

IX. Taboo in the Oedipus Theme

THALIA PHILLIES HOWE

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

So complex are the problems of interpretation* in regard to the two Oedipus dramas, the *Tyrannus* and the *Colonus*, that critics disagree as to whether Sophocles is defending or attacking the gods and traditional religious ethic, whether his protagonist is a unique individual or a symbol labeled "suffering humanity."¹ They question, again, whether Oedipus achieves his cult status in the *Colonus* because of his great intelligence, or whether this is the result of Athenian political policy.² There is, as we like to say, some truth in all these interpretations.³

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¹ S. Ranulf, *The Jealousy of the Gods and Criminal Law at Athens* (London 1934) 2.203 ff. I. Linforth, "Religion and Drama in Oedipus at Colonos," *U. of Calif. Publ. in Cl. Philol.* 14, No. 4 (1951) 75-192. Linforth's article is a welcome antidote to the overextended theories on theodicy prevalent in some classical scholarship on the Oedipus theme. He also very effectively takes to task the thesis of Oedipus as a symbol of suffering humanity (page 78). M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*¹ (Leipzig and Berlin 1930) 221-26, 367 ff. T. Rosenmeyer, "The Wrath of Oedipus," *Phoenix* 6 (1952) 92-112.

² B. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (Baltimore 1957) Ch. I and *passim*, regards Oedipus' great intelligence as the prime reason for his heroic stature, an intellectualism with particular appeal both to modern criticism and fifth century Athenian. E. Rohde, *Psyche* (Engl. transl. by W. Hollis [London 1925]) 430-31. Rosenmeyer (above, note 1) 98 ff. and note 30, 104 and note 48, 107 espouses Rohde's thesis that the figure of Oedipus does not warrant moral acclaim since he was made immortal for the glory of Athens. S. M. Adams, "Unity in the Coloneus," *Phoenix* 7 (1953) 136-47. F. J. Letters, *The Life and Work of Sophocles* (London 1953) 297, while regarding the divinization of Oedipus as the "master-theme" of the *Colonus*, also believes its other theme is a political one; and his reasons are acute and appropriate: "In view of the despondency into which his countrymen were thrown by the manifest decline of Athenian power and the immediate calamity of the Sicilian expedition . . . it is hard not to believe that the *Coloneus* was intended to bid Athens be of good cheer." H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1939) 401 ff.

³ As Bowra points out, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 5 ff., Sophocles gives much less guidance and explanation than a dramatist like Aeschylus, and in conse-

Among recent critics, Gerald Else, Bernard Knox, and Ivan Linforth have certain insights which are especially pertinent to the spirit of Oedipus. Else gauges more accurately than has been done before the important cultural role of blood kin relationships to the plays; Knox examines most acutely the role of mind in them, while Linforth sees the moral guiltlessness of the hero as the main issue:⁴ it is not the action of the gods and their oracles which matter so much⁵ but rather, as Knox also points out, how Oedipus thinks and feels about the nature of his pollution, and how he acts upon it. "This great issue [of pollution and moral guiltlessness], says Linforth, "is the only religious issue of the play—if it can be called religious—and must have been of profound significance to the audience."⁶

quence the meaning of his plays has been disputed. Sophocles, however, still belongs to the didactic tradition of Greek literature established by Hesiod and the lyric poets, so that there is always some moral or religious point to his plays, "an issue to which there must be a right answer but on which more than one opinion is tenable." On Sophocles as poet and philosopher, H. D. F. Kitto, *Sophocles: Dramatist and Philosopher* (Oxford 1958) 1 ff. But while there may be something to be said for a religious argument in regard to the Oedipus theme, few would believe with C. Robert, *Oidipus* (Berlin 1915), that the hero was originally a god. M. Nilsson argues most effectively against this view in his review of Robert's book in *GGA* 1922, 32 ff.

⁴ G. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1957) 352, 429 ff., 436. B. Knox (above, note 2). Linforth (above, note 1) 184; on pollution, 106 ff. On moral guiltlessness, see also the important study of Letters (above, note 2) 217 ff., and particularly Adams (above, note 2) 140 ff.

⁵ For a case in point, as to the function of oracles, Linforth (above, note 1) 83 ff. notes that there are two oracles in the *Colonus* which are not specifically designated but are, rather, very important dramatically, "for their effect upon the persons of the play, *their* understanding [L's emphasis] of them and the emotions and actions which are consequent upon their understanding of them." In contrast to Linforth's healthy skepticism toward the importance of oracles among the Greeks, one should include Letters' (above, note 2, page 226) very pertinent remarks on the function of the sphinx in setting Oedipus on his predestined path, and also the significance of Oedipus' answer "Man" to its riddle. Perhaps E. Durkheim's illuminating remarks concerning magical interdictions estimate most accurately of all how the Greeks may have felt about oracles in their own way, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London 1915) 299: "In disobeying these [oracular interdictions] a man runs risks similar to those to which an invalid exposes himself in not following the advice of his physician." Oedipus reflects just such an attitude in trying to avoid the prophecy by fleeing from Corinth. It is important to remember that no one holds it against Oedipus, at that time or any other, for having run away, nor does anyone express moral indignation. Nor are the oracles used in the play as excuses for discoursing on the power of fate or the helplessness of man. The professional advice, for such it is, is there to be taken—or not.

⁶ Linforth (above, note 1) 184. On the question whether the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a "tragedy of fate," Knox (above, note 2) 5 ff. most convincingly argues that it is not. To paraphrase, as Sophocles has arranged the plot, none of the predestined events takes place during the course of the play, nor are any of the main events of the play

It is this point—Oedipus' pollution, his feelings, and their significance to his audience—which I shall consider more closely. As Linforth suggests, Oedipus' pollution is not originally an ethical problem but rather a problem of primitive belief, such as commonly vexes a society prior to the development of the ethical religions. It is my contention that it is principally Sophocles who, in his two dramas, bridges the transition between such surviving notions surrounding primitive taboo and their elevation into a significant stage beyond, one which indicates a new, individual concern and feeling. There is evidence, however, which suggests that Sophocles is following a lead in this direction initiated by Aeschylus, the great ethical interpreter of drama. In 467 B.C. Aeschylus produced a tetralogy on the Oedipus theme which was awarded first prize. Of the salient events in that tetralogy, we know only one or two which survive in the fragments.⁷ How Aeschylus' four plays affected the Sophoclean works will be discussed later.

The two Sophoclean dramas we have, of course, in their entirety, and it is from them that most of our evidence and insights must come. They were not produced together, and in fact the *Tyrannus* was written some twenty or thirty years prior to the *Colonus*, which was presented three years after Sophocles' death in 406 B.C. In the earlier play the hero discovers that a number of years previously he has unknowingly broken two major taboos: he has committed patricide and, then, incest with his mother. The latter taboo is the great universal one, the most dreaded among all primitive societies and everywhere compounded with dire pollution.⁸ Patricide, while not so universal a taboo, was

part of the prophecy. Apollo did not predict the discovery of the truth, the suicide of Jocasta, or the self-blinding. The main event is not the fulfillment of the prophecy, but the discovery by Oedipus of his own identity. The *Tyrannus* is, rather, a tragedy of will, in which the character brings on his own doom. Kitto (above, note 2) 137 ff. also regards the *Tyrannus* as a tragedy of character rather than of fate.

⁷ Carl Robert, *Oedipus* (Berlin 1915) 1.253 ff. and note 1 for full discussion. The four Aeschylean titles: *Laius*, *Oedipus*, *Seven Against Thebes*, and the satyr-play, the *Sphinx*. For this tetralogy Aeschylus won first prize.

⁸ It is interesting to note that, in his mention of Oedipus, Homer (*Od.* 11.280) speaks only of the incest and disregards, or simply does not know of, the patricide. No society permits an individual to mate with all members of his or her family: A. Seligman, "The Problem of Incest and Exogamy," *Am. Anthropologist* 52 (1950) 308. A recent important, indeed seminal, piece on the possible origins of incest, is M. Slater's "Ecological Factors in the Origin of Incest," *Am. Anthropologist* 61 (1959), No. 6, 1042-59. In this article it is argued that the life-span among the earliest

for the Greeks almost as culpable an offense, for in committing it one shed kindred blood. Thus these two taboos represented their life-and-death attitudes toward familial blood: it is sacred, and one must neither procreate with it nor destroy it.⁹ These beliefs, of immemorial practice, functioned like all taboos, as institutions and "social symbols by which the complex fabric of society is built up."¹⁰ Furthermore, anyone breaking these taboos disrupts not only society but the cosmic order as well, insofar as the social structure is conceived by many primitive peoples, including the early Greeks, as resident within the framework of the natural order.¹¹ In the case of incest, "the fatal consequences are above

peoples was so short [among South African Bushmen today the average is 20 years, for example] that the parents would either be dead or too aged to breed with their children by the time that even the oldest was sufficiently matured. Slater demonstrates also how intermarriage between siblings under the same ecological strictures would also be so impractical as to make incest in their case as unlikely. Consequently, after tens of thousands of years of this kind of pattern of experience, even when the life expectancy rate had expanded to the point where incest might be possible and practicable, society forbade it as counter to long-established practice. Professor Nock raises the question whether there is "any indication that the Greeks had any marked anxieties about incest." As support, he cites Plato, *Rep.* 571c, in which section Plato states that the man who has parted company with all shame and sense is capable of committing every conceivable guilt "not excepting incest." This statement would imply that incest was the ultimate crime and, therefore, source of anxiety. I should like to cite further *Laws* 838, where Plato states that "the unwritten law which prohibits members of the same family from such intercourse is strictly obeyed, and no thought of anything else ever enters into the minds of men in general . . . The reason is that everywhere, in jest and in earnest alike, this is the doctrine which is repeated to all from their earliest youth. They see on the stage that an Oedipus or a Thyestes or a Macareus, when undeceived, are ready to kill themselves." This would indicate certainly that there was much anxiety about incest, perhaps as Nock suggests, not overt or "marked" but, rather, deeply suppressed. Men may jest about, flaunt, confess to, or even simply take for granted their adulteries, but no one discusses his incestuous involvements openly. It is doubtful that the Greeks were an exception to this tacit behavior; for once, on this point at least, the argument *e silentio* should be a valid one. As Plato says, it is evil and depraved even to see such things in one's sleep. See also Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.4.20 ff. and *Cyr.* 5.1-10; Lysias 14.28 and 41. Bowra's discussion (above, note 3, page 169) on the horror of incest among the Greeks is forceful.

⁹ Leslie White, *Science of Culture* (New York 1949) Ch. 11, 303 ff., points out that the reasons why familial blood is so sacred are, of course, not well understood by cultural anthropologists and social psychologists. My own footnote on possible Greek interpretations was, at this point, so complex and cumbersome that it became apparent that the argument would be better served if it were the basis of a separate article.

¹⁰ A. Radcliffe-Brown, *Taboo* (Cambridge 1939) 33, a statement which sums up his main thesis in the Frazer Lecture.

¹¹ Slater (above, note 8) 1045 ff. has a good résumé and criticism of the more recent theories on the function of taboo in society. See specifically Seligman (above, note 8) 305 ff.; White (above, note 9); B. Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage*

all manifested in the fact that the plantations will no longer yield their produce . . . The scourge it lets loose will spare no one, for famine, epidemic, hurricane, earthquake are calamities that no one can escape. Hence the need for concerted action."

This quotation does not paraphrase the opening scene of the *Tyrannus* but is taken from Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitives and the Supernatural*, which describes the universal reaction of peoples upon finding incestuous practice and its consequent pollution within the community.¹² Reactions of this kind cannot be called moral, but they *are* full of terror. In the opening of the *Tyrannus* such an experience is plainly evident; the city of Oedipus is suffering from most of the natural disasters that would be recorded from the field millennia later by Lévy-Bruhl.¹³ But precisely how did the plague and sterility function within these two dramas, for it is significant, as Knox reminds us, that they do not appear until many years after Oedipus has committed his foul acts and that he has, furthermore, prospered in the interim?¹⁴ If the cosmic order is disturbed at all, it has taken an unseemly amount of time to register its disapproval. At best these rumblings of nature appear to be the last retreating thunder-roll of primitive belief. But, it may be argued, the long delay in the inevitable peripety of Oedipus, the reversal in fortune coming after so much prosperity, make this downfall even more terrible, illustrating the conventional Greek maxim, "wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest," a quotation which is, in fact, the closing chorus of the *Tyrannus* itself.¹⁵

Society (London 1927) 243 ff. For the point of view particularly applicable to the southeastern Mediterranean cultures, there is also the older but still very perceptive work of W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (London 1907).

¹² H. Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitives and the Supernatural* (New York 1935) 202-4 ff., 225. On contagion see also Durkheim (above, note 5) 321 ff.; Hutton Webster, *Taboo* (Oxford 1942) 1: plague as inevitable punishment is animistic in nature.

¹³ Bowra (above, note 3) 171 notes that the plague in the *Tyrannus* is not like that of 430-429 B.C. "whose details Thucydides noted with meticulous science. This one comes from an older, more god-ridden world. Its characteristics are those Hesiod noted, *Erga* 242, pertaining to men when their rulers are proud and sinful." Knox, however, "The Date of the *Oedipus Tyrannos*," *AJP* 77 (1956) 133 ff., argues convincingly that the plague is *both* the ancient punishment for the breaking of a taboo *and* the plague of 430-425 B.C.

¹⁴ Knox (above, note 2) 9 ff. refutes the notion that the plague is "Apollo-sent."

¹⁵ *Tyrannus* 1524 ff. As Bowra states (above, note 3, page 9) the poet generally gives us in the last word of his plays a lead which we must take when we review the play in retrospect, for these leads are indispensable to any understanding of the poet's intention. Although it is necessary to regard the last statement in the *Tyrannus* as

Yet, in looking deeper, it becomes clear that within the economy of the drama the plague is a limited instrument of either cosmic or divine retribution. It is all but lost sight of after the first powerful stasimon. The two subsequent references to it are oblique and brief, when Jocasta (635) and the chorus (a few lines later) have to remind Oedipus and Creon of the "stricken state."¹⁶ Nor do these tokens of physical catastrophe reappear, even when the polluted hero fails to retire from the confines of Thebes according to the terms of the curse he has himself pronounced. It is crucial to observe that Sophocles does not mention them even once in the *Colonus*. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the plague does not directly touch Oedipus or his family. Indeed, had Oedipus not made every effort to find out the truth, he might never have suffered physical harm or social exposure.¹⁷ The long delay in the peripety of Oedipus is meaningful not only as an

truly the poet's own, I must confess, however, to an ambivalent attitude toward it. There are times when it seems, rather, that Linforth may be correct after all in finding the generalization so broad that it is ultimately as meaningless as when pious persons explain any and every painful event as "God's will." But for the sake of the argument, because so many persons do accept this closing, it seems best to confront it in those terms.

¹⁶ *Tyrannus* 635-36. Jocasta: . . . Have you no sense of shame? The land is plague-stricken and you pursue private quarrels.

Tyrannus 665-68. Chorus: My heart is racked with pain for the dying land of Thebes—must you add new sorrows of your own making to those we already have? (Tr. B. Knox.)

¹⁷ Knox (above, note 2) 10 ff., 18. Four times during the course of the investigation Oedipus is either not encouraged to investigate further or is urged outright to drop the matter. The fact that his so doing may cause the plague to continue never seems to bother anyone. It is Oedipus himself who first decides to consult Delphi, after the priest begs him to act on the city's behalf and without offering any advice as to how he is to proceed. For an excellent discussion on Oedipus' insistence in ascertaining the truth, see Knox, Ch. 1, "The Hero." It is Oedipus' impatience to find out the truth which makes him so angry a man, for his outbursts are directed entirely against those who would keep the truth from him. While it is reasonable to suppose that a man of quieter temperament might have persisted as much in arriving at the truth and might also have accepted the outcome more philosophically, we must bear in mind that Sophocles was not writing a play about a philosopher or a man of such temperament; he was writing about a man of *action in action*, which is the essence of the Greek word "drama," exactly as Aristotle also understood the term "praxis." G. Else (above, note 9) 69-73. Only such a man of action has the kind of feeling which could drive him to the self-blinding, the moment of truth of the drama. Therefore, I could not agree less with hybristic interpretations of Oedipus' behavior, such as Bowra's, above, note 3, page 201. According to him the hero lives in an "illusory world" because of his human temper. In his ignorance or passion Oedipus breaks the laws of the gods because his sense of his own importance takes the form of overconfidence. But such an attitude reflects better an inheritance of Christian humility.

illustration of a religious platitude, but it is also a very effective dramatic device on its own, serving to start the events of real importance on their necessary course.

The function of the plague appears to be more dramaturgical than religious, for Sophocles seems to imply that Athens of the fifth century no longer actually believes that plagues are the natural, automatic concomitants of taboo transgression. Such a decline in belief, however, posed a very crucial religious problem; for if primitive sanctions are no longer held to, then there would seem to be no agency to exact sanctions against those who threaten the social order by clandestine transgressions. While any inclination toward patricide can normally be kept under control simply because the outcome is usually detectable, how are the ties of kindred blood—still felt to be very sacred among the Greeks—to be protected against secret incestuous defilement?

It is Sophocles, and apparently also Aeschylus, who point to a solution by having Oedipus take an extraordinarily individual attitude toward his part in the taboo transgression, and thus denote a significant cultural change. In the *Tyrannus* Oedipus imposes upon himself the maximum penalties for taboo transgression: he would repudiate all rights of kingship, family, everything, and banish himself beyond the Theban boundaries, presumably taking with him the pollution infecting the community.¹⁸ It is significant that these sanctions which are so integral to the Sophoclean ethic were not imposed upon Oedipus by the community, but by the protagonist himself. These sanctions, moreover, do not occur in earlier literary references, either in Homer or even in Hesiod. In both these ancient poets Oedipus continued to rule as king until his death in Thebes and, in fact, mention is made in several passages of his funeral at that place.¹⁹ In one passage from the *Erga* of Hesiod there is reference to the fact that the demi-gods had perished, "fighting for the flocks of Oedipus," which would imply that he was still king and not blinded. It is only in the *Odyssey*, however, that we have some indication that Oedipus at least suffered somewhat for his unhappy deeds:

¹⁸ By his acts, the cursing and the blinding, Oedipus repudiates his relationship with his kin and society, just as they had rejected him by making him an outcast as an infant. M. Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion* (Cambridge 1959) 9. See also note 45 below.

¹⁹ *Il.* 23.679. Hesiod, *Erga* 162; *Cat.* 24. 99a, 99. See also Rosenmeyer (above, note 1) 94, note 9 on the exile as Sophocles' invention. Robert (above, note 7) 113.

"when he had slain his own father, and wedded her [Epicaste-Jocasta] *straightway* the gods made these things known among men. Howbeit he abode a lord of the Cadmeians in lovely Thebes, suffering woes through the baneful counsels of the gods, but she hanged herself—but for him she left behind many [woes] even all that the Avengers [Erinyes] of a mother bring to pass."²⁰

It is of special interest to note that in this passage, while there is specific reference to the pursuit of Oedipus by his mother's Furies, no mention is made of penalties incurred for the killing of the father. This might very possibly indicate that such transgressions against the father did not as yet incur the degree of social condemnation that they did in the fifth century. There is more than one indication that in progressing from the darker ages of the eighth century toward the more developed social and ethical concepts of the fifth, Greek attitudes toward acts such as Oedipus' became more severe, so that in the dramas Oedipus came to feel at least as deep concern toward his father as toward his mother. Even in an extant bit of the *Thebais*, one of the minor epics of the post-Homeric Cycle, Oedipus is represented as reigning king of Thebes, seated at a banquet with his full-grown sons and still in possession of his sight.²¹ Insofar as can be ascertained, then, in the extant literature up to Aeschylus, society did not treat Oedipus as an offender who needed punishment. Nor did he himself take any action against himself, although it is true that he was not untroubled by his acts, since he was plagued by the Furies of Jocasta.

Such an attitude of social tolerance is characteristic of societies of the kind described by Meyer Fortes in his Frazer Classical Lecture, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*. Fortes reports of societies, such as the Tallensi, which believe that misfortunes of the kind Oedipus experienced emanate in the last resort from

²⁰ *Od.* 11.271–80: "And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicaste, who wrought a monstrous deed in ignorance of mind, in that she wedded her own son, and he, when he had slain his own father, wedded her . . . and straightway the gods made these things known among men. [N.B. How quickly old-time retribution moved, not waiting for dramatic effects.] Howbeit he abode as lord of the Cadmaeans in lovely Thebes, suffering woes through the baneful counsels of the gods, but she went down to the house of Hades, the strong warder. She made fast a noose on high from a lofty beam, overpowered by her sorrows, but for him she left behind woes full many, even all that the Avengers [Erinyes] of a mother bring to pass" (Loeb). See Robert (above, note 7) 112 ff.

²¹ Athenaeus 11.465E-F. Robert (above, note 7) 169 ff.

Prenatal Destiny—or, as the Greeks would have it, from a man's daemon.²² Normally the victim in such a cultural climate can accept the ills in his life without feeling morbidly guilty or having guilt fixed on him by legal or religious sanctions.²³ And in the Greek world such tolerant attitudes seem to have been maintained toward Oedipus until the time of Aeschylus, who seems to have been the first to have Oedipus protest against the mold and employ independent action for his offenses. It is the Aeschylean Oedipus who first blinds himself,²⁴ an unprecedented individual

²² Fortes (above, note 18) 76 ff., 50 has much to say in regard to the filio-parental relationship as the social basis for the development of the concept of Prenatal Destiny within a culture. From his description one cannot help but note the number of parallels between this concept and the various meanings of the word "daemon" as given in *LSJ*. For excellent discussions, see J. Sheppard, *The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles* (Cambridge 1920) xxxiv-xl and, more recently, G. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 283 ff. Bowra (above, note 3, 180–81) has defined the term "daemon" best of all and, moreover, in terms of Oedipus' own personal daemon: "In a theological conception of this kind too much precision is hardly to be expected. But the daemon works on and through Oedipus and has a definite enough character. It is almost his individual destiny, his accompanying spirit, the power which arranges his life for him. Such an idea may have been familiar in the fifth century, as it certainly was in the fourth when Plato refers to 'each man's spirit which has taken possession of him in life' (*Phaedo* 107D), and anticipates some lines of Menander [Fr. 550]: 'A spirit [daemon] stands at each man's side at birth / To guide him through the mysteries of his life.' The orator Lysias had something of the same kind in mind when he spoke of 'the spirit who is master of our destiny' [Epitaph. 78] and that this was a fairly common view may be deduced from Socrates' denial of it in the *Republic* [617E], where his statement 'a spirit shall not choose you but you shall choose a spirit' is surely unexpected and unusual." It is at this point, I would think, that modern, autonomous man begins. See below, note 32.

²³ Fortes reports in the field (above, note 18, page 60) what Knox (above, note 2, page 43) also perceived from the *Tyrannus*, that actually "the prophecy [or, substitute 'Prenatal Destiny' here] is the only thing that makes the discovery of the truth bearable, not only for us but for Oedipus himself"; page 42: "An Oedipus who discovered he had done all these things just as a series of coincidences would be a spectacle too horrible to contemplate—a monstrous thing... The hero's discovery of his own unspeakable pollution is made tolerable only because it is somehow connected with the Gods." It would seem to me that this is one of the reasons why Oedipus keeps insisting again and again that the gods made him do it, for he needs the psychic reassurance of this insistence.

²⁴ Aeschylus, *Seven* 780–84. On the "double ill," Letters (above, note 2) 203 says, "i.e. Oedipus blinded himself and cursed his sons." In the *Frogs* (1182 ff.) of Aristophanes this is also intimated in Aeschylus' remark (1193): "Still young he [Oedipus] married an ancient crone [*sic*], and her his mother too. Then scratched out both his eyes." One cannot help wondering at this point, of course, whether the Aeschylean Oedipus actually appeared on stage as blinded, or whether he was merely reported in this condition. What could have been the difference, one wonders, between the Aeschylean version and the Sophoclean? Was Sophocles, after all, perhaps not so original in his version? What is for us the most stunning of all Greek,

action which signifies that the offender is loading himself with the enormous burden of shame and horror which he feels at his involvement, even though he and everyone else knows that he is not guilty.²⁵ Even from the little evidence we have regarding his tetralogy on the Oedipus theme, Aeschylus apparently regarded the protagonist as no less foredoomed than Achilles, who also has to fulfill a gloomy fate.²⁶ Yet, even though his Oedipus has very little responsibility in the matter of his fate, Aeschylus compels him to assume some feeling of horror at his personal involvement in it. Had Oedipus merely conformed and mechanically fulfilled that oracle, then there would have been no drama. When he expresses individual shame by his self-blinding, then his legend becomes transformed into drama; and similarly, when Achilles flouts custom and society by refusing the return of Briseis and all recompense for her, then the individual epic emerges from the stock of tales of customary behavior.

But Aeschylus, though a profound genius of the dramatic craft for its own sake, also regarded the genre as the perfect and beautiful vehicle for social ideas and reforms. In this respect the *avant-garde* Sophocles was his true heir, for he, too, grasped the meaning and possibilities of the unprimitive, unmechanical behavior of the Aeschylean Oedipus and explored these still further. His Oedipus is even more consumed by shame and revulsion, to the point where he wants only to be put to death:

Why did'st thou harbor me, Cithaeron, why
Did'st thou not take and slay me?²⁷

if not *all*, plays may have comprised for the Greeks of Sophocles' day material all too familiar and may have been the reason why he failed to receive a prize for the *Tyrannus*, even though it was structurally the masterpiece that Aristotle recognized it to be. On the other hand, it is most unlikely that a genius such as his would have merely restated the Aeschylean ideas and presentation. It is possible that Aeschylus emphasized the notion of Prenatal Destiny rather than the blinding, as indeed the *Frogs* seem to suggest (1182 ff.): Aeschylus speaks: "... A most unhappy man [Oedipus], / Who, not yet born nor yet conceived, Apollo / Foretold would be his father's murderer." Sophocles, for reasons stated below, seems to have developed further the idea that Oedipus must rise *above* the destiny he is to fulfill.

²⁵ For the basic study on shame and guilt cultures in general, see R. Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston 1946) Ch. 10, "The Dilemma of Virtue." For the Greeks specifically, E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston 1946) Ch. 2, "From Shame-Culture to Guilt-Culture." Professor David Sachs has been kind enough to discuss with me some of his ideas, etymological and other, on the Greek words *αἰδώς* and *αἰσχύνη*.

²⁶ See above, note 24.

²⁷ *Tyr.* 1391-92.

and,

O, I adjure you, hide me anywhere,
Far from this land, or slay me straight or cast me
Down to the depths of ocean out of sight!²⁸

Even years later at Colonus, Oedipus' response is as poignant as on that unforgettable day of recognition:

that very day
When in the tempest of my soul I craved
Death, even death by stoning, none appeared
To further that wild longing.²⁹

No man could bear a greater load of shame than the Sophoclean Oedipus, a feeling which the dramatist presses to the uttermost, though it is imperative to reiterate that the feeling of shame is to be distinguished from that of guilt. Yet, notwithstanding, Oedipus wishes for death by stoning, a common form of punishment for criminals. Elsewhere he exclaims, "...against those two [his parents] I have committed acts too bad for hanging,"³⁰ again inviting a form of death exacted of deliberate offenders. But, regardless of his emotional reaction, Oedipus is not guilty, as he himself fully recognizes; nor does anyone in the *Tyrannus* ever accuse him of being guilty—that is, a deliberate offender—except perhaps the translators. It is remarkable that most of the translators do the vilifying on this score, in using terms like "guilt," "crime," "sin," and "murder" where there is no justification in the text.³¹ But, although not guilty and knowing that

²⁸ *Tyr.* 1410–11.

²⁹ *Col.* 433 ff.

³⁰ *Tyr.* 1373 ff.

³¹ For example, the lines quoted (above, note 30) are rendered by Storr in the Loeb ed.: "...since against the twain, / I *sinned*, a *sin* no gallows could *atone*." See also his translation of *Col.* 539 ff.:

Ch. You have suffered.

Oed. Intolerable woe.

Ch. And sinned.

Oed. I sinned not.

The "sinned" is for *ereksa*, from the root *rezo*: 1. to do, act, deal; 2. in special senses, perform something such as sacrifices. To translate *ereksa*, therefore, even in its secondary, quasi-religious sense, as "sin," is to extend a Judaeo-Christian meaning to the verb which the original never had. The same violation of the noun *hamartia* as "sin" occurs time and again, even though it means literally "a missing of the mark," as in a shooting contest. In this same scene from the *Tyrannus*, in reference to the slaying of Laius, the chorus also says to Oedipus, *ekanes*, "you did it," which the translator

he is not, Oedipus still feels extreme unworthiness, an attitude which is notably different from the feelings of a man who feels he is fulfilling an oracle. He feels, perhaps, like a modern man who inadvertently strikes with his car a child that has darted in front of it: he is not legally or morally responsible, but his horror and self-loathing are unexpungeable. It is this attitude which Aeschylus and Sophocles think Oedipus owes to society: to reveal in an external and public way the terrible internal feelings a man *ought* to have who is involved in any way in a taboo transgression with blood kin. And so their Oedipus deliberately blinds himself.

In the Sophoclean play, which we have complete, the chorus cannot comprehend the king's action. Twice they ask him what daemon made him do it, never imagining that he himself devised and executed this action.³² The first time Oedipus is still too stunned to answer coherently; but when they repeat the question, he answers:³³

Apollo, friends, Apollo he it was
That brought these ills to pass;
But mine own hand struck the blow—
No one [did it] but hapless I.

ἔπαισε δ' αὐτόχειρ νιν οὐ-
τις ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τλάμων.

takes it upon himself to render as "you murdered." Similarly in *Tyr.* 414 one translator has Oedipus say, "I myself must bear the load of *guilt*," for "kaka," "evils, troubles." The only one who accuses Oedipus of being a *φονεὺς πατρός*, literally, "a shedder of his father's blood," is Oedipus himself (*Tyr.* 1357), which is a natural accusation under the circumstances.

³² *Tyr.* 1300; 1328. It is as if they were asking him what daemon, as Prenatal Destiny, made him do it. See above, note 22 *passim*, but especially *LSJ*, s.v. *δαίμων*, 2, of daemon as the "power controlling the destiny of individuals." Professor Nock has raised a real question on this point, arguing that the chorus does not ask specifically whether it was Oedipus' *own* daemon which is responsible, but simply *what* daemon. Nock is also of the opinion that "daemon" here is employed according to the normal usage and is equivalent to *theos*, and he cites *Hippolytus* 141, in which the chorus similarly asks Phaedra what deity, "Pan etc." is responsible for her unhappy state of mind. In answer I refer again to note 22 above and Bowra's powerful definition of *daemon*. Because one cannot be incontrovertibly precise on this issue, there is, then, a very real possibility that the daemon, at times, was also conceived of as a Prenatal Destiny. In the case of Oedipus there seems to be more possibility than not, for in answer to the chorus he replies that it was Apollo that brought these things to pass. And indeed Apollo had shaped his destiny even before his birth. But then Oedipus denies his god and daemon when he states that it was his own hand that struck the blow that blinded. His stand of independence here presages Socrates' own attitude on the daemon (*Rep.* 617E): "A daemon shall not choose you, but you shall choose a daemon." See also Pohlenz (above, note 1) 223.

³³ *Tyr.* 1329 ff.

This assertion is the climax of the play. The shocking sight of Oedipus, self-blinded and reeling from the palace, is an affirmation of personal engagement of a kind that a conventional scapegoat could never have embodied. Oedipus' independent action implies that the ethos behind the taboo must now begin to be imposed *within* the individual. And when innocent of evil intent, one must, upon involvement in a taboo situation, acknowledge a willingness to recognize and support that ethos. By his answer Oedipus challenges the basic belief that the individual can hold either his primitive daemon, his Prenatal Destiny, completely responsible, or even the later and more impersonal power of the Olympians. And in foregoing the deep comfort that attends total belief in Destiny and oracles, Oedipus instead sows the seeds of guilt-feeling which in later times will come to double fruition: first, in Judaeo-Christian times, in a strong personal sense of guilt and sin; and, in more recent times, in neurotic guilt as modern man understands the term. Curiously, as we have seen, Oedipus' emotional reactions seem closer to those of modern neurotic guilt, perhaps precisely because his reactions did not arise from the pressures of a dominant religious ethic with overriding convictions about sin. In any case, the οὔτις ἄλλ' ἐγὼ τλάμων of Oedipus signals that a great break has been made with the primitive tradition of the Greeks. Yet the break is not an abandonment of a tradition but the conversion necessary for strengthening it.

Oedipus' own reaction becomes clearer, however, if we examine further the significance of the blinding. In both the Aeschylean and Sophoclean accounts, approximately the same personal reason is given by Oedipus: he is too ashamed to look upon the members of his family, both the living and the dead.³⁴ There is also the possibility offered by Rose, based on his reading of Hyginus 242, that "after such horrible, though unintentional crimes he was unworthy 'to see the light,' and so should have died."³⁵ These feelings are understandable enough; but in the case of both ancient writers there are, however, cultural and

³⁴ *Tyr.* 822 ff., 1371 ff. Aeschylus, *Seven* 778 ff.: "When, unhappy one, he came to know his accursed marriage, impatient of his woe, with maddened soul he worked a double ill." An interpretation of shame can surely be validly inferred from these lines of Aeschylus.

³⁵ H. J. Rose, "Commentary on Surviving Plays of Aeschylus," *Verhandelingen d. Kon. Nederlandse Akad. u. Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkund* 64, No. 1 (1957) 227: *Seven* 783.

psychological implications to the blinding of "profound significance" [Linforth] to the contemporary audience. In the first place, it has implications as primitive as the concept of the scapegoat, since the use of blood to cleanse pollution is frequently regarded among primitive peoples as more effective than even the most sacred water.³⁶ For instance, a messenger in the *Tyrannus* states, "Not Ister, nor all Phasis' flood, I think, could wash away the blood-stains from this house."³⁷ Early in that play Creon also reported from the oracle that expiation should be by "banishment *or* the shedding of blood for blood."³⁸ Oedipus, of course, chose both means. We are reminded, too, of Aristotle's statement, as Professor Else reads the passage, that events pitiable and fearful should be purified by events of a like kind and by persons bound by natural ties of kinship—and here the son seeks expiation for patricide by gouging his eyes, literally "blood for blood."³⁹ And how it flowed from Oedipus' eyes! "...not oozing drop by drop, But one black gory downpour, thick as hail."⁴⁰ Furthermore, shedding of blood is commonly a primitive form of mourning, a piacular sacrifice for the dead, in which deliberately self-inflicted scratches and even wounds, and also hair-cutting or tearing, are used as libations for the dead.⁴¹

But there are other implications to the blinding which signify how profound are Oedipus' feelings of shame. In gouging his eyes Oedipus employs a form of punishment, by facial mutilation, which was used on other sexual offenders. The centaur, Eurytion, was similarly punished for the seizure of the Lapith women,⁴²

³⁶ H. Webster, (above, note 12); see esp. Ch. 1, page 37. Durkheim (above, note 5) 394.

³⁷ *Tyr.* 1227-31.

³⁸ *Tyr.* 100-1;

ἀνδρηλατοῦντας, ἢ φόνῳ φόνον πάλιν
λύοντας, ὡς τόδ' αἶμα χεϊμάζον πόλιν.

See Webster (above, note 12) 37 for purificatory rites by means of physical purgation, which include aspersion and ablution with water and sometimes blood.

³⁹ Else (above, note 4) 227 ff., 411, 423 ff. Aelian, *NA* 3.47, condemns Oedipus for the blinding and for thus attempting to cure one "evil" by another. See also Bowra (above, note 3) 177.

⁴⁰ *Tyr.* 1276 ff.

⁴¹ See Durkheim (above, note 5) 137, 394, 402, note 2. For a vivid example of blood and haircutting as signs of mourning among the Greeks, see Eur. *El.* 960 ff.

⁴² *Od.* 21.292 ff. In this passage Eurytion has his ears and nostrils shorn off. In this same passage and connotation, note also how the suitors of Penelope, her would-be lovers, similarly threaten Odysseus should he be mad enough to win the shooting match. See also *Od.* 21.87, also 18.87, 118 where Antinous threatens Irus

and Tiresias was blinded by Athena for observing her at her bath.⁴³ These suggestions become clearer when we recall that Euripides in his drama had Oedipus blinded by Laius' servant, an act which would also imply that they regarded Oedipus as guilty.⁴⁴ It is Sophocles, with greater penetration, who insists that Oedipus is not morally guilty. This is clear in the *Tyrannus* and most emphatic in the *Colonus*. Yet his shame is so great that he feels compelled to externalize his internal torment. "I myself must bear the load of ills [*kaka*] that no one but I can bear," he says.⁴⁵

This statement reflects better than any other in the play an ethos appropriate—for better or for worse—to a mature civilization. Yet, to externalize that ethos by the act of blinding, both Aeschylus and Sophocles chose to reach into a singularly primitive level of punishment. They seem deliberately to have chosen to reinforce the new ethos by an old and, no doubt, outmoded practice, by recourse to an old-fashioned severity, as it were.

with facial mutilation, should he prove the lesser man in his boxing match with Odysseus. In a similar fashion Melanthius was punished, along with the handmaids of Odysseus who had been the wanton lovers of Penelope's idle suitors (22.475).

⁴³ That Tiresias offended the goddess by observing her at her bath is paralleled by the legend of the hunter Actaeon, who observed Artemis under similar circumstances and was changed by her to a deer that was torn to death by his hounds which she set upon him. There are two legends accounting for the blinding of Tiresias, both of which significantly come to the same thing. (1) Callimachus in the third century B.C., *Hym.* 5.74 ff.: Tiresias saw Athena bathing, but she did not kill him because his mother was her friend. She blinded him, however, and by way of compensation gave him the gift of prophecy. (2) Hyginus, *Fab.*, in the second century A.D., spins a more elaborate version: one day Teiresias saw snakes coupling and struck them with his stick, at which he became a woman; later he was again turned into a man. On being asked by Zeus and Hera to settle the dispute as to which sex had more pleasure in love, he replied that the female by far. Hera in anger blinded him, but Zeus gave him long life and prophecy by way of recompense. On the relationship between the eyes and sexual fears in modern times, see R. Lindner, *Rebel Without a Cause* (New York 1944) *passim*, and the summary, 282–83.

⁴⁴ Euripides, Fr. 541 (Nauck²) from the *Oedipus*: "We, hurling the son of Polybus to the ground / Opened up his eyes and blotted out his eyeballs." Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 61: ἐν δὲ τῷ Οἰδίποδι οἱ Λαίου θεράποντες ἐτύφλωσαν αὐτόν. But note in the Euripidean *Oedipus*, at least at that point in the play, the protagonist was known only as the slayer of Laius and the possessor of his wife, for which crimes he is being mutilated. He is not known as Laius' son, at least not yet, since he is still described as the son of Polybus. See also L. Deubner, "Oedipus Probleme," *Abh. preuss. Akad. d. Wiss., Philos.-hist. Kl.* (1942) 19 ff.

⁴⁵ *Tyr.* 1414. See also below, note 46. In all this discussion on Oedipus' self-mutilation, mention should at least be made that anthropologists today regard such apparently irrational mutilations in the context of an overt or suppressed conflict between successive generations.

It also must have been in this same spirit of religious synthesis that Sophocles utilized the device of the plague.

But Sophocles went even further in using means associated with popular, primitive belief and practice in order to reinforce his new concept of man's personal involvement with his destiny. He chose, at the end of the *Tyrannus*, to have his Oedipus prefer to depart into exile, again self-imposed, and as a scapegoat, loaded not only with the primitive pollution of old but with a new sense of horror. Since the exile, however, is a voluntary one, imposed as a great gesture of self-recognition and responsibility, a gesture powerfully willed and comprehended, Oedipus remains indestructible. He recognizes, as he states, that he has been saved for some further awesome destiny.⁴⁶ It may be the end of the *Tyrannus* but not the end of Oedipus.⁴⁷

A generation later, in reopening the theme of Oedipus in the *Colonus*, Sophocles reveals the progress he had made in breaking down further the more mechanical aspects of taboo retribution, while at the same time keeping this in effective harmony with contemporary concepts of jurisprudence. Thus, instead of following through with the primitive exile, Oedipus stays in retreat.⁴⁸ There, undistracted because of his blindness, he comes to understand fully his moral guiltlessness, though this time in legal terms.⁴⁹ In consequence his attitude becomes one of great defi-

⁴⁶ *Tyr.* 1455 ff. I prefer to read the δεινὴν κακῶν of 1457 not as "dreadful evil" but as "strange doom," as Jebb translates it, or as "powerful trouble," using *kakos* in the sense of "ills, troubles" inflicted upon one. This is what Ismene implies by "ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν" in wanting to share Antigone's doom with her. Surely she would not wish to share these *kaka* if they implied "evil" or "wicked actions" perpetrated by Antigone. *Soph. Ant.* 540.

⁴⁷ Knox (above, note 2) 173 ff. is very good on this point: "The swiftness and force of Oedipus' recovery from the shock of self-recognition can be gauged from the fact that in the very last lines of the play, Oedipus has to be reminded of his reversal by Creon." As has been noted, the *Tyrannus* is an incomplete play, with the problem left in "mid-air," as Letters says (above, note 4, 285). Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*² (New York 1954) 418 ff., is also very illuminating on this point.

⁴⁸ Though not writing of Oedipus, Durkheim's comments on the meaning of retreat would apply admirably to the hero: retreat, even if not exile, would serve to elevate the religious tone of the individual. He has purified and sanctified himself by the very act of detaching himself from the base matters that debased his nature; he is not the same afterwards as he was before.

⁴⁹ Oedipus had always been wise, as a matter of his own intelligence. There is not much reference on his own part to his intelligence as god-given. The chorus states early in the *Tyrannus* (38-39) that he was god-inspired in answering the sphinx. But in contrast to the conventional attitude of the chorus, Oedipus flatly states that

ance and insistence.⁵⁰ But, we may ask, if his guiltlessness had always been taken for granted, why should a dramatist as acute as Sophocles have championed the point so far, if it were either hackneyed or unnecessary? There must be some fresh and daring innovation that he is trying to establish before his Athenian audience. Is he claiming justifiable homicide, that a man openly attacked has the right to defend himself? In part, no doubt. But as has been pointed out, this juridical opinion had been on the Athenian statute books since Draconian times and could by now hardly have been a fresh theme for social drama.⁵¹ What is new is the *special kind* of justifiable homicide that Sophocles is pleading.⁵² Note that Oedipus says specifically on three occasions that he killed a man in self-defense whom he did not realize was his father. On one of these occasions he also says, "Yet am I then / A villain born because in self-defense, / Stricken, I struck the striker back again? *Even had I known*, no villainy 'twould prove."⁵³ And the third time Oedipus states that *even* his father, if he could return to life "would not dissent," that is, would not blame Oedipus.⁵⁴ What Sophocles is insistently

he answered the sphinx by his own intelligence, γνῶμη (398). He makes this assertion in anger against Tiresias; but it is what he has truly believed all the time, and the anger only served to release the truth. In the *Colonus* there is only a passing reference by Oedipus to his oracular wisdom as god-given, in a statement to Creon in which he claims to hearken (κλύω) to the wisest of the gods, Phoebus and Zeus. In the opening of the *Colonus* Oedipus, in contrast to his physical weaknesses, seems to display an intelligence even more powerful and independent than ever, as though he had thrived in his blindness and retreat, undistracted by the outer, physical world.

⁵⁰ Rosenmeyer (above, note 2) 95 notes the striking change in Oedipus, in his attitude toward Apollo: In the *Tyrannus* Oedipus is submissive and abject; in the *Colonus* he is "in a state of confident fellowship with Apollo."

⁵¹ Rosenmeyer (above, note 2) 96-97.

⁵² This point raises the old question broached by Verrall in his *Eumenides* (London 1908) xlii ff., as to whether Greek drama can be anything but a doubtful authority on law and legal history. But, as Rosenmeyer astutely recognizes (above, note 2, 96-97, 102, and note 42): "No tragedy could have been certain of its appeal to the emotions of the audience unless its subject and its *Problemstellung* were also valid in terms of the legal practices of the day." Cf. R. Bonner and G. Smith, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle* (Chicago 1930) 1.128. On the slaying of Laius by Oedipus, Rosenmeyer states specifically: "But even the most radical sophist would have flinched from openly and seriously suggesting that the killer of his father might disavow any guilt whatever." On the slaying of the father, see Else (above, note 4) 353. It has been pointed out that kin-murder was probably one of the last offenses to be transferred from the authority of the family to the jurisdiction of the state. K. Latte, "Beiträge zum griechischen Strafrecht," *Hermes* 66 (1931) 141-42.

⁵³ *Col.* 269 ff.; also 546 ff.

⁵⁴ *Col.* 999.

pleading is that a man not be regarded as guilty who kills *even* his father in self-defense.⁵⁵ Therefore, under these special conditions of justifiable homicide, patricide specifically, even the ghost of the slain father would forgive and not demand retribution. The Furies need not pursue him and, in fact, as the token of their consent to this extenuation of taboo transgression, they allow Oedipus to be enshrined in their own sacred grove of Colonus.⁵⁶ They welcome him, however, not as the Furies, but as the Eumenides, the benign powers of Aeschylean conversion.⁵⁷

Yet, though Sophocles advocated, and possibly innovated, this special plea in the case of patricide, his religious temperament and or psychological understanding does not seem to have regarded the offender's involvement dissolved merely by legalistic acquittal, as in ordinary cases of justifiable homicide. Such an attitude of psychological absolution must not be encouraged in cases involving the shedding of sacred, familial blood. And so he keeps his hero tormented with horror to the very end, exclaiming when reminded of the incest by the chorus: "Ah me, it is death to hear this!"⁵⁸ And he demonstrates this self-revulsion in one magnificent gesture: even when the ancient primitive rites of purification are officially performed after everyone is convinced of his moral and legal innocence, still Oedipus will not let Theseus touch his hand to seal his absolution. He still feels ashamed, tainted even now, not with the miasma of pollution but with the blush of unexpungeable shame:⁵⁹

Give me thy hand, O Prince, that I may touch it,
And if that is right (*εἰ θέμις*), kiss thy cheek.
What say I? Can I wish that thou should'st touch
One fallen like me to utter wretchedness,
Corrupt and tainted with ills?
Oh no, I would not let thee if thou would's't.

⁵⁵ Linforth (above, note 1) 105. Letters (above, note 2) 218-19.

⁵⁶ Rosenmayer (above, note 1) 99 ff., among others, is of the opinion that prior to the *Colonus* Oedipus had no cult as such at Colonus, and that the Athenians responded to the play by establishing the cult.

⁵⁷ Linforth (above, note 1) 92 ff. Adams (above, note 2) 138. Letters (above, note 2) 299 ff. L. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults* (Oxford 1921) 332 ff.

⁵⁸ *Col.* 529.

⁵⁹ *Col.* 1130 ff. As Linforth carefully notes (above, note 1, 107-9), the stain is not that of pollution any longer. The unwillingness of Oedipus to touch Theseus becomes especially significant, if we view the Athenian king as Bowra does (above, note 3, 11) as the human representative of justice and right.

Thus the immemorial prohibitions adhering to familial behavior and blood relationships are kept more inviolate than ever. Not only are they protected by the external, legal sanctions of society; they are finally made subject by Sophocles in his figure of Oedipus to the most severe sanctions of all, to feelings of profound individual engagement, feelings for which Oedipus was accorded their contemporary form of beatification in his mystic death and burial.⁶⁰ Those problems involving the slaying of blood-kin, which had been first stated by Aeschylus in the transformation of the Furies in his *Oresteia*, are finally resolved by Sophocles in the grove of the Eumenides at Colonus. But where in that earlier work the protagonist was supported and directed

⁶⁰ The heroization of Oedipus in the *Colonus* takes on special significance, of course, when one recalls that much earlier, in Ismene's speech to her sister in the *Antigone* 50-51, Sophocles held so different a view: "Think how our father died, hated and disgraced." Sophocles deliberately changed his point of view because he had something of very special import to demonstrate by this change. Much has been written about the meaning of this heroization of Oedipus, but I do not quite see him emerging as a "near-daemon," who "merges with the Furies." Rosenmeyer (above, note 1) 106-7. See also Farnell (above, note 57) 332 ff. Letters (above, note 2) 300 ff. Linforth (above, note 1) 110, 115 ff., following Rohde, *Psyche* 2.244, points out that Oedipus is not promised a "state of bliss" after death. "At most," says Linforth (97 ff.), "his will be a posthumous distinction among the living and the belief that he or his corpse or his bones or other relics of him have power for good or evil." He is to be a "powerful talisman" for the defense of Athens (*Col.* 576-82, 1518 ff.). Thebes will be defeated by the Athenians at his grave, and "his cold corpse, asleep in the ground, will drink their hot blood" (*Col.* 605 ff.). Bowra (above, note 3) 320 ff. As Professor Nock stated it: "There is no thought of reward to Oedipus. If anyone is rewarded, it is the Athenians who because of their kindness get the magic of his body." But would not anyone receiving such "magic of the body" in effect be receiving extraordinary honors, a kind of contemporary posthumous reward? Certainly it would seem as if Oedipus achieved a condition of primitive power, which arises, I would hazard, because Oedipus has *survived* two taboos. Perhaps, lurking behind all that has been said on the face of this paper, there is another notion which deserves at least a footnote: there is somehow bound up in Oedipus' survival of his taboo violations the kind of experience noted among a variety of cultures, ancient Egyptian, the Hawaiians among the Polynesian peoples, ancient Peruvians, the Thonga of Africa, to name the foremost that come to mind. Among these peoples, when someone of importance, a king, a chief or great hunter or sorcerer, has incestuous relations with one of his immediate family, then extreme sanctity and invulnerability attaches to his person, and he can perform superior feats. An experience which would be enough to destroy an ordinary individual, in the case of such cultural figures, becomes a source of extraordinary power. It is in that sense, it would seem to me, that Oedipus also has power. Lévy-Bruhl, (above, note 12) 213-18. E. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe* (Neuchâtel 1912) 242-46. Radcliffe-Brown (above, note 10) 17. See also G. Méautis, "L'Oedipe à Colone et le culte des héros," *Univ. de Neuchâtel, Recueil de travaux publiés par la Faculté des Lettres*, Fasc. 19 (1940), 55 ff.

step by step by Olympian deities, Oedipus, with little more than the mixed blessing of Apollo, achieves his own wisdom. He demonstrates it by a new, individual thought and action toward religious beliefs, both primitive and Olympian. The *Colonus* is, therefore, a cultural stage beyond the *Eumenides*. It proves how an intelligent, ethical, and courageous man can not only transcend his fated misdeeds, but help society profit by the knowledge he has gained from his terrible destiny. To show this was the purpose of Greek drama.⁶¹

⁶¹ It is not enough to regard the Oedipus story as merely the Greek version of the story of Job: that the gods wished to make an example of Oedipus to show how a man may fall who is as pious, wise and noble as Oedipus. While this may, in part, be true, and is necessary background for the conditions of his tragedy, it is what Oedipus *actively does* with these conditions which goes far beyond the story of Job, and in a way that is truly Greek.