

Zeitschrift: Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique
Herausgeber: Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'Antiquité classique
Band: 29 (1983)

Artikel: Sophocles and the polis
Autor: Knox, Bernard
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-660662>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 16.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

I

BERNARD KNOX

SOPHOCLES AND THE *POLIS*

Towards the end of his long analysis of the religious and legal foundations of the ancient *polis*, Fustel de Coulanges speaks of “the omnipotence and the absolute empire it exercised over its members. . . The citizen was subordinate, in everything and without any reserve, to the city; he belonged to it body and soul. . . It is a singular error, therefore. . . to believe that in the ancient cities men enjoyed liberty. They had not even the idea of it. They did not believe that there could exist any right as against the city and its gods.”¹

This is of course an exaggeration, but it contains more than a kernel of truth: the ancient Greek *polis* (by which of course we mean Athens, the only one on which we are relatively well informed) made demands on its male citizens which today would be considered unreasonable². It expected and obtained military service (combat service, not chair-borne) for its all too frequent wars on land and sea (from the battle of Plataea in 479 to Chaeronea in 338 Athens had not

¹ *La cité antique* (Paris 1864). Quoted from the English translation, Doubleday (New York 1956), 219-20; 223.

² Goethe had expressed similar sentiments in 1806. See H. LLOYD-JONES, *Blood for the Ghosts* (London 1982), 57 and references there.

one interval of peace longer than ten years and most of them were shorter); men were liable for campaigns beyond the frontiers up to the age of 50 and might be called on to defend the city walls until the age of 60. By its jealous restriction of citizenship the *polis* in effect limited its citizens' choice of wives; its wealthy citizens were liable to special income taxes as well as 'liturgies'—public service which could range from the organization and financial responsibility for a dramatic performance to equipment (and command) of a warship. Participation in the meetings of the assembly and the jury sessions of the law courts was not, as far as we know, enforced but it was certainly expected: "we alone", says Pericles, "regard the man who holds aloof from the city's affairs ($\tauὰ πολιτικά$) not as 'quiet' but as 'useless'"— $\dot{\alpha}\chiρεῖον$, a harsh word. It is Hesiod's term (*Op.* 297) for the man who can neither think for himself nor take advice from others and Herodotus' advocate for oligarchy in the Persian debate applies it to the common herd—"nothing more stupid or violent than a useless mob" ($\deltaμίλου \dots \dot{\alpha}\chiρη̄του$ III 81)³. The force of such public opinion (for this is clearly what Pericles expresses) should not be underestimated; in the modern megalopolis it is possible to live a completely private and anonymous life but in the ancient Mediterranean city, crowded, walled and built for outdoor living, public disapproval, concentrated and oppressive, could not be ignored. There was no escape from daily contact with one's fellow citizens⁴. Even in peace time communal cult and

³ In the hopelessly corrupt text of Sophocles F 667 (Radt) it is nevertheless clear that $\dot{\alpha}\chiρεῖοι$ are contrasted with $\epsilonὐγενεῖς$ and that you would expect $\dot{\alpha}\chiρεῖοι$ to produce children who become $\kappa\alpha\kappaοί$. At Eur. *Med.* 299 $\dot{\alpha}\chiρεῖος$ is contrasted with $\sigma\omega\phi\kappa\sigma$; *OC* 627 $\dot{\alpha}\chiρεῖον \mathfrak{o}\mathfrak{i}\mathfrak{k}\mathfrak{e}\mathfrak{t}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{p}\mathfrak{a}$ is a forceful litotes.

⁴ The one Athenian we hear of who tried to withdraw completely from society, Timon, became proverbial. A fragment of the 5th century comic poet Phrynichus sums up the Athenian idea of the unsocial man: "I live the life of Timon: no wife, no slaves, a quick temper; no visitors, no smile, no conversation—and my private point of view" (*ιδιογμώμονα*), for which see Arist. *EN* VII 10, 1151 b 13.

sacrifice could not be dispensed with and in war the Athenian, side by side on the rowing bench of the galley or shield by shield in the hoplite phalanx, was an integral member of the body politic. The bonds which held the individual to the community were so strong that exile was considered a penalty on a level with death; the exile never ceased to intrigue, cajole and plot for the day of his return to the *polis* and his greatest fear was that his bones might not be buried in the soil where his ancestors lay. Themistocles, the hero of Salamis, was forbidden burial in Attic soil; he told his family to bring his body home, so Thucydides reports the tradition, and they did so secretly (I 138).

The city demanded a loyalty which overrode all others. Plato's Socrates puts its claims in the mouth of the city's laws, as they call on him to stand his ground and refuse to escape by leaving Athens. "Is this your wisdom—to fail to see that your fatherland deserves your respect, awe and reverence more than your mother, father, or all your ancestors? That it is considered more important both by the gods and by men of good sense? That when it is angry you ought to respect, obey and humor it more than you would an angry father; that you must either win its agreement or obey its orders, suffer in silence whatever suffering it assigns you—if it orders you to be beaten, if it orders you to be bound, if it leads you to war to be wounded or killed—its will be done. . . You must not give way, fall back or leave the ranks but in war and in the courts of law and everywhere you must do what the city commands. . ." (*Crito* 51 b-c).

But the city demanded more than obedience and conformity. In the great panegyric of Athenian imperial democracy which Thucydides attributes to Pericles, it demands a fanatical, irrational devotion, the devotion of a lover: the Athenians are to "fix their gaze daily on the power of the *polis* and become its lovers" (ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς II 43). This is an extraordinary phrase and its significance has been

generally undervalued; it is not to be compared, as most translations suggest, with such bland phrases as 'love of country.' The word ἐραστάς suggests an overwhelming romantic passion, an emotion usually associated in Athenian society of this period with homosexual love, one which takes exclusive possession of the soul of its victim, driving him to extreme demonstrations of devotion⁵. Such love is characterized in Plato's *Symposium*, the *locus classicus* for the subject, as "voluntary slavery" (ἐθελοδουλεία); the lover is "willing to serve in slavish ways no real slave would put up with" (δουλείας δουλεύειν οἵας οὐδ' ἀν δοῦλος οὐδείς *Smp.* 183 a). Pericles' phrase (and in view of the clear parody of it in Aristophanes' *Knights* 731 ff. and 1341 there can be little doubt that it is a genuine reminiscence of Pericles and not a Thucydidean invention) calls for a total dedication to the *polis*, a devotion inspired by contemplation of its power. That the call was answered is plain from the extraordinary record of Athenian activity in the years between 490 and 404 and the recognition on the part of Athens' enemies that they were facing no ordinary adversary. "They use their bodies in the city's service", say the Corinthians, "as if they were not their own and their minds as very much their own, for action in the city's interest" (I 70).

Sophocles' long life spanned almost the whole of the century which saw the creation, rise and fall of the Athenian empire. As a youth he took part in the victory celebration for Salamis⁶; as a grown man he served the *polis* at the height of

⁵ The parodic scene in Ar. *Eq.* 731 ff., where the two demagogues compete for the favors of *Demos*, calling themselves ἐραστής and ἀντεραστής, evokes the familiar homosexual atmosphere (*παισὶ τοῖς ἐρωμένοις* 737).

⁶ *Vita* 3. This tradition is dismissed as one of those stories "meant as representations of the poet's heroic stature, not as statements of literal fact" by Mary R. LEFKOWITZ, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London 1981), 77. It is not easy to see what such an anecdote about the poet's youth would have to do with 'heroic stature' and, in view of Sophocles' birth date, good family and early musical training, there is nothing improbable in the choice of such a man for such an occasion.

its power in military as well as civil offices ; his last years were spent in the Athens of the Peloponnesian War, the protracted death agony of the *polis tyrannos*, but he died in 406, just before the ignominious end. Though he was by our standards a remarkably productive playwright (and we must not forget that he was also director of his own plays) his record of public service is impressive : he served as *στρατηγός* at least once (in the campaign against Samos, a dangerous crisis for the empire) ; he was treasurer of the Delian League (he may have been chairman of the board of ten⁷, for his name appears first on the Tribute List inscription for the year 443-2), and it seems certain⁸ (though it has been doubted) that he was one of the *πρόβουλοι*, the committee of public safety appointed to emergency rule in Athens after the disaster in Sicily. This public career, combined with what must have been prodigious creation as a playwright-director (a hundred and twenty-three plays in sixty-two years) exemplifies Pericles' proud claim for the Athenian citizen : "Our citizens attend both to public and private duties and do not allow absorption in their own various affairs to interfere with their knowledge of the city's" (II 40,2).

As a poet Sophocles inherited from his predecessor Aeschylus a dramatic medium which after some experiments with near-contemporary themes had narrowed its focus to stories of the heroes, kings and dynasties of the splendid but violent age which ended with the first generation after the Trojan War. These stories reflected the rudimentary social organization of an unsettled age—hereditary kingship, dynastic feuds—and the violence, uninhibited by communal restraints, of the god-descended heroes. One of the achieve-

⁷ For a critical view of the whole concept of 'chairmanships' on collegiate boards see K. J. DOVER, in *JHS* 80 (1960), 61 ff.

⁸ Arist. *Rb.* III 18, 1419 a 26, cf. A. LESKY, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen* (Göttingen 1972), 173. For a thorough review of the question see M. H. JAMESON, "Sophocles and the Four Hundred", in *Historia* 20 (1971), 541 ff.

ments of Aeschylus was to impose on this primitive material the contemporary framework of the *polis*—still ruled by kings as in the saga but reminiscent in many suggestive details of the *polis* in which the audience lived. The king of Argos in *Suppliants* must consult his citizens before making a decision which will endanger the city and in the *Oresteia* the murder of Agamemnon by his wife is the first act in a drama which culminates in the foundation of the Areopagos and a hymn of blessing for Athenian democracy and empire. The *Seven* opens with an eloquent plea from Eteocles, defender of a city under assault; he summons the Thebans to the walls. “Now is the time for all of you—you that fall short of maturity, you that are past the time of youth, fostering the full growth of your limbs, and you that are in manhood’s prime—as is your duty, every one of you must protect the city and the altars of our native gods—let not their worship be abolished—protect, too, the children and the land, your mother and most tender nurse—she, who, welcoming all the travail of their upbringing, has reared them, young shoots on the kindly plain, to be makers of homes and bearers of shields” (Aeschyl. *Th.* 10-19 Page)⁹. This is a mythic hero speaking but his voice is that of the man who fought at Marathon. Tragedy, as Sophocles inherited it from his rival, was a dramatic medium which could invest with broad contemporary significance the actions and sufferings of ancestral heroes, whose mythical remoteness, sustained by the dignity of the tragic style, ruled out facile identification with particular partisan issues or controversial figures of the day. It was only to be expected that Sophocles, given his record of participation in the highest offices of the *polis*, would follow the lead of his great predecessor.

⁹ The emphasis on the city’s role as nurse and mother of the citizen (μητρί, τροφῷ 16; παιδείας ὅτλον 18; ἐθρέψατ’ 19) recurs in the Laws’ address to Socrates (Plat. *Crito*: ἐγεννήσαμεν 50 d; γεννήσαντες, ἐκθρέψαντες, παιδεύσαντες 51 c; γεννηταῖς . . . τροφεῦσι. . . 51 e).

When we speak of Sophoclean tragedy we often tend to forget something which the presence of Professor Radt in this gathering forcibly reminds us of—that we have only a small fragment of a vast œuvre, seven complete plays out of 123. We can only hope that the seven are reasonably representative of the whole; in any case, it is on these seven that we must base our interpretation. And they do, in fact, show us a Sophocles who, like Aeschylus, poses the heroic figures of the ancient saga against the background of a half-mythical, half-contemporary *polis*, or, in the case of the Trojan War plays *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, of the *polis* in arms, the στρατός. There is only one exception: *Trachiniae*. This play deliberately emphasizes the primitive, even monstrous, features of the Heracles saga—the fight with the river in his bull-shape, the centaur Nessos and his poisoned blood, the strident agony of Heracles' last hours and his bizarre end, whether it be death or apotheosis. The scene of the action is not a *polis* at all; the family of Heracles are guests of a 'foreigner' who is not even named and the *agora*, the meeting place of the people of Trachis, is a cow-pasture (cf. 188 with 372 and 424). The only *polis* of any importance in the action is Oechalia, a city which Heracles has sacked and razed (ἀνάστατον 240) ¹⁰. The characters of this play seem to be untrammelled by any sense that they are part of a community and the young women of the chorus are given no words which will identify them, justify their presence or attach them to a locality.

Electra, on the other hand, opens with the most precise location of the action in a city landscape to be found in extant Greek tragedy: Orestes' old tutor points out to him, from the vantage point of the Atridae's palace at Mycenae, the salient features of the city of Argos—the *agora* of Lycean Apollo and

¹⁰ Cf. Charles SEGAL, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981), 62.

“on the left, the famous temple of Hera.” Such a prologue seems the appropriate opening note for a drama which will emphasize the political aspect of Orestes’ action: the overthrow of a tyranny, the restoration of freedom. But, in fact, nothing could be farther from the truth; Sophocles concentrates our attention almost exclusively on the violent hatreds and internecine violence of a doomed and cursed family. The dominant words in this text are not *polis* and *πολίτης* (they occur only rarely)¹¹ but *πατήρ*, *μήτηρ*, *ἀδελφή*, *κασίγνητος*, *δόμος*, *δῶμα*, and *οἶκος*; they recur with obsessive frequency from beginning to end of the play. And the word ‘free’ *ἐλεύθερος* is used always of personal freedom: Chrysothemis’ freedom to marry once Aegisthus is dead (970); Electra’s freedom to speak now Orestes has come (1256); of freedom to rejoice and smile once success has been achieved (1300). There is one passage, in fact, where the non-political nature of this ‘freedom’ is emphasized by a startling phrase, which Sophocles puts in the mouth of Chrysothemis, the conformist and self-confessed coward. She admits that Electra has right *τὸ... δίκαιον* (338) on her side. “But if I am to live free,” she says, “I must obey every word of those in power” (*εἰ δ’ ἐλευθέραν με δεῖ/ ζῆν, τῶν κρατούντων ἐστὶ πάντ’ ἀκουστέα* 339-40).

Even in the one passage where the language suggests a political theme, Electra’s vision of the glory she and her sister will win if they murder Aegisthus—its striking use of the dual a reminiscence of the battle-hymn of Athenian democracy, the Harmodios song—even here the achievement for which they will be celebrated is not the liberation of Argos but the salvation of the house of Atreus; to *ἰσονόμους τ’ Ἀθήνας ἐποιήσατην* corresponds ὡς *τὸν πατρῶν οἶκον ἔξεσωσάτην* (978). And this restriction of the action to the domestic sphere is clearest of all in the final lines of the play, where

¹¹ *πόλις* 982; 1413; *πολίτιδες* 1227.

‘freedom’ is mentioned again: “Seed of Atreus, after much suffering, you have through struggle won freedom at last” . . . ὃ σπέρμα Ἀτρέως . . . δι’ ἐλευθερίας μόλις ἔξηλθες . . . ; it is the family, not the city, which has been freed. To appreciate the singularity of this treatment of the legend one has only to glance at Sophocles’ model, the *Choephoroe* of Aeschylus. One of the motives which Orestes says would have urged him to action even if Apollo’s oracle had not, is the thought that “fellow citizens, most renowned among mortals, the men who sacked Troy with blazing courage, should be thus subject to a pair of women” (302 ff.). And when the chorus of Trojan captives who see in the vengeance ‘good for the city’ (πόλει τάδ’ εὖ 824) try to comfort Orestes and restrain him from going as a suppliant to Delphi, they tell him: “You have brought freedom to the whole city of the Argives” (ἡλευθέρωσας πᾶσαν Ἀργείων πόλιν 1046).

The other Electra play, that of Euripides, reinforces the contrast, for it is just as political, though in a markedly different way, as that of Aeschylus. Though the setting is a remote country farm, the characters live and move and have their being in the charged atmosphere of the late fifth-century *polis*. Orestes is all too easily recognizable as a political exile with a price on his head (33) who has come home secretly, staying close to the frontier so that he can escape if recognized (96-97); he has returned to sound out the possibility of support for a coup (101; 601). The vengeance itself—the treacherous assassination of Aegisthus, Electra’s ghastly indictment of the tyrant’s severed head—recalls, as has often been pointed out, Thucydides’ account of στάσις on Corcyra—“the ingenuity of their enterprises and the ferocity of their reprisals” (III 82). And at the end of the play the Dioskouroi reset the action in its mythic frame: as in the *Eumenides*, Orestes is to be tried and acquitted in Athens. But Euripides takes the story farther still: he is to found a new *polis* in the West, one which will bear his name.

In his *Electra* Sophocles rejected the political element in the story of the Atridae, an element which, whether it was Aeschylean invention or traditional lore, was brilliantly exploited by Euripides in characteristically iconoclastic style. But in the remaining five of the extant Sophoclean plays we are securely placed in the world of the *polis*; in each play the *polis* or its wartime equivalent, the στρατός, provides the context for the heroic action; it has its own voice, the chorus, and its own spokesmen among the actors. In four of these plays the tragic tension stems from the incompatibility between the demands of the *polis* and the imperatives of the heroic will. In the fifth, the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, a ruler who embodies the supreme virtues of the devoted citizen ends, through his own heroic persistence, as an outcast from the *polis*, like the heroes of the other four plays.

In two of them, the hero's defiance of the *polis* leads to death: both Ajax and Antigone die by their own hand. Death, but not total defeat: Creon gives way and admits that he was wrong; Ajax will have his hero's funeral in spite of the vindictive order of the generals. But though there are resemblances between Ajax and Antigone, (since both share that stubborn heroic irreconcilability Sophocles saw as the core of heroic character) there are some basic differences between the plays in which they appear. Antigone's action, for example, can be defended and is in the end vindicated, whereas Ajax's murderous intentions far outrun any justification his injuries might have afforded. But the most striking difference lies in the terms used to express the demand of the community, στρατός or *polis*, for loyalty and obedience.

In the first part of the *Ajax* there is little discussion of the duty owed to the army, for attention is centered on the hero, his grievances, his failed revenge and his resolve to die; not only does Ajax feel no loyalty to the army, he includes it in the curse he levels at the Atridae as he prepares to fall on his sword: "Go to it, swift and vengeful Erinyes, show no

mercy, take your fill of the whole army, every last man" (πανδήμου στρατοῦ 844). He had intended to kill the commanders only but this all-inclusive curse gives some ground for the rhetorical exaggeration of the accusation leveled against him: that "his plot (βούλευμ') was against the Argives" (Odysseus, 44); that he was a "plotter against the army" κἀπιβούλευτοῦ στρατῷ (the Argives, 726); and finally that he "plotted the death of the entire army" στρατῷ ξύμπαντι βούλευσας φόνον (Menelaus, 1055). It is in the second half of the play, as the gigantic corpse of Ajax lies spitted on the sword of Hector, that the *polis* announces its claims. In the mouth of Menelaus, it does so in uncompromising terms. Ajax would never listen to Menelaus, Teucer is told: "there's a worthless man for you—a man of low degree (ἄνδρα δημότην) who takes it upon himself to ignore those set in authority over him" (τῶν ἐφεστώτων 1071-72). The words, as well as the situation they denote, are utterly un-Homeric; this is not the camp on the beachhead where rival chieftains grudgingly accept (or violently throw off) the loose and temporary authority of a pre-eminent king. The lines which follow make this even clearer. "You cannot have laws working smoothly in a city where fear does not have its established place, nor can you have discipline in an army without the protective shield of terror and respect." *Polis* and στρατός are different sides of the same coin; what goes for one goes for the other. When Menelaus returns to the theme of discipline (1081 ff.) he speaks of the *polis* alone. "Where there is no curb on licence—all do what they like—that's a city which may run now before a fair wind but will one day go down to the bottom. No, let me have fear installed, in due proportion. . ." (δέος τι καίριον 1084). These sentiments are echoed by Agamemnon. "Where such attitudes prevail" (he means Ajax's refusal to accept the award of the arms to Odysseus), "there can be no establishment of law of any kind. . ." (1246-47). And Teucer's offense, his insistence

on Ajax's right to be buried, is characterized not only as ὕβρις, intolerable insolence, but also as "speaking freely" (κάξελενθεροστομεῖς 1258).

These demands for discipline and submission, especially the elaborate formulas put in the mouth of Menelaus, are sometimes described as 'Spartan'¹²; they are supposed to represent, for the Athenian audience, a point of view alien to the tolerant spirit of Athenian democracy. But there is actually little in those lines which would not have seemed acceptable, if perhaps harshly expressed, to most Athenian citizens. Aeschylus' chorus in the *Eumenides* had stressed that fear had its place in the *polis*: "there are times when terror is a blessing; it must have its permanent seat as watcher over the mind" (ἔσθ' ὅπου τὸ δεινὸν εὖ 517 ff.) and Athena herself echoes their claim: "Do not utterly expel terror from your city . . .". Even the Funeral Speech, which so eloquently posed Athenian freedom of manners against the harsh Spartan discipline, reiterates the theme: "in our public life it is mainly through fear that we refrain from illegal action; we listen to those who are in office and to the laws . . ." (διὰ δέος μάλιστα οὐ παρανομοῦμεν . . . II 37, 3).

Familiar as these pronouncements of Menelaus and Agamemnon may have sounded to the average Athenian in the audience, their dramatic content must have given him pause. They are being advanced in favor of a decision to expose the corpse—"throw it out on the sand as food for the shore birds" (1064-5)—of a man whom even his enemy Odysseus celebrates as the best man, after Achilles, of all those who came to Troy (1340-41). The two kings who could not impose their will on Ajax living, as Menelaus admits

¹² R. C. JEBB (ed.), *Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments. Part VII. The Ajax* (Cambridge 1907), p. XLIII; W. B. STANFORD (ed.), *Sophocles. Ajax* (London 1963), on 1102 (cf. however, on 1073); J. C. KAMERBEEK, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. Part. I. The Ajax* (Leiden 1953), on 1074. But contrast L. RADERMACHER (ed.), *Sophokles. Aias* (Berlin 1913), on 1079.

(1067), will have their way with him now that he is dead; Agamemnon even goes so far as to deny his pre-eminence in battle—"Where did he go or stand that I did not?" 1237—a question which anyone familiar with the *Iliad* could answer at once. The two kings do not even claim that the horrifying penalty is meant to be exemplary; they simply exult vindictively in their power over the lifeless corpse of the hero whom they feared to cross when he was alive. The claims of the *polis* are advanced by unworthy spokesmen whose low and spiteful ranting enhances the dignity of that heroic corpse they wish to defile.

In the *Ajax* the voice of the *polis* is heard late in the play and it strikes a sour note. In the *Antigone* on the other hand, it is given full and eloquent expression right at the start, in that speech of Creon which, as we know from the way Demosthenes later used it in the court room¹³, became a classic text of the Athenian patriotic spirit. And in this play, although the setting is the moment of victory in war and the ruler Creon is a στρατηγός (8) who issues commands by proclamations (8; 27; 32; 34; 203), the background is not the armed camp on the Trojan shore but a *polis*, one with pillared temples (285-6), battlemented walls (131) and towers (122), gates (141), altars (1016), hearths (1083) and a council of elders (160). The *polis* is to be the scene of the execution by stoning (36) fixed as a penalty for disobedience to Creon's decree, which forbids the *polis* (ἀπόρρητον πόλει 44) to bury Polynices. Ismene, who will reluctantly obey those in authority, identifies the will of Creon with that of the *polis* as a whole, for she professes herself unable to act "in defiance of the citizens" (βίᾳ πολιτῶν 79). This judgement is confirmed by the conduct of the chorus, representatives of the *polis* summoned by Creon, who stand behind him and against Antigone until the last moment, when Tiresias makes it clear that Creon is wrong and also marked for punishment.

¹³ *Or. XIX (Amb.)* 247.

The emotional background for their support of Creon's harsh sentence is vividly presented in their opening song, which recalls the terrors of the enemy assault on the walls, the miracle by which the city has escaped collapse in a welter of blood and fire. The invaders were recruited and led by a πολίτης, the man whose corpse Creon has now consigned to the birds and dogs.

This lyric evocation of the dangers and terrors of the siege, the city's hairs-breadth escape from destruction at the hands of one of its own citizens, prepares the audience for Creon's inaugural speech. ἄνδρες, τὰ μὲν δὴ πόλεος . . . "Gentlemen, as for the city. . . the gods who tossed our ship on a heavy swell have righted it again, it rides safely" (162-3). The declaration of principles which follows, full of reminiscences (or anticipations) of Periclean rhetoric, states firmly the precedence of loyalty to the *polis* over all other loyalties, whether to friend or relative (both included in the one word φίλος). This is the same large demand which the laws of Athens make on Socrates in Plato's *Crito* and it is given some validity by Creon's implied claim that only in the framework of civilization made possible by the *polis* can friendship or any personal relationship exist. ἦδ' ἐστὶν ἡ σώζουσα. . . "This is the ship that brings us safe to harbor and we make our friends as we sail her and keep her upright" (189-90). These, says Creon, are the laws through which he plans to make the city great. His first official act makes a distinction between patriot and traitor and asserts the right of the *polis* to honor the one and punish the other in life and in death (209-10).

Creon began by mentioning the gods and he sincerely believes that the gods of the city approve of his decree. When the chorus tentatively suggests that the symbolic burial reported by the guard may be divine intervention he turns on them in what is obviously sincere anger. "Intolerable", he calls their suggestion: how could the gods take any thought for one who came to burn their pillared temples and the

treasures inside them? To an audience which probably believed, with Herodotus, that the gods had punished at Salamis and Plataea the Persians who burned and sacked the temples on the Acropolis, Creon's religious beliefs, like his political principles, would have occasioned no surprise, still less objection¹⁴. In this play the case for the *polis* is made early and in impressive form but, as in the *Ajax*, it is also a case for denial of burial to a corpse. And as the action develops, Creon, under the pressure of events, will abandon both his political and religious principles, will insist, in speeches which betray a temper both tyrannical and blasphemous, on his own will, no matter what the consequences. He no longer speaks for the *polis*; that role is assumed first by his son Haemon, who tells Creon that the people praise Antigone's action (though the chorus gives no sign that they share that opinion) and lastly by the spokesman for the gods, Tiresias, who tells Creon that communication with the gods has been cut off. The hearths and altars are polluted by dogs and birds who fed on the corpse. "And it is because of your will that

¹⁴ This aspect of Creon's position is sympathetically explored and discussed in the context of Athenian religious beliefs in Borimir JORDAN, *Servants of the Gods*, Hypomnemata 55 (Göttingen 1979), 85-102. Giovanni CERRI, "Ideologia funeraria nell'Antigone di Sofocle", in *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes*, ed. G. GNOLI and J.-P. VERNANT (Cambridge 1982), 121-131 puts an interesting case for the existence of exposure as penalty for treason in 5th century Athens. He sees it in every case as an emergency measure, sparked usually by political faction fights, and he suggests that there was in fact no established law defining public conduct in this matter. His thesis is based on the Themistocles story in Thucydides (which does not help it much), on the speech of Euryptolemos in Xenophon's *Hellenica* (I 7, 25 ff.) with its reference to the *psephisma* of Cannon (he follows the mss. reading ἀποθανόντα . . . ἐμβληθῆναι) and on Thucydides II 67, 4, the Athenian execution of the Spartan ambassadors to Persia, ἀπέκτειναν καὶ ἐς φάραγγα ἐσέβαλον (which, however, was a measure against foreigners not citizens and was in retaliation for similar treatment of captured Athenian crews by the Spartans). The thesis seems to me not fully proved but Cerri's article (and he promises a more extended treatment) does reopen the whole question of what he calls the "obiettivo rapporto semantico fra discorso mitico e realtà", which seems to have been largely ignored since H. J. METTE raised it in 1956 (in *Hermes* 84, 129 ff.).

this plague has come on the city" (*καὶ ταῦτα τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις 1015*).

Antigone never claims to speak for the *polis*; her loyalties lie elsewhere, to the ties of blood-relationship, to the gods who, as she rightly insists, will disavow Creon's action. She acts and speaks for the most part as if the *polis* did not exist. In her farewell lament she mentions it only to turn away to other, more favorable, presences. "I am mocked," she replies to the chorus which has reproved her for comparing herself to Niobe. "By the gods of our fathers, why do you not wait for my death to insult me, but do it to my face? O *polis*, and its wealthy men!" (*ὦ πόλις, ὦ πόλεως πολυκτήμονες ἄνδρες 843*). This must be a phrase of indignant repudiation¹⁵ for she goes on: "Hail, (*ἰω*) waters of Dirce, and grove of Thebes, city of chariots, you, at any rate (*ἔμπας 846*) I have as witnesses to my sorrow, as I go unwept by friends. . . to the rock bound prison of an uncanny tomb." And in her defence of her action she makes a clear admission that the *polis* did not enter into the reckoning when she made up her mind: if it had been someone else than my brother, she says, a husband or a child, "I would not have taken up this burden, defying my fellow citizens" (*βίᾳ πολιτῶν*—it is the phrase Ismene used to excuse her inaction in the prologue).

Yet it was Antigone who knew what was best for the *polis*, knew that there were everlasting laws more valid than those made by man, for all his ingenuity and daring. And it was Creon, devoted champion of the *polis*, whose action aroused the anger of the gods and sowed the seed of future disaster for Thebes (1080 ff.).

In both *Ajax* and *Antigone* the case for the *polis* was proclaimed by unworthy advocates and urged in defence of inhuman action; in the *Oedipus Tyrannos* the central figure is a

¹⁵ So, with most commentators, G. MÜLLER, *Sophokles Antigone* (Heidelberg 1967), 187, who suggests putting the question mark after ἄνδρες.

model statesman, the savior of the *polis* in its hour of danger, a king whose every thought and action is dedicated to the welfare of his plague-stricken people. The protagonist this time is not a rebel against the authority of the *polis* but an embodiment of that authority itself and in its noblest form. The voice of the *polis*, as we have heard it so far, expresses itself as a demand made on the citizens by the ruler; here the pressure is exerted on the ruler himself as the priests and citizens implore Oedipus to save them and as he suffers under his own sense of his obligation to the community. Nevertheless, this faithful servant of the *polis* will end, like Ajax and Antigone as an outcast ἐκβεβλημένος¹⁶. The fault lies not in his attitude or conduct but in a dreadful pollution of which he is ignorant; the force which drives him on to discover it is, in the opening scenes, his devotion to the welfare of his fellow citizens.

Oedipus is not only the savior of the city to whom all men now turn for help; he is a compassionate and responsible ruler, tormented by his inability to save the citizens who have put their trust in him. "Your sorrow," he tells them "comes on each one of you, each for himself, but my soul grieves for the city as well as for myself and you" (62-64). He has already sent Creon to Delphi and, after dismissing Creon's suggestion that the oracle's response be heard in private—it concerns the *polis* and so he proclaims: "Speak before all" (93)—he accepts the god's command and begins the search for the murderer of Laius. The solemn curse which makes the murderer an outcast from the *polis* is pronounced and Tiresias arrives, sent for by Oedipus. His stubborn refusal to speak is rebuked as "unfriendly to the city" (οὐτε προσφιλή πόλει 322) and his even more categorical refusal after phrases which hint that he knows something vital is interpreted as treason:

¹⁶ A key word in the Sophoclean tragic vocabulary: cf. *Aj.* 1064; 1392; *OT* 386; 399; *El.* 590; *Pb.* 257; 600; 1390; 1391; *OC* 770; 1257.

“...you intend to betray me and destroy the city?” (*καταφθεῖραι πόλιν* 331). His veiled accusations of Oedipus are an “insult to the city” (*ἀτιμάζεις πόλιν* 340). But when he hints darkly that Oedipus’ successful encounter with the Sphinx was his destruction, the answer is a proud defiance: “But if I saved this city, I don’t care” (*εἰ πόλιν τήνδ’ ἔξέσωσ*... 443). Later when Creon, at the height of their altercation, returns Oedipus’ epithet *κακός* (627) with a charge that he is a bad ruler (*κακῶς γ’ ἄρχοντος* 629) he appeals indignantly to that *polis* which it has been his life’s work to protect and preserve (*ὦ πόλις πόλις*...).

In the next scene Jocasta’s attempt to comfort him plunges him into an agony of fear that he may have been the man who killed Laius where the three roads meet. And from this point on, though his unrelenting search for the truth is still the action of a ruler intent on the rescue of his people from the plague, it is also the convulsive effort of a frightened man to establish his own identity. At its end he stands revealed as the source of the pollution which afflicts the city and as an outcast doomed to death or exile by the terms of his own solemn curse. As he explains and defends his self-blinding he counts among the sights he could no longer bear to look on the physical features—town, tower, holy statues of the gods (1378-79)—of that *polis* from which he has expelled himself. He had accused Creon of conspiracy to expel him (*ἐκβαλεῖν* 386; 399) but his future as a blind beggar in exile is the product of his own strange destiny and the zeal with which he fulfilled his function as protector and preserver of the *polis*.

In all three of these plays, *Ajax*, *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the action of the protagonist brings about exclusion from the society of the *polis*, in two cases through defiance of its representatives, in the other through devotion to its welfare. But in the remaining two plays, this motion is reversed: the hero begins as an outcast and ends reestab-

lished, Oedipus in a *polis*, and Philoctetes in the στρατός which cannot take Troy without him¹⁷.

Philoctetes is the most abused of all the heroes: he has been left to fend for himself for ten years, a sick man on a desert island, not because of any misconduct on his part but simply because he has been afflicted with a painful and offensive disease. The army has learned that it cannot win without him; the man it despised and rejected must now be courted and brought back into the ranks. It will not be an easy task; in fact, since the army has given the assignment to Odysseus, whom Philoctetes is ready to shoot on sight, it can only succeed through elaborate deception. Odysseus' chosen instrument for this is the young son of Achilles, Neoptolemos.

As in the *Ajax*, the spokesman for the *polis* does it no credit. When he urges Neoptolemos to play the liar in his plot (σόφισμα 14) to capture Philoctetes, the argument we expect to hear, that without Philoctetes' cooperation the army cannot return home victorious, appears only as a veiled suggestion: "If you don't do this, you will inflict pain on all the Argives" (66-67). The main thrust of Odysseus' argument is the advantage Neoptolemos will win for himself (κέρδος 111; 112)—his share in the glory of Troy's fall (119); to this he adds the prospect that if successful, Neoptolemos will be called clever σοφός (like Odysseus) as well as brave ἀγαθός (like his father Achilles). It is only when Neoptolemos decides to make amends for his deceit by giving back the bow that Odysseus invokes the army's name; he does so in a series of threats which begin as a challenge to arms (1243 ff.) but end ignominiously in a hurried exit: "I will go and tell this to the whole army—they will punish you" (1258). At the climactic moment, as Neoptolemos hands the bow back to its

¹⁷ On these two plays see K. MATTHIESSEN, "Philoktet oder die Resozialisierung", in *Würzburger Jahrbücher* N.F. 7 (1981), 11 ff.

owner, Odysseus, in a surprise entrance which is perhaps the most abrupt in extant tragedy¹⁸, forbids the action “on behalf of the sons of Atreus and the army as a whole” ($\delta\pi\epsilon\rho\tau'$ $\text{'Ατρειδῶν τοῦ τε σύμπαντος στρατοῦ 1294$). If it had not been for Neoptolemos’ intervention, he would have paid for this gesture with his life; Philoctetes is in no mood to listen to the commands of the army. And when Neoptolemos now tries to persuade him to come to Troy he does not mention the common good of the army at all; his arguments are based on what would be best for Philoctetes. Whatever right there may have been in the community’s case has been thoroughly compromised by Odyssean deceit; Philoctetes cannot be expected to trust appeals to his generosity and sense of duty after what has happened. Neoptolemos bears down hard on the fact that Philoctetes’ only hope of cure from his painful sickness is to come to Troy where the sons of Asklepios will restore him to health, so that, together, the two of them can take Troy. All this, he tells him, is fated to happen and furthermore, it is to happen this very summer. So Philoctetes should comply willingly with what must happen anyway ($\delta\epsilon\gamma\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota 1339$); he will regain his health and also, by taking Troy, win the highest glory. This plea moves the outcast at first but the memory of his wrongs comes flooding back in and he rejects it bitterly. Furthermore, he demands passage home, as promised, and Neoptolemos is in honor bound, now, to fulfil that promise, lie though it was. And Troy will not fall this summer, after all.

It does, of course; this time Philoctetes’ patron and exemplar, the divine Heracles, appears to bring him into line. But not even now do we hear the argument from duty to the *polis*. Heracles makes known the will of Zeus (1415); it is that Philoctetes, using the bow and arrows of Heracles, shall take Troy, killing Paris, the cause of all the suffering. Philoctetes

¹⁸ See O. TAPLIN, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978), 32.

is to dedicate part of the spoils at the place where he lit Heracles' funeral pyre, near his home in Oeta. And Philoctetes will be healed; Neoptolemos had promised a cure by the sons of Asklepios but Heracles will send Asklepios himself. To these divine commands Philoctetes makes no resistance (οὐκ ἀπιθήσω τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις 1447), but there is no enthusiasm in his acquiescence. There is more than a hint of regret in his farewell to the island and his closing words are mere acceptance, no more. "Send me off with a fair wind and no complaints to where great Destiny conveys me, the wisdom of friends and the all-victorious divinity who made this decree" (1465-1468). What he accepts is the will of Zeus, not the right of the community, in war as in peace, to demand compliance.

The Oedipus of the last play is just as much an outcast as Philoctetes; he is not a sick man, but he is old, blind, ragged and filthy, a wandering beggar—and he has no such resource as the unerring bow and arrows of Heracles. The Greeks remembered Philoctetes only when the Trojan seer Helenos told them Troy could not be taken without him; the Thebans, on both sides, seek possession of Oedipus only when the Delphic oracle tells them his burial site will bring victory in battle to the land in which it lies. As against Philoctetes, lies, force and persuasion are all deployed, but to no effect. But in this play no god appears to bring about the reintegration of Oedipus in the *polis*. He does become a citizen (ἐμπολιν 637)¹⁹ but a citizen of Athens, not Thebes; and his citizenship begins and ends with his mysterious death, a death which, we learn from the messenger's account (1626-8), is the will of the gods.

¹⁹ ἐμπολιν, Musgrave's conjecture for MSS. ἐμπαλιν seems solid (in spite of Campbell's objection). Both Jebb and Campbell assert that the word occurs only here (if it does) and at 1156 but it also occurs in the 5th century comic poet Eupolis (Fr. 137 Kock): τὸν ἀστὸν Εὔπολις ἐν τῇ Διάδι (?) ἐμπολιν εἴρηκεν, οἶον ἐγχώριον.

When Oedipus is challenged by the chorus to name his fatherland (*πατρίδ* 206) he calls himself ἀπόπτολις—a word which can mean simply ‘absent from the city’ (*Tr.* 647) but also, as it must mean here, ‘exile’²⁰. Exiles, in Greece, had little thought for anything but their return; “the true lover of his city”, says Alcibiades at Sparta, “is not the man who, unjustly deprived of her, fails to take the offensive, but the one who because of his desire for her, will go to any length to regain her” (*Thuc.* VI 92,4)²¹. This is of course exactly the program of Polynices (*OC* 379 ff.). But Oedipus is no ordinary exile; he has no wish to return to Thebes. As soon as he heard that the grove which sheltered him was sacred to the Eumenides, he announced his immovable decision to stay (45); the gift of victory which his body brings with it is to be offered not to Thebes but to Athens.

Towards his own *polis* Oedipus is bitterly hostile; the hatred of Philoctetes for the Atridae and Odysseus was nothing compared to his for Thebes and everyone in it. His destructive hatred for his native *polis* is implicit in his recognition of the holy ground on which he stands as the place prescribed in the prophecy where he was to find rest and bring profit to those who received him and “destruction to those who drove me out and sent me here” (92-3). For this ‘destruction’, as we learn later, will not be confined to the individuals he blames for his present condition but will fall on a Theban army fighting on the ground where he lies buried. For his expulsion from Thebes he blames not only Creon (770) and his own sons (428) but the *polis* (432); he can even speak of the *polis* driving him out with violence (*βίᾳ* 440). His rage against the *polis* of Thebes has even deeper (and darker) sources: he lays on the *polis* the responsibility for

²⁰ *OT* 1000 (voluntary exile). Cf. ἀπόπολις: Aeschyl. *Ag.* 1410; ἀπολιν: Soph. *OC* 1357; *Pb.* 1018.

²¹ Cf. Isocr. *Or.* XVI (*De bigis*) 14, 349 b-d.

the marriage which has made his name a byword. "The city", he tells the chorus, "bound me, all unsuspecting, in a marriage with destruction, a bed of evil" (525-26). It was a gift, he says later (539-41), a return for services rendered, which he wishes he had never received from Thebes. The Thebans will repay him with their blood. "This is the place", he tells Theseus, "in which I shall have victory over those who threw me out" (644, 646). Creon is speaking truth, for once, when he tells the old man: "You want victory over your own fatherland and your friends" (849-50).

The city's claim on Oedipus' loyalty is put in the mouth of Creon, who comes, he says, "not sent by one man, but under orders from the whole citizen body" ($\delta\sigma\tau\omegaν\ \bar{u}\piο/\pi\alphaντων$ κελευσθείς 737-38). This spokesman for the *polis* is even more suspect than the younger Creon of *Antigone* or the Atridae of *Ajax*, for, like Odysseus, he deals in lies. His invitation to come home pulls out all the stops of duty and affection: "Come of your own free will to the town and the home of your fathers, bidding a kind farewell to this city (Athens), for she deserves it. But your home city, as is only just, has a stronger claim on your devotion for it was she who nursed you long ago" (757-60) ²². Not only does he intend, as Ismene has already told her father, to deny Oedipus burial in Theban soil; he has already seized Ismene as a hostage. He fully deserves the fury of Oedipus' rejection; the case for the *polis* could hardly have had a more contemptible spokesman.

There is another, of course, later in the play. Polynices implores Oedipus to come with him to Thebes and invokes "the springs and the gods of our people" (1333); he promises to settle the old man in his house and settle himself there too (1342-43). But he is calling for his father's help in an assault on his native city to be launched by foreign troops under his

²² This customary appeal for loyalty (cf. p. 6, n. 9) happens to be falsely based: Oedipus did not grow up in Thebes—his $\tauροφός$ was Corinth.

command. And his appeal is rejected with even more terrible imprecations than that of Creon.

Oedipus has a new *polis*, Athens; Theseus declares him a citizen (ἐμπολίν 637) as he announces that he will settle him in the land. But that status has not been easy to win. Though he knows, as soon as the name of the Eumenides is pronounced (42), that Athens is the land foretold in the prophecy as the recipient of his gift, he still has to convince the inhabitants and the king that his unsightly body and polluted name should be received into the Athenian community. He concludes his prayer to the goddesses of the grove with an appeal to Athens—"most honored city of all" (108)—for pity: "pity this wretched ghost of Oedipus the man—this is not the body he possessed once long ago."

Pity is not what he gets from the outraged chorus of old men from Colonos. He is ordered off holy ground with a promise of protection that is broken when they know his name; they want to be rid of him. "Out! Be off! Leave this land!" (226). Only his eloquent appeal to the reputation of Athens, protector of the weak and suppliant, saves him from expulsion; they will await the decision of the king. He has proclaimed himself to the chorus as a 'savior' for Athens (460; 463); with Theseus he explains the meaning of this large claim. Theseus, when he learns that the Thebans want him back, reproaches him for refusing (590; 592); it is the natural reaction of any Greek. But he is admonished in his turn and accepts not only Oedipus' explanation of his gift of himself to Athenian soil but also his sermon on the instability of all things human—Thebes may be friendly now but "the same wind does not blow forever between man and man, city and city" (612-13).

Oedipus is a citizen of Athens now and when, under Creon's assault he calls for help (ἰὸ πόλις 833), it is Athens he is calling on for help against Thebes. The help comes in time and Oedipus, his daughters restored to him, prepares to make

good his promise. Once he hears the thunder he knows the time is short; he wants, he says to Theseus, "to die without failing to keep the promises I made to you and the city" (1508-9). With Theseus alone present he makes his way to where the gods impatiently summon him (1626-28) and the promise is fulfilled: Theseus will hand on to his son and he to his the secret of Oedipus' last resting place and "thus", as he told the king, "the city you live in will never be sacked by the men born of the dragon's teeth" (1533-34). Someday, he had prophesied to Theseus (619 ff.), the Thebans will invade Attica; "on some small pretext they will shatter with the spear the pledged agreements which now hold. And then my sleeping, hidden corpse, cold though it be, will drink their warm blood. . .".

These two final plays, as has often been pointed out, deal with the same situation: a community's attempt to reassert, by lies and force, control over a man it has rejected utterly and now finds essential to its welfare. This formulation is, as far as I can see, an exact description of what has been referred to in recent criticism as "an outcast's reintegration into society" or 'Resozialisierung'. It is of course true that Philoctetes returns to take his place in the army for the final assault on Troy and that Oedipus becomes a citizen of no mean city—welcomed by a Theseus who is the living embodiment of that Athenian civilization praised by the chorus in its famous ode. But the solution of the dilemma posed by Philoctetes' stubborn insistence in going home leaves, as Matthiessen rightly says, a "bitter aftertaste"; Heracles' warning against offending the gods when Troy falls could not fail to remind the audience that Neoptolemos would kill Priam on the altar of Zeus. Oedipus, on the other hand, turns against his own *polis* with malevolent hatred; there is a fierce exultation in his language as he dwells on the Theban blood which will be shed over his grave. Ajax prayed for destruction to fall not just on the Achaean princes who

had injured him but on the whole host of the army; Oedipus knows that in his grave he will have his revenge not just on Creon and his sons but on the whole Theban host. The joyful theme of his adoption by Athens is of course dominant in the play but the dark side of his action, the injury to his mother city, should not be forgotten²³. It is hard to think of a mythical parallel, but a historical parallel springs immediately to mind. It is of course Alcibiades, who cold-bloodedly gave the Spartans advice which, followed with alacrity, led to the defeat of his native city.

Matthiessen sees, in the ambivalent attitude to the *polis* which characterizes the last two plays, Sophocles' reaction to the sordid, desperate politics of the last phase of the war. There is some warrant for this claim but it does not take into account the fact that the early plays, *Ajax* and *Antigone* also raise questions about the right of the *polis* to demand obedience in all things—"in matters small and just, and their opposites", to quote Creon's cynical euphemism (*Ant.* 671). And in the *Oedipus Tyrannos* the hero's devotion to the welfare of the *polis* is the instrument of his downfall. In fact all five of the plays which explore the relation of the tragic hero to his *polis* end by suggesting that the *polis* is not the be-all and end-all of human life, that there are powers and laws which transcend its authority. The *polis*, as Sophocles had his chorus sing in *Antigone*, is a human invention, perhaps man's greatest creation, but it is no more than that. Such an attitude would not be out of place in a poet who was "the last great exponent of the archaic world view" but it is a little unexpected in a man whose life was such an exemplary record of full participation in the highest councils of the city's feverish activity. And yet that very fact may explain the

²³ It is given what may be deliberate emphasis by the contrast with the attitude of Theseus, who specifically exempts Thebes from blame for Creon's conduct (919 ff.).

paradox. Without that involvement in the politics and wars of the *polis* which in its brief imperial career justified the Corinthians' claim that it "was born never to rest itself and to prevent the rest of the world from doing so", he might not have become so keenly aware of the dangers inherent in the Periclean ideal. The word *theos* does not appear in the Funeral Speech (nor, for that matter, in any of the speeches Thucydides puts in the mouth of Athens' leading statesmen) ²⁴; there is more than a hint that this *dynamis* of Athens, which its citizens are to contemplate till they become its lovers, is the real object of Periclean religious feeling.

Jean-Pierre Vernant in the introduction to his *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, summed up, in a characteristically stimulating formula, the new vision which tragedy, with its chorus representing the community, imposed on the epic heroes it put on stage. ". . . ils sont en quelque sorte mis en question devant le public. . . Dans le cadre nouveau du jeu tragique, le héros a donc cessé d'être un modèle: il est devenu, pour lui-même et pour les autres, un problème." For Sophocles, one is tempted to add, the *polis* also, has become a problem.

²⁴ In the summary of Pericles' financial report to the Athenians (Thuc. II 13) the word occurs, but Pericles is talking about using the gold on the statue of Athena in case of emergency.

DISCUSSION

M. Winnington-Ingram: I am in general agreement with Knox's statement about the paramount authority of the *polis*. One should perhaps, however, recognize

- 1) that Socrates' attitude in *Crito* represents an extreme position which not all Athenians would accept in its full implications.
- 2) the passage in Pericles/Thucydides has the character of a persuasive manifesto (cf. the emotional appeal of the ἐραστής metaphor). Is the ἀπράγμων/ἀχρεῖος contrast intended to counter the notion of ἀπραγμοσύνη as a virtue (in private life)?

M. Knox: Certainly the case of Socrates is an extreme example; nevertheless the essence of his argument, that loyalty to the *polis* overrides all other loyalties, is so constant a theme in the literature—it is implied in the Funeral Speech and specifically stated by Creon in the *Antigone*, a passage cited by Demosthenes as a model—that I feel sure it was a sentiment shared by the Athenians as a whole. I am happy to be able to say that Mme de Romilly, in her book *La loi dans la pensée grecque*, cites the Platonic passage to the same affect. As for the ἐραστής metaphor, it is of course highly emotional, but the fact that it was used (and I think the Aristophanic parodies prove that it was) by a great statesman on a solemn public occasion suggests that it expressed a real and widespread feeling. I agree that the contrast ἀπράγμων/ἀχρεῖος is to some extent an assault on the idea of ἀπραγμοσύνη as a private virtue, but given the political context it must also function as a condemnation of those Athenians who called for a less active policy on the part of the δῆμος.

M. Seidensticker: Sie haben im Anschluss an Matthiessen für die beiden letzten Stücke des Sophokles von Re-Integration eines *outcast* in die Gesellschaft gesprochen. Gilt dasselbe nicht in gewissem Sinne auch für die dritte der späten Tragödien des Dichters? Die Problematik des Muttermords und seine Folgen sind am Ende der *Elektra* gewiss nicht

völlig ausgeblendet, aber doch stark in den Hintergrund gedrängt. Die Ermordung der Mörder, mit der das Stück schliesst, re-integriert den Flüchtling Orestes in Heimat, Palast und Familie, und auch für Elektra bringt die Tat Befreiung und Re-Integration aus einer unerträglichen *outcast*-Situation.

M. Knox: Since in this particular play there is no attempt to present the action of Orestes in political terms and practically no mention of 'society' or *polis*, the most that can be said along the lines of Matthiessen's formula *Resozialisierung* is that Electra and Orestes are restored not so much to society as to the palace, as you rightly put it, and to the family. But since the family, with the death of Clytemnestra, no longer exists for them to be reintegrated into, this does not seem too meaningfull. I would say, too, that your view of the play's ending seems to me too comforting; I have been convinced by Winnington-Ingram's discussion of the play in his recent book that the *Muttermord ist nicht stark in den Hintergrund gedrängt* and that the Erinyes are very much present and throw a shadow over the future, so that whatever reintegration takes place has no stable foundation.

Mme de Romilly: J'aimerais faire deux remarques. La première ne vise pas spécialement Sophocle, mais la façon dont peut être présentée cette toute-puissance de la cité: si elle limite la liberté de chaque citoyen, c'est pour assurer sa liberté par rapport aux menaces extérieures et pour éviter la vraie servitude, qui suit la défaite. Ceci donne du prix à cette soumission d'ordre intérieur, et du rayonnement. L'autre remarque est que ceux qui prêchent cette soumission, chez Sophocle, sont des personnages qui ont tort, comme Créon; mais il n'est pas sûr qu'ils aient tort en tout: les principes peuvent être bons et l'application erronée. Et il est conforme au sens tragique même d'avoir pu combiner ces deux aspects.

M. Knox: Je suis entièrement d'accord avec Mme de Romilly en ce qui concerne sa première remarque: la restriction de la liberté personnelle était une conséquence nécessaire des menaces extérieures; pour citer Périclès «un individu peut avoir du succès dans ses affaires personnelles, mais, si la cité est détruite, il périt avec elle» (Thuc. II 60, 3).

Que les principes puissent être bons et l'application erronée, j'en conviens; pourtant, à la seule exception d'*Œdipe Roi*, ceux qui parlent pour la cité sont, pour le moins, suspects. C'est troublant!

M. Steiner: Line 370 in the *Antigone* seems to concentrate problematically many of the issues raised by Bernard Knox. Its parataxic structure emphasizes the tension of the relevant concepts and polarities. The city in which man holds the divine law in honour and usage is a "lofty city", $\delta\psi\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$. He who fails to observe such usage and law is $\ddot{\alpha}\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$. But the haunted humanism of Sophocles's critique goes much deeper. He asks, notably in *Antigone*: "is it possible for man to construct, to inhabit a $\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$, in which he can both accomplish his own full humanity, the deployment of his moral being, *and* in which the civic and religious ideals of judicial piety are enacted?" There are suggestions throughout the extant plays—so few in number and only putatively representative—that Sophocles knows no unambiguous answer to this question.

The Fifth stasimon in *Antigone* further complicates and enriches the topic. The chorus, in what is existentially and technically a condition of ecstasy, calls upon Dionysus. His arrival in Thebes is as ambiguously fatal as it will be in the *Bacchae*. The gods literally swarm into the $\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$. We now encounter not only the 'Zeus of the hearth' at whose altar Eurydice kills herself, but Hephaistos of the 'denying' sacrificial flame, Hecate of the fatal cross-roads, Pluto. A city which the gods have thus entered is as doomed as a city from which the gods are absent. What, then, are the true distances between 'political' man and the transcendent dimension?

M. Knox: Line 370, and indeed the whole of the strophe in which that line occurs, does indeed concentrate many of the problematical issues raised by the play: I would accept the formulation of George Steiner—"is it possible for man to construct a $\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$ etc." as valid for the issue I raised in my paper—the $\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$ as *problème* for Sophocles. I can agree that the invocation of Dionysus in the stasimon which precedes the catastrophe is an ironic prelude and also, with Winnington-Ingram, an evocation of those forces which Creon has slighted in his rigid interpretation of the city's interest but do not recognize the phenomenon Mr Steiner describes in the words "the gods literally swarm into the $\pi\omega\lambda\iota\varsigma$ ". Hecate and Pluton are

both invoked *outside* the city at the place where Polynices' body was been exposed (1199-1200) and the altar of Ζεὺς Ἐρκεῖος has been mentioned before. That Creon has offended the gods there can be no doubt, but I do not find sufficient evidence to justify the metaphors employed.

The relation of the city to the gods is of course a main theme of the play and is indeed the problem posed in the closing strophe of the great ode πολλὰ τὰ δεινά. That begins as a celebration of the triumphs of man, the conqueror of his environment: the culmination of his achievement is the creation of the city, the "social temper" ἀστυνόμους ὁργάς, which he has taught himself, ἐδιδάξατο. But if he neglects the other νόμοι, those of the earth (χθονός, which surely suggests the rights of the dead, their right to burial) and divine justice he will no longer be ὑψίπολις, "a citizen of no mean city" but ἄπολις, man thrown back to the primitive stage of human existence which preceded the creation of the πόλις.

M. Taplin: Perhaps we should see the play as showing, in the eventual fate of Creon, something worse than becoming ἄπολις? He will stay on as ruler of the city, but life no longer has any joy for him. He must stay in Thebes with the debris of his folly. This is, in effect, the view put by the Messenger in lines 1155-71.

M. Irigoin: Il ne faut pas, me semble-t-il, entreprendre une discussion sur ὑψίπολις/ἄπολις, au v. 370 de l'antistrophe 2, sans tenir compte des adjectifs du v. 360: παντοπόρος/ἄπορος, qui ont le même nombre de syllabes et occupent la même place dans la strophe 2, avec le même rejet du premier adjectif, la même ponctuation forte entre les deux, la même asyndète après le second adjectif, la même syllabe – πο – suivie d'une liquide en 3^e et 6^e positions.

La formation de ὑψίπολις, un *hapax* tout comme παντοπόρος, est claire. C'est un composé de possession qui entre, avec les autres adjectifs composés en ὑψι-, dans la série des composés à premier élément adverbial à laquelle appartient aussi l'adjectif ἄπολις. Il ne peut que signifier, mot à mot, «qui 'possède' une cité élevée», désignant donc le citoyen d'une cité élevée, à l'élévation de laquelle il participe par sa conduite, et non pas le degré d'élévation du citoyen à l'intérieur de sa cité.

M. Radt: Für diese Interpretation wäre es natürlich schöner wenn ὑψίπολις sich als Kompositum vom Typus τερψίμβροτος auffassen liesse. Aber das einzige Verbum, von dem man ὑψίπολις dann ableiten könnte, wäre ὑψώω, so dass man eine sehr ungewöhnliche Analogiebildung annehmen müsste.

M. Winnington-Ingram: ὑψίπολις/ἄπολις : what is the subject? In the first half of the antithesis (like παντοπόρος/ἄπορος above), it is a generalized ἄνθρωπος: if the laws of the gods are respected, man lives in a πόλις that rides high. The second half moves towards the individual offender (ὅς τάδ' ἔρδοι), as a result of whose τόλμα the πόλις ceases to deserve the name.

Mme de Romilly: La solution au problème qu'ont soulevé M. Steiner et l'exposé lui-même, ne serait-elle pas qu'une πόλις n'est digne de ce nom que si elle sait faire régner le juste, dans ses lois, écrites et non écrites, et si elle n'entre pas en conflit avec les dieux. La cité ne pourrait être mise en question que dans ce cas. Ce serait là le sens de l'avertissement de Sophocle.

M. Steiner: It is important to observe that the word αὐτόνομος, which appears nowhere else in Sophocles' vocabulary such as we know it, carries a heavy load of fear and reproach. The πόλις can contain neither Creon *nor* Antigone. The one has arrogated law unto himself; the second is a law unto herself. But what kind of πόλις would it be if it can house neither the civic authority of a ruler nor the self-fulfilment of a great human conscience?

M. Knox: M. Irigoin is right to suggest caution in the interpretation of the word ὑψίπολις and to stress the extraordinarily exact correspondence with παντοπόρος/ἄπορος. As for Creon becoming ἄπολις there is perhaps a sense in which that can still be applied to him at the end of the play—he still has a city in the sense that he will, as Oliver Taplin says, go on living there in the ruin of his life but he has lost all claim to respect as the ruler and possessor of a great city—the chorus treat him at the end of the play with something like contempt.

J'accepte la formulation de Mme de Romilly: elle présente très clairement ce que je crois être le sens essentiel de la strophe finale.

And George Steiner quite rightly draws our attention to the designation of Antigone as *αὐτόνομος* and the fact that the word carries a load of reproach. The two parts of the compound in fact contradict each other when the word is applied to an individual rather than a community.

M. Taplin: May I open up the question of the relationship of the politics of the created world of tragedy to those of Sophocles' Athens? In three plays the hero-figure condemns the whole *πόλις*: in *Ajax*, *Philoctetes* (note in both the recurrence of the phrase *σύμπας στρατός*: *Aj.* 407; 1055; *Pb.* 387; 1226; 1243; 1294)—and, as Mr Knox pointed out, Thebes in *OC*. In each case the *στρατός* is condemned for, in effect, ratifying the evils done by their leaders. Only, I think, in the Haemon Scene in *Antigone* (683 ff.) is the voice of the people, *ὑπὸ σκότου*, set in explicit contradiction to its leaders; but the possibility is implicit in these three plays under discussion. The whole *πόλις* is dragged down by its rulers. Would you see this as a consequence of the 'epic' distancing of the world of tragedy, or as a commentary on Sophocles' own world?

M. Winnington-Ingram: Oedipus' violent condemnation of his own *polis* is a characteristic product of the irrational workings of his *θυμός*, which increases as he approaches the status of a *ἥρως* (cf. the wildly exaggerated language of *OC* 1360 ff.).

M. Knox: The question of the relationship of the world of tragedy and that of Sophoclean Athens is a perennial puzzle: I tried to formulate some sort of working formula for the problem in my paper. I don't see very much evidence that Sophocles tries to exonerate the *πόλις* by playing the good sense of the people against the folly and crimes of the rulers: as you say, the only place where such a suggestion is made is Haemon's speech in *Antigone* and even there the representatives of the people on stage, the chorus, show no such disagreement with Creon, in fact they back him up all the way until Tiresias gives them pause. So I don't think the Sophoclean picture is that of a whole *πόλις* dragged down by its rulers.

There certainly is an irrational element in the wrath of Oedipus. He blames the Thebans as a whole for his exile but he goes further than that and even blames them for his marriage with Jocasta—κακῷ μὲν ἐννῷ πόλις οὐδὲν ἔδριν/γάμων ἐνέδησεν ἄτα (OC 525-6; cf. 539 ff. where the word πόλις recurs).

Mme de Romilly: Il me semble que l'accusation portée par Œdipe est ici simplement un élément de sa propre justification. Cette justification est hardie, complète. Même si la justice conserve la culpabilité involontaire, ici elle est rejetée, et non sans de bonnes raisons. Ce procédé du rejet de responsabilité se rencontre souvent chez Thucydide, et montre un Sophocle qui n'est pas étranger aux discussions du temps et qui sait en utiliser les raisonnement et les arguments pour les causes défendues par ses personnages. Ce n'est pas soumission à une mode ou à la rhétorique, mais utilisation de tout au service du tragique.

M. Reverdin: A mon avis, ce n'est pas la question de la responsabilité qui est posée, mais bien celle de la culpabilité. Œdipe a commis un double crime (parricide etinceste); il en accepte la responsabilité, et, à la fin d'*Œdipe Roi*, il en tire les conséquences. Il est un être impur; mais il n'est pas moralement coupable.

M. Knox: Sans doute Sophocle est parfaitement capable d'utiliser les procédés rhétoriques qu'il a dû connaître dans l'assemblée et dans les tribunaux. Mais je ne crois pas qu'on ait le droit d'affaiblir la force d'une déclaration aussi outrée que celle d'Œdipe sur la responsabilité de son sort en se référant aux exigences de la rhétorique. Chez Euripide, en revanche, on trouve des arguments qui n'ont d'autre justification que l'effet rhétorique, et qui peuvent même sembler, quand on y réfléchit, mal accommodés au caractère du personnage; mais pas chez Sophocle.

M. Radt: Ich möchte mich Mme de Romilly anschliessen. Schon Goethe hat in dem bekannten Gespräch über die *Antigone* (28. März 1827) Eckermann, der fand dass Kreon doch «einiges Recht habe», davor gewarnt, sich nicht täuschen zu lassen von der rhetorischen Meisterschaft, mit der Sophokles seine Personen so überzeugend reden lässt, «dass der

Zuhörer fast immer auf der Seite dessen ist, der zuletzt gesprochen hat». Sophokles lässt, genau wie Thukydides, seine Personen τὰ δέοντα εἰπεῖν, und wir dürfen das bei der Interpretation seiner Stücke nie aus dem Auge verlieren. Auch der starke Ausdruck ἐραστάι des thukydideischen Perikles ist, wie mir scheint, rein *pour les besoins de la cause* gebraucht und erlaubt keine Schlüsse über das normale Verhältnis des Atheners zu seiner πόλις.

M. Knox: Je regrette de me trouver dans la situation de contredire Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, mais encore une fois, sa remarque sur l'effet des discours sophocléens me semble s'appliquer mieux à ceux d'Euripide. Prenez le discours de Créon dans *OEdipe à Colone*, par exemple — ou la tirade de Clytemnestre contre Electre — on ne se trouve pas, à la fin, «auf der Seite dessen..., der zuletzt gesprochen hat». Quant à la phrase de Périclès, devenue célèbre à Athènes, il ne me semble pas, toute frappante qu'elle est, et prononcée par le πρῶτος ἀνήρ d'Athènes, dans un moment dramatique, qu'elle puisse être qualifiée par les mots «rein *pour les besoins de la cause* gebraucht»; c'est un état d'âme idéal que Périclès propose à ses concitoyens.

M. Steiner: A supreme dramatic poet such as Sophocles is neither the servant nor the mechanical exploiter of the arts of rhetoric. When Creon, for example, proclaims the great and 'future' truth, i.e. "no man can bring pollution to the gods", he is neither being hypocritical nor mechanistically rhetorical. He is uttering a formidable insight in a context which *partially* negates that insight. He is, as Erasmus suggests, "speaking piously out of impiety". Only some such approach to the polysemic nature of poetry, and of dramatic poetry in particular, can do justice to the quality of the arguments which Creon puts forward on behalf of an absolute concept of πόλις and πολιτεία. In this respect, comparison with the overwhelming truths voiced by Macbeth towards the close of the drama is illuminating.

M. Seidensticker: Ich würde gern noch einmal zurückkommen auf die durch Herrn Steiner und Herrn Taplin angesprochene Frage der Bedeutung der von Ihnen so eindrucksvoll analysierten, in der Tat unüberhör-

baren Kritik an der $\pi\circ\lambda\circ\varsigma$. Handelt es sich Ihrer Meinung nach um eine kritische Reaktion auf aktuelle politische Phänomene und Entwicklungen oder um eine viel weiter und tiefer reichende allgemeine Kritik, die man dann eigentlich gar nicht mehr Kritik nennen dürfte: ich meine — im Anschluss an Herrn Steiners Bemerkungen zum 1. Stasimon der *Antigone* — die tiefe Einsicht in die tragische Dialektik der menschlichen Situation als soziales Wesen: er kann nicht leben ausserhalb der $\pi\circ\lambda\circ\varsigma$ und innerhalb der $\pi\circ\lambda\circ\varsigma$ kann er in gewissem Sinne auch nicht 'leben', d.h. er kann sich nur verwirklichen als Teil eines sozialen Ganzen, zugleich aber kann er sich auch nicht voll in allen seinen Möglichkeiten und Träumen, verwirklichen als Teil des Ganzen, das ständig Einschränkungen auferlegt und Kompromisse verlangt.

M. Knox: It seems to me the critique of the $\pi\circ\lambda\circ\varsigma$ goes much deeper than any reference to the contemporary situation, in fact I would accept Bernd Seidensticker's admirable formulation of tragic dilemma posed by the existence of the individual in a social context which he cannot live without but which restrains his freedom.

Kjeld Matthiessen, in the article I referred to in my paper, sees the dark mood of the last two plays as a reflection of Sophocles' rejection of the leaders and policies of imperial Athens in the final years of the war; I tried to show that the critical attitude to the $\pi\circ\lambda\circ\varsigma$ is a constant in Sophoclean tragedy and goes much deeper than contemporary allusion.

M. Taplin: Phrynicus' error was that he dramatised $\circ\lambda\kappa\eta\alpha\kappa\kappa\alpha$ (Hdt. VI 21), suffering too particular to his audience. I would agree with the sentiment that the politics within tragedy transcend those of their immediate historical world, or, rather, that these are subsumed into a broader political setting.

M. Seidensticker: Haben Sie eine Erklärung für die Zurückdrängung des politischen Aspekts in der *Elektra*? Handelt es sich um eine Antwort oder doch Reaktion auf die aischyleische (oder vielleicht auch die euripideische) Version des Stoffs?

M. Knox: No, I have no ready explanation for the absence of the political element in *Electra*. It may be simply that Sophocles felt it

necessary to write a play that was clearly not a remake of the *Choephoroe*—remember the scholion which explains that Ajax in Sophocles kills himself on stage because Aeschylus had already described the suicide in a messenger speech. It may be, too, that he wished to concentrate attention on the hatreds of the family so as to suggest the menacing future Winnington-Ingram has so eloquently presented: the political theme of liberation of the city would have undercut that effect.

