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Abstract

This short note pays close attention to the way in which the tragic Hector speaks about himself in his exchange with Rhesus (*Rhesus* 394–424). Hector's appeal to his natural disposition as the agent that not only determines his particular way of relating to his fellows but also — albeit more implicitly — drives him to initiate the debate with the Thracian king, as suggested by his closing words, is a quite rare instance in tragic poetry.

When interacting with each other, tragic characters rarely engage in direct self-characterisation which involves innate character-traits or natural inclinations and their recognition as such.¹ When they do so, they usually appeal to certain aspects of their nature in response to a challenge or crisis and in order to justify their course of action or simply give reasons for their particular decisions concerning their future attitude. Appeal to one's own nature, then, usually has an explanatory force or appears as a form of self-justification or self-defence.

Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* evokes one of his inborn qualities when rejecting Odysseus' proposal about the use of trickery. The young hero responds that it is not in his nature (i.e. he is not disposed by nature) to achieve anything by means of evil cunning (ἔφυν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐκ τέχνης πράσσειν κακῆς), nor, as he has heard, was it in his father's (88–89).² Instead, he is inclined to use either persuasion or force. Neoptolemus evokes his (inherited) nature in order to refuse to do what Odysseus encourages him to and which would bring him to act contrary to his nature — as, in fact, it does up to a certain point. Neoptolemus' self-perception and

* I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of *SHT* for their useful comments and suggestions.

¹ When tragic characters do proceed to some sort of self-characterisation or self-definition, they mostly speak about: (1) How they have developed or turned out to be, usually in connection to a tough choice they are about to make or when suffering the consequences of a decision or action already materialized. The Sophoclean Ajax delivers his 'deceptive' speech, in which he lays out his change of disposition and outlook on account of what happens in human life and the natural world, after having heard the pleas of Tecmessa and the Chorus (646–92). More implicitly, the Sophoclean Electra, long before undertaking action, admits that the situation in her father's palace has turned her into a very angry woman (e.g. 135, 222), who will be forced to commit terrible deeds. (2) What virtues or social character traits they incarnate. Oedipus, for instance, based upon his response to the Theban suppliants' pleas, implies that he is not *δυσάλγητος*, for only one who is *δυσάλγητος* would fail to pity them (*S. OT* 12–13). More rarely, tragic characters directly speak about their virtues (e.g. their piety or wisdom) in more general terms — that is, with no direct reference to a particular instance or event — and sometimes in connection to the way in which they are assessed by their fellow-men. Odysseus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* claims that, in the judgment of those who are just and virtuous, no man is more *εὐσεβής* than himself (1050–51); Medea states that she is *σοφῆ* and connects this trait with the way in which she is treated by other people in her community (*E. Med.* 303). Despite the general tone of these references, the virtues which the two heroes (Odysseus and Medea) invoke are in both cases quite central to the plays' plot and their course of action within it.

² See further Blundell 1988: 137–148 and Carlevale 2000: 26–60.

self-definition constitute an integral part of the debate and, more precisely, of his attempt to resist a pressing external constraint and, so to speak, keep his identity intact. Theonoe in Euripides' *Helen* connects her decision to help the Greek protagonists escape from Egypt with (her awareness of) the fact that her nature and inclination lean towards piety (ἐγὼ πέφυκα τ' εὐσεβεῖν καὶ βούλομαι) and that there is a great temple of justice in her nature (ἐν τῇ φύσει), which she considers a heritage from Nereus (998–1003). In the debate between Electra and her sister concerning their mother's punishment in the Sophoclean *Electra*, in which the former expresses her determination to kill Clytemnestra, Chrysothemis points out that if Electra had shown such resolve on the day of Agamemnon's death then she would have accomplished everything. Electra responds that her nature or temperament (φύσιν) has always been the same, yet her mind (νοῦν) has now grown ripe (1022). In all these cases, the characters' invocation of their nature comes as a response to an external stimulus-provocation and appears inseparably tied to those characters' decisions concerning a major issue at stake, which could or will actually determine the plot's development (Neoptolemus' [initial] rejection of Odysseus' proposal, which could jeopardize the mission's success; Theonoe's decision to oppose her brother-king and assist Menelaus and Helen after hearing their pleas; Electra's resolution to kill her mother for all her sister's objections). The heroes explicitly found their choice of course of action upon — and interpret it on the basis of — (their perception of) their natural inclinations, characteristics or disposition, at least in part.

What is significantly rarer is a character's engagement in this type of direct self-characterisation when it does not aim at having an impact on or when it is not (closely) related to his practical decision(s) regarding the play's crisis. In other words, when it neither leads to nor provides grounds for these practical decisions. The exchange between Hector and Rhesus right upon the latter's entrance in the Euripides-attributed *Rhesus*,³ and particularly Hector's speech, is an interesting case in point. The play dramatizes an episode from the Trojan War, familiar from *Iliad* 10 (the so called *Doloneia*). In the middle of the night, and after having been persuaded by his comrade Aeneas, Hector sends the volunteer Dolon to spy on the Achaeans; at the same time, Odysseus and Diomedes are heading for the Trojan encampment with the intention of inflicting harm on their enemies. The two heroes run into Dolon and lure him into disclosing vital pieces of information — concerning the whereabouts of Hector, the position of the Trojan sentries and that of the allies — before killing him. When the Greek pair does reach their destination, the goddess Athena guides them to the sleeping quarters of Rhesus, the king of neighbouring Thrace, who has arrived at Troy shortly earlier. Diomedes slays Rhesus and his men in their sleep, while Odysseus takes his glorious horses. Prior to Rhesus' arrival and appearance on stage, Hector had expressed his great discontent because of the former's failure to show up in time and assist his suffering friends (324–6, 333); Hector had in fact announced that he will not accept the Thracian as an ally.

³ For the play's dating in the fourth century see particularly Geffcken 1936: 394–408; Lesky 1956: 218–219; Bjoerck 1957: 7–17; Kitto 1977: 317–350; Liapis 2001: 313–328; Liapis 2004: 159–188; Liapis 2009: 71–88. Contrast Ritchie 1964 and Burnett 1985: 13–51.

However, the Trojan prince soon changed his mind after the intervention of the Messenger and the Chorus (334–5, 339–41).⁴

In their actual encounter, both Hector and Rhesus refer to their particular natural characteristics or inclinations which determine the form and spirit of their interaction but which will not otherwise influence their already-made decisions concerning their course of action. Hector's engagement in this sort of introspection and self-characterisation is even more noteworthy for two interconnected reasons: first, because it does not come as a response to a verbal challenge⁵ or crisis;⁶ second, and perhaps more importantly, the hero's desire not only to act in accord with but also to exhibit one of his character traits or individual qualities appears virtually as his motive for initiating the debate.

The exchange between Hector and Rhesus will not affect the action in any meaningful way. The former has already reversed his decision not to accept the latter as an ally; it is furthermore nowhere suggested that Hector considers changing his mind after actually encountering the Thracian king or while laying out his reproaches against him. W. Ritchie observes that the debate scene is of no consequence to the plot and points out that the exchange serves as a means of confirming Rhesus' loyalty to the Trojans, as well as his experience in fighting, which consolidates his image as a warrior of great prowess, thus preparing for the *peripeteia* of his death. Ritchie, moreover, claims that the exchange presents the two heroes as men of action and it, therefore, lacks any philosophizing and sophistry, which (though common in Euripidean speeches) would be inappropriate to the speakers' characters and detrimental to the dramatist's choice.⁷ "The dramatist shows himself conscious of this when he makes each speaker open with the prefatory remark that his words will be straightforward and blunt (394 f., 422 f.)."⁸ These prefatory remarks, however, as well as Hector's closing statement, besides preparing or accounting for the lack of philosophizing and sophistry in the debate and probably reflecting the dramatist's conscious choice of refraining from employing them, are interesting in their own right, for the heroes, and especially Hector, go a step further than simply announcing that they are about to speak bluntly.

The heroes' self-referential remarks present them not simply as men of action, and, as such, men who speak the plain truth, but as men who expressly identify their natural disposition as the agent that leads them to speak straightforwardly. Their frankness or outspokenness does not appear as a product of an isolated, momentary urge (an emotional, impulsive reaction) or of a broader set of moral

⁴ For the broader pattern of Hector's decision-making in the play (an initial rash decision followed by persuasion and choice of a more prudent course of action, to which the hero sticks till the end even if there is a personal cost) see Rosivach 1978: 54–73 and, more fleetingly, Kitto 1977: 335–336.

⁵ Unlike the case of Rhesus, who responds to Hector's reproaches.

⁶ Unlike the cases of Neoptolemus, Theonoe, and Electra, who are led to speak about, or in a way resort to, their nature in connection to a decision they are either called to make or they have already made.

⁷ Murray (1913: 59) argues that the scene represents a rather crude and early form of the celebrated psychological controversies of Euripides.

⁸ Ritchie 1964: 92. Ritchie, who argues that the play's author is indeed Euripides, observes that this phenomenon (i.e. a debate that is of no consequence to the plot) is not unique in Euripidean drama and employs as an example the debate between Admetus and Pheres in *E. Alc.* In the case of *Alcestis*, it is Admetus' despair and emotional detriment that largely give rise to the debate.

principles;⁹ instead, the heroes themselves explicitly attribute it to their natural disposition and habitual way of operating. What is more, Hector's desire to manifest his disposition appears virtually as his reason for initiating the debate. As the hero clarifies right away, he always loves to speak the truth and he was not born a double-minded man: ... φιλω λέγειν / τάληθες αἰεὶ κού διπλοῦς πέφυκ' ἀνήρ (394–5).¹⁰ The two parts are closely related but not identical in spirit. The second premise (κού διπλοῦς πέφυκ' ἀνήρ) points to inherent qualities or describes a state-of-being. The first part (φιλω λέγειν / τάληθες αἰεὶ) refers to the hero's standard preference and practice — a corollary (yet not necessary in principle) of his honest or straightforward nature — which inform his social dealings. Hector expresses his true feelings and thoughts on the particular occasion because this is how he naturally and customarily, as well as consciously, behaves.

Hector, moreover, closes his speech by affirming that he is ἐλεύθερος. Besides meaning “free”, ἐλεύθερος can have the narrower meaning of “fit for a freeman” or “frank”¹¹ (LSJ s.v.). The latter two meanings, though not necessarily interdependent, occasionally appear interrelated in classical literature, thus correlating one's social status with one's disposition when it comes to the properties of honesty and/or frankness. The thought that truth-telling or outspokenness befit a freeborn person is indeed expressed in tragedy¹² — though it usually appears as part of a *gnome* or of an external review (i.e. when a character assesses the behaviour of a fellow-man) rather than as a self-referential statement. What is more, a freeborn person's failure to exhibit such attitude can be considered as bringing about disgrace. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, for instance, and while struggling to persuade Lichas to disclose the whole truth, Dianeira claims that it is dishonourable for a freeborn man to be known as a liar (453–4). In a similar fashion, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* the eponymous hero accuses Odysseus of thinking foul and servile thoughts on account of his use of

⁹ Hector's very accusations are certainly related to, and actually spring from, deep-rooted, commonly accepted moral principles and values (friendship, gratitude, reciprocity), but the triggering of their forthright expression is attributed to the hero's very nature rather than his conviction that such an expression would be essential, noble or morally required. Hector's particular phrasing in his closing words (420–1; ταῦθ', ὡς ἂν εἰδῆς Ἐκτορ' ὄντ' ἐλεύθερον, / καὶ μέμφομαί σοι καὶ λέγω κατ' ὄμμα σόν) suggests that the hero's priority or foremost concern in his speech is not to express a moral belief, even if his emphatic statement that he is not duplicitous might at the same time correspond to a moral belief (“friends should not be duplicitous”). Rhesus, on the other hand, will use his own statement that he is not duplicitous (423) primarily as a means of preparing for the extraordinary arrogance of his final boast.

¹⁰ This statement is modeled on the opening words of Achilles' response to Odysseus' pleas in *Il.* 9.309–14: χορὴ μὲν δὴ τὸν μῦθον ἀπηλεγέως ἀποειπεῖν, / ἣ περ δὴ φρονέω τε καὶ ὡς τετελεσμένον ἔσται, / ὡς μὴ μοι τρῦζητε παρήμενοι ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος. / ἐχθρὸς γὰρ μοι κείνος ὁμῶς Αἴδαο πύλησιν / ὅς χ' ἔτερον μὲν κεύθη ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἶπη. / αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν ἐρέω ὡς μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἄριστα. More remotely, see *Il.* 3.60, where Paris refers to Hector's unyielding heart, while responding to his brother's rebukes: αἰεὶ τοι κραδίη πέλεκυς ὡς ἔστιν ἀτειρής. Cf. Polyneices' *gnome* in *E. Phoen.* (469–72), where truth and justice (which entail or call for simplicity and clarity) are contrasted with the unjust word (which requires clever treatment, since it is sick in itself) in more impersonal terms: ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος τῆς ἀληθείας ἔφυ, / κού ποικίλων δεῖ τάνδιχ' ἐρμηνευμάτων' / ἔχει γὰρ αὐτὰ καιρόν' ὁ δ' ἄδικος λόγος / νοσῶν ἐν αὐτῷ φαρμάκων δεῖται σοφῶν.

¹¹ Inversely, lack of freedom of speech, though not really identified with lack of honesty or frankness, is standardly connected with either tragic slaves or exiles/non-citizens (e.g. Ion in Athens [*E. Ion*] and Polyneices in Argos [*E. Phoen.*]) or subjects in tyrannical regimes (e.g. Asians in Aesch. *Pers.*).

¹² See further Dover 1994: 114–116.

stealth and trickery (1006; μηδ' ἐλεύθερον).¹³ In both cases, the correlation between one's free birth or honour and one's honesty is made in connection to (free) agents who are warned against (or accused of) either lying or plotting, rather than in connection to agents who would merely silence their true feelings and thoughts or refrain from speaking bluntly (as would be the case had Hector spoken more mildly or had he omitted his reproaches against Rhesus altogether).

If we interpret the term ἐλεύθερος in its narrow sense, Hector might simply be saying that as a freeborn man he accuses Rhesus straight to his face, because this is how freeborn men standardly (or, at least, ideally) behave, i.e. they speak unequivocally.¹⁴ In this case, the hero would be treating himself as a member of the social class to which he belongs, conforming with the requirements and expectations surrounding it; his free birth would account for his, presumably superlative, outspokenness. However, Hector's particular phrasing makes it more likely that the hero at this point does not really appeal to his social status in an attempt to authorize or even excuse his behaviour but to (what he perceives as) one of his individual character-traits, which actually drives him to engage in such a dialogue.

Rather than stating that as an ἐλεύθερος, a freeborn man, he speaks frankly (which would be the norm), Hector suggests that his direct reproaches against Rhesus are uttered so that he himself will be recognized as a man who is ἐλεύθερος: ταῦθ', ὡς ἂν εἰδῆς Ἑκτορ' ὄντ' ἐλεύθερον, / καὶ μέμφομαί σοι καὶ λέγω κατ' ὄμμα σόν (420–1). Thus, the exhibition of Hector's ἐλευθερία appears as the hero's motive for expressing his outspoken (and genuine, no doubt) complaints ("I am telling you all these so that you may see that Hector is frank / how frank Hector is") rather than as a means of explaining or justifying his outspokenness ("I am [or I can be] that frank because I am a freeborn person"). Hector shifts the focus to his (conscious) desire to project and draw attention to his frankness, which he seems to treat as a particular and worth-mentioning attribute of his, a distinctive trait or aspect of his disposition, rather than a mere corollary of his social status or of any sort of sociopolitical ideology/institution. The hero seems to be professing himself a frank individual (alongside being a freeborn prince rather than in virtue of being a freeborn prince), on the one hand, and to be placing emphasis on his need to be registered and recognized as such an individual, on the other.¹⁵ This would tie in well

¹³ Moreover, those agents' honesty (or the lack of it) is paramount to the story and, more specifically, to the protagonists' predicament and lot — unlike Hector's frankness.

¹⁴ In a slightly different view, the contrast implied in 420–1 could probably be between speaking frankly face-to-face and talking behind the other's back (as opposed to speaking frankly instead of speaking obliquely). In any case, Hector's statement comes close to the meaning of παρρησία, a central, though by no means uncomplicated, notion in classical Greek thought and a fundamental feature of fifth-century Athenian democracy. For various aspects and controversies of the issue of free speech in classical antiquity see further Balot 2004: 233–260; Carter 2004: 197–220; Raaflaub 2004: 41–62; Wallace 2004: 221–232; Foucault 2001.

¹⁵ The implication would then be that a man of free birth, royal status, and military leadership like Hector, but of a different disposition and character, might actually not have shown himself to be ἐλεύθερος — i.e. totally frank or blunt — under the given or similar circumstances. Hector's course of action concerning Rhesus thus far, i.e. his eventual yielding to his community's request and his resolution to accept the Thracian king as an ally for all the latter's misconduct (as perceived by Hector), which could be viewed as a concession on his part, might further strengthen his conscious urge to stress and publicly display how ἐλεύθερος he naturally is (or remains), through his outspoken accusations — even more so, since these accusations will not substantially alter the situation or his own reception of the Thracian.

with, and actually accentuate, his prior reference to his natural straightforwardness and habit of telling the truth right at the opening of his speech.

Rhesus, in his turn, before laying out the actual, quite specific reasons for his delay, responds roughly in the same terms, actually picking up Hector's statement that he was not born a double-minded man (423). The Thracian king clarifies that he is just the same as Hector (τοιούτος εἰμι καὐτός) in that he cuts his way straight to the point (422–4). He too wishes to highlight a particular aspect of his individual disposition¹⁶ — which, we might assume, would not necessarily have been taken for granted or been automatically deduced by other elements of his identity. The two heroes then make a point about their particular way of expressing themselves, which they ascribe to one of their distinctive natural inclinations or qualities, rather than their (quite comparable) social status and role (i.e. their free birth, male sex, kingship,¹⁷ military leadership, and common [non-Greek] ethnic identity). This character trait (frankness) is explicitly identified as the one which shapes and directs their particular way of relating to each other in an exchange which, rather than being closely related to the subsequent course of events, appears virtually motivated by Hector's very desire to exhibit the trait in question. In this way, the hero draws foremost attention to his self-image — and his concern for its proper perception by others.

The exchange between Rhesus' Charioteer and Hector, after Rhesus' murder, creates an interesting contrast. Being certain that Hector is the perpetrator of the crime, the Charioteer accuses the Trojan prince of twisting his words (πλέκων λόγους) and trying to cloud his judgment (γνώμην ὑφαίρη τὴν ἐμήν), despite the fact that he is a barbarian speaking to another barbarian (833–4). At this point, the expectation is expressed that barbarians (people of the same ethnic and/ or cultural status) would refrain from using subtle words,¹⁸ at least when interacting with one another. Unlike Hector, the Charioteer invokes ethnic/ cultural (and, thus, collective) identity rather than individual, inner qualities or proclivities as the decisive factor that influences, or, more precisely, should influence, the speakers' way of relating to straightforwardness and frankness — and which should essentially determine their code of communication.

The debate scene highlights: (1) Rhesus' prowess and loyalty to the Trojans — both of which are in principle quite meaningful for the future war and could thus create certain expectations about the action, (2) Hector's desire to express his blunt disapproval of Rhesus' (former) attitude, despite the fact that he has already decided to accept him as an ally. The latter leads to the manifestation of the former. Hector's direct reproaches constitute an effective way for Rhesus' attributes and disposition to be brought to light and highlighted, in an equally direct way, right upon his arrival. What is interesting, however, is the particular way in which Hector frames

¹⁶ Rhesus' particular response is of course motivated, at least in part, by his anxiety to raise himself to parity with Hector.

¹⁷ Rhesus though owes his kingship to Hector, as the latter emphatically points out while reproaching the Thracian (406–7). Another point of differentiation is Rhesus' divine pedigree — from the river god Strymon and the Muse (346–54).

¹⁸ Hall (1989: 123) contrasts “the blunt and unsophisticated barbarian intellect” with the “covert and cunning activities of the Greeks”, in connection to Dolon's deception by Odysseus and Diomedes, who afterwards slaughter the Thracians in their sleep.

his accusations, by focusing on his own nature and by virtually presenting his need for self-expression and conscious projection of one of his distinctive qualities as his driving force. In this way, besides ultimately highlighting Rhesus' loyalty and fighting merit, which create dramatic effects in the light of the future events, Hector's speech at the same time presents us with a type of self-characterisation which is interesting and rather uncommon in its own right.

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