

**Deianeira deliberates:
precipitate decision-making and *Trachiniae***

Good counsel is the most potent of assets (Tiresias at *Antigone* 1050)

Deianeira Decides

Trachiniae is a tragedy about sex, and a tragedy about destiny.¹ But it also constitutes a sophisticated lesson in the activity entailed by practical deliberation – what the Greeks termed *to bouleuesthai*.² It is through its stress on the importance of deliberation that it reveals its intimate relationship with the workings of the Athenian democracy, where the citizen-audience of drama was also the community's executive body. The officials charged with deliberating its policies at length – the members of the Council (*boulē*) – sat together in privileged seats at the front of the theatre. And in *Trachiniae* the training in decision-making that they received takes the form of a series of examples, enacted as scenes of impulsive action, of how *not* to deliberate. These scenes are typically Sophoclean in the intellectual and affective way in which 'they activate the process of engagement' in the audience, as Pat Easterling has recently put it.³ *Trachiniae*, like all Sophoclean tragedy, develops just as Stanley Kubrick recommends drama should, by letting 'an idea come over people without its being plainly stated. When you say something directly, it is simply not as potent as

when you allow people to discover it for themselves'.⁴ But indirect statements in classical drama are not always discovered by all its modern critics. It is rarely stressed, for example, that Deianeira does initiate a discussion about the wisdom of the most consequential action in the entire play – whether she should send a robe smeared with Nessus' blood to her errant husband.

Deianeira describes how she came into possession of the blood, and asks for the chorus' advice. She is committed, it seems, to finding out more about the possible outcome of sending the robe to Heracles before deciding how to act. Although she feels uncertain, she states with absolute clarity that if the chorus disapprove of her plan, then she will put a stop to it (585-7):

But this action has been arranged in case I may somehow get the better of this girl with spells and charms...unless you think that what I am doing is foolish! If so, I shall abandon it.

The interchange that follows is significant (588-93):

Cho. Well, if there is trust in actions, then I do not think that you have been badly advised.

Dei. I have trust to the extent that I can believe it, but I have never tried it out.

Cho. But you need to act on the basis of knowledge. For if you do not have experience of it, you would not be in a position to judge, even if you believed you were.

The meaning of the chorus's first response is somewhat opaque, but needs to be understood, since that is how Deianeira understands it, as an enquiry about the basis of her trust in the consequences of implementing her plan. Is it based on experience? The import of the chorus' second response has, however, not always been appreciated. Critics were long hell-bent on characterising the chorus as women of low intelligence, who deem it proper to reassure Deianeira that she knows what she is doing when she so clearly does not.⁵ But in a penetrating article, Solmsen showed that the chorus is actually advising not action but *caution*, and on a scientific ground. This is that the person who takes action must do so on the basis of knowledge (*eidenai*) derived from experience (*peirōmenē*, 592-3).⁶ The women of Trachis are actually saying that Deianeira needs to know, on the basis of a trial, experiment, or previous experience of the action she proposes, what its consequences will be.

Unfortunately, this sensible process of deliberation is cut short by the appearance of Lichas; as the play presents the situation, the *only* reason why the chorus fails to dissuade Deianeira from sending the robe is that, with Lichas' entrance from the palace, her deliberation is interrupted by a chance event.⁷ What becomes important is no longer Deianeira's attempt to retrieve Heracles' love (a reaction to how things really are), but her need to control her reputation (how things seem). The play here therefore adumbrates the precision of Socratic epistemology. Deianeira's commitment to deliberation before action now evanesces. She suddenly chooses, fully aware that she has no certain knowledge

of the effect of the substance with which she has smeared the robe, to send it to her husband anyway.

Precipices and Precipitate Action

One of the most memorable word-pictures in Sophocles is painted in *Trachiniae* by a professional purveyor of narratives, Lichas the herald, to Deianeira, the chorus, and the external audience of the play. It concerns the moment when Heracles hurled Iphitus (a guiltless youth with the misfortune to have a father who had insulted the superhero) to his death. The venue for this brutal, unpremeditated and treacherous murder was the highest turret of the fort on the rocky ridge of Tiryns in the Peloponnese, an acropolis of natural boulders that juts out dramatically from the surrounding hillscape. In this image of shocking lawlessness, Lichas stresses that Iphitus had no chance of self-defence, since when Heracles struck him in this precipitous place, the victim was out catching wild horses, 'his eye in one place and his mind in another' (272). Fifteen months later in terms of the time-frame external to the play, but only five hundred lines later in terms of its own unfolding internal narrative, it is Lichas' turn to have his death described. Hyllus relates how he was also hurled to his doom by the hero. On the very cliff-top of Mount Kenaion in Euboea, Heracles was sacrificing a hundred cattle to inaugurate a sanctuary of Zeus, dressed in the impregnated gown Lichas had brought from Deianeira. When the poison began to work, Heracles, in agony, seized Lichas by the ankle and sent him in freefall from the precipice down onto the rocks which met the sea, 'and the white brains poured out with blood from his hair as his head was shattered' (781-2).

Heracles has hurled two men, guilty of no crimes, precipitately and without premeditation or fair adjudication from extreme heights to their deaths. The hero's own agony is described by Hyllus in similar terms; his shouts and screams resounded amongst the rocks, and 'the mountain promontories of Locri and the Eubeoan peaks', until he 'hurled himself often to the ground' (787-90). A male body crashing at great velocity to earth is an ominous picture, emblematic of the atmosphere of primeval violence that suffuses the whole play but is different from the atmosphere in anything else that survives by Sophocles. The importance of lofty peaks in the play was well conveyed by Evelyn de Morgan in her painting *Deianera* (c. 1887), which is reproduced on the cover of this book; Charles Segal influentially pointed out that the elemental landscapes in *Trachiniae*, with their torrential rivers and high mountain peaks, serve to 'throw into relief the question of man's place in a world whose violence he both shares and subdues'.⁸

The sheer speed at which events can hurtle towards doom, like the physical bodies of Iphitus or Lichas, is stressed aesthetically everywhere in the imagery of the play. The chorus sings that for humans neither spangled Night, nor spirits of Death, nor wealth abides, since they 'suddenly' are gone (*all' apha bebake* (132-4). When Deianeira departs in silence, cursed by Hyllus, the chorus sing 'See, maidens, how swiftly (*aphar*) there has come upon us the oracular saying' (821-2). Deianeira, they say, had no foreboding of this when she saw the disaster of the new marriage with Iole 'speeding' (*aissousan*) towards the house (843-4). They regret that Heracles' spear has brought the 'swiftly running bride' (*thoan numphan*) from Oechalia (857-9). During the nurse's account of

Deianeira's suicide, she is said to have moved through the whole house, weeping, then 'suddenly' (*exaiphnēs*) she 'burst into the marriage chamber of Heracles' (913-14). But the emphasis on speed has more than an aesthetic impact. The visual image of the violent crash to earth, which is connected with the pervasive sense of velocity, expresses in physical, concrete, narrative terms what is actually one of the play's dominant *intellectual* interests: the nature and consequences of the unconsidered decision.

The subject-matter of *Trachiniae* – what was done by and to its awesome hero during the last, violent episode of his life on earth – has been consistently confused with Sophocles' purpose and methods in writing it. This has led to the play being judged a 'raw' and 'primal' artwork and indeed to it receiving an early date relative to Sophocles' other extant dramas. Many have felt not only that it depicts a far distant heroic age somehow more irrational, savage and closer to nature than the Argos of Sophocles' *Electra* or the Thebes of his Labdacid plays, but that the play itself 'is' somehow more crude, irrational, elemental and savage than *Oedipus Tyrannus*, say, or *Philoctetes*. At best, this quality has led to *Trachiniae* being described as 'if not the most baffling, then at least among the most mysterious' of Sophocles' works.⁹ At worst, it has been denied that it is 'not religious in tone' compared with his other dramas, even though it has 'supernatural elements'.¹⁰ It has certainly not often been praised as a polished or sophisticated drama.

This general apprehension in 19th and earlier 20th-century scholarship often derived from the influential set of lectures on drama published by A.W. Schlegel between 1809 and 1811. Outside Germany, the lectures were widely read

in the trenchant English translation of John Black, first published in 1815 and thereafter much reprinted. Schlegel dismissed the play in a single paragraph. He was so outraged by the lack of artistry he perceived, especially in Deianeira's prologue, which he deemed 'wholly uncalled-for', that he doubted Sophocles himself could have written it at all:

The *Trachiniae* appears to me so very inferior to the other pieces of Sophocles which have reached us, that I could wish there were some warrant for supposing that this tragedy was composed in the age, indeed, and in the school of Sophocles, perhaps by his son Iophon, and that it was by mistake attributed to the father... ..although this poet's usual rules of art are observed on the whole, yet it is very superficially; no where can we discern in it the profound mind of Sophocles.¹¹

The doubt Schlegel cast on the play's authenticity, and his conclusion that if it really was by Sophocles then 'in this one instance the tragedian has failed to reach his usual elevation', since it wholly lacks signs of his 'profound mind', lie at the head of the genealogy of criticism that frequently chose to omit the play altogether from collections of studies of Sophoclean drama.¹²

Writing today, a quarter of a century after Pat Easterling's magnificent commentary was published in 1982, and in the wake of several fine productions and adaptations of the play in the professional theatre and other media,¹³ it seems almost inconceivable that *Trachiniae* could be simply ignored in a book about Sophocles. The thoughtful study of the tragedy's rhetorical strategies by

Heiden (whose debt to Easterling's edition is considerable), has also done much to stall the recycling of the hoary old clichés that the Trachis play seemed to stimulate in critics.¹⁴ But in this essay I argue for its status as a cerebral and intellectually heavyweight drama, the philosophical profundity of which even today remains underestimated.

Ezra Pound's idiosyncratic 1956 version culminated in the announcement of his dying Herakles, once he has put all the available information together, 'What splendour, it all coheres'.¹⁵ Subsequently it began to be fashionable to emphasise the theme of knowledge in the play. This has been expressed in terms of 'late learning' and with reference to the series of recognitions of the manner in which oracles are fulfilled.¹⁶ It has also been noted how the remarkable use in *Trachiniae* of the term *metaitios* ('co-liable'), used of, for example Eurytus and Zeus (260-1), and Iole and Deianeira (1233-4), seems to reveal Sophocles wrestling, well before the philosophical distinctions were made, between efficient and instrumental causes.¹⁷ But Sophocles is often 'less inclined to explain *why* man fares as he does than to show us *how* he does fare in life',¹⁸ and it is often *the processes* by which some of these individuals became *metaitios*, when their ignorance is turned into disastrous action (i.e. through botched deliberation and precipitate decision-taking), in which Sophocles is interested. The idea of the unconsidered, hasty decision informs the aesthetics and epistemology of *Trachiniae*, as we have seen, but it also lends it ethico-political and metaphysical reverberations. The play's intellectual range and clout mean that it is actually one of the best examples of 5th-century tragedy's anticipation and development, through presentation in vibrant interaction, of all three foundational questions

asked by Greek philosophy -- ‘how should we live?’ and ‘what is to exist in relation to the universe?’ as well as ‘how do we know things?’

Deliberation as Theatre

Deliberation scenes were of course not invented by the Greek tragedians, as Malcolm Schofield’s account of *euboulia* in the *Iliad* amply demonstrates,¹⁹ but deliberation about future action in the face of an uncontrollable universe has long been connected with the very birth of ‘the Tragic’ in Western culture. Indeed, it is customary in diachronic studies of the tragic tradition to trace the entire idiom back to the passage in the *Iliad* where Achilles speaks about the choice his mother has told him faces him between two alternative destinies – a brief but glorious life, or a long one ending peacefully at home in old age (9.410-29).²⁰ One of the reasons why the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, did not give rise to many tragedies in antiquity is connected with the famed *euboulia* of its protagonist; a hero who deliberated competently, and almost invariably achieved his goals through effective implementation of the conclusions to which his ability to deliberate had led him, does not provide much scope -- at least as a protagonist -- for the tragic playwright.²¹ Many classical and Shakespearean tragedies portray at least one character in the act of deliberation, but competent deliberation that results in successful outcomes is difficult to find.

The virtue of *euboulia* designates the ability both to deliberate to one’s own (and / or one’s community’s) advantage and ‘to recognize good deliberation and the good advice arising from good deliberation’.²² By the term *to bouleuesthai* I mean, throughout this essay, the combined process of giving and

receiving counsel about future action, considering all alternative options and attempting to anticipate their consequences.²³ In *Moral Luck* (1981) Bernard Williams famously discussed the place of luck in ethical judgements; five years later, Martha Nussbaum focussed attention on practical deliberation in classical Greek Ethics, and stressed how important it was to Greek tragedy.²⁴ This makes it all the more surprising how little attention has been paid to deliberation scenes in Greek tragedy subsequently. It is certainly part of what Aristotle insists is the third most important constituent of tragic drama (preceded only by plot and character), namely the representation of ‘intellectual activity’ (*dianoia*) which has to do with both a political sense and with rhetoric (*Poet.* 1450b6-8).

Deliberation is also an aspect of tragic poetry that is interconnected with its status as theatre, since it anchors the action, however remote the time in which it was set, in the present tense, but always with an eye to future consequences – *ta mellonta*. As we watch Creon hurtle from one ill-judged decision to another in *Antigone*, it is always as if we were in the living presence of a man creating imminent catastrophe *right now*, rather than catastrophe long ago in Bronze-Age Thebes.²⁵ This temporal interface between a contextual past tense and a story physically enacted in the present tense, on the psychological cusp between present and future, creates the uniquely spontaneous emotional impact of ancient tragic theatre. Susanne Langer argued that each art form, including drama, has its own immanent laws, and offers a distinct conceptual space or place with its own inner rhythms. Langer maintains that narrative literature provides a ‘virtual past’ or ‘virtual memory’, lyric provides a ‘virtual experience’, but drama – and this is crucial given that drama can today be set in

the past, present, or future – provides a ‘virtual *future*’, on account of its constant orientation towards *what will happen next*.²⁶

Even the remote time depicted in ancient tragedy (which is set in its original audience’s past), or in ancient comedy (set in its original audience’s present), is transformed by live enactment into a dynamic representation of the margin between ‘now’ and ‘after now’. When we watch *Trachiniae*, however well we know the play, we are always present in Trachis, wondering how this woman who stands so visibly disturbed before us will react *right now* to the news that her husband is in love with someone else. And when Deinaneira deliberates on what she should do, we do not know how she will explore her dilemma nor what she will eventually decide to do.

From the Persian queen’s request for advice from her elders on how she should react to her dream and the omen she has seen in *Persians* (179-245), to Iphigenia’s articulation of her (very limited) alternatives – whether to die willingly or unwillingly -- in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the corpus of fifth-century tragedies offers many characters engaged in deliberation, both in soliloquy and in dialogue. Aeschylean characters deliberate less than those in the other two tragedians, since his characters are more ‘embedded’ in the actions represented in his dramas, and their fates more ‘externally’ determined;²⁷ this implies that the representation of deliberation in tragedy became more sophisticated and extensive in parallel with the development of deliberation by citizens in the Council and Assembly (see below). Yet Aeschylus was certainly interested in the metaphors that expressed the noetic activity involved in deliberation about action: he compared it with the *technai* of steering a ship (*Suppl.* 438-41) and

herding a flock of thoughts (*Ag.* 669).²⁸ Sansone has drawn attention in particular to the Aeschylean portrait of the psychological state of *amēchania* or inability to know how to act in a difficult situation: it is a temporary lack of the deliberative faculty, when supernatural forces bring a disease or disability that makes it impossible to use the *phrēn* well.²⁹ Euripides seems to have been interested in how rhetoric, where the impulse to control ‘how things seem’ supersedes the impulse to discover truth, can interfere with good deliberation and persuade people into immoral actions.³⁰ But deliberation as a mental *process* seems to have been an issue to which Sophocles, the only tragedian amongst the ‘big three’ who himself held important public offices, had given a great deal of thought. At least one crisis in most of his extant tragedies is precipitated by the inability of a character in a quandary to listen to good counsel, to discount bad, or simply to spend sufficient time considering potential outcomes: Oedipus fails to hear Tiresias, neither Ajax nor the Atridae demonstrate much ability to anticipate the consequences of their actions, and Creon substitutes bluster for deliberation when faced with important arguments framed by both Antigone and Haemon.

Indeed, it is striking that *Antigone*, the Sophoclean tragedy which talks most explicitly on deliberation, is also the one which the ancient tradition claimed so impressed the Athenians that they voted its author into the important public office of a generalship on the strength of it.³¹ In *Antigone* there is a stress even stronger than that in *Trachiniae* on the speed at which decisions are taken. Creon uses the language of *bouleumata* (179), but it is not at all clear what deliberation or consultation has gone on when he passes his decree (*kērugma*) prohibiting the burial of the dead. Ismene implies that it is the will of the citizens

(79), but there is no evidence other than this that the proclamation was not entirely Creon's idea. Creon's 'inauguration' speech says that he has passed the law on two grounds, the first of which is that 'anyone who while guiding the whole city fails to set his hand to the best counsels' (*mē tōn aristōn haptetai bouleumatōn*, 179) is the worst of men. But in the event he is enraged when he does hear a piece of wise counsel from the chorus shortly afterwards; they say, after the guard has described the dust that has covered Polynices' body, that their thoughts have all the while suggested to them (*hē xunnoia boulei palai*) that the matter has something to do with the gods (278-9).

When Creon has heard Antigone defend her action in covering her brother's corpse, his furious response involves him in the first of his precipitate decisions. Without even consulting his citizens, he suddenly decides that regardless of family ties to him, 'she and her sister shall not escape a dreadful death' (488-9), although he revokes the sentence on Ismene, equally suddenly, at 771. Creon fails to benefit from several potentially helpful consultants because, as Haemon says, he never takes the opportunities that are afforded him to foresee what people might say, do, or criticise. The reason for this is that nobody dares to help him deliberate since his face becomes so frightening to look at when he hears things he does not want to hear (688-91). Haemon does not seem to want to use the word 'advise' (*bouleuein*) in relation to his father, perhaps on account of a widespread feeling in Greek culture that it was inappropriate for the young to *bouleuein* their elders (see below); instead, he concludes with a statement in arguably milder language that since nobody can have complete understanding of every matter, 'it is also good to learn from those who speak well' (*kai tōn*

legontōn eu kalon to manthanein, 723). The chorus hastily tries to moderate even this by saying that both Creon *and* Haemon should learn from each other, but Creon demands to know why he, at his age, ‘should be taught’ (*didaxomestha*) by one so young (727).

Tiresias has another statement to make about advice-taking: good advice has a long shelf-life, and even a man who has made a mistake can sometimes rectify it if he acts, however late, to correct it (i.e. he need not remain *aboulos oud’ anolbos*, 1026). The important of this concept to the play emerges again in Tiresias’ retort to Creon’s savage attack on his character – why don’t people realise that *the most potent of assets is good advice and deliberation (euboulia*, 1050). Exactly the same term is used shortly after by the chorus, now brave enough to speak out, *euboulias dei, pai Menoikeōs, labein* (‘you should accept good advice, child of Menoeceus’, unfortunately textually corrupt at end of the line, 1098): they then tell him to release Antigone, immediately. He obeys, but far too late. Creon himself is quite clear in the final scene that it his own poor decisions (*bouleumatōn*, 1265) that caused Haemon’s death, which was the result of his own botched deliberations (*dusbouliais*, 1269).

Creon’s incompetence as a deliberator may receive uniquely explicit comment, but he is far from alone in Greek tragedy as a person who takes unconsidered decisions. Indeed, in Greek tragedy, for reasons which will be considered later, there are few wholly competent deliberators: the scene where Aethra advises Theseus in Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* is an outstanding counter-example (286-364). Yet even in the numerous compromised deliberation

scenes, although some of the arguments used are merely expressions of facile prejudice or strong emotion, others constitute sophisticated distinctions between knowledge and opinion, advanced reasoning from precedent, or careful assessments of likelihood. An example in *Trachiniae* of the sophistication involved is the dialogue between Deianeira and the messenger on the likely future domestic status of Iole. The messenger suggests that it is *probable* that Iole might remain not just Heracles' favourite concubine, but that she will be lodged with this status in his marital home. It is not likely, says the messenger (*oud' eikos*, 368), that she has been sent in order to be treated like a slave, since Heracles is inflamed with desire for her.³² Sophocles seems to be drawing attention to the dangers of arguments from probability, since Deianeira does not calibrate the likelihood of this for herself. She seems to accept wholesale the messenger's assessment of the likely situation, when further questioning might have elicited valuable information.

It has already been noted that the rigour of the training in deliberation that Greek tragedy offered its audience has not been a fashionable topic of research lately. Since the late 1980s it has been overshadowed by discussions of its portrayal of, for example, artworks, cult, space, ritual and sociological issues. A reason for the neglect may be that extended and systematic deliberation about alternative courses of action is out of favour in modern mass media and culture (one of the few arenas in which it is fashionable to deliberate being medical ethics). Although certain rhetorical formulae within deliberation scenes have received attention, such as the 'desperation' motifs in speeches by characters in terrible dilemmas, or the rhetorical question expressing the *aporia* of the

character (*ti poiēsō?*),³³ I have come across no systematic comparative analysis of the deliberation scenes in Greek tragedy. But it is my guess that most of them show deliberation that any student of Plato or Aristotle could immediately have identified as seriously and obviously flawed: recurring defects are that the deliberation is too brief, that it is based on false factual information that was potentially verifiable, or on prejudiced opinion rather than knowledge derived from experience.

Discussions of Deliberation

The topic of deliberation about future action is one which by the time of Aristotle had also become significant in rhetoric: indeed, it became one of its three main branches according to Aristotle's influential distinctions between deliberative rhetoric (which he defines as looking to the future and whose goal is expedience), epideictic rhetoric (which looks to the present and whose goal is honour), and legal rhetoric (which looks to the past and whose goal is justice).³⁴ It was also treated seriously as a method and topic in moral philosophy. No ancient treatise devoted to the topic of deliberation has survived, although Diogenes Laertius cites one, now lost, entitled *On Deliberation (Peri tou bouleuesthai)*, which he assigns to Simon the Cobbler, the long mysterious 'workbench philosopher' and friend of Socrates whose historicity has rather unexpectedly been proven by archaeological discoveries;³⁵ Aristotle's lost works included a *peri sumboulias*, or *On Counsel*.³⁶ That treatise presumably complemented what he has to say about deliberation in his extant works.

Deliberation is, for Aristotle, a distinctive activity; there are many things we do not deliberate about, such as the laws of nature or facts which can be certainly proven either way, such as whether a particular object is a loaf of bread, or whether a loaf has been baked for a sufficient time (*NE* 3.1113 A). It is only *uncertainties* about which we deliberate, and this does not include uncertain phenomena, such as the weather, or the chance discovery of treasure, over which we have no control: we deliberate ‘about things that are in our power and can be realized by action’ (*NE* 3.1112a-b, see also 6.1141b). We deliberate in order to act, and this is why deliberation is prominent in the spheres of Ethics and Politics, which are concerned with action (*NE* 10.1179a-b). Deliberation is an act of ‘figuring out’ questions that complements answers derived from sensory perception or scientific proof.

Ever since Erasmus chose deliberation as a topic in his *Adagia* (1500), and in England the Queen’s Counsel Francis Bacon published his treatise *Of Counsel* (1597), deliberation has been an important topic in more recent philosophy, both as part of political theory, in relation to group decision-making in democracies, and (in ways that overlap with cognitive psychology) with respect to the workings of the individual moral agent’s subjectivity. A worthwhile set of contemporary philosophical studies exists attempting to define the Ideal Deliberator. Good deliberation has been defined, for example, as evaluation of ends on the basis of full and correct information (which may well require seeking expert advice from a disinterested party). Sometimes the factor that is stressed is the ability to calibrate the likelihood of outcomes on the basis of precedent and experience. Others have seen good deliberation, rather, as a system of thinking in which ends

are justified according a set of norms containing a high degree of internal coherence in relation to each other. A fourth model stresses the desirability of a high degree of *stability* in the deliberator's intuitions and judgements.³⁷ Yet despite such differences of emphasis, certain fundamental principles underlie all these models, including the need for sufficient time to cogitate, and the importance of attempting to gain true information.

Analogously, a set of repeated beliefs about the nature of the Ideal Deliberator can be found scattered across archaic and classical Greek literature, even though there are differences in nuance and emphasis. Many feature, for example, in the authors whose assembled maxims were referred to by Isocrates as 'advisory literature', *ta sumbouleuonta* (2.42-3) – namely Theognis, Phocylides and Hesiod. It is often recommended, for example, that deliberation should be conducted slowly; this sentiment is directly expressed in Thucydides (1.78.1; see also Hdt. 7.10.6, Isoc. 1.34). But it is also anticipated by two passages of Theognis: his listener is enjoined to 'deliberate twice and thrice' (*bouleuou dis kai tris*, 633, an idea expanded at 1051-4). A variation on this theme was expressed by at least one character in Sophocles, who said that deliberation and running a race were not directed at achieving the same end (fr. 856 *TgrF*).

Ideal deliberators and advisors are male, since 'a woman just does not deliberate with an eye to expedience' (*Monostichoi* 106, see also 355), and 'a man who takes a woman's advice when he fears downfall actually deliberates his downfall into being'.³⁸ They must also be free: expressions of this imperative are legion, and the voices that oppose them are almost all servile themselves.³⁹ Another pole around which many ancient Greek discussions of Ideal Deliberation

revolved was that of the age of the deliberator or advisor. A proverb that Harpocration attributes to Hesiod assigns giving deeds to youth, counsel to men in their prime, and only wishes to old men (fr. 321 MW), but Nestor's reply to Diomedes at *Iliad* ix. 53-61 implies that seniority brings wisdom in counsel, and excellence in counsel becomes a topic in encomia of old age.⁴⁰ Men had to be in their thirtieth year in order to serve on the Athenian Council (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.35)⁴¹, and it seems that in practice men over fifty years old were given some precedence by the herald in the queue of men wanting to address the Athenian Assembly (see e.g. Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 23, 49). The notion of valuable long memory no doubt reinforced the association in Greek minds between the age of the deliberator and the often stated desirability of considering the events of the past while deliberating about the future (see especially Andocides 3.2 and 3.29): the topic of age groups and deliberation is developed in Isocrates' *Letter to Archidamus* (9.14).

Another issue which arises often in literature about deliberation is the desirability of accompanying deliberation with wine. The most famous instance is Herodotus' account of Persian decision-making about grave matters, which took place initially when they were drunk, but was then reviewed when they were sober (1.133); action was only taken if both verdicts were the same. Even on this debated question of the benefits wine might offer the deliberator, the ancient voices are far from unanimous (see the argument on the subject between the slaves in *Knights* 86-100, and Antiphanes fr. 19.5-6 KA), but it is perhaps less well asked of tragedy than of satyr drama, except in so far as it relates to the issue of uninhibited speech (see below).

From the perspective of tragedy, one of the most important topics in the literature about counsel is the relationship between deliberation and chance or luck. The *locus classicus* here is when Isocrates insists that true courage is tested during deliberations in the Assembly rather than in the face of the dangers of war, since ‘what takes place on the field of battle is due to fortune, but what is decided here is an indication of our intellectual power’ (6.92). The Greeks were aware that no amount of competent deliberation could ensure happiness if chance events militated against it, and it is Theognis in whose verse the earliest full statement of this conundrum is found. He sets up an opposition between the mentally inferior people whose luck is good, and competent deliberators whose bad luck means that they reap no rewards for their efforts (161-64). Herodotus’ meditative Artabanus nevertheless insists on the advantages that good deliberation offers: even if a competently deliberated plan is obstructed, it is important, in hindsight, to recognise that it was chance and not lack of deliberative effort that caused the problem (Hdt. 7.10).

One Thucydidean speaker, Nicias, argues that although it is incumbent upon his audience to deliberate extensively (*polla...bouleusasthai*), it is ultimately more important that they enjoy good luck (*eutuchēsai*, 6.23.3). The relationship between chance and deliberation was of course to become a topic of enormous importance in Greek philosophy. The intensity of the proverbial connection between *boulē* and *tuchē* is particularly evident from the etymological play upon them in Plato’s *Cratylus* (420 C); Aristotle develops the theme at length in his discussion of the fortunate man in the 8th book of his *Eudemian Ethics*. The need to have good luck as well as to practise expert deliberation

becomes apparent to many tragic protagonists. No amount of even the best possible deliberation could prevent a man from suffering the sort of bad luck that afflicted Philoctetes or Oedipus, but it is certainly up for discussion whether more and more effective deliberation could have prevented Deianeira from sending the robe, just it might have prevented Creon from refusing to listen to his niece and son.

By far the most prevalent commonplace in the ancient Greek literature on counsel, however, is the injunction to ‘deliberate at night’, which probably goes back at least as early as the original archaic ‘Phocylides’ known to Isocrates as an assembler of advisory maxims (see above).⁴² The phrase *nukti boulēn didous* is certainly used in Herodotus, and seems to mean something similar to ‘making the night a counsellor’, ‘taking night into one’s confidence, or just ‘sleeping on it’, as in the Euripidean phrase *nukti sunthakōn* (*Hclid.* 994). The proverbial association of night and deliberation is clear in Menander’s *Epitrepontes*, when Daos, in the arbitration scene, explains how he had had second thoughts about bringing up the baby he had found when he ‘took counsel in the night’ (252, *en nukti boulēn...*). This idea also forms a line of the *Monostichoi* traditionally attributed to Menander (no. 150, *en nukti boulē tois sophoisi gignetai*). It is obvious, however, that tragic deliberators are offered little opportunity for nocturnal lucubration.

When it comes to the right type of advisor to choose, stress is laid on the party being disinterested, to avoid the danger of their recommendations being more in their own interest than that of the advisee. But there is also an understanding of the importance of having had experience of a matter before

being qualified to give advice on it -- another common topic in the ancient literature about deliberation. For example, when in Herodotus the Spartan heralds object to putting themselves in the hands of Xerxes on the advice of the Persian Hydarnes (7.135), it is implied that a similar kind of experience is necessary before one may advise another: Hydarnes is told that his advice is one-sided since he has experienced slavery, but not freedom. A Sophoclean fragment recommending that only the person who has undergone the same experiences is in a position to advise a sufferer (900 *TgrF*, *hos mē peponth' hama, mē bouleuetō*) approaches this general thought.

Inadequate Deliberation in *Trachiniae*

How many characters in tragedy take or are offered the opportunity to 'deliberate slowly' or 'deliberate at night'? The answer must be, 'scarcely any'. Tragedy may, in fact, in some cases contrast the sensible decisions to which deliberators have come during protracted night-time thought and those that they take precipitately within the timescale of the play's action. Phaedra's great monologue is a clear example: a lengthy process of deliberation in the long watches of the night has allowed her to understand why people are not always able to carry out what they know is right, and also has helped her to arrive at the view that the best course of action entails silence and self-control (Eur. *Hipp.* 373-99). It is only the intolerable stress that Cypris has put her under that has now made her resolve on death as 'the most effective plan' (*kratiston...bouleumatōn*, 403). Although beyond the scope of this essay, the proverb 'deliberate at night' could illuminate considerably the normal practice of Greek tragic dramaturgy to confine the time

enacted to less than a single day, the notorious ‘unity of time’ that has had such an extraordinary effect on Western drama – and literature more widely – ever since. Although there are some signs of attempts to compress significant actions into single revolutions of the sun in Homeric epic, the mysterious origins of the distinctive temporal unity of ancient tragic drama have never been properly explained. The idea that Ideal Deliberators need to sleep on their decisions may at least explain why the compressed temporal dimensions of tragic theatre proved so longstanding a convention.

At the end of the speech where Hyllus describes the killing of Lichas and the suffering of Heracles, he curses his mother, precipitately. She is convicted of having ‘plotted and carried out’ the murder of his father (*bouleusas’...drōs*). In fact, the problem is, of course, that she neither plotted the murder (the activity denoted by the verb *bouleuein*) nor did she even competently *deliberate* (denoted by the middle form *bouleuesthai*) the action that accidentally led to Heracles’ death. The audience knows that her attempt to explore the potential outcome of sending the robe was truncated. Speed and strong emotion characterise Hyllus’ curse even more than Deianeira’s deliberations: he allows no time for consideration of what really happened, nor to hear what she might say in self-defence, before he curses her (807-12). Everyone in this family would have done well to listen to Diodotus’ warning to the inflamed Athenians during the second debate on the Mytilenean secession (Thuc. 3.42.1): ‘There are two enemies of good counsel: haste and passion’ (*tachos kai orgē*).

Another enemy of good counsel, however, is the failure to instigate it in the first place. Deianeira’s truncated deliberation and precipitate re-adoption of her

earlier plan reveal, for her, an uncharacteristic degree of initiative. In the prologue to *Trachiniae* to which Schlegel so objected, Deianeira recalls that she had remained seated, 'struck out of her wits with terror', while the river Achelous struggled over her in her distant Aetolian homeland; before the showdown, she had prayed to die (although had done nothing to hasten it) rather than marry Achelous.⁴³ She concludes this prologue with the information that fifteen whole months have elapsed since anything has happened -- fifteen months, for some of which she has lived on her own in Trachis, where she is an exile (44-5). But throughout these fifteen months, she has displayed no functioning dimension that might be called moral agency, despite the nightly anxiety attacks she has endured (29-30).

Her lack of ability to deliberate, or take autonomous initiative as a result of deliberation, is emphasised immediately after the prologue, when it is only because her *nurse* urges her to take action that the chain of events leading to the play's conclusion is instigated in the first place. Deianeira has up until today, the actual day set for the deciding of Heracles' fate, done absolutely nothing about it. She has not deliberated on the best course of action, nor aired the question with a competent advisor of any kind. The nurse tells her that she should send Hyllus on a mission to find out what has happened to his father; in doing so, the nurse 'presents the first example of enthymemic reasoning' in the play⁴⁴: Hyllus, who the nurse says might reasonably be expected to go (*honper eikos...ei*, 56), should be sent to look for news of Heracles. At this moment Hyllus happens to appear, but it is only because he asks what the nurse has been saying that Deianeira explains, 'She says that when your father has been absent for so long it is

shameful that you do not inquire as to his whereabouts' (65-6). 'She' -- the slave-class old nurse -- says.

Hyllus, thus prompted, now tells his mother what he knows about his father's whereabouts -- he is not far away now, but in Euboea -- and she responds by divulging the prophecy Heracles left her that this was the time at which his fate would be decided one way or another. There is reproof in Hyllus' retort that he would have gone 'long ago if I had known the import of these prophecies' (56-7). A matter of such enormity, one would have thought, might have benefited from pre-emptive thought and considered action. But it is only this ineffectual female whose attention has been focussed on this crucial subject. The significance of the prophecy does not even emerge until after Hyllus has gone on his mission. Deianeira explains, not to him but to the chorus, that Heracles was so concerned that before he left, fifteen months previously, he had told her how to dispose his estate. He was, he had said, fated either to die or to survive and live a painfree life fifteen months later. This prophecy had been delivered to him by no less an authority than the priestesses of Zeus who tended the ancient oak tree at Dodona in Epirus. In this household, therefore, a slave tells her mistress when and how to act, and the mistress divulges crucial details relating to personal family secrets of unparalleled importance, not to her adult son but to the local women in a town where she is stranded in temporary exile.

Can Women Deliberate?

At this point the velocity of the play suddenly increases. The fifteen months of anxiety, and the current day's talking, are interrupted by the arrival of an elderly

messenger who says that her husband will be home 'soon', *tacha* (186). Deianeira's tendency towards precipitate action is underlined – without even asking for any details about the condition in which he is returning, with whom, or whence, she orders the women to give voice to rejoicing, and they oblige by launching into a manic hyporcheme that welcomes the 'bridegroom' to the house (205-24). It is interesting to compare Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, when the chorus says that it is 'just like a woman' to give thanks for good news before the news is confirmed (483-7), revealing that precipitate joy was sometimes seen as a fault characteristic of the feminine psyche, just as ability at deliberation is a virtue characteristic only of men. For Clytemnestra, says the watchman, has an expectant heart 'capable of good deliberation like a man's' (*androboulon...kear*, 11).

If the Trachis play's catastrophe is set in motion by Deianeira's incompetence at deliberation, there arises the question of the extent to which this is determined by the fact that she is female. There were, as we have seen, widespread expressions of the view that women and deliberation should not be mixed. Aristotle explained that the deliberative faculty, which is not present in slaves and is undeveloped in children, is actually inoperative or 'without authority' – *akuron* – in women (*Pol.* 1.1260a). The term he uses for 'without authority' derives from the same stem as the term *kurios*, used for the male family member who had to act as legal representative and 'guardian' to every Athenian woman throughout her lives. It is significant that it is only male heroes in epic, such as Odysseus (2.272-3), who are said to be proficient at both *counsel* and *action*. In a chapter on the sociology of Athenian tragedy commissioned by

(and much improved under the editorship of) Pat Easterling, which I published a decade ago in the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, I argued that one of the recurring plot patterns in Greek tragedy involves a woman who is left alone, to plan and execute actions unsupervised by men.⁴⁵ Deianeira, sing the chorus, is worn down by sleeping alone, without her husband (*eunais anandrōtoisi*, 109-10), and her problems arise directly from the absence of male supervision.

This makes *Trachiniae* one of the many extant plays in which a woman creates or exacerbates a problem in the physical absence of any legitimate husband with whom she can have regular sexual intercourse. This convention applies equally to virgins and to married women, who create problems only in the absence of their husbands. The opposite rule does not always apply; husbandless women may behave with decorum (Chryosthemis, for example, in Sophocles' *Electra*, and Megara in *Heracles Mad*). But every single problematic woman in tragedy is temporarily or permanently husbandless in the true sense of the term. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is having sex, but not with her husband; Euripides' Electra is married, but not having sex.

The pattern is in turn dependent upon the striking prevalence of the type of plot in which the male head of the household enacts a homecoming (*nostos*) during the course of the play. The *nostos*-plot had a masterly antecedent in the *Odyssey*, where chaos also reigns in the hero's absence, although his wife is not in that case the culprit.⁴⁶ There is an implicit acknowledgement that although women were transferred from household to household (by male consensus in the case of marriage and male violence in the case of war), they were essentially immobilised, in contrast with the unrestricted movements of men. Greek tragedy

normally portrays static household-bound women awaiting and reacting to the comings and goings of men -- Deianeira, Clytemnestra, Medea, Phaedra, Hermione, and examples can be multiplied. Play after play portrays the disastrous effects on households and the larger community of *orgai* -- emotions such as anger and sexual desire or jealousy, or divinely inspired madness -- on women unsupervised by men.

Without free adult men to guide their judgment, women in tragedy are also portrayed as especially vulnerable to manipulative slaves. The most interesting category of tragic slave is comprised by the old female nurses like Deianeira's, and their male counterparts (*paidagōgoi*). In their portrayal there is often a suggestion of an unhealthy degree of inter-class trust and intimacy, for example in Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Ion*. It is no accident that the 'boorish man' amongst Theophrastus' *Characters* is recognisable by his habit of confiding the most important matters to his slaves while distrusting his own friends and family (4.2). Aristotle recommends that children, whose moral capacities he regarded as undeveloped, 'spend very little time in the company of slaves' (*Pol.* 7.1336a 39-40).

Yet *Trachiniae*, in fact, does not altogether fit the standard model of the amoral slave and the susceptible aristocratic female, since the nurse's suggestion to send Hyllus for news, and Deianeira's request for advice from the chorus of Trachinian women, are both sensible moves. This is striking when it is remembered that this play was composed in a society where women were formally excluded from all deliberation about public policy, and indeed were regarded as scarcely capable of autonomous deliberative activity at all. But

causation in Sophocles is always complicated, and of course Heracles, who killed Nessus, must in the grand scheme of things take some responsibility for the means by which he died. This is even stressed by the repetition of the verb *baptein* by Deianeira in describing the moment when the arrow was dipped in the poison and the moment when she dipped the wool in the blood (574, 580); this links the actions that eventually give rise to the mutual ruin,⁴⁷ for, as Easterling has argued, repetition in Sophocles tends to be purposeful.⁴⁸ Deianeira is not the only character whose failure to consider her actions before performing them is implicated in the creation of this tragedy. Since the characters of Deianeira and Heracles are likely to have been played by the same actor, some critics have argued that there is a sharp contrast created by the meek, un-authoritative Deianeira and her masterful, controlling husband.⁴⁹ But in one crucial respect – their incompetence at deliberation and tendency to take precipitate decisions – they are remarkably similar.

The question of Deianeira's moral culpability has exercised critics. Those who want to defend her use the remorseful Hyllus' defence of her towards the end of the play, when he three times asserts her lack of malicious *intention*. 'She did wrong without the intention' (*hēmarten ouch hekousia*, 1123); 'She did altogether wrong, but her intent was good' (*hapan to chrēm' hēmarte chrēsta mōmenē*, 1137); 'She went wrong thinking (*dokousa*) that she was applying a [love] philtre when she saw the bride in the house', 1140). Yet the story is not quite as simple as that. The play has devoted a considerable amount of 'airtime' to portraying and discussing the mental processes by which Deianeira came to commit the fatal mistake and send the anointed robe. Sophocles seems here to have added a new

factor – the question of Deianeira’s conscious agency – to an ambiguous tradition.

Sophocles’ Deianeira is certainly no Clytemnestra-like premeditative husband-slayer. But neither is she responsible solely for accidental manslaughter as she seems to have been in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, where she dyed the robe with lethal *pharmaka* in a state of foolish delusion (fr. 25.17-23 MW, although the reading *aasato mega thumōi* is uncertain).⁵⁰ In Bacchylides’ second dithyramb, which almost certainly antedates Sophocles’ play, her liability seems to have been a less complex matter: she was ‘the innocent victim of inscrutable destiny’, and it was ‘invincible divinity’ (*amachos daimōn*) who wove for her a ‘shrewd device of much sorrow’; she was destroyed by ‘far-reaching envy and a dark cloak of the things to come’ when she received the fatal portent from Nessus (Bacchylides 16.23-35 SM).⁵¹ The subtlety of the ethical maneuvering in the Sophoclean version becomes clear in comparison with these hexameter and the lyric versions. His Deianeira is not guilty of premeditated murder, but nor is she an entirely passive victim of delusion or of supernatural machinations or envy.⁵² Having seen Iole, she *decides on her own initiative* to send the robe, and also decides on her own initiative to deliberate and take advice on whether her policy is prudent. But she also decides, on a sudden impulse when Lichas enters, to rescind the impulse towards deliberation and take risk-laden action anyway. Sophocles here displays an unparalleled degree of precision and delicacy in his calibration of tragic characters’ performance as moral agents.

Tragic Deliberation and Democratic Politics

Trachiniae has not often played a significant part in the discussions of the relationship between the Athenian democracy and the tragic drama it produced, a relationship which has been such a dominant feature of the scholarship on the classical theatre over the last two decades. The reason is partly to do with the play's particular content. The myth it enacts has little direct relevance to Athenian state myth, genealogy or ritual; if there is a political culture or civic institution in Trachis, we do not see or hear of them, and we meet neither the Trachinians' leader (perhaps the unnamed guest-friend with whom Deianeira says she is residing at line 40), nor representatives of their citizen body.⁵³ When *Trachiniae* has been discussed in relation to Athenian society, it has therefore almost always been as a source of information about marriage or about the role and position of female slaves.⁵⁴ Over the last three decades much writing about Deianeira has fundamentally been akin to Dorothea Wender's caustic feminist diagnosis, that she is 'a recognizable fifth-century Athenian woman, dependent, domestic, submissive, timid, secretive, 'good', and depressed'.⁵⁵

Yet in the imagination of a community, feminine figures can play symbolic roles that differ from the roles allocated to them in daily life. Within a particular society, the representation of female minds sometimes has more to say about 'referred' or displaced class identity than about the contingent views on gender. It has persuasively argued, for example, that the eighteenth century's dominant ideal of femininity, with its emphasis on feeling and morality, was a powerful factor in establishing a more general middle-class identity. The emergence of female-dominated sentimental literature really demonstrates 'an evolution of a particular ideological construction of a new class identity, displaced into a

discussion of female virtue'.⁵⁶ Perhaps the large number of female deliberators in Greek tragedy might be 'referred' or displaced democratic subjectivities. They are part of what Pat Easterling has called Greek tragedy's 'heroic vagueness', the special idiom created by settings in the distant past and elevated poetic language, which 'enabled problematic questions to be addressed without overt divisiveness' and certainly without creating an art-form in which 'hard questions are avoided or made comfortable because expressed in these glamorous and dignified terms.'⁵⁷

If a performance of *Trachiniae* is considered as a site where the Athenian democratic subject flexed his intellectual muscles, a figure such as Deianeira in *Trachiniae* could be seen a mythical surrogate of the civic agent receiving advice, attempting to deliberate, and coming to a decision. This proposition stands even if the issue that she is deliberating is not so transparently political as, for example, whether or not a man perceived as a traitor should be given a burial (the issue in *Ajax* and *Antigone*). In this sense Deianeira is as much a ventriloquised surrogate of the Athenian *dēmos*, inspecting its own political practices and conduct, as Creon in *Antigone*, or the Atridae in *Ajax*, or Oedipus in *OT*. There have, of course, been some excellent challenges published recently to the idea that there was anything fundamentally 'democratic' about tragedy as an art-form, since it originated in Athens before the democracy was established, and since many of the political concepts it examines are also pertinent to other, undemocratic, city-states.⁵⁸ But the focus on deliberation, entailing audience scrutiny of -- and identification with -- characters who are deliberating about action, constitutes an important way in which Athenian tragedy was certainly 'to

do with' the democracy: in the tyrant Peisistratus' day the characters in tragedy may indeed have deliberated, but the audience that watched them was not the body with decision-making and executive powers – that was Peisistratus himself.

As my co-editor Simon Goldhill has trenchantly put it, the relationship between power and deliberation 'is one of the defining issues of a democratic system -- where questions of political agency, cultural norms, and legal regulation combine in the most fascinating manner.'⁵⁹ This is the reason why the topic of deliberation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* has stimulated interest in political theorists, especially in relation to his views on whether decision-making entities are fundamentally mediating discord or expressing a collective will; Bickford's fascinating study, which draws also on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, argues that what concerns the ancient philosopher most is the 'quality of attention' inherent in the deliberative process. The act of extensive, attentive and thoughtful deliberation is in itself part of the process of forming any political community where power is shared.⁶⁰

The Athenian Council was called the *boulē*, as the place where deliberation took place. Its importance in terms of the decisions made by the city is underlined by the speed with which the oligarchs who took power in 411 ousted the democratically elected bouleutai and took over the bouleuterion to serve as their own centre of power.⁶¹ The *boulē* required no fewer than five hundred citizens to serve, proportionately selected from each deme, and they were replaced every year, by lot (at least from the mid-fifth century):⁶² it 'could thus have contained a fair cross-section of the citizen body'.⁶³ Since no man could serve more than twice in his life (*Ath. Pol.* 62.3), the chances that any particular

citizen would serve at some point in his life (once he had reached the qualifying age) must have been very high, especially after pay was instituted in the later fifth century, apparently to encourage poorer citizens to sit on the Council. There is some evidence that originally only the top three property classes could serve, to the exclusion of the *thetes*, but this qualification for eligibility seems to have been dropped in the later fifth century, or not rigidly enforced.⁶⁴ The Council met almost every day (Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.11), and it considered matters relating not only to the state's finances and the scrutiny of magistrates, but the Athenian cults, festivals, navy, building programme, and care for the sick, disabled, and orphaned. To serve as a *bouleutēs* required accumulating information, assessing past actions and deliberating about future ones *virtually all day, every day*.⁶⁵ The 'quality of attention' required by service on the Council seems breathtaking compared with what is required of politicians, let alone ordinary citizens, today.

Members of the Council sat together in privileged seats at the front of the theatre to watch characters like Deianeira attempt deliberation. But the tragedians' interest in the mechanics and psychology of decision-making was perhaps fed even more by the real-life experience of their Athenian citizen spectators in a place where they were all *always* entitled to gather and not only deliberate but *decide* on policy -- the Assembly. The relevance of the experience of the Assembly to the scene where Deianeira deliberates is expressed by Thucydides in the several scenes in which he describes the citizens being led by strong emotions to take precipitate decisions in the Assembly, with life-or-death consequences, on the spur of the moment. These accounts underline how the

Athenians acquired for themselves the name of ‘mind-changers’ and ‘hasty deciders’ (*metabouloi* and *tachubouloi*, *Acharnians* 632, 630).

Indeed, in the second debate on Mytilene in the mid-420s, Diodotus needed emphatically to fuse the two *gnōmai* ‘deliberate slowly’ and ‘don’t deliberate in anger’ when he opened his response to the bellicose Cleon with the famous statement that the two things most inimical to good counsel are speed and passion (Thuc. 3.42.1). Since they were not characters in a tragedy, on this occasion the Athenians did, fortunately, have the chance to ‘deliberate at night’. Diodotus’ reproof was delivered just the day after the Athenians had taken an outrageously hasty decision to slaughter the entire male population of the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, and within hours had sent a trireme sailing off over the Aegean to carry out the mass execution. The extreme volatility of the demos’ temper is shown by what happened the very next day: after ‘a sudden change of heart’ (*metanoia tis euthus*, 3.36.4), they called a second Assembly. At the end of the second debate, which was of extreme intensity, they voted -- narrowly -- to rescind the measure taken the day before, and managed, more by good luck than good deliberation, to get a second ship to Lesbos in the very nick of time (Thuc. 3.49).

One major topic of the literature of counsel that appears first in comedy centres around what seems to have been already a gnomic expression, the incompetence of the Athenians at deliberation, *dusboulia Athēnaiōn*. Athens had a reputation for failing to make careful plans, but instead trusting to (and often enjoying) good luck. The *locus classicus* is *Clouds* 587-8, ‘They say that poor deliberation is inherent in this city; it is the gods who make better all the affairs

in which you have erred'. This is repeated, with the introduction, 'People in older days had a saying...' at *Eccl.* 473. And it is a scholion on the latter passage that records an ancient tradition explaining how the Athenians came to be so *dusbouloi*: when Poseidon failed to be selected patron of Athens, in his wrath he called down a curse on the city that would make it deliberate badly. Since Athena could not annul the curse, she compensated for it instead by granting Athens a special gift: things which the city planned badly would nevertheless turn out well.

The aetiological narrative about Athena and Poseidon may have been invented slightly later in order to explain a prevalent proverb, although the same scholiast mentions Eupolis in connection with the tradition, and Rogers argued plausibly on the basis of Chremes' prayer to Athena for good luck at *Eccl.* 476 that it was clearly known by the early fourth century.⁶⁶ But the image of Poseidon, sulking because things had not gone his way, is a vivid crystallization of the problem of how to deal with dissent and dissenters in a democracy. Diodotus wisely insists that the *demos* needs to consider all viewpoints, however much they may dislike them (Thuc. 3.43). Subsequently, most ancient discourse on deliberation often refers to the difficulties deliberators have in listening to unpalatable opinions or information, just as Creon's terrifying countenance prevents his subjects from speaking honestly to him (*Ant.* 690-1). One of the topics in literature on deliberation is its relationship to everyone's equal right to speak their mind freely, or *parrhēsia*. Philodemus regarded *parrhēsia* as an important topic under the rubric of the deliberative type of rhetoric.⁶⁷ One of the arguments in favour of drinking while deliberating is in Plutarch (*Quaest. Conv.* 7.10 = *Mor.* 715 F), where wine is claimed to be effective at producing *parrhēsia*

and as a result, the truth; the importance of freedom of speech to good deliberation is already to be found in an unattributed fragment of comedy (fr. adesp. 890 KA), where the speaker asserts that the wisest advisor that people deliberating about major issues can have is *parrhēsia*.

In tragedy, dissent is often articulated in scenes of dialogue, especially stichomythia. But the negative examples of deliberative activity that *Trachiniae* offers are thrown into sharper relief by the dearth of adversarial stichomythia until the appearance of Heracles, long after the seeds of death have been sown. There is no formal debate scene, and the only two sections of stichomythia involving conflict are between Heracles and Hyllus, over the immolation and the marriage to Iole.⁶⁸ In Trachis, women delay deliberating until it is too late and take advice from slaves. They fail both to discuss things with the adult males in their family, and to consult disinterested specialist advisors (why has Deianeira not seen fit to talk to a diviner?) They neglect to gather important information, question arguments from probability, test hypotheses, and listen to the viewpoints of witnesses. Lichas feels unable to speak an unpalatable truth, and the scenes where Deianeira begins to consider alternative actions, with Hyllus and the chorus, are both cut short before any contentious issues can be exposed. In *Trachiniae*, therefore, the problems to do with deliberation encompass nearly *every* topic covered in all the literature that discusses decision-making to have survived from ancient Greece.

The Metaphysical Consequences

The Athenians deliberated badly but enjoyed good luck: most tragic decision-makers, including Deianeira, deliberate badly but suffer *bad* luck. Greek tragedy could theoretically have pursued a different route in which good deliberators suffered solely – and therefore more unfairly – on account of ill fortune, like Job in the Old Testament. But that did not happen. The Greek tragedians seem to have chosen, by and large, to opt for bad deliberators meeting bad luck, or, rather, for deliberators who are put in a position *through pressure of time and emotion* which makes the incompetence of deliberations inevitable. The pressure of time is often expressed through metaphors placing the deliberator on the edge of a razor, or in the pan of a set of scales, which are not comfortable places from which to review alternatives thoroughly (see e.g. *Antigone* 996, *Trach.* 82).

The underlying ideological premise here is double and contradictory. This tragic vision suggests that there is a very great deal about human life that can not be controlled even by the most competent of deliberators. But this vision is far from fatalistic. It shows deliberators failing to take the most obvious precautions and establish the most crucial facts through enquiry, as well as failing to consult relevant parties and allow time to calibrate likelihood. But this procedure allows a fissure to open up in the action suggesting that, with more careful thought, many even of the great catastrophes of myth could have been averted even at the last minute, or, at the least, their consequences in terms of collateral damage ameliorated. The democratic sense of authority – that the Athenians had seized control of their own destiny – thus manifests itself, however highly mediated by the vocabulary of myth and the form and sensibility of tragic drama, even when Deianeira so disastrously deliberates. Greek tragedy may be metaphysically

pessimistic, but it is, socio-politically speaking, suggestive of a self-confident, optimistic, intellectually artarkic and morally autonomous Athenian democratic subject.

In final twist to the tale, however, the philosophical depth of *Trachiniae* is surely one of the reasons why it proved popular far *beyond* democratic Athens in antiquity. Besides quotations in ancient authors, its continuing presence in the cultural imagination is proved beyond all doubt by the fact that it was adapted into the imperial tragedy *Hercules Oetaeus* attributed to Seneca. Deianeira's grave was pointed out in Pausanias' time (2.23.5); the encounter between Hercules, Nessus and Deianeira was beautifully painted as a mural at Pompeii; the story told in *Trachiniae* seems to have been incorporated in the images on the reliefs at the theatre at the North African theatre of Sabratha.⁶⁹ The story of Deianeira, Achelous, Heracles and Nessus was danced in the popular imperial medium of pantomime (Libanius *Or.* 64.67).⁷⁰ This play could be exported without difficulty far beyond the immediate cultural context of Athenian democratic deliberation, and this versatility and staying power owed more to its Metaphysics than to its Ethics.⁷¹

The cult of the divine or semi-divine Heracles/Hercules was one of the most widely recognized across the Greco-Roman world, easily transportable to every theatre where drama was produced. The ending of the play is, however, mysterious, and arguably contains no overt reference to the worship of its dying hero in the future. Some scholars have even denied that the audience will have made any connection at all with the myth of Heracles' apotheosis and the tradition of his cult on Oeta. But Pat Easterling has always insisted that an

exclusive focus on the sociological dimensions of tragedy can lead us to forget the metaphysical significance of scenes involving heroes who had a continuing life in cult.⁷² In subtle words, she has suggested that we simply can't ignore the cultic reverberations that the play will have stimulated even in its original, 5th-century audience:

What we cannot tell from our extant evidence is whether by the date of the first production of *Trachiniae*...the story of Heracles' death on the pyre was already associated in most people's minds with the well-known story of his apotheosis... The silence of play about what was going to happen on Mt. Oeta no doubt left room for different responses on the part of the original audience, depending on the flavour of their piety or their view of life, just as it has left modern critics in a state of perpetual disagreement. There can be no authoritative version of 'what happened next', because the play's design does not allow it. But if it is right to see in the story of the pyre on Oeta an ironic allusion to something familiar in contemporary cult and belief outside the frame of reference of the play then there is a suggestion, however mysterious and obscure, that *some* significance should be attached to the manner of Heracles' death...⁷³

To any ancient spectator sensitive to the idea of Heracles' divinity, *Trachiniae* will always have suggested that the metaphysical imperative of the establishment of his cult partly resulted from the ineptitude of deliberating brains on the human level. Schlegel may have seen no sign of Sophocles' 'profound mind' in

Trachiniae. But surely the tragic paradox -- that the inevitability of the divine order of things is inseparable from the contingency of incompetence in the mortal sphere -- is surely lent, by the play's compromised deliberations, one of its most profound expressions.

¹ Winnington-Ingram (1980) 73-90.

² This essay is dedicated to Pat Easterling. As someone temperamentally prone to the 'passion and haste' that Diodotus said were the enemies of good counsel (see below), I have learned a great deal from her not only about ancient Greek literature, but also about the value of *euboulia*.

³ In her Inaugural Housman Lecture at UCL: Easterling (2005) n.p. I am grateful to Felix Budelmann for this reference.

⁴ Quoted from an interview published in *Time* 15th December 1975, 72, by Leinieks (1982) 4 n.1.

⁵ See e.g. *Letters* (1953) 183: the chorus, he says 'rejoins that she can only act by experiment. The hint is is enough. She will act.'

⁶ See Solmsen (1985).

⁷ See the detailed discussion of Heiden (1989) 91.

⁸ Segal (1995) 29.

⁹ Conacher (1997), 22.

¹⁰ O'Connor (1923) 8.

¹¹ Schlegel (1846), 109.

¹² See e.g. Woddard (1966).

¹³ Just two examples from the United Kingdom alone: Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Deianeira*, performed on radio in 1999 and published in her *Plays Two* (London 2002), and Martin Crimp's stage play *Cruel and Tender*, first performed in 2004 by the Young Vic and published as Crimp (2004).

¹⁴ Heiden (1989).

¹⁵ Pound (1969) 66.

¹⁶ See e.g. Lawrence (1978), Roselli (1981), Kane (1988).

¹⁷ Hoey 309.

¹⁸ Opstelten (1952) 234.

¹⁹ Schofield (1999) ch. 1.

²⁰ See e.g. Beer (2004), Rutherford (1982).

²¹ See Hall (2008a) ch. 3 and (2008b).

²² Stevens (1933) 104.

²³ See Sewell-Rutter (2005).

²⁴ Nussbaum (1986) especially chs. 1-3 and 9-13.

²⁵ See Hall (2004) 77-9.

²⁶ Langer (1953) 215, 307, 258-79, 307.

²⁷ See Goldhill (1990).

²⁸ Sansone 27, 33.

²⁹ Sansone 67-78.

³⁰ Hall (2005).

³¹ The tradition as recorded in the first ‘hypothesis’ to *Antigone*.

³² Heiden (1989) 6-7.

³³ See Fowler (1987); McWhorter (1910)

³⁴ *Rhet.* 1.1357a 36-b 29. See Baldwin (1924), 14-15.

³⁵ Diogenes Laertius 2.122; for the other literary testimonia on Simon see Hock (1976); for the vase from what seems to have been Simon’s workshop, see Camp (1986), 145-7.

³⁶ Diogenes Laertius 5.24 = Rose (1886), 6, fr. 1.88. Aristippus is also credited with a treatise addressed to the would-be advisor: Diog. Laertius 2.84.

³⁷ For an overview of these definitions and models see the accessible study of Tiberius (2000).

³⁸ Philemon fr. 177 Kock; not included amongst the fragments assigned to Philemon in KA.

³⁹ See Hall (1997) 110-23.

⁴⁰ Stevens (1933) 105.

⁴¹ See Rhodes (1985) 1 and n.3, and further below, pp. 000.

⁴² See Stevens (1933) 109. and Handley (2007) 98-100.

⁴³ Whitman (1951), 111 and 114, correctly saw that thinking about Deianeira in terms of passing moral judgment was to miss the point; the real question is her intellectual incompetence, suggested as early as the first few lines of the prologue, in which she delivers a powerfully contradictory statement.

⁴⁴ Heiden (1989) 32.

⁴⁵ Hall (1997) 103-10.

⁴⁶ For an interesting discussion of the relationship between *Trachiniae* and the *Odyssey*, see Davidson (2003).

⁴⁷ Halleran (1988).

⁴⁸ Easterling (1973).

⁴⁹ E.g. Kirkwood (1941) and (1951) 110; McCall (1972).

⁵⁰ Carawan (2000) 194.

⁵¹ Carawan (2009) 197.

⁵² One of the few critics to have sensed the complexity of Deianeira's mental processes in the play is Webster (1936) 97-9, although I do not agree with his overall picture of her character.

⁵³ See the distinctions drawn between the ways that different tragedies engage with or offer 'images of the community' in Easterling (1997c) 28-9.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Beer (2004), especially 81.

⁵⁵ Wender (1974) 2.

⁵⁶ Ballaster (1996) 280 and n.28; see Hall and Macintosh (2005) 91-2.

⁵⁷ Easterling (1997c), 25.

⁵⁸ See above pp. 000 and Hall (2006) 187-8.

⁵⁹ Goldhill (1999).

⁶⁰ Bickford (1996).

⁶¹ Thuc. 8.69-70.1; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 32.3; see the fascinating remarks in Shear (2007) 102-3.

⁶² Ehodes (1985) 4, 6-7.

⁶³ Rhodes (1985), 4. One scholiast on Aeschines 3.4 described the Council, indeed, as a ‘mini-polis’ (*mikra polis*).

⁶⁴ See Rhodes (1985) 2-3.

⁶⁵ The superb study by Peter Rhodes (1985) remains the most important single publication on the Athenian boule. It is surprising that words with *boul-* stems do not merit any discussion in the lexical examination of terms to do with knowledge and understanding in Sophocles included in Coray (1993).

⁶⁶ See Rogers (1902), 72-3. But the bad planning inherent in Athenian political culture is certainly present in Isocrates (8.57): ‘How, if the Athenians deliberate so badly, it is asked are they secure, and possessed of no less power than any other city? And he replies that their adversaries are as unwise as they’. Similarly, in Demosthenes 4.39-40, Athens is compared to the ‘foreign boxers’ whose hands are always where the last blow struck, in the way that it follows in its deliberations always just on the heels of events.

⁶⁷ Philodemus, *Peri Parrhēsiās* col. 13, ed. Olivieri (1914) 52.

⁶⁸ as the fascinating study of Pfeiffer-Petersen (1996), 170-5 reveals.

⁶⁹ See Caputo (1959), plate 44 fig. 77, with the connection he makes with *Trachiniae* on p. 20.

⁷⁰ On which see Hall and Wyles (2009).

⁷¹ For the relationship between these two in Greek tragedy generally, and with a focus on female suffering particularly, see Hall (2007d).

⁷² E.g. Easterling (1997c) 36-7.

⁷³ Easterling (1982) 10.