agent acting by his own devices (self-sufficiency). The successful kraterist would, by necessity, need to be self-sufficient or else it would diminish his ability to wield power. Any move away from this position would constitute a personal and community worldview change of significance.

Of course, there are paradoxes that lead to chinks in the explanatory scheme. In “Aristotle and the Best Kind of Tragedy” (chapter 2) Aristotle’s *Poetics* is brought forth in which the fate of a decent, *epieikes*, man is contrasted with the *poneros* and *mochtheros* individual. Those who are held to be shameful in their actions deserve their fate. This represents a boundary condition on the kraterist. He cannot go *too far* or he will not be successful in his prudential design. But even the *epieikes* man may slip up: he may make a moral mistake, *hamartia*, which may also have deleterious prudential consequences, as per *Oedipus Rex*. The unbridled kraterists, as well as the decent man, have boundary conditions around which they need to be mindful.

---

<sup>35</sup> A very light check, indeed, since powerful military chieftains throughout human history often fashion themselves as “god-like” figures. The tradition of religious *hubris* is a testament to this tendency. Most religions in human history rank this as a number-one sin.

In “Basic Greek Values in Euripides’ *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*” (chapter 3) we return to literature and examine two plays of Euripides. Adkins brings forth contradictions in both plays between the krateristic attitude and accepted, developing cooperative, quiet values. So, for example, the *Hecuba* is generally depicted as having two parts: (a) the Greek sacrifice of Hecuba’s daughter, Polyxena, to the shade of Achilles; and (b) the vengeance of Hecuba. Adkins details the payback strategy of exchange in the first half as Hecuba appeals to Odysseus to stop Polyxena’s death. She uses the rhetorical strategy of being a *phile* of Odysseus: she has conferred a benefit and expects something back, *charis*. This is the ethic that justice is “the returning of favors.” In the second half, there is the judgement by Agamemnon concerning Hecuba’s revenge. Because Polymestor has killed her son, Polydorus (who had been sent in good faith with money for protection), Polymestor has violated the basic requirements of hospitality (a critical *arete* in the traditional ethos, as well as the developing cooperative ethic). Thus, Hecuba was justified in killing Polymestor’s sons and blinding Polymestor. Part of this argument lies in classifying Polymestor’s killing of Polydorus as shameful (*aischron*). Agamemnon recognizes this claim while at the same time being cognizant of his obligation to the army: Polymestor assisted in killing the enemy. That makes him a *philos*. Should one go against a *philos* to support an enemy? This pits the developing cooperative ethic, in which avoiding shame is becoming important, against the traditional tribalism of “*us* versus *them*.”

In the second play, there are also two parts. In the first part the madness of Heracles causes him to kill his three sons and his wife (thinking he was killing Eurystheus, the king who assigned him his labors). In the second part, after Heracles’ father, Amphitryon, tells him of his homicidal deeds, Heracles wants to commit suicide

Heracles denies all of Theseus’ conventional arguments against his suicidal plans. What he *does* accept is the rather interesting claim that if he, Heracles, kills himself, then he will no longer be able to show his physical strength and power (thus he cannot keep his *arete* and status as an *agathos*). Since every warrior wants at all costs to be *agathos* and show his *arete*—in this way the traditional Homeric ethic wins the day.

In this essay, Adkins has illustrated the stress points in the traditional Homeric ethic via close reading of the popular usage as set out in these two plays.

In “Threatening, Abusing, and Feeling Angry in the Homeric Poems” (chapter 4) the kraterist finds one more foe: the common man who has gained a post in the civic affairs of the city. In the traditional Homeric

ethic, only the gods provide any check on excesses by the warrior chieftain (and these are very soft checks as the practical veracity of the gods’ power is always suspect).

*Neikeiein* is the focus of this essay. Though it has been used in the general literature to refer to: quarrel, wrangle with, chide, rail at, upbraid, and so forth, it has more exact usages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that Adkins cites. In counterpoint to *neikeiein* are overlapping terms such as *polemos*, *apeilein*, *ochtheo*, *ochthesas*, *choesthai* (particularly with the emphasis upon emotion), *kertomeein*, and *meneainon* (-ein). In various ways each of these can elicit the prospect of shame, *elegchein*, *aischron*, *kakos*.

But the point here is that one word, *neikeiein*, can refer to a psychological motivation for reproach: one based on more than ordinary threats, abuse, and anger. The extra element is the *shame* that the antagonist should feel as a result of his action. This is one more chink in the Homeric armor.

In “*Kosmos* and *Arete* in the Homeric Poems” (chapter 5) Adkins demonstrates one more step toward the developing cooperative, quiet morality. *Neikeiein* is again brought forward as a way of challenging the civic authority. The warrior chieftain no longer has *carte blanche*. He is restrained in his prudential kraterism. Behind this is a sense of what is appropriate to the civil authority (*kata kosmon*). Against this would be the unbridled actions of the kraterist who does not accept restraint and the civic order. Instead, this individual is reckless and disorderly (*ou kata kosmon*). As such, the common Greek would reject his actions and censure him. The developing civil system could move against these individuals and be supported by other male landowners. This moves a crucial step closer to there being an independent standard that constrains unbridled egoistic use of power. The fact that a somewhat general, abstract term, *kosmos*, is used to support this is one step in the direction of a recognized morality that may have even wider application.<sup>36</sup>

“*Arete*, *Techne*, Democracy and Sophists: *Protagoras* 316b-328d” (chapter 6) examines the debate between Protagoras and Socrates on whether excellence, *arete*, can be taught. Now it seems plausible, as Adkins argues, that the average Greek would have been attracted to Protagoras’ pitch (since he was a very successful sophist). Protagoras claims that he won’t “waste” the student’s time (in this case the well-bred Hippocrates) on arithmetic, astronomy, geometry or music, but will instead make him “well advised” (*euboulos*) on domestic and public

---

<sup>36</sup> This is an interesting point because (as the next section of this essay will suggest) there is a toggle between situational morality and more broadly construed ethics.

affairs. Socrates correctly terms this education outcome as: learning the art (*techne*) of citizenship and to become well-respected citizens (*agathos politas*).

So what Protagoras is really offering is a practical road map to “how to win friends and influence people.” This is a little different from the idea of teaching the political excellence needed to become the next Pericles. Being from the right class to begin with (those with leisure, money, and connections) is a good start. From there, one can pursue a Machiavellian-styled guide (like *The Prince*). However, something may be missing here. The house of Borgia was very successful in wielding power, but not always in a way that might avoid shame.

It is one thing, Adkins argues, to teach clerical and administrative skills (those of the managerial leader)<sup>37</sup> and another to claim to produce the next Pericles. Adkins’ claim here is that Protagoras is a prisoner of the language “meanings” that he employs such that an equivocation occurs (between *arete* as a mere managerial skill and *arete* as becoming the next head of Athens). But prudential outcome, alone, is not enough (as it had been in the Homeric ethic). Socrates claims that *arete* must be *dikaia*. But then, the “teachability question” raises its head. It cannot come from nature (*phusis*) because then no one would need Protagoras. Protagoras can finesse this a bit because his clients are already upper crust (financially and socially) so that they have the power of privilege already in their favor (they will be successful at the moderate level anyway, unless they screw up too badly).

This bald fact of privilege is neutralized a bit in Adkins’ next essay, “*Polu pragmosune* and ‘Minding One’s Own Business’: A Study in Greek Social and Political Values” (chapter 7). The *polupragmon* is a busybody. He is contrasted to the one who *ta hautou prattei*, who minds his own business. In the political realm these are certainly two distinct types. From the point of view of privilege, the busybody is a nuisance. The traditional Homeric *agathos* with *arete* could push his weight around. That was part of the accepted social role. Now there is the intervention of the politically involved (the *polupragmon*). These lower-born busybodies hold municipal civil service positions with some authority. They can hold the reckless and disorderly (*ou kata kosmon*) to account. In one small way this is the beginning of the rule of law—a very definite step toward the cooperative, quiet values of morality.

---

<sup>37</sup> The three generally agreed upon types of leaders in historical leadership theory are: transformational leader, managerial leader, and servant leader. For a discussion of these categories see Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Sage Publishers, 2015).

This trend toward the social link as a confining condition to the single Homeric warrior chieftain is continued in “*Theoria* versus *Praxis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Republic*” (chapter 8). The conventional way of reading the relationship between these two terms in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that there are two powers of reason in humans: theoretical and practical. These, in turn, are ranked, with theoretical reason being the property of only the few while practical reason is rather more widely distributed. If theoretical reason was more in the limited, private, personal zone, and it was principally involved with attaining *eudaimonia*, then “happiness,” “flourishing,” or other conventional translations of the term is largely confined to a small group of people (those with leisure the upper classes [economically/socially]). Practical reason allows a larger group of people without leisure (farmers, merchants, etc.) to a more limited reward of fitting into their given social role for the good of the *polis*.<sup>38</sup> Depending upon how one views this wider possession of knowledge, it could make Aristotle more open to broader political participation (another step away from the Homeric warrior chieftain).

Adkins recognizes this possible reading here and in the next essay (chapter 9). However, Adkins charts a different course. He rejects the bifurcation of the two sorts of knowledge (a move that Plato would approve). Instead, he sets out how Aristotle’s *theoria* has practical overtones. This is because one of the ways that *theoria* can operate (in conjunction with *phronesis*) is to bring about *eudaimonia* for oneself and for one’s friends. Such an outcome would be *kath’auto* desirable. In this way *theoria* moves away from a personal, selfish act concerned with studying and reflection and to a socially cooperative endeavor. Since from the beginning we have defined the journey toward ethics as moving closer to quiet, cooperative values, we are indeed much closer to this goal in the final essay (chapter 9). Coincidentally, the same understanding could be superimposed upon Plato to give a motivation for the philosopher to return to the cave: in order to bring about *eudaimonia* for himself and his *philoi*.

This is very heartening, but the mechanics of this move still need some specification. This is archived in “The Connection between Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*” (chapter 9). Here Adkins assumes correctly that *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* were intended as one work. The former is oriented toward the personal worldview and the latter to the shared community worldview. The common element is *eudaimonia*. The process

---

<sup>38</sup> I connect this reading to the understanding of natural law in Ancient Greece and in Ancient China; see Michael Boylan, *The Origins of Ancient Greek Science: Blood—a philosophical study* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), chaps. 2 and 3.

begins with *ergon*, here not merely understood functionally, but with a dynamic quality as well, situated in Greek political practice. This has a dual connection to the self and the polis. When it connects to the self, we are in the realm of ethics. When it connects to the polis, we are talking about politics. These are connected because any *ergon* that constructs in this way will lead to a special form: *arete*. \**Arete*\* differs from the normal usage of *arete* in that it is connected to personal and political *eudaimonia*, and because of this latter connection it is, *by definition*, cooperative. Thrasymachus and Callicles could invoke the Homeric *arete* and *agathos* in their exhortations, because they were based upon competitive excellence of the powerful: the socially enviable benefits were attained by the victor, warrior chieftain. But now things are different since the *ergon* => *arete*\*/*agathos* relation is predicated upon achieving personal and social *eudaimonia*, that is, itself, an expression of the social/political values of the day. This is not a metaphysical universalism (the province of “top-down” theories) but functionally/dynamically relevant to prevailing usage.

Adkins has now completed his task. From the general outline set out in *Merit and Responsibility* (Appendix A), he has carefully moved step-by-step forward to a vision of ethics tied to politics that insures the major role for the quiet, cooperative values over the competitive values. This represents a major accomplishment in the establishment of a new understanding of both ethics and politics.

## **The Application of Adkins’ Analysis to Ethics and Political Philosophy Today**

In order to understand the full significance of Adkins’ achievement, it is important to contrast his vision of virtue ethics with what is commonly called virtue ethics and to understand its role in political theory.

Commonly, *arete* has been translated as “virtue.”<sup>39</sup> This is then connected to a list of behaviors that are midpoint between extremes, for example, courage is midway between cowardice and foolhardiness.<sup>40</sup> The way to these “virtues” is through developing habits related to the desired

---

<sup>39</sup> Examples of this can be found in the following prominent translations of *Nicomachean Ethics*: W.D. Ross, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908); Martin Ostwald trans. (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1962); and Terence Irwin, trans. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1985); cf. my translations of *NE* in *Teaching Ethics Through Three Philosophical Novels* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> See my chart in Boylan, *Basic Ethics* (2009), 138.

function (*ergon*), and these habits act like metaphysical biology: they are universal and a-temporal (thus satisfying the conditions of what is commonly called moral realism.)<sup>41</sup> The moral realists view ethics and politics as a science. This means there are natural criteria in the world that one can discover that are cogent to the acceptance of particular normative theories.<sup>42</sup> They generally fit into the “top-down” approach.

One prominent virtue ethics theorist, Alasdair MacIntyre,<sup>43</sup> interprets Aristotle as a moral realist through a top-down approach. He does this by accepting what Adkins calls *metaphysical biology*.<sup>44</sup> Why does MacIntyre make this claim? Part of the answer lies in the contention that Aristotle is best understood as a biologist.<sup>45</sup> The second part of the answer says that Aristotle viewed normative truths in the same way that he did scientific truths. We know from *Posterior Analytics* that, in principle, Aristotle believed in universal absolute truth in natural philosophy, *episteme*. However, the story of the practice is more complicated. *Epi to polu* is more often used in the biological works to describe contingent conclusions rather than *apodeixis* (the necessary conclusion of a syllogism and the darling of *An.Post.*).<sup>46</sup> This belies one of the key premises for *metaphysical biology*. Another problem occurs in the acquisition of biological information by Aristotle via *endoxa*. Common opinion—such as from beekeepers—was part of Aristotle’s actual biological methodology.<sup>47</sup> This inductive procedure could never yield *apodeixis* and *episteme* on the terms set out in the *Prior Analytics* and the *Posterior*

---

<sup>41</sup> See my discussion of moral realism and moral anti-realism in Boylan *Basic Ethics* (2021), chapter 1.

<sup>42</sup> Examples of this approach are: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1948); Michael Boylan, *A Just Society* (New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); and Boylan, *Natural Human Rights: A Theory* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> It should be clear that Adkins believes the position of *metaphysical biology* in connection with *EN* is wrong.

<sup>45</sup> I make this claim in *Method and Practice in Aristotle’s Biology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield/UPA, 1983) cf. Marjorie Grene, *A Portrait of Aristotle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963). Thomas Aquinas also makes this assumption in, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C.I. Litzinger (South Bend, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993)

<sup>46</sup> See Michael Boylan, *The Origins of Ancient Greek Science* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), ch. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Boylan *Method and Practice*, 14, 26, 220, 221.



*Analytically.* Given this, the biological analogy is insufficient to make Aristotle's *Ethics* into the kind of project that would support moral realism via a top-down ethical universality.

MacIntyre may *want* Aristotle to be a moral realist (via a top-down strategy), but that doesn't make him so. I have written that virtue ethics, as an ethical theory, can exhibit *either* moral realism or moral anti-realism according to how primitive posits are justified.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it is my contention, following Adkins, that it is plausible that Aristotle's ethics is either anti-realist *per se*, or engaged in anti-realist, bottom-up justification. What would this mean?

The answer brings us back to how language usage fixes meaning. For example, since *eudaimonia* for the individual and the *polis* is said to be the lynch-pin for Adkins' final step, this is often understood in contemporary ethical/political theory as "meeting an *interest*—that is socially recognized as valuable." James Griffin (another bottom-up author) interprets it this way in his book *On Human Rights*.<sup>49</sup> Griffin embeds this social touchstone in "appropriate rational preferences." The "appropriate" comes from Wittgenstein's notion of "a form of life," which in this case refers to an environment in which our language can meaningfully develop and in which it can be judged to be intelligible.<sup>50</sup> This *form of life* mirrors my notion of *personal worldview* within the context of *community worldview*. Both work interactively to allow the conditions of meaning and intelligibility to emerge.

Donald Davidson brings forth a similar insight. We cannot interpret others unless we make certain assumptions on what attitudes and beliefs we have in common with them.<sup>51</sup> If Davidson is correct in this claim, then skepticism about the ability of communities to come to meaningful agreement about shared values and beliefs is unfounded. This dynamic corresponds to my notion of *the common body of knowledge* that I hold to be essential to the information flow of rational argument for the purpose of discussion and agreement within the shared community worldview in a way that can be tested.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Boylan *Basic Ethics*, ch. 11.

<sup>49</sup> James Griffin, *On Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35-36.

<sup>50</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), sect. 1-38, 136-56, 167-238—on the term "a form of life" see especially 19, 23, 241.

<sup>51</sup> Donald Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy "and "Mental Events" in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 237 and p. 222.

<sup>52</sup> Boylan *A Just Society*. ch. 5.

This translates to Adkins’ view of socially recognized *eudaimonia* that is based upon agreements on foundational criteria (*endoxa*) that are representational of some particular time and space (*arete*\* and the appropriate *erga*—socially situated).

On this understanding Aristotle, and in some ways Plato as well, are to be understood via ethical non-cognitivism<sup>53</sup> that uses as its data, the extant literature. Most critics of this interpretation would come from the Abrahamic religious traditions that have used Aristotle and Plato in the context of top-down moral/political realism. But, in fact, the way most people view ethics and political theory today is consistent with Adkins. The prime data are the social facts in existing communities.

The challenge that faces such positions is how do we alter our social attitudes (shared community worldview)? In the series of essays chosen for this volume, there is a distinct sense that quiet, cooperative values *are* right (in the sense of moral realism) but are *understood* situationally in the sense of moral anti-realism.<sup>54</sup> This continues to be an interesting area for further research among Adkins scholars. If Arthur William Hope Adkins were still alive today, undoubtedly, he would be continuing his exploration on the foundation of ethics and political theory in this direction. His understanding of a bottom-up approach to ethical justification would fit into contemporary debates in such a way that—like the effect of W. D. Ross’s work—the study of ancient Greek value theory might become a part of our contemporary understanding of how we can justify ethical and political judgements. It would constitute the coda to Adkins’ remarkable legacy of chronicling how the competitive Homeric ethic of the warrior chieftain could transform into an ethical/political vision that sets as its *telos* as individual and group *eudaimonia* (understood in both classical and contemporary social/political terms). This is a considerable accomplishment both in the historically focused worldview of 700-to-mid-fourth century B.C.E. Greece and in the fields of ethical and social/political philosophy today.

---

<sup>53</sup> Boylan *Basic Ethics*, ch. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Such a claim would make Adkins an ontological realist and an epistemological anti-realist.

# CHAPTER ONE

## “FRIENDSHIP” AND “SELF-SUFFICIENCY” IN HOMER AND ARISTOTLE

### Introduction

In “‘Friendship’ and ‘Self-sufficiency’ in Homer and Aristotle” Adkins applies many of his key concepts set out in *Merit and Responsibility* (*M&R*) (see Appendix A). Principal among these is how normative terms have changed meaning over time. We live in a post-Kantian era in which prudential outcomes for ostensibly moral actions actually detract from ultimate moral worth.<sup>1</sup> This was not the case in the age of Homer. Words such as *agathos*, *philos*, and *arete*<sup>2</sup> were actually commending the competitive skills of being a warrior chieftain who could wield events to his own advantage: a good man was a *successful, powerful* man. To be successful, one needed friends/allies (or a “crew” in contemporary parlance)—because you cannot do it all alone. There is a lingering sense of this today with social media. Some people seek to sell themselves and products to “friends” who are used instrumentally for success.

One key distinction drawn is the warrior chieftain within and outside his household (*oikos*). Inside the household, the key terms, *philos*, *philein*, and *philotes* refer to ownership: the, *philos aner* can refer to one’s own husband (as opposed to the standard translation “dear” husband). This sense of ownership can also apply to things. Thus, within the *oikos* the words *philos*, *philein*, and *philotes* reinforce a model of autonomy and self-sufficiency that was revered in the *agathos* (warrior chieftain).

The other stance is outside of the *oikos*. This puts someone who has strayed far away into the role of the supplicant or traveler. It invokes notions of hospitality, which is a cooperative virtue. The traveler is

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, utilitarians would demur. They are “behavior oriented” and not “intention oriented.” For more on this see Michael Boylan, *Basic Ethics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), ch. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Commonly translated as “good,” “friend,” and “virtue”—especially in translations of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.

dependent upon his host, so he will not compete with him. This reciprocal relationship is *philotes*. It is here where, having covered the background Homeric ethos, that the first-half of the article ends.

In the second half Adkins contends that a standard reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 8 and 9 views friendship as having three species: friendship from virtue (*arete/agathos*), from pleasure (*hedu*), and from utility (*chresimon*). The first is often depicted as being *per se* and not for some ulterior benefit and thus of a higher quality than the other two. However, if *arete/agathos* are understood from the Homeric background, then there is a built-in utility demarcation here that cannot be scrubbed away. If Adkins is right about this, then the standard understanding of *Nicomachean Ethics* 8 and 9 would have to be changed: all three varieties of friendship are prudential in nature. Thus, they are all selfish.

The last major point to consider is whether *philos*, *philein*, and *philotes* are reciprocal in nature. A passage cited brings up the thought experiment of whether someone could *love a bottle of wine* (an object which cannot reciprocate or with which someone could not cooperate). This is a thornier problem, because once one has given in on the necessity of *philos*, *philein*, and *philotes* as being selfish and instrumental, then the standard cogency of this position is also called into question.

What is at issue is whether Aristotle has really moved to a position in which a person creates a friendship that is selfless and based upon the goodness of the partner or whether the Homeric ethos, with its insistence upon instrumentality and self-sufficiency, continues on through the mid-fourth century in Greece. Modern readings of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* may be deficient in that they do not pay attention to the Homeric ethic residue that still inhabits Aristotle’s text.

In this article (one of the most cited articles ever written by Adkins) he carefully sets out the prudential sense of these key normative terms and shows that the Homeric competitive influence continues to some degree even through Aristotle. This is shown through the persistence of self-sufficiency in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* via abstract contemplation (so-called theoretical reasoning by means of which privileged philosophers might enjoy leisure time to achieve contentedness, *eudaimonia*, without the need of other allies, *philo*). This would detract from the interactive, cooperative friendship that is often the interpretation of Books 8 and 9. These are controversial claims, but ones that need to be

addressed lest we become anachronistic in our understanding of these classical texts.<sup>3</sup>

### Adkins' Essay

This article falls into two parts: the first is an analysis, in the light of my earlier discussions of *arete*<sup>4</sup> and time<sup>5</sup> of the Homeric usage of *philos* and *philein*, and *philotes*. The second is an attempt to show that, as in the case of *arete*, the effects of Homeric usage persist to a considerable degree in the moral philosophy of Aristotle. In the earlier discussions I have argued that the higher value placed upon the competitive *aretai* in Greek entails that co-operative relationships, even when valued and necessary, take the form dictated by the more valued qualities, the *aretai*. The most general words in Greek to denote co-operative relationships are *philos* and its derivatives: my purpose here is to show how the Homeric usage of these words is related to the Homeric *arete*-standard and to Homeric society, and to sketch in the outline of a wider discussion, which I hope to be able to fill in later.

The manner in which we are accustomed to think of the usage of *philos*, *philein*, and *philotes* in Homer results from the translations and classifications of lexicographers. Ebeling,<sup>6</sup> having suggested the meanings of “*carus*,” “*dilectus*,” and so forth, for *philos*, adds that sometimes there is not much that one is free of [as opposed to fate] but whether this is the literal meaning is subject to debate. Ebeling seems not to question the existence of one or more “meanings,”<sup>7</sup> merely the possibility of assigning priority to one of them; and Liddell and Scott behave similarly, separating the sense of “one’s own” found in Homer and the early poets, and classifying it quite separately from those usages which we usually translate as “dear” or “beloved.” We shall find a similar classification of the usages of *philein* and *philotes* in the lexicographers; but it will be convenient to

---

<sup>3</sup> This article should be seen in the context of Ch. 9 of this volume, in which the question of just how *arete* is to be understood takes on a new dimension with the addition of *eudaimonia* into the equation.

<sup>4</sup> *M&R* ch. 3.

<sup>5</sup> “‘Honour’ and ‘Punishment’ in the Homeric Poems” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 7 (1960): 23ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Lexicon Homericum*, s.v.

<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to understand exactly how Ebeling understood the usage of φίλος. Having stated that the usage sometimes appears very close to that of a reflexive pronoun, he nevertheless classifies the instances in which φίλος is used of things as parallel to those used of persons, under the general heading of “*carus*,” “*dilectus*”

begin by discussing the usages of *philos* in Homer, and to inquire first whether there is any real difference between these usages.

The Homeric usage of *philos*, *philein*, and *philotes* is, I shall argue, closely related to the structure of Homeric society revealed and molded by the Homeric usage of *agathos*, *arete*, and allied words. It will accordingly be useful to consider the manner in which the Homeric *agathos* (warrior-chieftain in charge of his own *oikos*) uses *philos* of his various faculties, possessions, and fellow men, beginning as near as possible to the man himself and working steadily outward. Those who were not *agathoi* in the Homeric sense could use *philos* in the manner that I shall illustrate below;<sup>8</sup> but they could not use *philein* in the Homeric manner<sup>9</sup> of their relations with those who were *agathoi*,<sup>10</sup> and Homer is not much interested in the relations of non-*agathoi* with one another. Accordingly, we can satisfactorily study only the *philotes* of the *agathoi* in Homer.

We can begin no closer to the *agathos* than the parts of his own body and his psychological functions. (The distinction is, of course, post-Homeric.) *Philos* can certainly be used of these. So (*Il.*11.407) we find *alla tie moi tauta philos dielexato thumos*; and (13.85) *ton r'hama t'argaleoi kamatoi phila guia lelunto*. In English we may translate the phrases with *philos* either “dear limbs (or *thumos*)”; but in either case, if we bear in mind the whole range of *philos*, what do we imagine that we mean, or that Homer meant? Widening the scope a little, we find such phrases as *phila heimata* (*Il.* 2. 261) and *phila demnia* (*Od.* 8.277): “own clothes (bed)” or “dear clothes (bed)”? We might perhaps give different answers in these two cases; but the usage is evidently the same. Again, Homer speaks of *philes* . . . *patridos aies* (e.g., *Il.* 2.178): a phrase that we will readily translate by “dear native land,” but would feel no difficulty in translating by “own” or “own dear.” If we consider these usages not as lexicographers or translators but as speakers and thinkers in Greek, it is difficult to find a clear line of demarcation between them.

---

<sup>8</sup> The “beggar” Odysseus (hopefully) addresses Antinous as φίλε (*Od.* 17, 415) when asking for alms.

<sup>9</sup> See Homer’s view of φίλος below.

<sup>10</sup> For φίλεῖν requires possessions (*Od.* 19, 194 ff.) and the ἀγαθός would have more of these anyway. Non-ἀγαθοί could use φίλεῖν of the benefits they conferred on their dependents, e.g., Eumaeus φιλεῖ the “beggar” (*Od.* 24. 388) and is addressed as φίλε (115 etc.); but menial services performed by the dependents in return would not be characterized by φίλεῖν, and Eumaeus does not address the “beggar” as φίλε. Aristotle finds similar difficulties in “unequal φίλε” (*EN* 1159b 1ff.).

Even if we consider only those instances in which *philos* is used of persons, no clear line can be drawn. In most cases we translate by “dear,” “friend,” or “beloved” without feeling any problem.<sup>11</sup> (This does not entail, of course, that any of these words is a full and accurate translation in any instance, merely that such translation causes no difficulties to the English reader.) Some examples, however, seem odd. Oddest of all is *Odyssey* I. 326 f.: Odysseus says that among the ghosts in Hades he saw *stugeren t’ Eriphulen, he ohruson philou andros edexato timeenta*. Here we have to choose. We can either suppose that Homer means “own *aner*” or “dear *aner*.” “Dear” is absurdly inappropriate in the context. We avoid the problem by claiming that *philou andros* is a Homeric formula, usually appropriate, since “dear” is an adjective commonly applied to husbands, but here used in an unsuitable context. This explanation is sometimes necessary,<sup>12</sup> but should be used with caution: it may be seriously misleading, particularly in the field of values,<sup>13</sup> and the interpreter, before assuming that Homer is talking nonsense, should make every effort to understand the text before him. “Her own,” with no overtones of affection, seems a good translation here, particularly so since the translation of *aner* as “husband” requires some such idea to be supplied from the rest of the context. “Her own man” causes no difficulties to the reader; but if we translate in this manner, it is hard to see the relationship of this usage to the general usage of *philos* when applied to persons, on the assumption that the general usage is correctly rendered by “dear.”

Two other passages may be compared. At *Iliad* 9. 144ff., Agamemnon says:

Because I have three daughters in my sturdy castle,  
Chrysothemis and Laodike and Iphianassa,  
Let him take away as his *philen* whichever of them he likes  
Without a dowry price to the house of Peleus . . .

At *Iliad* 3. 136ff., Iris says to Helen:

Alexandros and Menelaus, the warrior, will fight  
With long spears against each other to own you  
You shall be called the *phile* bedfellow of the one who wins you.

---

<sup>11</sup> “Beloved,” and not “friendly.” The active usages of φίλος applied to persons in Homer alleged by the lexicographers, (*Od.* I. 313) and (*Il.* 24. 775), can be translated as passive, and should be so translated.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., πίονα πενταέτηρον is used appropriately of a bull (*Il.* 2. 402), inappropriately of a pig, (*Od.* 14. 419).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., ἀμύμονος Αἰγίσθιο, (*Od.* 1. 29), is not a misapplied formula: ἀμύμων, belongs to the ἀρετή-group, and Aegisthus is as ἀγαθός as the suitors are.

The versions of the translators and editors are interesting. Lang, Leaf, and Myers in their translation, and Leaf and Bayfield in their notes, each translate the Helen example by “dear.” Leaf and Bayfield translate the other example by “own,” and add: “Here the original sense of the word, ‘own,’ is very well marked.” Lang, Leaf, and Myers do not translate the word at all on this occasion. The reason can only be that we know Helen to have been desirable, while we know nothing of Agamemnon’s daughters in this respect. The usage in the Greek seems identical. Indeed, “own” seems very apposite in the second passage, for *akoitis* simply means “bedfellow”;<sup>14</sup> some word seems needed to indicate that Helen will be the “own bedfellow,” without any possibility of dispute, of the victor in the single combat between Paris and Menelaus.

There are, then, a number of occurrences of *philos* in Homer in which the translation “dear” seems extraordinary, some in which “own” and “dear” seem equally appropriate, and of course a great number which we translate “dear” without question. If we adopt the strict lexicographical approach, we may say that *philos* originally “meant” (his, her, etc.) own, and gradually passed over into the meaning “dear.” Homeric Greek, however, has a full range of pronominal adjectives: if *philos* is a mere synonym, it seems a singularly unnecessary one. On the other side, we might maintain that in saying *philos thumos* and *phila eimata* Homer was using a strained “poetizing” diction, doubtless the result of formulaic technique. Here we must distinguish between (a) an expression introduced as normal usage by an earlier poet in the tradition that has not become obsolete or obsolescent and (b) an expression that was strained and unnatural at its first coining. The latter seems to me quite uncharacteristic of the Homeric poems; and in the former case we have still to explain why *philos* at some earlier period had, as its normal usage, the range that we find in Homer: I can discover no criteria for distinguishing an earlier from a later usage of *philos* in the poems as we have them.

At first sight this appears to be a difficult problem; but if we examine the use of *philos* in the context of Homeric society the solution seems clear. The Homeric *agathos* or warrior-chieftain was the head of a virtually autonomous household.<sup>15</sup> In Homer’s Ithaca the heads of such households might meet to decide questions that affected more than one of them; but they did not meet during the twenty years of Odysseus’ absence until Telemachus summoned a meeting just before his father’s return; and the lack of such meetings is nowhere said to be the cause of the troubles in

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. (*Il.* 6. 350).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *M&R*, p. 34.



Ithaca. The *agathos*, then, finds himself practically autonomous in a largely hostile or indifferent world, the nearer sections of which, being equally autonomous and in actual or possible competition with him for the produce of a not very fertile land, are quite as likely to be hostile as indifferent. I have tried to show elsewhere<sup>16</sup> that the *qualities* that the chieftain needs to survive in such a world are those commended by the Homeric use of *arete*. But no man can survive by his strength alone, without tools, possessions, and associates: what *things* (so to speak) can the Homeric *agathos* rely on? He has his own limbs and psychological functions, his tools, weapons, possessions, and portion of land; and he has his wife, children, servants, and other dependents. On these he can rely, or should be able to; apart from these, only on those with whom he has entered into relations of *philotes* or *xenia*. Human beings have no rights qua human beings in Homer,<sup>17</sup> only in virtue of some definite relationship, whether resulting from birth, from direct economic dependence, from marriage, or from some other cause. The rest of the world is indifferent or hostile: it competes.

If we try to imagine this situation as the *agathos* must have seen it, the reason for the range of the Homeric usage of *philos* becomes clear. In a hostile or indifferent world, the persons and things on which his survival depends must appear to him sharply defined from the rest of his environment. He is, accordingly, likely to use some word to demarcate these things from things in general: a man (or a society) is likely to classify his experience in the manner which seems most significant to him.

It is evident that *philos* in Homer demarcates in precisely this manner; and it should be equally evident that for this very reason no English word will render accurately the Homeric *philos*. We are not acutely conscious of possessing a limited stock of persons and things on whom our very existence depends. The Homeric *agathos* is; and it follows that his possession of them is of the utmost importance to him. I stress the word “possession.” He has these persons and these things that he can employ to ensure his continued existence. These things are his own: all else is hostile or indifferent, and the possessive affection he feels for what is *philon* is based on the need and desire for self-preservation. These are the good things, *agatha*, he possesses; and since the belief that human beings should be treated as ends-in-themselves rather than as means is totally un-Greek, there is no reason why persons and things should be thought of differently.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. “‘Honour’ and ‘Punishment’ in the Homeric Poems,” *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> The (post-Homeric) idiom χρῆσθαι φίλῳ is illuminating.

To distinguish the use of *philos* in Homer from the use of “friend” in English, we may usefully employ the distinction between the descriptive and the emotive aspect of the word. *Philos* is perhaps not a word that we should normally regard as a value-term; but undoubtedly anyone who uses *philos* of a person or a thing does so in virtue of an emotion that he feels for that person or thing, as does a man who uses the word “friend.”

It is clear that, in its range of application, the Homeric *philos* does not coincide with the English “dear” (or, when used as a noun, with the English “friend”); and that, though we could always use “own” where Homer uses *philos*, we feel in most cases that something important has been left out of the translation. We ought to feel this in all cases: what has been left out is the emotive aspect of *philos*, which is far more powerful than that of “own” in English, in proportion as the needs of the Homeric *agathos* are far more evident and urgent. The distinction between *philos* and “dear” or “friend” (in addition to the difference in range of application) is that we, with our very different society and presuppositions, include much more generosity in our view of friendship. The word is quite untranslatable, for it is locked firmly into the Homeric situation.

Homer’s view of *philotes*, the association of one human being with another, appears unappetizing, though thoroughly comprehensible. Thus far, however, we have only considered the manner in which A finds B “dear” to him: how A shows himself “friendly” to B must be discussed next. Since *philos* in Homer is always passive in sense, we must now examine examples of the Homeric use of *philein*. Ebeling divides these into (i) “*amo, diligo*” [love, hold dear] and (ii) “*bene aliquem tracto, imprimis officio accipio*” [treat someone well, especially welcome with help]. Though most of the examples considered here are drawn from Ebeling’s second group, I shall argue that there is really only one usage here, too.

We learn at *Iliad* 6. 14 ff. that a certain Axylus was:

A man of abundance and to everyone he was a host (*philos*)

Since he showed hospitality (*phileeden*) to all from his wayside house. Evidently, as one might expect, *philos* and *philein* are linked in usage.<sup>19</sup> Again, in *Odyssey* 13. 200, Telemachus, who has already experienced Nestor’s loquacity, on returning to Pylos asks Pisistratus to allow him to get down from the chariot and return to his ship before they reach the palace:

---

<sup>19</sup> Φίλος is passive here too: the φιλεῖν clause does not repeat the sense of the earlier clause, but *explains* why Axylus was φίλος to men.

For fear the old man in his desire to *phileein* me  
Will keep me in his house longer than I wish.

In l. 74 of the same book (which, though not in the best manuscripts, is Homeric/Hesiodic in thought and expression) we find:

One should *philein* a guest while he is present,  
But speed him on his way when he wishes to leave.

All these examples are listed under “welcome, treat kindly” by Ebeling. Ignoring for the moment the relationship between such examples and the rest, we may say that *philein* may denote merely the actions one can perform when the guest-friend is present; and that consequently one may *desire* to *philein* someone, but be prevented from doing so by his absence. In fact, in these examples at all events, *philein* requires of the subject of the verb not primarily emotions or intentions, which one might still have when the object of the verb was not present, but actions and results.

In the context of Homeric society, this is a familiar situation. In order to be a Homeric *agathos*, or to display Homeric *arete*, actions and results were necessary, not emotions or intentions.<sup>20</sup> The reason lay in the nature of Homeric society; and this is so also in the case of Homeric *philotes*. The essence of the *philos*-relationship is co-operation, not competition, so that we might expect intentions to be relevant,<sup>21</sup> but it is co-operation to meet the harsh demands of Homeric life. When a man is away from his own *oikos* he has no rights *qua* human beings, only the rights he is guaranteed by some member of the new society into which he has come.<sup>22</sup> He is a *hiketes*, a comer (or suppliant, for all comers must be suppliants); and if accepted, he may be given the status of *xeinos*<sup>23</sup> by someone sufficiently powerful member of society, some *agathos*. Now this relationship only subsists between the comer and the man who *philei* him. The unit of power, the social unit, the economic unit is the individual *oikos*; accordingly, the comer has no relationship of *philotes* with the remainder of society into which he has come. When he is in the *oikos* of the man who *philei* him, he is dependent on the *actions* of that man for his continued existence, outnumbered as he is in a land of potential enemies with no strong centralized government and no belief that human beings have

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *M&R*, pp. 46 ff.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. “‘Honour’ and ‘Punishment,’” p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> This comer can be termed φίλος only prospectively if he is an equal (cf. *Od. I.* 158, where Telemachus does not know who his guest is), not at all if he is unlikely ever to be able to φιλεῖν in return.

certain rights *qua* human beings. Furthermore, the comer, particularly if he comes by land, can carry little with him: this is a society with no coined money, no readily transportable wealth. What he needs is not primarily sympathy or affection, which are luxuries for a man in his position, but actions: the provision of food, shelter, and protection if he needs it—in short, *time*.<sup>24</sup>

This may readily be illustrated. Odysseus, in *Odyssey* 8. 208, excepts Laodamas from his general challenge to the youth of Phaeacia to compete with him in athletics, saying:

“For he is my host; who would fight with the person who *phileonti* him?”

Ebeling does not list this as an example of the senses of “welcome, treat kindly”; but this is evidently the same use of *philein*. Odysseus is not saying that it would be morally wrong to strive with one who has friendly feelings for you. He continues:

Certainly, any man would be called a fool and worthless,  
Who, as a guest among strange people, offers to challenge  
His host in contests? Such a man damages what is his.

To compete with one’s host would be the height of folly; and the reason is clear: the games are one field for the display of *arete*, the most important Homeric quality. To defeat a man is to *aischunein* his *arete*,<sup>25</sup> to cause him *elegchein*. No greater affront can be caused to one Homeric hero by another; and this makes dispute and anger certain when it is caused, so that *an . . . machoito* and *erida . . . aethlon* are not overstatements. Now the man in a strange land may not need friendly feelings from his protector, but he cannot afford to quarrel with him. He needs non-hostile actions, “friendly relations” in the sense in which one autonomous state may maintain such relations with another.<sup>26</sup> On his side, the feeling is one of reliance.

In Homer, then, there are two aspects of the *philotes*-relationship, expressed by *philos* and *philein*. When the chief concern of the *agathos* is to secure his own continued existence, a *philon* object, whether animate or

<sup>24</sup> Cf. “‘Honour’ and ‘Punishment,’” *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Il.* 23, 571, and *M&R*, p. 56. The *ἐλεγχεί* is felt most acutely when a man considered “worse” defeats a man considered “better”; but a stranger is likely to be considered “worse;” and if he wishes, as Odysseus does, to disprove this, then strife will result.

<sup>26</sup> For such a use of *φιλία* in later Greek, cf. *SIG* 3.1122, *Thuc.* 6.78. (I am indebted to Professor Dover for these examples.)

inanimate, is something he can rely on to use for his own preservation. But *arete*, the quality of the *agathos*, is also shown in protecting one's dependents, whether permanent residents or transients; and *philein*, which, as we can see from the examples quoted above, includes giving food, lodging, and protection to transients, characterizes this activity, at all events in its less violent manifestations.<sup>27</sup>

In the second part of this article, I shall discuss the degree of selfishness of the different types of Aristotelian *philia*; and it will be convenient to discuss first Homeric *philotes* from this point of view. If one considers only the usage of *philos*, such *philotes* appears entirely selfish; but clearly one does not *philein* a person from immediately selfish motives: when one *philei* a man who has come from a distance, he is the *immediate* beneficiary. In normal circumstances he cannot be a benefactor while he is in a strange land. *Philein* is to bring a person within (or if he is already a *philos*, to continue him within) a circle of cooperation whose members have a right to feel mutual reliance and a right to whatever basic necessities are available for consumption).<sup>28</sup> When one *philei* a member of one's own *oikos*, the pattern is the same: *philein* is to do useful services for a man, not in order to make him *immediately* more useful to oneself, but simply to secure his own existence in his own interest. It is not, of course, an altruistic act. It makes, and is intended to make, the other person a *philon* object on whose help one can rely when one needs it, perhaps at some distant future time if he is a *philos* from some distance, almost at once if he is a member of the same *oikos*. *Philein* is an *act* which creates or maintains a co-operative relationship; and *it need not be accompanied by any friendly feeling at all*: it is the action that is all-important.

The range of *philotes* in Homer illustrates the importance of the *philotes*-relationship. Every relationship from sexual passion to guest-friendship,<sup>29</sup> relationships whose differences we should emphasize much more than their resemblances, is denoted by *philotes*. The reason is evidently not that the Greeks were unusually warm friends or unusually cold lovers, but that a different aspect of these relationships is emphasized by *philotes*. The reason for the range of *philotes* is the same as that for the range of *philos*. In a hostile or indifferent world, a small number of persons is united with the Homeric *agathos* in co-operative relationships. Naturally this resemblance between the relationships seems to him much

---

<sup>27</sup> For this aspect of ἀρετή cf. *M&R*, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> κοινὰ τὰ φίλων would be a principle of great value to a wanderer in a moneyless society.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Od.* 10. 366; *II.* 3.354.

more important than the differences: *philotes* denotes the structure of that part of the world which is, or should be, reliable.

The existence of such *philotes*-relationships is naturally of the utmost importance; and this may have results that appear odd to us. In *Iliad* 6. 119ff., the Greek Diomedes meets the Lycian Glaucus and, in the conversational manner of Homeric fighting, asks him who he is. Glaucus replies that he is the son of Hippolochus and grandson of Bellerophon; whereupon Diomedes says at 215ff.:

You are my guest-friend from the time of our fathers  
Shining Oineus once hosted Bellerophontes,  
The blameless, keeping him for twenty days at his abode  
And the two exchanged fine gifts of friendship.

He concludes, 224ff.:

I am thus your host (*philos*) in the midst of Argos  
And you are mine in Lukia whenever I come to your country.

He suggests that in consequence they should avoid one another in the fighting and look for enemies elsewhere among the armies.

These two men have never seen one another before, and yet, in virtue of a compact of guest-friendship made between their grandfathers, they will not fight against one another in a war in which they find themselves on opposite sides. *Philotes* is the basic structure of co-operative life: Diomedes is far more closely bound to a Lycian who is his *philos* than to a Greek who is not, even during the Trojan War. This is not a war between nation states: the *oikos* in peace, and the contingent loyal to an *agathos*, their local lord, in war, are the largest co-operating units in normal circumstances. *Philotes* furnishes Homeric life with such stability as it possesses and is a permanent thing which cannot be overset by a transient occurrence such as the Trojan War; and it does not depend on the feelings or inclinations of individuals who inherit it, since Glaucus and Diomedes have never seen one another before. It follows that *philotes*-relationships have a very objective character: we can now see why Amphiarus was Eriphyle's *philos aner*, once she had entered into the relationship of co-operation and reliance with him, whatever her subsequent feelings for Amphiarus. Even in this extreme case *philos* is not reduced to “own”: the differences, as I have already said, lie in the emotive aspect of the word;<sup>30</sup> and this, like its range of application, is closely related to the structure of Homeric society.

---

<sup>30</sup> See my earlier remarks.

The Homeric usage of *philos* and *philein* has great importance for Greek ethical thought. To illustrate this, in the remainder of this article I shall discuss a short passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN 1155b 17–1156b 32), and try both to elucidate it and to show its wider significance. For this purpose, it must be emphasized that Homeric *philotes* is not really co-operative, but *reciprocal*: when A *philei* B, he is not behaving as a *philos* to B, for *philos* is passive; but B finds A to be a *philon* object when A *philei* him, and A will find B to be a *philon* object when B *philei* him. In the case of members of the same *oikos*, A may be doing a service for B while B is doing a service for A; but the two aspects, *philon* and *philein*, remain quite distinct. These distinctions may appear to be hair-splitting: the remainder of the article will show their importance.

The passage begins at 1155b 17:

Perhaps the answer to these questions will become clear if we ascertain the types of things that arouse love (*phileton*) for it seems that not everything is *phileisthai* but only the loveable (*phileton*) and that this is good, pleasant or useful.

The next relevant passage is 1155b 27ff.:

There are three motives, then, because of which people *philousin*; the term *philia* is not applied to the *philesei*<sup>31</sup> of inanimate objects because there is no *antiphilesis* nor a wish for the good of the object (For example, it would be ludicrous to wish well to a bottle of wine—At most one would wish that it would keep well for personal consumption); but for one's *philoï* they say one ought to wish good things for his own sake.

Aristotle goes on to say that to wish a friend well for his own sake is to show *eunoia*,<sup>32</sup> and that if the person for whom one feels *eunoia* is aware of it and returns the feeling, on account of one of the *phileta* (*agathon*, *chresimon*, or *hedu*) mentioned above, this is *philia*. Rackham, the Loeb translator, renders the passage thus:

To be friends, therefore, men must (i) feel goodwill for one another, that is, wish each other's good, and (ii) be aware of each other's goodwill, and (iii) the cause of their goodwill must be one of the loveable qualities mentioned above.

---

<sup>31</sup> Φίλησις and ἀντιφίλησις here each refer to the φίλον-aspect of φιλία. They may also refer to the φιλεῖν-aspect, c.f. 1168a 19.

<sup>32</sup> Discussed below.

The next paragraph begins at 1156a 6:

These qualities differ in kind (*eidei*), therefore, affection (*phileseis*) and friendship (*philiai*) differ in kind also. There are thus three kinds of friendship (*philiās*) corresponding to the three loveable qualities (*philetois*) for an *antiphilēsis* of which both parties are aware can be based on each of the three and when men *philountes* each other they wish good things for each other in respect of that for which they *philousin* each other.

Up to *tautei hei philousin* it seems quite evident that Aristotle means what Rackham’s translation of the earlier passage would suggest: a man wishes good things for his *philos*, and his reason for doing so, the reason why he has the other as his *philos*, is that the *philos* possesses one of the *phileta*: he is *agathos*, *chresimos*, or *hedus* to him. The *agatha* that A does or wishes for B, since these are “equal *philiai*”<sup>33</sup> are of the same kind as A receives: if the *philia* is on account of the *chresimon*, then A has B as his friend because B is useful to him, and the *agatha* which A does or wishes for B are things which B will find useful. This seems a reasonable schema, and quite Greek in tone, up to *taute he philousin*, which is ambiguous. “A and B want good things for one another in the manner in which each *philei* the other” could be analyzed as I have suggested; but Stewart<sup>34</sup> glosses the words thus:

Friends wish good to each other in respect of that which is the ground of their friendship—virtue, pleasure or utility: i.e., they wish their friends to be as virtuous, as pleasant or as useful as possible.

This seems to be the usually accepted interpretation.

*Prima facie* Stewart seems to be correct, for Aristotle immediately continues at 1156a 10:

Thus, those *philountes* each other *philousin* each other not for themselves, but in respect in respect of their quality by which something good comes to each from the other.<sup>35</sup> And the same holds true for those whose basis is pleasure. For example, we enjoy being with witty folk not because we like them, as such, but because they are good company. Thus, those *philountes* for utility appreciate the other for what is good (*agathon*) for themselves, and those *philountes* for pleasure appreciate the other for what is pleasant for themselves, not in

<sup>33</sup> Unequal φιλίαι, 1163a 24ff. could be similarly analyzed.

<sup>34</sup> J.A. Stewart, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892): II. 274.

<sup>35</sup>This phrase, and κατὰ συμβεβηκός, will be discussed below.



that he is *philoumenos* but in that he is useful or pleasant; therefore, these *philiai* are based upon some accidental quality for it is not as being who he is that the *philoumenos phileitōi*, but as providing in the one case some good or in the other some pleasure.<sup>36</sup>

If Aristotle can maintain that both those who *philein* on account of the *chresimon* and those who *philein* on account of the *hedu* “feel affection for”<sup>37</sup> their *philos* on account of their own *agathon* (or *hedu*), not for what the friend is, but for being useful or pleasant, it seems clear that the transaction is entirely selfish, and Stewart’s gloss fully justified: A, in desiring good things for B, desires things that A, not B, will find to be *agathon*. But if this is the case, Aristotle cannot also assert, as he does in a passage already quoted, that one cannot have *philia* with wine. That passage refers explicitly to all three *phileta*, and hence to all types of *philia*. Aristotle is arguing that one cannot have any type of *philia* with wine; and one proof is that it would be ridiculous to want good things for the wine for its own sake in an unselfish sense: one merely wishes to have it for oneself; that it may exist in such a manner as to be (more) pleasant or (more) useful to oneself. But this is precisely the manner in which, according to Stewart, one does *philia* one’s pleasant or useful *philoī*; and if this is sufficient proof that one cannot have *philia* with wine, it seems that either Aristotle or Stewart, or possibly both, has become confused. *Philia kat’areten*, however, remains to be discussed. Perfect *philia* (1156b 7ff.) is:

The *philia* of those who are good and resemble each other in excellence (*arete*), such friends wish each other’s good in respect to their goodness, and they are good, in themselves. But it is those who wish their *philois* good things (for their friend’s sake) who are friends in the fullest sense. For they do this because of their own nature and not as a result of an accidental quality. Therefore, the *philia* of these lasts as long as they continue to be good: excellence is an enduring quality.

The use of *ekeinon heneka* is a linguistic trick. Earlier (1155b 31) in a passage which is relevant to all three types of *philia*, *ekeinou heneka* is used in an “ordinary Greek” sense, and must be intended to include wanting useful or pleasant things for a man “for his own sake.” Here, however, “for their own sake” is opposed to “as a result of some accidental

<sup>36</sup> This clause might well appear neatly parallel to ταύτη ἢ φιλοῦσιν, above.

<sup>37</sup> It should not be assumed that these are synonyms for φιλεῖν. See below for further discussion. φιλεῖν-aspect, cf. 1168a 19.

quality”; and this must refer back to the same phrase in 1156a 16, and be intended to exclude the other two types of *philia*; and if we accept Stewart’s interpretation, the effect of the linguistic trick is to suggest that *philia kat’areten* is (largely) unselfish, the other two types of *philia* completely selfish.

Aristotle’s terminology suggests this in other ways. He speaks of *philia* on account of pleasure and utility. Surely in 1156b 7ff. we should expect to be informed quite soon why (on account of what) *agathoi philousin* one another, or alternatively to be told that there are no selfish reasons for this. Aristotle avoids this question for some time; but at 1156b 19 we are informed that all *philia* exists on account of *agathon* or *hedone*, either *haplos* or for the person who *philei*. This does not mean that *Agathos A philei Agathos B* on account of an *agathon* that is not *agathon* for *Agathos A* himself, but for *Agathos B*, whereas *Chresimos A* and *Hedus A philousi Chresimos B* and *Hedus B* on account of *agatha* which are only *agatha* for themselves, *Chresimos A* and *Hedus A*. It means that all men *philousin* on account of the things which are or seem to them to be *agatha* for themselves, but that in case of *agathoi* the things that are *agatha* for them are also *haplos agatha*. Quite late in the discussion we are informed that all three types of *philia* are equally selfish.<sup>38</sup> Earlier, Aristotle carefully avoids mention of any reason for the *philia* of *agathoi*. He does not say “those who *philousin* on account of the *agathon*,” but instead insists that these men are *haplos agathoi* (though they are also *agathoi* to their *philo* [1156b 13] and this [b14] is evidently equivalent to “beneficial to one another”).

This is very curious. Aristotle began by saying that the nature of *philia* would become clearer if the nature of the *phileton* were discussed. He divided the *phileton* into *agathon*, *hedu*, and *chresimon* (1155b 17ff.); and (1156a 7ff.) maintained that there were three types of *philia*, equal in number to the *phileta*—implying some kind of correspondence.<sup>39</sup> But the best type of *philia* is not treated as *philia* on account of the *agathon*, but as *philia* in respect of *arete*. Yet Aristotle finds the division into *phileta* so important that he begins his detailed discussion with it.

Aristotle’s purpose is to contrast *philia kat’areten* as sharply as possible with the other types of *philia*. This is also the purpose of Stewart:

---

<sup>38</sup> For *ἀπλως ἀγαφόν* does not mean “ἀγαθόν for both A and B at the same time,” but “really ἀγαθόν for A” who finds things which are really ἀγαθόν for him because he is ἀγαθός.

<sup>39</sup> This remains true even though the *φιλητά* can be reduced to two (1155b 19ff.): though *χρήσιμον* is only *χρήσιμον* because it is a means to *ἀγαφόν* or *ἡδονη*, three types of *φιλία* can easily be distinguished by the appropriate *φιλητά*.

liking a man because he is virtuous (to mistranslate both *philein* and *agathos* in the usual manner) is very different from liking a man because he is useful, and A's desire that B should become more virtuous is very different from C's desire that D should become more useful to him. There are indeed points of contrast between the types of *philia*, even if they are not those suggested by Aristotle's Greek, or by Stewart's interpretation of that Greek; but the real nature of the differences can best be indicated by pointing out the resemblances in structure of all three types, which Aristotle and Stewart in different ways conceal.

To reveal these resemblances, we must now consider Aristotle in the light of what we have learned from Homer; and a passage already discussed (1156a 6ff.) is particularly relevant. From 1155b 17 to 1156a 5 Aristotle is recording and basing his argument upon "ordinary Greek";<sup>40</sup> but from 1156a 6, he discusses *philia* in his own philosophical terminology, and the language immediately becomes more precise. While discussing "ordinary Greek," Aristotle treats *phileta* the direct object of *philein*; but at 1156a 10, as we have seen, he introduces the phrases "*philein* on account of the useful" and "*philein* on account of pleasure": it is the other man who is the object of *philein*, and the *phileton* is the reason for the activity, *philein*. Now the Homeric *agathos philei*, benefits, other people, in the hope that at some future time he will find them useful or beneficial to him: in the hope, that is, that they will then possess what Aristotle terms a *phileton*: we have at least a linguistic parallel with the Homeric situation.

That we have, in fact, much more than this is shown by the opening sentences of the discussion of *philia*, 1155a 1ff.:

Our next topic will be to discuss *philias*. For friendship is an *arete* or involves excellence, and is a central necessity of life. No one would choose to live without friends (*philon*) even if he possessed all other good things. In fact, the wealthy rulers and powerful men are thought especially to require friends (*philon*) since what use would their affluence be without an outlet for their beneficence which is displayed most and most praised when displayed toward friends (*philous*)? Indeed, how would it be guarded and kept safe without *philon*? And in the state of poverty or any other misfortune men view friends (*philous*) as their sole resource.

The resemblance seems complete *philo*i may still be regarded as external *agatha*: they are necessities of life for both rich and poor. Again, no

---

<sup>40</sup> 1155b 18 δοκεῖ, b23 δοκεῖ, b28 λέγεται, b31 φασί, b32 λέγουσιν.

affection is expressed for one’s *philoï*: the rich and powerful man, the *agathos*, needs friends to benefit, as an exercise of his *arete*, just as he *needs* them to protect him against his enemies. Clearly in Aristotle, as in Homer, one may speak of a *Philon*-aspect and a *philein*-aspect of *philia*. When one finds someone *philon*, one feels emotion, of an entirely selfish kind, as in Homer, for an external *agathon* : this is *philesis* which (1155b 27) one may have for wine. To *philia* both *philon*-aspect and *philein*-aspect are necessary: the reason why one may not have *philia* with wine is both the absence of any *antiphilesis*, reciprocal selfish emotion felt by the wine, and also that it would be ridiculous to benefit wine in its own interest.

In essentials, the concept of *philia* remains as it was in Homer. Nor is this surprising, for in essentials the conditions of life have not changed. I have tried to show elsewhere<sup>41</sup> that the individual paterfamilias of fourth-century Athens is still in much the same position, and has much the same values, as the head of the Homeric *oikos*. His aim, as Crito’s advice to Socrates shows,<sup>42</sup> is to help his *philoï* and to harm his enemies, in accordance with the law or in defiance of the law, as occasion demands. These are the requirements of *arete* as commonly recognized;<sup>43</sup> and the average Greek in the position of Socrates would have expected his *philoï* to display their *arete* and *philein* him by making every effort to rescue him from prison and execution, thereby showing themselves to be external *agatha* for him. In such circumstances, just as in Homeric society, actions and results are needed, not emotions or intentions. *Philein*, then, must lay emphasis on actions, as in Homer; and in such a society, no less than in Homer, one needs *philoï* as external *agatha*. Socrates’ needs are extreme, or would be if he wished to escape; but the paterfamilias could look to none but his *philoï* for any material help he might need: actions and results must be most important in all cases.

Before discussing this situation, we must consider *eunoia*. At 1155b 33ff., already quoted, reciprocated and mutually recognized *philia* is *eunoia*; and we might translate this in such a way as to suggest that *philia* consists in disinterested generous emotion felt by both *philoï*. But *eunoia* is to wish *agatha* for someone else (1155b 32) *on account of* one of the *phileta* (1156a 5) as it expresses no generous emotion for the man as a man, merely the wish that good things may come to him because he is (say) *chresimos* to oneself. If two *chresimoi* do this, Aristotle, in this passage of “ordinary opinions,” is willing to term the result *philia*; but at

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *M&R*, Ch. 11, especially, pp. 230ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Crito*, 45c 5ff.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. also Plato *Meno* 71e 2ff., and *M&R*, pp. 228ff.

1166b 30 it is not only not *philia* but not *eunoia* either: *eunoia*, 1167a 8 (Adkins, tr.):

Only wish *tagatha* to those to whom they are *eunoi*: they would not join with them in any activity or inconvenience themselves on their behalf. Accordingly, one might term *eunoia* “inactive *philia*.”

However, it might become *philia* on account of the *chresimon* or the *hedu*; for *eunoia* does not come about on these terms in the first place (A). For the man who has been benefited by another, renders *eunoia* in return for his benefits (B)—and this is just; but the man who wishes another to fare well because he hopes to become prosperous through his agency does not seem to be *eunous* to him but rather to himself, just as he is not a *philos* either, if he does services on account of some use, he hopes to make of him (D). In short, *eunoia* comes about *on account of some arete* or good quality . . . (E).

The contrast is clear: *philia* requires activity, *eunoia* merely “wishing good things.” But Aristotle is attempting much more than this here: he wishes to restrict the use of *eunoia* (A, E) and *philia* (D) to the field of *philia kat’areten*.<sup>44</sup> (D), however, characterizes what Aristotle earlier terms “*philia* on account of the *chresimon*,” and proves that our account of such *philia* is correct; and the denial that wishing *agatha* for a man in the hope that he will later prove useful is *eunoia* is restricted in 1166b 30ff. to a feeling (disinterested, one would suppose) Occasioned by another man’s *arete*, though (B), which almost equates *eunoia* with gratitude, and “*on account of some arete* in “(E)” might give us second thoughts. It is clear, at all events, that *eunoia* does not affect the structure of the *philia*-relationship: *eunoia* on account of the *chresimon* is no less self-centered than *philia* on account of the *chresimon*, and *eunoia kat’areten* exists because of the other’s *arete* in exactly the same manner as does *philia kat’areten*. The discussion of *philia kat’areten* below will show the extent to which *eunoia kat’areten* is self-centered.

We can now remove the misunderstandings of the nature of Greek *philia* caused both by Aristotle’s Greek and by Stewart’s interpretation. Since “*philein* on account of the *chresimon*” does not mean “to like a man because he is useful” but “to do useful services for a man because he is (or has been, or will be, or is under contract to be) useful to you” *philia* on account of the *chresimon* (and *philia* account of the *hedu* can be similarly

---

<sup>44</sup> This despite his use of “φιλία on account of the χρήσιμον or the ἥδον” earlier in the passage quoted (1167a 12). Aristotle’s language is confused here. The reason for the usual range of φιλία in Aristotle is of course the same as that for the range of φιλότης in Homer, see above.

analyzed) and is not so self-centered as Stewart implies. (Nor is *eunoia* as self-centered as Stewart’s *philia*: though one only wishes *agatha* for the other man, one does wish things that will be useful to him, not to oneself.) 1156a 10 ff. may be translated as follows, rendering *philein* as “treat in a friendly manner,” and interpreting this as signifying actions only [Adkins tr.]:

Those who treat one another in a friendly manner on account of the useful do not treat each other thus because of what the other is in himself, but in respect of the aspect of each other through which some *agathon* comes to them from each other (A). And similarly, those who treat one another in a friendly manner on account of pleasure; for they do not like (B) wits because they are the sort of people they are, but because they are pleasant to them. Those then who treat one another in a friendly manner on account of the useful feel affection for one another (C) each on account of his own *agathon* (D), and those who do this on account of pleasure feel affection for one another each on account of his own *hedu*, and not in respect of what the man so treated really is, but in respect of his usefulness or pleasantness (E).

This removes the misinterpretation of Stewart; but Aristotle, too, is trying to draw a false distinction between *philia kat’areten* and the other types. That he is at the same time pointing out a genuine contrast makes the paragraph more difficult. The genuine contrast is expressed by (A) and (E) above: one *philei* on account of the useful or pleasant because of some accidental characteristic, useful or pleasant, that the other man possesses; whereas in *philia kat’areten* one *philei*, treats the other in a friendly manner, because the other man is what he is. This is an important difference, but it does not prove that the *pattern* of *philia* is not the same here as in the other cases. We have already seen that Aristotle admits that all Greek *philia* exists on account of the *agathon* or the *hedu*, and the fact that the other man is an *agathon* because he is what he is<sup>45</sup> does not affect the pattern at all.

The false distinction is expressed in the remainder of the quotation. In (B) and (C) “like” and “feel affection for” lay emphasis on the *philon*-aspect of such *philia*, for such affection is only felt for the other in virtue of the *philon*-aspect; and though the *philein*-aspect was mentioned in the previous sentence, by appending his explanation to the *philon*-aspect and to the selfish emotion aroused by this aspect Aristotle emphasizes the

---

<sup>45</sup> The implications of this phrase are discussed below.

latter: it would be just as true, however, to say that men *philein* wits, treat them in a friendly manner, not because they are what they are, but because they are pleasant to them. (D) is true but misleading: such men do feel affection of a selfish kind on account of their own *agathon*: but this is true of *philia kat'areten* as well, so that it is unfair to write as if it were merely a defect of the other types of *philia*.

In fact, throughout his discussion of *philia* on account of the useful or the pleasant, Aristotle is emphasizing the *philon*-aspect of such *philia*, though the *philein*-aspect is present just as in *philia kat'areten*. The *philein*-aspect is given the most prominent place in the discussion of *philia kat'areten*, though Aristotle cannot deny that the *philon*-aspect exists and is important here, too. We can now interpret 1156b 9ff. more accurately [Adkins tr.] :

But those who want *tagatha* for their *philo*i for *their* sake are most of all *philo*i; for they are in this condition *on account of what they are in themselves* (*di'autous*), not as a result of some accidental quality.

The parallelism of “on account of what they are in themselves” with “on account of the useful” shows that the meaning is “each *philei*, on account of what the other is in himself,” that is *agathos*, which constitutes him as an *agathos* for the man who *philei*. The similarity of structure is complete.

In order to understand the implications of Aristotle’s analysis of *philia kat'areten*, we have to remember that the *agathoi* are not simply “good,” nor is *arete* “virtue”: *agathos* and *arete* denote and commend a leisured social class, the only men who are to be citizens in the state advocated in the *Politics*. They are financially secure landed proprietors: any help they need from one another will be in the fields of politics, the law courts, and war. In Greek thought from the late fifth century onwards these are the fields in which *arete* is pre-eminently displayed:<sup>46</sup> when help is needed by an Aristotelian *agathos*, it is of the *arete* of the other *agathos* that he has need, and it is *on account of* this *arete* that he *philei* the other *agathos*. He will feel a strong and selfish emotion when he needs him under the *philon*-aspect: he need feel none when he *philei*.

Aristotle tries to conceal the similarity of structure of the three types of *philia*. The remainder of this article will attempt to show his reasons for doing so, and will also point out certain tensions present in such a concept of *philia kat'areton*, which have important effects upon Aristotle’s moral philosophy.

---

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *M&R*, chs. 10 and 11.

The discussion of *megalopsuchia* is relevant here. The *megalopsuchos* is (one of) Aristotle’s ideals. He is termed *aristos* (1123b 27): he is possessed of *arete* in the highest degree. Aristotle says of this paragon (1124b 9) [Adkins, tr.]:

And he is the sort of man to confer benefits, but he is ashamed when he is benefited; for the one is the mark of a superior, the other of an inferior. And if benefited, he gives more in exchange; for in this manner the man who began the benefiting incurs a debt and will have been benefited himself. And such men seem to remember the benefits they confer, but not those they receive . . . and to hear about the one with pleasure, the other without pleasure. . . .It is the mark of the *megalopsuchos* also to need nothing, or hardly anything . . . .

He adds (1125a 11) [Adkins, tr.]:

He is the sort of man to have possessions which are *kala* and *akarpa* rather than productive and beneficial ones; for it is more the mark of an *autarkes*.

We have here an account of the social relationships, the *philiai*, of the man who (up to Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) is most *agathos* in Aristotle’s eyes: he confers benefits rather than receives them, he has beautiful and unproductive possessions (and a large and productive property that enables him to afford such things); and he is self-sufficient, or as near to it as possible. Here too, as in the case of *philia kat’areten*, the *philein*-aspect is emphasized, the *philon*-aspect left to the background; and we see how important it is that the *agathos* should be self-sufficient. The keynote of *arete* is self-sufficiency, as it has been since Homer, and for the same reasons. We have seen that the Athenian pater-familias of the fifth and fourth centuries needed to be almost as self-sufficient as the Homeric head of *oikos*. *Arete* always commended those qualities that seemed most necessary to the survival of the social unit;<sup>47</sup> hence to become more self-sufficient, to need less help, was to become more *agathos*, more like the *megalopsuchos*, remembering the occasions on which one *philei*, not those on which, falling short in self-sufficiency, one needs help and finds someone *philon*. Self-sufficiency is the ideal for the Homeric and later Greek head of family, in so far as he considers himself *agathos*. The ideal is incapable of realization: the *agathos* is certain to need *agatha*, including *philoï*, that he does not possess; but this fact is minimized as

---

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *M&R*, *passim*.



much as possible.

In *philia kat'areten* then, there is a tension between actual needs and the ideal. In ordinary circumstances equilibrium is maintained, for no man can do without *philoï*. But if one could by some means be self-sufficient without *philoï*, there seems no need to have any: *hotan ho daimon eu didoi, ti dei philon?*<sup>48</sup> Ordinarily, this is impossible: no man can become so *agathos* or so *eudaimon* as to be entirely self-sufficient; but if fortune grants prosperity in a new and unusual sense, and a man becomes capable of *theoria*, the situation is different. In *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, Aristotle maintains that *theoria* is the highest *arete*:<sup>49</sup> it is hence the highest state of *eudaimonia* for man, and is thus contrasted with the lesser *eudaimonia* of the life of practical *arete*, 1177a 27ff. [Adkins, tr.]:

And the quality which is called self-sufficiency would exist most in relation to the theoretic life; for while the wise man and the just and the rest need the basic necessities of life, yet when they are sufficiently supplied with these, whereas the just man needs men to whom he can behave justly and with whom he can behave justly, the wise man can indulge in *theoria* even by himself; *perhaps* he will do better if he has fellow workers, but nevertheless, he is the most self-sufficient of men.

Here the tension between two aspects of *philia kat'areten* is resolved by abolishing the need for either of them. One *philei* another by striving to secure for him *agatha* of the kind he needs, or desires, in the hope of receiving a like return one day; but if one no longer needs the return, there seems no need to *philein* in the first instance; and this is as true of *philia kat'areten* as of the other types of *philia*. If one can practice *theoria* without *philoï*, then, since *theoria* is Aristotle's highest *arete*, two results follow: *eudaimonia* and behavior in accordance with *arete* no longer require associates, so that *arete* and *philia* are no longer related, and there is no reason why the *agathos* should have *philoï*, and self-sufficiency, which has been the goal since Homer, has been achieved. (It has been achieved, of course, only for *agathoi* in Aristotle's new sense: the remaining inhabitants of the city will have to form *philiai* of different types in order to maintain the philosophers in their splendid isolation; but this fact is of much less interest to Aristotle.)

---

<sup>48</sup> Quoted by Aristotle, *EN* 1169b 7.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *M&R*, pp. 344 ff.

It should be clear, however, that these results derive from the structure of Greek society and Greek values as a whole, not from any belief peculiar to Aristotle—and Plato.<sup>50</sup> True, theoretic activity is a new kind of *arete* developed and commended by philosophers, a new kind of men; but the existence of *theoria* merely serves to aggravate the problem, which is always present in Greek values from Homer onwards: though the oddities (as they appear to us) in the Homeric range of *philos* as applied to things vanish long before Aristotle, the situation that produced the Homeric usage plays, as we have seen, a major part in shaping the Aristotelian ethic. The tensions in the Greek view of *arete* and *philia* exist independently of Aristotle, and any other form of completely self-sufficient activity would produce the same difficulties. The extent to which Aristotle feels these difficulties is indicated by the curious nature of the arguments he is obliged to use to explain the fact that *agathoi* do have *philoï*.<sup>51</sup> I have no space to discuss these arguments on this occasion; but their contortions show the gravity of the problems which faced the Greek moral philosopher in his efforts to create a civic morality out of the primitive and intractable materials which lay at hand.

---

<sup>50</sup> Who has (but does not acknowledge) the same problem? C.f. *M&R*, pp. 290 ff. *EN* 9.7

<sup>51</sup> Notably (but not exclusively) the *alter ego* arguments of *EN* 1169 b3 ff. need an article all to themselves for adequate discussion.

## CHAPTER TWO

# ARISTOTLE AND THE BEST KIND OF TRAGEDY

### Introduction

The generally accepted manner in which Aristotle's *Poetics*, ch. 13 (1452b 20ff.) sets out its argument is as follows:

Chapter 13: *The Aim and Function of Tragedy*

1. A good plot is one that is complex and works by creating a whole that arouses pity (*eleos*) and fear (*phobos*)—Fact (earlier argument)<sup>1</sup>
2. [Pity and fear are aroused only through actions based partially upon desert]—Assertion
3. Option A: Portraying a good (*epieikes*) man who moves from fortune to misfortune through no fault of his own arouses aversion in the audience not pity and fear—2
4. [Aversion is unlike pity and fear and works against good art]—Assertion
5. Option A is not a good plot structure—1-4
6. Option B: Portraying a bad man who moves from misfortune to fortune by happenstance does not evoke pity and fear nor is it sympathetic for the audience—2

---

<sup>1</sup> This style of argument reconstruction comes from Michael Boylan, *Critical Inquiry* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2009) and *The Process of Argument: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020). After each premise is a justification for the premise: A[ssertion] refers to the say-so of the speaker only [in this case Aristotle]; F[act] refers to agreement between speaker and an audience; numbers—e.g., 2,3 indicate an inference: if you read and accept the truth of premises 2 and 3 you must logically accept this premise. The use of square brackets [ ] around a premise refer to an enthymeme—this is a premise not explicitly mentioned in the text but it is assumed by the speaker, Aristotle, and is necessary to generate his conclusion.

7. [Sympathy from the audience is a secondary factor by which to judge a plot]—Assertion
8. Option B is not a good plot structure—1, 6, 7
9. Option C: Portraying a bad man who moves from fortune to misfortune is to show a person getting what he fully deserves, i.e., punishment—Fact
10. Though there is sympathy in #9, there is no pity or fear—9,2
11. Option C is not a good plot structure—1, 9, 10
12. Option D: Portraying a moderately good man who moves from fortune to misfortune partially due to his weaknesses or character flaw (deserts) evokes pity and fear—2

---

13. Option D is the best plot structure—1, 5, 8, 11, 12

For the most part, Adkins reading of chapter 13 is consonant with my reconstruction of the argument. *Epieikes* is the cornerstone of this essay. How *good* (decent) may the main character be in a drama? Since there is a change in the character's condition, what moral background conditions support a reasonable, cathartic outcome? The answer to this question is the key to understanding this argument.

“Moral mistake” (*hamartia*), sometimes referred to as the *tragic flaw* is also a pivotal term. Much of the first half of the essay is devoted to the analysis of how *hamartia* is understood by common language of ordinary Greeks of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. It is important that the main character is not an evil person as understood by Adkins' rendering of the traditional Homeric understanding of excellence (*arete*) and preeminence denoted by *agathos*.<sup>2</sup> In this way Adkins brings a reading of competitive versus co-operative excellences into the arena to interpret Aristotle's text.

Further, it is key for Adkins to set down just *what sort of* mistake the tragic hero might make. For the answer to this, Adkins turns to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle contrasts two sorts of “mistake” or “ignorance”—from not understanding either the *universal* or the *particular facts*. Aristotle concludes that only ignorance of the facts is excusable.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that many translate *arete* as “virtue” and *agathos* as “morally good.”

<sup>3</sup> **Book 3, Chapter One, 1109b 30-1111a 24**

1. Virtue is about feelings and actions--Fact (from previous argument)/ 1109b 30

2. People are only praised or blamed when they act voluntarily—Fact/1109b 32

3. A treatise on virtue must include an examination of the voluntary--1, 2/ 1109b 33

This is an important application and connects Adkins' literary appraisal of Aristotle to one of the foundational works in the Aristotelian opus.

- 
4. The causes of some action being involuntary are: force and ignorance—A/ 1110a 1-5
  5. Force can be absolute or mixed—F/ 1110a 5-10
  6. In the case of a tyrant threatening your family [in order to make you do something shameful] or throwing a precious cargo overboard, there is a mixture of the voluntary and force—A/ 1110a 5-10
  7. In order for praise or blame to be assigned to a mixed case it must be assumed that "force" is minimal or at least outweighed by one's own volition—A/ 1110a 20-35
  8. [Only in absolute force cases is one entirely blameless, otherwise, one can achieve praise or blame in proportion to his ability to act or not to act relative to the alternative]--5,6,7
  9. To act in ignorance is to be unaware—F/ 1110b 18
  10. [To feel pain and regret means that if one had the relevant information, i.e., was aware, he would not have acted in this way]--F
  11. When one acts shamefully in ignorance and later becomes aware he will either feel pain or regret or not--9, 10/ 1110b 20
  12. [In some cases, such as anger or drunkenness, one is ignorant due to a fault in the agent that creates ignorance of the universal rule]--A
  13. [A fault in the agent mitigates the protective veil of ignorance]--A
  14. To act in ignorance due to a fault in the agent mitigates the protective veil of ignorance that may block an agent's understanding of the universal rule--12,13/ 1110b 25-1110b 30
  15. [One can only be ignorant of universals or particulars]--A
  16. [Premise 12 describes the only sort of way that one is ignorant of the universal]--A
  17. When one is ignorant such that it mitigates his moral blame, the ignorance concerns particulars--14-16/ 1111a 1
  18. To be ignorant of particulars may mean being ignorant of: a) who is doing it, b) what he is doing, c) about what or to what he is doing it, d) what he is doing it with, e) for what result the action is being performed, f) the way that the action is being performed, e.g., gently or hard—A/ 1111a 3-6
  19. [The list in premise 18 constitute ways a person can be ignorant in a relatively blameless way]--A
  20. For an action to be involuntary due to ignorance, one must be ignorant of the particular and feel pain and regret--11, 17, 18, 19/ 1111a 20-24
- 

21. Moral praise or blame can only be accorded to voluntary actions; involuntary actions due to force or ignorance of particulars (accompanied by pain and regret) mitigate blame--2, 3, 4, 8,11, 17, 20

Following along this way, Adkins examines critical normative terms in the context of the tragedians. Adkins asserts that there is a difference between the way the tragedians view these moral terms and the way Aristotle does. The former is more influenced by the traditional Homeric ethic while the latter is in the midst of some redesign.

In the last half of the essay Adkins examines with fine resolution the nature of how these various key normative terms operate for each stakeholder: the playwright, the common language understanding of ordinary Greeks of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E., and Aristotle's own evolving understanding via the *Nicomachean Ethics*. These are all critical to understanding just how Aristotle understood "option D" to operate. This essay thus gives critical insight into Aristotle's most famous argument on the nature of tragedy.

### Adkins' Essay

The literary criticisms of the Greeks and Romans furnish some of the most baffling documents which have come down to us from antiquity. Nor could it be otherwise. Few elements of language can be at once so ephemeral and so elusive as the overtones of words used in aesthetic contests; even in our own language it is only with a conscious effort that the appropriate overtones of words used by quite recent critics can be recalled. Such recall must be much more difficult where the reader is concerned with a dead language; in the case of some terms it may well be virtually impossible;<sup>4</sup> but where the ancient critic is discussing ethical criteria for literature, as Aristotle does in *Poetics* 13, the modern interpreter is in a somewhat better position, for ethical terms are used in wider contexts, contexts that involve action, and there is more opportunity for studying their usage and endeavoring to recapture their elusive overtones.

In chapter 13 of his *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses the qualities that should be possessed by the best kind of tragic character and tragic situation, together with those which he considers unsuitable for tragedy. He rejects as most unsuitable of all the portrayal of *epieikeis* passing from good fortune to bad. Also unsuitable are the portrayal of *mochtheroi* passing from bad fortune to good; and that of the *sphodra poneros* passing from good fortune to bad (1452b34-1453a1). The type of tragic character favored by Aristotle appears at 1453a7: he is the man who "is neither outstanding in *arete kai dikaiosune* nor passes to ill fortune as a result of

---

<sup>4</sup> Some passages in Quintilian 10 seem to me to furnish good examples of this.

*kakia kai mochtheria*, but as a result of some *hamartia*; and he should be one of those who enjoys great reputation and good fortune, such as Oedipus, Thyestes and the prominent men from such families as these” [Adkins trans.]. The reason why Aristotle rejects the earlier types of character and situation in favor of the latter is, of course, that only the latter, in Aristotle’s eyes, arouses in the audience the emotions which he holds to be characteristic of the tragic experience. Ill fortune suffered by the *epieikes* is neither *phoberon* nor *eleeinon*, but *miaros*; good fortune enjoyed by the *mochtheros* is *atragoidotaton*, for it is neither *philanhtropon* nor *eleeinon* nor *phoberon*. Only the remaining type, that favored by Aristotle, produces the required *eleos* and *phobos*.

There is no lack of discussions of the nature of the tragic experience. In this article, however, I wish to consider somewhat different topics: first, what does Aristotle mean in the sentences I have just quoted, and is what he means (when we have discovered what it is) relevant to extant Greek tragedy? Secondly, why does Aristotle disapprove so strongly of the type of tragedy that he terms *miaros*? The reader may well be inclined to reply to my first question that the meaning is obvious, and the passage must be relevant: after all, Aristotle was a Greek, writing while Greek tragedies were still being written and produced. Surely, he is in a much better position than we are to pass relevant judgements on Greek tragedy. But we possess no Greek tragedy written after the end of the fifth century, and Aristotle was writing in the second half of the fourth century. There are many periods in history in which such an interval of time would be unimportant; but this, I suggest, was not one of them. I have tried to show elsewhere the change in values that took place in Athens during the fourth century. To make what I have to say clearer, I shall begin by summarizing the nature of the change; the rest of this article will fill in the details.

To understand the “meaning” of an ethical term in another language, and its function in another society, we need to know two things: the range of actions and experiences to which it is applied, and the emotive power that this word possesses, in comparison with other value-terms in the language. In Greek there is a traditional pattern of ethical terms that is found in Homer and persists, almost unchanged—at least in the aspects I am concerned with here—into the later years of the fifth century. By that time, the pattern, like almost everything else, is being challenged; but in broad outline there are still two groups of ethical terms: one, consisting of *agathos*, *arete*, *kakos*, *kakia*, *kalon*, *aischron*, and similar words, commends success, prosperity, victory in war, high birth, courage, and similar qualities, and decries their opposites. (These I shall term competitive values and excellences.) The other consists of words

commending justice, temperance, and similar qualities, and decrying their opposites—co-operative values and excellences. In the traditional Greek value-system, these groups are quite separate: a man can be *agathos* without being just, and to be just does not render a man *agathos*. Furthermore, *agathos* and *arete* are emotively much more powerful than any of the words commending the co-operative excellences; it is on the competitive excellences that the earlier Greeks set most value.

By the time of Aristotle, however, the co-operative excellences have themselves become *aretai*, members of the most valued group, at least in the eyes of Aristotle and his circle. (All the traditional *aretai* remain *aretai*.) Clearly this linguistic change reflects a great change in ethical outlook, and one that has largely taken place between the composition of the last extant Greek tragedy and that of the *Poetics*. In so far as Aristotle is looking at extant Greek tragedy from the point of view of the values of his own circle, there is at least a *prima facie* case for questioning the relevance of what he has to say.

But we must now leave generalities. The value-terms left untranslated above were *epieikes*, *mochtheros*, *poneros*, *arete kai dikaiosune*, *kakia kai mochtheria*, and the rather different word *harmartia*. To discover what Aristotle “means” by these terms we must establish the range of usage of each and, in the case of value-terms, also its emotive power.

I shall begin with *epieikeia*, the quality of the *epieikes*, usually translated by some word such as “goodness” or “virtue.” Since Aristotle does not define this, or any of the other terms I shall discuss, in the *Poetics*, it is reasonable to suppose that he is using it in the manner usual in his day, so that we may illustrate his usage from elsewhere in his work, or indeed from other contemporary literature.<sup>5</sup> *Epieikeia* is an *arete* in Aristotle’s eyes, and is expressly discussed as such in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1137a 31ff.). Again, at *EN* 1121b 21ff. we find the phrase “on account of some *epieikeia* and shunning of *aischra* [Adkins trans.]” To shun *aischra*, whatever is denoted by *aischron* at any time, is the mark of *arete*; and here we find *epieikeia* linked with this activity. Furthermore, it is a co-operative excellence; for at 1137a 31ff. it is argued that it is *dikaosune*. For Aristotle, then, *epieikeia* is both a co-operative excellence and an *arete*. Another indication of this is the use of *arete kai dikaiosune* in *Poetics* 13: “the man who is *not* outstanding in *arete kai dikaiosune* is opposed to the *epieike*” [Adkins trans.]. The phrase *arete kai dikaiosune* is

---

<sup>5</sup> I except the *analyses* of the terms in the ethical works, where words are sometimes endowed with a precision which they do not possess even elsewhere in the same work; e.g., *EN* 1137a 31ff. is such a passage, but in *EN* 1121b 21 ff. the usage is “ordinary Greek.”



used in the fourth century<sup>6</sup> to denote and commend co-operative *arete* in ordinary Greek.

*Epieikes*, then, in *Poetics* 13 denotes and commends a man manifesting co-operative excellence as an *arete*, as one of his most important qualities. But if we simply translate it by “good” or “virtuous,” we are in danger of losing some of the overtones. In *EN* 1167b 1, we find *homonoia*, political harmony, described as a condition in which both the *demos* and the *epieikeis* are agreed that the *aristoi* should rule. If *demos* and *epieikeis* may be opposed, *epieikeis* must commend a social group here. Again (*EN* 1132a 2ff.), Aristotle, in discussing corrective justice, says that it makes no difference whether “an *epieikes* has robbed a *phaulos*” or “a *phaulos* an *epieikes*,” in the eyes of the law. Even if we consider this sentence by itself, we shall hesitate to translate “It makes no difference whether a virtuous man has robbed a bad man or a bad man has robbed a virtuous man;” and if we look at the wider context we shall certainly not do so. Aristotle is opposing corrective justice to distributive justice, the assignment of rights and privileges to different members of society; and *there*, says Aristotle, differences in social status are important. His whole point is that in one case social status is relevant, in the other irrelevant; and the word *epieikes* is sufficient by itself to convey this. *Epieikes*, then has overtones of social position for Aristotle, and may be used by him to commend a particular social group.

We may now turn to *poneros* and *mochtheros*. *Mochtheria* is an important ethical term for Aristotle. It may denote moral depravity: in *EN* 1110b 30ff. Aristotle distinguishes mistake of fact from such depravity, and the word used is *mochtheria*. Again, it may be a synonym for *poneros*, as in *EN* 1135b 22ff., where it is said that a man is not *poneros* unless he acts from *mochtheria*, but that when he does so act, he is unjust and *mochtheros*. *Poneria* sometimes has a wider range than *mochtheria*, as in *EN* 1150b 32ff., where *mochtheria* denotes and decries one species of *poneria*. But this is more technical language than we have in the *Poetics*; and in any case, here too what are decried are breaches of co-operative excellences: *mochtheria* is a species, *poneria*, the whole genus. In less technical language, the words are virtually synonymous. Again, both are *kakiai*; for *agathos* can be directly opposed to them, as it is opposed to *mochtheros* in *EN* 1165b 13. *Mochtheros* and *poneros*, then, denote breaches of the co-operative excellences, and belong to the most important group of terms: they decry such breaches as strongly as possible.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Isocrates, *Antidosis* 67.

It is natural to ask whether these words too have social overtones for Aristotle. They are certainly linked with *mochtheros* and *poneros*, but this tells us nothing, for it is usage, not etymology, that “gives a word its meaning.” At *EN* 1113b 14ff. we find “To say that no one is *makarios akon*, or *poneros hekon* seems partly false and partly true; for no one is *makarios akon*, but *mochtheria* is *hekousion* [Adkins trans.].<sup>7</sup> The interpretation of this passage is complicated by the fact that the saying is not Aristotle’s own, but an extended form of the “Socratic Paradox;” but he gives no sign that he finds the opposition of *makarios* and *poneros* odd. Now *makarios* is a virtual synonym for *eudaimon*, and both prominently include prosperity among their characteristics: the *eudaimon*, (*EN* 1101a 14ff.), must *kat’areten teleian energein*, and must also be adequately provided with external good things, possessions; and *makarios* is used of such a man in 1101a19. *Makarios*, then, undeniably commends prosperity and social position, in addition to moral qualities; and in *EN* 1113b 14ff. *poneros* is opposed to it.<sup>8</sup> We might expect *poneros* to be predominantly “social” here; but Aristotle says “*mochtheria* is voluntary.” If so, it must be moral depravity in this passage; yet Aristotle seems to find nothing strange in the opposition of *poneros* to *makarios*. The adjectives *are* opposed, or were in the eyes of those who used the sentence originally; it was not simply a contrast between *akon* and *hekon*. *Oudeis hekon kakos/poneros* derived much of its original force from the fact that, in the days of Socrates, such words decried social and political failure much more evidently than moral depravity. The “paradox” was in large part a statement of an agreed proposition of value; a fact that rendered its refutation, when *kakos* was employed in the new co-operative usage, very difficult for the Greek of Socrates’ day. Now Aristotle does not object that the terms are not true opposites; in fact, by insisting that both are *hekousia* he links them more closely than before; and this must give the impression that Aristotle drew no clear line between the ethical and social usages of *poneros* and *mochtheros*. If no clear line was drawn, the social overtones must inevitably have been present, even though the ethical flavor of the words is much stronger for Aristotle than for the Greeks in the days of Socrates and Aristotle seems to be emphasizing the ethical flavor in his insistence that *mochtheria* is *hekousion*. Even had Aristotle attempted to draw such a line, it would have been almost impossible to exclude the social overtones; if a word of great emotive power denotes a range of

<sup>7</sup> Note that here, too, *πονηρός* and *μοχθηρός* are interchangeable.

<sup>8</sup> For which cf. Solon 14.7, Bergk. In the circumstances, the linguistic usage need not be Aristotle’s own; but, as will appear later, it is entirely characteristic of his own position.

qualities in a person or thing, it is to be assumed that the qualities are in some way linked—and importantly linked—in the eyes of those who so use the word; and *poneros* and *mochtheros* were so used in Aristotle's day, and had been for some time earlier. The confusions and complexities of this passage, in fact, epitomize tensions in Aristotle's position, whose importance to the question under discussion will become clear at the end of this article.

The words we have discussed, then, are *aretai* or *kakai*; they belong to the most powerfully emotive group of value-terms available in ancient Greece. They both denote co-operative excellences, or breaches of these, and also have overtones of social position; and they commend or decry the qualities they denote with all the power of words of the *arete*-group. The foregoing discussion is rendered necessary by the presence of these social overtones: one could argue that the words discussed must be used primarily in a co-operative moral sense in the *Poetics* on the grounds that, for example, the *poneros* can fall into *dustuchia*; for a *poneros* reckoned merely in social terms would become *poneros* only when he becomes *dustuches*; but only such a discussion as this will indicate the important tensions in Aristotle's position in the *Poetics* and throw light on the problems that I shall discuss later.

The Aristotelian usage of *hamartia* remains to be discussed. I shall discuss only Aristotle's general usage of the word in this part of the article; his usage in the *Poetics* has more relevance to the second half of the discussion and will be examined there. There are three possible situations, in Aristotle's technical terminology, to which he could apply the term: (1) *mochtheria*, a moral depravity, in which a man "does not know the major premise of the practical syllogism," "does not know how to behave" morally; (2) *akrasia*, in which a man knows what he should do, but has not a stable moral character and so does not always do it; (3) a mistake of fact, in which a man "does not know the minor premise of the practical syllogism." In ordinary Greek, *hamartia* certainly spans situations that we should distinguish as moral error and mistake of fact; and Aristotle's technical ethical terminology contains also the category of *akrasia*; so we may ask how Aristotle uses *hamartia* in respect of these three categories. In *Poetics* 13, *hamartia* is opposed to *kakia kai mochtheria*. Nevertheless, in *EN* 1110b 28ff., we find "Every *mochtheros* is ignorant of what he should do and of what he should not do, and on account of this kind of *hamartia* men become unjust and *kakoi* in general" [Adkins trans.]. Here, *mochtheria* results from *hamartia* about the major premise of the practical syllogism: Aristotle can represent ingrained moral depravity as resulting from a kind of *hamartia*. Aristotle can use *hamartia*

with reference to either premise of that syllogism, as in *EN* 1142a 20ff.: “Again, the *hamartia* may be concerned either with the general premise in deliberation, or with the particular one: [one may not know] either that all water that weighs heavy is harmful, or that this water weighs heavy” [Adkins trans.]. Mistake about the major premise, where the practical syllogism is an ethical one, where the choice worthiness of X depends on its being *kalon* or right to do X, is a mark of moral depravity, *mochtheria*; mistake about the minor, factual premise, “This is an X,” is a mistake of fact: *hamartia* may be either characteristic of *mochtheria* or opposed to it, as it is in *Poetics* 13, in Aristotle’s ethical language. When it is opposed to *mochtheria* there are two possibilities: it may refer to (a) mistake of fact, or (as is presumably contended by those who hold that *hamartia* is some kind of tragic moral flaw in *Poetics* 13) to (b) *akrasia*, the condition in which a man knows what to do but has not a sufficiently strong character, or established *hexis*, to enable him to do it. Now Aristotle does indeed (*EN* 1135b 17ff.) term *hamartemata* the actions of those who have not an established unjust *hexis* and so act from *akrasia* rather than from *mochtheria*; but when discussing *akrasia* itself (*EN* 1148a 3) he says “*akrasia* is censured not merely as an *hamartia* but as a kind of *kakia* . . . .” [Adkins trans.]. Here again, just as in *Poetics* 13, *hamartia* is contrasted with *kakia* or *mochtheria*. This is interesting, though it does not in itself prove that *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13 “means mistake of fact;” the foregoing passages when taken together simply indicate that for Aristotle *hamartia* is not a technical term for any one of the possible alternatives by which it is, on different occasions, rendered in English.<sup>9</sup>

We have so far discovered that in Aristotle’s opinion the best kind of tragic character should be moderately “good” in a co-operative, moral sense, but not extremely so; that the word he uses for “good” is for him and his circle<sup>10</sup> an *arete*, one of the most highly regarded qualities; that the words he uses for “good” and “bad” have social overtones; and that *hamartia* when opposed to *kakia* or *mochtheria* elsewhere by Aristotle may mean “mistake,” though it is a word which Aristotle uses both for “mistake” and for “moral error.”

---

<sup>9</sup> The idea of “missing the mark” is fundamental to Aristotle’s usage, as it is to that of the fifth century (see below). In his philosophical analysis, Aristotle can distinguish between different kinds of “missing the mark;” but the word still retains its fifth-century range of usage, and for essentially the same reason.

<sup>10</sup> That Aristotle and his circle accepted without proof that the co-operative excellences were *ἀρεταί* is sufficient for my present purpose. In fact, other extant fourth-century writers so used *ἀρετή*: see *Merit and Responsibility (M&R)*, chapter 16, p. 336.

Now no one supposes that (say) Sophocles had these precepts of Aristotle, or similar ones, at the forefront of his mind when he set out to write a tragedy, and that sometimes he succeeded in producing a hero or a plot to the required specifications, sometimes not, through inferior craftsmanship or some other cause. Nor does anyone suppose that Aristotle thought this to be the case; but it is only too easy to suppose that the tragedians had essentially the same values as Aristotle with which to evaluate the persons and the actions in their tragedies, and would have readily understood the point he was making. But so far as the fifth century is concerned—and fifth-century tragedies are all we possess—this is not so. It is not merely that *epieikes* is a comparatively rare word in fifth-century Greek;<sup>11</sup> it is that, with rare exceptions that I shall discuss below, *no* word in fifth-century Greek is at one and the same time an *arete*, a member of the most highly valued group of terms, and also used to denote and commend co-operative excellences. *Aretai* there are in abundance; but *arete* commends and denotes *competitive* excellences—success in war, courage, prosperity. Furthermore, these excellences are not merely distinguished from the co-operative excellences by the fact that they are termed *aretai* whereas the co-operative excellences are not; by being termed *aretai* they are marked out as being the most important characteristics of a person or an action.

I shall next attempt to illustrate this point from extant Greek tragedy. Since the values exemplified are Homeric values persisting, I have for the most part selected examples from Euripides, to indicate that these values did indeed persist to the end of the century to which extant Greek tragedy belongs.

In Euripides' *Heracles*, 1381ff. Heracles has killed his children; and he debates with himself whether he should continue to carry the bow and arrows with which he killed them:

Am I to carry these on my arms?

What can I reply? But bereft of these weapons,

With which I have performed great deeds in Hellas,

---

<sup>11</sup> It occurs already in Homer, e.g., *Iliad* 23.246, meaning roughly “suitable;” and as early as Herodotus (3.53) may be contrasted with δίκη or δικαιοσύνη in the manner of *EN* 1137a 31ff. (and cf. also Soph. Frag. 703 and Eur-Frag. 645 Nauck). In fifth-century writers it may commend the reasonable or decry the specious, as in Hdt. 2.22 It is used as an ἀρετή in the Aristotelian manner at Thu. 4.19: ἀλλ' ἦν παρὸν τὸ αὐτὸ δρᾶσαι πρὸς τὸ ἐπιεικὲς καὶ ἀρετῇ αὐτὸν νικήσας παρ' ἃ προσεδέχετο μετρίως ξυναλλαγῆναι an “advanced” passage for its date. In its characteristic fifth-century certainty not an ἀρετή, e.g., it is not an ἀρετή; in the passages from Herodotus and the tragedians cited above.

Must I submit myself to my enemies  
 And die in shame (*aischros*)? No, they must not be left  
 But must be kept wretched/ pitifully.

He does regard what he did while mad as a crime; at 1150 he thought of punishing himself for killing his children (“shall I become the avenger for my children of their murder?”); but he does not consider the possibility of submitting himself to others for punishment. For him, the world is divided into *philoï*<sup>12</sup>—or rather his one effective *philos*, Theseus, who offers him assistance because he *is* Heracles’ *philos*, treating the criminality of his act as irrelevant for this reason—and into *echthroï*, who would hunt Heracles down and kill him, not because he is a criminal but because he is their *echthros*, and defenseless if he were to abandon his bow and arrows. The world is divided into *philoï* and *echthroï*. One’s *echthroï* one must harm as much as possible with one’s *arete*, one’s fighting qualities: such actions are *kallista*, and not infrequent among Heracles’ past activities. One’s *philoï*, and oneself, one must defend with the same *arete*; against one’s *echthroï*. Not to do so is *aischron*, as Heracles says, and to avoid doing or suffering what is *aischron*, is more important than anything else.

This *arete*, and the judgement that to fall short of it and the actual success it demands is *aischron*, have nothing to do with justice at all. In Euripides’ *Supplices* 528ff.<sup>13</sup> *kalos* and *aischron* refer to the result of the battle, in which it is *kalon* for the victors to have won, *aischron* for the vanquished to have been defeated, whatever the rights and wrongs of the case. In the *Supplices* justice has been done, or is said to have been done, in addition; but this is a separate point, separately made (531). It is still *aischron* to get the worst of it, whether one is in the wrong or not; as it would have been *aischron* for Heracles if his enemies had got the better of him.<sup>14</sup>

To the end of extant Greek tragedy it is the competitive excellences that are characteristically commended by *arete* and *kalon*, their opposites that are characteristically decried by *kaka* and *aischron*.<sup>15</sup> There are some exceptions to this in Sophocles’ and Euripides’ portrayal of events in the

<sup>12</sup> For this usage of φίλος see my “Friendship” and “Self-sufficiency” in Homer and Aristotle. *Classical Quarterly*. n.s. 13 (1963): 30f—[Chapter One of this volume, ed.]

<sup>13</sup> Discussed at greater length in *M&R*, p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> Nor is this simply tragic diction: cf. Hdt. 1. 128; 6.45; Thuc. 5.99; and for another tragic passage, Eur. *Orest.* 775 ff.

<sup>15</sup> For the normal framework of values, see *M&R*, chaps. 8, 10, 11.

House of Atreus.<sup>16</sup> In these passages *aischron*, or *ou kalon*, is opposed to *dikaion*, not as competitive excellence to co-operative excellence—the normal usage—but in appeal to a higher standard of co-operative excellence; and, since the words of the *arete*-group such as *aischron* have the highest emotive power, this appeal (since the characters apparently concede that the actions termed *aischron* were *aischron*) ends the argument: no reply is offered in any instance. In fact, we might say that the characters concerned were being censured—with a word from the *arete*-group—for not showing themselves *epieikes* in the manner of *EN* 1137a 31ff. This is true; but these examples, and those I shall discuss in a moment, are individual attacks on the traditional *arete*-standard, which remains both the standard of ordinary life even in the later fifth century and that by which the tragic characters act and judge the actions of others, with very few exceptions. Traditional *arete*, in fact, provides the frame of reference in terms of which the fifth century judges men and actions. Athens has solved the problem of the House of Atreus by instituting homicide-courts; but the traditional *arete*-standard remains.

To return to the exceptions: can we find a tragic personage of whom it can be said that his most important characteristics are those desiderated by Aristotle, and are *aretai*? In Sophocles' *Philoctetes* we find some very curious uses of value-terms. At 119f., Odysseus tries to persuade Neoptolemus to cheat Philoctetes, promising him “two gifts” as a reward. The gifts are *sophos t'an hautos kagathos kekkel' hama*. Neoptolemus is convinced by this and replies:

Well, then I accede and cast aside all and any shame (*aischunen*)

Neoptolemus says that he will cast off all *aischune*, sense of shame, in order to be called *agathos*; and as he has already said (108) that he considers lying to be *aischron*, a sense of shame should restrain him. But the basic statement of Greek value is that the *agathos* does *kala* and shuns *aischra*; and yet by doing something that he holds to be *aischron*, and at which he feels *aischune*, Neoptolemus is to gain the “gift” of being termed *agathos*. This passage opposes the traditional<sup>17</sup> *arete*-standard (expressed by Odysseus' use of *agathos*), which commended success *per se*, to the new usage of some of the words of the *arete*-group, whereby it is *aischron* to fall short of the requirements of (at least some of) the co-operative excellences. It also shows the strength of the traditional standard:

<sup>16</sup> S. *Elec.* 558 ff. Eur. *Elec.* 1051; *Orest.* 194. These passages are discussed in *M&R*, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> This is the traditional ἀρετή-standard as exemplified by the power-politicians of later fifth-century Athens. For a demonstration that it is the traditional standard, see *M&R*, chapt. 10.

Neoptolemus is won over for the moment. Later he feels revulsion, and when Odysseus asks him whether he intends to return to Philoctetes the bow of which he has cheated him, replies (1234):

It was a shameful sin/wrong (*aischran/hamartian*)  
and (1248f.),

A sin/wrong that I shall try to retrieve

*Aischros* and *hamartian aischran* are used to decry cheating, a breach of the co-operative excellences, even though that cheating has led to a success, traditionally *kalon, per se*; and this use of words by a major character in the play to characterize himself and his past actions, and to determine his future actions, delineates Neoptolemus' character in the terms that

seem most important to Neoptolemus himself. For him, honorable behavior (by which he means honest behavior) takes precedence over success. Such behavior is by implication a manifestation of *arete*<sup>18</sup> as Aristotle would have considered it. Furthermore, if we were to term this *arete* (as Sophocles does not) *epieikeia*, Neoptolemus is not too *epieikes* to suit Aristotle, for it is only with a struggle that Neoptolemus resolves to do what he does.

Here (and here only in extant tragedy, it seems to me) we find a male Greek tragic character apparently manifesting as an *arete*, and as the most important *arete*, the qualities on which Aristotle lays emphasis in *Poetics* 13. It would be very curious if the *Philoctetes* were the extant tragedy that most nearly fitted the Aristotelian canon. Of course, it does not: the plot passes from ill fortune to good; and if Aristotle is defining the characteristics of the tragic "hero" in *Poetics* 13, rather than tragic characters in general,<sup>19</sup> there is a further flaw: the chief character of the tragedy—the one who passes from ill fortune to good, at all events—is Philoctetes, whose *epieikeia* is not discussed and is irrelevant to the plot.

In other tragedies, *agathos* denotes and commends quite different characteristics. Indeed, another exception indicates this. Euripides, in *Electra* 380ff., praises the Husbandman as *aristos* because he is self-controlled,<sup>20</sup> though he is not prosperous, well known, or of high position. The lines, in context, are a protest (by no means characteristic of Euripides' own use of *agathos* and *arete*); and the terms in which the

<sup>18</sup> By implication, since the performance of *αἰσχρά* should diminish one's *ἀρετή*; but the point might have been difficult to make explicitly, simply because the characteristics of the *ἀγαθός* were so generally agreed: see *M&R*, pp. 179-181.

<sup>19</sup> The point is not relevant to the topic I am discussing here.

<sup>20</sup> Orestes speaks the lines, but he seems to speak for Euripides himself. See *M&R*, pp. 177 and 195.



protest is made show clearly what was the normal use of these terms, both in the drama and in daily life. To be *agathos*, to display *arete*, is to be prosperous, of high position, strong, and brave. To come tumbling down from such a position, as the tragic hero does in passing from good fortune to bad, is to cease to be *agathos*; and this is *aischron*, than which nothing is worse. So Polyxena, in Euripides' *Hecuba* 373ff. prefers death to slavery. To meet with slavery is to meet with *aischra*, to live in a manner not *kalos*. There is no reference to any breach of co-operative excellences on Polyxena's part; but the *agathos* (or *agathe*) has a way of life incompatible with poverty, and even more incompatible with slavery; hence slavery is *aischron*, and one cannot be *agathos* as a slave. Aristotle *might* have been willing to say that such a slave as Polyxena was *epieikes*, but the characteristic usage of the fifth century would have never termed such a slave as *agathos* or *arete*.

In the fifth century, then, *agathos* and *arete* commend competitive excellences: victory in war, social status, wealth, and reputation; and defeat in the former, or loss of the latter entails that one ceases to be *agathos*. Now, particularly in the context of Greek values, one is unlikely to choose such defeat or loss,<sup>21</sup> though one might choose a course of action that led in fact to that end. Such a course of action, reckoned in terms of co-operative excellences and the intentions of the agent, might be moral, immoral, or neutral; but the result would be the same: loss of *arete*.

Now the qualities denoted and commended by *agathos* and *arete*, emotively the most powerful terms, are those that the tragedians and their audiences considered most important; this is simply another way of saying that these terms are emotively the most powerful. Two very significant results follow from this. In the first place, neither the Athenian tragedian nor his audience would regard as the most important characteristics of the tragic hero or tragic character in general those desiderated by Aristotle. Aristotle might say that such a character should not be outstanding in *arete kai dikaiosune*, and refer to the co-operative excellences. Of these, which are *aretai*, among the most important qualities for Aristotle, Aristotle's tragic character should not have too much; but the tragedians' audience regarded other qualities as most important, and certainly did not feel that the tragic character could have too much of *them*. While they prospered, Agamemnon, Oedipus, and Heracles were all very *agathos* indeed; but

---

<sup>21</sup> The only extant recorded instance of such a choice made by anyone who held traditional Greek values, whether on the stage or in real life, seems to be that of Prometheus in the *P.V.* discussed below. Socrates' standard of ἀρετή was not the traditional one; but he also believed that the result of his actions was βέλτιον for him. *Apol.* 41d.

when Agamemnon was murdered, he died *aischros* (*Choephoroi* 493ff.); and this was *aischron*—than which nothing can be worse—for Agamemnon. The word does not censure any breach of the co-operative excellences on Agamemnon’s part: Agamemnon has been killed in a manner totally unsuited to his prestige and position, his *arete*. And this is the most important aspect of the situation. The ethical *priorities* of fifth-century Athens are different, not only from our own, but also from Aristotle’s. To show that these were the standards of Aristotle’s predecessors in daily life, not merely on the stage, we have only to consider the manner in which Socrates’ life and death were evaluated.<sup>22</sup> Socrates had been poor all his life, had failed to defend himself satisfactorily in court, and had refused to escape from prison when he might have done so. He had been just all his life, and refused to escape because he thought it would have been unjust to do so. Aristotle would surely have regarded this as the height of *epieikeia*. But both the “ordinary man” Crito and the “immoralist” Callicles, as portrayed in the dialogues of Plato, thought such behavior *aischron*, *for Socrates*,<sup>23</sup> and Callicles jeered at it; and both were simply appealing to the accepted standards of their day. Success and prosperity were paramount, the co-operative excellences of lesser importance: how could a fifth-century audience, or the tragedians who wrote for such an audience, have seen a tragedy through the eyes of an Aristotle, with his very different sensibilities?

This affects *hamartia*, too. It is possible to use *hamartia* in tragedy to denote and decry moral error *per se*. So in Sophocles’ *Ajax* 1093ff. Teucer, holding that it is wrong to prohibit the burial of Ajax, can say:

Friends, I shall never again be surprised  
 To see a man of modest birth go wrong (*hamartanei*)  
 When those who are thought to be of the very noblest birth  
 Declaim such wrongful (*hamartanousin*) speech as you’ve just heard.

This is not a threat that Menelaus, the speaker whom Teucer is opposing, is making a mistake whose results may be damaging to himself; it is simply a protest that refusal of burial is morally wrong.<sup>24</sup> Such a use

<sup>22</sup> See *M&R*, chapt. 13, *ad init*.

<sup>23</sup> αἰσχα, *Crito* 46a 3. σαυτὸν προδοῦναι, 45c7 (and cf. 46a1) and τὰ ραθυμότατα αἰρεῖσθαι, 45d6, must be αἰσχρόν in terms of traditional Greek values. ἄπερ ἂν ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἀνδρεῖος ἔλοιτο, 45d6, is to preserve oneself and one’s family. Crito is afraid that it will appear αἰσχρόν for Socrates’ friends too that they have not saved him: 45c1, 46a 4, cf. *Gorg.* 484dff., 485eff.

<sup>24</sup> The reasons for this linguistic usage lie beyond the scope of the present paper; but see *M&R*, pp. 56ff., etc.

of *hamartia* and *hamartanein* is possible in Greek tragedy; but this is not the kind of *hamartia* with which Aristotle is concerned in *Poetics* 13: there the only relevant kind of *hamartia* is *hamartia* that leads from good fortune to ill, to (in fifth-century terms) loss of *arete*. We find *hamartia*, *hamartano*, and *hamartema* used of all three kinds of action—mistake, failure, and moral error—leading to disaster. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* 618ff., Oedipus says:

When he that plots against me in secret  
 Moves quickly, quickly must I counterplot.  
 If I pause without effective action  
 The plotter will prevail and I will lose  
 Mine will be the failure (*hemartemena*).

Oedipus thinks that Creon is plotting against him, and that unless he is quick to foil Creon's plans, it will be the worse for him: he will pass from good fortune to ill, as a result of his own failure to forestall Creon; and this failure would be an *hamartia*.

Again, in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* 1136, Hyllus says of Deianeira:  
 The whole matter is, she erred (*hemarte*) while intending good  
 Though her intentions were good.

Hyllus is defending Deianeira on the grounds that she has made a mistake: by mistaking a deadly object for a love-charm—which Aristotle would term a mistake (*hamartia*) about the minor premise—she has brought both Heracles and herself from good fortune to bad.

Thirdly, in Sophocles' *Antigone* 1261ff., Creon laments  
 O, crimes (*hamartemata*) of my senseless mind,  
 Harsh bringing death.

His actions, which were morally wrong—a mistake, so to speak, about the major premise—are *hamartemata*; and have certainly brought every member of the family from good fortune to ill.

All these actions may be denoted by *hamartia*, *hamartanein*, and *hamartema*, and in all there is passage from good fortune to ill, as Aristotle requires. Nor do even these represent the full range of *hamartia* leading to disaster. Altruistic actions in ancient Greece are about as common as unicorns, but in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vincetus* Prometheus has certainly performed one by acting as he has done on behalf of humanity. The characters thus evaluate his action: Prometheus (266ff.) says:

Willingly, willingly I erred,

Did wrong (*hemarton*); I will not deny it.

and the chorus, after Hermes (1035), has counselled Prometheus not to prefer self-will to good counsel (*euboulia*) says (1039):

Trust us, shameful (*aischron*) it is for one so wise to fall into error *euboulia* denotes and commends (as an *arete*) intelligent planning in one's own interest. In this Prometheus has failed, and an *hamartia* has occurred. But *Prometheus* does not consider his action to be a moral error, though he agrees that it was an *hamartia*; nor does he regard it as a mistake, subjectively reckoned—an action, that is, whose unpleasant results for himself he did not foresee (though (268) he admits that he had not expected Zeus' revenge to take such an extreme form); nor is Prometheus' action an accident. His action is an *hamartia* because he has—quite deliberately—performed an action that was not in his own interest, which diminished his prosperity and success. We cannot, of course, be certain that Aristotle would have regarded Prometheus as *epieikes*, though *epieikes* seems to be the appropriate adjective for a fourth-century writer to apply to him; but we can be sure how both characters and audience would have regarded even such an *hamartia* when the play was first produced: it was *aischron*, and Prometheus' *arete* was catastrophically diminished by it.

We have seen that in Greek tragedy there are passages in which *hamartia* is used to denote and decry moral error, without immediate reference to any disastrous result. But the *hamartia* with which Aristotle is concerned in *Poetics* 13 is *hamartia* leading to disaster; and all the last four examples—failure, mistake, moral error, and altruistic action—are examples of such *hamartia*. They are not distinguished linguistically by the tragedians; and the reason is clear. What is important in all these actions is that a character or characters have passed from good fortune to ill, from being *agathos*, which is *kalon*, to a condition that is *aischron*. Before such a change of condition can take place there must have been an “error,” *hamartia*, of some kind—unless one's palace is burnt down accidentally, or a tile falls on one's head; but such events are not of crucial importance to tragic theory, and would certainly have been rejected by Aristotle as unworthy of the tragic plot; but the exact nature of the “error” is of such small importance, compared with the change of condition, that one word can be used to designate all of these, whose differences we should emphasize far more than their resemblances. The Greeks had, from the time of Homer, been able to *distinguish* moral error from mistake; but the traditional *arete*-standard rendered such distinctions of little or no importance to the evaluation of such actions, and to the treatment of, or

attitude to, the persons involved in them, where the *arete*-standard was relevant; as it always was, where there was a change, actual or possible, from good fortune to ill.

We have now discovered certain fundamental differences between Aristotle's own values and those of the tragedy he is discussing. We have seen that, in so far as Aristotle is representing *epieikeia* as an *arete*, and as the most important *arete* of the tragic character—and the extent to which he is trying to do this will be one of the topics discussed in the remainder of this article—he is misrepresenting the values of the fifth-century tragedian and his audience. We have also seen the manner in which the fifth century used the word *hamartia*. We must now turn to consider some further points concerning the Aristotelian usage of *hamartia*. Enough has been said already to show that the Aristotelian criteria for the tragic character cannot validly be applied to extant Greek tragedy; but we have not yet discovered the extent to which Aristotle's use of *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13 differs from that of the fifth century.

In fact, though the general Aristotelian usage of *hamartia* has been discussed, we have yet to try to establish what Aristotle “meant” by *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13. In that chapter Aristotle restricts the range of his usage, in a sense, by excluding the *mochtheros*; but since a character who is not *mochtheros* in terms of the usage of Aristotle's philosophical ethics may be involved in moral error, failure, or mistake,<sup>25</sup> the full range of usage of *hamartia* may still be relevant. *Hamartia* in *Poetics* 13 may have (a) its full range, or be confined to (b) moral error, or (c) mistake or failure. If the word has its full range, Aristotle is correctly representing the usage of Greek tragedy. If this is his usage here, the distinction *mete dia kakian kai mochtherian . . . alla di' hamartian tina* is a “philosophical” one: his “best” tragic character must not have a bad moral *hexis*, but may be *akrates* committing a moral error. The form of the distinction, however; as Aristotle expresses it, gives great emphasis to *di' hamartian tina* an emphasis that is completely misleading so far as the fifth century is concerned for, as we have seen, *any* change from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia* involves an *hamartia*; and if any action that precipitates such a change is an *hamartia*, *hamartia* doubtless should be mentioned in the analysis, but requires no emphasis.

However, it seems unlikely that, using *hamartia* here, Aristotle had moral error in mind at all. Aristotle holds that it is *miaros* to depict or watch the portrayal on stage of a man who is very *epieikes* involved in an

---

<sup>25</sup> The distinction between *μοχθηρία* and *ἀκρασία* is useful to Aristotle in his philosophical ethics, but it would be pointless to try to determine which of the bad characters in extant tragedy is *μοχθηρός* and *ἀκρατής*.

*hamartia*<sup>26</sup> that leads him from good fortune to ill, though a man who is only moderately *epieikes*, depicted in such a situation, furnishes the best kind of tragedy. So, if Oedipus is hot-tempered his situation is *phoberon* and *eleeinon*, but if he lacked this flaw (and any other moral flaw he may be held to possess) the portrayal of his *hamartia* would be *miaros*. Accordingly, a man who is very *epieikes* may be involved in the kind of *hamartia* envisaged by Aristotle in *Poetics* 13. But *epieikeia* denotes and commends co-operative excellence generally: beyond a certain degree of excellence in *epieikeia*, the portrayal of the tragic character making a moral *hamartia* is not *miaros*, but impossible. This argument<sup>27</sup> excludes alternative (b), that *hamartia* means “moral error” in *Poetics* 13, and seems to exclude (a), that *hamartia* includes moral error. To say this is not to say that no Greek tragedies were occasioned by moral error; it is to say that Aristotle is not making this prescription for the best kind of tragedy.

The third choice remains: the best kind of tragedy portrays a man who is *epieikes*, but not not extremely *epieikes*, making a mistake of fact; and the portrayal of a man who is extremely *epieikes* making such a mistake is *miaros*. At first sight this choice seems little more attractive: *miaros* seems an extraordinarily strong word to apply to such a drama. A devotee of the “tragic moral flaw” theory of tragedy might well hold that neither of these types of drama was a tragedy at all; but he would certainly not be so shocked as is Aristotle by the portrayal of a very virtuous man making a mistake of fact. Very virtuous persons do make mistakes of fact; and it seems to be no part of the function of the drama to suggest that this is not the case.

Aristotle’s usage of *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13, then is far from coinciding with the usage of *hamartia* in extant Greek tragedy, and would exclude many *hamartiai* in which, as we have seen, important tragic characters are involved to their detriment. In so far as Aristotle is prescribing to the dramatists of his own day the best method of writing a tragedy, this is of little significance; but in so far as he is describing and evaluating fifth-century tragedy, we may reasonably ask why he restricts the range of *hamartia* in this manner. I have tried to show above that the range of

---

<sup>26</sup> ἁμαρτία is not mentioned in 1452b 34, but there must be *some* cause. The run of the paragraph shows that ἁμαρτία is more in Aristotle’s mind here, but my argument is not affected by the inclusion of accident as another possible cause. The resulting tragedy would be equally μαρὸν.

<sup>27</sup> The conclusion that ἁμαρτία “means” “mistake” in *Poetics* 13 seems now accepted by most Aristotelians. I find comparison of parallel passages inconclusive by itself, though *EN* 1142a 2 and *Rhet.* 137b 5ff. reinforce the argument offered here.

“*hamartia* leading from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia*” depends, in the fifth century, on the usage and pre-eminent emotive power of words of the *arete*-group. Aristotle’s restricted range of *hamartia*, as I shall now endeavor to prove, his shock at the portrayal on the stage of men who are very *epieikeis* making a mistake of fact, and the differences between his system of values and that of the fifth century, are closely linked phenomena: Aristotle approves of, and is shocked by, precisely the kinds of drama of which he does approve and by which he is shocked, in virtue of his own system of values, which differs not only from our own, but also from that of Athens in the fifth century.

Before discussing this in detail, I must point the distinction between Aristotelian values and those of the fifth-century tragic dramatists in a somewhat different manner; for I now wish to consider the attitudes to the characters in drama manifested by Aristotle (and, I would urge, at least some of his contemporaries). Aristotle reasonably enough, holds that a tragic drama should arouse pity, and that pity is felt *peri ton anaxion* . . . *dustuchonta*. It is relevant to observe which characters are pitied, or held to be *anaxioi dustuchein*, in extant tragedy. Enough has been said already to suggest that the criteria are likely to be different from those of Aristotle, for whom it is the degree of *epieikeia* of the character that determines whether or not he is *axios dustuchein*, (1453a1 ff.) but a few examples will indicate the differences more precisely.

In Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi* 444 ff., we find the following lines in the mouth of Electra:

You speak of the manner of my father’s death; while I  
 Dishonored (*atimos*) stood apart without worth (*ouden axia*).  
 Shut away in an inner room like a vicious dog  
 I brought forth tears that were readier than laughter,  
 As hidden away I poured forth my laments with heavy weeping.  
 Hearing such things, inscribe them on your heart <Father>.

In Sophocles’ *Electra* we find the following, again in the mouth of Electra (185ff.):

But for me, already, most of my life  
 Has passed without hope.  
 My strength has waned  
 And I am wasted in child-barrenness  
 Without a loving (*philos*) husband to champion me  
 Like an alien, unworthy (*anaxia*)  
 I serve in my father’s halls dressed in these rags,  
 And standing at a pauper’s table.

*Choephoroi* 444 is translated by Tucker: “I, the while, despised, counting for naught (*ouden axia*), was kept aloof . . .”; and by the Loeb translator “. . . But I the while, despised, *accounted a thing of naught*, was kept aloof . . .”; while Jebb translates *Electra* 189 “But like some *despised* alien . . .” In the contexts, these translations make tolerable sense, but do not accurately translate the Greek. *Anaxios* does not mean “despised,”<sup>28</sup> but rather “unworthy of” with reference to some criterion, whether expressed or, as here, unexpressed but readily supplied from the context. In the *Electra* passage, Electra’s train of thought is clear: she was the daughter of a wealthy house, and a princess; she might have been expected to have been married into another noble house and to have borne children; but as it is, like some alien in her native land, she is no more than a servant in her father’s house, and is dressed in a manner unbecoming a princess, and *kenais . . . amphistatai trapezais*. For Electra, as for Polyxena, this is *aischron*<sup>29</sup> but Electra complains more bitterly. The word she uses is *anaxia*; and she might have added *dustuchein*. She is *anaxia dustuchein*, in virtue of her inherited high position, her *arete*. Similarly, in the *Choephoroi*, both the general tenor of the *kommos*<sup>30</sup> and the immediate context of Electra’s speech indicate the meaning of the lines. The Chorus (443) said “you hear of your father’s dishonorable (*atimos*) sufferings.” Agamemnon, who was “of mortals most worthy (*axiotatos*) to be praised” in virtue of his destruction of Troy (*Agamemnon* 531), died *atimos*. Electra turns to her own situation, says that she, too, has become *atimos*, and adds *ouden axia*. Whether the last line of the antistrophe (450) is addressed to Orestes (Tucker) or to Agamemnon (Sidgwick), it is a complaint: Electra believes that her present situation should not be what it is, and that Orestes and Agamemnon should be angry. In these circumstances it is surely more likely that *ouden axia* means “in no way worthy of such a fate” than merely “counting for naught.” If so, the complaint in the *Choephoroi* is precisely that of the *Electra*: princesses should not be treated thus.

I have attempted to prove that this is the correct interpretation of the above passages, since it seems not to be the usual one. Elsewhere the tragedians make the point more explicitly. In Euripides’ *Heraclidae* (525ff.) Macaria says of the evil fate she fears for herself:

<sup>28</sup> Nor does ἄτιμος in the *Choephoroi* passage. The usage approximates to Homer’s, c.f., “‘Honour’ and ‘Punishment’ in the Homeric Poems” B.I.C.S. 7 (1960): 23 ff.

<sup>29</sup> And cf. Polyxena’s μὴ κατ’ ἄζϊαν, *Hecuba*, 374.

<sup>30</sup> *Kommos* is a lyrical song of lamentation within Greek Tragedy. Often the Chorus and a principal character sing in unison. This often occurs at a critical stage in the play[ed.].



Is it not better to die than to meet this fate  
 I don't deserve (*anaxian*)?  
 For some other woman this would be more fitting,  
 A woman not distinguished ('*episemos*) as I am.  
 Earlier in the play, the Chorus had said to Demophon (232ff.):  
 Hearing of their misfortunes, I pity them, oh King.  
 Now indeed, I really see good birth overcome by fortune;  
 For these children of a noble father (*patros esthlou*)  
 Are suffering ill-fortune that they do not deserve (*dustuchous' anaxios*)

Macaria says that she is *episemos*; the Chorus says that the children are sprung from an *esthlos pater*; and as a result of their status, the children of Heracles are *anaxioi dustuchein*, and the Chorus pities them.

In all the foregoing examples, those who are *anaxioi dustuchein*, are women or children, whose relevant *arete* is social, for they are not expected to display fighting qualities. It is true that they have not committed any breach of co-operative excellences; but it is not in virtue of their co-operative excellences that they are *anaxioi dustuchein*, even though co-operative excellences are an important aspect of the *arete* of Greek women from Homer onwards.<sup>31</sup> In the case of adult male *arete* extant tragedy furnishes examples of men who are held to be *anaxioi dustuchein* in virtue of that *arete*, despite breaches of co-operative excellences. In Euripides' *Ion* (1514ff.) Ion, who has recently discovered his true identity and status says:

Fortune, how close I came to killing my mother  
 How near I came to undeserved (*anaxian*) disaster.

Ion does not mean that to have killed Creusa would not have been a crime, but that other people would have thought so, so that he would have been punished none the less, but the punishment would have been *anaxion*. In the context he can only mean that to have been punished for the crime, as he would have been had he committed it, would have been *anaxion* of the status that he has now discovered himself to possess. Again, in Sophocles' *Ajax* Teucer thus curses Agamemnon and Menelaus, who have forbidden the burial of Ajax in consequence of what he had done while mad (1389ff.):

Therefore, may the Father, who rules on high Olympus,  
 And unforgetting Fury and Justice (*dike*), the fulfiller, destroy

---

<sup>31</sup> The possession of co-operative excellences is not a sufficient, though it is a necessary, condition of a woman's possessing ἀρετή in fifth-century and earlier Greek; see *M&R*, p. 36ff., 83 (28), 161.

The wretches wretchedly—even as they sought to cast out the man  
With outrage, undeservedly (*anaxios*).

That Ion and Ajax have committed breaches of co-operative excellences is irrelevant to their being *anaxioi dustuchein*, in the eyes of the speakers at all events. (I shall discuss this last point below.)

Nor, is this merely tragic usage in the fifth century. In Thucydides 3.59, the Plataeans are pleading with the Spartans not to destroy them at the behest of the Thebans. They ask them “to spare us and to yield to the impressions of a reasonable compassion; reflecting not merely on the awful fate in store for us, but also on the character of the sufferers, and on the impossibility of predicting how soon misfortune may fall even upon those who deserve it not.” They ask for *oiktos* not merely because the fate that the Thebans destine for them is terrible, but also in virtue of those of their characteristics that entitle them to it (*hoioi te an ontas pathoimen*); and they conclude by referring to the incalculability of misfortune, which may fall even on him who is *anaxios* (who does not deserve it). The Plataeans clearly regard themselves as *anaxioi dustuchein*. Their reason is that they fought bravely for the Greeks against the Persians at the time of the Persian War; and (3.58.1) they term this *tes aretes tes es tous Hellenas*.<sup>32</sup> Their claim to pity, to be *anaxioi dustuchein*, is founded on their *arete* in the traditional sense of the word.<sup>33</sup>

In a precisely similar manner Oedipus claims to be pitiable (*Phoenissae* 1758ff.):

You who abide in my homeland, behold Oedipus;  
He who solved the famous riddle and was the greatest (*megistos*) of  
men. It was I, alone, who stopped the murderous Sphinx  
Now it is I who am driven out dishonored (*atimos*)  
And pitiable (*oiktros*) from this land.

Oedipus does not claim that though he was *epieikes* (but not extremely *epieikes*) he has fallen from his high position and stature, and so is pitiable; but that he is to be pitied because, though he had manifested traditional *arete* on behalf of Thebes, he is yet *atimos* and cast out.

In all these examples<sup>34</sup> the speaker claims that the persons in whose interest he or she is speaking is *anaxios dustuchein*, and deserves pity, in virtue of his or her possession of *arete* in the traditional sense. To say this

<sup>32</sup> And see also 3.53.4 and 3.54.3.

<sup>33</sup> Herodotus always uses ἀνάξιος with reference to traditional ἀρετή; see 1.73.5; 1.114.4, 7, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also, e.g., Eur. *Phoen.* 627 ff.

is not to say that it is impossible under any circumstances to use other criteria in extant tragedy to determine whether or not a character deserves his fate, in the opinion of the speaker. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1527 Clytemnestra says of Agamemnon—if the line is correctly so emended—*axia drasas axia paschon* [worthy the suffering for the worthiness of the deed]. Nor is this surprising: qualities that are held to be *aretai* are most important, but only to those who regard themselves as belonging to the same group as the person evaluated, since the *arete* valued is the one that serves to defend *one's own* group. Clytemnestra regards Agamemnon as her enemy; that he has been brought low is naturally a matter for satisfaction in her eyes, and she reckons his deserts in terms of the wrong he has done her; but Agamemnon's being or not being *axios* of his *dustuchia* is reckoned in very different terms by Agamemnon himself and the members of his group.

Since it is the possession of traditional *arete* that renders one *anaxios dustuchein* in the fifth century, and since this is, with very rare exceptions, valued only by the members of one's own group, it is only from the members of one's own group, one's *philoï*, that one can expect pity. So, in Euripides' *Helen* 453ff., when the old woman tries to drive the shipwrecked Menelaus away, the following exchange takes place:

Menelaus: Where are my armies that won me fame?

Portress: At home you may have been great; but not here.

Menelaus: God, what an *undeserved* (*anaxi*) loss of station (*etimonetha*).

Portress: You weep, how so? For what are you to be pitied (*oiktros*)

Menelaus: I contemplate my past happiness.

Portress: Why don't you give your tears to your people (*philous*)?

Menelaus alludes to his status as ruler and general, his *arete*, adds *anaxi' etimometha*,<sup>35</sup> and claims pity for the loss of his former prosperity; but the old woman tells him to go to his *philoï* for pity; and this is the normal Greek attitude.<sup>36</sup> One rarely sets value on one's enemy's *arete* in Greek. When, in Sophocles' *Ajax* (1355ff.) Odysseus takes the *arete* of Ajax, his *echthros*, into account in urging that he should be given burial, the attitude is very unusual; and of course, Ajax is safely dead. Teucer's attitude,

<sup>35</sup>The phrase, with the substitution of ἀτιμάζειν for ἀτιμοῦν is also used by Achilles to refer to the treatment of Iphigenia, Eur. *I.A.* 943.

<sup>36</sup>Menelaus claims admittance and help also on the ground that he is a shipwrecked ξένος, 449; but this does not affect the argument of the lines quoted here; nor does the fact that Menelaus is in Egypt render the terms in which the argument is conducted less Greek. Cf. also Aesch. *P.V.* 239 ff.

quoted above, is normal: he is *philos* to Ajax. In general *arete*-qualities furnish the *agathos* with a claim only against his own group; and within that group, where *arete*-qualities and others are both in question, *arete* must take precedence: to be *anaxios dustuchein* is to have traditional *arete*, and pity is claimed by those who possess such *arete* and fall from it, whether they are tragic characters in fifth-century drama or fifth-century Plataeans, who are claiming to belong to the same group as the Spartans,<sup>37</sup> (by whose side they fought at Plataea, when the Thebans did not). In such cases, the question of the *epieikeia* of those concerned is of less importance: for the fifth-century tragedian and his audience, *epieikeia* is not an *arete*.<sup>38</sup>

We have seen already that the fifth-century tragedian and his audience did not share Aristotle's values and sensibilities; and we now see that pity, too, seems to be apportioned differently as a result. Since Aristotle holds that pity is an essential part of the experience of watching a tragic performance, this seems likely to cause further confusion. We must also note, for this, too, will be important later, that the possession of *arete* does not merely furnish a claim for preferential treatment from the other members of the group whose stability and prosperity is assured by one's *arete*, and a claim for pity from one's *philoï* when one is cast down; it also furnishes an expectation that, with one's family, one will enjoy—and continue to enjoy—a particular mode of life, of which, in virtue of the usefulness of one's *arete* to the group as a whole, one is *axios*. One's being *axios* of prosperity is a claim derived from the totality of one's *arete*-qualities; and the claim seems to persist in despite of the disapproval of heaven and the resulting downfall.<sup>39</sup> At all events, Artabanus (Hdt. 7.10) having pointed out to Xerxes that lightning strikes the tallest trees draws the moral: “And so it is that a large army is destroyed by a small one; whenever in jealousy the god casts fear or thunder among them, then are they destroyed in a way unworthy (*anaxios*) of them? For the god does

---

<sup>37</sup> The Thebans attack this claim by saying, 3. 63, that the Plataeans are *now* grouped with the Athenians against the rest of the Greeks, and that their *past áδίκη* of the Plataeans to the five Lacedaemonian δικασταί before whom the speeches are made; and can naturally use *áδίκη* with reference to different criteria, 3.63, *ὡς δε ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον τε ἠδικήκατε τοὺς Ἑλλῶνας καὶ ἀξιότεροὶ ἐστε πάσης ζημίας, πειρασόμεθα ἀποφάνειν*.

<sup>38</sup> There are occasional exceptions, corresponding to the exceptions in the use of *ἀρετή*, etc., discussed above. At Soph. *phil.* 681ff.,—an “advanced” play, as we have seen already—Philoctetes is suffering *ἀναξίως*; and the criterion is his not having wronged anyone; and c.f. also 438ff. and 1007ff.

<sup>39</sup> The claim of *ἀρετή* against heaven is much stronger in Homer. See *M&R*, p. 38.

not allow pride in anyone other than himself.” And Andromache, in Euripides’ *Andromache* (96 ff.) can say:

My sorrows are manifold—not one only:  
 My native city is vanquished, and Hector’s dead  
 My cruel fate bound me in shackles  
 Fell into a day of slavery, unworthily (*anaxios*)

The *arete*-qualities of Xerxes’ army and of Andromache render them *anaxoi dustuchein*, despite the fact that *ho theos* of Andromache’s *daimon* has brought them to *dustuchion*. The possession of *arete*, which necessarily includes prosperity, furnishes an expectation and a claim that one will continue to be—and deserves to be—prosperous.

We may now consider why Aristotle admires or is shocked by certain kinds of tragic drama. Since this entails an attempt to guess at Aristotle’s processes of thought—for Aristotle does not explain them here—it must be speculative; but there must be some reason, or cause, for the opinions expressed in *Poetics* 13. The problem may best be approached through the type of dramas which shocked Aristotle.

The preceding discussion has done little to show *why* Aristotle should be so shocked. He has defined his tragic hero in terms that suggest that his degree of *epieikeia* is his most important quality; and yet he seems to be saying also that if a man who is very *epieikes* passes from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia* as the result of an *hamartia*, this, when portrayed in tragedy, is *mieron*. But if *hamartia* means, as it seems to mean, “mistake of fact,” he still retains his *epieikeia*, in so far as this commends his moral goodness, for making a mistake of fact does not reduce one’s moral goodness, as Aristotle is well aware (*EN* 1109b 30ff). If his *epieikeia* is his most important quality, surely the *epieikes* could be portrayed as continuing to manifest it through every vicissitude of fortune. The resulting drama might not be the finest kind of tragedy, but one might suppose that it would at least be edifying; yet this is the kind of drama that Aristotle chooses to term *mieron*.

Now *mieron* is a very strong word, and a very curious word to find in such a context. It has a well-established usage in several fields in writers before Aristotle. Basically, it signifies something “stained” or “dirtied” in a physical sense; then, in technical religious language, it denotes an object or person which is both “polluted” and, since such “pollution” was contagious, “polluting.” When employed as it is in *Poetics* 13, its basic usage is irrelevant; and it has not its technical usage, since a character passing from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia* is not necessarily “polluted” in the religious sense (though incurring grave “pollution,” in the manner of

Orestes and Oedipus, would inevitably bring a man to *dustuchia*); and the audience is certainly not technically “polluted” by watching the kind of tragedy of which Aristotle so violently disapproves. *Miaron*, however, is also used by such writers as Aristophanes and Demosthenes as a term of strong abuse, frequently directed at moral failings. The link between these usages is the expression of strong feelings of repugnance and revulsion; and the last usage is neither literal nor technical.

I suggest that *miaros* in *Poetics* 13 is not only not used in its technical, religious sense, but not in any technical sense at all; that it is a piece of “ordinary language” used generally at the time to condemn works of art that were felt to be shocking; and that here it expresses a repugnance that neither Aristotle nor anyone else of his day had fully analyzed, and about whose cause Aristotle was not completely clear. This being so, it may well appear presumptuous to attempt to discover the cause now. Nevertheless, we have discovered certain tensions between the values of Aristotle, which he shared with at least some of his contemporaries, and the values of fifth-century tragedy; possibly the cause may be in some way related to these tensions, perhaps with the addition of others that have not yet become apparent.

In the fifth century, as we have seen<sup>40</sup> *arete* denotes and commends the competitive excellences. To possess and exercise these is clearly to the advantage of their possessor; in traditional Greek values it is undeniably better, for the *agathos* himself, to be *agathos* and successful rather than *kakos* and unsuccessful.<sup>41</sup> No divine rewards and punishments are needed to induce the *agathos* to be *agathos*, in the traditional usage. The *co-operative* excellences, on the other hand, were not traditionally *aretai*, and were choiceworthy only in so far as they were held to conduce to the desired condition of *arete*. Those who held that the gods inevitably punished *adikia* were restrained from injustice, for the gods punished by reducing a man’s prosperity and hence his *arete*.

This system of values leads to ethical problems, but not to the tensions of *Poetics* 13. From Homer onwards, the possession of competitive *arete* (whose possession entails that one is already prosperous) and its exercise to protect the stability and prosperity of the group gives the *agathos* a claim to preferential treatment from the rest of the group; he has, in a sense, a right to a privileged way of life—he is *anaxios dustuchein*—for the group cannot do without his services. But it is always clear that the *agathos* can only enjoy such a life if he defends the group successfully; if

---

<sup>40</sup> See above and *M&R*, *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> For the rewards expected by the ἀγαθός, when his ἀρετή involves him in danger and expense, see *M&R*, chapter 10.

he fails to do so, there is no sense of moral shock at the consequent fall to *dustuchia*, for the fall was only to be expected. Even if one comes to *dustuchia* after exerting one's *arete* to the utmost there is no sense of moral shock like that of *Poetics* 13; one may be faced with human odds so overwhelming that defeat is inevitable, or some superhuman power may have resolved on one's destruction. The fifth-century Greek may have hoped that heaven would be just—and may sometimes have railed at heaven when it was not—but he did not expect that all his gods would be just all the time. Traditional *arete*, then, is a desirable condition in itself and the *agathos* will make every effort not to lose it; if he does lose it, this is *aischron* for him, and his *philoï* will pity him, but they will not feel moral confusion.

Toward the end of the fifth century, belief in divine punishment for breaches of co-operative excellences seems to have declined, at all events in those sections of society whose views are represented in extant literature; and what was earlier decried as *anosion*, or by some similar word, began to be termed *aischron*, and it was asserted by some that the co-operative excellences were *aretai*. Once this assertion came under the scrutiny of the thinkers of the day, there were only two logically defensible attitudes that could be taken to it: one could either, with Thrasymachus and Callicles, maintain that *dikaïosune* was manifestly disadvantageous to its possessor, and so could not be an *arete* (for traditional *arete* is advantageous, and it is into the traditional pattern that the new *arete* must be fitted, if at all); or, with Socrates, one could maintain that *dikaïosune* is an *arete* like the others, and so must be advantageous.<sup>42</sup>

Aristotle and his circle accept without argument that the co-operative excellences are *aretai*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle takes this for granted, with the result that if as he argues at 1098a 16ff. *eudaimonia* is *psuches energeia kat' areten* [flourishing is the actualization of the soul according to excellence]. These excellences must be conducive to *eudaimonia*. He offers no rigorous demonstration, however, of the manner in which the co-operative excellences are “good for” the *psuche* of their possessors; and he is an “ordinary language” philosopher, handling words with the overtones that they possess in everyday usage; as a result, the manner in which the co-operative excellences are “better for” their

---

<sup>42</sup> The position of Polus, that ἀδικεῖν is more αἰσχρον than ἀδικεῖσθαι, but that ἀδικεῖσθαι is more κάκον than ἀδικεῖν, which entails that δικαιοσύνη is an ἀρετή, but κακόν (disadvantageous) for its possessor, is not a view which, in the context of traditional Greek ἀρετή, can be sustained for a moment; and it is naturally treated with contempt by Plato, *Gorgias* 474c 5ff. (and see *M&R*, 266 pp.).

possessors must be in respect of *eudaimonia* in the widest sense which prominently includes external *agatha*. The overtones of *epieikes*<sup>43</sup> themselves suggest that Aristotle expects that those who are “good” will prosper. Aristotle need not demonstrate step-by-step the manner in which *epieikeia* is “good for” its possessor; but the overtones of the word, and the tacit presuppositions that lie behind its being termed an *arete* at all, demand that it should be “good for” him, and entail that, in respect of the new *arete* as of the old, he is *anaxios dustuchein*.

Now Aristotle’s best type of tragic character must be *anaxios dustuchein*; and his deserts *seem* to be reckoned exclusively in terms of co-operative excellences. The more *epieikes* he is, the more he is *anaxios dustuchein*; and so, one would suppose, the more pity his fate would arouse, so that the tragedy of the man who is supreme *epieikes* and is brought down by a mistake of fact should be the best of all. In fact, such a tragedy is *miaros*. Clearly, Aristotle does not expect the response of the audience to be *less* than pity; he expects a reaction at once more violent and more confused. The situation must be more complex than *Poetics* 13 in itself would suggest.

In that chapter, Aristotle places great emphasis on the—considerable but not complete—*epieikeia* of the tragic character in the best type of tragedy, with the apparent implication that *epieikeia* is the most important of the *aretai* in Aristotle’s eyes; but, so far as concerns the values of real life, this is not Aristotle’s ethical position at all. As I have tried to show elsewhere, Aristotle was not able, even had he wished to do so, to assert the pre-eminence of the quiet moral excellences, though he could now term them *aretai*.<sup>44</sup> The man who, in his eyes, is *aristos* in practical *arete* is the *megalopsuchos* [great souled], who possesses co-operative excellences, *EN* 1123b32, but a great deal besides. He has high social position, great possessions, and reputation, and should ideally be completely self-sufficient materially (and in every other way). Now Aristotle not only defined the best type of tragic character in terms of his *epieikeia*, but also said that he should be *ton en megale doxe ontos kai eutuchia* [among those of great renown (*megale doxe*) and good fortune (*eutuchia*)]. The full significance of this addition now becomes clear: a great part of the *arete* of the tragic character depends on his possession of *megale doxa kai eutuchia*. This is as true of the fourth century as of the fifth: that *epieikeia* has become an *arete* has changed the system of values, but has not transformed it completely. For Aristotle the superlatively

---

<sup>43</sup> See discussion above.

<sup>44</sup> See *M&R*, chap. 16.



*epieikes* who is *ton en megale doxe onton kai eutuchia* is deprived of most of his *arete* and *eudaimonia* by his fall. He is still *epieikes*, perhaps—though the word has social overtones for Aristotle, as we have seen—but is no longer capable of much Aristotelian *arete*: *epieikeia* is one of a constellation of *aretai* for Aristotle, and in no sense the most important.

Yet the apparent importance of *epieikeia* in *Poetics* 13 does not result from the carelessness or ignorance of the modern reader; the word is emphasized by Aristotle himself. It must appear at first sight that Aristotle is using a different standard for evaluating actions on the stage from the one he uses in real life. This is not the case. I have argued elsewhere<sup>45</sup> that, though *epieikeia* is not the pre-eminent *arete* for Aristotle, actions can be judged in terms of the co-operative excellences alone in *optimum conditions*, that is to say, when all the persons involved are *agathoi* in the full Aristotelian sense, possessed both of all the *aretai*, including the ethical ones, and of external *agatha*. Now all the major characters of extant Greek tragedy either possess such external *agatha* or possessed them once and have been deprived of them. The fact that all belong to the class traditionally designated *agathoi* makes it possible for Aristotle, in evaluating tragic characters, to lay emphasis on their *epieikeia*; but the fact that, in the portrayal of a tragic drama, one or more of them must pass from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia*, produces serious tensions in Aristotelian values, tensions that are not found in the fifth century.

If we take into account that *epieikeia*, being now an *arete*, must be “good for” its possessor, that Aristotle has offered no proof of this, and that *epieikeia* is only one of the Aristotelian *aretai*, certain results follow, in terms of Aristotle’s values, when the superlatively *epieikes* passes from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia*.

In the first place, his being superlatively *epieikes* has not proved to be “good for” him in the end; and the fact that Aristotle has never attempted to show how it would be “good for” him to be *epieikes* only makes the position more shocking to the ethical susceptibilities of Aristotle and his circle. Had an argument been offered, it could be inspected for flaws; in the circumstances, shock is the only possible response.

To illustrate the second result, it is necessary first to examine a possible objection. After all, it may be said, Aristotle declares in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1136b 20) that the *epieikes* is *elattotikos*, that the equitable man sometimes, in making a division, allots a larger share than is strictly just to the person with whom he is sharing. Why then should Aristotle be shocked if the *epieikes* gets the worst of it? The reply is

---

<sup>45</sup> *M&R*, pp. 342 ff.

twofold. First, *epieikes* is used here in a special sense, which is included in the “ordinary language” usage of the word but forms only part of its range; and secondly, Aristotle immediately goes on to suggest that the *epieikes* does get a larger share as a result—either of *doxa* [renowned] or of *to haplos kalon* [popularly recognized as noble]. Of the latter, the securing of which motivates the actions of Aristotle’s moral man, the *epieikes* will certainly not take a smaller share. Now *kalon* is, by the time of Aristotle, a word which sets the same level as *arete*; for since the *agathos* does *kala* and shuns *aischra*, the range of *agathos*, *arete*, and *kalon* should coincide, and does—after Homer—when values are stable.

It follows both that *epieikeia* is *kalon*, and is indeed pursued *tou kalou heneka* [for the sake of the noble], and that the same is true of Aristotelian *arete* taken as a whole. Accordingly, when the superlative *epieikes* falls into *dustuchia* and loses much of his *arete*, his position is not *kalon* just as surely as it was not *kalon* for Polyxena to fall into slavery after having been a princess. But, it may be replied, Polyxena had nothing to set against this; while Aristotle’s *epieikes* can still regard his *epieikeia*, in so far as this commends moral goodness, as *kalon*. But herein lies the whole problem: that the position of the *epieikes* so situated is at the same time *kalon* (in general terms) and not *kalon for him*, and that the same term of value is being applied to two very different aspects of his position, creates ethical confusion. It seems to me not unnatural that Aristotle’s response to this confusion, which he had not himself analyzed, should be violent and emotional, as his use of *miaros* clearly indicates.

One further possible objection to this view must be examined. Aristotle has told us in *Poetics* 13 that the tragic character should be *anaxios dustuchein*. But surely the *epieikes* (goodness) endowing great renown and good fortune (*ton en megalei doxei onton kai eutuchia*) is *anaxios dustuchein* (unworthy through bad fortune) if anyone is, for he is so in respect both of his competitive *arete*, whose claim of course still exists in the fourth century,<sup>46</sup> and of his new co-operative *arete*. Why does Aristotle expect that the response of the audience to the fall of such a man will be so violent and confused?

The answer lies in the overtones and implications of the phrase *anaxios dustuchein*, which are quite different when the phrase is used of the co-operative *aretai* from those appropriate to its use with the competitive *aretai*; while its use of the tragedy of the moderately *epieikes* is different

---

<sup>46</sup> The difference produced by the new status of *ἐπιείκεια* is that, even though a man possesses competitive *ἀρετή*, a breach of the requirements of *ἐπιείκεια* cannot be taken into account, and he becomes ἄξιος δυστυχῆν for he has shown himself deficient in an *ἀρετή*.

yet again. I have shown that the fall of the *agathos* who had exerted his traditional *arete* to the utmost caused no moral tensions for the fifth century, *anaxios dustuchein* though he was. But the *co-operative aretai* are very different. I have already said that their desirability must be tacitly related to material prosperity for Aristotle. Such prosperity is not inherent in the possession of co-operative *arete*: a man might be just and yet *dustuches*. It follows that the traditional *agathos* possessed an *arete* that was manifestly desirable in itself, and *anaxios dustuchein* represented a claim, in respect of the services he had rendered, to continue to enjoy prosperity, while acknowledging that the universe was not so organized as to guarantee its continued enjoyment, however vigorously the desirable *arete* was exercised; but the co-operative *agathos* has an *arete* which is not *evidently* desirable in itself but that, *qua arete*, must be desirable, and whose desirability tacitly depends on the universe being organized in such a way as to ensure that prosperity will accompany the co-operative *agathos* through life. This is not something self-evident, but a tacitly assumed postulate, for Aristotle and his circle; and it is something on which the status of *epieikeia* as an *arete* ultimately depends. Necessarily, then, to say that the *epieikes* is *anaxios dustuchein* is to make a claim with very different overtones from those of the claim of the traditional *agathos*; and when the claim is overset, when a good person of great renown and good fortune (*epieikes ton en megalei doxei onton kai eutuchia*) falls as the result of a mistake, his fall shakes the foundations of Aristotelian ethics. The traditional guarantors of the desirability of the co-operative excellences, the Greek gods, now just, now jealous, now capricious, set many problems for the thoughtful fifth-century Greek; but in the nature of these gods, however he might disapprove of the results of certain of their actions, lay the explanation for the nature of the results. The fifth-century Greek could not be thrown into such an emotional turmoil by any tragic performance as would be Aristotle by seeing portrayed on the stage a disproof of his tacit assumption that the co-operative *aretai*, for the reasons already discussed, are desirable; and when we remember also the confusion occasioned for Aristotle by the simultaneous applicability of *kalon* and *aischron* to different aspects of the position of the fallen *epieikes*, his judgement that such a fall is *miaros* is not difficult to understand. Aristotle expects the tragic stage to portray situations of which he approves ethically;<sup>47</sup> were this not the case, he could hardly be ethically

---

<sup>47</sup> The ἐπιεικὴς τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ is Aristotle's εὐδαίμων. Such a man has his house set on a rock, *EN* 1101a 9ff. In the same passage Aristotle acknowledges that a conjunction of great catastrophes might bring down the εὐδαίμων; but he may yet

shocked by anything portrayed; and he can only find ethically shocking in the extreme the portrayal of the fall of the superlatively *epieikes* as the result of a mistake, for this strikes at the root of his unanalyzed ethical assumptions.

It remains to show why the fall of the moderately *epieikes* who is *ton en megalei doxei onton kai eutuchiai* is not polluted (*miarou*), but elicits fear and pity (*phoberon kai eleeinon*), for he too is *anaxios dustuchein*. The moderately *epieikes* has *some* co-operative moral *aischron* in his character; this is what renders him only moderately *epieikes*; and so, on the stage of all events, he might expect some ill fortune as a punishment: he is deserving of this ill fortune (*axios dustuchias tinos*). Accordingly, when he meets with ill fortune, as Aristotle requires, as a result of a mistake of fact, he is *anaxios dustuchein* in respect of the action that has brought him to *dustuchia*, though he is in terms of co-operative *arete* not *anaxios dustuchein*, *tout court*. The audience can thus pity him—as they would not have done had he fallen as the result of a *moral hamartia*, in so far as they shared Aristotle's values<sup>48</sup>—for he is *anaxios dustuchein* in respect to this action; they will not find his fate *miarou*, for he is not completely *anaxios dustuchein* with reference to the co-operative *aretai*. It is only when loss of traditional *arete* is combined with complete *epieikeia* that there is the sharp contrast between competitive *aischron* and co-operative *kalon*, and the problem of the fall of the man who is in every way *anaxios dustuchein* with all the appropriate overtones. The moderately *epieikes*, now fallen as the result of his mistake of fact, possesses some *aischron* in respect of both sets of *aretai*; and he never was completely *anaxios dustuchein*, though here was not sufficient co-operative *aischron* in his character to deprive him of the pity of Aristotle. Accordingly, the fate of the moderately *epieikes* who falls as the result of a mistake is *phoberon kai eleeinon*, and furnishes the best kind of tragedy.

I cannot deny that the foregoing argument is fine-drawn; but it does arise from the context of values found in Athens among the circle whom

---

find the portrayal of such an event on the sage *μυρόν*, as he does, for the reasons given in the text.

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle's equation of *ἁμαρτία* with mistake must derive in a great part from a feeling that a man of moderate *ἐπιείκεια* passing from *εὐτυχία* to *δυστυχία* as the result of moral error would not arouse pity, since his fall would be deserved: he would not be *ἀναξίως* *δυστυχεῖν*. Any such feeling would certainly have been reinforced by his admiration for the plots associated with Oedipus and Thyestes: Aristotle was well acquainted with fifth-century tragedy, and must have realized that the dramas he admired most had plots which contained important mistakes of fact.

Aristotle expects to agree without argument that the co-operative excellences are *aretai*, and it seems to me to explain—what otherwise appears very difficult to explain—the judgements of value actually passed by Aristotle in *Poetics* 13. Aristotle demands of the tragic dramatist that he shall not present upon the stage what is ethically shocking to him, whether it happens in real life or not; and what he finds most shocking is the spectacle of a man of great renown and good fortune (*ton en megalei doxei onton kai eutuchiai*) who is very *epieikes*—morally good in a co-operative sense, but with social overtones—making a mistake of fact, and being brought low as a result. Aristotle’s attitude can derive only from his system of values; and I hope I have succeeded in demonstrating how, in terms of that system, the attitude is comprehensible.

In this article I have tried to show what Aristotle “means” by the judgements of value that he passes in *Poetics* 13, to analyze the reason or cause for the most baffling of them, and to indicate in broad outline the differences between Aristotle’s system of values and that of the tragedians and audiences of the fifth century. On the basis of the foregoing pages, we may conclude by examining briefly the relevance of *Poetics* 13 both to extant Greek tragedy and to tragedy in general.

If Aristotle “means” “mistake of fact” by *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13, no theory of tragedy based on a moral flaw in the hero need look to Aristotle for support. In so far as these theories are based on the tragedies produced by other dramatists at other times with other systems of values, this naturally affects neither the status of these theories nor the stature of the tragedies on which they are based. Later tragedy is perfectly capable of standing on its own feet. Indeed, it must: the tragic experience, elusive as its definition may prove in any particular case, must—as I hope this paper has shown in part—take the form it does in any society in virtue of the values in terms of which that society looks at the world. Only a society that held *precisely* the same values as Aristotle would see the tragic experience in precisely the same way; and I hope I have succeeded in showing in this paper that not even the Athens of the century before Aristotle was such a society.

If my interpretation is correct, *Poetics* 13 has really no relevance at all to later tragedy, unless some society can be found that both produced tragedies and had the same values as Aristotle. Nor has the chapter any relevance to extant Greek tragedy. Aristotle’s values are not completely different from those of fifth-century Athens, but they are different in just those respects that most effectively distort his interpretation. Aristotle is looking at fifth-century drama through fourth-century spectacles. The criteria by which he is judging the drama of the fifth century only makes

sense in terms of values that that century did not use to evaluate either drama or daily life. Aristotle does indeed record for us the reactions of an unusually intelligent and sensitive fourth-century Greek to fifth-century Athenian drama. These reactions have considerable historical interest, but furnish no better criteria for judging fifth-century tragedy than the reactions of a modern critic who uses modern values and criteria and pays no attention to the values and criteria of the fifth century itself. Neither can present to us Greek drama as fifth-century tragedians wrote, or as fifth-century audiences understood, the plays we possess.

These conclusions are of course entirely negative; I am not attempting to state here any positive doctrine of extant Greek tragedy. A necessary preliminary of any such statement—supposing that a coherent doctrine held by fifth-century tragedians exists to be discovered, which is by no means self-evident—would be a minute examination, in terms of fifth-century values, of every extant Greek drama, and a detailed demonstration of the effect that that drama might be expected to produce in an audience that, like the tragedian who wrote it, held these values.<sup>49</sup> It might seem more appropriate to present the results that appear in this paper only after conducting such examinations, so that negative conclusions could be supplemented, if possible, with something more positive. Each examination of an individual drama, however, is hampered by the feeling that Aristotle's views must be relevant, and that one must look at the extant plays through his eyes; at every moment, Aristotle interposes his genius between the plays to be interpreted and the modern interpreter. Accordingly, it seems better to me to publish these negative findings now, in the hope that, if correct, they may diminish some of the difficulties that have bedeviled the studies of at least the present writer.

---

<sup>49</sup> This applies also to some specific questions I have been unable to discuss here. For example, I have tried to show that a fifth-century Greek would judge a φίλος to be ἀνάχιος δυστυχεῖν in virtue of his ἀρετή, even if he had committed breaches of co-operative excellences, but (ἀρετή being relevant only within the group) an ἐχθός to be ἄξιος δυστυχεῖν in virtue of similar breaches of co-operative excellences. In order to estimate the manner in which the audience would have judged whether or not a character was ἄξιος δυστυχεῖν in the fifth century, it is accordingly necessary to study the manner in which the Greek tragedian induced the audience to identify themselves with particular characters in the drama. Here no generalization is possible; it is necessary to examine the methods used in each individual play, as I have tried to do in the case of the *Hecuba* and *Heracles* in a forthcoming article (Chapter 3 of this book, ed). But the question is irrelevant to this paper; what is relevant here is that *no* character, generally speaking, is held to be ἀνάχιος δυστυχεῖν in virtue of his possession of the qualities emphasized by Aristotle in *Poetics* 13.

## CHAPTER THREE

# BASIC GREEK VALUES IN EURIPIDES’ *HECUBA* AND *HERCULES FURENS*

### Introduction

The two plays under analysis: Euripides’ *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens* provide a wonderful venue to explore the usage of the following words: *philia*, *philein*; *charis*, *arete*, *agathos*, *kakos*, and *aischron*. Both plays depict violent killing against the backdrop of other events: the aftermath of the Trojan War and Hercules’ twelve labors. These backdrops represent Adkins’ depiction of the traditional competitive ethic that was enunciated in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Against the backdrop are the hints of change in fifth-century Athens. They are only hints, but suggestion is important.

The *Hecuba* is generally depicted as having two parts: (a) the Greek sacrifice of Hecuba’s daughter, Polyxena, to the shade of Achilles; and (b) the vengeance of Hecuba.<sup>1</sup> In the first part Hecuba (who was on the other side in the war, as the wife of Priam) appeals to Odysseus to prevent Polyxena’s death. She uses the rhetorical strategy of being a *phile* of Odysseus. She has conferred a benefit and expects something back, *charis*. This is the ethic that justice is “the returning of favors.”<sup>2</sup> (Much of Adkins’ essay explores the fine details of payback in this traditional ethos.) However, this is mitigated by the fact that her daughter is technically a slave (because they lost the war). This reduces her status in a bargaining form of justice. However, it is still necessary to invoke another traditional argument, about the honor that the fallen receive in the army. To undercut this goes against the power ethic (*arete*) that is the basis of the traditional ethos.

In the second part of the play there is the judgement by Agamemnon on the revenge of Hecuba. Because Polymestor has killed her son,

---

<sup>1</sup> An alternate view sets up Hecuba as the central character such that everything is centered around her revenge—which may, in a sense, allow her to participate in male *arete*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cephalus’ definition of justice that mirrors this (Pl. *Resp.* 331c 1-10).

Polydorus, (who had been sent in good faith with money for protection), Polymestor has violated the basic forms of hospitality (a critical *arete* in the traditional, as well as the developing co-operative ethic). Thus, Hecuba was justified in killing Polymestor's sons and blinding Polymestor. Part of this argument lies in classifying Polymestor's killing of Polydorus as shameful (*aischron*). Agamemnon recognizes this claim while at the same time he is cognizant of his obligation to the army: Polymestor killed one of the *enemy*. This allows him to claim to be a *philos*. Should one go against a *philos* to support an enemy? Agamemnon's tactic is to reject both Hecuba's and Polymestor's claims that he is a *philos* of either of them. However, the charge against Polymestor for killing a guest (*xenos*) in his own home [to steal his money] does not equate to a proper exchange (*charis* to a *philos*). Agamemnon's decision for Hecuba is a clear indication of changing understanding of motivation from the traditional ethos.

In *Hercules Furens* there is another example of this change. This play also is said to have two parts—though sometimes three parts. In the first part the madness of Hercules causes him to kill his three sons and wife (thinking he was killing Eurystheus, the king who assigned him his labors). In the second part, after Hercules' father, Amphitryon, tells him of his homicidal deeds Hercules wants to commit suicide. Theseus, king of Athens, (whom Hercules freed from Hades) uncovers his head. Theseus contends that *philia* is greater than the pollution of bloodshed. But what is the nature of *philia*? Is it really bound up in the traditional notions of power and wealth upheld by a troop of supporters? If so, then we are back into the *arete*-standard of power through prowess and trading of favors, *charis*.

In the third part we consider Hercules' impending suicide? Is it an incidence of cowardice (*deilia*)? This might be one approach, but Theseus takes another approach. He first offers half of his wealth to Hercules—for even the gods commit evil acts and can quantify the recompense. But Hercules demurs. If he kills himself, he risks being *deilia* which would mean he'd be remembered as *kakos*. In the second place, he accepts a rather unique argument that says that if one kills himself, he could never be a warrior again—and to be a warrior is essential to the *arete* man. Q.E.D.

### Adkins' Essay

To be satisfactory, a scholarly interpretation of a Greek tragedy must enable the present-day reader to see the play, so far as is possible, through



the eyes of the fifth-century audience. If it does not, if it merely substitutes the predilections of a particular scholar for those of the reader, it is useless, and indeed worse than useless; for the reader unassisted by the interpretation of others may well examine the play critically for himself, while the reader with an interpretation at his elbow is likely to make every effort to fit the ideas of the tragedian into the schema provided for him. Certainly, more and more interpretations are of the kind that assists the reader; but a significant number, even of the most recent, throw more darkness than light on their subject by refusing to acknowledge the whole context of value and belief in terms of which the tragedians wrote, and the audience watched, these dramas. The result of such misinterpretation is frequently, as in the case of the two I shall discuss here, to present for our admiration a more high-minded and uplifting drama than the one which (say) Euripides wrote; but our concern is presumably not to achieve this end, but to understand Euripides and his audience.

The two recent interpretations of Euripidean plays I have selected for discussion here are not chosen as bad examples of this genre—each makes some interesting and cogent points about the play in question—but as good examples of the danger of interpretations not carried out in terms of basic Greek values.

In a recent book,<sup>3</sup> Professor Lionel Pearson discusses the *Hecuba* of Euripides. The discussion occurs in a chapter entitled “Justice, Friendship, and Loyalty,” which is devoted to an examination of the Greek view that justice consists in helping one’s *philoï*, (and harming one’s *echthroï*). He notes (p. 136) that “Classical Greek literature seems to lay far greater stress on the obligations of friendship and the duty of returning a favour<sup>4</sup> than on the virtue of conferring one;” and he claims (p. 147) that “as a refutation of the popular Greek view that virtue or justice consists simply in returning favors, the *Hecuba* is far more complete and far more brutal than any of the arguments of Socrates.”

Two points require immediate comment. First, in the quotation from p. 147 Pearson refers to “returning favors” as such, without the addition “to one’s friends.” Since the whole chapter is concerned with justice, friendship, and loyalty, and since Pearson, in summing up, also says that the purpose of the *Hecuba* is to show (p. 147) “The damage that can be done by the ‘friendships of evil men,’” the omission may seem trivial; but in his discussion he is inclined to emphasize exchanges of *charis*,

---

<sup>3</sup> *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 144ff.

<sup>4</sup> [Aside from quotations that use “favour” I will maintain “favor” outside these quotations, ed.]

proposed, effected, or refused, and to pay much less attention to the circumstances in which *philia* is held to exist or not to exist, to be possible or impossible. Pearson's discussion is a short one, and it may seem captious to complain of the omission; but this change of emphasis results in his not discussing some points (the possibility of *philia* between Polymestor and Agamemnon, for example) that are crucial to the proper understanding of the play. Even a brief discussion should lead to a correct conclusion. Secondly, in writing "virtue or justice" Pearson does not tell us what Greek word or words he is translating, *arete e dikaiosune*, seems impossible, for the words had, even in the late fifth century (and later), quite different ranges of usage and emotive power, and could not be used as alternatives. *Arete* by itself cannot be thus translated, for it certainly does not denote and commend *simply* returning favors. The word translated *seems* to be *dikaosune* (or rather, since the word is not tragic, some other from the same root); but it will be safest to use "virtue or justice" in the present discussion until it becomes quite clear what word Pearson has in mind, and how it is used in the play.

The Greek word Pearson translates by "favor" is certainly *charis*; and we must first establish how this is used in the *Hecuba*. *Charis*, and other words from the same root, certainly occur frequently in that play. Pearson notes (p. 145) "Polyxena is not to be killed for gain." The word used to characterize Achilles' demand is *geras* (41), and *ageraston* occurs later (115), but it is said that the Greeks would be *acharistoi* (138) if they failed to give Achilles such a *geras*; so we may allow that *charis* is relevant here. Secondly (p. 145), "before [Odysseus] raises the issue of *charis*, Hecuba reminds him that he owes her a *charis*. When Odysseus entered Troy as a spy in disguise, Helen had recognized him and told Hecuba: he entreated her not to reveal him, and she agreed. He admits this is true, and so she taunts him with the basest ingratitude." The word is *achariston* (254); here, too, *charis* is mentioned. Thirdly (p. 146), "Hecuba wants revenge, the punishment of her son's murderer. She makes this request both in the name of justice and as a *charis* that is due to her. Perhaps, she says, Cassandra will reward him for it by love and affection. Agamemnon tries to refuse, protesting that it will offend public opinion if he kills Polymestor; the Greeks will think he is letting a *charis* that he owes Cassandra outweigh the obligation that the army owes to a king of Thrace who is supposed to be an ally." Here certainly *charis* is used in 855 and in 874 *me dokon emen charin* (without seeming to be doing me a favor). Fourthly, (p. 147): "The tally of favors asked and granted is still not complete. Hecuba tricks Polymestor into the tent, where the women are waiting for him, by asking him to do a favor." In fact, she appeals to his

greed (1002ff.): no word for “favor” occurs in the Greek. The point requires no discussion here. Lastly (p. 147): “But instead of recognizing that he deserves to be punished for his crime [Polymestor] complains to Agamemnon that his murder of Polydorus was a *charis*, a favor done for the Greeks, for which they have rewarded him by betraying him to Hecuba, . . . Hecuba tears his defence to pieces in her final tirade; but without this plea, patently false, of *charis* as an excuse for murder, the play would not be complete.” *Charis* certainly occurs here: 1175, 1201, 1243.

Pearson has shown that *charis* is a frequent motif in the *Hecuba*. We have now to discover how this motif is related to the idea of “virtue or justice”: whether Euripides states that a return of *charis* constitutes “virtue or justice,” and whether he is attempting to refute this “popular” view. To achieve such a refutation, he must depict his characters as acting on this view, and either (i) producing a result that is morally repugnant to the *Greeks of the fifth century*, or (ii) being rebuked by some character within the play who explicitly rejects the “popular” view in favor of some higher (and presumably new, un-“popular”) ethic.

To discover which, if either, method Euripides uses in the *Hecuba*, it will be necessary to examine the judgements of value passed in the play in some detail. First, however, the system of values of the period must be characterized in general terms. For a more detailed discussion I must refer the reader to what I have written elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> The most highly valued qualities are still, as they have been throughout recorded Greek, commended by *agathos*, *arete*, *kalon*, and similar words, and their absence decried by such words as *kakos*, *kakia*, and *aischron*; and the qualities concerned are still characteristically those of the competitive excellences: courage, skill, prosperity, and social position. Anything commended as an *arete* still takes precedence over what is not: that is to say, over the co-operative excellences. It is more important to be *agathos* than to be *dikaios*. The justification for the pre-eminence of the competitive excellences is, as it has always been, that these seem more evidently conducive to the stability and prosperity of the group to which the *agathos* belongs, while the co-operative excellences seem less so. To decry something as *anosion*, as disapproved by the gods, is to decry it powerfully, so long as it is believed that the gods will act swiftly to harm the offending individual or his group; but in the later fifth century, belief in the inevitability of punishment from heaven seems to be declining, and

---

<sup>5</sup> See *Merit and Responsibility (M&R)*, ch. 8; and for new usages of these words, some relevant to the discussion of the *Hecuba*: ch. 9.

such words as *anosion* are beginning to lose their power, as the *Hecuba* itself shows. One other realignment of values is taking place at this time: certain words of the *arete*-group are beginning to be used to decry breaches of the co-operative excellences. Several examples of this occur in the *Hecuba*: their significance must be examined in the more detailed discussion.

We may now examine the judgements passed in the play. The first half (1-656) is devoted to Achilles' demand for the sacrifice of Polyxena, to Hecuba's attempts to persuade Odysseus to try to prevent the sacrifice, and to a narrative of its execution. The ghost of Polydorus says (41ff.) that Achilles' ghost has demanded it as a *philon prosphagma kai geras* (sacrifice and prerogative due to a friend), and adds: *oud' adoretos philon / estai pros andron* (nor will he fail to receive a gift from men who are his friends). He refers to his sister as *tes te dustenou kores* (the unhappy girl) (46). When the Chorus recounts the debate of the Greek army, in the course of which it was resolved to sacrifice Polyxena (107ff.), they recall that some Greeks opposed the sacrifice; but they do not mention any specific words of censure used. The words of the other side are recorded: the Athenian leaders said that the Greeks should (126ff.):

Crown Achilles' grave with living blood, and they were saying  
That they would never give preference  
To Cassandra's bed above Achilles' courage.  
And so, the struggle continued equally balanced.

Odysseus' view was that they should "not spurn the noblest (*ariston*) of all the Greeks on account of sacrificing a slave girl" lest one of the dead should say in Hades that the Greeks were *acharistoi* to the Greeks who died on their behalf. All these speakers emphasize Achilles' *arete* as a spearman, and Odysseus refers, too, to the fact that Polyxena is now a slave. These speeches won the day in the assembly; and (144ff.) the Chorus now recommend Hecuba to pray to the gods and to beseech Agamemnon as a suppliant. Hecuba (163ff.) has no confidence in divine help: *pou tis theon . . . eparogos* (where is one of the gods to be our helper)?

Up to 1.215, all the characters naturally feel sympathy for Polyxena; but neither they, nor those Greeks who were opposed to the sacrifice, have used any word to censure it morally. Polyxena's doom is pitiable, granted; but it must be remembered that to be pitiable is to be *athlios*, and so *kakos*, and that by the standards of traditional *arete* it is *aischron for oneself* to be in such a condition, but not *aischron* for the person who has caused the

condition. Only traditional *arete* has been mentioned so far; and it takes precedence over any claims that have yet been brought against it.

At 218 Odysseus arrives, and Hecuba reminds him that she saved his life when he was discovered as a spy in Troy before the city fell. Odysseus admits this; and Hecuba asks him (251ff.)

Wouldn't you admit that with these plans  
That you are acting contemptibly (*kakunei*)?  
You, who were treated by me as you admit you were,  
And yet are not treating us well in any way,  
But rather are treating us as badly (*kakos*) as you can?  
Odysseus should do her a good turn in exchange; but men in public life  
are an *achariston sperma* (a thankless breed, 256).  
This thankless breed—these politicians,  
Who though harming your friends, think nothing of it,  
Provided you are saying something  
To gain favor from the mob.

This couplet is a generalization; but Hecuba is trying to imply that she is Odysseus' *phile*. The reason must be that, as she says in 252, she has in fact conferred a benefit on him; and she expects him to *philein*, to benefit,<sup>6</sup> her in return. She also claims that Odysseus *kakuetai*, is behaving like a *kakos*, if he does not so benefit her. She now attacks the sacrifice directly (260)

Was it necessity that led them to slaughter,  
A human on the tomb,  
Where it is more fitting to sacrifice an ox?

The strength of this argument, like that of *kakune*, can only be discussed after Odysseus' reply has been considered. In 262ff. Hecuba mentions justice; perhaps Achilles wishes to kill some Trojan—*endikos*—in revenge for his own death at their hands. But Polyxena has done him no harm. It was Helen who caused his death. And if he wants the most beautiful of the prisoners, again Helen should die (269ff.):

For the daughter of Tyndareus is the most remarkable in beauty  
And was found to have wronged (*adikousa*) him no less  
Than we did. It is for what is just (*toi dikaioi*) that I  
Strive with this argument; but as what I have asked for  
In recompense, what you ought to give me, hear me.

---

<sup>6</sup> See my "'Friendship' and 'Self-sufficiency' in Homer and Aristotle," *CQ* n.s. 13 (1963): 30ff. [Chapter One of this volume].

Pearson claims that Euripides is refuting the popular view that “virtue or justice” consists in returning favors. Here for the first time in the *Hecuba*, *dikaïos* and other words from the same root occur; and the claim that Helen should be the victim, which is the claim of *dikaïosune*, is opposed (*toi men dikaioi . . . ha d'antidounei*) to the other claim that Hecuba is making. That claim is for a *charis* in return (276); and in the same line she supplicates (*hiketeuo*) Odysseus. There is no suggestion here that the return would be an expression of “virtue or justice.” Hecuba’s next point (282ff.) is:

The powerful ought not to exercise their power  
 Beyond what is necessary, nor when enjoying  
 Good fortune suppose that they will do well forever.

She cites her own sudden reversal of fortunes. The argument that one should be moderate in prosperity, since one may one day be the underdog, is as old as Homer (*Od.* 18. 130ff.); but neither in Homer nor here does it appear to be a very strong argument. The disadvantage of the first point is that it is a tautology, with which Odysseus might agree without conceding that the sacrifice of Polyxena is one of those things *ha me chreon* (that are not necessary); and unless Hecuba can decry that sacrifice very powerfully indeed, she is unlikely to persuade Odysseus or any other Greek. In fact, she now asks Odysseus for pity, as a suppliant (286ff.), and implores him to go to the army and say (288) that it will cause *phthonos* (reproach) to kill women whom they did not kill straightway when they snatched them from the altars, but pitied them. Further (291), there is an *isos nomos* (equal application of the law) concerning the shedding of blood for slave and free alike. The reference is, of course, to contemporary Athens, where a man might not kill his slave with impunity (*Dem. In Midiam* 48). This is a hint that it would be *adikon* to kill Polyxena; but it is really an irrelevant hint. Polyxena is a slave; but she is first and foremost a prisoner of war, and still in the arena where the battle was fought, not in a city in time of peace. I can see little to suggest that, in Greek eyes, those in this situation were protected by any such *nomos*. In conclusion, Hecuba says that if Odysseus will do this favor for her, his *axioma* will persuade the Greeks (294):

For when coming from men of little reputation  
 The same argument does not have the same strength  
 As when coming from those held in high regard.

Hecuba, then, has claimed that Odysseus will be behaving as a *kakos* if he does not do a favor in return; and implied—as she must imply, if the claim is to have any force at all—that she is *phile* to Odysseus. She has hinted that it would be unjust to sacrifice Polyxena, and said *bouthutein mallon prepei* (it is more fitting to sacrifice an ox) of human sacrifice in general; and also, that if Achilles wants justice: Helen is guilty; Polyxena not guilty.

Odysseus replies that he is quite ready to preserve Hecuba's life in exchange for the benefit that she has conferred on him, but in the matter of Polyxena (303ff.) Achilles has a more powerful claim on the Greeks. A long quotation is necessary, for several ideas that are important for the understanding of the whole play occur here:

What I said to all I will not deny, that once Troy was taken  
 I would give your daughter as a victim to  
 The foremost man of our army, as he demanded.  
 For it is in this that most cities come to grief,  
 Whenever a man who is brave and eager earns nothing more  
 Than men who are less worthy (*kakionon*) than he.  
 Achilles deserves honor (*axios times*) from us, woman,  
 A man who died most nobly (*kallist'*) for the land of Greece.  
 Is this not shameful (*aischron*) if while he's alive  
 You treat someone as a friend (*philoï*), but when he's perished  
 You treat him thus no longer?

If the army sees that the dead do not receive *time*, they will not fight bravely (313ff.). Again, many Greek women are *ouden hesson athliai* (no less wretched), for they lost their menfolk before Troy. He continues his first point (326ff.):

If we are wrong in our custom of honoring (*timan*) brave men,  
 We shall be blamed for our ignorance.  
 But as for you, barbarians, don't regard friends as *friends*.  
 Don't admire those who have died nobly (*kalos*) so that  
 Greece may prosper while you enjoy the fruits of your decisions.

The standard to which Odysseus is appealing is in no doubt. Achilles is *agathos*, indeed pre-eminently so, *protos stratou* (foremost man of the army). He has manifested his *arete* by fighting boldly for his group, the Greeks, and given final irrefutable proof of it by dying bravely in battle on their behalf. From Homer onward<sup>7</sup> the *agathos* has had a strong claim to

---

<sup>7</sup> See *M&R*, pp. 49 ff.

act as he pleases in respect of *dikaiosune* and the co-operative excellences generally, if he can succeed in doing so while still satisfactorily performing his *arete*-functions on the group's behalf: his fellows might feel disapproval, but they could not effectively censure him. It was *aischron* in the *Iliad* for Achilles that he had been deprived of his *time*—Briseis—by Agamemnon, but not *aischron* for Agamemnon to deprive him, if he could do it without diminishing his own *arete* by some more important failure;<sup>8</sup> nor yet, to take an example nearer to the situation here, would it have been *aischron* for the Greeks in Homer to acknowledge Agamemnon's superior *arete* by themselves performing some act that would have been unjust to Achilles. Acts of injustice, in traditional Greek values, diminish the *arete* only of the man who suffers them. To return to the *Hecuba* and Achilles: it would never, from Homer onwards, have been *aischron* for Achilles to demand something unjust from the Greeks, or for the Greeks to acknowledge Achilles' *arete* by doing something unjust (provided that it did not harm them and so diminish *their arete*) in order to benefit him. And now, in the late fifth century, the strength of Achilles' claim for the sacrifice of Polyxena is increased even further. It is still not *aischron* for Achilles to demand the sacrifice; but now not only is it not *aischron* for the army that they should grant his demand, it is said to be *aischron* for them not to do so—not to give *time* to their *philoï*, even when they are dead.<sup>9</sup> The Greeks would have been unlikely to have rejected the claim of Achilles' *arete*, for they were not going to lose significantly by it anyway; but to say that it is *aischron* to refuse him his *time* is to say that it would diminish *their arete* if they refused. This is not a "new" *arete* but a *development* of the traditional "competitive" use of *aischron*, and so in tune with the most powerful and deep-rooted values of Greece. To refuse such *time* is to make other *agathoi* less willing to fight, and so to diminish the stability and security of the group; and to do so this must be *aischron*.

This is Odysseus' case for sacrificing Polyxena: Achilles is a *philos*, a member of the same group, and has *arete*; it would be *aischron* to refuse him his *time*. How does Hecuba's case compare with this? She has claimed to be the *phile* of Odysseus. Even were this admitted (and we shall see that Hecuba, in another scene, makes statements that render it impossible), she is not the *phile* of the Greeks as a whole. Even were she the *phile* of the Greeks as a whole, Achilles has *arete* and she has not; and in the Athenian courts of the late fifth and fourth centuries the possession of *arete* still gave a man a powerful claim, even when a crime had been

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 50ff.

<sup>9</sup> Contrast the Homeric situation discussed in "'Honour' and 'Punishment' in the Homeric Poems," *BICS* 7 (1960): 23ff.



committed.<sup>10</sup> Even were Hecuba an accepted member of the group, Achilles' claim would be far stronger than hers; and as she is not merely not a member of the group, but a prisoner of war and a slave, she has really no rights at all. Her only chance would be to show that the Greeks, in sacrificing Polyxena, were smirching their own *arete*. As we have seen, Hecuba does claim that Odysseus is acting as a *kakos* (251) by not returning a *charis*; but this depends on the claim that she is Odysseus' *phile*, and even if this claim were conceded to her, *kakos* here could be replaced by *adikos*, but not by any word like *deilos* (cowardly); this is an example of the "co-operative" use of *kakos*. Now where this is opposed to "competitive" *arete*, the latter almost invariably<sup>11</sup> must take precedence, for "competitive" *arete* is traditional, deep-rooted, and more evidently conducive to the security of the group in the eyes of the Greeks of this period than *adikia* is disruptive of that security. Odysseus does not even trouble to reply to this point; and even had Odysseus granted that it had some relevance to him, it does not concern the Greeks as a whole, to whom Hecuba is certainly not *phile*. Hecuba says *bouthutein mallon prepei* (is more fitting to sacrifice an ox, 261); but *prepein* does not belong to the *arete*-group:<sup>12</sup> it is not the same as saying that it would be *aischron* for the Greeks, and they accepted her scale of values, they would be deterred; but she cannot say so, and we have seen that the Greeks believe that *not* to sacrifice Polyxena would be *aischron* for them. (A modern producer, using a translation, could make an effective point—though one quite alien from Euripides' intentions—with *bouthutein mallon prepei*, treating it as an understatement with powerful overtones and implications; but he could only do this because a present-day Hecuba could use a very much more powerful word in place of *prepei*, as a modern audience would inevitably realize. The Greek audience was not in this position.) Again, if Hecuba could say that the action was *anosion*, and that the gods would bring disaster on the Greeks if they sacrificed Polyxena, they would be deterred; but she does not say so; evidently it cannot be said. In fact, after a speech in which Polyxena says that death is preferable to slavery, Hecuba speaks as follows (383ff.):

If favor must fall due, be it granted to the son of Peleus  
And if you must avoid blame, Odysseus.

---

<sup>10</sup> See *M&R*, ch. 10, *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Always, where the point is not argued. For (argued) exceptions cf. *M&R* pp. 176ff.

<sup>12</sup> Its deterrent power resembles that of *αἰδώς*, etc., in Homer (*M&R.*, pp. 40ff.).

Hecuba is convinced. Convinced by the standard of “competitive” *arete*. Achilles has a more powerful claim: it would be *aischron*<sup>13</sup> for the Greek if they did not give Achilles his *time* for the reasons set out by Odysseus; and the *psogos* (blame) that the Greeks would incur would, as a result, be of the most powerful kind to say nothing of the disaster with which they are threatened, if *agathoi* do not receive their *time*.

Thus far, no character has successfully or convincingly (in terms of Greek values) rejected “popular” values in favor of higher (or different) values; but perhaps the moral repugnance of the audience has been aroused. Even *prima facie*, this seems unlikely; it is unusual, in a play of debate, to give weaker arguments to the side that one wishes the audience to judge stronger. (The remainder of the play might give the lie to the winner of a debate occurring early in the play; but we shall see that this does not happen in the *Hecuba*.) Euripides might be presenting a result so loathsome that the audience would inevitably question the values that had led to such a result; but if the values are fundamental to the society to which the audience belonged, and different from our own, we must hesitate before pronouncing that a situation must have been loathsome to the fifth century. We cannot assume that anything was repugnant to a fifth-century Athenian at which we find no fifth-century Athenian showing disgust, unless indeed it can be readily derived from disgust shown at an action or situation essentially similar. Now no one would maintain that human sacrifice was an activity in which the fifth-century Athenian lightly indulged; but we are concerned with the manner in which that sacrifice is presented in the *Hecuba*. It must be remembered that the *arete*-standard emphasized difference of status, not equality, even within the group; and that in Greece at this period there was no recognition of basic human rights: one's rights were those one was guaranteed as a member of a specific group, with whom one enjoyed *philia*. Those beyond that group, as Polyxena was beyond the group formed by the Greek army, have in the last resort no rights at all. Achilles is an *agathos* and a member of the group; Polyxena is a slave, a *kake*, not a member of the group; even had she *arete* its claims would not extend beyond the group to which she belongs; and of *arete*—the “competitive” male *arete* that alone in fifth-century Athens could have furnished a claim to set against that of Achilles—she has none. Polyxena's condition is pitiable; that is repeated several times in the play; and the audience would pity her. But her death has been represented as essential to the security of the Greek army; and the

---

<sup>13</sup> The strength of the obligation expressed by δέῖ varies according to the action. It is δέῖ because it would be αἰσχρόν not to perform it or because it would be ἄδικοῦν or ἀνόσιον not to.

Athenian citizen realized that on the *arete* of his own citizens depended his security, and he acknowledged even in the courts the claims that such *arete* gave its possessors. Euripides was not asking him, on this assumption, to abandon a detail of his system of values; he was asking him to abandon the base on which his values rested, and had rested since Homer. The fate of a barbarian slave, valued as lightly as the Athenians valued such people, was unlikely, to say the least, to make him reject the values on which so much depended.

Thus far we have seen no attempt by Euripides to reject contemporary “popular” values; and little indication of the nature of the words Pearson is translating by “virtue or justice.” Perhaps Hecuba’s plea to Agamemnon will make this clearer. The second part of the play opens at 658, when a maidservant comes to announce the death of Polydorus. By 714, Hecuba has decided that Polymestor has killed him out of greed, and says:

Things unspeakable: not to be named, beyond wonder  
 Things against the divine law: not to be borne  
 Where now is the justice between guest-friends?  
 Oh, accursed of men . . .

Here both human (*dika*) and divine (*hosia*, *katarate*) values appear at once. Hecuba has no hesitation in attacking Polymestor. When Agamemnon arrives, he says, with reference to the fact that the Greeks have left Polyxena’s body, without touching it, until Hecuba comes to give instructions for the funeral.

I can report that arrangements are under control and proceeding fine (*kalos*). If “*tond*” refers to the sacrifice, Agamemnon seems to doubt whether it was *kalon* for the Greeks to sacrifice Polyxena; but the words *tond*’ and *takeithen* refer more naturally to the honors done by the Greeks to the dead Polyxena (571ff.). Agamemnon is then saying that no matter how much honor the body has received, this can be little comfort to Hecuba. In any case, such a mildly expressed doubt could not annul the effect of the argument that has preceded.

Hecuba is at first reluctant to tell Agamemnon what is the matter (741ff.), lest, regarding her as *doule* (a slave woman) and *polemia* (an enemy), he should reject her pleas; but at length she reveals that Polydorus has been killed by Polymestor out of greed for hold. This attack is not mealy-mouthed. What Polymestor has done is *anosion*, for he has killed a *xenos* in his own house (788ff.). Hecuba is a slave, without resources; but the gods are strong and so is *Nomos* (798ff.). Hecuba now turns to human standards and values: it would be unjust and unfair if Polymestor were to escape punishment. At 806, she adds

So reckoning this as shameful (*en aischroi*),  
Show me respect, pity me . . .

*Aidestheti* and *oiktiron* could be used by any suppliant; Hecuba used them to Odysseus at 286ff. But Hecuba also asks Agamemnon to regard Polymestor's action as *aischron* in some sense. The phrase is an oblique one, but it is clearly intended to spur Agamemnon to action. Possibly the phrase is deliberately oblique; Euripides may have found himself unable to say directly that it was *aischron* for Agamemnon not to punish Polymestor; but this must be the implication, if Agamemnon is to act upon it. Such a judgement is only "traditional" on the assumption that Hecuba (and so Polydorus presumably, though Odysseus (303ff.) is willing to protect Hecuba but not Polyxena), is *phile* under Agamemnon's protection,<sup>14</sup> and she has not yet claimed to be *phile*. But if it is accepted, it is a powerful plea; and the cumulative effect of all these pleas is powerful indeed. Yet Agamemnon keeps silent. Hecuba interprets his silence as a refusal, and laments the fact that she has not learned the art of *peitho* (persuasion). It then occurs late to her, as Pearson says, to try an argument from *charis*. Agamemnon has taken her daughter, Cassandra, as his concubine: and (828ff.)

How then, King, will you explain the nights so dear to you?  
In return for the dearest (*philataton*) embraces in the marriage bed  
What favor (*charis*) will my daughter have from you?  
And *I* in return for her?

She is asking for a *charis* in exchange for a *charis*; and *philos* and *philtaton* hint that Cassandra is *phile* to Agamemnon, and perhaps Hecuba may be, too. This argument must be influenced by *Peitho*: at 741ff. she was *doule* and *polemia*, or feared that Agamemnon would treat her as such. At 833ff. she even says:

Listen now; do you see this dead man here?  
If you do well (*kalos*) by him,  
You will be doing well by your own brother-in-law.

Polydorus, she claims, is Agamemnon's relative by marriage. She ends her speech (844ff.):

For it is the duty of an honorable man to serve justice (*tei dikei*)  
And always do harm (*dran kakos*) to evil men (*tous kakous*)  
everywhere.

---

<sup>14</sup> See *M&R*, pp. 35ff.

It is the mark of the *esthlos aner* to punish evil men always and everywhere. We can only evaluate the effect of this speech when Agamemnon's reply has been discussed. He says (850) that he pities Hecuba and Polydorus (852ff.):

He says that he pities Hecuba and Polydorus . . .  
 And I wish for the sake of both gods and what is just (*tou dikaiou*)  
 That the impious host would pay this penalty (*dounai diken*) to you,  
 If only it might somehow come about both  
 That things go well (*echein kalos*) for you and that the army not think  
 That I have planned the murder of the Thracian King  
 As a favor (*charis*) to Cassandra.

Agamemnon was, in fact, impressed by the claims of pity, piety, and justice. But he is afraid that the army might think he was acting *Kasandras charin*.<sup>15</sup> The use of *charin* presumably takes up the *charis* of 830; and clearly this kind of *charis* will not win him general approval for (858ff.):

The army thinks of Polymestor as a friend (*philon*)  
 And this boy as its enemy.  
 You love your son,  
 But what does that matter to the Greeks?

The fact that the army holds Polydorus to be an *echthros*, Polymestor *philius*, precludes any possibility of punishing Polymestor as a *charis* to Hecuba. Agamemnon would support the claims of *to dikaion* and *to hosion*, however, were it not for the fact that the army would think that his real motive was to perform a *charis* for Cassandra. Yet the army holds Polymestor to be within its own group, Polydorus outside it; and in discussing the claims of Achilles we observed that his claims, as a member of the group and as a member possessing *arete*, doubly overrode any claims that anyone who neither was a member of the group nor possessed *arete* could muster. Polymestor has *arete* too, for he is a free monarch, though a barbarian; and yet Agamemnon would prefer the claims of justice and piety, provided that the army would acknowledge that these were his real motives. The reason is not that the attitude to *philia* has changed in a few lines: it is that Agamemnon does not say that *he* regards Polymestor as enjoying *philia* with him. Nor does he so regard Hecuba any more than Hecuba expected him to, for she put forward her claim that she enjoyed *philia* with Agamemnon only as a last resort: she knew that King

---

<sup>15</sup> This was also suggested as a possible—disreputable—motive for Agamemnon's wishing to save Polyxena, 127ff.

Agamemnon would not suppose that his having taken a barbarian captive slave, a woman without rights, as his concubine gave either Cassandra, Hecuba, or Polydorus any claim upon him. Agamemnon ignores this part of her speech; and in deciding between Polymestor and Hecuba he judges as an impartial arbitrator, bound by *philia* to neither party. In these circumstances he can certainly decide in terms of *to dikaion* and *to hosion*. The Greek army, holding as it does that Polymestor is *within* the group, Polydorus, Cassandra, and Hecuba *outside*, would certainly disapprove of Agamemnon's punishing the former in the interests of the latter, and so be more likely to look for a disreputable motive; but that point is not raised in *this* scene. The problem of deciding a question of justice between someone who is one's *philos* and someone who is not is the subject of the last debate of the play.

We may now consider whether Euripides in this scene is passing any judgement on the "popular" view that "virtue or justice" is to do favors for one's *philo*i. Agamemnon certainly rejects Hecuba's claim that he should do a *charis* for her; but as he also tacitly rejects the claim that she is his *phile*, the question does not arise. He declines to punish Polymestor, but not because Polymestor is *his philos*. Agamemnon's decision does not raise this issue at all. The audience might have thought, as Hecuba does (864ff.), that Agamemnon's decision was rather pusillanimous; but, for reasons already given, they would have agreed with the army's view of the status of Polymestor (on the assumption that he is indeed *philos*) and Hecuba, and of the appropriate action to be taken. Euripides is not attacking "popular" views here by either of the possible methods.

Nor has it become easier to identify the Greek word that Pearson is translating by "virtue or justice": the instances of *dike* and *dikaion* all refer to just punishment, without raising the question of *philia*, and the *esthlos aner*, the man with *arete*, should, according to Hecuba (844ff.), support precisely this kind of justice. (These lines will be discussed more fully below.)

The third debate of the play begins at 1129ff. Agamemnon asks Polymestor (1130ff.) what has happened:

Speak so that when I've heard you and her in turn

I may decide justly (*dikaios*) why you're suffering this.

This *dikaios* is again that of the impartial arbitrator; but at 1175ff.

Polymestor says in defense of his action:

This is what I suffered, Agamemnon, in striving

To do you a favor and killing your enemy.

It was a *charis* to Agamemnon: Polymestor has slain Agamemnon's *polemios*, a word that he has already (1138) used to Polydorus; and by his first words to Agamemnon (*o philtat'*, 1114) he has claimed that Agamemnon is a *philos* for him. This is a strong point. Hecuba is worried (1187ff.) and laments that it should not be possible for men to speak well when they have done unjust deeds (1191):

And [a man ought] never to be able to speak well  
About their unjust deeds (*tadika*)

She attacks Polymestor's claim (1199ff.):  
But villain (*kakistei*), first, never would the barbarian race  
Come into a friendly relationship (*philon . . . genoito*) with Greeks—  
It could never happen; and what favor (*charis*) were you eager to  
perform?  
Was it either to make an alliance in marriage  
Or because you were related by blood?  
What other reason did you have?

Polymestor is not the *philos* of Agamemnon. He could not be, for he is a barbarian. What reason could he have, then, for performing a *charis* for Agamemnon? He is not related to Agamemnon (or to any Greek) by blood or marriage. (In making the last point, Hecuba is presumably trying to avoid sawing off the branch on which she was recently sitting. She claimed (828ff.) that, barbarian or not, she was *phile* to Agamemnon in virtue of Agamemnon's relationship with Cassandra, which rendered Polydorus Agamemnon's *kedestes*.) Hecuba, does not say that Polymestor's plea is a bad plea: she says that it depends on the premise that Polymestor is Agamemnon's (and the Greeks') *philos*—and this, in her opinion, he could never be. Accordingly, no one would believe that Polydorus was killed as a *charis* to Agamemnon. She does not say that this would be an impossible or disreputable motive, simply that it was not Polymestor's. At 1233ff. she adds:

Agamemnon, if you protect this man, you will show yourself as bad  
(*kakos*): For you will be well-treating a man who as a guest-friend  
(*xenos*) Was neither dutiful nor faithful to those he owed that to,  
Who was not pious (*hosion*) and was not just (*dikaion*).

Hecuba here emphasizes the *xenos*-relationship which she (and Polydorus) had with Polymestor. Polymestor should have been *pistos* to them; and by failing in this he has transgressed against a moral principle that is guaranteed by the gods. Earlier in Greek thought and belief this

argument might have sufficed; but by the time of the *Hecuba* the argument of 1199 ff. was necessary, as Agamemnon's reply indicates (1243ff.). His verdict is:

So that you may know I don't think it was as a favor to me  
 Or to the Greeks that you killed your guest-friend (*xenon*);  
 No it was so that you might have his gold in your own house  
 So that (1249ff.): how then if I decide that you are not in the wrong  
 (*me adikein*)  
 Do I escape the blame? I wouldn't be able to.

Agamemnon concludes that Polymestor *adikei*; but the fact that Polymestor has killed a *xenos* in his own house does not, in itself, lead Agamemnon to this conclusion. He deduces from the facts of the case, and from Hecuba's argument, that it was not as a *charis* to Agamemnon himself, or to the Greeks in general, that Polymestor slew Polydorus, but out of greed for gold. Therefore, Polymestor *adkei*. Since this step in the argument is included, we must surely suppose that *had* Polymestor killed Polydorus as a *charis* to the Greeks, then even the murder of a *xenos* in one's own house would be something that Agamemnon is prepared to condone. For the next line (1246) is:

You are in difficulties (*kakois*) and are saying things  
 That are useful to your case.

Like Hecuba above, Agamemnon considers that Polymestor's plea would be a good one, if what he is saying were true. Admittedly the next lines are:

You may think it a trifling thing to kill a guest,  
 For us Greeks, at least, it is something shameful (*aischron*).

But these lines treat "killing a *xenos*" without qualification. This Agamemnon pronounces to be *aischron*—the new "co-operative" use of the word, whose importance will be discussed below; but it does not follow that "killing a *xenos* as a *charis* to a *philos*" would be similarly regarded at this period of the fifth century. Indeed, Hecuba, Polymestor, and Agamemnon clearly agree that it would not.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> I do not claim that Athenians of this date lightly killed ξένοι as a χάρις to their φίλοι—or indeed that they did so at all. My point is that if any action is represented as being a χάρις to a φίλος, and no divine sanctions can be effectively invoked against it, Athenian values of the period make it impossible to show that the action should not be performed (unless the agent holds that its performance would lessen his own ἀρετή).



So far, no character in this scene has attempted to reject accepted values in favor of a higher standard. Not values, but facts and motives, have been in dispute; and if there has been no attack on accepted values, there can have been no overt rejection of such values. There remains the question whether anything in this scene would be morally repugnant to a fifth-century Athenian audience. Such an audience could not feel moral repugnance at the punishment of Polymestor: he has killed a *xenos* out of greed, and is justly punished. The punishment may be horrible, but so was the crime; and Hecuba could not obtain more orthodox punishment of Polymestor from Agamemnon. We might suppose—on Pearson’s view of the scene—that Euripides was trying to show to the Athenians the repugnant results to which their view of *charis* and *philia* might lead; but if such was his purpose, it seems strange that he did not choose a plot in which a *xenos* actually was killed for some quite different reason. Yet it might be maintained that the Athenians would have realized from watching this scene the extremes to which their values might lead, and would have felt repugnance. Here some lines in which Agamemnon might appear to be rejecting “popular” values are relevant. When Agamemnon has given his decision, Polymestor complains that he has suffered at the hands of a slave woman (1252f.):

Alas, it is by a woman, a slave that I’ve been defeated!

He has been punished by someone more *kake*, with less status than himself. Agamemnon replies:

With justice (*dikaios*) surely, if you’ve committed unworthy deeds (*kaka*)?

This might recall 306 ff., where Odysseus, justifying the sacrifice of Polyxena, says:

For it is in this that very many cities come to grief:

Whenever a man who is brave and eager earns nothing

More than men who are worse (*kakionon*) than he.

There Achilles’ *arete* and *prothumia* gave him a claim strong enough to warrant the sacrifice of Polyxena to him; and Hecuba could find no reply. Polymestor has, as he says himself, more *arete* than Hecuba; and Hecuba refers him as *prothumos* (1202); yet Agamemnon maintains that this gives Polymestor no right to get the better of her. Is Euripides, through the mouth of Agamemnon, rejecting the earlier view, by which the sacrifice of Polyxena was justified?

If he is, he is cheating so flagrantly that only the most stupid members of any audience could be deceived. Agamemnon can only make this point because Polymestor (unlike Achilles) is not *philos* to the Greeks. The

question of Polymestor's *philia* has just been argued at length; and it has been made abundantly clear that this is of crucial importance to the decision given. If Polymestor is not a member of the group formed by the Greek army, his *arete* and *prothumia* give him no claim, for these qualities give a man a claim only on the other members of his group, precisely because his exercise of them is deemed essential to the stability and security of the group; but if he had been a member of the group, those same qualities would have given him the most powerful of claims to escape punishment for his *adikia*, just as they gave Achilles the most powerful of claims to receive Polyxena's sacrifice as a *geras*. Indeed, the killing of Polydorus would then not have been evaluated in terms of *adikia* at all; for Polymestor, in saying that he has killed the enemy of Agamemnon and the Greeks, is claiming to have exercised his *arete* and *prothumia* to defend the group.<sup>17</sup> These are the values of the audience as well as the characters: had Polymestor killed Polydorus as a *charis* to a *philos*, when that *charis* increased the stability and security of the group it must have been a valid exercise of *arete*. If the audience believed that the act, *qua anosion*, would inevitably be punished by the gods, they would hold that Polymestor should not have performed such a *charis*; for divine reprisals would *reduce* the prosperity and stability of the group. But this belief was losing ground in the Athens of the day. The only effective censure would be to term Polymestor's action *aischron*. We have seen Agamemnon use *aischron* of *xenoktonein* (killing a guest-friend) in general;<sup>18</sup> but the whole structure of the argument indicates that it would have been difficult to use it of *xenoktonein* as a *charis* to a *philos*. Even had it been so used, it would not have been effective. The "traditional" and "new" usages of words of the *arete*-group seem to desiderate two different kinds of men;<sup>19</sup> and where there is a clash between the demands of the "new" *arete*, and those of the old, the "traditional" takes precedence, for it is more deep-rooted, and commends those qualities that seem of primary importance in ensuring the survival of the group. In the context of Greek values at the end of the fifth century, it is impossible to say that Polymestor's murder of Polydorus—supposing Polymestor for the moment to be a member of the same group as the Greek army—is *aischron* for him *not* to aim at the security for his group.

---

<sup>17</sup> Agamemnon (1249ff.) is deciding whether Polymestor ἄδικεῖ or not.

<sup>18</sup> As a belief in divine punishment declined and judgements in religious terms lost their efficacy, secular value-terms were gradually substituted. This debate shows some of the disadvantages of the latter in Athens.

<sup>19</sup> See *M&R*, pp. 189, 259ff.

It follows that when Hecuba said (844f.) that it was the mark of the *esthlos aner* to support *dike pantachou aei*, she was using a “persuasive definition,”<sup>20</sup> and one that had no chance of acceptance in a society with the ethical presuppositions of fifth-century Athens. Hecuba had left out the claims of *arete* and *philia*; and these, in the minds of characters and audience alike, must take precedence.

Neither in this scene nor in earlier ones does Euripides use either of the available methods of rejecting “popular” values: no character explicitly rejects such values, and no situation that would have been repugnant to a fifth-century Athenian audience results from their application in the play. The *Hecuba*, then, is in no sense a rejection or refutation of the values of late fifth-century Athens.

We have not yet discovered what word or words are being translated by “virtue or justice;” and this now seems less surprising. Euripides is not *discussing* some clearly enunciated proposition, as Pearson seems to suggest, but *using* presuppositions (his own and those of the audience) about *arete*, *philia*, and other Greek terms of value. Certainly, *arete* is not simply returning a *charis* to one’s *philos*. Nor is *dikaiosune*: we have seen that the word, when used, does not refer to returning favors at all in this play. While if Pearson does not mean (as his words suggest) that the requirements of *dikaiosune* are exhausted by returning a *charis* to one’s *philos*, but merely that to return a *charis* to one’s *philos* is *dikaion*, we need only point out that both the sacrifice of Polyxena and the murder of Polydorus (as evaluated by Polymestor) are represented as measures to increase the stability and security of the group, and so as manifestations of *arete*. Now by no means all exchanges of *charis* involve *arete*: an exchange of cooking-pots between neighbors would be a *charis* in return for a *charis*, and there is certainly no *arete* here. In fact, “doing a *charis* for one’s *philos* in return for a *charis*”<sup>21</sup> cannot be consistently

---

<sup>20</sup> 901ff. are a Euripidean generalization meant to apply to Athens, where all the citizens are members of the same group; but here, too, “traditional” ἀρετή had its part to play in practice (see *M&R*, ch.10 *passim*). This, too, is really a “persuasive definition.”

<sup>21</sup> The Greek will do a χάρις for one who is not his φίλος, so long as the action will cause no trouble or disadvantage to himself or his group; so, Agamemnon gives Hecuba the χάρις of holding Polyxena’s and Polydorus’ funerals at the same time (898f.), though he would not have delayed the sailing of the fleet to do so; and even Lycus, portrayed as a complete villain, agrees to kill Amphitryon and Megara before the children, and to allow Megara to deck the children in funeral garb. *HF* 321ff. Each of these is asked for as a χάρις, and granted: neither causes any trouble to Lycus.

characterized as a mark of *arete* or of *dikaiosune*, and each includes much more than the performance of a *charis* in return for a *charis*. The manner in which such an action is characterized and evaluated in any particular instance depends on the basic values of Greek society, and cannot be understood except in these terms.

But if the *Hecuba* is not a rejection of contemporary standards, can we say more positively what it is? At its most obvious level it is a play of violent action, of dramatic and emotional debate—good debate, which could be relied upon to keep the audience interested—and of trickery matched by trickery. For the majority of any audience this would be enough; and this indeed may be all that Euripides intended. One aspect of the play, however, may be intended to interest those members of the audience who were familiar with the intellectual discussions of the sophists. For reasons that I shall give below, this is advanced only as a tentative hypothesis; but a clue to a possible further point may be given by the very different attitude taken by Hecuba to the death of her two children. We have seen that Polymestor has, like Achilles, a very strong case, if it is granted that he is *philos* to the Greeks; and that, were he *philos*, Hecuba would be silenced. But the claims of both Achilles and Polymestor are only put to Hecuba quite late in the scenes concerned with each of them; yet in the earlier stages of the Polymestor-scene Hecuba indicts his action as *anosion* and *adikon* and claims that it would be *aischron* for Agamemnon if he did not punish Polymestor, while in the Achilles-scene she makes no such violent charges and claims, only hinting (incorrectly) that Polyxena is protected by *nomos*. The reason is clear: the motives that occasion the deaths of Polyxena and Polydorus are very different. But motivation is emphasized much more than this. The case against Polymestor depends on his motive: that he has killed Polydorus is not in dispute, for (in the end) he admits this. The point at issue is the motive that led him to kill Polydorus. That he is not and could not be *philos* to the Greeks both removes any claims he might have to be allowed to kill Polydorus and also helps to indicate what his real motive was; but once it is established that he has no such claims, it is Polymestor's motive for killing that determines whether Hecuba's treatment of him was justified or not.

To a student of modern drama, the conclusion that the *Hecuba* is to some extent concerned with motivation and thus must appear supremely unexciting. This play, however, was written at the end of the fifth century B.C. in a context of Greek values. The most important aspects of those values are denoted by *arete*, *time*, and *philia*, and (particularly in tragedy) the phenomena and beliefs associated with "pollution." To all of these it is

what one has done that is important, not one's motives or intentions:<sup>22</sup> whether one is "polluted" or not, whether one is prosperous or not, does not necessarily depend on intention or motive. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* it makes no difference whether or not Oedipus intended to kill his father and marry his mother: that he has done so suffices; and in the *Choephoroi* it does not matter that Agamemnon did not intend to be killed as he was killed; it is *aischron* (493ff.) for him to have died thus, nonetheless. As a result, motives and intentions have little importance in Greek tragedy. To say this is not to say that Greeks of this period were incapable of distinguishing between an intentional and an accidental act, or one performed under compulsion. From Homer onwards such distinctions were drawn. When Patroclus (*Il.* 23.85ff.) killed the son of Amphidamas, he was *nepios ouk ethelon* (a child not intending to do it); and in the *Odyssey* (22. 27ff.) the suitors believe Odysseus to have killed Antinous by accident. The distinction can be—and is—drawn; but the distinction makes no difference to the treatment of the killer. Willful or unintentional, the Homeric homicide will be killed in his turn, unless he takes himself, or is taken, out of reach of those who would avenge the killing or, as Odysseus does, can kill them first. Later thought gave rather more importance to the question of intention: the Homicide Law of Draco furnished the Athenians from an early date with distinct categories of homicide; but the very different emphases of Greek values continued to render motives and intentions comparatively unimportant in the evaluation of actions and the treatment of agents.

Even in the small number of extant Greek tragedies, however, we can see a significant change toward the end of the century. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus' intentions and motives are irrelevant, but in *Oedipus at Colonus* they are of great importance. I have tried to show elsewhere<sup>23</sup> that this change can be traced, by resemblances of thought and language, to a stream of thought outside the drama, documents drawn from which, the *Tetralogies* attributed to Antiphon, are still extant. These seem to me to reflect and in part to facilitate the much greater emphasis on questions of motive and intention that, so far as can be judged from extant documents, is characteristic of the thought of the later fifth century at Athens. Here, as always, we are hampered by the huge and inevitable lacunae in our knowledge of the development of Greek thought; but it seems likely that more sophisticated questions of motivation were not discussed until the

---

<sup>22</sup> For ἀρετή see *M&R*, pp. 46ff., 165ff., 209ff., 304ff.; for τιμή my "'Honour' and 'Punishment'" 23ff; for φιλία "'Friendship' and 'Self-sufficiency'" 30ff.; for "pollution," *M&R*, ch. 5.

<sup>23</sup> See *M&R*, pp. 102ff.

answer to the straightforward question, whether an action was deliberate or accidental, acquired more importance than was the case in Greece before the later fifth century. Now Polymestor's defense of his action is quite sophisticated: the killing of Polydorus was deliberate, but his motive was a good one. It cannot be conclusively shown that such questions as this had not been discussed in Athens before; but I would suggest that it is probable that a greater emphasis on the simpler questions of motive and intention preceded questions such as the one raised in the *Hecuba*. Now in the first tetralogy, which is concerned with a case of murder, plausibility of motive, the comparative likelihood of different motives for the killing of the dead man, is discussed at length. The discussion differs from the one in the *Hecuba*, for the question is one of identity of the murderer. However, I am not trying to establish a direct link between the *Tetralogies* and the *Hecuba*; I am merely suggesting that more sophisticated questions of motive were now for the first time being systematically discussed in Athens, and that Euripides reflects some of this new sensitivity in the *Hecuba*.

If this suggestion is justified, the play contains something for the audience in general and something for the more sophisticated; but I do not claim that there is necessarily no other "point" to be found in the *Hecuba*. The purpose of this article more modest: I wish to suggest that, in the context of values of the later fifth century in Athens, the actions of this drama would have been evaluated by the tragedian and his audience in the manner set out in the foregoing pages. If a deeper tragic significance can be drawn from the actions thus evaluated, Euripides' stature as a tragic dramatist gains thereby; but if these were the values of the poet and his audience, an interpretation that ignores them may tell us something of the tragic vision of the interpreter, but it tells us nothing of Euripides.

For my second example, I have chosen to discuss *Hercules Furens*. In a recent article<sup>24</sup> H.H.O. Chalk offers a new interpretation of the play, based on the roles of *arete* and *philia*. His argument is detailed and interesting and, if the interpretation were accepted, would increase the stature of the tragedy considerably. Unfortunately, as I shall try to show, it would have been impossible for a fifth-century audience to understand the play in the manner suggested by Chalk.

Chalk restates more radically the views earlier by J.T. Sheppard.<sup>25</sup> The chief difficulty felt by interpreters of this play has been that it seems

---

<sup>24</sup> H.H.O. Chalk, "Ἀρετή and Βία in Euripides' *Herakles*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82 (1962): 7-18.

<sup>25</sup> J.T. Sheppard, "The Formal Beauty of the *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* 10 (1916): 72ff.

to fall into three inadequately linked sections: 1-814, the return of Hercules and the death of Lycus; 815-1087, the appearance of Lyssa and Iris and the madness of Hercules with its immediate consequences; and 1088-1428, Hercules' recovery of sanity and the arrival of Theseus. Sheppard suggested that these three sections are connected by the theme of the closing lines, 1425-26:

Whoever wishes to possess wealth or strength  
Rather than *philon agathon* is thinking poorly (*kakos*)

Chalk comments (p. 8): "This is a traditional Greek view and therefore easily discerned by the audience. . . in the wealth of the conventional tyrant Lycus; in the friendship of Theseus; both prepared for by the allusions of Amphitryon to friendship and to wealth by the royal but fallen Megara. The aged weakness of the Chorus is the antithesis of strength, and strength is embodied above all in Herakles, for whom it becomes also 'the source of his calamity.'" Now it seems very likely that the closing lines of the play should state the theme in this manner; and at the end of this discussion I shall suggest that they indeed do so, though not quite in the manner suggested by Sheppard. Chalk, however, continues: "This is a valuable thesis because it leads us to see that the recurrence of the themes implies in the action of the play a coherent abstract argument—what is the relative validity of human *φιλία* (*philia*), strength, and wealth? What is their relationship to the circumstances of human life or, as the Greek stage put it, to the Olympian gods? . . . The organic structure of the plot will become more apparent if we consider these themes as subordinates of a further general concept—*ἀρετή* (*arete*): and particularly we must re-examine the relationship between Herakles' strength and his *ἀρετή* (*arete*). In this way I hope to demonstrate more fully the unity inherent in the play's three parts." So, Chalk, for him the question posed by the play is "What is the place of *ἀρετή* (*arete*) in the universe?" *Philia*, strength, and wealth are themes, but "the *ἀρετή* (*arete*)-question is more than a theme. It *is* the play: the inexplicable overthrow by Hera of the conventional *ἀρετή* (*arete*) of Herakles followed by his recovery of a further *ἀρετή* (*arete*) prompt and (tragically) answer precisely this question."

An essential of Chalk's position is that Hercules "recovers" a new *arete* in the last part of the play. Another, in order that the play may be understood, is that certain characters in the first part (1-814) must embody or illustrate certain themes, all of which are aspects of *arete*; and which, indeed, for Chalk, prefigure the contrast between the old and the new *aretai* of Hercules. Amphitryon represents the old, Megara the new. Megara (92, 284ff., 307ff.) counsels acceptance of the inevitable, while

Amphitryon (105ff.) recommends hope. “These two views of ἀρετή (*arete*) introduce the contrast that eventually relates the two parts of the play as a whole, the contrast between the ἀρετή (*arete*) of Herakles, the deliverer, which seeks to mould circumstances to man’s intentions, and the ἀρετή (*arete*) of the stricken Herakles, which endures whatever happens with acceptance” (Chalk, p. 9).

This point, too, is essential to Chalk’s thesis. It will be convenient to discuss it first. Megara’s attitude is made clear in a number of places (84f.):

All hope that friends (*philoisin*) might come to our rescue is vanished.

There is no hope of preservation in their *philoï*, for Amphitryon and the chorus are too old to help, Hercules’ children too young, and Hercules himself absent. She says to Amphitryon that she *philei* her children, and that she thinks death a terrible thing but (282ff.):

Whoever strives against necessity, I think, is a stupid mortal.

Only a fool resists the inevitable. Since they must die (284ff.):

We must not die consumed by fire giving our enemies occasion to laugh. For my part that’s worse (*meizon kakon*) than death itself.

They must not die by fire, and give their enemies occasion to laugh, for that in Megara’s eyes is a worse *kakon* than death. (Lycus had threatened [238ff.] to burn Amphitryon and Megara at the altar if they would not leave their sanctuary.) This attitude must be that of the new *arete*, so-called; but Megara has so far said neither that it is *arete* nor that it is *kalon*—virtually the same point in different words. She has merely said that it is foolish to resist, but that they must not die in a manner that would cause their enemies to laugh. But the speech continues (287):

For we owe many noble (*kala*) things to our house.

Amphitryon and Megara owe many *kala* to their house. The line might mean either “We owe it to our house to do something *kalon* now” or “We have received many *kala* (success, prosperity, etc.) in the past, as a result of our membership of this house, and we owe it to the house now to do something that will not cause our enemies to laugh.” The rest of the speech indicates the correct interpretation. Megara goes on to say that in his youth Amphitryon was *euklees*.

So that he would not wish to keep these children alive

If he gave them a reputation for cowardice (*doxan kaken*)

For those of noble birth are distressed on their children’s behalf

By shame (*tois aischrois*) and I must not shrink from

Following my husband in this.



If the stigma of cowardice were on them, Hercules' children would have a *doxan kaken*; and he would not wish to save his children's lives at that price, for those of high birth are distressed on their children's behalf by *aischra* that come upon their children. The implications of Megara's resolve to imitate a man will be discussed below. The rest of the passage indicates that if Megara and Amphitryon besought Lycus for mercy for themselves and for Hercules' children, they would probably be unsuccessful; they would die nonetheless, and the stigma of cowardice would be added, as it would be for the children too, if Lycus were induced to spare them—and this would be *aischron* both for the children and for Hercules. All the emphasis in 288-93 is on the shame, the *aischron*, that would accrue if they showed cowardice, not on what Chalk is claiming to be the *arete* or the *kalon* of resigning oneself to one's fate. At 287, then, "We owe many *kala* to our house," must mean "We have received many *kala* in the past—we have enjoyed fair fame, high birth, prosperity, and success—and we owe it to our house not to disgrace these now." But to say that cowardice would be *aischron* is not to say that any *other* course of action would be *kalon*. In fact, the situation is that of *Phoenissae* 1622ff., where Oedipus says to Creon:

I will not clasp your knees in supplication  
 And thereby show myself a coward (*kakon*).  
 Even faring badly (*kakos*), I will not betray my noble birth.

Creon has just banished Oedipus from Thebes—a tragic, blinded Oedipus, who has long suffered the catastrophe of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but has till now remained in Thebes. Oedipus says, "I will not clasp your knees in supplication and show myself *kakos*; for I will not betray my erstwhile *eugenes*, even when I am faring badly." If Oedipus implores Creon to let him stay in Thebes, he will appear *kakos* and betray his one-time *eugenia* (noble birth) but not since the tragic denouement of the situation portrayed in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* could anyone in Thebes have thought of Oedipus as *agathos* or as possessing *arete*. Yet there are, in terms of *traditional arete*, lower depths to which Oedipus could sink; but Oedipus still retains some of his self-respect. The situation is that of the *Hercules*: neither Oedipus, nor Amphitryon, nor Megara, can display *arete*; but they could show themselves in even worse light; and this must be avoided at all costs.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> That there was a condition that, while not ἀρετή, was not κακία/κακότης, was maintained also by Simonides (5 Bergk). The qualities that characterize this condition are different in the two poets, however. (The poem is discussed in *M&R*, pp. 165ff. and Appendix.)

Megara's conclusion (307ff.) is:

Endure death with us, which awaits us anyway;  
I call up from you your noble birth, old man.

She calls upon Amphitryon's *eugeneia*, which should lead him to endure steadfastly a death that is in any case inevitable. This may be compared with 294, where Megara said that she would not refuse to imitate a man. Neither of these is a claim to be acting in accordance with *arete*. The *agathos* is expected to *tolman*, to fight and die against odds, if need be; but the *arete* is displayed by *fighting* bravely: the funeral orator, in using the cliché *andres agathoi genomenoi*, means not that the dead are dead merely, nor simply that they died without running away, but that they died fighting bravely; and this is the only occasion on which, by the standards of traditional *arete*, *agathos* may be used of a person whose action led to disaster for him. The *agathos* may be required to *tolman* to show endurance, in *acting* bravely, but the *arete* consists in fighting bravely, not merely in not running away from something unpleasant: *tolman* interpreted as meekly, if courageously, holding out one's neck to the axe, is not a constituent of *traditional arete*.<sup>27</sup> It is incumbent on the *agathos* to die in a manner as little ridiculous or shameful as possible; and this is the best that Amphitryon and Megara can do in the circumstances; but to say this is far from saying that it is *kalon* or a mark of *arete* to act as they do. This is not the normal view of *arete* in the fifth- (or fourth-) century Athens.<sup>28</sup> I am not denying that Euripides could have tried to redefine *arete* in this manner; what I am maintaining is that unless he had done so pointedly and explicitly—and he has not—his audience could not have understood what he was trying to do. Megara's *arete*, in fact, is not *arete* at all, so far as Euripides—or his audience—is concerned. That is to say, Megara has no *arete* that any *male* Greek could regard as *arete* in himself: her *mimem andros* falls far short of Greek male *arete*. She certainly possesses those quiet excellences characteristic of Greek female *arete*: she is a “good woman”; but Chalk is certainly not thinking of these excellences when he claims that Megara illustrates the *arete* manifested by Hercules in the last part of the play. I shall maintain that Hercules displays *no new arete* in that part; but it may be said immediately that had Euripides wished to endow Hercules, the paragon of Greek male *arete*, with a new *arete* that was, in fact, Greek female *arete*, he would have had to argue the point at length, since the view would have been not merely

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Eur. *Orestes* 777 ff. ἀρετή is reckoned by the results it produces; and the security of the group required active courage in its defenders.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Plato's difficulties over the death of Socrates (*M&R*, pp. 258ff.).

shocking but incomprehensible to his audience. “Womanish” is naturally a reproach when used of a man, as Theseus uses it of Hercules in 1412 of this play—unfairly, as I shall endeavor to show later.

Megara, then, is not manifesting any new *arete*, or asking Amphitryon to do so. All her judgements are couched in terms of traditional Greek (male) *arete*; and her traditional (female) *arete*, which she undoubtedly possesses, has no relevance to Hercules. There remains the question whether Amphitryon is manifesting any *arete* in part I of the play. Here Chalk can—and does—point immediately to 105f.:

This man is the best (*aristos*) who always trusts in hope  
Helplessness (*to d' aporein*) is the mark of an unworthy (*kakou*) man.

The *agathos* is he who trusts always in hope: *aporein* is the mark of the *kakos*. To evaluate these lines correctly, we must understand the function they are intended to fulfill. Are the lines (a) a general definition of *arete*, or one intended by Amphitryon to be applicable to himself in his present circumstances merely? (b) a definition of traditional *arete* or of a new *arete*? (c) related to Hercules' *arete* as manifested in part I of this play? Chalk's view is expressed on p. 9: “These two views of ἀρετή (*arete*) (Amphitryon's and Megara's) introduce the contrast that eventually relates the two main parts of the play as a whole, the contrast between the ἀρετή (*arete*) of Herakles the Deliverer, which seeks to mould circumstances to man's intentions, and the ἀρετή (*arete*) of the stricken Herakles, which endures whatever happens with acceptance.” “Introduce the contrast” is not very clear; but if any point is to be made at all, the audience must recognize in some sense the *arete* of Hercules in the definition of Amphitryon. Now the essential of traditional *arete* was that the *agathos* should be able to secure the continued existence and prosperity of himself and his dependents in the face of an indifferent or hostile world. But Amphitryon's definition of the *aristos* in the terms he uses is clearly meant to apply to himself in his present position, in which he can do nothing at all to protect himself and his *philoï*. The definition is in fact expressed with great rhetorical skill: the contrast between *to d' aporein andros kakou*—“helplessness is the mark of the *kakos*,” which is indeed the basic statement of traditional *kakia*—and *houtos d' aner aristos* is a clever means of claiming that Amphitryon's state of mind is that of traditional *arete*. But the true contrast, traditional *arete*, is not a state of mind merely, but the activity (among others) of helping one's *philoï* and harming one's *echthroi*. Traditional *arete* demands both the capacity to do this, and the actual activity whenever required. In fact, were Amphitryon arguing with less rhetorical skill he would be obliged to admit that he is, in the ordinary

usage of words, in a state of *aporia* (helplessness). Now Amphitryon, in this situation, is at liberty to try to redefine *arete* in any way that will prop up his self-esteem; but Chalk is not at liberty to equate this *arete*—adopted by Amphitryon precisely because Hercules, or someone with Hercules' qualities is not present—with the active *arete* of Hercules. No audience in the world could be expected to understand the situation thus. Chalk, in fact (p. 10), without apparently realizing the implications of what he has written, says “Here [in Amphitryon's debate with Lycus] out business is with Amphitryon's concern for the quality of Herakles and the fatherhood of Zeus in themselves. These are less purely theoretical subjects than might appear, for they form the ground of Amphitryon's original definition of ἀρετή (*arete*) in terms of *hope*. Ἐλπίς (*Elpis*) here means the return of Herakles (97) and this depends on his bravery and more, on his descent from Zeus, which should ensure the god's goodwill.” Now these Herculean qualities are, of course, those of traditional *arete*, so that Chalk is saying that Amphitryon is founding his definition of *arete* not on hope *per se* (which is novel in Greece, but a *possible* redefinition) but on hope in Hercules' *arete*; and “ἀρετή (*arete*) is to put one's trust in the ἀρετή (*arete*) of Hercules (or another such)” is both a very odd statement in itself, and also contradicts Chalk's other claim that Amphitryon's *arete* here in some sense *represents* the *arete* manifested by Hercules in part I.

Chalk's first point fails on both counts. Megara is not manifesting, or recommending, a new *arete*, and her (traditional) female *arete* cannot be a model for the behavior of Hercules in part III. Amphitryon is claiming a “new” *arete*, but claiming it in desperation, and it does not in any way resemble the *arete* of Hercules in part I.

We may now turn to the second thesis: that Hercules manifests a new *arete* in the third part of the play, and that this *arete* does not cancel the old *arete* but subsumes it, together with the *philia* that is the characteristic feature of this *arete*. “Φιλία (*Philia*) is almost interchangeable with ἀρετή (*arete*). In Stasimon II, though expressed for Herakles, φιλία (*philia*) is not named; but ἀρετή (*arete*) is; and for the same reason in part III φίλοι (*philoî*), φιλία (*philia*) are named repeatedly, ἀρετή (*arete*) hardly at all” (Chalk, p. 11). The last point is undeniable: *arete* is singularly absent from part III. This must prompt the question whether Hercules' alleged new *arete* is new *tout court* or new merely for Hercules. Either answer produces difficulties: if the *arete* is new *tout court*, it is hard to see how the audience are to know that the qualities manifested by Hercules *are arete*, without being told; and if it is new merely for Hercules, surely it should be demonstrated by reference outside the play that such a usage of *arete* had taken sufficient root in the Athens of the day for the point to be

clear to the audience, even though it was not made explicitly in the *Hercules*. I need not discuss these alternatives, since I can discern no new *arete* in part III at all.

In maintaining that the *arete* of part III subsumes the *arete* of part I, Chalk is arguing against Wilamowitz who maintained that the *arete* of part III cancels the *arete* of part I. This too need be discussed only if Hercules proves to be manifesting such in part III. Chalk's own points are (p. 13): "The gift of Theseus consists in providing a motive such as can prompt Herakles in new circumstances *himself* to find a new way to exercise his ἀρετή (*arete*) instead of destructively in suicide. With ἀρετή (*arete*) itself he could not present him. 'New' or 'old' ἀρετή (*arete*) is an activity, not a passive state; and even if we speak of Herakles displaying acceptance, such acceptance entails endurance. Ἐγκατερήσω βίον (Egkartereso *bioton*) are not the words of a passive figure." (P. ii): ". . . *arete*, embodied in the suffering Herakles, is . . . the topic of part III; . . . φιλία (*philia*) is the essential characteristic of this ἀρετή (*arete*)."

To examine Chalk's claim (and that of Wilamowitz) it will be necessary to analyze part III in some detail, in order to determine whether Hercules is manifesting (a) a new *arete*; (b) traditional *arete*; (c) any *arete* at all.

When Hercules, having come to his senses, realizes what he has done (1146ff.), he wishes to commit suicide. His motives are grief ([being] the murderer of my dearest children), a desire that justice be done (I shall become the avenger for my children, for their blood),<sup>29</sup> and a fear of bad reputation (*duskleian*). The arrival of Theseus is a mere hindrance to his purpose (1153ff.). He covers his head, lest "pollution for the murder of the children" should come upon Theseus, who is *philtatoi xenon* for Hercules: "I don't wish to harm in any way those who are blameless" (1162). Now *traditional arete* demanded that one should harm those who harmed one's *philo*i, and that one should oneself benefit one's *philo*i. Hercules' actions can therefore be fitted into the pattern of traditional *arete* so far, though it is doubtful (to say the least) whether Hercules' desire to punish himself for killing his own children, and his desire merely not to harm Theseus (as opposed to helping him actively), would bring vividly before the minds of the audience the thought that Hercules was exercising traditional *arete* here—particularly in the light of Hercules' past

---

<sup>29</sup> He wishes to *administer* justice, in the Herculean manner: an activity that in early Greece frequently required traditional ἀρετή. Quiet co-operative activity (which has to be argued to be an ἀρετή at this period) is not characteristic of Hercules' career as a whole.

life of traditional *arete* very differently manifested. Certainly, there is no sign of any new *arete* so far.

Theseus (1163ff.) has come to exercise traditional *arete* on behalf of Hercules: to drive out Lycus by force, for he has not heard of Hercules' return or anything subsequent. When he learns of the situation, at first, he grieves and nothing more (1202):

But I come to experience the grief with him; uncover him.

In his next long speech (1214ff.) he goes further: Hercules has said nothing and covered his head least he "pollute" his *philos*; but Theseus is willing to suffer even this (1220f.):

What do I care if your tragedy involves me?

You brought me good fortune once upon a time . . .

He does not mind faring ill with Hercules, for he once fared well because of Hercules. He recalls the time when Hercules rescued him from Hades (1223ff.):

I hate a favor (*charin*) that grows old between friends (*philon*)

And a man who is willing to enjoy [benefit from] fair fortune (*ton kalon*),

But not to sail with friends

When they are suffering from misfortune (*dustuchousin*).

He hates a favor that grows old, between *philo*i and a man who wishes to enjoy fair fortune, but will not voyage with his *philo*i when they are unfortunate. Later in stichomythia 1234ff.), he denies that he will suffer any harm from consorting with Hercules:

Theseus: Where there is *philon* destroying spirits are banished.

Hercules: Thank you. How right I was to help you then.

Theseus: You saved me then, now I render you pity.

Theseus: No destroying spirit comes upon *philo*i from *philo*i.

Hercules: Well said. And I do not deny that I benefited you.

Theseus: And I, having been benefited then, pity you now.

[trans. Adkins, originally following the Greek lines in the original essay. Ed.]

This last passage is important for it illustrates a characteristic of Greek *philia* which must be understood in order to determine whether Hercules is manifesting a new *arete* in part III. Chalk, who discusses 1235, says it "simply means 'I agree. (Whatever else I deny in your argument) we are friends.'" Hercules, however, does not say this. He says, "I do not deny that I benefited you." I have tried to show in a recent article<sup>30</sup> that Greek

<sup>30</sup> "'Friendship' and 'Self-Sufficiency'" 30ff.

*philia* is not strictly co-operative but reciprocal, that the essential of *philein* is action, not feeling, and that this action to help another is designed to make the other one's *philos*, someone on whose help one can rely when one needs it. It is a characteristic lament of Greek literature<sup>31</sup> that those whom one *philei* frequently do not show themselves to be *philoï* when the time comes; and Hercules' reply in 1235 is a variant of this. He does not deny that he has benefited Theseus; but he does not expect that Theseus will benefit, *philein*, him now, not in this case because he supposes any lack of good will on Theseus' part, but because *philein* requires effective action, and he cannot imagine any action that Theseus could take in order to benefit him, "polluted" and ill-famed as he is. (Nor, it seems, can Theseus at this point: he can only offer Hercules his pity.) The point is taken up at 1251-52, where, among the inducements to Hercules not to commit suicide, Theseus reminds him that he is:

Renowned benefactor to mortals and great friend (*philos*),  
 that he has conferred many benefits upon mortals, and is their great  
*philos* (and hence could expect them to *philein* him in return).  
 Hercules replies:  
 Of what benefit are men to me when Hera rules?

The rest of mankind benefits him not at all: Hera rules. He is a *philon* object to mankind, but they do not—cannot—help (*philein*) him in the great disaster that Hera has brought upon him. He needs someone who will *philein* him, who will be a *philon* object for him in his woe; and expects to find no one. But by 1322ff. Theseus has moved forward from pity: he offers Hercules a home and possessions in Athens, and concludes (1336ff.):

This kindness (*charis*) I render you in return, who once saved me;  
 For now you need a friend (*philon*). When the gods bestow favors  
 (*timosin*),  
 A man has no need of friends:  
 For the help of a god, when he wishes to give it, is sufficient.

Theseus will give Hercules this *charis* in return for Hercules' having saved him in the past; for now, Hercules is in need of *philoï*. As a *philos* should, he offers a *charis* in exchange for the *charis* he has received; for now, Hercules needs *philoï* to *philein* him in return. When the gods give one *time*—status and material benefits—one is (on the mortal plane) self-sufficient and does not need mortal *philoï* to *philein*, to *ophelein* (help)

---

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, 305f. of this play.

oneself; but now that the gods have turned against Hercules, one *philos* at least will not desert him in his extremity. Hercules is at first not convinced that any help Theseus can give will be of any avail; but when he has resolved on life, he says (1403f.):

A pair yoked in friendship; though one of us is in grief.  
O father, choose a man such as this as a friend (*philon*)

Theseus shows himself to be *philos* for Hercules, for he *philei* a man who does not even expect it, in return for Hercules' having shown himself *philos* to him in the past.

This is the manner in which Euripides presents the *philia* of part III—the *philia* that Chalk maintains to be characteristic of Hercules' new *arete*. Now on Theseus' part it is *arete*, traditional *arete*, to endure even much danger on behalf of his *philos*; as Hercules showed traditional *arete* on behalf of his *philos* when he rescued Theseus from Hades. To behave in this manner on behalf of one's *philo*i has always been part of *arete*. But what is Hercules' part now, *after the disaster*, in this *philia*? He finds Theseus *philon*, he is benefited by him. Now this is not explicitly said by Euripides to be *arete*: Chalk himself admits this. If the audience are to understand it as a new *arete* of Hercules, they must do so because in some way it suits their idea of *philia*, and of the *philia* of *agathoi*. But there is nothing whatever in the use of *philia*, *philos*, *philein*, and *arete* to suggest for a moment that *arete*, whose basic usage is in commending those very qualities in a man that ensure his independence, self-sufficiency, and ability to protect his dependents, can be manifested by receiving benefits from a *philos*. If we look at this play in terms of *our* values, we may see these transactions in a quite different light; but we are concerned with the values of Euripides and his audience, and in this case with those of the Greeks between Homer and Aristotle generally. In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b 7ff., a passage I have recently discussed<sup>32</sup> Aristotle discusses *teleia philia* (perfect friendship), which is *he ton agathon philia kai kat' areten homoion*, the *philia* of *agathoi* who are alike in *arete*. Here he diminishes as much as possible the extent to which such *philo*i find one another *philon*, need to be benefited, while emphasizing the aspect of *philein*, benefiting, in such *philia*. Aristotle even goes so far as to term such *philia*, *philia kat' areten* (in sharp contrast to *philia di' hedonen* (pleasure) and *philia dia to chresimon* (utility)), not *philia di' areten*, or indeed *di' anything*; and in his discussion of *megalopsuchia* (great souled) (1124b 9ff.) and *theoria* (1177a 27ff.), the chief *arete* of the different parts of the

<sup>32</sup> “‘Friendship’ and ‘Self-Sufficiency’” 39ff.



*Ethics*, he insists on the *autarkeia*, the self-sufficiency, of their possessors.<sup>33</sup> Such emphasis on self-sufficiency is entirely characteristic of *arete* in Greek from Homer onwards: had Euripides wished to redefine *arete* so radically as to render the *agathos* one who received (deserved) benefits rather than conferring them, he would have had to do so explicitly and at length in order to make comprehensible to the audience a view unparalleled in Greek literature up to and including Aristotle. Since he does not do so, we may conclude that, in portraying Hercules as receiving benefits from Theseus, he was not portraying *Hercules* as a manifesting any *arete*—traditional or new.

In part III, then, so far as *philia* is concerned, Theseus shows traditional *arete*, Hercules no *arete* at all. There remains the question whether Hercules shows any other aspect of traditional (or new) *arete* in part III. Here it must be borne in mind that traditional *arete* depends to a large extent on the success and prosperity of a man, not on his character, motives, and intentions.<sup>34</sup> Prosperity, *eudaimonia*, is an essential characteristic of the traditional *agathos*. Words to denote and decry the opposite situation include *dusdaimon*, *dustuches*, *athlios*. Now Hercules in part III is undoubtedly *athlios* (1198, 1226, 1385, 1393), *dustuches* (1143, 1225, 1262), and *dusdaimon* (1195). The point is repeatedly emphasized. All of his *arete* that depends upon success and prosperity has been swept away as completely as that which depends on his ability to help his *philoî*. He still has his high birth and his strength, and, if he can regain his self-control, his courage. These aspects are relevant to the understanding of part III. At first, Hercules is completely broken: nothing, he feels, can alleviate his condition in the slightest. He is pitiable (1236f.): another characteristic that the traditional *agathos* may not possess. But after Theseus has made his offer of a home and possessions in Athens, Hercules, though he still feels that even these *parerg'* . . . *est' emon kakon* (aren't as great as), he changes his resolve to die, and says (1347ff.):

But I asked myself, even in my troubles (*enkakoisin*)  
 Whether I might not be charged with cowardice (*dellian*)  
 If I killed myself: for whoever fails to withstand misfortunes  
 Would not be able to withstand a man's weapon, either.

Though he is *en kakoisin*, and has thus lost much of his claim to be termed *agathos* in the traditional sense, he fears that suicide, even in these circumstances, would look like *deilia*, always the mark of the *kakos*; for it

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 43f.

<sup>34</sup> See *M&R*, *passim*, and most succinctly Simonides' πράζας γὰρ εἶ πᾶς ἀνήρ ἄγαθος κακὸς δ' εἰ κακῶς (fr. 5 Bergk).

might be inferred that a man who could not face the worst disasters of life could not face an armed enemy either. The argument against suicide may be a new one in this form—our sources give us no means of finding out—but it is not an attempt by Euripides to produce a new form of *arete*. He is explicitly subsuming under an essential characteristic of traditional *arete*—courage in the face of the enemy—an action—refusing to commit suicide under any circumstances—which may not previously have been stated to be a necessary characteristic of the *agathos*. We have here no new *arete*. Hercules is merely salvaging from the wreck of his traditional *arete*—which he has not renounced: it has renounced him—the scraps that remain to him. It may be felt that *hupostenai belos* suggests a rather more passive attitude to battle than that of traditional *arete*, but it is of course not a manifestation of traditional *arete*; it will not be held that Hercules has shown himself *agathos* if he refuses to commit suicide, but he fears that he may be held to have shown himself *kakos* if he does commit suicide. His situation is precisely that of Megara in part I; and we have already seen that Megara there manifests no *arete*, traditional or new, that is relevant to judging the actions of a male Greek in the fifth century. But Hercules' judgement here, like Megara's in part I, is passed *in terms of* traditional male *arete*. The same may be said of Hercules' attitude to his bow and arrows. He thinks of casting them aside, but (1382 ff.):

Yet stripped of these weapons with which I performed  
 The greatest deeds in Hellas, am I now to submit myself  
 To my enemies and be killed in shame?  
 No, I must not abandon them [these weapons]  
 But in wretchedness I must keep them.

Can he think of stripping himself of his weapons, with which he did deeds that were *kallista* in Greece, offer himself unarmed to his enemies, and so die *aischros*? He must not leave them behind, but preserve them—*athlios*. Again *athlios*: a characteristic that the traditional *agathos* must not possess. Hercules is no longer prosperous and successful, able to harm his *echthroi* and help his *philoï*. But, I repeat, he has not ceased to judge his actions in terms of traditional *arete*, by which it is *aischron* to die without putting up a fight.<sup>35</sup> He may no longer be able to be the deliverer of Greece, but he will defend himself to the death as a traditional *agathos* should, even if so much of his *arete* is already gone beyond recall that he cannot claim to be *agathos* because he has done so. In fact, *hupostenai belos* (to withstand a weapon) in 1350 is used for the sake of the parallel

---

<sup>35</sup> C.f. Aesch. *Cho.* 493ff., Eur. *Or.* 77ff.

with withstanding the blows of fortune: Hercules will not show merely passive courage toward his enemies.

Every judgement of value in part III, then, is passed in terms of traditional *arete*; there is no “new” *arete* here. Theseus manifests traditional *arete*—magnificently—toward the *philos* whom he *philei*: Hercules, shorn of most of his traditional *arete*, manifests no “new” *arete*—no *arete* at all—in finding Theseus *philon*, but gathers together the tattered remnants of his old *arete* to avoid showing *deilia* and dying *aischron*. Few Greeks of this period would have applied *agathos* in the traditional sense to Hercules at the end of the play;<sup>36</sup> but at least he is recusing himself from the worst disgrace and indignities.

This analysis of *arete* and *philia* in the *Hercules* is based on the ordinary Greek usage of the day (and indeed of days long before and after in the history of Greek thought). Had Euripides wished to alter the ingrained attitudes of his audience, he could not have hoped to do so except explicitly and at length. He has made no such attempt; and a viable play results without our assuming gratuitously that the audience understood anything but their normal usages on hearing these words in this play. Certainly, all sophisticated theories based on the existence of a new *arete* for Hercules collapse; perhaps the tragedy has not the stature we might have preferred; but we have still a play whose theme is suggested by 1425-26, though not in Sheppard’s sense. Hercules might well reflect that it was absurd to prefer *sthenos* or *ploutos* to *philo agathoi*. At the beginning of the play, Hercules had *sthenos* and *ploutos*, but he was away from home; and no amount of *sthenos* or *plutos* he possessed could have kept his family from disaster, had he himself not returned when he did. True, he had *philo* then, but they were either too old, too young, or too weak to defend themselves or anyone else. They were *philo* of a kind, but *philein* essentially entails action in Greek, not feeling. When Amphitryon says (59) that *duspraxia* is *philon elengchon apseudesataton*, the surest test of *philo*, he is referring not only to false friends (55), but to helpless ones (56). Now when Hercules refers to *philon / agathon* in 1425-26, he is thinking of a quite different kind of *philos*, one who is *agathos*—note the emphasis of *agathon* at the beginning of the line—or, a slightly different expression but one with the same implications: one who is *agathos philein*, powerful and effective in helping his *philo* and harming his *echthroi*. At the end of the play disaster has overtaken Hercules and his

---

<sup>36</sup> 1334-35 are a generalization, much less pointed than saying that Hercules is ἐσθλός still. Euripides does not say this; for Theseus is concerned here with Hercules’ *past* ἀρετή when Hercules ἐφίλει *him*. In any case, it is in terms of traditional ἀρετή that Hercules is termed ἐσθλός here, if at all.

household, a disaster that neither Hercules' physical strength nor his wealth can alleviate to any great extent; but he has found such an *agathos philos*, and has attained the best position possible in the circumstances—certainly a much better one than he could have hoped for.

The interpretation of Chalk draws on much learning, sensitivity, and industry; but in the light of the ordinary usage of *arete* and *philia* every point on which it rests proves to have no foundation. I am not maintaining that there is no more than I have mentioned in this brief discussion to be found in the *Hercules*. I am, however, maintaining that unless the language of the play is interpreted in a manner that would have been comprehensible to Euripides and his audience, the interpreter is merely coming between Euripides and the reader; and, in our role as scholars at all events, we should surely be concerned rather with elucidating the tragedies Euripides has left us than with composing others on the same theme.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THREATENING, ABUSING AND FEELING ANGRY IN THE HOMERIC POEMS

### Introduction

This essay explores some of the fine details about *shame-* or *results-oriented* culture. It rests upon several pivotal assumptions—some of which are: first, that we must understand Homer as being a literature of action, emotion, and response that emphasizes the competitive virtues associated with excellence (*arete*). *Arete* is the most valued attribute of the competitive winner, one who earns the description *agathos*, the highest term of approval in the competitive universe of war as he directly subdues others and exhibits the power to do so. If literature is largely a metaphorical expression of some given culture's critical *données*, then this exercise here intends to reveal the minutiae of the verbal representation of reproach within this system of values. The details will reveal *how* exactly the shame-culture expresses itself.

The second assumption is that, *hosion* and *euchomai* are stand-ins for a correction to unbridled exercise of power (what I call *kraterism*).<sup>1</sup> By referring to the gods and their ability to interfere in this world for justice and in the next for punishment, there is a slight curb on *kraterism*.

Of course, in the midst of a story, the curb can be elevated by the author beyond what ordinary citizens might have felt. But there is a parameter upon the story teller: if he goes too far, then his version of events will be dismissed and he will be a rather impoverished singer of

---

<sup>1</sup> My coining of *kraterism* in contexts of justice and human rights is set out in my three key books on these subjects in contemporary contexts—nationally and internally: Michael Boylan, *A Just Society* (New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), *Morality and Global Justice: Justifications and Applications* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2011), and *Natural Human Rights: A Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

poetry or a starving playwright. In the end, since *these* are the records that have survived, we must construct our judgements about usage in the literature within certain historical settings (see introduction).

A third assumption, is the counterpoint of the use of force for what we in the twenty-first century would call immoral purposes—such as the suitors’ designs upon Penelope. The *kraterism* standard would suggest that they might do what they like—subject only to a superior exhibition of force (by someone else, like Odysseus) or the interference of the gods (a less likely event). In this third assumption is the exhibition of public shame. Unlike the second restraint, *shame* is real and can have actual social effects: enter *neikeiein*.

*Neikeiein* is the focus of this essay. Though it has been used in the general literature to refer to: quarrel, wrangle with, chide, rail at, upbraid, etc., it has more exact usages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that Adkins cites. In counterpoint to *neikeiein* are overlapping terms such as *polemos*, *apeilein*, *ochtheo*, *ochthesas*, *choesthai* (particularly with the emphasis upon emotion), *kertomeein*, and *meneainon* (-nein). In various ways each of these can elicit shame, *elencheie*, (with associated terms *aischron*, *kakon*).

But the point here is that one word, *neikeiein*, can refer to a psychological motivation for reproach: one based on more than ordinary threats, abuse, and anger. The extra element is that the recipient of the *neikeiein* speech feels the *shame*—as in the case of Paris and the two goddesses he didn’t choose. In choosing the third goddess Paris *neikesse* them by causing them to feel shame. So, shame doesn’t have to be the result of one’s own action but how someone feels about his or her status upon receiving *neikeiein* speech or action

This shame is the first cornerstone of developing a quiet, cooperative sense of morality that is a part of Adkins’ bigger project: to show the development of quiet values within the existing environment of the competitive understanding of these basic terms. “Shame” is the downside result of the *neikeiein* claim. This is not a standard negative reaction, but one that embraces something more—and that something more will stimulate the growth of cooperative morality.

## Adkins' Essay:<sup>2</sup>

At other times and in other places I have tried to show, by means of a study of the manner in which Homer uses words, the nature of the Homeric field of values.<sup>3</sup> I have also tried to show the effect of that field of values on the concepts of punishment, honor,<sup>4</sup> and friendship.<sup>5</sup> In this paper I wish to develop the inquiry in a rather different direction, but using the same tools and method of approach. I shall begin by discussing some peculiarities of behavior of certain Homeric words, leave, at first, the questions I shall ask hanging in the air, and then attempt at the end to show how these peculiarities fit together into a pattern, a pattern imposed (or encouraged) by Homeric values and the structure of Homeric society.

I begin with the word *neikeiein*. LSJ renders this as “quarrel, wrangle with,” or transitively “chide, rail at, upbraid;” Ebeling; *Lexicon Homericum* as *increpo*. Ebeling’s rendering I find unhelpful, since I am as unsure of the implications of *increpo* as of *neikeiein*. I understand the words LSJ uses, but (as presumably we all do) regard wrangling with someone as a different activity from chiding or rebuking him, and each as distinguishable from railing at him. What induced Homer to use the same word in Greek was presumably that he saw a resemblance between these activities stronger than their differences: at all events, the likelihood that this was the reason is strong enough to make it worthwhile to look for the resemblances by studying some examples of the usage of *neikeiein*.

In *Iliad* 7.161, Homer sums up a speech by Nestor:

So, the old man *neikesse* them and there stood up nine in all.

Now the last words of Nestor were:

But not even you, who are chieftains of all the Achaeans,  
are ready willingly to go face to face against Hector.

I shall have more to say about this passage later, but the lines at first sight certainly appear to be what I should term a rebuke: words uttered to another person or persons blaming him for an action or omission, disapproved of by his society, which he (or they) is in a position to

---

<sup>2</sup> In this essay Adkins inserted his own translations after the Greek. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay belong to Adkins.

<sup>3</sup> *Merit and Responsibility*, ch., 2 and 3.

<sup>4</sup> “‘Honour’ and ‘Punishment’ in the Homeric Poems” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 7 (1960): 23ff.

<sup>5</sup> “Friendship and Self-Sufficiency in Homer and Aristotle” *CQ* n.s. 13 (1963): 30ff. [Ch. 1 of this volume, ed.]

remedy. Nestor rebukes the chieftains for shirking; and nine of them take immediate action.

In *Odyssey* 8 Odysseus, on being asked by Laodamas to compete in the games, replies that he is sad at heart from his many toils and troubles, and that his thoughts are not turned to contests. But, (8.158):

Euryalus answered him and *neikese* to his face.

And what Euryalus said was, “I don’t think you’re an athlete. You look more like a merchant to me.” Odysseus is insulted, as Euryalus intended, and replies angrily (178ff.):

You have stirred up my heart (emotions) in my breast,  
speaking in an unseemly manner. I am not unskilled  
in contests, as you say. No; I think I was among the first and best  
as long as I trusted in my youth and my hands. But now  
I am overcome by *kakotes* (misery, bad physical condition)  
and woes; for I have borne many things, as I clove my way  
through the wars of men and the grievous waves.  
but even so, though I have suffered many hardships,  
I will make trial of the contests. For your speech  
“Bit into” my emotions, and you have stirred me by your words.

He hurls the discus far—further than anyone else, and (202ff.), he will compete with the Phaeacians in anything except the foot-race. Alcinous tries to sooth him (236ff.):

Stranger, since your speech among us is not ungracious,  
but you wish to display the *arete* that is yours, angered  
[but we will discuss *choomenos* later] because this man stood by you  
in the gathering and *neikesen*, in a way in which no mortal would find  
fault with your *arete*, supposing that he knew in his mind  
how to speak what is appropriate (fitting).

Euryalus’ speech is twice referred to as *neikesen*. We are not, I think, tempted to render this by “rebuke.” Even if we had as high a view of athletes and as low a view of merchants as is expressed here, we should not so translate it, for we rebuke others for doing something from which they could at once refrain, or for not doing something that they could do; and if Odysseus were really a merchant and no athlete, Euryalus’ words could not spur him on to hurl the discus beyond all the rest. Nor ought we to render *neikeiein* by “insult.” We might be tempted to do so by Alcinous’ words: “You are angry because this man . . . *neikesen*, since no right-thinking man could find fault with your *arete*.” “Insult” would suggest that



a man only *neikeiei* another when he says something at once disparaging and untrue. But in *Iliad* 6.325 Hector's speech to Paris is thus introduced:

And seeing him, Hector *neikessen* with the word of shame-to-Paris. He then rebukes Paris for shirking in a way of which he himself was the cause; and Paris replies in 333:

You *eneikesas* as is right, and not excessively.

*Neikeiein* does not cease to be *neikeiein* when it is justified, and so is not "insult"; and it seems not to be "rebuke" either.

Let us consider further examples. In *Iliad* 15, Poseidon acknowledges that Iris has just given him some good advice, but adds, with reference to the content of the message she has just brought him from Zeus (208ff.):

But this dreadful grief comes upon my heart and spirit,  
whenever he (one) wishes to *neikeiein* with angry words  
one who has an equal portion and is endowed with an equal share.

Now what Zeus said was (160ff.), "Tell him to stop fighting and rejoin the other gods on Olympus, or go into the sea." If not (163ff.):

Let him take thought then in his mind and heart,  
lest, strong though he is, he be not able to endure  
to await my onset, since I say that I am much mightier than he,  
and older; yet his heart recks nothing of declaring himself equal  
with me, whom even the other gods fear.

This seems to be neither an insult nor a rebuke, but a sharp command combined with a threat. Yet it is an example of *neikeiein*.

Again, in *Odyssey* 17 the goat-herd Melanthius kicked Odysseus, who made no reply. Eumaeus, however (239):

*neikese* looking full at him, and prayed loudly raising up his hands.

Now one could say that *neikese* refers to some words not given in direct speech; but this seems stylistically un-Homeric, whereas it is quite Homeric to use more than one verb to introduce direct speech. Accordingly, I take *neikes'* to refer to the direct speech that follows:

Ye nymphs of the spring, daughters of Zeus, if every Odysseus  
was wont to burn for you thigh-pieces of lambs or kids,  
having wrapped them in rich fat, grant me this desire:  
may that man return, and some divine power guide him.  
Then would he scatter all your proud airs that you insolently display  
as you ever wander through the city;  
but the evil shepherds devour the flock.

The prayer ends at 243. If the rest is what he *neikese*, it seems to be a combination of threat and rebuke.

*Neikeiein*, then, seems to be a mixture of threat, insult, and rebuke; or more precisely, it is none of those things, but a different phenomenon suited to the Homeric situation. This is emphasized by a passage from the Shield of Achilles (*Il*18. 497ff.):

The people were gathered in the place of assembly;  
And there a *neikos* had arisen, and two men *eneikeon*  
With one another about the blood-price of a man slain.

This is the manner in which Homer characterizes judicial proceedings of the kind he knew. In *Odyssey* 12.440 there is mention of a man who settles *neikea* when young men seek judgement of him; and in 7.74, Arete is said to settle *neikea* even for men by arbitrating.

We should remember the range of usage of *neikos*, which Ebeling divides among: (1) *altercation*, (2) *discordiae, lis*, (3) *pugna, certamen, bellum*, LSJ among (1) “quarrel, strife, feud,” (2) “strife of words, railing, abuse,” (3) “strife at law, dispute before a judge,” and (4) in Homer, not seldom for “battle, fight.” The sense of “strife at law” has already been exemplified. For “quarrel” or *altercatio* it will suffice to quote *Iliad* 2.375ff., where Agamemnon laments:

But Zeus who wields the aegis has given me grief,  
In that he hurls me into the midst of fruitless strife and *neikea*.

He is speaking, as he immediately goes on to explain, of his quarrel with Achilles, not of the seemingly endless Trojan War; and yet Hector (*Il* 3.86) says:

Hear me, ye Trojans, and well-grieved Achaeans,  
While I utter the speech of Alexander, on whose behalf the *neikos*  
arose.

Hector is referring to the Trojan War. Yet *neikos* is not synonymous with *polemos* (cf. *Il* 12.361, *polemos kai neikos*; 13.271, *neikos polemoio*): the range of the word indicates that *neikos* is not synonymous with “war” any more than with “quarrel” or “abuse,” but denotes something common to all these that is important to Homeric man. This may help throw light on *neikeiein*: the use of the verb need not closely resemble that of the noun, but the manner in which both are used in *Iliad* 18 above (and cf. 20.251) suggests that the usages are closely linked in this case.

I shall return to *neikeiein* and *neikos* later, after considering other words. The first of these is *apeileo* (with *apeilai*), which Ebeling renders:

(1) *minor*, (2) *voveo*, (3) *glorior*; LSJ: (1) “promise, also boast or brag,” (2) “threaten.”

In *Iliad* 21, Poseidon recalls to Apollo the time when they built the walls of Troy for Laomedon, and how Laomedon defrauded them, and (452):

Having *apeilesas*, he sent us away. He *epeilese* that he would  
Bind together our feet and hands above,  
And would sell us into far-away islands.

That, at all events, sounds like a threat.

However, somewhat earlier in *Iliad* 21, Pelegonus made a speech which ends (161), *hos phat' apeilesas*. The content of his speech was:

Great-hearted son of Peleus, why do you ask about my lineage?  
I come from deep-soiled Paeonia, a land far away,  
Leading the Paeonians with their long spears.  
This is now the eleventh dawn since I came to Ilium.  
But my lineage is from wide-flowing Axius—  
Axius, whose water is the fairest that flows on the face of the earth.  
Axius begat Pelegon, famed for his spear;  
And they say he was my father.  
Now, let us do battle, glorious Achilles.

If we read this passage in English we should not, I think, expect the next words to be “So spake he threatening”: which are in fact the words used by the Loeb translator to render *hos phat' apeilesas*.<sup>6</sup> But in what does the threat consist? He has given Achilles an account of his genealogy, saying that Axius is a broad-flowing river and that Pelegon, his father, was a famous spearman—neither pieces of information, one would have thought, calculated to strike terror into Achilles at this moment. Even if one supposes Pelegonus to be implying that, since his father was a good spearman, he is likely to be a good spearman, too, this is a gentle hint rather than a threat. (Achilles had threatened Pelegonus (151 ff.): but there *apeilein* is not used.)

Nevertheless, Ebeling lists this example under *minor*. It sounds more like *glorior*, but not if that word implies either exaggeration or a mode of speech disapproved of by society, as does LSJ’s “boast or brag.” Pelegonus is telling the truth, and the truth he is telling, and the mode of his telling it, are not disapproved of by Homeric society. Society, in

---

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the Loeb translation has been updated (1999) since this essay was written. The current translation here is “so he spoke with a threat.”

general, does not disapprove of *apeilai*. When, in *Iliad* 13.219ff., Poseidon says to Idomeneus:

Idomeneus, where have the *apeilai* gone  
That the sons of the Achaeans *apeileon* to the Trojans?

Poseidon is not disapproving of the act of *apeilein*, but of failing to make good one's *apeilai*.

The last *apeilai* sound indeed like threats again; but in *Iliad* 8 when Diomedes is counseled by Nestor to flee before Hector, since Zeus is manifestly helping Hector, he replies (146ff.):

Yes, indeed, all these things, old man you have said as is right.  
But this terrible grief comes upon my heart and spirit:  
Hector one day will say as he speaks among the Trojans,  
“The son of Tydeus fled before me and went to the ships.”  
Thus, one day he *apeilesei*; and then may the broad earth yawn beneath me.

Hector will not be threatening to harm Diomedes, for Diomedes will not be there and the event will be in the past. He will not be uttering words that are exaggerated, untrue, or disapproved of by those who will then hear them; and Diomedes has no right to disapprove of them as a boast, since *menos* (fierceness) put into a man by a god is not held to diminish a man's credit for what he does. Accordingly, neither supposed future hearers nor Diomedes should use the word “boast.” Ebeling classifies this example as *glorior*. In the sense of “speak proudly,” this seems adequate; but why did the Homeric Greek classify speaking *proudly* with *threatening*? It is possible to speak proudly without threatening that one intends to harm another; what aspect of the situations appears to the Homeric man as similar and important?

Again, in *Iliad* 23.863, Teucer shot an arrow at the target, a dove:  
But did not *epeilesen* to the lord (Apollo) that he would sacrifice  
To him a glorious hecatomb of first-born lambs,  
And accordingly missed the target.

Here Ebeling renders by *voveo*, LSJ by “promise,” and if we translate the lines we shall have to use some such word. But why does Homeric Greek use the same word as for threatening and speaking proudly? Homeric Greek has a rich vocabulary: it is not poverty of utterance that makes it necessary.

Once again, I leave the question in the air, until other words have been studied. *Ochtheo* presents certain problems. It is rendered by LSJ “be

sorely angered, vexed in spirit,” by Ebeling *aegre fero, indignor*. “Angered” and “*indignor*” are clear enough, but “vexed” and *aegre fero* though they prominently include “anger” in their usage, have a wider range. It is unclear to me whether the lexicographers (who do not divide the usages under separate headings, as is their wont) are treating their English or Latin equivalents as synonymous with each other, or suggesting a narrower (“anger”) and a wider (“mental and emotional agitation”) for *ochtheo*. The wide usage exists; and the behavior of the word requires explanation.

In *Iliad* 17, the son of Panthus threatens Menelaus with death across the newly-slain corpse of Patroclus. And (18):

And golden-haired Menelaus, greatly *ochthesas*, addressed him.

From 24 his speech refers to the fate of Hyperenor, already killed by Menelaus, and 30-32 threaten the son of Panthus with a similar fate; so, we might *prima facie* render “in great anger.” Most translators seem to take this view, though the Loeb translator has “in great agitation”—a rendering that begs fewer questions. I shall return to this passage later.

It may be felt that since most of the extant examples of *ochtheo* in Homer are in the formulaic: *meg’ ochthesas prosephe*, precision of utterance should not be expected. The formula occurs where it is metrically convenient. However, metrical convenience alone never dictates the use of this formula: *meg’ ochthesas* can always be replaced by *apameibomenos* (answering), the line then being one of the commonest Homeric formulae. There is at least a case for endeavoring to find a systematic usage of *ochthein*.

The line occurs again at *Iliad* 1.517. Thetis has just asked Zeus to help the Trojan cause until the Greeks have to compensate Achilles:

And cloud-gatherer Zeus, greatly *ochthesas*, addressed her,  
 “Indeed, this will be a grievous matter in that  
 You will make me engage in strife with Hera.”

Here we naturally render “greatly troubled”; but in *Iliad* 4.30, where Hera angrily complains of Zeus’ behavior in the war:

And cloud-gathered Zeus greatly *ochthesas*, addressed her.

Even the Loeb translator renders “stirred to hot anger.” The translation may appear appropriate, though I shall return to the context later, but why does the poet use the same line in situations that the translators find very different?

I append some more instances in which Homer uses *ochthesas* of his characters: of Odysseus (*Il* 11. 401ff.) when he is debating whether to fight

or flee; of Menelaus (*Il* 17. 90); Agenor (*Il* 21.552); and Hector (*Il* 22.98), all in similar situations on the battlefield; of Odysseus when he fears he will drown (*Od* 5.298), when he thinks Leucothea is trying to trick him to his death (*Od* 5.355); and of Eurymachus when he cannot string the Bow of Odysseus (*Od* 21.248).

I shall discuss the range of *ochtheo* later, having first considered some more words rendered by “anger” or similar words. *Choesthai* is rendered by LSJ “be angry,” by Ebeling *perturbor, animo doleo, irascor*. (Ebeling does not divide the examples under separate headings, however.)

In *Iliad* 1.80, Calchus is afraid to reveal Apollo’s anger, since he knows that Apollo’s demands will not be welcome to Agamemnon:

For mightier is a king, when he *chosetai* with a man of lower estate.

“Is angry” sounds appropriate; but when in *Iliad* 21 the gods are watching the battle and, according to their several sympathies, 519:

Some *choomenoi*, others exulting greatly,

are we quite sure that “angry” is the best word in this context? Again, in *Iliad* 22.289 ff., when Hector is fighting with Achilles:

He spoke, and poised his long-shadowed spear, and hurled it,

And struck the middle of the shield of Peleus’ son, and did not miss;

But the spear sprang back far away from the shield;

And Hector was angered (*chosato*) because his swift weapons had flown

From his hand in vain; and he stood *downcast*

For he had no other ashen spear.

I do not suggest that *chosato* and *katephesasare* are exact synonyms,<sup>7</sup> but the situation in general and the manner of expression of the last three lines suggest that “anger” is too simple a rendering. (Nevertheless, the Loeb translator has “waxed wrath”; and this seems to be a common translation.)

Again, in *Iliad* 1.243, Achilles warns Agamemnon:

And you shall tear your spirit within you,

*Choomenos* (in wrath) that you gave no status to the best of the Greeks.

While in *Iliad* 23, Diomedes would have won the chariot-race had not Apollo caused him to drop his whip (385):

And tears flowed from his eyes as he *choesthai* (in his wrath).

And in *Odyssey* 2.80, Telemachus has just made a speech full of emotion:

---

<sup>7</sup> See note 8.

So, he spoke *choomenos* (in his wrath), and threw the staff to the ground, bursting into tears. And pity seized hold of all the people.

In none of these cases do I find “anger” or “wrath” entirely appropriate ideas, though the Loeb translator does on all three occasions.

For the present, I wish to examine one other word before attempting to find some reason for these verbal usages. *Meneaino*, according to LSJ, means (1) “desire earnestly” or (2) “be angry.” According to Ebeling it means (1) *iratus sum*, (2) *aveo, vehementer appeto*.

Ebeling classifies as *iratus sum Odyssey* 1.20. All the gods pitied Odysseus:

Except Poseidon: but he continued to *meneainein* continually  
Against godlike Odysseus until he reached his native land.

However, in *Iliad* 22.8-10, Apollo has decoyed Achilles away so that the Trojans may escape. He then reveals himself:

Why, son of Peleus, do you, a mortal, pursue on swift feet me,  
Who am an immortal god? You have recognized that I am a god,  
But you *meneaineis* continually.

The Homeric phrase is the same; but Ebeling, though with some doubts, classifies this example under *aveo, vehementer appeto*. Once again, it seems a reasonable hypothesis that in Homeric Greek the situations appeared to resemble one another.

Again, in *Odyssey* 21, Telemachus (125):

Three times he struggled, *meneainon*  
To draw the bow, and thrice he relaxed his strength.

If we translate, we shall presumably render (as does the Loeb translator) “in his eagerness”; but if we do, what do we suppose is the link with Poseidon’s anger with Odysseus?

It is now time to sum up the problems we have discovered, and attempt to suggest answers for some of them at least. There are situations in which we are tempted to render *neikeiein* by “rebuke,” “insult,” “command,” or “threaten”; *apeilein* by “threaten,” “speak magniloquently,” or “promise, vow”; *ochthein* by “be angry,” or “be distressed”; *choesthai* very similarly by “be angry,” or “be distressed”; and *meneainein* by “be angry,” or “be eager.” Homeric man, not having the advantage of knowing modern English, was unaware that we should require different words to render each of these words on the different occasions on which his words appear. Our reason for speaking of different “meanings” of the words is precisely that we do use different English words to translate them on different occasions. Greek, however, uses the

same word on each occasion; and if we speak not of words as having “meanings” but as having *uses*, we shall remember that the word is the same word through its uses. We may then inquire why this particular Greek word has just the uses that it has, and may be able to discover reasons in the total environment of Homeric man.

A key passage in which *ochthein* appears is *Iliad* 11.403ff. Odysseus finds himself facing the Trojans alone, all the rest of the Achaeans having fled in terror:

*Ochthesas* he addressed his great-hearted spirit:  
 Ah me, what is to become of me? It is a great evil [a bad thing for me]  
 If I flee in terror at the host, but it is worse if I am caught alone;  
 And the son of Cronos has driven away the rest of the Danaans in  
 terror.  
 But why did my dear spirit say these things to me?  
 For I know that cowards, *kakoi*, depart from the war,  
 But that he who is outstanding in battle must stand firmly,  
 And either be smitten or smite another.

Here we are faced with the stark realities of Homeric *arete*. The *agathos* must be *successful* in defending the group with which he is identified; this is his justification for being termed *agathos*; and this is interpreted as entailing, among other things, that one must never retreat: there is no question of discretion being the better part of valor. Not good intentions, but results, are demanded of the Homeric *agathos*, in all his activities: he is constantly faced, or threatened, with a demand that he should succeed in doing what he cannot do; and a psychological response of frustration, distress, and anger, all confused together, seems not inappropriate to his situation. This, I suggest, is *ochthein*. I have already mentioned its regular appearance where heroes are debating whether to fight or flee. Here there is tension, doubt what to do and what is to happen. Similarly (*Od* 5. 298ff.) Odysseus, fearing he may drown:

*Ochthesas*, he addressed his great-hearted spirit, “Ah me,  
 Wretched me, what is to become of me at length?”

He is distressed, afraid, unable to do anything; and he speaks *ochthesas*; as he does in 5.355, when he suspects Leucothea is tricking him and does not know whether death is more likely on the raft or in the sea; in 5.407, when he has reached shore only to find a rocky coast; and in 5.464 when he fears that if he spends the night in the river he will freeze, while if he spends it on dry land he may be eaten by a wild beast.



Eurymachus is in a very different situation in *Odyssey* 21. He is at a feast, so far as he knows in no danger of his life. But when he finds himself unable to draw the Bow of Odysseus (248):

*Ochthesas*, he spoke, uttered a word and said,  
 “Ah me, verily I grieve about this and about everything.  
 I am not so distressed about the marriage, grieved though I am; . . .  
 But that we are so inferior in might to godlike Odysseus,  
 In that we are unable to draw the bow.  
 It will be *elencheie* for men that are yet to be heard of.”

Eurymachus is at a peaceful feast, but he is taking part in a context of strength and skill, of *arete*. To *fail* will show him to be *kakos*, and he will incur *elencheie*, the most powerful words available to decry a man in Homeric society. His will, his good intentions, are irrelevant, and he knows it: only the result, and what people say of it, count. His intentions are of as little importance as those of Odysseus being swept onto the rocks; and his response is naturally the same. As an *agathos*, he occupies a pinnacle from which he may at any moment be swept by forces beyond his control, in a society that will then no longer value him. He must be ever nervous, on the lookout for disaster. So, Odysseus (who well knew the malicious and capricious nature of Homeric deity) *ochthei* when Leucothea offered him a lifebuoy, though this would have provided exactly what he needed, would have enabled him to reach his desired destination, and was offered with kindly intent by Leucothea. In his situation he might well feel unsafe; but if in the light of what we have now discovered about *ochthein* we turn again to *Iliad* 17, more of Menelaus’ mental and emotional state there may become apparent. When Euphorbus threatened him, Menelaus (18) spoke *ochthesas*, and *he* ended in a threat (24ff.). So, the most obvious rendering is “to be “in anger.” But the earlier lines of Menelaus’ reply are:

Father Zeus, it is not becoming to proclaim oneself overmuch.  
 Neither a leopard, nor a lion, nor a wild boar of baneful mind,  
 Whose spirit in his breast exults most of all in his might,  
 Has mettle as great as that of the sons of Panthus,  
 Who wield good ashen spears.

Leaf and Bayfield (p. 19) take this reply to Euphorbus as contemptuous: “*Zeu pater*: not a mere expletive to give force to his words, but a rhetorical device to express contempt; he ignores the presence of Euphorbus, and affects to address his remarks to a third party”; and this seems to be the usual view.

The speech continues (24ff.):

Yet not even mighty Hyperenor, tamer of horses, had enjoyment  
Of his youth when he thought little of me and withstood my onset,  
And thought that I was the *elenchistos* warrior among the Greeks.

For Menelaus killed him. Now the mention of Hyperenor is apposite, for he was Euphorbus' brother; but if 19ff. are contemptuous, Menelaus is ironically attributing to the sons of Panthus the thought "Menelaus is a mighty warrior, but we are the most powerful creatures on earth and can overcome him." If so, he would hardly add 26 "and he thought I was the *elenchistos* warrior among the Greeks." I suggest that 19ff. are not contemptuous; that "father Zeus" is the type of emotional expression which frequently follows *ochthesas*<sup>8</sup>; that *euchetaasthai* refers not to what Euphorbus said, but to what Menelaus is about to say: he will *euchetaasthai* (Euphorbus uses *epeuchomai* of what he says, 35) but not excessively; that he seriously acknowledges the mettle of Euphorbus and Hyperenor; and that 26 expresses Menelaus' anxieties about his coming fight with Euphorbus. Like Eurymachus above, he fears *elencheie*, the most terrible fate of the Homeric warrior—and he speaks *ochthesas* in the same manner as Eurymachus, and in the same manner as he himself does again some seventy lines later (*Il* 17.90) when he finds himself facing the Trojans alone.

Another's plight may cause one to *ochthein*. So in *Iliad* 7, Poseidon points out to Zeus that the Greeks have built the wall without offering hecatombs, and fears that mankind will no longer communicate their plans to the immortals, and that men will forget the wall that Poseidon and Apollo built for Laomedon (454):

And him greatly *ochthesas* Zeus the cloud-gatherer addressed,  
"Ah me, earth-shaker whose power extends afar, what a thing you have said.

Another of the gods might fear this intent, one who was much weaker  
Than you in hand and might; but your fame shall extend  
As far as the dawn is spread."

Similarly (*Od* 15.325) Eumaeus *ochthei* when Odysseus wishes to go up to his palace, for he thinks the "beggar" will surely perish. The feeling may not, in these cases, be only for another: Poseidon has expressed the fear that mortals may disregard *all* the gods—and the gods need sacrifices to maintain their all-important status, if not for sustenance; and the

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ᾄ μῶτι in the *Il* 11.404; *Odyssey* 5.299, ᾄ πόποι in 21.249, quoted above.

“beggar” is to some extent under Eumaeus’ protection. However, we have here in part at least this feeling of frustration and distress on another’s behalf.

*Choesthai*, too, may be felt when a project is frustrated, as Hector *chosato* in *Iliad* 22 when he missed his aim, and as did the gods favoring the side that was losing in *Iliad* 21, when they were unable to help. However, Calchas’ fear of Agamemnon if he *chosetai* indicates that a man in this mood will take action if he can, and will still be held to be *choesthai*; whereas *ochthein* suggests at least anxious deliberation, and that when action takes place (if this is possible), *ochthein* has come to an end. Even when the speaker (or would-be agent) can do nothing, *choesthai* seems to differ from *ochthein*. In the speech summed up in *Odyssey* 2.80:

So he spoke *choemenos*, and cast the staff to the earth, bursting into tears. Telemachus had earlier asked his audience to refrain from devouring his substance, and to leave him to his grief without adding to it by their depredations. He ends (79):

But as it is, you are causing incurable woes to my spirit.

*Choesthai* seems to me to denote the frame of mind of a man who has received an unpleasant stimulus from his environment (and so far resembles *ochthein*); but whereas the man who *ochthei* says, “What am I to do?” in frustrated and angry distress and bafflement, the man who *choetai* is taking a much more positive attitude to the obstacle in his path: while the emotions of the man who *ochthei*, are swirling and eddying, those of the man who *choetai* are flowing in one direction, though the use of the word implies that there is at least for the moment an impediment to his reaching his goal,<sup>9</sup> or that the goal has not yet been reached: the emotions are confusedly grief and anger at once.

*Meneainein* is different again, the linking of psychological phenomenon here being a powerful positive forward drive. (The idea of *menos* is clearly present.) It is this eager activity that is in the foreground when Poseidon *meneainen* . . . *odusei*, that is he *menainei* to Odysseus’ disadvantage. Accordingly, when in *Iliad* 16.490

---

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, Hector *χόσατο*, *Il* 22.289ff., the natural response to missing with a spear-cast. Hector knows what he wishes to do, and has tried to do it, but his purpose has been frustrated, in that he has missed his target. His becoming downcase, *κατηφῆσας* (293) is subsequent on his realization that he has no other spear with him. (I take οὐδ’ ἄλλ’ ἔχε μείλινον ἔγχος as the explanation of *κατηφῆσας*.)

Thus, beneath Patroclus the leader of the Lycian spearmen *Meneaine* as he was killed, the Loeb translator's "struggled" gives an essential detail of the picture. *Choesthai* or *ochthein* would give a quite different impression.

Again, in *Iliad* 15.101ff., when Hera informs the gods that Zeus will continue to help the Trojans: "the gods *ochthesan* throughout the hall of Zeus and she [Hera] laughed with her lips. . . and said, 'How silly we are who *meneainomen* against Zeus in our foolishness.'"<sup>10</sup> We should not render (as the Loeb translator does) both *ochthesan* and *meneainomen* by "wroth." The gods were frustrated and baffled, but Hera speaks of their positive emotional drive, accompanied by anger, making straight for its goal and thinking nothing of obstacles. (*Ochtheo* only occurs in Homer's narrative about his characters: no character says that he *ochthei*; and possibly Hera is too polite to suggest that the other gods are baffled, and attributes to them instead the raging forward drive that is *meneainein*.) It is this positive drive that links Poseidon's attitude to Odysseus with Telemachus' efforts to string the bow. Telemachus feels that he can string it with another mighty effort; contrast Eurymachus who *ochthei*, when he realizes that he cannot do so, try as he will.

Our own experience will suggest to us the difference between the kinds of angry emotion attendant on these different psychological states; yet we are most likely to use "angry" in describing each of them. Why has Homer such a rich psychological vocabulary of this kind (and of course I have not discussed *menis* or *nemesis* [often translated as "wrath" or "anger" and "retribution" or "cause for anger," respectively] to go no further)?

The answer, I believe, lies in the total situation of Homeric man. As I have said, his most important terms of value (*agathos*, *arete*, *aischron*, etc.) evaluate not his intentions or his efforts, but their results. He is always "up against it," judged in terms of his successes and failures: further, the sanction is overtly "what people will say," and over this he has no control, and cannot set his own consciousness of his self and his value against the estimation of his fellows, since his self has only the value that they put upon it. In these circumstances he can and does have intentions, form plans, make choices, but these are not the most important aspect of the situation in his eyes (or anyone else's). Externally, what is important is the result: internally, what is important to him is his psychological response to the situations in which he finds himself, partly because these are directly relevant to his success or failure, partly because, his choices

---

<sup>10</sup> This is not Adkins' translation; my tr.

and plans being less important, his psychological conditions gain added prominence for him. These linguistic usages seem to me to give an accurate report of the psychological pressures of living in a shame- (or, as I prefer to call it, a results-) culture.

*Apeilein* and *neikein* seem to me similarly informative. *Apeilein* occurs in situations concerned with what we should distinguish as threatening, giving one's lineage, speaking magniloquently, or vowing. (Nor is this quite the full range, as we shall see in a moment.) These situations may be considered from the point of view both of the agent who *apeilei* and that of the person who is affected by hearing the *apeilai*, both of whom are living in the highly competitive Homeric world, in an environment indifferent and actively or potentially hostile, in the precarious condition I have already described. In these situations—as I have suggested for *euchomai* elsewhere—all his efforts to “make his presence felt” on this environment are likely to be classified together by him, since this resemblance is more important to him than the differences emphasized by our translations. *Apeilein* is the word, or one of the words, used to denote this activity in Homer. When Laomedon threatened Poseidon and Apollo, when Pelegonus narrated his lineage, when the Greeks said they would capture Troy, all were manifesting themselves; and if Teucer had vowed a hecatomb to Apollo, he would have been manifesting himself. *Euchomai* has a similar range, but seems to have two discernible differences: in the first place, *euchomai* is much more “subject-centered” and concentrates on the individual proclaiming himself, whereas *apeilein* seems to have the effect on the environment more in mind; and secondly (presumably arising out of this), *euchesthai* seems to require words on all occasions, while *apeilein* apparently does not. At all events, in *Iliad* 13.143ff.:

Thus, Hector for a while *apeilei* easily to make his way  
Through the tents and ships of the Greeks, slaying as he went;  
But when he encountered the dense-packed bodies of troops,  
He came to a halt, brought close up to them.

Hector has just been compared to a boulder bounding down a hill and coming to rest on a plain. There is no contrast between threatening words and ineffective deeds, and no suggestion that Hector uttered any words at all: *apeilei* refers—and we can use the same expression in English—to his actions as a threat to the security of the Greeks.

Here we are more concerned with *apeilein* from the point of view of the person affected; to which we may now turn. I have said that he who *apeilei* is seeking to “make his presence felt.” All the other members of the

competitive society are in the same position as he (the *agathoi* being of course those on whom most of the strain falls); and in such a society to hear another speaking magniloquently, magnifying himself, is to hear oneself by implication depreciated at least relatively. The depreciation may be direct and intentional, as in *Iliad* 8.150, where Diomedes imagines that Hector one day *apeilesei* that he fled from Hector: if Hector is to be believed, then Diomedes' reputation will fall and he will incur *elencheie*. Hector is not threatening to do something to Diomedes; but he is threatening his status and reputation. However, in so competitive a situation it is unnecessary for another man to be mentioned by name, or for the man who *apeilei* to have anyone particular in mind. If he magnifies himself, or someone with whom he is associated, he is claiming a larger share of the attention of men for himself or the other person; and since it is on the attention of men that one's fame depends, anyone who hears such magniloquent words may feel himself "threatened" to some extent. I do not suggest that the threat is felt as being equally intense in all cases, that for example it is very intense in *Odyssey* 8.382 ff., where Odysseus says:

Lord Alcinous, renowned above all men you *apeilesas* that  
Your people were the best dancers, and your words are made good.

There is no threat to Odysseus' well-being, and since he is not in his own community his reputation there is not diminished, particularly since the Phaeacians' *aretai* are not those of the ordinary Greek warrior. But Alcinous, in calling on the dancers to perform, gave as his motive for all the Phaeacian displays of *aretai* (251ff.):

That the stranger, on returning home, may tell his friends  
How much we surpass other men in seamanship, in running,  
In dancing, and in song.

This is *apeilein* from the point of view of Alcinous, the agent: the excellences of the Phaeacians are being drawn to general notice; and in so far as a man, or a society, can only pay attention to the deeds of a certain number of persons, his speech might be felt as *apeilein* by anyone else with a claim to fame who heard the magniloquent words, since his share of *kleos* might be diminished thereby.

Again, had Teucer in *Iliad* 23.863 vowed a hecatomb to Apollo, that god, in general, like all Homeric gods, indifferent to human affairs, would have had the existence of Teucer drawn to his attention, and also the claim, which the offering of a hecatomb represents, that Apollo should exert himself on Teucer's behalf. Teucer would have "made his presence felt." In this case, the emphasis is presumably on the subject of *apeilein*,

rather than on the effect it would have had on Apollo; but the well-being of the Homeric god is not unaffected by the actions of mankind, and the effect on Apollo is not irrelevant.<sup>11</sup> On the human level, certainly, the Homeric *agathos*, as I have already said, is in a precarious position, estimated by his successes and failures, which do not depend on his intentions alone. It is natural for him to classify together aspects of his surroundings that in different ways upset his equilibrium, just as he is likely to classify together different ways of making his presence felt; and this classification is expressed by the Homeric usage of *apeilein*.

The use of *neikeiein* similarly arises from the Homeric situation: if only results count, it is not worthwhile to distinguish a moral error from a mistake, where both lead to disaster, whether one is reprehending or being reprehended: a disastrous result is *aischron*, and will meet with disapproval, the same kind of disapproval, whatever the cause; and the man disapproved of will feel the same kind of shame, whatever the cause of the disaster.<sup>12</sup> There is, accordingly, an excellent reason for classifying together all types of disapproving speech. Some examples I have quoted may include more than one: Nestor in *Iliad* 7.123ff. (summed up, as we have seen, by *hos neikess' ho geron*, 161) not only rebukes the present Greek chieftains for shirking, but reminisces at length about the strong men of a former generation, possibly implying that these chieftains are not merely shirking but are not as strong as their predecessors, a matter beyond their control, but *aischron* nonetheless, and a cause of *elencheie*. Both forms of hostile speech are *neikeiein*, as is Euryalus' terming Odysseus a merchant, and hence deficient in *arete*; and we saw earlier that a result of this is that *neikeiein* is an idea untranslatable in English. If *Iliad* 24.29ff. is a line that reserves a genuine Homeric form of expression (it was athetized also on other grounds), it is illuminating: it refers to Paris:

Who *neikesse* (two of the) goddesses when they came to his stading,  
And *einese*<sup>13</sup> the one who furnished him with lust that was his ruin.

There are good reasons for supposing the lines to be late; but if my argument is correct, we need not follow Leaf and Bayfield's dictum "*neikesse*, too, makes no sense; the verb means only to quarrel or to rebuke," for the verb in fact means neither of these things; and when Paris gave his judgement that Aphrodite had won, the other two goddesses

---

<sup>11</sup> Apollo would naturally be pleased by the sacrifice; but he would be obliged to aid Teucer, and Homeric gods regarded it as an imposition to have to exert themselves for mankind, cf. *Il* 1.573, 21.462ff.

<sup>12</sup> *M&R*, ch. 3.

<sup>13</sup> There is no space in this paper to discuss αἰνεῖν, whose behavior is similarly affected by Homeric society.

naturally felt his words to be hostile, and indeed would feel *elencheie* at their defeat.

A usage of another word may lend support to this. In *Odyssey* 8.153, Odysseus says to Laodamas:

Laodamas, why do all of you urge *kertomeontes* me?

LSJ render *kertomeein* “taunt, sneer at”; so we naturally expect that Laodamas has said something particularly harsh and unfeeling to Odysseus. What he in fact said (145ff.)

was:

“Come, Sir guest, make trial of the games,  
 If perchance you have skill in any; and you are likely  
 To have knowledge of games; for there is no greater glory  
 For a man while he is yet alive than he achieves by his hands and feet.  
 Come, then, make trial, and banish cares from your heart.  
 Your journey will not be long delayed.  
 No, already the ship is launched and companions are ready.

This is a kind, polite speech, with no mocking *intent*: but its *effect* (and we are in a results-culture) is to remind Odysseus of his sea-tossed weariness and his inability as he feels it, till stung to action by Euryalus—to compete. Inability brings as much *elencheie* as shirking: the effect of the speech is hurtful; and this is *kertomeein*.

To return to Zeus and Poseidon in *Iliad* 15: Zeus’ words were neither a rebuke nor an insult, but a threat. Particularly since the threat is combined with a proclamation of Zeus’ greater strength, we might perhaps expect this to be *apeilein*, yet it is termed *neikeiein*. *Apeilein* would clearly be possible in the context: I suggest that *neikeiein* draws attention to a somewhat different aspect of the situation, to Zeus’ words as hostile speech, whereas *apeilein* is to manifest oneself as a competing threat usually (but not necessarily) through the medium of speech. Similarly, Eumaeus’ prayer is prefixed by both *neikes*’ and *euxato*, the latter word proclaiming Eumaeus’ existence to the deity, the former expressing the hostile implications that his speech has for Melanthius.

If the foregoing remarks have any basis in fact, in accepting the lexicographers’ words as valid equivalents for the Homeric words I have discussed we are both blunting our appreciation of the subtlety and sensibility of the Homeric poems as literature of action, emotion, and response, and concealing from ourselves the fact that we have here documents of great anthropological and psychological interest; for here we have a language that records clearly and with considerable precision what it is like to live in a shame- (or results-) culture.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# TRUTH, *KOSMOS*, AND *ARETE* IN THE HOMERIC POEMS

### Introduction

Adkins begins his essay by examining the etymology of *atheleia*, generally translated as “truth.” The root, *leth* refers to “forgottenness” or “concealedness.” The privative *a* means that it is not-forgotten or not-concealed, and thus is “remembered” and “declared.” In this way “remembering” is an essential component of *Iliad* 23.359. If *remembering* is the ticket, then what about a more distant past, such as what Telemachus was confronted with? If telling the truth is about not forgetting, then in the extreme case (Telemachus’ understanding of Odysseus, as being his father) telling the truth is impossible. In *Odyssey* 1.214 Telemachus replies to Athena that “My mother attests that I am his son. For my part I cannot say. Nobody really knows his own father.” If speaking the truth has as a necessary condition the act of observation that is conveyed to memory, then it is impossible to know one’s father. This will be one epistemological constraint on “telling the truth.” Telemachus is truthful about admitting his inability to use the accepted standard: viewing the event, remembering it, and rendering an account that follows the standard of verisimilitude.

The next step in this process of examining what is meant by truth concerns the phrase: *ou kata kosmon*. Now *kosmos* refers to what is properly ordered/ good form/ decent (according to social standards).<sup>1</sup> *Kata kosmon* refers to the activity that is in accord with what is properly ordered/ good form/ decent. *Ou kata kosmon* would refer to what is not

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, it later takes on “earthly” and “heavenly” meanings as the universe and its structure: Heraclitus 30; Xen. *Mem.* I.I.11; Pl. *Grg.*508a, *Ti.*27a; Arist. *Cael.* 280a 21.

*kata kosmon*: it is reckless and disorderly.<sup>2</sup> The underlying assumption is that “truth” is somber and orderly.

The opposite of “truth” is normally thought to be that which is false, *pseudes*. But there are different ways to be false. One way would be to be a deliberate fabricator who says something contradictory to fact for his own advantage.<sup>3</sup> Another would be someone who just gets the facts mixed-up (bad memory). This brings us to *nemertes*. It comes from the root *hamart-* referring to *mistake* or *moral mistake*. When combined with the negating prefix *ne*—we have a concept of truth built on the absence of moral/factual mistakes.

Getting the facts right and presenting them in an orderly fashion becomes a part of one’s excellence, *arete*. Since it assumes that the *kosmos* is an orderly place, mistakes and disorder are a version of falsehood. Other factors can be included in the *kosmos*—especially social norms like the Homeric *agathos* standard set out in *Merit and Responsibility* (see Appendix A). Words that go contrary to the asserted order are automatically disordered (e.g., *epesboliai*), q.e.d. *ou kata kosmon*, and therefore not supporting *arete* or *agathos*.

At the end of the day, since *kosmos* reinforces the status quo of values (including some competitive values that allow falsehood in the name of winning the day—remember the Trojan Horse and *polutropon* at the beginning of the *Odyssey*), it sets “order” as its supreme *telos*. Ultimately, to be *kata kosmon* is to fit into the account of the ethos that Adkins has set out—no matter what it takes.

---

<sup>2</sup> Note that these passages do not go so far as to say *para kosmon*. This would indicate a negative force away from the decent and orderly. The use of *ou* modifies this to being merely a privative—“not-*kosmos*” as opposed to “actively contrary to *kosmos*.” Compare to the usages of the natural philosophers who move from *kata phusin* to *para phusin*, see Michael Boylan, *The Origins of Greek Science: Blood—a Philosophical Study* (London: Routledge, 2015), ch. 1.

<sup>3</sup> A modern example of this might be the United States President, Donald Trump, who, according to the *Washington Post* had in his first 406 days in office made 2, 436 untrue statements: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?utm\\_term=.65057e3b0466](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?utm_term=.65057e3b0466) (accessed 15 April, 2018).

## Adkins' Essay

A number of scholars have discussed the difficulty of preserving accurately—or at all—information about the past in the Greek Dark Ages when the literacy of Minoan/Mycenean Greece had been lost.<sup>4</sup>

Such preservation necessarily depended on the memories of the members of the society, especially those of professional “rememberers,” the bards of the oral tradition: in such a society, if knowledge of an event is to be available to future generations, it must not be forgotten. The bards are of course aware of the importance of memory: the Muses are daughters of Memory,<sup>5</sup> and a prayer to them is a prayer that they will supply to the bard’s mind—and to the tip of his tongue—what he needs for his verse,<sup>6</sup> and in so far as he believes that the events portrayed in his poem really happened, he is aware that it is upon his memory, and the goddesses believed to work through it, that he must rely for knowledge about the past. Truth about the past, then, depends on accurate memory, and some scholars have discussed the extent to which this situation produces or encourages an epistemology, and view of truth, different from those familiar to those who live in literate societies.<sup>7</sup>

Where a necessary condition of making a true statement in a society is always that it has not been forgotten, is truth identified with “not forgetting” or “unforgottenness”? After all, one of Homeric and later Greek’s words for truth is *aletheia*, a plausible derivation of which is *a* privative + *leth-*, interpretable as “unforgottenness” or “unconcealedness.” In a non-literate society, one condition of the “unconcealedness” of a piece of information would be that it had not been forgotten; and we might be tempted to suppose that Homeric usage adverted to this fact.

Now there is a striking passage in *Iliad* 23 that, considered in isolation, might well suggest (a) that the etymology of *aletheie*, is *a* + *leth-*; (b) that the Homeric bards were aware of this; and (c) that their usage was closely controlled by their awareness. In 359ff. “Achilles stationed next to it [the

---

<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that Linear B script was used for this purpose; but its existence created possibilities not available to a non-literate society.

<sup>5</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 53ff.

<sup>6</sup> So that the most heartfelt prayer to the Muses occurs not at the beginning of a deeply felt passage of poetry, but at the beginning of the “Catalogue,” (*Il.* 2.484ff.) a list of names and numbers.

<sup>7</sup> See most recently Marcel Detienne, *Les Maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (Paris: Maspero, 1967). I find some of this author’s conclusions unacceptable; but pp. 11ff. and 22ff. furnish an illuminating evocation of the experience of living in a non-literate society.

turn post] as judge Phoenix the godlike, his father's attendant, to remember (*memneolto*) the race and declare the truth (*aletheien*)."

Phoenix was set there explicitly to *remember*—not perhaps the most obvious word to choose for the functions of an umpire, rather than “watch,” “notice,” “observe”—and declare *aletheie*. The juxtaposition suggests a conscious parallel between remembering and not having forgotten; but this passage, and one or two similar ones,<sup>8</sup> do not in themselves justify our equation of *aletheie* with not having forgotten, or with what one has not forgotten. Only a consideration of the total behavior of *alethes* and *aletheie* in Homer, together with that of words that appear similar in usage, will reveal the full implications of the word.

Those who have discussed *aletheie* in the light of its apparent etymology have on the whole considered the difficulty of making true statements about the (remote or fairly remote) past, which is indeed a problem in a non-literate culture. True statements about the past, however, are not the only kind of true statements that one can make, and *alethes* in Homer may have reference to the future. In *Odyssey* 17 Telemachus, pretending ignorance of Odysseus' identity, tells Eumaeus to take the “beggar” to solicit alms through the city, since he cannot afford to accept the “beggar” as his own guest, 14-15f.:

And if the stranger is very angry, it will be the worse for him:  
For I am wont to speak the truth (*aletheia*).

Similarly, in *Odyssey* 21, Odysseus makes a promise to his faithful servants, 212 ff.:

But to the two of you I will recount the truth,  
How it will be: if by my hand, the god masters these lordly suitors  
Then I will procure wives for both of you and give you possessions.

In both cases, “what I have not forgotten” is manifest nonsense. This, however, does not in itself entail that the idea of “forgetting,” or of the root *leth-*—whose range is not the same as that of “forget”—, is not consciously present to the mind of the poet or his characters. It would be possible to hold that *aletheie* acquires a notion of tense from its context, and that the one word can convey what has not been forgotten (by the speaker or another, or by any group up to and including the society as a

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also *Od.* 11.505 ff., where Odysseus says οὐ πέποσμαι anything of Peleus, but will tell πᾶσαν ἀληθείην about Neoptolemus. The contrast, and the fact that “the whole truth” seems a slightly odd phrase in the context, might lead us to render by “all I remember,” “all I have not forgotten.”

whole), what is not now being forgotten, or—as in the two passages quoted—what will not be forgotten. This last is most likely to occur when a speaker is expressing a resolve, promise, or threat, saying that he will not forget it; and since resolves and threats are kinds of utterance that we might hesitate to pronounce “true” or “false,” whereas they may evidently be *alethea*,<sup>9</sup> we might be tempted to treat this as further evidence for Homeric man’s consciousness of the *leth-* root in the word. (As will appear, however, so to treat this linguistic behavior would be oversophisticated: ordinary language, whether Homeric or modern English, readily speaks of true threats and promises.)

The wider question, however, needs further discussion, though Telemachus’ form of expression should perhaps at once cause us to doubt. When he utters the generalization *e gar emoi phil’ alethea muthesasthai* (quoting *Od* 17.15, above), how are we to interpret it? Which tense are we to supply? We cannot really supply all three, to produce the fully open generalization which seems needed; and if we confine the expression to the future, as seems necessary if only one tense is in mind, there is additional difficulty that there is no word for “threats” expressed, so that Telemachus appears to be saying, “I am wont to say things that I do not forget;” and Telemachus’ powers of total recall are not really relevant in the context. In fact, as will appear, there are good reasons for doubting whether Homeric man is conscious in this matter of the *leth-* root in *aletheie*.

Examples in which *aletheie* refers to the past themselves do not always encourage the interpretation “not forgotten.” In *Odyssey* 17. 104 ff. Penelope complains to Telemachus that, though she has been sunk in grief since the departure of Odysseus:

You couldn’t bring yourself—in advance of the arrogant  
 Suitors planting themselves at our palace—to tell me clearly  
 About your father’s homecoming whether perhaps  
 You have heard anything.  
 Telemachus replies (108):  
 Well, then, Mother, I will tell you the true story (*aletheien*).

It is hardly likely that Telemachus has forgotten anything he has recently heard about Odysseus’ return, for to discover any information that he could was the purpose of the voyage from which he has just returned;

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also Odysseus’ ἀληθέα threats in *Od*.18.342. A reluctance to speak of “true threats” might lead us to interpret the line in isolation as “threats he would not forget (to perform).”

and “what I have not forgotten” is hardly an appropriate or soothing response to Penelope’s outburst. Similarly, *Il.* 24.406ff. Priam’s

So, you are lackey to Achilles, son of Peleus, come then and render  
The whole truth (*aletheien*), and whether my son still lies next to the  
ships,  
Or whether he has been chopped-up and tossed before the dogs by  
Achilles.

asks for information that the supposed retainer of Achilles could hardly have forgotten or failed to notice, and the anguish of Priam’s own situation renders “all you have not forgotten” very inadequate.

If society were *neurotically* aware of the inadequacy of its historical information in comparison with literate societies of whose existence it knew, and allowed this awareness to overflow into daily life, we might interpret the last two passages as expressive of such a neurotic anxiety about memory: neurotic, certainly, for Penelope and Priam are asking for information that would not usually be committed to permanent record even in a modern literate society. But Homer’s characters—as opposed to the occasionally expressed and fully justified anxieties of the epic poet in face of his material—betray no such neurotic anxiety.<sup>10</sup> (Even literate cultures of their day and earlier did not keep detailed historical records.) Penelope and Priam, in fact, seem to be asking for the truth.

*Aletheie* has received more discussion than other Homeric words that appear to convey the idea of “truth.” The remainder should, however, be discussed, since their behavior and relationships with each other and with *aletheie* throw light on the concept of truth possessed by Homeric society.

*Iliad* 23.359ff. appeared to parallel *aletheie* with remembering, and therefore to oppose it to forgetting or failing to notice. Were the concept of truth to be absent altogether from Homeric society, its place being taken by that of not forgetting, or that of what has not been forgotten, we should expect to find *aletheie* always opposed to “forgetting” or “forgotten.” However, the *pseud-* root undeniably appears in the Homeric poems, and its function, and relationship to *aletheie* and other Homeric words frequently rendered “truth,” must be considered.

In *Iliad* 6.163ff. it is said of Anteia:

So lying (*pseusamene*) she addressed Proetus: “May you die, Proetus

---

<sup>10</sup> The anxiety that is felt is not that the character himself may forget a fact about the past, but that the other members of the society may not notice him adequately while he is alive and may forget him when he is dead. See my “Ἐϋχομαι, εὐχολί, and εὐχος in Homer,” *CQ* n.s., 19 (1969): 32ff., and “Threatening, Abusing, and Feeling Angry in the Homeric Poems,” *JHS* 89 (1969): 18ff. [Chapter Four of this volume.]

Or else kill Bellerophon, who wished to lie in love with me,  
Though I did not wish it.”

Here, it seems undeniable that the poet is ascribing deliberate falsehood to her. Certainly, Anteia did not act as she did because she had forgotten or failed to notice something. May we not then say at once that Homeric man had the concept of “lie” in precisely the form that is familiar to us? Further investigation is necessary, to discover the range of *pseudos* and *pseudesthai* in Homer; for were *pseudos* and *pseudesthai* to span both deliberate falsehood and mistake of fact, it would be impossible to say that Homeric man had either the concept of “lie” or the concept of “mistake of fact” in the forms familiar to us. Furthermore, we might *prima facie* expect to discover that Homeric man did not distinguish between lies and mistakes of fact, inasmuch as he was living in a shame-culture or results-culture. In such a society, results, not intentions, count; and since a statement that is factually incorrect may be the result either of a mistake or of a deliberate lie, we might well expect such a society as this to treat both as *pseudos*, and indeed inquire whether the society had the concept of “lie” as we know it.

The question is difficult to answer on the basis of the evidence supplied by the Homeric poems. Most usages of *pseudos* and *pseudesthai* certainly occur in passages where there has been deliberate deception; and there are none in which I am able to demonstrate conclusively that such an overtone is not present. The doubtful cases are the following.

In *Iliad* 9.115f. Agamemnon, now convinced that he should appease Achilles, says to Nestor, who has just advised such a course:

Aged sire, *ou ti pseudos* when you spoke of my madness.  
I was mad, and I do not deny this.

In saying “you are right,” *ou pseudos*, he implicitly contrasts Nestor’s utterance with the *pseudos* that he might have uttered; and the contrast with “error” at least makes good sense, in our eyes at all events. However, certainty is impossible here: *pseudos* is negated to convey the idea of truth; “truth” may be opposed either to “lie” or to “mistake,” and the range of *ou pseudos* conveying “truth” might be wider than that of un-negated *pseudos*; while, on the other hand, Agamemnon is under considerable emotional stress, and had he taken the opposite view of Nestor’s words, he might well have treated them as a deliberate falsehood rather than as a mistake of fact.

Again, in *Iliad* 5. 635 ff. Tlepolemus says to Sarpedon:  
*Pseudomenoi* who . . .since you fall far short of those who

Zeus sired a generation ago.

“They are in error” makes sense in the context; but Tlepolemus is taunting an enemy and possibly ascribing the flattering view of Sarpedon to Sarpedon’s friends, Tlepolemus’ enemies. To them he might well ascribe deliberate falsehood rather than mistake. We may compare a passage in *Iliad* 4.404ff. Agamemnon has been belittling Diomedes in comparison with his father. Diomedes, abashed, says nothing: but Sthenelus replies:

Son of Atreus do not *pseude* when you are capable  
Of speaking the clear truth (*sapha*).

Agamemnon’s opinion might have been sincerely held; but Sthenelus explicitly says that in his view Agamemnon could speak the truth and deliberately chooses *pseudesthai*. Sthenelus’ anger does not permit him to entertain the possibility of Agamemnon’s sincerity; and it is arguable that *Iliad* 5.635 and 9.115ff. betoken a similar state of mind. Accordingly, apparent pressures of a results-culture notwithstanding, it is necessary on the basis of the evidence so far presented<sup>11</sup> to incline rather to the view that Homeric society had the concept “lie” in a form familiar to us; and I shall indeed offer further evidence for this view in the course of this article, and endeavor to account for the situation.

But whether or no Homeric Greeks distinguished between mistakes of fact and deliberate falsehoods, it is evident that they had a concept of a false statement; so that it would be difficult to deny them the concept of a true statement (as distinct from one merely containing something that one had not forgotten). It remains to be determined, however, whether *pseudos* includes only false statements. A possible objection to the view that *alethes* meant “true,” and possible argument for its meaning “not forgotten,” or something similar, with appropriate tense-modifications, was the use of *alethes* of threats or similar utterances. *Pseudos*, however, has no possible etymological connection with forgetting and is undeniably used in contexts where the speaker is not unaware of the truth: it conveys, when used with statements, at least that the proposition is not in accordance with the facts. Accordingly, if *pseudos*, too, is used of threats and similar utterances, it is possible to argue on the basis of its range of

---

<sup>11</sup> One might, of course, contend that Sthenelus would have regarded Agamemnon’s speech as *ψεῦδος* even had he supposed that he did *not* ἐπίστασθαι σάφα εἰπεῖν; but this is speculation, and I shall offer more evidence below in support of the view given in the text.



usage that *alethes* when used of statements does not imply that these are in accordance with the facts.

In *Iliad* 4.234ff., when the Trojans have broken the oaths for the single combat between Paris and Menelaus in Book 3, Eurymedon indeed shouts:

Do not aid *pseudessi*, but as for those who were the first to violate  
The sworn oaths, vultures shall feed upon their delicate flesh.

This, whether one reads *pseudessi* (from *pseudos*, a *hapax* in the sense of “liar” in Homer) or *pseudessi* (from *pseudos*),<sup>12</sup> refers to making certain promises in an oath and failing to keep them. We might prefer to speak of promises being “fulfilled” or “unfulfilled” rather than “true” or “false,” and should certainly use such language of threats. But Homeric man clearly uses the *pseud-* root of promises. There is no example of such language in connection with a threat but the range of *alethes* and the *pseud-* root appears to be very similar, and there is no question of remembering or forgetting in the latter case. Homer’s speaking of true or false promises or threats is simply “ordinary-language: usage.”<sup>13</sup>

It would appear, then, that words derived from a + *leth-* and the *pseud-* root express for Homeric man the connection between a verbal utterance and what was, is, or will turn out to be the case; and no matter what philosophical difficulties can be generated from such a view of truth, this seems to correspond closely with the common-sense, unsophisticated view of the concept in literate societies.

Other questions raised by Homer’s use of *pseudos* will be discussed below. However, a few words must be said about other words rendered by “true.” First is *nemertes*. The word, it seems to be agreed, is derived from the negative prefix *ne-* and the root *hamart-*. Now the *hamart-* root spans both mistake and moral error, so that if the Greeks of the Homeric period were conscious of the etymology, and influenced by it, we might expect to find here a word that could be opposed both to making a factually incorrect statement and to telling a deliberate lie. The picture would be very different from “not having forgotten.” Forgetting is ceasing to be aware of or to have access to a piece of information: if all one’s fellows, in a non-literate culture, forget something, that piece of information is gone for good; but one may miss a mark while being aware of the mark’s existence.

---

<sup>12</sup> Thus, we contrast  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\iota$  that connects to the person lying and  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$  that connects to not keeping a promise [ed.].

<sup>13</sup> The Homeric Greek, like Annie Laurie, can “give a promise true.” Only in philosophical discourse do problems arise from this.

However, it is use, not etymology, that counts. Despite differing etymologies, *alethes* and *nemertes* might nevertheless have exactly the same range of usage. The range certainly overlaps. In *Iliad* 6.376 Hector bade Andromache's servants to tell him *nemertea*; and the housekeeper replies (382):

Hector, because you have commanded me to tell you *alethea*. . . .

simply replacing *nemertea* by *alethea*. Again (to widen the discussion to include other words rendered "true") *pseudos* may be opposed to *alethes* (e.g., *Od.* 14.124f.), or to *nemertes* (*Od.* 3.19ff.), or to *etumon* (*Il.* 10.534ff.); while *Odyssey* 4.642ff., where Antinous says to Noemon

Tell me *nemertes*, when did he leave and which young men

Went with him? The choice young men of Ithaca or

Or his own laborers and servants? That he could have also done.

And tell me this *etatumon*, so that I may really know:

Did he take your black ship away from you by force,

Against your will, or did you give it to him willingly . . . ?

shows a similar overlapping range for *nemertes* and *etatumon*: there seem to be no grounds other than metrical ones for the choice of one word rather than another in the passages quoted here.

At this point I must carefully define the limited purpose of this article. If words have different ranges of use, the fact that one of them can be substituted for another in a sentence to convey "roughly the same meaning" does not render the words synonymous; for the difference in range will endow the words with different overtones, and in so far as the etymology of the words is present in the mind of their user, this too may have a similar effect. It is always of great importance to remember this fact in reading literature, particularly poetry, in a foreign, and particularly a remote and "dead" language, and to make every effort to recover the overtones so far as is possible,<sup>14</sup> and the question is relevant to the poetic effect of the different Homeric words which we are tempted to render by "true" and "truth;" but I am here, in the limited space at my disposal, discussing a different matter: whether or not the non-literate nature of Homeric society has an important epistemological effect on that society's concept of truth; and for this limited purpose, when I am not engaged in literary criticism, it suffices to demonstrate whether or not these words are used in a manner which appears not unfamiliar to us, whose concept of truth is part of our literate culture.

---

<sup>14</sup> In this note Adkins referred the reader to his essay: "Meaning, Using, Editing, and Translating" that was to be published in a forthcoming book of essays. It was, in fact, published in *Greece and Rome* 21, no. 1 (1974): 37ff. [ed.]

The evidence so far cited points to a familiar concept of truth; and we must consider the reasons for this. Most important would appear to be the fact that, though in a non-literate society in particular—I shall discuss this further below—a necessary condition of being able to make a true statement is that one should not have forgotten or failed to notice the relevant facts, it is not in most cases the condition at the forefront of the mind of the person making the true statement. In *Odyssey* 16.243ff. Telemachus, while acknowledging Odysseus' prowess as a warrior, says:

Your story is too grand; I'm in awe: for could two men fight  
 Against strong men in such numbers? The suitors are *atrekes*  
 Not ten or even twice that, but many more. Even now you shall hear  
 The number of those who are here. From Doulichion there are fifty-  
 two  
 Select young men of distinction, and there are six attendants with  
 them:  
 And from the same there are 24 men.

Here a necessary condition of Telemachus' making these statements is that his memory has preserved the relevant facts; but Telemachus is not thinking of this, but of demonstrating the truth of his assertion about the suitors' numbers in a manner entirely familiar to us. Homeric society understands the function of evidence in establishing the truth.

More light is shown by a passage in *Odyssey* 1. Athena says to Telemachus (206ff.):

But come and tell me this and give an account *atrekeos*.  
 Are you, big as you are, really a child of Odysseus?  
 As for your head and beautiful eyes, you look strangely like him;  
 For we used to meet together so often before he embarked for Troy  
 With others beside him. . .

Athena (disguised as Mentor) is asking to be told *atrekeos* and she gives reasons, evidence, for making the surmise that she is asking Telemachus to confirm. Telemachus replies (214ff.):

Well, then stranger, I will speak to you very *atrekeos*.  
 My mother attests that I am his son. For my part I cannot say.  
 Nobody really knows his own father. But how I wish that I were now  
 The fortunate son of some man who could count old age  
 Among his possessions. But as it is among all mortals  
 This man seems the most ill-fated—he whose son they say I am,  
 Since you are asking me this.

Telemachus' speaking *atrekeos* here consists basically in his saying *ouk oid'*; and so, does not consist in giving a true answer to the question, but in being truthful about his inability to answer it. Much more important, however, is the indication that in the kind of situation portrayed here—which we have yet to define—“What people say” is not equivalent to the truth, though as I have tried to show elsewhere, there are situations in the Homeric poems in which “what people say” takes precedence over all considerations.<sup>15</sup>

In this society, then, truth is not equated with what has not been forgotten; it may be distinguished from “what people say,” though Homeric society is a “shame-culture”; and evidence is deemed relevant to establishing it. In fact, as far as I can ascertain, the society's non-literacy may render certain kinds of truths more difficult to establish, but does not affect the society's concept of truth. Nor, I believe, is this surprising: we are comparing the—“ordinary-language,” for there is no other—concept of truth in Homeric society with our own “ordinary-language” concept; and I see no reason to suppose that the latter has been developed primarily from situations in which documentary evidence is available, a minority even in our society. True statements about present events that fall within the experience of the person making them have the same relation to “the facts” in any society, literate or non-literate, and are confirmable in the same manner; and if an individual wishes to know the truth about an important (recently) past event in a non-literate society, the fact that he is a member of a society makes it possible for him to ask other members about the event; and if different people give him the same account, their agreement will be more in the forefront of his mind than the fact that, had they forgotten what happened, they would be unable to tell him anything. These situations are surely the majority, and certainly suffice to produce a concept of truth quite familiar to ourselves. (The Homeric concept does *not* equate the truth with “what people, most people, say”: as the case of Telemachus shows, it is “the facts of the case” that determine it; and true statements about present events falling within one's experience will serve to establish the concept in this form.)

In fact, the most powerful influences upon the Homeric concept of truth, and those that lend interest to discussing it, have little relationship with the non-literacy of the society, but a close relationship with the society's values.

In *Odyssey* 8.178ff. Odysseus says to Euryalus, who has taunted him with being a merchant, and no athlete:

---

<sup>15</sup> See my *M&R*. ch. 3; pp 48 ff.

“You have stirred anger deep in my heart with speech that is  
Not *kata kosmon*.” I am not such a novice at games  
As you suggest, but as I reckon, I was among the best  
When I could trust both in my youth and in my hands.

Now Odysseus certainly holds that what Euryalus says is untrue; but by terming it *ou (not) kata kosmon* he is not castigating the speech as untrue. Earlier, Odysseus has characterized Euryalus’ speech as *ou (not) kalon*, and “said of Euryalus you’re like a presumptuous man (*atasthalo andri eoikas*); and he then reflected, 167ff.:

It is not the case that the gods bestow gifts equally among men—  
Not stature, intelligence, or eloquence.  
For there is a certain sort of man who has eloquent speech  
But is feeble in form. They who look his way are joyful.  
He speaks to them without faltering and with gentle respect.  
And shines among those gathered. People view him as a god  
When he strolls about the city. Another again is godlike  
In his physical appearance, but his words are not wreathed  
Around with grace, as in your case the physical appearance is fetching  
(No god could improve it), but the mind within is without merit.

*Charienta, morphen, terpomenoï, charis*: Odysseus is evaluating speakers in terms of grace, charm, appropriateness, pleasantness; and in his mind there seems to be a parallel between a man being pleasant to the eye and a speech being pleasing to the ear. Euryalus’ speech is untrue; but by being *ou kata kosmon* it offends against a requirement that, at least in this type of situation, is more important than truth in the eyes of Odysseus, whose response is presumably characteristic of other Homeric *agathoi* here.

Another speaker whose utterances are of *ou kata kosmon* is Thersites (*Il.* 2.212ff.):

Thersites, the motor-mouth, went on scolding with his own. In his mind

He knew many words, with which *akosma* to quarrel with the princes  
Recklessly (*maps*) and *ou kata kosmon* with whatever seemed to him  
To be amusing to the Argives.

There is no suggestion that what Thersites says is, in general, false, and his one recorded speech (*Il.* 2.225ff.) is not demonstrably untrue. Nevertheless, it is *ou kata kosmon*: a characteristic that it shares with

Euryalus' untrue words discussed above; and in these passages no words that we render "true" or "false" are employed.

In *Odyssey* 14.361ff., however, when the disguised Odysseus has told him a long tale of his wanderings, including hopeful news of Odysseus, Eumaeus replies:

O, sorrowful traveler, truly you trouble my spirit  
 By your tale of suffering and wandering. Yet I think  
 Some part of this is disordered (*ou kata kosmon*)  
 And you will not convince me about Odysseus.  
 Why should such a man like you so blatantly lie?

Here we have *pseudesthai*, but accompanied by *mapsidos*; and it is *mapsidos* that parallels *ou kata kosmon*. Again, the status of the "beggar" (*toion eonta*, [being such a man]) seems relevant to the situation.

Other passages furnish Homeric reasons for speaking the truth. In *Odyssey* 3.17 ff. Athena, disguised as a Mentor, counsels Telemachus:

Bur come now go straight to Nestor, tamer of horses: let us know  
 What counsel he has hidden in his heart. Beseech him yourself  
 To speak *nemertea*; he will not utter *pseudos*  
 For he is very wise (*pepnumenos*)

It is *pepnumenos* not to utter *pseudos*—at least in some circumstances—just as it is *ou kata kosmon* to utter *pseudos*, at least in some circumstances. (The lines may also be taken as confirmation of the hypothesis that *pseudos* is not used to decry mistakes of fact as mistakes of fact: to be *pepnumenos* is not to be omniscient.) There may, however, be circumstances in which these evaluations would not apply. On two occasions characters debate whether or no they shall utter *pseudos*. In *Iliad* 10.533ff., when the Greek leaders are awaiting the return of Odysseus and Diomedes from their scouting expedition, Nestor hears the sound of hoofbeats, and says:

Friends, Argive leaders and rulers,  
 Shall I *pseusomai* or speak *eutmon*?  
 My emotions (*thumos*) are urging me on.  
 The thunder of fast-running horses is beating against my ears.  
 May this only be Odysseus and powerful Diomedes driving  
 Their single-hoofed horses rapidly away from  
 The Trojans. Yet, I feel dreadful fear in my heart  
 That the noblest (*aristoi*) of the Argives  
 May have suffered some ill from the loud Trojan host.

While in *Odyssey* 4.138ff. Helen, suspecting the identity of Telemachus, says:

Do we know, Menelaus, nourished by Zeus, who these men announce  
 Themselves to be who have come now into our house?  
 Shall I *pseusomai* or speak *etumon*?  
 My emotions (*thumos*) are urging me on.

What would be Nestor's and Helen's motives for *pseudesthai*? Nestor can hear hoof-beats, and infers hopefully that Odysseus and Diomedes are returning safely; but he fears they may have come to some harm, and presumably wishes to avoid giving the pain of dashing false hopes that he might raise in the other Greeks. While if Helen likens Telemachus to Odysseus, she will inevitably revive memories of the Trojan War (145f.) "When for the sake of shameless me you Achaeans went close under [the walls of] Troy turning over bold war in your minds" (*hot' emeio kunopidos heinek' Achaioi/ eltheth' hupo Troien, polemon thrasun hormainontes*). And these memories are painful for Menelaus and presumably embarrassing for Helen herself.

Here, on both occasions, the *thumos* enjoins speech; but presumably in each case the speaker was reluctant to speak "out of turn" from fear of causing unnecessary pain to no good end; and though *kata kosmon* does not appear, such behavior would presumably be *ou kata kosmon*, just as it is the mark of the *pepnumenos* to speak the truth where the information is longed for. Analogous judgements could be passed in other societies; but the use of *ou kata kosmon* and *pepnumenos* links the judgements, as it must, to the Homeric Greek value-system, with all its implications; and we should not assume that the implications are familiar to us. The situation of Thersites should already give us pause, as should Pisistratus' words to Menelaus in *Odyssey* 4. He says that Telemachus is Odysseus' son (157ff.):

This is *etetumon* the son of that man, just as you have said—  
 But he is prudent, and thus feels shame in his heart (*thumoi*),  
 Coming as he does for the first time, to display *epesbolias*  
 In front of you; for we both delight in your voice  
 As in the voice of a god.

Telemachus' reason for being unwilling to speak is that he is *saophron* and does not wish to display *epesboliai*. LSJ rather oddly render "hasty speech, scurrility," which Telemachus, on the basis of his general character, seems unlikely to have displayed if he had spoken. Butcher and

Lang render 158 ff.: “He is of a sober wit, and thinketh it shame in his heart as on this his first coming to make show of presumptuous words in the presence of thee, in whose voice we twain delight as in the voice of a god.” “Presumptuous;” but Telemachus has been deterred from saying *anything*: the implications of *epesboliai* need further exploration. The word is a *hapax* in Homer, as is the adjective *epesbolos*, used of Thersites at *Iliad* 2.275. LSJ render “scurrilous.” It is unlikely that had Telemachus opened his mouth the tone of his utterance would have resembled in any way Thersites’ one recorded speech: his speeches later in Book 4 exhibit his customary politeness, 291ff., 316ff., 594ff. Yet he feared—or Pistratus says that he feared—that his words might be interpreted as *epesboliai*: what characteristic do they share, or is it feared they may be thought to share, with Thersites’ railing words in *Iliad* 2?

It is first necessary to characterize the type of situations with which we are concerned. All are of the kind in which peaceful co-operation is hoped for and in a sense “expected” in Homeric society: relationships between hosts and guests, and fellow participants in assemblies. “Expected”; but Homeric society is stratified; its *agathoi*—among whom themselves there is an order of precedence, even if it is possible to discern it clearly only when we are concerned with *agathoi* of different ages—are drawn by the claims of their *arete*, and their need to demonstrate that they possess it, to compete with each other; and it is much more expected of them that they demonstrate their *arete* when challenged than that they behave in other ways. Accordingly, where each *agathos* is, and must be, so touchy about his *arete*, the utmost care is needed if any co-operation is to be possible at all. Words that hurt, that give offence, will be regarded in the same way by the recipient, whatever the intentions of the speaker, and where *arete* is, or may be, affected, *agathoi* are likely to evaluate what is said in terms of its grace, charm, and pleasantness—or at least the absence of offensiveness—rather than its truth; and *kosmos*, whose range spans what is orderly and what is ornamental, is a word well suited to evaluate speech in this manner. What speech is or is not *kata kosmon* will, of course, be determined by the *agathoi*, whose values are accepted by all the characters in the Homeric poems: speech or behavior that the *agathoi* as a group regard as unbeautiful, unpleasing, disorderly, will be stigmatized as *ou kata kosmon*; and where *arete* is affected, its being *ou kata kosmon* will override the question of its truth. An *agathos* will not of course be deterred from a speech or course of action demanded by his *arete* by the reflection that it is *ou kata kosmon*,<sup>16</sup> but he will expect his inferiors to behave *kata*

<sup>16</sup> See my “Homeric Values and Homeric Society,” *JHS* 91 (1971): 12 ff.



*kosmon* in their relations with him, and when those inferiors do not wish to make trouble for themselves, as Thersites makes trouble for himself in *Iliad* 2, they will behave and speak *kata kosmon*. If the *arete* of the *agathos* addressed is held by him to have been impugned by the speech, the intention of the speaker is irrelevant (though presumably an apology would sometimes be possible); hence Telemachus' reluctance at first to say anything to Menelaus, and the fact that Telemachus' words might have turned out to be *epesboliai*, like those of Thersites, despite the very different *intent* of the two.<sup>17</sup> (The young *agathos* was supposed to show *aidos* toward his elders and betters, as the cases of Telemachus (*Od.* 3.24), and Diomedes (*Il.* 10.237) demonstrate; and indeed might, as these two passages show, be deterred from actions approved, or not disapproved by society.)

A demand by the *agathos* that speech shall, if it cannot be both un-hurtful and true, be un-hurtful, may create a reluctance to speak a truth that would cause pain even when the *arete* of the recipient of the speech is not affected. Telemachus is afraid that Nestor will not tell him any news he may have of Odysseus (*Od.* 3.92ff.) though to discover the truth, whatever it may be, is the reason why he has come to Pylos:

It is for this reason that I come now to your knees,  
 In case you may be willing to tell of his dismal demise,  
 Whether you saw it with your own eyes  
 Or heard the tale from another wanderer:  
 For his mother bore him to be exceedingly miserable.  
 Do not soften anything for me from respect (*aidomenos*) or pity,  
 But recount to me plainly how you gained sight of him.  
 I beseech you, if ever noble Odysseus, my father,  
 Undertook some word or deed, and fulfilled it for you  
 In the land of the Trojans where you Achaeans suffered woes,  
 Call this to mind for me now and speak to me truthfully (*nemertes*).

To overcome *aidos* he fears Nestor may feel for him, Telemachus not merely asks him to set it on one side, but makes it a question of repaying a debt he may owe Odysseus for a good turn done by Odysseus to Nestor: Telemachus is emphasizing as strongly as he can that to tell him the truth about Odysseus' fate, whatever it may be, will be a good and kindly act.

When *arete* is unaffected by speaking the truth, not only is it *kata kosmon* to speak the truth, but the phrase may characterize the statement as

---

<sup>17</sup> Professor John Gould has suggested to me “forwardness” and “forward” as “rough English equivalents” for *ἔπεσβολία* and *ἔπεσβόλος*. These renderings seem to me to express admirably the “feel” and overtones of the words.

true. In *Odyssey* 8. 488 ff. Odysseus thus responds to Demodocus' song of Troy:

Either the Muse, daughter of Zeus, taught you or else Apollo.  
 For you certainly sing *kata kosmon* of the Achaeans' fate—  
 How much these Achaeans did and had done to them,  
 How much they suffered—as if you had been there yourself,  
 Or heard about it from someone who was.

Demodocus is praised for singing *kata kosmon*; and the whole passage is concerned with the factual accuracy that suggests an eyewitness, not with poetic quality: one does not become a better poet simply by being present at the event one is describing. *Kata kosmon*, it would appear, can *characterize a passage as being true*. Odysseus goes on to ask Demodocus to sing of the Wooden Horse, saying (496ff.):

If indeed you recount this to me *kata moiran*,  
 I will immediately tell all mankind that the god  
 Has graciously granted you the gift of inspired song.

He asks Demodocus to sing *kata moiran* as before he sang *kata kosmon*. He is asking Demodocus to sing with accuracy and truth: *kata moiran* and *kata kosmon* are sometimes<sup>18</sup> available for this purpose.

Now “in accordance with *kosmos*” and “in accordance with *moira*” certainly help to maintain the co-operative structure of Homeric Society as the *agathoi* wish it to be; but both *kosmos* and *moira* range beyond the social structure. When the Cyclops (*Od.* 9.342) milked his ewes and she-goats *panta kata moiran*, there was no reference to social status, any more than when the Phaeacians, (*Od.* 13.77) sat down *kosmoi* at the rowing-benches: in both cases the criterion is appropriateness to the task in hand; and a wide range of activities can be praised in this manner when they are well performed. When, even though the situation is a co-operative one, the *arete* and/or status of the participants are involved, to behave or speak *kata kosmon* is to behave with due regard to their relative status and *arete*, and truth is comparatively unimportant. But where such status and *arete* are not important, to narrate something *kata kosmon* or *kata moiran* may be precisely to narrate it truthfully and accurately.

Truth telling—the telling of desired, useful truths, at all events—is to be expected only from *philoï*, those who are for one reason or another

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also Eumaeus' words (*Od.* 14.361ff.) discussed above.

within the same co-operative group,<sup>19</sup> and even there it is only to be told when *arete* and status-considerations do not forbid it. But when they do not, and the truth is the most important consideration, the situation is co-operative and relaxed; and accordingly, intentions can be taken into account, and a lie distinguished from a mistake of fact. Furthermore, the truth can be *effectively* distinguished from “what people say,” as it cannot when the *arete* of the speaker is at issue. When Zeus (*Il.* 8.146ff.) terrifies Diomedes’ horses with a flash of lightning, Nestor, who is acting as his charioteer, realizes that Zeus is angry and advises retreat. Diomedes acknowledges the appropriateness of the advice:

Yes, honored elder, all that you say is *kata moiran*

It would be appropriate to yield to the superior *arete* of Zeus and no shame is involved in yielding to the gods.

But this comes as a bitter sorrow to my heart and my spirit;  
For some day Hector will speak publicly before the Trojans,  
“The son of Tydeus fled before me and made it to his boats.”

So, he will boast and then may the wide earth open  
To swallow me.

If Diomedes retreats before the superior power of Zeus, it will look as if he is retreating before Hector; and this would be *aischron* for Diomedes. Nestor replies (152ff.):

Ah me, son of fiery-hearted Tydeus what a thing you have said.  
If Hector ever calls you a coward and a weakling, then the Trojans  
And Dardanians won’t believe him, nor will the wives  
Of the tough Trojan warriors, whose husbands you have  
Cast into the dust in the pride of their manhood.

Nestor does not say, “Don’t worry. It isn’t true,” but “Don’t worry. If Hector does say that, the Trojans will never believe it.” Were they to believe it, of course, in a shame-culture—and here at least the absence of written documents, with the impossibility of the truth’s being thus preserved in defiance of what “they say,” does encourage the existence of the shame-culture—the situation would be *aischron* for Diomedes, who would experience terrible *elencheie*. Even here, of course, it is not that the truth cannot be intellectually distinguished from “what they say,” but that it is so much less important, in Diomedes’ eyes and everyone else’s, than “what they say.” Telemachus, however, in *Odyssey* 1.214ff., discussed above, is despondent, thinking not of his *arete* but of his generally

---

<sup>19</sup> Members of the same οἶκος or army contingent, and those with whom one is linked in guest-friend relationships. See my “‘Friendship’ and ‘Self-sufficiency’ in Homer and Aristotle,” *CQ* n.s., 13 (1963): 30ff. [Chapter One of this volume.]

wretched condition. People say he is the son of Odysseus, the *apotmotatos* of mankind, but he for the most part does not know whether it is true. In either case, in his present state of dejection, he does not feel that it would affect his *arete* much; for he is not at the moment conscious of himself as *agathos*.

I conclude, therefore, that the non-literacy of Homeric society has no discernible effect on the nature of its concept of truth—though it inevitably greatly affects the society’s ability to preserve and transmit facts—but the values of Homeric society have a considerable effect on the status of truth in the society and sometimes deter truth telling, sometimes render truth, though distinguishable and distinguished from “what people say,” much less important than the latter.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>This article is a product of my researches while at the Society for the Humanities of Cornell University during the academic year 1969/70. I should like to thank Cornell, the Director of the Society, Professor Max Black, and all at the Society for the outstanding facilities and manifold kindnesses that I enjoyed during my sojourn there.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *ARETE* AND *TECHNE*: DEMOCRACY AND THE SOPHISTS: *PROTAGORAS* 316B—328D

#### Introduction

In Plato's *Protagoras* we are presented with two critical issues: (a) the nature of education (particularly concerning excellence [*arete*]), and (b) the legitimacy of narrative to stand by itself as an argumentative form (fictive narrative philosophy).<sup>1</sup> Concerning the first point the generally held view is that the dialogue presents a dilemma that works dialectically:

1. If excellence (*arete*) is knowledge (as Socrates says), then it can be taught—Assertion /361a
  2. If excellence (*arete*) is not knowledge (as Protagoras says), then it cannot be taught—Assertion/ 361b
  3. Socrates says excellence cannot be taught—Fact/ 361b
  4. Protagoras says that excellence can be taught—Fact/361b
- 
5. Both Socrates and Protagoras are involved in inconsistent positions—1-4/361c-d

One way that this has been interpreted is that *arete* cannot be *taught* but it can be *learned*. This would make the teacher a stimulator (like a stingray) who positively shocks his students to take on the learning responsibility themselves.

Adkins takes more seriously the claims of Protagoras than is often the case. This begins at the outset. Adkins believes that a typical Greek at the time may have found Protagoras' position quite plausible. Of course, there

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted here that I have a particular stake in this discussion as per my book: *Fictive Narrative Philosophy: Fiction as Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2019).

is something to this because Protagoras was making a good living as a sophist.<sup>2</sup> But the focus of the essay is *why*.

Protagoras claims that he won't "waste" the student's (in this case the well-bred Hippocrates') time on arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, or music, but will instead make him "well advised" (*euboulos*) on domestic and public affairs. Socrates correctly terms this education outcome as learning the art (*techne*) of citizenship and to become well-respected citizens (*agathoi politai*).

Socrates demurs that excellence (*arete*) is not teachable (*didakton*). This is because Pericles and other prominent *agathoi politai* could not teach their own children to attain their level of excellence. However, the first movement toward the plausibility of Protagoras to his contemporary audience comes when *techne* is seen to be different than merely a "skill," "art," or "craft." *Politike techne* is rendered as being able to deliver actions showing qualities of respect (*aidos*) and justice (*dike*). This is a delicate move that Adkins documents carefully. We are now in the business of delivering positive, public outcomes. If one can do this, then he has *politike techne*, which includes *aidos* and *dike*. Since the possession of *aidos* and *dike* are necessary to be a well-respected citizen, the strategy of transferring *politike techne* becomes something to pay for.

But will *politike techne* transfer to *politike arete*? Protagoras is a little fast and loose here (as Adkins points out). Protagoras creates a story about Prometheus and Zeus to try to assert that it is a "god-given" precedent that *politike arete* is destined for mankind. Protagoras, according to this attempt at fictive narrative philosophy, is doing the work of the gods. But the story is not enough. To make his point requires that we broaden the understanding of *arete* to include normative terms (thus rendering it as "virtue"), then Protagoras makes the point that from the nurse onwards moral education is taught (325c6). Children are taught right from wrong and better teachers do a better job than mediocre teachers in doing this (a possible response to the Pericles argument above). This really changes the model of education from demonstrations (what the traditional teachers engage in, *apodeixis*) to a more informal, empirical *leading forward to display something* (*epideixis*).

---

<sup>2</sup> The sophists were self-help teachers who would travel around to cities giving private and semi-private lessons on how to become in the social elite, e.g., *agathoi politai*. They also gave general public lectures in larger cities. This garnered them quite a bit of money. Plato and Socrates were said to despise this approach to teaching. A modern analog might be "sales success" seminars that claim to get you rich in only two or three lectures for a pretty price. For more detailed discussion on this see the entry in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Because *epideixis* is less formal, there is less possibility of strict assessment. This is because it is a smokescreen (*proschema*) that can be used to associate itself with *political arete*. This is seditious to the traditional power structure: here is a sophist who will teach success to those who can pay. The courses are new, but *if* they could work then the established social system might be threatened, and, as Adkins says, the implications are far from democratic.

### Adkins Article

At *Protagoras* 316b8 Socrates introduces Hippocrates to Protagoras and explains why Hippocrates wishes to be his pupil; and for the next twelve pages of the dialogue the sophist, encouraged by Socrates, expounds his views and methods and explains what Hippocrates may expect to learn from him. The passage is a confused and confusing piece of Greek, and forms the philosophical introduction to one of Plato's more baffling dialogues. The confusions are, I believe, present in the Greek: we are not here concerned merely with problems created for the modern reader by his/her misunderstanding of Greek words. In translation, however, and in the light of the intervening centuries of philosophy, Protagoras' position may well appear much less plausible than it must have appeared to a Greek of Protagoras' (or Plato's) own day. My purpose in this article is to try to explain why a Greek might have found it more plausible; what type of Greek was most likely to be convinced; and the motive of Protagoras in presenting his case in the manner in which he does present it. ("Protagoras" throughout, of course, is to be understood as "the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue". I should not myself distinguish sharply between Plato's Protagoras and the historical Protagoras; but the question is not relevant to the present discussion.)

I shall inquire what the young Hippocrates wanted to learn from Protagoras, what Protagoras offered him in return, and why he did so.

At 316b8 Socrates thus introduces Hippocrates to Protagoras:

Hippocrates here is a native of Athens, son to Apollodoros, and a member of a great and wealthy house. His own natural talent puts him among the best of anyone his age. It's my impression that he really wants to be a respected man in the city, and he thinks this is most likely to occur should he associates himself with you.

Hippocrates is the son of a great and wealthy house who wishes to make a name for himself in politics and thinks that the best way of achieving his goal is to become a pupil of Protagoras. This was, of course, the principal

reason why the wealthy Athenian young thronged to the sophists;<sup>3</sup> and after some pages of discussion, Protagoras proclaims that unlike other sophists he will not waste his pupils' time on arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, or music, but will teach him about nothing else except "what he has come for (318e5):

The lesson is one in sound reasoning both about domestic affairs—how he might best run his own household (*oikia*)—and about the affairs of the city—how he might be most capable of managing the affairs of the city in action and speech.

To which Socrates replies (319a3):

Am I following your argument? I said; for you seem to me to be speaking about the art of citizenship (*politike techne*) and to be promising to make men good citizens (*agathoi politai*)

Protagoras agrees that he means *politike techne* and that he promises to make men *agathoi politai*. What Hippocrates wishes to learn, and what Protagoras claims to teach, appears to be a skill;<sup>4</sup> and Socrates seems to be of the same mind: when Protagoras (318a6ff.) promises Hippocrates that he will become better (*beltion*) every day as a result of his instruction, Socrates, to "clarify" Protagoras' position, asks a series of questions (318b1ff.) in which analogies are drawn with other *technai*, and Protagoras' "subject" is evidently assumed to be a comparable skill. Socrates expresses his doubts whether the subject is teachable (319a 8 ff.), and adduces evidence from Athenian practice: when the Athenians are in discussion of technical matters in the Assembly, they only allow experts to speak, and no one else, even if he be very handsome (*kalos*) . . . and rich among those of noble birth,<sup>5</sup> could expect a hearing; but when they are taking counsel about things concerning the administration of the city (*peri ton tes poleos dioikeseos*) anyone may address them, and no one asks what qualifications he has for doing so. Evidently, they do not suppose that one can be taught about things concerning the administration of the city (*peri ton tes poleos dioikeseos*). Nor is it only the average Athenian who holds this view (319e1):

but in private life even the wisest (*sophotatoi*) and best (*aristoi*) of our citizens are unable to transmit this *areten* to others.

---

<sup>3</sup> On this, e.g., my *Merit and Responsibility* [M&R] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); 226ff.

<sup>4</sup>For ἀγαθοὶ πολῖται, see M&R, pp. 226ff.

<sup>5</sup> An interesting sidelight on the kind of qualities whose possession benefited the Athenian orator when general political questions were under discussion.



Even talented individuals who are talented in this very field, make no effort to teach their sons, or to have them taught by others, the skills in respect of which they are themselves *sophoi* (wise) (320a); and Socrates concludes from his observations that *arete* is not *didakton*. (He has, of course, demonstrated at most that it is not taught, not that it is not teachable; but this does not cause concern my present argument.)<sup>6</sup>

Now even when Socrates is denying that *arete* is *didakton*, he is nevertheless here treating it as a skill: it is Pericles' *sophia* (practical wisdom) that he has not imparted, or been able to impart, to his sons; and that *sophia* is evidently his political skill, not his justice or any other “co-operative” excellence. (Granted, Pericles' fear that Alcibiades would corrupt Cleinias is based on Alcibiades' incorrigible immortality, but I shall discuss this below.) Furthermore, when Socrates says that *arete* is not *didakton*, he is controverting Protagoras' assertion that he teaches his pupil “both domestic affairs—how he might best run his household (*oikia*)—and about the affairs of the city—how he might be most capable of managing the affairs of the city in action and in speech.” Socrates himself glossed as teaching *ten politiken technen* and making men into *agathus politas*. It would appear, then, that the *arete* of that Socrates is thinking, and that he is denying is taught (or teachable), is identical with Protagoras' *politike technē* and that both are skills.

This is not a surprising conclusion; but the usage of *arete* at this period is complex, confused, and confusing. Traditionally, *arete* has denoted and commended excellences deemed most likely to ensure the success, prosperity, and stability of the group, primarily that which one feels oneself most closely associated, thereafter with a larger group (the *polis*), provided its interests do not conflict at the moment with those of the group to which primary loyalty is given; and these excellences have traditionally been “competitive.” Up to this point in the discussion *arete* is evidently being used of such a competitive success-producing activity. In the later fifth century, however, *arete* and *agathos* began to be used by some Greeks to commend in addition the “co-operative” excellences.<sup>7</sup> The usage in part reflects, in part helps to cause, the turmoil of values still discernible in the

---

<sup>6</sup> He attempts to strengthen his argument at 319b4 by emphasizing the σοφία of the Athenians, the implication being that what they made no attempt to teach was unteachable. (The irony of many of Socrates' remarks does not affect the present discussion.) The fact that διακτός spans both “taught” and “teachable” renders the discrepancy more difficult to detect in Greek.

<sup>7</sup> For the terms “competitive” and “co-operative” excellences see *M&R*, pp.6ff.; and “Homeric Values and Homeric Society” *JHS* 91 (1971): 3ff.; and for loyalty to smaller and larger groups, *M&R*, pp. 231ff., 236ff.

surviving documents of the late fifth and early fourth centuries,<sup>8</sup> a situation frequently exploited by Socrates in his arguments. (In this passage it facilitates Socrates' treating together the different deficiencies of Pericles' sons and Alcibiades.) The word *arete* is now applied to a much wider range of qualities and activities than has previously been the case; the implications of such a usage, spanning the competitive and the co-operative, have not yet been explored; and all kinds of verbal confusion and/or sleight-of-hand are possible. The remainder of Protagoras' exposition illustrates one of the possibilities.

Protagoras next (320c8ff.) relates his myth. When Epimetheus had failed to reserve any other form of defense for human beings, Prometheus "stole the wisdom of artistic practice (*ten entechnon sophian*) of Hephaestus and Athene together with fire." And at (321d) "So in this way mankind acquired the wisdom needed to maintain life (*ten . . . peri ton bion sophian*), but did not possess the art of citizenship (*ten politiken technen*) for that remained with Zeus." The *techne* of Hephaestus and Athena is a skill, or a corpus of skills; and *politike sophia* is treated as something similar. But when Protagoras describes the precarious condition of men before the foundation of cities, able to practice the arts and crafts, but too weak to defend themselves against wild beasts, he adds the following (322b3):

And although the skill of a workman was adequate for them to obtain food, it was insufficient in conflict (*polemon*) against wild animals. This was because they did not yet possess the art of citizenship (*ten politiken technen*) of which the art of war is a part (*polemike [techne]*). In fact, they kept seeking to come together to save themselves by founding cities. Well, whenever they came together, since they didn't possess *ten politiken technen*, they would commit injustices against each other (*adikein allelous*), and so would scatter again and be destroyed. Therefore Zeus, fearing for our race that it would be totally wiped out, sent Hermes to bring to human beings both respect (*aido*) and justice (*diken*), so that there might be both civic forms of government (*poleon kosmoi*) and unifying bonds of friendship (*philiias*).

This passage too begins by treating *politike techne* as a *techne* like the others; but if we ascribe to *techne* the same usage as our "skill," "art," or "craft," we shall surely be surprised by some of what follows. True, though we may find it a little odd that one should need the *politike techne* to fight successfully against wild animals, we may reflect that in a city whose effective defense by land depended on the hoplite phalanx, by sea on the

---

<sup>8</sup> See *M&R*, chs. 9-13.

trireme, the training of each of which must have required much organization and many regulations, such an attitude is explicable. (The statement may, in fact, be an inapposite projection back into primitive conditions of the proposition, entirely defensible in the context of a *polis* that in the analysis of the functions of a city, *polemike* falls under *politike*.)<sup>9</sup> Again, when we reach the statement that early men committed injustices against each other because they lacked *politike techne*, we may regard this as a characteristic example of Greek intellectualism; but when Protagoras informs us that Zeus cured this condition by sending to man *aido te kai diken* (both respect and justice), we must find the statement very odd indeed; for *aidos* bears no resemblance to anything which we should regard as a skill; and though *dikaosune* (justice) is elsewhere held to be a *techne*,<sup>10</sup> *aidos* never reappears in this guise.<sup>11</sup> We cannot simply write this off as mythological language: even mythological language has to appear plausible to its readers; and though *aidos*, and *dike* in the sense of *dikaosune*, are uncommon in the Attic prose of the period, their usage would be entirely familiar from poetic diction.

It seems unlikely that in the late fifth century the proposition that one could endow all mankind with *politike techne* by giving them *aidos* and *dike* was as implausible as rendering *techne* by “art” or “skill” would suggest. The range of *techne* seems readily to allow it to be used of justice: a Polemarchus does not reply “but *dikaosune* isn’t a *techne*,” even when in a logical *aporia* (Plato, *Republic* 332c ff.).<sup>12</sup> *Techne* seems applicable to any activity that reliably attains to an end, however diverse the means to the different ends might be; and in the intellectual climate of the sophistic, it is a highly commendatory word.<sup>13</sup> In these circumstances, any kind of purposive activity of which the speaker approves may be dubbed a *techne* by him, and thus endowed with intellectual respectability; for no criteria of *techne*-hood exist before the *Gorgias*, and the definition there offered is not necessarily relevant even to later dialogues of Plato, and is certainly not relevant to those that are earlier.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle *EN* 1094b2ff. The passage quoted in the text itself indicates that such analyses already existed.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Plato *Republic* 322c ff.

<sup>11</sup> Nor was it likely to do so, Aristotle’s reasons (*EN* 1128b10ff.) for not treating αἰδώς as an ἀρετή are even more cogent reasons against treating it as a τέχνη if this be interpreted as “skill”; and Aristotle here reflects the common usage of αἰδώς.

<sup>12</sup> See also *M&R*, p. 241, n. 100.

<sup>13</sup> Note Polus’ dismay (Plato, *Gorgias* 462b5ff.) at the suggestion that rhetoric is not a τέχνη but merely an (intellectually much less respectable) ἐμπειρία.

Protagoras' account may appear more plausible in Greek; but the range of *techne* has undoubtedly permitted him to equivocate. At 318e Protagoras was claiming to impart success-producing skill: "'sound reasoning,' '[how] best to manage one's household,' and '[how to be] most capable of managing the affairs of the city in action and in speech'" all command success and efficiency, and raise no questions of *aidos te kai dike*; but now (322bff.) *politike techne* is that whose absence causes men to "to commit injustices against each other (*adikein allelous*)," and whose absence may be cured by endowing all with *aidos te kai dike*; for *aidos te kai dike* appear to be not merely necessary but also sufficient. (I shall discuss this point further below.)

Protagoras now draws conclusions from the foregoing. All men must have *aidos* and *dike*: "for [otherwise] cities would not come into being (*ou gar an genointo poleis*)." Accordingly (322d5ff.) it is the Athenian custom to allow only a few—the experts—to discuss ". . . questions of 'excellence at carpentry' (*arete tektonike*)' or any other excellence at a craft (*demiourgike arete*)"; but when the discussion concerns 'excellence at citizenship (*politike arete*) . . . which should come totally through justice (*dikaiousunes*) and good sense (*sophrosunes*)," they very reasonably allow anyone to contribute, since it is a condition of the existence of cities that everyone should partake of *this arete*. As an indication that all mankind believes that everyone has a share in "justice and all the rest of excellence at citizenship (*dikaiousunes kai tes alles politikas aretes*)" Protagoras points out that in the case of the other *aretai*, men mock at or grow angry with anyone who pretends to be a good flute player (*agathos auletes*) or to possess any other *techne*, whereas even in the case of someone whom they know to be unjust they regard the admission of injustice as madness, though in the case of the inexpert flute-player they regarded it as mere *sophrosune* to acknowledge that one had no skill in playing the flute; for all must claim to be *dikaioi* whether they are so or not.

Now the emotive charge on *arete* was much higher than that on *techne* (though the use of *techne* as I have already said, itself conveys approval); but an examination of Protagoras' exposition shows clearly that *arete* and *techne* are being used to denote the same kind of activities. *Politike techne* and *politike arete* have the same implications; but "excellence at carpentry . . . or some other craft (*arete tektonikes . . . e alles tinos demiourgikes*)" employs *arete* where *techne* is usually employed. There is in one sense no reason to be surprised at the phrase *arete tektonike*: anything that is *agathos* may be said to have an *arete*, so that the *agathos tekton* (good carpenter) undoubtedly has a claim to possess *arete tektonike*, but such uses of *arete*

are unusual, and I shall argue below that the choice of the word here has an ascertainable motive.<sup>14</sup>

But whether the activity is termed *politike arete* or *politike techne* Protagoras is equivocating. *Politike arete*, which is simply the excellence of the *agathos polites*, and was a skill at 319a 4 has now become largely an assemblage of co-operative moral excellences, said—very reasonably—to be necessary if there are to be cities at all. But to say that it is necessary to be just in order to be a citizen, while it presumably entails that it is necessary to be just in order to give advice on general political questions, since only a citizen would be permitted to do this, does not entail that it is *sufficient* to be just in order to give good advice, “skillful” advice, on such questions, as Protagoras implies, for example at 323a5ff.; for though Protagoras speaks there of *dikaiosunes te kai tes alles politikas aretes*, and though, as I shall try to show, the addition has a part to play in the case Protagoras is (illogically) putting, the rest of the paragraph is concerned only with justice; and Protagoras has claimed no more than that all mankind have been endowed with *aidos te kai dike*.. Furthermore, Protagoras’ proof (323aff.) proves no more than the necessity for justice. It may well be true that, whatever the status of justice relative to other qualities in their society, it would be thought madness by most people at most times to proclaim one’s injustice; but it is not apparent, whether in ancient Athens or anywhere else, that it is madness to say that one is unqualified to give an opinion on a question of general politics because one has neither the skill nor the necessary specialized knowledge to do so. (Even Pericles merely terms “. . . such a person ‘useless’ (*achreios*) [Thuc. 2.40.2]). Protagoras is confusing co-operative excellences with administrative and political skills. Whether he has motives for so doing, or is led to do so by a confusion of thought prevalent at the period, will be considered later.

Protagoras now (323c5ff.) offers a proof that *politike arete* does not come to one “by nature” (*phusei*) but is “taught/teachable (*didakton*)”: no one is angry when men possess certain *kaka*—ugliness, weakness, small stature—*phusei* or “by chance (*tuche*)”—nor does anyone admonish or teach or punish anyone in this condition, whereas they do punish, admonish and grow angry with those who lack the *agatha* “are thought to come ‘from attention, practice, and teaching’; and ‘injustice, impiety, and, in short, everything that’s the opposite of *tes politikas aretes*’ fall into this category.”

The argument is reasonable, and “advanced” for its date; but it demonstrates no more than the need for co-operative excellences.

---

<sup>14</sup> The fact that ἀρετή is traditionally a “success-word” renders the substitution of ἀρετή for τέχνη valid in many contexts; and this renders substitution in all cases easier.

Protagoras may hint at more with “everything that’s the opposite of *tes politikas aretes (pan to enantion tes politikas aretes)*”; but he has proved no more. We may perhaps be rather surprised to find the emphasis on the teachability of *arete* combined with the assertion that *politike techne* is a gift from Zeus; for even if it was originally a gift from Zeus by special dispensation, surely Zeus does not send Hermes to endow each infant with *aidos te kai dike* individually. Surely, it is now part of the essential nature of human beings that they possess *aidos te kai dike*; so that we might expect Protagoras to hold that these qualities exist *phusei*. One might, of course, hold that the capacity for *aidos te kai dike* existed *phusei*, but needed teaching to develop it; and Protagoras does indeed use *euphuestatos* and *aphues* (327b8 and c1) in connection with learning flute-playing; but in the case of *phusis*, too, the presuppositions are more complex than might appear at first sight, as I shall endeavor to demonstrate below.

The confusion between co-operative excellences and administrative skills continues. At 324a6 and b6 *arete* is concerned primarily with co-operative excellences, and opposed to injustice (324a3, a6, a7, b2, etc.); but at 324c5 Protagoras sums up thus:

So it is with good reason that your fellow citizens accept a blacksmith’s or a cobbler’s advice in political affairs. And they might think that excellence (*arete*) can be taught and acquired. It seems to me that both of these positions have sufficiently been proved, Socrates.

These are not separate “proofs.” The appropriateness of all giving their advice in the assembly depends on their possession of this teachable *arete*; and this consists in the possession of *aidos* and *dike*.

In the next paragraph Protagoras returns to the question why *hoi agathoi* have their sons taught everything that schoolmasters teach, and make them *sophoi* “but as for the excellence (*areten*) at which they themselves are good (*agathoi*) they don’t make them better than anyone.” “Skill” seems to be in question; but Protagoras next asks Socrates—not in a *muthos* but in a *logos* (argument)—whether there is something that all the citizens must have if a city is to exist (324d7ff.) and (324e2ff.):

If there be such a thing it will not be the art of the carpenter, blacksmith, or potter, but justice (*dikaiousune*), good sense (*sophrosune*), and piety (*hosion*): which I collectively term the excellence of man (*andros areten*).

Once again Protagoras ends with a vague and unspecific phrase: the reader may begin to suspect that he is doing it on purpose. The other excellences are specifically co-operative; and the necessity of these alone has been

demonstrated. But it was not for his co-operative excellences that Pericles was regarded as being supremely possessed of *politike arete*;<sup>15</sup> and it is not the absence of these that is imputed to his sons. It is true that the traditional *arete* of courage manifested in the successful defense of the *polis* has not been mentioned. The necessity for the presence of this *arete* would have been generally conceded;<sup>16</sup> but again, it was not Pericles' courage in battle that was his principal claim to *arete*; political skill has been smuggled into the argument, entirely without justification.

Protagoras continues by giving an account of Greek practice in imparting *arete*. He argues that since it is teachable, and since people have their sons taught other things the lack of which is not punishable by death, it is unreasonable to suppose that they do not make every effort to have them taught those things for which (325b7) "the penalty is death or exile for their children if they have not learned or been coached toward excellence (*areten*)," and in addition to death confiscation of property and the utter destruction of *oikoi* (households). Here we are not concerned with political skill; for though Greeks sometimes took cruel vengeance on unsuccessful politicians and generals,<sup>17</sup> no such fate was likely to overtake a Greek for not taking an active role in politics: it is lack of justice and the other co-operative excellences that is relevant here. Protagoras insists that the subject is taught (325c6): from youth upwards—nurse, mother, *paidagogos* (tutor), and the father himself make every effort "that the child excel as much as he can (*hos beltistos eie [estai?]*), teaching him and pointing out to him each time he does or says something: '*this* is just (*dikaion*) but *that* is unjust (*adikon*), *this* is noble (*kalon*) but *that* is base (*aischron*), *this* is pious (*hosion*) but *that* is impious (*anosion*), do *this* but do not do *that*.'" Next come teachers; and they devote more effort to securing the *eukosmia* (good behavior) of their pupils than to their learning their letters or cithara-playing. When they can read, the pupils (325e5ff.) are given the works of *poieton agathon* to read, "that these works on the one hand contain numerous exemplars that set out in positive terms the good men of old so that the child is inspired to imitate and become like them." The citharistai behave similarly, taking the young to the poems of other *poietai agathoi*, (326b1) "compel the rhythms and harmonies to make their homes in the souls of the children, so that they may be more gentle and, growing more rhythmical (*euruthmoteroi*) and more harmonious (*euarmostoteroi*), may be proficient

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the implications of Plato, *Gorgias* 503cff.

<sup>16</sup> Its absence from the present argument may not be accidental; see below.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Miltiades, Herodotus. 6.136; Pericles, Thucydides. 2.65. See also *M&R*, p.217, n. 15.

(*chresimoi*) in both speech and action. For all human life requires much rhythm and harmony.”

The evident subject here is co-operative excellences; but the passages quoted again illustrate one of ambiguities in the Greek of the period on which Protagoras' exposition depends. *Tode men kalon, tode de aischron* may seem to us to be concerned with co-operative excellences; but the words traditionally belong to the competitive field, and now span both; while the *palaion andron agathon* of the *agathoi poietai* would certainly manifest competitive *arete*.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly the idea of being a good leader in war and peace is implicit; and this of course, assists the case—though not the logic of the case—that Protagoras is making. The contribution of the citharistai in rendering their charges *euruthmoterai* and *euarmostoterai*, while doubtless necessary, is certainly not sufficient to make one *chresimos* in speech and action, for *politike arete* does not mean simply reliably doing what one is told, whether by a superior or by the laws: nothing could be further from the *arete* of a Pericles or a Themistocles. (The *agathoi poietai* would in fact furnish only ideals and models of effective leadership in peace and war, and values rather than practical skills; but it is evident that at this time it was believed that practical skills could be learned from Homer and other admired poets;<sup>19</sup> and this too would assist Protagoras' case.)

The last stage of education, according to Protagoras, is supplied by the *nomoi* (326c7ff.): “The city, in turn, forces them to learn the laws (*nomous*) and to fashion their lives after them.” The practice is similar to that of school-teachers in furnishing examples of letters for their pupils to copy (326d5ff.): “In the same way the city has traced out laws (*nomous*) invented by great lawgivers of the past and it compels them to govern and be governed in accordance with them; but whoever goes outside these laws it punishes, and the name for this punishment, both among you yourselves and in many other places, is correction, since a penalty corrects.” This too is designed to ensure the *arete* of the citizen (326e2); and to make the passage logical it would be necessary to *identify* good administration with abiding by the laws. Now this is indeed the goal to which Plato aspires in the *Laws*; but it is not what Protagoras has in mind, and not the practice of Athenian democracy: Pericles would have received short shrift in Plato's *Laws*-state. Protagoras is once again confusing the proposition that it is necessary to be law-abiding in order to have *politike arete* with the proposition that it is sufficient.

---

<sup>18</sup> See *M&R*, chs 3, 4, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Plato, *Ion*, *passim*; *Ar*, *Ran*. 1006 ff.



In the next paragraph Protagoras addresses himself to the question why “many sons of distinguished fathers (*ton agathon pateron*) turn out to be useless (*phauloi*).” His answer is that it depends on the innate aptitudes of the sons (*euphuestatos*, *aphues* [327b8f.]): after all, if flute-playing were as important as *arete* and everyone paid as much attention to imparting it as they now do to imparting justice, the *agathoi auletai* (flute players) would not necessarily be the sons of *agathoi auletai*. The analogy suggests that *arete* is once again being regarded as a skill; but up to 328a8, at least, Protagoras is evidently concerned with *adikia* (though at 327b2 he uses another vague *dikaiosune kai arete*).

Protagoras now returns to his own professions as a teacher. At 318e5ff. he claimed to teach *ten politiken technen*, in terms that suggested a skill; but subsequently maintained that everyone possesses *aidos* and *dike* (or the capacity for *aidos* and *dike*) and that all teach *arete* interpreted as *dikaiosune*, with which *politike technē* now appears at least on some occasions to be identified; and he sketched an excellent account of the “socialization” of the young in a Greek state. Evidently Protagoras must now attempt to define his own contribution; and we might expect him to state that he teaches political and administrative skills to those whom the institutions and practices of the state have already rendered *dikaioi*.<sup>20</sup>

What he actually says (328a8) is that though all teach excellence (*arete*), “if there is someone who is even a little better than ourselves at leading people to *arete*, we must be content. I think that I am, in fact, one of these, being better than everyone else at helping a person toward becoming noble and good (*kalon kai agathon*).”

In these lines, Protagoras is undoubtedly trying to give the impression that what he does is essentially the same as what citizens-in-general do; and they impart *dikaiosune* and the co-operative excellences (according to Protagoras’ account). But he concludes (328c3ff.):

There it is, Socrates, my story and my argument that *arete* is teachable and that the Athenians consider it so. It is not at all surprising that worthless sons are born of good (*agathon*) fathers, and good sons of worthless (*phaulon*) fathers, since the sons of Polycleitus, who are the same age as Paralus and Xanthippus here, are nothing compared to their father, and the same is true of the sons of other artisans.

Here the analogy suggests that skill is once again in the forefront of Protagoras’ mind, as does the allusion to Pericles’ sons; for lack of justice is not the complaint against them. Again, it is difficult to suppose that

---

<sup>20</sup> Compare and contrast Gorgias’ position at Plato, *Gorgias* 456a7ff.

Protagoras taught, or thought that he taught, to young Athenian *agathoi* merely the nature of the Athenian legal system<sup>21</sup> and how best to obey it.

To the end of the exposition, then, the proposition that it is necessary for an active politician to be just and law-abiding is confused with the proposition that it is sufficient for an active politician to be just and law-abiding. In the course of my discussion, I have tried to indicate the vagueness of terminology (and hence, of course, the ideas and presuppositions that the terms reflect and carry) that renders such a confused exposition more plausible in Greek. In conclusion, I wish to consider whether Protagoras is a mere prisoner of his language, or in this sophistic *epideixis* he is in fact using words with great rhetorical skill as a *captatio benevolentiae* addressed to as many sections of the Athenian public as possible. (We need not debate the extent to which it makes sense to discuss the intentions of a Protagoras who is a character in a dialogue written by someone else: it suffices to indicate the likely effect of the language on certain types of Athenian.)

Protagoras was the greatest and most influential of the first generation of sophists, an entirely new phenomenon in Greece. Plato and Aristophanes portray the sophists as dangerous but attractive. Attractive, certainly, to some; but many Athenians must have found them simply dangerous. In Athens as in other Greek states, a restricted number of families of *agathoi*, (not the *agathoi* as a whole) had traditionally taken a prominent active part in politics. These were the repositories of political wisdom; and their older members, at least, must have resented the wandering “foreign” teachers who claimed to be able to teach what was necessary to succeed in politics in a city. (The younger members doubtless flocked to the sophists, along with others who could afford to do so: we may note Protagoras’ claim [316c7] to attract “the best (*tous beltistous*) of the young men” away from their former associations; for *beltistoi* certainly has socio-political overtones.) Again, many of the poorer citizens must have had suspicions of the likely political effect of the expensive education, which only the wealthier members of society could afford,<sup>22</sup> offered by the sophists. Such suspicions would have to be allayed; and I shall endeavor to show how Protagoras tries to allay them; but Hippocrates is “a member of a great and wealthy house” who wishes to become “a respected man of the city,” so that Protagoras can declare frankly to him that he will teach him “about nothing else than what he has come for.” He wants to acquire *politike techne, politike arete*, a skill

---

<sup>21</sup> Or customs, since νόμος spans both, but 326c7, but 326c7ff. seems to suggest that written laws are more in Protagoras’ mind.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Socrates’ ironical regret that he did not hear Prodicus’ fifty-drachma, but only the one-drachma, ἐπίδειξις, Plato, *Cratylus* 384b.

that will enable him to succeed in politics; and the ends to which the *agathos* wished to direct this skill are apparent from other Platonic dialogues.<sup>23</sup> The poorer citizens might well be suspicious.

Socrates then challenges Protagoras to prove that *arete* is *dikakton*; and offers as his reason for not believing in its teachability not an analysis of the nature of *arete* and a doubt that one could teach any such thing, but the empirical observations mentioned above. Whatever Plato's motive for this, the effect is to enable Protagoras' speech to draw on all the vagueness of *arete* (and *techne*). The *epideixis* which follows is not directed at Hippocrates, and is the kind of utterance that might well have been made by a newly arrived sophist with the suspicions of a mass audience in mind:<sup>24</sup> a necessary precaution in a democracy, for even if most of the inhabitants could not afford the sophist's full course of instruction, they had votes and could expel a stranger whom they suspected. Now *politike techne* is represented as being the possession of *aidos* and *dike*—which all would suppose themselves to possess—while a skillful disposition of vague phrases such as *tes alles politikas aretes* (323a6) hints that, of course, his hearers really have the whole of *politike techne* in its full sense, too. Protagoras does not express as a formal proposition “it is sufficient to have *aidos* and *dike* to have the *politike techne*.” he simply uses the demonstrable necessity of *aidos* and *dike*, coupled with the ambiguities and vagueness of *arete* and *techne*, to create in his hearers' minds the notion that they all have *politike arete* or *techne* with all the implications of those terms. His *epideixis* is an exercise of high rhetorical skill.

The nature of the supposed audience may well explain the surprisingly minor role of courage and warlike skill in Protagoras' exposition. The manifest importance of successful defense of the city “if there are to be cities at all” had traditionally given courage exercised in ensuring the city's victory in war a pre-eminent place among the *aretai*; but here, apart from a mention at 322b 4, where the enemy are wild beasts, it does not appear in the discussion, though it is there said to be part of *politike techne*. The reason may be that Protagoras is emphasizing qualities that *all* must possess “if there are to be cities,” and warlike *arete* was traditionally the prerogative of the wealthier members of society who could purchase their own hoplite-armor, those, that is, who were socially, politically, and militarily *agathoi* in contrast with the mass of the *kakoi*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Meno in Plato, *Meno* 71e2, 73c9, 77b4, 78c1.

<sup>24</sup> It may well have been modeled on an ἐπίδειξις of Protagoras known to Plato.

<sup>25</sup> The importance of Athens' navy had little effect on this situation. See *M&R*, pp. 197 ff.

*Tektonike arete*, I suspect, has its part to play here, too. I have already said that the phrase is justifiable but unusual. No *tekton* had *arete* unqualified, for this was the mark of the traditional *agathos*, the man of wealth and social position. But such an expression as *arete techtonike* could be employed by the democratic theorist of the day to demonstrate that all artisans who were *agathoi technitai*, good at their *techne*, had an *arete* arising from their possession of a *techne*; and an *arete*, moreover, that rendered them qualified, as others (including those who were *agathoi tout court*) were not, to address the Assembly on certain subjects. The *aretai* differ with the *technai*. But if one can then argue that all have *aidos* and *dike* and that these constitute [an] *arete* that, being essential to the existence of cities, is *politike*, if one can use the vagueness of *techne* to represent *aidos* and *dike* as *politike techne* and the vagueness and range of both *arete* and *techne* to imply that all possess all the skills and qualities that these terms are capable of denoting and commending, then the resulting picture is one that anyone who is not *agathos* in terms of the traditional evaluation would be likely to applaud, and one that should increase his confidence in speaking in the assembly on matters of general politics.<sup>26</sup>

Bait for a different group is furnished by “not by nature but taught/teachable” (*ou phusei alla didakton* [323c5]) and “from attention, practice, and teaching” (*ex epimeleias kai askesios kai didaches* [323d 6]) which contrast with *phusis* (and in 323d1 also with *tuche*) other means whereby *agatha*, and *kaka* come to human beings. As I have tried to show elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> in the earlier fifth century *phusis* denoted and, where the birth was high, commended, all the qualities with which the Greek was endowed, or was believed to be endowed, by his or her being born into a particular family with a particular social status; so that it served to reinforce the effects of the traditional *arete*. Certain sophists and Presocratic philosophers, however, insisted that practice gives more than good *phusis* gives (Epicharmus b33); that more have become *agathoi* from training than from *phusis* (Democritus B242, cf. Critias b9); and even that long practice in the end becomes *phusis*, or that *phusis* and teaching are much the same, for teaching molds the individual, and in so doing it imparts *phusis* to him.<sup>28</sup> Anyone who was not *agathos phusei*—the majority of the citizens of

---

<sup>26</sup> A confidence that might otherwise be absent; cf. my *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), 140.

<sup>27</sup> See: *From the Many to the One* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 79 ff.; 94 ff.

<sup>28</sup> The fact that all methods of learning are opposed to φύσις may help to emphasize their resemblances rather than their differences and to encourage still further the tendency to treat both moral excellences and skills as τέχνηαι.

Athens, or any other Greek state—would be pleased to learn that he could become *agathos* also by training, or even acquire a new, improved *phusis*, a word rendered very attractive by its traditional implications. Such a promise must have gained the sophists much good will and custom from those who, while not belonging to the families traditionally prominent in politics, now aspired to take an active part (and could afford sophistic education).

This group requires further definition. For most purposes, *agathoi* could be regarded, in traditional terms, as being coextensive with the hoplite class; but by no means all members of that class belonged to families prominent in politics; and Athens' increased wealth in the fifth century must have added to the numbers qualified to serve as hoplites. Some of the sophists' pupils were drawn from families that had traditionally been prominent politically, for example, Critias; but many must have been drawn from families who could afford such an education—and could accordingly be regarded as *agathoi*—but were not sons of old political families<sup>29</sup> *ou phusei alla didakton* must have been a most attractive idea to such young men; but the idea is, of course, not so socially egalitarian as might at first sight appear to be the case.

The egalitarian and democratic effect is much reinforced here by the insistence of Protagoras (unlike the other writers mentioned, so far as can be ascertained from surviving fragments) that everyone engages in this kind of teaching; but Protagoras' own role is now rather difficult for him to define. Since he has striven to give the impression that all teach the *politike techne*, and indeed in a sense already possess it, he cannot say that he will impart a skill that is different in kind from that which is imparted by the average Athenian, or average Greek. He can only say that it is to be welcomed if anyone is better than the average at bringing people to *arete*, and that he is one of these. (This mode of expression might be designed to mollify the traditional *agathoi* or *kaloï kagathoi ta politika*, in the sense of the politically active families, whose elder members believed that they, too, excelled in this.)

Protagoras' *epideixis* thus contains something for everyone. It is, however, a smokescreen, a *captatio benevolentiae*, a *proschema* (screen). A *proschema* of a kind similar to that which he says he will not use in 316c5, a passage that is on the face of it a long, rambling, and irrelevant speech. It is, in fact, I suggest, one of the numerous ironies of this dialogue: Plato portrays the sophist proclaiming that he will not do what he forthwith spends a considerable portion of the dialogue in doing. The *proschema* was needed.

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Moral Values*, pp. 64ff., 110.

As Protagoras says (316c5ff.), “If a man comes as a foreigner to great cities and there persuades the very best (*tous beltistous*) of the young men to jettison their association with others (including both relatives and people outside the family, both old and young) and instead to associate with *him* on the grounds that they will become better (*beltious*) as a result of that association, he must take care as he does all this.” He says that he will offer no such *proschemata* as others have done, who pretended not to be sophists; for they did not escape the notice of “those capable of action in the cities” (*tous dunamenous en tais poleisi* [317a3]); while one need not trouble about “the many,” for they “perceive nothing” (*ouden aisthanontai*);<sup>30</sup> so that *proschemata* are in the one case fruitless, in the other, unnecessary. Now it is true that Protagoras’ *proschemata* is different: he does not admit he is a sophist; but the whole of his long *epidexis* is, I suggest, a *proschemata* nonetheless, and a very necessary one. To reassure the mass of the citizens that what he was doing was “democratic,” and essentially the same as they did every day, was prudent. Both the traditional political families and the poorer Athenians had grounds for suspicion: the sophists were offering training in political skills to those who could afford to pay, not all of whom belonged to the old political families; and the *arete* that the sophists imparted had, like traditional *arete*, implications that were far from democratic.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> He is here, of course speaking to a small and select audience of ἀγαθοί. The ἐπιδειξις, on the other hand, is suitable for general consumption.

<sup>31</sup> See *M&R*, chs 10 and 11.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# *POLUPRAGMOSUNE* AND “MINDING ONE’S OWN BUSINESS”: A STUDY IN GREEK SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VALUES

### Introduction

This essay successfully mixes philosophy and cultural studies via the terms of social engagement—sometimes called *polupragmosune* (often translated as being a “busybody”)<sup>1</sup>—and *ta hautou pratein* (often translated as “minding one’s own business”)<sup>2</sup> along with *peritta pratein* (inaction caused by having too many other, more sufficient, things to do).<sup>3</sup>

The grand scheme is to examine four stances of these terms—with the emphasis upon *polupragmosune*: (a) *polupragmosune* among equals in the polis; (b) *polupragmosune* among un-equals in the polis; (c) *polupragmosune* as manifested by politicians or others in the public eye; and (d) *polupragmosune* as manifested by the polis itself in contrast with *apragmosune*.

The first case is rather straightforward. Among equals, there is a reticence to interpose one’s self in others’ affairs. This sense of being a busybody is as being a meddler who is taking away the personal autonomy of another of equal class/rank. It is simply “not done” by the *right sort of people*.

In the second case, the situation becomes more complicated. When the power relationship is unequal then positive social engagement can be a

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, social engagement can be politically useful as it is a necessary for democracy when understood as interest and concern for the affairs of others.

<sup>2</sup> In the private sphere we often encourage people to mind their own business, but in the public sphere it can lay the groundwork for political disengagement that can be the stepping-stone for tyrants.

<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this tack describes someone on the inferior side of a personal or political situation and is clearly a position for exploitation and tyranny.

problem. Contrast the sisters Antigone and Ismene. The latter invokes *peritta prattein* to support her inaction and lack of supporting her sister’s action against Creon (who has all the power). This case (to many in the contemporary audience) culturally supports inaction over action in a political situation in which one of the two underdogs (compared to Creon), Ismene, lives to breathe another day, but Antigone does not.

But then there is the case of the Chorus in *Heracles* advocating action by defending the children of Heracles against Lycus. This supports “getting involved.” Then there is the case of the soldiers described by Xenophon who equate *polupragmosune* with disobeying the given orders (the proper object of their attention) as opposed to *ta hautou prattein*.

In the third case, we examine those in the public eye. The first level of analysis is to set out social classes. The large class of common folk is made to be object of comedy. In this process arises the role of the sycophant, who is the politician, prosecutor in court, or some bureaucrat, with a modicum of power. Adkins notes that the literature making fun of the sycophant was written by the upper crust, *agathoi* (thus rendering it rather culturally self-serving). Now since the time of Solon, an ordinary citizen who “wished” (*boulomenos*) he could prosecute any wrongdoer, could under certain circumstances, do so. This was a restraint against the *agathoi*. Therefore, the *boulomenoi* were the bane of the *agathoi*.

An instance of the fourth case can be seen from the standpoint of foreign policy. In Euripides’ *Supplikes*, Theseus, king of Athens, is accused by a herald of being a meddler in his campaign to stamp out *hubris*.<sup>4</sup> In this case, *polupragmosune* becomes an aggressive stance that includes taking stock of other city states so that Athens might not ever have to accept the fate of the Melians to surrender without a fight—even if their cause seemed helpless (Thucydides). The intersection here is with traditional senses of *arete*. It is here that Adkins frames the balance from over-action (being a busybody) and inaction within an Aristotelian mean: *polupragmosune—arete—apragmosune*. This offers an interesting dimension to his analysis.

We can view the problem from domestic policy and the law courts (a combination of the third and fourth cases). In this instance we see depictions of those abusing the law courts by becoming engaged to take

---

<sup>4</sup> *Hubris* here does not have the religious connotations of its use in some other works, particularly in Homer. In this and other cases cited particularly toward the end of Adkins’ essay, the term refers to someone who has been spoiled by an easy upbringing so that they exude a false confidence. There is also the connotation of an “inferior” getting above his or herself—(see below the words of Solon about the *demos* in relation to its leaders).



advantage of the rich (old money *agathoi*) who tend to avoid the law courts at all costs (and thus allow themselves to be abused by these greedy meddlers). This raises a challenge to the traditional *agathoi*, who must move away from the *apragmon* disposition to one that is more engaged (or else face continual erosion). One cannot depend upon one's *moira* (in this context, goods that arise from birth giving undeserved stations of preferment in society). If one does go with the inherited money and status without engaging his character, then he runs the risk of being bested by inferior low-born individuals (*kakoi*) in the law courts. Such a situation from the point of view of the privileged (*agathoi*) would constitute *hubris* on the part of the low-born, inferior individuals.

Instead, the move is towards acting in accord with *kosmos* (the proper order of things) that requires acquisition of *sophrosune* (which is useful in different ways to all levels of society). The essay ends with Plato's *Republic*. Plato's sympathies are with the traditional *agathoi*. Thus, he is inclined to classify disturbing behavior as *polupragmosune* rather than the social-class *hubris* (since this is rather slanted at the offspring of the traditional *agathoi*). In the end, a certain amount of *polupragmosune* (all things considered) is a good thing, but only within these boundaries.

## Adkins' Essay

Almost thirty years ago Victor Ehrenberg published an admirable major article<sup>5</sup> on the subject of *polupragmosune*.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the present article is not to query Ehrenberg's findings, but to add comments on the subject of *ta hautou prattein* and *polupragmosune* from a somewhat different point of view: I wish to discuss *polupragmosune* at home rather than abroad, though I shall consider the question of Athens' foreign policy; and I wish to consider the socio-political overtones of these words.

Ehrenberg says of *polupragmosune* (p. 46), "There is no 'idea,' there are only psychological facts, in 'busybodiness.'" He adds that the busybody is indeed a type which, though little loved, is deeply rooted in the English mind, and this is undoubtedly the legitimate translation of *polupragmon*." This is qualified: "Though this translation may be adequate

---

<sup>5</sup> Victor Ehrenberg, "Polypragmosyne: A Study in Greek Politics," *JHS* 67 (1947): 46-67. Hereafter, referred to as Ehrenberg.

<sup>6</sup> I have throughout the article transliterated important, untranslatable Greek words and phrases as an alternative to printing them in Greek. I am aware that some scholars find transliterated Greek distasteful; but I think it is worthwhile to attempt to render such discussions as this as accessible as possible to the "Greek-less" students of ancient history and philosophy

in some passages of Greek literature, it is only too apt to conceal the full implications of the word”—implications that in the remainder of his article he proceeds to draw out. However, for the most part Ehrenberg confines himself, as “psychological facts” would suggest, to the idea of “being a busybody.” My primary concern in this article is to discuss the reasons for *being said to be* a busybody; and these are likely to reside as much in the attitudes of the user of the word as in the “psychological facts” or behavior of the person said to be a busybody. I shall, however, also consider the motives that might lead different types of person to pursue courses of action that others might characterize as *polupragmosune*, and the motives which might lead others to *apragmosune*, to *ha hautou prattein*, to “minding one’s own business.”<sup>7</sup> Having examined these reasons and motives in the context of the later fifth and earlier fourth centuries, I shall then consider the extent to which the idea of *polupragmosune* serves as the same kind of constraint on certain members of Athenian society as had earlier been supplied by other words with religious connotations and overtones; and I shall inquire what changes in practice result from the apparent democratization and secularization of Athens in the later years of the fifth century.

I shall begin by discussing *ta hautou prattein* and *polla prattein* in Plato.<sup>8</sup> I will try to show at the end of this article, is endeavoring to draw upon certain deep-seated attitudes and prejudices in society in the interests of his own political proposals; so that to begin here will serve to bind the discussion together.

Plato, in the *Republic* (433a-b), puts the following words in the mouth of Socrates:

And further that justice (*dikaiosune*) is *ta hautou prattein* and not *polupragmonein*, and that we have both heard this from many other people and often said it ourselves . . . This, then, . . . my friend, is likely to be in some sense of what justice is, *ta hautou prattein*.”

Justice is said to consist in *ta hautou prattein* and avoiding *polupragmonein*. Two conclusions may reasonably be drawn: first, that the phrase *ta hautou prattein* is in common use as a commendation (“we have heard this from many other people”)\*; and second, that the phrase is being used in a somewhat unusual manner (*tropon tina gignomenon*), which is likely, since the usage is closely linked with the structure of Plato’s

---

<sup>7</sup> Literally, “doing one’s own things.”

<sup>8</sup> *Polla prattein*, *polupragmonein*, and *polupragmosune* seem to have precisely the same range and “flavor”: any of them may be opposed to *apragmosune* and *ta hautou prattein*.

\* This is Adkins’ translation.

*Republic* state, and later (443d) with the tripartite “soul.” But how unusual is the political usage here, and what was usually commended thereby? In the *Charmides* (161b 56) Charmides, under pressure from Socrates, says, “For I just remembered—something I actually heard someone say—that *sophrosune* might be *ta hautou prattein*.” That *ta hautou prattein* is in the *Republic* a definition or account of justice, in the *Charmides* of *sophrosune*,<sup>9</sup> is a discrepancy, but a discrepancy unimportant for my present purpose: it suffices that quiet, “co-operative” behavior is being thus characterized. (It may be significant, as will appear, that Socrates immediately assumes that Charmides must have acquired the definition from some wise or clever man, possibly Critias.) The Socrates of the *Charmides* treats the definition simply as material for the *elenchus*; it has no positive role to play in the philosophy. Similarly, in *Alcibiades I* (which, though almost certainly not by Plato, is a fourth-century work and reflects Platonic usage and thought), *ta hautou prattein* (127b5-6) is attacked by Socrates as not capable of producing a condition in which cities are well administered, since *philia* (co-operative activity, “friendship”) will not be possible under such circumstances; and it is defended by Alcibiades. The exact use made of the phrase in the argument of *Charmides* and *Alcibiades I* is not important here: it is evident from the context in each case that the phrase is used to commend a state of affairs in society; a reasonable inference that Critias, Charmides, and Alcibiades represent the kind of persons who use such a mode of commendation; and evident that, for whatever reason, Plato wishes to portray Socrates in these early dialogues as taking the opposing view.

There are illuminating usages elsewhere in Plato. In the *Timaeus* (72a) it is said that those who are in a state of mantic possession are, while in that state, in no condition to evaluate their own utterances: “people have long done well to take the view that *ta hautou prattein* and ‘knowing oneself’ are the mark of the *sophon* alone.”\* Here once again we have *ta hautou prattein* linked with *sophrosune* and with “knowing oneself” (*sauton gnonai*), as an old and well-known view. The reference is clearly to the famous Delphic maxim, and hence to the traditional pattern of early Greek values. I shall discuss the relevance of this at the end of the paper.

On one occasion in Plato, *ta hautou prattein* is reprehended. In the *Politicus* (307e) the Stranger refers to those who are excessively *kosmioi* (orderly), and fond of a quiet life, qualifying them as “keeping themselves

---

<sup>9</sup> *Sophrosune* spans “moderation,” “self-control,” and “prudence.” No English word adequately renders it.

\* Adkins’ translation.

to themselves” and indulging in *ta hautou prattein* in relationships both within the city and with other cities. As a result of this they become unwarlike and pass from being free to being slaves. The Stranger contrasts the condition of excessive *kosmiotes* with excessive *andreia* (manliness), a quality that was traditionally the work of the *agathos*, the most admired type of man,<sup>10</sup> and of *arete*; whereas *sophrosune* was not traditionally an *arete* at all, and so not one of the most highly admired characteristics.

In *Laches* (179c), Lysimachus complains that his (and Meleias’) parents performed many “fine” (*kala*) deeds both in war and peace, “managing the affairs of the allies and of the city”\* (*dioikountes ta te ton summachon kai ta tesde tes poleos*). They themselves, however, have achieved nothing similar, and find fault with their parents because they did not supervise them properly as children, but “managed the affairs (or transacted the business) of the rest”:\* *ta de ton allon pragmata epratton* (179d) is a phrase evidently directly opposed to *ta hautou prattein*. Thus, is reprehended a life of active politics in the service of the Athenian Empire, the life for which Protagoras, as portrayed by Plato (*Protagoras* 319a), promised to equip his pupils: he fitted them to manage the affairs of their own households and also saw to it that they should be most capable of transacting the business of the city both by action and speech (*hopos ta tes poleos dunatotatos an eie kai prattein kai legein*). There is in the *Laches* a contrast between quietly educating one’s children and taking an active part in politics, presented as being mutually exclusive ways of life; and Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (216a) makes a not dissimilar point, saying that Socrates compels him to admit that though he is himself deficient in many ways he neglects himself and transacts the business of the Athenians: *emautou men amelo, ta d’Athenaion pratto* .

It seems clear from these passages of Plato that *ta hautou prattein* commends—or on one occasion decries—quietly busying oneself with the affairs of one’s *oikos* (household) while the *Politicus* passage indicates that the idea is opposed to traditional *arete*, which is manifested in action in the warlike defense of one’s city. *Polupragmonein*, however, is not generally admired in the writers of the period; yet it too is opposed to *ta hautou prattein*, and might be expected to bear some resemblance to the

---

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of *agathos*, *arete*, *kakos*, *kakia*, and other terms used rather than discussed in the article, see my *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960) and *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), *passim*. (These works are accessible to the Greek-less; they are abbreviated *M&R* and *MV*.)

\* Adkins translation.

\* Adkins translation.

admired *arete*. The rest of this paper will be devoted to examining the reasons for this apparent anomaly.

Inactivity is a fairly simply idea; but “busybodiness” can be exercised in a variety of fields. I propose to divide my material by discussing (1) *polupragmosune* between equals (or in circumstances in which the question of status does not arise) in a *polis*; (2) *polupragmosune* in circumstances where there is a difference in status; (3) *polupragmosune* as manifested by politicians and others in the public eye; and (4) *polupragmosune* as manifested by the *polis* itself. All these aspects of *polupragmosune* will be set against the ideal of *apragmosune*.

## 1. “Polupragmosune” between Equals in a “Polis”

Reluctance to interfere, lest one may be thought to *polupragmonein*, was a motive in Athenian social life even when the action might have been regarded as helpful, as may be seen in orators. In Lysias’ first speech another woman, jealous because she has lost her lover to Euphiletus’ wife, comes to tell Euphiletus of his wife’s adultery, saying (16), “Do not suppose I have come to you out of any *polupragmosune*; for the man who is committing outrages (*hubrizon*) against your wife and yourself is a personal enemy (*echthros*) of mine.”\* Were the other man not a personal enemy, to go beyond the bounds of one’s *oikos* and interfere in the affairs of one, or two, other *oikoi* might be interpreted as *polupragmosune*. To harm one’s enemies, however, was an admired pursuit, and a requirement of *arete*; so that here *motive* seems to determine whether an action is a manifestation of *polupragmosune* or of *arete*. Here, of course, the speaker is assigning her own motives; in other cases, not the agent but the observer will decide whether or not the agent *polla pratei*. I shall discuss in the remainder of this paper the observer’s likely reasons for judging an action to be a manifestation of *polupragmosune*.

“Butting in” where one is not wanted is *polla pratein*: when Trygaeus says (Aristophanes, *Peace* 1058), “You *polla prateis*, whoever you are,” he merely means, “Stop meddling with my private affairs.”\* And when Dicaeopolis utters the much-discussed “May *polupragmosune* return upon my own head”\* (Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 833), it seems likely that he is stigmatizing his accidental use of language distressing to the Megarian as *polupragmosune*, and wishing that the distress may return upon his own

---

\* Adkins translation.

\* Adkins translation.

\* Adkins translation.

head—a type of imprecation no doubt common in a society in which such offense was apparently so readily given and taken. Much in late fifth-century Athenian life gives the impression that the city was still to a surprising extent in sentiment and values, a collection of virtually autonomous households; and this aspect of the concept of *polupragmosune* reflects that situation. It was, of course, the general pre-existing dislike of “meddling” that rendered *polupragmosune* so useful a word of abuse in Athenian politics. What constituted “meddling” was, as we shall see, largely determined by the general values of Athens at the time.

## 2. “Polupragmosune” of Social or Political Inferiors

In other passages the deference expected by superiors from inferiors plays a part. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Ismene decries *peritta pratein*:<sup>11</sup> “I shall obey those in authority for I know that *to perissa prassein* is senseless” (67-68). The values of Greek tragedy are the values of contemporary Athens: the poets had neither the desire nor the ability to portray the values of the monarchical period of Greece (which might in any case, democracy or no, have had surprising resemblances to the values of later fifth-century Athens). Accordingly, when Ismene says that she will obey “those in authority,” and opposes such activity (or inactivity) to *peritta pratein*, we may infer that, in contemporary Athens, one might *peritta pratein* precisely by not obeying the authorities. It is not immediately clear how the situation should be evaluated: Ismene is faced with a tyrant, and she is a woman—and a very docile one. In this situation, to resist the tyrant, even in the interests of a moral or religious claim—the circumstances in which Ismene finds herself—is evidently likely to be regarded by the tyrant as *peritta pratein* or *polla pratein*; and a quietist like Ismene accepts his evaluation and thinks of resistance as mere folly. Now if the analogous situation in democratic Athens is resistance to the democratically passed laws, and we treat the moral and religious claim as something peculiar to the situation of the *Antigone*, then doubtless *peritta pratein* is to be deprecated; but I shall argue that this is not the case.

Further evidence is supplied by a passage in Euripides’ *Hercules Furens*. The Chorus says, “Am I a meddler because I come to the aid of a friend who, being dead, most needs my help” (266-67). They are attempting to defend the children of Hercules against Lycus, who has threatened their life; and they suppose that their action will be, or has been, interpreted, at least by Lycus, as *polla pratein*. Once again, we have

---

<sup>11</sup> *Peritta pratein*, “to do too many, more than sufficient, things.”

the anomaly that a requirement of *arete*, helping one's friends, seems in this case to constitute *polla pratein*. Lycus' words (248ff.) make the position clearer:

You shall bemoan not only Hercules' children, but also the misfortunes of his house, whenever it suffers any evil, and you shall not forget that you are now slaves under my rule.

The Chorus realizes that Lycus in using these words has accused them of *polla pratein*; and they know that it may appear to be *polla pratein*, because he has more status and power than they, since they are elderly citizens of Thebes, mere slaves in his eyes. True, Lycus is a tyrant and there are no tyrants in Athens; and Euripides evidently does not accept that helping one's friends against powerful members of society is *polla pratein*. But it seems ever more likely that action that discommodes one's social superiors is characterized by those superiors in this manner.

Other passages of Greek tragedy make it clear that for a social inferior to contend against a social superior in defense of his own, or a friend's, rights was difficult in Athens even in the second half of the fifth century. A striking passage in Sophocles' *Ajax* (1120 ff.):

ME. The archer appears to have no small opinion of himself.

TE. I have for not *banausic* is the (archer's) art that I possess.

ME. You would utter loud boasts if you were to get possession of a shield (and become a hoplite).

TE. Even light-armed I should be a match for you in hoplite armor.

ME. How terribly does your tongue nourish your spirit.

TE. One may "think big" when justice is on one's side.\*

Teucer is socially at a disadvantage: Menelaus is a king, while Teucer is the son of Telamon, a Greek *agathos*, and a foreign queen given to Telamon as war booty; he is not, as Ajax was, a legitimate son of Telamon, and he is armed with a bow, a (socially) inferior weapon. The last line taken in isolation might suggest that to have justice on one's side gives one a claim that the *arete* of the *agathos* cannot override; but Teucer has already argued that his *techne* is not banausic—as are the crafts of artisans—and that Menelaus is such a poor fighter that he could defeat him even though he is himself not armed as a hoplite. Furthermore, Teucer emphasizes elsewhere (1299ff.) not only that his father was an outstanding warrior, but that his mother was a queen in her own land. If a man is a good and brave fighter, not engaged in banausic craft, then, even if he is not a hoplite, the sense of the justice of his cause may give him confidence

---

\* Adkins' translation, *MV*, p.66.

even to answer back to an *agathos*. Were he engaged in banausic craft, or an ineffective warrior, he might well have difficulty in obtaining justice; and even Teucer regards his behavior as *mega phronein* (a phrase that we should sometimes render “being haughty”), not as a mere expression of undoubted rights. Now Sophocles is not on Menelaus’ or Creon’s side, nor is Euripides on Lycus’; but these passages taken together suggest that action that inconveniences a social superior is likely to be regarded by him as *polla prattein*.

Certain passages of Xenophon are illuminating. Ehrenberg<sup>12</sup> finds no interest in Xenophon’s usage, and the passages certainly throw no light on *polupragmosune* in foreign policy; but they furnish evidence for the aspect of *polupragmosune* under discussion here.

In *Hellenica* (1.6.3) the Spartan admiral Lysander claims, on handing over to his successor Callicratidas, that he has superiority over the Athenians at sea and has won a naval victory. Callicratidas tells him to sail from Ephesus past the Athenian fleet at Samos and hand over his command there; *then* he will admit that Lysander has superiority at sea. Lysander refuses to *polupragmonein* now that Callicratidas is in command. Again, in the *Polity of the Lacedaemonians* (13.5), we are told that two of the ephors accompany the Spartan king to war, but do not *polupragmonein* at all unless the king asks them to do so. In *Cyropaedia* (8.6.3), we find the following put onto the mouth of Cyrus: “Friends, we have garrisons and their commanders in the captured cities . . . On my departure I bade them ‘*polupragmonein* nothing else’ (*allo men meden polupragmonein*) but to protect the walls. I shall not deprive these men of their commands, since they have honorably (*kalos*) carried out orders.”\* The setting is Persian, but the values and aspirations are, of course, Greek: the portrait of Cyrus represents Xenophon’s ideal ruler. (We may remember in passing that both Xenophon and Plato, like others of their class, admired Sparta, and recall the passages from Plato discussed at the beginning of the article.)

From these passages of Xenophon, it is clear that one might *polupragmonein* by disobeying the orders or usurping the functions of a superior. The examples I have quoted from tragedy suggest that any aspiration by an inferior to “get above himself,” or above what the superior regards as the inferior’s appropriate position, may be regarded as *polupragmosune*, as failing to *ta hautou prattein*. A general dislike of “meddling” experienced by all members of society may be used by social

---

<sup>12</sup> Ehrenberg, 56 ff.

\* Adkins translation.



and political superiors in an endeavor to prevent their inferiors from performing actions that would be inconvenient for the superiors, even when (as in *Hercules* 266ff.) the inferiors' action is one commended by the values of the society; and fear of "meddling" may in fact sometimes deter them.

### 3. "Polupragmosune" in Domestic Politics and in the Law Courts

We may now turn to domestic politics and activity in the courts in Athens. *Polupragmosune* can undoubtedly be displayed in these fields. A passage of the "Old Oligarch" (ps. Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.18) is illuminating. The writer claims that the Athenian common people do not allow anyone to "comedize" the whole *demos*:<sup>13</sup>

They bid the poets to "comedize" individuals . . . knowing well that for the most part the person "comedized" is not one of the *demos* or of the masses but a man of wealth, birth, or influence (*plousios e gennaios e dunamenos*). Only a few of the poor and *demotikoi* are "comedized," and those only for *polupragmosune* and "Seeking to have more than the *demos*." As a result, the common people do not take it amiss when such people are "comedized."\*

The Old Oligarch is marked by spleen and shrewd observation: he is an intelligent *agathos*, whose attitudes are characteristic; and he judges that it is for *polupragmosune* and for "seeking to have more than the *demos*" that the poor and "demotic"—evidently not wealthy, of good birth, or influential as the Old Oligarch interprets these matters—are "comedized." (I shall discuss later what is meant by "not wealthy, of good birth, or influential.") Such *polupragmosune* that sets one above the general run of the *demos* must surely consist in taking a prominent part in the public life of the city, possibly as a politician, possibly as a prosecutor in the courts, a "sycophant." The last word leaves an evil taste in the mouth; and certainly, such people are frequently attacked in comedy. However, all the literature of the period was written by *agathoi*, and therefore all the complaints about "sycophants" were written by *agathoi*. Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.3.12) says that the Thirty Tyrants began by killing those who "lived by being

---

<sup>13</sup> I translate κωμφοδεῖν by "comedize" rather than "attack in a comedy," lest the rendering appear tendentious; but it would be difficult to maintain that "attack" is not the appropriate characterization of Aristophanes' portrait of a Cleon.

\* Adkins translation.

sycophants and were a nuisance (*bareis*) to the *kaloi kagathoi*.”<sup>14</sup> Being a nuisance to the *kaloi kagathoi*, the “gentlemen” of Athens, might well be a sufficient condition of being held by them to be a “sycophant,” a term that defies exact definition:<sup>15</sup> its emotive charge is powerful, its descriptive meaning vague. It gives a general impression of decrying accusers for making false accusations (I shall discuss this below), but seems also to be available to decry any behavior that the writer regards as scoundrelly in a legal context. Now since the days of Solon any citizen who wished (“the *boulomenos*”) had had the right to prosecute any wrongdoer,<sup>16</sup> and in certain types of case the reward offered to the successful prosecutor was high, certainly high enough to attract anyone who was both poor and unscrupulous to attempt false accusation.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, a prosecutor who failed to win one-fifth of the votes was fined a thousand drachmas and debarred from bringing a similar type of case again; and this provision must have acted as a deterrent. Doubtless false accusers existed, and we may be inclined to suppose that these, and these alone, were “sycophants”; but the question requires further examination.

I have just observed that Greek literature was written by *agathoi*, and this is certainly no less true of Old Comedy than of other works that have come down to us. Nevertheless, a certain kind of comic attack incidentally

---

\* Adkins translation

<sup>14</sup> The *boule* condemned these sycophants, but it was a *boule* selected by the Thirty, themselves (Xenophon. *Hellenica* 2.3.11).

<sup>15</sup> See: Robert J. Bonner and Gertrude Smith, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Bonner and Smith, *Administration of Justice*, 2:39 ff.

<sup>17</sup> The types of prosecution were notably *phasis* and *apographe*. *Phasis* was the term applied to cases such as breaking regulations related to trading and mines, and mismanagement of wards’ property by guardians. A successful prosecutor was rewarded with half the fine exacted or property confiscated. In *apographe*, the prosecutor listed property allegedly due to the *polis* that had been improperly retained by the accused. In such cases the prosecutor, if successful, received three-quarters of the property thereby recovered. Evidently the prosperous were more likely to be in a position to commit such offenses, and certainly offered “the *boulomenos*” more inducement to prosecute them. (The *euthuna* gave “the *boulomenos*” an opportunity to prosecute any democratic politician at the end of his period of office; but whether an *agathos* would have regarded prosecution of a politician of whom he disapproved as “sycophancy” is perhaps open to question.) The scale of rewards clearly indicates that the intention was to deter others from committing crimes prosecutable under *apographe* rather than to recover the property for the *polis* on this occasion. See: Bonner and Smith, *Administration of Justice*. 2: 50.

records the values and point of view of the attacked; and such an attack occurs in Aristophanes' *Plutus*. The Sycophant is complaining of his treatment, and says (899ff.) "Alas, how upset I am that, though I'm a good and patriotic citizen, I'm being badly done to." Dicaeus treats his claim to be a "good" and patriotic citizen with incredulity; he established by questioning that the Sycophant is not a farmer (the Sycophant expresses revulsion from the very idea), nor yet a merchant (though he pretends to be, when it suits him), nor yet a craftsman; and when Dicaeus asks him how he makes a living if he does nothing, the Sycophant's reply leads to an exchange that is worth quoting at length (907 ff.):

SY: I take care of the affairs of the city and all private affairs, too.

DI: Why on earth, you?

SY: I am willing (*boulomai*).

DI: So how can you be good (*chrestos*), thief that you are, when you bring hatred upon yourself (*apechthanei*) for doing what is none of your concern?

SY: Isn't it my concern to benefit my own city to the utmost of my strength, you birdbrain?

DI: Is benefitting being a busybody (*to polupragmonein*), then?

SY: It's helping the established laws and not letting it pass if anyone does wrong.

DI: Doesn't the city appoint jurors on purpose to be in charge of this?

SY: But who prosecutes?

DI: The one who is willing (*ho boulomenos*).

SY: That's surely who I am, and thus the affairs of the city are my concern.

DI: In that case it has a wretched (*poneron*) champion indeed. But wouldn't you prefer to live at leisure enjoying peace and quiet?

SY: But what you're talking about is a sheep's life, if there is no amusement to it.

This is, of course, character assassination rather than portrayal, as befits a comedy. To introduce anyone as a "sycophant" already prejudices the question of the respectability of his activities, but it is interesting to note what points are made by the Sycophant and by Dicaeus. The Sycophant says that he takes care of the affairs of the city and all private affairs, too; that he benefits the city to the utmost of his strength; and that he helps the established laws and does not allow anyone to break them. Thus far we may reasonably believe that Aristophanes has put into the mouth of the Sycophant the kind of justification that a real-life prosecutor (taking advantage of Solon's permission to "the *boulomenos*" to

prosecute) might have given. Aristophanes, who has established him as a “sycophant” (879), does not expect us to accept the prosecutor’s evaluation of his own behavior; but unless one takes the extreme view that all political or public activity is actuated by the basest of motives, there seems no reason to doubt that *some* such prosecutors prosecuted those whom they believed to be guilty, and for public-spirited motives. (Aristophanes’ final ascription of motive, “It would be a sheep’s life if I don’t have any amusement,” is, of course, character assassination again.) But to what extent are Dicaeus’ complaints directed against scoundrelly false accusers in particular? He says in effect (909), “How can you be *chrestos*<sup>18</sup> if you do what ‘is none of your concern,’ ‘does not befit you,’ *soi prosekon meden?* (*Apechthanei*, “you bring hatred upon yourself,” may be a mild *para prosdokian* for “you act in this manner.”) Now the fact that it “is none of his concern,” “does not befit him,” does not mean that the Sycophant is acting in an unjust manner, merely in a manner that Dicaeus and those for whom he speaks find *inappropriate*. The Sycophant reasonably asks whether it is “inappropriate” to benefit one’s city; and Dicaeus replies, not “You are making false accusations from base motives,” but “Is *polupragmonein* benefiting?” Once again, the implication is simply that the Sycophant is meddling in matters that do not concern him; and Dicaeus’ reply to his claim that he is helping the laws is similar: are there no dicasts to do that? But dicasts are not prosecutors: “the *boulomenos*” prosecutes, as the Sycophant naturally points out; and all that Dicaeus can say is that the Sycophant is a “bad” (*poneros*) champion of the city. He does not say or imply that the Sycophant is making false accusations for base motives here either, since *poneros* has strong social overtones and also implications of “miserable specimen;” the Sycophant is simply a wretched champion.

All of Dicaeus’ complaints are equally relevant to the situation of a prosecutor actuated by the highest motives, provided that one believes that “the *boulomenos*” should not meddle with accusations at all, since it does not befit him, since the matter does not concern him. (As we shall see, it is difficult to determine whether the complaint is against “the *boulomenos*” in general or “the *boulomenos*” of a certain social status and certain political sympathies: it is evident that those attacked by Aristophanes have that status and those sympathies, however, and it is possible, for reasons discussed below, that an *agathos* would in general shun the role of “the *boulomenos*” accuser.) Indeed, not only prosecutions may be in question:

---

<sup>18</sup> “Good,” virtually a synonym for *agathos*. By being a “sycophant,” one would fall far short of the behavior desiderated by and from *agathoi*; and, of course, “sycophants” were not of the necessary social class, either.

the first two lines quoted (907ff.), which depict the Sycophant as taking care of the city's business, may allude to a type of person who made a living—or is alleged by Aristophanes to have made his living—by public service and political activity in a wider sense.

But who is being attacked? Dicaeus and Aristophanes, and the Old Oligarch, contrive to give the impression that such *polupragmones* and “sycophants” were drawn exclusively from the poorer citizens of Athens, and that the other members of the *demos* disapproved so much of their activities that they would have tolerated their being “comedized” by the comic poets. However, Cleon, for example, undoubtedly falls into this category (and the portrait of the Sycophant in the *Plutus* suggests that a merchant might be a “sycophant”); and Cleon seems to have been no journeyman tanner, but the prosperous owner of a tannery. When such figures as these are regarded as “jumped-up members of the *demos*,” the prejudices of our sources become clearer; and it also becomes less likely that the *demos* as a whole disapproved of the activities of men whom they presumably regarded as their champions against injustice. When Aristophanes portrayed the Landlady in the *Frogs* shouting (569), “Go and fetch me Cleon the *prostates* (champion, protector),” he could doubtless rely on an unfriendly laugh from some of the audience; but he incidentally testifies to the fact that appeal could be made to a Cleon or a Hyperbolus to right injustices on behalf of those less able to defend themselves. Such men must have been prominent citizens and by no means poor—indeed, a Cleon is likely to have been more prosperous than some *agathoi*<sup>19</sup>—but they were not *agathoi* in the eyes of the traditional *agathoi*, particularly in the context of active politics and public life. Accordingly, though some “sycophants” and *polupragmones* may have been poor, and some may have been dishonest, we need not allow our *agathoi* sources to persuade us that all were, since anyone who, while not an *agathos*, presumed to take part in public life or make accusations as “the *boulomenos*” in the courts would have been stigmatized as “sycophant” and *polupragmon*, whether or no he in fact relied on such activities for his livelihood. I shall return to this point in section 5.

---

<sup>19</sup> For a similar situation in a different city at a different time, cf. Theognis, e.g., 57ff., 183ff., 315ff., 865ff. See also *M&R* and *MV*, indexes s.vv. “Theognis” and “Cleon.”

#### 4. “Polupragmosune” in Foreign Policy

At this point we may turn to Athens’ foreign policy. Ehrenberg shows definitively that *polupragmosune* was used of the democratic, active foreign policy pursued by Pericles and his successors;<sup>20</sup> and, since it is a pejorative term, it was evidently used by the opponents of that policy, at home and abroad. Here, too, I wish to inquire into the implications of using this particular term to decry it.

Two well-known passages are evidently relevant. In Euripides’ *Supplikes*, Theseus, king of Athens, is proposing to enter Theban territory in order to assist the Argives to recover their dead, killed in battle by the Thebans, although the Thebans are unwilling to give up the bodies. The Theban herald asks Theseus (574) “Did your father beget you then to be a match for everyone?” and the following dialogue ensues (575-77):

Theseus: For all who are insolent (*hubristai*), at least; but what is good (*chresta*) we do not punish.

Theban Herald: Meddling (*prassein poll'*) was always your approach—and also that of your city.

Theseus: And so, suffering much toil (*ponousa poll'*) she enjoys much prosperity (*poll' eudaimonei*).

Theseus proclaims that he and the Athenians are ready for conflict with all who show *hubris*. The herald terms such behavior *polla prattein*, a pejorative term, which Theseus pointedly replaces with *polla ponein*, “to undergo much toil” (on behalf of others, in the context), and maintains that Athens has gained her great *eudaimonia*, prosperity and well-being, by so doing. He evidently regards the behavior as admirable, even if he rejects the characterizing phrases; and, as is well known, the Athenian ambassador at Camarina is portrayed as making a very similar speech. *Prima facie*, it is true, he uses language differently, since he is willing to term Athens’ foreign policy *polupragmosune*; but he seems to be ironically adopting the expected language of his opponents.<sup>21</sup> Having used *polupragmosune* of Athenian behavior, the ambassador bids the Camarinans to take advantage of it, so far as it benefits them to do so, and claims that the majority of Greeks, far from being harmed by Athenian *polupragmosune*, are actually helped by it (Thucydides. 6.87.4):

For in every place, even where we have no presence, all men, both those who believe they are going to be wronged as well as those who

---

<sup>20</sup> *Passim*.

<sup>21</sup> But see shortly below.

are plotting to do wrong, have firm expectation, in the one case that they will receive aid from us in return, and in the other that if we do arrive, they run the risk of having reason to fear. Therefore, both are under constraint, the latter to exercise prudence (*sophronein*), albeit unwillingly, and the former to be saved without effort on their part (*apragmanos soizesthai*).

Let smaller cities lead a life of *apragmosune* and rely on the *polupragmosune* of the Athenians to defend them against would-be aggressors, who will be compelled to *sophronein* against their will (see #7).

Two questions suggest themselves: who is likely to decry such behavior as *polupragmosune*, and who is likely to accept such an offer of protection? One point should be noted: the situations of the Argive suppliants and of the citizens of Camarina are not strictly comparable. The Argives are in distress and, in the posture of suppliants, beseech the help of Theseus and the Athenians; the Camarinans—even though they are not on good terms with the Syracusans either—and the Sicilians in general suspect that Athens is bent on conquering them and incorporating them into her empire. It is the Theban herald who holds that Theseus' action is *polla pratein*; in the eyes of the Argives, it is undoubtedly *polla ponein*, and a manifestation of that *arete* for which heroes such as Heracles and Theseus were renowned. On the other hand, all the Sicilians seem to regard Athens' action as *polupragmosune*—a situation possibly acknowledged by the Athenian ambassador's use of the word himself (see below).

To understand these evaluations better, we must set them in a wider context. Hermocrates, endeavoring to turn the Camarinans against the Athenians, says (Thucydides. 6.80.5): “Consider then and choose now either immediate slavery without hazard or, having won victory in company with us, choose not to accept masters in a manner which is *aischron*, shameful. . . .”<sup>\*</sup> The choice is between immediate slavery without hazard or the chance of a victory through which the Camarinans would avoid having the Athenians as *despotai*, masters in the sense in which slaves have masters—a situation that would, of course, be *aischron*, since it is *aischron* to be a slave and have a master. We may recall Plato's words in the *Politicus* 307e: those who “keep themselves to themselves and indulge in *ta hautou pratein*” become unwarlike and pass from

---

\* Adkins translation.

freedom to slavery. Hermocrates threatens the Camarinans with just such a fate if they accept the Athenians’ invitation to a life of *apragmosune*.

Athens’ intentions are less veiled in the Melian Dialogue. The Athenians, to induce the Melians to surrender without a fight, say (Thucydides. 5.91.2): “We shall demonstrate that this speech of ours will be made with a view to benefiting our own empire and to ensuring the safety of your *polis*. We wish to rule over you without effort, and we wish you to be saved, which will be useful to both of us.”\* Now it is true that the Melians had no chance of defeating the might of Athens: in a hard world, capitulation offered them the only chance of continuing to exist. Yet they are not convinced; and a later exchange between themselves and the Athenians reveals the context of values that renders it impossible for them to be convinced. The Melians (5.100) say that if the Athenians are prepared to risk so much in order to avoid losing their empire, and if their subjects—those who are already “slaves” (*douleuontes*)—are prepared to run great risks in order to be free, “then it would be a sign of great *kakotes* and cowardice on the part of us who are still free (*eleutheroi*) not to make every effort to avoid enslavement.”\* The Athenians reply that the Melians will not act thus if they take a prudent view of the situation (*sophronos*): “For the contest is not on equal terms, concerned with *andragathia* and the avoidance of *aischune*; you should take counsel rather for your safety, and avoid conflict with those who are much stronger, [= more *agathoi*], than you are.”

The Melians are evaluating their actions in terms of the traditional standard of *arete*, whereby death was preferable to defeat and living *aischros*. The Athenians argue that such values are for those who are contending on equal terms. Those who are not should bethink themselves, not of *andragathia*, the quality of *agathoi andres*, who find it *aischron* to be defeated, but rather of safety, and avoid contending with those who are much stronger than themselves. Now these are values in terms of which a *kakos* member of a city may well have conducted his life, avoiding conflict with *agathoi* citizens: after all, he had no *arete* and they had, he was an inferior specimen while they were superior specimens. But when a *polis* such as Melos was asked to evaluate its relationships with other *poleis* in this manner, the situation was far more difficult: could the inhabitants of any *polis* admit that their *polis* was *kake*? If this was unthinkable—and certainly the Melians found it so—then its *arete* must be manifested by its being free and subject to the domination of no other

---

\* Adkins translation.

\* Adkins translation



*polis*, and the citizens must be prepared to die in this cause. Furthermore, any degree of control—even what others at other times and in other places might have regarded merely as the co-operation of a weaker partner with a stronger—might be represented as *douleia*: those Melians who survived were enslaved in the literal sense, but Athens' subjects were far from being slaves, though their liberties were restricted in a number of ways which irked them.

It is not my purpose to discuss the rights and wrongs of the Athenian Empire, merely the manner in which it was regarded at the time and the role played in its evaluation by the idea of *polupragmosune*. We have seen that the Camarinans are suspicious of the “safety with *apragmosune*” offered to them by the Athenians, a course of action differently evaluated by Hermocrates as “immediate slavery (*douleia*) without hazard;” and that Plato in the *Politicus* also holds that *ta hautou prattein* in an “ordinary language” sense, if carried to excess, leads to slavery; while the situation of the Melians indicates the ever-present dangers for the small *polis*. But do those who condemn *polupragmosune* commend *apragmosune*, and *vice versa*? And why do activities that are condemned as *polupragmosune* or *polla prattein* so closely resemble the activities of traditional *arete* that Theseus' defending and assisting of suppliants, traditionally a mark of *arete*, can be decried as *polla prattein*? If we recall both the characteristics of traditional *arete* and the political situation of the later fifth century, the answer becomes clearer.

*Arete*, from Homer onward, had denoted and most highly commended those activities that were held to contribute most to the continued existence of the unit—*oikos* or *polis*, but even in fifth-century Athens *oikos* rather more than *polis*<sup>22</sup>—with which the *agathos* was most closely linked; and it had commended “competitive” excellences, since these were held to contribute most. Such competitive excellences are conducive to civic strife, and to strife between *poleis*. (This had been realized, at least by some, in the later fifth century.)<sup>23</sup> However, when equals are contending with each other, some kind of equilibrium will be maintained—whether between *oikoi*, political groups within the *polis*, or *poleis*—by the competitive *arete* of the contenders, which is valued for this reason. Each contender has a sphere of influence, *oikos* or *polis*, within which he will brook no interference, since it is the mark of *arete* not to be subject to the behests of others. But suppose one of the contenders, whether individual, group in the *polis*, or *polis*, acquires

---

<sup>22</sup> *M&R*, pp. 226ff.; *MV*, pp. 126ff.

<sup>23</sup> *M&R*, pp. 172ff.; *MV*, pp. 112ff.

greater power and resources than the others. He will be able to exercise his power and resources to meddle in the affairs of others without effective opposition. Even if such meddling causes no material damage, the person (or group) affected by it, if he supposes himself to possess *arete*, will resent it and regard it as placing him in a subordinate position, as rendering him less free (*eleutheros*); and he is likely to treat *any* encroachment on freedom as slavery (*douleia*). Free Greeks were constantly surrounded by slaves, were aware that a military disaster might render them slaves, and were very sensitive to the slightest restriction upon their freedom of action. We may find their attitude difficult to understand; but the emotional response of the Greek *agathos* to the idea of “being beholden to anyone” is very well attested,<sup>24</sup> and Greek cities respond similarly.

The nature of *polupragmosune* and its relationship to traditional *arete* now become clear. Anyone (or any group or *polis*) who supposed himself to possess *arete* would be likely to use *polla prattein* or *polupragmosune* to censure the activities of anyone else (or any other group or *polis*) who was acting outside his own sphere of influence in such a way as to cross the boundaries of the censorer’s sphere of influence (*oikos*, group, or *polis*). The censorer is more likely to use the term if he is, for whatever reason, unable to prevent the interference; and, as I shall argue, in domestic politics he has an additional motive for using the term if the interferer has inferior social status. It seems probable also that the expression is applicable more to meddling than to actual attempts at conquest: Theseus, for example, is not attempting to conquer Thebes, but to rescue the dead Argives from the Thebans; and the usage in domestic politics suggests a similar “flavor.” The term is significantly absent from the Melian Dialogue. If I am right about the connotations, then the Athenian ambassador’s use of *polupragmosune* (Thucydides. 6.87) may not be merely irony, but the substitution of a weaker word, “meddling,” in reply to Hermocrates’ talk of aggression and slavery.

There is now no difficulty in explaining why *arete* commends, and *polupragmosune* decries, a very similar set of activities: for the agent, and for those who—never having possessed *arete*, or having lost it in a disaster—welcome his activities, the behavior is *arete*, precisely because they welcome and value it; for those whose *arete* and sphere of influence are infringed by the behavior, and who consequently resent it, it is *polupragmosune*. To decry *polupragmosune* is not necessarily to commend *apragmosune*, nor is to decry *apragmosune* to commend

---

<sup>24</sup> *M&R*, index s.v. “Independence,” *MV*, index s.v. “Autarkeia.”

*polupragmosune*; we have rather an Aristotelian triad, a virtue between two vices, *polupragmosune*—*arete*—*apragmosune*. No one will decry any type of activity by terming it *arete*, for *arete* is a word of powerful commendation. Of course, how much active and vigorous behavior constitutes *arete*, and how much would constitute *polupragmosune*, is a matter of personal judgement and depends on the standpoint of the person making the judgement. (Only *agathoi* are in their own eyes entitled to manifest *arete*, of course, so that all such behavior by a *kakos* will be termed *polupragmosune* by them.)

However, we have yet to discuss why the *agathoi* of Athens should have held Athens' active foreign policy to be *polupragmosune*. Insofar as the *demos* of Athens was assisting the *demos* of other cities of the empire against their *agathoi*, the attitude might be explained by the fellow-feeling of one *agathos* for another. This explanation accounts for the disapproval, but not for the choice of word: why should the policy be decried as *polupragmosune* in particular, and why should the *agathoi*, the possessors of *arete*, oppose the active foreign policy that itself seems to be a manifestation of traditional *arete*? The most likely reason, apart from the fellow-feeling already mentioned, is that such behavior on the part of the *demos* and its leaders (who might themselves be *agathoi*: no one could have denied that Pericles was an *agathos*) upsets the *status quo*, and the traditional *arete* of the hoplite and cavalry classes derived the high esteem that it enjoyed from the circumstances of the city-state of small or moderate size. The involvement of large numbers of the *demos* in the navy, which was demanded by Athens' foreign policy, increased their contribution to the well-being of Athens. The Old Oligarch, as has often been pointed out, realizes this;<sup>25</sup> and, though he is not willing to term the sailors *agathoi*, and there were indeed powerful reasons why they were not termed *agathoi*,<sup>26</sup> the *agathos* must have felt that the claims on his *arete* were being infringed—it was he, not the *demos*, who should perform such services for the city,<sup>27</sup> since doing so was in the last resort the justification for his being termed *agathos*—and he could do nothing to prevent the infringement. This is *polupragmosune*; for *polupragmosune* is exerting oneself in such a way as to impinge upon the sphere of influence and *arete* of those who are reluctant to allow one to do so but find difficulty, or fear they may find difficulty, in preventing it. This attitude is discernable in

---

<sup>25</sup> Xenophon [*Constitution of the Athenians*], 1.2.

<sup>26</sup> *M&R*, pp. 204ff.; *MV*, pp. 119ff.

<sup>27</sup> I am referring to the post-Cimonian period throughout. Before 450 the domestic implications of an active foreign policy based on the fleet may not have been apparent.

Plato’s *Laws*, a work in which prejudice is not infrequently given free rein. Plato maintains that seaborne soldiers are reluctant to stand their ground rather than retreat to their ships, and adds (707a4ff.): “Again, cities that owe their power to their fleets do not give credit to the most *kalon* part of their armed forces when a naval victory is won; for the battle is won by the efforts of steersmen, boatswains, rowers, and all kinds of rather inferior people (*ou panu spoudaion anthropon*), so that one could not give credit ‘correctly’ to each group. And how could one have a ‘correctly’ run state when this cannot be done?”\* When a naval battle is won, the credit goes to “rather inferior people,” not to the “best people”, and how could a state be “correct” if the wrong people get credit (*time*), an allocation that in Plato’s eyes is evidently “incorrect,” although they have earned it by their efforts? Again in the *Republic*, though Plato can advance his general principle of “one man, one job” as a justification for sharply distinguishing between the craftsman class and the warrior class (*Republic* 374bff.), his *agathoi* readers would have had powerful political and social reasons for finding the arrangement attractive; and Plato’s motives for enunciating this general principle are certainly in large part political.

The *agathoi* of Athens, then, had a powerful motive for regarding Athens’ foreign policy as *polupragmosune* and (save for those who, like Pericles, made that policy) for turning their backs on it. I shall discuss in section 6 the kind of activities to which they turned,<sup>28</sup> and the manner in which they evaluated them. First, however, I shall consider further aspects of *polupragmosune* in domestic politics and in the courts of law. There is no reason to suppose that such a neat distinction between spheres of activity existed in the minds of those who considered the doings of democratic politicians to be *polupragmosune*, for they probably condemned all such activities together; but we may discuss different areas of activity separately for the sake of clarity of exposition.

## 5. More about “Polupragmosune” in Domestic Politics and in the Law Courts

As we have seen (section 3), the Sycophant in Aristophanes’ *Plutus* gives an admirable “civic” justification for his behavior; but Dicaeus treats it as *polupragmoein*, whether or not the motives that the Sycophant adduces are genuine (a question to which indeed Dicaeus pays no attention), despite the fact that Solon had given the right of prosecution to “the *boulomenos*.”

---

\* Adkins translation.

<sup>28</sup> For the manner in which some turned to philosophy, see Ehrenberg, 54.

Such a prosecution evidently constitutes *polupragmonein* whether or not the prosecutor is actuated by honorable motives, and whether or not the accused is guilty. The reason is, I suggest, twofold: first, the *agathos*—and Aristophanes writes as an *agathos*, while *agathoi* were more likely to be involved in important cases and in many ways offered more tempting targets—feels himself attacked and insecure, and is unable to prevent it; and second, such accusations, in the political situation of late fifth-century and early fourth-century Athens, are likely to be made by those whom he regards as his social inferiors. I have already demonstrated (section 2) that this “flavor” is present in *polupragmonein* when it is used of activities within a household or city, and also that, despite the insinuations of Aristophanes and the Old Oligarch, by no means all of such social inferiors were penniless or politically obscure. We may also infer that “the *boulomenos*” accusers are for the most part from the city rather than from rural Attica. The *Plutus* passage suggests as much, and Trygaeus introduces himself (*Peace* 190f.) as “Trygaeus . . . a skilled vine-dresser, no sycophant and no lover of *pragmata*.” An honest countryman would not indulge in such accusations. Nor does he like *pragmata*, a phrase that is now difficult to interpret: it might mean that he has no relish for taking a prominent part in assembly politics (as opposed to merely casting his vote); for the Sycophant claims to busy himself with “the *pragmata* of the city,” and we need not restrict the reference of this phrase to the courts of law.

Who, then are the accused? At *Wasps* 1040-41 the Chorus attacks on Aristophanes’ behalf the scoundrels who “lying in the beds of the *apragmosin* among you, they glued together against them prosecutorial affidavits, summonses, and testimonies.” It was against *apragmones* that they brought all the paraphernalia of the law. Again, in the *Knights*, the Paphlagonian, complaining that he has been attacked, is thus abused by the Chorus (258 ff.):

And indeed justly, since you appropriate public funds before you’re even in office, and you press and squeeze like figs the magistrates being examined, looking to see which of them is raw—either ripe or unripe; and if you perceive that any of them is *apragmon* and unworthy [you bring them into court]; moreover, you look to see which of the citizens is as simple as a lamb, rich, not base (*poneros*), and afraid of *ta pragmata*.

Here the accused are selected as being not only *apragmones*, but rich, not “bad,” and afraid of *pragmata*, i.e., of appearing in court and possibly in the hurly-burly of politics.

Aristophanes’ picture is clearly drawn: harmless private citizens, rich and not *poneroi* (and therefore, by implication, surely *agathoi*), but inactive in politics, and guiltless of any crime, are being attacked in the courts by clever and unscrupulous townees, “just for the fun of it.” (In view of the emphasis sometimes laid on the mercenary motives of the “sycophant,” it is interesting that Aristophanes should adduce this willful motive for his actions (*Plutus* 922f.) and portray him as refusing to change his ways even if Dicaeus should give him “Plutus himself and Battus’ silphium.”<sup>29</sup> It is as if Aristophanes is, despite himself, constrained to admit that mercenary motives are not the most important, though in his eyes there must be *some* bad motive.) So, we are to believe that in Athens prosecutors who avail themselves of “the *boulomenos*” accusations never prosecute the guilty and always prosecute for unworthy motives; and we are to believe it despite the fact that in the *Plutus* passage, the most carefully worked-up portrait of such an accuser, the Sycophant, is attacked in terms as appropriate to one who prosecutes a guilty man for public-spirited motives as to one who prosecutes the innocent for base or frivolous motives. It strains credulity.

It seems, in fact, that all accusations by “the *boulomenos*” constitute “sycophancy” and *polupragmosune*, and also that, if the class of people portrayed attempts lead to an active life in politics, the same labels are applied. Why? Yet again we must remember that all Greek writers are *agathoi*; that a requirement of *arete* is that one should be able to maintain the prosperity and well-being of one’s own *oikos* and assist one’s friends and harm one’s enemies without suffering any harm at the enemies’ hands;<sup>30</sup> and that the enemies are themselves *agathoi* for the most part, or at all events that personal enmity is the cause of the attack. Such behavior was accepted by the Athenians as praiseworthy: we may recall the jealous woman in Lysias’ first speech (section 1). To prosecute, not out of enmity at a personal or inter-*oikos* level, but out of public-spiritedness or a desire for reward, whether the accusation was false or true, was to go outside the traditional *oikos*-based values of society, to “do many things” (i.e., more or different things than traditional values required); and it was to threaten the interests and *arete* of the *agathoi* in a manner that they could not readily prevent, since “the *boulomenos*” certainly had the right to prosecute under the law of Solon. The *agathoi* had adequate means of defending themselves, since the wealthy had an advantage in the

---

<sup>29</sup> Plutus was the god of wealth, and silphium (*ferula tingitana*) was a very valuable crop, the produce of Cyrene.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Meno’s definition (Plato, *Meno* 71e 2 ff.), discussed in *M&R*, pp. 229ff., and *MV*, pp. 131ff.

democratic courts.<sup>31</sup> But no one likes being taken to court, and no one is likely to admit that the accusation is true; so that, although any accusation by “the *boulomenos*” would be treated as “sycophancy” and *polupragmosune*, an aura of fraudulence hangs about such imputations in the works of the *agathoi* writers who are our sources.

The fact that, as a result of political alignments and the values discussed above, “the *boulomenos*” accuser was likely not to be a traditional *agathos*, while the accused were traditional *agathoi*, introduces the flavor of “getting above oneself” which I have already discussed. As I have shown, there is no reason to picture such accusers as ragged and poverty-stricken. Many may have been wealthy men, with money derived from commerce, like Cleon the tannery owner, whom our *agathoi* sources try so hard to present as a journeyman tanner: for such men to attempt a political career was to invite the scorn of the political families, even though they had the wealth and leisure, and in some cases the aptitude, to do so. Whether in the courts or the assembly, their behavior was in part *polupragmosune* because it went beyond their appointed status in life—a status appointed by the *agathoi*.

A Cleon or a Hyperbolus was not to be deterred by such evaluations; but they were evidently intended to deter, and are likely to have deterred, less determined individuals who were not *agathoi* in terms of the traditional evaluations. (Though, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>32</sup> the sophists offered a new political *arete* to all who could afford to pay, in the form of the political skills that they claimed to teach, it is most unlikely that the traditional *agathoi* would have conceded that the products of this education were, in fact, *agathoi*, unless they had the traditional qualifications as well.)

## 6. “Agathos” and “Apragmon”?

Our *agathoi* sources are unlikely to lament the lot of any *non-agathos* who was deterred from embarking on a political career; but what of the *agathos* who was *apragmon*? Politically inactive *agathoi*—men who were *agathoi* in terms of birth, possessions, and courage exerted in hoplite fighting in defense of the city—must have existed since, though even Athens was not very large by today’s standards, the number of *agathoi* was too great to permit every *agathos* to be an active politician. The “old political families” constitute a subgroup of the *agathoi*. It would, however, have been easier

---

<sup>31</sup> *M&R*, pp. 201ff.; *MV*, pp. 119ff.

<sup>32</sup> *M&R*, pp. 226ff., 236ff.; *MV*, p. 112.

for an inactive *agathos* to enter active politics than for a Cleon to do so. The method approved by those who were” *kaloi kagathoi* in respect of politics” was that the young aspirant should come to them and learn (Plato, [Theages] 126d): they naturally disapproved of the sophists as “foreigners” and rival experts.

I have used “politically active” to mean more than merely casting one’s vote in assembly, or serving on the *boule* when required to do so: it seems to me that an *agathos* who did no more than this would have been regarded as *apragmon*. However, *agathoi* who opposed the policies of the *demos* and its leaders may have been deterred from even attending the assembly, since they must have been permanently in a minority. And when it became apparent during the Peloponnesian War that the army was to play a smaller part than the fleet,<sup>33</sup> many of the *agathoi* may have lapsed into complete political *apragmosune* (or in extreme cases into secret plotting, which could be represented as mere *apragmosune* by a well-disposed witness). Others turned to philosophy, as did Plato later when he found the politics of Athens distasteful; but this type of *apragmosune* lies beyond the scope of the present article.<sup>34</sup> Such *agathoi* would not cease to regard themselves as *agathoi*: *arete* denotes and commends also the attributes of a social class, and they continued to be the “gentlemen” of Athens. The Old Oligarch, who freely acknowledges the importance of the fleet,<sup>35</sup> does not allow this acknowledgment to affect in any way his view of the identity of Athens’ *agathoi* and *kakoi*. Plato, of course, however *apragmon* himself in Athenian politics, stigmatizes such *apragmosune*, as we have seen (*Politicus* 307e), as leading to “slavery”: active *arete* is expected of the *agathos*.

## 7. Traditional Constraints

We have seen that the idea of *polupragmosune* in domestic politics and public life served to criticize and, it was hoped, to constrain, those who sought to go beyond the bounds deemed appropriate by the *agathoi*: democratic Athens of the later fifth century was still very stratified, extreme democratic institutions existing together not only with great inequalities of wealth but also with a system of values whose implications were quite undemocratic.<sup>36</sup> In earlier Greece there existed ideas that served

---

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Thucydides. 2.21.22; cf. 2.23 and 213.

<sup>34</sup> See Ehrenberg, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Xenophon [Constitution of the Athenians] 1. 2; *M&R*, p. 215(6).

<sup>36</sup> *M&R*, pp. 195ff.; *MV*, pp. 119ff., 139ff.



to constrain the aspirations of *kakoi*. I have discussed these elsewhere,<sup>37</sup> and will here cite only so much evidence as will serve to indicate the degree of continuity and difference as one passes from the earlier period to the later fifth century. I shall discuss *moira*, *kosmos*, *hubris*, and *sophrosune*.

In earlier Greece, *moira* was an important socio-religious concept:<sup>38</sup> one's *moira* was originally that share in goods and possessions, arising from one's birth into a particular position in society, that endowed one with a particular status and set of relationships with the other members of society. Its importance may be inferred from the fact that to speak or act "in accordance with one's *moira*" or "not in accordance with one's *moira*" is to act "rightly" or "wrongly." The implications of "rightly" and "wrongly" require further discussion.

When Mentor in *Odyssey* 2 rebukes the people of Ithaca for not driving out the suitors, Leiocritus in return makes a long speech, the general tenor of which is that what Mentor has suggested is too difficult. He adds (246ff.) that, even if Odysseus himself should return and should wish to drive out the proud suitors from his hall, he would not succeed, but would meet with an unseemly end if he were to fight with a greater number of men: Mentor has not spoken in accordance with *moira*. Now we should not suppose that Mentor had given morally wrong advice in urging the people of Ithaca to drive out the suitors. Nor, though Homeric values differ in many ways from ours, would Homer suppose this: Homer disapproves of the suitors' behavior; for there is a proper way to go wooing, and the suitors have not taken it. Accordingly, "you have not spoken in accordance with *moira*" cannot mean "you have not spoken in accordance with what is morally right" here.

*Kosmos* had a similar role to play. Thersites, in *Iliad* 2.212 ff., is said to "strive with the kings in a manner not in accordance with *kosmos* (*ou kata kosmon*)," and he is said to "know" many things of this nature. His utterances and actions are not in accordance with *kosmos*; but there is no suggestion that what he says is, in general, false, and his one recorded speech (*Il.*2.225 ff.) is not demonstrably untrue. Yet it is not in accordance with *kosmos*; and it is undeniably inconvenient for the kings, the *agathoi*.

I have discussed the concepts of truth, *moira*, and *kosmos* in Homer elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> and merely record here such of my findings as are relevant to

---

<sup>37</sup> *MV*, pp. 65ff.

<sup>38</sup> *M&R*, pp. 17ff; *MV*, pp. 19ff., 88ff.; Adkins, "Homeric Gods and the Values of Homeric Society," *JHS* 92 (1973): 1ff.

<sup>39</sup> Adkins, "Truth, *Kosmos*, and *Arete* in the Homeric Poems," *CQ* 22 (1972): 5ff., and the references in n. 38. [Note that this essay is Chapter 5 in this volume.]

the present question. In a competitive society, a shame- and results-culture, the utmost care is necessary to avoid giving offense even by accident, if any co-operation between *agathoi* is to be possible at all, and their inferiors are to avoid drawing down the wrath of the *agathoi* upon their heads. Words that hurt, which give offense, will be regarded in the same way by the recipient, whatever may have been the speaker’s intentions; and where *arete* is, or may be, affected, *agathoi* are likely to evaluate what is said in terms of its grace, charm, and pleasantness—or at least the absence of offensiveness—rather than its truth. We may add that behavior, too, will be evaluated in similar terms by *agathoi*. *Kosmos*, whose range spans what is orderly and what is ornamental, and *moira*, denoting one’s “due share” in society, are words well suited to evaluate speech and behavior in this manner. What speech is or is not in accordance with *kosmos* or *moira* will be determined by the *agathoi*, whose values are accepted by all the characters in the Homeric poems: speech or behavior that the *agathoi* regard as being unbeautiful, unpleasing, inappropriate, will be stigmatized as not in accordance with *kosmos*; and where such speech infringes the status of the *agathos* and slights his *arete*, its being not in accordance with *kosmos* will override the question of its truth. An *agathos* will not, of course, be deterred from a speech or course of action demanded by his *arete* by the reflection that it is not in accordance with *kosmos*, but he will expect his inferiors to behave in accordance with *kosmos* in their relationships with him, and if they prudently desire to avoid trouble, they will behave in accordance with *kosmos*.

*Hubris* too had its part to play among the traditional social and political constraints.<sup>40</sup> In the sixth century Solon (fragment 6, West) wrote:

In this way the *demos* would best follow their leaders’ rule, neither being given too free a rein nor subjected to excessive force (*mete biazomenos*) for surfeit (*koros*) breeds *hubris*, whenever great prosperity (*olbos*) attends men whose minds are not firm and sound.

Surfeit breeds *hubris* when much prosperity comes to those whose state of mind is not appropriate. We are likely to interpret *hubris* in a religious sense if we do not examine the context, and the fact that *hubris* is used in religious contexts is important; for it is one word throughout its usages, and the religious connotation, the feeling that the gods disapprove *hubris*, *per se*, strengthens its power as a constraint in other contexts. But if we look at the first two lines of the quatrain, we must surely conclude that the *hubris* would be manifested by the *demos* if it did not properly follow its

---

<sup>40</sup> *MV*, pp. 84ff., 88ff.

leaders, as it might fail to do were it given an excess of freedom and well-being. (Presumably there was a following couplet that amplified *mete biazomenos*: (Solon is a moderate, by the standards of his day.))

In the fifth century, similar usages of *hubris* may be found. In Sophocles' *Antigone* Creon says of Antigone (477-83):

I know that spirited horses have been broken in with a small bit; for there's no room for pride when one is slave to those about one. The girl knew well how to *hubrizein* when she transgressed established laws; but now that she's done it, this is a second *hubris*, to exult in all this and, having done it, to laugh.

Creon holds that it is *hubris* for Antigone to transgress the established laws (by which he really means his own edict that Polyneices not be buried); and also, *hubris* to exult in her action and laugh. This judgement is linked to his earlier judgement that it does not befit anyone who is the slave of those about him—as Antigone is his slave, in his eyes—to “think big.” Similarly, Clytemnestra in Sophocles' *Electra* (612 ff.) regards it as *hubris* for Electra to oppose her mother, whatever the crimes the mother may have committed. In both cases *hubris* is shown by “getting above oneself” in a manner offensive to those in power.

The foregoing examples concern family relationships. An overtly political example occurs in Pindar's *Pythian* 4, where Demophilus is praised as a youth wise beyond his years, who has learned to hate *hubris*, for he does not strive against the *agathoi*: “he has learned to hate the *hubrizonta*, for he does not strive against the *agathoi*” (285-86). Presumably he eschews *hubris* himself as well as hating it in others. Demophilus must have been a man of considerable means and social position (he commissioned the Fourth Pythian, the longest and most splendid of Pindar's *Odes*), though he had been placed at a disadvantage by being exiled. But the sentiment is general, and would serve to convict of *hubris* any social inferior who endeavored to assert his rights against an *agathos*. In a similar manner the Egyptians are held to be displaying *hubris* toward the Persians by revolting from them (Herodotus 7.5).

Such concepts as *kosmos*, *moira*, and *hubris*, then, served as social and political constraints in earlier Greece. They helped to preserve the *status quo*; and the fact that *hubris* and *moira* are also religious terms endowed these social and political restraints with religious authority. Now it is undeniable that Athens in the later fifth-century had become both more democratic, at least in institutions, and more secular, at least at the levels of society to which our document gives us access. It is, I hope, also clear that, even if bereft of their religious sanction and expressed in a different

terminology, the traditional social and political constraints had not vanished from Greek life.

Here it is relevant to reintroduce the idea of *sophrosune*. *Sophrosune* is used freely both in the earlier and the later periods under discussion, and helps to indicate the continuity of presuppositions and attitudes, for it is opposed in usage both to *hubris* and to *polupragmosune*. *Sophrosune* has a wide range of usage,<sup>41</sup> but I am here concerned only with that aspect of it that is displayed by submitting to another person who is superior in strength, power, influence, or status.

In Sophocles’ *Ajax*, much is made by Agamemnon and Menelaus of the inferior status of Teucer, as we have already seen. At 1258 ff., Agamemnon thus addresses Teucer:

You boldly *hubrizeis* and speak very freely. Will you not show *sophrosune*? Realizing who you are by birth, will you not bring another man here, a free man—someone who will speak to us on your behalf instead of you?

It is a mark of *hubris* for Teucer to speak freely. He would display *sophrosune* by holding his tongue and by bringing someone of higher status to speak on his behalf. The theme occurs several times in the play. Ajax tells Tecmessa (587) not to ask questions, but rather to *sophronein*: women were expected to defer at all times. In more general terms, Menelaus says (1075ff.) that an army would not be led *sophronos* if the men were not afraid and respectful. In *Philoctetes* 1259f., Neoptolemus commends Odysseus’ *sophrosune* when Odysseus declines to fight with him—in acknowledgment, he claims, that Neoptolemus is a better fighter. Menelaus’ words may remind us of the song of the Furies in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (517ff.), where they proclaim that it is profitable to *sophronein* with groaning, yielding to the fear inspired by more powerful beings. The fear of divine powers is less in evidence in the later fifth century; but *sophrosune* continues to have as part of its implications the idea of submitting to one who has more strength, power, influence, or status. Like behaving “in accordance with *moira* or *kosmos*,” *sophronein* requires that one shall “know one’s place.”

This discussion throws more light on the situation of the Melians. I have already said that *arete* demands that they should not surrender to the

---

<sup>41</sup> For copious quantities of material see Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), *passim*; cf. Helen North and Giles Laurén, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: Sophron Editor, 2019).

Athenians, for surrender would show them to be *kakoi*.<sup>42</sup> It now becomes apparent that a characteristic attitude of superiors to inferiors is to demand *sophrosune* of them; and that such *sophrosune* is manifested by deference and submission. A *polis* that accepts the invitation of a larger *polis* to *sophrosune* has acknowledged its inferiority, its lack of *arete*; and any *polis* would be very reluctant to do so, for where *arete* pulls in one direction and *sophrosune* in the other, the pull of *arete* is much stronger. It is presumably for this reason that the Athenian ambassador at Camarina speaks of the aggressor whom the Athenians restrain as being compelled to *sophronein* against his will (*akon*), while the peaceful small city merely “is saved without effort on its part.” The avoidance of aggressive action by a peaceful city might well be characterized as *sophronein* in some contexts; but where the stronger and more *agathos* is trying to *persuade* the weaker, it might be injudicious to use the word of the weaker’s behavior.

Enough has, I hope, already been said to make it clear that, though the terminology has changed in part, the attitudes of the *agathoi* to the rest of society, their wish to keep their social inferiors in their place, and their use of language to achieve this goal, persist in the later fifth and earlier fourth centuries. I shall now try to render more precise such differences as exist.

There are very striking detailed resemblances in some passages: we can discover similar situations evaluated in both older and newer terminologies by the same author. According to Herodotus, as we have seen, the Egyptians displayed *hubris* by revolting, since they rose against their superiors and disobeyed their commands (7.5); but Herodotus also says (3.15) that Psammenitus was guilty of *polupragmosune* when *he* rose against the Persians. In Sophocles’ *Electra*, at 612ff., Clytemnestra treats Electra’s behavior as *hubris*; but at 678 she tells her to busy herself with her own affairs, *ta sautes prattein*. The context is somewhat different, but the “flavor” is evidently the same.

Nor are these mere coincidences. The general overall resemblance is undeniable. To take only one example, the reasons why Thersites should not speak in the assembly of the Achaeans, whether what he says is true or not, are essentially the same reasons why a “sycophant” should not accuse as “the *boulomenos*,” whether his accusations are true or not. The vocabulary changes, even in the earlier period (*kosmos* is a less important value term after Homer, and *eunomia* has its day<sup>43</sup>); but if one considers the apparent social changes that occurred between the period of

---

<sup>42</sup> See *M&R*, pp. 222ff., 241 (8); *MV*, pp. 136ff.

<sup>43</sup> *MV*, pp. 46ff., 56, 84ff.

composition of the Homeric poems and later fifth-century Athens, the degree of continuity of attitudes and presuppositions is remarkable.

There are, of course, significant differences. A Cleon in an earlier generation might have kept silence, lest his words and actions constitute *hubris* and draw down the wrath not only of his social superiors, but also of heaven. (The words and actions of the *agathos*, too, might have constituted *hubris* and attracted the disfavor of the gods, and such considerations acted as a check on the *agathos*. But the *moira* of the *agathos* was larger,<sup>44</sup> he had more space to maneuver, and he might well have only the reprisals of the gods to fear; whereas the social inferior had to reckon with the more immediate and certain response of his social superiors. I have, however, written at greater length on the *hubris* of the *agathos* elsewhere:<sup>45</sup> the subject matter of the present paper renders it more relevant to discuss the *hubris* of the *kakos*.) Any politician in an earlier period might have been deterred from pursuing so active a foreign policy, and even more from treating the inhabitants of another city as Athens threatened to treat the Mytileneans, and actually treated the Melians, lest that, too, be *hubris* and punished by heaven: at a time when Athens had high aspirations to power in the Aegean, Aeschylus makes the Chorus at *Agamemnon* 367ff. express anxieties that have relevance beyond the context of the tragedy; and Aeschylus reflects traditional attitudes here. But in the later fifth century such constraints upon foreign policy became less effective; and a politically emancipated “tanner” could not be deterred by socio-religious threats from playing a part in public life. The use of the term *hubris* as a constraint now virtually vanishes, presumably because those whom the *agathoi* most wished to constrain no longer held the necessary beliefs to be constrained by it. It is replaced, as we have seen, by terms such as *polupragmosune*, gibes of a social character without religious overtones. Such will not restrain a Cleon either; but nothing will—or need—restrain an emancipated and prosperous individual from taking part in the politics of the extreme democracy. The Homeric hero was at an advantage, since he could not only stigmatize Thersites’ utterances as “not in accordance with *kosmos*,” but also beat him about the ears if he would not sit down and be quiet. The Athenian *agathoi* could not do this under the democracy, though the Thirty Tyrants began by doing it for them: they could only utter their social gibes.

These gibes might have two effects, apart from relieving the feelings of the *agathos*. The more obvious effect is to restrain those who are less

---

<sup>44</sup> *M&R*, pp. 20ff.; *MV*, pp. 19ff., 50ff., 88ff.

<sup>45</sup> *MV*, index s.v. “Hubris.”

prosperous and self-confident than Cleon: many mute, inglorious Cleons may have made no attempt to enter public life, accepting the evaluation of the *agathoi* that they were unworthy, incapable, in short, *kakoi*. The less obvious effect is to induce at least a proportion of social inferiors to take Cleon, and other persons who were not *agathoi* but were nevertheless active in public life (including those stigmatized as “sycophants”), at the evaluation of the *agathoi*. Aristophanes, for example, may well have been able to rely not only on the laughter of *agathoi*, but on a deferential laugh from at least some other members of his audience, when he attacked “sycophants” and others who meddled with matters that did not properly concern them since they were *kakoi*. The Old Oligarch may not be altogether incorrect in his view of the situation (section 3 init.). If *polupragmosune* has this double effect, then the concept may well have been an even more useful tool for the *agathoi* than appears at first sight. It is, however, a tool of limited effectiveness, and its use in itself seems to indicate that very fact: as I have tried to show, the *agathos* terms as *polupragmosune* behavior that he both regards as presumptuous and also knows he cannot effectively prevent, in the hope possibly of restraining the most presumptuous to some extent, and the less presumptuous altogether. It is, however, a term of those who “know” themselves to be socially superior, and “know” that they have a right to be politically superior, but nevertheless find themselves at a serious disadvantage in the existing political situation.

## 8. Plato and “Polupragmosune”

It is now evident that *polupragmosune* is manifested in a *polis* by transgressing the bounds of the traditional system based on *moira*—the system that gave to each his share in society and politics, a larger share to the *agathos*, a smaller share to the *kakos*—and upsetting the *status quo*. We need not be surprised to find that *ta hautou prattei*, whether termed *dikaiosune* or *sophrosune*, seems to be prized by the *agathos*. He stands to gain by it, both because an absence of “meddling” will leave his share of status, position, and power larger than that of his social inferiors, and also because, when the *agathos ta hautou prattei* in Platonic dialogues other than the *Republic* is difficult to evaluate, and doubtless not too much should be built on it; but approval of *ta hautou prattein* certainly seems characteristic of such Athenians as Charmides, Critias, and Alcibiades. Charmides and Critias were extreme oligarchs and evidently wished to confine political activity to their own, very small, group of aristocratic Athenians. Alcibiades was a popular leader, a “champion of the people,” it

is true; but he too was an aristocrat, and his political career demonstrates that he more consistently supported the interests of Alcibiades than those of Athens. His opinion of a Cleon can be guessed at: the words that Thucydides ascribes to him (6.16.1ff.) presumably convey his social attitudes accurately.

When we turn to the *Republic*, a less tentative evaluation is possible. In that dialogue, as elsewhere, Plato is trying to persuade the *agathoi* of Athens that his proposals, here for constructing an entire *polis* of an unusual, not to say bizarre, kind, are reasonable; and he must accordingly begin from their own attitudes or prejudices,<sup>46</sup> which are to a considerable extent also his own. His insistence on “one man, one job,” transformed—when the guardians and later the philosopher-kings are added—into “one class, one job” so far as concerns the upper two classes in his state, deprives the lowest class of his *polis* of a share either in its defense or in its government. It is true—or apparently true—that the lowest class contains many who might have been regarded as *agathoi* in other form of *polis*, and certainly true that the upper classes of the *Republic* state are not to handle money at all. But insofar as Plato is trying to persuade, it is surely the *agathoi*, and especially the members of those important families who have been politically active, who are most likely to be persuaded, for they are likely to suppose that they, if anyone, will pass the Platonic tests of character and intellect; and I suspect that Plato would have entirely agreed.

They are also the most likely to find attractive Plato’s account of *dikaiosune* and *sophrosune*. For civic *dikaiosune* is manifested, according to Plato (*Republic*. 433a), when those most competent to perform any task in the city do perform it, without interference from the unqualified; while civic *sophrosune* (*Republic*. 432a) is “agreement of the better and the worse as to which should rule the other.” I have argued elsewhere that, despite Plato’s efforts to give the impression that the civic *dikaiosune* and *sophrosune* of the *Republic* state resemble “ordinary language” *dikaiosune* and *sophrosune*, the *sophrosune* and *dikaiosune* that Plato has proved to be *aretai*, *aretai* to which all the classes of the city should conform, in fact bear no resemblance to *sophrosune* and *dikaiosune* as ordinarily understood:<sup>47</sup> “*Sophrosune* is the acknowledgement of the rulers that they

---

<sup>46</sup> Cf. also the manner in which Plato (e.g., *Republic* 579e) “moralizes” the notion of the tyrant as one who depends on *kakoi* and *poneroi*. Most tyrants, as the *agathoi* knew, depended on the support of those who were socially *kakoi* (for which, see *MV*, pp. 67 ff.); and this must have increased the readiness with which Plato might expect his views to be accepted.

<sup>47</sup> *M&R*, pp. 287ff.



should rule, of the defenders that they should defend, and of the rest that they should acquiesce; and *dikaiosune* is the state of affairs in which this is put into practice. The *manner* in which the rulers should rule is not indicated at all: if a political expert exploits his subjects to the utmost, and they acquiesce, both are behaving with *sophrosune* and *dikaiosune* in the sense in which these have been shown to be *aretai*, conducive to the smooth running of the state.<sup>48</sup> I said in my earlier discussion that Thrasymachus should have been delighted;<sup>49</sup> but it is now evident that not merely Thrasymachus but any *agathos* should have been equally delighted. *Sophrosune* and *dikaiosune* are most evidently in the context being defined “from the point of view of a ruling political expert;” but they are more broadly being defined from the point of view of the social superior, the *agathos*, for whom one requirement of *sophrosune* was that his inferiors should know their place.<sup>50</sup> Plato has retained this “flavor” of *sophrosune*, and indeed has brought it into the foreground. He has linked it—and *dikaiosune*—with “minding one’s own business” and avoiding *polupragmosune*.

His philosophy in the *Republic* goes, of course, beyond the mere preferences of the *agathoi*; but certain fundamental characteristics of the *kind* of state that he prefers—limited in scale, militarily efficient but not expansionist, opposed to change of any kind—derive from the preferences not only of Plato himself but of *agathoi* in general.<sup>51</sup> Plato, and they, are yearning for the past, for a past before the disturbing changes of democratic life, when everyone knew his place and kept to it. In characterizing such disturbing behavior as *polupragmosune* rather than as *hubris*, Plato is employing the vocabulary of the later fifth century; but we have seen that both words decry and depreciate changes of the status quo, and that the desirable situations tacitly or explicitly opposed to ones in which inferiors were manifesting either *hubris* or *polupragmosune* were very similar.

---

<sup>48</sup> *M&R*, p. 288.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Pp. 322f.

<sup>51</sup> See also Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 1966), *passim*.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *THEORIA VERSUS PRAXIS IN THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS AND THE REPUBLIC*

#### Introduction

A conventional understanding *eudaimonia* in Book X of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* goes like this:

1176b 1-1179a 30

1. Happiness (*eudaimonia*) is an activity (*energia*) not a state (*hexis*)—Fact (from earlier argument, 1098a 16)/ 1176b 1
2. Some activities are instrumental to some other end (*per aliud*) while others are carried out for themselves (*per se*)—F[act]/ b 2-3
3. Happiness is complete in itself (it lacks nothing)—A[ssertion]/ b 4
4. [All activities that are complete in themselves are desired *per se*]—F
5. Happiness is a *per se* activity—1-4/ b 5
6. Pleasant amusements undertaken by the [rich] and powerful are said [by many] to also be *per se* activities and thus akin to happiness—F/ b 10-16
7. Virtue (*arete*)<sup>1</sup> and understanding (*nous*) are the sources of excellent (*arete*) activity—F/ b 19-20
8. The [rich] and powerful originate their amusements not from virtue and understanding but from sensory bodily pleasures—F/ b 20-22
9. Happiness is not found in pleasant amusement—6-8/ b28
10. Amusement is for the sake of relaxation (since we cannot always be engaged in serious endeavors)—F/ b 35
11. Amusement prepares us for continued serious endeavors (thus it is not a *per se* end)—10/ b 36

---

<sup>1</sup> Conventionally, *arete* is translated as either 'virtue' or 'excellence' according to the context. Note that in this essay Adkins habitually uses 'excellence.'

12. Happiness requires serious endeavors (going after virtue/excellence)—F/ 1177a 1
13. Amusement can sometimes be degraded to mere bodily pleasures—F/ a 4-6
14. Happiness is different from pleasant amusement—7, 10-13/ 1176 b 29
15. Understanding is the supreme element in us and the objects of understanding are the supreme objects of knowledge—A/ 1177a 20
16. Study and contemplation (*theoretike*) is continuous while action is not—F/ a 23
17. [That which is continuous is superior to that which is not]—A
18. Philosophy has pure and solid pleasures associated with it—A/ a 25
19. [Pure and solid pleasures are to be most preferred]—A
20. The wise person can study by himself (thus study can be the most self-sufficient activity)—F/ a 26-30
21. [To be the most self-sufficient is to be the best]—A
22. Study aims at nothing beyond itself—F/ 1177b 2-3
23. The activity of studying virtue is the most noble (*kalon*) and divine (*theios*)—15-22/ 1177 a 12
24. We accept trouble and fight wars so that we can be at leisure (*schole*)—F/ 1177b 5
25. Leisure is chosen for something other than itself (i.e., for one to be able to [autonomously] direct his time—F/ b 18-25
26. [Leisure enhances study]—F
27. Though it is different from happiness, leisure can help bring it about—23-26/ b 20-25
28. Understanding is akin to the divine—A/ b 27
29. The life of study is akin to the divine—28/ b 31
30. Virtues of character are mixed with human action that expresses them as well as with human feeling that comes from our bodies—A/ 1178a 10-15
31. [Virtues of character are compounds of intelligence and the more changeable world of action and feelings]—F
32. [Compounds are not as high as the pure divine expression (e.g., of intelligence)]—A
33. Virtue of character, though noble, are not as high as the life of study—29-32/ a 22
34. The particular virtues of character, such as generosity, justice, self-control all require other goods to act (such money, power, and freedom of choice)—A/ a 30-35

35. In general any particular virtue also needs a [freely made] decision and the execution of this into action (two general external goods—A/ a 35- 1178b 4
  36. Study requires no other external good—A / b 4
  37. [Study is higher than any particular virtue]—32, 34, 35
  38. The gods gain blessedness through activity—A/ b 10-30
  39. [Study of activity that yields blessedness is useful]—F/ b 25
  40. Study of the gods can increase happiness—38, 39/ b 30
  41. Our physical needs as humans require that we have a moderate amount of [basic and secondary] goods [of agency]—F/ b 35
  42. Only a moderate amount of external goods is necessary for happiness; [there is a law of diminishing returns]—F/ 1179a 1-8
  43. Solon said that people only needed a moderate amount of goods in order to perform virtuous actions, and Anaxagoras said a happy person was neither rich nor powerful—F/ a 10-17
  44. [We should not concentrate upon obtaining excess external goods if we want to be happy]—41-23
  45. The gods take pleasure in what is most like themselves, i.e., possessing understanding—A/ a 23
  46. [Understanding by humans comes from study]—A
  47. [Humans who take on the highest properties of the gods are most loved by them]—A
  48. Humans who adopt study are most loved by the gods—45-47/ a 30
- 
49. Study in order to acquire understanding is necessary for the virtuous man to achieve blessedness and happiness—5, 9, 14, 23, 27, 33, 37, 40, 44, 48 /a 32

However, as Adkins points out in his essay, there is a problem here: on the one hand, one is pushed towards *theoretikon* so that one might develop *nous* and that this is often a private enterprise. To become excellent in this way is rather selfish—this is *theoria*. On the other hand, to become involved in community affairs is necessary for the stability of the state. This pushes one to another sort of *arete*: that of political action within the state—this is *praxis*.

The structure of Adkins' essay is to begin with Aristotle's treatment of *eudaimonia* in *EN* 1 & 10. The point is to examine just how abstract Aristotle is willing to go. Remember in the previous essay set out in this book, there was a tension between being willing to engage politically—to the point of being a busy body—and stepping back to be engaged in one's

own affairs. Here, that same tension occurs. One can be a concerned *politikos* in two ways: (a) interested solely in power and status; or (b) interested in *eudaimonia* for himself and his friends (see chapter one in this volume). The next level is to choose private life. *Arete* can apply to all three, but level-two *politikos* is the most choiceworthy.

What makes *theoria* intriguing is that it operates in a way that connects to the divine. What could be better? What could invoke *entelechia* more completely? It would be the end of humankind to engage in *theoria*, but unfortunately one cannot do this all the time both because of the realities of *praxis* and the great effort necessary to fully participate in *theoria*. But what if one had the private means to engage all the time in *theoria*? Then why shouldn't he? Adkins believes that Aristotle has no good answer for this.

Perhaps *theoria* could find its way into a scheme that moves from *phronesis* (practical wisdom). This might be a way to bring the philosopher back into the world of action. Adkins finds evidence for this at the end of the *Eudemian Ethics* where Aristotle suggests that one's opportunities for *theoria* in general might be enhanced by helping a friend (even though the time spent helping the friend would take one away from studying). Despite this feint, Adkins believes that Aristotle does not satisfactorily integrate *theoria* and *praxis*.

As a side reflection, Adkins notes that this is also a problem for Plato. Why should the philosopher who has left the cave go back again? The state needs him to do so. It could be his *ta hautou prattein* requires him to do so because it is part of the foundation of who he *is* with reference to his *psyche* (see chapter seven of this volume).

According to Adkins the goal since the time of Homer was the attainment of well-being, prosperity, and self-sufficiency for himself or for his *oikos* (see Chapters one, three, and five of this volume). These seem to emphasize the self above all. Thus, if one could get *eudaimonia* without exercising a political *arete*, then why should they bother with the fuss? The only answer seems to be concern with the well-being of the city, but then what if you'd rather just get on with your studies?

## Adkins' Essay\*

### I. Aristotle's Account of *theoria* and *eudaimonia*, EN 1176a 30-1179a 32<sup>2</sup>

The subject of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is *eudaimonia* (1095a 14 ff., etc.).<sup>3</sup> The discussion of the *aretai*, which occupies most of the work, is justified by the definition of *eudaimonia* (1098a 16 ff.) as “an *energia* (activity) of the *psuche* in accordance with *arete*, and if the *aretai* are several in number, in accordance with the best and most perfect.” Aristotle explicitly makes the point that study of the *aretai* will give a clearer picture of *eudaimonia* (1102a 5). It is not surprising that, having studied the *aretai*, he should return to the subject of *eudaimonia* in Book 10.<sup>4</sup>

At 1177a 12 Aristotle takes up the definition of 1098a 16, and adds that the best *arete* must be the *arete* of the best part of us, so that the *energia* of that part in accordance with its own *arete* must be *eudaimonia*. He also adds (1177a 17): “That this activity is ‘theoretic’ has been said.”<sup>5</sup>

*Theoria* is best because *nous*, the part of the *psuche* concerned with *theoria*, is the best part of us, and the objects of contemplation are the best knowable objects. (*Theoria* is not research, but the contemplation of [certain kinds of] knowledge already possessed.)

---

\* All translations in this essay are by Adkins.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based upon a paper which I read to a joint classics-philosophy seminar at Princeton University on April 15, 1975. Both the paper and I benefited considerably from the experience.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise identified, all Aristotelian references are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>4</sup> The subject has been little mentioned since Book 1. (*Eudaimonia* appears at 1129b 18, 1144a 5, 1152b 6, 1153b 11 ff., 1169b 29; *eudaimonismos* at 1127b 18; *eudaimon* at 1117b 10, 1143b 19, 1153b 14 ff., 1169b 3 ff., 1177a 2; *eudaimonein* at 1111b 28, 1169b 30, 1170b 18.)

<sup>5</sup> Precisely where Aristotle said it earlier is unclear. J.A. Stewart, *Notes on the “Nicomachean Ethics”* (London: Clarendon Press, 1882), *ad loc.*, suggests 1. 5. 2; A. Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1885), *ad loc.* suggests 9. 3. 1; 1. 13. 20; 1. 5, 7. There is nothing on the subject in Book 6.

Aristotle then (1177a 27) praises the life of *theoria* to the detriment of practical *arete*:<sup>6</sup> all men need the necessities of life, but the wise man can engage in *theoria* by himself (though it may be better to have colleagues); whereas the just man, the brave man, the rest need people to whom they may behave justly or bravely. The *theoretikos* is more *autarkes* (self-sufficient).<sup>7</sup> Aristotle is not commending self-reliance, which might enable one to help others in deed, but a self-sufficiency which enables the *theoretikos* to isolate himself from others.

The life of *theoria*, in Aristotle's eyes, is superior to any other. In fact (1177b 26), it is higher than human. Human beings are able to live it in virtue of some divine principle within, whose *energia* surpasses that of the rest of *arete* by as much as that divine principle surpasses the composite nature of the rest of our being. Accordingly, we should *athanatizein* (play the immortal) so far as in us lies and do our best to live in accordance with the best part of us. Aristotle adds (1178a 2): "Indeed, each one of us would appear to *be* this element in us, since it is the authoritative and the best part of us. It would be strange, then, if a human being were to choose not its own life but that of some other creature."

The life of practical *arete* achieves *eudaimonia* only in a secondary sense (1178a 9 ff.). Material goods are necessary for the life of practical *arete* as Aristotle understands it;<sup>8</sup> whereas (1178b 3) the *theoretikos* does not need material goods, at all events for the exercise of his *theoria*. Such goods may indeed impede his *theoria*. However, inasmuch as he is a human being and lives with others, he chooses to perform the actions of practical *arete*, and will need material goods in order to function as a human being (*anthropeuesthai*).

Perfect *eudaimonia*, as enjoyed by the gods, must be theoretic (1178b 7 ff.). Aristotle ridicules the idea of the gods being just, brave, or liberal; for (as Aristotle interprets the matter here) justice is displayed in business dealings, self-control presupposes base desires, and liberality necessarily involves the use of money.<sup>9</sup> We cannot, accordingly, suppose that the gods

---

<sup>6</sup> Since *arete* denotes and commends "excellence," not "virtue," and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* specifically "human excellence," to speak of a "theoretic" *arete* involves no straining of Greek.

<sup>7</sup> For the importance of self-sufficiency, see my *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), index, s.v. "Independence;" and *From Many to One* (London: and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), index s.v. "*Autarkeia*" and "Self-sufficiency." These works are hereafter abbreviated *MR* and *FM*.

<sup>8</sup> For the reasons, see *MR*, pp. 333 ff.

<sup>9</sup> That the gods might be liberal to mankind is not considered. (Aristotle is alluding critically here to the gods of popular Greek belief.)

*prattein* (engage in ethico-political activity); and less may they *poiein* (manufacture).<sup>10</sup> Only *theorein* constantly, and enjoy perfect *eudaimonia*; human beings enjoy it insofar as they *theorein*; animals never enjoy *eudaimonia*, since *theoria* is impossible for them.

*Theoria* and *eudaimonia* in the primary sense of the terms, then, are co-extensive and co-variable.

## 2. *Theoria versus Praxis in Nicomachean Ethics 1 and 10*

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, I now inquire whether an Aristotelian *theoretikos*, while actually engaged in *theoria*, can be offered any sufficient reason for interrupting his contemplation in order to perform a moral or political action.

Not all editors and commentators notice this question.<sup>11</sup> J.A. Stewart<sup>12</sup> does and gives a vigorous, if not entirely clear, answer. He argues that Aristotle, though apparently contrasting the lives of the just and the wise, is “really contrasting man in the concrete and reason, the form of man.” This form, “[Aristotle] would tell us, is realized in the concrete life of the just man as well as in the concrete life of the savant.” The exhortation to live an immortal life so far as in us lies “is addressed to the bulk of mankind,” since anyone who is not damaged in respect of his *arete* is able to contribute “if not in some brilliant way, as politician, or soldier, or leader of fashion, or athlete—at least as honest man, to the *eudaimonia* of a city in which savants are produced and held in honour.” Stewart also argues<sup>13</sup> that the life of *theoria* is not separate from the life of politics, and

---

<sup>10</sup> Manufacture is to be forbidden to the citizens of Aristotle’s ideal *polis*, *Pol.* 1328b 33 ff., 1329a 17. *A fortiori* it is unthinkable for Aristotle that the gods should engage in it, as, e.g., Hephaestus was popularly believed to do. Aristotle’s deities are remote from popular belief; see *Met.* 1069a 19.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the question is not discussed by P. Betbeder, “Ethique et politique chez Aristote,” *RSPH* 54 (1970): 453-88, though he writes, “Il y a différentes façons de travailler à ce bonheur; il y a différents domaines constitutifs de ce bonheur qui ont une autonomie relative les uns par rapport aux autres” (p. 482), an observation which might well have suggested the problem. It is touched on in passing by W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 332 ff.; J. Leonard, *Le Bonheur chez Aristote* (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1948), does not directly discuss the matter, but in his contrast of Aristotelianism and Catholicism (p. 187), he indicates what he finds lacking in Aristotle. G. Ramsauer, *Aristotelis “Ethica Nicomachea”* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1878), sees clearly that there is a problem.

<sup>12</sup> *Notes*, ad 1178a 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 1177a 27.



that *theoria* is a spirit which penetrates and ennobles politics. He contrasts the life of the ordinary politician with that of the “good man,” whose leisure “consists in the quiet of a well-regulated mind, not in an impossible immunity from the interruptions of practical life;” for “*unless we understand Aristotle in this sense* [my emphasis], we must suppose that in the *Ethics* the life of the good man is depicted as a more or less unsatisfactory public career . . . ending, if he is to reach the highest kind of happiness, in withdrawal from social activity . . . . Nothing could be more opposed to this than Aristotle’s view of life, which is social from beginning to end.”

This is a vigorously expressed view of the good life. Whether Aristotle held it is another question. Stewart apparently contrasts two forms of the political life, the one practiced by the run-of-the-mill politician, the other by the “good man;” though his words could be interpreted as a contrast between the life of the politician and the private practical life of the good man. But Aristotle says:

The life of the *politikos* is lacking in leisure; it is a life which, apart from the political action itself, aims at power and status, or in any event at *eudaimonia* for the *politikos* and his fellow citizens, a goal which is different from the practice of political skill . . . . Now if, of the activities in accordance with [practical] *arete*, the political and the martial ones are pre-eminent in *kalos* and stature, but are lacking in leisure, aim at some further goal, and are not choiceworthy in themselves, whereas the *energia* of *nous*, which is “theoretic,” is thought to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no goal beyond itself . . . [1177b 12 ff.]

Aristotle is concerned with two kinds of *politikos*: one aims merely at power and status, the other at *eudaimonia* for himself and his fellows. The latter is, or includes, if *eudaimonia* is appropriately interpreted, the “ideal politician” of Aristotle and Plato.<sup>14</sup> In Stewart’s view, the latter enjoys a life informed by *theoria*, and possesses true leisure; but Aristotle explicitly states that the life of *both* kinds of *politikos* is lacking in leisure. Furthermore, it is evident, here and throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that the life of practical *arete* in politics is more *kalon*, and hence more choiceworthy, than the life of practical *arete* of the private individual.<sup>15</sup> *Theoria* is most choiceworthy; then the public life of *arete*; then the private life of *arete*.

---

<sup>14</sup> E.g., 1095a 14 ff., and Plato *Rep.* 433a ff.

<sup>15</sup> 1177b 6 ff. treats “politics and war” as the sphere of the practical *aretai*.

Again, *pace* Stewart, the injunction that a man “should live an immortal life so far as in him lies” cannot be addressed to the average man as an inducement to be honest. Aristotle immediately adds, “. . . and do everything with a view to living in accordance with the best element in him” (1177b 33 ff.); that element, for Aristotle, is plainly theoretic *nous*. When a man is being honest, his activities are merely human, *anthropika* (1178a 14); the absurdity of supposing that the gods engage in such activities is emphasized 1178b 10 ff.).

Nor can Stewart claim that Aristotle is “really contrasting man in the concrete and reason, the form of man.”<sup>16</sup> Aristotle possesses a philosophical vocabulary which would enable him to make this point explicitly; his language suggests rather that he is thinking of different types of life.<sup>17</sup>

Here we may turn to an Aristotelian confusion of language and thought. At 1178a 2 ff., as we have seen, Aristotle identifies human beings with their theoretic reason, so that to choose *theoria* is to choose the life peculiarly appropriate to human beings. Yet at 1177b 26 ff. Aristotle says that the life of *theoria* is “higher than human; for one will not live in this manner in virtue of being man, but in virtue of the presence within of some divine principle.”

The clash here is not merely verbal. At 1177b 26 ff. Aristotle acknowledges that human beings are embodied *nous* (though without drawing what seems to be the appropriate conclusion),<sup>18</sup> at 1178a 2 ff. he claims that they are simply *nous*. In either case, however, the *nous* is to engage in *theoria*; and its objects are to be “the best,” i.e., objects far removed from human concerns (1177a 20).

The whole of active life is set on a lower level than the theoretic; no distinction is drawn between types of moral and political activity as far as concerns their inferiority to *theoria* in terms of *eudaimonia*; and there is no mention of the form of man and man in the concrete. It seems impossible to furnish an adequate reason why an Aristotelian *theoretikos* should willingly interrupt his *theoria* in order to perform any moral or political action. It is possible to furnish a reason why the *theoretikos* should sometimes engage in moral or political activity: he cannot engage

---

<sup>16</sup> Reason is not *the* form of man for Aristotle, at all events in his more careful moments. The human *psuche*, as a whole, stands to the body as form to matter.

<sup>17</sup> The “three lives” picture was evidently current; cf. 1095b 17 ff.

<sup>18</sup> I.e., that they cannot live as if they were disembodied *nous*, and must acknowledge the necessity of all the *aretai* of the embodied totality as constituents of *eudaimonia*.

in *theoria* all the time, for he becomes weary,<sup>19</sup> and when the best *eudaimonia* is not available, he should choose the best that is available. But it is not possible to supply a reason why the *theoretikos* should at a particular moment choose the second-best when he could have the best kind of *eudaimonia*, since he is (a) a person capable of *theoria*, and (b) intellectually fresh and unwearied. It is useless to say to a Greek of this period, “That way lies *eudaimonia*, or more *eudaimonia* than elsewhere, or better *eudaimonia* than elsewhere; but you ought nevertheless to go the other way.” Aristotle tells us (1095a 17) that *eudaimonia* is generally agreed to be the goal of life; and a survey of the late fifth- and fourth-century Greek usage confirms his statement.<sup>20</sup>

The *theoretikos* will indeed possess all the *aretai*: they are needed to render him a good specimen of human being (1144a 1 ff.), and an absence of well-established moral dispositions would distract him from his *theoria*. However, any *arete* can exist in a state either of *hexis* or of *energia*;<sup>21</sup> one cannot exercise both *theoria* and any practical *arete* at the same time; and for the well-being of the *theoretikos* it suffices that he possesses the other *aretai* in a state of *hexis* for so long as he is able to exercise his *theoria* uninterruptedly.

In Book 10 Aristotle gives no reason why the *theoretikos* should choose *praxis* so long as *theoria* is possible. Aristotle does indeed say that the *theoretikos* chooses, but offers no reason, and does not tell us *when* he chooses: he may well mean “chooses when *theoria* is not available” (1178b 6). Furthermore, the gods approve of *theoria* in men more than of any other kind of activity (1179a 24 ff.). In his discussion of *theoria* Aristotle gives no valid and sufficing reason why the *theoretikos* when actually engaged in *theoria* should abandon the pursuit in order to perform any practical moral or political solution.

### 3. *Theoria* versus *Praxis* Elsewhere in Aristotle’s Ethical Thought

Throughout books 2-9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* there is little mention of *eudaimonia*, or of *theoria* in the technical sense of Book 10.<sup>22</sup> In fact in

---

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, too much *theoria* may be bad for the health (1153a 20), so that one must sometimes pursue other activities. Aristotle gives no reason why a man should abandon *theoria* when he is fit and able to pursue it.

<sup>20</sup> *MR*, chaps. 10-16.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g., 1098b 31 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Theorein* in 1139a 6 ff. is wider in usage, including as its objects both what can change and what cannot; but the *theorein* of Book 10 includes only the latter.

Books 2-9 there are statements which *prima facie* arise from a quite different view of human action. For example, in Book 6 Aristotle treats *pratein*, the activity of the moral and political agent, as an end in itself (1139b 1 ff.), links *praxis* with *prohaeresis* (deliberate choice), and adds that what is capable of deliberate choice is a human being.

Now the idea that *praxeis* are ends does not appear for the first time in Book 6: it occurs on the very first page of the work (1094a 6 ff.). But when Aristotle also says that “what is capable of *prohaeresis* is a human being,” he is saying—and he believes—that the only living creature capable of *praxis* is a human being. In 1097b 23 ff. Aristotle is searching for the *ergon*, the “function,” of the human being, since *ergon*, *praxis*, and the *agathon* (and hence *eudaimonia*) are always related, the *agathon* being “in” the *ergon*. Aristotle resorts to his division of *psuche* into plant, animal, and human. He rejects any *ergon* residing purely in the plant or animal aspects of the human *psuche*, since any such *erga* would be common to plants and animals, while he is searching for something *idiom* (particular) as the *ergon* of the human being. He concludes (1098a 3): “There is left the practical life of the part that has reason . . . and since this [i.e., practical life] is used in two senses, we must stipulate a practical life expressed in activity.”

The editors and commentators have noted the reminiscence of Plato here. In *Republic* 1 the *ergon* of anything is stated to be “that which only it or it better than anything else can perform” (353a); and it is agreed (353d) that *psuche* has “an *ergon* which one could not accomplish with anything that the *psuche* has an *ergon* which one could not accomplish with anything else in the world, as for example management, rule, deliberation, and the like.” (Plato is evidently thinking of human *psuche*.) Plato continues by saying that the *ergon* of the *psuche* is also life (since only *psuche* endows living creatures with life). The reference is not to *psuche* in general, but the proposition is as true of human *psuche* as of any other; so that, for Plato, it seems not to be the case that everything that has an *ergon* can have only one, and that, too, an *ergon* that can be simply defined. If Plato were more precise here, he would distinguish between *psuche* in general and human *psuche* in particular, and exclude “life” from his account of the human *psuche*'s *ergon* on the grounds that it is not *idiom*.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the course of his argument shows that he does not rule out the possibility that a creature or a tool may possess two functions “which only it or it better than anything else could perform.” Aristotle, unlike

---

<sup>23</sup> His argument at 352d ff. would be considerably hampered if he did, however, since “living” is essential to it at 352e.

Plato, has excluded simply “being alive” from his account of *ergon* of the human being, along with the characteristic activity of the plant and animal *psuchai*. But if, for Aristotle as for Plato, the *ergon* of anything is that which it and it alone can do, and if the life of practical moral and political activity is *also*<sup>24</sup> something in which only human beings can participate, then the life of practical moral, and political activity ought to be the *ergon* of man just as much as *theoria* is, and accordingly just as much the *agathos* of man, and just as conducive to his *eudaimonia*. After all, the reason for refusing to ascribe *eudaimonia* to cattle, horses, and children (1099b 32 ff.) is that they are incapable of a life of practical moral and political activity.<sup>25</sup>

It follows that man is properly regarded as being not merely *nous* but embodied *nous*; so that the *eudaimonia* of man should consist in performing both the functions of his *nous* and those of his “embodiment,” which renders him a human being among other human beings. The definition of man expresses his *ousia* (*Met.* 1037b 25 ff.); and that definition cannot exclude the “embodiment.” Accordingly, one might expect that the *eudaimonia* of man would not be graded into better and worse, first and second class, but be treated as the *eudaimonia* of an embodied *nous* which is one entity.

If his *eudaimonia* requires the appropriate performance of all these functions, the *theoretikos* will have to make difficult decisions; but Aristotle does not suppose moral decisions to be easy:

Similarly, anyone can become angry, or give and spend money.

That is easy. But to know to whom to give it, and how much, and when, and for what purpose and how—that is not something that anyone can do, and it is not easy; and so, to do this well is rare, praiseworthy, and *kalon*.

[1109a 26 ff.]

Such passages emphasize the importance in ethical action of the appropriate behavior in the circumstances. Aristotle’s discussion of the mean is evidently relevant. I need not consider here the more vexed aspects of the doctrine.<sup>26</sup> I merely state—what I believe to be generally

---

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it is strictly the *sole* activity in which only human beings can participate, since *theoria* is shared with deity; and this strengthens the argument I am offering here, to the point, indeed, where practical *arete* should be given preference.

<sup>25</sup> Note that in 1178b 27 ff. *eudaimonia* is denied to all other living creatures on the ground that they do not participate in *theoria*; again, the emphasis of Book 10 is different.

<sup>26</sup> Some of which I discuss in *FM*, pp. 184 ff.

agreed<sup>27</sup> —that Aristotle holds that the *meson pros hemas*, the *meson* in relation to ourselves, varies in accordance with the characteristics of the agent: what would be an act of generosity for a poor man (giving *n* obols to a good cause) would be an act of great meanness for a rich one; and what would be an act of courage for Milo the wrestler might be an act of foolhardiness for a physically feeble person.

It is evident that there can be ethical problems concerning how to apportion one's time among different practical moral and political activities, and what to do while engaged in them. The *agathoi* citizens of Aristotle's ideal *polis*, like anyone else, will need to know how to decide matters of this kind. A *phronimos* will know, presumably, how to divide his time between the needs of one friend and the needs of another; and (a) he will see the problem and the solution in terms of "how much, when, how, to whom" (as in 1109a 26 ff.); and (b) what he can do, the resources other than his time which he has to divide, will depend on his own mental, physical, and material goods. No one can avoid making decisions of this kind.

There seems to be no reason *prima facie* why *theoria* should not take its place in this scheme. *Phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *prohaeresis* (deliberate choice) will then be of the utmost importance. (*Prohaeresis*, though not actually employed in *theoria*, can of course be employed in deciding whether to engage in *theoria* or not at any time.) A man will then take into account his own characteristics, which will include the presence or absence of the ability for *theoria*: if he cannot *theorein*, he will engage in the exercise of the practical *aretai* as much as possible; while if he can *theorein*, he will aim at the *meson* in the amount of time allotted to *theoria*,<sup>28</sup> bearing in mind that man is not disembodied *nous* but embodied *nous*.<sup>29</sup> In behaving thus, he is performing his function, or rather functions, his *idia ergo*, and thereby securing his true *agathon*, his *eudaimonia*.

This answer would suit many of Aristotle's philosophical views; but it seems not to be Aristotle's answer. I have discussed the relevant passages in Book 10. We may consider also a passage from Book 6:

It is strange if anyone supposes *politike* or *phronesis* to be the most

---

<sup>27</sup> As for example by Grant, *Ethics*; Stewart, *Notes*; and H.H. Joachim, *The "Nicomachean Ethics,"* ed. D.A. Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

<sup>28</sup> *Theoria* itself, not being an *ethike arete*, is not a mean between extremes.

<sup>29</sup> After all, Aristotle analyzes *dikaiosune* primarily in terms of the appropriate distribution of resources (1131a 10 ff.), a procedure which I am suggesting that the *theoretikos* should use with respect to his *theoria* and his other activities, "appropriate" being defined in terms of the "embodiedness" of his *nous* and his three-dimensional existence as a social animal.

important kind of knowledge, unless man is the most *agathon* object in the universe [1141a 20 ff.].

And Aristotle does not accord such a status to man. Further on, speaking of *phronesis*, he says:

But *phronesis* does not have authority over *Sophia* or the better part of the *psuche*, any more than medicine has authority over health; for it does not use it, but ensures that it comes into existence. Accordingly, it gives orders in its interest; it does not give orders to it. It is just as if someone were to say that *politike* rules the gods, because it gives orders about everything in the city.

If the answer I have suggested for Aristotle were Aristotle's answer, *phronesis* would sometimes have to give orders to *sophia* (or *nous*), or in other words say to the *theoretikos* that this is an inappropriate time to engage in *theoria*.<sup>30</sup> But Aristotle's answer is different. The function of *phronesis* is simply to ensure that *theoria* and *sophia* can occur; and the most obvious way of ensuring this occurrence is by ensuring the absence of disturbing "non-habituated" desires: the *akrates* (or *eitkrates*) will find his contemplations much more distracted than will the *sophron*.

The closing words of the *Eudemian Ethics* (1249a 21 ff.) express essentially the same view. There, Aristotle uses as an analogy to medicine that deals with the human being as a whole; and since the good man should have "a standard of disposition and choice," one might perhaps expect that he will choose his courses of action in the light of his being a whole human being, embodied *nous*. But there, too, Aristotle sets up as the goal of man a particular good, a good which is less than the good of the whole human being, but which is held to be more important than anything else; the contemplation of God. It is true that Aristotle counsels that choice of friends which will most produce the contemplation of God; and one might argue that the *theoretikos* must so act as to preserve his *philia* with friends of this kind. And since all *philia* requires reciprocal benefits, the *theoretikos* will sometimes have to confer those benefits upon appropriate persons, possibly at the expense of an opportunity for *theoria*, in order to make them his *philoï* or maintain them in that state. True; but (a) the

---

<sup>30</sup> It is true that, in terms of my answer, it is difficult to explain precisely how the *phronimos* will "see" that this is an appropriate time for moral action rather than for *theoria*; but no more difficult than to explain how he will "see" that the present moment is appropriate for devoting himself to the needs of his friends rather than to those of the city. As Aristotle himself says, such matters are not easy; and so, to do them well is "rare, praiseworthy, and *kalon*."

friends are merely means to an end, and a theoretically possible answer to the question, “What friends will be most conducive to my contemplation of God?” is “None.” (b) In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle presents it as an advantage of *theoria* that it is possible even without colleagues. (c) The problem that concerns us here is not that of persuading the *theoretikos* to perform some moral acts—for Aristotle should have no difficulty in persuading him to do that<sup>31</sup>—but of persuading him, at a particular moment when *theoria* is possible, to give up his *theoria* in order to help someone practically. The difficulty is more acute in the case of helping human beings in general; but, even in the case of this special kind of *philia*, it is hard to see how the argument is to proceed, if we bear in mind the meaning which *theoria* has for Aristotle. We cannot argue thus: “*Theoria* is the highest good. If I help this *philos* now, I shall lose an opportunity for *theoria*. But if I help him, I shall also increase my opportunities for *theoria* in general, and thus increase my possession of the highest good. Therefore, I will help him.” In a modern scientific research team, loss of a valued colleague might seriously hamper research, so that a modern Aristotelian might find that his researches benefited, in general, from his interrupting them at a particular moment to help that colleague. But there were no research teams of this kind in the ancient world, and *theoria* does not mean research. It is difficult to see how one’s contemplation of God could be impeded by the loss of a colleague.

In fact, I suspect that when Aristotle mentions the possession of suitable friends in the *Eudemian Ethics*, he is not thinking of colleagues, but of associates in daily living whose behavior will not impede one’s contemplation of God by encouraging the irrational part of the *psyche*.<sup>32</sup> Since their assistance in contemplation is of a more indirect kind, it would be much more difficult to argue that, by abandoning one’s *theoria* now to help one of them, one will increase one’s opportunities for *theoria* in general. If abandoning *theoria* in order to benefit one’s *philoï* does not ultimately enhance one’s own *theoria*, it will not increase one’s possession of the highest good, which is the goal of action.

We should consider also 1097b 6 ff.:

The same conclusion seems to follow from considerations of *autarkeia*. For the perfect *agathon* is thought to be *autarkes*. We mean by *autarkes* not merely sufficient for himself alone, living an isolated

---

<sup>31</sup> When he is too weary intellectually for *theoria*, practical *arete* will furnish *eudaimonia* as nothing else available will.

<sup>32</sup> Note the manner in which the mention of the possessions of friends and other goods is set in the discussion of the appropriate functions of the different parts of the *psyche*, *EE* 1249b 16 ff.



life, but also for parents and children and wives and generally for *philo*i and fellow-citizens, since man is *phusei* a *politikon* creature . . . . And we mean by *autarkes* that which, taken by itself, makes life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing; and we believe *eudaimonia* to be such.

Stewart<sup>33</sup> speaks of Aristotle's view of life as "social from beginning to end." Such passages as this (especially the statement that man is by nature [*phusei*] *politikon*), and much of the *Politics*, where Aristotle's analysis begins with the city, supports such a view; but it does not follow that Aristotle has harmonized every aspect of his ethical and political doctrines.<sup>34</sup> Other presuppositions and values may be—and, I shall argue at the end of this paper, are—in conflict with the analysis in terms of the *polis*. Indeed, if we compare what is said of the *autarkes* here with the ascription of *autarkeia* pre-eminently to *theoria* in 1177a 27, the possibility of conflict becomes immediately apparent; for there, *theoria* is in effect said to be "that which taken by itself makes life choiceworthy and lacking nothing."

But perhaps failure to exercise the moral *hexis* by actualizing them regularly will cause them to fade away. If Aristotle held such a view, he would have to take it into account when considering the roles of *theoria* and *praxis* in the life of the *eudaimon*; for the absence of a good moral *hexis* would impede the contemplation, and hence diminish the *eudaimonia*, of the *theoretikos*.

In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* we find:

No human activity has the same consistency as have the *energeiai* in accordance with *arete*; for they seem to remain more surely with a person than even the knowledge of the sciences. And the most prized of these themselves remain more surely because the fortunate occupy their time most of all and most continuously upon them; for this seems to be the cause of their not being forgotten. The *eudaimon* will accordingly have the characteristic for which we are seeking [i.e., stability], and he will be *eudaimon* throughout his life; for always, or by preference, he will *pratein* and *theorein* the things in accordance with *arete*. [1100b 14]

---

<sup>33</sup> P. 299.

<sup>34</sup> Even in the *Politics* (see 1325b 14 ff.), where Aristotle again expresses the view of *EN* 10.

*Hexis* here is notably absent; and A. Grant<sup>35</sup> holds that the words are “a sort of contradiction of Aristotle’s own philosophy,” since it is *hexis*, not *energia*, that is abiding. The emphasis on *energia* is, it seems to me, to be explained by the context. Aristotle is trying to demonstrate the stability of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia*, he has argued, is an *energia* of the *psuche* in accordance with *arete* (1098a 16). If such *energeiai* are consistently active, *eudaimonia* should be stable; and Aristotle argues that they are consistently active, for the reasons given. The goal of the demonstration may have induced Aristotle to state his position in a somewhat misleading manner; but if “the most prized of these themselves” refers to the *aretai* rather than the sciences,<sup>36</sup> Aristotle is remarking almost in passing that regular practice of an activity is necessary if one is not to forget it. If Aristotle believes ethical activity to require regular practice in this manner, the belief evidently affects the problem I am discussing here.

Usually, Aristotle is concerned primarily or solely with the establishment of the *hexis* (1103b 14 ff.):<sup>37</sup> when the *hexis* is established, he treats it as a datum. He specifies as the characteristics of an action in accordance with *arete* (1105a 30 ff.) that the agent should act with knowledge, that he should deliberately choose the action for its own sake, and that his action should proceed from a firm and settled character. There is no suggestion that the character will not remain firm and settled unless the action is performed. Nor can we say that the *agathos* will “inevitably” perform a just act when a just act is possible:<sup>38</sup> deliberate choice is necessary, and *eudaimonia* is the criterion of choice, as we have seen.

Again, elsewhere (1095b 32) Aristotle seems to suppose it is possible that an individual with a good *hexis* already developed could thereafter sleep throughout his whole life while possessed of *arete* as a *hexis*; and, though this supposition is admittedly a philosopher’s hypothetical extreme case, even such cases should not contradict the philosopher’s own views. Once again, it would appear that activity of the type which constitutes an actualization of the *hexis*, though necessary to create the *hexis* in the first place, is not necessary in order to maintain the *hexis* in being.<sup>39</sup>

It seems likely, then, that Aristotle’s remarks in 1100b 14 ff. do not represent his considered position, and that the context is responsible for the phrasing there used. But even if the words there are found express his

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ethics*, ad 1100b 14 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Stewart, *Notes*, ad loc.

<sup>37</sup> C.f., e.g., 1103b 6 ff., 1104a 20 ff.

<sup>38</sup> The *arete* of a human being does not resemble that of an eye or a horse (taken as examples, 1106a 17) in this manner: the analogy is not complete.

<sup>39</sup> *Phronesis* is not forgotten, 1140b 28-30.

considered position, they do not in themselves solve the problem. Regular activation of the moral *hexis* can occur at such times when the *theoretikos* is too tired to continue with his *theoria*, and needs a change. One would have to add the requirement that *not* performing a moral action at a particular moment when one is engaged in *theoria* is immoral, and therefore likely to weaken one's good *hexis*; and this Aristotle does not say. Indeed, how are we to render that "immoral" into Aristotelian Greek? *Theoria* is the exercise of an *arete*, a human (or superhuman) excellence, the best of which human beings are capable (1177a 12 ff.); and nothing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that it can be *aischron* or *adikon* to activate the best human *arete* at any time. It is difficult for us to envisage an "ethics" in which moral and non-moral excellences are alike *aretai*, and choice between them is made on non-ethical grounds; but that is Aristotle's position.<sup>40</sup> The best *arete* is the *arete* of the best part (1177a 12); and Aristotle suggests no ground for choosing to actualize an inferior *arete* when one might actualize a better one.

I conclude that Aristotle, though his general ethics contain much that would permit him to do so, does not satisfactorily integrate the life of *theoria* with the life in accordance with practical *arete*; for his ethics, taken as a whole, also contain much to prevent such integration.

#### 4. A Possible Explanation of Aristotle's Position

There is an analogous curiosity elsewhere in Aristotle. He usually treats *psuche* as the form, body as the matter, and the living creature as "something endowed with *psuche*" (*empsychon*, *De an.* 414a 14 ff.); and he holds that the *psuche* cannot exist without a body. But in *De anima* 430a 10 ff., his discussion of what is generally termed the "active intellect," he asserts that there is one aspect of the human *psuche*—*nous*—which can exist without a body. One can ascribe the discrepancy to "the Platonism of Aristotle." But Aristotle seems to have little motive for the retention of this aspect of Platonism (insofar as it resembles Platonism),<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in 1100b 14 ff., *theoria* in the sense of Book 10 seems not to be in Aristotle's mind. He uses *theorein* as in 1139a 6 ff. (n. 22 above). Stewart, however (*Notes, ad loc.*), interprets "most prized" in 1100b 14 ff. of "theoretic" activity—in which case the problem is lurking here, too, since "the fortunate" spend most of their time on it.

<sup>41</sup> On the general difficulties of using the phrase "the Platonism of Aristotle," see G.E.L. Owen's article of that title in *PBA* 51 (1965): 125-50. In *De anima*, in fact, the resemblances to the Platonic *psychai* are less striking than the contrasts; for Platonic *psychai* retain their memories after death, are rewarded and punished for

which disrupts his own view of the *psuche* as expressed at, e.g., *De anima* 414a 14 ff., and which is not evidently demanded by any other views which he holds about the *psuche* or about the conditions of the possibility of human knowledge. A human *psuche* which is simply the form and entelechy of its body, and perishes with it, could, so far as I can discern, perform all the tasks that Aristotle requires of it. I propose tentatively to suggest a more general reason for his treatment of *nous* in the light of other phenomena of the period—a reason linked with the status of the intellect in the eyes not only of Aristotle, but of a remarkably varied group of late fifth- and fourth-century Greeks.<sup>42</sup>

In *Republic* 519d ff. Plato faces the problem of inducing the philosopher-kings to return to the prisoners in the cave to take their turn in government rather than spend all their time in intellectual activity. The response is immediate: “Shall we *adikein* (commit injustice against) them, and compel them to live more *kakos* when it is possible for them to live more *eu*?” (519d 8). That there is a problem is evident from the language used. We might perhaps expect Plato to refer back to the discussions of *Republic* 4, where *dikaiosune* is certainly an important *arete*, and argue that *dikaiosune* requires that they return to the cave. Surely Plato can draw aid for his argument from this. We shall see.

In 433a ff. Socrates “discovers” that *dikaiosune* in the city exists when each of the citizens *to hautou prattein*, discharges his own function. Such behavior is one of the characteristics that render the city *agathe*, “good,” in the sense of flourishing and efficiently functioning; and it is this contribution which is the ground for terming *dikaiosune* an *arete* (excellence) of the city. It is with excellences of the city that we are concerned here: it would require further demonstration, which is not forthcoming, to show that behavior which brings the city into its best possible condition (and is therefore an *arete* of the city) must also bring every individual citizen into his best possible condition and render him *agathos*. The proof, accordingly, does not demonstrate that *dikaiosune*, even in the sense in which Plato is using the term, is an *arete* of the individual.

For such a demonstration we must presumably turn to the discussion of the *dikaiosune* of the individual (441e 1 ff.). Here, as in the discussion of

---

their deeds in this life, and are capable in life of recollection of important intellectual events (“seeing the Forms”) which occurred while they were disembodied.

<sup>42</sup> For the resemblances between the presuppositions of Plato and Aristotle, those of the characters in the Platonic dialogues, and those of contemporary Greeks of whom we have any knowledge, see *MR* chaps. 10ff.

political *dikaosune*. Socrates says that *to hautou pratein* constitutes *dikaosune*; but individual *dikaosune* exists when each of the parts of the soul *to hautou pratein*: “It befits the *logistikon* to rule, since it is wise and can exercise forethought for the whole *psuche*; and the *thumoeides* to obey and be its ally, does it not?” (414e 4). That those who are fitted to rule should rule the city, and the rest perform their appropriate tasks, is an *arete* of the city; but it has not been demonstrated to be an *arete* of the individual. The *dikaosune* of the individual requires that the individual’s *logistikon* rule over his own *psuche*, but not necessarily over anything else:

In truth. . . [individual] *dikaosune* is not concerned with one’s external activities, but with one’s internal ones, in the full sense with oneself and one’s parts; it means not allowing any of the “kinds” of *psuche* . . . to meddle with the activities of another. [443c 9 ff.]

Individual *dikaosune* requires the maintenance of one’s psychic harmony; civic *dikaosune* requires that the city be ruled by those most capable of so doing. But it is not proved that individual *dikaosune*, an unqualified *agathon* since it is necessary for the individual’s *eudaimonia*, must be harnessed to the production of *dikaosune* in the city—and it is unproved in the crucial case. Certainly, as Plato says (442e ff.), the individual *dikaos* will not commit crimes, for to do so would upset his psychic harmony; but can one philosophize too much, in such a manner to upset it? Plato does not say so.

We may now return to the problem of inducing philosopher-kings to return to the cave (519d ff.). Plato says (519e ff.):

(1) The *nomos* is not concerned that one class in the city shall *eu pratein* outstandingly, but tries to secure *eudaimonia* for the city as a whole.

It uses persuasion and compulsion to link the citizens and to cause each of them to make the contribution to the common good of which he is capable. The *nomos* brings about the existence of such men as these in the city, not so that they may behave as they please, but so that it may use them to create civic unity.

(2) The city has produced these philosophers deliberately and at the cost of

much effort, so the city is justified in asking them to help in return.

(3) It is a good thing that rulers should rule reluctantly.

Now I have argued elsewhere<sup>43</sup> that, though Plato represents this argument as successful in persuading Glaucon and Adeimantus (Thrasymachus’

---

<sup>43</sup>*MR*, pp. 287 ff.

attention seems to have wandered), it should not have persuaded any of them, since Plato has not satisfied their criteria for a choiceworthy action.

For what can Plato reply, not merely to Thrasymachus but also to Glaucon and Adeimantus, if they ask why the philosopher-kings should not be as *eudaimon* as possible? If we suppose that Plato has persuaded Thrasymachus that the avoidance of *adikia* in an “ordinary language” sense is necessary for *eudaimonia*,<sup>44</sup> then Thrasymachus will have to abandon his intention of exploiting his fellow-citizens in an unjust manner, since to do so would upset his psychic harmony and render him less *eudaimon*. But it is never suggested that an excess of philosophizing would upset one’s psychic harmony; and in the passages discussed here, and elsewhere, the manner of conducting the argument suggests precisely the opposite. There is no reason why Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus should accept less *eudaimonia* than they can get. And, if Plato suggested that it would be unjust for the philosopher-kings not to go back into the cave, he would be merely equivocating about the word; for the only injustice that has been shown to be bad for the individual, and hence inimical to his *eudaimonia*, is that which upsets his psychic harmony, not that which upsets the harmony of the city.

If we suppose Glaucon and Adeimantus to be susceptible to the demands of other important Greek values, they might return to the cave because they supposed this (540b 4). Again, in the manner of the ordinary Athenian,<sup>45</sup> they might be willing to confer *agatha* on the city in order to receive *agatha* in return; but the only *agathon* that the city can confer upon the philosopher-king is to permit him to return to his philosophy—and he would not need this benefit if he were not to engage in government in the first place.

True, Plato (as in the *Crito* much earlier, 50d ff., 51c 6 ff.) argues that the city has conferred very great *agatha* on philosopher-kings, so that they “owe” it to the city to confer benefits on it in exchange. This argument might appear to be a promising mode of approach, but it rarely appears in philosophical ethical argument in Greek, and therefore presumably was not found to be very cogent.<sup>46</sup> In any case, even if the argument were acceptable in general to philosopher-kings, it does not solve Plato’s problem. Plato expressly contrasts with philosopher-kings produced deliberately by a city those philosophers who spring up without the benefit of the educational system sketched in the *Republic*. The first generation of

---

<sup>44</sup> Thrasymachus should not have been persuaded, *MR*, pp. 288 ff.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, chapt. 10.

<sup>46</sup> I would say—as I did earlier in the essay—that rarity of this argument is a further indication of the self-centeredness, or *oikos*-centeredness, of Greek values.

philosophers who might become philosopher-kings must always appear “spontaneously . . . and against the wishes of their society” (520b 2; cf. 502a 3 ff.); and Plato himself says that there is no compulsion for such philosophers to take part in politics.

This problem is very like Aristotle’s; and like Aristotle, Plato has created it for himself. He had merely to state that, human beings being not merely intellect but embodied intellect, a life of unremitting philosophy would upset one’s psychic harmony, and that *psuche* of the philosopher-king in particular needs to rule as well as to philosophize for its well-being. Forthwith, the refusal to rule would be an act of injustice in the sense in which the term is used of the individual in the *Republic*, and so detrimental to one’s *eudaimonia*. But Plato, like Aristotle, seems unable to give precedence at any time to any activity which is intellectually less respectable than any available alternative.

Problems arising from a preference for intellectual respectability are not at this period confined to Plato and Aristotle. In many ways Thrasymachus and Callicles are diametrically opposed to Plato and Aristotle; but not in this respect, as we see in *Republic* 340b 6 ff. There, when Thrasymachus has entangled himself, or been entangled by Socrates, over “the interest of the stronger,” Cleitophon endeavors to rescue him, claiming that Thrasymachus means by the interest of the stronger what the stronger thinks to be in his own interest. But Thrasymachus will have none of this: “Do you think that I call stronger one who makes a mistake, when he is making the mistake?” (340c 6). Similarly in the *Gorgias* Callicles is not primarily a hedonist. He insists that the *agathos* is *phronimos* (491b, etc.); and, when there is an apparent conflict between being *phronimos* and pursuing pleasure, it is the pursuit of pleasure that is abandoned (499a ff.).

All these phenomena, it seems to me, form part of a pattern, a pattern comprehensible in the context of the historical circumstances of the latter fifth and fourth centuries in Greece. Socrates, Callicles, Thrasymachus, Plato, Aristotle—and many others—have a characteristic in common, in addition to many differences: all are excited by the powers of the human intellect, so suddenly come to flower in Greece at this time, however different the ways in which they wish to employ it<sup>47</sup> and however various the goals to which, in the guise of *eudaimonia*, they wish to attain. And all, given the choice between activities that are *intellectually* more and less respectable, will choose the intellectually more respectable. So, Thrasymachus insists on the expert status of the unjust man, even though

---

<sup>47</sup> Callicles and Thrasymachus did not wish to devote their lives to contemplation, or to philosophy in general; see *Gorg.* 484c 4 ff.

his insistence renders it easier for him to be refuted, or apparently refuted, by Socrates; and Callicles behaves similarly. So, Plato and Aristotle adopt views of human *eudaimonia* which pose problems for them; and Aristotle—I would suggest—is so excited by the powers of the “active intellect” that he puts forward a view of it which disrupts his general account of *psuche*.

In these circumstances, that the life of *theoria* should attain a position of unchallengeable superiority over the life of moral and political activity in Aristotle’s eyes is not surprising. I do not, however, suggest that the admiration for intellectual powers was the sole cause. Traditional Greek values have a part to play. From Homer onward, the goal of the *agathos* Greek is the attainment of well-being, prosperity (which brings increased leisure with it), and self-sufficiency if possible, for his household, his *oikos*. *Aretai* are the qualities deemed most likely to produce that result, *eudaimonia* the result itself. There is no obvious reason why the attainment of *eudaimonia* should demand, for example, just behavior in cooperation with one’s fellow-citizens. What it does require is an experimental issue: if Thrasymachus believes that *adikia* is a more reliable means to the desired goal, he is justified, in terms of Greek values, in terming *adikia* and *arete*. There is no expectation that moral action will be a necessary means to, or constituent of, *eudaimonia*; but there are certain criteria which any state of affairs claimed to be *eudaimonia* will be expected to satisfy.

Let us consider the terms in which Aristotle commends *theoria* in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: *autarkeia* (1176b 5 ff., 1177a 27, 1177b 21); pleasantness (1177a 23); and *schole*, leisure (1177b 4). *Theoria* affords more *autarkeia* and *schole* than does the life of practical *arete*, and it affords a superior kind of pleasure. Furthermore, it is divine, or quasi-divine, activity. That *theoria* pre-eminently possesses these characteristics is unlikely to have occurred to the Greek in the street; but if such a Greek is to value any activity most highly, these are the characteristics that it must possess. And, if one is commending anything most highly to anyone, one must try to demonstrate that it in fact possesses those characteristics which he himself admires most highly. (I do not suggest that Aristotle takes a cynical view; he seems to me to value the same characteristics himself.)

Now none of these characteristics is moral; all are self-centered, or at most *oikos*-centered. If we take traditional Greek values into account, there too the same self-centeredness or *oikos*-centeredness appears.<sup>48</sup> The *oikos*-

---

<sup>48</sup> *MR, passim*.



centeredness, too, poses problems for Plato and Aristotle. Both are political philosophers, and Plato in particular is trying to solve urgent practical problems.<sup>49</sup> In their analysis of the needs of the city, they naturally place the needs of the city first: consider Plato in his account of *dikaiosune* in the city, and Aristotle in much of the *Politics*,<sup>50</sup> where his discussion for the most part form the basis of Stewart's judgement that Aristotle's view of life is "social from beginning to end."<sup>51</sup> But when Aristotle and Plato have to commend behavior to others (or even to themselves), they must use the value terms available (*arete*, *eudaimonia*, etc.); and they must accept certain implications of these terms, which are inadequately "civic" for their purposes. When this necessity is added to their own preference for theoretical intellectual activity, it is not surprising that neither can successfully persuade a *theoretikos* at a time when he is engaged in *theoria* that he should perform some moral or political action instead.

Some final questions: Did Plato and Aristotle notice these problems? If not, why not? Would they have minded if the problems were insoluble? Of am I merely imposing on Plato and Aristotle a question which seems important in the light of the emphases of a different ethical system?

In Plato's case, the answer is clear: Plato did notice, and was deeply concerned to solve the problem, for the well-being of the city of his *Republic* rests upon the willingness of the philosopher-kings to govern it. About Aristotle I am less certain. The schematic arrangement of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which separate discussions of the *aretai* are set one after the other, makes it possible for such problems as these to escape notice, though the discussions of the two grades of *eudaimonia* are so juxtaposed, and so expressed, as to render failure to notice rather unlikely. However, the difficulty I am discussing involves a decision at a point in time; and such a decision, while characteristic of much more recent ethics, is not characteristic of ancient Greek ethics, where attention, in philosophical and non-philosophical writings alike,<sup>52</sup> tends to be directed rather to the nature of *arete* and *eudaimonia* and the identity of the *agathos*. For this reason, too, the problem might be overlooked. Nor am I certain that Aristotle would have been deeply concerned about the question: for him the *theoretikos* was not *qua theoretikos* uniquely well qualified to govern his city. The average *agathos/phronimos* could govern, and Aristotle's problem in the *Politics* is rather to give an opportunity for

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 238.

<sup>50</sup> See note 34.

<sup>51</sup> P. 299.

<sup>52</sup> *MR*, pp. 179 ff.

ruling to all who are qualified<sup>53</sup> than to compel the few who are qualified to do so. And as to saving someone from a burning building, we have no right to demand that Aristotle agree with us about such matters. He might well have replied, as did the younger Pliny<sup>54</sup> on being informed by his uncle that Vesuvius was erupting and that he was going to bring what help he could *studere me malle*: “I had rather get on with my studies.”

---

<sup>53</sup> *Pol.* 1332b 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Epist.* 6. 16.

## CHAPTER NINE

# THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ARISTOTLE'S *ETHICS* AND *POLITICS*

### Introduction

Throughout this book Adkins has been raising issues of how actual normative language usage fixes the meaning of terms concerning ethics and politics for everyday Greeks from Homer to the early Fourth-century, B.C. E. In this essay, he brings together these two strands so that there is a sense of theoretical completion. The essay was published in 1984 (twelve years before his death) and so can be said to represent his mature thought on these subjects.

The key process to focus upon in this essay is the relationship between *ergon*, *arete*, and *eudaimonia*. If Adkins is correct, then much of modern scholarship in virtue ethics (in particular) has been off the mark.

Adkins begins his essay by repeating what Aristotle suggests in several places that the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* are to be read together as one work with two separate foci.

Can the two of these be brought together? This is the purpose of Adkins' essay.

The primary lynch pin is *eudaimonia*. Does an individual work for *eudaimonia* in the private sphere and in the public sphere in the same way? The key term to determine this is *ergon*. Now many (including myself)<sup>1</sup> have emphasized the role of Aristotle as a biologist. In the biological context *ergon* stands for "function." It is related to how an animal part relates to what it is to do. Since Nature does nothing in vain, each animal part must have a function (*ergon*). Now following this in a general way via the theory of soul (*De Anima*) one might talk about a general way in which various *eide* (species) are what they are. For

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Boylan, *The Origins of Ancient Greek Science: Blood—A Philosophical Study* (London: Routledge, 2015), ch. 4, cf. Michael Boylan, *Method and Practice in Aristotle's Biology* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: UPA/Rowman and Littlefield, 1983).

example, if a tree (as a plant *genos*) has a nutritive soul as the essential part of its definition, then a good tree is one that takes in nutrition and sends out a lot of fertile seeds. This is what it means to be a good (*arete*) tree. If one were to examine two oak trees, for example, and one was thick and robust and the other was thin and scrawny, then one could (under this interpretation of *ergon*) say that the former was a *good (arete/agathos)* tree while the other was not. When compared back to the *Ethics* and *Politics* Adkins calls this sort of analysis the “metaphysical biology” approach. Those who take the metaphysical biology approach generally say that like the oak tree which is called good for exhibiting its nutritive soul, and the cheetah who could be called good by exhibiting its olfactory sense and speed on the plain (sensitive and locomotion soul), so also a human could be called good for exhibiting theoretical reason (according to his natural ability) and practical reason (going after the mean in everyday life—generally open to all). Ross and McIntyre are often cited as proponents of this position.<sup>2</sup>

So why does Adkins reject this interpretation? He begins with a careful history of normative language that he sets out in the preceding essays in this book along with his work in *Merit and Responsibility*.<sup>3</sup> These earlier works illustrate two understandings of the word, ‘*arete*.’ In the first sense the word essentially means functional excellence (function, *ergon*, without the metaphysical biology). This is a sense of accepting *arete* that even Thrasymachus could accept, e.g., if you wanted to buy a knife would you rather have a sharp one or a dull one? In this sense *arete* functionally commends the execution of any given *ergon* (here understood as “work”). But then there is another excellence, *arete\** which constitutes the human *arete* connected with *eudaimonia*. It is this *arete\** that most *previous* commentators have missed.

Now for *eudaimonia* Adkins goes through four restatements of Ross’s translation of *EN* 1097b 22-1098a 18. This process makes *eudaimonia* the result of activity characteristic of the human life principle in accord with human excellence (which is the best and most complete).

To make this case stronger Adkins looks at *ergon* in the context of the *Politics* (because under the initial assumption it is the second part of the *Nicomachean Ethics*). Once again, the power and capacity attributes are

---

<sup>2</sup> W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1923, rpt. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1949): ch. 7; and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2007): ch. 12.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A in this volume for the principal logical arguments of *Merit and Responsibility*.

highlighted in a practical way as a task, work, or job.<sup>4</sup> This goes back to Homer, as well, especially where *ergon* is seen in light of being a good soldier. This indicates another problem with the traditional interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*: *ergon-arete-agathos* are viewed situationally and not as a human characteristic, as such. For example, slaves and women have work appropriate to them within their social roles,<sup>5</sup> but they cannot be *arete/agathos*.

This practical bent to *ergon*=>*arete*\*=>*agathos*=>*eudaimonia* solves the problem of motivation for the quieter *aretai* so that *dikaioisune*, for example, might seem like a plausible life choice so long as it is clear that *arete*\* leads to *eudaimonia*. This, again is situational socially. In some societies obeying the constitution leads to a good outcome. To be good, in a civic sense, means obeying the constitution (for the most part unwritten). Other societies have evil constitutions and so being a straight arrow in that society will not make a person good.

So, what social conditions are necessary to get onto this new series of positive outcomes? First, it depends upon the station in which one lives. You need leisure. This means that those without leisure—such as a shopkeeper, a craftsman, or a farmer cannot be *agathos* and this continuum is not available to them. This fact, Adkins argues, means that the project of declaring that there is a universal *ergon* for all humankind based upon metaphysical biology is mistaken. The *arete* project that is the backbone for Ross, MacIntyre and other traditional virtue ethics advocates is to be replaced by the *arete*\* project which situates citizen *erga* (food, crafts, weapons, money, public worship, and making decisions in the public interest) are to be put forward—not because they are, in themselves, choiceworthy, but rather because they are connected by Greek political practice (slanted to the higher social stations) with *eudaimonia*. *Ergon* that brings *eudaimonia* connects with certain privileged men and not with humankind.

So, what does this really mean? It means that ethics/politics project goes hand-in-hand with the historical/social development of the Ancient Greeks. There were particular political/social needs and those who could fulfill them were deemed *arete/agathos*. The path there for those with leisure and an *ergon* is one that is politically/socially positively

---

<sup>4</sup> All without metaphysical biology.

<sup>5</sup> This may mean that these two groups can fulfill their social role (*ergon*) but not be *arete* or *agathos*. This seems to indicate that Aristotle is not creating general rules for all Humankind, but is rather in a tradition that has functional-specific definitions of the appropriate *ergon*—some of which may lead to *arete* or *agathos*, and some which may not.

recognized. The motivation to do so is *eudaimonia*. This makes the valuation instrumental, which is commonplace in social/political philosophy (and also to ethics\*—here understood in derivative *eudaimonia* terms). Ask a political philosopher whether this makes sense and I think you'd have general agreement. Ask a moral philosopher and controversy occurs with the virtue ethics folk and the deontology folk—but then that's what makes for a worthwhile discussion. Adkins here presents a unified vision of considerable interest that should be at the table of every serious inquiry of this sort.

### Adkins' Essay\*

Here are many possible ways of discussing the link between Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*. In the manner of Jaeger and Allan<sup>6</sup> one might attempt to locate each of Aristotle's works on ethics, or individual books of those works, in the light of one's favored theory of the history of Aristotle's intellectual development, do the same for the *Politics*,<sup>7</sup> and try to argue that the *Eudemian Ethics* or *Nicomachean Ethics*,<sup>8</sup> or some part of one or both, is closer to the *Politics* in doctrine than the rest of Aristotle's ethical writings; and a devotee of Kenny's work on the *Ethics*<sup>9</sup> might in addition upgrade or downgrade the *Politics*, or parts of it, according to its resemblances to or differences from the doctrines of the *Eudemian Ethics*.

Questions of this kind will not be discussed here. I shall be concerned with the *Nicomachean Ethics* and its relation to the *Politics*; but so far as I can discern, what I have to say is equally true of the *Eudemian Ethics*.

This article has a different genesis. Several times recently I have endeavored to convince serious students of Aristotle that Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* were intended to be read together, and can be properly understood only if they are so read; but I found difficulty convincing them.

---

\* All translations in this essay are by Adkins.

<sup>6</sup> W.W. Jaeger, *Aristotle*, R. Robinson [trans.] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948); D.J. Allan, *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics* [*P*]. I cite and quote from the versions of Sir Ernest Barker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948) [Barker], B. Jowett, in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English*, W.D. Ross, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) [Jowett], and T.A. Sinclair (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1962) [Sinclair].

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*), W.D. Ross, trans., in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English*. W.D. Ross, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) [Ross].

<sup>9</sup> A.J.P. Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

The situation is rather surprising. After all, Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Ethics* that *politike* is the art or science of the practical good (*EN* 1094a 27); and elsewhere that the *eudaimonia* of the individual is the same as the *eudaimonia* of the *polis* ([*P*]olitics) 1324a 5); that the *polis* is an association of like people for the sake of the best life or *eudaimonia* (*P* 1328a 35, cf. 1328b 34, 1332a 7 ff.); and he gives the same characterization of *eudaimonia* as in the *Ethics* (*EN* 1098a 16); that one needs leisure with a view to the development of *arete*, human excellence, and with a view to political activities (*P* 1392a 2), with which should be compared “the sphere of activity of the practical *aretai* is the political and the military” (*EN* 1177b 6); that the *arete* of the citizen and ruler is the same as that of the good man (*P* 1333a 11); and that human beings have the same goal of individuality in common, so that the definition of the best man and the best constitution must be the same (*P* 1334a 11).

There seems to be a *prima facie* case for my position. I do not deny that there are differences of emphasis between the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, nor that these may create some serious philosophical problems;<sup>10</sup> but for the understanding of Aristotle’s ethico-political thought, the resemblances and continuities are much more important.

To throw light on this topic, I shall briefly discuss the relationship of Aristotle’s values and presuppositions in ethics and politics to those of his culture. To suggest that Aristotle is not a great moral and political philosopher *simpliciter*, but a great moral and political philosopher who lived in Greece in the fourth-century B.C.E., is sometimes held to diminish him. In my view, it diminishes Aristotle solely in comparison with those great moral philosophers who did not live at a particular time and place; not a large group. In fact, Aristotle invites us to consider the values of the culture, saying (*EN* 1095b 6) that an adequate member of an audience for lectures on moral and political philosophy must have been well brought up morally; and he had already excluded the young and ethically immature (1095a 2). Aristotle will begin from the moral and political values that the well brought-up Greek—the Greek who shares Aristotle’s values and attitudes—brings to class. It cannot be irrelevant, and may be illuminating, to consider the relation of Aristotle’s values and attitudes—brings to class. It cannot be irrelevant, and may be illuminating, to consider the relation of Aristotle’s values and presuppositions to those of fourth-century, and earlier, Greece.

---

<sup>10</sup> See A.W.H. Adkins, “*Theoria* versus *Praxis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Republic*” *Classical Philology* 73 (1978): pp. 297-312 (“*Theoria*”)—[Chapter 8 of this volume].

Ideas are transmitted by words, and Greek ideas are transmitted by Greek words, not all of which are readily translatable into English. Value-terms are the most notorious examples. I shall discuss several here. But any Greek word, by virtue of possessing a different range of usage from any possible English equivalent, may possess different connotations from any English equivalent; and sometimes connotations render a philosophical position more plausible in one language than in another. The Greek word *ergon*, I shall argue, performs important services of this kind for Aristotle. I begin with Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for that is generally held to depend entirely on Aristotle's metaphysical biology, and hence to be independent of the values of his, or any, culture. Aristotle remarks that almost everyone agrees that the goal of human life is to attain *eudaimonia* (*EN* 1094a 17). (The "almost" is merely a philosopher's caution in the face of an empirical universal generalization: with the earlier near-synonym *olbos*, *eudaimonia* expresses the goal of all the Greeks of whose views we are aware, from Homer through Aristotle, and beyond.) Aristotle works towards a definition of *eudaimonia* thus (*EN* 1097b 22-1098a 18). The translation is that of Ross, with some Greek words added in brackets:

Presumably, however, to say that happiness [*eudaimonia*] is the chief good [*agathon*] is platitude, and a clear account of what it is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function [*ergon*] of man. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good or the "well" is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eyes, foot, hand and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; . . . Now if the function of man is an activity of the soul [*psuche*] which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say "a so-and-so" and "a good so-and-so" have a function which is the same in kind, e.g., a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness [*arete*] being added to the name of the



function (for the function of the lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player to do so well); if this is the case, and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence [*arete*]: if this is the case, human good [*agathon*] turns out to be activity of the soul [*psuche*] in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

Let me comment on some of the Greek terms. Most of us, when reading translations of Greek philosophy, acknowledge that some English words are being used in rather unusual ways, but we may not always be precise about the nature of what is unusual; and greater precision is needed here.

I begin with Aristotle's conclusion. The human good has been identified with *eudaimonia*, which Ross renders "happiness;" but since "human flourishing" seems not to be an uncontroversial rendering of *eudaimonia*,<sup>11</sup> we may restate Aristotle's position thus:

Human flourishing turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete virtue.

Next, "soul." Any serious student of Aristotle is aware of Aristotle's meaning, listed as a meaning of "soul" in the *OED*: #5: *Metaph.* "The vital, sensitive or rational principle in plants, animals, or human beings." Aristotle's argument in the paragraph under discussion makes his meaning clear; but this is not a common usage of "soul" in modern English; it is very difficult to exclude connotations derived from more common usages; and connotations cloud the clarity of arguments. It is better to replace "soul" with "the characteristic human life-principle," to produce:

Human flourishing turns out to be an activity of the characteristic life-principle in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

Better, but still neither accurate nor entirely plausible as a conclusion to Aristotle's argument: he has not justified the appearance of any word with

---

<sup>11</sup> See J.M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

the meaning of the English "virtue." But *arete* is not used in Greek in the same way as "virtue in modern English. Anything that can be said to be *agathos* ("good," in the sense of "good specimen of") may be said to possess an *arete*. If one can speak of an *agathos* horse, one can speak of the *arete* of horse: if of *agathos* plough-land, then of *arete* plough-land. Now, Aristotle has offered an argument, good or bad, for this use of *arete*: if a lyre-player discharging his function—so to render *ergon* for the moment—well (i.e., efficiently) is performing in accordance with his proper *arete* (excellence), then a human being performing his function well is performing in accordance with his proper *arete* (excellence). So, we may restate Aristotle's definition yet again:

Human flourishing turns out to be the activity of the characteristic human life-principle in accordance with human excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in accordance with the best and most complete.

The conclusion, as not stated, bereft of adventitious connotations, has two advantages over Ross's version:

1. It is a more accurate rendering of the Greek.
2. If one grants Aristotle his premises, the conclusion follows from them.

It has, however, two evident disadvantages:

1. It is a purely formal definition, telling the reader nothing about human flourishing or human excellences.
2. *A fortiori*, it has no moral content. Thrasymachus could cheerfully accept it.

Yet, Aristotle ignores this fact in the *Ethics* and *Politics*. If we term the human *arete* of the *eudaimonia-definition arete\**, and the "virtues" of *Nicomachean Ethics* 2-9, those accepted as such by Aristotle and his audience, *arete*, Aristotle simply assumes *arete\** is identical with *arete*, though Thrasymachus contended that injustice, not justice, was the *arete*.

The account of virtue (*arete*) is of little help. To be informed that an *arete* is a mean disposition between extremes allows abundant room for interpretation. Misunderstanding of the local interpretation may lead to serious practical and political problems, as anyone who supposed that "moderate" in politics had the same sense in London and in Belfast would rapidly discover. Yet there are extremists, and extremes, acknowledged in

Belfast. The Greeks were aware of the problem as Thucydides shows (3. 82):<sup>12</sup>

What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member, to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character; ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfit for action.

Thucydides is here describing a change of values under stress, and appeals to a sense of the customary use of words in his readers; but elsewhere he recognizes the possibility of disagreement in the application of value-terms between one group and another, as in the Melian Dialogue (5. 105), where the Athenians say: "Of all the people we know the Spartans are most conspicuous for believing that what they like doing is honorable and what suits their interests just."

These people differ from Plato's Thrasymachus, who is willing to say (*R* 348c 5-10) that injustice is an *arete*. They commend what is regarded by an observer—Thucydides, or the Athenians generally—as thoughtless aggression or self-interested behavior as being courageous or just, and pursue them under that evaluation. It is not clear how Aristotle could convince them they were wrong.

But the earlier part of the discussion that led up to Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* (*EN* 1097b 24 ff.) seemed to promise much more; for most translators agree with Ross in rendering *ergon* by "function" here; and "function" has very technical, scientific connotations. Furthermore, the argument by elimination that follows (1097b 33-1098a 7) is elliptical and virtually incomprehensible without knowledge of *De Anima*, on whose teachings it depends. It seems *prima facie* justifiable to claim, with most interpreters, that the argument to the *ergon* of man depends on Aristotle's "metaphysical biology," particularly as the *Metaphysics* furnishes a very similar, though brief, account of *eudaimonia* (1050b 1-3).<sup>13</sup> One might have hoped that the definition acquired some factual content from this source.

It would be pointless to deny that the *ergon* argument for *eudaimonia* is linked with discussions in the *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*, and with uses of *ergon* in the biological works. But there is more to be said: the

---

<sup>12</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Rex Warner, trans (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1954).

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics* (M), W.D. Ross, trans, in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English*, W.D. Ross, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

argument may not be derived from these sources alone; its plausibility for a member of Aristotle's audience may be derived from elsewhere; even in the technical works "function" may not adequately represent the Greek *ergon*; and we need to discover not merely why Aristotle supposed human beings to have an *ergon*, but why he characterized *ergon* as he did, apparently without fear of contradiction from his audience.

Let me begin with a brief discussion of the use of *ergon* and associated words in Aristotle's works. (We may note in passing that, according to Bonitz's *Index*,<sup>14</sup> *ergon* in all its senses is used about twice as frequently in the *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric* as in the *Metaphysics* and the major biological works.) In the biological works, in most cases, the translators render *ergon* by "function" without causing their readers any problems; but an unproblematic translation may not be fully satisfactory. Consider *Parts of Animals*, 694b 12: "Some birds have long legs; the reason for this is that the life of such birds is spent in marshes; for nature makes the *organa* for the *ergon*, not the *ergon* for the *organa*."<sup>15</sup> "Organ" and "function"? That *we* do not refer to legs as organs is unimportant; that *organa* had meant "tools" since the previous century (Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 905, Euripides, *Bacchae* 1208), and *ergon* "job task" since Homer, is not unimportant. A Greek who had read no other sentence of Aristotle could understand his words here: "Nature makes the tools for the job, not the job for the tools." Compare *GA* 794b 27: "Just as we should not say that fire alone could make an axe or any other *organon*, similarly fire could not make a foot or a hand" (termed *organa* above): It is evident that "tool" is the sense here, even in a biological context; that, as one would expect, the more recent usage of "organ" is felt as an analogy from the longer-established usage "tool."

Consider now *GA* 716a 23. Aristotle is discussing the male and female roles in reproduction: "Since the male and the female are distinguished by *dunamis* (ability, power) and some *ergon*, and the *organa* (tools) are needed for every work, and the parts of the body are the *organa* for the *dunamis*, both the male and the female sex organs are required." Note that here the use of *organa* in biological contexts is explained by reference to the sense "tools;" and also that to distinguish male and female by *dunamis* and *ergon*, with no context specified, would readily suggest that

---

<sup>14</sup> H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin: George Reimer, 1870; rpt. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> Translations are my own where not otherwise indicated. There is an English version of the *Parts of Animals* (*PA*), William Ogle, trans, and *Generation of Animals* (*GA*), Arthur Platt, trans, in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English*, W.D. Ross (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

men are physically stronger than women, and perform different tasks. At *EN* 1162a 19 Aristotle says that for other animals the association of male and female extends only as far as reproduction, whereas human beings associate not only for procreation but for the other activities of life: “for immediately the *erga* are distinguished, and those of a man and a woman are different.” Ross translates “functions;” but “tasks, work” is appropriate. At all events, a Greek who knew no Aristotelian philosophy at all could assign a meaning to Aristotle’s words here; and this suffices for my argument.

Now consider *EN* 1129b 19: “The law bids one does [*poein*] the *erga* of the brave man, for example not to leave one’s place in the ranks or run away . . . and the *erga* of the self-controlled man, for example not to commit adultery . . . ; the correctly established law does so correctly, the hastily drawn up law does so worse.” Ross reasonably renders “do the acts of a brave man;” no metaphysical biology is needed for comprehension, though the same phrase in a biological context would be rendered “discharge one’s function;” at *EN* 1160a 15, Aristotle discusses *arete*, and says (in Ross’s translation): “We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence [*arete*] both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work [*ergon*] of that thing to be done well; e.g., the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work [*ergon*] good.” The resemblance to *EN* 1097b 22 ff., with which we began this discussion, is close; but there, Ross rendered *ergon* by “function” here by “work.”

Next, a few examples from the *Politics*. At 1253a 18 Aristotle is arguing that the *polis* is naturally prior to the household and the individual, since the whole is prior to the part: “for in the absence of the whole body there will be neither foot nor hand, except in an equivocal sense . . . and everything is defined by its *ergon* and *dunamis*.” Jowett renders “working and power;” Barker “function and capacity;” Sinclair “power and function.” The disagreement of the translators makes my point; and we may note in passing that here the *ergon* of the individual is necessarily related to the existence of a larger whole, the *polis*. At 121299a 34 we find, in Jowett’s translation:

For in great states, it is possible, and indeed necessary, that every office should have a special function [*ergon*]; where the citizens are numerous, many may hold office . . . and certainly every work [*ergon*] is better done which receives the sole, and not the divided attention of the worker.

Jowett has two different renderings for *ergon*; but evidently Aristotle means the same thing. (Barker has “function . . . function,” Sinclair “tasks . . . assignment.”) “Task” seems adequate; at all events, no Aristotelian philosophy is needed to assign a meaning to the Greek.

Lastly, *P* 1276b 34 ff.:

It is clear that it is possible to be a good citizen without having the *arete* which would make one a good man. . . . For if the *polis* cannot consist entirely of good men, and yet each must do his *ergon* well, and this comes from *arete*, since the citizens cannot all be alike, the *arete* of the good citizen and the good man cannot be the same.

This is not Aristotle's last word on the subject; but it is evident that here *ergon* is linked with the different roles of different citizens in the *polis*, and cannot be the same as the—single—*ergon* of the *eudaimonia* definition, nor yet derived from metaphysical biology, which specifies a single *ergon*. Nevertheless, Aristotle can use the work *ergon* to express this too; and it is evident that the (different) *ergon* of each individual or group of citizens is linked with the *arete* of each. *Ergon* here denotes the role or task of each citizen qua citizen, whatever the role or task may be. Once again, one needs no Aristotelian philosophy to understand what Aristotle is saying here.

To sum up this discussion of *ergon*, a noun, common in the earliest extant—unphilosophical—Greek, which Aristotle nowhere defines. It is evident that the word is not used solely of biological function, or solely in technical senses (indeed, it is doubtful whether an undefined term may be said to possess a technical sense); that the sense of “task, work” is frequently appropriate; and that in the contexts in which the translators render *ergon* as “function,” that sense is felt as being derived from the sense that the word has in ordinary Greek. Accordingly, the connotations of “task, work, job” are always present, even in metaphysical and biological contexts, as the versions of the translators inadvertently indicate.<sup>16</sup>

Return now to the definition of *eudaimonia*. There Aristotle begins by considering the *erga* of artists and craftsmen before passing on to the argument that depends on the *De Anima*. Commentators have found it confusing that Aristotle employs both an argument from the *ergon* of craftsman qua craftsman to the *ergon* of a human being qua human being and an argument from the *ergon* of a biological part of a human being to

---

<sup>16</sup> R.G. Mulgan, in *Aristotle's Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), also doubts whether Aristotle's view of the function of man is derived primarily from metaphysical biology; but he offers no detailed argument.

the *ergon* of a human being as a biological whole.<sup>17</sup> Their complaints are philosophically justified; but Aristotle needs for his argument not merely *ergon* as it appears in metaphysics and biology but *ergon* as it appears in politics and ordinary life, and chooses examples that will keep the full range of *ergon* before the mind. It is the latter part of its range, as will appear, that mediates the transition from *arete* as (unspecified) human excellence of the rational part of the *psuche* to *arete* as the virtues recognized by Aristotle and his audience. There is even some rhetoric in his argument. When Aristotle inquires whether man has no *ergon*, but is *argos*, the translators render “without a function;” but *argos* is the everyday Greek for “lazy,” and Liddle-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, cites no other example of the sense “without a function.”<sup>18</sup> The choice of word is a donnish joke; and it directs the attention to the “task, work” sense of *ergon* even as Aristotle embarks upon his biological argument from *De Anima*.

Aristotle’s choice of the term *ergon* in the argument that leads to a definition of *eudaimonia* gives him a word whose usage ranges from technical biological contexts to completely unphilosophical ones. To throw light on the association between *ergon* or *erga*, *arete*, and *eudaimonia*, I turn next to an early, unphilosophical and indeed pre-philosophical poet: Homer, in whose poems *ergon* and *erga* appear frequently in the senses of “work, activity,” “product of activity,” and “work of art.” From the many examples I select a few illuminating ones.

In *Iliad* 6. 521 ff., Hector tells Paris that no one would find fault with his *ergon* of fighting for he is warlike.<sup>19</sup> Paris is voluntarily shirking, and Hector hears *aichea*, reproaches at which Paris should feel shame. Paris’s failure to perform the *ergon*, task, of fighting detracts from his *arete*. Adult warriors are disparaged by being compared with children, “who have no concern with warlike *erga*” (*I*, 2. 337, cf. 11.719); Polydamas says that the god gives to one man warlike *erga*, to another dancing, to another

---

<sup>17</sup> On function in Aristotelian and other ethics see: P.T. Geach, “Good and Evil,” *Analysis* 17 (1956-1957): pp. 33-42; R.M. Hare, “Teach, Good and Evil,” *Analysis* 17 (1956-1957): pp. 101-111; A.M. MacIver, “Good and Evil and Mr. Geach,” *Analysis* 18 (1957-1958): pp. 7-13; R. Sorabji, “Function,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1964): pp. 289-302; B. Suits, “Aristotle and the Function of Man,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1974): 23-40.

<sup>18</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon*, H.G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. Stuart Jones, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Translations of Homer are legion. Good and readily available versions of the *Iliad* (*I*) and *Odyssey* (*O*) are those of Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951 and New York: Harper and Row, 1967, respectively).

lyre-playing; and to yet another Zeus gives counsel (i.e., the ability to give counsel), which benefits many (*I*, 13. 730). Andromache tells her son Astyanax that when Troy falls, he may be compelled to perform unseemly *erga*, toiling for a cruel ruler (*I*, 24. 733-34). Astyanax is a Prince, an *agathos*, and it would be the end of his *arete* were he to become another's slave.

Like children, women have different *aretai* from men. Hector bids Ajax remember that Hector is neither a child nor a woman, who knows nothing of warlike *erga* (*I*, 7. 235), and tells Andromache to go home and attend to her own *erga*, the loom and the distaff: "war shall be men's concern" (*I*, 6. 492). A woman who is chaste and good at household tasks "knows blameless *erga*" (*I*, 9. 128, 270, etc.), and possess—female-*arete*.

This is ordinary language, not philosophy: there is no question of inquiring whether there is one *ergon* for man. But since some of the *erga* are related to the *arete* of men—and women—and *ergon* is related to *arete* in *EN* 1097b 23 ff., it is appropriate to inquire about the nature of *arete* in Homer and later. Male *arete* is the most relevant, since if contemplation is left out of account, Aristotle's human *ergon* turns out to be the *ergon* of a limited number of adult male Greeks.

What characteristics, then, has the *agathos*, the man of *arete*, in Homer? He is the head of a large *oikos*, or household. He is wealthy, and his wealth is based on the possession of land and the goods and chattels, animate and inanimate, thereon. The society is moneyless; he and his like possess the significant wealth. Its possession enables them to acquire armor—an expensive and scarce commodity—with which to defend their *oikoi*: their *oikoi* rather than the community in general, for the community has little institutional existence. (It is recorded as a matter of no surprise, and little inconvenience, that there has been no assembly in Ithaca during the twenty years of Odysseus's absence (*O*, 2. 26-34). The inconvenience of Odysseus's absence is not to Ithaca, but to Odysseus' household. In his absence, the child Telemachus has been unable to defend the *oikos*, and the suitors have ravaged Odysseus' possessions.) The *agathos* performs the essential function of defending the *oikos*, and in case of a general attack from elsewhere, the wider community, with his superior weapons and, in Homer's phrase, his warlike *erga*. His wealth furnishes the weapons and the leisure to become proficient in their use. He performs the service without which the *oikos* could not continue to exist, and consequently has prestige and authority as well as military power. It is he who gives counsel, takes an active part in such political activity as exists: Nestor reminds Agamemnon and Achilles of the prowess of his youth before attempting to arbitrate their quarrel (*I*, 1. 260-74), and Thersites is



beaten about the head for venturing to give an opinion, though what he says is true (*I*, 2. 212-69).

*Agathos* and *arete*, then, commend military effectiveness and the possession of wealth, leisure, and political power and prestige; and the role of the *agathos* in defending his group is understood to be the basis of his claim to be *agathos*. Achilles, “the most *agathos* of the Greeks,” is termed by Nestor “a great fence against woeful war for all the Greeks” (*I*, 1. 283-84); and Sarpedon is said to have been the bulwark of the city of Troy, though not a Trojan; for many soldiers followed him, and he was most *agathos* at fighting (*I*, 16. 549-51); while Odysseus expects quick reprisals for the killing of the suitors, for he and his companions have killed “the bulwark of the *polis*, the most *agathoi* of the young men” (*O*, 23. 121). Similarly, in the first recorded constitution of the Athenians the franchise was given to those who could furnish themselves with military equipment (Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 4).<sup>20</sup>

These values continue to prevail. Had one asked the Greek-in-the-street in fifth- or fourth-century Greece what was the most important *ergon* (task) of an *agathos*, the defense of the city and household would have been the almost inevitable answer; and since the cavalrymen and the hoplite continued to furnish their own equipment, the association of *arete* with wealth—more for the cavalryman than the hoplite—and leisure continues, together with the political and social prestige. The *agathos* performs certain tasks that are crucial, in the context of a whole way of life.

Even when a writer is trying to include among the *agathoi* those persons and qualities that are not normally included, the same attitudes remain. In Euripides’ *Electra* Orestes is praising a poor farmer, not an *agathos*, for his self-control, not until now an *arete* (367 ff.):

For this man, who neither has a high position among the Argives, nor is puffed up by the fame deriving from noble lineage, has proved to be most *agathos*. Will you not come to your senses, you who wander about full of empty opinions, and in the future judge men by their mode of life, and hold those to be noble who lead moral lives?

For such men administer well both their cities and their own households, whereas those who are nothing but senseless lumps of muscle are mere ornaments of the marketplace, for a strong arm does not even endure a spear-thrust any better than a weak one.

No, such ability lies in a man’s nature and in his excellence of spirit.

---

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *The Constitution of Athens*, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, trans., in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, W.D. Ross, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

Self-control is being enrolled among the *aretai* here, using the traditional criteria. The self-controlled man is better at performing the essential tasks demanded of the *agathos*, the superior specimen of a man, in ancient Greece: ensuring the well-being of *polis* and household by military and political means. Whether or not self-control does render one better at these tasks is an empirical question; and Thrasymachus disagrees.

Plato's *Meno* furnishes a fourth-century example of the link between *arete* and *ergon* in popular thought. The sanguine but unphilosophical Meno gives a number of confident replies to Socrates' question, "What is *arete*?" The first (71d 1-72a 5) employs the word *ergon*:

It's not difficult to tell you that, Socrates. First, if you want the *arete* of a man [*aner*], it's easy: this is the *arete* of a man: to be capable of transacting [*prattein*] the affairs of the *polis*, and in so doing to help his friends and harm his enemies, and to take care to suffer nothing of the kind himself. And if you want the *arete* of a woman, that's not difficult to tell: she must run her household well, keeping the contents safe and obeying her husband [*aner*]. And there is another *arete* for a child, different for male and female children, and for an older man, different for free and slave. And there are many other *aretai*, so that there is no lack of material to supply on the subject of *arete*; for each of us has *arete*—and similarly *kakia* too, I think—with respect to each of the activities and times of life, with a view to the performance of each task [*ergon*].

This use of *ergon* is ordinary Greek, and depends on no articulated philosophical position. There are many roles or tasks, which may be well or badly discharged, "well" meaning "efficiently, effectively and/or in a manner pleasing to one's superiors;" and these roles are defined by reference to the culturally-accepted structure of life in the household and *polis*.

Socrates sardonically remarks that Meno has given him not one, but a swarm of *aretai*, and creates his wonted dialectical havoc with Meno's stated views. Meno subsequently offers other definitions of *arete*: "What else is it than the ability to rule over people [*anthropoi*]?" (73c 9), and "to desire the *kala* and be able to get them for oneself," (74b 4-5). Socrates immediately induces him to replace *kala* by *agatha* in the latter definition producing "*arete* is to desire the things that are beneficial for oneself and to be able to get them for oneself."

Socrates' counter-arguments need not concern us here. What is noteworthy is that Meno, despite the profusion of different *aretai* in his first definition, subsequently offers definitions of *arete* suitable—as

Socrates points out—only for a limited number of free adult males. There are many *erga*; but only a few are really important. Note also that, though he adds the “co-operative” moral excellences<sup>21</sup> to his definitions when Socrates invites him to (73a, d), Meno’s immediate thought when *arete* is mentioned is of *effective* action.

Consider now Aristotle’s similar discussion of the *arete* of women and slaves (*P* 1259b 21 ff.): “First, we ought to inquire about slaves, whether there is an *arete* of a slave over and above his tool-like [*organikat*] *aretai* as a menial.” (His efficient performance of tasks is of course the *arete* of his role, reckoned from his master’s point of view.) Does the slave (woman, child) need justice, courage, self-control, and the other *aretai* discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, or are they necessary only for the adult male ruler? Aristotle replies that all need them, but in different way, saying 1260a 10 ff. (Barker):

It is true that all these persons possess in common different parts of the soul; but they possess them in different ways. The slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation; the female indeed possesses it, but in a form which remains inconclusive; and if children also possess it, it is only in an immature form.

Similarly, with respect to moral *arete*, “they must all share in it, but not in the same way—each sharing only to the extent required for the discharge of his or her function [*ergon*]. The ruler, accordingly, must possess moral goodness in its full and perfect form, i.e., the form based on rational deliberation, because his function [*ergon*], regarded absolutely and in its full nature, demands a master artificer; but all other persons need only possess moral goodness to the extent required of them by their particular position.”

The discussion invokes the same terms (*arete*, *ergon*) as did *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 7, with which we began. There is a temptation to speak of “metaphysical biology;” and Barker renders *ergon* by “function.” But in the light of the *Meno*, which also employs *ergon* and *arete*, and the earlier Greek discussed, metaphysical biology seems to have little importance; and where, we may ask, did Aristotle get the information that slaves do not have the faculty of deliberation, *to bouleutikon*, while women possess it in a form that remains inconclusive? We may also inquire whence Aristotle derives his account of animal-*psyche* and plant-*psyche*, the characteristic life-principles of plants and animals. Evidently

---

<sup>21</sup> For the term see Arthur W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960): p. 7.

by observing what plants and animals are characteristically able to do: plants to nourish and reproduce themselves, animals in addition having perception and motion. Similarly, Aristotle observes what free men, free women, and slaves characteristically do/ are able to do in fourth-century—and earlier—Greece. “Metaphysical biology” seems an inappropriate term: the direction of thought is not from a metaphysical biology independently arrived at to an appropriateness of *ergon*-function, but from an observation of *ergon* (behavior) to an explanation in terms of *psuche*; and only the translation “soul” introduces metaphysical connotations. Not only in the case of plants and animals but also in that of human beings Aristotle *seems* to suppose that actual roles are the only possible ones; but he knew that circumstances had enslaved many free Greeks, and consequently distinguished slaves by nature from slaves by *nomos* (*P* 1255a 3-b 4). Even in the present passage, note “all other persons *need* only possess moral *aretai* to the extent required of them by their particular position.” Earlier, “each needing to share” would be closer to Aristotle’s Greek than “each sharing.” The implication is not that they are incapable of more, but that they need no more for the performance of their roles. The *ergon* is defined by the society; and though Aristotle sets out to claim that women and slaves have defective *psuchai*, so that the defined role is appropriate “by nature” (*phusei*), his language here betrays him. So far as concerns the *erga* of mankind, their source is common practice; if any biology is involved, it is a normative pseudo-empirical sociobiology.

I now turn to the distinctions drawn by Aristotle between the *erga* of different adult male free Greeks, between the qualities of the *agathos* man (*aner*) and the *agathos* citizen (*polites*). In most cities they are distinct (*P* 1276b 34):

It is clear that it is possible for a man to be a good [here *spoudaios*] citizen and yet not have the *arete* in accordance with which one is a good man . . . for if it is impossible for a city to consist entirely of good men, yet each must do his own *ergon* well, and this derives from some *arete*; but since it is impossible for all citizens to be alike, the *arete* of an *agathos* citizen and that of the *agathos* man must be different.

This passage occurs in *Politics* 3. 4, a chapter in which, as Barker says (p. 122), Aristotle “shifts his ground.” He has previously argued (*P* 1276b 16-34) that the existence of different kinds of constitutions demonstrates that there must be different kinds of good citizen; for being a good citizen is relative to one’s task (*ergon*) in the constitution under which one lives. Aristotle does not emphasize the point, but since some kinds of constitution are bad, being a good citizen under some constitutions might

require one to be a bad man. Again, he compares the different roles of citizens in the same constitution to those of different sailors on a ship; and the comparison emphasizes skills and aptitudes rather than moral excellences.

This passage, however, refers explicitly to the ideal constitution; and later in the chapter it becomes clear that Aristotle is including all the *aretai* in “performing one’s task well” here. Yet, even under the ideal constitution the *agathos* man (*aner*) does not coincide with the *agathos* citizen; a fact that is puzzling, and may—inappropriately—suggest that the definition of the *agathos aner* is independent of civic role. A brief discussion of the best constitution will show that even here there are tensions in Aristotle’s view of the human *ergon*.

To clear the ground for his discussion, Aristotle distinguishes these necessary *erga* of a city’s inhabitants (*P* 1328b 5 ff.): food, crafts (*technai*), weapons, money, a provision for public worship, and sixth and most necessary, a method of “deciding what is demanded by the public interest and what is just in man’s private dealings” (Barker). “*Ergon*” may mean “end-product” as well as “activity;” and Aristotle seems to slide from one sense to the other here. He concludes (Barker): “The *polis* must therefore contain a body of farmers to produce the necessary food; craftsmen; a military force; a propertied class; and a body for deciding necessary issues and determining what is in the public interest.” Each group has its *ergon* in the sense of “activity;” and some have an *ergon* in the sense of “end-product” that can be used by other inhabitants.

The city needs inhabitants to perform all these *erga*; but in the best constitution not all will be citizens; for “being *eudaimon* necessarily accompanies the possession of *arete*, and we must call a *polis eudaimon* not with respect to a part of it but with respect to all the citizens” (*P* 1329a 22-24); and “since . . . the most *agathos* and the most *agathe* constitution must have the same definition, it is clear that the *aretai* which lead to leisure must be present” (*P* 1328b 24-1329a 2); he may not be a sailor, part of the naval defense of his *polis* (*P* 1327b 8). His leisure is assured by the possession of a landed estate, to be farmed for him by noncitizens (*P* 1329a 25). He is to employ that leisure in politics and, if need be in war: “the part that engages in warfare and the part that deliberates about what is expedient and gives judgement about what is just are inherent and manifestly especially parts of the *polis*” (*P* 1329a 25). Each of these roles, the warlike and the deliberative-ruling, should be discharged by the same people; but since each of the *erga* reaches its peak at different periods of life, in a sense they should be discharged by different people: war by the young, deliberation by their elders; for the one needs physical strength, the

other *phronesis*, practical wisdom. (Note that Aristotle adds a practical consideration: those who have weapons cannot permanently be excluded from power.)

The idea of complete *arete* is inseparable from that of defending the *polis* and exercising political power in it. If *theoria* is set on one side, these are the *erga*, or taken together this is the essential *ergon*, of the good man (*aner*) and—apparently—the good citizen that satisfies the definition of *eudaimonia*, the *ergon* of man (*anthropos*) manifested with appropriate excellence (*arete*), offered in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7.

We may return to *Politics* 1276b 34. There, even in the best constitution, Aristotle distinguishes between the *agathos* man and the *agathos* citizen. But surely all the *agathoi* citizens are *agathoi* men, in performing the best *erga*. The discussion of *Politics* 3. 4 indicates the tensions: “We say that the good ruler must be *agathos* and have practical wisdom, whereas the good citizen need not be *phronimos* (1277a 14-16)”. Under political rule, the citizens take it in turns to rule and be ruled (1277a 25 ff.). Ruling and being ruled are not equally praiseworthy, however (1277a 29); when not ruling, the citizen's *arete* will be inferior, for *phronesis* will not be required. The good citizen will strictly be an *agathos aner* only when ruling; and only so will he satisfy the requirements of the definition of *eudaimonia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1. 7. His *eudaimonia* is accordingly intermittent, at least when Aristotle insists that actual ruling is necessary for its attainment.

Whether one takes the broader or the narrower definition of the *ergon* of the *agathos* man, it is evident that its nature is derived not from metaphysical biology but from Greek political practice from Homer onwards. It is also evident that Aristotle can be confident that his definition of the *ergon*, thus defined, will not be challenged: that the *agathos* should rule, deliberate and defend his city, was agreed by Agamemnon, Socrates, and Thrasymachus and every one of Aristotle's Greek predecessors and contemporaries of whose views we are aware. It is not surprising that Aristotle felt able to claim that this *ergon* is related to the nature of the *agathos*.

In the light of the foregoing discussions, some puzzling aspects of the argument for the *eudaimonia*-definition of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 appear a little more comprehensible. The *ergon*-argument is undeniably odd. In the case of other things that have *erga*, not all of them perform those *erga* excellently: not all sculptors are as good as Phidias, not all eyes have 20-20 vision. But all can perform the *ergon* to some extent: for Aristotle, a blind eye is not really an eye at all, except homonymously (*GA* 726b 24, etc.). However, in the case of the *ergon* of man (*anthropos*), the function

can be discharged, the task performed, by only a small fraction of mankind; if we take Aristotle seriously, by a limited number of adult male Greeks with a leisured way of life (*P* 1252b 7, 1254b 20, 1260a 10, 1260a 14, 1327b 20 ff.). To repeat an earlier quotation: “The ruler, accordingly, must possess *ethike arete* in its full and perfect form [i.e. the form based on rational deliberation], because his *ergon* . . . demands a master artificer, and reason is such a master artificer” (*P* 1260a 17 ff.). “Perfect” is *teleia*, the same word as is used with *arete* in the definition of *eudaimonia* with which we began the discussion.

The *ergon* of a human being (*Anthropos*) has become the *ergon* of some men (*aner*): there is no *ergon* that human beings as such can all perform, and that is constitutive of human *eudaimonia* attainable by all. Aristotle’s change of focus, which occurs even within *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, is encouraged by a fact of Greek usage, which reflects the cultural attitudes under discussion in this article. One can speak of a good woman, child, or even slave, in the sense of “good of its kind;” but rarely of an *agathos anthropos*, since *anthropos* is used pejoratively of those who do not possess the prized male *arete*-qualities: as soon as *agathos* or *spoudaios* is used, the noun tends to change from *anthropos* to *aner*.<sup>22</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 Aristotle begins by seeking the *ergon* of an *anthropos* (1097b 24), but as soon as the *ergon*, well performed, is characterized as *arete* and “good” is applied to its possessor, *anthropos* becomes *aner* (1098a 14), and the reference is already to males only.<sup>23</sup>

It may now be easier to understand why Aristotle feels able to assume without argument that the formal *arete*\* of *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, the efficient performance of the human task, may be identified with the *arete* or *aretai* accepted as such by Aristotle and his audience. From the time of Homer onwards, *arete* denoted and commended the efficient performance of tasks, the most important of which were deemed essential for the flourishing, *eudaimonia*, of household and *polis*. From Homer through much of the fifth century, the co-operative excellences were not regarded as *aretai*, or as aspects of *arete*. Those who wished to enroll them among the *aretai* had to demonstrate, or assert, that these excellences constituted an essential means to, or part of, efficient and successful living. In Plao’s

---

<sup>22</sup> I do not claim that *agathos* and *anthropos* are never used together, merely that the respective ranges and emotive power of *anthropos* and *aner* will be likely to lead quickly to the substitution of *aner* for *anthropos* in any sustained discussion. (In *EN* 1106a 23 *anthropos* is the subject and *agathos* the predicate).

<sup>23</sup> I believe *EN* 1098a 12-16 to be authentic Aristotle. If there is a later gloss, the gloss indicates—what is certainly true—that the tendency continued after the time of Aristotle.

*Crito* 48b 8, Socrates reminds Crito that in the past he has agreed with Socrates that to life *eu*, to live *kalos*, and to live *dikaios* are the same. In an English translation “to live justly is the same as to live honorably, and to live honorably is the same as to live well” is a claim that seems hardly surprising, for the range of usage of the adverbs overlaps, and all are used to commend the co-operative excellences; but in the Greek of the time, Socrates' words express a novel attitude. The just life is given a new, more powerful commendation by the use of *kakis*, which belongs—as justice previously did not—to the *arete*-group: Socrates is claiming that just behavior renders one *agathos*. The use of *eu*, the adverb of *agathos*, emphasizes that *agathos* lives well in the sense of “efficiently.” A Greek who acknowledges that any quality is an *arete* is acknowledging that life is better—more efficient and successful—for those who possess that quality than for those who do not. It is for this reason that Thrasymachus claims that injustice, not justice, is the *arete*, arguing that injustice, not justice, brings successful living in its train (Plato, *Republic* 348c).

Since any Greek who accepts a quality as an *arete* regards it as a means to, or component of, successful living, it is comparatively easy for Aristotle to believe, and carry his audience along with him in believing, that the *aretai* that he and they acknowledge are the qualities that satisfy the definition of *eudaimonia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7. (Aristotle specified earlier that his audience must accept the same range of *aretai* as he does, 1095b 4 ff.). The identification of *arete*\* with *arete* is not argued, much less cogently argued, and Aristotle and his audience might simply be mistaken in identifying their *aretai* as the qualities most conducive to efficient and successful living; but it is evidently easier to claim that Greek *arete* (in the everyday sense) is true human excellence (in the sense of what makes life most worth living) than to make the claim about virtue in the usual twentieth-century English sense.

*Ergon* in Aristotle, then, has a wide range of usage; but its uses in ordinary language have a significant effect on its usage in technical contexts, as one might expect in the case of an undefined term. The effect is especially noteworthy in ethics and politics. Even if biology played some part in the argument that human beings have an *ergon*, the identification of that *ergon* is derived from the presuppositions and attitudes of daily life in ancient Greece. (If *metaphysical* biology contributes anything to Aristotle's thought here, it is the debate between the claims of contemplation and the practical life in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, insofar as the claims of the contemplative life are based on the “divine spark” view of *nous*; but those claims could have been stimulated by a quite un-metaphysical excitement over the powers of human reason, with



which Greeks had recently achieved so much.<sup>24</sup> *Ergon* is one of the terms and concepts that bind together Aristotle's ethical and political thought, and link both with the values and attitudes of the culture. If one considers the relationship of *ergon* to *arete* and *eudaimonia*, and the importance of all three in Aristotle's ethical and political thought, the necessity of reading the *Ethics* and *Politics* together, and both in the context of Greek values and attitudes, seems evident.

Let me conclude with a few remarks on a wider theme. Virtue-ethics has recently been increasing in popularity, after a long period of decline. If the arguments of this article are acceptable, it seems clear that, though we may learn much from Aristotle's analysis of *aretai*, the psychology of ethics, and similar topics, virtue-ethics and *arete*-ethics have great differences, some of which pose serious problems for the virtue-ethicist. For it is not nonsense to inquire whether the possession of (a) virtue is conducive to life at its best in any sense of "best" that renders the virtue indubitably choiceworthy. In the sense of "morally best" the claim is indubitable, for it is tautologous, but may fail to motivate choice; in the sense of "most flourishing," the virtue becomes choiceworthy but the claim becomes dubitable. In ancient Greece, if a moralist could convince others that a quality was an *arete*, his problems were over, for *aretai* are choiceworthy; now the problem is rather to demonstrate the choiceworthiness of virtue. Again, there is now no accepted *ergon* (or most important *ergon*). It is evident that even a small nation-state cannot satisfy Aristotle's requirement for the best constitution that all who have the capacity of performing the *ergon* of ruling should do so; and Aristotle has nothing else to say about the *ergon* of the human being. The *arete* of the good citizen is, for Aristotle, merely relative to the role or task he performs in his particular *polis*. If *arete* is based on this conception of *ergon*, it must be relative to a constitution. At least some virtue-ethicists hope for more. It is not my purpose to argue against them, merely to suggest that in some respects Aristotle's *arete*-ethics is of little use to them in the effective performance of their *ergon*.

A.W.H. Adkins

---

<sup>24</sup> See Adkins, "Theoria," p. 311.

## APPENDIX A\*

### A LOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CENTRAL ARGUMENTS IN *MERIT AND RESPONSIBILITY*<sup>1</sup>

#### **Chapter One: Moral Responsibility and Greek Moral Thought<sup>2</sup>**

1. For post-Kantians in the West, responsibility fixes itself upon the agent as an actor who assesses the situation, finds the proper moral maxim, and acts in a way to which he will be responsible—A[ssertion] (2-3)
2. The ancient Greeks had a rather more robust understanding of responsibility that included more of a person's beliefs and character—A (5-6)
3. [The ancient Greek notion of responsibility differs from contemporary Western notions]—1, 2
4. In every language some normative terms are valued more highly than others—F[act] (6)
5. There are two groups of values: (a) commendation for those who individually succeed (competitive values); and (b) cooperative

---

\* All translations are by Adkins.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960). Page numbers are in parentheses. Bracketed premises have no page numbers because they refer to enthymemes (suppressed premises implied, but not explicitly stated in the text).

<sup>2</sup> Please note that this logical reconstruction follows the deductive reconstruction model that I set out in *Critical Inquiry: The Process of Argument* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010, rpt. as *The Process of Argument*, London: Routledge, 2020).

values that lead to success for a common value (quiet values)—A (6)

6. [The popular struggle between whether competitive or cooperative (quiet) values are most highly ranked is a critical question for every society]—4, 5
7. Plato and Aristotle’s philosophical texts must be seen in their historical and social context in order to obtain an accurate reading—A (9)

- 
8. [In order to judge any society’s ranking of normative terms one must undergo a wide scan that includes not only philosophical texts, e.g., Plato and Aristotle, but also poetry and drama (literature) for it is here that important insights into popular attitudes that create the historical context may be found]—3, 6, 7

## **Chapter Two: Homer: Free Will and Compulsion**

1. The topic of moral responsibility has two sorts of claims for exception: (a) mistake [chapter three]; and (b) compulsion [chapter two]—A (10)
2. In a general sense one is not held responsible for actions he performs or fails to perform under compulsion—A (10)
3. Though Zeus is powerful (even if all the gods were to pull on a golden chain to displace him from heaven, they would be unsuccessful), Zeus is not omnipotent in the sense of medieval Christian debates—A (12-13)
4. There are instances in which characters from Homer claim that minor gods are responsible for some action (such as Patroclus dying from Hector’s spear)—F (15)
5. [Minor gods are even less omnipotent than Zeus and thus can never be understood as the critical defining causal incident]—A
6. However, Patroclus cannot use his claim of “god interference” as a valid instance of compulsion—2-5 (14-16)

7. Another possible source of divine compulsion is *moira*—A (17)
  8. In *Iliad* 8. 70 ff, Fate is depicted as superior to the gods (example of Zeus using the golden scales to make a judgment on punishment)—F (17)
  9. Death is also out of control of the gods and yet is under the power of *moira* (again the scale example and also the case of Polyphemus praying to Poseidon for Odysseus to die on his voyage home, *Odyssey* 9. 528 ff.)—F (17)
  10. The concept of fate for the ancient Greeks should not be confused with the modern philosophical concept of determinism since what is destiny is that we all die someday, but that there may be considerable variability in how that should come about (this amounts to one accepting one's share, cf. *Iliad* 10. 253 and it enables an enduring spirit to humans, *Iliad* 24.49; Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 333 ff.)—A (18-21)
  11. *Moira* is not concerned with all human action—F (22)
  12. Fate cannot count as compulsion—7-11 (22-23)
  13. Zeus complains that men blame the gods for their woes, *kaka*, and are wrong to do so (*Odyssey* 1. 32) and they suffer pain, *huper moron* because of their own actions—6, 12 (24-25)
- 
14. [Therefore, concerning compulsion, blaming the gods or fate is not exculpatory]—1, 13

### Chapter Three: Moral Mistake and Moral Error

1. Key moral words in ancient Greece were these: (positive) *arete* n, (its adjective *agathos*, and synonyms *esthlos* and *chrestos*; comparative forms *ameinon* and *beltion*; superlative forms *aristos* and *beltistos*; and (negative) *kakotes* n. (its adjective *kakos* and synonyms *deilos* and *poneros*; comparative form *kakion*; superlative form *kakistos*, neuter noun *aischos* (adj. *aischron*, *aischion*, *aischiston*)—most negative with the complement of *kalon* (*kallion*, *kalliston*)—F (30)

2. *Agathos* and *kakos* are moral terms (as are their synonyms) are moral terms in masculine and feminine forms, however; the neuter forms *agathon* and *kakon* are not moral terms but prudential terms—A (30-31)
3. For example, in the *Odyssey* (4. 778, 12. 204), Penelope's suitors chose twenty *aristoi* for an ambush and attempted murder of their host Telemachus—this is not commended morally, but militarily (prudential)—A (32)
4. [It is important to view the case of commending words and the situation in order to ascertain whether a moral or prudential usage is intended by the author]—1-3
5. The culture of the ancient Greek world viewed value in terms of those who exhibit the qualities of a warrior<sup>3</sup>—A (34)
6. Homeric values resonate from success in war—which can have considerable, visible, positive social impact on others—A (35)
7. The quiet, cooperative values<sup>4</sup> are not seen by all as having a positive effect on others—A (36)
8. In Homer the competitive values are honored more by the people than the cooperative values—5-7 (36)
9. Sometimes the competitive values come into conflict with the cooperative values such as when Agamemnon wants to deprive Achilles of his prize, the slave girl Briseis—but Nestor says that in this case the quiet should prevail<sup>5</sup>—F (37)

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Iliad* 12. 310ff. where Sarpedon asks Glaucus, “Glaucus, why are we two honoured most highly in Lycia with a seat of honour, with choice meats, and with full cups? . . . Not ingloriously do our kings rule throughout Lycia, and eat fat sheep, and drink choice wine. No; they have excellent strength, for they fight in the foremost ranks of the Lycians.”

<sup>4</sup> Examples of the quiet virtues are: *pinutos*, *pepnumenos*, *saophon*, and *dikaios*.

<sup>5</sup> *Iliad* 1.275ff. “Do not, *agathos* though you may be, take the girl from him.” The normative force is of the quiet virtue of promise keeping over the competitive right to do as he pleases as general.

10. The gods evince the same judgment at times (that quiet values should trump competitive values)—such as when Achilles drags Hector’s body round the walls of Troy<sup>6</sup>—F (38)
11. Sometimes a character needs to convince others that their competitive actions violate quiet, cooperative values such as when Penelope tells Eurymachus that they should not feel *elenchea* about not being able to bend a bow (competitive) but should feel that shame for dishonoring the house of a chieftain (Odysseus)<sup>7</sup>—F (39)
12. [Even though the competitive values are honored more than the cooperative values, there are some instances where this judgment is called into question in the face of important quiet values]—8-11
13. *Aeikes* is a term generally used for competitive military failure (*ergon aeikes*) but sometimes it picks up silent values as well (Agamemnon saying that Aegisthus plotted *aeiked*<sup>8</sup> and that Achilles acted *aeidea erga* to the corpse of Hector<sup>9</sup>, et al)—F (42-43)
14. Though generally *kalon* (linked to *dikaion*) is the direct opposite of *eischron*, there are cases in which *kalon* is not the direct opposite of *eischron* (as in Homer where *eischron* describes defeat but *kalon* does not describe victory)—F (44)
15. *Kalon* has no direct comprehensive link to the competitive excellences—13, 14 (45)
16. Society’s claim against the *agathos* is clear since the *arête* standard depends not upon intentions but upon physical skills, command skills, or inherited advantage and thus not a ground of mistake—A (46-47)

---

<sup>6</sup> *Iliad* 24. 53: Lest, *Agathos* though he be, we gods should be angry with him.

<sup>7</sup> *Odyssey* 21. 331 ff. “Eurymachus, it is impossible for men to be well spoken of, *euklees*, who dishonor the house of a chieftain and devour his positions. Why regard your failures [at drawing Odysseus’ bow] as *elenchea*? [when you should regard your dishonor of Odysseus as *elenchea*]”

<sup>8</sup> *Odyssey* 4.533

<sup>9</sup> *Iliad* 22.395, 23.24

17. The *agathoi* claims against society lies in the fact that moral mistake and moral error cannot be distinguished<sup>10</sup> due to the fact that *ate* spans mistake and moral error—A (49)
  18. The *arete* competitive standard gives society a strong claim against the *agathos*, and the *agathos* an equally strong claim against society—16, 17 (46)
  19. Quiet values are viewed as inferior to competitive ones—even though an *arete* competitor may feign quiet values to burnish his image—12, 15, 18 (50-52)
  20. Competitive values of strength and valor meet out justice in competitive terms—as in the case of Odysseus confronting the suitors<sup>11</sup>—F (54)
  21. Homeric values honor explicit physical prizes and the external good opinion of society whereas one may possess quiet values privately—A (55-56)
  22. Premise #21 creates a system that is confused about the relative roles of competitive and cooperative values—A (56-57).
- 
23. [Mistake and moral error are equivocal because they may be applied to both competitive and to cooperative values thus creating public moral confusion] —4, 8, 12, 15, 19-22

---

<sup>10</sup> Eg. *Iliad* 19. 85 ff., Agamemnon says, “Often indeed did the Greeks tell me this, and abused me. But I am not the cause *aitios*, of this. No; Zeus and *moira* and the Fury who walks in darkness are the cause; for they put fierce blindness, *ate*, into my mind in the assembly on that day when I deprived Achilles of his prize [Briseis]. But what could I do? The god brings all things to pass.”

<sup>11</sup> *Odyssey* 22.35 ff. “Dogs, you did not think I would return home from Troy; for you have consumed my possessions, lain with my maidservants by force, and wooed my wife while I was yet alive, fearing neither the gods who inhabit broad heaven, nor yet that there would be any retribution from men hereafter: but now the doom of death is upon you all.”

## Chapter Four: ‘Justice’: Homer to the Fifth Century

1. In Chapter Three two groups of values were enunciated: competitive (illustrated by the words ‘*arete*’ and ‘*agathon*’) and cooperative or quiet (illustrated by the words ‘*pinutos*,’ ‘*saophron*,’ and ‘*dikaios*’) with the former group favored over the latter—F (61)
2. Sometimes there can be an alignment of these two categories, and sometimes they conflict—there must be a clear way to adjudicate the two in order for merit and responsibility to be clear—A (61-62)
3. Some progress was made in this regard between Homer and the fifth-century BCE—A (62)
4. Chapter Four will examine this period of history in order to sort out how these two value dimensions can be understood together—1-3 (62)
5. There is no earthly authority that will aid the weak (who exhibit quiet virtues) against the strong (who exhibit the competitive virtues), ergo there must be appeal to the gods—A (62)
6. However, sometimes the gods act against the quiet virtues<sup>12</sup> in the same way that humans do—F (62-65)
7. The gods can be viewed under the same model as exhibiting the competitive and cooperative virtues, though their ability to position themselves via power makes them superior to men in the competitive virtues (but still subject to the tangle of the two virtue arenas)—5,6 (62-65)
8. However, there are downsides to the pure *arete* ethic because, as Odysseus says when he is disguised as a beggar and is ill-treated, “Life has its ups and downs. You should be cautious. One day you

---

<sup>12</sup> Examples abound: e.g., When Oeneus sacrificed hecatombs to all the other gods and goddesses, but not to Artemis: he either forgot or did not think of it (*Iliad* 9.536 ff.). Nonetheless, Artemis sent a wild boar to ravage the land: an act which harmed not merely Oeneus but the people as a whole. This fits into the competitive model via violent revenge but it is contrary to *dikaios* (justice) because it is a disproportionate punishment.



may be in my position, if the gods choose to deprive you of your *arete*, and you will then need just (*dikaios*) treatment from others”<sup>13</sup>—A (64-65)

9. This second side (the quiet virtues) is mentioned with reference to the gods when a traveler asks whether a region is well-disposed to strangers (hospitality)<sup>14</sup>—A (65)
10. The Greeks, in general, were too hard-headed to be just if it were not visibly prudentially advantageous to do so—A (67)
11. The project of identifying the quiet virtues with *arete* in the Homeric world fails—8-10 (70)
12. If there were a way to identify *dikaios* with *agathos* then the quiet virtues could come to the fore and dissolve the aforesaid inconsistencies in having two separate value systems—A (71-72)
13. According to Tyrtaeus’s “Eunomia,” an individual becomes *agathos* in war only if he shows valor in fighting—F (73)
14. Xenophanes moves in a slightly different direction saying that wisdom, *sophia*, is more to be valued than strength<sup>15</sup>—F (74)
15. Xenophanes says that the common good is advanced by *sophia*-type behavior—in some cases eclipsing pure physical prowess—F (74)
16. Solon says<sup>16</sup> that the key threat to Athens is the folly of its people that is caused by the *hubris* that leads to unjust deeds—*dusnomia* brings woe, *kaka* upon the city while *eunomia* makes everything orderly as it should be—F (75)

---

<sup>13</sup> *Odyssey* 18. 130 ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Odyssey* 6. 120, 8. 576, 9. 176.

<sup>15</sup> Theodor Bergk, *Kleine Philologische Schriften*, vol. 2 (Halle, Saxony: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1886): Xenophanes 2, cf. Mimnermus who said, “Rejoice your heart while you can, sitting in the sun and harming no one” Mimnermus 7. These are moves to the quiet virtues.

<sup>16</sup> Solon 4 Bergk, esp. 11 and 32ff.

17. Xenophanes and Solon assert that the state's welfare will come from a new kind of organization that can be the result of wise legislation, and that this skill is *arete* (in contradistinction to Tyrtaeus)—12-16 (75)
  18. Even Theognis who exalts the privilege of birth admits that many *kakoi* are rich and many *agathoi* are poor and will not take wealth in exchange for *arete*<sup>17</sup>—F (77)
  19. Aristotle cites the Theognis quote from a later vantage point as making the possession of *dikaioi* sufficient for being *arete*<sup>18</sup>—F (78)
- 
20. The move from Tyrtaeus to Xenophanes to Solon to Theognis demonstrates that *arete* and *agathos* have moved from mere competitive prowess to an acceptance of the quiet virtue, *dikaioi* as sufficient also to render one *arete*—4, 7, 11, 17-19

## Chapter Five: Pollution

1. Pollution is a key concept in the ancient Greek world and, at the time of Hesiod, covered all sorts of activity that might affect some vision of purity (non-moral and moral), e.g., after sexual intercourse (non-moral), and after some actual immoral act which might 'pollute' the divine fire; these are easily cleansed—F (86-87)
2. By the time of the fifth century BCE the sense of pollution includes a more durable stain—such as murder or the disasters of Oedipus; these instances of pollution could affect entire towns—F (88-89)
3. Thucydides describes the purification of Delos<sup>19</sup> for the natural pollution of birth (due to blood) and death (due to non-existence) would no longer be allowed on the island so that those who would give birth or die would be ferried to Theneia<sup>20</sup>—F (89)

---

<sup>17</sup> Theognis, *Reliquiae*, ed. Friedrich Gottlieb Weicker (Frankfurt: Broenner, 1826): 315ff. Some attribute these lines to Solon.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *EN* 1129b 29.

<sup>19</sup> Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 3. 104.

<sup>20</sup> Later in the tenth year of the war the Delians themselves were expelled from their island since the Athenians thought that the inhabitants were impure, *katharoi*

4. Pollution in the fifth-century BCE was thought to be dangerous whether it be from moral or non-moral causes—1-3 (89)
5. In the case of “Antigone” the pollution instigated by Creon is dangerous and there may not be a remedy (non-moral pollution is easily cleansed whereas moral pollution may not allow for escape—e.g., Oedipus)—A (90)
6. Pollution is a complex non-rational notion (beyond the simple washing of one’s hands from blood or dirt)—F (92-93)
7. One strand of the non-rational notion is that as a result of a violent death the shade (soul) of the dead person is still in the presence of his killer evincing resentment over the latter’s ability still to enjoy life while the shade cannot (this resentment hurts both the shade and the killer)—A (92)
8. Plato in the *Laws* declares that for one who kills by accident, he must employ means of purification greater than the more numerous means that are employed by those who kill a man at games, i.e., one year exile<sup>21</sup>—F (92)
9. Some seek monetary payment to the family of the slain (as in the case of the *Shield of Achilles*)<sup>22</sup> in lieu of being killed or exiled—A (94)
10. Demosthenes suggests that there must be limits to blood money—especially in the case of murder<sup>23</sup>—F (95)
11. [Pollution in the fifth century BCE has a tangled mixture of the empirically tangible sense of pollution and expiation along with a developing intangible sense—though the moral and prudential senses are still intertwined]—5-10

---

and that they had omitted this one aspect of purification, *katharsis*; Thucydides 5. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Laws* 865b 3 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Iliad* 18.497ff.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Demosthenes, *In Aristocratem*, ed. Ernst Wilhelm Weber (Lenae: Bibliopolio Croekeriano, 1845): 28.

12. There are “queer” cases which force a change in the Homeric worldview as seen in the fifth century BCE: e.g., Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (in which Oedipus becomes polluted for his actions even though there was no intentionality), and the Law of Draco which differentiates various levels of punishment for killing—F (98-99)
  13. Antiphon<sup>24</sup> in the *Tetralogies* examines various instances of killing and ascribes cause (*aitia*) so that they might be distinguished, e.g. (a) during sports practice in the javelin an unfortunate person runs into the infield as the spears are flying and is killed (whose fault is it—Antiphon sets it upon the victim for going where he shouldn’t be; (b) a younger man assaults an elder who has insulted him so that the elder man needs the care of a physician, but the elder man dies (whose fault is it?—Antiphon sets it upon the attacker whose action brought in the doctor in the first place)—F (103-104)
  14. In *Oedipus at Colonus* Oedipus tries to defend himself against the Chorus (common opinion) by saying that he has really not “done” anything (meaning voluntary action for which he might be held accountable)<sup>25</sup>—F (105)
  15. In Euripides’ *Orestes*, Helen denies that she can be “polluted” by speaking to Orestes since Orestes is not polluted by the events which led up to the death of Cleopatra—rather it is the god, Phoebus who is “polluted” and not Orestes (meaning causal agency brings about pollution and not the simple committing of the act itself)<sup>26</sup>—F (105-106)
  16. The sorts of defenses in premise #13, #14 and #15 are a stretch in ordinary Greek and thus show how attitudes on the quiet virtues are in transition—12-15 (104-107)
- 
17. Between Homer and the fifth-century BCE pollution transitioned from attaching itself to the act itself regardless of circumstances to a trend of requiring the intellectual justification of causation

---

<sup>24</sup> Antiphon, *Tetralogies*, ed. Fernanda Decleva Caizzi (Milan: Istituto editoriale cisalpino, 1969).

<sup>25</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 266 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Euripides, *Orestes*, 75 ff.

(particularly in the act of murder) and this continues into the fourth-century BCE via Plato<sup>27</sup> and Demosthenes<sup>28</sup>—4, 11, 16 (106-108)

### Chapter Six: External Interference

1. Though in the fifth-century BCE there are some inklings of the development of moral responsibility, for most common Greeks the notion of *deed done => resulting outcome* (regardless of circumstances) remains in most minds—A (116-117)
2. One key candidate for bringing moral responsibility to the fore would be the role of external influence (especially divine interference)—A (117)
3. There is no developed extant writing on a “freedom v. determinism” debate in the fifth- century BCE—F (118-119)
4. [There is some positive confusion in the fifth-century about how to understand external divine interference]—1-3
5. Herodotus reports<sup>29</sup> that the inhabitants of Siphnus believe that there may be an imminent assault by Samian exiles (that may be fated) but the response by the Siphnians is not fated—F (118-119)
6. Callinus says<sup>30</sup> that all will die when the *moirai* spin death for you, but that nonetheless a man should march straight forward brandishing his spear (meaning that though there may be external fate one must act heedless of this)—F (119)
7. [Though fate or actions by the gods may affect an individual’s situation in life, most would not think that this shifts responsibility/accountability away from the agent]—6, 7

---

<sup>27</sup> Plato *Laws* 865a-865b.

<sup>28</sup> Demosthenes, In *Aristocratem*, ed. Ernst Wilhelm Weber (Bibliopolio Crockeriano, 1845): 76.

<sup>29</sup> Herodotus, III. 37ff.

<sup>30</sup> Callinus I.8, Bergk.

8. Aeschylus in *Seven against Thebes* says in Eteocles' last speech that when the gods send evils, *kaka*, one cannot escape them<sup>31</sup>—F (120)
9. It seems as if the family curse against the house of Laius will end in Eteocles fighting his brother Polyneices and so end disastrously<sup>32</sup> (though this is still ambiguous)—A (120)
10. Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* moves away from the traditional Homeric model of “deed done causes resulting outcome” as he disclaims her responsibility for killing her husband<sup>33</sup>—A (121-123)
11. The declaration in premise #10 depends upon the existence of an avenging spirit that really killed Agamemnon (though not really successfully)—A (122)
12. [The examples of *Seven against Thebes* and *Agamemnon* make suggestive feints toward external interference and a more nuanced view of moral responsibility]—8-11
13. In the *Troades* of Euripides there is a debate on Helen of Troy's guilt or innocence<sup>34</sup>—F (124)
14. Helen (speaking in her own defense) claims: 1. The fault lies with Hecuba since she bore Paris, 2. The fault also lies with Priam for not killing his child,<sup>35</sup> and 3. The fault also lies with Aphrodite (a goddess so powerful that even Zeus could not resist) who appears with Paris<sup>36</sup>—F (124)

---

<sup>31</sup> Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, l. 719.

<sup>32</sup> Eteocles realizes the situation that he feels he cannot escape (due to external influences of fate) and speaks of the curse of Oedipus, “Alas, now are the curses of my father coming to fruition” (*ibid.*, 653ff, esp. 655).

<sup>33</sup> Clytemnestra says, “You say this is my deed. . .No; taking the form of the wife of that dead man, the old bitter spirit that takes vengeance for the crime of Atreus has offered him as payment, having sacrificed a full-grown man on top of young ones” (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1497 ff.).

<sup>34</sup> Euripides, *Troades*, 914, 1059.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 919/922.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 950.

15. Helen says “If you wish to overrule the gods, your desire is foolish”<sup>37</sup>—F (124)
  16. Gorgias also examines possible defenses in his play, *Helen*<sup>38</sup>—F (125)
  17. Gorgias’ arguments in Helen’s defense are: (a) she was influenced by the purposes of chance and the plans of the gods (necessity); (b) she was snatched away by force; (c) she was persuaded by arguments; and (d) she was captivated by love—F (125)
  18. Gorgias contends that 17 a-d all indicate force from without thus absolving Helen from wrongdoing<sup>39</sup>—F
  19. Though Gorgias’ project is more ambitious (proving Helen innocent no matter what) than Euripides (who only believes a limited number of arguments might hold sway) they both represent instances of external influence mitigating responsibility—13-18 (126-127)
- 
20. In the fifth-century BCE there are isolated attempts at evading personal responsibility due to external influences—4, 7, 12, 19 (127)

## Chapter Seven: The Ways of God to Man

1. In the fourth-century BCE a main function of the gods was to link *dikaiousune* to *arete* (i.e., underwriting morality)—A (131)
2. The relevant words in the divine context are *hosios* and *eusebes* and their opposites *anosios*, *asebes*, and *dussebes*—F (132)
3. In Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* there is a sentiment that the gods ought to protect just, *dikaios*, men and not punish them together with the *adikos*<sup>40</sup>—F (133)

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 964 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Gorgias, Encomium of Helen in *Die Fragmente Vorsokratiker*, H. Diels and W. Kranz, eds., 6th ed., vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1952, rpt. Dublin 1966).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>40</sup> “Alas for the fate which united a just man *dikaios*, with men who are *dussebeis*” *Seven Against Thebes*, 598.

4. By the fifth-century BCE *eusebes* and *hosios* possess a well-established moral usage—1-3 (133)
5. When Bacchylides addresses the tyrant Hiero, “Do *hosia* and cheer your heart; for this is the greatest of benefits”<sup>41</sup> the subtext is that the exhortation is to *hosios* (righteous deeds) in order to cheer your heart—A (134)
6. Bacchylides has been singing of Croseus who sent many gifts to Pytho and was yet overcome by the Persians (thus the righteous deeds cannot merely be gifts to the gods—a sort of commerce)—A (134)
7. Euripides makes a similar point—F (135)
8. One cannot buy one’s way to *hosion* or *eusebes*—5-7 (135)
9. In the *Suppliants* the Chorus sings for their children who lie unburied outside the walls of Thebes<sup>42</sup>—because of this fact the women are ‘polluted’—F (136)
10. Sometimes a person can be *hosios* under one description and *anosios* under another; this creates some confusion<sup>43</sup>—F (137-138)
11. *Hosios* and *eusebes* are used in the Greek of the fifth-century BCE to span the gaps between the heterogeneous mix of commending standards (from prudential to moral)—4, 8-10 (137-138)
12. In some contexts, people are rewarded or punished in this life by ignoring *hosios*, *eusebes*, and *dikaios*<sup>44</sup>—F (138-140)

---

<sup>41</sup> Bacchylides 31 (3), 83. In *Greek Lyric Poetry*, vol. 4 ed. and tr. David Campbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992—Loeb).

<sup>42</sup> Euripides, *Suppliants*, 63 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Orestes in Euripides’ *Orestes* says, “I know it: I am *anosios* in that I have killed my mother; but *hosios* in another in that I have avenged my father” (546 ff). Antigone says in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, “Through behaving as a *eusebes* I have incurred a charge of *dussebeia*” (924).

<sup>44</sup> In Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus contends that the gods reward *eusebes* and punish *dussebes*. Likewise in the *Electra* of Euripides, Electra says that she is sure that Orestes will be successful in avenging his father, “For if



13. Logically, another way the gods could reward the pious and just and punish the opposite would be through an afterlife in which such rewards and punishments might be eternal—F (140)
  14. An understanding of the afterlife in which souls persisted and could be subject to reward or punishment was not in the mainstream of fifth-century BCE Greek thought<sup>45</sup>—A (140-148)
  15. Empedocles thought that life on earth was a punishment for sins committed in another existence<sup>46</sup>—F (143)
  16. Sometimes crimes against basic, family relationships trumps (according to the gods) goodness in acting justly, e.g., Orestes' matricide—F (144-145)
  17. According to the model of gods enforcing (sometimes) penalties against those who are impious, humans should react by acts of cleansing—as Adeimantus discusses in the books of Musaeus and Orpheus, “if we do not sacrifice terrors await us”<sup>47</sup>—F (147)
- 
18. Though there are still multiple contradictions in the model of how the gods view the quiet values during the period of fifth-century BCE Greece, there are glimpses of honoring *hosios* and *eusebes* which connect to *dikaios*—11-17 (147-148)

## Chapter Eight: The Persistence of Traditional Values

1. The “shame” standard persists from Homeric values to the fifth-century BCE as set out by Theognis (who had made a step toward connecting *dikaios* to *agathos*) when he says, “One man finds fault with the *agathoi*, another man praises them; but of the *kakoi* no mention is made at all”<sup>48</sup>—F (154)

---

injustice is to get the better of justice, we must no longer believe that the gods exist” (583 ff.).

<sup>45</sup> Outliers would be the “Orphic” and ‘Pythagorean’ cults, and in some poetry such as Pindar’s “Laments for the Dead”

<sup>46</sup> Empedocles, DK fr. 115.

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Republic* 364e 3ff, cf. Homer, “Hymn to Demeter” 480 ff.

<sup>48</sup> Theognis DK fragment 797ff., cf. 665ff.

2. *Not being mentioned* (especially after one's death) is the worst fate of all (as per Theognis) which is seconded by Pindar<sup>49</sup> —F (154)
3. To have a good reputation is more important than anything else—1, 2 (155)
4. In Sophocles' *Electra*, Electra retorts to her mother, "You say you killed my father. What admission could be more *aischron* than this, whether you killed him justly, *dikaios*, or no?"<sup>50</sup>
5. In Euripides' *Suppliants*, Theseus replies to a demand of Creon that he shall not assist Adrastus to bury the Argives lying dead before Thebes in such a way that the two-tiered Homeric normative system is still active<sup>51</sup>—F (156)
6. In Euripides' *Heraclidae* Demophon also gives evidence of the two-tiered Homeric system<sup>52</sup>—F (157)
7. The two-tiered Homeric value system that puts competitive values above cooperative, quiet values still has resonance in fifth-century BCE Greece—4-6 (157)
8. Often being "put to shame" merely refers to being a competitive loser—F (159)
9. Slavery is said to be a terrible thing (*zen me kalos*), but this refers to the life one would have "being a slave" and not to the immorality of the institution itself—F (161)

---

<sup>49</sup> "*Aretai* which involve no danger win no honor either on land or in the hollow ships; but many men remember it, if something *kalon* is achieved with much labor" Pindar, *Olympian Odes*, tr. ed. William H. Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): 6: 9.

<sup>50</sup> Sophocles, *Electra*, 1051, cf. Euripides, *Orestes* 194.

<sup>51</sup> "For supposing you have suffered something at the hands of the Argives, they are dead. You have resisted the enemy [which is] *kalos*, but in a manner shameful, *aischros*, for them; and justice (*dikaios*) has been done" 528 ff.

<sup>52</sup> Euripides, *Heraclidae* "You had no chance of taking (these suppliants) from me by force, and so shaming, *aischunein*, me; for it is not a city subject to Argos that I govern but a free city" 285 ff.

10. Chastity is the only quiet moral virtue commended for women—A (161)
11. A woman's *arete* consists in not being spoken of at all—A (162)
12. It is not *aischron* for Clytemnestra (as a woman) to have killed Agamemnon as it would have been being seen leaving Achilles' tent—10-11 (162)
13. The Homeric virtues continue to hang on even in the fifth-century BCE—8-12 (162-163)
14. *Kalon* and *aischron* can be understood both as "beautiful v. ugly" as well as "noble v. shameful"—F (163)
15. For some in the upper classes, to be *kalon* is desirable as an "add-on" but until it is the case that the gods intervene and punish those who are *aischron* making them lose their fortune, it remains merely a sort of fashion accessory; only when it is believed that the gods support the quiet virtues and when they play a part in civic success will they be *real* to the average person—A (164-165, 168)
16. In a key text<sup>53</sup> by Simonides *agathos* is understood traditionally (Homeric competitive ethic where if someone wins, he is *agathos* and if he loses, he is *kakos*); it is hard to *become* and to *maintain* because man is subject to bad luck which could cause him to tumble to *aischron* without fault—A (165-166)
17. *Aischron* may function in two major ways: I. I say, "This is wrong, and I am guilty (*aischron*);" II. (a) "This is *aischron* for me" (subjective response); (b) "Because of an action done against me I am *aischron* (victim response); (c) "I am *aischron* because a relative has become *aischron* due to an action committed (family

---

<sup>53</sup> Simonides, 5 Bergk. "It is hard for a man to become truly *agathos*, four-square in hands and feet and mind, wrought blameless." Nor does the saying of Pittacus seem to me to be well said, though it was uttered by a wise man. He says it is hard to be *esthlos*. Only a god could have this privilege. For a man it is impossible not to be *kakos* if irresistible disaster overtakes him. For when he fares well, *eu prattein*, every man is *agathos*, but *kakos* when he fares badly, *kakos*. . . . I praise and make my friends anyone who does nothing *aischron* of his own free will, *hekon*; but against necessity even the gods do not fight."

ties); and (d) “I am *aischron* because a relative is a victim (family ties), “Jonah effect”)—A (167)

18. Only #17 (a) is an instance of personal responsibility—F (167)
  19. Most instances of *aischron* in fifth-century BCE Greece (as evidenced by the literature) are in class II—A (167)
  20. [Most instances of *aischron* in fifth-century BCE Greece are not instances of personal responsibility]—14-19
- 
21. Despite some progress during the fifth-century BCE in the Greek world to connect *dikaios* to *agathos* there is still considerable interest in the Homeric connection of *agathos* and *arete* to the competitive virtues of war and conquest—3, 7, 13, 20 (153)

## Chapter Nine: The Infiltration of “Morality”

1. The test for real transition to recognition of the quiet values is when *agathos* and *kakos* are given out to individuals on the basis of their exhibition of quiet values—F (172)
2. One step in this direction is when Oedipus says, “How can I be *kakos* by nature? I acted in self-defense; and so, even had I known who Laius was, I should not have been *kakos* in killing him”<sup>54</sup>—Oedipus’ actions were not *kakos* so unless one is born *kakos*, it would seem unfair to judge him that way—A (173)
3. Though Sophocles and Aeschylus connect *kakos* with the lack of quiet values they do not do the same with *agathos* and *dikaios*—A (173-174)
4. The key question, therefore, to ask is whether anyone becomes *agathos* due to *dikaios* alone? —A (175)
5. [One part of the gradual transition to a recognition of moral merit and responsibility would be authors who commend and decry on the basis of the quiet virtues alone] 1-4

---

<sup>54</sup> *Oedipus at Colonus*, 270 ff.

6. The fragments alleged to belong to the *Heraclidae* do connect *arete* with the possession of cooperative goods: honoring the gods, honoring one's parents, and honoring the laws of Greece—F (176)
  7. *Aristos* is connected to self-control (*sophrosune*) by Orestes<sup>55</sup>— (F 177)
  8. Herodotus regularly uses the negative approach of *kakos* and *kakotes* in the new quiet manner and in one instance uses the positive approach with *aristos*<sup>56</sup>—F (178)
  9. Though the negative approach is the most common in the fifth-century BCE, there are some emerging uses of the positive approach—6-8 (179)
  10. In the fifth-century BCE there is an emphasis in evaluating a person (as a whole) over individual actions; *agathos* attaches to the man and *kalon* to the actions—A (180)
  11. Telling lies is called *aischron* in *Prometheus Bound*<sup>57</sup> and adultery is highlighted as *aischron* for the husband in the *Agamemnon*<sup>58</sup>— F (181-182)
  12. In cases of possible mixed actions (such as disobeying the law, *nomos*, or nature, *phusis*, nature trumps convention)<sup>59</sup>—F (183-187)
- 
13. [The conventional sense of *agathos* (*kata nomos*) and the natural sense (*phusis*) can be in conflict with the latter conflated with the

---

<sup>55</sup> Euripides, *Electra*, 367ff.

<sup>56</sup> Herodotus, III. 80. Here he discusses the seven Persian conspirators (after they had slain the Magi) on the best form of government: democracy, monarchy, or oligarchy. Monarchy is decried because with absolute power not even the *aristos* could possess self-control (*sophrosune*).

<sup>57</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 685ff., cf. Pindar *Pyth.* 1.85.

<sup>58</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 222.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Antigone broke the civil law but obeyed the natural law in wanting to bury her brother, *Antigone*, 510ff. Other examples come from Sophocles, *Electra*, 558ff. and Euripides *Electra* 1051, in which in one sense an action is *dikaos* but in another sense it is *aischros*.

gods and thus trumping the former—though only occasionally and in extreme cases]—5, 9-12

## Chapter Ten: The Good Citizen and the Just Man: Assembly and Law Courts

1. In Euripides' *Electra*, the Husbandman, a man of poor, humble birth but who behaves with self-control is called *agathos*<sup>60</sup>—F (195)
2. The reason that a Husbandman can be called *agathos* is because of a new sensibility of what characteristics best help the *polis*<sup>61</sup>—A (195-196)
3. For Simonides the man who benefits the city is sound, while in Euripides he is *agathos*—F (197)
4. One fact that contributes to the democratization of *agathos* for everyone (in Athens) comes from the fact that the navy is populated by the common man—A (197)
5. There are instances in which social class plays less a role in being *agathos* because of quiet virtues (though it is still a property of gentlemen)—1-4 (197-198)
6. To be *agathos polites* has many forms, Nicias tried to dissuade the Athenians for a particular naval expedition—not for his own safety but for that of the *polis*<sup>62</sup>—F (199)
7. Pericles also expounds upon *agathos polites*<sup>63</sup>—F (200)

---

<sup>60</sup> Euripides, *Electra*, 386ff.

<sup>61</sup> Simonides, 5 Bergk, 165 f. also sets out that city benefiting justice makes for a sound man and inasmuch as a person is not *eischron* he is *kalos*.

<sup>62</sup> Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6. 9.2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 2. 42.2, “For it is right that those too who are worse, *cheirones*, in other respects should display courage, *andragathia*, in the face of the enemy on behalf of their native land; for having wiped out the harm, *kakon*, they did by the good, *agathon*, which they have now done (by fighting bravely), they have conferred a greater benefit upon the city than the harm they did by their individual actions.

8. In the Greek law courts, a defendant's service to the state was relevant—not only to get a lighter sentence, but to overturn an obvious violation of the law<sup>64</sup>—A (201-203)
9. Lysias' could not appeal to pity in the sense of trotting out one's wife and children (a common tack in Ancient Greece), but pity, *sungnome*, in which one appeals for others to think about the justice of one's case<sup>65</sup>—A (203)
10. The justice to which Lysias is referring is the common advantage of the city: "You will vote for what is both just, *dikaia*, and in accordance with your oath, *euorka*, and advantageous, *sumpheronta*, to yourselves and to the city"<sup>66</sup>—F (204)
11. When there is a clash between *dikaios* and *sumpheron tei polei*, then advantage wins—A (205)
12. In cases of the clash between quiet and competitive values in law courts in fifth-century Greece it was pointless to bring up quiet values—6-11 (205-207)
13. The two civic duties in Athens were to serve in battle (if needed) and to privately foot the cost of public projects—A (208)
14. Nicias said that the *agathos polites* was a man who benefitted the state or at least did not harm it deliberately (*akon*, from compulsion or mistake)<sup>67</sup> and Lysias in the thirteenth speech concurs<sup>68</sup>—F (209)
15. A goal for the acceptance of quiet values as *arete* is for law courts to commit that a breach of the law is worse than offending a powerful citizen—A (210)

---

<sup>64</sup> *Eight Orations of Lysias*, ed. Morris H. Morgan (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1895): 12. 38

<sup>65</sup> *Lysias*, 3. 47, "Remember these things and give a just verdict, *ta dikaia*."

<sup>66</sup> *Lysias*, 21.12, cf. Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 667ff.

<sup>67</sup> *Thucydides* 6. 14

<sup>68</sup> *Lycias*, 13.52

16. In his twenty-sixth speech Lysias holds that a man should be disbarred from office due to his family's collaboration with the tyranny of the Thirty<sup>69</sup>—F (211)
- 

17. Though there are cases of public acceptance of quiet virtues in the assemblies and law courts, the tack that is often chosen is to unite principles with expediency—5, 12-16 (212-214)

### **Chapter Eleven: The Administrator, The Immoralist, and The Ordinary Man**

1. In the second half of the fifth-century BCE the Delian League of Aegean cities created international applications of what counted as justice—A (220-221)
2. The Mytilenean revolt caused Cleon to call for severe punishment because the Mytileneans were *adikia* for revolting<sup>70</sup>--F (221)
3. Diodotus successfully framed the argument that it should be about Mytilenean misdeeds but about what is beneficial for Athens<sup>71</sup>—F (221)
4. [In cases of foreign policy self-interest, *ta sumphora*, trumps *ta dikaia*—1-3
5. The key to a self-interested foreign policy is to reward one's friends and to punish one's enemies—F (223)
6. The *arete* for a state is to maintain freedom and independence—A (224)
7. The wealthy of one state did not cooperate with the wealthy of another state—A (224)

---

<sup>69</sup> *Lycias*, 26.4

<sup>70</sup> Thucydides, 3. 38. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 40.7



8. The individual with mere native wit was no longer up to the task of looking after the state's interest in an international context—A (225)
9. Leaving state affairs to the wealthy to manage leads to the potential of political overreach which hurts the state—A (225)
10. The *arete* of political management led to a class of civic administrators—5-9 (225-226)
11. The case of the ordinary Athenian's attitudes towards *agathos* and the quiet virtues is displayed by Plato's *Theages*,<sup>72</sup> *Meno*, and *Crito*—A (226-228)
12. In the *Theages* sons of politicians are no better than the sons of shoemakers,<sup>73</sup> and then Socrates asks whether to be *agathos* one needed to be *kaloï kagathoi* (another way of being *agathos polites*) and the answer is "yes"—F (227)
13. In the *Protagoras*, this ability is associated with learning a particular skill, *techne*<sup>74</sup>—F (228)
14. In the *Meno* both men and women can be *agathos* by being *sophronos* and *dikaïos* in their spheres of influence: the city (taking care of one's friends and harming one's enemies)<sup>75</sup> and the household<sup>76</sup>—F (228)
15. In the *Crito*, Crito is afraid of Socrates' argument against harming the state even when the state acts unjustly (an instance of quiet virtue) by employing the unstated virtue of first helping one's family<sup>77</sup>—A (230)

---

<sup>72</sup> It is probable that the *Theages* is not a Platonic work. But the point still holds.

<sup>73</sup> (Plato) *Theages*, 126 d.

<sup>74</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 318e ff.

<sup>75</sup> Plato, *Meno* 71e 2 ff.

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Meno* 73a 6 ff.

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Crito* 45c 5. Under this account it is bad and cowardly not to look after one's family even when doing so is an instance of obeying the law (to one's own harm).

16. The ethic behind Crito is the virtue of being self-sufficient and self-defensive—even when doing so harms the state and disobeys its laws—A (231)
  17. The ethic of Meno represents a way for the common man to become *agathos* via piety and justice while Crito emphasized a self-sufficiency that is selfish in its orientation (harkening away from the quiet virtues and toward some echo of the old Homeric values)—11-16 (231-232)
  18. A third sort of individual, the immoralist, is characterized by Plato in the beginning of the fourth-century BCE, e.g., Callicles and Thrasymachus, whose positions are refuted by Socrates in the *Gorgias* and in *Republic I*—A (235-239)
  19. Because of the introduction of *techne* in the quest to be *agathos*, rich men hired sophists to teach their sons this *techne* so that the sons might attain to *agathos*—F (236-237)
  20. Protagoras, a sophist, promises just such a *techne* course with improved civic excellence (of learned skills) which Socrates also refutes—F (239)
  21. Callicles, Thrasymachus, and Protagoras would not have been viewed as nihilists by the contemporary Athenian audience because they represent an echo of the old Homeric competitive ethic—A (239-240)
  22. [The immoralists, represented by Callicles and Thrasymachus in their exhortation of the traditional Homeric ethics are refuted by Plato, and thus represent another step in the decline of the Homeric ethic]—18-21
- 
23. The traditional standards of Homer in late fifth-century and early fourth-century Athens are being undermined by words and phrases (and the thoughts they represent) that were unknown in the time of Homer—4, 10, 17, 22 (240)

## Chapter Twelve: Ground for Agreement

1. One way to find out how there can be agreement concerning the proper role of quiet virtues is to examine the key terms in question and to ascertain how things in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and early fourth-century BCE view these linguistic usages—A (244-245)
2. One new term to enter the fray is *phronesis* (n.)/ *phronimos* (adj.); Plato in the *Laches* says that a traditional *arete*, courage (*andreia*) requires *phronesis* in order to be complete<sup>78</sup>—F (245)
3. Isocrates links *phronesis* to political skill<sup>79</sup>—F (245)
4. [*Phronesis* is a sort of wisdom]—F
5. *Sophia* understood as “wisdom” has been an honored *techne* since Homer—F (246)
6. Sometimes *sophia* has been understood as being wise to gain one’s own advantage (the usage of the immoralists)—F (246)
7. In Plato’s *Protagoras* Socrates connects “*eu phronein*” with “reasons well” and that connects to “*eu bouleusthai*” (comes to a sound conclusion)<sup>80</sup>—F (247)
8. There is moral significance in the *Protagoras* that links the terms: (*sophronein* with *eu prattein* and *eu prattein*)—A (248)
9. [*Sophrosune* and *phronesis*, both quiet moral terms, become recognized as skills necessary to achieve the good “*eu*” life]—1-8
10. Another change during this time period (late fifth-century and early fourth-century) is that the way of life became valued via the terms: *agathon*, *eudaimonia*, *eu prattein*, *agathos bios* et al.)—F (249)
11. Another key term, *ophelimon*/ *ophelimos* (advantageous) became a key prudential term that was also linked to the quiet virtues—A (250)

---

<sup>78</sup> Plato, *Laches* 192 c.

<sup>79</sup> *To Nicias*. 14.

<sup>80</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 333d.

12. The use of *ophelimos* lends a factual dimension to the discussion—meaning that it cannot be based by mere convention, *nomos*—A (250)
  13. *Agathos* (because of premise #12) took on a new instrumental usage “good for x”—A (251)
  14. Premise #13 leads to the question, “whose good is some action directed?”—A (251)
  15. [The introduction of the quiet moral terms that hook onto ideas of a good life or an advantageous life is another step in promoting the quiet virtues as being worthy of private and public awareness]—10-14
  16. One key term that enters the fray is *eudaimonia* (*eu* (good) + *daimonion* (power, divinity, soul)) and is considered to be a synonym for *eu prattein* (doing well), *agathos bios* (the good life), and *eu zen* (living well)—F (252)
  17. Everyone would agree to setting the terms in #16 as a life goal so that there is no post-Kantian sense of duty v. prudential good—A (253)
  18. *Agathos* and *eudaimonia* possess a flavor of wealth—A (254)
  19. If it can be shown that *eudaimonia* is the reward for being *dikaios*, then the quiet virtues will have found full ascendancy—A (255)
  20. The number of essential terms to which any Athenian would aspire are now three in number: *eu zen* (efficient, enjoying life), *kalos zen* (having people say nice things about you), and *dikaios zen* (possessing the quiet morals)—A (256)
  21. Plato’s goal is to link the last value term in #20 to receiving the first two as a consequence—A (256)
- 
22. The stage is set for popular recognition that the possession of a quiet virtue can bring about absolute terms of commendation—9, 15-21 (256)

### Chapter Thirteen: Plato: Logic and Elenchus

1. In the *Crito* Socrates refuses to escape his execution—even though he has the clear opportunity to do so—F (259)
2. Under the traditional value system suffering evil (*kakos*) was *aischron* (so that Socrates' refusal makes him *aischron*—but Plato asserts otherwise due to Socrates adherence to civic *dikaios*<sup>81</sup>—F (259)
3. The paradigm in the *Crito* is a change in the status of quiet values and their relation to *arête* and *agathos*—1,2 (260)
4. In Plato's *Apology*, *dikaiosune* is linked to *arête* and *agathos*<sup>82</sup>—F (260)
5. “Holding one's post”—even in the case of possible death—is a traditional value [from warfare], but now Plato has Socrates “holding his post” under orders from the gods that were set out when he went to Delphi and was declared the wisest of men<sup>83</sup>—A (260)
6. One's *daimonion* refers to his particular, individual, mysterious power, so that what may be true of Socrates, may not be generally true of all others—F (261)
7. [Though the *Crito* offers an instance of a quiet values conferring *arête* and *agathos* though this may not be universalizable to mankind]—4-6
8. In the *Crito* the case is made that no city can exist if the people do not obey its laws—F (262)
9. Premise #8 is understood via the stability that following the laws entails and a contract theory in which Socrates (or anyone) benefits from the nurturing of the city so that he must abide by its judgments—even if they are unjust—F (262-263)

---

<sup>81</sup> “The most *agathos*, *phronimos*, and *dikaios* of all men of his time whom we have known” Plato, *Phaedo* 1181 16.

<sup>82</sup> Plato, *Apology* 38e 3.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 28b, 21a.

10. One problem with Socrates' contract theory is that there are no "voiding conditions"—A (263)
11. The immoralists would not accept any contract that did not contain voiding conditions—A (263)
12. The immoralists would not accept putting the civic interests above personal interests (as Socrates does)—A (264)
13. [The immoralists would not accept Socrates argument in the *Crito*—8-12
14. Polus, an immoralist, is a character in the *Gorgias* who depicts himself as an ordinary Greek—F (266)
15. Socrates confronts Polus with the following argument: a. there is a reason to be called *kalon* and it is due to actions; b. the reason is resulting pleasure (*hedu*) or advantage (*ophelimon*); c. the opposite to premise 'b' is *aischron*; d. harm to the community (*adikaion*) is worse than harm to one's individual self; therefore e. it is more *aischron* and *kakon* to commit *adikaion* actions [no matter what the individual benefits]—A (267)
16. Polus should have demurred and asserted that individual pleasure and advantage trump all—A (267)
17. Plato's ad hominen argument depends largely on the emotive power of *aischron*—A (268)
18. Plato also employs ambiguity in ordinary language that both asserts that one should seek *dikaiosune* and *arete* so that they won't be harmed (even though many who are unjust profit from this)—A (268-269)
19. Plato's usage creates a substitution of *dikaiosune* for *arete* as a descriptor of human actions to be commended—A (269)
20. At the very least, Plato (in the *Gorgias* and *Crito*) has shown that the old commending of competitive virtues (that was largely a homogeneous class) has now become a heterogeneous class with the quiet virtues—14-19 (269)

21. Plato still has a considerable burden of proof to confront the immoralists, like Thrasymachus, who claim that it is *arete* to be *adikaion* (both from the point of view of an ordinary person and of a king)—A (270)
22. Callicles expresses approval for being *phronimoi* respecting the affairs of the city but expresses contempt for individual *sophrosune*<sup>84</sup> since *eudaimonia* for Callicles is merely what is pleasant (like scratching an itch) —F (271)
23. Under Callicles, what brings pleasure is the commendable *techne*, so that the most *agathos* man is the one with the skill to obtain the most pleasure—21-22 (272)
24. Plato counters that the *techne* in question must satisfy both the body and the soul so that, without both, all one has is an *empeiria* (a fake *techne*) which can be likened to the relation of medicine and cooking: both bring pleasure, but only the former is really good for body and soul and the latter is an imitation of the former—A (272)
25. Even if Callicles were to return by saying that rhetoric is in fact an *empeiria* Socrates could return with the commonplace that rhetoric must be a *techne* associated with knowledge—A (273)
26. Further Socrates contends that the proper *techne* establishes the right relationship between lawfulness and the law and that this is *dikaiosune* and *sophrosune*<sup>85</sup>—A (273)
27. This emphasis upon *kosmia psuche* as a properly ordered soul puts Plato's theory onto general theoretical grounds—A (274)
28. [Plato refutes Callicles]—24-27
29. Plato's theory relies on the proper ordering of a state that would be recognized only in a democracy—A (276)

---

<sup>84</sup> Plato, *Gorgias* 491d 7.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *Gorgias* 504 d.

30. If all *technai* are subordinate to money making<sup>86</sup> and exercising of *adikaia* power (as in a monarchy), then the refutation of premise #28 will not hold—A (276-277)
  31. What Plato needs to succeed is an account that makes the introduction of knowledge (*epistemon* and *sophon*) critical to becoming *agathos* and outdoing others—A (277)
- 
32. Though Plato makes some interesting arguments in the *Crito*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic* I, the extreme immoralist is not yet defeated—3, 7, 13, 20, 23, 28-31 (277-278)

### Chapter Fourteen: Ideal States

1. Plato's task is to link *dikaiosune* with *arete* without using contracts or *ad hominem* logic—A (282)
2. A way to meet the immoralists on their own ground is to begin with the fact that both sides agree that *arete* is used to commend skills (*techne*)—what is needed is a different understanding of *agathos*—A (282)
3. It is agreed that the ordinary man wants to administer his household and the city efficiently—F (283)
4. The immoralists wish to exploit the city for himself and his cohorts while maintaining a good reputation—A (284)
5. To appeal to the immoralists *dikaiosune* must be linked to the here and now—A (284)
6. Plato's strategy to alter the dialog is to change the perspective from individuals to cities—F (284)

---

<sup>86</sup> In Socrates example of the two sorts of *technai*: being a shepherd and making money (*Republic* 341b ff.) according to Adkins it is not clear that the shepherd's art is superior to the money-making art. In fact, the average Athenian and all the immoralists would demur (Adkins, 276).



7. [Plato's new understanding of *agathos* will refer to operating cities as efficiently as possible]—1-6
8. Plato's three classes of people each have a *techne* associated with their class and this is determined by the make-up of the souls of that sort of class—F (285)
9. *Dikaiosune* becomes political harmony and those who promote this community end are *agathos*—A (285)
10. The quiet virtues aim at *eudaimonia* and *eu pratein* and *dikaiosune* and *sophrosune* denote and commend functions of the individual soul and the harmony of the state—7-9 (286)
11. But the inference at #10 begs the question because it forces immoralists like Thrasymachus to admit that for a state to be *agathos* it must be *dikaios* and *sophron* when Thrasymachus asserts that *akikia* is *arete*—A (286)
12. Plato should have argued for his conception of the state instead of merely asserting it via rhetorical tricks (such as viewing the "lower" classes from the vantage point of the "upper" class)—A (287-288)
13. The *dikaiosune* that is understood via the *polis* provides a new meaning: a smoothly running city—F (288)
14. Plato has now created a model in which the ordinary people can be *arete* by accepting their subservience without complaint—11-13 (289)
15. When the individual is considered apart from the *polis*, then the meaning reverts to the traditional account; in order to change this the burden of proof is to show an individual to be *dikaiosune* and therefore more *eudaimon*<sup>87</sup>—A (289-90)
16. Philosopher kings are less *eudaimon* as kings than as philosophers (outside the cave)—A (290)

---

<sup>87</sup> Adkins believes that Plato gives up this enterprise in Book IV of the *Republic* (see *MR* p. 290).

17. Plato cannot account for why philosophers should return to the cave in order to rule—A (291)
18. Plato has not solved the problem of why philosophers should govern—15-17 (292)
19. [The framework of the *Republic* based upon the model of the philosopher kings can be altered to one that emphasizes law over the ruling dynamics]—A
20. In the *Republic*, *sophia* and *andreia* are the same, but this can lead to a warrior-style education à la the Spartans and Cretans (an unacceptable outcome)—A (294)
21. A way around the problem set out in premise #20 is to rank the virtues separately and ranking courage as #4<sup>88</sup>—F (294)
22. In the *Laws* the *agathos polites* is available to the ordinary citizen as being a good citizen who, if the situation arises, can govern (accept responsibility) and can also be governed (be a team player under the law)<sup>89</sup>—F (294)
23. *Dikaios* is now at the forefront of the strategy of the *Laws*—19-22 (295)
24. The *Laws* has as its ultimate justification a path for the state to be prosperous so long as everyone obeys, i.e., will be *eudaimon*—A (295)
25. *Dikaioisune* is only *agathos* as it relates to civic success—A 296)
26. By linking the state's and the individual's interests together (starting with the state), Plato solves his essential problem—24, 25 (296)
27. Because the emphasis is now upon the civic law, the role of the scientific ruler (aka philosopher king) is no longer a necessity—A (297-98)

---

<sup>88</sup> Plato, *Laws* 666e.

<sup>89</sup> Plato, *Laws* 643e

28. Laws will limit freedom—F (298)
29. The needs of the state will supersede those of the individual in cases of conflict (i.e., personal liberty can be overridden)—F (298)
30. If the state is well-planned via its laws, each citizen will have his role to play and this supersedes his individual interests because of the good of the state—27-29 (299)
31. Plato successfully uses the training model to make plausible that just as we train animals, we can train men (in political *techne*) to bring about positive outcomes—A (300)
32. Part of the training in Plato's education plan was to elicit proper reaction to political events—for the chosen few, the philosopher kings, they can know the reason why for these reactions—A (301)
33. Ordinary people (who are not philosopher kings) need only know what the law demands and condition responses according to the law—A (302)
34. [All people can get on board for seeing co-operative virtues as exhibiting what will count for merit in achieving *eudaimonia*]  
—31-33
35. The golden cord of *logismos* (rational deliberation) allows reason to rule in Plato's psychology (and create the habits that will make following reason pleasant)—A (302-303)
36. The golden cord of *logismos* allows for a version of the doctrine of freewill—A (303)
37. For Plato no one commits errors (*harmartemata*) on purpose (*oudeis hekon harmartanei*)—A (304)
38. Weakness of the will (emotion overtaking reason), *akrasia*, is discounted so that punishment (responsibility) is related to an act done—F (305)
39. Punishment is reserved for those evil acts that arise from a conflict between reason and passion—F (307)

40. For acts done in ignorance these can be parsed in two parts: (a) *amathia* [where one is not aware that he is in ignorance] and (b) *agnoia* [where one can simply be taught what is lacking]—A (307)
  41. There are also voluntary and involuntary harmful actions—A (308)
  42. Plato is interested in treating malefactors, but if they cannot be helped Plato advocates the death penalty—A (309)
  43. Because Plato advocates for a closed society “moral error” and “moral mistake” are not distinguished—A (310)
  44. Since the good of the social group is supreme, maintaining order via promulgating quiet values is of the highest importance—35-43 (310-311)
- 
45. [Moral responsibility comes about in Plato’s ideal state theory through the *Republic* and the *Laws* with the latter being more successful in tying the quiet values to the *eudaimonia* of the State (via a closed society) that is asserted to be in everyone’s benefit]—7, 14, 18, 22, 26, 30, 34, 44

## Chapter Fifteen: Aristotle—Analysis

1. For Plato the immoralists’ possible objections (e.g., Thrasymachus) was always in the background, but not so for Aristotle—A (316)
2. The *Ethics* and *Politics* project is a handbook on *eudaimonia*—A (316)
3. Plato linked *dikaiois* (traditionally associated with intention) with *kalon* and *agathos* with *eudaimonia*: in this way these normative terms took on a quiet value tone—A (316)
4. Aristotle assumed his pupils would choose *kalon* and avoid *aischron*, and that the ruler’s *dikaioisune* would benefit others—A (317)
5. Aristotle’s approach differs from Plato’s—1-4 (317-318)

6. For Aristotle *eudaimonia* was “an activity of the *psuche* in accordance with *arête* and if there are several *aretai* [then] in accordance with the best and most perfect”<sup>90</sup>—F (318)
7. Aristotle’s *agathoi* are men of property—A (318)
8. The causal process for Aristotle was *kalon* => *agathon* => *eudaimonia*—A (318-319)
9. Aristotle presented a more fragmented psychology than did Plato with: 1. Desire (wish, passion, appetite), 2. Choice, and 3. Thought—A (320)
10. Using his *endoxa* methodology he examines possible objections to his psychology, but these lead to absurd conclusions and are thus rejected<sup>91</sup>—A (320-321)
11. Aristotle searches in the *Eudemian Ethics* for a definition of “voluntary” and ends up with the vague notion of acting in accord with thought (*dianoia*)—A (322)
12. [Aristotle believes that “voluntary” is best concept to avoid some of the dilemmas that Plato faced]—6-11
13. Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* has three distinctions that will give more specification to the voluntary/ involuntary: a. compulsion (defined as having the final cause come from outside the agent) causes the involuntary; b. ‘hope’ for the continent allows them to forego immediate pleasure for future *eudaimonia* and thus not to rock the “choice of the most pleasant” which was commonly held to be a truism; c. whether or not the action was in accord with *dianoia*—A (323-325)
14. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* the two principal causes of involuntary are: compulsion and ignorance—F (324)
15. Aristotle is very keen not to blame the external world as a cause of the involuntary—A (325)

---

<sup>90</sup> *EN*, 1098a 16

<sup>91</sup> *EE*, 1223a 28 ff.

16. Ultimately the most critical distinction that Aristotle makes regarding the voluntary/involuntary concerns (a) acting *in* ignorance, v. (b) acting *as the result of* ignorance—A (326)
  17. Acting in ignorance is the more important distinction for it gives rise to the moral syllogism with the major premise (moral rule) and the minor premise (the situation before the agent)—F (326-327)
  18. Ignorance of what is conducive to *eudaimonia* [generally the minor premise] must be involuntary—A (327)
  19. Ignorance of the moral premise is culpable [*ignorantia legis neminem excusat* ]—F (328)
  20. Aristotle gives a credible account of the voluntary/involuntary which are pivotal concepts in moral responsibility—A (328)
- 
21. It seems that Aristotle has come up with a credible contender for justifying moral responsibility—5, 12-20

## Chapter Sixteen: Aristotle—General Ethics

1. To arrive at an account of moral responsibility one must describe the function of *arete*—A (332)
2. In ordinary parlance *arete* commends correct results—F (332)
3. In ordinary parlance *phronesis* and *sophia* have nothing to do with *eudaimonia*—F (333)
4. Plato tried to address these linguistic issues by linking quiet virtues to the health of the soul—A (333)
5. Aristotle takes a different tack by saying: (a) that *phronesis* and *sophia* are per se desirable; (b) *sophia* is the formal cause of *eudaimonia*; (c) *phronesis* is necessary for practical living and that moral *arete* is not sufficient<sup>92</sup>—A (333-334)

---

<sup>92</sup> EN 1144a 7 ff.

6. Aristotle's use of *arete* is as *kuria* (judgment or power) and not *phusike* (Plato's health model)—1-5 (334)
7. In order to have proper judgment or power an Aristotelian agent must: (a) know what he is doing; (b) choose the action for its own sake; and (c) perform the action with a settled, unvarying attitude—A (334)
8. Aristotle does not believe in training habits into unthinking automata—7 (335)
9. The way earlier authors commended co-operative virtues was via rhetoric and a tie to a "gentleman's ethic"<sup>93</sup>—A (337)
10. In Xenophon's *Apology*<sup>94</sup> a distinction is made between negative outcomes and acting justly: it is not *aischron* for Socrates to die unjustly but it is for those who unjustly put him to death: this is responsibility—A (338)
11. Isocrates repeats this point that suffering injustice is not a failure<sup>95</sup>—F (338)
12. Among some the discussion has moved to *dikaiosune* and *kalon* being divorced from practical, material success—7-11 (338)
13. Aristotle relies on this change in attitudes in the presentation in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*: cooperative virtues yield *arete* —A (339)
14. Some aspects of the traditional worldview hang on with the result that the new standard is applied to land holders only with means—A (340-343)
15. Aristotle's assumption of attitude change on commending quiet virtues is connected to the upper class—13-14 (343)
16. Aristotle defines *eudaimonia*, the *agathon* of mankind as, "An activity of the *psuche* in accordance with *arete*, and if there are

---

<sup>93</sup> Xen, *Mem.* I.1.16.

<sup>94</sup> Xen. *Apol.* 26

<sup>95</sup> Isocrates, *Panath.* 185.

several *aretai*, in accordance with the best and most perfect<sup>96</sup>—F (344)

17. In Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle sets out that *theoria*, abstract thinking, is the most perfect *arete* —F (344)
18. [*Theoria* and *praxis* are different so that excellence in one does not imply excellence in the other]—A
19. Practical *aretai* are second class in Aristotle—F (345)
20. *Dikaosune* is a practical *arete* —F (346)
21. *Dikaosune* has lost its paramount role as a quiet virtue in Aristotle—16-20 (346)
22. In Aristotle's *Politics* the role of the civic life is commended as a practical necessity (still a second-class virtue)—A (347)
23. Aristotle exhorts abstract thinking as the best way to *eudaimonia*, but abstract thinking, by itself, does not support moral responsibility—6, 12, 15, 21, 22

## General Conclusion

1. Aristotle fails to solve the problem of general moral responsibility because he links the *arete* => *eudaimonia* in the primary sense to theoretical knowledge that is available only to a few and is not action-oriented—A (348)
2. Plato fails to solve the problem of general moral responsibility because: (a) philosophy kings may be impossibilities and (b) obedience to the laws of the state (when they go against a prominent immoralist) have no real power of enforcement—A (348)
3. [Aristotle and Plato are the two most prominent philosophers in the Ancient Greek world]—A

---

<sup>96</sup> EN 1098a 15 ff.



4. [The program of establishing general moral responsibility from seventh-century to fourth-century BCE Greece is largely a failure]—1-3
  5. The nature of the political unit (the Greek city state) meant that the strongest argument in favor of the recognition of quiet moral values lay in divine sanctions and an independent, fair legal system—A (349)
  6. Neither divine sanctions nor an independent, fair legal system (though they develop in force from the Homeric era to the fourth-century) are entirely successful in bringing forth general recognition of quiet moral values—A (349)
  7. The worldview recognition of quiet moral values that contribute to successful living in the state (where the *agathoi politai* assume the imperative of possessing all the relevant *aretai* in judging each other) is essential for moral responsibility to be generally accepted—A (349-350)
  8. The modern western worldview recognizes all the quiet moral values as essential to being a successful person; the ancient Greek worldview did not—A (350)
- 
9. Ancient Greek values and their conception of moral responsibility differ from those of the modern western civilization, and it is a mistake to read our modern worldview onto the ancients as we interpret their literature and philosophy dealing with moral values—4-8 (350)

## APPENDIX B

### ARTHUR WILLIAM HOPE ADKINS CV AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

REVISED BY E. M. ADKINS,  
MAY, 1996; FEBRUARY, 2013

#### CV

Born 17 October, 1929 (Leicester, England)  
Married 16 September, 1961, with two children  
Died 13 February, 1996

#### Degrees

B.A. (first class) in the Final Honour School of Literae Humaniores ('Greats'), Oxford University, 1952  
M.A., Oxford University, 1955  
D.Phil., Oxford University 1957  
Doctoral Dissertation: The Development of the Concept of Moral Responsibility from Homer to Aristotle

#### Honors and Awards

Postmaster in Classics, Merton College, Oxford, 1948-52  
Harmsworth Scholar, Merton College, Oxford, 1952-54  
Visiting Senior Fellow, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, 1969-70  
Also honored with a Symposium, entitled 'Ethics, Literature and Law,' at the University of Chicago, held on April 8th and 9th, 1994, to mark his sixty-fifth birthday.

#### Academic Posts Held:

1954-1956 (Latin)	Assistant (Assistant Professor) in the Humanity Department, University of Glasgow
1956-1961	Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Greek, Bedford College, University of London

1961-1965	Fellow in Classical Languages and Literature, Exeter College, Oxford
1966-1974	Professor of Classics, University of Reading
1972-1974	Secretary, Council of University Classics Departments of Great Britain [Organized conferences of CUCD members in each of these years]
1974-1975	Professor of Greek, University of Chicago
1975-1976	Professor of Greek and Philosophy, University of Chicago
1976-1977	Professor of Greek, Philosophy and Early Christian Literature, University of Chicago
1977-1996	Edward Olson Professor of Greek, and Professor of Philosophy and Early Christian Literature, University of Chicago
1975-1980	Chairman, Classics Department, University of Chicago
1978	Director, NEH Summer Seminar at the University of Chicago on the theme "Greek Values, Greek Society and the Interpretation of Greek Texts"
1979-1992	Founding Chairman, Committee on the Ancient Mediterranean World, University of Chicago
1980	Repeated NEH Summer Seminar of 1978
1985	Director, NEH Summer Seminar at the University of Chicago on the theme "Ancient Greek Values and Modern Values"

# PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH

## Books

- Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint, 1975.
- La Morale dei Greci da Omero ad Aristotele.* Italian translation of *Merit and Responsibility* by Riccardo Ambrosini with the assistance of Armando Plebe. With an introduction by Armando Plebe. Biblioteca di Cultura Moderna. Bari: Casa Editrice Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1964. Reprinted with a new introduction by Armando Plebe. Biblioteca Universale Laterza. Rome: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 1987. **CHECK**
- From the Many to the One: A Study of Personality and Views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values and Beliefs.* London: Constable and Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970.
- Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece.* London: Chatto and Windus; Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972.
- Poetic Craft in the Early Greek Elegists.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization, Vol. 1, The Greek Polis,* edited by Arthur W. H. Adkins and Peter White. General Editors, John W. Boyer and Julius Kirshner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Human Virtue and Human Excellence: Papers arising from an NEH Summer Seminar on Ancient Greek Values and Modern Values,* edited by A.W.H. Adkins, Joan Kalk and Craig Ihara. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.

## Articles

- "Honour' and 'Punishment' in the Homeric Poems." *BICS* 7 (1960): 23-32.
- "Heidegger and Language." *Philosophy* 37 (1962): 229-37.
- "Friendship' and 'Self-Sufficiency' in the Homeric Poems and in Aristotle." *Classical Quarterly* 13, no.1 (1963): 30-45.
- "Aristotle and the Best Kind of Tragedy." *Classical Quarterly* 16, no.1(1966): 78-102.

- "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*. " *Classical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1966): 193-219.
- "Greek Religion". In *Historia Religionum, Handbook for the History of Religions*, edited by C. Jouco Bleeker and Geo Widengren, Vol.1, 377-441. Leiden: Brill, 1969; revised in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1990]
- "*Euchomai*, *Euchole* and *Euchos* in Homer." *Classical Quarterly* 19, no.1 (1969): 20-33.
- "Classical Studies: Has the Past a Future?" *Didaskalos* 3, no. 1 (1969): 18-35.
- "Threatening, Abusing and Feeling Angry in the Homeric Poems." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 89 (1969): 7-21.
- "The Use of Tape-Recorded Material in Teaching the Classics: a Report on One Method." *Didaskalos* 3, no.2 (1970): 227-39.
- "Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates and Plato." *Antichthon* 4 (1970): 13-24.
- "Homeric Values and Homeric Society." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 91 (1971): 1-14.
- "Truth, *Kosmos* and *Arete* in the Homeric Poems." *Classical Quarterly* 22, no.1 (1972): 5-18.
- "The Ghost of Classics Yet to Come." *Didaskalos* 4, no.1 (1972): 3-17.
- "Homeric Gods and the Values of Homeric Society." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 92 (1972): 1-19.
- "*Arete*, *Techne*, Democracy and Sophists: *Protagoras* 316B-328D." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93 (1973): 3-12.
- "Meaning, Using, Translating and Editing." *Greece & Rome* 21 (1974): 37-50.
- "Art, Beliefs and Values in the Later Books of the *Iliad*. " *Classical Philology* 70, no.4 (1975): 239-54.
- "Merit, Responsibility and Thucydides." *Classical Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1975): 209-220.
- "The *Arete* of Nicias: *Thucydides* 7.86." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 16 (1975): 379-92.
- "Paralysis and *Akrasia* in *Eth. Nic.* 1102b16 ff." *American Journal of Philology* 97 (1976): 62-64.
- "*Polupragmosune* and 'Minding One's Own Business': A Study in Greek Social and Political Values." *Classical Philology* 71, no.4 (1976): 301-27.
- "Callinus 1 and Tyrtaeus 10 as Poetry." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 81 (1977): 59-77.
- "Lucretius I, 136 ff. and the Problems of Writing *Versus Latini*. " *Phoenix* 31 (1977): 145-58.

- "*Theoria versus Praxis in the Nicomachean Ethics and Republic.*" *Classical Philology* 73, no.4 (1978): 297-313.
- "Laws versus Claims in Early Greek Religious Ethics." *History of Religions* 21, no.3 (1982): 222-39.
- "Values, Goals and Emotions in the *Iliad*." *Classical Philology* 77, no.4 (1982): 292-326.
- "Divine and Human Values in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*." *Antike und Abendland* 28 (1982): 32-68.
- "Orality and Philosophy." In *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy* edited by Kevin Robb, 207-27. The Monist Library of Philosophy. La Salle, Illinois: Hegeler Institute, 1983.
- "Form and Content in Gorgias' *Hele and Palamedes*: Rhetoric, Philosophy, Inconsistency and Invalid Argument in Some Greek Thinkers." In *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 2, edited by John P. Anton and Anthony Preus, 107-28. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- "The Connection between Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*." *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 29-49.
- "Cosmogony and Order in Ancient Greece." In *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics*, edited by Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds, 39-66. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- "Ethics and the Breakdown of Cosmogony in Ancient Greece." *Ibid.*, 279-309.
- "Gagarin and the 'Morality' of Homer." *Classical Philology* 82, no.4 (1987): 311-22. (A reply to Michael Gagarin, "Morality in Homer," which appeared in the same issue of *CP*)
- "*Theoria versus Praxis in the Nicomachean Ethics and the Republic*." In *Schriften zur aristotelischen Ethik*, edited by Christian Mueller-Goldingen, 427-43. Olms Studien Band 7. Hildesheim: Olms, 1988. (Appeared originally in *CP* 73, no.4 (1978): 297-313.)
- "Human Nature in the Philosophical Ethics of Ancient Greece and Today." In *The Proceedings of an International Conference: As Humanidades Greco-Latinas e a Civilização do Universal*, 337-69. Coimbra: Instituto de Estudos Clássicos, 1988, 337-69.
- "Plato." In *Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy*, edited by Robert J. Cavalier, James Gouinlock and James P. Sterba, 1-31. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989.
- "Greek Religion." In *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed. 784-91, 801-2. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1990 (A revision of the article published in *Historia Religionum*.)

- "Myth, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient Greece." In *Myth and Philosophy*, edited by Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy, 95-130. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- "The Sage of New Lanark and the Sage of Stagira: Ignorance and Culpability in Aristotle and Robert Owen." In *Law and Philosophy: The Practice of Theory: Essays in Honor of George Anastaplo*, volume 1, edited by John A. Murley, Robert L. Stone and William T. Braithwaite. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University press, 1992, 164-83.
- "The Connection between Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*." In *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, edited by David Keyt and Fred D. Miller, Jr., 75-93. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. [A somewhat adapted version of the paper that originally appeared in *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 29-49. ]
- "The Homeric World." In *The Self and the Political Order: Readings in Social and Political Theory*, edited by Tracy B. Strong, 25-46. New York: New York University Press 1992. [A somewhat abridged version of the second chapter of *From the Many to the One: A Study of Personality and Views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values and Beliefs*, London: Constable; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.]
- "Homeric Ethics." In *A New Companion to Homer*, edited by Ian Morris and Barry Powell, 694-713. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

## Review Articles

- K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*. *Classical Philology* 73, no. 2 (1978): 143-58.
- J. Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*. *Ethics* 88, no.3 (1978): 266-71.
- E.A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice from its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato*. *Classical Philology* 75, no.3 (1980): 256-68.
- Bennett Simon, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1978. *Ethics* 91, no.3 (1981): 491-98.

## Book Reviews

- John Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World*. London: Methuen 1958. *Classical Review* 10, no. 1 (1960): 50-52.
- L. Quaglia, *La figura di Ettore è l'etica dell'Illiade*. Turin: Accademia delle Scienze. 1960. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 81 (1961): 159.

- C.J. Classen, *Sprachliche Deutung als Triebkraft platonischen und sokratischen Philosophierens*. Munich: C.H. Beck. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 81 (1961): 187-88.
- E. Voegelin, *Order and History. Vol. II. The World of the Polis. Vol. III. Plato and Aristotle*. Louisiana: State University Press, 1957. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 81 (1961): 192-93.
- Zevedei Barbu, *Problems of Historical Psychology*. London: Routledge, 1960. *Classical Review* 12, no.3 (1962): 300-01.
- Robert Payne, Hubris. A Study of Pride. New York: Harper, 1960. *Classical Review* 12 (1962): 323.
- Clyde Kluckhohn, *Anthropology and the Classics*. Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1961. *Gnomon* 1962: 300-02.
- A. Lesky, *Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1961. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 84 (1964): 159-60.
- Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Les origines de la pensée grecque*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962. *Classical Review* 14, no.1 (1964): 65-66.
- Lionel Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1962. *Classical Review* 14, no.1 (1964): 70-72.
- Fritz Wehrli, *Hauptrichtungen des griechischen Denkens*. Zürich, Stuttgart: Artemis, 1964. *Gnomon* 1965: 529-32.
- Robert William Hall, *Plato and the Individual*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 28-31.
- Hans Joachim Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1959. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 31-34.
- Heinz Schreckenberg: *Ananke: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Wortgebrauchs*. Munich: Beck, 1964. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 68-70.
- Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 78-79.
- Konstantinos Ch. Grollios, *Kikeron kai Platonike Ethike*. Athens: Privately printed, 1960. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 119.
- C. Kerényi, *Prometheus -- Archetypal Image of Human Existence*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1963. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 122-23.
- Religions du salut (Annales du Centre d' Étude des Religions, 2)*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1962. *Classical Review* 16, no.1 (1966): 123.



- Wolfgang Kiefner, *Der religiöse Allbegriff des Aischylos*. Hildesheim: Olms 1965. *Gnomon* 1968: 610-12.
- Helen North, *Sophrosyne. Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966. *Gnomon* 1968: 712-13.
- B.C. Dietrich: *Death, Fate and the Gods: The Development of a Religious Idea in Greek Popular Belief and in Homer*. London: Athlone Press, 1965. *Classical Review* 18, no.2 (1968): 194-97.
- John Pollard, *Seers, Shrines and Sirens. The Greek Religious Revolution in the Sixth Century B.C.* London: Allen and Unwin, 1965. *Classical Review* 18, no.2 (1968): 197-98.
- E.A.S. Butterworth, *Some Traces of the Pre-Olympian World in Greek Literature and Myth*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966. *Classical Review* 18, no.2 (1968): 198-200.
- Borivoj Borecky, *Survival of Some Tribal Ideas in Classical Greek*. Prague: Karlovy University, 1965. *Classical Review* 18, no.3 (1968): 321-22.
- Jack Lindsay, *The Clashing Rocks: Early Greek Religion and Culture and the Origins of Drama*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1965. *Classical Review* 18, no.3 (1968) 344-45.
- Uberto Pestalozza, *L' éternel féminin dans la religion méditerranéenne*. Brussels: Latomus, 1965. *Classical Review* 18, no.3 (1968): 357.
- Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs: études de psychologie historique*. Paris: Maspero, 1965. *Classical Review* 21, no.1 (1971): 80-82.
- Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus, Myth and Cult*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1965. *Classical Review* 21, no.1 (1971) 147-48.
- Édouard des Places, *Syngeneia: la parenté de l'homme avec Dieu d'Homère à la patristique*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1964. *Classical Review* 21, no.1 (1971): 148-49.
- Marcel Detienne, *Les maîtres de la vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*. Paris: Maspero, 1967. *Classical Review* 21, no.2 (1971): 220-22.
- H.W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus*. Oxford: Blackwell 1967. *Classical Review* 21, no.2 (1971): 235-37.
- Roland Crahay: *La Religion des Grecs*: Brussels: Editions Labor, 1966. *Classical Review* 21, no.2 (1971): 238-39.
- Rudolf Stein, *Megaloprepeia bei Platon*. Bonn, privately printed, 1965. *Classical Review* 21, 2 (1971): 290.
- Ernst Milobenski, *Der Neid in der griechischen Philosophie*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964. *Classical Review* 21, no.2 (1971): 293-94.

- José S. Lasso de la Vega, *Ideales de la Formación Griega*. Madrid: Rialp, 1966. *Classical Review* 21, no.2 (1971): 294.
- Burkhard Gladigow, *Sophia und Kosmos: Untersuchungen zur Frühgeschichte von sophos und sophia*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1965. *Classical Review* 21, no.3 (1971): 391-93.
- Hans Regnéll, *Ancient Views on the Nature of Life*. Lund: Gleerup, 1968. *Classical Review* 21, no.3 (1971): 403-405.
- Dario Sabbatucci, *Saggio sul misticismo greco*. Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1965. *Classical Review* 21, no. 3 (1971): 445-46.
- G.E.R. Lloyd, *Greek Science after Aristotle*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973. *Journal of European Studies* 3 (1973): 389.
- E.R. Dodds, *The ancient concept of progress and other essays on Greek literature and belief*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 95 (1975): 221-22.
- H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1971. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 95 (1975): 229-30.
- Günther Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. *Classical Review* 25, no.2 (1975): 239-41.
- Friedrich Solmsen, *Intellectual Experiments of the Greek Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975. *Phoenix* (1977): 262-65.
- C. Kerényi, *Zeus and Hera: Archetypal Image of Father, Husband and Wife*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976. *Classical Review* 28, no.2 (1978): 287-88.
- Eva C. Keuls, *Plato and Greek Painting*. Leiden: Brill 1978. *Phoenix* 35 (1981): 289-91.
- Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Vol. I: *Thales to Zeno*. Vol. 2: *Empedocles to Democritus* Vol. 3. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979. *Classical Philology* 78, no.1 (1983): 68-70.
- Ilham Dilman, *Morality and the Inner Life: A Study in Plato's 'Gorgias'*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1979. *Ethics* 93, no.2 (1983): 406-08.
- Helen F. North, *From Myth to Icon: Reflections of Greek Ethical Doctrine in Literature and Art*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1979. *Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1984): 249-51.
- Friedrich Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1979. *History of Religions* 23, no.4 (1984): 385-87.

- Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982. *Classical Philology* 80, no.4 (1985): 364-70.
- Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight*. New York: The Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1983. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23, no.4 (1985): 581-83.
- Mary Settegast, Plato Prehistorian: 10,000 to 5,000 B.C. in Myth and Archaeology. Cambridge, Mass: The Rotenberg Press, 1986. *Ancient Philosophy* 12 (1992): 185-86.
- Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. *Classical Philology* 88, no.4 (1993): 349-53.
- Douglas L. Cairns, *AIDOS: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. *Ethics* 105, no. 1 (1994): 181-83.
- N.R.E. Fisher, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1992. Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Douglas L. Cairns, *AIDOS: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. *The Classical Journal* 90, no.4 (1995): 451-55.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY GREEK TERMS USED IN THE TEXT

AGATHOS—good (wealthy and powerful from the Homeric competitive ethic; ethically good from developing quiet 5<sup>th</sup> century usage)

AIDOS—modest, meek

AISCHROS—causing shame or dishonor

AKRASIA—incontinence

ANAXIOS DUSTUCHEIN—unworthy and unlucky (see *dusdaimon*)

APEILEO—promise or threat

ARETE—excellent at some described *techné*. Sometimes translated as “virtue.”

ATHLIOS—miserable (opposed to *eudaimon*)

AUTARKES—self-sufficient

AXIA—worth

CHRESIMOS—useful; serviceable

DIKAIOSUNE—justice (evolves from competitive to a quiet virtue)

DOXA ENTUCHIA—renowned, good fortune

DUSDAIMON—wretched, unhappy (opposite of *eudaimon*)

ECHTHROS—enemy (opposed to *philos*)

ELEGCHEIN—to reproach or disgrace

ENKRATES—a morally strong man

EPIEIKES—good, decent

ERGON—work or functional activity to fulfill the requirements of a *techné*

EUDAIMON—good souled, content, flourishing (opposite of *dusdaimon*)

EUGENEIA—nobility of birth

EUKLEIA—good repute

EUPRAXIA—to act well

GERAS—privilege, gift of honor

HAMARTES—moral mistake

HEDONE—pleasure

HEKON, HEKOUSION—consensual, voluntary actor (opposite of *akon*, non-consensual)

KAKOS—bad, unfortunate (see *mochtheria*)

KERTOMOS—mocking

MEGALOPREPEIA—greatness befitting, magnificence

MEGALOPSUCHOS—great souled

MENEAINO—desire earnestly

MENOS—fierce

MIARON—stained, polluted

MOCHTHEROS—moral failure due to factual error

NEIKEIN—threatening, abusing

NEMERTEIA—truth, infallible

OCHTHEO—to be sorely angered

PHILOS—friend (opposed to *echthros*)

PHRONESIS—applied wisdom to action (see *sophia*)

PLOUTEO—rich, wealthy (opposed to *penomai*)

POLEMOO—make an enemy of

POLU PRAGMOSUNE—minding one’s own business

PREPON—distinguished, renowned

PROAIRESIS—moral choice

SOPHIA—intellectual, theoretical wisdom (see *phronesis*)

SOPHROSUNE—of sound mind, self-controlled, moderate.

SPOUDAIOS—serious man of high moral standards

STHENOS—strength, might

TECHNE—a functionally described activity that has a specified outcome goal, sometimes translated as “art” or “skill”

TELOS—end, purpose, goal

XENOS—guest, subject to the rules of hospitality