

Guilt and Character on the Stage in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*

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1. Introduction : Irascibility and Carelessness

As I have mentioned in Kitano (2013), in spite of the strong assertion of E. R. Dodds (1966 : 38) half a century ago that seeing a moral flaw in the character of Oedipus is one of the major misunderstandings that “are demonstrably false,” the search for guilt in his behavior on-stage and its *Vorgeschichte* has been one of the most favored interpretational projects concerning the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. According to Dodds, although anti-Oedipal critics admit that “[y] ears before the action of the play begins, Oedipus was already an incestuous patricide,” they would argue, however, that “Oedipus’ behavior on the stage reveals the man he always was : he was punished for his basically unsound character.” In other words, Oedipus’ assumed moral flaw on-stage should be counted as evidence of the baseness of his character that led to the patricide and incest. Moreover, they have accused him of an intellectual flaw, too, in that Oedipus should have been more careful to escape his fate of patricide and incest.

I have argued in detail that although precisely what happened at the crossroads where Oedipus and Laios made the fatal encounter was intentionally not made explicit by Sophocles, the character of Oedipus *narrated* on stage, that is, his character in the *Vorgeschichte*, contains neither moral nor intellectual flaw accused by anti-Oedipal critics (Kitano 2013). In this paper, I will examine his action on the stage and argue that although one may perceive in Oedipus a tendency to irascibility, the ascription of a moral or intellectual flaw in his behavior is unfounded and his character is, as far as we accept the Aristotelian concept of character, basically good.

The characteristic flaws often ascribed to Oedipus on-stage are irascibility, arrogance and carelessness. When Teiresias is led to the stage and hesitates to speak, Oedipus loses his temper too easily and assumes that Teiresias is a member of the group that has conspired and killed Laios. When Teiresias tells him that it was Oedipus who killed Laios, Oedipus, without careful consideration it might seem, jumps to the conclusion that Creon, conspiring with the false prophet, plots to usurp his throne. He refuses to listen to Teiresias when the latter finally tells the whole truth on his exit. Neither does he listen to Creon’s apology that is “moderate and persuasive in tone” (Vellacot 1971 : 179)⁽¹⁾. Even after he lets the innocent Creon go, his attitude is arrogant and hybriatic, as Creon points out. “You are obviously sullen in yielding and vehement whenever you lose your temper (*θυμοῦν περᾶσης*)” (673-674)⁽²⁾.

(1) Cf. Zink (1972 : 29). “In rationaler Klarheit stellt Kreon seine Geradheit und Unbescholtenheit heraus.”

(2) Unless stated otherwise in the notes, the translations of Greek Texts are my own.

These instances of indignation, arrogance and carelessness on-stage often cited by anti-Oedipal critics might, at least for a reader already familiar with the whole story, show his moral and intellectual defects, his 'tragic flaw'. It could be argued against this accusation that when this 'tragic flaw' is found and accused on the stage, the oracle that he would commit patricide and incest has already been realized long ago. They may answer, however, that it is in order to make his spectators aware that the same character flaw was the cause of the realization of the oracle that Sophocles showed so clearly his 'character flaw' on the stage. Character, according to Aristotle, is "that which reveals the moral choice (*προαίρεσιν*)" (*Poet.* 1450b8-9) and by which it is shown "for such and such people, to say or act such and such things is either necessary or probable" (1454a36-37).

But is the anti-Oedipal view that the hero on-stage shows the flaws both of character and intellect really sound? We shall make two arguments against this view. First, the inferences made by Oedipus on-stage are, in general, reasonable and the false conclusions were drawn by the false premise that he did not kill Laius, the king of Thebes. This premise is, however, a kind of self-knowledge that can not be reasonably doubted. Without this premise, the whole action on the stage would lose its sense. It constitutes the fundamental belief of Oedipus in the first half of tragedy. Second, his words and deeds, although offensive and sullen, do not imply the baseness of his 'character'. To demonstrate our second point, we have to refer to Aristotle's *Poetics* written about a century later. We shall justify this anachronism by the claim that we cannot discuss the 'character' of tragedy without the Aristotelian point of view at all.

2. Teiresias

2-1. Oedipus' First Charge against Teiresias

In his indignant exchange with Teiresias, Oedipus makes two different accusations. First, when Teiresias refuses to reveal his knowledge of Laius' murderer, Oedipus, in anger, jumps to the conclusion that he must have been an accomplice of the murderer (346-348). And second, when Teiresias in his reply to this accusation says that Oedipus himself was the murderer of Laius, Oedipus, without giving any reasons whatsoever, hastily concludes that it is Creon who is pulling the wire behind the blind bogus prophet, intending the usurpation of the throne (380-387). A sudden mention of Creon at 378 (*Κρέοντος ἢ σοῦ τὰντα τὰξευρήματα;*) is surprising and seems to suggest the distrustful character of the tyrant. Do these two hasty judgments really imply the intellectual and moral flaw of his character? Let us examine the first case first.

His first plan to find the murderer of Laius is the public ordinance that the murderer, if he denounces himself, "will suffer no other punishment but only leave the land safely" (228-229). And if someone in the town knows the culprit who is a foreigner, "let him not keep silent, I will pay the reward and my thanks will be attached to it" (231-232). On the contrary, "if anyone through fear, shall seek to screen his friend or himself from my order," Oedipus orders the total excommunication of the man from the community.

I pronounce this man's banishment from this land I possess power and throne, so that no one should give shelter to or address him, whoever he is, or make him a partner in prayer to gods or sacrifice, or give him a share of the purification rite. Thrust him away from houses of all of you (236-241).

Then he proceeds to "a solemn curse" on those who break the sanctions of excommunication⁽³⁾.

And for those who do not obey this, I pray that the gods send neither any harvest of land nor babies from women, but that they perish with the present evil or the one still worse (269-271).

Now his order becomes an oath to the gods (*εὐχόμεαι*). After reiterating his first order of excommunication in the form of prayer (*κατεὐχόμεαι*) (246-248), he adds another oath, which concerns neither murderers nor those who break the order of excommunication, but Oedipus himself.

I pray in addition (*ἐπεὐχόμεαι*) that, if he [the culprit] should become a sharer of the hearth in my house with my knowledge, I may suffer the same things I have just invoked on these persons (249-251).

It is just after this proclamation that Teiresias appears and tells Oedipus that he knows the murderer but will not tell.

For a reader who knows the Oedipus legend well, Oedipus' condemnation of Teiresias might seem too hasty. From the point of view of the action on-stage, however, what Teiresias does is exactly what those whom Oedipus cursed on oath do, that is, to "seek to screen his friend or himself from my order". As far as one shares the conviction that the man who knows the culprit but does not tell must be screening him either as an accomplice or through fear, one must judge the reaction of Oedipus justifiable. It is even a necessary reaction, we should add, judging from the curse he called down upon himself. Oedipus, in fact, has no other choice than accusing Teiresias.

Know that I think you have conspired and accomplished the deed, except so far as killing him by your hand. If you happened to see with your eyes, I would have said that you have done the deed only by yourself (346-349).

It might be argued that his carelessness lies not in the first charge against Teiresias, but rather in the ordinance itself, which excludes the possibility that one who knows and keeps his silence

(3) In the following two quotations I used both the translation and the emendation of this quotation of Dawe (2006: 97), in which he replaced 244-251 with 269-272. Cf. Dawe (1973: 221-225). This replacement makes the logical construction of his proclamation clearer. However, my argument here does not rely on this emendation.

can still be innocent. However, the fact that Teiresias, hearing that speech, only five lines after he had declared his silence regardless of the tyrant's indignation, changes his mind and reveals the murderer shows the efficacy of the ordinance. It is not the anger of Oedipus itself but the power of the oath that makes Teiresias speak. The proclamation, although Oedipus himself doubts on its efficacy, has proved to be effective in a way very different from he expected.

2-2. Oedipus' Second Charge against Teiresias

Teiresias' revelation of the murderer is first brought about indirectly.

I order you to abide by the decree you proclaimed, and from this day on, speak neither to these people nor to me. You are the polluter of the land (350-353).

Oedipus detects some kind of conspiracy in these words and becomes mad. However, he cannot grasp what the prophet really means. Teiresias, then, is forced to call a spade a spade.

I say you are the murderer of the man whose slayer you are hunting (362).

It is in the middle of the strained dialogue following this explicit declaration that the inference that Creon was behind the curtain crossed the mind of the tyrant. All of a sudden, *asyndetically* one may say, he asks, "Are these devices Creon's, or yours?" (378) It takes only 7 lines for his inference to become a conviction. "Creon the loyal, the friend from the old days secretly beguiling me desires to throw me out!" (385-386)

Again, for a reader who knows the innocence of Creon, his inference seems to be too sudden and unfounded, as Oedipus does not reveal the ground of his suspicion in his dialogue with the prophet. With the addition of one premise, however, his argument becomes sound as a human inference. The premise to be added is, as I said earlier, that he did not kill the king of Thebes. If Oedipus is innocent, the charge of Teiresias is false. This charge will, however, result in the loss of his throne. As Teiresias is not directly interested in the scepter, there must be someone behind him. To be sure, it does not logically prove that Creon is behind Teiresias. But when his name comes to mind, it suits the situation so perfectly well that it seems to be almost beyond doubt. It is Creon who will benefit. It is Creon who first told Oedipus to begin the search for the murderer. It is Creon who advised Oedipus to consult the prophet. If Oedipus is innocent, then Creon must be the puppeteer. This is a kind of abduction C. S. Peirce thought dominates practical thinking. The abduction cannot be infallible because it does not follow the inductive logic. However, the more thoroughly the situation is considered, the more certain the abduction becomes. In this case, the falsehood of the premise that Oedipus is innocent made every step of his abductive logic meaningless. But Oedipus believed his innocence with a kind of certainty inherent in the self-knowledge. How is it possible that you do not know whether you are regicide or not? One cannot overestimate the crucial importance of his later question to Jocasta about the entourage of Laius, "Did he travel with scanty following or with many attendant men, as a ruler should?" (750-751) In this dialogue with Jocasta, Oedipus for the

first time recognizes the possibility that the man he slayed at the crossroads may have been a ruler, a king.

To be sure, Oedipus has only circumstantial evidence and even if he is innocent, that would not logically prove that Creon is the traitor. However, it should be emphasized that Oedipus relies on the same kind of abductive logic he used to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. You cannot logically prove that the only existence applicable to the riddle is a human being. But when by any means it comes to your mind that the answer is a 'man', it becomes clear that this answer satisfies all the conditions mentioned in the riddle. In the same way, everything dovetailed beautifully with Creon the traitor. In the prologue, Oedipus wondered why the return of Creon has been delayed. Now he receives the answer. If Creon is behind the prophet, the order of Delphi to search the murderer of Laius becomes dubious, too. The first assumption that Teiresias has participated in the murder of Laius was replaced by the new assumption that the search for the murderer itself is a part of the plot against his rule⁽⁴⁾. It is natural that after the dialogue with Teiresias, Oedipus seems to have lost any interest in the search.

2-3. Teiresias' Exit Speech

We have seen that Oedipus' two accusations against Teiresias do not prove the baseness of his character. On the contrary, they both have their own justifications. In the first case, the justification lies in his oath and in the second in his belief that he is innocent. Oedipus, however, is not only accused of having a moral flaw, but often of having an intellectual flaw in that he did not respond to the last speech of Teiresias, which seems to tell not only the truth of regicide but also that of patricide and incest. In this section, we shall examine the validity of this accusation.

Teiresias, accused of the conspiracy with Creon, gave his last words before leave at the end of the first act.

I tell you : the man you have been searching for a while with threat and proclamation for murdered Laius, that man is here, said to be an alien resident, soon it will be shown that he is a native of Thebes : however, he will not enjoy this fortune. Because as a blind, after being sighted, and as a beggar, instead of being rich, he will make his way to a foreign land pointing the ground before him with his staff. The same man will be found, to his children with whom he lives, to be brother and father ; son and husband of the woman from whom he was born ; having the same wife with and becoming the murderer of his father. So go inside and consider this. If you find that I am mistaken, then deem that I am ignorant in prophetic art (449-462).

The failure of Oedipus to grasp the meaning of this speech has been explained in several ways.

(4) We should notice, however, a major difference between the investigation and the riddle solution. A riddle may have plural correct answers. All you need to show is that your answer satisfies all the conditions given by the riddler. In case of the investigation, this is not enough.

For those who argue for the 'Oedipus the stupid' theory⁽⁵⁾, this failure is an instance of the intellectual flaw which also led him to patricide, in spite of the fact that he was forewarned in Delphi and had doubts about his origin. Were he careful enough, he should have abstained from killing a man old enough to be his father. The same kind of carelessness made Oedipus ignore the implication of the Teiresias' last speech, they claim. However, this evaluation is not fair to Oedipus both in this scene and in the patricide. I have argued in detail against this evaluation of the patricide in Kitano (2013). Here, before presenting my own view about this scene, I should explain one possibility away.

B.M.W.Knox (1980) has advocated the view that Oedipus leaves the stage at 447 and is not present to hear what Teiresias said. In his view, the speech of Teiresias, beginning with an appeal "I tell you", simply vanishes into the void. Because of his blindness, he cannot see that the man he is speaking to is not there. This would make the scene quite grotesque, not to say comic. The grotesqueness itself is not improbable in this situation. It would embitter the ironic situation already felt by the spectator. However, as R. D. Griffith (1996) has pointed out, Oedipus should have exited through the central door of the *σκηνή*, which must be opened and closed when he goes in. It is quite improbable that Teiresias does not take notice of Oedipus' exit. Griffith (1996: 23) proposes another version of Oedipus' absence. Oedipus, "satisfied that he has had the last word, turns to depart, accompanied by the servants. Teiresias addresses 447-51 to his departing back." It means that Teiresias spoke the first three lines, namely, "I tell you; the man you have been searching... is here" to Oedipus' back: the rest of his riddle-like speech was "a soliloquy, although heard by the boy and the chorus". However, the imperative in 460-461 "go inside and consider this" does not sound like a soliloquy. A soliloquizing order to a character who refused to hear and went inside would make the scene even more improbable than the original unnoticed exit version.

So we should conclude that Oedipus was present while Teiresias gave his last speech. "The apparent failure of the highly intelligent Oedipus to grasp what has been said to him is unconvincing", notes R. D. Dawe (2006: 9). An useful key to the problem was offered by O. Taplin (1982, 42), who argues that "[t]he point is that Teiresias is speaking in riddles.... [M]uch of the speech is framed in the paradoxes characteristic of riddles". It is important that in contrast with the oracles mentioned in this play, the words of Teiresias are vague and riddle-like.

The three Pythian oracles mentioned in this play contain no riddle. (Or1) The oracle to Laius says his son will kill the father. (Or2) The oracle to Creon says that the cause of the plague is the murderer of Laius who should be punished. (Or3) The oracle to Oedipus says he will kill his father and mate with his mother. These oracles imply no riddles and raise no questions about their meaning. Or1 is simple and straight. It is certain that Or2 explicitly

(5) See Bain (1979: 133). Bain, of course, argues against this theory. The main concern of Bain, however, seems to lie in the response of spectators rather than the stupidity of Oedipus himself and his conclusion that Teiresias' words were not so clear to the spectators of the first performance as to the readers who already know Sophoclean version of the story, seems justifiable.

and Or3 implicitly raise questions : Who is the murderer? Who are my parents? In these cases, however, the oracles mean what they say. The questions to be solved are *outside* the oracular sentences and there is no vagueness *in* the meaning of these oracles. These oracles are straightforward. It is not necessary to delve into the riddle-solving.

Teiresias' last speech, on the other hand, is composed as a riddle. Like the riddle of the Sphinx, you must find out the true meaning of the text : What name should we supply to *the man* in this speech? Who can be both the brother and father to his children? etc... Riddle solving, however, is useless and can be only a kind of time-killing game if you do not believe in the seriousness of the riddler, as it will not lead to any fruitful result. If you do not think that solving the riddle of the Sphinx would destroy her and save Thebes, you have no reason and no motivation for solving. When Oedipus believes that Teiresias is a fake prophet and plotting liar, what could be the point of trying to solve his riddle? As he lost the interest in the search for the murderer of Laius because he believed it to be a part of the conspiracy, now he has no interest in the grasping the meaning of Teiresias' exit speech because he believes that taking him seriously is just the opposite of what he should do. There is no intellectual flaw in his 'failure'. To be precise, it is not a failure at all.

3. Creon

3-1. Creon's Apology and the anger of Oedipus

We have shown that Oedipus' behavior towards Teiresias contain no flaw of character and intellect. What about his threat of capital punishment on Creon? Pro-Creon critics tend to see the fatal flaw of the tyrant in the first half of the second epeisodion. As we have already argued, it is natural and almost necessary for Oedipus to detect signs of the conspiracy of Creon and Teiresias, *as far as* he believes the innocence of himself. He has two grounds to infer the conspiracy. First, Creon brought the 'Pythian oracle' that ordered the search for the murderer, which Oedipus believes triggered the conspiracy. Second, Creon advised Oedipus to resort to Teiresias who was of no help when Laius was murdered and the Sphinx raged. The first suspicion, although implicit in his charge, is not explicitly mentioned. Creon, however, noticed that Oedipus was suspicious about the authenticity of the Pythian oracle and brought the question forward for himself. "As a test of these things [i.e. that I am neither plotting for myself nor a member of the conspiracy], go to Pytho and ask if I reported the decree correctly to you" (603-604). This answer seems quite moderate, but what Creon really asks Oedipus is an impracticable demand that he must leave his throne and city and go to Delphi (*ἰᾶν ... πειθόν*)⁽⁶⁾. It is not a disarming type of answer.

More important is his answer to the explicit charge of Oedipus concerning the integrity of the prophet. Oedipus asks: "Did you persuade me that I need to send someone for that reverend seer, or did you not?" (555-556) "Even now I am in the same opinion" (557), answers Creon. Then Oedipus continues to ask whether "that prophet was practicing the craft" (562) when Laius was killed and "how, at that time, that 'wise' prophet did not tell this story" (568),

(6) Singular present imperative.

namely, the story that it is Oedipus who killed Laius. If he had the skill of prophecy, he could have named the murderer when Oedipus came to Thebes. Creon admits his ignorance. "I do not know. About things I do not understand I like to keep silence" (569). This seems to be an honest answer for the reader who knows he is innocent.

What Oedipus really asks Creon to answer is, however, the reason why he advised to consult the man who proved to be useless in the same case when it happened. To this question he does not reply. Instead, Creon offers a different kind of apology. First, he confirmed a commonplace that having married his sister, Oedipus and Jocasta have equal share in the rule of the country. Then he continues, "and I, as the third, am on a par with you two, am I not?" (581);

Consider this first : whether you think that anyone would choose to rule amid fears rather than fearlessly in peace when he will have the same power. I, for one, do not have the nature of desiring rather to be a tyrant (*τύραννος*) than to act in a tyrant's way (*τύραννον*). Neither does any other man equipped with sound mind. For now, I have everything without envy⁽⁷⁾ from you. But if I were a ruler myself, I would have to do many things even against my will. How then can being a tyrant be sweeter to me than having painless rule and influential position? Never am I so self-deceived as to crave for other honors than those with advantage.... I am neither born to be a lover of such thoughts nor could I bear to go along with another when he put them into action (584-603).

This apology has often been compared with the apology of Hippolytus in the Euripidean drama⁽⁸⁾, where Hippolytus denies the desire to throne and declares ; "I for my part would wish to be first at the Greek games but in the city to be second and to enjoy continuous good fortune with my noble friends. For not only is there scope for action, but also the absence of danger yields a greater pleasure than being king."⁽⁹⁾ The resemblance is clear. We should, however, also note the difference.

Unlike the Euripidean version, Creon's apology constitutes a syllogism. The major premise is the universal proposition that that all men having a sound mind would prefer the third position to the first, that of the tyrant⁽¹⁰⁾. The minor one is the singular proposition that Creon has a sound mind. The conclusion is that he has no desire for the throne (and therefore

(7) I followed Dawe (2006 : 124) in adopting Blaydes' correction and reads *φθόνον* instead of the MSS reading of *φόβον*.

(8) Cf. Müller (1984 : 12-27). Müller regards the resemblance of these two speeches as an evidence of direct influence of Sophocles to Euripides.

(9) Euripides. *Hippolytus*. 1016-20, David Kovacs's translation in *Perseus 2.0* (1995), now accessible via *Perseus 4.0* website: see www.perseus.tufts.edu.

(10) The same kind of universal proposition that those with the sound mind would not want to be a tyrant appears in *Hippolytus* 1013-1014. The text is corrupt, however, and I would prefer to excise this proposition as a whole adopting Kovacs' emendation.

not guilty of the conspiracy). Is this syllogism plausible? Surely not. It is implausible because at first the major premise that for any reasonable man to be the third is better than to be a ruler because it contains the same power but without danger is implausible on the face of it, especially spoken by a person who is third and on the verge of punishment. As his own case proves, his safety relies on the favor of the tyrant. He does not rule “fearlessly and in peace”. Second, it is implausible because it shows his dubious, “second rated nature” (Dawe 2006 : 124). How can we trust such a person who claims that he prefers the third position to the first because “having painless rule and influential position” is *sweeter*, especially when sweetness implies profit? Our history is full of usurpers and intending usurpers who for his own profit plotted against the throne. Creon’s speech should have seemed quite dubious for the spectator who is familiar with such narratives in history and legends. (For instance, one might remember the story of Oedipus’ children, which would have been known to many of the spectators from Aeschylean *Seven against Thebes*.)

What about *Hippolytus*, one might ask. The logic implied in both apologies seems to be similar, especially if we retain MSS texts and refrain from excising the part that seems to say that sound mind in general would not desire kingship. However, in the Euripidean drama, the spectator knows the truthfulness of Hippolytus’ word from the preceding actions. That he has no desire for both Phaedra and the throne is clearly shown before this speech. Only Theseus, ignorant of the events before the suicide of his wife, believes his son to be the rapist and usurper. On the contrary, in *Oedipus* the spectator knows almost nothing about Creon’s credibility. What he knows is exactly the actions that aroused the suspicion of Oedipus. And what he sees is exactly the speech that an intending usurper is likely to say. In short, the spectator has a quite dubious character in front of him.

Furthermore, what matters here is not the truthfulness of Creon but whether Oedipus is blameworthy or not. He may be unpleasant. For those who know that Creon is not guilty, his anger seems groundless. Inflammability is an unwavering feature of him, both in legend and in this play. However, there is an important feature of his character revealed in this scene that has not been given due importance, which is shown in the fact that Oedipus lets him go in spite of his firm belief that Creon was guilty of the conspiracy and his acquittal would deprive Oedipus of the throne. How should this feature be understood with regard to his character?

3-2. The Character of Oedipus in the first half of second epeisodion

The first half of the second epeisodion does not contain any substantial action. At the beginning of this section, Oedipus is angry and believes Creon is plotting against him. At the end, Oedipus is still angry and his belief unchanged. This section can be deleted without serious damage to the composition of the action. Namely, it does not constitute the *mythos* of this tragedy. At the end of the first act, Oedipus believed the conspiracy of Creon and Teiresias. The next act could start with Jocasta asking Oedipus why he is so angry with Creon. He answers: “Creon is the cause of my wrath, for he is plotting against me” (701). As Jocasta tells him why it is unreasonable to care about the words of prophets, he notices the possibility that what Teiresias told was true, as far as the murder of Laius is concerned. The first section has no importance for the rest of the story. However, in this section, not

belonging to the *mythos* of tragedy, one important decision is made, namely, that although Oedipus believes that Creon is conspiring against his throne and leaving him free will surely cause his own exile or death, Oedipus yields and lets him go. What Oedipus shows here is the kind of moral choice with which Aristotle characterized the ἥθος (character) of the tragedy.

According to Aristotle, tragedy making is divided into six component parts: *mythos*, character, thought, language, music-making and visual effects. *Mythos* (μῦθος, usually translated as story or plot) is the most important part. It is the composition of the events. *Mythos* is the principle, the end and the soul so to say, of tragedy. It should be composed according to necessity or probability so that “if some part is deleted or added to, the whole unity would be dislocated and removed” (*Poet.* 1451a33-34).

Although this section is not such that if it were deleted, the whole would collapse, it does not mean, however, *Oedipus* does not satisfy Aristotle's requirement, made about a whole century *later*. Rather, the first half of the second act is a part dedicated to another element of the tragedy-making, that is, character. “Character”, for Aristotle, “is that which reveals the moral choice (προαίρεσιν)” (1450a8-9). It might be revealed by either a speech or an action. “When the speech or the action makes some moral choice clear, tragedy will have the character, and if the choice is good, the character will be good” (1454a17-19).

In short, *character* for Aristotle is the characteristic action and the characteristic speech that make the moral choice of the protagonists explicit. When Oedipus believes the guilt of his brother-in-law and both his wife and the chorus beg his mercy, what he should do totally depends on his choice. However unpleasant he might be, he chose to acquit his brother in spite of his belief. This shows the fundamental goodness of his character, if we use this term in the same sense as Aristotle. “When the poet imitates hot-tempered or lazy persons who are in other respects have such (better) characters, he should make them hot-tempered or lazy, but make them better all the same, in the way Homer made Achilles hard but good” (1454b11-15). Sophocles represented Oedipus as an irascible person but definitely with a good character, in this case, forgiveness or magnanimity.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that the behavior of Oedipus on the stage shows neither his moral flaw nor his intellectual defect. On the contrary, the first half of the second epeisodion shows that his character is basically good, according to the Aristotelian point of view. I have shown in my paper published last year (Kitano 2013) that his behavior in the *Vorgeschichte* does not include explicit moral or intellectual flaw, except in his fatal encounter with his father at the crossroads. In this encounter, Sophocles keeps silent about the exact detail of the murder and we cannot judge the moral quality of his action. Were he shown to be bad in character on stage or in any action in the *Vorgeschichte* except this encounter, the audience would be forced to judge him as an arrogant bad person at the crossroads, too. But as his character both on and outside the stage excluding this crossroads encounter is depicted basically as good, the audience can refrain from the moral judgment about the encounter at the crossroads and seek the essence of this tragedy in other aspects.

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