laughing-stock. And infanticide is the form the revenge must inevitably take, for that alone can cause the supreme agony (793 ff.).

Medea herself realizes that this revenge will result in her own annihilation as a human being, and yet she admits in 1013 ff: 'The gods and I, in a kind of madness, have planned it so.'[26] In a sense Euripides' heroine perishes with the children, much the way Anouilh presents it in the final scene of his brilliant version. The granddaughter of Helios may stand in triumph on her dragon-chariot, but Medea the woman is dead.

23

THE *HIPPOLYTUS* OF EURIPIDES

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The usual critical treatment of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides is an analysis in terms of character, an analysis which, whatever its particular emphasis, is based on the Aristotelian conception of tragic character and the relation between character and reversal of fortune. In the case of the *Hippolytus*, this analysis, far from arriving at a generally accepted line of interpretation, has produced nothing but disagreement. Is Hippolytus the tragic hero,[1] destroyed by an excess of chastity, a fanatical devotion to the goddess Artemis? Or is Phaedra the tragic heroine,[2] and the conflict in her soul the tragic conflict of the play? The claims of Theseus should not be neglected; his part is as long as Phaedra's, and the Aristotelian word *hamartia* is used to describe his conduct by the goddess Artemis (1334).

Such divergence of views is natural in a play which develops so many characters so fully; though literary statistics are distasteful, the size of the parts in this play (an important statistic for the actors, at any rate) shows how difficult the problem of emphasis is. Hippolytus speaks 271 lines,[3] Phaedra and Theseus 187 apiece, and, surprisingly enough, the Nurse has more lines than either Phaedra or Theseus: 216.[4] The attempt to make Phaedra the central figure of the play seems perverse – why not the Nurse? She too has her conduct described as *hamartia*[5] – and even Hippolytus is not a central figure on the scale of Medea, who speaks 562 lines in a play of similar length, or Oedipus, who has 698 in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a play which is a little longer. The search for a central tragic figure in this play is a blind alley. When the action is so equably divided among four characters, the unity of the work cannot depend on any one, but must lie in the nature of the relationship of all four. In the *Hippolytus*, the significant relationship between the characters is the situation in which they are placed. It is exactly the same situation for

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each of them, one which imposes a choice between the same alternatives – silence and speech.

And we are shown that their choice is not free. Aristotle's comments on the tragic character assume, to some extent, that the human will is free to choose. But the freedom of the human will and the importance of the human choice are both, in the prologue of the *Hippolytus*, expressly denied. In no other Greek tragedy is the predetermination of human action by an external power made so emphatically clear. In the *Oresteia*, where each word and action is the fulfillment of the will of Zeus, the relation between human action and divine will is presented always in mysterious terms; the will of Zeus is an inscrutable factor in the background which is clearly revealed only at the close of the trilogy. And while Clytemnestra is on stage in the *Agamemnon*, we are not distracted by any feeling that her purpose as a human being is not decisive; in fact, it is the most important thing in the play. Sophocles' Oedipus has fulfilled and is still fulfilling the oracles of Apollo, but it is Oedipus, a human being making human decisions, who commands our undivided attention. And significantly, the prophecy of Apollo is presented as exactly that, a prophecy and not a determining factor; Apollo predicts, but does no more – it is Oedipus who acts.

Both the *Oedipus* and the *Agamemnon* may be ultimately, in logical (though not necessarily religious) terms, determinist, but dramatically they emphasize the freedom of the human will. But the *Hippolytus* begins with a powerful presentation of an external force which not only predicts but also determines; Aphrodite tells us not only what will happen but announces her responsibility and explains her motives. It is a complete explanation and one which (even if it were not confirmed in every particular by another goddess at the end of the play) we are bound to accept. Aphrodite is one of the powers which rule the universe; and though what she says may shock us, we must accept it as true.

The play, from this point on, should be simple, the unrolling of an inevitable pattern. But Euripides has a surprise in store. As we watch the human beings of the drama, unconscious of the goddess's purpose, work out her will, we are struck by their apparent freedom. In no other Greek tragedy do so many people change their minds about so many important matters. Here again Euripides is departing sharply from the procedure of his fellow dramatists. Clytemnestra's purpose in the *Agamemnon*, concealed from the chorus and her victim by the resolution of that male-thinking brain, dangerously close to the ironic surface of her speech of welcome, triumphantly achieved when she stands over Agamemnon's body – this inflexible purpose is the straight line along which the whole play moves. Oedipus' determination to know the truth,

carried relentlessly to the brink of the abyss and beyond, is the line of development of the greatest plot in western tragedy. But in the *Hippolytus* the line of development of the characters' purposes is a zigzag. Phaedra resolves to die without revealing her love, and then makes a long speech about it to the chorus. The Nurse urges her to reveal it, regrets her action when she hears her mistress speak, and then returns to urge Phaedra on to further lengths of speech. And Hippolytus, when he learns of Phaedra's passion, first announces his intention to tell Theseus the truth and then changes his mind and keeps silent.

'In this world, second thoughts are best,' says the Nurse (436). Three of the principal characters have second thoughts (the Nurse, in fact, has not only second but third and fourth thoughts); the play makes an ironic juxtaposition of the maximum dramatic complication of individual choice with a predetermined and announced result. The choice of one alternative then the other, the human mind wavering between moral decisions, accepting and rejecting in a complicated pattern which emphasizes the apparent freedom and unpredictability of the human will – all this is the fulfillment of Aphrodite's purpose.

The choice between speech and silence is the situation which places the four principal characters in significant relationship and makes an artistic unity of the play. But it does much more. The poet has made the alternations and combinations of choice complicated. Phaedra chooses first silence then speech; the Nurse speech then silence, then speech, then silence; Hippolytus speech then silence; the chorus silence; and Theseus speech. The resultant pattern seems to represent the exhaustion of the possibilities of the human will. The choice between silence and speech is more than a unifying factor in the play; it is a situation with universal implications, a metaphor for the operation of human free will in all its complicated aspects. And the context in which it is set demonstrates the nonexistence of the human free will, the futility of the moral choice.

The goddess Aphrodite presents the issue and announces the outcome. Her preliminary work is done (23); the moment has arrived for the consummation of her design, the punishment of Hippolytus (21). But there is still one recalcitrant detail, Phaedra's determination to remain silent. 'She, poor woman, is dying in silence. No one in the house shares the secret of her disease' (39–40). But this last obstacle will be removed; things will not fall out this way (41). The truth will come out (42). And Theseus will kill his son.

In the scene between Phaedra and the Nurse, we are shown the first stage of the accomplishment of Aphrodite's purpose – Phaedra's change from silence to speech. Her words are the involuntary speech of delirium,

the breakout of her suppressed subconscious desires. But this delirium is also the working of the external force, Aphrodite, who predicted this development and now brings it about before our eyes. Phaedra's wild fantasies make no sense to the Nurse and the chorus, but their meaning is clear to the audience. Her yearning for the poplar and the grassy meadow, for the chase and the taming of colts on the sand, is a hysterical expression of her desire for Hippolytus (210-11).

The Nurse calls her outburst madness (214), that is, meaningless speech, and Phaedra, when she comes to her senses, calls it madness too (241), but in a different sense, passion. She has revealed nothing, but she has for the first time put her desire into words, and broken her long silence. Her passion has overcome her judgment (240); in her case the choice between silence and speech is also a choice between judgment and passion. In the next few lines she defines her dilemma, poses the alternatives, and sees a third course open to her (247-49). To be right in judgment, that is, in her case, to remain silent, is agony; passion, in her case, speech, is evil. Better to make no choice and perish – to perish unconscious of the alternatives, to abandon judgment and choice, to surrender free will.[6] This is what she comes to in the end, but she has not yet reached such desperate straits. She is still in the no man's land between the alternatives of speech and silence, for her delirious outburst has not revealed her secret to the Nurse. But it has brought her a momentary relief and thus weakened her determination. She is now less able to withstand the final assault on her silence which the Nurse, at the request of the chorus, proceeds to make.

The Nurse has little hope of success; she has tried before and failed – 'Phaedra keeps silent about it all' (273), she tells the chorus. But she makes a last attempt. The essence of her practical viewpoint can be seen in her reproach to Phaedra when she gets no answer; for her there is no problem which cannot be resolved by speech. 'Well, why are you silent? You should not be silent, child. Either you should refute me, if I say something wrong, or, if I say what is right, you should agree with my words' (297-99). She gets no answer still, and in an angry reminder to Phaedra that she is ruining her children's future, she mentions, without realizing its significance, the name of Hippolytus. This fortuitous thrust provokes a cry of agony and a plea for silence. 'I beseech you, in future, be silent about this man,' (312).

The Nurse does not realize the reason for Phaedra's agitation, but she senses the moment of weakness and presses her advantage. She now makes a frontal attack on Phaedra's silence; throwing herself at her mistress' feet, she seizes her hand and knees. It is the position of the suppliant, the extreme expression of emotional and physical pressure

combined, and it is enough to break Phaedra's weakened resolution. 'I will grant your request,' (335). 'My part is silence now,' replies the Nurse, 'and yours is speech,' (336).

Phaedra finds speech difficult. She invokes the names of her mother and sister, examples of unhappy love, and associates herself with them. But she finds it hard to speak plainly. 'If only you could say to me what I must say myself' (345). This is her wish, to break silence and yet not speak, and she actually manages to make it come true. In a dialectic maneuver worthy of Socrates himself, she assumes the role of questioner and makes the Nurse supply the answers and repeat the name Hippolytus, this time in a context which leaves no doubt about its significance. 'You have said it,' she says to the Nurse, 'you did not hear it from me' (352).

This revelation is more than the Nurse had bargained for. She who saw only two attitudes toward speech for Phaedra – rebuttal or agreement – can adopt neither herself; she has no advice to give, no solution to propose. She is reduced to despair and silence; she who reproached Phaedra for wishing to die now resolves on death herself. 'I shall find release from life in death. Farewell. I am no longer living' (356-57). The full meaning of her words to Phaedra is now clear to us and to her. 'My part is silence now. Speech from this point on is yours.'

Speech is Phaedra's part now, and she pours out her heart to the chorus. The relief of speech, which first forced itself on her in a delirious outburst, is now the product of conscious choice. She tells the chorus the path her judgment followed (391): first of all, to hide her sickness in silence (394). But this proved insufficient; more was needed, to subdue her passion by self-control (398-99). And when this failed, she resolved on a third course, to die. She is still resolved to die; her change from silence to speech has made no difference to the situation, for she can depend on the silence of the chorus and the Nurse. But she has had the comfort of speech, told her love and despair to a sympathetic audience, and what is more, an admiring one. 'Honour? Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday,' says Falstaff, and this is the essence of Phaedra's dilemma too. She has resolved to die in silence to save her honor. But this very silence means that she cannot enjoy her honor while living, and it will not even be appreciated after her death. No one will ever know the force she overcame and the heroic nature of her decision. Death in silence involved an isolation hard for any human being to bear, and she makes it clear that her desire to be appreciated was one of the forces driving her to speech. 'May it be my lot', she says, 'not to pass unnoticed when I act nobly, and not to have many witnesses when my acts are disgraceful' (403-04).

Now she can act nobly, die rather than yield to passion, and yet not pass unnoticed. The chorus, the representatives of the women of Troezen,[7] recognize and praise her nobility (431-32). Phaedra can have her cake and eat it too. But it is not destined to end this way, as Aphrodite said in the prologue.

For the Nurse now intervenes again. Her passion and despair silenced her and drove her from the scene when she realized the nature of Phaedra's sickness. But she has changed her mind. She has now rejected silence, which abandoned Phaedra to her death, and chosen speech, which is designed to save her life. 'In human life', she says, 'second thoughts are somehow best' (435-36).

Phaedra's silence was judgment; her speech was at first passion. But in the Nurse's case these relationships are reversed. Her passion, despair, drove her to silence, and her speech now is the product of judgment. It is speech (*logos*) in both senses of the Greek word, speech and reason; the nurse here represents the application of human reason to a human problem.

The 'reason' behind the Nurse's lines is one stripped bare of any restraint of morality or religion, though it uses the terms of both. The speech is a masterpiece of sophistic rhetoric, in which each argument points toward the physical consummation of Phaedra's love. But this is a conclusion which the nurse is clever enough not to put into words. She leaves the implied conclusion to work on Phaedra's weakened resolution and contents herself, to conclude her speech, with specific advice in which every phrase is an ambiguity: 'bear your love (as you have so far)' or 'dare to love' (476), 'subdue your love (as you have so far)' or 'make it subject to you, turn it to your own good' (477), 'incantations and charmed words' (478) to cure her of her passion[8] or to make Hippolytus love her. The Nurse is probing to see what effect her speech will have on Phaedra; she does not dare commit herself fully yet.

She gets a violent reaction. These are too fair-seeming words (487); Phaedra asks for advice that will save her honor, not please her ears. But she has made an important admission; the Nurse's words did please her ears (488). The Nurse sees the weakness in Phaedra's defense and pushes hard. She speaks bluntly and clearly now. 'You need not graceful words [so much for honor] but the man' (490-91). This is plain speaking, and Phaedra replies with an angry and agonized plea for silence (498). But the Nurse presses her advantage and pushes the verbalization of Phaedra's suppressed wishes to a further stage; she has already mentioned 'the man', and now she invokes 'the deed' (501) – the act of adultery itself.[9] This word brings out into the open the consummation which Phaedra rejected with such horror in her speech to the chorus (413-18),

but now it is attractive as well as repulsive – like love itself (348) – and Phaedra now reveals that if the Nurse continues to put evil in a fair light (505), she will come to it and be consumed in what she now flees from (506).

The Nurse is clever enough to return to ambiguities, the love charms (509), which will relieve her sickness without disgrace or damage to the mind. The Nurse thus returns to her original proposal; this is the same circular movement of her earlier interview with Phaedra, in which the name 'Hippolytus' was the point of departure and return. And here, as there, the closing of the circle with the repetition makes clear the meaning of the words. Phaedra must know now, after all that has been said, what the Nurse means by 'love charms'. But the ambiguous phrasing is a triumph of psychology on the Nurse's part. She remembers how Phaedra tried to evade responsibility by a verbal fiction before – 'If only you could say to me what I must say myself' and 'You have said it. You did not hear it from me' – and she gives her mistress the same opportunity again. And Phaedra takes it. Her question is not 'What will be the effect of this love charm?' but 'Is it an ointment or something to drink?' (516). She has abandoned her critical intelligence and surrendered control over her own choice; she is now following the third and most desperate of the three courses she saw before her. 'To be right in judgment is agony, passion is evil, best of all is to perish without judgment or choice.'

That she surrenders control of her actions here is made clear and also plausible by the relationship between Phaedra and the Nurse which the words and tone of the next few lines suggest. She is now a child again, and the Nurse does for the grown woman what she had always done for the child – evades her questions, makes light of her fears, relieves her of responsibility, and decides for her. 'I don't know', she says, in answer to Phaedra's question about the nature of the love charms. 'Don't ask questions, child. Just let it do you good' (517). To Phaedra's expression of fear that her secret will be revealed to Hippolytus, the nurse replies, 'Leave that to me, daughter. I'll take care of that' (521). With a prayer to Aphrodite (523), 'co-operate with me', and a statement that she will tell her thoughts to 'friends within the house', the Nurse goes into the palace. And Phaedra lets her go. She has gone through the cycle of conscious choice, first silence, then speech, and come at last to abandon choice all together and entrust her destiny to another. And the result will be, as she said herself, destruction.

For that result she does not have long to wait. 'Silence' (565), is the word with which she follows the closing line of the choral stasimon to open the next scene. She is listening to what is happening inside the house, where Hippolytus is shouting at the Nurse. What Phaedra both feared and longed for has come true; Hippolytus knows of her love.

The opening lines of the ensuing dialogue show Hippolytus in his turn confronted with the same choice, between silence and speech. He must choose between telling Theseus what he has heard, and remaining silent, as he has sworn to do. His first reaction is a passionate announcement that he will speak, an appeal to earth and sun to witness what he has just heard (601-2). To the Nurse's plea for silence (603), he replies, 'Impossible. What I have heard is dreadful. I cannot keep silence' (604). This impulse to speak is, as in Phaedra's case, passion overriding judgment, but the passion which inspires him is not the same. Behind Phaedra's delirious words and subsequent conscious surrender to the Nurse's questioning, we can see the power of Aphrodite working in her. But Hippolytus' outburst is the shocked and incredulous reaction of the virgin mind, the working of Artemis in him. And in his case, as in Phaedra's, the passionate impulse endangers the chief objective of the conscious mind; Phaedra's speech endangers her honor, that *eukleia* which is her life's aim,[10] and Hippolytus' speech endangers his highest ambition, reverence, *eusebeia*,[11] for it involves breaking the oath he swore to the Nurse. Though they make their choices in different order (Phaedra choosing first silence, then speech; Hippolytus first speech, then silence), the parallel is striking. And the agent who brings about the change of mind is in each case the same, the Nurse.

The connection between the two situations is emphasized not only verbally and thematically but also visually. For the Nurse now throws herself at the feet of Hippolytus, as she did at Phaedra's, and clasps his hand and knees, as she did hers. The supreme gesture of supplication is repeated, to meet with the same initial resistance and final compliance. But this time she begs not for speech but for silence.

Hippolytus rejects her request with the same argument she herself had used against Phaedra's silence. 'If the matter is good', he says, 'it will be better still when published' (610) – a line which recalls what the Nurse had said to Phaedra, 'Then you will be even more honored if you tell' (332). Hippolytus launches on his passionate denunciation of women. The violence of his speech relieves the passion which made him ignore his oath, and he ends his speech with a promise to keep silence (660). He will respect the oath. 'Don't forget this, woman,' he says to the Nurse, 'it is my reverence which saves you' (666). Hippolytus too changes his mind: 'in this world second thoughts are somehow wiser.'

But Phaedra's situation is desperate. She does not believe that the disgust and hatred revealed in Hippolytus' speech will remain under control – 'He will speak against us to his father,' she says (690) – and even if she could be certain of Hippolytus' silence, she is not the woman to face Theseus with dissimulation. She wondered, in her long speech to

the chorus, how the adulteress could look her husband in the face (415-16), and even if she had the necessary hardness, the situation would be made difficult, to say the least, by Hippolytus' announced intention to watch her at it (661-62). Now she must die, as she intended from the first, but she can no longer die in silence. That would no longer be death with honor (687-88). Speech has brought her to this pass, and in order to die and protect her reputation she now needs more speech. 'Now I need new words,' she says (688).

'May I not pass unnoticed when I act nobly,' she said in the beginning, 'nor have many witnesses when I act disgracefully' (403-4). She got the first half of her wish – the chorus was witness to her noble resolution to die in silence – but the second half was not granted. Hippolytus is a witness to her weakness, and he must be silenced. To this motive for action against him is added the hatred of the rejected woman who has heard every word of his ugly speech.[12] The 'new words' which she finds, the letter to Theseus accusing Hippolytus of an attempt on her virtue, will save her reputation and satisfy her hatred. They will guarantee the ineffectiveness of Hippolytus' speech, if speak he does, and they will also destroy him.

But there are other witnesses to be silenced too, the chorus. She asks them to hide in silence what they have heard (712), and they agree. They bind themselves to silence by an oath. Thus the chorus, like the three principal characters so far seen, chooses between the same two alternatives, and seals its choice, silence, with speech of the most powerful and binding kind, an oath. The chorus will not change its mind.

The preliminaries are now over, and the stage is set for Hippolytus' destruction. Phaedra commits suicide, and Theseus finds her letter. What happens now, whether Aphrodite's purpose will be fulfilled or fail, whether Hippolytus will live or die, depends on whether Theseus chooses silence or speech. He does not keep us waiting long. 'I cannot hold it inside the gates of my mouth,' he says (882-83). But it is not ordinary speech. By the gift conferred on him by his father, Poseidon, he can speak, in certain circumstances, with a power that is reserved for gods alone – his wish, expressed in speech, becomes fact. In his mouth, at the moment, speech has the power of life and death. And he uses it to kill his son. 'Father Poseidon, you gave me once three curses. With one of these, wipe out my son' (887-89).

Here the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle of free will is fitted into place to complete the picture of Aphrodite's purpose fulfilled. And Theseus' curse is at the same time a demonstration of the futility of the alternative which the second thoughts of Phaedra, Hippolytus, and the Nurse have suggested. 'Second thoughts are somehow wiser' – they were not for

these three. Perhaps first thoughts are best. But Theseus is the one person in the play for whom second thoughts would have been wiser, and he gives himself no time to have them. He acts immediately, without stopping to examine the case or consider alternatives; to abandon judgment and perish – Phaedra's last desperate course – is Theseus' first impulsive action.

The alternatives before these human beings – first and second thoughts, passion and judgment, silence and speech[13] – are chosen and rejected in a complicated pattern which shows the independent operation of five separate human wills producing a result desired by none of them, the consummation of Aphrodite's purpose. The fact that the moral alternatives are represented by silence and speech is not merely a brilliant device which connects and contrasts the situations of the different characters; it is also an emphatic statement of the universality of the action. It makes the play an ironical comment on a fundamental idea, the idea that man's power of speech, which distinguishes him from the other animals, is the faculty which gives him the conception and power of moral choice in the first place.

The Greek commonplace is most clearly set forth in a famous passage of Aristotle's *Politics* (1.1.10). 'Man alone of the animals possesses speech. Mere voice can, it is true, indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore it is possessed by the other animals as well . . . but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful and therefore also the right and the wrong: for it is the special property of man, in distinction from the other animals, that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and other moral qualities.[14]

It is clear that Euripides was familiar with the idea, for he makes at least one ironical reference to the contrast between man, who has speech, and the animals, which do not. Hippolytus, in his furious invective, wishes that women could be provided with dumb animals instead of servants like the Nurse. 'Animals with bite instead of voice should be housed with them, so that women could neither speak to anyone nor get speech back in return' (646–48). Here he wishes that speaking beings could be made dumb, but in his own moment of trial and agony before Theseus he reverses his wish, and begs an inanimate object, the house, to speak in his defense. 'House, if only you could somehow send forth a voice and bear witness . . . ' (1074–75).

Speech is what distinguishes man from the other animals. But in the *Hippolytus* its role is not simply to point out the distinction between right and wrong. It is presented not as the instrument which makes possible the conception of moral choice and expresses moral alternatives, but as an explosive force which, once released, cannot be restrained and

creates universal destruction. 'To what length will speech go?' (342) asks the Nurse, when she has finally succeeded in opening Phaedra's lips. It goes far enough to ruin all of them. It assumes many forms: Phaedra's delirium, the Nurse's cynical argument, Hippolytus' invective, Phaedra's letter, Theseus' curse – and in all these forms it is the instrument of Aphrodite's will.

The *Hippolytus* is a terrible demonstration of the meaninglessness of the moral choice and its medium, speech. But it is not a mechanical demonstration; the unifying and meaningful situation is the key to the play, but that does not mean that character is unimportant. The demonstration is in fact powerful precisely because the choices and alternations of choice made by the human beings are in each case the natural expression of the individual character. As has often been remarked, if the prologue were removed, the action would still be plausible. The external directing force works not against but through the characteristic thoughts and impulses of the characters involved. But the brilliant delineation of character in the *Hippolytus* does more than motivate the action plausibly. The characters, like the situation, have a larger dimension of meaning than the purely dramatic; they are individual examples which illustrate the fundamental proposition implied in the situation – the futility of human choice and action.

The four characters involved are very different: different in purpose, action, and suffering. But they all go through the same process. Action in each case, far from fulfilling conscious purpose, brings about the opposite of that purpose. The individual purpose is the expression of a view of human life and a way of living it; in each case this view is exposed, by the individual disaster, as inadequate. And the view of human life implies, in turn, an attitude toward the gods; these attitudes are in each case proved unsound. The human beings of the world of the *Hippolytus* live out their lives in the darkness of total ignorance of the nature of the universe and of the powers which govern it.

Phaedra's purpose and way of life can be summed up in one word, the word which is so often on her lips: *eukleēs*, 'honorable'.[15] She has a code of honor proper for a princess, an aristocratic and unintellectual ideal. From first to last this is Phaedra's dominant motive, except for the fatal moment when she surrenders her initiative to the Nurse. It is to preserve this honor that she takes her original decision to die in silence; to enjoy appreciation of her honor she indulges in the luxury of speech to the chorus; and to rescue her honorable reputation from the consequences she ruins Hippolytus and brings guilt and sorrow on Theseus. But it is all to no purpose. In the end her conspiracy of silence is a failure and her honor lost. Hippolytus and the chorus keep the oaths

that they have sworn and remain silent; the house cannot speak; but the goddess Artemis coldly reveals the truth to Theseus, who learns not only that his wife had a guilty passion for Hippolytus but also that she has tricked him into killing his innocent son. Phaedra's attempt to save her honor has proved an expensive failure.

Not only is her purpose baffled and her code of conduct shown to be inadequate; her concern for her honor is dismissed by the gods as irrelevant. Both Aphrodite and Artemis treat Phaedra's honor with complete indifference. 'She is honorable – but still, she dies' (47), says Aphrodite, and when Artemis reveals the truth to Theseus she makes it clear that she is concerned with the reputation not of Phaedra, but of Hippolytus. 'I have come', she says to Theseus, 'to show that his mind was just, so that he may die in honor' (1299) – to save his reputation. Phaedra's passion, far from being buried in silence so that she can be honored after death, will be the subject of song in the ritual cult of Hippolytus. 'It shall not fall nameless and be silenced, Phaedra's passion for you' (1429-30).

Phaedra's purpose, to save her honor, is one consistent with her ideal of conduct and her life as she has lived it so far. It is characteristic of the Nurse that her purpose has nothing to do with ideals; it is specific and practical – she wishes to save not Phaedra's honor but her life, and to that end she will use any means which promise success. Her love for Phaedra is the motive for her actions from first to last. But in the end she succeeds only in destroying Phaedra's honor and her life as well; she hears herself rejected utterly and cursed by the person to whom she has devoted her entire life and whose well-being is her only objective.

The Nurse has no aristocratic code of conduct. Her word is not honorable, *eukleēs*, but *logos*,[16] speech, reason, argument. She believes in, and tries to effect, the settlement of human problems by human reason, *logos*, expressed in speech, *logos*, which influences others as argument, *logos*. This is in fact not an aristocratic attitude but a democratic one, and the Nurse has another quality characteristic of Athenian democracy, flexibility.[17] She can adapt herself quickly to new situations, seize a new ground of argument – a capacity illustrated by the fact that she shifts her ground in the play not once, like Phaedra and Hippolytus, but three times. She is in fact so flexible that her attitude is not a consistent moral code at all, but merely a series of practical approaches to different problems. It is natural therefore that the Nurse should be made to speak in terms that clearly associate her with the contemporary sophists, who, like her, had a secular and confident approach to human problems, the rhetorical skill to present their solution convincingly, and a relativism which, expressed as the doctrine of expediency, enabled them to shift their ground, as the Nurse does, from one position to another.

For the Nurse, when she first talks to Phaedra, the choice between speech and silence is meaningless. She behaves only in the choice between speech and speech. 'You should not be silent, child. But either refute me if I speak badly, or agree if I speak well' (297-99). This implies her basic confidence that no problem is beyond the power of human reason, but when she hears the first hints of what is wrong with Phaedra (337-42), her confidence begins to falter. 'To what lengths will speech go?' she asks. And when she understands the truth, she tries to stop Phaedra's speech, 'Oh. What will you say?' (353). She abandons hope of saving Phaedra's life, and consequently has no further use for her own. She goes off to die.

She comes back with her confidence renewed. She is now ashamed of her emotional reaction, her inadequacy (435). Second thoughts are best. What has happened to Phaedra is not 'irrational' (437), not something beyond the powers of reason and speech.

The powerful speech into which she now launches is easily recognizable as contemporary sophistic rhetoric at its cleverest and worst; it is a fine example of 'making the worse appear the better cause'. It is the devil quoting scripture; she cynically accuses Phaedra of *hybris* (474), insolence and pride toward the gods. She uses the stock sophistic argument to justify immoral conduct, the misdemeanors of the gods in the myths. And she reveals, in her description of the way of the world – the husbands who conceal their wives' infidelities, the fathers who connive at their sons' adulteries – a cynicism which is the well-known result of sophistic teaching, the cynicism of a Cleon, a Thrasymachus. Only a hardened cynic, in fact, could fancy that Hippolytus could be corrupted. And the Nurse's argument takes this for granted. Speech is all that is needed, winning words and in a double sense – the love charms and also her pleading the cause of love which will charm Hippolytus into compliance.

When we next see her, she is begging for silence. Speech has unloosed forces beyond her control, and she now persuades Hippolytus to remain silent. But Phaedra has overheard their interview and now resumes control of the situation. She pours out on the Nurse all the fury and hatred which Hippolytus' terrible denunciation has roused in her. She uses the verbal loophole the Nurse so cleverly left her; 'Did I not tell you to be silent?' (685-86) and curses her terribly, calling on Zeus to blast her with fire and destroy her root and branch (683-84). But the nurse is still not silenced. 'I can make a reply to this, if you will listen' (697), she says, and she maintains her practical, unprincipled viewpoint – 'If I had succeeded, I would be one of the clever ones' (700). And desperate though the situation is, she still has a way out. 'There is a

way to save you, even from this situation, my child' (705). But the Nurse, her way out, and the whole concept of *logos*, reason and speech, for which she stands, are rejected by Phaedra in one biting phrase, 'Stop talking' (706). And we hear no more of the Nurse.

The worldly, practical approach to the problem has proved no more successful than Phaedra's simple code of honor. The Nurse's one purpose, to save Phaedra's life, has, when translated into action, ensured her death. And the Nurse's outlook implies a view of the gods, a skeptical view, which is ironically developed in a play which has begun with the appearance of the goddess Aphrodite in person. The Nurse reveals her basic skepticism in her opening speech (176-97), in which she dismisses speculation about future life as unprofitable. Life as we know it is painful, she says (189-90), but as for some other thing, dearer than life, darkness enfolds it and hides it in clouds (192-93). There is no revelation of what lies beneath the earth (196). Later, when she recognizes the power of Aphrodite, she still expresses her belief in 'scientific' agnostic terms. 'Cypris was no god, then, but something greater, whatever it may be, than a god' (359-60). This rationalism of hers is the most unsound of all the views of the order of the universe expressed or implied by human beings in the play, and by a supreme irony this representative of skeptical thought is chosen to be the most important link in the chain of events which Aphrodite has forged. The Nurse's 'reason' is the driving force in the process which brings Phaedra and Hippolytus to their deaths.

Hippolytus' purpose and his ideal is put before us early in the play; it is to live a life of piety and devotion to the virgin goddess Artemis. 'I am in your company, and exchange speech with you,' he says to the statue of Artemis. 'I hear your voice though I may not see your face. May I round the final mark of the course of my life even as I have begun' (85-87). He hopes to round the final mark, to run the full course of a life of reverence and piety, but his prayer is to be ironically fulfilled this very day. At the end of the play, he hears Artemis' voice though he cannot see her face, and exchanges speech with her as he lies dying, but he has been cut off in full career, his chariot wrecked. And before that he will have suffered the spiritual agony of seeing his father condemn and curse him as a hypocritical adulterer, a man whom it would be a mockery to associate with Artemis.

Like Phaedra, he is an aristocratic figure; in fact, most of the commonplaces of the aristocratic attitude are put into his mouth in the course of the play.[18] But he is also an intellectual and a religious mystic.[19] His principles, unlike Phaedra's, are clearly and consistently formulated; for him the most important thing in life is *eusebeia*, reverence toward the gods.[20] 'I know first of all how to treat the gods with reverence' (996),

he says when defending himself against his father's attack. Except for the moment of passion when he threatens to break his oath and speak, he is guided in every thought and action by his *eusebeia*. And when he finally decides for silence and his oath, he emphasizes this motive: 'Know this, woman, it is my reverence which saves you' (656), he says to the Nurse. He might have said 'It is my reverence which destroys me,' for all through his father's bitter onslaught he stands by his principles, respects his oath, and keeps silent about Phaedra's part in the affair. As was the case with Phaedra and the Nurse, it is the central concept of his whole life and character which destroys him.

And, like them, he represents an attitude toward the gods. It is a religious position which is intellectual as well as mystic. His reverence for the gods manifests itself mainly in the worship of one goddess, Artemis; he completely rejects another, Aphrodite. The position is logical; on the intellectual plane, the worship of Artemis is clearly incompatible with the worship of Aphrodite, and acceptance of the one does constitute rejection of the other. The mass of humanity can ignore the contradiction, as the old servant does in the opening scene and just as most Christians manage to serve Mammon as well as God. But for the man who has dedicated his life to God, or to a goddess, there can be no compromise. Hippolytus must choose one or the other, 'Man must choose among the gods as the gods choose among men,' (104), he says to the servant.[21] And Hippolytus has chosen Artemis. It does not save him. He dies in agony in the prime of youth, and before he dies he has to go through the mental agony of hearing himself, the virgin soul (1006), treated by his father as a lustful hypocrite. And he sees himself in the end as a man who has spent his life in vain: 'In vain have I toiled at labors of reverence before mankind' (1367-69). He even goes so far as to wish that human beings could curse the gods, and though he is reproached by Artemis for this sentiment, he shows his disillusion in his farewell to her. 'This great companionship of ours, you find it easy to leave' (1441).[22] His reverence is inadequate, not merely as a way of life but also as a religious belief; it cannot stand unmoved in the face of reality – the knowledge that his privileged association with Artemis made him not a man to be envied but a pitiful victim, and that all the goddess can do for him is promise to kill another human being to avenge him.

Theseus is an early Attic king, but with the customary anachronism of Athenian tragedy, he is presented as a fifth-century statesman. His characteristic expression of thought and feeling is that of the man in the public eye, the man who is always conscious of his audience. When he states the charge against his son and invokes Poseidon's curse, he calls

on the city to hear (884), making it an official act. Even in his mourning for Phaedra he is conscious of his public stature (817), and in his tirade against Hippolytus he speaks to the audience as often as he does to his son (943, 956). And he supports his action by an appeal to his reputation; if he is worsted by Hippolytus, the monsters he conquered in his heroic youth will no longer serve as proof that he is harsh to evildoers (976-80). His life is devoted to the maintenance of a reputation; even in his private sorrow he never forgets that the eyes of Athens are upon him.

He is a statesman, but not, like his son, an intellectual. He is the man of action; this point is emphasized by his impulsive act, his appeal to his heroic past, and his contempt for speech (*logos*). This appears clearly in his attack on his son; he describes Hippolytus as one who pursues evil with 'pious words' (957). 'What words', he says, 'can argue more effectively than this woman's corpse?' (960-61) 'Why do I try to compete with you in words on this matter?' (971). He follows this last remark with action, the proclamation of banishment; he is a man not of words but of deeds. When he called Poseidon's curse on his son he did not wait, as Artemis reminds him later, for proof or prophecy or cross-examination, but followed his impulse. He is like another Athenian statesman, Themistocles, who, says Thucydides, was best at intuitive action in an emergency, and the best man to decide immediate issues with the least deliberation (1.138); Theseus acts with the swift decision of a Themistocles, an Oedipus. But he is wrong. And his mistake destroys the thing to which he has devoted his life. It is a mistake he can never live down, his public reputation is gone, as Artemis coldly tells him: 'Hide yourself in shame below the depths of the earth, or take wing into the sky . . . among good men there is now no portion you can call your own' (1290-95).

Theseus, too, has a distinct religious attitude. His is the religion of the politician, vocal, formal, and skin-deep, verbal acceptance but limited belief. He first appears on stage wearing the wreath of the state visitor to an oracle, and he can roundly recite the names of the gods in public proclamation or prayer – 'Hippolytus . . . has dishonored the awful eye of Zeus' (886), but he only half believes in all this. He prays to Poseidon to kill his son, and before the day is out, but when the chorus begs him to recall his prayer he replies: 'No. And in addition, I shall exile him from this land' (893). That revealing phrase 'in addition' is expanded in the succeeding lines. 'Of these two destinies he will be struck by one or the other' (894). Either Poseidon will strike him down or he will live out a miserable life in exile. The hint of skepticism is broadened when the messenger arrives to announce the disaster. He claims that his news

is of serious import (1157) to Theseus and all the citizens of Athens, but Theseus' first thought is of political news: 'Has some disaster overtaken the neighboring cities?' (1160–61). Informed that Hippolytus is near death he asks, 'Who did it? Did he get into trouble with someone else whose wife he raped, as he did his father's?' (1164–65). And only when the messenger reminds him of his curse does he realize the truth. 'O gods, Poseidon, then you really were my father, you listened to my curses' (1169–70). It is a revelation which proves the unsoundness of his skepticism, and he accepts it with joy. But he will live to regret it and wish his prayer unspoken. 'Would that it had never come into my mouth' (1412).

Theseus has gone through the same cycle as the other characters of the play. All four of the characters live, and two of them die, in a world in which purpose frustrates itself, choice is meaningless, moral codes and political attitudes ineffective, and human conceptions of the nature of the gods erroneous. But two of them learn, at the end of the play, the truth which we have known from the beginning, the nature of the world in which they live. They learn it from the lips of Artemis, as we have already heard it from the lips of Aphrodite. Artemis comes, like Aphrodite, to reveal (1298); she confirms, expands, and explains the process of divine government, of which the prologue was our first glimpse.

These two goddesses are powers locked in an eternal war, a war in which the human tragedy we have just witnessed is merely one engagement. In this particular operation, Aphrodite was the active agent and Artemis the passive; Artemis now informs us that these roles will be reversed – there will be a return made for this in which Artemis will assume the active role and Aphrodite the passive. The terms in which she explains her passivity in this case to Theseus make clear that this is permanent war, an eternal struggle in which the only losses are human lives.

'This is law and custom for the gods,' she says (1328). 'No one wishes to stand hostile against the energy of a god who has a desire – we stand aside always' (1329–30). The authority for this law and custom, as Artemis makes clear, is Zeus himself; but for her fear of Zeus, she says, she would not have allowed Hippolytus to die. What has happened, then, is no anomaly, but the working of the system of divine government of the universe, an eternal pattern of alternate aggression and retreat. And we can see from what Artemis says that when she has the active instead of the passive role, she will be as ruthless as Aphrodite was in this case.

The words which describe Aphrodite's direction of human affairs are thus equally applicable to Artemis; they constitute a description of the

function of divine government as a whole. And there are two words, repeated throughout the play at crucial moments and in significant contexts, which characterize the nature of the government of the universe. One of these words, *sphallein*, describes the action characteristic of the gods, and the other, *allōs*, describes the human condition which results from that action.

Sphallein, to trip, throw, cast down. It is Aphrodite's own word for her action in the play. 'I throw down those who despise me' (6). The literal accomplishment of this metaphorical threat comes when the bull from the sea 'throws' the horses of Hippolytus' chariot (1232). But this action is not confined to Hippolytus. The word recurs in connection with all the principal characters of the play. 'You are quickly thrown,' (183), says the Nurse to Phaedra in her opening speech. She is referring to Phaedra's sudden changes of mind, the capriciousness of the sick woman who vacillates between staying indoors or out, but the words have a terrible significance in the light of what happens later when Phaedra changes her mind about something more important. Speaking of her own love for Phaedra and wishing, for her own peace of mind, that she did not love her so much, the Nurse laments the fact that 'consistent conduct in life' (261), 'brings, so they say, not pleasure but overthrow' (262). It is true enough; the one consistent attitude in her, her love for Phaedra, brings her to ruin, and the words describe more exactly still the attitude and practice of Hippolytus, who is as consistent as the Nurse is flexible, as single-minded as the Nurse is versatile.

Phaedra, after she has heard Hippolytus denounce her and all her sex, sees herself as 'thrown' (671). As Theseus reads the fatal letter, the chorus prays to an unnamed god not to throw the house (871). And when Theseus explains to Hippolytus how he could curse and condemn him, he uses the same word; 'I was tripped and thrown in my opinion by the gods' (1414). It is this remark of his which provokes Hippolytus' wish that the human race could curse the gods.

The goddess trips, throws, leads astray, frustrates – all these are meanings of *sphallein*, and the word which describes the operation of the human will in these circumstances in *allōs*: otherwise, differently, wrongly, in vain. This adverb is used to describe the operation of human will throughout the tragedy; the character's actions produce results opposite to their purpose, things turn out 'otherwise'. 'Our labor is all in vain' (301), says the Nurse of her efforts to make Phaedra speak; the word has a double sense here, for the Nurse succeeds in her final attempt, but the results are not what she intended. 'Vainly', says Phaedra to the chorus, 'have I pondered in the long watches of the night, seeking to understand how human life is ruined' (375-76). This understanding she never attains, but it is given in all its fullness to Theseus and Hippolytus at the end of the play. 'In vain, in vain,' chants the chorus, 'does the land of Greece increase sacrifice of oxen to Zeus and Apollo . . .' (535-37). 'In vain', says Hippolytus in his agony, 'have I performed labors of reverence before mankind' (1367-69).[23] And the Nurse, speaking specifically of humanity's ignorance of anything beyond this life, characterizes the whole human situation with the same word (197). 'We are carried off our course, led astray, supported vainly, by myths.' In the context, it is of course a rationalist criticism of popular beliefs, but the verbal pattern of the whole poem invests it with a deeper meaning. We are borne astray, carried to a destination we did not intend, by myths, myths in which the Nurse does not believe, but which the appearance and actions of the two goddesses in the play prove to be not myths in the Nurse's sense, but the stuff of reality. The underlying meaning of the Nurse's words is brought out by the emphatic manner in which both goddesses are made to emphasize their connection with myth; myth, *mythos*, is the word they use of their own speech. 'I will quickly reveal the truth of these words [myths]' (9), says Aphrodite; Artemis, after telling Theseus the truth, asks him cruelly, 'Does my word [story, myth] pain you?' (1313). Human beings are indeed borne astray by myths, the goddesses who trip their heels and thwart their purpose. Humanity is merely the 'baser nature' which 'comes between the pass and fell-incensed points of mighty opposites.'

Of the nature and meaning of Aphrodite and Artemis in this play much has been written, and there is little to add. They have many aspects; they are anthropomorphic goddesses, myths, dramatic personalities with motives and hostile purposes and they are also impersonal, incompatible forces of nature. They are indeed 'mighty opposites', and that opposition may be expressed in many terms – positive and negative, giving and denying, increase and decrease, indulgence and abstinence – but what Euripides has been at some pains to emphasize is not their opposition, but their likeness. The play is full of emphatic suggestions that there is a close correspondence between them.

When Hippolytus describes the meadow sacred to Artemis from which he has made the wreath he offers to her statue, he mentions the bee (77), which goes through the uncut grass in spring. It is an appropriate detail, for the name *melissa*, bee, was given to priestesses of Artemis,[24] and the bee is in many contexts associated with virginity.[25] But some five hundred lines later the chorus compares Aphrodite to a bee, 'She hovers like a bee' (562-63). This transference of symbol from the appropriate goddess to the inappropriate one is strange, and it is reinforced by another striking correspondence. The chorus, early in the play,

describes Artemis, under one of her many titles, Dictynna. 'She ranges through the marsh waters, over the land and over the sea, in the eddies of the salt water' (148–150). And later, the Nurse, describing the power of Aphrodite to Phaedra, uses similar language; 'She ranges through the air, and she is in the wave of the sea' (447–48). The function of these surprising echoes[26] is to prepare us for an extraordinary feature of Artemis' concluding speeches: she repeats word after word and phrase of Aphrodite's prologue. These two polar opposites express themselves in the same terms. 'I gained a start on the road long ago' (23), says Aphrodite, and Artemis uses the same unusual metaphor – 'And yet I shall gain nothing, and only give you pain' (1297), she says to Theseus. 'I shall reveal' (6), says Aphrodite; and Artemis says that she comes 'to reveal' (1298). 'I am not unnamed' (1), says Aphrodite, and Artemis takes up the phrase; 'not unnamed shall Phaedra's love for you fall and be silenced.' Both of them claim, in similar words and with opposite meanings, that they reward the reverent and punish the wrongdoer (5–6 and 1339–41), and each of them, with the same characteristic word, *timōrēsomai* (21 and 1422), announces her decision to kill the other's human protégé.[27]

They are opposites, but considered as divinities directing human affairs, they are exactly alike. The repetitions emphasize the fact that the activity of Aphrodite and the passivity of Artemis are roles which will be easily reversed. And the mechanical repetition of Aphrodite's phrases by Artemis depersonalizes both of them; we become aware of them as impersonal forces which act in a repetitive pattern, an eternal ordered dance of action and reaction, equal and opposite. From the law which governs their advance and retreat there can be no deviation; Artemis cannot break the pattern of movement to save Hippolytus, nor can she forgive Aphrodite. Forgiveness is in fact unthinkable in such a context; it is possible only for human beings. These gods are, in both the literal and metaphorical senses of the word, inhuman.

Artemis does indeed tell Hippolytus not to hate his father (1435). But this merely emphasizes the gulf between god and man. She does not, on her plane, forgive Aphrodite; rather, she announces a repetition of the terrible events we have just witnessed: a new human victim is to die to pay for the loss of her favorite. 'The anger of Cypris shall not swoop down on your body unavenged. For I shall punish another man, with my own hand, whoever chances to be most loved by her of mortals, with these inescapable arrows' (1420–22). This, together with the promise that his memory will be the myth of a virgin cult, is the consolation she offers Hippolytus for the fact that she stood aside and allowed him to be destroyed. She cannot weep for him – that is the law which governs

the nature of gods (1396) – nor can she stay by him as he dies. 'It is not lawful for me to see the dead and defile my eye with their dying breath' (1437–38). And she withdraws, leaving father and son alone.

It has often been remarked that this disturbing play ends on a note of serenity. Méridier's comment is typical: 'le dénouement s'achève, grâce à la présence d'Artémis, dans un rayonnement de transfiguration. Et cette scène finale, où la tristesse déchirante s'épure peu à peu et s'apaise dans une sérénité céleste . . . '[28] The ending is serene, but the serenity has nothing to do with Artemis, who throughout her scene with Hippolytus coldly and insistently disassociates herself from him,[29] so that he bids her farewell with a reproach. The serenity comes not from the goddess but from the two broken men who are left on stage after she withdraws.

Hippolytus forgives his father. To err is human, as Artemis says to Theseus (1434); but to forgive is not divine. It is an action possible only for man, an act by which man can distinguish himself from and rise above the inexorable laws of the universe in which he is placed. And though Hippolytus recognizes that he is following Artemis' advice,[30] he shows too that he is fully conscious of the fact that in forgiving he is doing what she cannot do. As he forgives his father, he calls to witness his sincerity 'Artemis of the conquering arrow' (1451). The epithet is not ornamental; it recalls vividly Artemis' announcement of her intention to repay, twenty-five lines before – 'with these inescapable arrows I shall punish another.' Hippolytus calls to witness his act of forgiveness the goddess who canot herself forgive.

It is significant that Artemis leaves the stage before the end of the play; her exit closes the circle which began with Aphrodite's entrance. Within its circumference, the human beings of the play fulfilled through all the multiple complications of choice an external purpose of which they were ignorant. But Aphrodite's purpose is now fulfilled; she has no further use for these creatures, and Artemis has gone. The play ends with a human act which is at last a free and meaningful choice, a choice made for the first time in full knowledge of the nature of human life and divine government, an act which does not frustrate its purpose. It is an act of forgiveness, something possible only for human beings, not for gods but for their tragic victims. It is man's noblest declaration of independence, and it is made possible by man's tragic position in the world. Hippolytus' forgiveness of his father is an affirmation of purely human values in an inhuman universe.