INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.
Johnson, Julie Ann

THE FUNCTION OF DELPHIC RESPONSES IN GREEK TRAGEDY

The Ohio State University

Ph.D. 1982

Copyright 1982
by
Johnson, Julie Ann
All Rights Reserved
THE FUNCTION OF DELPHIC RESPONSES
IN GREEK TRAGEDY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Julie Ann Johnson, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1982

Reading Committee:
Professor Jane M. Snyder
Professor Robert J. Lenardon
Professor Charles L. Babcock

Approved by:

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of Classics
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the faith, encouragement, and criticisms to which this work owes a great debt, I wish to thank Jane Snyder, Robert Lenardon, and Charles Babcock.

J.A.J.
VITA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>B.A., University of Nebraska-Lincoln,</td>
<td>Lincoln, Nebraska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-1975</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>University of Nebraska-Lincoln,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>M.A., University of Nebraska-Lincoln,</td>
<td>Lincoln, Nebraska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1976</td>
<td>Teaching Associate</td>
<td>The Ohio State University,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1977</td>
<td>Research Associate</td>
<td>The Ohio State University,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-1978</td>
<td>Teaching Associate</td>
<td>The Ohio State University,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-1979</td>
<td>Graduate Fellowship</td>
<td>The Ohio State University,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-1980</td>
<td>Teaching Associate</td>
<td>The Ohio State University,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1981</td>
<td>Instructor of Greek and English</td>
<td>Wittenberg University, Springfield,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1982</td>
<td>Teaching Associate</td>
<td>The Ohio State University,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iii
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE CONCEPTUAL STATUS OF DELPHIC RESPONSES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. RESPONSES OF THE THEBAN CYCLE</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESPONSES OF THE MYCENAEAN CYCLE</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. NON-CYCLIC RESPONSES</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

According to legend, Zeus wished to locate the world's center and so he released two eagles at opposite edges of the earth. These eagles flew towards one another and met at Delphi, at a spot marked thereafter by the Omphalos or navel stone. To the ancient Greeks, then, Delphi represented the center of the geographical world, a position that reflected the prominence of Delphi in the political, religious, and social life of the ancient world. Delphi was established as an oracular center well before it reached its apex in the sixth century B.C. and it continued to operate as such up to the fourth century A.D. In its longevity, as well as in its wealth and influence, Delphi was unique among ancient oracular centers and, indeed, among ancient institutions.

It may be precisely because Delphi was so much a part of their daily lives that ancient authors discuss it so little. Perhaps the rituals were so well known to so many that they felt no need to expound in detail upon them. Yet although the Greeks have little to say about the workings of the oracular institution, they have a great many occasions to cite oracular responses, and these citations occur in nearly every area of Greek literature—poetry, drama, history, philosophy, and even inscriptions. Delphic pronouncements are cited by Greeks and by Romans, by pagans and by Christians, by lexicographers and by scholiasts. References to Apollo's utterances are
ubiquitous in classical writings.

In the last century there has been a considerable increase of interest in the Delphic sanctuary and its ritual. The French have excavated the site of the oracular center, and studies have examined the archaeological evidence in order to recreate, as far as possible, the rituals involved in consulting the god. Works have come forth on the history of the institution and on its influence over Greek politics, Greek religion, and Greek morality. Along with studies of the institution have come studies of the oracular pronouncements themselves. In 1956 Parke and Wormell published a list of all the known Delphic responses and citations, culled from every area of ancient writing. In addition to the list of responses, which were organized chronologically, Parke and Wormell discussed briefly the style and meter of the responses. Fontenrose in 1978 published a study of the pronouncements in which he classified the responses by their modes and topics. Fontenrose set out to establish the historicity of pronouncements whose authenticity was in question by compiling statistics on the characteristics of responses judged to be historic and on responses judged to be merely legendary. He then analyzed each questionable response to see whether it possessed those qualities dominant among the historic or among the legendary groups. In this way Fontenrose argued for the verification or elimination of every uncertain response.

Although Fontenrose was interested primarily in establishing whether or not a body of dubious pronouncements can be accepted as genuine, by his effort to make modal distinctions he began to analyze
oracular pronouncements as acts of speech. Fontenrose, however, stopped short of applying his categories as conceptual distinctions, using them primarily as statistical divisions. He finds, for example, that 13.6 percent of all legendary responses are conditioned commands, but none of the historical responses are. Thus a dubious response, if it is a conditioned command, is more likely to be legendary than historical. In these distinctions, nonetheless, are the bases for logical analysis of all oracular responses.

Parke, Wormell, and Fontenrose have laid the groundwork needed for further studies on the conceptual nature of Delphic pronouncements. This is a topic on which there has been as yet little organized and concentrated study. By "conceptual nature" I mean how the Greeks thought about the responses. Did they regard them as sacred or as secular texts? Did the Greeks expect Apollo to announce what must happen or what could happen? Did they believe that the god controlled events or only dispensed information? Why did one go to Delphi? What did one expect to get out of the trip and the fees for consultation? Did men visit Delphi in order to put their lives in someone else's hands—as one scholar has suggested—or did they only seek assistance?

Not every consultation at Delphi turned out well for the inquirer. Croesus, king of Lydia, gave magnificent gifts to Delphi's treasuries and he seems to have expected some consideration from Apollo in return. Nonetheless, as Herodotus (1. 49-91) tells the story, the Pythia replied ambiguously when Croesus inquired whether he should fight the Persians, predicting the fall of a great empire. Croesus, interpreting the response as favorable, fought the Persians—and lost.
His warm relations with Delphi did him no good. Yet such stories did not seem to discourage inquirers from making their way to Parnassus.

It is not unusual to find some stories of Delphic corruption as well among the Greek writers. Herodotus (6. 66) also tells a story of a Pythia's being suborned and a priest bribed by a Spartan king during a political struggle in Sparta. Croesus, once again, was arrogant enough to test the accuracy of Delphi and several other oracular centers (Hdt. 1. 46-50). Croesus hoped to find out which centers provided true prophecies. Delphi passed the test, so Apollo must not have considered such upstart challenges beneath his dignity. It is clear that false prophecy, whatever the cause, was conceivable. Not only was false prophecy possible from Delphi—Plutarch presents an argument suggesting that true prophecy might be impossible (De Pyth. or. 398Fff.). In Plutarch's dialogue a young man argues that, given an infinite amount of time and the infinite play of chance, anything that is said will eventually occur. So the fact that an event that has been predicted does one day occur does not make that prediction a fulfilled prophecy. At best, such a pronouncement is a good guess and, at worst, it is a blind coincidence. Of course Plutarch does not present this cynical argument propria persona, but he shows that such debates were not unheard during his time.

The Greeks seem to have demanded much more from Apollo and to have judged him more sternly than modern scholars have. Despite a general awareness that there are many kinds of oracular pronouncements and a range of options that might be open to an inquirer, oracular responses have not received much attention from an interpretive
There is, however, no need to consider the topic inef-fable. Not only is it possible to analyze oracular pronouncements, but in a literary context it may be essential.

The Delphic oracular center was one major connection between the Greeks and their gods. And the relationship of a man with his gods will color the relationship of a man with his world. Do the gods control everything or only those items in which they take interest? Does a man have complete control over an event, some control, or none at all? It is on the basis of a man's ability to control an act that we assess his responsibility for it. Consider a familiar literary case, the response to Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. When the Pythia pronounces patricide and incest to Oedipus, is this absolute foreknowledge or is it a warning? Does Oedipus have a chance or not? However one decides the matter, that decision must affect his interpretation of Oedipus as a moral agent in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. And the interpretation of Oedipus in that play is integral to the interpretation of the kind of world that Sophocles presents.

The question of human responsibility is a central issue not only in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* but in the other plays of the Greek tragedians as well. Of the thirty-two surviving tragedies, sixteen include a response from the Delphic oracle, which in many cases has an important bearing on the morality of the central character of the play. Despite the important contributions of Parke, Wormell, and Fontenrose, none of these scholars has made a systematic analysis of the oracular pronouncements as they are presented by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. What is needed is a coherent, consistent method for analyzing the language of the responses in tragedy in order to see how the pronounce-
ments are used by the dramatists and how the responses may affect the issue of the moral responsibility borne by the inquirer.

Chapter I will contain some general preliminary material relevant to oracular pronouncements and their interpretation. In particular, this chapter will specify a set of categories that will be used as a framework for the later discussions of individual responses. Chapter II will deal with the responses that are cited within the plays of the Theban cycle. Special attention will be given here to the response to Laius, a response used by all three dramatists. The pronouncements in plays of the Mycenaean cycle, namely, the pronouncements issued to Orestes, will make up the material for Chapter III. The non-cyclic responses, one citation from the Aeschylean corpus and four from Euripides' works, will be analyzed in Chapter IV, which will complete the survey of Delphic pronouncements in Greek tragedy. A final section will summarize my conclusions.
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 We have few extant ancient discussions of the Delphic rituals. In the fifth and sixth centuries, chresmologs, or professional collectors and interpreters of oracular responses, were common. They were experts at reciting and analyzing the pronouncements, and frequently amassed responses from many sources. These men left no writings for us. The earliest full discussion of oracular matters that we have is Cicero's De Divinatione, a presentation of arguments for and against the various methods of divination. Plutarch, himself a priest of Delphi, wrote several treatises which serve as good sources for Delphic anecdotes: De defectu oraculorum, De Pythiae oraculis, and De apud Delphos. Both Cicero and Plutarch raise philosophical difficulties in the concept of divination.


See, for example, D.B. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' Philoctetes," CQ 19 (1969): 34-56. Robinson states the dilemma, "how literally must one take the words of an oracle?" and correctly answers that it depends on the response and on the inquirer in question.
CHAPTER I
THE CONCEPTUAL STATUS OF DELPHIC RESPONSES

Oracular responses are frequently read as if they were sui generis phenomena, foreign and mystical entities.¹ There is no doubt that Delphi was a unique institution, even in the Greek world. Yet despite the wonder that Apollo still inspires in devotees of the Greek mind, there should be no reluctance to apply whatever analytical tools are available to the study of the Delphic institution and its workings. The light of rational inquiry can only increase our appreciation of the ancient use of oracular responses and is quite in keeping with the Apollonian spirit. It was never the nature of the ancient Greeks to accept anything without question. Yet although modern scholars can vary considerably in their descriptions of an oracular pronouncement, there has seldom been any formal analysis of such pronouncements.² It is important in beginning this inquiry to be as clear as possible about the nature of oracular utterances. And to avoid begging any questions, it is necessary to begin with the simplest distinctions.

An oracular response is a form of words uttered on a specific and specialized occasion. Its delivery is an act of speech.³ In an ordinary act of speech there is at least one speaker and at least one auditor. The speaker expresses some message more or less successfully and the auditor hears and comprehends the message more or less successfully. It seems simple enough, but there are any number of elements that can
go awry in even the most simple speech. The speaker may mumble, stutter, misspeak, or fail to put his thoughts into appropriate language. He may be mad, or so irrational that his words make no sense to anyone but himself. The auditor may mishear, misconstrue the context, confuse the words, or not understand the speaker's language. He may hear the words perfectly well but fail to comprehend their force. He may suppose that he understands when he does not. Any number of mistakes and misunderstandings can occur even with perfectly good intentions and sound intellects on both sides.

If such a simple act of speech is potentially quite a complicated event, yet more so is the speech of a Pythia. Here we have the speaker, the auditor, and the belief that the god is hovering about. Presumably the god supplies the content of the response, if not its precise wording. Plutarch, who was himself a priest at Delphi, suggested that while Apollo prompted and inspired his priestess, the form and the words of the utterance were her own. Parke and Wormell, however, observe that in those responses dated before 300 B.C., which are the ones they considered authentic, Apollo is always alluded to in the first person singular. From this they theorize that the Pythia's personality was supposed to be completely displaced. Whatever Apollo's role may have been in theory or in fact, the Greeks clearly thought that he had a major role in the exchange. And his presence is an additional complication in the act of speech, one more element that might go amiss. Even if we assume that Apollo himself would or could not err, yet the Pythia may be incompletely inspired or a mistake in the ritual invocation may confound the consultation. Plutarch attested that, on occasion, the presentation of the response could go absolutely wrong. In an oracular
consultation there is more than usual opportunity for a mistake to occur.

Even if a pronouncement is given without difficulty, problems can still arise in its reportage. A pronouncement which made sense to the inquirer at the time he received it might seem quite obscure out of context. If it is said that upon some occasion the Pythia delivered the response "Silver and gold," this might be counted a pronouncement terse to the point of utter perplexity. Yet to a consultant who asked "What shall I give the god?" such a response would be pellucid. The fact that a pronouncement itself does not appear immediately to be straightforward does not eo ipso imbue it with cosmic mystery. Real people went to Delphi, paid their fees, and received responses to their questions. The Pythia uttered real and audible sounds. Delphi did a good business, generated a large tourist trade, and accumulated a great treasury. This did not come about by dealing in matters completely beyond human comprehension. The Delphic institution was certainly extraordinary, but there is no hint that the Greeks felt its workings to be a complete enigma. In dealing with a response it is important, of course, to recognize what is peculiar to the context, but it is also important to recognize what is ordinary.  

The principal difficulty in assessing oracular pronouncements is deciding what kind of information a pronouncement gives, what the strength of the pronouncement is, and how the inquirer ought to take it. This is particularly an issue in Greek drama where a character's free will, or lack of it, makes all the difference in our assessment of his character and morality. Whether rightly or wrongly taken by a
persona in a drama, the precise force of a response can be a significant factor in dramatic criticism. Scholars have viewed the institution at Delphi as everything from an elaborate and intentional fraud to the inexplicable and mysterious product of a primitive mentality. Fraud or frenzy, those who consulted at Delphi surely had some notion, however inchoate, of what sort of information they were getting, what sort of assistance they might expect from Apollo. Socrates' interpretation and rationalization of the pronouncement to Chaerephon in the course of his public trial suggests that if a response was baffling one might feel free to apply alternative interpretations.

It will be helpful to focus on the epistemic status of oracular responses. By "epistemic status" I mean the range of knowledge that a response actually conveys, whether it be what must happen, what may happen, a threat, a warning, a suggestion, an instruction, a command, a hint, a guess, or whatever. A spectrum of the various sorts of oracular knowledge, once described in detail, will provide the framework for later discussion of individual responses. First, however, a brief digression on the matter of time will be useful. Most of our extant responses deal in some way with the future, not surprisingly since it is the future about which one most often deliberates and is anxious, and it is the future about which one is therefore most apt to consult. The future has a peculiar conceptual status, one that is significant for a study of oracular responses.

Philosophers have long noted that there is an asymmetry in our concept of time. To the logician, time is asymmetrical because we do not talk about the past, the present, and the future in the same ways. One may anticipate enjoying a party tomorrow, but not a party that
occurred yesterday. At least it would be strange to talk about doing so.
One may regret the past, but it would be curious to regret the future.
The differences in the way we think about different aspects of time are
built into our language. In the language of logic, the past is neces­
sary and the future is contingent. Although we can learn things about
the past that we did not know before or we can acquire new information
that compels us to revise our previous views of the past, yet we believe
that the facts of the past, whether we know them or not, are fixed and
immutable. The past cannot be other than it is— or was. The future,
on the other hand, is comparably quite open. Anything within reason,
and some things without, might occur. We deliberate and plan for the
future because deliberation and planning can be efficacious. The future
is said to be contingent because it can depend on what happens before­
hand, e.g. whether I eat steak tomorrow depends on my going to the but­
cher and purchasing the beef and surviving another day to cook the meat.

Because we think about the future differently than we think about
the past, the logical status of statements about the future is differ­
ent from that of statements about the past. One complication of remarks
about the future lies in the question of reference. A popular view of
semantics is that words derive their meanings from the objects to which
they refer, and that to understand a noun is to be able to identify its
referent. While identifying past and present individuals is quite pos­
sible, identifying future individuals is difficult since they do not,
as yet, exist. In dealing with pronouncements which seem to refer to
the future, one has to be alive to their logical peculiarities.

There are no easy criteria for deciding what sort of knowledge a
pronouncement conveys. The difficulty in assessing the status of an
oracular remark has doubtless contributed to the continued historical success of a good many soothsayers, prophets, seers, fortune tellers, and mystics. After all, an open-ended statement about the future is impossible to prove true or false.

There follows a description of five types of oracular response, each with a different epistemic status. Citing several criteria for assessing each category of response, the list provides a starting structure for the oracular analyses of Chapters II, III, and IV.

**Prescience**

A prescient utterance states flatly and without qualification that something will occur in the future. It is genuine precognition. The boldest sort of prediction is a case of prescience, for it constitutes the strongest possible claim to knowledge. It involves no intuition, hunch, or opinion, but a kind of strong Platonic episteme. Such knowledge is frequently attributed to the oracular Apollo at Delphi, although it entails a reversal of our common-sense notions of time and causation. The claim of prescience is really an extraordinary one. How can one know about an event that has not happened, know it the same way one knows about a past event? If we think of perception as, in a sense, an effect caused by the perceived object, then precognition seems to be a case of an effect preceding its cause. Ordinarily a cause is considered to be temporally prior to its effect. We do consider knowledge and perception to be connected in some way or other, particularly visual perception. We speak of people with apparent extrasensory faculties as having "second-sight," of fortune tellers as "looking into the future." So, again, prescience might be thought of
as knowledge garnered from the perception of something that does not exist—an effect without a cause. Further, while the usual view of time is that the past is necessary and the future contingent, in a case of prescience the future must be necessary as well, for it is entailed.  

If the idea of prescience seems to run counter to a logician's notions of the way the world works, that does not prove that people do not and have not believed that cases of prescience actually occur and have occurred. Religious belief is based on faith, not on logic. But it is well to remember what an exceptional cognition prescience is.

If an inquirer takes an oracular pronouncement to be a piece of prescience, there is really nothing for him to do but wait for the anticipated event to occur. Prescience should not spur one to any particular action, since the foreseen end will come about no matter what one does. No action of the inquirer could make the pronounced occurrence more likely to happen, nor yet could he ward it off. Prescience does not involve instructions, conditionals, or the like, since such are pertinent only if there is a possibility that the situation might be otherwise—and in genuine prescience there is no such possibility. Nor need one await fulfillment of a prescient utterance as confirmation, for if you are convinced ab initio that a pronouncement is a prescient one there can be no question of its being correct. It must be. It is, after all, based on knowledge, not opinion. The actions of an inquirer subsequent to his receipt of the response can be a clue to the status of the response.

Herodotus (5. 92) affords an informative example. He gives an account of the beginnings of the Corinthian tyranny as told by Soclees the Corinthian. According to Soclees, a certain Eetion wished to
consult Delphi on the matter of his childlessness. The Pythia announced, without inquiry, to Eetion that his wife was pregnant and that she would give birth to a rolling stone which would fall among monarchs and bring justice to Corinth. Soclees says that this pronouncement came somehow to the ears of the Bacchiadae, the ruling family of Corinth. The Bacchiadae compared Eetion's pronouncement to one which they had not previously understood, one that warned that an eagle was pregnant and would bear a mighty lion that would loosen the knees of many. After consideration of the two responses, the Bacchiadae decided that Eetion's unborn child was an actual threat to their position, and they planned to kill it. The child, of course, was Cypselus, the first tyrant of Corinth. Note that the response to Eetion did not call for any sort of action or decision on his part—there is nothing at all for him to do. Indeed, we hear no more about him in the story. Soclees says that the Bacchiadae took the pronouncements so seriously that they plotted against a person who did not yet exist. They assumed the truth of the pronouncement without any sort of corroboration. The context here matches the rough sketch of the context that I have suggested for a case of prescience. The people directly affected by the response considered the pronouncement to Eetion prescient.

We cannot hope for many cases to be absolutely straightforward. Not every listener may take a response the same way. Although the Pythia pronounced to Eetion that the child would bring justice to Corinth, Soclees observes that it was fated that evil come to Corinth from the offspring of Eetion. Soclees does not specifically say that the Pythia was mistaken, but a contradiction is implied. It is possible that, although Eetion and the Bacchiadae considered the pronouncement
prescient, Soclees did not.

At the top of the epistemic scale, along with prescience, we can also class those few responses which deal with the past and the present. For these, too, absolute knowledge is possible. The famous response to Croesus (Hdt. 1. 47. 3) in which the Pythia at Delphi correctly perceived what Croesus was doing in Lydia as he was doing it would be this sort of pronouncement.

**Conditional Predictions**

Conditional predictions are those which state that given $Y$, then $X$ will occur. One should not here confuse syntax with semantics. Not all sentences in the form of a conditional syntactically are logically conditional. If a man says "I will pay the debt when pigs fly," the form of the sentence is conditional, but the sense is "I will never pay the debt." Similarly, some remarks may logically imply a conditional without being uttered in the conditional form, with protasis and apodosis. We are here interested in the logic of oracular pronouncements as much as their forms.

The epistemic claim of the conditional prediction is no less certain than that of prescience, but it is of a different sort. There is less surety that an $X$ will come about, for there is a chance that $Y$ will not occur. But, if $Y$, then $X$ absolutely. The assertion entails two things: (1) that $Y$ is sufficient for $X$ and (2) that $X$ is a necessary condition for $Y$. Of course, the remark says nothing about whether $X$ might not occur quite independently of $Y$. Often with this sort of pronouncement the possibility of the predicted event depends upon some decision or action of an agent, usually the inquirer, and it is up to
him to see that the qualifying condition is met or, in the case of unpleasant prospects, to see that it is not met. There is, however, a possibility here of exercising some control in the outcome, as there is not with prescience.

It is not certain what would count in this case as a clear case of an oracular error. If the predicted event does not occur, one can always assert that the requisite conditions were not met, or not correctly met. If X occurs without Y, as is perfectly allowable by the condition, then an inquirer might assume that Y occurred, although he missed it, or he might feel cheated by Apollo if he had thought that he could avoid X by prohibiting Y. As with all oracular pronouncements, the predicted event may be so vague that almost anything would seem to fulfill it, if one is determined to seek out confirmation of the response. A Greek may have been inclined so to seek confirmation of his faith in Apollo, as well as of his money having been well spent at Delphi. When one pays an expert for information, there is a ready expectation that the information will be correct. Insofar as a conditional pronouncement does not contain the absolute claim for an event that a prescient pronouncement does and insofar as it is generally dependent on some human action to fulfill its conditions, it is a considerably safer pronouncement to deliver from Delphi's viewpoint.

Warnings and instructions may sometimes belong to this class of pronouncement. A warning implies a conditional, as "Beware of drinking the water" implies that if you drink the water, then you may become ill. "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts" has the force of "If you accept a gift from a Greek, you may be in danger." Simple instructions may be parsed into a conditional too. One frequent way of phrasing questions
to Delphi was the form "Will it be better and more good to do X?" Any instructions given in response might have the sense, "If you do so and so, then it will be better and more good." Threats from the god may imply conditionals too: "If you do/do not do this, I will punish you." Or by instructing the inquirer to build a temple or to make a dedication, the god may suggest, in effect, "If you do this, it will be pleasing to me." In short, this classification may cover a good many kinds of utterances.

The reaction to a conditional prediction, or to a pronouncement taken to be a conditional prediction, should be some sort of positive action. Pausanias reports an oracular pronouncement given to Erginus, king of Orchomenos, who asked the god how he might have children. The Pythia instructed him to "put a new tip on an old pole." The logical form of this response is "If you put a new tip on an old pole, then you will have children." Erginus married a young woman thereafter who gave him two sons. Thus the response seems to have been fulfilled, although Erginus had first to interpret and then to act on its instructions. Often the instructions are difficult and riddling, as in the pronouncement to the Spartans that directed them to seek out Orestes' bones "in Tegea where two winds blow under mighty force, and blow lies on blow and woe on woe" (Hdt. 1. 67. 4).

**Probabilities**

Short of predicting what will happen or what will happen under certain circumstances, an oracular pronouncement might predict only what is likely to happen. The claim to knowledge here is likely to be more general than that of the first two types of pronouncement. At this
level the Pythia might give non-specific advice or utter a gnomic re-
mark. Statements that such and such an event will probably occur may
rest on induction, the calculation that if a thing has been true in
the past more often than not, it will likely be true in the future more
often than not. One need not use the adverb "probably" in order to
make this sort of statement, of course. Metron ariston, the Delphic
maxim, can be taken as just such a piece, a prediction of probability.
This kind of assertion can be assessed as true or false, but it has to
be argued on a case by case basis. Ordinarily moderation is best, but
on occasion certain circumstances may demand a lack of moderation. To
argue that moderation is a bad rule generally would involve citing
enough cases where it would not work to be compelling.

If an inquirer takes an oracular pronouncement to be a statement
of probability, then there is considerable leeway for him to promote or
to take steps to avoid a likely outcome, depending on whether he sees
that outcome as desirable. There is always the chance of surmounting
the odds if they are not favorable. If the odds are in your favor, it
might encourage greater efforts on your part to make the desired results
even more likely. The inquirer's options for action are much broader
than in a conditional prediction, which gives the specific circum-
stances for the event in question. As the inquirer has more oppor-
tunity to act, he might also be considered to have more responsibility
for the outcome. As the epistemic force of a prediction decreases,
the onus of the inquirer may well increase.

There may be few oracular responses that count as patent cases
of this type, for there are no particular linguistic cues to look for,
and one must rely heavily on evaluating the attitude of the inquirer
toward the response. Herodotus reports an oracular pronouncement which might count as a prediction of probability. The Argives asked what they ought to do in the face of the forthcoming Persian invasion and the resulting Greek attempt to construct an alliance to stave off that invasion. The pronouncement was "Be on guard, holding your spear inside and protect the head, for the head will save the body." This would seem to be good advice on any martial occasion, if it means generally to proceed with caution and not to over-extend your resources. The wariness suggested by the pronouncement seems to be warning against any alliance. The Argives, however, calculated that they would have a better chance of survival in the long run by securing a thirty-year truce with Sparta in exchange for the alliance. The Argives respected the Pythia's admonition, but they felt at liberty to make their own decision on the matter, thus assuming the responsibility for the outcome. In fact, the Peloponnesus was spared a Persian invasion, and Argos, failing in its attempt at a Spartan truce, did not take an active role in the resistance. For this they later incurred charges of having Medized. It is important that the Argives felt that, in this specific instance, they might disregard the Pythian response, or at least interpret it quite freely.

Commands

A fourth sort of pronouncement is the command. In this group are straightforward commands expressed in the imperative mood as well as prohibitions and sanctions. All these types depend more on the claim to authority or on a tacit threat than on any particular knowledge on the Pythia's part. Yet the claim to authority itself may be based,
at least in part, on the supposition that Apollo is omniscient, or close to it. Therefore, commands may indeed lay claim to some epistemic status. When one gives a command or grants permission to a thing, no justification is called for. The context of such utterances is such that the source has some entitlement or authority granted it a priori by the petitioner; the relationship between the source and the recipient of a command is such that the source is already in a position to expect compliance. The pronouncement may not express any specific knowledge about the particular occasion. It may well express the will of the god himself, as the other classes of pronouncement might not. For example, a father might order his son to be home by midnight without claiming some intuition or knowledge that at 12:01 a.m. disaster will befall anyone roaming the streets. Nonetheless, such ratiocination may be present, and the father might articulate it upon questioning. Yet, on the grounds of filial piety, the son may well obey the injunction without question. So might function the authority of Delphi.

A command is not true or false; nor is it something that can be fulfilled or not in the way a prediction can be. Indeed, it is difficult to say what might count as a criterion of success for a command from the viewpoint of its recipient, for it is not clear what he gains by obedience other than the general lack of bad will from a divine authority. Of course, that may be counted quite a blessing by the Greeks. The command itself may be deemed a success insofar as it is clearly understood by the recipient and insofar as the recipient is both motivated to comply and capable of complying. Orders and prohibitions do put maximum responsibility on the inquirer to act or to refrain from action. Sanctions work a little differently, since
granting someone permission to do something does not in any way compel him to do it. Here the motivation must be supplied entirely by the inquirer.

Xenophon reports that the Argive habit of proposing a sacred truce whenever the Spartans planned an invasion of Argos prompted the Spartan king, Agesipolis, to consult at Olympia and Delphi as to whether it would be permissible to refuse such an inopportune truce (Hell. 4. 7. 2). Each sanctuary replied that he might reject a truce unjustly offered. In this case, Agesipolis appealed to Delphi as a recognized authority in religious matters. The oracular reply implies nothing but that Apollo had no objection to the proposed course of action. There is no specific suggestion or assertion of what will happen or what might happen whether Agesipolis accepts a truce or not. The full burden for action and for deciding whether a truce is unjustly proposed or not falls on the inquirer. The role of Delphi in a case of this sort is supportive and serves primarily to license the activity. Yet we must assume that the inquirer felt considerable responsibility to Apollo for behaving correctly. The role of Apollo in this sort of response can be very strong, if the god initiates an act by his command, or it can be rather mild, if the god merely allows an act to occur.

Silence

There are, finally, cases in which the Pythia simply refuses consultation, or those in which she responds to a question with another question. This would seem to be at the lowest end of the oracular epistemic scale, for there may be no claim to knowledge whatsoever, if nothing is articulated. Yet in this class of utterances the context
must be considered. Sometimes silence can be extremely meaningful, as in the injunction "If you cannot say something nice, do not say anything at all!" If an inquirer has asked for Apollo's sanction to proceed on a course of action, the refusal to reply might be considered prohibitive. When the god exercises his prerogative to give no explicit information, it is up to the inquirer to decide whether he has received some tacit pronouncement or whether the silence indicates that his options are quite open. This way of responding to a consultant is considered to be a genuine oracular pronouncement, although issues of truth and fulfillment do not seem to pertain.

The oracular response given to Calondas of Naxos is an example of this kind of pronouncement. Calondas had killed Archilochus the poet in battle and, later, went to Delphi on some errand. As he attempted to enter Apollo's temple, the Pythia ordered him out. Although Calondas later returned and was given instructions for expiation of his crime, on this occasion the god clearly refused response, yet by so doing signified an indictment.

These five categories make up an epistemic scale of responses. Each type represents an epistemic level, and to each type there is a particular sort of reaction that one can expect from an inquirer. A particularly important issue, especially in drama, is the degree of responsibility for choosing and carrying out an activity which the various types of pronouncement inflict upon the petitioner. The application of this format will educe the features of responses that are important for literary interpretations of oracular utterances.

Although I have said relatively little about the actual grammar
of pronouncements, syntactic evidence is certainly useful for analyzing many oracular pronouncements. Grammatical form is not the final and decisive factor in determining an oracular type, for it does not always coincide with the logic of a response, but the grammar of a pronouncement is a first-rate clue to the logical force of the utterance. Verb forms are especially important for this study. In addition, since many pronouncements are available only secondhand, the transformations from oratio recta to oratio obliqua become significant.

In drama the reaction of the inquirer is often immediately available and in some detail—not only what a respondent did, but how he felt about it and how others felt about it. In tragedy one can see whether an inquirer took action or not, what sort of action he took, what he had to say about that act, and whether he or anyone thought that he was responsible for that act. The discussions of the Delphic pronouncements of Greek drama in the following chapters show that the dramatists each create a form of an oracular response that fits the needs of the individual play and that, in particular, the dramatists frequently manipulate the epistemic status of a response as a rubric for suggesting different levels of moral responsibility in both the human and the divine actors.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. The word "oracle," frequently used rather loosely, is ambiguous amongst oracular institution, oracular site, Pythia, or Pythia's utterance. I shall refer to the words of the Pythia uttered in an oracular consultation as a response, pronouncement, or utterance.

2. Often too little attention is paid to the classification of oracular pronouncements. For example, interpreters of Aeschylus' Oresteia differ widely on the nature of the response to Orestes. H.D.F. Kitto, in Greek Tragedy (New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 82, first calls the pronouncement "Apollo's dire command," then, within a paragraph, "the path pointed out by the God." Richard Kuhns in The House, the City, and the Judge: The Growth of Moral Awareness in the "Oresteia" (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), pp. 31-34, 55-59, 119-132, says first that Orestes "is ordered" and that Apollo "has commanded," later that Apollo "has directed" and Orestes "is directed." T.C. Tucker, The "Choephoroi" of Aeschylus (New York: Macmillan, 1901), p. xxxii and note 556, mentions the compelling power of the oracular response, then calls it a "divine warrant." H.W. Smyth in Aeschylean Tragedy (Berkel. v: University of California Press, 1924), p. 192, calls the response to Orestes a "behest"; Michael Gagarin, Aeschylean Drama (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 100, says that Apollo merely "supported Orestes in Choephoroi." Surely the difference between a "dire command" and support can be crucial to the interpretation of Orestes as an independent moral agent.

3. I am herein following an approach to language laid out, although not originated, by semanticist J.L. Austin in How to Do Things with Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). I make no claim to expertise either on Austin's work or in philosophy of language generally, but I shall borrow some analytical tools which are useful to the present work. I must, however, disclaim any commitment to particular philosophical views that my use of the terminology coined by Austin might suggest to a semanticist.

4. De Pyth. or. 397c, 404b, 414e.


6. Yet the Pythia herself might well choose to use the first person singular, making a more forceful impression on the interlocuter.

7. De def. or. 438.
Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, pp. 9-10, observes that those responses which he classes as "historical" or genuine are "commonplace." Most of the unusual and interesting responses he considers spurious.


Apologia 21aff.

In Austian terminology, this has to do with the illocutionary force of an utterance, which is what the speaker intends.


I do not mean to suggest any sort of determinism. The past is not necessary in the sense that it was predetermined; rather, after the fact, the past cannot be changed.

For example, the observation that the King of England in 1999 will be bald, although perfectly understandable, is impossible to verify. We can neither confirm nor deny the claim, as we can observations about the past and present.

Fontenrose, *Delphic Oracle*, pp. 11-57, uses a system of classification which categorizes responses in terms of "modes" and topics. Fontenrose distinguishes six classes of modes: (1) simple commands, (2) conditioned commands, (3) prohibitions and warnings, (4) statements on past or present, (5) simple future statements, and (6) conditioned predictions. Despite my considerable reliance on the views of Fontenrose and despite some overlap in the terminology of classification, the categories of this study will differ considerably in concept and function from those above.

There is no point here in worrying the question of whether prescience is logically possible. The danger that a view might be untenable on rational grounds has never kept it from being held, and held quite cheerfully, nonetheless.

Aristotle, for example, found the implications of this to be troublesome, since it seemed to curtail the possibility of free action. See *De Int.*, Chapters 9-10.

The semanticist might call this a use of the perlocutionary aspect of an utterance, that is to say, a use of the effect that a statement seems to have on the interlocutor.

The verb used by the Pythia, ὀνομάζω, can also have the sense of "to claim as one's own right," a sense which dissolves the problem,
since the Pythia's claim may not suggest at all that the son of Eetion will improve matters in Corinth, only that he will exert power. In this way, Soclee's view of Cypselus is in accord with the interpretation of that response.


The usual form is Ἀφον καὶ ἀμετωνέν ἔστι;

Pausanias 9. 37. 4: ἔστοβοι γέροντε νέην ποτήραλλε κοράνην.

Out of context, this response also shows some characteristics of the conditional prediction.

Herodotus (7. 148) says that the Argives decided to ally themselves with Sparta "although respecting the oracular pronouncement."

For a philosopher's account of the logical status of commands, see Nicholas Rescher, *The Logic of Commands* (New York: Dover, 1966).

Protr. 23. Galen reports the full response as Μουσάων θεράπευτα κατέκτανες έξελεν νησί.
CHAPTER II
RESPONSES OF THE THEBAN CYCLE

Probably the most famous of all oracular pronouncements are those which were delivered to the royal house of Thebes. Their fame is surely due in part to the fact that all three of the Greek tragedians chose to dramatize at least some aspect of the story of Laius, Oedipus, and the children of Oedipus. Aeschylus portrayed the war between Polyneices and Eteocles in Septem contra Thebas; Sophocles presented the rise and fall and rise again of Oedipus in Oedipus Tyrannus and Oedipus Coloneus; Euripides staged the fratricidal war in Phoenissae and its aftermath in Supplices. Apollo and Delphi played an important role in nearly every generation of the kings of Thebes.

Legend said that Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, was directed to the spot of the future city by a response which instructed him to locate his settlement where a cow would lie down. According to the genealogy of Euripides' Phoenissae (1-16), Cadmus was succeeded by his son Polydorus, Polydorus in turn by his son Laius. Laius too consulted at Delphi on the matter of his wife's childlessness. Laius' son, Oedipus, in his turn made inquiry of Apollo on several occasions. As a young man he asked about his parentage; as king of Thebes, he sent an embassy to seek a solution to the plague; Sophocles gives some evidence in the Oedipus Coloneus that at yet another consultation the Pythia gave Oedipus indications of where and when he would die (OC 84-95). When
Creon succeeded Oedipus, he asked Delphi how to treat the former king (OC 1438-39); and finally, again according to Sophocles' version, the Thebans sent an embassy to Delphi for help with the trouble between Eteocles and Polyneices, the sons of Oedipus (OC 387-415). In all there may have been seven trips to the oracular well. As Euripides tells the story, at least one other inquiry may have been attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, for in Phoenissae Laius is on his way to Delphi to question Apollo about his son when he meets Oedipus at the cross-roads (Phoen. 34-37). Thus the chronicles of the race of Cadmus are closely tied to Delphi through five generations. Oddly enough, the Theban kings kept returning to Delphi, although they seldom got good news there. The earliest in the series of oracular pronouncements that is of dramatic interest is the utterance to Laius. This pronouncement, in various forms, is used by Aeschylus in the Septem contra Thebas, by Sophocles in Oedipus Tyrannus, and by Euripides in Phoenissae. The most detailed version of the response occurs in the argumenta both of Oedipus Tyrannus and of Phoenissae:  

Laius, son of Labdacus, you ask for the blessed birth of children. I will give to you a dear son; but it has been decreed for you to leave the light at the hands of your son, for thus Zeus, son of Cronus, has determined, heeding the hateful curses of Pelops, whose dear son you stole, and he was the one who called all these things upon you.  

This pronouncement is expressed in hexameters, a common oracular form. The use of direct address, too, is customary in Delphic responses, as is the use of the first person singular (δῶσω) in reference to
Apollo. The epic dative (χειρεσσω) and the epic participle (πληθωσ) are examples of a poetic influence that is characteristic of Delphic responses. Unlike many oracular responses classed as legendary, there is little metaphor beyond the use of φῶς, "light," for "life," an ordinary poetic usage. What is striking is the relative simplicity of language and the clarity of content.

The finite verbs of the first half of the pronouncement are all in the indicative mood and in primary tenses, resulting in a positive and assertive tone. The kernel of the response, that portion which answers the immediate inquiry, lies in lines 2 and 3. The verbs here (δώσω and πεπρωμένον ἔστω) are strong. δώσω alone seems more a promise than a prophecy. The god asserts, "I shall give to you a son." This can be construed most simply as a statement of intent. Since intentions, presumably even those of a god, can change or go awry, there is nothing in the phrase δώσω...ὑόν that absolutely entails the birth of a son to Laius. But the sentence is compound, and its second half adds the touch of finality. In particular, the use of the perfect periphrastic form πεπρωμένον ἔστω is significant. Although the perfect indicative has some range of meaning, it generally denotes an action fully completed in the past, the effects of which are persistent and manifest in the present. The perfect indicative is especially striking in an oracular response, for it plays upon the surety associated with past time, the events of which are over and fixed, in a context where one expects the interest to be in future events, which are, prima facie, insecure. So the perfect verb lends some epistemic strength to the δώσω, for the decision has already been made and is still in force—-not the decision that Laius will have a son, but the decision that his son
will kill him. In an interesting reversal, it is the apparent certainty of patricide that necessitates the birth of the child.

The final lines of the response reinforce the suggestion that this is a case of prescience by appeal to authority, to Zeus with appropriate and authoritative epithet, and by offering a reason for Zeus' decision. Not only does Apollo explain what will happen, but also who decided on it and why. As oracular pronouncements go, this one provides an unusual fund of information, explaining that Zeus nodded in response to the imprecations of Pelops, whose son Laius seized. The φυλον υιόν of line 2, the future offspring of Laius, is nicely echoed by the φυλον...υιόν of line 5, Pelops' son. The one balances the other. This is, in fact, quite a nicely wrought response all around—clear, informative, and not without poetic devices. It seems to be an example of prescience, the kind of response that makes the strongest claim to knowledge. Prescience, however, in an oracular response leaves no responsibility and no options for the inquirer, and the three dramatists use rather weaker versions to allow more flexibility of character.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides each use their own form of the response to Laius. Probably each felt free to handle an oracular pronouncement as he handles the legend itself, that is, to shape the pronouncement to his dramatic purpose. If this is so, it is quite reasonable that we do not find the response to Laius as strongly presented in drama as it is in the version above, which utters Laius' death sentence without equivocation. However interesting the psychology of a condemned man might be, his moral standing is a dead issue. There has to be some hope of release, at least on the part of the persona, to cause him to act at all. Aristotle suggests in Poetica that a persona
shows character (redicate) by making a choice (proadresis) clear. In order to make a choice one must have alternatives, or at least think that there are alternatives. In the strictest case of oracular pre-science, there are no options.

In Aeschylus' Septem contra Thebas the chorus of Theban women, anxious about Eteocles' determination to meet his own brother in combat, sing a choral ode relating the events which have troubled the royal house of Thebes. Recalling the Delphic utterance to Laius, they sing (Sept. 745-52):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{κρατήσει ἐν φθανόν ἀδελφῶν}
\text{ἔγεινατο μὴν μόρον αὐτῶν,}
\text{πατρικτόνον Ὀλύσσαν}
\end{align*}
\]

when Laius, in spite of Apollo saying thrice in the midst of the Pythian oracular seats that dying without offspring he would keep the city safe, overpowered by his own thoughtlessness sired his own doom, the patricide Oedipus...

The account of the response itself occurs in oratio obliqua and is the chorus' representation of the pronouncement. It has the tone of a summary, but there is no textual suggestion that it is not a complete summary. The patricide does not appear to be part of the pronouncement, but it is part of the series of disasters set in motion by Laius' having a child. The main verb of the reported pronouncement is oqéexi. The present tense suggests a continued action, not simply saving the city on a particular occasion, as one might save a drowning man, but keeping safe, preserving the city. ἕφοσκοντα, a circumstantial particle also in the present tense, is the subordinant verb and has a range
of possible interpretations ("because you/he die...," "since you/he die...," "although you/he die...," "when you/he die..."). The most neutral reading is simply that "dying without offspring" describes the circumstances under which Laius is to preserve the city. There is no necessary causal connection between the two. Nonetheless, the immediate context does suggest a contingency. Laius acts in spite of Apollo (Ἀπόλλωνος...βύς) and out of thoughtlessness (ἀθωμα) engenders a son who is a doom (μόρος) and a patricide (πατροκτόνος). Laius ought not to have had a son. Moreover, in this case there does seem to be a causal connection between the protasis and apodosis of the pronouncement. The siring is not only a condition of trouble, but also the direct cause of trouble if we suppose that a threat to Laius is, eo ipso, a threat to the city.

On grounds of form and context, the pronouncement to Laius as presented in Septem appears to be a prediction of contingency, and a fairly tight contingency at that, for it expresses both conditional and causal, both grammatical and logical connections between offspring and trouble. If this is so, then Laius will bear some onus for the problems of Thebes in Septem. In the version of the response from the argumenta, Laius was the cause of Pelops' curses and hence of Zeus' decision; however he apparently cannot avert the patricide and subsequent chaos. In the Aeschylean version, there is a chance for Laius and for Thebes, a chance which Laius throws away ἐκ ἀθωμα. In the Oedipus Tyrannus, however, the emphasis of the response shifts from the city back to the patricide, and its epistemic status seems ambiguous. Iocasta recounts to Oedipus (OT 711-14):
For an oracular response came to Laius once, I do not claim from Phoebus directly, but from his attendants, that his fate would be to die at the hand of a child who might be born to me and to him.

Again, the response is in *oratio obliqua*. The future optative (*ἐξου*) in secondary sequence represents the future indicative (*ἐξεε*) in *oratio recta*, and *γένοιτο* is unchanged from the original. The direct form of Iocasta's account would be: *αὐτὸν ἐξεε μοῦρα πρὸς παιδὸς θανεῦν, δότις γένοιτε μοι ἡ κάκευνον πάρα.* The future indicative, particularly given its subject, is a strong form. *γένοιτο* with the indefinite relative δότις is a generalizing form. The unborn child is not yet a particular individual. The optative mood also may suggest, according to Smyth, "a possibility less distinctly conceived." This indefinite relative clause adds a note of dubiety and ambiguity to the response.

The principal clause (*ἐξου μοῦρα*) appears to be an utterance of prescience. One's μοῦρα, in the general sense of fate or destiny, is one's allotted portion, no more and no less. It is the limit inflicted upon one by whatever source—nature, gods, character—and it is all to which one is entitled. While in the version of the response given in the argumenta the patricide was sanctioned by Zeus at the entreaty of Pelops, in Sophocles the causal factor is lifted above even the sphere of Zeus, for Zeus cannot control μοῦρα. But if the principal clause is strongly worded, the generality of the subordinate clause seems to equivocate. The possible offspring is indefinite and unnamed. This suggests a condition that might not be fulfilled.

Iocasta states immediately after this citation that Laius in fact
died at the hands of a band of highwaymen, thus confounding the prophecy. She admits the existence of a child (the subject of the indefinite subordinate clause) but denies the claim of *moira*, which seems the stronger of the two aspects of the response. Laius' *moira* instead was to be killed by bandits. Further, she implies that the error was not Apollo's, for she blatantly refrains from ascribing the response directly to him. She seems instead to mistrust the Delphic institution as a mediator. She is, of course, mistaken about Laius' death. Sophocles gives us conflicting signals as to the status of the response. The pronouncement seems to waver between prescience and contingency, just as Laius proceeds from miscalculation to mistaken action. The Delphic utterance suggests both possibility and inevitability, and Sophocles keeps the balance on a very fine line.

Euripides cites the pronouncement to Laius in *Phoenissae*, and his version of the response was often used by later authors. Here the response is given as a contingency within a command, so that in having a child Laius both disobeys the god and fails to preserve the city—a double failure. In the prologue, Iocasta tells the history of the royal family. She says that Laius, concerned about her inability to bear children, went to Apollo to ask for an heir. She quotes Apollo's reply (*Phoen.* 17-20):

```
δ' δ' ἄλοιπη Ὄς Θῆβαιοι εὐπόρους ἀναζρέω.
μὴ στέψη τέκνον ἥλισσα λαμάνας βίας.
εἰ γὰρ τεκνόσεις τοῦ, ἀπόκεισθι σ' ὁ φόρις.
καὶ τοὺς σὸν ἀδελφόν βίοπται δ' αἵματος.
```

And he said: "Lord to the well-horsed Thebans, do not seed the furrow of children against the divine will, for if you sire a son, your son will kill you, and all your house will run with blood."

Then she goes on to describe Laius' subsequent actions (*Phoen.* 21-27):
And he, given to pleasure and falling into the Bacchic revelry, sired a child to us; and having sired a child, recognizing the offense and the response of the god, he gave the babe to herdsmen to place out in the meadow of Hera and on the crag of Cithaeron, having passed an iron spike through the middle of its ankles, on which account Hellas named him Oedipus.

Euripides makes a point of providing a verbatim version of the response, and the direct address made possible by oratio recta adds an air of formalism to the citation. Unlike the response of the argumenta, which addresses Laius personally as "Laius, son of Labdacus," this response greets Laius qua lord of the Thebans, Laius in his institutional role. This is followed by a compound response. The first principal clause features a negative imperative in the present tense. This could be read as "stop seeding the furrow" but is more likely intended to urge restraint in the future, "refrain from seeding." The present tense suggests an on-going restraint. The imperative seems to have been considered a command, rather than a warning by Locasta, for she refers to Oedipus' conception as an offense (ἀμφιλόχεια). A command, of course, is not a prediction at all, and lays considerable onus for carrying out or failing to carry out an event upon the inquirer. This is quite a departure from the statuses of the other three versions of the response.

Coupled to this apparent command is an emotional future condition, a form sometimes used when the protasis expresses an unpleasantry and the apodosis a threat, warning, or appeal. It is a conditional used
to convey strong apprehensive feelings. The postpositive, \( \gamma \delta \rho \), indicates that the conditional is explanatory, justifying the command or reinforcing its urgency. This conditional expresses contingency and has the epistemic status of a contingency: given the child, patricide and blood in the family are inescapable.

The response appears to be a contingency within a command. The force of the particle \( \gamma \delta \rho \) suggests that the first clause has a logical and grammatical precedence. The response is, in fact, a command. The conditional, in part, adds motivation—both the motivation for Apollo to give the command and the motivation for Laius to carry it out. Further, the contingency may distinguish responsibility for events subsequent to the conception of the child. Laius will bear the blame for siring the babe—that flies in the face of Apollo's order—but the patricide and civil strife that occur afterwards are less under his control. They inevitably follow. Laius is not culpable for everything. So Euripides may use a complex version of the response, containing elements of several categories, to set off different levels of moral onus for different events. The one act that Laius was directly involved in as an active agent he failed to deal with correctly. In the other events he is passive or entirely absent, and, while he is indirectly a cause, the onus for him is not as great as it is for the rest of his family.

Although each playwright uses the pronouncement to Laius, it would not be quite true to say that they all use the same pronouncement—at least it would not be the whole truth. Not only do all three dramatists use versions of somewhat different epistemic status, they also emphasize different aspects of the trouble inherent in Laius' fatherhood. Aeschylus
stresses the danger to the city, Sophocles to Laius personally, and
Euripides to Laius as king and to his household. All of the versions
differ substantially from the response of the argumenta, which, while
surely written at a later date than the plays, must have been intended,
when added to the plays, to present the orthodox version. It cannot
be mere happenstance that the tragedians give disparate accounts
of the response. We must presume that they did so with some reason.
I wish now to take a closer look at each play, to see how each various
version of the response fits its context.

Aeschylus' Septem opens with Thebes virtually under assault by an
Argive force organized and accompanied by Polyneices. Eteocles, king
of Thebes and brother of Polyneices, is on stage to arrange the city's
defense. A Theban spy reports that the enemy captains are encamped
and drawing lots to determine against which gate each will lead an
attack. Eteocles arrays his own leaders at the first six gates, taking
the seventh gate for himself, the very gate his brother Polyneices
has drawn. The battle is waged off-stage. A messenger reports that
the two brothers have killed each other, but the Thebans have routed
the enemy and the city is saved. The chorus of Theban maidens laments
for its king and rejoices for its city. In the final scenes, of which
the authorship is uncertain, Ismene and Antigone, the sisters of Eteo-
cles and Polyneices, appear to lament their brothers and to cry out
against the announced edict that one will be buried and with honors
while the other is to be left without sacraments. These are the bare
events of the play.

Nearly one-third (302 lines) of the play is taken up by the descrip-
tion of the Argive leaders and of the Theban defenders, as Eteocles
matches his men to an appropriate foe. More than one-third of the play is comprised of choral odes during which the young women of Thebes sing of their fears for the city under siege (Sept. 78-202, 287-368), of the familial problems in the palace (Sept. 720-791), and of their grief at the double fratricide (Sept. 822-960). The play deals with the crisis of Thebes and with the crisis of Eteocles. Indeed, the fates of the two are quite interwoven and interdependent. The Argive assault on Thebes is prompted by a dispute between Eteocles and Polyneices. Eteocles qua sibling shares some responsibility for the attack; qua king, he bears most of the responsibility for the city's defense.

In the prologue Eteocles declares that he is to the city as a pilot to a ship, the watchguard of its safety. If the pilot fails, the ship sinks. Eteocles' family ties too are pronounced, not only his position as regards his brother, but also other family connections. He is often addressed as the son of Oedipus, an unhappy association.¹⁰

Aeschylus was interested in the peculiar status of a king. Matters that would ordinarily be only of personal concern become public issues when they occur within a royal family. This is clear in the circumstances of Eteocles. It is also true for Zeus in Prometheus Vinctus, where the god's personal foibles become a cosmic concern because of his position, and it is true for Agamemnon in the Orestes, as Agamemnon abrogates paternal duties for political expediency. This double role of the king, as head of state and head of family, is bridged by the Aeschylean version of the response to Laius which states that Laius will preserve the city by dying without offspring. If Laius is to preserve the city, he must fail in his conjugal duties and in his obligation to beget male heirs. This is a straightforward conflict of
duties, made starker by the absence in the response of the usual reference to some personal danger to Laius at the hands of his offspring. There is no fear for his own safety to affect his actions. Laius violates his obligations as head of state ἐκ φυλαττω ὑβουλίας, a phrase which might indicate foolish passion, thoughtlessness, or simply poor calculation. Whether Laius impregnated Iocasta quite intentionally is left unclear by the chorus, but it is quite clear that he made a mistake.

The response to Laius highlights a potential danger to the city through the direct machinations of Polyneices, fruit of Laius' mistake. Eteocles, yet another shoot of Laius' sowing, is confronted with a decision or set of options not unlike those presented to Laius by the pronouncement. When Eteocles, having assigned the first six gates to the Thebans best suited to defend against the appropriate Argive chief, takes the seventh, Polyneices' gate, for his own, the chorus urges him to withdraw himself and to avoid the possible pollution of fratricide. Eteocles is confronted with opposing obligations—to defend the city at the risk of personal disaster or to withdraw from his station, thus avoiding an encounter with his brother but also failing in his duty to the city. City or family—it is Laius' choice once again. The obligation to meet Polyneices is thrust upon Eteocles; he does not intend to do so all along. This is important for the play. The chance of the lots which assigned the Argive troops and the coincidence of Eteocles' skill in assigning his own men forces the leader of Thebes into an untenable position to which he must attend nonetheless. As if in atonement for the error of Laius, Eteocles chooses to defend Thebes.
And on this occasion the city is saved, although the king is lost.

If the emphasis on Thebes' danger in the response is well suited to the play, so also its status as a contingency serves a function.

We expect that an inquirer who receives a contingent response will bear some responsibility for the occurrence of an event described in its logical apodosis, or for the failure of such an event to occur. While it makes no sense either to praise or to blame a person for the fulfillment of a prescient response—since he has no options—it is reasonable to make a judgement of his actions in a case of contingency. Such a judgement is suggested by the chorus when it says that Laius was overpowered by ἀσκόλιος in spite of Apollo's response. This remark implies that Laius ought to have known better and acted differently.

Laius is mentioned on two other occasions in the play to the same effect. Eteocles, having resigned himself to meeting his brother at the seventh gate, is urged by the chorus not to act rashly. He replies (Sept. 689-91):

ἐπεὶ τὸ πράγμα κάρτ' ἐπιστείρχει θεός,  
ἐγὼ κατ' οὖρον, κόμιο Κυκνίου λαχόν  
Φοίβης στρατηγὸν πάν τὸ Λαίου γένος.

Since the god strongly hastens the event, may it be for the best, the wave of Cocytus has obtained by lot the whole race of Laius, a race hated by Phoebus.

After the battle the messenger, having reported Theban success at six gates, adds (Sept. 800-802):

τὰς δ' ἐβδόμας ὡς εἰσναχ ἐβδομαγέταις  
ἀνα Ἀπόλλων εὔλεκτη', Οδίπος γένει  
κραίνων παλαιὸς Λαίου δυσβουλός.

The holy hebdomagetes, Lord Apollo, has taken the seventh, bringing to completion the old foolishness of Laius upon the race of Oedipus.
Clearly the encounter of Laius and Apollo has some relevance to the current proceedings. No one suggests that Apollo is to blame for the troubles of Thebes and Eteocles. The god hates the race of Laius and he brings to fulfillment the foolishness of Laius. He hastens the event and he takes the seventh gate. But it is Laius who flouted the prophecy, whose behavior incurred the scorn of Apollo, whose misjudgement is reaching its inevitable outcome. Since Apollo predicted that outcome, he is seen as a party to it. This does not entail that the god caused it in any relevant sense, in any moral sense. In fact, the fratricide is most often attributed to the curse of Oedipus.

It is clear that the royal family of Thebes has had more than its share of ill fortune, but Aeschylus does not mitigate their responsibility for their own acts. Laius, Oedipus, and Eteocles all undergo difficulties that are imposed upon them, but they also act, and they act voluntarily. Laius sires a child when he might have refrained. Oedipus, in anger, curses his sons. Eteocles goes out to battle Polyneices. It is crucial to see that Eteocles is victimized by chance, by birth, by position, by circumstances, and yet he acts and makes decisions freely. His options are narrow, but his choices are no less genuine for it. To struggle against odds not entirely of one's own making is a principal activity of the hero. Eteocles submits himself to the result of chance and to his father's curse, so the city is saved. In the prologue of Septem Eteocles points out the unhappy lot of a king—if all goes well, the success is attributed to god; if disaster ensues, the king is blamed. If Eteocles bears the onus for the fratricide, he also deserves some credit for the preservation of
Thebes. By fulfilling the curse of Oedipus, he purges the palace of the seeds of Laius' mistake, thereby fulfilling his obligations as king and pilot of the city.

The response to Laius is a small but significant piece of the drama, quite integral to the play's thematic and moral content. We cannot know whether Aeschylus was aware of any other versions of the pronouncement, nor what might have been a source, if any, for the version that he uses. But we need not resort to historical speculation to account for its inclusion in this form in the Septem. Aeschylus uses it in this play in this form because it works for the drama. The epistemic status of the response is so fully integral to the play that it suggests a creative adaptation by Aeschylus.

When Sophocles uses the response to Laius in the Oedipus Tyrannus the effect is quite different. The danger here is from within the city, not from without, and Oedipus, who dominates Oedipus Tyrannus as Eteocles did the Septem, has an enemy to confront who is less easily identifiable than the Argive host. The scene is Thebes in the clutch of a devastating plague. The Thebans appeal for help to Oedipus, who has already sent Creon, his brother-in-law, to Delphi to seek the aid of Apollo. Creon reports that the plague is caused by the presence in Thebes of the murderer of Laius, Oedipus' predecessor, and Oedipus vows to track down the culprit, invoking a curse upon the regicide and upon anyone who harbors or conceals him. Oedipus begins the search by interviewing the seer Tiresias, who accuses Oedipus of being the killer. The king, suspecting a political plot, accuses Creon of conspiring with Tiresias against the throne. Queen Iocasta, thinking to
smooth matters over, urges Oedipus to discount any seers or prophecies, explaining that an oracular response once came to Laius and it proved false. In recalling the circumstances of Laius' death, she mentions that it took place at the crossroads in Phocis. The description of the site startles Oedipus, who recalls an unpleasant encounter he once had at the same spot. Then Oedipus tells how he fled from his home because of an oracular response which prophesied patricide and incest for him. Travelling on the road to Thebes, he had met an old man at the junction and killed him.

After the sole survivor of Laius' last escort is summoned for questioning—in the hope that this will clear the king—a Corinthian messenger arrives to announce the death of Oedipus' father, Polybus, king of Corinth. The messenger, hoping to induce Oedipus to return to Corinth, assures him that Polybus and his wife Merope were not Oedipus' true parents. Oedipus, he says, was a foundling given as an infant to the messenger, who in turn gave him to Polybus. The Corinthian had received the child from the very shepherd lately summoned. The shepherd arrives and the two mysteries—Oedipus' parentage and Laius' murder—are solved at once. Oedipus is both the murderer and the son of of Laius, himself the infant taken to Corinth. Iocasta kills herself, realizing her own double identity as wife and mother to a single man. The king blinds himself and submits to Creon's authority.

The plot of _Oedipus Tyrannus_ is clearly more complex than that of Aeschylus' play, a reversal of Delphi's usual connection with the future. The focus is not on a current event but on an inquiry into the past. The pulse of the play is in the ebb and flow of Oedipus' emotions.
from pride to anger to fear, relief, shock, and despair. The plot moves on Oedipus' reactions, the pronouncements of the seer and of Apollo, and the coincidences of the messenger and shepherd. These events seem to be in free-fall, propelled onward by their own weight.

At the heart of the play is Oedipus and his investigation, and the pronouncement to Laius is one of several pieces in the puzzle. This response refers only to a danger to Laius; nothing was prophesied beyond his death at the hands of a child of his own making. Cited by Iocasta midway through the drama, the response in fact answers the initial question of the play: Who killed Laius? The difficulties in the status of unborn individuals are here put to interesting effect. The potential individual so indefinitely specified in the response to Laius years ago is now an actual person. An individual can be named in many different ways and in this play Oedipus is identified and re-identified by a succession of predicates until it is made clear to whom they all apply. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles includes no mention of the city in Laius' pronouncement. We are not interested in the city. The chorus of Theban elders appeal to the gods for assistance against the plague in the parodos, but in each stasimon thereafter they are caught up in the quest and subsequent grief of Oedipus, reflecting upon each emotional stage through which he progresses.

We are interested in Laius only as far as the identity of his murderer is in question. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles makes no comment upon the moral status of Laius. No adjectives of any color are applied to him. Nothing in the play suggests any sort of moral judgement made by anyone with regard to him. Iocasta, who tells the story of
the response, mentions none of the circumstances surrounding Oedipus' conception. We hear only that when the child was three days old, Laius bound its ankles and handed it over to be taken to the mountain and exposed (OT 717-19). The only thing we are told about his thoughts is that Laius feared the prophecy (OT 720-21). In analyzing the response we found aspects which suggested both prescience and contingency; the fact that Laius' status as an agent never arises strongly implies that the response was a case of prescience. That is the only case in which individual responsibility is not at hand. What is left at issue in the response and in the play is the identity of the child, a matter neatly taken up by the indefinite relative clause which refers to that child in the response.

While the context of the pronouncement and the failure to characterize Laius support the assessment of the response as a piece of prescience, Sophocles plays upon the opening left by the relative clause. Iocasta actually cites the oracular response in order to show that such pronouncements can be false. Laius avoided the danger, she explains, by having the child killed. Iocasta and, evidently, Laius have seen the pronounced patricide as avoidable. They have made a mistake about the response, as we learn. It is the same sort of mistake that Oedipus makes, not a moral failure but an intellectual lapse.

We must, at this point, digress from the discussion of the response to Laius in order to pick up two other pronouncements used by Sophocles in Oedipus Tyrannus, for this is a play in which all roads lead to (and from) Delphi. In addition to the response to Laius, Sophocles cites a pronouncement given to Creon concerning the plague
and one given to Oedipus when he inquired about his birth.

Although Creon makes the trip to Delphi, it is Oedipus who sends him and poses the question: "Doing what or saying what might I cure the city?" Oedipus is seeking a solution to the plague of sterility afflicting Thebes and Creon serves as proxy for Oedipus in Delphi. Creon reports the response in a stichomythic passage with Oedipus and explains the god’s message a bit at a time (OT 96-111):

Διαγνυν ἡμᾶς Φοῖβος ἐμφανῖς ἄναξ
μίσσαμα χώρας, ὡς τεθραμμένον χαοῦν
ἐν τῇ', ἔλαυνεν μηδ' ἄνεκεστον τρέφειν.

O. τόγε καθαρμῷ; τίς ὁ τρόπος τῆς ἐμφορᾶς?

K. ἀνθρωπτάτιστα, ἡ φόνοι φόνον πόλεως
κόστιστα, ὡς τοῦ' αἵμα χειμάζων πόλεως.

O. ποιόν γὰρ ἄθροί τήμει μὴ τεύκη;

K. ἦν ἡμῖν, ἄναξ, Λαῖος ποῦ' ἥγεμὼν
γῆς τρόπε, πρὶν ὁ ποῦ' ἄπειρον πόλεως.

O. ξοῦρ' ἀκούων: οὗ γὰρ εἰσεῖδον γε' πῶ.

K. τοῦτον ἰμπότος τὸν ἐπιστέλλει σαφῶς
τὸς αὐτοῦτα χειρὶ τιμωρεῖ τῶν.

O. οὔ εἴποι τὸν γῆς; ποῦ τοῦ' εἰρηθήσεται
ἰκνοὶ παλαιῶς δυστέκμαρτον αἰραίας;

K. ἐν τῇ' ἱσορροπῇ γῇ. τὸ δὲ ζητοῦμεν
ἀλλωτὸν, ἐκπεφυγεῖ δὲ τάμελοσμενον.

Cr. Lord Phoebus clearly bids us drive out the pollution of the place, as it has been nurtured in this earth, and not to nourish it beyond remedy.

Oed. By what purification? What is the manner of the event?

Cr. Banishment, or effecting murder again for murder, because this blood afflicts the city.

Oed. The blood of what man reveals this ill fortune?

Cr. Lord, we once had Laius as chief of this land, before you guided the city.

Oed. I know by hearsay; for I have never seen him.

Cr. Now Apollo clearly enjoins someone to punish by hand the murderers of this dead man.

Oed. Who are where? Where will this difficult trace of ancient guilt be found?

Cr. He said in this land. The thing being sought is caught, but it escapes unnoticed.

In sum, Creon reported that the murderer of Laius was in Thebes and was polluting the city and must be removed by banishment or death.
Creon does not quote the response, but appears to summarize as he explains various details in response to Oedipus' questions. His language suggests that the response is a command. This is implied by the verbs ἀναγέν and ἐπιστελλεῖν, each of which can mean "command." Creon also says that the response was quite clear; he twice uses adverbs to that effect (ἐμφανές, σαφῆς). The context of the pronouncement, however, suggests that it is a contingency. Given the initial inquiry, the response might be supposed to have the tacit rider, "if you want to cure the city, then...." As a contingency, the pronouncement might be construed merely as instruction or advice from the god. The difference between a command and a contingency ought to be one of the degree of responsibility involved on both sides of the tripod. If a command, as I have argued in Chapter I, places the full burden of responsibility to act upon the inquirer—for the cosmic necessity of the action is moot—it also places some responsibility upon the god who instigates the act, at least to whatever extent the gods may be held accountable. In a contingency, however, the prophesied act or event is necessary, given the fulfillment of the attached conditions. In this case the god simply articulates the truth and the inquirer, although responsible in part, does not have complete control over his situation. If this response is a command, then it is not absolutely inevitable that Oedipus discover the murderer of Laius and thus learn his own identity. Rather the revelation is forced by the will of Apollo and by Oedipus' obedience to the god and by his investigative skills, by the fact that Oedipus has both the motivation and the capacity to carry out the command. If the response is a contingency, then
Apollo may have no especial hand in the matter and the only inevitability is the end of the plague when and if the killer of Laius is purged. This distinction could be important to an interpretation of the play, but the text blurs it. As with the response to Laius, Sophocles appears to be giving conflicting cues for this response.

The third response in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is that given directly to Oedipus. He relates the following pronouncement, given when he asked who his parents were *(OT 788-93)*:

```
καὶ μὴ ὁ Φοῖβος ἄν μὲν λέομη
ἀτιμον ἐξεπέμψει, ἀλλὰ δὴ ἀθλήρ
καὶ δεινὰ καὶ δαμάστη προδόφησεν λέγων,
ὅτι μητρὶ μὲν χρείᾳ με μεικήθηκα, γένος δὴ
ἀθλητὸν ἀμφότεροι δηλώσωμι ἀρίστη,
φονείς δὲ ἱσώμη τοῦ φυτεύσαυτος πατρός.
```

and Phoebus sent me away without that for which I came, but, speaking dreadful and unhappy things for wretched me, foretold that I must lie with my mother, and I should bring a wretched race clear for men to see, and I should be the murderer of the father who begat me.

So speaks Oedipus. Two hundred lines later he gives the Corinthian messenger an account of the same response *(OT 994-6)*:

```
ἔψε γὰρ μὲ Λοξίας ποτὲ
χρήναι μεγήναι μητρὶ πήματος, τὸ τε
πατρίδον ἀλμα χερσὶ ταῖς ἐμαῖς ἔλειν.
```

for Loxias told me once that it was necessary to lie with my own mother, and to take paternal blood with my own hands.

The second citation, again in *oratio obliqua*, uses the *same* mood and tenses. The present and future infinitives (μυγήναι and ἐλεῖν) stand in for the present and future indicatives of direct discourse. The future indicatives are used for positive and firm statements about the future and the use of χρή, of course, denotes a necessity.
Yet if Oedipus took the response as prescient, he reacted in a manner that is curious in a logical sense, although understandable psychologically. He tries to run away (OT 794-97). Later, he receives the news of Polybus' death by disease with relief, sure that it counts as proof that the pronouncement was false (OT 964-72). He hopes to avoid the unavoidable and he thinks that he has succeeded. Yet, when he finds that the man he takes to have been his father has died, and not at his hands, he does not adjust his estimate of his paternity, but declares the pronouncement a lie. He does not change his mind about the epistemic force of the response, but proclaims it false prescience. Here the status of the response seems to be clear, but its legitimacy is in question.

The issue of legitimacy is raised with respect to the response to Laius as well. Indeed, the reliability of the mantic art in general is questioned often in the play, by Iocasta, by the chorus, and by Oedipus. Iocasta tells Oedipus the story of Laius in order to convince him that one need not pay any attention to human attempts to anticipate the future (OT 708-09, 723-25, 857-58). She is, as we have noted, careful to distinguish between prophecy by a human agent and a direct message from Apollo, for she will not ascribe falsity to the god.22 The chorus articulate similar sentiments, albeit more generally, in the first stasimon. Puzzled and distressed over the confrontation of Oedipus and Tiresias, they remark that although Zeus and Apollo are sagacious and knowledgeable in matters mortal, when it comes to men it is not at all clear whether a mantic knows more than anyone else (OT 498-501). Oedipus attacks the integrity of Tiresias, Apollo's seer, and
allows Iocasta to persuade him that human prophecy is incompetent (OT 380ff.).

Although the mantic techne is often doubted, no one attacks or accuses Apollo of any perversity in the disasters that befall Laius' family. Oedipus attributes the fulfillment, the bringing to completion of his troubles to Apollo, but he does not blame the god (OT 1329-32). Indeed, by bringing the miasmos to light, Apollo fulfills his function as a healer, purging the city. This is the function by which he is invoked early on in the play (OT 149-50). Further, Tir-esias says that Apollo will take care that the moira of Oedipus is played out (OT 376-77). These remarks are consistent with the interpretation of the response to Creon as a command, for they suggest that Apollo has some personal interest in the matter of Oedipus. This is not, however, an issue of which Sophocles makes much, perhaps to avoid diverting attention from the responsibility of Oedipus—perhaps, too, because the intentions of the gods are not meant to be a matter for human comprehension in the play.

For what, then, is Oedipus responsible? If the response he received concerning his mother and father were prescient, then, presumably he should not be held accountable for fulfilling the inevitable. Is he culpable for anything? As in Laius' case, the language used of Oedipus in the play is neutral with respect to morality. He is usually referred to either in his capacity as sovereign or as a victim of circumstance. He is called either "lord" or "wretch," but never "criminal." No one blames him or accuses him. There is no mention of a wrong, no adikia. As a miasmos, it is hard to condemn him, any more
than one can condemn the plague, for the destructiveness of each is impersonal. Neither intends to destroy.\textsuperscript{25}

An analysis of the oracular pronouncements in the play suggests, at least from one point of view, that whether Laius was bound to have a son and whether Oedipus was bound to kill his father and marry his mother is not at issue. Each was bound to. Nor is their personal responsibility for these acts at issue. They have none. The issue is not one of actions at all. What is at stake is the matter of knowledge and human intelligence. Oedipus' intelligence leads not to his downfall but to his recognition that he is destroyed long since, from the moment that the shepherd thought to do a good deed and save the baby. Everyone fails in their attempts to rationalize oracular responses. They do not underestimate the power of Apollo so much as they overestimate their own. They try to control matters beyond their reach. No moral onus is given in the play to the patricide and incest; these simply occur, like the plague. It may be that the mistake, the infamous hamartia, of Oedipus is not what he did, nor yet in failing to know what he had done, but in failing to realize that he might be ignorant of some thing quite relevant to himself.

For each of the three responses in Oedipus Tyrannus there is some question about the epistemic status. The pronouncement to Laius, predicting that he would die at the hands of his child, has some qualities of prescience and some of contingent predictions. The response given to Creon about the miasmos may be a command or a contingency as presented. And although Apollo's utterance to Oedipus seems post eventum to have been prescient, Oedipus reacted as if there were some hope of
forestalling the patricide and incest. Certainly by the dramatic time of the play Oedipus thinks he has been successful in avoiding these crimes. Sophocles blurs the epistemic distinctions which would, if drawn finely, tell us whether these personae have control over events. By so doing, the dramatist insures that the audience too cannot be sure about the precise position of these characters with respect to the gods and to fate. The just renown of the play comes from its portrayal of human beings who persist and who try in spite of their limited capacities to comprehend their own nature. The ambiguity of the oracular responses reflects the ambiguity of men's control over themselves and their world.

In the Oedipus Coloneus, however, Sophocles changes his use of Delphic pronouncements a bit. The oracular responses here are about the future, not about events already past. Here Oedipus is a blessing on the Athenian land, not a miasmos in Thebes. Although blind and old, Oedipus knows who he is and what his place is in Colonus. So Sophocles here gives us an Oedipus with a clarity of purpose and a pair of responses with a clear meaning. The two responses are given to Oedipus and to the Theban people. Each comprehends the response correctly and acts in accordance with it.

The Oedipus Coloneus is the latest of the Theban plays and contains two responses for which there is no evidence earlier than Sophocles. The drama covers the final hours in the life of Oedipus, dealing with his reception in Colonus by Theseus and his transformation at death into a powerful protective spirit for Athens. The play opens as Oedipus and Antigone stumble into a temenos or holy precinct in
Colonus, near Athens. When the local men try to warn them off the sacred ground, Oedipus seeks asylum and Theseus, king of Athens, is summoned to adjudicate. As they wait for Theseus, Ismene arrives and tells Oedipus that the Thebans have received a new Delphic pronouncement suggesting that the city needs Oedipus, and she says that Creon is on his way to fetch the old man back. Polyneices, we learn, has raised an Argive force and intends to wrest the throne from Eteocles. Theseus arrives and grants the request for sanctuary, promising Athenian protection for Oedipus and his daughters. In turn, Oedipus promises that his presence will strengthen the city.

Creon approaches and tries to cajole and, finally, to force Oedipus to return to Theban territory. With the help of Theseus, Creon is foiled and sent away. Polyneices enters to solicit his father's support and he, too, is rejected. A great thunderstorm comes up and Oedipus, accompanied by Theseus, moves off to a secret spot where he disappears, transformed into a protective daimon. In the final scene, Antigone and Ismene start out for Thebes hoping to prevent their brothers' clash.

Each of the oracular responses in *Oedipus Coloneus* deals with Oedipus' final fate and his function after death as a spiritual power. The first response is reported by Oedipus himself in a prayer to the holy goddesses of the grove. He explains that Apollo once described such a place during a consultation (OC 87-95):

> τὰ πόλλα ἱκεῖν δὲ ἴχθυρη κακά,  
> ταῦτα θλῆε ταῦτα ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῳ,  
> ἔλθοντι χάρων τερμαί, ὅπου τεϊν  
> σεμεῖων ἔδραν λάθους καὶ ξενόστασιν.  
> ἐνταῦθα ἐκφύει τῶν ταλαίπωρον βίον,
when he pronounced those many evils he mentioned this rest for me approaching in a long time a final place where I might take a seat of the holy gods and a lodging for strangers, there to rest my laborsome life, abiding as a benefit to those who have received me, but a ruin for those who have driven me out. And signs of these things will come to me, passed along, either earthquake or some thunder or the lightning of Zeus.

We do not know on what occasion this response was given. Oedipus suggests that it was part of a longer response. The pronouncement is reported in oratio obliqua and is in apposition to τερμῶν. The major verbs (καταφέσων and ἔσεσον) are in future tense, replacing the future indicative in the original. The aorist optative of the subordinate temporal clause suggests an original subjunctive temporal clause referring to the future. The future indicatives imply a case of prescience. Indeed there is really nothing for Oedipus to do in the matter. The response seems to be a promise—and a fairly detailed one. It describes his resting place; it predicts that he will become some sort of guardian spirit; it gives the signs which will show him the appointed spot. As prescience, any moral issue surrounding the response may be lost. And the issue does not arise for Oedipus, at least with respect to his death, although he vigorously defends his actions of the past (OC 960ff.).

To this response is joined another, reported to Oedipus by Ismene, who says that she heard it from Theban envoys when they returned from Delphi (OC 385-94):

Οὐ οὖν γὰρ ἔχεις ἔλεος ἀν ἐνοῦθεν ἔχεας ἄραν τῷ ἔλεοι, δεινας σωθήρας ποτε;
Oed. Did you have hope already that the gods will have some
time for me, so as to be saved?

Is. I do from these current oracular pronouncements, father.

Oed. What are these? What has been prophesied, child?

Is. That you will be sought by the men there sometime both
dying and living, for the sake of your good will.

Oed. Who would profit from such a man?

Is. They say that the power exists in you.

Oed. When I am no longer, am I so much?

Is. Now the gods straighten you, before they destroyed you.

Ismene seems to give a fairly loose report, relating the essen­
tials of the response given to the Thebans. Again the inquiry is not
mentioned, although one might suppose the delegation asked Apollo for
help against the Argives. The substance seems to be that Oedipus had
some power and would or should be gotten under Theban control. As in
the first response, Oedipus is to have influence before and, especially,
after death.

Whatever the original wording of this response may have been, it
seems to have been taken quite seriously. Both Creon and Polyneices
appear to enlist Oedipus' assistance. Creon goes so far as to try to
kidnap Oedipus and his daughters. This suggests that these characters,
at least, take the response very seriously. This in turn suggests
prescience. And, once again, the moral onus for the predicted act is
absent—indeed, what is predicted is a state rather than an action.

There is no question of responsibility or morality in Oedipus' taking
on of daemonic powers, for he becomes an impersonal sort of force.
Outside of the issue of responsibility, the two responses are the vehicles upon which the plot of Oedipus Coloneus rides. The focus of the play is on the relationship of mutual benefit that grows up between Oedipus and Theseus. Oedipus' plight as an assailed supplicant offers the opportunity for the nobility of Theseus and of Athens to express itself. Theseus is the perfect gentleman and ruler—moderate, honest, reliable, thoughtful—a marked contrast to nearly every other king portrayed in Greek drama. The natural purity of Theseus is matched by the refined purity of Oedipus—for the old man has been cleansed by his ordeals. Oedipus takes on an inhuman awesomeness as he receives a final redemption. The messenger who reports Oedipus' last moments calls him θαυμαστός ("wondrous"; OC 1665). Part of Oedipus' redemption is his ability now to be a kindly force for Theseus, his only friend. This cleansing and restoration are presaged in the responses.

Sophocles shows that Delphic responses can be a curse or a blessing for men, but for the characters of Euripides, there is only the curse. The third extant drama that uses a version of the pronouncement to Laius was produced around 410 B.C., about seventeen years after Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus. The Phoenissae is named for its chorus of Phoenician women; but its occasion, like Aeschylus' Septem, is the Argive assault against Thebes. Unlike Aeschylus, Euripides deals with the dilemma faced by the entire royal household. He brings Polynices, Iocasta, Antigone, Oedipus, Tiresias, Creon, and Creon's son, Menoeceus, on stage, in addition to Eteocles. Iocasta opens the play with a short genealogy of Theban kings and an account of the problems in
the last three generations. Most recently, Eteocles and Polyneices
have quarreled, and Polyneices has brought an Argive force to bear on
the issue. Iocasta has persuaded her sons to parlay, hoping to fore­
stall the fight.

After an interlude during which Antigone and a paedagogus discuss
the enemy troops and the chorus sings, Polyneices enters. Under their
mother's supervision, Eteocles and Polyneices debate their positions.
Iocasta decides that each is in the wrong. Polyneices and Eteocles
exchange harsh words, and Polyneices exits, leaving Eteocles to con­
sult with Creon upon the best method of defending the city. Eteocles
exits to array his men and Creon interviews Tiresias, who explains
that Thebes can be saved only by the blood sacrifice of Menoeceus.
Despite Creon's refusal to hand his son over for such a purpose, Men­
oceus decides to sacrifice himself. After a choral ode, a messenger
announces to Iocasta that her sons are planning single combat. She
and Antigone dash off to intervene. Another choral hiatus passes and
Creon enters, mourning his son lately dead. A messenger announces
that Eteocles, Polyneices, and Iocasta have all died in quick succes­
sion. Finally, Antigone returns from the field with the three corpses
and Oedipus comes out of the palace to join in the lament. With these
two, Creon discusses the disposition of the bodies; he then sends the
bereaved pair into exile.

There are so many characters in the play, so many disjointed
scenes, that the drama lacks the coherence of Oedipus Tyrannus and the
economy of Septem. What continuity Euripides may manage is disrupted
by the frequent, sometimes lengthy, emendations and contaminations of
later writers. Yet the two Delphic citations, one to Laius and one to Adrastus, fit well with the rest of the play.

The response to Laius, as analyzed early in this chapter, was a command with a contingency tag. Laius was commanded not to have children, and told that if he did have a child, that child would kill him and all his house would run with blood. Euripides seems to make a point of including in the pronouncement not only the patricide but also a general prediction of a bloody fate for Laius' family and household—his oikos. It is this which is peculiar to the Euripidean response. Not only this response, but the entire play gives emphasis to the doom of the royal family. Indeed, we see everyone left in that family on stage at one time or another. Although Laius is not often referred to after the prologue, everyone talks about Oedipus all the time, and throughout the play the unseen presence of the blind old man in the dark of the palace is felt. In particular, people are always being called the children of Oedipus; Oedipus is often referred to as the father of someone; the family is said to be in the house of Oedipus; and Iocasta is called the wife of Oedipus, son of Laius. In short, nearly everyone seems to be referred to by his relationship to Oedipus. In the inner chambers of the palace, Oedipus is the heart and soul of the family, the center about which all the troubles seethe.

The plot of the play focuses upon the threat of fratricide and the efforts of Iocasta and Antigone to prevent it. The sub-plot of Creon and Menoeceus does not concern the royal family directly, but it does echo the motif of fathers and sons. We are constantly reminded
of the family relationships among all of the major personae of the play. Phoenissae fairly teems with royal family members on and off stage. Thus the grief of Laius' oikos is displayed.

The theme of family is repeated in the second Delphic response of the drama, the pronouncement to Adrastus. Polyneices reports this response to Iocasta during their discussion of the nature of exile (Phoen. 408-423):

Io. How did you come to Argos? What plan did you hold?
Po. Loxias pronounced a certain response to Adrastus...
Io. What sort? Why did you mention this? I do not understand.
Po. ...to marry his children to a boar and a lion.
Io. And what part of the name of beasts do you have, child?
Po. I do not know, a daimon called me to the chance.
Io. God is wise. How did you obtain the marriage?
Po. It was night; I came into the porch of Adrastus.
Io. Seeking a bed as a wandering exile?
Po. Yes. And another exile came too.
Io. Who was this? How wretched that fellow was also.
Po. Tydeus, who, they say, is the son of Oeneus.
Io. Why did Adrastus liken you two to wild beasts?
Po. Because we fought over bedding.
Io. Then the child of Talaos understood the response?
Po. And he gave his two daughters to us two.

We are not told what Adrastus might have asked Apollo or what
occasion might have prompted this pronouncement. The substance of the response is given in oratio obliqua in a simple infinitive phrase—whether command or advice is not clear. Since the status of Adrastus as an agent is not in the least at issue in the play, Euripides does not need to give any clues about the epistemic level of the response. The pronouncement does other jobs in Phoenissae. It again raises an issue of fathers and offspring, a recurring motif. It explains how Polyneices was able to enlist the support of the Argives. The story of the squabble over bedding serves as a lively instance of the indignities that befall the exile—and the unhappiness of exile is the general subject of the stichomythy. Further, the pronouncement presages a simile in which the sons of Oedipus are likened to "boars sharpening their wild jaws" as they prepare for combat (Phoen. 1380). Finally, this response adds a touch of absurdity to the current situation of the play and a mockery of obscure oracular responses. Because Polyneices was an oafish and truculent guest, he wins a bride and an ally. On the instruction of an oracular pronouncement, Adrastus marries his daughters to the two least civilized men that he can find in the hope that, by so doing, he will comply with the riddling response. Just after the exchange above, Iocasta asks Polyneices whether the marriage has been lucky. Polyneices replies that he has no complaints thus far (Phoen. 424-25). The lines are so banal and so out of place in the middle of a crisis that it is difficult to suppose that Euripides is being quite serious.

The pronouncement to Adrastus serves to advance and to explain the plot, to echo themes, and to foreshadow images. We can tell little
about its epistemic status on the information given. Since Adrastus had to give some thought and effort to carrying out the response, it is likely to have been a contingent prediction. While we can assess the pronouncement to Laius with a good degree of certainty, Euripides does little with the moral consequences thereof. Iocasta reports the response to Laius as a command, "Do not seed the furrow of offspring...." And she suggests strongly that Laius would have obeyed if he had not been given to drink. She says that he realized his mistake and attempted to destroy the child. It is clear that Laius was remiss and that he was responsible for it. He was, ironically, killed by Oedipus on his way back to Delphi years later, intending to ask whether the child had died. Indeed, in Iocasta's version of the story, Oedipus too was on his way to Delphi, not from Delphi, to ask about his parents when he met Laius at the crossroads (Phoen. 32ff.).

Laius is at fault for the birth of Oedipus. But the form of the response to Laius suggested that the patricide and the blood in the house were inevitable given that birth. Are Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polyneices all quite innocent then? Euripides makes no references to a response to Oedipus, although Iocasta tells of the patricide and incest. Oedipus is spoken of in the play as being old, blind, wretched, and sick—in particular, "sick from fate" (Phoen. 65). The sick old man curses his sons—"twin beasts" they are called by the chorus (Phoen. 1296). No one seems to like Eteocles very much and after the debate between the brothers Iocasta gives favor to neither. Neither of the two young men seems capable of throwing off the curse of his father. Oedipus says that he took the curse of Laius and gave it to his sons
Tiresias says that no one of the family of Oedipus can be either citizen or king in Thebes ὡς δαμονῶντας κάνατρωσιντας ἔσων ("because they are bedeviled and upsetting the city"). All this evidence suggests that no one in particular can be blamed for the city's present troubles, unless it be Laius, who condemned the royal family by his actions. Yet the others are not entirely without some stain. Once Oedipus is born the problems for Thebes are unavoidable, but constant catastrophe hangs on Oedipus like a disease and is born into his sons, the therses ("beasts").

Euripides also uses the response to Adrastus in *Supplices*. Although the earlier play, *Supplices* presents the aftermath of the conflict portrayed in *Phoenissae*. In this play Adrastus and the Argive wives and children appeal to Theseus and to Athens for help in reclaiming the corpses of those who died in the war with Thebes. Theseus agrees and, having put the Thebans to rout, he buries the fallen troops and returns with the seven dead Argive chiefs. A pyre is formed, and the final third of the play is given over to the laments of relatives. In particular, Evadne, wife of the warrior Capaneus and daughter of Iphnus, throws herself on the pyre to join her husband, much to the sorrow of her father. In the end, Athena appears ex machina instructing Adrastus to swear a military alliance between Argos and Athens, and enjoining the children of the seven chiefs to return one day against Thebes.

The response to Adrastus is cited early in the play, as Adrastus explains to Theseus how he became involved in Theban affairs by the marriage of his daughter to Polyneices (*Supp.* 138-40):
Ad. The puzzling riddles of Phoebus came upon me.
Th. What did Apollo say to accomplish marriage for the maidens?
Ad. That I should give my two daughters to a boar and a lion.

As in Phoenissae, when Adrastus found Tydeus and Polyneices fighting in his house one evening, he took their appearance to fulfill the pronouncement and promptly wed his daughters to the "beasts" (Supp. 145). Here Adrastus laments this act, for it brought him into a disastrous war.

The disasters of war and the relative merits of democracy seem to be the principal topics of the play, which features lengthy debate on each. It has generally been thought that the play presents a pious attitude toward the gods that is uncharacteristic of Euripides. Theseus, after all, accuses Adrastus of ignoring the bad omens and flouting the gods when he set out against Thebes. But Theseus also admonishes Adrastus for being "yoked to the pronouncements of Phoebus" and having married his daughters to strangers who led him into a war (Supp. 155-61, 219-37). Conacher suggests that since Apollo's response drew Adrastus and Argos into the war and since the war was against the will of the gods, we must infer that Delphi on this occasion did not speak the will of the gods. This inference Conacher takes as one suggestion of an ironic attitude toward the gods expressed throughout the play.

We do not have very much information about the response, only a brief oratio obliqua citation. There is no future infinitive, which
might suggest prescience. The aorist infinitive (δοκεύει) seems to indicate no more than a simple act. As in Phoenissae, we must suppose that the response was some sort of contingency, since Adrastus was looking for ways in which it might be fulfilled. Euripides takes no particular pains to make the epistemic status of this pronouncement clear to us and, as usual, the morality of Adrastus is not a major issue in the play. It is hard to blame Adrastus for trying to follow Apollo's pronouncement; Theseus can do so only after the fact. Despite Conacher's suggestion, Apollo only spoke to Adrastus about matrimony—the god never urged a military campaign. In any case, the ultimate result of that campaign is a good thing, since it leads to an alliance between Argos and Athens. When Athena commands this alliance she directs that the binding oath be engraved upon a tripod and dedicated to the god of Delphi (Supp. 1201-04). Thus Delphi is brought in at the beginning and end of the drama, as well as the beginning and end of the story it tells. If we attribute any of these events to Apollo, we must attribute the good as well as the bad.

The response to Adrastus may have brought some good to Argos and Athens, but for individuals in the drama it has brought only grief. The chorus sing of "bitter marriages" and the "bitter word of Phoebus" (Supp. 833-34). Not only does the response connect the start and finish of the plot of Supplices, it also foreshadows the scene of Evadne and Iphnís. The pattern of a father giving his daughter in marriage and that marriage leading to death and sorrow is repeated by the tragedy of Evadne, Capaneus, and Iphnís. This was, evidently, a happy family whose lives have been ruined by the mistakes of other people.
The motif of family—wives and mothers, fathers and husbands, sons and daughters—is repeated all through the play. The family is the current beneath the stormy political debates of heralds and kings; it is the structure that supports the city.

The response to Adrastus, while it has no thematically important effect on the morality of Adrastus, does seem to function as a cohesive element in Supplices. The pronouncement ties events together and it ties themes together. Euripides uses this response, even more than he does in Phoenissae, as an integral unit of the drama.

On examination, it is clear that the three playwrights did not merely use whatever version of a response floated their way but created a version which would suit the needs of the drama. The response to Laius cited by the argumenta shows how strong and complete a citation could be, foretelling both the birth of Oedipus and the patricide, and explaining that this was Zeus' will as a favor for Pelops in punishment for Laius' rape of Pelops' son. This response is prescient. Aeschylus uses a shorter citation. In Septem, Apollo says only that if he does not have a son, Laius will keep the city safe. Aeschylus uses a contingent prediction that emphasizes the preservation of the city. He thereby makes Laius responsible for the danger to Thebes in Septem—a responsibility that accrues to Eteocles too. Yet another citation of the response is used by Sophocles, who suggests by the wording that the responses to Laius and to Oedipus were prescient but undercuts this by the general skepticism of Oedipus and of Iocasta regarding oracular responses. In the Oedipus Tyrannus Sophocles leaves the epistemic status of the three oracular responses open to allow for the struggle
of character. In the Oedipus Coloneus he uses responses that are clearly prescient, for there he presents characters who know who and what they are, who are secure in their world. Euripides in Phoenissae presents the response to Laius as a contingency within a command. Thus Laius sins doubly, by disobeying the god and by failing to keep his family safe. There Laius is clearly at fault, and his grandsons do nothing to redeem his mistake, as Eteocles did in Septem. With the response to Adrastus, Euripides uses a Delphic pronouncement purely as a device of plot and of theme. Its epistemic status is not important for either Phoenissae or Supplices, although the response is quite important in other ways.

These dramatists clearly can manipulate the epistemic status of a pronouncement, as well as its theme and emphasis, in order to fit it to their dramatic conception. For the reader of these plays the issue of the epistemic status of responses should be of special interest, for it often signals the dramatist's attitude toward major moral issues.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. The date of this hexameter verse is not certain. C. Robert, Oidipus (Berlin: Weidmann, 1915), p. 62, argued that this version of the response was the oldest. Fontenrose, Delphic Oracle, pp. 98-99, thinks it a late version. The scholiast in Pindar (Ol. 2. 42) quotes one line of this response as a citation from Mnaseas, so it can at least be dated prior to 200 B.C.

2. All textual citations are from the Oxford Classical Texts. I use the abbreviations for individual plays specified by the Oxford Classical Dictionary, 2nd edition. All the translations from the Greek are my own and intended primarily for the purpose of assisting Greekless readers. They are not intended nor designed to represent the poetry or charm of the Greek.

3. See, for example, Il. 18. 61, Od. 4. 540; Hes. Op. 155, Th. 157; Aesch. Pers. 299, Soph. OT 375. Oracular language borrows a great deal from Homeric usage. For a general discussion of the style of responses, see Parke and Wormell, Delphic Oracle, vol. 2, pp. xxiff.


6. μοῖρα is cognate with and, in its broad sense, synonymous with μόρος, the term used by Aeschylus in syntactic apposition to "Oedipus."

7. For a list of citations, see Parke and Wormell, The Delphic Oracle, vol. 2, p. 66.


9. There are various opinions about the ending of the original play. For a discussion of the arguments for different points of terminus, see Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "The End of the Seven Against Thebes," CQ 53 (1959): 80-115. The most recent argument of which I am aware is that of William G. Thalmann, Dramatic Art in Aeschylus' "Seven Against Thebes" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), Appendix I, who proposes line 1004 as an end of the play.

This is a hotly debated issue among scholars of the play. Thalmann, Dramatic Art in Aeschylus' "Seven Against Thebes," p. 133, argues that Eteocles really has no control over events. J.T. Sheppard, "Plot of Septem contra Thebas," CQ 7 (1913): 74, says that Eteocles does have control. Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "Seven against Thebes: A Tragedy of War," Arion 1 (1962): 68, says that Eteocles in the shield scene makes decisions on the spot. A.J. Podlecki, "Character of Eteocles in Aeschylus' Septem," TAPA 95 (1964): 283-99, gives the background of this scholarly debate and decides himself that Eteocles is both free and determined in his choices.

Thalmann, Dramatic Art in Aeschylus' "Seven Against Thebes," p. 23, finds no sign that Apollo exacts any personal revenge. For an opposing view, see Don Cameron, Studies in "Seven Against Thebes" (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 29, who emphasizes "Apollo's anger" as the major threat to Thebes and to the family.

The curse put upon his sons by Oedipus is mentioned in Euripides' Phoenissae too (63-69, 475). There was a quarrel over the old man's care, in consequence of which Oedipus cursed his sons, crying that they should divide their inheritance by the sword. This curse is emphasized in the interpretations of Thalmann, Dramatic Art in Aeschylus' "Seven Against Thebes," pp. 147-48, and of Rosenmeyer, "Seven against Thebes," p. 75.

The view that Eteocles is a hero who sacrifices himself is somewhat old-fashioned. For a recent restatement of the position, see R.D. Dawe, "Inconsistency of Plot and Character in Aeschylus," PCPS 189 (1963): 21-62. For an opposing view, see D. Cameron, Studies in "Seven Against Thebes," p. 29, who claims that Thebes is saved by the defeat of the Argives, not by Eteocles' death. Cameron considers Eteocles a victim. Rosenmeyer, "Seven against Thebes," p. 73, thinks that Eteocles does save the city but that he does so unintentionally.


Outside of two lines of purely physical description (OT 742-43) where we are told that Laius was a big man with grizzled hair, similar in shape to Oedipus, Laius is called "leader" (103), "sovereign" (128, 1042-43), "son of Labdacus" (224, 267), "corpse" (1245). Most often he is called simply "Laius" without an adjective or adjectival phrase (112, 126, 308, 558, 573, 703, 711, 729, 759, 814, 852, 1042, 1117, 1122, 1139, 1167, 1383).
18 OT 71-72.

19 However lines 110-11 have a decided Delphic, riddling flavor, a style most uncharacteristic of Creon who is a careful and precise speaker habitually (OT 565, 569, 1519).

20 Alister Cameron, The Identity of Oedipus the King, p. 64, asserts that in this response the god "commands" Oedipus. Thus, in Cameron's view, Apollo intentionally sets Oedipus off on the task of self-discovery. Opposed is Kirkwood, Study of Sophoclean Drama, p. 75, who says that the response to Creon "has no particular religious power or meaning: it merely gives information."

21 Oedipus gives the same impression in yet a third reference to the response (OT 825-26).

22 This is noted by G.H. Gellie, Sophocles: A Reading (Australia: Griffin Press for Melbourne University Press, 1972), p. 88.

23 Gellie, Sophocles, p. 105, says "the Apollo of the play is not cruel, only omniscient." But C.M. Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), pp. 175ff., reads the play as "the humbling of a great and prosperous man by the gods."

24 ονεία (OT 11, 103, 650, 746, 770, 834, 852, 1002, 1173); τιμωφόρος (514, 535, 925); δόξατης (1149, 1165, 1178); βασιλεύς (1202); κλεονής (8); κράτος (40, 1525); κρατήρων (14); μέγας (776); θρομων άμφως (46); κράτων άνδρών (33); άνευνος (1071, 1309); άνευστης (1068, 1165, 1181); τάχυς (1195, 1299); κακός (1397, 1433); άείλαμος (1347).


26 Parke and Wormell, Delphic Oracle, vol. 2, pp. 67-68, list this consultation as a separate citation. Fontenrose, Delphic Oracle, p. 364, also lists the pronouncement as a separate response, but thinks that Sophocles intended to link the two pronouncements to Oedipus in a single inquiry.

27 For a summary of both the separatist and the unitarian positions, see Marylin B. Arthur, "Euripides' Phoenissae and the Politics of Justice," (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1975), Chapter I.

28 Laius: Phoen. 9, 13, 35, 39, 218, 341, 868, 1598, 1600, 1609, 1611; Oedipus: 27, 33, 50, 60, 254, 283, 288, 327, 353, 376, 379, 473, 475, 567, 623, 628, 804, 813, 869, 872, 879, 886, 1044, 1070, 1088,
Antony J. Podlecki, "Some Themes in Euripides' Phoenissae," TAPA 93 (1962): 373, notes the connection of several major themes in the play to Oedipus.


See also Phoen. 1296, where the chorus call Eteocles and Polyneices δούμοι δήρες. The animal imagery is noted and discussed by Podlecki, "Some Themes in Euripides' Phoenissae," pp. 362-67.

Oedipus as wretched: Phoen. 60, 869, 1044, 1205, 1533, 1599, 1608, 1615; as old: 327, 376, 1088, 1243, 1532, 1711; as blind: 61, 377, 1088, 1531.

CHAPTER III
RESPONSES OF THE MYCENAEN CYCLE

No response in Greek drama is cited more frequently than the Delphic pronouncement made to Orestes. It is mentioned in six plays--Aeschylus' Choephori and Eumenides, Sophocles' Electra, and the Electra, Orestes, and Iphigenia Taurica of Euripides. For Oedipus and Laius, Delphi was where their troubles began, but when Orestes approaches Apollo's sanctuary he is already in distress. His father, Agamemnon, has been murdered by his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. Electra, his sister, sent him into exile for safety and now awaits his return.

Aeschylus is the first author to mention the pronouncement of Apollo to Orestes. Orestes went to Delphi presumably to obtain some instructions concerning his return home. In the Choephori, Orestes gives a lengthy account of the response that he received (Cho. 269-296):

οὗτοι προδώκεις Λοξίων μεγαλεθῆς
χρησίμες κελευόν τὸν κύδωνον περὰν,
καζορθίζων πολλά, καὶ δυσεμέρους
άτας ώστε ἤπαρ θερμὸν ἐξαυθῶμενος,
εἰ μὴ μέτειμι τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ αὐτοῦ
τρόπον τὸν αὐτὸν, ἄνυπποτείνα λέγων·
αὐτὸν δ' ἔφακε τῇ φίλη φυγῆς τιθε
teicexen μ' ἔχοντα πολλὰ δυσερπὴ κακά,
ἀποκρημάτων ζήμιαις ταυροῦμενοι
τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ γῆς δυσφροῦν μελίγματα
βροτοῖς πιθαύκων εἶπε, τὰς δ' αὐτῶν νόσους,
Indeed the great oracle of Loxias will not betray me, commanding me to run this hazard and crying out many things, and speaking out curses chilling on my hot heart if I do not pursue the cause of my father in this very way—telling me to kill in turn—it said that I myself would pay the price with my own life by having these many dread evils, becoming savage from penalties that cannot be bought off. For it spoke declaring for mortals the propitiations of those angry ones out of the earth—the diseases of these dreadful ones, sores of the flesh that have wild jaws, cancers eating out primal nature and white down of disease rising on the temples—and it voiced other attacks of the Erinyes, performed out of paternal blood 'one wielding a brow seeing light in darkness.' For the dark shaft of those below from the fallen avengers in the race and rage and vain fear out of the nights (all) move, confound, and pursue the flesh mutilated by the brazen whip. And it is not possible for such people to enjoy a share of the bowl, nor a drop of libation but the blind anger of a father keeps him away from the altars; no one receives him and in time he dies dishonored by all and friendless, terribly withered and wasted in body.

This response is reported as a long oratio obliqua. The first sentence (Cho. 269-285) is packed with verbs of speech: present participles (κελεύων, ἔξορθιάζων, ἔξαιρόμενος, λέγων, and πιθαύνων), indicative aorists (ἐφασκε, εἶπε), and an imperfect indicative (ἐφώνει). This suggests that Orestes was so deeply impressed by the utterance
that he cannot convey the act of speech by a single verb. Dependent on these verbs are two present infinitives (περαν, ἐπαντελεέων) and one future infinitive (τεῦσεων). The participles in oblique cases, as subjects of infinitives or attributives, are primarily in the present case (ἐχοντα, ταυρομένον, ἐξεσθοντας, τελουμένας, ὑμνοντα, νυμνοντα), suggesting continuous action. The main verb of the sentence (προδέωει) is future indicative. The next two sentences also emphasize the present tense, hence, continuous action. The second sentence of the response is grammatically independent, but logically a continuation of the oratio obliqua. This sentence contains in quick succession a series of present indicative verbs (κανει, ταράσσει, διωκάτει) and an aorist passive attributive participle (λυμανθέν). In the third sentence there is again a continuation of the indirect construction, here both logically and grammatically. A series of present infinitives (ἐνωι, ἀπεργει, δέχεσθαι, συλλέει, θυσκεει), all suggesting the aspect of continuous action, depends upon the earlier verb of speaking (ἐξώνει).

So, early in the first sentence there are fully eight verbs of speaking in participial and indicative forms. κελεύετω is a fairly specific sort of verb. The usual translations of this word ("command," "bid," "urge," "exhort") suggest some vested interest on the part of the speaker, who is Apollo in this case. Several other verbs, using intensifying prefixes, imply that the response was loud and forceful (ἐξορθάξων, ἐξανθίμενος, περανθίκων). The multiple present participles all suggest continuous action, so the response was probably long as well as loud. If the delivery of the response was long, loud, and pressing, the prevalence of present infinitives and participles within
the oratio obliqua suggests that the punishments which the response describes would be long also. Only ὀνταξομετέχωμεν ("to kill in return") in the aorist tense implies a simple, single action.

Orestes was, it seems, quite impressed by the oracular pronouncement. One imagines him as a young man for whom the experience at Delphi was profoundly intimidating. His account is evidently a summary (Cho. 271), so we cannot presume to have the very language of the response in indirect form. There is, however, a strong sense that Apollo is being very emphatic in this pronouncement. The choice given Orestes—to avenge his father or to be wasted by unspeakable disease and isolation—is no choice at all. It amounts to a command. Apollo, exerting his authority, is not in any way predicting the future; he is creating it. Orestes is to be the proximate agent of matricide, but Apollo is going to be responsible for the act. The long list of terrible and disgusting diseases makes refusing the task out of the question. It is quite unlike the common run of responses, which are generally brief.

When a response is a command, of course the recipient has the responsibility for carrying out whatever act is enjoined. Unlike a case of prescience, there is no event that must occur, so the inquirer cannot just wait around for something to happen. He must take some initiative and do something to carry out the command. But having some responsibility for carrying out an act does not necessarily make one wholly culpable for that act. We expect that the issuer of the command will bear the moral onus, if any. But to what extent do we blame someone who only follows the orders of his superior? This becomes, as we
shall see eventually, an important problem in the *Oresteia*.

The citation of this pronouncement in the *Electra* of Sophocles is a marked contrast to the intensity of the Aeschylean version. In the prologue of the play Orestes recounts to his companion (el. 32-39):

> ἐγὼ γὰρ ἥριξ' λέομεν τὸ Πυθικὸν μαντίσιον, ὡς μάθωμεν ἡγηγήτατε παρὰ δικαι ἄροιμη τῶν φοινικῶν πάρα, χρῆ μοι τοιαύτ' ὁ Φαύνος ἔν πεύχη τάχα. ἀσκενοῦν αὐτὸν ἀστίδων τε καὶ στρατοῦ δόλοις ἐλήφατ' χείρὸς ἐνίδειος σφαγά. δὴ' οὖν τοιάδε χρησμῶν ἐλησθοῦσαν, σὺ μὲν μολὼν

For when I arrived at the Pythian seat in order that I might learn in what way I could take satisfaction for my father from the murderers, Phoebus pronounced to me such things as you will quickly learn: that I, unfurnished with shields and army, should by craft steal the rightful killings with my hand. Therefore, since we have heard this pronouncement, you go....

We can tell a little from the language of the report. Orestes gives the response in an *oratio obliqua* which stands in apposition to τοιαύτα ("such things"), usually considered a vague and generalizing pronoun. The infinitive of the indirect discourse is in the future tense. In *oratio recta* that verb would likely be a future indicative. The future tense suggests that the pronouncement may have been prescient, since the future indicative is a fairly strong form for a response. This tone is belied, however, by the context of the pronouncement, that is, by the nature of Orestes' inquiry.

Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles supplies the reason for Orestes' trip to Delphi. Orestes says that he went to ask how he could avenge his father (el. 32-34). The Pythia replied at least something like, "You will take them by craft, not force." This is a set of instructions,
not a piece of prescience. It is not necessary that Orestes will kill the murderers; that is, it is not a predetermined event. But Orestes can avenge his father if he wishes to and if he does so by stealth. Apollo supplies the means in his response, not necessarily the motivation for the act. This context makes the response appear to be a contingency of sorts: "If you want to exact vengeance, then do it with a *dolos.*" This kind of response puts the Orestes of Sophocles in quite a different moral light from that of the Orestes in *Choephoroi.* Here Orestes is the prime mover, a self-starter in the vengeance. His success is assured by Apollo, but he decides to make the attempt on his own. The action is not instigated by the god, although it is abetted and, perhaps, sanctioned. Apollo responds to Orestes' inquiry with a statement of fact; there is only a suggestion in this citation that Apollo approves of the plan.  

Just as Aeschylus' Laius was caught up in a conflict of duties in the *Septem,* so his Orestes is swept up in a whirl of cosmic-sized forces. In contrast, Sophocles is restrained in his use of responses. The pronouncements to Laius and to Orestes in Sophocles are subtle, suggesting first one kind of category, then another. In none of Sophocles' versions of the responses does Apollo seem to be personally directing the proceedings. He foresees, but does not cause events. The gods of Sophocles seem dispassionate by comparison with the stormy divinities of Aeschylus. Sophocles saves his passions for his heroes. In contrast to both, Euripides is quite prepared to present Orestes as a weakling corrupted by a shady and irresponsible Apollo.  

In Euripides' *Electra,* Orestes and Electra mention the response
after the death of Aegisthus but before the murder of Clytemnestra

(El. 971-73):

Or. οὐ̣ Φοίβος, ποιήσας γ' ἀμαθῶς ἐθέτεσας...

Hl. διὸν ὦ 'Απόλλων σκαλίστη τὶνες σοφοὶ;

Or. δοτις μ' ἔχησας μητέρ', ἵνα σε χαὶ ἐκεῖνοι.

Or. Oh Phoebus, you prophesied in much ignorance...

El. Where Apollo is dim, who are wise?

Or. ...who told me to kill my mother, whom one ought not to.

Orestes here is resisting the matricide, although he performs it nonetheless. This suggests that the response was a command, a category permitted by the grammar of the account. Later in the play the Dioscuri appear and announce that Apollo is the cause (αὐτός) of the matricide (El. 1266-67). Euripides gives this citation quite late in the play, however, after the audience has had ample opportunity to observe the bravura and conspiracy of the siblings. Apollo is logically responsible for the act as the commander of that act; but Orestes is shown to be quite willing to go along, until the penultimate moment.

In the Orestes the same kind of response, a command, is referred to after the matricide. Orestes summarizes this response in one line (Or. 416):

Φοίβος, κελεύσας μητέρος ἐκπράξαι φάνω.

Phoebus, you ordered me to kill my mother.

And in the Iphigenia Taurica, too, Orestes holds Apollo responsible for the matricide (IT 711-15):

ἡμῶς δ' ὁ Φοίβος μάτις ἐν ἐφεύρατον

τέχνην δι' ἄθεμος ὦς προσώπον Ἑλλάδος

ἀπῆλθοι, αἵδοι τῶν πάροι ματαιμάτων.

ψάρτ' ἦν δεός τάμα καὶ πεισθείς λόγος,

μητέρα κατακαίσω αὐτός ἀνταπόλλομαι.
Phoebus as prophet deceived me—using his skill he drove me out of Hellas as far as possible in shame for the earlier pronouncements by which I, who gave all my possessions and was persuaded by words, having killed my mother, destroy myself in turn.

Nowhere does Euripides give a very full account of the response to Orestes. In each play, however, Apollo is held accountable for the matricide. This suggests that Euripides is presenting the pronouncement as a command. He seems to use the same conception of the response in each play—at least the character of Orestes is similar in each play and it is principally Orestes who cavils against the god. The response in Euripides has the same epistemic status as in Aeschylus. For each dramatist Apollo has some responsibility. But Orestes' character is not the same at all. Aeschylus, by presenting the response in extensive detail with emphasis on the threats, gives us an Orestes who is coerced—an Orestes we find hard to blame. The Orestes of Euripides is commanded, but his compliance seems to come from his own weakness, not from Apollonian authority.

Again, as with the Theban responses, we have three disparate presentations of the response to Orestes represented by the three dramatists. The differences in their versions of the pronouncement are symptoms of and clues to the differences in their conceptions of the myth and its significance. Apollo does not seem to play the same role at all for Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The responses of Delphi can be natural and useful vehicles through which one might bring the gods into a play—when the pronouncements are the sort which suggest some interest, some involvement on the god's part. The strongest sorts of responses epistemically, prescience and contingency, do not
automatically entail such divine participation, for there the god merely states the facts, *ex hypothesi*. A command involves the god since it issues from the god and expresses his will. Of the three writers, it is Aeschylus who makes the most of the response to Orestes; I have pointed out the exceptional aspects of that citation, its length and strength. The command of Apollo is an important feature in the *Choephoroi*—even more important in the *Eumenides*—for it is through this response that Aeschylus brings the will of Zeus to bear on the proceedings.

These two plays, along with *Agamemnon*, make up the only ancient Greek trilogy still extant. This set chronicles the fortunes of two generations in the house of Atreus—from the return and death of Agamemnon to the release of Orestes from the cycle of blood-guilt represented by the Erinyes. In the final half of the last drama, the focus is lifted out of the personal fortunes of the Mycenaean royalty and shifted to the replacement of the old archaic methods of dealing with capital crime. In their place is established a system of trial by jury. This substitution is represented by the reconciliation of the Erinyes, the furies who punished blood-guilt with more blood, with Athena and with Athens, location of the newly established court of the Areopagus.

The principal citation of the response to Orestes (*Cho. 269-96*), as observed, seems designed to mitigate Orestes’ responsibility in the crime as much as possible. The multiple verbs of speech used by Orestes in relating the response suggest that he found the very transmission of the pronouncement exceedingly awe-inspiring. The lengthy
threats of physical disease reported to be part of the response were related in gruesome detail. It is not surprising that Orestes would be overwhelmed by the experience, and it would be extraordinary if Orestes were able to refuse the god's injunction. Through the force of the response, and through its form, Aeschylus passes a large portion of the responsibility for the matricide to Apollo. In Choephoroi, however, Aeschylus explicitly avoids making Orestes no more than an obedient robot. Immediately after his report of the oracular pronouncement, Orestes cites two other factors that influence him (Cho. 297-301):

τοιοίτε κρήκηκοι αφ' χρ' πεποιθέναι;
κεῖ μ' πέποθα, τοδρόν δ' ἐργαστένην
πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰς τὸ ειμπίπτονος ἱμεροῦ,
θυεῖ γ' ἐφετειαί καὶ πατρός πένθος μέγα,
καὶ πρὸς πιέζει χρησάτων ἁγιὸν.

Is it necessary to trust in these pronouncements? Even if I do not trust, this act must be done, for many desires fall together into one: the commands of god and great grief for my father and the lack of money presses me in addition...

Orestes has reasons of his own for returning to Argos, and not all of them are altruistic. Electra and the chorus are enthusiastic about the task ahead, even without the injunction of Apollo (Cho. 142-44, 267-68, 827-30). During the long kommos (Cho. 306-478) in which Orestes, Electra, and the chorus prepare for the kill, they invoke not Apollo for aid but Agamemnon (Cho. 315, 332, 346, 364, 456), Dike (311), Ares (461), the Moirae (306), and Zeus (382, 395, 409). After the response is cited we hear no more of Apollo until Orestes reveals that the response instructed him to approach his prey by means of a dolos or trick (Cho. 559-59). Afterwards again no one mentions Apollo
until the penultimate moment of the matricide. As Orestes stands over his mother, her breasts bared in supplication, he hesitates and calls out to Pylades for advice. Pylades responds (Cho. 900-902):

\[ \text{ποῦ δαί τὸ λοιπὸν Λοξίαν μαντεύματα} \\
\text{τὰ πυθίχρηστα, πιστὰ τ' ευφράκτωμα;} \\
\text{ἀπαντάς ἔχθροιν τῶν θεῶν ἦγου πλέον.} \]

Where in the world are the Pythian-delivered pronouncements of Loxias, and the trusty oaths? Consider all men enemies rather than the gods.

At the moment of the matricide Electra is absent. Her last lines occur at Cho. 506 and then she disappears. The chorus also withdraw (Cho. 872-74) in order "to appear innocent of evil" (ἀνατιταί κακῶν εἶναι). So in the end there is no encouragement for Orestes beyond the reminder of Apollo's injunctions. At the close of the play, Orestes turns again to Apollo, claiming that the god had promised him immunity (Cho. 1029-32):

\[ \text{καὶ ἄλλα τὸλματε τῆς δὲ πλευτηρίωμαι} \\
\text{τῶν πυθίματων Λοξίαν, χρήσαι ἐμοὶ} \\
\text{πράξαντα μὲν ταῦτ' ἔκτις αἰτίας κακῆς} \\
\text{εἶναι, παρέτη 8' οὐκ ἔμω τὴν ξημίαν.} \]

And I name Loxias, the Pythian prophet, as the inducer of this boldness, pronouncing to me that having done these things I would be blameless, but if I did not do them--I will not speak the punishment.

Aeschylus makes Orestes sufficiently human to have his own feelings and motives, but it is Apollo's command that is telling, and it is to Apollo that Orestes looks after the fact. Orestes himself is presented in either complimentary or neutral terms in the text. He is neither a helpless pawn of Apollo nor a crazed killer--but a relatively normal young man in a very strange situation. Aeschylus provides the startling response early in the play but does not make Apollo seem too
heavy-handed by mentioning the god too much. Orestes cites the pronouncement of Apollo at the beginning of the play and the dolos suggested by the god in the middle (Cho. 556-59). But from line 900, at the murder of Clytemnestra, to the end of the play at line 1575 Apollo is mentioned six times. The god thus becomes more prominent in the play, and more important to Orestes, when it is time to assess the consequences of the matricide. Orestes is the only character thus far to levy responsibility, and he names Apollo at the close of Choephoroi.

At the beginning of Eumenides, the next play and the last of the trilogy, we find ourselves, ironically, right on the god's doorstep in Delphi, where Orestes has fled. Orestes is pursued by the Erinyes, horrific goddesses whose function is to hound those who murder relatives. In the Eumenides Orestes first seeks refuge at the temple in Delphi, and from there is instructed by Apollo to go on to Athens. Apollo promises that in Athens Orestes will find relief from the pursuit of the Erinyes. On his arrival in Athens, Orestes petitions Athena herself and she convenes a jury of citizens to hear his case. The Erinyes argue for the prosecution; Apollo appears to speak for the defense. After a series of arguments, the vote is taken. The jury is divided, but, since Athena has earlier cast for the defense, Orestes wins his release. By line 778 the trial is over and Orestes has gone. From that point on the action is concerned with pacifying the Erinyes and transforming them into the Eumenides, kindly, protective spirits of Athens. The Erinyes accept their new role at last and the drama ends with a joyful procession leading the Furies to their new home.
In the *Eumenides* Aeschylus takes pains to show that Apollo is the cause of the matricide, following through on the view suggested in *Choephoroi*. Orestes was the agent of Clytemnestra's death, but Apollo is responsible. It is the initial commanding pronouncement which permits the strong association of Apollo with the act of a mortal. This is the very association through which Aeschylus eventually connects Zeus to the events of the trilogy, by making Apollo the agent of Zeus. This connection—Zeus with the matricide—is crucial for the playwright.

In *Agamemnon* we are caught up in the spectacle and grandeur of Homeric tones. The play is set against the background of the Trojan war, which is the repeated topic of choral odes (*Ag.* 40-263, 355-487, 681-809). The return of Agamemnon, captive in tow, and the bloody vengeance of Clytemnestra have the air of archaic heroism. Justice in *Agamemnon* is in the hands of the individual. For the death of Iphigenia, Clytemnestra has no recourse and no resource beyond herself. By the last play of the trilogy, the atmosphere has changed completely. Instead of a tangle of robes and the flash of an axe, the *Eumenides* contains debate, litigation—sometimes on matters that seem more academic than pertinent—and balloting. Due process has been instigated. This is the great conversion expressed by the *Oresteia*—and its expression is the great achievement of Aeschylus. In this ebb and flow of cosmic passions and forces, the oracular pronouncement functions first to guarantee Orestes' participation in the matricide and, second, to connect Zeus, through the agency of Apollo, to the proceedings of the *Eumenides*. The involvement of Zeus then brings the highest
authority to bear upon the invention of due process.

The one issue that nearly all the characters agree on in *Eumenides* is that Apollo is responsible for the matricide. Apollo says to Orestes (*Eum.* 84):

\[
\text{kai γὰρ κτανεῖν έπεισα μητρῶν δέμας.}
\]

For I persuaded you to kill your mother.

And he announces it to the chorus and Athena (*Eum.* 579-80):

\[
\text{αἰτίαν δ' ἔχω}
\text{τὴν τοῦδε μητρὸς τοῦ φόνου.}
\]

I am responsible for the murder of the mother of this man.

The chorus, although they pursue Orestes, strongly accuse Apollo (*Eum.* 199-200):

\[
\text{αὐτὸς κό τοῦτων ὡδ' μεταιτοιοί πῆλη,}
\text{ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ πᾶν ἐπραξας ὡς παναιτοιος.}
\]

You are not an accomplice of these things, but you alone, fully responsible, did it all.

Although Orestes admits that he performed the act, he too claims that Apollo is responsible (*Eum.* 463-67):

\[
\text{ἐκεῖνα τὴν τεκοῦσα, οὐκ ἄρηζομαι,}
\text{ἀντικεῖσαι ποιαιεί φιλάτου πατρός.}
\text{καὶ τώθεν κατή Λοξίας ἐπαιτίος}
\text{ἄλγη προσμοῦν ἀντίεντερα καρδίαι,}
\text{εἰ μὴ τί τῶν' ἔρξαιμι τοὺς ἐσπαίτοις.}
\]

I killed my mother, I will not deny it, in revenge for my dearest father. And of these things, Loxias is publicly blamable, foretelling sharp pains to my heart if I should not do something to those who were guilty.

The judgement is virtually unanimous. Apollo, through his oracular response, is responsible for the matricide. Orestes killed his mother, to be sure, and he had several reasons for doing it, but the reason that counted was the command of Apollo. It counted because
at the final moment only the support of Apollo could induce Orestes to kill his mother. It counted because only Apollo's support will free Orestes from the Erinyes.

Apollo, however, is not the only Olympian involved and implicated. By his own testimony, Apollo's pronouncements are dictated by Zeus (Eum. 616-18):

Never on the mantic seat did I ever speak, not concerning man, nor woman, nor city, anything which Zeus, father of the Olympians, did not order.

Later, Apollo enjoins the jury (Eum. 713-14):

I order you to respect the pronouncements of me and of Zeus, and not to render them fruitless.

The message is clearly that a vote for Apollo is a vote for Zeus.

Athena, too, is connected with Zeus explicitly. She is twice referred to as the child of Zeus (Eum. 415, 664). She votes with Apollo's case on the grounds that Zeus is her only parent and, hence, she supports the man's side in all matters (Eum. 734-38). Finally, in the last half of the play, Zeus is given epithets that emphasize his involvement with the world rather than his isolation. He is called "savior," "all-powerful," "public," "all-seeing."

I suggest that the involvement of Zeus in the proceedings, however indirect, is designed to throw the weight of the supreme Olympian's authority behind the decisions of Athena. Apollo's announcement that Zeus virtually determines all Delphic pronouncements implies that
Zeus has, as it were, stage-managed the events of the Choephoroi and Eumenides and that the rehabilitation of the Erinyes is by his design. In the clash between the old goddesses and the young Olympians, powers of equal claim in the world, it requires a greater power than either to settle matters and to bring them into harmony.  

The oracular response is a crucial element in this process. It brings Apollo and, through him, Zeus into what would otherwise have been a matter of concern only to the royal family of Argos and to their people. Because the response is a forceful command, the weight of moral responsibility for the matricide can be shifted from Orestes to Apollo. Orestes is given a ritual cleansing to eliminate the quasi-physical pollution of matricide, but he is redeemed from any extended punishment. Orestes is not an innocent, but it is his superior, the one who gave the command, who must answer for the justice of the matricide. Apollo's argument in the Eumenides, specious as it seems, wins because it is on the side of Zeus. Aeschylus designs his version of the oracular response in such a way as to involve the gods as much as possible in the drama.

The Sophoclean version of the pronouncement is quite different from the pronouncement of Aeschylus. In the Choephoroi, Apollo commanded the matricide and, in Eumenides, he was held responsible for it. Orestes' responsibility for the murders was mitigated by the involvement of Apollo, and, through the good offices of Apollo, Athena, and Zeus, Orestes was reprieved. Sophocles, however, manipulates the pronouncement in order to gain a very different effect. In Electra, Orestes wishes to learn from Apollo how he can kill his father's
murderers and is advised to approach the problem with intrigue rather than with force. The initial motivation, the instigation for the matricide, seems to come from Orestes, not from the god. The force of the contingent prediction ("If you want to avenge Agamemnon, you can do so by stealth") is such that Apollo seems to allow Orestes to decide whether to kill his mother. Apollo is involved in the play, but only indirectly and rather ambiguously.

The plot of Electra covers roughly the same action as Choephoroi. Orestes returns to Argos, joins forces with his sister, in disguise gains access to the palace, and murders Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Sophocles, however, shifts the focus of his play from Orestes' actions to Electra's feelings. The playwright shows little interest in the crime itself. Electra dominates the play while Orestes makes only relatively brief appearances. From lines 77-1097 Orestes is completely absent from the stage. The elaborate dolos of Orestes and his cohorts, the lie about his death in a chariot race, is used by Sophocles as a framework, a broad structure against which to set Electra's emotionalism. She is on stage from line 77 until the end of the play. Sophocles insures that she is the most interesting character of the drama, if not an especially charming character. Electra is so intense a figure that we see whatever action occurs only in relation to her. All the other characters of the play serve as foils to her. The play moves with her reactions to each new character and event.

Given Sophocles' emphasis in Electra, it is not surprising that he plays down the role of Apollo and that of Orestes. Indeed, he subdues any character and any theme that might compete with Electra for
our attention. Sophocles plays down the role of Apollo, but he does not eliminate it altogether. Instead, he suggests Apollo's presence by a few tantalizing references without ever committing the god's whole-hearted approval in any substantive way to the action.

Orestes gives the oracular citation during the prologue, but there are two other references to the pronouncement in the play. When Orestes catches his first glimpse of Electra, he asks his comrades whether they should not linger and eavesdrop. The paedagogus replies (El. 82–85):

Absolutely not. Let us try to do nothing before the things of Loxias and let us try to get a start on these things by pouring libations for your father; for I say that these things bring victory and power over the criminals.

There are two aspects of the speech that are of interest. The first is the vagueness with which the paedagogus refers to the contents of the response. τὰ Λοξίου can cover nearly everything from the property of Apollo to anything that is in the interests of Apollo to, as seems likely, the instructions of Apollo to Orestes. This open-ended reference echoes the looseness of Orestes' original account, which he introduces in apposition to τοιαύτα ("such things"), an indefinite pronoun. Secondly, by giving grammatical parallel to the two infinitives (Ἅρω[ε]ν and ἄρχηγετες) and by putting the participle in apposition to the second infinitive, Sophocles strongly suggests that the pouring of libations is part and parcel of τὰ Λοξίου. It is
likely, then, that Orestes does not provide the full details of the response. The paedagogus appears to supply a little more information about the pronouncement, information which he must have known about ab initio, since no one has mentioned it previously. We do not know all there is to know about the pronouncement. Without really giving us any new solid evidence about the response, Sophocles brings our knowledge of it into question. As usual, he displays a tendency to obscure our view of the god.

The second reference to the pronouncement occurs immediately following the murder of Clytemnestra. As Orestes confronts and kills Clytemnestra within the palace, the queen cries out and Electra answers her from the stage, urging Orestes to strike twice. It is in some ways a terrifying scene—not for what we cannot see, but for the ferocity that we can. The chorus then make a brief and mournful comment about curses, blood, and death. Finally Electra calls in to ask Orestes how things stand. Orestes answers (El. 1424-25):

\begin{quote}
\textit{ràv òmousi mun kalôs, 'Aπόλλων ei kalôs ã̇bêstèsen.}
\end{quote}

In the house it is well, if Apollo prophesied well.

The remark seems strange. Clearly Orestes has been successful in completing the first half of his task. Why does he qualify his statement? Both Bowra and Kamerbeek think that this line suggests some anxiety on Orestes' part. Kirkwood finds it part of an overall "enigmatic emotional and moral situation." Orestes here may be trying to put some of the onus for the act onto the god, or he may simply be suggesting that everything is all right provided that the god gave
the correct instructions concerning the dolos. The tone hinges on the reading of καλός, whether it is to suggest a successful act or a good act, or perhaps both. Doubtless the ambiguity is intentional.

There are only two other mentions of Apollo in Electra. Far from adding information to whatever we know of the god from the pronouncement, these passages only add to the mystery. Both Clytemnestra and Electra speak a prayer to Apollo. Clytemnestra, frightened by a dream of Agamemnon, asks Apollo to fulfill the dream if it is advantageous to her and, if it is not, to turn it against her enemies (El. 644-59). With appropriate Sophoclean irony, as soon as the prayer of Clytemnestra is finished, the paedagogus arrives and sets the dolos in motion. Some scholars have taken his entrance to be Apollo's immediate response to Clytemnestra's invocation. Sophocles is not so obvious. We have been expecting Orestes' cohort all along, and he is merely acting according to plan. Yet the timing is peculiar, another instance of Apollo's presence in the play.

In the second reference to Apollo, Electra, too, speaks a prayer to the god. As Orestes enters the palace, Electra invokes Apollo, asking his assistance in punishing the sinners (El. 1376-83). As soon as Electra finishes, the chorus sing an ode in which they observe the approach of Ares and of Hermes "leading the dolos" (El. 1384-97). Clytemnestra is killed within the next twenty lines. This too appears to be a quick response to the prayer, this time a positive response. There is certainly not sufficient evidence to make Apollo completely responsible for everything that occurs, yet the Delphic god is always in the background, an encouraging presence behind the mortal agents.
in the action.\textsuperscript{14}

The textual evidence on Apollo in Sophocles' \textit{Electra} is inconclusive; and Sophocles surely means it so to be. The dramatist seems to accept the god's support of Orestes' venture, but conclusive evidence thereof is not forthcoming in the text. Unlike the \textit{Eumenides}, no character in \textit{Electra} claims that Apollo is \textit{o\`t\`o\`s}. This was also Sophocles' way of handling pronouncement in the \textit{Oedipus} plays—to render a response ambiguous and the god's function obscure. In \textit{Electra}, then, the response to Orestes is modified from the commanding form of Aeschylus—a form far too straightforward for Sophocles' purpose—to an implied contingency. The change in the epistemic status of the response removes the absolute responsibility for the matricide from the god. This leaves Sophocles free to play at, to hint at, but to circumvent the issue of divine intervention.

If moral responsibility is removed from Apollo by the response, is it then transferred to Orestes—or to anyone? Theoretically, Orestes is a self-starter in the matricide now, and should bear the guilt, if there is any guilt. But for some reason Sophocles never levies any onus at all. No one is blamed for the murder of Clytemnestra. The issue of blame does not even arise, at least not blame for matricide. Electra's worst fault is her excessive emotionalism, on which nearly all the characters comment at one time or another.\textsuperscript{15} No one says anything bad about Orestes, who is most often called either "child" or "dearest."\textsuperscript{16} Certainly there is no hint of a dark and sinful, a Fury-ridden side to his nature. Indeed, what seems to bother scholars of the play most is the fact that Sophocles removes
the blame from Apollo and never reassigns it to anyone else. Thus scholars have been inclined to assign more responsibility to Apollo than Sophocles suggests in an attempt to inject morality into the play. Although there are certainly suggestions that Apollo sanctions and approves the matricide, there is no evidence that the god instigates it. The ambiguous role of the god is expressed, in part, by the ambiguous nature of the pronouncement. As in Oedipus Tyrannus, mortals are left to struggle and to suffer as a consequence of divinity, but it is the human dilemma upon which Sophocles focuses.

While Sophocles is chary of representing the god Apollo in too clear and glaring a light, Euripides shows no similar restraint. As we have observed, Euripides, like Aeschylus, represents the pronouncement to Orestes as a command in Electra, Iphigenia Taurica, and Orestes.17 The citations of the pronouncement in these plays are terse, generally an oratio obliqua using simply a verb of speaking followed by a single infinitive. The citations alone, then, are often not particularly informative. The context of these citations, however, is frequently helpful. Orestes' tone, when he speaks of Apollo, is generally querulous, since he blames Apollo for bringing him to the brink of matricide (El. 97ff.), for luring him to perform the matricide (Or. 285-87), and for failing to stand by him after the matricide (IT 711-15). The status of the pronouncement is such that Orestes (as nearly everyone else in the plays) is allowed to consider Apollo culpable. Yet, in Euripides, this vulnerability of the god does not seem to mitigate the action of Orestes in the least.

On the contrary, given the characters of Electra in Electra and
Orestes in *Orestes*, it is clear that Apollo's role cannot possibly be as insistent a factor in the matricide as the obsessive egoism and emotionalism of the children of Agamemnon. Apollo is a facile and, *prima facie*, sufficient scapegoat for Orestes' guilt as far as the persona of Orestes is concerned. But the god seems distant to us (even when, as in *Orestes*, he appears *ex machina*) and hardly likely as a causative agent. In fact, the god is a mannikin in contrast to the emotionalism of the royal siblings. Only in *Iphigenia Taurica* is this relentless miasmos of character relieved. There a pronouncement of Apollo seems to work out for the best, and Orestes can show a nobility of sorts while succeeding in a good deed. The *Iphigenia Taurica* is the most fanciful and romantic of the three plays. In general, then, we can observe that in Euripides the nature of the god is often a mirror of the protagonist's character and circumstances. In each play Orestes describes an Apollo who reflects the tenor of Orestes' own mind: uncertain in *Electra*, changeable in *Iphigenia Taurica*, and viciously unpredictable in *Orestes*.

Euripides' *Electra* covers the same events represented in Aeschylus' *Choephori* and Sophocles' *Electra*, namely, the return of Orestes and the murders of Clytemnestra and of her lover, but the treatment is entirely different. Electra here is the peevish and discontented wife of a poor but honest farmer, reveling only in her own self-abasement. Orestes is tentative and skittish, ready to run off at the slightest mischance. Having met Electra, he converses with her for 350 lines (*El.* 220-571) before he reveals his own identity, and that only when an aged servant recognizes and identifies him. Without
a plan of his own, Orestes must ask Electra and the old man for advice (El. 274, 599, 614, 646). The slave suggests that Aegisthus can be taken in a nearby field where he is preparing a sacrifice to the local nymphs. Electra provides a plan to lure Clytemnestra into her hut and into ambush. The two killings are successfully performed, but the matricide shocks both Electra and Orestes into remorse. Their uncles, the Dioscuri, appear at the last moment and instruct Orestes to give Electra to Pylades in marriage and to proceed to Athens for trial. They promise that in Athens Apollo will take the blame for the matricide and Orestes will be acquitted. They reveal that Menelaus and Helen have returned and that Helen never did go to Ilium at all, explaining that Zeus sent an image of Helen to Ilium "so that there might be strife and murder among mortals" (El. 1282-83). This last remark appears to reduce the Trojan war and its aftermath, especially the events of this play, to a divine practical joke—an amusement for Zeus! How far this is from the Zeus of Aeschylus, who works to bring order, not disorder to the world!

Any mention of an oracular pronouncement is conspicuously absent in Euripides' Electra until just before the matricide. At this time the murder of Aegisthus has already been accomplished cheerfully and without hesitation. When Orestes does talk about the pronouncement, he does so in terms that suggest, at least, a lack of clear communication between the god and himself. At El. 971-73, he says that when the god told him to kill his mother Apollo prophesied πολλὴν γ' ὀμασθήν ("a lot of ignorance/puzzlement"), which we may interpret as Orestes' ὀμαθήν. Electra calls Apollo σκαυδὸς or "dark/opaque/shady"
Yet she urges Orestes to proceed with the matricide and not to question the god (El. 979-82). After the matricide, Electra announces αὐτὰ δ' ἐγὼ ("I am responsible!" El. 1183). At this time Orestes is still singing darkly of Apollo's δύκαυ' ἀφαντα ("unseen/blind justice," El. 1190-91). The Dioscuri, when they arrive, seem inclined to blame Apollo too, observing (El. 1266-67):

Λοξίας γὰρ αἰεὶς
ἐς αὐτῶν ἀλείς, μητέρας χήρας φόνον.

for Loxias will take responsibility for this, having pronounced the death of your mother.

The status of the pronouncement as a command makes it easy for Orestes and for the Dioscuri to blame Apollo for the matricide. Electra, who has a stronger personality than the other conspirators, is willing to take on all the responsibility herself, but, in the finale, she is brushed aside and simply married off. The focus of the play, however, is on Electra. This is a play of domestic strife, not of epic furies. The speech of Electra addressed to the remains of Aegisthus passes over the charge of regicide to dwell at some length on the sins in the royal boudoir (El. 907-56). Likewise, the exchange between Clytemnestra and Electra (El. 1011-1099) gives emphasis to domestic and sexual matters—namely, to Clytemnestra's anger at the death of Iphigenia and, particularly, at the arrival of Cassandra as a war bride as opposed to Electra's domestic plight and jealousies. The contrast of the earthy and genuine, if indelicate, motives of Electra against the pat and tidy resolutions of the Dioscuri leaves the gods looking artificial and irrelevant. Apollo's command is a convenience for Orestes. If we are to seek the real locus of responsibility,
where we as the audience feel it belongs, it is with Electra, as she claims, not Apollo. Euripides is at pains to minimize Apollo's role, even as Orestes and the Dioscuri appear to maximize it.

There is some indication, as above, that Orestes did not even understand the pronouncement fully. Unlike Sophocles and Aeschylus, Euripides does not have Apollo tell Orestes how to carry out the murders. Here the dolos is supplied by human participants. In the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus, Orestes is cautious but has no ready expectation of defeat. In Euripides' Electra, Electra contemplates Orestes' failure as a genuine possibility (El. 686-692). This suggests that the murderers are not fully confident of Apollo's support. Orestes and Electra act on their own here more than in any other of the plays. The condemnation of Apollo made by the Dioscuri does not really remove any onus from the siblings. The fact that Apollo may have commanded the response does not mean that the two have not acted from motivations of their own. The finale of the play does not belie the impression of all that precedes it. The moral force of the Dioscuri and of the commanding pronouncement cannot compensate for the personal and patent drives of Electra and Orestes.

The pronouncement to Orestes is used in much the same way in Iphigenia Taurica and Orestes, plays which offer alternative versions of the matricide's aftermath. The Iphigenia Taurica takes place among the Taurians in a remote kingdom on the Black Sea. This play in some ways serves as a counterpart to Electra. Here another sister of Orestes, Iphigenia, pines away hoping for her brother's arrival. Instead of dying at Aulis, she was spirited away by Artemis and deposited
with the Taurians as priestess at the temple of Artemis. One of her functions here is to perform ablutions for all strangers in preparation for their sacrifice to the goddess. Orestes arrives with faithful Pylades, in response to a pronouncement of Apollo suggesting that he steal the statue of Artemis and take it to Athens. Orestes and Pylades are, of course, seized by the local men and designated for sacrifice. They are brought to Iphigenia who eventually recognizes them. There is a happy reunion and all three make off with the image of Artemis. As the Taurians prepare to pursue the trio, they are stopped by the appearance of Athena, who explains that everything has turned out according to divine plan and that the three are to be left in peace.

In *Iphigenia Taurica* Apollo is chastised not so much for his command to perform matricide, but for his failure to stand by Orestes afterwards. Orestes explains that after the murders in Argos he went to Athens and there Phoebus won him acquittal (*IT* 939ff.). Not all of the Furies, however, accepted the verdict, and some of them continued to torment him. He returned then to Delphi, threatening to die on Apollo's doorstep unless the god gave him aid. Addressing Apollo in the land of the Tauri, Orestes recounts (*IT* 85-92):

```
σὺ δ' ἐλέησαι Ἑλληνικαῖοι Ταύρων, μείρεται Ἀρτεμίς μ' ἄδειον τοιοῦτον ἔχων,
λαβεῖν τ' ἀγαλμα θέας, ὃ φαέσω ἐνθέτε ἐς τούσδε καύσιν οὐρανοῦ πεπέτωκεν. Ἀπὸ
λαύσατε δ' ἡ τίχναινων ἡ τοῖχος τις,
κύδωνον ἐκπέλησεν', Ἀθηναῖων χαρί
dούνα—τὸ δ' ἐνθέτε τ' αἰδέα ἐρήμην πέρα—
καὶ ταῦτα δράσαντ' ἄμμονας ἔχουν πάνω.
```

You told me to go to the hills of the Taurian land, where Artemis your sister has shrines, and to take the
image of the goddess which they say fell into those temples from heaven, and stealing it either by craft or by some opportunity and scorning risk, to give it to the land of the Athenians and—what was not said further—that doing these things I will have rest from troubles.

The pronouncement is expressed in oratio obliqua, a series of three aorist infinitives. Apparently, Orestes asked how he might get some relief from the madness (IT 82-84) and this was the oracular reply. Orestes, as he says, took the response as a contingent prediction, promising that if he should fulfill the task, then he would be released from his suffering. When he and Pylades are taken by the Taurians, he accuses Apollo of lying and betraying him (IT 711-15). The pronouncement, as reported, has the tone of a suggestion, one which may imply a tacit contingency: "If Orestes should do so-and-so, he would find relief." Orestes, however, adds a stronger apodosis to the response (IT 92): "I will have rest." Both Orestes and Pylades early in the play express respect for and trust in Apollo (IT 104-05, 120-21).

As a contingent prediction, one would expect that the responsibility for fulfilling the conditions for success would lie with Orestes. Yet Orestes blames Apollo when the expedition goes awry and he, along with Pylades, is captured for sacrifice. Then he blames the god for treachery (IT 711):

εἷμαι γ' ὧν Φαεθὸς μάς ἐν ἐγκέσατο

Phoebus, being prophetic, deceived us.

This again suggests a contingent pronouncement. Orestes fully expects something good to come of the trip and is anticipating success before his capture—he is not blindly following a command wherever it
leads. His relationship with Apollo is one of reciprocity. This expectation suggests that he understood a promise, if tacit, from Apollo that everything would work out smoothly on the enterprise. Orestes has himself fixed upon the god as responsible for anything, good or ill, that befalls him now. He seems unable to function on his own. Pylades must suggest a concrete plan for stealing the statue (IT 104-15) and Iphigenia concocts the ruse for their escape from the Taurians (IT 1029ff.).

The only other view of the pronouncement concerning Orestes' trip is expressed by Athena. As a deus ex machina, she observes (IT 1438-41):

περαμένος γὰρ θεαφότους Λοξίου
ἀδιόθ' Ἡθ' Ὀρέστης, τὸν ἥ' Ἐρωτίων χόλον
φεύγων ἀδελφής τ' Ἀργος ἀπελθόντων δέμας
ἀγαλμά θ' ἴδειν ἓς ἣδεν δέξαν χέσανα,
τὰν τὸν παρόντος πημάτων ἀναφεχάς.

For Orestes, fated by the decrees of Loxias, came here, fleeing the anger of the Furies and bringing his sister to Argos and taking the holy image to my land—releases from the current troubles.

The appearance of Athena seems to be a final irony. Just at the point where the human characters in the play initiate and engage in action to save themselves and carry out their quest, a goddess appears to say that everything has been pre-arranged and to suggest that the pronouncement was prescient, a prediction of an inevitable event. Euripides seems to shuffle the status of the response around, as well as the responsibility for the turns and twists of Orestes' fortune. Whenever events go badly, Apollo is blamed, although the pronouncement suggests that Orestes shares responsibility. When things go well
everyone wants to take the credit. At least in this play the outcome is a happy one, to whomever one must attribute it.

The happy ending of *Iphigenia Taurica* is satisfying to the audience. Orestes, Pylades, and Iphigenia seem to be decent young people. Occasionally they nearly rise to noble heights of affection and self-sacrifice. In sharp contrast, the ending of *Orestes*, although ostensibly equally tidy, is almost universally disturbing to scholars.

The plot of *Orestes* involves a series of setbacks for Electra, Orestes, and Pylades.

At the outset of the drama Orestes has been put under arrest by the folk of Argos. He is sick, confined to bed with fever and with an accompanying frenzy. The city of Argos will vote in assembly on the current day to decide his fate. Electra delivers the prologue setting the scene and accusing Apollo of causing all their troubles (Or. 28–32). She suggests that there would have been no matricide but for Apollo’s influence on Orestes. Their one hope now is that Menelaus, who is soon to arrive, will protect them. When Menelaus does arrive he proves useless and worse—a banal politician who would rather not run the risk of association with so controversial a set of kin. Orestes then goes off to appear at the assembly and to plead his case before the people of Argos. They condemn him to death. Pylades, Orestes, and Electra resolve to die fighting and, at the same time, to have their revenge upon Menelaus by killing Helen. This final course becomes a new hope of escape, for the desperate trio begins to think that they might win the praise of Argos by Helen’s murder and, further, by going on to take Hermione, Helen’s daughter, as hostage,
they might yet barter their way to safety. The three proceed with this last plot and just when the final confrontation between them and Menelaus seems hopeless, Apollo appears. The god gives everyone instructions, explaining that Helen has been saved and made immortal, that Menelaus should remarry, that Orestes will go to Athens to be purified and then will marry Hermione, and that Electra and Pylades will marry and be happy. Orestes then hails Apollo as a "true" (ἐντυπωμός, Or. 1666-7) prophet and the play closes.

Whenever the pronouncement of Apollo to Orestes is mentioned in the first half of this play, it is mentioned in order to blame the god for Orestes' troubles. Electra blames the god (Or. 28-32, 160-65, 191-93). Helen blames the god (Or. 76, 121). Orestes blames the god (Or. 285-87, 416-19). The messenger blames Apollo for not helping Orestes out at the assembly (Or. 955-56). Even bland Menelaus, who tries his best to be neutral all around, agrees that the response of the god was a bad one (Or. 417). As long as Orestes is the sufferer he rails against Apollo as the cause of the matricide. Yet as soon as Orestes, Pylades, and Electra have fixed upon their new course of murder and mayhem, their attitudes toward the death of Clytemnestra change. At once they are all eager to claim a part in that former murder (Or. 1235-37). As they feel the more in control of their present actions, they admit more responsibility for their past actions.23

The shift in the amount of responsibility that the protagonist is willing to assume and the shift in his attitude toward the god suggest that the divinity is little more than a convenience for Orestes
again. One can blame the god when affairs are rough, praise him when they go well. One can throw off responsibility when all seems hopeless and assume it again when confidence returns. The inconsistency in this play and *Iphigenia Taurica* in Orestes' attitude toward the god cannot be accidental. Euripides is using the pronouncements and divine appearances as a way of suggesting that, though one can use the gods only as is advantageous to oneself, such manipulation results in contrived deities and people without conscience. Since the response to Orestes is presented as a command, Euripides is able to make Orestes' pleas of innocence almost acceptable, almost viable—until Orestes' character is fully exposed. It is clear from *Orestes* that, with or without Apollo, Orestes and Electra are monsters. Euripides leaves off the threats that Aeschylus included in the pronunciation. Here Orestes needs no such persuasion. Orestes can, in Euripides, use Apollo's response as a vaguely plausible excuse for matricide, but he cannot cite a response that was completely intimidating, as the Orestes of *Choephoroi* could.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides use and adapt the response to Orestes in their dramas. Each makes the epistemic status of his own version of the pronouncement work for him, particularly in the sphere of moral responsibility. A command response is unique in the epistemic range of pronouncements, for the recipient of it is responsible for carrying out the orders—i.e. he must do something—but the god becomes responsible as well, as the first mover, the instigator of an act. The command is the oracular category that suggests the most self-interest on the god's part. This is brought out by Aeschylus
and Euripides in particular, since neither includes any account of the inquiry of Orestes. The responses seem to come ex nihilo, at the god's behest. The command is made by the god without the context of an inquiry. Apollo appears to be a self-starter. In Sophocles, however, the question of Orestes is provided and this serves to alter the status of the response as well as to take most of the initiative away from Apollo, with a shift to the painful consequences upon the human agents.

If both the commander and his agent must bear responsibility for an act, that does not mean that their culpability is always the same. Aeschylus makes the command to Orestes strong enough and irresistible enough to overshadow and, thereby, to mitigate Orestes' own motives. Orestes does not act with impunity. He must undergo purification and acquittal, but then he is free. The moral onus falls primarily upon Apollo, but he is, in turn, shown to be under the instruction of Zeus. There the matter ends. The onus for matricide is passed to Zeus and, thence, to oblivion. In the Eumenides the stakes have been raised from a seamy series of murders to no less than the cosmic establishment of justice and legal procedure. The status and expression of the oracular response facilitate this transition.

Euripides also makes the response a command, but here the status of the pronouncement allows the characters to use the god as scapegoat. And so they do use him, when this suits their purposes. Generally, in Euripides' Oresteian plays, when the personae are feeling helpless and trapped by a situation, they blame the god for their bad luck; when all is well and they feel in control, they assume responsibility for their good luck. The commanding response, with its dual
onus, supplies the leeway for Euripides to portray humans who shuffle responsibility about according to their own convenience. The result here is that neither the god nor the humans are exonerated.

Only Sophocles uses a different epistemic category of the response to Orestes. In his *Electra* the contingent prediction shuts out to a great extent the issue of divine responsibility, or even of divine interest. A contingent prediction does not usually imply any manipulation on Apollo's side; it is merely a statement of truth. The instigation of the matricide seems to lie with Orestes, who asked the god how to go about the vengeance. Sophocles typically seems to keep the gods out of focus and their purposes blurred so that the lines of human action can be more sharply drawn. The ambiguous nature of the gods helps to highlight the uncertainties and woes of mortals.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Line 285 makes little sense grammatically since there is no obvious referent for the participles.

2 Scholars sometimes take ἐνόψιος to suggest, even to prove, Apollo's sanction and approval of the matricide. However, in the context of an open-ended oratio obliqua and of Orestes' rough and hasty account, the specific language of the citation may be Orestes' own. The ἐνόψιος does serve Orestes' self-interest. In Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles, Martin Classical Lectures, vol. 26 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 280, Charles Segal writes "we are not sure which are Apollo's words and which are Orestes' interpretation," and "the precise details of the oracle are left vague, and nowhere in the play does Apollo give explicit and unambiguous sanctions for the matricide."

3 Electra calls him "dear" (El. 131, 235) and "exile" (135) and "hope of salvation" (235). The chorus call him "godlike" (867), "eye of the household" (933), "exile" (940). His nurse calls him "dear" (749) and "colt" (794).


5 In Eumenides 64-93, Apollo appears at the door of his temple and directs Orestes to proceed to Athens. Fontenrose counts this as a genuine oracular response, Delphic Oracle, pp. 357-58: "When the god speaks from his adyton, whether in his own voice or in his servant's, he is speaking an oracle." Parke and Wormell, The Delphic Oracle, vol. 2, in their appendix of "dubious and pseudonymous oracles," pp. 233-34, list this citation, remarking that it "is not strictly an oracle at all." Because this utterance, although Apollo's, is not issued by a Pythia during a formal consultation, I do not consider it a legitimate response.

6 The most extravagant praise is sometimes accorded this theme. For example, Kuhns, The House, the City, and the Judge, p. 7, says, "Rarely, if ever, in dramatic literature has so comprehensive a theme as Aeschylus' been attempted and realized in the theater."

7 Some scholars have found Orestes completely responsible for the matricide. For example, Kuhns, The House, the City, and the Judge, pp. 55-56 passim. This is generally due to a reading of Orestes as
a character of considerable moral sensitivity, a character that suffers and grows wise. There is little textual evidence for such views.

8 The debate of the trial, although taken seriously by some scholars, has been correctly viewed as at least partial parody by others, for example, Anne Lebeck, The "Oresteia": A Study in Language and Structure (Cambridge: Harvard University Press for the Center for Hellenic Studies, 1971), pp. 134–141.

9 Cho. 760, 918, 973, 1045.

10 Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Zeus in Aeschylus," JHS 76 (1956): 55–67, recognizes the emphasis in Eumenides on Zeus as the sanctioning agent of the matricide. Gagarin, Aeschylean Drama, pp. 76ff., suggests that the mention of Zeus by Apollo is merely to indicate Zeus' support of the matricide, not his instigation.

11 This was also the view of J.T. Sheppard, "The Tragedy of Electra according to Sophocles," CR 41 (1927): 2–9, who nonetheless felt that perhaps Apollo was refusing to become involved in order to lure Orestes into committing a terrible crime—this as punishment for asking the impious question at the outset. R.C. Jebb, too, in his edition of Electra, rev. and ed. R.H. Mather (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1889), p. 86, feels that Apollo "simply instructs" but does not initiate action. Kirkwood, A Study of Sophoclean Drama, p. 76, speaks vaguely of Apollo's support, minimizing the god's role in a play that Kirkwood sees as being about Electra, not Orestes or revenge.

Contra: see Waldock, Sophocles the Dramatist, p. 172; Gellie, Sophocles, p. 107; Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 138; and J.C. Kamerbeek, Plays of Sophocles, part 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p. 25. Each of these scholars thinks that Apollo clearly approves the matricide. At the most extreme are Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy, pp. 217, 256, and S.M. Adams, Sophocles the Playwright (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 59–62. Bowra believes that we are to think of Apollo as having commanded the murders, showing that the gods do punish the wicked. Adams thinks that Apollo orchestrates the entire action of the play, directly controlling all the actions of Orestes from the beginning in order to expiate the murder of Agamemnon.


14 S.M. Adams, Sophocles the Playwright, pp. 59 passim, attempts this very interpretation.


This view of Electra's dominance in the play and, specifically, in the matricide is quite orthodox. See, for example, Conacher, Euripidean Drama, p. 203.

Whitman, Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth, pp. 5-6, wrongly assumes this pronouncement is a command. Anne P. Burnett, Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 57, calls the response "the linked promise and command."

See also IT 570-75 for Orestes' view on the treachery of mantic arts in general.

For a general summary of views, see Burnett, Catastrophe Survived, p. 13, note 1. Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 368, calls Orestes "ghastly"; Vellacott, Ironic Drama, p. 19, finds him "horrific."

Burnett, Catastrophe Survived, pp. 184ff., discusses the play as a series of failed tragic actions.

The shift in their attitudes towards Apollo is noted also by Conacher, Euripidean Drama, p. 218.
In Chapters II and III, I have discussed those citations of oracular pronouncements which were used in portraying the Theban and the Mycenaean cycles, concentrating especially on the responses to Laius and to Orestes, responses used by all three playwrights. Besides the pronouncements already analyzed, there are five Delphic pronouncements that are cited only once in extant Greek tragedy.1 These citations are in Aeschylus' Prometheus Vinctus and in Euripides' Ion, Medea, Heraclidae, and Helen. In each of these plays the Delphic response is given to minor characters, but the pronouncements nevertheless display a range of dramatic usage and importance. The epistemic status of the response to Inachus in Prometheus Vinctus suggests an eventual resolution to the major conflict of the play. In Ion, Euripides plays upon the status of Xuthus' response both to absolve as well as to accuse Apollo of perfidy, and also to indict the human characters for inconsistency. In Medea and Heraclidae the responses to Aegeus and to Eurystheus echo basic themes and advance the plots. Finally, in Helen the pronouncement to Teucer acts primarily as a device of plotting, providing a rationale for Teucer's entrance and prompting his exit.

These individual citations further support the conclusions.
reached in earlier chapters, suggesting that each of these playwrights has a characteristic use of oracular pronouncements. The dramas here display the full range of oracular functions in Greek tragedy, working as evidence of moral onus and providing echoes of major and minor themes. The examination of the five responses will proceed from the most epistemically interesting citations, in the *Prometheus Vinctus* and *Ion*, to those playing pivotal roles in theme and in plot, in the *Medea*, *Heraclidae*, and *Helen*. These citations will complete the survey of Delphic responses in Greek tragedy.

First is the response to Inachus cited in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vinctus*. The plot of the play is quite simple. Prometheus the Titan is chained by Zeus' orders as punishment for the theft of fire. The drama is notoriously static: Prometheus is affixed on stage through nearly all the play and what little action there is consists of thecomings and goings of various interlocutors. During the course of Prometheus' conversations with his sundry visitors, it is revealed that the Titan knows the secret about a marriage that will lead to Zeus' destruction. So Zeus is twice affronted, for Prometheus is both insolent toward and dangerous to his authority. Zeus is portrayed as young, insecure, brutal, and violent; Prometheus, as stubborn and proud. Prometheus is the benefactor and champion of mankind; Zeus, its oppressor. Zeus is the tyrant; Prometheus, the sufferer. Much of the scholarship on *Prometheus Vinctus* has dealt primarily with this dichotomy. A major difficulty for students of Aeschylus has been the reconciliation of an apparent inconsistency between the portrayal of Zeus here and in other plays by Aeschylus. In *Agamemnon*, Zeus seems
to be associated with justice, rather than with persecution.\(^3\)

In fact, the Delphic pronouncement has some bearing on these matters, albeit indirectly. The response is cited by Io, who enters in bovine form in the third episode accompanied by a gadfly. Prometheus and the chorus of Oceanids, naturally curious about the new arrival (and happy for a distraction from their own woes), ask for Io's story. She tells how, as a maiden, she was visited by a series of dreams which spoke of Zeus' desire for her, reproaching her for her virginity and urging her to make herself available to the god in the pastures of Lerna. Troubled, Io related these dreams to her father, Inachus, who sent messengers to Delphi and Dodona to ask what might be done to appease the deities (PV 659-60). Io narrates the results of the inquiry (PV 661-72):

They returned announcing ambiguous pronouncements, confusing and difficult speeches. But finally plain tidings came to Inachus, clearly enjoining and telling him to thrust me out of home and country, let loose to wander to the farthest hills of earth; and if he did not wish to do this, there would come from Zeus a fire-bearing thunderbolt which would extinguish our entire race. Persuaded by these responses of Loxias, he drove me out and locked me out of my home, each against our will; but the curb of Zeus compelled him by force to do these things.
The citation, coming to us second- or third-hand, is probably a summary rather than a straightforward oratio obliqua account of the exact response. The dependence of the main infinitives (ὦθετυν and ἄλασθαι) on participles (ἐπωσκηπτουσα and μυθομεμη) does not provide much syntactic precision in the report. Yet the general form and tone of the pronouncement are quite like the response to Orestes in Choe­phori, namely, a command followed by a threat. Here, too, the command is so strikingly expressed by the Pythia that it requires more than one verb of speaking to convey the sense of the uttering. As Aeschylus constructed the pronouncement to Orestes to be compelling, so too he is at pains here to make it clear that Inachus had no choice—Inachus was compelled (ἐπηνάγαςε) by force (προς βόων) to act against his will (ἐνον). This is the testimony of Io, whose exculpation of her father is the more striking since she suffers the most from his actions.

Inachus is relieved of guilt, by his daughter and by the nature of the response. We must hold the god responsible for the command. The onus might go to Apollo, then, but Apollo’s pronouncement is closely connected to Zeus. The nocturnal expression of Zeus’ lust prompts the consultation. Dodona, Zeus’ oracular shrine, is consulted, as well as Delphi. It is the thunderbolt of Zeus that will punish disobedience to the command. Io names Zeus as the source of the force exerted on Inachus, not Apollo. Apollo’s pronouncements are the medium through which Zeus has worked his will.

The parallel for this manipulation is, again, the Oresteia, where-in Apollo confesses that he speaks nothing not ordered by Zeus (Ευμ.
616-18). In the *Oresteia*, the association of Apollo with Zeus lends the authority of the chief Olympian to the institutionalization of a legal procedure. In *Prometheus Vinctus* this association functions in two ways. Because of Zeus, Io is forced from her home. Like Prometheus, she is a victim of Zeus' unrestrained power. This adds to and reinforces the general picture of Zeus as aggressive and unscrupulous. But the expulsion of Io has consequences beyond her current suffering. In response to Io's entreaty, Prometheus consents to reveal her future. He predicts the route of her wanderings (*PV* 707-735, 786-815, 823-843) and her eventual release when Zeus will impregnate her "by the touch alone" (*PV* 848-49). Not only does this predicted mating suggest a far gentler Zeus, but the descendant of this strange union will one day set Prometheus free (*PV* 871-74). So Prometheus and Io both glimpse their own futures through the other.

By the presentation of Io and her future, Aeschylus suggests a resolution to the dilemma of *Prometheus Vinctus*, and he connects Zeus to that resolution. Zeus' character at present may not be pretty, but the god has already set in motion a chain of events which will lead to a reconciliation with Io and to a release for Prometheus. This is a characterization of Zeus less black than is usually supposed by scholars. The oracular pronouncement helps to bridge the gap between the current and the future Zeus. As in the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus has used a Delphic command as the medium through which Zeus can exert his will.

In *Prometheus Vinctus* the response of Apollo simply utters the will of Zeus. In the *Ion* of Euripides, however, the oracular
pronouncement is all Apollo's responsibility. Indeed, the integrity of the Delphic god seems to be one issue at stake in the play. The Ion is set in Delphi. Ion, a young man, is a servant of Apollo's temple. The boy is the product of Apollo's rape of Creusa, an Athenian maiden, who gave birth to Ion and left him to die. Under orders from Apollo, Hermes rescued the baby and delivered him to Delphi, where the priestess took the infant in. Years later, Creusa, now married to Xuthus, an ally of the Athenians, comes to Delphi with her husband. Their public mission is to ask Apollo about their childlessness, but privately, Creusa wants to inquire about the fate of her long-abandoned infant. It is rather a complicated situation. Hermes lays out much of the background to the story in the prologue, explaining that Apollo plans to present Ion to Xuthus as his long-lost son. Then in secret the god will reveal the boy's true identity to Creusa. In this way, Ion will gain legitimacy of social station and be reunited with his mother. That is Apollo's plan.

In fact, the reunion of Creusa and Ion becomes incredibly complicated, primarily through the inclination of nearly everyone to conceal information from others. Xuthus accepts Ion as his son, but wishes to keep this news from Creusa. Creusa learns of the deception, is suspicious of a plan to oust her from her home, and attempts to poison Ion. The plot fails, Creusa is exposed as an attempted murderess, and Ion plans to kill her instead. As Creusa takes refuge on Apollo's altar, the priestess delivers to Ion the box and garments in which he came to her as an infant. By these tokens Creusa recognizes her son; by the identification of the tokens Ion accepts her as his mother.
Creusa explains that his father is Apollo himself. Just as Ion is puzzling over how he can be both Apollo's natural son and Xuthus' natural son, Athena appears. The goddess brushes aside Ion's doubts about Apollo's veracity and predicts a great future for him and for his line. Creusa and Ion accept Athena's happy forecasts and the play closes with their praise of Apollo.

Much of the scholarship on Ion has been concerned with the presentation of the god, Apollo. Various interpreters have argued that Apollo is to be seen as a thorough villain, as the benevolent and kindly hero, or as a figure of contradictions to which no moral judgement at all can be applied. Is Apollo an interfering bungler or a benefactor—both or neither? Although the drama has an admittedly happy ending, the behavior of the human participants is often annoyingly venal. Creusa wins our sympathies by her pitiful experience with Apollo, then forfeits them with her murderous plot. Ion is transformed from the gentle servant of the god, sweeping the temple stoop at the outset, to the young, hostile man, bent on avenging himself by murdering Creusa.

This is the context of the Delphic pronouncement to Xuthus, who reports the response to Ion as follows (Ion 534-37):

Io. ὁ δὲ λόγος τίς ἐστι Φοίβου; Ἑκ. τὸν συμπαθησάτα μοι...
Io. τίς συνάστησις; Ἑκ. ἴδον τόν τιν' ἤγερτ' τοῦ Διὸς
Io. συμφορεῖ τίνος εὐρήσατι; Ἑκ. ποῦ ἐμὸν περισχίναται.
Io. σὺν γεγύτ', ὦ δώρῳ Ἑλλων; Ἑκ. δώρῳ, ὦτα δ' ἐς ἢμοι.

Io. What is the word of Phoebus?
Xu. The one who meets me...
Io. What meeting?
Xu. ...as I leave the house of the god...
Io. Hits on what chance?
Xu. ...is my son.
Io. Born of you, or a gift of a sort?
Xu. A gift, and my own son.

In response to Ion's anxious questioning, Xuthus goes on to explain that he had not asked the god about the mother of the child, but he had once visited Delphi, and may well have begotten Ion in a long past drunken revelry.

Xuthus was told that the one who would meet him as he left the temple was his son. The citation is in oratio obliqua as usual. Xuthus reports the pronouncement with a simple infinitive phrase; the consultation is still fresh to him, so the language may be close to the Pythia's own. The perfect tense of the infinitive (περιστέρων), suggesting an action already completed and settled in the past, and Xuthus' immediate and enthusiastic embrace of Ion as soon as they meet imply that the pronouncement is a prescient statement of the future based on absolute knowledge of the past. That is, Apollo knew that a child had been born to Xuthus and that Xuthus would meet him immediately in the future. Xuthus accepts Ion without qualm. He has none of Ion's nagging doubts nor curiosity about the boy's mother. This unquestioning compliance with the response also suggests that Xuthus took the pronouncement as expressing absolute knowledge, as prescient. This is, as Hermes informed us at the beginning of the play, exactly how Apollo wants Xuthus to take the response (Ion 65-75). If the pronouncement is prescient, then there is no moral responsibility at all involved; Apollo has simply stated the facts of the matter. On this occasion it is in the god's interests to remain discreet.

But the audience knows from what Hermes has said that the oracular
pronouncement, as Xuthus understands it, is false. Xuthus says specifically that he is the biological father of Ion (Ion 537), but he is not. Xuthus is being misled by the god. He does not question the response. In fact, no one is concerned about the lie of Apollo except Ion, and he only briefly. When Creusa reveals that he is truly the son of Apollo, he is shaken by the possibility that Apollo's response to Xuthus may have been false and he resolves expressly to put the issue to Apollo again (Ion 1537-38, 1546-48). Only Ion is anxious about the matter of principle, and his fears are allayed quickly by Athena's appearance.  

Why has Euripides represented the pronouncement and Apollo in this way? We know Apollo has lied, as he has raped, but no one in the play seems to care much. Despite the fact that the drama is set in Delphi and in spite of all the talk about Apollo, the Delphic god is rather remote. Certainly any aggression and mistakes on his side are equally matched by the obtuseness, viciousness, and headlong action of the human characters. Nor should we forget how much emphasis there is in the play on purely domestic matters—on talk of children and families. Since no one (not even the chorus!) is upset by the lying pronouncement, probably we are not intended to be either. Euripides could well have made a major issue of it if he had wanted to, but he does not. The play is rather true to human nature in suggesting that human concern with the integrity of a god is conditional. In the other plays of Euripides characters were inclined to blame the god if things went badly and to praise themselves when all went well. So in Ion, as long as everyone is to be happy, no one will want to press
the matter of Apollo's lie. That Ion has a momentary lapse of faith is a measure of his naivety and simplicity—a reflection of the sheltered life he has led.

Once again, Euripides presents people for whom the gods are little more than convenient ad hoc scapegoats. It is not Apollo's actions in the play that are interesting, but those of the mortal characters. The false pronouncement almost invites indignation, but indignation is not forthcoming. In most instances, when Euripides cites Delphic pronouncements, he uses the pronouncement to display the character of the humans involved, rather than to reflect upon the god.

The plot of the Medea is simple by comparison to Ion. Medea, wife of Jason, has been abandoned outside of Corinth by Jason, who plans now to marry the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. Medea, who had betrayed her father to win Jason the Golden Fleece and who has borne sons to Jason, is driven to distraction by this rejection. Worse yet, Creon orders her out of the country. In revenge, Medea murders Creon's daughter and her own children, exiting in a chariot drawn by dragons at the dramatic finale.

Just before the midpoint of the drama, after Medea has had angry exchanges both with Creon and with Jason, Aegeus, king of Athens, enters (Med. 663). Aegeus, an old friend of Medea's, happens to be travelling from Delphi, where he had made consultation, to Troezen. In Troezen he plans to ask the advice of the wise Pittheus, a guest-friend, about the response that Apollo gave him. Aegeus reports the pronouncement at Medea's request (Med. 678-81):
Me. What did he utter? Speak, if it is proper to hear.
Ae. That I should not loosen the jutting foot of the wineskin—
Me. Before you do what or arrive at what land?
Ae. Before I come back again to home and hearth.

Given Aegeus' inquiry, how he might have children, the response seems to be a contingent prediction. If he follows these directions, then he will have offspring. It is up to Aegeus to fulfill the protasis, to see that the conditions specified are fulfilled. The god has no interest in the matter. Aegeus' awareness of his responsibility is suggested by his decision to go directly to Pittheus (one of the Seven Sages of Greece) to ask his help in considering the god's reply. Aegeus must try to understand Apollo's instruction in order to insure that he is carrying it out correctly—for the response does seem, prima facie, rather irrelevant to the matter at issue. What has the wineskin to do with children? Yet Aegeus' confidence in the response and in his ability to follow Apollo's directions is not sufficient for him to refuse Medea's offer to use her magic in his cause if he will grant her refuge and protection in Athens. He is willing to try any possible solution. The oracular pronouncement puts the responsibility for its fulfillment on Aegeus. The moral status of Aegeus with respect to his wineskin, however, is not the principal issue of the play.

At least one issue of the play is, as might be expected, the character of Medea. Are we to see her as a pathetic victim of a grand passion, as an heroic figure, or as a mad fiend? The pronouncement to
Aegeus helps to advance the plot, since it provides an excuse for the king of Athens to pass by. Conacher observes that his appearance and the exchange with Medea give us some idea of Medea's social standing outside of Corinth and away from her enemies, marking her "as a 'personage' not to be disposed of as a mere gypsy baggage from barbarian lands." By agreeing to accept Medea into Athens, Aegeus provides a ready refuge for the abandoned woman, a resource which may increase her confidence for the task at hand. Certainly the scene shows Medea's ability to think quickly to her own advantage. She seizes immediately on the opportunity, bartering with Aegeus for sanctuary. This suggests that even in the midst of her despondency and anger she is capable of calculation. So the scene as a whole helps to establish her character.

The scene with Aegeus also touches on general topics of the play—on the desire of men for children and on the relationship of husbands and wives. Indeed, Aegeus serves in some ways as a foil to Jason. Aegeus wants children badly and his wife has given him none, yet he neither blames nor abandons her (Med. 671-73). Jason has children of his own, and he seems to care for them. He tells Medea that he has arranged this new marriage, in part, for their good, to provide them with good familial connections through the half-brothers and half-sisters that his new bride will bear (Med. 555-567). Jason has no use, however, for the mother of his children. He wishes aloud that children could be gotten in some different fashion so that women would not need to exist and so that men could thus be freed from evil (Med. 573-75). Jason's wish for a novel means of acquiring children almost seems to
be answered by the Pythia's strange instruction to Aegeus regarding his wineskin. Is this a new way to produce sons? Medea promises to help Aegeus have children; then as soon as the Athenian king exits, she announces her plan to kill the child of Creon and the sons of Jason (Med. 717-18, 764-810). She gives, and she takes away. By killing the bride, Medea effectively kills Jason's immediate hopes for offspring as well. (She is a thorough woman.) In this way the response to Aegeus is thematically connected with Medea's revenge.9

Although Aegeus is a seemingly incidental character in Medea, his Delphic response functions as a plotting device, as an echo of dramatic themes, and as an additional showcase for Medea's character. In the Heraclidae the response to Eurystheus, equally incidental, nevertheless makes a similar contribution to the play.

The plot of Heraclidae, like many of Euripides' plays, seems very disconnected. The children of Heracles, now orphaned, have come to Athens as suppliants and have taken refuge in temple of Zeus at Marathon. They are seeking sanctuary and protection from Eurystheus, king of Argos and Mycene, who had persecuted Heracles while alive, and now pursues the harasses his children. The Heraclidae are accompanied by Iolaus, an old henchman of Heracles, and by Alcmene, their grandmother.

Although Eurystheus' messenger loudly objects, Demophon, son of Theseus, agrees to shelter the Heraclidae. While the Athenians prepare to battle Eurystheus who hovers on their borders, the seers declare that a well-born maiden must be sacrificed to Persephone in order to win the war. Heracles' daughter, the refugee Macaria, volunteers. Shortly after Macaria departs for the slaughter, an attendant
brings news that Hyllus, one of the Heraclidae, has arrived with an army and has joined his troops to those of the Athenians. In the battle that follows, Eurystheus is captured; then he is brought before Alcmene, who directs that he be killed immediately. The chorus object that it is against Athenian law to murder a prisoner of war. This objection, however, is smoothed over by Alcmene’s assurances that she will avoid breaking the letter of the law and by Eurystheus’ revelation of a Delphic pronouncement. In the end the king of Argos and Mycene is taken off to die.

Eurystheus is given two brief speeches at the end of the drama. In the first, he blames Hera for his long feud with Heracles and with Heracles’ family (Heracl. 983-1017). In the second speech, Eurystheus, maintaining his dignity in the face of his own execution, gives an account of a Delphic utterance (Heracl. 1026-36):

\[
\text{Kill me. I will not beg you; but, since this city refused and was ashamed to kill me, I will present it with an ancient pronouncement of Loxias, which will help more than it seems in time. For, according to fate, you will bury me, when I die, in the presence of the shrine of the maiden goddess; and I will always lie there as a settler in the land, kindly toward you and a savior for the city and most hostile to the offspring of these people, when they come back with a great army, betraying this favor.}
\]
Eurystheus reports the response using future indicative verbs, suggesting that he has some certainty about the events specified. The use of τὸ μόρσυμον ("fate, destiny") also indicates strongly that Eurystheus' burial in Athens and his transformation into a spirit protective of that place are inevitable. The pronouncement appears to be a case of prescience, a status which helps to explain the chorus' odd and sudden resignation to the murder of Eurystheus. They resign themselves to what must occur. They cannot alter the sequence of events if these events are necessary. Alcmene remarks that the prospect of a defensive daimon ought to calm the chorus' protests of due process and law (Heracl. 1045-49).

The status of the pronouncement, then, helps to ease the abruptness of the play's ending. But while it closes the play, it also suggests a continuation of the conflict. The long-standing bitterness between Eurystheus and the family of Heracles is attested to both by Iolaus (Heracl. 1-54) and by Eurystheus (Heracl. 983-1019). At the end of his account of the pronouncement, Eurystheus mentions that, as a local spirit, he will be extremely antagonistic to the descendants of the Heraclidae when they return as enemies to Athens. Eurystheus' report is rather open-ended, but it does imply, through the linkage of the connective δὲ, that part of the original Delphic statement dealt with a future invasion of Attica by future Heraclidae. Thus the hostility between Eurystheus and the Heraclidae is passed on to future generations.

Conacher emphasizes the importance of the theme of χάρις ("favor, reciprocity") in Heraclidae and points out that the oracular response
represents a reversal of the *charis* extended elsewhere in the play.\textsuperscript{10} Despite the alliance of *charis* between Athens and the Heraclidae against the Argive king that has been developed during the drama (*Heracl. 214-20, 240-41, 427-60, 547-48*), in the final moments Alcmene refuses to favor Athens by demurring to its laws and Eurystheus promises future favor. Indeed, Alcmene's impatience with Athenian law and custom portends the Heraclid betrayal that Eurystheus foretells.

The pronouncement of the *Heraclidae*, by predicting Eurystheus' future after his death, continues the theme of the play's conflict on into the indefinite future, just as it echoes the theme of *charis*. The prescient status of the response gives the added substance of certainty to the solution which resolves the play, but not the battle. The death of Eurystheus does not end the war; it simply puts it on a different level, with new lines of alliance. Euripides has made good use of the epistemic status of the response, although moral responsibility is not at issue here—and should not be with prescience. The response functions by assisting in the final moves of the plot and, particularly, by repeating the themes of hostility and of friendship.

In *Helen* the pronouncement to Teucer works in a much more limited fashion. The response is used here primarily as an excuse for moving Teucer on and off stage. *Helen* takes place in Egypt, where Helen, wife of Menelaus, has been sheltered for ten years. She explains in the prologue that she has never gone to Troy. Instead, Hera had sent her off in a cloud to Proteus, now deceased king of Egypt, for safe-keeping while an image of Helen was carried off by Paris. Hera arranged this to spite Aphrodite, who had promised Helen to Paris as
bride. In Euripides' drama, the real Helen in Egypt is reunited with Menelaus, who is trying to return home from Troy. Together, through a clever and elaborate ruse, Helen and Menelaus escape Proteus' son and Helen's suitor, Theoclymenus, and the two sail off for home. In a concluding dei ex machina, the Dioscuri appear to soothe Theoclymenus and to predict a safe voyage, future happiness, and eventual deification for Helen.

The Delphic response is cited in the prologue. As Helen laments before the tomb of Proteus, Teucer enters. Helen, without revealing her identity, questions him about the war and about her family. Teucer explains that Troy was taken, but heroes like his brother Ajax and like Achilles were lost. He tells her that Menelaus disappeared at sea, that Leda hanged herself, that the Dioscuri were gone—dead or deified. According to Teucer, all Hellas detests Helen now (Hel. 80). After conveying this information, he asks to speak to Theonoe, daughter of Proteus and a seeress, in order to receive advice from her (Hel. 144–150):

```
ἐν δ' αὖντ' ἦλθον τοῦτον βασιλέως δόμους,
τὴν θεσπισμὸν Θεούν χρήσων ἰδεῖν,
σὺ προζήσῃς, ὡς τούχω μαστευμάτων
ἡ λείας στελαύμαν ἄν ὁπρόκεινται
ἐκ γῆς ἐναλίων Κύπρου, οὐ μὴ ἐπέστησα
ἀκεῖν' Ἀπόλλων, ἄνομα ἡσσαμέλιν
Σαλαμίνα βλέμνον τῇ ἑκὶ χάρι τάρασ.
```

For these reasons I came to this royal house, desiring to see the prophetic Theonoe; you be my agent, so that I may acquire the responses by which I can direct the fair-winded wing of my ship into the island of Cyprus, where Apollo predicted that I settle, establishing the island's name "Salamis" there, after my country.

There is no indication of the inquiry, if any, that Teucer made
in Delphi. The pronouncement is reported in *oratio obliqua*, using simply a single present infinitive. In indirect discourse, an imperative is usually replaced by a periphrasis with χρηστεύει. Failure to use such a form of words does not rule out a command, but it makes it less likely. Indeed, the pronouncement can be interpreted as a contingency, as a command, or as prescience. Euripides does not supply sufficient data on the response to choose among the possibilities. Nor is the context especially helpful. Teucer wants to ask Theonoe for advice, and that implies that the pronouncement was not prescient. In the case of a prescient response, the colonization of Cyprus would be inevitable, so Teucer would not have to worry about whether he could carry it off successfully. But for either a commanding or for a contingent response, the inquirer would have some responsibility. By giving us Teucer's inquiry, by using a particular wording, by leaving out the desire to consult Theonoe—by any one of these Euripides might have suggested the status of the response. He does none of them. In this play the status of the response is not important.

The main function in *Helen* of the pronouncement is generally to serve as an excuse for bringing Teucer on and, by his mention of Theonoe, to provide a means of getting him off stage as well. When Teucer asks to see the daughter of Proteus, Helen is reminded of where they are and of the ban against Greeks. She hastily urges Teucer to flee for his life and he exits summarily. On the Teucer scene as a whole, critics are divided between those who think it dramatically superfluous except as a messenger-scene and those who try to find a way to make the scene fit with the rest of the play. Certainly,
Teucer's scene is useful, for he provides a quick account of the war and he effectively displays the hostility of all the Greeks toward Helen. The sight of a woman who, as he believes, only resembles Helen rouses his anger (Hel. 72-81). The information that Teucer provides, particularly the news of Menelaus' loss at sea, supplies Helen with material for the long lamenting kommos that follows the prologue.

Even when there are no other dramatic citations of a response for comparison, a good deal can be learned from the analysis of a pronouncement. Even a response of apparent insignificance in a drama can be shown to play several roles. These Delphic responses further substantiate the patterns of oracular use in Greek tragedy that were established in earlier chapters, i.e. the use of Delphic pronouncements as elements of plot and theme, and as a basis for assigning moral responsibility. In addition, these citations add strength to the thesis that the Greek dramatists each show a characteristic use of Delphic responses. The pronouncement of Prometheus Vinctus is very similar in form and content to the response of Aeschylus' Choephoroi, for example. The use of oracular responses as an explanation and motivation for some travel is found in the Iphigenia Taurica, as well as Medea and Helen. The contrast between Aeschylus' and Euripides' employment of Delphi and Apollo is as striking here as amongst the Theban and Mycenaean citations. The consistency of the playwrights in this regard is good evidence that they intentionally manipulate their responses to fit dramatic purposes—the very premise with which these chapters began.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 Parke and Wormell, The Delphic Oracle, vol. 2, pp. 78-79, list two oracular inquiries as citations from Euripides' Andromache.
Fontenrose, Delphic Oracle, pp. 242-43, omits these from his catalogue of responses on the grounds that no Delphic response to the inquiries is recorded. Euripides' play contains information only about the reasons for the consultations, and does not include the god's pronouncements. According to the play, Neoptolemus went to Delphi first to ask Apollo for compensation for the death of his father, Achilles (Andr. 1004-08). On his second visit, Neoptolemus was murdered by Orestes and the Delphians.

2 There is some question about the authorship of Prometheus Vinctus. I do accept the authorship of Aeschylus. For a recent worrying of the dispute, see C.J. Herington, The Author of "Prometheus Bound" (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), who argues for Aeschylus, and Mark Griffith, The Authenticity of "Prometheus Bound" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), who argues against his authorship.


5 Parke and Wormell, Delphic Oracle, vol. 2, p. 234, cite Athena's remarks as an oracular response among their "dubious and pseudonymous oracles." Fontenrose does not consider it an independent pronouncement.
ment. Since the speech of Athena is not given within the usual, formal oracular ritual by a Pythia, I do not consider it a proper Delphic response.

6 For example, the long, sympathetic, and gentle exchange of Ion and Creusa when they first meet at the temple (Ion 247-380).

7 For the "victim view," see Kitto, Greek Tragedy, pp. 189ff.; for the heroine and fiend views, see Conacher, Euripidean Drama, pp. 196-97.

8 Euripidean Drama, p. 190.

9 D.L. Page, ed., Medea (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. xxix-xxx, states without qualifications that Medea gets the idea of killing her children here for the first time. Conacher, Euripidean Drama, p. 190, note 11, demurs, suggesting that Medea may have thought about killing her sons as early as lines 112-14.

10 Euripidean Drama, pp. 111-120.


12 For an example of the former, see Whitman, Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth, pp. 40-41. Conacher, Euripidean Drama, p. 292, argues that this scene is necessary to set up the later scene of the reunion between Menelaus and Helen. Burnett, Catastrophe Survived, p. 76, goes much further, arguing that Teucer's circumstances act as a mirror image of Helen, setting the pattern for the rest of the play.
Among the surviving plays of the principal Greek playwrights, there are twenty-one separate citations of thirteen Delphic responses within sixteen dramas. Although the occasion for the production of these plays was the festival of Dionysus, the influence of Apollo was pervasive. The two gods did, after all, jointly inhabit and share the Delphic sanctuary—proof of their compatibility.

Curiously, most of the responses in drama deal simply with family matters. Fifteen of the citations concern domestic issues, principally family relations. Many of these citations are of the responses to Laius, Oedipus, and Orestes, and they alone make up a great part of the data; but other responses also deal with domestic subjects. Laius, Xuthus, and Aegeus all asked Apollo about children. The responses to Inachus and to Adrastus both concerned their daughters. Apollo’s pronouncement to Orestes dealt with family relations of a sort. All these household matters become important when they are linked to royal families, whose domestic instability directly involves the city. Thebes undergoes plague and war because of Laius and Oedipus; Argos, too, is drawn into war because of the response to Adrastus. Apollo also pronounced on death and on the metamorphosis into a guardian spirit undergone by Oedipus and by Eurystheus. He spoke to the Thebans on ending the plague and winning the war. He sent Orestes on
a mission to the Taurians, and he sent Teucer off to found a new colony.

The Delphic pronouncements of Greek drama are almost uniformly pronouncements of social significance, that is, pronouncements which involve the family and the community. The response to Inachus is doubly so, since it is important for the divine community as well as the human. There is no response that does not, in some way, go beyond the inquirer and affect others, thus increasing the influence and significance of Apollo's utterances.

The most frequent epistemic type of these Delphic citations is the contingent prediction—ten of the citations are entirely or partially conditional. This is to be expected, since contingent predictions combine an aspect of metaphysical necessity with some obligation of the inquirer: they allow a protagonist to act, but he must act within limits. So they contribute a dramatic tension for the consultant and for the audience between what is possible and what is inevitable, between control and impotence.

Second in frequency are citations involving commands, of which there are seven. Most of them are to Orestes, but Laius (in Phoenissae) and Inachus also are commanded by the god. The usefulness of a commanding response lies in its focus on the relations between the inquirer and the god. Aeschylus and Euripides both use commands to express that relationship, but to opposite effects. In Choephori Apollo commands the matricide; but in Eumenides he admits and assumes the onus of that act, thus fulfilling his promise to Orestes. This relationship is not one-sided. Apollo has power over Orestes, but he
also is responsible to him. Orestes must obey the god, but he can rely on Apollo's assistance thereafter. Between Euripides' Orestes and Apollo, however, there is no such trust. Orestes speaks of Apollo only to cavil against the god, and resolutions come about only by the artifice of fate. Sophocles never uses a commanding response, preferring that his Apollo play a role less forthright than the others.

The third most frequent kind of pronouncement is the prescient response. Sophocles cites two such pronouncements to Oedipus and one to the Thebans, and Euripides cites one to Eurystheus and one to Xuthus. By his extensive use of prescience, Sophocles effectively refuses to reveal the god's attitudes or desires, keeping the responses on an impersonal basis. Euripides uses the prescient utterance either to portray the god as a patent deceiver, as in Ion, or to provide an emphatic reinforcement of a motif, as in Heraclidae. Sophocles uses prescience to give a restrained tone to divinity; Euripides uses it to add strength.

Dramatic responses, therefore, tend to be near either the top of the epistemic scale or where the onus is greatest for the god. The dramatist may use prescient, contingent, or commanding responses depending upon the degree of responsibility with regard to an act that he wishes to suggest for the protagonist and for Apollo, but he is not likely to use a prediction of probability or to present a rejected consultation. We do not have to prove that the Greek dramatists thought consciously in terms of epistemic categories and their logical implications. The epistemic analysis of Delphic responses brings out within a conceptual structure the ways in which the Greek
tragedians quite naturally used these responses. The dramatist intentionally and creatively produced a version of the response that suited the moral and universal themes of a particular play. For interpreters of Greek literature, a consideration of the epistemic status of a literary oracular citation puts the response in a framework and a context; it provides a means of assessing what kind of utterance a response is and how it affects the inquirer.

There is good evidence for the contention that the dramatists manipulate the epistemic status of responses. The analysis of the three dramatic versions of one response to Laius, as well as the studies of the response to Orestes, strongly support this premise. In addition, the fact that each dramatist makes a characteristic use of pronouncements, a use which suggests a particular view of the world and gods, further implies that the playwrights intentionally adapted their Delphic citations.

Aeschylus, for example, expresses Delphic pronouncements in clear, strong terms. The consultants at Delphi are told precisely what to do and what the consequences of their failing will be. Laius is given his response three times, as the story is told in Septem. Apollo could scarcely have been more emphatic. In Aeschylus, men are able to know exactly where they stand in relation to the gods. Apollo is a spokesman for Zeus, a fact which both enhances the prestige of Delphi in particular and also provides a means of expressing the will of a supreme authority in the theatrical context. The plays of Aeschylus seem to present a world in which the gods both have an interest in mortals and make those interests known. Zeus takes notice of humans
both out of social benevolence, as in *Eumenides*, and out of personal desires, as in *Prometheus Vinctus*. Although the characters of Aeschylus may be more limited in their options, at least they have less uncertainty and more security about their place in the world. And they can still act, as Eteocles does in *Septem*, within the recognized parameters of the mortal sphere.

In contrast, Sophocles prefers that the oracular responses be obliquely expressed and that the gods be indirectly and dimly perceived. The only exceptions to this attitude are the pronouncements of *Oedipus Coloneus*. There it seems significant that Oedipus' death, his realization of his true status in the world, and clear responses all coincide—an exceptional case on every point. Only after long suffering and just before death can Oedipus glimpse his fate truly, and then it is an impersonal fate and hardly a human experience. Elsewhere in Sophocles pronouncements are obscure and ambiguous, suggesting divine notice without committing Apollo to any act or absolute sanction, as in *Electra*. The responses of Delphi seem to imply that greater than human knowledge of the world is possible, but that such knowledge is divine and only distantly comprehended by mortals.\(^1\) Apollo is less an instigator of action here than he is in Aeschylus; thus, in Sophocles, it is with mortals that action and responsibility begin. In general, Sophocles seems to focus upon the human world; the presence of the gods is no doubt felt, but never clearly grasped. His protagonists, therefore, must do the best they can in an uncertain world. If anything, this perception of man's status heightens his courage and heroism, for he does act in spite of his myopia. Oedipus seeking
the murderer of Laius is a ringing tribute to man's intellectual self-reliance and tenacity, even as it displays the limits of his knowledge and the excess of his pride.

Euripides, from whom we have the most citations, shows the greatest cynicism, as well as the greatest versatility, in oracular use. His citations are most often brief, with little detail, and the responses are usually reported by a character blaming the god for an unfortunate turn of events. Euripides gives a great deal of information about the characters of his mortals, but almost none about those of his gods. Therefore, although Orestes accuses Apollo of causing the matricide, the audience is much more aware of Orestes' and Electra's reasons for killing their mother than of Apollo's. Although, in Supplices, Adrastus blames Apollo's response for connecting him by marriage to Polyneices, Theseus points out that Adrastus himself ignored the many signs against assisting Polyneices in the war against Thebes. In Ion Creusa rages against the lusty brutality of Apollo, but is quick to approve the cold-blooded murder of an innocent boy on her own account. By his use of Delphic responses, Euripides suggests that the gods are a convenience for men, providing loci on which to focus unhappiness. Carry this approach even further, the playwright occasionally uses oracular pronouncements as a convenient tool of plot and theme. These responses, as in Medea, are fully integrated and functional in the plays, yet they are barren of genuine feeling, hence of theological significance. They do not present the attitude of Apollo, nor of the inquirer. Even the Ion, which celebrates the charm and dignity of the Delphic sanctuary and
ritual, gives a rather arch portrayal of the god. The tone of Euripides' responses and his use of them suggest a world in which men act quite on their own, and the gods either act as artificial scapegoats or offer unreal panaceas. Apollo in Euripides' plays is quite bereft of moral influence and has little function in the natural world—and often men are little better.

The Delphic responses of Greek drama serve, in part, as windows to the various worlds conceived by the three playwrights. And each dramatist affords a strikingly different view. In these worlds, the most important part of the landscape, for better or worse, is man, man and his morality. Oracular pronouncements are complex acts of speech uttered in a ritualized and mystical context, yet they are not wholly irrational. In Greek tragedy, and in other sorts of Greek literature as well, there are few more significant issues than those of human action and responsibility—and to these issues Apollo's Delphic pronouncements speak directly.
NOTES TO SUMMARY

This view was first suggested to me by Mrs. P.E. Easterling in a series of conversations at Newnham College, Cambridge, England, during the spring of 1979.
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


