

Ancestral Fault in Ancient Greece

Renaud Gagné



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Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | page vii |
| <i>Note on abbreviations</i> | ix |
| Introduction | I |
| 1 The theology of <i>progonikon hamartēma</i> | 22 |
| <i>De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam</i> | 22 |
| <i>De sera numinis vindicta</i> | 39 |
| Confrontations and translations | 54 |
| Isaak Sebastokrator | 65 |
| William of Moerbeke | 70 |
| 2 Haereditarium piaculum and inherited guilt | 80 |
| <i>Parentum peccata</i> | 82 |
| Domestications | 90 |
| Grotius | 97 |
| Lomeier | 112 |
| The scholarship of inherited guilt I | 120 |
| The scholarship of inherited guilt II | 133 |
| 3 The earliest record: <i>exōleia</i> in Homer and Hesiod | 159 |
| Hesiod | 159 |
| Homer | 177 |
| 4 Sympotic theologies: Alcaeus, Solon, and Theognis | 206 |
| Alcaeus | 210 |
| Solon | 226 |
| <i>Theognidea</i> | 249 |
| 5 Tracking divine punishment in Herodotus | 275 |
| The oath of Glaukos | 278 |
| The wrath of Talthybios | 296 |
| The <i>Enagees</i> | 306 |
| Croesus and Solon | 325 |

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 6 | Tragic reconfigurations: Labdacids | 344 |
| | <i>Seven against Thebes</i> | 351 |
| | <i>Antigone</i> | 362 |
| | <i>Phoenissae</i> | 376 |
| | <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> | 386 |
| 7 | Tragic reconfigurations: Atridae | 394 |
| | <i>Oresteia</i> | 394 |
| | <i>Iphigenia in Tauris</i> | 416 |
| | <i>Orestes</i> | 425 |
| | Conclusion | 438 |
| | Conclusion | 446 |
| | <i>Bibliography</i> | 473 |
| | <i>Index locorum</i> | 539 |
| | <i>General index</i> | 545 |

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Introduction

The anxieties of heredity mirror the fears and conflicts of society at any one time. Stains from the past and questions about the length of collective responsibility through generations currently occupy a prominent place in the national consciousness of many countries. Almost seventy years after the fall of the Third Reich, to take the one clearest example, as the last witnesses of the events are disappearing, Germany and Austria remain firmly set in the grip of its many ghosts and the shadow of the Holocaust. If that is a unique case, with no close parallels, other states also share memories that give an important role to the living presence of the violence 'they' inflicted in the past. The destruction of Native American societies in South, Central, and North America can be mentioned in that regard, or the open wounds of the African slave trade in the Atlantic world. The ambivalent legacies of Empire in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Portugal, in Holland and Belgium, and, in somewhat different guises, in Turkey, Japan, the United States, and Russia, are a source of shame and even disgust for some as much as they are matters of pride for others. While many will disagree on the evaluation of ancient violence and the understanding of its relevance for the various groups of the present, few will ignore the challenges it poses. Who is responsible for the real, tangible suffering that remains when all the executioners are dead? Are their flourishing families to be marked somehow in later times? Where does *that* abundance come from? How long is the case for historical reparations legitimate? Is it ever legitimate? The past can be a source of culpability, menace, and distress. That is as true now as it has ever been.

The dangers of heredity can also play a significant number of roles at the levels of the family and the individual. The effects of the parents' lifestyle on the health of their children are currently heavily emphasised by medical literature, and the risks of genetic predisposition to disease are well-established factors of fear in the lives of many people. Family history, antecedents, are regularly mentioned at the doctor's visit. Behaviour,



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by a large number of causes that leave no traces in the record and react differently to different contexts. No one work can hope to do proper justice to the massive range of the problem and its many imbrications within larger literary and cultural issues. Exhaustive treatment of all relevant sources and their eventful reception is beyond the reach of any single study. Such a scholarly mammoth of erudition would make for a singularly unreadable book, in fact, without any of this weight necessarily adding much to the value of the research. It would also give an illusion of completeness to a fragmentary record. A leaner, more narrowly circumscribed study focused on a single author or genre will miss the great articulations and the intricacies of the dialogue at play between texts, genres, and institutions. What I propose here instead is a comprehensive approach. The aim is to bring together the various facets of the question in one common investigation of Greek cultural representations. Instead of a complete review of sources, selected material will be presented in detail through case studies. Instead of a sequential narrative with an origin and a plot, the discussion will consist of investigations based on the perspectives of the individual sources. Such a study has to cast a wide net and take into account both diachronic and synchronic aspects of the material. From our fragmentary perspective, any part of the record can make sense only in relation to the whole, a situation that activates the familiar problems of the hermeneutic circle.

Separate parts of that gigantic puzzle are often of little use by themselves. Their significance stands out through combination and contrast with the contours of the big picture and other pieces of the ensemble. The meanings of ancestral fault in Theognis, for instance, are impossible to understand without serious consideration of the Theognidean collection's engagement with contemporary elegy.⁹ Narratives of delayed punishment in classical historiography cannot be read properly without reference to this same elegiac tradition, and tragedy's complex involvement with the same idea is thoroughly grounded in a myriad other texts.¹⁰ The list goes on. The trajectory of such an idea in time is a web of criss-crossing paths. Separated from us by millennia, it is still perceivable through the dialogue of texts with each other and the contrasts between their various formulations. Only a comprehensive approach can identify and use the many links of this web of correspondences and rewritings; the overarching trajectory of the idea is an integral part of its individual expressions. Individual texts respond to other texts, but it goes without saying that they mostly follow

⁹ See pp. 249–74. ¹⁰ See e.g. pp. 373–6.



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genre; what role it plays in this or that occasion; what its thematic echoes are, or its aesthetic value. This is a study in the literary and cultural history of representations. It consists of situated, interconnected interpretations of distinctive passages. In what follows, literary texts are not used as sources to be mined for the reconstruction of a separate cultural artefact. They are the direct objects of this study. Literary interpretation forms the core of the book, not the historical reconstruction of belief. In other words, rather than trying to ascertain what people did or what they thought, the discussion will look at what they said. What does ancestral fault specifically express in each individual passage, and how? What are its implications within the text? How does it differ from other similar passages? If literary interpretation can hardly aim for proof or demonstration, the fact remains that literary texts are what we have as evidence for this question, and a positivistic refusal to assess their meaning on their own terms and dismiss the investigation of their echoes and imagery as mere speculation is to condemn our understanding of the ancient Greek imagination to platitudes and impotence. Individual readings of texts are here conceived as open presentations of the material and invitations for further reinterpretation, rather than a search for (rhetorically) safe, buttressed results.

Writing the poetics of such a cultural concept requires an eclectic methodology able to combine many complementary approaches in one account. In this case, the research programme will be essentially concerned with five related issues: (1) the semantic extension of the concept and its grounding in vocabulary, theme, and imagery; (2) the roles and meanings of the idea in the economy of the individual texts where it appears; (3) the significance of these individual expressions in the larger social and cultural contexts that produced them; (4) the continuities and ruptures of the idea's progression over time and genres; (5) the intertextual links coursing through the recurrent expressions of the concept. All these issues will be considered together in each single chapter, and as a whole in the greater architecture of the book. Close readings are combined with generic and chronological synthesis. The goal is to open new perspectives on this one central question of ancient Greek culture. As successive expressions of the idea accumulated in the written record, some formulations stood out from others (each with its own logic), other notable formulations were written over them, and a distinctive series of related texts was progressively constituted in the literary archive.¹⁹ Even millennia later, and with the less than fragmentary record at our disposal, it is possible to identify clear

¹⁹ For the meaning of archive as used here, see A. Assmann 2012 [1999]: 327–32.



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His examination of the sources arranges the material according to genre and context. For Parker, the 'doctrine of inherited guilt' is a question of 'several interrelated ideas . . . not all of them involving Erinyes and curses, which tend to shape into one another, even though they are perhaps theoretically separable' (1983: 198–9). Defending in this way an entirely different take on the question from that of Moulinier, he tries to show how the material of those interrelated ideas can be organised into adequate patterns of classification. In a few broad strokes, Parker shows how the idea of inherited guilt is articulated in elegy, historiography, oratory, and, more prominently, tragedy. He argues that, throughout the development of early Greek religion, 'the basic conception remained the same' (1983: 199), and he discusses its representation as a sign of clear, divine action, or as a ground for accusing divine injustice, noting in the process, against Dodds, that it is not necessarily an expression of anxiety. It can be seen in functional terms both as an idea that 'protects the belief in justice against crude empirical refutation', and as a diffuse, vague threat that could be perfectly controlled in terms of anxiety by simple good luck sacrifices (1983: 202). Parker argues against Dodds and others, and agrees with Lloyd-Jones, in estimating that the doctrine of inherited guilt was probably not a late archaic development, but a belief perfectly adapted to the system of justice of the Homeric period. He does see a probable 'hardening' of the belief in the late archaic era, which he links to the contemporary 'development of the Orphic doctrine of inherited guilt', but he consistently warns against overplaying the significance of this belief in the classical religious world-view of the individual and of the city.

'Few of the ideas discussed so far', he writes, 'would be likely to have much influence on behaviour, except to the extent that individuals might be encouraged, or discouraged, in their crimes by the prospect of the reckoning being postponed to their descendants. They do not, that is to say, isolate a recognisable category of polluted persons, sprung from criminal ancestors' (1983: 203–4). Taking, then, a careful, minimalist position, he emphasises the limited importance of ancestral fault in the determination of behaviour, as opposed to representation, and portrays it as a doctrine of little actual consequence. Ancestral fault is shown as an idea of weak cognitive intensity in the classical period, and something that remains entirely restricted to the 'narrowly religious sphere' (1983: 205). In the wider space of civic religion that Parker attempts to define in his work, 'inherited guilt' is portrayed as a belief of much weaker social range than the 'inherited innocence' of civic benefactors.



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The idea of ancestral curse exercises a dangerous fascination. It found its way by stages into myths where it did not originally belong; and interpreters of tragedy have persistently introduced it where it is not present. It has become, so to speak, one of the inherited curses of scholarship. (1999: 44)

An inherited curse it is. Like all such curses, it will not go away so easily.

The minimalist and critical positions of the past few decades have had the salutary effect of sharpening the debate and challenging long-held assumptions. An inherited curse is not the persistent wrath of a god, and neither one nor the other is necessarily linked to the idea of pollution. In Hesiod, for instance, the idea of generational punishment does not involve any consideration of pollution (*Op.* 280–5). In Homer it is linked exclusively to the context of the oath, while in Solon's *Elegy to the Muses*, it has nothing to do with oaths or 'curses'.²⁶ The idea of 'guilt', whatever meaning we give to that charged word, rarely has a role to play in the tales of punishment under consideration. Continuity through the generations and substitution of one generation for another, moreover, are not equivalent processes of divine punishment. The idea that the 'doctrine of inherited guilt' had a monolithic consistency, that it was a persistent and widespread belief throughout Greek culture, and a necessary part of the web of myth surrounding the stories of the Atreid and Labdacid houses (in tragedy or elsewhere), has been justly battered down. Niall Sewell-Rutter's stimulating 2007 study on inherited guilt in tragedy shows well the value of this critical approach for identifying the relevant material, and its usefulness for analysing the differences and discrepancies that distinguish each source from the other, as well as linking some of them together. As he writes, 'curses and Erinyes have close connections with ancestral transgression and are often found in association with it, but they are not simply facets of it'.²⁷ The renewed focus of this work on the categories in play, its insistence on greater analytical clarity, and the idea that the close scrutiny of the evidence rarely tallies with the grand narratives of research on the question, have done much to improve our grasp on the complexity of the material at hand. But the danger is then to mistake the forest for the trees.

²⁶ See p. 240.

²⁷ Sewell-Rutter 2007: 24. His study focuses on the notion of 'moral inheritance'. At page 48, for instance, in reference to Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Euripides' *Phoenissae*, he writes that 'What has emerged within the limits of this consideration is a conjunction of inherited guilt with moral inheritance: in both authors, the doomed family's recurrent misfortunes through the generations are mediated not simply through some mysterious supernatural means, but at least in part through the recurrence of traits and modes of behaviour, which help to create the recurrent patterns of doom through intelligible continuities of human character and action.'



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of scholars from Byzantium and the Latin West. Chapter 2 is mainly concerned with the adaptations of Greek ancestral fault to the theological scholarship of the early modern period, both as an object of appropriation, something that can be made to illustrate Christian thought, and its transformation as a figure of alterity, a false belief that embodies the errors of another time and another place – and thus points to the genuine (Christian) truth by contrast. The chapter ends by looking at some of the main roles that the notion of ancestral fault has played in the research of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, and the cultural implications, programmes of thought, and ideas about ancient Greek religion that they embody. This section on the receptions of Greek ancestral fault is not an end in itself. It is conceived as an integral part of the idea's history, and a necessary preparation for making sense of the challenges of the second section.

That section seeks to describe the major trajectories of ancestral fault in the implicit theology of the archaic and classical periods. Its chapters follow a largely chronological framework. Prominent and roughly contemporary examples of the concept are contrasted in every chapter, and the results of each chapter locked in a common investigation of temporal change. The long diachronic trajectory of the idea is divided into synchronic moments of shared horizons and reference. Chapter 3 looks at the earliest extant evidence in Homer and Hesiod, and the common grounding of these expressions in the ritual institution of the great oath. Chapter 4 is concerned with the role of the idea in the sympotic poems of Alcaeus, Solon, and Theognis, and its articulation of inheritance and memory in the major ideological struggles of the sixth-century *polis* between *agathoi* and *kakoi*. Chapter 5 investigates the rich and complex attestations of the idea in Herodotus' *Histories*, while Chapters 6 and 7 are concerned with the immensely varied record of tragedy: Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and *Seven against Thebes*, Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Phoenissae*, and *Orestes*. The conclusion offers more brief considerations concerning the role of the idea in the civic reflections of epideictic and forensic oratory, and its reconfigurations in Empedocles, 'Orphic' literature, and Plato's dialogues. It looks at how the different trajectories of the idea ultimately merged into one another and eventually crystallised into the explicit theology discussed in Chapter 1. This book, in other words, aims to trace the eventful history of Greek ancestral fault over some three thousand years.



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Making sense of the apparent paradox of ancestral fault is presented as a defence of traditional cult.⁹ It also leads to further understanding of hallowed religious forms. In other words, deciphering the logic of delayed providential punishment is for Proclus part of a larger hermeneutics of Greek culture. Three main points stand out. One is that a city or a family is a single form of life (*animal unum*, ζῷον ἓν) that is both more immortal and more sacred than the individual human life.¹⁰ This form of life has one ‘homochronous’ *period*.¹¹ The temporal cycles of these entities function on different levels from that of individual human beings. The actions committed at one moment of this extended life reverberate on all subsequent moments. Bodies, stature, and fortunes change, but the descendants of one extended life are united in common experience (*compassio*, συμπάθεια) with their predecessors. They will justly receive punishment for their crimes (*peccata*, ἀδικήματα). The extended life of a city or a family can be seen as a cord linking all parts of the monad through time, a *funis* – the translation of σείρα, a common fixture of Neoplatonic metaphysical literature.¹² Just as one civic deity (*poliouchus*) presides over the entire life of a city, a single ‘kindred divinity’ (*omognios*) presides over the entire family from generation to generation. Proclus must have heroic ancestors in mind for this second group, or divine powers of kinship.¹³

The link that binds an individual culprit to an individual descendant punished for his crime is based on *similitudo*. Obscure correspondences often bind one element to another element of a whole. To intervene on the hooves of an ox, for instance, fat can be applied to its horns. Medical

⁹ Cf. Festugière 1966.

¹⁰ 59: *dicatur primo quidem quod omnis civitas et omne genus unum quoddam animal est maiori modo quam hominum unusquisque, et immortalius et sanctius.*

¹¹ 59: *et periodus una communis civitatis est et generis, equidem secundum eadem concludens utriusque vitam et mores; hii quidem aliorum, hii autem aliorum, et civitatum et generum, tanquam utique omokhronou (id est contemporanea) ea que in hiis ente vita; et corporum magnitudines et pecunie differentes et figure et motus, tanquam utique una natura per civitatem totam et genus unumquodque eorum que in civitate pertingente, et hanc quidem unam, hoc autem unum faciente.*

¹² 59: *si igitur est, sicut ostensum est, animal unum et civitas unaquaque et genus unumquodque, quid miramur, si ea que progenitorum et usque ad pronepotes exsolvuntur et civitatum vita desuper tanquam funem evolvens, una ens, actorum in aliis temporibus aut meliorum aut deteriorum in aliis habet retributionem?* On the process of participation as a vertical movement in Proclus, see Sweeney 1982. On the Latin translation of σείρα by *funis* in philosophical literature ever since the time of Lucretius (2.1153–6), see Radke 1956; cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.56.127; Isaac 1977: 149–50. See e.g. Wifstrand 1957–8 on the fundamental importance of the σείραι linking the different planes of existence together in the system of Proclus. The Golden Chain of the *Iliad* is the central image of this philosophical tradition.

¹³ Ὀμόγνιος is attested as an epithet of Zeus in Plato, and the θεοὶ ὁμόγνιοι, also mentioned in the *Laws*, are common figures of classical literature: Pl. *Leg.* 729c; 881d; Soph. *OC* 1333; Eur. *Andr.* 921; Ar. *Ran.* 750; cf. R. C. T. Parker 2005a: 9–36.



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memory of the tragic theatre. With these select examples, the short discussion of Question Nine thus aims to solve the apparent paradox of ancestral fault for the students of the Academy in terms they can understand. It has made the ἀπόρημα 'clear' (*palam*, δῆλον), even if the philosopher tells us that he has treated the question at much greater length 'elsewhere'.²² That extended discussion is unfortunately lost.

Another trace of the Diadochus' engagement with the definition of ancestral fault can be mentioned, however. A scholion to line 284 of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, for instance, in which Hesiod famously mentions the terrible consequences of perjury on the transgressor's family (τοῦ δέ τ' ἀμαυροτέρη γενεὴ μετόπισθε λέλειπται), contains clear echoes of precisely the same ideas on ancestral fault found in Question Nine of Proclus' treatise:

τὰ γὰρ τῶν πατέρων ἀδικήματα χραίνει καὶ τοὺς ἐγγόνους αὐτῶν καὶ ἐνόχους ἀποφαίνει ταῖς τιμωρίαις· καὶ γὰρ ὀνειδίη καὶ ἀδοξία αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ἀδικιῶν συμβαίνουσι καὶ τίσεις ἐκ τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων ἀπολαμβάνοντες, ὧν ἔσχον ἀδικήσαντες οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν, συναπολαύουσι τῶν ὀφειλομένων ἐκείνοις κολάσεων. ἄλλως δὲ γινώσκει τὸ θεῖον, ὡς τοῖς ἡθεσιν αὐτῶν ἐμπέφυκε τι τῆς ἀδίκου τῶν γεννησάντων προαιρέσεως καὶ ἡμᾶς λανθάνωσι καὶ εἰκότως ταύτην ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁρῶντες τὴν ρίζαν ἐκκόπτουσι διὰ τῶν τιμωριῶν καὶ τοῦ μὴ ἐνεργῆσαι κωλύουσιν, ὡς ἱατροὶ προκαθαίροντές τινες ὧν ὑφορῶνται νόσους.

Indeed, the faults of the fathers also defile their descendants and reveal them as bound to retribution. For blame and ill repute also come upon them from these wrongdoings, and, inheriting vengeance from the crimes that their fathers committed, they share in the punishments that are their due. Divinity knows, in any case, that something of the unjust inclination of their progenitors grows into their character, even if it escapes our attention, and seeing this root in them, they justly cut it down for vengeance and so as not to let it grow, as doctors preventively purge some sicknesses which they suspect.

That text is obviously related to the discussion of Proclus in *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam*.²³ The punishment (κολάσις) inherited by the posterity of the culprit is a legacy of the vengeance (τίσις) transmitted by the ancestor to his offspring, and blame and ill-repute also follow through the generations. The work of divinity (τὸ θεῖον), more importantly, is described as a medical intervention when it punishes someone for

²² 61: *hoc quidem igitur et per hec sit palam; et novi etiam a me ipso in aliis elaboratum*; see Isaac 1977: 150.

²³ See Gagné 2010b: 4, n. 8; Van den Berg (forthcoming): 15. For Hes. *Op.* 284, see pp. 159–76.



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on the matter, the exactly contemporary commentary of Hermias on the *Phaedrus* of Plato.³⁰ The text is found in the lemma to the famous discussion of initiatory madness in *Phaedrus* 244d, which presents the second madness, the ‘initiatory madness’ (τελεστική μανία), as a deliverance from and a protection against the ‘ancient wraths’ (παλαιὰ μηνίματα) sent by the gods against some families, the source of the prayers and propitiatory ceremonies from which come the purifications and expiations that can guard against ancestral fault:

ἀλλὰ μὴν νόσων γε καὶ πόνων τῶν μεγίστων, ἃ δὴ παλαιῶν ἐκ μηνιμάτων ποθὲν ἐν τισι τῶν γενῶν ἡ μανία ἐγγενομένη καὶ προφητεύσασα, οἷς ἔδει ἀπαλλαγὴν ἡῦρετο, καταφυγοῦσα πρὸς θεῶν εὐχάς τε καὶ λατρείας, ὅθεν δὴ καθαρῶν τε καὶ τελετῶν τυχοῦσα ἐξάντη ἐποίησε τὸν [ἐαυτῆς] ἔχοντα πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον, λύσιν τῷ ὀρθῶς μανέντι τε καὶ κατασχομένῳ τῶν παρόντων κακῶν εὐρομένη.

Moreover, when diseases and the greatest troubles have been visited upon certain families through some ancient guilt, madness has entered in and by oracular power has found a way of release for those in need, taking refuge in prayers and the service of the gods, and so, by purifications and sacred rites, he who has this madness is made safe for the present and the after time, and for him who is rightly possessed of madness a release from present ills is found (trans. Fowler).

That is the same passage referred to in Proclus’ discussion of *progonikon hamartēma* in his commentary to the *Cratylus*.³¹ The commentary of Hermias to this passage launches into an extended definition of ancestral fault, ‘how it is that the descendants are punished instead of the ancestors’.³² The transmission of wealth appears as the first element of the explanation, in terms that are reminiscent of the ideas expressed in Proclus’ commentary to the *Cratylus*. The inheritance of wealth that has been acquired unjustly, ‘gold and silver, which have often been amassed out of crime’, also entails the transmission of responsibility for the transgression, and the punishment of the descendants who received this wealth is thus justified.³³ The text goes further and adds that the individual soul is not found where it is by chance but is led to the appropriate *genos* for the

³⁰ *In Platonis Phaedrum scholia* 96.1–97.27 Couvreur. See Van den Berg (forthcoming): 3–4; 9–10.

³¹ See pp. 30–2. Cf. Iambl. *Myst.* 3.10, who ascribes the power of ἀποκαθάρσεις ψυχῶν καὶ λύσεις παλαιῶν μηνιμάτων to Sabazios.

³² 96.7–8: ἀλλὰ πῶς λόγον ἔχει τὸ ἐκγόνους ὑπὲρ προγόνων δίκας διδόναι;

³³ 96.9–11: ἡ μάλιστα μὲν καὶ διεδέξαντο τὰς ἐκείνων κτήσεις, καὶ χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον, ἐξ ἀδικιῶν πολλάκις συναχθείσας, ὃ καὶ ἱκανὸν αὐτοῖς ἐπαγαγεῖν τὴν δίκην;



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of bodies and souls in Hermias. One does not exclude the other, but the emphasis is not at the same place.

These differences of detail show a great amount of family resemblances. The variations on the idea of ancestral fault found in the texts of Proclus and Hermias all belong to the same systematic and coherent theological tradition. The discussions of Syrianus on the matter are lost, as is the extensive treatment of Proclus mentioned at the end of Question Nine of the *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam* (see n. 22), but the four texts we have just looked at can give us a fairly good idea of later Neoplatonic thought on ancestral fault. At the end of antiquity, the systematic theology developed by Proclus identified the idea of ancestral fault as one of the fundamental principles governing divine action in time. In consolidating the Hellenic archive as a religion against the onslaught of Christianity, Proclus designed a coherent and unified Hellenic faith, with its authorities, its sense of history, its rituals, and its systematic theology – what Luc Brisson has called ‘la synthèse la plus achevée de l’Hellénisme’.⁴⁸ It is as an element of pagan theology that the principle of ancestral fault was last expressed and codified by late Greek antiquity, the dogma of a system defined by its opposition to the hegemonic Christian creed.⁴⁹ The question of *progonikon hamartēma* is there a discrete, circumscribed problem of theology, a ζήτημα. It consists of an apparent anomaly, an ἀπόρημα, the justice of punishing the descendants of the transgressors, explained by the different temporalities of life, metempsychosis, and the nature of providential preventive medicine. It brings together the languages of heredity, pollution, initiation, character, human knowledge, and divine will in one coherent picture. Above all, the explanations of the philosophers ultimately confirm the validity of the various literary and ritual traditions of Hellenism built on the idea of *progonikon hamartēma*. The influential heads of the Academy and their students saw fit to define the notion of ancestral fault at great length in their work, to justify it and use it as an interpretative tool of traditional Greek wisdom.

Proclus obviously built this particular definition of the idea for the purposes of his own philosophy. His discussion is made to illustrate certain points of the creed, such as the providential omniscience, the healing emanations flowing down from one level of reality to another, psychic purity and metempsychosis, and the idea of a complete underlying

⁴⁸ Brisson 1999.

⁴⁹ See Festugière 1966; Ramos Jurado 1974; Saffrey 1975. On Proclus as a systematic philosopher, see further Beierwaltes 1987.



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atone for the crime.⁵⁷ That man was Iadmon, three generations later, who was in no way related to Aesop, but the descendant of Aesop's master, Timon tells his friends, following Herodotus (2.134).⁵⁸ Similarly laughable is the claim of the Syracusan tyrant Agathocles to have justice on his side, as a kinsman of the Cyclops Polyphemus, in his designs against Corcyra and Ithaca.⁵⁹ The undue severity of Alexander's destruction of the city of the Branchidae as a price for the role of their πρόπαπποι in betraying the sanctuary of Didyma in 494 is related with horror.⁶⁰ Presented as the paradigm of a just divine vengeance in Aelian, it is portrayed as an act of cruelty in Timon's speech. Even worse is the destruction of the city of Pheneos by Apollo for Heracles' theft of the Delphian tripod a thousand years earlier, or the triple destruction of Sybaris through Hera's enduring wrath (μήνιμα), and even more absurd still the servitude of the Locrian maidens, sent by their city to Troy as a price for Ajax's debauchery (ἀκολασία) – a practice, we are told, that was just recently ended.⁶¹ These famous tales from tradition are as preposterous as the customs of the Thracians and the barbarians of the Eridanos, who tattoo their women and wear black because of what their ancestors did to Orpheus and their grief for Phaethon (12: 557d). Whereas these customs are simply silly, however, the enduring wrath of the gods is intolerable and horrific. 'But for what reason should the wrath of the gods at first sink out of sight', asks Timon at the end of his speech, 'like certain rivers, only to resurge later against others, leading in the end to the direst calamities?'⁶² This impasse thus rejoins the critical puzzlement at the beginning of his intervention, where he presented the ἀπορία of ancestral fault as an illustration of

⁵⁷ See Luzzatto 1989. ⁵⁸ See Asheri *et al.* 2007: 337.

⁵⁹ The story is otherwise attested in 'Plut.' *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata* 176c–f.

⁶⁰ 557b (12): καὶ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον οὐδ' οἱ πάνυ φιλοῦντες, ὧν ἔσμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἐπαινοῦσι τὸ Βραγχιδῶν ἄστει συγγέαντα καὶ διαφθεύραντα πᾶσαν ἡλικίαν διὰ τὴν γενομένην τοῦ περὶ Μίλητον ἱεροῦ προδοσίαν ὑπὸ τῶν προπάππων αὐτῶν. The story is otherwise attested in Quintus Curtius 7.5.28 and Aelian F 54 (who comments οὐ μὴν ἐκάθευδεν ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοια on the event).

⁶¹ 557c–d (12): ἄρ' οὖν οὐκ ἀτοπώτερος τούτων ὁ Ἀπόλλων, εἰ Φενεάτας ἀπόλλυσι τοὺς νῦν, ἐμφράξας τὸ βάραθρον καὶ κατακλύσας τὴν χώραν ἅπασαν αὐτῶν, ὅτι πρὸ χιλίων ἐτῶν, ὡς φασιν, ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ἀνασπάσας τὸν τρίποδα τὸν μαντικὸν εἰς Φενεὸν ἀπήνεγκε, Συβαρίταις δὲ φράζων ἀπόλλυσιν τῶν κακῶν, ὅταν τρισὶν ὀλέθροις ἰλάσωνται τὸ μήνιμα τῆς Λευκαδίας Ἥρας; καὶ μὴν οὐ πολὺς χρόνος ἄφ' οὗ Λοκροὶ πέμποντες εἰς Τροίαν πέπαινανται τὰς παρθένους, αἱ καὶ ἀναμπέχονοι γυμνοῖς ποσὶν ἢ τε δοῦλαι | ἢ οἶαι σαίρεσκον Ἀθηναίης περὶ βωμόν, | νόσφι κρηδέμοιο, καὶ εἰ βαθὺ γῆρας ἰκάνοι, διὰ τὴν Αἴαντος ἀκολασίαν. ποῦ δὴ ταῦτα τὸ εὐλογον ἴσχει καὶ δίκαιον; for references to these events, see Vernière 1974: 208–9. For the ritual of the Locrian Maidens, see p. 448.

⁶² 557e (12): καίτοι τοῦτ' ἀβελτερίαν μὲν ἔχει μόνον οὐδὲν δὲ δεινὸν οὐδ' ἀνήκεστον· αἱ δὲ τῶν θεῶν ὀργαὶ τίνι λόγῳ παραχρῆμα δυόμεναι καθάπερ ἔνιοι τῶν ποταμῶν εἴθ' ὕστερον ἐπ' ἄλλους ἀναφερόμεναι πρὸς ἐσχάτας συμφορὰς τελευτῶσιν;

Euripides' accusation against the gods, that they punish 'the faults of the parents on their descendants'.⁶³ That is the challenge that lays the ground for Plutarch's long and comprehensive answer in defence of the justice of ancestral fault.

Its methodical progression can be followed in three steps. Plutarch first mocks his friend, gently, for having chosen examples that consist mostly of 'myths and fictions' (μῦθοι καὶ πλάσματα), and he disapproves of this bizarre choice of ἀτοπίαι to illustrate his point (13: 557e–f). The record of tradition cannot be used without examination.⁶⁴ Rather than uncritically collect stories from the fabrications of literature, Plutarch invites his interlocutor to reflect on the logic of concrete, well-known practices from everyday experience. Individuals are indeed honoured by cities for the triumphs and the glorious deeds of their ancestors, as everyone can see, especially himself, a member of the esteemed Opheltiadaï clan, and that is both just and logical, the opposite of the accusations levelled by Timon against ancestral fault. But if hereditary honour is justified, argues Plutarch, something that no one will contest, it follows that so is hereditary punishment, which is based on the same pattern. Anyone who disputes this is simply seeking to quarrel with the gods (13: 558c–d). That simple inference is sufficient to defend and validate the idea of ancestral fault. What remains is to understand its logic, a question that provides the material for the rest of the discussion. That logic can only be reached through further inference, the uncovering of 'the likely and the believable' (τὸ εἰκὸς καὶ πιθανόν), as 'the clear and truth' (τὸ σαφὲς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια), when talking about divinity, will continue to escape the power of human speech (13: 558d). Trying to understand the nature of delayed generational punishment is like following a thread through a dark labyrinth.

Be that as it may, results can be obtained. A fundamental point of the argument is that correspondences unite like with like through intervals (διαλείμματα) in time and space.⁶⁵ The correspondences that course through space are readily observable and altogether uncontroversial. One part of a body can affect the other, just as what happens to one member of a flock can have repercussions on the entire group. Contagion, more importantly, can make its way through cities, even distant lands, as everybody knows. Powers, δυνάμεις, are demonstrably at work in the

⁶³ F 980 Kannicht: τὰ τῶν τεκόντων σφάλματ' εἰς τοὺς ἐγγόνους (12: 556e); see p. 344.

⁶⁴ See Torraca 1991.

⁶⁵ 558e (14): ἄλλαι τε δυνάμεις ἀφ' ἧς ἔχουσιν καὶ διαδόσεις ἀπίστους ὀξὺται καὶ μήκεσι δι' ἐτέρων εἰς ἕτερα περαίνουσιν. ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς τὰ κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους διαλείμματα θαυμάζομεν, οὐ τὰ κατὰ τοὺς τόπους.

intervals of space. It should come as no surprise, then, that the same patterns that we can see in space are also at work in the intervals of time, and that, even if we cannot perceive them, certain powers 'have a way of reverting from their furthest points to their origins and effecting a connexion'.⁶⁶ The long delay in the punishment of the Delphians and the Sybarites mentioned by Timon is perfectly understandable in this light.

The connections made by these powers through time are not arbitrary, of course, but they follow clearly determined channels of transmission: cities and families. Just like a living thing, a ζῶον, a city has a clearly defined unity and continuity in time, one that actually changes less through the centuries than the individual changes through the ages of life (15: 559a–c). As long as the city continues to exist, it keeps the responsibility (αἵτια) and the merit (χάρις) of what it has done in the past. The same is true of the family, the *genos*, which is metaphorically imagined as a chain of generations linked to the same origin (that is the image that Proclus will rewrite as a Neoplatonic σειρά), which carries a 'power' (δύναμις) and a congenital 'communion' (κοινωνία) through the generations (16: 559d–560a).⁶⁷ The sharing of responsibility over time in the *genos* is simply an extension of that principle. More, the continuity of the family requires that the wrongs committed by one of its members can be corrected by exacting punishment on another member. Providence acts like a doctor, healing the sickness of one part of the *genos* by applying treatment on another (16: 559d–560a). The criminal character of the transgressor is transmitted to his descendants, and the intervention of punishment thus functions as a cure for the vice of the family, a cure that works not only as a physical remedy on the body of the punished individual, but as an example that affects the soul of the original transgressor with courage or fear through φαντασίαι and can lead to correction (ἐπανόρθωσις) and improvement.⁶⁸ Contrary to what Timon was saying, there is nothing odd, ridiculous, or unjust about this treatment.

Olympichus intervenes (17: 560a–b) and rightly says that Plutarch's argument presupposes the immortality of the soul, its ability to learn

⁶⁶ 558f (14): ἔχουσι γὰρ τινὰς αἰ δυνάμεις ἀναφορὰς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἐπὶ τὰ πρῶτα καὶ συνάψεις ὧν ἡ αἰτία, καὶ ὅταν ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἀγνοῖται, σιωπῇ περαίνει τὸ οἰκεῖον.

⁶⁷ 559c–d (16): εἰ δ' ἐστὶ [τι] πόλις ἐν πρᾶγμα καὶ συνεχές, ἔστι δῆπου καὶ γένος, ἐξηρτημένον ἀρχῆς μιᾶς καὶ δυνάμιν τινὰ καὶ κοινωνίαν διαπεφυκυῖαν ἀναφερούσης, καὶ τὸ γεννηθὲν οὐχ ὥς τι δημιουργημάτων πεποιημένον ἀπὸ γένεστος· ἐξ αὐτοῦ γὰρ οὐχ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γέγονεν, ὥστ' ἔχει τι καὶ φέρεται τῶν ἐκείνου μέρος ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ κολαζόμενον προσηκόντως καὶ τιμώμενον.

⁶⁸ 560a (16). Note the parallel between this usage of ἐπανόρθωσις and the ἐπανορθώμεθα of Hermias 97 (see n. 42). On φαντασία in Plutarch, see Semenzato 2006.

through lives, after death, something that Plutarch confirms, rehearsing the arguments in favour of the immortal soul in the process, and reminding his audience that the present discussion about Providence and late punishment and the survival of the soul are part of the same vision. This brief aside is used to prepare the reader for the last section of the dialogue, the myth of Thespesios, and show how its exposition of the afterlife and metempsychosis fits within the framework of the present investigation into the workings of late punishment. The punishments of the afterlife and the punishments of ancestral fault through generations are complementary. If the sanctions of the souls in their 'separate existence in the other world' are invisible to mortals, says Plutarch, the punishments of their descendants in this world are there for all to see and can thus serve as warnings for the 'wicked' (πόνηροι). The two sanctions are simply facets of the same operation. They have different audiences, and different forms of communication. One can only be told through μῦθος, whose pedagogical role is thus reclaimed at the end of the text, and the other, the spectacle of ancestral fault, can be understood through probability, τὸ εἰκός.⁶⁹ It is to that mode that the speech of Plutarch returns in its last chapters on ancestral fault, the third step of the argument (561c–563b).

The medical imagery of the previous chapters is pursued and applied to the effect of the sanction on the descendants of the transgressor. If the culprit can justly be punished through his offspring, as the previous discussion established, a difficulty remains in the fact that these offspring did not commit the crime themselves. How can it be just for innocents to be punished then? The answer is simple: they are not really punished. If their ancestors are indeed punished through them, what they have to suffer is not a punishment, but in fact a cure by the hand of Providence (19: 561c–f). The reason is clear. The crime of the ancestor has become part of the constitutive heredity of his descendants. The character of the transgressor can be transmitted to his offspring, and the 'inborn similarity of evil' (κακίας ὁμοιότης συγγενική) that the descendants share with their criminal ancestors, something that can 'germinate and shoot up in a youthful character', will often reveal itself in the same crimes, provided that the right conditions are found, unless it is stopped in time.⁷⁰ The key

⁶⁹ 561b (18): ἔχω μὲν τινα καὶ λόγον εἶπεῖν ἑναγχος ἀκηκῶς, ὁκνῶ δὲ μὴ φανῇ μῦθος ὑμῖν· μόνῳ οὖν χρῶμαι τῷ εἰκότι.

⁷⁰ 561f–562f (19): ἄρ' οὖν σῶμα μὲν ἔκγονον φαύλου σώματος ἄξιόν ἐστι θεραπεύειν καὶ φυλάττειν, κακίας δ' ὁμοιότητα συγγενικὴν ἐν νέῳ βλαστάνουσιν ἡθεὶ καὶ ἀναφυσομένην ἐὰν δεῖ καὶ περιμένειν καὶ μέλλειν, ἄχρι ἂν ἐκχυθεῖσα τοῖς πάθεσιν ἐμφανὴς γένηται 'κακόφρονά τ' ἀμφάνη πραπίδων | καρπὸν' ὥς φησι Πίνδαρος.

is in the similarity or difference that links the generations of a *genos* in time. Some individuals share the same predispositions as their parents, others do not, and marked character traits, just like physical properties, often skip generations to reappear later. Worse, the ‘hereditary stain of evil’ (ἐγγενὴς κηλὶς τῆς κακίας) is often hidden from view, even to those who actually have it (20: 562b). Its patterns of transmission are invisible to mortals, but not to divinity, which knows the ‘disposition and nature’ (διάθεσις καὶ φύσις) of each individual (20: 562c–d). Its decision to intervene when it does, far from being arbitrary, is designed to cure them, ‘removing the vice, like an epilepsy, before the seizure’ (20: 562d).⁷¹ The intervention of divinity targets the state and disposition of the individual, his potential for crime. It is a proleptic cure, applied only when it has a chance of success, and when it is needed, just like any medical intervention (21: 562e).⁷² The accusation of Euripides, thus, that ‘the sins of parents on the children the gods do visit’, is not defensible, as the crimes of the ancestors only have consequences for their descendants when it is just that they do so (21: 562e). That pattern of explanation of ancestral fault can hardly be described as ‘inherited guilt’.

Plutarch’s speech ends with a direct return to the images used by Timon in his diatribe against ancestral fault, especially that of the underground river, the hidden course of ‘similarity’ (ὁμοιότης) that runs unseen through the generations, only to reappear at a later date in order to bloom and restore the inherited bent of the *genos*.⁷³ The last exemplum is particularly rich, drawn from an event that happened recently in Thebes, the birth of one of the children of Python of Thisbè, who died ‘just the other day’.⁷⁴ Python was said to be a descendant of the *Spartoi*, the fabled autochthonous inhabitants of Thebes, and his child had the mark of a spear on his body, something that points directly to that ancestry, as if its character reappeared ‘from the depths of the earth’. A local occurrence, familiar to all the assembled friends of the dialogue, creates a direct link between the present and the most remote Boeotian past, the primordial days of Thebes, events most remarkably attached to the idea of ancestral fault staged in the

⁷¹ Note the similar mention of epilepsy in Proclus, *De decem dubitationibus* 61.

⁷² The formulation is close to what we find in Hermias 96–7; see p. 35.

⁷³ 563b (21): οὕτω πολλάκις ἦθη καὶ πάθη ψυχῆς αἱ πρῶται κρύπτουσι γενέσεις καὶ καταδύουσιν, ὕστερον δὲ ποτε καὶ δι’ ἐτέρων ἐξήνθησε καὶ ἀπέδωκε τὸ οἰκεῖον εἰς κακίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν ἢ φύσιν. Cf. 557e.

⁷⁴ 563a–b (21): τῶν δὲ Πύθωνος τοῦ Θισβέως παίδων, ὃς ἔναγχος τέθηκε, λεγομένου τοῖς Σπαρτοῖς προσήκειν εἰς ἐξανήνεγκε λόγχης τύπον ἐν τῷ σώματι, διὰ χρόνων τοσούτων ἀνασχούσης καὶ ἀναδύσης ὥσπερ ἐκ βυθοῦ τῆς πρὸς τὸ γένος ὁμοιότητος.



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social stability in the life of the *polis* and the Empire. Pictured as a philosophical stance in opposition to the renouncement of the Epicurean ascetic, and thus as a justification of the world and a participation in its mechanisms superior to the sterile bickering of a rival School which has stepped out of the *polis*, it is an expression of the philosopher's engagement with the living past and the present of the city, and with the city's place in the Empire.⁷⁸ In Proclus, on the other hand, ancestral fault is a figure of the Common Concepts embedded in our souls and unanimously agreed upon by the true philosophers of the unified Hellenic tradition, and confirmed by the revelations which buttress their thoughts; it is not one philosophical stance in the Hellenic tradition, but the position of true Hellenism against Christianity. It is an object of revelation uncovered through exegesis of the hallowed canon. Cut off from concrete participation in the *polis*, it is a block in the coherent, monolithic, and definitive edifice of Hellenism built by Proclus. Ancestral fault becomes a pagan dogma.

The Neoplatonic programme of Proclus' discussion is reflected in the very systematic nature of the divine order deployed to explain the mechanisms of ancestral fault, with the One, Providence, the gods of the city and the demons of the *genos* all perfectly aligned in their proper place in the hierarchy of the universe. The text of Plutarch, on the other hand, stages a much less methodical understanding of *pronoia*, and its references to individual gods, notwithstanding the prominence of Apollo, considering the dramatic setting of the dialogue in Delphi, are mostly conditioned by the literary and historical sources of the examples at hand, such as the enduring wrath (*mēnima*) of Hera against Sybaris.⁷⁹ Prophecy is mentioned in that dialogue as part of this Delphic staging, and in reference to the survival of the soul, whereas it appears to be a source for the teaching of ancestral fault in Proclus, together with the initiations of the mysteries and the purifications of the cleansing gods. The mention of Apollonius of Tyana also fits with this marked pattern of religious reference in the text of Proclus.⁸⁰

If both Plutarch and Proclus give pride of place to tragedy in the cultural baggage of Hellenism used to illustrate the nature of ancestral fault,

⁷⁸ See Scholten 2009. On the representation of Nero in *De sera numinis vindicta*, see Torraca 1991, Brenk 1987 and Zadorojnyi 1997. For the close interaction of Hellenic education and power in the world of Plutarch, see Stadter and van der Stockt 2002, with ample reference to earlier bibliography. On the protreptic value of Plutarch's treatise, see Gauthier 1995. On his engagement with Epicureanism, Hershbell 1992; Boulogne 2003.

⁷⁹ See p. 41. ⁸⁰ See p. 65.

Plutarch's dialogue cites a much greater number of texts and historical events, and the diversity of its references creates an effect of resonance with the deep baggage of tradition, from Homer and Hesiod to the most popular current proverbs.⁸¹ The dialogic structure of the text presents the meaning of that tradition as a controversial problem, a conflict, and the confrontation of voices that contradict the position of Plutarch and show the oppositions that exist on the question within the philosophical systems constitutes a challenge that must be solved by the educated man. The *paideia* offered by Plutarch to his readers is a sustained effort of reasoning based on deduction and probability, and the ability to navigate the contradictions, inventions, and deceptive appearances of (mostly historical) tradition – the necessity for the proper exercise of balanced judgment. It reaffirms the continuing importance of the past for making sense of the present.

The text of Proclus follows another course. Constructed as a magisterial lesson imparting foundational wisdom to students, it has none of the playful dramatic structure of the *De sera numinis vindicta*, and none of its qualifications about probability. It is a text that proclaims the meaning and the truth of eternal Hellenic tradition before the main challenge of the day, which no longer came from within. The authority of tradition is based on its unity, the harmony of ancient wisdom, a convergence that can be restored through proper exegesis. The discussion of Proclus is constructed as a theological exposition, the religious vision of a Common Concept. In their respective codifications of the Greek heritage, their systematic reconfigurations of the archive, both Plutarch and Proclus chose to make the principle of ancestral fault a central concern of their historical, moral, and religious world-views. They defined it as an element of Hellenic identity based on opposition: one gave it the shape of a cultural principle in the context of Roman rule; the other cast it as the religious dogma of a unified pagan faith in the context of a triumphant Christianity. These efforts of self-reflexive and systematic reinventions of tradition ultimately produced original categories of thought superimposed over the living material of culture. But both also continued earlier and in many cases similar definitions of the question.

The reflection of Plutarch, like that of Proclus, drew directly from other systematic discussions of ancestral fault. This can be seen by the obvious familiarity of the characters in the treatise with the question, the implied familiarity of the audience with the arguments being rehearsed

⁸¹ On the usage of quotations in Plutarch, see Helmbold and O'Neil 1959.

by the proponents of the various philosophical schools in the text, and the many references to earlier literature. Philosophical dialogues and debates between Platonists, Cynics, Stoics, and Epicureans, such as that represented in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, prepared the way for the extensive elaborations of Plutarch. One of these discussions is preserved in Cicero's *De natura deorum*.⁸² There, at the close of the third book (3.90–1), at the very end of the dialogue between the representatives of the various schools, the Academic Cotta finishes his attack against Balbus and the Stoic view of providential justice with a refutation of the idea of ancestral fault:

'Non animadvertunt' inquit 'omnia di, ne reges quidem.' quid est simile; reges enim si scientes praetermittunt, magna culpa est; at deo ne excusatio quidem est inscientiae. quem vos praeclare defenditis, cum dicitis eam vim deorum esse, ut etiam si quis morte poenas sceleris effugerit expetantur eae poenae a liberis a nepotibus a posteris. o miram aequitatem deorum: ferretne civitas ulla latorem istius modi legis, ut condemnaretur filius aut nepos, si pater aut avus deliquisset?

'quinam Tantalidarum internecioni modus
paretur, aut quaenam umquam ob mortem Myrtili
poenis luendis dabitur satias supplici?'

utrum poetae Stoicos depravarint an Stoici poetis dederint auctoritatem non facile dixerim; portenta enim ab utrisque et flagitia dicuntur. neque enim quem Hipponactis iambus laeserat aut qui erat Archilochi versu vulneratus a deo immissum dolorem non conceptum a se ipso continebat, nec cum Aegisthi libidinem aut cum Paridis videmus a deo causam requirimus, cum culpae paene vocem audiamus, nec ego multorum aegrorum salutem non ab Hippocrate potius quam ab Aesculapio datam iudico, nec Lacedaemoniorum disciplinam dicam umquam ab Apolline potius Spartaee quam a Lycurgo datam. Critolaus inquam evertit Corinthum, Carthaginem Asdrubal; hi duo illos oculos orae maritumae effoderunt, non iratus aliqui, quem omnino irasci posse negatis, deus.

'The gods do not take notice of everything, any more than do human rulers', says our friend. Where is the parallel? If human rulers knowingly overlook a fault they are greatly to blame; but as for god, he cannot even offer the excuse of ignorance. And how remarkably you champion his cause, when you declare that the divine power is such that even if a person has escaped punishment by dying, the punishment is visited on his children and grandchildren and their descendants! What a remarkable instance of the divine justice! Would any state tolerate a lawgiver who should enact that a son or grandson was to be sentenced for the transgression of a father or a grandfather?

⁸² See Pease 1955–9, vol. II: 1214–15; van den Bruwaene 1981.

'Where shall the Tantalids' vendetta end?
 What penalty for Myrtilus' murder
 Shall ever glut the appetite of vengeance?'

Whether the Stoic philosophers were led astray by the poets, or the poets relied on the authority of the Stoics, I should find it hard to say; for both tell some monstrous and outrageous tales. For the victims lashed by the lampoons of Hipponax or the verses of Archilochus nursed a wound not inflicted by a god but received from himself; and we do not look for any heaven-sent cause when we view the licentiousness of Aegisthus or of Paris, since their guilt almost cries aloud in our ears; and the bestowal of health upon many sick persons I ascribe to Hippocrates rather than Aesculapius; and I will never allow that Sparta received the Lacedaemonian rule of life from Apollo rather than from Lycurgus. It was Critolaus, I aver, who overthrew Corinth, and Hasdrubal Carthage: those two glories of the sea-coast were extinguished by these mortals, not by some angry god – who according to your school is entirely incapable of anger (trans. Rackham).

The principle of punishment through generations is presented as a key idea of Stoic thought about the nature of divine involvement in human affairs.⁸³ It is attacked as a complete travesty of justice, something that would contravene the spirit of all human laws.⁸⁴ Cotta describes the very idea as 'monstrous and outrageous tales' fit for tragedy about the Tantalids, such as Accius' *Oenomaus* or *Atreus*, which he cites.⁸⁵ He wonders whether the Stoics derive their philosophy from such poetic nonsense, or whether popular theatre is in fact an illustration of their false ideas. In any case, both are similarly wrong. He proceeds to show this by adducing various examples from archaic poetry, myth, medicine, and history. The victims of Hipponax and Archilochus, he says, have no one but themselves to blame. Aegisthus is alone responsible for his crimes, and so is Paris: 'their guilt (*culpa*) almost cries out to our ears'. Hippocrates is a more efficient healer than Aesculapius. Cities fall because of their rulers, not gods. And so on and so forth. What can seem to some motivated by divine anger is in fact the work of men.

An interesting point about this discussion of the *De natura deorum* is the weakness of Cotta's position on the matter. Any discerning reader will at

⁸³ On the doctrines of providence represented in the text, see Auvray-Assayas 1991; 1999a; 2005; cf. still Krumme 1941.

⁸⁴ On Cotta's style of argumentation, see Ardley 1973.

⁸⁵ Fragment xi of the *Oenomaus* in Dangel 1995. Accius' *Atreus* was a prominent play of the time (Cicero met Accius: *Brut.* 107), and an important antecedent of Seneca's *Thyestes*. See Pociña 2003; Baldarelli 2004; Fantham 2005; cf. Krašovec 1999: 146.

once see that something is not quite right with the statement that the victims of Hipponax and Archilochus are themselves responsible for the iambic abuse they receive.⁸⁶ The daughters of Lycambes were paradigmatic examples of the innocent victim throughout antiquity. Similarly, the assertion that Aegisthus is alone responsible for his crimes, that divine justice can be evaluated through the standards of human justice, or that Aesculapius cannot heal as well as Hippocrates could all be easily countered or contested by most educated interlocutors of Cicero's time. It comes as no surprise, then, when the voice of Cicero himself says that, although Velleius thought Cotta's speech to be the truer (*verior*), 'I felt that that of Balbus approximated more nearly to a semblance of the truth.'⁸⁷ That is the very last sentence of the dialogue, immediately after Cotta's attempted refutation of ancestral fault. The defence of the ideas attacked by Cotta, in fact, is understood by Lucilius as a defence of religion itself:

'Vehementius' inquit 'Cotta tu quidem invectus es in eam Stoicorum rationem quae de providentia deorum ab illis sanctissime et prudentissime constituta est. sed quoniam advesperascit, dabis nobis diem aliquem ut contra ista dicamus. est enim mihi tecum pro aris et focus certamen et pro deorum templis atque delubris proque urbis muris, quos vos pontifices sanctos esse dicitis diligentiusque urbem religione quam ipsis moenibus cingitis; quae deserui a me, dum quidem spirare potero, nefas iudico.'

'You have indeed made a slashing attack upon the most reverently and wisely constructed Stoic doctrine of the divine providence. But as evening is now approaching, you will assign us a day on which to make our answer to your views. For I have to fight against you on behalf of our altars and hearths, of the temples and shrines of the gods, and of the city-walls, which you as pontiffs declare to be sacred and are more careful to hedge the city round with religious ceremonies than even with fortifications; and my conscience forbids me to abandon their cause so long as I yet can breathe' (trans. Rackham).

The idea of ancestral fault presented in the *De natura deorum* through the attack of Cotta is again portrayed as a tenet of the traditional faith. It is grounded in Roman culture with a quotation of a tragedy from Accius. The Hellenistic sources used by Cicero might very well have cited a classical tragedy instead.⁸⁸ One of the Greek texts behind the Academic diatribe against Stoicism in Book 3 of the treatise is probably Clitomachus, the student of Carneades, and chapters 90 and 91 are possibly based on

⁸⁶ On the usage of humour in Cicero's representation of Cotta, see Auvray-Assayas 1998.

⁸⁷ DeFilippo 2000. ⁸⁸ See Thompson 1979–80.



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medieval *debitum hereditarium*.⁹³ *Erbsünde* is the standard Catholic and Lutheran term for 'original sin'. Both ultimately derive from terms such as the Patristic Latin *haereditarium peccatum*, a composite formation used by pre- and post-Augustinian Church Fathers in reference to the then emergent notion of Christian original sin.⁹⁴ Some will prefer to keep using a Christian theological term over the Greek *progonikon hamartēma* out of habit or conservatism. We have to recognise, however, that the usage of such terms to describe the institutions and discourses of pagan Greek culture is a direct imposition of Christian filters and ideological implications on ancient material. The English 'inherited guilt', like the German *Erbschuld*, the French *péché héréditaire*, or the Italian *colpa ereditaria*, is more than a mere neutral usage transmitted through scholarship. It continues a long history of Christian theology and imposes a complex baggage of associations on the Greek material. We continue to ignore it at our peril. Whatever term we adopt, however, calling the same object with another name will not change anything.

In order to understand something of how this Christian theological baggage has shaped the modern perception of Greek ideas on delayed generational punishment and has contributed to constituting the etic category of 'Greek inherited guilt', I propose here to briefly consider some particularly important aspects of openly religious readings of the question. The matter would require its own extensive study to do justice to the range and complexity of the sources, but this is not the place for such a detailed investigation. A clear understanding of the main stakes and articulations of thought at work, however, is essential to making sense of the way the issue has been framed by earlier research. Serious engagement with reception is a necessary condition for work on material that is so clearly imbricated with the development of modern Western cultural categories. The study of ancient Mediterranean religion is a unique form of cultural anthropology in that it paradoxically involves looking at something that is distinctively both same and other.⁹⁵ Turning the *regard éloigné* of the anthropologist towards this strange mirror, a distant history that has played such a fundamental role in shaping the DNA of Western culture throughout its evolution, generates specific and often overlooked challenges of interpretation. There is a crucial difference between a European investigation of the

⁹³ *Erbschuld* (*sic*) in Luther: *Schriften*, 34. I. Band, Predigten 1531.24 Drescher; for *debitum hereditarium*, see *Das Deutsche Wörterbuch* s.v. 'Erbschuld'.

⁹⁴ E.g. Ambr. *De Myst.* 1.32; cf. Rondet 1966; Beatrice 1978; Dubarle 1999; Minois 2002: 43–80; see p. 78.

⁹⁵ Cf. the useful term 'das nächste Fremde': U. Hölscher 1994.

Naven, or an American study on the Polynesian concept of ‘mana’, on the one hand, and research on the ancient Greek idea of ἐλπίς, χάρις, or προγονικὸν ἁμάρτημα.⁹⁶ Another logic is at work. In order to recover the memory of scholarship, to see where we stand when we look anew at this material, what lies under our feet, and attempt to better discern what the other possible positions are, a thorough review of reception is imperative. Scholarship on Greek religion is not an antiquarian pastime and it does not start with Friedrich Creuzer or Christian August Lobeck. A much wider diachronic perspective is needed to make sense of the broad picture. The study of ancient Greek religion has far deeper roots than the professional Protestant scholarship on religious history so brilliantly discussed by Jonathan Z. Smith and others over the years. Scholars often talk about the necessity of moving beyond the ‘culturally determined assumptions’ that condition research on ancient Greek religion and culture, especially the prevalent legacy of Christian filters, yet they seldom define what these assumptions actually are in any detail or disentangle what their precise implications might be. The statement is often used as a rhetorical claim to discredit earlier scholarship and justify the new research as a more adequate rendering of cultural difference. It can also lead to facile deconstruction and claims of perpetual aporia. The aim of the following pages, instead, and more modestly, will be to outline some dominant characteristics and important moments in the history of the etic category ‘inherited guilt’, so that a less predetermined approach to the material of ancestral fault might be better conceived.

In the first centuries of the Christian era, not only was ancestral fault an object of explicit theology discussed by philosophers and authors such as Plutarch, but it functioned as a more general principle of religious thought. A passage from Pausanias can be taken as an example. Pausanias interrupts his geography of Arcadian memory at Book 8 of the *Periegesis* with a rich digression about Philip of Macedon.⁹⁷ Stumbling upon traces of the ancient king in the local calendar and the landscape of Nestane, a mere village, he relates a story about the great Philip’s cautionary wickedness. When he was forty-six, about to embark on his great Eastern expedition, the Macedonian king joyously received an oracle from Delphi stating that the victim was ready for sacrifice. Rather than the Persian, of course, the

⁹⁶ Compare, for instance, the translation of *trokosi* shrine-cult practices as the ‘inherited guilt’ of biblical corporate responsibility, especially Ezekiel 18, by present-day Pentecostal anthropologists and missionaries in Ghana (e.g. Asamoah-Gyadu 2004), to the processes of Christianising translation of Greek προγονικὸν ἁμάρτημα reviewed in the following pages; cf. M. Smith 2008.

⁹⁷ Paus. 8.7.4–8; cf. Diod. Sic. 16.91.1–4; see Moggi and Osanna 2003: 322–4.

god was referring to the Macedonian himself, and Philip promptly perished. Not only did he die, however, but Alexander did not outlive him long, and his descendants died horrible, tragic deaths at the hands of their kin; children boiled in bronze cauldrons and the like. Macedonian power was erased as quickly as it came about. This, Pausanias tells us, was a result of Philip's impiety; more specifically, of his propensity for perjury. He might have demonstrated greater deeds than any Macedonian before or since, but no one in his right mind could call him a good general, we are told, as he continually trampled on the oaths of the gods and broke the trust (πίστις) of men. Victory is nothing in itself:

Φίλιππον δὲ βασιλέων μὲν τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ ὅσοι Μακεδόσι γεγόνασιν ὕστερον, τούτων μὲν πείθοιτο ἂν τις μέγιστα αὐτὸν ἔργα ἐπιδείξασθαι· στρατηγὸν δὲ ἀγαθὸν οὐκ ἂν τις φρονῶν ὀρθὰ καλέσειεν αὐτόν, ὅς γε καὶ ὄρκους θεῶν κατεπάτησεν ἀεὶ καὶ σπονδὰς ἐπὶ παντὶ ἐψεύσατο πίστιν τε ἡτίμασε μάλιστα ἀνθρώπων. καὶ οἱ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ μήνιμα ἀπήντησεν οὐκ ὀψέ, πρῶτα δὲ ὧν ἴσμεν.

Philip may be supposed to have accomplished exploits greater than those of any Macedonian king who reigned either before or after. But nobody of sound mind would call him a good general, for no man has so sinned by continually trampling on oaths to heaven, and by breaking treaties and dishonouring his word on every occasion. The wrath of heaven was not late in visiting him; never in fact have we known it more speedy.

The wrath of the gods (μήνιμα) saw no delay in punishing the founder of the κοινὸν τῶν Ἑλλήνων, but it also later extinguished his descendants and the power of his kingdom.⁹⁸ This inscription of failed Empire in the remote countryside of Arcadia must have been particularly resonant with an audience living under the Antonine *pax Romana* and the promises of the new Panhellenion. It was even more notable as an example of the cultural capital offered by the Greek literary archive. If only Philip had heeded the story of Glaukos and remembered the verse of the Pythia – 'If a man keeps his oath, then his family prospers hereafter', she had told him, ἀνδρὸς δ' εὐόρκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀρείων – then his descendants would not have suffered oblivion at the hands of the gods.⁹⁹ The same Hesiodic passage cast as an example of 'the injustices of the fathers' (τὰ τῶν πατέρων ἀδικήματα) in Proclus' commentary to the *Works and Days*, read

⁹⁸ Note 8.7.7: ἔμελλε δὲ ἄρα ὁ δαίμων καὶ τὸ γένος τὸ Κασσάνδρου κακῶς ἐξαμήσειν.

⁹⁹ 8.7.8: εἰ δὲ τῶν ἐς Γλαῦκον τὸν Σπαρτιάτην ἐποιήσατο ὁ Φίλιππος λόγον καὶ τὸ ἔπος ἐφ' ἐκάστου τῶν ἔργων ἀνεμίμησεν αὐτόν, 'ἀνδρὸς δ' εὐόρκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀρείων', οὐκ ἂν οὕτω δίχρα λόγου δοκεῖ μοι θεῶν τις Ἀλεξάνδρου τε ὁμοῦ τὸν βίον καὶ ἀκμήν τὴν Μακεδόνων σβέσαι. For oracular tales in Pausanias, see Overmark Juul 2010.

in this case through its rewriting in Herodotus 6.86, functions as an index for the idea of ancestral fault, activating a whole range of references to the idea of generational punishment.¹⁰⁰ Even in far-away Nestane, the long cultural memory of the Greek literary landscape described by Pausanias is revealed, yet again, as a key to Empire.¹⁰¹ The notion of ancestral fault, here as elsewhere, is used by the text to make a statement about the solidarity of generations. It combines imperial history and the patterns of tragic myth, Delphic prophecy, divine wrath, curse, and generational politics, and it is designed to be recognised by all.

Pausanias, it is worth noting, also used the Glaukos story in 2.18.2 as a clear and obviously familiar shorthand for understanding the ancestral fault of the Pelopids in the Argolid:¹⁰²

ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἀργείᾳ προελθοῦσιν ὀλίγον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡρώου τούτου Θυέστου τάφος ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ· λίθου δὲ ἔπεστιν αὐτῷ κριός, ὅτι τὴν ἄρνα ὁ Θυέστης ἔσχε τὴν χρυσὴν, μοιχεύσας τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τὴν γυναῖκα. Ἀτρέα δὲ οὐκ ἐπέσχευεν ὁ λογισμὸς μετρησαί τὴν ἴσιν, ἀλλὰ τῶν Θυέστου παίδων σφαγὰς καὶ τὰ ἁδόμενα δεῖπνα ἐξεργάσατο. ὕστερον δὲ οὐκ ἔχω σαφὲς εἰπεῖν πότερον ἀδικίας ἤρξεν Αἰγισθος ἢ προὔπηρξεν Ἀγαμέμνωνι φόνοσ Ταντάλου τοῦ Θυέστου· συνοικεῖν δὲ φασιν αὐτὸν Κλυταιμνήστρᾳ παρθένῳ παρὰ Τυνδάρεω λαβόντα. ἐγὼ δὲ καταγνῶναι μὲν οὐκ ἐθέλω φύσει σφᾶς γενέσθαι κακοῦς· εἰ δὲ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον αὐτοῖς τὸ μίasma τὸ Πέλοπος καὶ ὁ Μυρτίλου προστρόπαιος ἠκολούθησε, τούτοις ἦν ἄρα ὁμολογοῦντα, ἥνικα ἡ Πυθία Γλαύκῳ τῷ Ἐπικύδους Σπαρτιάτῃ, βουλεύσαντι ἐπίορκα ὁμόσαι, καὶ τοῦδε εἶπεν ἐς τοὺς ἀπογόνους κατιέναι τὴν δίκην.

Advancing a little way in the Argive territory from this hero-shrine one sees on the right the grave of Thyestes. On it is a stone ram, because Thyestes obtained the golden ram after debauching his brother's wife. But Atreus was not restrained by prudence from retaliating but contrived the slaughter of the children of Thyestes and the banquet of which the poets tell us. But as to what followed, I cannot say for certain whether Aegisthus began the sin or whether Agamemnon sinned first in murdering Tantalus, the son of Thyestes. It is said that Tantalus had received Clytemnestra in marriage from Tyndareus when she was still a virgin. I myself do not want to condemn them for having been wicked by nature; but if the pollution of Pelops and the avenging spirit of Myrtilus dogged their steps so long, it was after all only consistent that the Pythian priestess said to the Spartan Glaukos, the son of Epicydes, who consulted her about breaking his oath, that the punishment for this also comes on the descendants of the sinner.

¹⁰⁰ For line 284 of the *Works and Days*, see pp. 159–76; for Hdt. 6.86, see pp. 278–96.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Musti 1996. ¹⁰² See Musti and Torelli 1986: 271.

Following a pattern of association that is somewhat reminiscent of what we find in Plutarch, Hermias, or Proclus, Pausanias sees the records of tradition as reflections of the same doctrine of divine punishment. The generational misfortune of the Pelopids can be understood through the teaching of the Pythia to Glaukos concerning the effects of perjury on the descendants of the transgressor, the same teaching that was not heeded by Philip in 8.7.4–8; that is, even if the myth of the Pelopid crimes and punishments has nothing to do with perjury. It matters that one example of punishment through generations is equivalent to the other, ‘congruent’ (ὁμολογοῦντα) with it. Pausanias does not know if Agamemnon or Aegisthus ‘first’ committed a crime, but he makes it clear that the murderous acts of one reproduce the murderous acts of his father; and the adultery of the other, the adultery of his father. He refuses simply to ascribe this to their heredity, their *physis*. It is, rather, the consequence of a crime from another generation, that of Pelops, whose agency is identified as the pollution of Pelops, his μῖασμα, and the avenging spirit of his victim, the προστρόπαιος of Myrtilus.¹⁰³ The length (ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον) of its effect through the generations motivates the comparison with the story of Glaukos. The μῖασμα and the προστρόπαιος that ‘follow’ (ἠκολούθησε) the descendants of Pelops are the same thing as the punishment (δίκην) that ‘comes down’ (κατιέναι) on the descendants of the perjurer. Clearly lacking the kind of detailed, explicit theology of generational punishment exposed by Plutarch and his philosophical successors and predecessors, Pausanias more modestly proceeds by analogy and rationalises the logic of a myth through an example of history. The passage, which stems from the physical remains of the tomb of a mythical character, shows how the contemplation of a monument can generate the idea of ancestral fault.

This idea had wide currency in Greek and Roman literature in the first centuries of the Christian era. It appears in many genres and contexts.¹⁰⁴ The Republican dramas of Accius and the Neronian tragedies of Seneca, notably, made ample use of it in their ideologically charged representations of cursed dynasties.¹⁰⁵ The often-repeated claim that the notion of delayed generational punishment is a mere vestige of the archaic period in later sources is obviously groundless. A famous Greek proverb said: ‘The mills

¹⁰³ Cf. 8.14.10.

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Paus. 1.36.3; 1.37.6–7; 2.18.2; 3.13.4; 5.2.3; 7.15.6; 8.7.4–8; 8.53.3; 9.5.9; cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.28, 30–1; 3.6; Liv. 10.38.10; 22.53.11; Jos. *AJ* 8.15; Val. Flacc. 4.33–4; Dio Cass. 59.11.4; Val. Max. 1.1; Pers. 2.25; Juv. 13.206; Ael. *VH* 3.43; 13.2; Ath. 552a–b; Tert. *Adv. Marcionem* 2.15.

¹⁰⁵ See Dangel 1987; Rivoltella 1993; Baldarelli 2004; Mantovanelli 2004.

of the gods are slow in grinding, but they grind to fine flour.¹⁰⁶ Like all proverbs, this one is impossible to date precisely, but the Proverb of the Mill first appears in Plutarch as an expression of the traditional ethical wisdom on ancestral fault assembled and consolidated in the *De sera numinis vindicta*. It was also used by Celsus in his own discussion of ancestral fault. In the *True Discourse*, his apologetical defence of Hellenism and attack on Christianity, Celsus attempted to define ancestral fault as a positive element of Greek wisdom:

καὶ ἡμεῖς μὲν ὅ τι ποτὲ περὶ κολάσεως λέγοντες καὶ διὰ τῆς περὶ κολάσεως διδασκαλίας πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων ἐπιστρέφομεν· ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὸν Κέλσον ἱερεὺς τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος ἢ τοῦ Διὸς οἷα ἀποκρίνεται, κατανοήσωμεν· Ὁψέ, φησί, θεῶν ἀλέουσι μύλοι, καὶ Ἐς παίδων παῖδας, τοί κεν μετόπισθε γένωνται.¹⁰⁷

Whatever we may say about punishment, we turn many from their sins just by our teaching of punishment. But let us consider what reply is made by the priest of Apollo or Zeus quoted by Celsus: 'The mills of the gods grind slowly', he says, even 'To children's children, and to those who are born after them.'

The idea of ancestral fault is dressed in the full legitimacy of immemorial tradition in that text. It belongs to the speech of 'the priest of Apollo or Zeus', according to the author, something that gives it grounding in the prestige of sanctuaries and the knowledge of privileged specialists of religion.¹⁰⁸ Quoted from a poem that combines the Proverb of the Mill with an adapted line from the *Iliad* (20.308: καὶ παίδων παῖδες, τοί κεν μετόπισθε γένωνται), the statement embodies the weight of tradition.¹⁰⁹ The assurance of punishment ranging over generations is shown as a witness to the power of the gods in this text. Not only is teaching the principle of ancestral fault a testimony to the moral worth of traditional Hellenic religion, but the 'education of punishment', if we can take the words of Origen to reflect the text of Celsus, is shown as an efficient tool in the instruction of morality, as it conditions people to refrain from doing

¹⁰⁶ The afterlife of the proverb is notable: it appears as 'God's mill grinds slow but sure' in the *Jacula Prudentium* of George Herbert (1640), for instance, as 'Gottes Mühlen mahlen langsam, mahlen aber trefflich klein | Ob aus Langmut er sich säumet, bringt mit Schärf er alles ein', in the *Retribution* of Friedrich von Logau (1694) and as 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small' in Longfellow's 1870 translation. As well as a number of books and short stories, *The Mills of the Gods* is also the title of a 1965 documentary on the Vietnam War.

¹⁰⁷ Origen, *Cels.* 8.40; see Fédou 1988: 98–9.

¹⁰⁸ See G. T. Burke 1981; Pichler 1980; Fédou 1988; Hauck 1989; Hargis 1999.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Pichler 1980: 177–9.



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further revelation and new exegesis. It is interesting to note that the theme of Greek ancestral fault in Origen is not compared to any notion of original sin, as such a notion plays little part in Origen's interpretation of the Christian message.¹¹⁷

These two modes of understanding, appropriation and rejection, marked all subsequent centuries of Christian reception and scholarship on the question. The many Christianising readings of Greek ancestral fault have of course been far from uniform. What I propose to call theological deixis, the expression of the religious distance established by the speaker with the material described, necessarily establishes such a category in terms of its degree of nearness to or farness from other familiar categories. Analogy, distinction, and evaluation are the main operations in play, with one object assessed as the equivalent of something else. The operation functions as a form of cultural translation. These two modes of understanding follow twin patterns. One consists in bridging the gap between the translated text and the language categories of the reader, bringing the semantic and ideological baggage of the translated text closer to the reader by adapting the text to his frames of reference. The other consists in drawing the text as an object of alterity that can only be understood by the reader through an effort of defamiliarisation; there the text remains, or is cast as, something wholly other. In this process, the translated text does not move towards the reader, but the reader has to move towards the text.¹¹⁸ These two processes, rebaptised 'domestication' and 'foreignisation', have been shown by the work of translation theorists, most notably Lawrence Venuti in his 1995 book *The Translator's Invisibility*, to be guiding principles behind the history of Western translation.¹¹⁹ Although the two are rarely completely separate from each other, as the example of Origen above well shows, the poles are clear.

The long Christian reception of Greek ancestral fault was largely shaped by these related and complementary translating processes of domestication and foreignisation. From the Middle Ages onwards, following on the footsteps of early Christian apology, the meanings of Christian sin, with their implications of temptation, intention, and moral evil, the theological narratives of biblical corporate responsibility and Patristic original sin came to be superimposed on the Greek material of ancestral fault in order

¹¹⁷ See Hammond Bammel 1989; Laporte 1997; Ramelli 2007.

¹¹⁸ The two strategies are famously discussed by Schleiermacher in his 1813 essay *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*; see Venuti 1991; Bernofsky 1997; Snell-Hornby 2004.

¹¹⁹ Venuti 1995; cf. Pym 1996.

to make it understandable and familiar. Ironically, the systematisation of ancestral fault by Proclus as a dogma of pagan religion against Christianity made the Christian reception of the principle all the more straightforward, as it could approach the material in the form of a clearly defined religious doctrine. Through a long process of domestication, the Plutarchean principle has thus been thoroughly Christianised and made to answer the most familiar frames of reference of the day. A parallel process of foreignisation has led to the reconfiguration of ancestral fault as an object of alterity: the incommensurable belief of an essentially different world. The principle of ancestral fault, in other words, has been reframed in later times as something thoroughly different, eventually to be rejected as an unjust belief incompatible with the modern Christian self and modern 'rational' religion. These reflexes of domestication and foreignisation have largely conditioned the medieval and modern receptions of Greek ancestral fault. Over and above the Plutarchean filter of tradition, these different and complementary programmes of Christian reception have also left their imprint on the modern baggage of the scholarly category inherited guilt.¹²⁰

I will try in what follows to bring out the significance of these two programmes in some detail, the fifteen centuries of Christian reading superimposed on the Plutarchean tradition, in order to better frame what is at stake in redefining Greek ancestral fault. A 'thick translation' is needed to examine the processes at work in transferring the codes of one culture into another.¹²¹ We will start with the first extant Christian translations of the pagan material: the work of Isaak Sebastokrator and William of Moerbeke, two medieval translations of Proclus' text on ancestral fault in the *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam*. One tried to integrate the text of Proclus to the requirements of Christian discourse, recasting it as a piece of Christian theology, while the other clearly framed it as a foreign, pagan text. In both cases the translation operated an exegetical annexation, which reduced the translated object to Christian categories, either as Christian teaching, or as an artefact of pagan alterity. These two translations of Proclus' *progonikon hamartēma* perfectly illustrate the twin processes of domestication and foreignisation at work in the reception of Greek ancestral fault. Here, as elsewhere, it is not sufficient to acknowledge the Christian baggage that has shaped the study of Greek religion. It is necessary to know what that baggage actually is.

¹²⁰ Cf. the observations of Hertz's classic 1922 study, with von Fürer-Haimendorf 1974.

¹²¹ See Appiah 2005.

Isaak Sebastokrator

The text of Isaak Sebastokrator directly appropriates the treatise of Proclus for the theology of his day.¹²² In this he continues a long tradition of Christianising the Hellenic Πρόνοια (Providence).¹²³ In his domesticating adaptation of the old treatise, the doctrine of ancestral fault of the Diadochus became a theological position in contemporary Christian theories of sin, a justification of the Orthodox Christian God's delayed method of punishment.¹²⁴ The Providence of the One in Proclus becomes the Providence of God in Sebastokrator; what we see simply as individual *fatum* in Moerbeke becomes 'natural necessity' (ἀνάγκη φυσική) in Sebastokrator; and the sense of ἁμάρτημα (fault) and its cognates is loaded with the meanings of Christian sin. All traces of the text's pagan origins were taken out, starting with the name of Proclus. The operation was so successful, in fact, that it took close to a thousand years for scholars to identify Proclus as the actual author behind Sebastokrator's text.¹²⁵ Gods are rendered as God, and Plato's name disappears. Every mention of Hellenic cult and ritual is taken out of the text, of course, as well as all mythical and religious *exempla*, such as the names of Teiresias and Oedipus, and the story of Apollonius of Tyana.¹²⁶ The first chapter of Proclus' Question Nine is altogether cut from Sebastokrator's text, but there is an important addition to the model of the text – a biblical citation is inserted at the beginning of the passage. At the end of the first paragraph, after the presentation of the paradox, Sebastokrator introduced the sentence:

τὸ δὲ προγονικῶν ἁμαρτημάτων δίκας τίνειν τινὰς τὸ γονεῖς φάγωσιν ὄμφακας καὶ τέκνα αἰμωδιάσουσι λόγιον μαρτυρεῖ.

That some pay a penalty for the faults of their ancestors illustrates the *logion*: 'Parents will eat <sour> grapes, and their children's [teeth] will be set on edge.'

The entire passage of Question Nine is thus framed as a witness to the biblical Proverb of the Grapes (here in the version of Jeremiah 31.29–30).¹²⁷

¹²² On Sebastokrator, see Böse 1960; Westerink 1962; J. Dornseiff 1966; Rizzo 1971; Isaac 1977: 23–8; Erler 1979; Magdalino 1987; Opsomer and Steel 2003: 4–7.

¹²³ See Ewing 2005.

¹²⁴ On Byzantine theories of the Fall and divine punishment, see e.g. Meyendorff 1974: 143–9; Aghiorgoussis 1977; Weaver 1985a; 1985b; Cunningham 2006.

¹²⁵ The identification of Sebastokrator's text as a translation of Proclus was first made by Westerink in a letter to Böse (see Westerink 1962).

¹²⁶ Found in chapter 60 of Proclus' 'original' text.

¹²⁷ See Kaminsky 1995: 139–78; Krašovec 1999: 428–50.

It becomes in this way an illustration of the Old Testament passages on the question, which Origen contrasted so violently with the ancestral fault of the Hellenes more than seven centuries earlier. Ancestral fault, *progonikon hamartēma*, is shown as the equivalent of Hebrew corporate punishment in the version of Sebastokrator.

In chapter 59, for instance, the entire section concerning the ontological continuity in time of city and family is omitted, including the discussions of participation through emanation and substance, as well as the mentions of the σείρα. Instead, the shared, common nature of the human race is emphasised by Sebastokrator to explain the continuity of punishment over generations. Adapting the discussion of Proclus on the *animal unum* of city and family, Sebastokrator argues for the shared substance of the entire human race, which is made under the image of God, γενόμενον κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ (59). It is the species as a whole that has a kinship with eternity in his text, not the *polis*. Man is a creature of reason (ζῷον λογικόν), says the theologian, and each one of us belongs in common to the larger group of the species (60). The species itself is more comprehensive, longer lived, and more divine than every one of its individual elements. Its superiority derives from its kinship with eternity, which itself exists according to the image of God (59). On the level below, in the same way as the human race is one living being (ζῷον) under God, each individual family is a unique combination of men and bodies in the same species. 'Also one is the family of many men', says Sebastokrator, 'and one the blending of many bodies.'¹²⁸ Each family is subsumed under the more comprehensive, longer lived, and more divine species, and in turn each individual is also subsumed by his family. The family is a common ensemble of lives, the essential unit of participation of the individual in this world below the level of the species. In the text of Sebastokrator, the human race as a whole plays the role of the *polis* in Plutarch and Proclus, and the family is the unit that defines us inside this group.

In this Byzantine rendering of chapter 59 of the *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam*, the greater part of Proclus' discussion is omitted in favour of a Christianising image of participation in the justice of God. Sebastokrator does reproduce there the entire discussion of Proclus on therapeutic sympathy (e.g. the cauterisation of the opposite hip) and similitude in the actions of Providence over time. But, instead of involving only the extended groups of family and city, his portrait of participation in sin refers to the entire human species. Man is made in the image of God,

¹²⁸ 59: καὶ γένος πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἓν, καὶ κράσις διαφορῶν σωμάτων μία.

but he is only the imperfect reflection of his model. *By nature*, he shares in the common fault of the Fall. His further responsibility inside the group of the family is but one element of his more consequential participation in the larger category of the species. The image of humanity's shared nature as an imperfect image of God is what Sebastokrator translates out of the different ontological levels of Monads and Henads that he found in Proclus. Ancestral fault is an equivalent of original sin in this Byzantine text. It illustrates the common medieval Orthodox picture of original sin, defined not as a state of guilt and shared responsibility, but as the cause of human fallibility.¹²⁹

Another example of the text's strategy of appropriation in adapting Question Nine of Proclus to Christian theology is found in chapter 60, where Sebastokrator radically alters his model. As the theory of transmigration obviously cannot be adapted to a Christian text, it is simply done away with, and chapter 60 is reduced to a short paragraph, which only reproduces the image of the theatre of souls.¹³⁰ Instead of this image expressing the continuity of the roles played by the transmigrated souls in a family over time, it portrays only the continuity of the successive generations in the drama of the family. In the picture of Sebastokrator, it is not *fatum* that is the playwright, but 'natural necessity' (ἀνάγκη φυσική), the same 'natural necessity' that was said to be identical for all 'bodies' at the beginning of chapter 59.¹³¹ That is: the Fall. As the different souls of the drama, submitted to the same physical necessities of the family, reproduce the same play, they can be attributed rewards and punishments through the principle of similitude on that basis.

In the text of Sebastokrator, the entire structure of Proclus' argument from Question Nine of the *De decem dubitationibus* is profoundly transformed.¹³² The alterations made to the text are more thorough than in that of any other Question. A large part is simply cut out, and there are some important modifications added to the text in order to make the discussion compatible with contemporary Christian teaching. It is domesticated as a

¹²⁹ See e.g. Meyendorff 1974: 143–9; Minois 2002: 48–65.

¹³⁰ 60: καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς βίοις ἡμῶν δράματι μὲν ἀνάλογον ἡ σύμπασα τοῦ γένους περίοδος, τῷ δὲ ποιητῇ τοῦ τοιοῦτου δράματος ἡ φυσικὴ ἀνάγκη, τοῖς δὲ εἰς τὸ δράμα τελοῦσιν αἱ ἄλλαι καὶ ἄλλαι ψυχαί, πληροῦσαι τὴν εἰμαρτὴν ταύτην σκηνήν· ἀθλοθετεῖ δὲ ἡ πρόνοια ταῖς ψυχαῖς καὶ τιμᾶι δι' ἄλλας ἄλλας καὶ ἀτιμάζει διὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῆς ζωῆς.

¹³¹ And, it must be noted, that forms the subject of Sebastokrator's second treatise in the *Tria Opuscula*: Περὶ προνοίας καὶ φυσικῆς ἀνάγκης.

¹³² For the patterns of Sebastokrator's adaptations, see J. Dornseiff 1966; Rizzo 1971; Erler 1979. There is no detailed study on Sebastokrator's adaptation of the Proclean original of Question Nine. The observations of I. Böhme 1975 are of little to no use.



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Old Testament and of the doctrine of original sin. The *De decem dubitationibus* of Isaak Sebastokrator shortens and modifies the Proclean 'original' of Question Nine more than any other passage in the treatise; it cuts the greater part of Proclus' argument and completely transforms the nature of its thought.

William of Moerbeke

The other extensive medieval translation of Proclus' text takes a completely different path. Instead of trying to integrate the text of the *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam* into a project of Christian theology, the translation of William of Moerbeke (c. 1215–86) keeps it safely distant by framing it as a foreign text.¹⁴² There is no special effort made to accommodate the discussion of the Diadochus to contemporary dogma, and the text is kept as close to the original as possible. It is interesting to note that the word *culpa* does not appear in the translation of Moerbeke, for instance; the Dominican scholar was more careful on the question than many of his modern successors. One of the very last works of Moerbeke in his old age, the *Tria opuscula* follows a radically literal principle of foreignising translation, and the vocabulary and the word order reproduce the original Greek text to the letter.¹⁴³ The language of Moerbeke superimposes a thin layer of Latin equivalences over the Greek text, forging a number of neologisms in the process; it does not seek to translate it into familiar, elegant Latin, with familiar, Christian categories of thought.¹⁴⁴ Finished just after Étienne Tempier's condemnation of the 219 propositions in 1277, the translation of Moerbeke does not seek to make the pagan treatise into a Christian text.¹⁴⁵ The text of Proclus is framed as an

¹⁴² On the characteristics of Moerbeke's translations, see Grabmann 1936; Verbeke 1953; Isaac 1977: 28–35; Böse 1985; Opsomer and Steel 2003: 7–10.

¹⁴³ Opsomer and Steel 2003: 8–10.

¹⁴⁴ In terms of neologisms, there is nothing quite as exciting as the *iuxtasubpullulatio* of the *In Parmenidem* (used to translate παρυπόστασις; 923, 13) in Question Nine of the *De decem dubitationibus*, but we do find words like *preaspicere*, *preinterimens*, *repullularunt*, *preexterminare* to translate, respectively, προιδεῖν, προαναιροῦσα, ἀνέκυψαν, προαφανίζεῖν; see Opsomer and Steel 2003: 7–10. The verb *palificare*, used to translate the Greek δηλοῦν, is formed on the *palam*–δηλον equivalence, and is a common fixture of Moerbeke's translations. The words of the passage which Moerbeke noted down in the margins of his autograph, and which are still present in the margins of V, include ὑπούλου, ἀμυσσουσιν (*sic*), σκηνη, προσωπεῖα and κῆρας. He later rendered them with the Latin *turgido*, *laxant*, *fune*, *larvis*, and *nequitias*; see Opsomer and Steel 2003: 9–10; Bataillon 1989b.

¹⁴⁵ On the 1277 condemnations, see Wippel 2003, with bibliography.

irreducible object, the foreign product of a foreign world. Nowhere is this clearer than in the translation of Question Nine.

The passages of chapters 58–61 where Proclus mentions elements of pagan religion, such as purification rituals, oracles and mysteries, and reincarnation, are not omitted from the text, as in Sebastokrator, but are all translated in Latin as faithfully as possible. So are the discussions concerning emanation from the One and participation in the various levels of reality. But many other important words of the passage are left untranslated and rendered *tel quel*: *dika*, for instance, is kept in Greek.¹⁴⁶ This is a term that appears four times in the passage. Some Latin equivalent would have been readily available to Moerbeke, a high official of the Papal chancellery with a long experience in manipulating the rich juridical language of Medieval Latin, but the word's precise meaning at the intersection of guilt and sanction, responsibility and justice, would then have been lost. As Carlos Steel has shown, one characteristic of Moerbeke's translation practice, which is far from being the slavish word by word version that some have portrayed, is a precise understanding of the text's meaning; the choice of keeping *dika* untranslated in the text is an illustration of this principle at work.¹⁴⁷ The result is a constant reminder that we are faced with the unfamiliar concepts of a foreign world.

Other words for which Latin equivalents were available, and which Moerbeke also chose to keep in Greek, are *omokhronus*, which he rightly glosses as *contemporanea*, and *ypocrite*, glossed as *qui sub larvis*, a word which he could easily have rendered with *actor* or one of its synonyms but would then have lost the very important reference to the mask.¹⁴⁸ Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' theatre of souls, in fact, is a good example of his technique of defamiliarisation. The technical words for mask, cothurns, and costume are rendered with the Latin equivalents of a Roman theatre that had long ceased to exist by the thirteenth century. The more easily convertible *ypocrites*, on the other hand, is not translated, its foreignness emphasised by the gloss *id est qui sub larvis* ('that is, the one who is under the mask'), even keeping the force of the ὑπό with the *sub*; the text thus focuses our attention on a word which would otherwise have been read without a second thought. On that note, it is interesting to point out that, at least since the ninth-century *Commentum Brunianum* to Terence, many people in the Latin West thought that ancient drama was performed by

¹⁴⁶ *dika* (58: 4x); see also *telete* 58; *lysii* 58; *poliukhus* 59; *omognios* 59; *omokhronou* 59; *ypocrite* 60.

¹⁴⁷ Opsomer and Steel 2003: 7–8. ¹⁴⁸ Chs. 59 and 60.

silent, masked actors who mimed a text read by a *recitator*.¹⁴⁹ The translator's insistence that it is the person who is *under the mask* who speaks the words of the two characters is meant to avoid confusion.

A number of other words were not translated because there are no precise Latin Christian equivalents for them: these are all terms of pagan religious vocabulary which Moerbeke refuses to assimilate to Christian categories, simply leaving them in the original or affixing them with a gloss. In chapter 58 *telete* is kept in Greek next to the translated *revelationes*, and the original λύσιοι is also kept as *lysii*. In chapter 59 we find *polioukhus*, glossed as *id est praeses multitudinis*, and *omognios*, glossed as *id est caput generis*, two other types of divinities irreducible to Christian categories and correspondingly emphasised as foreign by Moerbeke. Like modern anthropologists translating other cultures into their own and choosing to emphasise certain 'indigenous' concepts as particularly significant examples of the irreducible 'otherness' of another society's cultural categories, Moerbeke marks certain words by keeping them in the original and framing them as distant and unfamiliar. This is a translation strategy that can be seen at work throughout Moerbeke's text. What is more significant for our purpose, however, is the frequency of these untranslated words in the passage concerning ancestral fault: there are more Greek terms in Question Nine than in any other question of the treatise, even though Question Nine is smaller than almost all the other questions.¹⁵⁰ Proclus' doctrine of ancestral fault comes out of Moerbeke's translation as a particularly exotic, unchristian element of the text.

The goal of Moerbeke's translation, however, is of course to translate foreign meaning into intelligible terms. Like modern anthropologists putting their fieldwork on paper, he has to resort to the categories of his own culture to describe his material and render the foreign concepts of Proclus into contemporary Latin. Foreignising translation necessarily involves an accompanying process of domestication of the text. In this Latin translation of a text from the Greek *magister paganorum*, the vocabulary of fault and punishment of Question Nine, for instance, is conveyed through the language of Christian sin: release from the faults of ancestors is rendered through 'atonement', *purgare*, ἀμάρτημα and its cognates are systematically translated with *peccatum*, *peccare*, ἀμοιβή with *retributio*,

¹⁴⁹ See Pittaluga 1997; Symes 2003. I am grateful to Benjamin Victor for the reference to the *Commentum Brunsonianum*.

¹⁵⁰ It takes 6 Budé pages. In comparison, the other nine questions take 6, 5, 16, 8, 8, 12, 9, 14, and 6 pages, respectively.

δίκη in three passages with *vindicta*, συμπάθεια and cognates with *compassio*, *compatientia*, and so on.¹⁵¹ In spite of Moerbeke's extensive effort to translate the text literally, it is readily apparent that the greater part of Proclus' pagan theological doctrine is repackaged into the Christian language familiar to the Dominican scholar.

The translations of Moerbeke were part of a larger contemporary effort of theological domestication of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy, of which Thomas Aquinas is only the most famous representative.¹⁵² We know that Moerbeke's *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam* continued to be read in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁵³ The pagan text was sought during this time in terms of its contemporary usage for Christian doctrine. It is important to keep in mind that Question Nine of the *De decem dubitationibus* was translated by Moerbeke in a reading context where a Christian notion of ancestral fault was fully conceptualised and intensely debated. Hebrew corporate responsibility and Patristic sources provided a large amount of material on the question, and the issue of punishment through generations was a topic of great interest in the circles of Moerbeke and his readers. The *Concordantia Discordantium Canonum* of Gratian, to take an influential example, the twelfth-century monument of scriptural and Patristic jurisprudence at the basis of Canon Law, devotes the entire fourth *quaestio* of Book I to the issue of the *parentum crimen*.¹⁵⁴ It accepts this category of fault as a legitimate cause of preventive punishment. Similarly, the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74), close collaborator of Moerbeke and fellow Dominican, looks at the question of 'involuntary sin' in *quaestio* 108 of Book II, and its description of divine vengeance on the children of the wicked comes surprisingly close to what we find in the passage of Proclus.¹⁵⁵

It famously justifies the punishment of children for the crimes of the fathers as a *vindicta sine culpa, sed non sine causa*.¹⁵⁶ One of the grounds of this apology for delayed divine wrath is that it 'may be considered as a medicine, not only healing the past sin, but also preserving from future sin,

¹⁵¹ *Purgare* ch. 58; *peccatum* 58; 59; 60; 61; *retributio* 59; 60; *vindicta* 59; 60; 61; *compatientia* 59.

¹⁵² See e.g. Conway 1996; 2002; Keys 2006.

¹⁵³ See Grabmann 1936; Imbach 1978; Kristeller 1987: 199; Bataillon 1989a; Boss and Seel 1987; Bos and Meijer 1992. Fifteen manuscripts survive, written between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries (see Böse 1985).

¹⁵⁴ On Gratian's *Concordantia*, see Winroth 2000; Kuttner 2004.

¹⁵⁵ On sin in the work of Aquinas, see e.g. Kors 1930; Labourdette 1985; Weithman 1992; Leblanc 1993; Scheppard 1996; Minois 2002: 95–101; te Velde 2005; Otto 2009. Contrast with Kemeny 1991 or Krahmer 2002.

¹⁵⁶ II.ii.108; cf. I.ii.81–2.

or conducing to some good'.¹⁵⁷ As in the treatises of Plutarch and Proclus, this method of healing may be compared to the medical action of the doctor on one part of the body to relieve another, even if 'the medicine of the body never blinds the eye in order to repair the heel'.¹⁵⁸ Children can be punished for the faults of their ancestors on three grounds: because they are the possession of their father, because sin can be reproduced by *imitatio*, and because God may wish to make an example of 'our humiliation or probation'.¹⁵⁹ Even then, the delay 'unto the third and fourth generation' is a function of divine clemency, as it gives time for the descendants to mend their ways.¹⁶⁰ 'Yet should the wickedness of the descendants increase, it becomes almost necessary to take vengeance on them.'¹⁶¹ The similarities between this passage and the texts of Plutarch and Proclus are striking, even if a direct borrowing is chronologically difficult to establish, as we will see below.

The laws of men cannot follow the 'hidden judgments of God', yet they must conform to the spirit of divine law, and the *Summa Theologiae* justifies the punishment of children for the faults of their parents by human law. Thomas Aquinas, it must be said, asserts as a general principle that 'according to human judgment, a man should never be condemned without *culpa* of his own' to punishments such as flogging, death, mutilation, or beating.¹⁶² But he does allow for certain cases where a man may be condemned to a punishment of forfeiture, 'even according to human judgment', *etiam sine culpa, sed non sine causa*.¹⁶³ These punishments, in some conditions, can involve punishment *pro peccato parentis*.¹⁶⁴ This passage was interpreted less restrictively by subsequent readers. In the *Malleus Maleficarum*, for instance, the infamous manual for Inquisitors published in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, the two

¹⁵⁷ II.ii.108.

¹⁵⁸ II.ii.108: *sciendum tamen quod nunquam medicina subtrahit maius bonum ut promoveat minus bonum, sicut medicina carnalis nunquam caecat oculum ut sanet calcaneum, quandoque tamen infert nocumentum in minoribus ut melioribus auxilium praestet*; compare with Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta* 19. Cf. Ziegler 2001.

¹⁵⁹ II.ii.108.

¹⁶⁰ II.ii.108: *quod autem dominus dicit, visitans peccata parentum in filios, in tertiam et quartam generationem, magis videtur ad misericordiam quam ad severitatem pertinere, dum non statim vindictam adhibet, sed expectat in posterum, ut vel saltem posterius corrigantur; sed, crescente malitia posteriorum, quasi necesse est ultionem inferri*.

¹⁶¹ II.ii.108.

¹⁶² II.ii.108: *et ideo nunquam secundum humanum iudicium aliquis debet puniri sine culpa poena flagelli, ut occidatur, vel mutiletur, vel verberetur*.

¹⁶³ II.ii.108: *poena autem damni punitur aliquis, etiam secundum humanum iudicium, etiam sine culpa, sed non sine causa*; see n. 156.

¹⁶⁴ II.ii.108.



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the ideas of Proclus and Aquinas on the topic, we can single out this one element, the image of the group, and by extension of the human race, as one single body, a *corpus*:

Et ideo alia via procedendum est, dicendo quod omnes homines qui nascuntur ex Adam, possunt considerari ut unus homo, inquantum conveniunt in natura, quam a primo parente accipiunt; secundum quod in civilibus omnes qui sunt unius communitalis, reputantur quasi unum corpus, et tota communitas quasi unus homo. Porphyrius etiam dicit quod participatione speciei plures homines sunt unus homo. Sic igitur multi homines ex Adam derivati, sunt tanquam multa membra unius corporis. Actus autem unius membri corporalis, puta manus, non est voluntarius voluntate ipsius manus, sed voluntate animae, quae primo movet membra. Unde homicidium quod manus committit, non imputaretur manui ad peccatum, si consideraretur manus secundum se ut divisa a corpore, sed imputatur ei inquantum est aliquid hominis quod movetur a primo principio motivo hominis. Sic igitur inordinatio quae est in isto homine, ex Adam generato, non est voluntaria voluntate ipsius sed voluntate primi parentis, qui movet motione generationis omnes qui ex eius origine derivantur, sicut voluntas animae movet omnia membra ad actum. Unde peccatum quod sic a primo parente in posteros derivatur, dicitur originale, sicut peccatum quod ab anima derivatur ad membra corporis, dicitur actuale. Et sicut peccatum actuale quod per membrum aliquod committitur, non est peccatum illius membri nisi inquantum illud membrum est aliquid ipsius hominis, propter quod vocatur peccatum humanum; ita peccatum originale non est peccatum huius personae, nisi inquantum haec persona recipit naturam a primo parente. Unde et vocatur peccatum naturae; secundum illud ephes. ii, eramus natura filii irae.

Therefore we must explain the matter otherwise by saying that all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, inasmuch as they have one common nature, which they receive from their first parents; even as in civil matters, all who are members of one community are reputed as one body, and the whole community as one man. Indeed Porphyry says (*Praedic., De Specie*) that 'by sharing the same species, many men are one man'. Accordingly the multitude of men born of Adam, are so many members of one body. Now the action of one member of the body, of the hand for instance, is voluntary not by the will of that hand, but by the will of the soul, the first mover of the members. Wherefore a murder which the hand commits would not be imputed as a sin to the hand, considered by itself as apart from the body, but is imputed to it as something belonging to a man and moved by a man's first moving principle. In this way, then, the disorder which is in this man born of Adam is voluntary, not by his will, but by the will of his first parent, who, by the movement of generation, moves all who originate from him, even as the soul's will moves all the members to their actions. Hence the sin which is thus transmitted by the first parent to his

descendants is called 'original', just as the sin which flows from the soul into the bodily members is called 'actual'. And just as the actual sin that is committed by a member of the body, is not the sin of that member, except inasmuch as that member is part of the man, for which reason it is called 'human sin'; so original sin is not the sin of this person, except inasmuch as this person receives his nature from his first parent, for which reason it is called 'the sin of nature', according to Eph. 2:3: 'We ... were by nature children of wrath' (trans. English Dominican Province).

The spiritual punishment set in motion by original sin is the result of a shared guilt of origin and similitude in the fault of Adam at the Fall. The first impulse of the common ancestor, understood in Aristotelian terms by Aquinas, is the direct cause of the state of sin in which we are all born. We inherit its responsibility by virtue of our shared nature, our participation in the extended body of the species. The *peccatum originale* is transmitted to man through his corrupt origin, as a 'stain', or an 'infection'.¹⁷¹ Such elements of correspondence between the contemporary understanding of original sin and the portrait of ancestral fault in the *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam* – and there are many others – were certainly a central point of reference for the interpretation of Question Nine by the readers of Moerbeke. The picture of Greek ancestral fault coined by Moerbeke's translation was without any doubt read in reference to Christian original sin. It was to continue being read in this way for many centuries afterwards.

The discussions of the *Summa Theologiae* on the nature of involuntary sin and original sin are strikingly reminiscent of the passages of Plutarch and Proclus on ancestral fault, in the logic of their argument and their usage of imagery. If the text of the *De sera numinis vindicta* had been available in Latin in the Middle Ages, or the *magnum opus* of Aquinas had not been completed thirteen years before the translation of the *De decem dubitationibus* by Moerbeke in February 1280, a case for direct borrowing might have been conceivable.¹⁷² Perhaps part of the text had been known to Aquinas before the completion of the translation by Moerbeke.¹⁷³ But it could well be that the similarities are rather to be imputed to the common imperial and late antique language of ancestral fault that had infused both the texts of Plutarch and Proclus, on the one hand, as well as the Patristic discussions of corporate responsibility and original sin on which Aquinas grounds his own treatment of the two questions, on the other.

¹⁷¹ I.ii.83; cf. Scheppard 1999.

¹⁷² The date of the translation is indicated on the last page of the manuscript.

¹⁷³ For Aquinas' knowledge of Moerbeke's Proclus, see e.g. Kristeller 1987: 198, n. 36.

The profound similarities between the discussions published by Aquinas in 1267 and that of the Proclus passage translated by Moerbeke in 1280 are possibly not witnesses to any direct contact but could result from a diachronic coincidence in the parallel evolutions of the two related traditions.

The very idea of original sin itself, after all, that fairly late Christian dogma, developed mostly around Romans 5:12, and, following others, defined by Augustine and his successors in the West, must have been influenced, at least in part, by the readily available ideas, words, and images of Greek ancestral fault – something that, for very obvious reasons, has never really been explored. Few scholars of early Christian thought seem to be aware of the importance and abundance of the Greek material of ancestral fault (and its Latin expressions) in the first three centuries of the Christian period.¹⁷⁴ The term for original sin in the Greek Orthodox Church, interestingly enough, is now προπατορική αμαρτία, προπατορικό αμάρτημα, or προγονική αμαρτία. A profound continuity links the ancient Greek and Christian ideas of generational punishment through the much deeper differences that separate them. Whatever the case, and this is certainly not the place to reopen the old debate on the origins of Christian original sin, what is important for us in this context is that the discussion of Proclus, however faithfully translated it could be by such a precise and conscientious scholar as Moerbeke, found itself readily integrated to a set mould of interpretation. The expressions of Greek ancestral fault, when they were rediscovered in ancient literature in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, were recognised as familiar figures and read through the closest available categories.

Moerbeke, then, framed the text of Proclus as a distant, foreign product of paganism, only to recoin it in readily intelligible Christian terms. The end result is a Christianised exotica. Proclus' theory of ancestral fault, contrary to what we find in Sebastokrator's text, is shown as the utterly foreign product of a different world, and the language used by Moerbeke emphasises this 'framing of alterity'. But the passage of Proclus was translated and received in a context that had strikingly similar frames of reference on the question. The Latin terms used by Moerbeke to translate

¹⁷⁴ Beatrice 1978: 243–60, is representative in his interest in the Christian variants of the idea in the 'eresia popolare' with which the Augustinian texts were engaged, and his complete lack of reference to the prominent non-Christian material of Greek ancestral fault that was such a staple of popular and philosophical religion in the entire cultural area of Hellenism within which early Christianity was formed. See also Dubarle 1967; Rondet 1966; N. P. Williams 1929; Alexandre 2004; Steinberg 2005; cf. Ricoeur 1960–3, vol. II: 323–54.

the text impose a heavily Christian meaning on the language of the passage, and the entire text is thus filtered through the contemporary Christian understanding of sin, retribution, and atonement. In its Christian translation, the punishment of Greek ancestral fault becomes the result of a sin, a *peccatum*. This involves, among many other things, its being a moral error, an overwhelming condition of transgression, a disorder of the will, weakness to desire and guilt of conscience, a pollution of the soul, a failing before the commandments of an omniscient God, participation in cosmic evil, and so forth. Whereas Sebastokrator's version strove to integrate the text of Proclus into Christian thought, achieving its result only by cutting a good part of it out and strongly modifying the rest, Moerbeke's translation aims to preserve the status of Proclus' text as the document of another epoch and another religion, even emphasising its alterity by the language it uses – only to end up reinscribing the greater part of it with contemporary Christian meaning. In other words, one strove to Christianise a passage which he ultimately failed to integrate fully into his version, while the other, although he was trying to render the pagan text faithfully in all its strange, distant tone, ended up superimposing a deep Christian filter over its meaning. The same dialectic of domestication and foreignisation is at work in both medieval translators, but on the opposite sides of the spectrum. In both cases, the doctrine of ancestral fault, conceived of by Proclus as part of an apology of Hellenism against Christianity, was reframed entirely in terms of Christian thought.

Haereditarium piaculum *and inherited guilt*

The intertwined dialectic of domestication and foreignisation discussed in the preceding chapter has of course been at work in the Western reception of its classical past from the earliest times of Christianity to the present day. It is a truism to say that Athens and Jerusalem have always been read through each other, but the implications of this process are not always fully disentangled in contemporary cultural history, and ‘Athens’ rarely stands for ‘religion’ in the equation.¹ In the case of such a theologically involved topic as ancestral fault, it is imperative that we do this, if we want to move beyond the unwitting reproduction of earlier ideological debates. The ready codifications of the Greek tradition by Plutarch and Proclus, the shocking nature of the ancestral fault paradox, its strong religious roots in pagan myth and ritual, and its many similarities with the corporate punishments of the Old Testament as well as with Christian theories of sin made this reception particularly tense and eventful. Domestication and foreignisation continued to orient the way Greek ancestral fault has been conceptualised and perceived in the later centuries of its modern reception. As this reception is what ultimately determined much of the baggage of perceptions and associations behind present research on the topic, it will be fruitful to continue following the usages of Plutarch’s text in later centuries, and the different generations of scholarship that have predicated the modern category of ancestral fault on this text. The first section of this chapter follows that process from the sixteenth century onwards.

The early modern reception of Greek ancestral fault can be divided schematically into two overlapping phases. Both had profound effects on the constitution of the modern perception of the question. In the first phase, the principle of Plutarch was recognised as a reflection of Christian doctrine, and the expressions of Greek ancestral fault were thoroughly Christianised in the process of this framing and its accompanying

¹ See e.g. Pelikan 1997.

translations. Integrated into the early humanistic project that was elevating the classical heritage to the level of canonical authority, ancestral fault was conceptualised as an expression of Christian penology.² The *De sera numinis vindicta*, perceived as 'the testament of antiquity', was read as a manual of Christian doctrine, and the different mentions of ancestral fault in Greek literature, especially in tragedy, were gathered in a web of citations around the core of Plutarch's treatise. The principle of Plutarch and Proclus was seen as a pagan dogma echoing Christian thought on the transmission of sin. As Christian thought changed, so did the interpretations of the Greek idea. In line with a long Christian tradition, Greek ancestral fault continued to be perceived in the modern period as a direct counterpart to the corporate responsibility of the Old Testament, and the inherited stain of original sin. Read through the medieval and early modern theological tradition, it became indexed to the language of Christian programmes on Providence, responsibility, and sin. It could be made to challenge rival Christian authorities on the question, or to confirm others. Seen as an expression of divine justice, it was thought to contribute to the concrete expression of this justice in moral education, and in the practice of human law.

The second phase of early modern reception continued to perceive Greek ancestral fault as a single dogma of antiquity, to see it through Christian lenses, and it continued to predicate its understanding of the question on the reading of Plutarch's treatise – but it rejected its value as a model of thought for the contemporary world. The clearest expressions of this process can be seen in the seminal work of seventeenth-century Dutch humanism, which has traced the path for so much subsequent scholarship on the question. At the dawn of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, the prestigious heritage of classical literature carried on being used to challenge the scriptural hold on authority, but in time its overwhelming authority itself came to be challenged by the rise of a more self-conscious modernity. The importance of the first large-scale enterprises of universal cultural comparatism that saw the light at this period cannot be overplayed.³ As Europe came to see the 'savages' of the world through the eyes of the Greeks, it began to look at the Greeks as savages. The consequent foreignisation of the Greek material led to its reframing as a figure of alterity. This is readily apparent in the case of ancestral fault, as we will see in the work of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and Jan Lomeier (1636–99).

² For the notion of 'penology', see Saunders 1993.

³ See the essays gathered in Höfele and von Koppenfels 2005.



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Mother of the convent of St-Clare in Nuremberg.¹¹ The work, he says in the preface, belongs to the type of philosophy which can ‘heal the soul, dissolve empty anxieties, free us from desires, and cast away all our fears’. This philosophy has been given to us by God as a tool against sin. The teaching of Plutarch, *vir gravissimus ac doctissimus*, is a manual of Christian virtue. ‘Ponder the text of this pagan man with great care’, he tells his *suavissima soror*. ‘If you do this, you will learn with certainty that these ancient philosophers sometimes did not stray far from the path of truth.’ All mortal possession is empty and vain, he says, ‘but only virtue is noble, and lasts unto eternity’. This type of marked Christian framing was to accompany the treatise for a long time afterwards.

More than two hundred and fifty years later, for instance, in 1772, the Calvinist Daniel Wyttenbach (1746–1820) wrote that reflection on the delays of divine punishment is fundamental for the thought of a true Christian (1820–I: 297).¹² This is how he justified starting his enterprise, the work which was to occupy all his life, the full critical edition of Plutarch’s *Moralia*, with the *De sera numinis vindicta*. Wyttenbach sees a close correspondence between the text of Plutarch and Christian thought, and he asserts that few texts are more useful for the pious conduct of our individual lives, and even the conduct of states. The present editions of the text are defective, he says, and its language still utterly corrupted, so that even though all praise it, it remains read by few (1820–I: 300–4). This first edition of an enterprise that already aimed to cover the entire *Moralia* is presented as an urgent and useful task of Christian piety (1820–I: 295–9). In this highly influential text, the *De sera numinis vindicta* remains a document of Christian doctrine through and through.

In addition to the rewriting of Plutarch’s text by Proclus in late antiquity, and the medieval rewriting of Proclus’ treatise by Sebastokrator, the text of Plutarch has also been rewritten in the modern period. The essay *Sur les délais de la Justice Divine dans la punition des coupables* (1816) presents us with an extensive Christianisation of the text. This pamphlet was composed by a radical Catholic ideologue of the French revolutionary wars and the Restoration, the reactionary count Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), a leading figure of the Counter-Enlightenment.¹³ In his ‘edition’ of

¹¹ On Caritas Pirckheimer, see P. S. D. Barker 1995; Deichstetter 1982; Robinson-Hammerstein 2010.

¹² Wyttenbach 1772, re-edited in volume XII of the 1820–I complete edition of the *Moralia*. See Vernière 1974: 124–5, which is altogether invaluable on the reception of the dialogue. On Wyttenbach, see Sandys 1921, vol. II: 461–5.

¹³ See now Rohrbasser 2012 and Frazier 2012. On de Maistre, see Lafage 1998; Lebrun 2001; Boncompain and Vermale 2004; Fisichella 2005.

the treatise, which is explicitly based on the 1572 version of Amyot (*Pourquoy la iustice diuine differe quelquefois la punition des malefices*), de Maistre recast the *De sera numinis vindicta* as a manifesto of Ancien Régime Christianity against the French Revolution and Napoleon. De Maistre wrote his text at the imperial court of St Petersburg and published it in Lyon in 1816; the 'translation' was reprinted no fewer than six times in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The essay of de Maistre presents itself as a translation of Plutarch, but it is in fact a long ideological improvisation on the model of the Greek original.¹⁵

The ancient text of Plutarch thus becomes an expression of anti-Revolutionary ideology. For de Maistre, the *De sera numinis vindicta* is 'le chef-d'oeuvre de la morale et de la philosophie antique' (1884: 245). It is largely superior to anything we can find in Plato, he says, and it approaches the truth of divine revelation more than any other text from pagan antiquity. This master text reflects the divine truth reached by Plutarch; for the Greek philosopher cannot have been innocent of the Christian message. Having lived 'dans le second siècle de la lumière', he is 'notablement éclairé' and has been recognised since antiquity as one who had heard the teaching of the Gospels (1884: 40).¹⁶ De Maistre sees the vengeful hand of God in the fall of Napoleon, a symmetrical punishment for the earlier sins of the Revolution, and he recognises the calamitous tyrant of the *De sera numinis vindicta* sent to punish the city in the figure of 'Buonaparte'. The principle of ancestral fault, 'le vice héréditaire', is a 'dogme universel' shared by men of all times and places (1884: 43). It 'disgusts reason' at first, but its 'apparent absurdity' is precisely what makes it plausible:

Tout le monde a cru, sans exception, qu'un méchant n'ayant point été puni pendant sa vie, il peut l'être dans sa descendance, qui n'a point participé au crime, de manière que l'innocent est puni pour le coupable ... On ne peut s'empêcher de se demander 'Comment une opinion aussi révoltante, du moins pour le premier coup d'oeil, a pu devenir la croyance de tous les hommes; et si elle ne serait point appuyée peut-être sur quelque raison profonde que nous ignorons?' Et ce premier doute amène bientôt des réflexions qui tournent l'esprit dans un sens tout opposé. (1884: 41)

The combination of experience, tradition, and the agreement of all men contribute to convince us that ancestral fault 'ne présente plus rien qui choque notre raison' (1884: 44). As the revealing title of the translation

¹⁴ In 1838, 1844, 1845, 1862, 1863, and 1884.

¹⁵ Cf. the comments of Méautis 1935: 21–8.

¹⁶ For Plutarch and Christianity, see e.g. Beaujeu 1959; Valgiglio 1985.



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delayed generational punishment he sees at work in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*: the ancestral curse of the Atridae from the *Oresteia*, and the punishment of Cresphontes' sons in the play of Euripides. The principle of *haereditarium piaculum* can thus be shown to appear in all three tragedians. The various generational punishments of the different cursed families that we see on stage are so many *exempla* of a principle of ancient Greek theology and the moral function of tragedy as a genre.

This ancestral fault of Greek tragedy is thus seen as a unified religious dogma. It is explicitly presented as the same doctrine which is also found in the *De sera numinis vindicta* of Plutarch. It reflects the teaching of Christian belief and its moral function, and it is a central element of interpretation to understand the logic of the dramatic action in individual plays. The reference to the analogy of Christian authorities, and of other Greek texts, creates the image of a familiar and clearly defined principle at work in the wisdom of the ancient plays. We find the same logic in the writings of many other scholars of the day. Georg Rattaler, for instance, another disciple of Melanchthon, sees the principle of ancestral fault at work as an element of moral education in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as he writes in the preface of his 1550 *Sophoclis Ajax Flagellifer*.³² The same thought is repeated by Johannes Lalamantius in 1557 in his in the *Argumentum* to the *Oedipus Rex* of his *Sophoclis tragoedias*.³³ In the preface to his 1562 edition of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Gaspar Stiblinus, also a student of Melanchthon, writes that the horrible punishments staged by the play have the edifying role of showing us the nature of *numinis vindicta*, how it pursues the crimes of the fathers *in libros & nepotes usque*.³⁴

The example of the 'Erbschuld-Erklärungsprinzip' in the sixteenth-century interpretations of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* shows the importance which ancestral fault had acquired so early on as a shared category of scholarship – in the reading of a text which famously does not even mention it.³⁵ It is a good illustration of how involved the process of religious domestication was in the constitution of inherited guilt as a reading grid. Ancestral fault was of course all the more recognised and discussed in the interpretation of texts that actually mentioned it; a web of analogies and cross-references on the subject, transmitted in numerous editions and commentaries, was thus eventually constituted in early modern scholarship. In the scholarship of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the explicit usage of the material as a tool of moral and religious

³² Rattaler 1550: 7–8; see Lurje 2004: 103.

³³ Lalamantius 1557: 102; Lurje 2004: 105.

³⁴ Stiblinus 1562: 125; cf. Lurje 2004: 100.

³⁵ Lurje 2004: 99–101; 392; see pp. 346–7.



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Grotius

The eminent classical scholar Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), as mentioned above, used Greek ancestral fault as a theological referent in the interpretation of Scripture. Many of the notes on ancestral fault from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which we saw earlier refer to the Latin translations of two Euripides fragments collected by Grotius in his editions of the *Florilegium* of Stobaeus (1623) and of the fragments of Greek tragedy and comedy (1626) respectively.⁴² First, in his edition of the poetic fragments found in Stobaeus, Grotius translates the fragment from the *Alcmaeon* τὰ τῶν τεκόντων ὡς μετέρχεται θεὸς | μιάσματα as *commissa quae sunt in parentes, haec Deus persequitur ultor*.⁴³ As Valckenaer remarks about this translation in the note to verse 833 of his *Hippolytus: vera quidem ista sunt; sed Graecis significantur, ab ipsis parentibus commissa, quae Deus ultor in liberis persequitur*.⁴⁴ Three years after the edition of Stobaeus, however, Grotius again translated what he seems to have thought was the same fragment of Euripides, but modifying the text this time in reference to a comparable fragment from the *De sera numinis vindicta*.⁴⁵ There he renders what he now gives as τὰ τῶν τεκόντων σφάλματ' εἰς τοὺς | ἐκγόνους οἱ θεοὶ τρέπουσιν, the text which has remained the accepted reading of the Plutarch passage, as *in posterorum capita mos Dis vertere culpas parentum*.⁴⁶

These translations were written during the time of Grotius' captivity in castle Loevestein.⁴⁷ As Grotius himself said in a letter of this period to his friend G. J. Vossius, they were designed to prepare the way for his work of political philosophy; the classical scholarship and the political philosophy of the great humanist scholar are as intricately intertwined as Canon Law with scriptural sources. The ambivalence shown by Grotius in his translation of Greek ancestral fault in the two respective editions is a result of his intense reflection on the question at this time. Nowhere is this clearer than in the actual *magnum opus* of political philosophy which also came out of the Loevestein captivity: the *De iure belli ac pacis*, published in Paris in 1625, precisely between the translations of Stobaeus (1623) and of the dramatic fragments (1626).⁴⁸

⁴² These texts are referenced by Valckenaer, for instance; see p. 95.

⁴³ Grotius 1623; Grotius 1626: 422; now Eur. F 82 Kannicht.

⁴⁴ Valckenaer 1768 ad loc. ⁴⁵ Now F 980 Kannicht; see p. 42.

⁴⁶ Grotius 1626: 422. ⁴⁷ On the captivity of Grotius in Loevestein, see e.g. Rademaker 1972.

⁴⁸ Tuck 2005: ix–xxxvii.

The *De iure belli ac pacis*, the masterpiece of natural-law theory at the basis of many central aspects of modern political theory, a text usually presented as a founding document of international law, makes ample use of the *De sera numinis vindicta* in its discussion of punishment.⁴⁹ The treatise of Plutarch played an important role in shaping Grotius' thought about responsibility, free will, and determinism.⁵⁰ As we will see, the great Delft humanist took an altogether different course from that of his predecessors in the domestication of Greek ancestral fault for the modern age, moving far beyond the simple collection of sources and their usage as exhortation for pious conduct – and mostly against it. Grotius brought the Greek material squarely in contact with the building of his new project for modern society.⁵¹ Assessing it with all the tools of scholarship then available, but also with the rudiments of the comparative ethnography pioneered by his generation, and especially the category of the radically unique, independent, and free self that was then being shaped by contemporary political philosophy (notably his own), he explicitly laid out in his influential monument of natural law what was at stake in modern Christian Europe's confrontation with the principle of Plutarch. The end result was to trace the way for the Christian liberal understanding of Greek ancestral fault: the ancient pagan material became unacceptable.

The discussion of Grotius opens the second phase of the early modern reception of Greek ancestral fault.⁵² The Christianising reading of the Greek principle remained unchallenged, and it continued to be perceived as a dogma along the lines of Hebrew corporate responsibility and original sin. But, together with the rejection of corporate responsibility and original sin from the political and civil spheres of modernity, the ancestral fault of Greek literature was morally delegitimised and exposed as an unjust encroachment upon individual liberty.⁵³ In the radical secularist position of Grotius, especially in the first edition of the *De iure belli ac pacis*, the rigid separation between divine and human law – a clear break with the Thomist tradition – is a requisite for the constitution of an independent human sphere of rational, universal justice: natural law.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ On the important role of Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta* in Grotius' treatise, see the index to Barbeyrac's text in volume III of Tuck's 2005 edition.

⁵⁰ See pp. 101–3.

⁵¹ Cf. the famous evaluation of Rousseau on Grotius and Hobbes: 'The truth is that their principles are exactly the same: they only differ in their expression. They also differ in their method. Hobbes relies on sophisms, and Grotius on the poets; all the rest is the same.' Tuck 2005: xvi.

⁵² See p. 80. ⁵³ See A. Schubert 2002.

⁵⁴ See Tuck 1979; Lagrée 1991: 19–42; Stumpf 2006: 101–61.



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classical literature. Euripides and Plutarch, Proclus, Virgil, and Tacitus are cited there with the kind of weight which used to be reserved for Augustine.⁶¹ Classical texts could be used in this way to defend and justify any position. They were set up before biblical sources, and also against each other. This is the context in which Grotius made use of the *De sera numinis vindicta*.

Ancestral fault is discussed in chapter 21 of Book 2: *De poenarum communicatione*. This chapter is concerned with the transmission of punishment within groups and over time. It devotes important passages to the definition of ancestral crimes, and the applicability of punishment through generations in a just juridical system. These passages are based in large part on Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta*. Chapter 21 is divided into twenty sections covering a number of questions concerning the transmission of punishment. These chapters are themselves divided into two parts. The first part looks at how punishment (*poena*) can be meted out as a consequence of participation in guilt (*culpa*).⁶² The second, in turn, looks at the question of whether punishment can be communicated when guilt is not communicated.⁶³ In the first part, Grotius is interested in determining the extent of the individual's responsibility for the actions of the group (*communitas*), and of the group for the actions of the individual.⁶⁴ How can the guilt of the group be communicated to the actions of the individual who has not himself committed any *delictum*, or the guilt of the individual transferred to the whole of the group to which he belongs? How far does the responsibility for the actions of one member of the group, or of its ruler, extend to the rest of the community? This responsibility, in the thought of Grotius, can only be transmitted through 'penal desert' (*meritum poenae*). Like the familiar Thomist distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission, mentioned in the last chapter, it must involve a personal choice, either to act (*factum*), or not to act (*omissio*). The actions of one element of the community will only involve the responsibility of:

those who command a vicious act, they who give the consent which is requisite, they who assist, who receive the things, or in any other way participate in the crime itself; they who give their counsel towards it, who praise it, who assent to it; those who being bound by their special rights to forbid it, do not forbid it; or being bound by similar rights to give aid to the person who suffers wrong, do not do so; those who do not dissuade when

⁶¹ Lagrée 1991; Wickenden 1993: 90–110. ⁶² Lib. 2, Cap. 21.1–8.

⁶³ Lib. 2, Cap. 21.9–20. ⁶⁴ See especially Lib. 2, Cap. 21.2; 8–10; 12–13.

they ought to dissuade; who keep silence with regard to a fact which they were bound by some right to make known; all these may be punished if there be in them such malice as suffices for penal desert, according to what has already been said. (*De iure belli ac pacis*, Lib. 2, Cap. 21.1. Trans. Whewell)

Similarly, the ruler will only share in the responsibility of his subjects through 'allowing' (*patientia*), or 'receiving' (*receptus*).⁶⁵ *Patientia*, if he lets some crime happen which he could have prevented, and *receptus*, if by unjustly harbouring a fugitive he should become a participant himself before the eyes of another state. The section contains a lengthy discussion of the rights of supplication, extradition, and asylum, which, it is interesting to note, Grotius published when he was in exile himself.⁶⁶

The entire argument of Grotius, here as elsewhere, rests on the accumulation of exempla from Hebrew Scripture, but mostly from classical antiquity. This usage of successive embedded exempla is reminiscent of Plutarch, and characteristic of contemporary humanist discourse. Here is a typical specimen:

About this sentence of Hesiod: 'the entire city is often punished for one bad man (*Works and Days* 240)', Proclus rightly says: 'as having had it in their power to prevent him, and not having done so (*Schol. vet. in Op. et Dies* 240)'. So in the army of the Greeks, when ... (Lib. 2, Cap. 21.2. Trans. Whewell)

The comment on line 240 of the *Works and Days* comes from the scholia of Hesiod, which mostly transmit material from the lost commentary of Proclus on Hesiod's poem (Grotius was one of the earliest systematic collectors of ancient fragments).⁶⁷ This commentary, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was itself a large-scale 'rewriting' of Plutarch's earlier commentary on the same poem, a work which is now also lost. But the influence of Plutarch on the argument of the passage is much more direct than this. Plutarch is cited more frequently than any other single author in chapter 21, and the *De sera numinis vindicta* plays a more essential role there than any other work. It appears in the central argument of both halves of the chapter.⁶⁸ In both places, it serves to frame the argument. The material of Plutarch on ancestral fault is domesticated for its exemplary value, and as a clear example of the mechanisms of divine law; but in the human realm it is rejected as contrary to natural law. The ideas of

⁶⁵ Lib. 2, Cap. 21.2–3. ⁶⁶ Lib. 2, Cap. 21.4–6. ⁶⁷ See p. 97.

⁶⁸ See the Barbeyrac index in the third volume of Tuck's 2005 edition.

Greek ancestral fault are explicitly foreignised in the treatise of Grotius, and the principle of ancestral fault defined in the *De sera numinis vindicta* is thoroughly reinterpreted in the process, as we will now see.

At the end of the first section of chapter 21, Grotius discusses the extension of the group's responsibility in time:

This important question occurs, whether punishment may always (*semper*) be exacted for the deeds of the corporation (*universitas*). So long as the corporation continues, it will seem that it can, because the same body (*corpus*) remains, though preserved by a succession of different particles, as we have shown elsewhere. (Lib. 2, Cap. 21.8. Trans. Whewell)

The corporation forms a single body over time, a *corpus*: a single continuous life of successive moments. The image of the human group as a co-responsible *corpus* is found in Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas already, but not the idea of the extended life as succession of moments.⁶⁹ Grotius' highly influential description of the corporation's continuity in time as the sequence of different moments of the same life is probably taken directly from Plutarch (and possibly also Proclus, whose work he knew well). Contrary to Plutarch, however, and to Thomas Aquinas, Grotius refuses to admit a continuity of group responsibility through time. The corporation can own treasury and the like, he says, and such things can remain liable for the duration of the corporation's existence; but the group is composed first and foremost of free individual members. They are imputable only for their own actions. The possessions of such members, and their lives, cannot be submitted to the punishment of actions committed by preceding generations of the group. For Grotius, there is no justifiable *vindicta sine culpa, sed tamen non sine causa*. Personal responsibility is the only just cause of human punishment. *Culpa* is a function of *meritum*, and *meritum* is a result of choice: *factum*, or *omissio*. Without this choice, the reflection of man's conscience before God, responsibility cannot exist; punishment of the corporation over generations is thus necessarily unjust and contrary to natural law. From the moment when the individual members of the group who bear responsibility as individuals have passed away, all *meritum* of punishment for the group has disappeared.

The principle of inherited guilt cannot be rightly applied in human justice, then. It does not belong to natural law.⁷⁰ A series of examples from the *De sera numinis vindicta* follows, in which Grotius explicitly marks his

⁶⁹ See Tuck 1979; Weithman 1992; Landau 2000; Nocentini 2005; Di Blasi 1999.

⁷⁰ Lib. 2, Cap. 21.12–13.



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nature of *culpa*. The terms of the debate are framed in reference to Plutarch, and against him. The justice of ancestral fault in human law is strictly refused. As Grotius says at the end of the section, the discussion of Plutarch must be judged to be incompatible with natural law:

Nor is the defense of this or such cases satisfactory, which we find in Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta*. For the justice administered by God is one thing, that by men, another, as we shall show hereafter. (Lib. 2, Cap. 21.8. Trans. Whewell)

Grotius continues the same thought in the second section, where he discusses the possibility of transmitted punishment without transmitted guilt. There he looks at transmission through kinship rather than transmission through polity. This section starts with precisions concerning the nature of delictual intentionality, and it ends with a look at the heredity of debts. But the core of the passage is taken by three sections in the middle. In paragraphs 12, 13, and 14, Grotius considers the biblical and classical traditions concerning the transmission of punishment over generations, and he interprets ancestral fault through the distinction between human and divine law, as he hinted at the end of the first section. In human law, just as the extension of responsibility to the group without desert is judged to be utterly unjust, so the extension of punishment through generations without extension of responsibility is deemed to be opposed to natural law:

Having premised these distinctions, we say that no one innocent of delict can be punished for the delict of another. But the true reason of this, is not that which is given by the jurisconsult Paulus, that punishment is instituted for the amendment of men: for it would seem that an example may be made even extraneously to a man's own person, in a person whose welfare affects him, as we shall soon have to show; but because liability to punishment arises from desert: and desert is a personal quality, since it must have its origin in the will, than which nothing is more peculiarly ours: it is, as we may say, *entirely free* (αὐτεξούσιον). (Lib. 2, Cap. 21. 12. Trans. Whewell)⁷²

There can be no punishment in human law that does not involve the free will of the individual, he says, using the same language that he had already coined in the *De iure praedae*. This is one of the famous passages for which Grotius is recognised as one of the conceptual fathers of the modern free self as an individual moral agent.⁷³ Every justification of ancestral fault in human terms is to be condemned. This excludes hereditary slavery, it must be noted, which does not involve punishment, but dominion.⁷⁴ Neither

⁷² See Tuck 2005: xviii–xix.

⁷³ Tuck 2005, p. xix.

⁷⁴ Lib. 2, Cap. 21.14.



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keep what he has acquired, and transmit it to his children. If he does not, his *geneē* will fade away from sight.

This is a statement that the audience would have found familiar at this point in the poem. In the Myth of Races (106–201), one *genos* succeeds another through the consequences of their actions. They are defined, as ‘Races’, by their common relation to justice. A binding solidarity unites them in the face of punishment. Only the first one has been unalloyedly just. The Golden Race lived in the plenty of abundance, bliss, and peace.⁴ Once they were covered by earth, they became the guardians of mortal men, watchers of judgments and cruel deeds. ‘Clothed in mist’ (ἡέρα ἐσσάμενοι), they roam everywhere over the face of the earth to watch over men.⁵ This is the ‘royal’ honour they have received from gods. Men of abundance and bliss, they have no grief or pain. The other races, however, have all succumbed to violence and injustice. Like the beasts of line 278, they have destroyed *each other* (ἀλλήλους) through violence within the group. The Second Race, the *genos* of silver, did not know how to restrain its actions. The men were unable to refrain from hurting each other (ἀλλήλων).⁶ In addition to their incapacity to follow the rules of justice, they refused to give honour to the gods. They remained children for the greater part of their existence, unable to live lives of responsible restraint, never fully coming into adulthood. The Race of Bronze, on the other hand, lived only for violence, and it eventually destroyed itself, without leaving name or posterity for the future, an anonymous race perpetually bent on the endgame of death. They ate war instead of bread (146–7). The Fourth Race, however, that of the named Heroes, closer to us in time, the προτέρη γενεή, had a choice between two roads in justice. Some knew only war in life, the poet tells us, and they destroyed each other in Thebes or Troy (156–73). They were covered by death and they disappeared. Others, noble and just, were allowed to live in plenty on the Islands of the Blest. These are the Heroes who live in abundance, ὀλβιοὶ ἥρωες (159). For them, ‘the grain-giving field bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing three times a year’ (167–73). They are living a better (ἀμείνων) life.

The Fifth Men are, as many have observed, entirely different from the first three Races, but not from the Fourth.⁷ The life of absolute plenty that is the lot of the Golden Race is beyond our reach. We can, contrary to the

⁴ *Op.* 109–26; see Calame 2006: 85–142.

⁵ Line 125. The lines are repeated later in the poem, where we are told that there are thirty thousand of these watchers of mortal men, and that no crooked judgment can escape their attention (*Op.* 255).

⁶ *Op.* 127–42. ⁷ Rudhardt 1981; Crubellier 1996: 460.

Silver Race, avoid continuous transgression. We are not bent on complete destruction through war like the Race of Bronze. As the Race of Heroes did, we have a choice. This choice, however, is presented in a much more sombre light than that of the Heroes. The lot of our individual *geneai* in the future is constrained by the lot of our common *genos*. As a result of violence (*biē*), our *genos* is threatened with common destruction in times ahead. When the rule of justice will fall, and all conventions of right and wrong cease to be followed, our race will also be destroyed by the gods. When violence becomes the foundation of right, and lying, envy, and flattery the basis of social relations between men, when son turns against father and reverence disappears, then will the announcement of our imminent destruction be made clear. The crimes of others are the signs of our common fall. Our violence can eventually lead us to annihilation, in the way of the Race of Bronze and of the Heroes who died before Thebes and Troy. When we start aging prematurely, becoming old men at birth, there will be no more reproduction. Like the Race of Silver, whose children were incapable of surviving manhood, we will know that our generation has come to an end.⁸ It will no longer be able to ensure continuity and transmission. When ‘there is no more favour for the man who keeps his oath, or for the just, or for the good’, then we will know that the Race of Iron has entered its last moments.⁹ This is the time when ‘the wicked will hurt the worthy man, speaking false words against him, and will swear an oath upon them’.¹⁰ The crime of perjury is singled out as the sign of future downfall – as in verses 280–5. This clearly stands out: there is no mention of oaths in the narratives of the other Races. As in verses 280–5, we are told that perjury is linked to the punishment of an entire kin group in the account of the Race of Iron. The same distinctive combination of themes is found in both passages. One might be seen to prepare the other. But how closely, in fact, can we compare the *geneē* of lines 280–5 to the γένη of 106–201?

The noun *geneē* has two major meanings in the Hesiodic corpus, as Glenn Most has observed in an important article.¹¹ The first can be described as classificatory. It means generation in terms of kin group,

⁸ See Fontenrose 1974.

⁹ *Op.* 190–1: οὐδέ τις εὐόρκου χάρις ἔσσεται οὐδέ δικαίου | οὐδ’ ἀγαθοῦ, μάλλον δὲ κακῶν ῥεκτῆρα καὶ ὕβριν.

¹⁰ Lines 193–4: οὐκ ἔσται, βλάψει δ’ ὁ κακὸς τὸν ἀρεῖονα φῶτα | μύθοισι σκολιοῖς ἐνέπων, ἐπὶ δ’ ὄρκον ὁμεῖται.

¹¹ Most 1997: 111–13; see also Crubellier 1996: 439; Couloubaritsis 1996: 492; and especially Calame 2006: 116.

offspring, descendants.¹² The other is temporal, referring more specifically to generations placed in time.¹³ In both cases, and allowing for the many nuances of the word's usage, the accent is placed on descendance and ascendance. The noun *genos*, on the other hand, has one essential meaning. It is broadly similar to the first meaning of *geneē*, as Hofinger observes, but perhaps less exclusively tied to kinship in its classificatory function: it can mean kind, race, line, kin group, offspring, descendants.¹⁴ The parallels of Homeric diction, where the two terms can actually be used interchangeably (*Il.* 21.157; 186), go in the same direction.¹⁵ To distinguish between species, for instance, *genos* will be used, at least before the *Batrachomyomachia*, where they are already synonyms.¹⁶ To distinguish subgroups within a *genos*, according to Most, *γενεαί* will be used.¹⁷ This observation, based on a particular reading of the Myth of Races, and especially of line 160 of the *Works and Days*, is of great interest for making sense of the emphatic use of *geneē* in our passage. The sentence in question is (vv. 156–60):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῦτο γένος κατὰ γαῖα κάλυπεν,
 αὐτίς ἔτ' ἄλλο τέταρτον ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
 Ζεὺς Κρονίδης ποίησε, δικαιοτέρον καὶ ἄρειον,
 ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἳ καλέονται
 ἡμίθεοι, προτέρη γενεή κατ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν.

When the earth covered up this race, too, Zeus, Cronus' son, made another one in turn upon the bounteous earth, a fourth one, more just and superior, the godly race of men-heroes, who are called demigods, the generation before our own upon the boundless earth (trans. Most).

If, as Most argues, the word's meaning there is determined by opposition to the *genos* of the preceding line, then we do have to accept temporal, subgroup 'generation' as its strict meaning. The implication is that the Heroes are not presented as a new race in the text, but as an earlier generation within a race: the *προτέρη γενεή* of the *genos* to which we also belong. We would then have four races instead of five (and three in

¹² *Theog.* 871; *Op.* 736; *Sc.* 55; 327; F 37 MW. ¹³ F 276; 304 MW.

¹⁴ *Theog.* 21; 33; 44; 50; 105; 161; 336; 346; 590; 591; *Op.* 11; 121; 127; 140; 143; 156; 159; 169; 176; 180; 299; F 43; 123; 204 MW. See Hofinger 1975 s.v. *γένος*.

¹⁵ Liddell–Scott, Chantraine, West, the *Lfgre* (Schmidt), and the *Diccionario Griego–Español* all argue for a broad equivalence between the two terms, as have most other scholars. Only once in Homer does *γένος* mean generation (*Od.* 3.245), however, and this is a suspect passage; see Most 1997: 111.

¹⁶ Lines 23; 25; 263; 291.

¹⁷ Most 1997: 112. The *γένη* of 106–201, however, as Crubellier (1996: 439) notes, can be seen as subgroups of the human *γένος*. An archaic example of *γένος* as a subgroup can also be found in Semonides 7, where we are shown the different *γένη* of women within the *γένος* γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων.



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after they have passed away. No man escapes mortality and death remains (μένει) in wait for us all. What *moves* is the effect of the oath long after its actual performance. Parallel to this contrast between movement and immobility is the opposition of the present moment to the future outcome of the event. Death is a common, static endpoint. The punishment of perjury, on the other hand, is fast (κραιπνός) and it always reaches its proper prey. While the perjurer may find gain (κέρδιον) in the present through his act, its consequences after death are devastating. The poem stages an opposition between the αὐτίκα of the first line and the μετόπισθεν of the last verse.

What does it mean, then, to say that the agent of punishment for perjury is κραιπνός? The vengeance of the oath, after all, strikes only after death. It is marked by delay, opposed to the immediate, apparent gain of the transgressor. This oracular paradox finds a correlate in the puzzling image of the child that stands at the centre of the poem. The son of Horkos has neither hands nor feet. It is without feet that it pursues (μετέρχεται) the perjurer. It is without hands that it seizes his family (συμμάρψας), a verb regularly used with the instrumental χερσίν.²⁵ His two fields of action are defined by two absences that separate him from all human comprehension, an image underlined by the chiasmus hands–feet–running–seizing placed at the centre of the poem.²⁶ The swiftness of the divine punishment serves as a direct pendant to the immediate profit of the crime. To the death that awaits each man in the end, the poem opposes the lot that awaits the *geneē* after death. There is the appearance of κέρδος on the one side, in the short time of men, a semblance of enrichment through crime. On the other side is the total eradication of the family and of its possessions in the long time of divine action. The κραιπνός of line 5 is surprising at first, since the manifestation of divine punishment is clearly not a matter of rapidity. The text offers another, counterintuitive vision of pace, based on the progressive force of the present μετέρχεται, which begins as soon as the crime has been committed, to find its way to eventual fulfilment in the end, εἰς ὃ κε, beyond death. The enlarged immediacy of the punishment completely surrounds the immediacy of the crime, a speed that remains invisible to mortal understanding. The true swiftness of the vengeance can only be conveyed to the reader by the privileged temporal perspective of oracular discourse.²⁷

²⁵ See e.g. 'Hesiod' F 343.7 MW; cf. the emphasis on the hands and feet of the Erinyes in Soph. *El.* 489; see Finglass 2007: 243–4.

²⁶ χεῖρες–πόδες–μετέρχεται–συμμάρψας. ²⁷ Cf. pp. 364–5.

The other characteristic of the Ὀρκου πάϊς is another absence, the fact that it has no name. This contrasts with the emphatic identification of the addressee at the beginning of the poem: Γλαῦκ' Ἐπικυδείδῃ. Although Glaukos is defined by his name and the name of his father, however, his dominant trait is that his own children will be nameless, as his entire line of descent is set for extermination. No hearth is said to be 'of Glaukos' any longer. The oracular poem completes the Hesiodic genealogy of Horkos, who is presented as the last son of Eris in the *Theogony* (231), and thus identified as the very last descendant of Night in the great poem. The son of Horkos embodies the punishment of perjury. The nature of this anonymous monster reflects the force that is set in motion by the broken oath. Its movement and its action are emphatically marked as inhuman and vast in power. The speed of its progress operates beyond human time. What seems to be an immediate victory (νικῆσαι) for the perjurer is in fact an immediate defeat. The reversal is completed when the family of the man who has pillaged somebody else's goods will be seized by the Ὀρκου πάϊς. The image of filiation used to define this agent of punishment is particularly appropriate for a tale that revolves around the idea of generational eradication. The son of Horkos destroys both *geneē* and *oikos* as it combines the vertical depth of descent with the horizontal inclusion of the household. One points to diachronic transmission through generations, the other to the synchronic presence of the kinship unit as a recognisable entity in the community: the *oikos* as a shared identity of physical spaces, cult, and group. The text underlines the totality of the extermination with the adjectives πᾶσαν and ἅπαντα placed at the end of lines 5 and 6 respectively. The prose narrative of the episode adds that the oracular threat has been confirmed and that not only are there no ἀπόγονοι of the perjurer left in Sparta, but the extended household (ἰστίη) of Glaukos has been extirpated root and branch (ἐκτέτριπταί . . . πρόρριζος) from the city, a marked echo of the ritual oath formula.²⁸ The ἀπόγονον answers the γενεή of the poem, and the ἰστίη the οἶκον of line 6. There is no longer any continuity of descent for the recipient of the oracle, or an established household in the city. Prominently displayed at the beginning of the poem, his name becomes the icon of the house with no name at the end. The verb of ἐκτέτριπταί τε πρόρριζος ἐκ Σπάρτης agrees with the single Glaukos, not ἀπόγονον or ἰστίη – descent and household are presented as extensions of the transgressor. Glaukos, the son of Epikydes, that is, 'The Illustrious', will become *anonymous* (ἄνωνυμος), like the son of Horkos.

²⁸ See p. 174. For that usage of the verb, see W. S. Barrett 1992: 291; add F 81 Snell (*TrGF* 2).

While death awaits the honest man and the perjurer alike, the continuity through generations that allows human existence to escape complete oblivion is closed to the latter. What is a better lot in Hesiod becomes an absolute difference between continuity and extinction in the oracle. Its rapid flash of ominous wisdom paints a fundamental challenge of the human condition.

Another element that stands out in the Glaukos story is the theme of the circulation of riches. The oracle is built on the unjust acquisition of wealth through perjury. As in Hesiod, it is concerned with the act of ‘plundering’ (ληίσσασθαι) with a false oath. The idea that the temporary enrichment provided by the broken oath leads directly to ruin is the foundation of the message of justice in time delivered by the oracle. It encodes the warning of traditional poetic wisdom into a different textual register. The short oracular tale presents itself as the memory of an event, an act that can be shown as an exemplary moment of normative wisdom. The poem hardly makes sufficient sense by itself: it demands a narrative context. As most other records of the Pythia’s verses in circulation at the time, it invites a telling both of the circumstance that motivated the oracular answer and of the outcome of the story. Before it was crystallised in its Herodotean version, the easily detachable tale could have been adapted to time and place from one performance to the next and serve to illustrate a suitably relevant past. While it is presented as a local Spartan tale in the work of Herodotus, it could as well be located in Athens, in Crete, or in Thessaly in another context. It belongs to no fixed occasion.²⁹ Unlike most other verse ‘answers’ ascribed to the Pythia, the oracle of Glaukos reveals a general truth applicable to all who hear it – the stark message is a lesson for all publics. The striking image of the Son of Horkos (Ὁρκου παῖς) and the uncharacteristically clear warning of the Pythia in the poem could thus be used to imprint a standard of morality on whatever audience it was delivered to.

The idea of delayed justice presented in the poem draws from the most prominent antecedent of the written record and deploys it in the simple form of a popular moral admonition. The oracle reproduces a familiar pattern of high poetry in the form of a memorable, straightforward tale of edification through the fear of punishment. The grounding of the colourful poem in the hallowed, Panhellenic authority of Hesiod gave it a stamp of recognised wisdom. The echo of text into text strengthens the resonance

²⁹ Cf. Parke and Wormell 1956, vol. II: xxiv–xxx; Fontenrose 1978: 119; 180; on the many links between oracles, *gnōmai* and proverbs, see Fernández Delgado 1986: 89–98; Nagy 1990: 334.



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next to the later speeches of Cassandra, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus about ancestral fault in the same play, and the chorus's evolving and often combative views about the weight of ancient crimes in its reactions to these speeches, which we have reviewed above.⁷⁷ The hidden, silent concerns of spirits of vengeance for the crimes of ancestors is a prominent theme of the *Agamemnon*; if there is one notion from that play that is brought to mind by τὰ ἐκ προτέρων ἀπλᾶκήματα of line 934, that is it. But the words of Athena do not single out a precise referent for τὰ ἐκ προτέρων ἀπλᾶκήματα. There are many aspects to the idea of ancestral fault in the *Agamemnon*, and no good reason to believe that one is referenced to the exclusion of the others in Athena's statement. What is certain is that the statement does point us back to the *Agamemnon*, where the idea is so prominent, in contrast to its near absence from the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*.

Athena's statement comes as something of a shock. Just after having acquitted Orestes, she now establishes the Erinyes as the judges of ancestral faults in Athens.⁷⁸ No statement of the play prepares us for this very specific function, and the idea seems to clash with the repeated emphasis of the chorus on the personal responsibility of transgression it has pursued throughout the tragedy. The statement is counterintuitive; it stands out in the strophe. Activating a prominent idea of the first play at the end of the trilogy, it affirms its relevance for what has just taken place, and its significance for the world of the audience. There is no question of punishing innocents here or elsewhere in the play. But dark forces are at work behind the choices we make, and the disasters of *atē* do not come from any random place. They are not mere products of chance. Ancient crimes continue into later generations. The murder by Orestes, and the punishment he has suffered on stage, are ultimately the consequences of crimes committed generations before. This in no way denies the responsibility of Orestes for his acts; it places it in a larger chain of causality. There is of course no reason to introduce an opposition between free will and predetermination in this text, where the crimes of the present are thoroughly embedded in the crimes of the past. The long exploration of choice and agency staged in the *Choephoroi*, and the long exploration of responsibility and punishment staged in the *Eumenides*, are simply reinscribed in the much broader temporal framework of the *Agamemnon* with this statement.

⁷⁷ Knox 1952; Saïd 1978: 111.

⁷⁸ See Bernek 2004.

τελοῦσ' ἄραί· ζῶσιν οἱ
 γὰς ὑπαὶ κείμενοι.
 παλὶρρυτον γὰρ αἶμ' ὑπεξαιροῦσι τῶν κτανόντων
 οἱ πάλαι θανόντες.

The curses are at work! Those who lie beneath the ground are living, for the blood of the killers flows in turn, drained by those who perished long ago!
 (trans. Lloyd-Jones)

At (504–15), at the end of the first *stasimon*, the chorus had earlier sung of the ancient crime of the family as the point of origin of its unceasing troubles and emphatically presented it as the antecedent of the crimes and the punishments that followed:⁸⁵

ὦ Πέλοπος ἅ πρόσθεν
 πολύπονος ἱππεία,
 ὥς ἔμολες αἰανῆς
 τᾷδε γᾶ.
 εὔτε γὰρ ὁ ποντισθεὶς
 Μυρτίλος ἐκοιμάθη,
 παγχρύσων δίφρων
 δυστάνοις αἰκείαις
 πρόρριζος ἐκριφθεὶς,
 οὔ τί πω
 ἔλιπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου
 πολύπονος αἰκεία.

O ride of Pelops long ago, bringer of many sorrows, how dire was your effect upon this land! For since Myrtilus fell asleep, plunged into the sea, hurled headlong from the golden chariot with cruel torment, never yet has the torment of many troubles departed from this house (trans. Lloyd-Jones).

This is a beautiful example of the kind of background role that the idea can take in a play of the Atreid cycle in the later part of the fifth century, an expected element of the tradition that can be clearly and rapidly indexed, rewritten, compressed or expanded. That is the type of expectation that is manipulated by Euripides in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

The play contains an important reference to ancestral fault in the last part of the *parodos*.⁸⁶ After Iphigenia, revealing her dream to the chorus of young girls in lines 143–78, laments the death of her brother and the

⁸⁵ See Finglass 2007: 247–8; Kyriakou 2009: 339–42. Note the parallel of the Erinyes' portrait in the preceding lines with the son of Horkos in Hdt. 6.86 (see p. 283).

⁸⁶ See Sewell-Rutter 2007: 66, n. 55, who notes that there is no reference to the curse of Pelops in the play (or indeed to Pelops himself in that passage). I agree with him that Murray's supplement at 192 cannot be used to say anything about the ancient crime. The text reproduced here is that of Kovacs.

collapse of her house, the chorus answers her with ἀντιψάλμους ᾠδὰς ('antiphonal songs') that intone a funeral dirge for the House of Atreus and the reduplicated calamities that have struck it (178–202):⁸⁷

ἀντιψάλμους ᾠδὰς ὕμνων τ'
 Ἀσιητᾶν σοι βάρβαρον ἄχάν,
 δέσποιν', ἐξαυδάσω < ᾠδῶ >,
 τὰν ἐν θρήνοις μοῦσαν
 νέκυσιν μέλεον, τὰν ἐν μολπαῖς
 Ἄιδας ὕμνεϊ δίχα παιάνων.
 οἴμοι τῶν Ἀτρειδᾶν οἴκων.
 ἔρρει φῶς σκῆπτρόν < τ' >, οἴμοι,
 [πατρῶων οἴκων].
 ἦν ἐκ τῶν εὐόλβων Ἄργει
 βασιλέων < τᾶς νῦν ἄτας > ἀρχά.
 μόχθος δ' ἐκ μόχθων ἄσσει
 δινευούσαις ἵπποισιν < ἐπεὶ >
 πταναῖς ἀλλάξας δ' ἐξ ἔδρας
 ἱερὸν < μετέβασ' > ὅμμ' αὐγᾶς
 Ἄλιος, ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλα προσέβα
 χρυσέας ἄρνός μελάθροισι ὀδύνα,
 ἔφονος ἐπὶ φόνῳ ἄχεα ἄχεσιν†.
 ἔνθεν τῶν πρόσθεν δμαθέντων
 ἐκβαίνει ποινὰ Τανταλιδᾶν
 εἰς οἴκους, σπεύδει δ' ἀσπούδαστ'
 ἐπὶ σοὶ δαίμων < δυσδαίμων >.

Songs antiphonal to yours and the foreign
 clamor of Asian hymns
 to you, mistress, shall I intone,
 music for the dead amid dirges,
 the unblessed tunes which Hades sings
 (no paean these) among his songs.
 Ah me, the light of the house of the Atridae
 and its sceptre have perished, ah me
 [of my ancestral home]!
 From the blessed kings in Argos
 <this disaster> took its beginning,
 and trouble from trouble came,
 <ever since> with his whirling winged steeds
 Helios changed from its station
 the sun's holy radiant face,

⁸⁷ The text is particularly damaged. See Kyriakou 2006: 93–5. For the characterisation of the chorus in the play, see Kyriakou 1999; 2006: 36–7.



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and more medical-sounding ἀλιτηριώδης. For that strategy to work, the idea had to have a resonance with his intended audience, and a recognised association with cultural practices such as ἀποδιοπομπήσεις or the θεῶν ἀποτροπαίων ἱερά. For the statement of that passage to make any sense, the notion of ancestral fault must have had something of a field of reference, a discernible shape with connotations and a certain place in religious practice. That expression of ancestral fault, like the one found in the *Against Andocides*, the ὑπὲρ Φανίου παρανόμων and the *Busiris*, presupposes that the notion had a distinctive shape for the audience's imagination of society here and now. They could only appear at the end of the long trajectories of implicit theology that we have been following in this book.

The Athenian Stranger does not present the idea of ancestral fault as an actual diagnostic and a cure for the potential temple robber, but as the material for a story that can be used to veer him in the right direction (even if the chances of success are slim). He does not, in other words, present ancestral fault as an explanation, or a principle of justice. Nowhere does it appear as such in the *Laws*.⁷⁰ It does not, in fact, appear as a principle of justice anywhere in the Platonic corpus. Perfectly at odds with the cosmic view of individual responsibility and justice defended in the *Timaeus* and elsewhere in Plato, it has no place in the philosophical structures of the dialogues.⁷¹ When Plato mentions ancestral fault, as in the *Cratylus*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Republic*, the *Theaetetus*, or the *Laws*, it is always as a reference to tradition, or to the practices of the city. Ancestral fault is not an element of Platonic justice.

Neither does it appear anywhere in Aristotle. But while it has no role to play in his system, that hardly means that it had suddenly vanished from the concerns of Greek society. We know that Aristotle's student Bion attacked it, for instance, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, undermining its validity, and showing its incompatibility with any true notion of justice.⁷² That attack is obviously launched at its opposite, the suggestion that ancestral fault is a valid principle or a true notion of justice. In the early Hellenistic period such confrontations with the explicit theology of ancestral fault were bound to become more frequent. Now an object of philosophical debate, the idea could be defined, analysed, compared,

⁷⁰ The discussion of 856cd (with Schöpsdau 2011: 275) is the exception that proves the rule. It is stated there that children will never be punished for the faults of their fathers, except one whose great-grandfather, grandfather, and father have all been condemned to death, in which case the person is to be expelled from the city.

⁷¹ Cf. *Tht.* 173d. See e.g. Mackenzie 1981; Saunders 1993; Van den Berg (forthcoming).

⁷² See p. 53.

criticised, or explored, the trigger to a whole range of associations from the records of the written archive. From that moment on, our sources concerning ancestral fault take the form either of attacks against it or of defences of its validity. It had become a doctrine to be buttressed or refuted, an opposition that was to take its clearest form in the disputations of the Stoics and Epicureans reflected in Cicero and Plutarch. From the time of the late classical period onwards, ancestral fault mostly appears to us as an object of explicit theology. As such, it will continue to change, of course, with its own history, transformations, adaptations, and new range of associations, all the way into its eventual inscription at the heart of Platonism with the work of Plutarch and the later Neoplatonists. But that trajectory of explicit debate and systematic theological investigations constitutes a wholly different type of history than the more diffuse and inchoate evolution of implicit theology which we have been tracking. It offers material for another sort of study.

The point of starting from the end in Chapter 1 with the explicit theology of ancestral fault was to define a *telos* for the conduct of the study. This book was conceived as an attempt to discern the different paths that have led to the explicit theology of ancestral fault. If it is fundamentally opposed to the evolutionary model of much previous scholarship, which tended to see the idea as a vestige from primitive beliefs, a survival in various stages of decay, it has tried to map the contours of a different type of evolution. Two main processes are at play. One is the progressive expansion of the idea. From the confines of the institutional and ritual logic of the oath, we can see the notion of ancestral fault occupy a much larger field over the course of the centuries, to the point of appearing in almost every genre of later classical literature. Used in the dynastic struggles of the archaic period, it found an ideal environment in the conflicts and celebrations of the aristocratic symposium, and the reflections on the ethics of heredity it fostered. It is in the symposium and its distinctively agonistic concern with kinship that we first see the idea of ancestral fault appear independently of perjury in the record. From there, it was repeatedly adapted to many other environments; its role largely surpassed the simple necessity of explaining injustice in the world. The usefulness it had as a tool of knowledge about the past, its ability to identify causes, to locate the sufferings of the present in a coherent sequence, even one that could be accused of being thoroughly unjust, the role it could play in developing notions of the self that surpassed the will and action of the individual, its position at the heart of kinship, heredity, and the transmission of wealth, its resonance with different



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- Apollo, [41](#), [60](#), 145, 229, 328, 331, 338, 357, 381, 413, 422
 Apollonius of Tyana, [48](#), [65](#)
 Aquinas, T., 73–8, 98–9, 106
 Arcadia, [56](#), 293
 Archidamos, 324
 Archilochus, [51](#), 221, 248
 archive, 10, 20, [37](#), 39, [49](#), 54, [57](#), 157, 275, 469, 471
 archons, 308, 313
 Areopagus, 319, 422, 424
 Ares, 378–9, 382–3, 385, 422, 444
 Argos, 294, 377, 386
 Aristarchus, 192
 Aristotle, 53, 143, 241, 468, 470
 Arminianism, 99, 110, 119
 Arrian, 103
 Artemis, 205, 422–3
 Arthur, M., 383
 assembly, 300
 Assmann, A., 321
astoi, 211, 272
 Astyanax, 197
asylia, 292
atē
 Agamemnon, 142, 396, 403, 407–8, 413
 Antigone, 362, 364–5, 369, 371–2, 374
 and danger, 222–3
 Eumenides, [415](#)
 Homer, 149
 Orestes, 426, 433
 perspective, 237, 254–5, 264
 Phoenissae, 384
 punishment, 229, 231, 236, 256, 336
 release, 36, 253
 and *waštul*, 178
 and wealth, 253, 262, 337, 344
 Athamas, 117, 445, 448
 Athena, 181, 221, 291, 322, 384, 413, [415](#), 422, 455
 Athens, 290–1, 294, 296–7, 303–4, 306–25, 338, 389, 415, 446
athlos, 362
atimia, 144
 Atreids, 224
 Atreus, 30, [58](#), 93, 225, 396, 400, 405, 414, 420, 423, 426, 429, 434
 Atreidae, 4, [17](#), 30–1, [51](#), [58](#), [94](#), 133, 138, 223, 225, 346, 349, 394–445
 Atthis, 321
 audience, 296, 306, 324, 373, 409, 412, 443, 461
 Augustine, 75, [78](#)
 authenticity, 249, 257, 279
 authority, 454, 470
 age, 372
 conflict, 446
 elegy, 232, 245
 group, 234
 oratory, 464
 revolutions of wisdom, 339
 ritual, 451, 453
 science, 428, 432
 theology, 274
 tradition, 373
 tragedy, 441
 autochthony, 380

 Bacchylides, 373
 Bakker, E. J., 234
 barrenness, 167
Batrachomyomachia, [163](#)
Begriffsgeschichte, 8, 19
 belief, 6–8, 14, 139, 150, 339, 342, 439
 condemnation, 113
 doctrine of inherited guilt, [17](#), 128
 exotic, 136
 new, 11
 popular, 126, 129
 primitive, 131, 133, 146, 469
 text, 18, 153, 156, 470
 tradition, 141
 Bellerophon, 177, 205
 Benedetto, V. di, 216
 Benveniste, E., 189, 203
 Bernabé, A., 456
 Bia, 200
 Bianchi, U., 155
 Bion of Borysthenes, 53, 468
Birds, 300
 Blessed Isles, 334
 blood, 368
 human sacrifice, 319
 lust for, 399
 and murder, 367
 and pollution, 11, 114, 352, 401, 410–11
 and punishment, 403, 438
 and sacrifice, 173, 186, 190
 value of, 379
 Bollack, J., 462
 Borges, J. L., 257
 borrowing, 251
 Bouzyges, 208
 Branchidae, [41](#), 103
 Brisson, L., 455
 Bulis, 303
 Burkert, W., 155, 170

 Cadmus, 372, 380, 382, 384, 443
 Callias, 464
 Callimachus, 95
 Calvinism, [84](#), 99, 112, 114



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