Tragedians and Historians*

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In a famous passage in the *Poetics* Aristotle differentiates between poetry and history: 'Our discussion has made clear that the task of the poet is not to relate events as having happened, but the sort of thing that could potentially happen in terms of what is probable or necessary. The difference between historian and poet does not consist in writing in verse or prose, respectively — for it would be possible to put Herodotus' work into verse, but it would remain history regardless of whether it is written in metre or not; it rather consists in that the one describes actual events, while the other the kind of thing that might happen. For that reason poetry is a more intellectual and more serious pursuit than history: poetry deals with general principles, history with particular facts. By 'general principles' I mean the kind of thing a certain kind of person will say or do in terms of what is probable or necessary. This is the aim of poetry, and it attaches personal names to each kind; by 'particular facts' I mean what Alcibiades did or what was done to him'.[1]

Though the thrust of this statement is to differentiate factual from fictional writing, it shows a rather deplorable blindness to historiography.[2] If we were to take Aristotle literally, the only kind of historical writing he would recognize as such would be the kind of annalistic historical writing practised in his own times especially by Ephorus and the local chroniclers of several Greek states, including the Atthidographers, who tend to list

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1 Arist., *Po.* 9, 1451a36-b11: φανερὸν δὲ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ὅτι οὐ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον. ὁ γὰρ ἱστορικὸς καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς οὐ τῷ ἢ ἔμμετρα λέγειν ἢ ἄμετρα διαφέρουσιν (εἴη γὰρ ἂν τὰ Ἡροδότου εἰς μέτρα τεθῆναι καὶ οὐδὲν ἧττον ἂν εἴη ἱστορία τις μετὰ μέτρου ἢ ἄνευ μέτρων)· ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ' ἱστορία τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγει. ἔστιν δὲ καθόλου μέν, τῷ ποίῳ τὰ ποῖα ἄττα συμβαίνει λέγειν ἢ πράττειν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, οὗ στοχάζεται ἡ ποίησις ὀνόματα ἐπιτιθεμένη· τὸ δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον, τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν. (Lucas)

2 On this point see the comments of D.W. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics* (Oxford, 1968) 119 on 51^{b}6. For a different view, see Margaret Hubbard in D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (eds.), *Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1972) 102, n. 1.

events but do nothing to relate them to one another. What Aristotle says here is certainly not applicable to Herodotus or Thucydides. Although Thucydides is never mentioned by name in any of Aristotle's works, his knowledge of Herodotus' work is attested within the passage we have cited. While it is obviously true that historical events have more of a substratum of actuality than dramatic events and that, in the ancient Greek context at least, tragedy uses verse and history is written in prose, it seems to me that the activity of a historian involves the relation of events 'in terms of what is probable or necessary' just as much as does the activity of a tragic poet. Moreover, as Bernard Knox has pointed out, the events recounted in the myths used by the Greek tragedians were regarded by the Greeks as reflecting part of their own distant historical past, just as many events of our distant past cannot easily be differentiated from myth.[3]

The tragedian, according to Aristotle, 'must not undo the traditional stories, for example that Clytaemnestra was killed by Orestes and that Eriphyle was killed by Alcmaeon; his job is to re-invent the story and use the traditional elements skilfully'.[4] Aristotle does not see — or at least does not state — that a historian, too, is bound by irreducible historical facts, the relation between which it is his task to establish. The creation of coherence and persuasiveness is up to tragedian and historian, respectively. In order to achieve this goal, each has to arrange the basic facts at his disposal in a pattern of 'probability and necessity', that is, each has to convince his audience that the sequence of mythical or historical events is credible, because it embodies the way human beings 'must' or 'are likely' to act in the circumstances in which they have been placed. In other words, the circumstances are given; to link them together so as to make them humanly intelligible is the task of tragedian and historian, each in his own way.

It is my contention that in all the varieties of linkages that we encounter both in tragedy and in history, there can be detected a characteristic Greek way of looking at the human condition. The polytheism of the Greeks alone brings with it presuppositions about the role of the divine in human affairs that are significantly different from what seems self-evident to those reared in monotheistic traditions. For the Greeks, there is no doubt that gods exist: in no other way could love and war, meteoric phenomena and agricultural phenomena be explained, although this cannot be regarded as the full explanation of the Greek gods. The most important thing about them is the fact that they exist and that their existence must be recognized in order to prevent them from disturbing human life. But our destiny is not completely in divine hands: even an Apollo, who knows what the future holds and can communicate his knowledge to humans in his veiled way, cannot shape or even change the way things are going to be; at best he can postpone it.[5] Even the gods are often said to be subject to an ἀνάγκη which they cannot escape.[6] And that ἀνάγκη is only rarely described as divine, and it cannot be swayed by

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3 B. Knox, 'Myth and Attic Tragedy', *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore and London, 1979) 3-24.

4 Arist., *Po.*14, 1453b22-26: τοὺς μὲν οὖν παρειλημμένους μύθους λύειν οὐκ ἔστιν, λέγω δὲ οἷον τὴν Κλυταιμήστραν ἀποθανοῦσαν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὀρέστου καὶ τὴν Ἐριφύλην ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀλκμέωνος, αὐτὸν δὲ εὑρίσκειν δεῖ καὶ τοῖς παραδεδομένοις χρῆσθαι καλῶς. (Lucas)

5 See, e.g., Hdt. I.91.3, where Apollo can postpone (ἐπανεβάλετο) but not avert (παραγαγεῖν) the fate of Croesus.

6 See, e.g., Simon., fr. 370, 29-30 (Page): ἀνάγκαι δ' οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται.

prayer, sacrifice or worship. What is more, it can be recognized only after the event it has shaped has happened; nothing can be done beforehand to avoid it, though in some cases it is looked upon as potentially teaching man a lesson which he may or may not heed the next time. It is this fact that makes it unavoidable, and this in turn makes human life 'tragic'.

My warrant for calling it 'tragic' is not rooted in the ancient Greek use of the adjective τραγικός. Most of the occurrences of the adjective in Aristotle refer to the formal aspects of tragedy: it contrasts the poets of tragedy with those of comedy (*Rhet.* III.14, 1415a19; frg. 20, line 20; *Pol.* III.3, 1276b5) or epic (*Po.* 26, 1461a26); it refers to a solemn elevated style (*Rhet.* III.1, 1403b22; 3, 1406b18 and 16; *Mete.* II.1, 353b1), or to the masks worn by tragic actors (*Probl.* 21, 958a17) and it appeals to people inferior to devotees of epic, because they require actors' poses to be added to the narrative to convey their meaning (*Po.* 26, 1462a3-4).

It comes a little closer to what I understand as 'tragic' when Aristotle applies it to events that arouse pity and fear and end in misfortune,[7] and perhaps also to the situation in which a wise but mischievous man (such as Sisyphus) gets his just deserts.[8] A negative use of τραγικόν is slightly more helpful: when a person fails to act (morally) because he recognizes the potential consequences (to himself) of his action, the situation 'is morally outrageous but not tragic, since it does not end in suffering'. Aristotle adds: 'it is better to have a person act in ignorance but recognize what he has done after he has acted'.[9]

Substantively, however, something arousing pity and fear and ending in disaster; something that satisfies our moral sense, and something in which an action is performed in ignorance of consequences that are recognized only after the agent has acted, do not exhaust what I propose as the meaning of 'tragic'. τραγικός has a narrower range than 'tragic' has in modern languages: we tend to use 'tragic' in situations which are merely 'sad' and to which the agent has made no contribution: 'sad' though it is to see a child hit by a car when trying to retrieve a ball from the street; 'sad' though it is to see a young person killed by cancer; or 'sad' though it is to see innocent people slaughtered by a wicked tyrant, none of these situations are 'tragic' *unless* the victim is shown to have in some sense unwittingly contributed to the situation.

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7 Arist., *Po.* 13, 1453a23-30: διὸ καὶ οἱ Εὐριπίδῃ ἐγκαλοῦντες τὸ αὐτὸ ἁμαρτάνουσιν ὅτι τοῦτο δρᾷ ἐν ταῖς τραγῳδίαις καὶ αἱ πολλαὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς δυστυχίαν τελευτῶσιν. τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ὥσπερ εἴρηται ὀρθόν· σημεῖον δὲ μέγιστον· ἐπὶ γὰρ τῶν σκηνῶν καὶ τῶν ἀγώνων τραγικώταται αἱ τοιαῦται φαίνονται, ἂν κατορθωθῶσιν, καὶ ὁ Εὐριπίδης, εἰ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα μὴ εὖ οἰκονομεῖ, ἀλλὰ τραγικώτατός γε τῶν ποιητῶν φαίνεται. (Lucas)

8 Ibid. 18, 1456a19-23: ... ἐν δὲ ταῖς περιπετείαις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἁπλοῖς πράγμασι στοχάζονται ὧν βούλονται θαυμαστῶς· τραγικὸν γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ φιλάνθρωπον. ἔστιν δὲ τοῦτο, ὅταν ὁ σοφὸς μὲν μετὰ πονηρίας ‹δ'› ἐξαπατηθῇ, ὥσπερ Σίσυφος, καὶ ὁ ἀνδρεῖος μὲν ἄδικος δὲ ἡττηθῇ. (Lucas)

9 Ibid. 14, 1453b36-1454a3: ἢ γὰρ πρᾶξαι ἀνάγκη ἢ μὴ καὶ εἰδότας ἢ μὴ εἰδότας. τούτων δὲ τὸ μὲν γινώσκοντα μελλῆσαι καὶ μὴ πρᾶξαι χείριστον· τό τε γὰρ μιαρὸν ἔχει, καὶ οὐ τραγικόν· ἀπαθὲς γάρ. διόπερ οὐδεὶς ποιεῖ ὁμοίως, εἰ μὴ ὀλιγάκις, οἷον ἐν Ἀντιγόνῃ τὸν Κρέοντα ὁ Αἵμων. τὸ δὲ πρᾶξαι δεύτερον. βέλτιον δὲ τὸ ἀγνοοῦντα μὲν πρᾶξαι, πράξαντα δὲ ἀναγνωρίσαι. (Lucas)

What I render here as 'situation' emerges from Aristotle's emphasis on πρᾶξις, 'action', which involves the individual and the community within which he acts: the 'most important element [of tragedy] is the arrangement of incidents. Tragedy is a representation not of individual men but of actions and of life. [Note that good or bad fortune resides in action: the end we aim at is an action of some kind, not a quality; people have qualities in terms of the character they have, but they are happy or unhappy in terms of the actions they perform.] Accordingly, the point of acting is not in order to project a kind of character, but character is encompassed in the actions. It follows that the incidents, i.e., the plot, are the final purpose of tragedy, and the final purpose is the most important of all'.[10] Some elements that Aristotle identifies as constituent parts of tragedy, but without applying the term τραγικός, clarify my point. A plot or situation would not be what it is, if it did not have a central figure (I am intentionally avoiding the controversial term 'hero') faced with issues rooted in the fact that he lives in society. Aristotle's discussion of this aspect bring us closer to a substantive meaning of 'tragic': Tragedy, he says, 'must not show decent men changing from good fortune to misfortune, for that arouses neither pity nor fear but disgust. Nor must it show bad people changing from bad fortune into good, for that would be the most untragic thing conceivable: it would have none of the essential elements, neither moral sensibility, nor pity nor fear. Nor must it show a thoroughly wicked man falling from good fortune into bad: an arrangement of this kind would satisfy our moral sensibility, but it would include neither pity nor fear. For we feel pity for a person who falls into misfortune without deserving it, and fear for a person who is like ourselves: pity for one who does not deserve what he suffers, and fear for one who is like ourselves. Consequently, the outcome will arouse neither pity nor fear. This leaves a person between these two: he is a person neither outstandingly good and moral nor one whose fall into misfortune is due to a fault in morals or in character, but due to some shortcoming; a person of high social standing and prosperity, such as Oedipus and Thyestes, prominent men of families of this kind. A well-constructed plot must, accordingly, ... show a person changing not from bad fortune into good, but, on the contrary, from good fortune into misfortune; not because of his wickedness but because of a serious shortcoming on the part of either the kind of person described or rather one better than him than worse'.[11]

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10 Ibid. 6, 1450a15-23: μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις. ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου [καὶ εὐδαιμονία καὶ κακοδαιμονία ἐν πράξει ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ τέλος πρᾶξίς τις ἐστίν, οὐ ποιότης· εἰσὶν δὲ κατὰ μὲν τὰ ἤθη ποιοί τινες, κατὰ δὲ τὰς πράξεις εὐδαίμονες ἢ τοὐναντίον]· οὔκουν ὅπως τὰ ἤθη μιμήσωνται πράττουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἤθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις· ὥστε τὰ πράγματα καὶ ὁ μῦθος τέλος τῆς τραγῳδίας, τὸ δὲ τέλος μέγιστον ἁπάντων. The bracketed lines 17-20 are excluded by some (e.g. Lucas [above, n. 2] 102) as not being germane to the context. It seems to me, however, that, though awkward, they are relevant.

11 Ibid. 13, 1452b34-1453a17: πρῶτον μὲν δῆλον ὅτι οὔτε τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς ἄνδρας δεῖ μεταβάλλοντας φαίνεσθαι ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, οὐ γὰρ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἐλεεινὸν τοῦτο ἀλλὰ μιαρόν ἐστιν· οὔτε τοὺς μοχθηροὺς ἐξ ἀτυχίας εἰς εὐτυχίαν, ἀτραγῳδότατον γὰρ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ πάντων, οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔχει ὧν δεῖ, οὔτε γὰρ φιλάνθρωπον οὔτε ἐλεεινὸν οὔτε φοβερόν ἐστιν· οὐδ' αὖ τὸν σφόδρα πονηρὸν ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν μεταπίπτειν· τὸ μὲν γὰρ φιλάνθρωπον ἔχοι ἂν ἡ τοιαύτη

Since I have discussed this crucial passage at some length in an article published in 1958,[12] I can confine myself here to a very few observations. In the first place, the central figure in tragedy must morally be 'like ourselves', that is, not a paragon of virtue nor an exemplar of vice, but, like most human beings, 'not too bad' and rather on the better side than on the worse. That he must be of a prominent family means, I think, simply that he 'matters' socially; his fortune will affect others in his community. The statement concerns an essential element a playwright must observe in order to engage the interest of his audience: it does not, in my opinion, affect the destiny of the tragic figure. What does matter is that his moral fibre — his ἀρετή or κακία — is not instrumental in causing his downfall, his 'misfortune'. That, Aristotle says, is due to 'some kind of shortcoming' — δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά. What does he mean? This has been a very controversial subject, but I think a solution can be found.

Clearly the ἁμαρτία is not a *moral* weakness, since that has explicitly been excluded. It is not an 'error of judgment', through which a usually sane person meets his doom by making a mistake in analyzing or misinterpreting a particular situation. The Greek for that would be ἁμάρτημα; ἁμαρτία is an ingrained quality of character which produces ἁμαρτήματα. But ἁμαρτία is not a 'flaw in character', either.[13] The central tragic character is not a person decent in all other ways, except that he has a weakness for liquor, women, drugs, or some other addiction that brings him down, because that sort of thing would be described as a 'fault in morals or in character' (κακία), which is explicitly excluded by Aristotle as the cause of his downfall.

An answer can be found by bringing in what Aristotle says in some of his ethical writings about the role played by knowledge and ignorance in acts emanating from ἁμαρτία. This is not the time to discuss the relevant passages in detail, and we must rest content with a statement of Aristotle's result that in a given action, the ἁμαρτία of a good man does not consist in ignorance of general principles of what he ought or ought not to do, but of ignorance of particulars, that is of mistaken assumptions about elements involved in his choice, for which we are willing to pity and pardon him. A list of such elements is provided in Aristotle's discussion of voluntary and involuntary acts in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. An involuntary act is performed if the agent acts in ignorance (ἀγνοῶν) of (1) who he is, (2) what he is doing, (3) what thing or person is affected, and sometimes also (4) the means he is using, e.g., some tool; (5) the result intended by his

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σύστασις ἀλλ' οὔτε ἔλεον οὔτε φόβον, ὁ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιόν ἐστιν δυστυχοῦντα, ὁ δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, ὥστε οὔτε ἐλεεινὸν οὔτε φοβερὸν ἔσται τὸ συμβαῖνον. ὁ μεταξὺ ἄρα τούτων λοιπός. ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά, τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχίᾳ, οἷον Οἰδίπους καὶ Θυέστης καὶ οἱ ἐκ τοιούτων γενῶν ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρες. ἀνάγκη ἄρα τὸν καλῶς ἔχοντα μῦθον ἁπλοῦν εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ διπλοῦν, ὥσπερ τινές φασι, καὶ μεταβάλλειν οὐκ εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας ἀλλὰ τοὐναντίον ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην ἢ οἷου εἴρηται ἢ βελτίονος μᾶλλον ἢ χείρονος. (Lucas)

12 M. Ostwald, 'Aristotle on AMAPTIA and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*', *Festschrift für Ernst Kapp* (Hamburg, 1958) 93-108. See also the discussion of this passage by Lucas (above, n. 2) 143-5.

13 See Ostwald (above, n. 12) 95-105 for the detailed argument.

action, e.g., saving a life, or (6) the manner in which he acts, e.g., gently or violently. Only a madman, he continues, could be ignorant of all these factors, but anyone might be ignorant of one or more of them. His action would be involuntary, especially if it is performed in ignorance of the most important of these factors.[14]

Of the tragic characters Aristotle cites in the *Poetics* as exemplifying a fall into misfortune through ἁμαρτία (Oedipus and Thyestes) the Oedipus of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is the only one known to us. How does he fit into this scheme? His purpose in the play is to rid Thebes of the plague by finding the murderer of Laius. It is the purpose of a man not outstandingly good, but of one who simply discharges his duty as a ruler. The purpose is honourable and no ἁμαρτία is inherent in it. However, of the particular circumstances involved in his action, Oedipus knows all but one: he knows what he is doing, for deliberately and systematically he has sent Creon to consult the Oracle, he has called in Teiresias, and he has sent for the old servant of Laius — all before it is suggested to him that he do so.[15] He knows the person or thing affected, Thebes; he knows the instrument, namely consultation of the Oracle by Creon and the advice of Teiresias; he knows the desired result, to liberate Thebes from the plague, and he knows the manner, namely that speed is required to minimize the suffering of his subjects. But he does not know the one thing of which, according to Aristotle, a man is least likely to be ignorant: he does not know who he is himself, he is ignorant of his identity as the son of Laius and Iocasta and the slayer of his father and husband of his mother. It is here that his ἁμαρτία lies in terms of the tragedy, and it is in this sense alone that he acts involuntarily. Moreover, there is, in terms of the tragic action, no other ἁμαρτία in the play, since the events that spring from it — his ἁμαρτήματα — are placed by Sophocles outside the tragic action proper (ἔξω τοῦ δράματος). It is not a moral quality for which Oedipus is himself responsible, but a factor ingrained in his condition as a human being. In order to avoid ἁμαρτία, Oedipus would have to transcend his humanity and be endowed with the omniscience and power of a god. In acting to the best of his human ability, he stumbles against the limits of his being human and meets disaster. He acts responsibly as any agent would in his situation, but his responsibility is diminished by

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14 Arist., *EN* III.1, 1110b24-1111a11: ἕτερον δ' ἔοικε καὶ τὸ δι' ἄγνοιαν πράττειν τοῦ ἀγνοοῦντα· ὁ γὰρ μεθύων ἢ ὀργιζόμενος οὐ δοκεῖ δι' ἄγνοιαν πράττειν ἀλλὰ διά τι τῶν εἰρημένων, οὐκ εἰδὼς δὲ ἀλλ' ἀγνοῶν. ἀγνοεῖ μὲν οὖν πᾶς ὁ μοχθηρὸς ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ ὧν ἀφεκτέον, καὶ διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην ἁμαρτίαν ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοὶ γίνονται· τὸ δ' ἀκούσιον βούλεται λέγεσθαι οὐκ εἴ τις ἀγνοεῖ τὰ συμφέροντα· οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει ἄγνοια αἰτία τοῦ ἀκουσίου ἀλλὰ τῆς μοχθηρίας, οὐδ' ἡ καθόλου (ψέγονται γὰρ διά γε ταύτην) ἀλλ' ἡ καθ' ἕκαστα, ἐν οἷς καὶ περὶ ἃ ἡ πρᾶξις· ἐν τούτοις γὰρ καὶ ἔλεος καὶ συγγνώμη· ὁ γὰρ τούτων τι ἀγνοῶν ἀκουσίως πράττει. ἴσως οὖν οὐ χεῖρον διορίσαι αὐτά, τίνα καὶ πόσα ἐστί, τίς τε δὴ καὶ τί καὶ περὶ τί ἢ ἐν τίνι πράττει, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ τίνι, οἷον ὀργάνῳ, καὶ ἕνεκα τίνος, οἷον σωτηρίας, καὶ πῶς, οἷον ἠρέμα ἢ σφόδρα. ἅπαντα μὲν οὖν ταῦτα οὐδεὶς ἂν ἀγνοήσειε μὴ μαινόμενος, δῆλον δ' ὡς οὐδὲ τὸν πράττοντα· πῶς γὰρ ἑαυτόν γε; ὃ δὲ πράττει ἀγνοήσειεν ἄν τις, οἷον †λέγοντές φασιν ἐκπεσεῖν αὐτούς,† ἢ οὐκ εἰδέναι ὅτι ἀπόρρητα ἦν, ὥσπερ Αἰσχύλος τὰ μυστικά, ἢ δεῖξαι βουλόμενος ἀφεῖναι, ὡς ὁ τὸν καταπέλτην.

15 Soph., *OT* 69-72, 264-89, 765-70, 836-40. See also my article 'On Interpreting Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*', in K.-L. Selig and E. Sears (eds.), *The Verbal and the Visual: Essays in Honor of William Sebastian Heckscher* (New York, 1990) 133-49, esp. 144-8.

circumstances he cannot control. Furthermore, no god can control them: Apollo and Teiresias *know* the result of his actions but they cannot avert them.[16]

That there is a 'tragic' element also in Herodotus has been beautifully demonstrated by the late David Asheri. He remarks how the mechanism of historical development operates in Herodotus, as it does in tragedy, through an unconscious cooperation of gods and men. 'In Herodotus', he writes, 'history repeats itself in this sense: behind the multifariousness and variability of particular events, which never repeat themselves, there exist archetypal models which remain and recur and which can be detected by way of analogy: "I know", says Artabanus to Xerxes (VII.18.2-3) "how bad it is to desire many things; for I remember how Cyrus fared in his expedition against the Massagetae, I also remember Cambyses' expedition against the Ethiopians, and I participated in Darius' campaign against the Scythians. Knowing all that, I have reached the conclusion that you, Xerxes, can be the happiest man in the eyes of all humanity, if you do not move [against the Greeks]". Artabanus, that is Herodotus, shows that behind specific Persian expeditions — different in detail, conducted by different kings against different peoples — there looms a recurrent "model" of expansionism failed. If a particular event catches our interest as a curiosity, it gains historical significance as a symptomatic and paradigmatic phenomenon. That does not mean that Herodotus falsifies particulars so as to adapt them to the model; but a paradigmatic history necessarily implies a selection of human actions. In this respect, Herodotus is more of a philosopher than a historian, if philosophy, in the Ionian sense of the word, is primarily the search of being in becoming. Moreover, he is more of a poet than a historian, even though he wrote prose, because he is interested more in what might happen than in what really happened, less in "what Alcibiades did and suffered" than in the paradigm'.[17]

I believe that it is possible to go beyond this to point out that Herodotus shares this paradigm more closely with Sophocles than with either Aeschylus or Euripides.[18] Euripides' tragic vision tends to consist in frail, vulnerable humans buffeted by hostile powers in a world not of their own making: the passionate jealousy of a Medea is too strong to restrain her from killing her own sons in order to punish a priggish husband, who tries to make the best of his exile; an Elektra spurs on a cowardly brother to commit the heinous murder of a flawed but mellowed mother and her hospitable paramour by paranoid obsession with social norms that demand revenge for the death of her father. Similarly in other Euripidean plays. There is little of that in Herodotus.

Nor does Herodotus share with Aeschylus the view of a moral universe in which superhuman forces control a human destiny which leaves to human agents little more initiative than to enter through their own choice a chain of events already predetermined in

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16 Of the 17 discussions of ἁμαρτία listed in the most recent instalment of the *Database of Classical Bibliography* (covering the years 1974-1989), this insight is shared only by E. Lefèvre, 'Die Unfähigkeit, sich zu erkennen. Unzeitgemässe Bemerkungen zu Sophokles' Oidipus Tyrannos', *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 23 (1987) 37-58. But see also E.R. Dodds, 'On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*', *G&R* 13 (1966) 37-49.

17 D. Asheri (ed. and comm.), *Erodoto, Le storie* I (Milan, 1988) xliv-xlv.

18 I have discussed this relationship in 'Herodotus and Athens', *Illinois Classical Studies* 16 (1991) 137-48.

the mysterious ways of heredity.[19] I shall return to what I should like to call 'the tragic moment' in Aeschylus and Euripides a little later, and concentrate a little more on Sophocles, because I believe that a strong affinity between his view of the human condition and Herodotus' view can be demonstrated.

It is not only in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* that Sophoclean characters find themselves in conditions in which, however reasonably they act, their actions will inevitably recoil against them and against those close to them in kinship, friendship or citizenship: Creon, in the *Antigone,* in trying to restore balance to a state wrecked by fraternal war, stumbles against the religious obligations incumbent upon members of the family; in the *Trachiniae,* Deianeira, in attempting to regain the love of her husband, destroys him. However good their intentions, however rational their aims, Sophoclean characters discover the limits of their humanity as set by inscrutable and inexorable forces. An Oedipus or a Creon may be warned of what is to come by a Teiresias, but no warning can avert what is in store for them.[20]

A remarkably similar view of the human condition is taken by Herodotus both in working out the theme of his work as a whole and in innumerable details in his narrative that serve as building blocks for his structure. History is enacted by persons whom character, family, and social and political mores and traditions have placed into situations with which they cope as reasonably as they can according to their lights, but they cannot control the outcome of their actions. A decision once made is subject to the inexorable laws of an external necessity, a force which, though transcendent, can be communicated to men by gods, especially by Apollo and his oracle, but is apparently not determined by them. In Herodotus, the fate of a great individual is usually identical with the fate of his people; his doom is their doom. This is the thread that holds together the large issue central to the work, the wars between Greeks and barbarians from the first major encroachment of non-Greeks upon Greek territories to the re-establishment of a natural boundary — the Hellespont — between them.

As in Sophoclean tragedy, history is enacted by great individuals. Rejecting mythical accounts, Herodotus starts out by naming Croesus as 'the individual I know to have been the first to perpetrate acts of injustice against the Greeks',[21] and the fate of Croesus is the fate of Lydia, just as the fate of Media and subsequent rise of Persia is the fate of Cyrus, and just as the fate of Persia becomes identical with the fate of Xerxes. Croesus, though warned by Solon that wealth and power do not constitute happiness, learns his lesson the hard way when he attacks Persia; Cyrus is taught by his attack on the

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19 For a recent treatment of Herodotus' religiosity, see T. Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford, 2000).

20 I have dealt with this problem in 'On Interpreting Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*' (above, n. 15).

21 Hdt. I.5.3-6.2: τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τοῦτον σημήνας προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὁμοίως σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστεα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιών. τὰ γὰρ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλα ἦν, τὰ πολλὰ αὐτῶν σμικρὰ γέγονε, τὰ δὲ ἐπ' ἐμεῦ ἦν μεγάλα, πρότερον ἦν σμικρά. τὴν ἀνθρωπηίην ὦν ἐπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν τὠυτῷ μένουσαν ἐπιμνήσομαι ἀμφοτέρων ὁμοίως. Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος ... οὗτος ὁ Κροῖσος βαρβάρων πρῶτος τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν τοὺς μὲν κατεστρέψατο Ἑλλήνων ἐς φόρου ἀπαγωγήν, τοὺς δὲ φίλους προσεποιήσατο.

Massagetae that he was misguided in 'his belief in his more-than-human birth and good fortune in war',[22] despite Croesus' attempt to make his captor profit from his experience; Cambyses' mad lust for expansion is checked by the Ethiopians, Darius' by the Scythians, and Xerxes' by the Greeks.

The inevitability of the pattern inherent in the paradigm is driven home by innumerable vignettes whose structures exhibit a distinctly Sophoclean tragic irony. There is, in the first place, the story of Candaules, whose excessive infatuation with his wife boded a bad end (I.8.2: χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλῃ γενέσθαι κακῶς), which came to pass through the duress his actions eventually imposed on Gyges; we find it in the story of Arion and the dolphin, which shows that those who believe that they can enrich themselves with impunity through murder on the high sea cannot get away with their crime; we find it in the story of Polycrates who, though willingly accepting the advice to give up his most treasured possession, retrieved it in spite of himself and met a horrible end. And we find it in a most striking way when a dream makes Xerxes realize that he cannot back out of his decision to march against Greece, however much he desires to do so. In the detailed narration of events as well as on the larger canvas of his history, Herodotus shows human agents placed in situations in which they are constrained to act in ways which are bound to lead to failure, because they do not recognize until it is too late the limits which their humanity has set for them.

The similarity between the tragic elements we find in Herodotus and in Sophocles is particularly striking, and may be due to a personal acquaintance between them, which is fairly reliably attested.[23] However, we find differently based patterns that can only be regarded as 'tragic' also in the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides and in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. The lack of testimony for any personal contact in these cases suggests a similarity in thought pattern that gives all these authors a common Greek denominator.

Since Aeschylus' general practice — the *Persae* seems to be the only surviving exception — was to use an entire trilogy to express what he saw as the 'tragic' element in human life, the *Oresteia* is the only full surviving expression of what he saw as 'tragic'. To look under these circumstances for an Aristotelian ἁμαρτία as the tragic moment in the sense in which we found it in Sophocles would be idle folly. In fact, it is difficult to speak of any central characters. The focus of the trilogy is rather the fate of a family, the descendants of Atreus. We can approach the essence of the tragic element most effectively through some choral lyrics, which are placed just before the entrance of Agamemnon:

> It has been made long since and grown old among men,/ this saying: human wealth/ grown to fulness of stature/ breeds again nor dies without issue./ From high good fortune in the blood/ blossoms the quenchless agony./ Far from others I hold my own/ mind; only the act of evil/ breeds others to follow,/ young sins in its own likeness./ Houses clear in their right are given/ children in all loveliness.// But Pride aging is made/ in men's dark actions/ ripe with the young pride/ late or soon when the dawn of destiny/ comes and birth is given/ to the spirit none may fight nor beat down, sinful Daring; and in those halls/ the

22 Ibid., I.204.2: πολλά τε γάρ μιν καὶ μεγάλα τὰ ἐπαείροντα καὶ ἐποτρύνοντα ἦν, πρῶτον μὲν ἡ γένεσις, τὸ δοκέειν πλέον τι εἶναι ἀνθρώπου, δεύτερα δὲ ἡ εὐτυχίη ἡ κατὰ τοὺς πολέμους γενομένη.

23 See the article cited above, n. 18.

> black visaged Disasters stamped/ in the likeness of their fathers.// And Righteousness is a shining in the smoke of mean houses./ Her blessing is on the just man./ From high halls starred with gold by reeking hands/ she turns back/ with eyes that glance away to the simple in heart,/ spurning the strength of gold/ stamped false with flattery./ And all things she steers to fulfilment. (tr. Richmond Lattimore)[24]

Aeschylus substitutes here for the conventional view — prosperity grown excessive automatically breeds 'insatiable agony' for a family that has enjoyed good fortune — the view that it is not prosperity as such but an 'act of evil' perpetrated by an individual member of the family which generates in his descendants further acts of evil. In other words, it is not great prosperity that is doomed, but a prosperous person whom it corrupts into evil action, whose descendants will enter a cycle of disaster through an evil act of their own. Agamemnon donned this 'yoke of necessity' (line 218: ἀνάγκας ἔδυ λέπαδνον) when he decided to sacrifice Iphigeneia so that his fleet could set sail against Troy;[25] Orestes enters it when he accepts Apollo's injunction to avenge the death of his

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24 Aesch., *Aga.* 750-81:

παλαίφατος δ' ἐν βροτοῖς γέρων λόγος
τέτυκται, μέγαν τελε-
σθέντα φωτὸς ὄλβον
τεκνοῦσθαι μηδ' ἄπαιδα θνήσκειν,
ἐκ δ' ἀγαθᾶς τύχας γένει
βλαστάνειν ἀκόρεστον οἰζύν.
δίχα δ' ἄλλων μονόφρων εἰ-
μί· τὸ δυσσεβὲς γὰρ ἔργον
μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει,
σφετέρᾳ δ' εἰκότα γέννᾳ·
οἴκων γὰρ εὐθυδίκων
καλλίπαις πότμος αἰεί.

φιλεῖ δὲ τίκτειν ὕβρις
μὲν παλαιὰ νεά-
ζουσαν ἐν κακοῖς βροτῶν
ὕβριν τότ' ἢ τόθ', ὅτε τὸ κύ-
ριον μόλῃ φάος τόκου,
δαίμονά τε τὰν ἄμαχον ἀπόλε-
μον, ἀνίερον θράσος μελαί-
νας μελάθροισιν ἄτας,
εἰδομένας τοκεῦσιν.

Δίκα δὲ λάμπει μὲν ἐν
δυσκάπνοις δώμασιν,
τὸν δ' ἐναίσιμον τίει·
τὰ χρυσόπαστα δ' ἔδεθλα σὺν
πίνῳ χερῶν παλιντρόποις
ὄμμασι λιποῦσ' ὅσια †προσέβα
τοῦ†, δύναμιν οὐ σέβουσα πλού-
του παράσημον αἴνῳ·
πᾶν δ' ἐπὶ τέρμα νωμᾷ. (Page)

25 Ibid. 205-227: The elder lord spoke aloud before them:/ 'My fate is angry if I disobey these,/ but angry if I slaughter/ this child, the beauty of my house,/ with maiden blood shed staining/ these father's hands beside the altar./ What of these things goes now without disaster?/ How shall I fail my ships/ and lose my faith of battle?/ For them to urge such

father in *Choephoroi* 269-305. As in Sophocles, it is the act of an individual that recoils not only against him but also against his descendants. It is noteworthy that Aeschylus exempts from this cycle the lowly righteous family, living in the 'smoke of mean houses' rather than in 'high halls starred with gold'. Their lives are duller and less tumultuous, but also less suitable to drama and tragedy.

The tragic thought that each succeeding generation will, through an act of its own, enter the chain of crime-punishment following crime-punishment is not the final statement of Aeschylean drama. Fairly early in the *Agamemnon* the Chorus of old Argives delivers a lyrical statement that looks forward to the end of the trilogy in the *Eumenides*:

> Zeus: whatever he may be, if this name/ pleases him in invocation,/ thus I call upon him./ I have pondered everything/ yet I cannot find a way,/ only Zeus, to cast this dead weight of ignorance/ finally from out my brain.// He who in time long ago was great,/ throbbing with gigantic strength,/ shall be as if he never were, unspoken./ He who followed him has found/ his master, and is gone./ Cry aloud without fear the victory of Zeus,/ you will not have failed the truth:// Zeus, who guided men to think,/ who has laid it down that wisdom/ comes alone through suffering./ Still there drips in sleep against the heart/ grief of memory; against/ our pleasure we are temperate./ From the gods who sit in grandeur/ grace comes somehow violent. (tr. Richmond Lattimore)[26]

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sacrifice of innocent blood/ angrily, for their wrath is great — is right. May all be well yet'.// But when necessity's yoke was put upon him/ he changed, and from the heart the breath came bitter/ and sacrilegious, utterly infidel,/ to warp a will now to be stopped at nothing./The sickening in men's minds, tough,/ reckless in fresh cruelty brings daring. He endured then/ to sacrifice his daughter/ to stay the strength of war waged for a woman,/ first offering for the ships' sake. (tr. Richmond Lattimore)

26 Ibid. 161-83:

161 Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ' αὐ-
τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ,
τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω·
οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι
πάντ' ἐπισταθμώμενος
165 πλὴν Διός, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος
χρὴ βαλεῖν ἐτητύμως·

οὐδ' ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας,
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,
οὐδὲ λέξεται πρὶν ὤν·
ὃς δ' ἔπειτ' ἔφυ, τρια-
κτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών·
Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων
175 τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν,

τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώ-
σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν·
στάζει δ' ἔν γ' ὕπνῳ πρὸ καρδίας
180 μνησιπήμων πόνος· καὶ παρ' ἄ-
κοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν·
δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων. (Page)

Zeus is invoked as the sole master of the universe, who after having overthrown his father (Kronos), who in turn had overthrown his father (Ouranos), had established the authoritative rule that learning comes through suffering. The suffering is painful and even disturbs one's sleep at night; but it inevitably shows man his place (σωφρονεῖν), whether he likes it or not (καὶ παρ' ἄκοντας). In this sense it is a boon (χάρις) which, however heavy-handed, comes to men from the divinity. The ordeal to which three generations are subjected in the story that underlies the *Oresteia* ends in the lesson (μάθος) of trial by jury as a substitute for family vendetta for mankind in the *Eumenides.* Its conclusion would, presumably, have made Dante classify it as a 'divine comedy'. But Aeschylus will not let us forget the magnitude of the tragic necessity that has been the price of progress in human society, a progress which could not have come about without divine help: it takes the vote of Athena to break the gridlock caused by a human jury when left to its own devices.

In the plays of Euripides, 'society' in our sense of the word plays a much more direct part as the 'tragic' moment than it does in either Sophocles or Aeschylus. In Euripidean dramaturgy it is neither the limitations of the human individual that condemn him to misfortune, nor a πρώταρχος ἄτη, a 'sin that began it all' (*Aga.* 1192), that willy-nilly draws the family into a chain of disaster, from which only the boon of Zeus' universe will eventually liberate it. It is rather the clash of human norms of conduct with rigid but inferior social conventions that creates tragedy. One might almost say that Euripides makes tragedy out of the conflict of νόμος and φύσις which, as we know from contemporary comic, philosophical and historical sources, dominated the social thought of the second half of the fifth century. At the same time, it makes Euripides the keenest social critic of the three tragedians.

This comes out especially clearly in, for example, his treatment of the Orestes myth in the *Electra*, where we are in the unusal position of being able to compare it with the use Aeschylus and Sophocles made of the same story in the *Oresteia* and *Electra*, respectively. Euripides is less interested in the problems involved in revenge for a slain father than in the psychological problems the demand for revenge produces in the avengers, especially Electra. The setting is pressed into 106 lines of the prologue — the story of Agamemnon's murder, Clytaemnestra's affair with Aegisthus and Electra's unconsummated marriage to a social inferior are related by her peasant husband; Electra vents her passionate desire for the return of Orestes to avenge her father's murder; and Orestes' less than heroic return to Argos — while the solution of the problems arising from the vacuum left by the completed revenge is packed into 122 lines (1238-1359), starting with the appearance of the Dioskouroi as *dei ex machina*, and end with their tying up all loose knots. In short, Euripides' focus is less on action than on exploring the psychic states of children whom society expects to avenge a father's murder perpetrated by their mother and her paramour. What heroic dimensions of the story appear in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' treatment of the myth are reduced to flaws in human character in Euripides: Orestes is a coward who needs to be spurred into action by the venom of his sister's resentment at being deprived of her royal status; Aegisthus is killed offstage at a point where he had hospitably invited Orestes to participate in a ritual sacrifice; and Clytaemnestra is murdered when she appears as a compassionate mother, treacherously summoned by her daughter on the false pretense of helping her at childbirth, and full of remorse at having slain her husband. The tragic moment in

Euripides' *Electra* may then be defined as disaster caused by the perversion of human values in the face of expected social behaviour. Disaster seems for Euripides the inevitable outcome of a conflict of this kind, which is resolved only — and in an unconvincing way — by divine outside intervention. To stress the inevitability of the outcome, Euripides in the *Electra* appeals to φύσις as an unalterable reality.

It is perhaps worth our while to illustrate this point by analyzing a speech in which Orestes, in expressing bewildered admiration of the sterling qualities of the poor farmer whom his sister had married, questions the relation between real and apparent nobility (367-90). After observing that a noble father may have worthless children and vice versa, he wonders by what criteria true worth ought to be judged and rejects in turn wealth, poverty and valor in arms as appropriate yardsticks. The answer at which he finally arrives is interesting both for what Orestes commends and for what he rejects. True nobility is judged by the company a man keeps and the character he displays; they are noble who run their own affairs and those of the state well. Orestes rejects judgment on the basis of family prestige, which he attributes to opinionated vacuity, or of mere physical prowess.[27] The significance of this is reinforced later in the play, when Electra vaunts over the body of Aegisthus: 'You used to boast that you were one whose strength lay in his money; but money is with us only for a brief moment or not at all: it is our innate character (φύσις) that remains steadfast, not our money. For character is always with us and helps us overcome adversity, but when prosperity comes with injustice and stupidity, it flies out of the house after flourishing but a short time'.[28] Here wealth is opposed to φύσις; in the earlier passage wealth, poverty and family prestige were. Φύσις alone has a permanence and a reality, which status symbols and other social trimmings lack: intelligence is on the side of φύσις; only the stupid and empty-headed attach value to transitory externals. However, it is they who set the standard against which the true and permanent values tragically clash.

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27 Eur., *El.* 367-90: 'Alas, we look for good on earth and cannot recognize it/ when met, since all our human heritage runs mongrel./ At times I have seen descendants of the noblest families/ grow worthless though the cowards had courageous sons;/ inside the souls of wealthy men bleak famine lives/ while minds of stature struggle trapped in starving bodies.// How then can man distinguish man, what test can he use?/ the test of wealth? That measure means poverty of mind;/ of poverty? The pauper owns one thing, the sickness/ of his condition, a compelling teacher of evil;/ by nerve in war? Yet who, when a spear is cast across/ his face, will stand to witness his companion's courage?/ We can only toss our judgments random to the wind.// This fellow here is no great man among the Argives,/ not dignified by family in the eyes of the world — /he is a face in the crowd, and yet we choose him champion./ Can you not come to understand, you empty-minded, opinion-stuffed people, a man is judged by grace/ among his fellows, manners are nobility's touchstone?/ Such men of manners can control our cities best,/ and homes, but the well-born sportsman, long on muscle, short/ on brains, is only good for a statue in the park,/ not even sterner in the shocks of war than weaker/ men, for courage is the gift of character'. (tr. Emily Vermeule)

28 Ibid. 939-44: ηὔχεις τις εἶναι τοῖσι χρήμασι σθένων·/ τὰ δ' οὐδὲν εἰ μὴ βραχὺν ὁμιλῆσαι χρόνον./ ἡ γὰρ φύσις βέβαιος, οὐ τὰ χρήματα./ ἡ μὲν γὰρ αἰεὶ παραμένουσ' αἴρει κακά·/ ὁ δ' ὄλβος ἀδίκως καὶ μετὰ σκαιῶν ξυνὼν/ ἐξέπτατ' οἴκων, σμικρὸν ἀνθήσας χρόνον.

It would be devaluing the art of Euripides to claim that all his plays follow a similar pattern. But it is true that his tragic situations typically hinge on innate characteristics running afoul of social conventions. We find this in the *Medea*, where Jason's complacent attempt to give his family a comfortable exile is shown as self-serving and does not reckon with its effects on the wife to whom he owes his salvation. We see it in the *Hippolytus*, where Phaedra's frustrated lust clashes with the innate sexual puritanism of her stepson and leads to the death of both. And we see it with special horror in the *Bacchae*, where the rigid *raison d' état* of Pentheus is tragically confronted with a new form of worship that demands recognition.

To sum up: their decisive differences notwithstanding, there is a common denominator that characterizes the view all three of the great Greek tragedians take of the human condition. Man may be frail, but he is not a mere toy in the hands of superior powers. Gods exist but do not ordain what is to be: oracles *know* but do not *shape* what is to come, and there are suggestions that even the gods are subject to necessity.

Man plays a decisive part in forging his own destiny and certainly is somehow responsible for the consequences of his actions, even if he has not consciously willed them. In Aeschylus, impious deeds — but interestingly enough, we are not told who judges them as 'impious' — willy-nilly perpetuate themselves and recoil upon the descendants of those who perpetrated them, until divine intervention first establishes human means to break the chain of vendetta, and then intervenes to remedy human indecision. For Sophocles, a human agent acting with the best of intentions according to human lights falls victim to his actions because, like all humans, he is frail and lacks omniscience. For Euripides, the artificial norms set by human society clash with values innate — for better or for worse — in the human animal and lead to disaster.

This thoroughly human determination of human events is also found in the foremost Greek historians, Herodotus and Thucydides. We have already remarked on Herodotus' approach in noting his intellectual affinity to Sophocles. The rise to and fall from greatness to which states are subject is not determined by an identifiable divinity, but by forces, recognized but undescribed, to which human leaders ruling these states are subject. In the case of Candaules, it is his excessive infatuation with his wife that caused the downfall of his dynasty in Lydia and paved the way for the dynasty of which Croesus was the last member;[29] his willingness to accept the good advice of his Egyptian friend Amasis to sacrifice his most precious possession did not save Polycrates of Samos from disaster: when fishermen brought him the ring they had retrieved from a fish, Polycrates realized θεῖον εἶναι τὸ πρῆγμα (III.42.4: 'that a divine factor was involved') and that his doom was sealed;[30] in the case of Xerxes, it was a dream which also appeared to Artabanus when Xerxes made him sleep in his bed, which convinced him that he was in no position to rescind his order to march against Greece, once he had decided to do so.[31] However unbelievable and unhistorical *we* might consider these and similar incidents in Herodotus, there is strong reason to believe that *he* regarded them as historical enough to be landmarks indicating that the concatenation of events was ineluctable. Note that in none of these cases, does τὸ θεῖον have a name attached to it; no thought is given to

29 Hdt. I.8-12.

30 Ibid., III.39-43, 120-25.

31 Ibid., VII.14.

who ordained or formulated a given destiny: it simply exists as a natural irreversible operative whose existence must be taken for granted. It manifests itself in human actions, yet the agent himself is not aware of it until it is too late: it is recognized by an outsider before he realizes what the consequences of his action are bound to be.

Thucydides, too, has a keen sense of an inevitability in the way human actions shape events, but it differs radically from Herodotus' view of it. In the first place, it is nowhere related to an unknowable supernatural agent. To explain it, he frequently uses ἀνάγκη and other terms expressing necessity, although he treats these necessities as nothing obscure or mysterious.[32] But they do inhere in human nature and are conditioned by it. Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides is indifferent to whether, in any given case, the agent is aware of the consequences of his actions or whether realization of what he has done comes as a result of an outside observer. What concerns Thucydides much more is that he, as the narrator of events, is aware of these forces keenly enough to be able to communicate them with precision to posterity.

This comes out clearly in his statement of his purpose: 'If those who will wish to gain a clear view of the events of the past and, in the future, of the events which, human affairs being what they are, will again be like or very similar to them, will judge my work useful, I shall be content'.[33] That this does not state a circular view of history, which would make history a tool for predicting future events, is now generally recognized.[34] Thucydides rather assumes that the 'likeness' and 'similarity' of future events to those of the past are predicated on his belief in the permanence of human factors which time will not change. The factors he sees at play in history are embedded in the narrative he gives of them and in the speeches he reports as filtered through his mind. His belief that the nature (φύσις) of man remains constant throughout human history constitutes an immutable ἀνάγκη which guarantees the similarity of past and future.

Its constituent parts are first detailed in the argument of the Athenians at the First Lacedaemonian Congress that fear, prestige and self-interest compelled them to expand into an empire what had been a hegemony assumed at the request of their allies:[35] in short, what had begun as a voluntary act on the part of the allies[36] was transformed by universally motivating factors[37] into an imperialism which, by engendering fear in the

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32 See M. Ostwald, *Ananke in Thucydides* (Atlanta, GA, 1988).

33 Thuc. I.22.4: ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἕξει.

34 On this issue, it is sufficient to cite S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* I (Oxford, 1991) 61.

35 Thuc. I.75.2-3: καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴν τήνδε [sc. τὴν ἀρχὴν] ἐλάβομεν οὐ βιασάμενοι, ἀλλ' ὑμῶν μὲν οὐκ ἐθελησάντων παραμεῖναι πρὸς τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τοῦ βαρβάρου, ἡμῖν προσελθόντων τῶν ξυμμάχων καὶ αὐτῶν δεηθέντων ἡγεμόνας καταστῆναι· ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἔργου κατηναγκάσθημεν τὸ πρῶτον προαγαγεῖν αὐτὴν ἐς τόδε, μάλιστα μὲν ὑπὸ δέους, ἔπειτα καὶ τιμῆς, ὕστερον καὶ ὠφελίας.

36 Ibid., I.96.1: Παραλαβόντες δὲ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ ἐκόντων τῶν ξυμμάχων διὰ τὸ Παυσανίου μῖσος, ἔταξαν ἃς τε ἔδει παρέχειν τῶν πόλεων χρήματα πρὸς τὸν βάρβαρον καὶ ἃς ναῦς.

37 Ibid., I.76.2: οὕτως οὐδ' ἡμεῖς θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν πεποιήκαμεν οὐδ' ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου τρόπου, εἰ ἀρχήν τε διδομένην ἐδεξάμεθα καὶ ταύτην μὴ ἀνεῖμεν ὑπὸ ‹τριῶν› τῶν μεγίστων νικηθέντες, τιμῆς καὶ δέους καὶ ὠφελίας, οὐδ' αὖ πρῶτοι τοῦ

Lacedaemonians, created a situation from which a new ἀνάγκη arose, the ἀληθεστάτη πρόφασις for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.[38] There are a few other architectonic ἀνάγκαι to trace the course of the war. Thucydides states in his own name that Sparta's reluctance to enforce adherence to the terms of the Peace of Nicias necessitated the resumption of hostilities,[39] and through a number of speeches he shows the ἀνάγκαι lurking behind the Sicilian Expedition. As a prelude to the expedition, we get in the Melian Dialogue the strongest statement anywhere of the ἀνάγκαι by which an imperial power finds itself constrained (V.99: τῆς ἀρχῆς τῷ ἀναγκαίῳ παροξυνομένους): fear, prestige and self-interest push arguments from morality into the background when a weak power is faced with a stronger; a constraint inherent in nature makes gods as well as men assert their power wherever they have control.[40] The expedition itself, as the speeches of Alcibiades (VI.18.3) and later Euphemus (VI.87.2) show, is an ἀνάγκη arising from the possession of empire.

I could cite many more passages to demonstrate that Thucydides viewed the historical process as constrained by the nature of the human animal, whose responses to any given situation are motivated by fear, prestige, and self-interest. There is nothing we can do about this constraint — it is what flesh is heir to — and we have to live out its consequences, unless perhaps the study of history can make us know what it is and make us try to inhibit the extreme of the consequences it can lead to. Pericles realized this; his successors did not: 'those who came after him concentrated more on conflicts with one another, and in striving each to be first turned to surrendering even the affairs of state to the people and its whims. The results were, as is to be expected in a great and imperial city, many mistakes, especially the expedition against Sicily. This was less the outcome of misjudging the target of their attack, than their failure to vote the measures to support the troops sent. By indulging in personal intrigues to gain popular leadership they took the edge off their military operations, and first stirred up civil disturbances with one another'.[41]

τοιούτου ὑπάρξαντες, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ καθεστῶτος τὸν ἥσσω ὑπὸ τοῦ δυνατωτέρου κατείργεσθαι ... .

38 Ibid., I.23.6: τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ, τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγοῦμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν ... .

39 Ibid., V.25.2-3: καὶ ἅμα καὶ τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι προϊόντος τοῦ χρόνου ὕποπτοι ἐγένοντο ἔστιν ἐν οἷς οὐ ποιοῦντες ἐκ τῶν ξυγκειμένων ἃ εἴρητο. καὶ ἐπὶ ἔξ ἔτη μὲν καὶ δέκα μῆνας ἀπέσχοντο μὴ ἐπὶ τὴν ἑκατέρων γῆν στρατεῦσαι, ἔξωθεν δὲ μετ' ἀνοκωχῆς οὐ βεβαίου ἔβλαπτον ἀλλήλους τὰ μάλιστα· ἔπειτα μέντοι καὶ ἀναγκασθέντες λῦσαι τὰς μετὰ τὰ δέκα ἔτη σπονδὰς αὖθις ἐς πόλεμον φανερὸν κατέστησαν.

40 Ibid., V.85-111.

41 Ibid., II.65.10-11: οἱ δὲ ὕστερον ἴσοι μᾶλλον αὐτοὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὄντες καὶ ὀρεγόμενοι τοῦ πρῶτος ἕκαστος γίγνεσθαι ἐτράποντο καθ' ἡδονὰς τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τὰ πράγματα ἐνδιδόναι. ἐξ ὧν ἄλλα τε πολλά, ὡς ἐν μεγάλῃ πόλει καὶ ἀρχὴν ἐχούσῃ, ἡμαρτήθη καὶ ὁ ἐς Σικελίαν πλοῦς, ὃς οὐ τοσοῦτον γνώμης ἁμάρτημα ἦν πρὸς οὓς ἐπῆσαν, ὅσον οἱ ἐκπέμψαντες οὐ τὰ πρόσφορα τοῖς οἰχομένοις ἐπιγιγνώσκοντες, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας διαβολὰς περὶ τῆς τοῦ δήμου προστασίας τά τε ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ ἀμβλύτερα ἐποίουν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν πόλιν πρῶτον ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἐταράχθησαν.

I hope to have shown that a common denominator runs through all the five authors I have discussed, tragedians as well as historians. They all regard the human animal as the focal point of his/her actions, and thus to a large degree responsible for the consequences they bring in their train. In this the Greek view of man differs essentially from the view taken by monotheistic cultures. Man is not a mere toy of divine powers who use him for their own inscrutable ends. There are indeed powers — usually divine — which we can recognize as determinants of a lot which we cannot alter. But these powers may themselves be subject to a transcendent necessity, which they may know and communicate, but which they cannot avert.

The central fact of all Greek beliefs is that humans are agents who have to act in the belief that what they are doing is done to the best of their knowledge and ability; what they do not realize until after they have acted is their own frailty, the fact that in acting they have encountered limits they cannot trespass with impunity. This is the condition I should like to name 'tragic'. In Aeschylus we found it in the belief that an impious deed renders generation after generation liable to perpetuating criminal deeds, until a human lawcourt, sponsored by divine intervention, puts an end to generational bloodshed by introducing trial by jury, which, however, requires another divine intervention to be decisive. Man is not an arbitrary toy of the gods, but he depends on divine assistance in liberating himself from forces he has called upon himself. In Sophocles, we find human beings, acting intelligently and reasonably, nevertheless falling victim to powers they have themselves unwittingly unleashed. The clash of the demands made on humans by their natural make-up with artificial and often immoral social norms constitutes the tragic moment in the plays of Euripides. Divine interference in human affairs brings disaster more often than good.

The sense of the tragic in the human condition pervades Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars in his belief in the basic inconstancy of human prosperity, in his belief that the destiny of the community is intimately linked to the destiny of its ruler, and that the rulers act to the best of their lights, but realize the ruin they have wrought only when it is too late. In Thucydides it is fear and the need for prestige and for profit that determine the course of events for societies and for individuals. Men bear the ultimate responsibility for what they do and suffer, but, as in Aeschylus and in Thucydides, their experiences can bring them an insight that can be trained by a close study of the past to recognize social symptoms and prepare themselves for what is likely to be in store for them.

Neither in their artistic creations nor in their accounts of the past did the ancient Greeks whose works have come down to us content themselves with an enumeration of simple facts, strung together in no perceptible order. It is fair to generalize that they believed that what happens to us humans is a structure, which, though its basis is condemned to remain inexplicable to us, is intelligible and makes a statement (or a variety of statements) that we have to accept our humanity for what it is: a combination of frailty and majesty.

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