OEDIPUS PHARMAKOS? ALLEGED SCAPEGOATING IN SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS THE KING*

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IN HIS RECENT BOOK, *Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction*,[1] Frederick Ahl argues that the text of *Oedipus the King* offers no proof for the conclusion, drawn by the protagonist himself, that he has killed his father and slept with his mother. Oedipus' self-conviction, he argues, owes more to the clash of self-interested, half-true statements and false assumptions of Sophocles' characters, that is to their rhetoric,[2] than to any logic in the play's quasi-legal inquiry. The implication of this argument is that the question posed by traditional interpreters of whether the play is a tragedy of fate or of free-will is wrong-headed and irrelevant. The present work critiques the argument of Ahl and of those who have anticipated his reading. It advocates the traditional idea that Oedipus did in fact do what he convicts himself of, suggesting that many of the play's inconsistencies upon which Ahl bases his argument are evidence not of the innocence of Oedipus but of the controlling power of Apollo.

Ahl argues that "in this play, no conclusive evidence is presented that Oedipus killed his father and married his mother."[3] By this he does not simply mean that Oedipus killed Laius under such extenuating circumstances as that he did not know his identity, he was provoked to kill against his will, he was fated by the gods to do so, and as a result he must be accounted innocent. This, I take it, is the mainstream view of the play among classicists and is well stated in E. R. Dodds's essay, "On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*"[4] and it was Oedipus' own position in *Oedipus at Colonus* 270–274. (This view is itself seriously flawed, as I have attempted to show elsewhere.)[5] Ahl's claim is much more radical. According to him, Oedipus is totally innocent of the crime of which he is accused; he never laid a finger on Laius, who died instead at the hands of persons unknown. Thus not only

[1] F. Ahl, *Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction* (Ithaca 1991); referred to henceforth by author's name alone. An earlier version of this paper was read at the University of Western Ontario on November 8, 1991. I am grateful to the audience on that occasion as well as to Professor Emmet Robbins and two anonymous referees for *Phoenix* for much helpful criticism and advice.

[2] Ahl 15.

[3] Ahl x.

[4] E. R. Dodds, "On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*," *G&R* 13 (1966) 37–49 = *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford 1973) 64–77.

[5] R. D. Griffith, "Asserting Eternal Providence: Theodicy in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*," *ICS* 17 (1992) 193–211.

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have all the generations of classical scholars misread the play, but Oedipus himself misreads it in wrongly convicting himself of the crime.

I

Before considering the innovative aspects of Ahl's case, let me set it in the context of the play's *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. This is important, for the advocacy of Oedipus' innocence has a more interesting history than is immediately apparent from Ahl's work. I will therefore summarize and critique the works of three of Ahl's precursors before moving on to consider his own new contributions.

Ahl's most recent and tenacious precursor in advocating the innocence of Oedipus is social scientist René Girard. Girard has a fascinating theory that purports, like all great theories, to explain everything.[6] Although nominally a professor of French literature, Girard allows his thought to range over issues that are best called anthropological and to concern itself chiefly with the omnipresence of violence in human societies both present and past. The source of this violence, says Girard, is "triangular desire," man's tendency to want what his neighbour wants simply because his neighbour wants it. Such desire traces out the triangle of desired object, desiring subject, and equally desiring neighbour, who mediates between the two.[7] (This is not quite the same thing as envy, which is the desire for what one's neighbour already has.) The subject reveres the mediator, hence his imitation of him, and at the same time, since he recognizes him as his rival in the struggle to obtain the object of their mutual desire, he resents him; this conflict of attitudes is, in a word, hatred.[8] The subject in one triangle will inevitably also be the subject, object, or mediator in some other and so the pattern spreads throughout all of society in an infinite latticework of hate. This structure of endless triangles of opposing force is strained so taut that any blow delivered to any part of it will cause the whole thing to shatter. When this happens, a crisis results. Society must respond to the crisis in order to return to its normal state, and this response, in Girard's view, inevitably takes the form of the scapegoating mechanism.

The operation of this mechanism may be discerned in literary texts by means of four stereotypes. First, there is the crisis involving the generalized

[6]I will refer to the following among R. Girard's works in abbreviated form: *Deceit* = *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, tr. Y. Freccero (Baltimore 1965); "Symétrie" = "Symétrie et dissymétrie dans le mythe d'Oedipe," *Critique* 249 (February 1968) 99–135; *Violence* = *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. P. Gregory (Baltimore and London 1977); *Scapegoat* = *The Scapegoat*, tr. Y. Freccero (Baltimore 1986); *Job* = *Job: The Victim of his People* (Stanford 1987); "Generative" = "Generative Scapegoating," in R. G. Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Violent Origins* (Stanford 1987) 73–105.

[7]Girard, *Deceit* 1–52.

[8]Girard, *Deceit* 10.

loss of difference within society. For example, there may be a plague that kills rich and poor, just and unjust without distinction. Second, there are allegations of violations of those taboos that establish social order. For example, the dead king may be rumoured to have been murdered as though he were an enemy. Third, someone will be chosen who bears the "mark of the victim," which can be any sign that the person is out of the ordinary. For example, the person may be a foreigner, he may have a limp, he may even be set apart by his unusual power, for example by being himself a king. Fourth, the society will unanimously direct a violent attack upon this marked person, killing him or driving him away in an attempt to cure the plague that set off the crisis.

It is of prime importance that the scapegoat is chosen "for inadequate reasons, or perhaps for no reason at all, more or less at random" from among all those who bear "marks of the victim"[9] and that he is completely innocent of the charges brought against him. This is true even though his persecutors are acting in good faith and believe him to be guilty[10] and even though he probably is so imbued by the outlook of his society that he shares their view.[11]

Girard illustrates this mechanism with a myth of the Yahuna Indians[12] and with a text by the fourteenth-century poet Guillaume de Machaut concerning the contemporary persecution of Jews during the Black Death in France (people die of plague, it is rumoured that the wells have been poisoned, the Jews are alleged to have done so, a pogrom ensues),[13] but he wishes to show that this phenomenon has been with human society since time immemorial and that it stands at the centre rather than at the periphery of our culture, and so turns to the classical period in quest of an example. He could easily have found many examples of scapegoat-rituals in ancient Greece or Rome. Rituals in which a scapegoat, or φαρμακός, is driven from society to alleviate some ill are well-attested[14] and there are famous literary representations of them, such as the driving of Encolpius from Marseilles in Petronius' *Satyricon*, or the leading of Lucius around Hypata during the Festival of Laughter in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. The classical world also offers, alas, examples of scapegoating in the broader sense of persecution: one thinks of ostracism as well as of the Athenians' prosecu-

[9]Girard, "Generative" 78; this idea is already present in "Symétrie" 103. This idea is obviously correct and the persecution-concept by definition demands it. In what follows I will criticize Girard not for holding this view, but for adhering to it too little.

[10]Girard, *Scapegoat* 8.

[11]Girard, *Scapegoat* 9.

[12]Girard, "Generative" 79.

[13]Girard, *Scapegoat* 2.

[14]E.g., J. Bremmer, "Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece," *HSCP* 87 (1983) 299–320.

tion on false charges of Pericles,[15] Aspasia, and Anaxagoras[16] during the great plague (Thuc. 2.65.3, Pl. *Grg.* 516a, Plut. *Per.* 32, 35, and Diod. Sic. 12.45.4). But Girard is not content with these; he chooses instead Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. The idea that the Oedipus-myth reflects scapegoat ritual goes back to Jane Harrison and has been accepted among others by Jean-Pierre Vernant, who claims that Oedipus occupies an ambiguous position as at once tyrant and scapegoat;[17] nevertheless, Girard goes further and argues that Oedipus is an example of secular persecution. His choice of this myth is evidently motivated by the fact that this text is central to the two pillars of French intellectual life, psychoanalysis and structuralism. Sophocles' text received influential analyses in Freud's *On the Interpretation of Dreams*[18] and Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology*.[19] If Girard can prove that both of these central disciplines have failed to lay bare the real point of this shared proof-text, his theory will have gone a long way toward usurping their supremacy. (This suspicion regarding Girard's motive is corroborated by the fact that scattered throughout his writings one finds attacks upon his two rivals, Freud and Lévi-Strauss.)[20] Girard has returned to Oedipus repeatedly in his writings, from an article published in 1968 until his most recent discussion in 1987.[21]

[15] J. Beloch, *Die attische Politik seit Perikles* (Leipzig 1884); H. Swoboda, "Über den Prozess des Perikles," *Hermes* 28 (1893) 536–598; and D. Kagan, *The Archidamian War* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1974) 90–93.

[16] A. E. Taylor, "On the Date of the Trial of Anaxagoras," *CQ* 11 (1917) 81–87; J. A. Davison, "Protagoras, Democritus and Anaxagoras," *CQ* NS 3 (1953) 33–45, at 41–45; J. Mansfeld, "The Chronology of Anaxagoras' Athenian Period and the Date of his Trial," *Mnemosyne* 32 (1979) 39–60, 33 (1980) 17–95; and L. E. Woodbury, "Anaxagoras and Athens," *Phoenix* 35 (1981) 295–315 = *Collected Writings* (Atlanta 1991) 355–375.

[17] J. E. Harrison, *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1921) xli, who writes, "behind the Old King Oedipus is the figure of the scapegoat"; F. Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre* (Princeton 1949, repr. Garden City, N.Y. 1953) 39; J.-P. Vernant, "Ambiguity and Reversal: on the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*," tr. P. duBois *New Literary History* 9 (1977–78) 475–501, at 486–489 = *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1972) 117–122; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 84, and *id.*, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979, Sather Classical Lectures 47) 65; R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983) 257–280, esp. 259.

[18] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (London 1953) 4.260–264.

[19] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris 1958) 235–242.

[20] E.g., "Examples [of parricide and incest in myth] are so numerous—so numerous and so diverse, as a matter of fact, that they cast doubt on the special significance Freud conferred on the two particular instances he so passionately espoused, the patricide and mother incest of Oedipus" (Girard, "Generative" 83), and "The triangle is a model of a sort, or rather a whole family of models. But these models are not 'mechanical' like those of Claude Lévi-Strauss" (*Deceit* 2).

[21] Girard, "Symétrie," *passim*; *Violence* 68–88; *Scapegoat* 25–30; *Job* 33–40; and "Generative," *passim*.

The choice of Sophocles' text—and let me emphasize that it is Sophocles' rather than any other version of the myth that Girard has in mind[22]—is not, however, a happy one. In order to lay bare the persecution-stereotypes underlying the text, Girard retells it as though it were a historical document, apparently on the assumption that the text is a dim recollection of some real persecution. He writes:

> Harvests are bad, the cows give birth to dead calves; no one is on good terms with anyone else. It is as if a spell had been cast on the village. Clearly, it is the cripple who is the cause. He arrived one fine morning, no one knows from where, and made himself at home. He even took the liberty of marrying the most obvious heiress in the village and had two children by her. All sorts of things seemed to take place in their house. The stranger was suspected of having killed his wife's former husband, a sort of local potentate, who disappeared under mysterious circumstances and was rather too quickly replaced by the newcomer. One day the fellows in the village had had enough; they took their pitchforks and forced the disturbing character to clear out.[23]

Girard characterizes this account as a "slight modification" of the original text,[24] but in fact Girard's story differs from Sophocles on four major points (if we consider the claim that Oedipus had two rather than four children [cf. lines 1459–65] rather as a slip of the pen than as a deliberate change). In Sophocles there is no hint that anyone has suspected Oedipus of having killed his wife's former husband until Teiresias comes on stage and makes this scandalous, scarcely comprehensible allegation. Then too there is no reason to think that Oedipus is portrayed with a limp,[25] and he is obviously not in the habit of discussing his old injury (1033); it is therefore incorrect to characterize him as a cripple. Moreover, in Sophocles' version, by contrast with that of Cocteau and Stravinsky, it is not "the fellows in the village" but Oedipus himself who pronounces sentence of exile, and as it happens the exile does not, in the course of this play at least, occur (although it is clearly foreshadowed in lines 96–101 and 305–309).[26] (While we avoid the error of claiming

[22]Girard, *Scapegoat* 25; Girard has lately retreated from this position, mentioning Sophocles only once in his latest treatment, "Generative" 85.

[23]Girard, *Scapegoat* 29.

[24]Girard, *Scapegoat* 30.

[25]O. Taplin, "Sophocles in His Theatre," in J. de Romilly (ed.), *Sophocle* (Geneva 1982, Fondation Hardt: Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 29) 155–183, at 155.

[26]M. Davies, "The End of Sophocles' *O.T.*," *Hermes* 110 (1982) 268–278. J. March, *The Creative Poet* (London 1987, *BICS* Supplement 49) 148–154 revives the theory of Schneidewin and Graffunder that the present ending of the play was written not by Sophocles but by another poet of the same name (his grandson, to accompany the posthumous première of *Oedipus at Colonus*). This suggestion may be correct and it is in any case impossible to refute speculation of this kind. I note, however, that

that the Thebans exiled Oedipus, we must not claim that he volunteers to be chased out like the willing victim of an animal sacrifice or the volunteers for self-sacrifice who people Euripides' tragedies.[27] We will see that Oedipus is neither victimized nor self-victimizing; his passage of sentence upon himself is evidence not of any irrational destructiveness on the part either of others or of himself, but of his impartiality in executing the duties of his office.) Most important, perhaps, is the fact (to which we shall return) that Girard's rewriting of the text suppresses all mention of Apollo. But these problems in Girard's translation of the text into historiographic language pale by comparison with his odd analysis of the resulting tale.

Girard's discussion of the scapegoat-mechanism in general is reminiscent of the old woman who "[w]hen accused of having made a hole in a kettle she had borrowed, ... argued simultaneously that the kettle did not have a hole in it, that it had already had one when she borrowed it, and that the hole she made in it added to its value."[28] Girard says at once that no crime has actually been committed, that there was in fact a crime, but that the scapegoat is innocent of any involvement in it, and that the scapegoat is guilty of the crime, but that this guilt does not justify the punishment that he receives. The question of guilt cannot be treated in so cavalier a manner; we should distinguish more clearly than does Girard between the victim either of an annual scapegoating ritual or of a spontaneous eruption of persecution on the one hand and the "fall-guy" made to shoulder all the blame by his fellow conspirators or the self-confessed criminal legitimately punished for his crime on the other; the first category is separated from the second by the all-important issue of guilt. Girard's curious double reasoning on the matter of guilt persists in his treatment of the Oedipus story. Admittedly, he does not actually say that Laius is alive and well and living in Paris. He does, however, claim both that Oedipus never murdered Laius and that, although he did commit parricide, that fact is irrelevant to

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March's assumption that a Greek tragedy can be expected not to "[peter] out into such irresolution" as found at the end of *Oedipus the King* (p. 152) does not carry much conviction; the author of *On the Sublime* found it a common flaw of Sophocles' plays that σβέννυνται δ' ἀλόγως πολλάκις καὶ πίπτουσιν ἀτυχέστατα (33.5) and Plato favoured aporetic endings for his dramatic dialogues, which, like *Oedipus the King*, often turn on the revelation that someone has thought that he knew something that he did not know.

[27] *Pace* Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (above, n. 17) 71. On voluntary self-sacrifice, see J. Schmitt, "Freiwilliger Opfertod bei Euripides," *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 17 (1921) 1–103, and P. Roussel, "Le Thème du sacrifice volontaire dans la tragédie d'Euripide," *RBPhil* (1922) 225–240.

[28] G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, tr. J. E. Lewin (Ithaca and New York 1988) 41, n. 3.

his eventual punishment. Let us consider the first of these two incompatible claims (we will turn to the second in Part III below).

Girard points out that for much of the play the burden of guilt oscillates freely between Oedipus, Teiresias, and Creon before finally settling upon Oedipus alone. "It might very well," says Girard, "have settled on another, or on none." He characterizes the determination of how the guilt shall fall as a "mysterious mechanism."[29] This mystery is caused, or at least enhanced, by our own manipulation and delusion as spectators and readers,[30] that is to say from the fact that "[w]e cannot expect a scapegoat-generated myth to be explicit about the arbitrariness of its victim's choice."[31]

But is the process whereby blame settles on one person rather than another in this play as mysterious as Girard claims? Creon offers his own convincing apologia in the play (lines 583–615): he has not committed regicide or any other murder and is not conspiring against the throne, because it is in his best interest not to do so. That Creon's self-defense is unanswerable is shown by the fact that Oedipus does not answer it, even though the rules of a formal debate (ἀγών) require an answer. Blame does not attach to Teiresias either, and for good reason. For one thing, he is blind. Blindness, while doubtless a "mark of the victim," is a great hindrance to an assassin, as Oedipus himself remarks (348). Secondly, he is a seer, and in all literature antecedent to Sophocles, whenever a dispute arises between a seer and a layman the seer is proven by the sequel to be correct.[32] What is true of seers in general is true specifically of Teiresias, for the chorus says as he makes his first entrance that "truth is native to him alone of men" (298–299, cf. *Ant.* 1092–94). If society always decides in favour of the claims of the seer and against those of the "layman," then the choice is—so far from being arbitrarily random—predetermined and easily predictable. Thirdly, Teiresias is innocent. This is not a fact that we know in its own right, but it is a necessary inference from the fact that Oedipus alone is guilty. To the consideration of this fact let us now turn.

Girard does not elucidate the way in which Sophocles' play has deluded so many spectators and readers; he refers to Sandor Goodhart,[33] whose reading of the play he endorses.[34] Goodhart states "that the play uncovers systematically the arbitrariness of the determination of any unique culprit," and "that the empirical issue (whether we decide Oedipus killed Laius or

[29]Girard, *Violence* 78.

[30]Girard, "Generative" 74.

[31]Girard, "Generative" 82.

[32]D. B. Levine, "Theoklymenos and the Apocalypse," *CJ* 79 (1983) 1–7, at 6–7.

[33]S. Goodhart, "Λησταὶς Ἔφασκε: Oedipus and Laius' Many Murderers," *Diacritics* 8 (1978) 55–71.

[34]Girard, *Job* 40.

not) is less important, finally, than the plague of scapegoat violence for which it comes to substitute."[35] Goodhart in turn restates in more theoretical form a reading of the play first advanced by Karl Harshbarger in his article, "Who Killed Laius?"[36] In excerpted form, Harshbarger's argument is this:

> There are two versions of Laius' murder in *Oedipus Rex*. First, there is the version that is current in Thebes and is expressed by Creon, Jocasta, the Chorus, and presumably the Shepherd if he were to talk about it. Second, there is Oedipus' version .... (120)
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> Although there are striking similarities in the two stories, there are important differences ... concern[ing] the number of murderers and the number of survivors .... (120–121)
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> [T]hese discrepancies are not accidents due to careless writing. The contradictions are deliberately established for us by Sophocles.
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> Granting this, ... as a matter of cold examination of the evidence, we cannot be sure that Oedipus killed Laius .... (122)
>
> If it is possible that Oedipus did not murder Laius, [we can] determine from the play if there is anyone else who might have done it .... I have chosen a suspect that might appear the least likely: the Chorus. I am not urging the certainty of the Chorus' guilt. I am only arguing the possibility of the Chorus' guilt .... (124)
>
> If the Chorus is guilty, and if that guilt is made more painful by a renewed desire to kill again, then the Chorus' action in the play is to find a way to relieve itself .... (130)
>
> The solution—which perhaps Oedipus senses and lends himself to—is a sacrifice. (131)

But the empirical issue, in Goodhart's phrase, of whether or not Oedipus killed Laius is crucial to determining whether any scapegoat violence is occurring in the play at all, and most readers will want to know how Harshbarger's surprising reading stands up against an examination of the play.

The answer is that it does not stand up at all. It is true that there are two separate accounts of the murder given in the play. Not to prejudice the matter we could say that two separate murders are described. The two accounts are of quite unequal evidentiary value. One is Oedipus' eyewitness testimony (800–813), the veracity of which is compellingly urged by the fact that it goes against his self-interest. The other is hearsay reported by Creon (118–127) and Jocasta (713–716). The source of this hearsay is a still living witness, whose testimony alone would be acceptable in an Athenian court (Dem. 46.6–8, 57.4), yet, although he appears as a character in this play, he is not asked about this crucial point. Moreover, there are two reasons to suspect this witness's story. First, it is doubtful how much he actually

[35] Goodhart (above, n. 33) 56, n. 2.

[36] K. Harshbarger, "Who Killed Laius?," *Tulane Drama Review* 9 (1964–65) 120–131.

saw; he appears not even to have realized that Laius was dead until he returned (none too quickly, apparently) to Thebes and saw Oedipus on the throne (759). Second, as one who promised Jocasta that he would expose the infant Oedipus but then avoided doing so, he "is not above practising a deception."[37] Furthermore, on this occasion at least he has a strong motive for lying: as part of the king's entourage, he would have been expected to protect the king or else die trying; the shame brought upon him by his failure to do so can be mitigated to some extent by his emphasizing (whether truthfully or not) the large number of attackers. Nevertheless, the hearsay nature of this testimony is diminished by the fact that the witness gave it in public (849), that is before members of the chorus among others, and not just to Creon and Jocasta alone, and there is independent confirmation of two important aspects of it: the time and the place of the crime. All Thebans know that Laius died shortly before Oedipus came to Thebes, and our independent knowledge that Laius was on an embassy to Delphi when he was killed (114), an embassy that would have led him through the crossroads, lends credibility to the shepherd's claim that Laius died at that place.

It is also true, as Harshbarger says, that the two murders differ as to the number of reported assassins (one vs. many) and the number of reported survivors (none vs. one). Let us consider what is known from the text and from common background knowledge concerning these two murders. The scene of the murder committed by Oedipus (801) was real rather than fictitious and was well known to the play's first audience.[38] Laius was reportedly murdered at the same crossroads. We also know something of the relative timing of the two murders. The following events happen within a brief period (cf. 736–737): Oedipus consults the oracle and straightway commits murder; news of Laius' murder reaches Thebes; Oedipus solves the riddle of the Sphinx and becomes king in Thebes. It is possible to narrow down this time-frame considerably, in the following way. When he was murdered, Laius was on an embassy to Delphi (114). Oedipus' victim was also on such a mission, as is shown by the herald who accompanies him (802) as well as by his whereabouts at the time of death. The historian Callisthenes reports that in the archaic period the Pythia granted oracular responses only one day each year (*FGrHist* 124 F 49). Even in later times the frequency of consultation had increased only to one day per month (Plut. *Mor.* 292e–f). Since both Laius and Oedipus' unidentified victim were on their way to consult the oracle within the same space of a few days, they must have been murdered on the same day.[39]

[37] W. C. Greene, "The Murderers of Laius," *TAPA* 60 (1929) 75–86, at 84.

[38] See APPENDIX.

[39] It may be objected that Oedipus' victim could not have been intending to consult the oracle on the same day on which Oedipus had already obtained his response from

Given that both murders occurred at the same place at about the same time, it is unlikely that they were different murders. First, in the account of neither murder is mention made of the wreckage and gore littering the intersection from any quadruple homicide already committed there. Second, the lone survivor of Laius' party can only recognize and fear the newcomer Oedipus as he apparently does (759) if he has already seen him; the only occasion for this sighting deducible from the text is the fatal encounter on the road. At the same time, it is highly likely that the accounts are different descriptions of the same murder. That variant versions of stories abounded in ancient Greece (as at all times and places) is abundantly clear from Herodotus' *Histories* 1.5 etc. A recognition of them is already a feature of Pindaric narrative in the generation before Sophocles (*Pyth.* 11.22–25, cf. Homer *Od.* 2.30–33, 42–45).

The particular nature of the discrepancy in the two accounts of the murder—for that is manifestly what we are dealing with—concerns numbers, as we have said. There are two symmetrical falsehoods: the surviving shepherd wrongly augments the number of murderers; the murderer Oedipus wrongly diminishes the number of survivors. Why does Laius' slave report that Laius was killed by more than one assassin (123 etc.)? Perhaps because of the inaccuracy of his observation and because of his mendacity, which we have already noted.[40]

The case with Oedipus' misinformation is parallel. Too forthright to lie, he may be mistaken. The lone survivor evidently did not linger on the scene

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it, for the necessary purification and sacrifice must have taken some time. Yet, if Laius was travelling in the great haste evinced by the behaviour of his entourage (805), he will have spared little time for such niceties; we might expect that he shared Oedipus' characteristic impatience and chronic haste as well as his looks (743). For his part, Oedipus will have arrived at the crossroads soon after consulting the oracle. The crossroads are about 18 kilometres downhill from Delphi, a brief journey for a man sound of foot (as I believe the actor's portrayal will have shown Oedipus to be) who is running away from something (796).

[40]A third possibility is that the shepherd is reporting honestly that supernatural beings visible to himself alone contributed to the slaughter, as Apollo helped Paris kill Achilles (*Il.* 22.359–360, Aesch. fr. 350 *TrGF*, Pl. *Resp.* 383b) and as "one of the deities" guides Oedipus to his hanging wife (1258). The phenomenon of perceiving more persons than are actually present, known to us as Shackleton's delusion (E. H. Shackleton, *South* [London 1919] 209) was familiar to the ancients. One thinks of Nebuchadnezzar, who saw in his furnace not the three victims he had thrown in, but four persons (Daniel 3.24–25), and of the phantom Deiphobus (*Il.* 22.295). It is characteristic of such manifestations that they are visible to one person alone, as is Achilles' vision of Athena (*Il.* 1.198) or Priam's of Hermes (*Il.* 24.444–446).

E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951, Sather Classical Lectures 25) 85, n. 25 says that at *OT* 1258 Sophocles credits Oedipus with having "a temporary clairvoyance of supernatural origin." Supernatural portents accompany the deaths of kings in Shakespeare also (cf. *Julius Caesar* 1.3.1–40 and *Hamlet* 1.1.113–116).

or otherwise make himself conspicuous, for, if he had, he would probably not have survived and certainly not have remained ignorant of Laius' death as he apparently did (he expressed shock at learning upon his return to Thebes that Laius was dead, 759). Moreover, Oedipus is prone to jump to erroneously absolute conclusions and was no doubt too busy manslaughtering to concern himself with making an accurate count.[41] On the other hand, Sophocles' gods are capable of concealing from the sight of certain characters events that they do not wish them to see; the second burial of Polynices during a sudden tornado (*Ant.* 417–422)[42] and the apotheosis of Oedipus within the grove of the Furies (*OC* 1661–64) are examples. Perhaps the gods concealed the presence of the surviving shepherd from Oedipus. The possibilities that I have put forward as alternative explanations need not constitute an either/or. The Greeks were not uncomfortable with a type of thinking that some moderns label as "overdetermination," according to which seemingly incompatible human and divine agencies work together to the same end.

II

Ahl incorporates much of this earlier material into his own book, acknowledging in particular the influence of Goodhart[43] and culminating in the presentation of Oedipus as a Girardian scapegoat.[44] The objections that I have already raised apply therefore to these sections of Ahl's argument. In addition, Ahl adds a number of interesting new insights to the case for Oedipus' innocence, in particular the isolation of rhetoric as the "mysterious mechanism" that determines how the burden of guilt shall fall.

Particularly deserving of comment are three of the new points that he raises. First, he uses a euhemerizing comment in Pausanias (9.26.2–4, cf. schol. Hes. *Th.* 326) to the effect that the sphinx was really the leader of a band of highwaymen in order to suggest that she stands at the origin of the rumour that robbers killed Oedipus (Soph. *OT* 122) and to offer her, as against Harshbarger's proposal of the chorus, as the prime suspect in the case.[45] This suggestion has no warrant in the text and its only merit is novelty.

[41]It is better to ground the discrepancy in Oedipus' account in a feature of his own character and action as I have done than to find in it a *maladresse* on the part of Sophocles as does L. Roussel, "Le Récit du meurtre de Laïos," *REG* 42 (1929) 361–372, at 370.

[42]See most recently R. Scodel, "Epic Doublets and Polynices' Two Burials," *TAPA* 114 (1984) 49–58.

[43]Whose article Ahl (62) characterizes as a "brilliant discussion."

[44]Ahl 262.

[45]Ahl 12, 63, 65.

Second, as well as clearing Oedipus of the charge of regicide, he denies also that he is the son of Laius and hence an incestuous parricide. Ahl bases this denial upon an unreliability that he detects in the information conveyed by the anonymous Corinthian. The Corinthian, says Ahl, is motivated by self-interest, contradicts himself in his account of his acquisition of the infant Oedipus, and offers no proof of the new identity that he reveals for the king.[46] These points do not impugn the reliability of the Corinthian's report. It is true that he hopes to profit from his message (1006) just as the guard who must bring unwelcome news to Creon in *Antigone* 223–236 fears that he will suffer; this natural expectation (cf. *Trach.* 191, *El.* 772, *Phil.* 552) offers no textual warrant for the elaborate portrait of a manipulative schemer that Ahl extrapolates from it. It is less true that he contradicts himself in saying first that he found the infant Oedipus (1026) and then that he was given him (1038). It is forgivably loose usage to speak of finding a foundling (εὕρημα, the word is used in 1106), especially in Greek, where εὑρίσκω means "to get, gain, procure" as well as "to find."[47] Thus, like most messengers, the Corinthian moves from general statement to the specific treatment of details; there is nothing suspect in this. It is absolutely false to say that the Corinthian offers no proof of Oedipus' identity as the son of Laius and Jocasta. He offers the most traditional and effective recognition-token, the scar, for he knows about the infirmity of Oedipus' feet and this must be genuine knowledge and not spur-of-the-moment deduction, as Ahl implies, for the infirmity is invisible (Oedipus does not limp) and Oedipus is not in the habit of discussing it (1033). This recognition-token establishes the credibility of the Corinthian's report in three ways. First, with it he offers a simple and previously lacking explanation for Oedipus' affliction. Second, it enables him to offer the affliction itself as an explanation for Oedipus' name. Until now, Oedipus has thought that his name meant, "I know about feet," because he had solved a riddle concerning feet. But how could Polybus, who named him, have known that he would one day solve a foot-riddle? The only thing, in fact, that he did know about the baby he was given was that his feet were distinctively maimed and hence he named him, "my foot is swollen." Third, the recognition-token dovetails perfectly with Jocasta's story of having exposed an infant with pierced ankles (718), for while infant-exposure may have been common, infant-anklepiercing is unparalleled.

Third, Ahl claims that the oracle comes neither from Apollo nor from the Pythia, but from the theorist Creon, who as a Theban might well have a vested interest in seeing Oedipus become a scapegoat.[48] Yet if Creon has

[46]Ahl 173 (self-interest), 178–180 (self-contradiction), 192 and 206 (lack of proof).

[47]LSJ s.v. εὑρίσκω IV.

[48]To the poetic mind the meaning of one's name is often not actualized until the middle or end of life: so Pelops was recognized as "black faced" only once he had grown

fabricated the response, why does he invite Oedipus to test it by going to Delphi himself (603–604)? If he looks upon the oracle as an instrument of political vengeance, why does he himself consult it as a first priority upon his acquisition of power (1438–39)?

III

In the end, Ahl may allow the truth of all that I have said, and still discount my arguments. In addition to distancing the self-punishment of Oedipus from his guilt in the matter of parricide and incest, he follows Girard[49] in strengthening the connection between his self-punishment and the plague. Bernard Knox has demonstrated that "the plague is not a traditional feature of the Oedipus story .... [but apparently] a Sophoclean invention"[50] and Ahl rightly follows him in this view,[51] noting that the play's opening description of a plague would have surprised the audience.

Why did Sophocles import the plague into the story of Oedipus? From a biographical point of view, we can suggest two possible reasons why Sophocles would have invented the plague at Thebes. The first reason, and the central point of Knox's and Ahl's treatment of the question, is that the latest possible date for the première of *Oedipus the King* is the City Dionysia in March 426.[52] This is four years after the date of the

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a beard (Pindar *Ol.* 1.68), Helen as the "ship-destroyer" only once her abduction had become a *casus belli* (Aesch. *Ag.* 689), and Hippolytus as "loosed by horses" only once he had met his death in a chariot-accident. That Oedipus views his name in this poetic light rather than in the more prosaic way as a reflection of qualities apparent at the time of his birth is suggested by the fact that his own reading of the name, οἶδα πόδας, resembles the Doric form Οἰδιπόδας found only in the choral songs (*OT* 495, 1193), while the "prosaic" reading, οἰδεῖ πούς, suggested by the Corinthian resembles the common (i.e., unpoetic) Attic form, Οἰδίπους.

[49]Girard, "Generative" 83–84.

[50]B. M. W. Knox, "The Date of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles," *AJP* 77 (1956) 133–147, at 134–135. The state of our knowledge regarding the plague is left unchanged by the discovery in 1976 of the Lille papyrus of Stesichorus' Theban poem. Classicists have not devoted much attention to the plague in the drama, once they have used it to address the issue of dating. Rare exceptions are G. Daux, "Oedipe et le fléau (Sophocle, *Oedipe-roi*, 1–275)," *REG* 53 (1940) 97–122 and J. Duchemin, "La Peste de Thèbes dans l'*Oedipe-Roi* de Sophocle," *L'Information littéraire* (1949) 108–115.

By contrast with the narrative poets of epic and lyric, the dramatists were comparatively free to innovate with their mythic material, because everyone realized that the drama was a fictional recreation rather than the presentation of a literally true story; cf. E. Robbins, "Pindar's *Oresteia* and the Tragedians," in M. Cropp *et al.* (eds.), *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy: Essays Presented to D. J. Conacher* (Calgary 1986) 1–11, at 3.

[51]Ahl 35.

[52]Knox's argument is that *Oedipus the King* is parodied in Aristophanes' *Knights* of 424 B.C.; some also find parodies of *OT* 629, ὦ πόλις, πόλις in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* of February 425 as well as in Eupolis' *Cities* (fr. 219 *PCG*) of 422 (the ever-sceptical Dawe

first outbreak of plague in Athens (Thuc. 2.47–55).[53] For those (like Knox and Ahl) who accept the latest possible date for the play, the plague-motif will be a case of art imitating life. There is another possible reason, not mentioned by them. Sophocles had an abiding interest in medicine, possibly stemming from his experience of the plague. He held the priesthood of the healing-hero, Amynus, the "warder off of evil" (*Vita Sophocleis* T1 A.11 *TrGF emend.* Koerte; *codicum lectio* "Αλωνος)[54] and his house evidently doubled as a shrine to that hero. This was no passing interest on the poet's part,[55] for when the worship of Asclepius was introduced into Athens several years after the probable date of *Oedipus the King*, and before a temple was built for his worship, he was "entertained as a guest" by Sophocles in his own house (Plut. *Numa* 4.6, *Etym. Magn.* s.v. Δεξίων). On this occasion he evidently wrote the hymn to Asclepius (737 *PMG*) mentioned in Lucian *Encom. Demosth.* 27, Philostr. *VA* 3.17, and Philostr. *Imag.* 415.7. His concern for medicine is still clear many years later in his description of Philoctetes' snakebite in the eponymous play of 409.[56] On this view, Sophocles would have added the plague to the plot of *Oedipus the King* in order to give a nod to his au-

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ad OT 1515–30 doubts that these are allusions to Sophocles). The most recent discussion of the dating is C. W. Müller, *Zur Datierung des sophokleischen Ödipus* (Wiesbaden 1984, *AbhMainz* 1984.5) who, perhaps rightly, dates the play before the war and (pp. 31–38) points to a difference between the Homeric and Sophoclean plagues on the one hand and the (on his view) post-Sophoclean real-life plague on the other, namely that the literary ones are temporary divine punishments, while the real-life one was an epidemic. See further E. Robbins, "Achilles to Thetis: *Iliad* 1.365–412," *EMC/CV* 34 (1990) 1–15, at 7, n. 20.

[53]On the plague at Athens see J. C. F. Poole and A. J. Holladay, "Thucydides and the Plague at Athens," *CQ* NS 29 (1979) 282–300, who cite further bibliography to which add A. Parry, "The Language of Thucydides' Description of the Plague," *BICS* 16 (1969) 106–118 = *The Language of Achilles and Other Papers* (Oxford 1989) 156–176, A. Gervais, "À propos de la peste d'Athènes: Thucydide et la littérature de l'épidémie," *BAGB* (1972) 395–429, and J. S. Rusten, *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War: Book 2* (Cambridge 1989) 179–194.

[54]U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin 1932) 2.225.

[55]By contrast with his (probable) service as Hellenotamias (treasurer of the confederacy of Delos) in 443/2 and as general in 441/0, both of which were positions of one year's duration that left, as far as we can tell, no permanent imprint on his life or work. See B. D. Merritt, "The Name of Sophokles," *AJP* 80 (1959) 189 and L. E. Woodbury, "Sophocles Among the Generals," *Phoenix* 24 (1970) 209–224 = *Collected Writings* (above, n. 16) 206–221.

[56]The argument says that the play was produced ἐπὶ Γλαυκίππου, i.e., in the third year of the 92nd Olympiad; on medical concerns in the *Philoctetes* see E. Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow*[2] (London 1952) 260; for more general discussions of Sophocles and medicine, see F. R. Walton, "A Problem in the *Ichneutae* of Sophocles," *HSCP* 46 (1935) 167–189, at 170–176 and J. H. Oliver, "The Sarapion Monument and the Paean of Sophocles," *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 91–122, at 121–122.

dience as though he were saying, "my message applies to you" (Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.69–70).[57]

The addition could, of course, change the message, but the degree and nature of that change will be controlled by intertextual allusion, and Sophocles' plague may be explained entirely in intertextual rather than biographical terms. At the outset of a work of Greek literature the description of a plague—which is in any case an obvious device to engage the spectators' attention—cannot possibly fail to recall the *Iliad*,[58] a work in which a haughty young man discovers to his horror that his obsession with protocol and his own prestige has cost the life of his aptly named surrogate father, Patroclus. This reminiscence makes of Achilles an apt analogue for Sophocles' Oedipus. It is possible to read the *Iliad* from a Girardian perspective, although the scapegoat will be in the eye of the beholder. For some it might be Thersites,[59] for others, Helen, for others still Briseis,[60] but no scapegoat found in the *Iliad* would be remotely analogous to the Oedipus scapegoat posited by Girard.

Moreover, the connection between the plague and the punishment of Oedipus is not immediate. The previous national affliction, the Sphinx, far from sparking demands to avenge the murder of Laius, had the opposite effect, preventing any investigation into the crime from taking place (130–132). The present plague also brings with it no spontaneous outcry for blood. The notion of punishing someone comes from the Pythia, or less plausibly (as Ahl would have it) from Creon's fabricated response. Even if we assume, although nothing but universal scepticism would invite the assumption, that the Pythia does not serve as Apollo's spokesperson (cf. 712–713), we must conclude that she is speaking for herself alone, for as a citizen of a different city residing in a foreign state she has neither the motive nor the capacity to act as mouthpiece for any hypothetical collective scapegoating urge of the Theban populace.

If the Pythia's reply is what it claims to be, namely the word of Apollo, then to Oedipus' question of how he can save his city (71–72) Apollo appears

[57]Cf. Ahl 35.

[58]On the plague in the *Iliad*, see F. Bernheim and A. A. Zener, "The Sminthian Apollo and the Epidemic among the Achaeans at Troy," *TAPA* 108 (1978) 11–14.

[59]W. G. Thalmann, "Thersites: Comedy, Scapegoats, and Heroic Ideology in the *Iliad*," *TAPA* 118 (1988) 1–28, at 22–26.

[60]Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (above, n. 17) 74, and M. Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca and London 1989) 21.

Oedipus' counterpart in the opening of the *Iliad* is Agamemnon, the king who causes the plague, as Oedipus ostensibly causes the plague in the *OT*. No-one would suggest that Agamemnon is a scapegoat because, with his cruelty (*Il.* 6.55–60), incompetence (*Il.* 2.1–483), and impiety (supplied by the later tradition: Aesch. *Ag.* 338–340, 524–527), he richly deserves the misfortunes that he reaps.

to reply, "Pollution is nurtured in this land. Drive it out . . . by driving out a man or avenging murder by murder, for bloodshed has been storming on the city" (97–101). This reply, especially its first word, "pollution" (μίασμα), seems to involve the notion that a ritually polluted person is magically a carrier of physical disease. Although the idea is well attested in Greek literature, we ourselves regard it as nothing less than barbaric and even Sophocles knew that disease was spread by contact with diseased persons or corpses (θαναταφόρα 181, with Dawe's note; cf. Thuc. 2.51.4–6). We all agree with Girard that, "the stereotypical crimes of which [Oedipus] is accused . . . never spread the plague,"[61] and with Ahl that, since it does not actually exist, pollution is most likely to be found where it will serve political expedience.[62] Thus it appears for a moment as though Apollo is abetting a persecution after all.

But this interpretation presupposes that Apollo's words differ from the other two oracles mentioned in the play. In response to Laius' question, "What should I do to have children?" (hypoth. 2, Aesch. *Sept.* [= pars 2 fasc. 2 p. 1 Smith]), Apollo replies that he is ordained to die at the hand of his child (713). In response to Oedipus' question concerning his parents' identity, Apollo says that he will murder his father and sleep with his mother (789–793). As Oedipus himself complains (789), these responses do not answer the questions asked.[63] If the oracle about driving out pollution conforms to this pattern, there will be no implied causal link, magical or otherwise, between the expulsion of the polluted individual and the end of the plague. It will rather be as though the god had said, "The plague lies outside of your control, but here is a problem that you can solve, namely the murder of Laius."

Sophocles fails to tell us that the expulsion occurs, much less that it ends the plague. This would be insignificant if the plague were a tradition already known to the audience, for the dramatist might find it unnecessary to belabour the obvious.[64] If, however, Knox and Ahl are right to claim that the plague is an invention of Sophocles (and I believe that they are), then he will also be obliged to invent the end of the plague, if there is to be one. That he does not do so, and that Oedipus' expulsion in other mythic accounts does not end Thebes' troubles (there follow the violent deaths of Polyneices, Eteocles, Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice),[65] encourages the belief that Apollo is conceived of as demanding a legitimate prosecution rather than as abetting a persecution for magical ends.

[61] Girard, *Scapegoat* 26.

[62] Ahl 39.

[63] Cf. 969–970, where Oedipus again shows his awareness of the riddling nature of the oracle.

[64] D. H. Roberts, *Apollo and his Oracle in the* Oresteia (Göttingen 1984, *Hypomnemata* 78) 24.

[65] Ahl 45.

In his rewriting and analysis of the text, Girard had suppressed all mention of Apollo and of the Pythia. Apollo is absent from Ahl's reading also, although for different reasons. Because Ahl sees the words of Apollo that so influence the course of the action as a fraud perpetrated by Creon, Apollo is wholly fenced off from the play; his existence is called into question, his relevance flatly denied. This suppression of the role of Apollo has a venerable ancestry in the criticism of the play. Aristotle's treatment in the *Poetics* of tragedy, of which he holds *Oedipus the King* to be the greatest example, largely ignores its religious component. Stephen Halliwell correctly remarks that "[t]he treatise's minimal concern for religion should ... be taken at face-value as a virtual rejection of any central role for modes of religious understanding or explanation within the scheme of a poetic plot-structure."[66] Walter Burkert, speaking of the myth rather than the play, writes that, "if myth is defined as a tale about gods, or as a sacred tale, this would exclude central parts of Greek mythology, including Oedipus."[67] It is with this most orthodox part of Ahl's analysis rather than with any of its more radical aspects that I find the greatest fault.

The oracle that brings about the long-overdue inquiry into the murder of Laius is only one of four direct interventions of Apollo in the course of events staged or narrated in the play. It was Apollo who predicted to Laius that his son would kill him (713–714), a prediction that brought about the maiming and abortive exposure of the infant Oedipus. It was Apollo, again, who predicted to Oedipus that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother (791–793), a prediction that caused him to avoid Corinth and come to Thebes. It is Teiresias in his capacity as messenger of Apollo (284–285, 410) who tells Oedipus at the outset of the play that he is the murderer of Laius (362), a statement that brings about a demonstration for our benefit, as it were, of Oedipus' considerable temper.

In addition to these four direct interventions, we must see the fortuitous arrival of the Corinthian stranger at the very moment of the inquest into the regicide, an event that enables Oedipus at last to discover his parentage, either as a flaw in the composition of the play, an improbability of

[66]S. Halliwell, in G. A. Kennedy (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* 1: *Classical Criticism* (Cambridge 1989) 172.

[67]Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (above, n. 17) 22. To be fair, Burkert does accord due weight to Apollo's role in this play; cf. his excellent remarks in *Oedipus, Oracles, and Meaning* (Toronto 1991, The Samuel James Stubbs Lecture Series 1) 23, "there remains the fact that the problem of gods, and of oracles and seers, is ... much in the foreground in the whole play, even if many modern interpreters tactfully tend to gloss this over," and at 27, "The horrible breakdown of Oedipus proves the veracity of divine prescience, proves the existence of an all-comprehending intelligence that envelops this world of ours, proves the function of the 'universal signifier' and thus the meaning of the universe. This proof is worth the sacrifice, the breakdown of this man with whom we unwillingly identify, Oedipus."

the sort for which Zoilus was wont to "whip" Homer,[68] or as another intervention of Apollo—covert, this time—in the action of the play. We owe it to Sophocles to take the latter possibility seriously. We may wish to see the hand of Apollo at work in the play's other coincidences, namely that the sole survivor of the attack upon Laius is—"astonishingly, wildly improbably"[69]—the same man who was too tender-hearted to expose the infant Oedipus (1051–53) and that the Corinthian is the same man who gave the infant to Polybus and Merope (1022). The large number of these improbabilities argues either for a wildly high degree of coincidence or for the operation of an invisible, purposive causal force. The only candidate for such a force mentioned in the play is Apollo. And who, if not Apollo, was the δαιμόνων ... τις who led Oedipus to the body of his wife (1258)? Whatever view we ourselves finally adopt, both Teiresias and Oedipus see in all of these things the workings of Apollo (376–377, 1329–30).

IV

Near the beginning of this paper, I offered an account of triangular desire; let me conclude with another geometrical parable. When open, a belt is a longish rectangle. Done up properly, it has the shape of a cylinder. If the belt gets accidentally twisted through one hundred eighty degrees, the resulting surface differs fundamentally from the cylinder. The mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius discovered in 1865 that the surface, called the Möbius strip, has only one side. This is not apparent when you look at just part of the strip, which appears to have two sides like the original belt, but only when you consider the whole thing. Mathematicians like to explain this one-sidedness by saying that a fly who walks along the centre of the strip without ever deviating from his path will eventually pass the antipodes of his starting point (the point obtained by drilling a hole through the belt). This fly has acquired almost mythic status: a sculpted shield over one of the fireplaces at Princeton University shows him crawling along the Möbius strip proving its one-sidedness to himself.[70]

[68]Oddly Voltaire, "Lettres sur Oedipe, III," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. L. Moland (1877, repr. Nedeln, Liechtenstein 1967) 2.18–28, the modern Sophocleomastix, does not complain about this facet of the play. Others do, however. See most recently J. Peradotto, "Disauthorizing Prophecy: The Ideological Mapping of *Oedipus Tyrannus*," *TAPA* 122 (1992) 1–15, esp. 7.

[69]A. Cameron, *The Identity of Oedipus the King* (New York and London 1968) 22, quoted with approval by R. D. Dawe, *Sophocles: Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge 1982) 20. Ahl (192) writes of this coincidence that "the fabric of credibility is stretched thin even by the standards of comic recognition in Plautus or Shakespeare."

[70]W. Lietzmann, *Visual Topology*, tr. M. Bruckheimer (London 1965) 110–113. The fly is already mentioned in H. Seifert and W. Threlfall, *Lehrbuch der Topologie* (Leipzig 1934, repr. New York 1947) 8.

A typical homecoming plot is like the cylinder of the correctly fastened belt, uroborically illustrating the theme of *Ma fin est mon commencement*, to quote Guillaume de Machaut once again.[71] Oedipus' homecoming departs from the norm because of a one-hundred-eighty-degree simple twist of fate. He comes back to whence he started, but in an inverted position: having left as legitimate (if unwanted), he returns as usurper; having left as Jocasta's son, he returns as her husband. This twist of fate unites opposites and accounts for the play's many coincidences.

The spectacle that Sophocles affords us in this play is that of Oedipus marching along like the mythical fly on his Möbius strip in order to return to his point of origin and discover who he is. That the fly finds the two sides of his strip to be one is no coincidence, but the result of a mathematical law. That Oedipus finds that he has murdered his father and slept with his mother is no mere coincidence either, but a logical, determinate fact. Let us call what determines it (for want of any better name) the justice of Apollo.

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APPENDIX: THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

In view of the confusion of the commentators on this point, it is worth describing in detail the crossroads where Laius met his death. One road runs roughly east-west from the gulf of Corinth through Delphi to Thebes. This road is intersected at an oblique angle by a road from Daulis to the north. This second road continues in a south-westerly direction beyond the intersection to Ambrossus and hence to the sea, but this continuation is not mentioned by Sophocles, is irrelevant to the situation, and should be ignored. In other words, we are to think of a fork in the road[72] rather than of an intersection of two crossing roads, such as is indicated by the modern name of the place, *Stafrodhromo tou Mega*. Oedipus enters the intersection from Delphi, his victims from Thebes; Sophocles mentions Daulis only as

[71] W. J. Starr and G. F. Devine, *Omnibus: Music Scores 1. Earliest Music through the Works of Beethoven* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1964) 23–24. Further examples of this cliché include: "The beginning and the end are common," Heraclitus 22 B 103 Diels-Kranz, "En ma fin est mon commencement," the motto embroidered on Mary Queen of Scots's chair of state (see M. Baring, *In my End is my Beginning* [New York 1931] vii), and "In my beginning is my end," T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," 1.1.

[72] This generates "three roads" as the text repeatedly says, if one views the matter, as the Greeks did, with reference to the point of intersection. We, on the other hand, viewing it from the point of view of one or other of the roads, would speak of "two roads."

the coordinate for the third road. In the direction along which Oedipus is travelling, the fork in the road represents a bifurcation and hence a choice; in the direction in which his victims are travelling the fork constitutes the convergence of an ineluctable fate.[73]

[73]R. C. Jebb in his commentary (Cambridge 1893) *ad* 733 and S. Rossiter, *The Blue Guides: Greece* (London 1967) 367–368, seem to think that Laius is travelling along the road from Daulis rather than along the direct road from Thebes, but this is obviously wrong because (1) this would be the long route and Laius is in a hurry and (2) it is fitting that Oedipus and Laius meet each other head-on.

It is not obvious what plot-events would have brought Laius and Oedipus to Potniae (= mod. Greek Tachi, practically a southern suburb of Thebes) where the murder takes place in Aeschylus (fr. 387a *TrGF*). Oedipus is evidently travelling north, overland from Corinth (on his way to the Delphic oracle, which he will never get a chance to consult?). The choice of Potniae for the encounter may have been suggested to Aeschylus by religious considerations, for, as the home to a shrine of Demeter and Kore, it is an appropriately uncanny place, rather than by any pragmatic plot considerations.