IV.—Ἁμαρτία Again

PHILIP WHALEY HARSH

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

This paper is summarized in its final paragraph.

Careful consideration of method may sometimes lead to a more satisfactory solution of an old problem. Such a consideration seems overdue in regard to certain problems in Aristotle's *Poetics*, especially that of *ἁμαρτία*, in which the word has sometimes been extracted from its elaborate context and belabored beyond its endurance, and the general intention of Aristotle in the *Poetics* and his background, especially Greek tragedy and the literary theories of Plato, have not always been allowed their proper importance.[1]

I

A thorough acquaintance with Greek tragedy is assumed by the author of the *Poetics*. Any interpretation of a doubtful passage that contravenes the actual practice of tragedy, therefore, is suspect. Although Aristotle may express distinct preferences, he does not primarily theorize how tragedy should be written in a theoretical world. At one point, he deliberately refuses here to speculate about possible developments (1449a7). Normally Aristotle seems either to analyze the most effective tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides and to generalize from his admirably keen analysis,[2] or to substantiate his theorizing by reference to actual practice. In

[1] For a recent discussion of the problem with bibliographical notes, see Seymour M. Pitcher, "Aristotle's Good and Just Heroes," *PhQ* 24 (1945) 1–11, and "Further Comment on Aristotle's Heroes," *PhQ* 24 (1945) 190–91. Pitcher in the former article cites various scholars who interpreted *ἁμαρτία* in *Poetics* 1453a10 as "moral fault." Pitcher himself presents an original interpretation of this passage, an interpretation which the present writer cannot accept and which, Pitcher in the latter article admits, does not precisely conform to any extant Greek tragedy. In general, however, Pitcher is inclined to agree with his very impressive list of recent modern scholars who insist that the word *ἁμαρτία* means "error of judgement" and has no moral implications: Bywater, Rostagni, Gudeman, and others. Indeed the denial of moral implications here has now become almost universal.

For references to various studies of the word itself, see note 24 below.

[2] "Aristotle is the analyst *par excellence* . . ." — J[ames] M. Watson, *Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato* (Oxford, 1909), 83.

his consideration of the most effective tragic character, he specifically declares that his view is substantiated by actual practice (1453a17). Let us examine Greek tragedy, then, with regard to the culpability or moral responsibility of characters for their acts of tragic consequence.

Greek tragedy regularly depicts characters who are at least partially responsible for their own downfall. Since this is the usual interpretation of modern critics,[3] there is no call for detailed consideration of each tragedy here.[4] Frequently the tragic poet himself makes the culpability of the main character clear through remarks of the chorus or of a character. Thus at the end of the *Bacchae* (1346), Cadmus admits that his family is at fault but complains that the punishment exceeds the crime. The culpability of Oedipus is a much disputed point.[5] But surely the pre-eminently good and just man does not fly into a fury when a carriage crowds him from the road, and he does not commit murder indiscriminately even when he is lashed by the driver. Surely such a man, given the oracle of Oedipus, would die before slaying a man old enough to be his sire or before marrying a woman old enough to be his mother. Neither Pentheus nor Oedipus deliberately intends to do wrong, neither is base or vicious, neither deserves the extremity of misfortune which results; but both are culpable to a degree. So it is with most of the great figures of Greek tragedy.

The reasonable presumption, we conclude, is that Aristotle too considered the most effective tragic character as at least in part morally responsible for his fate. We know that he so considered two of the six heroes whom, in the crucial passage in the *Poetics*

[3] For instances, see C[ecil] M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1944), 368; Seymour M. Pitcher in *PhQ* 24 (1945) 10.

In general, human responsibility looms large in Greek thought from the time of Homer. See William Chase Greene, *Moira: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), 22–23, 38–39, 44, 76. In his discussions of individual plays (105–219), Greene frequently demonstrates that the characters are at least in part responsible for their acts of tragic consequence.

[4] Various cases in which the poets bring out a note of culpability are cited in the present paper in connection with their use of the word ἁμαρτία.

[5] Besides the discussions of Bowra and Greene (in the works cited in note 3), see Roger A. Pack, "Fate, Chance, and Tragic Error," *AJPh* 60 (1939) 350–56. In an earlier article ("A Passage in Alexander of Aphrodisias Relating to the Theory of Tragedy," *AJPh* 58 [1937] 418–36), Pack seems to go too far in finding a basic inconsistency in Aristotle's conception of ἁμαρτία. There are various degrees of culpability: one can be culpable to a degree without being base. But Pack's treatment is much more satisfactory than most recent considerations of the problem.

(1453a20), he cites as the most effective tragic characters, namely Alcmaeon and Orestes, for in incidental references elsewhere he intimates that these two were culpable.[6] In still another passage, he intimates that the lie of Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* was as blameworthy as his recantation was praiseworthy.[7] Again, he cites Niobe's pride in her children as an instance of what is basically a virtue being carried to a culpable extreme.[8] Presumably the pride of Ajax would be similarly judged, and so the excesses of many another tragic character. In short, Aristotle admits a degree of culpability in these tragic characters.

Moral responsibility is assumed in the *Poetics* (1450b8), furthermore, when, in discussing character, Aristotle points out that character shows choice (προαίρεσις). So in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1111b6) he says that choice distinguishes character better than does action. Greek tragedy — one need think only of the *Hippolytus* — is filled with examples of such choice, which of course entails responsibility.

Aristotle's theory of poetry as depicting the necessary and therefore the universal rather than the accidental and the particular (1451a36–b11) also demands moral responsibility. Why is the spectacle of a pre-eminently good and just man suffering misfortune odious to Aristotle and to us? Not primarily because a disproportion exists between deserts and rewards. Such disproportion, though here at its maximum, is pathetically great in all that is genuinely tragic. It is odious primarily because significant causation — a degree of culpability — is utterly and obviously lacking; because such a spectacle is a mere chronicle of misfortune, accidental rather than universally significant. The accidental is not profoundly tragic because it is external: life, if governed by the laws of mathematical chance, would frequently end in success. The great tragedy of life is that most individuals and obviously mankind as a whole are doomed by their inherent modicum of human weakness. Man's admirable virtues and his noble intentions are all nullified by that ignorance which he will not throw off and by passion's fatal mastery over reason. This is the significant source of the ironic contrast between man's intentions and his accomplishments, of the pitiful discrepancy between man's aspira-

[6] *Eth. Nic.* 1110a27–29; *Rhet.* 1397b3–7, 1401a35–b3.
[7] *Eth. Nic.* 1146a20, 1151b19.
[8] *Eth. Nic.* 1148a33–34.

tions and his fate. Moral responsibility, then, is essential to the most fundamental tenet of Aristotle's theory of poetry.

II

Aristotle spent twenty years in Plato's seminars. In the end the pupil seems to have grown somewhat weary of the master's voice and skeptical of some of the master's opinions. In literary criticism especially Aristotle is at pains to rectify the conceptions of Plato. An essential step in the interpretation of *κάθαρσις*, for example, is to set forth Plato's view of the effect of certain poetry upon the emotions. Aristotle's insistence that poetry is truer than history obviously contradicts Plato's contention that poetry is the shadow of a shadow.[9] Platonic theory is the background not only of Aristotle; it must have been a major part of the discipline of the audience to which the *Poetics* was originally addressed. The modern interpreter too, therefore, must take Platonic theory into account before interpreting Aristotle, and the presumption is that if Aristotle disagrees, he will make his disagreement clear, since it is his practice to do so. What, then, is Plato's view of the tragic character's responsibility?

Plato's fundamental objection to tragedy appears to be that "a disproportion exists between cause and effect, between guilt and resulting catastrophe."[10] Such an interpretation assumes some responsibility, and this is as we should expect in Plato, according to whom God is not the cause of evil and the human agent is responsible (*Rep.* 617E). Furthermore the just man, Plato insists in the *Republic* (613A), is not made miserable by poverty or sick-

[9] By "history" here Aristotle is thinking not of writings like those of Thucydides, who brilliantly succeeded in drawing generalizations from particulars, but of mere chronicles. Herodotus is mentioned in the immediate context (1451b3). Possibly he is thinking also of the *ἐγκώμια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς* which Plato accepted into his ideal state (*Rep.* 607A). The deeds of a famous man, Alcibiades, are cited by Aristotle here as an example of particulars without universal significance.

For a treatment of *κάθαρσις* and of the relationship of Aristotle as literary critic to Plato in general, see Georg Finsler, *Platon und die Aristotelische Poetik*, Leipzig, 1900.

[10] Helmut Kuhn, "The True Tragedy: On the Relationship between Greek Tragedy and Plato, I," *HSPh* 52 (1941) 21.

Aristotle is not impressed by Plato's objections to tragedy presumably because Aristotle is willing to admit a disproportion between man's deserts and his lot in life. (Thus he says that the perfectly good and just man, though he will never be made miserable by fortune, may be kept from happiness by it; *Eth. Nic.* 1101a6–8; cf. 1153b19–21.)

ness or any other seeming misfortune. In incidental references Plato condemns Orestes and, if the *Second Alcibiades* is genuine, Alcmaeon.[11] Nor does Plato agree with those who contend that Thyestes and Oedipus are wholly innocent,[12] for he joins these two with Macareus and condemns them of sin (*Laws* 838C): . . . *ὅταν ἢ Θυέστας ἢ τινας Οἰδίποδας εἰσάγωσιν, ἢ Μακαρέας τισὶν ἀδελφαῖς μειχθέντας λαθραίως, ὀφθέντας δὲ ἑτοίμως θάνατον αὐτοῖς ἐπιτιθέντας δίκην τῆς ἁμαρτίας.*

A degree of culpability, we conclude, is recognized in tragedy itself, in Aristotle's own incidental references to tragic characters, in his theory of the portrayal of character, in his theory of poetry as depicting the necessary and the universal, and in Plato's interpretation and criticism of tragedy.

III

Before proceeding to other phases of the problem which may confirm this conclusion, let us define culpability and certain terms that have been widely used in connection with the problem. Indeed, failure to define such terms accurately and a tendency to divide all acts into the too simple alternatives of good and evil have been the main source of confusion and disagreement concerning the problem of *ἁμαρτία*.

Many recent commentators, including Bywater and Gudeman, have insisted that the tragic character's act is one of intellectual error or "error of judgement" and not one of "ethical fault" [13] or "infirmity of character." Such classification involves a false dichotomy between intellectual error and moral fault. Some error or ignorance may be without moral implications, but much of it is definitely culpable, and the Greek tragic poets and philosophers consistently emphasize this. So a fragment of Sophocles (925 Pearson): [14]

ἡ δὲ μωρία
μάλιστ' ἀδελφὴ τῆς πονηρίας ἔφυ.

[11] *Cratylus* 394E; *Alcib.* 2.143C–D.

[12] So O. Hey in *Ph* 83 (1927–28) 3. See note 24 below.

[13] Except in quotations, the term "moral" fault is used in this paper, and the term "ethical" is reserved for the systematic consideration of moral problems.

[14] "It cannot be too strongly insisted that the Greeks drew no firm line between folly and wickedness. Intellectual dullness was a sign of moral depravity." — A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* (Cambridge, 1917), 3.98.

Similarly two lines attributed to Euripides (1031 N²):

> τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι σε μηδὲν ὢν ἁμαρτάνεις,
> ἔκκαυμα τόλμης ἱκανόν ἐστι καὶ θράσους.

Indeed, the intellectuality of Greek ethics is a commonplace.[15]

Plato considers ignorance, along with passion and appetite, the cause of wrong-doing.[16] In general, he considers the acquisition of true knowledge the first duty of man; much of the ignorance which is the cause of wrong-doing, therefore, is culpable in his opinion.

Aristotle's classification of injuries is somewhat more elaborate, and of course it should constitute our basis for defining the culpable because it is Aristotle's own and because it is wholly adequate and valid. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1135b11–25) Aristotle classifies injuries under three categories: (1) a mischance (ἀτύχημα) contrary to reasonable expectation, (2) an error arising in ignorance of particulars (ἁμάρτημα) not contrary to reasonable expectation but without baseness, (3a) an unjust act (ἀδίκημα) arising in anger or other passion but not deliberate, (3b) an unjust act deliberately decided upon.[17] Culpability obviously is attached to the third category, in varying degree, and also to the second category, as is shown by the words μὴ παραλόγως. This point of reasonable expectation, as is so clearly brought out by the Roman jurists,[18] distinguishes the inculpable from the culpable.[19]

Incidentally we may note that Aristotle applies the word ἁμάρτημα specifically to the second category, but he uses the cognate ἁμαρτάνοντες also in reference to the first division of the third category.[20] Earlier (1110b29) the word ἁμαρτία has been applied to that gross ignorance of principles that results in injustice and viciousness, and again (1111a34) to acts done deliberately or in wrath. Although Aristotle often distinguishes between ἁμάρτημα and ἀδίκημα, it is obvious from these passages that he does not invariably do so,[21]

[15] Cf. Greene, *op. cit.* (see note 3), 22; Ar. *Eth. Nic.* 1144b15–17.

[16] *Leg.* 863A–E; cf. Ar. *Eth. Nic.* 1111a24–25.

[17] On the classification of injuries, see also Ar. *Rhet.* 1374b6–11.

[18] Cf. Gaius, *Inst.* 3.211; Just. *Inst.* 4.3.3–8.

In Greek law, deliberate injury (ἑκών) was punished with a penalty twice as severe as that for indeliberate (ἄκων). This, of course, presumes a degree of culpability even for the indeliberate. Cf. Demosth. 21 (*In Mid.*) 43.

[19] Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1113b19–1114a7.

[20] En jam vox ἁμαρτεῖν non proprio illo usu qui vs. 12–19 erat — G. Ramsauer, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea* (Leipzig, 1878) on 1135b22.

[21] Not infrequently Aristotle uses the word ἁμαρτάνειν as a very general all-inclusive term. See *Eth. Nic.* 1109b6, 13.

and — more important — that he specifically applies ἁμαρτία and its cognates to acts that are to a degree culpable.

To which category are we to assign the deeds with fatal consequences of the most effective tragic characters? Oedipus' ignorance of the identity of his father belongs to the first and is certainly not culpable.[22] His wrath or insolence [23] appears to belong to the first division of the third and to be culpable. His willingness, in spite of the oracle given him, to marry a woman old enough to be his mother, a willingness, we may assume, spurred by desire of wealth and power, would seem also to belong at least in part to the third category. Most deeds with fatal consequences in Greek tragedy, involving as they do the passions as well as ignorance of particulars, which is sometimes culpable, and perhaps a not too culpable ignorance of principles, would seem to belong in part to the second and third categories. They would involve a degree of culpability, therefore, in Aristotle's own classification in the *Ethics*, and of the terms there used, none could be more appropriately applied to such tragic deeds as a group than the inclusive term ἁμαρτία.

IV

Turning to the word ἁμαρτία and its cognates (but not its compounds),[24] we observe that Aristotle in the *Poetics* was not the first

[22] Earlier (1111a12), in distinguishing voluntary from involuntary acts, Aristotle cites Merope's mistaking her son for the murderer of her son as an involuntary act brought about through ignorance. Merope's mistake, the exciting complication of a melodramatic play, is obviously quite different from Oedipus' slaying his father or marrying his mother. The results of Merope's proposed act would perhaps have been contrary to reasonable expectation. But the warning of the oracle should have deterred Oedipus from slaying any man or marrying any woman old enough to be his parent. Oedipus acts despite this warning and under the stress of unrestrained emotion; Merope acts — from the Greek point of view — with unimpeachably righteous intent and perhaps after reasonable deliberation. In this passage, Aristotle grants pity and forgiveness to such mistakes as that of Merope. Such indulgence does not necessarily imply the recognition of a total absence of culpability but rather of undeserved misfortune. Compare *Poet.* 1453a4; *Rhet.* 1374b10–11. Such indulgence might, then, be granted also to Oedipus.

[23] Cf. Eurip. *Phoen.* 41.

[24] For an interesting collection of material on this word, see O. Hey, "ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑ: *Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte des Wortes*," *Ph* 83 (1927–28) 1–17 and 137–163. Hey's method is faulty in certain respects. His definition of moral fault as a deliberate violation (7, 157) is fundamentally unsound. The history of a word, especially one as broad in meaning as this one, does not necessarily determine its specific meaning in a given context, although of course it is valuable to point out the usage of Aristotle with regard to the word. Here, however, Hey appears sophistic in rejecting or explaining away cases where the word is used to include unjust acts in Aristotle. Hey's

to apply this term to the deed of tragic consequence in drama. It had been so applied more than thirty times in twelve extant tragedies. Indeed it is hard to understand why this common usage of tragedy has been given so little attention by commentators on the *Poetics*.

In the *Prometheus*, these words are repeatedly used of Prometheus' fatal act, first by Kratos (9), then by the Chorus (260 *bis*), and finally by Prometheus himself (266):

ἑκὼν ἑκὼν ἥμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι·

In each case there are intimations of moral fault.[25]

In the *Agamemnon*, Cassandra uses this word of the ancient crimes of the house of Atreus (1197), and in the *Choephoroe*, Orestes uses it of the crime of Clytemnestra (519).

In Sophocles, these terms occur most frequently in the *Antigone*, first in the heated exchange between Haemon and Creon (743–44):

Haemon: οὐ γὰρ δίκαιά σ' ἐξαμαρτάνονθ' ὁρῶ.
Creon: ἁμαρτάνω γὰρ τὰς ἐμὰς ἀρχὰς σέβων;

Later Teiresias, generalizing, uses this same combination of compound followed by simple verb (1024–25). Antigone has used the term to refer to Creon's charges against her (914, 926) and to her charges against Creon (927). Implications of moral fault are here present throughout, but are most plain in the chorus' solemn condemnation of Creon (1259–60):

εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἀλλοτρίαν
ἄτην, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἁμαρτών.

Creon uses the same term to refer to his fatal deeds in the first line of his subsequent lament (1261).

In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Hyllus describes the deed of his mother as follows (1136):[26]

ἅπαν τὸ χρῆμ' ἥμαρτε χρηστὰ μωμένη.

treatment of the word in tragedy is inadequate and does not give sufficient weight to those passages wherein the reference is to the act of tragic consequence.

Cf. P. van Braam, "Aristotle's Use of 'Αμαρτία," *CQ* 6 (1912) 266–72.

See also Henry Phillips, Jr., *De Vocis* AMAPTIA *Vi et Usu apud Scriptores Graecos usque ad Annum CCC ante Christum Natum*, unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1933. (This is the best study of the word, but regulations of the University prevent quotation or comment without special permission. A very brief summary may be found in *HSPh* 44 (1933) 244–46.)

[25] Cf. Herbert Richards in *CR* 24 (1910) 88.

[26] Cf. *Trach.* 1123, 1127.

Whether or not Deianeira is morally at fault is perhaps subject to difference of opinion. Some critics feel that she should have recalled the dangers of magic, to which many calamities in Greek legend testify; that she should have pondered the source of her gift and the truth that the gifts of evil men bring no good.

In the *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus himself confesses the disgraceful implications of the deception which he has attempted (1248–49):[27]

τὴν ἁμαρτίαν
αἰσχρὰν ἁμαρτὼν ἀναλαβεῖν πειράσομαι.

In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus twice uses these terms in reference to his acts of tragic consequence (439, 967–68 *bis*) and Polyneices uses the term to include his own deeds (1269). In all these passages moral implications appear to be admitted; but here, as in some of the other passages just cited, these kindly neutral words are used no doubt deliberately in order to soften the confession of fault as much as possible.[28]

Turning to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, we find that Aphrodite uses this term of Hippolytus' sin against her (21). The Nurse uses it vaguely of Phaedra's fault (507, 615), as does Phaedra herself (690). Finally Artemis (1334) and Hippolytus (1409) use it of Theseus' haste in condemning his son.

In the *Andromache*, the Nurse uses this term of Hermione's attempt to put Andromache out of the way (840).

In the *Phoenissae*, Teiresias says of the sons of Oedipus (873–74):

. . . ὡς δὴ θεοὺς ὑπεκδραμούμενοι,
ἥμαρτον ἀμαθῶς. . . .

In the *Orestes*, the term is used of Clytemnestra's adultery (576), somewhat as in the passage from the *Choephoroe* cited above. Helen (76) and Orestes himself (596) also use it in reference to the slaughter of Clytemnestra.

Finally, in the *Bacchae*, Pentheus uses the word ἁμαρτίαι in appealing to his mother for his life (1121). Here again, the most kindly word is chosen, but we can hardly doubt that Pentheus

[27] Cf. *Phil.* 1224–25; compare note 7 above.

[28] So Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1372b18) uses the word ἁμαρτεῖν in contrast to ἀδικεῖν to intimate the absence of intentional wrong.

Oedipus rightly insists that he is not κακός (*O.C.* 988–96). Of course one may commit a culpable wrong without necessarily being vicious. Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1138a34–35.

recognizes and confesses his sin — the most effective type of supplication.[29]

Such are the instances in which ἁμαρτία and its cognates appear to be used of the acts of fatal consequence. These acts are sometimes sins against Heaven, sometimes crimes of the blackest sort, but usually acts not deliberately wicked but nevertheless carrying, as is obvious from the context, a degree of culpability. No stringent limitation of the term should be assumed. Apart from the passages just cited, it is frequently applied to deeds that are incidental or outside the action proper of the play, and occasionally to minor mistakes that have no moral implications, occasionally also to deliberate malicious acts. In short, the word ἁμαρτία and its cognates is used as a broad term for "error" in Greek tragedy; and when it is used in reference to acts of tragic consequence, it is accompanied by intimations of a degree of culpability.

V

The text of an author must not be attacked in the fashion of a lawyer trying to invalidate a contract, and this is true especially of the text of the *Poetics*, a work which, though the result of much profound thought, is not composed with meticulous care. The context must be studied sympathetically. The examination of individual words is important; but in order to explain a given word, it is a too common practice to cite a "parallel" passage, in which the word is used with clearer distinction, and then to assume that this word has the same meaning in the original passage as it does in the "parallel" passage, or, in short, to proceed as if the original passage were the "parallel" passage. Context is more important than individual words, especially words which are abstract and somewhat neutral, like the word ἁμαρτία, for it is clear from the passages cited in this paper, as it is from the citations in Liddell and Scott, that this word may be used of culpable misdeeds and of inculpable mistakes.

In discussing the most effective tragic character, Aristotle begins by saying that "A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery. . . ." [30] Later he continues: "There remains,

[29] Cf. E[ric] R. Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford, 1944), 204, commentary on vss. 1117–21.

[30] *Poet.* 1452b34–35, translation of Ingram Bywater, *Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry* (Oxford, 1909).

Bywater understood the passage correctly, it seems to the present writer, with the

then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some" — ἁμαρτία. Now it is clear that this second type of personage differs from the first: the second is not wholly a good man (ἐπιεικής) and yet, of course, not wholly base. That much is clear. It is clear from other passages in the *Poetics* [31] that the most effective tragic character is in general a good man.[32]

If this most effective type of tragic character is not wholly good (ἐπιεικής), in what does he fail to be so? [33] There is only one possible answer, since the Greek tragic poet's conception of portrayal of character is distinctive and definite: only traits of character sig-

exception of one detail: he doubtless assumed that the most effective tragic character was "not pre-eminently virtuous and just" in some respects irrelevant to the ἁμαρτία. Such an interpretation, of course, is wholly possible from the mere words of Aristotle; but it is impossible in view of the ancient tragic poets' practice in portrayal of character, whereby only those characteristics that are significant for the dramatic action are included. Bywater nods also when he says: "In thus making the tragic story turn on an ἁμαρτία Aristotle is probably thinking more immediately of the Oedipus Tyrannus. . . ." Aristotle himself a few lines later cites as most effective and widely used the stories of six various houses. Nor does it seem likely that Aristotle would base such an important point as this upon a single play. Finally the tragic poets themselves often refer to the act of tragic consequence as ἁμαρτία. There is no reason, then, to limit the application of this term to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

In contending that ἁμαρτία "in the Aristotelian sense of the term is a mistake or error of judgement," and not some "ethical" fault or infirmity of character, Bywater cites two passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1135b12; 1110b31). In both these passages, culpable acts are included under the term ἁμαρτία or its cognates (1135b22–23; 1110b28–30). Indeed, in the earlier passage the acts of the base and vicious man are included! The very passages which Bywater cites, therefore, prove that these terms may be used of culpable or inculpable deeds; in short, that these terms are neutral ones and take their implications from the context. In the later passage, acts committed in anger or under the stresses of other passions are included. Bywater's contention that the ἁμαρτία of Oedipus does not concern his hasty temper, therefore, has no sound basis.

[31] *Poet.* 1448a18, 1454a17, b13.

[32] There is nothing in this section, in the opinion of the present writer, inconsistent with Aristotle's statements elsewhere that the tragic hero must be a good man, except that ἐπιεικής is here used more strictly than in 1454b13. Throughout, Aristotle contends that such a character must not be deliberately vicious; here in 1453a10 he specifically brings out, as he intimates in the other passage just cited, that the character must be at least partially culpable.

[33] Alfred Gudeman (*Aristoteles*, ΠΕΡΙ ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗΣ [Berlin and Leipzig, 1934], 237–38) is certainly wrong in his interpretation of ἐπιεικεῖς. (In a copy of this work in the Harvard College Library, an undergraduate, perhaps, has encircled οὔτε in Gudeman's lemma and written: "Look, Gudeman!") Cf. Seymour M. Pitcher in *PhQ* 24 (1945) 3, note 13. This error leads Gudeman to others, and his interpretation of the whole passage is mistaken.

nificant for the dramatic action are given, and all insignificant trivia are omitted.[34] One may recall how Henry VIII ate a roast chicken, but none of us can imagine how Oedipus would do so. Eating is not a part of the artistic creation of Oedipus. He exists only in certain aspects directly relevant to his prosperity and his adversity. He is more than a personified human quality: his noble love of his people, his wise care of them, his affection for his children — all these good characteristics are depicted along with his too passionate wrath; but he remains something less than a full portrait of an individual.[35] So in all Greek tragedy: moral faults depicted bear directly on that which results in the tragic consequence and which Aristotle and occasionally the tragic poets themselves term ἁμαρτία. Ἐπιείκεια, a moral quality, can be affected only by moral qualities; it is here nullified by ἁμαρτία; ἁμαρτία, therefore, is here a moral quality.

This context, interpreted in the light of the actual practice of the Greek tragic poets, we conclude, proves that in Aristotle's opinion the most effective tragic character is in some way culpable and at least partially responsible for his downfall. This interpretation, as has been shown above, is consistent with the actual practice observable in the extant tragedies, with Plato's interpretation of Greek tragedy, and with Aristotle's own pertinent opinions and theories elsewhere expressed. The use of the word ἁμαρτία and its cognates to include culpable ignorance and culpable acts of passion has been abundantly shown for each of the three great tragic poets, for Aristotle himself in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and, if the above interpretation of the context is admitted, for the *Poetics* itself. The definiteness and consistency of all the evidence is conclusive: ἁμαρτία as used in the crucial passage in the *Poetics* (1453a) includes some degree of culpability.

[34] The proper proof of this statement concerning the portrayal of character lies within the plays themselves. It is corroborated, however, by what Aristotle says concerning character in tragedy; see especially *Poet.* 1450a20–b10.

[35] In the first book of the *Republic*, Plato portrays old Cephalus in a detailed and intimate fashion that approaches the method of the modern novelist; but even here, every detail, even the cushioned chair, has an important bearing upon the main theme of the *Republic* — the desirability of the just life.