

A Sacrifice to Athena: Oikos and Polis in Sophoclean Drama

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ABSTRACT

In Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* (*Oedipus the King*), the chief characters, Antigone, Creon, and Oedipus, become entangled in a complex web of events relating in important ways to both *oikos* (οἶκος) and *polis* (πόλις), and each character threatens the existence or stability of one of the other (or both) of these spheres, by neglecting or rejecting outright their respective claims, rules and duties. Each of the three protagonists presents a different case, but the resolution to the two plays is similar, and evokes, in majestic fashion, the tragic essence of Greek tragedy at its highest. The complex power system of the Greek world creates complications, some of which are never fully resolved by Sophocles, but the New Order of the polis, despite its weaknesses, reigns supreme at the end of the drama. The final resolution is not, however, unmitigated, as the continuance of the polis order necessitates the sacrifice, as it were, of the plays' protagonists. In this essay, the interdependent but sometimes conflicting spheres of *oikos* and *polis* are examined with reference to the development of ancient Greek civilization and Greek tragedy, specifically the works of Sophocles and Aeschylus.

[H]ow many griefs our father Oedipus handed down!
— There's nothing, / no pain — our lives are pain —
no private shame, / no public disgrace, nothing I
haven't seen in your griefs and mine.
— Antigone to Ismene, *Antigone* 2, ll. 5-8

Private shame and public disgrace—thus laments Antigone, daughter of the once glorious but now disgraced and exiled king of Thebes. In the Greek world of Sophocles, the now-commonplace distinction between a public and a private sphere was neither so distinct nor so easily recognizable as it is today. For the sake of analysis and exposition we may, however, utilize the Greek terms *oikos* (οἶκος) and *polis* (πόλις) to discuss two primary realms of classical Greek life that loosely correspond to modern conceptions of public and private spheres, respectively.

In Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* (*Oedipus the King*), the chief characters, Antigone, Creon, and Oedipus, become entangled in a complex web of events relating in important ways to both *oikos* and *polis*, and each character threatens the existence or stability of one of the other (or both) of these spheres, by neglecting or rejecting outright their respective claims, rules and duties. Each of the three main protagonists presents a different case, but the resolution to the two plays is similar, and evokes, in majestic fashion, the tragic essence of Greek tragedy at its highest. The complex power system of the Greek world creates complications, some of which are never fully resolved by Sophocles, but the New Order of the polis, despite its weaknesses, reigns supreme at the end of the drama. The final resolution is not, however, unmitigated, as the continuance of the polis order necessitates the sacrifice, as it were, of the plays' protagonists.

It may be expedient at this point to clarify the terms in which the Greek terms *oikos* and *polis* will be employed in this essay. *Oikos* is, generally, a name for the Greek household, along with the sphere of relations and activities directly attached to such, which moderns might call the domestic or private sphere. A classical Greek household was, however, much larger than a modern nuclear family, usually including three generations as well as slaves, livestock, and a host of deceased ancestors. The *oikos* is associated with a number of unwritten rules or customs that may be loosely termed "oikos morality." The *oikos* is also in some sense tied up with the Hesiodic Code typical of the Homeric epics: honor

and glory, for oneself and for one's family (i.e., household) are of primary importance. Loyalty to members of one's *oikos*, and the principles of revenge justice (*lex talionis*) also emerge as important aspects of the *oikos* sphere. Homer's heroes appear to exist in a world of *oikos*-morality, in particular Achilles, the "backer of oïkes." Halverson, for one, argues that in Homer there are in fact no states, only estates (i.e., no *polis*, only *oikos*). The issue may not be that simple, however, as certain refigurations of the *polis* can be seen in the *Odyssey*.¹

The *polis* was, of course, much more than just a form of political organization—it involved an entire cultural and spiritual system as well. In a narrower, political sense, however, the *polis* refers to the emergent city-state, with its rules, customs, and attendant morality. The notion of the *polis* as a civic community involved, above all else, the voluntary subordination of the individual and his needs and interests to the community and the (to use Rousseauian terms) "common good."² The *polis* in some sense became the new individual, of which citizens were necessary but ultimately sub-ordinate parts. *Polis* morality is based upon the citizens' unquestioning obedience to its laws, customs, and institutions, as well as its gods, while striving to uphold the four cardinal virtues of any *polis*: justice, piety, moderation, and courage.

Oikos and *polis* must not be seen as isolated, independent spheres, however; rather, the *oikos* is the biological, social and economic basis of the *polis*. The *oikos* produces generations of citizens via reproduction, and generates the wealth of citizens via production. Thus, the *oikos* is the sphere of biological and economic sustenance, forming the natural and material foundation for the *polis*, and in some sense acting as mediator between raw nature and pure culture. This very picture of harmony was not always in evidence, however, as the tragedies of Sophocles reveal.

The interdependent but sometimes conflicting spheres of *oikos* and *polis* can be examined historically with reference to the development of ancient Greek civilization. From the eighth century BCE, tribal Greece began a slow but steady transformation into the world of the city-state, ultimately reaching a peak in democratic Athens of the fifth century. The emergence of the *polis* was viewed by many Greeks, including Aristotle, as a progressive development by and for humankind—a civilizing force. Tribal Greece had been dominated by the *oikos* and *oikos* morality, in which the

Oikos In Sophoclean Drama

Barbara Goff, Michael Simpson



Oikos In Sophoclean Drama:

Off-Stage Groups in Athenian Drama Alexandra Hardwick, 2024 Off Stage Groups in Athenian Drama analyses how off stage groups in fifth and early fourth century tragedy and comedy influence and respond to events on stage and how characters interact with these groups Alexandra Hardwick argues that Athenian drama engages with early ideas of group psychology providing ways to explore collective emotion

Gendered Politics in Sophocles' Trachiniae Gesthimani Seferiadi, 2022-04-07 This is the first book length examination of the notion of gendered politics in Sophocles Trachiniae Making use of feminist theory and tackling the political nature of the categories of identity culture and sexuality Seferiadi brings the interpretation of Sophocles play up to date with the most recent scholarly developments She discusses the play in the light of its Amazonian and monstrous background and touches upon topics such as marriage and the exchange of women reciprocity within a corroded system of gift exchanges and the dynamics of female silence and the impaired hegemonic masculinity Contributing to the topic of rape in the ancient world this book focuses on sexual violence and the intertwining of marriage and rape from the perspective of tragedy With an Amazon being placed within the civilized arrangement of an oikos the play negotiates the position of the female and advocates the need to expel the monstrous sexualities from the polis Differing from previous analyses this study is a reminder that female subjectivity was less foreclosed than is often tacitly assumed

The Representation of Marriage in Sophoclean Drama Kirk Ormand, 1992

Looking at Antigone David Stuttard, 2017-11-02 Antigone is one of the most influential and thought provoking of all Greek tragedies Set in a newly victorious society where possibilities seem boundless and mankind can overcome all boundaries except death the action is focussed through the prism of Creon a remarkable anti hero a politician who in crisis makes a reckless decision whose pride or insecurity prevents him from backing down until it is too late and who thereby ends up losing everything Not just the story of a girl who confronts the state Antigone is an exploration of inherent human conflicts between men and women young and old power and powerlessness civil law and the unwritten laws of nature Lauded in Antiquity it has influenced drama and philosophy throughout history into the modern age With an introduction discussing the nature of the community for which Antigone was written this collection of essays by 12 leading academics from across the world draws together many of the themes explored in Antigone from Sophocles use of mythology his contemporaries reactions and later reception to questions of religion and ritual family life and incest ecology and the environment The essays are accompanied by David Stuttard's performer friendly accurate and easily accessible English translation

Dolos and Dikê in Sophocles' Elektra Leona MacLeod, 2017-07-31 The main problem facing critics of Sophocles Elektra has always been understanding the presentation of the vengeance and the nature of justice it represents This volume addresses the ethical issues of this play through an analysis of the language and argumentation which the characters use to explain and justify their behaviour The focus is on the examination of the themes of aid s and dolos and the way in which each contributes

to our overall understanding of the vengeance as an act which for all its justice remains shameful By exploring the union between these two contradictory elements this study exposes the ethical complexity of Sophokles treatment of the vengeance theme Dolos Dik contains a useful critique of recent interpretative approaches to the play a full bibliography and a complete index of passages cited *Information Modelling and Knowledge Bases XXXII* M. Tropmann-Frick, B. Thalheim, H. Jaakkola, 2021-01-04 Information modeling and knowledge bases are important technologies for academic and industrial research that goes beyond the traditional borders of information systems and computer science The amount and complexity of information to be dealt with grows continually as do the levels of abstraction and the size of databases This book presents the proceedings of the 30th International Conference on Information Modelling and Knowledge Bases EJC2020 due to be held in Hamburg Germany on 8 and 9 June 2020 but instead held as a virtual conference on the same dates due to the Corona virus pandemic restrictions The conference provides a research forum for the exchange of scientific results and experiences and brings together experts from different areas of computer science and other disciplines with a common interest in information modeling and knowledge bases The subject touches on many disciplines with philosophy and logic cognitive science knowledge management linguistics and management science as well as the emerging fields of data science and machine learning all being relevant areas The 23 reviewed selected and upgraded contributions included here are the result of presentations comments and discussions from the conference and reflect the themes of the conference sessions learning and linguistics systems and processes data and knowledge representation models and interfaces formalizations and reasoning models and modeling machine learning models and programming environment and predictions modeling emotion and social networks The book provides an overview of current research and applications and will be of interest to all those working in the field Greek Drama Pamela Loos, 2009 This volume examines the development of comedy and tragedy in early Greek Drama with essays that explore the works of many of the original dramatists including Aristophanes Sophocles Aeschylus and Euripides Exchange and the Maiden Kirk Ormand, 2014-08-27 Marriage is a central concern in five of the seven extant plays of the Greek tragedian Sophocles In this pathfinding study Kirk Ormand delves into the ways in which these plays represent and problematize marriage thus offering insights into how Athenians thought about the institution of marriage Ormand takes a two fold approach He first explores the legal and economic underpinnings of Athenian marriage an institution designed to guarantee the legitimate continuation of patrilineal households He then shows how Sophocles plays Trachiniae Electra Antigone Ajax and Oedipus Tyrannus both reinforce and critique this ideology by representing marriage as a homosocial exchange between men in which women are objects who may attempt but always fail to become self acting subjects These fresh readings provide the first systematic study of marriage in Sophocles They draw important connections between drama and marriage as rituals concerned with controlling potentially disruptive female subjectivities **Page and Stage** Stuart Douglas Olson, Oliver Taplin, Piero Totaro, 2023-06-19 Our knowledge of the ancient theatre is limited by the

textual and iconographic character of the evidence available to us we cannot watch or otherwise experience an Athenian tragedy or comedy These essays by a distinguished group of international scholars bridge the gap between the surviving literary and iconographic evidence and the realities of performance on the ancient Greek stage This ambitious goal is reached by means of a detailed examination of several case studies the construction of dramatic space in Sophocles *Antigone* the significance of the use of deictic pronouns in Sophocles *Trachiniae* the theatrical and religious dynamics of the appearance of divine figures on stage the relationship between the victory celebrations at the end of Aristophanic comedies and their counterparts in the after performance real world the investigation of nude or semi nude female characters in Aristophanes the staging of *Clouds* and the opening scene of *Acharnians* the meditation on the metapoetics of the use of props in 5th century comedy the relationship between performance context and text through a close reading of a number of Aristophanic fragments the way the scholia vetera on *Frogs* imagine and use questions of staging practice and the potential Aeschylean authorship of some of stage direction traceable in Aeschylus *Eumenides* and *Diktouloko*

Antigone Efimia D. Karakantza, 2022-12-30 This book explores the figure of Antigone and her many reconceptualizations from antiquity to the present One of the most popular heroines of classical literature Antigone defied political authority to carry out the forbidden burial of her brother Readers will become familiar with the key themes of Antigone's story such as the law and politics gender and death tracing their survival and transformations over time Notably the book explores the thorough de politicization of the heroine in philosophy and psychoanalysis followed by a reversal and re politicization through feminist and socio political theories It provides a useful tool to approach postmodern receptions of Antigone in the arts and society in the modern era particularly in the contexts of occupied and civil war era Greece in Palestine and in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon It also addresses issues of Antigone like struggles of individuals or collectivities to overcome obstacles of systemic and racialized violence and gender based oppression in the 21st century while challenging heteronormative practices and policies to allow new subjectivities to emerge Though Antigone's story is complex Karakantza provides an accessible fascinating overview of this enduring figure's legacy and impact over the course of history Antigone provides a comprehensive study of this classical heroine suitable for students and scholars of classical literature reception studies and gender studies It also appeals to theatre practitioners interested in adapting and staging Sophocles *Antigone* or any Antigone of the ancient sources

Sophocles and the Tragedy of Athenian Democracy D. G. Beer, 2004-03-30 The Athenian democracy of the 5th century B C created the most important political theatre of western culture Sophocles the most successful tragic playwright of the age was a radical innovator who produced his tragedies to present to his audience complex moral social and political issues of a kind that they might be faced with in their various legal and political assemblies Beer examines Sophocles as a political playwright against the background of Athenian democracy breaking new ground by showing the importance of the mask for understanding Sophoclean tragedy and redefining the notion of *skēnographia* or

setting the scene He concludes that Sophocles revolutionized the concept of dramatic space The Athenian tragic theatre was deeply political and played an important and active role in the life of Athenian democracy This book presents an introduction to the political nature of Greek tragedy and Sophoclean tragedy in an effort to shed new light on the dramatic works of the 5th century playwright As Aristotle noted Sophocles two most important innovations were the introduction of the third actor and skenographia which brought tragedy to its fully evolved form Beer argues that although his use of the third actor has been widely understood his use of skenographia has not Carefully exploring the true sense of this method of using dramatic space Beer brings a new understanding to the works of this old master **The Lost Sophocles** Akiko Kiso, 1984

Sophocles Edith Hall, 2025-01-28 Very Short Introductions Brilliant Sharp Inspiring This Very Short Introduction introduces the life work and influence of one of the greatest dramatists of all time Sophocles the Athenian Placing his plays within their historical context and explaining the conventions of ancient Greek tragic theatre Edith Hall spotlights their distinctive features tight plots titanic personalities lucid style sympathetic women exquisite poetry and stagecraft This analysis is followed by an account of how and why Sophoclean dramas have survived to be read and widely performed into the twenty first century ABOUT THE SERIES The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area These pocket sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly Our expert authors combine facts analysis perspective new ideas and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable Aristophanes and His Tragic Muse Stephanie Nelson, 2016-02-15 Despite the many studies of Greek comedy and tragedy separately scholarship has generally neglected the relation of the two And yet the genres developed together were performed together and influenced each other to the extent of becoming polar opposites In Aristophanes and His Tragic Muse Stephanie Nelson considers this opposition through an analysis of how the genres developed by looking at the tragic and comic elements in satyr drama and by contrasting specific Aristophanes plays with tragedies on similar themes such as the individual the polis and the gods The study reveals that tragedy s focus on necessity and a quest for meaning complements a neglected but critical element in Athenian comedy its interest in freedom and the ambivalence of its incompatible visions of reality **Eheprobleme im griechischen Drama** Daniela Gierke, 2017-03-27 Bis heute ist die Ehe die bevorzugte Form des Zusammenlebens von Menschen Das war auch in der griechischen Antike nicht anders Obwohl Athener wie Spartaner klare Vorstellungen von den Geschlechterrollen hatten pr sentierten die attischen Trag dien des 5 Jahrhunderts vor Christus Eheprobleme zwischen Mann und Frau der ffentlichkeit Die vorliegende Untersuchung geht den Fragen nach worin diese Eheprobleme auf der B hne bestehen und ob sie Reflexe einer realen Krise der Institution Ehe in Athen sind Dabei steht die M nnerrolle im Vordergrund denn die m nnlichen B rger sind im realen gesellschaftlich politischen Leben die Hauptakteure Mit ihr r ckt auch das Verh ltnis von Oikos und Polis in den Mittelpunkt das durch die sukzessive Einf hrung der Demokratie in den Fokus des Interesses geriet In einem weiterf hrenden Teil wird

skizziert wie die Polis Sparta als Gegenbild zu Athen und als Folie für Verherrlichung und grundlegender Kritik an den zeitgenössischen athenischen Verhältnissen diente

Refiguring Tragedy Ioanna Karamanou, 2019-05-20 This book brings together case studies delving into different unstudied aspects of the Nachleben of selected lost tragedies either in their once extant form or in their fragmentary state in later periods of time It seeks to explore the ways in which the plays in question were reworked discussed represented or reperformed within varying frameworks Notably enough research on the reception of tragic fragments could yield insight not only into the receiving work but also into the facets of the source text that have attracted attention in its subsequent refigurations It could thus shed light on the ideological and cultural routes through which these fragmentary tragedies were received by the poet the scholar the artist the viewer the reader and the spectator in each case The complex process of the refiguration of a fragmentarily preserved play within different contexts could form a yardstick of its cultural power and elucidate the dynamics of fragmentation in modern times the volume is of particular interest to scholars in the fields of classics reception cultural and performance studies as well as to readers fascinated by Greek tragedy and its vibrant afterlife

Theology and Existentialism in Aeschylus Richard Rader, 2014-11-27 Theology and Existentialism in Aeschylus revivifies the complex question of fate and freedom in the tragedies of the famous Greek playwright Starting with Sartre's insights about radical existential freedom this book shows that Aeschylus is concerned with the ethical ramifications of surrendering our lives to fatalism gods' curses inherited guilt and thoroughly interrogates the plays for their complex insights into theology and human motivation But can we reconcile the radical freedom of existentialism and the seemingly fatal world of tragedy where gods and curses and necessities wreak havoc on individual autonomy If forces beyond our control or comprehension are influencing our lives what happens to choice How are we to conceive of ethics in a world studiously indifferent to our choices In this book author Ric Rader demonstrates that few understood the importance of these questions better than the tragedians whose literature dealt with a central theological concern What is a god And how does god affect impinge upon or even enable human freedom Perhaps more importantly If god is dead is everything possible or nothing Tragedy holds the preeminent position with regard to these questions and Aeschylus our earliest surviving tragedian is the best witness to these complex theological issues

Heidegger and Classical Thought Aaron Turner, 2024-09-01 Explores Martin Heidegger's rich and profound engagement with ancient philosophy and literature and demonstrates both his essential place within the discourse of classical studies and the fundamental significance of classical thought for his own work Despite a sustained and fruitful relationship with the classical philologists of his day Martin Heidegger's status among classicists has long since been strained especially in the Anglophone tradition Heidegger and Classical Thought reemphasizes both Heidegger's importance to classical discourse and the significance of classical discourse for Heidegger's own work The essays found in this book demonstrate the depth and breadth of Heidegger's engagement with classical thought throughout his life from his early engagements with Aristotle and

Plato to his profound readings of the early Greek thinkers At the same time this book shows how reading Heidegger's interpretation of classical thought offers new and innovative ways to approach and study antiquity A Companion to Sophocles Kirk Ormand, 2015-06-02 A Companion to Sophocles presents the first comprehensive collection of essays in decades to address all aspects of the life works and critical reception of Sophocles First collection of its kind to provide introductory essays to the fragments of his lost plays and to the remaining fragments of one satyr play the Ichneutae in addition to each of his extant tragedies Features new essays on Sophoclean drama that go well beyond the current state of scholarship on Sophocles Presents readings that historicize Sophocles in relation to the social cultural and intellectual world of fifth century Athens Seeks to place later interpretations and adaptations of Sophocles in their historical context Includes essays dedicated to issues of gender and sexuality significant moments in the history of interpreting Sophocles and reception of Sophocles by both ancient and modern playwrights *Crossroads in the Black Aegean* Barbara Goff, Michael Simpson, 2007-11-15 A study of African rewritings of Greek tragedy this title asks why the plays of Sophocles Theban Cycle are so often adapted by dramatists of African descent and how plays that dilate on the power of the past can articulate the postcolonial moment

Reviewing **Oikos In Sophoclean Drama**: Unlocking the Spellbinding Force of Linguistics

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Table of Contents Oikos In Sophoclean Drama

1. Understanding the eBook Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Oikos In Sophoclean Drama User Reviews and Ratings

- Oikos In Sophoclean Drama and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Oikos In Sophoclean Drama Free and Paid eBooks
 - Oikos In Sophoclean Drama Public Domain eBooks
 - Oikos In Sophoclean Drama eBook Subscription Services
 - Oikos In Sophoclean Drama Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Oikos In Sophoclean Drama eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Oikos In Sophoclean Drama Compatibility with Devices
 - Oikos In Sophoclean Drama Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Interactive Elements Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
- 8. Staying Engaged with Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Setting Reading Goals Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Oikos In Sophoclean Drama
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources

13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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