

OEDIPUS AND THYESTES AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS: INCEST AND CANNIBALISM IN PLATO, DIOGENES, AND ZENO

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INCEST AND CANNIBALISM, the “unspeakables” of the tragic stage, appear with a direct and insistent regularity in Cynic and early Stoic writings. Diogenes, Zeno, and Chrysippus put these acts in the same context, as moral exempla of things permissible for the wise man, the one with “right reason.”¹ The reasons behind the philosophers’ choice of these “unspeakables” as paradigms were lost even in antiquity; later Stoics were sometimes embarrassed by Zeno’s *Republic*, largely because of these examples.² Some of Zeno’s critics considered these as Cynic elements that the young Zeno adopted, probably from his early teacher Crates,³ and some modern scholars have followed that suggestion.⁴ Neither the Cynics nor the Stoics were necessarily advocating this sort of practice as daily custom (though they were understandably castigated by others on that score); rather, they were seeking out examples that would be considered both extreme and incontrovertible to illustrate their tenets. The clearest explanation to date of Zeno’s probable motivation is expressed by Paul Vander Waerdt:⁵

I suggest that Zeno considered incest and cannibalism as test-cases of moral prohibitions that might be thought to apply without exception. . . . Thus he does not advocate incest or

1. The following abbreviations of source material will be cited more than once: *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim (Leipzig, 1905) = *SVF*; *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*², ed. G. Giannantoni (Naples, 1990) = *SSR*²; *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, ed. A. A. Long and D. Sedley (Cambridge, 1987) = *HP*.

All citations from Philodemus *De Stoicis* refer to the edition of Dorandi 1982.

For Diogenes on cannibalism, cf. Diogenes Laertius (hereafter, D. L.) 6.73; *SVF* 3.750; Philodemus *De Stoicis* 16.20–17.4. For Zeno on cannibalism and incest, cf. D. L. 7.121; *SVF* 3.745–46. For Chrysippus on cannibalism and incest, cf. *SVF* 3.743–53.

2. Cf. D. L. 7.32–34; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.9.58.2 = *SVF* 1.43 = *HP* 67E; and Philodemus *De Stoicis*, passim. Philodemus (11.1–13) states expressly that in the early writings of Epicurus he finds nothing “shameful or impious” (μηδὲν αἰσχρὸν . . . μηδ’ ἄσεβές), but the *Republic* of Zeno he found “stuffed with these things” (ἀνάμειστον δὲ τούτων εἶναι ταύτην). As an Epicurean, of course, Philodemus read Zeno with an especially critical eye. On the *obscentitas* of the Cynics and the “Stoics who are almost Cynics,” cf. Cicero *Off.* 1.128 and *Fam.* 9.22. Zeno is named in the latter, and Cicero sketches the Stoic argument that “there is nothing obscene or base in speech” (*nihil esse obscenum, nihil turpe dictu*, 9.22.1).

3. A position that Philodemus reports and rejects (*De Stoicis* 9).

4. For example, von Arnim titles the section of *SVF* 3 containing the fragments that mention incest and cannibalism (frags. 743–46) “Cynica,” and see Goulet-Cazé 2003. Cf. also Dorandi 1982, 92–94; *HP* 1:435; and Mansfield 1986, 295–382, esp. 328–51. For discussions of the date of Zeno’s *Republic* and its relation to his “mature thought,” cf. Erskine 1990, 9–15, and in response, Vander Waerdt 1991, 192–94.

5. Vander Waerdt 1994b, 300–301.

cannibalism but merely insists that they do not constitute immutable moral prohibitions, hence exceptions to the principle that the sage's right reason is circumstance-dependent.

Certainly for the Greek city-states, these acts were not only examples of exceptionless moral prohibition, but even defining boundaries of civilization and its absence, and as such they found their expression in the context of tragedy.⁶ Several mythic figures, chief among them Oedipus and Thyestes, became emblems of these actions, which were represented on the Greek stage again and again.⁷ I hold that there is a connection between the representation of these tragic "unspeakables" and their adoption by the Cynics and the Stoics as paradigmatic actions. That connection runs through the works and thought of Plato.

It is now generally accepted that the early proponents of Cynicism and Stoicism saw themselves as followers of Socrates,⁸ and viewed Plato as merely one interpretation, if not a corruption, of what Socrates really was. Consequently, the Cynics and Stoics wrote against Plato, or at least attempted to revise him.⁹ The Stoics in particular seem to have given an especially close reading to Plato's *Republic*.¹⁰ Scholars who address the nature and intent of the Stoic response to Plato have generally followed two paths. Some have focused on the similarities and differences in particular propositions for the ideal city; these approaches either make brief mention or pass over entirely the references to cannibalism and incest. Vander Waerdt attempts "to explain exactly how the early Stoic theory of natural law" shapes the philosophical response to Plato; his general explanation of the details of incest and cannibalism is cited above. I argue that there is something more specific at work as well. The Stoics chose the actions of incest and cannibalism not as random moral prohibitions, but with the specific mythic exemplars of Oedipus and Thyestes in mind. These actions and their agents, in turn, are specific responses to Plato's picture of the tyrant and the tyrannical soul in his *Republic*. The Stoics' attention to Plato's *Republic*, and their goal of refuting or

6. As defining boundaries between (Greek) civilization and (foreign) barbarity, the actions of incest and cannibalism found expression in other works as well, most notably the *Odyssey*, the *Histories* of Herodotus, and the writings of the sophists. The works of Herodotus and of the sophists in turn influenced the later tragedians. For the importation of these actions into tragedy, cf. Hall 1989, 121–33, 181–90. Although it is impossible to measure the relative influence of specific works, I will argue below that tragedy is the proximate influence for the philosophers I study, and that Thyestes and Oedipus, not foreigners, are their primary representatives for the actions of incest and cannibalism.

7. Seven Greek tragedians are reported to have written a play or plays titled *Thyestes* (Sophocles, Euripides, Agathon, Apollodorus, Carcinus, Chairemon, Cleophon) in addition to Diogenes the Cynic; and Aeschylus features the myth prominently in the *Agamemnon*. Persaeus, a disciple of Zeno, is credited with a work entitled *Thyestes*, though it is not specified as a drama (D. L. 7.36). A play or plays titled *Oedipus* are attributed to nine tragedians, including Diogenes the Cynic.

8. Cf. Long 1988 and the essays in Vander Waerdt 1994a. In his introduction, Vander Waerdt states, "During his lifetime and in the century following his death, Socrates inspired a variety of philosophical movements, each of which claimed to trace its ancestry to him and to expound the authentic version of his philosophy" (1994a, 6–7). The evidence for these continuations and adaptations of Socratic philosophy is collected in *SSR*.

9. Plutarch says that Zeno "wrote against Plato's *Republic*" (*De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1034e–f = *SVF* 1.260). Schofield makes the more general but useful observation: "Any Greek philosopher who wrote a *Republic* will have been challenging comparison with Plato's great work" (1991, 24–25). Zeno's disciple Persaeus is reported to have written a response to Plato's *Laws* in seven books (D. L. 7.36).

10. Cf. Vander Waerdt 1994b, p. 278 and n. 22.

amending it, explain their incorporation of incest and cannibalism as moral exempla. Because Plato uses the actions of cannibalism and incest to describe his view of a particular cast of soul, the Stoics choose these very actions to distance themselves from Plato's psychology, as well as from his political philosophy. Plato's sources for the actions of cannibalism and incest seem to have come from the tragic stage. The Cynic and Stoic uses of the motifs of incest and cannibalism reveal their understanding of Plato's *Republic* and their awareness of the tragic sources of his examples. The connections with tragedy also suggest how the Stoics may have intended their presentation of incest and cannibalism to be understood, and may indicate some of their reasons for writing tragedy and works on tragic characters.

PLATO

The *Republic* may seem an odd place to look for Plato's appropriation of tragic figures. When one thinks of tragedy in relation to the *Republic*, probably first to mind is Plato's famous banishment of poets of all genres from his ideal state.¹¹ The tragedians are specifically condemned in his censure (597e6–8). Socrates argues that poets are not knowledgeable of what is true, not able to make people better, and in fact solicitous of the soul's lowest part. But Plato's relationship with tragedy was not limited to those thoughts expressed in Book 10 of the *Republic*.¹² It is not germane to rehearse here the variety of ways in which Plato appropriates elements of tragedy (and comedy) to his own purposes, which many scholars have studied with rich insight.¹³ I want to build upon their work and explore the appropriations that appear in the *Republic*, those which led to some of the later philosophical responses to Plato.

Plato redefined tragedy,¹⁴ just as he redefined the hero in the figure of Socrates.¹⁵ He wrote what he apparently saw as "the truest tragedy," if we read the claim in the *Laws* (817b–c) as his. According to that passage, the truest tragedy is "the best and most beautiful life," or, presumably, its dramatization;¹⁶ that would be truly "serious" (σπουδαῖος), unlike what passes for tragedy among the tragic poets. That claim, and Socrates' argument at

11. A good discussion of Plato's problem with poetry can be found in Gould 1992.

12. If the tradition is to be believed, Plato himself wrote tragedies until he met Socrates; he then consigned all his writings to the flames (D. L. 3.5). Cf. Else 1986, 3. It is unlikely, however, that Plato did not meet Socrates until his twentieth year, as Diogenes says; but that fact need not invalidate the possibility of Plato's early attempts at tragedy.

13. Several articles proved extremely valuable and helped clarify my thinking on the relationship between Plato and tragedy: Kuhn 1941 and 1942; Clay 1975 and 2000, in the latter esp. chaps. 2.5 ("Plato and the Poets") and 2.6 ("Platonic Poetry"); Patterson 1982; Halliwell 1984; and Nightingale 1992, which was reworked into a chapter of her book (1995). Of course, many scholars have studied the "dramatic" elements of Plato's dialogues, especially the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Phaedo*.

14. See the excellent article of Patterson 1982. His article is specifically directed towards a reading of the *Symposium*, but the argument has application to all of Plato's work.

15. For Socrates as Achilles, see Clay 1972 and 2000, esp. chap. 1.6 ("Socrates *Heros*"); as Odysseus, see Eisner 1982. For an interpretation of Plato's redefinition of heroism, see Hook and Reno 2000, 43–62.

16. If we interpret the "best and most beautiful life" to refer to an individual's life rather than to a collective way of life, we may read the *Phaedo* as the most tragic in Plato's terms. In its final scene, Plato has Socrates speak "as a tragic man, called by fate" (ἐμὲ δὲ νῦν ἥδη καλεῖ, φαίη ἄν ἀνὴρ τραγικός, ἡ εἰσαρμμένη, 115a).

Symposium 223d that the same man could know how to compose both comedy and tragedy, indicate that Plato was confronting and reworking the idea of the tragic and the comic in his dialogues. His result is consistent with his theory of forms: Plato saw a tragic essence that consisted in “seriousness,” separable from the staged performance of tragedy. Plato saw tragedy as a metaphor. The innovation of Plato’s distinction between “tragedy” and “tragic seriousness” is easily overlooked, since we often speak of something as “tragic” that has no relation to drama; but the ancients did not do so. The Greeks of the fifth century and earlier could see a “tragic” dimension to life; there were, after all, historical tragedies, such as Aeschylus’ *Persians* and Phrynichus’ *Fall of Miletus*. Herodotus’ “Lydian logos” about Croesus (1.1–91) has unmistakable parallels with tragedy, but Herodotus never uses the word “tragic” of Croesus. The Athenians were shocked by Phrynichus’ play to the tune of a one thousand-drachma fine (Hdt. 6.21), while they had no recorded reaction to Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, despite its “thematic” similarities to the contemporary situation on Melos.¹⁷ In short, the first Greek to apply a metaphorical sense of tragedy in a way familiar to us is Plato.¹⁸ Calling the “best and most beautiful life” the “truest tragedy” is his most striking example.

Richard Patterson distinguishes one sense of the Platonic notion of true tragedy and comedy from a passage in the *Philebus* (49b–c):

All who foolishly hold this false opinion about themselves, just as they do about all others, must be divided into those who have strength and power and those who are opposite. . . . Divide them in this way then, and all of them who are weak and unable to take vengeance when ridiculed, you would be right to term comic [γελοῖους]. But if you call those who are powerful and able to take vengeance formidable and hostile, you will provide yourself the most accurate measure of them. For the ignorance of the powerful is hateful and base—both it and its images are harmful to those around it. But the ignorance of the weak has obtained the disposition and the nature of the comic.¹⁹

Just before this passage, Socrates distinguishes three types of ignorance: ignorance of one’s wealth (external goods), of one’s stature and beauty

17. In the introduction to his translation of the *Trojan Women*, R. Lattimore calls “the parallel of Troy with Melos painfully close” and says, “I can hardly understand how the Athenians let him present this play at all” (1958, p. 123, n. 1).

18. It is possible that Socrates himself did this. In a passage in Aelian (*VH* 2.11 = *SSR*² V A 16), Socrates, in conversation with Antisthenes, draws parallels and contrasts between the events in Athens and tragedy (cf. also Dio Chrys. 13.20 for tragedy and 30 for Archelaus). On the basis of this passage in Aelian, some scholars have conjectured that Antisthenes, another of Socrates’ disciples, drew parallels between life and drama in his work *Archelaus*, from which Aelian took this anecdote (for full scholarly discussion, see *SSR*² 4.353–54). There is certainly a dramatic element to Plato’s Socratic dialogues, which was presumably part of their original nature; cf. Gifford, who examines the “tragic irony” of Plato’s early dialogues (among which he includes *Republic* 1) and concludes that Plato was “converting the living logos of a Socratic conversation into the form of written drama” (2001, 99).

19. πάντες ὅποσοι ταύτην τὴν ψευδὴ δόξαν περὶ ἑαυτῶν ἀνοήτως δοξάζουσι, καθάπερ ἅπαντων ἀνθρώπων, καὶ τούτων ἀναγκαιότατον ἔπεσθαι τοῖς μὲν ῥόμην αὐτῶν καὶ δύναμιν, τοῖς δὲ οἶμαι τούναντιον . . . ταύτῃ τοίνυν διέλε, καὶ ὅσοι μὲν αὐτῶν εἰσι μετ’ ἀσθενείας τοιοῦτοι καὶ ἀδύνατοι καταγελῶμενοι τιμωρεῖσθαι, γελοῖους τούτους φάσκων εἶναι ἀλγυρῇ φέγγει· τοὺς δὲ δυνατοὺς τιμωρεῖσθαι καὶ ἰσχυροὺς φοβεροὺς καὶ ἐχθροὺς προσαγορεύων ὀρθότατον τούτων σαυτῷ λόγον ἀποδώσεις. ἀγνοία γάρ ἡ μὲν τῶν ἰσχυρῶν ἐχθρά τε καὶ αἰσχρά—βλαβερὰ γάρ καὶ τοῖς πέλας αὐτῆς τε καὶ ὅσαι εἰκόνες αὐτῆς εἰσιν—ἡ δ’ ἀσθενῆς ἡμῖν τὴν τῶν γελοίων εἴληχε τάξιν τε καὶ φύσιν.

(bodily goods), and of one's virtue (the goods of one's soul, *Phlb.* 48d–e). The discussion concerns comedy and its mixture of pleasure and pain; tragedy is not mentioned explicitly in reference to self-ignorance. But in the conclusion to this passage, Socrates says that his reasoning applies not only to lamentations, tragedies, and comedies on the stage, but also to the “whole tragedy and comedy of life” (50b).²⁰ Patterson (1982, 83) suggests that such a definition of tragedy would be recognizable to the greater part of the Athenian public, but has specific application to the philosopher because he “will naturally have ideas different from *hoi polloi* about the true goods of the soul, and hence about who is ignorant concerning such goods in his own case.”

Before Plato banishes the poets from his state in Book 10 of the *Republic*, he admits a possible use for them in Book 2.²¹ The first charge against the poets occurs there: the poets lie about the gods by representing them as fighting, sending evil, and changing forms (377a–383c). The primary target of this attack seems to be Homer (377d4, 378d5, 379c8, 381d1–5, 383a6), but Plato includes Hesiod (377d4, 377e6–378a6), perpetrator of “the great lie” about the myth of the succession in heaven, and Aeschylus (380a1–5, 383a9–c2). Presumably all other tragedians fall under this censure. When he mentions “the sufferings of Niobe, or of the Pelopidae, or of Troy” (380a6), Plato is thinking of subjects of tragedy, not epic; the lines of Aeschylus that immediately precede these examples come from his *Niobe*, no longer extant. But Plato does not say that these things ought not be represented—rather, that if they are represented, god must not be shown as the author of evil or misery, only of good, and that the sufferings of the human characters either came not from god, or came as a punishment from him for their correction. This must be the case, Plato says, whether a poet writes epic or lyric or tragedy. In allowing the poets to stay in his city as long as they conform to the “laws and types” of representation (τῶν περὶ θεοῦ νόμων τε καὶ τύπων, 380c6–7), Plato seems to be consistent with his own practice demonstrated later in the *Republic*.²² When Plato describes the tyrant and the tyrannical soul, he appropriates the actions of incest and cannibalism for his definitions of these types. These actions and their representative agents appear to be taken from the tragic stage.

20. μὴνύει δὲ νῦν ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν ἐν θρήνοις τε καὶ ἐν τραγωδίαις καὶ κωμωδίαις, μὴ τοῖς δράμασι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ τοῦ βίου συμπάσῃ τραγωδίᾳ καὶ κωμωδίᾳ, λύπας ἥδοναίς ᾗμα κεράννουσθαι. . . .

21. For some, the contradiction between the two passages is insurmountable. In discussing Book 10, Julia Annas says, “In Books 2 and 3 poetry was just one of the arts, though the most important. Here Plato singles it out for attack in a way impossible to reconcile with Book 3” (1981, 336). More neutrally, Siskin Clay refers to Book 10 as “a summit reached by an arduous climb and one not yet sighted in the discussions of poetry in books 2 and 3” (2000, 117).

22. Socrates gives the lovers of poetry, if not the poets themselves, a chance to argue that poetry is beneficial (ὠφελίμη) as well as pleasant (ἡδεῖα) in Book 10 (607d6–e3), though it is not clear whether Plato believes that epic or dramatic poetry can ever be beneficial. Although he says that the charm of poetry is so great that its hearers need the protection of some kind of “incantation” (ἐπωδὴν, 608a4) against it, Socrates himself demonstrates a soul who has heard and yet resisted its charms—and by extension, Plato reveals himself as another. As Socrates says at the beginning of Book 10, the real damage of mimetic poetry is done to those “who lack the inoculation of knowing what these things really are” (λῶβη ἔοικε εἶναι πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῆς τῶν ἀκούοντων διανοίας, ὅσοι μὴ ἔχουσι φάρμακον τὸ εἰδέναι αὐτὰ οἷα τυγχάνει ὄντα, 595b5–7).

In the ninth book of the *Republic*, incest and cannibalism represent figuratively the desires and actions of the tyrant's soul. When asked what the desires of the tyrannical soul are, Socrates answers with examples that are specifically drawn from the tragic stage: the appetitive part of the tyrant's soul, while the other parts sleep, attempts sex with its mother (and with anything else), pollutes itself with murder, and refrains from no food (571d):

οἷσθ' ὅτι πάντα ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτ' τολμᾷ ποιεῖν, ὥς ἀπὸ πάσης λελυμένον τε καὶ ἀπηλλαγμένον αἰσχύνῃς καὶ φρονήσεως, μητρί τε γὰρ ἐπιχειρεῖν μείγνυσθαι, ὥς οἴεται,²³ οὐδὲν ὀκνεῖ, ἄλλω τε ὁπόσων ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν καὶ θηρίων, μαιφονεῖν τε ὅτιοῦν, βρώματός τε ἀπέχεσθαι μηδενός· καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ οὕτε ἀνοίας οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει οὐτ' ἀναισχυντίας.²⁴

The first desire of the appetitive part that Plato describes, sleeping with its mother, alludes clearly to Oedipus, even more clearly with the qualification ὥς οἴεται. The “fancy” of sleeping with one's mother recalls Jocasta's disturbing solace that “many men have even slept with their mothers in their dreams” (*OT* 980–82), which Sophocles may in turn have borrowed from Herodotus (6.107). Jocasta in Sophocles' play and Socrates in the *Republic* make a similar point, that dreaming about and actually sleeping with one's mother are not identical acts. Jocasta apparently finds no fault with such dreaming. Plato, as if rewriting her lines, sees it at the root of tyrannical actions, such as those, I argue, that Oedipus commits. Similarly, in such a context, Plato's reference to pollution by murder (μαιφονεῖν) recalls Oedipus and his murder of Laius, though such pollution is a theme common to many Greek tragedies.

After the mentions of incest and murder, the desire for eating, albeit illicitly, seems almost a *non sequitur*. Context and language suggest that we see this desire in the strongest possible terms, namely as a reference to cannibalism.²⁵ There is a connection drawn between tyranny and cannibalism at *Republic* 8.565d–566a, with an analogy to the Arcadian rituals of Zeus Lycaeus on Mt. Lycaon. The verb μαιφονῇ appears at 565e6 to describe the

23. The expression ὥς οἴεται is ambiguous. It troubled Förster in 1885 enough to lead him to suggest emending it to ὥς Οἰδῖπου, an interesting suggestion that Adam harshly but rightly rejects as “a tasteless conjecture which confuses reality and dreamland” (Adam 1963 ad loc.). That is exactly the problem: the passage in Plato is clearly describing dreamland, and the need for the qualification is not obvious. The expression is usually translated “as it supposes” (Adam, Grube), if it is translated at all. The implication clearly seems to be that the appetitive part of the soul is merely *thinking* about sex with its mother—but what else could it do? I suggest that the phrase ὥς οἴεται be read as a modification of the infinitives μείγνυσθαι and μαιφονεῖν rather than as a general exclamation. At *Charmides* 167a, Plato uses οἴεται in opposition to οἶδεν, which A. E. Taylor translates as “fancies” (1936, 54). This is just the sense we want: Plato is drawing attention to the difference between imagining sex with one's mother and having it. By drawing our attention to it, however, Plato invites us to realize that for the appetitive part of the soul, there is no difference. It is having sex with its mother in the only way it can, in its fancy.

24. “You know that it [the ἐπιθυμητικόν] dares to do all things in such a state, inasmuch as it is loosed and freed from all shame and prudence. For it shrinks not at all from attempting to sleep with its mother, as it understands that act, and with any other of gods, men, or beasts, nor shrinks from polluting itself with murder, nor refrains from any food; and in a word it falls nothing short of madness and shamelessness.” This passage bears some relation to Glaucon's story of the ring of Gyges from *Resp.* 2.360b–c. There Glaucon imagines the lack of legal restraint taking the form of sex and rape, theft, and murder. Socrates calls the desires of the tyrannical soul παράνομοι (9.571b5) and describes them as incest, murder, and cannibalism.

25. This interpretation is generally accepted; see, for example, Benardete 1989, 206.

action of the demagogue, and he “tastes the blood of kinsmen with unholy tongue and mouth”; but any reference to tragedy is oblique at best.²⁶ In the passage in Book 9 quoted above, Plato’s words are not that specific; the tyrannical soul is simply said not to refrain from any food. The same phrase is used a few paragraphs later in Book 9 of the man who begins to live out what his soul does in sleep: under the tyranny of erotic desire, he “will not refrain from any terrible bloodshed, or any food or act.”²⁷ The word βρῶμα does not carry any specific connotation other than food or meat, nor is it particularly common in Plato.²⁸ The more usual word for “food” in Plato is σῖτος, which can designate grain-food as opposed to meat.²⁹ As βρῶμα may mean meat and is used instead of the more usual σῖτος, the passage may also suggest that the food from which the tyrannical soul does not refrain is sacrificial in nature: the Greeks ate meat in the context of sacrifice. The suggestion of sacrifice, combined with the preceding mention of cannibalism in the Arcadian ritual and myth, evokes several myths taken up in tragedies, including those of Lycaon, of Tantalus and Pelops, of Tereus, and of Thyestes.³⁰ Because the tyrant’s soul is eating, not serving, the meal, the more natural referents in the passage are Tereus and Thyestes.³¹ The perversion of sacrifice involved in the killing of Thyestes’ children is a prominent feature of Aeschylus’ account in the *Agamemnon*³² and in Seneca’s *Thyestes*. For Plato’s audience, the soul’s lack of restraint from food is as specific an allusion to Thyestes as its copulation with its mother is to Oedipus.

The final connection between tyranny and cannibalism in the *Republic* provides the clearest allusion of all. At the end of the tenth book, in the myth of Er, Socrates tells Er’s account of the endless cycle of souls and their responsibility for the lives they choose.³³ Tyranny plays a large role in Er’s account. He sees the punishment of Ardiaeus and other tyrants (615c–616a), and he also witnesses the souls’ selection of future lives. When the souls arrive at this place of judgment, they are given lots to determine their order of choosing, and the lives from which they will choose are spread out before them. Of the types of lives available (τὰ τῶν βίων παραδείγματα,

26. Only one tragedy on the myth of Lycaon is known. Produced by Xenocles in 415 B.C.E., it was the second play of a tetralogy that began with an *Oedipus*. In the *Antigone*, Creon characterizes the hopes of Polynices in cannibalistic terms: “he wished to feast on kindred blood” (ἡθέλησε δ’ αἵματος κοινού πάσασθαι, 201–2). Sophocles uses the verb πατέομαι only here. It appears twice in Aeschylus, once in the *Agamemnon* where the chorus speaks of Clytemnestra, and also in the disputed end of the *Seven Against Thebes* (1036), used of wolves who will feast on Polynices.

27. *Resp.* 574e: τυραννευθεὶς δὲ ὑπὸ Ἐρωτος, οἷος ὀλιγάκις ἐγίγνετο ὄναρ, ὕπαρ τοιοῦτος αἰεὶ γενόμενος, οὔτε τινὸς φόνου δεινὸν ἀφεῖξεται οὔτε βρώματος οὔτ’ ἔργου.

28. It appears in *Resp.* 437e, where it means simply “food,” as well as in 571d and 574e; it also occurs at *Criti.* 115b and *Leg.* 638c, 782a, 932e, 953e. I am unable to suggest a reason for its use only in later dialogues.

29. *LSJ* I.2. Cf. *Od.* 9.9: σῖτον καὶ κρέα; Hes. *Op.* 146; Hdt. 2.168. σῖτος may also refer to “food” as opposed to “drink” (*LSJ* I.3), as Plato uses it at 571c5–6: ἢ σῖτον ἢ μέθης πλησθέν.

30. In discussing the slaughter of Thyestes’ children, Burkert says, “It is certain that the feast of Thyestes followed the form of a sacrifice, as did any meal with meat” (1983, 105).

31. In addition to several plays on Thyestes, Sophocles wrote a *Tereus*, which is famously parodied by Aristophanes in the *Birds*.

32. Cf. Zeitlin 1965.

33. Halliwell has explored the tragic parallels and the allusion to Thyestes in the myth of Er in his fine 1984 article, esp. 50–55.

618a), some are tyrannies.³⁴ There are more lives to choose from than there are choosers. The soul that receives the first lot immediately chooses the greatest tyranny (619b–c):

εἰπόντος δὲ ταῦτα τὸν πρῶτον λαχόντα ἔφη εὐθὺς ἐπιόντα τὴν μεγίστην τυραννίδα ἐλέσθαι, καὶ ὑπὸ ἀφροσύνης τε καὶ λαίμαργίας οὐ πάντα ἱκανῶς ἀνασκεψάμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν λαθεῖν ἐνόησαν εἰμαρμένην παίδων αὐτοῦ βρώσεις καὶ ἄλλα κακά· ἐπειδὴ δὲ κατὰ σχολὴν σκέψασθαι, κόπτεσθαι τε καὶ οἰδύρεσθαι τὴν αἴρεσιν, οὐκ ἐμμένοντα τοῖς προρρηθεῖσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτου· οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτὸν αἰτιάσθαι τῶν κακῶν, ἀλλὰ τύχην τε καὶ δαίμονα καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον ἄνθ' ἑαυτοῦ.

And when the prophet had said these things, Er said that the one drawing the first lot rushed out and chose the greatest tyranny, and he chose it because of his senselessness and his gluttonous greed, not having considered everything sufficiently, and it escaped his notice that part of the fate of his lot was the eatings of his own children and other evils; but when at his leisure, Er said, he became aware of this, he beat his breast and bewailed his choice, not adhering to the conditions set out by the prophet; for he did not fault himself for his evils, but chance and the divinities and everything instead of himself.

The eating of his children is described with the word βρώσις, which echoes the earlier uses of βρῶμα and in turn casts a more specific meaning back onto them; the passages at 571d and 574e now seem less vague about what sort of forbidden food Plato has in mind. No name is given to the would-be tyrant, but Er's language clearly describes the defining actions of Thyestes, as Stephen Halliwell notes: "This anonymous figure . . . is specifically reminiscent of the mythical Thyestes, whose life contained the two main details mentioned in the myth—the possession of tyrannical power, at least for part of his life, and the appalling fate of devouring his own children."³⁵ Plato's description also incorporates the trait of "gluttonous greed," the element of ignorance, and the consequent wild regret that appear, for example, in Seneca's *Thyestes*, the only extant tragedy on the subject.

Certain verbal echoes of Sophocles' *Oedipus* also surface in the description of this would-be tyrant in the myth of Er. When the chooser of the greatest tyranny realizes the consequences of his choice, he blames "chance and the divinities and everything instead of himself," even though before the lots are thrown, the prophet announces that each will choose his own daimon, and that god is not responsible.³⁶ The words τύχη and δαίμων have a similar importance in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In the ironic speech before the fourth chorus, after the messenger has arrived from Corinth to announce Polybus' death and informs Oedipus that he is no blood relation to Polybus,

34. *Resp.* 618a: τυραννίδας τε γὰρ ἐν αὐτοῖς εἶναι, τὰς μὲν διατελεῖς, τὰς δὲ καὶ μεταξύ διαφθοιρομένας καὶ εἰς πενίαν τε καὶ φυγὰς καὶ εἰς πτωχείας τελευτώσας ("There were tyrannies among them, some permanent, others waning before their end and falling into poverty, exile, and mendicancy").

35. Halliwell 1984, 50. In another work (1988, 188), Halliwell observes that this passage "recalls Thyestes" and notices the similarity of the words βρώσις and βρῶμα to suggest that "similar horrors are hinted at in connection with tyranny at 9.571d, 574e." He does not cite the passage at 8.565d–566a and the analogy with Arcadian ritual.

36. *Resp.* 617e: οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἰρήσεσθε . . . αἰτία ἐλομένων· θεὸς ἀνάτιος.

Oedipus calls himself the “child of Tyche” (ἐγὼ δ’ ἐμαυτὸν παῖδα τῆς Τύχης νέμων, 1080). After Oedipus blinds himself, the chorus asks about divine responsibility (τίς σ’ ἐπῆρε δαιμόνων; 1328) and Oedipus answers, “Apollo.”³⁷ Plato’s intricate involvement of human responsibility and a fixed portion in the myth of Er seems to answer the questions that the situation of Oedipus poses: the responsibility is the chooser’s, god is blameless.

In the analogy with Arcadian ritual, in the description of the tyrannical soul, and especially in the myth of Er, Thyestes appears as the source for the recurrent parallel of tyranny and cannibalism, and Oedipus as the model for incest. These two figures are named together by Plato in the *Laws* 838c; and perhaps in specific response to Plato, they are paired by Aristotle in the *Poetics* 1453a. Their common feature, apart from their horrific crimes against family, is their ignorance of their actions: neither knows what horrific acts he is committing.³⁸ In the passages from Plato’s *Republic* discussed above, there are varieties of intention and consciousness. The tyrant in 8.565e and the appetitive part of the tyrannical soul in 571d are conscious and eager to transgress the taboo against incest or cannibalism, even against their own kin. The chooser of tyranny in the myth of Er is unconscious in his choice of cannibalism, and horrified when he learns of it. The coherence of these examples lies in Plato’s premise of the tyranny within as the symbol and cause of the tyranny without. That part of the soul that is willing to eat or copulate with its own kin operates, on a figurative level, as a representation of the illimitable desire or greed that possesses the tyrant; but it also operates as the actual part of the tyrant’s soul that drives him to do those things. These two roles of the soul, the symbolic and the causal, in Plato’s representation of tyranny find their point of contact in the characters of Oedipus and Thyestes.

Plato’s failure to name these characters is consistent with his discussion of tragic representation in the *Republic*. Having dismissed tragedy as false representation, Plato does not then nominally employ two characters who are, to the Athenian mind, quintessentially tragic. Plato extracts these characters and their recognizable actions and characteristics from tragedy. The principal characteristic of Oedipus and Thyestes in both their tragic and Platonic representations is their ignorance and the choices that follow from it. The tragedies regard this ignorance from the aspect of Delphi, and Plato regards it from the perspective of Socrates. Oedipus and Thyestes are the best examples of the “tragic” aspect of ignorance. Tragedy represents their failure to know themselves as a human dilemma, not as an entirely moral failing,

37. OT 1329–32: Ἀπόλλων τάδ’ ἦν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι, / ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελὼν ἐμὰ τάδ’ ἐμὰ πάθεα. / ἔπαισε δ’ αὐτόχειρ νιν οὔτις, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ τλάμων (“Apollo, my friends—these things are Apollo, the one who worked out these my evil, evil pains. But no one struck the blow with his own hand, but I myself, wretched”). Oedipus takes responsibility for causing his blindness, though not for the events leading to that action.

38. The ignorance and subsequent horror of both Oedipus and Thyestes are significant for my argument in that they distinguish them from presumed barbarian practitioners of incest and cannibalism, who would be ignorant only of a sense of taboo, and would lack any horror. Plato’s attempt to locate a moral culpability within them would seem misplaced without their sense of wrong.

and their horror upon realizing their ignorance separates their actions from their intentions. Plato, however, reads these tragic figures Socratically as examples of souls out of control, ungoverned by self-knowledge and reason, and he attributes some responsibility to them for their ignorant and irrational state. Oedipus and Thyestes cannot serve Plato as “tragic heroes” in any sense, because they are led by the lowest parts of their souls, fear death, and will suffer in the next life—in short, they do not represent “the best and most beautiful life,” and are therefore not part of the “truest tragedy.” But they can serve him as examples of tyranny and the tyrannical soul, and he employs them, without naming them, to this end.

Plato obeys his injunction in *Republic* 2: when the tragedians represent the gods as they are—that is, as Plato thinks they are—their works are “legalized” for public consumption. This gives us some insight into the way Plato read the dramas that involved Oedipus and Thyestes, and possibly the specific Sophoclean versions, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and his lost *Thyestes* plays. In Plato’s interpretation, the gods are not responsible for the horrible actions that the characters commit, but the fault lies somewhere within them, unrecognized. At most, the god simply names the fault. Their ignorance does not acquit them in any way; rather, to Plato’s mind, it indicts them, being equivalent to a lack of virtue, on the one hand, and evidence that they are controlled by their ἐπιθυμητικά, on the other.

ADIOGENES OF SINOPE AND CYNICISM

As it is revealed in our sources, the Cynicism of Diogenes directs its attack more against the conventionalism of actual states than against the idealism of Plato’s Kallipolis. To pass from Plato’s *Republic* to the *Republic* of Diogenes, we travel through the figure of Antisthenes. The nature of the “succession” from Antisthenes to Diogenes is disputed and not to be solved in this study.³⁹ But Antisthenes apparently had an influence on Diogenes, directly or indirectly, and several connections between them are germane to this discussion. First, the Cynic opposition to Plato can be grounded in Antisthenes. Despite similarities between them, Antisthenes had a rivalry with Plato that was well documented in antiquity (and Plato himself may have been taking aim at Antisthenes in certain works).⁴⁰ But their similarities are important: Antisthenes reveals a hatred for tyranny and for the Athenian democracy (*SSR*² V A 71–76 and 4.403–5) in ways that imply he understood Plato’s evolution of the tyrannical man from the democratic man. The emperor Julian also joins Plato and Antisthenes, along with Xenophon, in their use of myths; for them “the writing of myths has been mixed in not cursorily,

39. There is still disagreement about the relationship between Antisthenes and Diogenes, though Diogenes is generally considered the true founder of Cynicism. However, there is no debate about the similarities between them. Cf. Goulet-Cazé 1986, 141–55; Long 1996, 31–41; and *SSR*² 4.223–33 for the lines of modern arguments on the origins of Cynicism.

40. Some scholars have seen this rivalry behind the discussion of animals and herding in the *Politics* (261c–268d) and in the *Republic* with the reference to the “city of pigs” (372d); cf. *SSR*² 4.405–7. For Antisthenes’ parallels between human and animal “government,” see, e.g., Arist. *Pol.* 1284a.

but with a certain harmony” as they “work out their definitions of ethics.”⁴¹ If present in these three students of Socrates, this “harmonious” introduction of myth into ethical discussions may have originated with Socrates himself.⁴²

Antisthenes, like other Socratics whose titles appear in the biographies of Diogenes Laertius, wrote works on a wide array of subjects, with literary, philosophical, and political focuses. His literary titles come largely from Homeric themes and characters, and these works seem to have been moralistically exegetical.⁴³ Antisthenes wrote a work titled *On Law, or On the Republic*, according to Diogenes Laertius, but its content is not known.⁴⁴ One of his doctrines, though not attributed to a specific context, would have been relevant in a work with such a title: “A wise man will serve as a citizen not according to the established laws, but according to the law of virtue.”⁴⁵ In an intriguing phrase, Diogenes Laertius joins Diogenes the Cynic, Crates, and Zeno in their debt to Antisthenes and adds that Antisthenes “himself laid the foundations of their republic.”⁴⁶ For the purpose of tracing possible developments and responses between Plato and later writers who considered themselves Socratic, Antisthenes provides intriguing evidence of disagreement that may still have taken the “Platonic” forms of mythography, allegory, and appropriation of tragedy.

Fewer writings are attributed to Diogenes the Cynic than to Antisthenes, but Diogenes Laertius lists a *Republic* and seven tragedies among the works

41. Jul. *Or.* 7, 216D–217A = SSR² V A 44: ἐπεὶ καὶ Πλάτωνι πολλὰ μεμνησθὲν περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου πραγμάτων θεολογοῦντι καὶ πρό γε τούτου τῷ τῆς Καλλιόπης, Ἀντισθένης δὲ καὶ Ξενοφῶντι καὶ αὐτῷ Πλάτωνι πραγματευομένοις ἠθικάς τινας ὑποθέσεις οὐ παρέργως ἀλλὰ μετὰ τινος ἐμμελείας ἢ τῶν μύθων ἐγκαταμέμικται γραφῇ, οὓς σ' ἐχρῆν, εἴπερ ἐβούλου μιμούμενος, ἀντὶ μὲν Ἡρακλέους μεταλαμβάνειν Περσέως ἢ Θησέως τινὸς ὄνομα καὶ τὸν ἀντισθένηϊον τύπον ἐγχαράττειν . . . (“Many myths have been fashioned by Plato as he discoursed on the affairs in Hades, and before him by Orpheus, the son of Calliope; and by Antisthenes and Xenophon and by Plato himself, as they work out their definitions of ethics, the writing of myths has been mixed in not cursorily, but with a certain harmony. These you ought to have done, if you wished to imitate, and in place of the name of Heracles you ought to have substituted the name of some Perseus or Theseus, and followed closely Antisthenes’ pattern . . .”).

42. Julian does not cite Socrates as a “mythologizing” philosopher in *Or.* 7, but an anecdote of Aelian (*VH* 2.11 = SSR² V A 16) is interesting in this context. Seeing the ravages of the Thirty against noble and wealthy Athenian citizens, Socrates says to Antisthenes: μὴ τί σοι μεταμέλει ὅτι μέγα καὶ σεμνὸν οὐδὲν ἐγενόμεθα ἐν τῷ βίῳ καὶ τοιοῦτοι οἶους ἐν τῇ τραγωδίᾳ τοὺς μονάρχους ὀρώμεν, Ἀτρεΐας τε ἐκείνους καὶ Θυέστας καὶ Ἀγαμέμνονας καὶ Αἰγίσθους; οὗτοι μὲν γὰρ ἀποσφαττόμενοι καὶ ἐκτραγωδοῦμενοι καὶ πονηρὰ δαίπνα δειπνοῦντες [καὶ ἐσθιοντες] ἐκάστοτε ἐκκαλύπτονται· οὐδεὶς δὲ οὕτως ἐγένετο τολμηρὸς οὐδὲ ἀναίσχυντος τραγωδίας ποιητής, ὥστε εἰσαγαγεῖν εἰς δῶμα ἀποσφαττόμενον χορόν (“Do you regret at all that we’ve become nothing serious or worthy of respect like those monarchs we see in tragedy, those figures of Atræus, Thyestes, Agamemnon, and Aegisthus? Those are revealed each time being slaughtered, decked out in tragic pomp, dining on unholy food—but no poet of tragedy has become so daring and shameless so as to introduce into his drama the slaughter of a *choros*”). The tendency here, however, is antimythologizing: Socrates sees a contrast rather than a parallel between tragedy and life under the Thirty.

43. For example, one of Antisthenes’ works is reported with the triple title *On the Use of Wine, or On Drunkenness, or On the Cyclops*. Cf. SSR² V A 185–97 and SSR² 4.331–46 for references to Antisthenes’ interpretations of Homer, which seem to have been allegorical. Cf. Xen. *Symp.* 3.5–6, in which Antisthenes derides “the wretched race of rhapsodes”; Socrates then adds that they know all the words, but not the “allegorical meanings” (ὁπνοίας). Also cf. Dio Chrys. (*Or.* 53.4–5 = SSR² V A 194), who claims that Zeno distinguished between what Homer wrote “according to opinion” (κατὰ δόξαν) and “according to truth” (κατὰ ἀλήθειαν), a distinction that Antisthenes had made before him.

44. Cf. SSR² 4.245 for this work. Antisthenes expressed some of his political thought in his works *Alcibiades*, *Archelaus*, *Cyrus*, and the *Politics*. For a study of this thought, cf. SSR² 4.403–11.

45. D. L. 6.11: καὶ τὸν σοφὸν οὐ κατὰ τοὺς κατέμεικτους νόμους πολιτεύεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀρετῆς.

46. D. L. 6.15: αὐτὸς ὑποθέμενος τῇ πολιτείᾳ τὰ θεμέλια.

of Diogenes the Cynic.⁴⁷ One of the tragedies bears the title *Oedipus*, another, the title *Thyestes*. Some of the content of this *Thyestes* we are told: “nothing was unholy in the partaking of human flesh, as is clear from foreign customs; and he said also that for the one with right reason all things are in every other thing and through every other thing . . . as he makes clear in his *Thyestes*” (D. L. 6.73).⁴⁸ Diogenes Laertius gives some examples of this interpenetration and blending that involve food; he claims that Diogenes considered meat a constituent part of bread, and bread of vegetables, and by extension, everything a part of everything else. There is some similarity with the philosophies of Anaxagoras and Empedocles.⁴⁹ The latter famously taught that the combinations of divine elements in all living things made them kin, but the moral conclusion that is drawn is the polar opposite of that of Diogenes. The belief that a human element existed in animals prevented Empedocles from eating them, thus underscoring the taboo of cannibalism.⁵⁰ The belief that a human element pervades all things, as all things pervade the human element, sanctioned even cannibalism for the Cynics. It is not clear how or why this philosophy was expressed in tragedy, especially since Diogenes “was so opposed to the natural sciences.”⁵¹ In all probability, the scientific reasoning was not worked out in detail, but Diogenes borrowed bits from other philosophers to accomplish his goal, which was to attack every convention and taboo. In the *Thyestes*, that convention and taboo was cannibalism.

It is not difficult to imagine reasons for Diogenes’ appropriation of tragedy. Diogenes must have assumed that the actions of tragedy would evoke a sense of horror in any Greek audience, just as Plato seemed to have assumed. Diogenes, however, evoked the horror to contradict it. Diogenes stressed that

47. D. L. 6.80. In 6.73, Diogenes Laertius expresses doubt about Diogenes’ authorship of any of the tragedies; he offers that they may have been written by Diogenes’ friend and disciple Philiscus of Aegina or by a certain Pasiphon, but apparently in accord with Diogenes’ philosophy. The authenticity of these tragedies, and of all other writings of Diogenes the Cynic, was called into question by many, including Stoic philosophers and the emperor Julian (cf. *Or.* 7, 210D, 212A). The scholarly opinions are best summarized by Goulet-Cazé (1986, 85–90, and 2003, 11–27), who comes down firmly on the side of authenticity, as do most scholars. The testimony of Philodemus is compelling; he believes that the tragedies and the *Republic* are works of Diogenes, and says that Cleanthes and Chrysippus accepted them as well. Cf. also Marti 1947, 4–5; *TrGF* 1, 88 T 1–4 Snell; and *SSR*² 4.475–84 for the ancient sources and scholarship.

48. There is some controversy regarding the full text of this passage. For discussion, cf. Gigante 1962, 130–36, and *SSR*² 4.479–81.

49. Anaxagoras is the apparent source of the thought that “all things are in all things” (καὶ οὕτως ἂν εἴη ἐν παντί πάντα· οὐδὲ χωρὶς ἔστιν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ πάντα παντός μοῖραν μετέχει, B 6 DK = T 481 Kirk-Raven-Schofield, *Presocratic Philosophers*, from Simplicius, in *Phys.* 164.26); Empedocles, of the theory (not included in the quotation above) of pores and effluences that allow mixture and interpenetration (cf., e.g., Pl. *Meno* 76c). Anaxagoras and Empedocles were roughly contemporaries, but ancient sources and modern scholarship suggest that Anaxagoras was responding to Empedocles, perhaps by “correcting” his thought on elements and mixture. Aristotle, for example, compares and contrasts the two as those who “say that ‘what is’ is both one and many” (*Ph.* 1.4, 187a22–187b7). Of Diogenes’ use of Anaxagoras, cf. Giannantoni ad *SSR*² 4.481: “Diogene trasferisce sul piano etico la dimostrazione ‘fisica’ di Anassagora, facendone il fondamento della scelta di cibi ‘semplici e frugali,’ della critica del tabù dell’ antropofagia e quindi della riconferma del suo concetto di autosufficienza. . . .” For a fuller and more positive interpretation of the Cynic appropriation of Anaxagoras and Empedocles, cf. Moles 1996, 112.

50. Empedocles added to the horror of cannibalism by saying that fathers were slaughtering sons changed in form, and that children were eating the flesh of the parents they loved (cf. B 137 DK = T 415, Kirk-Raven-Schofield, *Presocratic Philosophers*, from Sext. *Emp. Math.* 9.129).

51. Dudley 1937, 30.

virtue was more than adherence to convention, and he chose the stark conventional lines of morality, humanity, and civilization examined in tragedy in order to assert a virtue beyond them.

Diogenes Laertius' statement about Diogenes' *Thyestes* addresses its content but answers no questions about its presentation. A passage from Dio Chrysostom may address some of the questions about presentation. The Cynics cited incest alongside cannibalism as their most shocking examples of permissibility. Their paradigm for incest was Oedipus, and we have a Cynic interpretation of Oedipus and his actions. Diogenes the Cynic is a character in the tenth discourse of Dio Chrysostom; in his ridicule of the Delphic oracle, Diogenes speaks of Oedipus as a fool:

There is one thing, however, I forgot to say about Oedipus: He did not go to Delphi to consult the oracle but fell in with Teiresias and suffered great calamities from that seer's divination on account of his own ignorance. For he knew that he had consorted with his own mother and that he had children by her; and subsequently, when perhaps he should have concealed this or made it legal in Thebes, in the first place he let everybody know the fact and then became greatly wrought up, lifted up his voice and complained that he was father and brother at once of the same children, and husband and son of the same woman. But domestic fowls do not object to such relationships, nor dogs, nor any ass, nor do the Persians, although they pass for the aristocracy of Asia. And in addition to all this, Oedipus blinded himself and then wandered about blind, as though he could not wander while still keeping his sight.⁵²

The tragic possibility of an Oedipus who knows more than the Sophoclean Oedipus bears some correlation to the Oedipus of Seneca, who is aware from the opening of the play that he is somehow the cause of the plague.⁵³ Berthe Marti assumes that this passage reveals the way that Diogenes himself produced it on the stage. If so, the last sentence quoted above reveals that Diogenes is critical of that plot and presentation. We can imagine that one of the characters pointed out that foreigners and domestic animals do not share the same moral principles, or that such observation could have fallen to the chorus (we might again think of Seneca's indirect but often moral choruses); but if it were not said explicitly, how would the audience have understood that Diogenes disapproved of Oedipus' grief?⁵⁴ It certainly seems unlikely that Diogenes could have produced an Oedipus untroubled by his situation, or a Thyestes happily eating his children. A much later source, the emperor Julian, was a great admirer of Diogenes, and sided with those who attributed the tragedies to a different author because of their "excess of vile speech."⁵⁵ If Julian is a reliable source, he indicates that part of the effect of Diogenes' plays may have been the frank description of the

52. Dio Chrys. 10.29. The translation is that of J. W. Cohoon in the Loeb series (1932).

53. Cf. Sen. *Oedipus* 36 *fecimus caelum nocens*.

54. This is the problem with the observation that "[p]resumably the point of the [*Thyestes*] was that Thyestes incurred no religious defilement because he was unintentionally tricked into eating his own children; and of the [*Oedipus*], that Oedipus could not have been defiled by unintentional incest" (Dawson 1992, 144). He does regard these tragedies as "parodies," however, not as "real" (1992, 144 and 150).

55. Jul. *Or.* 6.210C = *TrGF* 1, 88 T3: ὑπερβολὴν ἀρρητοῦργίας. There is some question about the tragedies that were available to the emperor Julian; cf. Marti 1947, 5.

crimes (which for the Greeks were “unspeakable”) or their actual display on stage in some fashion. Marti overstates the case when she says there is “no doubt as to the character of the tragedies,” but she also imagines a substantially different work from classical tragedy: “They presumably consisted of long tirades and tedious philosophical dialogues, relieved only by the dramatic action of the legend and the vividness of Diogenes’ style and the addition of numerous coarse jokes and sarcasms.”⁵⁶

It is significant that Diogenes customarily referred to himself as one who had met with “tragic curses”—homeless, exile, poor, a beggar—but that he could “oppose courage to chance, nature to law, and reason to suffering.”⁵⁷ In other words, Diogenes does not present himself taking delight in his difficulties, but able to find elements within himself, for which he is responsible, to place in opposition to the “tragic” externalities of his life. I offer this as evidence that Diogenes need not have trivialized every tragic action, either by advocating it, or by lessening its weight. Rather, with himself as tragic figure, Diogenes posited a virtue and knowledge that outweighed tragic circumstances—and presumably he could have done so in his tragedies with his tragic characters.⁵⁸

The examples given in the paragraphs above provide strong support that tragedy, rather than ethnography or sophistic inquiry, is the source for Diogenes’ use of incest and cannibalism. Even though Dio Chrysostom does have Diogenes interpose the Persians as examples of the conventionality of incest, the character who represents the horror of incest is Oedipus, who, like Thyestes, is Greek. Likewise, Diogenes refers to homelessness, chance, and suffering not as mere states of perception, but as real conditions that cause anguish for the unwise. Thyestes and Oedipus can serve as representatives of such anguish, however unwise Diogenes might think it, while foreigners for whom those actions are native customs cannot. For the Greek world in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., tragedy is the principal public articulation of the social and religious conventions that Diogenes attempted to undermine. For this reason, I argue, Diogenes not only wrote his own tragedies but used the most familiar characters from tragedy as his examples.

The actual plots that Diogenes employed cannot be known, but in an important passage, Philodemus says that the topics of the tragedies were the same as those of his *Republic*: “In his *Atreus* and *Oedipus*, and in the *Philiscus*, Diogenes himself records most of the things shameful and unholy found in the *Republic* as his doctrines.”⁵⁹ The *Atreus* of Diogenes is not mentioned by

56. Marti 1947, 7.

57. D. L. 6.38: εἰώθει δὲ λέγειν τὰς τραγικὰς ἀρὰς αὐτῷ συννητηκέναι· . . . ἔφασκε δ’ ἀντιτιθέναι τύχῃ μὲν θάρσος, νόμῳ δὲ φύσιν, πάθει δὲ λόγον.

58. Diogenes’ “tragic” self-presentation may also be a response to Plato’s presentation of Socrates (cf. n. 16 above, with reference to *Phd.* 115a).

59. Philodemus *De Stoicis* 16.29–17.4 = *TrGF* 1, 88 T2: αὐτὸς θ’ ὁ Διογένης ἐν τε τῷ Ἀτρεῖ καὶ τῷ Οἰδίποδι καὶ τῷ Φιλίσκῳ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν κατὰ τὴν Πολιτείαν αἰσχροῶν καὶ ἀνοσίων ὡς ἀρέσκοντα καταχωρίζει. I omit the textual symbols indicating the lacunae in the papyrus; this reading is quite secure, since no more than two letters are missing at any place except at the restoration of “Philiscus.” The translation is somewhat problematic, especially regarding the word ἀρέσκοντα. Dorandi translates it as the participle “pleasing” (“lo stesso Diogene nell’ *Atreo* e nell’ *Edipo* e nel *Filisco* registra come gradite la maggior

Diogenes Laertius, but it is presumably the same play as the *Thyestes*; the word ἀνθρωποφαγία appears in a tattered line just before the passage mentioning the plays. Of Diogenes' *Republic* very little is known, and there is still some doubt that he wrote one. Philodemus in the first century B.C.E. is aware that some deny Diogenes' authorship of the *Republic*, but says that the Stoics Cleanthes and Chrysippus were familiar with it as the work of Diogenes.⁶⁰ The evidence of Philodemus argues for authenticity. If Philodemus is correct in saying the *Republic* contained the same issues as the tragedies, specifically the *Atrous/Thyestes* and the *Oedipus*, then we may assume that the *Republic* discussed the permissibility of incest and cannibalism for the Cynic sage. Whether this permissibility was introduced by way of the negative example of characters who considered themselves polluted by these actions, as I have suggested for the tragedies, is unknown. In a nondramatic context, Diogenes could have expounded arguments from physics and natural law that could only have been adumbrated in the tragic medium.

There is little evidence for Diogenes' *Republic*, and none for the fact that he wrote it in opposition to Plato's *Republic*, though Diogenes Laertius records antipathy between them (6.24–26, 40–41). The title of Diogenes' work, however, certainly must have invited comparisons. In such a light, the presence of incest and cannibalism in Diogenes' *Republic* may be seen as a response to Plato's descriptions of the tyrannical soul and the chooser of tyranny in the myth of Er. Incest and cannibalism were not advocated as practical actions for the sage, but put forward as actions that could not sully a wise man's virtue. Diverging more from Plato, Diogenes may have suggested that such actions have no correlation to unruly desires or to any internal quality. Those actions do not indicate a lack of virtue; only a human's inability to put virtue, nature, and reason in opposition to them would indicate such a lack.

For the purposes of this paper, the society that surrounds the sage is the most important distinction between Diogenes' political philosophy, and therefore presumably his *Republic*, and the *Republic* of Zeno. Diogenes never presumes an ideal human society, and therefore his sage is only imagined in the context of existing, not utopian, society: "The Cynics . . . welcomed the conception of the philosopher as the odd man out. The wise man not only

parte delle sozzure e delle empietà contenute nella *Politeia*" 1982, 108), but the word is frequently used substantively and means "prevailing opinions" or "doctrines" in a doxographical context (cf., e.g., D. L. 6.103). The choice of the word ἀρεσκοντα must be Philodemus', as is the characterization of the tragic actions—presumably incest and cannibalism—as shameful and unholy, which would not be Diogenes' view. My translation of the text concurs with that of Goulet-Cazé (2003, 26): "Diogène lui-même, dans l'*Atrée*, l'*Oedipe*, et le *Philiscos*, consigne comme ses opinions la plupart des choses honteuses et impies qui sont dans la *Politeia*."

60. *De Stoicis* 15.21–31 (for Cleanthes and Chrysippus) and 17.10–22 (for the denial of some of Diogenes' authorship). For most scholars, the passage of Philodemus, and the fact that Stoics were familiar with it, argue strongly for authenticity. A handy summary of sources and scholarship on this issue is found in Erskine 1990, p. 27, n. 47, and more recently, Goulet-Cazé summarizes what is known about the content of Diogenes' *Republic* (2003, 33–38).

does, but should, stand apart from society.”⁶¹ Cynicism, in other words, is antinomian, and its political principles are negative and destructive rather than constructive. The permissibility of incest and cannibalism in Diogenes’ philosophy fits his general attack on all societal and religious conventions and laws, and has no connection to an ideal state inhabited only by the wise. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could. But this is exactly the problem we face when we turn to Zeno’s *Republic*.

ZENO OF CITIUM AND STOICISM

Zeno’s *Republic* is his most cited work and one of the most influential documents of Hellenistic philosophy.⁶² Unfortunately, there is little to work with, and its contents invited censure by detractors and rationalization by proponents of Stoicism, both of which color the sparse information that we have.⁶³ We do not know the date or structure of the work. Zeno’s *Republic* seems to have been a single book, and we are told that Zeno “wrote against Plato’s *Republic*.”⁶⁴ Some of the doctrines reported in Zeno’s *Republic*, such as the “sharing” of spouses, are taken from Plato. Scholars have differed on the nature and extent of Zeno’s state,⁶⁵ whether its character was more anti-Platonic or pro-Cynic, whether the state described contained only the wise, or both wise and foolish citizens, whether it was an actual locality and government or simply the loose fellowship of sages, wherever they lived on earth, whether it was regarded as a real possibility or not. Presently the weight of scholarship comes down on the side of an actual though ideal community composed only of the wise, but not without dissent.⁶⁶ The likely presence of incest and cannibalism in Zeno’s *Republic*, and thus in its imagined republic, has traditionally been taken as an indication of its pro-Cynic nature, and with the exception of Vander Waerdt, whose quotation appears in the first paragraph of this paper, none of the other scholars who try to reconstruct Zeno’s *Republic* attempts any explanation other than Cynic influence for these actions. Though the nature of the evidence allows nothing more than conjecture, I suggest that incest and cannibalism both appeared in Zeno’s

61. Baldry 1959, 14. Erskine makes the same point in greater detail to emphasize the Platonic roots of Zeno’s *Republic* in opposition to its oft-cited Cynic inheritance (1990, 27–30).

62. The evidence for Zeno’s *Republic* can be found in *SVF* 1.259–71. For recent considerations of its content and importance see Baldry 1959; Erskine 1990, 9–42; Schofield 1991; Vander Waerdt 1994b, 272–308; and Goulet-Cazé 2003, 38–60.

63. Erskine (1990, 3–5) and Goulet-Cazé (2003, 61–72) give good accounts of the problems of the evidence.

64. Plut. *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1034e–f = *SVF* 1.260.

65. For some basic statements on these differences, see Baldry (1959, 3); Schofield (1991, 22), who identifies three possible approaches to Zeno’s “principal political proposal”: (1) antinomianism, (2) revisionism, and (3) communism; and Erskine (1990, 18–20).

66. Vander Waerdt, for example, argues that Zeno never intended “to describe a political community whose practical realization he considers possible but rather the way of life that characterizes the first rational community, in which the wise share by virtue of their rationality” (1994b, 294). One of his supports for this interpretation is Plutarch’s statement that Zeno wrote the *Republic* “as if having a dream or image of a philosopher’s well-regulated state” (*De Alex. fort.* 329b = *SVF* 1.292); Vander Waerdt also notes Socrates’ position on the realizability of their republic in Plato’s work, when he calls Kallipolis “that dream of ours” (*Resp.* 443b). The possibility of a world community as the ideal state, in which gods and humans are citizens, finds its *locus classicus* in Sen. *De otio* 4.1–2, but Seneca’s cosmic city does not seem to exclude anyone.

Republic, as our sources suggest, with at least implicit reference to the exemplary figures of Oedipus and Thyestes, and that Zeno incorporated these “tragic” actions as an element of his opposition to Plato. By extension, the presence of these actions in the ideal state calls into question the exclusive nature and location of that state as argued by some scholars.

It seems certain that Zeno controverted the accepted Greek attitude towards incest and cannibalism, even though the evidence for this comes from those hostile to Stoicism. Only in one source, Philodemus’ *De Stoicis* (16.20–25), does cannibalism seem directly attributed to the *Republic*. Diogenes Laertius records Zeno as saying that the wise man “will even taste human flesh under the stress of special circumstances”;⁶⁷ although he does not attribute that statement to a particular work, he quotes from the *Republic* in the same paragraph. Another source confirms Zeno’s justification of cannibalism and mentions fathers and children cooking and eating each other.⁶⁸ Zeno’s advocacy of sharing wives is expressly attributed to his *Republic*.⁶⁹ Zeno is also said to have “permitted” incest; though the work or works that contain that teaching are not named, some scholars assume that it appeared in the *Republic*.⁷⁰ Zeno’s critics usually charge that he was advocating such action, but it seems that he merely allows them “under the stress of special circumstances,” and only to the sage.

In a community of sages where marriage and childbearing were promiscuous, the possibility of incest would be quite real. In Book 4 of his *Republic*, Plato recognizes this as well and makes provisions to avoid intergenerational, though not brother-sister, incest (*Resp.* 461b8–e4).⁷¹ It might be thought that

67. D. L. 7.121: γεύσεσθαι τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων σαρκῶν κατὰ περίστασιν.

68. Theophilus, *SVF* 1.254; but in this passage it is the children who eat the fathers. Philodemus (19.23–20.3) also mentions eating the dead “a banchetto” (Dorandi’s translation of the hapax legomenon τὸ συγκατασιτεῖσθαι, 19.25). Philodemus appears to connect cannibalism, burial, and sacrifice, but the tattered state of the papyrus where this passage occurs, as well as his use of a hapax legomenon, obscure his thought. See Dorandi’s comments on the passage for parallels to the vocabulary and content.

69. D. L. 7.131, 133 = *SVF* 1.269. The first passage mentions the doctrine as Plato’s as well, though some scholars consider that a later addition to the text. Chrysippus advocated the same in his *Republic* (D. L. 7.131 = *SVF* 3.728) and said that there is marriage/sexual relations (συνέρχεσθαι) with mothers, daughters, and sons (D. L. 7.188 = *SVF* 3.744).

70. *SVF* 1.256, which includes three related passages from Sextus Empiricus; cf. Erskine (1990, 14): “Zeno, probably in his *Republic*, had also allowed incest”; and Vander Waerdt (1994b, 300): “The doctrine of ‘special circumstances’ provides the context in which to consider the place of cannibalism in Zeno’s *Republic*. Zeno’s critics took this practice—as well as incest, not specifically attested for the *Republic* but probably treated there—to be recommendations to follow in ordinary practice.”

71. Plato thus relaxes the Athenian attitude that brother-sister unions were incestuous. Cf. *Ar. Nub.* 1370–71 and *Ran.* 1081 for outrage expressed at brother-sister incest in some of Euripides’ plays, such as his *Aeolus*; Xen. *Cyr.* 5.1.10, where φόβος and νόμος are sufficient to prevent sexual desire for a sister; and Plut. *Cim.* 4.5–7 for rumors about Cimón and his sister Elpinice. Because such incest was not unknown among the gods (Zeus and Hera) or among the Persians (cf. Hdt. 3.89 for Cambyzes and Atossa), Humphries argues that “[l]es Grecs n’étaient pas convaincus que la tabou de l’inceste fût une loi universelle” (1994, 31), citing Xen. *Mem.* 4.4.19–23, where the sophist Hippias disagrees with Socrates and distinguishes the prohibition against incest from other “unwritten laws,” because some transgress it. The passage from Plato, however, suggests that he considers incest not simply against Greek convention, but against divine approval; hence brother-sister marriages in Kallipolis must be sanctioned by the Delphic oracle, in another quiet allusion to Oedipus. In the *Laws* (838a–c), in fact, the Athenian Stranger states that no law is needed against incest, since “. . . most human beings, however lawless (παρνόμους) they may be, nevertheless punctiliously refrain from intercourse with beautiful persons, and do so not involuntarily, but with the greatest possible willingness. . . . when the beautiful person is one’s brother or sister. . . . In fact, among the many there isn’t the slightest desire for this sort of intercourse” (trans. T. Pangle).

Zeno's permission of incest is simply going a step further than Plato in following through on the implications of the community of spouses.⁷² I suggest that Zeno was responding not to these "practical" aspects of incest that appear in Book 4 of Plato's *Republic*, but to the moral and psychological image of incest that appears in Book 9, where incest is one of the characteristics of the tyrannical soul, and where Oedipus seems to be the mythological exemplar. Plato does not bother to reconcile the potential act of incest in Book 4, which seems less horrible should it occur, with the psychological image of incest in Book 9. In other words, in Kallipolis the horror of incest seems diminished by the practical advantages of such social structures, including eugenic engineering and the generalization of filial affection. Incest loses none of its horror, however, as the expression of the desires of the tyrannical soul.

As I argued above, Oedipus serves as one of the mythological allusions behind Plato's tyrannical soul in the ninth book of his *Republic*, and Zeno's use of the same exemplar gains significance in counterpoint, as Zeno argues for a reduced or removed sense of horror. When Sextus Empiricus attacks Zeno's advocacy of incest, he cites Zeno's use of Oedipus and Jocasta:

And with regard to honoring one's parents, one might adduce the cases of incest which they harp upon. Thus Zeno, after stating the facts about Jocasta and Oedipus, asserts that there was nothing shameful in his rubbing (τρίψαι) his mother. "If she had been ailing and he had done her good by rubbing her body with his hands, it had not been shameful; what shame was it, then, if he stopped her grief and gave her joy by rubbing her with another member, and begat noble children by his mother?"⁷³

Sextus does not attribute this passage to Zeno's *Republic*. The mention of the production of noble children, however, gives an additional connection between this passage and the themes of that work. This passage bears a similarity to the Cynic version of Oedipus given by Dio Chrysostom and cited above. Like that passage, this appropriation does not suggest an alternative presentation of the myth, but a revisionist interpretation of it. In other words, Oedipus is not transformed into a model of the wise man, but his actions could be imagined in a different light than that in which tragedy—and Plato—portray them.⁷⁴

The case of cannibalism provides additional support for the argument that we should read the role of incest in Zeno's teaching primarily in a moral and psychological light rather than in a civically "practical" light, despite the assertions of some of our sources that Zeno was advocating such action.

72. This is the interpretation of Alesse (1998, 31–32).

73. *Adversus ethicos* 191 (*Math* 11.191 = *SVF* 1.256). The translation is that of R. G. Bury from the Loeb edition. Sextus has the same account in his *Outlines* 3.246 (cf. also 3.205).

74. In Sextus' presentation of Zeno's words, Zeno appears to attribute knowledge and intention to Oedipus: he committed incest to prevent his mother's grief and give her noble children. Sextus would prefer this to be the case, and I assume that this is more Sextus than Zeno. I use the admittedly distant example of the oration of Dio Chrysostom, in which Diogenes offers other potential interpretations of Oedipus' actions that mitigate his guilt, but that do not serve as the intentions of Oedipus himself; if they did, Diogenes would seem to be exculpating Oedipus, which he certainly is not doing. Perhaps Zeno's example of Oedipus and Jocasta worked similarly in its original context, as a past contrary-to-fact condition.

The unintentional act of cannibalism seems more remote than that of incest in a community sharing spouses (though looser observances of burial practices could, I suppose, cause problems). In the sources that mention cannibalism, the act is far from accidental. According to some writers, children are practically exhorted to lead their parents to the sacrificial altar, to boil them and eat them; if anyone refrains from doing so, he himself should be eaten.⁷⁵ The myth of Thyestes often represents a nexus between cannibalism and sacrifice, but the act of sacrifice is done intentionally. Some sources also add the funerary dimension and represent the Stoics as teaching that the dead should be eaten rather than buried. It has proven virtually impossible to take these sources at face value and to incorporate them into the other fragments of Stoic political writing; most scholars make no effort to do so. One scholar who focuses exclusively on “la nécrophagie cynique et stoïcienne” addresses few other aspects of their philosophies and does not attend to the original context of the quotations or to the hostility of the sources. From such a perspective, the conclusion about the sage’s life is clear: “ce personnage supra-humain pratique d’ailleurs l’inceste aussi bien que le cannibalisme.”⁷⁶

This, I contend, is not the way to read the sources hostile to Stoicism. Those authors who present cannibalism and incest as the sage’s intentional actions are misrepresenting the Stoics; we should make this assumption even if the original contexts of the Stoics are impossible to reconstruct. It is important to recall Diogenes Laertius’ formulation: the sage will taste human flesh according to “special circumstance.”⁷⁷ To turn the phrase around, in normal circumstances, a sage will not eat human flesh or, presumably, participate in incestuous relationships. Incest and cannibalism are not actions that are in general accordance with Nature; they are not “preferred indifferents.” A more conventional example of a normal state that accords with Nature, which special circumstance may nevertheless vitiate, is health. In some special circumstances (service to a tyrant is sometimes adduced), illness may be more in accordance with Nature and providence than health is.⁷⁸ If we view incest and cannibalism in this light, as Diogenes Laertius indicates, then we are unlikely to conclude that this is normal practice for the sage or positive legislation in the ideal republic of the Stoics.

It remains to consider what sort of “special circumstances” would render incest and cannibalism as actions according with Nature, and how such circumstances could arise within the ideal city, if it is composed entirely of sages. A community of shared spouses could lead to incest—as it inevitably

75. Plut. *De esu carniū* 997e = SVF 3.749; Theoph. *Ad Autol.* 3.5 = SVF 3.750. Relevant here is Herodotus’ illustration of the maxim νόμος βασιλεύς: Darius introduces Greeks, who had previously claimed that they could never be induced to eat the bodies of their dead parents, to members of an Indian tribe from Callatiae who react with horror at the idea of cremating their parents instead of eating them (3.38).

76. Daraki 1982, 157. Daraki approaches the material structurally, and to her credit notices the connection with tragedy, though in a rather perfunctory way; the sage, like the tragic hero, combines “les traits du bestial et du divin” (1982, 158).

77. D. L. 7.121. For discussion of the meaning and role of “special circumstances,” see Vander Waerdt 1994b, 298–301.

78. Epictetus *Diss.* 2.6.9 = SVF 3.161; Sext. Emp. *Adversus ethicos* 64–67 = *Math.* 11.64–67 = SVF 1.361.

would in Kallipolis, despite the preventive measures advocated by Socrates in *Republic* 5—but such a community would not be a “special circumstance” if it were the instituted norm.⁷⁹ Cannibalism is more difficult to imagine. In the myths of Thyestes and Tereus, the human flesh is served to them intentionally and maliciously; they are ignorant of what they eat and then made aware. We can imagine “special circumstances,” such as the siege of a city, or closer to our age, an airplane crash in the Andes, that would potentially lead to intentional cannibalism.⁸⁰ To our knowledge, such examples did not circulate in the Hellenistic world; none of our sources mentions anything like them. These examples enter the record later, with an exculpatory force that seems alien to Diogenes and Zeno.

Without the operation of deceit and disguise, or of profound ignorance, at least, there are few if any circumstances, or institutions analogous to the sharing of spouses, that would potentially lead to cannibalism. In a city composed only of sages, there should be no such internal malice and deceit, and precious little ignorance. If we assume that there is any ignorance at all, then the possibility of cannibalism, actual or metaphorical (as in the case of Plato’s tyrannical soul), suggests that there are others present in Zeno’s ideal state whose virtue is not perfect, even if all its citizens are sages. George Boys-Stone makes the same observation: “. . . while all *citizens* of Zeno’s state are virtuous, this does not mean that all *members* of the state will be virtuous.”⁸¹ Since the citizens are those who participate in the government of the state, they are the ones who determine the character of the state, which will be like their own characters. But if others of imperfect virtue are present in the state, even if they are “moral progressors,” then every action that occurs within the state will not be in perfect accord with Nature and reason. What is the sage’s reaction when she or he is the object of such an imperfect or irrational action?

I propose that Zeno uses Oedipus and Thyestes as the extreme answers to that question, and that he does so not generically but in specific response to Plato. Even if the sage is the practitioner of perfect virtue, she or he may still be the object or recipient of vicious acts done by irrational people. (Even the example of intentional cannibalism during a siege supports this conclu-

79. Of course, promiscuity is never an end in itself. Epictetus explains that fidelity is a distinctive quality of humans. When a philosopher is caught in adultery and asks whether all women are not to be held in common, Epictetus offers the analogy of a theater, which belongs to all the citizens—but no one should turn another out of his seat (*Diss.* 2.4). From this example, it appears that Epictetus is accepting marriage as an institution in the world as it is, not in an ideal sense. Epictetus might have had difficulty imagining male and female relationships even in an ideal world; see Wöhrle 2002, 137–40.

80. The example of a city siege leading to cannibalism appears in the Roman world, most famously with Saguntum in Spain, though it seems to have been untrue and a later addition to the story. The Saguntines, besieged and destroyed by Hannibal in 219 B.C.E., did not resort to cannibalism, according to the historical sources (Polyb. 3.17, Livy 21.7–16), nor do they in Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 1.271–2.698). However, other authors do make the claim: Petron. (*Sat.* 141), who also mentions Numantia and Petelia; and Juv. (15.113–15), who also mentions the Vascones.

81. Boys-Stone 1998, pp. 172–73, n. 14. Boys-Stone, however, goes less far than I think we should. He is not suggesting that there are “the wicked” in Zeno’s ideal state, only those who have not yet arrived at the state of perfect virtue: “Children, in particular, cannot be virtuous . . .” (p. 173, n. 14).

sion.) It is important for both Plato and Zeno that the sage's virtue not be compromised by the vice of others. The relevance of Oedipus and Thyestes is clear: their actions were undertaken in ignorance, but nevertheless those actions thrust them outside the boundaries of human and civic life. By way of solving that conundrum of action and passion, Plato implicitly attributes responsibility to Oedipus and Thyestes. In the *Republic*, cannibalism is first a psychological act, then enacted; the tyrannic soul "refrains from no food" and then the chooser of the greatest tyranny is fated to eat his children. Plato apparently understands the tragic acts of Oedipus and Thyestes as realizations of their souls' desires, restrained neither by their rationality nor by the words of Delphi. Zeno necessarily differs from Plato in his understanding of the construct of the soul, and he offers a different connection between one's actions and one's soul. He also dissociates the substance of true virtue from obedience to oracular or legal constraints on conduct.

Although Plato regards virtue as a state of soul (a form of knowledge of reality as well as a psychological balance), he still seems to view certain actions as virtuous or vicious.⁸² Zeno and Stoicism offer a different position, which concerns right actions (καθήκοντα) and perfectly right actions (κατορθώματα). Whatever the sage does will be done perfectly rightly, for that is the tenor of her or his soul. This perfect rightness can certainly involve killing or suicide, which fall into the "special circumstances" category of actions in accordance with Nature.⁸³ Therefore, laws proscribing murder, theft, rape, or any violent or unjust action are unnecessary for sages. The sages' right reason, perfectly attuned to Nature, serves in place of, and more perfectly than, any positive law.

To return to Vander Waerdt's initial claim, that incest and cannibalism serve as "test cases of moral prohibitions . . . without exception": I agree, and I would add that these moral prohibitions were not chosen at random, but were chosen with the specific mythic exemplars of Oedipus and Thyestes in mind; I propose that these figures were chosen not simply as the best known of all mythic exempla available, but in response to Plato's apparent allusion to them in the actions of tyrants and of the tyrannical soul. I also posit that incest and cannibalism were actions permitted even in the Stoic ideal state; if true, the possibility emerges that Zeno's ideal state described in his *Republic* was not a single regime or locale, but the *kosmopolis* to which the sage belongs by reason of her or his rationality, while at the same time living in a conventional earthly city with conventional human laws. Even while exercising their "true" citizenship in the *kosmopolis*, the sages

82. Plato never offers a simple definition of virtue. That virtue is a state of soul rather than a set of actions or a kind of action is concluded in the *Laches* and the *Meno*, for example; that it is knowledge, in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*; that it is psychological balance, in the *Phaedo*. Irwin 1979 and 1995 discuss these works and their approaches to virtue. Plutarch criticizes the Stoics for attacking Plato on virtue but struggling with its definition in similar ways (*De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1034c–d).

83. Socrates served as an example of chosen death. For Stoics of the first century of our era, Cato Uticensis served as the paradigm of the sage engaging in war and committing suicide. Cf. Sen. *Constant.* 2; and Luc. 2.284–325.

may have the experience of responding to the irrational actions of others that have some effect on them, though not on the perfection of their virtue.⁸⁴

This response to Plato seems designed as a clarifying correction rather than a destructive objection. Zeno would certainly agree that those with irrational and therefore vicious souls are capable of incest and cannibalism. Stoicism holds that the actions themselves, however, do not reveal the tenor of the soul, nor does the tenor of the soul dictate the performance or avoidance of particular actions. Actions that benefit others do not necessarily reveal a sage's soul, and actions that transgress convention do not necessarily reveal a tyrannical soul. The state of the sage's soul renders *all* his or her actions in accordance with Nature; the vicious person's soul cannot act in accordance with Nature, since viciousness itself is not in accordance with Nature. It is in the separation of actions and the state of soul that the Stoics most distinguish themselves from the psychology of Plato's *Republic*.

It remains unclear, however, exactly what limitations the Stoics put on the sage's knowledge, and to what degree the Stoics will allow ignorance to operate in the sage. I propose that Zeno and Chrysippus did allow for a certain kind of ignorance—and consequent realization—in sages. If the sages of Zeno's ideal city live among those who are not sages, and if the sages themselves are affected by the imperfectly rational actions of others, then stages of ignorance and recognition seem likely. The fact that sages know the interconnecting causes of things does not make them omniscient.⁸⁵ But can the sage marry his or her parent or child without knowing, or eat a child without knowing? The texts hardly seem to allow this level of ignorance. The sage's consonance with Nature, after all, must render recognizable the "special circumstances" that would lead to such actions, even after the fact. In the extreme, I think that we must conclude that, contrary to Plato, should Fate prescribe the eating of children, as in the myth of Er, the sage would play Thyestes; if Fate should lead him or her to incest, then the sage would beget noble children from a parent, child, or sibling, like Oedipus. Unlike these two tragic figures, however, the sage would not grieve or wail, dash out his eyes, seek revenge, or consider himself cursed or worthy of death. I suggest that this is the use to which Thyestes and Oedipus were put by Zeno and the Stoics who followed him: not in alternative forms of the myths in which these characters were presented as sages, but with revisionist interpretations of their actions and potential responses, opposing not only conventional tragic

84. In their "perfect" response to imperfectly rational acts, the sages could be thought to move their city and fellow-citizens toward perfection. A quotation from Stobaeus (*Flor.* 2.7.11b) is relevant in this context, though it is not connected to Zeno: τὸ πολιτεύεσθαι τὸν σὸφὸν καὶ μάλιστα ἐν ταῖς τοιαύταις πολιτείαις ταῖς ἐμφαινούσαις τινὰ προκοπὴν πρὸς τὰς τελείας πολιτείας ("the sage will serve as citizen especially in those governments which exhibit some progression towards perfection"); see Goulet-Cazé 2003, 33.

85. Lucan illustrates this type of limitation of knowledge in Cato's refusal to consult the oracle of Jupiter Ammon (9.544–86). Labienus urges Cato to learn the future outcomes (*eventus*, 9.550; *bellis datos cognoscere casus*, 9.553), specifically for Caesar and for the Republic (*inquire in fata nefandi / Caesaris et patriae venturos excute mores*, 9.558–59). Cato replies that he has nothing to ask about virtue, for he already knows, and the oracle will not tell him anything new (*scimus, et hoc nobis non altius inseret Hammon*, 572). He implies that matters such as the length of his life or the harm that may come to him are not the material of wisdom, and states that all he needs to know has been available to him—and to all—from birth: *nec vobis ullis / numen eget, dixitque semel nascentibus auctor / quidquid scire licet* (575–76).

“wretchedness” but more specifically the Platonic correlations between psychology and action.

SUMMARY

The representative actions of incest and cannibalism appear repeatedly in Cynic and Stoic writings. Cleanthes and Chrysippus follow Zeno in citing cannibalism as acceptable, and Chrysippus reaffirms the allowance of incest. In Plato's *Republic*, incest and cannibalism represent figuratively the desires and actions of the tyrant's soul. I argue that Plato chooses Oedipus and Thyestes from the tragic stage as representatives of the tyrannical soul, and employs them without naming them in the *Republic*. In their ignorance, Oedipus and Thyestes serve Plato as Socratic examples of souls out of control, ungoverned by self-knowledge and reason, and he attributes to them responsibility for the actions that they commit in their ignorant and irrational state. Plato's subsequent readers responded to the actions of incest and cannibalism and recognized the tragic sources of these actions. Because Plato uses the actions of cannibalism and incest to describe his view of a particular cast of soul, the Stoics choose these very actions to distance themselves from Plato's psychology, as well as from his political philosophy. The Cynics and Stoics do not admit incest and cannibalism as actions permitted only to the wise, as their critics often allege; rather, they state that only the wise man could do these things with justice. For all who lack right reason, these same actions would be wrong, even horrific. The wise man or woman would commit such actions only under the stress of special circumstances, but even so, the wise would not become tragic, cursed figures, because in their understanding and obedience to Fate, they would have no reason to be devastated.⁸⁶

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