

DISGRACE, GRIEF AND OTHER ILLS: HERAKLES' REJECTION OF SUICIDE¹

INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH the incidence of suicide in classical antiquity has been studied for over a century, a proper methodological basis for such a study has been established only recently. The scholars who have been most concerned with this issue are Hirzel, Katsouris, Aigner, Walcot, Seidensticker, and, recently, van Hooff, and they have approached the topic in various ways.² Although their interpretations have contributed to our knowledge of suicide in ancient Greece, they have rarely done more than analyse and classify examples of suicide *as these occur* in classical literature: we have not used our knowledge of the topic to re-examine the literature. The task of investigating the ways in which poets made use of contemporary notions about—and attitudes towards—suicide for their own *dramatic* purposes still needs to be carried out.

Euripides' *Herakles* is an exemplary text for the conduct of such an analysis. Most interpretations of the hero's wish for death and his rejection of suicide are commonly both too simple and too hasty, and I know of no critic who has examined, for instance, how the two stages of Megara's argument intensify the reasons for which one might choose death.³ I propose to examine this play for evidence of the dynamics of the conflict between the incentive and deterrent factors to suicide that we may suppose would have been generally significant to the ancient Greeks as they might have had to confront the issue in their daily lives.

This paper aims to offer a more complete understanding of Euripides' *Herakles* by investigating how in this play Euripides tackles the issue of suicide and in particular by attempting to take into account the significance of that behaviour as it would have appeared, as far as we can tell, to a fifth century Greek.

Most of the critics who have discussed the topic of suicide in this play have focused on the question of the hero's *rejection* of suicide:⁴ what makes Herakles reject suicide as an option?

¹ The Greek text I use is: J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae* ii (Oxford 1981).

² R. Hirzel, *Der Selbstmord* (Darmstadt 1908; rpt. 1966); A.G. Katsouris, 'The suicide motif in ancient drama', *Dioniso* xlvii (1976) 5-36; H. Aigner, *Der Selbstmord im Mythos* (Diss. Graz 1980); P. Walcot, 'Suicide, a question of motivation', in *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster* i (Bristol 1986) 231-7; B. Seidensticker, 'Die Wahl des Todes bei Sophokles', in *Sophocle (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* xxix (1982)) 105-53; A.J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-killing in Classical Antiquity* (London 1990). Hirzel collected a vast quantity of data about suicide in classical antiquity with emphasis on the relationship between suicide and society; Katsouris and Aigner demonstrated the variety of reasons, methods and patterns of suicide in classical literature by analysing each case in every genre; Walcot cited Durkheimian sociology to point out the great influence on classical suicides of the Greek peoples' sense of honour and the social pressures they were under; Seidensticker applied the theory of modern clinical psychology to demonstrate the multiplicity of causation of Sophoklean suicides; and van Hooff, who examined 960 cases of both real and fictional 'self-killing' from every genre of the literature in the Graeco-Roman world, compiled almost exhaustive statistics on the incidence of suicide and showed the predominance of the sense of honour in the causation of suicide in classical life and literature. (The multifariousness of his sources, from historiography to mythography, may discredit his statistics, but they contain some truth that we cannot ignore.)

³ See n. 7 below.

⁴ Studies which have dealt with the motif of suicide in *Herakles* are: U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Euripides Herakles*² (Berlin 1895); H.H.O. Chalk, 'Arete and Bia in Euripides' *Herakles*' *JHS* lxxxii (1962) 7-18; A.W. H. Adkins, 'Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*', *CQ* xvi (1966) 209-19; C. James, 'Whether 'tis nobler...: some thoughts on the fate of Sophocles' Ajax and Euripides' Heracles, with special reference to the question of suicide', *Pegasus* xii (1969) 10-20; M. Schwinge, *Die Funktion der zweiteiligen Komposition im Herakles des Euripides* (Diss. Tübingen 1972); J. de Romilly, 'Le refus du suicide dans l'*Héraclès* d' Euripide', *Archaiognosia* i (1980) 1-9; D. Furley, 'Euripides on the sanity of Herakles', in *Studies in honour of T.B.L. Webster* i (Bristol 1986)

They often select the hero's words at 1347-51 as the answer: he rejects, or the poet has him reject, suicide because he recognises that it is *deilia* to attempt to escape suffering by preferring death.

Indeed, this passage on cowardice has been the key which many scholars have used to open—and shut—the issue, although they have not always agreed about what they found: von Wilamowitz and Chalk argued for the newness of the notion, whereas Adkins claimed, on the contrary, that Herakles' viewpoint was in conformity with traditional heroic values; de Romilly suggested that what was new was the application of the old values to support an untraditional kind of behaviour.⁵ None of them, however, doubted that it is here, in this passage, that we can discover the grounds for Herakles' rejection of suicide—and that the content of his crucial decision is to 'endure whatever happens with acceptance'.⁶

Yet our scholarly faith in such a simple interpretation needs, I believe, to be questioned. We need to ask a more fundamental question: in classical Greece, what reasons could justify suicide, and what reasons could not? To help us to answer this question we need to pay most careful attention to the fact that earlier in the play two other characters discuss the issue of abandoning life and do so in a similar way to Herakles himself. We must also pay due regard to the significance of the moment when Herakles changes his mind. We also need to widen our point of view to take in commonplace beliefs about the logic of suicide held by ordinary Greeks as well as the conventions that operate in the treatment of suicide in Greek poetry. I hope also to be able to show that by thus employing what we know of how the ancient Greeks in general thought about suicide we shall be better able to understand this play.

I. MEGARA AND AMPHITRYON

(a) *Their Choice of Death*

Although the poet's concern with the issue of suicide is raised as early as the Prologue (1-106), the importance of the arguments of Megara and Amphitryon for and against the acceptance of death, which constitute the main substance of the Prologue and the First Epeisodion (140-347), has been almost entirely neglected in previous interpretations of the play.⁷ Yet their arguments amount to two different ways of justifying voluntary abandonment of one's own life; and they should not therefore be ignored as possible guides for understanding Herakles' own argument over the question of suicide in the later part of the play.

102-13. G.W. Bond, *Euripides: Heracles* (Oxford 1981), is a commentary which here and there considers the issue. The study of C. James cited above is a concise collection of the reference data for the motif of suicide in *Heracles* and *Aias*; this is an interesting article in itself, but does not seem to contribute directly to one's understanding of either play. Studies mentioned in nn. 2 and 4 will be cited by author's name only.

⁵ Wilamowitz 127 f.; Chalk 10; Adkins 218; de Romilly 8. The controversy between Chalk and Adkins is reviewed concisely in Furley's article (102 f.) which is itself a criticism of the latter's argument. Chalk offers insight into Amphitryon's and Herakles' endurance, but his application of the word *aretē* seems nonetheless fallacious. On the other hand, few critics seem to have estimated in due detail Adkins' argument on our play. See the end of II(d), especially n. 37 below.

⁶ The quotation is from Chalk 10. The same phrase is also quoted by Adkins 210.

⁷ For example, Schwinge has investigated with rigour the relationship between the first and the second parts of the play, but the only tragic reaction that she finds common to Megara and Amphitryon in the first part and Herakles in the second part is simply that they choose to die (131); she has not marked what is common to their argument for the choice of death. Chalk (9 f.) has noticed that the endurance which Amphitryon displays at 105-6 is a key to the unity of the play (see n. 11 and n. 31 below, and T.C.W. Stinton, 'Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek tragedy' *CQ* xxv (1975) 251, rpt. in his *Collected papers on Greek tragedy* (Oxford 1989) 181; cf. Bond xxiii), yet he has failed to notice the way in which Amphitryon's argument for contemplating self-murder subsequently develops.

In the Prologue, just after describing the helplessness of their situation, Megara asks Amphitryon for his opinion about their survival:

ἦντιν' οὖν γνώμην ἔχεις
λέγ' ἐς τὸ κοινόν, μὴ θανεῖν ἔτοιμον ἦι. (85-86)

This is a rhetorical question, which evidently implies two things: that death is unavoidable and that they ought to *do* something to deal with the situation. The pain of waiting inactively for the arrival of some better situation is intolerable (94). When she says:

λύπησ' τι προσδεῖς ἢ φιλεῖς οὕτω φάος; (90)

the implication is that they should choose to die, but here she does not say so explicitly and unequivocally nor does she try to persuade Amphitryon to take his own life. Amphitryon, on the other hand, insists on living in the hope that his suffering may end (91, 105). His aim is to save Herakles' children (47), and he does not care how slight the chances of doing so are (54, 84), for he is sure that there is still room for hope (95-7). In the Prologue Megara's wish for death is therefore seen as resulting from a lack of the strength to endure and is hardly persuasive, while Amphitryon's resolve to live is described as being absolute, supported by the idea of hope.

In the First Epeisodion, however, this is no longer the case. Lykos grows angry during the debate with Amphitryon and threatens to burn Megara, Amphitryon and the children in spite of their status as suppliants (235-46). This greatly alters the situation not only for Megara but for Amphitryon as well. Now for the first time Megara proposes openly that they should choose to die in order to avoid disgrace (307). She argues that it would be a greater evil if they were burnt and laughed at by 'their enemies' (284-6). She does not hesitate to say that any person who cares for his or her honour should avoid humiliation by choosing death. It is evident that failure to preserve one's honour means disgrace. This time, neither Amphitryon nor the Chorus tries to refute her argument. If we remember that in the Prologue Megara's argument in support of her wish for death was weak, we notice that now in the First Epeisodion, through recourse to the notion of honour, her argument is much stronger. Amphitryon too comes to welcome death in the new situation (319 f.), emphasising that this is because he no longer perceives any hope of saving the children (318, 326).⁸ It must also be said that there is more here in their wish to abandon their lives than the mere acceptance of death. They are *actively* choosing death, when Amphitryon provokes Lykos to kill him at once at 319 f. and when at 338 Megara with her children of her own will leaves Zeus' altar to abandon the status of suppliant.⁹ These actions are not far from suicidal.

The difference between the motives of Megara and Amphitryon for choosing death is also made clear through the motif of banishment in the First Epeisodion. The fact that Amphitryon at 214 asks Lykos to banish them implies that he does not mind if he suffers humiliation as long as there is a hope of saving the children. Megara, on the other hand, sticks firm to the notion

⁸ Schwinge (37 f. and 40) has pointed out perceptively that the intention to die of both Megara and Amphitryon expressed in the First Epeisodion derives not from their *personal* wish to die but from something else; but she has not traced the earlier development of their arguments.

⁹ A.P. Burnett, *Catastrophe survived* (Oxford 1971) 159 f., is right to see much importance in Megara's act of leaving 'the protection of Zeus' altar', which means 'a violation of the rules of the suppliant plot'. cf. J. Gould, 'Hiketeia', *JHS* xciii (1973) 74-103. We do not have to agree with Burnett, however, that we are expected to find Megara's 'active unfaith' in her act. Bond's refutation is just (Bond xix, n. 10). Euripides employed the suppliant plot in order to provide Megara and Amphitryon with time to deliberate on the relevance of choosing death and time to change their minds.

that honour must be preserved. She rejects the idea of being banished even to save the children, because life in banishment would be *athlion* (304).

Amphitryon believes that while it is still possible to hope we must reject the option of taking our own lives: this is his ultimate life-line; and regardless of whether or not such an argument would have been acceptable to the Athenian audience, it certainly enables him to resist Megara's taunting words at 90: at 91, 95-7 and 102-6, he reaffirms the unique power of hope and the possibility of their being able to help themselves.¹⁰ Hope will continue to deter him from choosing death.¹¹

In the Prologue and the First Epeisodion we see the different processes by which Megara and Amphitryon come to justify the choice of death. We can infer that in our play both the threat of disgrace and the loss of hope are to be understood as decisive motives and that they offer powerful justifications for choosing death.

(b) *Disgrace and Hopelessness*

This inference is in keeping with the facts recorded of ancient Greece. Van Hooff 237 has reported that *pudor* (shame) was the motive for 30% of Greek male suicides, *desperata salus* (despair) for 19%, *dolor* (psychic pain) for 17%, *impatientia* (unbearable physical ailments) for 8%.... Although we must be careful when we apply these statistics to our study, it is probable that 'shame' and 'despair' were the two main motives of male suicide in ancient Greece.¹² No doubt it is in conformity with this fact that Euripides implies that the threat of disgrace and the loss of hope are the decisive *motives* of choice of death in this play.

Such statistics, however, do not prove that these two motives also constituted the most powerful *justification* of the choice of death. We can judge that a choice of death is considered to be justified only when the general public or some person who might be expected to speak out against it regards it as reasonable or acceptable. Examples of cases in which choice of death is deemed commendable or reasonable are those of Aias in *Aias* 418 f., Oidipous in *OT* 1368, Deianeira in *Trach.* 723, Phaidra in *Hipp.* 722-74,¹³ Aias in Demosthenes Ix 31, Demosthenes

¹⁰ Cf. Bond ad 90.

¹¹ Amphitryon insinuates at 105-6, with rhetorical skill, that a man can be *aristos* simply by having hope (of any kind), but it is important to recognise that it is not hope in general that deters him, but the specific hope of helping Herakles' children. He is obliged to protect Herakles' children (44-7) when he forbears to accept death and adheres to the possibility of helping them. We must understand that it is in this particular situation that Amphitryon insists that one should not give up hope. He is loyal to the contention that if a man has a duty and there is a possibility that he can perform it, he must not abandon his duty in desperation. This is why later, when he chooses death, he points out repeatedly that it is no longer possible to help the children (318, 326). The same attitude can be seen in Herakles, too, when he rejects suicide. See n. 31 below.

¹² Although his figures are valuable, we must admit that van Hooff's statistics include some arbitrary data (e.g. on the accomplishment of Iphis' suicide, and on the motive for the suicide of Haimon, etc., in his Appendix A). At the same time, a more rigorous distinction between accomplished and merely contemplated suicide would have increased the utility of his statistics. As to the current issue, the numbers cited above are produced by his *including* the 'soft cases' (i.e. the cases of unaccomplished suicides), but we need to know the figure for the *accomplished male* suicides. It may be useful to look at what he has shown, though without distinguishing between male and female suicides: if we exclude the 'soft cases', the proportion of the population of suicides out of *dolor* falls from 13% to 6%, while that of *pudor* suicides rises from 32% to 35% and that of *desperata salus* suicide from 22% to 24%. This suggests that, if we look at the *accomplished male* suicides, the proportion of the cases motivated by *dolor* is likely to be less than 17%, while those motivated by *pudor* and *desperata salus* are nearly 30% and 19% respectively. Consequently, *dolor*, though it is ranked as the third motive of Greek male suicides in van Hooff's statistics, would be ranked far below the first two motives if the soft cases were to be excluded. Accordingly, 'shame' and 'despair' will prove to be the two major motives of accomplished Greek male suicides.

¹³ In *Hipp.*, when Phaidra reveals her intention to kill herself, the Chorus says nothing to rebuke her (431 f., 483); and when she confirms her will, they do no more than say 'speak no ill words!'. When, later, she is found hanged, they hesitate to save her, but choose to leave her to die (782-5). Here, we detect their passive approval of

in Aischines iii 212, etc. In all of these examples, since irreparable disgrace is at issue, disgrace and hopelessness form an inseparable basis for the justification of suicide.¹⁴ The first four examples here are thought to pre-date *Herakles*. It is also noteworthy that we can find hardly any cases in which disgrace and hopelessness do *not* justify the choice of death in the extant Greek literature before the time of Euripides. It is therefore highly probable that substantial numbers of people living at the time of our play thought that disgrace and hopelessness were motives that could justify the choice of death.

The audiences of ancient Athens must have noticed that Euripides devoted an elaborate analysis to these familiar ideas about the choice of death during the first two scenes of his play, and they must surely have sensed that disgrace and hopelessness would be motifs of great importance in the play. That must be what Euripides intended.

II. HERAKLES' REJECTION OF SUICIDE

(a) *Herakles' Argumentation*

Let us now consider Herakles' wish for and rejection of suicide. Soon after Herakles is informed that in his madness he has killed his children and wife he wishes to kill himself:

Ηρ. οἴμοι· τί δῆτα φείδομαι ψυχῆς ἐμῆς
τῶν φιλότατων μοι γενόμενος παίδων φονεύς;
οὐκ εἶμι πέτρας λισσάδος πρὸς ἄλματα
ἢ φάσγανον πρὸς ἦπαρ ἐξακοντίσας
τέκνοις δικαστῆς αἵματος γενήσομαι,
ἢ σάρκα †τὴν ἐμὴν† ἐμπρήσας πυρὶ
δύσκληιαν ἢ μένει μ' ἀπόσομαι βίου; (1146-52)

In this manifestation of the wish to kill himself he describes his children as the creatures dearest to him (1147), while the Second Epeisodion (particularly 574-82) has already shown that his affection for his family is boundless. As there is now no hope of restoring them to life, however, he is in a state of profound dejection. Moreover, he sees that *dyskleia* will accompany him for the rest of whatever life is left him (1151 f.): there will be no hope for release from his disgrace. He now possesses the two decisive motives for abandoning life which have already been raised in the first half of the play. Besides, Herakles implies at 1150 that *dikē* also urges him to kill himself. No doubt Theseus is right in saying later that the penalty which *nomos* imposes on him is not death but banishment (1322), which seems to have been the case for unintentional homicides in historical Attika in the fifth century,¹⁵ and Herakles does not dare to refute him on this point. At this moment, however, his wish to kill himself appears to the

her suicide. Cf. W.S. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) ad 784-5. *Od.* xi 271-3 is said to offer a similar example, where the poet narrates the suicide of Epikaste without the slightest hint of blame in his tone. Cf. H.R. Fedden, *Suicide: a social and historical study* (London 1938; rpt. New York 1980) 55; Aigner 46; A. Alvarez, *The savage god: a study of suicide* (London 1971; Pelican ed., 1974) 76.

¹⁴ Plato, who expresses a rather strict opposition to suicide in *Phd.* 62b-c, nevertheless states in his *Nomoi* (ca. 360-48 BC) ix 873c, that suicide is not an act of cowardice if a man kills himself while suffering an 'exceedingly painful fate' or 'unmanageable shame'. Cf. Walcot 231; and n. 30 below. This suggests that in the first half of the fourth century a suicide committed because of disgrace and hopelessness was to be considered justified; and there is no positive reason to believe that people's general attitude to suicide would have changed greatly between the time of Euripides.

¹⁵ Cf. D.M. MacDowell, *Athenian homicide law* (Manchester 1963) 117-23; M. Gagarin, *Drakon and early Athenian homicide law* (New Haven 1981) 118-24. Drakon's law on homicide (*IG* i² 115), which was still valid in Athens in 409/8 BC, declared that a man found guilty of unintentional homicide had to go into exile. MacDowell (120) concludes convincingly that no alternative kind of penalty was permitted in Athens. Gagarin (118) asserts further that capital punishment would be enforced only if the homicide did not go into exile submissively.

audience perfectly justifiable. There is no need of his further argument, for the audience look at it from the viewpoints which have already been staked out in the play and established as valid.

Before Herakles decides how to kill himself, Theseus arrives and deprives him of the chance to do so. Herakles veils his head, because he is ashamed of what he has done (1160, 1199 f.) as well as wanting to avoid infecting Theseus by his 'stains of bloodshed' (1161 f., 1201). The action of veiling his head and the words that accompany this action prove and emphasize his sensitivity to shame and honour. In his attempt to dissuade Herakles from killing himself Theseus relates suicide to *amathia* (1254),¹⁶ and this argument stimulates Herakles to try to justify his will to take his life through *logoi* (1255). His argument for suicide is that the humiliation which he, since he is not *hosios* (1282), must endlessly suffer in banishment from both people and the personified earth, sea and rivers is not a thing to be endured: it has to be rejected (1255-1310). Furthermore, he recites the numbers of afflictions that the gods have brought down on him from the moment of his divine conception. This implies that he believes that his unhappiness is appointed by the gods and that his ill fate is by no means likely to be altered in the future: his despair is perfect. This reinforces his argument for suicide.¹⁷

Theseus, in answer, recommends him to leave Thebes and to obey the *nomos* (1322), and he offers to accept him in Athens, to purify him of 'the stains', to provide him with house and property, and to arrange that he can receive honour both in his life and after death, while he exhorts Herakles to endure *tychē* (1321), after the example of the gods (1313-39). Theseus thus shows that the afflictions which Herakles has specifically mentioned in the *logoi* as imperative reasons for his duty to kill himself, namely the stains of pollution and the humiliation, can be overcome, at least in principle. He has only to accept Theseus' offer to recover his honour. This reestablishes the chance of hope for Herakles, and so automatically destroys the integrity of his hopelessness.

Herakles does not reject Theseus' offer explicitly, but says immediately:

Ηρ. Οἴμοι· πάρεργα < > τὰδ' ἔστ' ἐμῶν κακῶν· (1340)

'This is quite beside the question of my troubles.'

He thus denies that *tad'* (these things) help him. It is a reaffirmation of 1253:

Ηρ. οἱ δ' οὐδὲν ὠφελοῦσί μ', ἀλλ' ἦρα κρατεῖ.

Although the hero later accepts his friend's bounty, line 1340, spoken in the same defiant mood as his justification of suicide, sounds like a rejection of Theseus' argument and a refusal of his offer. A question thus arises: what does *tad'* refer to? One may well think that *tad'* means the gods' example which Theseus has cited at 1315-21, for Herakles begins in the very next line to disclose a negative view of the gods. This argument, however, is not decisive, for although we need not exclude the gods' example from among the meanings of the word, we must consider other possibilities as well.¹⁸ Bond is perhaps right to point out that it is natural for us to understand that, because of the distance between them, *tad'* means primarily Theseus'

¹⁶ *Amathia* is usually not a word that indicates lack of prudence or thought but rather a lack of knowledge or learning; but de Romilly (5) is right to understand that by this word Theseus is condemning suicide as a 'conduite impulsive et irréfléchie'.

¹⁷ Cf. III below.

¹⁸ R. Schlesier, 'Héraclès et la critique des dieux chez Euripide', *ASNP* xv (1985) 33, justly describes line 1340 as a 'protestation générale'.

offer.¹⁹ We must understand that the line can mean not only that the example of the gods whom Theseus regarded as subject to *tychē* (1314-15) are no encouragement to him because, as he afterwards claims immediately at 1341-46, such stories are false, but also that, even if Theseus purifies him and welcomes him in honour, Herakles' ills will still remain unrelieved.

What ills, then, if any, remain uncured? This is a question that needs to be answered in order to understand fully the meaning of 1340. Although Herakles appears to remain afflicted by his sense of the inevitableness of his ill fate for which the gods are responsible, he nonetheless soon denies their authority. His despair does not therefore seem to have a religious dimension. The play does not give us an immediate answer. For some time, indeed, we are left with a vague impression that Herakles has found no help in Theseus. This has a significant effect when Herakles declares his rejection of suicide a few lines later:

ἔσκεψάμην δὲ καίπερ ἐν κακοῖσιν ὄν
 μὴ δειλίαν ὀφλῶ τιν' ἐκλιπὼν φάος·
 ταῖς συμφοραῖς γὰρ ὅστις οὐχ ὑφίσταται
 οὐδ' ἀνδρὸς ἐν δύναιθ' ὑποστήναι βέλος.
 ἔγκαρτερήσω βίον· εἴμι δ' ἐς πόλιν (1347-51)

The tone of this statement tempts us to suppose that Herakles is talking about his overall attitude to his ills. One may deem it to be a total recantation of 1251:

ἐν μέτρῳ μοχθητέον.

'It is within due limits that one must labour.'

and one may take him to imply that to escape from *any* kind of ill by death would be *deilia* in any circumstances and that this is why he rejects suicide. If we look at his words and not at the situation in which they are spoken, his rejection of suicide appears to be the result of the recognition that *any* suicide is *deilia*, and thus his decision will *not* be considered by others to be the result of Theseus' offer. This supposition sounds still more plausible if we take line 1340, as we do, as a refusal of Theseus' offer. Indeed many critics have thought that Herakles has always been brave enough to endure any pain, and that he has lacked, until now, only the recognition of the cowardice of suicide, not his own capacity to endure his ills.²⁰ The hero, in speaking these ambiguous words, suggests his sufficient capacity to endure and his independence of Theseus, and thus preserves his dignity and saves his honour.

¹⁹ Bond ad 1340. As to the corruption of this line, we can follow Bond and supply γὰρ, if necessary. It is true that Herakles later in fact accepts Theseus' offer, but it cannot be a good reason for Halleran to maintain that *tad'* cannot refer to Theseus' offer of gifts and other things. Cf. M.R. Halleran, 'Rhetoric, irony and the ending of Euripides' *Herakles*', *CA* v (1986) 175.

²⁰ E.g. A. Lesky, *Greek tragic poetry*, tr. M. Dillon (Göttingen 1972; Eng. tr., New Haven 1983) 280; de Romilly 3. Some critics, however, have felt that the motivation by which Herakles suddenly comes to recognise so keenly the cowardice of suicide is insufficient. In order to attribute Herakles' rejection of suicide to Theseus' appeal to his sense of honour, they think it necessary to supply a more forceful argument for Theseus in the supposed lacuna post 1312. de Romilly, *ibid.*, is attracted to this idea. B.M.W. Knox, in P.E. Easterling and B.M.W. Knox ed., *The Cambridge history of classical literature* i (Cambridge 1985) 328, and H. Lloyd-Jones, *The justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971) 154, mention the importance of what seems to have been lost in this lacuna. Bond (ad 1313) reports similar views held by M. Pohlenz and E. Kroeker. Certainly one might well suppose Theseus' speech to suffer from a lengthy lacuna if the two speeches were meant to balance each other in length, but this is not a necessity. If we can pursue an interpretation, a reasonable one, with Bond's simple and short conjecture for the lacuna, we should refrain from expecting more where nothing is guaranteed. The motivation of the rejection of suicide lies elsewhere, as will be seen later. Halleran (n. 19) also believes that Herakles' rejection of suicide results from something other than Theseus' appeal to the sense of honour, although there is a distance between his interpretation and mine.

(b) *Euripides' Revelation*

Euripides, however, makes Herakles proclaim his rejection of suicide at the very moment when he has just learnt that Theseus is ready to dissolve the threat of disgrace and that he is thus saved from utter hopelessness. We must not overlook the significance of this timing of Herakles' decision. Herakles' case is the reverse of the cases of Megara and Amphitryon: the dissolution of the threat of disgrace and the release from hopelessness work as a discouragement of and an obstacle to Herakles' choice of death.²¹ Euripides, if he had liked, could have made Herakles reject suicide while in total despair with no prospect of a solution to his problems, and he could have painted a clearer image of a brave Herakles who would have endured *any* ill, no matter how severe it might be. By not doing this, however, he has avoided depicting Herakles as an impossibly perfect hero. We notice Euripides' implication that even Herakles was not brave enough to endure the worst as long as he was apprehensive about his honour and lacked any hope. This suggests that Herakles in fact rejects suicide because of the change of his situation, namely, the dissolution of the threat of disgrace and hopelessness, rather than out of the recognition that suicide is an act of *deilia*.²² That Herakles must not commit suicide no matter what might happen to him has been Theseus' original argument and the reason for his censure of Herakles' unheroic attitude expressed at 1248 and 1250. Herakles' answer to this was line 1251, which I have already quoted. This exchange, too, hints that it is because the situation has changed and his troubles are now *en metrōi* that Herakles rejects suicide.

Theseus has offered to help Herakles overcome every condition that the latter has raised in the *logoi*, yet at 1340 Herakles nonetheless says that his troubles will remain unchanged. Now we must ask again: What issues does Herakles believe remain unresolved? What are the ills that Herakles is resolved to endure if he has decided to 'harden his heart' (1351)?

Schlesier's remark that Theseus attempts to dissipate his anxieties '*de façon matérielle*' is noteworthy.²³ There may be troubles which Theseus' proposal has not covered. Some lines later we find that the scene after his rejection of suicide, the scene which ends the play, is dedicated to the description of Herakles' engagement with his grief over the loss of his children and wife, and the remorse which he feels as the result of killing them. These are certainly the ills which he will have to endure for ever. They must have been the fundamental factors of his anguish. It was for this reason that his first excited manifestation of his wish for death included such words as *philtatōn... phoneus* (1147) and *teknois dikastēs haimatos* (1150); these have revealed his acute sense of guilt, amplified by his familial affection.

We are not, however, allowed to feel certain about this until after he has rejected suicide, because he ceases to mention those ills as soon as he has expressed his sorrow for the murder of his children at 1146-52, and shifts instead to the issues of his disgrace and 'stains'; furthermore, he does not refer to those ills in the *logoi* in which he tries to justify his suicide. Nor does he refer to them, even when he has been deprived of the justification of suicide by

²¹ This notion is somewhat similar to that of W. Desch, 'Der Herakles des Euripides und die Götter', *Philologus* cxxx (1986) 20, and of Schwinge 175.

²² We might even suspect that any such recognition of the cowardice of suicide would not be enough to enable him to reject it unless Theseus also rescued him from the obloquy of hopeless disgrace; but this is a point open to scepticism. Although it would be rather strange if he were ignorant of the notion of cowardly suicide, the fact is simply that there is no clear indication as to whether he has had any thoughts about the cowardice of suicide before Theseus' offer of help. However, since he was convinced that his honour had already been irreparably and fatally damaged, it is quite understandable that he has not been influenced by such a consideration until this moment. Cf. II(c) and IV(a) below.

²³ Schlesier (n. 18) 32.

Theseus' offer to resolve his problems:²⁴ he merely claims to find no help in Theseus at 1340, hinting that some of his ills will remain unchanged for him. And again at 1351, when he rejects suicide, he implies merely that something against which he has to fight will remain irreparable. Only after that does he reveal what ills are in store for him, while he no longer mentions the threat of disgrace as a motive that would afflict him or cause him to kill himself.

In this play, therefore, the threat of disgrace and despair on the one hand and the pains of bereavement and self-reproach on the other hand are clearly distinguished: the former are what he wishes to escape from and whose shames he employs to justify his suicide; while the latter are what he refrains from declaring as the justification of suicide, yet are what he shows himself readily resolved to endure. There must be a reason why initially he keeps silent about the latter.

(c) *Bereavement and Self-reproach*

In order to investigate this matter fully, we also need to examine Herakles' rejection of suicide in the light of the conventions of Greek poetry prior to Euripides as these concern themselves with the suicide motif.

The prototype of a figure in Greek poetry who can be considered as wishing for death as a result of the grief of bereavement or self-reproach must be Achilles in *Il.* xviii, and there are many other characters in Homer and tragic drama who express similar feelings. Yet it is almost always women who actually kill themselves, or try to do so; men rarely commit suicide for reasons of grief, at least in Greek poetry.²⁵ Although it is extremely difficult to specify the reason for any one's wishing for death or committing suicide, we will be justified to say that men who wish for death in a state of *bereavement* are, besides Achilles and our Herakles, Priamos in *Il.* xxiv, Laertes in *Od.* xv, Xerxes in *Pers.*, Haimon and Kreon in *Ant.*, Admetos in *Alk.*, Theseus in *Hipp.*, Adrastos and Iphis in Euripides' *Hik.* etc.; but among these male figures it is only Haimon who in his bereavement actually commits suicide.²⁶ Men who wish for death in a feeling of *self-reproach* are, besides Achilles and Herakles, Xerxes in *Pers.*, Oidipous in *O.T.*, Haimon and Kreon in *Ant.*, Theseus in *Hipp.* etc.; but again only Haimon kills himself.²⁷ Haimon's case is a rare exception.²⁸ This brief survey indicates that in Greek

²⁴ Schwinge 160 and W. Zürcher, 'Die Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides', *Schweizerische Beitr. z. Altertumsw.* ii (1947) 94-6 have observed that in his speech Herakles gives less weight to his grief and self-reproach than to his ill-fortune and despair as the ground for his determination to kill himself. However, their explanation for this is highly speculative: the latter assumes 'a change in Herakles' in the course of his justification speech, while the former supposes the hero's shifting from emotional disturbance to the realization of his own fate. Both have failed to recognise that during the speech the hero becomes increasingly reluctant to raise the topic of grief and self-reproach. See II(c) below.

²⁵ The fact that it is exclusively women who 'die of *achos*' is evident in the contrast between Oidipous and Epikaste in *Od.* xi; between Laertes and Antikleia in *Od.* xi and xv; and between Kreon and Eurydike in *Ant.* What Oidipous endures are his pangs of self-reproach for incest, and maybe patricide, besides those of grief for the loss of his parents; what Laertes bears is undoubtedly the grief of losing his son, while Kreon bears both grief and remorse for causing the death of his son.

²⁶ Throughout the whole of Greek myth there are hardly any examples of males who die of grief owing to bereavement. Aigeus, who throws himself from the cliff on seeing the black sail on his son's ship, is surely a rare instance, and it is remarkable that there seems to have been no literature in the archaic and classical period that dealt with his suicide. For the variety of versions of the legend, cf. Frazer's note on the legend of Aigeus' death in J.G. Frazer, *Apollodoros* ii (Loeb 1921) 137 (n. 4). A. van Hooff (104) observes that suicide as a result of grief is a feminine action.

²⁷ One may sense self-reproach in Sophokles' Aias, when he says, 'I have let the accursed men escape my hands' (*Aias* 371-72), when he compares himself with his glorious father (434-40) or presumes his father's embarrassment at his empty-handed homecoming (462-5). Although he later kills himself, nobody will admit that he acts out of self-reproach when he stabs himself, for his speech just before his suicide has contained no trace of such feelings but is full of his grudges against others.

poetry a man is generally unlikely to kill himself for reasons of bereavement or self-reproach, even if he may wish for death. We can say that for a male who suffers such sorrows in Greek poetry, it is generally regarded as possible and normal to remain alive even without the specific recognition that abandonment of life is an act of *deilia* which one must avoid at any cost. The pang of bereavement and self-reproach was for male Greeks normally something that they had to endure.²⁹ If Herakles has recognised this, he behaves in a way no different from that of the other males who reveal no such recognition. The ancient audience must have assumed that, even if he did not come to precisely that recognition, he would nonetheless be aware that his suicide would be scandalous: since the recovery of his honour has been guaranteed by Theseus, and his hopelessness is no longer absolute, he no longer has any acceptable reason for killing himself. Euripides puts him in a situation in which his suicide would have been seen as a distinctive mark of cowardice. This is a situation comparable to yet still considerably different from that of Megara in the First Epeisodion. If he had insisted on killing himself in that situation before the eyes of the Athenian audience, he would have appeared to them exceptionally womanish or cowardly.³⁰ They must have been aware that the fear of this sort of disgrace was the prime deterrent for Herakles in that situation.³¹ The reason why Herakles does not mention his grief and self-reproach in the *logoi* thus proves intelligible, even if he is a dramatic character who is not absolutely bound by human psychology. We can now explain also why Herakles' words just before he rejects suicide are ambiguous.

He is depicted as almost cowardly. In the scene following the rejection of suicide Herakles asks Theseus to accompany him to Argos, suggesting that he might kill himself out of *lypē paidōn* (1386-89) and at 1397 he expresses a wish to be no longer a human being:

αὐτοῦ γενοίμην πέτρος ἀμνήμων κακῶν.

²⁸ Of course we can think of several reasons for Haimon's suicide: besides the pangs of bereavement and self-reproach, he must fear the people's judgement and contempt for his spitting in Creon's face and for his lunging at his father with his sword, as well as their derision for his failure to carry out the patricide. In general, of course, it is mostly impossible to discern what *are* and what are *not* the exact reasons for any suicide. I do not intend to link Haimon's suicide to his grief and self-reproach more closely than to other reasons. I only say that his suicide is certainly exceptional enough, for he kills himself in the state of bereavement and in the situation where the feeling of self-reproach is to be expected.

²⁹ Cf. *Il.* xxiv 46-48.

³⁰ Plato, *Nomoi* ix 873c attributed suicide to idleness and unmanly cowardice (*argiai de kai anandrias deiliai*), if it was not due to an exceedingly painful fate (*periōdynōi tychēi*) or unmanageable shame (*aporou aischynēs*). Herakles might also have appeared short-tempered or irascible, for suicide was thought to be committed out of anger or rashness: in *Antigone* the Messenger describes the motive for Haimon's otherwise inexplicable suicide as 'enraged with himself' (*hautōi cholōtheis*: 1235); Aristotle, *EN* 1138a10, counted anger (*orgēn*) as a motive of suicide, along with poverty, the pangs of love, pain and cowardice. Perhaps for this reason Herakles' wish to kill himself is described as *leontos agriou thumon* (1211). Anger and rashness were not necessarily regarded as negative ethical values in ancient Greece, particularly before Plato; but here line 1212 (*dromon epi phonion anosion*) gives a negative twist to the hero's wild temper.

³¹ To put it more clearly, Herakles abandons the idea of suicide since, as an escape from disgrace has been offered to him, he can no longer claim the licence to evade the duty of enduring grief and self-reproach. It is shrewd of him to explain his choice by comparing his case to that of a soldier who resists the enemies' arrows (1350); but what he has just done is, strictly speaking, not equal to what a good soldier resolves to do upon the battlefield, that is, never to run away but, whatever happens, to stick to his post as long as his duty lasts. (cf. 162-4; Plato, *Apol.* 28e-29a; Herodotos, i 82, vii 232; Thuc. ii 42-4.) As regards his current agony (setting aside his previous labours), Herakles has only passed the test of not giving up this duty *as long as* it is practicable. This behaviour is exactly the same as that of Amphitryon which we observed during our discussion of the Parodos and the First Epeisodion. (See n. 11 above.) Chalk offers the insight that Amphitryon in the first part and Herakles in the latter part of the play have a virtue in common, namely endurance, and to the same extent, whether or not it can be called *aretē*. (See Chalk 9 f., 12; but see also Adkins 212-3.)

Certainly these words may suggest that Herakles lacks fortitude despite his rejection of *deilia*, but in fact he is not depicted as a *deilos* who is unable to endure grief and self-reproach. Euripides' intention in this passage is rather to show how much grief and self-reproach Herakles has to suffer, even after Theseus has cancelled the threat of disgrace and saved him from hopelessness, and how much endurance he will have to exercise for the rest of his life. The image of Herakles that this play leaves us with at the end is not that of a superman who is ready to endure any ill, but that of an ordinary human being who struggles and will have to *continue* to struggle against grief and self-reproach.³²

(d) *Conformity with Traditional Thinking*

If we consider the whole play in this spirit, we can glimpse Euripides' attitude toward suicide and this will enable us to set the drama in a broader context. It is true that Herakles recognises that suicide is *deilia*, but it is not this recognition, the poem suggests, that actually enables the hero to give up the notion of suicide. We are led to think that Herakles rejects suicide on the one hand because he is freed from the threat of disgrace and despair, and on the other because it is inadmissible in this society for a male to commit suicide by reason of grief and self-reproach. The drama rather implies that even Herakles is not able to endure disgrace and despair. It does not appear to be the play's intention to denounce equally as *deilia* every suicide undertaken to escape from disgrace.³³ The argument Theseus uses to dissuade Herakles from killing himself (particularly 1227 f., 1248, 1254) may be influenced by some minor contemporary trend of thinking that suicide must be avoided whatever its cause, but if this is so, it is not accepted by Herakles. As far as the extant text stands, it is hard to hold that Euripides intended this aspect of Theseus' argument to effect Herakles' change of mind.³⁴ The example offered by Megara rather indicates that a suicide can be justified if one's sense of disgraced honour prompts it. Euripides did not confine this attitude to our play. In several plays he made his characters choose their own death, if not kill themselves, always with a view to keeping or recovering their own honour. In such cases he never made other characters criticise them cogently but, rather, required admiration of them for their choice of death.³⁵ This suggests, at least, that Euripides had a flexible mind on the question of choosing between life and death and viewed the problem of honour as an important factor in the decision; this reinforces our interpretation of this play.

Such a way of viewing suicide was not a novelty in fifth century Attika, since it was a common idea from Homer to Plato that a choice of death in the name of honour was acceptable while a male ought to suppress or overcome a wish for death if it was a consequence of grief

³² A further analysis of the figure which Herakles presents at the end of this play is to be found in IV below.

³³ Orphics and Pythagoreans seem to have assumed a totally negative attitude toward suicide, irrespective of its motives, which reminds us of that of the Christians. Cf. Plato, *Phd.* 62b; Athenaios iv 157c. And the followers of Plato inherited it, according to Diogenes Laertios ix 120. Cf. van Hooff 192; R. Garland, *The Greek way of death* (London 1985), 98. It is understandable that the ancient Greeks, like every other race or society, issued general injunctions against suicide. Cf. J.C.G. Strachan, 'Who did forbid suicide at *Phaedo* 62b?', *CQ* xx (1970) 216; for the reasons why most societies have abhorred personal (as opposed to institutional) suicide, cf. Fedden (n. 13) 17, 27 ff., particularly 42 ff. Positive evidence is too scarce, however, for us to assume that the prohibition prevailed in its full strictness in early fifth-century Greece. It is conceivable that the absolutely condemnatory attitude was known to Euripides as de Romilly (8) suggests, but we need not conclude that it was the attitude which he allowed to prevail in this play.

³⁴ For the textual problem *post* 1312, cf. n. 20 above.

³⁵ E.g. Alkestis in *Alk.*, Makaria in *Hkld.*, Polyxene in *Hek.*, Iphigeneia in *I.A.*, Menoikeus in *Pho.* The suicide of Phaidra in *Hippolytos* is also motivated primarily by her sense of wounded honour, although other motives occur to her later to justify her suicide.

or self-reproach.³⁶ Adkins is therefore right in arguing that Herakles rejects suicide not because he is *agathos* but because he *fears* to show himself *kakos*, and that Euripides introduced no novel moral idea in this play, as far as Herakles' own reaction is concerned.³⁷

III. SUICIDE AND THE GODS

(a) *Herakles' Religious Belief*

What we have argued so far about Herakles' reasons for rejecting suicide will also help us to understand the comment about the gods which he makes at the most significant moment just before coming to his new decision (1341-46):

ἐγὼ δὲ τοὺς θεοὺς οὐτε λέκτρ' ἄ μὴ θέμις
στέργειν νομίζω δεσμά τ' ἐξάπτειν χερσίν
οὐτ' ἠξίωσα πάποτ' οὐτε πείσομαι
οὐδ' ἄλλον ἄλλου δεσπότην πεφυκέναι.
δεῖται γὰρ ὁ θεός, εἴπερ ἔστ' ὀρθῶς θεός,
οὐδενὸς· αἰοιδῶν οἶδε δύστηνοι λόγοι. (1341-46)

How are we to relate this argument to his rejection of suicide? In order to answer this question we need to know what the hero means here and why he speaks these words at this moment.

Herakles denies that the gods enjoy illicit love, that they use force, or that one god is master over another; he explains that a true god has no needs, and condemns the mythical poems as mere 'pernicious stories'. This passage has indeed troubled many critics: they have thought that Herakles' words contradict 'the whole Olympian religious system' and give rise to inconsistency in the play. This is because the words have seemed to them to negate the legends of the hero's own career that are requisite for the plot of the play and to deny even the existence of the two goddesses, Iris and Lyssa, who appear and speak on the stage. Lesky wrote, 'the poet shakes the foundation on which he can build his structure', and regarded our play as 'two dramas in one' discerning in it Euripides' own struggle with the problems of the era in which he lived. Kitto presumed that there was a concurrence in the hero of 'a moral instinct' which made him disbelieve the legends and, at the same time, some other kind of instinct—a religious instinct, perhaps—which nevertheless made him believe in Hera. He regarded it as a necessary means for the dramatic purpose, and concluded that the contradiction was inevitable. Knox simply asserts 'Herakles is quite surely wrong'. Greenwood believes that the poet abandoned dramatic verisimilitude to make the hero the mouthpiece of his own views that the gods did not exist. Verrall, however, found here Herakles' 'profession of faith'.³⁸ His insight is certainly

³⁶ Cf. the examples of Achilles and Hektor in *Il.* xviii 31-4, 98-121 and xxii 99-110, and the accounts in Plato, *Nomoi* 873c.

³⁷ Adkins 218 f. His argument would have been more apposite if he had written 'under grief and self-reproach' instead of 'under any circumstances' just after the phrase 'refusing to commit suicide' on p. 218. Furley's refutation of his theory (111) is logical and cogent in itself, but Adkins is still right to insist that no new conception of *aretē* is demonstrated in this play. Doubtless Adkins's argument is not perfect: Stinton (n. 7) 251 f. (rpt. 181 f.) who was aware of the merits of Chalk's view, aptly called Adkins' attack on Chalk a 'playing with words'; and it was certainly Adkins' mistake that he refused to recognize what Chalk tried to show by using the notion of 'new *aretē*'. However, we should notice that Adkins' article is not merely a commentary on the term *aretē*. It includes a sound interpretation of the play. Herakles' rejection of suicide is a reaction to the change of his circumstances, and his sense of honour works only passively. Adkins offers a rare example of a scholar who has marked the passivity of Herakles' rejection of suicide.

³⁸ Lesky (n. 20) 281 f.; H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek tragedy*³ (London 1961) 247 f.; B.M.W. Knox (n. 20) 322; L.H.G. Greenwood, *Aspects of Euripidean tragedy* (Cambridge 1953) 62, 64, 81 ff.; A.W. Verrall, *Four plays of Euripides* (Cambridge 1905) 191 ff.. A.P. Burnett (n. 9) 175 f., denies that there is any contradiction between Herakles' statement of faith and the myth quoted and acted out in the play, but she does so in a peculiar way. We must be

accompanied by a very problematic theory, and it is reasonable that Greenwood and Bond find it difficult to accept the whole of Verrall's 'rationalistic' or atheist interpretation. But we have no good reason to deny that the passage is the genuine expression of Herakles' faith. Bond is surely right, too, in saying that the structure of 1341-6 corresponds to that of Theseus' argument about the gods (1314-21), but it is dangerous for him to regard Herakles' words simply as an 'ad hominem reply' and say, 'it is enough for him that Theseus' argument is refuted'.³⁹ No doubt it is true that Herakles is here saying something that contradicts what the audience will have naturally assumed about the gods up until this passage. It is possible, however, to accept 1341-6 as a sincere statement of the hero's faith, independently of Verrall's interpretation. I argue that we do not have to conclude that Herakles' theology destroys the structure of the play based, as it is, on Olympian myth, or that he is insincere at this moment. If we take his words simply, we shall understand, as Stinton maintains, that Herakles is not declaring disbelief but the belief of an idealist believer.⁴⁰ He has his own opinion about the true nature of the gods and distinguishes his gods from the gods whom 'the poets' have invented. He is neither negating the existence of Zeus and Hera nor denying that they have done what he himself has attributed to them in the *logoi* (1255-1310); he is simply proclaiming that these poetic creations are unworthy of the name of god. Hera and Zeus may exist and have supernatural powers, but as they are portrayed by 'the poets' they behave contemptibly, and therefore cannot be true gods.⁴¹ The audience is ready to accept even such a radical theology as this as a serious notion and one worthy of serious consideration, since the play has already from time to time shaken ordinary people's credit in the gods (339 ff., 498 ff., 809 ff.).⁴²

We must think about this passage further, for, firstly, Herakles seems to have made use of the traditional myth in order to justify his suicide in his *logoi*, while secondly, his subsequent renunciation of this traditional religious system wrecks his own justification of suicide.

The force of his reference to the gods in the *logoi* becomes intelligible if we ask why he mentions the names of Zeus and Hera. Could he not justify suicide without making a remark about the gods, merely by evidencing the disgrace which threatens him and his consequent hopelessness? He asserts that his misfortune began with his conception and Alkmene's seduction by Zeus, that he has been pursued until this moment by the continual vindictiveness of Hera. His adversity, it is implied, will last for ever unless the goddess suspends her ill will, and this will naturally suggest to the audience his mood of religious despair. By recourse to the authority

cautious of her theory, as B.M.W. Knox advises us: 'Review: *Catastrophe Survived*', *CP* lxxvi (1972) rpt. in *Word and action* (Baltimore 1979) 340. The hero's argument must not be removed from its context, as Bond (ad 1341-6) warns.

³⁹ Greenwood (n. 38) 63-80; Bond xxii and ad 1341-46. Halleran (n. 19) 177-80, and Burnett (n. 9) 176 have tried to absolve Herakles from responsibility for this impious statement. Halleran implies that at 1341-6 Herakles is imprudent: he regards it as the 'outburst of a proud man' in his 'anger' against the gods who have humiliated him; and Burnett points out that the hero is aberrant at 'his most faithless point of despair' when he attributes mean jealousy to Hera. These views are, however, largely subjective.

⁴⁰ T.C.W. Stinton, "'Si credere dignum est": some expressions of disbelief in Euripides and others', *PCPS* n.s.xxii (1976) 83 f. Schlesier (n.18) 34 seems to take a position close to Stinton's on this point. She makes a neat and helpful distinction between Herakles' two criticisms of the gods: namely, the moral reproach directed against them personally and the philosophical doubt about anthropomorphism in general. Cf. *ibid.* 10 f.

⁴¹ Desch (n. 21) 16, 23, claims that Zeus is not *orthōs theos* for Herakles and that Hera's offence is an 'Eifersuch einer übermächtigen Frau gegenüber seiner Mutter'. Moreover, he is right to understand that Herakles considers that in actuality the gods do not behave like gods and denies to them 'die Göttlichkeit im wahrsten Sinne'.

⁴² In a sense, Herakles' theology sounds odd only superficially. Winnington-Ingram and Knox have sensibly written that the traditional gods in Greek poetry do not possess an unearthly existence endowed with a higher, superior form of morality, but symbolise the uncontrollable forces of human life: R.P. Winnington-Ingram, 'Hippolytus: a study in causation', in *Euripide (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* vi (1960)) 169-97; Knox (n. 20) 322.

of the traditional gods, he thus succeeds in attesting the integrity of his hopelessness and reinforces his justification of suicide.⁴³

(b) *A Logic of Suicide*

In addition, recognition that in Greek poetry there was a relationship between suicide and religion helps us to know how, in the Athenian theatre, our hero's argumentation was expected to function, in religious terms, in support of his wish to kill himself. It was not the unique privilege of Orphism, Pythagoreanism or Christianity to regard suicide as sacrilege and vice. It is usual for any religion to hold its own views on suicide and so seek to influence a man's thoughts about suicide. In Greek Tragedy, too, we observe that certain religious beliefs affect notions of suicide, and this makes Herakles' reference to the gods, both as to the justification and the rejection of suicide, significant. Let us survey some examples in this genre.

- We must not express a wish for suicide in the presence of the gods. (S. *Aias* 362)
- We have the right to commit suicide publicly if divine protection proves ineffectual. (A. *Hik.* 156-61)
- We may leave a man to kill himself if Zeus sanctions it. (S. *Trach.* 1248 f.)
- I, a prophetess, deem it right to accept death willingly, if it fares badly with my fatherland due to the judgement of the gods. (A. *Agam.* 1287-91)
- A man is entitled to kill himself if the gods have forsaken him. (S. *Aias* 396-402, 457-8; *O.T.* 1360-68)
- We may kill ourselves if we are no longer in debt to the gods. (S. *Aias* 589-90)

All these examples merge into one logically consistent attitude: suicide is not normal behaviour when a man is under divine protection, but it becomes permissible when he has been forsaken by the gods.

It must be because fifth-century Athenian audiences were well familiar with this logic that both Aischylos and Sophokles made their characters express it in only the briefest terms in several plays. Euripides did not use the argument as naively as the two other tragedians, perhaps because he had more complex religious beliefs and a more complex view of self-killing. Undoubtedly, however, it is on the basis of this attitude that at 1241 f. in our play Euripides makes Herakles, on the one hand, attribute his intention of killing himself to the culmination of his calamity 'reaching *heaven*', the seat of the gods, and makes Theseus, on the other, suspect Herakles' plan to be *apeilē* to the gods.⁴⁴

This logical position allowed the Greeks to decide objectively when suicide would be justifiable. It would automatically have led them to think that a man was entitled to kill himself

⁴³ Cf. Halleran (n. 19) 173. The role of hopelessness in our play has already been explained in I above. See also II (a) above.

⁴⁴ Θη. ἄπτηι κάτωθεν οὐρανοῦ δυσπραξίαι.
 Ηρ. τοιγὰρ παρεσκευάσμεθ' ὥστε κατθανεῖν.
 <Θη. >
 <Ηρ. >
 Θη. δοκεῖς ἀπειλῶν σῶν μέλειν τι δαίμοσιν; (1240-2)

Along with Desch (n. 21) 19, I deem it unnecessary to think that two lines are lacking after 1241. At 1240 Theseus uses the word *ouranos* to describe the degree of Herakles' adversity. He implies that even the heavens know of the hero's adversity. This specifies the meaning of *toigar* at 1241 as the following: 'I intend to die *because* the gods have been indifferent to my calamities till now, and because I do not want to bear any longer such cruel adversity'. 1242 is apparently grounded on the idea that a suicide would annoy the gods. Since Euripides was not interested in explaining how a suicide *would* annoy the gods, it is therefore rash to understand that the issue of the line is the gods' concern about others' opinion of them, an understanding to which Desch's explanation of 1343 may lead.

if he was suffering from the gods' malice. The Athenian audience of our play must have believed, at first, that Herakles might well kill himself, when they heard him say that he was afflicted by Hera's cruelty.

This use of the myth would eventually have had the obvious effect of reinforcing Herakles' justification for his suicide. Although it is not easy to decide how sincere he is supposed to be in the *logoi*, it is beyond doubt that the reference to the gods is a part of the hero's tactics to fortify his argument.

(c) *Herakles' Tactics Demolished*

Soon after he has made these claims, however, he denies that Hera is a true goddess. The audience will then realise that the claimed licence for suicide is no longer pertinent to his case; that therefore the hero has lost the most authoritative grounds for justifying his suicide by the time he rejects its possibility; and, moreover, that if he is no longer threatened by hopeless disgrace, no choice is left to him but to live; and it will be then no extraordinary exploit for him to reject suicide. Euripides must have had this in mind when he makes Herakles refer to the myth at two important moments of the play.

The hero has therefore completely destroyed his own justification for suicide just before he actually rejects it as a choice. A question arises here: Why does Herakles deal with the gods so critically at this particular moment? Why does he himself dismiss his case for suicide? Does he need to do so before he rejects the option of suicide? Of course, one striking effect of his expressing his genuine religious belief must be, as we have seen above (II), to rebut Theseus' prior reference to the gods, words spoken as consolation and encouragement, to deny his friend's influence upon his rejection of suicide, and so preserve his dignity. But isn't he intending more than a rebuttal of Theseus' reference to the gods? Isn't it possible that Theseus' words offended Herakles' religious attitude of mind? Is he trying to obliterate any lingering image of a weak Herakles, or merely to show his contempt for the poetic figure of Hera? Since there are several such possibilities, we can never be absolutely sure what Herakles is intending in his hasty dismantling of his former arguments. Yet it is not so difficult to grasp the dramatist's intention: Euripides has taken this occasion to show the audience the nature of Herakles' authentic religious beliefs.

We infer from the *logoi* that his religious despair is one of the main reasons for his wish to kill himself. Yet, to our surprise, he soon rejects suicide, although nothing has been offered by Theseus or anyone else to change his relationship with the gods. The simplest reason we can think of for this change is that his religious anguish has not been sufficiently serious. Our understanding of his religious faith (III (a)) leads to this inference. He has never placed much credence in the mythical gods. Actually he says at 1343 that he has no more believed in the indecent gods *in the past* than he does at present. If this is true, his disbelief is not an instant invention. It follows that, although in the *logoi* the gods' power seemed to have afflicted the ill-fated hero and reinforced his hopelessness, this was not the case. As far as we believe Herakles' words at 1343, it is reasonable for us to understand that his citation of Hera's wrong in the *logoi* was 'mere rhetoric', which he employed insincerely to reinforce his case.⁴⁵ By

⁴⁵ The general conception of rhetoric current at the time was that the *rhētōr* had to be persuasive about whatever theme was chosen, according to Plato, *Gorgias* 457a. We can sense in the character Herakles the influence of rhetoric and the sophistic movement which flourished in fifth-century Athens. Cf. R.G.A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek tragedy: a study of Peitho* (Cambridge 1982), 10-20. The fact that Herakles, not apprehensive of appearing inconsistent, denies the authority of the mythical gods soon after making use of it in his argument reminds us of Euripides' famous fragment 189: 'A man may make two sides to an argument on any matter, if he has a skill in speaking' (tr. C. Collard, adapted). For the use of the myth for the sake of rhetoric among the ancient Greeks, see P. Veyne, *Les grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (Paris 1983), ch. 7.

incorporating the motif of the gods' cruelty into the climactic speech of the play, Euripides must have intended to depict, with a certain irony, the hero's cunning effort to kill himself on the one hand, and to attack the wantonness and levity of Olympian myth on the other.

IV. THE ACTIONS OF THESEUS

(a) *Suicide in the Name of Honour*

The importance of the threat of disgrace and humiliation as motives of Herakles' desire to kill himself has already been explained. Let us now notice van Hooff's remark that self-killing is *preferably* understood as the deed of someone who hopes to preserve his honour.⁴⁶ We need to extend this consideration to make it applicable to the interpretation of Euripides' play. When a man dies in the name of honour he is either escaping disgrace or demonstrating his own keen sense of what his honour means to him. Whichever it may be, he is aiming at the satisfaction of his sense of personal honour. However, this is not the only advantage of dying in the name of honour. It also justifies escape from the complexity of pain: choice of death, if it is a means to defend honour, serves also as a sort of legitimate panacea that can end *in toto* all kinds of pain by annihilating a subject's sensibility.⁴⁷ For a man in calamity, therefore, a moment of disgrace or a moment in which his honour is under threat is a good chance to justify the choice of death that can offer an all-round, if personal and egotistical, solution to all his problems. Sophokles was aware of this fact and made Antigone, Aias, Deianeira and Haimon kill themselves at particular moments in such a way that their suicides appear to be splendid achievements that might restore their honour and remedy their ills at the same time. We must, however, remember that a man's honour and disgrace are not unalterable moral values but transient products in the eyes of others that he perceives through some form of communication with them.⁴⁸ Disgrace can be alleviated or dissolved as a result of a change of others' opinions or of the conditions of communication with others.⁴⁹ It follows that a suicide must be committed opportunely before the problem of one's honour can be solved, if it is to be

⁴⁶ Van Hooff 131. (*cf.* also 90, 108, 120).

⁴⁷ It seems that among the Athenians of the age of Attic tragedy (5c. BC) there were those who believed and those who disbelieved in the sensitivity of a deceased person. Examples of the belief that a deceased person still feels some pain are seen in Sophokles' *El.* 400; *O.T.* 1371-4; Euripides' *El.* 684; Lysias, xii, 99 f. Those of disbelief in *O.K.* 955; *Trach.* 1173; Euripides' *Hik.* 86 f., 1004-5; *Hipp.* 599 f.; *Bac.* 1361 ff.; Lysias, vi, 20. Greek ambivalence over the issue can be traced early in *Od.* xi and xxiv. *Herakles* 490 f., along with Sophokles' *El.* 355 f., hints at an agnostic attitude that falls between the two extreme positions, and this attitude seems to have prevailed into the next age (4c. BC): e.g. Lykourgos, *Leokr.* 136; Hyperides vi 43; Isokrates xix 42; Xenophon, *Kyr.* viii 7.19-22, etc. However, Aischines, i, 14; Plato, *Phd.* 69e-70a and Menandros, fr. 648 offer evidence that disbelief could still be found in the fourth century. What is important for us is that *none* of those who wish for death in Greek Tragedy believe in pain after death. For a general survey, see K.J. Dover, *Greek popular morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974), 243 f, 266 f.; W. Burkert, *Greek religion*, tr. J.Raffan (Stuttgart 1977; Eng.tr. Oxford 1985), 196 f.; J.D. Mikalson, *Athenian popular religion* (Chapel Hill 1983), 77 f., 81.

⁴⁸ Since the pain of disgrace is intimately related to a subject's awareness of the scrutiny and reports of others, the effect of cutting off such communication weighs considerably with him. This is why Herakles veils his head when Theseus appears (1160, 1199 ff.) and wishes to evade association with the Thebans and the eyes of the Greeks (1281-1300). Many similar cases can be found in Greek Tragedy: e.g. *Aias* 460 f., 658 f.; *Ant.* 1321, 1339; *Trach.* 799 f.; *O.T.* 1410-12; *Hipp.* 1290 f.; *Or.* 460 ff. Certainly their sense of honour and dishonour oppressed the Greeks very strongly as Walcott, *op.cit.*, argues, but the conditions of their shame reveal their general recognition that disgrace was not a perpetual thing nor was it an absolute motive for suicide.

⁴⁹ Disgrace could fade from people's memory, or be cancelled or replaced by honour re-acquired. We can think of the examples of Achilleus (*Il.* xviii 90-3, 121), Aristodemos (Herodotos vii 231; ix 71), Alkibiades (Xenophon *Hell.* i 4.8; Ploutarchos, *Alkibiades* 32 ff.), etc. This is the basis of Theseus' argument that the city of Athens can redeem Herakles' honour (1328-35), when answering the latter's argument that he will be perpetually disgraced, wherever he goes.

committed in the name of honour. Otherwise the subject not only loses the chance to justify killing himself and satisfy his sense of honour, he will also be obliged to continue suffering from all his other lesser problems.

Euripides knew this. In our play, Theseus, by promising to overcome Herakles' fears of disgrace and pollution, deprives him of the precious chance of killing himself justifiably in the name of honour. Herakles is forced to choose whether he will still kill himself only because he is sad and sorry. Euripides, by inventing such a situation, reveals the hidden side of Herakles' wish for death. We are led to suspect that cowardice lay behind his heroic wish for death. We remember that Euripides wrecked Phaidra's intention of committing a purely honourable suicide in *Hippolytos*. Calling a halt to Herakles' suicide, the poet invites the audience to reconsider the ignored aspect of such seemingly honourable tragic suicides as those of Sophokles' Antigone, Aias, Iokaste and Deianeira.⁵⁰

(b) *Philia*

Theseus' *offer* has motivated Herakles' rejection of suicide in its most strict sense. This act of Theseus evidently arises from his friendship for Herakles (1214-25, 1234, 1337). Herakles' decision, however, means the beginning of his struggle to overcome grief and regret. And Theseus' *assistance* to Herakles in this struggle also comes from his feelings of friendship (1398, 1403 f.). Most critics have regarded *philia* as one of the main themes of the play, and treat it as the common source of both his assistance and his offer to Herakles, without making a clear distinction between them.⁵¹ But our interpretation of Herakles' rejection of suicide clarifies the necessity of distinguishing the nature of Theseus' two acts of friendship.

Herakles admires Theseus for his friendship at 1404:

ὦ πρέσβυ, τοιόνδ' ἄνδρα χρῆ κτᾶσθαι φίλον.

We doubt, however, whether Herakles is entirely happy with what Theseus has done for him. The hero would have been able to solve his problems by killing himself, if Theseus had offered no gift to him, and it was what he was wishing to do when Theseus appeared before him. For him, therefore, Theseus' offer of property, honour and purification is an unwelcome favour in itself. Line 1340 quoted above (II a) shows his mood of dissatisfaction. Certainly at 1352 he

⁵⁰ In his last years Sophokles, too, was interested in blocking the suicide of his heroes. In *Phil.* he creates a situation in which Odysseus' interference hinders Philoktetes from committing suicide to prevent falling into a humiliating situation, while the rest of the play focuses on the hero's returning to a positive attitude towards life. In *O.K.*, Oidipous recounts that he, deprived of the freedom to kill himself, has, as a part of his penance, survived a terrible ordeal and has consequently acquired enough patience to approach his promised land. In both plays Sophokles absorbed the motif of blocked suicide into the framework of tragedy, but he did not analyse the hidden motives of suicide as Euripides obviously wished to do. His purpose was to introduce into his plays the notion of a *reward* received for giving up the idea of suicide, whether voluntarily or not, and enduring calamities. For Philoktetes it is the divine promise of his future exploits and glory in the Trojan War, and of the magical healing of his wounds (1421). For Oidipous it is his mysterious end which is 'blessed', 'wonderful' and 'without pain' (1663-5, 1720), and which means his becoming an everlasting champion of the Athenians (92, 1524 f.). It is significant that Sophokles makes the turning away from suicide result in the supernatural reward of the subjects, while Euripides rewards Herakles with the distinguished but mere name of a man of endurance. For Sophokles' treatment of Herakles' endurance (while in disgrace) and his blocked suicide, see my 'The flammentod of Herakles in Sophokles' *Trachiniai*', *Classical Studies* (Kyoto) viii (1990) 55-70.

⁵¹ J.T. Sheppard, 'The formal beauty of the Heracles', *CQ* x (1916) 72-9; Chalk 14; Bond xxiii and ad 1425 f.; Adkins 219 (cf. 215); Furlley 111. Rare exceptions are Burnett (n. 9) 181, n. 29, who doubts that *philia* is the unifying motif of the play, and Schlesier (n. 18) 32, n. 87, who criticises the tendency to see importance in the motif of *philia* and so attribute a 'happy end' to the play. She is right to deny a happy ending to our play (*ibid.* 37-9), but we have not enough reason to belittle the role of this motif in it.

expresses gratitude to Theseus for his offer, but this is done only briefly, as Bond points out.⁵² It is difficult to think that Herakles can be really grateful to Theseus at this moment. Having no good reason to refuse Theseus' offer, however, he accepts it with polite words, but we doubt, with reason, that he is pleased with the outcome. At 1404, however, we understand, that Herakles is now happy with what Theseus has done to support him against the grief which is now the main burden of his trouble. Theseus apparently holds out his arms to Herakles at 1398, promises to accompany him at 1402, and by 1403 has helped him to stand up. Herakles now admires Theseus for what this friend has done readily in answer to the serious requests for assistance that he has expressed at 1386 ff., and not for what this friend has done for him without being asked to.

When Herakles, in his last words, says:

ὄστις δὲ πλοῦτον ἢ σθένος μᾶλλον φίλων
ἀγαθῶν πεπᾶσθαι βούλεται κακῶς φρονεῖ. (1425-6)

he must be thinking of Theseus as the desired friend. Certainly it was because Theseus had wealth and political power in his city that he could offer several things to salvage Herakles from disgrace and pollution; Adkins argues that in this passage *agathōn philōn* must mean powerful, effective and helpful friends⁵³. We must add, though, that Herakles does not imply that any wealthy and powerful friend will suffice. Theseus is a desirable friend for him not because he has prevented him from committing suicide by the application of wealth and power, but because this friend is helping him to bear grief and regret, and thus to prevent the reproach of cowardice. We must note that Herakles is here opposing friends (*philoī*) to wealth (*ploutos*) and power (*sthenos*). This opposition strongly suggests that he now appreciates not what wealth and power have enabled Theseus to do for him, but what humble yet warm friendship have provided, for which Theseus' wealth and power were useless. It corresponds with the fact that the Athenian army commanded by Theseus which is waiting by the stream of Asopos (1163-5) has proved useless for the salvation of Herakles.

We must understand that, in this play, wealth or political power are not depicted as the most desirable requisites of a true friend: they do not, for Herakles, constitute *agathoi philoi*. Early in the Prologue, however, the audience has heard the words of Amphytrion:

φίλων δὲ τοὺς μὲν οὐ σαφεῖς ὀρώ φίλους,
οἱ δ' ὄντες ὀρθῶς ἀδύνατοι προσωφελεῖν. (55-6)

and has been told that a helpless friend cannot be a desirable friend, even if he is a true friend. These remarks warn us against going too far in interpreting Herakles' last words as complete rejection of the usefulness of power. We are not justified in interpreting this passage in the light of Chalk's argument that the *philia* of the elders is an *aretē*, even if it is shorn of *sthenos*.⁵⁴ Theseus who has acted to help his friend should be distinguished from the Chorus which has not acted and cannot act. In short Euripides' implication is that a desirable friend is the one who is capable of helping a friend effectively by having the material means to back up his spiritual assistance.

Our poet has created such a desirable friend in the person of Theseus, but his purpose in

⁵² Bond ad 1347 ff. I follow Bond in taking *μυρῶν* not *μυρίων*, at 1352.

⁵³ Adkins 215 f., 219. The inconvenience of Adkins' theory of *philia* is pointed out rightly by Bond ad 57; on 1426 he translates *agathoi philoi* simply as 'effective (friends)'.

⁵⁴ Chalk 11. Cf. Adkins 215 f.

writing this play was not to express admiration of this figure. The greatness of ideal friendship is merely the conclusion of the play. Up until Herakles' rejection of suicide Euripides has depicted Herakles' seemingly heroic reactions to disaster as behaviour in which the negative side of the hero can be observed. The opportunity to kill himself in the name of honour is the space in which his vanity can dominate and his cowardice hide itself. In the last scene, however, the hero is deprived of this outlet. Instead, the poet describes sympathetically Herakles' serious struggle to face grief and self-reproach, pains of the sort most fundamental to all mankind, ills that can be soothed only by *philia*, the highest virtue.

V. CONCLUSION

Euripides made Herakles decide on suicide dramatically and then reject it painfully, not because he intended to put forward a new doctrine that all suicide is *deilia*,⁵⁵ nor because he intended to present an invincible hero who would have nothing to do with *deilia*. His intention was to depict a human Herakles who needed to struggle against grief and regret, narrowly escaping the reproach of cowardice as a consequence of Theseus' supreme act of friendship. If this paper has validated the utility of suicidology as a means to assist in the interpretation of Greek Tragedy, its aim has been attained.⁵⁶

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⁵⁵ de Romilly (6 f.) is thus refuted. As to the invention of Euripides, we know that some legends had told of Herakles' murder of his children before Euripides wrote our play, but little is known as to what the legendary outcome of the murder had been. Cf. Bond xxviii f.; Frazer (n. 26) i 183, n3. It is likely that Euripides invented a Herakles who decides and insists, if only temporally, on suicide in the face of grief, regret, the threat of indignity and hopelessness after he has murdered his children. That is, as Bond says, there is a possibility that Euripides intended to emphasise Herakles' *catastrophe* when he reversed the traditional chronology of the hero's murder while mad and his labours as atonement for it.

⁵⁶ An early draft of this paper was written during my research at the University of Bristol where I was supported by the Overseas Research Students Awards, and in a later version was read at meetings of the Classical Society of Kyoto University and of Hokkaido University. I am most grateful to Dr R.G.A. Buxton for insightful and encouraging supervision in Bristol and to Professor J.Gould for later draft reading and valuable advice. I wish also to thank the audiences in Kyoto and Sapporo, especially Professor M. Oka for shrewd comments.