I

Introduction

> Let us add to the philosophers a most learned man, and indeed a divine poet: Sophocles.
>
> Cicero, *De Divinatione*

Tragedy and ethics

According to Aristotle, character or *ethos* in tragedy is 'that which reveals what the moral choice is like' (*Po.* 50b8f.). Although I did not come to this study by way of Aristotle, this kind of *ethos* is what I wish to explore in Sophocles, by examining five tragedies in which moral choice is central to the course of the drama. These choices are made within the context of traditional Greek morality, which, amongst other things, expected one to help one's friends and harm one's enemies (abbreviated hereafter as 'Help Friends/Harm Enemies' or 'Help Friends' and 'Harm Enemies'). Closely allied to these principles, as we shall see, is the conception of justice as retaliation. I have chosen to focus my discussion around this nexus of principles, since they provide a pervasive ethical background to most of Greek literature and are of special significance for tragedy. They are also connected with broader ethical questions, such as the nature of pleasure and advantage. In particular, both Help Friends/Harm Enemies and retaliatory justice are rooted in passion, and therefore raise profound questions about the rationality of moral action and the relationship of moral justification to the emotions. In the next chapter I shall outline the salient features of Help Friends/Harm Enemies, in order to illustrate its scope as a moral code and provide a context in which to assess Sophocles' handling of such issues. I shall go on to argue that they are fundamental to the plays under discussion, not merely as an unthinking reflection of popular attitudes, but

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as an integral part of each drama.[1] First, however, some preliminary questions must be addressed.

To begin with, can we expect an intellectually serious presentation of ethical issues from a dramatist such as Sophocles? Critics have not hesitated to approach Greek tragedy in such a spirit, in the hope of determining the playwrights' moral and religious thought. Although Sophocles has often suffered in comparison to his fellow tragedians in this regard,[2] he has had his share of such investigations.[3] But these discussions tend to be vague and subjective, seeking the 'philosophy of Sophocles' in a very broad sense: a sweeping metaphysical scheme into which all the surviving plays can be fitted.[4] In their concern to discover the dramatist's own views, none of these writers examines the way in which moral issues are explored within the plays through the ethical language and argument used by the various characters.[5] Moreover the search for Sophocles' personal world-view or general moral and religious stance must ultimately be a subjective exercise.[6]

[1] So too Winnington-Ingram 312–16 and passim, and most recently Goldhill 85–106. Others have noted the importance of the talio and Help Friends/Harm Enemies for Sophocles, usually assuming that he accepted them uncritically (so Hirzel 468f.; Hester, *Friends* 24f.).

[2] For more or less patronising remarks about Sophocles' intellect, often contrasting him with Aeschylus and Euripides, see e.g. Rohde 431f.; Perrotta 630; Jaeger 266f.; Norwood 177; Jones 167, 171 and cf. 181; Hester, *Unphilosophical* 46f. Many scholars seem to share a tacit assumption that if Sophocles is eulogised sufficiently for his many other excellences, then it is acceptable to neglect or even belittle the intellectual content of his work. Yet it is precisely the inextricable synthesis of thought and artistry in Sophocles which has led, through concentration on the latter, to the obscuring of the former (cf. Bowra 2; Opstelten 2f.; Torrance 270).

[3] See e.g. Webster ch. 2; Moore; Kitto, *GT* ch. 6 and *SDP*; Musurillo ch. 11.

[4] Kitto glosses 'philosopher' as someone with 'coherent thoughts about the universe' (*SDP* 2).

[5] Moore, despite his title *Sophocles and Arete*, never actually discusses Sophocles' use of the word *arete* (likewise Kieffer and Whitman). Similarly Kitto speaks of *dike* in the most general terms. (For the meaning of these and other transliterated Greek words see the glossary.) Moreover Kitto's *dike* may be an amoral force (*SDP* 47–9, *GT*³ 135f.), and is therefore of little use for resolving problems of human justice. (Some of Kitto's admirers have been less careful to distinguish between human morality and universal *dike*.) For criticism of such approaches see Torrance 271f.; Vickers 23–9.

[6] Bowra's interpretation depends on his own dubious criteria for determining which passages are being used by Sophocles to 'show us what to think' (11). The same problem arises with Webster ch. 2 and Musurillo ch. 11. Cf. also Opstelten 141–8.

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Such discussions of Sophocles' 'philosophy' usually focus on his view of the gods and their relation to mortals, often succumbing to the anachronistic temptation to tie morality too closely to religion. Much criticism has been coloured by the Judaeo-Christian tradition in which morality (how people relate to each other) and religion (how they relate to their gods) are linked far more consistently than they are in Greek thought. So Bowra tells us of *Electra*, 'The gods and his dead father work with Orestes. They approve, demand and further his vengeance. We need no other proof that Sophocles thinks the vengeance right' (Bowra 226f.). But the role of the gods in human morality (do they enforce it, share it, ignore it?) is a persistent problem for the Greeks, and one which is solved, if at all, in a variety of ways.[7] The attempt to ascertain Sophocles' religious and metaphysical views is no substitute for examining those questions of human choice and action that constitute the stuff of moral theory.[8]

The last several decades have seen some more promising approaches to the ethical content of Sophocles' plays.[9] One strand of criticism has studied human morality in Sophocles from the perspective of the protagonist or 'hero' and the choices that he or she faces. 'Human responsibility now fills both foreground and background', declared Whitman in 1951 (Whitman 39). He departed radically from earlier interpretations, announcing a new approach to the Sophoclean hero: 'The real moral nature of his position must be judged only by his own standard as he reveals it in the play, and by the moral choices open to him in the action' (Whitman 16). Yet Whitman did not carry out the careful analysis of Sophocles' handling of ethical issues which this programmatic statement might sug-

[7] Cf. Kitto, *FMD* 74, *SDP* 44–6; Adkins, *Tragedy* 96f.; Dover 246–61. For the multiplicity of religious attitudes to be found in Sophocles' plays see Kirkwood 269–72. On religious anachronism see the salutary warning of Hester, *Unphilosophical* 41–6.

[8] The words 'moral' and 'morality' themselves risk anachronism (cf. the unfortunate and by now notorious remark of Adkins 2 that 'we are all Kantians now'). I shall use such language in the broadest sense, for values that provide a guide for conduct in situations affecting the well-being of others, thus imposing constraints on what one may do in pursuit of personal gain (cf. the definitions of Dover 1; Vlastos, *Justice* 301). For a recent discussion of these terms see Williams ch. 1.

[9] At the same time there has been a growing number of attempts to place the dramatist more adequately within his intellectual milieu. See Webster ch. 1; Finley, *Three* passim; Long; Rose.

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gest. The approach he championed necessarily touches on ethical issues, and may provide considerable insight into the hero's moral psychology, as it has done most notably in the hands of Bernard Knox in his book *The Heroic Temper*. Its focus, however, is the character of the protagonist rather than the ethical concepts articulated through the dramatic characters.

Philosophical writers have also been showing an increasing interest in the moral content of Greek literature. Much discussion has been provoked by Adkins' *Merit and Responsibility*, which uses Greek literature as evidence for the development of ethical concepts before the advent of formal moral philosophy. Adkins distinguishes two sets of values which he calls 'competitive' and 'cooperative' or 'quiet', and argues that the former were traditionally the dominant values of Greek culture, while the task of moral philosophy was to gain acceptance for the latter.[10] There has been considerable criticism both of this basic dichotomy and of its application to particular authors.[11] But with respect to fifth-century non-philosophical authors like Sophocles, the most general charge of which Adkins is guilty is question-begging.[12] Adopting a narrowly lexical approach, he assumes that any occurrence of a word such as *agathos* always refers to the 'competitive' values inherited from the Homeric tradition. When such words appear in a context which ties them unequivocally to one of the 'quiet' values, he treats them as exceptions, characterised as 'abortive moralism' (Adkins 246).[13] But given the acknowledged 'turmoil of values' of the period (Adkins 232), he is not entitled to dismiss such cases in this way. It is this assumption of what he intends to prove which leads him to conclude, for example, that 'Sophocles does not employ *agathos* or *arete* in a quiet moral sense' (Adkins 193). In fact *agathos* and its cognates and synonyms

[10] This is the central thesis of *Merit and Responsibility*, reaffirmed by Adkins in a series of subsequent articles.

[11] See Robinson's review in *Philosophy* 37 (1962) 277–9; Long, *Morals*; Lloyd-Jones ch. 1; Creed; Dover, *Evaluation*. For Sophocles see Freis (to whom I am grateful for making her dissertation available to me). For recent contributions to the continuing debate on Homer see Rowe; Morris 115–20.

[12] Cf. Creed 218; Freis 93.

[13] Similarly in his treatment of Homer any passage that does not fit his scheme is discounted as a 'persuasive definition' (38–40).

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do have significant areas of overlap with the 'quiet' virtues in Sophocles.[14]

Another limitation in Adkins' treatment of tragedy is his use of individual scenes or brief passages without considering the overall dramatic context or the place of moral debate in each play as a whole.[15] On *Philoctetes* 119f., for example, he notes that Sophocles is making use of the 'confusion of values' which is 'part of the moral scene at this period' (Adkins 189). Again, he observes that line 1248 'indicates that there has been a change of linguistic habits in at least a section of society' (Adkins 183). But such passages, within the context of the entire drama, may contribute to a more complex exploration of moral issues than Adkins suggests. In a work as wide-ranging as *Merit and Responsibility* it would be impractical to cover complete plays in any depth. But the decision to treat only select passages leads Adkins to represent Sophocles as merely reflecting a contemporary 'confusion of values', without asking whether the dramatist is articulating such confusions into a constructive ethical debate. Despite these shortcomings, however, Adkins has helped to stimulate the currently burgeoning interest in the relationship between Greek literature and moral philosophy.[16]

Such interest is entirely appropriate, since the two, until at least the time of Aristotle, are inextricably linked. Homer is the wellspring of all Greek culture, including both tragedy and moral philosophy, and many of the issues that will later come under the scrutiny of ethics receive their first articulation in epic.[17] Poets generally were regarded by the Greeks as repositories of wisdom on all kinds

[14] This is demonstrated by Freis, employing the criteria for synonymity outlined in Dover 62–4.

[15] Cf. Dover, *Evaluation* 36–44. Ironically, Adkins makes the same criticism of Dover's *Greek Popular Morality* (*Problems* 157f.), also with some justification. But Dover is scrupulously careful in his choice of sources and makes little use of tragedy. Pearson's *PE* does look at whole plays, but the treatment of Sophocles is brief and superficial.

[16] Nussbaum, *Consequences* is an explicit reaction to Adkins. On the relationship between literature and ethics see also Schadewaldt 100; Raphael, *Paradox* 71–4, 94–111 and *Literature*; Redfield 80–2; Putnam 488f.; Barbour ch. 7; Nussbaum 12–16. Nussbaum's recent substantial contribution is influenced by the work of Bernard Williams, whose interest in the ethical implications of tragedy goes back many years (cf. *ML* 30 n. 2, *PS* 173).

[17] See especially Lloyd-Jones chs. 1 and 2.

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of matters, especially morality. The conception of the poet as a 'teacher' was applied not only to avowedly didactic poets like Hesiod,[18] but to every kind of poetry, even lyric.[19] Tragedy, like the 'dramatic' portions of epic, was thought to 'teach' through the mouths of its characters. The conventions of old comedy allowed even a comic poet like Aristophanes to claim humorously for his chorus the role of political adviser (e.g. *Frogs* 686–8).

Only gradually does philosophy come to be conceived of as a distinct activity in its own right. Early thinkers as well as rival poets assert their claims in opposition to the received wisdom of the dominant poetic tradition (represented principally by Homer and Hesiod).[20] When Socrates quarrels with the poets (Pl. *Ap*. 22abc), and Plato treats them as fundamental enemies of philosophy (*Rep*. 607bc), they are not only reacting against a deeply ingrained traditional attitude, but acknowledging poetry as a serious competitor.[21] And despite Plato's assault on the poets' claim to knowledge (e.g. *Ion* 536d–42b, *Rep*. 598d–600e), he is not above appealing to their authority, especially Homer's, when it suits him (e.g. *Rep*. 404bc, 407e–408a, 468c–469a; *Leg*. 706d–7a). Many early philosophers (notably Parmenides and Empedocles) wrote in verse, which was not only a memorable form of expression but the most natural way of claiming their place in the tradition, enabling them to dignify their rival brand of wisdom with the cloak of poetic authority.[22] Nor did prose writers necessarily eschew the 'literary' qualities of poetry. Heraclitus' ornate and riddling prose and Plato's dialogue form are each in their own way essential to the author's philosophical purpose.

Philosophers, dramatists, rhetoricians and even historians used the dramatic technique of opposing speeches and sometimes dialogue to articulate the moral debates which formed part of their common intellectual inheritance. Any writer could grasp the opportunity to air various sides of an issue in the mouths of different

[18] See Hes. *WD* passim and cf. Solon 4.30 (West); Theogn. 769–72. For a discussion of the purpose of Hesiod's poems see Heath, *Hesiod*.

[19] For the evidence see Heath 39–44. See further below, p. 12–16.

[20] Cf. Xenoph. DK 21 B 1.21–3, 10–12, 14–16; Heracl. DK 22 B 57, 104; Solon 29 (West); Plut. *Solon* 29.4f. On rival claims to truth and the question of poetic truth and falsehood see Heath 39f.

[21] Cf. Havelock, *Preface* 27–31; Raphael, *Paradox* 74–9; Nussbaum 123f.

[22] This is especially apparent in Parmenides' proem. See Fränkel, *Parmenides* 1–6.

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speakers. The *agon* ('contest' or 'debate') was a fundamental feature of Athenian life, manifested variously in the assembly and the law-courts, in tragedy, comedy and the philosophical dialogue:

> In understanding each of these as a manifestation of the *agon*, we ought to recognize that the categories *political*, *dramatic*, *philosophical* were much more intimately related in the Athenian world than in our own. Politics and philosophy were shaped by dramatic form, the preoccupations of drama were philosophical and political, philosophy had to make its claims in the arena of the political and the dramatic.
>
> (MacIntyre 129)

Drama and dialectic

Many extant Greek tragedies revolve around the questions of human choice and action that provide the raw material of ethics. Hence tragedy frequently dramatises particular cases of the kind of problem that moral philosophy attempts to solve, and in doing so may help to shed light on such issues by placing them in a new perspective.[23] It offers us a concrete, particular and urgent enactment of a crisis, encouraging us to identify with the subjective viewpoint of particular figures, without preventing us from judging them. At the same time it is free to avoid the kind of trivial particular that may blur the dilemmas of real life, thus prompting reflections extending beyond the specific situation. Literature has the capacity to suggest that the persons it portrays exemplify universal human predicaments. In Greek tragedy this capacity owes much to the resources of poetry, most clearly visible in the choral lyrics whose significance often extends well beyond their immediate dramatic reference.[24]

Many of the ethical issues dramatically presented in tragedy are also important to Plato. Like tragedy, his dialogues scrutinise the nature of justice and revenge, the relationship of the individual to friends, family, state and gods. But the philosophical dialogue typically dramatises not the problem itself but its discussion in theoretical

[23] See especially Raphael, *Literature*.

[24] This does not mean, however, that the chorus may not be viewed as a reasonably coherent character. I shall follow Aristotle (*Po*. 56a25–7) and recent critics such as Burton and Gardiner in treating them this way. See also Kirkwood 180–6; Vickers 10–17 (who interestingly ascribes to Sophocles' chorus the role of the Socratic victim, and brings out well the thought-provoking quality of Sophoclean ethical debate).

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terms. It must therefore, like non-dramatic philosophical discourse, introduce specific cases into the discussion in order to test the validity of its general claims. Unlike drama, such cases are elaborated only so far as is necessary for their philosophical purpose. Accumulated detail is rarely required, and may either confuse the issue or over-clarify it, 'dissolving' the dilemma so that it is no longer useful.[25] Moreover since a dialogue does not enact the problems it aims to solve, it will tend to suffer from a lack of immediacy in comparison with the urgently presented dilemmas of tragedy.

Plato does his best to minimise this disadvantage. In the *Euthyphro* he constructs an elaborate example to test various notions of piety and justice and the relationships between them: Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father for murder because he negligently allowed a labourer, himself an arrested killer, to die (4cd). Plato deliberately 'dissolves' the potential dilemma by accumulating the kind of detail that would make the case seem absolutely clear cut to any ordinary Greek. As a test case it is tailor made for the purpose at hand. But in order to give it serious reality, Plato introduces it not hypothetically, but as the real situation that has generated Socrates' chance meeting with Euthyphro and is soon to be decided in court. Moreover Euthyphro was probably a historical figure, like most of Plato's named characters.[26] This use of real persons as participants is an important way in which Plato gives immediacy to his dramatised discussions. Their reality is both reinforced and exploited for philosophical purposes through the requirement that they say only what they really believe (e.g. *Gorg*. 495a, 500b, *Rep*. 350e), which is an essential ingredient of the Socratic method.[27]

Euthyphro is rather a comic figure (cf. 3c), his case has an artificial air, and he is undertaking no serious personal risk by his extraordinary behaviour. We therefore do not feel the anxious concern for his situation that we do for the great figures of tragedy. His role is more closely analogous to those lesser tragic characters who help to shed light on the protagonist. Plato's tragic hero was, of course, Socrates. The encounter on the courtroom steps has implications

[25] The latter observation is drawn from Williams 180.

[26] See Burnet 85f. I make no claims about the historicity of Euthyphro's lawsuit. There is no external evidence, and the elaborate detail of the case can be used to argue either way.

[27] See Vlastos, *Elenchus* 35–8.

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whose profound seriousness overshadows Euthyphro's mild absurdity. Socrates' impending trial for impiety gives far greater depth and urgency to the question that emerges from the discussion of Euthyphro's case, namely the true nature of piety. This kind of use of the dramatic setting and circumstances is more fully developed by Plato in the *Apology* and *Crito*. In each the dramatic situation arises from certain moral choices made by Socrates prior to the action. Both works reenact such choices and demonstrate their consequences. In both the issue, as so often in tragedy, is one of life or death for the central character, with broader implications for his friends and the community as a whole. The *Crito* even resembles a Sophoclean tragedy in its structure, with the hero resisting persuasion, even from a well-meaning friend, to abandon his principles and save himself.[28]

Other dialogues do not have this special unity of moral dilemma and dramatic circumstances, nor do they concern specific matters of life or death. But Plato continues to use the figure of Socrates to generate a comparable sense of urgency for the subject of his enquiry. In the *Phaedo* the prison setting and the moving narrative description of Socrates' death both illustrate the practical consequences of his refusal to compromise his principles and give special significance to the discussion of the immortality of the soul. In the *Meno* and especially the *Gorgias* Plato uses Socrates' death to similar effect, by foreshadowing it in the veiled threats of his interlocutors (e.g. *Meno* 94e, *Gorg.* 485e–86d). By such means Plato tries to give philosophical and above all ethical issues an urgency and relevance which a purely theoretical discourse might seem to lack. He exploits dramatic form to convey the vital significance of what he sees as the central question of human life:

> And do not take what I say as if I were playing, for you see that the subject of our discussion is – and about what subject should someone with even a little sense be more serious than this? – what way one should live.
>
> (*Gorg.* 500c)[29]

[28] Knox 58 ascribes to Socrates the 'heroic temper' which he sees in the Sophoclean hero. Individual Sophoclean heroes have often been compared to Socrates. The prototype for all of them is Achilles (see especially Wolff 36–40). On Plato and drama see Kuhn (1) 5–11; Egermann 34–48; Tarrant, *Plato*; Friedländer 167; Raphael, *Paradox* 79–89, *Literature* 2–4; Nussbaum, interlude 1.

[29] Cf. *Gorg.* 487e; *Lach.* 187e–8a; *Rep.* 352d, 578c, 608b.

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A special virtue of dramatic form is the opportunity it provides for the persuasive presentation of various points of view without obliging the author to commit himself to any of them or provide any systematic answers. In an early aporetic dialogue like the *Euthyphro* it enables Plato to conduct an inconclusive debate while raising many suggestive points in the process. Later he canvassed a range of viewpoints in the mouths of some of his most famous characters, such as Callicles, Protagoras and Thrasymachus. The dramatic form enables him to present such views with uninhibited rhetorical power, giving them full value as dangerous forces to be reckoned with, but without having to subscribe to them himself.

The tension of competing personal perspectives contributes to the authentically dramatic feel of many of the earlier dialogues. But this kind of drama is potentially inimical to constructive dialectical argument. The complacent but well-meaning Euthyphro may end up merely bewildered,[30] but in many cases the argument degenerates into hostile confrontation. As Socrates himself says in Plato's *Apology*, his conversations earned him 'many most harsh and severe enmities' (23a). If dialectical argument promotes conflict rather than cooperation, it becomes self-defeating. This is vividly illustrated by the sulks and ill-tempered outbursts of a Socratic victim like Thrasymachus, who is beaten in argument but remains far from convinced.[31] Thrasymachus also illustrates how Plato, like anyone working with dramatic form, can and does use characterisation to direct the audience's sympathies. The skilful delineation of personality may enhance or undermine the credibility of a speaker's arguments, as it does with Thrasymachus and often with Socrates. Or Plato may lead us to a sympathetic understanding of a character's viewpoint while simultaneously exposing its inadequacy (Crito, Protagoras, Alcibiades). These vivid portraits make an intrinsic contribution to a dialectic that exploits not only a speaker's views, but the personality and way of life in which those views are rooted.[32] But this dramatic form of dialectic operates in Plato's hands with an inbuilt bias, for he was searching for answers and was fundamentally hostile to ethical plurality and conflict.

[30] It is a moot point whether Euthyphro's departure at the end of the dialogue (15e) shows that his encounter with Socrates has taught him to think again about prosecuting his father.

[31] Cf. Annas 55–7.

[32] On the ad hominem character of the Socratic method see Kahn; Stokes.

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Although the dialectical spirit remains important to Plato, he turns increasingly to a more sustained and constructive form of argument. At the beginning of *Republic* 2 Glaucon and Adeimantus, Socrates' allies in the pursuit of truth, restate at some length the views of the obnoxious Thrasymachus. Plato pulls out all his rhetorical stops to give their words a powerful emotional appeal and thus convey the vital importance of combating them. As Socrates remarks, 'There must be some divine element in you, if you are not convinced that injustice is better than justice, when you are able to make such an eloquent case for it' (368a). Such arguments in the mouths of Socrates' willing accomplices illustrate the changing character of Plato's dialectic. The silencing of Thrasymachus makes possible a sustained exploration of positive ideas quite contrary to the confrontational spirit in which the first book ended. As the stranger says near the beginning of Plato's *Sophist*, 'When the other party to the conversation is tractable and gives no trouble, to address him is the easier course; otherwise, to speak by oneself' (217d, trans. Cornford). Moreover Glaucon and Adeimantus' restatement makes it clear that the implications of Socrates' arguments extend beyond the ad hominem discomfiture of an unpleasant sophist. The brothers can feel the power of the opposing viewpoint, but since they are not committed to it, Socrates' arguments do not assault their convictions, their lives or themselves. It is therefore no accident that their personalities are at best shadowy and remain virtually indistinguishable. The development of a constructive argument need not exclude drama or lively characterisation, but it does make them less integral to Plato's purpose. Hence the dramatic personality of his speakers tends to dwindle, and with it the dramatic force of his dialectic.

Moral conflict was not a notion congenial to Plato or most Greek philosophers, but it is the life blood of tragedy. The playwright, like Plato the dramatist, is free to make some characters more sympathetic than others and to suggest a preference for certain views. But a simple 'right answer' to the complex ethical issues central to many Greek tragedies risks reducing the plays to melodrama. The essence of the tragedy in such cases is often precisely that moral conflict is insoluble or soluble only at enormous cost. This kind of tragic conflict tends to arise from the clashing ethical perspectives of different characters, making moral confrontation integral to the drama. A tragic outcome is inevitable as long as the characters cannot agree on criteria for resolving disputes. While most do share the

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same set of terms for expressing approval and disapproval, conflict is frequently generated by the varying content which two or more speakers ascribe to the same value term.[33] Such conflict can only be resolved by persuasion, which may induce one of the disputants to alter or even abandon a decision or moral principle. Speeches of persuasion therefore play a substantial part in the drama, as the disputants and others try to avert the disaster that threatens to result if all persist in adhering to their original positions.[34] These speeches rarely succeed, usually because of the intransigence of one or more central characters. Such doomed attempts at persuasion are a characteristically Sophoclean means of effecting tragic pathos and suspense, and at the same time provide a forum for the revelation of moral character and the airing of ethical issues.

This dialectical picture of tragedy does not correspond to the way in which the Greeks themselves commonly viewed their poets as 'teachers'. On the contrary, they often treat poetry as a source of factual or categorical wisdom. Isocrates considers the poets an influence making ordinary people 'better', for they bequeath 'precepts on how one should live' (2.3).[35] Such precepts might be harvested and evaluated independently of their context or poetic purpose (cf. e.g. Demos. 19.247; Arist. *Rhet.* 1416a28–35). Poets were also thought to exert a moral influence through the active example of their characters. Protagoras in Plato's dialogue tells us that teachers make children memorise poetry full of worthy sentiments and eulogies of good men, 'so that the child may emulate and imitate them, and exert himself to become such a one' (*Prot.* 326a). This view of the educational function of poetry may be implicit in the judgement attributed to Eudicus' father, that the *Iliad* is a finer poem than the *Odyssey* to the extent that Achilles is 'better' than Odysseus (Pl. *Hipp. Min.* 363b).[36] It certainly underlies the moral debate between

[33] See MacIntyre 125–8; Vickers 26–9; Segal, *Praise* 47f.; Vernant, *GT* 279–83, *Tensions* 31–6. Cf. also Eur. *Phoen.* 499–502; Havelock, *Dikaiosune* 67; Stevenson 333, 344–50.

[34] On persuasion and its importance in tragedy see Buxton.

[35] The wording recalls the practical ethical concern of Plato's Socrates (above, p. 9). Cf. also Aeschin. 3.135.

[36] Homer was the 'educational' poet par excellence. Cf. Pl. *Hipp. Min.* 364b–65b, *Alc.* I 112b; Xen. *Symp.* 3.5; Isoc. 4.159; and see Verdenius 5–19; King 78f. On the role of poetry, especially Homer, in Greek education see also Beck 117–22.

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Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.[37] Aeschylus claims to have improved the citizenry by writing the *Seven against Thebes*, since 'after seeing it any man would have desired to be warlike' (1021f.). Later he says he portrayed the exploits of Homeric heroes 'so as to rouse each male citizen to strain to equal them' (1041f.). When Euripides asks what harm his Stheneboeas have done, Aeschylus answers that (by their example), they induced many noble Athenian women to commit suicide (1050f.).[38] According to the orator Lycurgus, one reason Euripides is a good poet is that he portrayed patriotic behaviour as a model to which the citizens might look, and so accustom their souls to love their country; similarly Homer is worthy of praise for portraying fine deeds, which inspired his audience's ancestors to emulate and surpass them at Marathon (*Leocr.* 100–4).[39]

This naive view of the didactic function of poetry does not do justice to extant Greek tragedy, and a strong case can be made for the view that although poetry was used in this way, the poets' own aims were not didactic in any such simple sense.[40] Apart from anything else, if they aimed to provide their audience with models of virtue, they undoubtedly failed a great deal of the time. It was partly the manifest inadequacy of tragic characters as uplifting moral exemplars which led Plato to banish them from his ideal state. But the underlying view of the relationship between art and life has various interesting implications, explored in different ways by Plato and Aristotle, which point towards a more sophisticated understanding of the moral content of tragedy. Although this more complex view is not to be found in our ancient sources, it is one that can be developed from various elements in ancient views of tragedy, and so does not seem to me alien in principle to the spirit of ancient literary theory.

[37] Taplin, *Trugedy* argues that the notion of the poet as teacher is also presupposed in other plays of Aristophanes.

[38] The 'bad example' tradition is said to go back to Solon, who objected to Thespis' 'lies' because of their anticipated corrupting influence (Plut. *Solon* 29.4f.; cf. also Pl. *Rep.* 424d).

[39] He adds that Tyrtaeus' elegies 'educate' the Spartans in courage; all their soldiers are obliged to listen to them before battle, in order to make them more willing to die for their country (*Leocr.* 106f.). For further examples from the orators see Heath 44.

[40] Cf. Rosenmeyer, *Gorgias* 238f.; Gomme, *Attitude* 50f.; and most recently Heath ch. 2.

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First of all, why is it that we are supposed to reproduce in our own lives the behaviour of dramatic characters? Isocrates and Plato's Protagoras both speak of 'emulation' and 'desire' (Isoc. 4.159; *Prot.* 306a; cf. also Isoc. 1.51); Aristophanes' Aeschylus of 'stirring up' men (*Frogs* 1041), so that they will 'passionately desire' to be brave (*Frogs* 1022); Lycurgus of 'habituation in the soul', 'persuasion', and 'emulation' (*Leocr.* 100, 102, 104). Aeschines tells us that Homer's depiction of Achilles and Patroclus is enough to make one weep and emulate their excellence and love (*arete* and *philia*) (1.146). Aristophanes' Aeschylus claims that Euripides 'persuaded' the women of the audience to commit suicide, supposedly because they felt the same shame as the tragic heroine whose behaviour they were imitating (*Frogs* 1050f.). This kind of language suggests that the means by which poetry influences us to imitate dramatic characters is the arousal of emotional sympathy with their point of view.[41] This accords well with various Greek views on the effects of poetry.[42] Plato's Socrates suggests to Ion that when he is reciting, 'you go outside yourself and your soul thinks it is present at the events which you narrate under inspiration' (*Ion* 535bc). The soul is envisaged as a sort of invisible bystander 'in Ithaca or at Troy', sharing the emotions of the principal characters (a role analogous to that of the theatrical audience). Ion warmly concurs: 'When I recite something pitiful, my eyes fill with tears, and when I say something fearful or terrible, my hair stands on end with fear and my heart leaps.' The passage strikingly recalls Gorgias' discussion of poetry: 'Into the listeners comes fearful shuddering and tearful pity and mournful longing, and through words the soul experiences emotions of its own at the successes and failures of the persons and affairs of others' (*Helen* 9).[43] This is the Gorgianic 'deception' which signifies the emotional hold of the poet over his audience, their involvement in the emotions of his characters.[44] As Aristotle puts it, 'the hearer always shares in the

[41] For the avoidance of the word 'identification' in such contexts cf. Heath 15 and see Harding 141f. Harding finds it too vague to be useful, since it may indicate 'empathy, imitation, admiration, or recognition of similarities' (141). As the ancient examples show, at least the first three are relevant here, as is the further element of the onlooker's emotional response *to* the characters (e.g. pity), on which see Harding 145–7.

[42] See Heath 5–10.

[43] For the influence of Gorgias on Plato's *Ion* see Flashar 68–73.

[44] Cf. Gorg. DK 82 B 23 with Rosenmeyer, *Gorgias* 227–33; Heath 40. Cf. also Untersteiner 108–14; Lanata 193f.

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same emotions as the one speaking emotionally' (*Rhet.* 1408a23f.; *Pol.* 1340a12f.). There is also some evidence for the view that a drama will benefit from the poet's own emotional involvement with his characters.[45]

The view that poetry influences the audience by accustoming them to feeling the emotions of others is shared by Plato, who sees sympathetic involvement as one mechanism whereby poetry exerts its pernicious influence.[46] It can corrupt 'even good men', he says, for when we listen to Homer or a tragedian, 'you know that we enjoy it and giving ourselves up we follow along sharing in the emotions' (*Rep.* 605cd).[47] The damaging effect of this sympathetic engagement, which swamps our rational judgement and habituates us to emotional indulgence, is one reason for Plato's great fear of 'imitation' (cf. *Rep.* 387d–88d, 606ab). But he is not just concerned about the dangers of empathy with an inferior character. There is also the fragmenting effect of empathy with a variety of characters of any kind. His guardians are to be specialists, and their single-mindedness will be impaired by 'imitating' many models (*Rep.* 394e–5b). Plato mistrusts the poets not merely as 'teachers' of a rival brand of categorical wisdom, but as purveyors of a plurality of viewpoints with which the performer and audience are induced to sympathise.[48]

Yet the idea that the poet teaches through the example of his characters also presupposes that these characters may be evaluated as models of behaviour, and hence may legitimately be subjected to moral scrutiny. The plays themselves invite us to locate their characters within such an evaluative framework, not only through the kind of action that they represent, but through the characters' frequent deployment of moral language and argument. As we saw with Plato, the resources of poetry and rhetoric may be used to rein-

[45] See Ar. *Ach.* 410–13; *Thesm.* 146–72 (the main point here is that the play as a whole will reflect the character of the poet, but the application of this theory to the characters seems assumed e.g. at 153); Arist. *Po.* 1455a29–32 (note γάρ in the second sentence; the passage is correctly interpreted by Bywater ad loc.; Jones 34f.; Gill, *Ethos* 152f.; cf. also Lucas ad loc.; Brink 182f.). For a related idea cf. Eur. *Supp.* 180–3.

[46] Cf. Havelock, *Preface* 44f. Most interpretations of Aristotle's defence of mimesis through catharsis also imply sympathetic involvement on the part of the audience (cf. von Fritz xiii).

[47] For the treatment of Homer as a tragedian by Plato and others see Heath 4.

[48] See Annas 96–8 and cf. MacIntyre 132f.

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force moral judgement by arousing the audience's sympathy or revulsion towards various characters. Conversely, our moral judgements will undoubtedly influence the nature and degree of our emotional responses. But these judgements may also come into conflict with the emotional sympathy that encourages us to understand a character's behaviour from his or her own point of view.[49] In particular, we may respond sympathetically to characters of whom we disapprove. Plato thinks that in such cases emotion will overwhelm and corrupt the capacity for moral judgement, but the situation is not so simple. The poet controls both kinds of response, and may play them off against each other using a range of dialectical techniques. He is free both to pit one moral standpoint against another, with or without resolving the resulting conflict, and to bias us in various ways both ethically and emotionally. We may be asked to sympathise with several characters in turn or simultaneously. If the moral viewpoints of such characters are in conflict, we must either choose between them or conclude that some moral conflicts are incapable of resolution. It does not follow in drama or life that *just* because someone evokes sympathy, we will either lose our capacity for judgement or be driven to grant our approval. Nor are arguments used by an unsympathetic character necessarily to be spurned. Such an oversimplified view obliterates the potential complexities of competing sympathies and judgements by reducing them to a clear-cut right and wrong. There is a tension inherent in multiple emotional sympathies, which a dramatist can avoid only by eschewing moral conflict between sympathetic characters. This serious limitation would exclude both the sense that two sympathetic viewpoints are tragically irreconcilable, and the powerful tragic effect that may be generated by the tension between sympathy and judgement.[50]

Ethos and *dianoia*

The method followed in this book depends on the hypothesis that Sophoclean stage figures may be treated as bearers of a broadly con-

[49] For these two perspectives on character and the tension between them see Gill, *Character*. Cf. also Heath 80–8.

[50] On this kind of mixed response see Vickers 57 and cf. Black 73f.

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sistent Aristotelian *ethos*, or moral and intellectual character.[51] Plot is fundamental for Aristotle, because he sees it as logically prior to the other qualitative parts of tragedy (50a20–5). But he is more interested in dramatic *ethos* than is sometimes allowed. It is the only serious contender with plot for primacy, remains an easy second of the six 'parts' of tragedy (50a39), receives detailed treatment in its own right, and is inextricably involved in the discussion of plot and action.[52] 'They do not act in order to represent their characters, but they include the characters for the sake of their actions' (50a20–2). Thus despite the logical priority of action over *ethos*, the two are intimately related. Not only does *ethos* help to generate action, but action also reveals *ethos*.[53] This I take to be the implication of another crucial passage: 'The action is performed by people doing it, who must *necessarily* be of a certain kind with respect to both *ethos* and intellect, *for* it is through these that we also say that actions are of a certain kind' (49b36–50a1). 'Necessarily' and 'for' show that it is precisely because we characterise actions in this way that the agents must also have the appropriate qualities. Thus the presumed moral and intellectual character of the agent will generate the *ethos* of the action, but at the same time particular actions and speeches will reveal these aspects of the agent.

Ethos and action are inextricably linked for Aristotle. And in Sophocles they are even more closely knit.[54] The *ethos* of a figure like Odysseus in *Philoctetes* does not merely generate the action, nor

[51] I shall say more on 'intellect' as an aspect of *ethos* below. Aristotle's *ethos* does include personal traits such as walking and talking at the same time (*Rhet.* 1417a22–4), but for him these are indicative of moral character (cf. also *EN* 1125a2–16).

[52] Moral terms pervade these parts of the *Poetics* (see especially 49b36–50a1, 52b30–53a17).

[53] The usual translation of διά as 'for the sake of' is supported by the teleological colouring of the passage (ὅπως 20; τέλος 22, 23). Pearson suggests 'as a result of their actions are certain moral qualities' (*Poetics* 83). The idea that Aristotle means *ethos* is revealed through action in the course of the play is attractive, but Pearson's stronger conclusion, that Aristotle means character is actually formed in the course of the play by the relevant actions, is dubious. This may be true of life (*EN* 1103b1, cited by Pearson, *Poetics* 80), but it is implausible for the limited timespan of drama.

[54] Cf. Dale, *Electra* 221f. Sophocles himself is said to have described his own third stage as 'most full of *ethos* and best' (Plut. *Mor.* 79b). The ancient life of Sophocles praises his ability to delineate the *ethos* of an entire character with 'a little half-line or a single word' (Pearson xxi.21).

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is it just revealed in passing by his deeds. For his moral character could have been quite different without significantly affecting the development of the plot, while the same actions, performed from different motives or principles, could have displayed a different *ethos*. As Sophocles portrays him, he could be open to Aristotle's charge of being worse than is 'necessary' for the plot (54a28f.). But this particular version of his *ethos* forms part of the plot as Sophocles conceived it.

Aristotle requires dramatic *ethos* to be consistent or 'consistently inconsistent' (54a26–8). The stringency of this demand is shown by his objection to Iphigeneia's about-face in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (54a32), which some have found insensitive or perverse.[55] Paradoxically, tragedy may require a greater degree of consistency than we may expect in real life, for only then can the universal patterns of human behaviour be clarified and understood.[56] Like most of us, however, Aristotle could overlook minor discrepancies (at least he never seems perturbed by the kind of minute inconsistencies discovered by diligent modern analysts). He takes exception only to what he apparently considers an abrupt or poorly motivated character change.[57]

Iphigeneia's inconsistency evidently violates 'probability', for the portrayal of *ethos*, like other aspects of tragic construction, must follow either probability or necessity (54a16–36).[58] Aristotle's criterion accords naturally with the demands of a drama that achieves its effects through the representation of persons. A reasonable coherence and plausibility of character are necessary both to prevent the audience from being distracted or confused,[59] and to provide an effective personal focus for emotional engagement.[60] Consequently 'human behaviour is portrayed – through whatever artificial conventions or whatever fantasy – as something we can understand and identify with. And inconsistency, though exploited for dramatic

[55] See Lucas ad loc.

[56] Cf. Halliwell 135–7.

[57] Vahlen 61f. and Lucas ad loc. suggest that Aristotle's mention of Neoptolemus at *EN* 1151b18 shows he did not object to an adequately motivated change of character. But Neoptolemus does not really change. He wavers, but finally confirms his true *ethos*.

[58] On this aspect of Aristotle's theory see Halliwell 99–106.

[59] See Easterling, *Presentation* 15.

[60] See Heath 90–7, 115–23.

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purposes in all kinds of ingenious ways, is not allowed to break the illusion' (Easterling, *Presentation* 15).[61] The dramatist is assisted here by 'our overwhelming natural expectation that most figures should show some continuous identity and some approximation to a human nature' (Garton, *Characterisation* 250). He or she may also choose to subvert this expectation, but cannot disregard it. If a fundamental consistency and plausibility of character are neglected in favour of other considerations, it must either be in the hope that the inconsistency will pass unnoticed, or in a desire to draw it to our attention.

The evidence suggests that the Greeks too expected dramatic characters to display 'some continuous identity and some approximation to a human nature'. Aristotle specifies that *ethos* should be 'similar' (54a24), which probably means 'like human beings'.[62] The view of the poet as a teacher, in so far as it assumes that we can both sympathise with and evaluate the characters, offers prima facie evidence that this was a general cultural expectation. Moreover most tragic characters were thought of as historical figures.[63] Aristotle attributes the preference for characters from the past to their greater plausibility (51b15–19).[64] He also likes to use legendary examples in both the *Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, habitually referring to the situations of specific characters as presented in tragedy.[65] The epic, from which most such characters are descended, presents itself as essentially

[61] On inconsistencies and the ways they are disguised see Heath 111–15; cf. also Goldhill 173f.

[62] See Vahlen 60; Gomme 55 n. 8; Else, *Poetics* 460f.; Lucas ad loc. 'Likeness to truth' is used as a criterion for plausibility in fiction (cf. Hom. *Od.* 19.203; Hes. *Theog.* 27f.; Theogn. 713; *Diss. Log.* 3.10). Cf. also Heath 116 n. 45 on the attitudes of the scholia towards *ethos*.

[63] Cf. Easterling, *Presentation* 7. Aeschylus' *Persians* is thus not an exception in quite the way that is sometimes assumed.

[64] I follow the usual interpretation of *τῶν γενομένων ὀνομάτων* at 51b15 (see Lucas ad loc.). Cf. the use of *ὁ ὢν λόγος* to mean 'what really happened' (Herod. 1.95.1, 116.5; Ar. *Frogs* 1052f.).

[65] E.g. *EN* 1146a19–21, 1151b17–21 (Neoptolemus), 1150b8–10, 1135a28–30 (a clear allusion to Oedipus); *Rhet.* 1417a28–33 (Antigone). Rhetoricians also liked to debate the dilemmas of such characters. Note that neither Plato nor Aristotle has a word for a dramatic persona as opposed to a real person (cf. e.g. *Rep.* 605e4–6). In the *Poetics*, *ethos* seems to mean *dramatis persona* only once (60a10d). See Lucas ad loc.; Vahlen 316; and cf. Bywater on 1454a23 (contra Schütrumpf 93–5). *πρόσωπον* (originally 'face') is used in the *Poetics* for 'mask' (1449a36, b4). For its later ethical development see Pohlenz, *Führertum* 68 and cf. De Lacy 163–5.

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truthful, insisting on the divinely inspired accuracy of its historical claims (e.g. *Il.* 2.484–92, *Od.* 8.487–91).[66] These figures from the legendary past are far less concrete in their historicity than many of the participants in Plato's dialogues. Some of them – Creon, for example – seem to have inherited no clearly defined personality, and could thus be characterised at the poet's convenience. But the major heroes of the past – Achilles, Odysseus, Ajax – were endowed with limited but definite character traits. Although later writers could vary these personae for their own purposes,[67] certain basic features had to be respected. Later critics might complain if a dramatist equipped traditional figures with inappropriate traits or behaviour.[68]

Aristotle also requires *ethos* to be 'fitting' or appropriate to type: it is inappropriate for a woman to be courageous or clever, and for a hero to weep (54a22–4, 30f.).[69] Plato attributes a similar concern to Ion, who boasts that the rhapsode knows 'what is fitting for a man to say, and what for a woman, what for a slave and what for a free man, what for a subject and what for a ruler' (*Ion* 540b4–6). Plato himself, like Aristotle, thinks (for example) that lamentation is womanish and unsuitable for a hero (*Rep.* 387e–88b, 605de), though his objection is of rather a different kind from Aristotle's (he disapproves of portraying any behaviour that does not befit the 'good man'). It is true that he also censures the tragic poets for pandering to the masses by portraying 'the fretful and varied *ethos*' instead of 'the wise and calm *ethos*, always consistent with itself' (*Rep.* 604e–605a). But this merely shows that he interprets variation within a dramatic character in terms of his own understanding of human character-types (in this case the type dominated by the passions).[70]

[66] On Greek belief in the historicity of Homeric characters see Finley, *Odysseus* 22–5; Gomme ch. 1.

[67] Cf. Lattimore, *Patterns* 58–62. We shall see such variation in Sophocles' handling of Odysseus.

[68] See Lucas on 54a24. Some of Gudeman's examples of inappropriateness from the scholia could (though they need not) refer to 'likeness to prototype' (Gudeman on 54a29). Some have also interpreted Aristotle's criterion of 'similarity' in this way (see Bywater ad loc. and cf. Lucas ad loc.; Else, *Poetics* 460).

[69] For Aristotelian character types see *Rhet.* 1388b31–91b6. These may be compared with specific characters in tragedy (e.g. the 'young man' of the *Rhetoric* with Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes*).

[70] Cf. also Arist. *EN* 1159b7–9: 'The wicked have no constancy; for they do not even remain similar to themselves.' Plato was right that tragedy favours the pas-

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The characters are, of course, presented through the formal conventions of the ancient Greek tragic theatre. Heath has well observed that such conventions actually enhance our perception of continuity by 'naturalising' features of theatrical presentation that might otherwise seem highly implausible.[71] Yet he has joined others in arguing that the techniques of rhetoric may be exploited in an opportunistic way that leads to '"suspension" of *ethos*', offering evidence from Aristotle for this view.[72] But on Aristotle's view of *ethos* there is no intrinsic conflict between *ethos* and rhetoric. Rhetorical argument belongs to the 'part' of tragedy called *dianoia* or 'intellect' (*Po.* 50b4–7; cf. 56a34–7). But rather than 'suspending' *ethos*, *dianoia* is an important vehicle for its articulation.[73]

In the *Poetics*, *dianoia* as a part of tragedy (50a6f.) is derived from the need for the persons doing the action to have certain qualities of intellect (49b36–8). This implies that the stage figures' use of rhetorical argument will characterise them in respect of intellect. But intellectual character is itself an important aspect of *ethos*. Although 'ethical' and 'intellectual' virtue are distinguished in the *Ethics* (*EN* 1103a3–7), they are bridged by the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, which is essential for a good moral choice or *prohairesis* and hence for complete virtue (*EN* 1139a22–b5, 1144a6–22, 1144b30–2). *Prohairesis*, which is what reveals *ethos* in both oratory and drama (*Rhet.* 1395b13f.; *Po.* 50b8f.),[74] thus has an essential intellectual element (*EN* 1139a33f., 1139b4f.). In the *Rhetoric* we are told that the speaker must project various desirable qualities as indicators of *ethos*

sionate *ethos*, though we might ascribe this to the demands of effective tragedy rather than to the low tastes of the audience. But for Plato the two apparently coincide. He might approve of Theseus in *OC*, but a play with only such characters would be dull indeed.

[71] Heath 113f. On stylisation cf. also Vickers 54–6; Easterling, *Character* 121. Gould's interesting paper is vitiated by the idea that stylisation makes the audience *perceive* the action and stage figures as 'fragmented and discontinuous' (Gould 50).

[72] Heath 130f. Heath's use of *Rhet.* 1356a8–10 is misleading. It is not the case that Aristotle 'explicitly denies that rhetorical *ethopoiia* [portrayal of *ethos*] depends on maintaining consistency with a previously established impression of character' (Heath 131). He simply says *ethos* should be achieved through the speech itself rather than a prior opinion about the speaker.

[73] On the close relationship between *ethos* and *dianoia* see Dale, *Ethos*; Halliwell 154–6.

[74] Cf. also *Rhet.* 1367b22–7; 1374a11–13; 1417a16–19; *Po.* 54a17–19.

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(1356a4–8, 1366a23–8), including practical wisdom (1378a6–9).[75] Similarly in the *Poetics* 'cleverness', a close relative of practical wisdom,[76] is included under *ethos* (54a23f.). Moreover in both works one of the functions of *dianoia* is to express *gnomai*, or moral generalisations (*Po.* 50a6f.; cf. 50b11f.; *Rhet.* 1403a34–b1; cf. 1394a21–5). In the *Rhetoric* we are told that these are useful for showing *prohairesis* and hence the speaker's *ethos* (1395b12–17; cf. 1395a19–33, 1418a17–21). Sometimes the meaning of the *gnome* will be clear, but if not, then further explanation is needed (1394b7–34, 1395a27–9). This is the province of the enthymeme or rhetorical syllogism, which embraces the *gnome* and constitutes a broader branch of rhetorical *dianoia*. Similarly, the reasoning behind a particular *prohairesis* must sometimes be explained if it is to carry conviction. Aristotle illustrates this point with Antigone's famous self-justification (1417a28–33). In such cases the techniques of argument encompassed by *dianoia* may furnish the reasoning to explain and justify a *prohairesis*, and thus become a vehicle for the expression of *ethos*, both moral and intellectual.

The playwright may, when convenient, exploit the 'rhetoric of the situation',[77] using a speech-writer's techniques to make a speaker more persuasive and attractive and to delineate other characters, especially the speaker's opponents (cf. *Rhet.* 1417a3–7). Like lyric or stichomythia, this kind of rhetorical argument is an accepted formal convention, used to some degree by all the Greek dramatists. As such it 'naturalises' behaviour that might otherwise seem strange or inappropriate, such as coherent and systematic argument from a 'grief-stricken old woman', or the elaborate presentations of a tragic messenger.[78] But the techniques of rhetoric do not thereby 'suspend' *ethos*, at least in the Aristotelian sense. Rather they provide the play-

[75] In both *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* this process is spoken of as being or appearing 'of a certain kind' (*Po.* 49b37, 50a5f.; *Rhet.* 1377b20–8). On *ethos* in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* cf. Gill, *Ethos* 151–5. We may note that the practice of Lysias in the fifth century accords well with Aristotle's recommendation to present oneself as virtuous. He was to become famous for his portrayal of *ethos* (Dion. Hal. *Lysias* 8; see Usher for discussion and bibliography).

[76] It is morally neutral, but a necessary condition for practical wisdom (*EN* 1144a23–8).

[77] Dale xxvii (who has influenced e.g. Gould, *Character* 57f.).

[78] The quoted phrase is from Heath 130, who is quoting Lee on Hecuba in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. On the messenger convention see Heath 153–7.

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wright with a valuable dramatic resource for its articulation. For the fact that a speech is forensic or otherwise conventional in form or tone does not make it meaningless or irrelevant. The rhetorical element in tragedy reflects not just the sophist's school but the real Athenian world of the assembly and the lawcourts.[79] In these contexts the effectiveness of a speaker's rhetoric depends on his being taken seriously by his audience. The portrayal of oneself as virtuous, as Aristotle recommends, will not arouse sympathy or admiration if the audience can merely dismiss it as so much 'empty' rhetoric.[80] In drama as well as life a speaker's rhetorical arguments may enhance his or her character and credibility, or undermine them, as with the flagrant sophistry of Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Women*.[81] As in life, so in drama, an audience comfortable with such techniques may be expected to evaluate speakers according to the use they make of them.

I shall work on the assumption, then, that *dianoia* is expressive of *ethos*, and that we are entitled to approach the dramatic figures with a broad expectation of continuity and coherence of moral character. This does not mean the *ethos* of every character is always consistent. Indeed, it is only if the characters are granted a continuous moral identity that it becomes possible to ask questions about their ethical consistency or lack of it. Apparent inconsistencies in their ethical views will become data to be explained in terms of a unitary moral personality. Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, for example, is highly inconsistent in his moral language.[82] I shall assume that we may treat such inconsistencies as indicators of his *ethos*.[83] The 'rhetoric of the situation', in the hands of a skilful speech-writer, could give him a far better case. But for the playwright the situation served by the rhetoric includes the *ethos* with which he wishes to endow his

[79] Heath 135 reminds us that Gorgias' *Helen* is a jeu d'esprit (*Helen* 21). But Gorgias' overall rhetorical project was both serious and highly practical. For the right emphasis see Goldhill ch. 9.

[80] The rhetorical convention of denying one's own rhetorical skill (e.g. Lys. 19.1f.) is designed to preempt such reactions.

[81] On the relation of Eur. *Tro.* 914–65 to Gorgias' *Helen* see Nestle, *Euripides* 90f.; Adkins 124–7; Goldhill 236–8.

[82] I have discussed this aspect of his character in my *Odysseus*.

[83] I do not mean that during a performance the audience is constantly alert for minute verbal discrepancies, but that they respond to the overall effect to which each discrepancy contributes. On audience awareness see Taplin, *GTA* 6.

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Odysseus. When Sophocles presents us with such a character he expects us to understand, in Aristotle's phrase, 'what kind of person' would use moral language in this way.

Questions about consistency may be of several different kinds. To behave in contrary ways in analogous situations may be condemned as folly or even as disgraceful.[84] A specially heinous kind of inconsistency is the failure to act on one's words, for this undermines trust and so strikes at the heart of social cooperation.[85] Equally reprehensible is the failure to hold oneself to the standards one demands of others.[86] But such breaches need not arise through the agent's planning or choice. They may be a consequence of internally inconsistent principles. If so, we must ask whether the agent can or should render his or her values coherent, or whether the conflict is inescapable. Socrates set himself the task of ironing out the inconsistencies in the convictions of his fellow Athenians.[87] Yet the removal of inconsistency may be either undesirable or impossible.[88] Even in such cases, however, one must ultimately choose a single course of action and face its consequences.

These choices and the passions and principles from which they spring, as presented by Sophocles, are the subject of this book. In order to reduce it to manageable proportions, I have centred my discussion round the Help Friends/Harm Enemies code. This choice of ethical focus is not arbitrary, for the code lies at the heart of Greek popular ethics and is fundamental to the understanding of much of Greek tragedy. Its importance does, however, vary from play to play. Although both *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Trachiniae* could be examined from such a perspective, the code is less integral to either than to the rest of extant Sophocles. Moreover in *Trachiniae* the moral issues are further complicated by the fact that the central tragic decision is made in ignorance of a vital particular. As Aristotle would agree, actions performed in ignorance of a relevant particular are not open to moral evaluation in the same way as those that result

[84] For disapproval of this and other kinds of inconsistency see Dover 219f.

[85] For condemnations see e.g. Theogn. 979–82; Democr. DK 68 B 82; Ant. Soph. DK 87 B 56; Lys. 12.26. Cf. also Lys. 1.48.

[86] Cf. Pittacus DK 10.3ε.4; Hyp. 3.31; Isoc. 3.49, 62; Demos. 20.135, 25.81; Plut. *Mor.* 88d–89b.

[87] For Socrates' emphasis on personal consistency see Pl. *Crito* 46bcd.

[88] This is a central argument of Nussbaum's book. On moral consistency see further her ch. 2 and Gowans. Cf. also Mackenzie 14.

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from fully informed decisions (cf. *EN* 1109b30–11b3). The same, of course, applies to Oedipus' actions revealed in the course of *OT*.[89] On this play I can only echo Bowra's judgement, that 'in the dark emotions aroused by *King Oedipus* approval and disapproval have a very small place' (Bowra 8). For these reasons I shall concentrate on the five remaining extant plays of Sophocles. Before turning to them, however, I shall outline the principal features of the Help Friends/Harm Enemies code as a background for the discussion that follows.

[89] Ignorance does play an important role in other Sophoclean tragedies (notably *Electra* and *Philoctetes*), but it does not distort a central moral decision in the same way.

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