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Arguments Employed in Favour of Unjust Action in Euripides, Thucydides, and Plato

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Abstract

This article examines arguments used in the fifth century in favour of unjust action. Three main lines of argument are distinguished: (i) arguments based on ordinary human behaviour, employed by Glaucon in Plato's *Republic* and by the Athenians in Thucydides' Melian Dialogue, (ii) arguments based on self-interest, found also in Plato and Thucydides, and (iii) arguments based on setting against justice another value, normally courage (*ἀνδρεία*) or wisdom (*σοφία*). These arguments are absent in Hesiod and Aeschylus, but present later in Euripides, Thucydides and Plato. Categorising them allows us to understand more precisely a central intellectual phenomenon of the fifth century, and to identify how the argumentation, and therefore the discourse of power, employed in these sources varies according to genre. In particular, Euripides, in his portrayal of individuals, deals with these issues differently, and employs different arguments, from Thucydides, who is concerned with the conduct of *poleis*.

Keywords

Euripides – Thucydides – Plato – Sophists – injustice

1 Introduction

A striking feature of the intellectual history of the fifth century BC is the use of arguments in favour of actions which might be regarded, by the victim or even by the perpetrator, as unjust. Famously lampooned in the debate between

the Arguments in Aristophanes' *Clouds*,¹ this argumentation, sometimes called 'immoralist', is generally associated with the Sophists' widespread influence on fifth-century Athenian culture.² This argumentation has received much attention from scholars working on Plato's *Gorgias* and *Republic*, where it is employed in different forms by Calicles, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon.³ Similarly, recent Thucydidean scholarship has paid much attention to the Athenians' arguments in defence of their empire, in order to investigate Thucydides' political thought, and also in order to explore the nature of fifth-century Athenian imperialism.⁴ Much research has been conducted, then, which seeks to investigate how the presence of this argumentation in Plato or Thucydides contributes to the exposition of each author's thought, or which aims to identify the roles played by this argumentation within the construction of their literary works.⁵ However, although it has long been recognised that the 'immoralist' argumentation employed in Plato is anticipated in Thucydides and Euripides, recent scholars have paid relatively little attention to it as a phenomenon of intellectual history. Moreover, since most scholars discussing this argumentation have been interested primarily in only one of these three authors, scholars have rarely attempted to place their three genres on an equal footing, or to discern the differences in how this argumentation is used in each.

Traditionally, the emergence of this argumentation has been seen as an element of the fifth-century 'Enlightenment', and has been investigated as part of the Sophists' influence on tragedy and historiography. As a consequence, these 'immoralist' arguments have often been envisaged as a single doctrine, sometimes known as 'the Right of the Stronger'.⁶ However, investigating this

1 Ar. *Nu.* 866-1104, discussed further below.

2 For the term 'immoralist', see Barney 2004, n. 1.

3 Recent discussions include Weiss 2007; Safty 2014; Anderson 2016.

4 E.g. Tritle 2006; Low 2007, 222-233; Greenwood 2009; Orwin 2017; Hoekstra and Fisher 2017.

5 Unfortunately, less attention has been paid to its use in Euripides, although see Allan 1999-2000; Papadopoulou 2012. Since the subject-matter of Euripides' tragedies varies enormously, as does the characterisation of each speaker who employs these arguments, the role and effect of this argumentation vary greatly from play to play. The present article does not aim to discuss individual scenes in Euripides extensively, or to identify the particular role played by these arguments within given tragedies; however, by outlining and categorising some of the main arguments used in Euripides, this article may make it easier to do so in future.

6 In German, 'das Recht des Stärkeren'; scholarship in English uses various expressions. An influential analysis of the Sophists' influence on tragedy and on Thucydides is that of Nestle, who saw Euripides as "der Dichter der griechischen Aufklärung" and Thucydides as "der Geschichtschreiber der griechischen Aufklärung", and who discussed 'das Recht des Stärkeren' as part of this: Nestle 1901, 203-205; 1948, 357-362. On these arguments in philosophical contexts, see Guthrie 1969, 84-116; de Romilly 1992, 111-161; Meister 2010, 86-101. On their use in Thucydides, see Heath 1990; Meister 2011; Hoekstra and Fisher 2017. On their use

development as a unified intellectual phenomenon presents several problems. Firstly, it has rightly been pointed out that some elements of this argumentation are already present in early authors, such as Hesiod.⁷ Also, some scholars doubt that its emergence had much to do with the Sophists: might it not instead have emerged in the context of debates regarding Athenian imperial policy?⁸ Furthermore, the two most elaborate surviving arguments against justice—the Sophist Antiphon's argument that the most beneficial (μάλιστα ξυμφερόντως) behaviour is to act according to νόμος ('law' or 'custom') in public but φύσις ('nature') in private, and Callicles' argument in Plato's *Gorgias* that the unjust man's actions are only unjust by νόμος but not by φύσις—are not paralleled in Thucydides and Euripides, or even in Plato's *Republic*.⁹ There is no reason to believe that Thucydides or Euripides was familiar with such stances as these. Indeed, we cannot take it for granted that arguments made in Plato circulated in the fifth century at all, except where corroborated by fifth-century sources (as with the arguments upon which this article focuses). The arguments that Thucydides and Euripides include in their work are much simpler, and are not generally based on this sort of ingenious manipulation of the νόμος-φύσις antithesis.¹⁰ There are in fact three lines of argument which recur particularly conspicuously, and which (since they occur not only in Plato but

in tragedy, see (on various plays) Bengt 1929, 62-74; Finley 1938, 30-34; Allan 1999-2000, 145-156 (on E. *Heracl.*); Gotter 2008, 191-193 (on E. *Ph.*). Jordović 2005, 82-116 provides an interesting investigation of the origins of 'das Recht des Stärkeren'.

7 Jordović 2005, 82-84.

8 De Romilly 1992, 111-161 argues at length that it is impossible to show that any known Sophist expounded 'immoralist' views. Building partly on this, Jordović 2005, 77-82, 84-91 argues for this argumentation's emergence in the context of Athenian imperial policy; Meister 2011, 265-267 likewise thinks that Athenian imperial policy should be seen as influencing the argumentation rather than *vice versa*. Somewhat similarly, Trampedach 2006, argues that "der griechische Machtdiskurs an sich keine sophistische Übersteigerung ist, sondern in der 'popular morality' wurzelt und als Ausdruck einer konventionellen Einstellung verstanden werden muß" (4), and sees 'realist' ideas about power as part of the Athenian practice of rule (17-18).

9 On Antiphon's argument (87 B 44A DK = [37] Antiph. D38a LM), see Furley 1989, 66-76; de Romilly 1992, 121-128; Pendrick 2001, 59-65. For discussions of Callicles' argument (Pl. *Grg.* 482d7-484b1) from an intellectual-historical perspective, see Guthrie 1969, 101-107; de Romilly 1992, 119-120, 126-127, 158-161; Hoffmann 1997, 110-150; Barney 2004, section 6.

10 The νόμος-φύσις antithesis, an important and pervasive development of late fifth-century intellectual life, is prevalent in all these authors, and often arises in connection with arguments in favour of injustice. However, it is also often absent, and is not essential to the construction of the arguments discussed below in the way that it is to those of Antiphon and Callicles. On the antithesis, see Heinimann 1945; Ostwald 1986, 260-273; Meister 2010, 83-86. I follow de Romilly 1992, 126-127 and Barney 2004, section 2, against Kerferd 1981, 122, in not considering Thrasymachus' argument to be based on the νόμος-φύσις antithesis.

also in Thucydides and Euripides) can be considered fifth-century phenomena; these will be laid out in the first half of this article.

Perhaps the most important objection to seeing ‘immoralist’ argumentation as a single and unified entity, however, is that—as we will see—some of the arguments that *are* employed in Thucydides and Euripides to argue in favour of unjust conduct are not *solely* so employed. They are not ‘immoralist’ arguments *par excellence*, but are arguments of broader applicability that *may* be used for ‘immoralist’ purposes.

There are, then, significant problems with the traditional interpretative paradigm. However, scholars have not yet provided an alternative overall view of this phenomenon which takes all three genres properly into account. Firstly, therefore, I will set out a more circumspect view of the nature of this argumentation, taking into account the problems which I have just highlighted. The second half of this article will then explore how the use of this argumentation is affected by our three writers’ differing subject-matter and genre. By providing a balanced and nuanced view of this argumentation, this article aims to contribute to our understanding of fifth-century intellectual history, and to clarify these three authors’ places within it.

2 The Main Lines of Argument Used

Our first purpose, then, is to identify the three main lines of argument used. These arguments are used not only to argue in favour of unjust conduct in general (as in Plato), but also, prospectively or retrospectively, in favour of particular actions taken by the speaker or another party, whether or not the speaker admits that the action is unjust. (These are, then, flexible arguments, adaptable to a range of argumentative objectives.)

Firstly, there are arguments based on ordinary human behaviour.¹¹ These rest on the basis that no sane person, placed in a position to act unjustly, would act justly instead. Glaucon enunciates this viewpoint in Plato’s *Republic* when he says that ‘a person capable of doing injustice who was a real man would never agree with anyone not to do each other injustice: he would have to be mad’ (τὸν δυνάμενον αὐτὸ ποιεῖν [sc. ἀδικεῖν] καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἄνδρα οὐδ’ ἂν ἐνί ποτε

11 Guthrie 1969, 84-101 uses the word ‘realist’ to cover all arguments based on ordinary human behaviour or self-interest. For present purposes, however, it seems important to distinguish these, since they are logically independent (in that an appeal to ordinary human behaviour does not intrinsically entail an appeal to self-interest, and *vice versa*), and since argumentation based on self-interest is in practice often employed without any appeal being made to ordinary human behaviour.

συνθέσθαι τὸ μήτε ἀδικεῖν μήτε ἀδικεῖσθαι· μαίνεσθαι γὰρ ἄν, Pl. R. 2.359b2-5). The Athenians' line of thought in Thucydides' Melian Dialogue is based on a similar appeal to ordinary behaviour, when they say that both they and the Melians know 'that in human arguments just decisions are made when both parties are subject to equal compulsion, and that those who are at an advantage do what they can and the weak comply' (ὅτι δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπείῳ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἴσης ἀνάγκης κρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ πρὸνχοντες πρᾶσσουσι καὶ οἱ ἀσθενεῖς ξυγχωροῦσιν, Th. 5.89). The Athenians again appeal to ordinary human behaviour when they state that 'we believe of the gods, and know of mortals, that, as an unvarying result of natural necessity, they rule wherever they have the power. We did not make his law, nor were we the first to make use of it when it was established, but we make use of it having taken it up and will leave it behind us for the future, knowing that you and other people, if in the same position of power, would do the same' (ἡγούμεθα γὰρ τό τε θεῖον δόξη τὸ ἀνθρώπειόν τε σαφῶς διὰ παντὸς ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκαίας, οὐδ' ἂν κρατῆ, ἄρχειν· καὶ ἡμεῖς οὔτε θέντες τὸν νόμον οὔτε κειμένῳ πρῶτοι χρησάμενοι, ὄντα δὲ παραλαβόντες καὶ ἐσόμενον ἐς αἰεὶ καταλείψοντες χρώμεθα αὐτῷ, εἰδότες καὶ ὑμᾶς ἂν καὶ ἄλλους ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ δυνάμει ἡμῖν γενομένους δρῶντας ἂν ταυτό, Th. 5.105.2). Similar statements about ordinary human conduct are used in support of the Athenians' violent use of power throughout Thucydides' work.¹² A partly similar argument occurs in Euripides' *Children of Heracles*, when Eurystheus justifies his attempt to have Heracles' children killed on the basis that Alcmena, Heracles' mother, would have done the same if she had been in his dangerous position. Here, though, there is no generalised appeal to human nature.¹³

Secondly, there is argumentation based on self-interest. A novel concept that features prominently in this context is τὸ συμφέρον—what is in somebody's interests, what is expedient, or what is good for somebody—but such arguments often employ older concepts, above all κέρδος (gain), ὠφελία (benefit), and the adjective χρήσιμος (useful), which, although their exact senses differ, can all be used to refer to one's own or somebody else's interests.¹⁴ These concepts

12 See further Heath 1990 and Meister 2011; examples of such argumentation, based on appeals to ordinary human behaviour, include arguments made by the Athenians at Sparta (Th. 1.76.2), Hermocrates (4.61.5-6, playing devil's advocate), and Alcibiades (6.18.2).

13 E. *Herac.* 1005-1008. Eurystheus' main argument here, however, is one based on self-interest, as discussed below.

14 Spahn 1986 provides an excellent account of the emergence of τὸ συμφέρον, discussing its relationship to these other terms (especially 1986, 10). The concept of τὸ συμφέρον had currency among medical writers, and may or may not have originated among them (cf. Heinemann 1945, 127-129, 135; Spahn 1986, 13; Furley 1989, 69-70; Pendrick 2001, 63).

can be used alongside justice, to argue that what is just is also advantageous,¹⁵ but can also be used to argue that injustice is advantageous. Thrasymachus presents a general argument for precisely this in Plato's *Republic*. He starts by trying to explain the nature of justice, which he says initially is 'the interests of the stronger' (τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον, Pl. R. 1.338c3, 1.339a3-4), but which he then restates as 'the good of someone else, the interests of the stronger and of the ruler' (ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν ... τοῦ κρείττονός τε καὶ ἄρχοντος συμφέρον, Pl. R. 1.343c3-4). It is disputed whether here he is attempting to establish definitions of justice, or whether he is rather offering 'a debunking or critique of justice' as conventionally understood.¹⁶ In any case, it is only at the end of his argument that he actually argues in favour of injustice. He does so entirely on the basis that injustice is expedient: firstly, he appeals to numerous practical examples from everyday life to demonstrate that 'the just man everywhere does worse than the unjust' (δίκαιος ἀνὴρ ἀδίκου πανταχοῦ ἔλαττον ἔχει, Pl. R. 1.343d2),¹⁷ before concluding that 'injustice, when it occurs on a sufficiently large scale, is both stronger, freer and more masterful than justice, and, as I said at the beginning, justice is in fact the advantage of the stronger, and on the other hand injustice is what is profitable and advantageous to oneself' (καὶ ἰσχυρότερον καὶ ἐλευθεριώτερον καὶ δεσποτικώτερον ἀδικία δικαιοσύνης ἐστὶν ἰκανῶς γιγνομένη, καὶ ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔλεγον, τὸ μὲν τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον τὸ δίκαιον τυγχάνει ὄν, τὸ δ' ἀδικον ἑαυτῷ λυσιτελοῦν τε καὶ συμφέρον, Pl. R. 1.344c5-9, tr. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy). This last phrase concludes Thrasymachus' presentation of his general argument, based upon τὸ συμφέρον, for unjust behaviour.

In Thucydides, τὸ συμφέρον is frequently set in opposition to τὸ δίκαιον.¹⁸ This happens in the debate at Athens between the Corinthians and the Corcyraeans. Here, since there is no standing treaty which would place the Athenians under an obligation of justice to help the Corcyraeans, the Corcyraeans have to present arguments chiefly on the basis of τὸ συμφέρον, although they also do their best to argue that it would not be unjust of the

15 For instance, the Corinthians at Athens argue that the Athenians' self-interest (ξύμφορα, Th. 1.42.1; τὸ ... ξυμφέρον, 1.42.2) lies in not harming their equals, i.e. the Corinthians (τὸ γὰρ μὴ ἀδικεῖν τοὺς ὁμοίους, 1.42.4). Cf. Spahn 1986, 16; Heath 1990, 389-390.

16 Barney 2004, section 2; I am inclined to agree with her, and with Guthrie 1969, 88-97 and de Romilly 1992, 116-121, that Thrasymachus is primarily critiquing justice rather than attempting to define it rigorously. If he is seen as offering a rigorous definition of justice, as argued by Kerferd 1976 and others, this would not negate the importance of τὸ συμφέρον as the essential basis of his argument for the rejection of justice. For all this, cf. also Spahn 1986, 17.

17 The examples are given at 1.343d2-344c4.

18 On the importance of τὸ συμφέρον in Thucydides, with discussion of the cases mentioned here and others, see Solmsen 1975, 96, 117-122.

Athenians to help Corcyra. The Corinthians, though, argue primarily on the basis of τὸ δίκαιον, although not without taking the Athenians' interests into account. Thus, by using the concept of τὸ συμφέρον, the Corcyraeans are able to argue more powerfully than they otherwise could that the Athenians should take the action that the Corinthians consider unjust.¹⁹ The concept of τὸ συμφέρον is also prominent in the Mytilene debate. Here, Cleon invokes justice and self-interest to advocate a harsh and violent course of action (executing the male population of Mytilene), whereas Diodotus explicitly sets self-interest against justice to advocate a milder course of action, showing the great flexibility of these argumentative concepts.²⁰ The Athenians also make arguments from their own self-interest in the Melian Dialogue, prompting the Melians to observe that the Athenians exclude τὸ δίκαιον from discussion and argue only from τὸ συμφέρον.²¹ Arguments based on self-interest can be combined with arguments based on ordinary behaviour, as in the Melian Dialogue, or used separately, as in the debate between the Corinthians and the Corcyraeans.

Euripides' characters often use arguments based on self-interest, although the abstract concept τὸ συμφέρον rarely occurs.²² In Euripides' *Medea*, Jason argues that deserting Medea is actually in his and Medea's interests.²³ Eurystheus makes a clear argument from self-interest in *Children of Heracles*, when he explains that killing Heracles' children would ensure that his interests would be safe.²⁴ Furthermore, the Argive Herald in *Children of Heracles* relies on the argument that it would be in the Athenians' interests to hand over the children of Heracles to the Argives, and that it would bring the Athenians no benefit to help them; as in the Melian Dialogue, the notion of κέρδος is employed.²⁵ Other characters also explain their conduct on the basis that they wish to defend

19 The two ideas of τὸ συμφέρον and τὸ δίκαιον are particularly clearly opposed at Th. 1.32.1, 1.36.1, 1.42.1-2, and also notably in the Plataea debate at Th. 3.56.3; see further Solmsen 1975, 34-36, 120 and Heath 1990, 389-390.

20 Especially 3.40, 47. Cf. Solmsen 1975, 38-39, 120-121; Heath 1990, 388-389.

21 Th. 5.90, 98. As Solmsen 1975, 118 notes, the Athenians themselves use various terms for self-interest here, including χρήσιμον and ὠφέλιμον.

22 It only appears in Euripides at *Polyidus*, fr. 634 *TrGF*, where it is not used in connection with injustice.

23 *E. Med.* 559-573, 595-596; Finley 1938, 33 and 1942, 51.

24 *E. Heracl.* 1004: τοιαῦτα δρῶντι τᾶμ' ἐγγίγνεται ἀσφαλῆ.

25 *E. Heracl.* 57-58, 146-178, with the verb κερδαίνω at 154; κέρδ- also occurs at 5 and 1043. See further Conacher 1998, 90-93 and Allan 1999-2000, 149-151, who consider the contrast between κέρδος (advocated by the Herald) and δίκη in this scene and throughout the play in relation to Sophistic debates about morality and self-interest. Papadopoulou 2012, 384-388 draws some broader parallels between the Herald's line of argument and the sort of Athenian power-politics seen in Thucydides.

themselves or their families from some harm,²⁶ or to defend their position against another woman.²⁷ In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, moreover, the main justification advanced by Odysseus and Neoptolemus for stealing Philoctetes' bow is τὸ συμφέρον, although accompanied by the further defence that it is just to obey those in command: we see this especially when Neoptolemus says that he cannot give the bow back because justice (τὸ ἔνδικον) and self-interest (τὸ συμφέρον) prompt him to obey his commanders.²⁸ Only here is the abstract neuter τὸ συμφέρον used, but Odysseus also uses self-interest to argue in favour of tricking Philoctetes early in the play, when Neoptolemus protests that it would be αἰσχροῦν to do so, and Odysseus replies: 'not if lying brings safety!' (οὐκ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναι γέ το ψεύδος φέρει, *S. Ph.* 109). He then proceeds to add that 'when you are doing something to gain advantage, it is not appropriate to hesitate' (ὅταν τι δρᾷς εἰς κέρδος, οὐκ ὀκνεῖν πρέπει, *Ph.* 111); again, the word κέρδος is used. As in Thucydides, argumentation based on self-interest can be used alongside argumentation based on justice; indeed, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* Odysseus and Neoptolemus both claim that δίκη is on their side.²⁹ Argumentation based on self-interest is, then, used not only in Thucydides, but also in Euripides and in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, frequently and flexibly, both in combination with δίκη and in opposition to it.

A third type of argument involves using values with normative force of their own—especially ἀνδρεία (courage) and σοφία (wisdom)—to argue in favour of an action. As with τὸ συμφέρον, a speaker employing such an argument does not necessarily have to admit that the action is unjust: a speaker can maintain that an action is both δίκαιος and either ἀνδρεῖος or σοφός. However, as with τὸ συμφέρον, arguments based on ἀνδρεία or σοφία can be used in favour of actions the injustice of which the speaker recognises, or which the speaker would find it difficult to frame as just. The Sophistic treatise the *Anonymus Iamblichii* also mentions argumentation based on ἀνδρεία, imagining an opponent who argues that 'power founded upon greed is virtue while obedience to the laws is cowardice' (τὸ κράτος τὸ ἐπὶ τῇ πλεονεξία ... ἀρετὴν εἶναι, τὸ δὲ τῶν νόμων ὑπακούειν δειλίαν, 89 DK = [40] *Anon. Iambli. LM*, at 6.1). Likewise, Thucydides' famous passage on στάσις explains that participants in στάσις

26 Creon at *Med.* 289-291; Lycus at *HF* 165-169; Menelaus at *Andr.* 370-379.

27 Hermione at *Andr.* 155-162.

28 *S. Ph.* 925-926. Sophocles uses the abstract neuter singular only here, but uses cognate forms in analogous ways in other late plays: Spahn 1986, 12 n. 33 cites *Ph.* 131, 287, 627, 659, and *OC* 464, 592, 1186, 1347, 1635, although also *OT* 875. In general on Sophistic elements in Sophocles, which have sometimes been underestimated, see Rose 1976, Craik 1980, and de Romilly 1995, 97-109 (against the earlier view of Nestle 1948, 195-225).

29 *S. Ph.* 82, 926.

would justify their conduct, immoral by ordinary standards, on the grounds that it constituted ἀνδρεία: ‘reckless boldness was considered courage in support of one’s friends, and delay with foresight was considered specious cowardice’ (τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθῆς δειλία εὐπρεπής, Th. 3.82.4).³⁰ Euripides’ Eteocles does the same when he says that he will not surrender his power to Polynices because it is ἀνανδρία to give up something that is greater for something that is less.³¹ The value σοφία is used in similar ways. Thus, Plato’s Thrasymachus maintains at Socrates’ prompting that ἀδικία is a type of σοφία,³² but the best examples come from Euripides. Alcmena states in *Children of Heracles* that it is οὐ σοφόν not to kill an enemy,³³ and Menelaus states in *Andromache* that ‘if I do not arrange my affairs as well as possible, I am worthless and not σοφός’ (εἰ μὴ θήσομαι τᾶμ’ ὡς ἄριστα, φαῦλός εἰμι κού σοφός, E. *Andr.* 378–379). In *Heracles*, even Amphitryon admits that it is σοφός of Lycus to want to kill Heracles’ family for self-preservation.³⁴ Eteocles in *Phoenician Women* and, more explicitly, Jason in *Medea* both lay claim to σοφία, too.³⁵ Most of these speakers—except for Eteocles, who explicitly acknowledges the injustice of his behaviour,³⁶ and Alcmena, who claims that her actions are in line with δίκη as well as σοφός³⁷—do not directly discuss the question of whether their actions are just or not. This is because σοφία, like τὸ συμφέρον, makes it possible for these speakers to sidestep the question of justice, by arguing in favour of these actions without maintaining that they are just.

Those three lines of argument are particularly conspicuous across all three authors. Other arguments, however, also occur. For instance, there are several cases where the invincible power of love is used as an excuse for misconduct: Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen*, the Worse Argument in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*,

30 Pl. *R.* 8.560e4–561a1 similarly denounces the practice of using fine names for bad conduct, including referring to ἀναίδεια as ἀνδρεία. One may also compare Plato’s Callicles and Xenophon’s Menon, who are both portrayed as regarding their enemies’ conventional virtue as ἀνανδρία (Pl. *Grg.* 492a7–b1; X. *An.* 2.6.25); Plato’s Callicles furthermore explicitly denounces conventional values as φλυαρία καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄξια (Pl. *Grg.* 492c7–8). (I draw these parallels from Bengt 1929, 70.)

31 E. *Ph.* 509–510: ἀνανδρία γὰρ, τὸ πλεόν ὅστις ἀπολέσας τοῦλασσον ἔλαβε.

32 Pl. *R.* 1.348d–e.

33 E. *Heracl.* 881; cf. Allan 1999–2000, 151.

34 E. *HF* 207.

35 E. *Ph.* 499, *Med.* 548; cf. *Supp.* 510, *El.* 982. We may perhaps also compare the attitude of Xenophon’s Menon, who considers virtuousness to be equivalent to τὸ ἡλιθιον and its practitioners to be ἀπαιδευτοι (X. *An.* 2.6.22, 26, cited by Nestle 1901, 204).

36 E. *Ph.* 524–525.

37 E. *Heracl.* 882, 941, 971, 1025.

and the Nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus* all make use of this.³⁸ Another emotion sometimes used by Euripidean characters who wish to explain their conduct is fear: thus Creon in *Medea* and Eurystheus in *Children of Heracles* both state that fear drove them to act.³⁹ Fear is, however, not employed in these contexts in quite the same way as love. Creon and Eurystheus do not cite fear as an overmastering and irresistible emotive force, which is how love is presented in Gorgias, Aristophanes and Euripides. Rather, fear is simply presented as producing the circumstances that led Creon and Eurystheus to deliberate over the right way of securing their interests. Fear is presented similarly in Thucydides when the Athenians explain that three motivations led them to obtain an empire and not to give it up—honour, fear and self-interest.⁴⁰ Thucydides also states that the Spartans went to war because of fear: 'I consider the Athenians, by becoming great and making the Spartans afraid, forced them into war' (τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγοῦμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν, Th. 1.23.6). As de Romilly points out, the three motives given by the Athenians in Thucydides are also found, in a different form, in Gorgias' oration the *Defence of Palamedes*, where Gorgias lays out alternate motives as explanations for why Palamedes might have committed treachery, and refutes each one; in this oration, as de Romilly puts it, "the distinction between the available hypotheses is noticeably based upon a lucid analysis of the major motives at work in human beings generally (wealth, honour, safety)".⁴¹ In both Euripides and Thucydides, then, fear and self-interest are closely associated; we are not talking about fear in the sense of mindless terror, but about fear in the sense of a lucid consideration that motivates the person experiencing it to self-interested action.

Not all speeches in Euripides that argue in favour of actions that might be seen as unjust use one of the argumentative techniques that I have outlined. In fact, the most common argumentation in such speeches is specific to the occasion: characters simply outline the circumstances that led them to act, or explain what they hope their action will achieve. This is true of Creon in *Medea* and Eurystheus in *Children of Heracles*, who mention fear but also take much care to explain why they are afraid and what they hope to achieve by their action.⁴² It is also true, for instance, of Clytaemestra in *Electra*, who explains at length how Agamemnon's killing of Iphigenia and his return with Cassandra

38 82 B 11 DK = [32] Gorg. D24 LM, sections 6 and 15-19; Ar. *Nu.* 1075-1082; E. *Hipp.* 459-481; for discussion and further examples, see de Romilly 1995, 129-142.

39 E. *Med.* 282, 316-317; *Herac.* 991-996.

40 Th. 1.76.2: τιμῆς καὶ δέους καὶ ὠφελίας.

41 82 B 11a DK = [32] Gorg. D25 LM, sections 15-17; de Romilly 1992, 62-63.

42 E. *Med.* 282-291, *Herac.* 991-1004.

combined to prompt her to murder him.⁴³ Agamemnon in *Iphigenia at Aulis* argues simply that the ἀνάγκη produced by a concatenation of circumstances leaves him with no option but to kill Iphigenia or for his family to be slaughtered by the mutinous army.⁴⁴ When characters in Euripides defend their actions, then, such explanations often constitute an important part of doing so.

We can see, then, that, although these arguments all serve the same end—to argue in favour of an action which might be regarded as unjust—they are based on different premises and argue for this effect in different ways. That is to say, we are not really dealing with a single doctrine, the ‘Right of the Stronger’, which is manifested in different texts, but rather with a fairly diffuse variety of argumentative techniques, among which three are particularly prominent—the argument based on ordinary human behaviour, the argument based on τὸ συμφέρον, and the argument based on σοφία or ἀνδρεία.

3 The Extent to Which This Argumentation Is Novel

We can now see that the argumentation under investigation, rather than consisting in a single doctrine, consists in a number of separable arguments. Now we should consider another problem with the traditional view: how novel should we really consider this argumentation to be? A basic obstacle lies in the fact that we do not have prose literature from the early fifth century. Consequently, we cannot possibly prove that there is a given date before which this argumentation is not used. We can, however, compare what we see in late fifth-century texts with what we find in Hesiod and Aeschylus.

Aeschylus’ plays contain various cases where one party intends to kill or injure another, and is called upon to justify this, and which therefore bear comparison with the kinds of situation in which ‘immoralist’ arguments are used in Euripides. One example of this is the well-known scene in *Agamemnon* where Aegisthus threatens to kill the Chorus. Aegisthus issues his threats simply and directly, without any attempt at justificatory argument.⁴⁵ Likewise, in Aeschylus’ *Suppliants*, the Egyptian Herald initially tries to carry off the Danaids by force, without argument.⁴⁶ When challenged by Pelasgus, though, the Herald makes a counter-claim: he argues that δίκη is on his side, not on

43 E. *El.* 1011-1040.

44 E. *IA* 511-537.

45 A. *Ag.* 1617-1653.

46 A. *Supp.* 903-907. Cf. Allan 1999-2000, 155, who compares this ‘pre-sophistic’ Herald with the Herald in E. *Heracl.*

the Danaids.⁴⁷ Polynices in *Seven Against Thebes* is also portrayed as claiming δίκη.⁴⁸ In Aeschylus, then, those who wish to act unjustly can make a counterclaim of δίκη, or can resort to threats of violence without argument—but these are the only two possibilities, and the other arguments which we have discussed are absent.

Arguments based on δίκη do, of course, continue to be used in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides. For instance, when Creon in *Oedipus at Colonus* attempts to justify seizing Antigone and Ismene, he maintains that his seizure of the women is in line with δίκη⁴⁹—an argument similar to that of the Egyptian Herald in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*. In Euripides, 'immoralist' argumentation is more prominent, and claims of δίκη are often left out. Unlike Sophocles' Creon and Aeschylus' Herald, the Heralds in Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants* scarcely mention δίκη.⁵⁰ Sometimes, argumentation based on δίκη is used alongside more 'immoralist' types of argumentation: characters such as Alcmene in *Children of Heracles*, Clytaemestra in *Electra*, and Polynices in *Phoenician Women* emphatically claim that their actions are just.⁵¹ Argumentation based on justice does not, then, fall out of use; the difference lies in the fact that Euripides and (to a lesser extent) Sophocles use the arguments discussed above *as well*.

One passage in Hesiod's *Works and Days* is sometimes cited as anticipating late fifth-century arguments, namely the Hawk's speech to the Nightingale. Within the poem, this is framed as a fable (αἶνος) to dissuade both the unjust βασιλῆς whom Hesiod mentions and Hesiod's brother Perseus from acting unjustly.⁵²

ὦδ' ἴρηξ προσέειπεν ἀηδόνα ποικιλόδειρον
 ὕψι μάλ' ἐν νεφέεσσι φέρων ὄνυχεσσι μεμαρπώς·
 ἦ δ' ἔλεόν, γναμπτοῖσι πεπαρμένη ἀμφ' ὄνυχεσσι, 205
 μύρετο· τὴν ὃ γ' ἐπικρατέως πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
 “δαιμονίη, τί λέληκας; ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων·

47 A. *Supp.* 916.

48 A. *Th.* 646-648.

49 Creon claims that he is acting justly at S. *OC* 832, 880, 957, while the Chorus and Theseus call his behaviour unjust at 831, 913-916, 920.

50 The exception is the Argive Herald's statement at E. *Heracl.* 137-138: πολλὰ δ' ἦλθον, ὦ ξένη, | δίκαι' ὀμαρτῆ δρᾶν τε καὶ λέγειν ἔχων. However, he does not flesh out his claim that his actions are δίκαια.

51 E. *Heracl.* 882, 941, 971, 1025; *El.* 1049-1050 (cf. 1051); *Ph.* 470, 490-496.

52 Hes. *Op.* 202 (βασιλῆς) and 213 (Perseus). On the connection of this fable with the rest of the work, cf. West 1978, 204-205; Clay 2003, 39-40 with further bibliography.

τῆ δ' εἶς ἦ σ' ἄν ἐγὼ περ ἄγω καὶ ἀοιδὸν εὐόσαν·
 δεῖπνον δ', αἶ κ' ἐθέλω, ποιήσομαι ἢ ἐμεθήσω.
 ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλη πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν·
 νίκης τε στέρεται πρὸς τ' αἰσχεσιν ἄλγεα πάσχει."⁵³ 210

The hawk addressed the nightingale with its brightly-coloured neck, seizing her in its claws and carrying her high amid the clouds. She, pierced by the curved claws, wailed miserably, but he spoke commandingly to her: "Foolish bird, why make such a noise? You are held by someone far stronger than you, and I will take you wherever you like, even though you are a singer, and I will make you my dinner if I like, or let you go. Whoever has a mind to struggle against those who are stronger has no sense, and suffers pain on top of the dishonour of being deprived of victory."

Scholars have rightly pointed out that this speech anticipates what the Athenians say in the Melian Dialogue.⁵⁴ Both the Hawk's speech and the Athenians' arguments contain the idea that the strong subdue the weak and that the weak can do nothing about it. Also, rather as the Hawk claims that the Nightingale should submit to him on account of his superior strength and ignores the concerns of *δίκη* which Hesiod advocates throughout his poem, the Athenians claim that the Melians should submit to them on account of their superior strength, and discount any claims of justice which the Melians might put forward.⁵⁵ The *core* of the Athenians' stance, then, is the same as the Hawk's.

However, what the Hawk's speech does not display is any of the supplementary argumentation outlined above—and it is this argumentation, rather than the central point which the Athenians are making, that marks the Melian Dialogue as a product of the late fifth century. Thus the opening part of the Dialogue is strongly based on the relationship between self-interest and justice: the Athenians use *τὸ συμφέρον* to argue that justice is irrelevant to the matter in hand, while the Melians argue that to act justly would actually be in the Athenians' own interests. Equally, argumentation based on ordinary human behaviour is employed by the Athenians, when they say that ruling wherever one can is a law of nature, and that they are merely acting in accordance with it.⁵⁶ Therefore, although the Hawk anticipates the Athenians in some central

53 Hes. *Op.* 203-211.

54 The analogy is pointed out by Jordović 2005, 83 and by Hornblower 2008, 219-220, 223-224.

55 Th. 5.89, cf. 5.90.1.

56 Th. 5.105.2, discussed above.

regards, the Hawk's words do not in fact undermine the notion that the three arguments set out above are a development new to fifth-century thought.

There has not, then, been an essential alteration in the conception of power or human nature between Hesiod and Aeschylus and Euripides, Thucydides and Plato. The basic notion that the strong subdue the weak, which Gotter has shown to be essential to the Greek conception of power,⁵⁷ was nothing new, since it was present in Hesiod. We may add that we are not talking about a change in how Greeks acted: they waged violent wars both before and after the mid-fifth century,⁵⁸ and, in tragedy too, characters kill and oppress each other just as readily in Aeschylus as in Euripides. What is present in Euripides, Thucydides and Plato and not in Hesiod and Aeschylus, though, is a considerably greater variety of supplementary argumentation that can be used to argue in favour of actions which might be seen as unjust. In Hesiod and Aeschylus, that is, a person accused of injustice can either lay claim to justice or act regardless accompanied by the necessary violence or threats, whereas in our late-fifth-century authors speakers additionally present arguments in terms of ordinary behaviour, self-interest, and the competing values of *σοφία* and *ἀνδρεία*—and may also bring emotional and motivational factors into the picture. We cannot, of course, eliminate the possibility that these arguments appeared in earlier literature than we are aware of, but there does seem to be a genuine difference between the arguments found in Euripides, Thucydides and Plato and what we can observe in earlier literature.

4 The Possible Origins of the Argumentation

We can see, then, that, although we are dealing with a variety of arguments rather than with a unified doctrine, the use of these arguments does seem to characterise Euripides, Thucydides and Plato in a way distinctive from earlier writers. Therefore, we should briefly reconsider the origins of this argumentation, asking how the considerations discussed above might affect our view of this difficult question.

Conventionally, it has been supposed that the Sophists were responsible, although perhaps responding to a demand for such arguments produced by the conditions of Athenian political life or by the need for arguments to justify the

57 Gotter 2008, 183–199, discussed further below.

58 Cf. Guthrie 1969, 21: “Doubtless the Athenians did not need a Thrasymachus or a Callicles to teach them how to deal with a recalcitrant island.”

empire.⁵⁹ Some support is lent to this view by Aristophanes' *Clouds* of 423 BC, in which Aristophanes presents a debate between two Arguments, introduced as the Better (κρείττων) and Worse (ἥττων); the Better Argument (who consistently professes conventional moral attitudes) is defeated by the Worse Argument (who is repeatedly referred to as ἄδικος).⁶⁰ Although it is Socrates, rather than any of the figures more commonly called 'Sophists', whom Aristophanes portrays as teaching these arguments, Aristophanes presumably felt that it was a colourable imputation against contemporary intellectuals not only that they made the weaker argument the stronger (as Protagoras openly professed to), but also that they made unjust arguments prevail over arguments based on conventional morality.⁶¹

On the other hand, however, as de Romilly and others have argued, there is no firm evidence that arguments in favour of injustice were actually employed by the Sophists of the late fifth century. Antiphon's argument, although it does seem to imply that one need not heed νόμος when nobody is watching, does not actually recommend unjust action; Thrasymachus in the *Republic* only seems to positively recommend injustice at the end of his argument, and it is not clear that Plato's Thrasymachus reflects the real Sophist Thrasymachus on this point; and in Plato's *Gorgias* Callicles is not presented as an actual Sophist, but rather as an ambitious young man who happens to be Gorgias' pupil.⁶²

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- 59 The view that the Sophists were essentially responding to the issues raised by Athenian democracy and imperialism is advanced by Finley 1942, 42; de Romilly 1963, 302-304 and 1992, 25; and Guthrie 1969, 20-21. Forrest 1975, 42-43 and Ostwald 1986, 237-238 stress the role of the younger generation of ambitious young men in Athens in the 420s. Martin 1976, 153-164 provides a more ambitious, and less Athenocentric, account of the Sophistic movement's origins; he argues that it responded to the decline of the aristocratic morality of the archaic period by exploring anew the individual's role within the *polis*.
- 60 They are introduced by Strepsiades as τὸν κρείττον' ὅστις ἐστὶ καὶ τὸν ἥττονα, | ὅς τ' ἄδικα λέγων ἀνατρέπει τὸν κρείττονα (*Ar. Nu.* 883-884). The Arguments are named as Δίκαιος Λόγος and Ἄδικος Λόγος in our manuscripts, but not in the text of the play itself, and therefore cannot be presumed to have been so named by Aristophanes, although the latter is repeatedly referred to as ἄδικος in the play (*Ar. Nu.* 116, 657, 885); Dover 1968, lvii-lviii.
- 61 According to Arist. *Rh.* 1402a23-25, Protagoras professed to 'make the weaker argument the stronger' (τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν), by which he will not have meant that he made the *unjust* argument the stronger. Aristophanes' equation of the ἥττων λόγος with injustice is a polemical redefinition (Schiappa 2003, 106-113; Major 2013, 82-97). The portrait of Socrates in *Ar. Nu.* is greatly at variance with the positive presentation of Socrates in the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon, and is generally regarded as a composite picture of the contemporary intellectual (cf. Dover 1968, xxxii-lvii, especially xlix-liv; Konstan 2011).
- 62 Indeed, Callicles emphatically dissociates himself from the Sophists (*Pl. Grg.* 520a1-2). I here summarise the stance of de Romilly 1992 regarding Antiphon (123-124), Thrasymachus

None of this demonstrates that the Sophists did *not* teach their pupils in rhetoric such arguments, of course, but evidence that they *did* is lacking.⁶³

All this makes it possible to suggest, as Jordović maintains, that this argumentation should be seen not primarily as a product of contemporary intellectuals, but as evolving in the context of debates over Athenian imperial policy, as seen in Thucydides.⁶⁴ On this view, the argumentation discussed above would have emerged in a practical context within the Athenian democracy, only subsequently spilling out into tragedy and philosophical debate; its prominence in Euripides might be explained as a consequence of this shift.

However, despite the attractiveness of this suggestion, we should perhaps be cautious. Grounds exist for doubting whether the Athenians really can have used such cynical arguments as Thucydides gives them.⁶⁵ If they did not, our basis for attributing such arguments to late fifth-century politicians may not be much better than our basis for attributing such arguments to fifth-century intellectuals. Certainly, Thucydides' statement that he kept to the *ξύπασσα γνώμη* of what was actually said does not guarantee that these politicians really used the specific arguments set out above.⁶⁶ Furthermore, even if these arguments were widely used in practical contexts, this does not exclude the involvement of Sophists or other intellectuals. After all, the Sophists were teachers of rhetoric: their notability rests on their status as inventors of arguments who taught people to speak. Indeed, the fact that the phenomenon consists in a number of arguments rather than in a unitary doctrine may make it more, rather than less, likely that they played some role.

Perhaps, therefore, the evidence does not really allow us to generalise with confidence as to whether political debates or intellectual currents were more important in encouraging the emergence of this argumentation. Indeed, since we are dealing with a number of distinct arguments rather than with a unified phenomenon, it may be wrong in principle (rather than merely difficult in practice) to seek a single source: the arguments might have originated in different contexts from each other. Moreover, these arguments might easily have arisen not squarely in one context, but in the interstices between them—in the low-level interactions that must have occurred continually between

(178), and Callicles (xiv, 156-157). Throughout her discussion, de Romilly emphatically minimises the possibility that the Sophists advanced 'immoralist' argumentation.

63 On this view, *Ar. Nu.* "is just as unfair to the Sophists" as it is to Socrates (de Romilly 1992, 10); cf. Major 2013, 84.

64 Jordović 2005, 77-82, 84-91.

65 Strasburger 2009; Heath 1990, 391-399; Low 2005 and 2007, especially 227-228.

66 Th. 1.22.1. For discussion of this controversial sentence, with bibliography, see Hornblower 1987, 45-47.

politicians, intellectuals, rhetoricians, playwrights, and actors. In a small society like Athens, it is perhaps difficult to imagine that argumentation of this sort could have remained confined to one of these spheres for long.

All in all, then, when we recognise that we are looking not at a unified phenomenon but at a series of discrete arguments, it becomes less coherent to try to identify a single source for them. We should recognise that we are dealing with a broad and multifaceted concern, present in political, theatrical, and intellectual contexts alike, regarding how controversial actions might be justified. The political problems raised by the Athenian empire perhaps helped to prompt this concern, but this does not necessarily entail that these arguments actually *originated* in the political sphere; no secure basis is available for establishing the relative importance of political, intellectual, and theatrical contexts in producing a cultural situation in which these arguments might emerge. But it is precisely in the fact that this argumentation affects multiple genres in the late fifth and early fourth centuries that its importance as a phenomenon of Athenian intellectual life lies.

5 Differences in the Use of the Argumentation Based on Genre and Subject-Matter

Perhaps the most important advantage of categorising the argumentation into three main lines of argument and studying these arguments across genres is that it enables us to explore how this argumentation differs between genres—a question which it would have been difficult to pose, let alone answer, without properly defining the scope and internal complexity of the phenomenon, as we have done. There are three rather heterogeneous differences which I would like to highlight.

Firstly, the genres of philosophy, history and drama differ greatly in their structure and purposes, and consequently the role played by the argumentation is very different in each. Since the central concern of Plato's *Gorgias* and *Republic* is to discuss justice in abstract terms, Callicles, Thrasymachus and Glaucon present arguments in favour of injustice in general, rather than in specific instances.⁶⁷ By contrast, although Thucydides does exhibit a strong interest in employing and exploring abstract values such as τὸ δίκαιον and τὸ συμφέρον, he uses these to discuss specific historical issues—above all, the morality and exigencies of Athenian imperialism. As a dramatist, Euripides'

67 That is, except for occasional real-life examples, such as that of Archelaus of Macedon (Pl. *Grg.* 470d5-471d2).

subject-matter varies greatly, and so the argumentation is used in a correspondingly great variety of ways—to justify abandoning one’s wife (Jason in *Medea*), depriving one’s brother of his share of power (Eteocles in *Phoenician Women*), murdering the children of one’s enemy (Eurystheus in *Children of Heracles*; Lycus in *Heracles*), and, as we have already seen, for various other purposes.

Furthermore, since Plato’s work is concerned with justice in the abstract, and since Callicles and Thrasymachus therefore argue against justice in the abstract, they must necessarily *reject* justice, at least as conventionally understood. By contrast, in Thucydides and Euripides, users of such arguments (naturally enough) do not usually accept that their conduct is unjust. Instead, they use these arguments to sidestep the question of justice, or make a counter-claim to the effect that their act is actually just (rather as characters in Aeschylus sometimes do), or—in the case of the Melian Dialogue—discount justice as irrelevant.

Those, then, are the simplest ways in which the role of this argumentation differs between the authors: in Plato, it is employed abstractly against justice in itself, whereas in Thucydides and Euripides it is employed in concrete situations, and consequently speakers do not necessarily admit that they may be acting unjustly.

A second and equally important difference between Thucydides and Euripides concerns the conceptions of human nature and power that underlie the use of this argumentation. Here, it is useful to start by considering the Athenian discourse of power in the late fifth century, which has been excellently elucidated in recent articles by Ulrich Gotter and Kai Trampedach.⁶⁸ Gotter maintains convincingly that, compared to Roman conceptions of power, the Greeks—at least from Thucydides and Euripides onwards—saw power as a matter of the strong dominating the weak, a process in which all normative considerations are seen as largely irrelevant. For Thucydides in particular, “it is an anthropological constant that anyone applies the power he has to the greatest possible extent”.⁶⁹ But how true is this of Euripides—who deals, for the most part, with the exercise of power by *individuals*, rather than by *poleis* as in Thucydides?

Sometimes, as is pointed out most effectively by Colin Macleod, the picture which Euripides presents of the behaviour of individuals seems to resemble Thucydides’ picture of the behaviour of *poleis* at war. Consider, for instance, Euripides’ *Hecuba*: Hecuba argues, with arguments based on νόμος and justice, that Agamemnon should punish the Thracian Polymestor for murdering

68 Gotter 2008, 183–199; Trampedach 2006.

69 Gotter 2008, 186–187 (quotation at 186) lists the main features of this discourse of power.

her son. Agamemnon replies by saying that, although he wishes to do what is just, he is constrained by fear of being criticised by the army. To this, Hecuba replies: ‘no mortal exists who is free: either he is the slave of money or chance, or the city’s crowds or laws compel him to act against his own judgement’ (οὐκ ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἔστ’ ἐλεύθερος· | ἢ χρημάτων γὰρ δοῦλός ἐστιν ἢ τύχης, | ἢ πλήθος αὐτὸν πόλεος ἢ νόμων γραφαί | εἴργουσι χρῆσθαι μὴ κατὰ γνώμην τρόποις, E. *Hec.* 864-867). This, as Macleod argues, indicates a conception of human nature and of ἀνάγκη akin to Thucydides.⁷⁰ Equally, in *Medea*, the Tutor remarks regarding Jason, ‘are you only now learning that each man loves himself more than others?’ (ἄρτι γινώσκεις τόδε, | ὡς πᾶς τις αὐτὸν τοῦ πέλας μάλλον φιλεῖ, E. *Med.* 85-86).⁷¹ On the basis of remarks like these, one might think that Euripidean individuals, like Thucydidean *poleis*, are more or less totally governed by self-interest.

However, this by no means holds for Euripidean individuals in general. Sometimes individuals are under pressures that compel them to act unjustly (as with Agamemnon in *Hecuba*), or are simply unjust people (as with Jason in *Medea*, perhaps). Often, though, Euripides’ characters act eminently justly, as with Demophon in *Children of Heracles* (who refuses to turn out the children of Heracles despite imminent destruction hanging over his city)—or they *fail* to “exercise their power to the greatest possible extent”,⁷² as with Creon in *Medea* (who relents when Medea supplicates him, declaring that he does not possess a ‘tyrannical’ nature)⁷³—and so on.

Nor do characters in Euripides generally talk as though they expect other people to act amorally—except perhaps in dire circumstances which leave no alternative. For instance, when a character in *Hippolytus Veiled* says ‘I myself say, do not give even law greater respect amid dangers than necessity’ (ἔγωγε φημί καὶ νόμον γε μὴ σέβειν | ἐν τοῖσι δεινοῖς τῶν ἀναγκαίων πλέον, E. fr. 433 *TrGF*), this statement operates on the premises that one would only consider violating νόμος under definite external constraint (δεινά, ἀναγκαῖα), such as that applied to Agamemnon in *Hecuba*, and that most or at least some people *would* respect νόμος in dire circumstances, and would therefore need the speaker’s advice. Similarly, when Euripides’ Eurystheus asserts that Alcmena would have killed the children of Heracles if she were in his position,⁷⁴ this passage does perhaps bear a similarity to Thucydides’ notions about how *poleis* exercise power,

70 Macleod 1983, 154-156. On ἀνάγκη and human nature in Thucydides, see Ostwald 1988, especially 53-61; Hoekstra and Fisher 2017.

71 Finley 1942, 52.

72 Gotter 2008, 186.

73 E. *Med.* 348.

74 E. *Heracl.* 1004-1008.

but it is also dissimilar. On the one hand, it is a statement about Alcmena's character (which is, in fact, being exemplified at that very moment by her own resolve to kill Eurystheus on rather similar principles), and, on the other hand, Eurystheus decided as he did, like Agamemnon in *Hecuba* or Creon in *Medea*, under the influence of a particular source of compulsion, not simply because, as in Thucydides, it is in the nature of *poleis* to rule wherever they can. In Euripides, indeed, appeals to a 'realist' view of human nature in order to justify a character's conduct appear to be absent.⁷⁵

In short, *poleis* in Thucydides may follow the principle Gotter lays out. In Euripides, however, where the relations of individuals are in question, we see a full range of moral and immoral behaviour, which may be taken to reflect the wide range of behaviours exhibited by individuals in real life.

This brings us to our third way in which the argumentation above differs between our authors. We have already seen that Plato's argumentation is both more elaborate and more abstract than that of Thucydides and Euripides, who are dealing with specific situations rather than general moral issues. However, Thucydides and Euripides also differ substantially in *which arguments* they employ, as can be seen from the overview presented in section 2 above. In particular, Thucydides makes heavier use of arguments based on ordinary human behaviour and τὸ συμφέρον, whereas Euripides' argumentation is less abstract: his discussions of self-interest do not use the abstract neuter phrase τὸ συμφέρον, his characters draw attention to the basically individual virtues of ἀνδρεία and σοφία, and there is often a detailed focus on the specific circumstances that lead an individual character to a particular action. This is just the effect that we would probably expect the subject-matter to have on the argumentation in the respective authors. That is to say, the abstraction inherent in arguments based on ordinary behaviour or τὸ συμφέρον is well-adapted for explaining the conduct of *poleis*, but, since Euripides was sensitive to the fact that humans, as individuals, do act on a variety of moral and circumstantial grounds, for his purposes arguments of this sort were more relevant.⁷⁶

In this section, we have seen how thoroughly the use of this argumentation is affected by the subject-matter and genre of each work. This, in turn, reinforces the argument of the first half of this article. That is to say, if it seemed that Thucydides and Euripides imposed this argumentation inflexibly on their

75 Cf. Finley 1938, 34 ("Euripides seems nowhere to expound the 'natural right' of the strong").

76 It is probably also significant that the Herald in *Heracl.*, who (as we saw above) perhaps presents the nearest thing in Euripides to a Thucydidean τὸ συμφέρον argument, is dealing not with relations between individuals but with relations between cities. We should, however, avoid overstating the similarity between *Heracl.* and Thucydides.

material, we might have to suppose that it was an artificial adaptation of fundamentally Sophistic material. However, since Euripides' and Thucydides' use of this argumentation is in fact deeply and thoroughly affected by the subject-matter and genre of each work, it is clear that the use of this argumentation against justice in the abstract, as seen in Plato and in the fragments of Antiphon, is actually only one very specialised application of what is a much wider phenomenon.

Previously, then, we saw that this argumentation, found in authors of the late fifth century, was broad in its scope and versatile in its possible applications; we have now seen that it is, in fact, adapted with corresponding flexibility for use in drama, historiography and philosophy alike.

6 Conclusion

In this article, by the redistribution of well-known evidence, I have aimed to draw attention to some significant aspects of an intellectual phenomenon that is just as important for our understanding of tragedy and historiography as for our understanding of the Sophists and Plato. In making clear the logically separate nature of the various arguments for unjust action, I have been able to specify the nature of this phenomenon more precisely than previously. I have also demonstrated how much the argumentation found in Euripides, Thucydides and Plato shares in terms of their dependency on a shared intellectual context, but also how much the argumentation used is shaped by the authors' different subject-matter and authorial projects.

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