

*Materials 1: The language of disease in tragedy*

A few decades ago, after philological examinations of very specific terms for types of bodily woes, scholars tended to dismiss the metaphorical aspects of disease in general out of hand, as “mere metaphor.” These scholars erred, I believe, in making sweeping assumptions about poetic language in its historical situation, in underestimating how rapid shifts in that situation could affect metaphoricity, and in not considering how their own historical conditions might have affected the way they read the Greek texts. Recently, G. E. R. Lloyd has more fundamentally cast doubt upon the traditional conception of metaphor as an analytical tool for Greek discourse, especially for studying the Greek terminology for disease (Lloyd 2003: 8–9):

It is unhelpful because it sets up a rigid dichotomy between a supposed primary, literal use and other deviant ones. Over and over again the key terms used in relation to health and disease pose severe problems for anyone who seeks an original “literal” sphere of application. I accordingly prefer to think of all the terms we shall be considering as possessing what I call “semantic stretch.” Indeed in my view all language exhibits greater or less semantic stretch.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, can we really be so sure which use of *nosos* designates real illness and which is a trope? And could there not sometimes be slippages between the real and metaphorical applications of a word even inside the same text? Such slippages will quickly become apparent when I turn to examining specific dramas. My broader argument shares Lloyd’s concerns about the assumptions of metaphoricity that have dominated the history of scholarship on disease language in tragedy. “Semantic stretch” is a bit cumbersome as a descriptive term, and I shall thus keep using the more traditional term “metaphor,” but with the understanding that to call a Greek city “sick” is not to deploy a “mere” or “dead” metaphor. Lloyd’s qualms concerning traditional thinking about metaphor, however, are consonant with developments over the past few decades in the study of the

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd first questions the notion of *metaphora* in Lloyd 1990.

theory of metaphor that have incorporated advances in cognitive science and cognitive linguistics. Such work has increasingly put into doubt the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical in language, and it has stressed that the projection of the human body into our environment and into our representation of that environment entails that the concept of the dead metaphor is dead (Fludernik, Freeman and Freeman 1999: 385): “Since all language is embodied, dead metaphors can no longer be regarded as ‘dead.’”<sup>2</sup> And the functioning of the body and its disfunctioning when subject to illness is certainly one of these metaphors. We first need, though, to see how assumptions among classical philologists about disease metaphors developed and why.

In 1944, a seminal article by H. W. Miller recognized that medical language in tragedy was “derived ultimately . . . from the vocabulary of Ionic medicine” (Miller 1944: 156–57) and was used consciously so by the poets, but then, when explaining his decision to concentrate on the terminology for very specific symptoms, he rejected any larger discussion of words such as *nosos* and *iatros* (doctor) because they were too common in everyday language. Miller thus makes fairly substantial assumptions about everyday, let alone poetic, language in fifth-century Athens, and further does not account for whether the ritualized setting of the dramatic performance in the Theater of Dionysus motivated many aspects of Greek language which might have been unimportant in the agora. More recent scholarship has concluded that disease language has more potency, and freshness, than was previously believed to be the case. Roger Brock, for example, has reexamined the evidence in extant tragedy and discovered that, in the *Oresteia*, Agamemnon’s threatful promise, upon his return to Argos, to restore civic health by surgery (*Agamemnon* 848–50) is unique in literature of the classical period, and so certainly not an overused and thus dead metaphor (Brock 2000: 31–32). Moreover, if, as Miller admits, the tragedians were actively interested in the new science imported from Ionia, then it is entirely possible, even probable, that this interest could have breathed new life into dead metaphors, if they were indeed even dead at the time.

One finds a similarly broad dismissal of disease symbolism in Robert Goheen’s 1951 study of imagery in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. We cannot take

<sup>2</sup> Fludernik, Freeman and Freeman 1999 is a valuable and clear overview of developments in metaphor theory that have been influenced by cognitive science. See further Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987 and Kövecses 2005. Many of these issues are discussed from the perspective of classical philology in Kirby 1997, who also shows how Aristotle’s approach to metaphor actually has important adumbrations of Lakoff’s cognitive methodology and that the two views can be reconciled through a semiotic model.

such language seriously, says Goheen, because “[t]he expression of almost any adverse condition as a *nosos* (disease, diseased state) can be found in Greek poetry” (Goheen 1951: 41), and, moreover, “in Greek tragedy the idea of a *nosos* seems to be transferred often to distress and sorrow or to mental disorder and to the causes of great commotion, without necessary supernatural connection.” Again, this is in part true, but it is a large assumption from a relatively small number of texts, and there does seem to be a supernatural connection at least in the *loimos* affecting Thebes in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I also do not understand why Goheen lumps mental disorder in with general distress and does not see it as a legitimate illness in itself, since the madresses of Ajax and Heracles seem real enough illnesses to those two and their *philoï*. The operating scheme of thought here as with Miller is that the actual use of a metaphor by a poet kills it. In 1962, N. E. Collinge, following Goheen’s lead, is slightly more willing to admit the metaphorical implications of disease language in tragedy, but here also the scope of examination is quite limited and the author ultimately merely lists medical terminology and briefly discusses psychological pathology.

Subsequently, and more productively, during the latter part of that period, the importance of disease as a theme in Sophoclean drama was examined in a 1966 article by Biggs, who followed Knox’s lead in his earlier study of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and in Welsey Smith’s 1967 article on Euripides’ *Orestes*. These studies grazed the tip of the proverbial iceberg that remained floating in the frozen north of Greek drama studies.<sup>3</sup>

Part of the problem here, I think, is that such discussions had, for the most part, become excessively detached and distanced from the real trauma in Athens and the imagined suffering in the Theater of Dionysus, as they neglect the corporeal ailments of the characters, overlooking their physical agony before an audience composed of people suffering from a variety of ailments that we no longer experience in significant numbers in the modern world. I further do not believe that we can so simply assume that a culture lacking immunization shots, antibiotics and anesthetic would have let connections of bad things to the language of disease slip by too easily. We can talk all we want about historicizing the study of tragedy by focusing on the role of the *polis* or rejecting a universal psychology that makes Oedipus the cousin of Hamlet, but the sheer fragility of life itself in antiquity, and how the ancient imagination responded to it, seem to me at least as an important historical factor in how we read the texts that survive

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent overview of recent scholarship on the relationship between fifth-century medical writings and tragic drama see Kosak 2004: 6–11.

to us. I submit that there does not seem to be any convincing reason to believe that the Greeks of the fifth century BCE found so little meaning in calling certain woes *nosoi*, particularly in dramas where characters (and their societies) literally ail.

Perhaps these doubts about metaphoricity are reasonable and true, since it is not unreasonable to posit that some metaphors ossify, die and lose their force in everyday speech, but on the other hand it might be more unreasonable to assume that metaphors which seem bland and worn to us and in our everyday language would have also sounded similarly to Athenians 2,500 years ago. One would also have to engage in some rather fine hair-splitting about which specific instances retain their metaphorical import, and to posit that poetic language operates at the same motivational level as conversational speech. The context of such language, and the relationship between text and context, should be taken more seriously. It would seem more helpful, I suggest, to ask new questions and see whether a drama's use of *nosos* and related words participates in a larger structure of signification for the drama and the culture that produces it. The modern reader, I propose, needs to examine his or her own assumptions in addition to those of the fifth-century audience.

Thus, understanding the force of the imagery of disease in the Theater of Dionysus requires resituating the dramatic texts historically, both in the era of Euripides and Sophocles and in ours. At the risk of banality, I suggest that we need to imagine more vividly what it was like to live without the hygienic comforts of modernity and the possible impact more precarious health might have on our reception of Greek terms. We must more concretely imagine "a world," in John Gould's words (Gould 1985: 6),<sup>4</sup>

constantly vulnerable to crop failure and sickness and far closer to present-day India than to anything in our own experience, a world in which the expectation of life was appallingly low and in which medicine (the most articulate and sophisticated of ancient sciences) was all too often an unavailing witness of human suffering, disease and death.

Gould's observation should be weighed heavily against the doubts about both the reality and the metaphoricity of disease in texts from ancient Athens and should help us guard against modern complacency. Further, the work of the three earlier scholars of medical language in drama that we have just discussed was all published between 1941 and 1962, a time of

<sup>4</sup> More recently Stephens 1995: 157–59 forcefully questions the complacency of the modern scholar in the light of the very different physical conditions the Athenians experienced.

tremendous scientific optimism, when medicine had ameliorated, if not eliminated, most major curable diseases, and there was even hope for a cure for cancer; and the social unrest spawned by the Vietnam War had not destabilized America and Europe. 1962 was also, oddly enough, the publication year of Rachel Carson's landmark book *Silent Spring*, which exposed the damage modern man had done to the environment through DDT in his attempts to control nature. We forget that, before the relatively recent introduction of antibiotics in the twentieth century, even a cut in one's skin could kill through infection, though the alarm, early in the twenty first century, over infections suddenly resistant to treatment and virulent illnesses spread quickly through globalization shows a potential mnemonic recovery.<sup>5</sup> This earlier time of rapid medical progress was also, perhaps not coincidentally, the era of the birth of the New Criticism, which, while it offered important new insights into the rhetoric and structure of literary works, also sealed off texts from the messy circumstances of their production as self-sustaining artifacts to be admired solely for their beauty or as timeless works of art. Art, like disease, could be contained, even at the cost of quarantine. For these reasons, I thus suspect that metaphors of illness might not have had the appropriate resonance for those scholars and their colleagues. My impression of the modern history of the language of health is that words like "disease" and "plague" have much greater power now, in the era of AIDS (not to mention the various newly lethal viruses that could be spread quickly thanks to globalization), than they did three or four decades previously.

It is in the word *nosos* that I am particularly interested, and not in terms for specific illnesses and maladies, as these have been variously catalogued and further do not seem as persistently central thematically as the more general word *nosos*. The focus on individual maladies can be an interpretive dead-end, as it often remains decoupled from the larger patterns of thought in a text. While examining *nosos* and derived words, I shall also try to explain the strange neglect of the more precise word for plague, *loimos*. I pursue this study mindful of the sage warnings from my predecessors concerning the excessive concentration on a single word or vocabulary group,<sup>6</sup> but I hope that my attempts to work comparatively among a range of authors

<sup>5</sup> For a brief and informative account of how much medicine has changed our lives in the last century see M. F. Perutz's review essay, "The White Plague," in the May 26, 1994 issue of *The New York Review of Books*. Perutz reviews Frank Ryan, *The Forgotten Plague: How the Battle against Tuberculosis Was Won—and Lost*; Sheila Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History*; and Alan Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the Immigrant Menace*.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, M. Griffith 1977: 147, with bibliography.

and to take into account certain important features of historical context will mitigate the potential dangers of such a study, not least of which is the loss of perspective. I seek to discover the general metaphorical and literal semantic ranges that *nosos* had in the Theater of Dionysus, and Greek usage itself appears to support concentrating on this word. The plague that began in 430 BCE in Athens, and its recurrence for several years thereafter, surely deepened an Athenian audience's sensitivity to a dramatic poet's deployment of such language, which itself had been inspired by the plague. And this is probably an understatement. If Thucydides' description of the plague is at all accurate, then we cannot underestimate the power words like *nosos* had in the theater, especially when they were articulated at key moments of pressure in dramatic action. We thus must ask how acknowledging this affects the way we read the relevant representational practices in Athens. I begin with words, the vehicle of those representations. I start, however, not with *nosos*, but with the more specific term for plague, *loimos*.

#### THE RARITY OF *LOIMOS* IN TRAGEDY

Since tragic language builds so much on Homer, one wisely starts there, and *loimos* only occurs once in all of Homer: this is, not surprisingly, in the description of the plague Apollo sends against the Achaean army (*Il.* 1.61, λοιμός). Elsewhere in archaic poetry, Hesiod solely uses *loimos* when he describes the two woes Zeus sends against men as *loimos* and *limos*, famine (*Op.* 243), a combination possibly driven in part by poetic needs, since the word *laoi* (people) completes the line, thus tripling the alliteration.<sup>7</sup> This relative avoidance of *loimos* in archaic poetry sets the stage for the lyric poets; Pindar, for example, never uses it.

Before turning to the tragedians, I should widen our scope briefly, to see whether other writers of this general era eschew *loimos*. It never appears in Pindar, whose career antedated the Athenian plague, and only three times in the vast output of Herodotus, who likely lived at least to the beginning of the plague but away from Athens.<sup>8</sup> In one passage (7.171.2), Herodotus, like Hesiod before him, pairs off *limos* and *loimos* as the twin afflictions of Crete. That Herodotus, as recent scholarship has shown, had a thorough acquaintance with early Greek medical writings, makes the persistence of

<sup>7</sup> Bremmer 1983: 301, while citing this passage from Hesiod, notes that plague, famine and drought are "events which of course can hardly be separated."

<sup>8</sup> *Hdt.* 6.27, 7.171, 8.115. On scholarly controversies over the publication date of Herodotus see Thomas 2000: 20.

such Archaic thought patterns even more noteworthy.<sup>9</sup> Plato, who was born during the plague years in Athens (428 BCE) and who thus grew up hearing the stories elders and friends told about it, can only bring himself to write the word four times, two times each in the *Laws* (4.709a, 10.906c) and *Symposium* (188b, 201d), and in that last passage, a description of Diotima's wisdom, Plato refers specifically to the great plague of 430, but also in the same sentence, like Thucydides, then uses *nosos* to designate the identical event. However, authors who had no contact with the fifth century do not share this aversion to the word *loimos*. In the fourth century, in an oration originally attributed to Demosthenes, *Against Aristogeiton*, the speaker asks the jury to convict "the scapegoat, the plague," ὁ φαρμακός, ὁ λοιμός (25.80).<sup>10</sup> Given the tendency we have observed in fifth-century writers to avoid the word *loimos*, the power of this language in the fourth century might have been remarkable.

Still later, Plutarch summons up the courage to write it six times, though predominantly in texts concerning figures central to the plague years, with one of these in *The Life of Nicias* and four in *Pericles*, the latter scattered over three chapters.<sup>11</sup> Pausanias differs even more starkly from his predecessors with nineteen instances of forms of *loimos*, some of which in passages about the great plague of 430.<sup>12</sup> Thus, during the fifth century, the authors of still extant texts avoid *loimos*, probably out of superstition, and, especially in its last three decades, *loimos* virtually disappears as part of fifth-century literary vocabulary.

Similarly, the fifth-century writer Thucydides is most concerned with the broader term *nosos*, occasionally combining it with more specific adjectives like *loimôdês* (pestilent), but his descriptive language remains surprisingly non-specific. *Loimos* itself is strangely rare in Thucydides, but in his report scorning religion, at the end of the plague narrative, he repeats the Hesiodic coupling I mentioned in the previous paragraph. An oracle

<sup>9</sup> On Herodotus on early Greek medical treatises see Lateiner 1986 and Thomas (2000).

<sup>10</sup> *Pharmakos*, scapegoat, should not be confused with *pharmakeus*, poisoner or sorcerer, which is what the Loeb translator does in rendering ὁ φαρμακός, ὁ λοιμός as "this poisoner, this public pest." There are no instances in Classical Greek that justify such a translation, especially when, as here, *pharmakos* is combined with a word such as *loimos*, which would be the precise condition, plague, that warrants a scapegoat; compare *Lys.* 6.53 (another speech wrongly attributed) which asks its audience to "cleanse the city . . . and send away the scapegoat" (τὴν πόλιν καθαίρειν . . . καὶ φαρμακὸν ἀποπέμπειν). The Loeb translator, who might have been unduly influenced by an actual word for sorcerer a few lines before (φαρμακίδα, 79), thus seems to repeat the reluctance of the Athenian writers 2,500 years previously.

<sup>11</sup> *Cim.* 19.4; *Nic.* 6.3; *Per.* 34.3, 36.1, 36.3, 38.1.

<sup>12</sup> Pausanias writes of the great plague at 1.3.4. Other instances of *loimos* occur at 1.43.7, 2.32.6, 3.9.2, 4.9.1, 5.4.6, 5.13.6, 7.7.1, 7.10.3, 7.17.2, 8.41.2, 8.41.8, 9.5.1, 9.5.9, 9.8.2, 9.22.1, 9.36.3, 9.38.3, 10.11.5.

allegedly foretold (2.54.3) that “a Dorian war (*polemos*) will come and with it plague (*loimos*),” with the assonance of *polemos* and *loimos* surely further linking them conceptually. There followed, Thucydides reports, a dispute whether the oracle foretold a famine, *limos*, or plague, *loimos*, but the Athenians chose the latter because “they made their memory fit with what they had suffered.” Thucydides thus shows his awareness of the role of language in the public perception of disease and suffering. Perhaps significantly, because the oracle in Thucydides repeats in its two readings the combination of two disasters in the aforementioned Hesiodic passage, and again in Herodotus (7.171.2) plague and famine, *loimos* and *limos*, seem to be related conceptually, which then the strong assonance reinforces; I shall try to show later how the associations between plague and famine are also present in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*. *Nosos* itself frequently pairs off with another calamity, war; often Thucydides tends to cluster *nosos* with *polemos* (war) in alliance, as seen already just in the dispute over the oracle, and this combination continues a line of thought from the Archaic Age, as I shall examine later, that closely linked the two catastrophes.<sup>13</sup> Herodotus (7.171.2) also links plague with his account that Cretans who fought in the Trojan War returned home only to find themselves and their flocks afflicted by famine and pestilence to the extent that Crete was made desolate. Moreover, given the aforementioned scholarly commonplace that *nosos* is too generalized a word that designates bad things in general to be meaningful itself, one wonders why Thucydides never uses it directly for anything other than actual, specific bodily disease.<sup>14</sup> *Loimos* and *nosos* are completely interchangeable in Thucydides’ narrative; for example, at the beginning of his account of the plague, the first mention of it is as *nosos* – ἡ νόσος πρῶτον ἤρξατο γενέσθαι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, “the plague first began to occur to the Athenians” (2.47.3) – and then, in the same sentence, only a few words later, it is *loimos*. All four occurrences of *loimos* are confined to these two brief passages, joined only by the adjective *loimôdês* in Book 1 (1.23.3), which is, moreover, combined with *nosos*. All subsequent passages, especially those in the body of the plague narrative, refer to the plague as *nosos*. I shall defer for a short space a fuller account of disease language in Thucydides.

Tragic language confirms this pattern of avoidance. Both before and after the plague strikes Athens, *nosos* is also the predominant, if not exclusive, choice of the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to represent

<sup>13</sup> *Nosos kai polemos* in Thucydides: 2.59.3, 3.3.1, 5.41.2, 6.12.1, 6.26.2.

<sup>14</sup> Thucydides does cluster other medical vocabulary metaphorically; see Kallett 1999.



disease. *Loimos* appears twice in the extant dramas of Aeschylus (the only tragedian among these three who died well before the Athenian plague) and thus twice as often as in the substantially larger combined output of Euripides and Sophocles, and, as with the other passages already discussed, plague is paired off with war or strife as one of the two disasters which can afflict an individual or state. In the first passage, from Aeschylus' *Persians*, the ghost of Darius questions his wife Atossa, who has heard before her husband's reappearance about the swift and unexpected disastrous loss of the Persian forces to the Athenians, concerning her sudden plunge into despair: τίνι τρόπῳ; λοιμοῦ τις ἦλθε σκηπτὸς ἢ στάσις πόλει; "How did it happen? Did some stroke of plague or factional strife come upon the polis?" (715–16). Given the strong associations, later in the fifth century, between disease and *stasis*, this passage might significantly indicate the predilection in older Greek to associate the two forces; if nothing else, it builds on the wider link between war and disease that stretches back to Homer.<sup>15</sup> In the second instance in Aeschylus, from the *Suppliant Women*, the Chorus of fugitive women, overjoyed at their reception by the Argives, pronounces a series of blessings over Argos that again combine *loimos* and strife, and, although here strife in Greek is the more generic *eris*, the context of its effects on the land's inhabitants suggests a meaning more like *stasis* (659–62):

μήποτε λοιμὸς ἀνδρῶν  
 τάνδε πόλιν κενῶσαι·  
 μηδ' ἐπιχωρίοις <ἔρις>  
 πτώμασιν αἵματίσαι πέδον γᾶς.

May plague never empty this city of its men  
 nor may strife ever bloody the plain of the land  
 with the blood of its fallen inhabitants.

Note that in the Aeschylean excerpts plague attacks not the land but the city, the human creation of the body politic, again preparing the later more open conceptualization of the sick city. One would perhaps expect plague to strike the land instead and cause famine, but tragic language seems more interested in the malfunctioning of civic structures than in agricultural stability.

The successors of Aeschylus follow his lead. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, probably produced sometime in the later 440s or early 430s, we hear of Antigone's mental *nosos* (according to Creon, 733), Creon's similarly described delusion (by Tiresias, 1052), the dust storm at Polynices burial described by the

<sup>15</sup> On *stasis* and disease in general, and in Thucydides in particular, see Price 2001.

Sentry as “divine plague,” θεῖαν νόσον (421), and two references to the sick city of Thebes (1015, 1141).<sup>16</sup> The movement of *nosos* among characters and between characters and *polis*, merely hinted in the *Antigone*, is then picked up and developed by post-plague tragedy, as I shall show in my later studies of Euripides and Sophocles.<sup>17</sup> The specific term for plague, *loimos*, does not occur in the extant dramas of Euripides, and is found only once in Sophocles, line 28 of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the tragedy where one would most expect to find an abundance of instances, and, given Sophocles’ persistent interest throughout his career in illness, this singularity seems remarkable. This usage persists through the dramatic mode, for Aristophanes restricts his medical vocabulary in his comedies exclusively to *nosos*, and *loimos* thus never appears in comedy. Since *loimos* does not present any metrical difficulties for a poet, as evinced by its appearance twice in Aeschylus, this rarity most likely does not entirely lack cause. Aside from superstition, perhaps *nosos* becomes, paradoxically, the word of choice for Thucydides and the tragedians because it came to be used to designate bad things in general outside of the theater; that is to say, its very vagueness there thus would lend *nosos* a greater metaphorical potential or semantic resonance which the poet can redirect as needed.

Moreover, because Greek tragedy tends to universalize or, we might say for lack of a better term, allegorize, contemporary events, the shift from the specific *loimos* to the more general *nosos* would seem typical of the relationship between history and tragic drama; perhaps *loimos* would too directly remind the Athenians of their recent troubles, which is suggested when the Theban priest in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, with decidedly unminced words, calls the *loimos* “most detestable” (*echthistos*). It could be that any tragedian producing dramas which include the word *loimos* too soon after 430 could run the risk of suffering the same fate as Phrynicus did several decades earlier, when he was fined 1,000 drachmas for reminding the Athenians of their losses at Miletus in his tragedy *The Sack of Miletus* (Hdt. 6.21). The presence of *loimos* might turn the relationship between stage world and audience world, in the words of Sourvinou-Inwood, “transgressive,” in making the two spheres too similar (Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 16). Or, put in analogous Aristotelian terms, *loimos* would represent “something too close to the experience of those in the audience,” and thus arouse “in them extreme sorrow for themselves, which, like the kind of extreme fear

<sup>16</sup> *Nosos* and its cognates appear a total of seven times in *S. Ant.*: 360, 421, 733, 1015, 1052, 1141.

<sup>17</sup> On the date of the *Antigone* see Lewis 1988, who argues, convincingly to me, for 438. On *nosos* in the *Antigone* see Winnington-Ingram 1969: 5–6 and Scullion 1998.

mentioned in *Rhetoric* 1386a17–24, is incompatible with pity” (Belfiore 1992: 232).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in my chapter on the *Oedipus*, I shall thus suggest here a possible solution for the mystery of how the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a drama admired both by Aristotle and countless modern audiences, could have finished second. Since *loimos* seems taboo, our attention must focus on the broader term *nosos*.

#### THE USE OF *NOSOS* IN TRAGEDY

At this point, I believe it is helpful to include two tables that represent the surviving fifth-century tragic dramas (and I thus exclude Euripides’ satyr play, the *Cyclops*), their years of production (which are admittedly often conjectural) and the frequency of forms of *nosos* in them. These tables contain the same data, only arranged differently, with the first focused on *nosos* and the second on chronology. The totals for the *nosos* frequency in both of them include cognate forms such as verbs and adjectives. I shall then draw some preliminary observations and conclusions from the data in the tables before turning to a more detailed discussion of *nosos* in the dramas of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles.

From these tables I can deduce some broad, though not absolutely consistent, patterns that can be linked first to the plague, then to the construction of the Asklepieion starting in 420 and finally to reactions, I suspect, to the oligarchic coup of 411. One must, however, be ever aware that we only possess a small sample of dramas produced in ancient Athens, and we further lack absolutely secure dates for many of the ones we do have, and thus any conclusions must be tentative. Please note that I discuss controversies concerning the dating of tragic dramas in subsequent chapters, and thus do not provide arguments and citations on that subject here.

Three of the highest six in *nosos* frequency are either definitely or likely dated to the first half of the 420s, and the top pair to the years subsequent to the oligarchic revolution of 411, but here I shall proceed chronologically through the set as a whole. We have secure external evidence for the date of the *Hippolytus*, and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* seems about as surely placed during the plague years as is possible without direct testimony. In my chapter on the *Trachiniae* I shall argue that internal evidence suggests a strong case for its production during the first half of the same decade; the eighteen instances of *nosos* are part of that equation. *Prometheus Bound*

<sup>18</sup> Both Sourvinou-Inwood and Belfiore in their respective passages discuss the failure of *The Sack of Miletus*.

Table 1: *Tragedies ranked according to frequency of forms of nosos.*

Play	Poet	Year	<i>Nosos</i> frequency
<i>Orestes</i>	Euripides	408	45
<i>Philoctetes</i>	Sophocles	409	26
<i>Hippolytus</i>	Euripides	428	24
<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Aeschylus??	??	17
<i>Trachiniae</i>	Sophocles	429–425?	18
<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	Sophocles	429–425?	14
<i>Ajax</i>	Sophocles	440s?	13
<i>Ion</i>	Sophocles	418–412	12
<i>Andromache</i>	Euripides	425?	8
<i>Antigone</i>	Sophocles	442–438	7
<i>Phoenissae</i>	Euripides	411?	7
<i>Iphigenia at Tauris</i>	Euripides	413?	6
<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Euripides	407–406	6
<i>Alceste</i>	Euripides	438	5
<i>Agamemnon</i>	Aeschylus	458	5
<i>Medea</i>	Euripides	431	3
<i>Heracles</i>	Euripides	422–416	4
<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Sophocles	406	4
<i>Trojan Women</i>	Euripides	415	3
<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Aeschylus	460s	3
<i>Electra</i>	Euripides	417–413	3
<i>Choephoroe</i>	Aeschylus	458	3
<i>Helen</i>	Euripides	412	3
<i>Bacchae</i>	Euripides	407–406	3
<i>Eumenides</i>	Aeschylus	458	2
<i>Electra</i>	Sophocles	413?	1
<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Euripides	423?	1
<i>Heraclidae</i>	Euripides	430–427?	1
<i>Persians</i>	Aeschylus	472	1
<i>Rhesus</i>	Euripides??	??	1
<i>Seven against Thebes</i>	Aeschylus	467	0
<i>Hecuba</i>	Euripides	424?	0

clearly does not conform to this trend, and I shall attempt to account for its uniqueness shortly later in my argument. Sophocles' *Ajax* also is ranked unusually high, with thirteen instances of *nosos* placing it seventh, but those are motivated by the madness of its hero. Starting around 425, *nosos* then decreases in frequency with the *Andromache*, drops to one with Euripides' *Suppliants*, and disappears completely in his *Hecuba*; again taking into account the limited evidence available, I would surmise that, with the conclusion of the plague's waves of attack, Euripides at least decided to put

Table 2: *Tragedies ranked according to likely year of composition or production.*

Play	Poet	<i>Nosos</i> frequency	Year
<i>Persians</i>	Aeschylus	1	472
<i>Seven against Thebes</i>	Aeschylus	0	467
<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Aeschylus	3	460s
<i>Agamemnon</i>	Aeschylus	5	458
<i>Choephoroe</i>	Aeschylus	3	458
<i>Eumenides</i>	Aeschylus	2	458
<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Aeschylus??	17	??
<i>Ajax</i>	Sophocles	13	440s?
<i>Antigone</i>	Sophocles	7	442–438
<i>Alcestitis</i>	Euripides	5	438
<i>Medea</i>	Euripides	3	431
<i>Heracclidae</i>	Euripides	1	430–427?
<i>Trachiniai</i>	Sophocles	18	430–425?
<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	Sophocles	14	429–425?
<i>Hippolytus</i>	Sophocles	24	428
<i>Andromache</i>	Euripides	8	425?
<i>Hecuba</i>	Euripides	0	424?
<i>Suppliant Women</i>	Euripides	1	423?
<i>Heracles</i>	Euripides	4	422–416
<i>Ion</i>	Euripides	12	418–412
<i>Electra</i>	Euripides	3	417–413
<i>Electra</i>	Sophocles	1	413?
<i>Trojan Women</i>	Euripides	3	415
<i>Iphigenia at Tauris</i>	Euripides	6	413?
<i>Helen</i>	Euripides	3	412
<i>Phoenissae</i>	Euripides	7	411?
<i>Philoctetes</i>	Sophocles	26	409
<i>Orestes</i>	Euripides	45	408
<i>Bacchae</i>	Euripides	3	407–406
<i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i>	Euripides	6	407–406
<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Sophocles	4	406–405
<i>Rhesus</i>	Euripides??	1	??

its language and metaphors aside for a while, possibly because of audience fatigue or the poet's need for innovation. Construction on the Asklepieion commenced in 420, and, perhaps coincidentally, Euripides' *Ion*, a drama about another son of Apollo, was likely produced around 418 and is ranked eighth in *nosos* frequency. The Asklepieion, I shall argue in later chapters, helps to keep disease as a theme and metaphor current. Once one moves into the middle of Table 1 and the bottom third of Table 2, the numbers become

insignificant in themselves for some dramas or, for others, the relatively low total of instances, such as four for the *Heracles*, is balanced with the recognition that they all come at key moments, as I shall demonstrate in my extended discussion of the *Heracles*. With the *Philoctetes* of 409 and the *Orestes* of 408, *nosos* explodes in frequency, an outcome, I believe, of the oligarchic revolution of 411 and the consequent political upheavals, as both Euripides and Sophocles came to exploit more fully the metaphors of the sick body politic, something which Euripides had begun in the *Phoenissae* of (probably) 411.

A few more comments are needed here concerning dramas that do not conform to these tendencies. I first note that Euripides' *Heraclidae*, which is generally thought to have been produced between 430 and 427, and thus possibly during the heart of the plague years, falls near the bottom of Table 1; this could be because Euripides did not imagine a connection between its themes and the plague, or because, if it were produced at the City Dionysia of 430, it would have been composed before the plague struck that summer. One could thus in general draw a distinction between dramas in which characters literally ail, such as the *Ajax*, and which as a result feature *nosos*, those which deploy it metaphorically and thus need some kind of motivation, such as the *Trachiniae*, and those in which neither is the case, such as those about, for example, the murder of Clytemnestra. Following this overview of *nosos* in Greek tragedy, I now turn to an assessment of its general deployment among the works of the three poets.

#### AESCHYLUS AND NOSOS

Aeschylus, the only tragedian to use *loimos* twice in the extant plays, employs *nosos* and cognates either thirty-one or fourteen times, depending on how one regards the authenticity of the *Prometheus Bound*.<sup>19</sup> Since seventeen instances are in the *Prometheus*, let us begin there. Indeed, the sheer relative abundance of this word in the *Prometheus* might either add to the case against its Aeschylean authenticity, or further establish it as influencing other tragedies later in the century, or even suggest it marks a shift in the conceptualization of disease in tragic drama. Because of major stylistic differences from the other six plays attributed to Aeschylus, some scholars, in particular Mark Griffith (1977), have argued that the *Prometheus Bound* is likely the work of another, probably later, poet, and thus date

<sup>19</sup> *A.* 542, 835, 850, 1002, 1016; *Ch.* 70, 279, 282; *Eu.* 479, 942; *Pers.* 750; *Supp.* 561, 587, 684. *Pr.* 225, 249, 378, 384 (twice), 473, 478, 483, 596, 606, 685, 698, 924, 977, 978 (twice), 1069.

the play anywhere from 479 to 415, with a date between 450 and 425 (that is, after Aeschylus' death) most likely.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, a quiet, but persistent, series of studies have noticed similarities between the *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides' *Heracles*, which is itself most commonly thought to have been produced around 415, that are so striking as to suggest they are not coincidental; *nosos* would be part of the web of connections between the two dramas (Mullens 1939 and 1941; Jouan 1970; Aéliou 1983: II, 127–32 and 358–63; Papadopoulou 2005: 120–22). With nineteen instances of *nosos* and its derivatives, the frequency in the *Prometheus* makes it look more like a play by Sophocles or Euripides later in the century (not even to hint of a possible authorship by either), as the two tables provided earlier suggest.<sup>21</sup> Generally, the later plays feature this word and theme more prominently, mainly because of the plague of 430 and then, I argue below, under the influence of the construction of the Asklepieion next to the Theater of Dionysus. And the range of possible dates for the *Prometheus* allows for the influence of either of those events; I should note, however, that the *Ajax* almost certainly dates before 430, although Sophocles' plays are notoriously impossible to pin down in years and, after the redating of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, we should always be careful about relying solely on stylistic criteria.<sup>22</sup> Two further cautions. First, word counts in themselves are not absolute proof of anything, but they can show us tendencies and thus suggest possible lines of reasoning. Second, my own ultimate judgment of the authorship of the *Prometheus Bound* remains fairly conservative and even the idea of placing it after 430 (a full quarter-century after Aeschylus' death) remains for me on the side of uncomfortably radical. Still, we need to consider the range of issues involved and their relationship to our larger concerns. Another difference between the *Prometheus Bound* and the rest of Aeschylus is that here the author uses *nosos* in its more general or metaphorical sense, while Aeschylus tends to restrict its usage to mean specific physical illness, though a passage from the *Agamemnon*, we shall see shortly, shows differently.<sup>23</sup>

One point of contact between the *Prometheus Bound* and the rest of the Aeschylean corpus, though, that also points us toward the later stages of

<sup>20</sup> In support of Griffith see Taplin 1977: 460–69 and West 1979. In support of an Aeschylean authorship see Herington 1979 and Hammond 1988: 9–16.

<sup>21</sup> M. Griffith 1977: 174 finds it “curious that [*Prometheus*] has so many explicit uses of the word *nosos* and its derivatives . . .” On medical language in the *Prometheus* in general see now Kosak 2004: 44–49.

<sup>22</sup> The *Suppliant Women* was originally thought to be a relatively early play, based on the prominence of its chorus, but the discovery of *POxy*. 2256.3 proved it to be late. See the discussion in Jones 1962: 65–72. I return to this problem in more detail in my chapter on the *Trachiniae*. On doubts about style to date the plays of Euripides see Michelini 1987: 334–37.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Pr.* 227, 251, 381, 386, 473, 596, 607, 632, 686, 924, 1069.

this study, is that in both the *Prometheus Bound* and the *Agamemnon* political instability is compared to illness. If, as Herington suggests (1979), the *Prometheus* comes very late in Aeschylus' career (i.e. just after the *Oresteia*), then this shared metaphor marks the development in Aeschylean thought of a linkage between the body and the body politic that becomes pervasive later in the fifth century. In the *Oresteia*, King Agamemnon, in his opening speech to the Argive elders after his return from a decade fighting the Trojan War, announces his intention to reconvene the assembly and casts himself as the doctor who will heal any civic malady of dissent (*A.* 848–50):<sup>24</sup>

ὄτω δὲ καὶ δεῖ φαρμάκων παιωνίων,  
ἤτοι κέαντες ἢ τεμόντες εὐφρόνως  
πειρασόμεσθα πῆμ' ἀποστρέψαι νόσου.

But whenever there is a need for healing drugs,  
whether by burning or cutting carefully  
we will try to turn away the woe of disease.

Those disloyal to the king, and thus, presumably, to the *polis*, are to be purged – literally. The king would be the doctor of the polis. Of course, it turns out that Agamemnon himself is the substance that will be burnt and cut, an idea which typifies the Oresteian dynamic that the agent is always successively the acted upon. The king is the state and thus its physician cannot operate on himself, an idea that recurs more explicitly in the *Prometheus Bound*.<sup>25</sup>

Prometheus, then, recounting the ingratitude of King Zeus after Prometheus had helped him overthrow the Titans, pronounces Zeus' attitude as characteristic of the tyrant's illness: ἔνεστι γάρ πως τοῦτο τῆ τυραννίδι / νόσημα, τοῖς φίλοισι μὴ πεποιθένοι, "For this is the disease of tyranny: to fail to trust friends (*philoî*)" (*Pr.* 225–26). Prometheus elsewhere casts himself as the healer, yet he is repeatedly told that he himself is sick, not just in terms of his physical distress but in his unyielding hostility to Zeus' reign, transforming the physical suffering into a social one. Both Zeus and Prometheus suffer diseases that threaten not their bodily health, but their places in the social and political order, and, since Prometheus carries a secret that can destroy Zeus, the disease threatens that order itself. By placing itself above the welfare of the *kosmos*, the unyielding spirit of Prometheus endangers all. Attempting to dissuade him, Okeanos thus reminds the stricken Titan that "words are doctors of the diseased temperament," ὀργῆς νοσοῦσης εἰσὶν ἰατροὶ λόγοι (380). This metaphorical

<sup>24</sup> On these lines see Brock 2000: 31.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, 473–75, and the notes for those lines in M. Griffith 1983.



field even extends to the Io scene when Io, whose own bovine illness is one of the themes that link her to Prometheus, ultimately replies gnominically when she asks the reluctant Prometheus for true prophecy, not flattery: “I say the most shameful disease is fake (‘synthetic’) words,” νόσημα γὰρ / αἴσχιστον εἶναί φημι συνηέτους λόγους (685–6). The bodily suffering of Prometheus thus is transformed, through Zeus’ mistrust and Prometheus’ intransigence, into a political metaphor, an illness that only proper speech can cure. If Zeus does not punish the rebel, the disease could spread; in other words, if the patient refuses treatment, then the doctor must resort to more cathartic means of healing.

#### NOSOS IN SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES

Thus concludes my overview of Aeschylean (and possibly pseudo-Aeschylean) drama, and so I move on to the two tragedians active before and after the plague struck. Since we have far more plays by Euripides than his two peers one inevitably turns to this corpus to examine the possible role of nosological imagery for the Theater of Dionysus in general, a choice further motivated by the production of every extant Euripidean drama save two after the plague’s first onset. Sophocles, as early as the ancient *Life*, was long associated with medicine and the Asclepius cult, and, of course, we see a clear evocation of the plague at the opening of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, produced sometime between 430 and 425 BCE, and disease figures prominently in his penultimate play, the *Philoctetes* of 409, whose hero suffers exile because of a festering wound. Already in the earlier *Antigone* Sophocles associates *nosos* with the events in the *polis* of Thebes (421, 1015, 1141) and with the conduct of specific characters (732, 1052), but here Sophocles does not develop the metaphor and it remains, at most, episodically deployed, especially in comparison with later Sophocles; I wonder, though, whether the *nosos* in Thebes in the *Antigone* became a seed which only sprouted in Sophocles’ imagination a decade later. Thus, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Philoctetes*, along with the *Trachiniae*, show the most thorough interest in disease as a theme, and these texts, and a paean (a song of healing, woe or victory) to Asclepius attributed to Sophocles’ authorship, led to an early tradition that Sophocles himself introduced the cult of Asclepius to Athens; I shall return to the origins and function of this story later. Sophocles throughout his career took a great interest in characters and communities under the threat of disease, but Sophoclean drama deployed these illnesses not out of any clinical interest; as Biggs observes (Biggs 1966: 223), “the Sophoclean description of diseases is fully subordinated to their

development as dramatic symbols.” Because Sophoclean drama has for so long been connected to medicine and the plague because of the plague in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and since Bernard Knox lucidly and thoroughly demonstrated the function of medical language in it (Knox 1957: 139–47), I shall, after a briefer discussion of the *Oedipus* that supplements Knox, concentrate my energies on the *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes* later in this study, where the potential of *nosos* is more fully exploited and Asclepius is evoked as a healer for the suffering hero in the latter.

Despite the reasonably frequent occurrence of specific terms for maladies both physical and psychological in Aeschylus and Sophocles, the language of disease achieves almost startling prominence in Euripidean drama, especially after 430, when the plague begins. Sourvinou-Inwood, as part of her argument that Euripidean drama does not deny traditional religion, as is frequently thought by modern critics who write under the influence of Aristophanes, but that rather Euripides explores or, at most, “problematizes” it, contends that in Euripides “a tendency had begun at around 430, intensified very strongly by 428, to articulate tragedies through a dense deployment of rituals, and to intensify religious problematization” (Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 405–07).<sup>26</sup> While Sourvinou-Inwood only peripherally touches upon the plague in her discussion as part of more general environment of anxiety in Athens, still her articulation of a shift in ritual intensity in tragedy is consistent with a focus on the plague’s effect, and, I think, it supports my larger argument for a fundamental change in the use of disease imagery and language, joined with an increasing use of paens and references to Asclepius, because disease is seen as sent by the gods. The dramas with the least amount of ritual density are the *Alcestis* and *Medea*. In the dramas written before the plague of 430 – that is, the *Alcestis*, produced in 438, and to a lesser extent the *Medea* of 431 – words such as *nosos* are present, though not central, as the *Alcestis* has five occurrences and the *Medea* only three, while, for example, the *Hippolytus*, composed in the aftermath of the plague’s first and most virulent attack and produced in 428, while the plague was still recurring, has twenty-four. Lest I appear overconfident that there is any neat formula at work here, I note that some late plays reduce severely their nosological language. One of Euripides two final dramas, the *Bacchae*, has only three instances, and these are all clustered together.<sup>27</sup> This

<sup>26</sup> For the view that Euripides was more traditional in his attitude to the gods than normally thought see also Lefkowitz 1989.

<sup>27</sup> *Alc.* 203, 237, 885, 1047 (twice); *Med.* 16, 471, 1364; *Hipp.* 40, 131, 176, 179, 186, 205, 269, 279, 283, 293, 294, 394, 405, 463, 477 (twice), 479, 512, 597, 698, 730, 766, 933, 1306; *Ba.* 311, 327, 353. On the *Bacchae* passages see Lloyd 2003: 91–94. Could the reduction in such language be a result of

reduction might show the effect of the passage of time on the power of the metaphor, or the effect of Euripides' sojourn from Athens in Macedonia. Internal plot motivations can explain such imagery in the two early plays. The *Alcestis* deals with the untimely death of a woman, and (as I shall discuss later) the death of Asclepius lurks in the background of that story, while in the *Medea* love is depicted as a disease, and poetry as a cure for suffering, according to traditional Greek thought about the power of Aphrodite. The increase of intensity and much greater pervasiveness of the love-as-disease metaphor in the *Hippolytus*, produced a couple of years after the *Medea* and the plague's onset, possibly indicates the poet's expanded awareness of the range of the metaphor, or at least a greater interest in deploying it.<sup>28</sup> The metaphor of disease thus runs powerfully through the plays written during and after the great plague of Athens, perhaps climaxing in the late drama, the *Orestes*, one of the few texts where scholars have recognized this metaphor's potency. Wesley Smith's early important study of the *Orestes*, though, still continues the focus on psychological illness, on pathology, while neglecting the sociopolitical implications of the diseased aristocracy of the drama's community; and the *Orestes* is a very political play.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in the next chapter I shall attempt to sketch out the more metaphorical or symbolic possibilities for disease in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, a line of inquiry I shall pursue through Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Trachiniae*, shifting focus more to politics in the dramas of Euripides after 420, until I close with similar concerns in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

#### ARISTOPHANIC COMEDY AND THE PLAGUE

The persistent interest in nosological language and imagery in tragic drama becomes especially thrown into relief when one compares it to the relative scarcity in Aristophanes. Since Athenian comedy deals more directly with contemporary social concerns than does tragic drama, one might expect to find the plague to have factored into Aristophanes' plays from the 420s, yet

the composition of the *Bacchae* outside of Athens and thus away from the physical environs of the Theater of Dionysus? However, recently Scullion 2003 has argued that the Macedonian exile was one of those Euripidean biographical fallacies that Lefkowitz has exposed. One also wonders about the nosological language of Euripides' lost *Philoctetes*, produced the same year as *Medea* and any connections Euripides might have drawn between these two dramas through shared language and imagery, especially given the strong thematic connections of betrayal and abandonment shared by the two myths.

<sup>28</sup> On poetry as a cure in the *Medea* see Pucci 1980, although this work is, to my mind, fairly obscure at times.

<sup>29</sup> Smith 1967. Of *Orestes*, J. Peter Euben (1986: 222) writes: "Euripides' *Orestes* is about political corruption." "Corruption in Euripides' *Orestes*," in Euben 1986.

Aristophanes seems to have skirted it. Here I shall examine Aristophanes' use of *nosos*, possible references to the plague, and why Aristophanes avoided the plague. Aristophanes debuted, during the plague years, with the *Banqueters* of 427, followed by the *Babylonians* in 426, neither of which, based on the available information and fragments, seems to have engaged the plague, and then the *Acharnians*, the first comedy to have survived antiquity, and that play is devoid of any direct sense that the plague had recently concluded its attacks on Athens, an elision which suggests its two predecessors steered clear of the subject as well.<sup>30</sup>

One would have to surmise that a disaster like the plague was terrible fodder for comedy, especially for a young, ambitious playwright who proclaimed his desire to win at every available opportunity. One might consider here that in our day comedians generally do not make jokes about AIDS or cancer. Aristophanes certainly relished ridiculing savagely politicians, sophists and charlatans of all stripes, yet, when it came to attacking the war, he was careful to restrict his comedies to lampooning blustering generals, joking about the mismanagement of the conflict by politicians, or war's effects on conjugal relations and the livelihood of small businessmen. There were no references to bodies impaled by spears or trampled by horses, and certainly no grieving widows, children or parents. Indeed, the mortality of war was given a very wide berth. If I am correct in my argument later in this study that the depiction of the Theban plague in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* during or just after the plague of Athens had something to do with its second-place finish, then Aristophanes would have seen a negative model for himself that would have been even more urgent for a comic poet whose first job was to entertain and please. On the other hand, according to Michael Vickers (1991), Aristophanes might have alluded to the suffering of plague victims in the *Clouds* of 423, in his depiction of the agonized Strepsiades, lamenting the assaults on his body by bed-bugs after Socrates had ordered him to lie down and think (707–16). If the comic use of the dire distress in Athens of just a few years before registered with the audience and judges, it might have contributed to the discomfiture that led to its defeat, a loss that clearly rankled Aristophanes, who complained about this decision at great length in the main section of the *parabasis* in the *Wasps* (1015–50) the following year and then rewrote the *Clouds* itself.

The *Wasps* is, curiously enough, then also the only Aristophanic comedy in which disease is a theme, and Aristophanes thus transfers it into the

<sup>30</sup> If, however, in the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes speaks through Dicaeopolis, as Reckford 1977: 298 argues, it might be significant that the specific Euripidean tragedy parodied there is the *Telephus*, whose hero, like Philoctetes, needs to be healed.

safer metaphorical realm.<sup>31</sup> In the *Wealth*, as I shall discuss in my concluding chapter, the god Wealth is healed in the Asclepius sanctuary, but its vocabulary is free of *nosos*, which Aristophanes seldom uses. There are only twelve lines in all of Aristophanes in which a form of *nosos* appears (*Av.* 31, 104, 473; *Nu.* 243; *Ra.* 1033; *Lys.* 1088; *V.* 71, 76, 80, 87, 114, 651); thus, one half occur in the *Wasps*, Aristophanes' comic exploration of the excesses of the Athenian legal system. The old man Philocleon suffers from a "strange illness" (71), which takes the form of being a "lover of trials," φιληλιαστικής (87), so that he "lusts," ἐρᾷ (88, 753), for judging. On one level we see here a parody of the linkage in tragedy, found in the *Hippolytus* and *Trachiniae*, between *eros* and *nosos*. Sidwell (Sidwell 1990: 10) notes "the strong reliance of Aristophanes on an intuitive grasp of tragic patterns," and thus that the *nosos* pattern and its relation to *eros* must satire recently produced tragedies. Philocleon's son Bdelycleon has tried various cures for the father, including an incubation at the Asclepius sanctuary on Aegina (121–25), but manages, ultimately, to cure his father by redirecting Philocleon's energies toward more traditional debaucheries. In the process, however, Bdelycleon, who at times seems to become the voice of Aristophanes,<sup>32</sup> indicates that the task of the comic poet is "to heal the ancient disease in the city," ἰάσασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει (651). This disease, which Bdelycleon fears, perhaps in a statement of false modesty, is too much for the comic poet to heal, and is not just a mania for the courts, but the entire set of civic ills, embodied in the demagogue Cleon, that has afflicted Athens since the death of Pericles. As Reckford observes on these lines (Reckford 1977: 298), "[t]he longtime, deeply ingrained disease of Philocleon merges with that of Athens." The city is sick, as tragic drama intones repeatedly during these years, and needs a healer, and here Aristophanes suggests himself, building on traditional Greek associations between poetry and healing that will be subtly echoed later in the *Frogs* and, as I shall show later, in forms both more direct and more indirect, in the *Wealth*.

In sum, then, Aristophanes in general avoided the plague because it was a poor source for comedy and its use risked the disapproval of the audience on which he depended for success and acclaim. In 422, during the period when disease imagery recedes in tragic drama (at least as it seems to in the small sample that survives), it becomes safe enough for Aristophanes to apply metaphorically to the condition of Athens.

<sup>31</sup> See Sidwell 1990. Beta 1999 sees resemblances between the madness of Philocleon and that of the Euripidean Heracles and thus argues for an earlier version of the *Heracles* than the one we currently have and to which the *Wasps* alludes.

<sup>32</sup> On Aristophanes and Bdelycleon see Olson 1996: 144 and Reckford 1977: 297–302.

## MEDICINE, POLITICS AND TRAGIC DRAMA

Athenian comedy, unlike tragedy, is often openly and aggressively political, yet Aristophanes does not exploit the metaphorical possibilities of illness in and of the city. Tragic drama drew these metaphors from early medical writings. Thus I shall now examine briefly the language of early Greek medicine, not only, as is typical scholarly practice, as a source for dramatic speech, but more for its use of political language to describe physical malady, an image seen frequently in tragedy, and so we can begin to see the discursive homologies among medicine, politics, poetry and sacrifice that circulated throughout Greek culture. Jean-Pierre Vernant, building on the work of Charles Kahn and Gregory Vlastos, has already explored such homologies as they pertain to Greek cosmology and politics. Vernant shows how Anaximander's theory of a universe is viewed geometrically with the independent Earth, dominated by nothing, at its center, equidistant from all points of the celestial circumference in a space of symmetrical and reversible relationships, a structure which Vernant compares to the rise of the *polis* centered around the open and free agora which no individual dominates.<sup>33</sup> Just as Anaximander's cosmology deploys political concepts to describe a universe governed by *isonomia* (equal rights) and subject to law, so too does the Greek *polis* become based on the idea of a center which gives all members equal right to speak and act.<sup>34</sup> The political idea of *isonomia* thus circulates through cosmology and, we shall see shortly, medicine, before moving into the discourse of drama. I shall suggest then that Euripides later reverses the equation in employing medical language to depict political turmoil. Hence, identifying disease imagery in the texts of Athenian drama is only a first step to understanding the multivalent, suggestive power of its discourse in the Theater of Dionysus.

Two concepts central to early Greek medicine that are especially relevant here are that diseases enter the body from the outside through *poroi* (holes, paths) and that health depends on a proper balance of the body's different components. Early Greek thought held that the human body continually experiences attack from external sources; some of them enter the brain and are manifested in thought or sensation, and others introduce disease.

<sup>33</sup> On these issues see Chapter 6, "Geometry and Spherical Astronomy in the First Greek Cosmology," and Chapter 7, "Geometrical Structure and Political Ideas in the Cosmology of Anaximander," in Vernant 1983. These essays were first published in the French *Mythe et pensée* in 1965. Vlastos 1953 links Anaximander's cosmology to Alcmaeon's medical theory. Wiles 1997: 63–86 takes this idea of the center and links it to the basic structure of the Greek theater.

<sup>34</sup> Lloyd 1979: 246–64 discusses the conceptual relationships among Greek science and politics.

Padel observes (Padel 1992: 54): “Outside cause, therefore, is cardinal in Hippocratic nosology. Disease comes from *ta esionta*, ‘the things coming in,’ *exôthen*, ‘from outside’.” Early in the fifth century, the pre-Hippocratic writer Alcmaeon, whose concepts profoundly influenced the Hippocratic texts, believed that good health arose from the equilibrium of the powers in the body, and he cast this balance in strikingly political language (DK24 B4):<sup>35</sup>

Ἀλκμαίων τῆς μὲν ὑγείας εἶναι συνεκτικὴν τὴν ἰσονομίαν  
τῶν δυνάμεων, ὑγροῦ, ξηροῦ, ψυχροῦ, θερμοῦ, πικροῦ,  
γλυκέος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν, τὴν δ’ ἐν αὐτοῖς μοναρχίαν  
νόσου ποιητικὴν· φθοροποιὸν γὰρ ἑκατέρου μοναρχίαν  
. . . τὴν δ’ ὑγίαιαν τὴν σύμμετρον τῶν ποιῶν κράσιν.

Alcmaeon maintains that the bond of health is the “equal rights” (*isonomia*) of the powers, moist and dry, cold and hot, bitter and sweet, and the rest, while the “monarchy” of either is destructive . . . Health on the other hand is the proportionate admixture of these qualities.

Health thus is cast as a political struggle between warring factions, almost a *stasis* (the Thucydidean overtones of my language are not accidental and their implications will become apparent shortly). Health is *isonomia*, equality of power or rights, one of the hallmark terms of Greek democracy in the fifth century.<sup>36</sup> The universe, the *polis* and the body all rely on the same basic principles. The comparison between the balance of the parts in a body and the state should sound familiar to students of Plato, and indeed Alcmaeon’s theories influenced not just the Hippocratic writers, but also philosophers beginning with Empedocles, as “political ideas increasingly articulated an image of health in society and government as a balance of inner powers that may be upset, either by the emergence of a single stronger power or by the intrusion of an alien, outside force” (Padel 1992: 57). Herodotus, while describing the troubles of Miletus, notes that the Milesians for two generations “were very sick with civil strife,” νοσήσασα ἐς τὰ μάλιστα στάσι (5.28), until the Parians made them orderly by selecting as rulers those who managed well their own farms; this is the only metaphorical instance of *nosos* in Herodotus. Thus from Thucydides to Aristotle the idea of a mixed polity, based on the Hippocratic ideals of a balance in physical properties,

<sup>35</sup> Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983: 260, no. 310. Longrigg 1963: 167. See also Belfiore 1992: 35, Longrigg 1993: 47–81, Padel 1992: 58–59, Ostwald 1969: 97–99 and Kosak 2004: 157–58. Longrigg 1993: 51 argues for Alcmaeon to have been active in the second quarter of the fifth century. Price 2001: 121 suggests that Thucydides likely knew Alcmaeon’s teachings.

<sup>36</sup> On *isonomia* and the language of democracy see Vlastos at 1947, 1953. Vlastos discusses the Alcmaeon fragment at 1947: 156–58 and 1953: 363–66.

becomes common.<sup>37</sup> Plato in the *Republic* (556e) compares the sick body (σῶμα νοσῶδες) and the divided city as two entities subject to *stasis*, and, in the *Sophist* (228a), the Eleatic Stranger says that *nosos* and *stasis* are the same. In the Platonic dialogues, such language, and the noetic structure it implies, while relying ultimately on the Hippocratic texts, might also stem directly from tragic discourse, a reliance that might be suggested by Plato's insistence on the word *nosos*.

Moreover, in the account of the sick body the image of the one standing apart from the others, gaining control and thus threatening the whole sounds not only like a common political scenario, but also like a fairly typical basic plot structure for much of Greek drama, and in turn it suggests a more powerful metaphorical potential for disease than we have suspected. Typically, as Vernant has shown, tragedy sets in opposition the conflicting values of the democratic polis and the aristocratic hero, who is usually a member of the royal household that rules the city of the play's locale.<sup>38</sup> Hence, by mirroring a constant political concern of fifth-century (not to mention sixth-century) Athens, drama enacts the tensions between the needs of the many and the desires of the one. Given this political current in Greek medical thought, the obvious acquaintance of the tragedians with the Hippocratic writings, and the political setting of the City Dionysia, it should not be surprising that disease becomes a live, not a dead, metaphor for the crises afflicting the political communities on stage. This metaphor becomes especially common after the outbreak of the plague in Athens, and perhaps can be seen even in Thucydides' text, to which I shall now briefly detour.

The great plague of Athens that began in 430 and recurred sporadically for several years figures prominently in Thucydides' analysis of the breakdown of Greek society during the Peloponnesian War. By placing the plague description directly after Pericles' Funeral Oration and restricting the detailed accounting of the plague's effects primarily to this section of Book 2, Thucydides' description condenses the extended time frame so that the reader experiences the plague as intensely, if not as dramatically, as possible. Indeed, unless the reader pays careful attention, she is led to think that the plague did not last more than the time devoted to it in that particular section of the *History*.<sup>39</sup> And while Thucydides does detail the disease's

<sup>37</sup> See Connor 1984: 228–29, who discusses Thucydides Book 8 and the proposal of a mixed constitution. Note 35 lists a fragment of Euripides, *TGF* (II) 21, as a source for metaphor, and cites its medical origin. See also de Romilly 1976.

<sup>38</sup> On this tension see the important work in Seaford 1994.

<sup>39</sup> On Thucydides' manipulation of his reader's perception of the duration and intensity of the plague see Mikalson 1984.



symptoms, the historian focuses mainly on the plague's psychological and ethical effects. The narrator creates a sense of overwhelming despair that leads directly to a severe weakening of the moral, and, ultimately, the political structure of Athens: "For the catastrophe was so overwhelming that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion or law" (2.52). The consequential human behavior seems almost to be a disease itself. If we believe that the placement of this narrative directly after Pericles' Funeral Oration, with its glorification of Athens at its orderly civilized apex, is intentional and thus significant, then this change from structure to anarchy suggests the political metaphor of disease in Alcmaeon. As with the later civil war in Corcyra, the change in the hierarchy of values and expectation breeds a diseased polis. Ruth Padel observes (Padel 1992: 53):<sup>40</sup>

Change in the body is an image for change in the body politic. Thucydides' parallel between the plague in book 2 of his *History* and *stasis*, "civil war," in book 3 rests on his culture's familiarity with this sort of comparison. His comment, "so *ômê* [raw] did *stasis* become," introduces the symptoms and effects of *stasis*, summed up by *toioutai orgai*, "such angers," using for *stasis* an image of "rawness" applied in tragedy to *orgê*, *daimôn*, *phronêma*, "anger," *daemon*, and "(arrogant) thought." In tragedy, *ômotês* is "cruelty, savagery." In biology it appears as "indigestion." *Stasis* in book 3 behaves as an exterior overriding destroyer, like a disease or daemonic tragic passion . . . The image of *stasis* resonating against it adds a political dimension to the moral, physiological, and social disintegration possible in a Greek "body."

Thucydides' analysis of the plague is important not just for its diagnosis of the illness, but also for the disease's broader implications. Until Adam Parry, Thucydidean scholars tended almost exclusively to worry about the exact identification of the disease, or how Thucydides employs precise medical language from the Hippocratic texts. Parry, however, showed that the historian's language tends not toward technical, but to normal, everyday, usage, and may even have been taken from drama, and this non-technical language can lend itself in turn to a larger system of associations and metaphors.<sup>41</sup> Parry even seems to take the metaphorical potential of Thucydides' language more seriously than do his counterparts in the study of Greek tragedy, for he recognizes that, as early as the first book of the *Iliad*, Greek thought

<sup>40</sup> Also see the related thoughts in Price 2001: 28–30.

<sup>41</sup> Parry 1969 argues most pointedly against Page 1953. More recently, see Allison 1983, Morgan 1994, Swain 1994, and Kallet 1999. Hornblower 1991: 316–18 has an excellent overview, with bibliography, of the controversies over Thucydides' language in the plague narrative and its debt, or lack thereof, to the medical writers. Hornblower's wise words of caution (1991: 317) that "we should always remember that there was more than one Thucydides" should be kept in mind throughout any reading of the plague narrative.

equates war and plague. Thucydides' first mention of the plague in his Book 1, with its rare deployment of the more specific adjective *loimôdês* in combination with *nosos*, could recall the sole occurrence of *loimos* in Homer, the description of the plague Apollo sends against the Achaean army in Book 1 of the *Iliad*. Thucydides thus seems aware of the resonance of disease in the Greek imagination as symptomatic of moral and political disintegration; for example, he begins his litany of the plague's consequences by observing (2.53.2) that plague was the beginning of lawlessness, *anomia*, language that is distinctly evocative of Alcmaeon's political metaphor for disease. Plague breeds lawlessness, which in turn thus becomes a societal illness; recall here that Nicias later in Thucydides urges the presiding officer of the Athenian Assembly to reopen debate over the Sicilian Expedition, and thus to become a doctor for the disordered state. When Thucydides lists early the disasters Athens experienced during the war, the catalogue climaxes with the plague, in one of the longest spans between an article and its noun in Greek literature, redundantly piling adjective on adjective: ἡ οὐχ ἥκιστα βλάψασα καὶ μέρος τι φθειράσα ἡ λοιμώδης νόσος, "the not least harmful and in part devastating pestilential disease" (1.23.3). As I noted earlier, Thucydides links *nosos* and *polemos* a number of times in his sentences, and verbs normally describing the onset of diseases he uses for the turmoils of battle and civic *stasis* (Swain 1994: 306–07). For Thucydides, writes Parry (Parry 1969: 116), "[t]he plague is a *paralagon* [something outside of expectation] beyond all others, and is essential part of the war. It represent the most violent incursion of the superhuman and incalculable into the plans and constructions of men." The idea of something irrational, monstrous and unexpected exploding into human affairs suggests more than one Euripidean tragedy, but in particular the *Heracles*, one drama where *nosos* figures as a powerful image of civic and psychological disintegration.<sup>42</sup> With Euripides we move from the Thucydidean interest in the social and psychological effects of disease to a discourse where society and the mind are literally diseased.

Thus concludes my overview of the language of disease in Athenian tragic drama, which presents the introductory materials to the succeeding three chapters on Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Trachiniae*. In these three subsequent chapters I shall proceed chronologically through a series of dramas in the order in which I believe they were produced. After the three case studies on the plague which focus on

<sup>42</sup> On the similarities between Thucydides and Euripides see Finley's (1967) and Macleod's (1983) chapters on this topic.

close readings of the dramas' language, I establish a second set of introductory materials. In these, I discuss the role of the development in Athens of the cult of the healing hero/god Asclepius, as it was, I believe, after the plague an important part of the performative context of tragedy, especially of the *Heracles*, which was first produced shortly after the construction of the Asklepieion, the temple of Asclepius, on the slope immediately above the Theater of Dionysus, and then of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, which directly engages the Asklepieion. The construction of the Asclepius sanctuary adjacent to the Theater of Dionysus seems to have given new life to nosological discourse, especially as that discourse became joined to growing political conflicts in Athens in the course of the Peloponnesian War.