

HAMARTIA IN ARISTOTLE AND GREEK TRAGEDY¹

It is now generally agreed that *ἁμαρτία* in Aristotle's *Poetics*, ch. 13 means 'mistake of fact'. The moralizing interpretation favoured by our Victorian forebears and their continental counterparts was one of the many misunderstandings fostered by their moralistic society, and in our own enlightened era is revealed as an aberration. In challenging this orthodoxy I am not moved by any particular enthusiasm for Victoriana, nor do I want to revive the view that *ἁμαρτία* means simply 'moral flaw' or 'morally wrong action'.² I shall try to show that the word has a range of applications, from 'ignorance of fact' at one end to 'moral defect', 'moral error', at the other, and that the modern orthodoxy, though not as clearly wrong as the moralizing interpretation it displaced, restricts Aristotle's meaning in a way he did not intend, and does less than justice to his analysis of classical drama. This wider interpretation is indeed not new. It is indicated by Dacier, clearly and concisely argued by Butcher, implied in an important article by Glanville, and briefly endorsed by Grube and Walter Kaufmann.³ But it is worth restating. The arguments against it are inadequate, it is not vulnerable to the standard refutation of the 'moral flaw' interpretation, and there are considerations in its favour which have not been appreciated. I hope therefore that there is sufficient reason for going over this well-trodden ground again.

I

The crucial passage is as follows: 'The best tragedy is so composed as to arouse pity and terror. Firstly, it is clear that morally good men (*ἐπιεικεῖς ἄνδρες*) must not be shown passing from good fortune to bad; this does not arouse pity or fear but is repulsive (*μισρόν*). Nor must a morally vicious man (*μοχθηρός*) be shown passing from bad fortune to good, for this does not satisfy our human feeling (*τὸ φιλόανθρωπον*, cf. p. 238 n. 2) nor does it arouse pity or fear. Nor again must the very crooked man (*ὁ σφόδρα πονηρός*) be shown falling from good fortune into bad; this arrangement would satisfy human feeling, but would not arouse pity or fear. For pity is concerned with unmerited misfortune (*περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον δυστυχοῦντα*), fear with a character like ourselves. There remains the intermediate kind of character: not pre-eminent in moral excellence (*ἀρετὴ καὶ δικαιοσύνη*), nor falling into misfortune through vice and depravity (*κακία καὶ μοχθηρία*), but through some *ἁμαρτία*, being one of great reputation and good fortune', e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, etc. It follows

¹ I am indebted to Miss M. E. Hubbard and to Professors J. L. Ackrill and H. Lloyd-Jones for valuable criticism and advice.

² This view is not of course Victorian at all; it is found in Vettori's edition of 1560, and often later (see J. M. Bremer, *Hamartia*, 1968, 69 ff.).

³ A. Dacier (ed.), 1692, 190 (cf. below, p. 226 n. 4); S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1897), 4th ed. 1907, 317-22 (it is Butcher's misfortune that

although he makes it perfectly clear that he understands *ἁμαρτία* in the widest possible sense and explains why, he is constantly criticized for restricting it to the moral sense); I. M. Glanville, 'Tragic error', *C.Q.* xliii (1949), 47-57 (cf. below, p. 234 n. 3); G. M. A. Grube, *Aristotle on Poetry and Style*, 1958, xxiv f., *The Greek and Roman Critics*, 1965, 79-80; W. Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, 1969, 61-2.

that the well-constructed plot is single rather than double, the change being from good fortune to bad, not vice versa, not through viciousness (*μοχθηρία*) but through a substantial error (*ἀμαρτία μεγάλη*), the agent being either of the kind specified or better rather than worse than that. Witness the practice of poets: originally they used any story, but now the best tragedies centre on a few families, dealing, e.g., with Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and any others whose fate has been to do or suffer something dreadful (*ἢ παθεῖν δεινὰ ἢ ποιῆσαι*).¹

The main arguments to determine what *ἀμαρτία* means have turned (1) on the usage of the word and its cognates elsewhere in Aristotle and in earlier writers; (2) on the requirements of this context; (3) in particular, on the examples Aristotle here gives to illustrate his meaning. I shall consider these in order.

The senses of *ἀμαρτία* can be grouped under three main headings: to miss the mark (literally); to fail in some object or make a mistake; and to offend morally, to do wrong. In Homer the literal sense is much more common than the others, but by the fifth century the moral sense has gained ground, and in tragedy is the most frequent, though in Herodotus and Thucydides the three senses are about equally represented. In fifth-century orators the moral sense is considerably less frequent than the sense 'make a mistake', but in the fourth century this trend is again reversed: in writers other than Aristotle, the moral sense is far more frequent.¹

Aristotle's usage is conspicuously different. Otto Hey² counts only six sure examples of the moral sense: one in the *Politics*; two in the *Constitution of Athens*, which he discounts as a non-philosophical work; and three in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³ Bremer reduces the figure to five, disallowing the *E.N.* instances but allowing two more in the *Rhetoric* disallowed by Hey.⁴ He counts 139 instances in all (126 if we omit *διαμαρτάνειν*, which seems never to have the full range anyway). Bremer's conclusion (Hey's in an even more positive form) is that 'from a mere statistical point of view it is extremely probable' that *ἀμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 means mistake.

Even if it were true that the word was used in a 'moral' sense by Aristotle only once in twenty-five times, the argument is dubious. If we are presented with an isolated instance of a word in an unknown context, e.g. in a papyrus, the statistical argument is fair enough: it is more likely to mean X than Y here, because in this author it means X much more often than Y. But when we have the full context, the method is less plausible. We might indeed argue that if Aristotle has a strong preference for one sense of a word, he would be careful to avoid ambiguity when using it in another. But anyone tolerably familiar with Aristotle knows that he has no such consideration for his readers, at least in the esoteric works.

In fact, however, the figure of five or six instances for the moral sense of *ἀμαρτία* allowed by Hey and Bremer is highly misleading. We can best see this

¹ Bremer, *op. cit.* (p. 221 n. 2), 31–60. This valuable study sets out all the available evidence, with full references to earlier work.

² O. Hey, *AMAPTIA*, *Philologus* lxxxiii (1928), 1–17, 137–63.

³ *Pol.* 1336^a2; *Ath. Pol.* 8. 4, 16. 2; *E.N.* 1107^a15, 1110^b29, 1119^a34. Hey, *op. cit.*, 140, 149, 153–4, 157. Professor Ackrill points

out that in fact the use in 1110^b29 need not be a 'moral' use, because of the restriction *τὴν τοιαύτην ἀμαρτίαν*.

⁴ *Rhet.* 1396^a21 (emended by Hey after the Latin version, 145); 1412^b28 (regarded by Hey as a colourless use, 151). Bremer, *op. cit.*, 55 f.

by asking why Aristotle's usage should differ from the norm. The answer lies, as Hey and Bremer have seen,¹ in the all-pervasive schema of moral action in Aristotle, the doctrine of the mean, whereby ἀρετή is a kind of μεσότης, inasmuch as it aims at the mean, στοχαστική γε οὐσα τοῦ μέσου (*E.N.* 1106^b28). 'People who cannot hit the mark but fall into excess or deficiency are not κακοί, οὐ γὰρ κακοποιοί εἰσιν, ἡμαρτημένοι δέ (1125^a18). . . . It is admitted that hamartiai will happen, because it is extremely hard to hit the mark exactly, ἐπεὶ τοῦ μέσου τυχεῖν ἄκρως χαλεπόν (1109^a34).'² In such passages (Bremer goes on) moral praise or blame are not entirely absent, but the stress is everywhere laid on the 'ethical' wrongness as such, i.e. the stress is on the agent doing the wrong thing, οὐκ ὀρθῶς πράττειν, not in his action being morally wrong. This is why Aristotle uses ἁμαρτία and cognates always in the sense of 'mistake'.

Bremer's account is correct as far as it goes,³ but it completely undermines his own argument. For if Aristotle systematically describes as 'mistake' or 'failure' what the rest of us would call 'morally wrong action', and this counts as a 'non-moral' sense, we cannot infer from his 'non-moral' use of ἁμαρτία (if it is so) in *Po.* 13 that he means by it 'mistake of fact'. But this is precisely what Bywater, Hey, Bremer, and the rest want it to mean. In other words Aristotle's system of moral terms means that his 'non-moral' use of ἁμαρτία is not always what we should call non-moral; Bremer's distinction between 'ethical' wrongdoing and 'moral' wrongdoing does not assist his argument.⁴ Similarly with Aristotle's intellectualizing treatment of moral failure as due to ignorance. In *E.N.* 3. 1. 1110^b29 ἁμαρτία is applied to ignorance of moral principle, i.e. of the major premiss of the practical syllogism, through which men count as 'unjust and completely bad' (ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοί).⁵ Hey (153 f.), though he counts this as a 'moral' sense, which Bremer does not, discounts its moral significance on the ground that the defect ('Mangelhaftigkeit') which it denotes is purely intellectual, and could just as well have been described by ἀμαθία.⁶ The moral significance of *E.N.* 6. 8. 1142^a21, where ἁμαρτία is applied to ignorance of either premiss of the practical syllogism, Hey does not see at all (141), since the example (heavy water is bad, this is heavy water) is not one of moral action. Again, it is perfectly proper to point out that these are not straight 'moral' uses of the word ἁμαρτία, of the kind found commonly in, e.g., Isocrates. But if the word can be used to cover situations which we

¹ Hey, 146 ff.; Bremer, 53 f.

² Bremer, 54.

³ It would, however, be better supported by *E.N.* 2. 2 and 5–6 than by 1125^a18, since this, as Professor Ackrill points out to me, does not apply to all virtue–vice triads, but only to the special case (οὐδ' οὗτοι κακοί) in which the extreme ἐξέως are not called κακίαι because they are not particularly harmful in their effects, cf. 1123^a31–3.

⁴ This is not to say that Aristotle could not distinguish between acts that are wrong because they break the rules and acts that are wrong because of their motives, which is the distinction Bremer (54 n. 92) seems to be making (cf. *E.N.* 2. 4); or that he could not distinguish between a mistaken moral judgement and a morally wrong act due, e.g.,

to ἀκρασία. The point is that he sometimes uses the same language to cover both types of situation (cf. p. 226).

⁵ I take γίνονται to mean 'come to be reckoned as', 'count as', rather than 'become' (causal); but the causal interpretation is possible, and the argument is not affected. (Cf. 1108^a5 for a similar ambiguity.)

⁶ For Aristotle the ignorance is not purely intellectual, since rightness or wrongness about the end is inseparably connected with ἠθικὴ ἀρετή: cf. *E.N.* 6. 12–13, esp. 1144^a8, 20, 35; 1145^a5. (ἀμαθία is often in fact not morally neutral: it means 'culpable ignorance', 'stupidity', as opposed to plain ignorance, ἀγνοία. Cf. *E. H.F.* 347, and Wilamowitz's note.)

should normally term moral, e.g. an intellectual defect as the result of which men become morally bad (since it involves ignorance of what ought or ought not to be done), this clearly knocks the bottom out of the argument that *ἁμαρτία* always means mistake of fact, and therefore does so in *Po.* 13; unless indeed it is argued that the mistake or ignorance is of *moral* fact, in which case the argument springs a leak in a different place. Hey's survey of the material is thorough and exhaustive. But through failing to appreciate these points he claims to establish a conclusion about *Po.* 13 which his evidence simply does not warrant; and in so doing he has led astray all those exponents of modern orthodoxy who have faithfully followed in his wake.¹

A more useful method of inquiry than this numerical approach is to consider the range of meanings *ἁμαρτία* has in Aristotle and particularly those contexts likely to be relevant to our passage, as Adkins does in his article 'Aristotle and the best kinds of tragedy' (*C.Q.* n.s. xvi [1966], 78–102, esp. 82, 89–90), which is no less subtle and ingenious for reaching what I believe to be the wrong conclusion. Adkins's main thesis, that the difference between Aristotelian and fifth-century values makes this part of Aristotle's analysis irrelevant to the criticism of Greek tragedy, I shall touch upon later (pp. 242–4). In his treatment of *ἁμαρτία* (82), he considers first Aristotle's general usage. 'There are three possible situations to which he could apply the term: *μοχθηρία*, moral depravity, in which a man "does not know how to behave"; *ἄκρασία*, in which a man knows what he should do, but has not a stable moral character and so does not always do it; and mistake of fact, in which a man "does not know the minor premiss of the practical syllogism"' (*E.N.* 6. 8. 1142^a20 ff., see above); in particular, ignorance of the major premiss resulting in *ἀδικία* and *κακία* can be called *ἁμαρτία* (*ibid.* 3. 1. 1110^b28 ff.). *ἁμαρτία* may also be *opposed* to *μοχθηρία*, as in *Po.* 13; in this case it refers either to (1) mistake of fact or (2) (as it must be taken if it is interpreted as 'tragic flaw' in *Po.* 13) to *ἄκρασία*. Now Aristotle does apply *ἁμαρτήματα*² to actions resulting from *ἄκρασία* (*E.N.* 1135^b17 ff.); but 'when discussing *ἄκρασία* itself (7. 4. 1148^a2 f.) he says "*ἄκρασία* is censured not merely as an *ἁμαρτία* but as a kind of *κακία*", i.e. *ἁμαρτία* is contrasted with *μοχθηρία*, as it is in *Po.* 13. This is interesting', Adkins goes on, 'though it does not in itself *prove* that *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 means "mistake of fact"; the foregoing passages . . . simply indicate that for Aristotle *ἁμαρτία* is not a technical term for any one of the possible alternatives by which it is . . . rendered in English.' This conclusion is fair enough, with the proviso that the contrast with *κακία* in 1148^a2 f. —and 'not only as a *ἁμαρτία* but as a kind of *κακία*' is scarcely a contrast—not only does not *prove* that *ἁμαρτία* means 'mistake of fact' in *Po.* 13, it does not even tend to show this, as we shall see.

Adkins resumes his argument presently (89–90) as follows: *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 may (1) have its full range, or be confined to (2) moral error, or (3) mistake or failure. If the word has its full range here (correctly representing the usage of Greek tragedy), 'the distinction *μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν . . . ἀλλὰ δι'*

¹ Or Bywater's wake; e.g. Rostagni, ed. 1927 (2nd ed. 1945); Gudeman, ed. 1934; H. House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 1956; Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument*, 1957; John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, 1962; D. W. Lucas, ed. 1968; R. D. Dawe, 'Some reflections on Ate and Hamartia', *H.S.C.P.* lxxii (1968), 89–123; Bremer, *op.*

cit.; H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, 1972; Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy*, 1973.

² Strictly Aristotle does not call these acts *ἁμαρτήματα*, but the point is well taken, since he describes their agents as *βλάπτοντες καὶ ἁμαρτάνοντες*.

ἀμαρτίαν τινά is a "philosophical" one: his "best" tragic character must not have a bad moral *εἶς*, but may be an ἀκαρτὴς committing a moral error. The form of the distinction, however, as Aristotle expresses it, gives great emphasis to ἀμαρτία, Adkins goes on, 'an emphasis which is completely misleading as far as the fifth century is concerned for . . . any change from εὐτυχία to δυστυχία involves an ἀμαρτία; and if any action which precipitates such a change is an ἀμαρτία, ἀμαρτία doubtless should be mentioned in the analysis, but requires no emphasis.'

This argument is opaque to me. The phrase δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινά, as Dawe has observed,¹ is not particularly emphatic. It is normal for Greek to make explicit what English leaves unsaid (just as Greek favours expressions of the type 'A and not B', where B is the contrary of A, and not-B is therefore tautologous). If, as Adkins grants, ἀμαρτία must appear in the analysis, it is hard to see how it could appear less emphatically. But in any case there is no tautology. Aristotle is emphasizing that the change from good fortune to bad must result from some action, i.e. not be the result of a mischance, an ἀτύχημα. True, he has said this positively elsewhere (g. 1452^a1 ff.), but it is important, so he says it again, negatively.² There is no ground whatever in the form of the expression for restricting the range of ἀμαρτία.

Adkins now proceeds to his formal proof, that ἀμαρτία in *Po.* 13 means 'mistake of fact'. 'It is μισαρόν, repulsive, for a very good man, ἐπιεικής, to be involved in an ἀμαρτία which leads him from good fortune to ill' (Aristotle does not mention ἀμαρτία here, but according to Adkins he implies it), 'though a man who is moderately ἐπιεικής, depicted in such a situation, furnishes the best form of tragedy. . . . But ἐπιείκεια denotes and commends co-operative excellence generally: beyond a certain degree of excellence in ἐπιείκεια the portrayal of the tragic character making a moral ἀμαρτία is not μισαρόν, but impossible. This argument excludes alternative (2), that ἀμαρτία "means" "moral error" in *Po.* 13, and seems to exclude (1)' (my italics), 'that ἀμαρτία includes moral error. To say this is not to say that no Greek tragedies were occasioned by moral error; it is to say that Aristotle is not making this prescription for the best kinds of tragedy.'

That the restricted sense 'moral error' is excluded by this argument is indeed true, and the point is well taken. But that this argument should even seem to exclude the full range of ἀμαρτία is a mere error. That a word 'means' X or Y does not imply that both the senses X and Y are available as alternatives whenever that word occurs, but that at least one of them is available. It is impossible for a very good man to commit moral error. It is not impossible for a very good man either to commit moral error or to make a mistake of fact: he can make a mistake of fact. So ἀμαρτία cannot, by this argument, be restricted to moral error, but may still include it.

To speak of 'alternative senses' of ἀμαρτία is in fact somewhat misleading, though this does not affect the argument above. It might, however, be argued

¹ Op. cit. (p. 224 n. 1), 93.

² The point in ch. 9 is rather different, that incidents arouse more pity and fear if they are manifestly (or apparently) 'caused', i.e. seem to be the result of some action, not ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης (coincidences, etc., which are in principle unpredictable, *Phys.* B. 5-6). In *E.N.* 5. 8,

ἀμαρτήματα are distinguished from ἀτυχήματα in that the ἀρχὴ τῆς αἰτίας is within the agent, not outside, as it is if the consequence of his act is unpredictable (see p. 226, and p. 232 with n. 1). So here: the fall from prosperity must manifestly result from some action.

(wrongly) that Aristotle would not use the word in two different senses in the same context. But it is not a question of *ἀμαρτία* having different *senses*, in the way *κατὰ τύχην δμῶνυμα*, e.g., 'bank', or 'gay' meaning (a) cheerful and (b) homosexual, have different senses, which could only occur in the same context at the risk of confusion or for the sake of a pun. *ἀμαρτία* is a word which covers a range of situations, and will be interpreted in each case according to the situation to which it is applied. 'For the captain of a ship, a wrong action which involves moral depravity may be less dangerous than a wrong judgement or a wrong prediction which does not.' 'Wrong' here is applied first to a moral then to an intellectual situation, but it is not used in different *senses*, nor are the two uses at all confusing. (Cf. Aristotle's discussion of the meaning of *ἀγαθός* in *E.N.* 1. 6, especially the notion of *ἀγαθός πρὸς ἑν*.)¹

In any case Adkins's claim, that *ἀμαρτία* is implied in the 'repulsive' (*μισρόν*) situation of the very good man coming to grief, is not strictly justified. It could be argued² that Aristotle is *excluding* *ἀμαρτία* here—that not only moral *ἀμαρτία* but any kind of *ἀμαρτία* is impossible for the very good man, since he could never be 'responsible' in the sense required by tragic action. In other words his act might be an *ἀτύχημα*, but not a *ἀμάρτημα*; in the terms of *E.N.* 5. 8, he initiates the action, but since its consequences are contrary to calculation, the *ἀρχὴ τῆς αἰτίας* is not within him.³ I do not take this extreme view, since I think even a very good man could be said to make a mistake whose consequences were foreseeable (or not contrary to calculation, cf. p. 232 n. 1); his act would not be culpable, but it would meet the requirements of tragedy. But the point is that Aristotle is here ruling out a certain situation as unsuitable for tragedy, because it is morally repulsive and so inhibits tragic pleasure: namely that a very good man suffers disaster. It is irrelevant who or what has brought this situation about; it may be due to pure accident, an Act of God. This is still morally repulsive, because we feel it to be unjust. Of course a disaster due to pure accident would not be suitable for tragedy, since, as Aristotle has already established in ch. 9, it must be seen to be the probable or necessary consequence of some action; hence δι' *ἀμαρτίαν τινὰ* in his conclusion at 1453^a 10. This part of the conclusion follows not from what has immediately preceded it, but from this *together with* the requirements of ch. 9.

The argument from the examples used in this chapter to illustrate the ideal prescription is found at its simplest in Bywater's commentary (on 1453^a 10). 'The Sophoclean Oedipus is a man of hasty temper . . ., but his *ἀμαρτία* was not that, but in the 'great mistake' he made, when he became unwittingly the slayer of his own father.' This has often been disputed,⁴ but it is no doubt correct, and the argument goes home against the interpretation of *ἀμαρτία* as moral flaw *only*. But the example of Oedipus does nothing to prevent *ἀμαρτία* having its full range; Oedipus simply illustrates one kind of *ἀμαρτία*, mistake of fact. What about Thyestes? We do not know which story Aristotle had in mind here: possibly the seduction of Aerope, if that was ever represented as due to *ἀμαρτία*; possibly the banquet; possibly the seduction, in error, of his own

¹ The general point is fully treated by R. M. Hare in *The Language of Morals* (1952). Cf. also p. 223 n. 4 above.

² I am indebted to Miss Hubbard for pointing out to me this possibility.

³ See p. 228 and p. 232 n. 1 below.

⁴ Dacier, *op. cit.* (p. 221 n. 3), having

rightly assigned *Oedipus Tyrannus* to the category of acts done through ignorance, spoils it by finding Oedipus' moral failings, such as they are, more important than his incest and parricide. This was intended neither by Aristotle nor by Sophocles (see p. 240 n. 2 below).

daughter. But even if we could be sure that the story intended was one of mistake of fact, this would still not suffice to show that *ἁμαρτία* in the prescription was confined to this sense. Aristotle's examples are not always carefully chosen,¹ and though no doubt an example of moral error combined with one of mistake would illustrate the full range of *ἁμαρτία* more clearly, the fact that the full range is not illustrated would not prove, or even tend to show, that the full range is ruled out.

A more elaborate argument on the same lines is derived from the second set of examples, illustrating the few families in myth on which poets came to concentrate because their stories were most suitable for tragedy: concerning Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus. Else, followed by Bremer, shows that each name mentioned has connected with it at least one story, or version of a story, which hinges on a mistake of fact. For example, Alcmaeon: in a play of Astydamos, mentioned in ch. 14, Alcmaeon kills his mother not knowing who she is (perhaps in a fit of madness),² and this might be the version meant; or in Euripides' *Alcmaeon in Corinth*, he unwittingly commits incest with his own daughter, like Thyestes. Again, the story about Orestes to which Aristotle refers, need not concern him as agent, i.e. as matricide, but could be the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, in which he is almost the victim; another play whose plot Aristotle admired (ch. 17). And so on. What all these stories will then have in common is that they turn on a mistake of fact; this then is what *ἁμαρτία* means.

All this seems to me implausible special pleading. Alcmaeon and Orestes, to start with, are standard examples of a particular kind of horrific episode, viz. matricide, the essentials of which are given in the tradition. They figure thus not only in ch. 14, but also as a *topos* in earlier rhetorical discussion (cf. the sophistic *Dialexeis*, DK ii, p. 410). And Aristotle himself cites Alcmaeon's matricide as an example of a deed too horrible for the agent to plead that he acted under compulsion (*E.N.* 3. 1. 1110^a28). It is true that Antiphanes (fr. 191K) cites as a well-known story the mad Alcmaeon killing his mother, but it is improbable that we should be meant to think here of Astydamos' idiosyncratic version or the lesser-known stories treated by Euripides. (It is also true that in ch. 14 Astydamos' version is cited as an example of how to treat the matricide *καλῶς*, 'in the right way', i.e. as the result of ignorance; but that is part of a different argument.) But in any case the whole argument is invalid. These heroes are chosen as especially suitable for tragedy simply because of the dreadful things they do and suffer, so that the poets gradually narrowed down their choice to such stories. Quite apart from Aristotle's laxity in the use of examples, there is no reason to suppose, as Else does, that the stories connected with these names are meant to illustrate all the features of the ideal prescription.

I should add that Else, unlike Bremer, does not use the examples as a substantive argument to show that *ἁμαρτία* means mistake of fact, but merely to confirm the interpretation. This he takes to be established by a quite different argument from context: viz. that Aristotle is here talking about complex

¹ e.g. in his discussion of Anaxagoras he gives as examples of *ὁμοιομερῆ* the elements fire and water, which are *ὁμοιομερῆ* for him but not for Anaxagoras (*Met.* 984^a14, where see Ross).

² Else, *op. cit.* (p. 224 n. 1), 391 n. 86; T. B. L. Webster, *Hermes* lxxxii (1954), 305, compares Antiphanes fr. 191K, where it is implied that the madness version was well known.

plots, as he says explicitly at the beginning of ch. 13. Complex plots will arouse pity and terror in a particular way, namely through reversal and recognition following on a mistake of identity. This then is the specific *ἀμαρτία* of the complex plot, and it is in this very restricted sense that the word should be understood in the prescription. Else's view, surprisingly acclaimed by Lattimore¹ as the definitive solution of the problem, is rightly dismissed out of hand by Dawe as being much too restricted in scope: 'it is enough to point out that the number of Greek tragedies in which a hero passes from good fortune to bad through failure to recognise a blood relative does not exceed one' (91). The relevance of Aristotle's analysis to extant tragedy is indeed an open question, but it is fair to assume in him some small minimum of critical intelligence. Else's positive argument is inadequate. Aristotle gives two conditions for the ideal tragedy: (1) that its plot should be complex, (2) that it should be so constructed as to arouse pity and fear, i.e. according to his prescription. These conditions are independent (*καὶ ταύτην* in 1452^b32 simply emphasizes that they must both be operative); in fact the condition inferred from the proper function of tragedy applies equally well to simple as to complex plots, as we shall see.

II

So far my contention has been negative: the arguments reviewed show that *ἀμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 cannot mean 'moral error' alone, but not that it cannot have its full range, i.e. either moral error or mistake of fact. The only argument explicitly directed against this disjunctive interpretation, that the very good man cannot commit moral error, does not allow for the disjunction.² I turn now to positive reasons for including moral error in the range of *ἀμαρτία* here.

First a brief look at three well-known passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, all of which have been used on both sides of this argument. In 3. 1 Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of unintentional (involuntary)³ acts: (1) those done by compulsion (*βίᾳ*) or under pressure and (2) those done through ignorance (*δι' ἄγνοίαν*). (1) is subdivided into (a) acts of which the initiative (*ἀρχή*) is outside us, e.g. if we are carried away by a wind or by men in control of us; these are *βίαια*, and are unintentional without qualification; (b) acts of which the initiative lies with us, but compulsory in that they are done under duress, to avoid something worse, or through the inducement of achieving some greater good. We can incur blame for submitting too easily to a threat, or enduring a shameful situation for a disproportionately small good; or earn praise for enduring much pain or shame for a great good; or merit pardon (*συγγνώμη*) if the *πάθος* is too great for human nature to bear. These acts are

¹ *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy*, 1964, 10, 19 (so also Vickers, op. cit. [p. 224 n. 1], 63-4).

² 'Disjunction' is a convenient term here; it is of course a misnomer: see pp. 225 f.

³ I shall render *ἐκούσιος* by 'intentional', *ἀκούσιος* by 'unintentional', *οὐχ ἐκούσιος* by 'not intended', as being more in accordance with English usage than the traditional 'voluntary', 'involuntary', 'non-voluntary'. This translation will not always work, and I am forced to abandon it in the discussion

of *E.E.* 2. 8 (pp. 239-40); nor does it work throughout in *E.N.* 3. 1, where Aristotle debates whether a wrong act done by one acting *ἄγνων διὰ πάθος* is *ἐκούσιος* or *ἀκούσιος*: such an act could not be 'intentional'. In fact no pair of meaningful terms can be found to correspond exactly to *ἐκούσιος* and *ἀκούσιος*, because Aristotle's various criteria for distinguishing between them cannot always be consistently applied. (I owe this point to Professor Ackrill.)

compulsory in the sense that we should not choose them for themselves, but voluntary, in that we do choose them in these particular circumstances. Some acts are so heinous, however, that they cannot be considered compulsory, however great the pressure; e.g. Alcmaeon's defence of his matricide in Euripides' play is absurdly inadequate. These acts are thus 'mixed' (μικταὶ πράξεις). It is open to question whether such acts should be called intentional or unintentional. They are nearer to intentional acts both, it seems, because they are accorded praise and blame, and because the initiative is with the agent; for which latter reason Aristotle eventually decides to call them intentional (ἐκούσια).

Acts done through ignorance are unintentional unless (a) they are not regretted afterwards in full knowledge, in which case they are neither intentional nor unintentional but not intended (οὐχ ἐκούσια); or (b) the ignorance is the result of some πάθος, e.g. drunkenness or anger, in which case the agent acts not *through* ignorance but *in* ignorance (ἀγνοῶν), through drunkenness, etc.; (c) the ignorance is of the major premiss, i.e. of principle, in which case the act is not unintentional but vicious: it is only ignorance of the minor premiss, some particular of the actual situation, which makes it unintentional, and such an act earns pity and pardon. Acts done (knowingly) through passion or desire should not be termed unintentional, for various reasons; in particular, there is no difference in principle between errors made (or wrong acts done, ἀμαρτηθέντα) by calculation or through anger.

At first sight it appears that the only acts suitable as the ἀμαρτίαι of the ideal tragedy are pitiable acts, and that Aristotle regards pitiable acts as a small sub-class of pardonable acts, restricted to acts done through ignorance of the minor premiss, since it is only in connection with these that pity is mentioned; that is, through mistake of fact. But this is too narrow an interpretation. In *Po.* 13 it is not the act that is pitiable, but the fall from good fortune to bad. The effect is spoilt either if the agent is ἐπιεικής, when his fall is morally repulsive; or if he is vicious and bad, when it is not pitiable, since his suffering is deserved, and pity concerns one whose misfortune is undeserved (ὁ ἀνάξιος δυστυχῶν). The only kind of act ruled out in *Po.* 13 is one due to μοχθηρία and κακία, i.e. to a bad ἔξις and/or deliberate malice. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, on the other hand, no such complete reversal is specified. For an act to be pitied, the agent must of course suffer, otherwise we should not pity him; but the suffering need not be on anything like the scale required for the tragic effect.¹ Now pity, for Aristotle, is the product of two factors: the innocence of the agent and the extent of the suffering. For the tragic effect, the suffering must be intense: it involves a complete reversal of fortune. So the agent need not be blameless for his plight to be pitied. But in *E.N.* 3. 1 no such complete reversal is in question, so only those acts are said to be pitiable where the agent, acting through ignorance, is blameless.² We need not therefore regard as suitably tragic only those acts which Aristotle in *E.N.* 3. 1 specifically says deserve pity. A wide range remains of acts which are due to moral error rather

¹ Thus in real life (and this is what Aristotle is talking about in *E.N.*) we might pity someone simply for the mental suffering caused by an act for which he was completely exonerated and suffered no material disadvantage at all, e.g. if he ran over a child

who had suddenly darted in front of his car; though Aristotle, who nowhere mentions mental suffering in connection with pity (see Cope on *Rhet.* 2. 8. 2), might not have allowed this extreme case.

² 1111^a1, cf. 1109^b32.

than mistake, but where the suffering is in some sense undeserved; i.e. acts for which there is *συγγνώμη*, and perhaps also acts which are culpable in themselves but cause disproportionate misery to the agent.

Firstly there are those mixed actions which merit pardon; i.e. the agent does something *ἀσχρόν* through the compulsion of a force too strong for human nature. Whether pardon is merited, and to what extent, will depend on the particular case. The circumstances of the act may completely excuse it, or just extenuate its culpability in some degree. Some acts are not justified as compulsory by any circumstances, e.g. matricide: the grounds on which Euripides' Alcmaeon claims that he was compelled to kill his mother are ludicrous, says Aristotle. We might wonder if he would allow more excuse for Orestes' matricide in Aeschylus, or even Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter. The point is that the agonizing choice between evils which is typical of this kind of tragedy is allowed for in *Po.* 13, and shown by implication to be suitable for tragedy in *E.N.* 3. 1. Secondly, there are acts done in ignorance through some passion. These are not *ἀκούσια* and are culpable; but the degree of guilt may be more or less explained by the particular circumstances, and so the resulting disaster is not deserved. Some culpability may attach even to acts done through ignorance, when the ignorance is not due to some passion but could have been avoided. These too will be suitable tragic acts.

The second relevant passage is in *E.N.* 5. 8, where in his exposition of a theory of justice (what constitutes a just or unjust action or agent), Aristotle distinguishes between four kinds of action of varying culpability: (1) Acts done in ignorance (*μετ' ἀγνοίας*: the distinction made in 3. 1 is not introduced here), where the result of the action could not reasonably have been foreseen; these are mischances, *ἀτυχήματα*. (2) Acts done in ignorance, when the result could reasonably have been foreseen, but not done through vice (*κακία*); these are blunders, *ἀμαρτήματα*. (3) Acts done knowingly, but as a result of impulse, e.g. anger or some other necessary or natural passion; these are wrong acts, *ἀδίκηματα*, and those who commit such injury or error (*ταῦτα βλάπτοντες καὶ ἀμαρτάνοντες*) do wrong, *ἀδικοῦσι*, but they are not thereby unjust or wicked (*ἄδικοι, πονηροί*), since the harm done is not due to vice, *μοχθηρία*. But (4) when the wrong act is done as the result of deliberate malice, the agent is unjust and vicious, *ἄδικος καὶ μοχθηρός*.

This analysis corresponds to a standard distinction in earlier writers between *ἀτύχημα*, *ἀμαρτημα*, and *ἀδίκημα*, which can be seen, e.g., in Gorgias, *Hel.* 15, Antiphon 6. 1, Dem. 18. 274.¹ Aristotle is not therefore defining his own peculiar usage of *ἀμαρτημα*, as Hey (138) makes out (as Adkins says (82), *ἀμαρτία* is not a technical term in Aristotle), but simply adapting the familiar threefold division to the requirements of his present context. The simpler form of the distinction, between *ἀμαρτημα* (venial error) and *ἀδίκημα* (culpable wrongdoing) is still more common (e.g. Thuc. 1. 69), and may go back to Prodicus.² The rhetorical point of the distinction is usually to minimize the culpability of what must be admitted an offence. The corresponsion in *E.N.* 5. 8 of *ἀδίκημα* with intentional action and *ἀμαρτημα* with unintentional is again not new (cf. e.g. Lys. 31. 11³). Aristotle's fourfold division subdivides the unintentional into *ἀτυχήματα*, which are not culpable at all, and *ἀμαρτήματα*, which are culpable only in the sense that the results should have been foreseen (see p. 232

¹ Bremer, 40 f., 49.

² L. Radermacher, *Artium Scriptores*, SB

Wien 227, 3 (1951), 69; Bremer, 40 n. 47.

³ Bremer, 48.

n. 1); and intentional actions into ἀδικήματα done on impulse and after deliberation: both culpable, but the former having some excuse or defence which the latter do not. It is significant that ἀμάρτημα, ἀμαρτάνειν are applied to both (2) and (3). Its application to (2) corresponds to the standard distinction between ἀμάρτημα and ἀδίκημα, mistake and wrong act; in applying it to (3), Aristotle is concerned to emphasize that ἀδικήματα due to impulse are less culpable than those done after deliberation. Hey therefore discounts the moral element in ἀμαρτάνειν here (βλάπτοντες καὶ ἀμαρτάνοντες), applied to (3), on the ground that it is a euphemism; he compares *Rhet.* 3. 2. 1405^a, where Aristotle gives as an example of μεταφοραί (euphemistic and pejorative usages) ἔξεστι λέγειν τὸν ἀδικήσαντα μὲν ἀμαρτάνειν, τὸν δ' ἀμαρτάνοντα ἀδικῆσαι.¹ But this is grossly misleading, so far as his argument is concerned. For if ἀμαρτάνειν can be used euphemistically to stress the venial nature of a wrong act which falls short of μοχθηρία, the same may well be true of ἀμαρτία in *Po.* 13.

How then does the division in *E.N.* 5. 8 bear on *Po.* 13? (1) is irrelevant: ἀτυχήματα are untragic, whether they are external events or actions whose harmful results are wholly due to mischance, so that the agent cannot in any way be held accountable (see p. 232 n. 1). The contrast in *Po.* 13 between a suitable tragic act, ἀμαρτία, and an act due to μοχθηρία is usually matched with the contrast in *E.N.* 5. 8 between class (2), unintentional ἀμαρτήματα, on the one hand, and class (3), intentional ἀδικήματα, on the other, i.e. the contrast is between mistake of fact and morally wrong act. But an equally valid contrast is between (2) and (3) on the one hand, and (4) on the other; i.e. between mistake and wrong act due to impulse on the one hand, and wrong act due to κακία on the other. This is precisely where the line is drawn in *Po.* 13. An ἀδίκημα due to impulse will then be a suitable tragic ἀμαρτία; and so it is, e.g. Ajax' intention to kill the Greek leaders, due to the natural, human impulse of injured pride (though I am not implying that this is an important factor in Sophocles' play).

The third relevant passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is in the account of ἀκρασία in 7. If I am right in what I have so far said, the whole of this book is in some sense relevant, since it concerns an important class of wrong actions not due to μοχθηρία but to natural, human impulses which afford some excuse or defence, though not exonerating the agent. Thus in 7. 8 ἀκρασία is distinguished from κακία in much the same terms as the impulsive ἀδικήματα from the deliberate in 5. 8: 'it is clear that ἀκρασία is not κακία, though perhaps it is in some sense (ἀλλὰ πῇ ἴσως); for it does not involve deliberate choice. Hence ἀκρατεῖς are not wrongdoers (ἄδικοι), although they do wrong (ἀδικοῦσι)' (1151^a5-10). Particularly significant, however, is ch. 4, in which the standard sense of ἀκρασία is extended from the physical appetites to other sources of pleasure, e.g. the pursuit of victory, honour, or wealth, which is good in itself but culpable in excess, or to weakness in respect of other passions, e.g. anger. These extended senses are analogous to the standard sense, but the difference is indicated partly by the way in which they are described, i.e. not simply as ἀκρασία, weakness, but as weakness in respect of money, honour, anger, etc.; and partly by the way they are evaluated. 'For ἀκρασία (in the standard sense) is censured not only as ἀμαρτία but also as κακία, but not in these extended senses' (1148^a2-4). This distinction between ἀμαρτία and κακία is relied on by Adkins, as we have seen (p. 224), to show that ἀμαρτία is normally not

¹ Hey, op. cit. (p. 222 n. 2), 138-40.

a moral failing. But the less culpable kind of ἀκρασία in respect of honour, etc., is still a moral fault, albeit a less culpable one; and it is certainly not a mistake of fact. The qualification 'we do not call them simply (ἀπλῶς) ἀκρατεῖς' means, I take it, that inability to postpone or value properly the satisfaction of the appetites, even if they are natural, commonly counts as a vice, i.e. a bad ἐξίς. But ἀκρασία in respect of honour, etc., though a weakness, is not called a vice because honour is in itself a good. Such weaknesses, which are culpable but not very, are especially suitable for the undeserved misfortune of tragedy, and it is no accident that Aristotle cites as an example the tragic figure of Niobe, who was over-enthusiastic (σπουδάζειν) about her children—such enthusiasm being in itself a good, but not in excess (1148^a31–4).

We may now review the range of actions (as defined in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) which according to my interpretation of *Po.* 13 Aristotle held to be suitable for the ideal tragedy. Of involuntary acts, the wholly compulsory are excluded, since the initiative, the ἀρχή, is not with the agent: he does not control his actions. This leaves acts done through ignorance, i.e. through a mistake of fact. I have already suggested that actions whose consequences are wholly unforeseeable—just a stroke of bad luck—may also be excluded, since there is another sense in which the agent is not responsible—the ἀρχή τῆς αἰτίας does not lie with him.¹ There remain errors of fact whose consequences might have been foreseen. Intentional actions suitable for tragedy are as follows. (1) μικταὶ πράξεις, where the agent does something wrong or unjust or even shameful in order to avoid a greater ill or achieve a greater good. (2) Acts done in ignorance due to temporary obfuscation by some passion. (3) ἀδικήματα committed without deliberation through a natural human impulse, e.g. anger. (4) Wrong acts done through weakness of will, due to overmastering desire or passions (this overlaps with (3)), or sometimes to an excessive desire for things good in themselves.

What all these have in common is that the act has extenuating circumstances which the agent can plead in his defence. If the act is unintentional the defence is complete, and acquits the agent of this act, though his ignorance may be culpable. With mixed actions, there may be pardon, if the pressure is beyond human nature to bear; in any case the plea of compulsion, if it is not frivolous, will have some mitigating effect. The purely voluntary (intentional) acts, in which there is no element of compulsion, are culpable, but are all due to mastery by natural impulses, which again may be pleaded in mitigation. Thus in all these acts culpability is reduced or modified in some way.² This corresponds to the use of ἀμαρτία well established in the orators and the speeches of Thucydides where a defence or plea in mitigation

¹ This is generally taken, perhaps rightly, to mean 'when the agent is responsible for his own ignorance', whether or not Jackson's ἀγνοίας is read for αἰτίας; the whole emphasis being on μὴ παραλόγως (cf. *Rhet.* 1374^b7). M. Schofield has, however, argued (*P.C.P.S.* n.s. xix [1973], 66–70) that Aristotle is not here primarily concerned with negligence, but with unintended acts for which the agent cannot plead in excuse mischances outside his control; he adopts Burnet's rendering, 'when the charge (i.e.

the charge against him) originates in him'. (For this view, cf. *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1427^a34–6.) The interpretation of Joachim-Rees, 'the origin of the cause of the act *qua* injurious is within him' (presumably with a similar emphasis) seems to me very difficult. The point does not affect my argument.

² 7. 6. 1149^b4 ἔτι ταῖς φυσικαῖς μᾶλλον ἀκολουθεῖν ὀρέξεσιν . . . ὁ δὲ θυμὸς φυσικώτερον, κτλ.; cf. 1145^a10 ff. and 7. 5 on the θηριώδης (see Glanville, *op. cit.* [p. 221 n. 3], 49 nn. 5 and 8).

is put forward.¹ No such act is due to *μοχθηρία*, *κακία*, or *ἀδικία*, nor is the agent thereby *μοχθηρός*, *κακός*, or *ἄδικος*. This satisfies the requirements of *Po.* 13.

So much for the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But there is also a passage in the *Eudemian Ethics* (2. 8. 1224^a7–25^a33), whose relevance was pointed out by Miss Glanville,² in which the distinction between voluntary action is analysed in an entirely different, and less subtle, way. Aristotle argues in general that the criterion of voluntary action is intention, *διάνοια*; any involuntary action (provided the agent controls his own actions) will be due to ignorance. He first considers the apparent exception where impulses conflict, so that the agent, whether *ἄκρατής* or *ἐγκρατής*, might seem to be compelled by the stronger, and therefore act involuntarily. But although each part of the agent's soul may be regarded as controlled by its own impulse, the resultant is the action of the whole soul and since both impulses are equally natural the action is voluntary. He then considers the agent who does something bad or painful to avoid greater evil or achieve greater good (the 'mixed actions' of *E.N.*), and allows with hesitation that his actions are involuntary, if the circumstances are outside his control. 'For this reason', she goes on, 'many hold that love too is involuntary, and some feelings of anger and natural tendencies, because their strength is actually beyond nature, and we pardon them as being naturally such as to do violence to nature.' Aristotle, as Glanville says, does not commit himself to this view, but accepts the criterion: 'For *within his control* (our own standard) means *what his nature is able to bear*. What it is not able to bear, not being within reach of his natural desire or calculation, is not within his control.' So that *ἐπιθυμία* may be outside the agent's control even if he intends the action, just as the words and actions of divinely inspired persons are outside their control. Glanville comments: 'Any tragic act performed without vice, but with knowledge, would fall into one or other of these classes' (i.e. mixed actions or actions due to *πάθος*) 'and there is nothing so far to suggest that Aristotle would have been shocked by a Euripidean Medea, or that he would have failed to condone the matricide of a conventional Orestes or Alcmaeon as, according to his own definition, involuntary.' Glanville goes on to observe how differently the subject is treated in *E.N.* (1) Mixed actions are only pardoned when the pressure is beyond human nature to resist *and which no one could withstand*; i.e. appeal can be made to human nature in general, but not to the individual nature of the agent. But some acts are such that no pressure justifies them. (2) Action *διὰ θυμὸν ἢ ἐπιθυμίαν* is not involuntary, however strong the *πάθος*, because these *πάθη* are human, and the agent is responsible; though his responsibility is diminished, and the act to some extent condoned, in so far as the *πάθος* is natural and common to most men. According to the new analysis of *ἄκρασία*, the agent who is not bad or vicious and acts on impulse *διὰ πάθος* does so in some sense in ignorance, since it is only by a suspension of his moral principles that his action can be explained; but in another sense knowingly, so that his action is voluntary. It cannot therefore be pitiable, according to the *E.N.* criterion, since pity is accorded only to involuntary actions (and perhaps to some actions done *διὰ πάθος ἄγνοῶν*, where the *πάθος* is not the agent's fault: see p. 232 n. 2). His action will, however, be to some extent pardonable, provided his *πάθος* is natural; otherwise it will be *θηριώδης*, and not pardonable. In terms of tragic action (1) Alcmaeon and Orestes will no

¹ Bremer, 45–54.

² Op. cit. (p. 221 n. 3), 48 ff.

longer be pardonable, since matricide cannot be justified by pressure; (2) Medea's action will no longer be pardonable, since her *πάθος* is not natural and human, and cannot be justified by appeal to her special (barbarian) nature.¹ These acts will therefore no longer be suitable for the best kinds of tragedy. Moreover, (3) of acts done *διὰ πάθος*, only those due to ignorance, where the *πάθος* is not the agent's fault, will be pitiable and so suitable tragic acts (e.g. Deianeira).

So runs Glanville's argument. She then applies it to a well-known crux, the apparent contradictions between *Po.* 13 and 14, the resolution of which is the main object of her article. In ch. 14 Aristotle specifies that the greatest *πάθος* attaches to acts of violence done within the family. He then outlines the possible modes of action: (a) it can either be done or not done, (b) the agent acts or is about to act either knowingly or in ignorance. This gives (1) not done, knowingly; this is untragic and lacks *πάθος*;² (2) done, knowingly, e.g. Medea; favoured by the older poets; (3) done, in ignorance, e.g. Oedipus; better than (2); (4) about to be done in ignorance, but not done, e.g. Merope; best. Aristotle's preference for (4) over (3) is strange, since it appears (a) to lack *πάθος*, (b) to conflict with the clearly stated requirement in ch. 13 in another respect. There, the condition for the best tragedy derived from the dynamics of pity and terror does not in itself exclude actions done knowingly due to some passion. In ch. 14, this class of action is relegated to third place, which seems to imply that it no longer qualifies. Glanville supposes that ch. 13 is based on the account of moral action in *E.E.*, ch. 14 on a new and (from the philosophical point of view) improved account in *E.N.* By this difference she also explains, in a subtle and complex argument, Aristotle's preference for (4) over (3). To the latter problem I shall revert presently (pp. 252 f.). Is Glanville right in her answer to the former?

Why acts done in ignorance are preferred in ch. 14 is easy to see: the two conditions in ch. 13, that the plot should be (a) complex and (b) so constructed as to arouse pity and terror, are here combined. A complex plot, with recognition and reversal, must hinge on a mistake, i.e. on an act done in ignorance. Aristotle passes no judgement on class (2), acts done knowingly, but his remark that they were favoured by the older poets suggests that they represent for him a less-developed form of tragedy. But given the wider interpretation of *ἀμαρτία*, the prescription for the arousal of pity and terror in ch. 13, as we have seen, works also for simple plots, i.e. with acts of class (2). Now Glanville thinks that the prescription is only satisfied by pitiable acts, and she infers from *E.N.* that Aristotle regarded only involuntary acts as pitiable. According to the account of moral action in *E.N.*, this will mean acts done *δι' ἄγνοιαν* (and perhaps some acts done *ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος*). This in turn implies that *ἀμαρτία* in ch. 13 means mistake. Glanville, who holds as I do that there are good reasons for believing that *ἀμαρτία* in ch. 13 may mean moral error as well as mistake,³ avoids this conclusion by referring ch. 13 to the account of moral

¹ Glanville, 49, cl. *E.N.* 1110^a23.

² See p. 252 below.

³ Op. cit. 53: 'Too narrow a view of the meaning of *ἀμαρτία* here is precluded by Aristotle's list of suitable men' (cf. pp. 226-8 above). She includes the whole range of *ἀμαρτία* in *E.N.*: a mistake in the practical syllogism; wrong acts due to some

kinds of *ἀκρασία*; and any act 'not *κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον*', cl. 1115^b15, 1119^a34. Dawe describes Glanville's article as 'an interesting and valuable complement to Hey's discussion' (90 n. 1). Since Glanville's views for the most part run counter to Hey's, perhaps 'corrective' would be a better word than 'complement'.

action in *E.E.* not *E.N.* According to this account, involuntary acts include as being compulsory some acts done knowingly through strong passion or desire, whereas in *E.N.* such acts are specifically said to be voluntary and not compulsory. She supposes, therefore, that the difference in standpoint between chs. 13 and 14 represents a development in Aristotle's views on the psychology of moral action.

This hypothesis may be true, but as far as the present argument is concerned it is not necessary. Even if the prescription in ch. 13 does require pitiable *acts*, it is not to be inferred from *E.N.* that only involuntary acts merit pity, but rather that only involuntary acts merit pity *per se*, without further justification. Of course voluntary and involuntary acts are not evaluated in terms of black and white in *E.N.* Some acts are not pardonable in themselves, but may be rendered more or less pardonable by various mitigating circumstances (cf. p. 232 n. 2 above), and presumably more or less pitiable also. Such grounds serve to diminish culpability and may, as it were, reduce sentence even if they do not secure an acquittal. But, as I have argued above (pp. 229–30), in ch. 13 it is not the act itself which is to arouse pity, but the whole tragic *πρᾶξις*, the fall from good fortune to bad. For pity and fear to be effectively aroused, the agent must not be morally faultless, and the misfortune must not be deserved, i.e. the act must not be due to *κακία*, *ἀδικία*, or *μοχθηρία*. As we have seen, the account of moral action in *E.N.* allows for a wide range of morally wrong acts satisfying this condition. There is no need, therefore, to refer specifically to the different account in *E.E.* in order to make sense of *Po.* 13. At the same time it is important to remember that the account of moral action in *E.N.* is not the only account Aristotle could have had in mind, and that in fact *E.E.* makes the range even wider: viz. by taking into account the psychology of the individual agent in the assessment of his action, so that, e.g., Medea's action would be pitiable and not merely barbarous (see p. 234 n. 1).

III

I shall now consider how Aristotle's analysis in *Po.* 13, so interpreted, applies or does not apply to some extant tragedies. Much misguided ingenuity has been expended on proving that Aristotle's prescription applies to all Greek tragedy worth the name (which is untrue), or that because it manifestly does not apply to some tragedies, it does not significantly apply to any (which is also untrue). Adkins indeed, approaching the problem from a new and individual angle, sought to show that Aristotle's analysis was unlikely to be relevant (and in fact was not relevant) because of the difference between fifth-century values and his own, a difference of which Aristotle himself was unaware. A big step forward has been made since by Dawe, and independently by Bremer,¹ with their insight that the concept of *ἄρτη* is central to classical tragedy, and that Aristotle's *ἁμαρτία* has much in common with *ἄρτη*. Obviously the question needs far more space than I can give it here. I shall argue that the inclusion of moral error in the scope of *ἁμαρτία* makes the conclusions of Dawe and Bremer not less illuminating, but more so; and that although Aristotle may have misunderstood some aspects of fifth-century tragedy, his analysis is not invalidated (any more than his criticism of presocratic philosophy is invalidated) because it is stated in his own terms.

¹ Dawe, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Bremer, chs. iv–vi (N.B. p. 99 n. 1).

Before applying Aristotle's prescription, however, we must first make sure what it is, and there are still some ambiguities to be cleared up. The moral element in *ἁμαρτία* I have translated by 'moral error', which implies an act, a particular instance, rather than a disposition, 'moral flaw'. M. Ostwald,¹ who follows Hey in denying any moral element in *ἁμαρτία*, argues that there is a systematic distinction between *ἁμαρτία* and *ἀμάρτημα*, such that the former denotes a disposition, the latter an act or particular instance, a standard function of nouns in *-μα*. *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 cannot therefore, he thinks, denote an act, since Aristotle would then have written *ἀμάρτημα*. The disposition is not, however, a moral flaw, but a disposition to commit the relevant mistake; e.g. in Oedipus' case the disposition, the *ἁμαρτία*, is his ignorance of his parents' identity. This argument will not work, since although there is in general such a distinction between nouns in *-μα* and other abstracts which holds also for Aristotle, he does not invariably observe it, as Bremer points out (p. 55 nn. 95, 96). There is no reason why Oedipus' *ἁμαρτία* should not be his particular error of killing his father and marrying his mother; though it is true that the corresponding disposition is Oedipus' ignorance, and it is not impossible that Aristotle had this in mind. Dawe (pp. 120 f.) argues against Ostwald that this is ruled out by *ἁμαρτία μεγάλη*: 'ignorance does not come in sizes.' It can, however, be more or less important or momentous, and this, the normal rendering, is no doubt the right sense of *μεγάλη* here. Indeed, as Glanville reasonably remarks (op. cit. 53 n. 1), if *ἁμαρτία* is restricted to 'error of fact', Aristotle would have made his meaning much clearer if he had written *δι' ἄγνοιάν τινα*; though Glanville rightly does not use this as her substantive argument—Aristotle is not always so concerned about clarity.

Thus, given that its scope includes a moral element, *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 can mean 'moral error', a particular wrong act; it can also mean 'moral flaw'.² In general any act due to *ἁμαρτία* will have its corresponding disposition. Xerxes' rashness, folly, and hybris is the disposition which leads to his particular rash, foolish, and hybriatic act—mounting an expedition against Greece. Phaedra's inherited sexuality disposes her to fall fatally in love with her stepson, her inability to keep silent leads her into betraying her secret. (The latter examples are *exempli gratia*; I am not suggesting that any of them are *the ἁμαρτία* of *Hippolytus* in Aristotelian terms.) If then the stage-figures are given characters conformable to their acts, as Aristotle recommends, such dispositions will be manifested in how they behave and what they say; and to this extent, in the Aristotelian analysis, their characters are a determinant of their fate. Whether in extant tragedy it is an important determinant is another matter.

Mistake of fact will not in general have a corresponding disposition in the

¹ M. Ostwald, 'Aristotle on *Hamartia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*', *Festschrift Kapp*, 1958, 93–108.

² It might be argued that *ἁμαρτία μεγάλη* made against this: that although a misdeed, as well as a mistake, could be called *ἁμαρτία μεγάλη* meaning 'momentous' (in its consequences), the same phrase applied to a flaw of character or disposition must mean a serious defect in the character *per se*, not only serious for its consequences (so M. E. Hubbard, *Ancient Literary Criticism* [ed. D. A.

Russell and M. Winterbottom], 1972, 107 n.). But this would be wrong. A machine can have a defect which is at the same time serious (in its consequences), in that it may be dangerous, and slight, in that it is easily remedied or does not seriously impair the machine's functioning. So a relatively slight defect of character in a man, such as hastiness or irritability, may have grave consequences (through hasty decisions, etc.), and this would be properly termed *ἁμαρτία μεγάλη*.

same way, except in the trivial sense that such a mistake will always be the result of some specific ignorance. But if the ignorance is culpable, the failure to see the consequences of the act may be due to a particular disposition, i.e. a moral weakness. Such is the connection sometimes alleged, not very convincingly, between Oedipus' mistake and his impulsiveness. A clear case is Deianeira's use of the charm in the *Trachiniae*. That she should have foreseen the result is brought out in the play, both in her dialogue with the chorus emphasizing its experimental nature and her consequent hesitation, and in her subsequent self-reproach for trusting the gift of an enemy (584-93; 706 ff.). Her use of the love-charm, which while not morally wrong is shameful (*αἰσχρόν*) for her, is forced upon her by her passionate nature (1138-9; cf. 841 ff.); despite her humanity and restraint, she cannot endure a rival in the house—three in a bed, what woman could bear it? (545-6). So she overlooks the danger. Deianeira's act is sometimes regarded as the paradigm case of *ἁμαρτία* in the sense 'mistake of fact', and so it is. But it is not a simple case of acting through ignorance, δι' ἄγνοιαν: it verges on acting in ignorance through passion, ἄγνοῶν διὰ πάθος; technically, that is, a voluntary not involuntary action. Nevertheless, as the πάθος is human and irresistible, and indeed good in itself, it is certainly pardonable, and is as near pitiable in itself as it could be without being strictly involuntary. In such cases, again, the relevant disposition is manifest in the words and actions of the stage-figures, if they are to act in character.

This brings us close to a notorious source of confusion. The first situation ruled out by Aristotle in ch. 13 as untragic is that morally good men, ἐπικεκίς ἄνδρες, should be represented as changing from good fortune to bad. This is in itself surprising and far from evident (δῆλον); for ἐπικεκίς is a word of moderate commendation, and overlaps in sense with χρηστός and σπουδαῖος, words designating qualities which Aristotle elsewhere prescribes for the stage-figures of tragedy (*Po.* 3; 15 init.).¹ This difficulty is partly resolved by the context: ἐπικεκίς, being opposed to ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη, must here stand for σφόδρα ἐπικεκίς, morally faultless (Adkins, Sykutris), though this is hard to get out of the Greek.² Adkins (99-101) feels a more sophisticated puzzlement: why should Aristotle be shocked by a morally good man passing from good fortune to bad? Presumably because he thought moral goodness a guarantee of prosperity. But no one in the fifth century would have understood this: for the tragedians and their audiences, it was not moral excellence, ἐπιείκεια, but competitive excellence, ἀρετή and the success and prosperity which it entailed, which furnished the guarantee, or at least the presumption, of continued prosperity. Now since prosperity is a necessary condition of ἀρετή in this sense, the possessor of ἀρετή, in passing from εὐτυχία to δυστυχία, loses not only his good fortune, but his ἀρετή as well. But moral excellence, ἐπιείκεια, which is an ἀρετή (and perhaps the most important ἀρετή) in Aristotle's view, is not affected by the change. Aristotle, Adkins maintains, still retains enough of the fifth-century attitude to feel that a fall from good fortune to bad entailed, even for an ἐπικεκίς, a loss of ἀρετή, but at the same time it did not, since according to contemporary attitudes the ἀρετή of ἐπιείκεια would be retained

¹ Cf. Lucas on 1448^a2, cit. Vahlen⁴, 278-8 (cf. also *Beiträge zu Aristoteles Poetik*, 1865, 78).

² 'The sense of the word is sufficiently

fixed by its opposite, σφόδρα πονηρόν, as well as by the equivalent expression, ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη', Twining; so most modern editors.

after the fall. The resulting contradiction was for Aristotle a source of confusion and shock, and so he calls such a fall *μαρόν*.

Adkins's puzzlement seems to me to be largely of his own making. Even granted that fifth-century values were so close to Homer's and so far from Aristotle's (and Adkins has not to my mind proved this as he claims, though this is not the place to argue the point),¹ I cannot myself feel any puzzlement at Aristotle's view that the spectacle of a good man overtaken by disaster is morally repulsive, since it is a view I share. Not that I imagine goodness to be a guarantee of prosperity, or believe the world to be so organized that such injustice cannot happen. I am well aware that they often do happen. But when they do, and there is no saving factor, my moral sense is outraged. So too with stage representations: again, if there is no saving factor, my moral sense is outraged. This has nothing to do with the influence of Plato, Aristotle, or Christianity: it is an aspect of human feeling, a function of the moral sensibility which in Aristotle underlies *ἔλεος*, *τὸ νευεσᾶν*, and *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον*.²

From this position it is a short but mistaken step to the view that the diminution of *ἐπιείκεια* which Aristotle prescribes is to be identified, or necessarily connected, with the *ἀμαρτία* which occasions the downfall; indeed, a fatal step, if it leads (as it has sometimes led) to crediting—or debiting—Aristotle with the notion of poetic justice. That Aristotle is not talking about poetic justice, i.e. crime meeting with condign punishment, is sufficiently shown by the requirement that the suffering should be undeserved. That the diminution of *ἐπιείκεια* is not necessarily connected with the *ἀμαρτία* is sufficiently shown by at least one play which Aristotle thought to hinge on *ἀμαρτία*: the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The *ἀμαρτία* of Oedipus, as is now generally agreed, consists in killing his father and marrying his mother, a mistake of fact; diminution of *ἐπιείκεια* is produced by flaws of character, irascibility, over-confidence, and (as Adkins puts it) any other defect of character he may be held to have. Socrates' death, for the Academy the paradigm case of *τὸ μαρόν*, is morally shocking not only because he was innocent of the charges against him, but because he had, or was reputed to have, a character of impeccable integrity. If it were shown that he was, let us say, an inveterate scrounger and parasite or that he persistently beat Xanthippe, he would be no less innocent of the charges, but the outrage would be mitigated. It does not follow, however, that because the *ἀμαρτία* and the diminution of *ἐπιείκεια* need not be connected, they *must* not be;³ indeed, the dramatic economy will tend to favour such a connection. Deianeira's *ἀμαρτία*, using the centaur's

¹ For a cogent criticism of Adkins's view see J. L. Creed, 'Moral Values in the Age of Thucydides', *C.Q.* n.s. xxiii (1973), 213–31.

² *ἔλεος* is a painful feeling caused by the spectacle of undeserved suffering (other factors may contribute, but this one is necessary). *τὸ νευεσᾶν*, its counterpart, is a painful feeling caused by undeserved prosperity (which in *Po.* 13 is called *οὐ φιλόανθρωπον*). Both situations are unjust, and this is what disturbs us (*Rhet.* 2. 8–9). Excessively unjust suffering so disturbs us that we feel not pity but moral outrage. A situation is *φιλόανθρωπον* if it satisfies our moral sense: deserved suffering or deserved prosperity.

(That *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον* is connected with 'moral sentiment' was rightly seen by Twining [ed.², 1812, ii. 104–6]; cf. Schade-waldt, *Hermes*, lxxxiii (1955), 137. This is rather different from the fifth-century use, in which *φιλόανθρωπία* means more generally sympathy with, compassion for one's fellow men. Pohlenz's attempt to mediate between these senses [ibid. lxxxiv (1956), 59] is unsuccessful.) In this note I am much indebted to Miss Hubbard.

³ See K. von Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie*, 1962, 11 ff. (= 'Tragische Schuld', *Studium Generale* 8 [1955]).

poison as a love-charm, is due to her jealousy (or her excessive love), which is the only diminution of her ἐπιείκεια.

At first sight it might seem as if Aristotle held the spectacle of innocent suffering to be tolerable only if the sufferer is not really innocent. This of course is not so: there is no doubt about the *innocence* of Oedipus or Deianeira—or Socrates. The point of diminishing the agent's ἐπιείκεια is to avoid the sense of moral outrage which impedes the tragic pleasure. Two conflicting factors are at work here. Pity depends on undeserved suffering. The more undeserved it is, the greater the pity; and in the sphere of human feeling, the better a man is, the greater his deserts are held to be; though in a modern law-court this would not—or should not—help towards his acquittal.¹ It should follow, then, that the better the man and the greater the pity, the more intense the tragic emotion and consequent pleasure. But at some point in the scale of deserts, or goodness of character, another feeling supervenes, which counteracts the pity: a sense of moral outrage.

The tragic emotions, ἔλεος and φόβος, depend on the involvement of the audience with the stage-figures and their sufferings. So it is a necessary condition of φόβος that the agent should be ὁμοιος, like ourselves (*Po.* 13. 1453^a5), so that we can identify with him, and feel 'mea res agitur'. This is also a factor contributing to ἔλεος, for the same reason (*Rhet.* 2. 8. 1386^a24).² Manipulating the sympathies of the audience to achieve the desired tragic effect is an important part of the dramatist's art, and he does it by adjusting the moral terms of the action (see p. 249 below on the *Bacchae*). The conflicting factors of ἔλεος and τὸ μαρὸν which Aristotle mediates by the diminution of ἐπιείκεια might also be expressed in terms of audience sympathy. We tend to sympathize with stage-figures who have qualities such as we ourselves have or admire (cf. *Po.* 13. 1453^a16 οἷον εἶρηται ἢ βελτίονος μᾶλλον ἢ χείρονος); though these may not in fact be moral qualities. Up to a certain point, the greater the sympathy, the more intense the tragic emotion and consequent pleasure. But beyond this point, sympathy with a stage-figure will not enhance the tragic effect, but impede it: he must not be completely sympathetic or admirable, or we shall feel his downfall as an outrage. So the effect of diminishing his ἐπιείκεια, and so mitigating this outrage, is to ensure some minimal degree of distancing or alienation of sympathy.³ The stage-figure must have some characteristic which we ourselves would not wish to have. But Aristotle in fact does not put it in this way. He bases his exclusion of τὸ μαρὸν from tragic action on purely moral considerations, and the human feeling that responds to them.⁴

¹ Ancient views on the matter were rather different: a man's character and position in his city, and the fact that he had helped it, might be invoked as a ground for acquitting him (*Lys.* 21. 15); cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 1974, 292 ff. Considerations other than moral were relevant to the notion of ἀνάξιος δυστυχῶν in the fifth century (cf. Schadewaldt, *op. cit.*, 141; Adkins, *op. cit.*, 91–5), and possibly also in Aristotle, though here the moral element is necessary and predominant.

² Identification is not always a helpful concept, nor is 'mea res agitur' always appropriate. It is better to speak more generally

of sympathy or involvement (cf. Vickers, *op. cit.* [p. 224 n. 1], 57–9).

³ This alienation of sympathy has of course nothing to do with Brechtian alienation; in fact the emotional involvement it implies belongs to a kind of drama Brecht was concerned to repudiate (though it is a commonplace of criticism that Brecht was a great dramatist despite his theoretical aims and not because of them: it is precisely because we respond to Galileo, for all the faults he is given, that the play has the impact it does).

⁴ There is some analogy to the limitation of ἔλεος by τὸ μαρὸν in its limitation by τὸ

Aristotle's insight, that moral outrage impedes the tragic effect, is true and important,¹ but his prescription for avoiding it is too narrow in its scope. For although diminution of the agent's *ἐπιείκεια* is certainly one way of palliating moral outrage at injustice, it is not the only way. Oedipus' faults of character, such as they are, would not in themselves be enough. The moral balance is in this case restored, as Dodds has shown,² by the peculiar nature of his acts. Even for a society in which guilt and innocence is in principle altogether a matter of intention, some acts are so hideous, the taboo on them is so strong, that we still cannot feel that the agent, be he never so unwitting and innocent, is completely absolved. The problem of *Antigone* needs a different solution. Her 'defects of character', diminishing her *ἐπιείκεια*, are alleged to be obstinacy and truculence;³ her *ἀμαρτία*, her defiance of lawful authority. Now if we are to suppose that this is the *ἀμαρτία* Aristotle would have recognized in this play—if we are not to say, the play has no *ἀμαρτία*, it works in a different way, or that the *ἀμαρτία* is Creon's, or whatever—then it must be granted that this is not a 'misdeed' in the ordinary sense, since Antigone knows what she is doing, and what she does is right: to break a bad law is a positive merit, whatever the Lord Chancellor may say.⁴ In Aristotelian terms her act is a *μικτὴ πράξις* meriting not only pardon but praise, since it involves undergoing a painful threat and its fulfilment for the sake of a greater good (*E.N.* 3. 1. 1110^a19 ff.). So too obstinacy and truculence in the face of tyranny are not only excusable, but praiseworthy. But the *Antigone* does not outrage the moral sense. Why not? Partly, perhaps, because the oppressor gets his deserts, and deserved suffering satisfies the moral sense—another side of *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον* (*Rhet.* 1386^b28, *Po.* 1453^a2). But a more profound satisfaction is given by Creon's *recognition* that he and not Antigone is after all the offender; in effect a case of late learning, though the disaster, with its intensified *πάθος*, in fact occurs afterwards. This again restores the moral balance. Finally even Deianeira's intense love for Heracles and jealousy of her rival can hardly be accounted a detraction from her warm humanity. Heracles' amours might have to be explained away as a *νόσος*, but inordinate affection for a husband is not, in Greek morality, a grave fault—though perhaps, like Niobe's inordinate affection for her children, a technical *ἀμαρτία*. So what diminution there is of Deianeira's *ἐπιείκεια* could not in itself compensate for the cruelty of her fate. Again, there is nothing morally repulsive about the *Trachiniae*; what then, if any, is the compensating factor? Not the suffering of Heracles, the cause of her disaster; this is part of his own tragedy, and though this has many subtle links with hers, it does nothing to redress the moral balance. The redeeming factor is Hyllus' recognition of her innocence—this time a true case of late

δεινόν: although we tend to pity those who are like us (*Rhet.* 1386^a24), we do not pity the suffering of those who are closely related to us (*σφόδρα ἐγγὺς οἰκειότητι*), but find it terrible and are shocked by it (*ibid.* 1386^a 17–23). But this clearly has nothing to do with alienation of sympathy.

¹ It is not of course true of the Theatre of the Absurd; a difference which might seem to make against Jan Kott's claim (if I understand him rightly) that most Greek tragedies can be placed in this category

(unpublished lecture delivered in the University of Toronto, 1972, cf. *The Eating of the Gods*, 1974 [1970], 9, 43, 101, 145, etc.).

² 'On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*', *G. & R.* xiii (1966), 37–49. The same point is briefly made by von Fritz, *op. cit.* (p. 238 n. 3), 8, 467–8.

³ Cf. the remarks of von Fritz, *op. cit.*, 5–6.

⁴ Lord Hailsham, as reported in *The Times*, 4 Dec. 1973; cf. Paul Oestricher's letter in reply, *ibid.*, 8 Dec.

learning—and his fruitless defence of her to his father. In these three plays, then, the moral outrage is annulled in quite different ways. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the deed of guilt is such that the innocent sufferer, though morally guiltless, is not felt to be wholly absolved. In *Antigone*, reparation is made through recognition of her innocence by Creon, the cause of her suffering. In the *Trachiniae*, the recognition is by Hyllus, the link between the tragedies of the two principals. In none of them is the ἐπιείκεια of the agent substantially diminished. But Aristotle's prescription that the morally faultless agent should not suffer, though wrongly framed, reaches out to an important principle: not the principle of poetic justice, which can do nothing for tragedy but trivialize it, but the annulment of moral outrage by a restoration of balance which for want of a better term I will call 'moral redress'.

It must be allowed at once that this is not what Aristotle said or intended to say. In *Po.* 13 he is concerned with the fortunes and deserts of one central figure as the moral schema for the best tragedy, i.e. that which in his view best produces the tragic effect. He expressly excludes plays with a double issue, let alone a multiple issue (1453^a30 ff.). Now though he has fifth-century tragedy throughout in mind, he is not concerned to find a formula which will fit as many fifth-century tragedies as possible, but rather one that best embodies the essentials of tragedy. We should not, however, expect those tragedies considered best by Aristotle and ourselves to deviate significantly from the recommended schema; if they do, something has gone wrong. In ch. 6 Aristotle sees the essential schema of tragedy, its εἶδος, not in the changing fortunes of a central character, but in the whole πρᾶξις, to which all the stage-figures contribute; and it is legitimate to see in this, as John Jones does,¹ the more important insight. This is not to deny that the insight of ch. 13 has any value, but rather to suggest that if the one is to be brought into line with the other, it is ch. 13 which should be adjusted. Nor is it to deny that many Greek tragedies are mainly concerned with a central character; but unless the central character is brought into relation with all aspects of the πρᾶξις, critical justice will not be done to the drama. So if a great tragedy does not fit Aristotle's formula, rather than rule the play deviant or censure Aristotle as obtuse, it is more useful, provided the insight is worth saving, to adjust the formula so that it does fit. So here the unworkable requirement, that morally faultless agents should not be portrayed falling from good fortune to bad, can be made to work, if we see what lies behind it, by adding the clause, 'unless there is some compensating factor in the πρᾶξις'. Similarly Aristotle's insight into the importance of recognition and reversal, which leads him to a rather rigid formula for plot-construction, can be usefully retained if the formula is modified to allow for all the complex interplay of upward and downward movement which the structure of Greek tragedies in fact exhibits. Above all, we may recognize as a valid insight the importance assigned by Aristotle to ἁμαρτία, while allowing, despite the rigidity of his schema, that a great tragedy might achieve its effect with more than one ἁμαρτία or with none at all.

IV

It may well be objected at this point that my whole enterprise is misguided. It is one thing to explain what Aristotle meant by what he said, quite another

¹ Op. cit. (p. 224 n. 1), 36–40.

to determine what he ought to have said, so that it actually applies to extant Greek tragedy. This is the wrong way to proceed. A serious critique of Greek tragedy can never be achieved by a piecemeal adjustment of Aristotelian insights. It should start by a complete rejection of his terms of reference: by realizing that his psychology of tragic effect is distorted by over-reaction to Plato, that his insistence on the moral content of tragedy and its inherent logic merely reflects his own philosophical preoccupations, and misrepresents the aims of the tragedian no less than it distorts their values; and in particular that the elimination of gods from a literature in which they play a major role so cripples his analysis as to make it not only useless but dangerously misleading.

My apology must for the most part be brief and dogmatic. About the psychology of the tragic effect, and the implications of *κάθαρσις*, I have nothing to say; except that the therapeutic aspect of this theory—the more questionable aspect, which indeed owes something to reaction against Plato—is more important in the *Politics* than in the *Poetics*, where Aristotle is concerned with the peculiar pleasure of tragedy and how it is to be achieved. Serious drama may have other aims than to give pleasure, as, e.g., Brecht has polemically maintained,¹ but Brecht himself allows that so far as Greek tragedy is concerned the Aristotelian standpoint is perfectly fair. It is also true that in general the fifth-century tragedians intended their plays to be edifying, and that it is often important, in interpreting them, to remember this. But this was not their main aim, and it is not for this reason that their drama has permanent value. At the same time (and this is quite a different point)² the moral content of Greek tragedy, the moral dimensions of the *πρᾶξις*—e.g. the constant preoccupation with *δίκη*—is very important indeed, and Aristotle's emphasis on it, though perhaps too narrow, is not unjustified.

The particular charge is brought by Adkins that Aristotle's emphasis is misplaced, because he did not realize how fifth-century values differed from his own, and therefore stressed moral properties which were important in his own time but not a century earlier. Aristotle's emphasis on the *ἐπιείκεια* of the agent was indeed misplaced, as we have seen; not, however, because he went wrong about values, but because he did not cast his net wide enough. But Adkins holds that Aristotle's whole emphasis on the *deserts* of the agent, that to achieve the tragic effect he must be *ἀνάξιος δυστυχῶν*, is misconceived. For, he argues, in the fifth century *ἀνάξιος δυστυχῶν* means something quite different: it means that the agent's suffering is unbefitting and shameful to one possessing his *ἀρετή* (including his success and his status); that in falling thus unbefittingly from good fortune to bad he loses his *ἀρετή* along with his *εὐτυχία*; and that this is why, in tragedy and fifth-century literature generally, such a fate is pitied. The agent's moral blamelessness—or relative blamelessness—of

¹ *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (1948), nr. 1-12, 33-5 = *Gesammelte Werke* (Werkausgabe, 1967), 16. 2, 663-7, 676-8. Cf. K. von Fritz, *Antike u. moderne Tragödie*, 1962, x-xiv.

² The distinction has often been blurred, from the *Frogs* onwards. The plays, and the myths they embody, show an overriding concern for moral or religious sanctions and their violation, which doubtless reflects a

central preoccupation of early Greek society (cf., e.g., Kirk, *Myth, its Meaning and Function*, 1970, 190 ff.; *The Nature of Greek Myth*, 1974, *passim*; Vickers, *op. cit.* [p. 224 n. 1], 165-337). Given this preoccupation, which most societies to some extent share, it is not surprising that tragic conflict should often be projected in moral terms. This does not mean that these terms can be simply defined, or that the poet is preaching.

which Aristotle makes so much, is simply irrelevant. The only exception he finds in tragedy is Philoctetes, who the chorus says suffers undeservedly because he has never done anyone any harm.¹

That the social aspect of misfortune was important in the fifth century is amply illustrated by Adkins. The attitude he isolates is not indeed peculiar to the fifth century; it is still true that a month's imprisonment is felt to mean more to an alderman than to an old lag, and the courts take this into account. It is in any case the change to misfortune, rather than the actual loss of ἀρετή, which more often occasions pity in tragedy; it is a commonplace that those who are unfortunate all the time suffer less than those who fall from the heights of prosperity, because they are used to it.² Moreover the fact that suffering is undeserved is perhaps more often a ground for pity in tragedy than Adkins allows.³ But it is true that moral innocence as a ground for pity is not prominent in the fifth century. There are, however, two good reasons why Adkins's argument does not go home against Aristotle. Firstly, Aristotle expressly provides that the agent shall have ἀρετή in the fifth-century sense (ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχίᾳ), and requires elsewhere that the stage-figures should be σπουδαῖοι, a term with social implications (see p. 237 n. 1). So a change from good fortune to bad will inevitably involve an end of success and status, and Aristotle, it may be presumed, took it for granted that this is pitiable. The moral aspect therefore becomes prominent because it is the only variable, the loss of competitive ἀρετή being a constant. Secondly, as I have pointed out (pp. 229f.), Aristotle does not say in *Po.* 13 that the sufferer is to be pitied because his suffering is undeserved. What is pitiable is the change from good fortune to bad; but a *condition* of its being so is that it should be undeserved. This does not mean that the agent must be morally faultless—this would be actually μαρόν—but that he is not μοχθηρός or κακός; otherwise pity is not felt, and the tragic pleasure is impeded. Now this condition holds for Greek tragedy just as much as it does for Aristotle. No character in tragedy is said, or intended, to merit pity who is μοχθηρός. We feel nothing but satisfaction at the bloody end of Lycus. This is not so much because he is an enemy, but because he is evil. Enemies can be pitied, as Odysseus pities his enemy Ajax (*S. Aj.* 121–4); a prudential pity—‘it might be me’—which is very much in point. There is no question here, certainly, of Ajax' moral blamelessness. But Sophocles takes care at this point that he should not be morally blameworthy either: his design to kill the Greek leaders—which in any case would not be counted as μοχθηρία (see p. 231)—is not censured in the prologue. Clytemnestra might be thought an exception. But she could claim that the killing of Agamemnon was not done through μοχθηρία, but to achieve a greater good, vengeance on her

¹ 681 ff., with 438 ff., 1007 ff. (Adkins, op. cit. 94 n. 4). But the *Philoctetes*, he says, is a special case, being ‘advanced’ in other respects (ibid. 85).

² See Kannicht on *Hel.* 417–18.

³ Io is more pitiable because she is innocent (*P.V.* 577: that is the point of the appeal); Prometheus asks for sympathy (ibid. 274) because his punishment is out of proportion to his deserts (268). (Prometheus also considers that he deserves pity because he pitied mankind (239–41)—a co-operative

virtue (φιλανθρωπία), though no doubt traditional ἀρετή was needed to give it effect (235).) At *Ag.* 1526 (if Page is right to keep the paradox) Iphigeneia merits pity because she did not deserve what Agamemnon did to her; he merits none because he deserved what he got. Antigone is ἀναξιώτατη in her death (*S. Ant.* 694) not because of her status, but because she does not deserve to die—rather she deserves a reward (699): οὐχ ᾗδε χρυσῆς ἀξία τιμῆς λαχεῖν;

daughter's murderer: a μικτὴ πράξις. Her plea is not accepted, nor does Orestes pity her; and the rights and wrongs of their respective actions are debated in the next play. So in prescribing that the change from good fortune to bad should not be deserved, Aristotle does not do violence to fifth-century moral attitudes, and Adkins's argument falls to the ground.

The criticism that Aristotle's omission of gods as a factor in tragedy fatally impairs his analysis is more serious. For although his aim is not to interpret tragedies but to define the essence of tragedy in formal terms, he is still very much concerned with motivation; and to ignore divine motivation in Greek tragedy must lead to distortion. That the defect is not so serious as it seems, that Aristotle's analysis, though biased by this omission, is not stultified by it, is made clear by the valuable insight of Dawe and Bremer (see p. 235 n. 1 above), that the concept of ἄτη is central to Greek tragedy and that Aristotle's ἀμαρτία has much in common with ἄτη. On the face of it the primitive idea of ἄτη, whereby gods achieve their ends by perverting human action and making use of human error, is unintelligible without gods. But from another point of view (which may have been Aristotle's), gods—that is, Olympian gods, who have nothing to do with the god of *Metaphysics* Λ—are simply a projection of the unaccountable in human action and human suffering. Since, however, in early Greek thought divine and human motivation run parallel, a particular act is unaccountable in human terms not so much because no human motive explains it, as because no human motives explain it completely. There is nothing in itself unaccountable in Aeschylus' Eteocles assigning to himself a place opposite his brother; but it is fully intelligible only as a fulfilment of the curse. In earlier Greek belief, this is called ἄτη and attributed to gods; in Aristotle it is called ἀμαρτία and regarded as human aberration. This is not just lack of historical insight on Aristotle's part. As far as he is concerned such gods and their interaction with human affairs are a product of superstition. But since he believes tragedy to be of permanent value, its essential working must be explained in terms that are permanently valid. Hence gods are excluded. This means that as far as the interpretation of fifth-century drama goes, he leaves out much that is important. But as far as purely human action is concerned, its functioning in tragedy is given full value. The movements of the solar system are fully intelligible only if we realize that it is heliocentric; but they can in some sense be adequately described even if we do not. The analogy is indeed unfair to Aristotle. It might be said that in attempting to isolate the essence of tragedy as such, he was right to exclude the gods, which are specific to fifth-century Greek tragedy; and that his own analysis thereby acquires a more permanent value, so that it can be applied—and has for centuries been applied—to other kinds of tragedy in which gods have no part.

The insight of Dawe and Bremer, that ἄτη and ἀμαρτία go together, thus makes very good sense. Both of them, however, were misled by Hey into believing that ἀμαρτία must mean 'mistake of fact'. If, as I have made out, it includes moral error in its scope, their findings make even better sense. No doubt Dawe, after Stallmach, is right to see harm, βλάβη, as the primary sense of ἄτη, the blinding and infatuation of the agent, through which the harm is done, being secondary.¹ It is still true that although ἄτη can mean harm done

¹ Dawe, 95 ff.; cf. J. Stallmach, *Ate: frühgriechischen Menschen*, 1968, (Diss. Göttingen 1950), who leaves the question open.

through ignorance or deception and so through mistake of fact, it can also refer to *moral* error, a confusion of *moral* perceptions. Dawe and Bremer cite many examples of the 'intellectual' language used in early poetry to describe the workings of *ἄτη*: the god induces a malfunctioning of the *φρένες* resulting in *ἀπάτη*, mistake and consequent destruction. But the functioning of the *φρένες* in early poetry is not purely intellectual: it has a strong moral component, and its malfunctioning may, in a case of moral action, refer to a wrong application of moral principles as well as to a mistake of fact. Thus Xerxes' downfall *can* be attributed to an error in strategy and logistics; but in Aeschylus the emphasis is on his *moral* shortcomings, the defects of a bad king, with whom Darius is contrasted. The case of Agamemnon is more complex, and to Dawe a stumbling-block; for the effect of *ἄτη*, the *φρενῶν παρακοπά*, is plainly *subsequent* to Agamemnon's decision, not coincident with it (218 ἐπεὶ δὲ . . .); hence Dawe rearranges the text.¹ There are indeed difficulties here. It is fair to suppose that Aristotle would have regarded Agamemnon's choice (a non-pardonable *μικτὴ πράξις*) as his *ἁμαρτία*. But the moral error—the blunting of the moral perceptions which makes it possible for a man to kill his own child—is not in the decision, but in its fulfilment. The outrage in Agamemnon's act lies not in his decision to kill Iphigeneia, but in his bringing himself to do so.² It is also true that if we are to interpret Aeschylus correctly, we must envisage the divine control: Agamemnon's duty to the expedition is the binding power of Zeus *ξένιος*, his decision and its fulfilment are alike the inheritance of Thyestes' curse, by which his *ἦθος* is determined.³ Take away the divine control, and we get *ἁμαρτία* in human terms: the impossible choice between evils and the consequent cruelty and impiety of the sacrifice.

It does not, however, follow that because *ἄτη* is a central concept in Greek tragedy, a play which lacks this peculiar interaction of divine and human is thereby defective, lacking the essential tragic core. But this seems to be Dawe's view of the *Trachiniae*: '... other plays tend to be richer in alternative explanations; for even if the last words of the play are *κούδέν τούτων ὁ τι μὴ Ζεύς*, it has to be admitted that the action of the piece is not pervaded by the mysterious interpenetrating ambiguities which most of us have come to regard as the essence of Greek tragedy.' It is true that, thanks to Lesky, Dodds, and others, most of us have come to understand the coincidence of divine and human motivation in Greek tragedy better than we did. It is true also that Aphrodite is a powerful and significant figure behind all the action in this drama, and that Deianeira's fate, her *δαίμων* (cf. 910), is to be vulnerable to Aphrodite. But there is here no conflict between human and divine, no design which Aphrodite effects by the hand of her unwitting instrument. There is indeed a design which Deianeira is unwittingly instrumental in effecting: the fulfilment of the oracles by which Heracles is to be 'released from his labours'

¹ Op. cit. 110 f.; argued in full in *Eranos*, lxiv (1966), 1–21, esp. 6–13.

² Cf. Lesky's interpretation in *J.H.S.* lxxxvi (1966), 80–3 (this still seems to me the most helpful account, despite the emphasis on theology criticized by Dover, *J.H.S.* xciii [1973], 58–69). I do not see that the words *αἰσχρομήτης, πρωτοπήμων* show that the *παρακοπά* (i.e. *ἄτη*) in 223 refers to the decision, not the act (Dawe,

110)—they imply merely that the act was wicked, deliberate, and harmful in its consequences. Of course in Aristotelian terms the deliberation is part of the action, but Aeschylus' account need not be so precisely analytical.

³ See J. Peradotto, 'The Omen of the Eagles and the *ethos* of Agamemnon', *Phoenix* xxiii (1969), 237–63.

and to 'die by no human hand', i.e. through the remote agency of the centaur; one might also see the hand of Zeus more directly behind the destruction of Heracles than Dawe allows, though it is, I think, wrong to claim, as Kitto does,¹ that the just punishment of Heracles by Zeus is the clue to the drama. Contrast the *Hippolytus*, in which despite the self-sufficiency of the human motivation the function of Phaedra as Aphrodite's instrument in destroying Hippolytus is made perfectly clear. It might be said that this was simply a difference in technique between the two dramatists. I should prefer to say that we are invited to regard the interaction of divine and human rather differently in the two plays. I therefore hesitantly agree with Dawe, against Bremer, that the *Trachiniae* is not exactly an *ἄρη* play, in that *ἄρη* is certainly not central to it. But to complain that the play lacks 'the richness of alternatives' which belong to the essence of Greek drama is to beg the question. The *Trachiniae* is of the essence of Greek tragedy; if *ἄρη* is not a significant factor in it, then *ἄρη* is not essential to tragedy. But what is conspicuously present and central to this play, as is universally allowed, is *ἀμαρτία*. Aristotle's analysis of the essence of tragedy is again vindicated.

The oracle in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is more organically internal to the drama than in the *Trachiniae*, and it is true that in fulfilling it Oedipus fulfils the curse on the house of Laius. But I doubt whether the curse is of any importance in this play. I argue elsewhere that the hints on which Lloyd-Jones relies² to establish the opposite view are not prominent enough to carry the weight of dramatic significance which he would put upon them. My point here is that the question is again one of emphasis: in so far as the curse and its working-out is intended to be seen as central to the drama, this is an *ἄρη* play. Now in the *Oedipus Coloneus* there seems to be much more reason for believing the curse to be central to the action.³ Oedipus in cursing Polyneices puts his seal on the action of the family curse, and ensures by his own action not only that the brothers should kill each other, but that Antigone, the focus of his love, should perish with them. Oedipus' curse has its motivation in his anger, but it is also the last kick, as it were, of the family curse working within him, before he is finally freed from it by death. On this interpretation, the working of *ἄρη*, though not recognized here by Dawe (94)⁴ or Bremer (172), becomes more important than in any play of Sophocles save the *Ajax*.

The three Euripides plays in whose divine action Dawe rightly sees a development of the ancient idea of *ἄρη* are *Hippolytus*, *Bacchae*, and *Heracles*. In all of them gods are actually seen at work, and the divine plan is made explicit in words. But though it is legitimate to see *ἄρη* at work in all three plays, there are important differences in its operation. The point is lucidly made by Bremer; my aim is to show that Aristotle's concept of *ἀμαρτία*, as I have interpreted it, has an even greater relevance than he allows.

First, *Hippolytus*. There are three tragic figures, all of whom contribute to

¹ H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis*, 1966, ch. iv, esp. 177 (cogently criticized by P. E. Easterling, *B.I.C.S.* xv [1968], 58-68).

² *The Justice of Zeus*, 1971, 121-3. Professor Lloyd-Jones tells me that I misunderstand his position: he holds that the curse has no special dramatic importance in the play and therefore receives no special emphasis, but none the less is essential to the scheme

of the plot. I accept the correction, but would still maintain that anything essential to the plot of a Greek tragedy is always emphasized in the play.

³ As Lloyd-Jones maintains, *op. cit.* (above, n. 2), 117-19.

⁴ He considers only those plays in which 'a noble person goes to his doom'.

their own and others' downfall. Phaedra errs (1) by falling in love with her stepson. She knows this to be wrong, but cannot help it: in *E.N.* terms, a case of ἀκρασία. Her aberrant passion is caused (a) by Aphrodite's express design, as the audience knows from the prologue, though Phaedra does not (her apparent recognition of it at 725 ff. is a *façon de parler*, which in this case has an ironic resonance); (b) by her inherited sexuality, which makes her vulnerable to Aphrodite;¹ in *E.E.* terms, her peculiar nature makes her unable to resist her πάθος, so that she acts by compulsion. (2) She betrays her secret to the nurse; she knows that she should keep silent, but cannot resist the probing questions, because the temptation to speak is too strong for her: another case of ἀκρασία.² (3) She falsely accuses Hippolytus in writing before she kills herself. Her motive is (a) to protect the good name of her children and herself against Hippolytus' declared intention of informing Theseus of 'her' proposition: a μικτή πράξις—a wrong act to achieve, for her, a greater good—not perhaps wholly pardonable, but certainly with a strong plea in mitigation; (b) to cause pain to Hippolytus and teach him a lesson, a natural consequence of his bitter hostility and cruel attack; a less admirable action, but understandable—in *E.N.* terms, a provocation stronger than human nature could bear.³ All three acts, since they are directly inspired by Aphrodite in the execution of her design, are properly ascribed to ἄτη. All three, as wrong acts with extenuating circumstances, are properly described as ἁμαρτίαι.

Hippolytus errs (1) by rejecting Aphrodite, the ἀρχή of the whole tragedy. It is important to realize that Hippolytus is punished not simply because his way of life has no place for sex, but because he rejects it, and rejects the worship of the goddess, with contumely. This is brought out in the scene with the old servant (88 ff.): Hippolytus is σεμνός, in the bad sense, and regards the works of Aphrodite with contempt and disgust. That is, it is not his abnormal sexuality alone that provokes his ruin, but his arrogant confidence in his own rectitude. This is the fault of character which leads him (2) to react with such violence and unnecessary cruelty to what he believes to be Phaedra's proposition, which, in turn, given his threat to betray her to Theseus, partly motivates her false accusation.⁴ Hippolytus' arrogance (1) is of course what occasions his vehemence, (2) is the faulty disposition which leads to the wrong act.⁵ According to Bremer, Hippolytus' ἁμαρτία is his failure to recognize

¹ See R. P. Winnington-Ingram in *Entretiens Hardt* vi (1958), 175–6.

² So the scene is in effect interpreted by Dodds (*C.R.* xxxix [1925], 102–4), and—with some difference of emphasis—by Barrett (on 333–5), E. R. Schwinge (*Die Verwendung der Stichomythie in den Dramen des Euripides*, 1969, 182–4), and C. P. Segal (*Hermes* xcvi [1970], 284 ff.). But John Gould has argued, perhaps rightly (*J.H.S.* xciii [1973], 86–7; cf. Vickers, *op. cit.* [p. 224 n. 1], 359 n. 6), that by the rules of supplication Phaedra must yield at this point. Her plea of αἰδώς cannot then be dismissed as an excuse, and her confession cannot technically be faulted, though it is still a wrong choice in a conflict of duties. So even if the wrong choice is due to weakness, it will not be a case of ἀκρασία, properly so called.

³ This motive, though certainly made clear in the text, is not stressed and should not be over-estimated. We can ask: would Phaedra have acted otherwise without this additional provocation, or does the logic of the play demand that she accuse him anyway?—and answer, perhaps, yes. But this question does not I think arise for Euripides: that her motivation is over-determined at the human level causes no more logical difficulty than its over-determination by the duality of divine and human intentions.

⁴ Dodds would add (3) that Hippolytus is culpably over-scrupulous in keeping his oath; but there is no warrant in the play for supposing that Euripides meant his audience to take this point.

⁵ How far his arrogance and vehemence would in real life be causally connected with

that the proposition does not originate with Phaedra—a mistake of fact. The mistake is there, of course, and an important factor in the action; but the *ἀμαρτία*, as I interpret it, embraces also the moral quality of Hippolytus' reaction—its bitterness and, in Phaedra's presence, cruelty; and the disposition which gives rise to the act, the 'moral flaw', can also quite properly be described as *ἀμαρτία*. Here, then, *ἀμαρτία* is wider than *ἄρτη* and includes it: Hippolytus' arrogant disposition is what angers Aphrodite in the first place; she then uses it to destroy him (as she uses Phaedra's sexual disposition to destroy her) by his reaction to 'Phaedra's' proposition, a reaction which can then properly be ascribed to *ἄρτη*.

Theseus errs by assuming Hippolytus' guilt without hearing him, and by failing utterly to understand his character and disposition. Theseus acts wholly *δι' ἀγνοίαν*, though his ignorance is culpable to this extent, that his *πάθος* (his grief and anger) prevent him from giving due weight to his son's protestations of innocence. So too the curse, which is a natural outcome of his mistake, is culpable because it is hastily uttered and irrevocable. But this culpability is allowed for also in the narrower definition of *ἀμαρτία*, and I here have no quarrel with Bremer. There is also, as Knox has pointed out,¹ a fourth effective character in the drama: the nurse. She is not a tragic figure, as her fate is of no consequence in the play; indeed, her status would not allow it, as Aristotle rightly recognized. All the same, her mistake—a failure to understand either Phaedra or Hippolytus, which stems from her natural coarseness of fibre—is a significant factor in the play. If we pay attention to the whole *πρᾶξις*, rather than to the fate of the protagonist (i.e. to *Po.* ch. 6 rather than ch. 13, see above, p. 241), we can see that the term *ἀμαρτία* is applicable to the nurse also: both to the misunderstanding, and to the defect of character which occasions it; though the nurse's lack of tragic weight might make us hesitate to use the word, for all that Phaedra does so (690). So too, since she is instrumental in fulfilling the divine plan, we might, with the same qualification, see *ἄρτη* behind her acts.

Secondly, the *Bacchae*. Pentheus errs (1) in not recognizing Dionysus as a god; (2) in not recognizing his captive as Dionysus; (3) in not recognizing the danger of his fatal escapade, until it is too late. Agave errs (1) through rejecting Dionysus as a member of the family (outside the drama), (2) as a result of her consequent madness, through mistaking her son for a wild animal, a mistake she also recognizes too late, after the moving and realistic scene in which she recovers her sanity. Cadmus errs, not through rejecting Dionysus, but through accepting him for the wrong reason; so too does Teiresias, for a more subtly wrong reason.² The play is of course as much 'about' Dionysus and the Bacchantes as it is 'about' the characters who suffer. The tragedy of the *Bacchae*, to risk distortion by a simplifying formula, is that Dionysus, who is vital to a full human life, cannot flourish unchecked without the disintegration of organized society (Pentheus' problem as ruler), and cannot be coerced and contained within society without its total destruction (the outcome of his

his sexual abnormality is not in question: again, if Euripides had intended us to take this point he would have made it clear.

¹ B. M. W. Knox, *T.C.S.* xiii (1952), 3-4, 19 ff.

² I think it likely that Teiresias was

punished with all the rest, this being indicated in the gap in our text before 1330. Admittedly this cannot be proved, but lack of mention in Apsines' brief summary does not make against it. Cadmus and Teiresias are not, however, strictly tragic figures.

solution).¹ The climax of the *πρᾶξις* is, however, the destruction of Pentheus, and this is due to ἄρτη, the delusion by the god of Agave and her son, both of whom learn too late (1113, 1296).

The *Bacchae* is in some ways remarkably like the *Hippolytus* in conception, but differs from it in this, that Pentheus' end, unlike that of Hippolytus, is not explicitly predicted in the prologue. We may surmise what the fate of a θεομάχος will be, and feel our fears confirmed by his brutality (240-1) and intransigence in the scene with Cadmus and Teiresias; but it is not until the first scene with Dionysus that we actually see him seal his fate by his direct provocation of the god (cf. 516-18). Pentheus' resistance, unlike his delusion, is not due to the influence of Dionysus. It may none the less be attributed to ἄρτη, since no one in his right mind fights a god, and it was all ordained long before by Zeus (1349). Now the gods work their will through exploiting human weakness. Pentheus is predisposed to resist Dionysus by his youthful arrogance and aggressiveness, and it is these same defects that prevent him from recognizing the god in his human form. Again, he falls victim to Dionysus' persuasion, and fails to see the dangers to which he is exposing himself, because he is predisposed to be persuaded: he wants to see the maenads on the mountain. There is deep insight here into human nature, as Dodds has pointed out: Pentheus' fatal desire is due to the power of Dionysus within him, suppressed and perverted. So his fatal errors, failure to recognize the god and failure to recognize the danger, answer to faulty dispositions, and the errors and the dispositions alike may be properly termed ἁμαρτίαι.² So the singular genius of Euripides brings about the paradox that in the only ἄρτη play where a god, as stage-figure, dominates the *πρᾶξις*, the crucial actions of the protagonist can be understood in purely human terms. To complete the picture I will add that while the actions are *mistakes*, the dispositions are *moral flaws*, condoned by youth, and these moral flaws, and the youth which condones them, are factors in the complex shift of sympathies for which my term 'moral redress' is in this play, where it is so important and so finely contrived, manifestly inadequate.

That Heracles is the victim of ἄρτη is obvious: his delusion and fatal error is due to direct divine intervention, which we see enacted. This is a clear case of Aristotelian ἁμαρτία: Heracles acts ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος, and the πάθος is human and outside his control (see p. 250 n. 1). The delusion and its consequences are central to the action. Here, then, if anywhere, Aristotle's analysis might seem to be vindicated. Yet the *Heracles* is evidently nothing like the kind of play Aristotle regarded as essentially tragic, and indeed no one could call it typical. Its peculiarity, apart from some apparent structural weaknesses and lack of cohesion, is that the visitation of Lyssa which causes the tragic act is not grounded in any part of the previous action: it has no causal antecedents in the action, and it has no kind of moral justification. Its only motive as given in the play is the malign jealousy of Hera, a datum of the myth from Homer on.

¹ Those who think that Euripides is talking about orgiastic religions like that of Sabazius, or about mass hysteria like St. Vitus's dance, mistake the model for the concept, and miss the whole point of the play's universality. The *Bacchae* is about liberation and its containment, one or other of which is likely enough to destroy our own society in my lifetime.

² Whether Pentheus' aggressive hostility to Dionysus would in real life be connected with his voyeurism is another question which does not arise, since Euripides does not invite us to consider it; any more than he invites us to connect Hippolytus' vehemence with his abnormal sexuality, see p. 247 n. 5 above.

The lack of causal antecedents runs counter to Aristotle's requirements in *Po.* ch. 9 (1451^b10) that the sequence of events in tragedy should be *κατὰ τὸ εἶκός ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον*; the lack of justification as well makes the onset of madness a matter of *τύχη*: it is perfectly possible for an epileptic seizure to be unheralded and undeserved, but such is not the proper material of tragic action (contrast the statue of Mityls falling on his murderer, which had the appearance of deliberate retribution (ch. 9, 1452^a9–11)). Now innocent suffering is not in itself a problem for Aristotle; he is not recommending poetic justice as a tragic principle, and in ch. 13 he expressly requires that the agent should be *ἀνάξιος δυστυχῶν*. He also requires, however, that the agent should not be perfect, that there should be some diminution of his *ἐπιείκεια*. But Heracles is perfect, so far as possible: not only is he the best of men in competitive *ἀρετή*, who had the power and the will to protect his friends, but in this play he is shown to have domestic virtues which are not usually associated with him. His deep and sincere love for his wife and children, and theirs for him, do of course serve to enhance the *πάθος* of their death at his hands. But it is also the mark of a man who is pre-eminently *ἐπιεικής*. Heracles in fact has no faults. It is true that by the standards of *E.N.* his act is not wholly blameless and does not in itself merit pity, since he acts *ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος* and not *δι' ἄγνοιαν*. But Euripides takes care of this by making it clear that the *πάθος* is of divine origin, a possibility excluded in Aristotle's mature moral philosophy.¹ Moreover Lyssa herself, significantly enough, stresses Heracles' virtues as the friend of mankind.

The unheralded madness of Heracles has been a stumbling-block to many critics, not because they have held Aristotle's prescriptions to be mandatory, but because they themselves recognize it as a serious fault in the play. Some have attempted to supply the antecedent cause or justification which Euripides rules out.² In particular, it has been suggested³ that Heracles' bloodthirsty desire for revenge, and the extravagant language in which he expresses it, is a foreshadowing of his madness, and betrays a violence, itself a flaw of character, which the madness only exaggerates and misdirects. But the fierce desire for revenge is entirely justified by the brutal persecution of Lycus and the treachery of his supporters, and is wholly in accordance with a code in which

¹ That is, in *E.N.*; at *E.E.* 1225^a28 he observes: 'we say that those divinely possessed (*ἐνθουσιῶντας*) are not in control of themselves: it was not within their own power to say or do what they said or did' (cf. 233). Madness, epilepsy, etc., are regarded by Aristotle in *E.N.* as a special kind of *ἀκρασία* (*θηριώδης* or *νοσηματώδης*) to which the normal terms of moral action do not directly apply (cf. 7. 5, esp. 1149^a9–20). In a court of law the plea 'I was sent mad by a god' would doubtless not have carried much weight, since its truth could always be denied, or the divine visitation ascribed to some sin (see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 1974, 151–2). But in the *Heracles* both objections are ruled out (cf. *ibid.* 154). (This dramatic premiss does not of course mean that Euripides is tilting against the author of *περὶ ἐρῆς νόσου*.)

² The strain of the labours has caused a nervous crisis (Dodds, *C.R.* xliii [1929], 99) or an obsession (Kamerbeek, *Mnemos.* 19 [1966], 15) or toppled a megalomaniac over the edge (Wilamowitz, *Herakles*², 128: Heracles' superhuman heroism is grounded in violence, and 'leads not to heaven but to madness'); the madness is due to an excess of black bile in a natural melancholic (Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*², 1954, 298–300); Heracles has usurped divine functions and honours, and is struck down to protect the divine prerogative (A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived*, 1971, 177–8). See also n. 3 below.

³ Wilamowitz, *op. cit.*, 129; Pohlenz, *loc. cit.*; Murray, *O.C.T.*, app. crit. to v. 575; E. M. Blaiklock, *The Male Characters of Euripides*, 1952, 128–9.

friends are helped but foes harmed. The fact remains: this is the one Greek tragedy in which divine *φθόνος* is totally divorced from *δίκη*.¹

Should we then regard Heracles' downfall as irretrievably shocking, *μαρόν*? I think not, at least not in the ordinary sense; the play has faults, perhaps, but not this fault. Aristotle's prescription for avoiding it is that the agent should not be completely *ἐπιεικής*: he should have some fault which alienates our sympathy. But as we have seen there are other ways of achieving what I have called 'moral redress'. Antigone is vindicated by Creon, as Deianeira is by Hyllus, when he recognizes the truth and admits her innocence, so that the sense of moral outrage is assuaged. Here it is Heracles who proclaims his own innocence, with the curious result that the whole concept of divine retribution is turned upside-down. The 'retribution' is seen to be mere spite: the man is vindicated and the god arraigned. The governance of the world is not only irrational, but malignant; the forces that control it have human faults, as true gods would not,² but super-human powers, against which the best of men is helpless.

No less important is Heracles' way of accepting his fate. As Chalk has suggested in his perceptive article,³ Heracles' courage in adversity is as admirable as his previous *ἀρετή*. This is certainly on the right track, a track across which Adkins has since drawn a red herring.⁴ Adkins, with legalistic precision, objects to Chalk's use of the word *ἀρετή* to describe courage in adversity; for, he holds, *ἀρετή* implies success and control of circumstances, and no fifth-century audience could have understood this new kind of *ἀρετή* unless it were explicitly defined, which it is not. This is playing with words. Adkins may be right that the word *ἀρετή* in the fifth century normally has the implication he claims; though if Thucydides can use it of those who succumbed to the plague by helping their friends and exposing themselves to infection (2. 51. 5),⁵ I doubt if Euripides' audience would have had much difficulty in understanding such an innovation. But the word *ἀρετή* is neither here nor there. What matters is that we are invited to approve and admire Heracles' behaviour, that is, courage in adversity, which is all that is left to him of his previous heroism—except his bow, the power to resist. Moreover, Heracles expressly compares his decision to endure life⁶ with the courage of those standing fast against adversity in the line of battle (1347–50). This, as Adkins himself remarks,⁷ is the one situation in which traditional *ἀρετή* did not imply control of circumstances, and in making Heracles compare it to his own situation Euripides is giving in the clearest possible terms the 'redefinition' which Adkins finds wanting. These lines in fact give the vital link with the first part of the play: Heracles' decision to endure life combines Megara's policy, to accept

¹ Lloyd-Jones reminds me that Poseidon in the *Odyssey* punishes Odysseus for blinding the Cyclops, and that Athena and Aphrodite do not brook the insult to their *τιμή* offered by Ajax or Hippolytus: 'this is not the same as the justice of Zeus.' But Odysseus survives, and the blinding of the Cyclops is no subject for serious drama; while Ajax and Hippolytus have done something to merit the gods' anger. All Heracles has done is to be begotten by Zeus as the enemy of Hera (1263 ff.).

² 1307 *τοιαύτη θεῶ / τίς ἄν προσεύχουθ'*; cf. *Hipp.* 120, *Bacch.* 1348, *Bellerophon*, fr. 292.

³ 'Αρετή and βία in Euripides' *Herakles*', *J.H.S.* lxxxii (1962), 7–18.

⁴ *C.Q.* n.s. xvi (1966), 209 ff.

⁵ This example, and the substance of p. 252 n. 1 I owe to Dr. Matthew Dickie. Cf. J. L. Creed, op. cit. (p. 238 n. 1), esp. 218 ff.; Andrewes–Dover on Thuc. 5. 105. 4.

⁶ Wilamowitz's *ἐγκατερήσω βίον* (for *θάνατον*) is certainly right.

⁷ Op. cit. (n. 4 above), 212.

fate since we cannot change it (308–11), and Amphitryon's, that to have hope in adversity is the mark of the *ἄριστος* (105–6).¹ Heracles has lost all he values, success, power, and fame, along with his wife and children, and he must for ever bear the taint and disgrace of his act; he has no hope. But unlike Megara, he sees that acceptance of fate does not entail retreat from life; and unlike Ajax, he sees that the heroic course is not to die, but to live on. So Heracles is vindicated both by his words and by his actions; and this is what makes his downfall not only not shocking, but noble.

In *Hippolytus*, *Bacchae*, and *Heracles* gods are prominent. Of course some sense can be made of the plays without them: Aphrodite or Artemis are the dominant powers in the psyche of Phaedra or Hippolytus, Pentheus is a young king trying unsuccessfully to suppress a new religion which proves too strong for him, Heracles is the victim of an irrational world where epileptic seizures strike at random. It is hard to set limits to the Greek capacity for externalizing feelings, when 'recognizing one's friends' is a god.² But the gods' role is too positive here for such treatment. Moreover, to ignore the interaction of divine and human motives is not only to miss the peculiar irony and horror it gives to the action, but to rob the plays of a significance their author certainly intended. *ἁμαρτία* therefore leaves out an important aspect of *ἄτη*. But at the human level *ἁμαρτία* is a more useful concept: it is wider and more flexible and a more subtle instrument of criticism.

In the light of what has now been said, we may return to the problem of *Po.* ch. 14, where Aristotle lists the four possibilities of tragic action in order of merit. (1) The agent is about to act knowingly, but refrains. This, he says, lacks *πάθος*. His verdict is commonly accepted, but it is not clear why a situation in which the agent refrains from acting because, say, he is overcome by a conviction that his action is wrong, has less *πάθος* than if he learns a vital fact. Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* is an adequate example: he takes the bow, a wrong act to secure a greater good (*μικτὴ πράξις*), but realizes that the wrong is greater than the good. There is no lack of *πάθος* in the two episodes which precede his change of heart. (2) The agent acts knowingly. The schema is not uncommon (e.g. *Medea*); as Lucas points out, it is not excluded as untragic by Aristotle, but simply not preferred, as belonging to the simple not the complex plot. (3) The agent acts in ignorance: the typical schema, involving a complex plot. (4) The agent is about to act in ignorance, but learns the truth in time (he cites the example of Merope in Euripides' *Cresphontes*).

Why does Aristotle prefer (4), the tragedy with the happy ending, when (a) the element of *πάθος* will presumably be less, (b) in ch. 13 the unhappy, 'tragic' ending is in fact said to be the best? The contradiction is unavoidable and must indicate a change of view; all we can do is to try to guess what prompted it. Adkins's theory, that Aristotle had two sets of values, traditional

¹ Hope is often a bad thing in archaic and classical Greek thought, as a source of delusion (cf. F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, 1907, 167 f.; H. Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie*, 1951, see index b. s.v. *ἐλπίς*); but it is not always so (e.g. S. *Trach.* 124–6, 723–6; fr. 196; E. fr. 408, 409, 761; D. 18, 97), and in particular it is the mark of an *ἀγαθός* to show courage in a tight place, cf. P. *I.* 8. 16 *χρή δ' ἀγαθὸν*

ἐλπίδ' ἀνδρὶ μέλειν, *ibid.* 7. 35 *προμάχων ἀν' ὅμιλον, ἐνθ' ἄριστοι | ἔσχον πολέμοιο νείκος ἐσχάταις ἐλπίσιν*. Amphitryon takes the view of the Melians at *Thuc.* 5. 102, which the Athenians cynically rebut; there is nothing untraditional about his attitude, as Adkins seems to think (*op. cit.* [p. 251 n. 4], 213). See p. 251 n. 4 above.

² *Hel.* 560; see Kannicht's note.

and modern, which conflicted when the agent lost his competitive ἀρετή and not his ἐπιείκεια, would explain why (4), without the downfall and the conflict, is preferred; but there is no good reason to accept his theory (see above, pp. 237–8). Glanville's explanation is interesting.¹ She notes the importance of gods in Greek tragedy, that often the agent's error is the unwitting fulfilment of a god's design. (4), she argues, shows how a good man could come to disaster, but does not do so; it therefore 'rescues both man and God from a moral condemnation through which pity is roused for what is human only at the cost of misrepresenting what is divine' (p. 56). Now it is true that in those acts whose effects recoil on the agent (περιπέτεια) 'we seem to have seen, not chance or nature or necessity, but the very meanstaking of the deity' (54). *We* do; but Aristotle, I suspect, did not, despite the example of the statue of Mitys (*Po.* ch. 9) to which Glanville here appeals. At least she shows no sign of seeing the hand of god in the events of tragedy (see Glanville, 51 n. 1), whether it is an Olympian god, such as we might see at work, or the perfect being of Aristotle's own theology. To see a benevolent deity at work in Greek tragedy would be as great an error as to see none at all, and we need not attribute it to Aristotle.

I believe, however, that Glanville is on the right lines. Aristotle's aim is to determine the schema which will have the maximum tragic effect. It may seem to us that if the tragic act is left undone, there must be less πάθος. But Aristotle seems to have held that as much πάθος was generated by an event still in the future as by a past event, provided it was πρὸ ὁμμάτων.² It might even be argued, in Aristotelian terms, that in (4) the πάθος is greater. It has two components, ἔλεος and φόβος. ἔλεος, pity or sympathy (Mitleid), depends on undeserved misfortune; and the more ἐπιεικής the victim, the greater the sympathy—up to a point: beyond that point his downfall becomes μαιρόν. So his ἐπιείκεια must have a limit (see pp. 238–9 above). If there is no downfall, however, this limit is unnecessary: he can be as ἐπιεικής as we like, and our pity will still be heightened, not diminished. At the vital moment, then, before the imminent disaster, we shall pity him more than we should pity the actual downfall of a less good (and less sympathetic) character. Fear, as we have seen, need not on Aristotle's view be less intense if it is not fulfilled. It might even be argued that a fear which is to be averted by rescue could be worked up to a higher pitch, and still be tolerable, than a fear which is fulfilled.³ And so on either count the tragic effect, which is the product of pity and fear, may be greater with (4) than with (3).

If this is Aristotle's view, it must be allowed that he is wrong. There is indeed some evidence that Euripides' *Cresphontes*, in which Merope learned the truth in time before killing her son, was full of πάθος and thrilled the spectators with intense fear (*E.N.* 1111^a1; *Plut. Mor.* 998e). Perhaps the same was true of the *Alexandros*, in which we now know⁴ that Hecuba was similarly prevented by Cassandra from unwittingly killing her son; with the additional irony that, as the other plays of the trilogy were to show, it would have been to the general good if she had killed him after all. But this is the

¹ Op. cit., 54–6, the conclusion of her whole argument.

² See Glanville, 55 nn. 6, 7, cl. *Rhet.* 1385^b13; 1386^a34; 1382^a21.

³ The argument about fear I owe to Miss

Hubbard.

⁴ See R. A. Coles, *A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus: the Hypothesis of Euripides' Alexandros*, *B.I.C.S. Suppl.* no. 32 (1974).

typical schema for melodrama rather than the best kind of tragedy, and it is disappointing to see the penetrating insight of ch. 13 replaced by such a facile formula. It looks rather as though Aristotle became obsessed by his own calculus of tragic emotions, so that he came to judge plays according to his criteria, instead of deriving the criteria from the plays. In his moral philosophy his second thoughts would appear always to have been more subtle and profound, but in the *Poetics* this seems not to be so.

To conclude. *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 does not mean only 'mistake of fact' or 'ignorance of fact'. It embraces a wide range of meanings, from acts done δι' ἄγνοιαν, at one end of the scale, through acts done by an agent ἄγνοῶν διὰ πάθος, and acts done through ἀκρασία (a kind of ignorance), to wrong acts done knowingly for the sake of a greater good (μικταὶ πράξεις). What is common to all these is that the agent has some excuse for his act, ranging from a complete defence (when his act is pitiable in itself) to various degrees of extenuating circumstances permitting a plea in mitigation. The evidence of Aristotle's own use of the term *ἁμαρτία* has commonly been misused through failure to take account of his peculiar paradigm of moral action, whereby a wrong act is a deviation. *ἁμαρτία* is a general term: it can mean specific acts, specific decisions leading to acts, or dispositions, which may vary from some kind of ignorance to some defect of character. The diminution of ἐπιείκεια, which Aristotle regards as necessary if the agent's downfall is not to be μαρόν, is independent of the *ἁμαρτία* but may coincide with it. The point of this condition is to alienate our sympathies from the agent. The idea is well conceived, but does not go far enough: there are other ways of securing 'moral redress', so that the downfall of a good man is not shocking. *Po.* ch. 13 has always been rightly regarded, with ch. 6, as embodying Aristotle's most important perceptions about the nature of tragedy. The interpretation here advocated greatly enhances the value of these perceptions in the criticism of actual Greek tragedies. To omit the gods is to ignore a vital factor in Greek tragedy and must distort it. Aristotle's aim, however, is not to interpret Greek tragedy, but to isolate the essence of tragedy, so that this very defect gives his prescriptions a universality which otherwise they would lack.

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