Change of mind, persuasion, and the emotions: debates in Euripides from *Medea* to *Iphigenia at Aulis*

Keywords: Euripides, *agones*, rhetoric, persuasion, emotions

Abstract: the paper discusses the failure of persuasion in the *agones* of Euripides, in spite of the fact that several characters in Euripides complain about the dangers of overpersuasive speech. In the plays of Euripides characters do change their minds, but not in the course of *agones*. 'Anger', 'shame', and 'autonomy' are three crucial factors in blocking the persuasive effects of persuasive language. Characters explain their change of minds not on the basis of persuasion but as a consequence of autonomous deliberation. The change of mind of Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Aulis* is in keeping with the ethical development and self-definition of many characters in Euripides.

In Euripides, characters often comment on the persuasive power of language. Hecuba notes that 'persuasion' is 'the only sovereign of human beings' (*Hec*. 816: πειθὼ δὲ τὴν τύραννον ἀνθρώποις μόνην). Rhetorical contests, formally designated as 'contests of words' (Eur. *Andr*. 234 and *Pho*. 930: ἀγῶν(α)... λόγων)[1] are a frequent feature in his plays[2].

Echoing sophistic rhetoric, one of the speakers in the fragmentary *Antiope* (fr. 189) states that

> ἐκ παντὸς ἄν τις πράγματος δισσῶν λόγων
> ἀγῶνα θεῖτ' ἄν, εἰ λέγειν εἴη σοφός.
> A man could make a contest between two arguments from any matter, if he were a clever speaker[3].

Protagoras famously claimed that he was able to do just that (DK 80 A 20, B6a), and we can still read an anonymous collection of such 'double speeches' from the late classical period (DK 90)[4]. Rhetoric is thus presented as indifferent to the moral value of the argument discussed, and in fact Euripides, in writing competing speeches for characters that fight each other, is doing on stage exactly what Protagoras claimed to be able to do in front of a crowd. Euripides' plays, more dangerously, do this in a religiously sanctioned and politically crucial moment for the Athenian polis, the festival of Dionysus. These texts are doing precisely what

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[1] For other 'quasi-metatheatrical' designations of *agones* cf. Mastronarde 2002 on Eur. *Med*. 546.

[2] Main discussions of *agones*: see Duchemin 1968, Strohm 1957 3-49, Collard 1975b, Buxton 1982, 1-66 and 147-87, Conacher 1981, Lloyd 1992, Goldhill 1986 1-78 and 223-43, Goldhill 1997, 133-35 and 145-50, Scodel 1999-2000, Dubischar 2001, Barker 2009, 324-65, Mastronarde 2010, 207-45, with further references. For a definition see Lloyd 1992, 1: 'The *agon* basically consists of a pair of opposing set speeches of substantial, and about equal length. Other elements are often present, such as angry dialogue after the speeches, or a judgement speech by a third party, but the opposition of two set speeches is central to the form.'

[3] Translation Collard and Cropp 2008.

[4] On the invention of rhetoric in classical Greece and its connection with drama see now Sansone 2012.

Aristophanes' characters accuse Euripides of doing: teaching morally bad people to speak well. It is not surprising that this type of language gets the enthusiastic approval of thieves and criminals, when 'Euripides' arrives in the underworld in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (771-8).

In fact, characters in Euripides too complain about the fact that it is possible to speak well for immoral causes, as for instance Hecuba does in *Hec.* 1187-91:

> Ἀγάμεμνον, ἀνθρώποισιν οὐκ ἐχρῆν ποτε
> τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν γλῶσσαν ἰσχύειν πλέον·
> ἀλλ᾽ εἴτε χρήστ᾽ ἔδρασε, χρήστ᾽ ἔδει λέγειν,
> εἴτ᾽ αὖ πονηρά, τοὺς λόγους εἶναι σαθρούς,   1190
> καὶ μὴ δύνασθαι τἄδικ᾽ εὖ λέγειν ποτέ.
>
> Agamemnon, men's tongues ought never to have more force than their doings: if a man has done good deeds, his speech ought to be good, if bad, then his words should ring false, and he should never be able to give injustice a fair name[5].

Plutarch repeats the accusations of Aristophanes, and finds Sophocles and Euripides guilty (*Quomodo adul.* 27f-28a):

> μάλιστα δὲ τοῦτο ποιεῖν δεῖ ἐν ταῖς τραγωιδίαις ὅσαι λόγους ἔχουσι πιθανοὺς καὶ πανούργους ἐν πράξεσιν ἀδόξοις καὶ πονηραῖς. οὐ πάνυ γὰρ ἀληθὲς τὸ τοῦ Σοφοκλέους λέγοντος
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> > οὐκ ἔστ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἔργων μὴ καλῶν ἔπη καλά·
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> καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς εἴωθεν ἤθεσι φαύλοις καὶ ἀτόποις πράγμασι λόγους ἐπιγελῶντας καὶ φιλανθρώπους αἰτίας πορίζειν. καὶ ὁ σύσκηνος αὐτοῦ πάλιν ὁρᾶις ὅτι τήν τε Φαίδραν καὶ προσεγκαλοῦσαν τῶι Θησεῖ πεποίηκεν ὡς διὰ τὰς ἐκείνου παρανομίας ἐρασθεῖσαν τοῦ Ἱππολύτου. τοιαύτην δὲ καὶ τῆι Ἑλένηι παρρησίαν κατὰ τῆς Ἑκάβης ἐν ταῖς Τρωιάσι δίδωσιν, οἰομένηι δεῖν ἐκείνην κολάζεσθαι μᾶλλον ὅτι μοιχὸν αὐτῆς ἔτεκε. μηδὲν οὖν τούτων κομψὸν ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ πανοῦργον ὁ νέος ἐθιζέσθω, μηδὲ προσμειδιάτω ταῖς τοιαύταις εὑρησιλογίαις, ἀλλὰ βδελυττέσθω τοὺς λόγους μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ ἔργα τῆς ἀκολασίας.
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> 27f It is particularly necessary to do this with tragedies in which plausible and artful words are framed to accompany disreputable and evil actions. For the statement of Sophocles [fr. 839 in Radt 1999] is not altogether true when he says:
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> > From unfair deed fair word cannot proceed
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> For, as a fact, Sophocles himself[6] is wont to provide for mean characters and unnatural actions alluring words and humane reasons. And you observe also that his companion-at-arms in the dramatic art [28a] has represented Phaedra as preferring the charge

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[5] Translation Kovacs 1995.

[6] Babbitt 1927 apparently translates Emperius' conjecture αὐτός, recorded in his apparatus, rather than the manuscript text οὗτος which he prints in the main text (reproduced above, except for this detail: I inserted Emperius' conjecture in the main text). Hunter and Russell 2011 print Emperius' conjecture, which they consider more rhetorically effective.

against Theseus that it was because of his derelictions that she fell in love with Hippolytus[7]. Of such sort, too, are the frank lines, aimed against Hecuba, which in the *Trojan Women* he gives to Helen, who there expresses here feeling that Hecuba ought rather to be the one to suffer punishment because she brought into the world the man who was the cause of Helen's infidelity. Let the young man not form the habit of regarding any one of these things as witty and adroit, and let him not smile indulgently, either, at such displays of verbal ingenuity, but let him loathe the words of licentiousness even more that its deeds[8].

Plutarch unusually presents Sophocles as a writer who invents 'alluring reasons' to justify the immoral actions of evil characters[9]: this can be viewed as a negative take on the ancient tradition that praised Sophocles' ability in portraying characters[10]. Other sources present 'a remarkably consistent and unanimous picture of Sophocles' greatness', stressing 'his usefulness as a source of moral teaching'[11].

Euripides, on the other hand, was often reproached for devising 'immoral' arguments for his evil characters[12]. This is especially evident in his *agones*, where many morally dubious characters speak eloquently; if they do manage to persuade, that would pose a great moral, social and aesthetic threat. Euripides' characters themselves perceive, as Ruth Scodel notes, 'the dangers of overpersuasive speech'[13]. Athenians were prone to political persuasion, and theatre was the cause of this love for persuasive speech, according to what 'Cleon' observed in a passage of Thucydides: when meeting in the Assembly, they act as 'spectators of speeches' (θεαταὶ ... τῶν λόγων 3.38.4) rather than as good deliberators, and are 'the best at being deceived by a novel argument ... slaves to every new paradox' (μετὰ καινότητος ... λόγου ἀπατᾶσθαι ἄριστοι ... δοῦλοι ὄντες τῶν αἰεὶ ἀτόπων 3.38.5). In sum, Cleon concludes, they are 'defeated by sweet talks, and similar to spectators of sophists' (ἀκοῆς ἡδονῇ ἡσσώμενοι καὶ σοφιστῶν θεαταῖς ἐοικότες 3.38.7). Thucydides' 'Cleon' compares the citizens in the assembly to spectators in the theatre, especially when he includes a clear allusion to Gorgia's famous dictum on theatrical 'deception' (ἀπατᾶσθαι ἄριστοι)[14]. Unlike Simonides' Thessalians,

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[7] See Kannicht 2004, vol. I, 465, test. v.

[8] Translation Babbitt 1927, slightly adapted. On the interpretation of this passage see Hunter and Russell 2011 *ad loc.*

[9] For another instance where ancient readers 'rectified' the moral content of a passage by Sophocles cf. Soph. fr. 873 in Radt 1999, and Plut. *Quomodo adul.* 33d, with Hunter and Russell 2011 ad loc.

[10] Cf. Arist. *Po*. 1460b32 and D. H. *De imit.* 2 fr. VI II 11-13 in Usener and Radermacher 1929: 206 (= *Epitome* of the treatise *On imitation*, chapters 11-13 in Aujac 1992: 34); these texts are reproduced as T 53a and T 120 in Radt 1999: 54 and 77.

[11] See Wright 2012: 598 and 597, respectively, with further references; T 108-147 in Radt 1999: 74-82.

[12] Ancient readers showed limited sympathy for his ability in portraying all types of human ethical predicaments and views: see the texts cited above, note 10, and in general T 135, 145-154, 170-171 in: Kannicht 2004, vol. I, 108-124.

[13] Scodel 1999-2000, 130. See Buxton 1982, 5 and Jouan 1984.

[14] See Gorgias 82 B 23 DK: Tragedy is 'a deception [ἀπάτη] in which the person who effects the deception is more honorable [δικαιότερος] than the person who did not' (translation Sansone 2012, 91, with useful discussion and bibliography; see also Hunter and Russell 2011, 78 on Plut. *Quomodo adul.* 15d). Gorgias repeatedly stresses the persuasive power of speech: 82 B 11, Dow 2015, 14-19.

the Athenians are excellent in allowing persuasive speech to deceive them[15]. Theatrical and sophistic speech is thus presented as dangerously persuasive for Athenian audiences, which were exposed to conflicting views about political, military, and judicial action.

Can persuasion be effective at all? This topic is of course much debated in ancient and modern theories of rhetoric, politics, ethics, and business. Some scholars claim that persuasion in fact plays a limited role in influencing the choices of people, especially in political debates, where entrenched beliefs are unlikely to be changed by rational arguments.[16] One should note that the lack of political parties made political choices in antiquity much less consistent and predictable than in modern democracies (and, possibly, more open to persuasion).[17] Ancient and modern practitioners of rhetoric (and more modern practices, such as advertising, marketing, political propaganda) offer evidence supporting the claim that persuasion can be effective[18].

But is persuasion effective in ancient tragedies? In most cases, it is not. Echoing earlier evaluations, Lloyd writes that 'the *agon* in Euripides rarely achieves anything'[19]. There are about twenty-one *agones* in Euripides[20]. In four cases only the course of the plot takes a turn as a consequence of what people say in the *agon*: the heralds in *Heraclidae* and *Supplices* are rejected; Helen and Menelaus persuade Theonoe (who perhaps does not need to be persuaded) in *Helen*; Heracles decides not to kill himself in the *Heracles*[21]. This lack of results is especially strange in tragedy, which is a genre full of action. Tragic characters often change their minds[22], and manage to persuade each other: for instance, in Eur. *Or*. 1069-1100 Pylades persuades Orestes not to kill himself, and in Aesch. *Ag*. 905-74 Clytemnestra persuades Agamemnon to walk on the fragile and precious red fabric.

How come characters speaking in the *agon* fail to achieve their goal? Do they argue badly? Or is the text paradoxically suggesting that rhetoric is in fact devoid of power?

Many scholars have noted the similarities between the *agon* in Euripides and judicial and political oratory[23]: people are on trial for attempted rape (*Hipp*. 902-1089) or murder (*Hec*. 1109-1292, *El*. 998-1138, *Or*. 470-728), and other debates discuss the legal, moral and military predicament of offering asylum to refugees (*Her*. 120-283; *Suppl*. 162-249 and 399-580). Scholars however have often also

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[15] See Plut. *Quomodo adul*. 15c 'when someone asked Simonides, 'Why are the Thessalians the only ones whom you do not deceive (ἐξαπατᾶις)?' he replied, 'Because they are too backward to be deceived by me' (trans. Sansone 2012, 99, with discussion and bibliography; see also Hunter and Russell 2011, 78 ad loc.).

[16] For a brief survey, and evidence to the contrary, see e.g. Tan, Niculae, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil and Lee 2016

[17] Finley 1973 offers a classic treatment of this interpretive problem.

[18] On antiquity see Buxton 1982; Dow 2015; on modern practices see e.g. Perloff 2014.

[19] Lloyd 1992, 15. See Strohm 1957, 11: 'Kein Streitgespräch schließt bei Euripides mit einer Einigung; in der Regel ist am Ende der Gegensatz gegenüber dem Anfang vertieft'.

[20] Lloyd 1992, 3 acknowledges only 13 *agones*, on the basis of a stricter criterion.

[21] Lloyd 1992 does not consider these scenes from *Heracles* and *Helen* as proper *agones*.

[22] See Knox 1966, Gibert 1995.

[23] See e.g. the discussion in Scodel 1999-2000.

noted some glaring differences from forensic practice: in many cases, the judge is one of the speakers[24]; in several other cases the decision has been taken in advance, and is merely confirmed in the trial (a 'staged trial' or 'show trial')[25]. In other debates no decision needs to be taken; characters simple try to assess who is to blame for the situation that is causing their suffering[26].

It is true that some characters do change their minds *after* an *agon*. However, they do that for reasons that are completely different from the arguments advanced in the *agon*. For instance, in *Hippolytus* Theseus changes his mind because of divine intervention; in *Andromache* Hermione modifies her attitude in accordance to the change of circumstances. Theseus, after debating the fate of refugees with Adrastus in Eur. *Suppl*. 162-249, discusses the matter with his mother Aithra at 286-364, finally changing advice and accepting the supplication out of a sense of duty, and in accordance to what he sees as his 'true' character; he stresses that his previous words in the *agon* were morally and logically correct (333-5). Electra does change her mind, but only after killing her mother (*El*. 1182-1232). Heracles decides not to kill himself, but he does that in a reply to Theseus which starts with a complete rejection of Theseus' arguments (*HF* 1340-52). The case of *IA* 317-542 is especially complex: Menelaus changes his mind out of pity, not because he is persuaded by Agamemnon.

In the 'trial' type of *agon*, on the other hand, the decision is normally taken beforehand, or, if taken onstage, is not changed[27].

Why then does Euripides devote so much space in so many dramas to inconclusive debates? Does the tragic text aim to show the powerlessness of language?

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[24] See the following examples (the name of the 'judge' is listed after the names of the speakers): Eur. *Hipp*. 902-1089 (Theseus, Hippolytus: judge Theseus); *Andr*. 147-273 (Hermione, Andromache: judge Hermione); *Andr*. 547-746 (Peleus, Menelaus: judge Menelaus); *Hec*. 251-331 (Hecuba, Odysseus: judge Odysseus); *Suppl*. 162-249 (Adrastus, Theseus: judge Theseus); *Suppl*. 399-580 (Theseus, Herald: judge Theseus); *El*. 998-1138 (Clytemnestra, Electra: judge Electra); *HF* 140-347 (Amphitryon, Lycus: judge Lycus); *HF* 1255-392 (Heracles, Theseus: judge Heracles); *IA* 317-542 (Menelaus, Agamemnon: judge Agamemnon). Note for instance that the 'democratic' decision in the *Suppliant Women* is taken by King Theseus, who is the only judge (as well as one of the speakers).

[25] The term 'judge' is used not only in reference to the role of formal judge in a judicial procedure, but also in reference to the person who has to make a decision on a practical matter or even simply express an ethical evaluation on the action past or future. See Eur. *Her*. 120-283 (Herald, Iolaus; judge Demophon); *Hec*. 1109-1292 (Polymestor, Hecuba; judge Agamemnon); *Tro*. 860-1059 (Helen, Hecuba; judge Menelaus); *Hel*. 865-1090 (Helen, Menelaus; judge Theonoe); *Phoen*. 446-635 (Polyneices, Eteocles; judge Jocasta); *Or*. 470-728 (Tyndareus, Orestes; judge Menelaus); *IA* 1146-275 (Clytemnestra, Iphigenia; judge Agamemnon). The 'democratic' decision in Heraclidae is in fact taken by King Demophon, who is the only judge. In *Hec*. 1109-1292, *Tro*. 860-1059 and *IA* 1146-1275 the decision has been taken in advance, and is merely confirmed in the debate. In *Phoen*. 446-635 the 'judge' has no power; in *Or*. 470-728 Menelaus should express his evaluation on Orestes' matricide, but abandons the scene and does not commit himself to help either Orestes nor Tyndareus; only in *Her*. 120-283 and *Hel*. 865-1090 a 'decision' takes place on stage.

[26] See Eur. *Alc*. 614-733 (Admetus, Pheres), *Med*. 446-622 (Medea, Jason).

[27] See *Her*. 120-283, *Hec*. 1109-1292, *Tro*. 860-1059: (Menelaus will change his mind *after* the end of the play), *Hel*. 865-1090, *Pho*. 446-635, *Or*. 470-728, *IA* 1146-275 (Iphigenia will change her mind later).

In Euripides, 'anger', 'shame', and 'autonomy' are three crucial factors in blocking the persuasive effects of 'language'. The point of many *agones* is not so much that they perform persuasion onstage, but that people stress the autonomy of individuals, and their power to make decisions based on their view of moral actions and of their own character. Note that some speakers in *agones* later accept the advice given to them in the *agon*. When they do change their mind (for real or with the intent to deceive), they stress the fact that their decision has been reached 'autonomously'.

Anger is a crucial element that often prevents characters from taking considerate decisions: *orge* is opposed to *euboulia*[28]. Diodotus states this as a general principle in the Mytilene debate in Thucydides (Thuc. 3.42.1):

νομίζω δὲ δύο τὰ ἐναντιώτατα εὐβουλίαι εἶναι, τάχος τε καὶ ὀργήν
I think that two things are the worst enemies of good counsel: haste and anger

The most characteristic example of this interaction of emotion and persuasion occurs in the *Medea*. 'Anger' is one of the defining emotions of Medea[29]. These are the very first words of Jason when he meets her for the first time onstage, at the beginning of the second episode (Eur. *Med*. 446-7), just before the *agon*[30]:

οὐ νῦν κατεῖδον πρῶτον ἀλλὰ πολλάκις
τραχεῖαν ὀργὴν ὡς ἀμήχανον κακόν.
Not now for the first time but often before I have seen what an impossible evil to deal with is a fierce temper.

Jason stresses this just before the end of the episode:

λήξασα δ' ὀργῆς κερδανεῖς ἀμείνονα.   615
Forget your anger and it will be the better for you.

The entire second episode is framed between these references to anger, and in fact Medea's speech in the *agon* is a ferocious denunciation of Jason's misdeeds. In the fourth episode, Medea claims she has changed her mind completely. 'Adopting the stance of the weak, irrational female'[31], she says she has now recognised the wisdom of Jason's advice in the *agon*. Medea mentions her own process of reflection, but claims that Jason's words were crucial to maker her change her mind (Eur. *Med*. 869-74):

Ἰᾶσον, αἰτοῦμαί σε τῶν εἰρημένων
συγγνώμον' εἶναι· τὰς δ' ἐμὰς ὀργὰς φέρειν   870
εἰκός σ', ἐπεὶ νῷν πόλλ' ὑπείργασται φίλα.

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[28] On deliberation and *euboulia* in Homer and Sophocles see Schofield 1986, Goldhill 2009, Hall 2009, and Hall 2012.

[29] See Mastronarde 2002, 17-18 and on Eur. *Med*. 121, 156, Harris 2001, 169-71, with further references. On particles and emotions in general see Drummen 2016 section III.5.

[30] Translations from *Medea* are taken from Kovacs 1994.

[31] Mastronarde 2002, 312 on 866-975.

ἐγὼ δ' ἐμαυτῆι διὰ λόγων ἀφικόμην
κἀλοιδόρησα· Σχετλία, τί μαίνομαι
καὶ δυσμεναίνω τοῖσι βουλεύουσιν εὖ,

Jason, I beg you to forgive what I said: it is reasonable for you to put up with my anger since many acts of love have passed between us in the past. I have talked with myself and reproached myself thus: 'foolish creature, why am I raving and fighting those who arrange things for the best?'

It is all too easy for Jason to be persuaded that he has managed to persuade Medea. Medea is in fact denouncing 'anger' as the emotion that clouded her reasoning, just as Jason predicted. Had she not been angry in the second episode, her attitude would have been perceived as feigned; having displayed the emotion Jason expected her to feel, she is perceived as 'sincere' in her repentance. Her words appear to him persuasive and 'natural'; he thinks *he* persuaded her (Eur. *Med*. 885-6, 892-3):

... ἐγὼ δ' ἄφρων,   885
ἧι χρῆν μετεῖναι τῶνδε τῶν βουλευμάτων
...
παριέμεσθα καί φαμεν κακῶς φρονεῖν   892
τότ', ἀλλ' ἄμεινον νῦν βεβούλευμαι τάδε.

It is I who am the fool, since I ought to be sharing in your plans […] I give in: I admit that I was foolish then, but now I have taken a better view of the matter.

In no other play does a character admits that the arguments advanced in an *agon* achieved persuasion. Medea mimics the language of autonomous moral agents, like Admetus, Heracles and Theseus, who arrive at a decision 'autonomously' (even if in fact they repeat arguments that others used with them)[32]. Differently from other characters, she explicitly refers to Jason's arguments and claims that, after her new, calmer, 'autonomous' reflection, she found them persuasive. This is exceptional. She manages to be so convincing to Jason precisely because she rejected his advice in the *agon*: it took her time to restrain her emotion (haste is an enemy of good deliberation, as Diodotus states in Thucydides) and when she finally managed to restrain herself she accepted his point of view. Jason is enthusiastic (Eur. *Med*. 908-13):

αἰνῶ, γύναι, τάδ', οὐδ' ἐκεῖνα μέμφομαι·
εἰκὸς γὰρ ὀργὰς θῆλυ ποιεῖσθαι γένος
γάμους †παρεμπολῶντος† ἀλλοίους πόσει.   910
ἀλλ' ἐς τὸ λῶιον σὸν μεθέστηκεν κέαρ,
ἔγνως δὲ τὴν νικῶσαν, ἀλλὰ τῶι χρόνωι,
βουλήν· γυναικὸς ἔργα ταῦτα σώφρονος.

I approve this, woman, nor do I blame your earlier resentment. It is natural for a woman to get angry when marriage of a different sort presents itself to her husband. But your thoughts have changed for the better, and though it took time, you have recognised the superior plan. These are the acts of a prudent woman.

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[32] See esp. Eur. *Alc*. 939-61, *Suppl*. 334-45, *HF* 1340-52.

In assessing the behaviour of Medea, and the effect of his persuasive rhetoric, Jason focuses on εἰκός, a crucial concept in historical and rhetorical theory and practice[33]. He poses as a prudent leader who, like Pericles in Thucydides, is able to assess the mood and emotions of other individuals, and is not fazed by an occasional outburst of anger: in particular, Pericles' last speech in Thucydides aims at assuaging the anger of the Athenian demos[34]. In Euripides, Jason is won over by his own arguments. He persuades himself, and as a consequence of that he is defeated. The only instance of 'persuasive' rhetoric proves to be a perfect counterexample: only fools think their rhetoric will convince other people, and they pay the price for their excess of self-confidence.

It is not a coincidence that this counterexample features a woman as the person who is 'persuaded': Medea adopts (or feigns) the kind of self-blaming language that is characteristic of female characters in Greek literature. She not only 'reflects' by herself (ἐμαυτῆι διὰ λόγων ἀφικόμην: 872) but blames herself (κἀλοιδόρησα: 873) and employs words of self-abuse (σχετλία ... μαίνομαι: 872; ἀβουλίαν: 882; ἄφρων: 885). Medea renounces her previous 'storm of [...] wearisome prattling', στόμαργον ... γλωσσαλγίαν (Eur. *Med*. 525), and turns to the language of self-blame, which Jason finds appropriate. Jason accepts Medea's generalisation about the ethical and intellectual inferiority of women and finds it in keeping with the frequent language of self-abuse adopted by women (Eur. *Med*. 889-91):

> ἀλλ' ἐσμὲν οἷόν ἐσμεν, οὐκ ἐρῶ κακόν,
> γυναῖκες· οὔκουν χρῆν σ' ὁμοιοῦσθαι κακοῖς,   890
> οὐδ' ἀντιτείνειν νήπι' ἀντὶ νηπίων.
> Well, we women are, I will not say bad creatures, but we are what we are. So you ought not to imitate our nature or return our childishness with childishness.

Modern audiences may perceive these words of Medea as exaggerated and, as consequence, as offering the vital clue that reveals her insincerity. In fact it Medea's abuse of women that makes her more, not less believable to the mind of Jason, who, like the prototypical misogynist Hippolytus (Eur. *Hipp*. 615-24), fantasises a world without women (Eur. *Med*. 573-5):

> χρῆν γὰρ ἄλλοθέν ποθεν βροτοὺς
> παῖδας τεκνοῦσθαι, θῆλυ δ' οὐκ εἶναι γένος·
> χοὔτως ἂν οὐκ ἦν οὐδὲν ἀνθρώποις κακόν.   575
> Mortals ought to beget children from some other source, and there should be no female sex. Then mankind would have no trouble.

Other female characters use similar language to express Medea's abuse of women at 889-91 (see Andromache in Eur. *Andr*. 352-4). To Jason, the fact that Medea despises women simply means that she has come to see the truth. Accepting

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[33] See Hoffman 2008, with further references.
[34] Pericles, like Jason, begins with a guess on the emotion of the people he is addressing: «I am not surprised that your anger is directed against me: I understand the reason for it» (Thuc. 2.60.1, translation Rhodes 1988).

persuasion is thus presented as a feminization of the self: Medea (apparently) accepts to be lead by her man.

Male characters prefer to construe their changes of mind as a quest for their own true self, rather than an acceptance of other people's words. Theseus in the *Suppliant women* provides one of the best examples: in the first *agon*, he rejects Adrastus' plea and refuses to rescue the bodies of the Argive leaders who died in the war against Thebes. Theseus' decision threatens to prevent one of the crucial mythical episodes in the history of Athens, routinely quoted as an example of Athenian justice and prowess in speeches for the fallen Athenian soldiers: the fight with Thebes to impose the burial of the people who died in the war led by Polyneices[35]. Euripides plays with audience expectations, making them wonder how the play will return on course, and allow Theseus and the city of Athens to perform the deeds they were famous for. Thesus is then approached by his mother Aethra, who begs him to accept the supplication of the mothers of the fallen Argive leaders. He changes his mind, and decides to accept the request of the suppliants, but he explicitly comments on the fact that he has *not* been persuaded by the words of his opponent in the *agon*, Adrastus. He is acting instead on the basis of 'consistency' with his true nature (*Suppl*. 334-9):

> ἐμοὶ λόγοι μέν, μῆτερ, οἱ λελεγμένοι
> ὀρθῶς ἔχουσ' ἐς τόνδε κἀπεφηνάμην   335
> γνώμην ὑφ' οἵων ἐσφάλη βουλευμάτων.
> ὁρῶ δὲ κἀγὼ ταῦθ' ἅπερ με νουθετεῖς,
> ὡς τοῖς ἐμοῖσιν οὐχὶ πρόσφορον τρόποις
> φεύγειν τὰ δεινά.
>
> Mother, the words I spoke to this man were the truth: I spoke my mind about the counsels that ruined him. Yet I can also see what you say to me, that it is not like me to run from danger[36].

The element that clinches Theseus' decision is the 'true nature' argument. Theseus refuses persuasion, and changes his mind only because the 'new' course of action is more in accordance with his nature of moral agent. This theory implies that «you must consider not only the fact that you are a rational being […] when deciding how it is right to act. […] Among other things, you must be true to your own character, and people with different characters may be called on to act differently in the same circumstances» (Sorabji 2006: 41). This is the ethical theory of Cicero (*Off*. 1.112) and Epictetus (Arr. *Epict. diss*. 1.2). Cicero and Epictetus appropriately use the theatrical terms persona and *prosopon*. This is because «Personae are constituted partly by our roles in life, and many of these roles, like fatherhood, are common to many people. But in some cases of special interest, there is a unique persona» (Sorabji 2006 158). Cicero quotes the example of Cato's suicide. It was right for him to kill himself, not for every person defeated by Caesar. Cato would stop being who he was if he did not kill himself. Similarly, Theseus would stop being Theseus

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[35] See Flower and Marincola 2002, Asheri in Asheri, Vannicelli, Corcella and Fraschetti 2006 on Hdt. 9.27.1-6 esp. 9.27.3, Aeschylus' *Eleusinians* (cf. Plut. *Thes*. 29.4-5), Wilkins 1993, xi-xix, Allan 2001, 25, Collard 1975a vol. I, pp. 3-7, Todd 2007, 218-21 on Lys. 2.7-10, with further references.
[36] Translation Kovacs 1998.

if he did not fight in favour of Adrastos. The same applies to Heracles in *HF* 1240-52: shame (see esp. 1160, 1200)[37] gives him «a sense of who one is» (Williams 1993: 102). Only by appealing to his sense of identity (1248-52, 1412-17) can Theseus induce Heracles to reconsider his decision to kill himself.

In the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia too, in the *agon* (*IA* 1146-275), fails to persuade her father not to kill her. Like many other characters, including Medea and Heracles, she changes her mind later, well after the end of the *agon*; like Admetus (*Alc*. 940 'now I understand': ἄρτι μανθάνω), Medea, and Heracles, she stresses the fact that her change of mind was brought about by autonomous reflection, not persuasion (*IA* 1374):

> οἷα δ' εἰσῆλθέν μ' ἄκουσον, μῆτερ, ἐννοουμένην·
> Hear, mother, the thoughts that have come to me as I pondered[38].

In fact, she echoes some of Agamemnon's arguments, but presents them as her own, carefully avoiding any reference to her father's speech or to persuasion. Iphigenia's sense of her own identity is crucial to her decision, even when she echoes the patriotic words of her father, who justified the sacrifice claiming that Greece 'must be free', not subject to the violence of 'barbarians' (*IA* 1273-5). Agamemnon himself presented this argument as an afterthought and addition to the argument that the Greek army would force him to sacrifice his daughter anyway, even if he tried to oppose them (*IA* 1255-72). Iphigenia too reformulates that argument, saying that Achilles should not die in the vain attempt to prevent her sacrifice (1390-3). The point that clinches the discussion is another self-disparaging, anti-feminine remark (*IA* 1394):

> εἷς γ' ἀνὴρ κρείσσων γυναικῶν μυρίων ὁρᾶν φάος.
> Better to save the life of a single man than ten thousand women!

a remark that is also often found on the lips of men, often expressed in the context of accusation towards women[39].

In her final appeal she goes well beyond Agamemnon's comparatively tame remarks. Agamemnon insisted that he lacks freedom, and that he is a slave of Greece and of the necessity of the sacrifice (*IA* 1272: τούτου δ' ἥσσονες καθέσταμεν). Iphigenia, on the contrary, stresses her freedom (note δίδωμι at 1398), and redefines her femininity, claiming that self-sacrifice is a (better) substitute for children, marriage, and good name (in decreasing order of importance) (*IA* 1398-1402):

> δίδωμι σῶμα τοὐμὸν Ἑλλάδι.

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[37] See Cairns 1993, 291-5 for a fine discussion of 'shame' in the *Heracles*.

[38] Translation (here and below) from Kovacs 2002. This paper was submitted before the publication of Collard and Morwood 2017; this book now offers an excellent edition and interpretation of the play.

[39] See esp. *Il*. 9.339, Aesch. *Ag*. 62, 448, and *IA* 1417-20; for similar statements in reference to other women see Eur. *HF* 1308-9 (with Bond 1981 *ad loc*.), Aesch. *Suppl*. 476-7 'then comes the bitter waste – and it is a bitter waste – of men bloodying the ground for the sake of women' (trans. Bowen 2013; see Friis Johansen and Whittle 1980 *ad loc*.)

θύετ', ἐκπορθεῖτε Τροίαν· ταῦτα γὰρ μνημεῖά μου
διὰ μακροῦ καὶ παῖδες οὗτοι καὶ γάμοι καὶ δόξ' ἐμή.
βαρβάρων δ' Ἕλληνας ἄρχειν εἰκός, ἀλλ' οὐ βαρβάρους   1400
μῆτερ, Ἑλλήνων· τὸ μὲν γὰρ δοῦλον, οἱ δ' ἐλεύθεροι.

I shall give myself to Greece. Make sacrifice, all of you, and sack Troy! That shall be my long-lived memorial, that for me will be my children, my marriage, my good name! Greeks, mother, must rule over barbarians, not barbarians over Greeks: the one sort are slaves, but the others are free men!

Her change of mind has sparkled a complex controversy: some interpret take her final appeal as sincere, whereas other see her as an inconsistent character, as plagiarised by Agamemnon, as deluded, or as acting because of her (undeclared) love for Achilles[40]. Like Jason, and, earlier in the play, Menelaus (501), she appeals to what is εἰκός: her self-sacrifice will help restore the consistency in the world, not simply the consistency in her own character or in her interpretation of other people's action.

In conclusion, the *agones* in Euripides rarely introduce changes into the plot; language fails to achieve persuasion. In most cases, the decisions are taken in advance; if the judge is one of the speakers, the chances of persuasions are low. Some of the people involved in *agones* do change their minds; but the change of mind takes place later in the play, and is presented as reached autonomously. 'Shame' and 'reflection' are part of this process of autonomous deliberation. Moreover, ethical choices are presented as dependent on the uniqueness of each character, rather than on general rational criteria. The conflict expressed in rhetorical contest is thus crucial to the development of character in plots. Medea is the only character who explicitly admits that she was persuaded, and she plays on her gender identity, and on the expectations of male interlocutors on female submissiveness, successfully persuading them of the sincerity of her feigned submission. Iphigenia's change of mind occurs within a frame of partial masculinisation: she presents herself as concerned with glory and the outcomes of war, and assumes the self-disparaging attitude that mimics the misogyny of male speakers. Her speech is thus considered persuasive and is approved by male characters (less so by female characters: *IA* 1454-5). Euripides thus gives his female character a language that is 'inappropriately' manly, but unpredictably so: his female characters do not speak like men, but mix female and male speech genres and traits. It is this very fragmentation that makes Euripides' characters so puzzling and fascinating[41].

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[40] See Siegel 1980, Stockert 1992 *passim*, Rabinowitz 1993, 38-54 Gibert 1995, 222-54, Burgess 2004, Beltrametti 2008, Mirto 2015, and now Collard and Morwood 2017 *passim* for a survey of the main interpretations and different assessment of Iphigenia's character and choice.

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