

RHETORICAL BALANCE IN ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION OF THE TRAGIC AGENT: *POETICS* 13

The most recent attempt to explain Aristotle's use of *ἁμαρτία* in *Poetics* 13 is that of T. C. W. Stinton (*CQ* N.S. 25 (1975), 221–54). Stinton insists that *ἁμαρτία* must not be restricted to any one definition, but should be understood to include a 'range of applications' embracing both moral error and 'ignorance of fact' (p. 221). To determine what *ἁμαρτία* must mean in *Po.* 13, Stinton relies upon a detailed examination of usages of *ἁμαρτία* and its cognates in the moral and ethical writings of Aristotle. This approach is, of course, not new; it was used, among others, by van Braam, Hey, and Glanville, and more recently by Ostwald and Bremer, with varying results.¹ Neither the arguments of these scholars for various particular meanings of *ἁμαρτία*, nor Stinton's effort to embrace them all, however, seem to satisfy the context in which the term appears. In fact, *ἁμαρτία* has been studied as if it could be divorced from other ethical terms present in the immediate context, and from the arrangement — that is, the rhetorical structure of balance and contrast — in which these terms are related to each other. It is the aim of this paper to analyse the entire definition of the tragic agent (1453^a 7–10) for the relation of *ἁμαρτία* to the other ethical terms in the definition, and for the rhetorical structure of the whole sentence. In the absence of other determinants this may well be the best source of evidence. It is also the only source still insufficiently explored.²

Aristotle's stipulations for the perfect plot in tragedy (1452^b 28 ff.) are well known. The finest kind of tragedy must have a plot complex in nature, which imitates events arousing pity and fear. Since the events depicted must arouse these emotions, three possibilities for the general outcome of the plot are unacceptable: (1) virtuous men (*ἐπιεικεῖς*) should not be shown changing from good to bad fortune (*ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν*); much less (2) should bad men (*μοχθηροὺς*) be shown changing from bad fortune to good; nor even (3) should a very bad man (*σφόδρα πονηρόν*) be shown changing from good fortune to bad. Only the third of these possibilities could satisfy our natural sympathies (*τὸ φιλόπρωπον*), and, more importantly, none of them would be either pitiable or fearful. To be fearful the plot must involve an agent like ourselves; to evoke pity the plot must involve an agent who experiences undeserved misfortune.

At this point (1453^a 7) Aristotle takes up the kind of character ideally suited to generate a tragic plot, and it is this sentence we would like to scrutinize — not immediately for the meaning of *ἁμαρτία*, but for the meaning and position

¹ P. van Braam, 'Aristotle's use of *ἁμαρτία*', *CQ* 6 (1912), 266–73; O. Hey, 'AMAPTIA', *Philologus* 83 (1928), 1–17, 137–63; I. M. Glanville, 'Tragic Error', *CQ* 43 (1949), 47–57; M. Ostwald, 'Aristotle on *Hamartia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Festschrift Kapp* (1958), pp. 93–108; J. M. Bremer, *Hamartia* (1968), pp. 4–64. Hey and Bremer trace *ἁμαρτία* and its cognates from Homer onwards, while van Braam and Glanville concentrate on specific passages from the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*. Bremer and Hey, judging

by the high frequency of *ἁμαρτία* (or cognate) meaning 'mistake' in the other treatises of Aristotle, conclude that *ἁμαρτία* has this meaning in *Po.* 13. Glanville and Stinton find in the review of *ἁμαρτία* and its cognates in Aristotle too diverse a range of meanings to conclude with certainty that in *Po.* 13 it means only 'mistake'. For a discussion of Ostwald's views see pp. 64 f. below.

² The other terms in the definition were treated briefly by A. W. H. Adkins (*CQ* N.S. 16 (1966), 78–102).

of the terms surrounding that famous word. The definition of the tragic agent falls naturally into four units.³ (1) ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη, (2) μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν, (3) ἀλλὰ δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινά, (4) τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία. It seems to us that the pairing of nouns in clauses (1), (2), and (4) is significantly balanced, and helps to define the isolated term ἀμαρτία in (3); and that (4) is not an after-thought, as scholars have sometimes held, but an essential element of a carefully constructed definition in the form

not *a b*,
and not *c d*,
but *x*,
and *e f*,

where *ab*, *cd*, and *ef* are meant to be considered both in relation to each other, and to *x*.

We shall begin our discussion with an analysis of the pairing of terms in (1). The first qualification of the tragic agent is that he must not be outstanding or specially distinguished (διαφέρων) either in virtue or in justice. In the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1105^b 19 ff.) Aristotle gives a formal definition of ἡθικὴ ἀρετή, beginning with its generic classification. ἀρετή is distinguishable from emotions like pity and fear, which do not involve choice, and from capacities, which are for the most part innate (*E.N.* 1106^a 3–10). ἀρετή, neither involuntary nor innate, is rather a disposition (ἔξις) which must at once make a man good and good at performing his natural functions (1106^a 22–4). In this regard ἀρετή is the mean not only of emotion but also of action, and through the observance of this mean we can avoid deficiency and excess, as well as all other forms of error (τὸ ἀμαρτάνειν 1106^b 16–29). ἀρετή, then, is a disposition of the soul by which a man chooses a proper course of action and deals prudently with his emotions (1106^b 36–1107^a 2). Since it governs action, ἀρετή becomes practically synonymous with δικαιοσύνη, the second term in (1). Aristotle clarifies the fine distinction between these two terms in another section of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1129^b 26 ff.). δικαιοσύνη is perfect ἀρετή, not in its absolute sense, but ἀρετή πρὸς ἕτερον (1129^b 26–7, 1130^a 10–13). While it does not exhaust Aristotle's thoughts on δικαιοσύνη, this differentiation is significant for the context of *Po.* 13, in which both terms figure so closely. In clause (1), then, Aristotle qualifies the moral character of the tragic agent. He must be lacking (but not completely lacking) in two ethical dispositions, one absolute (ἀρετή), and one co-operative (δικαιοσύνη). It is not sufficient for his downfall that he should be virtuous in himself but ignorant of his social obligations; or that he should be formally and perfectly just to others but lacking in inherent virtue. The two terms in (1) are chosen to supplement each other.

Now let us turn to clause (2), μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς

³ Although in general the *Poetics* appears to be written in a haphazard manner, important definitions like that of the tragic agent show deliberate construction. Similarly the definition of tragedy (1449^b 24–8) is carefully laid out by Aristotle in a quadripartite structure, with every element except

the last having received an earlier treatment in the *Poetics*. See Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (1957), pp. 221–32. It is clear from the *Topica* (139^b 12–140^b 26) that Aristotle regards clarity of language and succinctness as two necessary elements of a well-constructed definition.

τὴν δυστυχίαν. Although the grammatical structures linked by μήτε . . . μήτε shift here from a dative of the respect in which the man is not distinguished to a prepositional phrase describing the cause of his ruin, the emphatic parallelism is obvious enough. It is generated by the repetition μήτε . . . καί/μήτε . . . καί, and underlined by the word order, which gives κακία and μοχθηρία a primary position in the second clause. Indeed it is emphatic enough that the reader may, if he likes, understand both the literal meaning that the agent falls 'neither through κακία and μοχθηρία', and the meaning, suggested by the juxtaposition of these terms with those in (1), that he is no more 'distinguished' for these qualities than he is for ἀρετή and δικαιοσύνη. That, of course, is implied already in the stipulation that the agent is μεταξύ and not σφόδρα ποιηρός. However, although the parallelism of these terms is evident, it is not possible to establish a more exact double antithesis, in which ἀρετή corresponds to κακία, and δικαιοσύνη to μοχθηρία. The former pair of terms are assuredly opposites, as the disposition κακία consists in the very same extremes of which ἀρετή is the mean (E.N. 1106^b 33–4). μοχθηρία, however, seems not to be a disposition opposed absolutely to δικαιοσύνη; according to Aristotle's general usage it is more often a variant term for κακία itself, and its presence is perhaps more significant as a balance to paired terms in (1) and (4), and a contrast to the single term ἀμαρτία in (3), than in itself.

When we turn to (3) ἀλλὰ δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινά, we can see first of all that a clear opposition to clause (2) is intended by the formula 'not *a* but *b*'. The emphasis which ἀμαρτία receives from this construction is amplified by the absence of a pair term in (3) to balance the sets of words in (1) and (2). In this regard we agree with Adkins that 'the form of this distinction, as Aristotle expresses it, gives great emphasis to δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινά' (p. 89). Dawe (p. 93) and Stinton (p. 225), who find no such emphasis, are clearly not considering the rhetorical form of the whole sentence. Lucas seems right in saying that 'he chose the present form to bring out a contrast between a moral and a non-moral cause of tragic action . . .'⁴ But surely, also clause (1) is as strongly contrasted with (3) as (2). That is, the ἀμαρτία and the fall are not *caused* by the agent's moral defects, but neither are they rendered improbable or repulsive by his outstanding virtues.

Thus far we suppose that most, if not all, modern critics of the passage would agree. The two most interesting questions which remain seem to us (1) the choice of the word ἀμαρτία: does it have the same meaning as ἀμάρτημα, a particular error or mistake, or is it a disposition of character to make such errors, as Ostwald argues;⁵ and (2) is ἀμαρτία completely divorced from moral considerations, or can it be brought into line with Greek morality in general and Aristotle's in particular by some other line of argument?

It is quite plausible that ἀμαρτία in clause (3) could simply refer to a single error, as it does in numerous contexts elsewhere in Aristotle. In this regard Ostwald fails to the extent he insists that ἀμαρτία *cannot* refer to a particular act (= ἀμάρτημα) on the basis of what he observed to be a 'remarkable degree of consistency' (p. 104) in Aristotle's use of ἀμαρτία and ἀμάρτημα. Yet the point Ostwald raises about the possibility of ἀμαρτία meaning more than 'a particular mistake' has not been sufficiently answered by recent scholars.⁶ It

⁴ D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics* (1968), pp. 143–4.

⁵ M. Ostwald, *op. cit.* (n. 1).

⁶ Other than Bremer, discussed below,

is not enough, as Bremer does, to cite examples of Aristotle using *ἁμαρτία* to refer to a mathematical or scholarly error, or to offer a generalization that in the plural *ἁμαρτία* refers to a number of individual mistakes.⁷ Ostwald maintains that *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13 refers to a disposition which gives the tragic agent 'the capacity of making mistakes'.⁸ He argues that Aristotle's choice of *ἁμαρτία* instead of *ἁμάρτημα* in this passage would thus be in line with the usual distinction in Greek between noun forms in *-ια* and *-μα*. The weight of Ostwald's argument, however, rests not so much on this distinction as on the parallels he offers for *ἁμαρτία* in *Po.* 13, which are more relevant than Bremer's counter-examples. In *E.N.* 1148^a 3, for example, Aristotle uses *ἁμαρτία* in the same context with *ἄκρασία* and *κακία*: *ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἄκρασία ψέγεται οὐχ ὡς ἁμαρτία μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς κακία τις*. In this phrase *ἁμαρτία* appears as the middle term between two dispositions, the latter of which is one of those present in (2) of our definition. Surely it makes better sense to understand that lack of self-restraint is censured as a 'proneness to make mistakes' rather than 'a mistake' (in a particular instance).⁹ Furthermore, the formula 'not only *a* but even *b*', where *ἁμαρτία* is *a* and *κακία* *b*, demonstrates that at least one type of proneness to error is less reprehensible than *κακία*. Similarly in *Po.* 13 the context of the definition seems to tell us that *ἁμαρτία*, whatever its exact nature, does fall short of, and consequently may be distinguished from, the disposition *κακία*. Such a distinction is worth making in the definition of the tragic agent, chiefly because a propensity to error may also be characteristic of the wicked: *ἀγνοεῖ μὲν οὖν πᾶς ὁ μοχθηρὸς ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ ὧν ἀφεκτέον, καὶ διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην ἁμαρτίαν ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοὶ γίνονται* (*E.N.* 1110^b 28–30). Here *ἁμαρτία* refers to a mistake-making propensity which must embrace excess and deficiency, a disposition opposite to *ἀρετή* and almost identical to *κακία*. Clearly, then, there is a sense in which *ἁμαρτία* may be ascribed to the wicked (and may itself be a moral term), and a different sense in which it may denote a propensity to error which is less objectionable than *κακία*, and hence distinct from that characteristic of the *μοχθηρὸς* or *κακός*. In this regard, perhaps the best argument in favor of Ostwald's interpretation of *ἁμαρτία* is the structure of rhetorical balance and emphasis¹⁰ which we have observed in (1), (2), and (3). In the absence (partial or total) of the four moral dispositions in (1) and (2), Aristotle would then be requiring a disposition which is intermediary between the two sets of moral terms, and in itself without moral force.

Supposing we are right in preferring Ostwald's interpretation of *ἁμαρτία* to Bremer's, however, it remains to enquire what sort of disposition to error is involved, and from what source it comes. Clause (4) of the definition, *τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία*, has usually been treated by scholars as a mere pendant to the definition, requiring high social status of *all* tragic agents, not merely the ideal one in question. But it seems to us that it is in fact this clause that offers the vital specification that is needed about the nature and source of

only R. D. Dawe (*HSCP* 72 (1967), 120–1) states objections to Ostwald's interpretation of *ἁμαρτία*. Stinton (p. 236) in disputing Ostwald merely refers to Bremer's inadequate discussion, though he does defend Ostwald against at least one of Dawe's criticisms.

⁷ Bremer, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁸ Ostwald, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁹ Bremer (p. 55) seems to abet more than hurt Ostwald's case when he unaccountably inserts *τις* after *ἁμαρτία* in this passage.

¹⁰ This is not to deny that the emphasis on clause (3) would not be as great if *ἁμαρτία* is really the equivalent of *ἁμάρτημα* in this context.

this disposition to err. That clause (4) can be taken in chiasmic opposition to (1) is suggested by the parallel word order, with the participles between the two nouns:

- (1) ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη
 (4) τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ᾧτων καὶ εὐτυχία

In that case, *μεγάλη* and *διαφέρων* are also parallel (i.e. the agent does not possess great virtue and justice but *does* possess great reputation and prosperity). Aristotle would then be requiring a tragic agent whose *δόξα* and *εὐτυχία* in life are to some degree above his true character. Or, to put it another way, though only a *μεταξὺ τούτων* in the moral world, he is of great eminence in the world of fame and prosperity. We think it can be argued, from Aristotle's general discussions of the moral effect of *δόξα* and *εὐτυχία* on men of less than perfect virtue, that *δόξα* and *εὐτυχία* can themselves be the source of error-prone states of mind.

Of the terms in (4), *εὐτυχία* is the more sufficiently defined in Aristotle's writings. Aristotle emphasizes the difference between *εὐτυχία* and *εὐδαιμονία* in both his *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*. While *εὐδαιμονία* is an activity of the soul (*E.N.* 1098^a 12–20; *E.E.* 1219^a 35–9), it cannot be sustained without external goods, which are the mark of *εὐτυχία* (*E.N.* 1099^a 30–2; 1099^b 6–8). On the other hand, although *εὐτυχία* is the material condition which always accompanies the absolute activity, *εὐδαιμονία*, it may also occur without the latter. *εὐτυχία* is nowhere in Aristotle considered an activity of the soul: rather, when it occurs apart from *εὐδαιμονία*, *εὐτυχία* is the product of an irrational impulse which makes men succeed illogically (*E.E.* 1247^b 1–1248^a 15). Such irrational impulses are not of human origin, but are dispensations from the gods (*E.N.* 1179^b 21–3; *E.E.* 1248^a 25–33). In the context of *Po.* 13, *εὐτυχία* is then an extrinsic condition which consists in the acquisition of goods which do not form part of the content of *ἀρετή*. In spite of the fact that (1) stipulates that the tragic agent must not have great *ἀρετή* or *δικαιοσύνη*, he nevertheless in (4) has great extrinsic prosperity, as the result, perhaps, of divinely-inspired impulses.

δόξα (= *fama*) does not receive a detailed treatment in the ethical treatises of Aristotle, in all probability because the implications of the term were a philosophical commonplace in his own day.¹¹ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle finds *δόξα* objectionable as an index of a man's real worth because it represents the judgment of the majority and because this judgment is based only on superficial appearances (*E.N.* 1179^a 13–16). The common man seeks *δόξα* from all quarters, and because *δόξα* for him is not an end in itself so much as a means to acquire further benefits, it is sought from those who are capable of rewarding him (*E.N.* 1159^a 18–21). Those who are wise will seek to attain a good *δόξα* only from the good and knowing, as a confirmation of their own virtue (*E.N.* 1159^a 22–4). As a consequence such men will act in accordance with *ἀρετή* even if their actions do not result in a good *δόξα*, in the ordinary sense (*E.E.* 1216^a 19–22). For Aristotle, then, *δόξα* may be an unworthy substitute for *ἀρετή* and an inaccurate gauge of it.

¹¹ The possibility that a disparity could exist between a man's *δόξα* and his personal worth, unthinkable in the morality of Homer, was generally recognized by the fourth century. So it was not difficult for Glaucon to imagine the perfectly just man with the *δόξα* of perfect injustice, and his

opposite, the perfectly unjust man with the *δόξα* of perfect justice (*Republic* 361 a–d). It is interesting that in this passage we find the phrases *τὴν μεγίστην δόξαν* and *δόξαν τὴν μεγίστην*, which resemble the opening of (4) *ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ*.

Thus the type of tragic agent Aristotle's stipulations call for may be understood as follows. He is the sort of man who is distinguished in respect of what Aristotle commonly calls τὰ ἐκτός, without being distinguished in the virtues of mind and conduct which should ideally accompany reputation and fortune. This means that, although as specified in (2) he is not markedly vicious, and thus below our sympathy, he is to a certain extent more vulnerable than he should be to reversal of the same destiny that brought him his good fortune.

It remains to show that the possession of great δόξα and εὐτυχία without the corresponding virtues can be a cause of ἀμαρτία. Here many different texts can be offered in proof, for both Greek popular morality and the writings of Aristotle insist on nothing so much and so frequently as the tendency of the wealthy and the fortunate to forget their mortality and their weakness, and to consider themselves secure from misfortune when, by merely being human and alive, they cannot be.

The idea that wealth and power in the hands of ill-equipped and irresponsible men could result in ruin is familiar to us from the early poets. Solon carefully distinguishes ἀρετή, a fixed human quality not subject to reversal, and πλούτος, which is implicitly unstable and often leads in a progression from κόρος to ὕβρις to ultimate ἄτη.¹² The ὕβρις Solon ascribes to the prosperous is not caused by an inherent baseness of character, but by a combination of good fortune and lack of mental excellence: τίκει γὰρ κόρος ὕβριω ὅταν πολὺς ὄλβος ἐπῆται/ἀνθρώποις ὁπόσοις μὴ νόος ἀρτίως ᾗ (Sol. 6 3–4). The latter passage from Solon is not only quoted by Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 12.2), but also paraphrased and glossed in an Aristotelian fragment (R 57): τίκει γάρ, ὥς φησω ἡ παροιμία, κόρος μὲν ὕβριω, ἀπαίδευσία δὲ μετ' ἐξουσίας ἀνοίαν.¹³ In this statement we see the essence of Aristotle's criticism of the rich and fortunate. Their chief characteristic, ὕβρις, is proverbial, but the danger they represent to themselves and their state lies in an unhealthy combination of power and lack of intellectual training.

This gloss of Solon's thought is but a part of a larger Aristotelian fragment which survives from Stobaeus and independently in a papyrus recently edited.¹⁴ It is, on excellent grounds, considered a part of Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, and Düring in his edition of the fragments argues convincingly that R 57 (= Düring B 2–5) belongs to the opening of that work.¹⁵ We know that Aristotle, at the beginning of this treatise, used an elegant paradox: he congratulated the addressee,

¹² Sol. 13, 15 (West).

¹³ It would appear that Aristotle's manner of glossing the proverb of Solon is influenced by Plato's definition of tragedy at *Phil.* 47 d ff. Plato says that tragedy in life and on the stage is caused when ignorance and power are joined (ἄγνοια γὰρ ἡ μὲν τῶν ἰσχυρῶν ἐχθρά τε καὶ αἰσχροί; βλαβερά γάρ καὶ τοῖς πέλας αὐτῇ τε καὶ ὅσαι εἰκόνες αὐτῆς εἰσὶν 49c 1–3. Perhaps the manuscripts are right in reading ἀνοία rather than ἄγνοια. The latter is Cornarius' emendation, which must be made no less than five times (38 c 8, 48 c 2, 49 c 2, 49 d 9, 49 e 6), mainly to bring the sentence quoted into line with the neighboring discussion of γυνῶθι σαυτὸν (48 c–d). Plato

himself says at *Tim.* 86 b that ἀνοία comprises both μανία and ἀμαθία, so there is perhaps some reason why the MSS. reading should be followed; in addition, cf. the uses of ἀνόητος and ἀνοηταίνεω at *Phil.* 12 d and 49 b 1. In that case, there may even be a verbal echo of the *Philebus* in Aristotle's fragment. But whether we read ἄγνοια or ἀνοία, what Plato is defining seems to us very close to what Aristotle means by ἀμαρτία.

¹⁴ Stob. iii. 200 Hense; *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* iv. 666.

¹⁵ Ingemar Düring, *Aristotle's Protrepticus: An Attempt at Reconstruction* (Studia gr. et lat. Goth. xii, 1961). For the purposes of this discussion we use Düring's numbering of the fragments.

King Themison of Cyprus, on having acquired *πλοῦτος* and *δόξα*, not because these acquisitions are valuable in themselves, but because they are assets in the study of philosophy (B 1). Düring believes that the fragment containing the Solonian proverb followed the opening almost immediately to demonstrate that external goods without purity of soul and education lead to misfortune. Examples of mere prosperity bringing on ruin are meant for our observation so that we may see that happiness does not consist in riches (*δεῖ τὴν τούτων θεωροῦντας ἀτυχίαν φεύγειν καὶ νομίζειν τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν οὐκ ἐν τῷ πολλὰ κεκτῆσθαι γίγνεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ἐν τῷ πῶς τὴν ψυχὴν διακεῖσθαι* B 2). Just as the body which is dressed in splendour but unhealthy within cannot be considered happy, so the man who is decked out in external goods but is himself worthless cannot be said to experience true happiness (*τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον εὐδαίμονα προσαγορευτέον ἐστίν, οὐκ ἂν τοῖς ἐκτός ἢ λαμπρῶς κεχορηγημένος, αὐτὸς μηδενὸς ἄξιος ὢν* B 2). Those possessed of many external goods value those possessions more than the goods of the soul; hence they are pathetic because their worth in possessions is greater than the worth of their own nature (*οἷς πλέονος ἀξίαν τὴν κτῆσιν εἶναι συμβέβηκεν τῆς ἰδίας φύσεως, ἀθλίους τούτους εἶναι δεῖ νομίζειν* B 3). It is in this context that the Aristotelian gloss of Solon occurs. The proverb may be that *κόρος* in the fortunate produces *ὕβρις*, but Aristotle adds that *ἄνοια* is produced in them when lack of education is yoked with power. In fact, he says, for those who are not virtuously disposed in soul, wealth (or strength, or beauty) cannot be considered in the class of good things. These conditions only hurt those who do not have the wisdom to deal with them, and the wealthier an uneducated man is, the more hazardous the 'advantages' of wealth are to him (*τοσοῦτω μείζω καὶ πλείω τὸν κεκτημένον βλάπτουσιν, (ἐὰν) ἄνευ φρονήσεως παραγένωνται* B 4).¹⁶ In the fragments B 2–4 we may have the basic meaning which is implicit in the definition of the tragic agent in *Po.* 13 — namely, that a man having great *εὐτυχία* and *δόξα* without sufficient *ἀρετή* or *δικαιοσύνη* is inevitably liable to develop a mental deficiency, *ἀμαρτία* (= *ἄνοια*), which ultimately causes his fall to misfortune. It is perhaps significant that B 2–4 also contains instances of theatrical imagery which may help explain why Aristotle thinks such events in a play educational. In real life, Aristotle implies, a rich but not particularly virtuous man seems decked with splendid riches in a manner reminiscent of the tragic stage (*λαμπρῶς κεχορηγημένος* B 2).¹⁷ And the pathetic *spectacle* (*θεωροῦντας* B 2) of the prosperous falling from power helps us to see that riches are not an end in themselves, and not valuable except to educate the soul in virtue. Aristotle seems to envisage the rich and fortunate of myth and history *acting out* their own downfall for our enlightenment. Indeed, Düring even conjectures that the missing bridge between the beginning of the *Protrepticus* and his fragment B 2 may have mentioned myth (i.e. the traditional subjects of tragedy) as a source of *exempla* for the moral point Aristotle is trying to make.¹⁸ Whether that is so or not, it is

¹⁶ Cf. *E.E.* 1248^b 27 ff., where Aristotle makes a similar statement about the harmful effects wealth and good fortune may produce in men of insufficient wisdom.

¹⁷ The metaphorical use of *χορηγεῖν*, and in particular of *κεχορηγημένος τοῖς ἐκτός ἀγαθοῖς* and the like is common enough in Aristotle (e.g. *E.N.* 1101^a 15, 1117^a 30, 1179^a 11); cf. the similar use of *ἀχορήγητος*

E.N. 1099^a 33). In the more elevated style of the *Protrepticus* and emphasized by *λαμπρῶς*, it seems more a 'live' metaphor than elsewhere.

¹⁸ Düring (op. cit., pp. 176–7) paraphrases what must have been included in the missing section of the *Protrepticus* partially as follows: 'Both from your knowledge of myth and history and from personal

evident from the fragments we do possess (B 2–4) that the same discrepancy between internal and external worth implied in the structure of *Po.* 1453^a 7–10 is singled out by Aristotle as the cause of a fall from good to bad fortune.

It cannot be coincidence that similar damning descriptions of the rich, reputable, and unwise occur in the *Rhetoric* precisely in the sections we are always taught to consider most relevant to the *Poetics*: the discussions of pity and fear (1382^b 2–1387^a 5). Aristotle defines as one of the elements involved in fear the expectation that misfortune might befall us. Consequently, those who consider themselves beyond the reach of misfortune, at any one time or for all time, are incapable of anticipating fearful things (*Rhet.* 1382^b 29–33). In this class Aristotle especially identifies men in great prosperity and reputation, in language which is strikingly similar to (4) of our definition: οὐκ οἰόνται δὲ παθεῖν ἂν οὔτε οἱ ἐν εὐτυχίαις μεγάλας ὄντες καὶ δοκοῦντες (*Rhet.* 1382^b 35–1383^a 1).

The phrase οἱ ἐν εὐτυχίαις μεγάλας ὄντες is reason enough to consider the attributes of this group in the *Rhetoric* pertinent to the tragic agent, who is one τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία. These are insolence, contemptuousness, and rashness (ὑβριστὰ καὶ ὀλίγωροι καὶ θρασεῖς (ποιεῖ δὲ τοιούτους πλοῦτος ἰσχύς πολυφιλία δύναμις) *Rhet.* 1383^a 1–3). Characteristics such as these not only tend to reduce the possibility of the fortunate man feeling fear, but they also interfere with his capacity to feel another emotion essential to tragedy, pity: οὔτε οἱ ὑπερδαμνοῦν οἰόμενοι (ἐλεοῦσιν), ἀλλ' ὑβρίζουσιν (*Rhet.* 1385^b 21–2). Those who are most capable of feeling a moderate (i.e. the right) amount of pity and fear are, among others, the educated, for they are skilled at reckoning what might happen to them (οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι· εὐλόγιστοι γάρ *Rhet.* 1385^b 27–8). On the other hand, the fortunate but uneducated man feels less pity and less fear not only because of his ὑbris, but also because he is unable to reckon what fate may have in store for him (μήτ' ἐν ὑβριστικῇ διαθέσει (καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι ἀλόγιστοι τοῦ πείσεσθαί τι) *Rhet.* 1385^b 31–2).¹⁹ It appears, then, that pity and fear, the very emotions which tragedy most of all works upon, are deficient in the figure Aristotle describes in *Po.* 13. If we remember that ἀρετή, the disposition the tragic agent is *not* distinguished in, is the mean of emotions like pity, fear, and anger, it is easy to see why the tragic agent might stray from a middle course in human emotion. He seems naturally inclined to become deficient in some emotions (pity and fear), and excessive in others (anger and insolence). It is clear from the passages we have already cited that ὑbris is one of the most consistently mentioned attributes of the rich and fortunate.²⁰ But Aristotle also clearly identifies anger as an emotion which easily exceeds the limits of proper indignation in men of high standing. ὀργή is the emotion which characteristically arises in men who believe they have a right to be held in high esteem by those inferior to them in wealth and power (*Rhet.* 1378^b 34–1379^a 4). Moreover, if such men are accustomed to receiving honour from their inferiors, they become angry when they sense that their reputation is dwindling (*Rhet.* 1379^b 4–6). Excess in insolence and anger, as well as deficiency in pity and fear, seems to be

experience you will remember instances of pride coming before a fall: you have seen men who have put too much faith in wealth, good fortune, and power and met with a sudden change, a μεταβολή τοῦ βίου ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς ἀτυχίαν. The greater their

success was, the deeper they felt their failure and bad fortune . . .'

¹⁹ Cf. *Rhet.* 1391^a 33–1391^b 1: ὑπερφανώτεροι μὲν οὖν καὶ ἀλογιστότεροι διὰ τὴν εὐτυχίαν.

²⁰ Cf. *Pol.* 1295^b 6–20.

characteristic of any man who is (a) uneducated in ἀρετή and (b) τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία.²¹

It seems evident, then, that the ἁμαρτία of the tragic agent consists in his capacity to stray off course in both his reasoning and emotions. This ἁμαρτία in part results from his lack of distinction in ἀρετή and δικαιοσύνη, but that condition alone will not produce the ἁμαρτία necessary for tragedy. Such ἁμαρτία must occur in a character whose high fortune and public acceptance involve him in situations where his ἁμαρτία has important consequences (ἁμαρτία μεγάλη, 1453^a 16). Whatever proportions this ἁμαρτία assumes in the tragic agent, it must not be so severe as to become indistinguishable from the form of ἁμαρτία which is synonymous with κακία (E.N. 1110^b 28–30). Only by staying within this limit may ἁμαρτία still arouse our feelings of pity and fear.

Though this interpretation of ἁμαρτία differs somewhat from that of Dawe, it does not contradict his perceptive thesis (independently formulated by Bremer, and accepted with some modification by Stinton) that ἁμαρτία is the Aristotelian term for poetic and tragic ἄτη.²² What Dawe failed to mention in his discussion of ἄτη and ἁμαρτία was the strong association in tragedy and early Greek poetry of ἄτη and ὕβρις, and, in turn, the association of ὕβρις and ὄλβος (= εὐτυχία). The paradigm for Solon and the tragedians (and Herodotus for that matter) may be stated thus: wealth and good fortune (= κόρος, ὄλβος) beget ὕβρις, which leads to mental blindness (ἄτη) and brings about the fall of the great. Aristotle's paradigm is a little more complicated but is in essence the same. Wealth and good fortune in the hands of those who, because of a lack of education in ἀρετή and δικαιοσύνη, are ill equipped to deal with prosperity, produces in them a characteristic tendency to miss the mean in their thinking and in their emotional state. It is not simply that εὐτυχία begets ὕβρις and ὕβρις leads to a mental blindness (ἄτη), but that εὐτυχία and ἀπαιδευσία in virtue beget an *erroneous* state of mind and an *erratic* emotional state which ultimately brings misfortune. This is Aristotle's prescription for the tragic plot and for the tragic agent who must fall in such a way as to arouse our emotions. Indeed, the reason we feel some confidence in our rhetorical analysis of Aristotle's definition is that the sentence now presents us with such commonplaces as Aristotle, and most Greeks, believed to be the foundation of wisdom. Oedipus' ἁμαρτία, through which we see him falling into δυστυχία, is indeed, as Dawe argued, what an earlier stage of Greek thought would have called his ἄτη. But this ἄτη is partly caused by that success and high reputation at Thebes which made Oedipus forget, until trouble came, the anxious pursuit of his identity and fate which was so important to him before he triumphed over the Sphinx and won the kingship. ἁμαρτία finds expression not only in his ignorance but in his over-confidence concerning his powers of detection and in his princely arrogance to Tiresias and Creon. Fate may indeed punish a successful man's roseate view of his own character and future far beyond anything he could be said to deserve. Because such a man, not perfectly ἐπιεικής, is like us he inspires fear; and because he does not deserve his suffering he inspires

²¹ By now it should be obvious how our interpretation of *Po.* 13 differs from that of Adkins (op. cit. (n.2), pp. 98–9), who believes Aristotle's tragic agent must be

ἐπιεικής τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία.

²² Dawe, op. cit. (n. 7), pp. 89–107).

pity. And we learn from his fate, which embodies truth καθόλου, the beginnings of wisdom: θνητὰ φρονεῖν.²³

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remain, we are of course responsible. We regret that it was not possible for us to see John Moles, 'Notes on Aristotle's Poetics' 13 and 14, *CQ* N.S. 29 (1979), 77–94, in time to take account of it in our discussion.