

# Gnomology and Criticism

*William Slater*

WE PROBABLY UNDERESTIMATE the moral and logical force which the Greeks reposed in their maxims, which they quoted so lovingly in their poetry, and which bore students today.<sup>1</sup> Certainly there is very little easily obtainable scholarship on the subject. Some of this wisdom literature was attributed to individuals such as Hesiod, Chiron, Admetus, Solon, others of the Seven Wise Men, and handed down, Polonius-style, by schoolmasters, inscribed and nailed up in temples and schools and gymnasia. There is a long tradition also of course of gnomologies,<sup>2</sup> and collections of such popular maxims, as this wisdom was systematized, and indeed it was common for ancient writers to collect such moralizing parallels, from the *sententiae* of Menander or Laberius, whence

<sup>1</sup> Modern attitudes range from the mild—e.g. W. Allan, *Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy* (Oxford 2000) 137, “As Lloyd observes, Menelaos’ speech ‘is characterized by clichés, proverbs, and tricks of style’”—to the extreme, e.g. H. M. Roisman, *Nothing is as it seems* (Lanham 1999) 48, referring to the Nurse’s speech at *Hipp.* 189–197, “this string of mindless clichés.”

<sup>2</sup> J. Barns, “A New Gnomologicum: with Some Remarks on Gnostic Anthologies,” *CQ* N.S. 1 (1950) 126–137, 2 (1951) 1–19. K. Horna, “Gnome, Gnomendichtung, Gnomologium (Horna),” *RE Suppl.* 6 (1935) 74–87, from which the examples that follow are drawn. G.-J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Muthoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Literature* (Leiden 1997), gives a fine collection with bibliography of related wisdom. M. Tziatzi-Papagianni, *Die Sprüche der Sieben Weisen* (Stuttgart/Leipzig 1994), is a useful collection with testimonia. Much recent bibliography with a theoretical slant can be found in J. Russo, “Prose Genres for the Performance of Traditional Wisdom in Ancient Greece,” in L. Edmunds and R. Wallace, edd., *Poet, Public, and Performance in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore/London 1997) 49–64; and A. Lardinois, *CP* 92 (1997) 213–234 (reference thanks to Michael Lloyd]; I have not seen the latter’s dissertation *Wisdom in Context* (diss.Princeton 1995), or the thesis of Artur Daix, *Les sentences (gnomai) dans la littérature grecque* (diss.Paris 2000), directed by Vidal-Naquet.

they could be formed into anthologies. This is the wisdom of the old Cephalus, and not Plato; and it was largely unquestioned wisdom, even if it did not stand up to rigorous examination and was often contradictory. Systematic morality is something for philosophers not ordinary mortals, and there has accordingly always been an equally strong tradition of caution verging on contempt for unsystematic and tedious moralizing maxims. The attitude of the young men in Plato's *Republic* to Cephalus's citation of a piece of Simonidean wisdom shows as much, and Aristotle notoriously considered that only the vulgar would admire these maxims, which are the forte of old men (*Rh.* 2.21.9 1395a6–7). Trimalchio of course provides an excellent example of such vulgarity (Petron. *Sat.* 55.6), as does Dogberry. But on the other hand the sophists<sup>3</sup> and their tradition regarded apt quotations from poets as a valuable exercise, *περὶ ἐπῶν δεινὸς εἶναι*, and Seneca, philosopher and orator, agreed: “the theatre resounds whenever some sayings are uttered which we recognize publicly, and acknowledge to be true by our common assent.”<sup>4</sup>

Clearly then maxims inspired popular and public approbation and intellectual denigration, but we can nonetheless be sure that Pindar's audience appreciated them as much as Euripides'. Perhaps in modern times the intellectualist attitude has been more apparent in scholarship, and ancient drama is likely to attract commentary about sophists rather than the parallels for some ancient Polonius, even though it is by no means evident that the ordinary citizen of Euripidean Athens cared less for Polonius than about the speculations of sophists, or knew any more about sophists than he could learn from the *Clouds* and such plays. In what follows, I seek, as an example, to trace two

<sup>3</sup> Barns 1951 (*supra* n.2) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 108.8. Already Aristotle (*Rh.* 2.21.15) claims that the hearers are pleased to hear stated in general terms the opinion which they have already especially formed, though he also ascribes this pleasure to the φορτικότητα of the hearers.

pieces of wisdom; first, I attempt to establish the importance of one demonstrable piece of ancient wisdom, and put it in its cultural context,<sup>5</sup> and then I argue that another ancient maxim must have existed, for which we have much less evidence, but which for all we know was every bit as well known.

In *Hippolytus* (695–701) the Nurse responds to Phaedra, who is now aware that the Nurse has betrayed her secret to Hippolytus:

εἰ δ' εὖ γ' ἔπραξα, κάρτ' ἄν ἐν σοφοῖσιν ἦ·  
πρὸς τὰς τύχας γὰρ τὰς φρένας κεκτήμεθα.

The Nurse claims that she can answer the accusations, and the first argument she gives is: “If I had been successful, I would certainly have been considered *sophos*.” This would certainly not get a cheer from any audience, but it deserves a better reception than it gets in Barrett’s famous commentary.<sup>6</sup> One parallel is given, but for the idiom “be among the wise” as equivalent to “be wise.” We know exactly what the Nurse means. What we do not know, because we have not been told, is what its value is, and we do not know whether it is typical of nurses. Or servants? A clever or stupid or cynical remark, or what? We therefore do not know its dramatic value either. Since we are given no parallels, we can make of it what we want, and that happens, because we have been given no guidance as to its value. I mean value in the sense that no remark, without a cultural context, means very much. In short, we need to find a colour for the remark. This is after all drama, and colour,

<sup>5</sup> So J. Mossman, *Wild Justice* (Oxford 1995) 7: “I do think insisting on the cultural context of the play should enable modern readers and audiences to react less naively and less arrogantly towards it.”

<sup>6</sup> W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964), where the comment on this line fills 21 closely written lines, with a footnote of three lines. It has nothing to say about the meaning of the line, which it translates and considers as self-evident. Barrett does say that Euripides “has the habit of introducing sententious digressions in places where they are dramatically irrelevant” (199 on line 197), though I think that one can often disagree about the meaning of “irrelevant” and so about “digression.”

expression, nuance are absolutely everything. In extreme cases, an actor can with a wave of the hand subvert the meaning of the very utterance he makes. Nurses however in tragedy are prone to utter generalizations, as does the nurse at *Andromache* 851: "Why distress yourself in this way? Disasters sent by the gods come to all mortals sooner or later." To which a commentator responds, "Here however, the conventional sentiment rings hollow."<sup>7</sup> Why? Simple people do and did appeal to simple truths, and the hollow ring is audible mostly to the overeducated or the overtheorized ear. Ordinary folk, now and then, think and talk in this way, and they find consolation in what they consider a truth, and which the unsympathetic academic, now and then, considers a platitude.

Bernard Knox's article<sup>8</sup> may be the most cited article on *Hippolytus* and he has this to say of the Nurse (and I have to paraphrase because his discussion is long): She follows no aristocratic code of honour, because she is concerned with *logos*—reason and argument—not with honour. This is not an aristocratic view but a democratic one. She also shows that other trait of the Athenian democracy, flexibility or adaptability, in that she suits herself quickly to new situations. She is so flexible that she has no code of morals. She speaks "in terms that clearly

<sup>7</sup> Allan (*supra* n.1) 246. I am not unaware of such remarks as this, by S. Goldhill, "Character and Action" in Chr. Pelling, ed., *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1990) 100–127, at 106: "However much one needs a sense of 'human intelligibility' or models of the self or of the person to understand a drama, it does not follow that the same criteria that we use to evaluate or discuss real human behaviour and real human beings can be used without question for analyzing 'character' in a text critically." It may be a personal failing, but this kind of thing seems to me critical shadowboxing, for "without question" is not an option any of us have in such issues.

<sup>8</sup> B. M. W. Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," *YCS* 13 (1952) 1–31, often reprinted, e.g. in the version in E. Segal, ed., *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1983) 311–331. I paraphrase from the full version in E.-R. Schwinge, ed., *Euripides* (Darmstadt 1968) 238–274, at 258. S. Goldhill's discussion of *Hippolytus* in *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1986) calls it "classic" (125). I hasten to say that I have great respect for Knox's work, and it would be easy to find much worse offenders, who are less authoritative.

associate her with the contemporary sophists." Like the sophists, she has a pragmatic and optimistic view of human problems, rhetorical skill, and relativism.

The value then which I failed to find in Barrett has now been inferred. One is not surprised to find that the Nurse is not following an aristocratic code, if such a thing ever existed. But it is more surprising to learn that this remark of the Nurse along with other things she says is a sign of the influence of sophism,<sup>9</sup> or worse, sophistic rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> This is not demonstrable. Further, it is allegedly a sign of democratic thinking to show flexibility and therefore adaptable morals, and is—we must infer—contrary to aristocratic thinking which holds to firm and immovable principles. The evidence given by Knox is a sentence from the funeral speech of Perikles in Thucydides, praising the Athenians for their ability to adapt (*eutrapelia*), even though some of the virtues praised in that speech are not at all incompatible with aristocratic morality. This too is without foundation.

Before anything else it is the duty of a commentator or critic to find the parallels for the thought, "To enjoy good fortune is to be considered *sophos*," in order to estimate with any degree of approximation how an audience might have reacted, or how Euripides wanted an audience to react. Parallels for this have in fact been collected by a number of scholars, perhaps not all of

<sup>9</sup> Literature on this issue of sophists can be found in Allan (*supra* n.1) 118ff. I am glad to say that in conversation Prof. Allan agrees with me that the sophists may have had no more influence on Athenians than Hegel (whose Swabian accent was hard to fathom) on contemporary Berliners. One will readily grant a certain justice to C. A. E. Luschnig's remark in *Time Holds the Mirror* (Leiden 1994) 9, that the Nurse "is a fascinating combination of moral flexibility (approaching slovenliness) and candid awareness of the ways of the world." But that describes most human beings—even those not "of limited imagination"—not sophists. I realize that to prove my point in full, I should have to deal with every word uttered by the Nurse; but nothing I have found invalidates the point made here.

<sup>10</sup> Goldhill (*supra* n.8) 130, "nurse's sophistic manipulation," 131 "the sophistic rhetoric of the nurse," etc. Roisman (*supra* n.1) writes: the Nurse "is usually seen as a parody of the sophists: pragmatic, cynical, full of doubt."

them relevant, and mostly incomplete, but certainly sufficient to be worth citing for *Hippolytus*.<sup>11</sup> First is:

Euripides fr.1017 (Σ Pind., Stob., Monost. Menandri)

τὸν εὐτυχοῦντα καὶ φρονεῖν νομίζομεν.

Indeed, we do not have to look far, since Euripides here says (in what may be a form adapted for gnomologies): “We consider the man who enjoys good fortune (εὐτυχοῦντα) to be smart (φρονεῖν).” That is the same thought, even if it has no context, and indeed our Nurse in the next line goes on to say, “we have been given *phrenes* (“intelligence”) to cope with the blows of *tyche*”: so *tyche* and *phrenes* make the verbal connection between the two passages. But we observe that in fact there is no word in the Nurse’s remark that connects lexically with the fragment. In other words, lexical searches by themselves do not suffice to discover thought parallels. That is even more true if the thought is disguised by being turned into baroque variations, which is exactly what poetry will do. But we can now be sure that we are dealing with proverbial wisdom.

Euripides *IT* 352

Or again, the thought can be inverted. We could say: “If a man is unfortunate, he is considered stupid *ipso facto*.” And indeed we find this in *IT* 352–353, and in exactly the form we postulate: here are lines 348ff, spoken by the anguished Iphigeneia, and they require a longer discussion.

νῦν δ’ ἐξ ὀνειρώων οἷσιν ἠγγιώμεθα  
δοκοῦσ’ Ὀρέστην μηκέθ’ ἥλιον βλέπειν  
δύσνον με λήψεσθ’, οἵτινές ποθ’ ἤκετε.  
καὶ τοῦτ’ ἄρ’ ἦν ἀληθές, ἠσθόμην, φίλαι·

<sup>11</sup> E.g. I. L. Pfeiffer, *Three Aeginetan Odes of Pindar* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne 1999) 570, follows P. Giannini in B. Gentili, ed., *Pindaro: Le Pitiche* (Verona 1995) 580, on *Pyth.* 8.73–75, and cites *Ol.* 5.14, Eur. *Hipp.* 700, fr.1017, and *Heracl.* 747 with J. Wilkins, *Euripides Heraclidae* (Oxford 1993) *ad loc.*, on which see below.

οἱ δυστυχεῖς γὰρ τοῖσιν εὐτυχεστέροις  
 αὐτοὶ κακῶς πράξαντες οὐ φρονοῦσιν εὖ.  
 ἀλλ' οὔτε πνεῦμα Διόθεν ἦλθε πώποτε,  
 οὐ πορθμῖς, ἥτις διὰ πέτρας Συμπληγάδας  
 Ἑλένην ἐπήγαγ' ἐνθάδ', ἥ μ' ἀπόλεσεν,  
 Μενέλεόν θ', ἴν' αὐτοὺς ἀντετιμωρησάμην, ...

The maxim we sought is clear: “The unfortunate (*dystycheis*), merely by their own bad fortune are unintelligent (*ouk eu phronousin*) to (*i.e.* in the eyes of) those who are better off (*eutycheisterois*).” Success therefore demonstrates wisdom, failure demonstrates foolishness in the public’s estimation.

Kovacs follows F. W. Schmidt in deleting 351–353.<sup>12</sup> Murray’s OCT gave Wecklein’s “correction” *δυστυχεστέροις* for the manuscripts’ *εὐτυχεστέροις*. Reiske wanted *αὐτοῖς κακῶς πράξασιν*. Platnauer thought *αὐτοὶ κακῶς πράξαντες* “objectionable” and suggested three other emendations. There can in fact be no doubt about the text at *IT* 352: it is correct and should not be emended. Indeed it has only been mistreated because the thought was not recognized. Apparently this negatively phrased idea too was known to the audience, but not to many editors. The reasons are worth exploring. These scholars did not recognize a standard Greek thought, and so did not react as an Athenian of the late fifth century would have reacted. They looked instead for its immediate, not its wider, context, *i.e.* a logical connection with what preceded and followed in the text. Logic is a fine thing, but Occam’s razor is not always the best way to dissect dramatic utterance.

Iphigeneia has just said that now that she knows Orestes to be dead, she has no illusions; she will show no mercy to Greeks, and be hostile. The emendations, so far as we can follow their

<sup>12</sup> In his Loeb text; more serious is that J. Diggle in his new OCT also adopts Schmidt’s excision, described rightly as “extreme” by Cropp in his forthcoming commentary on lines 352–353, though he too despairs too readily of the sense offered by the text.

reasoning, focussed on the word δύσνονν “hostile” and connected it with the words οὐ φρονοῦσιν εἶ which they wrongly assumed—for it did not occur to them that Euripides could be talking of pure “intelligence”—to mean “are not well disposed, are hostile.” This in turn required someone to be hostile towards, and that must then be the dative εὐτυχεστέροις. So they then logically ended up with “The unfortunate when they have fared badly are not well disposed to the more fortunate,” which is a comprehensible and easy thought, and grammatically correct. However, besides being hopelessly banal, that really would make nonsense in the context. For “the unfortunate” in her speech can only be people like herself, and so the “more fortunate” would have to be the prisoners Orestes and Pylades, whom she has just threatened with merciless punishment. Then, since that makes no sense at all, logic further demands Wecklein’s emendation “less fortunate” so that it would apply to Orestes and Pylades after all. Once the first premise has been accepted, the commentators, following their logic, dig themselves ever deeper into the textual pit. But their initial premise is wrong, and Euripides’ audience knew exactly from their cultural conditioning what was meant, because reference was being made to a well-known maxim. They automatically took the words οὐ φρονοῦσιν εἶ together as “are stupid” absolutely.

There are I think purely grammatical grounds for taking οὐ φρονοῦσιν εἶ as an absolute, “lacking in wisdom,” but since we know now that the overall sentiment is a good Greek one, we have no reason whatsoever to understand it otherwise. Even so, we are not finished with the devices of commentators, because even if the text is not changed, it remains a “maxim” and maxims are liable to be deleted as intrusions by ancient actors into the text of Euripides, because they do not fit into the logic or economy of the run of the argument. Editors, wielding

Occam's razor, if they do not emend, can always initiate a surgical strike.

It is certainly never easy for a modern reader of ancient drama, bereft of both cultural conditioning and the excitement of performance, to understand the sequence of thought on the voiceless and undramatic page. No matter, for the first question is whether it was easy for a Greek audience to follow the thought as performed, and whether it is then possible for us to recreate it. Iphigeneia says she has no illusions, and will be ruthless; she cites the maxim (351–353) that her audience know. "This much I have learned, women. The unfortunate in the view of the more fortunate are unintelligent by their very misfortune." That is, "People just treat the unfortunate as fools." Then she goes on to say that she in her misfortune has never had the opportunity to seek vengeance from Helen and Menelaos. That is, "Yet I never had any chance to take revenge," which would obviously, by her thinking, have prevented her being taken for a fool. Does this make sense? Here we have to realize that this is first and foremost drama. She starts by addressing her heart, she then addresses "You," meaning Greeks, and then she turns to the chorus, "you friends." This is the high emotion of the Euripidean heroine in despair. She is throwing her arms around, as she turns from herself, to the audience, and finally to the chorus. We are jumping from one addressee to another, from thought to thought, not following a logical chain of argument. We must rephrase our question: is this dramatic sense, is it actable sense? Surely, we have to answer that it is. It makes every sense from a pragmatic point of view, to have her say that she was nice to Greeks before but now: "I will seek revenge on you Greeks." Perhaps she shakes her fist. She turns to the chorus in a change of mood and gesture: "I know, my friends: people assume that misfortune must be the result of foolishness. So they think I deserve what I get." She pauses, another gesture

of resignation. “Well, the fact is I had no chance to take revenge on those who did deserve it.” The thought progression is elliptical and associative as is only natural of emotional heroines. But it is great dramatic writing. The maxim acts as a bridge between two different arguments.<sup>13</sup> In short there is absolutely nothing in this text that is not dramatically appropriate.

But it is also ethically appropriate. When Iphigeneia says, “If you succeed, people think you are smart,” we should see the remark not only as a step in a logical argument but an absolute truth, commanding respect and immediate understanding. (Her reasoning assumes that revenge on Helen would have been smart, too.) The opposite of *aphrosyne* here is not *sophrosyne* as e.g. in Theognis 497: the opposite of folly is not self-control but smartness, sharpwittedness, *phronesis* or *sophia*. These are for us intellectual terms, not moral. Clement of Alexandria nicely points out that the *poneros* (as in modern Greek) can be *phronimos*, but he is not a *moros*.<sup>14</sup> Smartness in the more particular sense of clever dealing (*kerdosyne*) is a characteristic of the *agoraios*.<sup>15</sup> In fact of course it is a necessary skill for the businessman then and now, but it is not one that our ancient sources openly admired; and Aristotle typically considered it necessary for the agora of the merchants to be separated from the agora of the educated, whose nobility of spirit would otherwise get corrupted by their mercantile pragmatic dealings (*Pol.* 1331a30). Differently, Kovacs could contrast the two in *Hippolytus*: “In

<sup>13</sup> This is a dramatic version of the so called “bridging gnome,” better attested and documented in Pindar. Some further references may be found in W. Slater, “Pindar’s Myths: Two Pragmatic Explanations,” in *Arktouros: Festschrift B. Knox* (Berlin 1979) 63–70, at 66 n.9.

<sup>14</sup> *Paed.* 2.5.46.4 (p.186.6 Staehlin-Treu).

<sup>15</sup> I have expressed myself briefly on this intellectualization of ethics in “Aristo-talk,” in D. Papenfuss and V. M. Strocka, edd., *Gab es das griechische Wunder?* (Mainz 2001) 39–49. I hope that no one will confuse this “smartness” with the Homeric notion of *μητις*, discussed somewhat diffusely by M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Les ruses de l’intelligence: la Métis des Grecs* (Paris 1974), though there is good comparative material in the first two chapters.

contrast to the queen, who depreciates the intellectual virtues, the Nurse regards them as preeminent,"<sup>16</sup> though I would argue that the term "intellectual virtue" is not useful. This opposition of *quaestus* and *virtus*, self-interest versus nobility, is a fundamental tenet of ancient thinking, and as Aristotle remarked of Greeks generally, φανερώς μὲν τὰ δίκαια καὶ τὰ καλὰ ἐπαινοῦσι μάλιστα, ἰδίᾳ δὲ τὰ συμφέροντα μᾶλλον βούλονται (*Rh.* 2.23.16, 1399a31) The same opposition underlies Iphigeneia's deliberations here. That I suspect is why we do not immediately comprehend this new pragmatism she espouses. Iphigeneia claims to be suddenly aware that her previous clemency, openness and generous decency to Greeks—an attitude that was appropriate to her class—was completely misplaced, and now she has to be pragmatic, businesslike, and treat people as they treat her, in a new mode of realism. (We may conveniently forget that she has been sacrificing them for some time past!) For she runs the risk of being considered stupid and responsible for her own misfortune. She must no longer be seen as naive and innocent, but—by the fundamental antithesis—practical and able to see her advantage. That does not make her a peasant; it does mean that she like many another Euripidean heroine<sup>17</sup> is following a course that is not perhaps as high-minded as moralists and educationists and even she herself would ideally like. Once we can establish what "stupid" means to her audience, we can follow the train of thought towards her new-found "ruthlessness."

Plautus *Pseudolus* 678ff

We have already seen that our maxim is a good Greek

<sup>16</sup> D. Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse* (Baltimore 1987) 50.

<sup>17</sup> One thinks of the remarkable amount of unfocussed moral outrage aimed at Orestes and Electra in Euripides' *Orestes*, when they are driven to the same kind of desperation. See the sensible remarks of J. R. Porter, *Studies in Euripides' Orestes* (Leiden 1994) 162–163.

thought, one that might generate nods of approval in a pragmatic bunch of farmers. In fact the general wisdom was known probably to Menander's audience, and Plautus<sup>18</sup> took the trouble to translate this Greek wisdom in his *Pseudolus* 678ff in its fullest version.

*centum doctum hominum consilia sola haec devincit dea,  
Fortuna. atque hoc verum est: proinde ut quisque Fortuna (= συντυχία) utitur,  
ita praecellet atque exinde sapere (= φρονεῖν) eum omnes dicimus.  
bene ubi quoi scimus consilium accidisse, hominem catum  
(= σοφόν)  
eum esse declaramus, stultum (= ἄφρονα) autem illum quoi vortit  
male. ...  
sed iam satis est philosophatum.*

"This is the truth. A man is eminent in relation to his fortune, and we all say that he is smart (*sapere*) accordingly. Wherever we know a plan has been successful, we declare the man smart (*catum*), but we call stupid him when things turn out badly ..." and so forth. "But that's enough of philosophizing" he ends, as if to apologize for the digression into wisdom literature. One immediately notes that *hoc verum est* is exactly as in Euripides' *IT*, τοῦτ' ἄρ' ἦν ἀληθές, though one may doubt that it is taken directly from there; rather, one should postulate some earlier gnomic source. The distinction between smart and stupid in the popular view remains as before. The audience may nod approval at such examples of folk-wisdom, for the reasons that Seneca gave. That is indeed why actors may have put these maxims in the text, but it is also why Euripides put them in the text; why Menander gave them to specific characters as a hallmark; and also why modern scholars cut them out because they do not seem immediately logical or to fit the argument.

<sup>18</sup> The readiness of Latin playwrights to translate Greek gnomic wisdom directly into Latin is well known: consider e.g. Apollodorus Carystius fr. 8–11 with Kassel-Austin's notes.

We have not yet tackled the question of democratic and sophistic maxims, but we can at least say already that what the Hippolytean Nurse says suits a character that bleats out old-fashioned maxims without being affected by the latest philosophic wisdom. If however we ask about democracy versus aristocracy, and we seek an expression of aristocratic values, we should normally look to their principal exponent Pindar; in fact, we find the Nurse's allegedly democratic and sophistically influenced views there no less than three times.

Pindar *Ol.* 2.51

τὸ δὲ τυχεῖν περὶ ὄμιον ἀφροσύνας παραλύει.

αφροσυν[ Π<sup>12</sup> = *P.Oxy.* 2092, ἀφροσύνας Bowra e schol., ἀφροσυνᾶν iam T. Mommsen; δυσφροσυναν Αα, δυσφροσυνας C<sup>p</sup>, δυσφρονᾶν Snell-Maehler, παραλύει δυσφρονᾶν W. Dindorf.

“To be successful when one embarks upon competition frees one from stupidity (ἀφροσύνη = lack of *phrenes*, of sense).” That is, the charge of stupidity is reserved for failure; you are liable to be accused of stupidity for trying to win, but if you do win, then you are redeemed from any accusation of foolishness. Once again, however, we find that the philologists have caused us problems. We are fortunate that a papyrus preserves the correct language here, *viz.* ἀφροσυν-. Bowra in 1935 had the good sense to restore it to the text from the scholia, since a papyrus, published in 1929 had already confirmed it. But, even before, Tycho Mommsen had in his *ed. maior* of 1864 (reading ἀφροσυνᾶν) correctly explained it, relying on several scholiasts: “a reprehensione stultitiae liberavit.” The manuscripts in fact read δυσφροσυνᾶν, which will not scan, whereas ἀφροσύνας, -ᾶν, will, with normal resolution in iambs. In view of the parallels there can be no doubt at all that Bowra was right, even if the latest commentator still describes the thought as outrageous.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> M. M. Willcock, *Pindar's Victory Odes* (Cambridge 1995), in the comment on *Ol.* 2.51. Some of the argument in this present paper is anticipated in my review in *BMCR* 7.2 (1996) 180.

Indeed, Pfeiffer still asserts blandly: “Dindorf’s δυσφοροσυνᾶν is certainly correct,”<sup>20</sup> but he seems unaware that it is confuted by the papyrus. More interesting of course is the question why the text was changed at some point to the unmetrical δυσφοροσυνᾶν. The answer must be that this is one of those banal changes which appeal to the morality of scholars: Pindar’s thought becomes “Success frees one from gloomy thoughts.” No doubt it does, but that is not what Pindar thought worth saying. Yet we find the Teubner text still trying to rescue the banal by changing δυσφοροσυναν to δυσφρονᾶν. But Pindar had a tougher message, and one his audience knew: success frees one from being called a fool. Evidently scholars for a long time have found this pragmatic thought one that was difficult to grasp and therefore, by a logic all too common, easy to emend. But archaic thinking was more open to such folk wisdom, and a clear parallel exists, and has long been cited,<sup>21</sup> for Solon fr.13.69 W. runs

τῶι δὲ κακῶς ἔρδοντι θεὸς περὶ πάντα δίδωσιν  
 συντυχίην ἀγαθήν, ἔκλυσιν ἀφροσύνης.

This shows that the Mommsen’s “*liberatio stultitiae*” was correct. We observe that *tyche* (*eutychia*, *syntychia*)<sup>22</sup> once again as in Eur. fr.1017 is the λῦσις ἀφροσύνης.

Pindar *Ol.* 5.16

αἰεὶ δ’ ἀμφ’ ἀρεταῖσι πόνος δαπάνα τε μάρναται πρὸς ἔργον  
 κινδύνῳ κεκαλυμμένον· εὖ δὲ τυχόντες σοφοὶ καὶ πολῖταις  
 ἔδοξαν ἔμμεν.

“Those who are successful (*n.b.*: *eutychia* again) are thought even by their fellow citizens to be *sophoi*.” Whether this poem is by

<sup>20</sup> Pfeiffer (*supra* n.11) 568–572 with n.186.

<sup>21</sup> J. van Leeuwen, *Pindarus’ Tweede Olympische Ode* (Assen 1964) I 140–146, gives all the evidence necessary for understanding the history of the text, and approves of Mommsen’s reading of the plural.

<sup>22</sup> See K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford 1974) 174, on the equation of wealth with luck and *tyche*.

Pindar or not does not matter for my purposes. It merely proves that the thought was commonplace and easily comprehensible. “Even by one’s fellows” implies that one’s own colleagues will be the last people to believe one to be *sophos*, and the first to think one stupid. There is something refreshing in this pragmatism. We can say already that the sentiment is neither democratic nor aristocratic, it is a common-sense remark suitable for anyone, but apparently very suitable for mention in poems for aristocratic victors, who clearly did not want to be thought stupid.

Pindar *Pyth.* 8.73

εἰ γάρ τις ἐσλὰ πέπαται μὴ σὺν μακρῷ πόνῳ,  
πολλοῖς σοφὸς δοκεῖ πεδ’ ἀφρόνων  
βίον κορυσσέμεν ὀρθοβούλοισι μαχαναῖς·  
τὰ δ’ οὐκ ἐπ’ ἀνδράσι κεῖται· δαίμων δὲ παρίσχει·

Pindar plays on what we now know to be a commonplace. “If a man achieves success without hard work, then he is held to be *sophos* among *aphrones*, a wise man among the unintelligent, and to have crowned his life by his good decisions.” This is here a foil for: “but <really> it is not men but the gods who are responsible.” Most commentators assume that Pindar would be denouncing the idea of success without hard work. But that is not what the text says. The fact is that people do think it intelligent, smart, and as far as I can see, aristocratic, to manage to win even by avoiding as far as possible the agonies of competition. It shows *euboulia* and above all *phrenes*. As a bonus, others will think you *sophos* and not an idiot, as they may initially have thought till you proved them wrong. There is therefore no ground for the belief that the Nurse in *Hippolytus* is trotting out a democratic thought, and, given Pindar’s time, she is not likely to be sophistic either. She is simply uttering a well-known pragmatic truth, or, depending on your view, platitude, applicable

to democrats, aristocrats, and other members of the human race.

But one must distinguish the clear maxim we have followed from others that are similar, and have been cited as parallel, so confusing the issue. A small digression on one of these is worthwhile.

Euripides *Heraclidae* 745–747

ἔστιν δ' ἐν ὄλβῳ καὶ τόδ' οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἔχον,  
 εὐψυχίας δόκησις· οἰόμεσθα γὰρ  
 τὸν εὐτυχοῦντα πάντ' ἐπίστασθαι καλῶς.

Iolaos speaks: “There is in wealth this injustice, the semblance of *eupsychia*” (= courage, stoutheartedness). That is, says Euripides: the wealthy merely by virtue of their wealth seem morally superior, more courageous, etc. He gives the reason: “Because we think that prosperous people have a good understanding of the world.” That is, because we think the successful are wise to the world, or, as my students say, “street-smart.” In other words, the first statement about morality is backed up by an appeal to the general wisdom about intelligence we know and have been documenting. So we have two ideas loosely linked: “The wealthy by virtue of their wealth are deemed (wrongly) stouthearted, because we tend to think that people enjoying good fortune (*eutychia* again) have an excellent understanding of everything.”

Wilkins' commentary (*supra* n.11) gives four parallels for the first thought and three for the second. The first thought is paralleled by two passages from Euripides, one from Demosthenes, and one from Juvenal. This is a strange assortment. The first Euripides passage from the same play (lines 685–686) is irrelevant, and the second, the *Hippolytus* passage we know, says something very different. There is no strict equation between saying (a) that Wealth makes you appear stouthearted when you are nothing of the sort, and (b) that good fortune

proves to others that you were right in your choices after all. But the third passage cited is a good parallel for the first sentiment: Demosthenes *Ol.* 2.20, ἀλλ', οἶμαι, νῦν μὲν ἐπισκοτεῖ τούτοις τὸ κατορθοῦν· αἱ γὰρ εὐπραξίαι δειναὶ συγκρύψαι τὰ τοιαῦτ' ὀνειδίη, "Successes are good at concealing reproaches." But this morally loaded maxim is also found in Isocrates<sup>23</sup> and is picked up inevitably by the rhetorical schools. It is even translated into Latin by Sallust: *res secundae mirae sunt vitiis obtentui*.<sup>24</sup> It appears in Seneca, and from there gets into Juvenal, Dio, and other imperial writers.<sup>25</sup> This first moral maxim in the *Heraclidae* therefore has a long history in rhetoric, but in fact it is a variant of a common classical saying<sup>26</sup> that wealth conceals wickedness, found in both comedy and earlier tragedy. At any rate, it is of no value as a parallel to our Nurse's remark, for which Wilkins offers one irrelevant parallel (Eur. fr.99), and two that are relevant, viz. fr.1017 and *Ol.* 5, as we have seen.

Let us return now to the edifice of interpretation erected by Knox. Have we any reason at all to think that the Nurse as a character with all her other remarks is supposed to make us think of the sophists, in the same way perhaps as some of the remarks of the Cyclops in the satyr play? I confess that I can find none. She appears to me to be the meddling type of old woman, who thinks to improve things and makes the mess worse. She likes to fix things straightaway, because she thinks of herself as pragmatic. She likes to quote old wisdom, as old people do. Nurses are notoriously go-betweens, and old women

<sup>23</sup> 6.102: αἱ μὲν γὰρ εὐτυχίαι καὶ τοῖς φαύλοις τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὰς κακίας συγκρύπτουσιν, αἱ δὲ δυσπραξίαι ταχέως καταφανεῖς ποιοῦσιν ὅποιοί τινες ἕκαστοι τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες.

<sup>24</sup> Sen. *Controv.* 9.1.13 W.: *Thucydidis sententiam* (immo Ps.-Dem. *In epist. Philipp.* 13 e Dem. *Ol.* 2.20) δειναὶ γὰρ αἱ εὐπραξίαι συγκρύψαι καὶ συσκιᾶσαι τὰ ἐκάστων ἁμαρτήματα, *deinde Sallustianum* (*Hist.* 1.55.24 M.) *secundae res* etc.

<sup>25</sup> It does not appear in A. Otto's *Sprichwoerter* (1890) but it should.

<sup>26</sup> See Kassel-Austin on Antiphanes fr.165.

are the matchmakers of choice. Knox however accuses her of the democratic vice of *eutrapelia*, versatility and adaptability, of changing her morals and reasoning to suit the circumstances, or failing to abide by a *Sittenkodex*. This strikes me as far off the mark; and Knox's parallel is irrelevant. Aristotle says indeed that *eutrapelia* is a feature of young men (*Rh.* 1389b8), like educated hybris and "jock" jesting. Why would an audience think that a slave nurse would have anything in common with the educated hybris of young men? The categories are wrong. The Nurse is a slave and thinks and talks as an old woman is supposed to think and talk. I do not see that the historical Greeks would for a moment have considered her to represent democratic thinking or sophistic training restricted to elite young men.

As for this alleged moral code, the absence of which was a feature of the Nurse's allegedly democratic thought processes: Phaedra has it presumably because she thinks of her *kleos* and adopts *sophrosyne*. But surely this is what any self-respecting housewife in democratic Athens is supposed to do. They are also supposed to resist the blandishments and the *Vulgarethik* of an old nurse, who suggests immediate gratification. Not therefore aristocratic and democratic at all, but old-fashioned bourgeois morality versus its enemy, the would-be clever slave with ready arguments from folk wisdom and a ready tongue for intrigue. That every Athenian household could understand, and New Comedy would immortalize. I would suggest that these are the categories and context within which we should understand the Nurse's remarks. Not a world of sophists, but of bourgeois Athens in tragic guise.

I come now to my second example, and I preface my remarks with the warning that this can only be a suggestion, though I think it a suggestion worth making. Very much has obviously gone missing from our understanding of these common sayings. Aeschylus and Sophocles presuppose a knowledge of the ritual curses of the Bouzugidae,<sup>27</sup> which are known to us largely from a chance remark of Philo. Of the sayings of Chiron, and so much else dunned into the Athenian schoolchild, we know practically nothing. Of the ordinary proverbs that the man in the Athenian street cited, we have a smattering from our surviving literature, especially comedy, and from inadequate Byzantine collections.<sup>28</sup> Much therefore has vanished, and in turn we cannot appreciate the references to this lost wisdom in the literature that survives, for by its very nature and function it was not cited directly but used as a reference point. This is certainly true of Pindar, but also of Euripides, *densus sententiis*, and the illustration I have given above should demonstrate that. What follows is an attempt to reconstruct a lost piece of wisdom, a gnomic robbed wall.

Augustine gives a famous excerpt from Seneca's lost *De superstitione* (fr.36 Haase), in which he lists the foolishness of the those who mime ritual actions at temples, and concludes: "A celebrated archimimus but by then a broken down old man used to act out a mime each day on the Capitol."<sup>29</sup> This is a story that appears in several authors in different forms. The Calendar

<sup>27</sup> Diphilus fr.62. K.-A. H. Bolkestein, *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht 1939) 69–71.

<sup>28</sup> See now the useful book of Renzo Tosi, *Dizionario delle Sentenze latine e greche* (Milan 1992); my thanks to N. Horsfall for the reference. I have not seen an unpublished 1985 Cambridge dissertation, G. A. de Grouchy, *Proverbial and Gnostic Material in Greek Tragedy*, which I have been told by Martin Cropp consists of a catalogue of gnomic material from the tragedians.

<sup>29</sup> *De civ. D.* 6.10, *doctus archimimus senex iam decrepitus, cotidie in Capitolio mimum agebat, quasi dii libenter spectarent.* G. Piccaluga, *Elementi spettacolari nei rituali romani* (Rome 1965) 61 n.63, cites this passage and compares also *De civ. D.* 2.4, Arnob. *Adv.Nat.* 7.33.

of A.D. 354 shows an elderly male dancer with *krotaloi* for the month of April, a theme which M. Salzman has suggested should be linked to the Megalesia.<sup>30</sup> Servius (*ad Aen.* 3.279) had indeed postulated that an original story of an old man who danced and placated the Mother of the Gods was the origin of the proverb *omnia secunda, saltat senex*, "Everything is fine, the old man's dancing." This in turn has a parallel in Festus' explanation of the proverb *salva res <est dum cantat> senex*, for he cites the grammarian Verrius for a similar story whereby an aged freedman mime Gaius Pomponius continued to dance to the pipes in 211 B.C., thereby keeping the religious rites going.<sup>31</sup> But Festus also cites Sennius Capito for a different version about a Gaius Volumnius, a mime of the second parts, and so a *parasitus*, at the *ludi Apollinares*: this is clearly an explanation of the term *parasiti Apollinis*. Servius in another passage (*ad Aen.* 8.110) gives the version as *salva res est, saltat senex*. On the same set of sources Livy draws for his versions (26.10.2–8, 26.23.3). Though the explanation(s) are of no historical value, there can then be little doubt that *salva res, saltat/cantat senex* was an old proverb, and Ribbeck thought it sufficiently metrical to include it as fr.xvii in his *Anonymorum Mimorum Reliquiae*.

The ancient explanations are self-evidently unhistorical, and we should normally conclude that this is just another example of republican history manufactured out of gnomonic trivia. But most surprisingly the saying is undoubtedly classical Greek in origin, and occurs, doubtless in a slightly modified form, in Phrynichus fr.9 K.-A: ἀνὴρ χορεύει καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καλά. This at least explains why *saltat* and *cantat* are variants, since the Greek allows of both translations. The saying to which reference is made did not obviously begin with ἀνὴρ, and we cannot tell

<sup>30</sup> Michele Salzman, *On Roman Time* (Berkeley 1990) 83–91, with Appendix 7.

<sup>31</sup> Festus 436.21–438.27 Lindsay.

who the missing person was, though we could suspect that “the old man” might be right. It is then very tempting to assume that Aristophanes *Pax* 868, as Kassel-Austin note, could derive its humour from this same saying: ἡ παῖς λέλονται καὶ τὰ τῆς πυγῆς καλά, where preparations for a ritual are being made. Certainly the passage would gain; indeed it is difficult to see why the line is really funny, if it does not have this reference.<sup>32</sup> “Young girl” replaces “old man,” “bathing” replaces “dancing,” and comic proctology replaces religion. Otherwise there is no other passage in classical Greek that is directly relevant. It follows that there was a saying: “an/the (old?) man is dancing/singing, the (things) of the god(s) are fine”; and just possibly, if we follow the Latin, this could be more general, “things are fine.”<sup>33</sup> This in its many forms was known through most of antiquity, even though its import could not have always been the same. The Greek form must have been intended to presuppose the importance of civic participation in a choral activity, while the Latin version speaks only of a freedman and of mime, and one cannot imagine Roman citizens dancing in the same way as classical Greeks. To that extent the point of the saying has moved from civic choral participation to the formal maintenance of ritual, an alteration which is in accord with our expectations of the attitude of the two cultures to religion. Such stories and sayings about old men dancing that survive have to do largely with symposia, and the influence of wine, and presum-

<sup>32</sup> The note of S. D. Olson, *Aristophanes Peace* (Oxford 1998), on the passage is not comprehensible: “τῆς πυγῆς is *para prosdokian* for τῆς τύχης,” comparing our Phrynichus fr.9, Eur. *Phoen.* 1202, *IA* 1403. Perhaps he was unaware of the maxim.

<sup>33</sup> Many years ago, I was taught an Italian saying: *Ride ride mamma fa gnocchi*, which struck me as being used in the same fashion: “everything’s fine.” But I cannot confirm this now.

ably are normally irrelevant to cultic performance, despite the old men in the *Bacchae*.<sup>34</sup>

But, this being so, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the famous final question of the chorus of old men in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, "Why should I dance?" (868), would be much more meaningful against this background. The maxim has been inverted exactly as in the example we studied earlier. "If an/the old man dances, things to do with gods are fine" becomes "If things to do with the gods are not fine, then why should old men like me dance?" "The 'I' of tragic lyric often introduces a general maxim or gnome," commented Stinton,<sup>35</sup> and gnomic conclusions are always appropriate.<sup>36</sup> It follows that there is nothing inappropriate at this point about this remark by the Theban chorus of old men, nothing that leads to a Brechtian breach of character or *Verfremdungseffekt*, let alone exaggerated searches for metatheatrical reference.<sup>37</sup> It is

<sup>34</sup> Socrates in Xenophon's *Symposium* is the subject of an excellent article by B. Huss, "Dancing Socrates and Laughing Xenophon," *AJP* 120 (1999) 381–409; cf. Antiphanes fr.111 with Kassel-Austin's comments. Wine of course makes old men dance, Eriphus fr.1 K.-A. which is proverbial, but see also J. Roux, *Euripide: les Bacchantes* II (Paris 1972) 308: "un lieu commun." Prof. S. Scullion makes me aware of Ar. *Plutus* 757–761 as an example for old men's dancing equated with prosperous times. Perhaps the strange attempt to force the old Knemon to *choreuein* in the final scene of *Dyskolos* also has its origin in this saying.

<sup>35</sup> Allan (*supra* n.1) 220 n.104, quoting with approval T. Stinton, *Collected Papers* (Oxford 1990) 253.

<sup>36</sup> See M. Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford 1992) 97, for gnomic conclusion as common in rhetorical speeches in drama.

<sup>37</sup> This line was the title of an influential article by Albert Henrichs, *Warum soll ich denn tanzen? Dionysisches im Chor der griechischen Tragödie: Lectio Teubneriana* IV (Stuttgart/Leipzig 1996). I regret that, though there is much of value including a reference to the Phrynichus fragment, I find his ingenious thesis, taken up in later work (e.g. "Why should I dance?: Choral Self-referentiality in Greek Tragedy," *Arion* III 3 [1994/5] 56–111), of both choral metatheatricality and Dionysiac influence in this and other examples he cites untenable, even though it has won some approval from scholars such as C. Calame, "Performative Aspects of the Choral Voice of Greek Tragedy," in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne, edd., *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge 1999) 125–153, at 136 (but I think that the use of "self-referential" is inaccurate). Clearly I do not accept Henrichs' "im gesamten Stück findet sich nämlich keine Erklärung dafür, warum sich die würdigen Greise ausgerechnet

exactly what a chorus of pious old men would and should say at an Athenian festival, if they are supposed to feel that things to do with the gods have lost their value. The utterance is more meaningful as well as appropriate precisely because it is predicated on an awareness in the audience of the saying we have tried to establish, even on the slender basis of one certain contemporary occurrence. We can only guess how many more such utterances depend on public knowledge of proverbial wisdom that is now irretrievably lost, partially at least because of long-standing intellectual disdain.<sup>38</sup>

September, 2001

Department of Classics  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario  
Canada L8S 4M2  
slaterw@mcmaster.ca

---

mit dem Tanz identifizieren sollten" (56). Prof. Scott Scullion in a forthcoming *CQ* will offer criticism in detail, which will forestall a discussion by me here; and I am grateful to Prof. Scullion for showing me his article in advance. Regarding the instability of the choral voice I shall have something to say elsewhere on the epiphany in Pindar's *Pythian* 8.

<sup>38</sup> This paper was given first as a talk at the University of Illinois, Urbana, and in a different form at a conference on Greek drama at Banff, Alberta, organized by Martin Cropp; my best thanks to Prof. Cropp for a long discussion of the passage discussed from the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and for sending me his comments on it. I hope that I can convince him.