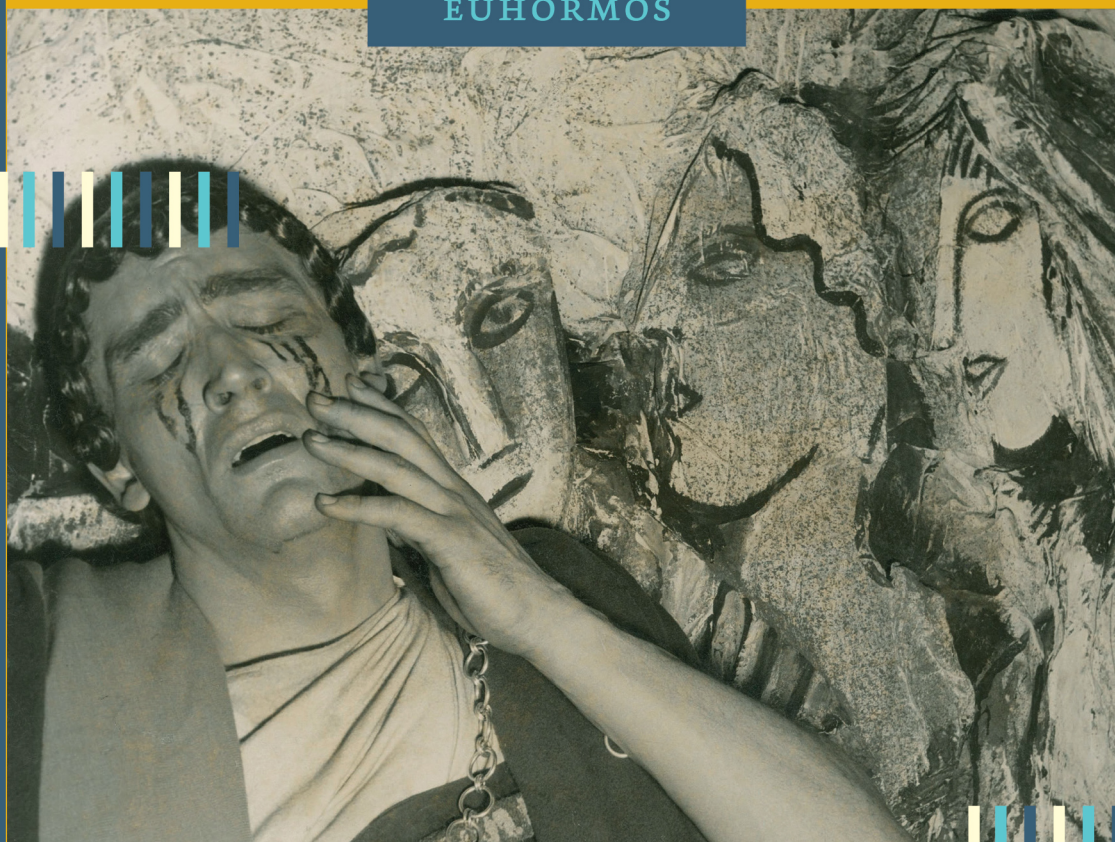


SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

Methods and Applications

EUHORMOS



Edited by

Luuk Huitink, Vlad Glaveanu and Ineke Sluiter

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Social Psychology and the Ancient World

Euhormos

GRECO-ROMAN STUDIES IN ANCHORING INNOVATION

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Luuk Huitink
Vlad Glaveanu
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To the memory of David Konstan (1940–2024)
With love and gratitude



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Foreword

EUHORMOS is an international book series intended for monographs and collective volumes on Greco-Roman Antiquity. Specifically, we welcome for publication manuscripts related to the concept of ‘anchoring innovation’ by classical scholars of all disciplines from all over the world. Books in this series will be published as much as possible in Open Access. EUHORMOS is one of the results financed by the Dutch so-called Gravitation Grant (2017), awarded to a consortium of scholars from OIKOS, the National Research School in Classical Studies. See <https://anchoringinnovation.nl/>, where we also list earlier results from this research programme.

The ancient world saw many examples of change and innovations. The unique accessibility of materials from and about this period in the ancient Mediterranean frequently makes it possible to analyze successful and unsuccessful ‘anchoring’ of change: the various ways in which ‘the new’ could (or could not) be connected to and embedded in what was already deemed familiar. ‘New’ and ‘old’ are mostly not used as objective labels, but also a matter of the perception, framing, and valuation by relevant social groups and actors. ‘The new’ is not restricted to the technical or scientific domains, but can also include the ‘new information’ imparted by speakers through linguistic anchoring strategies; innovations in literature and the arts; political, social, cultural, legal, military, or economic innovation; and new developments in material culture.

The name ‘Euhormos’ itself is well-anchored. It is the Homeric term for a harbor ‘in which the anchoring is good’, although the careful reader will notice that danger is never far away. This dynamic nature of ‘anchoring’ and the risks involved in it are embraced by our research team as part of this title. For now though we will focus on its auspicious aspect, since we are looking forward to affording ‘good anchorage’ to studies contributing to a better understanding of ‘anchoring innovation’ in Greco-Roman Antiquity.

Ineke Sluiter

Academic Director

Leiden

On behalf of the Governing Board of the Anchoring
Innovation Programme

Preface

Social Psychology and the Ancient World: Methods and Applications sets out to foster a productive interdisciplinary dialogue between classics and social psychology, and more in general between the (historical) humanities and the social sciences. *What* can historical disciplines contribute to modern questions and *how* can they responsibly do so? And conversely, *what* can modern (social-)scientific insights offer to the study of history, and *how* can they responsibly do so? These questions gain particular force when thinking about phenomena of (social) psychology in a historical period. The chapters in this volume all explore salient socio-psychological phenomena as they appear in a variety of texts, ranging from Greek tragedy and comedy to the historical writings of Herodotus and Xenophon, and beyond. They demonstrate that incorporating concepts from modern social psychology when approaching ancient literature can enrich our interpretations; in the process, they bring out continuities in human behaviour, but also highlight changes, which stem from shifts in values, attitudes, and beliefs over time. This brings out the importance of cultural-historical context, also in studying the social psychology of our own time. Taken together, the case studies also make a point about method: they showcase various ways in which classicists may go about extracting and interpreting relevant socio-psychological information embedded within the texts they study. If it succeeds in its aims, the present volume also provides an answer to the question *why* it is interesting and useful to study socio-psychological phenomena in ancient societies—an answer which, we hope, will appeal to classical scholars and social scientists alike.

Most of the contributions to this volume originate from an international conference, *How to Do the Psychology of the Ancient World*, which was held at Leiden University from December 13 to 15, 2018 as part of the Anchoring Innovation research programme (supported by a 2017 Gravitation Grant, Ministry of Education of the Netherlands, NWO). This volume, then, has been long in the making. We would like to express warm thanks to everyone who participated in the editorial process, particularly our student-assistants Olivia Monster and Henric Jansen (now a PhD student), and Iris van Kuijk, and our intern Laïs Bentall. We would also like to thank Max van Duijn and André Lardinois for help on specific editorial matters, and Cornelis van Tilburg for his expert assistance with the Index of Passages.

A final note on the use of Greek in this volume is in order. All Greek has been translated, with English preceding Greek where both appear. To assist readers without a background in Greek, we provide key terms and phrases in transliteration when they play an important role in the argument or when authors discuss the precise meaning of specific terms. At the same time, we have allowed individual contributors flexibility in their approach and have not aimed for absolute consistency.

Right before this volume went to the Press, we received the devastating news of the passing of David Konstan, a long-time friend, not just to us personally, but also to Dutch classics. David's chapter in this volume shows his characteristic clarity of mind and writing, and the willingness to take on big topics. We dedicate this volume to his memory, in the only fitting way: with love and gratitude.

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David Konstan

(1 November 1940–2 May 2024) was one of the world's foremost and best-loved classicists. At the time of his death, he was Professor of Classics at New York University, having previously served for 18 years as John Rowe Workman Distinguished Professor of Classics at Brown University. Among his many publications are *Roman Comedy* (1983), *Greek Comedy and Ideology* (1995), *Friendship in the Classical World* (1997), *Pity Transformed* (2001), *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks* (2006), *Before Forgiveness* (2010), and *Beauty: The Fortunes of an Ancient Greek Idea* (2014). A recipient of NEH, ACLS, Guggenheim, and other fellowships, he held visiting appointments in New Zealand, Scotland, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, Egypt, and elsewhere, and honorary degrees from the universities of Uppsala (Sweden) and Salamanca (Spain). His achievements as a scholar were recognised by Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Honorary Fellowship of the Australian Academy of the

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Introduction: How to Do the Social Psychology of the Ancient World

Luuk Huitink and Ineke Sluiter

1 Introduction: Frisians in the Theatre

At some point during Nero's reign (54–68 CE), an embassy of the Frisians (part of the wider *Germani*), waiting for an audience with the emperor, toured Rome and ended up in the Theatre of Pompey. The anecdote is relayed to us by the Roman historian Tacitus (early second century CE):

Among the places that are usually shown to barbarians, they entered the theatre of Pompey, so that they might contemplate the size of the population. There, to kill time (in their ignorance they took no delight in the show), they were inquiring about the crowd seated in the auditorium (the distinctions between the orders—which were the knights?—where was the senate?) when they noticed a few men in foreign dress on the senatorial seats. They asked who they were, and, on hearing that this was a compliment paid to the envoys of nations distinguished for their courage and for friendship to Rome, exclaimed that no people in the world ranked before Germans in arms or loyalty, went down, and took their seats among the Fathers. The action was taken in good part by the onlookers, as a trait of primitive impetuosity and generous rivalry.

inter ea quae barbaris ostentantur intravere Pompei theatrum, quo magnitudinem populi viserent. illic per otium (neque enim ludicris ignari oblectabantur) dum consessum caveae, discrimina ordinum, quis eques, ubi senatus percontantur, advertere quosdam cultu externo in sedibus senatorum; et quinam forent rogitantes, postquam audiverant earum gentium legatis id honoris datum quae virtute et amicitia Romana praeccellerent, nullos mortalium armis aut fide ante Germanos esse exclamant degrediunturque et inter patres considunt. quod comiter a visentibus exceptum, quasi impetus antiqui et bona aemulatio. (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.54)

This vignette relates how the Frisians attempt to insert themselves into the Roman social order, navigating a socio-cultural environment with which they are quite unfamiliar. They show no interest in the theatrical performance at all, however important to Roman culture that was. They are, however, keenly interested in manifestations of social difference and they are able quickly to draw up a rudimentary social hierarchy based on limited information and contextual cues, such as the segregated seating arrangement and variations in attire. Having a clear sense of themselves as a brave and loyal ally of Rome, they then arrogate a seat of honour among the senators, the highest rank of Roman society, next to other ambassadors of valued allied peoples. We also get a glimpse of the intentions and reactions of their Roman hosts: the visit to the theatre seemed intended to impress the visitors ('barbarians', i.e. neither Greeks nor Romans) with the sheer magnitude of the Roman people.¹ Moreover, the benevolent reaction to the appropriation of the seats of honour was itself based on social categorization, just as much as the behaviour of the Frisians itself had been. The Roman audience entertained preconceptions on the nature of their guests, which made it easy for them to be forgiving of a social *faux pas*.

Tacitus clearly presents us with a psychologizing narrative. He represents the mind states of the different actors, but from his own perspective, for instance in the way in which he explains the evaluation by the Roman audience of what had just happened: the Romans feel, he suggests, that the Frisians are somewhat primitive in their lack of impulse control (*impetus antiqui*), but they also ascribe a healthy sense of competition to them. So much for Tacitus' own psychological interpretation.

However, for us, as interpreters of this text, there are more layers to be explored. This story offers a scene from the ancient world that can be used as evidence (obviously in combination with other sources and materials) for the social and cognitive psychology of its time. As classicists, we usually base such inferences on a combination of methods and insights from the humanities and the social sciences. Humanities scholars are trained to analyse language, rhetoric, and narrative, not just for their surface meaning, but precisely for what lies underneath, what is taken for granted. The social sciences have long provided inspiration, concepts, and theories, for instance, in the study of emotions, motivation, rituals, etc. It is our aim with this volume to foster the productive interdisciplinary dialogue between classics and social psychology even further, and to show how such a dialogue may benefit both fields.

¹ This intention can be derived from the combination of *ostentantur* (there was a guided tour) and *quo ... viserent* (since only the guides knew the mass audience the Frisians would encounter in the theatre).

In this volume, as in the conference that inspired it, we bring together classicists and social psychologists. Each Part will be introduced by a social psychologist or cognitive literary scholar setting the scene. They set out the wider conceptual and disciplinary framework and so introduce and contextualize the classical case studies that constitute each Part.² Psychological research informs each chapter, but, in turn, historical case studies provide opportunities to study (representations of) human behaviour within fully complex settings, rather than abstract experimental ones. Ancient literature, like all literature, ‘offers a virtually limitless archive of the ways in which human beings think, and how they imagine themselves and their world’, as Terence Cave puts it.³ Obviously, this volume does not lay claim to exhaustiveness, neither for the issues studied by social psychology nor for those in classical studies. However, it does aim to show a wide range of both, to demonstrate the mutual advantages of combining forces, and, most of all, to offer careful reflections on the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ of the study of the social psychology of a historical period.

Tacitus’ anecdote belongs in the archive just mentioned. We could use it for different purposes, for instance, to bring out the influence of the positionality of the interpreter (see section 5 below); or to illustrate the power of the ‘search-light function’ of psychological theory, in combination with the importance of acknowledging situatedness, whether ancient or modern (see sections 3.2 and 3.3 below). It is also an apt illustration of the intellectual impetus of this volume, stemming from a large-scale research programme in Classics, called ‘Anchoring Innovation’.⁴

2 ‘Anchoring’ and Social Psychology

The ‘Anchoring Innovation’ research programme is concerned with the many different ways in which people in classical antiquity processed situations, ideas, objects, and procedures that struck them as ‘new’. How did relevant social groups (rather than individuals) manage (or fail) to connect (that is, to ‘anchor’) such things to something which they could somehow regard as already familiar?⁵ The importance of anchoring (integrating, accommodating) the new in what is already cognitively available is brought out by Tacitus’ story as well. The Frisians are unfamiliar with theatrical performances in their own culture and society, and therefore they are completely oblivious to that aspect

² For a more elaborate overview of the different Parts and chapters, see section 6 below.

³ Cave 2016: 14.

⁴ <https://anchoringinnovation.nl>.

⁵ General introductions include Sluiter 2017; 2021; Sluiter and Versluys 2022.

of their (new) surrounding: for lack of a suitable anchor, the performance fails to keep them interested.⁶ The upside to this failed anchoring is that they have time on their hands (*otium*) to focus on other things, things for which they do have an anchor. For the Frisians have no trouble quickly to grasp the way in which seating arrangements were manifestations of social hierarchies, although they are in a new situation. They could relate to this instantly, since such hierarchies are, after all, a quite general phenomenon of human societies, including their own. However, the way in which they then translate this insight into social behaviour (usurping a place of honour that had not been formally assigned to them) marks them out as quaintly foreign to the Roman public. That public, in turn, anchors their assessment of the Frisians in the cultural stereotypes of a primitive impetuousness and a good kind of ambition; on these grounds, they let the Frisians' behaviour pass.

Clearly, there are significant socio-psychological aspects to 'anchoring'.⁷ It is crucially concerned with how relevant social groups categorize (or fail to categorize), conceptually and linguistically, what they perceive as new; how they cognitively process new input and respond to it, intellectually, emotionally, and morally; and how all such processes are situated: they are affected by relevant social factors, including social context and setting, social norms, sense of self and social identity, and group influence. It is in full acknowledgment of

6 For a contemporary example of 'failed anchoring', see Sluiter 2017: 21. Of course, what we get here is Tacitus' interpretation of the Frisians' behaviour; see section 3.2 below for other possible explanations of the Frisians' limited interest in the performance.

7 Our term 'anchoring' is an expansion of the term as used by Kahneman and Tversky, who reserve it for a subconscious phenomenon mainly related to the way in which people make numerical estimates (see Kahneman 2011: 119–128; Klooster, this volume (Chapter 8), uses the concept in this way, while Murnaghan (Chapter 2) also uses Kahneman's work. We also acknowledge the work by other psychologists, such as Moscovici 1976 (1961), who uses 'anchoring' for 'the naming and classifying of novel encounters, ideas, things, or persons' (Moscovici 1976: 172). Such labelling and classifying (see also Bauer and Gaskell 1999) is indeed one of the most important forms anchoring can take, but there are also other non-linguistic manifestations, such as visual familiarity (for an example of the persistence of architectural features, see Sluiter 2017: section 5) or geographical 'ancrage' (Debarbieux 2014). The concept of anchoring has the important affordance of facilitating interdisciplinary dialogues with disciplines that feature different, but related concepts, such as 'accommodation' (economics; Rogers 2003 (1962)); 'intertextuality' (literary studies; the term was coined by Julia Kristeva; see Kristeva 1969; influential application in Classics by Hinds 1998); 'belonging' (sociology; Duyvendak 2011), or 'common ground' (cognitive linguistics; Clark and Brennan 1991; Clark 1996; Kroon 2021). Without obliterating the important differences between such concepts, the language of 'anchoring' facilitates a dialogue between scholars from all of these disciplines.

the importance of all such aspects, and of the need to engage with specialist expertise on these issues, that this volume was designed.

'Anchoring' plays at least some role in many of the following chapters, but several also address the issue directly, particularly in Part 5, which deals with the accommodation of 'the new'. Thus, David Konstan demonstrates how the novel Christian concept of 'sin' was anchored in the traditional Greek religious lexicon (Chapter 12), and Thomas Martin discusses a whole range of anchoring strategies with which the Athenians at the end of the fourth century BCE tried to come to terms with the novelty of deifying a mortal man, Demetrius of Phaleron (Chapter 13). But the issue of 'anchoring' also plays a prominent role in Anne-Sophie Noel's exploration of how objects (props) in Greek tragedy can function as 'material anchors' for shaping individual and collective identity (Chapter 10, see pp. 271, 277). Jacqueline Klooster shows how in Euripides' *Ion* judgements about surprising events—are they a 'coincidence' or part of a divine plan?—are anchored in specific cultural and cognitive schemas (Chapter 8). And, finally, Karen Bassi argues that 'the prospect of death provides an impetus for "anchoring innovation" in Greek tragedy' (p. 287), by which she means that characters' awareness of human mortality is a precondition for imagining a future (Chapter 11).

In what follows in this introduction, we start from classics, also in the interest of colleagues from the social sciences interested in this volume. We first discuss the *status quaestionis* of psychological approaches in classical studies and the appeal to classicists of the most recent developments in cognition studies, including the importance of the notion of situatedness (section 3). Then we give a rapid sketch of the particular ways in which the humanities organize their research (section 4). It is clear that antiquity studies have benefited enormously from the insights developed in the social sciences. However, ideally, the benefit is mutual. In section 5 we set out the ways in which the study of classical antiquity (as an example of a particularly accessible and rich historical environment) complements insights from the social sciences, and contextualizes them in a new way. Section 6 provides an outline of the volume.

3 Classics and Psychology

3.1 *An Ultra Brief History of Psychological Approaches in Classics and Their Appeal*

The materials that are the object of classical studies, the questions asked of them, and the methods by which classicists arrive at answers (see section 4 below for an explication of those) all contribute to the readiness with which

psychological approaches have long been embraced by classicists.⁸ Without wishing to offer an exhaustive overview, we should mention here, for example, the stimulating work done on Greek notions of selfhood, which has firmly put the question on the table to what extent modern subjective conceptions of personal identity can be applied to the ancient Greeks.⁹ Furthermore, sustained work has been done on ancient emotions, including on how to ‘read’ them from archaeological evidence and literary and non-literary texts.¹⁰ There are studies on affective regimes and on individual emotions in Greek culture, such as shame, anger, envy, and pity;¹¹ a recent addition is Konstan’s work on notions of forgiveness and sin, which also features in the present volume.¹² Furthermore, classical scholarship on Greek religion has often shown an interest in its psychological and social dimensions. One notable example are Versnel’s studies of how people coped with inconsistencies in religion, which is informed by Festinger’s work on cognitive dissonance reduction.¹³ The social aspects of rituals have also received ample attention.¹⁴ As a final example, we mention that ancient value systems and the societal negotiations through which they are constituted have been central to a long-standing international research project, *The Penn-Leiden Colloquia on Ancient Values*.¹⁵

3.2 *The Cognitive Turn in Classics: Situatedness*

In the last decade or so, these and other efforts have increasingly been passing under the name of ‘cognitive classics’.¹⁶ That label, to be sure, should not be taken to imply a fully unified field with a tightly focused research agenda.

8 See e.g. Cairns 2019: 18; Budelmann 2023: 2–3.

9 Thus, Gill 1996; 2006 has opposed ancient Greek ‘objective-participant’ and modern ‘subjective-individualist’ perspectives on selfhood, while Sorabji 2006 has argued that there are in fact significant continuities between ancient and modern notions. See Verheij 2014 for an attempt to find middle ground in the debate. The topic is taken up in Part 1 of the present volume.

10 For general overviews, see Chaniotis 2012; Chaniotis and Ducrey 2013; Plamper 2012; Braund & Gill 1997; Konstan 2006; Cairns & Nelis 2017; Hitzler 2011; Campeggiani and Konstan; Sanders 2021.

11 Affective regimes: see Chaniotis 2012, Chaniotis and Ducrey 2013; Van Nijf 2013; individual emotions: see Cairns 1993; Williams 1993; Kaster 1997; 2001; Kalimtzis 2012; Konstan 2001; Harris 2001; Braund and Most 2003; Konstan and Rutter 2003; Sternberg 2005; Munteanu 2011.

12 Konstan 2022, and see his contribution to this volume (Chapter 12).

13 Culminating in Versnel 2011. Festinger’s work also informs the contribution of Martin to this volume (Chapter 13).

14 E.g., Hüsken 2007; Chaniotis et al. 2010; Chaniotis 2011.

15 E.g. on *andreia* (manliness and courage) (Rosen and Sluiter 2003), free speech (Sluiter and Rosen 2004), ‘badness’ (Sluiter and Rosen 2008), and labor (Flohr and Bowes 2024).

16 Early ‘classics’ of the field are Fagan 2011 on crowd psychology at Roman games, and Struck 2016 and Larson 2016 on aspects of Greek religion. Budelmann 2023: 1–3 offers a brief lucid overview of the ‘cognitive turn’ in classics, on which we draw here.

Rather, cognitive classics represents a spectrum of diverse inquiries with their own distinct focal points. A number of wide-ranging edited volumes published in quick succession in the last five years or so showcase the breadth of research done under the banner 'cognitive classics', with an impact in areas ranging from linguistics and literature to ancient philosophy and science, material culture, and archaeology.¹⁷ However, the umbrella term 'cognitive classics' is neither gratuitous nor superfluous. Amidst the diversity of approaches, certain common methods and theoretical frameworks are beginning to emerge, suggesting a shared intellectual project. This coherence, albeit nascent, is precisely why the term is valuable. It serves the purpose of definitively putting cognitive approaches on the map and staking a claim for them as a major new perspective on the interdisciplinary field of classical studies.

To a large extent, developments within the cognitive sciences themselves have in recent years significantly increased their appeal and applicability to the (historical) humanities. A first wave of studies into cognition in the second half of the twentieth century conceived of the human mind as a computational processing device and of cognitive processes as turning on the manipulation of abstract, amodal symbols or mental representations of a pre-given world. However, recent cognitively inflected work in classics takes as its much more relatable point of departure what has been called a 'second generation' of cognition studies. This approach challenges the computational model and seeks to replace it with a view of cognition as embodied or distributed over mind, body and environment.¹⁸ One popular move here is to unpack cognition in terms of the '4 Es'.¹⁹ It emphasizes that the mind is *embodied*, as opposed to the Cartesian mind-body dualism underlying the 'mind as computer' metaphor; *embedded* in its environmental, social and cultural contexts; *extended* into the physical world (relying, for instance, on memory being encoded in writing or the shape of tools); and *enactive*, that is determined by, and during, our interactions with the world. When the computational model is abandoned, the earlier bias towards higher cognitive functions associated with deliberate reasoning is no

17 See Meineck et al. 2018 (a comprehensive handbook); Lauwers et al. 2018 (reflecting deeply on the manifold historical and current connections between the fields of psychology and classics); Anderson et al. 2019 (a somewhat more specialized endeavour, on notions of 'distributed' cognition in Antiquity); Clifford and Buxton 2023 (a partly cognitively inflected volume dealing with imaginative processes at work in Greek literature and art, which resonates with our Parts 4 and 5 in particular); two further volumes have appeared in the new series, *Cognitive Classics*, of Oxford University Press: Grethlein et al. 2020 on the cognitive effects of ancient narrative on recipients; Budelmann and Sluiter 2023 on cognition and Greek tragedy.

18 Precursors notwithstanding, Varela et al. 1991 is the foundational text. Wilson and Foglia 2017 offer an up-to-date account.

19 See Menary 2010; Newen et al. 2018. For applications in the realm of cultural and literary criticism, see, e.g., Kukkonen and Caracciolo 2014; Morgan et al. 2017.

longer warranted; some scholars therefore add two further 'Es', of *emotion* and *experience*. However, the precise articulation of theories of second-generation cognition studies matters less to us than the general acknowledgement that an adequate account of human cognitive processes cannot be limited to a description of what goes on 'in the mind'. Instead, we should think of cognition as always and fundamentally 'situated'. We will use 'situatedness' and 'situated cognition' as a comprehensive term for all aspects of 4E (or 5E, or 6E) cognition; for 'all forms of cognitive interaction between agents and the circumstances (in the widest sense of the word) in which they find themselves'.²⁰ Cognition is 'grounded', to use a term of Lawrence Barsalou, in our sensory experiences, bodily interactions, and the environments we navigate, including the cultural and social contexts we inhabit.²¹

Taking situatedness into account highlights the shaping force of both immediate situational and contextual factors and broader historical and cultural influences. For instance, if we return to the anecdote in Tacitus, a comprehensive description of the behaviour of the Frisians in the theatre should emphasize that their prioritization of the audience over the theatrical performance is probably informed not simply by their ignorance of the latter, but also by their current social role as ambassadors on a mission to gain influence in Roman society and politics—insights not fully evident in Tacitus' rendition of the events. An adequate description of how the Frisians 'read' the Roman social hierarchy should also point out the interaction between cognitive processes (which may be universal) and a highly specific socio-cultural environment. In particular, the general human tendency to make social attributions is here significantly aided by the fact that Roman theatres did indeed have separate seating areas for different classes: the seating arrangement serves as a 'cognitive scaffold', a visual and spatial representation of the Roman social order, which helps the Frisians in quickly organizing and understanding the new information.²² The inherent situatedness of socio-psychological phenomena requires cultural-historical expertise of the analyst and an awareness of the pitfalls in applying ideas originating in a very different socio-cultural context. For social psychologists, the study of historical periods is a way to reflect on the historical and cross-cultural adequacy of their theories and concepts.²³

20 Corthals and Sluiter 2023: 210. This encompasses all forms of so-called 4E-cognition (embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive).

21 Barsalou 2020.

22 See Ng 2019: 122–123, commenting on how the customary seating arrangement can be seen as 'a cognitive artefact that served as a scaffold for knowledge of Roman society'.

23 For brief discussions of the relationship between universality and cultural specificity, see Lauwers et al. 2018: 2–4; Budelmann 2023: 10–13. We fully subscribe to Budelmann's view that we should not regard the two as an either/or binary. Rather than regarding

The way in which current cognition studies emphasize and welcome the kinds of complexity of context evidenced in such a passage from Tacitus is precisely what makes them so appealing to the humanities in general, and classical studies in particular. Classical studies are frequently concerned with seeking to understand the origins, contexts, functions, and effects of products of the human mind, be they literary texts, material remains, or cultural and social institutions. This has also usually been true when classicists have engaged with approaches to literature that are technically strictly formalist, such as structuralist narratology. In classics, they were never entirely divorced from issues of audience response and of the effects of certain narrative choices on listeners and readers. It stands to reason that the newest insights from cognitive scientists about the embodied and situated nature of all psychological and cognitive processes are genuinely exciting to classicists: such insights into the workings of the mind provide a new and up-to-date contextualization for their interpretative work. The label 'cognitive classics' serves to channel energy in that direction, encouraging scholars to explore the intersection of cognitive science and classical studies more deeply and systematically.

3.3 *The Search-Light Function of Socio-Psychological Research in Classics*

The chapters of this volume all take serious account of current socio-psychological research. They draw on concepts and theories from modern social psychology, using them as the foundation for their analyses. In most cases, insights from modern social psychology serve to construct hypotheses about what is going on in our texts. More generally, they have what has been called a 'search-light function,' enabling our contributors to bring certain aspects of texts into sharper focus and to reveal features that may otherwise remain underappreciated or overlooked.²⁴ For example, we might consider the anecdote from Tacitus through the lens of social attribution theory, which suggests that people are generally prone to making rapid judgments and attributions about others in social situations, using only limited cognitive resources (and even cognitive shortcuts). This would help explain the rapidity and ease with which the Frisians establish a social hierarchy of Roman society based on only limited information.²⁵ It also sheds light on why

'universalizing perspectives ... as a threat', we should consider them 'a way of sharpening the grasp on specificity' (2023: 10).

24 The term 'search-light function' is from Lauwers et al. 2018: 7. The concept is taken up in particular in the contribution of Huitink and Crone, p. 358.

25 Cf. Baumeister and Finkel 2010: 84–85. For social attribution, see also the Introduction to Part 1 by Jovchelovitch, and Chapter 3 by Van Emde Boas.

the Romans quickly attribute the Frisians' behaviour to cultural stereotypes without delving deeper into the ambassadors' specific motivations. In short, applying modern socio-psychological concepts and theories to the Tacitean anecdote and other historical texts helps classicists in understanding how those texts reflect fundamental elements of human social cognition. It also once again offers more insight to social psychologists on the situatedness of all socio-psychological phenomena.

4 Classics as Exponent of Humanities Methodology²⁶

It may be useful to make explicit some of the specific forms of research in classics (many of which apply to the humanities in general), in contrast to much modern cognitive and social psychological research. The latter often relies on the possibility to create laboratory conditions with controlled variables and on quantitative (statistic) data analysis, and it aims for generalizable results, even prognostic theories, establishing relationships of causality or correlation between dependent and independent variables. Classics (and, again, much of the humanities in general), on the other hand, often utilizes research designs that are qualitative, conceptual, and hermeneutical. This means that it is based on interpretation, with constant reflection on the very methods and validity of interpretation themselves. The sources used are historical documents, which, however, were not designed for the purposes for which scholars interested in the social psychology of the ancient world may wish to use them—a point to which we shall return presently.

This type of humanities research has, to be sure, a large empirical component. Classicists work with empirical data, mined from the rich 'archive' of written and material sources on which our knowledge of the ancient world depends. The data which we gather in this context are always human-made: they are products of the human mind and of individual or collective creative processes. In studying these, it is imperative to take into account both the specific conditions of their production, which might include historical context, cultural norms, and the artist's or author's personal background, and the specific conditions and contexts of our own interpretation (awareness of the interaction of these two is the basis of the hermeneutical method). This implies that the phases of data-collecting and interpretation cannot be radically separated. It is

26 We thank the Anchoring Innovation consortium and the research group working on Global Dynamics in Antiquity for discussion of these methodological issues and permission to publish below the joint outcome of that discussion.

nearly always impossible, and, indeed, mostly undesirable, to abstract from the inherent complexity of these data in ways that much experimental research in the hard sciences, or quantitative research in the social sciences, needs to do. This type of research is designed to provide insight, rather than generalized statistical trends, and its results are often presented in a narrative argument.

The chapters in this volume all provide case studies, that is, focused examinations of a particular figure (real or fictional), literary work (or a part of one), or historical event.²⁷ Object selection in research of this nature is not based on (random) representative sampling of a statistical population. Instead, our authors have made an informed choice of objects based on their expected instructive potential: these might be especially well-preserved examples, hold unique historical significance, or offer a window onto a specific cultural phenomenon.

In this volume, we ask the question how we can study socio-psychological phenomena and processes in ancient societies. For this purpose, we have restricted ourselves to *literary* source material; even more precisely: ancient drama, satire, and historical prose narratives. Such literary texts usually represent human beings in the midst of situations of heightened tension: crises of various kinds in ancient drama, societal turmoil in historical texts (with ancient satire serving as, among other things, a bonding tool to release or divert tensions, as Ralph Rosen demonstrates in Chapter 6). Our focus on literary texts means that material culture only plays a role as reflected in text, as in Anne-Sophie Noel's study of the role of objects in make-believe play in Chapter 10.²⁸ This volume does not include non-literary texts, although it goes without saying that they, too, can provide a wealth of information, certainly not restricted to the *realia* of the ancient world, but also about the presentation of self and others and therefore about social psychology.

The literary character of the texts studied here poses its own demands on the interpreters and requires a good grasp of cultural and historical context, genre, and language. As we stated above, these highly sophisticated plays and prose narratives were obviously not designed as experiments in social psychology, and the questions we seek to answer are often not those that their authors put centre stage. To fully grasp the underlying socio-psychological dynamics, we must delve beyond the text's surface meaning and pay close attention to what it takes for granted or presupposes, rather than solely focusing on its overt statements. What is taken for granted gives us a fair indication

27 For reflections on reasoning with cases, see Forrester 1996; Asper 2020.

28 The connections between objects and anchoring will be the topic of a future *Euhormos* volume.

of the common ground between the parties in the literary communication—although we always have to be aware that common ground management can be manipulative.²⁹ Genre is also important here. For instance, as we have been aware for at least 50 years, since Dover's seminal book,³⁰ ancient drama and ancient judicial speeches are rich sources for the study of popular morality. In each case, they are performed for a (very) large audience of Athenian citizens, and they are designed to win over that audience somehow. For the purpose of this volume, ancient comedy is especially important. The comic poet is always taking part in a contest, and tries to win first prize, which automatically entails the attempt to curry favour with the audience. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively by Xenia Makri and Alexandra Hardwick, analyse Aristophanic comedy for the social representations of groups and individuals underlying them. The case of tragedy is somewhat more complex, given that these plays are set in a mythical past and feature heroic characters that do not necessarily straightforwardly reflect fifth-century attitudes. Still, as becomes clear from Jacqueline Klooster's contribution (Chapter 8), audiences would seek to explain extraordinary tragic events in terms of contemporary religious views, while Evert van Emde Boas shows in Chapter 3 how later interpreters relegated (to the extent that was possible) the larger-than-life actions of tragic heroes and heroines to common patterns of social behaviour in an effort to make sense of them. Crowd reactions are also central in Chapter 13 by Thomas Martin on the deification of Demetrius.

As we confront our literary texts, we must at times actively read 'against the grain', navigating through the biases and perspectives of the original authors that shape their (re-)presentation of socio-psychological phenomena. Even in the case of a text like that of Tacitus' anecdote, which quite explicitly grapples with socio-psychological themes, it is essential to acknowledge Tacitus' complicity in perpetuating certain Roman attitudes towards 'barbarians' (note that Tacitus does not ascribe the use of the sobriquet *barbari* to the Romans in the theatre, but uses it in the narrator text). By recognizing Tacitus' alignment with the Roman public's complacent attitude and gently mocking tone, we can better comprehend his selection of details and why he overlooks alternative explanations for the Frisians' focus on the audience rather than the performance. The importance of this awareness of the positionality of the author will be further addressed in the next section.

29 Kroon 2021.

30 Dover 1974.

5 Giving Back: Contributing to the Modern Study of Social Psychology³¹

If classics has a lot to gain from recent insights in cognitive and social psychology, the reverse is also true. This is the case in three ways in particular. First, psychological accounts by classical authors seem to anticipate the importance of the concept of situatedness in modern theory. Secondly, detailed analyses by modern classicists of psychological phenomena in the ancient world can be an eye-opener both to the similarities between historical minds and our own, and the important differences owing to vastly different socio-cultural and historical contexts. A grasp of the similarities restores, as Vlad Glaveanu puts it (p. 259), ‘a lost sense of historical continuity’, while understanding situated difference is an important warning against abstraction from contexts, and essentializing psychological phenomena *per se*.³² The third point is that in studying ancient authors, it is usually relatively easy to become aware of their particular viewpoints and biases, their (sociocultural and historical) positionality. This is a helpful insight in raising awareness of our own positionality.

Let us elaborate on these three points, first of all the one about ancient psychological accounts: ancient discourses of cognition—or rather metacognition—provide accounts of how the Greeks themselves conceived of their own and other people’s psychological processes.³³ Such discourses routinely take account of socio-cultural and situational factors in assessing people’s thoughts and behaviours, that is their take on cognition is always situated and in a way 4E *avant la lettre*. This means that ancient conceptualisations of human mental functioning resonate in non-trivial ways with modern accounts of embodied cognition.³⁴ Indeed, as Habinek and Reyes have recently suggested, the real *explanandum* may be, not why notions of embodied cognition

31 See also the section, ‘Two-way Traffic: Can cognitive criticism give back to cognitive science?’, in Felix Budelmann’s recent introduction to cognitive literary criticism (Budelmann 2023: 16–18). He rightly emphasizes the humanities’ embrace of complexity and holistic description as a caution against scientific reductionism and compartmentalization; he further points out that humanities scholars ‘own’ part of the evidence for human cognition, to the extent that that evidence is ‘stored’ in Cave’s ‘cognitive archive’ (see section 1 above). We wholly endorse these points and in this section offer some additional considerations.

32 The context-sensitivity of certain psychological effects has even been advanced as an important factor in the so-called ‘replication crisis’ in social psychology. See Van Bavel et al. 2016.

33 See Corthals and Sluiter 2023: 210.

34 Cairns 2019: 18–19; Budelmann 2023: 3. The volume of Anderson et al. 2019 is largely devoted to bringing this out.

are currently being re-introduced, but how and why, in the European philosophical tradition, cognition ever came to be considered ‘as a singular, disembodied process’.³⁵ For example, the ancient commentators (‘scholiasts’) of Greek tragedy discussed by Evert van Emde Boas in Chapter 3 tend to explain characters’ behaviour with reference to the situation in which they find themselves (rather than, or at least in addition to, some inner, inalienable character traits). Michiel van Veldhuizen demonstrates in Chapter 9 how the application of abductive reasoning, a form of logical inference, as portrayed in an episode in Herodotus’ *Histories*, is determined by culturally engendered expectations about the way in which gods communicate with humans. As Huitink and Crone show in Chapter 14, while Xenophon displays a keen interest in the young Persian prince Cyrus’ mental developments during puberty, he considers these developments, not as a decontextualized, biologically or neuropsychologically driven phenomenon, but in light of how they prepare Cyrus for his future role as king of Persia.

The second point mentioned above suggests that classics can make a contribution to modern cognitive and social psychology by showing ways in which to integrate historical insights. It is reasonable to expect similarities between ancient and modern subjects based on the fact that the human biological make-up and ‘hardwired’ aspects of psychology have not materially evolved in the centuries separating us from classical antiquity. We share with the Greeks and Romans the same bodily functions, perceptual, cognitive, and emotional capacities and innate patterns of (social) behaviour. This biological continuity provides the foundation for attempts to study the ancient world with the help of modern psychological concepts.³⁶ We use those concepts as a search-light, illuminating previously unexamined aspects of ancient texts (see section 3.3 above). However, the social, cultural, and material environments of the ancient world were vastly different from our own, allowing us to investigate how fundamental human capacities manifest in different contexts in order to gain a richer understanding of the interplay between biology and culture, or universality and specificity, in human experience.³⁷ This emphasis on situatedness

35 Habinek and Reyes 2019: 226.

36 Cf. Van Duijn, this volume, p. 177: ‘Given the relatively stable biological basis underlying our perceptive and emotional systems, our capacity for memorizing, inference, etc., the cognitive framework comes with a degree of universality that warrants its applicability to people inside and outside texts (i.e., characters, authors, readers), as well as across different cultural communities and time frames.’

37 One chapter that in particular addresses this balance is Chapter 7, in which Douglas Cairns argues that, on the one hand, certain responses to narrative are fairly basic and universal, such as ‘shuddering’ (*phrikê*) at the report of horrific events, while on the other hand, a seemingly basic concept like *phrikê* is at the same time culturally specific by

prevents undue generalization of the results of modern experiments. The ancient Greco-Roman world is a particularly felicitous laboratory for carrying out this type of historical research: its sources have been closely studied for centuries and are very well disclosed by digital and analogue search tools as well as a sophisticated tradition of scholarly work. They have been studied through the lens of a wide variety of (ever new) theories. This makes it readily apparent whether a new ‘search-light’ will indeed yield new insights.

The third way in which the historical study of psychological phenomena can support the progress of modern psychology as well as classics, lies in the awareness of positionality. Identifying the biases and perspectives inherent in the historical sources and linking them to the positionality of the author can serve as an invitation for classicists and social psychologists alike to reflect on their own positionality. Taking into account historical source material offers social scientists studying contemporary society an opportunity to critically examine the tacit assumptions and cultural preconceptions which have informed their own concepts and theories. Psychological explanatory models are just as much part of the global archive of the ‘ways in which human beings think, how they imagine themselves and their world’ as world literature, and this implies nothing derogatory about modern science.³⁸ This is true for modern psychology as well as for historical modes of explaining human behaviour (itself a universal human interest). There is also a distinct advantage to the use of modern psychological insights in a historical context: historical human agents mostly will not have access to modern theoretical concepts, and hence, their behaviour is not informed by them, whereas the self-understanding of contemporary subjects is sometimes premised on such concepts (the popular use of ‘repression’, ‘psychological trauma’, ‘passive aggression’, etc., comes to mind).³⁹

6 The Social Psychology of the Ancient World

As briefly mentioned in section 1 above, the interdisciplinary dialogue which we seek to foster in this volume is reflected in its format. The volume consists of five Parts, each organized around a central concept or domain in social psychology:

virtue of its typical association with religious experiences like initiation and epiphany. See also Cairns 2013.

38 To cite Terence Cave again (see section 1 above). See Corthals and Sluiter 2023, for instance, for a comparison based on this insight between a scenario in a Greek tragedy and the infamous Milgram experiments.

39 This phenomenon has been recognized for at least 50 years (see Gergen 1973: 313 ‘if a society is psychologically informed, theories about which it is informed become difficult to test in an uncontaminated way’).

selfhood (Part 1); social representation (Part 2); narrative meaning-making (Part 3); imagination, creativity, and innovation (Part 4); and the accommodation of new concepts (Part 5). Each Part begins with an essay by a member of our team of social scientists that introduces the social-psychological contexts relevant to the classical case studies that follow, outlining major concepts and methodologies within the respective domain and reflecting on how the ancient case studies presented by a classicist challenge or enrich these approaches. These introductory essays are printed on grey paper to distinguish them clearly. This present section serves a complementary role, considering each Part as a collaborative whole by classicists and social scientists, and now introducing the case studies for a wider audience and contextualizing them in the field of classical studies. While some overlap between the present chapter overview on the one hand and the individual Part introductions on the other is inevitable, they are designed to offer different angles on the same interdisciplinary discussions.

In Part 1, 'Character and Individual', an introduction by Sandra Jovchelovitch is followed by two chapters on Greek tragedy by Sheila Murnaghan and Evert van Emde Boas. Together, the three contributions demonstrate at once how cross-fertilization between social psychology and classics can help further fundamental debates in both fields. In her introduction Sandra Jovchelovitch explains that within social psychology the study of character and selfhood has been transitioning towards a new perspective. Instead of viewing human behaviour as mostly driven by the operations of a decontextualized and disembodied mind, the emerging paradigm emphasizes the critical influence of social context in shaping individual actions and identities. 'Individuation and socialization go hand in hand in human developmental history' (p. 38). For Jovchelovitch, the study of Greek tragedy can open our eyes to the dangers of isolating the individual from its surroundings, as it represents characters acting in richly contextualized settings, as imagined by playwrights and interpreted by audiences on the basis of folk psychologies potentially very different from our own.

The chapters by Murnaghan and Van Emde Boas integrate recent social psychological theory from the start, but they also receive their impetus from a long-standing debate in classics itself, about the alleged lack of psychological 'depth' in the characterization of tragic heroes and heroines (Shakespeare's supposedly round characters are usually the implicit contrast). To them, the recent emphasis in psychology on the situatedness of human behaviour suggests that classicists should adopt a different approach to characterization than they have often done: there is no need to look for some individual and partly mysterious 'core' that will 'explain' an Antigone or a Medea. In Chapter 2,

Murnaghan reconsiders the changing self-explanations of King Oedipus and Antigone in Sophocles' eponymous plays in the light of modern psychological models that do not assume such a coherent 'core'. Instead, she suggests that Sophocles paints a convincing picture of human action and decision-making that depends on a constant dialogue between individual and social aspects of selfhood (what Jovchelovitch has termed 'the dialogicality of the self' in her introduction). In Chapter 3, Van Emde Boas takes us to the world of ancient commentaries (or *scholia*) on Greek tragedy and the kinds of social attribution in which they engage. While *scholia* use the same types of explanations for characters' behaviour as we see in modern folk-psychological models, Van Emde Boas suggests that there is a salient difference in the type of explanation that is preferred: ancient commentators were more prone to explaining behaviour in terms of short-term mental states of characters in particular situations than in terms of longer-term dispositions. As Jovchelovitch highlights in her introduction, a strict separation between the individual and the social is to misunderstand their entanglement. While such entanglement can also be discerned in ancient reflections on personhood, the way in which this is articulated is a function of the perspective of the historical mind.

Part 2 'Social Representation in Practice' is introduced by Gordon Sammut, who offers an account of social representations, an important body of theory within social psychology. Social representations are cognitive structures that play a fundamental role in shaping how individuals comprehend the world around them and engage with it. One example which Sammut gives concerns the social representation of gender roles, which influences how individuals perceive and enact gendered behaviours and expectations within society. Social representations often pass for 'common sense' and are not widely questioned. However, they are not fixed and permanent structures, but are established through social interaction, can evolve over time, and adapt to changing circumstances and realities. Like Jovchelovitch in her introduction to Part 1, Sammut therefore underscores the notion that human understanding and cognition are deeply influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which individuals are situated. Sammut also discusses how social representations are formed and processed in social cognition, drawing on the concept of dual-process models. This framework suggests that social representations can be utilized in both automatic and controlled cognitive processes. Automatic processes rely on readily available social representations, shaping initial judgments and reactions. Controlled processes involve a more deliberate analysis, potentially revising these initial interpretations.

The case studies of this Part move from the world of Greek tragedy to that of comedy (Aristophanes) and satire. As Sammut emphasizes, Aristophanic

comedy is suitable for studying social representations in action, because it exposes and exaggerates shared understandings. By portraying characters in absurd situations or with outlandish traits, Aristophanes does not simply mirror 'common sense'. Instead, he challenges and lays bare the underlying assumptions and biases embedded in these social representations. This comedic exaggeration makes the audience conscious of these often-unquestioned ideas, prompting them to either laugh along with the absurdity or re-evaluate their own beliefs. Through laughter and satire, Aristophanes provides a platform for examining the social representations that shape Athenian society.

Central to Xenia Makri's discussion of Aristophanes' *Birds* in Chapter 4 are the questions of how shared social identities are shaped and social communities are created. The play centres around two Athenians who are fed up with their own city and persuade the birds to help them found a new, fantastical city in the sky. Using Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory as 'search-lights' (see section 1.4 above), Makri shows how the Athenians are able to gain control of the new city of birds by cleverly exploiting and manipulating their group identity. At the same time, Aristophanes invites Athenians to reimagine their own social order. Alexandra Hardwick's reading of Aristophanes' *Assembly-Women* in Chapter 5 also places significant emphasis on the dynamics within groups. In particular, she highlights how the protagonist, Praxagora, savvily uses different means of persuasion when dealing with a group of assembled women than when confronting her husband Blepyrus, playing to the impulsive emotions of the former and using more deliberative reasoning with the latter. In this way, *Assembly-Women* can be seen as a dramatization of the dual-process models highlighted by Sammut in his introduction, and as a commentary on differences in decision-making processes in groups and between individuals. In Chapter 6, finally, Ralph Rosen takes up the question of group behaviour by considering the thorny notion of 'derisive laughter', as elicited by satirical authors like Aristophanes and Horace when they single out specific people for mockery and scorn. Against prevailing assumptions that the laughter of derision has mostly negative psychological and societal effects, Rosen enlists the voices of ancient satirists to make a case for its prosocial character. In the process, he demonstrates how complex literary texts can be used to challenge the received distinction in scientific laughter research between spontaneous, joyful ('Duchenne') laughter and intellectual, cerebral ('non-Duchenne') laughter.

In Part 3, 'Narrative Meaning-Making', we shift our attention from social representations to another fundamental mechanism by which human beings make sense of the world, namely narrative. The introduction, written by cognitivist literary scholar Max van Duijn, explores narrative as both a psychological

and communicative phenomenon. Scholars have long pondered how narrative meaning emerges from stories, seeking to understand the cognitive processes involved in story comprehension and interpretation. Recent cognitively inflected work in narrative theory highlights how stories have the power to transport individuals into imagined worlds, eliciting mental simulations and emotional responses. At the same time, stories also serve as a means of conveying messages, values, and cultural norms to audiences. Van Duijn's introduction puts the relation between universal and socio-culturally situated aspects of story-telling centre stage. Some of the basic perceptual, emotional, and inferential capacities that underpin our engagement with narrative have remained more or less constant, but stories themselves, as well as the specific cultural values and messages they encode, are shaped by ever-evolving social, historical, and ideological contexts of production and reception.

Each of the chapters in Part 3 engages this issue. In Chapter 7, Douglas Cairns addresses a universal question with the help of ancient source material: what is the relationship between the emotions of characters and those of audiences in narrative? Cairns argues that recent attempts to cast that relationship in terms of a simple 'mirroring system'—perceived or imagined bodily expressions of emotions trigger a contagion response that makes audiences experience the same emotions as characters—are reductive and excise layers of complexity. Through a variety of examples he demonstrates that, by contrast, ancient Greek literary theorising and literary practice never assumed that audiences simply replicated the emotions of characters. While spontaneous mimicry may play a role, this is but the beginning of a more complex, layered response that depends on the audience's background knowledge and cultural frames of reference. In Chapter 8, Jacqueline Klooster turns to Euripides' *Ion*, a play that is notorious for the many 'coincidences' on which the plot turns. Klooster enlists a number of recent psychological accounts of how people react to coincidences, such as Tversky and Kahneman's 'conjunction fallacy', to explain how coincidence plots manage to command an audience's attention instead of being dismissed as a 'cheap trick'. However, in the process Klooster also poses the question what 'counts as' a coincidence in different communities: some unexpected occurrences in the *Ion* may seem 'simply' coincidental to modern audiences, but may have been tinged with divine providence for ancient ones. Chapter 9, by Michiel van Veldhuizen, moves in a similar direction. Van Veldhuizen analyses the episode from Herodotus' *Histories* (1.65–69), in which the Spartan Lichas, prompted by an oracle, searches and then finds the bones of the hero Orestes. On the one hand, he shows that mechanisms described in modern semiotic theory can be used to analyse ancient modes of reasoning (in the present case especially abductive reasoning). On the other

hand, he makes clear that the concepts with which signs are associated or the cultural background assumptions on the basis of which they are interpreted are by no means universal.

Vlad Glaveanu introduces Part 4, 'Imagination, Creativity, and Innovation', which otherwise comprises two further chapters on Greek tragedy, by Anne-Sophie Noel and Karen Bassi. The topic of this Part was chosen for its centrality to both the Anchoring Innovation research agenda and recent psychological theorising. Glaveanu starts by dispelling the idea that creativity and innovation are specifically modern notions, valued only in contemporary societies. If the 'cognitive archive' (see section 1 above for this concept) of world literature and other artifacts shows one thing, it is that imagination and creativity have always been at the heart of what it means to be human. Glaveanu suggests that the Greek plays which are studied in this Part's case studies and which form such a vibrant part of the 'cognitive archive' may help to recover a lost sense of historical continuity in our thinking about creativity and innovation. This is especially true because by portraying characters in action, they demonstrate how creativity does not merely depend on decontextualized mental processes, but on the interplay of pretense, play, imagination, and engagement with the material world. Such insights into the historical roots of creativity and innovation offer valuable perspectives for contemporary discussions and practices in these domains.

In Chapter 10, Noel explores the function of make-believe play and counterfactual imagination in Euripides' tragedies *Heracles* and *Ion*, especially in the protagonists' handling of objects (supplementing Klooster's analysis of the latter play's plot in Chapter 8 with a consideration of the role of props). Using Vygotsky's approach to play and Moreno's theory of psychodrama as 'search-lights', Noel makes the case that scenes in the plays under discussion, in which characters imagine alternative possibilities that will not materialize and act out roles which they will not in the end grow into, are far from superfluous, but crucially contribute to Heracles' and Ion's identity formation and dynamic and creative construction of the self. Objects (props) play a significant role in sparking imagination and guiding the creative process. In Chapter 11, Bassi confronts the question whether death can form an impetus for creativity through a close-reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. While death and creativity may seem at odds, Bassi shows how this play exemplifies the fact that awareness of one's mortality is a precondition for imagining a future in which other people will live.

Part 5, 'Accommodating New Concepts', continues the theme of 'the new'. Paula Castro's introductory essay highlights the importance of considering different levels of analysis in social-psychological research on innovation, ranging

from individual processes via group and inter-group processes to broader societal and socio-cultural processes. Castro emphasizes the need to integrate insights from research into these various levels of analysis to comprehensively understand how new concepts are accommodated and integrated into existing social structures. In particular, she advocates a socio-psychological perspective that recognizes the dynamic *interplay* between individual cognition, social interactions, and cultural contexts in shaping processes of meaning construction. In Castro's view, each of the case studies that follow bring out the need to focus on that interplay, providing what she calls a 'processual understanding' of complex anchoring mechanisms in progress; she therefore sees a clear place in socio-psychological research for the sort of 'thick' narrative arguments that scholars in the humanities can provide.

In Chapter 12, David Konstan poses the surprising question 'how the ancient world learned to sin'. He argues that new Christian values were anchored in a traditional Greek vocabulary. His discussion oscillates between tracing semantic shifts in key terms like *hamartia* and analysing the socio-cultural contexts in which these changes occurred. Through this approach, Konstan illustrates how meanings evolve within linguistic frameworks shaped by societal norms and practices, thereby demonstrating the mutual constitution of culture and individual subjectivities. In Chapter 13, Thomas Martin examines a radical innovation: the collective decision in ancient Athens to deify a military commander, Demetrius of Phaleron. Martin explores the mechanisms of cognitive dissonance reduction involved in this decision-making process. As Castro makes clear in her introduction, Martin's discussion shows that, although cognitive dissonance reduction is usually regarded as emerging from an individual desire for consistency, it is in fact better understood as a phenomenon at the intersection of individual mental processes and societal debates over contested meanings. The book ends fittingly, we hope, with a collaboration between a classicist and social psychologist. In Chapter 14, Luuk Huitink and Eveline Crone tackle the start of Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, which provides us with perhaps the most elaborate portrayal of an adolescent which Greek antiquity has left us. Their contribution is an exercise in 'looking both ways': on the one hand, they demonstrate that recent neuropsychological research into adolescent behaviour can shed light on hitherto badly understood parts of Xenophon's text; on the other hand, they emphasize the situatedness of Xenophon's treatment of Cyrus' adolescence, which is constrained both by general Greek background assumptions and by Xenophon's aim of painting a portrait of Cyrus as an 'ideal' leader and future king.

Together, the chapters in this volume illustrate three important principles in 'doing the social psychology of the ancient world'. First, by applying modern

concepts from social and cognitive psychology, it becomes possible to bring into focus and illuminate aspects of the ancient world easily overlooked without them. This is the search-light function of contemporary ideas. Secondly, in order to do full justice to the psychological aspects of the ancient world, it is imperative to study them in the full complexity of their socio-cultural and historical contexts: cognition is situated. Thirdly and finally, both ancient and modern perspectives on psychological phenomena should take full account of the biases, assumptions, and presupposition of the analyst: good interpreters will critically assess the influence of their positionality.

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PART 1

*The Psychology of Selfhood: Character
and Individual*



Introduction to Part 1: the Psychology of Selfhood Now and Then

Sandra Jovchelovitch

1 Introduction

What would Antigone—a young woman determined to honour family and gods—make of our current emphasis on the self and the many platforms we have today for curating its presentation? Would she be on Instagram or any other social media platform? And what about her father, Oedipus, or Medea, another such extraordinary woman? Could they possibly be themselves when confronted with the digital choruses that populate the public sphere of the early 21st century? Our age has come to be seen as the age of the excessive self, trapped in the ‘tyranny of visibility’ (Schroer 2014), diligently cultivating its own exposition, skilfully presenting itself if not with authenticity, certainly with mediatic competence. Could this make any sense for selves that lived long ago?

The study of the classics opens our eyes to the long-standing psychological problem of studying human behaviour in time and underscores the historical character of all social and psychological phenomena (Glaveanu and Yamamoto 2012; Jovchelovitch 2012). The ancients and their plays challenge the idea of de-contextualized minds and behaviours and urge us to consider the lines of continuity and discontinuity that connect the lives of predecessors to the lives of our contemporaries (see the Introduction to Part 2 by Gordon Sammut, this volume). Would it be possible for Antigone, Oedipus, or Medea to understand us? And how can we understand them, what they did, what they wanted, who they were? How do we treat the evidence left for us in voices of the past, received in the form of stories and commentary? What lenses are required to understand their understandings and compare those understandings to our own?

In the two chapters that follow, Sheila Murnaghan and Evert van Emde Boas address these fundamental questions as they explore perennial aspects of the human self, including what makes its individuality, agency and relation to context. There is much to learn from these chapters, from the detailed in-depth analysis of ancient texts to the manner in which they use psychology to respond to the modern charge levelled at Greek tragedy for its alleged failure to portray character with psychological depth. They offer us a rich discussion

of how selves are relationally constructed and talked about as they compellingly demonstrate that tragedy remains a central medium for sense-making, a powerful reservoir of folk psychologies, a carrier of the deep psychological common sense against which and within which we come to understand our individual and collective lives.

'Taming the Extraordinary: Shifting motives and the psychology of tragic actors' (Chapter 2) examines the ways in which Antigone and Oedipus relate to the extreme actions they are famous for, unpacking, against the modern critique of diminished characterization, the power of tragedy to make visible the contradictory, ever-changing and non-linear relationship the self sustains with itself over the life course. It shows that these evolving selves are as much creative agents as they are cultural resources, which travel through the centuries in the folk psychologies contained in stories. 'Individuals or Types: Ancient criticism and modern psychology on characterization in Greek tragedy' (Chapter 3) considers the types of social attribution used by scholiasts to explain the behaviour of literary characters. It draws on the folk psychology at work in these attributions to challenge the idea that Greek tragedy is focused on the typification of characters rather than on their individuality. In addition to the interest related to scholia as a data source, it raises the question of what constitutes individuality and how it stands in relation to types. As meta-perspectives expressing the world around the stage, scholia give us an inroad into ways of thinking that guided the reception of ancient plays at a time not too distant from the period they were enacted. Both chapters offer a reflection on the sources of individuality and how to work through the perennial tension between the internal world of the self and its external determination—whether by gods, cultural traditions, social categorization or typification.

I find the analysis presented by these chapters highly compelling and in what follows I will explore aspects that chime with current research on the dialogicality of the self and its socio-cultural development and realization. This will hopefully add a psychological perspective to the challenge the chapters present to the problem of individuality, its cultural sources, and what constitutes its 'depth'. Interestingly for us psychologists, these classical studies offer a robust body of evidence for understanding the historical mind, avenues for rethinking the individualization of psychological science, and not least resources to confront internal fractures within the walls of psychology itself, which are far from being resolved and where Cartesian dualist assumptions continue to predominate (Marková 2016; Farr 1991; Valsiner 2009).

2 The Dialogicality of Selfhood: the Individual and the Social, Again

Humans are highly individualized as well as highly social organisms. This apparent paradox is inscribed in our biology and central to human psychology (Tomasello et al. 2005). We are unique in that in the course of our evolutionary history, a key adaptation emerged, enabling a reflexive consciousness to understand itself as an individual agent (Humphrey 2007). Right at the centre of this agentic consciousness, regulating the individual organism's experience of itself and the environment is the private self (Harré 1998), a dual psychological structure comprising the I and the Me (Mead 1934). A central feature of the human private self is the evolution of an internal dialogicality, that is, a developed ability to creatively engage in a conversation with itself. Through perspective-taking, a major socio-cognitive skill established in early childhood, humans are able to engage in mindreading, that is, they place themselves in the position of another and infer what they think and the reasons that guide their actions (cf. the Introduction to Part 3 by Max van Duijn, this volume). Importantly, understanding the perspective of others enables the self to understand that it holds a perspective of its own, and to reflexively put itself forward as an object for consideration (Gillespie 2006, 2012).

Multiplicity of perspective—self, immediate other, we—is thus integral to the agentic awareness of the human self, internally lived as the constant dialogue between the I and the Me in relation to a given context. The internal dialogicality of the self has been captured by all central psychological theories of the modern age (Zitoun et al. 2007; Farr 1996) and in many respects resembles the insights of ancient tragedy where we are actors but not and never fully authors of our lives. Human behaviour is such that the meaning and outcome of a human act is to be found not only in the behaviour of the actant but also in the responses it elicits from others (Mead 1982). The human self, even at its most lonely, is never alone and its predicament is that its individual psychology is per necessity a social psychology as well.

This is evident in Murnaghan's detailed discussion of the changing motives and understandings that guide Oedipus and Antigone as they try to explain and make sense of their extraordinary acts. Antigone's apparent inconsistency is worked through as she encounters Ismene's opposition to what she wants to do, Creon's decree forbidding her to act as she wants and finally her impending death, the ultimate penalty for her determination to act. Her beliefs and actions change as a function of her interaction with others and the close prospect of dying; she is guided by these externalities as she presents herself

to us in her variety, contradictions, grief. And yet, through all of this, she is entirely consistent and her opting for death is a mark of her utter uniqueness, a choice that reveals her determination and ability to remain true to herself and no one else. Oedipus has more time, as Murnaghan perceptively notes, and over the course of two plays, just as in the course of a life, Oedipus works through a narrative of his deeds, from which he cannot escape but which he can recast as he finds new ways and resources to explain anew what he did. Developmental time is a precious psychological asset (Gopnik, Frankenhuis, and Tomasello 2020) and he can count on the experience of old age to renew his account: he was guided by the gods and unaware of the full scale of what he was doing, he did not know the identity of his victims, he acted in self-defence and in marrying Jocasta simply accepted a gift. Here is a man who can now see himself from a distance and reconsider the question of agency through a more encompassing and forgiving view of what shaped his behaviour. We can see how Oedipus' change is driven both by his position in the life course and his renewed interpretation of what the worlds of humans and gods have given him. Legal and religious explanations are the available socio-cultural tools of his context, which scaffold him and which he uses effectively to enable some form of reconciliation between the I and the Me, between himself and his extraordinary deeds.

Rather than lack of coherence, Oedipus and Antigone showcase the evolved plasticity and dialogicality of human selves (Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon 1992; Howarth 2002). The evolving reasons of tragic characters express the polyphony of the dialogical self (Renedo 2010), whose internal drama unfolds as it negotiates both its encounters with others' voices and the changes imposed by the life course and the embodiment of cognition (Tsakiris 2017). They change themselves as they change their representation of the situation and the situation itself changes. Whereas the script of the play may be conceived as a proxy for invariance, i.e., pre-determined by external forces, the selves involved in enacting it establish a reflexive and creative relationship with it (see the Introduction to Part 4 by Vlad Glaveanu, this volume). And as they go on speaking, acting, and letting us know why this is the case, Oedipus and Antigone become a source of knowledge for us. Through their complexity, multiple contradictions, extreme behaviours, and interactions, ancient characters make themselves instructive and paradigmatic selves. Their acting consolidates a cultural template that supports sense-making and tames the extraordinary, or in the language of social psychology, makes the unfamiliar familiar (Moscovici and Duveen 2000). Objectified in story-telling and performance, they become social representations of paradigmatic selves that travel in history and public spheres as anchors for other selves. A central social and

psychological function of all social cognition, the taming of the extraordinary renders visible the formidable role of tragedy as a cultural resource for guiding the self-understanding and behaviour of ordinary selves throughout the ages. This is a central point in Murnaghan's illuminating analysis.

Van Emde Boas' investigation of scholia takes us a step further into the complex internal structure of internal and external voices at play in the dialogical self. For the social psychologist, his analysis evinces the role of external social representations and social attributions in framing selfhood as a societal mandate. We have in scholia a dual meta-perspective on what takes place on stage: scholiasts commented on characters, their actions and motives, and at the same time on how well plays re-present typical human behaviour. This dual aspect of reception has not entirely gone away, as at least in psychology we still debate the capabilities of literary texts as data sources for human behaviour (Contarello 2002; see also the Introduction to Part 3 by Max van Duijn, this volume). Van Emde Boas's approach is to pay less attention to the content and more to the thinking strategies at work in the scholia, in particular social attribution processes. His analysis points to the multiple attributional strategies present in the scholia, with stereotyping of characters being only one and not even the most prevalent.

Greek commentators helped audiences to understand what was happening on stage drawing on attributions that primarily linked characters to situations, but also to their individual dispositions and to their group membership (including stereotyping, or the particular representations that circulate about groups). If we approach this corpus as a sample of societal thinking, we can see that everyday attributions deployed at the period draw on a range of different explanations and modalities of thinking for establishing the determinants of human behaviour. Van Emde Boas's compelling use of Malle's theory of attribution enables us to discard the overly sharp opposition between the dispositional and the situational, and even the alleged stability of dispositions as personality traits. It shows both the co-existence of types in the corpus as well as a combined use of causal explanation and a history of reasons in thinking, which only make sense in relation to a given socio-historical context and its underlying folk-conceptual framework.

Now, a central problem in attribution (and all Theory of Mind) is that however much we specify the cognitive processes at work, we cannot make attributions outside the social conventions and cultural mandates that influence the perception, experience, and judgement of one's own and other people's actions, as well as the definition of the situation (Moscovici and Duveen 2000). No attribution makes sense without a social representational framework that establishes what is intelligible and acceptable in a given context and time.

Whatever we define as dispositional or situational is in itself part of a wider framework within which these explanations make sense. Much of social psychology has been able to review Heider's original work on attribution and criticize the cultural assumptions that created not only an exaggerated distinction between dispositional and situational attribution, but also a dichotomy between the perspective of actors and the perspective of observers (Farr and Anderson 1983; Hewstone 1983). The perspectives of actors and observers diverge as all individual perspectives to some extent do. But importantly, they are reconciled by the common ground of culture (Goffman 1958) and by the psychological imperative of inter-subjective communication between actor and observer. Experimental work (Miller 1984) has corroborated these re-conceptualizations showing that cultural conceptions of what is an individual agent determine how social actors use both situational and dispositional attributions. This use is in itself managed to sustain a narrative order that must be intelligible to all participants. Thus, when current critiques emphasize personal traits and underplay situations in characterization, we could suggest that they are guilty of committing this 'fundamental attribution error' (Jones and Harris 1967) or alternatively that such critiques are reinforcing a familiar narrative order about characterization as mainly dispositional.

Both chapters resonate with psychological theories of the dialogical mind linking the changing identities of dialogical selves to the social representations and attributions of immediate others and the wider socio-cultural environment. Ancient characters take us through their individual thinking in context, revealing how the I who speaks negotiates situations and representational mandates about their own extreme forms of behaviour. They disclose themselves as complex agents trying to act and understand themselves and their deeds amidst changing situations, which they do not fully control but which are nonetheless integral to who they are and why they act. Just as with us today, Oedipus, Antigone, and Medea are dialogical selves in context, experiencing and exposed to states of cognitive polyphasia, in which individuals and communities draw on different forms of explanation and reasoning and different registers of knowing to make sense of situations and communicate with the groups and cultural niches to which they belong (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez 2015). If anything, they show that amongst the many reasons why ancient texts speak to us today, is their ability to circumvent the view of an unchanging, internally homogeneous and bounded rational individual, who is at best one amongst many and at worst an idealized but never realized type constructed by the dualism and individualism that came to dominate our understanding of individual psychology in the modern era (Farr 1996). This consideration takes me to the second point I would like to discuss related to

the socio-cultural realization of the self and the dangers implicit in not fully appreciating its variation in time and context.

3 The Development of Selfhood: the Socio-cultural Self

Multiplicity of perspectives within the private self is not given at birth but develops through a long ontogeny through which children enter culture (Tomasello 2019); full-term human infants are helpless and premature at birth and depend on the attention of caregivers for survival and healthy post-uterine development. It is a risky adaptation compensated for by the fact that neonates are neurologically hardwired to share and align emotions with others from birth (Iacoboni 2011); babies are equipped biologically for relating to caregivers and these in turn have complementary natural propensities that motivate the care they give to infants (Keller and Greenfield 2000), even if at times in troubling ways (for an illuminating experimental study on the consequences of rejection for human infants, see Tronick 1989). It takes attachment between people, but also time and effort to transform the biological potential carried by human infants into an individual self (Ainsworth 1967), which may also explain why humans are cooperative breeders and rely on alloparenting to take care of their children (Hrdy 2009). As the saying goes, ‘it takes a village’ to transform a baby into a person, but this social effort pays off: the most important human socio-cognitive achievements such as language, mathematics, a sense of self, ethics, morality, the acquisition of social representations and cultural traditions are all the outcome of children’s cooperative self-other interactions in a given cultural context (Tomasello 2019a).

The socio-cultural genesis of all higher forms of behaviour is a robust finding first established by Vygotsky in the early decades of the 20th century and to this day continuously corroborated by experimental evidence. Whatever is internal to the individual was social and external at some point. A generic law of human psychological development postulates that ‘all higher mental functions make their appearance in the course of child development twice: first, in collective activity, social activity, i.e. as interpsychic functions, second in individual activity, as internal properties of the child’s thinking, i.e. as intrapsychic functions’ (Vygotsky 1934: 31, emphasis in original). Thus, what is internal to the individual was by necessity an (external, social) relation between people before becoming an individual function within people (Vygotsky 1978). Infants internalize cultural patterns through primary relationships with care-givers and this is realized repeatedly through the key tasks of individuation and socialization: we become agents by recognizing the agency of others and

come to understand ourselves through the understanding of other selves with whom we must interact and communally live in the wider societal context (Kagıtçıbaşı 1996). Through internalizing the perspective of this generalized Other (Mead 1934), individuals grow into a community of fellow humans, create links between their personal trajectories and the community to which they also belong and apprehend the shared understandings that express the identity, culture and ways of life of the group (Keller 2017). Individual mental activity is thus dependent for its full development and expression on being linked to a specific cultural toolkit (Bruner 2001). We establish our autonomy just as we realize the ways in which the cultural norms and social representations of our cultural environment come to define who we are, shaping our identity and general outlook.

Different historical periods and societies present different modalities of selfhood, which are dependent on the different templates social worlds present to individuals as they internalize culture in order to become themselves. Our understandings of our own mind and the minds of others is entangled with societal assumptions and shaped by the culture and historical context that define what is an individual agent and how it should grow up and behave (Jovchelovitch 2019). This means that while the dialogical structure of the self is a universal individual phenomenon, its socio-cultural realization is not. The realization of character and its internal individual psychology is always played out in the theatre of a social life that carries its own 'chorus' of social representations, i.e., the values, ideas and practices of a cultural community (Moscovici 2000). These social representations provide the values, stories, ideas and practices that frame the self over time and situate its qualia in a given context. They are the tools that mediate the relations between the I and the Me and build the range and reach of the self's internal world, making that which it feels, senses, perceives, does, thinks, says, remembers and forgets, a matter of culture. Social representations are anchors for the self and establish the templates for selfhood that circulate in any given society (Oyserman and Markus 1998).

In this sense, the requirement for psychological depth, defined as 'inner lives', originality against a script, and bounded individuality, is culturally located and shaped by social representations of selfhood, rather than an essential state of being that pertains to the human self. We know that this is not a universal, but a culturally situated folk psychology, which presents in specific niches and in fact is not even found in the majority of the human world (Kagıtçıbaşı 2012). It is not a universal for thinking and enacting the self but a specific modality of selfhood that belongs to a well-defined era and its folk psychology. Definitions of a human agent comprising inwardness, bounded and rational individuality, freedom, and being embedded in nature became predominant only at the

beginning of the modern era (Taylor 1989) and not accidentally provided the basis for the scientific psychology that followed (Farr 1991; Cole 1996). Born out of the Cartesian separation between mind and body and mind and context, these individualistic conceptions intermeshed with wider social and economic transformations to produce the template of the independent self, whose inner life and experience became psychology's central unit of analysis (Farr 1996). However influential this view has been (Arnett 2008), it remains the case that the individualized character is but one type, and should be seen as nothing but one, amongst the many other templates for self-realization that are part of the human spectrum.

Now, could antiquity produce an inner life of the self that only emerged as psychological experience at the beginning of the modern era? Cultural psychologists would most likely say no because the cultural mandates that shaped the representations of selfhood we live by in the Western modern era were not available to the ancients, just as they continue to be non-hegemonic to the Tikuna of the Amazon (Lima 1998), for young girls wearing the hijab in Scotland, growing up in the favelas of Brazil (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013; Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez 2013), or for Muslim women engaging in disciplines of prayer in contemporary Egypt (Mahmood 2001). We may consider the type of characterization we see in the novel—I can think of Henry James and the stream of consciousness his brother William helped us to understand—as part and parcel of selfhood in the modern era, but this should not be taken for granted as a universal that presents through the ages and across cultures (but see Verheij 2014 for a fascinating discussion of this problem from the perspective of classicists).

Psychologists have researched the different socio-cultural templates that offer anchors to the self-concept and demonstrated that there are different forms of being an individual and different pathways for expressing the depth of our inner lives (Greenfield 2009). Individualism and collectivism have been described as prototypical social representations of the self (Markus and Kitayama 1991), ideal types corresponding to independent and autonomous versus inter-dependent and relational forms of selfhood (Kagitçibaşı 2005). This work has shown that some human cultures tend to foster an independent and autonomous self-construal since they are focused on individual autonomy, uniqueness and a strong emphasis on the inner core of the self. Its dominant discourses and everyday social representations build a folk psychology where identity is mainly defined by personal characteristics and individual choice and accomplishments are reinforced and taken for granted. Other human cultures on the contrary, foster inter-dependent and relational forms of selfhood and define identity through the characteristics of the group to which

one belongs. The emphasis is on the social context and its mandates, prioritizing silence and modesty over self-expression. In such contexts, excessive distinction between individual and type fail to hold and even to be intelligible (Markus and Kitayama 2010).

These prototypical modalities are ideal types and rarely present in pure form; more recent investigations point precisely to the polyphasia in self and attribution suggested by the analyses by Murnaghan and Van Emde Boas, in which dialogical selves combine elements of different cultures and creatively use forms of independence and inter-dependency, autonomy and relatedness throughout the life course. The dialogicality of mind enables us to understand this plasticity with which human selves adopt, discard, negotiate and reconstruct their relationship to themselves, their own actions and the social representations of selfhood offered by the templates of their socio-cultural world. Importantly, there is agency and individuality in the rule-governed behaviour of collectivistic selves. For many individual selves, cultural social prescriptions create the stage on which the depth and inner life of the self is enacted, the practices through which the self can both be itself and express itself. Rule-governed behaviour still requires the perspective of a first person that decides to act and this implies both choice and expression of individuality. The view that social prescriptions and ritualistic behaviour are a constraint on the self is only possible under the assumption that the agency of the self is entirely independent from others engaging in the same behaviour and the cultural context that prescribes it.

4 Conclusion

In the above I have emphasized the dialogicality of selfhood and its socio-cultural realization as key psychological aspects of the contributions by Murnaghan and Van Emde Boas. Right from birth human development shows that our human nature makes us inter-dependent on collective forms of acting and thinking. Humans' long ontogeny evinces the social foundations of our biological development and opens the species to pedagogy and cultural transmission, which in turn make us social and historical beings. Individuation and socialization go hand in hand in human developmental history: they are the two sides of the same process of development and challenge the strict separation between what is individual and what is social in the constitution of personhood. Rather, we internalize culture and its social representations, drawing on its materials as resources for thinking and being. I have also emphasized that any requirement for inwardness and depth must be seen through the

perspective of the historical mind and the specific manner in which modern psychology and the modern era define and conceptualize selfhood.

Interestingly enough, the global emergence of social media has made connections ubiquitous and reset the modern requirement for 'depth' and 'inner life'. A new form of collectivism has entangled online self-characterization with celebrity culture and the gaze of others, making selves ever more dependent on the empty act of 'watching others watching me' (Ibrahim 2017). The internal life of the self becomes dependent on strangers but at the same time a-relational and narcissistic (amongst other forms of vulnerability). Indeed, many of our current frameworks for selfhood are focused on the pressures coming from this external gaze, leaving much to ask about what is happening to the idea of 'inner life' and individual freedom. Today, algorithms, ideologies of success and failure, perfectionism and relentless pressure to achieve (Curran and Hill 2019) are insidious and widespread so that these social representations of who we should be, end up shaping in fact who we are. In this context, it is not accidental that mental distress in the form of anxiety and depression are major contributors to the overall global burden of disease (GBD 2017 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators 2018).

To go back to the beginning, what would the ancients say of this type of psychology? Well, ancient tragic characters are involved in parricide, incest, filicide, defiance of the city's law and self-sacrifice for what they believe to be right. Much of their worlds are out of joint and they suffer, they mourn, they go against the grain, they live with actions that are difficult to bear. With Antigone and Medea, we are initiators of our actions, but as Oedipus will discover we also suffer what we do. However, in everything these characters do and experience there is also a psychology of hope that keeps teaching us of the potentials of human action, of its being infinitely open and fundamentally linked to beginnings (Arendt 1958), even if it never quite escapes from the social and cultural ground in which, for better or for worse, we must all live. The dialogicality of ancient selves gives us anchors to look ourselves in the eye and make sense of that which is both self and other, individual and social in ourselves and our human world. No wonder they do not go away and their influence on us will continue.

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Taming the Extraordinary: Shifting Motives and the Psychology of Tragic Actors

Sheila Murnaghan

1 Introduction

The study of classical Athenian tragedy is an ideal proving ground for new ways of doing the psychology of the ancient world. Tragedy is one of the most enduring products of ancient culture, with a proven capacity to speak to modern audiences, realized both in reperformance and in reception. The original plays are repeatedly restaged in contemporary theatrical settings and their plots are retold over and over again in multiple dramatic and non-dramatic forms. And yet tragedy has also been a principal reference point for what may seem like a strange deficit, especially given the ongoing popularity of the genre: the apparent absence from ancient literature of fully recognizable psychology as understood in modern terms. Tragedy figures prominently in debates about whether the people we meet in classical texts manifest the same degree of psychological depth, the same rich inner lives, that we expect and find in characters from modern literature and especially the modern novel. The position that they do not is well stated by the tragedy specialist Mark Griffith in his introduction to an edition of Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Distinctively drawn though each of these figures is, we should acknowledge none the less that their internal psychological states and personalities, i.e. their true 'characters' as such behind their dramatic masks, remain largely unformulated by the text, and thus beyond our consideration.¹

Tragedy evidently fails to portray character in a way that can be considered 'true' and so fails in this way to be true to life. Griffith elaborates on this absence by adding that 'we are not encouraged by the text to ponder the inner workings of their minds'.²

¹ Griffith 1999: 37.

² Griffith 1999: 38. For the extensive bibliography on this question, see Budelmann and Easterling 2010: 289–292; De Temmerman and van Emde Boas 2018. While Griffith's statement

Griffith's statement serves as a point of departure in an influential article by Felix Budelmann and Pat Easterling, 'Reading Minds in Greek Tragedy', which has set the agenda for much recent work that attempts to bring the insights of cognitive science to bear on classical texts, especially works of drama. Budelmann and Easterling propose a shift away from the futile pursuit of idiosyncratic character portrayal towards an investigation of how tragedy represents states of mind, and particularly the mental operation of mindreading, the cognitive capacity by which people envision the states of mind of others. In this chapter, I suggest some further ways in which cognitively-oriented approaches to psychology are helpful for understanding plays like *Antigone*, and especially for understanding why they remain compelling even though they may fail to portray psychology as Griffith defines it, with the result that they are replayed over and over again both in their original forms and in adaptations.

2 The Assignment of Motives in Folk Tales, Folk Psychology, and Tragedy

My starting point is an observation about the human practice of retelling certain favoured stories that comes, not from contemporary psychology, but from a work of formalist poetics, Vladimir Propp's classic *Morphology of the Folktale*, first published in Russian in 1928. Propp analyses a large sample of Russian fairy tales and breaks them down into thirty-one invariable, recurrent components: situations and actions such as 'one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something' or 'the hero acquires the use of a magical agent'. To these recurring components he gives the label 'functions'. Propp's work has been influential for theories of characterization that stress the identity of literary characters as narrative agents, who ensure that the plot progresses reliably through the necessary sequence of events, rather than as psychologically complex individuals.³ But a basis for insight into the psychological significance of story-telling can also be found in a passing comment that Propp offers on the subject of 'Motivations':

Motivations often add to a tale a completely distinctive, vivid coloring, but nevertheless motivations belong to the most inconstant and unstable

offers an especially useful formulation of one position on this question, it should be noted that he himself also went on to explore the inner workings of *Antigone's* mind from a psychoanalytic perspective. See Griffith 2005.

3 Culler 1975: 232–234; De Temmerman and van Emde Boas 2018: 12–13.

elements of the tale ... Here one may observe that completely identical or similar acts are motivated in the most varied ways.⁴

While Propp himself is mainly interested in the stability of his set of repeatedly narrated events, he also identifies here a persistent human investment in the activity of finding new motivations for an unchanging set of actions. The appeal of that activity is useful for thinking about classical tragedy, both in relation to its survival over time through collective repetition and in relation to individual characterization and self-presentation within tragedy itself, in ways that also chime with contemporary psychological thinking.

The role of the folktale as an occasion for attributing motivations, as revealed by Propp, dovetails with the process by which people acquire the fundamental cognitive skill that is known as 'folk psychology', especially as defined by Daniel Hutto: 'the practice of making sense of intentional actions ... by appeal to an agent's motivating beliefs and desires'.⁵ Folk psychology is a means of understanding the minds of others, and so of negotiating the world of interpersonal relations, that is 'importantly, even constitutively, related to narrative practices'⁶ in ways first suggested by Jerome Bruner (1990; 1991). According to Hutto's 'Narrative Practice Hypothesis', folk psychology is acquired through exposure to 'folk-psychological narratives', in which reasons are assigned to actions. Such exposure is an essential feature of childhood development:

Learning how to deploy the framework of everyday psychology requires the development of a very special and flexible kind of skill, one that can only be acquired by seeing reasons in action against a rich backdrop of possibility. Folk-psychological narratives provide precisely the right sort of training set for this ... By repeated exposure to such narratives, children become familiar with both the forms and norms of folk psychology.⁷

Beyond its role in childhood development, Hutto's 'folk-psychological narrative' offers a suggestive paradigm for tragic drama as a powerful and psychologically affecting story-telling medium. Tragedy's dramatic form, in which a story is enacted through direct speech rather than indirectly recounted by a detached narrator, provides for the most effective communication of such narratives: '... by far the best and most reliable means of obtaining a true understanding of

4 Propp 1968: 75.

5 Hutto 2008: ix.

6 Hutto 2009: 10.

7 Hutto 2008: xii.

why another acted is to get the relevant story directly from the horse's mouth'.⁸ Because the main actions of the tragic plot typically take place offstage, the performance itself foregrounds the discussion of action, including characters' direct testimony about why they acted as they did.

Furthermore, tragic plots typically involve the kind of situations in which folk-psychological narratives are especially salient, those in which the actions for which motives are sought are 'seemingly aberrant': such narratives 'mediate in cases in which an action deviates from our expectations ... helping us to tame the extraordinary ... allowing us to cope with unusual or eccentric actions by putting them in contexts that make them intelligible'. They can sometimes 'serve to extend the bounds of what is regarded as normal'.⁹ Just such circumstances are tragedy's defining focus: acts that are destructive, self-destructive, and transgressive, especially self-inflicted damage and violence directed at friends and family members.

Unlike the ancient communal rituals that also addressed and sought to tame human propensities to violent and anti-social behaviour, classical Athenian tragedies were prized for their originality, as playwrights competed with one another to retell familiar stories in new ways, providing fresh accounts of how their protagonists could be brought to commit such horrific and bewildering acts.¹⁰ As a genre that has been recognized from the time of Aristotle on as being instructive as well as sensational, tragedy offered its original spectators, and continues to offer new audiences, narratives that are especially well suited to refining and expanding their folk-psychological capacities. A play like Euripides' *Medea*, in which a mother voices the reasons why she purposely kills her own children, well exemplifies the capacity of folk-psychological narratives to 'extend the bounds of what is regarded as normal'.

The specific 'forms and norms of folk psychology' that such narratives transmit have inevitably shifted over time, for folk psychology on Hutto's understanding has 'a decidedly sociocultural basis'.¹¹ It is not unvarying throughout human history, but evolves in ways that generate the newly conceived

8 Hutto 2008: xi.

9 Hutto 2008: 7.

10 For the distinction between folk-psychological narratives and 'ritualistic dramatic re-enactments, involving established canonical forms, roles and figures', see Hutto 2006: 237.

11 Hutto 2008: x. For the eliminative materialist Paul Churchland, such historical developments are meaningless given that, in his view, all folk psychology (FP) is a misrepresentation of processes in the brain that will one day be properly described by neuroscience. In contrast to this anticipated scientific advance, 'The FP of the Greeks is essentially the FP we use today, and we are negligibly better at explaining human behavior in its terms than

protagonists of modern tragic narratives, as well as the changing motivations in Propp's retold folktales. Some historical periods may feature more attention to reasons for actions than others. One scholar, Jean-Pierre Vernant, has connected the emergence of Athenian tragedy, with its foregrounding of motivation, to the development of law courts in fifth-century Athens, and with them new, legally-defined ways of evaluating human action, often with attention to questions of motive or intention.¹²

In what follows, I draw on two characters in plays by Sophocles, Oedipus and Antigone, to consider the psychological significance of tragedy as a genre that depicts the assignment of motives to seemingly aberrant actions, specifically motives that are not stable and invariable but that are differently formulated at different times, even when a single character is explaining a single set of actions. Oedipus will serve in particular to illustrate the articulation of reasons for extraordinary acts and the socio-cultural dimensions of folk psychology, Antigone to make a further point: that an individual's adducing of multiple, even contradictory motives for a single act represents, not a failure of plausible characterization, but a portrait of human action and decision-making that aligns with certain strands of modern psychological thought.

3 Oedipus and the Limits of Motivation

In *Oedipus the King*, the first of the two plays Sophocles wrote about Oedipus,¹³ Oedipus responds to the revelation that he has committed the extraordinary and abhorrent actions of killing his father and marrying his mother with the extraordinary and abhorrent action of blinding himself. This happens offstage, outside the view of the audience, which instead witnesses Oedipus returning to the stage and explaining himself to the bewildered chorus, which cannot fathom the reasons for such an action. Assuming no human would do that on his own initiative, they ask what god drove him to it. In his response, he names Apollo as the god behind his acts but also insists on his own agency:

was Sophocles' (Churchland 1981: 74). My thanks to Grant Hussong for pointing out this reference.

12 Vernant 1988a: 25–26.

13 Sophocles wrote three plays about the family of Oedipus, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*, but he did not write them in the order of the events of the myth or at the same point in his career. *Antigone*, which concerns events after Oedipus' death, was probably written in the 440's BCE, *Oedipus the King* is generally assigned to the 420's and *Oedipus at Colonus* was written shortly before Sophocles' death in 406.

No one struck my eyes but I myself,
 in my wretchedness, with my own hand.
 Why should I have to see,
 when there was nothing sweet for me to see?

ἔπαισε δ' αὐτόχειρ νιν οὐ-
 τις, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τλάμων.
 τί γὰρ ἔδει μ' ὄραν,
 ὅτῳ γ' ὀρώντι μηδὲν ἦν ἰδεῖν γλυκύ; (Soph. *OT* 1331–1335)

The chorus continues to have difficulty making sense of this action, although he explains it several times. When they propose that he would have been better off dead than living and blind, he reiterates his motivation and underscores it by asserting that it would pertain even in the underworld.

I do not know with what eyes I could have looked
 at my father when I went to Hades
 or at my poor mother: things were done to them by me
 beyond what hanging can punish.

ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅμμασιν ποίοις βλέπων
 πατέρα ποτ' ἂν προσεῖδον εἰς Ἄιδου μολῶν
 οὐδ' αὖ τάλαιναν μητέρ', οἷν ἐμοὶ δυοῖν
 ἔργ' ἐστὶ κρείσσον' ἀγχόνης εἰργασμένα. (Soph. *OT* 1371–1374)

Oedipus' insistence on this point gives unexpected insight into an act that might be read as simply self-punishing, providing a refined and clarified understanding of how and why someone might act under the most extreme circumstances.

This staging of Oedipus' forceful explanation of his self-blinding is embedded in a sequence of two plays, encompassing the later *Oedipus at Colonus* as well as *Oedipus the King*, in which the question of Oedipus' motivation for his signature crimes is repeatedly addressed over a long span of time, from his youth to his old age. Oedipus offers various accounts of his own relationship to the fixed actions he is known for; cumulatively these accounts convey to the plays' audiences a rich understanding of how someone could do what he did. This is in striking contrast to the way Oedipus' motivation is approached in Freud's seminal discussion of *Oedipus the King*, which is a foundational document in the creation of contemporary expectations that psychology is to be

equated with, as Griffith puts it, ‘the inner workings of ... minds’.¹⁴ For Freud, Oedipus’ actions are meaningful in relation to a single, powerful pair of linked motivations, a desire to perform the specific acts of patricide and incest that is common to all people (or rather all male people), formed in childhood, and hidden from view through repression. The power of the play would then lie, not in what the audience can learn about motivation from Oedipus’ explanations, but rather in the actions that Oedipus is revealed to have performed, which owe their fascination to motivations that the audience members themselves already unconsciously possess.

Viewed as folk-psychological narratives, Sophocles’ two Oedipus plays dramatize the shifting relationship over time between those fixed actions with which the hero is identified and how he understands and articulates his own motivations. In doing so, they provide a variegated and culturally specific account of motivation, its limits, and its intersection with other causal factors in relation to truly aberrant actions. They do the work of highlighting reasons for actions within an extreme scenario, in which the actions are—in Sophocles’ non-Freudian conceptual universe—impossible to desire and in which the actor who nonetheless performs them is characterized by hyper-activity: Oedipus is exceptionally quick both to react and to act, and this remains a consistent personality trait through the many vicissitudes of his life story.¹⁵

Oedipus is identified with the acts of killing his father and marrying his mother throughout his life, starting even before he is born, and he first encounters those acts in the form of prophecy, as we learn from the autobiographical narrative that he gives in *Oedipus the King*. His reaction is intense aversion, a powerful desire not to do them, which motivates his instant flight from Corinth:

When I heard these things, I fled from Corinth,
wanting to know that place only from the stars above,
so that I might never see that awful oracle’s
shameful predictions ever fulfilled.

κἀγὼ ‘πακούσας ταῦτα τὴν Κορινθίαν
ἄστροις τὸ λοιπὸν τεχμαρούμενος χθόνα
ἔφευγον, ἔνθα μήποτ’ ὀψοίμην κακῶν
χρησμάτων ὀνείδη τῶν ἐμῶν τελούμενα. (Soph. *OT* 794–797)

14 Freud 1953: 262–263.

15 For the inapplicability of Freud’s interpretation to the classical Greek context, see Vernant 1988.

As he goes on (in the last fleeting moments of his ignorance about the identity of his victim) to tell how he killed his father all the same, he vividly evokes his angry impulse to retaliate when subjected to demeaning assaults: being pushed from the road where he is walking, being struck from above by a man who may be old but is also strong and aggressive. These assaults were especially insulting in the context of classical Greece because they amounted to being treated as a slave.¹⁶

The driver, the one who pushed me from the road,
I struck in anger. The old man saw this.
He waited until his carriage passed right by me
and smacked me on the head with his two-pronged goad.
I paid him back and more: to put it briefly,
he was hit with a stick by my hand, and right away
rolled head-over-heels out of that wagon.
I killed them all.

κάγὼ τὸν ἐκτρέποντα, τὸν τροχηλάτην,
παίω δι' ὀργῆς· καί μ' ὁ πρέσβυς ὡς ὀρέ,
ὄχους παραστείχοντα τηρήσας, μέσον
κάρα διπλοῖς κέντροισί μου καθίκετο.
οὐ μὲν ἴσῃν γ' ἔτισεν, ἀλλὰ συντόμως
σκήπτρῳ τυπεῖς ἐκ τῆσδε χειρὸς ὕπιος
μέσης ἀπήνης εὐθὺς ἐκακλίνδεται·
κτείνω δὲ τοὺς ξύμπαντας. (Soph. *OT* 806–813)

The cogency of those motivations, both the aversion to parricide and incest and the sense of an imperative to punish offensive behaviour are reinforced through the action Oedipus takes in the course of the play itself, the punitive self-blinding which blocks a fully cognizant encounter with his victims.

But when we meet Oedipus many years later in *Oedipus at Colonus*, close to the point of his mysterious death, his horrific actions have long been for him an accepted fact, and he articulates his own agency in terms other than a simple, unhesitating aversion. He calls his self-punitive instincts into question, contrasting his desires on the day of revelation, 'when my anger was boiling over, and I felt the sweetest thing would be to die, to be killed by stoning'

16 Gregory 1995: 145.

(ὀπηγνίκ' ἔξει θυμός, ἥδιστον δέ μοι / τὸ κατθανεῖν ἦν καὶ τὸ λευσθῆναι πέτροις, Soph. OC 434–435), with those of a later time:

when all my anguish had softened
and I realized my anger had gone too far
in punishing my earlier misdeeds ...

ὅτ' ἤδη πᾶς ὁ μόχθος ἦν πέπων,
κάμάνθανον τὸν θυμὸν ἐκδραμόντα μοι
μεῖζω κολαστὴν τῶν πρὶν ἡμαρτημένων ... (Soph. OC 437–439)

In his most extensive account of his motivations in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus redescribes them within a specifically legal framework. His antagonist Creon expresses surprise that the Athenians are willing to welcome Oedipus since he is just the sort of polluted figure that their famous court, the Areopagus, could be expected to condemn and expel (Soph. OC 947–50). In his response, Oedipus draws on ways of describing motivation that had developed in the lawcourts, which, as Vernant pointed out, played a formative role in the development of tragedy. He stresses that he did not recognize his parents for who they were when he acted and so designates his actions, when understood as his crimes against them in particular (not just homicide, but parricide and incest), as unintended or unmotivated. In order to do this, he characterizes himself as *akôn*, 'unwilling' or 'not intending', repurposing terminology that was used in legal contexts to distinguish between two types of homicide, intentional and unintentional; both were crimes, but unintentional homicide was tried in a court other than the Areopagus and was subject to a lighter penalty.¹⁷ He uses this term for his incestuous marriage as well as his parricide: 'I married her not intending to (*akôn*)', ἐγὼ δέ νιν / ἄκων ἔγημα (Soph. OC 986–87). Here too he is applying a legal lens to an act that would have incurred pollution but not a criminal sanction.

In the case of killing his father, Oedipus presents his instant retaliatory impulse as an understandable reason for acting that even Creon could identify with. Countering Creon with a sarcastic hypothesis, he both underscores his ignorance of his victim's identity and depicts the murder as undertaken in self-defence, which would have made it justifiable homicide under Athenian law:¹⁸

¹⁷ MacDowell 1978: 114–117.

¹⁸ MacDowell 1978: 113–114.

If right now someone stood here by you, you paragon of justice,
and tried to kill you, would you ask that killer
if he was your father, or would you strike back at once?

εἴ τις σὲ τὸν δίκαιον αὐτίκ' ἐνθάδε
κτεῖνοι παραστάς, πότερα πυνθάνοι' ἂν εἰ
πατήρ σ' ὁ καίνων ἢ τίνιοι' ἂν εὐθέως; (Soph. *OC* 992–994)

Earlier, he has similarly depicted his marriage to Jocasta (who was offered to him by the Thebans after he saved them from the predatory Sphinx) as an unreflecting, natural act under the circumstances: 'I accepted a gift', ἐδεξάμην δῶρον (539–540).

To the extent that Oedipus' crimes would have come under the jurisdiction of a fifth-century Athenian court, it is impossible for us to know what the outcome would have been. The account he gives in *Oedipus the King* of how he killed Laius, quoted above, does not necessarily support his claim to have killed in self-defence, and it does not specify whether he expected his blow to be fatal, a question that would have determined whether his homicide was to be judged intentional or not. As a result, his efforts at self-exoneration in *Oedipus at Colonus* have not been equally persuasive to all readers and critics.¹⁹ But such judgements do not negate the important effects of his explanations: in making a case for himself, Oedipus extends the audience's folk-psychological horizons, providing recognizable, assimilable reasons for his extraordinary actions.

Oedipus' self-defence in legal terms is also intertwined with a religious explanation: he was driven to act as he did by the gods. Here he invokes the double motivation that is a constitutive feature of Greek mythology, in which events are brought about by coinciding divine and human causes, in keeping with a world view in which humans are subject to supernatural powers that they do not necessarily control or understand. While in *Oedipus the King* he answered the chorus' question about the god behind his self-blinding by naming Apollo but stressing his own agency, now he portrays himself as wholly passive, speaking of his past crimes as misfortunes 'which I have borne / without wanting to (*akôn*); for this is what was pleasing to the gods', ὅς ἐγὼ τάλας / ἤνεγκον ἄκων· θεοὶς γὰρ ἦν οὕτω φίλον (Soph. *OC* 963–964).

19 For a survey of Oedipus' arguments in *Oedipus at Colonus* that is both informative and sceptical, see Kelly 2013, 52–59. For competing views on whether the actions described in *Oedipus the King* would have met the criteria for justifiable homicide, see Harris 2010, who argues that they would not have, and Sommerstein 2011, who responds to Harris and argues that they would have.

At an earlier moment, when trying to persuade the chorus of old men of Colonus not to send him away, Oedipus similarly portrays himself as passive but finds an even more thorough-going way of eradicating or nullifying the very thought of himself being motivated to act as he did. In a jarringly paradoxical statement, he declares that they should not fear him for what he did ‘because my deeds / suffered rather than acted’, ἐπεὶ τὰ γ’ ἔργα μου / πεπονθότ’ ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα (Soph. *OC* 266–267). This is assumed to mean something like ‘because I suffered my deeds rather than performed them’, but with this formulation Oedipus removes all personal agency as well as all personal motivation from the equation, replacing himself with his actions as the subject of his sentence in a way that contradicts normal, common-sense modes of describing human behaviour. Here Sophocles draws on paradox to convey the perspective of a visionary heroic character who has come to see that he has been drawn into a divine plan that he does not control or comprehend, so that familiar notions of motivation leading to action do not really apply.²⁰ This visionary perspective adds another element that is specific to classical Greek culture to the array of explanations of Oedipus’ extraordinary actions that these two plays convey to their audiences.

4 Antigone’s Self-Narratives

Sophocles’ *Antigone* presents a very different portrait from Oedipus of a character who communicates multiple explanations for a single set of actions. In her case, there is no suggestion that her particular story is part of a divine plan. We are left in the dark about whether the gods have any interest in Antigone’s act of burying her brother Polyneices in defiance of her uncle Creon’s prohibition and her consequent death. There are indications of a divine perspective according to which Creon is wrong not to allow Polyneices’ burial and wrong to bury Antigone alive as punishment, but no sign that she is required—or externally compelled—to act as she does. Nor do we encounter her over a long span of time, during which shifts of perspective that generate reformulated explanations of past behaviour are to be expected. We see her for just half of a play, in one moment of a brief life, during which she nonetheless seems to evolve quite radically in the ways in which she conceptualizes her own motivations, as she variously describes and redescribes her relationship to the single extraordinary action by which she is defined. This evolution has

20 For further discussion of Sophoclean paradoxes as capturing states of mind beyond the reach of folk psychology or ordinary secular theories of mind, see Murnaghan 2023.

made Antigone a perennially challenging figure for modern audiences and critics. Not only are theatrical audiences particularly inclined to assign single motives to the actions of dramatic characters, but Antigone has regularly been assimilated in both criticism and reception to the modern figure of the political dissident, someone defined by inflexible dedication to a single animating principle.²¹

While Antigone's story lends itself to the depiction of political dissidence, Sophocles' play offers something different: an illustration of the ways in which people facing unexpected challenges reach for and formulate positions under the shifting pressures of the moment, improvising as they go. When we meet Antigone at the beginning of the play, she is not thinking about the ideas her action has been taken to illustrate: the moral imperatives of civil disobedience, or the rights of the individual in relation to the state, or the laws of the gods in relation to the laws of men, or the claims of the family in relation to the city. She simply knows that her brother *has* to be buried and that she—and she assumes her sister Ismene—are the ones who have to do it. She knows it will take courage: her proposal to Ismene is framed as a test of whether Ismene is a coward. But her plan is based on an instinctive sense of what she must do.

It is as she meets with and responds to the opposition of others that Antigone begins to form and announce new ideas about what her action means and her reasons for doing it. It is only when Ismene fails to automatically fall in with her plan and asks her to think about how terrible it would be to die for breaking the law that Antigone begins to portray herself as motivated by the belief that such a death would be noble:

Be however you like. I will bury him.
 What a fine thing for me to die for that!
 I am his: with him I will lie with my own.
 My crime is holy, for I have to please
 the dead far longer than the living:
 I will lie with them forever. Feel free
 to dishonour what the gods honour most.

ἀλλ' ἴσθ' ὅποιά σοι δοκεῖ· κείνον δ' ἐγὼ
 θάψω· καλὸν μοι τοῦτο ποιούσῃ θανεῖν.

21 For experimental demonstration of audiences' tendencies to ascribe single motives, see Budelmann, Maguire and Teasdale 2016; for the conclusion, after a survey of modern receptions of the play, that 'Our Antigone, in the theatre and in contemporary thought, is a dissident', see Cairns 2016: 153.

φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα,
 ὅσια πανουργήσας, ἐπεὶ πλείων χρόνος
 ὄν δει μ' ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε.
 ἐκεῖ γὰρ αἰεὶ κείσομαι· σοὶ δ', εἰ δοκεῖ,
 τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' ἀτιμάσας ἔχε. (Soph. *Ant.* 71–77)

Ismene's lack of instant agreement spurs Antigone to develop a number of new positions that explain why she is determined to bury Polyneices: She, Antigone, is nobler than Ismene and someone who does not care about mere life; being alive along with Ismene would be worthless, because it would just be for a short time, not an endlessly long time like being dead with Polyneices; for Ismene not to bury Polyneices is a deliberate choice that equals insulting the gods—something that she, Antigone is not willing to do. In the space of a hundred lines, the woman who was addressed in the first line as 'My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene!' (tr. Fagles) when she was expected to agree with Antigone's plan is now Antigone's enemy and destined to be hated by Polyneices as well, and someone who dishonours the gods.

It is only later, when Antigone has been captured and is forced to explain herself to Creon, that she aligns her burial of Polyneices with a concept of divine law, of which she presents herself as the champion, and raises far-reaching questions about when and whether human laws have to be obeyed. The very idea of thinking about what she did in terms of law is prompted by Creon. It is when Creon makes her admit she knew about the decree he had announced and asks how she could have disregarded it that she arrives at the idea of unwritten divine laws.

Creon

And yet you dared to ignore this law?

Antigone

Zeus did not issue that proclamation.
 And the Justice of the underworld gods
 did not give laws like that to humans.
 Your proclaiming does not make you so strong
 that you, who are mortal, can override
 the gods' unfailing and unwritten laws.
 They're always in force, not just now or then,
 and no one knows when they first appeared.
 I would not have the gods find me guilty
 of breaking those laws through fear of some man.

KP. καὶ δῆτ' ἐτόλμας τούσδ' ὑπερβαίνειν νόμους;
 AN. οὐ γάρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε,
 οὐδ' ἡ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη
 τοιούσδ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὥρισεν νόμους,
 οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὥοιμ' ἐν τῇ σά
 κηρύγμαθ', ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῇ θεῶν
 νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητὸν ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν.
 οὐ γάρ τι νῦν γε κάχθές, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ ποτε
 ζῇ ταῦτα, κοῦδεὶς οἶδεν ἐξ ὅτου φάνη.
 τούτων ἐγὼ οὐκ ἔμελλον, ἀνδρὸς οὐδενὸς
 φρόνημα δείσας, ἐν θεοῖσι τὴν δίκην
 δώσειν (Soph. *Ant.* 449–460)

This is a stirring speech and the concept of unwritten laws is an indispensable starting point for concepts of natural law that supersedes the more variable and provisional laws devised by specific communities. But it is not a philosophical position that Antigone has arrived at through abstract reasoning and then acted upon; it is a reason for her to have acted as she did, which she comes to out of the need to explain herself to Creon in the terms that he has introduced. It is not that she does not mean it when she says it, or that it is not a valid way of describing her motivation and a compelling idea for audiences to take away from the play and think about, but it is not the only way Antigone articulates her decision to bury Polyneices whatever her circumstances.

The same can be said of an especially challenging and famously controversial passage that comes later in the play, when Antigone is no longer explaining herself to Creon but is actually confronting the death to which she has been condemned. Just before she is taken away to be buried alive, Antigone makes the startling statement that she would not have done what she did for Polyneices for anyone else, not even if he had been her husband or her child.

And now, Polyneices,
 for all that care, I get this reward.
 The wise can see I'm right to put you first.
 If it were my children or a dead husband
 who lay there rotting, then I would not
 have defied the city to take on this service.

νῦν δέ Πολύνεικες, τὸ σὸν
 δέμας περιστέλλουσα τοιάδ' ἄρνυμαι.

καίτοι σ' ἐγὼ τίμησα τοῖς φρονοῦσιν εὖ.
οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἄν, εἰ τέκνων μήτηρ ἔφυν,
οὔτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανὼν ἐτήκετο,
βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἄν ἡρόμην πόνον. (Soph. *Ant.* 902–907)

This picking and choosing among relatives creates serious difficulties for anyone who sees Antigone as motivated by adherence to absolute principles and unwritten but inviolable divine laws. In terms of her personal situation, it also sits oddly with the fact that she is engaged to marry Creon's son Haemon, whom she never even mentions. Her position does not get easier to accept when she gives reasons for her position that seem overly technical and oddly calculating.

And what's the law that underlies this claim?
If a husband dies, I can get another,
or have a new man's child if the first one's die.
But both my parents are now in Hades;
I have no way to get a new brother.
Because of that law, I honour you more.
In Creon's view, I've done something wrong,
an act of daring that fills him with dread.

τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω;
πόσις μὲν ἄν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ᾦν,
καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἡμπλακον,
μητρὸς δ' ἐν Ἄιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοιιν
οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἄν βλάσται ποτέ.
τοιῷδε μέντοι σ' ἐκπροτιμήσας' ἐγὼ
νόμῳ Κρέοντι ταῦτ' ἔδοξ' ἀμαρτάνειν
καὶ δεινὰ τολμᾶν, ὧ κασίγνητον κάρα. (Soph. *Ant.* 908–915)

This speech has seemed so 'out of character', so inconsistent with Antigone's high-minded, principled nature that some modern readers have wondered whether it really is an authentic part of Sophocles' play.²² It has often been noted that Antigone's logic makes much more sense in the original story from which it appears to have been borrowed. That is a story that we know from the

22 On the issues raised by this speech, see Murnaghan 1986, in which I make some of the same points I do here, and Griffith 1999: 277–279, with further bibliography.

historian Herodotus about a woman whose entire family was condemned to death and who was granted the chance to save just one of them—someone therefore who had a genuine choice to make among competing relatives rather than expressing a preference for what she had actually done for her real brother to what she might have done for a hypothetical son or a hypothetical husband.

But given Antigone's situation and what she faces at this particular moment, the unreal, hypothetical nature of any husband or child that she might have is very much to the point. It is now coming home to her that she is really going to die, and she is acutely, achingly aware of what she is losing. Just a little later in the same speech, she is explicit about this.

So he's having me seized and led away
with no chance of marriage, no wedding song,
no chance of being a wife or a mother ...

καὶ νῦν ἄγει με διὰ χειρῶν οὕτω λαβῶν
ἄλεκτρον, ἀνυμέναιον, οὔτε του γάμου
μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς ... (Soph. *Ant.* 916–918)

Now that she is really dying, Antigone is not declaring, as she earlier did to Ismene, that life is too short to be worth valuing. Now that she is losing the chance to have a husband or a child, she is also devaluing them, much as she devalued Ismene herself when she realized Ismene was not going to fall in with her plan. Like Oedipus, Antigone provides the audience of her tragedy an instructive array of reasons for extraordinary action, in her case an action that costs her own life. Each of these reasons makes sense in its own terms, and they are also congruent with the socio-cultural context of Athenian tragedy. The importance of honouring unwritten laws is invoked in Pericles' 'Funeral Oration', the speech outlining the distinctive ethos of Athenian life that the historian Thucydides put in the mouth of the statesman Pericles; the distinction that Antigone draws between a brother and a husband or son reflects tensions between ties of blood and ties of marriage that are also found in other telling documents of that society, such as Aeschylus' tragic trilogy *Oresteia*. But as sequential, logically inconsistent, contingent responses to her rapidly shifting circumstances, they also lack the coherence that is often assumed to be a required feature of successful character portrayal; in this way, they might seem to confirm the view that Greek tragedy does not in fact present fully drawn, psychologically complete characters.

5 Antigone and Modern Psychology

But it is also possible to understand Antigone's variable explanations through modern models of psychology that do not assume the kind of internal coherence that has been sought and found lacking in ancient literary characters. Her trajectory of deciding first and explaining herself afterwards is congruent with current thinking about decision-making, which is increasingly recognized as instinctual and involuntary rather than proceeding from rational considerations. By affirming the joint functioning of instinct and rational explanation such approaches make obsolete, and so resolve, a longstanding difference of opinion between scholars who view Antigone as largely instinctual and those who stress her rationality.²³

This perspective on decision-making has been popularized especially in relation to behavioural economics. In the terminology of the best-selling Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, Antigone's initial conviction that she must bury Polyneices is an example of 'thinking fast' which he defines as 'automatic and effortless'. Her later formulations, her appeal to the concept of unwritten laws and her rationalization that Polyneices merits her sacrifice because he is uniquely irreplaceable, more closely resemble the opposite, 'thinking slow', which is more deliberate and explicitly logical, and as Kahneman puts it 'takes over when things get difficult',²⁴ as they do when Antigone has to square her action with Ismene's hesitation, or Creon's prohibition, or her own sense of overwhelming loss. Sophocles' two portraits of Oedipus could also be mapped onto this distinction, with the swiftly self-punishing Oedipus of *Oedipus the King* as an exemplar of thinking fast, and the self-exonerating Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus* as an exemplar of thinking slow. As an economist, Kahneman approaches these modes of thinking as competing ways of arriving at good decisions. From that perspective thinking fast risks being less accurate, more subject to bias, than thinking slow, though it is also less costly in terms of effort.

Another recent approach that is useful for thinking about the interplay between instinctive plan and retrospective explanation displayed by Antigone involves the concept of the 'adaptive unconscious', especially as elaborated by Timothy Wilson. On this view, much of the functioning of the human mind is hidden from conscious awareness, not because it is known but repressed as in Freud's theory of the unconscious, but in order to achieve greater efficiency

23 For a list of scholars who view her as merely intuitive, see Hester 1971: 14; for a defence of her rationality, Foley 2001: 182.

24 Kahneman 2011: 25.

by freeing up the conscious mind. 'The mind is a well-designed system that is able to accomplish a great deal in parallel, by analyzing and thinking about the world outside of awareness while consciously thinking about something else'.²⁵ The mind has its 'inner workings' but they cannot and need not be known. Exposing those inner workings in a quest for self-knowledge or true understanding of another, as mandated by psychoanalysis or by the related assumptions about character that Griffith expresses, is impossible and pointless.

On Wilson's view, the self-knowledge that is required for negotiating the world is achieved not through introspection but through the construction of self-narratives that satisfy expectations of accuracy and credibility. People come to know themselves, to the extent that they do, by considering the behaviour inspired by their unconscious and producing explanations and justifications for them. 'It is often better to *deduce* the nature of our hidden minds by looking outward at our behaviour and how others react to us, and coming up with a good narrative'.²⁶ Here, as in Hutto's narrative practice hypothesis, both interactions between agents and others and the narrative framing of explanations play an important role in the elucidation of behaviour for agents and their audiences. Wilson's actors trying to understand themselves are in essentially the same position as Hutto's audience members who learn from such actors' explanations: 'introspection is ... like literary criticism in which we are the text to be understood'.²⁷ People come to know themselves by constructing self-narratives that are essentially 'inferences' or even 'confabulations', but which must meet certain criteria, including accuracy and believability. In doing so, they must apply to themselves the same folk-psychological expertise that they use to make sense of others.

From this perspective, we can think of Antigone as initially moved by her unconscious to bury Polyneices, then when confronted with the reactions of others generating accurate and believable self-narratives that make retrospective sense of her instinctive decision. In dialogue with Ismene, she emerges as someone who refuses to put personal survival ahead of family loyalty; in dialogue with Creon, as someone for whom there are fundamental, inalterable human obligations that cannot be nullified by the laws of any political community; as she faces the premature death that Creon imposes, as someone who places a higher value on her brother, as a member of the family she was born into, than on any husband or child that she might have had.

25 Wilson 2002: 9.

26 Wilson 2002: 16.

27 Wilson 2002: 162.

6 Conclusion: Taming the Extraordinary

The theories of Kahneman and Wilson are designed not just to describe the workings of psychology but to facilitate positive pragmatic outcomes. In Kahneman's case, that means finding the objectively best decision, the right answer to such problems as what is the optimal next move is in a chess game or whether it will pay off to invest in a certain stock. Wilson is interested in how people can best arrive at self-narratives that serve them in their lives, and so his criteria for success include peace-of-mind as well as accuracy and believability. As a tragedian, Sophocles portrays a situation in which it is very difficult to say whether Antigone makes the best decision. Her impulse to act is powerful and her several explanations for it are compelling and thought-provoking, but the cost of her decision could not be higher. In a universe in which the gods communicate with humans regularly, if obliquely, there is no sign of divine approval or even interest in Antigone's action. In her final moments on-stage, she continues to view her choice as an act of piety, but she is painfully uncertain about where the gods stand.

What have I done to offend the gods?
 Why should I even look to the gods?
 Who can I call on? I honoured the gods
 and for that I'm convicted of sacrilege.
 If the gods truly think that this is right,
 what I suffer will show me that I did wrong.
 But if these men do wrong, then they should suffer
 evils that match their mistreatment of me.

ποιάν παρεξελθούσα δαιμόνων δίκην;
 τί χρή με τήν δύστηνον ἐς θεοὺς ἔτι
 βλέπειν; τίν' αὐδᾶν ξυμμάχων; ἐπεὶ γε δὴ
 τήν δυσσέβειαν εὐσεβοῦς' ἐκτησάμην.
 ἄλλ' εἰ μὲν οὖν τάδ' ἐστὶν ἐν θεοῖς καλὰ,
 παθόντες ἂν ξυγγνοῖμεν ἡμαρτηκότες:
 εἰ δ' οἷδ' ἁμαρτάνουσι, μὴ πλείω κακὰ
 πάθοιεν ἢ καὶ δρώσιν ἐκδίκως ἐμέ. (Soph. *Ant.* 921–928)

This is not someone whose self-narratives have allowed her to achieve peace of mind.

Antigone's explanations do not change the minds of her interlocutors. Neither her loving sister Ismene nor her threatened uncle Creon, nor the sympathetic

chorus who hears her exchange with Creon, is persuaded that she had to act as she did, and she ends her life feeling that she is entirely alone. In a discussion of the psychological effects of narratives that builds on the work of Hutto among others, Marco Caracciolo makes the important point that in literary texts such failures of communication can enhance the audience's understanding. 'Yet, by highlighting the impossibility of intersubjective engagement *between* the characters, the text increases readers' awareness of their own intersubjective access to the characters' experiences'.²⁸ This is what Sophocles achieves—in the medium of tragic drama, which foregrounds public interrogation of human actions—through his portrayal of a young woman who willingly takes a step that costs her life despite the incomprehension of all around her. He provides his audiences with new insights into such seemingly incomprehensible behaviour, taming the extraordinary.

Tragedy's power to illuminate behaviour in this way is especially pronounced in *Antigone* because there is no revelation of a divine purpose that overrides human motivation as in the case of Oedipus. Although Antigone's action is shaped by Greek religious beliefs about the importance of proper burial and future relations between the living and the dead, the political constraints that make that action so risky have recurred throughout history. The need to understand why people sacrifice their lives in defiance of political authority is ongoing. So audiences go on needing to hear Antigone explain herself—in ways that are ever-shifting, whether over the course of her brief appearance in Sophocles' play, or through the subsequent centuries as new versions of Antigone reenact her perennial story.²⁹

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28 Caracciolo 2014: 150.

29 For the reception history of *Antigone*, see Cairns 2016, 115–154; Steiner 1986; Mee and Foley 2011. On the unexpressed motivations of Sophocles' characters as raising questions out of which we, like the twentieth century playwright Jean Anouilh, 'may construct our own new dramas', see Griffith 1999: 37n1.

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Individuals or Types? Ancient Criticism and Modern Psychology on Characterization in Greek Tragedy

Evert van Emde Boas

1 Introduction: Doing the Psychology of the Ancient World through Scholia

1.1 *Two Initial Examples*

The prologue of Euripides' *Medea* centres around a discussion of Medea's misfortunes between two unnamed slaves: Medea's nurse and the tutor to her children. When asked by the tutor why she is outside the house by herself, leaving Medea alone (49–52), the nurse explains that she is there because a 'desire came over me to tell my mistress' misfortunes to heaven and earth' (57–58). A scholiast—a commentator in antiquity whose notes have been preserved in the margins of our manuscripts—found this justification particularly persuasive:

Euripides has well represented (καλῶς ... μεμίμηται) those who find themselves in very dire circumstances (τοὺς ἐν μεγάλαις δυστυχίαις ἔξεταζομένους), and who dare not tell anyone about their misfortunes, either because of fear of their masters, or because of some need arising from the circumstances. For such people, because they cannot stay silent about the events and are afraid to tell them to people, relate (διηγούνται) them to the heaven or sun or earth or other gods. (Σ (= Scholiast on) Eur. *Med.* 57)¹

Another nurse's behaviour, in another play by Euripides, was felt to be equally convincing. In the *Hippolytus*, Phaedra's nurse explains (433–436) that she found her mistress' confession—Phaedra is in love—worrying at first but later decided that it is unproblematic. The accompanying scholion deems this change of heart entirely plausible:

¹ Translations of scholia throughout this article are my own, based on the text editions used by the online *TLG*.

He has well represented (καλῶς ἐμμήσατο) the fickleness of old women (τῶν γράων τὸ παλίμβολον): they're excessively afraid and overbold (ὑπερφοβοῦνται ... καὶ θρασύνονται) in the face of misfortune. (Σ Eur. *Hipp.* 433)

These two initial examples neatly demonstrate an explanatory model that is employed frequently in the ancient scholia on Greek tragedy, and more specifically those dealing with questions of characterization. The behaviour of characters (leading characters as much as anonymous minor figures) is compared to behaviour that one might come across in real life. We may observe the references in our two examples to the key concept of *mimêsis* (μίμησις, 'imitation' or 'representation'), in the cognate verb forms *memimêtai* and *emimêsato*. What the examples further show is that such characterization is deemed 'well done' if it correlates to the *typical* behaviour of certain identifiable groups ('those who find themselves in dire circumstances' and 'old women', respectively).² It is because of these features, as René Nünlist has observed, that such comments traverse the space between literary criticism and social psychology:

In their interpretations, [ancient commentators] repeatedly apply extra-textual criteria such as typically human behaviour in general. Notes of this type can therefore be said to transcend the domain of actual literary criticism ... towards more general areas such as psychology and ethics. (Nünlist 2009: 256)

1.2 *Scholia Psychology*

The scholia, then, often double as exercises in folk psychology, and as such they seem to offer a particularly fruitful avenue for exploring the social psychology of the ancient world. There are various directions in which one might conceivably take such an enterprise. First, and by all accounts least promisingly, one could use the scholia as evidence for *real-world* psychological phenomena in antiquity, particularly certain group differences. From the *Hippolytus*-scholion, for instance, we could infer—we shouldn't, but we could—that old women in antiquity really were, as a group, more likely to display anxiety and impulsiveness under stressful conditions.

Secondly, and much more securely, scholia of this kind can be taken as evidence of certain folk-psychological stereotypes that were available to

2 The explanations are formulated entirely in generic terms, with the groups referred to by way of a generic article (τοὺς ... ἐξεταζομένους, τῶν γράων) and their behaviour by way of generic present indicative verbs (διηγοῦνται, ὑπερφοβοῦνται, θρασύνονται).

interpreters in antiquity.³ Without ourselves accepting as fact that older women in the classical and/or Hellenistic period(s) were above-averagely fickle, we can safely infer from the *Hippolytus*-scholion that (a good number of) people *believed* that this was the case. In fact, the psychological ‘archaeology’ that is required to uncover such stereotypes is, in the case of these scholia, unusually straightforward (although we should still be careful to generalize too much on their basis about what ‘the ancients’ believed): the scholiasts are fully explicit about assigning certain traits to certain categories of people.

A third approach—the one that will be central to my own investigation—is less interested in the *content* of the explanatory models displayed by the scholia, and more in their nature, that is to say, in the folk-psychological strategies that we see at work: what kind of explanations do ancient commentators use to elucidate the behaviour of literary characters? Do they really think mainly in terms of categories? If so, to what kind of categories do their explanations pertain?

1.3 *Ancient and Modern Literary Criticism on Typification*

This third approach is pertinent to my concerns because it allows us to circle right back to questions of literary criticism. It is a commonplace in modern criticism on Greek tragedy to say that the tragedians were, in contrast to modern playwrights, on the whole less concerned with creating strongly *individualized* characters, but rather dealt in figures that could readily be assimilated to certain recognizable *types*. The article on ‘Character and Characterization’ in *The Encyclopedia of Greek Tragedy*, for instance, puts it as follows:

Sense of individuality ... is what we feel as generally less important in the Greek dramatic personae ... tragedy reflects a view of humanity that privileges paradigmatic action and external output to individual, inward psychological processes. (Thumiger 2013: 2)

3 To be clear, in spite of my use of general phrases such as ‘interpreters in antiquity’ and ‘ancient commentators’, my focus is in fact on a fairly narrow subset. The relevant comments about characterization in the tragic scholia come exclusively from the *scholia vetera* (‘old notes’, dating back to the Hellenistic period, as opposed to *scholia recentiora*, ‘more recent notes’, which come from the Byzantine period), and as such they can be traced back almost entirely to a handful of commentators working in the library of Alexandria roughly between the third and first centuries BCE (accordingly, they postdate the playwrights themselves by at least a few centuries). The precise origins of the *scholia vetera* vary between Aeschylean, Sophoclean and Euripidean scholia. For brief discussions of the nature and origin of the (tragic) scholia, see e.g. Dickey 2007: 3–17, 31–38; Nünlist 2009: 7–19; also pp. 81–84 below. For a fuller account see the relevant chapters in Montanari et al. 2015.

Similarly, a chapter on Euripidean drama in a companion volume asserts that 'Euripides is more concerned ... to illuminate aspects of human nature than to delineate specific individuals', and that 'it seems more fruitful to discuss ... characters in terms of classes ... than in terms of individuals.'⁴

Ancient literary criticism is relevant here because modern critics see such a view of Greek tragic characterization reflected in the work of their predecessors in Greek antiquity—and indeed more generally in ancient thought about character and personality (the key Greek term is *êthos*, ἦθος).⁵ Here is Malcolm Heath, in a rich and influential discussion of tragic poetics:

Such Sophoclean characters as Electra or Philoctetes carry great dramatic conviction, because their individuality has been worked out in the details of the text; but the individuality that is thus worked out is not in itself detailed or subtly nuanced: it consists rather of a few basic traits, clearly and consistently delineated. Commentary on *êthos* in the scholia is in keeping with this; the commentators think in generic terms, not focusing on the individual as the possessor of a complex of personal traits that uniquely defines his or her individuality, but on the behaviour typical of or appropriate to a class to which the individual can be assigned. (Heath 1987: 119)

Ancient literary criticism in general indeed appears to offer ample basis for this view: it regularly demonstrates an approach to literary character in categorical rather than individual terms. Thus, of the four (apparently prescriptive) guidelines for tragic characterization that Aristotle famously sets out in his *Poetics*—that characters be good, that they be appropriate, likeness of character, and consistency of character—two are explicitly framed around 'classes' (*genê*, γένη) of people:

[On goodness:] Characterisation will arise ... where speech or action exhibits the nature of an ethical choice; and the character will be good when the choice is good. But this depends on each class of person (*estîn de en hekastôi genei*): there can be a good woman and good slave, even though perhaps the former is an inferior type, and the latter a wholly base one. ... [On appropriateness:] it is *possible* to have a woman manly in

⁴ Gregory 2005: 261.

⁵ For the meaning of this term, which I translate loosely (and not unproblematically) as 'character' in this chapter, see e.g. Nünlist 2009: 254–256, with further references.

character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever. (Arist. *Po.* 15, 1454a16–27, tr. Halliwell)⁶

And again, in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses how the ‘propriety’ (*to prepon*, τὸ πρέπον) of prose style (*lexis*, λέξις) can be achieved by fitting the words to the character of the speaker:

One can express character ... when the suitable indication goes with the relevant class and disposition (*hekastōi genei kai hexei*). By ‘class’ (*genos*) here I mean, for example, determination by age (for instance, child, man, or old man), sex (man or woman) or nationality (Lacedaemonian or Thessalian), while I confine ‘dispositions’ (*hexeis*) to those that make us say that in his life a man has such and such a character; ... a rustic and an educated man would not use the same terms or in the same way’ (Arist. *Rh.* 3.7, 1408a25–32, tr. Russell, slightly adapted)⁷

The tendency, then, seems clear enough.⁸ Yet to my mind most modern discussions have too readily treated ancient criticism in monolithic terms, ignoring crucial differences between the scholia and other texts. It will be my contention that the scholia in particular offer a much more complex picture, and do not in any straightforward way support the idea that tragic characterization worked predominantly through typification.⁹ One important first observation,

6 For discussion of this passage in relation to Aristotle’s theory of *êthos* more generally, see e.g. Halliwell 1998: ch. 5.

7 *Hexis* (ἕξις) is difficult to translate: Aristotle elsewhere describes *hexis* as an ‘acquired moral principle that has become a permanent habit of character’ (Burkett 2011: 179, referring to Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 2.1, 1103a–b). The fact that he distinguishes between classes and ‘dispositions’ already complicates the notion of typification: such habits do not naturally map onto clearly defined groups of people (even if, admittedly, Aristotle’s own example—rustic vs educated—seems to centre around categories defined by education and economic background). On *lexis* see also Russell 1995: 131–132 (Russell describes as ‘in accordance with the general ancient view of character’ the idea that ‘speech is an indication of the moral characteristics of the speaker, marking not his individuality, but his type’).

8 Other relevant passages include Arist. *Rh.* 2.12–17, 1388b31–1391b6 (a lengthy discussion of the typical traits of the young, old, powerful, etc.), Pl. *Ion* 540b (Ion knows, through his rhapsodic skill, ‘what is appropriate for a man to say, for a woman, for a slave, for a free person, for a subject and for a ruler’), Plut. *Mor.* 853C–D (*Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander*; Aristophanes ‘does not give to each kind its fitting and appropriate use’ of words), and Theophrastus’ *Characters* (thirty type-sketches).

9 Such a view of tragic characterization is, in my view, also not supported by what we find in the plays in actual practice. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a demonstration of this point, but I may refer to some discussion in van Emde Boas 2018a, 2018b.

in this regard, concerns a difference of scope: whereas Aristotle's comments about characterization and style are themselves generic, and might thus be expected to deal in generalities,¹⁰ the scholia are by their very nature intended to elucidate the behaviour of individual characters in individual moments of individual plays. As we will see presently, the explanations that such moments elicit are much less often related to character types than is sometimes thought.

1.4 *Person and Situation*

If we return to the two examples with which I opened this chapter and examine them more closely, a vital difference appears between two kinds of generalization employed. The scholion on the opening scene of *Medea* relates the behaviour of the Nurse to that of 'those who find themselves in dire circumstances, and who dare not tell anyone about their misfortunes'; the *Hippolytus*-scholion speaks of 'the fickleness of old women'. Only the latter is a generalization about a *class* of people (specifically, as often in the scholia, women); the former, by contrast, generalizes about people *in a certain kind of situation*. The difference is apparent from the form used to express the two categories in the commentators' original Greek: whereas the *Hippolytus*-scholion speaks about a characteristic of a category denoted by a noun (the Greek has the generic article, *tôn graôn*, 'of old women'), the *Medea*-comment takes the form of a sequence of substantivized participles (τοὺς ... ἐξεταζομένους καὶ μη(δενὶ) ... θαρροῦντας 'those who find themselves in ... circumstances and who dare not'). This form, the participle with generic article, precisely mirrors the type of categorization at work: it turns a verb form denoting a certain situation into a nominal form generically denoting people involved in that situation ('those who X').

It is instructive to cast this difference in the terms of modern attribution theory, that is, the study in psychology of ways in which humans explain their own and other behaviour. Traditional—if by no means unchallenged, as we will see—models of attribution tend to distinguish between *dispositional* attributions, which assign causes of behaviour to internal factors of the person (personality traits, motives, beliefs, etc.), and *situational* attributions, which seek causes for behaviour in external factors in the environment or situation.¹¹ Dispositional attributions and situational attributions appeal to different kinds

10 For the 'somewhat abstract and generalised' style and purpose of the *Poetics*, see e.g. Halliwell 1998: 162 (also 1998: 34–35 on the specific issues raised by *Po.* 15 in this regard). It is true that in the treatise Aristotle offers specific examples of characters that violate his precepts (Menelaus as an example of needlessly bad character; Odysseus and Melanippe as characters who behave indecorously). Yet Aristotle does not make explicit how these characters violate type-driven expectations.

11 The distinction is conventionally traced back to Heider 1958.

of knowledge structures on the part of the observer: in the case of the former, the observer pinpoints the causes of the behaviour in her/his (schematic) knowledge about personality traits, whether they are those of an individual (i.e. person schemas), or those typical of a group (i.e. stereotypes); in the latter the observer rather associates the causes with his/her knowledge about the normal sequence of events in certain kinds of situations (i.e. scripts) and the role-based behaviour of agents in such events.¹² Thus, the distinction between individual and type need not come into play with situational attributions at all. When the scholiast comments on ‘those who find themselves in dire circumstances’ to explain the behaviour of the nurse in *Medea*, the explanation does not rely on knowledge about nurses (or women, slaves, etc.) in general or about this nurse in particular. By extension, we learn nothing from this scholion about whether ancient critics tended to think in terms of individuals or personality types. This particular scholion—and many like it—in fact offers evidence of neither way of thinking.

As already hinted at, ‘classic’ theories of attribution which rely on a simple distinction between personal and situational attributions have in recent decades been significantly challenged and revised within psychology. In my final section I will assess whether more recent work on attribution theory, as well as other work on folk psychology, can shed further light on the prevalence of situational attributions in the scholia. It will be appropriate first, however, to substantiate that prevalence, by giving a fuller account of the types of explanatory strategies we find at work in the corpus.

2 The Generalizing Scholia

Both types of generalizing scholia exemplified by my initial nurse-examples—those that interpret the behaviour of characters as typical of certain classes of people and those that connect it to types of situation—are richly evidenced in the tragic scholia, but the situational explanations outnumber the personal ones by roughly two to one.¹³ I give below a few further representative examples

12 For fuller accounts of the knowledge structures involved attribution, see e.g. Read and Miller 2005; Malle 2004: 144–145.

13 This estimate is based on the material gathered under the header ἦθος, *êthos* (‘character’) in Trendelenburg 1867: 110–123, supplemented with relevant scholia mentioned in Steinmann 1907 (esp. 8–19). Steinmann’s corpus is much larger than Trendelenburg’s, seemingly due to a much more inclusive interpretation of what counts as *êthos* (accordingly, unlike Trendelenburg he includes many instances of the kind that I will define below (pp. 78–79) as ‘reason explanations’). I have analysed all instances listed

from each type; most instances can fairly straightforwardly be identified by their grammatical construction (the use of a generic article with either a participle or an adjective/noun, as described above).¹⁴

2.1 *Situations: (ἦθος +) Participle ('The êthos of Those Who ...')*

- Euripides, *Hippolytus* 199: the ailing Phaedra asks for her body to be supported:

Σ Eur. *Hipp.* 199 'He has taken care to draw the *êthos* of those who are sick (τὸ τῶν νοσοῦντων ἦθος), who obsess in every way over the care of their body. Both through language and posture, he has all but given us Phaedra herself, being carried on. ...'

- Euripides, *Hippolytus* 176–186: Phaedra's nurse complains about her lot, having to take care of her mistress:

Σ Eur. *Hipp.* 178 'The *êthos* is that of someone exhausted by the ills of service (τὸ ἦθος ἀπειρηκείας τῆς θεραπείας), leading to an utter rejection of life. That, too, is why she utters the general thought, which is characteristic of those who are in trouble (σύνηθες τοῖς δυστυχούσιν).'

- Sophocles, *Ajax* 596: the chorus addresses its home country Salamis in apostrophe:

Σ Soph. *Aj.* 596 '⟨The poet⟩ has represented the *êthos* of those who are absent from their home country (τὸ ἦθος ἐμιμήσατο τῶν ἀφεστῶτων τῆς οἰκείας). For whenever something difficult happens they tend to invoke their fatherland.'

- Euripides, *Phoenissae* 263–268 (a rich example): Polyneices, by himself but armed with a sword, is afraid that he is walking into a trap:

Σ Eur. *Ph.* 267 'Some critics say that it is foolish ⟨for Polyneices⟩ to trust in his sword, and not yet in the truce, as if he were able to defeat so many ⟨hypothetical⟩ assailants by himself. But ⟨those critics⟩ do not recognize that, for those who go to meet some danger by necessity (οἱ μετὰ ἀνάγκης

by Trendelenburg (86 in total), as well as the scholia listed by Steinmann for five plays (Soph. *Aj.*, *OT*; Eur. *Med.*, *Or.*, *Phoen.*; 193 in total). I have also checked citations in relevant scholarship for relevant instances missing from both Trendelenburg and Steinmann, and searched and browsed editions of the scholia themselves. Since many scholia offer more than one type of behaviour explanation, and since others are not easily categorized, I have not attempted to give precise figures.

14 Some further examples (in addition to those given in full below) of situational explanations: Σ Aesch. *Sept.* 134; Soph. *Aj.* 44, 179, 245, 261, 340, 342, 368, 371, 421, 428, 641, 940, *El.* 135, 307, 675, 679, 849, 1117, *OT* 46, 85, 1023; Eur. *Andr.* 229, 329, *Hec.* 1100, *Hipp.* 208, 215, 362, 672, *Med.* 57, *Phoen.* 1605. Further examples of stereotyping scholia: Σ Aesch. *Sept.* 158, Soph. *Aj.* 82, 485, *El.* 126, 328, 766, 1236, 1406, *OC* 1725, Eur. *Hec.* 342, 924, *Hipp.* 433, *Or.* 823 (2x), *Ph.* 507, 1083.

ἐπί τινα κίνδυνον ἐρχόμενοι), it is not by all possible means that they want to look for safety, but whatever sort of it they can get at the moment. And those who travel by themselves with a dagger are not as well armed as anticipated wild animals, or robbers, but better than those who are entirely unarmed. This happened to Polyneices, too. For when he had been forced to come to a negation in Thebes, he did come, so as not to give the impression of being intractable, but expecting a trap he provided for his safety as best he could.' In some instances the situation about which the scholiast generalizes is described not through the use of a participle, but by other means: relative clauses, the first person plural ('we tend to ...'), or explicit generalizations about how 'people' typically behave in certain situations:

- Sophocles, *Ajax* 572–576: Ajax decrees that his son, and no one else, should get his weapons after his death:
Σ Soph. *Aj.* 572a 'it is believable that Ajax returns constantly to the point about the weapons: he is very concerned that they do not get taken by his enemies; and it is human and entirely natural (ἀνθρώπινον δὲ καὶ μάλα φυσικόν) to mention things that we have on our mind (περὶ ὧν ἐν νῷ ἔχομεν) more frequently.'
- Euripides, *Phoenissae* 766–770: Eteocles, covering all his bases, says that the Thebans still need to ask an oracle for help and insight:
Σ Eur. *Ph.* 766: 'People typically look down (εἰωθότες γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ... καταφρονεῖν) on the oracular art when things are going well for them (ἐν ταῖς εὐπραγίαις), but when things are going badly (ἐν ταῖς συμφοραῖς) they have recourse to seers.'

2.2 *Person Classes: (ἦθος +) Noun/Adjective ('The êthos of a (Good/Bad/ Old/Etc.) Person ...')*

- Euripides, *Orestes* 218: Electra addresses her brother affectionately:
Σ Eur. *Or.* 218: 'He has represented the *êthos* and words of a sisterly girl (φιλαδέλφου κόρης τὸ ἦθος καὶ λόγους ἐμιμήσατο).'
- Sophocles, *Ajax* 915–916: Tecmessa covers Ajax's body:
Σ Soph. *Aj.* 916: 'It is the *êthos* of a woman (ἦθος γυναικός) not to display the body indecorously.'
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 118–122: Creon relates how a single eye-witness returned from the altercation at the crossroads; the audience knows that that eye-witness's version of the events is false:
Σ Soph. *OT* 118: '⟨The poet⟩ has precisely described the *êthos* of cowards (τὸ ἦθος τῶν δειλῶν). For they simultaneously exaggerate the events so as not to give the impression that they fled because of cowardice, and at the same time they make a mountain out of a molehill because they are in a state of delusion.'

- Euripides, *Phoenissae* 446–451: Eteocles appears onstage to engage his brother in a debate; he wastes no time at all but wants to get straight to it: Σ Eur. *Ph.* 446: ‘The character has been very well crafted by the tragedian to be such as an unjust man ought to be (οἷον δεῖ εἶναι ἄδικον ἄνδρα): he knows that he has nothing just to say so he brings forward the decision, thus avoiding the detailed reproach arising from the pleading.’

3 Individualizing Scholia

The previous section has raised substantial difficulties for the view that the scholia explain behaviour primarily by reference to classes of persons, since a majority of the adduced examples were found to categorize *not* by stereotypes, but rather by situation-based roles. Yet the problems for the view do not end there. In his discussion of the scholiasts’ treatment of characterization, René Nünlist (2009: 246–256)¹⁵ has shown that the generalizing scholia are only one part of the story:

Generally speaking, the characters’ behaviour is often explained in the light of commonsensical notions of psychology and typical human behaviour. ... [S]uch generalisations tend to treat characters as representatives of a particular type. It should, however, be underlined that these comments ... cannot be said to be typical of the entire corpus ...: the extant corpus of scholia contains both comments that emphasise the typicality of characters and others that emphasise their individuality. They form two sides of the same coin. (Nünlist 2009: 252–253)

Apart from what is (as we have seen) a problematic equating of generalization *per se* with treating characters ‘as representatives of a particular type’, this is spot on. The scholia in fact frequently focus on the *individual* attributes of characters, and explain their behaviour with reference to those traits. In contrast to the scholia discussed above, these comments relate behaviour not to patterns that readers will have been familiar with from their daily lives, but to the specific characteristics of the agent. In the terms of attribution theory they constitute, like the stereotyping generalizations discussed above, dispositional explanations, but the personality traits to which behaviour is linked are in these instances not seen as typical of a wider group but described only as belonging to the individual character. Significantly, individualizing comments

¹⁵ See also his treatment of this topic in Nünlist 2015, 716–717 (and index s.v. ‘characters/characterisation’).

easily outnumber the stereotyping generalizations, although they are not as numerous in the scholia as situational generalizations.¹⁶ They are typically applied to major named characters such as Oedipus, Ajax, or Medea.

3.1 *Explicit Ascriptions of Traits*

Individualizing comments frequently come in the form of an explicit ascription of a trait, by way of an adjective (e.g. *megalphrôn*, μεγαλόφρων, 'proud') or noun (e.g. *megalphrosunê*, μεγαλοφροσύνη, 'pride') applied to the character's name or to his/her *êthos*. Here are some examples:¹⁷

- Sophocles, *Ajax* 356–361: Ajax asks the chorus to kill him:
Σ Soph. *Aj.* 360: 'Ajax does not want to be killed because he is bitter over the loss of his weapons, but because he fears the censure of his flock. In this <the poet> shows the *êthos* and the pride (τὸ ἦθος καὶ ἡ μεγαλοφροσύνη) of Ajax.'
- Sophocles, *Ajax* 815–820: Ajax plants his sword, taken from his mortal enemy Hector, in the hostile territory of Troy, in order to throw himself on it:
Σ Soph. *Aj.* 818: 'Ajax is proud (μεγαλόφρων) and to his dying moments hateful of the Trojans.'
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1: at the start of the play, Oedipus addresses the supplicating elders as 'children' (τέκνα, *tekna*):
Σ Soph. *OT* 1: 'The *êthos* of Oedipus is patriotic and showing forethought for the public good (φιλόδημον καὶ προνοητικὸν τοῦ κοινῇ συμφέροντος τὸ τοῦ Οἰδίποδος ἦθος), and the people favour him on account of the things he has done for them. It is, then, reasonable that he uses the word *tekna* as if he were a father.'
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 58: Oedipus again addresses the elders as 'children' (παῖδες, *paides*):
Σ Soph. *OT* 58: 'The phrase *ô paides* is not so much used with respect to their age as it is fitted to his kindly *êthos* (ἀρμόζον ἐστὶ τῷ φιλοφρονουμένῳ ᾗθει), just like the phrase *ô tekna* at the start of the play.'

3.2 *Consistency*

Another way in which the scholia reveal a focus on characteristics of individuals is by their repeated interest in consistency of characterization: characters' behaviour is then judged to be in line with (or, sometimes, at odds with) their

¹⁶ For the basis for this claim, see n. 13.

¹⁷ Some additional examples: Aesch. *PV* 177, *Ag.* 841, *Sept.* 107; Eur. *Med.* 296, 922, 538, 1046, *Phoen.* 446, 909, 1083, *Tro.* 630; Soph. *Aj.* 112, 766, 1047, 1184, *Ant.* 69, 82, 423, *El.* 469, 975, 1240, *OT* 93, 312.

other actions in the play.¹⁸ Such comments are often combined with explicit trait ascriptions:

- Euripides, *Orestes* 99: Electra attacks Helen rather bluntly:
Σ Eur. *Or.* 99: ‘The *êthos* of Electra is in no way inconsistent (οὐδαμῶς ἀνώμαλον (*anômalon*) τὸ τῆς Ἡλέκτρας ἦθος).’
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 287–289: Oedipus reveals that he has already sent for Tiresias:
Σ Soph. *OT* 287: ‘Here too (κάνταῦθα), he has maintained the provident nature of his *êthos* (τὸ κηδεμονικὸν τοῦ ἥθους).’
- Euripides, *Orestes* 482: Menelaus defends his talking to Orestes on the basis that he is ‘the son of a father dear to me’:
Σ Eur. *Or.* 482: ‘[The poet] *again* (πάλιν) shows the man’s base *êthos* (τὸ κακὴν ἦθος τοῦ ἀνδρός), in that he calls his brother dear to him.’¹⁹

3.3 *Ancient and Modern Vignettes*

Summing up the types of scholia we have seen so far: behaviour is variously attributed to the individual personality traits of the character, to stereotypical traits of a class to which the character can be ascribed, or they are seen as typical for the particular situation that the character is in. Individualizing scholia occur with considerably greater frequency than stereotyping scholia, although in turn they are handily outnumbered by the situational explanations.

A first inevitable conclusion is that, as a whole, this material offers little support to the notion that the scholiasts interpreted the characters exclusively or even predominantly as representatives of certain classes of person. In spite of the stereotyping precepts that emerge from ancient *theoretical* treatises on tragic poetics and rhetorical technique (particularly, Aristotle’s), in actual *practice*, the Hellenistic commentators were fully capable of producing highly individualized interpretations of the characters.²⁰ Read together,

18 On such scholia see also Nünlist 2009: 249–252 and 2015: 721–722. Consistency (τὸ ὁμαλόν, *to homalon*) is another one of Aristotle’s criteria for good characterization in the *Poetics* (15, 1454a26, cf. p. 69 above). In modern psychology, particularly in Kelley’s influential covariation model of attribution (1967), consistency is one of the three variables on whose basis attributions are made; it is closely linked with dispositional attributions.

19 At Menelaus’ first appearance in the play, the scholiast had already commented (Σ Eur. *Or.* 368) that ‘from his initial entrance, the baseness of Menelaus’ thought (τὸ κακὴν ἦθος τῆς γνώμης Μενελάου) is marked.’

20 So, similarly, Nünlist 2015: 717: ‘Hellenistic critics ... explored the characters’ individuality and subjectivity, two notions which are often strikingly absent from ancient discussions, esp[ecially] the *Poetics*’. Theory and practice will of course not have operated independently: for discussion of the influence of Aristotelian poetics on the (Homeric) scholia, see Schironi 2009.

such comments can even amount to ‘character vignettes’ that would not look out of place in the work of a modern (or rather, perhaps, mid-20th-century) commentator: we have seen, for instance, the scholia describe Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* as ‘patriotic and showing forethought for the public good’ (1), someone who is favoured by his people (1), and ‘kindly’ (58); later they add that he is ‘intelligent’ (112) and someone possessed of ‘urgency’ (287, 300). It is striking how much of this we see replicated in perhaps the most memorable character sketch of Oedipus produced by modern scholarship, that of Bernard Knox (1998 [1957]: 29):

Such is the character of Oedipus: he is a great man, a man of experience and swift courageous action, who yet acts only after careful deliberation, illuminated by an analytic and demanding intelligence. His action by its consistent success generates a great self-confidence, but it is always directed to the common good. He is an absolute ruler who loves and is loved by his people, but is conscious of the jealousy his success arouses and suspicious of conspiracy in high places. He is capable of terrible, apparently ungovernable anger, but only under great provocation, and he can, though grudgingly and with difficulty, subdue his anger when he sees himself isolated from his people.²¹

Still, the relative prominence of situational explanations may give rise to the idea that the psychological strategies employed by the scholiasts are at least qualitatively different (even if along slightly different lines than scholars have previously maintained) from modern ones. In the next (and last) section I hope to qualify this idea, taking my cue from more recent developments in the psychology of attribution and other approaches to folk psychology.

4 Causes, Reasons, Explanations, and the Value of the Scholia for the Study of Characterization

4.1 *Reason Explanations and the Business of the Scholia*

Long before the scholiast elaborated on the nurse’s behaviour in Euripides’ *Medea*, the nurse herself did so in the play. We may recall that the lines to which the scholiast’s comment is keyed contain the nurse’s own justification

²¹ Knox was, of course, fully aware of the material in the ancient scholia (he refers to ancient commentary regularly; see his index s.v. ‘scholiast’).

for her being outside—a ‘desire came over me’ (ἔμερος μ’ ὑπῆλθε, 57)—and that this justification is offered in response to the tutor quizzing her about her behaviour—‘why are you standing in front of the gates?’ (τί πρὸς πύλαισι ... ἔστηκας, 50–51). We see here a behaviour explanation elicited by a direct appeal for it, and formulated by providing a reason for the behaviour in the form of a mental state (‘desire’). As Bertram Malle, one of the most influential psychologists working on attribution theory today, has demonstrated, this is entirely in line with what we would expect from naturally occurring behaviour explanations.²² Malle’s ‘Folk-Conceptual Theory of Behaviour Explanations’ is based on the observation that traditional attribution theory is unduly focused on the distinction between dispositional or situational *causes* for behaviour. Naturally occurring behaviour explanations, Malle’s research shows, appeal to such causes regularly only when the behaviour is judged to be unintentional; in the case of intentional behaviours, explanations in the wild are most often given in the form of *reasons*, usually with reference to the agent’s belief or desire (‘because she thought that ...’, ‘because they wanted to ...’). In fewer cases, and only by extension, do underlying causes—or, as Malle labels them, ‘causal histories of reasons’—come in. Schematically, Malle’s model relates the different modes of explanation as follows:

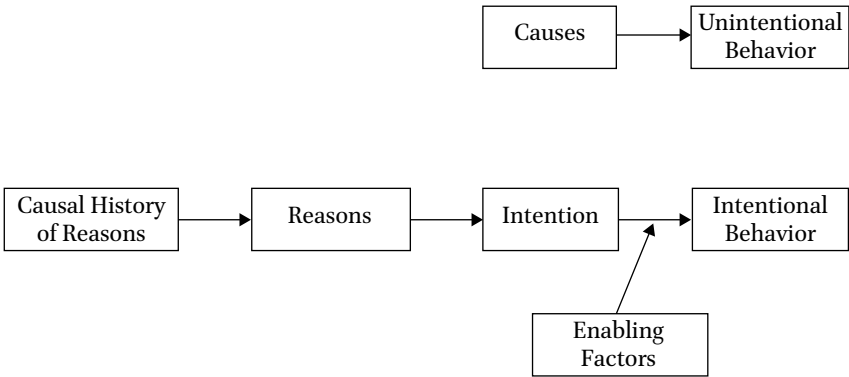


FIGURE 1 Modes of explanation (shaded boxes) for unintentional and intentional behaviour (Malle 2022: 105)

22 See e.g. Malle 2004, 2011. Malle’s theories are applied to Greek tragedy by Scodel 2023.

The tragic scholia align with Malle's model remarkably well: a majority of the scholiasts' explanations of behaviour and speeches²³ is in fact phrased in terms of reasons, specifically with reference to a mental state (belief, desire, evaluation). Here is a small assortment of examples:²⁴

- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 673–675: Creon speaks harshly to Oedipus:
Σ Soph. *OT* 673: 'Creon still persists in his free speech because he *knows* (ἐπιστάμενος) that he has done nothing wrong.'
- Euripides, *Medea* 899–900: Medea is distressed by the secret prospect of killing her children:
Σ Eur. *Med.* 899: 'From this it is clear that she does not proceed to the murder *according to a predefined plan* (κατὰ προαίρεσιν) ... but because *she is very eager* (διὰ τὸ προτεθυμῆσθαι) to avenge herself against Jason.'
- Euripides, *Phoenissae* 1310–1312: Creon arrives and wonders whether he should 'mourn myself or my city with tears':
Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 1310: 'So as to seem to be patriotic (ἵνα δόξῃ φιλόπολις) and not to make his speech only about his son, Creon says "For whom should I start my laments, for my son or the city?" And yet *he knows full well* (καίτοι εἰδώς) that the city survives because of the death of his son.'

Moreover, for each of the types I described in the previous sections (situational, stereotyping, and individualizing), many of the examples *combine* a causal explanation with a discussion of more immediately antecedent reasons.²⁵ In such instances we can see particularly clearly the chain that Malle identifies as running from 'causal histories of reasons', through reasons in the form of mental states, and to intention (see figure 1):²⁶

- Euripides, *Medea* 820–823: Medea, a foreigner, successfully extracts a promise of silence from the chorus of Corinthian women:

23 By 'explanations of speeches' I am not referring to the very frequent type of scholion in which the words of a character are paraphrased in plainer language. Such scholia answer, as it were, the question 'What does [what character X is saying] mean?' (they are often marked by φησί [*phēsi*], 'he/she is saying ...'). Rather, I am interested in scholia that answer a different question: 'Why is this character saying this?'. (The distinction is, admittedly, not always easily made.)

24 A further selection from two plays: Σ Soph. *Aj.* 34, 57, 462, 495, 1318, 1324, 1328; Eur. *Or.* 4, 25, 71, 88, 470, 779, 1559.

25 For such combinations, see Malle 2004: 104–109.

26 See also many of the examples already given above, e.g. Σ Soph. *Aj.* 360 (Ajax wants to be killed because he *fears* the censure of his flock, which is the result of his pride); Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 446 (Polyneices is impatient because he *knows* he has no righteous arguments to make, which demonstrates his overall unjust nature), and 267 (Polyneices has brought a sword because he *wanted* to provide for his safety as best he could, which is what people in such situations tend to do).

Σ Eur. *Med.* 823: 'We should in no way be surprised that, although they ought, as Corinthian women, to take the side of Creon, they choose to keep her secret. For being free women they give preference to whatever occurs to them to be just.' [The reason for the chorus' secrecy, their belief that Medea is on the right side, is associated with their status as free women.]

- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 93: Oedipus declares that a proclamation should be made to the entire population:

Σ Soph. *OT* 93.: 'In accordance with his regal *êthos* (ἀξίως τοῦ βασιλικοῦ ἥθους) he orders a public proclamation, since he suspects nothing concerning himself (μηδέν ὑποπτεύων περὶ ἑαυτοῦ) and thinks (οἶεται) that he is favoured by the gods.' [Oedipus's lack of suspicion and his misguided belief that he has the gods on his side, the reasons for his request for a public declaration, are connected with his kingly *êthos*.]

4.2 *The Nature of the Scholia*

The fact that the scholia—and indeed the play texts themselves—so closely mirror what Malle's research has shown to be the bread and butter of everyday behaviour explanations not only further problematizes the notion that the ancient Greeks employed fundamentally different psychological models in staging and interpreting tragic characters than 'we' do, it also invites us to consider various foundational questions about the nature of the scholia and their value for the study of tragic characterization.

A few words, then, on the nature of the material. Although I have above liberally applied the term 'behaviour explanation' to describe what the scholiasts 'do' with their notes, explanation is certainly not the only mode of communication that we see the ancient critics adopt *vis-à-vis* their audiences.²⁷ In the scholia, including many of the ones cited in this chapter, we variously see the critics praise the poets for their character portrayal, defend them against criticisms deemed unjust, and conversely, criticize their failings. It is likely, moreover, that the repeated discussion of behaviour and words as 'appropriate' or 'fitting' to certain characters reflects the degree to which the scholiasts thought of the play texts as models of rhetorical or poetic composition, and of their own works as guides for emulating those models.²⁸ The commentaries from which the scholia derive were, in short, vehicles of aesthetic evaluation and instruction as much as elucidation. Still, in spite of this variety of aims,

27 See also Heath 1987: 116 n. 45, Nünlist 2009: 249–252, and (more generally) Nünlist 2015: 707–709 and Hunter 2015 (on Homer).

28 See Nünlist 2009: 248 on the *progymnasmata* (ancient rhetorical exercises), with further references.

the fact that discussions of character behaviour are framed for the most part around reasons suggests that we may not be too far off if we take *explanation* to be the critics' core business: the plays, widely read but perhaps not always immediately understood, posed fairly immediate questions ('why is the chorus keeping Medea's secret?') that needed answering first. Of course, explanation and other aims need not be seen as mutually exclusive:²⁹ by helping their readers understand the texts, the critics also allowed their readers to evaluate and emulate them.

Against this background, it becomes clear that an attempt to extract a coherent theory of character and characterization from the scholia is by necessity a fraught enterprise. The ancient critics talk about *êthos* regularly, certainly, but they do so in the context of a wider project for which *êthos* is not necessarily *the* organizing principle. In many instances, the critics' simple explanations of the goings-on in a play elicit discussion of the relevant character's underlying traits and dispositions: in at least as many other instances they do not. And because reason explanations tend to refer to transient mental states (beliefs, desires), they often have no immediate bearing on questions of 'long-term' characterization. In the terms of attribution theory, reason explanations—particularly those not combined with causal histories—need not be accompanied by a 'correspondent inference' about the agent's dispositional traits.

4.3 *Reading Minds, Reading Situations*

Insofar as their default mode of explanation seems to pertain to short-term mental states, and longer-term dispositions come in only by extension, it could be felt that the scholia are better analysed within the cognitive psychology framework of 'mindreading' (a.k.a. 'Theory of Mind'—a topic that has attracted much interest in recent work on Greek tragedy)³⁰ than in the social psychology framework of attribution. As one scholar working on mindreading describes the difference in approach between the two traditions, attribution theorists have typically studied how people make 'inferences about traits and beliefs that are enduring characteristics of people', and how they 'make such inferences on the basis of scant behavioural evidence', whereas 'research on mindreading has typically studied beliefs and desires that are short-term

29 One of the key strengths of Malle's research is his sensitivity to 'the why and when' of naturally occurring behaviour explanations (2004: ch. 3) and their role in communication, especially with regards to impression management (2004: ch. 6).

30 See Budelmann and Easterling 2010 and many of the contributions in Budelmann and Sluiter 2023. For surveys of the psychology of mindreading and the main approaches within it, see Apperly 2011; Marraffa <https://www.iep.utm.edu/theomind/#H3>; Lavelle 2022; from a very different angle, see also Gallagher 2005: ch. 5, 2020: part II.

characteristics of an agent and are normatively warranted' (Apperly 2011: 87–88). It remains interesting, however, to explore when, why, and how the ancient critics link short-term states to long-term traits, so we may in fact best be served by an approach which combines attribution and mindreading: it is a fortunate circumstance that the two disciplines, which were long devoid of mutual interest, have at last begun to interact.³¹

One point on which mindreading and attribution may usefully inform each other is precisely the fact that beliefs and desires are usually, as Apperly describes them, 'normatively warranted'. This refers to the fact that we tend to apply our knowledge of the social world (social scripts and schemas) in drawing inferences about mental states.³² Beliefs and desires do not exist in a vacuum: they have (as Malle's model formulates it), 'histories', and because the line from history to mental state follows predictable paths, we are able to follow it in both directions when we reason about the minds of others: we can infer what they must be like and/or what situation they must be in from what we know about their thoughts or feelings (attribution) *and* we can infer what someone else must be thinking or feeling on the basis of what others like them and/or in a similar situation think or feel (mindreading).

It is along these lines, finally, that the high frequency of situational generalizations in the scholia may be contextualized. The point of portraying the actions of tragic characters as typical of someone in such-and-such a situation is not to demonstrate how neatly the characters map onto particular types, that is, not to conform to a broader view of character and personality that deals mainly in generalities. Rather, the critics use this strategy to make the characters' words and deeds—which must often have been enigmatic to

31 Malle (2004: 29) laments that 'the literature on behavior explanations ... has had little contact with the rapidly growing literature on theory of mind'; similarly, from the cognitive psychology side, Apperly (2011: 87) calls the 'lack of interaction' between work on attribution and work on mindreading 'truly surprising'. Malle's own work represents one of the fullest attempts at integrating the approaches (see also e.g. Epley and Waytz 2010); it is notable that mindreading plays a significant role in recent handbook chapters on attribution (e.g. Reeder 2013), and that recent introductions to mindreading adopt broader definitions (e.g. Lavelle 2022; Westra 2022), including, in one case, 'character traits' (Lavelle 2022: 17).

32 For the importance of social scripts and schemas in mindreading, see Apperly 2011: 116–117, 129–132. They take on even greater significance in the work of Daniel Hutto (Hutto 2008, cf. also Gallagher and Hutto 2008), whose 'Narrative Practice Hypothesis' suggests that we understand others by fitting their behaviour into familiar narrative patterns (such a model seems to align with the interpretative strategies in the scholia quite well, particularly with the situational generalizations).

contemporary readers—comprehensible, to make their minds accessible, by situating them in frameworks that are familiar to their readers from their own daily lives.

5 Conclusion

If this chapter's survey of explanatory strategies in the tragic scholia has shown anything, it is that those strategies are diverse. Within that diversity, however, certain trends can be identified: discussions of behaviour tend to include an indication of the characters' reasons (beliefs, desires); comments can also connect behaviour to (in descending order of frequency) situational generalizations, individual traits of the character, and/or the stereotypical traits of certain classes of person; such explanations are often combined with reason explanations, although they also occur independently. These patterns suggest that the view of (tragic) literary characterization that we find expressed in ancient theoretical treatises, which sees character primarily as associated with types, is somewhat alien to the actual practice of the commentators. They also suggest that their primary interest was making the characters' words and deeds comprehensible to their readers, by connecting the behaviour to their everyday lived experience.

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PART 2

***Social Representations: the Role of Comedy
and Satire***



Introduction to Part 2: Social Representation in Practice

Gordon Sammut

1 Introduction

What is a crowd, and how is it different from a mob? What is a bird, and what features must it display to be classified as a ‘bird’? What does femininity entail, and what features must a human demonstrate to qualify as ‘female’?

Our ability to make sense of elements in the world around us, as in the examples above, in such a way that it enables everyday action and interaction, relies on structures of knowledge—social representations—that make up a society’s stock of common sense (Sammut and Howarth 2014; Sammut and Bauer 2021). If you were out dining and saw that the restaurant was serving ‘Coq au Vin’ on the menu, you’d understand immediately that if you proceeded to order this item, you would be served chicken that is cooked according to a traditional French recipe. You wouldn’t consult the waiter over the meaning of chicken, and how it could be a bird if it cannot fly. The meaning of chicken in routine everyday interaction is captured in a social representation people share of the bird and its uses (Chryssides et al. 2009). Had you not been socialized into this meaning structure, you would not know what a chicken was, you would not know that it is a bird and that it is edible for human beings, and you would not know how a ‘Coq au Vin’ is different from a ‘Chicken Curry’.

Social representations, however, are not fixed and permanent structures. They change and evolve over time, adapting to situated circumstances and emergent realities (Sammut, Tsirogianni and Wagoner 2012). Our contemporary understanding of what it means to be female, for instance, is very different from the meaning associated with femininity a mere 100 years ago. As a consequence, we cannot make sense of femininity in the same way that our forefathers did in a different epoch. The social representation of femininity has changed over time and the same goes for many other social representations that structure our common sense today.

This raises a key point in our study and interpretation of objects and issues pertaining to different cultures or different historical epochs, that is, common sense is socially embedded and meaning cannot be separated from its context of production (Sammut and Bauer 2021). To interpret psychological phenomena outside the context in which they materialize is to risk reifying

psychological constructs as if they were immutable entities. Take personality as an example. There is a long and highly popular tradition in psychology that supports the Big Five theory of personality (Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience, Costa and McCrae 1992). This theory is sometimes taken to be universal in its manifestation. However, Zhou et al. (2009) report that a seven-factor structure was more plausible in accounting for personality structure in China (Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Unselfishness, Emotional Volatility, Positive Valence, as well as Dependency and Negative Valence). Similarly, the Russian neuropsychologist Aleksander R. Luria, in his studies amongst illiterate communities in Uzbekistan, demonstrated how human cognition is socio-culturally embedded. Luria (1976) noted how cognitive processing, such as mathematical computation, differs between individuals who rely on concrete and practical operations in their everyday lives and those who are accustomed to thinking in abstract, verbal and theoretical ways.

The concern with the universality of psychological phenomena is a critical issue and intersects with considerations of cultural and historical specificities. One way the social and psychological sciences have sought to resolve this issue is by distinguishing *emic* from *etic* (Harris 1976). The former refers to a socio-culturally embedded display (e.g. using chopsticks), whilst the latter refers to its universal operation (e.g. eating). This distinction is useful and leads to innumerable insights—such as, for instance, that personality can be variably structured by context. However, in interpreting psychological phenomena outside their context, one must proceed with caution. Psychological phenomena are intertwined with cultural products that evolve over historical time to serve the interests of the individuals and groups that participated in their emergence and production (Sammut 2011; Buhagiar and Sammut 2020). It would be very convenient for us if we were able to interview the classical authors on the meaning of their works. One suspects we would gain insight into their social representations of womanhood, crowds, reason, democracy, and so on. Whilst this is clearly impossible, we are however able to understand that the classical authors deployed particular meanings in their performances and represented characters to stir their audiences in critical ways. In the two comedies analysed in this section, *Assembly Women* and *Birds*, we understand that Aristophanes ‘psychologized’ his characters in ways that succeeded in making even ordinarily respectable figures ridiculous. This in itself, I argue, is an act of social representation (Chryssides et al. 2009).

The three chapters that follow, by Hardwick, Makri and Rosen, draw on a popular demarcation in psychology: on the one hand, there is logical reasoning, which commonly applies to rational individuals—historically and in

popular conceptions this is associated with men. On the other hand, there is emotive reasoning, (stereo-)typically associated with women and crowds. The distinction has received considerable scholarly attention over the years. Its ascription to crowds was made famous by Gustav Le Bon (1895), who stated in no uncertain terms that whilst individually a person may be civilized and cultivated, in a crowd one's mental faculties are hampered to the point where she or he become no more than a 'barbarian', acting by instinct (1895: 32). In the same year, Freud published his *Studies on Hysteria* with Breuer. This volume advanced the thesis that physiological symptoms could be caused by underlying mental illness. The thesis was supported by a series of case studies—all female. At the time, hysteria was widely thought to apply only to women. The study of psychology has admittedly come a long way since. Crowds today are recognized also as agents of social change (Drury 2020; Sammut and Bauer 2021) and psychosomatic disorders in the DSM-5 are diagnosable in both sexes (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The distinction between the two types of cognitive processing detailed above has also gained further scholarly attention. Bruner (1986), for instance, distinguishes between narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought, whilst Kahneman (2011) similarly distinguishes 'thinking fast' from 'thinking slow'. In the cognitive sciences, these theories are broadly known as dual-process models of cognition, to which we now turn.

2 Modes of Thinking

Aristophanes' *Assembly Women*, as Alexandra Hardwick argues in chapter 4, sees Praxagora deploy differential treatment of the *dêmos* on the one hand, and of her husband Blepyrus (himself an assembly member) on the other. The assembly is claimed to act in a manner akin to 'the ravings of drunkards'. It shouts down the first speaker before he can speak, for being a 'squinter'. Hardwick notes how the *dêmos* prefers to attack speakers *ad hominem* rather than through argumentation. The battle between opposing factions, the author further notes, is conducted through sheer volume of noise alone. Praxagora is well aware of the *dêmos*' perverse tendencies and she tailors her pitch accordingly. Specifically, she makes plans for dealing with counterarguments in similar fashion, by insulting her opponents rather than engaging them in reasoned deliberation. In her dealings with Blepyrus, however, Praxagora adopts a different approach. Though himself characterized as stupid, Blepyrus cross-examines Praxagora's policy. He demands explanations and allows himself to be convinced only after his queries have been fully dealt with. Hardwick notes a parallel in Aristophanes' *Birds*, with Tereus similarly providing a

charismatic pitch that 'trains' the Chorus and paves the way for Pisthetaerus' vision. We can see here how persuasion can be the outcome of reasoned argumentation. In other settings, however, tangential features seem to be more significant. And in other circumstances yet, as in Pisthetaerus' appeal to the birds, both rational and emotive routes to persuasion are involved concurrently.

In psychology, dual-process models (the Elaboration Likelihood Model [ELM] (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model [HSM] (Eagly and Chaiken 1993; 1998) propose two routes to persuasion, which is understood to occur as a function of how the persuasive appeal is cognitively processed. The first route is through a deep processing route (i.e. the central route in ELM, or the systematic route in HSM), where a message perceived by an individual is consciously attended to and rationally processed in terms of its core message. The individual attends to the intricate features of the persuasive appeal, reasons for and against persuasion are mustered and persuasion takes place when the balance tips in favour of the appeal following appraisal and evaluation.

By contrast, the shallow processing route operates on peripheral features that may nevertheless persuade (i.e. the peripheral route in ELM and the heuristic route in HSM). This route is used when deep engagement is not possible due to circumstances, but the appeal is still perceived. What happens in these situations is that tangential features may provide a heuristic evaluation of content, for example, endorsement of an idea by the leader. In essence, therefore, human beings can be persuaded in two ways: either by good, strong arguments and pertinent information detailing how what is presented to them is what they actually need; or, through peripheral features that are appealing but that might not be relevant with regards to the product itself (or both simultaneously, as a persuasive message may in itself be multivariate). As noted above, these two types of cognitive processing mark the species in its entirety and not any subgroup in particular. Whilst Praxagora relies on the deep processing route in dealing with Blepyrus privately and the shallow processing route in her dealings with the assembly, suggesting an individual/crowd distinction, it is worth noting that in an actively agitated crowd, no reasonable character is afforded the luxury of deep and critical commentary. That may have been a factor in an individual's choice of joining the crowd in the first place, but in an active crowd situation, other factors necessarily come into play. Clearly, which route is opportune depends on situational criteria rather than a supposed 'crowd effect'.

The reason why some seemingly peripheral heuristics are nevertheless persuasive in certain circumstances is that human cognition is biased in determined directions that have helped our ancestral survival. This feature of

human cognition is termed ‘ecological rationality’ (Todd and Gigerenzer 2000) in evolutionary psychology and represents ‘fast and frugal’ tendencies rooted in our evolved genetic baggage that remain active in human cognition today. In this way, any type of information stands to exert influence if and when judged relevant by the situated subject. One type of evidence that individuals typically consider is other people’s opinions. Asch (1952) identifies this as the *social check*. In persuasion, other people’s opinions are judged relevant or not depending on the epistemic authority they command (Kruglanski and Thompson 1999). This is akin to the notion of source credibility (Hovland and Weiss 1951), or what classical rhetoric identified as *ethos* (*êthos*) (cf. Sammut and Bauer 2021). The epistemic authority assigned to some individuals may be highly influential, to the point of overriding other types of evidence. Hardwick notes, for instance, that Tereus exclaims how *phronimos* (‘sensible’) Pisthetaerus is, appealing to his credentials without, however, providing any evidence for his claims. People default to and converge on the leader’s opinion not out of laziness, but for a good reason—the leader’s position is supported by the mass of the group.

For this reason, social identification along with social representation is a critical dynamic (Breakwell 2015) that determines the standards a social group considers common sense. Challenging the standard paves the way for ushering a new sense that is yet to become common—an uncommon sense, which at first glance an audience perceives, in this case through a satirical performance, as comical nonsense (Sammut and Bauer 2021). This point is brought home in Xenia Makri’s chapter on Aristophanes’ *Birds*. Makri notes how Pisthetaerus invokes the social identity of the birds to motivate their revolt on the basis of a quest for positive distinctiveness. By playing up the perceived injustice the birds have suffered at the hands of gods and humans alike, Pisthetaerus presents a social representation of the prevalent order that provides birds with a sense of entitlement they did not previously feel. The perceived injustice serves to motivate their identification with Pisthetaerus’ quest. In social representations theory (Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell and Valsiner 2015), projects serve to bind social actors in purposive relations with regards to an object of common concern. Groups form when individuals come together in pursuit of some activity (Buhagiar and Sammut 2020), setting the grounds for social identification with one another and with a prototypical leader who best embodies (i.e. represents) the quest. Pisthetaerus positions himself as an in-group member despite the fact that he himself is not a bird. This constitutes a social representation of the in-group/out-group boundary. He draws on this newly forged representation to become leader-dictator of the birds capable of crushing dissenting in-group rebels. In social psychology, this tendency is termed

the ‘black sheep effect’, representing a cognitive bias that serves in-group cohesion through social exclusion (Sammut, Bezzina and Sartawi 2015). In *Birds*, this is only possible in light of the fact that new social representations have altered the sense-regulating social interaction—from the common to the non-common with regard to the dissenting birds’ sceptical actions, and from nonsense to sense with regard to Pisthetaerus’ role in the drama (cf. Sammut and Bauer 2021). At this point, it is worth considering what representational work is at play in the texts analysed and what consequences this representational work precipitates.

3 Social Representation in Practice

It is worth singling out two social psychological processes apparent in the chapters of this Part. First, the distinction between reflexive and reflective engagement; secondly drama as performed social representation. The distinction between reflexive and reflective engagement is crucial in understanding the role of satire in society, from antiquity to today. In a crucial sense, the distinction seems to map onto the shallow/deep cognition distinction we reviewed in dual-process models of persuasion. Reflexive engagement constitutes an instinctive response, whereas reflective engagement implies higher intellectual functioning. It also seems to map onto the distinction Rosen presents in Chapter Six between Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter. The former represents genuine expressions associated with happiness whilst the latter is intellectual and, as Rosen notes, is self-generated without requiring positive affect. It is worth noting that just as the shallow and deep cognitive-processing routes can be activated concurrently, so reflexive laughter can simultaneously involve reflective engagement. When we observe a funny act, such as a clown falling headlong into a cake, we reflexively laugh at the occurrence. Satire includes such humorous fictive events but also employs recognizable characters and personifications enjoying respect in ordinary life. To the extent that the analogy between the cast of satire and real life is not perceived, satire constitutes mere comedy and any laughter it generates can be understood to be reflexive. Yet to the extent that the analogy between cast and real life is indeed perceived (e.g. *dêmos*: assembly; Paphlagon: Cleon, see the chapter by Rosen), the laughter it generates is understood to be reflective, and satire thus serves the political role of social representation. It is for this reason that its reception remains contentious, potentially attracting backlash and requiring at times the management of audience expectations, as Rosen notes when discussing the prelude to *Frogs*.

This brings us to the second point, which builds on the first. That is, in essence, satirical drama is a performed social representation (Chryssides et al. 2009). It is social inasmuch as it involves a communicative, intersubjective exchange between different parties (i.e. dramatist, actors, spectators). It is a representation inasmuch as it does more than enact characters (sometimes personifications) in a natural and realistic way, to the extent that this is at all possible. Rather, it represents characters (i.e. political leaders, Athenians, crowds, council, etc.) in irreverent ways that makes them *laughable*. In this act, a social representation is performed. Even if the attempt fails and attracts scorn on the part of the audience who finds the play either distasteful or simply not funny (following deliberation using the central route of ELM), the performance itself, by virtue of its enactment, nevertheless succeeds in socially representing its primary characters as ridiculous at the very least. In this way, the classical dramatist, by making light of some tough issues, is doing more than jesting. The dramatist, under the vestige of satirical comedy, is a political player pushing the boundaries of common sense.

4 Conclusion

The following chapters deal with two psychological processes: cognitive processing and social identity. Both are relevant for the performative enactment that brings together dramatist and audience. The performance is a political act of social representation. The audience, engaging with the performance through smile or smirk, is presented with an opportunity for identification with a represented cast. What may normally be respectable is represented as laughable, or the object of mockery. In this way, it is dethroned, demoted to the realm of human imperfection and subject to scrutiny by common sense (Sammut and Bauer 2021).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the deployment of common sense in this way opens up possibilities for revisiting and updating the community itself. What a community holds as reverent at the start of a performance may end up as a joke following the performance's enactment. The representation opens up possibilities for the audience to identify reflectively with the critical pitch. If successful, the object is represented according to a newly established sense that sees a new social representation take root. Satiric drama is catalytic in this sense and, as the following three chapters make clear, it contains the seeds of social change that is as innovative as it is uncomfortable, but that falls just shy of outright revolt. It is easy to recognize, in our days, that this remains a timeless lesson indeed.

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Innovation, Group Psychology and the Comic *Dêmos*

Alexandra Hardwick

1 Introduction

But the Athenian state wouldn't hold on to that custom if it worked just fine; no, they'd be fiddling around with some innovation.¹

ἦ δ' Ἀθηναίων πόλις, / εἰ τοῦτο χρηστῶς εἶχεν, / οὐκ ἂν ἐσώζετο, / εἰ μή τι καινὸν ἄλλο περιηγάζετο. (Ar. *Eccl.* 218–220)

Athens is stereotyped, in Aristophanic comedy, as disproportionately favouring innovative policies (*Eccl.* 220; cf. 586–587). Aristophanes' characters are not alone in making such a claim: Thucydides' description of the Mytilenean debate has Cleon accusing the Athenians of being 'great at being deceived with new-fangled arguments' (μετὰ καινότητος ... λόγου ἀπατᾶσθαι ἄριστοι, Thuc. 3.38.5).² Implicitly, these claims are considering Athens, collectively, as a single psychological entity: they suggest that the *dêmos* (the collective of Athenian citizens) can collectively hold a specific priority, such as the desire for innovation, and make decisions motivated by this priority. These accounts both imagine the city, or the *dêmos* within it, 'thinking' as one. This chapter discusses what Aristophanes' *Assembly-Women* can tell us about the group psychology behind the Athenian *dêmos*' decisions.³ I adopt a twofold approach.

1 Translations of *Assembly-Women*, unless otherwise noted, are from Henderson 2002. All remaining translations are mine. At times, I slightly adapt Henderson's translation where it is necessary to demonstrate how my argument is based on the Greek.

2 Translation mine.

3 Existing scholarship tends to elide the motifs of group psychology found in *Assembly-Women*. Ober 1998 discusses how Praxagora is able to persuade the assembly and various other parties on a thematic level (dealing with her assumption of the male gender, for example) but does not discuss the language and argumentation used in sufficient depth to understand the psychology at work. Rothwell 1990: xi comes close to a discussion of crowd psychology, with his observation that the idea of Peithô in Athenian democracy anticipates the twentieth-century idea of the hold which a demagogue's 'charismatic' leadership exerts on followers.

First, I demonstrate that Aristophanes' depiction of the *dêmos*, and how it is persuaded, echoes portrayals of the *dêmos* in contemporary oratory, political thought and historiography, drawing on standardized fifth-century tropes about the *dêmos*' psychology. Secondly, I show that many of the *dêmos*' tendencies in *Assembly-Women* closely resemble important ideas in modern group psychology. Thus, studying *Assembly-Women* in light of modern psychological ideas may be a way to advance our understanding of the political processes depicted in Aristophanes.

In *Assembly-Women*, the Athenian assembly is persuaded to adopt a radical innovation: transferring all political power to the women, who subsequently institute economic and sexual communism. The play allows us to scrutinize the persuasive methods which Praxagora, the women's leader, adopts. Praxagora initially gathers the women on stage to rehearse her arguments and prepare them to impersonate men in the assembly. Later, in a reported off-stage assembly scene, she wins a vote that places the women in charge of Athens. *Assembly-Women* offers various ways to explore why, on a psychological level, the assembly is so easily persuaded. First, in the initial 'rehearsal scene' with the chorus, Praxagora comments on the assembly's psychological tendencies with a view towards persuading them. These tendencies are imagined through the lens of comic humour and cliché, but nevertheless reflect some trends in contemporary Athenian understanding of group psychology. The second relevant passage is the assembly's reported meeting, which seems to confirm Praxagora's previous comments: the assembly shouts down speakers in an *ad hominem* fashion, and is convinced by comic insults rather than logical argumentation. Most importantly, however, the play gives us a third way of assessing the assembly's psychology. After persuading the assembly, Praxagora also persuades her husband Blepyrus (who had stayed at home and missed the assembly) to support the new regime. The strikingly juxtaposed contrast between Praxagora's approaches to persuading the assembly and Blepyrus offers an unparalleled chance to compare the representations of individual and group decision-making processes when both are faced with a similar question. Our attention is drawn to how logically Blepyrus engages with Praxagora's proposals, implying differences between the decision-making psychology of the assembly and an individual. In turn, Praxagora responds by encouraging Blepyrus to reason with her counterarguments, selecting a very different persuasive mode to that which she adopted in the assembly.

The theme of characters analysing the assembly's decision continues with a scene in which two unnamed characters argue over how to respond to the vote. This scene can be analysed profitably using modern social psychology. The distinction between social conformity and compliance helps us to understand

how these individuals react differently. Furthermore, the fact that two individuals continue debating the assembly's decision reminds us that collective decision-making is a process, which takes shape before, during, and after the assembly, rather than in an isolated moment. This is rarely apparent in Attic prose, which often acknowledges both collective and individual cognition but not individual minds as constituents of a group. While the Blepyrus-scene highlights differences between group and individual decision-making, *Assembly-Women* also shows how the two intersect.

2 The Athenian Assembly as Psychological Unit: A Modern Approach

Mining Aristophanic comedy for evidence of the Athenian assembly's psychology encounters two major problems. The first is genre-related: a comedic depiction of the assembly's decision-making process may well exaggerate or distort deliberately for humorous purposes. The second affects ancient sources on the *dêmos* more widely: we depend primarily on sources written by elite individuals whose political sympathies were often anti-democratic. As such, they are predisposed to present the *dêmos*' psychology negatively. This chapter, then, makes no claim to reconstruct how Athenian assemblies truly 'thought'. Instead, it discusses how *Assembly-Women* portrays assembly-wide decision-making processes, and considers how far this reflects both ancient and more modern thought concerning group psychology.

The term 'group psychology' implies a strong cohesion: it suggests that the assembly can be understood as 'thinking' as a single unit. This section surveys some salient aspects of ancient depictions of the assembly, and considers the modern psychological models which might productively be used to understand the assembly as group. Modern psychological theory allows us to analyse ancient views of the *dêmos* in a psychological as well as a political light. In turn, ancient views of the uniquely-structured *dêmos* have useful implications for modern theory. The *dêmos* in assembly occupies a space between corporate and aggregative groups:⁴ although, like corporate groups, it has a structure and formalized decision-making process, most individuals who constitute the assembly have no defined role, which makes the *dêmos* resemble an aggregative group. As such, analysing the Athenian assembly pushes us to move beyond existing paradigms of corporate group psychology (such as committees, corporations or governments).

4 I follow the definitions of corporate and aggregative groups offered by (e.g.) Tollefsen 2015: 3.

The fact that groups are often able to share the same emotion collectively has long been observed by theorists, but explaining this has proved more elusive.⁵ Le Bon and McDougall, amongst others, first suggested that emotions could spread through a group through processes such as ‘contagion’, ‘telepathic influence’ or ‘primitive sympathetic response’, arguing that groups form collective emotions which transcend the distinctions between individuals.⁶ Others, beginning with Allport, place more emphasis on individual minds by suggesting that individuals in a group are likely to share the same emotion, because that emotion is what gathered them into the group in the first place; the emotion is merely strengthened by seeing others who also share it.⁷ A third approach begins with Bion, who suggests that group emotions derive from fundamental ‘basic assumptions’ (connected with psychic defence mechanisms such as anxiety) which all members of the group share, even when not physically together.⁸

Le Bon’s views are outdated and underpinned by elitism.⁹ However, his approach is paralleled by ancient characterizations of the Athenian assembly. The assembly is often depicted not only as sharing the same emotions, but *changing* emotions as a collective: suddenly becoming angry with a speaker,¹⁰ for example. Furthermore, prose texts sometimes explicitly depict the assembly’s collective emotions as being characteristic of group psychology: ‘as the crowd often does’.¹¹ Such group-wide emotional shifts are less readily explicable by approaches which understand group emotions as collections of individual emotions. As Budelmann notes, Athenian thought tends to conceptualize either individual or group minds, not individual minds which operate as a group.¹² Praxagora in *Assembly-Women* similarly depicts the assembly experiencing and changing emotions collectively,¹³ although separate factions form in the off-stage assembly scene later.¹⁴

The depiction of the Athenian assembly as a psychological collective extends beyond their emotions: the assembly was broadly understood as possessing collective agency. As Canevaro convincingly argues, the assembly

5 For a useful survey, cf. Brennan 2004: 51–68.

6 Le Bon 1895: 126; McDougall 1920: 37.

7 Allport 1924: 295.

8 Bion 1961: 172.

9 As noted by (e.g.) Brennan 2004: 54.

10 E.g. Thuc. 5.46.5, 6.40.1. See further section 4.

11 E.g. Thuc. 2.65.4, 4.28.3.

12 Budelmann 2019: 200–201, who cites Arist. *Pol.* 1281a40–b10 as a rare exception.

13 E.g. Ar. *Eccl.* 195.

14 Ar. *Eccl.* 431–433.

would usually make decisions by consensus rather than by simple majority vote.¹⁵ This suggests that the assembly's decision was viewed as a *group* decision, giving them collective agency, rather than the sum total of individual voters' decisions.¹⁶ The question of whether the assembly was understood as possessing collective cognition is rather more complex. Much modern work on group cognition revolves around tightly-organized corporate groups with compartmentalized roles: navigation teams on a US navy vessel,¹⁷ physics research groups,¹⁸ or (frequently) small- or large-scale companies.¹⁹ Such paradigms are not readily applicable to the Athenian assembly, nor even to the deliberative groups discussed by (amongst others) Pettit.²⁰ However, the assembly-wide noise referred to as *thorubos* would have provided a means for the entire assembly to comment on and react to speeches in real time, expressing opinions and 'thinking' as a collective.²¹ Aristophanes depicts similar processes of collective opinion expressed through assembly-wide noise.²² By such processes, the *dêmos* can 'think' as a single unit when gathered in the assembly. As well as thinking collectively, the *dêmos* was understood as making decisions collectively:²³ this is clear from formulae such as 'the *dêmos* decided' (*edoxe tōi dêmōi*) and 'the *dêmos* recognizes' (*gignôskei ... ho dêmos*).²⁴ The idea of 'same-mindedness' (*homonoia*) or making decisions 'with a single judgement' (*miai gnômêi*) was enshrined as a goal for the *dêmos*.²⁵ As such, the ancient

15 Canevaro 2018.

16 A distinction made by Rovane 2014, who argues that group agency requires the creation of a unified perspective, which occurs through joint deliberation rather than voting. The deliberation (through various speeches and *thorubos*) required to produce an assembly-wide consensus vote is what gives the Athenian *dêmos* group agency; simply voting by majority would not have the same effect.

17 Hutchins 1995.

18 Huebner 2014.

19 E.g. Tollefsen 2015: 88. Surowiecki 2004 moves away from this trend by analysing the 'judgements' demonstrated by stock market operations in the aftermath of the *Challenger* disaster, although Huebner 2014 argues that these group-wide judgements can be explained as an aggregation of individuals' judgements.

20 Pettit 2003 discusses committees in which every member can affect the group's decision by contributing knowledge and opinions. Though the Athenian assembly formulaically invited anyone who wanted to speak (e.g. Aeschin. 1.23), it is unclear whether the vast majority of ordinary Athenians felt able to do so (cf. Yunis 1996: 10–11).

21 Bers 1985; Tacon 2001.

22 E.g. Ar. *Eccl.* 431–433, *Eq.* 651.

23 As noted by Budelmann 2019: 192; for exceptions, cf. Budelmann 2019: 198–200.

24 Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.2, Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.3.

25 E.g. Din. 1.99, Lys. 2.17–18, Pl. *Resp.* 351c–d. For a more complete list of passages, cf. Ober 1989, 297–299.

understanding of the Assembly is consistent not merely with group agency, but collective cognition: the *dêmos* is understood as thinking and making up its mind as one.

By saying that the city consistently seeks innovation (Ar. *Eccl.* 218–220), Praxagora attributes both a collective desire and an intentional state to the *dêmos* as a single unit. Whether a group can form intentions is disputed. Colloquially, we often attribute intentions to groups, and several scholars have argued for the existence of collective intentions, which differ from the summation of individual intentions within a group.²⁶ Others, though, argue that group intentions can be reduced to the sum total of individuals' intentions within the group;²⁷ in most modern practical examples, it is difficult to disprove this. Those models which agree that group-wide intentions can exist tend to agree that such intentions require (1) every group member having the same intention, and (2) every group member knowing that the others have the same intention.²⁸ With these criteria, the idea of assembly-wide intention as depicted by Aristophanes is at best inconsistent. We might assume that Aristophanes' *dêmos* unites in the assembly for the shared goal of making decisions by voting, in the knowledge that their compatriots too intend to make decisions by voting. However, even though outcomes of the votes are understood as a product of collective cognition and agency, it is more difficult to interpret them as a product of collective intention: voters may be influenced by individual self-interest,²⁹ and they may be present with the individual intention of collecting three obols (for which Aristophanes satirizes them: see section 3) rather than the wider intention of making decisions by voting.³⁰ This chapter, then, stops short of attributing group-wide intention to Aristophanes' assemblies.

Ancient depictions of the *dêmos* offer a fascinating case study for modern psychological analysis. In assembly, the *dêmos* forms an organized decision-making group that differs vastly from the corporate groups typically studied. Furthermore, Aristophanes and fifth-century prose authors depict the assembly possessing group agency and cognition in ways that follow modern models, and sometimes offer new tools with which we can understand collective cognition (such as *thorubos* as a means of group thought). Depictions of assembly-wide emotion tend to emphasize its collective nature, similar to the

26 Searle 1990; Tuomela 2006.

27 Miller 2001.

28 E.g. Velleman 1997: 38–39 (for a simple two-person model); Tuomela 2006.

29 Ar. *Eccl.* 206–207.

30 E.g. Ar. *Eq.* 51.

early explorations of modern group psychology by (e.g.) Le Bon: this makes sense, as Le Bon's elitist approach mirrors the anti-democratic standpoints taken by many ancient portrayals of the *dêmos*.

3 Praxagora's Persuasion of the Assembly

Assembly-Women begins with Praxagora plotting to infiltrate the assembly along with the Athenian women. Praxagora meets the chorus of women in order to teach them to impersonate men in the assembly: consequently, this scene has been interpreted as a rehearsal scene.³¹ It contains commentary on the assembly's psychological tendencies and how best to persuade them, which (as well as being comically humorous) reflects ancient perceptions of the assembly more widely. Early on, the assembly is compared to drunkards:

Praxagora

When you think about what they get up to, their decrees are like the ravings of drunkards. And they certainly pour libations too: why else would they make those long prayers, if they didn't have wine? They certainly also yell at each other like drunks³²

τὰ γοῦν βουλευματα
αὐτῶν ὅς' ἂν πράξωσιν ἐνθυμουμένοις
ὥσπερ μεθυόντων ἐστὶ παραπεπληγμένα.
καὶ νῆ Δία σπένδουσί γ' ἢ τίνος χάριν¹⁴⁰
τοσαύτ' ἂν ἡῤῃοντ', εἴπερ οἶνος μὴ παρῇν;
καὶ λοιδοροῦνταιί γ' ὥσπερ ἐμπεπωκότες. (Ar. *Eccl.* 137–142)

The assembly makes decisions 'like the ravings of drunkards' (139) and 'yell at each other like drunks' (142). These blunt stereotypes (which, notably, describe the assembly experiencing extreme emotions as a single collective) create the impression of frenzied irrationality.

Praxagora then comments on the assembly's venal nature:

[...] anyone who draws pay praises [Agyrrhios] to the skies, while anyone who draws none says that the people who attend for the pay deserve the death penalty.³³

³¹ For discussion of this scene as rehearsal, cf. Slater 2002: 207–234.

³² Translation adapted from Henderson 2002.

³³ Translation adapted from Henderson 2002.

ὁ μὲν λαβὼν ἀργύριον ὑπερεπήνεσεν,
 ὁ δ' οὐ λαβὼν εἶναι θανάτου φήσ' ἀξίους
 τοὺς μισθοφορεῖν ζητοῦντας ἐν τήκκλησίᾳ. (Ar. *Eccl.* 186–188)

Voters' venal self-interest is a running joke throughout *Assembly-Women*, and affects individuals (cf. 205–208) as well as the assembly collectively. Lines 186–188, though, go further: they interrogate how bribery affects the psychology of voters in relation to each other. Those who have been bribed offer their praise, described in terms connoting an excess of emotion,³⁴ whereas those who do not receive money (187–188) experience extreme mistrust for their compatriots. This portrays the assembly as rife with mutual mistrust and suspicion, and desperate to find scapegoats even within its own body—a motif which recurs in prose accounts of collective decision-making, and is also prominent in modern group psychology (see section 4). Immediately afterwards, Praxagora satirizes the *dēmos*' changeable emotions, with particular emphasis on anger:

But when it finally was ratified, the people *were angry*, and the speaker who had persuaded them of this policy had to leave town immediately. (...) You *get angry* with the Corinthians, and they with you;³⁵

ὅτε δὴ δ' ἐγένετ', ἤχθοντο, τῶν δὲ ῥητόρων
 ὁ τοῦτ' ἀναπέισας εὐθὺς ἀποδράς ὤχετο.
 (...)
 Κορινθίοις ἄχθεσθε, καὶ κεῖνοί γέ σοι.
 (Ar. *Eccl.* 195–199)

Here, the group's collective opinions come across as superficial: there is little evidence that the implications of a given policy are being thought through. They seem to make decisions based on emotional rather than intellectual reasoning, a trope which recurs in ancient and early modern thought about group psychology.³⁶ Specifically, the emotion in question is anger: *ékthonto* (195), *akhthesthe* (199). Their abrupt anger with the speaker who proposed the

34 This is the force of ὑπερεπήνεσεν (cf. Ar. *Eq.* 680). Elmer 2013: 4–6, 34–36, 184–185 suggests that the verb ἐπαινέω depicts community-wide consensus, and hence solidarity, in decision-making contexts; as such, it is striking then that the verb here implies division, a strong consensus in a sub-group that is emphatically not shared by another sub-group.

35 Translation mine (based on the somewhat elliptical version offered by Henderson 2002).

36 E.g. Pl. *Resp.* 505b. This is especially characteristic of classical-period prose thought concerning democracy: cf. (e.g.) Pl. *Resp.* 559c–e, Hdt. 3.81.2, Thuc. 3.38.4–7. Early explorations of group psychology tend to portray groups as propelled by emotion rather than reason: cf. Le Bon 1895. See further section 4.

alliance makes him flee for his life (195–196) which, again, evokes groups' tendency to seek individual scapegoats.

Praxagora's initial assessment of the *dēmos*' psychology presents them as extremely emotional, and suggests that their collective emotions influence their decision-making. In the preview of Praxagora's arguments, we begin to understand how she tailors her mode of persuasion accordingly:

First, [women] dye their wool in hot water according to their ancient custom, each and every one of them; you'll never see them try anything new.

πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ τάρια
βάπτουσι θερμῷ κατὰ τὸν ἀρχαῖον νόμον
ἀπαξάπασαι, κούχῃ μεταπειρωμένας
ἴδοις ἂν αὐτάς. (Ar. *Eccl.* 215–218)

Logically, this argument (the first of a series of analogies drawn by Praxagora) is unsatisfactory. It does not try to persuade the assembly by explaining the specific policies which the women will institute; rather, it uses a nostalgic, emotional vision of the women washing their wool to argue that they are *the right kind of people* to preside over Athens, and the perfect antidote to the Athenians' desire for innovation.³⁷ Apparently, Praxagora believes that arguments which appeal to the *dēmos* on a shallower, emotional level are more likely to persuade them.

Praxagora plans to adopt a similarly tailored mode of persuasion when dealing with counterarguments. She avoids logically engaging with the other speakers, instead planning to win over the audience through comic insults. She plans to rebut Cephalus through mockery: 'I'll say that he's out of his mind,' she says, 'and that he's a madman' (φήσω παραφρονεῖν αὐτόν (...) ἀλλὰ καὶ μελαγχολᾶν, 250–251). Neocleides is to receive similar treatment: 'I'll tell him to go look at a dog's rear end' (τούτῳ μὲν εἶπον ἐς κυνὸς πυγὴν ὄραν, 255). Rather than engaging with opposing arguments, Praxagora plans to insult her opponents in comic *ad hominem* fashion, implying that this type of counterargument will appeal to the assembly. Indeed, it is assumed that her opponents will treat her

37 This recalls Lysistrata's extended metaphor of wool-working for untangling Athenian politics (*Lys.* 567ff.). False, overly-concrete analogies and tenuous connections between the concrete and the abstract are a set-piece of comedy ('comic logic'). As such, it is difficult to take these arguments as evidence of their listeners' psychology. Even by the standards of comic logic, though, Praxagora's analogies seem obfuscatory. Lysistrata attempts to explain what the women will do; Praxagora only claims that the women are the right sort of people to do it.

similarly (254). This presentation of the assembly is typical in comedy; however, it also follows a strand of thought found in Attic prose texts, which imagines that the assembly is typically turned against sensible speakers by witty, entertaining insults.³⁸

Praxagora's women then depart to infiltrate the assembly, which her husband Blepyrus misses; fortunately, his friend Chremes describes what had happened in the off-stage assembly. Chremes' report confirms Praxagora's assumptions concerning the modes of persuasion which are best suited to the assembly's psychology. The first speaker is shouted down before he can speak, simply for being a 'squinter' (γλάμων, 398). This suggests that the *dêmos* is persuaded by *ad hominem* attacks on speakers rather than assessing their arguments, as Praxagora had anticipated. Euaion's speech is then described, in terms suggestive of a man skilled in persuading his listeners: 'Euaion, the most skilful one' (Εὐαίων ὁ δεξιώτατος, 408).³⁹ He is naked, but still persuades the assembly that he is wearing a cloak, and secures unanimous support (423): in short, he persuades the assembly to ignore the evidence of its senses.⁴⁰ The implication of Aristophanes' representation is that the *dêmos* is easily swayed into bad decisions by a clever orator, and can just as easily be turned against a sensible proposal by insulting its proponent, exactly as Praxagora predicted (indeed, here they do so spontaneously). These motifs are central to Attic prose depictions of group decision-making (see section 4).⁴¹

The rest of the scene further confirms Praxagora's predictions concerning the assembly's behaviour: the scene is dominated by shouting and emotions. When the 'young man' (Praxagora in disguise) suggests handing power to the women, the urban faction utters their support through the typical noise-making associated with crowds: 'they all cheered (*ethorubêsan*) and yelled (*kanekragon*) "well said"' (ἐθορύβησαν κἀνέκραγον ὡς εὖ λέγοι, 431). The rustic faction, similarly, expresses dissent by 'ma[king] deep rumbles' (ἀνεβορβόρυξαν, 433).⁴² This sets *thorubos*, which is frequently used in prose texts to

38 Cf. Dem. 19.46 (Philocrates' one-line jibe undermines Demosthenes' logical argument). This forms part of the broader stereotype of groups preferring entertaining, flamboyant speeches to logical reason, e.g. Dem. 19.35, Pl. *Ap.* 38d–e.

39 This echoes the earlier praise of Praxagora as speaking 'skilfully' (δεξιῶς, 241).

40 Ober 1998: 142.

41 The idea that groups are easily swayed by manipulative orators is a widespread stereotype in prose; cf. e.g. Aeschin. 2.156, Dem. 3.22, 22.31.

42 The use of a stereotypical dichotomy between urban and rural electorates aligns Praxagora with the sophisticated, immoral rhetoric often associated with urban speakers. Cf. Eur. *Or.*, in which the Messenger lavishes praise on the 'farmer who rarely has contact

describe collective noise during assemblies or trials,⁴³ alongside a compound form of *krazô*, a specifically Aristophanic verb for collective shouting (cf. *Av.* 306, *Eq.* 285–287). In this passage, there is no suggestion of logical or even coherent debate: the battle between opposing factions is conducted through volume of noise alone.⁴⁴ Moreover, Praxagora's speech involves 'praising the women extensively, and abusing you [Blepyrus]' (τὰς μὲν γυναῖκας πόλλ' ἀγαθὰ λέγων, σὲ δὲ | πολλὰ κακὰ, 435–436),⁴⁵ which does not imply a sustained or sophisticated argument; rather, it suggests that her argument consists simply of praising the women and insulting the men, inviting her audience to engage on a shallower cognitive level. At this point, Chremes' unreliability as narrator might be at fault (perhaps he is incapable of remembering the details of Praxagora's argument, and so reduces it to praise and blame). It makes sense for Praxagora to claim simply that the women are *better*, given that she is arguing for the women to be put in charge of Athens; however, this argument seems strikingly simple when compared with Praxagora's subsequent interaction with Blepyrus alone (see section 5). It therefore seems as though this approach is tailor-made in its simplicity to appeal to the assembly: the insults delivered against Blepyrus, again, recall the comic character assassination which Praxagora predicted would convince the voters, and draw on wider contemporaneous perceptions of the assembly's psychology (see section 3).

Praxagora's faction wins the vote (457). It is possible that Praxagora simply triumphs by bringing a large number of supporters to the assembly, thus ensuring numerical superiority. Chremes explicitly says that her opponents were the minority (434), and that the orator 'shouted them down' (κατεῖχε τῇ βῳῃ, 435), with the strong implication that this was victory by volume rather than persuasion.⁴⁶ Previously, moreover, it is said that the disguised women packed the assembly, to the extent that some men were unable to claim their

with the city or the circle of the marketplace' (ὀλιγάκις ἄστὺ καγόρῳς χραίνων κύκλον, | αὐτουργός, 919–920).

43 Cf. Bers 1985, Tacon 2001 for extended treatments of *thorubos*.

44 *Thorubos* was an important way for the audience to express their shifting opinions as the trial or assembly was in progress, compensating for the fact that they have no formal opportunity to speak as a collective (see section 2). It is interesting, then, that Aristophanes' portrayal of this assembly seems to cast *thorubos* as representing the *dêmos*' inability to engage logically with the debate; it is paired with the verb *krazô*, which frequently represents shouting in a disorganized or incoherent light, or more generally the *absence* of logic and reason.

45 'You' here is a comic *aprosdokêton*, an unexpected twist: the subsequent exchange reveals that Blepyrus stands as synecdoche for men in general.

46 This is the view taken by MacDowell 1995: 321.

attendance fee (388).⁴⁷ If the women won by numbers only, there was no need to persuade any other assembly-goers to change their mind. In itself, this would be a somewhat damning indictment of decision-making by democratic assembly, since the merit of the case would be irrelevant. However, Chremes suggests that Praxagora did win a victory by persuasion, because of the assembly's psychology: her proposal was the only new thing that had never yet been tried (456–457).⁴⁸ The actual decision-making process (455–457) is described in such cursory terms as to make it seem a formality, implying a spontaneous and perhaps unanimous vote in favour of Praxagora's policy by those present. Furthermore, if we follow Canevaro's evidence that decision by consensus (rather than simple majority) was the norm in the Athenian assembly,⁴⁹ the audience would likely have assumed that Praxagora persuaded the dissenting minority, rather than simply outvoting them. The minority who initially opposed Praxagora's policy are supposed either to have been persuaded to support her, or cowed into silence by the sheer number of their opponents.

Praxagora's success, then, seems to confirm her initial assessment of the psychology which governs the *dêmos*' decision-making process, and consequently the routes through which they can be persuaded. Debate is conducted primarily through volume of noise. To judge by their treatment of previous speakers, the *dêmos* proves either unwilling or unable to engage with specific details of proposed policies. As a result, Praxagora does not provide any, but relies on shallower modes of persuasion by praising women and insulting men (435–436). In this comedy, Praxagora's triumph in the assembly implies that the onslaught of entertaining insults and collective noise is sufficient to win over her detractors.

4 Anger and Scapegoating: Psychologizing Tropes in Prose Accounts of the *Dêmos*

Aristophanes' satirical depiction of the *dêmos* echoes attitudes found in various Attic prose genres. It has already been stated that fifth-century accounts normally treat the *dêmos* as experiencing shared emotions, as well as embodying

47 The sheer size of the influx of women is emphasized using a compilation of words connoting vast numbers: 'a huge crowd of people' (πλείστος ἀνθρώπων ὄχλος, 383); 'packed' (ἄθροος, 384); 'full of pale faces' (λευκοπληθής, 387).

48 Slater 2002: 234 argues that victory is attained not by numbers alone, but by the persuasive force that the illusory disguised supporters convey.

49 Canevaro 2018.

collective cognition and agency in their decision-making (section 2). In particular, anger is often cited as a prominent group emotion. In Thucydides, when the *dêmos* is mentioned, it is frequently characterized by anger (*orgê*): ‘they instantly turned to anger (*orgês*)’ (εὐθὺς δὲ ὀργῆς εἶχον, Thuc. 5.46.5), ‘the Athenian *dêmos* (...) then became angry (*khalepos*) and suspicious’ (ὁ δῆμος ὁ τῶν Ἀθηναίων (...) χαλεπὸς ᾔην τότε καὶ ὑπόπτῃς, Thuc. 6.40.1). Most famously, the Athenians decide to slaughter the Mytileneans ‘in anger (*orgês*)’ (ὑπὸ ὀργῆς, 3.36.1–2).

However, anger is not just a way for anti-democratic writers to stereotype the *dêmos*. In the orators, too, anger is a recurrent emotion experienced by the *dêmos*; however, the orators often encourage their audiences to feel anger, instead of deploring it.⁵⁰ Demosthenes encourages the jury to feel hatred and anger for Meidias (Dem. 21.186) and subsequently tells them that Meidias deserves ‘hatred, spite and anger (*orgê*)’ (μῖσος καὶ φθόνος καὶ ὀργή, Dem. 21.196).⁵¹ Lysias encourages his listeners to consider two diametrically opposed options: ‘pitying the guilty’ and ‘being angry with them (*orgioumenoi*)’ (οὐδὲ τοὺς ἀδικούντας ἐλεήσοντες, ἀλλὰ (...) αὐτοῖς ὀργιούμενοι, Lys. 15.9). It is possible that ‘to become angry (*orgizesthai*) with such deeds’ (ἐπὶ τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ὀργίζεσθαι, Lys. 28.2) was often used as a formula synonymous with ‘to vote against someone’ or ‘to find someone guilty’ in Attic orations.⁵² As such, the association of group psychology with anger is not just a way for elite individuals to denigrate democracy; it was conceptualized both positively and negatively as an important part of group decision-making in assemblies and trials. Anger could drive the *dêmos* down the wrong path, but orators encouraged collective righteous anger.

The idea of the *dêmos* being inclined to seek individual scapegoats, too, is common in prose texts. An important source here is the *Constitution of the Athenians*, a short antidemocratic tract whose unknown author is conventionally known as the ‘Old Oligarch’.⁵³ The Old Oligarch portrays the *dêmos* as typically blaming specific individuals for setbacks affecting the collective

50 This section is limited to discussing explicit references to the emotions in question, rather than phrases and arguments designed implicitly to arouse those emotions in the audience. Cf. Sanders 2012 for analysis of the various strategies which forensic oratory uses to arouse its listeners’ hostile emotions.

51 As emphasized by Sanders 2012: 361.

52 Cf. Lys. 19.2 ‘listen (...) without anger (*orgês*)’ (ἄνευ ὀργῆς (...) ἀκοῦσαι), although there is no obvious reason for the jurors to feel angry with the speaker; Lys. 29.6 ‘when they saw your anger (*orgên*), desiring recompense’ (ἑώρων τὴν ὑμετέραν ὀργὴν τιμωρεῖσθαι βουλομένην); Lys. 29.11; Lys. 30.23; Lys. 25.1; Dem. 16.19.

53 For more information and bibliography, cf. Rhodes 2012.

(Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 2.17). Demosthenes also directly accuses his audience of unfair scapegoating:

men of Athens, [...] if something goes unexpectedly wrong, you often vent your anger not against those who are responsible, but against those who addressed you last about these matters.⁵⁴

ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, [...] πολλάκις ὑμεῖς οὐ τοὺς αἰτίους, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ὑστάτους περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων εἰπόντας ἐν ὀργῇ ποιεῖσθε, ἂν τι μὴ κατὰ γνώμην ἐκβῇ.
Dem. 1.16

Demosthenes presents the *dēmos* as indiscriminate in its attempts to blame setbacks on scapegoats, and again uses the collective anger (*orgê*) motif. In Thucydides, too, large groups are eager to find scapegoats to blame for their woes. When the Athenians escape from Syracuse, the Syracusans accuse Gylippus of deliberately allowing their escape (7.81.1). In similar fashion, the Athenian *dēmos* is 'wrathful (*khalepoi*) [...] and angry (*ôrgizonto*)' (*χαλεποὶ μὲν ἦσαν* (...), *ὠργίζοντο δέ*, Thuc. 8.1.1) with the orators who had supported the Sicilian expedition and the soothsayers who predicted success. Thucydides' aside 'as if they had not voted for it themselves' (*ὥσπερ οὐκ αὐτοὶ ψηφισάμενοι*, 8.1.1) attacks the *dēmos*' hunt for scapegoats.⁵⁵

The *dēmos*' tendencies (as represented in prose) are recognizable in modern psychological terms. A group affected by collective trauma is likely to seek explanation or remedy by blaming scapegoats.⁵⁶ Generally, a scapegoat is likely to be a person or subgroup which is discernibly different from the group;⁵⁷ in larger groups (e.g. a gathered crowd, rather than a family group) such difference is typically identified by their symbolic aura (e.g. leadership status) rather than any specific personality traits or actions.⁵⁸ Group leaders are particularly vulnerable to scapegoating if the outcome of the trauma supports a collective shift of values,⁵⁹ though they also tend to hold the power to channel or diminish a group's drive to nominate scapegoats.⁶⁰ As such, it makes sense that

54 Translation mine, based on the version by Vince 1930.

55 Other examples include the Arginusae trial (Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.35: the Athenians regret condemning the generals and vote to punish those who persuaded them to do so) and, according to later tradition, the aftermath of Socrates' trial (Diog. Laert. 2.43).

56 Behr 2018: 520.

57 This has been identified since Foulkes and Anthony 1965.

58 Behr 2018: 518.

59 Behr 2018: 518.

60 Gallagher and Burke 1974; Behr 2018: 519.

the orators who supported a proposal should be especially vulnerable to scapegoating by the *dêmos*. Although they are notionally equal to every member of the *dêmos* in ideological terms, they are symbolically associated with the policy in a leadership role, and thus easily rendered outsiders by the collective. It is especially notable that scapegoating is consistently presented as a collective phenomenon in ancient prose sources: when the group turns against an individual, their opinion shifts as a uniform body.

In *Assembly-Women*, the *dêmos* is portrayed as similarly keen to seek scapegoats. However, it comes across as more psychologically complex in its scapegoating habits. Praxagora offers a textbook example of the *dêmos* scapegoating an orator and forcing him to flee (195–196). However, the way members of the *dêmos* turn against each other on the suspicion of accepting bribes (187–188) fits less easily into accepted paradigms of scapegoating: the scapegoats are a concealed subgroup within the *dêmos* rather than an identifiably distinct figure. It is perhaps closer to modern paradigms of intergroup bias:⁶¹ members of an in-group (the morally upstanding people who are not receiving bribes) react to the presence of a real or imagined out-group (those who accept bribes).

Praxagora's satirical characterization of the assembly, then, is not only a comic way to mock the *dêmos*: it draws on wider contemporary discourse on group decision-making, as reflected both 'first-hand' (in oratorical works designed to persuade the *dêmos*) and 'second-hand' (in historiographical descriptions of a *dêmos* being persuaded). The assembly is depicted as experiencing group-wide psychological phenomena, both as a collective (anger and scapegoating) and as smaller sub-groups (out-group derogation directed against people accepting bribes). These phenomena closely resemble motifs that surround the *dêmos* in fifth-century prose, and are readily comprehensible in light of more recent group psychology; furthermore, in some ways, Aristophanes' portrayal is more varied than that of his prose contemporaries, for example highlighting the formation of mutually suspicious sub-groups within the *dêmos*.

5 Blepyrus' Logic: Collective vs Individual Decision-Making

The problem lies in how we know that we can interpret these tropes as reflections on group psychology. Some would dismiss Praxagora's depiction of the assembly, and the persuasive mode she adopts, as simply comic logic: the

61 On which see e.g. Hewstone et al. 2002.

dêmos is portrayed as hunting for scapegoats, enjoying the spectacle of abuse and averse to logic simply because this is funny. This would be insufficient: as section 4 demonstrates, many of the tropes Aristophanes uses have their roots in wider prose discourse. Therefore, something beyond just comic humour is at play here. Crucially, moreover, two separate scenes subsequently enable us to compare the decision-making of an individual with that of the off-stage assembly. The first, in which Praxagora persuades her husband, enables us to compare how a group and an individual think when faced with the same decision, and suggests that different modes of persuasion are suited to different types of audience. The second, in which two anonymous citizens argue about whether to comply with the new laws, explores what makes individuals choose to comply with wider group expectations (an important aspect of social psychology).

After winning over the assembly, Praxagora persuades her husband Blepyrus. Blepyrus' motivations are self-interested: he is concerned not for the city, but for how much work he will have to do (460). He is also presented as unintelligent and slow to grasp Praxagora's argument: he asks for several points to be repeated, and requires multiple descriptions of private property being abolished (588–607) before he understands. However, Blepyrus' decision-making process is presented as strongly contrasting to the assembly's. When Praxagora expresses delight at the assembly's outcome, his first reaction is to ask why (559): he instinctively begins to interrogate Praxagora's plan. Similarly, he asks *why* owning money will no longer be useful (604). Praxagora responds to Blepyrus' engagement by adopting a very different persuasive process to what she used in the assembly. Previously, she simply proposed handing over all power to the women (430); here, though, she explains her plan in detail (588–594). Of course, Aristophanes would likely have wanted to avoid making his audience sit through the same arguments twice; however, he did not need to include Praxagora explaining her plan to Blepyrus at all. Though Blepyrus is a constituent member of that same *dêmos*, and is characterized as stupid, Praxagora believes that he will be persuaded by precise details and explanations, whereas she used appeals to emotion and insulting character assassination to win over the *dêmos* in assembly (see section 3).

Praxagora's choice of persuasive mode is seemingly justified when Blepyrus begins analysing the logical implications of her policy. His objection that some people may hold 'concealed wealth' (602) is an important potential flaw in Praxagora's plans to abolish private property (597–600). Later, Blepyrus finds logical arguments against sexual communism: he asks how they'll stop individual men from bribing women to sleep with them (611–613) and how they'll stop the prettiest women from receiving disproportionate attention (615–616),

eliciting further explanation from Praxagora.⁶² Blepyrus steadily becomes less sceptical as he realises, for example, that Praxagora's policy will reduce theft (οὐδ' αὖ κλέπτῃς οὐδεὶς ἔσται, 667) and will be particularly beneficial to him personally.⁶³ The cross-examination continues extensively, with Praxagora responding to Blepyrus' questions and finally spelling out a vision of what her policy will mean for him (689–709). At last, Blepyrus' queries are exhausted, and he is convinced.

Though stupid, Blepyrus interrogates Praxagora's arguments logically and considers potential consequences. This type of decision-making is alien to Aristophanes' presentation of the assembly.⁶⁴ In his unimaginative and banal way, Blepyrus engages with Praxagora's proposal and asks what it might mean for him and those like him; the assembly, on the other hand, avoids active engagement with the proposal. As a result, Praxagora adopts a different *modus operandi*. Instead of trying to persuade Blepyrus using comic insults and minimal explanation of her policy, she lays out her proposal in full and allows his questioning to elicit further information. Through this contrast, *Assembly-Women* compares individual and group decision-making processes: the same type of person thinks differently, and is influenced by different types of argument, when gathered into an assembly than in individual discussion.

6 Anonymous Individuals and Social Pressure

The theme of how individuals within the *dêmos* respond to the *dêmos*' decision continues beyond the Blepyrus scene, though the focus moves away from Praxagora's persuasive methods. As Praxagora's edict reverberates across the city, we encounter two anonymous individual men.⁶⁵ One plans to contribute his possessions to the state (730–745); the other prefers to wait and see what others are doing first (746–755).⁶⁶ In this scene, Aristophanes depicts a phenomenon known to modern social psychology: how individuals think

62 Other examples include *Eccl.* 635–636, 655–656, 662–664.

63 Saïd 1996: 309, citing 705–706, 710.

64 Ober 1998: 132 elides this important point by arguing that Praxagora calms Blepyrus' and Chremes' fears by playing on their desires, similar to her strategy in the assembly.

65 This is an under-appreciated scene: a short recent treatment by Halliwell 2020: 128–133 discusses how an Athenian audience might have viewed both men's attitudes, and highlights the importance of analysing Aristophanes' politics through 'small-scale' scenes such as this. For possible identifications of the two characters, cf. Olson 1991).

66 Halliwell's statement (2020: 129) that 'the utopia somehow seems to need people to decide individually whether or not to go along with its requirements' is perhaps an

differently when they perceive themselves as part of a collective. Even the man who does not wish to contribute his possessions waits to see what the collective decides (τὸ πλῆθος ὃ τι βουλευέται, 770; cf. 788–789). He states explicitly that the commands of authority figures do not influence him (767); he considers it important, though, to comply with the group (and indeed to see if the group changes its mind: he explicitly psychologizes the *dēmos* by depicting them as changeable, 797–798). The first speaker is overtly motivated by devotion to the laws (759), but is also acutely aware of the majority's will ('well, that's what they're saying in the streets' λέγουσι γοῦν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς, 773). Aristophanes is depicting a process that would today be understood as social conformity: the first speaker not only complies with the social pressure he perceives around him, but has changed his beliefs in line with this pressure.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, too, it is possible to find examples of social conformity in the *dēmos*' psychology: although a small number of people in the assembly ('so it seemed *to the majority*' ὡς ἐδόκει τοῖς πλείοσιν, 409) can see that Euaion is naked, they follow the majority of people who are too far away to see clearly and must trust Euaion's claims.

Aristophanes' depictions of the two unnamed citizens can be understood by reading them through the lens of modern social psychology, and understanding them as part of a wider collective. The two characters represent two different ways of responding to society-wide pressure: one feels potentially forced into social compliance, while the other conforms more deeply and instinctively. Their namelessness perhaps encourages us even more strongly to consider them as members of a collective.⁶⁸ The dialogue between these characters atomizes the *dēmos*' decision, showing us the different ways individual members might understand their participation in a community-wide policy. This scene offers an unusually detailed perspective on the *dēmos*' decisions as a process, rather than a one-off event. As noted previously, Attic prose sources tend to depict either individual or collective 'minds', not the activity of individual minds within a collective (see section 2): this encourages a binary

overstatement: citizens can debate a decision made in assembly, and consider the possibility of dissent, without implying that the new regime might be overturned as a result.

67 For the distinction between compliance and conformity, cf. Cialdini and Goldstein 2004. An alternative analysis (first posited by Kelman 1958) interprets compliance as a specific type of conformity which does not necessarily entail changing one's beliefs; according to Kelman's model, the enthusiasm with which the first speaker plans to contribute his possessions would suggest that he represents the internalization type of conformity.

68 For a reading of the cynical second citizen as a prototypical Athenian everyman who exemplifies widespread values, cf. Christ 2008: 178–182 (who interprets this scene as depicting the tension between collective responsibility and individual selfishness).

approach, contrasting group and individual psychology without considering the interactions between them. However, as well as depicting aspects of group decision-making psychology, Aristophanes' *Assembly-Women* portrays the psychologies of individuals interacting with and responding to the groups of which they form a constituent part. As such, Aristophanes' works offer us an opportunity to study the wider social psychology of classical Athens, and see how collective decisions take shape over time outside the physical assembly space.

7 Conclusion

Aristophanes' *Assembly-Women* encourages us to view the assembly's decision-making process from various angles: it is analysed by Praxagora, reported by Chremes, and contrasted with Blepyrus' individual decision-making process. Finally, the conversation between two unnamed citizens demonstrates how members of the wider population react to the decree. It is difficult to reconstruct the assembly's psychology through source material plagued by both comic logic and, in certain places, oligarchic sympathies. However, this chapter argues that the portrayals of the assembly encourage us to consider why, on a psychological level, the assembly votes for Praxagora's radically innovative policy. A broader analysis of *Assembly-Women* using modern models demonstrates how concepts such as collective emotion, cognition and agency can readily be applied to the Athenian *dêmos*; indeed, the unique nature of Athenian assemblies makes this a productive exercise for reconsidering how (for example) collective cognition might function. More specifically, *Assembly-Women* portrays the assembly as swayed by their emotions, inclined towards anger, quick to seek scapegoats from among their number, and capable of turning against a speaker based on witty insults alone. These motifs echo Attic prose discourse concerning the *dêmos*' psychological tendencies. Furthermore, several of these phenomena can be profitably analysed through modern lenses: scapegoating, intergroup bias and social compliance/conformity are well known to modern psychology, while the 'emotional' nature of groups has been an active stereotype in psychological thought for much of the twentieth century. Blepyrus' very different decision-making process implies that the psychological traits demonstrated by the Athenian assembly are specific to their nature as a group; this, like the scene in which two individual citizens react to Praxagora's policy, demonstrates the usefulness of discussing how group and individual psychologies interact in Aristophanes' works.

These findings offer promising possibilities for further research, especially concerning Aristophanes' depiction of group decision-making on stage, and how characters adapt their persuasive approaches to their audience's psychology. In Aristophanes' *Birds*, Pisthetaerus is consistently portrayed as a quintessentially unscrupulous orator;⁶⁹ closer inspection of his interaction with the chorus suggests that he uses modes of persuasion which are recognizable through modern psychological paradigms as an appeal to intergroup bias. Pisthetaerus begins by constructing a narrative that the birds are exceptionally deserving of power (466–467), encouraging in-group favouritism. He then uses a hostile image of humans capturing, selling and eating the birds (523–538) to encourage out-group derogation, which often revolves around a perceived threat from the out-group.⁷⁰ Consequently, *Birds* highlights how group decision-making psychology might be exploited in practice, and how a stereotyped demagogue deploys modes of persuasion rooted in group psychology—and, most importantly, wins his listeners over by satisfying their desire for innovation.

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69 Cf. e.g. Ničev 1989: 28ff.; Sidwell 2009: 420; Arrowsmith 1973: 138 n. 10. On Aristophanes' *Birds*, see the chapter by Xenia Makri in this volume. Text and translation in Henderson 2000.

70 Hewstone et al. 2002: 578–580, esp. 586 for the importance of (perceived) threat in inter-group bias.

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“Not by Others but by Our Own Feathers”: a Social-Psychological Reading of Aristophanes’ *Birds*

Xenia Makri

1 Introduction

Aristophanes’ plays dramatize social worlds, utopian or real, in which heroes and choruses are members of groups with various power and status relations to one another. As group-members, heroes and choruses are bearers of well-defined collective identities and thus act and interact (amongst themselves or with opponents) within a framework of identity salience; in such worlds, both utopian and real, the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is pivotal. Following the propositions of the integrative Social Identity Model of Collective Action for Social Change (SIMCA), our analysis seeks to demonstrate how the comic hero of Aristophanes’ *Birds*, Pisthetaerus, is instigating an avian revolt against human and divine tyranny, invokes the social identity of the birds and mostly the cognition and emotions stemming from that identity (the prejudice, the hostility and the anger). In doing so, the birds not only accept this human being as a member of their group, but voluntarily pronounce him their leader and at the end even succumb to the tyrannical regime that he establishes. Therefore, our analysis aims at providing a (psycho-)logical answer to the following questions: what psychological likelihood is invoked in order to explain how Pisthetaerus manages to become the leader of the birds, why and under which conditions his regime becomes tyrannical and why the birds succumb to this new tyrannical regime.

2 Tereus’ Twofold Nature

The *Birds* starts with two Athenians, Pisthetaerus and his companion Euelpides, leaving Athens in order to find a calm place to settle (44).¹ To find the

1 All citations and translations are from Henderson’s 2000 Loeb edition of Aristophanes’ *Birds*. In Henderson the comic hero’s name is ΠΕΙΣΕΤΑΙΡΟΣ (Peisetaerus); however, I use Pisthetaerus in line with the paradoxos.

perfect city, they need the advice of Tereus, the Thracian king who was once transformed into a hoopoe and now lives happily among the birds. Tereus’ transformation into a bird has not been entirely successful, judging, for example, from his diet (76–78, 82, 159–160)² and his customs—he still has a servant (71–73); he is a kind of hybrid, both a human and a bird, and Pisthetaerus manipulates his twofold nature to secure his advice:

Pisthetaerus

Well, originally you were human, like us, and once owed money, like us, and once enjoyed not repaying it, like us; then trading all that for the guise of birds, you’ve flown the circuit of land and sea, and your mind contains everything a human’s does, and everything a bird’s does too. That’s why we’ve come to visit, hoping you know of a nice cushy city, soft as a woolen blanket, where we could curl up.

ὅτι πρῶτα μὲν ἦσθ’ ἄνθρωπος ὥσπερ νῶ ποτε,
 κάργυριον ὠφέλιγας ὥσπερ νῶ ποτε,
 κοῦκ ἀποδιδούς ἔχαιρες ὥσπερ νῶ ποτε·
 εἴτ’ αὖθις ὀρνίθων μεταλλάξας φύσιν
 καὶ γῆν ἐπέπτου καὶ θάλατταν ἐν κύκλῳ,
 καὶ πάνθ’ ὅσαπερ ἄνθρωπος ὅσα τ’ ὄρνις φρονεῖς.
 ταῦτ’ οὖν ἰκέται νῶ πρὸς σέ δεῦρ’ ἀφίγμεθα,
 εἴ τινα πόλιν φράσειας ἡμῖν εὖερον
 ὥσπερ σισύραν ἐγκατακλινῆναι μαλθακῇν. (Aristophanes, *Birds* 114–122)

Tereus is eager to help his former companions and makes a couple of suggestions, all of which are turned down by the two Athenians (143–154). Meanwhile, Pisthetaerus conceives a grandiose plan: to found with the birds an avian city in the air (172). In order to win Tereus for his plan, he calls upon his avian identity:

Pisthetaerus

Aha, aha! Oh what a grand scheme I see in the race of birds, and power that could be yours, if *you take* my advice!

Tereus

What advice *would you have us take*?

2 For discourse about food in comedy, see Wilkins 1997 and 2000.

Pisthetaerus

What advice *should you take*? For a start, don't fly around in all directions with your beaks agape; that's discreditable behaviour. For example, back where *we come from*, if among the flighty crowd you ask, "Who's that guy?" Teleas will reply, "The man's a bird, unstable, flighty, unverifiable, never ever staying in the same spot."

Πε. φεῦ φεῦ·

ἦ μέγ' ἐνορώ βούλευμ' ἐν ὀρνίθων γένει
καὶ δύναμιν ἢ γένοιτ' ἄν, εἰ πίθοισθέ μοι.

Τη. τί σοι πιθώμεσθ';

Πε. ὅ τι πίθησθε; πρῶτα μὲν

μὴ περιπέτεσθε πανταχῇ κεχηνότες·

ὥς τοῦτ' ἄτιμον τοῦργον ἐστίν. αὐτίκα

ἐκεῖ παρ' ἡμῖν τοὺς πετομένους ἦν ἔρη

"τίς ἐστὶν οὗτος;" ὁ Τελέας ἐρεῖ ταδί·

"ἄνθρωπος ὄρνις ἀστάθμητος, πετόμενος,

ἀτέκμαρτος, οὐδὲν οὐδέποτε ἐν ταύτῳ μένων." (Aristophanes, *Birds* 162–170)

Interestingly, Pisthetaerus and Tereus no longer represent the same 'we'; the comic hero juxtaposes *we* (men) to *you* (the birds). Tereus' avian identity is automatically activated.³ However, he is in fact easily persuaded by Pisthetaerus' argumentation (194–197) because of his human nature; it is enough to hear 'And then you'll rule over humans as you do over locusts; / and as for the gods, you'll destroy them by Melian famine' (ὥστ' ἄρξετ' ἀνθρώπων μὲν ὥσπερ παρνόπων, / τοὺς δ' αὖ θεοὺς ἀπολεῖτε λιμῷ Μηλῖω, 185–186) for Tereus to embrace the new plan and summon the birds to hear all about it. In the words of David Konstan 'Pisthetaerus ... wins the hoopoe to his grandiose scheme with the promise of limitless power, but with the native birds—those who, unlike Tereus, never had been human—he takes a slightly different approach'.⁴

3 Note the use of first-person plural forms: 'What advice would you have us take?' (τί σοι πιθώμεσθ', 164), 'But what can we do about it?' (τί ἂν οὖν ποιούμεν, 172), 'But what kind of city could we, mere birds, found?' (ποιῶν δ' ἂν οἰκίσαιμεν ὀρνίθες πόλιν, 173).

4 Konstan 1997: 11.

3 Angry Birds and Their Social Identity

In simpler terms, an individual can only represent and speak for a group if there is a group to represent in the first place⁵

After Tereus' call, the chorus of birds arrives. As is often the case in Old Comedy, the chorus is hostile, but not only towards the comic hero:

Chorus

Oo, oo!

We are betrayed, we are impiously defiled!
Yes, our former friend, who browsed with us
in the fields that feed us all,
has broken our ancient ordinances,
has broken our avian oaths.
He's lured me into a trap,
he's cast me out among
an unholy race, that
since its very creation
has been groomed to be my foe.

Chorus leader

Well, him we'll settle accounts with later; as for these two
codgers, I think they should give us satisfaction on the
spot by being dismembered.

Χο. ἔα ἔα·

προδεδόμεθ' ἀνόσιά τ' ἐπάθομεν·
ὃς γὰρ φίλος ἦν ὁμότροφά θ' ἡμῖν
ἐνέμετο πεδία παρ' ἡμῖν,
παρέβη μὲν θεσμούς ἀρχαίους,
παρέβη δ' ὄρκους ὀρνίθων.
εἰς δὲ δόλον ἐκάλεσε,
παρέβαλέ τ' ἐμὲ παρὰ
γένος ἀνόσιον, ὅπερ
ἑξότ' ἐγένετ' ἐμοὶ
πολέμιον ἐτράφη.

5 Haslam and Reicher 2012: 22.

Κο. ἀλλὰ πρὸς μὲν τοῦτον ἡμῖν ἔστιν ὕστερος λόγος·
 τῷ δὲ πρεσβύτῳ δοκεῖ μοι τῷδε δοῦναι τὴν δίκην
 διαφορηθῆναι θ' ὑφ' ἡμῶν. (Aristophanes, *Birds* 327–338)⁶

On the one hand, the birds rave against Tereus after seeing him trampling on the feeling of collectivity that binds them and they interpret his decision to accept men in their avian society as a betrayal of their common oaths (329–332). On the other hand, their anger towards the two Athenians stems from their bias against, and stereotypes of, the race of men in general, who constantly threaten them and put their collective identity in danger (333–335). Tereus unsuccessfully tries to alleviate the birds' anger by implicitly invoking his own human nature; he refers to the Athenian origins that the visitors share with his wife Procne (366–368),⁷ but the birds argue that men are their perennial enemies and cannot, irrespective of their intentions, be considered friends (369–374). Next, Tereus makes use of a sophistic argument for persuading them:

Yet the wise can learn much from enemies.
 Caution does save the day—a lesson you can't learn
 from a friend, but the first lesson an enemy imposes.
 For instance, it was from enemies, not friends,
 that cities learned to build lofty walls and master warships,
 and that lesson safeguards children, household, and property.

ἀλλ' ἅπ' ἐχθρῶν δῆτα πολλὰ μανθάνουσιν οἱ σοφοί.
 ἢ γὰρ εὐλάβεια σῶζει πάντα. παρὰ μὲν οὖν φίλου
 οὐ μάθοις ἂν τοῦθ', ὁ δ' ἐχθρὸς εὐθὺς ἐξηνάγκασεν.
 αὐτίχ' αἱ πόλεις παρ' ἀνδρῶν γ' ἔμαθον ἐχθρῶν κοῦ φίλων
 ἐκπονεῖν θ' ὑψηλὰ τεῖχῃ ναῦς τε κεκτῆσθαι μακράς·
 τὸ δὲ μάθημα τοῦτο σῶζει παῖδας, οἶκον, χρήματα. (Aristophanes, *Birds*
 375–380)

The birds agree to hear Pisthetaerus out, although their bias towards men is not completely eliminated (451–452).

⁶ For this *parodos* (the entrance of the chorus), see Gelzer 1996: 206–208.

⁷ In the play there is no reference to the gory elements of Tereus' myth. Instead, Tereus and Procne, now transformed into a hoopoe and a nightingale respectively, are a happy couple, even though Procne still mourns Itys' death (210–212). For Tereus' representation in the play as a counterpoint to the tragic *Tereus* by Sophocles, see Dobrov 2001: 105–132.

Before examining the comic hero's argumentation, let us define the birds' social identity. Social identity is defined as 'the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'.⁸ Social identities are both descriptive (they describe attitudes) and prescriptive (they prescribe behaviour), and this is relevant to the birds as well: they have norms to which they have to conform (see the references to 'ancient laws' and 'oaths', 331–332).⁹ Although the exact nature of these norms is not described, in this context we can assume that they prescribe the way they must treat men, their perennial enemies (333–335, 369–370). Also, the birds have low self-esteem: they consider Tereus insane for believing that they can achieve something (417–426) and call themselves witless (452–456). All in all, the birds constitute a group with a negative social identity.

One of the core assumptions of Social Identity Theory is that the quest for positive distinctiveness and positive social identity urges people to adopt different strategies depending on their own, subjective beliefs regarding both society and the relations between the groups within society.¹⁰ For example, when people with a negative social identity think that the boundaries between the groups are permeable, they move from one group to another. This is the social mobility strategy, an individualistic strategy which does not change the status quo. But when people think that group boundaries are impermeable, they adopt true group strategies, which can be divided into strategies of social creativity and of social competition. Social creativity strategies are adopted when the status quo is considered stable and no cognitive alternatives for a different social structure exist. In these cases, groups can improve their self-esteem by comparing themselves to groups of lower status than theirs or equally subordinate with them. Alternatively, they can redefine their traditional negative

8 Tajfel 1978: 63.

9 Norms are defined by Hogg and Vaughan 2018: 300 as the '[a]ttitudinal and behavioural uniformities that define group membership and differentiate between groups', whereas Cialdini and Trost 1998: 152 refer to the 'rules and standards that are understood by members of a group and that guide and/or constrain social behaviour without the force of laws. These norms emerge out of interaction with others; they may or may not be stated explicitly, and any sanctions for deviating from them come from social networks, not the legal system'.

10 The social identity literature is massive and extensive reviews of the basic theories can be found in almost every handbook of social psychology. As a non-specialist, I have learnt in particular from Hogg and Abrams 1988, Turner and Reynolds 2001, Yzerbyt and Demoulin 2010, Stangor 2016 and Hogg and Vaughan 2018. For the core readings, see Hogg and Abrams 2001. Needless to say, the present review is highly selective and lays no claim to comprehensiveness.

characteristics by positively re-evaluating them or by comparing them favourably with characteristics of the dominant group. Although social creativity strategies do not change the status quo, they do ascribe to the members of the subordinate group a positive social identity. The only strategy adopted which can indeed change the status quo, is social competition—direct, real conflict between the dominant and a subordinate group. However, for the members of low-status groups to engage in social competition, the status quo must be considered insecure, unstable and illegitimate and they must be able to envisage a cognitive alternative. Direct, real competition can take several forms, such as war, revolution, riot or protest, and usually gives rise to social movements.

The birds, however, do not opt for positive distinctiveness and under these circumstances Pisthetaerus' plan, which presupposes intergroup conflict (185–186), becomes impossible. Therefore, in order to implement his plan, the comic hero has to undertake the task of injecting into the birds the psychological and thus human-like quest for positive distinctiveness and then urge collective action for achieving it. In doing so, he will take advantage of specific aspects of their social identity, namely their low self-esteem and status and their enmity towards men.

4 Persuading the Birds to Act Collectively: Pisthetaerus' Speech

Pisthetaerus' argumentation corroborates, and is in turn corroborated by, the integrative Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), proposed by Martijn van Zomeren, Tom Postmes and Russel Spears.¹¹ SIMCA came out of meta-analyses of three socio-psychological perspectives of collective action, that of perceived injustice, perceived efficacy and social identity. Each of them has a different theoretical background and provides a unique explanation for collective action, sometimes treated as in conflict with the other two. Although not all of them form part of a fully developed, clear-cut theory, but rather belong to developments in the initial concept of collective action, it is useful to keep in mind that 'perceived injustice' basically stems from Relative Deprivation Theory (RTD) and refers to 'a perceived discrepancy between attainments or actualities ('what is') and expectations or entitlements ('what ought to be').¹² On the other hand, 'perceived efficacy' assumes that collective action is more likely to occur when it is based on the shared belief that acting

¹¹ Van Zomeren et al. 2008.

¹² Hogg and Vaughan 2018: 416. For a detailed account of RTD with references to the primary sources, see Hogg and Vaughan 2018: 414–418 and van Zomeren et al. 2008: 505.

together will indeed lead to goals' achievement. Its distinct origins lay in the sociological Resource Mobilization Theory, according to which social change is the result of sustained social protest and is achieved through the actions of social movement organizations.¹³

The basic proposition of SIMCA is that collective action is predicted both directly through social identity and indirectly through two variables, that of injustice and efficacy. In the words of SIMCA's introducers:

Social identity underlies injustice because it provides the basis for the group-based experience of injustice. Hence, it can positively buffer group members against the negative consequences of low group status and emotionally gear them up for collective action. Moreover, social identity underlies efficacy because a stronger sense of identity empowers relatively powerless individuals. In other words, social identity affects group members' experiences of both group-based injustice and efficacy, which prefigures SIMCA's prediction that social identity functions as a conceptual bridge between the two. Given these considerations, SIMCA proposes that identity, injustice, and efficacy all provide unique explanations for collective action and that social identity bridges the injustice and efficacy explanations of collective action in so far as it predicts perceptions of both. Thus, social identity is not a unique predictor of collective action, but it also functions as the psychological connection between injustice and efficacy.¹⁴

Let us consider Pisthetaerus' speech in detail. In the first part (462–538, the *epirrhêma* of the *agôn*), the grand plan is not revealed to the birds at once, because Pisthetaerus first attempts emotionally to win their trust. As he confesses to Euelpides:

No, no, it's just that for quite some time I've been trying to
put something into words, a big juicy utterance that will
shatter these birds to the very soul.

μὰ Δί' ἀλλὰ λέγειν ζητῶ τι πάλαι, μέγα καὶ λαρινὸν ἔπος τι,
ὅ τι τὴν τοῦτων θραύσει ψυχὴν. (Aristophanes, *Birds* 465–466)

13 Hogg and Vaughan 2018: 419–420 and van Zomeren et al. 2008: 506–507.

14 Van Zomeren et al. 2008: 511.

He thus starts by expressing his sorrow over the terrible situation which the birds find themselves in and which contrasts so sharply with their allegedly glorious past:

Pisthetaerus

So sorrowful am I on your account, who once were kings—

Chorus leader

Us kings? Of what?

Pisthetaerus

Yes you, kings of all that exists—starting with yours truly and including Zeus himself—and born a long time before Cronus, and the Titans, and even Earth.

Chorus leader

Even Earth?

Pisthetaerus

I swear by Apollo.

Chorus leader

I certainly never heard that.

Πε. ... οὕτως ὑμῶν ὑπεραλγῶ,
οἵτινες ὄντες πρότερον βασιλῆς—

Κο. ἡμεῖς βασιλῆς; τίνοις;

Πε. ὑμεῖς
πάντων ὅπόσ' ἔστιν, ἐμοῦ πρῶτον, τουδί, καὶ τοῦ Διὸς αὐτοῦ,
ἀρχαιότεροι πρότεροί τε Κρόνου καὶ Τιτάνων ἐγένεσθε
καὶ Γῆς.

Κο. καὶ Γῆς;

Πε. νῆ τὸν Ἀπόλλω.

Κο. τουτὶ μὰ Δί' οὐκ ἐπεπύσμην.

(Aristophanes, *Birds* 466–470)

Pisthetaerus' main contentions that the birds are the oldest beings on earth and were once the kings of the universe are supported by a number of arguments, all of which involve comparisons, both chronological (the present state of the group is compared to the past) and social (the group's state is compared to that of other groups). To begin with, the Lark who is the birds' ancestor was born before Earth and the Gods (471–475) and therefore the birds' claim to rule is rightful. Moreover, in the old days the birds were kings of Persia, Greece, Egypt and Phoenicia (481–485, 499–501, 504–506), perched on the scepters of human kings—if there were any—(508–510), and men used to swear by birds

instead of by gods (520). Even nowadays, birds are perched on gods' scepters and cult-statues (514–516), enjoying their share of innards offered to the gods (518–519). Nonetheless, people treat them dreadfully by trapping, killing and eating them (523–538).

In the terms of SIMCA, Pisthetaerus' description indicates the illegitimacy and instability of the current status quo, thus enhancing the birds' identification with their group. Instability refers to the fact that the gods' current kingship over men and birds is not actually perennial, as the latter have so far assumed, although Pisthetaerus does not give any information regarding the time and the way divine sovereignty was established. Nonetheless, it is implied that the birds can also change the status quo, just like the gods have done before them. Instability entails vulnerability as well; this, of course, does not become immediately evident to a low-status group engaging or planning to engage in collective action like the birds do, but it is a rather gradual realization. The scene with Iris (1170–1261), the intercepted winged messenger of the Olympian gods, sent to earth because the gods have noticed that smoke of human sacrifice no longer reaches heaven, shows the birds' challenge to the status quo, and is indicative of its vulnerability. This sense of vulnerability culminates in the scene with Prometheus, who secretly informs the birds that Zeus' position is severely weakened by the birds' challenging actions (1494–1552).

Furthermore, the birds' identification with their group is enhanced by Pisthetaerus' arguments that they are experiencing fraternal or group-based deprivation, meaning that as a group they are enjoying less than they are entitled to: perceived injustice. According to the more recent assumptions of RTD, the affective components of fraternal deprivation (e.g. group-based feelings like anger) are more likely to foster collective action than its cognitive components (the cold knowledge that you are experiencing inequality). Remarkably, Pisthetaerus ends his description with men's dreadful treatment of the birds, arousing in this way their distress and anger; the birds' response is indicative of their emotional state:

Chorus

Very harrowing, yes very, is the tale
 you've brought us, human. It made me weep at my fathers'
 baseness, who in my own time have wrecked these privileges of mine
 that my forebears bequeathed to them.
 But now you're here, by the grace of god or some happy
 chance, to be my saviour.
 So shall I live, entrusting to you
 my nestlings and myself.

πολὺ δὴ πολὺ δὴ χαλεπωτάτους λόγους
 ἦνεγκας, ἄνθρωφ'· ὥς ἐδάκρυσά γ' ἐμῶν πατέρων
 κάκην, οἱ τάσδε τὰς τιμὰς προγόνων παραδόν-
 των ἐπ' ἐμοῦ κατέλυσαν.
 σὺ δέ μοι κατὰ δαίμονα καὶ <τινα> συντυχίαν
 ἀγαθὴν ἤκεις ἐμοὶ σωτήρ.
 ἀναθεὶς γὰρ ἐγώ σοι
 τὰ νεόττια κάμαυτὸν οἰκετεύσω. (Aristophanes, *Birds* 539–547)

Indeed, it soon becomes clear just how willing the birds are to act collectively under Pisthetaerus' command to redress the injustice (548–549).

Following the birds' demand, Pisthetaerus moves to the second part of his speech (550–626), expounding his plan. This part is rationalistic, in contrast to the emotional former part, even if sophistic arguments abound in both. In order to recover the birds' lost kingship, he instructs them to build a city with fortification walls in the air (550–552). In case Zeus refuses to return power to the birds, he tells the birds to declare holy war against him and a ban against any gods travelling through the bird-city (555–557). He also suggests dispatching a herald to the humans, to inform them of the new status quo (561–569). In the end, he advises the birds on what course of action to take in order to convince men of their power (577–626), finally expelling the birds' doubts.

Pisthetaerus' detailed analysis proves to the birds that his plan is rational and well-organized. In this way, the plan puts pressure on those in power, eventually making them submit to the group's demands (resource mobilization theory). Yet, even such an instrumental and objective motive is not enough to foster collective action; it needs to be mediated by more subjective elements. The birds must believe that by acting collectively they can attain their goal of regaining rulership. Since the implementation of his plan rests on the birds' shared belief, Pisthetaerus cultivates the birds' sense of efficacy by expelling their doubts and by highlighting their collective power on the basis of which they can act and be treated as gods by men (perceived efficacy). The end of the speech finds the birds won over to Pisthetaerus' grandiose plan, and hailing him as their leader:

Chorus leader

Old man, my worst enemy changed into my very best
 friend, it's impossible that I could ever choose to discard
 this idea of yours!

Chorus

Emboldened by your words,
I give notice and solemnly swear:
if you bring to my cause congenial proposals,
and fairly, squarely, righteously attack the gods,
tuning your thoughts to mine, then not much longer
will the gods be abusing my sceptre!

Chorus leader

So in the tasks that call for brawn, we're ready for duty; in
the plans that call for brains, you're in charge of all that.

Κο. ὦ φίλτατ' ἐμοὶ πολὺ πρεσβυτῶν ἐξ ἐχθίστου μεταπίπτων,
οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως ἂν ἐγὼ ποθ' ἐκὼν τῆς σῆς γνώμης ἔτ' ἀφείμην.

Χο. ἐπαυχήσας δὲ τοῖσι σοῖς λόγοις

ἐπηπείλησα καὶ κατώμοσα,

ἐὰν σὺ παρ' ἐμὲ θέμενος ὁμόφρονας λόγους

δίκαιος ἄδολος ὅσιος ἐπὶ θεοὺς ἴης,

ἐμοὶ φρονῶν ξυνωδὰ, μὴ πολὺν χρόνον

θεοὺς ἔτι σκῆπτρα τὰμὰ τρίψειν.

Κο. ἀλλ' ὅσα μὲν δεῖ ῥώμῃ πράττειν, ἐπὶ ταῦτα τεταξόμεθ' ἡμεῖς·

ὅσα δὲ γνώμῃ δεῖ βουλευεῖν, ἐπὶ σοὶ τάδε πάντ' ἀνάκειται. (Aristophanes,

Birds 627–637)

5 Pisthetaerus Becomes the Leader of the Birds

Leadership is essentially a process of social identity management—and hence effective leadership is always *identity leadership*¹⁵

Pisthetaerus' persuasive argumentation makes him more than a simple advisor of the birds; at the end of the *agôn* he is declared leader and such a declaration sharply contrasts with the birds' initial hostile attitude towards him and Euelpides (336–365). Since his arguments enhance the birds' social identity and thereby foster collective action, it is reasonable to suggest that leadership is granted to Pisthetaerus in accordance with the fact that his self-presentation

¹⁵ Haslam et al. 2011: 197 (slightly modified).

fits the picture of the leader as drawn by the theory of identity leadership.¹⁶ To elaborate this argument, we turn to the book *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, influence, and power* by Alexander Haslam, Stephen Reicher and Michael Platow.¹⁷ According to these scholars, the four core principles of the theory of identity-leadership are:

- ‘to lead us, leaders must represent “us”’
- ‘to engage followers, leaders’ actions and visions must promote group interests’
- ‘leaders are masters not slaves of identity’
- ‘leadership and the production of power both center on the hard but rewarding work of identity management’.¹⁸

To begin with, the foregoing analysis has already demonstrated that ‘... *for would-be leaders, nothing can substitute for understanding the social identity of the group they seek to lead*. There are no fixed menus for leadership success, it is always à-la-carte’.¹⁹ Both Tereus, the current leader of the birds, and Pisthetaerus have invoked the birds’ social identity in order to persuade them. But in contrast to Tereus, Pisthetaerus knows that social identity is a dynamic notion, the current content of which should not trap, or work as an impediment for, its managers. So, even though the interactions with Tereus and the birds themselves provide him with a clear cultural knowledge of the latter, he chooses to focus on the past in order to prove that the current situation is an age of decline during which the true qualities of the group are not displayed.²⁰ However, the birds’ reaction to his main contention that they are the oldest beings and once upon a time were the kings of the universe is: ‘I certainly never heard that’ (τοῦτ᾽ ἂν Δὲ οὐκ ἐπετύσμεν, 470). This indicates that he does not work with the traditional version of identity, but crafts a new one.²¹ Although identity entrepreneurship is not an easy task, Pisthetaerus proves himself an artist thanks to his excellent rhetorical skills.

16 The ‘theory of identity leadership’ must be considered a more recent development and extension of the social identity theory of leadership as articulated by Hogg and van Knippenberg 2003.

17 Haslam et al. 2011.

18 Haslam et al. 2011: 106, 132, 162, 192 respectively.

19 Haslam et al. 2011: 133.

20 Cf. Haslam et al. 2011: 161.

21 Cf. Haslam et al. 2011: 149: ‘... what marks out great leaders from ordinary ones is the fact that they don’t just repeat traditional stories of identity. They innovate. They draw on less well-known strands of group culture. They weave familiar strands into novel patterns. They are careful not to violate what we know of ourselves. Their genius is to make the new out of elements of the old and thereby to present revolution as tradition’.

The effects of his masterly executed work are to be seen more emphatically in the *parabasis* where the birds are portrayed as having already espoused their real identity, to which they are fully living up:²²

Chorus

Now, then, ye men by nature just faintly alive, like to the race of leaves,
do-littles, artefacts of clay, tribes shadowy and feeble,
wingless ephemerals, suffering mortals, dreamlike people:
pay attention to us, the immortals, the everlasting,
the ethereal, the ageless, whose counsels are imperishable;
once you hear from us an accurate account of all celestial phenomena,
and know
correctly the nature of birds and the genesis of gods, rivers, Erebus, and
Chaos,
thenceforth you'll be able to tell Prodicus from me to go to hell!

...

There was no race of immortal gods before Eros commingled everything;
then as this commingled with that, Sky came to be, and Ocean and Earth,
and the whole imperishable race of blessed gods.
Thus we're far older than all the blessed gods, and it's abundantly clear
that we're the offspring of Eros.

ἄγε δὴ φύσιν ἄνδρες ἀμαυρόβιοι, φύλλων γενεᾷ προσόμοιοι,
ὀλιγοδρανέες, πλάσματα πηλοῦ, σκιοειδέα φύλ' ἀμενηνά,
ἀπτήνης ἐφημέριοι, ταλαοὶ βροτοί, ἄνδρες εἰκελόνειροι,
προσέχετε τὸν νοῦν τοῖς ἀθανάτοις ἡμῖν, τοῖς αἰὲν εὐοῦσιν,
τοῖς αἰθερίοις, τοῖσιν ἀγήρως, τοῖς ἄφθιτα μηδομένοισιν,
ἴν' ἀκούσαντες πάντα παρ' ἡμῶν ὀρθῶς περὶ τῶν μετεώρων,
φύσιν οἰωνῶν γένεσιν τε θεῶν ποταμῶν τ' Ἐρέβους τε Χάους τε
εἰδότες ὀρθῶς, Προδίκῳ παρ' ἐμοῦ κλάειν εἵπητε τὸ λοιπόν.

...

πρότερον δ' οὐκ ἦν γένος ἀθανάτων, πρὶν Ἐρῶς ξυνέμειξεν ἅπαντα·
ξυμμεικνυμένων δ' ἐτέρων ἐτέροις γένετ' Οὐρανὸς Ὠκεανὸς τε
καὶ Γῆ πάντων τε θεῶν μακάρων γένος ἄφθιτον. ὧδε μὲν ἐσμεν
πολὺ πρεσβύτατοι πάντων μακάρων ἡμεῖς. ὥς δ' ἐσμεν Ἐρωτος

22 *Contra* Hubbard 1991: 7 who treats the birds' cosmogony/theogony as indicative of their arrogance. For *Birds' parabasis* in general, see Hubbard 1991: 157–182 and for the cosmogony/theogony presented as a parody of the Orphic cosmogony/theogony, see Meisner 2018: 88–94.

πολλοῖς δῆλον· πετόμεσθ' <τε> γὰρ καὶ τοῖσιν ἐρώσι σύνεσμεν' (Aristophanes, *Birds* 685–704)

One does not fail to notice that the new identity of the birds is inextricably connected to power; the theogony and cosmogony they present in the *parabasis* leaves no doubts. Accordingly, Pisthetaerus' plan is in line with the norms and values emanating from the social identity he has just crafted for the group; clearly, what matters for the birds is power and status, not material resources. Therefore, by engaging them in collective action, Pisthetaerus actually promises to consolidate their power and to establish a new social world dominated by them. Indeed, here lies another important aspect of his genius as a leader, namely the promotion of group interest according to the norms and values of the specific group. For, group interest is neither a static notion nor common for all groups, but it is determined by the values and norms of each group.²³

The issue of power leads us to another point. In the *parabasis* the birds, having completely internalized their new identity, express their willingness to reward mankind, that is, to exhibit their power by offering blessings if recognized as gods (708–736); they do not even hesitate to invite men to join their society (753–754). Given the birds' initial bias against men, their perennial enemies, such a striking reversal of their feelings must be credited to Pisthetaerus. In crafting a new identity for the birds, the comic hero has changed the comparative context; the divine birds will now compare themselves to the Olympians who will take men's place as birds' arch-enemies. In a more technical vocabulary, Pisthetaerus redefines the group boundaries so that out-group members can become in-group members.

Indeed, the transformational power of Pisthetaerus is a function of his prototypicality;²⁴ prototypicality refers to the extent to which a member of a category is representative of the category as a whole.²⁵ For, it should be

23 Hubbard 1991: 130–132.

24 I use the adjective 'transformational' without invoking the technical meaning that social psychology has attached to it after the formulation of 'transformational leadership theory'. According to Hogg and Vaughan 2018: 336 transformational leadership is '[an] approach to leadership that focuses on the way that leaders transform group goals and actions—mainly, through the exercise of charisma. Also a style of leadership based on charisma'. The term was initially used by Burns 1978. Although Pisthetaerus does transform the birds' goals and actions, his leadership lacks, as we are soon to discover, the moral aspects of transformational leadership.

25 The notion of leader group prototypicality stems from Social Categorization Theory. Haslam et al. 2011: 83 define it in the following way: 'leaders need to have qualities, attributes, and behaviors that emphasize what makes them the *same* as their followers, while differentiating them from other groups that are salient in a particular context'. Generally,

obvious by now that by making the birds matter, making sense of their existence, and working from their perspective, Pisthetaerus becomes one of them. Although apparently a significant divergence from the theory for which common identity and thus prototypicality is a prerequisite for identity-leadership, Pisthetaerus' case proves, albeit in a comic context, that when an out-group member manages to be seen and treated as an entrepreneur and embedder of identity as well as in-group champion of the group, in the end he can become the in-group prototype. Even if it sounds paradoxical, it is he who with his arguments actually gives the birds real wings to fly to the top, and in turn he metaphorically takes wing himself just by talking. However, '[d]efining oneself as prototypical is not simply a matter of what one says, it is a matter of what one does, how one looks, and even ... what one wears'.²⁶ And so we see that just before the *parabasis* Tereus assures both Pisthetaerus and Euelpides that they will wear wings. The winged Pisthetaerus eventually literally becomes one of the birds.

6 The Nature of Pisthetaerus' Regime

In short, shared social identity can be a basis for tyranny, but it can also be a basis for resistance²⁷

Pisthetaerus appears an ideal leader not only in theory, but in action as well: he expels a group of visitors who arrive in the birds' newly founded Cloudcuckooland and either try to make a profit from it or to impose restrictions on it (903–1057).²⁸ The birds do not seem to be bothered by his decision to act without informing or consulting them on the matter; on the contrary, in the second *parabasis*, which is set immediately after the dismissal of the first group of visitors, they continue to denounce human tyranny over them, giving the impression that they don't include Pisthetaerus in that category and that they approve of his actions (1076–1087). In fact, the birds embrace Pisthetaerus' regime long before the herald reports the response of men to

leader group prototypicality is not a static notion, varies with context and is inextricably connected with the effectiveness of leaders. For a detailed analysis, see Haslam et al. 2011: 83–90, Hogg 2001 and van Knippenberg 2011.

26 Haslam et al. 2011: 140.

27 Haslam and Reicher 2012: 7–8.

28 Cf. Hubbard 1991: 171.

their revolt (1277–1307) and they turn to his expertise for everything, from naming the city and sacrificing (809–858) to expelling Iris (1170–1261).

But what is the exact nature of the regime that Pisthetaerus establishes? The scholars who introduced the concept of identity leadership clarify that their model does not promote a specific political system, but explains how different types of political systems are established.²⁹ The decisive point is the interpretation of identity, or rather, the extent to which the leader involves the group in the definition of identity. Therefore, they identify three types of political system which correspond to three different relations between leaders and groups in the process of identity interpretation: democratic, hierarchical, and dictatorial. Pisthetaerus' regime and the norms, practices, and actions underlying it (decisions, governance, task delegation, strategy development) suggest the second of these types, the hierarchical system. In such a political system 'leaders remain in conversation with members about group identity, but the conversation is limited and asymmetrical. Here leaders can claim to have special expertise in defining group identity. They do not offer their suggestions as a contribution to a debate. Rather, they ... present their version of identity as the only possible version. *In principle*, they leave open the right of followers to dissent, but *in practice* they seek to make dissent more difficult. The model here is the leader as master'.³⁰

Gradually, though, Pisthetaerus' actions chime with a rather dictatorial rather than a hierarchical system: 'a dictatorial system is one where the leader becomes the sole embodiment of the group, where what the leader says by definition is what the group believes, and any disagreement with the leader necessarily sets an individual outside or against the group. Here, the leader alone is active and followers are inert. Indeed, anything they do that runs counter to the wishes of the leader is likely to lead to repression'.³¹ The dismissal of the second group of visitors can be seen as the starting point of this *modus operandi* since it blatantly contradicts the birds' proclamation in the *parabasis*: the comic hero sends off the would-be citizens of Cloudcuckooland who can potentially weaken his influence over the birds and threaten the social order that he has been trying to establish.³² His dictatorial behaviour reaches a climax when he cooks the dissident birds:

Heracles

And what sort of meat is that?

29 Haslam et al. 2011: 217–218.

30 Haslam et al. 2011: 217.

31 Haslam et al. 2011: 218.

32 See also Hubbard 1991: 171.

Pisthetaerus

Some birds who've been convicted of attempted rebellion
against the bird democracy.

Ηρ. τὰ δὲ κρέα τοῦ ταῦτ' ἐστίν;
Πε. ὄρνιθές τινες
ἐπανιστάμενοι τοῖς δημοτικοῖσιν ὀρνέοις
ἔδοξαν ἀδικεῖν. (Aristophanes, *Birds* 1583–1585)

As for the birds, they seem to realize the change in the regime.³³ Immediately after the dismissal of the second group of visitors, they do not restate their confidence as they did before, but sing about Cleonymus (1470–1481) and Orestes (1482–1493). One feels tempted to identify the similarities of Pisthetaerus to these figures: despite their transformation—Pisthetaerus is now a bird and Cleonymus a tree—, both retain their basic traits, the former is still treacherous whereas the latter is a glutton and coward; as the hero Orestes turns into a criminal at night, so Pisthetaerus is the hero of the birds who proves a betrayer at the end of the day/play. The birds' abusive song continues after the Prometheus scene: they now sing about Pisander (1553–1564) who is a peculiar type of psychagogue like Pisthetaerus is. The fourth stanza of their song refers mainly to the sophist Gorgias (1694–1705) and comes after the visit of the divine embassy where the birds witness Pisthetaerus persuading the gods in a Gorgias-like manner with his great rhetorical skills and sophistic arguments.

Despite their realization, the birds go on to celebrate Pisthetaerus' wedding and his general success:

Chorus

Great, great is the luck that embraces
the race of birds
thanks to this man; now with wedding
and bridal songs please welcome
Himself and His Princess!

μεγάλοι μεγάλοι κατέχουσι τύχαι
γένος ὀρνίθων
διὰ τόνδε τὸν ἄνδρ'. ἀλλ' ὕμεναίοις
καὶ νυμφιδίοισι δέχεσθ' ὥδαίς
αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν Βασίλειαν. (Aristophanes, *Birds* 1726–1730)³⁴

33 See Moulton 1981: 32–36.

34 See also *Birds* 1763–1765.

Two questions naturally arise from this: why does Pisthetaerus become a tyrant and why do the birds succumb to his authoritarian regime or even accept his hierarchical system in the first place? If we interpret their behaviour as an example of what Michael Silk calls ‘Aristophanic discontinuity’,³⁵ then the answer to these questions is simple: ‘Aristophanes’ plot wants it this way’. On the contrary, our assumption is that, far from being treated as illogical or discontinuous, both Pisthetaerus’ and the birds’ behaviour become intelligible within a social psychological framework.

7 The Social Identity Perspective on Tyranny and the *Birds*

The issue of tyranny—why and how people endure tyranny or become tyrants themselves—is one of the core issues that have concerned social psychology theorists and practitioners.³⁶ After years of seeking explanations of tyrannical behaviour in individual traits, social psychologists realized the need for a group-psychological approach to tyranny. In most cases, the findings of group-oriented experiments were gloomy; being a member of, or acting in, a group promotes extreme antisocial behaviour, including the establishment of tyranny. Given the extremity of some experiments and of their findings, the debate over the social-psychological interpretation of tyranny subsided for some years. But for social psychologists working on social identity, the worrisome results seemed at odds with the basic principles of their approach. The revision of the issue of tyranny within social psychology is mainly the achievement of the BBC prison study (BPS), an experiment conducted by Reicher and Haslam in 2001 in order to counterbalance the main findings of the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) of Zimbardo.³⁷

35 Silk 2000: 239: ‘The switches, the transformations, the reversals embodied in Aristophanic characters are—we may surely now agree—something more than incidental odd moments in otherwise tidy or homogeneous wholes. They represent a pervasive and essential fact of Aristophanic drama and, as such, may quite naturally constitute the most important part of a single character’s presentation’.

36 A more detailed outline of the history of the issue of tyranny within the domain of social psychology with references to the primary sources can be found in Reicher and Haslam 2006b: 1–3.

37 Since the details of Zimbardo’s study are not relevant here, it is enough to recall that in the SPE young college students were divided into guards and prisoners and were set in an environment that replicated prison. The guards were corrupted by their role and became extremely brutal towards the prisoners, whereas the latter got extremely passive. The basic finding of the study—which had to stop sooner than planned due to its intense

Here is a short description of the BPS: fifteen men were randomly divided into two groups (prisoners and guards) and their behaviour was examined within an environment which replicated the social world, meaning the inequalities between the social groups. When the prisoners realized that there was no longer any possibility of being promoted to the group of the guards (in social psychological terms, they realized that the boundaries of the groups were impermeable), they started developing a shared identity and worked collectively to challenge the guards who did not identify with their own group. These challenging actions made the prisoners realize that the relationship between the groups was illegitimate and insecure. This became more acute when a new prisoner arrived, a trade union official, who further questioned the status quo, but most importantly succeeded in making arrangements with the guards as the chosen representative of the prisoners, which decreased the hierarchical status of the former. His case proved how the individual triumphs by working through the group and indicated that leadership within a group is a matter of intergroup relations. After his achievement, the new prisoner was removed from the study. His fellow prisoners proved unable to implement his democratic vision without him, so they started again challenging the guards and conflict seemed more obvious than ever. Soon the guards' regime collapsed.

Interestingly, the second part of the study was not planned by the experimenters themselves, but came about naturally; with the experimenters' approval, the participants agreed to establish a self-governing system in which all would be equal. Although at first the new system worked, a group of dissidents (in fact, some of those who had previously contributed to the collapse of the guards' regime) decided to establish a new guards' regime. This internal opposition to the new system—in combination with an irrelevant incident that gave the Communards the impression that there was external opposition to their system by the experimenters themselves—made them lose both faith in democracy and the will to fight for it. For ethical reasons the study did not move on, so the establishment of the new regime did not actually take place; yet the disposition of the participants towards it was clear.³⁸ Therefore, the BPS has proved that the emergence of tyranny is a matter inextricably connected with group dynamics and not simply a matter of role assignment: an individual needs to identify with the role of the tyrant, whereas the rest of the

results—was that people can commit atrocities when given powerful roles. For a comprehensive description of the experiment and its findings, see Haney et al. 1973.

38 For a comprehensive description of the BPS and its findings, see Reicher and Haslam 2006a and online <http://www.bbcprisonstudy.org/>.

group members need to share and reinforce this identification. More importantly, there needs to be an active leadership grounded on common identity which will promote the interests of the group.

With this in mind, we now turn to *Birds*, which does not only portray tyranny dynamics in action, but is believed to have provided the model for the erotic tyrant of Plato's *Republic* IX.³⁹ *Birds*' plot has striking similarities to the BPS; like the BPS participants, neither Pisthetaerus nor the birds are naturally disposed towards authoritarianism: the former typically detests tyranny like most Athenians (125–126),⁴⁰ whereas the latter at the beginning of the play appear to live happily under Tereus' democratic leadership; they have allowed him to live freely in their avian society. Thus, both Pisthetaerus' and the birds' behaviour at the end of the play do not stem from authoritative traits of their personality and neither do they result from simply enacting the roles which have been assigned to them. Social interactions prompt both to identify with these roles and transform Pisthetaerus into a tyrant and the birds into his servile followers who are in need of his grand vision, his own hard work for the implementation of the vision, and his capacity to resist any threats to it. Equally importantly, Pisthetaerus' leadership is grounded in the shared identity of the group and promotes the common interest; we must not forget that he keeps his promise and makes the birds the dominant group in the social world. The birds are prompted to denounce their democratic principles in favour of authoritarianism because democracy has failed: Tereus' leadership just generated the existing social system in which the birds were a failing and subordinate group. Even if the birds had not embraced the tyrannical regime—and in fact some of them did not—it would still be hard for them to overturn it: Pisthetaerus' regime is powerful since he copes effectively and drastically with external (the visitors) and internal (the dissident birds) threats. It is ironic that in order to secure their dominance and tyranny over the gods, the birds have to endure tyranny domestically.

8 Conclusion

Our social psychological analysis has demonstrated that *Birds* can be read as a case study of how the Social Identity Approach (Social Identity Theory

39 See Saxonhouse 1978 and Meyer 2014.

40 Pisthetaerus states that he detests aristocracy, but he means oligarchy; see Dunbar's 1995 comment *ad loc.* For the Athenians of the fifth century BCE the term tyranny included oligarchy and generally any anti-democratic activity, see Thuc. 6.60.1.

and Self-Categorization Theory), perhaps the most prominent and influential theory of social psychology nowadays, can be fruitfully applied to classical texts. Given that the play has so far resisted a convincing and unanimous interpretation,⁴¹ it is tempting to argue that its contested immediate social and political allusions, whatever these might have been, are mediated by a social psychological perspective. The plot of the play highlights the importance of group membership and of social identities for group processes and intergroup relations and corroborates Aeschylus' verse quoted humorously by Euelpides after acquiring wings: '*not by others but by our own feathers*' (807–808).

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Cognitive Approaches to Ancient Satire: Rethinking the Laughter of Derision

Ralph M. Rosen

1 Introduction: Laughter and the Problem of Satire

There is a passage, easy to overlook, in the Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin's famous book on Rabelais where he formulates his influential theory of festive laughter and the carnivalesque. Speaking of the laughter of carnival, Bakhtin notes that this kind of laughter is 'directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world.' He makes this comment because he wants to distinguish festive laughter from the laughter associated with satire. As he says, the holism, or all-inclusiveness of festive laughter is

one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. (Bakhtin 1984: 12)

The laughter that comes from what we call satire (which I will define for the moment as aestheticized comedic forms of complaint and derision) is, for Bakhtin, 'negative' in the sense that its objects or targets are excluded from the social communion he finds at work in carnival laughter. He is not alone in his discomfort with satire—the perceived nastiness, even cruelty, of such forms has been thematized since antiquity as a negative quality (though often, as we shall see, for ambivalent ends), and satire remains today typically categorized as a separate form of humour (referring to the stimuli of laughter) and comedy (i.e., the literary vehicle of that humour).¹

1 Freud (1905 [1960]: 90–94) was aiming for a distinction of this sort in discussing 'tendentious' (which would include satirical joking) and non-tendentious ('innocent', i.e., without a specific target) jokes separately.

This anxiety about arts that attempt to elicit a specific 'laughter of derision' has also worried the social psychologists and evolutionary biologists who study laughter across primate species. For them the problem arises with the general recognition that primate laughter is generally felt to indicate *positive* subjective emotions in the laugher, and that it offers prosocial benefits for a community. Laughter tends to be 'emotionally contagious', so people who perceive it will experience elevated and lightened mood and may be induced to laugh themselves.² In the case of derisive or 'disparagement laughter' as it is sometimes called, people often worry that stimuli that produce it have the opposite effect—its content relies, that is, on anti-social sentiment which seems to cleave rather than consolidate or regenerate a community.

My own interest in scientific research on derisive laughter began when considering a similar set of anxieties found in many Greek and Roman satirical writers, and the scholars who study them. These anxieties cut to the very nature of the laughter this particular kind of writing was typically supposed to elicit, and I found myself seeking a layer of explanation that seemed more the purview of scientists than literary scholars. When we ask, for example, *why* the Greek iambographer Archilochus (seventh century BCE) chose to mock Lycambes, or *why* the Roman satirist Juvenal (first to second century CE) singled out the glutton Crispinus for ridicule (to take two examples at opposite ends of the chronological spectrum of Greco-Roman literature), our answers necessarily involve speculation about the poets' lives, their relationships with their targets, and with their audiences. We can often draw reasonable conclusions about what was and was not a legitimate target of satire at any given historical moment, and in what performative or literary contexts satire would have been appropriate. But however satisfied we might be with some of these answers, there always remains an unexplored antecedent moment of causation—*why* would an author like Archilochus, Aristophanes or Juvenal be moved to write satire in the first place?

We may allow that there were things that bothered them in their lives and gave them cause for complaint, and sometimes we believe, at any rate, that we can gain access to what those things were.³ But why choose satire for this purpose, an artistic form designed to induce a specific physiological response

2 For scientific studies of 'emotional contagion' see, e.g., Hatfield et al. 1994; Doherty 1997; Hatfield et al. 2009. On the emotional contagion of laughter specifically, Provine 1992, Bachorowski and Owren 2001; Owren and Bachorowski 2003a.

3 For ancient satirists in particular, however, this is always a fraught enterprise, since we have no information to work with other than what authors tell us themselves, or occasionally testimonia from ancient commentators who themselves were extrapolating from the authors' works. I have treated this problem at length in Rosen 2007.

(laughter) in a specific audience (a community of sympathizers)⁴ when other forms of complaint would also have been available to them—if complaint was even their main goal?⁵ It is this initial decision to write with the intention of making an audience—and sometimes, at least, also the target—react with a form of behaviour highly marked as an indicator of specific emotional states (i.e., laughter) that requires a kind of questioning that literary history is unequipped to answer. It may be a truism to state that literary behaviour is a function of human behaviour, but in the case of satire the consequences of this truism remain, I think, underappreciated. My contention in this chapter, then, is that, on the one hand, the social science on laughter can provide us with some tools to help us better understand, functionally and conceptually, how these ancient authors talk about aggressive satire, and, on the other, that these *ancient* discussions of satirical humour are useful, in fact, for refining the conceptual terminology used by social psychologists.

The specific problem with satire, to reiterate, is its fraught relationship to laughter, that is, its deployment of antisocial content in the service of laughter, an apparently prosocial goal.⁶ We will explore in this chapter, then, what it even means to speak of satirical laughter as ‘negative’, and whether it is valid and useful to describe it as such. My argument will be that everything depends on the group for whom a satirical work appears to be negative. We may ask not only ‘for whom is this satire negative?’ but also what ‘work’ satire, in all its alleged negativity, is supposed to be doing. Does it induce laughter that we should call *intrinsically* ‘negative’ or antisocial, or is it only negative when its targets are perceived to be attacked unjustly? And if that happens, is there even *any* space left for listeners to laugh when they are unsure if the target deserves to be laughed at or not? In any case, audiences are never monolithic, and satirists, as is well known, can never predict how their aggressive humour will land with any individual or group.

Satirical humour that ends up properly placed in an audience—humour crafted around a shared communal sense of contempt for a target—is only

4 See Rosen 2007: 246–247.

5 Assuming that their main goal was in fact to take someone to task for something (that is, as opposed to having as a goal the composition of satirical poetry that would be successful with an audience or reader), they might well have chosen any number of informal ways to publicize their unhappiness which could have remained within the realm of the serious, and avoided the ambiguities that comic tone introduces.

6 On laughter as a response in humans (and most primates) generally signaling emotional well-being, see e.g., van Hooff 1989 (with some caveats, 126–127); Panksepp 2000; Gervais and Wilson 2005 esp. 397–403 (with further bibliography); van Hooff and Preuschoft 2003; Leavens 2009; Ruch 2008: 77–79 (who also noted the need for more empirical research).

antisocial if it is thought to inspire *undeserved* scorn in its listeners. So, as I will suggest in this chapter, the reputation satirical laughter has for being *negative* is a judgement formed by observers *outside* the triangle of satirist—target—audience, whether that means scholars trying to ‘study’ satire, or a satirist’s contemporaries who watch, but do not participate in, the transaction between the *stimulus* of humour and the *response* of laughter. They see only the aggression of the humour, not how listeners might respond to that aggression—as justified or not. In the case of ancient satire, it is obvious why this is so: we have no direct evidence for how audiences actually responded to satirical humour, and assess a satirist’s aggressive humour as negative simply because it is anti-social against *someone*, without knowing whether listeners would approve or not, i.e., without knowing what *kind* of laughter satirical humour would draw from them.

It is easy to observe across literary history that satirists themselves are keenly aware how listeners and outsiders perceive what they do as problematic, and Greek and Roman satirists were especially interested in thematizing this perception. In fact, as we will see, some of these authors were able to isolate exactly the nexus of questions that has also troubled psychologists and biologists who study laughter, and I am hoping that by bringing these two worlds together on this topic, I will be able to make a case for the *prosociality* of derisive humour, at least when it functions as its producers intend it to (an important qualification often emphasized by its practitioners).

2 Is Satirical Humour Prosocial?

I use the term ‘prosociality’ as social scientists do, i.e., referring to behaviours felt to offer some benefit to a community, although the concept is far more complex than this brief definition suggests.⁷ To call satire prosocial in any respect might appear a paradox, since the hallmarks of satire—aggression, contempt, anger, hatred, etc.—seem, if anything, to indicate *anti*-social behaviour; and that paradox is what returns us to the problem of satirical *laughter*, a human response typically felt to indicate happiness or joy.

Part of the problem with satire is the difficulty in understanding the exact nature of the laughter it is supposed to induce. Laughter researchers agree on a basic distinction between what they call ‘Duchenne laughter’ and ‘non-Duchenne laughter’ (named after the nineteenth-century physician,

⁷ See Jensen 2016.

Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, d. 1875, who studied the physiology of facial expressions, including laughter).⁸ The difference between 'Duchenne' and 'non-Duchenne' laughter reflects differences in antecedent stimuli: Duchenne laughter tends to be spontaneous, emotionally reflexive and ingenuous (e.g., one's spontaneous reaction to the punch line of a good joke or sight-gag), while non-Duchenne laughter is 'self-generated' (i.e., it is not a response to an external stimulus) and does not necessarily reflect the mirthful emotion it is supposed to indicate (e.g., nervous, deceptive, or manipulative laughter).⁹ Despite considerable debate about the fine points of this distinction, there remains basic conceptual agreement that they exist as separate categories, they can be mapped in separate parts of the brain, and that Duchenne laughter was almost certainly an earlier evolutionary development than non-Duchenne laughter, which is thought to have required higher cognitive abilities and has been referred to as a 'learned facsimile of Duchenne laughter'.¹⁰

Duchenne laughter 'appears to be intrinsically linked to the ancient brain circuit that underlies mammalian rough-and-tumble play ...'¹¹ Behavioural scientists usually base their hypothesis of a hard-wired human mechanism for laughter on the common observation that human infants start to smile between 3–6 weeks old in response to parental (usually maternal) positive conditioning, and some of the earlier work in this area explained this process as a means to communicate a subjective emotional state (here: the mother's) to the recipient (the infant), who can then 'decode' it, and interpret the mother's laughter as a signal indicating safety and play. More recent research has downplayed the idea that laughter transfers some sort of coded emotional message, but stresses what is called the 'affect-induction hypothesis',¹² i.e., the idea that the purpose of making someone laugh is to induce positive emotional states. The fact that laughter is demonstrably 'contagious' has led others to theorize that one of its evolutionary functions was to foster cohesion and cooperation within a community.¹³

8 See Duchenne's original study (1862); van Hooft 1972; Ekman et al. 1990; Messinger et al. 2001; Ross et al. 2009; and Hurley et al. 2011: 19–24.

9 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 401.

10 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 400.

11 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 401, referring to the work of Iwase et al., who conclude 2002: 766: 'In the present study, we demonstrated the *distinct* [my emphasis] neural substrates of generation of facial expression of pleasant emotion and voluntary facial movement mimicking laughter/smile in healthy humans ...'.

12 Owren and Bachorowski 2003.

13 See, e.g., Fredrickson 1998.

Where does satirical laughter (the *response* to a satirical product) fall in this scheme, and what is its relation to satirical *humour* (the stimulus to that laughter)? That is, if satirical laughter is properly speaking Duchenne laughter, i.e., spontaneous and indicative of mirthful affect, what do we do with the typical claim of satirists that they are purveying something 'serious', along with whatever laughter they are aiming for? One of the most recent attempts (Gervais and Wilson 2005) to delineate the 'essential and at root singular stimulus that elicits Duchenne laughter in apes and humans' includes an explicit quality of *non-seriousness*: '... a sudden unexpected change in events that is perceived to be at once *not serious* and in a social context—that is, *nonserious social incongruity*.'¹⁴ Duchenne laughter requires humour as a stimulus; non-Duchenne laughter has been described as 'spontaneous conversational laughter that occurs in the absence of attempts at humor'.¹⁵ Satire, then, seems to aim for Duchenne laughter (spontaneous and mirthful), not non-Duchenne laughter (autonomic, but strategic, and spontaneously adopted as a way to deflect anxiety (see note 15), despite the fact that, as we will see, there is persistent resistance to the idea that satirical humour belongs in the same category as less aggressive, more obviously 'joyous', forms of humour. I have not, in fact, found any psychological literature that confronts this problem specifically, and psychologists who are aware of it seem uncertain how aggressive humour should be categorized from the start. Non-Duchenne laughter is described as strategic and learned: in human evolutionary history it has been felt to be subsequent to Duchenne laughter—i.e., humans could observe the positive effects of Duchenne laughter, and learned to mimic that kind of laughter and manipulate it for strategic social purposes. Gervais and Wilson offer a list of exemplary manifestations of non-Duchenne laughter: 'conversational laughter, nervous laughter, appeasement laughter, and *aggressive or derisive laughter* ...'.¹⁶

14 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 398–399, who invoke a vast bibliography from psychology and ethology on the essential non-seriousness of play especially in children, but also adults, human and non-human primates alike.

15 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 401. As Gervais and Wilson note (401) Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter 'should not be distinguished in terms of spontaneity but instead in terms of antecedent stimuli, emotional valence, or physical characteristics.' One reacts to a stimulus that causes discomfort or anxiety, for example, with a *spontaneous* kind of laughter that mimics the mirthful laughter of Duchenne laughter, as if hoping that it will have the same kind of effect on the person perceiving your laughter. It is spontaneous in that one laughs in this mode as an automatic reflex that draws on learned behavior, but not (or not necessarily) self-consciously ('strategic and learned but largely beyond conscious control', 401).

16 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 403.

An early attempt to sort out the purposes of laughter and theorize its possible evolutionary origins by McComas (1923) segregates the laughter of derision from more 'natural' forms indicative of *pleasure and mirth* in a formulation that will be a useful starting point for our study:

Certainly the pleasures which grow out of the sensations, activities and instincts cannot account for all forms of laughter. *They have no part in the laughter of derision, for example, or the laughter of embarrassment.* Such laughter is an artifice. It is allied to language. *It is not a natural outcome of a pleasurable experience. It is rather a means of conveying an idea, a form of statement.* Though a laugh is as instinctive as a cough or a cry, it *can be simulated* as well as they. When an auctioneer laughs at the first bid he gets it is no expression of mirth, it is a statement to the crowd to bid higher ... It does not express pleasure ... Many an argument finds its full answer in a guffaw, many a refusal is tempered by a kindly chuckle. Laughter of this sort *is but a form of language.* (McComas 1923: 50, emphases added)

McComas' claim that derisive laughter is a function of language as a vehicle for thought, and as such can be confected to mimic 'natural' laughter for non-pleasurable effect, while more impressionistic than empirical, has become, as we have begun to see, a common trope among both literary scholars and social scientists. But it is a muddy claim, in fact, because it conflates two laughing subjects, and the goal implicit in each subject's laughter. Whether or not we can say that people who *simulate* laughter (non-Duchenne laughter) feel any pleasure themselves (McComas' denial that the laughing auctioneer does, in any case, seems dubious), what about the 'artificial' laughter a nervous laugher hopes to elicit from a listener by simulating 'real' laughter? Non-Duchenne, simulated laughter, after all *aims* (consciously or not) to defuse a tense situation by making another person laugh with 'natural' or mirthful laughter. So do we apply the term 'aggressive laughter' to the *producer* of such laughter or to its implied listener? If I laugh at an instance of derisive mockery, for example, is it impossible to call my laughter in this case 'Duchenne laughter' because we have labeled the humour of this mockery 'derisive'?

It is not entirely clear exactly what kind of laughter social psychologists think literary satire in particular produces, and no dedicated discussion of it in the psychological literature seems to exist. From the little I have found, however, most social psychologists become flustered trying to explain the apparent contradiction of aggressive humour that McComas and others have articulated. Keltner and Bonanno, for example, acknowledge that the diversity

of functions laughter exhibits 'inevitably leads to theoretical debate about the nature of laughter, for example, whether laughter is necessarily associated with the experience of positive emotion.'¹⁷ But they think this can be resolved simply by refining our distinctions between Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter. They continue:

Certain functions of laughter that seem to be independent of the experience of positive emotion, such as the punctuation of conversation or the expression of superiority [*included in this would be laughter induced by aggressive humour*], are likely to be the province of non-Duchenne laughter, whereas the positive functions served by laughter that have been the focus of this study are more likely to be served by Duchenne laughter. [emphasis added]

This seems, however, to put off the real question of whether aggression (and aggressive humour) can ever be positive. Keltner and Bonanno assume that aggressive humour must aim to elicit a negative kind of laughter, and that this laughter, therefore cannot be categorized as Duchenne, which exists only in the realm of social play, positive emotional contagion and community building. By suggesting that aggressive humour must be aiming for *non*-Duchenne laughter, however, an entire area of questioning is cut off prematurely, one that has never been properly addressed.¹⁸ Put succinctly, why must we assume that aggressive laughter in humans *cannot* be socially positive?

Greek and Roman authors, as it seems, had a better handle on this problem than many theorists of our own day, if only because they did not have to worry about naming technical categories of laughter. Several important texts, however, survive which indicate a highly sophisticated approach to distinguishing types of laughter, and their effect on communities. We will look at a sampling of these first from the fifth-century BCE Athenian poet Aristophanes, and then from the late Republican Roman poet Horace. Though representative of very different literary traditions, each reveals the same anxieties about satire in their own times (i.e., about literary genres of complaint, mockery, invective in a marked comic mode) as modern scholars trying to come to terms with

17 Keltner and Bonanno 1997: 700.

18 Another conceptual question that Keltner and Bonanno's quotation raises is what it even means to think of a listener's laughter in response to satirical humour as non-Duchenne. Put another way, can laughter ever be categorized as *non*-Duchenne when it has been elicited intentionally by another person, insofar as non-Duchenne laughter typically refers to self-generated laughter—spontaneous (see above, n. 15), but learned and strategic laughter as well, laughter that originates in a feeling of anxiety of nervousness?

the paradoxes of aggressive, supposedly ‘anti-social’ humour. These ancient authors, as we will see, make their own pitch for aggressive humour to be considered something ‘positive’, even though classical *scholars* have a long tradition of denying that it can be.

3 Theorizing Aristophanic Satire

3.1 *Aristophanic Categories*

I begin with a well-known passage from Aristophanes’ comedy, *Frogs*. This passage comes from the *parodos* of the play, that is, the entrance song and dance of the comic chorus, a group of 24 actors, here representing a band of initiates into the mystery cult of the chthonic goddess Demeter, who had a cult site at Eleusis. Here, as often in Aristophanes, the *parodos* offers some reflection on the play’s literary program. The chorus enters singing and dancing, and clarifies who their ‘proper audience’ should be:

All speak fair, and the following shall stand apart from our dances: whoever is *unfamiliar with such utterances as this*, or harbours unclean attitudes, or has never beheld or danced in the rites of the first-class Muses nor been initiated in the Bacchic rites of *bull-eating Cratinus’ language*, or enjoys clownish words from those who deliver them at the wrong time, or *forbears to resolve hateful factionalism and act peaceably toward other citizens*, but foments and inflames it from desire for personal gain, or as an official sells out the city when she’s tossed on stormy seas, or betrays a fortress or fleet ... or is a *politician who nibbles away the poets’ honoraria after being lampooned in a comedy* during the ancestral rites of Dionysus (...) To these I proclaim, and proclaim again, and thrice proclaim: stand apart from the initiates’ dances.

εὐφημεῖν χρὴ κάξιστασθαι τοῖς ἡμετέροισι χοροῖσιν,
 ὅστις ἄπειρος τοιῶνδε λόγων ἢ γνώμην μὴ καθαρεύει
 ἢ γενναίων ὄργια Μουσῶν μήτ’ εἶδεν μήτ’ ἐχόρευσεν,
 μηδὲ Κρατίνου τοῦ ταυροφάγου γλώττης Βακχεῖ’ ἐτελέσθη,
 ἢ βωμολόχοις ἔπεσιν χαίρει μὴ ’ν καιρῷ τοῦτο ποιούντων,
 ἢ στάσιν ἐχθρὰν μὴ καταλύει μηδ’ εὐκόλός ἐστι πολίταις,
 ἀλλ’ ἀνεγείρει καὶ ῥιπίζει κερδῶν ἰδίων ἐπιθυμῶν,
 ἢ τῆς πόλεως χειμαζομένης ἄρχων καταδωροδοκεῖται,
 ἢ προδίδωσιν φρούριον ἢ ναῦς ...
 ἢ τοὺς μισθοὺς τῶν ποιητῶν ῥήτωρ ὧν εἴτ’ ἀποτρώγει,
 κωμωδηθεῖς ἐν ταῖς πατρίοις τελεταῖς ταῖς τοῦ Διονύσου· (354–368, tr.
 Henderson 2002, mod.)

Behind this vigorous declaration of how the chorus' performance should be processed as part of the comic drama lies at least the pretence that such performances are often *misunderstood*. Specifically, as they make clear, their list of misunderstandings all revolve around the difficulty some audiences have with satirical humour, i.e., people who are 'unfamiliar with *such utterances*' (*apeiros toiônde logôn*), and who do not understand the kind of language (*glôttê*) used by the notoriously aggressive comic poet Cratinus.¹⁹ What such people fail to realize, they note, is that 'such utterances' are directed at community-building, not its opposite, factionalism and strife, for example. Those who are not 'calm, peaceful' (*eukoloi*) to fellow citizens will not understand that the joking of a comic chorus, even aggressive joking, should be, as we would say, 'prosocial'. Their final example is particularly telling: the politician, targeted for ridicule in a comic performance, who *took offence* at the ridicule, and who retaliated by reducing the honoraria paid to poets who wrote for the festivals. As if to offer a specific example of the kind of satirical humour they are endorsing, they proceed with a sampling of comic mockery directed haphazardly against various citizens. The suggestion to mock is sudden and unmotivated, as e.g., the opening line (416–417)

So what say we get together
and ridicule Archedemus?:
At seven he still hadn't cut his kinsdom teeth,
but now he's a leading politician
among the stiffs above,
and holds the local record for rascality.
And I hear that Cleisthenes' son
is in the graveyard, plucking
his arsehole and tearing his cheeks;
all bent over, he kept beating his head.
wailing and weeping
for Humpus of Wankton, whoever that may be.
And Callias, we're told,
that son of Hippocoitus,
fights at sea in a lionskin made of pussy.

19 See Bakola 2010: 26–27, 69, 254, who reads Cratinus' 'Bacchic' association in Aristophanes as affiliating him stylistically with Aeschylus (i.e., 'old', 'inspired'). The specific concern of the Aristophanic *parodos* to defend comic mockery, and the epithet 'bull-eating', points to Cratinus' 'vigorous' poetic style as well ('with perhaps a hint at some crudity in his work', Stanford 1963: 105–106). See also Rosen 1988: 27.

βούλεσθε δήτα κοινῇ
 σκώψωμεν Ἀρχέδημον;
 ὃς ἐπτέτης ὦν οὐκ ἔφυνε φράτερας,
 νυνὶ δὲ δημαγωγεῖ
 ἐν τοῖς ἄνω νεκροῖσι,
 κᾶστιν τὰ πρῶτα τῆς ἐκεῖ μοχθηρίας.
 τὸν Κλεισθένους δ' ἀκούω
 ἐν ταῖς ταφαῖσι πρωκτὸν
 τίλλειν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ σπαράττειν τὰς γνάβους·
 κακόπτειτ' ἐγκεκυφώς,
 κᾶκλαε κακεκράγει
 Σεβῖνον ὅστις ἐστὶν Ἀναφλύστιος.
 καὶ Καλλίαν γέ φασι τοῦτον τὸν Ἴπποκίνου
 κύσθου λεοντῆς ναυμαχεῖν ἐνημμένον. (416–430, tr. Henderson 2002)

These aggressive attacks on notorious citizens, with their obscene punning and the absurd scenarios, all succeed as classic examples of 'nonserious social incongruity' and serve no other apparent purpose in their context than to make an audience laugh.²⁰ That laughter is conceptualized here as an essential element of the festival dynamics, which strive explicitly to foster social bonding.

But why is it presumed that so many people might well miss the stated goal of such humour as prosocial 'Duchenne' laughter? That group—not just the *targets* of such humour, but audience members who also found aggressive humour devoid of playfulness—seem incapable of 'reading' the comic author's intentions of stimulating laughter, and associate derisive humour with negative, socially expulsive goals. The chorus' remarkably self-conscious account of essentially two kinds of humour—its own aggressive, *ad hominem* humour and the buffooneries it claims to disparage in other poets *precisely* because they elicit a kind of spontaneous laughter that has *no* particular point (cf. 358)—highlights well the fraught faultline between Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter that continues to puzzle evolutionary and social scientists. A social scientist considering this passage from *Frogs* might rightly wonder how to categorize the laughter elicited by each kind of humour that Aristophanes alludes

20 By 'apparent purpose' I mean that nothing about the passage indicates that the chorus is trying to criticize their targets hoping that they might learn something about their behaviour, or that the audience will be morally edified by learning about the bad behaviour of their fellow citizens Archdemus, Cleisthenes' son, and Callias. These jocular lines are fleeting and epigrammatic in their effect, each showcasing an obscene, and so, humorous, punch line.

to here. When an audience laughs at derisive humour is that laughter qualitatively the same as the laughter induced by buffoonish humour? Can they both be characterized as spontaneous, and so, as ‘Duchenne’ laughter?²¹

3.2 *Aristophanic Humour and the Science of Laughter*

Evolutionary biologists locate Duchenne laughter—spontaneous, not calculated and non-volitional—in all primates from the earliest periods. Gervais and Wilson note that Duchenne laughter and protohumour (i.e., non-formal attempts to elicit laughter, such as ‘rough and tumble play, tickling’, etc.) would have been always ‘present in the prehuman behavioural repertoire’ as humans evolved sophisticated volitional capacities, such as the ability to manipulate facial expressions at will, along with language and technology that allowed them to elicit laughter symbolically in both verbal and visual humour.²² Non-Duchenne laughter, then, according to this hypothesis, arises as a kind of co-optation of Duchenne laughter, ‘allowing humans to use its affect-inducing properties to strategically influence others’. According to this argument, humans came to realize that spontaneous laughter made others feel good and had prosocial benefits, so as hominid volitional capacities evolved, they developed ways of mimicking the things that induced spontaneous laughter *symbolically* through language and other cultural productions (theatre, literature)—essentially *manipulating* laughter with an ‘agenda’ in mind.²³

21 It may be useful here to think in terms of Kahneman’s (2011) ‘two-system thinking’, which stems from his research as a decision psychologist. The mind’s ‘fast’, intuitive responses to perceptions happen instantaneously and without the application of measured thought. We often laugh immediately at something comic without thinking of its content, but when time allows for reflection (even just after our initial affective reaction) we may conclude—rationally, logically—that our immediate response was problematic for any number of reasons (social taboos, cultural norms, etc.). While any type of humour can be processed in both ways, affectively and rationally, aggressive humour seems to suffer most (i.e., has the greatest chance of failing to elicit laughter) from ‘slow’ thinking, because it allows time for one to process the aggression as if it were *non-comic*, that is, ‘serious’. See also Sloman 2002. Certain strands of ‘incongruity theory’ within humour studies also attempt to account for how audiences can laugh at derisive humour in particular, and why such humour can also be risky, especially if one ‘misses a joke’ or fails to see the incongruity that makes it funny in the first place. For an overview of ‘incongruity theories’ of humour, see Hurley et al. 2011: 45–53.

22 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 399.

23 One complication here is that the person who attempts to induce laughter with calculated humour, wants the laughter response to be of the Duchenne variety (spontaneous, emotional, affective), but the humour itself, the stimulus to laughter, is highly contrived, itself not spontaneous.

The *humour* of a comic work functions, then, as a mimetic, manipulated stimulus to laughter, making it difficult to see how exactly to apply 'spontaneous' or 'non-spontaneous' (Duchenne, or non-Duchenne) to the kinds of laughter it induces in an audience. To return to the example of *Frogs*, is the motivation or agenda of the comedian who performs aggressive humour the same as the one who performs expressly non-tendentious—here, 'buffoonish'—humour? That is, can we even assume that the goal of both comedians is to induce Duchenne (spontaneous, authentic, non-dissembling) laughter in an audience, or is the derisive comedian himself laughing with a different sort of laughter, of the calculated non-Duchenne type, in order to make his audience laugh in a similarly non-Duchennian way? And if that is the case, what does it even mean for an audience to be laughing a non-Duchennian sort of laughter at a comic performance, especially if, as we have just noted, all *literary* humour might have to be seen as deriving from non-Duchennian (= calculated) motivations?

This question of a comedian's agenda is particularly critical because audiences and scholars so routinely *assume* that the humour of derision is categorically different from other forms of less aggressive humour, and aims for a categorically different kind of laughter from its audience. As we will see, there is little doubt that aggressive humour does function differently from non-aggressive humour, but exactly *how* it functions requires some nuanced clarification. If we want to answer questions about what motivates satirists to perform as they do, we need to try, at least, to analyse their motivations in relation to their intended audiences. The most succinct way to formulate this guiding question would be to ask whether an audience laughing at derisive humour is supposed to have an affective response that is qualitatively different from the kind of laughter induced by non-aggressive humour.

Research on the affect-inducing ability of laughter suggests that much depends on a listener's ability to interpret 'contextual cues including the perceivers' own emotional states at the time, and their experience both with specific vocalizers and laughers more generally. It follows that two listeners hearing the same laughs could derive exactly opposite "meanings" from the sounds and attribute quite different emotions or intentions to the laugher.²⁴ Owren and Bachorowski in fact, specifically note that 'derisive' or 'scornful' laughter 'may not exist as a unique acoustic event', but can only be interpreted positively or negatively as a function of a listener's 'emotional state and past experience with the laugher [i.e., the person attempting to induce laughter

24 Owren and Bachorowski 2003: 196.

in a listener]'.²⁵ The addition of language to the communicative act intended to induce laughter complicates matters further, and adds yet another layer to the production of non-Duchenne laughter. As Gervais and Wilson put it, 'language can only spontaneously trigger Duchenne laughter if the structure and context of the statement or story embodies nonserious social incongruity'.²⁶ It is crucial, though, for the listener to be able to infer the 'subjective states of others' and the 'mental states and intentions [in a laughter] that elicited the laughter'.²⁷ Gervais and Wilson continue by speculating that from this mind-reading ability

much 'aggressive' laughter arises, as the hearers of such laughter can thereby recognize it as being aggressive. This ability to read another's mind allows people to recognize that they are being laughed at and are thus part of the out-group. The sender of such laughter is either intentionally laughing (non-Duchenne) to be aggressive or is simply laughing (Duchenne) at what he or she perceives to be nonserious social incongruity. Such incongruity is in this case nonserious because the aggressive laughter has no inherent concern for the well-being of the target of the laughter, and it is this lack of concern that the target can then infer. More generally, the interaction of 'mind-reading' abilities with conversational

25 Owren and Bachorowski's study was not, of course, concerned with satire, nor with any form of *linguistic* humour; they investigated, rather, the response of listeners to people laughing in particular ways (i.e., a 'nonrepresentational mechanism of communication', 2003: 195). Their studies of laughter (as well as other research on nonrepresentational communication beyond laughter important to their study), stress the importance of signaling or cueing for this mode of communication for conveying meaning to a listener, and they conclude that 'signals are used not to convey information about underlying state, but rather to influence perceiver affect and associated behavior ... We therefore expect humans to produce laughter in virtually any situation where the effect of its affect-inducing features on perceivers can benefit the vocalizer' (2003: 195). Their conclusion is particularly useful for our attempt to understand the satirist, who, while not vocalizing laughter as such, is writing or performing something that *implies* a (derisively) laughing subject. The satirist, in short, can functionally be considered a 'laugher', i.e., a performer whose satirical work implies an affect emotionally and psychologically equivalent to laughter. The psychological research on the affect-induction of laughter, then, affirms that what is at stake in a relationship between 'laughing' satirists and their audiences is not so much the satirist's success at communicating their actual emotional states (or, something critics often worry about, their 'personal views' on the objects of their derision) as their success at manipulating their audiences' inferences about the satirist's intentions.

26 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 418 (where they draw on Deacon 1997 and Apte 1985).

27 See also Jung 2003, and previous note.

laughter creates myriad opportunities for nuanced information to be conveyed as variability in laughter acoustics is correlated with different social contexts. (Gervais and Wilson 2005: 419)²⁸

I have quoted Gervais and Wilson here at length, not only because they put a finger on the central problem of satire and its audiences as articulated in the *Frogs* passage, but also to point out that that passage's own vagueness does little to resolve the very question of what 'aggressive laughter' even means. Aristophanes' chorus, for example, knew that its audience might have difficulty deciding whether 'the sender of such laughter is ... intentionally laughing (non-Duchenne) to be aggressive or is simply laughing (Duchenne) at what he or she perceives to be nonserious social incongruity,' but as the chorus is shown to realize, at least, what *appears* to some to be aggressive laughter is in the chorus' view a mistaken inference (faulty mindreading, we might say); they claim, at least, that all *their* laughter is *supposed* to be taken as nonserious and playful.

If it is true, however, as Gervais and Wilson have proposed on the basis of various psychological studies, that 'there is a necessary continuity between all types of laughter, as they are all derived from the primate play display, hominoid protolaughter, and hominid Duchenne laughter,' then it also follows that non-Duchenne, manipulative attempts at laughter-induction—even if they are contrived *imitations* of Duchenne laughter—will aim for listeners to laugh with Duchenne laughter, which is to say, laughter generated by the inference that the laughter-stimulus was nonserious and playful.²⁹ This is not to say that there may not be a disconnect between the intention of the laughter-producer and the listener—the *Frogs* chorus certainly *imagined* that might happen—but when the cueing and receiving are aligned, the laughter remains in a consistent zone of the nonserious.

3.3 *Serious Humour*

In actual practice across different developed human cultures, of course, this is hardly the end of the story. It is easy to point to kinds of laughter (generated through humour, and then experienced by listeners) which appear, at least, to come from a place of unmitigated contempt and derision. But there is a common tendency both in antiquity and in modern scholarship to conflate the question of the *target* and the target *audience* of such humour. Even if a person is singled out for genuine derision, the goal of that derision is to make *someone*

28 See also Vettin and Todt 2004.

29 Gervais and Wilson 2005: 418.

laugh through the well-recognized process of emotional contagion.³⁰ As such, even this laughter—laughter that seems to come from a ‘crueler’ place—has a bonding role in its attempt to induce mirth and joy in the listener. It does not seem unreasonable, then, to consider even this type of laughter prosocial insofar as it joins the producer and receiver of laughter together in common agreement that the target *deserves* to be ‘expelled’ in some sense from the community. In sociological terms, in short, the target has been consigned to an ‘out-group’.³¹

Comedians such as Aristophanes have a large store of non-Duchennian strategies at their disposal, whether inherited from their own comic tradition or invented themselves by shrewd mimicry of Duchenne laughter, and they do not always make it clear what they ‘really’ feel about a target. This, too, is part of a comedic strategy. The *parodos* of *Frogs*, for example, seems to imply that the chorus’s particular brand of ridicule aims exclusively at fun and play—targets are singled out for mockery, but the targets are not expected to be offended or to feel expelled. They are supposed to laugh too, and targets who do not laugh are felt to have misunderstood the context and its cues.

Other Aristophanic targets, however, seem to be ridiculed with the intention of rallying an audience around their expulsion, at least notionally. Aristophanes’ attack on the demagogue Cleon in *Knights* is perhaps the most conspicuous example. The behaviours for which Cleon is mocked and censured (corruption, embezzlement of public funds, *et sim.*) are presented within the plot as anti-social and reprehensible, and the sentiment *seems* at any rate to be

30 See above, n. 2.

31 Panksepp 2000: 185 regards this as the ‘dark side to laughter’: ‘The establishment of exclusionary group identities can set the stage for finding mirth in misfortunes of other people. Within-group laughter may promote group solidarity, which may then be used to exhibit disdain toward others and to ostracize those outside the group.’ One is tempted to ask, however, ‘dark side’ for whom? Here, once again, resides the central problem of satire: it only appears ‘anti-social’ for those who perceived themselves to be targeted for some sort of notional exclusion. I say ‘notional’ because as even Panksepp notes, ‘laughter can be a tool for “roasting” friends and enemies alike’. The very fact that the satirical dramatists of Old Comedy, such as Aristophanes, produced their plays as part of annual civic religious festivals at Athens points to its prosocial status within fifth-century Athenian society. Goldhill 1987: 75 sees Athenian comedy (and tragedy) as ‘genres of transgression’ that evolved in order to question civic discourse; for comedy, part of this transgression, at least, was the ‘special license’ Goldhill 1987: 78 speaks of normalizing ordinarily socially problematic speech such as obscenity and lampooning. See also Homer, *Iliad* 1.599–600 for an earlier example of prosocial derisive laughter (the Greek gods laughing uproariously [*asbestos gelôs*] during a banquet at the the way the lame god Hephaestus shuffles among them).

'genuine'.³² Some would say that this is a 'serious' aspect of Aristophanic satire, but serious for whom exactly? Is the audience who are supposed to laugh at the derisive jokes at Cleon's expense laughing at something they regard as serious—a cerebral, intellectual response—or because the humour they are responding to has a particular emotional effect on them? We cannot address these complicated questions here in detail, except to say that seriousness and laughter—inherently contradictory realms—can never co-exist unproblematically, despite frequent claims of critics and authors to the contrary, and even the most derisive humour, which *appears* to come from a 'serious place', is aiming first and foremost at a nonserious physical response, i.e., Duchenne laughter, in its intended listeners.

In the case of Cleon in *Knights*, one will recall that Aristophanes does not even name the politician directly as a character in the play—the audience is left to infer from various indications in the play that the character Paphlagon is a cipher for Cleon.³³ What is more, the name 'Paphlagon' itself, suggesting both a 'man from Paphlagonia' and someone who 'blusters', is clearly chosen for its comic associations, and Aristophanes pits him against an equivalently comic, equally reprehensible character, the Sausage-seller, who is presented in the play as the preferable choice to Paphlagon/Cleon. Both characters ridicule each other within the play for each other's bad behaviour, but Paphlagon is set up to be rejected, and the Sausage-seller to be embraced. There is no rhyme or reason to this outcome, other than the fact that Cleon was an actual, historical controversial member of the community, and the Sausage-seller a fictional character intended as a foil for Cleon. That is, if each is portrayed to be as bad as the other, neither *ought* to seem preferable to the other, even though in a contest of wills such as we find in *Knights* and other Aristophanic plays one of the two antagonists must emerge victorious. But the grounds for preferring one over the other, in the end, is on the face of it little more than capricious. The Sausage-seller, after all, as is often pointed out, is perfectly comfortable engaging in the same reprehensible rhetorical techniques continually censured in Cleon (bribery, flattery, bullying).

It is revealing, moreover, that immediately after the character representing the Athenian city, 'Demos', declares his support for Sausage-seller over against Paphlagon/Cleon (*Eq.* 1259–1260), Aristophanes has the chorus offer an explanation for why this has happened. Their statement (the *epirrhêma*)

32 For further discussion of Aristophanes' mockery of Cleon, particularly how strikingly *unspecific* it is, given how prominently Cleon's badness featured in comedies such *Knights*, see Dorey 1956 and Rosen 2020: 18–19.

33 See Sommerstein 1981: 3.

at 1274–1289, spoken by the chorus-leader, opens with a defence of derisive comedy, as if imagining that someone might have objected to the wrangling between the Sausage-seller and Paphlagon in the previous scene:

There is nothing hateful in railing at bad people;
In fact it brings honour to good people, when one considers it logically.

λοιδορήσαι τοὺς πονηροὺς οὐδέν ἐστ' ἐπίφθονον,
ἀλλὰ τιμὴ τοῖσι χρηστοῖς, ὅστις εὖ λογίζεται. (*Eq.* 1274–1275)

This pronouncement implies that, even though the quarreling in the previous scene between the Sausage-seller and Paphlagon might have seemed somewhat unpleasant, maybe even anti-social in all its vulgarity and aggressiveness, such a response would be *emotional* and as such would constitute a misreading of what was actually happening. In fact, they say, if we take a moment to *think* about it (*hostis eu logizetai*), we realize that one of the antagonists had to be 'bad' (*ponêros*) (which the plot indicates must be Paphlagon/Cleon), and the other (the Sausage-seller) 'good' (*chrêstos*).³⁴

There is something inherently humorous, no doubt, in the suggestion that an audience might have to be instructed to ponder a scene of reciprocal abuse and mockery before they could realize that it actually carried some kind of moral weight. But a larger 'problem' (which one can only assume Aristophanes was well aware of and enjoyed playing with) is the simple fact that neither the Sausage-seller nor Paphlagon, as we have seen, can really be called *chrêstos*. The chorus-leader's logic is comical in itself: 'it's not a bad thing to make fun of bad people, because doing so implies you're honouring good people.' Their logic, in other words, acknowledges that most people tend to be uncomfortable around derisive humour or feel guilty about enjoying it, even if it seems justified. Hence the chorus-leader's tendentious twist that turns the negative (people recoil when they witness derision) into a positive ('don't think of it

34 Since the character Demos, along with the Sausage-seller, is here aligned with *chrêstoi*, the audience themselves (qua *dêmos*), in a classic move of *captatio benevolentiae*, are also implicitly included in this category. For a political reading of the *chrêstos/ponêros* polarity, see Rosenbloom 2002 and 2004; also Storey 2008: 130. Rosenbloom 2004: 57 formulates the essential distinction between the two categories as follows: '*Ponêroi* exercise leadership legally but lack the symbolic validation of their culture. *Chrêstoi* have a traditional, culturally valid entitlement to lead'. Rosenbloom is surely right about these specific political associations in fifth-century Athens, but politics as such is hardly on the chorus-leader's mind in this passage, where the source of Aripbrates' 'badness' (*ponêria*) is little more than his perverse sexual preferences. See discussion below.

as attacking bad people; think of it as praising good people!'). But the lines that immediately follow expose all of this as ironic mock-sanctimony, for the paradigm of a good and bad person that the chorus-leader selects—the one deserving praise, the other censure—does no favours to either of them:

Thus, if the man who's about to be called lots of bad names were well known in his own right, I wouldn't mention a gentleman *who's a friend of mine*. But it's a fact that everyone who can tell good music from bad knows who Arignotus is. Now Arignotus has a brother of dissimilar character, *Ariphrades the sleazy*. Yes, that's what he likes to be. But he's *not merely sleazy*, or I wouldn't even have noticed him, *nor even utterly sleazy (pamponêros)*. The fact is, he's added a brand new meaning to the term. He pol-lutes his own tongue with disgraceful gratifications, licking the detestable dew in bawdyhouses, besmirching his beard, disturbing the ladies' hotpots, acting like Polymnestus and on intimate terms with Oeonichus. *Anyone who doesn't loathe such a man* will never drink from the same cup with me.

εἰ μὲν οὖν ἄνθρωπος, ὃν δεῖ πόλλ' ἀκούσαι καὶ κακά,
αὐτὸς ἦν ἔνδηλος, οὐκ ἂν ἀνδρὸς ἐμνήσθην φίλου.
νῦν δ' Ἀρίγωντον γὰρ οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐκ ἐπίσταται,
ὅστις ἢ τὸ λευκὸν οἶδεν ἢ τὸν ὄρθιον νόμον.
ἔστιν οὖν ἀδελφὸς αὐτῷ τοὺς τρόπους οὐ συγγενής,
Ἀριφράδης πονηρός. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν καὶ βούλεται·
ἐστὶ δ' οὐ μόνον πονηρός, οὐ γὰρ οὐδ' ἂν ἡσθόμην,
οὐδὲ παμπόνηρος, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσεξηύρηκε τι.
τὴν γὰρ αὐτοῦ γλώτταν αἰσχροῖς ἡδοναῖς λυμαίνεται,
ἐν κασαυρείοισι λείχων τὴν ἀπόπτυστον δρόσον,
καὶ μολύνων τὴν ὑπὴν καὶ κυκῶν τὰς ἐσχάρας,
καὶ Πολυμνήστεια ποιῶν καὶ ξυνῶν Οἰωνίχῳ.
ὅστις οὖν τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα μὴ σφόδρα βδελύσσεται,
οὔποτε' ἐκ ταύτου μεθ' ἡμῶν πίνεται ποτηρίου. (*Eq.* 1276–1289, tr. Henderson, 1998).

Aristophanes has written this passage coyly and a little obliquely, so a few words of orientation might be helpful here. He has his chorus-leader here mock a person named Ariphrades, singling him out for derision because he 'invented' and practices cunnilingus. The chorus-leader 'worries' that Ariphrades is not well-known enough to the audience to have the full derisive effect he would like the name to have, but he says that the audience *will* know Ariphrades' brother, Arignotus (a musician of some notoriety, with a suspiciously relevant

name here, i.e., 'well-known'). So it is as if by mentioning Arignotus ('everyone knows ... who he is!'), his unsavoury brother, Ariphrades, will somehow resonate more with the audience. Worrying about the logic of this passage for too long will of course ruin the pleasure of its comic absurdity.

Ostensibly, the passage is intended to further the point in the preceding lines that there is nothing wrong with mocking 'bad people' (*ponéroi*) who deserve whatever they get, because mocking bad behaviour implicitly honours 'good/decent people' (*khrestoi*). To do this, then, the chorus-leader proceeds to contrast the two brothers, one 'good' (Arignotus), the other 'bad' (Ariphrades). Ariphrades' hyper-badness (*pamponéros*) consists, as noted, in his socially unacceptable practice of cunnilingus. The joke, of course, is that the 'good brother' Arignotus is dragged into the whole business as well simply because he is the famous one, not Ariphrades. One might well wonder how Arignotus could have possibly felt that gratuitously publicizing his family connection with Ariphrades could be doing him any kind of favour!³⁵ In the end, although the brothers Arignotus and Ariphrades are presented as contrasting moral types, Aristophanes seems to be having as much fun at Arignotus' expense³⁶ simply associating him publicly with his reprobate brother as he is in calling out Ariphrades' alleged lurid sexual proclivities.³⁷

3.4 *Prosocial Aggression—Duchenne Laughter*

This passage and the scene between Sausage-seller and Paphlagon/Cleon immediately preceding it, then, illustrate how complex and subtle the mechanisms by which the satirical author cued his targets and audiences for laughter could be, and how difficult it is for anyone—especially anyone who was not part of the original audience—to read the cues intended to direct their responses. The incongruities and ironies of the scene, as we have discussed,

35 Especially since it seems unlikely that Ariphrades was 'unknown' to the audience. He is mocked in three other places for the same practice: *Wasps* 1280–1283, *Peace* 883–885, and *Ar. fr.* 63. As Sommerstein notes (1981: 211, *ad loc.*), as well, other passages in Aristophanes suggest that cunnilingus was not considered a particularly taboo sexual pleasure: 'Ar.'s repeated attacks on Ariphrades, and the unusually moralistic tone of the present one, cannot be accounted for entirely by Ariphrades' addiction to cunnilingus—which elsewhere, indeed, Ar. regards as a perfectly acceptable pleasure (cf. *Eccl.* 846–847 and probably also *Peace* 716)' His suggestion that the accusation might be explained by '... Ariphrades' having been a comic poet and therefore a rival of Ar. ...' seems unnecessary: the obscenity alone seems sufficient to generate laughter, even if the practice was in reality not particularly taboo.

36 Not to mention, at the chorus-leader's *own* expense—note that he has explicitly aligned himself with the family in referring to Arignotus as a 'friend of his' (an *anēr philos*, 1277).

37 Storey 2008: 130 calls this passage a 'rather left-handed compliment at Arignotus'.

signal that its goal is to induce spontaneous Duchenne laughter in the audience, thereby transforming the anti-social strands inherent in real-life aggression into a pro-social experience in which an audience, and often targets too, are suspended in a realm of non-seriousness and play. The humour generated by all of these Aristophanic rogues (Cleon/Paphlagon, Aiphrades, and even Arignotus, who is only roguish by association!), then, aims at a Duchenne response from the audience *regardless* of any supposed moral agenda, or claims to seriousness of purpose. And operating the strings from above is the playwright himself, who has created these characters to embody an outrageousness cued to be playful and incongruous, operating at the level of affect rather than substance.

The very notion of 'serious laughter', in short, is an oxymoronic fantasy—a construct of comedians engaging in their own form of highly evolved, calculated and culturally inflected *non*-Duchenne laughter, and aiming for a state of emotional fusion with an audience, not a moment of serious instruction or the like. It is not so much that aggressive humour is more 'serious' than any other kind of humour (though it often pretends to be), but such humour is made more difficult for audiences to read by comedians who well understand that derision is a powerful social force that *can* at least in theory have real consequences for real targets. People certainly could be ostracized—literally expelled from the community—in classical Athens, but there is no evidence that this ever happened as a direct consequence of a comic attack.³⁸ Expulsion from the community was thematized, as we have seen, within aggressive comedy as a *notional* threat, but the Greek comedian (to judge from Aristophanic satire, at least) seems to have been more interested in sowing playful confusion through *miscuing* and *misdirection* for the sake of inducing laughter than in ensuring any actual social consequence for the target. This strategy of 'playful confusion', as we might call it, can take many culturally and historically inflected forms in the hands of different satirists, but its fundamental dynamics are notably stable transhistorically. Satirists mock and deride community members with accusations of badness or eccentric behaviour as if performing a social service, but humour and laughter consistently prevent the articulation of, let alone the implementation of, a stable or meaningful agenda.

38 Faraone 2004 argues that Hipponax fr. 128 W reflects an actual incantation to expel a scapegoat from his community, which, if true, perhaps brings us close to an example of a poet deploying the kind of expulsive language against a target that would have been used in real scapegoat rituals. But aside from the fact that this text is at least a century earlier than Aristophanic Athens, there is no evidence that Hipponax' poem actually *succeeded* in removing his target from their community.

4 Horace Theorizing Satiric Laughter

By the time we reach first-century BCE Rome, even more sophisticated literary and cultural overlays had evolved in the Greco-Roman satirical tradition, as we may best observe in Horace's shrewd and sly self-consciousness about derisive poetry in his *Satires*. Indeed, across several of his more programmatic *Satires*, Horace throws out for contemplation all the problems of aggressive humour that authors and audiences, and scientists too, have wrestled with. As we will see, although suffused at times with playful irony, Horace wants to make the case that the derisive humour of satire only *appears* to be anti-social to those who misread a satirist's intentions and fail to grasp the 'badness' of his chosen targets. For those who do remain on the satirist's wavelength, however, there remains the possibility of the 'emotional fusion' I mentioned above—a prosocial bonding experience induced by laughter. Let us look at how Horace lays this out.

In *Satires* 1.4, a poem that famously opens by tracing its satirical lineage to the comic poets of classical Greece,³⁹ Horace gets right to the heart of the matter at lines 69–78:

Right now I only want to ask you this one thing, *whether you justifiably regard this kind of writing [my satire] with distrust*. Sharp-nosed Sulcius and Caprius walk around, terribly hoarse and carrying their little notebooks,⁴⁰
 both causing great fear in robbers. *But if a person lives well and keeps his hands clean, he can thumb his nose at both of them.*
 While you may be like those robbers Caelius and Birrius,
 I'm not Caprius or Sulcius: *why should you be afraid of me?*
 No stall or kiosk should hold my little books
 so the hands of the crowd—and of Hermogenes Tigellius⁴¹—can sweat
 all over them.
And I don't read from them to anyone but my friends, and then only when forced
—not just anywhere or in front of just anyone ...

39 Discussion at Gowers 2012: 152–153.

40 Sulcius and Caprius were contemporary informers.

41 Hermogenes Tigellius appears several times in Horace's *Satires* (e.g., 1.2.3), and 'epitomizes the tasteless, ostentatious prima donna (against the reticent H.); he is also a model of inconsistency (1.3.9) and adaptability (1.3.130)' (Gowers 2012: 92).

nunc illud tantum quaeram, *meritone tibi sit suspectum genus hoc scribendi*. Sulcius acer ambulat et Caprius, rauci male cumque libellis, magnus uterque timor latronibus: at bene *si quis et uiuat puris manibus, contemnat utrumque*. ut sis tu similis Caeli Birrique latronum, non ego sum Capri neque Sulci: *cur metuas me?* nulla taberna meos habeat neque pila libellos, quis manus insudet uulgi Hermogenisque Tigelli, *nec recito cuiquam nisi amicis idque coactus, non ubiuis coramue quibuslibet*. (Horace, *Satires* 1.4.69–78)

Horace addresses here the perennial and familiar complaint about satire, namely, that it comes from a place of malice and contempt, and as such is reprehensible. There is play and irony even in Horace's attempt to defend his satire with an analogy between dreaded political informers of contemporary Rome and the righteousness of a satirist. People who have no misbehaviour to hide, he claims, should have no fear of a satirist just as they should have no fear of an informer. But, as Gowers notes (2012: 169), 'by assimilating his product ... to that of professional informers, H[orace] is hardly reassuring about his innocence,' since actual informers were known to be capricious and partisan, often taking orders from superiors with malevolent motives. Any Roman listener would surely have picked up on that irony (= 'I'm no worse than an informer ... oh wait! ...'), and likely found the image comically incongruous in itself. The 'proper' targets of informers and satirists, he notes, are robbers and other malefactors—they deserve to be called out and expelled. It is just that if a satirist is as unpredictable as an informer, the audience is back to guessing whether a target has been justly derided in the first place. Again, confusion and irony abound and the necessity for an audience to understand that *laughter*, and little more, is the desired outcome. Horace adds, disingenuously, at the end that he only writes and performs for his private circle of friends anyway, so even a malefactor need have no fear of him—again adding to the irony (somehow these poems made their way to posterity and into our hands, after all) and to the comic instability that finds little resolution beyond laughter.

Horace continues to address the problem a few lines later when he imagines someone accusing him of outright malice:

'You enjoy inflicting pain',
 someone says, *'and you do so eagerly out of viciousness'.*
 Where does that accusation come from that you hurl at me? Did someone
 I live with start it? The man *who slanders a friend when he's not there,*

who doesn't defend him when someone else blames him for something, *who longs for the laughter of men* and the reputation of being a wit, who can make stuff up about things he's never seen, who can't keep confidences—*that man is a dirtbag!* watch out for him, Roman!

'Laedere gaudes'

inquit, et '*hoc studio prauus facis*'. Unde petitum
hoc in me iacis? est auctor quis denique eorum
uix cum quibus? *absentem qui rodit amicum*,
qui non defendit alio culpante, *solutos*
qui captat risus hominum famamque dicacis,
fingere qui non uisa potest, commissa tacere
qui nequit: hic niger est, hunc tu, Romane, caveto. (Horace, *Satires*
1.4.78–85)

The pretence here—and I stress that this is pretence—is, once again, that the satirist only mocks people who deserve it, and when that happens the laughter between satirist and audience is continuous and positive. True malice can be seen in the person who attacks a friend behind his back (i.e., someone who does not deserve it), who will do *anything* to get a laugh from a crowd. This last defence addresses the kind of charge often laid against satirists themselves—that *they* will do anything for the sake of a laugh, and care little for the 'well-being' of their targets. Horace is clearly playing again here with these common conceits about satirists, both denying and enacting at the same time the threat of negativity that always lies at the heart of derision.

Horace's claim in a subsequent passage of the same satire that he is really only interested in laughter may also be slightly disingenuous (as nearly all his programmatic claims turn out to be), but his interest in reducing his literary project to a kind of trivial joke certainly aligns with other statements he makes about the fundamental importance of laughter for satire:

As for me, *if I've laughed* because the ridiculous
Rufillus smells like a breath-freshener, or Gargonius like a goat,
do you think that makes me malicious and biting?

ego si risi, quod ineptus
pastillos Rufillus olet, Gargonius hircum,
lividus et mordax videor tibi? (Horace, *Satires* 1.4.91–93)

The final lines of another programmatic poem, *Satires* 2.1, for example, end in a similar place, privileging *form* and *quality* of satirical humour over its actual

content. Horace's interlocutor, a lawyer named Trebatius, warns him that if he is not careful with his satire, he will be charged with violating one of laws of the ancestral XII Tables which made it an offence for someone to 'sing a malevolent song' (*qui malum carmen incantassit*).⁴²

[Trebatius]: 'Indeed, I can take no exception to this.
But for all that, let me warn you to beware,
lest haply ignorance of our sacred laws bring you into trouble.
If a man write ill verses against another, there is a right of action
and redress by law.'

[Trebatius]: 'Equidem nihil hic diffindere possum;
sed tamen ut monitus caveas, ne forte negoti
incuriat tibi quid sanctarum inscitia legum.
si mala condiderit in quem quis carmina, ius est
iudiciumque'. (Horace, *Satires* 2.1.79–84)

While it is unclear whether the historical law referred to the production of slanderous satire (i.e., a literary form, not mere slander) or a magical spell, as some have suggested,⁴³ what matters most to Horace is the comic opportunity for a pun on the word *malum*. Trebatius had just warned him that if someone writes malicious verses (here *mala carmina*) against another, the victim has a right to prosecute. To this, Horace responds:

[Horace]: Well, sure, in the case of *bad* [*mala*] verses. But what if a person composes *good* [*bona*] verses, and Caesar deems him worth of praise?

What if he has *barked at someone who deserves attack*, but *he himself* is without blame?

[Trebatius]: The case will be dismissed *with a laugh* [*risu*] and you'll get to walk away unscathed.

[Horace]: 'Esto, si quis *mala*; sed *bona* si quis
iudice condiderit laudatus Caesare? si quis
opprobrii dignum latraverit, integer *ipse*'

[Trebatius]: 'Solventur *risu* tabulae, tu missus abibis'. (Horace, *Satires* 2.1.83–86)

42 See Freudenburg 2004: 104–105.

43 See Rives 2002: 279–288.

The poem ends here, with Horace being ‘sent off’ (*missus*) with impunity by listeners (judges, as here) who have been induced to laugh by the formal qualities of his satire. This is ‘good’ satire, in other words, which is to say a ‘good “bad poem”’. All the elements are properly aligned: the target is supposed to deserve derision, the audience will understand as much and will respond with laughter. Laughter—a lighthearted, joyful laughter—is all that remains, even in the face of satirical mockery likened to a dog-attack.⁴⁴

5 Conclusion

Aristophanes and Horace take us a long way from those moments in hominin evolution when scientists imagine that humans first developed their capacity for Duchenne laughter as a fundamentally prosocial form of physical behaviour, and our literary satirists have demonstrated how enormously complex laughter became at the moment when humans developed the ability to mimic and manipulate Duchenne laughter for volitional purposes far more sophisticated and culturally contingent than the spontaneous laughter of primates, early humans, and infants still today. Derisive humour has presented a particularly thorny problem for scientists and literary critics alike partly, as it seems, because we are prisoners of our own acculturation—derision always *seems* to be intrinsically negative because it presents a rupture to our sense of community as a social species—and partly because literary satirists have developed so many ways to produce laughter using non-Duchenne strategies. Our ancient satirists, however, objected to this conclusion, and defended their derisive humour—sometimes ironically, sometimes disingenuously, but always with an eye to inducing laughter—as something positive, even essential, to the community, and this is a perspective that might be helpful for social scientists to consider. Some of the evolutionary speculation about the nature of laughter, as we have seen, holds that even the most complex, culturally specific laughter is continuous with the prosocial origins of Duchenne laughter, and that, as such, even aggressive humour will in some meaningful sense promote communal solidarity. But many scientists still seem eager to separate derisive humour from less overtly aggressive forms, and to disapprove of its perceived negative psychological and sociological effects. The ancient satirists we have discussed were highly attuned to this dilemma, and exploited it for yet deeper comic purposes, pleading their case that their mockery only *appeared* to be

44 Further discussion in Rosen 2012: 37–38.

antisocial, but that to anyone properly attuned and receptive to their type of humour, there was in the end nothing negative about the laughter it produced.

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PART 3

Narrative Meaning-Making



Introduction to Part 3: Narrative Meaning-Making

Max J. van Duijn

1 Narrative Meaning as a Psychological and a Communicative Phenomenon

We spend a good deal of our time in story-worlds. From the novels we read and films or performances we watch, to a science-fiction series on Netflix or a gossip tale we overhear at the supermarket—what stories in all these different formats have in common is the power to take us out of our here-and-now, into an imagined world with its own objects, characters, events, and circumstances. At the same time, we furnish our daily social and material environments with elements that we bring along from those story-worlds, adding layers of meaning to objects and events in a constant meaning-making process.

Scholars and scientists in different areas and eras have wondered how such ‘mental transportation’ to and from a story-world works, and how narrative meaning comes about in the first place. A useful starting point is the view that narrative meaning is prompted by *cues*, usually arranged in a text, performance, oral tale, etc., that *instruct readers’ or spectators’ imagination* in a particular way, so that they mentally produce the relevant objects, characters, relationships, perspectives, and so on, that together constitute a story-world.¹ This view positions narrative meaning as a *psychological* phenomenon: it comes about in the heads of an audience through the interplay between relatively universal capacities (such as emotional engagement or logical inference) and socio-culturally situated factors (such as shared values and world views).² At the same time, this view highlights how narrative meaning is a *communicative* phenomenon: what happens in the audience’s heads is triggered by an arrangement of cues, a ‘recipe’ that was intentionally put together in a particular way and order to guide the imaginative process of meaning-making.

Psychological and communicative aspects of narrative meaning-making take centre stage in the chapters by Douglas Cairns, Jacqueline Klooster and Michiel van Veldhuizen that constitute this Part of the volume. My introduction

1 The formulation of cues ‘instructing one’s imagination’ was inspired by Dor 2015, but see in particular Dancygier 2012 for this view on narrative meaning.

2 By distinguishing between universal and socio-culturally situated factors I do not claim that these are strictly separable or independent: at various points below and in the chapters in this Part it is discussed how they are related and influence each other.

will highlight three aspects. The first concerns the different levels of analysis on which psychological phenomena occur. A key distinction can be made between such phenomena *inside* and *outside* the text, i.e. the psychology of characters versus the psychology of readers/spectators (section 2). The second concerns the *intertwinement* of the narrative mode with cognitive and emotional states (section 3). The third issue revolves around *continuity* of psychological processes across different cultural communities and timeframes. When analysing ancient material in which emotions, mental states, lines of reasoning, etc. are represented, we find elements that are highly familiar to a modern psychologist as well as elements that point towards differences between historical periods and our own time in how people process information from the world around them (section 4).

As I will argue, these issues are revisited in interesting and successful ways by all three authors in this Part. I will globally situate their work within disciplines and traditions on either side of the customary divide between the sciences and humanities; however, due to the inherent multidisciplinary nature of meaning-making as a topic of study, these boundaries soon become permeable.

2 Psychological Phenomena on Different Levels of Analysis

Identifying a specific point in time at which branches of literary studies or narratology started to become 'cognitive' remains a somewhat arbitrary matter. Various themes that we may now gather under the banners of cognitive literary studies and narratology were already on the agenda of traditional literary criticism of the Romantic era, with its focus on the author's and readers' psyche, imagination, and emotional engagement (e.g. Barth 2015). For this tradition Aristotle was an important source, so some of these ideas have occupied readers and critics for many centuries.³ The formalists and structuralists of the early twentieth century revolted against the Romantic tradition of literary criticism with their turn towards studying the literary object independently of its historical, social, and psychological contexts (e.g. Erlich 1973). Their heritage kept the minds and emotions of authors and readers mostly out of the debate for the ensuing decades, until the instigation in the 1970s of reader-response

3 Illustrations of this are Aristotle's ideas on audience's emotional engagement with characters in a play or with speakers in a rhetorical context, as quoted and discussed by Klooster and Cairns in their chapters below.

theory and reception aesthetics by Iser, Jauss, Fish, and others.⁴ Yet within formalist and structuralist frameworks attention was paid to mental phenomena *within* texts, mostly via the analysis of speech and thought representation.

One could thus argue that the difference between contemporary cognitive literary studies and various traditional approaches lies not so much in the kind of phenomena to which attention is being paid (readers' mental processes; characters' thought representation), but rather in the obvious fact that earlier traditions did not have access to the concepts and methods developed in the cognitive sciences over the past decades. This is certainly true to some degree. However, in his *Living Handbook of Narratology* David Herman (2013 [2011]) makes a compelling case that this is not the entire story. He argues that in the late 1970s the dialogue between analysts of narrative and cognitive phenomena gave rise to entirely new sorts of questions concerning what he refers to as the 'mind-narrative nexus' (2013 [2011]: 4). Not only were cognitively-inspired frameworks and methods added to the analytical repertoire of narratologists and literary scholars, but *entirely new types of questions* emerged from the cross-fertilization of, for example, Dennett's intentional stance (1971) and Baron-Cohen's (1985) studies of 'mind blindness' in people with autism-spectrum disorders, with Rosenblatt's (1969) transactional reader-response theory and Margolin's (e.g. 1983) work on character. These questions were picked up in studies such as Palmer's *Fictional Minds* (2004) and Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction* (2006). Both authors use insights from research on Theory of Mind in particular (see below) to achieve fresh forms of textual analysis and shed new light on the mechanisms by which readers form an understanding of characters and events as they 'fill in the blanks' left by the necessarily incomplete set of cues comprised in a text.⁵ And indeed, as Sluiter et al. 2013 have suggested, a defining characteristic of this work, and cognitive literary studies more broadly, is that it is not limited to only recasting old ideas in new terminology. Given the relatively stable biological basis underlying our perceptive and emotional systems, our capacity for memorizing, inference, etc., the cognitive framework comes with a degree of universality that warrants its applicability to people inside and outside texts (i.e., characters, authors, readers), as well as across different cultural communities and time frames.

4 Foundational publications include Iser 1974; Fish 1976; and Jauss 1982. For an overview and discussion see Davis and Womack 2002.

5 This is not to say that all such new directions are necessarily a success. A specific question within the newly emerged mind-narrative nexus addressed by Zunshine is why some readers seem more inclined to attribute complex mental states to characters than others. Elsewhere I have criticized her suggestion that this is due to individual differences in Theory of Mind propensity; see Van Duijn 2018.

However, it is important to emphasize that this is universality by degree, and not in absolute terms, given qualifications that will be touched upon below.

In her chapter ‘The experience of coincidence in Euripides’ *Ion*’ Jacqueline Klooster asks whether cognitive psychology can help us understand how both character and audience respond to a few cases of striking coincidence in the *Ion*. At the core of her approach is the idea of ‘anchoring’ as operationalized in psychological research by Tversky and Kahneman 1983 and Fisk 2002.⁶ In various experiments subjects are confronted with two events happening at the same time. If one event is more surprising than the other, they experience the conjunction of the two events as less surprising than the most surprising event alone. In other words, for two events occurring together, the least surprising event *anchors* the degree to which people tend to be surprised. If, however, both events are highly surprising, they may amplify one another, meaning that subjects experience the conjunction as even more surprising, to the point of being judged unlikely.

With these insights Klooster returns to the coincidences in the *Ion*, some of which happen in conjunction with one another and have different degrees of being surprising. The resulting analysis is a good example of how cognitive literary scholarship can further our understanding of ancient texts. Traditional accounts of coincidence plots have often tried to ‘explain away’ the uneasiness of seemingly over-the-top serendipity in terms of an audience’s willingness to ascribe surprising events to providence and divine intervention, or, as in literary-theoretical work by Dannenberg (2008) that Klooster discusses, by suggesting that audiences’ emotional engagement or suspense distracted them from asking meta-questions. However, Klooster treats the amount of surprise induced by the events of the *Ion* as an *empirical* question in the first place. Invoking cognitive psychology, she shows that the play as a whole in fact does not contain that many moments of uneasy surprise, given that events with different degrees of surprisingness appear in conjunction.

This insight is enlightening both at the level of the audience watching or reading the play *and* at the level of the characters acting within it. It may explain why the *Ion* has continued to appeal to a wide range of audiences over time, despite the unpopularity of coincidence as a plot device. At the same time, it provides new ground for analysing characters’ responses to the serendipitous events within the play, as Klooster shows towards the end of her chapter. In this way she demonstrates the universal potential of cognitive literary scholarship—yet, as mentioned, this universality needs to be qualified. Such

6 This work was also a source of inspiration to the Anchoring Innovation research program, of which this volume is a product. See Sluiter 2017; www.anchoringinnovation.nl.

qualification is effectively induced by Klooster's reading of the *Ion* as a whole: reflection on the delicate balance between divine intervention and human agency takes centre stage in the play, and it is particularly the combination of cognitive theory *and* discussion of culturally specific frameworks for attributing meaning to unexplained events that make her analysis of the many serendipitous plot twists of the play so compelling.

3 Intertwinement of Narrative Meaning with Cognitive and Emotional States

Douglas Cairns' chapter 'Emotional Contagion, Empathy, and Sympathy as Responses to Verbal and Visual Narratives: Some Conceptual and Methodological Issues' addresses the relationship between emotions at the level of the characters and the level of the audience. The central questions are whether the emotional responses evoked in audience members by works in genres such as epic and tragedy depend on mimicry or mirroring of emotions of characters, and whether these need to be induced by direct visual cues, such as characters' facial expressions, gestures, and body postures. Cairns argues that such cues can play a role, but warns against too narrow a view of mimicry as a mechanism that can explain emotional engagement by itself. Through a theoretical discussion and the analysis of various passages from ancient texts he systematically points out the problems that come with such a narrow view, which is found in various cognitive approaches, specifically Amy Coplan's (2006) study of 'emotional contagion' in film.

One of the examples used in Cairns' argument is a passage from Josephus' *Jewish Wars*. His focus is on the deeply tragic act of Mary, a desperate mother who turns her own son into a meal by killing and roasting him, and the emotional responses that this induces in three different audiences: a group of rebels entering Mary's house and being confronted with the cannibalistic scene first-hand, a secondary audience of Mary's fellow citizens hearing about it afterwards, and 'us' as the tertiary audience external to the story. One of the interesting observations made by Cairns is that both modern and ancient readers are likely to have (had) an emotional response that parallels that of the primary and secondary audiences within the story—who are shivering with horror based on what they have either seen with their own eyes or visualized based on the report that they have been given—and *not primarily* that of the protagonist Mary. It is likely that empathizing with Mary's emotions, ranging from the deep desperation that motivated her deed to the unfathomable grief that was caused by it, is part of what the primary, secondary, and tertiary

audiences do when processing the tragic scene. However, this is only one part of a much richer and more complex train of responses based on such things as smelling the roasted flesh (or hearing about that smell), input from other bystanders' reactions, background knowledge about the immediate circumstances of hunger and depredation, and the wider frame of cannibalism as a polar opposite of a parent-child relationship. The analysis makes it clear that it is somewhat arbitrary to set apart mimicry or mirroring of Mary's emotions based on seeing her facial expressions and body posture directly. As far as such mimicry occurs, it seems inseparable from a much larger set of affective processes at play, which are triggered in the secondary and tertiary audiences as well, while these have no direct visual access to the scene.

Switching back to the bigger picture of cognitive literary scholarship once again, Cairns' chapter and a lot of the literature that he cites demonstrate that not only have concepts and methods from the cognitive sciences opened up new areas of interest for narrative analysis, but also the other way around. Among pioneers of psychology as a scientific discipline, narrative has always been a phenomenon of interest, both as a communal practice and as a capacity of human individuals that interacts with memory, perception, and other faculties.⁷ But here too it was from the dialogue with scholars of narrative that a whole new realm of questions and approaches emerged. From the 1980s, an important line of inquiry features Jerome Bruner's 1987 work on the narrative construction of reality. He distinguished the 'paradigmatic' mode of thinking, which is logical in nature, from the 'narrative' mode, which organizes everyday interpretations of the world in the form of stories we tell ourselves and others. In this context Herman speaks of 'storying the world' as he highlights the key role of narrative in structuring our experience, for example by making sense of apparent phenomena in terms of invisible systems of rules, motives, or beliefs (see 2013 [2011]: chapters 6–8 for an overview of decades of theoretical and empirical research in this area).

A particular sense-making process that has attracted a lot of scholarly attention is the human capacity known as 'mindreading' or 'Theory of Mind' in the cognitive sciences. This capacity partly overlaps (or is perhaps best seen as a special case of) the broader concepts of empathy and sympathy central in

7 Examples can be found in Wundt's vast work *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* (1910) and in Bartlett 1932. Another relevant example is Vygotsky's work, which was the furthest ahead of its time in terms of integrating psychology and narrative theory (cf. 1978, which is a collection of relevant fragments of his work conducted in the years before his early death in 1934); see also Herman 2006.

Cairns' chapter. For example Zunshine (2006) and Budelmann and Easterling (2010) have argued that audience members rely on mindreading for understanding actions and decisions of literary characters in terms of their mental states, which is essential for their ability to enjoy (or even follow) nearly any story's plot. Conversely, there is a sense in which narrative meaning-making, broadly understood as the mental capacity to produce a rich understanding based on a handful of cues, is needed for Theory of Mind to get off the ground. Starting from Premack and Woodruff's foundational work (1978), it is highlighted that mindreading relies on the ability to imagine scenarios *beyond* what can simply be perceived in real-world settings or retrieved from one's memory of earlier comparable situations.⁸ In other words, there is a *generative* component to mindreading: we make sense of the parts of the behaviour of others that we can perceive by imputing to them all kinds of inner states that we cannot perceive, including feelings, desires, beliefs, fears, and so on. Scenarios enriched with such inner states not only help us to understand the behaviour of others better, but also to predict future behaviour, so that we can anticipate their actions, accommodate their needs, and thereby interact with them in more meaningful ways.

The debate over the past decades has mostly focused on the mechanisms behind this generative component of mindreading. Reading the intentions of, for instance, someone stretching out their arm towards a salt cellar that is placed just out of reach, may come to us so naturally that we have provided a helping hand before even noticing. In such cases, an explanation that relies on lower-level, immediate, and embodied or enactive mechanisms might be satisfactory.⁹ Yet additional, higher-level, and possibly conscious processes come to the foreground when we read the mind of someone who is engaged in more complex interactions with their environment, especially when these deviate from an expected default. Whereas some researchers studying these latter processes have put more emphasis on theories and abstractions (e.g. Gopnik and Wellman 2012), others have argued that we rely rather on analogy

8 In van Duijn 2016: 37–40, I discuss their work on chimpanzees in more detail and argue that it is still relevant since it foreshadows the key oppositions in the Theory of Mind debate of the ensuing decades, regarding both humans and other animals.

9 See e.g. Noë 2004; Gallagher 2018. Although even in such cases it is likely that *both* bottom-up and top-down processing are involved, and that one's assessment of even a simple movement of an interaction partner's arm relies on a combination of immediate bodily responses and higher-order responses based on context, background knowledge, degree of affiliation, and so on. See e.g. Teufel, Fletcher, and Davis 2010, and see Cairns' chapter (this volume) pp. 4–5.

and exemplar-based reasoning (e.g. Bach 2014).¹⁰ In either case the question is how such abstractions and/or exemplars originate. Our own life experience is certainly an important source, but narrative fiction adds a crucial dimension here, both in terms of its form and contents. Stories give us access to a ‘communal pool’ of experience lived by characters, which we can use to complement our necessarily limited and one-sided personal histories (see also Nussbaum 1997; Vermeule 2010; van Dijk et al. 2023). Plus, crucially, the narrative form by its very nature offers not just a mere explication of mental states, but fleshes them out in detail and situates them against the background of the larger context and history of an interaction (Hutto 2008; van Duijn et al. 2015). In other words, the generative component of mindreading may itself come down to a form of telling stories—internally, in our minds, or out loud in discourse. Or, as Cairns formulates it: ‘one reason why we understand other people in narrative terms may be that these are the terms in which we make sense of our own experience in the world’ (with reference to essays on narrative and the mind collected in Fireman, McVay, and Flanagan 2003; see his footnote 43).

This view can be seen as an application of Bruner’s ‘narrative mode of thinking’ and Herman’s ‘storying the world’ in the domain of social cognition. In nearly any work of literature we can find compelling illustrations of characters fleshing out beliefs, emotions, personal histories, etc., to make sense of their own and others’ behaviour and decisions in storied form. Such processes by which characters explicitly ‘make sense’ of what happens in the story-world around them are mirrored in the ways in which audiences of these stories do the same thing. This underlines the somewhat paradoxical insight that our ability to understand stories partly *relies* on capacities such as empathy and mindreading, while at the same time *informing* or even *constituting* these capacities. Cairns’ chapter gives substance to this insight, and shows that careful analysis of narrative examples renders any account that seeks to understand such capacities through isolated, one-dimensional mechanisms is implausible.

4 Historical Continuity of Reasoning Processes

Michiel van Veldhuizen’s chapter ‘Finding Orestes: Oracles and Abductive Reasoning’ centres around a passage from Herodotus’ *Histories* describing how the Spartan ‘intelligence officer’ Lichas correctly interprets a Delphic oracle, thereby revealing the hiding place of the bones of Orestes. What makes this

10 For my own more detailed overview see Van Duijn 2016: 37–47; other overviews include Apperly 2011, Gallagher 2012, and Rakoczy 2022.

text sample unique, van Veldhuizen argues, is that it includes a detailed record of the steps by which Lichas arrives at the right solution, thus providing us with 'a rare glimpse into the workings of an ancient mind'. Another such glimpse is provided by a passage from Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, also discussed in the chapter, featuring Electra's inference of the potential presence of her brother Orestes from the observation of a hair lock on their father's tomb.

Van Veldhuizen makes an important methodological remark about the status of Lichas' inner workings as depicted by Herodotus, which is arguably valid for all historical passages involving the minds of fictional characters: these may be regarded as 'representative for general beliefs about divination, in a way that tells us something about how oracles were *imagined* to operate' (p. 240, van Veldhuizen's emphasis). In other words, in studying the psychology of a historical period, we do not take descriptions of thought processes in a historical narrative, or in tragic fiction, at their word, as if they were a snapshot of an ancient mind at work. However, such descriptions or renderings *can* lead us closer to an ancient psychological reality, as long as we carefully interpret and contextualize them as meta-level reflections, showing how that reality was understood and processed by an author. The framework van Veldhuizen creates for engaging in such careful interpretation and contextualization takes the logical inferential format of abduction as its starting point, and adds substance to long-standing pleas by De Saussure, Peirce, and others, to organize more structural cross-fertilization between the fields of semiotics and psychology. Semiotic concepts allow him to tease apart different elements of the processes by which the ancient minds represented in the text supposedly operated, and that, in turn, enables reflection on continuity or discontinuity with contemporary psychology.

The chapter showcases how our counterparts in antiquity lived in a 'pan-semiotic universe' (p. 241) no less than we do today. We see meaning in almost anything around us, ranging from fully intentionally produced signs, such as a linguistic utterance or a road sign, to all kinds of other, less intentional affordances and objects: a serendipitous encounter, a thunderstorm, and so on. Semioticians study how we derive all kinds of meanings from such signs, by association (symbols) or inference (icons, indices). One of the many interesting insights of the chapter, is that the mechanisms described in modern semiotic theory also apply to ancient forms of reasoning. However, what differs are (some of) the concepts with which signs are associated and (some of) the background assumptions made when drawing inferences. For instance, in Herodotus' description a blacksmith finds a coffin with bones that are remarkably large. Lichas is told about this surprising finding and reasons that the bones must belong to a hero—an acquired association specific to the

timeframe and community to which he belongs.¹¹ Next, he factors in the riddle received from the Delphic oracle, and after figuring out how it matches the surroundings of the coffin's finding place he concludes that the bones must belong to Orestes. The association between heroes and large bones, and even more so the reliance on an oracular riddle, is unusual from a contemporary perspective. However, on a more abstract level the patterns of building on an association learned in a particular socio-cultural environment and of drawing a conclusion by abductive inference are familiar enough. The same reasoning can be applied to Electra. As van Veldhuizen shows, her thought-processes not only use abduction, but also rely on common knowledge available to both Aeschylus' audience and modern readers, such as the idea that family members can be expected to have similar hair, as well as elements specific to the context of the ancient audience only, such as the honorific practice of putting a lock of hair on someone's tomb.

Cognitive scientists should pay particular attention here, given that reflection on the continuity or discontinuity of patterns of reasoning across different cultural contexts and timeframes can give a new impulse to long-standing debates about the universality of various elements of our cognition.

5 Conclusion

As a final observation based on what Cairns, Klooster and van Veldhuizen offer, let us reflect again on the scientific possibilities of studying psychological phenomena in the historical record. Most contemporary cognitive science emphasizes the need to structure one's observations such that multiple instances can be compared. This is how experiments are set up, which seek to isolate a specific cognitive phenomenon by studying it in multiple individuals under maximally similar conditions. While this experimental approach has proven itself over the past decades as a successful way to learn about the mind, the very isolation from real-world contexts also makes it limited and as such in need of a complementary perspective. This is where the authors of the chapters in this Part of the volume—and scholars of narrative in general—have a great deal to offer to cognitive scientists: rather than in isolation, they study

11 And to be precise, within a Peircean framework this association would also have an iconic element, besides a symbolic (and hence acquired) one: the mapping between 'large bones' and 'hero' is clearly not fully arbitrary. Cf. Keller 1995 and the references to Peirce's work in Van Veldhuizen's chapter, where he also associates the abductive process as a whole with the mechanism of iconicity.

psychological processes *situated* in the contexts in which they are represented in stories. Such contexts are often rich and multifarious, and therefore add valuable detail and balanced analysis. And, unlike minds in the lab, minds represented in stories persist over millennia.

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Emotional Contagion, Empathy, and Sympathy as Responses to Verbal and Visual Narratives: Some Conceptual and Methodological Issues

Douglas Cairns

1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to air the following basic questions: what is the relationship between the emotions of characters and audiences in genres such as epic and tragedy; and what role do vision and visualization play in the mediation of this relationship? But I want to approach these questions by means of a more limited one: do the emotional responses of audiences depend to any significant extent on forms of mimicry or mirroring of the emotions of characters, and if they do, must these emotions be elicited by direct visual stimuli or can they be set in train by the imagination? This will then lead to a further question: how (if at all) does this issue bear on the theory and practice of ancient literature, and can ancient theory and practice help us frame the questions that we should like to see answered with the help of modern research in psychology and cognitive science?

2 Visualization, Vision, and Emotional Contagion

I approach these questions in the first instance by focusing on a comparatively recent and much-cited study which suggests that there is a fundamental difference between (a) responding emotionally to the visual stimulus of characters' emotional expressions in film and (b) emotional responses that rely on visualization as opposed to vision. I refer to Amy Coplan's 2006 paper, 'Catching Characters' Emotions: Emotional Contagion Responses to Narrative Fiction Film'.¹ It will become apparent that I disagree with the assumptions, methods, and conclusions of this paper, but I believe it is heuristically useful to start with it here, first because it raises all the right questions for my purposes in this

1 Coplan 2006.

chapter, second because its assumptions are widely shared,² and third because it allows me to establish the categories and distinctions that I propose to use in the discussion that follows. Finally, though I think that Coplan's arguments and conclusions are wrong, her paper is none the less commendable in that it seeks to bring the findings of cognitive and social psychology into relation with issues of major importance for humanities research. It inspires and requires the kind of debate of which the current volume is an example.

Coplan begins her study with a discussion of the opening sequence of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Though she acknowledges that many of the audience's emotional responses to these scenes will be 'generated by our understanding of what the soldiers portrayed in the film were doing and what its impact would be, our knowledge of how poor their odds of survival were, and our sympathy for them' (Coplan 2006: 26; cf. 30), she distinguishes these responses from forms of mimicry allegedly caused solely by the sight of characters' faces in close up. These, she says, are a cause of emotional contagion, 'an automatic and involuntary affective process that can occur when we observe others experiencing emotions'. This process does not involve 'beliefs or the imagination' and 'should be clearly distinguished from responses based on other emotional processes' (2006: 26–27). Mimicry of bodily movements, especially facial expressions, allegedly gives rise, through bodily feedback, to the subjective experience of the same emotion as conveyed by the characters. The process is summarized as follows (2006: 28):

First the imitator mimics another's facial expression. Making this facial expression then influences the imitator's subjective emotional experience and induces physiological changes characteristic of the emotional expression that she is mimicking. Consequently, people can end up 'catching' the emotions of those they observe.

As a response to fiction, Coplan claims, this is restricted to media, such as film, which give direct access to others' facial expressions; it cannot occur as a response to a purely verbal narrative (2006: 26, 29, 31–33, 35).

We know that mimicry of emotional expressions occurs, and that it can take place without conscious awareness.³ We also know that assuming a certain facial expression of emotion can be enough to give rise to the experience of

2 The paper is, for example, cited with approval by Rosenwein and Cristiani 2018: 114.

3 Dimberg 1982; Dimberg et al. 2000; for a summary, see Hatfield et al. 2014: 109–110; cf. Colombetti 2014: 187–188.

that emotion.⁴ But there are substantial questions about Coplan's account of the role of these processes in audience response and about her restriction of the phenomena in question to visual narrative.

First, Coplan distinguishes her account from others, by scholars such as Noël Carroll, Carl Plantinga, and Murray Smith,⁵ who see these phenomena as elements in a more inclusive set of emotional responses to narratives *qua* structured, emotion-eliciting scenarios—responses that *do* involve belief and imagination. She concedes that—in the messy world that human beings do in reality inhabit—‘emotional contagion’ can, and indeed almost certainly will, occur in conjunction with other emotional responses, such as ‘empathy’ (defined as feeling *with* the other person) and ‘sympathy’ (defined as feeling *for* that person),⁶ responses which do involve ‘higher order cognition’.⁷ But she still wants to keep ‘emotional contagion’ distinct, unaffected by the factors that cause these higher-order responses:

Although empathy and emotional contagion can and often do occur simultaneously, recent empirical research suggests that they are distinct processes that originate from different types of experience and typically result in different kinds of responses. Due to the differences in how emotional contagion and empathy arise, empathy can occur in our engagement with literary narratives but emotional contagion cannot. (Coplan 2006: 31)

Perhaps the most important difference between emotional contagion and other emotional processes is that emotional contagion seems to be unique to our engagement with audiovisual fictions. Engagement with literary fictions can produce empathy, sympathy, simulation, and emotional responses ... In fact, much of the scholarly work on emotional

4 Adelman and Zajonc 1989; Levenson et al. 1990; cf. Neal and Chartrand 2011; Hatfield et al. 2014: 111.

5 See Smith 1995; Plantinga 1999; Carroll 2001, with discussion at Coplan 2006: 30–32. Cf. the more recent contributions in Smith 2017; Plantinga 2018; Stadler 2018; also (more broadly and without restriction to the medium of cinema) Johnson 2017; 2018.

6 For these distinctions, as commonly used in psychology, see Oatley 2011: 115–20; on empathy versus sympathy, cf. various authors in Coplan and Goldie 2011.

7 See Coplan 2006: 32: ‘In fact, I think it is unusual for a spectator to experience emotional contagion alone, without some kind of empathy or sympathy also occurring. There are at least two reasons for this. First, narrative fiction films typically engage us by inviting us to empathize or sympathize with certain characters early on in a film, and filmmakers use multiple techniques to encourage this. Thus we are usually empathetically or sympathetically engaged to some degree from the beginning. Second, it is rare for the camera to focus on characters we do not feel some empathy or sympathy for, except in the case of villains toward whom we typically feel antipathy. Nevertheless, empathy, sympathy, and emotional contagion are distinctive processes’.

engagement with narratives makes little or no distinction between our engagement with film and our engagement with literature. But our engagement with literature does not produce emotional contagion; it cannot, at least for texts that are not illustrated. Emotional contagion requires direct sensory input. Mimicry and afferent feedback are not produced by imaginative processes or evaluations of characters and narrative events (Coplan 2006: 35).

Coplan's actual examples, however, show how difficult it is in practice to keep these responses distinct. According to her (2006: 29–30), it is primarily prolonged exposure to facial close-up that creates audience emotion in the opening scenes of Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. This is because, she claims, these scenes offer no cues as to the narrative situation in which the woman we see on screen is involved; all we have is 'what shows on her face'. But Coplan describes the scene as follows (2006: 30): 'she has been badly beaten, she struggles for breath, she trembles with fear and pain, and she is looking around, anxious and afraid'. It is difficult to believe that this does not encourage audience members to speculate, imaginatively and on the basis of substantial knowledge of both cinematic genre and the cultural realities to which genres relate, about possible narrative contexts. Nor is it by any means self-evident that audience members 'cannot help but begin to mirror the woman's fear and anxiety'. By 'mirroring' Coplan evidently (given the theoretical assumptions quoted above) means that the audience themselves experience fear and anxiety. But might it not be the case that that the woman's fear and anxiety elicit *different* emotions in the audience?

It is striking that Coplan takes no steps to verify empirically that facial mimicry actually takes place when audiences view this scene. Its presence is purely hypothetical. This is the case also with regard to the emotional response of the audience. And there is every reason to suspect that an actual audience's response may be something more than emotional contagion, even if elements of mimicry and contagion do play a role.

The same is true of the account Coplan offers of a scene in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien Resurrection* (1998). The hideous alien has gained access to the spaceship and has begun to kill its crew. The creature is the offspring of the queen alien that had once grown inside Ripley's body; and so it is (somehow) genetically related to Ripley. Ripley finds it about to have its wicked way with Winona Ryder (at which point its demeanour, discernible in its posture and facial expression, is described by Coplan as 'menacing'), and demands that the creature desist. Coplan continues (2006: 33–34—my italics):

We are then presented with a close-up of the creature's face, looking shamed and sad, *like a reprimanded child*. In the next part of the scene, Ripley embraces the creature, which *clearly recognizes Ripley as its*

mother, and the two caress each other for a few moments. Then Ripley uses some of her own blood, which is acidic, to burn a hole into a window, breaching the ship's hull. We quickly *realize* that by creating the hole in the window, Ripley has devised a way to kill the creature. *The creature realizes this too*, and in the third part of the scene we are presented with an extreme close-up of the creature's eyes, which *express sadness, fear, and a feeling of betrayal*. The creature looks at Ripley *as if to say*, 'How could you?'

At this point, Coplan claims (2006: 34; again my italics):

Our response to the creature's reaction is ambivalent. On the one hand, we are disgusted by this hybrid monster and want it to be destroyed. On the other hand, *its facial expressions of sadness and fear trigger a contagion response so that we also experience feelings of sadness, fear, and betrayal*.

One need not dispute that Coplan's characterization of audience reaction to the scenes she describes is likely to be (broadly) correct; but, again, mimicry and emotional contagion are assumed, not empirically verified. And there is plenty in this description (especially in the phrases that I have italicized) to suggest that what the audience is actually doing is deploying extensive knowledge of narrative context and background to form patterns, construct a narrative, and develop interpretations of the experiences of the creature, interpretations that are affected above all by their awareness of the social (familial) relationship that exists between it and Ripley (and so by a narrative context) and by the deployment of gestures and expressions that are typical of such a relationship (and so form part of a rich repertoire of social and behavioural scripts). Perception of the creature's facial expressions (etc.) here is fundamentally a matter of pattern-finding, narrative construction, and contextual knowledge; this in itself undermines the argument that the audience's response is purely one of 'automatic and involuntary' emotional contagion that does not entail 'beliefs or the imagination'. But it is also worth observing that the hypothetical audience responses do not, in fact, seem to be identical to those of the creature at all—do we *really* feel 'betrayal' when we see someone else feeling betrayed? One wonders, indeed, whether 'betrayal' (in itself) even has the kind of facial expression that could give rise to automatic mimicry or contagion in an onlooker. It is much more likely to be the case that we draw the conclusion, from the alien's expression and body language, that it feels betrayed, because we know about the relationship between the creature and Ripley. This knowledge, together with the activation of the affective dimensions of that

relationship, gives rise to emotion because, momentarily, we see the alien as a creature that is in some ways like us.⁸

3 Facial Mimicry and the Perception of Emotion

Psychological research also casts doubt on Coplan's claims. First, even direct visual perception involves not only bottom-up, 'direct sensory input', but also top-down processes such as active prediction and the application of conceptual and experiential knowledge. It may seem to us that we receive, passively, a complete and objective picture of a given visual scene, but any number of well-known experiments, common illusions, and phenomena such as change blindness and inattentional blindness indicate that, to a very large extent, what we see is what we expect to see in the light of predictions made on the basis of experience and in the light of our own subjective aims and concerns.⁹ Direct perception of others' emotions will equally draw on social context, experience, and conceptual knowledge. Indeed, for the constructionist psychologists, James A. Russell and Lisa Feldman Barrett, emotions themselves (as ways of making sense both of the world and of one's own experience of the world) are like perception in that they have both bottom-up and top-down aspects, the latter depending on concepts and categories that are heavily inflected by language.¹⁰ Further, as Ursula Hess and colleagues emphasize, perception of others' emotional expressions involves the attribution of developed forms of social and cultural meaning, and so any mimicry of these expressions opens up the possibility of participation in a wider nexus of meaning that depends on the interactive context and the social relationships that lie behind it.¹¹ These

8 Something we can do even with two-dimensional geometrical figures, provided that they are made, by a human agent, to behave in agent-like ways: Heider and Simmel 1944.

9 See e.g. Simons and Chabris 1999; Noë 2004; Hansen et al. 2006; Zhang and Lin 2013; Vetter and Newen 2014; Barrett 2017: 59–61. Cf. Troscianko 2014: 50–53. For a recent set of essays on the cognitive penetrability of perception, see Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos 2015.

10 See Barrett 2006: 35. As Russell 2009: 1270 puts it: 'Perceiving oneself as having an emotion is no different in kind from other perceptions. Percepts are often compelling, but they are not simple. Nor are they infallible. Like other acts of perception, an emotional experience is not entirely "bottom-up", not entirely data driven. A percept is the end product of a complex process involving raw data, concepts, learning, and context.' For the specific analogy with colour perception, see Barrett 2006: 20, 27–31, 34–35, 41–42; Lindquist and Barrett 2008: 902; Barrett 2017: 84, 129, 145–146.

11 See e.g. Bourgeois and Hess 2008; Hess and Bourgeois 2010; Hess et al. 2014; Hess and Fischer 2013; Hess and Fischer 2014; Drimalla et al. 2019; Olszanowski et al. 2020. Cf. Gendron et al. 2012; Wróbel and Imbir 2019.

studies find that facial mimicry is indeed subject to a range of contextual influences (such as degrees of affiliation); that in some contexts it does not necessarily give rise to congruent emotions (though it certainly can do so); that the role of facial mimicry in phenomena such as ‘emotional’ or ‘cognitive’ empathy is also contextually influenced; and that facial mimicry can be produced by contextual cues *other than* facial expressions—cross-modal mimicry, for example, is possible.¹² Hess, Houde, and Fischer argue that ‘Facial mimicry ... reflects not what the observer sees, but rather the observer’s knowledge of others’ emotional state.’¹³ In one experiment, they induced facial mimicry by showing subjects images of neutral faces, but with narrative cues suggesting that the individuals pictured were subject to this or that emotion. This has implications for audience response to masked drama, as in Attic tragedy: an audience can credit an apparently neutral mask with emotional expressivity at least partly on the basis of textual cues.¹⁴ But we knew that already: the essence of the phenomenon is the well-known Kuleshov effect, by which contextual cues (montage) are used to create the impression in the observer’s mind that what is in fact a neutral face, identical in each different context, is emotionally expressive.¹⁵ What the recent research adds to this is the possibility that audiences of masked drama might have mimicked the (contextually constructed) facial expressions attributed to the character or suggested by the actor, underpinned by the expressive powers of the mask (which, when combined with posture and movement, and supported by contextual cues, are in fact much more extensive than is often supposed).¹⁶

In the case of the experiment just mentioned (Hess et al. 2014), images of faces were used as prompts, but the information required to elicit facial mimicry was supplied by narrative, non-visual cues. This makes it likely, as the authors observe, that visualization, even in the absence of visual prompts, should be sufficient to elicit facial mimicry.¹⁷ This is suggested also by all the evidence that facial mimicry facilitates the processing of emotion words, phrases, and scenarios, and that blocking of facial mimicry (e.g. by holding

12 Cf. Wood et al. 2016: 235–236.

13 From the abstract to Hess et al. 2014, as given in Oxford Scholarship Online.

14 For the importance of this point, see Meineck 2011; cf. Meineck 2019.

15 Named after the pioneering Soviet director Lev Kuleshov and memorably discussed in François Truffaut’s discussions with Alfred Hitchcock, published in Truffaut 1984: 214–16. For a recent account of the phenomenon from the perspective of affective neuroscience, see Calbi et al. 2019.

16 See Meineck 2011, esp. 130–134.

17 Cf. Hess et al. 2014: 102–104; as they note (2014: 102): ‘there is no requirement to actually visually perceive an emotion expression to show facial mimicry’.

a pen in one's mouth or after Botox injections) inhibits emotion recognition, both visually and verbally.¹⁸ This is congruent with the findings of Kosslyn and others that vision and visualization are overlapping processes that make use of the same areas of the brain, and with studies that suggest that readers exhibit a wide range of mirroring and mimicry effects in the process of reading.¹⁹

4 Visualization and Audience Emotion

4.1 *Mary's Cannibal Feast*

That vision *and* visualization can produce the same (embodied) emotional response is of course something with which practitioners and theorists of ancient Greek literature would have agreed. A key term of art in the theory and practice of ancient literary and rhetorical theory is *enargeia*, 'vividness', the quality that literary and rhetorical texts and narrative have of making readers or audience members feel as if they were present and able to participate in the events being described. A passage I have discussed before,²⁰ one that illustrates very well the workings and emotional implications of both *phantasia* (imagination) and *enargeia*, is a well-known episode in Josephus' *Jewish Wars*. The passage concerns the actions of Mary, a starving woman who cooks and eats her own son in a desperate attempt to avenge herself upon the Jewish rebels whose depredations have reduced her to this level (6.207–213):

18 See Niedenthal et al. 2009; Neal and Chartrand 2011; Niedenthal et al. 2014. See also the review by Wood et al. 2016 of studies on the role of cross-modal sensory integration and sensorimotor simulation in the recognition of facial expressions of emotion. Krueger 2009: 684–688 reports that, for some sufferers from Moebius syndrome, facial paralysis is accompanied by a diminution in the felt capacity to experience emotion, yet he also adduces evidence that sufferers adopt alternative strategies which 'phenomenologically [fill] in the affective qualities of the state compromised by facial paralysis' (686). As far as emotion recognition is concerned, Rives Bogart and Matsumoto 2010 found no difference in terms of accuracy between patients with Moebius syndrome and a control group nor any correlation between accuracy and ability to produce facial expressions.

19 See Kosslyn et al. 1978; Farah 1989; Kosslyn et al. 1993; LeBihan et al. 1993; Kosslyn 1994; Farah 2000; Kosslyn and Thompson 2000; Ganis et al. 2004; Kosslyn 2005; Page et al. 2011. On the role of visualization as an aspect of readers' responses to verbal narratives, see the various approaches of Mar and Oatley 2008; Mar et al. 2011; Miall 2011; Wojciehowski and Gallese 2011; Sanford and Emmott 2012: 200–8; Keen 2013. Cf. Freedberg and Gallese 2007 for the visual arts. For a recent overview of the degrees of overlap and difference in the experiences of readers of verbal narratives and audiences of visual narratives, see Jajdelska et al. 2019.

20 See Cairns 2017: 66–67.

‘Come, for me be food, to these fomenters of faction an avenging Fury, and to posterity a cautionary tale of the only thing so far missing from the calamities of the Jews.’ As soon as she had said this, she killed her son. After roasting him, she ate the one half, and kept the other concealed. Immediately the rebels came in, and, on inhaling the unholy aroma, threatened that if she did not show them the food she had prepared, they would cut her throat at once. She replied that she had kept a fine portion for them, and uncovered the remains of her son. Straightaway shivering (*phrikê*) and amazement seized them, and they were fixed to the spot at the sight (τοὺς δ’ εὐθέως φρίκη καὶ φρενῶν ἔκστασις ἦρει καὶ παρὰ τὴν ὄψιν ἐπεπύγεσαν, 210).²¹ She said, ‘This is my own true-born son and my own work. Eat—I have! Don’t be softer than a woman or more compassionate (συμπαθέστεροι) than a mother. But if you are scrupulous and repelled by my sacrifice, as I have eaten your share, let the rest be reserved for me also.’ After that they went out trembling (τρέμοντες, 212), terrified by this, as never before, relinquishing this food with difficulty to the mother. Immediately the whole city was full of this abomination; and all the inhabitants, placing the terrible experience before their eyes as if they had committed it themselves, shivered with *phrikê* (καὶ πρὸ ὀμμάτων ἔκαστος τὸ πάθος λαμβάνων ὥσπερ αὐτῷ τολμηθὲν ἔφριττε, 213).

Here, the embodied emotions of those who see at first hand the evidence of Mary’s cannibal feast and of those who merely hear the report of it are the same: in both cases, what they feel is *phrikê*—goose pimples, shivering, shuddering, horror—in both the extended sense and in the strict sense of piloerection.²² The secondary internal audience, too, do what Josephus encourages *us* to do by placing the reported scene before their eyes,²³ imagining it not merely as eye-witnesses but as agents in the same position as the protagonist herself.

If mimicry or mirroring of narrated emotions can be a feature of reader response we should expect this to have been true of ancient as well as of

21 φρενῶν ἔκστασις is the reading of most MSS; Niese 1895 prints παρέκστασις, found in one MS, but not otherwise attested.

22 For a full, synthetic account of *phrikê*, see Cairns 2013.

23 Josephus’ πρὸ ὀμμάτων deploys a keyword for *enargeia* as a poetic and rhetorical technique that goes back at least as far as Aristotle: *Po.* 17, 1455a22–26, *Rh.* 3.10, 1410b33–36, 3.10–11, 1411a25–1412a10. As shown by Grethlein and Huitink 2017 and Huitink 2019, neither ancient theories of *enargeia* nor the narrative techniques of ancient authors entail that the reader’s imagination should depend exclusively on the accumulation of visual cues as a means of creating ‘mental pictures’—Josephus’ narrative is typical in being both selective and multimodal in the sensory detail that it deploys and evokes. Cf. Cave 2016: 78–84, 121.

modern readers. But of course no ancient source gives us the level of detail we need to establish this, or at least not at the level of micro-gestures and barely detectable movements. In broader terms, however, the Josephus passage raises some questions that we might like to pose to our contemporaries in cognitive science and social psychology. Mary's deed is vividly described, and (like the secondary internal audience) we are encouraged to imagine what it might be like to be in Mary's position. But though there is a convergence in embodied emotional response between eye-witnesses and those who first hear their reports, and even though the latter *in some sense* put themselves in Mary's position, this is not emotional contagion or feeling what the character feels (even if it may well be driven to some degree by an understanding of what the character feels). The secondary internal audience and we as the tertiary, external audience put ourselves in Mary's position not to adopt her particular emotional perspective, but as a way of picking up on the affordances for action and emotion that the narrative foregrounding of her action and her feelings provides.²⁴ The emotions of the secondary internal audience in fact correspond to those of the primary internal audience, not to those of Mary herself. Our emotions, as an external audience, focus on Mary, but these emotions are primed by contextual cues—the emotions first of eye-witnesses and then of those who hear the tale—that present the story of Mary as a narrative of a certain emotion-eliciting type. The emotions in question are third-person, observers' responses that differ from those of the agent whose act is the cause or target of those emotions. The structured narrative that describes that act is sufficient in itself to elicit the emotions of the external audience, but still their response is steered by the responses of two sets of internal audiences, one of which sees, while the other visualizes.²⁵

4.2 *Plato on Audience Emotion*

This sort of thing is much more common in ancient practice and theory than the phenomena that Coplan argues for in modern cinematic audiences. Two passages in Plato come close to suggesting that the emotions of audiences might replicate those of characters in epic or tragic poetry (in ways that might permit a direct line from mimicry to emotional contagion to empathetic

24 See further Huitink 2019. And so the phrase 'placing the terrible experience before their eyes as if they had committed it themselves' refers to a process describable in terms not of empathy (feeling what Mary feels), but of empathy's progenitor in German, namely *Einfühlung* (in its original sense of placing oneself and one's feelings in the scene). For the history of these two terms, see Curtis and Koch 2009 (*Einfühlung*) and Lanzoni 2018 (empathy).

25 Thus the phenomenon of emotional convergence in such narratives is a species of what Noël Carroll (2001; 2011; 2015) calls 'criterial prefocusing'. Cf. n. 38 below.

emotion); but the appearance, I think, is only superficial. In the first example, in *Republic* 10, Socrates does indeed characterize the emotions of characters and audiences in similar terms (605c–d, 606a–b):

For I suppose that even the best of us feels pleasure when we hear Homer or another tragedian imitating one of the heroes in the throes of grief, making a long speech of lamentation, or even singing and beating his breast—we give ourselves up, as you know, and are carried away, sharing the character's *pathos* (συμπάσχοντες) and enthusiastically praising as a good poet whoever most strongly induces this state in us ...

Bear in mind that what is on these occasions, in our own misfortunes, restrained by force, though it has hungered for tears and the satisfaction of sufficient lamentation (since it is its nature to desire these things), is the very thing that is satisfied and delighted by the poets; whereas that which is by nature best in us, since it has never been sufficiently educated by reason or even by habit, relaxes its guard over this lamentatory element, on the basis that it is merely a spectator of others' *pathê* and it is no disgrace for oneself to praise and pity someone else who, claiming to be a good man, grieves without limit; rather, it thinks this thing, the pleasure, is advantageous, and it would not agree to be deprived of it by spurning the poem altogether. For few, in my view, have the capacity to calculate that we inevitably reap the benefits of others' experiences in our own case. For having nourished *to eleinon* in their case, it is not easy to restrain it with regard to our own *pathê*.

οἱ γάρ που βέλτιστοι ἡμῶν ἀκροώμενοι Ὀμήρου ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν τραγωδοποιῶν μιμουμένου τινὰ τῶν ἡρώων ἐν πένθει ὄντα καὶ μακρὰν ῥῆσιν ἀποτείνοντα ἐν τοῖς ὀδυρμοῖς ἢ καὶ ᾄδοντάς τε καὶ κοπτομένους, οἷσθ' ὅτι χαίρομέν τε καὶ ἐνδόντες ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐπόμεθα συμπάσχοντες καὶ σπουδάζοντες ἐπαινοῦμεν ὡς ἀγαθὸν ποιητὴν, ὃς ἂν ἡμᾶς ὅτι μάλιστα οὕτω διαθῇ ...

εἰ ἐνθυμοῖο ὅτι τὸ βίᾳ κατεχόμενον τότε ἐν ταῖς οἰκείαις συμφοραῖς καὶ πεπεινηκὸς τοῦ δακρῦσαι τε καὶ ἀποδύρασθαι ἱκανῶς καὶ ἀποπλησθῆναι, φύσει δὲ τοιοῦτον οἷον τούτων ἐπιθυμεῖν, τότε ἔστιν τοῦτο τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν πιμπλάμενον καὶ χαίρον· τὸ δὲ φύσει βέλτιστον ἡμῶν, ἅτε οὐχ ἱκανῶς πεπαιδευμένον λόγῳ οὐδὲ ἔθει, ἀνίησιν τὴν φυλακὴν τοῦ θρηνώδους τούτου, ἅτε ἀλλότρια πάθη θεωροῦν καὶ ἑαυτῷ οὐδὲν αἰσχροὺν ὃν εἰ ἄλλος ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς φάσκων εἶναι ἀκαίρως πενθεῖ, τοῦτον ἐπαινεῖν καὶ ἐλεεῖν, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο κερδαίνειν ἡγεῖται, τὴν ἡδονήν, καὶ οὐκ ἂν δέξαίτο αὐτῆς στερηθῆναι καταφρονήσας ὅλου τοῦ ποιήματος. λογιζεσθαι γὰρ οἶμαι ὀλίγοις τισὶν μέτεστιν ὅτι ἀπολαύειν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλλοτριῶν εἰς τὰ οἰκεία· θρέψαντα γὰρ ἐν ἐκείνοις ἰσχυρὸν τὸ ἐλεῖν ὃν οὐ ῥάδιον ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ πάθεσι κατέχειν.

Here, the emotions of both characters and audience members involve tears and lamentation, and both take pleasure in satisfying their hunger for tears. Audiences are συμπάσχοντες with the grief of the heroes (605d) and think that the best poets are those who can make them feel this way to the greatest degree. Socrates, indeed, disagrees with those who draw a distinction in kind between audiences' and characters' emotions—people *say* that these are others' *pathê* (606b), and that it is fine to pity (*eleein*) the hero's sorrow (*penthos*); but Socrates takes the view that how one reacts to others' sufferings will impact on how one deals with one's own. Yet we should note that this does not entail that characters' and audiences' emotions are the same: there is an overlap (which is perhaps the import of συμπάσχοντες), but the hero grieves (πενθεῖ) and the audience member pities (ἐλεεῖ), even if it is true that cultivating *to eleinon*—the capacity that allows one to respond to the pity-inducing qualities of texts and performances—makes it difficult to deal with one's own sufferings.²⁶

Equally, in Plato's *Ion*, when the rhapsode performs the Homeric poems, and especially when he is performing character speech, he is lending not only his voice, but also his body to the presentation of the characters' emotions (535c):

For whenever I tell of a pitiable event, my eyes fill with tears; and whenever I narrate something frightening or terrible, my hair stands on end out of fear, and my heart leaps.

ἐγὼ γὰρ ὅταν ἐλεινόν τι λέγω, δακρύων ἐμπίμπλανταί μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί· ὅταν τε φοβερόν ἢ δεινόν, ὀρθαὶ αἱ τρίχες ἴστανται ὑπὸ φόβου καὶ ἡ καρδίᾳ πηδᾷ.

Ion's hair stands on end and his heart leaps, as might a character's.²⁷ But the coupling of *phoberon* and *deinon* here with *eleinon* in the previous line suggests that it is not primarily or at least not only the characters' emotions that he is thinking about; for these (especially *eleos*) are *audience* responses. Accordingly, when he describes his ability to transmit these full-blooded, embodied emotions to the audience (at 535d–e), it is clear that both Ion and his audiences

26 Cf. Liebert 2017: 169–170 (though, for reasons given above, I think that it is not quite the case that this entails 'adopting another's misfortunes as our own'). *To eleinon* here successfully highlights a relation between pity and grief that (as I argue elsewhere) is a traditional element of Greek (and especially Homeric) poetics (see Cairns 2023). Here, as elsewhere, pity and grief overlap in their expression and, as one's own pity focuses on others' grief, so one's own grief invites the pity of others. Part of the complaint is thus that grief puts one in a pitiable (i.e. inferior and ignoble) condition.

27 Just so, Socrates began (at 535d1–5) by characterizing Ion's performance as representing forms of grief and fear that would be irrational in the absence of things *for him* to lament or be afraid of.

take a third-person, onlooker's perspective on the emotion-eliciting scenarios of the poem:

Socrates

So do you realize that you rhapsodes produce these same effects on most of the spectators too?

Ion

Yes, I am very well aware of that: every time it happens I look down on them from the platform above and see them weeping, with fear in their eyes, sharing my amazement (*thambos*) at what's said.

Σω.

οἶσθα οὖν ὅτι καὶ τῶν θεατῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ταῦτά ταῦτα ὑμεῖς ἐργάζεσθε;

Ιων

καὶ μάλα καλῶς οἶδα· καθορῶ γὰρ ἐκάστοτε αὐτοὺς ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος κλάοντάς τε καὶ δεινὸν ἐμβλέποντας καὶ συνθαμβοῦντας τοῖς λεγομένοις.

Like Ion, the audience members weep and show fear, but this is a matter of their shared amazement (συνθαμβοῦντας), as onlookers, at the emotion-eliciting power of the narrative. Ion does, as a performer, represent and embody the emotions attributed to the characters.²⁸ The emotions displayed by the performer no doubt cue and prime those of the audience. And the influence of the performance as such on the emotions of the audience may be very substantial. But still the ultimate focus of both performer and audience is on the structured presentation of an emotion script—a narrative—in the text itself. Both audience's and performers' reactions to that script are third-person in character. Though it may happen that the symptoms of characters, on the one hand, and of performer and audience (on the other) coincide, their perspectives diverge and their emotions differ.

4.3 *Speaker's and Audience Emotion in Aristotle*

The issue of coincidence between speaker's and audience's emotions arises also in connection with a passage in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The general issue here is propriety of style (*lexis*), which will be achieved, Aristotle says, when style appropriately expresses emotion and character and is in proportion to the subject matter of the speech (3.7, 1408a10–11, τὸ δὲ πρέπον ἔξει ἢ λέξις, ἐὰν ᾗ

²⁸ Cf. the passages cited at n. 32 below; see also n. 44.

παθητική τε καὶ ἠθική καὶ τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πράγμασιν ἀνάλογον). As far as emotion is concerned, the passage continues (16–25):

Lexis expresses emotion when, if it is a matter of *hubris*, it is that of an angry person, or, when it comes to impious and shameful matters, that of an indignant person, one who hesitates even to speak of such things, or when it expresses admiration of praiseworthy things, humility [or perhaps ‘pathos’] with regard to pitiable matters, and so on in the case of the other emotions. The appropriate style also lends credibility to the subject matter: the mind draws a false inference that the speaker is telling the truth, because in such situations people do feel that way, with the result that [the audience] think, even though the situation is not as the speaker makes out, that things are as he says they are, and the listener always feels the same emotion (συννομοπαθεῖ) as an emotional speaker, even if he is lying. Which is why many try to stun their audiences with their bluster.

παθητική δέ, ἐὰν μὲν ᾗ ὕβρις, ὀργιζομένου λέξις, ἐὰν δὲ ἀσεβῇ καὶ αἰσχρά, δυσχεραίνοντος καὶ εὐλαβουμένου καὶ λέγειν, ἐὰν δὲ ἐπαινετὰ, ἀγαμένως, ἐὰν δὲ ἐλεεινά, ταπεινῶς, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων δὲ ὁμοίως. πιθανοὶ δὲ τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ ἡ οἰκεία λέξις· παραλογίζεται τε γὰρ ἡ ψυχὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς λέγοντος, ὅτι ἐπὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις οὕτως ἔχουσιν, ὥστ’ οἴονται, εἰ καὶ μὴ οὕτως ἔχει ὡς <λέγει> ὁ λέγων, τὰ πράγματα οὕτως ἔχειν, καὶ συννομοπαθεῖ ὁ ἀκούων αἰεὶ τῷ παθητικῶς λέγοντι, ἂν μὴ θέν λέγῃ. διὸ πολλοὶ καταπλήττουσι τοὺς ἀκροατὰς θορυβοῦντες.

The first thing to note is that this passage is, on the face of it, compatible both with first-person and with third-person narratives on the part of the emotional speaker. The speaker, that is, may be telling of his own or of others’ experiences. Anger and indignation can be observers’ as well as victims’ responses;²⁹ humility (in the presentation of a pitiable scenario) may suggest the assumption of the role of victim,³⁰ but admiration for praiseworthy deeds surely implies a third-person perspective. The passage, therefore, is not explicit on a question that might interest us, namely whether we are dealing with empathy (feeling with), sympathy (feeling for), a bit of both, or not quite either. Second, in spite of the assertion that ‘the listener always feels the same emotion (συννομοπαθεῖ) as an emotional speaker’ Aristotle clearly does not think that emotional

29 The classic discussion of Strawson 1962 argues for ‘kinship’ between personal or participant reactive attitudes and their vicarious, impersonal, or generalized cousins.

30 Perhaps, however, ταπεινῶς means ‘pathetically’ rather than ‘humbly’ here, which might allow third-person as well as first-person reference to the plight of the victim.

contagion is a factor in such cases. The listener does not simply catch, automatically or unconsciously, the emotion performed by the speaker. Rather, the listener makes an inference: the speaker creates a structured scenario which encompasses the eliciting conditions of an emotional script, and the listener may well be so disposed, on the basis of an evaluation of that scenario, to respond with the desired emotion; but the scenario's credibility is enhanced by the speaker's own emotional performance, because the listener (at least implicitly) infers that, if the speaker appears to feel as one would normally feel in such a situation, then the situation must be as the speaker represents it. Both speaker and audience are responding evaluatively to an artfully constructed narrative.³¹ The speaker's diction, and no doubt the performance in general, involving *hupokrisis* as well as *lexis*,³² prime the audience to react as intended, and the audience-member's reasoning (that *this* speaker is behaving in precisely the way that people do behave when the eliciting conditions are as the speaker says they are) does involve an element of perspective-taking that is very important in such scenarios, but still—despite the superficial thrill of coming upon a term such as *συνομοπαθεῖν* (to share in feeling the same thing)—we need to guard against easy assumptions that such terms in themselves refer to the phenomena that modern research finds interesting, whether that be (at a minimal level) emotional contagion or (at a maximal) the phenomenon of empathy. Once again, we are talking about priming, reinforcement, and emotional convergence, not mirroring, mimicry, contagion, or empathy.³³ This makes it slightly more probable that the perspective of both

31 Thus, despite *παραλογίζεται* ... ἡ ψυχὴ in a19–20 the passage supports a narrative account better than a 'theory theory' account of social cognition: see n. 42 below. The passage illustrates the point made at *Rh.* 1.1, 1354a16–18 (to be taken with the discussion of the *pathê* in *Rh.* 2) that there are illegitimate as well as legitimate ways of performing and exciting emotion.

32 In making a similar argument at *De oratore* 2.188–194, Cicero compares the orator's performance of emotion to that of the tragic actor, rehearsing the notion that the poet, like the actor, also needs to inhabit the character's emotions if he is successfully to compose the part. For this idea (and its application to rhetorical *hupokrisis/actio*), cf. *Pl. Resp.* 3, 392e–393c (esp. 393c), *Arist. Po.* 17, 1455a22–34, [Long.] *De subl.* 15, *Cic. Orat.* 132, *Tusc.* 4.43 (but deprecated in 4.55), *Hor. AP* 102–103, *Quint. Inst.* 6.2.26–28. For discussion, see Brink 1971: 186 on *AP* 102–103; Leeman et al. 1989: 145–146, Wisse 1989: 257–269.

33 An excellent illustration of what Aristotle is taking about here (at least in terms of the power of diction—and the vivid, emotion-arousing images of events that it is able to create—to lend credibility to a speaker's narrative), with particular reference to *hubris*, the first of Aristotle's examples, is Demosthenes' indignant description of the demeanour of the *hubristês* (including the look of his eyes and his body language) at *Against Meidias* (21).72. For the argument that Athenian litigants do in fact excite the emotions of their audiences in the manner that Aristotle describes (by speaking in ways that

emotional speaker and his audience envisaged here is a third-person one, even if convergence of victim's and observers' responses remains possible.

4.4 *Gorgias on Audience Emotion*

The distinction between characters' emotions and audiences' emotions is characteristic of ancient poetics, as we see from the very beginning of theorizing about the emotional effects of poetry in Gorgias' *Helen*:

All poetry I regard and describe as speech with metre. Into those who listen to it comes a fearful shuddering (*phrikê*) and a tearful pity and a longing that loves to lament, and at the fortunes of others' deeds and persons, for good and for ill, the soul undergoes, through words, a certain experience of its own.

τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον· ἥς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολύδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθήs, ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἴδιόν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἡ ψυχή. (B 11.9 DK)

That the emotions of characters and audiences are different is, as we have seen, the regular ancient Greek assumption, but it may still be the case that Gorgias is Socrates' particular target in *Republic* 10, given that his is a prominent and emphatic statement of the view that the misfortunes that elicit fear, pity, and the desire to lament belong to *others*, while the disturbance experienced by the *psukhê* of the listener is a distinct experience of one's own.³⁴ Gorgias, like other sources we have considered, envisages a full-blooded, embodied emotional response to the experiences of the characters depicted in poetry. In this passage and in the immediate sequel it is apparent that Gorgias is thinking of verbal narrative rather than visual representation in dramatic form—the paradigm is no doubt, as in the *Ion* and *Republic* passages we have considered, the Homeric poems. But it also emerges from the sequel that Gorgias thinks of the persuasive power of speech and that of visual perception as operating in parallel ways. The power of speech to mould the *psukhê* is illustrated by the

highlight, enact, and reinforce the emotion-eliciting conditions outlined in their own narratives, rather than explicitly labelling their own reactions as anger or the like), see e.g. Sanders 2012; Rubinstein 2013.

34 See Halliwell 2002: 77, 2011: 267 n. 9. I find it odd that, though Liebert (2017: 108) recognizes this, and characterizes the response Gorgias describes as a *sympathetic* one (108–111), she nonetheless wants to describe it in terms of 'emotional contagion' (106–111). On the issues here, cf. Grethlein 2023: 157–158.

arguments of astronomers who make what is incredible and invisible appear to the 'eyes of opinion' (B 11.13 DK):

That persuasion added to speech (*logos*) also moulds the *psukhê* as it wishes one can see first of all from the arguments (*logoi*) of the astronomers, who remove one opinion (*doxa*) and replace it with another and so make what is incredible and obscure appear to the eyes of opinion (*doxa*).

ὅτι δ' ἡ πειθῶ προσιοῦσα τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐτυπώσατο ὅπως ἐβούλετο, χρὴ μαθεῖν πρῶτον μὲν τοὺς τῶν μετεωρολόγων λόγους, οἵτινες δόξαν ἀντὶ δόξης τὴν μὲν ἀφελόμενοι τὴν δ' ἐνεργασάμενοι τὰ ἄπιστα καὶ ἄδηλα φαίνεσθαι τοῖς τῆς δόξης ὄμμασιν ἐποίησαν.

In this respect, there is no substantive difference between what one hears and what one sees, since 'the nature of what we see is as it is, not as we wish it to be; through vision the *psukhê* is moulded in its character too' (ἀ γὰρ ὁρῶμεν, ἔχει φύσιν οὐχ ἣν ἡμεῖς θέλομεν, ἀλλ' ἣν ἕκαστον ἔτυχε· διὰ δὲ τῆς ὀψεως ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τοῖς τρόποις τυποῦται, B 11.15 DK), and vision, like speech, creates its emotional effects by means of mental images (οὕτως εἰκόνας τῶν ὁρωμένων πραγμάτων ἡ ὄψις ἐνέγραψεν ἐν τῷ φρονήματι, B 11.17 DK).³⁵

4.5 *Seeing the Blinded Oedipus*

A final example, from one of the greatest of all works of dramatic poetry, will suffice. At *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1297, Oedipus re-appears on stage, after blinding himself. The actor has changed his mask, and the new mask suggests the terrible mutilation, and the excruciating physical pain, of the self-blinding. It is perhaps striking that in one of the few passages in which an ancient author discusses anything that one might consider akin to emotional contagion it is precisely this sort of scenario that the author has in mind.³⁶ The passage in question occurs in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* (7.7, 887a15–18):³⁷

Why when we see someone being cut or burned or tortured or suffering something else that is terrible, do we share his pain in our thought? Is it that all of us have a common nature? So when one sees something of

35 Cf. Halliwell 2011: 280–281; Munteanu 2012: 45–47. Grethlein and Huitink (2017: 86) caution that 'we should not overestimate the importance of the philosophically inspired "pictorialist" language used by some ancient critics'. Cf. Huitink 2019.

36 More precisely, the issue is one of the mental pain of the observer as a response to the physical pain of the observed: see Singer et al. 2004, with Colombetti 2014: 193.

37 On this and other passages illustrating *sumpatheia* in *Probl.*, see Fortenbaugh 2017.

this sort, one shares the pain of the person who is suffering on account of kinship.

διὰ τί, ἐπειδὴν τεμνομενόν τινα ἴδωμεν ἢ καιόμενον ἢ στρεβλούμενον ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν δεινῶν πάσχοντα, συναλγοῦμεν τῇ διανοίᾳ; ἢ ὅτι ἡ φύσις ἡμῖν κοινὴ ἅπασιν; συνήλγησεν οὖν, ἐπειδὴν τι τοιοῦτον ἴδῃ, τῷ πάσχοντι διὰ τὴν οἰκειότητα.

Confronted with a man who had just blinded himself, an onlooker's emotional reaction would no doubt be automatic, instinctive, and physical. But this is a man in a mask, not a man who has actually blinded himself. And so the external audience, who see the masked actor pretending to be Oedipus, are afforded some assistance on the part of the internal audience, the Chorus of Theban elders, who (we imagine) see the mutilated face of their king. Their reaction, in turn, is cued by the Messenger:

Messenger

You will soon see a sight that even someone who is repulsed by it would pity.

Chorus

What suffering, terrible for humans to see, most terrible of all that I have ever encountered! What madness came upon you, wretched one? What divine being was it that leapt further than the longest leap on top of your unhappy fate? Alas, poor man: I cannot even look at you, though there is much I want to ask, much to hear, and much to look at; such is the shiver (*phrikê*) you cause in me.

ΕΞ.

θέαμα δ' εἰσόψῃ τάχα 1295
τοιοῦτον οἶον καὶ στυγοῦντ' ἐποικτίσαι.

Χο.

ὦ δεινὸν ἰδεῖν πάθος ἀνθρώποις,
ὦ δεινότατον πάντων ὅσ' ἐγὼ
προσέκυρσ' ἤδη. τίς σ', ὦ τλήμων,
προσέβη μανία; τίς ὁ πηδήσας 1300
μείζονα δαίμων τῶν μηχίστων

πρὸς σῇ δυσδαίμονι μοίρᾳ;
φεῦ φεῦ δύστην', ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἐσιδεῖν
δύναμαι σ', ἐθέλων πόλλ' ἀνερέσθαι,
πολλὰ πυθέσθαι, πολλὰ δ' ἀθρήσαι 1305

τοίαν φρίκην παρέχεις μοι. (OT 1294–1306)

All the stress at the beginning of this scene is on spectacle: the Messenger who announces Oedipus' reappearance emphasizes the sight (*theama*) that the Chorus are about to see (1295–1296), and the Chorus immediately comment on the 'terrible sight' of Oedipus' suffering (1297). They want to look at him, but they cannot bear to, such is the *phrikê* they experience when they try (1303–1306). So the Chorus do experience an instinctive, automatic, embodied emotional reaction. Its primary cause is the gory spectacle that they see before them. And yet this is not a simple, reflex response. It encompasses fear and revulsion. It takes account not just of Oedipus' appearance, but of his entire life history, the ill-favoured *moira* that has culminated in his act of self-mutilation and the irrational, divinely inspired impetus that drove him to it. For them, the face and body of Oedipus, their visual appearance, make a difference; but there is more to their emotional response than that. For us, on the other hand, their embodied response and their relaying of the spectacle that they as characters see contribute to the full realization of the masked theatrical spectacle that we, as spectators, not only see but also imaginatively complete by means of the words we hear as well as the sights we witness. Primed by the cues in the Chorus' words and by the movements of their bodies, we are supposed to feel something similar to what they feel—though, of course, we, like they, also respond directly to Oedipus and to his own, complex emotional responses. If this does, at any level, entail any trace of the emotions that Oedipus performs or expresses, still we do not feel what he feels. Like the Chorus, as invited by the Messenger, we feel pity and the instinctive physical revulsion of *phrikê*. Both of these are observers', not agents', responses. And if the *phrikê* of the Chorus primes or coincides with the *phrikê* of any member of the audience (or reader of the text), still it is not simply the case that the Chorus transmit that emotion directly to the audience in any straightforward way. Their embodied emotional reaction is based not only on what they see, but on what they know and what they think about it. So with the theatrical audience, or in a reader, an embodied emotional response will be primed and reinforced by what the Chorus say about their response (whether we see them say it or visualize them doing so), but we also know what they know, and Oedipus for us is much more than just a spectacle. Our emotions and those of the Chorus converge, elicited not just by the spectacle of Oedipus but by the entire structured narrative that that spectacle represents, by the totality of Oedipus' *pathos* as presented in the play.³⁸

38 See n. 25 above for references on 'critical prefocusing', and cf. Frank Brandsma's account of the function of 'mirror characters' in Brandsma 2006 (cf. Brandsma 2008).

5 Conclusion

Modern research suggests that our witnessing of emotional expressions, postures, and forms of behaviour in others can involve elements of mimicry and mirroring. But it also suggests that the processing of emotion words and concepts (including metaphorical constructions of such concepts),³⁹ as well as the processing of emotion-eliciting scenarios in verbal narrative, can also involve mimicry, mirroring, and similar embodied reactions. Mirroring of expressions, gestures, posture and so on, in whatever form it takes, seems to be possible both when we see the felt emotions of others and also when we merely imagine or think about them. Coplan's denial of this, with which we began this discussion, seems simply to be wrong; for what it is worth, our ancient practitioners and theorists agree that both visual and visualized or imagined stimuli can produce identical emotional responses. But expressing emotion and responding to the expression of emotion are such inherently meaningful, social activities that it is difficult to be sure how much of this is purely automatic; and if, on any level, some of it is, it is hard to believe that even that level of experience is not at least typically and probably always enmeshed in the multimodal processes, multidimensional scenarios, and interactive contexts in which human emotion takes place.

If we think about it, we all probably believe that the presence of others influences our emotions and we intuitively recognize the truth that face-to-face participation in a group can give rise to forms of emotional experience that feel at least to some extent and in some respects different from the emotional experiences that one has purely as an individual.⁴⁰ Emotional contagion, whatever precisely it may be, may play a role in this.⁴¹ But too little is currently known about that phenomenon for us to be able to build very much upon it in terms of our theories regarding audience and readers' emotional responses to visual and verbal narratives. As Hatfield et al. write (2014: 113):

Not surprisingly, since emotional contagion research is still in its infancy and of such popular interest, theorists are deeply divided about the details

39 For references on this point, see Cairns 2014: §4 and nn. 6–7.

40 See the essays in von Scheve and Salmela 2014, in particular the enactivist account of collective emotion as a form of extended cognition (or extended affectivity) by Slaby 2014. See also Krueger and Szanto 2016 (in general on extended affectivity) and 868–870 (on shared, collective, and socially distributed emotions in particular); cf. Krueger 2014; Carter et al. 2016; Colombetti and Roberts 2015; Colombetti 2017.

41 For an argument to that effect, see Hatfield et al. 2014.

of how the process of contagion might work. Among the things that remain unclear, for example, are how important such feedback [i.e. feedback from facial, vocal, and postural mimicry of others] is (is it necessary, sufficient, or merely a small part of emotional experience?), how specific the linkages are, and exactly how the physical expression and the emotion are linked ... Only subsequent research will answer these questions.

When we are dealing not just with complex and dynamic scenarios of everyday social interaction, but with highly structured fictional narratives or dramatic performances, it is unlikely that we shall be able to separate minimal and purely reflex forms of mirroring, sensorimotor resonance, embodied simulation, or emotional contagion from the much more complex ways in which embodied, acculturated, linguistically competent human beings make sense of others' behaviour, mental states, and emotions, *via* the deployment of such higher-level capacities as imagination and perspective-taking; inference, hypothesis, and interpretation; pattern-making and narrative construction.

At the same time, we should beware of the temptation to assume that mimetic phenomena such as mimicry and mirroring (whether at a neurophysiological or at a surface level) necessarily belong with or entail shared emotion in the sense of feeling what other people feel. We saw that Coplan distinguished sharply between automatic emotional contagion caused by direct visual stimuli and higher-order responses, dependent upon belief and imagination, such as empathy and sympathy. Coplan did concede that automatic and higher-order responses (both empathetic and sympathetic) can co-occur, but she nonetheless sought to keep them apart, attributing different ontologies and aetiologies. I have argued for a much more intimate association and a greater blurring of the boundaries between the reactions involved, whatever they may be, as aspects of a total, holistic response, all of which is influenced by knowledge of context and processing of narrative cues, both visual and verbal.⁴² But this does not mean that I think that such mimetic aspects of

42 In this chapter we have been dealing primarily with emotional responses to narrative, and so it is hardly surprising that it should be features of narrative, understood in fundamentally narratorial terms by audiences, that emerge as the prime elicitors of audience emotion. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that narrative understanding in fact proves central also to accounts—modern, such as Coplan's account of emotional contagion, as well as ancient, such as Aristotle on emotional *lexis*—that emphasize phenomena that might appear to lend themselves (on the one hand) to description in terms of contagion, mirroring, and simulation or (on the other) to explanations in terms of inference and theorization. This chimes with the narrative approach to social cognition and

emotional response as there may be are in any straightforward way conducive to 'empathy'.

Though Coplan sought to keep these elements apart, we saw that, in practice, she was attributing to her hypothetical automatic, mimetic reactions the kind of imaginative, inferential, belief-based content that many associate with empathy. But empathy is a very tricky concept. It has both scientific and popular senses, which overlap very imperfectly. And since there is no general agreement over the definition of either sense, but each is in its own ways both vague and elastic, the potential for equivocation is extremely high.⁴³ Observable phenomena, whether at the neural or at the surface level, do not necessarily tell us anything (yet) about the complex ways in which we understand others' actions or motives, and the ways (whatever they may be) in which others' emotions resonate in our brains, our faces, and our bodies do not in themselves prove that we can, in any very strong sense, feel what others feel. There are conceptual as well as ontological questions to be posed about the differences and similarities among such phenomena as mirroring and mimicry, imagining how another person might feel, imagining how one might oneself feel in another's situation, and sharing another's emotions.

It is not surprising that ancient sources give little or no evidence for the presence, in ancient audiences or readers, of the barely detectable micro-gestures that are characteristic of facial and bodily mimicry, or even for more readily visible forms of mirroring.⁴⁴ This does not mean that they did not occur.

other-understanding that has in recent years emerged to challenge both 'simulation theory' and 'theory theory' approaches (see Gallagher 2020, esp. part II; cf. Gallagher and Hutto 2008; Hutto 2008; 2011). One reason why we understand others' emotions in narrative terms may be that emotions—both others and our own—have an event-structure of their own that lends itself to such understanding (see Goldie 1999; 2012; Voss 2004: 181–224; Mendonça 2019: 679–684; cf. the trail-blazing work of Bruner 1986, 1991). In turn, one reason why we understand other people in narrative terms may be that these are the terms in which we make sense of our own experience in the world (see the essays in Fireman et al. 2003).

43 For what Rob Boddice calls empathy's 'remarkably unstable history' (Boddice 2018: 56), see Lanzoni 2018. Cf. Zahavi 2010; Coplan and Goldie 2011, xii–xxxi (and *passim* in the contributions to that volume, esp. Carroll, Goldie, McFee, and Morton). For a recent review, starting from the premise that 'The inconsistent definition of empathy has had a negative impact on both research and practice', see Cuff et al. 2016. For a much more positive account of the scope for empathy and identification in the experience of ancient audiences, see Ready 2023.

44 Hor. *AP* 101–103 (cited in n. 32 above) uses something like emotional mirroring as a basis for the *topos* that the poet must experience the emotions s/he wishes to arouse in the audience: *ut ridentibus adrident, ita flentibus adsunt / humani uoltus; si uis me flere, dolendum*

But ancient sources also typically make the emotions of poetic audiences third-person, observers' emotions. Where similarity of response is concerned, they are more interested in convergence of emotional response between internal and external audiences *qua* observers of the suffering of focal characters, even if there are occasionally elements of convergence between the emotional symptoms of focal characters and audiences or of performers and audiences. This seems to me to be a plausible picture of what consumers of verbal and visual narratives actually do experience. Coplan allows that facial mimicry and emotional contagion can co-exist with the third-person, sympathetic responses that feature typically in our ancient sources and it may indeed be that mirroring, mimicry, and emotional contagion do interact with the sympathetic emotions; but much work is needed on how this happens. It may be the case that there is no 'feeling for' without at least some kind of 'feeling with', but the cognitive and affective sciences are still a long way from telling us precisely what the mechanisms are that would support such a claim. And so the onus is on those of us who would apply contemporary affective science to contemporary audience experience (with a view, perhaps, to understanding the experiences of ancient audiences) to urge and perhaps even to help our colleagues in the relevant fields to devise not only the experimental methods, but also the right conceptual tools to characterize what it is that takes place when the emotional experiences portrayed and constructed in verbal and visual narratives give rise to emotions in their audiences.

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est / primum ipsi tibi. Sen. *De ira* 2.2.5 discusses similar phenomena in an account of the involuntary (in the Stoic sense) *motus animorum* that constitute *propatheiai* or *principia proludentia adfectibus: inde est quod adridemus ridentibus et contristat nos turba maerentium et effervescimus ad aliena certamina*. More remotely, [Arist.] *Probl.* 7.1–2 (886a25–35) and 6 (887a4) discuss contagious yawning.

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The Experience of Coincidence in Euripides' *Ion*

Jacqueline Klooster

1 Introduction: the Coincidence Plot

Coincidence is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a notable concurrence of events or circumstances having no apparent causal connexion'.¹ For the creators of narratives, coincidence is attractive, but it can also be a problematic category. It represents a type of situation everyone is familiar with in reality, but, mainly because of the lack of 'apparent causal connection', it risks appearing artificial or implausible when a narrative plot depends on it too much for its effect.² In this chapter I take a cognitive-humanities approach to the evaluation of coincidence in the *Ion* of Euripides. After first reviewing literary criticism's approach to coincidence plots, I ask if modern cognitive psychology can cast light on the use of coincidence by Euripides in this play. In other words, are representations of coincidences and their effects on characters and the audience in this ancient drama anchored in cognitive structures, and if so, how does that work?

2 The *Ion* as a Coincidence Play?

The traditional coincidence plot usually revolves around the loss and finding again of family members. Hilary Dannenberg defines it as follows in her 2008 book *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*:

- [It] consists of three main phases in terms of the story sequence:
- A. The previous relationship (prehistory);
 - B. The coincidental encounter (intersection) of the characters in the time and space of the narrative world;

¹ *OED* s.v. 4 'coincidence, n.'

² Cf. Richardson 1997; Ryan 2009: 56–75; Grener 2012: 322–342. For interesting considerations on the plots of ancient tragedies and New Comedy, and in particular how they invite audiences to 'think along' in coincidence plots and recognition schemes, see Lowe 2003: 157–222.

- C. A cognitive process involving the characters' recognition (discovery) of each other's identity.³

If we look at Euripides' *Ion*, it maps onto this scheme as follows:

- A. Prehistory: the prehistory consists of the fact that Creusa, an Athenian princess, has been raped by the god Apollo. She has exposed the child, and assumes he is dead. This, however, is not true: Apollo has had the child transported to his temple in Delphi, where the boy was brought up by the priestess to be a temple servant. Creusa is currently married to the non-Athenian Xuthus and they are childless (Prologue, reported by the god Hermes, 1–81).
- B. Intersection: The encounter between Creusa and Ion takes place in Delphi where Xuthus and Creusa have gone to inquire at the oracle of Apollo about their childlessness.
- C. Discovery: The recognition is not a straightforward process. In the first episode Ion and Creusa meet without recognizing each other (238–400). Afterwards Xuthus 'falsely' recognizes Ion as his son, because the oracle of Apollo has told him that 'the first he would meet upon exiting the temple would be his son' (534–536). When this story reaches Creusa, who is still traumatized by the rape and the loss of her child, she flies into a mad rage and decides to poison Ion. This is only just prevented by a stroke of luck (1187–1210). But now Ion is mad with rage and wants to kill Creusa. Only after the priestess who has brought up Ion arrives with tokens of his birth (from line 1320), do mother and son finally recognize each other. The recognition is then confirmed by the apparition of the goddess Athena, a *deus ex machina*. She prophesizes that Ion will reign over Athens and become founding father of the Ionians. Xuthus never learns the truth.

To better appreciate the dramatic effect of the *Ion* in its original performance circumstances, we need to take into account two things:

- 1) Euripides apparently invented the plot twist about Apollo as father. The myth was not known to his audience in this form, and so neither were the oracle, and the potentially failed recognitions between the characters.⁴
- 2) The audience is however made aware of the relations between Apollo, Creusa, Xuthus and Ion in the prologue by the god Hermes. They know from the very beginning what the family ties between the characters are. They learn that Apollo has planned a happy ending. They also know that Ion was destined to become founding father of the Ionians.

³ Dannenberg 2008: 94–95.

⁴ See e.g. Lee 1997: 1–5; Martin 2018: 10–11. On the relationship between Ion and Apollo, see the chapter by Anne-Sophie Noel in this volume.

This means that Euripides deliberately created an outrageous coincidence plot. It also means that the suspense occurs at the moments when things are seemingly starting to go differently from what the god in the prologue has told the audience: Creusa flies into a rage over the fact that, as she assumes, a bastard son of Xuthus is going to be foisted upon her by Apollo, and she wishes to kill Ion.⁵ Ion's reaction to Creusa's attempt on his life then continues this suspense, and it is only the entrance of the priestess with the tokens of Ion's birth that resolves the recognition.

The remarkable amount of 'false turns' in this play seem to be meant to keep the audience in a state of perplexity on a par to that of the ignorant characters in the play, although of course focused on different uncertainties. The audience knows things are supposed to end well since the eponymous Ion was to become ruler over the Ionians. It also knows the truth about the characters' relations because Hermes has revealed this in the prologue. But they are kept in uncertainty as to how exactly things will play out.⁶

The characters, on the other hand, only know partial truths at best about their present relations, and have no inkling of what the future may bring. An ironic place on the scale from ignorance to knowledge is reserved for the god Apollo. He is absent as a character, but referred to throughout by the other characters as a sort of 'known unknown'. Apollo should know everything, being the god of prophecy. Besides, he has all the factual information as to how and why Ion's engendering came about, because he is responsible. But apparently he is ignorant about how human characters think and feel. They seem to be as unpredictable to him as he is to them.⁷ This leads to a strong interplay in the drama between divine and human agency, where coincidence may occur despite providence.⁸

For all these reasons *Ion* is a complex and intriguing play, which has elicited widely varying critical evaluations. Many scholars have called it a *tyche* [*tukhê*] play.⁹ And indeed, as I have just shown, the plot conforms to the modern definition of a coincidence plot.

5 It is useful to note that the first oracle to Xuthus (by Trophonius) had in fact said that Creusa would not go childless from Delphi either (409). Creusa forgets this when she learns about the oracle proclaiming Ion to be Xuthus' son, because the information does not square with the previous oracle: she and Xuthus share no children she has borne.

6 Burnett 1971 named the, *Ion* a 'play of mixed reversals'; see further Martin 2018: 6. Another important recent study of the *Ion* which has informed this chapter is Swift 2008, in particular ch 3.

7 See Martin 2018: 8–10.

8 Giannopoulou 1999–2000.

9 Bartosiewiczova 1979: 31–39; Giannopoulou 1999–2000: 162. Swift 2008: 36–50 and Lefkowitz 2016: 100–127 focus more on the moral dimension of religion in this play, not so much on *tyche*.

But of course what the human protagonists call *tyche* in the sense of ‘chance’ or ‘random luck’, is, in the Greek religious context, not what they think it is, if in the background divine powers are operating.¹⁰ Other critics have therefore stressed that if the *Ion* is to be called a ‘*tyche* play’, then it is only *tyche* on the level of the human protagonists. If a god has raped Creusa, taken away the baby and planned the eventual reunion of Creusa and Ion with an ulterior motive (viz. ‘Ion must rule Athens’), then as some critics would argue, we are dealing in all the above instances with *divine providence* rather than with coincidence, as the unusually happy ending of this tragedy proves.¹¹ It is only the ignorance of the human protagonists that makes events look like *tyche*.¹²

However, as still other critics argue, this view too needs some nuance. The play clearly contains elements that undercut the idea that the gods determine and plan everything perfectly, and thus it seems subtly to undermine the notion of ‘fate/providence’. Most importantly, as noted, the divine prophet Apollo lacks all psychological insight or empathy, which evidently disables his prediction of how the human actors in his plan will react. He does not foresee that Creusa’s trauma (caused by his rape of her, and her loss of the baby) will engender a murderous rage in her towards Ion, nor what kind of reaction this in turn will cause in Ion.¹³ In fact, it suspiciously looks like last-minute re-scheduling on Apollo’s part (or even just coincidence) when an unfortunate pigeon accidentally drinks Creusa’s poisonous draught which was meant for Ion. We as audience are left to wonder: was this just an unlucky pigeon (coincidence) or was it sent by Apollo (divine intervention, providence)? The messenger who recounts the story (at lines 1187–1208) does not state that the pigeon was divinely sent, but of course, he is only a human.

Apparent last-minute re-scheduling on the part of Apollo is even clearer when finally at line 1320 the Pythia enters with the tokens identifying Ion and Creusa as mother and son. This even leads Ion to ask suspiciously why she had never shown these objects before (1337–1353), alerting the audience to the suddenness of the intervention. The Pythia’s answer that Apollo *now* wishes it that way, while before he did not (1353) also seems strangely gratuitous.

10 On the theme of fate, luck, and chance and their interrelations, see Eidinow 2011 and Lüthy and Palmerino 2016: 9–44. On the *Ion* see in particular Conacher 1959: 20–39; Burnett 1962: 89–103; Forehand 1972: 74–187; Giannopoulou 1999–2000: 257–271 on this theme.

11 Wassermann 1940; Burnett 1971; Martin 2018.

12 I note in passing that it is theoretically possible to read the play, with the infamous rationalist critic Verrall 1895, as purely making fun of superstitious humans, i.e. as not accepting the gods as real, although it is not clear that much is gained from such a reading.

13 See Giannopoulou 1999–2000: 257–271.

When instead of Apollo Athena finally arrives to clarify things to the humans, she actually says that Apollo would not come, because he did not want to be blamed by the humans (1557–1558). We are led to surmise that Apollo must at this point have become aware of some flaws in the execution of his divine plan, and be feeling slightly uneasy.

As Giannopoulou implies, the real question Euripides thus actually poses is: what *are* we dealing with in the *Ion*, is it providence or coincidence, or perhaps a mixture of both, an '... imprecisely determined interaction of divine agency, free will and chance' (1999–2000: 265)?

In the rest of this chapter, I will ask the following: if we set aside the religiously and culturally determined elements such as Apollo and the distinction between divine providence and coincidence, are we then able to understand the audience's reactions to the plot structure with the help of literary criticism and neuropsychology? And, in addition, can cognitive neuropsychology also help us understand how and why the characters react to the events in the play? We begin with literary criticism.

3 Literary Criticism and Coincidence

3.1 *Aristotle, Coincidence, and the Oedipus Tyrannus*

Ever since Aristotle's *Poetics*, the representation of coincidence in narrative and dramatic fiction has been on the agenda of critics. Aristotle's basic stance—to summarize somewhat irresponsibly—is that coincidence is not a plot device to be relied on too heavily, because it weakens the plausibility of the plot and disturbs the illusion of the audience by calling attention to the artifices of the author,¹⁴ when for instance in a recognition scene, as he puts it, 'a character says something not because he wants to say it, but the author wants it.'¹⁵ In other words, events must be firmly and plausibly motivated within the visible causal logic of the play, Aristotle holds, so that a consistent and plausible drama can be created, with the desired effect of a catharsis through (or: of) fear and pity. This also implies that the author should not revert too easily to divine agents for the solution of the play (*deus ex machina*). Each event must follow logically *because* it is caused (even unexpectedly so) by a prior event known to the audience.¹⁶ Interestingly, however, a plausible or successful play

14 See e.g. O'Sullivan 1995: 47–63; Frede 1992: 206.

15 Arist. *Po.* 1454b35.

16 Ideally, events in drama should unfold *παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα* (1452a4) 'against the expectation, (but) because of one another'.

in Aristotle's view can apparently also be what modern critics like Dannenberg would call a 'coincidence play'. That is to say, a play determined precisely by the co-occurrence of two or more (seemingly) unrelated events, of which one was *not* previously known to the audience. The best example is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which Aristotle praises highly.

In this earlier play by Sophocles, which in some ways reads like a negative image of the *Ion*, King Oedipus of Thebes gradually finds out that he has unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. Many of the events in the play which lead up to this final discovery have a strangely coincidental character. One is the fact that Oedipus' presumed father, King Polybus of Corinth just happened to die at the time when the plague in Thebes forces Oedipus to find out who killed king Laius, his true father. Another is the fact that the Corinthian messenger who tells Oedipus that king Polybus is dead, also happens to be the herdsman who once took up the exposed Oedipus as a baby. Finally, the Theban herdsman who originally gave baby Oedipus to this herdsman/Corinthian messenger, happens to be the same man who saw Oedipus kill his father Laius at the crossroads years ago (*and* he is conveniently still alive to tell the story). Are all these coincidences somehow part of the divine plan to destroy Oedipus, i.e. to not only make him commit unwitting crimes, but also make him aware of them? We can only say that the coincidences are never explicitly pointed out in this sense in the text of the play, or indeed, remarked upon by Aristotle.¹⁷

That Oedipus has happened to meet and kill a man who turns out to have been his own father and the Theban King, and has happened also to marry the Theban Queen, who turns out to be his own mother, all of this *unwittingly*, is of course the greatest and most monstrous coincidence of them all. However, in the world-view of the play, we are asked explicitly to understand this as an expression of Oedipus' divinely determined destiny, not as random coincidence; it is a given. The fact that there is no explanation of *why* this is his fate, other than that the oracle of Apollo had predicted it, nevertheless makes it feel terrifyingly random and cruel.

Whereas in the *Ion* human ignorance and coincidences finally lead to a providential and happy ending (Ion's future rule over the Ionians) and the averting of disaster through a recognition of kinship, they lead to the incomprehensible if divinely motivated utter undoing of the protagonist in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, once he recognizes his true kinship relations. Oedipus is so devastated when he finds out the truth about his identity and his past actions, that

17 See on this point in particular Dawe 2006: 1–22.

he blinds himself, and goes into exile. His mother/wife Iocasta hangs herself. In both plays, the god in the background, apparently determining the fates of the protagonists in inscrutable ways, is Apollo.

3.2 *Modern Discussions of Coincidence Plots*

To return to the question of coincidence plots, broadly speaking, modern critics agree with Aristotle that coincidence can easily become a 'cheap plot trick', as Ryan (2009: 56–73) calls it. Like Aristotle, she feels that it points too openly at the hand of the author in the plot and thus disturbs the immersion of the reader in the fiction. However, in modern literature we find the same apparent paradox as was just mentioned with regard to the admired *Oedipus Tyrannus*: there are many successful coincidence plots (e.g. in 19th-century novels), even if 'coincidence' is apparently considered a cheap trick that disturbs our immersion in the fictive world of the narrative or drama. This makes us wonder: where is the pay-off for audiences and readers?

Dannenberg argues that a number of mechanisms provide an answer. Paradoxically, immersion is actually one of them: if the emotional and cognitive appeal to the reader or spectator is engaging enough, (s)he vicariously experiences the emotions and cognitive processes of the protagonist. This means (s)he will not be inclined to ask meta-narrative questions about the way the plot has been formed by the author. Dannenberg posits that, in particular, kinship ties between a parent and a child have the power to effectuate this, because of their primal emotional appeal. The parent-child emotional schema is so universally appealing that it bolsters our belief in the narrative world. It causes us to (willingly) overlook breaches in the illusion caused by the implausibility of coincidences. In the *Ion*, this would mean we empathize with the motherless Ion and the childless Creusa. We want them to reunite and we therefore easily accept the remarkable divine/coincidental way in which they are brought together in the tragedy ('willing suspension of disbelief').

Suspense is a somewhat similar mechanism of appeal to our emotions that can help us to accept coincidences, according to Dannenberg. Audiences can be made curious and emotionally involved in what will happen next through a number of suspense-enhancing mechanisms besides the appeal to primal kinship ties. In coincidence plots this boils down to the eagerness to learn *whether* the protagonists will recognize each other, *how and when* they will do so, and sometimes also *what the effect* of the recognition will be.¹⁸ These questions likewise help override our possible irritation at breaches of plausibility. This

18 Compare Aristotle's typologies of recognitions and the kind of suspense they cause (*Po.* 1453b–1454a), see on this in particular Ferrari 1999: 181–198.

type of suspense can be skilfully manipulated by the author, as we have seen in the *Ion*, which features one delayed recognition, one false recognition and two near fatalities between a mother and a son before the actual recognition takes place. Indeed, the suspense seems to be hinted at by the god Hermes in the prologue (76–77): ‘But I will go to this cave of laurels, so that I may learn what is fated for the child ...’.

As the application to the *Ion* shows, such narrative mechanisms go a long way towards explaining what happens to the audience of the drama and of coincidence plots in general. Yet, the very centrality of the theme of coincidence in *Ion* makes one wonder if and how this fictional representation of coincidences can be linked more closely to the *actual psychological and neuro-cognitive experience* of coincidence in real life: how do we react to actual coincidences cognitively, how do we assess and process them? Hilary Dannenberg does not consider these questions in depth because, as noted, she focuses rather on the *emotions* of kinship recognition and the *suspense* created by pending recognition scenes.¹⁹ This means that she downplays the importance of perception or assessment of the actual coincidences themselves. But if coincidence and the experience of coincidence as a sense-making mechanism are at the center of a drama, as is the case with the *Ion*, we might wonder whether such downplaying is warranted.

4 Cognitive Psychological Approaches to Coincidence

This is where neuropsychological theory comes in. The psychology of experiencing coincidence has been studied by a number of scientists, on the basis of various approaches to cognition and the brain. The basic assumption, that the experience of coincidence is linked to the way in which the brain learns (by the association of co-occurring events) seems to be broadly uncontested.²⁰ But the assessment of why and how some people are more prone to attributing a metaphysical significance to the random co-occurrence of events (coincidence) is still a matter of debate.²¹ This latter question is not what I will be

19 The literature she quotes on the psychological experience of coincidence does not extend beyond 1967, and boils down to the statement that there is an inherent interest for humans in coincidence (2008: 91–93).

20 See Vyse 2013: 73–81.

21 See e.g. van Elk 2016: 171–185; Vyse 2013: 73–111; Rogers et al. 2011: 692–702; Svedholm et al. 2010: 252–265.

looking into; I will rather ask how audiences can be made to accept coincidences in plots without feeling they are implausible.

In the following discussion I will first set out the common opinion about how and why the brain reacts to coincidences on the basis of the account of Vyse. I will then propose that we can understand why the coincidences in the *Ion* work as a plot device by following the lead of the behavioural psychologist Fisk (1996; 2002; 2004), who builds on the findings by Tversky and Kahneman. They propose that we can understand the human experience of two co-occurring events as more or less surprising by means of the so-called conjunction fallacy.

In his 2013 book *Believing in Magic: The psychology of superstition*, Vyse explains the human tendency to attribute meaning to the co-occurrence of two unconnected events as a by-product of the way the human brain learns, namely through association and conditioning. The basic principle, as originally demonstrated by Pavlov in his famous experiments, is that when two independent things (the ringing of a bell, the giving of food) are made to coincide a number of times, the brain will be conditioned to assume they are connected. After the ringing of the bell had been accompanied by feeding a number of times, the dogs in Pavlov's experiment began salivating whenever they heard the bell ring, even if no food was given to them.

Building on Pavlov's findings, Skinner used the principle of conditioning to explain the existence of superstition in his famous pigeon experiment (1948). Pigeons were kept in a box in which food was dispensed at regular times (every 15 seconds). Skinner observed that the pigeons tended to repeat the random actions they had been engaging in at the particular moment when food was first dispensed (bobbing of the head, walking in circles, making sounds) from that moment on, because they had apparently learnt to connect those behaviours with the dispensing of food, and seemed to 'hope' that their actions would bring about the dispensing of more food.

These animal experiments lead psychologists to infer that co-incidence (the happening together of two random events) acts on the brain as a powerful stimulus to construe a meaningful connection (cause—effect). It thus allegedly helps to understand the origins of superstition and by extension, of ritual and religion. Indeed, it may even go some way towards explaining why a society such as that of the Greeks saw the hand of the gods in events like the ones recounted in the plot of the *Ion* (a separated mother and son fortuitously reunited). These behavioural experiments may thus account for some of the basic religious background which informs the Greek belief in fate and the gods, and which makes it plausible for humans in general to think that meaningful, providential coincidence can exist.

But perhaps the question of what keeps the series of coincidences in the plot of the *Ion* palatable for an audience is a different one. What is it that makes coincidence plots so popular despite the ancient and modern recognition that coincidence is often a ‘cheap plot trick’? To give a possible answer to this question, I now turn to Tversky and Kahneman and their theory of the so-called ‘conjunction fallacy’ (1982), which attempts to explain how people react to the co-occurrence of two causally unrelated events. Their estimation of the likelihood of such co-occurrences is usually wrong in strictly probabilistic terms, as experiments have demonstrated. To explain why this happens, Tversky and Kahneman argue:

Conjunction biases usually arise when the co-occurrence of a representative (likely) plus unrepresentative (unlikely) event is deemed more consistent with one’s worldview than the occurrence of the unrepresentative (unlikely) event alone. Thus it is usually only the representative component which distorts conjunction estimates and generally, the more representative a component is, the stronger is the conjunction fallacy.²²

This theory has been criticized by Fisk (1996; 2002; 2004), who proposes that we should take into account not only the likelihood, but also the potential surprise value (PSV) of the co-occurring events. Fisk uses the psychological theory of ‘anchoring’, originally proposed by Tversky and Kahneman (see e.g. Kahneman 2011) to explain how this works:

Consider the co-occurrence of one *unsurprising* and one *surprising* event. Since the unsurprising component has little if any PSV, it is effectively redundant in determining the PSV—hence the subjective probability—of the conjunction; only the surprising component has an impact. This is true even if both components seem highly surprising. In most instances the more surprising component serves as an anchor upon which conjunctive probabilities are based. Generally, if the non-anchoring component is deemed un-surprising (i.e. is assigned a (near) zero PSV), an unlikely/likely combination ensues and the conjunction is assigned a PSV slightly *lower* than that of the anchor. Likewise, if the non-anchoring component is deemed surprising (i.e. is assigned a relatively high PSV) the ensuing unlikely/unlikely combination usually results in the

22 Tversky and Kahneman 1983: 293–315, as quoted from Rogers et al. 2011: 693.

conjunction being assigned a PSV which is again, slightly *lower* than that of the anchor.²³

In other words, if two events occur, and one is surprising but the other is not, we will think of them together as less surprising than the occurrence of the surprising event alone. For example, you might be listening to a favourite song from your past, which happens to be playing on the radio (relatively unsurprising), and suddenly a long lost friend from that same period calls you (surprising). In Fisk's view the two taken together are awarded a lesser PSV than only the surprising fact that you are called out of the blue by your long lost friend.

Moreover, if two surprising events occur together, we will also evaluate the co-occurrence as less surprising than if only one of the single surprising events occurred, e.g. you suddenly read in the newspaper about your long lost friend (surprising) and at that moment you look up and she is suddenly sitting at the café table next to you (also surprising). Apparently, the co-occurrence of these two events gets attributed a lower surprise value than either one of them occurring alone.

Finally, Fisk also proposes that if two extremely unexpected things are co-occurring (e.g., getting hit by lightning and winning the lottery on the same day), there is *no* lowering of the PSV, indeed, the combination of events gets attributed a slightly *higher* PSV than the events would separately receive.²⁴

Might this theory provide a part of the key to the acceptance of coincidence plots? In the following I will use the *Ion* as a case study.

5 Potential Surprise Value of Events in the *Ion* for the Audience

The plot of the *Ion* is made up of a series of events, some of which coincide without apparent causal connection, while others are very clearly causally connected. Schematically this could be represented as follows:

- 1) Creusa has a lost son by Apollo, whom she believes to be dead
This coincides with the fact that
- 2) Creusa and Xuthus have no children
This in turn leads to the fact that

²³ Quoted from Rogers et al. 2011: 692–693.

²⁴ See the explanation in Rogers et al. 2011: 695.

- 3) Creusa and Xuthus go to Delphi to inquire about children
This coincides with/leads to the fact that
- 4) In Delphi, they meet (the still nameless) Ion, Creusa's lost son, who is a temple servant there.
(They could also not have met Ion: surprising turn)

As Hermes had explained to the audience in the prologue (and which hence does not come as a complete surprise):

- 5) The nameless boy is identified in an oracle to Xuthus as his son. The etymology which underpins the identification points to coincidence as such: 'the one you will happen to meet when you exit the temple [*exionti*, 535]'.²⁵

This divine intervention, which the audience had been led to expect then surprisingly and coincidentally leads to the fact that

- 6) Creusa is so hurt she plans to murder Ion with poison she happens to carry

(Coincidence/surprising turn: the chorus could also not have been present when Xuthus came out of the temple to overhear the events; Creusa could also not have carried poison; Creusa's old attendant could also have stopped her from planning the murder, but instead incited her.)

But, surprisingly, coincidentally

- 7) The table attendant accidentally (?) speaks a blasphemy; the poisoned cup is emptied on the floor, and a pigeon dies

(Coincidence/providence/surprise: there could also not have been a blasphemy, or no pigeon present)

This leads to the fact that

- 8) Ion finds out about the murder plot

This leads to the fact that

- 9) Ion wants to kill Creusa

Then, coincidentally/providentially

- 10) The Pythia arrives with tokens

(She could also have been elsewhere; she could also have shown the tokens to Ion before)

This leads to the fact that

25 What makes this etymology surprising is the apparent transfer of the agency of 'going' inherent in the verb behind the name (Ion) to the boy (instead of the 'father', Xuthus), as Sluiter (2015: 912) remarks.

- 11) Creusa recognizes Ion
This leads to the fact that
- 12) Ion recognizes/accepts Creusa as his mother
- 13) Athena arrives and explains.

Set out like this, it looks as if there are three main junctures at which coincidences take place: the first coincidence is made up of 1-2-3-4. The two points that are seemingly unconnected, but brought together to great dramatic effect, are the childlessness of Xuthus and Creusa (which remains unexplained in the play) and the presence of Ion in Delphi (explained in the prologue, and hence expected). If we would want to complain about 'cheap plots tricks', we could say that the childlessness, if not entirely surprising or unexpected in the sense that it is a plausible natural occurrence, is very obviously an invention by Euripides to make Xuthus and Creusa go to Delphi and cross paths with Ion.²⁶

The second coincidental nexus happens at 5-6-7-8-9, where first Creusa is accidentally made aware of Xuthus' 'recognition' of Ion because the chorus happened to overhear (this is very clearly not part of the divine plan). She then decides, spurred on by her old attendant, to kill Ion, and she just happens to be carrying lethal poison (surprising, because the audience is not prepared for this).

Also quite unexpectedly, Creusa's murderous plan becomes clear to Ion, because some of the poison is accidentally thrown on the ground because the cupbearer blasphemed, and a pigeon drinks it and dies on the spot. Here the two co-occurring events are the unexpected throwing away of the libation because someone uttered a blasphemy and the presence of the pigeon that drinks from it and, surprisingly, dies. Again, the 'cheap plot tricks' seem to reside in the introduction of the 'unexpected' elements such as the fact that Creusa carries poison; the throwing away of the poisoned wine; and the unfortunate pigeon.²⁷

This leads to the final hub of coincidences, which happen in 10-11-12: Ion wishes to attack the woman who has plotted to murder him (which is fully understandable and hence 'expected', if very suspenseful because of his unawareness of her true identity). The arrival of the Pythia with the tokens on

26 The more so since Xuthus was normally considered the father of Ion, see. e.g. Martin 2018: 1-10.

27 Note however the emphatic bird motif introduced in Ion's first song, which in a sense prepares the audience for this event: 106-107; 154-180.

the other hand is entirely unexpected and very surprising, especially since she has not previously appeared on the stage, and the audience was not prepared in that sense. We may note however, that she has been named before by Ion as his foster mother (321), and hence we see that Euripides was preparing for her arrival. Nevertheless, her arrival feels almost like a doubling of the *deus ex machina*, later embodied by Athena.

If we look at these major coincidental turns in the play, it is obvious what possible explanation a pious believer in the gods or fate and their benevolence could have said about them: the good ones were all *meant to* coincide or happen, in order for the plot to end well; we are dealing with providence. In 1, the childlessness of Creusa and Ion was no coincidence, but was fated, in order for Ion to be able to become the uncontested heir of Athens' rule. The throwing away of the poisoned libation and the presence of a pigeon who drank the poison from the ground can also be interpreted in the same way, i.e. as divine intervention, to prevent the death of Ion.²⁸ Finally, the Pythia's arrival is explicitly motivated by divine intervention, both to prevent Ion's murder of his mother and to reveal his true identity to him. This interpretation is a culturally specific solution to the riddle of how an audience can be made to accept the coincidences in the plot: they fit in a world-view that sees the hands of the gods and fate behind all unexpected and otherwise inexplicable events. We are of course left with the tell-tale chorus and the murderous poison carried by Creusa; these may be considered 'human agency', as was remarked by Giannopoulou.

But what happens if we look at events through the lens of the 'anchoring' of their potential surprise value in the terms of Fisk, Tversky and Kahneman? Does this help at all to get a handle on the acceptability of the coincidences in the play? In the first case (1-2-3-4), we might argue that the surprise value of Xuthus and Creusa's trip to Delphi (because of their unexplained childlessness) is higher (for the original audience) than that of the fact that Ion is in Delphi (because Apollo has put him there, as the audience knows thanks to the prologue). The PSV of their going to Delphi *and* meeting Ion would then be mitigated (and perhaps thus be made acceptable) by the lesser PSV of Ion being in Delphi, if we follow Fisk. Indeed, this co-occurrence might be considered less surprising than their childlessness alone, because it is anchored in what the audience has already been told about Ion and his presence in Delphi.

In the second composite case, the telling of the story to Creusa by the chorus leads to her murderous plan, which happens to be feasible thanks to her

28 A similar reasoning can be applied to the strange coincidences in Sophocles *OT*, discussed above.

carrying of poison. The first event (the message of the chorus) is not surprising; the second is. That the one leads to the other feels more or less 'natural', if unexpected. Next, in the co-incidence of Creusa's murder plot with the throwing away of the poisoned drink and the death of the unfortunate pigeon, the spilling of the drink and subsequent death of the pigeon is clearly the more surprising and unexpected, or even unlikely element. Note however, that the presence of the pigeons is implicitly accounted for or prepared by the text (Ion's song in 106–107; 154–180 mentions the annoying flocks of birds at the temple of Apollo, which he tries to shoo away, in vain). Again, the combination of the 'expected' with the 'unexpected' event should, following Fisk, result in the lower PSV of the conjunction of the two events.

In the last instance, the same logic would make the arrival of the Pythia with the tokens of Ion's birth just at the moment when he is about to murder the woman he does not know to be his mother, less surprising than if she just happened to come on stage for the first time without anything else happening at the same time.

6 The Experience of Coincidence by the Characters

Thus far, we have been investigating the possible effect of the coincidences in the plot on the audience. However, as has already been set out, the theme of coincidence is also thematized in the play on the level of the reactions of the characters to the unexpected turns of fate/coincidences they encounter. This is what I want to look at briefly to conclude.

When Xuthus has just explained that Apollo has told him that 'the one he should meet by chance when exiting the temple, is your son', (534–535) Ion asks: 'So where did that *tyche*/coincidence come from?' (539) If we try to understand this in terms of PSV, we might say that to Ion it feels like a great coincidence that he has just been speaking about his unknown parentage to Creusa (308–329), and that now it is announced that he is Xuthus' son (cf. 530). The latter of these two occurrences clearly has the greatest PSV. For Xuthus, things are different: for him the fact that he came to *ask about* a child and the announcement that he *has* a child coincide in such a way that he is pleased. The announcement that Ion (the boy he meets exiting the temple) is his son is not a true surprise to him, or at least, any possible surprise is mitigated by the fact that a) he was asking the god for a son, and was answered that he would find one on exiting the temple b) has in the past indulged in actions that could have led to the fathering of a son, as he explains to Ion (545–555). He thus accepts 'coincidence/providence', backed up by the god in some elusive way, as

a sufficient explanation for his finding a son he assumes he has once inadvertently fathered on a previous visit to Delphi, even if he cannot recall the precise details. *Tyche* is 'divine luck' to him.

Ion

Where did this *tyche* come from?

Xuthus

The two of us marvel at the one event.

Ion

Ah! But who is my mother?

Xuthus

That I cannot say.

Ion

Phoebus did not tell you?

Xuthus

I was pleased at this and did not ask him that.

Ion

Then I was born from mother earth.

Xuthus

The earth bears no children.

Ion

Well, how could I be yours?

Xuthus

I do not know; I refer it to the god.

Ἴων

ἢ τύχη πόθεν ποθ' ἦκει;

Ξοῦθος

δύο μίαν θαυμάζομεν.

Ἴων

ἔα. τίνος δέ σοι πέφυκα μητρός;

Ξοῦθος

οὐκ ἔχω φράσαι.

Ἴων

οὐδὲ Φοῖβος εἶπε;

Ξοῦθος

τερφθεῖς τοῦτο, κεῖν' οὐκ ἠρόμην.

Ἴων

γῆς ἄρ' ἐκπέφυκα μητρός.

Ξοῦθος

οὐ πέδον τίκτει τέκνα.

Ἴων

πῶς ἂν οὖν εἶην σός;

Ξοῦθος

οὐκ οἶδ', ἀναφέρω δ' ἐς τὸν θεόν. (*Ion* 539–543, tr. Potter)

In the final scene, when the recognition has just taken place, Creusa similarly states that she cannot understand where her sudden good luck has come from:

Creusa

Oh, oh, wide expanse of the bright sky, what shall I say, what shall I cry aloud? From where did this unexpected pleasure come to me? Where have I found this joy?

Κρέουσα

ὦ ὦ, λαμπρᾶς αἰθέρος ἀμπυχαί,

τίν' αὐδ' ἄν ἄύσω,

βοάσω; πόθεν μοι

συνέκυρσ' ἀδόκητος ἡδονά; πόθεν

ἐλάβομεν χαράν; (*Ion* 1445–1449, tr. Potter)

Here the incidents combined are more complex, because the identification of Ion as her lost son is only the last in a complex series of events, which we might schematize as follows:

- 1) Creusa has lost her child by Apollo
- 2) She is childless in her marriage
- 3) Xuthus is told he is not childless
- 4) Creusa has tried to kill Xuthus' (presumed) son
- 5) The presumed son of Xuthus has tried to kill her
- 6) The presumed son of Xuthus is revealed to be her own son by Apollo.

Perhaps it would be simplest to say that all events up to 5 count as one composite series of events with high, and indeed ever increasing PSV, but the revelation in 6 tops all this by far. As we have seen, Fisk states that if two extremely unexpected things are combined, there is no lowering of the PSV, indeed, they get attributed a slightly *higher* PSV than the separate events would receive. This, indeed, is what appears to be happening here.

7 Conclusion

The *Ion* is a complex and grandiose play, which puts center-stage the question: 'Is coincidence a human experience, or a divine plan, or perhaps both—and

how do we make sense of it?' Intriguingly, it does so not only by showing the impact of surprising and unexpected events on the characters, but also by eliciting the surprise of the audience and testing the limits of their acceptance of the story through a great many clever artificial plot twists. Rather than minimizing this element of the play by only focusing on the emotional impact or on the suspense created by recognition scenes, we should also pay attention to the fact that Euripides has deliberately put the experience of coincidence at the center of the play. How do his characters react to the coincidences with which they are confronted? And why does the audience accept the coincidences introduced into the plot? Approaching the play with cognitive approaches such as Tversky and Kahneman's conjunction fallacy-theory and Fisk's theory about the importance of anchoring in the case of divergent PSVs might provide an answer to these questions, as proposed here. It can moreover perhaps help us appreciate better how well Euripides calibrated his plots to the cognitive processes in the human brain, of which he seems to have been intuitively aware.

Besides, as posited, this approach may fill in one of the gaps in explaining why coincidence plays in general, although generally acknowledged to be potentially problematic by literary critics from Aristotle through to Dannenberg and Ryan, are still so extremely popular. If two unforeseen events with unequal surprise values are presented as co-occurring, then the audience will anchor their surprise in the element with lower PSV and will accept the surprise more easily than if it had occurred alone.

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Finding Orestes: Oracles and Abductive Reasoning

Michiel van Veldhuizen

1 Introduction

In Book 1 of the *Histories*, Herodotus relates the Spartan mission to establish hegemony over the Peloponnese during the sixth century BCE (Hdt. 1.65–69). After a series of setbacks in the war against the Arcadian city of Tegea, the Spartans send a delegation to Apollo's Oracle at Delphi to ask which god they should propitiate in order to ensure them victory.¹ Apollo's priestess, the Pythia, tells the Spartans they will be victorious if they bring home the bones of Agamemnon's son Orestes. The Spartans launch a searching expedition but are unable to discover the tomb of Orestes. Once again they send for Delphi, asking the Oracle where the bones are buried. The Pythia responds with six lines of hexameter poetry that sound like a riddle: Orestes lies in Tegea, 'where under strong constraint two winds are blowing; smiting is there and counter-smiting, and woe on woe' (ἐνθ' ἀνεμοὶ πνείουσιν δῶω κρατερῆς ὑπ' ἀνάρχῃς, / καὶ τύπος ἀντιτύπῳ, καὶ πῆμ' ἐπὶ πῆματι κείται, Hdt. 1.67.4).² Herodotus then narrates in great detail how Lichas, one of the elite Spartan servicemen known as the *Agathoergoi*, managed to interpret the oracle correctly, piecing together the lines one by one. Happening upon a smithy, Lichas connects the 'two winds' to the blacksmith's bellows, the 'smiting' and 'counter-smiting' to the hammer and anvil, and the 'woe on woe' to the discovery of iron. He reports his findings to Sparta and, with a trick, eventually secures the bones of Orestes for the Spartan cause.

Scholarly engagements with this passage have typically focused on the historical practice of establishing hero cults through repatriating bones, or on the Spartan civic structure that apparently is equipped to manage the oracle's ambiguity while, in Herodotus's framing, Croesus's autocratic regime is not.³

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- 1 The ascendancy of the Spartans, which in Herodotus's narrative is embedded in the ascendancy of the Lydian king Croesus, is marked by their respective success and failure at interpreting oracles. Written with a capital letter, 'Oracle' refers to the institution and shrine of Apollo at Delphi; written with a lower-case, 'oracle' refers to the oracular pronouncement made by the Oracle.
 - 2 All translations of Herodotus are taken from De Selincourt and Marincola 1996, unless mentioned otherwise.
 - 3 Most recently, Fragkaki 2016. See also Barker 2006 and the seminal study by Boedeker 1993.

Yet I propose a cognitive approach, focusing on one salient feature of Herodotus's detective story that stands out most of all: the 'strikingly elaborate' description and 'point-by-point breakdown' of Lichas's thought process in deciphering the oracle.⁴ Herodotus offers a rare glimpse into the workings of an ancient mind, and the fact that this is the first oracle in the *Histories* that is interpreted correctly heightens its significance. As I shall demonstrate, Lichas's sleuthing is not only a classic example of the power of observation through signs; it also sheds new light on an old question: what is the logic, or the 'type of rationality', expressed in the divinatory procedure?⁵ What I am advocating in this chapter is a connection between cognition and semiotics as a way to come to terms with the logical procedures that are involved in making sense of an environment that is abundant with signs. The oracular signs that aid Lichas's mission to find a real-world object (the bones of Orestes) form an integral part of abduction, a process of inferential reasoning described and developed by the semiotician C.S. Peirce (1839–1914). One way, then, to study the psychology of the ancient world is to see how Herodotus's narrative presents Lichas's mind in action, thus revealing the interplay between abductive reasoning and oracular divination.

The study of ancient divination—and oracular divination in particular—is increasingly drawing on insights from psychology and the cognitive sciences to make sense of the divinatory procedure, and understand how the system works. Studies of divination, broadly understood as the observation and interpretation of divine signs,⁶ have long grappled with the question of the mental state of the diviners and their clients.⁷ Traditional social-historical analyses have often been dismissive of the Pythia and her clients, expressing disbelief at the gullibility of either party.⁸ But as Peter Struck has rightly argued, such

4 These descriptions are found in Kindt 2003: 106 and Hollmann 2011: 35, respectively.

5 Vernant 1991: 303–304. The importance of Vernant's 1974 volume for the study of divination is stressed by Johnston 2008, 17–27, and again by Johnston and Struck 2005: 1–25.

6 Consider, for example, the definition of divination given by the Stoic Chrysippus: 'The science of observing and explaining signs given to humans by the gods' (ἐπιστήμη ... θεωρητική καὶ ἐξηγητική τῶν ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀνθρώποις διδομένων σημείων, Chrysipp. SVF II Nr. 1018 = S. Emp. *Math.* 9.132). Cf. Cicero's translation of this definition: 'The power to observe, understand, and explain premonitory signs given to humans by the gods' (*vim cognoscentem et videntem et explicantem signa, quae a diis hominibus portenduntur*, Cic. *Div.* 2.130).

7 Studies that focus on the mental state of the Pythia include Maurizio 1995 and Chalupa 2014.

8 Eidinow 2019: 449 invokes Parke and Wormell's reductionist account of the oracular consultation centred on the question who is more gullible, the consultants or those being consulted: 'The mystery of the oracle can only be accounted for on two extreme theories or a blend of them. (i) The priesthood and the Pythia were deliberate charlatans who worked a traditional hocus pocus, because it paid them well ... (ii) The opposite view would be to suppose that the priesthood and the Pythia were perfectly sincere. Instead of being the deceivers they were the deceived' (Parke and Wormell 1956: 34).

concerns with deliberate deception and charlatanism proceed from an irrationalist premise, namely the idea that divination, as a form of human behaviour, makes little or no sense and needs to be explained away with functionalist principles such as social manipulation or crisis management.⁹ Now, armed with insights from the cognitive sciences, scholars have turned increasingly to the psychology of those who are consulting the oracle to explain why the divinatory experience had such reach and staying power.¹⁰ In a recent contribution to a volume on cognition and the history of religion, Esther Eidinow shows how theories of embodied simulation may contribute to our understanding of the credibility of oracle consultation in the ancient world. In the same volume, Hugh Bowden similarly draws on theories in the cognitive science of religion to demonstrate how beliefs about the oracle's effectiveness could be created and sustained in ancient Athens. In this chapter, I shift the focus from the consultation—the process of requesting and receiving the divinatory sign—to the interpretation of the sign itself. By focusing on the divinatory sign and its interpretation, the logical procedures by which divination operates (or is imagined to operate) come to the fore.

Both Eidinow and Bowden successfully apply the so-called embodied-embedded approach to cognition to the experience of oracle consultants in the ancient world. As Michael Wheeler succinctly puts it: 'The embodied-embedded approach revolves around the thought that cognitive science needs to put cognition back in the brain, the brain back in the body, and the body back in the world'.¹¹ While as ancient historians we have no access to actual brains and bodies, we do have access to narratives such as those of Herodotus, and the system of signs that are created, negotiated, and sustained through them. Narratives are essential, Armin Geertz has argued, in 'transforming the virtual, religious worlds into human, social realities'.¹² For our purposes, narrative is helpful for us to learn how minds are perceived to work.

A methodological note on using Herodotus's narrative to encounter ancient minds interpreting oracles seems in order. The occurrence of oracles in the *Histories* has typically elicited three kinds of scholarly attention: first, the assessment of the historical validity of the text, particularly with a view to establishing the authenticity of the oracular pronouncements;¹³ second, the analysis of the workings of divination within Herodotus's narrative, not only as

9 Struck 2016, 9. For oracular consultation as a 'tool to eliminate disorder and establish a consensus of opinion in favour of a particular solution to a difficult problem,' see Morgan 1990: 154.

10 Bowden 2019, and Eidinow 2019.

11 Wheeler 2005: 11.

12 Geertz 2010: 29.

13 Parke and Wormell 1956; Crahay 1956; Fontenrose 1978.

a plot device but also as part of Herodotus's constructive role as a historian;¹⁴ and third, the attempt to understand how oracles function not in a positivist way, but, taking Herodotus as representative for general beliefs about divination, in a way that tells us something about how oracles were *imagined* to operate.¹⁵ The latter approach is a useful reply to those who dismiss the notion of the ambiguous oracle on the grounds that most so-called 'historical' and 'genuine' oracles present straightforward, unambiguous responses, often to binary questions ('is it better to do x or y').¹⁶ Even if the extent to which the oracular riddle tells us something about divination is debated, Herodotus's role in constructing the tradition of oracular ambiguity is beyond doubt.¹⁷ It is characteristic of Apollo's Oracle, as Heraclitus puts it, 'to neither speak (*legei*) nor hide (*kruptei*), but indicate through signs (*sêmeinei*)' (B93 DK).

2 Whose Hair? Abduction with Peirce and Electra

Semiotics is not readily thought of as closely related to psychology; and yet, despite mutual neglect in either discipline, the relationship between semiotics and psychology appears quite a natural one.¹⁸ After all, when one of the founding fathers of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), made the case for 'a science that studies the life of signs within society', he left no uncertainty about its relative position in the academy: 'It would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology'.¹⁹ The reason is that Saussure understood the association of sound patterns (signifiers) with mental facts or concepts (signifieds), or vice versa, to be a purely psychological process. The study of the sign-mechanism in the individual is therefore the business

14 Kirchberg 1965. For Herodotus as a 'master of signs', see Hollmann 2011.

15 See, for example, the position argued by Julia Kindt, who aims to show 'how narrative serves not only as a medium, a "carrier" as it were, for the religious views contained in these stories—no matter whether historical, partly historical or fictional—but also as an integral part of these views' (Kindt 2016: 11). See also Kindt 2019.

16 See the discussion in Fontenrose 1978: 7–9, and Struck's critique of Fontenrose in defence of the literary record of the ambiguous oracle: 'Fontenrose's dismissal of the ambiguity of the Delphic oracle as nothing but a literary fiction forces him to ignore an important part of the contemporary impact of ancient oracles. ... I am operating from the premise that even if only legendary, or quasi-historical, the literary evidence, in inception and reception, is invaluable for gauging what the Greeks *understood* divination to be' (Struck 2003: 172).

17 See Naerebout and Beerden 2012.

18 For a recent overview from the perspective of psychology, see Petocz 2011.

19 Saussure 1974.

of psychologists. Saussure's semiology, however, is predominantly concerned with linguistic signs, especially in speech, and leaves little or no room for referents in the 'real' world, while oracular signs often become manifest in, or have referents in, the real world, whether through objects, monuments, or embodied actions. Moreover, Saussure had little to say about the logical processes by which this sign-mechanism actually operates. And yet, the psychology of 'sign handling', as modern psychologists have called it, is a crucial aspect of living in a pan-semiotic universe.²⁰

For our purposes, then, the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce serves us particularly well when we are focused on the process of sign-handling. The (psycho)logical process of the sign-mechanism takes centre stage in his concept of abduction, which Peirce understood as a complement to the more familiar logical operations of deduction and induction.²¹ Cast in formal terms, the abductive process moves from result, to rule, to case.²² Put in narrative terms by Peirce himself, the abductive process sounds familiar enough (5.189):²³

The surprising fact, C, is observed;
But if A were true, C would be a matter of course;
Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.

Abduction is 'the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis' (5.171) to explain a pre-existing fact that is experienced as surprising or unexpected; it is such that it needs to be accounted for. For Peirce, this process of forming hypotheses about the world starts with perceptual judgement. Based on his experimental work on the psychology of perception with Joseph Jastrow (1863–1944), Peirce argued that this process is not fully conscious, but comes

20 Petocz 2011: 108–109.

21 For a useful overview of the history of abduction as a form of inquiry, specifically for the field of psychology, see Shank 1998. Himself an educational psychologist, Shank is one of the most persistent and persuasive advocates of abduction as a methodology in modern psychological research. For this assessment, see for example Stainton Rogers 2011: 48.

22 Peirce explains the relation between these three forms of inference as follows: 'Deduction proves that something must be; Induction shows that something actually is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something may be' (5.172). Peirce's own example of the bean bag is famous (2.623–625), but not as helpful as Shank's side-by-side formal representation of the three modes of reasoning (Shank 1998; compare also the schema in Eco 1984: 40). All references to Peirce are from his *Collected Papers* (1965–1966), eds. Hartsthorpe et al. (8 vols.).

23 Peirce's theory of abduction goes through several stages, and is variously called hypothesis, retrodution, presumption, and originary argument. One thorough yet accessible study of abduction in Peirce's semiotics is Fann 1970.

to us 'like a flash' or 'an act of insight' (5.181). The difference between perceptual judgement and abductive inference is that the latter is subject to logical analysis, whereas the former is not. The most significant and hazardous step in abduction (which is why it is akin to the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*) is the almost instinctive jump from the observed fact to the rule one needs to formulate in order to explain the phenomenon. This rule suggests itself because of past experience, a natural law, some general principle—or, as we will see, an oracular sign. The end product (the case) does not have any more or less epistemological value than a guess, which needs to be tested through inductive reasoning. Abduction is the only form of inference that introduces a new idea—which is why, according to Peirce, it lies at the basis of all discovery, ranging from scientific breakthroughs to detective work.²⁴

Before we analyse Lichas's process of abductive reasoning in discovering the bones of Orestes, we may consider a similar example from the same time period (i.e., mid-fifth century BCE) but from a different genre (namely, tragedy), which not only illustrates abductive inference effectively but also sets up a useful contrast with the abduction based on oracular divination. In Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers* (458 BCE), Electra showcases her abductive powers like a true Sherlock Holmes, inferring Orestes's presence from the observation of a lock of hair lying on the tomb of their father, Agamemnon, who has been murdered by his wife Clytemnestra.²⁵ As in Herodotus's narrative, it is the presence of Orestes—albeit the living one, not his skeleton—that is hypothesized based on this clue. Aeschylus gives us a psychological portrayal of Electra's semiotic powers:

24 See the contributions in Eco and Sebeok 1983. The method of 'backward reasoning' starting from the result is explained by Sherlock Holmes: 'Most people, if you describe a train of events to them, will tell you what the result would be. They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass. There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backwards, or analytically' (STUD). The titles of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories are abbreviated according to the four-letter system devised by Jay Finley Christ; the key is given in Tracy 1977: xix.

25 For a similar analysis along these lines, see Boitani 1991. Boitani recognizes the importance of the scene, referring to it as 'the first example I know of in Western literature of a "scientific process of deduction"'; as I will demonstrate, however, the scene is instead a classic example of Peirce's abduction. Commenting on line 174, Garvie also speaks of 'the correct deduction' (Garvie 1986: 90). I would argue that distinguishing between deduction, induction and abduction is crucial, because each yields knowledge of a different epistemological value. See above, n. 22.

Electra

I see (*horô*) this cut lock of hair on the tomb.

Chorus

From what man, or what slim-waisted maiden?

Electra

That's easy for anyone to guess (*euxumbolon*) and form an opinion.

Chorus

So how can I, old as I am, learn from someone younger?²⁶

Electra

There is nobody who could have cut it except myself.

Chorus

Yes, those who ought to have mourned him with hair-offerings are his enemies.

Electra

And another thing—this looks very similar (*idein homopteros*)—

Chorus

To whose hair? That's what I want to know.

Electra

It greatly resembles my own (*prospherês idein*).

Chorus

You don't mean this was a secret gift from Orestes?

Electra

It looks very much like his locks.

Chorus

And how could he have dared to come here?

Electra

He *sent* (*epempse*) this cut lock, to honour his father.

(Aesch. *Cho.* 168–180)

Electra is confronted with a surprising observation: a cut lock of hair on her father's tomb ('surprising fact, C, is observed'). The cognitive process is governed

26 Lines 170–171 are transposed by West to follow 175; Sommerstein (Loeb), whose translation I am using, adopts West's transposition (argued for in West 1990: 237–238, although West's Teubner edition retains the line order). Since I am following Garvie's text (which is reproduced from Page's OCT), I have maintained the line order and moved Sommerstein's translated lines accordingly. I will not argue against West's transposition here, but the abductive scheme below should clarify why the Chorus's question is 'easy to guess' (*euxumbolon*): it invites the formulation of rule 1. Cf. Sherlock Holmes's comment: 'It is impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect have stated it wrong' (PRIO).

by two principles of likeness and appropriateness (*eikos*, εἰκός), which are the basis of the rules that she formulates.²⁷ The explanation Electra produces is based, first, on the likeness of the lock to her own hair, and second, on the unlikely proposition that her mother would have left it there, since there is no reason for her to mourn Agamemnon. (The Chorus confirms this reasoning in line 173.) The logical conclusion is that it must be her own hair ('There is nobody who could have cut it except myself', line 172), since it accounts for both the lock's placement on the tomb as a sign of mourning, and the fact that it resembles her own hair. And yet, she knows she did not place her own hair on the tomb. Thus, confronted with the observation of a surprising fact—this lock of hair looks like mine; but it is not mine, nor is it my mother's—the abductive inference presents itself: But if this were Orestes's lock ('But if A were true'), both its placement on the tomb and its resemblance to my own hair would be a matter of course. The new idea of Orestes may have suggested itself, despite his absence in exile (hence the suggestion that 'he sent it', *epempse*), because of the lock's striking resemblance to Electra's own hair (line 176).

Thus, the final hypothesis ('this is Orestes's lock') is based mostly on the rule *family members have similar hair*, but other rules have implicitly come into play as well. The following scheme formalizes the logical structure from result to case:

Result: a lock of hair on the tomb; the hair resembles Electra's

Rule 1: Electra does not have the experience of placing it there
(hypothesis: it is not Electra's hair)

Rule 2: family members have similar hair
(hypothesis: it is Clytemnestra's hair)

Rule 3: placing a lock of hair on a tomb is a sign of honour
(hypothesis: it is not Clytemnestra's hair)

but if this were Orestes's lock, its appearance would be a matter of course

Case: there is reason to suspect the lock of hair belongs to Orestes

What prompts the formulation of a rule is not always immediately clear. Only rule 3 is made explicit by the Chorus, in line 173; rules 1 and 2 are never expressed. They are rather straightforward expectations about the world: rule 1 is a recollection of past experience; rule 2 is based on natural laws; and rule 3

27 The role of resemblance in the abductive process is significant: Peirce connects abduction with inference through an *icon*, the type of sign that has a relationship of likeness or resemblance to its object. Examples of icons include maps, portraits, and the picture of a smoking cigarette with a diagonal bar running across.

reflects common social and cultural knowledge. Electra's abductive inference is based on keen observation and common-sense knowledge, which allows her to formulate the rule, or rather, a series of rules.

Abduction appears more as a practice based on skill and experience than an act of reasoning. Three historical models of abduction exemplify this practice: detection, diagnosis, and divination.²⁸ Carlo Ginzburg has identified these models as part of an epistemological paradigm based on the observation and interpretation of signs.²⁹ The significance of this conjectural paradigm lies with the recognition that the various practices assembled under this paradigm—divination, jurisprudence, hunting, medicine, psychoanalysis, detective work—were invested with meaning through a process much like abduction.³⁰ The goal of abduction is to take away the surprise, to render something that appears unique as in fact part of the world we know.³¹ As Pascal Boyer, who contends—not unlike Shank and Ginzburg—that this model ought to be not only studied but also applied in various disciplines—puts it: 'The main purpose of abduction is to make surprising data unsurprising by positing an assumption, of which the data would be a normal consequence.'³² This is a very economical enterprise: Electra has no use hypothesizing that extra-terrestrial invaders deposited the lock of hair. Her experience does not allow for that option to be under consideration. The art of abduction, argue Bonfantini and Proni in their analysis of Sherlock Holmes's method, belongs to '*puzzle-solving*, not to *hermeneutics*. Puzzle-solving, like detective work, calls for keen observation and encyclopaedic knowledge in order to have at one's fingertips *the finite and predetermined set of immediate and clue-fitting possible hypothetical solutions*.'³³ To perform a successful abduction, observation and encyclopaedic knowledge are required.³⁴

28 Shank 1998.

29 Ginzburg 1983: 81–118.

30 Cf. Horowitz 1983: 184. See also Manetti 1993. The distinction between different models based on the temporal orientation (past, present, or future), however, is questionable. Ancient Greek divination, for example, is often diagnostic, oriented toward the past to reveal information useful for the present.

31 In this sense, abduction is our default mode of cognition: '... [A]bductive inference is present any time we find ourselves in an ordinary situation where we know what to expect, and we are operating based on our understanding that the present situation makes perfectly good sense to us' (Shank 1998). Cf. Peirce Ms. 692, cited in Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1983: 16.

32 Boyer 1994: 147.

33 Bonfantini and Prodi 1983: 127–128. Emphasis in the original.

34 This is encyclopaedic knowledge as opposed to dictionary knowledge, for which see Eco 1984: 255–271.

The power of observation is rooted in perceptual judgement. When Electra sees the lock of hair she immediately recognizes its *outré* character. She perceives the lock *as something else*. Considering Peirce's notion that 'nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign' (2.308), Electra sees the lock of hair as a sign (in Peirce's lexicon, an *index*) even if she does not quite know yet whom it indicates.³⁵ As the fictional character and uncrowned king of abduction Sherlock Holmes notes: 'Singularity is almost invariably a clue' (BOSC). In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes similarly remarks that 'what is out of the common is usually a guide rather than a hindrance' (STUD). Holmes frequently criticizes his companion Dr Watson for his inability to perceive. When Holmes asks Watson how many steps lead up to their apartment at 221b Baker Street, Watson has no idea, although he has ascended these stairs countless times: 'You see, but you do not observe,' Holmes rebukes him, 'Now, I know there are seventeen steps, for I have both seen and observed' (SCAN). And again: 'Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important' (IDEN). Holmes combines this perceptive acumen with an encyclopaedic knowledge about the world—at least, some aspects of it—which he has acquired through observation and experimentation.³⁶ Holmes specializes not just in things heard and seen; he can also distinguish 75 perfumes (HOUN). This empirical knowledge of seemingly trivial minutiae—he can recognize 42 different tire impressions (PRIO), and he has published a book enumerating 140 forms of cigar, cigarette, and pipe tobacco, with coloured plates illustrating the difference in ash (SIGN)—borders on the fantastic; but, to be sure, it serves an important purpose: it allows the detective to formulate rules quickly during the inferential process, turning surprising facts into meaningful clues.

3 Lichas and the Bones of Orestes

Lichas's discovery similarly starts with the observation of a surprising fact, but his abductive inference takes place in a radically different context from

35 An index is a sign that is physically related to, connected to, or affected by, its object. The relation is one of contiguity, and may be causal or sequential. Peirce's examples include a weathercock, a barometer and a sundial, and physical signs such as footprints; an elevated body temperature is an index of inflammation. The index corresponds to Jakobson's narrative pole of metonymy (the part for the whole, the cause for the effect, etc.).

36 Holmes is only knowledgeable about subjects that may be of use to his profession (British law, chemistry, anatomy, botany, geology); Watson remarks that Holmes's 'ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge', knowing nothing of literature, philosophy, astronomy or politics (STUD).

Electra's. While both end up finding Orestes, Electra is not actually looking for him; Lichas, on the other hand, is actively searching for the bones of Orestes, based on the clues offered by an oracle:

In Arcadia lies Tegea in the level plain,
Where under strong constraint two winds are blowing;
Smiting is there and counter-smiting, and woe on woe;
There earth, the giver of life, holds Agamemnon's son;
Bring him home, and you will prevail over Tegea.³⁷

ἔστι τις Ἀρκαδίας Τεγέη λευρῷ ἐνὶ χώρῳ,
ἐνθ' ἄνεμοι πνεῖουσι δύω κρατερῆς ὑπ' ἀνάγκης,
καὶ τύπος ἀντιτύπῳ, καὶ πῆμ' ἐπὶ πῆματι κείται.
ἐνθ' Ἀγαμεμνονίδην κατέχει φυσίζοος αἶα·
τὸν σὺ κομισσάμενος Τεγέης ἐπιτάρροθος ἔσση. (Hdt. 1.67.4)

The oracle taken as a whole functions as a sign (an index, in Peirce's terminology) of the place that must be found: 'Where ... There' (ἐνθ' ... ἐνθ' ..., *enth'* ... *enth'* ...). The riddling parts are the second and third line ('Where under ... on woe'), which make no sense when taken literally. But the goal is not to solve that riddle. The goal is finding the bones of Orestes—and *realizing* that they have been found. It is a story about detection: seeing *and* observing. Technically, a blacksmith finds Orestes, but like Dr Watson, the blacksmith sees but does not observe. And the reason for this, quite simply, is that Lichas's semiotic perception is enhanced by his knowledge of the oracle, which allows him to formulate the rule that leads to the correct hypothesis.

Abduction starts with the observation of a surprising fact, and Lichas's story is full of surprises and amazement. Herodotus mentions variations of the word *thôma* ('wonder, surprise') no fewer than four times in this short passage: first, Lichas is amazed when he observes 'some iron being hammered out' (*sidêron exelaunomenon*) in the smithy; then, when the blacksmith notices his amazement, he tells Lichas that his amazement is nothing compared to the blacksmith's own surprise the other day when he found an enormous coffin, containing an equally enormous corpse, in his backyard.³⁸ The blacksmith says: 'You'd be very much amazed, inasmuch as you now happen to be amazed

37 For the oracle, see Q77 (Fontenrose) = PW33. Cf. Paus. 3.3.6–8, Diod. Sic. 9.36.3.

38 *en thômati* (Lichas's amazement at ironworking, 1.68.1); *apothômazonta* (blacksmith sees Lichas's amazement at ironworking, 1.68.2); *an ethômazes* (blacksmith hypothesizes Lichas's amazement at coffin, 1.68.2); *thôma* (Lichas's amazement at ironworking, 1.68.2). The narrative illustrates Lichas's transition from the first *thôma* to the second.

by ironworking' (κάρτα ἂν ἐθώμαζες, ὅκου νῦν οὕτω τυγχάνεις θῶμα (*thôma*) ποιούμενος τὴν ἐργασίην τοῦ σιδήρου, Hdt. 1.67.2). Thus, there are two *thômata*: the beating of iron, observed by Lichas; and the enormous coffin, observed by the blacksmith. Herodotus's neat ring composition strengthens the idea that for Lichas, the one leads him to the other. Herodotus then details Lichas's thought process:

Lichas turned over in his mind (*ennôsas*) the smith's account of his discovery, and came to the conclusion (*suneballeto*) that the oracle was fulfilled and that this was the body of Orestes. He found the explanation (*sumballomenos*) of the 'winds' in the smith's pair of bellows; the 'smiting and counter-smiting' were the hammer and anvil, and the 'woe on woe' the beaten iron (*ton de exelaunomenon sidêron*)—the inference being drawn (*eikazôn*) from the fact that the discovery of iron was a bad thing for mankind. Confident that he had solved the puzzle (*sumbalomenos*), he returned to Sparta and told the whole story. (Hdt. 1.68.3–5)

First, the surprising fact is observed (or rather, heard): a coffin and bones of enormous size. Now, Lichas turns it over in his mind searching for something that can explain this singular occurrence—the oracle pops into his head. If this were the coffin of Orestes, the enormous size and its location would be a matter of course, because now the riddling language of the oracular sign falls into place. The abductive process can be organized as follows:

Result: a coffin near a smithy in Tegea; the bones are enormous

Rule 1: bones belonging to a hero are enormous

(hypothesis: the bones may belong to a hero)

Rule 2: 'In Arcadia lies ... etc.', i.e., the oracle

(hypothesis: the bones may belong to Orestes)

but if these were Orestes's bones, its occurrence would be a matter of course

Case: there is reason to suspect the bones belong to Orestes

What makes the coffin a *thôma* (or, 'a surprising fact') is its size: this is what the hypothesis needs to account for. Rule 1, which is implicit and may get Lichas thinking about Orestes by implication, accounts for the coffin's size by hypothesizing that the bones belong to a hero. This rule is similar to rules 2 and 3 in Electra's abduction, because they are founded upon common-sense, and culturally specific, expectations about the world. But unlike Electra, Lichas has an actual way of not only confirming but also specifying his hypothesis: if the oracle applies here, then the bones belong to a hero, and that hero is Orestes.

This process of ‘throwing together’ (*sumballô*, literally) the surprising observation (result) and the oracle (rule) is designated by Herodotus’s use of the middle form *sumballomai* (‘compare’). The related noun *sumbolon* designates a piece that corresponds to another piece, or two parts that fit together.³⁹ Aeschylus’s *Electra* similarly uses the adjective *euxumbolon* (‘easy to guess’, Aesch. *Cho.* 170) to give expression to this fitting together of a sign and its referent. It is a process based on comparing and likening (Peirce’s *iconic* function of the sign), underscored by Herodotus’s use of the verb *eikazô*, translated as ‘draw an inference’ but literally ‘liken’. These verbs perfectly denote the role of perception and imagination in abductive reasoning. Because of this process, the specific pieces of the oracular sign now fall into place as well. And so, within the abductive reasoning in which the oracle as a whole functions as the rule, there is the parallel process of inferential reasoning in deciphering the linguistic signs within the oracle by *likening* them to their real-world counterparts. Each sign (‘winds’, ‘smiting and counter-smiting’, ‘woe on woe’) corresponds, like a *sumbolon*, to another piece, a real-world referent (bellows, anvil and hammer, and iron, respectively). The relationship between sign and referent is not arbitrary or based on agreement or similarity, but indexical: wind is produced by bellows; smiting is the result of anvil and hammer; woe is caused by using iron as a weapon.⁴⁰ The latter association of woe and iron requires the culturally specific knowledge about the Hesiodic Age of Iron—and the metonymic use of ‘iron’ (*sidêros*) as ‘sword’.⁴¹ Lichas’s skill as a reasoner consists in his ability to see *and* observe, allowing him to perceive things *as signs* and to figure out the correct relationship between sign and object.

The text intimates that this last inference (namely, iron is ‘woe on woe’ in the oracle) sets in motion the other inferences. The phrase ‘beaten iron’ (*exelaunomenon sidêron*) corresponds exactly to the first *thôma* Lichas experienced when he observed iron being hammered out. As Herodotus tells it, the *thôma* of the giant corpse would not have presented itself without the *thôma* of the beaten iron. We can now surmise that Lichas was so surprised at the beaten iron because, at the level of perceptual judgement, he had already intuited that this observation corresponded, like a *sumbolon*, to part of the oracle.⁴² At the conscious level of logical analysis, however, the surprising news about

39 Struck 2014: 72–99.

40 Hollmann 2011 reaches the same conclusion but invokes metonymy rather than Peirce’s index.

41 On the importance of metals in this oracle and related oracles, see Kurke 1999: 154–155.

42 Contra How and Wells 1928 *ad loc.*, who interpret the surprise at ironworking as ‘a very primitive feature that has become incorporated in a sixth-century myth’.

the coffin—and its suggestion of a hero's bones—was required to actively call the oracle to mind. The case is then verified by matching the riddling oracular signs to their corresponding real-world objects, concluding with the 'woe on woe' and beaten iron. For, as Sherlock Holmes notes, 'one true inference invariably suggests others' (SILV).

The standard interpretation of Lichas's feat is that he has 'solve[d] the puzzle'; he has cracked the oracle's code, typically described by scholars as a riddling, enigmatic, ambiguous, or polysemic message.⁴³ But after closely examining the (psycho)logical process by which Lichas discovers the bones of Orestes, the oracle is not really the puzzle that must be deciphered; rather, the oracle offers one crucial *piece* of the puzzle with which the answer to the actual problem (the discovery of the bones of Orestes) can be hypothesized through the process of abductive reasoning. Without the exclusive focus on the oracular sign as 'puzzle' or 'riddle', we can appreciate the total semiotic environment in which Lichas's cognitive activity is embodied and embedded.⁴⁴ He does not sit at home to puzzle out the meaning of 'woe on woe' to discover where Orestes is. While the crucial issue, and indeed the Oracle's pronouncement, is about where the bones of Orestes lie, Lichas's brilliance consists in recognizing the applicability of the oracle after the bones have already been found. Lichas interacts with his environment, and the oracle primes him to see things as signs, exemplifying Karl Popper's notion that an observation is a planned and prepared perception. The oracle provides this prepared perception, partly in straightforward language (Arcadia, Tegea, Agamemnon's son) and partly in code (winds, strike and counterstrike, woe on woe). In the semiotic web in which he operates, Lichas relies on the oracle to see and to observe, and to formulate the crucial rule, already supplied by the oracle, that accounts for his observations.

4 Conclusion: 'I Only Saw It because I was Looking for It'

The Lichas episode demonstrates that ancient Greek oracles, especially the ones in the narrative of the *Histories*, can function as the rule in the process of discovery governed by the logical operation of abduction. If oracles, when

43 E.g. Barker 2006: 16; cf. 'Solved the riddle', for *aneure*, in the Penguin translation by de Selincourt; preferable is Blanco's translation 'it [i.e. the tomb] was found'.

44 More sensitive to this 'semiotic environment' is Hollmann 2011: 35; however, in his brief but insightful discussion of this passage Hollmann makes no claims about oracles or divination in general.

interpreted correctly, are believed to furnish truth, then the epistemological value of the resulting hypothesis is on much less shaky ground than that of ordinary guesses. It is in part the quality of the rule that determines the strength of the hypothesis. Because of the oracle, Lichas is certain he has found Orestes—and indeed he has. Electra on the other hand, who does not rely on an oracle to supply the rule for her abduction, is tormented by the suggestive yet quite inconclusive nature of the evidence that she *might* have found Orestes. Abduction, after all, is nothing but guessing, according to Peirce. It furnishes one possible explanation among many, even if it seems to be the most likely one. Electra realizes this, and is quite distressed about it:

But for me to accept this outright, that I think this adornment comes from the person I most love in the world, Orestes—oh, hope is flattering me! Ah, if only it had a mind and a voice like a messenger (*eith' eikhe phônên emphron' aggelou dikên*), so that I wouldn't be tossed about in two minds (*diphrontis*), but would know for sure (*eu saph'*) that I should reject this lock, if it really was cut from the head of an enemy, or else, if it was my kin, it would be able to join in my mourning, giving glory to this tomb and honour to my father! (Aesch. *Cho.* 192–200)

She explicitly wishes for the evidence to be more revealing, saying of the lock of hair: 'Ah! If only it had a mind and a voice like a messenger'. Recognizing the communicative aspect of an indexical sign, Electra wishes for the sign to express who its sender is. She wishes to infer unambiguously what the referent of the sign is.

Impressive though her skills are, Electra is limited by the fact that her observation is not exactly a planned and prepared perception. Lichas, on the other hand, is drawing on his previous experience of the oracle to have such a planned and prepared perception—to see and to observe, as Holmes would say. Indeed, the detective himself excels at these prepared perceptions, relying on his extraordinary skill and knowledge rather than oracles. In a classic example, invoked by at least one Psychology textbook, Sherlock Holmes, crawling on hands and feet, finds a matchstick in the mud, much to the chagrin of the police inspector: "I cannot think how I came to overlook it", said the inspector with an expression of annoyance.' To which Holmes replies: "It was invisible, buried in the mud. I only saw it because I was looking for it" (SILV).⁴⁵ While

45 Cf. Leahy 2018: 10.

Holmes is guided by certain privately held theories when searching for and interpreting signs, Lichas is guided by an external cognitive apparatus (the Oracle) that primes him for the encounter with signs, starting with the iron being beaten. When Herodotus writes that Lichas found Orestes 'by the aid of luck and his own wits' (*kai suntukhiêi khrêsamenos kai sophiêi*, 1.68.1), the word *suntukhiê* ('chance', literally 'meeting with') points to the importance of such chance encounters. After all, it seems to be mere coincidence that Lichas stopped at the smithy that happened to be the place indicated by the oracle. And yet, the very idea of meaningful coincidence is a paradox, as Struck has argued: 'Two things that happen at once become such a coincidence only when two criteria are met: logic must dictate the event as purely accidental, but the simultaneity must nevertheless tempt one to assume some more remote, mysterious connection between them'.⁴⁶ The meaningful coincidence that underpins Lichas's discovery of Orestes is not just Lichas's 'meeting with' (*suntukhiê*) the blacksmith, but also the oracle's 'meeting with' its real-world referents. The recognition of the latter, as we have seen, depends on Lichas's 'wits' (*sophiê*).⁴⁷

And so, Lichas emerges as a master of signs, drawing successful inferences because of keen observation and extraordinary (for divine) external knowledge. In this process, abductive reasoning allows him to uncover new information—namely, *these are the bones of Orestes*—anchored in the interplay between oracular signs and real-world referents. The sign may or may not be ambiguous, but if decoded correctly, yields certain knowledge—not the mere guess that tormented Electra when faced with the sign of a lock of hair. Instead of considering the oracle something that needs to be interpreted, it can function as an extended form of cognition that accounts for something surprising that is encountered and must be explained. The oracle *is* not the puzzle; it is a crucial *piece* of the solution to the puzzle. The oracle supplies a planned and prepared perception, and, in logical terms, furnishes the rule for the abductive inference that allows Lichas to find Orestes. Herodotus's Lichas episode thus presents oracular divination as an extraordinary cognitive tool in the total semiotic landscape of the archaic Greek world.

46 Struck 2004: 66. Herodotus uses the same phrase ('by the aid of luck', συντυχίῃ θείῃ χρησάμενῃ, 5.41.1) to describe a miraculous pregnancy, but adds the adjective *theiêi* ('divine'). A sense of uncanny meaningfulness underpins such instances of 'luck'. For coincidence, see also the chapter by Klooster in this volume.

47 On the importance of the diviner's intelligence, see Flower 2008: 190.

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PART 4

Imagination, Creativity, and Innovation



Introduction to Part 4: Imagination, Creativity, and Innovation across the Ages

Vlad Glaveanu

1 Introduction

Creativity and innovation are claimed to be defining characteristics of contemporary societies. As a 21st-century skill (Trilling and Fadel 2009), creativity, for instance, is considered the engine of capitalist economies, organizational success, and personal growth. It is an important feature of societal discourses that emphasize individuality, originality, non-conformism and the break with cultural norms, a key identity marker for many people and corporations worldwide. We also tend to consider today's rate of creativity and innovation as unprecedented and, in doing so, imagine that there is a sharp divide between the way in which we live now, guided by ideologies of creative agency and personal freedom, and the way our ancestors lived under the weight of tradition, unable or unwilling to think freely and innovate radically. Of course, as this volume demonstrates (see also Glaveanu 2019), creativity and innovation are *not* a modern invention. Even the interest and value we place on them are not as recent as we tend to think (Mason 2017). Practices related to the imagination and to our capacity to create and to (re)create ourselves are arguably as old as our species is (Festinger 1983). And, with the start of recorded history, we have proof of just how much our ancestors did inquire into these abilities that make us human. Classical studies offer us a unique opportunity to rebuild a lost sense of *historical continuity* in our thinking about and practices of creativity and innovation and to learn from the past. How and why this is the case concerns me in this introduction.

The two chapters I focus on here—‘Playing Make-Believe with Objects: Counterfactual Imagination and Psychodrama in Greek Tragedy’, and ‘The Posthumous Future in Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*’—offer contributions to our understanding of imagination, creativity and innovation by studying Greek tragedy. The authors, Anne-Sophie Noel and Karen Bassi, not only construct compelling arguments about issues such as the use of pretence and as-if thinking in play, and the construction of individual and collective futures beyond one's mortality; they also do so by referring to psychological theories in a nuanced and scholarly manner. The main source of inspiration for these chapters are sociocultural theories of the cognitive and affective processes

involved in expanding the possibilities of human existence. Before examining the similarities and differences between these chapters and their relation to contemporary scholarship, let's start from a few basic definitions.

Today, in psychology, imagination is considered the higher mental function involved in the construction of imagery that explores the past, the future, and alternatives to the present (Hilgard 1981). As such, imagination is essential for creativity as the process by which individuals and groups come up with ideas or objects that are new, original and useful, valuable or meaningful (Runco and Jaeger 2012). The distinction between creativity and innovation is often based on the difference between generating ideas and implementing them, with innovation denoting the application of imaginative and creative outcomes (Anderson et al. 2014). While useful for analytical purposes, these definitions are also limiting if not misleading. They give the impression that imagination is largely reduced to imagery, that creativity is judged mainly in terms of end products, and that there is a sharp divide between ideation and action (for more of this critique, see Glaveanu 2014a). These are largely based on Cartesian-inspired separations between mind and body, individual and society, the possible and the actual. In an effort to integrate and transcend such dichotomies, sociocultural accounts of imagination, creativity and innovation start from a relational and developmental epistemology. This means, first of all, that these phenomena are not placed 'inside the head' of isolated individuals, but distributed *in-between* people, objects, places, and across time (Glaveanu 2014b). Secondly, processes and products are fundamentally linked, with processes being products themselves and products coming out of, and supporting, new (creative) processes. Thirdly, the dynamic of imagination, creativity and innovation builds on the reality of humans as embodied, social and cultural beings; beings, more specifically, positioned in shared worlds to which we relate through a range of perceptual, cognitive and affective perspectives, which we exchange with others.

In this brief introduction, I start by identifying themes raised by both contributions that capture something essential about imagination and creativity today and in the classical period: the role of play and pretence, imagining the future, and the role of material objects (section 2). Then I focus on more specific topics raised in the chapters, topics that could and should inform our contemporary understanding of human possibility. These are the imaginative reconstruction of self and identity, and the place of death in creativity (section 3). Both these issues, I argue, reveal something essential about the perspectives involved in creative action and the interaction of these perspectives. Such insights not only contribute to the study of creativity and innovation in the ancient world, but concern us to this day. In fact, there are several

conceptual ‘bridges’ across time that are actively built by these two chapters. I briefly discuss the relation between Greek tragedy and psychodrama, and classical and romantic meditations on death, life and the (dangers of) creation (section 4). I end with some reflections on how classicists and psychologists can continue to learn from each other.

2 Common Themes: Play, Future-Making, and Material Objects

One theme brought up in this Part of the volume is that of *play* and especially of *pretend play* (for an in-depth psychological analysis of imaginative play, see Harris 2000). Noel’s contribution is centred on make-believe play with objects and counterfactual imagination. Tragedy may not come to mind immediately as a genre within which play and playfulness thrive, and yet this analysis compellingly demonstrates not only the use of pretend play, but its fundamental role in reshaping self-understandings in Euripides’ *Heracles* and *Ion*. In Bassi’s discussion of *Oedipus at Colonus*, pretence strikes a much more sombre note, with Oedipus, for example, claiming that his sons are dead to him. Thus, the broader mechanism of inversion, common in play episodes, here takes on an intergenerational, personal, and political dimension, when the principle that children should not die before their parents is symbolically transgressed.

In all these cases, a fundamental process of creativity and innovation is revealed: our human capacity temporarily to ‘bracket’ *what is*, in order to imagine *what might or could be*, and act ‘as if’ what we imagined were the case. Heracles’ weapons can thus become toys but also, in a much darker turn of events, return to being real weapons within a final play episode with his children. Oedipus uses the means of imagination to reconstruct an alternative and tragic reality that ends up becoming true. We are thus presented here with a much more complex image of play than we have in psychology, in which, for instance, the exploration of negative or even dangerous consequences of playing is rare (see, for example, Hviid and Villadsen 2018). At the same time, the experience of play—and the imagination it sparks in audiences then and now—builds powerful bridges of identification across the ages and makes all these stories eminently human.

Another common theme is that of the *future*, a key concern of imagination, creativity and innovation researchers alike. Each of these processes contributes to what can be called, broadly, *future-making*, by eliciting views of what is ‘not yet here’, building the means that facilitate its actualization, and remaining open to what is to come. Bassi’s analysis of Sophocles’ play revolves around the construction of a posthumous future for both particular individuals and entire

communities. This future, after the passing of Oedipus, includes all those people who outlive him (and, symbolically, the spectators) and is at once open and tragically determined by a past from which ‘the dead make demands upon the living’. Imagined futures, however, are not always meant to be. Heracles, in playing with his children, assigns future roles and prerogatives to every one of them. Noel shows, though, how these imaginings, though unrealized, can still be used by the protagonist to shape an identity and a role for himself (e.g., in a reversal, he becomes the little boat towed by a big ship, represented by his friend Theseus). Future-making remains a powerful engine of creativity and innovation even when possible futures never get to be realized. It is, after all, by imagining things differently that we change our relationship with them in the here and now.

The third theme that brings the chapters in this Part together in their analysis of human possibility is that of *material things*. Objects rarely get to play a part in creativity research and, when they do, they are reduced to the level of representations or mental prototypes (Finke et al. 1992). It is primarily in discussions of play that the materiality of things comes to the fore and can be seen to guide the creative process. Noel makes this point clearly in her examination of make-believe play, when she notes how the sensorial qualities of different objects such as Heracles’ weapons, and their manipulation over time, invite various forms of symbolic identification (they become toys, murderous tools and, finally, living substitutes for his children). In *Ion*, it is again the embodied use of objects that allegorically announces the protagonist’s filiation with Apollo. However, the imagination may also be triggered by the absence of objects, not only their presence. In tragedy, Bassi argues, the material presence of the corpse helps conceal the moment of death. Oedipus’ body is, however, never shown to the audience, further amplifying Ismene’s claim that he is ‘without a tomb’. In this case, material absences cast a long-lasting shadow of symbolic presence over the lives of his children and the survival of the *polis*.

3 Specific Themes: the Possible, Imagination and Creativity

What states of mind invite one to playfully reimagine reality, and what do these acts result in, at a psychological level? Wonder is, by definition, a possibility-enabling type of phenomenon. It is triggered by a realization that more is possible, for our thinking and action in the world, than we previously realized, followed by an exploration, imaginative and embodied, of these often unexpected possibilities. In this way, as I have argued elsewhere (see Glaveanu 2019; 2020), the act of wondering manages to both immerse us into the materiality

of things and detach us from them, allowing a space of imagination and reflection in which we experience 'not knowing' as a productive, generative state. Of course, this can be associated with some negative feelings, including frustration (*vis-à-vis* what is) and fear (of what is to come), but these emotions, when paired with a sense of amazement, sustain rather than close possibilities. It is to be noted that the notion of the *sublime*, rediscovered in the 18th century by philosophers like Edmund Burke, includes elements of wonder and fear when faced with the greatness of nature (Lloyd 2018).

If the sublime and wonder make us aware of a broader space of imagination by pushing the boundaries of our (daily) existence, even beyond the 'natural' order of things (see Daston 2019), then *death* and the *afterlife* are the ultimate borders of what is known and familiar to us. In a creative manner, Bassi manages to connect, in her study of Greek tragedies, the end of life and, with it, of human possibility, with the endless domain of the possible which is the future. She does so by making us aware of the simple fact that not only do other people outlive the dead, but that the dying person can and does imagine a posthumous future, one that, willingly or not, he or she helps bring into being.

It is undeniable that death and creativity have a complicated relationship. On the one hand, destruction is for many at the very heart of the creative process—doing away with the old in order to move on from it (Schumpeter 1942). On the other, we actively use our creativity in order to 'hold on' to life and engage in creative work in the hope that our ideas and creations will exist long after we are gone. In fact, according to terror management theory (Routledge and Arndt 2009), it is precisely the prospect of our own mortality and the terror associated with it that we 'manage' through engagement in creativity and innovation, even if we often are not aware of it. Whether these rather psychoanalytical considerations are correct or not can be debated, but Bassi's point is that 'death's inevitability both limits and promotes confidence in a human future'. 'What was' shapes 'what will be' through its obstinate presence in the 'what is' of individuals and communities.

This future, open and constrained at the same time, is defined not only by the actions of creative actors, but also by their *roles and identities*. Noel makes a compelling claim in this regard. She raises the issue of the construction of the self as a creative process. Building on Vygotskian scholarship, she argues for the emergence of the self through imaginative play (an argument also made by the pragmatist G.H. Mead 1934). Most importantly, play episodes offer protagonists an opportunity to re-discover and re-fashion themselves, sometimes with therapeutic effects. These acts of re-creation, coming out of experiences of trauma, are central to the identity of many creative people, from Antiquity to this day. It is a testament to the idea that imagination and

creativity are essential for resilience, healing processes and personal growth. This potential is embedded in the fact that we all occupy various social roles throughout our existence, roles we acquire and learn in interaction with others. It is by taking the perspective of these others and exchanging positions with them, initially in play and games (Gillespie 2006), that we can take some distance from given roles and identities and experiment with other possibilities of being. Both Heracles and Ion illustrate this social and psychological dynamic in their quest for (a new) identity. Today, there is increased interest in the relation between creativity, identity and the self (Karwowski and Kaufman 2017), but a conceptual shift is needed to see creativity as part and parcel of the human self and not only as an antecedent or consequence of it. And there is more to learn, as Noel's chapter demonstrates, about the complex relation between possible selves, pretend play, and the imaginative shaping of one's life course.

4 Bridges across Time

Until now I have been focusing on both shared and specific themes in this Part of the volume. I have argued that some of them are 'old' concerns for the community of imagination, creativity and innovation researchers (e.g., for play and playfulness, future-making and creative identities), while others are attracting more and more interest nowadays (e.g., materiality and death). But there are even more notable historical resonances between the chapters that cut across the ages and describe interesting trajectories of thinking about what makes us creative and, ultimately, human.

If we take the issue of imaginative play, we can draw, as Anne-Sophie Noel does, a line between its use in Greek tragedy and in modern forms of psychodrama. But this line becomes more of a pathway, with its own ups and downs, when we consider the place and value of play and of imagination across history (for details, see Kearney 1988). In a similar way, the idea of death and its relation to creativity, aptly captured by Karen Bassi, has a longer history culminating in the story of *Frankenstein*, a novel that embodies the Romantic revival of ancient myths (it is not accidental, after all, that Mary Shelley gave her book the alternative title of *The Modern Prometheus*). While Oedipus accepted and even welcomed his demise, many creators actively fight it, becoming fascinated by Promethean transgressions of the natural order. By creating life out of death, Frankenstein disrupted death's contribution to the future and suffered the consequences for it.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, there are more things than expected that can bring classicists together with imagination, creativity and innovation researchers. It is undeniable that classical Antiquity was an age of creativity, but this does not mean that we should be interested in it as a grand depository of past creative products, including the several plays examined here. We would do well, as psychologists, to focus on these resources and texts as a dwelling place for ideas and processes that can shed new light on our present-day studies and concerns. If creativity is less of a modern idea than we think, then learning from the (distant) past can at the very least prevent us from reinventing the wheel of how imagination, creativity and innovation 'work'. And it can reveal new fieldwork for social scientists and humanities scholars alike (Glaveanu and Yamamoto 2012).

What is there to be gained by classicists? The chapters included in this Part demonstrate the usefulness of engaging with psychological research in the areas of play, imagination, and creativity. There are many other theories to be discovered, some of which have been referred to above (e.g., terror management theory, possibility studies). And there are interdisciplinary conversations to be held on how classical and contemporary theories and research could be placed in a creative dialogue for the benefit of both communities. The present introduction advanced some themes of common interest and pointed, briefly, to what can be learnt from them. In the end, if creativity really does come *out of difference*, as suggested by socioculturalists (Glaveanu and Gillespie 2015), then it is not agreement between scholars that we should be looking for. Constant exchanges, new interpretations, and (in)tense dialogues are what this volume, and other initiatives like it, are keen to foster.

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Playing Make-Believe with Objects: Counterfactual Imagination and Psychodrama in Greek Tragedy

Anne-Sophie Noel

1 Introduction

In a recent chapter on the ‘cognitive life of things’ in Greek tragedy, I showed that some characters entertain the idea of the intellectual agency of objects as a counterfactual hypothesis, rather than a confident certitude.¹ Nonetheless, as evidenced by current research in social psychology, thinking with objects brings emotional and social benefits even if just as a speculative fiction. Although we know that objects around us do not have a mind, treating them as if they possessed feelings or speech has been proved to foster more appropriate cognitive responses and emotional adjustment.

This insight leads to the question of *helpful speculative fiction*: do fictional characters from Greek tragedy devise counterfactual fictions for psychological benefit? Developing a fiction inside a fiction, a play-within-a-play, is a meta-theatrical modality that speaks to the defining features and potentialities of theatrical art.² My perspective, however, is not to study the metatheatricity of Greek tragedy for its own sake, but rather to examine if, how, and to what extent the tragic plays demonstrate an awareness of the impact of imaginary, enacted fiction in dealing with individual or collective issues (related to, for instance, identity, ethics, and political or social organization).

2 Playing As-If, Psychodrama, and Vygotsky’s Approach to Play

The problem-solving potential of playing make-believe has been theorized and practiced in various branches of modern psychology, psychoanalysis, developmental psychology, performative psychology and cognitive sciences.³

1 Noel 2023; for the ‘cognitive life of things’, see Malafouris and Renfrew 2010.

2 See for instance Dobrov 2001; Wright 2005; Mastronarde 2010; Torrance 2013; Wohl 2014; Paillard and Milanezi 2021.

3 Cf. Lillard 2017.

I am particularly interested in psychodrama, since this method has had its roots in Greek tragedy from its conception in 1922 by Jacob Moreno.⁴ Psychodrama is a modern, experiential form of therapy that comprises a great diversity of schools and practices.⁵ They nevertheless share the principles of using the means of theatrical art to address mental blockages and traumas. This entails going through a physically enacted fiction, on a stage or any setting designated as a stage, making use of a wide range of props (from chairs and tables to something more elaborate), costumes, puppets, sometimes a pre-prepared scenario ('script training'), make-up, light or music effects and so on. From its invention in 1922 by Jacob Moreno right up to today's psychologists or psychoanalysts (at least the ones who still claim his legacy), the idea of theatrical *catharsis*, of a Dionysiac liberation through mask and play, has been fundamental. Greek tragedy is explicitly invoked as a model.⁶ According to practitioners, embodied *play* is offered to participants as a substitute for transfer and free association, as in regular Freudian psychoanalysis. In a group, the players are in turn actors (*protagonist* and *auxiliary egos*, e.g. participants taking part in the play to enact a scene) and spectators.⁷ They either improvise from situations taken from real life or act out fictive stories. Whatever the content of the fiction performed, going through a physically enacted story provides the participants with the opportunity 'to put play and movement back into their minds'⁸ and thus *through playing* to develop solutions to contend with the difficulties they might encounter in real life. As a French practitioner working with children writes: 'the setting in motion of imagined or real stories' elicits 'dialectical emergences': 'the child emerges as a self, and addressing the others, both adults and children, she can read and more freely interpret her mortal destiny'.⁹ In her research on embodied cognition and psychoanalytic psychodrama, Claudia Scorolli emphasizes the centrality of 'embodied simulation': the acting cure is shown to be more effective than a talking cure, since 'the sensory-motor and affective experience on stage provide the patient with tangible evidence of the potentiality of her action, that is on the efficacy and persistence of her agency'.¹⁰

4 Moreno and Moreno 1973.

5 For instance, Moreno's psychodrama, psychoanalytical psychodrama, group therapy, drama therapy, etc.; see Gaudé 2018.

6 Moreno 1940 and 1973; Bourdariat 2018: 15. Moreno situates himself originally outside the field of Freudian psychoanalysis; yet psychoanalysis has subsequently elaborated its own 'freudian psychodrama' (inspired by Freud's *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*, 1915, where references to catharsis and tragedy abound too).

7 Scorolli 2019: 7.

8 Bocquenet 2018: 63.

9 Saint-Prix 2018: 46.

10 Scorolli 2019: 8.

In its principles, psychodrama converges with the works of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky in educational theory. Vygotsky theorized imaginary play as a method for stimulating self-making.¹¹ He regards creativity, not as a special talent limited to a few people, but as a capability that human beings can acquire, which is expressed through the imaginative play of children. This emphasis on *play*, as a way for therapy participants to become ‘other than what or who they are’, to ‘see and act “as-if” and “other-than”’¹² forms notable common ground with psychodrama. Some recent research continuing Vygotsky’s work willingly acknowledges the relevance of ‘role-playing games and simulations, drama and improvisation’, as ‘some of the many opportunities for repurposing, (...) recreating ourselves with others in revolutionary ways across contexts and throughout the life course.’¹³

Theatrical playing is a practice based on play, on performing ‘as-if’ and ‘other than’. As such, it offers potential for self-transformation, repurposing, overcoming obstacles by sparking new solutions. I am interested in tracking early evidence of this way of thinking at the level of the characters of ancient Greek tragedy. Do the extant Greek plays dramatize this beneficial, exploratory function of enacted fiction in tackling psychological traumas, or fostering self-realization? Do tragic characters project themselves *on to others*, and does this process allow them to engage somehow with individual or collective issues? To propose a provisional answer to this question, I have selected two case studies: Euripides’ *Heracles* and *Ion*, two tragedies produced between 416 and 412 BCE. Two plays where, I argue, *playing* is dramatized in relation with self-realization: it is through play, and specifically playing with objects and role-playing, that characters are shown in their attempts to discover their real self or to refashion it.

3 Role-Playing and Defining One’s Identity: Euripides’ *Heracles*

Euripides’ *Heracles* dramatizes imaginative play in a way that has not been emphasized enough. In a retrospective narrative told by his wife Megara,

11 Vygotsky 2004 [1966], 2016 [1976]; see also Baim et al. 2007; Vadeboncœur et al. 2016.

12 Vadeboncœur et al. 2016: 287 (‘Acting or performing “as if” and “other than” are the building blocks for imaginative play, imagination, and creativity, as well as central to cultural continuity and change’).

13 Vadeboncœur et al. 2016: 301; Perone and Göncü 2014 argue that pretend play is an adaptive human activity of adulthood and not only of childhood. Holzman 2009 draws on the insights of Vygotsky to advance a performance-based methodology of development and learning applicable to different contexts (psychotherapy, classrooms, out-of-school youth programs, and the workplace).

Heracles is shown assigning the future roles and prerogatives of his three children in play (460–485). Later in the play, a messenger narrates how Heracles, maddened by Hera, kills his wife and children through a grim make-believe play (922–1015). Eventually, in *acting as if* being other tragic characters, Heracles attempts to redefine his life and identity, after his heroism has been radically shattered (1146–1428). Euripides thus seems to raise his audience's awareness of the potentialities of play in self-discovery and self-transformation, while exploiting the horror aroused by perverted play to boost tragic irony and tragic suffering.

3.1 *Playing with Children*

To you, my son, your dead father used to assign Argos,
and you were going to dwell in the palace of Eurystheus
and hold sway over fertile Pelasgia.
He used to put about your head the lion
skin which was his armor.

And you, child, were the ruler of Thebes that delights in chariots,
and you took the plains of my country for your inheritance
—such was the persuasion you worked upon your father—
and he lowered into your right hand the finely wrought club
that warded off danger, a gift in pretense only.

And to you, my son, Oechalia, which he once sacked
with his far-flying arrows, he promised to give.

The three <of you> your father
fortified with three thrones, proud of his martial valor.¹⁴

Σοὶ μὲν γὰρ Ἄργος ἔνεμ' ὁ κατθανών πατήρ,
Εὐρυσθέως δ' ἔμελλες οἰκήσειν δόμους
τῆς καλλικάρπου κράτος ἔχων Πελασγίας,
στολήν τε θηρὸς ἀμφέβαλλε σῶ κάρα
λέοντος, ἥπερ αὐτὸς ἐξωπλίζετο.
Σὺ δ' ἦσθα Θηβῶν τῶν φιλαρμάτων ἄναξ,
ἐγκληρα πεδία τὰμὰ γῆς κεκτημένος,
ὥς ἐξέπειθες τὸν κατασπείραντά σε·
ἐς δεξιάν τε σὴν ἀλεξητήριον
ξύλον καθίει δαίδαλον, ψευδῇ δόσιν.
Σοὶ δ' ἦν ἔπερσε τοῖς ἐκηβόλοις ποτὲ

14 Unless otherwise noted, I borrow (and sometimes slightly modify) the translation of D. Kovacs, from the Harvard Loeb Classical Library.

τόξοισι δώσειν Οἰχαλίαν ὑπέσχετο.
 τρεῖς δ' ὄντας <ὑμᾶς> τριπτύχοις τυραννίσιν
 πατήρ ἐπύργου, μέγα φρονῶν εὐανδρία. (Eur. *HF* 460–473)

When she delivers this speech, Megara has been sentenced to death by Lycos, tyrant of Thebes, together with her three sons and Amphitryon, Heracles's father. She believes Heracles to be dead, and offers a rare, nostalgic portrayal of a father playing with his children. In this picture, Heracles's heroic emblematic weapons are crucial material anchors for affectionate play between father and sons. Adopting the function of toys, the weapons indeed prompt enjoyable verbal and physical interactions with his sons:¹⁵ actions such as covering the head of one child with his lion's skin (στολήν τε θηρὸς ἀμφέβαλλε σῶ κάρα λέοντος, 463–464) or placing the club into the right hand of another (ἐς δεξιάν τε σὴν ἄλεξητήριον ξύλον καθίει δαίδαλον, 468–469) trigger visual and corporeal *stimuli* by combining famous iconic attributes that everyone had in mind, with caring, teasing gestures of everyday life. This amusing distribution of his famous attributes is called 'a gift in pretence only' (*pseudê dosin*, 469): it explicitly labels Heracles' playing as make-believe. Still, the play is serious, since each weapon symbolizes a legacy and a territory that will be given to each child. In playing, the emblematic attributes of Heracles lose their offensive function but not their heroic, hereditary status. Playing with objects amounts to a game of thrones preparing his children's future, established in advance.

'This dual world of "being" and "not being" enables the child to weave together past experiences, and possible futures, within the practice of play in the present.'¹⁶ This rare scene in Greek tragedy could illustrate this statement. It also leaves a durable imprint on the relationship between Heracles and his sons. Playing make-believe with children is indeed later actualized on stage when Heracles comes back and saves his children at the last minute. Taking his boys by the hand, he pretends to lead them 'as a ship would tow little boats' (ἄξω λαβῶν γε τούσδ' ἐφολκίδασε χεροῖν, ναῦς δ' ὥς ἐφέλω, 631–632). This is a loving gesture, as is made clear in the following, emotional lines: 'All the human race loves its offspring' (636). By *acting as if* being a reassuring big vessel, in which his boys, as little boats, can find protection, Heracles enters the fictional world of play where boys, even in ancient Greece, are given vehicles to play with (boats, chariots with horses).¹⁷

15 See Grethlein and Huitink 2017: I apply to drama their enactive re-definition of *enargeia* in epic as an embodied response triggered by the description of simple bodily actions.

16 Vadeboncoeur et al. 2016: 289.

17 Boats, horses and chariots are common archaeological finds in children's tombs, cf. Johnston 1985; Pilz 2011.

3.2 *When the Game Turns into a Nightmare*

Play is crucial in preparing a child's future: Euripides may have had this intuitive knowledge about children's development, but as a dramatist, he can also exploit the ways in which the pleasure of playing is transformed into tragic horror. The ironic structure of his tragedy is well known but I am paying particular attention here to the important place given to *playing make-believe* in the description of the killing. Maddened by Hera, Heracles is caught up in a terrifying game, where the limits between playing and folly are grimly blurred:

The servants' feelings were torn between mirth and fear,
and one of them, looking at his fellows, would say,
'Is our master playing a game with us, or is he insane?'

διπλοῦς δ' ὁπαδοῖς ἦν γέλως φόβος θ' ὁμοῦ.
καί τις τόδ' εἶπεν, ἄλλος εἰς ἄλλον δρακῶν·
Παίζει πρὸς ἡμᾶς δεσπότης ἢ μαίνεται; (Eur. *HF* 950–952)

The presence of the verb 'to play' (*paizein*) speaks volumes. Heracles plays a dreadful game by acting the part of someone else ('he was not himself anymore', ὁ δ' οὐκέθ' αὐτὸς ἦν, 931), of an enemy of his own family. Laughing, which often goes with playing, is distorted by a cruel delusion ('maniacal laugh', γέλωτι παραπεπληγμένῳ, 935). The several repetitions of the participle *dokôn* ('seeming', but also 'faking', 967; 971) hint at this chilling pretence of play. Beside himself, Heracles is literally acting, *imitating* a Gorgon (990) or a gory 'smith forging iron' (μυδροκτύπον μίμημ', 992) when he smashes the head of one child with his club. It is a fool's game, cruelly imposed by the gods, with immensely destructive consequences: an unspeakable *agôn* against defenceless children (ironically, *agôn* means both 'fight' and 'game', 1229); a 'war that is not a war' (*apolemon polemon*, 1133), as Euripides puts it a few lines further on, using the Aeschylean figure of an *oxymoron* to express the inexpressible. Club and bow, given in pretence as a legacy in the happy past, become the very tools that kill the children. The phrasing *pseudê dosin* ('a gift in pretence only') retrospectively takes on a darker meaning: it was also a 'lying gift' that eventually brought death to the children instead of a glorious future.

3.3 *Role-Playing as Self-Repurposing*

The killing does not put an end to experimenting with play. Role-playing and make-believe play are again involved in designing a new identity for Heracles. This is first enacted through his (perhaps unexpected) projection into female roles:

Woe is me! Why then do I spare my life
 when I have become the murderer of my dearest children?
 Shall I not go and leap from a sheer cliff
 or stab myself with my sword
 and thus give my children justice for their murder?
 Shall I not burn their father's flesh with fire
 and thrust from myself the ignominy that awaits me in my life?

οἴμοι· τί δῆτα φείδομαι ψυχῆς ἐμῆς
 τῶν φιλτάτων μοι γενόμενος παίδων φονεύς;
 κοῦκ εἶμι πέτρας λισσάδος πρὸς ἄλματα
 ἢ φάσγανον πρὸς ἥπαρ ἐξακοντίσας
 τέκνοις δικαστῆς αἵματος γενήσομαι;
 ἢ σάρκα †τὴν ἐμὴν ἐμπρήσας† πυρί,
 δύσκληϊαν ἢ μένει μ' ἀπώσομαι βίου; (Eur. *HF* 1148–1152)

Killing himself with 'the leap, the sword, the fire', has been qualified by commentators as a traditional 'triadic structure' found in other poetic works.¹⁸ But in fact, this line closely duplicates Andromache's prospects, as they are phrased in Euripides' play of 426 BCE.¹⁹ Heracles expresses himself as Andromache, a mother grieving for her dead son, which contributes to enacting not only a gender inversion but also a change of role for the character. Other verbal reminiscences, moreover, resonate as intertextual and inter-performative allusions to at least four other female roles from earlier tragedies by Euripides and Sophocles: like Medea, Heracles now envisages himself as the desperate 'murderer of his dearest children' (φιλτάτων παίδων φονεύς), a phrasing that precisely echoes Medea's words.²⁰ The leap from a 'sheer cliff' recalls the speech of the Danaïds in Aeschylus's *Suppliants*: the daughters of Danaos threaten to jump into a precipice and die rather than marry their cousins.²¹ The sword (φάσγανον) and where it struck (πρὸς ἥπαρ) are reminiscent of Deianeira's suicide in Sophocles's *Trachiniae*.²² The death by fire was that chosen by Evadne, widow of Capaneus in Euripides's *Suppliants*, who jumped into her husband's pyre to attain honour and fame (τῆς εὐκλείας χάριν, Eur. *Suppl.* 1015), while Heracles contemplates suicide to save himself from 'ill fame' (δύσκληϊαν, Eur. *HF* 1152).

18 Cf. Eur. *Andr.* 841; Ar. *Ran.* 118, Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1. 97; Bond 1981 *ad loc.*

19 Eur. *Andr.* 841.

20 Eur. *Med.* 795 (see also 996).

21 Aesch. *Suppl.* 795–799.

22 Soph. *Trach.* 930–931.

This fluid gender identification should not surprise modern readers: in tragedy, when a man performs female verbal and physical acts, it typically encodes the destruction of his male, dominating status and power. In Sophocles's *Trachiniae*, the dying Heracles, devoured by a poisoned tunic sent by a woman, claims to have become nothing more than 'a woman, in his misery'.²³ Euripides' Heracles endures the same annihilation through feminization, but the convention is given a metatheatrical touch. The character is not assimilated to any woman, but to tragic women previously seen on stage. Euripides's Heracles seems to show a greater awareness of being a theatrical character, or even maybe an actor, looking for a new role and projecting himself onto former memorable characters of grieving mothers and widows—roles that now better fit his gruesome acts.²⁴

All these female parts are denounced by Theseus as wrong ones for Heracles: the former blames the latter for acting like a weak woman and betraying his name, associated with heroic stature and glorious, civilizing deeds.²⁵ Still, these reproaches confirm a definitive change of status and role for Heracles more than they help him to revive his manliness. Defining a new self also triggers make-believe play including playing with objects perceived as *other* than they are. In a 'ventriloquial dubbing', Heracles gives voice to his arrows:²⁶

How painful the pleasure of kissing you,
 how painful the embrace with these weapons!
 I do not know whether I should keep them or let them go,
 since they will hang at my flanks and say to me,
 'By means of us you killed your children and your wife: you keep us,
 the slayers of your children'. Shall I then carry them
 in the hollow of my arms? What will I say? Or shall I strip myself of the
 weapons
 with whose aid I performed my glorious exploits in Greece,
 put myself at the mercy of my enemies, and thus meet a disgraceful
 death?
 I must not let them go but must in misery keep them.

23 Soph. *Trach.* 1075 (νῦν δ' ἐκ τοιούτου θήλυς ἡϋρημαι τάλας).

24 He also envisions acting as (ἐκμιμήσομαι) a new 'Ixion in chains, turned upon his wheel' (1297–1298), a masculine role that denies the possibility of salvation and a future.

25 Eur. *HF* 1412–1414.

26 If we accept the definition of ventriloquism by Davis as 'the act of speaking as other' (Davis 2003: 64).

ᾧ λυγραί φιλημάτων
 τέρψεις, λυγραί τε τῶνδ' ὅπλων κοινωνίαι.
 Ἀμηχανῶ γὰρ πότερ' ἔχω τάδ' ἢ μεθῶ,
 ἃ πλευρὰ τὰμὰ προσπίτνοντ' ἐρεῖ τάδε·
 Ἡμῖν τέκν' εἶλες καὶ δάμαρθ'· ἡμᾶς ἔχεις
 παιδοκτόνους σούς. Εἴτ' ἐγὼ τάδ' ὠλέναις
 οἴσω; τί φάσκων; ἀλλὰ γυμνωθεὶς ὅπλων,
 ξὺν οἷς τὰ κάλλιστ' ἐξέπραξ' ἐν Ἑλλάδι,
 ἐχθροῖς ἐμαυτὸν ὑποβαλὼν αἰσχροῦς θάνω;
 οὐ λειπτέον τάδ', ἀθλίως δὲ σφωστέον. (Eur. *HF* 1376–1385)

This is the second occurrence of make-believe play with his weapons: in a more radical way, this engagement in a counterfactual dialogue *de facto* transforms the ontological status of these objects.²⁷ They are not mute objects anymore but perform the role of anthropomorphized close companions: previously applied to parental relationship, *koinônia* ('communion' or 'partnership') suggests an unexpected communion between a man and his weapons, now envisaged as living substitutes for his children. The partnership is expressed both verbally and physically: the arrows are envisaged as dangling against Heracles's sides (πλευρὰ τὰμὰ προσπίτνοντ', 1379), a contact that ironically duplicates the games of his children clinging to his clothes and his knees.²⁸ Make-believe play with arrows thus generates a burst of emotion and memory that impacts Heracles's choice for his future. He will save his weapons at least as companions and bodyguards until he finds out whether they could be instruments of glorious deeds again. The prospect of keeping his weapons 'in the hollow of his arms', that is, acting the part of a mother cradling her children, might also suggest a gender inversion. Covering his head with his *peplos*, wishing he were an insensitive rock (πέτρος ἀμνήμων κακῶν, 1397), Heracles acts out a new Niobe weeping over the death of her children: the unfortunate rival of Leto had been memorably staged by Aeschylus as a silent grieving mother, her head covered by her mantle, like a stone in the making.²⁹ Seeing Heracles thus becoming Niobe, through visual and verbal allusions, potentially gave spectators the disturbing feeling of a casting error, or a casting change happening right under their eyes.

27 For more on this, see Noel 2023.

28 Eur. *HF* 986 (προσπεσών); see also for the same action, *HF* 79; *Alc.* 948; Soph. *Trach.* 762.

29 Ar. *Ran.* 911–913; Achilles apparently adopted the same posture in Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (Taplin 1972; 2016).

In Dunn's inspiring monograph on Euripidean endings, the outcome of *Heracles* is described as dark and disturbingly open-ended: 'erasure' is the title given to his chapter, meaning the disintegration of all that Heracles represented in terms of heroism and *kleos*.³⁰ Heracles's (psycho)drama is indeed unfinished when the curtain falls. His projection onto various possible new roles is left unsettled, unsatisfying and incomplete: his self-redefinition is largely postponed beyond the time of the play. However, I would nuance Dunn's pessimistic reading by suggesting that the very end of the play hints at a possible way out for Heracles. It will be through play, *role-playing and pretence play*, that Heracles may overcome his identity crisis. In the very last lines of discussion with Theseus, he is shown adopting another new role, reversing the one he played with his children: he now defines himself as the little boat(s) (*epholkides*) towed by a big ship, this time embodied by his friend Theseus.³¹ Friendship and the ability to redesign his self with plasticity and openness can save him. Until its closing lines, Euripides' tragedy is a play that metatheatrically calls for further plays, further productions in which Heracles might find a new part that transforms (at least to some extent) his mythical identity. This seems consistent with modern findings on playing make-believe: Heracles must invent new fictions through playing and repurpose old symbols, to redefine his (theatrical) self.³²

4 Playing Apollo in Euripides' *Ion*

Like the *Heracles*, the *Ion*, too, displays the dramatic leitmotifs of role-playing and forging connections between father and son through the transmission of significant objects. The main character, Ion, is an orphan, secretly born from the rape of the Athenian princess Creusa by Apollo.³³ Abandoned by his mother, the baby has been brought by Hermes to the temple of Apollo. The Pythia has raised him without knowing his real identity and as a young man, Ion has been serving as a janitor in the sanctuary of Delphi.³⁴ The play's dynamic embraces Ion's quest for identity, a quest that is complicated by its political dimension. Scholarship has clearly established that self-discovery and the redefinition of the relationships between Athens and Ionian Greeks are

30 Dunn 1996: 115–132; see also Silk 1985.

31 Eur. *HF* 1424.

32 Boquenet 2018: 63 (see n. 8 above).

33 On Eur. *Ion*, see also the chapter by Jacqueline Klooster in this volume.

34 Eur. *Ion* 50–51.

two central and connected themes of the play.³⁵ Most identity-related scholarship focuses on the second part of the play, the *anagnôrisis* where Creusa and Ion recognize each other as mother and son, thanks to three tokens contained in a basket—this crucial sequence reveals how in this play, objects are material anchors for individual and collective identity.³⁶ I have nevertheless argued elsewhere that other objects are invested with the same identity-related function throughout the play, outside the recognition scene: Ion's filiation with Apollo is unknowingly performed through the handling of the god's divine attributes.³⁷ The tragedy thus displays a coherent network of objects that favours playful manipulation and role-playing—two elements that may fuel a connection with psychodrama.

Jonah Radding's recent contribution, with its focus on Paeanic songs stands out in an interesting way: he convincingly demonstrates that the monodic song of Ion at the beginning of the play, and later, that of Creusa, are also crucial for addressing the question of identity.³⁸ His dramaturgic and political take on this topic can provide a welcome support for my analysis. 'Ion will have to pass from one fictional identity (orphaned slave of Apollo) to another (son of Xuthus), before eventually finding his true identity as the son of Creusa, descendant of Erechtheus', as he puts it.³⁹ Such an interpretation fits well with a psychodramatic reading of this tragedy: Ion must go through a series of different fictional roles to discover his real self. I will therefore attempt to reinterpret the playful games, including puns and visual humour, which accompany and stimulate Ion's quest for identity within the framework of psychodrama. *Playful* is, however, in my mind, different from comic, ridiculous, or incongruous—other old labels wrongly applied to Ion's song by those who read it as a ludicrous 'broom-dance', as Winnington-Ingram once wrote.⁴⁰ My interpretation aims to reincorporate a ludic dimension into the quest for identity at the heart of this play.

4.1 *Acting the Part of Apollo: the Laurel Branch*

To begin with, Ion is himself a *pais*, a young man barely out of childhood, who honours his so-called master, Apollo, by singing and dancing, holding several

35 Taplin 1978: 97 sq.; Goff 1988; Zeitlin 1989; Zacharia 2003; Mueller 2010; Sloan 2016; Radding 2017.

36 Taplin 1978: 97 sq.; Mueller 2010; Sloan 2016.

37 Noel 2014: 120–126.

38 Radding 2017: 395.

39 Radding 2017: 398.

40 Winnington-Ingram 1965. For a detailed bibliography of these mocking readings of Ion's monody, see Noel 2014: 120–121.

props in his hands. The verb meaning 'to play' (*paizein*) occurs several times in archaic and classical poetry in relation to singing and dancing, in sympotic but also ritual contexts.⁴¹ Ion, the *pais*, is playing in many different respects. He is singing, dancing, and playing with words: for instance when in the ritual paeonic refrain *euaiôn euaiôn*, he noticeably makes his own name resonate (*iôn*, 126, 142).⁴² He is playing with objects too, when using them as 'other than they are' and displaying visually the traditional Apollonian triad of attributes inherited from hymnic poetry: the laurel branch, bow, and lyre.

When he holds the laurel branch (103–106, 112–143), the commentators have well perceived that Ion is like a visual double of Apollo *daphnêphoros*.⁴³ While this is correct, it is also important to note the textual and scenic elements which show that he is not Apollo, but a young boy *acting the part of* Apollo. Firstly, the actor was moving in the *orkhêstra*, and not acting on the higher level of the roof of the *skênê* or hanging on the *mêkhanê* (crane), which were, in this play and others by Euripides, the conventional ways that divinities appeared. *Acting as if* is thus immediately signified by this spatial position. Ion also plausibly resembles the *pais amphithalês*, a young man whose very role was to *act as if* being Apollo, laurel branches in hand, in a procession occurring each year in Delphi during the Septerion Festival.⁴⁴ *Acting the part of* is thus also facilitated by the ritual context hinted at in this scene. Finally, the distance that remains between Ion and Apollo is visually translated by the unexpected use that Ion makes of the laurel branch: in a fun visual gag, it is turned upside-down to accomplish the ritual/domestic function of sweeping the ground. It is used as *other than* it should be; yet, far from being ridiculous, it creates meaning. It visually demonstrates, at one and the same time, both how Ion is in complete confusion regarding his birth, and how close he is to discovering it.

41 Pind. *Ol.* 1.16; In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, παίζειν occurs for the songs and dances of the initiates: 319, 376, 407, 442, 452 (cf. Banchich 2017: 324; he also mentions a lost play, *Paidiai*, by the comedian Crates, whose chorus members plausibly appeared as various amusements and games, 336; see also Bierl 2021).

42 Interpreting Ion's name is explicitly said to be significant in the play (80–81, 661–663).

43 Furley and Bremer 2001 II: 309. About the laurel branch in Apollonian iconography, see for instance the Attic *lekythoi*, attributed to the Aischines Painter, ca. 500 BCE, Athens, National Museum, 1203 (*LIMC*, s.v. Apollo, 239).

44 In line 327, Ion says that he is clothed in the *peploi* of the god he serves, another hint at his visual resemblance with Apollo. On the relationship between Ion and the *pais amphithalês*, see Rutherford 2001: 112; on epiphanic rituals in which priests could borrow the gods' paraphernalia and become 'intermittent vectors of divine manifestation', see Pirenne-Delforge 2010: 131–134.

This object, and the others that follow are so many opportunities for the character to play mirror games: the young man and the laurel branch share the same subordinate position ('assistant', *propoleuma*, 113) and are tied by bonds of reciprocity—'you sweep' *saireis*, 115), addressed to the laurel, precedes 'I sweep' (*sairô*, 121).⁴⁵ Like Ion, the laurel has grown in the privileged space of the sanctuary thanks to the care of Apollo's attendants.⁴⁶ This mirror game is all the more plausible in that for Greeks, a young man or woman is like a young sprout—a recurrent metaphor in Greek tragedy and epics.⁴⁷ In psychodrama, in the technique of doubling, a participant supplements the role of the protagonist, usually by standing behind them and saying things that the protagonist might want to express or is withholding.⁴⁸ When holding the laurel branch, a double aptly chosen by Ion, the words pronounced may apply to both.

Phoebus is the father who begot me.

Φοιβός μοι γενέτωρ πατήρ (Eur. *Ion* 136)

In this duet between the boy and the branch, both could legitimately utter these words—gesture and gaze would be crucial on stage to suggest this potential 'ventriloquial dubbing'. While Ion is playing with the laurel, Euripides therefore toys with the expectations of his audience. Language and visual effects collaborate to foretell the end: Apollo is indeed the genetic father of Ion (*genetôr*) and not merely a paternal surrogate. While Ion is turning his laurel branch upside down (and turning it into a make-believe companion), he touches the truth although he is unable to appreciate it fully. The following lines do bring a correction: he regards Phoebus as his symbolic father only (137–140). However, I would not label this setback as a 'failure' but rather as a step made on the fictional level of *acting as-if*.⁴⁹ But at this stage, this truth is not incorporated into the real world—psychology and dramaturgy converge to prevent it: the play cannot stop at the end of the prologue. Another set of revelatory games begins, as Ion moves along and grasps other objects.

45 See also Eur. *Ion*, 111, 124, 129, 152.

46 Archaeological excavations have shown the central place of the laurel tree in the temple's *aduton*. See Roux 1979: 123–129.

47 Hom. *Od.* 6.163: Odysseus mistakes Nausicaa for Artemis, and compares her to a young offshoot of a palm-tree (νέον ἔρνος); Aesch. *Cho.* 204, 236; Eur. *IT* 171. Cf. Monbrun 1989.

48 Scorolli 2019: 10.

49 My interpretation therefore differs from Radding 2017: 407.

4.2 *Visual Play: the Bow and the Lyre*

Ion and *ios*, 'the arrow', sound similar. This proximity is given a material form when Ion seizes a bow to chase away birds from the cornice of the temple.

Here toward the temple wings another, a swan!
 Will you not take elsewhere your feet that show red against your belly?
 The *phorminx* of Apollo that accompanies your song
 cannot save you from my bow!
 Fly off to somewhere else!
 Alight upon the lake at Delos!
 Your tuneful song will change to shrieks of pain if you do not obey!
 See, see!
 What strange bird is this that comes?
 Does he mean to make under the gable
 a nest of straw for his young?
 The twang of my bowstring will prevent you!
 (....)
 Yet I hesitate to kill you,
 who convey the gods' words to mortals.
 But I shall duly perform the tasks
 I am devoted to for Phoebus and never cease
 serving him who feeds me. (Eur. *Ion* 161–183)

If it is accepted that the birds remained imaginary (which seems the most plausible stage reconstruction),⁵⁰ one may first want to reflect on the possible impact on spectators. Ion's sung words require gestures in the direction of invisible attackers coming from the air: put differently, an actor would be expected to aim his bow towards the sky and mime the action of scaring the birds away. But what is miming if not a constant exhibition of oneself *playing as-if*? Miming seems a perfect *mise en abyme* of the actor's ability to recreate the world through imitation, suggestion and imagination.⁵¹ This scenic configuration could therefore immediately prompt spectators to appreciate this scene on the level of representation, besides that of fiction.

Directing his arrows towards the imaginary birds, Ion, moreover, offers another actualization of *acting the part of Apollo*, this time as the famous divine archer (*toxophoros*), as he was staged in the prologue of Aeschylus's *Eumenides*,

⁵⁰ Taplin 1977: 34, *contra* Ruck 1976: 250; Martin 2018: 170.

⁵¹ According to the French mime Étienne Ducroux (1963: 24), 'mime is the essence of theatre, which derives itself from mime only by accident'.

for instance.⁵² However, the action performed is far more complex than using the bow as a violent weapon against the singing swan, a symbol of Apollo.⁵³ While the visual focus is on the bow, the *phorminx*, another defining attribute of Apollo (ἄ φόρμινγξ ἄ Φοίβου, 163) also materializes on stage through verbal allusion and physical action. Rather than genuinely threatening the swan, Ion recreates in the scenic space the dialectical relationship between the bow and the *phorminx*: the famous *palintropos harmonia*, the ‘harmony born from opposite tensions’, mentioned in a fragment of Heraclitus, and well known to Euripides and his audience.⁵⁴ For Greeks, bow and *phorminx* are not enemies, but dialectical opponents whose tension resolves itself in harmony. I therefore detect in this passage another opportunity for playful theatrical invention.⁵⁵

This seems all the more plausible in that Ion eventually projects himself on to the role of a *phorminx*-player, complementing the song of the swan rather than opposing it. It is *playing make-believe* that brings the lyre to life: Apollo’s *phorminx* is unexpectedly materialized on stage when Ion says that he plucks the string of his bow (ψαλμοί σ’ εἰρξουσιν τόξων, 171) *as if it were a lyre*. The plural *psalmoi* takes on the concrete meaning of ‘vibrations’, ‘twang’: the term can be used both for the string of a bow and the string of a musical instrument.⁵⁶ The image of the lyre is superimposed on the bow, which could also happen because the Greeks perceived a mimetic relationship between an archer and a *phorminx* player. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus bends his bow ‘like an expert with a *phorminx*’.⁵⁷ Retrospectively, one can therefore positively assert that his former apparently aggressive attitude towards the swan was *only pretence play* as he admits himself (κτείνειν δ’ ὑμᾶς αἰδοῦμαι τοὺς θεῶν ἀγγέλλοντας φήμας θνατοῖς, 179–180).⁵⁸

52 Giraud 1987: 86. See also Eur. *Alc.* 34–40; Noel 2014: 114–116.

53 I therefore disagree with Giraud’s emphasis on violence and her interpretation of Ion as a ‘black hunter’ (1986: 87; 93). I do not think either that the power of Apollo, as well as his musical abilities, are negated by Ion (Radding 2017: 407).

54 Heracl., fr. 51 Diels-Kranz: ‘it is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre’ (παλίντροπος ἀρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης). See also Hom. *Od.* 12.406–411; Arist. *Rh.* 1413a; Callim. Hymn 2.42–44. On the *palintropos* tension of the bow and the *phorminx*, see the detailed study of Monbrun 2007: 91–179.

55 Interestingly, in Bateson’s theory of play (1987: 138–148), threat and play are two sides of the same coin: play-threatening (by signaling the possibility of causing harm, and at the same time, combining it with a lack of harm) is a means to communicate peace and friendship.

56 See Eur. *HF* 1064 (τοξήρει ψαλμῶ); *Bacch.*, 783–784; Aesch. fr. 57, l 7 *TrGF*³ Radt; Telestes, fr. 6; Diogenes *tragicus* fr.1.

57 Hom. *Od.* 21.40.

58 Mastronarde 2010: 198. In a psychodramatist perspective, the birds are not Ion’s opponents but could be his *doubles*. The swan is intimately associated with Apollo’s territories, as Ion is attached to Delphi. The theme of filiation also characterizes the third bird:

The interpretation whereby Ion fails to perform his real identity in this song in honour of Apollo can therefore be nuanced: on the contrary, he repeatedly performs his filiation. He creates meaning through ‘the ability to see objects, actions and participants “as if” they are “other than” what or who they are’, but this meaning developed at the level of play and fiction is not transposed to the level of reality or consciousness. Studying children’s playing, Vygotsky wrote that the ‘awareness of what being a sister means increases when sisters play at being sisters.’⁵⁹ One could say that when Ion acts as if he were Apollo, Euripides shows him on the way to consolidating his filial relationship with him. The *anagnôrisis*, recognition, does not happen, though, and for good reason: if Ion’s *play* worked straightforwardly, it would simply put an end to Euripides’ play. Ion needs to go through playing other (wrong) roles before reaching his real self—this is a dramatic need and a psychological truth. In psychodrama, playing never leads to a straightforward self-realization. Participants often need, first, to go through a variety of roles; second, self-discovery is mediatized through discussion with the other participants and with the director-psychodramatist, who intervenes as an external interpreter—this is sometimes called the ‘talking phase’, a final step, offstage and after the drama, when ‘conscious logical thinking is gradually reintegrated.’⁶⁰

It is also worth noting that Ion’s prospect of performing his real identity at the end of the tragedy is also postponed, to some extent, beyond the final lines. As a *deus ex machina*, the goddess Athena announces that Ion and Creusa will have to *pretend* that Xuthus is the real father of Ion to keep him pleased with the ‘false belief’ (*dokêsis*, 1602) of his paternity. More playing is always needed ... As in the *Heracles*, the end of the play resembles an *éternel recommencement*. But despite (or even because of) that, I suggest that the theatre is shown as an appropriate place for experiencing the efficacy of role-playing in working out one’s identity.

5 Conclusion

Applying psychodrama to ancient Greek tragedy requires some transpositions. An obvious difference is that characters on stage are fictional creatures without

the verb *παιδοῦργει* (‘hatches your brood’, 175) hints at anthropomorphic relationships between parents and children—Ion’s obsession with filiation is projected onto the birds themselves. As mentioned by Giraud, the birds also symbolize Ion’s future and identity (1986: 88).

59 Vygotsky 1967: 9–10.

60 Scorolli 2019: 7.

consciousness. In psychodrama, participants are real, sentient subjects who willingly take part in collective role-playing as a group psychotherapy. Despite this inevitable distance, the heuristic scope of this investigation can arguably extend in two directions. Psychodramatists today still invoke Greek tragedy as an inspiration and a model. They refer to broad notions such as ‘catharsis’, ‘Eleusis mysteries’, or the ‘Dionysiac’, which they interpret in their own terms, far removed from the knowledge and research questions of specialists in antiquity. A renewed anchoring in Greek drama, through close reading and textual analysis of the Greek texts themselves, could impact the understanding of their practice and the epistemology of their discipline.

On the other hand, for Classics scholars, this detour through psychodrama allows a fresh appreciation of the function of playing, pretend playing, and role-playing in Greek tragedy, which may be applied to other plays. It also leads to detection of new *loci* of *implicit* metatheatricality in Greek tragedy, highlighting their multilayered significance. Far from being the exclusive domain of comedy, tragic metatheatrical effects draw the spectators’ attention to the means of theatrical art, but also, perhaps, to the ways in which theatrical means offer appropriate tools to work out individual and collective issues. Finally, in the tragedies under study, playing is strongly rooted in the manipulation of objects—not by accident. Playing with objects and displacing their instrumental functions—in words and deeds—is fundamentally theatrical. Theatre is the place where the importance of thinking with objects (objectifying thoughts, persons, and concepts) is highlighted as a process that structures human cognition.

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The Posthumous Future in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

Karen Bassi

1 Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which the prospect of death provides an impetus for 'anchoring innovation' in Greek tragedy. This somewhat counterintuitive argument begins from the premise that the knowledge of human mortality—comprising both one's own death and the deaths of others—is the precondition for imagining a human future. Put another way, the future is comprised of the belief that other humans will live after we have died; I will return to this point at the end of the chapter. The argument also begins from the premise that the relationship between the present and the future in Greek tragedy—punctuated by the deaths of protagonists—demonstrates how anchoring innovation names a temporal structure. In the terms of this chapter, it names an afterlife. Addressing the specific theme of this volume, the study of death and its effects as a heuristic in ancient Greek tragedy also invites a dialogue—both methodologically and conceptually—with the field of death studies in the social sciences, including its use of statistical and demographic data (i.e., mortality rates).¹ The aim here is to contribute to this dialogue, not by collecting historical or sociological data but by investigating the political, temporal, and emotional effects of death in tragedy, with attention paid to the genre's unique form and content.

1.1 *Conceptual and Empirical Unknowability*

At the conceptual level, the posthumous future I have in mind comprises the defamiliarization of both political institutions and social relations. To extend Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 coinage, defamiliarization refers here to the poetic and

1 Death studies in English scholarship is well represented in the journal *Mortality* published by Taylor and Francis (<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cmrt20>). Most of this scholarship is focused on contemporary responses to death and dying, but also includes essays on what might be called the history of death (primarily in the west). A 2019 article by Robert and Tradii, for example, reviews the scholarship on the denial of death in the west.

dramatic representation of what is both familiar and inevitable in life, i.e., death. According to Shklovsky:

The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (1917: 2)

It might be countered that death is always unfamiliar. We all know that we will die, even as we may find ways to avoid or ignore that eventuality. But this knowledge is also paradoxical insofar as the state of being dead and the question of when and how it will happen to ourselves and to others are in principle unknowable. In the Greek mythological tradition, this unknowability is captured in the *Prometheus Bound* in which the Titan Prometheus says that he has ‘stopped mortals from foreseeing their death ... and caused blind hopes to dwell within them’ (PV 250–252). Historically and philosophically, the limits of human knowledge—our blind hopes—are confronted in the question of whether death ought to be feared. For Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*, the fear of death is the test case for what humans can know.² For Epicurus, in his *Letter to Menoeceus*, this fear is met in the dictum that ‘death is nothing to us’.³ Responses to the fear of death are also expressed in the material culture of ancient Greece. Maria Serena Mirto notes that, ‘Since the 8th c. BC, when the fear of death was more intense, graves were placed outside inhabited areas in Greece’.⁴ Whether or not the fear of death was ‘more intense’ from one period to another, the long-term practice of placing tombs outside urban centres is a means of confronting that fear by keeping the dead at a distance.⁵ That the fear of death—in all its cultural expressions—tests the limits of human knowledge is concisely captured by contemporary philosopher Marcel Conche for whom ‘Death is the ... horizon of thought’.⁶

² Pl. *Ap.* 29a–b.

³ *Ep. Men.* 124–125.

⁴ Mirto 2012: 64. According to Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (1981 and 1983, cited by Mirto 2012: 65) this practice indicates that ‘the space of the dead had to be separated from that of the living owing not only to growing urbanization but also to a change in the collective attitude toward death’. This last conclusion—including what is meant by a ‘change in the collective attitude toward death’—has been challenged by recent archaeological research which, for example, finds no preference for inhumation or cremation from the archaic to the classical periods.

⁵ Mirto 2012: 84–91.

⁶ Conche 1973: 14, cited by Schumacher 2011: 86 with n. 4. Cf. Heidegger 1962: 282–283: ‘We have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man “suffers”’.

As the physical or material proof that humans are destined to die the human corpse inhabits this horizon, as I have argued elsewhere.⁷ The result is a situation in which empirical observation (the sight of the dead human body) only confirms what the observer cannot know (the state of being dead); the human corpse is the proof of what Bernard N. Schumacher calls a 'radical ignorance'.⁸ Disclosed in the act of viewing the dead bodies of others, this ignorance is a defining characteristic of the tragic spectator.⁹ The fact that the bodies of the dead in tragedy are often revealed on the *ekkuklêma* or wheeled cart after the characters have died off-stage casts this ignorance in the form of a disavowal.¹⁰ As a distinctive feature of Greek tragedy, this mechanical device gives prominence to the material presence of the corpse in the service of concealing the moment of death.

1.2 *Concealment*

This concealment is a source of the defamiliarization of death spoken of above as an effect of poetic (tragic) language which, again in Shklovsky's words 'in the process of perception has an aesthetic end and must be prolonged'. In the current context, tragedy as a cultural form is a prolonged confrontation with death that causes fear, requires concealment, and exposes ignorance. Hiding the moment of death from the audience is also the precondition for its vivid and often lengthy descriptions by messengers or other (off-stage) eye-witness observers in tragedy. If Sophocles' Ajax is an exception, i.e., if he dies a violent death in full view of the audience, the need to conceal that moment is gestured toward in the statement of his wife Tecmessa who, upon finding the hero's corpse, states that it is 'not to be looked at' (*outoi theatos* Soph. *Aj.* 915) and that she will cover it entirely 'since no one who loved him could bear to look at him as he spurts blackened blood towards the nostrils and out of the bloody wound as a consequence of his self-inflicted slaughter' (915–919; tr.

7 Bassi 2018.

8 Schumacher 2005: 148.

9 On survivors as spectators, see Schumacher 2011: 127–129. On the paradox of being a spectator (*Zuschauer*) at our own death, see Freud 1915: 289. Razinsky 2009: 83 notes that the theatre 'brings us close to death ... yet assures us in advance that it is only make believe, that we will not be personally touched by it ... It is also possible that the necessity to come close to death is what drives us to attempt representation'. But Razinsky does not address the question of why the theatre—as opposed to other forms of representation—has this particular capacity to bring us close to death. Cf. Murnaghan 1999–2000.

10 In Freudian terms, disavowal names a 'mode of defense which consists in the subject's refusing to recognize the reality of a traumatic perception'. For the definition, see Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 118, who stress that disavowal in Freud is directed—somewhat ambiguously—toward an 'external reality'. I am suggesting that the *ekkuklêma* activates this mode of defence in effectively hiding the moment of death.

Finglass 2011; cf. 376). Scholars have questioned the authenticity of these last lines based upon their perceived un-Sophoclean goriness (See Finglass 2011 *ad loc.*).¹¹ But if Tecmessa's words can be said to compensate for the absence of a full-blown messenger's speech in the play, that absence may also be an indication that the hero's suicide had in fact been seen by the audience.¹² In any event, the moment of death in Greek tragedy is normally given over to description (poetic language) whose veracity is proven in the subsequent exposure of the character's corpse.

1.3 *Survival*

As Sheila Murnaghan succinctly states, tragedy is 'a song of survivors' in which 'the hero's death is tied into the survival not of individuals but of whole communities'.¹³ Survival is crucial to the idea of a tragic future I am arguing for here, in which tragic spectators can also be defined as (virtual) survivors. That future is further determined by variables that include historical context, gender, filiation, and age. If tragic plots chart a trajectory to a post-mortem world, i.e., a world that comes into being following and as a result of the death of a protagonist, this trajectory is often fueled by wars and their aftermath. These wars comprise the legendary Trojan War as the basis of so many tragic plots, the war over the control of Thebes in the Oedipus plays, and the almost constant warfare in Greece during the fifth century BCE, culminating in the crushing defeat of the Athenian empire at the century's end. I am not arguing for a strict historical connection between these events, i.e., that tragedy's legendary wars are simply foils for the wars Athens was fighting. Rather, as the basis for analysing tragedy in the fifth century, the *virtual* contemporaneity of

11 See Scullion 1994; Mueller 2016: 30 assumes that Ajax's corpse is brought on stage on the *ekkuklêma*.

12 The most relevant antecedent is Aeschylus' fragmentary Ajax trilogy in which the suicide is not dramatized but is reported by an eyewitness messenger (*Thrêissai*, fr. 83 Sommerstein). See also the scholiast on Soph. *Aj.* 815, who states that Sophocles, 'perhaps wishing to innovate and not to follow in the footsteps of another, or rather wishing to astonish, placed the deed in full view'. On the scholiast see Falkner 2002: 354, as discussed by Mueller 2016: 17. The messenger speech is the most common way of reporting deaths in Greek tragedy. Sophocles' radical innovation is to effectively replace the messenger speech with two monologues by Ajax, his so-called 'deception' speech (645–692) followed by his suicide or 'death' speech (815–865). This innovation has resulted in a longstanding conundrum in the history of classical scholarship about how the hero's suicide was originally staged. Cf. Hecuba asking to hear the details of Polyxena's slaughter from Talthybius in Euripides *Hecuba* 518ff.

13 Murnaghan 1999–2000: 109.

these wars is governed by analogy based on an increased risk of death within the community.

Within this framework, I will be looking at the prospect of death in tragedy in terms of a particular temporal phenomenon: the deaths of children who pre-decease their parents. After some preliminary remarks about this phenomenon in the literary sources, I will argue that Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which Oedipus curses his own sons to die at each other's hands, demonstrates the complex ways in which this phenomenon is tied to the idea of a tragic future.¹⁴ The argument also sheds light on the mysterious nature of Oedipus' own death, on the fact that his corpse is never revealed to the audience, and on the related fact that (as the messenger reports) no tomb marks the place where he died; Ismene says that Oedipus is 'without a tomb' (*ataphos*, 1732).

2 Children's Deaths

While not explicitly stated in the Homeric poems, the idea that children should not die before their parents is implied in Priam's description of his own fate following the deaths of his sons and daughters:

Have pity for wretched me while I am still alive,
I whom the father, the son of Kronos, will destroy on the threshold
of old age by a grievous fate after I have witnessed many evils,
my sons destroyed and my daughters dragged away.

πρὸς δ' ἐμὲ τὸν δύστηνον ἔτι φρονέοντ' ἐλήησον
δύσμορον, ὃν ῥα πατὴρ Κρονίδης ἐπὶ γήραος οὐδῶ
αἴσιγ' ἐν ἀργαλέῃ φθίσει κακὰ πόλλ' ἐπιδόντα
υἷάς τ' ὀλλυμένους ἐλκηθείσας τε θύγατρας. (*Il.* 22.59–62)

In stating that he is still alive or still conscious (*eti phroneonta*), Priam implies that he should be dead. In a similar vein in the *Iliad*, Priam's wife Hecuba asks how she will live now that her son Hector has died (*Il.* 22. 431–432). Hector's well-known advice to his young son, Astyanax, provides an example by contrast:

14 We can compare the theogonic myths in which immortal parents (Ouranos and Kronos) imprison their children in battles over succession. The Orestes myth, in which children kill their parent, represents a radical counter example to the normative idea that parents should pre-decease their children.

And some day let someone say of him, when he returns from war, 'He is better by far than his father.'

καί ποτέ τις εἴποι πατρός γ' ὅδε πολλὸν ἀμείνων
ἐκ πολέμου ἀνιόντα. (*Il.* 6.479–480)

Hector's words—spoken in the light of his own impending death—are clearly based on the principle that parents should die before their children.¹⁵ The fact that these words are spoken in *prosopopoeia* confirms the absolute absence of Hector in that indefinite future; in other words, it confirms that he will have died. The principle that parents should die before their children is also invoked in the emotional scene between Achilles and Priam in Book 24 of the *Iliad*. There, Achilles tells the old man about his own once prosperous father, Peleus:

But the gods brought evil even upon him, in that there
were no offspring of sons to rule in his palace,
but he sired one only son, doomed to an untimely end
Nor can I take care of him as he grows old, since I sit in Troy
far from my own country, where I bring pain to you and your children.

ἀλλ' ἐπὶ καὶ τῷ θῆκε θεὸς κακόν, ὅττι οἱ οὐ τι
παίδων ἐν μεγάροισι γονὴ γένητο κρειόντων,
ἀλλ' ἓνα παῖδα τέκεν παναώριον· οὐδέ νυ τόν γε
γηράσκοντα κομίζω, ἐπεὶ μάλα τηλόθι πάτρης
ἦμαι ἐνὶ Τροίῃ, σέ τε κήδων ἡδὲ σὰ τέκνα. (*Il.* 24.538–542)

The point is clear that Achilles' death is 'untimely' (*panaōrion*) in part because he will die before his father. In a similar fashion, the poet comments on the death of Hippothous in Book 17:

He did not repay his dear parents for rearing him (*threptra*); short was his life (*minunthadíos de hoi aiōn*), falling beneath the spear of noble Ajax.

οὐδὲ τοκεῦσι
θρέπτρα φίλοις ἀπέδωκε, μινυνθάδιος δέ οἱ αἰῶν
ἔπλεθ' ὑπ' Αἴαντος μεγαθύμου δουρὶ δαμέντι. (*Il.* 17.301–303)

15 On this passage, see Pratt 2007: 27–29.

Citing this last passage, Jasper Griffin (1983: 108) remarks that two of Homer's most 'pathetic motifs' are 'short life' and 'bereaved parents'.¹⁶ I would add that these motifs are linked and that together they are further evidence of the principle that children should not pre-decease their parents. In these Homeric examples, this principle is negatively verified in the proposition that parents who do survive their children are destined for a wretched old age and a life that is not worth living.¹⁷

An explicit reference to children pre-deceasing their parents comes from a famous story in the Lydian Logos of Herodotus' *Histories*. When the Persian king Cyrus asks why Croesus waged war against the Persians, the Lydian king answers:¹⁸

No one is so foolish as to choose war over peace. In the latter children bury their fathers, in the former fathers bury their sons.

οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτω ἀνόητος ἐστὶ ὅστις πόλεμον πρὸ εἰρήνης αἰρέεταί· ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ οἱ παῖδες τοὺς πατέρας θάπτουσι, ἐν δὲ τῷ οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας. (Hdt. 1.87.4)

In the *Histories*, Croesus is a student of the Athenian lawgiver Solon and becomes, in effect, a Greek avatar. Whether or not the aphorism quoted above expresses what Robert Renehan calls a 'genuinely Herodotean outlook', both its gnomic content and its epigrammatic form are hallmarks of Herodotus' style.¹⁹ In short, the sentiment is more Greek than Lydian.²⁰

The notion that children should not pre-decease their parents is also inferred in the common tenet of Greek social life—already evident in the

16 See Felson 2002: 37–38; Finley 1981. Patronymics are another expression of the principle that children should outlive their parents.

17 See Pratt 2007: 33 on 'a recurrent motif in warrior obituary of the parent's inability to prevent the child's death, as at *Il.* 20.407–412'. Wanting to prevent the death of one's child is complementary to the idea that children should not pre-decease their parents. In a preliminary review of scholarship on children and parents in Homer, I have found no sustained treatments of this question. Ingalls 1998: 27 notes 'the frequency with which children are cited as the reason for fighting' in Homer. Here too this 'reason' confirms that children should outlive their parents.

18 I am grateful to Martin Devecka for bringing this passage to my attention.

19 For the phrase, see Renehan 2001: 176.

20 Cf. Solon's reply to why he thinks Tellus is the happiest of men (Hdt. 1.30.3–4): 'For one thing he lived in a famous city and had good and noble children, and he saw all his children and grandchildren surviving him' (tr. Strassler). See also Plutarch's *Life of Solon* 27.4. Quoted in Ingalls 2002: 246–247.

Homeric passages cited above—that children are to take care of their aged parents.²¹ As we have seen, there is even a Greek term for this expectation, *threptra* (as quoted above, *Il.* 17.301–303).²² This expectation is also commonly invoked in tragedy. Thus, for example, in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Hecuba's daughter Polyxena laments that her death means that she [Polyxena] will no longer be able to care for her aged mother:

No longer, no longer shall I
Share your slavery, I wretched child
[attending] your wretched old age.

οὐκέτι σοι παῖς ἄδ' οὐκέτι δὴ
γῆρα δειλαίῳ δειλαία
συνδουλεύσω. (Eur. *Hec.* 202–204)

Later in the same play, after lamenting the deaths of her fifty children, Hecuba says that Polyxena's death is 'untimely' or 'out of season' (*aōros*):

O daughter [you who are subject to] a miserable and untimely fate.

ὦ τῆς ἀώρου θύγατερ ἀθλίας τύχης. (Eur. *Hec.* 425)

Clearly, Polyxena's death—like Achilles' death in the passage quoted above (*Il.* 24.538–542)—is 'out of season' because she is young. But spoken here by her mother, the phrase also infers the grief of knowing that her daughter will die before she does.²³

In Euripides' *Alcestis*, Admetus is allowed to find someone willing to die in his place. His wife Alcestis volunteers. His father Pheres says that, in agreeing to die in place of his son, Alcestis has saved him [Pheres] from a wretched old age:

She [Alcestis] who died in exchange for your life, child,
did not make me childless and did not allow
me to waste away in wretched old age, bereft of you.

21 See Easterling 1967: 8, n. 1 on Solon's law concerning children's treatment of their parents: 'If someone does not nourish (*trephêi*) his parents, let him be dishonoured' (Diog. Laert. 1.55).

22 On *threptra*, see Felson 1999.

23 Polyxena's death thus ironically echoes the untimely death of Achilles. The irony lies in the fact that, in Euripides' play, Polyxena is sacrificed to the dead Achilles. But their untimely deaths are both measured in the fact that they die before their parents.

ἥτις γε τῆς σῆς προύθανε ψυχῆς, τέκνον,
καί μ' οὐκ ἄπαιδ' ἔθηκεν οὐδ' εἶασε σοῦ
στερέντα γήρᾳ πενθίμῳ καταφθίνειν .(Eur. *Alc.* 620–622)

In the following heated exchange between Admetus and his father Pheres, Admetus argues that Pheres should have agreed to die for him since he is old and Alcestis is young (635). As a consequence, Admetus explicitly refuses to care for Pheres in his old age and to provide him with a proper burial when he dies. In this strange play, a father's refusal to die in order to keep his son alive ironically—and by contrast—confirms the related principles that parents should die before their children and that children should care for their aged parents.

As noted above, these examples from literary sources should be read in the context of the wars (legendary or actual) that frame them. The threat of violent death in war, a threat that applies to adults and children alike (of both genders), necessarily tests the idea that death should happen according to a normative temporal sequence (this is the explicit point of the passage from Herodotus). These examples should also be read against what is believed to have been a high infant and child mortality in Athens in the fifth century BCE.²⁴ In a society in which women often died in childbirth, moreover, the principle that children should outlive their parents testifies to the way in which harsh realities (the deaths of mothers and children) call for a compensatory strategy. The fact that this principle is more often inferred than stated outright in the literary sources also testifies to its precarious logic.

3 Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus*

In pursuing the consequences of this logic I turn now to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, produced in 406 BCE. Focused on the potential benefit that Oedipus' death will confer on the city that receives him, the play explores the relationship between the death of the individual and the survival of a *polis* or city-state. Uneasily settled in the grove of the Furies in Colonus (outside Athens) when the play begins, Oedipus occupies a position of spatial and moral ambiguity marked first of all by a confusion of normally distinct kinship relations: husband, son, father, and brother.

24 See Woods 2007. It is noteworthy that no literary sources are brought to bear on the question raised by Woods (2007: 396) of the emotional connections between children and parents in antiquity. See also Patterson 1985; Golden 1988; Ingalls 2002.

Positioned between the terrible acts he unknowingly committed in life and the death he knows is imminent, moreover, Oedipus tests the validity of what appears to have been a familiar adage, spoken by the chorus late in the play, that it is best never to have been born or, having been born, to die as quickly as possible. The chorus elaborates on this pessimistic if pragmatic advice:

Not to be born conquers every *logos*; but once [a man] appears,
to go back to that place from where he came
as quickly as possible is the second [best thing] by far.
For when he has seen youth go by with its thoughtlessness,
what hard-labouring strokes are foreign to him, what suffering
is not close by? Envy, civil wars, strife, battles,
and murders? Last of all falls to his lot old age, abhorred,
weak, unsociable, friendless, where dwells
all evils among evils. In such a condition
is this miserable man here [Oedipus], not I alone.

μη φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νικᾷ λόγον· τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῇ,
βῆναι κεῖθεν ὅθεν περ ἦκει,
πολὺ δεύτερον, ὥς τάχιστα.
ὥς εὖτ' ἂν τὸ νέον παρῇ κούφας ἀφροσύνας φέρον,
τίς πλαγὰ πολύμοχθος ἔξω; τίς οὐ καμάτων ἔνι;
φθόνος, στάσεις, ἔρις, μάχαι
καὶ φόνοι· τό τε κατὰ μεμπτον ἐπιλέλογχε
πύματον ἀκρατές ἀπροσόμιλον
γῆρας ἄφιλον, ἵνα πρόπαντα
κακὰ κακῶν ξυνοικεῖ.
ἐν ᾧ τλάμων ὅδ', οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος. (Soph. *OC* 1225–1240; cf. Thgn. *Elegies*
425–428)²⁵

While something of a commonplace, the statement that the second-best thing is 'to go back to that place from where one came as quickly as possible' emphasizes the fact that Oedipus and his children have come from the same place: the womb of his mother/wife Jocasta. And by extension, it also emphasizes the

25 For the meaning of *hapas logos* in l. 1225, see Jebb 2004 [1900] *ad loc.* Jebb translates, 'Not to be born exceeds every possible estimate,'—of the gain, as compared with the loss, of being born' (emphasis in the original). *Logos* has a wide semantic range in Greek but is everywhere associated with human knowledge, reason, and the ability to differentiate between competing arguments, as in this passage.

fact that Oedipus has outlived his father by having killed him. Caught between these related acts, the principles that children should not pre-decease their parents and should care for them in their old age are at once invoked and ironically contested in Oedipus' story. Oedipus outlives his parents but is at the same time the cause of their deaths (proximate in the case of Jocasta; direct in the case of Laius).

In Sophocles' play, Oedipus epitomizes the ravages of old age that prove both the value of an early death and, alternatively, the value of living children. A leitmotif of the play is the competition between Oedipus' sons and daughters as his rightful caregivers (providers of *trophê*, 351) in his old age. While his daughters have assumed this role, Oedipus repeatedly asserts that it ought to have fallen to his sons—as in the following passage:²⁶

Oh, those two [my sons] in every way conform to the ways of Egypt
both in their nature and their way of life (*biou trophas*).
For there the men sit weaving indoors
and the women as is customary always go outside
to provide the means of supporting life (*tropheia*).
Just so those two brothers of yours, children, for whom
these tasks are rightly suited, keep house like young women,
while you two instead of them bear the evils
I endure in my wretched state.

ὦ πάντ' ἐκείνω τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ νόμοις
φύσιν κατεικασθέντε καὶ βίου τροφάς·
ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἄρσενες κατὰ στέγας
θακοῦσιν ἱστουργοῦντες, αἱ δὲ σύννομοι
τάξω βίου τροφεία πορσύνουσ' αἰεὶ.
σφῶν δ' ὦ τέκν', οὓς μὲν εἰκὸς ἦν πονεῖν τάδε,
κατ' οἶκον οἰκουροῦσιν ὥστε παρθένοι,
σφῶ δ' ἄντ' ἐκείνων τὰ μὰ δυστήνου κακὰ
ὑπερπονείτον. (Soph. *OC* 338–346)

Later, Oedipus will refer to his daughters Antigone and Ismene as 'my only pair [of children]' (*tên monên xunôrida*, 895) to indicate, as Jebb notes, that 'his sons are as dead to him'.²⁷ The idea that Oedipus' sons are effectively dead because

26 Cf. Daly 1986: 445.

27 Jebb 2004 [1900] *ad loc.* On this passage, see also Easterling 1967: 3.

they have abandoned him in his old age again validates—by an inversion—the principle that children should not die before their parents.

When Creon confronts him with his father's death, Oedipus launches a defence based on the fact that he had not yet been born at the time the oracle was given to Laius:

Then show me: if some decree from a god
came to my father that he was to die by his children,
how could you justly reproach me with this,
I who had not yet had been conceived by a father
or a mother, but was at that time unborn (*agennêtos*)?
If then being born into misery, as I was,
I came to blows with my father and killed him,
knowing neither what I was doing nor to whom,
how could you rightly blame the involuntary act?

ἐπεὶ δίδαξον, εἴ τι θέσφατον πατρὶ
χρησιμοῖσιν ἰκνεῖθ' ὥστε πρὸς παίδων θανεῖν,
πῶς ἂν δικαίως τοῦτ' ὀνειδίζοις ἐμοί,
ὃς οὔτε βλάστας πω γενεθλίου πατρός,
οὐ μητρὸς εἶχον, ἀλλ' ἀγέννητος τότ' ἦ;
εἰ δ' αὖ φανείς δύστηνος, ὡς ἐγὼ φάνην,
ἐς χεῖρας ἦλθον πατρὶ καὶ κατέκτανον,
μηδὲν ξυνεῖς ὦν ἔδρων εἰς οὓς τ' ἔδρων,
πῶς ἂν τό γ' ἄκον πράγμ' ἂν εἰκότως ψέγοις; (Soph. OC 969–977)

Oedipus' defence anticipates the chorus' statement later in the play that 'not to have been born conquers every *logos*' (discussed above) where the *logos* here comprises the acts of an unwilling and unknowing parricide.²⁸ But the claim that he is not blameworthy because he had not been born at the time of the oracle only underlines the temporal anomalies that structure Oedipus' life: once he had been born, he did the deed even while attempting to escape it. The question of Oedipus' guilt or innocence is outside the scope of this chapter. The point I want to make here is that having never been born is the

28 It is worth remarking that the adjective 'unwilling' (*akôn*) in this passage is transferred from the human actor (Oedipus) to the act (*pragma*). The effect of the hypallage is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it emphasizes Oedipus' insistence that he was ignorant of what he was doing. But the transfer also infers recognition of his complicity in the act.

implied antidote to being a parricide. If the expectation is that living children support their aged parents, in other words, those who would kill their parents should never have been born. And, of course, once he was born, Oedipus was the object of attempted filicide. Lived on a continuum between killing a parent and being killed by a parent, Oedipus' life becomes a test case—by the precarious logic mentioned above—for the principle that children should outlive their parents.

Creon's failed abduction of Oedipus's daughters adds another element to this logic. The attempt proves Creon's betrayal of Oedipus just as the girls' retrieval by Theseus and the Athenians proves the latter's loyalty. But the highly emotional scene of the daughters' return (1099ff.) illuminates by contrast the arrival of the son, Polyneices. Theseus reports the obvious fact that he has returned the girls 'alive' (*zôsas*, 1147). In contrast, the two sons will wage war against each other and, in the end, will kill each other. Here a war between cities (Argos and Thebes) is more immediately and more pointedly a war between sons. Similar to Laius leaving the infant Oedipus out on Mount Cithaeron to die (i.e., not killing him outright), moreover, Oedipus causes the deaths of his own sons by indirection—the curse that takes time to mature. The combination of Laius' unsuccessful attempt to kill his son and Oedipus' successful (if unknowing) killing of his father emphasizes the fact and significance of Oedipus' survival into old age.

Upon seeing Oedipus, Polyneices describes his father's condition:

Oh! What shall I do? Should I weep first for
my own evils, children (*paides*), or for those I see of
this old father? A man I have
found in this foreign land, an exile with you two,
wrapped in clothing whose wretched filth has long come to live
with the old man, withering his sides.
And the hair on his sightless head
is unkempt and blows about in the wind.
And sister to this, it seems, is the nourishment (*threptêria*)
he carries for his miserable belly.
I learn these things too late (*opse*) and I am wholly destroyed (*panôlês*),
And I bear witness that I have come to be
the most evil of men, where your care (*trophais*) is concerned.

οἷμοι, τί δράσω; πότερα τὰμαυτοῦ κακὰ
πρόσθεν δακρύσω, παῖδες, ἢ τὰ τοῦδ' ὀρώων
πατρὸς γέροντος; ὃς ξένης ἐπὶ χθονὸς

σὺν σφῶν ἐφηύρηκ' ἐνθάδ' ἐκβεβλημένον
 ἐσθῆτι σὺν τοιᾷδε, τῆς ὁ δυσφιλῆς
 γέρων γέροντι συγκατώκηκεν πίνος
 πλευρὰν μαραίνων, κρατὶ δ' ὀμματοστερεῖ
 κόμη δι' αὔρας ἀκτένιστος ἄσσεται·
 ἀδελφὰ δ' ὥς ἔοικε, τούτοισιν φορεῖ
 τὰ τῆς ταλαίνης νηδύος θρεπτῆρια.
 ἀγὼ πανώλης ὄψ' ἄγαν ἐκμανθάνω·
 καὶ μαρτυρῶ κάκιστος ἀνθρώπων τροφαῖς
 ταῖς σαῖσιν ἥκειν (Soph. OC 1254–1266)

In these lines, Polyneices emphasizes a child's care for his aged father by *polyptoton* ['old man'] (*gerôn*,²⁹ *gerontos*, *geronti*), by referring to his sisters as 'children' (*paides*), and by the references to *threptêria* and *trophais*. Together, these last two words comprise a reciprocal form of care: that of children for their parents (*threptêria*) and of parents for their children (*trophê*). Polyneices' speech is an admission of failure on both counts, mediated by Oedipus' roles as both Laius' son and Polyneices' father. But I want to focus on the statement that Polyneices learned of his father's condition 'too late' (*opse*).³⁰ This temporal adverb is not common in tragedy. But when it does occur, it has to do with intellection or understanding, as here, where the temporal lag names a son's failure to know—in time—how to be a son. Polyneices is thus like Oedipus in learning 'too late' who he is, where this knowledge in both cases is revealed in a son's relationship to his father. In more general terms, the act of learning 'too late' gives temporal structure to Oedipus' roles as both parricide and filicide and to Polyneices' role as fratricide.

Polyneices' statement that he is 'wholly destroyed' (*panôlês*) also anticipates Oedipus' claim that his sons are not his sons or, more pointedly, that they were not born from him:

But now these girls preserve me, these are my nourishers,
 these are men, not women, who suffer along with me.
 But you two are from some other man and were not born from me.

νῦν δ' αἶδε μ' ἐκσώζουσιν, αἶδ' ἐμαὶ τροφοί,
 αἶδ' ἄνδρες, οὐ γυναικες, εἰς τὸ συμπονεῖν·
 ὑμεῖς δ' ἀπ' ἄλλου κοῦκ ἐμοῦ πεφύκατον. (Soph. OC 1367–1369)

29 Strictly speaking construed with *pinos*.

30 The word is uncommon in Sophocles' extant plays and fragments: *Ant.* 1270; *OC* 1536; *Trach.* 934. Other examples include Eur. *Hipp.* 480; *El.* 111; *Or.* 99; *Ba.* 1344; Aesch. *Ag.* 1425.

The claim that his sons were not born from him echoes again the Chorus' adage that 'not to be born (*mê phunai*) conquers every *logos*' and prepares for Oedipus' death curse against his sons:

Leave, since you are detested and fatherless in my opinion,
 you who are most evil of the evil, and take these curses,
 which I call down upon you. You shall neither overcome
 your native land with the spear nor shall you ever return
 to the hollows of Argos, but you will die by the hand of your kin
 and you will kill him by whom you have been driven out.
 Such is my prayer and I call on the abhorred paternal
 darkness of Tartarus to find you a new home.

σὺ δ' ἔρρ' ἀπόπτυστός τε κἀπάτωρ ἐμοῦ,
 κακῶν κάκιστε, τάσδε συλλαβῶν ἀράς,
 ἄς σοι καλοῦμαι, μήτε γῆς ἐμφυλίου
 δόρει κρατῆσαι μήτε νοστήσαι ποτε
 τὸ κοῖλον Ἄργος, ἀλλὰ συγγενεῖ χερὶ
 θανεῖν κτανεῖν θ' ὕφ' οὔπερ ἐξελήλασαι.
 τοιαῦτ' ἀρῶμαι καὶ καλῶ τὸ Ταρτάρου
 στυγνὸν πατρῶον ἔρεβος, ὥς σ' ἀποικίσῃ. (Soph. *OC* 1383–1390)

As mentioned above, a striking feature of the curse is its indirection, i.e., the fact that neither Polyneices nor Eteocles is mentioned by name.³¹ Oedipus, in fact, never calls his sons by their names in the play.³² This omission is the lexical equivalent of their being fatherless (*apatôr*) and being fatherless is the precondition—or the justification—for their being cursed to death. Oedipus' sons are vulnerable or precarious because, in his worldview, they do not exist (*mê phunai*); Oedipus may die before his sons but they are already dead to him.³³

The end of the play is taken up with Oedipus' mysterious and divinely orchestrated death. His sons are only mentioned once again when, at the very end of the play, Antigone asks Theseus to let her and Ismene go back to Thebes so that they might prevent the two brothers from killing each other.

31 For the common inclusion of names on curse tablets, see Eidinow 2007: 324, n. 22.

32 Eteocles is mentioned by name by Polyneices (1295 and 1316). Polyneices is mentioned by name by Ismene (375), the chorus (1397), and Antigone (1253, 1414).

33 Jebb 2004 [1900] *ad loc.* offers various explanations for why the darkness of Tartarus is called 'paternal'. See also Kamerbeek 1984 *ad loc.* I believe that death is paternal in Oedipus' speech simply because it is the consequence of a father's curse.

There she refers to them only as her relations by blood (*homaimoi*, 1772). This indirection—like those mentioned above—is an expression of Oedipus' insufficiently distinct blood relationships and is key to what Pat Easterling calls the juxtaposition of 'Oedipus' terrible cursing of Polyneices and his mysterious and solemn passing'.³⁴ Two related points are pertinent to this juxtaposition. First, that the play is about the relationship of fathers and sons; the daughters—as Easterling argues—provide a contrast by their 'unnatural' acceptance of the sons' responsibilities.³⁵ And second, that the confusion of Oedipus' blood relations—which is both natal and social—is implicitly posed in the play in the question of who ought to die first, a father or his son(s). If the question of political succession in the play is framed on the social plane by gender hierarchies and martial rivalry, it is governed first of all by the ethical relationships that define what I am calling mortal succession.

The most striking feature of Oedipus' death—in terms of both plot and performance—is its concealment. As the messenger reports, his moment of death is hidden to all but Theseus (1647–1666). And this concealment is dramatically reinforced by the fact that no corpse is revealed to the audience on the *ekkuklêma* at the end of the play. This secrecy is explained, of course, as a requirement for the political and martial benefits that Oedipus' place of death will confer on Athens. But I suggest that it is also an expression of the precarious logic that we have been investigating, i.e., the idea that children should outlive their parents. In Oedipus' unique case, this precariousness is the consequence of a triangulation that begins with Laius' attempt to kill his son Oedipus, extends to Oedipus' killing of his father Laius, and culminates in Oedipus cursing his own sons to death. The representation of Oedipus' own death—which is neither violent nor feared—can be understood in its contrastive relationship to these three acts. In this reading, his death does not easily result in the 'reconciliation' demanded of German Idealism.³⁶ Rather, it resists reconciliation in both its manner and its effects: it guarantees the destruction of Oedipus' family for which the benefits to Athens are only uncertainly compensatory. The principal variables are generational, political, ethical, and temporal. In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, the idea of a tragic future is expressed in the struggle between learning too late and dying too soon.

34 Easterling 1967: 1.

35 Easterling 1967: 3.

36 See Billings 2013 and the Introduction to Lyons 2018.

4 Conclusion

In his 2013 book *Death and the Afterlife*, the philosopher Samuel Scheffler urges us to embrace our mortality as the pre-condition for the collective existence of the species and argues that living and dying well are predicated on the expectation that others—our children or someone's else's children—will live after us (cf. Benatar 2008). It is this expectation that enables us to work, to have goals, to keep on living. I have suggested that Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* both raises this expectation and resists its optimistic consequences by laying bare the precarious logic of the principle that children should outlive their parents. If tragedy is an 'anchor' in the western tradition, if it is all too familiar, it also exposes the myriad ways in which death's inevitability both limits and promotes confidence in a human future. In Bauman's words, 'The dead cannot be buried in the past, as their lot is the future of all those living in the present'.³⁷ In Sophocles' play, this sentiment is expressed in Oedipus' admonition to pity his ghost:

Pity this poor image/ghost of the man Oedipus!
For in truth it is the former/ancient body no more.

οἰκτίρατ' ἀνδρὸς Οἰδίπου τόδ' ἄθλιον
εἶδωλον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ τόδ' ἀρχαῖον δέμας. (Soph. *OC* 109–110)

Oedipus' words, and especially his reference to himself as an *eidôlon*, signal his ontological predicament as he hovers between life and death.³⁸ In terms of the performance, his 'former/ancient body' also brings to mind his 'former' role in *Oedipus the King*. On the level of both form and content then, the death of Oedipus exemplifies the tragic future we have been discussing, one in which the dead make demands upon the living.

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³⁷ Bauman 1992: 24.

³⁸ The ghosts of the dead in Homer are called *eidôla*, e.g., at *Od.* 11.476.

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PART 5

Accommodating New Concepts



Introduction to Part 5: Possibilities of Existence—Making and Changing Subjectivities and (Ancient) Worlds

Paula Castro

1 Introduction

This Part contains three chapters: (12) ‘How the Ancient World Learned to Sin’; (13) ‘Anchoring Religious Innovation: the social psychology of deification in Athens 307 BCE’; and (14) ‘Cyrus’ Learning Curve: views of adolescent psychology in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. The three illuminate our understanding of the ancient world by taking us through very different time-scopes and textual ranges. Yet, despite these differences, they share a common concern with two central social-psychological concepts: those of *anchoring*, essential for the first two chapters, and *cognitive dissonance*; in addition, an interest in neuropsychological research becomes prominent in the third chapter. In this introduction I will highlight, first, how anchoring is predominantly employed as a *how* concept, both in these chapters and in social psychology in general, used with what we can call an *ambition of processual comprehension*. Then I will show how cognitive dissonance tends instead to be employed as a *why* process, or with the *ambition of explanation for prediction*. However, I will defend here the position that the concept of *cognitive dissonance* can also powerfully illuminate the psychosocial dimension when used for *processual comprehension* in tackling *how* processes. In what follows, I will briefly highlight some notable differences between the three chapters, while simultaneously substantiating this social-psychological argument.

In social-psychological research four different levels of analysis can be identified that are relevant to the (different) approaches of each chapter. According to Doise’s (1982) classical formulation, the levels are those of (1) individual processes, (2) inter-individual relations/group processes, (3) inter-group processes and (4) societal/socio-cultural processes. Each of these levels—and their processes—can be independently addressed in psycho-social research. However, the ways in which the various levels interact can be—and often are—the main object of psycho-social interest. For a constructionist social-psychological approach, in fact, the interaction of processes at different levels is *the* object of interest (Jodelet 2012; Castro 2019a; Castro 2019b; Negura 2020; Rizzolli et al. 2019).

This connects directly to an expression used in the third chapter of this Part, that of ‘looking both ways’, with which Luuk Huitink and Eveline Crone highlight the need to take seriously both the ‘biological basis of being young and the historically and socio-culturally specific conceptualization of what it means to be young’ (p. 359). In the context of the ‘levels of analysis’ I am using here, the idea of looking ‘both ways’ implies looking both at individual processes *and* at processes happening in the relations which individuals maintain with each other and with socio-cultural institutions. Yet, and importantly, a constructionist approach also involves another conceptual step when (and indeed *for*) ‘looking both ways’: the step of assuming that these ‘ways’ are mutually constitutive. This entails assuming that individuals construct relations and relations construct individuals; that people devise certain shared meaning systems for making sense of the world and constructing certain collective institutions—and that these in turn enable certain potentialities of the individual, or certain subjectivities, and make others harder to maintain (Castro 2019b; Reicher 2004; Batel and Castro 2018). The result of this step is that the main analytical interest is shifted towards the processes happening in the interaction of the two ‘ways’ at several levels, and to the question of how these interactions construct the person in the situation. In this sense, social psychology is, in sum, about how meaning and action are constructed in the *interactions* amongst subjects (and thus subjectivities), relations, and institutions (Castro, 2019b). Let me now read each of the chapters with these premises.

Konstan’s chapter develops the concept of *anchoring*: it shows how it was possible for early Christian values to find an anchor in the traditional Greek lexicon, which subsequently served in turn as a suitable host for new shifts in meaning, making (old) common words assume new meanings. For this, various texts from different periods—Christian texts, but also texts from classical Greece, the Roman empire, and early Christianity—are scrutinized in search of the changes in the meanings of certain words through extended time. Konstan pays particular attention to words such as Greek *hamartia* and Latin *peccatum*, which ceased to signify simply ‘error’ or ‘fault’ and acquired the loaded sense of ‘sin’ in early Christianity. He follows the alterations in the meanings of these terms in two major stages: first, in the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, where these words retained much of their classical Greek meaning; second, when the emergence of the ascetic and monastic forms of Christian practice changed their meaning. Both stages reveal the process of ‘anchoring’ at work, showing the multifarious ways in which ‘relevant social groups connect what they perceive as new to what they feel is already familiar’ (Sluiter 2017).

Furthermore, reaching across the centuries in search of how meanings are anchored, the chapter gives concrete examples of a fundamental psychosocial reality: how the way we make sense of the world and of ourselves is dependent upon both language and context, with context here referring both to the discursive proximal context in which words are employed and to the distal cultural context in which Discourses exist. Or another way of putting this: the chapter illustrates how meaning is dependent upon the interaction between what the literature calls small 'd' and big 'D', that is between 'D'iscourse' as the socio-cultural-historical embeddedness of (situated, concrete) 'd'iscourse' (Batel and Castro 2018). And the chapter also shows how new 'd'iscourses' and 'D'iscourses' are constructed and reconstructed from old ones, adopting pre-existent words, but linking them to different practices and/or institutions and/or meaning-systems and relations—and how in this way they acquire new meanings.

With respect to the levels of analysis, Konstan's chapter directly tackles the broadest one, the societal/socio-cultural level, and in a really wide sense, as it looks at the Roman empire while it is surprisingly fast becoming a Christian world, and then focuses on that Christian world. When we read the chapter, always present is an underlying sense that these analyses matter not just because they illustrate the big 'Discourses' of these cultures, but also because they offer a glimpse of the interactions happening between big D and small d, opening a window on processes involved in the mutual constitution of culture and person. In my view, this is because the chapter is implicitly propelled by questions such as the following: 'Can there be a sense of *sin* without the institutions and the worldviews that define a place for sin, making sin come into existence as a reality for the person?'. Through such implicit questions, the chapter invites us to stop for a moment—in order to wonder about the different everyday experiences of being a person at the different points in time and context it examines. It incites us to reach across time and seek to grasp, for instance, how the experience of being a person who risks being a 'sinner' or risks 'sinning' may be different from the experience of being a person who risks making an 'error'. Or, in other words, the chapter contributes to our understanding of how different cultural worlds and big 'Ds' create different possibilities for little 'ds'—and different possibilities for existing, as in Rilke's formulation of the unicorn ('They fed it no corn, only the possibility that it might exist').¹

1 'Sie nährten es mit keinem Korn, / nur immer mit der Möglichkeit, es sei' (*Sonnets to Orpheus* II 4).

In the second chapter of this Part (13), by Thomas Martin, a few texts from a more narrowly demarcated period are investigated in order to contextualize and understand a specific time-bound and momentous collective decision: in 307 BCE, the democratic legislative assembly of the citizens of the city-state of Athens voted to deify Demetrius, a military commander from Macedonia, proclaiming him a 'saviour god'. That decision involved the need to make room—in their institutions, meaning systems, subjectivities and practices—for sharing their lives with a living god.

This chapter in my view tackles the intersection of the societal/socio-cultural level and the group level, since its focus is a (societal) decision taken by the (group of) citizens of Athens. The chapter shows how these citizens, facing a world where previous gods could be seen as having failed them, collectively agreed to make a new world—one where at least one god (Demetrius) had not failed them. They made that new world out of the materials offered by the old one, of course. This included, for instance, their views on what an Athenian god should and could do, or the examples of similar practices by their neighbours. And they fed this new world with a collectively held belief in the possibility that it might come to exist, thus bringing it into existence, like Rilke's unicorn. But belief was not enough, new practices and institutions also had to be constructed to accommodate the innovation, and they were anchored to old ones, as the chapter shows—for example, they associated a festival for Demetrius with the pre-existent festival in honour of Dionysus. In this way, by making a new world with new institutions, Athenians enabled new practices, new relations and new possibilities for being and subjectivities to emerge—which in turn created space for new possibilities to appear in the distant future. At least, that is how I read Martin's assertion that '[e]ventually, the process of communities learning to live with this perplexing kind of human/divine being while continuing the worship of traditional gods led to the institutionalization of what is now labelled 'ruler cult', in which deified human beings ruled as kings' (p. 347). In sum, in this second chapter about *how* Athenians accommodated the innovation of a human 'deity', the concept of anchoring is used for extending our comprehension of certain processes—how old meanings anchored new ones, old practices anchored new ones, old institutions anchored new ones, and also how meanings, practices and institutions created in that period became anchors for future ones.

Anchoring, therefore, is also central in this chapter and again comes about as a *how* process, one with the *ambition of processual comprehension*. In addition, cognitive dissonance is also central in this chapter. The concept is here mobilized to explain *why* the deification decision was taken, namely with the *ambition of explanation for prediction*. As Martin puts it: 'Cognitive dissonance

helps explain the psychological process that led to this new policy, in contrast to the explanation offered by some scholars that the decision to deify Demetrius was motivated by hypocrisy, with the voters simply wanting to flatter Demetrius for their own advantage without genuinely believing in his divinity' (p. 337).

The concept of cognitive dissonance is part of a theoretical tradition in social psychology that finds some of its roots in Festinger's and colleagues' study based on the method of *observant participation*, in which they integrated the meetings and daily life of a small collective organized around an *end of the world* prophecy (Festinger et al. 1956). In this study, the researchers were looking at how a group of people with a shared worldview comprising beliefs highly dissonant from those shared by basically everybody else in society was able to maintain their shared meaning-world even after one of its central components—the prophecy—was disconfirmed. And at how they were even capable of actively seeking to convert others after disconfirmation of the prophecy. They were thus studying a rather interesting phenomenon, one that in my view clearly warrants more research about the *interaction of the group and individual levels*. Instead, however, research on cognitive dissonance soon took a different direction: it turned to assuming an individual motivation for consistency in order to explain why people change ideas or behaviours. In Festinger's words in the presentation of his 1957 book: 'Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction'.² The comparison with hunger clearly sets the level of analysis that Festinger is considering here: an internal process manifesting at the individual level. Groups or societies do not feel hunger, only individuals do. Further definitions go in the same direction: 'If a person is induced to do or say something which is contrary to his [sic] private opinion, there will be a tendency for him to change his opinion so as to bring it into correspondence with what he has done or said' (Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959: 209). Again, it is clear that the focus is the individual. Moreover, a few years later it was hypothesized that self-concept and self-esteem were the individual structures relevant for dissonance—'if dissonance exists it is because the individual's behaviour is inconsistent with his self-concept' (Aronson 1968: 23). This further introjected the concept, establishing it as a phenomenon of people looking at themselves, a concept placed 'inside the head' of isolated individuals, not one distributed, in the expression used by Glaveanu (2014), *in-between* people, relations,

2 Festinger 1957: 3.

institutions and worldviews. However, explanations of ‘inside the head’ processes risk becoming ‘thought-stoppers’ when it comes to understanding meaning-making and relational processes. They frame change, action, and decision-making solely in terms of internal motivation (e.g., an uncomfortable state of dissonance), leaving no room for broader social or contextual influences—end of story.

Interestingly, Martin’s chapter takes the concept of cognitive dissonance back to the group level where it originated. But then, when taken to a group level, explanations that assume a generic and similar distribution of mutually exclusive and ‘inside the head’ processes (like motivations for consistency) at once become less interesting. They even risk distracting us from the many interesting processes involved in *how* the individual level interacts with the group level (here the voting citizens in the assembly) to impact the whole society. Let me develop this point. If we take cognitive dissonance as a *why* process at the individual level and oriented towards *explanation for prediction*, we are led to imagine a whole assembly of Athenian citizens sitting there on the Pnyx, all more or less alike, following an internal motivation for consistency that predicts that they will vote for the deification. However, if we take cognitive dissonance as a *how* process we are led along a different path. In this case, moved by an *ambition of processual comprehension*, we imagine an assembly where fierce ‘battles of ideas’ (Moscovici and Markova 2000) and arguments took place between citizens with different ways of making sense of the predicament of the city and of the potential deification. And an assembly where battles of ideas occurred in the internal dialogues of individual participants, too, when they were attempting to make up their minds, or assessing if they should change them, or trying to make sense of their conflicting, contradictory, beliefs. In other words, we are led to imagine two types of psycho-social battles. On the one hand, relational, *out-in-the world* discursive battles of arguments between citizens. And on the other hand, *internal* battles involving ambivalence and the re-evaluation of meanings and feelings—in interaction with those they heard of others. Both battles could have involved not just cognitive dissonance *but also* ‘cognitive polyphasia’ (Moscovici 1976)—i.e., the capacity of individuals to mobilize a plurality of modes of reflection, types of knowledge and meaning-systems in different contexts, weighing different arguments and sometimes achieving their hybridization—even when they initially seemed contradictory (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez 2015; Caillaud et al. 2020; Mouro and Castro 2012).

When we focus on these *battles*, we see that there is analytical power in viewing cognitive dissonance as a *how* process. For when we do, we can locate two main types of *hows* in the internal and external debates on the Pnyx: one about content, another about process/format. Regarding content, we can

then wonder to what extent and how the idea of an inconsistency or a dissonance between what they expected and had received from the gods entered the debates, how arguments for and against deification were built (e.g., in which meaning categories, values and goals they were anchored), and how they sought legitimacy. Regarding format, we can wonder if the debates were polarized, with radically different and dichotomic and rigid arguments on each side, or whether argumentation instead sought common ground in values and meanings that were highly shared and useful in helping some individuals change their minds; we can ask ourselves how capable of fashioning hybrid solutions to diverging beliefs and positions the assembly was, and to what extent the different power capacities and social roles of the protagonists influenced the outcome. In sum, we can imagine the Pnyx as a space for deliberation and relation enabled by the Athenian democratic institutions—and wonder about the extent to which relation allowed deliberation to be a more or a less open-ended process.

From this perspective, we are led to an impossible longing, of course: a wish to get hold of recorded versions of the speeches made in the Athenian assembly by the voting citizens on the occasion of the decision that made Demetrius a god! We will never have them, alas. However, it seems to me—and to Thomas Martin—that even without them we can still be confident that battles there would have been. It is their contents and formats that are harder to imagine. Furthermore, how wonderful would it be, too, to also have records of any kind (diaries or letters, for example) of what the non-voting residents, slaves and women, told each other and the citizens on the same occasion: did they indeed concentrate on blaming the gods, on expressing the need to make a world without contradiction and unexpected results? Or did they perhaps blame the citizens and their war-related decisions and worldviews? Who knows? But knowing would be relevant, for as Martin states, '[t]he views of the adult male citizens who constituted the assembly were influenced by dialogue with the women in their lives, who were concerned with politics and public policy despite their not being allowed direct political participation.' In this context, these informal everyday conversations could indeed have illuminated the arguments used in internal and external 'battles' in the assembly. They could also illuminate the types of person, or subjectivities, that could cross a deified human being's path in the streets of Athens, and the emotions experienced in the encounter.

The third chapter in this Part (14), by Luuk Huitink and Eveline Crone, concentrates basically on only one text—Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*. The chapter inspects Xenophon's text to investigate how a character (based on a real person)—Cyrus, later King Cyrus II (ca. 600–530 BCE), the founder of the first Persian Empire—is constructed. It studies in particular Xenophon's

account of Cyrus' prolonged stay at his grandfather Astyages' court between the ages of twelve and sixteen—the most detailed literary portrait by a classical Greek author of what we today would call an adolescent, as the authors indicate. The way I view it, this chapter concentrates on the intersection of the individual (Cyrus) and the societal levels (the two societies in which Cyrus grows up, as read from the perspective of a Greek).

Regarding this depiction of one individual, the authors are clear: 'To be sure, we should not assume that it was Xenophon's aim to paint a portrait of Cyrus which was in every respect "realistic". Rather, he singles out aspects of adolescent development, such as an acute sense of reciprocity and an emerging sense of autonomy, which he deems crucial for the sort of leader Cyrus will become' (pp. 371–372). In other words, the depiction of the individual is in interaction with the societal level, the level where the definitions of the societal characteristics desirable for a future king are available and constructed (and re-constructed). The norms and values that he should uphold and embody are constantly made clear by Xenophon, and this chapter, in turn, makes it very clear how Cyrus' maturing years are oriented towards producing a person responsive to these norms and values—through a host of relations, experiences, and forms of interpreting those experiences provided by those relations.

These processes, through which the malleable material that humans are is guided in a certain direction, are well illustrated where Cyrus is concerned. So well-illustrated that here, too, we are led to wonder about what we do not have. In other words, here, too, we are led by the *ambition for processual comprehension* to long for what more we could have learned about the interaction of individual processes and societal ones than we already did through Xenophon. What if he had also given us detailed descriptions of the servants in Astyages' court that were going through adolescence at the same time as Cyrus? If we had been given a picture of how future servants were guided towards the norms and values befitting *their* future roles at court, we would have had a comparative perspective for grasping how different subjectivities of the time were being shaped, and maybe also how they were resisting that shaping. If Xenophon had given us such comparative material, we could have learned a lot in terms of our processual comprehension of the interaction between individual processes and societal ones. No doubt the potentialities of adolescence were channelled differently for adolescent future servants and kings at Astyages' court. But how? We have to make do with the interaction of the individual and the societal on the level of the king only. The point of this interaction between the potentialities of the human and society, an interaction that makes the potential become actual, is clearly made by Huitink and Crone. They write: 'whereas modern psychologists investigate the extent to which, for

instance, varying degrees of self-control in children are predictive of future education levels, wealth and physical and mental health, the desired outcome of Xenophon's "Persian" education system is first and foremost the creation of an obedient citizen body and disciplined soldiers' (pp. 365–366). This is why I wonder what the servants in the same age group as Cyrus—who never come into the foreground in Xenophon's depictions—would have to teach us about the plasticity of the human mind immersed in culture.

In sum, in this introduction I have adopted a socio-psychology perspective that views social worlds as constructed from various types of *building blocks*—from meanings and meaning-making processes, from individuals and relations to practices and institutions, and especially from the *interactions* between these building blocks. I used this perspective to pleasantly perambulate through the ancient world as offered by these three chapters, and argued that they help illuminate how the social worlds we make, make us too, how we come to exist together through mutual constitution, and change together. Concomitantly, I defended the importance of developing comparative analysis guided by *how* concepts for advancing the *ambition of processual comprehension*. Taking us to the ancient social worlds to illustrate how anchoring works, how cognitive dissonance is expressed and may help understand momentous change, how the plasticity of the human mind is directed in different directions by culture, these three chapters offer invaluable insights about our building blocks and their interactions, advancing our comprehension ambitions.

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How the Ancient World Learned to Sin

David Konstan

1 Introduction

Did Greeks and Romans in the classical period, prior to the spread of Christianity, have a conception of sin, as opposed to error or wrongdoing? The Greek term that corresponds most closely to ‘sin’ in the Bible is *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία), which, however, in classical Greek means a fault or mistake, like its equivalent in Latin, *peccatum*, without the specifically religious associations that the modern term ‘sin’ evokes. If indeed there was a distinct notion of sin in the Judeo-Christian tradition, different from anything with which the Greeks and Romans were familiar before they became acquainted with biblical literature, how did they respond to this foreign idea and come finally to make it their own? This question, it seems to me, invites an analysis very much along the lines of one of the main foci of this volume: the multifarious ways in which ‘relevant social groups connect what they perceive as new to what they feel is already familiar’, a process that is labelled ‘anchoring’ (Sluiter 2017). That is, this Part deals with ‘the ways in which ‘the new’ fits into pre-existing value systems and then in turn helps shape such value systems.’

Near the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, we read: ‘John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (1:4 NRSV). This sounds like strong medicine, especially since, as the Gospel informs us, ‘John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey’ (1:6). Perhaps Jews in Galilee, especially those given to blaming their impiety or faithlessness for their suffering and confessing their sins in order to win God’s favour, would have understood and responded to John’s message. It is not by accident that the Gospel begins by quoting some verses from the prophet Isaiah (the reference is to 40:3). But if such a proclamation was intelligible, even if not especially welcome, to the Jewish community who would have heard John’s own voice, what would the readers of Mark’s Gospel, composed in Greek rather than in Aramaic some four decades or so after the crucifixion of Jesus, have made of it? Repent of what, they might well have asked—or, even more fundamentally, what is meant by the very word ‘repentance’?

2 What Is Repentance?

Theologians today speak of repentance as a response to a profound sense of sinfulness. Thus, Amitai Etzioni, in a book he co-edited under the title *Repentance: A Comparative Perspective*, affirms: 'To fully repent, "sinners" must *restructure their lives* in line with the prevailing mores'.¹ In the same volume, Harold Brown writes: 'Christian repentance involves not merely a turning away from what one has done in the past, but also a rejection of what one has been'.² These are modern views, of course, but they harken back to ancient conceptions that are often expressed in still more extreme language. Basil of Caesarea writes to the Neocaesarians: 'I pray that you all live amid tears and perpetual repentance (*metanoia*)' (*Epistles* 207). Or in Latin, Ambrose intones: 'I have people who, during penitence, have made rivulets of tears in their faces, holloed their cheeks with continual weeping, prostrated their bodies so that they might be trampled by all, and with their faces forever pale with fasting, presented the appearance of death in a breathing body' (*On Penitence: Against the Novatians* 1.90–91). If John the Baptist, as Mark portrays him, was summoning people to such acts, and the necessary means by which their sins—whatever they may have been—could be forgiven, it is hard to imagine that he would have gained many converts to the new religion. Yet the religion was spreading fast—faster than many suppose these days—and well beyond Galilee. In what ways did social groups in the Greek East and the Latin West connect what they perceived as new—and surely this call to grief must have struck them as new—to what was already familiar to them; that is, to what did they anchor this novel and challenging demand?

3 What Was *Metanoia*?

The answer I propose (for it is one of many factors) is that John's proclamation may not have sounded as radical to Greek ears as we might imagine. The reason is that the Greek word translated as 'repentance', that is, *metanoia*, did not, in the classical period, bear the sense that later Christian writers heard in it, any more than the Latin *paenitentia* did. In Menander's *Epitrepontes*, Daos, a shepherd, had found an exposed child and given it to a charcoal maker named Syros, but refused to hand over the tokens that had been set out with

1 Etzioni and Carney 1997: 12–13 (original italics).

2 Etzioni and Carney 1997: 33.

the infant; when Syros demands the tokens, Daos replies: 'I gave you something of mine; if this is agreeable to you, keep it now, but if it is not, and you have changed your mind (*metanoein*), then give it back' (287–289). We might loosely render the term, 'repent of', in the morally neutral sense of regret, but it clearly carries none of the retrospective, tormented consciousness of guilt that it acquired in later Christian doctrine. The root sense of *metanoia* is 'afterthought' (from *meta*-, 'change' and *noia*, 'mind', as in *paranoia*). In Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, the verb *metanoein* is defined as 'feel remorse, repent, be converted', while the first definition offered for the noun *metanoia* is 'change of mind', and then 'remorse (as regret for shortcomings and errors)'; following that, the dictionary gives 'repentance, turning about, conversion'. Indeed, the 1599 Geneva Bible, which preceded the King James version, has 'John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of amendment of life, for remission of sins.' More recently, the New Century Version has John 'preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins'; the J.B. Phillips translation gives 'preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins'; and, more freely, the Living Bible paraphrases John as proclaiming that 'all should be baptized as a public announcement of their decision to turn their backs on sin, so that God could forgive them'. The Spanish La Palabra version of John's proclamation reads 'un bautismo como signo de conversión', and the Traducción en Lenguaje Actual offers '¡Bautícense y vuélvanse a Dios!' The Conferenza Episcopale Italiana translation gives 'un battesimo di conversione', and the Gute Nachricht Bibel has 'Kehrt um und lasst euch taufen!' Greek readers of the Gospels who were not necessarily Jewish would have found nothing especially strange in a summons to amend their lives.

Evidence in the Bible for the sense of *metanoia* as conversion or change of heart rather than repentance is the parallel use of *pistis*, usually rendered as 'faith', in connection with forgiveness and sin. At *Acts* 19:4 NRSV, Paul reports that 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance (*metanoia*), telling the people to believe (*pisteusôsin*) in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus'. When we read in *Acts* that 'All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (10:43), belief takes the place of *metanoia* as the condition of the remission (*aphesis*) of sins. Again, when Paul says, 'as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about *metanoia* toward God and faith (*pistis*) toward our Lord Jesus' (*Acts* 20:21), taking *metanoia* as 'conversion' pairs it with 'faith' more naturally than 'repentance' does: 'repentance toward God', which is the standard translation, sounds odd in any case. We may further compare *Acts* 3:19, where the New Revised

Standard Version gives ‘Repent (*metanoēsate*) therefore, and turn again (*epistrepsate*), that your sins may be blotted out’. The pairing of the verb *metanoein* with the idea of turning gives an appropriate combination, and makes it clear that the proper sense of *metanoein* here is a change of mind.

4 The Greek Idea of ‘Faith’

But we may ask in this connection, how readily would a Greek public have understood the idea of faith, which is the way *pistis* in Greek and *fides* in Latin are typically rendered in translations of the Bible? Today, we understand the word ‘faith’ to signify belief, and this in two senses. On the one hand, ‘faith’ connotes a deeply rooted conviction that transcends reason, since it concerns spiritual truths that are not susceptible to scientific inquiry. On the other hand, ‘faith’ refers to doctrine, or what we may call the content of belief, for example that there is a God, or that Christ died for our sins. The classical words *pistis* (and *fides* in Latin), however, bear neither of these meanings. As Teresa Morgan has shown in a magisterial study, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches*, the classical terms rather signify ‘trust’ or ‘confidence’, and sometimes ‘trustworthiness’, that is, reliability. What is more, Morgan convincingly demonstrates that this is also the predominant meaning of *pistis* in the Gospels, *Acts*, and the authentic letters of Paul.³

Let us consider Jesus’ healing of the paralytic, which is told in various versions in all four Gospels. In *Matthew* 9:2 it is related as follows: ‘And just then some people were carrying a paralysed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven’. In what did these men believe? In the preceding chapter, we learn that ‘there was a leper who came to him [that is, Jesus] and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean”. He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed’ (*Matthew* 8:2–3). Jesus presumably perceived the confidence that the leper had in his healing powers. Then a centurion petitions Jesus on behalf of a slave of his, ‘only speak the word, and my servant will be healed’ (8:8), and Jesus replies, ‘Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith’ (8:10). As Jesus and his disciples were crossing a lake in a small boat, a gale arose and ‘the boat was being swamped by the waves’; the disciples awakened Jesus and

³ Morgan 2015.

in panic said, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (8:24–26). With this, he calms the storm. Then Jesus drives demons out of a pair of men and into swine. This is the prelude to the faith of the paralysed man and his friends: in each case, *pistis* or the corresponding verb signifies confidence in Jesus' ability to perform the cure or abate the winds.

Immediately after the story of the paralytic, 'a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well". Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well". And instantly the woman was made well' (9:20–22). And for the clearest example of all, right after this, 'two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord". Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you". And their eyes were opened' (9:27–29). What is meant by 'faith' in all these instances is plainly exactly that, the belief or confidence that Jesus can perform the cure or miracle in question. This was language, and this was an idea, that any Greek could readily understand.

5 Forgiveness

So far, so good: Greek readers of the Gospels were given evidence of Jesus' wonderworking so that they might change their minds and trust in his powers. But what about the payoff of this new confidence, which was not just the healing of diseases but also the forgiveness of sins? For Jesus not only enabled the paralysed man to rise and walk, he also affirmed, to the consternation of the rabbis who were present, that the man's sins were forgiven, something, they said, that only God could do. Forgiveness is a complex concept: in general, it requires that the offender admit to the offence and commit to never repeating it, often with the implication that she or he has undergone a deep change of character, to the degree that one may speak of being a different person altogether, a new man who has cast off the old Adam. In the Hebrew Bible, there is a special term for forgiveness (*salakh*), and only God can grant it; he alone is the subject of the associated verb. What God most often is asked to pardon is a violation of the covenant, which takes the form of chasing after foreign gods, or, as it is conceived in the Bible, idolatry. By confessing one's error and promising not to lapse into apostasy again, one may hope to win God's favour and mercy.

The New Testament demands something different, in a sense the very opposite: not a turning back to God but a turning toward Jesus. No lapse or prior fault is indicated, no failure, and hence there is no emphasis on confession. It suffices to manifest trust in Jesus to achieve pardon. This is why Jesus can say, in a passage from the Gospel of John (15:22) that has given rise to much controversy: 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin (*hamartian ouk eikhosan*); but now they have no excuse for their sin'.⁴ John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, worried: 'It may be thought that Christ intended by these words to say, that there is no other sin but unbelief; and there are some who think so. Augustine speaks more soberly, but he approaches to that opinion; for, since faith forgives and blots out all sins, he says, that the only sin that damns a man is unbelief'. Calvin himself rejected this interpretation, but it is hard to get around the literal sense of Christ's words. As Jesus instructs his disciples after his resurrection, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned' (*Mark* 16:15).

In the classical period, Greeks and Romans did not seek to appease those they had wronged, whether fellow human beings or gods, by confessing their error and begging for pity. They were much more likely to make excuses for whatever they had done to offend, pleading that they were overtaken by a sudden madness, whether godsent or caused by some natural or irresistible vulnerability—youth and erotic passion were commonly invoked.⁵ They sought to vindicate, not transform themselves. But the Greek words frequently rendered as forgiveness, namely *aphesis* along with its associated verb *aphiēmi*, did not signify forgiveness in this morally charged sense. Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon*, which I cited above, defines the Greek noun as 'release', as from captivity, and then as 'pardon, cancellation of an obligation, a punishment, or guilt', and the verb as 'let go, send away', and hence 'cancel, remit, pardon', as of a loan or debt, and so too 'give up, abandon', and again 'let go, tolerate' and 'allow, permit'. Examples of this usage abound, and are most familiar from the biblical injunction in the Lord's Prayer: 'forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (*Matthew* 6:12), or, in the version in *Luke* 11:4, 'forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us'.⁶ The latter formula takes the form of an analogy between God's ability to absolve one of sin and our own capacity to

4 New International Version, slightly modified.

5 Compare the way Agamemnon, in apologizing, insists that he was not responsible (*ouk aitios*) for offending Achilles, and blames his behaviour rather on *Atē*, that is, a fit of madness (Homer, *Iliad*: 19.86–19.90).

6 King James Version.

cancel or remit a debt—an action that we still speak of as forgiving a debt, with no necessary implication, in this context, of wrongdoing on the part of the debtor. The distinction is strictly appropriate to God's unique status in regard to sin, but could be heard as explaining that sins are effectively like arrears or liabilities, and that just as Jesus can eliminate diseases and demons, so too he can cancel the consequences of error or misconduct.

6 Anchoring the Forgiveness of Sins

But what misconduct is it that Jesus wipes away by virtue of turning to him in the confidence that he can? For this is the nub of the matter: what are the sins that Jesus remits, lets go, tolerates, or pardons? 'Sin' in English translations of the Bible, and the corresponding words in other languages such as *Sünde*, *péch  *, *peccato*, or *pecado*, render the Greek *hamartia* (or, much more rarely, *hamart  ma*), a term that in classical Greek means 'a failure, fault', according to the standard Greek-English dictionary (LSJ), or 'error of judgement', save that it is also said to mean 'guilt, sin' in philosophical or religious contexts (the great Greek-Spanish dictionary by Adrados and Gangutia restricts the sense of 'sin' more narrowly to Judeo-Christian texts). *Hamartia* is the term Aristotle employs, for example, when speaking of the 'tragic flaw', which he makes clear is an intellectual rather than a moral failing. We immediately think of the various forms of wrongdoing that count as sins, beginning with the ten commandments and including crimes such as adultery, murder, and incest as well as moral indecencies such as disrespect for parents and more narrowly religious violations such as idolatry. And indeed, these are condemned in the Gospels, as when Jesus, in the Gospel of Mark, insists that foods in themselves are clean (7:19), and explains: 'For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions (*hoi dialogismoi hoi kakoi*) come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things (*panta tauta ta pon  ra*) come from within, and they defile a person' (7:21–23). The evil in 'evil intentions' renders the Greek word *kakoi*, the most common Greek term for 'bad', from the root of which we get cacophony. 'Evil things', in turn, corresponds to Greek *pon  ra*, a word that is often applied to vicious or immoral people.⁷ Jesus is plainly condemning the behaviours he lists as wicked, but as it happens he does not employ the word *hamartia* in this connection.

7 On the terminology, see Rosenbloom 2004: 55–105, 323–358; Sluiter and Rosen 2008, and within that volume Sluiter 2008.

Like English, Greek has many words for vice. Besides *ponêron* and *kakon*, we find in the New Testament such resonant terms as *rhadiourgia*, *adikia*, *anomia*, *skandalon*, *planê*, *halisgêma*, and *paraptôma*, which are rendered by such terms as 'evil', 'wickedness', 'iniquity', 'villainy', 'badness', 'injustice', 'error', 'slip', 'pollution', 'transgression', and so forth. But it is remarkable that none of these terms is used in connection with forgiveness; that is the context in which *hamartia* occurs, and what is particularly striking, though I myself only came to this realization relatively recently, is that *hamartia* is used almost exclusively in connection with divine pardon (there are a very few exceptions). Greeks outside the Jewish tradition hearing such expressions as they were read aloud (not in the original Aramaic, of course) might have understood something like a call to change their minds about Jesus and trust him not to hold them to account for their failings. He was not undertaking to overlook or pardon their crimes or delicts: these came under another description and were under the purview of the law. Jesus was powerful but kind, and if you put your faith in him he would discount your weaknesses.

7 Conclusion

Of course, that was just one way to hear the message delivered by the Gospels. One could imagine that the defects identified as *hamartiai* involved some kind of pollution or an inherited sinfulness harking back to the fall, and that it was this that Jesus was promising to forgive, on the condition that one underwent a profound conversion experience and acquired, by grace of God rather than through witnessing his miracles, that enigmatic quality of faith that transcended reason and accepted the mystery of the trinity and more. Nor was it a great stretch to extend the notion of *hamartia* to cover related ideas of evil, and so render such offences as well subject to the pardon of Christ and his disciples, to whom he had entrusted this authority, and via them to the priesthood of the Church, which took advantage of this mandate as it assumed institutional form and responsibility for its members. Such views were latent in the language of the New Testament, there to be animated when conditions were favourable. But that language was intelligible also in ordinary, classical Greek, and it was anchored, as it were, in habits of thought that were current when Jesus's message was being rendered into Greek. As Peter Brown wrote (in a book review): 'It was precisely by its untidiness, its lack of consistency in tying itself to a single identity, and its opportunistic openness to current modes of expression that Christianity, as a movement rather than simply as a

church, made such progress at the end of the ancient world'.⁸ I would say that it was by a similar kind of osmosis that it gained a foothold at the very beginning, as well. It was through a process of gradual semantic transfiguration that the ancient world learned to sin.

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⁸ Brown 2018: 52–54 reviewing Corby Finney 2017 and Schibille 2014: 'Christianity sucked into itself much of the visual language of the ancient world', and he adds: 'It was precisely by its untidiness, its lack of consistency in tying itself to a single identity, and its opportunistic openness to current modes of expression that Christianity, as a movement rather than simply as a church, made such progress at the end of the ancient world.'

Anchoring Religious Innovation: the Social Psychology of Deification in Athens 307 BCE

Thomas R. Martin

1 Introduction

In 307 BCE, the democratic legislative assembly of the city-state of Athens voted to deify Demetrius, a military commander from Macedonia, as a ‘saviour god’ (*theos sôtêr*).¹ Three components of social psychology underlie this deification: (1) reducing and resolving cognitive dissonance, (2) the cognitive science of religion concerning the human conception of divinity, and (3) the attribution theory of religion (see below, section 3). Together they illuminate the motivations and consequences of the deification of a present, intentional human agent as a voluntary, majority-sanctioned innovation in traditional Athenian religion. This innovation and its subsequent anchoring (section 4) took place as a group phenomenon, which makes social psychology an apt lens for examining these developments.²

The decision to deify Demetrius as a saviour god was a group response to his unexpectedly and in person having brought the Athenians salvation when they were experiencing terrible distress, as that is how ‘the many’ (*hoi polloi*, *to plêthos*) in the population evaluated their situation (Plutarch *Demetrius* 8–10).³

1 For clarity in reference, it should be pointed out that this Demetrius came to be known as *Poliorcetes*, meaning ‘City-Besieger’; modern historians commonly use this epithet to distinguish him from other prominent figures of the same name.

2 As Crisp (2015: 45) says, ‘social psychology is all about groups’. See Fagan 2011: 3–4, 39–48 on the applicability to ancient history of the social psychology of groups.

3 On deification in ancient Greek religion, see Petrovic 2015; O’Sullivan 2017 (focusing on Demetrius and Athens). *Sôtêria* (‘salvation’) was the Greek term describing what the many at Athens believed they had received from Demetrius, indicating their cognition of having been saved as a community by an intentional agent who was in this case a *theos sôtêr*. For relevant instances of *sôtêria* in Athenian texts, see, among very many examples, Plato *Laws* 4.715d; on its frequent appearance in official decrees, see Oliver 2007: 212. For a contemporary example from another Greek city-state, see lines 8–9 in the inscription from Colophon dating from between 311 and 306 BCE whose *editio princeps* is Merritt 1935a. See Kearns 1990 on the relationship between a city-state and its divine saviours, and Mikalson 1998: 110–113 on the Athenian cults for Zeus Soter and Athena Soteira. Some scholars do not accept this usage of the word ‘salvation’, restricting it to the religious beliefs of individuals; see Smith 2017:

The assembly on this occasion also voted to deify Antigonos, Demetrius' father, because Antigonos, although not present in Athens, was credited with having supported his son's action. Since Antigonos had no direct interaction with the Athenians before his death in battle six years later, my discussion focuses on the deified Demetrius' twenty-year relationship with Athens.⁴

As will be described below, Demetrius was not the first man deified in ancient Greece, but he was the first one who had repeated interactions over time with a human social/political community. And he was not the last, either; over the coming centuries, people's lived experiences of long-term contact with deified leaders in the Mediterranean world constituted a continuing process that motivated many to reformulate their ideas about the nature, power, and goals of deified human beings and to anchor this evolving development of religious beliefs and practice by associating it with traditional ways.

That the Athenian assembly voted to deify Demetrius in 307 BCE of course does not mean that absolutely every citizen agreed with this decision; on such a complex issue as the nature of divinity as judged by people involved in the case of Demetrius, different opinions would naturally have been expressed because 'experiential claims [relevant to religion] are invariably contested'.⁵

13. However, Caneva 2017 employs 'salvation' in the same sense that I do. For the ongoing debate on the applicability for ancient religions of the notion of belief, see Davies 2019; for a recent thorough overview of belief as conceptualized in the cognitive science of religion, see White 2021: 24–48. I use 'belief' here to refer to ancient Athenians' cognitive concepts about the relationship between themselves and their gods.

4. See Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 145–405 for the most comprehensive analysis of the evidence for this period of Demetrius' history. Mikalson 1998: 75–104 and Habicht 2017: 31–39 discuss the deification in the context of the diversity of Hellenistic Greek religious thought and practice; Dreyer 1999: 17–95 argues that Athenian democracy remained active in its internal affairs in this era and did not become subordinate to foreign pressure on issues of domestic politics; Thonemann 2005 explores the overtly performative aspects of Demetrius' presence in Athens; Oliver 2007: 113–126 analyses the economic troubles inflicted on the Athenian countryside and its many inhabitants during this period; Bayliss 2011: 94–186 investigates the internal political stresses and conflicts that plagued Athens during Demetrius' period of influence; Shear 2012 shows that after 286 BCE Athenians remembered their split from Demetrius as a response to a foreign enemy and not as the result of internal disagreement on an issue of political policy; O'Sullivan 2017: 82–90 situates Demetrius' story in the context of early Hellenistic history; Seaford 2022 argues that the deification is the community's response to a perception of transcendence understood as comprehensive power from beyond.

5. Taves 2009: 55. For disputes (whose dates cannot be firmly determined), see Plutarch *Demetrius* 12, 24, 26. The hostile words that Philippides included in a comic play to criticize Stratocles for supporting Demetrius' deification (Plutarch *Demetrius* 12.7–8, 26.5) may well have expressed the opinion of some at Athens, though this incident belongs chronologically at least several years later than the assembly vote in 307 BCE. Moreover, Luraghi 2012: 360–362 shows that the strife between Philippides and Stratocles had more to do with

But there can be no doubt that a significant majority of Athenians favoured this outcome because the assembly's decisions were rendered by votes taken in randomly composed meetings whose attendees numbered approximately 6,000, a total that constituted a statistically significant sample of the total adult male citizen population of 20,000 to 30,000 at the time of Demetrius.⁶

The Athenian assembly determined the official policy of the city-state's public religious system—the citizens' distinct socio-cultural package of ideas and practices.⁷ The views of the adult male citizens who constituted the assembly were influenced by dialogue with the women in their lives, who were concerned with politics and public policy despite their not being allowed direct political participation.⁸ Therefore, I include both women and men when I refer to 'the many' at Athens. The goal of the assembly's decision-making on religious policy was to maintain mutually beneficial reciprocal relations for the community with the gods who were believed to keep it safe in return for their being appropriately honoured.⁹

In keeping with this goal of being saved by divine power while living in a world whose total number of gods no human being could ever be confident of knowing, Athenians could innovate in their religious beliefs and practice because as polytheists they accepted that they might at any time come into contact with a new divinity whom they had not previously worshipped but who, they subsequently discovered, could help them.¹⁰ The citizens themselves made these innovations because their religion was a dialogically and communally constructed, open-ended system of representation of the real, rather than a dogmatic top-down system of knowledge.¹¹ It also located the

a political rivalry than with controversy over deification. Bayliss 2011: 152–186 provides an extensive review of the evidence on Stratocles.

6 On the size of the population, see van Wees 2011; see Hansen 1987 on the operation of the assembly in this period; see Canevaro 2018 for the debate on whether decisions of the assembly were generally reported as the result of a consensus among the voters rather than as the result of a majority.

7 For this definition, see White 2018: 45.

8 See Pabst 2016; Blok 2017.

9 On reciprocity as a significant theological principle in ancient Greek religion, see Larson 2016: 40–56; on war as 'central to [reciprocal] interaction between powerful leaders and groups', see Chaniotis 2005: 74.

10 For surveys of the Athenians' adoption of new cults, see Garland 1992; Parker 1996: 152–198. The open-ended nature of polytheism specifically meant that there was no necessity to reject traditional gods in order to begin worshipping new gods; see below on the *peplos* at Athens and on the hymn to Demetrius. For this point, see Rubel 2014; Anderson 2015; Knapp 2017: 178–179. On *sôtêria* as a component in anchoring the innovation of new gods in early ruler cult, see Paul 2016.

11 See Jovchelovitch 2007: 2, 32 for the definition of representation on which I base this interpretation. On the nature of ancient Greek religious systems, see Parker 2011; Kindt 2012;

natures and powers of gods, heroes (in the Greek religious sense of a human beings who after death possessed power that could protect living people), and humans along a sliding scale of categories of being; it did not draw impassable boundaries among these categories.¹² This characteristic gave the Athenian many the cognitive flexibility to deem it a 'special thing', based on their lived experience, that they had been given salvation by a being whose power revealed him to be divine.¹³ The resultant deification of Demetrius as truly a god occurred as a group phenomenon—that is, as a social-psychological process of representation constructed by conversations and interactions among the many at Athens.¹⁴

2 The Historical Background of Demetrius' Deification at Athens

The deification of Demetrius in 307 BCE had its psychological genesis in events of the past.¹⁵ Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, the Athenians went to war to regain their freedom from Macedonian dominance. They initially achieved tremendous success on the battlefield. During a lull in fighting in the winter of 323–322 BCE, Athens held its traditional 'Memorial Day' event, for which a prominent citizen was chosen to address the community with a 'Funeral Oration' honouring the war dead and praising Athens. The Funeral Oration of 322 BCE, which has survived in large part, expresses

Eidinow 2015. See Versnel 2011: 5, 7, 11, 72–73 on the 'inconsistencies' resulting from the non-dogmatic nature of ancient Greek religious systems. On the much-discussed issue of the nature of—or even the existence of—belief in ancient Greek religion, see Harrison 2015a and 2015b, especially 2015b: 170–175; Petrovic and Petrovic 2016. On belief from the perspective of cognitive science, see Van Eyghen et al. 2018; Boyer 2019; T. Martin 2019.

¹² Currie 2005: 177, 187.

¹³ On divine entities ('superhuman agents') from the perspective of the cognitive science of religion, see White 2021: 180–221. On the terminology of 'specialness', see Taves 2009: 17, 19, 28–48; on experiences counting as special things, and on how 'deeming things religious' as part of lived experience promotes innovation in religious beliefs and practices, see Taves 2009: 22–27, 99; on Taves' interpretation, see C. Martin 2016: 535–536. See Anderson et al. 2019 on enactivism and lived experience.

¹⁴ As Currie 2005: 186 says, with Demetrius 'the title *theos* ['god'] is literally meant'. For an introductory overview of group psychological phenomena ('collective beliefs'), see Hewstone 1989: 205–236. On groups as agents, see List and Pettit 2011. See Boyer 2018: 96 for group belief as a 'cultural representation'; see Visvardi 2015 on collective emotion in the context of ancient Athens, and Budelmann 2019 on the group being the default context in which mental activity was situated at Athens.

¹⁵ The most detailed ancient sources are Diodorus *Bibl.* 18–21, and Plutarch *Life of Demetrius*, on which see Landucci Gattinoni 2008; Erskine 2018; Rose 2011.

an overtly triumphalist message. Its presenter, Hyperides, proclaimed that the Athenians were now fighting the most important war in their history and were prevailing in this epochal conflict especially because they were doing battle to defend the honours of their traditional gods against those people—he meant Macedonians and their allies—who had neglected the worship of the ancestral deities in favour of worshipping human beings.¹⁶

Hyperides' reference to worshipping human beings refers to the recent case of Alexander (356–323 BCE). Before Alexander's time, there had been instances of divine honours being conferred on human beings by Greek city-states—the idea of a human being recognized as 'more than human' was not new in 307 BCE.¹⁷ Lysander of Sparta approximately a century earlier was probably the first living person to have been honoured with an official cult 'as a god' (Plutarch, *Lysander* 18) by a Greek city-state (Samos)—and the only one before Alexander with such a cult.¹⁸ In 324 BCE, Alexander let the Greeks know that he wished to be recognized as a god (Plutarch, *Apophthegmata Laconica* 219E; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 2.19).¹⁹ In response, certain city-states, probably including Athens, established a cult for Alexander's worship.²⁰ So, his case was a precedent for that of Demetrius, but there were significant differences: Alexander had never saved Athens, his deification had not come as the result of spontaneous enthusiasm by the majority of Athenians following an unexpected salvation but rather at Alexander's own initiative, and Alexander did not have long-term interactions with Athens in his new divine status because he had been far away in Asia at the time of his request and then died in Babylon in 323 BCE before ever returning to Greece. Whatever cult Athens may have established for Alexander was short-lived.²¹

16 See Herrman 2009.

17 Currie 2005: 172–190, who analyses in detail the evidence for the Greeks' religious concept and recognition of a 'godlike man' (*theios anēr*).

18 Flower 1988, esp. 131–134, disputing the conclusion of Badian 1981 that Lysander did not receive a divine cult while he was still alive; Currie 2005: 159–160; Habicht 2017: 1–4, 172–173, 179. Habicht 2017: 4–5 also shows that the evidence for a cult for Alcibiades at Athens is unreliable; Currie 2005: 164–172 demonstrates that the cults and honours for Hagnon, Euthymos, Brasidas, and Gelon were not for them as gods, and that although Empedocles experienced extraordinary treatment from fellow Greeks that evoked identification as a god, an identity that he had himself promoted, he, too, did not receive an official regular cult.

19 On the much-discussed question of whether Alexander expressed his wish directly or indirectly, see Habicht 2017: 24–26, 165, 173–174.

20 Anson 2013: 83–120; Siekierka 2016; Habicht 2017: 11–26.

21 Habicht 2017: 160–161.

Consequently, Alexander's history as a precedent for deifying human beings could not resolve for the Athenians the question of exactly what type of divine being a deified man was, nor, crucially, the question of what it would mean for Athens as a Greek city-state to have direct interaction with that kind of being for an extended period. In other words, Alexander's deification gave Athenians no secure guidance about what would actually be involved in successfully anchoring the innovation of a corporeally present saviour god of whatever type it turned out that such a deified being really was.

Several months after Hyperides' speech had promised victory because the Athenians were fighting on the side of the gods, however, the tide of war completely turned against them: to their utter shock, they were forced to surrender unconditionally. The consequences were devastating.²² The victorious Macedonian commander, named Antipater, imposed harsh punishments of a kind Athens had never before experienced: the stripping of political rights from the majority of the population, the forced exile of many thousands of families into the dangerous far north, and the installation of a Macedonian military garrison. We can scarcely imagine the depth of the emotional response to these hardships experienced by the many.²³

It is critical to emphasize that Plutarch reports (*Phocion* 28.2–3) that this unprecedented disaster *bewildered* most Athenians; their defeat and punishment were bewildering because these catastrophes were inexplicable on traditional religious grounds.²⁴ That is, most Athenians had a strongly held belief that the gods would save them from such dangers. Their bewilderment was compounded by the recognition that the imposition of their horrible sufferings took place on the very same day of the year (20 Boedromion) on which, a century and a half earlier in 480 BCE, the gods had unforgettably ensured Athens' salvation in the face of a giant Persian invasion by favouring the Athenian fleet in the astonishing Greek victory at the Battle of Salamis. For the many, a calendrical synchronicity of this kind was salient.²⁵

22 Plutarch, *Phocion* 26–29; Diodorus 18.18 misrepresents the situation by claiming that Antipater treated the Athenians 'philanthropically'. See Baynham 2003; Landucci Gattinoni 2008: 104–108.

23 For disparate examples of the depth of modern emotional and intellectual reactions to catastrophes and the consequences for religion, see Schmuck 2000; Gil 2017.

24 See below on the wording of Plutarch's report. The bewilderment that many Christians in the US South felt during and after the US Civil war about God's role in their war-time sufferings and catastrophic defeat presents a useful comparison concerning the powerful social psychological impact of inexplicable defeat. See Wilson 2009.

25 Grafton and Swerdlow 1988. See Elk et al. 2016 on the human tendency to attribute significance to coincidences, and cf. the chapter by Klooster in this volume.

It is important to point out that well-known English translations of Plutarch's description of the bewildered reaction of the Athenians to this disaster are seriously misleading because these renderings say that 'the many' (*hoi polloi*) concluded that 'the gods looked down with indifference on the most grievous woes of Hellas'.²⁶ In fact, the Greek text means that the many reached the opposite conclusion about the cause of their troubles: they concluded that the gods had not merely been indifferent to their sufferings but in fact had *supervised/managed* (the operative term in Greek is *episkopein*) the infliction of these horrors.²⁷ This divine intentional action was totally undeserved in the opinion of the many because, as Hyperides emphasized, Athenians had fought and died to protect the honours of the traditional gods. And this conclusion about disastrous supervision by the gods in 322 BCE was not the only idea that underpinned the many's bewilderment; it was also going to be incomprehensible to them that their sufferings would continue for the next fifteen years. Certain members of the Athenian elite flourished in this intervening period when a *de facto* oligarchy headed by a *de facto* tyrant backed by Macedonian power held power in Athens, but the majority of Athenian citizens experienced hard times.²⁸ In short, the Athenian many continued to have good reasons to be bewildered at the traditional gods' ongoing failure to relieve their troubles that began in 322 BCE.

With this background in mind, it becomes easier to grasp the overwhelming psychological salience of the total surprise that the Athenian many experienced when the Macedonian Demetrius saved them in 307 BCE and therefore why they decided to deify this particular individual: because it was he and he alone who had demonstrated the power to bring them salvation after a decade and a half of unprecedented oppression, and 'power is the distinguishing feature of gods'.²⁹

The surprise began with the fact that the many expected that Demetrius was going to attack Athens rather than save it because he was an enemy of

26 '... ἀναλογίζεσθαι τοὺς πολλοὺς ... νῦν δὲ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἱεροῖς τὰ δυσχερέστατα πάθη τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐπισκοπεῖν τοὺς θεοὺς ...' (*Phocion* 28.2–3).

27 See Martin and Sun 2017 for the evidence for the meaning of *episkopein*, and for other similar English translations as well as in other languages. Textual evidence shows definitively that *episkopein* does not mean 'to be indifferent to' or 'to ignore'; it signifies intentional, active management and oversight.

28 See Oliver 2003 and Bayliss 2011 on the oligarchic character of the Athenian regime after 322. Scholars disagree about how to characterize conditions in Athens from 322 to 307, but the ancient evidence reveals that a large majority of the population had good reason to view the situation negatively.

29 Petridou 2015: 38–39.

Cassander, the leader of Macedonia, who in turn was the patron of Athens' oligarchic tyrant Demetrius of Phaleron. Therefore, the main Athenian harbour was chained closed specifically to prevent Demetrius' warships from entering.³⁰ The barrier had been temporarily lowered, however, on the day that Demetrius happened to show up because the Athenians were expecting the arrival of the fleet of Ptolemy, another Macedonian who sided with Cassander against Demetrius.

So, when Demetrius' warships did sail into the harbour, the Athenians initially thought that these were Ptolemy's vessels. Very soon, however, they realized to their horrified surprise that they were mistakenly welcoming Demetrius' fleet; they instantly became terrified that he would now destroy them. Imagine the depth of their continuing surprise when, to the contrary, they heard Demetrius immediately announce that he was liberating Athens and reversing the punishments imposed in 322 BCE. The many who were present at the harbour dropped their weapons, clapped their hands, and shouted for Demetrius to come ashore, hailing him as their 'saviour and benefactor'. Demetrius of Phaleron then fled into permanent exile in Thebes, with the permission of Demetrius. His departure effectively restored the ability of the citizens to control Athenian policy by majority vote in the assembly, free of oligarchic dominance.

For Athenians, Demetrius' arrival and surprising actions amounted to an especially notable episode because they took place on yet another calendrically memorable date: only one day after what Athenians regarded as the unluckiest day of their annual calendar, as dramatically demonstrated by the awful luck that the Athenian commander Alcibiades had experienced after he had sailed into the same harbour on that inauspicious day during the Peloponnesian War a century earlier.³¹ That Demetrius had just avoided that 'bad-luck day' was yet another indication to the many that they were correct in deeming this person special for having done what the traditional gods had failed to do for fifteen years: provide (from the many's point of view) national salvation.

Soon after Demetrius' astonishing proclamation, the assembly voted to recognize the present and corporeal Macedonian as a saviour god in gratitude for their city-state's having been saved from a traumatic experience that had for the many been bewilderingly incomprehensible ever since its

30 For the following events including Demetrius' deification, see Plutarch, *Demetrius* 8–9, Diodorus 20.45–46, and the detailed discussion in Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 113–144.

31 The unlucky day was the 25th of Thargelion, during the Plynteria festival for Athena Polias. The episode is referred to in Plutarch, *Demetrius* 8 and *Alcibiades* 34.

commencement in 322 BCE. No evidence suggests that Demetrius encouraged or coerced this vote.

As Plutarch reveals, what was markedly innovative in the deification of Demetrius, in contrast to earlier instances, was the Athenians attributing divine agency to a human being because he had saved them after the traditional gods had inexplicably supervised their sufferings in 322 BCE. Moreover, it was a special thing both that he was physically present in the community in incarnate form and also, because he was only about 30 years old, that he might be using his superhuman power to interact with their community for an indefinite period to come. For all these reasons, it made sense to the majority of Athenians to decide to deify him.

3 Three Insights from Social Psychology

3.1 *Reducing and Resolving Cognitive Dissonance*

In the 1950s the psychologist Leon Festinger and his research team proposed what has become known as the theory of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance concerns the changes in people's beliefs and behaviour when they experience contradictions between strongly held cognitions (ideas, thoughts, beliefs). Above all, people become strongly motivated to reduce and resolve the psychological dissonance created by the perceived contradictions. This phenomenon helps explain why the majority of the voters in the Athenian assembly decided that they needed to take action to revise their conception of the nature of their city-state's relationship with the divine.³² As with any significant and complicated set of ideas affecting members of a large group, there could hardly have been complete agreement among all Athens' citizens about this significant policy decision. But with traditional 'popular democracy' now once again fully functional, the vote clearly did represent a majority view.

The initial focus for Festinger's research was a field investigation into the psychological effects on the members of an apocalyptic sect in the US of the disconfirmation of the group's strong belief that extraterrestrials would save them from being destroyed in an imminent global catastrophe by flying them away in a spaceship. Festinger also cited the nineteenth-century Millerite religious movement for the effects of cognitive dissonance on a large group when its belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was disconfirmed.³³ Later

32 For the application of cognitive theory to historical data, see Klocová 2019.

33 Festinger et al. 1956; Festinger 1957: 248–251. These effects notably included attempts to reduce and resolve the ensuing cognitive tensions.

investigators have confirmed, expanded, and refined the theory over decades of study and experimentation.³⁴ The scholarly consensus about the theory of cognitive dissonance is that it is 'reliable'.³⁵

The incontrovertible reality of the experience of unprecedented and inexpressible sufferings by the many at Athens in 322 BCE and then for fifteen more years must have generated cognitive dissonance. The dissonance motivated changes in thought and action to resolve this contradiction. The particular cognitions that clashed to generate dissonance for the Athenian many concerned their religious beliefs. Specifically, the troubles of the mass of citizens disconfirmed their cherished belief regarding the protective role of their patron deities. Their city-state's defeat in 322 BCE and their subsequent punishments created dissonance between their focal cognition that if their community behaved piously it would be protected by divine favour and their strong cognition that they had been behaving piously by sacrificing lives in a war fought to protect the gods' honours. As the theory also predicts, the arousal of dissonance generated a pressing desire to find relief by reducing or alleviating the contradiction that had been generated by irrefutable new information—namely, that the Athenians could not always count on their traditional gods to save them from unjustified suffering.

The dissonance that the many at Athens experienced was relieved by the generation of a consonant new cognition explaining their national salvation. This innovative cognition was that a divine being of the sort that Demetrius evidently was could save them when, contrary to all expectations, the traditional gods had originally supervised just the opposite. The assembly consequently verified the cognition of the many by approving the public recognition of Demetrius' innovative status. Cognitive dissonance helps explain the psychological process that led to this new policy, in contrast to the explanation offered by some scholars that the decision to deify Demetrius was motivated by hypocrisy on the part of the majority at Athens, asserting that the voters in the assembly simply wanted to flatter Demetrius for their own advantage and did not genuinely believe in his divinity.³⁶ In fact, the cognitive dissonance experienced by the Athenian many as a group meant that they now needed to

34 Nail and Boniecki 2011; Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2015. Despite the origins of the theory in the study of historical groups, experimental confirmation has focused on individuals in laboratory settings. Festinger 1999: 384–385 pointedly called for more 'studies in the real world'.

35 Cooper 2007: 6. 'Reliable' is of course not the same as 'simple'; the effects of and responses to cognitive dissonance manifest themselves in diverse ways, for groups as for individuals.

36 See the survey in Bartol 2016.

construct new knowledge about their representation of this reality—that is, they had to revise their religious beliefs.

3.2 *The Cognitive Science of Religion*

The cognitive science of religion (CSR), the second of the three aspects of social psychology informing the argument of this chapter, helps clarify the psychological context of the revision of belief accompanying the decision at Athens to acclaim Demetrius as somehow divine.³⁷ Insights from CSR reveal that this revision would have taken place through a ‘communally shared shaping of the world’ by the many to generate new cognitions about the possibility of the existence in their midst of a deified human being with soteric power, and that these beliefs had ‘truth by virtue of fit and generativity’ within the community at Athens that had experienced bewildering loss—that is, the many—when, as they judged the situation, the old gods had not saved them.³⁸ That Demetrius had saved the Athenians—or at least the many—from their sufferings fit with the communal belief that he must be a saviour god because, as previously said, events proved that he possessed the power to achieve what was believed to be the domain of the divine—the salvation of their city-state.

CSR makes clear how this revision of belief aligns with the human conception of divinity: people tend to conceptualize deities as anomalous, minimally counterintuitive agents with intentionality who observe reciprocity in their relationship with human beings and who are anthropomorphic in their form.³⁹ Demetrius in 307 BCE met these criteria. He was attributed an anomalous nature differing from that of the traditional gods because he had been able to do what none of them had done for fifteen years—provide national salvation for Athens through military victory and the restoration of democratic political self-direction. He was minimally counterintuitive in his divinity because, aside from his divine-level of power, he was otherwise recognizably human. He was reciprocal because he rewarded the Athenians’ gratitude with huge gifts of food and supplies. That this revision of belief about the nature of Demetrius occurred in the context of near constant warfare conferred salience on the developing process of reciprocity between successful leaders and Greek

37 On cognitive science in the study of religion, see Arnold 2012: 6–14, 236–243; Geertz 2016; Panagiotidou with Beck 2017: 3–16; Ambasciano 2019; Petersen et al. 2019: 253–434 (‘Part 3: Cognition’); White 2021 is now the clearest and most thorough survey of this relatively new academic field.

38 See Cresswell 2018: 31, 108 on these characteristics of belief.

39 Tremlin 2006 provides a convenient overview of these much-discussed phenomena; see also Benavides 2016 and Barrett 2019.

city-states whereby ‘power, victory, and protection [of a city-state’s population] gave a monarch divine properties.’⁴⁰

None of this is to say that it was a simple task to undertake this revision of religious belief, that is, to complete the formation of a new cognition to relieve cognitive dissonance in consonance with the characteristics of divinity evidenced by the tenets of the cognitive science of religion. To quote Lara O’Sullivan from her study of the case of Demetrius, ‘The recognition of a god manifest on earth was ... a complex cognitive task.’⁴¹ It was an especially complicated challenge for Athenians to figure out what sort of god Demetrius was because he certainly was not a traditional Greek god.⁴² As already mentioned, he was obviously incarnate, human in his form and daily activities. Traditional gods, as least as people learned from the epics of Homer, also ate food, drank liquids, went to sleep, had sex, and so on. But Demetrius was clearly not an Olympian dining on ambrosia and nectar, as the Athenians could readily observe, nor was he an occasional visitor to the earth only assuming a temporary corporeal reality while apart from other gods. He was constantly present, though presumably he would at some point die. In short, the characteristics of his divinity compared to those of the old gods remained unsettlingly but necessarily underdetermined.

This was not because Demetrius’ deification was a complete innovation—as described above, Greeks had previously deified human beings—but because never before had deification become a lived religious experience ‘on the ground’ for a Greek community for any length of time. Now, for the first time, a Greek city-state (and, as it would turn out, not only Athens) had to puzzle out how to live up close and personal—often in close contact and for long periods—with the complicated and confusing nature of this new kind of divinity. They were going to have to hold multiple concepts of the nature of God all at the same time—but, as modern research demonstrates, that is indeed what people regularly do.⁴³

3.3 *The Attribution Theory of Religion*

The attribution theory of religion, the third aspect of social psychology being considered here, expands our understanding of the process of creating the innovation in religious belief and practice that came as a result of the Athenians

40 The quotation is from Chaniotis 2005: 252.

41 O’Sullivan 2017: 88.

42 The category of ‘God-man’ in ancient and modern Christian theology provides a provocative comparison that for reasons of space I hope to explore elsewhere.

43 Barrett 2019: 23.

learning to live with their new kind of god. It does so by illuminating the tendencies of human beings in constructing schemes of cause and effect to make sense of their experiences, a cognitive task that people are strongly motivated to perform.⁴⁴ As this theory specifies, the most attention-getting agent in a situation gains perceptual salience, a cognitive heuristic that encourages attribution. Furthermore, traumatic life events can cause people's ability to explain to break down, which can in turn lead to creative new ideas. In particular, people in non-stereotypical situations of inexplicability and ambiguity tend to revise their mental models of cause and effect, to over-attribute agency in the interest of securing safety, and to introduce radical changes in beliefs and practices.

These insights apply to the Athenians' situation in several ways. First, their prediction error in originally misidentifying Demetrius' role during the tense scene in the harbour of Athens in 307 BCE made them focus cognitively on the novel event that they now realized was unfolding—their being unexpectedly saved by an intentional agent with special powers instead of being destroyed. This focus therefore predisposed them to revise their understandings and belief.⁴⁵ Then, primed both by their prior religious beliefs and expectations about the traditional gods' role in protecting them and also by their interactions with each other as a group experiencing this novel situation, the Athenian many were stimulated to ascribe an innovative religious significance to the nature of Demetrius, who despite looking and acting like a human being nevertheless evidently possessed a power and an intentionality deserving of the status of divinity.

In these circumstances, it seems likely that the social psychological attitude of the Athenians as a group about Demetrius—that is, their mental model, their beliefs about him—reflected the effects of informational influence, by which people use the responses of others in their group to a new situation to guide themselves in reshaping their own beliefs and practices. Since informational influence is more pronounced in situations of high uncertainty, it certainly would have exercised substantial power on the interactions and discussions of the members of the group constituted by the Athenian many during the dangerous and confusing events of 307 BCE and the years following. Informational influence would have promoted an attitude change genuinely accepting and upholding the concept and the reality of deification; it would not have supported attempts just to 'fit in' socially by publicly mimicking the attitude change without truly believing in it, as can happen when normative

44 Krueger 2007; Taves 2009: 14–15, 43, 88–119; Crisp 2015: 3–32; Malle 2011; Smith 2017: 36–189.

45 On prediction error and the effect of novel events, see Passingham 2016: 104–105.

influence is psychologically dominant. The important consequence of this conclusion for analysing the case of Demetrius' deification is that the Athenian many's attitude change should be regarded as a conversion, in which private mental models align with public behaviour, rather than as a compliance, in which people give the public appearance of accepting a mental model without actually believing it in private.⁴⁶

In fact, as attribution theory emphasizes, that the Athenians in 307 BCE and thereafter keenly realized that they were living in a dangerous and unpredictable world strongly motivated them to construct an explanation for how they had been saved. Being able to explain their salvation to themselves allowed them to satisfy human beings' fundamental psychological need to have faith that they understand their world and are therefore in the best possible position to be able to predict and to control what might happen to them going forward.⁴⁷ To construct that much-desired explanation, the Athenians invoked the most readily available meaning system and the one of the greatest familiarity, in this case their traditional expectations of the salvific role of divinity.⁴⁸

4 Anchoring Deification at Athens

The comforting effects that many Athenians felt from creating and accepting this explanation in turn motivated their anchoring the innovation of deification by connecting it to well-established civic traditions. This anchoring was achieved at the group level through numerous modifications of long-standing institutions (Plutarch, *Demetrius* 10–13, 23). For reasons of space, these institutionalized anchorings cannot be discussed here in any detail for the most part.⁴⁹ They included the annual election of a priest associated with a cult of the saviour gods; this priest may have become the eponymous official whose name was used to designate the civic year, replacing the name of the annually chosen political official (the eponymous archon), whose name had traditionally served this important calendrical function. Additionally, the great Athenian festival celebrated to honour the Olympian god Dionysus was associated with

46 See Crisp 2015: 49–51 on informational vs normative influence and conversion vs compliance.

47 On the human cognitive drive to predict and control, see Crisp 2015: 11, 29, 32, 37, 42.

48 See Taves 2009: 94 and Crisp 2015: 34 on the role of familiarity in explanation.

49 On the wider context of these various honours for the relationship between Demetrius and Athens, see Rose 2018.

a festival for Demetrius.⁵⁰ Another anchoring was the building of an altar like those for traditional gods that was consecrated to Demetrius on the spot where he had first set foot on the ground in Athens. Two new administrative divisions (*phylai*) of the citizen body were added to the current ten divisions and named for Demetrius and Antigonos, in the same way that the pre-existing divisions had been named after legendary 'more-than-human' entities from Athenian ancient history. Also, Athenian ambassadors dispatched to Demetrius and Antigonos were now designated as sacred envoys (*theôroi*), just like those sent on official missions to the shrines of traditional gods such as Apollo at Delphi and Zeus at Olympia. On one such occasion, Demetrius was asked to deliver an oracle. After he had saved Athens a second time (see below), Demetrius was given living quarters in the Parthenon, Athena's most conspicuous temple. The name of one of the months in the annual civil calendar was changed to 'Demetrius' Month,' while the designation of the last day of the lunar months used at Athens was changed to 'Demetrius Day'.

Two other anchorings merit more explanation as support for my argument. The first of these was the decision to add portraits of Demetrius and Antigonos to the very prominent, publicly displayed tapestry (*peplos*) that was employed in the city-state's rites honouring the goddess Athena.⁵¹ The images woven into this large sacred cloth depicted a battle between Athens' traditional protective deities and supernatural beings intending to destroy the human world. This now-redesigned work of art therefore visually joined the new saviour gods to the old gods in a shared exertion of the salvific powers that Athenians prayed that divine beings would together employ to allow their city-state to survive and flourish. Significantly, this official imagery visually and publicly communicated that the innovation of deification was going to revise and complement, not replace, the worship of traditional gods, who, the many evidently wanted to believe, would now resume their protective role for Athens.

The second anchoring provides more evidence for this development.⁵² This anchoring modified Athenian communal religious practice by offering an official ceremony of greeting to Demetrius each time he visited Athens.

50 Habicht 2017: 97 argues that Plutarch is mistaken both about the eponymity of the priests of the 'Saviours' and in saying that the Dionysia festival was renamed the Demetria festival. On the close association of the festivals of Dionysus and Demetrius, see Currie 2005: 137.

51 Barber 1992.

52 That the Athenians still worshipped other gods after the deification of 307 BCE is shown both by the report in Plutarch, *Demetrius* 24 of an Athenian decree that references Demetrius and 'the gods', and also by inscriptions such as Woodhead 1997 nos. 114 and 115, in which definite references are preserved to the 'Saviours', meaning Demetrius and

These public ‘welcomings’ (*xenismata*) for him were designed to be like those traditionally performed to greet the gods Dionysus and Demeter when they were believed to visit Athens for religious events held in their honour. One central aspect of such ceremonies was the performance of ‘a song for a god’, called a hymn.⁵³

The Athenians commissioned hymns to be performed to welcome Demetrius on his visits to their city-state.⁵⁴ An author contemporary with Demetrius, Duris of Samos (ca. 350–after 281 BCE), reports the version of the song publicly presented by specialized performers on the occasion of a visit to Athens by Demetrius in the later 290s BCE.⁵⁵ There is much more in this extraordinary text than I can discuss here. Since its wording assumes the religious significance of Demetrius’ bringing salvation to the city-state, it recalls Demetrius’ first arrival in Athens in 307 BCE, celebrating it as an epiphany.⁵⁶ This demonstrates that Demetrius remained a religious special thing for the Athenians and is now being asked to provide salvation from yet another external danger.⁵⁷

Moreover, this song specifically links the Athenians’ innovation in deeming Demetrius a saviour-god to their traditional belief in the protective role of patron deities.⁵⁸ It does so by associating his current presence at Athens with the presence of Demeter at the same time in the calendar, namely at the time of the year when the goddess’ internationally famous initiatory rites known as the Mysteries were celebrated at Athens.⁵⁹ Those rites promised initiates a better fate both in this world and after death, and the ceremonies took place at the very period in the year when Athenians believed they had received divinely-provided salvation in 480 BCE.

Antigonus, and to Athena and Helios, and probably other gods whose names are restored in the damaged texts.

53 For this meaning of the Greek term ‘hymn’, see Arrian, *Anabasis* 4.11.2; on the characteristics of hymns see Furley and Bremer 2001: 1–64.

54 Furley and Bremer 2001: 29. It is not recorded when a hymn to Demetrius was first performed, but Plutarch, *Demetrius* 12 seems to imply that this occurred during the period when the institutionalized anchoring of his deification first started to take shape, not long after 307 BCE.

55 Powell 1925: 173–175 = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 6.253d–f = *FGH* 76 F 13. For recent discussions of the hymn, see Chaniotis 2011; Holton 2014; Bartol 2016.

56 Furley and Bremer 2001: 58, n. 174. See Petridou 2015: 105 on epiphanies as ‘constructing cultural and political identity’.

57 The enemy is from Aetolia, a region against whose forces Demetrius had previously made war (Plutarch *Demetrius* 41).

58 As Chaniotis 2005: 72–73 says in connection with the Athenians’ hymn, ‘Power and protection made Demetrius’ rule acceptable and even gave the ruler divine properties’.

59 See Clinton 2010 on the Eleusinian Mysteries.

This same anchoring effect of connecting the new to the old is produced by the references made in the song to Demetrius' familial relationship with the Olympian gods Poseidon and Aphrodite. The specialness of Demetrius' status is additionally emphasized by lines that describe his genial appearance and characterize some other gods (though not all) as distant, or not listening to humans' prayers, or having no actual presence, or having no concern for the Athenians.⁶⁰ Demetrius, the song says, is real, is true, and therefore the Athenians pray to him to bring them peace and salvation.

For these reasons, Demetrius' tangible, responsive presence sets him apart from those of the traditional gods who have not resumed their roles as civic protectors. At the same time, the hymn provides additional evidence that belief in the existence and importance of at least some of the traditional gods both continued and was also compatible with the simultaneous existence of the different kind of divine being represented by a deified human being.⁶¹ This diversity of belief and practice aligns with the open-ended nature of ancient Greek religion.

One final point about this song is meaningful in considering the issue of whether the deification of Demetrius represented emotion that was hypocritical or sincere, if in fact that is a type of question that can even be meaningfully posed about human emotion.⁶² The point is that the Athenians reportedly not only had this song performed in public but also sang it 'at home', presumably in intimate groups gathered for meals or religious rituals. The ancient source for this report expresses a negative attitude toward the Athenians on the grounds that they were excessive in flattering Demetrius, but the detail about the hymn being sung at home is added only to denigrate the Athenians as lacking courage, not to accuse them of being insincere. Even though the hymn is flattering, the fact that Athenians sang it in private speaks against the view expressed by some modern scholars that the song was nothing more than a manifestation of public hypocrisy; if that were true, why bother to sing it privately?⁶³ Rather, the pragmatic desire—and religion is above all pragmatic—to predict and control, an essential feature of the compelling human drive to survive and to flourish,

60 It is important to note that the Greek text's reference to 'other gods' (*alloi theoi*) does not mean 'all other gods' because it is lacking the article 'the' (*hoi*); the hymn's respectful mentions of Demeter, Poseidon, and Aphrodite make this point clear. Olson's translation 'The other gods' in the Loeb Classical Library (2008: 165) is therefore misleading, as noted by Bartol 2016: 505, n. 20.

61 Petrovic 2015: 434.

62 Rosenwein and Cristiani 2017 argue that this is not possible.

63 For example, Olson 2008: 163 n. 262 calls the hymn 'a singularly embarrassing incident in Athenian history'.

propelled the many at Athens to make this innovation and to anchor it.⁶⁴ In my judgement, the complex of ideas contained in the song reveals a significant step in the evolution of Greek religious beliefs and practices at the group level about the diverse natures of divinity, a process, as has been noted, with a history before 307 BCE, and with a history going forward influenced by Demetrius' deification.

The vicissitudes of the two decades of interactions between Demetrius the saviour god and the Athenians following his deification reveal how contentious the process became of anchoring the innovation of learning to live as a community that had to interact with this kind of present divine being.⁶⁵ As noted above, disputes occurred over specific honours and privileges granted to Demetrius, and perhaps even over the deification itself.⁶⁶ As a result, the Athenians underwent a diachronic process during which their attributions concerning the special category in which they had placed Demetrius were modified in the light of their experiences with his agency.⁶⁷

This process should not surprise us. Since, to repeat an important point made earlier, ancient Greek religion had no dogma, no scripture, and no authorized leaders to compel unity of belief, everything was always and everywhere subject to argument. One crucial issue emerged when events after 307 BCE showed that the new divine being's powers were inconsistent—that is, like traditional gods in Homer's *Iliad*, he could be defeated in battle, and especially by other powerful leaders whom Greeks were now acclaiming as divine, such as Seleucus and Ptolemy, former generals of Alexander the Great who after his death had carved out kingdoms for themselves.⁶⁸

So, while Demetrius succeeded in saving Athens a second time, by repulsing an attack by a hostile Macedonian force several years after his deification, a

64 Here I disagree with Boyer 2018: 100, 119, who argues that a 'practical' approach to 'supernatural practices and ideas' is characteristic only of pre-modern small-scale societies (and presumably therefore not of large city-states such as Athens) and that this pragmatism rules out the possibility of 'religion' or 'spirituality'. In such societies, he argues, people 'are not interested in "metaphorical questions"', focusing on an 'intensely pragmatic concern', namely 'They simply want their crops to thrive and misfortune to fall away'. It seems historically unjustified to conclude that the size of past societies resulted in different attitudes toward pragmatic and metaphorical concerns in religion.

65 These vicissitudes merit much more attention than can be offered here. As mentioned above (n. 4), Wheatley and Dunn 2020 provide the most detailed discussion currently available.

66 See n. 5.

67 See Taves 2009: 98 on this type of process; see Mari 2016 on significant episodes in this process at Athens.

68 See Habicht 2017: 59–84 on the cults for Seleucus and Ptolemy.

couple of years after this success he was defeated by a coalition of rivals in Southwest Asia. As a result, the Athenians tried to reduce their connection to him—could it be, we might ask, that they wondered if his powers were only effective when he was present with them? In any case, when he subsequently won spectacular victories outside of Athens, the Athenians welcomed him back. And then he saved Athens for a third time, liberating it from a new tyrant.⁶⁹ But when Demetrius once again suffered a major military setback abroad at the hands of a coalition of rival kings, the Athenians cut their ties with him, now preferring to seek salvation from Ptolemy, who as king of Egypt had been officially deemed a saviour (*sôtêr*) by other Greeks.⁷⁰ Still, they agreed to peaceful terms with Demetrius, who then left Europe for Asia, never to return, apparently to the Athenians' relief. In short, Demetrius' effect on human affairs proved to be disconcerting, even to the point of leading to ruptures in relations between the community and its first officially anointed saviour god. As the Athenians learned, the power of a deified human being, like that of a traditional god, was ambiguous in its effect on Greek city-states: it could be wielded by a divinity who was capable of becoming both a 'welcome liberator and a feared assailant'.⁷¹

Nevertheless, I maintain that the ascription of specialness to Demetrius persisted. This reflected the psychological impact on the Athenians of the highly negative memory of their fifteen years of sufferings and the immense feeling of relief that they had experienced when they had finally been saved.⁷² As for Demetrius' own attitude concerning his ontological status, no statements of his survive, but his coins from the 290s BCE portraying him with the bull's horns of Dionysus do publicize him as divine at that date nearly two decades after he had saved Athens for the first time.⁷³

In the aftermath of Demetrius' deification, the growing cadre of deified human rulers such as Seleucus and Ptolemy could and would come into conflict with each other, as well as with Greek city-states. This volatile situation produced unpredictable results for those people who regarded these ambitious men as religiously special things. This complex interaction continued even after the death of Demetrius in the 280s BCE. At Athens, the assembly dropped the eponymous priesthood to him, but they kept the two civic divisions named

69 For these episodes, see Plutarch, *Demetrius* 23, 28–31, and 33–34.

70 Plutarch, *Demetrius* 46. See Habicht 2017: 79–84 on Ptolemy as *sôtêr*, and Luraghi 2019 on Athens' creation of a relationship with Ptolemy.

71 O'Sullivan 2017: 78.

72 See Smith 2017: 40 on the powerful and lasting effects of negative experiences.

73 See, for example, the silver tetradrachm at the American Numismatic Society no. 1967.152.205 (<http://numismatics.org/collection/1967.152.205?lang=en>).

after him and his father. Two decades later, they recognized his son Antigonus Gonatas as a god.⁷⁴

Eventually, the process of communities learning to live with this perplexing kind of human / divine being while continuing the worship of traditional gods led to the institutionalization of what is now labeled 'ruler cult', in which deified human beings ruled as kings.⁷⁵ This development in turn promoted further innovations in Greco-Roman beliefs concerning how the long-term impact of the rule of a saviour god affected the administration and autonomy of large-scale political entities. In the very long run, this process contributed to the development in Christianity of the concept of a corporeal saviour god who was not directly concerned with assuming power over the political structures of the present, but rather with the eternal salvation of individuals after death, if they rejected the worship of other gods.⁷⁶

5 Conclusion

Social psychology contextualizes the process through which the Athenians created and anchored their innovation of deifying a present human being in 307 BCE, continuing the long-term evolution of this concept. This process was motivated by the desire of human beings living in the perilous and changing world of the Mediterranean region in this period to form consistent cognitions about the new diversity that deification represented along the sliding scale of the concept of divinity and its exercise of power over people in the here and now of the world.

The deification of Demetrius at Athens constituted a significant step in this process because it was the first time that a Greek social and political community had the lived experience of close contact with a deified human being over an extended period of time and of the complex challenges, from cognitive to political, that this experience entailed. This psychological process endured for so long and had such direct consequences on social and political action by people living in Greek city-states (and eventually elsewhere, too) because it served the overriding human goal of securing salvation in every sense of that

74 Kralli 2003; Landucci Gattinoni 2016.

75 See, among many studies, Erskine 2014.

76 Amitay 2010 argues for the long-term impact of Alexander's deification as related to Christian theology; Litwa 2012: 71–74 discusses the deification of Demetrius as part of the background for Paul's soteriology; see Martin 2019 for studies applying cognitive dissonance to early Christianity.

word, beginning with being saved from physical danger. As Max Weber said, 'At all times and in all places, the need for salvation—consciously cultivated as the substance of religiosity—has resulted from the endeavour of a systematic and practical rationalization of life's realities'.⁷⁷

The historical realities described in this chapter changed the ways in which the Athenians in the early Hellenistic period conceptualized their communal possibilities and responsibilities in a world directly affected by external forces, which now included the perceived presence of a new form of divine power present among them. Social psychological insights from cognitive science help us to grasp how they accommodated themselves intellectually, emotionally, and politically to the dramatic change in their lives made necessary by what they had experienced. At the same time, their history also informs our understanding of the depth and complexity of the effects on human thought and behaviour exerted by the desire to reduce and resolve cognitive dissonance. In this way, the story of the deification of Demetrius emphasizes the value of exploring the relationship between the social sciences and the historical humanities as something 'good to think with' in the context of the cognitive science of religion.⁷⁸

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⁷⁷ Weber 1946: 353. On this general principle, see Riesebrodt 2010; Smith 2017.

⁷⁸ See Garber 2012: 97 for the quotation, a frequently used English translation of the phrase *bonnes à penser* in Lévi-Strauss 1962: 128.

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Cyrus' Learning Curve: Views of Adolescent Psychology in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*

Luuk Huitink and Eveline Crone

1 Introduction

Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* or *Education of Cyrus*—which probably dates from the 360s BCE¹—is an elaborate biography of King Cyrus II ('the Great', c.600–530 BCE), the founder of the first Persian Empire. While Cyrus is a historical figure, scholars agree that the work contains a great many fictional elements and that the character Cyrus first and foremost embodies Xenophon's own views of what it takes to be a successful political and military leader; as such, the *Education* chiefly belongs to the ancient genre of *politeia*-literature on the best forms of government (the most famous example is Plato's *Republic*) and is one of the first examples in European literature of a 'mirror of princes'.² Near the start of the work, Xenophon attributes to Cyrus three chief character traits, the possession of which he deems crucial for effective leadership: 'love of people' (*philanthrôpia*), 'love of learning' (*philomatheia*) and 'love of honour (ambition)' (*philotimia*) (1.2.1).³ The body of the *Education* demonstrates how all of Cyrus' actions are informed by these traits as he deals—in exemplary ways, and nearly always with success—with ever new challenging situations which Xenophon devises for him in successive scenes.⁴

Xenophon appears to think of these crucial character traits as innate, but at the same time he makes it clear that they are not fully fledged from a person's earliest childhood onwards, but require honing and training and need

1 See Mueller-Goldingen 1995: 45–55.

2 Cf. e.g. Gera 1993: 1–13; Tatum 1994.

3 'It is still now reported in stories and songs by the barbarians [i.e. the Persians] that he was by nature (φύσει) most beautiful in appearance, and in his soul most loving of people, most eager to learn and most ambitious (ψυχὴν δὲ φιλανθρωπότητος καὶ φιλομαθέστατος καὶ φιλοτιμότητος), so that he endured every labour and engaged in every dangerous enterprise for the sake of being praised'.—All references are to the *Education*, unless stated otherwise. Translations are taken from Ambler 2001, with some adaptations.

4 For readings of the *Education* along these lines, see Due 1989; Sandridge 2012.

to be supplemented by other, acquired moral qualities.⁵ From the outset, he emphasizes that great leadership is a matter of both 'nature' and 'nurture' or, in his own terms, of *phusis* and *paideia*. The word *paideia* is usually translated as 'education', but has a wider purview than that English term: it refers to all formal and informal instruction as well as life experiences in the early stages of life that are instrumental in making someone a full and mature member of society (the word can simply mean 'upbringing' or, still more generally, 'youth, childhood').⁶ Xenophon's views on the importance of *paideia* help explain a curious feature of the *Education*. Most ancient Greek biographical writings pay only scant attention to their subjects' youth, which may imply that our modern view of youth as a distinct and crucial phase of life and as formative in the development of one's later personality was not widely shared by the Greeks.⁷ Xenophon, by contrast, devotes much of the first book of the *Education* to Cyrus' younger years (1.2.1–1.5.1). It is the most detailed literary portrait by a classical Greek author of what we today would call an adolescent.⁸

Yet, the childhood narrative of the *Education* has received remarkably little attention from historians interested in classical Greek conceptions of, and attitudes to, childhood and adolescence.⁹ This is no doubt largely because most research in this area has focussed on the ritual and institutional customs and practices by which ancient Greek and Roman societies marked child-to-adult transitions.¹⁰ From that point of view, Xenophon's *Education* must seem an

5 Sandridge 2012: 17–18.

6 The title of the entire work, *Education (Paideia) of Cyrus*, seems to describe only its first part, which narrates Cyrus' childhood—though it is also possible that Xenophon sees 'education' as a continuing process which goes on at every stage of life; see Tatum 1989: 90; Due 1989: 15.

7 Cf. Garland 1990: 141–144; Pelling 1990.

8 Cf. Due 1989: 152, 156. For anything comparable, one has to turn to Homer's earlier portrait of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* (on which see Garland 1990: 170–174) or Augustine's much later autobiographical account of his own boyhood and adolescence in the first books of the *Confessions*.

9 Exceptions are Erasmus 1954 and Due 1989: 152–156 on the various developmental stages of Cyrus as described by Xenophon, and Thomas 2010: 207–214, an engaging analysis of Cyrus' developing speech behaviour in the childhood narrative. We regret that Bevilacqua 2024 was published too recently to be incorporated into our analysis.

10 For an overview of scholarship, see Beaumont 2012: 3–9 and Laes and Strubbe 2014: 1–22 (focussing more on Rome than Greece). The latter succinctly describe the fundamental and influential discussion between Eyben 1987 on the one hand, and Pleket 1990 and Kleijwegt 1991 on the other. The former, mainly using literary sources, thought that he could discern a distinct *Jugendraum* in (Roman) antiquity, a period between childhood and adulthood in which young people could fully experience their youth and undergo moral and mental turmoil comparable to modern adolescents. The latter, focusing on non-literary sources such as inscriptions and using comparative evidence from other pre-industrial societies, more influentially argued that there was no such thing as a

unpromising source. After all, Xenophon's story is set in Persia and does not deal directly with Greek institutions. Furthermore, Xenophon presses his account of Cyrus' formative years into the service of a broader philosophical and didactic project: he is less interested in depicting the world as it is than as—in his idiosyncratic eyes—it should be (for similar reasons, Plato's many pronouncements on the upbringing of children cannot be taken straightforwardly to reflect general Greek views).¹¹ However, although—or perhaps precisely because—Xenophon has little to say about Greek customs, rituals and institutions (the outward trappings of classical Greek adolescence, so to speak), he does show a keen interest in the inward changes which Cyrus undergoes, and captures aspects of adolescent behaviour and psychology which are, as we might say, 'true to life', but which do not often come to the fore in Greek literature.

In this chapter, we will analyse Xenophon's narrative about Cyrus' childhood with the aim of bringing out some of the underlying views about adolescent psychology on which it appears to be predicated. We will bring Xenophon's account into dialogue with recent neuropsychological research into the cognitive and psychological development of adolescents, especially as it has been conducted at the Brain and Development Lab of Leiden University over the past decades.¹² This research has demonstrated that the brain does not fully mature till the ages of 20–25, and has linked observations about changes in specific brain areas to adolescents' cognitive, emotional and social development, as well as to what are considered typical forms of adolescent behaviour in contemporary western societies, including perceived recklessness, recalcitrance and laziness.¹³ It has also turned around the idea that the adolescent brain is simply 'immature', but rather interprets the changes in wiring and connectivity across brain networks as a window of opportunity for social learning

recognized *Jugendraum*, but that youths in Roman society were expected to behave like adults early on and were rapidly integrated into adult society.

11 Garland 1990: 9 states that what 'Xenophon is describing is entirely non-Greek' and leaves it at that. Strauss 1993: 199 speaks of 'that cranky and idiosyncratic "Persian" allegory of contemporary Greece', at which he glances only sideways. Golden 2015: 9 does call the early part of the *Education* 'our most developed portrait of what we would today call a cute kid' (an oversimplifying reading), but he is wary of Xenophon's ulterior motives: 'there is always a subtext in these stories; they are early signs of Cyrus's exceptional success'. Neither Too's 2001 companion to Greek and Roman education nor the massive *Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Evans Grubbs et al. 2013) make more than passing references to the *Education*.

12 See <https://brainanddevelopment.nl/>. Crone 2018 offers a general introduction.

13 Van Duijvenvoorde et al. 2016.

and adaptation; Lawrence Steinberg has coined the term ‘age of opportunity’ to capture this aspect of adolescence.¹⁴

In this chapter, insights from modern psychology primarily serve what has been called a ‘search-light function’, ‘in that psychology provides a framework to focus on particular aspects of ancient texts and phenomena which may otherwise go unnoticed, but which can form the very basis for an original dialogue between the ancient worldview and that of modern interpreters.’¹⁵ To the extent that modern neuropsychological research informs us about general (biologically determined) patterns of behaviour, it can indeed serve as a framework for our analysis of the *Education*, as it in principle has validity across time and space: there is in any case little reason to suppose that—say—the brains of ancient Persian or Greek adolescents were wired differently from those of their modern counterparts. Therefore it should be possible to take modern insights into adolescent behaviour as a hermeneutic hypothesis to bring out some intuitive psychology that must have informed Xenophon’s narrative of Cyrus’ development. We will make the case that Xenophon is indeed a keen early observer of adolescent behaviour in ways that are—by Greek standards—quite exceptional.

However, the fact that certain behaviours can be observed in different times and places does not mean, of course, that they are also explained and evaluated in the same ways. In other words, metacognitive models—‘the ways in which, in different settings, periods, places, and cultures, people have conceived of their own and other people’s cognitive processes and functions’—are by no means universal.¹⁶ Different societies in different periods have had different ideas about the most important physical and mental characteristics of adolescents and their causes and about the extent to which it is necessary or useful to create a space for (whatever they define as typical) youthful behaviour to play out. For instance, while modern scientists readily explain adolescent behaviour in terms of the gradual development of the brain (and such scientific thinking also permeates popular discourse on the topic), the ancient Greeks did not have recourse to such explanations, but tended to talk in terms of the possession or lack of certain virtues, so that undesirable adolescent behaviour was, for instance, often attributed to a regrettable absence of the virtue of rationality (*phronêsis*) in young people.¹⁷ So, in order to bring Xenophon’s and modern views into the ‘original dialogue’ envisaged by Lauwers and his

14 Steinberg 2014; see also Blakemore and Mills 2014; Crone and Fuligni 2020.

15 Lauwers et al. 2018: 7.

16 Corthals and Sluiter 2023: 210.

17 See Dover 1974: 102–103.

colleagues, the trick is—to use a phrase of Douglas Cairns—‘to look both ways’, and take seriously both the biological basis of being young and the historically and socioculturally specific conceptualization of what it means to be young.¹⁸ The point here is not to adjudicate between different models, but to be aware that all models ‘offer examples of socio-culturally situated metacognition, rather than decontextualized universal truths.’¹⁹

In the special case of the *Education*, a consideration of sociocultural specificities should take account of both the general cultural context in which the work was written and Xenophon's own intellectual agenda, which is almost certainly in part polemical (and so written *against* the general cultural context). As we have seen, the latter aspect appears to have deterred earlier scholars of Greek childhood and adolescence from taking full advantage of the *Education*. In our view, however, this need not be a problem. On a practical level, we shall argue that close-reading of the relevant passages makes it possible to discern occasions on which Xenophon appeals to widely shared Greek values and occasions on which he puts forward his own views. The main point, however, is again that *all* descriptions and explanatory models of child development require contextualization. We should be aware that Xenophon adopts a specific model of Cyrus' development because in his view it facilitates the *paideia* of an exceptional individual, who as an adult will become an ‘ideal leader’. To that end, he draws attention to certain aspects of adolescence, whilst all but ignoring others.²⁰ We will elaborate on these points in the course of the chapter, but will first give a general overview of the childhood narrative of the *Education*.

2 A General Outline of the Childhood Narrative

The childhood narrative of the *Education* establishes a fairly explicit temporal framework for understanding Cyrus' development—which in itself is indicative of Xenophon's interest in the matter. It starts with a brief account of Cyrus' birth into a noble lineage (1.2.1): he is the son of the Persian king Cambyzes and of Mandane, the daughter of the Median king, Astyages; he is destined to unify

18 Cairns 2008. See also Laes and Strubbe 2014: 2, 228–231.

19 Corthals and Sluiter 2023: 226.

20 Corthals and Sluiter 2023: 226 talk in this respect about different models' ‘*differential situated salience* to agents in different contexts and to their understanding of self and others: the explanatory power of certain concepts is deemed greater in a given situation than that of others’ (original italics).

both peoples under his rule. The remainder is divided into two main parts. The first offers a systematic exposition of what Xenophon claims to be a Persian system of public education (1.2.4–16), although it is almost certainly largely his own invention (see the next section). The system is based on a strict division of Persian males (Xenophon nowhere considers women) into various age-groups: they start their education among the ‘boys’ (*paides*) and then graduate to the ‘young men’ (*ephêboi*) at ‘16 or 17 years of age’ (1.2.8), before being admitted into the class of ‘adult men’ (*teleioi andres*) at the age of 26 or 27.²¹

However, we do not get to hear how Cyrus personally functioned among the Persian *paides*, but are merely told *that* he was educated there until he was ‘about 12 years of age or a little older’ (1.3.1). The longer, second part of the childhood narrative (1.3.1–1.4.27) relates how Cyrus interrupts his formal education in order to stay at the Median court of his maternal grandfather, Astyages. In loosely connected scenes, we follow Cyrus as he attends a royal banquet, learns how to hunt, makes friends, and has his first taste of battle. The narrative contains one major temporal caesura, when it is said that ‘time, in addition to making him taller, brought Cyrus into that time of life in which one approaches early adulthood (*tou prosêbon genesthai*)’ (1.4.4); this new period heralds major changes, as we shall see below. It is further testimony to Xenophon’s interest in child development that he here introduces into Greek literature (at least, as far as we can tell) the term *prosêbos* (literally ‘approaching early manhood’, from *pros* ‘towards’ and *hêbê* ‘youthful prime, early manhood’) to refer to a stage between those of *païs* (‘boy’) and *ephêbos* (a much more common word; literally ‘on the cusp of early manhood’, from *epi* ‘at/on’ and *hêbê*).²² Two further temporal indications state that Cyrus ‘was about 15 or 16 years of age’ when he went on his first military campaign (1.4.16) and that, when he finally returned to Persia, he spent one more year in education ‘among the boys (*paides*)’ (1.5.1), who, as we have seen, graduate at the age of 16 or 17. All in all, then, Cyrus stayed in Media for about four years, from the ages of about 12/13 till 16.

21 Twenty-five years later, they proceed to the class of the ‘elders’ (*geraiteroti*), defined as ‘those who are beyond the years of military service’ (1.2.4); according to Xenophon, then, a Persian male’s entire life is strictly regulated and spent almost exclusively among peers from one’s own age-group. Contemporary readers will have been familiar with the division of the life cycle into four stages, for which there are many parallels in Greek thought (though divisions into three, five, seven and even ten stages were also made): see Laes and Strubbe 2014: 22–28 for an overview.

22 The word *prosêbos* only recurs in Imperial Greek literature. Lexicographers (Ptolemaeus, *Περὶ διαφοράς λέξεων* 403.19 Heylbut; Pollux, *Onom.* 2.9.3) gloss it as *antipais* (lit. ‘instead of a boy’ > ‘no longer a boy’).

In the following sections, we will first discuss some salient aspects of the Persian education system as described by Xenophon, and then turn to the first stage of Cyrus' stay in Media when he is still a *pais*, and finally consider the changes which he is said to undergo as a *prosēbos* during the second part of his Median sojourn.

3 A 'Persian' Education

As a child, Cyrus is first educated for a while according to the customs (*nomoi*) of the Persians; these customs, Xenophon tells us, are instituted for the common good (*to koinon agathon*) and so differ from those of most city-states (*poleis*), which allow parents to educate their children however they see fit (1.2.2). The main points of the Persian educational programme can be quickly described. Both the 'boys' (*paides*) and the 'young men' (*ephēboi*) are supervised by those 'older men' (*geraiteroi*) who are thought to make each age-group best (1.2.5). The *paides* are trained in the cardinal virtue of 'justice' (*dikaio-sunē*) (1.2.6) and in three closely related forms of self-mastery: 'self-control' (*sôphrosunē*), 'obeying the rulers' (*peithesthai tois arkhouisi*) and 'moderation' (*enkrateia*) in food and drink' (1.2.8).²³ Justice is taught by making the boys participate in mock trials presided over by the elders, in such cases as naturally arise, because 'just as men do, the boys of course also accuse each other of theft, robbery, violence, deceit, calumny, and other such things as are likely' (1.2.6); particular attention is devoted to cases of 'ingratitude' (*akharistia*), when boys did not repay a favour they were able to repay (1.2.7). Self-control, obedience and moderation are taught by example: the boys 'see their elders spending the whole day in temperate fashion (*sôphronôs*)', 'obeying the rulers' and 'not going off for food until the rulers dismiss them' (1.2.8), and it is assumed that they will aspire to follow these behaviours themselves.

When the *paides* move to the class of the *ephēboi* at 16/17 years of age, they present themselves to the rulers every day and even spend the night around the government buildings, both so that they can quickly be deployed if the city needs them and with a view to reinforcing *sôphrosunē*, 'because this age

23 As Rademaker 2005: 251–277 shows, *sôphrosunē* refers to the kind of good sense which enables people to avoid harm to self and others; moderation in pursuing pleasures and desires is a core part of it, and in the case of children (and women and servants), it also entails 'quietness', i.e. 'orderly behaviour and obedient submission to their superiors' (2005: 262). Sandridge 2012: 63 notes that in the *Education* *sôphrosunē* is mostly used to refer to control over emotional distractions and *enkrateia* to refer to control over physical appetites. See also Due 1989: 151.

seems especially in need of care' in that respect (1.2.9). They spend a significant part of their time hunting with the king, because the hunt is regarded as the best preparation for war, not least because it further habituates the young men to endure hardship (1.2.10). When they do not hunt, they compete with each other in shooting bows and throwing spears, in part in public contests where prizes and honour can be won. They also assist the magistrates in any job which requires strength or speed, such as standing guard or chasing after robbers (1.2.12).

Xenophon's first readers will have understood this account of 'Persian' education practices as a contribution to a contemporary Greek debate, rather than as a true reflection of Persian society.²⁴ That debate involves the question whether Greek city-states should take active control of the education of their citizens.²⁵ Together with Plato, Xenophon belonged to a group of Athenian thinkers who expressed admiration for the centrally organized Spartan education programme (the *agôgê*, as it was known), which was allegedly instituted by Sparta's quasi-legendary lawgiver, Lycurgus, preferring it to Athens' less stringent approach.²⁶ Indeed, Xenophon's 'Persian' education bears striking resemblances to the Lycurgan programme, which Xenophon himself describes in the *Constitution of the Spartans* (2–4). Lycurgus divided the Spartan youth into different age-groups, one ranging from 7–12, another from 12–18 and a third, the *hêbôntes* (like *ephêboi* related to *hêbê*), from 18–20.²⁷ Furthermore, Lycurgus also felt that the *hêbôntes* were most in need of supervision and that they were characterized by a 'spirit of competition' (*philoneikia*) best satisfied in several sorts of contests (*Lac.* 4.1–2). At the same time, Xenophon stakes out an independent position.²⁸ For instance, the 'Persian' system is much more

24 Xenophon's use of the term 'city-state' (*polis*) in the opening remark is a give-away: it makes no sense in a Persian context, but all the more so in a Greek one; according to the historian Herodotus (1.136) the education of Persian boys was very different from what Xenophon describes here.

25 See Ober 2001; Nightingale 2001.

26 Humble 2018 compares Xenophon's and Plato's attitudes to Sparta, and Tuplin 2018: 599–600 their (fanciful) depictions of Persian educational practices; it is likely that Xenophon and Plato are in dialogue with each other, but their exact relationship remains unclear. Gill 1985 remains an excellent analysis of Plato's proposals for the education of the 'Guardians' of the state in terms of the philosopher's conceptions of human psychology. For Plato's ultimately ambiguous attitude towards Spartan education, see Schofield 2006: 35–39.

27 Xenophon does not give the precise nomenclature or the division in ages, which have to be puzzled together from other sources (with some degree of uncertainty); see Tazelaar 1967.

28 See Mueller-Goldingen 1995: 69–73 and Carlier 2010: 336–340 for more elaborate comparisons between Xenophon's 'Persian' and Lycurgus' Spartan system.

concerned with instilling specific virtues like 'justice' and 'self-restraint' than the Spartan one. Furthermore, Xenophon only divides the young men up into two age-groups (the *paides* and the *ephêboi*), and Persian *ephêboi* are considered proper adults much later than the Spartan *hêbôntes* (at 26/27, not 20 years old). That late cut-off point, incidentally, nicely chimes with the current neurobiological view that the adolescent brain may not be fully matured in certain important respects till the age of about 25.²⁹

We will here leave Xenophon's discussion with his contemporaries to one side and instead consider his 'Persian' education in its own right: what implicit views of how children and adolescents learn and develop underpin his proposals for educational reform? In the following paragraphs we will first trace some points where Xenophon's underlying views appear to resonate with modern developmental psychology, and then return to some distinctively classical Greek aspects of his approach.

A first thing to note is that Xenophon appears to have tried to come up with educational activities which are both suitable and appealing to the *paides* and *ephêboi* at their respective stages of development. Most obviously, the fact that the *ephêboi* engage in physically demanding activities whereas the *paides* do not, probably reflects the many changes which occur during (male) puberty, including rapid increases in height, the size and capacity of the heart and lungs and muscle mass; these changes can be taken to be more or less universal and are indeed widely remarked upon by ancient authors as well.³⁰ More interesting, perhaps, is the observation that the *paides* are expected to accept the elders' authority without question, complying with their verdicts in the mock trials and imitating their moderate behaviour, while the *ephêboi* are kept under close observation and are in addition encouraged to measure themselves against their peers in various kinds of contests. The different expectations chime with two phases of child psychology as established in modern research: young children are still quite reliant on their parents or other authority figures for setting rules, while adolescence is marked by a decreasing trust in (parental) authority and an increasing sensitivity to peer influence.³¹ In addition, the *ephêboi* are introduced to hunting and athletic competitions at a time when, as

29 Arain et al. 2013.

30 Rogol et al. 2002. See Eyben 1972: 685–687 for explicit references by ancient authors to physical growth and the increase of physical strength associated with puberty. Intriguingly, Schlegel and Barry 1991 claim that in pre-industrial societies puberty occurred by as many as four years later than today (the average age of the onset of puberty in contemporary western society is about 12)—which may or may not be relevant to the fact that Xenophon's *paides* transition from *paides* to *ephêboi* only at the age of 16/17.

31 For decreasing respect for (parental) authority, see Darling et al. 2008, for increasing peer influence, see van Hoorn et al. 2014.

recent neuropsychological research has shown, adolescents become increasingly attracted to risk-taking and sensation-seeking, particularly in social contexts which create opportunities for peer admiration.³² Interestingly, psychologists today interpret such behavioural developments, not simply as difficult or problematic (as was once common), but as driving forces of social and emotional learning as well as contributing to the honing of important skills and knowledge. Xenophon, too, appears to operate on the premise that it is better to exploit certain characteristics of adolescents for educational purposes than to suppress them.³³

When we move from a consideration of the methods of instruction to that of its avowed goal of instilling 'self-control' (*sôphrosunê*) and 'justice' (*dikaio-sunê*), there are again some things which may look familiar to modern psychologists. Current research on the question how best to educate children for success in today's world single out two factors as especially important indicators of high achievement in education as well as well-being later in life.³⁴ The first is the proper development of cognitive control skills, that is the ability to modify your attention, emotion and behaviour in the service of long-term, 'adult' goals. The capacity to exert cognitive control continues to develop from early childhood to late adolescence, leading to improvements in working memory, inhibitory control and complex decision making.³⁵ The second is the emergence of prosociality, that is a shift from self-oriented to other-oriented behaviour, as reflected in, for instance, an ability to get along with others, cooperative actions, emotional awareness and the capability to see things from someone else's perspective. Like cognitive control, prosociality develops throughout childhood and adolescence and is seen as an important

32 See e.g. Steinberg 2008; Crone and Dahl 2012; Duell et al. 2022.

33 In this respect, Xenophon is notably more positive than both Lysurgus and Plato, who seem more concerned with curtailing children's perceived natural tendencies. Thus, according to Xenophon, Lysurgus observed that *paidiskoi* were given to 'pride' (*phronêma*), 'insolence' (*hubris*) and 'an appetite for pleasure' (*epithumia tôn hêdonôn*) and therefore designed a programme the main goal of which was simply to leave boys with no spare time at all to indulge these vices (*Lac.* 3.2). Plato claims that 'of all wild things (*thêriôn*), the boy (*pais*) is most unmanageable: an unusually powerful spring of reason, whose waters are not yet canalized in the right direction, makes him sharp and sly, the most unruly animal there is. That's why he has to be curbed by a great many "bridles" so to speak' (*Laws* 808d–e).

34 Bauer et al. 2021: 1 (with further references).

35 Crone and Dahl 2012; Crone and Steinbeis 2017. Working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility are the three core 'executive functions' underpinning cognitive control; see Diamond 2013.

prerequisite for attaining 'adulthood' and the social roles and responsibilities which go with it.³⁶

In some ways, the education of Persian boys appears to be born from similar concerns. Their training in 'self-control' (*sôphrosunê*), which aims to teach them to check their immediate impulses and appetites, can be connected with core aspects of the cognitive control skills as defined by modern psychologists (especially inhibitory control). Furthermore, the boys' training in 'justice' (*dikaïosunê*) during mock trials should teach them both to control their immediate emotions and to consider complex situations from more than one perspective, stimulating prosociality. Even the fact that trials involving 'ingratitude' are taken most seriously resonates with recent research which suggests that the development of trust and reciprocity during adolescence are among the most important determinants of a person's ability to engage in 'adult' social interactions.³⁷ In addition, as we have seen, the entire system has been drawn up for 'the common good', which in itself suggests that socialization is one of the main goals; one can also imagine that hunting, the *ephêboi*'s main pursuit, enhances discipline and cooperation.³⁸

That having been said, we should not lose sight of the fact that Xenophon has specific ideas about the sort of adults which the training in *sôphrosunê* and *dikaïosunê* should ideally produce, and that these reflect great socio-cultural differences between the ancient Greeks and us. Whereas today's psychologists (and the policy makers influenced by them) emphasize the need to stimulate the development of cognitive control skills and prosociality during education for *all* children (a universalist tendency reinforced by brain research), Xenophon targets a much more restricted group. Though he states that all Persians are in principle allowed to send their sons (but not their daughters) to 'the common schools of justice', in reality only those wealthy enough to raise their sons without putting them to work can afford to do so (1.2.15); rather than regarding this inequality of opportunity as a problem, Xenophon presents it as a *solution* to the problem of dividing up labour among citizens (a pre-industrial society needs agricultural workers as well as soldiers). The actual activities in which Xenophon wishes boys and adolescents to engage—litigation and hunting—also first and foremost reflect elite Athenian pursuits *par excellence*, which confer high social status on the educated. Furthermore, whereas modern psychologists investigate the extent to which, for instance, varying degrees

36 Güroğlu et al. 2014; Crone and Achterberg 2022.

37 Van den Bos et al. 2010.

38 One may compare Xenophon's own eulogy of hunting as a good preparation for the cooperation required in battle at *Cynegeticus* 12.2–9.

of self-control in children are predictive of future education levels, wealth and physical and mental health,³⁹ the desired outcome of Xenophon's 'Persian' education system is first and foremost the creation of an obedient citizen body and disciplined soldiers.

There is one final catch, however. Exactly how we are to evaluate Xenophon's proposals for educational reform is a moot point. As stated above, Xenophon has nothing to say about Cyrus' individual development during the time he was educated among his Persian peers and Cyrus in fact misses about four years of 'school'. One implication may be that Xenophon intimates that systems of communal education, which were the subject of such intense discussion in his time, may be able to produce obedient citizens, but not truly exceptional leaders like Cyrus.⁴⁰ As we will see presently, Cyrus does many of the things Persians do as *ephêboi* at a younger age in Media, where he is given considerably greater freedom to follow his own interests. As we will also see, in doing so he certainly does not always display the levels of *sôphrosunê* which Persian boys are desired to display.

4 Cyrus as a Boy (*Pais*) in the Land of the Medes (Media)

Readers first properly get to meet Cyrus when he interrupts his Persian education at the age of twelve or thirteen and goes to his grandfather's court in Media. To see how Xenophon portrays him, we follow the opening stages of the narrative.

As soon as Cyrus arrived and knew Astyages to be his mother's father, he immediately—since he was by nature an affectionate boy (οἷα δὲ παῖς φύσει φιλόστοργος ὢν)—hugged him as one would have done if he had been raised with him and had been friendly with him for a long time. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.3.2)⁴¹

39 E.g. Moffitt et al. 2011; Diamond 2013.

40 In one rather enigmatic passage Cyrus, now in Media, tells his mother Mandane about an incident during his education among the Persian boys (1.3.16–17), when he contradicted one of the elder 'judges' during a mock trial. One possible interpretation of that episode is that Cyrus is shown to have outgrown Persian conceptions of justice. If so, the episode is a further indication that Xenophon does not wish readers to conclude that the Persian education system is in every way ideal; cf. Whidden 2007: 546; Danzig 2009.

41 We have included a few key Greek phrases for readers interested in Xenophon's original wording. However, throughout the main text, we consistently provide transcriptions

When Cyrus notices that his grandfather is wearing a luxurious robe and make-up—both Median customs which stand in sharp contrast to Persian frugality—he turns to his mother and says:

'Mother, how handsome my grandfather is!' And when his mother asked him whom he thought more handsome, Astyages or his father, Cyrus then answered, 'Of the Persians, my father is the most handsome by far; of the Medes, however, this grandfather of mine is by far the most handsome of those I have seen both in the streets and at court.' (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.3.2)

Astyages at once gifts Cyrus a robe and takes him out riding.

Since he was a boy and loved beauty and honour (ἄτε παῖς ὦν καὶ φιλόκαλος καὶ φιλότιμος), Cyrus was pleased with the robe and exceedingly delighted at learning how to ride a horse. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.3.3)

We next find Cyrus at a banquet hosted by Astyages. Not used to luxury, Cyrus fails to understand why his grandfather and the other guests delight in the many delicacies on offer. When Cyrus is given a large portion of meat, he decides to do something unusual with it:

Cyrus, taking the meat, distributed it to his grandfather's servants and said to each, 'This is for you, because you teach me to ride with enthusiasm; for you, because you gave me a javelin, and now I have it; for you, because you serve my grandfather nobly; for you, because you honour my mother.' He proceeded like this until he distributed all the meat that he received.

'But to Sacas, my cupbearer, whom I honour most,' Astyages said, 'do you give nothing?' Now Sacas happened to be handsome and to have the honour of admitting those who sought Astyages and of excluding such as he did not think it opportune to admit. And Cyrus answered rashly, as would a boy not yet shy (προπετῶς ὥς ἂν παῖς μηδέπω ὑποπτήσων): 'Why, grandfather, do you honour him so?' And Astyages replied jokingly,

and/or translations of all relevant terms to ensure that readers without knowledge of Greek can fully follow the argument.

‘Do you not see how nobly and gracefully he pours out my wine?’
(Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.3.7–8)

At this point, Cyrus asks Astyages to let him have the cup to allow him the opportunity to outdo Sacas.

Cyrus, they say, taking the cup, rinsed it so well, as he had seen Sacas do, made such a serious face, and brought and presented it to his grandfather so gracefully that he afforded much laughter to his mother and Astyages. Cyrus himself laughed out loud, leaped up onto his grandfather, kissed him, and said (ἐκγελάσαντα ἀναπηδήσαι πρὸς τὸν πάππον καὶ φιλοῦντα ἅμα εἰπεῖν), ‘Sacas, you are done for; I will cast you out of honour, for I will both pour the wine more nobly than you in other respects and I will not drink of the wine myself.’ (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.3.9)

When Astyages asks Cyrus why he did not drink the wine, he explains that he thinks that Sacas poisoned the wine, because of what he observed during an earlier party:

‘To begin with, you yourselves were doing such things as you do not allow us boys to do, for you all shouted at the same time, and you did not comprehend each other at all. Then you sang very ridiculously, and even though you did not listen to the singer, you all swore that he sang most excellently. Then, after each spoke of his own strength, when you stood up to dance, far from dancing in time with the rhythm, you were not even able to stand up straight.’ (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.3.10)

And so it goes on for a while.

Now in some ways, these scenes read like part of a typically ancient Greek childhood story. As Louise Pratt has shown, throughout Greek literature children are portrayed as precocious and playful, and as a source of mirth and laughter for indulgent adults, as Cyrus is here.⁴² Remarkably often, too, a child’s precocity and playfulness manifest themselves when the child is separated from a parent (as Cyrus is from his father) and reflect the child’s awkward unfamiliarity with the comforts of civilized life (in this case the refined customs

42 Pratt 2013. Next to ‘precocity’ and ‘play’, she discerns a third *p* of Greek literary childhood, namely ‘pathos’, the child as a source of pity and sorrow—a *p* that is understandably absent from Xenophon’s portrait of his ideal leader, Cyrus.

of fine dining).⁴³ The gentle humour of such scenes often derives from the fact that the child unwittingly speaks uncomfortable truths, as here about the effects of alcohol.⁴⁴ Furthermore, ancient Greek stories about the childhood of important men tend to focus on incidents which foreshadow their future career. The present scene contains two concrete instances. First, Cyrus' delight in his Median robe foreshadows the use he sees for splendid Median dress to impress his subjects once he is king (8.1.40).⁴⁵ Secondly, Cyrus' distribution of food to servants as a reward for services or gifts establishes a lifelong habit (see especially 8.2.3) and, like the adoption of Median dress, is a further means by which Cyrus learns to exert control over those around him. Stories of this kind tend to evince an integral conception of personality: the traits which a person has in later life were there from the beginning; the man is present in the boy, so an exceptional man is such by virtue of the fact that he already was an exceptional child—and this of course explains nothing.⁴⁶

At the same time, Xenophon's story goes beyond traditional story patterns in ways which suggest that in Cyrus' case, at least, childhood is not just a relatively uninteresting precursor to adulthood. In particular, Xenophon no fewer than three times explicitly accounts for Cyrus' actions in terms of the apparently typical behaviour of boys at a specific stage of their development. Thus, his uninhibited embrace of his grandfather is excused with reference to the fact that he was 'by nature an affectionate boy' (*pais phusei philostorgos*); *philostorgia* is a type of affection commonly ascribed to children in Greek literature and typically denotes the love children naturally bear to their relatives (*phusei* therefore can be understood as referring to Cyrus' 'boyish' nature at this point in the story).⁴⁷ Similarly, Cyrus' uncritical delight in the luxurious Median robe is explained with reference to the fact that he was a 'boy' (*pais*), albeit a boy already possessed of two typical 'adult-Cyrus' qualities, 'love of beauty' (*philokalia*) and 'love of honour' (*philotimia*). Finally, Xenophon also attributes Cyrus' 'rash' (*propetôs*) answer to his grandfather to the fact that he is still a 'boy' (*pais*) and 'not yet shy' (*mêdepô hupoptêssôn*); the negation, 'not

43 Pratt 2013: 237–238, suggesting that these themes are 'a deliberate inversion of cultural assumptions about what children need (loving parents, protection from the elements and other dangers) and are (relatively weak, vulnerable)'.

44 See Erasmus 1954: 114 on children instantiating the literary motif of 'die Aufdeckung des wahren Sachverhalts durch den Mund des Naiven'.

45 On Cyrus' adult adoption of such luxuries, see Gera 1993: 291–293.

46 Garland 1990: 141; cf. Pelling 1990: 213–214, 226, Huitink 2018: 374–375.

47 Cf. Mueller-Goldingen 1995: 89 (citing relevant parallels of the use of *philostorgos/philostorgia*).

yet', looks forward to a later stage, when he may no longer answer his grandfather so rashly (which Xenophon also treats, as we will see below).

By way of a brief intermezzo, we can compare a scene in Herodotus *Histories*, which also includes an account of Cyrus' boyhood (1.107–130), to highlight just how remarkable Xenophon's keen eye for typically 'boyish' behaviour is. Herodotus relates how Cyrus is exposed at childbirth at the behest of Astyages, who had received ominous dreams suggesting that his daughter's son would rule in his stead. Cyrus survives, of course, and, at the age of ten (1.114.1), ends up at his grandfather's court. When he appears before Astyages, the king realizes almost at once that he must be dealing with his grandson 'because the look of his face was like his own and his way of addressing him was freer (*eleutherôtêrê*) than customary' (1.116.1). The Herodotean story follows the usual pattern: Cyrus' 'free' manner of speaking to Astyages both betrays his royal ancestry (the Greek word *eleutheros* connotes nobility) and foreshadows his future: already he behaves like the king he will become.⁴⁸ There is no indication that Herodotus (or Astyages, for that matter) thinks that Cyrus' frank speech is specifically a function of his age. In the *Education* things look different, at least to some extent.

When we consider Xenophon's pen portrait of Cyrus as a *pais* in early adolescence in light of the major concepts of developmental psychology introduced in the previous section, it turns out to be surprisingly nuanced. The explicit references to Cyrus' 'boyish' behaviour suggest that he still lacks a certain inhibitory control (an aspect of cognitive control) and that he is still rather insensitive to social evaluation (a part of prosociality): when he embraces his grandfather, delights in the Median robe, or speaks 'rashly', he acts on impulse and does not consider what others might think about him. Other aspects of his portrayal likewise touch on these themes: the same 'boyish' temperament can be seen in his disregard of social hierarchies (a lack of respect for Sacas, the hugging of his grandfather and jumping on his lap), and in his quick and easy surrender to primary emotions: his immediate delight in the new robe, his spontaneous laughter and later on (in a passage not cited here) the fact that when Astyages once fell ill, Cyrus 'never stopped weeping, and it was clear to everyone that he was very scared (*huperephobeito*) that his grandfather would die' (1.4.2). Finally, it can be seen in his speech behaviour, which is spontaneous to the point of being blunt ('how handsome my grandfather is!', 'why do you honour Sacas?') and attention-seeking (note the frequent use

48 Cf. Huitink 2018: 474. On the Herodotean story of Cyrus' youth in general see van der Veen 1995: 23–52. For the relation between the Herodotean and Xenophontean narrative (which differ in many points of substance), see Gera 1993: 154–156.

of vocatives: 'mother', 'grandfather', 'Sacass'); Xenophon himself characterizes Cyrus' speech behaviour as 'chattering' (*elalei*, 1.4.1) and 'too ready with words' (*polulogôteros*, 1.4.3).⁴⁹

On the other hand, Cyrus has clearly already learned certain other important skills related to cognitive control and prosocial behaviour—which is itself in line with modern findings that adolescent development is in many respects nonlinear, but rather a complex and dynamic process influenced by a variety of environmental, social and personal factors.⁵⁰ To begin with, Cyrus appears to have internalized some important lessons from his time spent in education among the Persian *paides*. Thus, while he is defenceless against the allure of Median dress, he easily resists his grandfather's luxurious diet, having been taught *enkrateia* in food and drink. We may here also consider his flawless imitation of Sacas, since imitation is another thing which Persian *paides* are taught. Furthermore, the fact that he seems as yet unconcerned with social evaluation and conforming to social norms does not mean that he has a weak self-concept or that he is incapable of considering other points of view.⁵¹ The fact that he shares his food with the servants in return for services rendered suggests that he can be sensitive to the needs and expectations of others (perhaps again a lesson learned in Persia, where, as we have seen, reciprocity is an important value). In addition, Cyrus' claim that he finds his father the most handsome among the Persians and his grandfather among the Medes, shows that he is able to engage in hypothetical thinking and imagine several scenarios. Finally, when he blames his grandfather for doing 'such things as you do not allow us boys to do', this could indicate that he is beginning to develop a stronger sense of independence and autonomy and that he is progressing from viewing rules as fixed to an understanding of rules as variable and context-dependent.

To be sure, we should not assume that it was Xenophon's aim to paint a portrait of Cyrus which was in every respect 'realistic'. Rather, he singles out aspects of adolescent development, such as an acute sense of reciprocity and

49 See Thomas 2010: 208–211, who notes these and other features of Cyrus' speech and links them to modern linguistic research to suggest that it is all quite realistic for children's speech behaviour. We add that the second-century CE rhetorician Hermogenes (*Id.* 323.11–16 Rabe) adduces Cyrus' utterance, 'Mother, how handsome my grandfather is' as a chief example of the 'simple' (*aphelês*) style, suitable to 'little children or childlike men, women, country people or other guileless folk'.

50 See Crone et al. 2022.

51 For the emergence of a concept of self, see Harter 2012; Crone et al. 2022. For the complex interplay between perspective-taking, reciprocity, empathy and emotional awareness, see Hollarek and Lee 2022.

an emerging sense of autonomy, which he deems crucial for the sort of leader Cyrus will become. It is nonetheless interesting to note how Xenophon gives prominence to the complexities of early adolescence, not only showing that Cyrus *already* possessed certain qualities, but especially also highlighting—through the explicit references to his ‘boyish’ behaviour—that he did *not yet* possess others. The point which he appears to be making is that such spontaneous ‘boyish’ behaviour as Cyrus displays is actually quite a useful stage in a person’s development: owing to his uninhibited temperament, Cyrus gets to try out things which in later life will turn out to stand him in good stead. In this way, the *Education* serves to qualify the idea that the Greeks mainly thought about childhood and adolescence in negative terms, as a period marked by a general ‘immature’ absence of important virtues and skills.⁵² Xenophon, we contend, intimates that Cyrus’ early adolescence offers distinct possibilities of its own for acquiring new skills.

5 Cyrus as *Prosēbos* in Media

The second part of the childhood narrative in Media starts with a recapitulation of the three key innate virtues which Cyrus possesses.⁵³ After his mother leaves, he quickly develops a close relationship with boys his own age and uses his standing with Astyages to help both those boys and their fathers to secure favours—behaviour which Xenophon explains with reference to Cyrus’ *philanthrōpia* (love of people) and *philotimia* (ambition) (1.4.1). Cyrus also keeps approaching many people with curious questions on all sort of topics, ‘because of his love of learning’ (*dia to philomathēs einai*, 1.4.3). Soon, however, things begin to change:

But as time, in addition to making him taller, brought him into the season in which one becomes a young man (*prosēbon*), he then used fewer words and a gentler voice. He was so filled with respectful reticence (*aidous*) that he blushed whenever he encountered his elders, and his puppyish running up to all alike was no longer so prominent in him. Thus, he was gentler but in his associations there was altogether charm (*epikharis*). (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.4.4)

⁵² See Dover 1974: 102.

⁵³ Mueller-Goldingen 1995: 97; Sandridge 2012: 21–22.

This much admired passage provides insight into several aspects of adolescent development in Cyrus, as he transitions from childhood (*pais*) to young adulthood (*prosêbos*).⁵⁴ Xenophon makes a brief reference to Cyrus' physical growth, but he is clearly more interested in his cognitive, social and emotional maturation. The fact that Cyrus now speaks more carefully, treats his elders with more respect and no longer runs up to all and sundry like a 'puppy' may indicate that he has become more aware of how his behaviour is perceived by others and has gained more control over his impulses. It may also hint at a growing understanding of social norms and hierarchies and at an emerging desire to fit in (as opposed to his earlier attention-grabbing shenanigans). The 'charm' (*epikharis*) which now marks his dealings with others suggests that he is becoming more adept at forming positive relationships.

A marked increase in sensitivity to social evaluation and the emergence of self-conscious emotion are well documented changes in adolescents, as they begin to establish their own identities, discover their place in the world and navigate social situations.⁵⁵ Xenophon frames the relevant process first and foremost in terms of Cyrus becoming 'filled' with *aidôs*. This social virtue *par excellence* captures the respectful and reticent behaviour with which people should deal with each other ('social discretion' is often a good rendition).⁵⁶ In earlier Greek literature, *aidôs* is also a notable characteristic of the young Telemachus in the *Odyssey* as he visits his father's former associates—indeed, Telemachus may well be a specific model for Xenophon's depiction of Cyrus here (we will encounter another epic model below).⁵⁷ The 'charm' (*epikharis*) which now marks Cyrus' dealings with others is also in the first place a social virtue, as it captures a sense of giving people their due.⁵⁸

54 See Erasmus 1954: 115; Huitink 2018: 475. Cf. already Wyttenbach 1820: 377: *Elegantissima simul ac verissima descriptio*; Due 1989: 154: 'a very fine description of the first stages of puberty, emphasizing some of the most obvious signs'.

55 For social evaluation, see van den Bos et al. 2017; for self-conscious emotions, see Somerville et al. 2013.

56 Cairns 1993. See Rademaker 2005: 51–54 for the difference with the closely related term *sôphrosunê*: *aidôs* is exclusively concerned with proper conduct *vis-à-vis* others, whereas *sôphrosunê* also pertains to self-preservation. Also, *aidôs* can be a more or less spontaneous occurrence, whereas *sôphrosunê* is the result of a conscious effort.

57 Telemachus' *aidôs* also notably manifests itself in a reluctance to speak; see especially the *aidôs* felt by him at the thought of addressing the elder Nestor at Hom. *Od.* 3.24: αἰδῶς δ' αὖ νέον ἄνδρα γεραίτερον ἐξερέεσθαι ('a young man has shame to question an elder'), with Cairns 1993: 104.

58 Cf. e.g. Xen. *Oec.* 7.37, where it is linked with reciprocity: 'it will be most charming (ἐπιχαριώτατον), if those who are well cared for prove to feel grateful and more loyal than before'.

For Xenophon, Cyrus' maturation or acquisition of (or 'being filled up with') *aidôs* is a gradual process and, at times, a bumpy ride; in the words of a group of modern psychologists, which are also applicable to Cyrus, he still 'transitions into and out of adolescence'.⁵⁹ In subsequent scenes, Xenophon shows how Cyrus navigates increasingly complex social dynamics, in which he is often torn between different desires and impulses, and at no later point in the narrative will Cyrus, by then a proper adult, be described as subject to inner conflict to this extent. We will here review a number of moments from the narrative which show this. In our view, the overall message once more seems to be that, in Xenophon's view, adolescence provides valuable experiences which actively contribute to Cyrus' positive cognitive, social and emotional development and set him on his way to becoming a supremely successful leader.

One strand of the story is concerned with the way in which Cyrus continues to struggle to control his impulses. When he is finally allowed to hunt in the wild (because he has killed every animal in the palace grounds), he eagerly soaks up the lessons from his experienced attendants, including his uncle Cyaxares, about what animals can be safely approached and what terrain is most suitable for hunting. However, Cyrus finds it difficult to put those lessons into practice:

So Cyrus was learning all these things with enthusiasm. But when he saw a deer leap out, he forgot everything he had heard and pursued it, seeing nothing but the way it went as it fled ... When he got to the open ground, he threw his spear and struck the deer down ... Now he, of course, was exceedingly delighted (*huperekhainen*); but the guards, when they got near to him, reproached him and told him of the danger into which he had gone, and said that they would report him. So Cyrus stood there, dismounted, and was distressed (*êniato*) by what he heard. But when he perceived a shout, he leaped up on his horse as would one possessed (*hôsper enthousiôn*); and when he saw a boar bearing down upon them, he rushed straight toward it, poised his spear, and with a good aim struck the boar in the forehead and brought it down. Now, however, after seeing his rashness (*thrasutêta*), his uncle reproached him. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.4.8–9)

Cyrus will repeat this behaviour in a different and even more dangerous situation, when a group of Assyrians crosses the border into Media and Cyrus joins his grandfather and uncle in pushing them back. Cyrus displays considerable tactical insight (1.4.19–20), but once again all is forgotten once he enters the fray:

59 Casey et al. 2011: 21.

Just as a well-bred but inexperienced dog rushes without forethought (*apronoêtôs*) against a boar, so also rushed Cyrus, only making sure to strike down everyone he overtook, with forethought for nothing else. When the enemy saw their own troops in distress, they moved their main mass forward, expecting that the attackers would cease their pursuit as soon as they saw them move forward. None the more did Cyrus slacken, but in his delight (*hupo tês kharmonês*) called out to his uncle and continued the pursuit; and pressing on, he made the enemies' rout complete. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.4.21–22)

After this almost accidental victory, Cyrus is made to leave the battlefield only with difficulty:

As for Cyrus, Astyages did not know what to say about him, for he knew that he was the cause of the deed but also recognized that he was mad with daring (*mainomenon ... têtî tolmêi*). Even then when they were going home, in fact, he alone, apart from the others, did nothing but ride around and gaze at the fallen, and it was with difficulty that those who were ordered to do so dragged him away and led him to Astyages. As he came he kept his escort very much in front, because he saw that his grandfather's face was angry at the sight of him. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.4.24)

Cyrus' behaviour in both scenes is described as compulsive: he simply cannot stop himself from attacking a second animal, from pursuing the enemy, and from staring at the corpses of the fallen; Xenophon even twice uses terms associated with divine possession (*enthousiôn*) and madness (*mainomenos*) to characterize Cyrus. His behaviour is also driven by intensely felt emotions, as he is overjoyed at his success during the hunt and the battle—though he quickly becomes distressed once his attendants rebuke him, and cautious (and perhaps ashamed) once he notices that his grandfather seems angry. The description resonates strongly with research demonstrating an increased tendency to take risks in adolescents and a tendency to make decisions, not based on a rational weighing up of pros and cons, but on the basis of emotions and a wish instantly to gratify one's desires.⁶⁰ This has been linked to differential developmental trajectories of brain regions involving motivation and control; the as yet poor integration of motivation and control processes may lead adolescents to experience intense emotions, such as curiosity or fascination, that

60 Steinberg 2004; 2008; Casey et al. 2011.

can be difficult to control or ignore, and it is also thought to lie at the root of adolescents' vulnerability to compulsive and even addictive behaviour.⁶¹ Developmental psychologists therefore argue that, on the one hand, a period of increased daring can be beneficial for people's development as it helps adolescents explore new things, while, on the other hand, it is not without risks. Xenophon seems to be of a similar opinion. To be sure, in military leaders a lack of foresight and rational calculation is clearly a grave fault; from that point of view, the scene might be regarded as a negative *exemplum*.⁶² However, it is precisely Cyrus' daring which opens up entirely new—and, given who he will become, supremely useful—realms of experience for him, and allows him to test his own strength.

Another strand of the narrative is concerned with Cyrus' dealings with others. As his awareness of social discretion grows, Cyrus approaches his grandfather with greater hesitation, and while he used to blame Sacas for not always admitting him to Astyages, 'he now became a Sacas to himself, for he did not approach without seeing whether it was opportune' (1.4.6). This leads to problems when his age-mates exert pressure on Cyrus to plead with his grandfather to let them go hunting together. Whereas he used to find it easy to gratify his friends in everything, he now suddenly feels himself incapable of approaching Astyages and asking for permission:

'By Hera,' he said, 'I do not know what sort of man I have become (*hostis anthrôpos gegenêmai*)! For neither am I up to speaking to my grandfather nor am I even capable of looking at him as I did before. If I advance in this direction, I fear that I may become a dolt and simpleton. Yet when I was a little boy, I seemed to be quite clever at small talk.'

'It is a bad problem,' the boys said, 'if you are unable to act on our behalf when it is needed; but, rather, it will be necessary for us to ask someone else for you.'

Cyrus was stung at hearing this, and going away in silence, he ordered himself to take the dare. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.4.12–13)

This memorable passage can be related to key themes in adolescent psychology. For one thing, the heightened social awareness of adolescents makes

61 Steinberg 2004: 51: 'adolescence is a period of heightened vulnerability to risk taking because of a disjunction between novelty and sensation seeking (both of which increase dramatically at puberty) and the development of self-regulatory competence (which does not fully mature until early adulthood)'; Gladwin et al. 2011.

62 Cf. Mueller-Goldingen 1995: 99–100, noting a contrast between this passage and many other battle-scenes in the *Education*.

them more sensitive to peer pressure, which may induce them to try out new things.⁶³ Cyrus will in the end give in, allowing himself to be pushed into a leadership role for the first time. Furthermore, adolescence is a key period in identity formation. As adolescents try to navigate unfamiliar social roles and changing expectations, this may often lead to a period of self-doubt, marked by a feeling of inadequacy and a loss of confidence; adolescents may experience this as a tension between the memories of childhood (when they felt that they knew exactly what they were worth) and the expectations of adulthood, or as a balancing act between the security of the past and the uncertain promises of the future.⁶⁴ In our passage, Cyrus appears to voice just such a temporary crisis of identity, as he is called upon for the first time to take the lead in a joint endeavour. For once, Cyrus will not be immediately successful. He tries to outsmart Astyages with a clever argument, but fails to secure permission to take his friends out hunting:⁶⁵

On hearing this, Cyrus obeyed and stayed back, but he passed his time in silence, aggrieved (*aniaros*) and sullen-faced (*skuthrôpos*). When he realized that he was greatly distressed, Astyages of course wished to gratify him and led them out hunting. (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 1.4.14)

The way in which the problem is resolved may seem both familiar and rather strange. On the one hand, even today adolescents are often characterized as emotionally reactive, and they may respond to disappointment or perceived injustice with strong emotional reactions.⁶⁶ The fact that Astyages gives in can probably count on the sympathy of many modern parents faced with the challenge of raising teenagers. On the other hand, Xenophon's purpose in the *Education* is thoroughly didactic, and we may well wonder what the 'lesson' to be learned here is: would many people today feel that adolescents should be rewarded for sulky behaviour? Here, we are once again reminded of the need of full contextualization and of 'looking both ways'. To Xenophon's first audience, Cyrus' moping withdrawal (as well as his earlier battle *mania*, for that matter) will have recalled heroic behaviour; Achilles' intransigence in the *Iliad* is particularly relevant.⁶⁷ Paradoxically, Cyrus' response to being denied something he wants is in some ways a sign that he is ready to take on the mantle of

63 Chein et al. 2011.

64 Harter 2012; Becht et al. 2021.

65 See Huitink 2018: 476–477, analysing it in terms of a bungled effort in a specific type of dialectic which Cyrus will perfect later in life, but also avoid if possible.

66 For an empirical study of adolescents' emotion regulation and rejection sensitivity, see Silvers et al. 2012.

67 See Huitink 2018: 475 n. 35.

leadership. The 'lesson' is not, to be sure, that it is necessarily helpful or proper to sulk and withdraw (readers of the *Iliad* will know that, too), but that he should never again allow himself to be put in a position which could warrant that response—at that, he will brilliantly succeed.

6 Conclusion

Scholars have had difficulty reconciling Cyrus' innate virtues of *philanthrôpia*, *philotimia* and *philomatheia* on the one hand with the process of change described in the childhood narrative on the other. Erasmus argues that Xenophon offers a convincing description of Cyrus' 'innere Entwicklung', but that he failed to give it a place in his theory of leadership, which is based on a static understanding of the ideal leader's moral qualities.⁶⁸ By contrast, Due maintains that any idea that Cyrus truly undergoes fundamental changes is mistaken: 'Xenophon gives a description of a change of behaviour, not of fundamental qualities'.⁶⁹ The consequence of both positions is rather similar, however: Xenophon no doubt 'deserves recognition for this charming picture of a child and young boy which displays great understanding',⁷⁰ but nothing of philosophical substance would be lost, if the childhood narrative were taken out of the *Education*.

In this chapter, we have confronted the narrative about Cyrus's youth with insights from modern developmental psychology and have come to different conclusions. One thing which this confrontation allowed us to do is to bring into sharper focus some of the intuitive psychology which undergirds Xenophon's portrait of Cyrus and which is clearly admired by both Erasmus and Due. On the one hand, we have suggested that Xenophon's narrative resonates with important recent results of research into children's brain development. On the other hand, we have emphasized that Xenophon does not intend to give a full and 'realistic' picture of adolescence. The features on which he focuses attention—such as a lack of inhibitory control, an increased tendency to take risks, and especially an emerging social and emotional awareness—are

68 Erasmus 1954: 115: 'In der Kyrupädie wird eine innere Entwicklung geschildert ... In die Theorie ist die innere Entwicklung jedoch nicht aufgenommen. In ihr verändert sich die Physis nicht, und die Entfaltung der Eigenschaften geschieht durch die Paideia. In der Schilderung sprengt das Leben die Theorie. Es mag Xen. entlasten, daß zu seiner Zeit philosophisch nicht die Voraussetzungen für eine Erkenntnis der Entwicklung der Physis gegeben waren.'

69 Due 1989: 156.

70 Due 1989: 156.

all regarded as helping Cyrus to establish himself as an exceptional leader. The childhood narrative proves to be highly relevant: it is not the case that Cyrus simply acquires new skills in a linear fashion, but rather that his time as a *pais* and then as a *prosêbos* gives him specific opportunities to gain certain valuable experiences, which will prove useful in his later life. Perhaps, raising awareness of Xenophon's generally positive attitude to the early phases of life is the most important gain of our inquiry, for both classicists and psychologists.

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Social Psychology and the Ancient World: Methods and Applications fosters an interdisciplinary dialogue between classics and social psychology. Classicists use modern social-psychological insights to interpret ancient texts, while social psychologists engage with classical case studies to refine their own conceptual frameworks. This dialogue unfolds through an innovative structure: thematic sections introduced by social psychologists are paired with wide-ranging case studies by classicists, covering topics such as the psychology of tragic characters, comedic group dynamics, and the cognitive processes at play in oracles and deification. The volume offers methodological guidance for reconstructing the social psychology of past societies, addressing questions like: How did ancient Greeks understand character? How did laughter shape social cohesion? What role did emotional contagion play in narratives? How did ancient societies accommodate religious innovation? And above all: how do we know, and how can we properly investigate such questions?

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