**Dialogue 18: on Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos**

Key word: *miasma* ‘pollution, miasma’.

**A) Plato Republic 9.571c-d** [Socrates talks about epithumiai [desires] and hēdonai [pleasures] in sleep . . . ]:

“When one part of the psukhē sleeps - I mean the part that is logistikon [rational] and hēmeron [domesticated] and arkhon [in control] of the other part, which is thēriōdes [beast-like] and agrion [savage] - then this other part, which is gluttoned with sita [grain] or methē [intoxicants], skirītai [prances, bolts] and seeks to push aside sleep and to glut its own étos [pl.]. When it is like this, it dares to do everything, released as it is from all sense of aiskhunē [shame] and phronēsis [thinking]. It does not at all shrink back from attempting to lay hands on his mēthos [mother] or on any other human or god or beast, and to commit whatever polluting [= miasma-making] murder, or to eat whatever food. In a word, there is nothing in the realm of noos [in Plato’s time pronounced nous] and shame that it will not do.”

**B) Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos 91-109**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creon</th>
<th>If you want to hear in the presence of these people, I am ready to speak: otherwise we can go inside.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>Speak to all. The sorrow [penthos] that I bear for these is more than for my own life [psukhē].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creon</td>
<td>I will tell you what I heard form the god. Phoebus our lord clearly bids us to drive out the defilement [miasma], which he said was harbored in this land, and not to nourish it so that it cannot be healed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>With what sort of purification? What is the manner of the misfortune?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creon</td>
<td>By banishing the man, or by paying back bloodshed with bloodshed, since it is this blood which brings the tempest on our polis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>And who is the man whose fate he thus reveals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creon</td>
<td>Laioi, my lord, was leader of our land before you directed this polis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>I know it well - by hearsay, for I never saw him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creon</td>
<td>He was slain, and the god now bids us to take vengeance on his murderers, whoever they are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>Where on earth are they? Where shall the dim track of this old guilt [aitia] be found?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C) Aristotle Poetics 1449b24-28** [his definition of catharsis = katharsis]:

“Tragedy is the mimesis of a serious and complete action that has magnitude, with seasoned speech. ... The mimesis is done by those who perform [draō] instead of through narrative, bringing about through pity and terror the purification [katharsis] of such emotions [pathos pl.].”

**D) Aristotle Rhetoric 1371a31-b10** [on mimēsis = re-enactment; imitation; representation]:

Both understanding and wonder are, for the most part, pleasant. In wonder there is the desire to understand.... Since both understanding and wonder are pleasant, it is necessary that a work of mimēsis also be pleasant, like painting, sculpture, poetry, and everything that is well represented, even if the thing represented is not in itself pleasant. For it is not there that the pleasure lies, but in the inference “This is that.” What happens as a result is that we understand something.

**E) Aeschylus Libation Bearers 514-522** [Orestes is speaking about his mother]:

“But it is not off the track to inquire [515] from what motive she came to send her libations, seeking too late to make amends [time] for an irremediable experience [pathos]. They would be a sorry return [kharis] to send to the dead who have no phrenes: I cannot guess what they mean. The gifts are too paltry for her offense [hamartia]. [520] For though a man may pour out all he has in atonement for one deed of blood, it is wasted effort. So the saying goes. If indeed you know, tell me: I wish to learn.”

**F) Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos 1283-1285** [messenger is speaking]:

“But now on this day there is lamentation, atē, death, disgrace; of all the evils [1285] that can be named, not one is missing.”
G) Aristotle Politics 1342a8-15 [on catharsis = katharsis]:
We see from sacred songs that whenever those who are in a state of enthousiasmos [= being entheos ‘possessed’ = ‘having a theos (god) inside] use songs that stir up the psukhē, they are put into a condition as if they had undergone a medical treatment and katharsis. People liable to pity or terror must experience the same thing - and other generally emotional [pathētikoi] people, as much as is appropriate for each. All of them attain some katharsis and are pleasantly relieved.

H) Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos 14-57
Oedipus, ruler of my land, you see the age of those who sit {15} on your altars: some, nestlings still too tender for flight; others, bowed with age, priests of Zeus like me; and some, these here, the chosen youth. The rest of the folk sit {20} with wreathed branches in the agora, and before the twin temples of Athena, and where Ismenus gives answer by fire. The polis, as you yourself see, is now sorely buffeted, and can no longer lift her head from beneath the angry waves of death. {25} A blight has befallen the fruitful blossoms of the land, the herds among the pastures, the barren pangs of women. And the flaming god, a most hateful plague, has swooped upon us, and ravages the polis; he lays waste to the house of Cadmus, but enriches Hades with (30) groans and tears. It is not because we rank you with the gods that I and these children are suppliants at your hearth, but because we deem you the first among men in life’s common chances and in dealings with the daimones. {35} Coming to the city of the Cadmeans, you freed us of the tax that we rendered to the hard songstress [= by solving the riddle of the Sphinx] and when you knew no more than anyone else, nor had you been taught, but rather by the assistance of a god, as the story goes, you uplifted our life. {40} Now, Oedipus, most powerful, we, your suppliants, beseech you to find some succor for us, whether you hear it from some divine omen, or learn of it from some mortal. For I see that the outcome of the counsels of experienced men {45} most often have effect. Come, best [aristōs] among mortals, resurrect our polis! Come, take care, since now this land gives you kleos as its savior [sōtēr] for your former zeal. Let it not be our memory of your reign that {50} we were first set up straight and then cast down; resurrect this polis so that it falls no more! With good omen you provided us that past happiness; show yourself the same now too, since if you are to rule this land just as you do now, it is better to be lord of men than of a wasteland. {55} Neither tower nor ship is anything, if it is empty and no men dwell within.

I) Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos 58-77
My piteous children, I know quite well the desires with which you have come; I know well that you {60} all are sick, and though you are sick I know well that there is not one of you who is as sick as I. Your pain comes on each of you for himself alone, and for no other, but my psukhē groans at once for the polis, for myself, and for you. {65} You are not awakening me from sleep; no, be sure that I have wept many tears, gone many ways in the wanderings of my thought. I have made use of the only remedy which I could find after close consideration: I sent my wife’s brother {70} Creon, Menoikeus’ son, to Apollo’s Pythian residence in order to learn what we might do or say to protect this polis. And now, when the lapse of days is reckoned, I’m troubled about what he is doing, for he tarries oddly {75} beyond the fitting length of time. But when he arrives, I will be kakos if do not perform all that the god reveals.

J) Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos 216-226
You pray. And in answer to your prayer, if you will give a loyal reception to my words [epos pl.], and minister to your own disease, you may hope to find succor and relief from woes. These words I will speak publicly, as one who was a stranger [xenos] to the report, {220} a stranger to the deed. I would not go far on the trail if I were tracing it alone, without a clue [sumbolon]. But as it is - since it was only after the event that I was counted a Theban among Thebans - to you, Cadmeans all, I do thus proclaim: Whoever of you knows {225} by whom Laios son of Labdakos was slain, I bid him to indicate [sēmainai] all to me.
K) Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannos* 1266-1285

And when the hapless woman was stretched out on the ground, then the sequel was horrible to see: for he tore from her raiment the golden brooches with which she had decorated herself, (1270) and lifting them struck his own eyeballs, uttering words like these: “No longer will you behold such evils as I was suffering [paìkhês] and performing! Long enough have you looked on those whom you ought never to have seen, having failed in the knowledge of those whom I yearned to know - henceforth you shall be dark!” (1275) With such a dire refrain, he struck his eyes with raised hand not once but often. At each blow the bloody eye-balls bedewed his beard, and did not send forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail. (1280) These mingled evils have broken forth upon the heads of them both, not of one alone, on husband and wife together. Their old prosperity [olbos] was once true prosperity, and justly [dikaiâ] so. But now on this day there is lamentation, atê, death, disgrace; of all the evils (1285) that can be named, not one is missing.

L) Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannos* 1327-1335

[Chorus] Man of dread deeds, how could you extinguish [marainô] your vision in this way? Who among the daimones urged you on?

[Oedipus] It was Apollo, philoi, Apollo (1330) who gave telos to these evil, evil sufferings [pathos pl.] of mine. But the hand that struck my eyes was none other than my own, wretched that I am! (1335) Why was I to see, when sight showed me nothing sweet?

M) Aeschylus *Seven* 709-711...

Yes, it [the daimôn] boiled over with the curses [kateugmata, from eukhomai] of Oedipus! True are the visions [opsis plural] of apparitions-in-dreams [en-hupnia], - visions of dividing the father’s property.

N) Aeschylus *Seven* 720ff...

I shudder in dread of the goddess who destroys dynasties. She is not like other gods. She is the all-truthful [pan-âlêthês] seer [mantis] of evils, the Fury [Erînys] of a father’s cursing [eukhomai]. (725) She is poised to bring to fulfillment [telos] the curses [kat-ârai], full of passion [thumos], that came from Oedipus, the one whose mind [phrên] was thrown off course. This discord [eris], destroyer of his children, is pressing ahead.