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ATTITUDES TOWARD SUICIDE IN ANCIENT GREECE

ELISE P. GARRISON
Texas A&M University

In his authoritative study *Miasma*, Robert Parker defines pollution "as a kind of institution, the metaphysical justification for a set of conventional responses to the disruption of life through violent death."[1] It is not so much a rationalization as a vehicle for expressing social disruption. Suicide, as a violent death, threatens to pollute society at large. Parker, however, assigns "extra pollution" to suicides, i.e., pollution beyond that associated with death of any kind, and pollution which "obviously derives from that same moral revulsion against suicide that caused punitive measures to be taken against the corpse."[2] Parker's brief and sweeping statement about the punishment of the corpses of suicides raises significant questions about the typical ancient attitude towards suicide, and it is important to reexamine the evidence Parker has collected, and to create a larger picture of attitudes towards suicide in antiquity by examining sources he omits.[3] The sources on suicide in ancient Greece provide complex and

[1] *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) 120.

[2] Parker (above, note 1) 42.

[3] In fact, Parker bases his statement on very few sources; namely *LSCG* 154b 33–36; Plut. *Them.* 22.2; Harpocration, s.v. *oxythumia*; D.L. 6.61; Aesch. 3.244. Of course, the question of suicide pollution forms only a small part of Parker's argument and so, though he does not necessarily misinterpret the cited sources, he simply does not cite enough.

For the first study of suicide which comprehensively collected all instances of historical and literary suicide in Greek literature, see R. Hirzel, "Der Selbstmord," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* (Leipzig 1908, rpt. Darmstadt 1966) 75ff, 243ff, 417ff. In his philosophical approach to suicide, Hirzel aimed at tracing the evolution of attitudes towards suicide from antiquity to 19th century Germany. Through a chronological survey he assembled virtually all of the literary references to suicide which were available in 1908, and this in itself produces an immensely useful study. He was interested primarily, however, in showing how art and life react and respond to each other. A recent compilation can be found in A. J. L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self Killing in Classical Antiquity* (Routledge 1990), which provides an up-to-date assembly of instances of ancient suicide and includes discussion of both Greek and Roman suicide. Despite the interesting statistics he compiles, his intertwining of Greek and Roman attitudes makes it difficult to filter out specifically one or the other, nor does he make a clear enough distinction between cowardly and honorable suicide. Unfortunately he claims Durkheim's theory of suicide (for which see infra) has no relevance to either Greek or Roman society because we cannot know any motives (other than the immediate ones) of ancient suicide victims (80). However, Durkheim himself excluded individual's motivations from his discussion, and even van Hooff at critical moments resorts to Durkheimian explanations (see, for instance, 53, 126 or 127). Other useful works on suicide include K. A. Geiger, *Der Selbstmord im klassichen Altertum* (1888); "Selbstmord" *RE* II.A. (1923) 1134–35; M. Delcourt, "Le Suicide par vengeance dans la Grece ancienne," *Revue*

sometimes contradictory evidence, but one overwhelming fact emerges: social significance attached to suicide, and at the same time very little odium or repulsion. I propose to support this statement by looking at suicide along two avenues: through descriptive sources which deal with the actual deed, including the victim's motivations, and its repercussions (inscriptional evidence, oratory and post fifth-century literary evidence) or which reflect popular attitudes towards the act (fifth-century history and tragedy), and through prescriptive sources which try to rationalize those popular attitudes (Plato and Aristotle).[4] To anticipate my conclusion, which agrees with Parker's conclusion concerning the importance of the social ramifications of suicide, but which differs in other ways, the relative silence of the sources on the treatment of suicide corpses leads to the logical conclusion that these corpses were considered by and large normal corpses. If in fact these corpses were abnormal, one would expect explicit mention of the pollution above and beyond the pollution that results from death of any kind. The view of suicide which will emerge emphasizes the importance of the concepts of shame and honor in motivation, and the distinction between cowardly and courageous self-destruction, for the eternally disturbing phenomenon of suicide clearly engendered contradictory feelings then as now.[5]

DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE

In this section I will first treat sources concerning actual suicide in an attempt to modify Parker's conclusion, and secondly, I will address popular attitudes to suicide in a sociological context, because underlying this second part is the assumption that suicide is a response to social pressures. Though Emile Durkheim (*Le suicide* 1897) first articulated this phenomenon, it is one clearly evidenced in the ancient writers.[6] Durkheim begins with a definition of suicide:

de l' Histoire des Religions CXIX (1939) 154–71; C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 46; W. B. Stanford, ed., *Sophocles' Ajax* (London 1963), Appendix E; K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974) 168–69; A. Katsouris, "The Suicide Motif in Ancient Drama," *Dioniso* 47 (1976) 5–26, originally published in Greek in *Dodone* 4 (1975) 203–34; Y. Grisé, *Le Suicide dans la Rome antique* (Montreal 1982) 167–92; B. Seidensticker, "Die Wahl des Todes bei Sophokles," in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* XXIX: *Sophocles* (Geneva 1982) 105–54; R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London/Ithaca 1985) 95–99; N. Loraux, *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme* (Paris 1985), trans. A. Forster, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge and London 1987), to be read with the review of B. Knox, *NYRB*, April 28, 1988; P. Walcot, "Suicide, a Question of Motivation," in *Studies in Honour of T. B. L. Webster* I, edd. J. H. Betts, J. T. Hooker and J. R. Green (Bristol 1986) 231–37.

[4] These are not, of course, mutually exclusive categories, and attitudes gleaned from one subdivision will affect interpretations of others. Likewise, the distinction between generally Greek and specifically Athenian is difficult to maintain, though the majority of the sources under discussion here are Athenian.

[5] For a discussion of the complexities of moral attitudes towards suicide throughout history see M. P. Battin, *Ethical Issues in Suicide* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1982).

[6] For an English translation of Durkheim, see J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson, trans. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London 1975). For general discussions of Durkheim and his work see, e.g., T. Parsons, *International Encyclopedia of Social*

any death which is the direct or indirect result of a positive or negative act accomplished by the victim and which he knows will produce this result. A person may use a positive, violent action, or simply abstain from life support. Or to put it more succinctly, "suicide is always the act of someone who prefers death to life" (277). Durkheim considered suicide rates a measure of the health of the social body; by studying suicide a better understanding of the causes and consequences of the underlying sickness of a society could be achieved. He developed his system in terms of collective sentiments, that moral authority which determines both the degree of cooperative loyalty and the overriding concept of order. His two major explanatory variables, integration and regulation, correspond in general to the Greek concepts of φιλία and δίκη.[7] Φιλία refers to the relationships that exist between equals (Theognis 306, Herodotus 7.130, Plato *Symposium* 179C), between family members (Xenophon *Hier.* 3.7, Aristotle *Poetics* 1453B19), between dependents and superiors (Xenophon *Anab.* 1.6.3, Isocrates 16.28), and between states (Thucydides 5.5) or communities (Isocrates 6.11); it describes, in short, the range of possible associations and the mixture of society, and corresponds almost exactly to Durkheim's understanding of integration. For Durkheim, the strength of collective sentiments determines the degree of social integration. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* notes the multi-faceted aspects of φιλία (VIII.1159B25ff), and suggests an intimate connection between φιλία and τὸ δίκαιον (VIII.1155A22–28).[8] Δίκη, justice, has been defined as the preservation of established order, and has received full attention elsewhere.[9] As the controlling force in society, δίκη resembles the regulation factor of Durkheim's plan, regulation which determines one's needs and the means to attain them. The abstract nature of Durkheim's social system invites comparison with these Greek social concepts, and although particular social rules may vary according to their geographical and temporal locations, human conflict with the values abstracted from individual rules persists in any society.

Sciences, D. L. Sills, ed. Vol. 4 (New York 1968) 311–20; W. Pope, *Durkheim's Suicide: A Classic Analyzed* (Chicago 1976); S. Taylor, *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide* (New York 1982); J. Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*, Vol. 2. *The Antinomies of Classical Thought: Marx and Durkheim* (Berkeley 1983). See also Walcot (above, note 3) 233–34 for a succinct discussion of the usefulness of Durkheim's work for understanding ancient attitudes. See also S. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London 1978) 94–106.

[7] I am indebted to James Redfield for this suggestion. Durkheim's theory claims validity for all societies, and therefore is relevant to any geographical or temporal entity. Whether the Greeks might have understood it, though not important to the theory's value as a tool, is interesting, and the virtual interchangeability of the Greek value terms with Durkheim's terminology adds depth to the applicability of the model. Of course, the relationship between justice and the notions of honor and shame in Greek ethics is complex, and throughout this chapter δίκη will be discussed under the more particular notions of shame and honor.

[8] See M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1986) 343ff for a discussion of these concepts in Aristotle.

[9] See, e.g., A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960); H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971); Dover (above, note 3); E. A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978); R. Lamberton, *Hesiod* (New Haven and London 1988).

Very often this conflict issues in suicide because an individual may feel a sense of shame, that is, a feeling of inadequacy in the eyes of others, from failure to fulfill the requirements of being a functioning member in a network of φιλία, or dishonor by external society for failure to abide by its rules. Many of the suicides under discussion in this paper take place because the victims are determined to regain lost honor and restore equilibrium to society.

Equally important for analyses of suicides are Durkheim's further distinctions between types of suicide. Durkheim's categories—egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic—correspond to the overriding social structure of regulation and integration. Egoistic suicide represents low integration and excessive individuation; altruistic high integration and insufficient individuation. The egoistic suicide necessarily possesses a high development of knowledge and reflective intelligence, and questions everything. When this sceptic becomes disillusioned, suicide can occur. For Durkheim, Protestantism with its spirit of free inquiry shows a proclivity for causing egoistic suicides. The altruistic suicide feels devalued as an individual personality and becomes completely absorbed in the social group, and feels hope in death because of "beautiful perspectives beyond this life" (225). Catholicism and Judaism, according to Durkheim, are religions which have strict control over details of life and leave little to individual judgment, and therefore precipitate altruistic suicides. Altruistic suicide encompasses self-sacrifice, a concept prevalent in Greek thought, as we shall see. On the regulation continuum, anomic suicide represents low regulation and insatiable needs, while fatalistic results from high regulation and blocked desires. For example, if marriage regulates sexual relations, then divorce represents conjugal anomie (273) and can become the impetus to anomic suicide. Fatalistic suicide occurs among persons whose futures are hopelessly blocked, e.g., the childless married woman or a slave. Durkheim acknowledges that these types often combine with one another. For example, there is an affinity between egoism and anomie, or even between the opposites egoism and altruism.

Implicit in Durkheim's discussion of suicide is the understanding that judicial and institutionally imposed deaths are really suicides. Altruistic tendencies account for many of the suicides under discussion, and encompass the notion of self-sacrifice. In Durkheim's words, instances of self-sacrifice have as their root "the same state of altruism which is equally the cause of what might be called heroic suicide" (240)[10] Several sub-categories of suicides will emerge in this study. For the most part, as we shall see, the Greeks considered self-sacrifice which saved the community virtuous. Suicidal obedience to orders in battle is praised. Institutional suicide carries no stigma.[11] Suicide out of shame or guilt or fear of dishonor is commendable, while suicide out of laziness or cowardice is condemned. And suicide to restore one's honor is embraced approvingly.

[10] This part of Durkheim's theory is complex, since he classifies even martyrs as suicides because "though they did not kill themselves, they sought death with all their power and behaved so as to make it inevitable. To be suicide, the act from which death must necessarily result need only have been performed by the victim with full knowledge of the facts" (227).

[11] See note 25 below.

I. Inscriptions, oratory and post fifth-century evidence

From Cos there is an inscription of the first part of the third century B.C. which records traditional rules relating to ritual purity.[12] This heavily restored inscription falls into three parts, the first two of which deal with the cults of Demeter at Olympia on Cos and perhaps at Isthmia on Cos respectively.[13] The third part lists unsystematically sacrileges in need of purification, and these rules seem sometimes to belong to particular cults, but sometimes to have general application. The whole text concerns itself with pollution to shrines and priests, as well as with pollution that affects the whole community. Lines 17–36 of this third section lay out procedures to be followed in the case of pollution from death, including that from an open grave or a human bone. They specify that if death pollutes a sacred place, the god's statue must be carried out, washed, a propitiatory sacrifice must be offered, and the whole shrine must be purified. In all instances kin or *kyrioi*, if any, are responsible for burying the dead; if there are no kin, the task falls to the demesmen (29–32).[14] The inscription then discusses cases of suicide by hanging (33–36):

> αἰ δὲ τίς κα ἔν τινι δάμωι ἀπάγξηται σχοι]νιδίωι, ὁ ἰδὼν πράτιστον καταλυσά[τω τὸν νεκρὸν καὶ εἵματι κατακαλυψάτω· τὸ] δὲ ξύλον ἐξ οὗ κα ἀπάγξηται, ἀπο[ταμὼν ἐξενεικάτω καὶ κατακαυσάτω καὶ τ]ὸ σχοινίον ὁ ἰδών. αἰ δὲ κα ἱερεὺς ἴδηι [τὸν παριόντα πράτιστον κελέσθω ταῦτα πο]ιεῖν.[15]

Clearly, with its numerous restorations the inscription leaves us with a plausible yet far from certain reconstruction. For example, in l. 35 the phrase εἵματι κατακαλυψάτω is reconstructed on the basis of *Ajax* 915ff and Theocritus 23.36ff and 52ff.[16] Nonetheless, we can perhaps tender the following conclusions. In the context of the immediately preceding lines presumably unburied suicide corpses also fall under the kin-burial rule, with an additional consideration: namely, not only is there pollution from death, but also pollution from the material objects used in committing the suicide, and just as in the case of murder either by persons unknown or killing by non-humans the weapon is "punished" (e.g., Dem. 23.76; *Ath. Pol.* 57.4; *Pol.* 8.120, Aesch. 3.244).[17] With suicide there is no other person to purify and/or prosecute, so apparently the instrument becomes the focus of the purification process. A priest, of course, like shrines and statues, is susceptible to a greater amount of pollution

[12] R. Herzog, *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* Nr. 6. *Heilige Gesetze von Kos* (Berlin 1928) 20–25, and F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris 1969) 154.

[13] Restored by Herzog on the basis of Section A.I.18.

[14] For similar kin-burial responsibilities see Dem. 43.57–58.

[15] "[If anyone in a deme hangs himself] with a rope, let the first to see him release [the corpse and cover it with clothing]. And let the one who sees it cut down the wood from which (the suicide) hanged himself, [carry it and] the rope [out and burn them]. If a priest should see (the corpse), [let him bid the first passerby] to do this" (my translation).

[16] Herzog (above, note 12).

[17] Cf. D. M. MacDowell, *Law in Classical Athens* (Ithaca 1978) 117.

than the layman. But certainly this passage gives no indication of punitive measures taken against the actual corpse.

A more difficult passage to interpret occurs in Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles* 22.2, where he describes another case of self-destruction by hanging.

> πλησίον δὲ τῆς οἰκίας κατεσκεύασεν ἐν Μελίτῃ τὸ ἱερόν, οὗ νῦν τὰ σώματα τῶν θανατουμένων οἱ δήμιοι προβάλλουσι καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ τοὺς βρόχους τῶν ἀπαγχομένων καὶ καθαιρεθέντων ἐκφέρουσιν.

Plutarch has just described the growing dislike of the Athenians for Themistocles, a dislike fueled by Themistocles' erection of a shrine to Artemis Aristoboule, of Best Counsel, which implies that he himself had given the best counsel to all of Greece. Plutarch then gives a piece of information apparently current in his own day, but he enlightens us neither as to when nor how the Artemis Aristoboule shrine acquired this dubious distinction,[18] and his conflation of a piece of fifth-century information with a practice current in the second century renders interpretation even more difficult. He seems to make a distinction between the corpses of criminals and suicides, the former corpses explicitly said to be cast out, the latter not mentioned at all except for their clothes and the instruments of death. Perhaps we can assume that since suicide corpses were in the charge of kin who would be required to take care of them in the appropriate manner (cf. the Coan law on unburied corpses discussed above), they were not brought to the Artemis shrine. Implicitly, however, Plutarch seems to distinguish as does Plato in *Laws* 9 (see below) between treatment of criminal corpses and suicides, but seems to suggest in addition that even the clothes of suicides pick up and possibly transmit the pollution inherent in a normal corpse.

In the Temple Chronicle of the Temple of Athena on Rhodes, Timachidas of Lindos, writing around 100 B.C., reports an apparently early fifth-century instance of a corpse found hanging in the temple.[19] The text consists of four parts: A, the notice to create the inscription; B and C, lists of Temple dedications made by figures from myth—e.g., Minos and Heracles—to historical figures, including Alexander the Great and Philip V. Part D of the register describes so-called "Epiphanies" of Athena, and records cases from the opening of the fifth century down to at least 305/4 B.C.[20] Of interest to our discussion is the second epiphany which records the following event.

> 'Επ' ἱερέως τοῦ 'Αλίου Πυθαννᾶ τοῦ 'Αρχιπόλιος/ ἐν Λίνδωι συνκατακλαιχθείς τις λάθραι νυ/κτὸς αὐτὸν ἀπεκρέμασε ἐκ τῶν ἀντηρί/δων τᾶν κατὰ νώτου τοῦ ἀγάλματος/ ποτηρεισμένων τῶι τοίχωι. καὶ Λινδί/ων δηλομένων εἰς

[18] Professor Michael Jameson suggests assimilation to Hekate before whose roadside images ὀξυθύμια (trees used for hanging oneself) were piled. Cf. also Plato's *Laws* 873B4–6 where a criminal is thrown out where three roads meet outside the city. See also M. Puhvel, "The Mystery of the Cross-Roads," *Folklore* 87 (1976) 167–77.

[19] *FGrH* IIIb532D(2).

[20] For a discussion of collected works of "Epiphanies" see *FGrH* IIIb334. Istros F 50–53; M. Rostovtzeff, *Klio* 16 (1919) 203ff.

> Δελφοὺς ἀποστεῖ/λαι καὶ διερωτᾶσαι περὶ τοῦ συμβεβακό/τος τί δεῖ ποιεῖν, ἃ θεὸς ἐπιστᾶσα τῶι ἱερεῖ καθ' ὕπνον ποτέταξε ἡσυχίαν/ ἔχειν περὶ αὐτᾶς, τᾶς δὲ ὀροφᾶς γυ/μνῶσαι τὸ ἐπάνω τοῦ ἀγάλματος μέ/ρος καὶ ἐᾶσαι οὕτως ἔστε κα τρεῖς ἅλιο/ι γένωνται καὶ τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς /ἀγνισθῆι λου[τ]ροῖς, ἔπειτα τὰν μὲν /στέγαν πάλιν ἐπισκευάξαι καθὰπερ /ἦν πρότερον, τὸν δὲ ναὸν καθάραντα/ τοῖς νομιζομένοις θύειν κατὰ τὰ πά/τρια Διὶ...[21]

Clearly, this passage is concerned with pollution of the statue, which would be polluted by *any* death in a sanctuary. The passage makes no explicit mention of the actual corpse, and we assume perhaps some similar disposal as that specified by the Coan rules, that the rope will be burned and the corpse buried by his kin. To assign extra-pollution here goes beyond the available evidence.[22]

Often in discussions of suicide, as we have noted, the implements used to commit the act receive the emphasis, as in the following definition of ὀξυθύμια from Harpocration, the Alexandrian lexicographer.

> ἔνιοι μέν, ὧν ἐστι καὶ 'Αρίσταρχος, ὀξυθύμια λέγεσθαί φασι τὰ ξύλα ἀφ' ὧν ἀπάγχονταί τινες, ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀξέως τῷ θυμῷ χρῆσθαι. ταῦτα δ' ἐκκόπτοντες ἐξορίζουσι καὶ καίουσι.[23]

Here again, whatever has been in contact with a suicide is polluting, in this passage, the instrument. It receives the same treatment as any inanimate murder weapon would, and becomes the focal point for purification from the pollution

[21] "In the time of the priest of the Sun Pythannas, son of Archipolos in Lindos, someone enclosed himself in secret during the night and hanged himself from the stays of the props attached to the wall behind the statue. When the Lindians wanted to send to Delphi and inquire about what had happened, the goddess appeared to the priest in a dream and told him not to be concerned about her, but to remove the part of the roof above the statue to expose it and to leave it thus for three days. When it had been cleansed by the baths of her father (rain), she told him to replace the roof just as it was formerly, and having purified the temple with the customary materials, to sacrifice to Zeus in the ancestral fashion" (my translation).

[22] Parker (above, note 1) 185 n. 228 wonders if this is an actual case of "morally coercive suicide" of the type found in Herodotus 7.141.2 or Thucydides 3.81.3, or like that used by Aeschylus in *Supplices* 459–79. However, in all these cases the pollution (or threat of pollution) surely results from death itself, not suicide per se. Parker's query simply cannot be answered. The important common point, however, is that the corpse itself is not punished nor is there mention of extra pollution from it. In effect, Parker conflates the punishment of the corpse with the punishment of the suicide implements. It might well be a case of the suicide acting out of a sense of anomie, expressed by his apparent anger at the gods and/or human agents responsible for his self-destruction, but without knowing the suicide's motives, we can only speculate. Durkheim (above, note 6) 284 classifies people who commit suicide through anger as anomic types. Throughout this section of the paper, the Durkheimian framework can be applied only tenuously since we do not know the circumstances causing the deaths, but only the effect the suicides have.

[23] "Some, including Aristarchus, say, that *oxythymia* are the trees from which some hang themselves, because of treating the spirit bitterly. And cutting these down, they cast them beyond the border and burn them" (my translation).

of death. The passage does not support the suggestion that the corpse itself suffers mistreatment.

We have only two pieces of evidence from the fifth and fourth centuries suggesting the possibility of punitive measures taken against the actual suicide victim, neither of which is compelling, and both of which Parker omits from his discussion. On closer inspection, however, the two passages point in opposite directions. Lysias 12, *Against Eratosthenes*, dated 403 B.C., provides clear evidence against punitive measures taken against suicide corpses. At 12.96 Lysias describes some of the horrors that occurred during the reign of the Thirty.

> τοὺς δὲ ἀπὸ τέκνων καὶ γονέων καὶ γυναικῶν ἀφέλκοντες φονέας αὐτῶν ἠνάγκασαν γενέσθαι καὶ οὐδὲ ταφῆς τῆς νομιζομένης εἴασαν τυχεῖν, ἡγούμενοι τὴν αὐτῶν ἀρχὴν βεβαιοτέραν εἶναι τῆς παρὰ τῶν θεῶν τιμωρίας.[24]

Though at first glance this passage may seem to suggest some connection between self-slaughter and a prohibition from customary burial, closer inspection is revealing. Certainly there is no grammatical reason to postulate a cause and effect between the two events. καὶ οὐδέ (not ὥστε) suggests something "in addition to," not "with the result that," some further disgrace inflicted by the Thirty, who were eager to avoid the negative publicity customary funerals would produce, but yet seemed unwilling to forbid burial completely, as at 18 Lysias states that Polemarchus as a victim compelled by the Thirty to drink hemlock, although he was denied prothesis in any of his houses in Athens, was nevertheless laid out in a hut *also in Athens*. In this case, neither his "criminal" status brought public mistreatment (cf. Plut. *Them.* 22.2), nor did his institutional suicide[25] (cf. Plato *Laws* 9) bring any additional revulsion upon him,

[24] See also 12.45 where Lysias refers to citizens who were forced to perish by a "most shameful and ignominious death," where clearly he intends not to reproach the dead, but rather to express the revulsion directed against the Thirty. See Dover (above, note 3) 242.

[25] Institutional suicide, so-called because of external pressure or coercion to perform it (e.g., the suttee in India or harakiri in Japan), is technically suicide since the victim accomplishes the act (see above, note 10). In Japan harakiri was made compulsory as a form of punishment for those of noble rank, allowing them to die by their own hand rather than at an executioner's, and to thereby retain their dignity. In ancient Greece there is little evidence to suggest this explanation, and surely the Thirty would not be concerned with the question of "dignity" in the death of their opponents, and though Socrates certainly dies with dignity, there is no mention that this was the authority's intention. Perhaps "institutional suicide" provided the authority with a way to avoid pollution (a close parallel to this being Creon's motive for burying Antigone alive rather than killing her in the *Antigone*), but when the practice of using hemlock for execution began and in which ways it superseded the other methods of execution is unknown (see MacDowell [above, note 17] 255). For sociological discussions of the phenomenon of institutional suicide see e.g., N.L. Farberow, "Cultural History of Suicide," in *Suicide in Different Cultures*, ed. N. L. Farberow (Baltimore 1975) 1–16; A. Venkoba Rao, "Suicide in India," in *Suicide in Different Cultures* 231–38; M. Iga and K. Tatai, "Characteristics of Suicides and Attitudes toward Suicide in Japan," in *Suicide in Different Cultures* 255–80; and D. deCatanzero, *Suicide and Self-Damaging Behavior. A Sociobiological Perspective* (New York 1981) 27–28.

although Lysias here for rhetorical purposes treats compulsion to kill oneself as worse than being murdered.[26] The Lysias passage suggests two important observations: first, Lysias treats institutional suicide as suicide, as did Plato (see below), and second, in his indignation at the poverty of his brother's funeral, he takes it for granted that his brother should have had a normal funeral. Socrates also expected a normal funeral, as he indicated by bathing before drinking the hemlock to spare the women the trouble later. In other words, those who drank hemlock had expectations of regular funeral honors. On the other hand, corpses of executed criminals were thrown into a *barathron* and although they were technically buried, ordinary rites were not conducted.

Aeschines' speech of 330 B.C. *Against Ctesiphon* 244, in addition to the evidence concerning the treatment of murder weapons (see above), provides a second shred of evidence concerning the mistreatment of suicide corpses.

> ...εἰ τὰ μὲν ξύλα καὶ τοὺς λίθους καὶ τὸν σίδηρον, τὰ ἄφωνα καὶ τὰ ἀγνώμονα, ἐάν τῳ ἐμπεσόντα ἀποκτείνῃ, ὑπερορίζομεν, ἐάν τις αὐτὸν διαχρήσηται, τὴν χεῖρα τὴν τοῦτο πράξασαν χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος θάπτομεν.

This passage provides the only clear testimony, at least for Athens (but see below for other places), for punishment of any sort of the corpse of a suicide victim. Several observations, however, need to be made. Most obvious is the connection Aeschines makes between objects which kill, whether it be inanimate things or one's own hand. In both cases, the instrument of the destruction must somehow be isolated, because in Greek thought it is necessary to localize guilt. In this case guilt is placed in the hand alone, which thus cannot be buried with its victim, who would be offended.[27] Secondly, since this is the only reference to such treatment of a suicide, we are left to wonder how regularly the cutting off of a hand occurred. In the third place, the context of this speech must be kept in mind, especially in light of the distinction between cowardly and honorable suicide which is an important distinction in the discussions of Plato and Aristotle (see below). The speech, ostensibly against Ctesiphon, primarily seeks to discredit Demosthenes as the instigator of the disastrous battle of Chaeronea. This rhetorical context advises caution in interpretation. Aeschines equates Demosthenes, the betrayer of soldiers, with the treacherous sticks and stones that kill someone and the hand that kills its own body. Aeschines here makes no mention of the kind of suicide he has in mind, that is to say, whether the suicide who suffers this punishment committed a cowardly or noble act, but earlier in the speech Aeschines has suggested that on occasion suicide is the honorable solution, for at 212 he states that Demosthenes is so contemptuous

[26] See also Xenophon, *Hell.* II.3.56 where Theramenes after drinking hemlock pours the last few drops out in (sarcastic) tribute to Critias. Xenophon's remark is telling: "Now I am not unaware of this that these are not sayings worthy of record; but I deem it admirable in the man that when death was close at hand, neither self-possession nor the spirit of playfulness departed from his soul."

[27] This same mechanism is evident in tragedy, e.g., Teucer talks about Ajax's death at the hands of Hector's sword so that Hector becomes his killer; or Antigone manipulates the audience into blaming Creon for Haemon's death, which then becomes more of a murder than a suicide.

of civic honor that he will not kill himself if he fails. Throughout the oration the thrust is that Demosthenes proved a coward, and perhaps 244 should be interpreted with the cowardly/noble distinction in mind. In other words, the coward Demosthenes deserves punishment just as a *cowardly* suicide does.

One other piece of courtroom evidence shows just how unfounded are statements which categorically claim punishment of the suicide corpse. In Demosthenes' speech *Against Eubulides*, dated to 345 B.C., the speaker, Euxitheus, attempts to prove that he is indeed an Athenian citizen, contrary to Eubulides' claims to the opposite. He ends his plea with an emotional outburst addressing the question of burial (57.50):

> ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦ μὲν πατρὸς ὀρφανὸς κατελείφθην, τὴν δὲ μητέρ' ἱκετεύω ὑμᾶς καὶ ἀντιβολῶ διὰ τοῦτον τὸν ἀγῶν' ἀπόδοτέ μοι θάψαι εἰς τὰ πατρῷα μνήματα καὶ μή με κωλύσητε, μηδὲ ἄπολιν ποιήσητε, μηδὲ τῶν οἰκείων ἀποστερήσητε τοσούτων ὄντων τὸ πλῆθος, καὶ ὅλως ἀπολέσητε. πρότερον γὰρ ἢ προλιπεῖν τούτους, εἰ μὴ δυνατὸν ὑπ' αὐτῶν εἴη σωθῆναι, ἀποκτείναιμ' ἂν ἐμαυτόν, ὥστ' ἐν τῇ πατρίδι γ' ὑπὸ τούτων ταφῆναι.

Though courtroom speeches are by nature designed to persuade and may thus overstate a case, nonetheless they must seem εἰκός to the jury. We may deduce from the passage spoken by one claiming to be an Athenian that the common practice with regard to suicide corpses was similar to the disposition of any normal corpse.

We possess some very late evidence pertaining to our discussion which suggests a certain uneasiness about suicide corpses, but again the context provides important points of clarification as to whether or not a corpse is "punished." Artemidorus in *On Dreams* 1.4 records the following dream as an example of a dream which proclaims many things through a few images.[28]

> οἷον ἔδοξέ τις τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ὄνομα ἀπολωλεκέναι. ἀπέβη αὐτῷ τοῦτο μὲν τὸν υἱὸν ἀπολέσαι (οὐχ ὅτι τὸ τιμιώτατον ἀπώλεσε μόνον, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ ταὐτὸ ὄνομα καλούμενος ἔτυχεν ὁ παῖς) τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τὴν κτῆσιν ἀθρόαν, δικῶν τινων αὐτῷ γραφεισῶν, ἐφ' αἷς ἑάλω φεύγων γραφὴν δημοσίων ἀδικημάτων· ἄτιμός τε καὶ φυγὰς γενόμενος ἀναρτήσας ἑαυτὸν ἐτελεύτησε τὸν βίον, ὡς μηδὲ ἀποθανὼν ἔχειν ὄνομα. τούτους γὰρ μόνους ἐν νεκρῶν δείπνοις οὐ καλοῦσιν οἱ προσήκοντες.[29]

[28] See further R. J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams. Oneirocritica by Artemidorus* (New Jersey 1975).

[29] "For instance, someone dreamt that he had lost his name. This resulted, first of all, in his losing his son (not only because he had lost his most prized possession, but also because his child happened to be called by the same name). Then he also lost all his possessions, since he was indicted and convicted on a charge of public misconduct. Being dishonored [without civil rights] and in exile he hanged himself and died, so that he even has no name, now that he is dead. For only these do kin not invite to the feasts held among the dead" (my translation).

The passage refers not to the actual corpses, but rather the psyche,[30] and this late 2nd c. A.D. reference is our first notice of such a practice of exclusion. When or where it began remains unknown, and the question is further complicated by the fact that the dreamer is at the time of his suicide a criminal, a status which in itself may account in part, at least, for the exclusion.[31]

Philostratus presents in his *Heroicus* a long dialogue between a Phoenician seaman and a local vintner in the Thracian Chersonese. In the dialogue, the vintner, claiming to be in contact with Protesilaus' spirit, gives a version of the Trojan war different from Homer's. The dialogue synthesizes literature, history and religion, and blends in typical sophistic manner contemporary and archaic elements.[32] Of interest to our discussion is Protesilaus' version of the judgment of arms and the treatment of Ajax after his suicide (188).

> ἐπαινούντων δὲ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν τὸν Ὀδυσσέα ἐπῄει μὲν καὶ ὁ Τεῦκρος, τὰ δὲ ὅπλα παρῃτεῖτο· μὴ γὰρ ὅσια εἶναι ἐντάφια τὰ τοῦ θανάτου αἴτια. ἔθαψαν δὲ αὐτὸν καταθέμενοι ἐς τὴν γῆν τὸ σῶμα, ἐξηγουμένου Κάλχαντος ὡς οὐχ ὅσιοι πυρὶ θάπτεσθαι οἱ ἑαυτοὺς ἀποκτείναντες.[33]

Calchas' injunction not to burn suicides seems to have been taken out of an ancient poem, for already in the *Ilias Parva* Ajax was not cremated but inhumed.[34] In that poem, this happened "because of the anger of the king," and

[30] In this case the soul, by not being given full funeral rites, seems to have been thought not to enter completely into the world of the dead. For the inference of soul belief from funeral rites see J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton 1983). Bremmer concludes that since one of the functions of the funeral rites was to help the transition of the soul into afterlife, "it may be reasonably assumed that such a transition did not take place in the case of suicides, slaves, children and adolescents" (100). He concedes, however, that there is no explicit data for the categories of suicides and slaves, and in light of my discussion his stated assumption seems questionable. What he does effectively show, though, is that even for people who died "outside the ordered social world" there is little evidence that they remained to haunt the living as ghosts or revenants (chapter 3, passim). For an anthropological/structural approach to funeral rituals, see L. M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton 1982) and the bibliography there cited.

[31] Although these souls are thought to be angry and therefore likely to do harm. See also van Hooff (above, note 3) 160–61.

[32] See G. Anderson, *Philostratus. Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A.D.* (New Hampshire 1986) 241–58.

[33] "Since the Achaeans were praising Odysseus, Teucer also praised him, but cursed the arms. For, he said, it was not good to bury the cause of death in the same tomb. And they buried him, placing his body in the earth, since Calchas declared that those who kill themselves are not lawfully buried by fire" (my translation).

[34] See E. Rohde, *Psyche. The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks* (New York, 1966, 8th ed.), trans. W. B. Hillis, 187–88 n. 33, who argues against this point of view. But cf. Bremmer (above, note 30) 96, and his discussion of the distinction between inhumation and cremation in which he concludes that "the relevance of contrasting inhumation and cremation per se has to be rejected," and bases the remainder of his argument on the issue on the fact that "it would have been strange if the Greeks, with their polar way of thinking,

not because suicides must be punished.[35] In other words, though a difference in status between suicides and the normal dead may be thought to account for the prohibition against cremation, in the poem this reason is not suggested. Again, we can put no significant interpretive weight on the statement.

The Sixty-fourth Discourse, "On Fortune," ascribed to Dio Chrysostom, though its authenticity has been denied,[36] begins with a catalogue of people who have blamed fortune for their problems, such as Medea or Midas or Orestes (1–2). The author then proceeds to tell a Cyprian tale of Demonassa, who was gifted in statesmanship and law-giving. She is said to have given the Cypriots three laws, the second of which records that suicides shall be cast out without burial.[37] Demonassa had two sons, one of whom died for having slain an ox (the third law of Demonassa), while the other for having killed himself was cast out unburied. Later in her own career, seeing a cow lowing over a dying calf and recognizing her own misfortune, she melted bronze and leaped into it (4). The author of the discourse reports a Cypriot practice, and tells us about the law of a woman who herself commits suicide in a way which precludes compliance with her own law! The too-close connection between the laws and her own misfortune leads us to suspect the evidence altogether, although even if the story of Demonassa is fiction, the law may be real.[38]

The second century A.D. paroemiographer Zenobius in Book 6.17 reports that, according to Aristotle, in Thebes those who have killed themselves receive no honor. Interestingly, Socrates and his friends—including Cebes the Theban—seem to have had no knowledge of this prohibition, and perhaps it is no earlier than the time of Aristotle.

These writers of the Second Sophistic, though often purporting to be recording much older information and practices, are themselves largely concerned with style rather than historical or scholarly preciseness and, of course, reflect the attitudes of their own time,[39] rather than the attitudes of the historical periods to which they refer. For these reasons, though the evidence adduced does suggest an uneasiness about suicides which *may* have a traditional and long-standing background, the evidence does not suggest a categorical mistreatment of or societal revulsion from suicides.

II. Fifth-century history

To this point, I have sought to clarify our understanding of the classical Greek position on suicide by examining descriptive sources concerning actual suicide. As we turn now to an examination of descriptive sources which reflect

had not used the two modes of disposal to differentiate between people according to their age and manner of their death."

[35] Though Bremmer (above, note 30) 96 suggests this is a late explanation since suicides belonged to the class of "dead without status." But at p. 100 he admits that there is no explicit data for the "liminal" status of suicides.

[36] By H. v. Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dion von Prusa* (1898).

[37] τὸν αὐτὸν ἀποκτείναντα ἄταφον ῥίπτεσθαι· δεύτερος οὗτος Δημωνάσσης νόμος.

[38] Hirzel (above, note 3) 56 n. 1, even questions the historicity of Demonassa.

[39] For general comments on the writers of the Second Sophistic see Anderson (above, note 32) especially chapters 4 and 5, and his bibliography.

popular attitudes, we find that these attitudes correspond to two concepts of profound significance in Greek thought—shame and honor.[40] These social values themselves represent the moral code based on the utilitarian observances of φιλία and δίκη. Every civilized society requires such a moral code. Society regulates the mores which, if overstepped, produce shame in an individual, and society determines the degree of honor granted to an individual for adhering to its standards. In other words, both shame and honor imply a scrutiny of the individual by the many, the one with a negative outcome, the other with a positive result. These social phenomena of shame and honor (and its opposite, dishonor) motivate many of the suicides recorded by the historians and nearly all suicides in Greek tragedy. For example, in a society embued with the heroic code of death over dishonor, a typical impetus to suicide may be one's behavior in battle. Though Leonidas (Herodotus 7.220–21) at Thermopylae might have saved himself and his small group, he chose to stay, to sacrifice himself and his men, and to receive honor by leaving behind a great name.[41] We may call this a self-sacrifice rather than a suicide, but in sociological theory self-sacrifice and noble suicide result from the same over-pronounced integration into society and the same willingness to die.[42] Two other of the 300 Spartans, Eurytus and Aristodemus, barred from the fight because of eye inflammation, chose differing paths: Eurytus to fight anyway; Aristodemus to survive. Eurytus, though killed instantly, received due honor, while Aristodemus lived in infamy until he made amends at the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 7.228ff), though even then his death was regarded as ambiguous, since he was considered ἄριστος by Herodotus (9.71–72), but not by the Spartans, because though he had fought magnificently, he had done so merely to retrieve his lost honor. Herodotus suggests that perhaps envy motivated the Spartans' actions against Aristodemus.[43] One final survivor—Pantites—on his return to Sparta found himself in such disgrace that he hanged himself (7.232).

Thucydides, in the Corcyraean civil war episode (3.81), mentions the suicide of the Messenian prisoners who refused to be tried by their captors. Thucydides has emphasized the anomic state of affairs at Corcyra, the general chaos and despair that accompanies revolution. He then proceeds to theorize about revolution in general. Thucydides lends a "tragic" air to this kind of suicide by using the word ἀναλίσκομαι for suicide. The basic meaning of ἀναλίσκω, "use up" or "spend," is extended by the tragedians to "kill," and in this meaning seems primarily to be restricted to tragedy (e.g., Aesch. *Ag.* 570; Soph. *OT* 1174, Fr. 892 (Radt); Eur. *El.* 681). The Messenians committed

[40] For the centrality of these concepts in Greek life see, e.g., E. R. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951) passim; Hirzel (above, note 3) esp. sections 1 and 2; Dover (above, note 3) esp. 236–42; Walcot (above, note 3) passim; and van Hooff (above, note 3) passim.

[41] For a similar event see Xenophon, *Hell.* IV.8.39 concerning Anaxibius.

[42] See Durkheim (above, note 6) 240, who insists that instances of self-sacrifice have as their root "the same state of altruism which is equally the cause of what might be called heroic suicide."

[43] Though for the Spartans courage is not admirable unless there is genuine fear. I am grateful to Ruth Scodel for pointing this out to me.

"tragic" suicide in order to escape punishment and further disgrace. The Athenians on the Acropolis in 480 (Hdt. 8.53) acted likewise.

Herodotus relates another instance of suicide committed to escape punishment. Nitocris (2.100), Queen of Babylon, after taking revenge on the Egyptians for killing her brother, their ruler, flung herself into a room of ashes.[44]

Explicit motives of shame may be seen in the following examples from Herodotus. In 1.45 Adrastus stabbed himself from shame at his bad luck because, though commanded by Croesus to protect Atys, instead actually killed him. In 2.131 Mycerinus the King of Egypt desired and violated his daughter, who then hanged herself because of the outrage.[45] Herodotus here uses the word ἄχος to describe her state of mind, a word infrequent in prose but common in tragedy.[46] As in Thuc. 3.81 a single word helps to create a tragic atmosphere around a suicide.

Usually, neither Thucydides nor Herodotus makes any explicit value judgments concerning the suicide victims they mention, but implicitly, by using an evocative word, by creating a tragic atmosphere, by imputing the same motivations to Greeks and barbarians alike, and by conceding—or rather, by the very act of recording the events without blame, helping to create—pity and honor for many of the victims, they leave us with the sense that suicide created no "moral revulsion," but rather provided people with an honorable release from an undesirable life, a life made unbearable because of shame or dishonor, i.e., because of unfavorable societal perception. However, Herodotus explicitly praises a suicide at least once: he concludes his description of the suicide of Boges (7.107) by saying "thus it is that he is justly (δικαίως) praised by the Persians to this day."[47]

PRESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE

Before we turn to a discussion of suicide in tragedy, it will be useful to examine the prescriptive evidence in order to highlight a scheme of distinctions among suicides to which tragedy can be compared. As we examine the philosophical discussions of Plato (Socrates) and Aristotle, the societal considerations of shame and honor are very much under consideration, and value judgments become explicit. In this prescriptive evidence, we will note that both Plato and Aristotle distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable suicides,

[44] For choking by ashes as a Persian punishment used by Darius Ochus see Ctesias 29.48, 51, 52 in *FGrH* IIIc688. Ctesias says that Darius in order to evade an oath he had taken not to kill those caught in a conspiracy against him devised a punishment by which they would fall into a pit of ashes while asleep. Cf. Val. Max. 9.2.6 and Ovid, *Ibis* 317.

[45] Xenophon, *Hell.* VI.4–7, relates how the Leuctrian maidens also hanged themselves after they were violated by the Spartans.

[46] When ἄχος does occur in prose, it appears in contexts concerning tragic and/or mythical figures. E.g., Xenophon *Cyr.* 5.5.6.4 and 6.1.37.5; Aristotle fr. 640.24–25 (Rose); or Antiphon (Soph). *Testimonia* fr. 6.10–11 (Diels/Kranz).

[47] Boges' suicide follows the execution of his family and servants, but all the violence is precipitated by his refusal to surrender to the Athenians. In antiquity, as van Hooff ([above, note 3] 108) says, a "leader is expected to end his life if he has been defeated...".

and their discussions underline many of the complexities and ambiguities involved in reactions to suicide.

Plato discusses self-destruction in the *Phaedo*,[48] a dialogue which relates the final conversation of Socrates with two young speakers, Simmias and Cebes, both of whom belong to the "scientific" side of the Pythagorean movement. By reminding them of the conceptions which form Pythagorean religion, Socrates points out the inconsistency of its scientific developments with its religious aspects. Socrates puts forth a moral argument by suggesting that if one has put aside all other pleasures save the pleasure of learning, then he can hope that death is the entrance to a better life (114D–115A). The discussion which leads to that conclusion receives its initial impetus from Socrates' statement that a philosopher is one who will willingly die, though to do violence to oneself is not lawful (61C).[49] The paradox that it is better to be dead but forbidden to kill oneself becomes the lemma from which Socrates can rebut an apparently absolute prohibition on suicide of the Pythagoreans,[50] a prohibition suggested by Philolaus at 61E. Socrates unravels the paradox in 62B–C by showing that just as we would be angry if one of our possessions killed itself when we had not required it to, so too would the gods be angry if a man kills himself before they send some necessity upon him.[51]

First of all, suicide is prohibited because any individual benefit (i.e., death is better than life) is outweighed by the deprivation it causes the gods.[52] But he goes on to say that even after death he will be with equally wise, though apparently different, gods (63B–C), and so this "liberation" from a life under the guidance of some gods creates no new paradox. Socrates believes not only in the immortality of the soul, but also that the souls of the just are in gods' care after death as well as before. Socrates has managed to modify and explicate the Pythagorean stance on suicide by pointing out a circumstance under which self-destruction becomes permissable and acceptable;[53] namely, when a sign is

[48] For general discussions see A. E. Taylor, *Plato. The Man and his Work,* 4th ed., (London 1937) 174–208; K. Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto 1981); J. Eckstein, *The Deathday of Socrates* (New Jersey 1981); D. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford 1986); Nussbaum (above, note 8) 136–60.

[49] For a review of interpretations of this paradox, see Dorter (above, note 48) 11–19.

[50] See J. C. G. Strachan, "Who *did* forbid suicide at *Phaedo* 62b?" *CQ* 64 (1970) 216–20, who suggests that Plato here refers not to a Pythagorean prohibition, but rather to an Orphic one.

[51] ...τὸ θεοὺς εἶναι ἡμῶν τοὺς ἐπιμελουμένους καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν τῶν κτημάτων τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι. Ἢ σοὶ οὐ δοκεῖ οὕτως; Ἔμοιγε, φησὶν ὁ Κέβης. Οὐκοῦν, ἦ δ' ὅς, καὶ σὺ ἄν, τῶν σαυτοῦ κτημάτων εἴ τι αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἀποκτιννύοι μὴ σημήναντός σου ὅτι βούλει αὐτὸ τεθνάναι, χαλεπαίνοις ἂν αὐτῷ, καί, εἴ τινα ἔχοις τιμωρίαν, τιμωροῖο ἄν; Πάνυ γ', ἔφη. Ἴσως τοίνυν ταύτῃ οὐκ ἄλογον μὴ πρότερον αὐτὸν ἀποκτιννύναι δεῖν, πρὶν ἀνάγκην τινὰ θεὸς ἐπιπέμψῃ, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν νῦν ἡμῖν παροῦσαν.

[52] Dorter (above, note 48) 16.

[53] Eckstein (above, note 48) 44–50 argues that the contradiction between the absolute prohibition on suicide and Socrates' conclusion that sometimes suicide is necessary points to the "incertitude of the whole argument," and argues further that the main thrust of the *Phaedo* is that Plato "is painfully opposed to Socrates'

given. Furthermore, the Pythagorean stance is in no way indicative of common practice or thought on the subject of suicide, as we have already seen.

Plato elaborates in the *Laws*.[54] This very long and practical work reflects Plato's most mature thoughts on the subjects of ethics, law and education. "More than any other work of Plato, the *Laws* stands in direct relation to the political life of the age in which it was composed and is meant to satisfy a pressing felt need."[55] Of significance for my discussion is *Laws* 9 in which the legislator introduces criminal law and punishment, and addresses questions of legal responsibility. Contemporary Athenian law and legal institutions in general provide the basis for the details,[56] and so *Laws* 9 furnishes an excellent source for a discussion of Athenian attitudes towards suicide.[57] In book 9 the Athenian first discusses "capital crimes" in descending order of gravity—sacrilege, treason and parricide. After he makes the distinction between causing hurt or loss (βλάβη) and acts of injustice (ἀδικία) (861E–862C), he creates a penal code based on that distinction. He then sets out regulations for cases of homicide and suicide, penalties for which depend on the main difference between βλάβη and ἀδικία, on the status of the parties, and on involuntary homicide, homicide committed in anger, and voluntary homicide. The last category of murders "which are premeditated and spring from sheer injustice—the lack of control over the desire for pleasure and over one's lusts and jealous feelings" (869E) receive the most severe punishment, namely that "he must be punished by death and be deprived of burial in the country of his victim. (In this way we can show he has not been forgiven, and avoid impiety.)" (871D). Those guilty of specific kin-murder will be executed by the officials, and thrown out, naked, at a specified place where three roads meet outside the city. The officials then stone the corpse's head to purify the entire state, after which the corpse is cast out beyond the borders and granted no burial (873A–B). Immediately following the outline of this severe punishment comes the Athenian's discussion of suicide (873C–D),[58] logically proceeding from a discussion of "kin-murder." If

suicide." But surely he goes too far in asserting that Plato deliberately fuzzies Socrates' thinking on this crucial subject.

[54] See further J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato* (London 1914) 301–12; Taylor (above, note 48) 463–97; E. Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (London 1918) 292–380; E. Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York 1959) 183–207; L. Strauss, *The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago 1975); T. L. Pangle, *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago and London 1980); and R. F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws* (Indianapolis 1983).

[55] Taylor (above, note 48) 463.

[56] See G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City. A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (Princeton 1960) 544ff.

[57] For recent general discussions, see Pangle (above, note 54) 496–504; and Stalley (above, note 54) 137–50. Neither one, however, discusses the Athenian legislator's views on suicide.

[58] τὸν δὲ δὴ πάντων οἰκειότατον καὶ λεγόμενον φίλτατον ὃς ἂν ἀποκτείνῃ, τί χρὴ πάσχειν; λέγω δὲ ὃς ἂν ἑαυτὸν κτείνῃ, τὴν τῆς εἱμαρμένης βίᾳ ἀποστερῶν μοῖραν, μήτε πόλεως ταξάσης δίκῃ, μήτε περιωδύνῳ ἀφύκτῳ προσπεσούσῃ τύχῃ ἀναγκασθείς, μηδὲ αἰσχύνης τινὸς ἀπόρου καὶ ἀβίου μεταλαχών, ἀργίᾳ δὲ καὶ ἀνανδρίας δειλίᾳ ἑαυτῷ δίκην ἄδικον ἐπιθῇ. τούτῳ δὴ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θεὸς οἶδεν ἃ χρὴ νόμιμα γίγνεσθαι περὶ καθαρμούς τε

one commits suicide when it is not legally ordered by the State, or when he is not burdened by some intolerable and inevitable misfortune or disgrace that is beyond remedy, but merely kills himself because of laziness and cowardice,[59] then—unlike those committing suicide justifiably, who will be buried by their kin—the cowardly suicide will be buried in an isolated place and in the barren and nameless borders of the twelve districts. They will be forever infamous and will have neither a tombstone nor tombs marked with their names.

It is interesting to note the difference in tone when Plato turns to the subject of suicide, as well as the less harsh punishments he prescribes. Plato admits categories of acceptable suicides, and makes a clear distinction between cowardly and honorable suicide, because throughout *Laws* 9 he generally asserts that punishments for crimes must vary according to their motive and circumstance.[60] In addition, suicide is acceptable if ordered by the State, i.e., Plato recognizes institutional suicide. Surely Plato here recalls Socrates' end.[61] Furthermore, if one has fallen under some excruciating pressure or to some unendurable disgrace, Plato implies no punishment is due, and therefore situates his own thinking within the popular morality we can adduce from the orators, historians and tragedians.[62] If, however, cowardice or laziness (ἀργίᾳ δὲ καὶ ἀνανδρίας δειλίᾳ)[63] motivates one's self-destruction, then the suicide victim must be buried alone, and in disgrace, in deserted places but within the borders, without a headstone. Later in the *Laws* (900E9–901CB), the legislator defines ἀργία and δειλία as elements of the soul, which, since it is the source of everything, must be the source of values—good and bad, fair and foul, just and unjust (896D).[64] Sloth is the offspring of cowardice (901E5), and cowardice is a part of badness (900E1). In other words, cowardice and laziness are intellectual

καὶ ταφάς, ὧν ἐξηγητάς τε ἅμα καὶ τοὺς περὶ ταῦτα νόμους ἐπανερομένους χρὴ τοὺς ἐγγύτατα γένει ποιεῖν αὐτοῖσι κατὰ τὰ προσταττόμενα. τάφους δ' εἶναι τοῖς οὕτω φθαρεῖσι πρῶτον μὲν κατὰ μόνας μηδὲ μεθ' ἑνὸς ξυντάφου, εἶτα ἐν τοῖς τῶν δώδεκα ὁρίοισι μερῶν τῶν ὅσα ἀργὰ καὶ ἀνώνυμα, θάπτειν ἀκλεεῖς αὐτούς, μήτε στήλαις μήτε ὀνόμασι δηλοῦντας τοὺς τάφους.

[59] Plato, unfortunately, does not give examples of the kinds of suicides he condemns, but one might possibly argue that Phaedra, who mentions laziness as the cause of destruction, though apparently in her case laziness means not committing suicide, or Haemon commit unacceptable suicides. Plato might condemn certain tragic suicides because they generate pity for passionate actions. In addition, a suicide which harms friends might also be negatively judged. So M. W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies. A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge 1989), argues concerning Ajax. However, in Ajax's death he does harm his enemies by his curse and paradoxically helps his friends by his quasi-heroic power.

[60] Stalley (above, note 54) 144.

[61] So R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Indianapolis 1955) 36 n. 4. See also Eckstein (above, note 48) 48 who claims Socrates' death was a suicide not because his own hands brought the poison to his lips, but because he had alternatives of going into exile or escaping from prison.

[62] See Dover (above, note 3) 167–69 who suggests that this attitude was formed in part by their "high regard for the man who faces the instrument of death unflinchingly."

[63] This is an interesting example of hyponymy, like that in Dem. 21.160 "because of his δειλία and ἀνανδρία." See Dover (above, note 3) 64.

[64] See Stalley (above, note 54) 170–72.

properties, and so Plato implies that ignoble suicide results from a defective soul. Therefore this kind of suicide deserves exclusion and punishment, because even god himself abhors such a character (901A6).[65] Plato's distinction between acceptable and unacceptable suicide is of singular significance to a discussion of suicide in antiquity. We have already noted it frequently. And even an unacceptable suicide receives far less punishment than a voluntary homicide. Clearly, some extra "something" attaches to certain suicide victims, but Plato makes no mention of the need to purify the entire state (as he did in regard to kin-murderers), nor to deny burial altogether. Purification and burial rest in the hands of suicide victims' relatives.

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,[66] we initially encounter an encompassing condemnation of suicide, but his reasons for forbidding it put significant emphasis on its social and political ramifications. Later, however, Aristotle himself qualifies his sweeping prohibition. Aristotle's *Ethics* is teleological: both the State and the individual through action seek the good, which Aristotle defines as "that at which all things aim" (1.1094A1–3). The State and the individual aim at the same good, though the good in the State is greater and nobler (1.1094A27–B11). Thus ethics become a part of political or social science, i.e., an individual becomes explicable and can exhibit his courage (ἀνδρεία) in terms of his interaction with his society. Aristotle defines ἀνδρεία as "a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear...and it chooses or endures things because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to do so" (3.111BA10–12). Suicide is his example (3.111BA12–15).[67] It is, he states, the mark of a coward to die in order to escape from poverty or love or anything painful, because it exhibits softness to escape from what is troublesome. This kind of person does not die because it is noble, but only to escape evil.

Aristotle has already stated that a typical object of fear is death, because "it is the end, and nothing is thought to be any longer either good or bad for the dead" (1115A2B–7). Therefore, one who faces death must have courage, which enables him to endure it in the proper spirit. The prominent place Aristotle gives to suicide seems to indicate that suicide was a current issue under discussion, but that he considered the subject needed clarification. In large part Aristotle's discussion is very similar to Plato's. For example, suicide to escape

[65] ἀργία occurs elsewhere in Plato and seems sometimes to refer to physical idleness (*Theact.* 153B6.5–6; *Symp.* 191A8–B1; *Resp.* 398E6–7; *Resp.* 405C9–D1; *Resp.* 422A1–2; *Laws* 761A1–2), and sometimes in addition to the *Laws* passages here cited to intellectual inactivity (*Soph.* 232A7–B1; *Soph.* 267D5–6; *Symp.* 182D3–4; *Phaedr.* 259A2–3). In the *Timaeus* 89E6–7 and 91E8–92A1, he combines both physical and intellectual aspects of ἀργία, stating that the soul becomes weak from lack of motion and so gets crushed into a new physical form.

[66] See H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford 1951); H. G. Apostle. *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics* (Holland and Boston 1975); F. H. Eterovich, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: Commentary and Analysis* (Washington, D. C. 1980); T. Irwin, tr. *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis 1985); Nussbaum (above, note 8) esp. chapters 10 and 11.

[67] τὸ δ' ἀποθνήσκειν φεύγοντα πενίαν ἔρωτα ἤ τι λυπηρὸν οὐκ ἀνδρείου, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δειλοῦ. μαλακία γὰρ τὸ φεύγειν τὰ ἐπίπονα, καὶ οὐχ, ὅτι καλὸν ὑπομένει, ἀλλὰ φεύγων κακὸν.

poverty seems to be a form of Plato's suicide "from laziness and cowardice." In addition, though Aristotle uses the word μαλακία which seems to suggest a certain perception of effeminacy surrounded suicide,[68] he carefully specifies what kind of suicide is the mark of a coward, and with more precision than Plato, he also creates a list of unacceptable suicides which suggests that some types of suicide are acceptable.

In book 5 Aristotle discusses justice, and in what sense it is a mean. He concedes that justice is not really a mean in the way other virtues are, but in the sense that "it relates to an intermediate amount, while injustice relates to the extremes" (1133B30ff). Justice also, alone of the virtues, is thought to be another's good (1130A3–4). Since this is the case, can a man treat *himself* unjustly or not (1138A4)? Aristotle provides a negative answer (1138A5ff).[69] There are just acts, he suggests, which are prescribed by the law, and since the law does not expressly permit suicide, it forbids it. If someone breaks the law and harms another voluntarily (that is, an agent who knows whom he is affecting and what he is using), he acts unjustly. Anyone who in anger stabs himself breaks the law and acts unjustly, though not towards himself but towards the State. The suicide who kills himself in anger suffers voluntarily, though no one voluntarily suffers injustice. Therefore the State suffers the injustice, and so punishes suicides by a certain loss of civil rights (ἀτιμία), which presumably means lack of commemoration, and perhaps curtailment of the usual rituals, a procedure which Plato also forbade for cowardly suicides.[70]

Clearly, for Aristotle a suicide poses a paradoxical problem which he attempts to resolve in terms of suicide's effects on society. Aristotle, like Plato, condemns only certain kinds of suicide, and here (as opposed to 3.1116A12–15) narrows the distinction even more to those who commit suicide δι' ὀργήν. But

[68] Cf. 1150B15, and Irwin (above, note 66) 354.

[69] Πότερον δ' ἐνδέχεται ἑαυτὸν ἀδικεῖν ἢ οὔ, φανερὸν ἐκ τῶν εἰρήμενων. τὰ μὲν γάρ ἐστι τῶν δικαίων τὰ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου τεταγμένα, οἷον οὐ κελεύει ἀποκτιννύναι ἑαυτὸν ὁ νόμος, ἃ δὲ μὴ κελεύει, ἀπαγορεύει. ἔτι ὅταν παρὰ τὸν νόμον βλάπτῃ μὴ ἀντιβλάπτων ἑκών, ἀδικεῖ, ἑκὼν δὲ ὁ εἰδὼς καὶ ὃν καὶ ᾧ. ὁ δὲ δι' ὀργὴν ἑαυτὸν σφάττων ἑκὼν τοῦτο δρᾷ παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, ὃ οὐκ ἐᾷ ὁ νόμος. ἀδικεῖ ἄρα. ἀλλὰ τίνα; ἢ τὴν πόλιν, αὐτὸν δ' οὔ ἑκὼν γὰρ πάσχει, ἀδικεῖται δ' οὐδεὶς ἑκών. διὸ καὶ ἡ πόλις ζημιοῖ, καί τις ἀτιμία πρόσεστι τῷ ἑαυτὸν διαφθείραντι ὡς τὴν πόλιν ἀδικοῦντι.

[70] One would like to know, for instance, exactly what ἀτιμία a suicide victim (or his kin?) may incur. It seems unlikely that Aristotle should be referring here to penalties on children, but rather seems to indicate that cowardly suicides should not be memorialized. Cities, through public pressure rather than written law, may generally have restricted funeral honors for "bad" suicides, and probably families would be relatively willing to be less close to such dead, given the intense ambivalence that the relatives of suicides feel, especially weakly motivated suicides. J. Burnet, ed., *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London 1900) 245, cites Aesch. *Against Ctesiphon* 244 and says, "It is clear from this [the Aeschines passage?] that the ἀδικία consisted in bringing blood-guiltiness (μίασμα) on the state, not in depriving the state of a citizen. Hence ἀτιμία is the appropriate punishment, not damages." However, in context Burnet's conclusion is far from clear, and W. D. Ross's [*Aristotle. Ethica Nicomachea* (Oxford 1915)] translation—namely, loss of civil rights—seems more accurate in that it retains the ambiguity of Aristotle's statement.

with Aristotle we remain squarely in the realm of social theory, and his testimony supports the suggestion that social significance attached to suicides, and that a distinction between different kinds of suicide existed.

DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE (Continued)

Tragedy

In tragedy, astonishingly often suicide provides characters with a resolution to the unbearable pain of living. In 13 of the 32 extant tragedies (including the *Alcestis*) suicide and/or self-sacrifice figure prominently, whether actual, threatened, or contemplated. In 10 other scripts, it plays a significant incidental role, and in some of the dramas more than a single instance of suicide occur. All three tragedians use the motif of suicide as a means of exploring the interrelationship of tragic figures with family, political systems, and/or the gods, that is, of exploring the actions of an idealized individual within a societal context. The issue of tragic suicide is far too complex for exhaustive treatment here, but by looking at seven representative examples we can perhaps offer some insight into popular attitudes concerning tragic self-destruction,[71] which is for the most part noble, courageous, resolute and socially-motivated. I have delayed until now discussion of suicide in tragedy because in many ways the tragedians present the most complex picture of an inherently paradoxical phenomenon. Tragedy blurs the subtle but important distinction between willingness to die rather than failure to behave honorably (Menoeceus) and eagerness to die (Antigone). Very often tragedy blames suicide on other people (e.g., Haemon and Eurydice), but frequently suicide occurs because of one's sense of shame. Suicide can be characterized by a silent exit (Deianeira and Eurydice), but also by self-analysis of the failure of integration (Ajax, Antigone and Phaedra). One of tragedy's outstanding characteristics is the extent to which virtually all suicides receive sympathy.

In the Durkheimian scheme, pure categories for the most part become intermingled, as tragic characters frequently feel the push and pull of opposite tendencies, resulting in a tension and ambiguity which precipitates self-destruction. In the seven suicides to be discussed here six different Durkheimian categories occur.

In extant Aeschylean plays, actual suicide never occurs though Clytemnestra claims to have dreamt about it in the *Agamemnon*, and in the *Supplices* suicide threats form an important component in the fabric of the play.[72] The Danaids' threat begins as a veiled reference, but becomes more and

[71] For studies of suicide in drama, see e.g., Katsouris, Seidensticker and Loraux (above, note 3). For a study of tragic suicide which uses the sociological theory of Durkheim, see E. P. Garrison, *Some Contexts of Suicide in Greek Tragedy* (Stanford dissertation 1987).

[72] See further J. H. Finley, Jr., *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1955) 195–208; A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplices. Play and Trilogy* (Cambridge 1969); H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle, edd., *Aeschylus: The Suppliants* (Copenhagen 1980); R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983) 55–72; and M. Sicherl, "Die Tragik der Danaiden," *Museum Helveticum* 43 (1986) 81–110.

more ominous as the action proceeds, until at l. 465 their threat of pollution creates a turning point in the play where religious authority prevails over civic law.[73] Pelasgus responds to the threat of death pollution by complying with their demand for protection. But once they have attained their goal they leave off coercion, though not the idea of suicide. The protection offered by Pelasgus after their coercive suicide threat seems tenuous now, and they feel only despair and desperation. Therefore, the third stasimon (776ff),[74] the "Escape Song," becomes an elaborate death wish in which they state their willingness to die by various methods. They see in their possible suicides a way to emphasize their freedom from the rules of a society that betrothed them to undesirable mates, for, they conclude, only in death will they find release from their ills (802–3). This final suicide threat shows the extent to which they are prepared to assume responsibility for themselves, and yet this elaborate suicide threat replaces actual suicide, since the Danaids are destined to commit violence against others.[75] While the coercive threat forms a pivot for the action of the play and carries the action forward, the lyrical death wish of the escape song halts action. Aeschylus engenders pity in us for the suppliants because of the urgency of their predicament, and fear because their suicidal wishes intensify their violent natures.

In extant Sophocles, suicides abound. Six of the seven plays have at least one suicide and/or suicide threat. Ajax, Antigone, Eurydice, Haemon, Deianeira and Jocasta all kill themselves, while Electra and Philoctetes threaten to do so, and the chorus fears Oedipus may kill himself.[76] All of the suicides Sophocles depicts as noble and understandable, and all of the victims kill themselves in response to societal pressures.

The *Ajax* provides an excellent example of sociological aspects at work in Greek tragedy,[77] which we can examine through the various motivations for

[73] Finley (above, note 72) 202.

[74] For discussions of this ode see R. D. Murray, *The Motif of Io in Aeschylus' Suppliants* (Princeton 1958) 72–73; M. Kaimio, *The Chorus of Greek Drama* (Helsinki 1970) 242–43; and T. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley 1982) 162.

[75] Bibliography on the trilogy includes R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "The Danaid Trilogy," *JHS* 82 (1961) 141–52; Garvie (above, note 72) chapter 5 with full bibliographical citations; Friis Johansen and Whittle (above, note 72) I.40–55; and Sicherl (above, note 72).

[76] Hirzel (above, note 3) 94 concludes from this astonishing statistic that Sophocles himself may have had a propensity to suicide.

[77] Bibliography includes T. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Berlin 1919); C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951); T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theater Production* (London 1956); B. M. W. Knox, "The *Ajax* of Sophocles," *HSCP* 65 (1961) 1–37; P. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions* (Oxford 1962); M. Wigodsky, "The 'Salvation' of Ajax," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 149–58; W. B. Stanford, ed., *Sophocles Ajax* (London 1963); B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964); P. Biggs, "The Disease Theme in Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*," *CP* 61 (1966) 223–35; M. Simpson, "Sophocles' Ajax: His Madness and Transformation," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 88–103; G. H. Gellie, *Sophocles: A Reading* (Melbourne 1972); J. Tyler, "Sophocles' *Ajax* and Sophoclean Plot Construction," *AJP* 95 (1974) 24–42; M. Sicherl, "The Tragic Issue in Sophocles' *Ajax*," *YCS* 25 (1977) 67–98; C. P. Gardiner, "The Staging of the Death of Ajax," *CJ* 75 (1979) 10–14; O. Taplin,

Ajax's suicide. Ajax believes his suicide will allow him to avoid mockery, to reconcile himself with the gods, to prove to his father that he was not a coward. Or, in terms of his relationship to society, to maintain his honor and overcome his shame, to reintegrate himself into religious society, and to be true to his "warrior" ethos. In addition to these "positive" reasons for suicide, Ajax also has "negative" motivations, namely his rejection of contemporary values, which is shown by his growing and self-imposed isolation from gods and men. The importance of his solitude in his decision to kill himself is shown by the several ways Sophocles presents it. For example, at 396ff Ajax acknowledges that he can look to neither gods nor humans for help; at 458ff, he states that he is hated by the gods, by his fellow warriors, and even by the land itself. The tableau of Ajax pitifully sitting amidst the slaughtered animals (384–595) presents an Ajax passively challenging his heroic society, for he has attempted to commit murder by treachery.[78] The chorus frequently notes his isolation by observations such as "feeding his own mind apart" (614). Ajax himself seems to understand his isolation and he underscores it in his famous soliloquy (646ff). Furthermore, the implied background of the play, namely his alienation from two societies, poignantly reminds us of his isolation, for he reflects the conflict between the traditional heroic ideal and fifth-century reality.[79] The scene of the actual suicide,[80] its removal from the camp, very dramatically indicates his utter aloneness. Menelaus and Agamemnon also serve as reminders of Ajax's unique position, even after he is dead: at 1067–68 Menelaus notes that one could not rule Ajax while he was alive, and Agamemnon (1234) scornfully recalls Teucer's claim that Ajax came to Troy under his own command. And of special significance, the prophetic warning (754–79), ostensibly for Ajax, never reaches him.[81] Certainly the prophecy, like many prophecies in Greek tragedy, shows that there is a divine plan at work,[82] but no other prophecy remains unrevealed

Greek Tragedy in Action (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979); R. W. B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980); P. Holt, "Ajax's Ailment," *Ramus* 9 (1980) 22–33; C. P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization. An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981); R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles. An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1981); S. P. Mills, "The Death of Ajax," *CJ* 76 (1980–1981) 129–35; R. Scodel, *Sophocles* (Boston 1984); J. F. Davidson, "Sophoclean Dramaturgy and the Ajax Burial Debates," *Ramus* 14 (1985) 16–29; C. Sorum, "Sophocles' *Ajax* in Context," *CW* 79 (1986) 361–77; C. P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus. A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City 1987); M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (Stanford 1987); F. Jouan, "Ajax, d'Homere à Sophocle," *IL* 39 (1987) 67–73; and Blundell (above, note 59).

[78] For other significant tableaux in the *Ajax* see Taplin (above, note 77) 108–9.

[79] See Sorum (above, note 77).

[80] For discussions concerning the staging of the suicide see e.g., Webster (above, note 77) 17–18; Arnott (above, note 77) 131–33; Stanford (above, note 77) 173–74; Gardiner, "Staging," (above, note 77) 10–14; Heath (above, note 77) 192ff.

[81] For discussions of the prophecy see e.g., Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (above, note 77) 52–53; Kamerbeek, "Prophecy and Tragedy," *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965) 29–40; Wigodsky (above, note 77) 149–58; and Garrison (above, note 71).

[82] Tyler (above, note 77) 24–42, argues that Calchas' account attributes Ajax's death to events falling entirely outside of the action of the play, i.e., divine retribution for hybris. The other side of the story, the human motivations, creates

to its subject.[83] For the plays of Sophocles, in particular, oracles function to show the distance between human knowledge and divine will,[84] and Sophoclean irony thrives on human attempts to overcome human limitations. Ajax disdains divinity. He is unconcerned with the need to attempt to discover divine purpose. This creates the irony in the *Ajax*: despite his scorn of it, divine purpose prevails. It exists without his knowledge of it, and by keeping the prophecy from Ajax Sophocles has deftly created another way in which to depict a hero detached from heroic society. Tragic characters may try to defy or resist oracles—one need only think of Oedipus or Jocasta—but they always at least know what the oracles prophesy. But because Ajax is far removed from his world he does not even receive the prophecy, and his suicide can be neither a response to nor a rebellion from it. Accordingly, one must look to Ajax himself and his position in his society for his motivations to suicide.

His isolation results not so much from his megalomaniacal pride,[85] but rather from his attempt to maintain traditional values when society no longer permits it. That is to say, when Ajax was passed over at the judgment of arms, traditional values broke down, because though in a healthy heroic society martial *arete* takes precedence over all else, here the arms were granted to Odysseus, a representative of a society with different values, "in a court's majority verdict" (1243). Yet the play depicts more than a simple breakdown of one type of society, because in the person of Ajax it depicts the conflict between heroic and fifth-century reality.[86] Suicide happens at such a critical moment, when one finds oneself in the marginal area in which one set of values is being replaced by another, but neither set of values is completely established in society.[87] Ajax's excessive heroic morality, or in Durkheimian terminology, his state of excessive individuation, both symptomizes a society in decay, and the same excess also prevents his integration into an emerging but less individualistic society. Because Ajax has set his own personality "on so high a pedestal that it can no longer be subordinated to anything,"[88] his only solution

a play with a double plot, both sides of which result from Ajax's extreme self-confidence.

[83] Herodotus relates one instance of an oracle which is given to someone other than the person concerned. In 6.19 he records that when the Argives were consulting the Delphic oracle about the safety of their own city a response was given which not only answered their immediate concern but which contained an additional passage about Miletus. Although the Milesians had no foreknowledge of their predicted doom, it came about nonetheless. Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle I and II* (Oxford 1956) 84, and How and Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 2 vols. (Oxford 1912) 1.70–71, 94–95, accept it as genuine. However, J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations* (Berkeley 1978) 169 questions the authenticity of the "double oracle" because no other Pythian responses address anyone but the consultant.

[84] Winnington-Ingram (above, note 77) 181 n. 4.

[85] Cf. Winnington-Ingram (above, note 77) 20.

[86] So Sorum (above, note 77).

[87] See Durkheim (above, note 6) 158ff. It is difficult to know whether the play reflects a real crisis of values in Athens or whether Sophocles understood this instinctively, but certainly the tragedians were informed by or susceptible to the influence of the Sophists, who articulated many of the value crises.

[88] Durkheim (above, note 6) 227 about the egoistic suicide.

amounts to what Durkheim would have called "egoistic suicide," combined with a feeling of anomie which he displays by his curse against those he held responsible for his unhappiness. His honor, slighted at the judgment of arms, led him to attempt murder by treachery, and his shame at having failed led him to suicide. His suicide accords with his notion that to live nobly and to die nobly befit the man of noble blood (477–80), and the play never depicts the suicide as cowardly or deserving of punishment, since in the end Ajax is granted burial. In fact, the characters involved in the controversy over Ajax's burial never refer to his suicide at all, nor is there any suggestion that burial is somehow a concession and that burning would have been more typical if Ajax had died in some other way. Of course, tragic figures are always larger than life, and cling to ideals which outstrip reality, but our reaction to Ajax is one of pity and respect, not loathing or fear.[89]

Antigone represents a more paradoxical aspect of the effect of society on one's decision to commit suicide.[90] Throughout her play she is driven by conflicting forces: the desire to be reintegrated with her dead family, and her refusal to be integrated into her *polis*. Much of this conflict resonates in one of the prevalent motifs of the play, the Bride of Hades motif, which often provides a point of convergence for two other important themes: death and marriage. These themes occur significantly in virtually every episode of the *Antigone*, but for our purposes the fourth episode provides the most striking example of the Bride of Hades motif used as a concentrated and succinct statement of the death and marriage imagery. Though knowing from the onset of the action that she must die, Antigone has now learned that she will be buried alive, and she is horrified. The marriage and death imagery which has been articulated in every scene and by all major characters now merges in one simple sentence: "I will marry Acheron"

[89] See Walcot (above, note 3) 235–36 for some brief but incisive comments on the suicide of Ajax.

[90] Bibliography includes R. F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone. A Study of Poetic Language and Structure* (Princeton 1951); Whitman (above, note 77); C. S. Levy, "Antigone's Motives: A Suggested Interpretation," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 137–44; C. P. Segal, "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the *Antigone*," *Arion* 3 (1964) 46–66; Knox, *Heroic Temper* (above, note 77); G. Müller, *Sophokles Antigone* (Heidelberg 1967); W. M. Calder, "Sophokles' Political Tragedy, *Antigone*," *GRBS* 9(1968) 389–407; Gellie (above, note 77); J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Part III. The Antigone* (Leiden 1978); Burton (above, note 77); H. Rohdich, *Antigone. Beitrag zu einer Theorie des sophokleischen Helden* (Heidelberg 1980); Winnington-Ingram (above, note 77); Segal (above, note 77); Scodel (above, note 77); S. Murnaghan, " *Antigone* 904–20 and the Institution of Marriage," *AJP* 107 (1986) 192–207; Loraux (above, note 3) esp. 31–32 and 38; R. W. Bushnell, "Stage Tyrants. The Case of Creon and Caesar," *CML* 7 (1987) 71–85; Gardiner, *Chorus* (above, note 77); D. H. Porter, *Only Connect. Three Studies in Greek Tragedy* (Lanham, MD 1987); C. W. Oudemans and A. P. M. H. Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity. Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone* (Leiden 1987); R. W. Bushnell, *Prophesying Tragedy. Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Ithaca and London 1988); Blundell (above, note 59); C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "The Fourth Stasimon of Sophocles' Antigone," *BICS* 36 (1989) 141–65; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' *Antigone*," *JHS* 109 (1989) 134–48; R. Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy. The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry* (London 1990) 83–90.

(816), in one brief but revealing metaphor. She envisions her premature death as a marriage, and this in part because she sees her "life" as having meaning only in the underworld where she will join her family.[91] She also reminds us by this statement that she remains forever a maiden, and her sexuality will only come of age in her death, death by her own hand, and not through her marriage to Haemon. When she expresses this brief metaphor, she knows she will die a horrible death, and so the process leading to her "anticipatory" suicide subtly begins. She chooses Niobe as her mythological exemplum—there was no escape for her from her rock covering either.[92] The comparison to Niobe calls to mind petrification. Antigone will not petrify in the sense of dying slowly, but rather in the sense of dying unfulfilled as a woman. Her regenerative power, unlike Niobe's, will petrify even before it can begin. Yet she presents her intention to kill herself so subtly that it eludes the chorus, for in the fourth stasimon the mythological examples of imprisonment which clearly pertain to Antigone, Danae and Cleopatra, are examples in which the imprisoned women are rescued.[93] Antigone takes control over her life and her sexuality in her suicide through hanging herself with her girdle, the loosening of which symbolizes her loss of virginity,[94] but a loss which precludes regeneration and thus integration into her *polis*. The Bride of Hades metaphor from now on in the play modulates from the imagery of death in general to the imagery of suicide in particular. The exodos is full of death, specifically suicide, as the messenger—in the presence of Eurydice who in turn kills herself—reports the suicides of Haemon and Antigone, and as he does so he also employs the metaphor (1204–5; 1240–41).

Antigone's suicide exemplifies a central part of Durkheim's definition of suicide. Her death is both the result of an indirect negative action in that she disobeys Creon's order, and is at the same time a direct, positive act: she hangs herself. Her intent is explicit. By l. 72 she states her awareness of the consequences of her defiance: it is good for me doing this to die. To live nobly, to die as a martyr to one's convictions—the Ajaxian maxim holds for Antigone.

In Antigone's well-known speech about "unwritten laws" (460–70) where she describes society in terms of Zeus, Dike's laws, the *polis* and the family, she contrasts two social structures, one based on Creon's laws, one on

[91] See Garland (above, note 3) chapter 5; and Blundell (above, note 59) chapter 4.

[92] For Antigone as a *mater dolorosa*, see Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (above, note 77) 180–83; and Oudemans (above, note 90) 188–89 who stresses that though Antigone recognizes the similarity, she does not accept her situation.

[93] For discussions of this complicated ode see, e.g., Burton (above, note 77); Gardiner, *Chorus* (above, note 77); Oudemans (above, note 90) 146–51; Sourvinou-Inwood, "Fourth Stasimon" (above, note 90) 141–65; and Garner (above, note 90) 83–90.

[94] Loraux (above, note 3) 31–32, because she distinguishes between spouses who commit suicide and virgins who are killed, must somehow account for Antigone's suicide. She suggests that in fact Antigone's suicide is a sort of abnormal sacrifice, based on Creon's words at 773–80. But Creon makes a feeble attempt to rid himself of guilt, and these few words of his are not representative of Antigone's perceptions or actions.

unwritten laws.[95] As a proponent of older, traditional values she sets herself apart from the life of the *polis*, but since these traditional values place great emphasis on family life, she commits suicide both to escape Creon's world which she refuses to understand and to join, but also, paradoxically, to join representatives of a simpler world. And her exit speech records yet another ambiguity: her willingness to die, her "martyrdom," as expressed by Ismene and Creon, indicates her lack of integration into the *polis*, while her laments at dying unmarried suggest the possibility of normal integration after all.[96] In sociological terms even her suicide is paradoxical, for it represents both an intense isolation from society (like Ajax), but an equally intense denial of one's own existence in favor of an integration with another kind of society, i.e., her suicide is at once egoistic and altruistic. No one in the play condemns her for committing suicide, and by her suicide she reaffirms the importance of the *oikos*, as will Eurydice by her suicide later.

Eurydice and Haemon also commit suicide, and it is through these characters that Sophocles examines Creon's relationship to his family. Though Haemon has a dramatic purpose in the play independent of Creon, Eurydice functions dramatically as a part of her husband's story, in many ways providing a foil for him. Sophocles does not expend much time on Eurydice; the audience hears nothing about her until her unexpected and unannounced entry late in the play (1183–91).[97] She speaks only nine lines as she comes out of the house to fulfill her religious duties, but she is greeted by the messenger's narrative of the suicides of Haemon and Antigone. Eurydice exemplifies the religious and domestic ideals of her society; she is portrayed in her few lines as well-integrated. Eurydice played no part in the play up to this moment. No one has even mentioned her, not even Teiresias in his long prophecy of doom, in part because the play's action has transpired in public, while Eurydice primarily embodies the private life of the *oikos*, in part because Sophocles holds her in reserve to land the final devastating blow on Creon. After listening to the messenger describe the suicides of Haemon and Antigone, Eurydice exits silently and slowly,[98] but our attention on her is interrupted abruptly when Creon enters with the corpse of Haemon. Once again, as throughout most of the play, we turn our attention away from Eurydice as Creon, unaware of his wife's demise, sings a dirge for Haemon.

[95] In social-anthropological terms, the *Antigone* examines the conflict between a traditional and kin-based society that abided by customary but unwritten rites of burial and an emergent and complex *polis*-based one that bases its authority on the written law. For various views of the conflict in the *Antigone*, see Knox, *Heroic Temper* (above, note 77) 96–98; Murnaghan (above, note 90); Bushnell (above, note 90); Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions" (above, note 90); and Blundell (above, note 59) 133. Perhaps interpreters exaggerate the dichotomy between Creon and Antigone regarding written and unwritten laws. For my purposes, the salient point is that both the family and the city are social units, and Antigone choses integration into one rather than the other.

[96] For aspects of *philia* in the play, see Blundell (above, note 59) esp. 130ff.

[97] O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 11, n.3.

[98] See E. P. Garrison, "Eurydice's Final Exit to Suicide in the *Antigone*," *CW* 82 (1989) 431–35.

When the messenger of doom some 26 verses after Eurydice's exit returns with the announcement of her suicide, Creon's dirge continues and Eurydice's body is revealed (1294). The messenger watched her weep for her dead children and stab herself on the altar after her final curse upon Creon (1301–5). The messenger who shortly before had related so poetically the suicides of Haemon and Antigone now objectively describes Eurydice's. Her motivations resemble, in part, those of Antigone: both sharply felt the loss of their families; both suffered when their integration into those families became impossible. Unlike Antigone, Eurydice's *only* sense of purpose came from her family ties, particularly from her motherhood, and since her family is now destroyed, she seeks a reintegration with it in death. She commits an altruistic-anomic suicide in a state of despair for her lost family, and reacts to the disintegration of her family in anger as she curses Creon for her loss. Her private act has public repercussions as King Creon is relentlessly beaten by the pain of separation from his family.

Eurydice chooses to stab herself on the altar. The locus of the action, on the altar (1301), and the weapon, a knife (1301), at first glance suggest a sacrifice,[99] and though the text at this point is hopelessly corrupt,[100] the scholia paraphrase the line ὡς ἱερεῖον περὶ τὸν βωμὸν ἐσφάγη, παρὰ τὸν βωμὸν προπετής. However, there remains some ambiguity, since an altar also provides the locus for activities other than sacrifices, such as oath taking or supplication, and the vocabulary describing her act has no specific sacrificial connotations. The knife, as far as we can tell, is not a sacrificial knife, not a σφαγεύς; nor did she slit her throat in proper sacrificial procedure. Rather, she struck her heart with her own hand (παίσασ' ὑφ' ἧπαρ αὐτόχειρ αὐτήν 1315). Creon in his grief refers to her as a σφάγιον (1291), but he refers to her "slaughter" as heaped upon Haemon's.[101] Whether she sees herself as a sacrifice or not, certainly she chooses the altar as the place most efficacious for increasing the power of her curse on Creon.[102] Like Ajax, she curses the ultimate cause of her self-destruction, and neither is blamed for it within their plays.[103] The pollution of the altar also bears witness to the seriousness of the disruption of the religious aspects of her society.

Haemon kills himself in grief and anger,[104] which as we have seen, constitutes grounds for condemning the act insofar as Aristotle is concerned. But in the *Antigone*, we feel only sympathy for his act because we blame Creon, as does Creon himself. But although Haemon is apparently not motivated by shame and honor—although we cannot disregard completely the possibility that he feels shame at attempted parricide—he is motivated by his father's excessive

[99] So Loraux (above, note 3) 13–14; and Oudemans (above, note 90) 195.
[100] See Kamerbeek (above, note 90) ad loc.; and Müller (above, note 90) ad loc.
[101] Kamerbeek, ad loc., renders it as "bloody."
[102] For the increased power of curses with suicide see Parker (above, note 1) 198; W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979) 74; and Fontenrose (above, note 81) 147f.
[103] This would seem to indicate that gender does not acccount for differences in the acceptability of suicide.
[104] For a Durkheimian analysis of the suicide of Haemon, see Walcot (above, note 3) 234. See also Gellie (above, note 77) 50–51.

regulation, which leads him to the kind of suicide "persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passion violently choked by oppressive discipline" commit.[105]

Deianeira's suicide exemplifies yet another reaction to the rules of society.[106] Her life has always been strictly regulated, first by her father, then by Heracles, and before the critical moment depicted in the play she has led a fearful life of inaction.[107] When she finally moves to action, she plans and performs incorrectly. Her world is the opposite of Heracles'. Hers is the world of female society and of civilization, made possible by Heracles' participation in the world of bestiality and wantonness.[108] Both are ruled by eros (441–46),[109] yet each experiences eros differently. Heracles exemplifies unrestrained subservience to eros, and in Greek art and literature he exists ouside of the norms. Lusty and untamed, what he wants he takes, regardless of law or decorum. His eros is

[105] Durkheim (above, note 6) 176. Walcot (above, note 3) 234 points out that traditional values have totally disintegrated, and therefore argues that Haemon's suicide is a "clear example of anomic suicide," but Haemon also feels restricted by parental regulation, and so "fatalistic" tendencies pertain as well.

[106] Bibliography includes G. M. Kirkwood, "The Dramatic Unity of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 203–11; F. L. Shisler, "The Use of Stage Business to Portray Emotions in Greek Tragedy," *AJP* 66 (1945) 277–84; Whitman (above, note 77); A. Beck, "Der Emfang Ioles. Zur Technik und Menschengestaltung im ersten Teile der *Trachinierinnen*," *Hermes* 81 (1953) 10–21; G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958); J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries II. The Trachiniae* (Leiden 1959); Biggs (above, note 77); Knox, *Heroic Temper* (above, note 77); T. F. Hoey, "The *Trachiniae* and the Unity of Hero," *Arethusa* 3 (1970) 1–22; M. McCall, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Structure, Focus and Heracles," *AJP* 93 (1972) 142–53; D. Wender, "The Will of the Beast: Sexual Imagery in the *Trachiniae*," *Ramus* 3 (1974) 1–17; C. P. Segal, "Mariage et sacrifice dans les *Trachiniennes* de Sophocle," *AC* 44 (1975) 30–53; K. Reinhardt, *Sophocles*, tr. H. Harvey and D. Harvey (New York 1979); Burton (above, note 77); C. Fuqua, "Heroism, Heracles, and the 'Trachiniae'," *Traditio* 36 (1980) 1–81; Winnington-Ingram (above, note 77); P. Easterling, ed., *Sophocles Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982); R. G. A. Buxton, *Sophocles* (Oxford 1984); M. R. Halleran, "Lichas' Lies and Sophoclean Innovation," *GRBS* 27 (1986) 239–47; H. Friis Johansen, "Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *CM* 37 (1986) 47–61; J. D. Mikalson, "Zeus the Father and Heracles the Son in Tragedy," *TAPA* 116 (1986) 89–98; Loraux (above, note 3); Scodel (above, note 77); M. R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (Baltimore 1986); Gardiner, *Chorus* (above, note 77); B. Heiden, *Tragic Rhetoric: An Interpretation of Sophocles' Trachiniae* (New York 1989); E. P. Garrison, "Silent Accusation: The Motif of Silence in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*," in *Text and Presentation XI*, ed. K. Hartigan (Gainesville, Fl. 1991) 31–37.

[107] Easterling (above, note 106) 84 and passim, argues for a "firm and dignified" Deianeira. This reading is unconvincing since Deianeira continually mentions her "fear," and constantly needs direction, or at least approval. Cf. McCall (above, note 106); Gellie (above, note 77) 53ff; Burton (above, note 77) 41–43; and Winnington-Ingram (above, note 77) 78.

[108] Segal, "Mariage..." (above, note 106) overstresses the bestiality of Heracles, who is not so much a beast as a controller of beasts. In order to tame the savage world, though, he must be in it. Therefore, the contrast between Deianeira's world and Heracles' is valid. For readings which cast Heracles as the single hero (as opposed to a shared central focus on Deianeira and Heracles) see McCall (above, note 106) and Fuqua (above, note 106).

[109] For the theme of eros as a sickness, see Biggs (above, note 77).

active. Deianeira has expressed her eros in quietly waiting for her husband to return. It is a passive eros. She has been the object of the eros of Heracles, Nessus, and the river god Achelous. Her self-definition has hinged on being the object of eros, and when she is in danger of losing this status she makes her disastrous decision.[110] The institution of marriage regulates her eros which exists only for Heracles, and when her marriage and all of the social regulations inherent in that institution are threatened, she lapses into a state of anomie. By sending Iole home, Heracles has helped to create this state for Deianeira, whom the disruption overwhelms. She, therefore, compelled to take action, acts out of character, because she acts on her own volition. Though her life has been previously strictly regulated, now she must take control in order to ensure her continued safety under the control of her husband, and her act leads to her suicide. She feels uncomfortable in the world of action, and in fear of disgrace she bids the chorus to be discreet (596–97). Tragically, she becomes bold and hateful not only to herself, but also, she fears, to society (721–22). Just as her life in Trachis began by an uprooting because of Heracles (39), so too now as she ends her life, she finds herself with no foundation, and with no hope (726) that affairs can be set aright. Fear of shame spurs her on, and in her desperate attempt to retain her position as spouse of the *oikos*, she oversteps societal limits, and consequently fears the shame which results from failure. Hyllus reinforces her shame by exposing her treachery publicly, accusing her, cursing her, and promising that Justice and the Fury will punish her (808–9). Deianeira silently acquiesces, and the chorus remarks "surely you see that by silence you join your accuser and accuse yourself"? (813–14). Because Deianeira does not defend herself, society can only condemn her actions and cast her out, as she herself condemns and isolates herself by the very means, silence, by which she has lived her life.

Deianeira no longer has a place in society, and speaks only to inanimate objects in her farewell to life (904–11). After she addresses her final words to her bed, the emblem of her self-definition, she proceeds to unfasten her gown, uncover her whole side and stab herself. The sexual imagery of the action[111] and the use of the sword with its obvious phallic and masculine connotations underline the anomie Deianeira finds herself in as she steps out of her feminine character and into a masculine one. On the other hand, her placement of her suicide in the context of a sexual encounter with Heracles suggests that Deianeira thereby reaffirms the regulations which she overstepped by trying to dictate Heracles' actions, and reaffirms the place of marriage in society, and that particular type of marriage that Greek society sanctioned.[112] By her very private act she underscores the very public importance of societally-imposed restrictions. Deianeira, the unwitting killer of her husband, becomes the resolute

[110] See, e.g., Kamerbeek, *Trachiniae*, p. 25: "her existence is entirely dependent on Heracles'."

[111] See Winnington-Ingram (above, note 77) 81n. 28. See also Wender (above, note 106) 13; and Seidensticker (above, note 3) 114 who suggests that Deianeira uses Heracles' sword because she is bent on self-punishment.

[112] For details on marriage and concubinage, see W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca 1968) 113ff; MacDowell (above, note 17) 87ff; and Lefkowitz (above, note 106) 64ff.

suicide for fear of disgrace. Of course, she is not remembered in disgrace since Hyllus forgives her, and Heracles recognizes the fulfillment of the oracle.

In the extant works of Euripides many different motivations and reactions to suicide occur, and self-destruction becomes complicated by the notion of self-sacrifice. But social pressures still underlie most characters' tendencies to suicide, and this is especially noticeable in the suicides of Phaedra in the *Hippolytus* and Menoeceus in the *Phoenissae*.

Phaedra[113] is, like Antigone, a "double" suicide, one who is resolved on death from the beginning of the action, but whose death finally takes place under different circumstances and from different motives than those presented at first. At the opening of the play, she is near death because she has abstained from food for several days. This process has taken place in private, and the cause of Phaedra's dying has remained hidden as the chorus shows in the first stasimon. But when she is brought out into the public realm and when her passion is finally discovered by the nurse, social pressures which she has already felt internally now acquire an external reality. Consequently she becomes over-concentrated on her own and her family's reputation. We can see her reaction to this external social reality in her suicide note, which provides a critical piece of evidence for a sociological interpretation of her death. What motivates her to condemn Hippolytus? She has eavesdropped on Hippolytus' speech of hatred against women (616–68),[114] and the sentiments he expresses there lead Phaedra

[113] Bibliography for the *Hippolytus* includes E. R. Dodds, "The *Aidos* of Phaedra and the Meaning of the *Hippolytus*," *CR* 39 (1925) 102–4; B. M. W. Knox, "The *Hippolytus* of Euripides," *YCS* 13 (1952) 3–31; H. Strohm, *Euripides. Interpretation zur dramatischen Form* (Munich 1957); R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique VI. Euripides* (Geneva 1958) 169–98; W. S. Barrett, ed., *Euripides' Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964); C. P. Segal, "The Tragedy of the *Hippolytus*: The Waters of Ocean and the Untouched Meadow," *HSCP* 70 (1965) 117–70; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme, and Structure* (Toronto 1967); T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967); B. Frischer, "Concordia Discors and Characterization in Euripides' *Hippolytus*," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 85–100; S. A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971); K. Reckford, "Phaethon, Hippolytus, and Aphrodite," *TAPA* 103 (1972) 405–32; D. Kovacs, "Shame, Pleasure, and Honor in Phaedra's Great Speech (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 375–87)," *AJP* 101 (1980) 287–303; M. Orban, "*Hippolyte*: palinodie ou revanche," *LEC* 49 (1981) 3–17; F. Zeitlin, "The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the *Hippolytus*," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian (Durham 1985) 52–111; A. P. Burnett, "Hunt and Hearth in *Hippolytus*," in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy. Essays Presented to D.J. Conacher*, edd. M. Cropp, E. Fantham and S. E. Scully (Calgary 1986) 167–86; A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison, WI 1987) 277–320; N. S. Rabinowitz, "Female Speech and Female Sexuality: Euripides' *Hippolytos* as Model," in *Rescuing Creusa. New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity*, ed. M. Skinner, *Helios* n.s. 13 (1987); E. P. Garrison, "Suicide Notes in Euripides' *Hippolytus*," in *Text and Presentation IX*, ed. K. Hartigan (Lanham, MD 1989) 73–85.

[114] Taplin (above, note 77) 70–71 points out that this "sustained scene of eavesdropping, with its almost grotesque associations with listening at the key-hole, is quite without parallel in surviving Greek tragedy." Cf. also W. D. Smith, "Staging in the Central Scene of the *Hippolytus*," *TAPA* 91 (1960) 162–77; and

to fear for her reputation at the hands of this potential slanderer. Resolving therefore to die, she addresses two issues of concern to her: reputation and revenge.[115] Her quest for revenge results from a desperate wish to involve Hippolytus in her passion, and a desire to teach him moderation (731), as well as from her belief—her misguided belief—that by her suicide she can acquire an almost magical control over him, a power and advantage she could not wield while alive.[116] She wishes to punish Hippolytus and to reduce her own personal guilt. The revenge motif also links Phaedra to the divine mechanism of the play, but her other motivation, the moral standards of society, detaches her from that role and places her firmly in the human sphere. It is in this sphere that we can understand her suicide and the social motivations for it.

Phaedra's moral code encompasses the three ideals of σωφροσύνη, εὔκλεια and αἰδώς, and during Phaedra's last critical scene where her determination to die impels her to action, she concentrates on εὔκλεια. Εὔκλεια, and its opposite, δύσκλεια, signify reputation; that is, societal perception and categorization of one of its members. Phaedra's guilty secret has created a private and public persona, and she becomes involved in a conflict between the two.[117] Every statement in the play concerning honor or dishonor concerns external reality: how will Phaedra's reputation be perceived, how will society respond to her? She becomes focussed exclusively on social concerns to the exclusion of her personal concerns. In such circumstances, suicide becomes a duty, a sacrifice imposed by society for the continued well-being of society at large. In Phaedra's case, her society demands that the social meanings of marriage remain uncontaminated, that the wife remain faithful. Phaedra's dilemma is one of integration into society. Her guilty secret and adulterous thoughts have left her disintegrated from the social ideals she longs to uphold, and in her attempt to escape the stigma of disgrace, she commits suicide. As Durkheim argues, and as Greek culture demonstrates, a close-knit society makes demands on its members which if violated, voluntarily or involuntarily, leave the individual in conflict with the social milieu. This individual therefore exhibits an inclination to suicide. Though society may be safe whether one individual abides by its laws or not, an individual's shame at nonconformity can precipitate suicide.

Euripides, however, depicts a complex character in Phaedra, and no one motivation or characteristic suffices to describe her. Phaedra's confusion between good and bad shame in her speech of 375ff[118] arose from her adulterous desire, which created an internal imbalance. Every member of society functions

D. J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity. Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage. UC Classical Studies* 21 (1979) 81.

[115] For a discussion of the tendency in scholarship to emphasize one aspect of Phaedra's motivations to the exclusion of the other, see Conacher (above, note 113) 41, and n. 19 for more complete bibliographical references.

[116] It would be interesting to study suicide in Greek tragedy in light of Greek magic. For one example of a sociological discussion of suicide as a magical act, see C. W. Wahl, "Suicide as a Magical Act," in *Clues to Suicide*, edd. E. S. Shneidman and N. L. Farberow (New York 1957) 23–28.

[117] Zeitlin (above, note 113) 100.

[118] See Kovacs (above, note 113) for a detailed discussion of this speech and an overview of scholarly attempts to explicate it.

by submitting to social regulations which prescribe one's needs and the means to achieve them. Phaedra's desire has exceeded society's marriage-imposed restraints, and consequently she finds herself internally in a state of anomie because inside herself social norms are in conflict with her desires. By stating that love has wounded her (392), she verbalizes how her life has been disrupted, thrown into confusion. She tells the chorus that she tried to conquer it, first by enduring it in silence (394), then by conquering it with good sense (399). Since both attempts at equilibrium failed, she finally yields to eros in death (400). Her particular type of suicide, then, reflects her particular type of problem, the external self at variance with the internal self. The external reality of society—her fear for her reputation, her fear of isolation, combined with the internal reality of her disorientation to that aspect of society which regulates—impels her to commit an altruistic-anomic suicide. Again, even despite her attempt at revenge, the play depicts Phaedra in a favorable and sympathetic light.

In the *Phoenissae*,[119] the complex distinction between self-sacrifice and suicide becomes blurred as Menoeceus not only renounces his existence for a greater societal good, but also plunges the knife into his own neck (1091–92). An oracle demands his death, and he alone will be an efficacious sacrifice as the one survivor of the Sown Men who is of pure blood and still a virgin.[120] Though Creon chooses to save his son, Menoeceus never wavers from his resolve to die for his country, for fear he may prove a coward and a weakling (997ff). Using vocabulary typical of sacrifice, he announces he will slay himself (σφάξας) over the black pits of the dragon in order to free the land (1008–10). Menoeceus has been ordered to die by a higher authority, i.e., to commit institutional suicide which on occasion demands self-sacrifice.[121] Menoeceus now renounces his life for the benefit of his land, laying bare his motivations. In social terms he is completely a part of the state and has lost any sense of individuality. His own person claims no notice; his only duty is to the state,[122] and

[119] Bibliography includes P. Roussel, "Le theme du sacrifice volontaire dans la tragédie d'Euripide," *RBPhH* 1 (1922) 226–40; G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941); Webster (above, note 113); B. Snell, "Zu Euripides' *Phoenissae*," *Hermes* 87 (1959) 7–12; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (London 1961) 351–61; J. de Romilly, "*Phoenician Women* of Euripides: Topicality in Greek Tragedy," *Bucknell Review* 15 (1967) 108–32; Conacher (above, note 113); E. Rawson, "Family and Fatherland in Euripides' *Phoenissae*," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 109–27; R. Rebuffat, "Le Sacrifice du fils de Créon dans les *Phéniciennes* d'Euripide," *REA* 74 (1972) 14–31; P. Vellacott, *Ironic Drama. A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning* (Cambridge 1975) 167–73 and 197–99; M. B. Arthur, "The Curse of Civilization: The Choral Odes of the *Phoenissae*," *HSCP* 81 (1977) 163–85; H. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca 1985) 106–46; Loraux (above, note 3); E. A. M. E. O'Connor-Visser, *Aspects of Human Sacrifice in the Tragedies of Euripides* (Amsterdam 1987) 73–98.

[120] Haemon is unsuitable because, though unmarried, he is already betrothed (944–45).

[121] Socrates furnishes an historical example of this kind of suicide, and he also insisted in the *Crito* that his act was for the good of the state.

[122] This is not to trivialize his ἀρετή or his courage. But a soldier's ἀρετή is defined by sublimation of the part to the whole. Thus, Achilles puts his ἀρετή on hold because of his rejection of Agamemnon's authority in *Iliad* 1. For a

he believes he will gain a greater good by dying. His motives are pure and noble as he commits an altruistic suicide.[123]

From these few examples of tragic suicide it is evident that societal validation (honor), and shame, the feeling of inadequate adherence to social rules, motivate the suicidal acts of many characters. The playwrights depict the characters' motivations within the societal parameters of the fifth century rather than in psychological terms of monomania, madness, or imitation.[124] Reactions of other dramatis personae in these plays reflect pity, respect and sometimes disbelief (for example, see the choral reaction to Evadne's daring leap in Euripides' *Supplices* 1076), but never loathing or disgust.[125]

CONCLUSION

We have examined a wide variety of ancient sources and can say with a fair amount of certainty that the Greeks generally recognized a sharp distinction between honorable and cowardly suicides, and that very often suicide was a response to such social pressures as the desire for honor, fear of shame, or simply society's demand for one's self-sacrifice for the good of the whole. Conversely, suicide might be condemned absolutely, as the Pythagoreans for example, apparently did.[126] Plato's Socrates showed that the Pythagorean stance

discussion of this important value in Greek ethics, see A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (above, note 9) 46ff, 165ff, 304ff; and his "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* n.s. 16 (1966) 193–219, esp. 206.

[123] See Vellacott (above, note 119) 198–99 who questions whether or not Menoeceus accomplishes what he intended because "...the sublimity of the self-sacrifice, for the necessity of which there is no evidence whatever, is swallowed in the flood of despair and death which covers Thebes after the invading army has dispersed." Menoeceus presents a problem to those who wish to include him in the four other Euripidean plays concerning self-sacrifice: *I. A.*, *Heracleidae*, the *Hecuba* and the fragmentary *Erechtheus*. He clearly commits suicide: he takes the sword in his hand and plunges it into his neck. He has motivation, because he is excessively integrated into his community which asks for his death, and he makes his intent clear. Loraux (above, note 3) 41–42 subsumes Menoeceus under "virgin sacrifice," and suggests that since it is a male (and Theban) prerogative to wield a knife, he is a self-sacrifice and not a suicide. For Loraux, if one accepts death but does not look for it, one does not commit suicide. Therefore, self-sacrifice is a more proper term, because through self-sacrifice one gains glory, whereas suicide is not an heroic act. We have established here, however, that there is not ancient evidence for her assertion.

[124] Nor can the gender distinction in tragic suicide, which Loraux overstates, account for it. See Durkheim, chapters 1–4, for a discussion of "extra-social" causes of suicide.

[125] If the scope of this paper permitted, we would see that characters who have only cowardly reasons for suicide do not in fact go through with it. See, e.g., Hermione in the *Andromache* who is motivated neither by shame nor honor, but only fear.

[126] Suicide, according to Plutarch's *Kleomenes* 31 and 37, was absolutely forbidden at Sparta, though, as the story of Pantites indicates, it might still be a more viable alternative to dishonor. For more details see Hirzel (above, note 3) 55. Conversely at Keos suicide was an accepted way to end life. See B. Schmidt, *Neues Jahrbuch für dem klassichen Altertum* 11 (1903) 619ff and Hirzel (above, note 3) 116 and 32 n. 2.

was too rigid, but clearly many different attitudes to suicide can coexist in any given society. And, of course, prescriptive treatments need not be in complete harmony with actual practices or attitudes, but interestingly, the fact that a moral attitude exists, whether the attitude is one of approval or condemnation, may perhaps suggest that suicide was a more or less common occurrence.[127]

The aim of this discussion has been to clarify our understanding of the view on suicide in classical Greece. In all cases, a corpse is powerful and dangerous, and in some forms of violent death the implements used acquire additional danger. But the evidence suggests that, though a variety of responses to suicide existed, the importance of shame and honor meant that a distinction between honorable and cowardly suicide was widely recognized, the first acceptable and even praiseworthy, the second to be condemned.

[127] See L. Dublin, *Suicide* (New York 1963) 84.

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