

*Aristotle and Menander on the Ethics of Understanding*

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## ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis explores a subject falling in the interface between ancient Greek philosophy and literature. Specifically, I am concerned with common ground between the New Comedy of Menander and aspects of Aristotle's philosophy. The thesis does not argue that the resemblance identified between the two writers shows the direct influence of Aristotle on Menander but rather that they share a common thought-world. The thesis is structured around a series of parallel readings of Menander and Aristotle; key relevant texts are Menander's *Epitrepontes*, *Samia*, *Aspis*, *Perikeiromene* and *Dyscolos* and Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*, *De Anima* and *Poetics*. My claim is that Menander's construction of characters and plots and Aristotle's philosophical analyses express analogous approaches on the subject of the relationship between knowledge and ethics.

Central for my argument is the consideration that in Aristotle's writings on ethics, logic, and psychology, we can identify a specific set of ideas about the interconnection between knowledge-formation and character or emotion, which shows, for instance, how ethical failings typically depend on a combination of cognitive mistakes and emotional lapses. A few years later than the composition of Aristotle's school-texts, Menander's comedies, as expressed in the extant texts, present to a wider audience a type of drama which, as I argue, reflects an analogously complex and sophisticated understanding of the interplay between cognitive or rational understanding and character or emotion.

More broadly, Aristotle and Menander offer analogous views of the way that perceptions and emotional responses to situations are linked with the presence or absence of ethical and cognitive understanding, or the state of ethical character-development in any given person. Thus, I suggest, the interpersonal crises and the progress towards recognition of the identity of the crucial figures in Menandrian comedies embody a pattern of thinking about perception, knowledge and the role of emotion that shows substantial linkage with Aristotle's thinking on comparable topics.

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## FOREWORD

This thesis has evolved as a natural progression from my undergraduate degree in philosophy and my studies, at Master level, in classical drama in its intellectual and social context. As an undergraduate in Bologna, I decided to write my final dissertation on the problem of self-knowledge in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. There, I interpreted Oedipus' discovery as an epistemological problem and, at the time, I argued that human knowledge and its limits are the elements that constitute the main issue of this play and other Sophoclean tragedies such as *Trachiniae*. This dissertation represented a first attempt to bring together my two main interests as an undergraduate student: philosophy and ancient drama. My experience of trying to combine these two subjects increased my interest in this project and this is what brought me to Exeter. While studying for my Master of Arts there, I had the opportunity to study Menander's comedies and I observed that Menander often presents characters that, like Oedipus, think they know the truth but are mistaken. The dramatic consequence of such partial knowledge is that, in most cases, they act wrongly. It seemed to me that this feature was not only similar to Attic tragedy but also evoked certain aspects of Aristotelian ethical and epistemological thought. I decided that this feature of Menander's drama merited further investigation, and in my Master dissertation, I examined, in a preliminary way, Menander's presentation of the state of knowledge of his characters, the limits of their knowledge and the consequences that these states of mind lead to. In that occasion, I also pointed out, again in a preliminary way, that there were potentially close parallels between Menander's presentation of these topics and various aspects of Aristotle's philosophy. This thesis is an attempt to take forward this line of thought and to develop a path of research started some years ago. Although the current thesis establishes decisively, to my mind, the resemblance between Menander and Aristotle that struck me some years ago, it raises broader questions that merit further research beyond the thesis, as outlined in the Conclusions.

This thesis has been written in its present form at the University of Exeter in 2007-2010 and it would not have been realised without the support of the Department of Classics. To each member of the Department is addressed my deepest thanks for

creating the lively, intellectually stimulating and exceptionally supportive environment that has accompanied my research from begin to end. I would like to thank, in particular, my two supervisors Christopher Gill and John Wilkins who have been always responsive to my ideas and available in offering tirelessly help and support until the very last stages of my dissertation. To them go my sincere esteem as scholars and inspirational models of human beings.

I would also like to thank the Department of Classics of Brown University – Providence, RI (USA) that in the fall term of 2008/09 and again in April 2010 welcomed me warmly as visiting student and allowed me to participate in the numerous activities going on in the Department. Special thanks go to David Konstan and Pura Nieto whose incredible enthusiasm, warmth and availability as hosts really made a difference during my stay in Brown. David Konstan, Marie Louise Gill and Adele Scafuro also offered advise and help on specific parts of this thesis (especially Chapters 2, 3 and 5) and gave me precious suggestions of which I hope to have made good use. In this respect, I would also like to thank Dana Munteanu for having variously discussed some parts of my thesis (Chapters 2 and 4 in particular) and having responded to my ideas with much promptness and enthusiasm.

The development of this thesis has also been taken forward by seminar papers and research visits taking place during the whole period of research and composition in Exeter, Cork, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Providence and Geneva. In particular, Chapter 2 has been the subject of discussion in the panel ‘Re-examining dramatic’ recognition at the Classical Association Annual Meeting (Glasgow, April 2009). The panel was aiming to explore the ideological, dramaturgical and structural significance of dramatic recognition processes. I thank Rowan Fraser and Anne-Sophie Noël for having allowed me to take part in this exciting and enriching project. Chapter 3 has been variously discussed during a departmental research seminar in Exeter (November 2009): the comments received in that occasion have been of crucial importance for the understanding of certain topics and, more precisely, to formulate further hypotheses raised by my research. In particular, I thank Barbara Borg and Richard Seaford for having pointed out to me possible questions and issues to which I have tried to give a tentative answer in the Conclusions.

Finally, I would like to record some more personal debts. I would like to thank friends and colleagues whose presence, liveliness, kindness and availability to discuss any imaginable topic in any imaginable setting made these years in Exeter so enjoyable: Daniele Carrieri, Mattia Gallotti, Daniel King, Hadeel Maaitah, Michiru Nagatsu,

Pierre-Olivier Methot and Rafael Scopacasa. The period of research of this thesis has coincided with my moving to England and my subsequent marriage with Pascal, whose presence and deep comprehension have given to me unimaginable help and the necessary strength needed to complete this project. To him goes my profound thanks with much love. Finally my last acknowledgement goes to my family in Narni and Vasto, to my sister Claudia and to my parents Lucia and Paolo to whom this thesis is dedicated: their vigorous, deep and unshakable love and support was vital to sustain this project, as each project that I have so far undertaken, especially in the moments in which I, as first, was not believing in it. For this, *grazie*.

## NOTES ON CONVENTIONS

### *I. Ancient authors*

In the footnotes I abbreviate names and works of ancient authors as in H. G. Liddell & R. Scott (eds.), *Greek-English Lexicon* (1st ed.1843), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996 and in P. G. W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.

I have used Greek texts from the TLG 1992 *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, University of California, 1992 on Compact Disk. I have underlined the Greek text in words or phrases that I consider especially relevant. At times, in quoting Greek or Latin texts, I choose to omit certain sentences or parenthetical expressions: this will be indicated with the sign '[...]'. Words or expression that are considered interpolations will be identified by square brackets both in the Greek or Latin text and in the English translation.

Translations of Greek texts are my own unless otherwise specified. I have used published translations, usually modified by me, for the following works of Aristotle:

APOSTLE, H. G. 1969, *Aristotle's Physics*, trans. with introduction and notes, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

— 1975, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. with introduction and notes, Dordrecht: Reidel.

BARNES, J. 1984, 'Eudemian Ethics', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. J. Solomon, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— 1994, *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics*, trans. with introduction and notes, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

HICKS, D. R. (ed.) 1907, *Aristotle: De Anima*, trans. with introduction and notes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

KENNEDY, G. A. 2007, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. with introduction and notes, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

JANKO, R. (ed.) 1984, *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II*, trans. with introduction and notes, Berkeley: University of California Press.

REEVE, C. D. C. 1988, *Aristotle: Politics*, trans. with introduction and notes, Indianapolis: Hackett.



## 2. Modern Works

The following modern works are abbreviated:

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>DNP</i>  | H. von Cancik and H. Schneider (eds.), <i>Der Neue Pauly</i> , 16 vols., Stuttgart; Weimar: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 1996/2003.                  |
| <i>LIMC</i> | Fondation pour le <i>LIMC</i> (ed.), <i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , 8 vols., Zürich und München: Artemis Verlag, 1981. |
| <i>LSJ</i>  | H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and Jones H. S. (eds.), <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (first edition 1843), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.             |

All secondary literature is cited in footnotes with name of the author(s) and year of publication; it is given in full form in the Bibliography.

*A Mo e Pò*

## INTRODUCTION

### *1. Setting the scene: Aristotle and Menander*

Several studies have been produced about the influence that Peripatetic philosophy allegedly had on Menander's comic production,<sup>1</sup> and various scholars have focused on the attempt to analyse Menandrian plots and characters on the basis of Aristotle's ethical or aesthetic thought.<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, I will not try to demonstrate the direct philosophical influence of Aristotle on Menander; my overall aim is to show that there are significant analogies between the two authors that reveal a shared thought-world and to explore the implications of these analogies on subjects ranging from theory of knowledge to ethics.

It has been often noticed that certain passages of Menander's comedies, fragments and *gnomai*, reproduce ideas that are very similar to those presented by Aristotle and Theophrastus, or more generally, the Peripatetic school. The interest of previous scholarship has often been directed at establishing similarity in ethical thought. In particular, it has been pointed out that Menander often makes statements about topics such as the role of accidental ignorance and fortune in human affairs that reflect Aristotle's thought.<sup>3</sup> It has been claimed that Menander, in his construction of character, virtually reproduces on stage the sketches given by Theophrastus in the *Characters*<sup>4</sup> and that he seems to have similar ideas to Theophrastus about the education of character as a process that involves critical reflection and support from good friends.<sup>5</sup> However, to establish the direct influence of the Peripatetic school on Menander's ethical thought, on the basis of the limited evidence that we have about Menander's life and work, has proved to be a difficult, if not impossible, task and, for this reason and others, this is not the aim of my research here.

What I aim to do here is to study Menander's surviving plays as dramatic wholes (as far as our evidence allows us to do this) analysing their structure, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Tierney 1935; Webster 1950; Steinmetz 1960; Barigazzi 1965; Gaiser 1967; Guzzo 1978.

<sup>2</sup> See Post 1938; Fortenbaugh 1974; Gutzwiller 2000; Munteanu 2002; Scafuro 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Tierney 1935 and Gutzwiller 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See in particular Steinmetz 1960, Barigazzi 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Steinmetz 1960, Barigazzi 1965; Gaiser 1967.

unfolding of their plots and the modes of presentation of the characters. Through this analysis I aim to bring out what Menander's plays convey about human life and psychology in order to reconstruct, as it were, a system of Menander's thought about specific topics. I believe that this kind of analysis offers a much more illuminating understanding of Menander's ideas than we can gain on the basis of scattered or fragmentary ethical reflections as expressed in fragments or *gnomai* taken out of their dramatic context. I also aim to demonstrate that the set of ideas established in this way is comparable, and indeed remarkably analogous, to the ideas presented in Aristotle's works on ethics and psychology. My claim is not that Menander provides his audience with a system of ideas that is as intellectually rigorous as the one that we can find in Aristotle's treatises. Nevertheless, I believe that, in studying the structure, plots and characters' actions of Menander's plays, it is possible to identify the way in which Menander approaches the processes of rational and practical understanding, how he presents the psychology of his characters and how he deals with specific ethical issues. I aim to demonstrate that, although Menander and Aristotle address different audiences, the two authors, within their different types of writings, share an analogous system of ideas. Specifically, they seem to have a common understanding of human nature and its psychological and ethical aspects.

A further research question that is raised by my thesis is why we find these analogies in the works of Menander and Aristotle and whether this investigation can be extended beyond the works of these two authors and shown to reflect the thought-world of Athenian culture more generally at this time. This question will be raised in general terms at the end of this thesis. However, at this stage, I will focus solely on the comparison between Menander and Aristotle, aiming to bring out clearly what the significant analogies between these two authors are and to suggest the possible implications of these similarities for understanding the history of ideas of a specific period of Greek civilisation.

The set of ideas in Aristotle that I propose to correlate with the themes embodied in Menandrian comedies are the following. They centre in Aristotle's theories about the importance, for human beings, of realising their natural potential. In particular, Aristotle suggests that human beings ought constantly to exercise their cognitive and ethical skills, and educate their emotions and natural desires, if they are to develop a stable character that will enable them to reason correctly in finding out factual truths and making right practical choices. Achieving this sort of excellence in theoretical and practical understanding, and thus gaining the ethical and intellectual virtues, offers

people a good chance of living the best possible life that human beings can hope for. However, Aristotle also points out that the path towards this kind of life is not easy: one can fail in controlling one's emotion when responding to given circumstances, as happens in cases of ἀκρασία, or one can make mistakes in interpreting adequately one's own perceptions regarding certain particulars, or, finally, one can simply have bad luck and not be able to respond adequately to the sort of unfortunate circumstances one finds oneself involved in. These failings show that one's capacity to achieve successfully cognitive and practical understanding is not properly developed and needs to be further refined so that it may, eventually, become integral to one's character and psychological processes and, thus, provide the basis of living a truly happy life.

A few years later than Aristotle (who probably taught and wrote for the Lyceum between 335-323 B.C.), Menander's comedies (probably written between 325 and 290 B.C.), as reflected in the extant texts, present to a wider audience a type of drama which appears to reflect an analogously complex and sophisticated understanding of the interplay between cognitive or rational understanding and character or emotion. Menander presents us with characters that make factual and ethical mistakes because they are not able to handle adequately their emotional reactions at given circumstances; they are easily misled by their perceptions and they fail to respond appropriately to their bad luck. Their bad-tempered disposition leads them into troubles and leads the other characters to blame them for their bad conduct. However, generally speaking, at the end of these comedies, characters understand from their experiences what went wrong or finally realise what the situation was that created their misunderstanding. Because of this, at the end of the plays, we have the impression that they make progress in their ability to understand things and how to deal with them: generally speaking, the experiences they have gone through, in some ways, improve their characters and strengthen their resolution to become better persons.

My research hypothesis here is that Aristotle and Menander offer analogous views of the way that people's perceptions and emotional responses to situations are linked with the presence or absence of ethical and cognitive understanding and their state of ethical character development. In order to show this, I will examine in detail analogies between the presentations by Aristotle and Menander of the relationship between knowledge-formation, character, choice and emotions, and of how these factors are affected by contingency and chance. At the end of this thesis, I hope to have shown that Menander and Aristotle share a very close view of how people understand, reason and make ethical and factual mistakes (Chapter 2 and 3); how they face chance and

accidental ignorance (Chapter 4); how they develop their character and what are the problems and factors involved in this process (Chapter 5).

## 2. *The questions underlying my hypothesis*

### 2.1 *Menander and Theophrastus on Character(s)?*

The way in which Menander constructs his characters has often been associated with the analysis of characters as presented in Theophrastus' *Characters*. Menandrian characters are often described as stock characters,<sup>6</sup> that is, as instances of specific predictable features that recur from play to play and represent well-acknowledged types of behaviour. This kind of interpretation might indeed lead one to make a comparison between Menander and what remains of Theophrastus' work on the subject. In fact, in the *Characters*,<sup>7</sup> we find a certain kind of pattern in the presentation of behaviour that seems to carry specific implications about the psychology presupposed. In his treatise, Theophrastus gives examples of types of behaviour that recur constantly, and does so without explaining the underlying reason why this happens; he just lists the various kinds of action that a certain kind of person is expected to perform. The assumption made by the treatise seems to be that it is everyone's natural inclination that shapes their ethical behaviour and not a series of reasoned choices as it is for Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> As noted in the previous section,<sup>9</sup> Aristotle assumes that one's character formation, the shaping of one's ethical identity, depends on a complex interplay between natural inclinations, habituation and reasoned choices. When reading Theophrastus' character-sketches, we do not find the same complex set of factors involved. The suspicious man (ἄπιστος), for instance, always behaves in the same way; every instance of his behaviour will

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<sup>6</sup> See MacCary 1970 and for a recent functionalist reading of Menander's characters Macua Martinez 2008: "Las comedias de Menandro están, en effect, protagonizadas por un repertorio limitado de figuras típicas, definidas por un conjunto de rasgos psicológica, conocidos antemano por el público. Non son, en consecuencia, caracteres único, sino abstracciones de lo que se supone debe ser un hombre concreto. No proceden de la realidad empírica, sino de la que se considera deseable, y no están destinados a reflejar conflictos individuales, sino a representar el comportamiento de los ombre en la medida en que éste es significativo desde determinada perspectiva socio-histórica y doctrinal" (Macua Martinez 2008, p. 18).

<sup>7</sup> See Diggle 2004 for a recent discussion of the authenticity of this title and, more generally, the aims of the treatise, which have been much debated.

<sup>8</sup> See Fortenbaugh 2005, pp. 87-92.

<sup>9</sup> See pp. 12-13.

reproduce the same pattern of choice and action: his natural inclinations alone seem to determine the way he behaves and they do not give scope for possible changes in his way of life and ethical understanding.

However, Menander's characters are not stock characters: they have their own ideas and a specific life-history that explains their deliberations and motivations for action. They might have specific natural inclinations that influence their choices and actions, but they also make reasoned choices, they recognise their mistakes and they try to change their way of life and their way of approaching people and situations. They formulate their reasoning on the basis of an identifiable framework of values and ideas: they thus have social and historical depth. In order to clarify this latter point, I will refer to a play that has often been treated as supporting the idea that Theophrastus may have influenced Menander: the *Dyscolos*. The purpose of this example is also to bring out more explicitly why I believe that it is worthwhile to explore possible analogies between Aristotle's philosophy and Menander's comedy rather than to concentrate on the alleged similarities between Theophrastus' character-sketches and Menander's characters.

The presentation of Knemon, in the *Dyscolos*, resembles the description that Theophrastus gives of two comparable character-types, that is, the ἄπιστος and the αὐθάδης. What is particularly interesting in comparing these figures (that of Knemon and Theophrastus' ἄπιστος and αὐθάδης) is to note their radical standpoint in each case: both Menander and Theophrastus seem to describe extreme characters that are reluctant to change and that have grown old in habits that now constitute the way in which they naturally behave. Knemon and these two character-types appear particularly similar if we focus on the attitude that they maintain towards other people, especially towards the members of their family. Here is the description that Theophrastus gives of a distrustful (ἄπιστος) character:

καὶ ὅταν ἦκη τις αἰτησόμενος ἐκπώματα, μάλιστα μὲν μὴ δοῦναι, ἂν δ' ἄρα τις οἰκεῖος ἢ καὶ ἀναγκαῖος, μόνον οὐ πυρώσας καὶ στήσας καὶ σχεδὸν ἐγγυητὴν λαβῶν χρῆσαι.

When somebody comes asking for the loan of cups, he would rather say no altogether, but if he has to oblige a member of his family or a close relative he will lend them only after he has all but checked the quality and weight of the metal and practically got someone to guarantee the cost of the replacement.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thphr. *Char.* XVIII, 15-18. Translation by Diggle 2004 (modified).

As Diggle suggests, “loan for domestic objects would normally be made without interest, witnesses, or security”.<sup>11</sup> But when an ἄπιστος such as Knemon is asked for something like that, the first thing he thinks about is whether the person who is asking has a sort of contract (συμβόλαιον) with him, on the basis of which that person could reasonably make the request. In the mind of the ἄπιστος, that would be the only reason why someone would think of asking him for something: he does not conceive any other way in which he could take part in relationships with other people. This is true also for Knemon, and this is made clear in the exchange between the cantankerous old man and the slave Getas who knocks at Knemon’s door to ask for the loan of a brazier.<sup>12</sup>

We find some traits of Knemon also when we look at Theophrastus’ description of the self-centred man. The ἀνόδης is someone who does not return a greeting<sup>13</sup> and who refuses to sing, recite or dance.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, Knemon seems to fit Theophrastus’ description: the self-centred man considers only his own perspective. Knemon refuses to speak with other people and to perform conventional acts, such as greeting, that would make him one of them. Like Knemon, the self-centred man also refuses to take part in parties where he needs to sing or dance; that is to say, he refuses to take part in those gatherings that facilitate the cultivation of interpersonal relationships and interaction with other people. On the other hand, we also know that, somehow, Knemon is induced to change his attitude as the play proceeds and, furthermore, we are told why the old man became the distrustful, self-centred person that we see on stage.<sup>15</sup> What we have left of Theophrastus’ work does not offer scope for a possible change of mind of this kind: Theophrastus does not show characters who change and he does not explain why they become what they are.

It is possible to suppose that Menander had heard about, or even read, Theophrastus’ *Characters* and that this had somehow influenced the construction of some of his plots; however, Menander’s *Dyscolos* includes topics that go beyond the theme of the misanthropy of his main character. The structure of the *Dyscolos* involves a set of topics that range from psychological analysis to ethics and politics.<sup>16</sup> These topics, taken together, constitute a coherent design that has analogies with Aristotelian thinking about human nature and psychology in a way that goes beyond anything we find in the rather superficial sketches that Theophrastus offers in the *Characters*. As

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<sup>11</sup> Diggle 2004, *ad loc.* and Millett 1991, pp. 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 466-480. This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, pp. 164-165.

<sup>13</sup> Thphr. *Char.* XV, 3.1.

<sup>14</sup> Thphr. *Char.* XV, 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 711-723.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 5 for an extended discussion of this topic.



will be shown in this thesis, in reading Menander and Aristotle we come to understand why doing certain things or responding to specific situations in a certain way is not good; we are also offered an analysis of the motivation that might lead someone to perform a specific act and the explanation of what is involved in the development of a certain kind of character. In Theophrastus' *Characters*, we are left without such explanations.

It is possible to argue that Theophrastus would have shared with Aristotle the same ideas about the cultivation of one's intellectual and ethical virtue and the formation and education of one's character. We also seem to have some evidence of this common ground from a testimony of Stobaeus that might help us in retracing the construction of a self-centred and distrustful dramatic character such as Knemon.<sup>17</sup> In a short passage from Stobaeus' *Anthology*, we learn that Theophrastus thought that the key to a good life does not lie only in having a liberal upbringing and good friends and relatives. Young people, in particular, should also know how to use their friends, they should engage with them in critical reflection (τὸ κρίνειν καὶ σκοπεῖν); they should ask them for suggestions as they would ask suggestions from a guide when they travel.<sup>18</sup> In this way, as they become adult, they will be less likely to acquire the bad disposition of someone such as Knemon. It seems, therefore, that Theophrastus, like Aristotle, ascribed great importance to the role that human relationships and a shared life have for correct character development. It is, therefore, probable that Theophrastus' theories on the topic were actually very close to those ascribed to Aristotle earlier.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, it is also possible that there are analogies between Theophrastus' ethical thought and the way in which Menander constructs his characters (in this specific case, Knemon) and develops their psychological analysis. However, evidence and testimonies for Theophrastus' thought do not provide enough material to carry on a deeper study of this hypothesis; this is why, in this thesis, I have deliberately chosen to focus solely on possible analogies between Menander and Aristotle, without getting involved in the discussion about analogies between Menander and Theophrastus or the later Peripatetic school.

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<sup>17</sup> The testimony is quoted as evidence of possible influence of Theophrastus on Menander by Steinmetz 1960, Barigazzi 1965, p. 120, Gaiser 1967, especially pp. 34-35. All of them agree in saying that there are evident Peripatetic influences on the way in which Menander constructs and develops his characters; however, it is not possible to verify to what extent these influences include Theophrastus' thought specifically.

<sup>18</sup> Stob. 2.31.124. See Fortenbaugh 1992, p. 292-293.

<sup>19</sup> See pp. 12-13.

## *2.2 Menander and the previous dramatic tradition?*

One salient factor to be considered, in analysing Menander's comedies, is the sharp difference in focus and theme between the surviving works of fifth-century Athenian comedy, mainly represented for us by Aristophanes, and Menandrian comedy. The other important fact to take into account is that certain recurrent themes in Menander can also be found in Athenian tragedy, particularly towards the end of the fifth century.<sup>20</sup> This thesis does not attempt to analyse the whole relationship between Menander and previous kinds of drama, and to consider what the differences and similarities are and whether we can identify in fifth-century drama ideas of human nature and psychology that are comparable to those that we find in Menander (and, I will argue, Aristotle). Nevertheless, in the course of my discussion, I will correlate my reading of Menander's comedies with certain dramatic works of the previous comic and tragic tradition that deal with topics that seem comparable to those treated by Menander. As far as I can judge from my observations so far, it is difficult to apply to pre-Menandrian Attic drama the same kind of analysis that I am applying to Menander. However, the primary aim of these comparisons between Menander and fifth-century Attic tragedy and comedy is to show that, although Menander may have been influenced by some recurrent themes of the previous dramatic traditions, he interprets them in his own distinctive way with reference to a coherent set of distinct ideas. As noticed already, Menander analyses the psychological processes of his characters in a manner that closely matches Aristotle's ideas in a way that is not true of earlier drama. Furthermore, I will argue, the way in which Menander presents his characters to the audience is substantially different from what we find in extant previous dramatic texts. Menander constructs his characters and displays their thought-processes in a way that indicates the reasons why they fail. I do not think this point also holds good for his tragic and comic predecessors.

Menander was preceded by a tragic tradition that seems to have had a special interest in states of knowledge and ethical reasoning, the role of chance and accidental ignorance in human life, misunderstandings and recognitions. The main aim of this thesis is not to clarify the relationship between Menander's comedy and the previous tradition of fifth-century Attic tragedy. However, I believe that this tradition should be

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<sup>20</sup> For an extended discussion of this topic see Werhli 1936; Webster 1950; Friedrich 1953; Arnott 1975; Katsouris 1975; Dvoraki 1978; Jäkel 1982; Segal, E. 2001(b) and Vogt-Spira 2001.

taken into account in order to understand the possible different approaches and interests that seem to underlie Menander's work. In the fifth century BC, Sophocles reinterprets tragic myths and plots with a particular focus on characters' ignorance and their efforts to achieve the truth.<sup>21</sup> For instance, the tragedy of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in Sophocles' version centres on the persistent enquiry of Oedipus into the discovery of his past and the tragic knot of *Trachiniae* is based on Deianeira's false beliefs and her tragic acknowledgement of the truth.<sup>22</sup> Euripides, furthermore, focuses on recognition scenes, misunderstandings and the effect of emotions such as love on the working of human psychology.<sup>23</sup> He also surprises<sup>24</sup> the audience with extended ἀναγνωρίσεις in a way that accentuates the cognitive state of the characters involved and their perception of reality.

[Euripides' use of] recognition is more interesting than a plot-device; it is (as even its etymology shows) an epistemological topos, profoundly connected to the plays' treatment of ideas in general. The recognition-scenes encapsulate the main themes of the plays: how are appearances and reality connected, and how do we define personal identity?<sup>25</sup>

At first glance, it might seem that Menander borrows some of these tragic topics and includes them in his comedies, though deploying different sorts of characters and different sorts of endings. However, I think that there is a substantial difference in the way in which Menander presents to the audience situations of this kind and the people involved in them. Fifth-century Attic tragedy presents characters that find themselves involved in inextricable situations and in the middle of extraordinary sufferings that arouse the audience's pity and, therefore, emotional engagement in their experiences. As Aristotle suggests, the audience of a tragic performance is not intended to judge what a tragic character does on stage as straightforwardly ethically right or wrong. Tragic characters are not typically presented as meriting their misfortune: they are not wicked people who bring upon themselves disasters they rightly deserve; if they were characters of this kind, we would not feel pity and fear for them and their fall<sup>26</sup> but, rather, we would find that their malice has been rightly punished. Tragic characters arouse our pity

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<sup>21</sup> On this theme see Whitman 1951; Knox 1964; Di Benedetto 1983; Lefèvre 2001(a) and more recently Lauriola 2007 and Orsi 2007.

<sup>22</sup> The cases of Oedipus and Deianeira will be treated more extensively in Chapter 3, section 1.1 in comparison with Menander's *Samia*.

<sup>23</sup> Zeitlin 1985. Gibert 2000 and, more recently, Markus 2009 contrast Sophocles and Euripides on these points.

<sup>24</sup> Arnott 1973.

<sup>25</sup> Wright 2005, p. 299.

<sup>26</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 13, 1452b36-1453a4.

because we feel they do not entirely deserve their loss or sudden reversal of fortune;<sup>27</sup> they do not show evident moral flaws but, somehow, they fall inevitably. It is not always possible to establish clearly what they did wrong or what they could have done better. As Aristotle observes, they do not fall because of their vices (κακία) or their wickedness (μοχθηρία);<sup>28</sup> they make mistakes but these cannot be clearly characterised as being ethically right or wrong.<sup>29</sup> When tragic characters make a choice, the audience is emotionally engaged in the rationality of their reasoning and appreciates that there is a logic in this reasoning: we cannot entirely blame characters such as Creon or Oedipus for their choices, we understand that their reasoning is not expressive of vice and badness of character even if it finally brings disaster. The way in which tragic characters are presented seems to invite us “not to judge, not to make inferences about moral character, but to share the point of view of the tragic figures and to try to understand them however bewildering their predicaments and however horrible their actions”.<sup>30</sup>

I believe that Menander introduces a different kind of perspective. In watching Menandrian comedies, the audience is given a clear indication of the ethical character of the figures on stage. Menander brings out in various ways which is the figure who reasons in a good or bad way and which is the right and wrong way of acting or understanding something. When Menandrian characters invite the audience to share their reasoning, the audience is able to tell what is wrong with the way in which characters construct their thought-processes and make decisions. The comic characters often act in the grip of emotions that overpower their reasoning: at the end of the comedy they repent and they confess their mistakes, having acquired a clearer idea of what they should have done. The audience watches their progress, having from the start a precise idea of what it is that they are doing wrong, being able to judge the characters and, therefore, to laugh at them. In Menander’s comedy, the audience is led through a process of increasing understanding that terminates successfully and is celebrated by a happy ending. At the same time, the plays’ happy endings and the representation of

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<sup>27</sup> Sherman 1992, pp. 181-184.

<sup>28</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 13, 1453a8-9.

<sup>29</sup> This idea follows the discussion of ἁμαρτία in Halliwell 1986: “*hamartia* is not [...] a discrete, technical term, designating a single, sharply demarcated formula of tragic potential, but rather an appositely flexible term of Greek moral vocabulary to signify the area opened up in Aristotle’s theory by the exclusion both of full moral guilt and of mere subjection to the irrational strokes of external adversity” (Halliwell 1986, p. 220). My point here is that, independently of the meaning we give to the term ‘ἁμαρτία’ in the *Poetics*, and of the various kinds and degrees of mistakes made in tragedies, in Aristotle, tragic characters (at least in what he considers the best kind of tragic plot) are presented as suffering beyond what they deserve and therefore as objects of our pity. For broader discussion about ἁμαρτία and its meaning (as intellectual mistake or moral flaw) see van Braam 1912; Hey 1928; Kommerell 1940; Harsh 1945; Pitcher 1945; Bremer 1969; Stinton 1975; Halliwell 1986, ch. 7; Sherman 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Gill 1986, p. 265. See also Chapter 1, section 2 and Chapter 5, pp. 177-178 for fuller discussion.

ordinary life and people in Menandrian comedies do not prevent the treatment of serious issues: “The misapprehension of the actors is never shared by the audience, since they are warned in advance what to expect. The solution is not merely a matter of restoring the original situation by the removal of misunderstanding. The problems of conduct that arise are seriously treated, and their solution produces better understanding”<sup>31</sup> both for the audience and the characters involved.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, by the end of my enquiry I aim to show that the kind of themes presented by Menander’s comedies are not just recurring literary *topoi* that Menander borrowed from the fifth-century tragic tradition (with the addition of the happy ending). Moreover, in the construction of his characters and plots Menander seems to adopt specific ideas that are analogous to those suggested by Aristotelian philosophy, and, therefore, arguably different from those presented in fifth century tragedy, although my thesis does not propose to establish this difference by detailed analysis. On this point, it has been argued that fifth-century Attic tragedy already shows a progressive development towards a more ethical (in an Aristotelian sense) way of understanding human psychology and life.<sup>33</sup> It has also been argued that Aristotle’s reflection on certain topics was actually influenced by the representation of human actions in fifth-century Attic tragedies and that, consequently, Aristotle articulated further some insights explored by dramatic productions of this kind.<sup>34</sup> My thesis does not aim at exploring these broad questions: I have focused here exclusively on a parallel reading of Aristotle and Menander that aims to bring out more effectively their analogies independently of possible comparison with the previous tradition as regards the ethical and psychological ideas involved. Hence, the comparisons drawn here between Menander and Attic tragedy will be directed at bringing out more clearly Menander’s distinctive approach as regards certain themes and modes of characterisation rather than at comparing them systematically with the tragic tradition.

If we now look at Aristophanic comedies, we find that it is even more difficult to establish the basis for comparison with Menander in the presentation of the characters’ ethical and psychological states. Aristophanes seems rather to lead us in an opposite direction from Menander. Aristophanes presents characters in a way that does not invite

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<sup>31</sup> Post 1938, p. 38. Post 1938, in particular, argues for the presence of serious topics in Menander’s plot. See also Post 1931.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 36 for extended discussion of the difference between the understanding of the audience and that of the characters.

<sup>33</sup> For this view of the development of fifth-century tragic representation of figures see Bremer 1969; Saïd 1978 and Vernant 1981.

<sup>34</sup> Nussbaum 1986(b), pp. 237-239.

sustained analysis of them as realistically presented psychological and ethical agents.<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to interpret their behaviour as reflecting an identifiable set of ideas that can explain rationally why the figures make certain choices; it is also difficult to say what coherent set of dispositions constitutes their characters and makes them act in one way rather than another. Aristophanic people go beyond the normal limits of rationality and logic: what they do, and the world in which they live, cannot be easily compared with the audience's standards. They are, in certain respects, absurd characters and they live in a far-fetched world: "Aristophanes' comedy presupposes a non realist sense of logic and human beings".<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the New Comedy of Menander shows an interest in describing more realistic characters who, in the plays, experience difficulties as they often lack proper knowledge of what circumstances or people are or because their overwhelming emotional reactions to given circumstances prevent their understanding the right choice to make. These comedies usually end after some intelligent figure has helped to bring about a full understanding of how the situation developed and after the recognition of who the people involved were.

Nevertheless, Aristophanes and Menander write plays that belong to the same genre and one that the audience knows to be clearly distinct from tragic plays; this difference is reflected also in the formal organisation of Athenian dramatic festivals that distinguished the two genres.<sup>37</sup> When watching a comedy, the audience expect to face specific kinds of circumstances and specific kinds of characters involved in the plot. In the case of comedy, both Old and New, we deal with characters that are φαυλότεροι, as Aristotle puts it;<sup>38</sup> they are ordinary people that make various kinds of mistakes. The comic drama does not show us the disastrous consequences of a difficult situation of the kinds examined in tragedy. Comedy presents us with characters whose reasoning is

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<sup>35</sup> Halliwell 2008, especially pp. 208-212. I often think that it is tempting to compare Aristophanic comedy to the kind of entertainment offered by *Monty Python*. In a recent article, Bakhurst defines the kind of humour provided by *Monty Python* in this way: "the intention of this sort of humour is not to make a moral point [...]. Much humour derives simply from incongruity, from inversion of sense and non-sense, the expected and the surprising, the possible and the impossible" (Bakhurst 2008, p. 195). See also Bergson 1911, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> See Silk 1990, p. 172, where he also explains: "In realist representation, characters are assumed to have minds and thoughts which work like those of real people in real life. [...] Fictional people necessarily have experience only when we know that they do, and responses and memory only when these are made public in some way. Within this limitation, however, the character of realist fiction impinges on us as sentient beings: so far as we see and know them, they act from their minds (experiences, responses, memories) and their behaviour is referable to their minds" (Silk 1990, p. 172). See also Whitman 1964 on the topic of Aristophanic comic heroes; see also Chapter 1, section 2 and Chapter 5, pp. 179-181 for a broader discussion of this topic.

<sup>37</sup> For broader discussion on this point see Csapo and Slater 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 5, 1449a32. For further distinctions regarding the genres of tragedy and comedy in general see Silk 1988.

clearly “disjointed and lacking any sequence”<sup>39</sup> and this is what generally invites our laughter. However, we might suppose that there are different reasons that underlie our laughing at a comic character’s action and different ways of elaborating this kind of material: I believe that with Aristophanes and Menander we are looking at two different interpretations of these factors. In their comedies we can see clearly that people on stage are acting in a way that is incongruous and stimulates our laughter in the sense that i) it is absurd and totally different from the way in which human beings, in general, would act and think, as in the case of Aristophanes, or ii) it is close to what happens in real life but it develops in conflict with identifiably correct ethical or cognitive processes, as in the case of Menander. In Menander we laugh at characters because Menander shows us when they make mistakes and why, when their emotions overwhelm them and lead them astray and when the way in which they handle circumstances is rather inadequate.<sup>40</sup> I believe that we cannot apply the same analysis to Aristophanic comedies: Aristophanic characters think and behave in a way that we cannot compare with identifiable ethical or psychological standards; they are absurd and they invite our laughter at the absurdities they think about or perform. Thus, I suggest, the New Comedy of Menander is the first example<sup>41</sup> in Western literature of a type of drama in which the audience is invited to observe in a humorous way the way in which people deploy factually or ethically wrong reasoning and also to observe the consequences of these defective processes.

### *3. The structure of the thesis and the method of enquiry*

As already mentioned, in this thesis, I will try to establish a comparison between two sets of ideas (those of Menander and Aristotle) showing the possible analogies between them. In each chapter I have chosen to focus on one or two texts that enable me to specify Menander’s ideas on specific topics. This choice is motivated by the thought that to reconstruct the possible ideas behind a dramatic play, whether tragic or comic, it is necessary to look at the entire structure of the play, to follow the progressive unfolding of the plot and the presentation of characters, as far as the extant text allows us to do this. To focus attention on specific lines without explaining the context in

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<sup>39</sup> Arist. *Poet. II.* fr. IV Janko.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 201-202 for further discussion of this topic.

<sup>41</sup> It seems that Krates started to write some kind of social comedy but evidence on this point is too limited to support a detailed comparison with Menander.

which they are spoken, or which kind of person expresses them, would not help the present enquiry. This is the reason why I have deliberately chosen not to include generally in my research a discussion of some of Menander's more fragmentary plays, short fragments and *gnomai*.

Once I have outlined the main ideas that, I believe, underlie Menander's plays, in the second part of each chapter, I compare them with specific passages of Aristotle's work that identify an analogous set of topics. As with Menander, the discussion of passages from Aristotle's works is set in the broader context of Aristotle's thought so as to provide a comprehensive account of his ideas about certain topics, which can then be more effectively compared with what has been said about Menander.

I now give an outline of the structure of the thesis and a more specific account of the topics to be treated.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the broader research background in which I locate my enquiry on Aristotle and Menander. The aim of this section is to clarify the main ideas that underlie my research: for instance, what I mean when I speak of the connection between cognitive and ethical understanding and of the importance of these types of understanding for human life and character and what relevance these concepts have when applied to dramatic performances.

In the following two chapters, I deal with dramatic and philosophical treatment of the status of (theoretical and practical) understanding and cognitive failure. Aristotle and Menander have similar ideas about how understanding develops, why it fails and what are the consequences of this failure. In order to demonstrate this point, in Chapter 2, I will consider Menander's treatment of ἀναγνώρισις and Aristotle's ideas about understanding (ἐπιστήμη). Generally speaking, the similarities between the two authors will be shown to lie in i) the relevance that the individual's cognitive attitude has for the completion of a successful cognitive process and ii) the importance of grasping a comprehensive theoretical framework that can validate the individual's empirical experience.

In relation to this latter point, in Chapter 3, I will examine how, in both authors, ethical issues are closely related to epistemological ones. In this respect, I will mainly stress two points: i) an inappropriate factual understanding of something or someone often leads to practical error. Even though the reasoning that leads to the practical decision is virtuous in itself we might still misunderstand what the circumstances of the action are. Moreover, ii) practical and factual understanding varies according to the state of mind of the person involved: an incorrect control of emotions can influence the



positive outcome of one's rational and cognitive activity so as to vitiate ethical reasoning and therefore an adequate ethical understanding. In this respect too, Aristotle and Menander will be shown to have an analogous set of ideas.

In the last two chapters, I will consider how Menander and Aristotle treat cases in which someone's intellectual and ethical insight, as analysed here, is challenged by situations that are not dependent on the agent but that happen by accident and influence in some way his life and his character. In these cases, Menander and Aristotle, analogously, do not consider that a person caught by chance or accident is simply passive; rather, they seem to believe that a person who has intellectual and ethical insight can respond effectively to what happens to him by accident. Hence, knowledge and ethics are not just dependent on the subject's theoretical and practical intelligence: they partly depend on variables that are external to the agent, but also on the response that the agent gives them. In Chapter 4, I will, therefore, analyse the role of chance and accidental ignorance on human actions. Unforeseen events affect human life; these events are interpreted by rational beings who make choices and have different reactions to them. Depending on the character of people they affect, these events produce different interpretations and their effects can thus be concurrent causes of other events that people decide rationally to bring about. Thus, it seems to me that, from Menander's and Aristotle's point of view, chance events take on a different meaning according to the people that they involve and, hence, according to their ability to understand what is at stake and what should be done, that is to say, on their factual and practical understanding.

In Chapter 5, I will develop some ethical reflections related to these observations. Accidental events and our interpretation of them are fundamental ingredients that shape our character and exercise our *ēthos*. Events, however, fortunate or unfortunate they might be, form an important part of ethical life and they offer a useful chance to build up one's character: they constitute the gymnasium in which we exercise our skills and values. It seems that Menander and Aristotle share analogous ideas also in this respect. Self-formation, the building up of a consistent character and the progressive understanding of certain issues, develops as we respond to life's accidents and relationships with others. Ethics function properly inside a community of φίλοι: a correct understanding is achieved by communicating one's own thoughts to others in the context of a shared life. Understanding, therefore, also depends on the existence of a community and the public sharing of ideas. Menander's comedy represents an important part of this sharing: its *raison d'être* depends on the existence of

an audience that participates in a dialogue with the playwright and that shares with him ideas about what is to know and what is the best thing to do once one has been given a specific plot or a specific life.

The fact that in the same century, we find an identifiable set of ideas both in the context of popular literature and philosophical reflection raises further questions that will be explored in the conclusions: to what extent do the analogies shared by Menander and Aristotle also form part of the thought-world of the fourth century? As I aim to show, Menander's New Comedy describes characters and plots on the basis of certain ideas that have analogies with those found in Aristotle. My further tentative suggestion is that this is not due to the direct philosophical influence that Aristotelian thought had on Menander. It is, rather, the fact that Menander and Aristotle shared the same culture: they shared ideas about understanding, ethics and human nature and psychology that constitute the thought-world of the fourth century BC. Nevertheless, to answer this question other kinds of sources need to be explored and all these sources need to be compared with those of different periods in order to identify possible shifts. At present, therefore, I will limit myself to demonstrating the first part of the question and analysing the analogies that philosophy and drama of the fourth century BC share in matters of theoretical and practical understanding.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Setting the Broader Background*

Having now specified the focus and the aims of this thesis, I dedicate this short chapter to discussing the broader research context that underlies the ideas discussed so far. In introducing Aristotle, I have mentioned that, in his works, we can identify a specific interest in the way in which people use their cognitive skills and the importance that this use of cognitive skills has for their ethical life. In the following section (section 1), I will explain these ideas at greater length. In doing so, I will also specify the differences between ancient and modern treatment of themes related to knowledge and its meaning for practical life. This short survey will make clear a rather important starting point of my research: it will emerge that in ancient philosophy generally, and in Aristotle in particular, a close connection is seen between themes related to knowledge (that is, epistemology) and those related to ethics. This is an important point to clarify as it is on the basis of this framework of ideas that I am comparing Aristotle and Menander as regards the presentation of ethical and rational understanding.

In section 2, I will explain how the same set of ideas examined in Aristotle can be seen as relevant to the dramatic presentation of characters. To speak about the theory of knowledge and ethics in connection with comic works risks transforming a piece of literature made for entertainment into an artificial expression of serious philosophical ideas – and this is not the view I want to convey. I believe that Menander, like any other playwright, wrote his plays with the intention of pleasing the people in his audience and giving them an enjoyable dramatic experience. The aim of section 2 of this chapter is precisely to explain the kind of pleasure that, I believe, Menander's comedy is meant to convey and in doing so to discuss more fully some of the themes regarding Menander's distinctive mode of comedy noted in the Introduction.

## *1. Understanding, ethics and ancient philosophy*

In contemporary philosophy, epistemology is the discipline that focuses on issues related to knowledge and, more generally, the process of understanding. As a discipline, modern epistemology attempts to answer such questions as: “What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure, and what are its limits?”<sup>1</sup> Typically, epistemology is seen as the study of justified belief. We know something because we first believe something. However, in order to be classified as true knowledge, our belief needs to be i) true and ii) justified. Justification is an important element that enables true belief to become knowledge. We might just be lucky in believing something that finally turns out to be true;<sup>2</sup> therefore, if we want to claim knowledge, we should give a justification for our beliefs. Hence, in contemporary philosophy “knowledge is a belief of a special kind, belief satisfying certain conditions. These necessary conditions for knowledge, on the traditional approach, are the truth of what is believed and the justification or evidence of what is believed”.<sup>3</sup>

In ancient Greek philosophy too, thinkers were concerned from an early period with the interrelationship between knowledge, belief and truth.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the distinction between δόξα and ἀλήθεια is discussed in Xenophanes<sup>5</sup> and Parmenides<sup>6</sup> while Anaxagoras’ fragments contain reflections on human intellectual power and the ability to infer from signs, and to understand what is invisible from what is visible.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the question of the nature of the difference between belief and knowledge was already a major issue in early Greek philosophy; and belief was, typically, regarded as an inadequate source of knowledge, because it was variable and qualitatively different from knowledge. However, it is not until the time of Plato and Aristotle, in the fourth century BC, that we find fully developed theories about human intellectual ability, the possibility and prerequisites of scientific knowledge, the problem of the distinction between knowledge and belief and the question of the possibility of error.<sup>8</sup>

It is, however, worth noticing that the characteristic approach of ancient philosophers to epistemology is different from the contemporary approach outlined earlier. Justified belief, in Plato and Aristotle, does not have the same status as

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<sup>1</sup> Moser and Vander Nat 2003; <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>

<sup>2</sup> On the concept of ‘epistemic luck’ see Pritchard 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Moser and Vander Nat 2003, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See for extended discussion of this topic: Everson 1990; Brunschwig and Lloyd 2003; Tuominen 2007.

<sup>5</sup> DK 21, B 34.

<sup>6</sup> DK 28, B 1 25-30.

<sup>7</sup> DK 59, B 21b.

<sup>8</sup> Brunschwig 2003, p. 19.

knowledge as it has in the contemporary approach. In ancient philosophy, to know is not just to justify a belief: to know something means to raise one's own understanding to a level which is qualitatively different from that of mere belief. In this framework of ideas, to understand also means to realise that the higher status, that of knowledge, *ἐπιστήμη*, is indispensable for understanding fully and explaining the lower one, that of belief, *δόξα*. Consequently, the transition from belief to knowledge is differently treated in ancient thought. In the transition from *δόξα* to *ἐπιστήμη*, ancient thought attaches great importance to the cognitive status of the subject who is in the process of gaining understanding, and completing this process. To have knowledge implies understanding the explanatory power of knowledge in relation to belief.

To achieve knowledge we need to have appropriate cognitive abilities but we also need to work on these in order to develop their full potential and to shape a consistent disposition as regards to finding the truth, that is, to have intellectual virtue.<sup>9</sup> To possess intellectual virtue, in fact, involves constant exercising and development of one's own cognitive skills. An intellectually virtuous person would be one who has achieved a stable disposition that enables him or her<sup>10</sup> to be successful in finding the truth. This involves working on what reason, emotions, perceptions and particular situations suggest and following through a kind of reasoning that is rigorous and well-conducted and that in this way leads to knowledge of the truth.<sup>11</sup> Intellectual virtue depends on our knowing something properly because we do not just believe it on the basis of mere experience or hearsay but because we understand the cause of it and we use the best possible reasoning to grasp its truth.

This approach suits an epistemology which is *person-based* instead of *belief-based*: to find out the truth we not only need a set of justifiable beliefs; we need to be the kind of person that is able to formulate them in the best possible way and to give an explanatory, comprehensive account of them. This kind of thinking is currently maintained by a new strand in contemporary philosophy, namely, virtue epistemology.<sup>12</sup> Virtue epistemologists say that an agent *S* knows that *p* only in cases where *S*'s believing *p* results from a virtuous cognitive character. In virtue epistemology, the agent is "reliable": that is to say, starting from experiences, sensory appearance and beliefs,

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<sup>9</sup> See Sherman and White 2003 for a broader discussion on this topic and Montmarquet 1986 and Zagzebski 1996 for cognate modern theories.

<sup>10</sup> In this thesis I will normally refer to indefinite subjects using the male personal pronoun. My reason for doing so is that ancient philosophers tend to speak exclusively from a male perspective and also that, in Menander's comedies, those who make the ethical and factual mistakes central to the dramas are mainly male characters.

<sup>11</sup> Arist. *EN* VI 7, 1141a3-5.

<sup>12</sup> Sosa 1980; Code 1987; Montmarquet 1986; Zagzebski 1996; Greco 2000; DePaul and Zagzebski 2003.

the agent is able to produce an additional state in a reliable, i.e. truth-conducting, way,<sup>13</sup> in this way, “knowledge is produced by a cognitive process that ‘gets things right’ or is ‘accurate’ a good deal of the time”.<sup>14</sup>

The points just made are designed to clarify what epistemology typically meant in ancient authors: namely, a reflection on our potentialities and limitations in pursuing a complete understanding of our world. I will now outline how specific authors treat these topics, beginning with Plato but focusing especially on Aristotle, whose philosophy is the main subject of the philosophical side of my investigation here. According to Plato, sensory experience is not enough to discover the truth that underlies our world. The appearances offered by sense perception do not offer a precise or reliable account of what surrounds us: true knowledge must include the contemplation of objects of knowledge that can be achieved only through a sustained process of enquiry about the reliability of what we know, or what we think we know. Thus, sensory experience needs explanatory understanding which culminates in knowledge of the Forms in order for the individual to grasp fully what is perceived. To reach full understanding is a difficult process and knowledge of the truth is achieved only by exercising one’s intellectual ability and expressing a sustained desire to achieve the ultimate, most complete understanding;<sup>15</sup> between knowledge and belief there is a gulf that few are able to bridge. For instance, according to Plato’s *Republic*,<sup>16</sup> ἐπιστήμη, δianoia, πίστις and εικασία are the four kinds of cognitive states that human beings, like the prisoners in the cave, experience. The progress from one of those states to another depends on the subject’s ability to discriminate between them, that is, to understand the difference between having a belief and possessing the explanatory power of ἐπιστήμη that makes sense of our belief.<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, on the other hand, believes that we can gain a

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<sup>13</sup> Greco 2000, pp. 167-168.

<sup>14</sup> Greco 2000, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> These brief comments synthesise a complex set of ideas variously formulated in different platonic dialogues: *Pl. R.* V, 476b-e; 490a6-b7; 518b6-d1; *Symp.* 210a-d. See among others Cornford 1935; Bluck 1961; Cooper 1970; Burnyeat 1976 and 1990; Fine 1990; Woodruff 1990. For recent discussions with a particular focus on late Platonic dialogues and Platonic dialectic method see M. L. Gill 2006 and El Murr 2006.

<sup>16</sup> *Pl. R.* VII, 534a-b.

<sup>17</sup> At the level of imagination, εικασία, the ordinary world of φαινόμενα, the prisoner in the cave sits bound in chains and sees shadows passing in front of him (*Pl. R.* VII, 514c-515c.). What is crucial here is not what he sees: the point is that the prisoner cannot “discriminate between images and the objects they are of” (Fine 1990, p. 101). He understands the difference when he turns his head to the objects behind him (*Pl. R.* VII, 515c-d) and understands the explanatory cause of the shadows that he was seeing before. The prisoner should then be able to discuss, διαλέγεσθαι, what he sees by using his reason and discerning gradually the real essence of the images (*Pl. R.* VII, 532a). Through this dialectical process, he can eventually give a satisfactory and fully explanatory account of what surrounds him. Only this kind of account constitutes ἐπιστήμη, and it offers a revealing new perspective on what the prisoner was confusedly seeing before. In this process of understanding, the error seems not to lie in sense data taken

certain degree of knowledge, and not just belief, even at the lower level of sense perception; indeed, we cannot achieve any knowledge of truth without perceiving particulars. Everyone, since he can perceive, should theoretically be able to achieve understanding<sup>18</sup> by assimilating his experiences and sense perceptions according to proper reasoning. The problem arises when perception of particulars is missing or we are simply not able to see them in a sufficiently comprehensive view.<sup>19</sup> It thus turns out that experience and insight are fundamental ingredients of theoretical understanding.

At the same time, the relevance of one's individual ability in getting to know something has its counterpart in the field of ethics.<sup>20</sup> In fact, in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, as well as in Greek Philosophy more generally, knowledge has important implications for practical life. For Plato, to gain proper understanding is a prerequisite of an ethically good action. To understand the truth about what is good and bad provides the basis on which we should measure the goodness or badness of our choices.<sup>21</sup> In Aristotle, by contrast, dianoetic virtues are not enough in the realm of ethics by themselves.<sup>22</sup> Someone who potentially has knowledge of what is good and what is not also requires the ability to deal with human emotions<sup>23</sup> or accidents<sup>24</sup> appropriately in order to secure an exact knowledge of the empirical circumstances in which he finds himself acting and to make sure that he is properly affected by them.<sup>25</sup> Intellectual virtue helps us to make the right kind of decisions but it needs to be combined properly with natural dispositions and adequate habituation. Moreover, in order to understand the right choice to make one needs to have in mind identifiable action-guiding principles that should function as major premises of the reasoning leading to the virtuous rational choice.<sup>26</sup> Practical understanding, therefore, seems to function analogously to theoretical understanding; it is a sort of scientific enquiry (ζήτησις). On the basis of a given set of particulars and being affected by certain sensory perceptions, one has to comprehend

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on their own but in how we are able to reason to gain knowledge based on these data: namely, in our ability to use dialectic method correctly (Pl. *R.* VII, 533c7-e2).

<sup>18</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 980a21.

<sup>19</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 18, 81a38-b9; I 28, 87a38-b3. On these ideas see among others Sorabji 1980; Burnyeat 1981; Nussbaum 1982; Lear 1988; Barnes 1994; Tuominen 2007.

<sup>20</sup> "Even if the intellectual virtues enable us to discover truths about matter that are recondit and abstract still our increased grasp of truth will serve to broaden and deepen the understanding at the basis of the kind of practical knowledge which is moral virtue" Annas 2003, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Pl. *Cri.* 47e-48b; *Symp.* 210d and *Prot.* 356d.

<sup>22</sup> Arist. *EN* I 13, 1102a25-1103a10.

<sup>23</sup> Arist. *EN* I 6, 1098a1-20.

<sup>24</sup> Arist. *EN* III 7, 1135b15-20 see also *MM* I 33, 1195a-b.

<sup>25</sup> Arist. *EN* III 2, 1110b18-1111a6. See among others Nussbaum 1978, essay 4; Broadie 1991, pp. 214-219; Annas 1993; Sherman and White 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1146b31-1147a10.

these elements adequately in order to find out which is the right choice to make.<sup>27</sup> However, by contrast with scientific analysis, the quality of ethical deliberation does not depend on the outcome being successful (this can be affected by variables that do not depend on the agent, as for instance, luck) but on the quality of the ethical choice itself.

Moral virtue, then, is a skill in the ancient virtue tradition; it is an expertise, a kind of practical knowledge. Local mundane skills serve as examples of the kind of unified practical understanding, which, if we become virtuous, will order our lives in a unified way based on understanding.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, ethics is agent-centred in a manner that is similar to epistemology.<sup>29</sup> We need particular intellectual skills to understand correctly and also to act virtuously. To have moral virtue means to develop the best possible disposition to choose to do the right thing in any given situation. As will be discussed in the following chapters, Aristotle's version of this approach has significant points in common with Menander's drama.

## *2. Understanding, ethics and aesthetic pleasure*

When I argue that Menander's comedies engage with issues related to knowledge and ethics, I also mean that the pleasure deriving from them is related to these issues. We enjoy characters' misunderstandings and the troubles they go through to achieve finally the full understanding of what happened and the final revelation of their factual and ethical mistakes. At the end of the story, the full comprehension of facts and of people's identity is achieved and we take pleasure from the positive understanding we get from this process. The end that we, as audience, are waiting for is the achievement of a fully explanatory version of the story, namely, a version that frames and gives sense to what was supposed by hypothesis before. Also, we wait to know what and who on the stage will make this final comprehension possible: we see characters' reasoning (or lack of reasoning) that leads to (or prevents) this type of understanding. Consequently, at the end of the performance we might say that the understanding of the audience, as well as

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<sup>27</sup> Arist. *EN* III 5, 1112b15-24.

<sup>28</sup> Annas 2003, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> The attempt to establish a theory of knowledge based on the model of 'virtue ethics' theory is the main focus of virtue epistemology. Although I cannot pursue this strand of modern theory here, I agree with the general reading of Aristotle that attempts to connect his epistemology and his ethics. See Bloomfield 2000; Annas 2003; Sherman and White 2003 for recent notes on this topic.



that of the characters, is improved. One of the aims of this thesis is to argue that this kind of aesthetic pleasure finds an analogue in the Aristotelian framework of ideas.

Starting with the *Poetics*, it is clear that, according to Aristotle, the mimetic arts, including drama, give pleasure because they produce understanding. To imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) is to reproduce a situation similar to the truth, looking at which we learn (μανθάνειν) something about the truth.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, understanding is a natural desire for human beings and it is the most agreeable (ἡδιστον) activity.<sup>31</sup> “Our pleasure in art is a branch of this pleasure; the poet or the orator or the painter makes us see or understand things that we did not see before, and particularly he points out the relations and similarities between different things, enables us to say, in Aristotle’s phrase, this is that”.<sup>32</sup>

τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παιδῶν ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας [...]. αἴτιον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅτι μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἡδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτοῦ. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὁρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος·

To imitate is something natural in men from childhood and in this respect they differ from all other animals: that man is the most imitative creature and learning, [for him], comes through the imitation of what [he has experienced] before; and, the fact that all of them take pleasure in imitations [...]. The reason for this is that to learn is the most pleasant activity not just for philosophers but equally for all the others, they just have a limited share of it. So it is for this that they rejoice when they see the images, because it happens that in beholding [art work] we learn and we infer [reasoning syllogistically] what each thing is, as [for example] that this person is such and such person.<sup>33</sup>

The pleasure that the audience receives from attending a dramatic representation inheres precisely in this learning process and in the final understanding that this produces. In mimetic arts in general, and drama<sup>34</sup> in particular, what the spectator

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<sup>30</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 4, 1448b5-9. According to Dosi 1960, Janko 1984 and Fortenbaugh 2005 the relation between μίμησις and μάθησις is seen differently in Theophrastus. Evidence of this is a single testimony in which Theophrastus seems to oppose poetry and truth: the source is Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ essay *On Lysias*: ὁ Θεόφραστος τῶν φορτικῶν καὶ περιέργων αὐτὸν οἶεται ζηλωτὴν γενέσθαι λόγων καὶ τὸ ποιητικὸν διώκειν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἀληθινόν (*Lys.* 14, 1-4). See also Nesselrath 1990, p. 59 n. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* III 10, 1410b7-12 and see *Metaph.* A 1, 980a21.

<sup>32</sup> Hubbard 1972, p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 4, 1448b5-17.

<sup>34</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 7, 1450b21-27. This passage refers to the imitation of actions that constitute a tragedy. It is, however, possible to attribute, by symmetry, the same definition to the imitation of actions that constitute a comedy: the imitation should be equally complete in all its parts and should have a beginning, a middle and an end. To confirm this hypothesis see Arist. *Poet.* II, fr. IV Janko: “κωμῳδία ἐστὶ μίμησις πράξεως γελοίας καὶ ἀμοίου μεγέθους, τελείας”.

beholds is one (ένός) object – the plot (μῦθος): a story that has, as its content, an imitation of actions, that should be complete in all its parts and fully developed within the space of a beginning, a middle and an end.<sup>35</sup> The plot is formed by the narration of several actions the unitary structure of which is understood progressively by following the performance from the beginning to the end. “The perception of dramatic sequence and structure is comparable to the understanding of a logical or a quasi-logical argument; the audience’s sense of intelligible structure is a matching response to the causality within the plot”.<sup>36</sup> This is what constitutes the difference between history and poetry:<sup>37</sup> history records particular facts that have not been unified in a final version by a poet. The structure of an historical report is not unitary as it is bound to follow circumstances and the random order in which, in the actual historical situation, those circumstances happened to follow one another. This point might also explain why Aristotle dislikes episodic drama:<sup>38</sup> episodes do not form a well articulated whole and “the scenes follow one another without the inward connection of the εἰκός or ἀναγκαῖον”.<sup>39</sup> Mimetic arts, instead, are made to be of this kind;<sup>40</sup> the pleasure that we expect to receive from them is the understanding of this general idea, the universal, that the poet had in mind while shaping the plot.<sup>41</sup> Aristotle’s aesthetic theory “explains our attraction to tragedy and comedy on the basis of a deeply felt impulse arising from our very nature as human beings to achieve intellectual insight through that process of learning and inference which represents the essential pleasure and purpose of all artistic *mimesis*”.<sup>42</sup> The understanding of the general idea, the acknowledgement of the real course of events and the definition of the characters’ factual and ethical identity is made explicit during the recognition – and this is why recognition, for Aristotle, is a vital element of the plot (μῦθος).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 7, 1451a30-3.

<sup>36</sup> Halliwell 1986, pp. 100-101.

<sup>37</sup> See de Ste Croix 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 9, 51b33-35.

<sup>39</sup> Butcher 1927, p. 282. See also Finkelberg 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 17, 1455b4-7. “The universal of chapters nine and seventeen is built into the plot structure of a drama – into the causal network of actions and events which it comprises [...]. So universals are not inherent in the raw stuff of a tragedy or comedy but become apparent only in and through the shaped mimetic structure of ‘action and life’ that the poet makes: it is this unified design of the art-work which differentiates poetry, as Aristotle insists, from ordinary events and hence from history. This means that universals are related to causes, reasons, motives and patterns of intelligibility in the action and characters as a whole” (Halliwell 1992, p. 250). See also Butcher 1927 and Yanal 1982.

<sup>41</sup> See Arist. *Poet.* 4, 1448b4-19 and also 9, 1451b5-15.

<sup>42</sup> Golden 1992, p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 9, 1452a11-21.

Only by virtue of the recognition do the truth, the inner coherence and the meaning of the plot [...] become evident to the mind of the spectator.<sup>44</sup>

Through *anagnorisis* the spectator learns to express in an orderly and satisfactory way what is happening on the stage and what is happening in his soul; he passes therefore from unarticulated confusion to articulate knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not possess Aristotle's analysis of comedy. However, the *Tractatus Coislinianus* has considerably improved our understanding of what Aristotle or, alternatively, a Peripatetic scholar might have been written on the argument.<sup>46</sup> The author of the *Tractatus* presents us with a list of possible sources of laughter in comedies. In particular, two of them confirm the idea that comedy too – and not only tragedy – might be defined, by Aristotle, in terms of the epistemic pleasure that it produces. In comedy, laughter is produced, among other cases:

8. ὅταν τις τῶν ἐξουσίαν ἔχόντων παρῆς τὰ μέγιστα <τὰ> φαυλότατα λαμβάνη.

9. ὅταν ἀσυνάρτητος ὁ λόγος ἢ καὶ μηδεμίαν ἀκολουθίαν ἔχων.

8. When someone who has the power (to choose) lets slip the most important and takes the most worthless.

9. When the reasoning is disjointed and lacking any sequence.<sup>47</sup>

The first statement relates to comic characters' choices and the fact that often, due to an incorrect evaluation of the circumstances, they might fail to take the most suitable decision. Also in Menander's comedy, ignorance – due to wrong inference, lack of evidence or emotions – often prevents characters from forming a correct understanding of the situation and leads to ethical mistakes. The error of a comic character is often similar to our error in real life. In this respect, Menander's comedy can be included in Frye's fourth kind of fictional mode: "If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction".<sup>48</sup> By contrast with that of a tragic character,<sup>49</sup> the error of the comic

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<sup>44</sup> Entralgo 1970 p. 230.

<sup>45</sup> Entralgo 1970 p. 233.

<sup>46</sup> For the much debated question of the authorship of the *Tractatus Coislinianus* see Bernays 1853; Kayser 1906; Rostagni 1922; Janko 1984.

<sup>47</sup> Arist. *Poet.* II, fr. VI Janko.

<sup>48</sup> Frye 1957, p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 13, 1453a7-8.

character depends on human flaws and vices; therefore, at the end of the comedy we achieve a better understanding of how this kind of error is possible and which kind of motivations have produced it. The kind of aesthetic pleasure provided by Menandrian comedy is therefore double: it is pleasure in understanding the logic of the whole story presented in the plots and pleasure in understanding what went wrong in it and how the ethical mistakes of the characters will finally be resolved. People in the audience are led to follow the characters' reasoning and they are given clear indications when characters go wrong and the reason why a given character, being a certain kind of person, made that particular mistake. As noted in the Introduction,<sup>50</sup> in fifth-century Attic tragedy we do not have quite the same impression: typically, we follow the characters' reasoning and we understand the motivation for their actions and sympathise with them. However, by the end of the tragedy, good people may suffer disaster and it is often not clear what would have been the right choice for them to make; this is why the performance arouses emotions of pity and fear, in Aristotle's terms.<sup>51</sup>

The second statement that we find in the *Tractatus Coislinianus* (number nine in the *Tractatus'* list of sources of laughter) is connected to the first and it focuses particularly on the laughter generated from seeing a character engaging in inconsistent reasoning. As we will see, Menander's comedy presents an extensive range of examples of people who do not reason correctly, who are misled and fail to choose the right thing to do. The aesthetic pleasure of comedy is produced by seeing characters that are misled and that misunderstand the situation: the happy ending arrives when they understand (or they are told) what the truth is, as happens in Menander's comedies.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, therefore, our laughter at them is motivated by the fact that we can clearly see from outside the stage, from a detached perspective and well aware of the inevitable happy ending, what is wrong with their reasoning.<sup>53</sup> We recognise their inconsistency and we laugh at them because we are not on the stage with them. This is the reason why the type of pleasure that we gain from watching an Aristophanic comedy and a Menandrian comedy are, to a large extent, different. Both Menander and Aristophanes write comedies: in both cases, we react by laughing at what people do on stage and our

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<sup>50</sup> See Introduction, pp. 18-21 and Chapter 5, pp. 177-178

<sup>51</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 6, 1449b27.

<sup>52</sup> See Cave 1988 and his treatment of Donatus-Evanthius's formulation of comic *anagnorisis* in *De Comoedia*, IV 5 : "[...] the [comic] 'knot' (*nodus*, from Greek *desis*) is constituted by 'error' and the denouement by a *conversio rerum* (equivalent to *peripeteia*) which is also a *cognitio gestorum*. The account is clearly analogous to Aristotle's description of the complex plot in tragedy, except that the place of *anagnorisis* is taken by a wider term (*cognitio*) denoting the disclosure to all concerned of 'what has been done'. This is no doubt because the plot of New Comedy is in virtually every case dependent on disguises, secrets, confusions, as well as false identities" (Cave 1988, p. 51).

<sup>53</sup> For further discussion on this topic in relation to Menander's comedy, see Halliwell 2008, pp. 400-404.

laughter is motivated by the fact that we witness their flaws and we realise that their reasoning lacks adequate logic. However, on the one hand, in Aristophanes we laugh because the way in which characters reason or behave is actually absurd and totally different from the way we would reason or behave in real life.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, in Menander, we laugh because the way in which characters reason and behave is comparable to the way in which we would reason and behave but their reasoning is clearly defective, often because their emotions and perceptions overwhelm them. As Bergson puts it in some related reflections: “Society properly so-called, proceeds in exactly the same way [as comedy]. Each member must be ever attentive of his social surroundings; he must model himself on his environment [...]. Society holds suspended over each individual member, if not the threat of correction, at all events the prospect of a snubbing [...]. Such must be the function of laughter. Always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is, really and truly a kind of social ‘ragging’”;<sup>55</sup> however, we cannot avoid seeing characters on the stage as fellow men that do things as we might do.<sup>56</sup> That is to say, in the type of comedy presented by Menander, we laugh at characters because we understand the reasons why characters act in a certain way, and we understand this because we would reason in the same way. Our laughter reflects the fact that we spot their flaws and also our own flaws<sup>57</sup> and this produces some kind of understanding: we might say, that, to some extent, Menandrian comedy is educative.<sup>58</sup> I believe that Menander’s comedies provide the first examples of this kind of aesthetic pleasure and that overall this aesthetic goal shapes his mode of characterisation.

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<sup>54</sup> See Introduction, pp. 22-23 and Chapter 5, p. 201.

<sup>55</sup> Bergson 1911, p. 135; see also Pl. *Phlb.* 49e-50a.

<sup>56</sup> Bergson 1911, p. 194-196.

<sup>57</sup> See Bergson 1911, pp. 135-196 and Pl. *Phlb.* 49e-50a.

<sup>58</sup> Bakhurst 2008, p. 205.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Degrees of Understanding: Menander and Aristotle on How we Understand.*

This chapter continues my enquiry into the analogies between the epistemological frameworks that can be identified in the comic plays of Menander and the philosophical writings of Aristotle. I will analyse how Aristotle and Menander present the processes of understanding and the problems involved in reaching understanding. In this chapter, I focus particularly on Menander's *Epitrepontes* and its relationship to Aristotle's epistemology. I argue that Menander's dramatic presentation of the way that characters get to know (or to recognise) something or someone and Aristotle's philosophical treatment of how we gain understanding are similar in certain key respects. In Menander, for instance, recognition-scenes present the achievement of a complete understanding of what has happened following confusion created by ignorance of facts, especially of people's identity and their social roles. The final resolution re-organises the actions into a new and more desirable order:<sup>1</sup> dispersed tokens of recognition find their full meaning at the end of the recognition process. Similarly, for Aristotle, to gain understanding is to locate empirical evidence in a more comprehensive context which involves grasping (γνώριζεν) universal principles that explain the empirical evidence itself.

In the first part of this chapter I start with the analysis of Menander's *Epitrepontes*. The overall structure of this play is an extended recognition the solution of which requires the interaction of several people and a range of different approaches. My reading of this comedy shows that the main focus of this work is on recognition and on the danger of failing to recognise. Firstly, the confusing nexus of events which links all the characters of the plot is built on a multiple ἀναγνώρισις: namely, the recognition of the identity of the baby and of his mother and his father. This process is brought to an end after a long process of verification which is organised by one of the characters so as

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<sup>1</sup> See Frye 1957, pp. 160-171 and Booker 2004, p. 111. "At the beginning of the play, the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment in which this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution of the action, the comic discovery, *anagnorisis* or *cognitio*" (Frye 1957, p. 163).

to avoid false conjectures and to find out the truth of the whole story. Secondly, all the characters on the stage potentially possess all the pieces of information needed to draw correct inferences about what has happened; nevertheless, the final understanding is possible solely thanks to one of them, a female character,<sup>2</sup> who is able to draw the evidence together. Consequently, my analysis of this play will focus specifically on the various steps of the recognition process (ἀναγνώρισις) that extends throughout the plot and on Menander's representation of characters with different intellectual skills who are involved in this process.

To bring out the distinctive character of the Menandrian pattern, I shall discuss a passage of Euripides' *Electra* that features a process of recognition apparently similar to that of the *Epitrepontes*. At first glance, it might seem that Menander adapts rather mechanically in his plays the motifs used by the previous tragic tradition, and, specifically, by Euripides' *Electra*. However, comparison between *Electra* and *Epitrepontes* will suggest that this is not the case: Menander's *Epitrepontes* seems to have a distinctive focus and concerns which are parallel to the ideas of Aristotle. Menander is interested in themes that are in some ways similar to those treated by fifth-century Attic tragedy but he presents them in an original, distinctive way according to an identifiable framework of ideas.

The second part of this chapter will focus on an analysis of philosophical ideas worked out by Aristotle, some time before Menander's composition of his plays. In examining degrees of knowledge, belief and error in cognition, I offer an example of Aristotle's approach to scientific knowledge in the *Posterior Analytics*. At the end of the chapter, I aim to show that Menander's comedy and Aristotle's epistemological thought share a focus on a distinct set of topics and treat them in an analogous way. In particular, I believe that they share analogous ideas about the process of getting to know something or someone and about people's differing ability to do so, and also about the danger of not having this ability or having it only to a certain degree. Understanding, for Aristotle and Menander, seems to depend on an accurate evaluation of perceived particulars that includes a comprehensive understanding which gives an account of what has been perceived. Both perceptive insight and intellectual habituation are needed in order to sharpen multiple perceptions according to principles that show how things stand in the world and how situations are to be understood.

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<sup>2</sup> For a broader discussion of the prominent, often dominant, role of female characters in Greek drama see particularly Foley 1981; Zeitlin 1990 and (with specific reference to women in Menandrian comedies) Henry 1985 and Traill 2008. See also pp. 73-74 below where I point out the fact that, in Aristotle, by contrast, given the different aim of his works, women are not even included as possible candidates in the process of acquisition of knowledge.

### *1. Epitrepontes: recognition and understanding.*

Northrop Frye speaks of the comic *cognitio* as the transition from πίστις to γνῶσις, illusion to reality. In his opinion, the *cognitio* is an epistemological moment in which, as audience, we find the previous misunderstandings, illusions and ignorance explained by a new perspective.<sup>3</sup> I believe that this description suits the plot of Menander's *Epitrepontes* particularly well. The comedy starts with a situation that needs to be clarified (or understood) in order to achieve the restoration of order and the final happy ending. And, as is often the case in Menander, the disclosure of what has happened is provided by ἀναγνώρισις. In this respect, Goldberg has pointed out the main features of the Menandrian recognition, which he summarises as follows: i) the recognition occurs late but is often foreshadowed; ii) the object of the recognition is often a central character in the play; iii) the recognition makes the happy ending possible.<sup>4</sup> However, the *Epitrepontes* does not follow this pattern: the basic recognition of the exposed child occurs in the second act; the child recognised is not the main character and the first ἀναγνώρισις is complicated by the mechanism of other scenes which interrupt the unfolding of the play. I will now try to describe in detail the process of recognition and give an interpretation of this process.

At the beginning of the play we have two apparently distinct situations: a young man, Charisios, is currently spending his time in the house of the courtesan Habrotonon because he has discovered that his wife, Pamphile, gave birth and exposed a child that was not his own but was the offspring of a rape. Secondly, Charisios' father-in-law, Smikrines, is called in to be arbiter of a quarrel between two servants: one of them, Daos, has discovered a foundling and given it to the other slave, Syros, while keeping the identifying belongings for himself. Syros is now asking for the child's γνῶρίσματα back for the child's sake. From the beginning, it is easy for the audience to imagine how these two situations will eventually be connected: the foundling is discovered to be the child of Pamphile and Charisios and, therefore, Smikrines' grandson. Charisios himself raped his wife, at the festival of the Tauropolia, before their marriage. Nevertheless, for the characters involved, the understanding of this situation is more complex and it is

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<sup>3</sup> Frye 1957, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> Goldberg 1980, p. 61.



possible to identify various types of reasoning carried out by the characters that take part in the process of recognition.

I am now going to analyse in more detail the main characters, focusing on the role that they have in the process of recognition and pointing out their different approaches to what they experience and what they understand of the situation in which they happen to be. The first attempt at recognition of the foundling comes in Act Two. The recognition could have occurred here during the arbitration scene, when Smikrines sees the *γνωρίσματα* of the foundling. This would represent, according to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the most common kind of recognition in Greek drama: ἡ διὰ τῶν σημείων.<sup>5</sup> The slaves Daos and Syros enter the stage and ask Smikrines, Charisios' father in law, to be the arbiter of their quarrel about an exposed child.<sup>6</sup> They are fighting for the possession of the child's identifying belongings that Daos, who first found the child, does not want to give back to Syros who is now its adoptive father. The importance that these objects have for retracing the identity of the child is stressed by Syros:

Συ: – τὰ δέραια καὶ γνωρίσματα  
οὗτός σ' ἀπαιτεῖ Δᾶ'· ἐαυτῶι φησι γὰρ  
ταῦτ' ἐπιτεθῆναι κόσμον, οὐ σοὶ διατροφήν.

SYROS: He [the child] is asking you, Daos, for the necklace and the other tokens of recognition. He says that they have been put in as ornaments for him not as a means of sustenance for you!<sup>7</sup>

The passage refers explicitly to these items as *γνωρίσματα*, a term often used in the tragic tradition to indicate tokens of recognition that are, usually, the ornaments of the child's mother.<sup>8</sup> Syros tries to support his argument by giving a few examples that clearly refer to the world of tragedy. Syros' examples are meant to attribute importance to the objects that have been left with the child and, in the tragic tradition, are fundamental to revealing someone's identity.<sup>9</sup>

Συ: τεθέασαι τραγωιδούς, οἶδ' ὅτι,  
καὶ ταῦτα κατέχεις πάντα. Νηλέα τινὰ  
Πελίαν τ' ἐκείνους εὔρε πρεσβύτης ἀνὴρ

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<sup>5</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 16, 1454b20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 227-229. See Scafuro 1997, p. 156 for the discussion of the legal aspect involved in this process of arbitration.

<sup>7</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 303-305.

<sup>8</sup> See also Arist. *Phgn.* 806a15 where *γνωρίσματα* are the signs through which we can identify a certain state of someone's soul and body.

<sup>9</sup> Hurst 1990; see also Scafuro 1997, pp. 156-162.

αἰπόλος, ἔχων οἶαν ἐγὼ νῦν διφθέραν,  
ὡς δ' ἦισθετ' αὐτοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ κρεῖττονας,  
λέγει τὸ πρῶγμ', ὡς εὔρεν, ὡς ἀνείλετο.  
ἔδωκε δ' αὐτοῖς πηρίδιον γνωρισμάτων.  
ἐξ οὗ μαθόντες πάντα τὰ καθ' αὐτοὺς σαφῶς  
ἐγένοντο βασιλεῖς οἱ τότε ὄντες αἰπόλοι.

SYROS: You have seen the tragic representations! I know very well, and you indeed understand all these things! An old man, a goatherd, dressed in leather like me, found Neleus and Pelias and when he understood that they were of better origins than him, he told them the whole thing: how he found them, how he collected them. He gave them a bag of tokens from which they learnt clearly everything about themselves; they became kings who before were goatherds.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, however, the value of these tokens of recognition is played down. The arbiter Smikrines is the actual grandfather of the foundling and yet he is looking at the ornaments belonging to his daughter without recognising what they are when they are shown to him. But we know that he sees them because Syros asks Smikrines to stay to make sure that Daos gives him the child's ornaments one by one.<sup>11</sup> Smikrines' final verdict is in favour of Syros who is claiming the value of the ornaments as indispensable signs of recognition of his foundling; nevertheless, he himself is not paying close attention to them.

To sum up, in the first scene, i) the entrance of the baby close to his grandfather Smikrines ought to lead to the discovery of the identity of the child; ii) the display of the tokens with which the child has been found makes us expect that Smikrines will recognise the child by recognising the ornaments of his daughter. In fact, the inattentive Smikrines goes away quickly as soon as his role of arbiter is ended.<sup>12</sup> The scene is very well constructed so as to make the audience anticipate consequences that the author will frustrate in the short term<sup>13</sup> and to focus the audience's attention on tokens of recognition that, at this moment, are not bringing about the recognition they are meant to enable.

In the second scene of Act Two, we are once again close to the discovery of the identity of the foundling. In fact, Onesimos, Charisios' slave, unexpectedly, comes out

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<sup>10</sup> Men. *Epir.* 325-333.

<sup>11</sup> Men. *Epir.* 361-365. According to some scholars, we should see here a reference to Euripides' *Ion* and *Alope*; for Menander's use of metatheatre in this play see Goldberg 1980, p. 67 and Stockert 1997, p. 9. See also Gutzwiller 2000, p. 133 for a more general treatment of this topic.

<sup>12</sup> Men. *Epir.* 366-369.

<sup>13</sup> See Katsouris 1976; Ireland 1983 and Zagagi 1994, especially pp. 83-93.

just at the moment at which Syros is showing, and describing in detail to his wife, a strange ring he has found among the tokens of the child:

Συ: ὑπόχρυσος δακτύλιός τις οὔτοσί,  
αὐτὸς σιδηροῦς· γλύμμα ταῦρος ἢ τράγος·  
οὐκ ἂν διαγνοίην· Κλεόστρατος δέ τις  
ἔστιν ὁ ποιήσας, ὡς λέγει τὰ γράμματα.

SYROS: This is a gold plated ring with iron inside, the seal is a bull or a goat. I would not be able to distinguish which. The one who made it is someone named Kleostratos, as the inscription says.<sup>14</sup>

After this detailed description, we expect that Onesimos will recognise his master's ring; and this is indeed what happens. On the one hand, the accurate description of the ring adds value to its status as a token of recognition; on the other hand, the inference drawn by Onesimos on this basis is shown to be rather inconsistent. Indeed, as expected, Onesimos quickly infers that Charisios is the father of the child through a process of reasoning that seems not to be very rigorous. Onesimos knows, in fact, that Charisios once lost that ring at the Tauropolia; he therefore guesses that, probably, Charisios raped a girl. He also imagines that she might have got pregnant by him and, consequently, he suggests that, after having given birth to Charisios' child, she might have exposed the baby along with the ring that Charisios lost at the moment of the rape.<sup>15</sup> In any case, we expect the third Act to confirm the still awaited recognition. On the contrary, in the third Act, the recognition of the child through his identifying belongings seems finally to fail. Onesimos is afraid to reveal to his master what he has just discovered and he keeps the ring, being uncertain about what to do next. The entrance of the courtesan Habrotonon will speed up the recognition process. The woman, however, casts doubt on the reliability of the ring as a symbol of recognition and she suggests another way of finding out the truth.<sup>16</sup>

Another case of recognition based on tokens that turn out not to be trustworthy can be found in the *Aspis*. There again, tokens are shown to be misleading elements for proving someone's identity. At the beginning of the comedy, a slave, Daos, tells Smikrines (the greedy uncle of Daos' master Kleostratos) that Kleostratos is dead and he gives Smikrines an account of how it happened. However, this account does not seem to be completely trustworthy: Kleostratos is a soldier and he was supposed to

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<sup>14</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 386-390.

<sup>15</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 446-457.

<sup>16</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 499-510.

have died during an assault made on his camp. Daos declares that, on that occasion, he himself was not physically present in the camp.<sup>17</sup> He has heard (ἤκουον) the story about the assault from others but he has not experienced it directly by seeing his master's death. He has an opinion that was not based on direct sensory evidence.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Smikrines asks Daos whether he has sure evidence to believe that Kleostratos is dead; he asks whether he saw the corpse.

Σμ: ἐν δὲ τοῖς νεκροῖς  
πεπτωκότ' εἶδες τοῦτον;

SMIKRINES: Did you see him lying among the corpses?<sup>19</sup>

Daos' answer is crucial: he admits that it was not possible to recognise (ἐπιγνῶναι) him with any certainty.

Δα: αὐτὸν μὲν σαφῶς  
οὐκ ἦν ἐπιγνῶναι· τετάρτην ἡμέραν  
ἐρριμμένοι γὰρ ἦσαν ἐξωιδηκότες  
τὰ πρόσωπα.

DAOS: It was not possible to recognise him with certainty: their faces were swollen up as [it was] four days [since] they had been thrown there.<sup>20</sup>

Smikrines, therefore, asks how it is possible then to declare that Kleostratos is dead without having seen him (πῶς οὖν οἶσθα; “But then, how do you know?” asks Smikrines): an exact knowledge of what has happened to Kleostratos seems not to be possible if Daos was not able to see and recognise the corpse as his master's.<sup>21</sup> Smikrines is asking for a verification of Daos' account that is grounded on visual perception; conversely, Daos has said that it has not been possible to verify that Kleostratos was dead by seeing him. Daos has identified Kleostratos' corpse because Kleostratos' shield lay there with him. This implies, for Smikrines as well as for the audience, that he cannot be sure of the fact. But Daos seems sure of the fact that the corpse he saw was his master's and he replies to Smikrines' question:

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<sup>17</sup> Men. *Aspis* 50-61.

<sup>18</sup> Men. *Aspis* 52-62.

<sup>19</sup> Men. *Aspis* 68-69.

<sup>20</sup> Men. *Aspis* 70-72. Paduano remarks that, at this point, the text anticipates a remarkable doubt about Kleostratos' death (Paduano 1980, p. 335).

<sup>21</sup> Men. *Aspis* 73.

Δα: ἔχων τὴν ἀσπίδα  
ἔκειτο.

DAOS: [I know that because] he lay there with his shield.<sup>22</sup>

From this piece of evidence (Kleostratos' shield close to the dead body), Daos infers that his master is dead. However, this recognition through a token (i.e. the shield) is clearly mistaken. Daos does not evaluate rigorously what he has heard and seen: Kleostratos is alive and will soon step on the stage. The shield does not serve as certain token of recognition because it comes as a single piece of sensory evidence without a trustworthy account of its meaning in the context in which it is found. The shield was indeed lying with a corpse that Daos could not identify with certainty (σαφῶς ἐπιγιγνώσκειν) as being Kleostratos' corpse. Moreover, the corpse was found by Daos after an assault the details of which he had heard indistinctly from someone else because he was not present at the camp at that moment: the ἀναγνώρισις that opens the *Aspis* is a false recognition that will be corrected in the course of the comedy.

From the point of view of the staging of the *Epitrepontes*, the failure of the first attempt at recognition through tokens directs our attention to what will follow. Dana Munteanu<sup>23</sup> distinguishes three further kinds of ἀναγνώρισις performed in this play, which follow Aristotle's divisions in the *Poetics*: ἀναγνώρισις through memory (διὰ μνήμης), by reasoning (ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ) and by false reasoning (ἐκ παραλογισμοῦ).<sup>24</sup> I will now summarise Onesimos' attempt at recognition and Habrotonon's reply to this. As anticipated, Onesimos' first inference about the identity of the child is simple:

Ον: τοιουτονί  
ἐστιν τὸ πρᾶγμ', ἄνθρωπε· τοῦ μὲν δεσπότη  
ἔστ', οἶδ' ἀκριβῶς, οὐτοσί Χαρισίου,  
ὀκνῶ δὲ δεῖξαι· πατέρα γὰρ τοῦ παιδίου  
αὐτὸν ποῶ σχεδόν τι τοῦτον προσφέρων  
μεθ' οὗ συνεξέκειτο.  
[...]  
Ταυροπολίοις ἀπώλεσεν τοῦτόν ποτε  
παννυχίδος οὔσης καὶ γυναικῶν. κατὰ λόγον  
ἐστὶν βιασμὸν τοῦτον εἶναι παρθένου·

<sup>22</sup> Men. *Aspis* 73.

<sup>23</sup> Munteanu 2002, p. 118-119.

<sup>24</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 15, 1454b37-1455a14.

ἢ δ' ἔτεκε τοῦτο κάξέθηκε δηλαδή.  
εἰ μὲν τις οὖν εὐρῶν ἐκείνην προσφέρει  
τοῦτον, σαφὲς ἂν τι δεικνύοι τεκμήριον  
νυνὶ δ' ὑπόνοιαν καὶ ταραχὴν<sup>25</sup> ἔχει.

ONESIMOS: It is like this, man! I know it for sure, it [the ring] belongs to my master Charisios. But I am afraid to show it to him: for I will probably make him the father of the child bringing to him this thing that was exposed with it.

[...]

He lost it at the Tauropolia, the women's night-festival! It is reasonable to think that he used violence on a girl: clearly she bore this child and exposed it. If now someone, finding her, would bring her this [ring] he would produce a sure proof, but all there is now is confusion and conjecture.<sup>26</sup>

Habrotonon, who has just arrived on stage, reproaches Onesimos for the fact that he does not want to tell his master what he has just found out. Moreover, she seems to remember an episode of rape at this very same festival of the Tauropolia.<sup>27</sup> Onesimos immediately believes in this second kind of ἀναγνώρισις (διὰ μνήμης) which confirms his hypothesis: the raped girl about whom Habrotonon speaks is the mother of Charisios' child; κατὰ λόγον, it follows that Charisios' raped her and lost his ring. Onesimos asks her help in finding the girl and showing her the ring as actual proof that her child is Charisios'. On the contrary, the kithara-girl casts doubt on Onesimos' recognition hypothesis because she believes that Onesimos' reconstruction of the facts is not rigorous:

**Ἄβρ:** οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην, τὸν ἀδικοῦντα πρὶν [σαφῶς  
τίς ἐστιν εἰδέναι. φοβοῦμαι τοῦτ' ἐγώ,  
μάτην τι μνηύειν<sup>28</sup> πρὸς ἐκείνας ἃς λέγω.  
τίς οἶδεν εἰ καὶ τοῦτον ἐνέχυρον λαβῶν  
τότε τις παρ' αὐτοῦ τῶν παρόντων ἀπέβαλεν  
ἕτερος; κυβεύων τυχὸν ἴσως εἰς συμβολὰς  
ὑπόθημ' ἔδωκ', ἢ συντιθέμενος περὶ τινος  
περιείχετ', εἴτ' ἔδωκεν ἕτερα μυρία  
ἐν τοῖς πότοις τοιαῦτα γίνεσθαι φιλεῖ.  
πρὶν εἰδέναι δὲ τὸν ἀδικοῦντ' οὐ βούλομαι

<sup>25</sup> In Plato, we have a similar use of the word ταραχή as disorder caused by the appearances provided by perception (Pl. R. X, 602c-603b).

<sup>26</sup> Men. Epit. 446-457.

<sup>27</sup> Men. Epit. 471-475.

<sup>28</sup> Adele Scafuro pointed out to me that this particular verb (μνηύειν) is often used in forensic rhetoric: Habrotonon is using rhetorical devices to set up an argument that could persuade Onesimos to abandon his hypothesis and follow hers.

ζητεῖν ἐκείνην οὐδὲ μηνύειν ἐγὼ  
τοιούτων οὐδέεν.

HABROTONON: I couldn't [search for her], before knowing [with certainty] who was the man who used violence on her. I am afraid I would make some declaration in vain to the ladies I mentioned. Who knows, if someone else, among those who were there lost it, after having taken this [ring] from him as a pledge. Maybe, perhaps, he gave it as a pledge into the poll while playing at dice. Or, he was overcome making an agreement with someone and so he gave it away. Thousands of other things like that happen in these drinking sessions. Before knowing who was guilty for the rape I don't want to search for her or say anything like that.<sup>29</sup>

Charisios, she explains, might not be the child's father and might not have raped that girl: he could simply have lost the ring or pledged it to someone else in making an agreement.<sup>30</sup> She suggests a plan for discovering the truth about the entire story. Her intention now is to find out accurately what happened and to avoid making declarations that are not adequately supported by reasons and reliable evidence (μάτην). Instead, she suggests a plan for discovering the truth about the identity of the child's father: the courtesan will pretend she is the raped girl wearing Charisios' ring.<sup>31</sup> "This device presupposes an ἀναγνώρισις through false reasoning (ἐκ παραλογισμοῦ) as well, because the courtesan will pretend that she is the raped girl".<sup>32</sup> Habrotonon thinks that if Charisios is the one guilty of the rape, he will immediately confirm the story and they can obtain the proof for the recognition of the child: namely an ἀναγνώρισις ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ.<sup>33</sup> In this way, after having discovered who the father is, Habrotonon and Onesimos could have searched for the mother calmly.<sup>34</sup> What, in conclusion, Habrotonon provides – and what Onesimos does not – is a reasoned verification of what they seem to have discovered by collecting all the pieces of evidence together: this is what the kithara-girl needs in order to make an accusation on the basis of reliable evidence (and, therefore, not at random, μάτην); constructing from the evidence a form of reasoning that makes sense of the evidence.

The last recognition, which brings the definitive περιπέτεια and λύσις, is made by Habrotonon in the course of Act Four. The recognition is a double ἀναγνώρισις: Habrotonon recognises Pamphile; Pamphile recognises the child.

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<sup>29</sup> Men. *Epir.* 499-509.

<sup>30</sup> For more details see Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 336.

<sup>31</sup> Men. *Epir.* 511-515.

<sup>32</sup> Munteanu 2002, pp. 119.

<sup>33</sup> Men. *Epir.* 516-519.

<sup>34</sup> Men. *Epir.* 536-538.

**Ἄβρ:** αὐτὴ 'στιν [ἦν] ἐό[ρ]ακα· χαῖρε, φιλτάτη.

**Πα:** τί[ς δ' εἶ] σύ;

**Ἄβρ:** χεῖρα δευρό μοι τὴν σὴν δίδου.

λέγε μοι, γλυκεῖα, πέρυσιν ἤ[λθε]ς ἐπὶ θέαν  
τοῖς Ταυροπολίοις εἰ[

**Πα:** γύναι, πόθεν ἔχεις, εἰπέ μοι, τὸ παιδίον  
λαβοῦσα;

**Ἄβρ:** ὄρᾳς τι, φιλτάτη, σοι γνώριμον

ὄν] τοῦτ' ἔχει; μηδέν με δείσῃς, ὦ γύναι.

HABROTONON: (*aside*) She is the girl, I have seen [her]. (*to Pamphile*) Hello dearest!

PAMPHILE: Wh[*o are*] you?

HABROTONON: Here, give me your hand, tell me sweetheart: did you [come] to the performance at the festival of Tauropolia one year ago?

PAMPHILE: Lady, tell me, where did you find the baby?

HABROTONON: Do you see something, dearest, some symbol of recognition [among the things] that this child has? Do not be afraid of me, lady.<sup>35</sup>

Habrotonon recognises Pamphile and seeks a proof of her identity showing her the child and asking her specific questions: she asks whether Pamphile has recognised something familiar looking at the child Habrotonon is holding. Pamphile, having seen the child and his γνώρισματa recognises her son and her guess is immediately confirmed by Habrotonon. Both women understand the situation on the basis of signs of recognition (that is, the appearance of the child and its γνώρισματa), enquiring into their validity and their place in the part of the story that they have knowledge of. The two accounts complete each other.

**Ἄβρ:** προσεποιησάμην,

οὐχ ἴν' ἀδικήσω τὴν τεκοῦσαν, ἀλλ' ἵνα  
κατὰ σχολὴν εὔροιμι. νῦν δ' εὔρηκα· σὲ  
ὄρῶ γάρ, ἦν καὶ τότε.

**Πα:** τίνος δ' ἐστὶν πατρός;

**Ἄβρ:** Χαρισίου.

**Πα:** τοῦτ' οἶσθ' ἀκριβῶς, φιλτάτη;

**Ἄβρ:** εὔ οἱ ἴδ' ἔ[γω]γ'· ἀλλ' οὐ σε τὴν νύμφην ὄρῶ  
τὴν ἔνδον οὔσαν;

<sup>35</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 860-866. See Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 359, for the forms of address in this scene. See also Trail 2008, pp. 228-230.



HABROTONON: I have been pretending [to be his mother] not so as to harm the one who has given birth to him but so that I could find her calmly. Now I have found her, I see you indeed here as I saw you that time.

PAMPHILE: Who is his father?

HABROTONON: He is Charisios’.

PAMPHILE: Do you know this for sure, my dear?

HABROTONON: [I know this well]! [But] am I not seeing his young wife who was in the house before?<sup>36</sup>

This final ἀναγνώριστις brings the happy ending of the play: everything that has happened finds an explanation, consequently, Charisios and Pamphile are reconciled and the identity of the child is revealed. In Menandrian comedies, “the ‘dissolution’ almost always involves the conclusion of a dispute, as if ‘reconciliation’ is the harmonious note on which the playwright must have his players leave the stage: the Aristotelian *lusis* becomes *dialusis*”.<sup>37</sup> However, in the specific case of the *Epitrepontes*, the final recognition that allows the *dialusis* of the whole case is only the last of a long series and it occurs because Habrotonon’s quick-wittedness helps the recognition. Her behaviour is in contrast to that of the rather slow and suspicious Onesimos.<sup>38</sup> The courtesan remembers the circumstances of the rape at the Tauropolia; but she hesitates to link this fact with Charisios’ still hypothetical rape.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, she quickly thinks of a plan to discover the truth with certainty.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, she immediately recognises Pamphile and induces her to look at the baby to recognise him<sup>41</sup> giving her additional information that is meant to match and complete Pamphile’s account. Therefore, Habrotonon is vital to the plot because: i) “Without her knowledge of Pamphile’s rape, the other characters would have only known that the ring had once been Charisios’”<sup>42</sup> and the discovery of the identities of the child and his parents would have not taken place; ii) her lively mind examines pieces of evidence and confirms them with a trustworthy account leading to the true version of the story and reconciliation of Charisios and Pamphile.

The ἀναγνώριστις of the child of Pamphile and Charisios and the identity of its parents are topics that are presented and discussed throughout the whole play. The process of recognition is broken down into several stages and the final recognition through reasoning (ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ) gives meaning to the first recognition through

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<sup>36</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 867-873.

<sup>37</sup> Scafuro 1997, p. 181.

<sup>38</sup> Henry 1985, p. 50.

<sup>39</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 499-509.

<sup>40</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 536-538.

<sup>41</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 865-866.

<sup>42</sup> Henry 1985, p. 53.

tokens (διὰ τῶν σημείων). According to Goldberg, the effect of this extended recognition is “to maximise opportunities for expanding their effect upon his characters while maintaining an underlying unity”.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the function of this process is also to exploit the comic effect of recognition leading the audience to focus on the characters’ various states of misapprehension and their efforts to find the truth.<sup>44</sup> In conclusion, what is clear is that Menander has built a plot i) on the search for a well-grounded knowledge of truth that can finally explain what happened to the characters and ii) on the different degrees of knowledge or ignorance that characters possess.

Confronted by the γνωρίσματα, which constitute empirical evidence, we can see three kinds of cognitive attitude. Smikrines completely ignores the value of the tokens of recognition and fails to understand what is happening around him. Onesimos tries to put the pieces of evidence together; however, he follows a non-rigorous type of reasoning that risks reaching false conclusions. Habrotonon, after having considered all the circumstances, seeks a proof that could validate her reasoning. If my analysis is correct, Menander creates a comic plot by exploiting the interaction between a range of cognitive positions that vary from an inattentive or simplistic approach to empirical evidence to a thoughtful – and consequently successful – analysis of them by a process of reasoning that is able to explain the evidence.<sup>45</sup> What is also interesting is that the whole discovery is completed by a woman, Habrotonon, who is also a courtesan, rather than by the two other male characters involved, Onesimos and Smikrines.<sup>46</sup>

## 2. Notes on recognition in Euripides’ *Electra*

If we look at the structure and themes of *Epitrepontes*, it might be possible to argue that Menander is simply reformulating typical tragic *topoi* in a comic style. Recognition, as Aristotle confirms,<sup>47</sup> is a powerful theatrical device of which Euripides also seems to make use. Indeed, Habrotonon’s reply to Onesimos’ rather simple line of reasoning may look back to the dialogue between Electra and the Old Man in Euripides’ *Electra*, in which the two characters debate about the identity of the people who have come to

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<sup>43</sup> Goldberg 1980, p. 71.

<sup>44</sup> Ireland 1983, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> See Goldberg 1980, p. 69 and also Post 1938, p. 29-33 on Menander’s treatment of individuals and characters with variant perspectives on the action.

<sup>46</sup> See p. 39 and n. 2 above.

<sup>47</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 11, 1452a 29.

Agamemnon's grave leaving behind traces of their visit.<sup>48</sup> As in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*,<sup>49</sup> the Old Man offers Electra three signs to prove that Orestes is the visitor who has come to Agamemnon's grave: the lock of hair matching Electra's hair, the footprints matching those of Electra, and Orestes' clothes that Electra had woven for him. In turn, in what seems to be a pointed comment to the *Choephoroi*,<sup>50</sup> Electra engages in a sceptical point-by-point rejection of the Old Man's arguments, making statement such as:

**Ηλ:** ἔπειτα χαίτης πῶς συνοίσεται πλόκος,  
ὁ μὲν παλαιστραῖς ἀνδρὸς εὐγενοῦς τραφεῖς,  
ὁ δὲ κτενισμοῖς θῆλυς; ἀλλ' ἀμήχανον.  
πολλοῖς δ' ἂν εὖροις βοστρύχους ὁμοπτέρους  
καὶ μὴ γεγῶσιν αἵματος ταυτοῦ, γέρον.

ELECTRA: And then, how can two locks of hair match each other, when one is nurtured in the noble man's wrestling-schools, the other combed and female? No, it's impossible! Anyway, you could find many people with like-coloured locks, even when they are not of the same blood, old man.<sup>51</sup>

Without this piece of dialogue “the recognition will be too simplified and abrupt”.<sup>52</sup> Electra's acknowledgment of the fact that her brother is alive, and that he has visited their father's tomb, requires an extended process of recognition to bring out more clearly the emotional tension involved in this process. Thus, Electra here needs to carry out a point-by-point analysis of the Old Man's arguments about the traces that a stranger could have left in paying his visit to Agamemnon and that the Old Man takes precipitously as signs of recognition of Orestes. “In insisting on paradox, emotional impact and dramatic irony, even at the cost of some implausibility, Euripides is attending to what conventionally made a ‘good’ recognition: for Orestes to declare himself directly is too straightforward, and even the old man's simple task can become the vehicle of a *peripeteia* (‘turnabout’) through Electra's unpreparedness to believe”.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> E. *El.* 527-544.

<sup>49</sup> A. *Ch.* 164-234.

<sup>50</sup> For discussion on this point, see Lloyd-Jones 1961; Winnington-Ingram 1969(a); Gellie 1981, Solmsen 1982; Kovacs 1989; Davies 1998; Raeburn 2000 and Gallagher 2003.

<sup>51</sup> E. *El.* 527-531. All the translations from Euripides' *Electra* are by Cropp 1988 (modified).

<sup>52</sup> Cropp 1988, p. 137. On the importance of props in Greek tragedy see Taplin 1978, ch. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Cropp 1988, p. 134. See Arnott 1973, p. 63, who explains the extended recognition with Euripides' tendency to tease his audience “by laying false clues, by exploiting conventions of tragedy”.

In addition, it is worth noticing that, in Euripides' *Electra*, the value of τεκμήρια,<sup>54</sup> as they appear in the *Choephoroi*, is questioned like that of any other empirical evidence. In fact, when Orestes comes out, his identity is revealed by a scar (οὐλήν) which is a sign of recognition that seems to have the same worth of the other three offered by the old pedagogue. This is another τεκμήριον that can be questioned like the others, but this time Electra will trust its validity.

**Ηλ:** πῶς φήεις; ὀρῶ μὲν πτώματος τεκμήριον.  
**Πρ:** ἔπειτα μέλλεις προσπίτνειν τοῖς φιλάτοις;  
**Ηλ:** ἀλλ' οὐκέτ', ὃ γεραιέ· συμβόλοισι γὰρ  
τοῖς σοῖς πέπεισμαι θυμόν. ὃ χρόνοι φανείς,  
 ἔχω σ' ἀέλπτως

ELECTRA: What do you mean? I do see the sign of a fall...

OLD MAN: And then are slow to embrace your dearest one?

ELECTRA: No, old man, no longer. My heart is convinced by your signs. Oh, at long last you appear; I hold you as I never hoped to.<sup>55</sup>

The idea may be that to recognise someone – or to get to know something – is an exceedingly difficult process that may have no positive outcome. Empirical evidence can be deceptive,<sup>56</sup> empirical signs all have the same worth, what counts is the ability to use them in order to produce persuasion.<sup>57</sup> In the end, the Old Man's σύμβολα will change Electra's mind: the last sign of recognition, coming on top of the other signs, has finally persuaded her, “πέπεισμαι θυμόν”, she says.<sup>58</sup> This process holds true even though the person to be recognised is Orestes and we know from the myth that the recognition between brother and sister will eventually happen one way or another.

The line of thought that Euripides seems to be suggesting here can be confirmed by another passage from the *Electra*:

**Ορ:** φεῦ·  
οὐκ ἔστ' ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν εἰς εὐανδρίαν·  
ἔχουσι γὰρ παραγμὸν αἱ φύσεις βροτῶν.

<sup>54</sup> A. Ch. 205.

<sup>55</sup> E. El. 575-579.

<sup>56</sup> Wright 2005, p. 285.

<sup>57</sup> On the use of rhetorical techniques in Euripides' *Electra*, with particular reference to the passages quoted here see Goldhill 1986(b); Mossman 2001 and Quijada 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Indeed Electra at line 577 states that she is eventually persuaded by the σύμβολα that the old man provided to identify Orestes. “The plural is rather strange here. Perhaps Electra means, somewhat illogically, though naturally, that she is convinced not only by the scar, but by the other signs that she has rejected” (Dennistion 1939, p. 122).

ἤδη γὰρ εἶδον ἄνδρα γενναίου πατρὸς  
τὸ μηδὲν ὄντα, χρηστὰ δ' ἐκ κακῶν τέκνα,  
λιμόν τ' ἐν ἀνδρὸς πλουσίου φρονήματι,  
γνώμην δὲ μεγάλην ἐν πένητι σώματι.  
[πῶς οὖν τις αὐτὰ διαλαβὼν ὀρθῶς κρινεῖ;]

ORESTES: Well! Nothing is clear-cut when it comes to virtue. There is confusion in the nature of men. Before now, I have seen a man of no account sprung from a noble father, and good children from inferior parents; I have seen vacuousness in the thinking of a rich man, and a great mind in the body of a poor one. [How then can a man correctly distinguish and rate them?]<sup>59</sup>

Orestes says here that there is no accurate (ἀκριβὲς) criterion to determine someone's εὐανδρίαν. Wealth, poverty, family relationships are visible signs (σύμβολα) that do not disclose the truth about someone's character and cannot be trusted to find the truth. Orestes seems again to be suggesting the fallibility of empirical evidence as a way of revealing how things really stand, and who someone really is.

Thus, it is possible that, in Orestes' recognition scene in *Electra*, Euripides is not just satirising Aeschylus' play:<sup>60</sup> he is perhaps reflecting on a famous process of recognition, revising the myth and modifying it to bring up new questions. For instance, he highlights the difficulty of getting to know something clearly, or, perhaps, the relationship between reality and illusion and between ignorance or knowledge.<sup>61</sup> It is indeed plausible to think that Euripides' interests were different from Aeschylus', and his use of metatheatre<sup>62</sup> or metamythology<sup>63</sup> may have served the purpose of leading the audience to focus on a different set of ideas. In the two passages quoted, Euripides seems to be particularly interested in the gap between appearance and reality: pieces of empirical evidence or sensory experience all have the same worth both in the context of Orestes' recognition process and as criteria for identifying someone as having a noble or wicked nature. The question of how to interpret these scenes, and what dramatic ideas they reflect in Euripides, goes beyond my concerns here. My main focus is in the more limited question of how Menander's use of similar material, in the *Epitrepontes*, brings out significant differences of aims in his dramatic composition. However, some further

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<sup>59</sup> E. *El.* 367-373. At 373 διαλαμβάνω is a 'method of logical division' Denniston 1939, *ad loc.*

<sup>60</sup> Goldhill 1986(a), p. 247-250.

<sup>61</sup> Wright 2005. See also Reinhardt 2003.

<sup>62</sup> As defined by Abel 1963, metatheatre is a conscious self-reference, a dramatic device whereby a play comments on itself, drawing attention to the literal circumstances of its own production, such as the presence of the audience or the fact that the actors are actors, and thus making explicit the literary artifice behind the production.

<sup>63</sup> Wright 2005, p. 135.

suggestions can be made about Euripides, which may be helpful in thinking about the dramatic representation of recognition processes in fifth- and fourth-century BC drama.

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that the way in which Menander presents the recognition process in the *Epitrepontes* seems to suggest ideas that show analogies with Aristotle's thought on comparable topics. Similarly, we can suggest that the interpretation of the recognition scene in Euripides' *Electra* can gain deeper significance if read in the light of Euripides' contemporary intellectual context.<sup>64</sup> Euripides questions the Aeschylean τεκμήρια that figure in the *Electra* at the beginning of Orestes' recognition and he replaces them with another τεκμήριον that concludes the recognition. This procedure recalls, at least in its overall structure, Gorgias' procedure in the *Ἑλένης ἐγκώμιον* or in the *Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ περὶ φύσεως*.<sup>65</sup> In these treatises Gorgias engages in the exercise of challenging an Eleatic philosophical position,<sup>66</sup> or popular ideas about a well-known myth, by offering another philosophical position or opinion that is extremely well argued but even more questionable. Underlying this exercise there seems to be a specific philosophical position: the world is not rational nor fully intelligible. We may not be able to find out clearly what is true, what is real, and what is not because maybe there is no objective knowledge of reality to understand rationally. The only thing we can do, as human beings, is to accept this fact and use words to make up our own opinion about reality according to the ever-changing circumstances. Words or discourse, λόγος, create deception (ἀπάτη) and, responding to the opportunities given by the specific situation, persuade people that one point of view or other is more credible than others.

We can find in Gorgias and Euripides an analogous system of oppositions: knowledge *versus* opinion; truth *versus* deception and the importance of persuasion. For instance, in the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias begins his apology of Helen by saying that he wants to reveal that the opinion that people holds of her is false and deceptive and that a more credible point of view should be disclosed to free people from their false opinion. In order to do that, he says, he will not put forward facts or empirical evidence, but, rather, he will use words organised in a series of persuasive arguments.

ἐγὼ δὲ βούλομαι λογισμὸν τινα τοῖσι λόγοισι δοῦναι τὴν μὲν κακῶς ἀκούουσαν παῦσαι τῆς αἰτίας, τοὺς δὲ μεμφομένους ψευδομένους ἐπιδείξας καὶ δείξας τᾶληθές [ἦ] παῦσαι τῆς ἀμαθίας.

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<sup>64</sup> On this topic see mainly Goldhill 1986(a), ch. 9; Allan 2000; Reinhart 2003 and Wright 2005, ch. 4.

<sup>65</sup> For comparison between the structure of Gorgias' treatises and the recognition scene in Euripides' *Electra* see Müller 2000.

<sup>66</sup> Specifically Melissus' *Περὶ φύσεως ἢ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος*. For further explanation of the title and aims of Gorgias' treatise, see Untersteiner 1949, pp. 177-180; Gagarin 1997 and Curd 2006.

For my part, by introducing some reasoning into my speech, I wish to free the accused from blame and, having reproved her detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free her from [their] ignorance.<sup>67</sup>

Facts are misleading, what we see is misleading:<sup>68</sup> bodies and objects that we see may be just appearances. What produces persuasion about a state of affairs is λόγος.<sup>69</sup> λόγος has the power of persuading people about a certain version of the story which may be opposite, or different, from the opinion that they initially held.

ὅσοι δὲ ὅσους περὶ ὅσων καὶ ἔπεισαν καὶ πείθουσι δὲ ψευδῆ λόγον πλάσαντες. εἰ μὲν γὰρ πάντες περὶ πάντων εἶχον τῶν <τε> παροιχομένων μνήμην τῶν τε παρόντων <ἐννοίαν> τῶν τε μελλόντων πρόνοιαν, οὐκ ἂν ὁμοίως ὁμοίος ἦν ὁ λόγος, οἷς τὰ νῦν γε οὔτε μνησθῆναι τὸ παροιχόμενον οὔτε σκέψασθαι τὸ παρὸν οὔτε μαντεύσασθαι τὸ μέλλον εὐπόρως ἔχει· ὥστε περὶ τῶν πλείστων οἱ πλείστοι τὴν δόξαν σύμβουλον τῆι ψυχῇ παρέχονται. ἡ δὲ δόξα σφαλερὰ καὶ ἀβέβαιος οὔσα σφαλεραῖς καὶ ἀβεβαίαις εὐτυχίαις περιβάλλει τοὺς αὐτῆι χρωμένους.

How many people have and do persuade people of things by moulding a false argument! For if all men on all subjects had both memory of things past and <awareness> of things present and foreknowledge of the future, speech would not be equally similar since as things are now it is not easy for them to recall the past nor to consider the present nor to predict the future. So on most subjects most men take opinion as counsellor to their soul, but since opinion is slippery and insecure it casts those relying on them into slippery and insecure success.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, it turns out that nothing is stable, not even arguments: λόγος is also deceptive as it just gives the appearance of what is actually the case. Gorgias' speech can be challenged by other speeches that are equally persuasive.<sup>71</sup> The function of λόγος seems to be, therefore, not only aesthetic but also metaphysical: arguments do not only describe a possible version of the story, one way of seeing the external world; they also create one.<sup>72</sup> Knowledge of this version of the external world is provided by discourse itself and it remains valid for the length of the discourse by which it is created. Consequently, there is no objective criterion for judging someone or something; a well-

<sup>67</sup> Gorg. *Hel.* 2, 10-11 all the translations of Gorgias' *Encomium* are by Kennedy in Kent Sprague 1972 (modified).

<sup>68</sup> Gorg. *Hel.* 18, 113-118.

<sup>69</sup> Gorg. *Hel.* 9.

<sup>70</sup> Gorg. *Hel.* 11, 64-72.

<sup>71</sup> Gorg. *Hel.* 1. See Coinsigny 2001, p.80

<sup>72</sup> “εἰ δὲ λόγος ὁ πείσας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπατήσας” Gorg. *Hel.* 8, 1. “Gorgia comprese l'essenza una, metafisica ed estetica a un tempo, del fenomeno poetico, quando gli attribui come fattore fondamentale il motivo dell' ἀπάτη accettandone in tal modo l'irrazionalità con la necessità di imporla e rispettivamente di accoglierla: così facendo, egli riconobbe quella molteplicità contraddittoria del reale che, di volta in volta, solleva a validità il momento voluto da καιρός. Poesia è, dunque, confessione della non razionalità del mondo” (Untersteiner 1949, p. 142). See also Noël 1998, p. 235 and Consigny 2001, ch. 2.

constructed discourse could be as persuasive as another as a man is the sole judge of his own sensations and beliefs.<sup>73</sup> My suggestion is that the recognition scene in the *Electra* gains new significance if considered from this perspective.

More importantly we can identify significantly different intellectual concerns from those that underlie Menander's *Epitrepontes*. At the beginning of this section I mentioned that, in Euripides' *Electra*, the expansion of the process of identification of Orestes and the inquiry into the reliability of the recognition-tokens resembles the presentation of the long enquiry carried out by Onesimos and Habrotonon in the *Epitrepontes*. However, in Euripides' *Electra*, pieces of evidence, σύμβολα, and the reasoning attached to them, are appearances and might be deceptive; they are not a secure criterion for reconstructing how things really are and who people are. Menander, in the *Epitrepontes*, draws the attention of his audience to a different set of issues. When Menander gives his own interpretation of a dramatic recognition process, he seems to have in mind a clear view of how this process needs to unfold and what are the steps of the reasoning that will bring about the final understanding successfully. In the *Epitrepontes*, empirical evidence is questioned because characters are not able to interpret this evidence by a rationally rigorous process of reasoning: for instance, tokens of recognition are not questioned thoroughly by Onesimos and Smikrines. In the *Epitrepontes*, tokens are important pieces of evidence but characters must be able to use them adequately to find out the truth. This is not the impression we have in Euripides' *Electra*, or at least, this does not seem to be the issue at the core of Orestes' recognition. In Menander's play, as discussed here, Habrotonon is not questioning the importance of γνωρίσματα in order to replace them with other pieces of evidence that are equally questionable. She is constructing a chain of reasoning to explain those γνωρίσματα in a more comprehensive and rigorous manner as she knows that there is a true version of the story that needs to be found out. Furthermore, she uses a specific language of inference and deduction that is very close to that used by contemporary philosophical thought of the time, as will be shown in the next section of this chapter. Thus, she displays an attitude in constructing a reliable version of the story that can be contrasted with Smikrines or Onesimos who do not reason or, rather, are in danger of reasoning inadequately on the basis of tokens of recognition. This is what Menander seem to stress

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<sup>73</sup> See DK 80 A 21 where Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, gives an account of Protagoras' point of view. "The personal nature of our sensations did not mean that all perceptible properties coexist in an external object but I perceive some and you perceive others. It meant rather that they have no objective existence, but come to be as they are perceived, and for the percipient" (Guthrie 1971, p. 267).



when he construct his extended recognition in the *Epitrepontes* and this is why I have included comparative discussion of Euripides' *Electra* here.

### 3. *Grasping the sense*

As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1), the late fifth century BC introduces some important changes in the history of epistemology. First Socrates, followed by Plato and Aristotle, inaugurate critical and systematic reflection on issues related to knowledge and the scope or limits of human understanding. They start questioning how we acquire the basic contents of our mind, how understanding is possible and what are the starting-points of the knowledge that we have of our world. The general picture conveyed by the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition is that the world has an intelligible structure, and that things are organised in a way that is not random but follows a rational order and human beings have the potentiality to know the truth about it.<sup>74</sup> This process of understanding is not always easy; the steps of the rational reasoning that one should follow to achieve a complete grasp of this order are subject to errors and misunderstandings. Plato and Aristotle also start inquiring into these questions: they start questioning how error or doubt are possible, what are the thought-processes that shape our (right or wrong) understanding; what are the cognitive capacities of our soul and what is their role in the formation of (right or wrong) understanding. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 1, in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, to understand something adequately implies understanding the comprehensive order that explains and makes sense of our beliefs. Seeing, touching, hearsay, inferring, understanding, believing, proving and having an intuition are not seen as being the same thing as knowing.<sup>75</sup> To know is not just to perceive, or to have a belief; it is to understand and reason about what we perceive or believe.<sup>76</sup> We necessarily start our inquiry from the sensible objects available to us. We are provided with senses, perceptions and beliefs arising from these: the issue is how to evaluate this sensory experience and how to reach a comprehensive understanding of the rational order that explains it.

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<sup>74</sup> Tuominen 2007, pp. 155-156. See also Lear 1988 and Everson 1990.

<sup>75</sup> Brunschwig 2003, pp. 18-38.

<sup>76</sup> "To know is to understand, that is, to bring back together [...] to organise experience according to the structure that belongs to reality, to bring to speech the reason that governs things. To know a single thing is not to know it; taken to the extreme there is no knowledge but total knowledge, and no knowledge but knowledge of everything. [...] Not until Aristotle does the principle of a total science begin to give way to the idea that a science is a structured set of statements bearing on entities that belong to a specific class and to that class alone" (Brunschwig 2003, pp. 29).

I will now focus on Aristotle's approach to these questions and analyse his account of how we reach complete understanding. Aristotle's view of the process of getting to know something is broadly similar to what I have attributed to Menander in the first section of this chapter. Earlier I showed that Menander created a type of comic plot in which the characters' perception alone was not enough to make sense of the whole story: a rational account was needed to comprehend what people happened to perceive, and specific skills were necessary to construct this account successfully. In Aristotle we can find a similar set of ideas. My analysis here will focus on two points. First, I will discuss Aristotle's treatment of the role of sensory perception and empirical evidence considered as forming part of a comprehensive understanding. The framework that maintains our understanding is supported by two distinctive ἀρχαί. Both of them represent what is more "knowable" (γνωριμώτερα) in two different and opposite respects that are, nevertheless, necessarily<sup>77</sup> dependent on each other. What we know better, particulars in the world, need to be explained by what we *would have* to know better, if we had complete knowledge (i.e. understanding) of universal principles of the intelligible structure of the world – and of our language – that we can potentially grasp<sup>78</sup> in part through our sensations.<sup>79</sup> Secondly, I will stress the idea that, in Aristotle's account, a successful process of understanding requires a particular attitude or, more precisely, trained intellectual skills, in order to achieve the kind of understanding that can make sense of what is around us. Aristotle's approach to understanding starts from experience but is nevertheless not as gradual as it might seem: understanding requires i) an *attitude* aiming at recollecting our observational beliefs appropriately and ii) making sense of these in a complete comprehension of our world.

Aristotle describes human access to understanding as a natural and gradual process. First of all, it is a natural process because rational human beings naturally desire (ὀρέγονται) to acquire information about things in their world. Indeed, it seems that we love (ἀγαπῶνται)<sup>80</sup> our sensations precisely because they show us things and, therefore, enable us to start getting acquainted (ποιεῖ γνωρίζειν)<sup>81</sup> with them. Moreover, our desire to know is, in principle, not directed to any practical aim: we love our sensations also independently of their practical benefits.<sup>82</sup> Secondly, human access to

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<sup>77</sup> Sorabji 1980, pp. 85-208.

<sup>78</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 1, 71a; Barnes 1994 and Ross 1949 *ad loc.*

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Top.* I 12, 105a17-18; *Top.* II 7, 113a31-32; *APo.* I 18, 81b5-6; *APo.* I 31, 88a14-15; *APo.* II 19, 99b37-40; *APo.* II 19, 100a4-9; *APo.* II 19, 100b3-4.

<sup>80</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 980a22.

<sup>81</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 980a26.

<sup>82</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 980a22.

knowledge is gradual. Starting from sensation (αἴσθησις) and moving through memory (μνήμη), experience (ἐμπειρία) and art (τέχνη), a rational being can achieve an overall grasp of all the scattered pieces of information that he receives from the outside world.<sup>83</sup> However, this kind of knowledge is not yet wisdom (σοφία). We exercise wisdom when we understand (ἐπίστασθαι)<sup>84</sup> the causes and principles of what we get to know randomly.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Aristotle explains further that the sciences (ἐπιστήμαι) were discovered (εὑρέθησαν) subsequently to all these disciplines necessary for everyday life. In particular, they were cultivated by people who were free from practical activities and who had time (σχολή)<sup>86</sup> for speculative investigation.

In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle gives a description of what it is to understand something, that is to say ‘ἐπίστασθαι’, and he also gives some examples of how this process might develop or might go wrong. The *Posterior Analytics* confirms the idea that ἐπιστήμη implies the ability of our mind to collect and recollect acquired beliefs and to sum them up by grasping their significance. The transition from arts to science centres precisely on this ability to grasp, which seems not to be present in everyone. It seems to me that even though the results of understanding are epistemologically secure (i.e. true in an objective sense) the process of getting there is neither secure nor guaranteed: we might not understand even though we have the potentiality to do that; we might lack the right understanding of our world even if this understanding is in principle available.

It is worth pointing out that we face comparable features in the field of Aristotle’s ethics (as will be discussed in Chapter 3). When, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines virtue as a mean, he specifies that the mean varies according to us and according to the particular variables involved in our decision.<sup>87</sup> However, for each circumstance there is a standard of the mean set by those whose judgment is correct and who are virtuous.<sup>88</sup> This is why according to Aristotle it is so difficult to understand what the right mean is in any circumstance.<sup>89</sup> This is why we need time and exercise to sharpen our ethical understanding. Analogously, in the field of epistemology, a complete understanding of the principles that organise our world is possible if we make good use of our cognitive abilities: after the arts, the sciences were discovered by those

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<sup>83</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 980b1-981b20.

<sup>84</sup> The translation of ἐπίστασθαι as “to understand” follows Burnyeat 1981.

<sup>85</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 982a1-3.

<sup>86</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 981b20-23.

<sup>87</sup> Arist. *EN* II 5, 1106a26-b23.

<sup>88</sup> For full discussion of this topic see Chappell 2005.

<sup>89</sup> Arist. *EN* II 9, 1109b14-26.

few people who had time for intellectual exercise<sup>90</sup> and grasped the significance that the others lacked.

### 3.1 *Understanding and missing understanding*

As specified, in this chapter, I will address issue related to processes of understanding in relation to Aristotle's philosophy. Nevertheless, I believe that Plato's mature works present a set of ideas that is worth considering in this context as they present an understanding of the relationship between perceptions and knowledge that Aristotle will discuss later and, to a certain extent, challenge. In *Republic* book X, we are told that perception presents us with divergent and contrasting appearances.<sup>91</sup> To cope with this disorder (*ταραχή*), we are equipped with the ability to calculate, measure and assess what the senses suggest. If we exercise this ability, we will be able to judge what things really are. Therefore, it seems that, according to Plato, perception just suggests lines of inquiry that the rational part of the soul must then judge.<sup>92</sup> This treatment of perception is consistent with a comparable passage in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>93</sup> In this dialogue, Socrates and Theaetetus inquire about knowledge and its sources and this particular passage appears as the last argument against the idea, suggested by Theaetetus, that knowledge is perception. Theaetetus has just stated that we perceive something and we judge it to be in a certain way (black and white; sharp or bass) because our sense organs give us an account of what surrounds us: we perceive something because we see, touch and hear things – and that is knowledge. However, the idea suggested by Theaetetus, as Socrates says, generates some difficulties. Perceptions come from various kinds of sources (things that we can hear, touch, see or smell) and they generate different sensations through different sense organs: according to Theaetetus, this is how we perceive (that is, to Theaetetus' mind, how we know). Socrates' objection is that this kind of account is not really plausible and that it does not actually explain how perception works: we do not become aware of what surrounds us by experiencing individual, scattered and diverse sensations.<sup>94</sup> We should suppose instead that there is a unitary subject that can collect different sensations coming from different sense organs and judge them: this is

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<sup>90</sup> See Burnyeat 1981, p. 131.

<sup>91</sup> Pl. *R.* X, 602c-603b.

<sup>92</sup> Burnyeat 1976, p. 43.

<sup>93</sup> Pl. *Tht.* 184d-185d. See Cornford 1935; Cooper 1970 and Burnyeat 1976.

<sup>94</sup> Pl. *Tht.* 184d-e.

presented by Socrates as a more plausible account of how we perceive and assess our perceptions,<sup>95</sup> though it still remains to be determined whether this offers a correct account of what understanding consists in.<sup>96</sup> In any case, the relevant point of this passage is that we perceive through our senses but with the soul that is equipped to use their evidence: in other words, what Socrates shows is that “there is something in us, the soul, which can think and reason about what we perceive”.<sup>97</sup> In Plato, this is not yet understanding, it is perception and perception is described as interpretation through one’s mind, of diverse sense data.

In Aristotle’s account, instead, perception and the soul’s ability to interpret sense data are given a larger and more integral role in the process of understanding.

Φανερόν δὲ καὶ ὅτι, εἴ τις αἴσθησις ἐκλείπειν, ἀνάγκη καὶ ἐπιστήμην τινὰ ἐκλείπειναι, ἢν ἀδύνατον λαβεῖν, εἴπερ μανθάνομεν ἢ ἐπαγωγῇ ἢ ἀποδείξει, ἔστι δ' ἢ μὲν ἀποδείξεις ἐκ τῶν καθόλου, ἢ δ' ἐπαγωγὴ ἐκ τῶν κατὰ μέρος, ἀδύνατον δὲ τὰ καθόλου θεωρῆσαι μὴ δι' ἐπαγωγῆς [...] ἐπαχθῆναι δὲ μὴ ἔχοντας αἴσθησιν ἀδύνατον. τῶν γὰρ καθ' ἕκαστον ἢ αἴσθησις· οὐ γὰρ ἐνδέχεται λαβεῖν αὐτῶν τὴν ἐπιστήμην· οὔτε γὰρ ἐκ τῶν καθόλου ἄνευ ἐπαγωγῆς, οὔτε δι' ἐπαγωγῆς ἄνευ τῆς αἰσθήσεως.

It is clear too that if some perception is wanting, some understanding must also be wanting – [understanding] which is impossible to get if we learn either by induction or by demonstration, demonstration depend[ing] on universals and induction on particulars; but it is impossible to study universals except through induction [...], and it is impossible to make an induction without having perception (for particulars are grasped by perception). [So] it is not possible to get understanding of these items – either from universals without induction or through induction without perception.<sup>98</sup>

This paragraph follows the discussion of the various possible ways in which ignorance – more specifically, error through deduction – might arise within syllogistic reasoning.<sup>99</sup> According to the lines just quoted, an important factor that influences ἐπιστήμη is perception. Ross comments on this passage that “the whole matter is that sense-perception is the necessary starting point for science”.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, universals are only

<sup>95</sup> Cooper 1970, p. 123. See also Cornford 1935.

<sup>96</sup> In Pl. *Th.* 186b-c the argument that perception is knowledge is eventually rejected.

<sup>97</sup> Burnyeat 1976, p. 49. See Pl. *Th.* 184d1-184e1.

<sup>98</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 18, 81a38-b9. On this particular passage, see Barnes 1994, p. 168. With reference to the interpretation of these difficult lines, see Mignucci who states that, ‘ἔστι’, here, as frequently in Aristotle, means ‘it is possible’. On the other hand the sentence “ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως λεγόμενα ἔσται δι' ἐπαγωγῆς γνώριμα ποιεῖν” (that is omitted in my text), because it is introduced by ἐπεὶ, seems to start the explanation of the sentence “ἀδύνατον δὲ τὰ καθόλου θεωρῆσαι μὴ δι' ἐπαγωγῆς”. However, it is clear that to say that *it is possible* that τὰ ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως λεγόμενα are known through induction, does not prove that is *impossible* to get to know the universal principles of science without induction as it is said before “ἀδύνατον δὲ τὰ καθόλου θεωρῆσαι μὴ δι' ἐπαγωγῆς” (Mignucci 1975, p. 384).

<sup>99</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 16, 79b23- 81a37.

<sup>100</sup> Ross 1949, p. 566.

grasped by induction and induction starts from particulars – and sense-perception is about particulars. Therefore, sense-perception provides the basis of ἐπιστήμη because it is the starting point of induction.<sup>101</sup> The assumption is that we can understand universal principles of ἐπιστήμη only after passing through a series of empirical experiences from which we should be able to form a systematic and synoptic view.<sup>102</sup> Universal principles of ἐπιστήμη constitute what is primary, indemonstrable, immediate, causative, and explanatory.

αἰτία τε καὶ γνωριμώτερα δεῖ εἶναι καὶ πρότερα, αἰτία μὲν ὅτι τότε ἐπιστάμεθα ὅταν τὴν αἰτίαν εἰδῶμεν, καὶ πρότερα, εἴπερ αἰτία, καὶ προγινωσκόμενα οὐ μόνον τὸν ἕτερον τρόπον τῷ ξυνιέναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ εἰδέναί ὅτι ἔστιν.

[The items from which demonstrative understanding proceeds] must be explanatory and more familiar and prior – explanatory because we only understand something when we know its explanation, and, prior, if they are explanatory and we already know them not only in the sense of having insight into them but also of knowing that they are the case.<sup>103</sup>

What is prior and more knowable by nature (γνωριμώτερος φύσει) depends on our perceptions and what is closest to them; that is, what is more knowable to us (γνωριμώτερος πρὸς ἡμᾶς).<sup>104</sup> In this way Aristotle undoubtedly confers an important role on perception and experience. Understanding emerges when we start to take a more global view of objects that we have experienced; this global view needs to be consolidated by understanding of causes and principles.<sup>105</sup> The process seems to be two-fold: in order to understand something, we should move from perception of particulars to universals and from universals to particulars. The aim is to reconstruct an intelligible structure of the world through an understanding of the causes of events in the world.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> See Bolton 1990 who shows a tendency to a more empiricist reading of Aristotle. “Aristotle does not take ordinary perceptual judgments to be in principle or in general unrevisable (*De Anima* III 3, 428 b18-25). This is compatible, however, with his general assignment of final epistemic authority in science to perceptual over theoretical beliefs (*De Caelo* III 7, 306a13-17) [...]. It follows from the doctrine that revision must always be made by reference to what is most intelligible to us, together with the doctrine that what is most intelligible to us is always closest to perception. In this respect there is a kind of foundationalist empiricist element in Aristotle’s theory of justification both in science and in pre-rastoric dialectic generally” (Bolton 1990, p. 236).

<sup>102</sup> Burneyat 1981, p. 112.

<sup>103</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 2, 71b29-33.

<sup>104</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 2, 71b34-72 a6.

<sup>105</sup> See Mansion 1984: “Notre connaissance commence par une saisie globale des objets soumis à notre expérience, saisie qui aura à se *préciser* ensuite en faisant dans la masse confuse des données les distinctions nécessaires” (Mansion 1984, p. 165).

<sup>106</sup> See Mansion 1984 and Tuominen 2007.

However, what we can call Aristotle's epistemological 'realism' presents, at this stage, two difficulties. The first problem concerns the possibility of error in interpreting perceptions. In the *De Anima* Aristotle states that perception is never wrong;<sup>107</sup> however, error is possible. This is because the reasoning based on this primary data can lead to wrong conclusions. We find evidence of this also in the *Posterior Analytics* where ignorance is described as the product of error during the process of syllogistic reasoning.

Ἄγνοια δ' ἢ μὴ κατ' ἀπόφασιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ διάθεσιν λεγομένη ἔστι μὲν ἢ διὰ συλλογισμοῦ γινομένη ἀπάτη.

Ignorance, that is called such not in virtue of a negative state but in virtue of a disposition, is error arising from reasoning.<sup>108</sup>

This is quite an important point if we consider that to reason is the crucial key characteristic of being human. Apparently, then we do not just perceive but we also constantly form opinions about what we perceive.

Moreover, we usually share our reasoning with other members of the community in order to improve our thoughts by mutual interchange: "If the person does not speak he ceases to be one of us and we are not required to take account of him. If he does speak, we can urge him to take a close look at his linguistic practices and what they rest on. In doing this we are giving him the *paideia* he lacks, a kind of initiation into the way we do things".<sup>109</sup> This is why the one who possesses more wisdom is the one who has properly understood the causes of what it is and is also able to teach others about it.<sup>110</sup> This implies that fallacious reasoning might have great significance not just for our understanding but for that of the whole community.

As human beings we are provided with tools: reason, perception, memory, a life of experience. Nevertheless, we may fail when we try to attach significance to our perceptions; namely, we may miss the understanding of what is more knowable by nature, namely universals, which is also what we should understand in order to have

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<sup>107</sup> Arist. *De An.* III 3, 427b11-14. "Sense organs do not add any contribution of their own to the effects caused by perceptible object. In relation to their objects, senses are never mistaken [...]. Aristotle, however, does not claim that perceptual error is impossible. He only says that perceptions are highly reliable and that typically in the case of perceptual error we can find an explanation why the error occurred" (Tuominen 2007, p. 173-174).

<sup>108</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 16, 79b23-24.

<sup>109</sup> Nussbaum 1982, p. 285 commenting on Arist. *Metaph.* Γ 4, 1006a13-15. Looking also at the ethical works, in Arist. *Pol.* I 2, 1253a9-15, language (λόγος) is exclusive to man, since only man can use this tool to discuss and define what is good and what is bad, what is virtuous and what is not. I will explore the relevance of this topic to ethics in Chapter 5.

<sup>110</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* A 1, 982a12-14.

ἐπιστήμη.<sup>111</sup> Secondly, perception might just be lacking. We might not have empirical data to start our inquiry. Luck is a potent agent that can hide particulars and this happens also in the realm of ethics: we might not know particulars related to our practical decision-making.<sup>112</sup> In this case we should respond with pity and forgiveness, since we may suppose that the reasoning behind the unfortunate choice could have been, in theory, virtuous. However, a lack of knowledge might lead to the wrong decision and the performing of a ἁμάρτημα.<sup>113</sup> In the same way, according to the passage quoted at the beginning, missing a perception of a single particular can lead to a complete misunderstanding of the nature of things. Going back to Menander, the happy ending following the final understanding of the whole story might not occur if a particular, such as a ring, is missed, or if precipitous reasoning leads to a mistaken recognition.

### 3.2 Grasping and missing the grasp

I would now like to discuss how, after having fully grasped sense data, it is still possible to fail in understanding something properly. I would like to analyse this point looking at the verbs that describe this further and final step.

The principal ingredients in Aristotle's vocabulary of knowledge are the three verbs *eidenai*, *gignōskein*, and *epistasthai*, together with the cognate nouns *gnōsis* and *epistēmē*. Aristotle also uses *gnōrizein* (*gnōrimos*, "familiar" [...]), *sunienai*, and *echein* (as general as "have" in English, but translated as "grasp" in its epistemological use).<sup>114</sup>

Several studies have been made of the meaning and use of the first three verbs: it seems that, in the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle uses them to describe different kinds of knowledge in a way that makes these terms not amenable to substitution by each other.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, γνῶριζειν has often been discussed with reference to the cognate comparative or superlative adjectives. I shall discuss the meaning of γνῶριζειν after clarifying that of γιγνώσκειν and ἐπίστασθαι.

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<sup>111</sup> Taylor 1990, p. 126.

<sup>112</sup> Arist. *EN* III 2, 1110b18-1111a2. The relevance of this feature of Aristotle's theory of causation will be explained further in Chapter 4.

<sup>113</sup> Arist. *EN* V 10, 1135b12.

<sup>114</sup> Barnes 1994, p. 82.

<sup>115</sup> Barnes 1994, p. 82; See also Burnyeat 1981 and Moravcsik 1974. On the use of these verbs in Plato, see Lyons 1963, p. 177.



In an article published in 1981,<sup>116</sup> Burnyeat clarified the difference between *γινώσκειν* and *ἐπίστασθαι* in the terminology of *Posterior Analytics*. *γινώσκειν* could be translated as ‘to know’ whereas, for *ἐπίστασθαι*, ‘to understand’ would be a better translation. With this translation, *γινώσκειν* would keep its epistemological validity but it is differentiated from *ἐπίστασθαι*. *ἐπίστασθαι* is not just *γινώσκειν*: it indicates the ability to explain what we get to know and to understand the reasons and principles according to which something is such as we understand it. However, the first difficulty with this account is the fact that Aristotle gives a definition of *ἐπίστασθαι* by means of the verb *γινώσκειν*.

Ἐπίστασθαι δὲ οἴομεθ' ἕκαστον ἀπλῶς, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸν σοφιστικὸν τρόπον τὸν κατὰ συμβεβηκός, ὅταν τὴν τ' αἰτίαν οἴομεθα γινώσκειν δι' ἣν τὸ πρᾶγμα ἐστίν, ὅτι ἐκείνου αἰτία ἐστὶ, καὶ μὴ ἐνδέχεσθαι τοῦτ' ἄλλως ἔχειν. δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι τοιοῦτόν τι τὸ ἐπίστασθαι ἐστίν.

We think we understand something *simpliciter* (and not in the sophistic way, incidentally) when we think we know the cause for which a thing is [as such], that it is its cause, and also that it is not possible for it to be otherwise. It is plain then that to understand is something of this sort.<sup>117</sup>

Barnes recognises that this explanation “would avoid circularity only if ‘understand’ (*epistasthai*) and ‘know’ (here *gignoskein*) are kept apart in sense”.<sup>118</sup> Burnyeat quotes the same passage as evidence to show the difference in meaning between *ἐπίστασθαι* and *γινώσκειν*.<sup>119</sup> However, if the difference in meaning implies a difference between a richer and a more basic concept of knowledge,<sup>120</sup> the quoted passage would mean that *ἐπιστήμη* would be possible only through a less complete kind of understanding (that is, *γινώσκειν*). Consequently, it seems that *ἐπιστήμη* is needed to “turn something *which is already knowledge* into that type of knowledge secured by understanding”.<sup>121</sup> This remark would explain the distinction between the two senses in which things are more knowable (i.e. for us and by nature) and it implies that Aristotle admits the possibility of, at least, two levels of knowledge that are, nevertheless, both *γνῶσις*.

[...] the celebrated and all-pervasive distinction between what is more knowable or familiar in the order of nature and what is more knowable or familiar to us is intended quite literally. It points not only to a natural order of explanation – an order of explanation which is not relative to the knowledge and needs of

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<sup>116</sup> Burnyeat 1981.

<sup>117</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 2, 71b9-14.

<sup>118</sup> Barnes 1994, p. 90.

<sup>119</sup> Burnyeat 1981, p. 106.

<sup>120</sup> Burnyeat 1981, p. 108.

<sup>121</sup> Burnyeat 1981, p. 132 (my emphasis).

particular persons – but also, in view of the remarks about conviction which comes from a grasp of first principles and the man whose conviction must rank as knowledge (γνῶσις).<sup>122</sup>

This conclusion will help the comprehension of *Posterior Analytics*; however, it does not make our approach to knowledge simple. The world is made to be known: we progress in understanding when we build our knowledge on the senses and we reason about them; this is already γνῶσις and we can claim to know truly. However, there is also another kind of knowledge, which is more complete – namely ἐπιστήμη.<sup>123</sup> We might say that to know (γινώσκειν) entails having senses, memory, experience and arts; however, we should know that this is not yet to achieve full understanding. To reach the higher level, that of ἐπίστασθαι, we should not only keep recollecting sensible experiences; we should also have the ability to grasp their overall sense to give an account of them; and, this is a matter of intellectual habituation, time and also luck.

This idea comes out in several passages in the *Posterior Analytics* where the verb γνωρίζειν plays an important role as it describes the final grasp of the principles of our understanding. It is important to understand its meaning by comparison with the verbs already treated – namely, γινώσκειν and ἐπίστασθαι. In Bonitz's *Index Aristotelicus* we find:

Omnino et significatione et usus ambitu gnorizein et gignoskein vix possunt inter se distingui, ac pro synonymis vel in eodem sententiae contextu vel in iisdem formulis gnorizein, gignoskein, gnosis, [...] eidenai epistasthai leguntur.<sup>124</sup>

Burnyeat also seems to identify a similarity between the use of γινώσκειν and γνωρίζειν but from a different point of view. The starting point for his argument is a passage from *Physics*.

ἐπειδὴ τὸ εἰδέναι καὶ τὸ ἐπίστασθαι συμβαίνει περὶ πάσας τὰς μεθόδους, ὧν εἰσὶν ἀρχαὶ ἢ αἷτια ἢ στοιχεῖα, ἐκ τοῦ ταῦτα γνωρίζειν (τότε γὰρ οἰόμεθα γινώσκειν ἕκαστον, ὅταν τὰ αἷτια γνωρίσωμεν τὰ πρῶτα καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς τὰς πρώτας καὶ μέχρι τῶν στοιχείων), δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τῆς περὶ φύσεως ἐπιστήμης πειρατέον διορίσασθαι πρῶτον τὰ περὶ τὰς ἀρχάς.

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<sup>122</sup> Burnyeat 1981, pp. 128.

<sup>123</sup> In Plato's epistemology, there is only one kind of true knowledge: to be able to see what really is, and what the truth is, is the crucial factor that divides knowledge from mere belief. The empirical world and the sensations connected to it are just starting-points of a process of recollection that is the prerequisite for true knowledge; perceptual knowledge, however, is not knowledge in the proper sense (Tuominen 2007, pp. 172-180; see also Mansion 1984, p. 169).

<sup>124</sup> Bonitz 1955, s. v.

Since understanding and knowing in every inquiry concerned with things having principles or causes or elements results from the knowledge of these (for we think that we know each thing when we think that we know the first causes and the first principles and have reached the elements), clearly, in the science of nature too we should first try to determine what is the case with regard to the principles.<sup>125</sup>

He compares this passage with *Posterior Analytics* I 2, 71b9-14 and he argues that here between γινώσκειν and γνωρίζειν occurs the same relationship that occurs between γινώσκειν and ἐπίστασθαι. He then concludes:

In both passages, the definition of ἐπίστασθαι in the *Posterior Analytics* and the definition of γινώσκειν in the *Physics*, our verb ‘know’ is needed in the analysans not in the analysandum. Aristotle is analysing a cognitive state which is achieved by knowing explanations, and whether he is currently calling it ἐπίστασθαι or γινώσκειν the corresponding term for that state in philosophical English is ‘understand’.<sup>126</sup>

Consequently, the translation of γνωρίζειν as ‘to know’ serves again the purpose of clarifying the translation of γινώσκειν as ‘to understand’. However, this translation lacks a particular nuance of γνωρίζειν which is: ‘grasp’, ‘gain knowledge of’, ‘make something known’,<sup>127</sup> recollecting pieces of knowledge or signs to get to know something. For instance, in *Prior Analytics* “we shall identify (γνωρισθῆμεν) the figure of the syllogism by the position of the middle term”.<sup>128</sup> γνώρισμα is usually used to mean ‘that for which a thing is made known’.<sup>129</sup> γνωρίσματα is the name given to tokens of recognition that serve to recollect the identity of an exposed child.<sup>130</sup> And also in the *Posterior Analytics* we find that:

Ἔστι δὲ γνωρίζειν τὰ μὲν πρότερον γνωρίσαντα, τῶν δὲ καὶ ἅμα λαμβάνοντα τὴν γνῶσιν, οἷον ὅσα τυγχάνει ὄντα ὑπὸ τὸ καθόλου οὗ ἔχει τὴν γνῶσιν.

To ‘grasp’ (γνωρίζειν) is when one has grasped some items earlier and gained knowledge of the other items at the very same time (e.g. items which in fact fall under the universal of which you possess knowledge).<sup>131</sup>

Therefore, this sense of γνωρίζειν should be taken into account particularly in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, as it has interesting epistemological implications. The

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<sup>125</sup> Arist. *Ph.* I 1, 184a10-14.

<sup>126</sup> Burnyeat 1981, p. 106.

<sup>127</sup> A. *Pr.* 487.

<sup>128</sup> Arist. *APr.* I 32, 47b14.

<sup>129</sup> LSJ s. v.; See X. *Cyr.* 2.1.27; Arist. *Phgn.* 806a15 and Plu. 2.885b.

<sup>130</sup> Men. *Epir.* 303; Plu. *Thes.* 4.

<sup>131</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 2, 71a17-19.

original meaning of this verb implies an interpretative effort that needs to be made on the data starting from which we gain understanding of something. Thus, in the light of this sense of γνωρίζειν, to understand something is not only to recollect particulars that are more knowable to us; one should also have readiness of mind<sup>132</sup> and be able to evaluate this correctly in order to grasp an understanding of what is more knowable by nature. To some extent, the possibility of getting the process of understanding right is therefore *person-based*.<sup>133</sup> As noted in Chapter 1 (section 1), according to Aristotle, to be able to grasp understanding we need to exercise our intellectual skills and perfect them until we achieve excellence in reasoning and in finding the truth about things in every circumstance; to cultivate this kind of excellence is, to a great extent, up to us and how we decide to engage with our cognitive skills.

If my reading is correct, it would be important to take into account all the passages in which γνωρίζειν is used to describe the way we get to understand universals. Indeed, this usage is found in several passages of *Posterior Analytics*: I 2, 72a39; I 3, 72b25; I 18, 81b3; I 31, 87b39; II 8, 93a18; II 19, 99b18; II 19, 99b29 and II 19, 100b4. Maintaining the original sense of the verb γνωρίζειν in these contexts will produce interesting results: these passages will confirm the idea that understanding is possible through grasping. Grasping premises is much more than making a generalization on the basis of scattered fragments of empirical evidence; it constitutes an interpretation of them in the light of their principles and causes. These latter make scientific discourse possible; they form the necessary truths that we should get to know to understand the nature of things properly.

However, premises are known immediately (ἄμεσον) by induction: that is, they cannot be proved syllogistically by means of a middle term.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, in the final paragraph of the book we find that ἐπίστασθαι<sup>135</sup> (understanding the premises) in some ways needs perceptions, particulars, empirical elements. But then, νοῦς needs to work on it to attempt to achieve γνωρίζειν, the final explanatory grasp. It seems that, even

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<sup>132</sup> Ἡ δ' ἀγγίνοιά ἐστιν εὐστοχία τις ἐν ἀσκέπτῳ χρόνῳ τοῦ μέσου; “readiness of mind is a talent for hitting upon the middle term in an imperceptible time” (Arist. *APo.* I 34, 89b10-12).

<sup>133</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 29-30. In virtue epistemology, this may imply that the agent has also an epistemic responsibility and he should be motivated to get the process of understanding right, finding the truth and avoiding error. “The simplest way to describe the motivational basis of the intellectual virtues is to say that they are all based in the motivation for knowledge. They are all forms of the motivation to have cognitive contact with reality, where this includes more than what is usually expressed by saying that people desire the truth. [...] understanding is also a form of cognitive contact with reality, one that has been considered a component of the knowing state in some period of philosophical history. I will not give an account of understanding in this work, but I have already indicated that it is a state that includes the comprehension of abstract structures of reality apart from the propositional” (Zagzebski 1996, p. 167).

<sup>134</sup> LSJ, s. v.

<sup>135</sup> Arist. *Apo.* I 3, 72b30; II 5, 91b 34.

after a correct recollection of empirical data (things that are more knowable to us) our knowledge is still not complete.<sup>136</sup> A more complete knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) depends on our individual ability to grasp things and on a specific faculty (ἡ γνωρίζουσα ἕξις),<sup>137</sup> νοῦς.<sup>138</sup> We sharpen this kind of ability through a process of habituation and through engaging within this kind of epistemic exercises. In the next chapters, we will see that this kind of exercise is also necessary to achieve a higher level of ethical understanding.

Rather than regarding intellectual excellences as the competences or traits or affects by which we are best positioned to pursue the truth, he [Aristotle] views them as states that mark an intellectual grasp of the truth, in the sense of having arrived at scientific understanding, or wisdom of various sorts, or a grasp of foundational first principles. The emphasis on achievement underscores basic Aristotelian points about virtue, namely, that virtue is a cultivated and acquired state. Intellectual excellences will depend on natural powers, faculties, and receptivities as moral virtue does.<sup>139</sup>

This reading sheds light also on other fields of Aristotle's thought: his treatment of dramatic recognition in the *Poetics*, for instance, acquires new significance if read in the light of these observations. Aristotle seems to dislike dramatic recognitions that are brought about by the mere use of tokens. He states that the ἀναγνώρισις διὰ τῶν σημεῖων is the simplest kind of recognition and the least suitable in terms of poetic art.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, it is quite evident that this kind of discovery does not require the characters to exercise much reasoning: sometimes, in drama, a necklace or a scar can identify someone quickly without further need of reasoning on these tokens of recognition. The recognition of the best kind is the one that proceeds from the circumstances of the action (ἡ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων) and the one that proceeds from the characters' reasoning about the circumstances they find themselves involved in (ἡ ἐκ συλλογισμοῦ).<sup>141</sup> What I have said with respect to the *Posterior Analytics* can help us to understand why this is the case.

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<sup>136</sup> Taylor 1990, p. 122.

<sup>137</sup> Arist. *APo.* II 19, 99 b18.

<sup>138</sup> Arist. *APo.* II 19, 100b12. See Irwin 1988 for a slightly different account of the role of νοῦς in grasping the first principles: "Experience and familiarity with appearances are useful to us as a way of approaching the first principles: they might be psychologically indispensable as a way to form right intuitions. But they form no part of the justification of the first principles. When we come to have the right intuition we are aware of the principles as self evident, with no external justification [...]. The acquisition of *nous* is not meant to be magical, entirely independent of inquiry. Nor however, it is simply a summary of the inquiry or a conclusion that depends on the inquiry for its warrant" (Irwin 1988, p. 136).

<sup>139</sup> Sherman and White 2003, pp. 38-39.

<sup>140</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 16, 1454b20-21.

<sup>141</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 16, 1455a15-21.

In Aristotle's epistemology, mere perception of sensible objects does not, by itself, constitute complete understanding: in the first place, mere perception might be misleading if it is not accompanied by adequate reasoning and, secondly, to reason about our perception is a crucial exercise that we need to undertake to sharpen our intellectual skills and achieve complete understanding. My suggestion is that, analogously, in drama, to say that someone has been recognised through signs or tokens does not constitute a good type of recognition because it is not truly convincing and the process is not supported by adequate explanation of the evidence that has been found. The example of Menander's *Epitrepontes* can clarify the point made by Aristotle. As Habrotonon explains, Charisios' ring is not a good token of recognition of the child's identity because the ring might have been lost or stolen by someone who then raped Pamphile: consequently, Charisios cannot be identified with certainty as the child's father.

Secondly, it might be argued that recognitions through tokens take place too quickly: spectators find themselves at the end of the recognition process without having engaged in any sort of reasoning. That is to say, a recognition through tokens does not engage the audience's intellectual skills in the same way as a recognition that involves some kind of reasoning on the basis of pieces of evidence in order to find out the truth of what happened. As an audience, we want to be shown each step of the reasoning that brings about the solution of a plot; the more complex the recognition is, the more we will pay attention to how characters will find the solution to it, as we want to be sure that they find the right one and that their reasoning is secure and rigorous. A recognition that proceeds through reasoning succeeds better than the others in leading the audience's understanding through the causal network of evidence, actions and events that comprises a recognition process.<sup>142</sup> That is why this kind of recognition is of the best kind according to Aristotle; namely, because it engages the characters and the audience in a process of understanding that is rigorous and that implies a good deal of intellectual involvement from the audience providing a greater pleasure in the final moment of discovery.

I will now summarise the main points of Aristotle's approach to understanding and, in the conclusion of this chapter, I will link these ideas to Menander's *Epitrepontes*. In the first part of this section, the distinction between the two senses of 'being more knowable' has been shown to be important. Both particulars and universals

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<sup>142</sup> See Halliwell 1992, pp. 249-250. For scholarship on Aristotle's treatment of recognition and cognitivist readings of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Chapter 1, section 2.

are needed in order to make up complete knowledge: particulars seem to be a necessary starting-point that needs to be framed in a wider theoretical explanation that necessarily includes principles and causes. Nevertheless, in this dual movement from universal to particulars and particulars to universal, I have distinguished two main risks that seem to have parallels in Aristotle's ethical works and that might apply as well to Menander's plots. Firstly, it is possible to fail in the process of reasoning about the data of our experience and to miss the significance of what we have been recollecting. Secondly, experience might just be lacking and ignorance of the smallest particular might invalidate our reasoning. As a third point, I have also shown that interpersonal debate about relevant topics is important for the intellectual enhancement of the whole community: the more we talk about things, the more we understand them. This will be shown to be particularly relevant also in matters of ethical understanding because, as shown in Chapter 5, we understand better the right way to live by engaging in discussion with people that care about us and that we care about.

In the second part of this section, I have analysed in more detail the movement from knowledge to understanding, from what is more knowable to us to what is more knowable by nature. Indeed, in drawing this distinction between the two senses of knowable, Aristotle also suggests the possibility of two levels of knowledge. As explained in *Metaphysics A*, we might acquire art (τέχνη) as we are able to take advantage of senses, memories, experiences, in order to know the general principles that form the basis of those τέχναι. However, to understand is a completely different matter. It also implies an ability that develops with intellectual habituation.<sup>143</sup> ἐπιστήμη needs time and cultivation and a νοῦς from which time and cultivation can produce some epistemologically valuable results. The problem is that a perfect combination of these components may not actually exist. Consequently, the transition to a superior degree of knowledge might not happen: therefore, the process of getting there is neither easy nor guaranteed. In *Metaphysics A* the movement from τέχνη to ἐπιστήμη undergoes variation precisely because to make this passage an ability to grasp (γνωρίζειν) is required and this, unfortunately, is not common. However, understanding (ἐπιστήμη) does not need scientific deductive reasoning.<sup>144</sup> To understand causes and principles it is necessary to grasp them and to develop a certain ability in doing so. We have also seen that this idea has its counterpart in Aristotle's ethics and aesthetics.

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<sup>143</sup> Burnyeat 1981, p. 139.

<sup>144</sup> Arist. *APo.* I 3, 72b19-22; I 9, 76a16-22; II 19, 99 b20-41.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the preceding discussion I have not attempted to answer conclusively certain much debated questions regarding Aristotle's epistemology or about the structure and functioning of scientific reasoning. My aim has been to stress some relevant features that are interestingly connected with a kind of drama that is sensitive to these issues. Menander is highly interested in recognitions, lack of knowledge, and in different attempts to gain a clear understanding of what the character's story is.<sup>145</sup> Could it just be a coincidence that his drama is preceded by an intellectual discussion that deals with analogous topics in a comparable manner? My guess is that it is not, because Aristotle's and Menander's points of view and framework of ideas on this topic seem to be comparable to a great extent. I think that my analysis so far has shown that Menander and Aristotle provide an interpretation of the process of understanding and making factual mistakes that is analogous in many important respects.

Aristotle and Menander both stress the importance of the achievement of a stable, complete understanding. This understanding does not consist in a simple acquaintance with people or facts: to have a happy ending all the evidence should be included in an explanatory account. To produce this account, perceptual insight and intellectual ability are necessary; what might create a problem is not having this ability or having it only to a certain degree. It seems, therefore, that whether we are Aristotelian philosophers or Menandrian comic characters, what we mean by understanding is the achievement of a fully explanatory version of the story; namely, a recognition, recollection or understanding of a system that frames, and makes sense of, what we experience at a particular level.

In this respect, I believe that the analysis of Aristotle's treatment of recognition through tokens associated with the analysis of Menander's *Epitrepontes* has produced positive results. In section 3.2 of this chapter, I suggested a possible solution for Aristotle's negative view of recognition *διὰ τῶν σημείων* (a view whose rationale is not obvious). On the basis of what we learn from the *Posterior Analytics*, recognition through tokens does not appear to be convincing as often the evidence provided by tokens is not supported by adequate reasoning. In Menander, we find an analogous idea: in the *Epitrepontes*, Menander avoids a quick resolution of the process of discovery of

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<sup>145</sup> See Greimas and Courtés 1989 where New Comedy seems to be included in a particular kind of narrative discourse which has knowledge as its narrative pivot.



Charisios' and Pamphile's child. We will discover that Onesimos is right to believe that Charisios is the father of the child solely on the basis of the evidence of the ring; nevertheless, at first, we are not completely convinced of his reasoning. As Habrotonon suggests, a complete understanding of the story is not possible without a reasoned evaluation of what the empirical evidence suggests. Furthermore, in the case of the *Aspis*, we learn that Kleostratos' recognition (his identification with the corpse lying with the shield) is completely mistaken because the sign of recognition (Kleostratos' shield) was not appropriately supported by a trustworthy account of the circumstances.

More importantly, I hope to have shown that it is not just Aristotle's treatment of recognition in *Poetics* that is analogous to Menander's use of recognition in the *Epitrepontes*. The way in which Menander presents his character's reasoning on stage seems to be analogous to Aristotle's version of the thought-processes through which we get to know something, as discussed with reference to *Posterior Analytics*. Menander builds plots based on problems caused by lack of proper knowledge of what circumstances or people are. As we have seen, these plots ended happily after some clever person had enabled the full understanding of what has happened and who the people involved were. In both Aristotle and Menander, the ones who are successful in the process of understanding, and that make the final recognition possible, reason in a specific way: they start from sensory experience to build up a kind of a reasoning that can explain why these things are as we see them. Perception, that is, mere sensory evidence, in Aristotle and Menander, is not enough to guarantee that something has been fully understood or that a recognition has been completed. The transition from perception to understanding needs to be supported by adequate reasoning. In addition to that, I think that my inquiry has suggested an alternative reading of Menander's use of recognition. The long recognition process in Menander's *Epitrepontes* acquires new significance when looked at from the perspective of Aristotle's theory of understanding. Also, the way in which Menander builds dramatic recognitions has various original aspects and is not a mere adaptation of tragic themes into a comic plot.

It is relevant to point out that the figures who, in comedy, bring about the final understanding (very often being slaves and courtesans) do not correspond to the class of the people that, in Aristotle's opinion, had the privilege of gaining ἐπιστήμη (that is, people who had time for intellectual exercise and speculative research).<sup>146</sup> In any case,

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<sup>146</sup> At the same time, assuming that what is required to get to know something are intellectual skills and a life-time of habituation in dealing with certain topics, courtesans and slaves, as depicted in New Comedy and Roman Comedy, are certainly good candidates for possession of these qualities and this can be seen

the kind of speculative, theoretical understanding with which Aristotle is concerned in the *Posterior Analytics* is not the factual understanding with which Menander's characters are dealing. Despite this difference, their ideas about the steps of the reasoning that lead to the final understanding of something (scientific principles or the story behind the plot) are comparable and analogous in many respects.

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as part of the subversive message at the core of the comic genre. For discussion on this topic see Silk 1988; see also p. 39, n. 2 above.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Misleading Power of Perceptions and Emotions*

In the previous chapter, I have considered the analogies between Menander and Aristotle focusing on what understanding means to them and what its preconditions are. The overall result of my inquiry is that, in both Aristotle and Menander, understanding depends on an accurate evaluation of perceived particulars which includes a comprehensive grasp of what has been perceived. Both perceptive insight and intellectual exercise are needed in order to organise multiple perceptions under principles that show how things stand in the world and how situations are to be understood. The argument of this chapter is that this kind of understanding is also implied in Menander's and Aristotle's ethical thinking. Correct ethical choice, in fact, is seen as dependent on the context of the action, on how this context affects the agent and on the agent's ability to reason about this context so as to perform the ethically right action. As a consequence, practical life also depends on how we perceive particular situations, how well we can understand them and how we recognise what is the appropriate response to them. Thus, correct ethical choice involves i) understanding which are the particulars involved in our choice, ii) feeling correct emotions as well as iii) performing right actions. Consequently, the ability to interpret multiple perceptions properly so as to give a correct account of what surrounds us seems to be crucial also in the fields of ethics because it is on this basis that we make right or wrong ethical choices.

At the same time, the rational process that leads to correct ethical choice might go wrong in various ways: for instance, the perception of actual particulars can unleash emotions that we are not able to control or we might not be able to reconstruct the context of our action, thereby misjudging people and facts. Situation of this kind are often at the core of Menandrian comedies and, to my mind, the way in which Menander describes his characters and their processes of decision-making, is again analogous to Aristotle's thinking on comparable topics. To illustrate this point I shall compare the plot and characters of Menander's *Samia* and Aristotle's works on ethics and psychology.

In the first part, I will consider Menander's *Samia*, focusing on the characters of Demeas and Moschion, Demeas' adopted son. Scholars have often presented their relationship as the main focus of the plot;<sup>1</sup> however, here, I focus mainly on the problems that prevent this relationship from remaining untroubled during the dramatic action. Before introducing the topics related to this particular text, I will provide a short outline of the plot. The whole situation is explained by Moschion at the beginning of the play, in a monologue which makes the audience aware of some important pieces of information needed to understand the facts that follow. Moschion informs the audience that, during the festival of Adonis, he raped a girl, namely, the daughter of their neighbour Nikeratos. The girl got pregnant and, at the moment of the action, she has just given birth to his child. Moschion wants to marry her and he must ask Demeas about this. However, the young man is ashamed and would like to keep secret from his father the fact that he now has a baby by the girl, which is the product of the rape: accordingly, he decides to leave Demeas' *hetaira*, Chrysis, nursing the child, pretending it was the child of her and Demeas. Demeas wrongly believes that the child is that of Moschion and Chrysis and he drives Chrysis out from his house.

What I am interested in seeing here is, first, how Demeas forms his incorrect belief. This misunderstanding is due to lack of knowledge but also due to a) wrong conclusions inferred from his sensory perceptions and b) his altered state of mind in reacting to these perceptions. His misconception of what really happened leads him to act wrongly and to misjudge Chrysis and Moschion. In addition, I will analyse Moschion's behaviour in order to determine why, in his case, despite his correct knowledge of the facts he fails to behave properly. In every circumstance he knows, in theory, what the right thing to do is and he is aware of the particulars involved in the action; however, when facing the specific situation he fails to act as he should. Thus, Demeas fails to manage perceptions and emotions in the act of understanding what has happened; he then misunderstands everything and acts wrongly. On the other hand, Moschion has a clear understanding of how things stand but he fails to control perceptions and emotions in deciding what it is best to do in a given circumstance. The two of them are presented as characters who would normally know what it is right to do and, at the end of the comedy, their regret confirms this; however, faced with the specific circumstances involved they fail to do so.

In the second part, I will take into account how Aristotle conceives the same topic. The relevant issue that I will consider is how error is possible in judging practical

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<sup>1</sup> See Wehrli 1936; Barigazzi 1965; Treu 1969; Keuls 1973 and Grant 1986.

circumstances and what is the role that emotions play in this process. In order to explain this, I will start with the *De Anima* in considering how, in general, it is possible to go wrong in drawing inferences from sensory evidence. On the basis of specific passages from Aristotle's works on psychology, it will become clear that the correct analysis of sense data is a process internal to the agent and, therefore, the successful outcome of this process depends on the agent's state of mind.

Having clarified this, I will explain how this analysis relates to practical life. In Aristotle, choice is sometimes described as a process in which the agent, having specific desires and being in a specific situation, tries to find out, on this basis, what is the right action to perform in order to obtain his desired end,<sup>2</sup> which, in the virtuous person, coincides with what is ethically correct in this situation.<sup>3</sup> Deliberation is activated by desires and emotions stimulated by a specific circumstance, but it also requires calculation and reasoning to be finally carried out. Aristotle sometimes summarises this process schematically in the form of a syllogism:<sup>4</sup> the first premise of the syllogism is an opinion that relates to what an agent desires to do; the second premise relates to the particular circumstances of the action to which the first premise applies; the conclusion follows as the result of a process of calculation that takes into account both these premises.

The right (ethical) choice, therefore, should follow from reasoning of the following kind: the agent considers what is universally considered good to do (and what one should desire to do if one is a truly virtuous agent) and the particular context of the action; the result is that he makes the right choice, and calculates the best possible way to achieve his desired end. This process is, therefore, context-dependent and also affected by the agent's state of mind. On this basis, the effective completion of the ethical syllogism can be perverted in two ways. It is possible to be mistaken at the level of the first premise: i.e., the agent may not recognise what would be generally considered good to do in a specific type of situation. For instance, particular situations can overpower his better judgement and lead him to make a mistake in considering the major relevant premise. Secondly, the ethical reasoning can be perverted at the level of the second premise: i.e., the agent might miss the understanding of what the particulars of the actions are in the kind of situation in which he finds himself acting. For instance, the emotion felt at the perception of a given particular may hinder the correct

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<sup>2</sup> Arist. *EN* III 4, 1112a15-16 and III 5, 1112b11-24.

<sup>3</sup> Arist. *EN* III 6, 1113a29-b2.

<sup>4</sup> See Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a25-35 and *MA* 7, 701a32-6. See also Gill 1996, pp. 52-53 and pp. 104-105 below for further discussion and relevant bibliography.

understanding of the context of the agent's action. Thus, as we will see in more detail later, an incorrect management of the agent's emotions may influence the agent's insight considerably and it may affect the content both of the first and the second premises of his practical reasoning. This can happen also to people who are normally considered to be of good character but whose judgement, at a crucial moment, is somehow clouded so that they fail to act in the right way.

I need to clarify here that, in this part, I am not considering cases in which the ethically good choice is made, because of bad luck, in circumstances that could not have been grasped properly by the agent;<sup>5</sup> this will be the topic of Chapter 4. On the contrary, I will analyse here cases in which the right ethical choice is prevented by other factors internal to the agent, cases in which the successful working of practical reasoning is affected by i) inattentive processing of sensory perceptive experience, which leads to an incorrect evaluation of the particulars involved in the action; and ii), an emotionally altered state of mind that leads to the wrong choice of what the action should be.

## 1. "Is this plausible?" (*Men. Sam.* 216)

### 1.1 *Demeas*

Moschion's concealment of the truth, at the beginning of the *Samia*, is the cause of the other characters' ignorance and it is from this action that a series of misunderstandings arise, among which that of Demeas is the most complex and interesting. He is, in fact, the character with the lowest level of information and the one who is in most urgent need of having a clear understanding of what happened in his household while he was away. In the third act of *Samia*, after Moschion's monologue has informed the audience of the events, Demeas comes out in a state of desperation and explains why he is in this

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<sup>5</sup> Annas 2003 defines clearly the complexity of the concept of success in relation to virtue: "[...] a virtuous person can succeed in achieving the overall aim of living virtuously by performing a virtuous act, even if, through no fault of her own, she fails to achieve the immediate target. [...] It is crucial, therefore, in examining a virtuous act, to ask what kind of success is in question – success in achieving the overall goal or success in achieving the immediate target. For achieving the overall goal is a matter of having the right motivation [...], and this is up to the agent. But success in achieving the immediate target may not be in this way up to the agent, and may depend on various kind of moral luck" (Annas 2003, pp. 24-25).

state.<sup>6</sup> He says that he has just i) heard a nurse referring to the child (which he thought that of Chrysis and himself) as Moschion's; and ii) that he has seen Chrysis nursing the child. On the basis of these two separate pieces of perceptible evidence he infers, hastily, that the child is that of Moschion and Chrysis. His inference could be partly justified as, at the beginning of the comedy, we know that Demeas has been informed that Chrysis gave birth to a child of which he was said to be the father. It is true that Moschion's distortion of the story provides Demeas with a version that plausibly matches the interpretation of what he has heard and seen. However, when Demeas attempts to investigate the matter further, he is clearly in a confused state of mind, caused by what he has just experienced through his perceptions, and he is not able to reconstruct adequately the circumstances he witnesses. I am now going to examine Demeas' reconstruction of what has happened as he describes his impressions to the audience.

In a first attempt to analyse carefully what he had just experienced, Demeas asks the audience to examine (σκέψασθε) the credibility of what he has seen and inferred. He is not sure that he has seen things in the right way, but he has the impression that something really bad has happened to him. He does not know whether he has inferred a plausible (πιθανόν) version of the story through correct reasoning or whether he is in a state of rage (μαίνομαι) that may have influenced his inferences about the whole situation.

Δη: οὐδ' εἰ βλέπω, μὰ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, οἶδ[α νῦν  
καλῶς ἔτ' οὐκ, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν π[ροάγομαι,  
πληγ]ήν τιν' ἀνυπέβλητον ἐξ[αίφνης λαβών.  
ἢ 'στ[ι] πιθανόν; σκέψασθε πότερο[ν εὖ φρονῶ  
ἢ μαίνομ', οὐδέν τ' εἰς ἀκρίβειαν [τότε  
λαβὼν ἐπάγομαι μέγ' ἀτύχημα.

DEMEAS: I don't know if I am seeing straight, by Athena! But I am [coming here] at the front, having received a [sudden] exceptional [blow]. Is this plausible? Please consider whether [I am sane] or mad! Am I bringing a great misfortune on myself by interpreting nothing accurately?<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “Demeas comes out of his house and in a long monologue confides in the audience that as all seemed set fair, he had been struck out of the blue by a catastrophe. By a brilliant piece of writing the hearer is kept waiting for some 40 lines before he learns the nature of the blow, which is revealed, when it comes, as unexpectedly as it had hit Demeas” (Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 564).

<sup>7</sup> Men. *Sam.* 213-218. See Bain 1983, p. 117 who comments at line 213 (“I don't know if I am seeing straight”): “This is explained later when he tells us how he saw Chrysis nursing the baby”.

He then explains how he formed his belief about the present case. As we will see in the following pages, his reasoning seems not to be stringent and the audience is invited by Demeas himself to be the silent judge of his misleading reasoning, at the end of which, he decides to drive Chrysis out of his house with the accusation of having betrayed him by having an affair with his son. As Scafuro notes,<sup>8</sup> Demeas, like most Menandrian characters, displays his reasoning to the audience in a discourse that includes proofs and arguments as if he was settling a lawsuit. However, as often happens in a law-court, the aim of his address is not to find out the truth of what has happened but to convince the audience, and, maybe, also himself, of his version of the story.<sup>9</sup> The structure and purpose of this kind of discourse have analogues in the contemporary intellectual and philosophical context.

Menander's preoccupation with 'proving' has both a philosophical basis and a foundation in the tradition of rhetoric. While it cannot be proven with certainty that Menander is reproducing Peripatetic ideas, it can be shown that his intellectual framework for proving and argumentation shares a common background with that school.<sup>10</sup>

In particular, the reasoning that Demeas develops in his speech has a structure that is similar to what Aristotle calls an 'ἐνθύμημα'. This is a particular kind of syllogism used in rhetorical speeches: in the case of an enthymeme the conjunction of the first premise with the second produces a conclusion that is persuasive but may not be logically correct:

ἐπει δ' ἐστὶν ὀλίγα μὲν τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐξ ὧν οἱ ῥητορικοὶ συλλογισμοὶ εἰσι [...] τὰ δ' ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ συμβαίνοντα καὶ ἐνδεχόμενα ἐκ τοιούτων ἀνάγκη ἐτέρων συλλογίζεσθαι, τὰ δ' ἀναγκαῖα ἐξ ἀναγκαίων, [...] φανερὸν ὅτι ἐξ ὧν τὰ ἐνθυμήματα λέγεται, τὰ μὲν ἀναγκαῖα ἔσται, τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ.

Since few of the premises from which rhetorical syllogism are constituted are necessary [...] and since things that happen for the most part and are possible must be reasoned on the basis of other such things, and necessary actions from necessities, [...] it is evident that those [premises] by which the enthymemes are spoken sometimes are necessarily true and most of the time [they are true only] for the most part.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Scafuro 1997 and 2003.

<sup>9</sup> According to Traill, in this speech, Demeas is convincing himself that Chrysis has betrayed him. Demeas' subsequent accusation of Chrysis is made relying on the assumption of what people of her status usually do; therefore, he needs little evidence to condemn her and convince himself of this: "Menander counted on his audience to recognise when characters use arguments intended for winning a lawsuit in order to fool themselves" (Traill 2008, p. 85).

<sup>10</sup> Scafuro 2003, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* I 2, 1357a22-33. "Aristotle is speaking here about the kind of statement which is possible in *enthymemes*. In what it infers, any syllogism differs according to the character of its premises. For example, if the modality of the premises is necessary, the syllogism asserts necessary relations; if the



An enthymeme gives scope, therefore, for a kind of reasoning that is plausible and convincing because it appears in the form of a logically rigorous argument, even if, at times, this is not really the case. In some cases, enthymemes have necessary premises, but, in other cases, it is possible that an enthymeme is based on principles that are valid only for the most part and not necessarily, and, therefore, they do not constitute a valid premise for a logically consistent conclusion. These two cases – of enthymemes based on necessary premises or premises valid only for the most part – relate to what Aristotle describes as enthymemes built on necessary signs (τεκμήρια) or signs (σημεῖα).<sup>12</sup>

τὰ ἐνθυμήματα λέγεται ἐκ τεττάρων, τὰ δὲ τέτταρα ταῦτ' ἐστίν, εἰκὸς παράδειγμα τεκμήριον σημεῖον, ἔστι δὲ τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῶν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἢ ὄντων ἢ δοκούντων συνηγμένα ἐνθυμήματα ἐκ τῶν εἰκότων, τὰ δὲ δι' ἐπαγωγῆς ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου, ἢ ἐνὸς ἢ πλειόνων, ὅταν λαβὼν τὸ καθόλου εἶτα συλλογίσηται τὰ κατὰ μέρος, διὰ παραδείγματος, τὰ δὲ διὰ ἀναγκαίου καὶ <ἀεί> ὄντος διὰ τεκμηρίου, τὰ δὲ διὰ τοῦ καθόλου [ἢ] τοῦ ἐν μέρει ὄντος, ἐάν τε ὄν ἐάν τε μή, διὰ σημεῖων.

Enthymemes are drawn from four sources and these four are what is probable, an example, a necessary sign (τεκμήριον) and a sign (σημεῖον). Enthymemes from probability are drawn from things that either are, or seem from the most part [to be] true; those from example are drawn from induction from a similar case, whether one case or more, whenever a general statement is made and then is supported by particular instances; those drawn from necessity and what is <always> the case, from τεκμήρια; those drawn from what it is generally or in part true, existing or non existing, from σημεῖα.<sup>13</sup>

In Scafuro's opinion, the reasoning that Demeas discloses to the audience is not based exclusively on necessary signs: consequently, Demeas' version of the story is persuasive but not logically correct. My argument builds on this point and aims to take it further. It can be asked, in fact, why Demeas is offering to the audience and to himself misleading arguments and how they eventually affect his ethical choice.

In order to do this, I would like to examine closely the structure of Demeas' discourse. Demeas tells the audience that, in the storeroom, he has heard (ἀκούω) the nurse taking care of the child and addressing him as “son of Moschion”.<sup>14</sup> After that, Demeas says that he came out from the storeroom in a completely calm state:

**Δη:** κάγω προήμειν τοῦτον ὄνπερ ἐνθάδε

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modality is contingent, it asserts contingent or possible relationships” (Grimaldi 1980(a), p. 60). See Burnyeat 1994.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion on this distinction see Grimaldi 1980(b).

<sup>13</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 25, 1402b12- 20.

<sup>14</sup> Men. *Sam.* 245-254.

τρόπον ἀρτίως ἐξῆλθον, ἡσυχῆι πάνυ,  
ὡς οὔτ' ἀκούσας οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἠισθημένος.

DEMEAS: and I went in exactly in the same way I came out, being absolutely calm, as if I did not hear and perceive anything.<sup>15</sup>

Considering that he had already been told that Chrysis was the child's mother, the revelation that Moschion was the child's father should have created in Demeas an angry reaction. On the contrary, it seems that the nurse's statement leaves him calm and, maybe, willing to investigate the matter of the child's paternity. However, after having heard the nurse, coming out from where he was, he says that he has seen (ὄρῳ) Chrysis nursing the child.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, he infers that it is definite, knowable, γνώριμον<sup>17</sup> that the child is Chrysis' and Moschion's child.<sup>18</sup> At this point, his state of mind changes completely and he speeds up his inquiry precipitously: this critical moment comes precisely when he sees Chrysis holding the child close to her breast. Nevertheless, at this point he has a confirmation (or so he believes) of what he was told by Moschion at the beginning of the play: namely, the fact that Chrysis was the child's mother. Nevertheless, it is when he links this last vivid perception to what he has heard before from the nurse that that he is completely driven out of his mind (ἐξέστηχ' ὄλωσ).<sup>19</sup> This state of confusion causes his false inference and diverts him from inquiring further to discover what has really happened. Menander is interested in describing a character that is not just misled by others but rather one whose own temper complicates the situation and produces a scenario in which Demeas lives by his own judgement, deaf to any doubt and not making any sustained attempt to investigate, building up his anger against a non-existent enemy.

If we look at his reasoning more closely, we realise that, from the first piece of audible evidence, Demeas learns that he is not the father of the child, as he has been told, and that the child is Moschion's. Using the language of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, this element would constitute the infallible sign (τεκμήριον) of Demeas' enthymeme. However, Demeas seems to be keen to inquire further about this point. After that, when Demeas sees Chrysis with the child, he infers that the child is also Chrysis's and that

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<sup>15</sup> Men. *Sam.* 262-264.

<sup>16</sup> Men. *Sam.* 265-266.

<sup>17</sup> "Here Demeas means 'that this is her child is something that can be *known*', as opposed to the mere hypothesis about paternity. It is comic irony that he is mistaken on the one point he believes to be certain" (Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 569).

<sup>18</sup> Men. *Sam.* 267.

<sup>19</sup> Men. *Sam.* 279.

the two of them have betrayed his trust while he was away. However, the piece of evidence that Demeas uses to draw his final conclusion and to complete the reconstruction of the whole story appears to be not as reliable as the first one (i.e. the nurse's words that he has just overheard). I will now explain why.

Δη: αὐτήν δ' ἔχουσιν αὐτὸ τὴν Σαμίαν ὄρω  
 ἔξω καθ' αὐτήν <καὶ> διδούσαν τιθίον  
ὅσθ' ὅτι μὲν αὐτῆς ἐστὶ τοῦτο γνῶριμον  
εἶναι, πατρὸς δ' ὅτου ποτ' ἐστίν, εἴτ' ἐμὸν  
 εἴτ' –

DEMEAS: Outside, I see her, the Samian woman, holding him close to her <and> giving him her breast. So now the fact that this is her [child] is well-known, but from which father could he possibly be, either me or -<sup>20</sup>

In the passage just quoted, Demeas concludes that, because Chrysis is nursing the child, that child must have been hers and, as he has just learned, Moschion's. However, it is possible to argue that this inference might be challenged in at least two ways: the fact that Demeas says that Chrysis was nursing the child does not necessary imply either i) that she is its mother or ii) that she was *actually*, as a matter of fact, nursing it.

I will now start by considering the first issue. It is true that, according to the ancient medical tradition, to have a woman feeding a child is clearly a sign that the woman had recently given birth. This kind of example was reported in rhetorical treatises as an example of infallible proof: a woman having milk must be or must have been recently pregnant.<sup>21</sup> However, it is not necessarily true that a woman has given birth to the same child that she feeds with her milk. Accordingly, the first problem in Demeas' reasoning is that he declares that he saw Chrysis holding the child and giving it the breast (διδούσαν τιθίον)<sup>22</sup> and, he believes that this is the proof that Chrysis has recently given birth to the same infant that she is now nursing and that he has discovered to be son of Moschion. However, the fact that Chrysis διδούσαν τιθίον does not imply that she has actually given birth *to the child to whom διδούσαν τιθίον*. Demeas is wrong in believing that her doing so is a confirmation that she is the child's mother.

<sup>20</sup> Men. *Sam.* 265-269. This case is another example of ἀναγνώρισις ἐκ παραλογισμοῦ according to Munteanu 2002, pp. 123-125.

<sup>21</sup> See Arist. *APr.* II 27, 70a11-b6. See Scafuro 2003 pp. 117-118 for a detailed explanation.

<sup>22</sup> Men. *Sam.* 266.

Scafuro reconstructs Demeas' reasoning in this way:<sup>23</sup>

I premise: Women *διδούσαν τρῆθιον* have given birth to the infant to whom they *διδούσαν τρῆθιον*

II premise: Chrysis *διδούσαν τρῆθιον*

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Conclusion: Chrysis has given birth to the infant to whom she is *διδούσαν τρῆθιον*

Demeas is, therefore, misleading himself and the audience in formulating the first premise of this reasoning. Secondly, it is possible that Demeas also gets the second premise of his reasoning wrong. In fact, the fact that Demeas tells the audience that Chrysis was *διδούσαν τρῆθιον* does not imply that Chrysis was actually feeding the child: she might just have held him close to her breast and Demeas could have been misled by this image. We know that, at the beginning of this third Act, when Demeas comes out from his house, he states that he is not sure how to see things straight anymore.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, towards the end of the play, when Nikeratos comes out saying that he saw his daughter *διδούσαν τρῆθιον* to the child, Demeas replies that she could have just been playing with him.<sup>25</sup>

Menander has formulated the eyewitness testimony of both Demeas and Nikeratos with ambiguous phraseology: both report they have witnessed a woman *διδούσαν τρῆθιον* to the infant [...] but neither man precisely says the infant actually received nourishment thereby.<sup>26</sup>

It is true that, in this context, Demeas' reply is meant to be a clumsy attempt to calm Nikeratos down. However, it is arguable that, when Demeas saw Chrysis holding the child, he was in a confused state of mind similar to that of Nikeratos later: Demeas recognises here that seeing a woman holding a child close to her breast does not entail that she is its mother and that she is breast-feeding it. As I will show in the next paragraph, Demeas' state of mind could have altered his perception of Chrysis holding the child. Consequently, the second piece of evidence of Demeas' enthymeme is not an infallible proof but a fallible one, which corresponds to the way in which Aristotle defines a 'σημεῖον'. And, as Aristotle suggests, an enthymeme based on *σημεῖον* can be easily refuted because no fallible sign can enter into a strictly logical proof.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Scafuro 2003, p. 128.

<sup>24</sup> Men. *Sam.* 213.

<sup>25</sup> Men. *Sam.* 540-543.

<sup>26</sup> Scafuro 2003, p. 129.

<sup>27</sup> λύεται δὲ καὶ τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ διὰ σημείου ἐνθυμήματα εἰρημένα, κὰν ἢ ὑπάρχοντα, ὥσπερ ἐλέχθη ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις· ὅτι γὰρ ἀσυλλόγιστόν ἐστιν πᾶν σημεῖον.

In conclusion, it is arguable that Demeas worked out his reasoning in the following way:

I premise: Moschion *might be* the child's father because the nurse said so

II premise: Chrysis is *undoubtedly* the child's mother as *I believe I saw* her nursing it (and *I was told* she was).

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Conclusion: Moschion and Chrysis are the child's parents and Chrysis was the one who seduced Moschion.<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, Demeas makes use of several conjectures that are not properly verified as being true. A possible explanation is that Demeas is in love with Chrysis<sup>29</sup> and, when he sees her, the possibility that she could be breast-feeding Moschion's child and that that child could have been the result of a relationship with his son, makes him so angry as to prevent a rigorous inquiry. Emotions provided by this perception mislead Demeas as i) they prevent a thorough inquiry to discover what really happened and, probably, ii) they also influence his own perceptions. As mentioned before, we do not know, in fact, what Demeas might have seen: it is possible that Chrysis was actually feeding the child (as she has just lost hers)<sup>30</sup> but it is also possible that she was just holding the baby close to her and that Demeas, from a distance, thought she was actually nursing it. Indeed, when Demeas comes out from the house, he is in an evident status of confusion and he is not sure any more if he can see and reason properly.<sup>31</sup> The apparent possibility that Chrysis had a child with Moschion has a devastating effect on Demeas and prevents him from inquiring thoroughly about the identity of the child's father, which he seemed determined to discover before seeing Chrysis with the child.

We realise this if we continue to examine Demeas' monologue. After having established in his mind that the child was Chrysis', he laments that the whole thing is unbelievable: Moschion has always been an affectionate child and he couldn't have

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“σημεῖα and enthymemes that draws conclusion through a σημεῖον are refutable even if true, as was said in the first lecture, for the fact that any σημεῖον is non-syllogistic” (Arist. *Rhet.* II 25, 1403a2-4).

τὰ δὲ τεκμήρια καὶ τεκμηριώδη ἐνθυμήματα κατὰ μὲν τὸ ἀσυλλόγιστον οὐκ ἔσται λῦσαι [...], λείπεται δ' ὡς οὐχ ὑπάρχει τὸ λεγόμενον δεικνύναι. εἰ δὲ φανερόν καὶ ὅτι ὑπάρχει καὶ ὅτι τεκμήριον, ἄλυτον ἤδη γίγνεται τοῦτο.

“But τεκμήρια and enthymemes with τεκμήρια cannot be refuted as non syllogistic [...], and what is left to show is that the alleged fact is not true. If it is evident that it is true and that it is a τεκμήριον, the argument is irrefutable” (Arist. *Rhet.* II 25, 1403a10-15). For further discussion about these passages and the distinction between fallible and non-fallible signs see Grimaldi 1980(b).

<sup>28</sup> Demeas formulates this accusation explicitly at Men. *Sam.* 333-342

<sup>29</sup> Men. *Sam.* 80-85.

<sup>30</sup> Men. *Sam.* 55.

<sup>31</sup> See Men. *Sam.* 213-16.

done something like that. However, when he looks back again with his mind at those images and those words and he considers them again, dwelling on the memories that they have left in him, he is completely driven out of mind. And, as we will see from the following scene, this will lead him to complete his wrong version of the story.

Δη: οὐχ ὑπονοῶ, τὸ πράγμα δ' εἰς μέσον φέρω  
ἅ τ' ἀκήκο' αὐτός, οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν οὐδέπεω.  
σύνοιδα γὰρ τῷ μειρακίῳ, νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς,  
καὶ κοσμίῳ τὸν πρότερον ὄντι χρόνον ἀεὶ  
καὶ περὶ ἔμ' ὡς ἔνεστιν εὐσεβεστάτῳ.  
πάλιν δ', ἐπειδὴν τὴν λέγουσαν καταμάθῳ  
τίτθην ἐκείνου πρῶτον οὖσαν, εἴτ' ἐμοῦ  
λάθραι λέγουσαν, εἴτ' ἀποβλέψῳ πάλιν  
εἰς τὴν ἀγαπῶσαν αὐτὸ καὶ βεβιασμένην  
ἐμοῦ τρέφειν ἄκοντος, ἐξέστηχ' ὄλωσ.

DEMEAS: I am not just making a conjecture, I am bringing the facts before you, and what I have myself heard, I am not yet angry. I know the young boy, I really do, and he has always been moderate before and always as dutiful to me as he could be. But whenever I consider once more that the nurse who was talking was once his own, and she was talking secretly, and whenever I look again at her [Chrysis] who adores it [the child] and who forced me to raise it when I did not want to, I am out of my mind.<sup>32</sup>

On one hand, Demeas considers that what he has just experienced seems to be incredible; on the other hand, the recurrent images of the nurse and Chrysis can only confirm his doubts. In particular, he cannot stop looking in his mind at the sight of the woman he loved with the child. Accordingly, having been impressed and confused by all these circumstances, Demeas just accepts a persuasive (but wrong) version of the story that appears to his mind right at the moment that he interprets the perceptive data. This conclusion, in fact, is drawn while Demeas, in an evidently excited state of mind, recapitulates what he has seen and heard, having been powerfully impressed by those images and those words.

A further passage may serve as evidence of the fact that the state of mind in which Demeas is drawing inferences is not suitable for carrying on a rational inquiry about what he has seen and heard. Immediately after his first monologue, when Demeas attempts to interrogate Parmenon in order to be sure of his assumption about Chrysis, the child and Moschion, he is again prevented from knowing the truth by his excited

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<sup>32</sup> Men. Sam. 270-279.

state of mind. In front of Parmenon Demeas claims that he is not just guessing (οὐ γὰρ εικάζων λέγω),<sup>33</sup> but he knows with certainty what happened (εἰδότα γ' ἀκριβῶς): Moschion is the father of the child that Chrysis is nursing and he just wants confirmation of this.

**Δη:** εἰδότα γ' ἀκριβῶς πάντα καὶ πεπυσμένον  
ὅτι Μοσχίωνός ἐστιν, ὅτι σύνοισθα σύ,  
ὅτι δι' ἐκεῖνον αὐτὸ νῦν αὕτη τρέφει.

**Πα:** τίς φησι;

**Δη:** πάντες. ἀλλ' ἀπόκρισαι τοῦτό μοι·  
ταῦτ' ἐστίν;

**Πα:** ἔστι, δέσποτ', ἀλλὰ λανθάνειν –

**Δη:** τί “λανθάνειν”; ἱμάντα παιδῶν τις δότω  
ἐπὶ τουτονί μοι τὸν ἀσεβῆ.

DEMEAS: I know everything [really] accurately and I have found out that [the child] is Moschion's, that you also know about that and that she [Chrysis] is nursing it now for him.

PARMENON: Who says?

DEMEAS: Everyone! But now answer this question for me: is that true?

PARMENON: It is sir, but something is missing...

DEMEAS: what [is this] “something is missing”? Some one among you slaves, give me a leather strap for this sacrilegious man!<sup>34</sup>

Surprisingly enough, Demeas makes an interesting choice of words in order to explain what he has understood: talking with Parmenon, Demeas seems to have, apparently, a clearer view of the situation. He tells Parmenon what he has concluded from the facts that he has just witnessed but, when talking with him, he does not present them in the distorted version of the story as he did just a moment before meeting him. He says that he knows that Moschion is the father of the child and that Chrysis is nursing it for him. Thus Demeas asks Parmenon, without intending to, to confirm the true version of the story. He admits here the possibility that Moschion actually is the child's father and

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<sup>33</sup> Men. *Sam.* 310.

<sup>34</sup> Men. *Sam.* 316-323. “Demeas proceeds quite in the wrong way in his interrogation of Parmenon and ends by having his own misconception confirmed as the truth:

Q. Who is the baby's mother? A. Chrysis (Parmenon sticking to the story)

Q. Who is the father? A. You, she says

When Demeas then goes on to say that he knows the truth, Parmenon would undoubtedly, if questioned correctly, have revealed the true state of affairs. Demeas, however, by saying only that he knows that Moschion is the father and not enquiring further about the mother leaves himself open to misunderstanding. Parmenon assumes that if Demeas knows that Moschion is the father he must also know that Plangon is the mother. All that he is actually asked to agree to is Moschion's share in the matter and this simply confirms to Demeas that he has been cuckolded” (Bain 1983, p. 118-119).

that, when he saw her, Chrysis was nursing a child that might not have been her own. However, his comprehension is only apparent as, at the end of the dialogue, Demeas refuses to listen to what Parmenon has to tell him and is still convinced that the child is that of Moschion and Chrysis.

On the other hand, Parmenon tries to let him know that something escaped his notice. Parmenon says ambiguously that something ‘λανθάνειν’ in the reconstruction that Demeas has just asked to confirm. He uses the verb λανθάνω perhaps because he means that something has not been clearly detected by Demeas and so he fails to understand what has really happened. Demeas, instead, infers that something is missing because someone has actively concealed the fact that Chrysis and Moschion are the child’s parents. Parmenon tries to tell Demeas that what escaped his notice are the real facts: namely, that Moschion is the father’s child and that Nikeratos’ daughter, whom he now wants to marry, is its mother, not Chrysis. However, Demeas refuses to listen; hence, his attempt at inquiry will fail and the misunderstanding will continue.

This scene recalls in some way the first episode of the *Oedipus Tyrannos*. At the end of that episode, Oedipus is having a lively debate with Tiresias who is trying to explain to him who is the cause of the plague that is afflicting Thebes and, therefore, who Oedipus is and what he has done.<sup>35</sup> Oedipus does not understand the final revelatory sentence that Tiresias pronounces, as he still cannot imagine why Tiresias is accusing him of Laius’ death. He goes away full of anger, threatening Tiresias and accusing him and Creon of being authors of a plot to overthrow his kingship.<sup>36</sup> However, Oedipus subsequently discovers the truth by carrying on his inquiry alone, collecting relevant information that he missed before. Apparently, both Demeas and Oedipus seem to have a disposition to draw inferences quickly which have the effect of extending the initial misunderstanding. On the other hand, what we have in *Oedipus Tyrannos* is a rational inquiry and a progressive discovery that requires boldness and steady resolution on the part of the main character to find the truth to be solved.<sup>37</sup> In Demeas’ case, the character is highly influenced by his state of mind: anger and deception prevent rigorous reasoning and lead him to construct a parallel fictional scenario in which he struggles on alone.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> S. *OT*. 449-462.

<sup>36</sup> S. *OT*. 446. See Konstan 2006(b), p. 38. On this much-debated passage see Carrière, 1956; Taplin 1978, pp. 43-45; Knox 1980.

<sup>37</sup> See esp. Bowra 1944; Knox 1957; Diano 1968; Golden 1978; Giangrande 1983; Segal C. 2001; Longo 2006 and Greenspan 2008.

<sup>38</sup> See Scafuro 2003 and Traill 2008. Groton 1987 declares that Demeas’ anger is contagious and that, in particular, Nikeratos will be affected by it. In Groton’s opinion the arousing of the characters one after



There is another passage that supports this reading: in the fourth Act, Demeas will behave similarly while speaking with Moschion. There, he claims to know (οἶδα) everything because he has heard the truth (ἀκήκοα) from Parmenon.

Δη: ἀλλ' ἐγώ. τὸ παιδίον σόν ἐστιν. οἶδ', ἀκήκοα  
τοῦ συνειδότης τὰ κρυπτὰ Παρμένοντος· ὥστε μὴ  
πρὸς ἐμὲ παῖζε.

DEMEAS: Then I [will tell you]! The child is yours, I know. I have heard from Parmenon who shares knowledge of these secrets; and so, do not make fun of me.<sup>39</sup>

However, as shown in the first section, just to hear or to see something – that is, to have bare sensory evidence – is not a warrant of certain knowledge, especially if the person who is having the sensory evidence is as enraged as Demeas was while talking to Parmenon. In reality, Parmenon did not have the opportunity to tell Demeas the whole truth and, consequently, Demeas did not have the chance to listen to the whole story. Menander insists on Demeas' lack of knowledge, caused partly by his angry temper, and on the difficulty, because of his angry temper, of informing him about his erroneous inferences. We will find a verification of this at the end of the comedy. In Act Five, Demeas will explain his own error with a significant series of verbs the presence of which is strongly accentuated by asyndeton.

Δη: οὐδὲν δικαίως ἠτιτιάσάμην τί σε·  
ἠγνόησ', ἤμαρτον, ἐμάνην.

DEMEAS: I accused you wrongly; I did not know, I made a mistake, I was out of my mind.<sup>40</sup>

He wrongly accused his son – and Chrysis – because he did not understand the situation and he formulated a false belief about it (ἠγνόησα)<sup>41</sup> and he made a mistake (ἤμαρτον). He recognises now that he behaved like a mad man (ἐμάνην). He now sees clearly that when he came out from the house and told the audience what happened, he did not

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another does not only generate humour but also serves the function of organising, energising and unifying the plot.

<sup>39</sup> Men. *Sam.* 477-479. Where οἶδα is emphatic and not parenthetic as when it is parenthetic it is normally joined with σαφῶς (Gomme and Sandbach 1973 *ad loc.*).

<sup>40</sup> Men. *Sam.* 702-703. “Thus the *agnoia*, i.e. unawareness of the real state of affairs, is supposed to clear him of his error. On the other hand, Demeas is aware of his rash action and therefore he explains his *hamartia* also as a result of temporary madness (*mania*)” (Dworacki 1977, p. 21).

<sup>41</sup> Gomme and Sandbach 1973 *ad loc.* “ἠγνόησα is more than ‘I did not know’; it means I had a false belief”. See Men. *Sam.* 705.

reason correctly (εὖ φρονῶ), but he understood things wrongly as he was angry (μαίνομαι) at what he had seen.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, Demeas' state of knowledge and lack of accuracy in making the right judgment about the situation leads him to a complete misunderstanding of people and sensory evidence. Consequently, absence of knowledge is not the only reason for his wrong behaviour; misinterpretation of his perceptions is also a remarkably important element and his bad temper contributes to extending this misunderstanding for a considerable part of the action.

Demeas' perceptions are not adequately evaluated and connected in a rigorous line of inquiry. Between perception and knowledge there is the possibility of wrong belief: all perceptual awareness seems to be subject to error and this is affected by the perceptive subject's state of mind. Demeas does not consider sufficiently this possibility, as he is evidently angry, and he does not check the reliability of what he has perceived. The false belief affects Demeas' understanding of who the characters are – or what they have done – and sets the action in motion. What I have pointed out here is how Demeas' misunderstanding develops. According to my analysis, the potential scope for error, in his evaluation of the circumstances, lies in the reasoning that constitutes the transition between acquisition of perceptions (αἴσθησις) and certain knowledge.

At this point, it would be relevant to recall that the contrast between dramatic characters' beliefs and the reality of the situation was a recurrent topic in tragedy. For instance, the opposition between δόξα and ἐπιστήμη gained after a process of verification is one of the core themes of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.<sup>43</sup> The play mainly centres on the two versions of this contrast: namely, the case in which δόξα is verified in order to gain ἐπιστήμη; and, the cases in which it is not.<sup>44</sup> In the play, Deianeira believes that Heracles has betrayed her with Iole, daughter of Eurytus, who entered Deianeira's house as Heracles' slave. Before accusing her husband, Deianeira enquires scrupulously in order to discover the real identity of Iole. She asks the Messenger and Lichas many times to explain clearly what happened and to tell her the whole truth.<sup>45</sup> Once certain knowledge about Iole is achieved, Deianeira plans to use the charm that the centaur Nessos gave her to win back Heracles' heart. However, in this case, she does

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<sup>42</sup> See Men. *Sam.* 216. Perception of a certain situation creates a certain emotion that, in its turn, influences the agents' beliefs about that situation. I will come back to the dynamic of this process when discussing Aristotle (see pp. 104-106 below).

<sup>43</sup> This is explicitly set out by the Chorus at *S. Tr.* 588-593. See Lawrence 1978.

<sup>44</sup> Papadimitriopoulos 2006 argues that *Trachiniae* is divided into four parts, each part presenting conflicting versions of the truth and each part contributing to the transition from ignorance to knowledge.

<sup>45</sup> *S. Tr.* 349-350; 398; 400; 437; 453. See Di Benedetto 1983, p. 148.

not make an inquiry about the real power of the charm: she has never done an experiment (πεῖρα) to test the effectiveness of Nessos' suggestion. Moreover, she knows that knowledge based only on opinion does not provide ground for confidence (πίστις).

Δη: Οὕτως ἔχει γ' ἡ πίστις, ὡς τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν  
ἔνεστι, πείρα δ' οὐ προσωμίλησά πω.

DEIANEIRA: Indeed, to say the truth, my ground of confidence lies only in having personal opinion, I have not yet confirmed it with experience.<sup>46</sup>

However, she urgently needs to restore her house's welfare and she will test the charm on Heracles himself. She will apply her δόξα about the charm without having verified whether her belief is right or not.<sup>47</sup> She achieves a clear understanding of the situation (μάθησιν ἄρνημαι)<sup>48</sup> only after having sent the robe, smeared with Nessos' deadly blood, to Heracles.<sup>49</sup> In her case, what leads her into error is the fact that she fails to use empirical experience that might verify what Nessos tells her about the power of the charm. Thus, Deianeira's error does not lie in the incorrect working out of empirical evidence but in the tragic lack of empirical evidence itself.

Similar issues related to knowledge *versus* opinion and truth *versus* deception arise in the *Helen* of Euripides. In the recognition scene between Helen and Menelaus, Helen tries to convince Menelaus that she is the real Helen and that she should not be blamed for actions that she did not perform. The Helen for whom Menelaus fought at Troy is just an εἶδωλον.<sup>50</sup> Helen also asks him to look ('σκέψαι') at her as nothing better than Menelaus' eyes could produce evidence for what she is saying. Menelaus admits that the woman in front of him has Helen's appearance but he does not trust his eyes which seem to be failing him.<sup>51</sup> He will instead trust the servant's words when the latter enters and says that the Helen brought back from Troy has suddenly disappeared in the

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<sup>46</sup> S. Tr. 590-591.

<sup>47</sup> S. Tr. 588-593.

<sup>48</sup> S. Tr. 711.

<sup>49</sup> See Whitman's thesis about the "late learning" of Deianeira (Whitman 1951, pp. 105-116).

<sup>50</sup> E. Hel. 582.: "Ironically Helen herself appeals to the very source of 'knowledge' which her circumstances show to be wholly unreliable as a guide to reality. Thus, given Menelaus' belief in the phantom, Helen's argument is self-refuting and Menelaus rejects the visual 'proof' [...] of her identity on the evidence [...] of his own eyes" (Allan 2008, p. 211).

<sup>51</sup> τὸ δ' ὄμμα μου νοσεῖ E. Hel. 575. "These lines ring the changes of the appearance/reality antithesis. Menelaus first wonders whether his eyes rather than his mind are deceiving him; the implicit contrast is between the hallucinations just pondered, which would be a sign of god-sent madness, and the possibility of simple mistaken identity. The latter is figured, however, as a different form of ill-health [...]. Helen responds with the language of appearance and when Menelaus admits that she seems to be Helen, she presses the point, urging him to accept the evidence of his own eyes. Menelaus' response shows that he has decided that it is precisely his eyes (i.e. her appearance) that he cannot trust" (Burian 2007, p. 226).

sky as a phantom.<sup>52</sup> Here, sensory evidence seems to be of no worth for the purpose of producing a clear understanding of what people and facts really are. The things perceived, properties of things in the world, have no objective existence, but only exist as they are perceived and for the percipient. Words are, eventually, the element that persuades Menelaus.

In the *Trachiniae* and the *Helen* the scope for misunderstanding seems to lie in the sphere of external evidence. In the case of Deianeira, what is stressed is the importance of sensory evidence and the tragic consequences that its absence produces. In the second case, the power of sensory evidence is denied and replaced by the power of words. Thus, by contrast with Demeas' case, the error in judging a situation is not produced by the subject's internal reflection on sensory evidence but on the lack or worthlessness of this kind of evidence itself. It may be argued that Menander draws our attention to different kinds of issue from those discussed here in Sophocles and Euripides. If we consider Demeas' misunderstanding, the problem is not simply the fatal lack of sufficient knowledge, as in Deianeira's case, or the impossibility of recognising someone by his perceptible appearance, as in the *Helen*. In Demeas' case, what is stressed is Demeas' struggle to draw correct inferences from empirical evidence in order to understand the sequence of actions; this is what creates the comedy. This is why Menander gives Demeas two long monologues:<sup>53</sup> this is so that the playwright can make clear what Demeas has misunderstood and why and so that he can present Demeas' misleading reasoning to the audience. Menander is interested in pointing out that Demeas fails to carry out a correct process of inference that is derived from sensory evidence already gained and this failure represents ethical failure in his state of mind or character. This representation, I believe, is strikingly analogous to Aristotle's analysis, as will be shown in the next section.

In Menander's extant works, there is another case in which a figure, because of being emotionally involved in the situation, completely misunderstands it: this is that of Sostratos in the *Dis Exapaton*. The comedy is largely fragmentary, but it is possible to reconstruct the plot on the basis of Plautus' *Bacchides*, which is most probably the Roman version of the Menandrian comedy.<sup>54</sup> Sostratos, a young Athenian, meets Bacchis, a *hetaira* in Ephesos and falls in love with her. Immediately after their meeting, Bacchis must leave Ephesos for Athens as she has sold herself to a soldier

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<sup>52</sup> E. *Hel.* 605. See Wright 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Men. *Sam.* 207-282 and 324-356.

<sup>54</sup> See Handley, 1968; Questa 1970; Del Corno 1975, Bain 1979; Barsby 1986; Lefèvre 2001(b) and Paduano 2008.

who is living there. Sostratos asks his friend Moschos, who is in Athens, to find the girl: Sostratos would have provided the money for taking the girl back on his return from Ephesos. However, Bacchis has a sister in Athens: she is a *hetaira* and she is using the same professional name as her sister. When Moschos finds the two girls he falls in love with Bacchis' sister.

When Menander's fragment starts, Sostratos has probably just been told that his friend Moschos is involved in an affair with a courtesan, Bacchis: Moschos' *paedagogus* begs Sostratos to criticise his friend for his relationship with her.<sup>55</sup> Sostratos suddenly infers that Moschos' Bacchis is the same one he is in love with. As soon as he is alone on the stage, he starts his monologue already convinced of the culpability of Bacchis: she has betrayed him with his friend; the courtesan, he says, is reckless (ἰταμῆ), everything is clear to him (οὐκ ἄδηλόν ἐστί μοι).<sup>56</sup>

He then starts to formulate his strategy:<sup>57</sup> he will give the money that he received to buy Bacchis back to his father and the greedy *hetaira* will be left with nothing: her seductive words will have no power on him any more.<sup>58</sup>

If the emotional language and hints of ambivalence in these speeches warn us not to trust them, so too do the obvious elements of fantasy. We are not allowed to forget that the speakers' assertions spring from their imagination as they sketch the unmistakably hypothetical scenarios.<sup>59</sup>

While Sostratos is forming these resolutions and making these accusations building a case on his own, he does not check the reliability of his hypothesis either with Bacchis or with Moschos. His emotional involvement does not allow him to enquire further; he is sure of the conclusions drawn on the basis of what he has heard and he is angry as result. In Act Four, we find that Sostratos has not made progress in his understanding or his resolutions;<sup>60</sup> he declares that he is angry at his friend and he is still accusing the charming Bacchis of being the cause of what he thinks they have done to him:

Σω: αὐτῆ δ' ἰκανῶς, καλῶς ποοῦσά γ', εὐρέθη  
οἷα<ν> ποτ' ὄμιην οὔσα, τὸν δ' ἀβέλτερον

<sup>55</sup> Men. *Dis Ex.* 15-17.

<sup>56</sup> Men. *Dis. Ex.* 20-21.

<sup>57</sup> Batstone 2005, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Men. *Dis Ex.* 29-30.

<sup>59</sup> Traill 2008, p. 101. As usually happens in this sort of speeches, “il momento fantastico e associativo, prevale fino a quasi escludere quello logico, discorsivo” (Del Corno 1975, p. 207).

<sup>60</sup> “Per quello che si riesce a vedere, Menandro esprime con vivacità e duttilità di stile ed abilità scenica l'incoerenza dei pensieri dell'innamorato deluso che oscilla, prima e dopo aver restituito il denaro al padre, tra la stizza nei suoi propri confronti, l'ira per la creduta fedigrafa, la delusione nei confronti di Moscho-Pistoclero, anch'esso creduto traditore” (Questa 1970, p. 195).

Μόσχον ἔ.ε..· καὶ τὰ μὲν ἔγωγ' ὀργίζομαι,  
τὰ δ' οὐκ ἐκεῖνον τοῦ γεγονότος αἴτιον  
ἀδικήματος νενόμικα, τὴν δ' ἰταμωτάτην  
πασῶν ἐκείνην.

SOSTRATOS: She has revealed herself enough (and she did well) to be as once I thought. Silly Moschos...and indeed I am enraged, but I think that that one [Moschos] is not the cause of the mistake that was made but she, the most reckless woman of all.<sup>61</sup>

Immediately after this, Moschos enters. He does not understand why Sostratos is accusing him of having offended his friend.<sup>62</sup> He asks for an explanation,<sup>63</sup> and, possibly, the misunderstanding will be clarified. Summing up, Sostratos has heard something that is true: in fact, Moschos is in love with a courtesan named Bacchis. On the sole basis of this auditory knowledge he infers something wrong: that Moschos is in love with *the same Bacchis* that he is in love with. Like Demeas, he does not make any further inquiry to support his inference with a larger set of proofs: love for the courtesan and anger towards her and his friend prevent any inquiry.

## 1.2 Moschion

In the *Samia* it is possible to identify another character, Moschion, for whom emotions play an important role in matters of ethical choice. In Moschion's case it is not possible to talk about misunderstanding or partial knowledge with respect to particulars or circumstances involved in his action. Nevertheless, even if Moschion seems to have a clear understanding of the circumstances in which he is acting, he fails to act correctly on at least two occasions. At the beginning of the play, Moschion decides not to tell Demeas the truth about the child he had by Nikeratos' daughter: the process by which he made this choice merits detailed study.

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<sup>61</sup> Men *Dis. Ex.* 97-102. "The self-congratulatory pity, framed from the perspective of the experienced ex-lover, is designed to console Sostratos with the fantasy that poor Moschos will be betrayed. Then for a moment we hear the truth: 'yes, in a way, I am angry', a truth carefully worded to protect Moschos from its consequences [...]. Then just as quickly the anger at Moschos is hidden in the conventional insults directed at the *hetaira*. This moment of revealed suppression allows us to see something that was hiding in Sostratos' 'strategy of the self' and in the rhetorical organisation of his earlier speech: Sostratos is faking it" (Batstone 2005, pp. 22-23).

<sup>62</sup> Men. *Dis. Ex.* 108-112.

<sup>63</sup> Men. *Dis. Ex.* 112.

Menander describes his relationship with his adoptive father Demeas as close and as allowing frank discussion.<sup>64</sup> He knows he does not have to be ashamed to talk to him about what he has done; however, he decides to conceal the truth. Moschion's shame prevents him from understanding Demeas' character properly and forming a correct judgement about what he should do in the present situation.<sup>65</sup>

**Πα:** ἀλλ' ὅπως ἔσει  
ἀνδρεῖος εὐθύς τ' ἐμβαλεῖς περι τοῦ γάμου  
λόγον.

**Μο:** τίνα τρόπον; δειλὸς ἤδη γίνομαι  
ὡς πλησίον τὸ πρᾶγμα γέγονε.

**Πα:** πῶς λέγεις;

**Μο:** αἰσχύνομαι τὸν πατέρα.

PARMENON: But act like a man and get straight to the matter of the wedding.

MOSCHION: How? I am a coward now that the matter has come close.

PARMENON: How do you mean?

MOSCHION: I am ashamed before my father.<sup>66</sup>

Shame and its objects are clearly defined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. I will quote the passage here to spell out the kind of feeling that Menander's Moschion may have in mind in speaking of his shame before his father. In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle describes what sort of things people are ashamed of and we find what Moschion has done included there.

ἔστω δὴ αἰσχύνῃ λύπη τις ἢ ταραχὴ περι τὰ εἰς ἀδοξίαν φαινόμενα φέρειν τῶν κακῶν, ἢ παρόντων ἢ γεγονότων ἢ μελλόντων [...], ἀνάγκη αἰσχύνεσθαι ἐπὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις τῶν κακῶν ὅσα αἰσχρὰ δοκεῖ εἶναι ἢ αὐτῷ ἢ ὧν φροντίζει [...], τὸ συγγενέσθαι οἷς οὐ δεῖ ἢ οὐ δεῖ ἢ ὅτε οὐ δεῖ.

Let shame be [defined as] a sort of pain or agitation concerning the class of evils, whether present, past or future, that seems to bring a person in disrespect [...]. By necessity being ashamed applies to such evils as seem [in the eyes of the others] to be disgraceful to a person or one about whom one cares. [...] And [such is] having sexual relations with those with whom one should not or where one should not or when one should not.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Men. *Sam.* 16-22. Moreover the fear that Demeas would have refused the wedding is hardly justified since Nikeratos and Demeas were travelling together (Blume 1974).

<sup>65</sup> See Blume 1974, pp. 12-15 and Goldberg 1980, p. 94.

<sup>66</sup> Men. *Sam.* 63-67. For the discussion on this passage see Wehrli 1936 and Jäkel 1982.

<sup>67</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 6, 1383b12-23.

Shame, which is a sort of pain or emotion characteristic of young people, as Aristotle defines it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,<sup>68</sup> powerfully affects the state of mind of Moschion who has done something of which, he knows very well, he is now ashamed. We can suppose that the possibility that his act will bring on him the disapproval of his adoptive father, whom he holds in the greatest respect, affects his reasoning: he decides not to tell the truth, but this will cause an even worse misunderstanding.

This is not the only case in which emotions overpower Moschion's rational reasoning and lead him to make mistakes. The young man, in fact, seems to have found himself in a similar state of mind at the moment of the young girl's rape, though the kind of dominating πάθος involved was different. To analyse this point, it is worth recalling Moschion's confession of his error during his monologue at the beginning of the play. There, he plainly confesses to the audience that he has made a mistake: “ἡμάρτηκα γάρ”,<sup>69</sup> as he says referring to the rape of Nikeratos' daughter. Moschion's ἁμαρτία lies in the fact that he knows clearly the circumstances in which he find himself acting; he knows the identity of the girl that he approaches at the festival of Adonis<sup>70</sup> and he also knows very well that he should not approach her and, least of all, rape her.

**Μο:** ἐξ ἀγροῦ δὴ καταδραμῶν  
ὡς ἔτυ]χ[έ] γ' εἰς Ἀδώνι' αὐτάς κατέλαβον  
συνηγμένας ἐνθάδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς μετὰ τινων  
ἄλλω]ν γυναικῶν· τῆς δ' ἑορτῆς παιδιὰν  
πολλή]ν ἐχούσης οἶον εἰκόσ, συμπαρῶν  
ἐγινόμην οἶμαι θεατῆς·  
[...]  
ὀκνῶ λέγειν τὰ λοιπ', ἴσως δ' αἰσχύνομαι  
οἷς] οὐδὲν ὄφελός ἐσθ'· ὅμως αἰσχύνομαι.

MOSCHION: One day, hastening down from the country, it happened that I found them inside our house all together with other women to celebrate the festival of Adonis. As you might imagine, since the feasting was bringing a lot of fun, being present there I became, I think, a spectator. [...] I hesitate to say what followed, perhaps I am ashamed and it is not at all useful [to be ashamed] of that, but all the same, I am ashamed.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Arist. *EN* IV 15, 1128b10-21.

<sup>69</sup> Men. *Sam.* 3.

<sup>70</sup> See Detienne 1979.

<sup>71</sup> Men. *Sam.* 38-48. See Gomme and Sandbach 1973 *ad loc.*



What has happened to Moschion is that, led by the sudden passion for the girl, he could not restrain his erotic desire and he made a mistake in raping the girl. Moschion was clearly overwhelmed by the circumstances he found himself in. He says that, from being a spectator of the festival of Adonis, he became one of the protagonists of the festival, raping, eventually, one of them. He now feels shame because he now regrets that he approached sexually someone he should not have approached. It seems that, in this kind of situation, the vulnerable state of mind of a young man such as Moschion, powerfully affected by the whole festive atmosphere, quickly led him to lose grip of himself and to make a mistake, acting against his better judgment. Once the deed has been done, Moschion knows that he does not have any plausible justification for his behaviour and, as he says, he is ashamed of what he has done. At the beginning of the play, Moschion recovering his senses, gives a clear account of his mistake and he takes responsibility for it. Clearly, erotic desire influenced his thoughts about what should have been done at that present moment as shame influences his choice about how to deal with his adoptive father.

Overall, then, Moschion, like Demeas, represents a case in which perceptions and emotions affect clear insight about what the right course of action is. In Demeas' case, the character's understanding of the situation is influenced by his overwhelming emotional reaction at what Demeas thinks he has perceived. Demeas would be right to be angry at Chrysis and Moschion if they had really had an affair; however, this is not the case. This is also what creates a comic situation for the audience: Demeas believes he is in a tragic situation;<sup>72</sup> but he is not and the audience knows this. Demeas attaches importance to his relationship with his adoptive son and his courtesan and he is clearly vulnerable to the emotional intensity that this involves. A few scattered pieces of information make him angry and unable to conduct a rigorous analysis of what really happened. Moschion's example is different: like any young man of his age, the emotions aroused by the sight of the girl or his adoptive father eclipse any ethically good reason he might have thought of in deciding what has to be done.

Menander seems to be interested in constructing two characters that the audience can recognise as clearly mistaken. The errors they make depend on their inability to control their emotions when responding to situations and this is what triggers the chain of events leading to a happy ending. Furthermore, Moschion and Demeas confess openly to the audience their (wrong) thought-processes, the deceptive reasoning that leads them to making a wrong choice. In this way, the audience is able to spot their

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<sup>72</sup> See Men. *Sam.* 324-336.

flaws and to laugh at their mistakes, being aware of the happy ending and understanding exactly how and why they make wrong decisions and, therefore, what it is that makes events unfold in a certain way.

## *2. Aristotle on the vulnerability of correct (ethical) reasoning*

If we turn now to Aristotle, we realise that he is interested in dealing with a very similar analysis of human motivations. The description that Aristotle gives of the psychological and ethical process we experience when we form opinions from perceptions and respond emotionally to circumstances matches, and can help to explain, what happens to Moschion and Demeas on the stage. Generally speaking, in Aristotle we find that the difference between ethically right and wrong choice depends on how we perceive<sup>73</sup> (αἰσθάνομαι) the particular facts on which we act. The success of this process of evaluation relies significantly on the subject's ability to grasp the various aspects of his situation in order to respond adequately to this grasp.<sup>74</sup> This relates to a point made in chapter 2:<sup>75</sup> for Aristotle, what seems to be essential, in theoretical understanding as in practical actions, is the ability to grasp salient features of the various situations that we experience in a lifetime.<sup>76</sup> This ability should provide i) theoretical knowledge with the acquisition of first principles that explain the phenomenal world; and ii) practical knowledge with the completion of the final decision of what the ethically good action should be in a particular circumstance.

καὶ ὁ νοῦς τῶν ἐσχάτων ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα· καὶ γὰρ τῶν πρώτων ὄρων καὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων νοῦς ἐστὶ καὶ οὐ λόγος, καὶ ὁ μὲν κατὰ τὰς ἀποδείξεις τῶν ἀκινήτων ὄρων καὶ πρώτων, ὁ δ' ἐν ταῖς πρακτικαῖς τοῦ ἐσχάτου καὶ ἐνδεχομένου καὶ τῆς ἐτέρας προτάσεως· ἀρχαὶ γὰρ τοῦ οὗ ἔνεκα αὐταὶ ἐκ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα γὰρ τὰ καθόλου· τούτων οὖν ἔχειν δεῖ αἰσθησιν, αὕτη δ' ἐστὶ νοῦς.

And insight, too, is of ultimates, and in both directions, for of both the primary terms and the ultimate particulars there is insight and not reasoning; and insight with respect to demonstrations is of immovable terms and of that which is primary; but, in practical [reasoning, intuition] is of the ultimate and variable objects and of the other [i.e., minor] premises, since these are principle of the final cause; for it is from

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<sup>73</sup> I am using here the verb 'to perceive' in the sense of 'to apprehend what is not present to observation; to see through', Onions 1983, s. v.

<sup>74</sup> The principles of practical understanding are not universal but context-dependent (Nussbaum 1986(b), p. 298-306). This does not mean that Aristotle is a relativist; action is concerned with particulars and these are relative to the specific situation (see further Chappell 2005).

<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 2, section 3.

<sup>76</sup> Nussbaum 1986(b), p. 305; See also Wiggins 1981(a) and Miller 1984.

particulars that we come to universals. Accordingly, we should have perception of these particulars, and this is insight.<sup>77</sup>

“On the theoretical level, to see an object of the first kind (it might be a fact) as made up of its elements is to have an explanation (systematic knowledge) of why it is as it is. The practical analogue is: seeing the general aim of pushing some desired objective in terms of a decision that reflects an analysis of the particular circumstances, thereby making the general aim into something that a good person in those circumstances can bring to realisation”.<sup>78</sup> To restate this line of thought: universal practical principles differ from universal principles of ἐπιστήμη. They are not universal in the sense that they form the basis of an unchangeable deductive system of knowledge or that they are the explanatory causes of our understanding of facts and ideas. Principles of practical reasoning are universal in the sense that they are chosen as objectively best by an ongoing reasoned ethical inquiry. On the basis of a shared idea of human nature, its aims and inclinations this enquiry selects guidelines that each human being should be able to apply to the specific circumstance in which he finds himself acting. The reciprocal sharing and understanding of these objective practical principles provides benefits for everyone.<sup>79</sup> The ability to apply to specific situations universal ethical principles that can guide the agent’s choice requires a certain education and a developed state of ethical character.

I have already analysed, in Chapter 2, how an analogous kind of ability is necessary also in theoretical understanding and the way in which it functions there.<sup>80</sup> Here, I consider how this kind of skill is also necessary in practical understanding and I focus on the steps of the practical decision and the way that perception and emotions might influence the agent’s practical insight in this process. According to Aristotle’s description of practical deliberation, it seems that in order to act virtuously the agent must i) understand exactly the circumstances in which he finds himself acting; and ii) consider what would generally be considered good to do in these circumstances. In order to choose virtuously what has to be done, it is important that the agent handles his emotions correctly at both these stages. To analyse this process, I will consider, first, the

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<sup>77</sup> Arist. *EN* VI 12, 1143a35-b5. On this passage see Sorabji 1973; Irwin 1978; Woods 1986 and Walsh 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Broadie and Rowe 2002, pp. 378 give a commentary on the passage just quoted (Arist. *EN* VI 12, 1143a35-b5).

<sup>79</sup> For what he calls an ‘objective-participant’ conception of the functioning of ethical reflection see Gill 1996, pp. 342-343 where he sees it as pervasive in Classical Greek culture. See also Gill 2005 on the relationship between universality and objectivity in ancient Greek ethics. See Nussbaum 1978, essay 4, on the difference between the principles of practical and theoretical reasoning.

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 2, section 3.2.

thought-processes that, in general, Aristotle ascribes to someone who draws together pieces of evidence: this process has not only epistemological relevance but also has ethical implications. In fact, in considering a practical situation, the correct working out of this process shapes the agent's understanding of the situation in which his action is involved. Secondly, I will discuss why an accurate management of the agent's emotions is fundamental in this process: to understand correctly the particulars involved in the practical action is sometimes not enough to produce right actions.

### *2.1 Thinking about one's own perceptions*

In Aristotle, inference from perceptions is a complex procedure that, in order to be correct, needs the accurate evaluation of pieces of evidence and the way they are connected. In the third book of *De Anima*, we find a good explanation of how this process of inference from perception works. Aristotle states that perception, in human beings, implies thinking (νοεῖν) and judging (φρονεῖν): thinking and judging what is in front of us are, in fact, a sort of perceiving (αἴσθησις) since the soul, in both of these states, forms a judgement and becomes acquainted with something existent.

Ἐπει δὲ δύο διαφοραῖς ὀρίζονται μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν, κινήσει τε τῇ κατὰ τόπον καὶ τῷ νοεῖν καὶ φρονεῖν καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι, δοκεῖ δὲ καὶ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν ὡςπερ αἰσθάνεσθαι τι εἶναι (ἐν ἀμφοτέροις γὰρ τοῦτοις κρίνει τι ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ γνωρίζει τῶν ὄντων).

[Having said that], there are two different characteristics by which the soul is mainly defined. i) Movement in space and ii) thinking, judging and perceiving. To think and to judge are thought to be a sort of perceiving (since the soul, in both of these states, forms a judgement and becomes acquainted with something existent).<sup>81</sup>

However, perceiving differs from thinking (νοεῖν). Indeed, the perception *per se* is always true and is found in all animals (ἢ μὲν γὰρ αἴσθησις τῶν ἰδίων ἀεὶ ἀληθής), whereas it is possible to think falsely also, and thinking is found in no animal in which there is not also reason (λόγος). Thus, once sense data have been perceived we can still make mistakes in interpreting them, that is, we can construct wrong reasoning on the basis of mere perceptions. This is why Aristotle distinguishes between φρόνησις,

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<sup>81</sup> Arist. *DA*. III 3, 427a17-21. Here I suggest for τὸ φρονεῖν the translation 'to judge' as it fits this more general case.

ἐπιστήμη, δόξα ἀληθής and αἴσθησις: sound judgement, understanding, true opinion and mere perceiving are not the same because the first three are always right; that is to say, they already imply right thinking and the ability to make the right kind of reasoning. Mere perceiving, however, (αἰσθάνεσθαι) can give scope for false thinking (μὴ ὀρθῶς νοεῖν) and, consequently, false belief (μὴ ὀρθῶς δοξάζειν).

ὅτι μὲν οὖν οὐ ταυτὸν ἐστὶ τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν, φανερόν· τοῦ μὲν γὰρ πᾶσι μέτεστι, τοῦ δὲ ὀλίγοις τῶν ζώων. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τὸ νοεῖν, ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶ τὸ ὀρθῶς καὶ τὸ μὴ ὀρθῶς, τὸ μὲν ὀρθῶς φρόνησις καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ δόξα ἀληθής, τὸ δὲ μὴ ὀρθῶς τάναντία τούτων – οὐδὲ τοῦτό ἐστὶ ταῦτο τῷ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἢ μὲν γὰρ αἴσθησις τῶν ἰδίων ἀεὶ ἀληθής, καὶ πᾶσιν ὑπάρχει τοῖς ζώοις, διανοεῖσθαι δ' ἐνδέχεται καὶ ψευδῶς, καὶ οὐδενὶ ὑπάρχει ᾧ μὴ καὶ λόγος.

It is indeed clear that to perceive and to judge are not the same thing: for all animals have a share of the one, but few of the other. Neither is thinking [the same as perceiving], in which is included right thinking and not right thinking: right thinking being sound judgement, understanding and true opinion, and not right thinking the opposites of these – and this is not the same as perception. Indeed perception of proper objects of specific senses is always true and it belongs to all animals, while thinking can be [true or] false and it belongs to no one that does not have also reason.<sup>82</sup>

It seems that, for Aristotle, in all these processes, which involve the movement from sense-perception to thinking or belief, the possibility of cognitive failure arises in the reasoning that accompanies perceptions, which is internal to the subject and dependent on how he interprets sense data. Thinking and believing can be right or wrong and human beings have the capacity to reason on the basis of their perceptions. This is why judgement (φρόνησις) and understanding (ἐπιστήμη) are always true – as they imply an already successful completion of the process of understanding. These differ fundamentally from thinking, (νοεῖν) and belief (δόξα) which can also be false (διανοεῖσθαι δ' ἐνδέχεται καὶ ψευδῶς)<sup>83</sup> as they have not yet achieved the exactness of a comprehensive understanding and become complete ἐπιστήμη.<sup>84</sup> Having said that, it would, therefore, be interesting to look more closely at the thought-process of belief-formation as presented by Aristotle and to discuss the way in which it is possible for the subject to form a wrong opinion, after having perceived (αἰσθάνεσθαι) something.

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<sup>82</sup> Arist. *DA*. III 3, 427b 6-16.

<sup>83</sup> We find evidence of this also in the *Posterior Analytics* where ignorance is described as error during the process of syllogistic reasoning (Arist. *APo*. I 16, 79b 23-24 and Chapter 2, p. 63).

<sup>84</sup> See Chapter 2, section 3 for further details on this point.

According to *De Anima*, to form an opinion it is necessary to be convinced of it. Thus, opinion seems to require that one reasons about sensations and persuades oneself of the rationality of one's own reasoning.

[...] γίνεται γὰρ δόξα καὶ ἀληθῆς καὶ ψευδῆς, ἀλλὰ δόξη μὲν ἔπεται πίστις (οὐκ ἐνδέχεται γὰρ δοξάζοντα οἷς δοκεῖ μὴ πιστεύειν), τῶν δὲ θηρίων οὐθενὶ ὑπάρχει πίστις, φαντασία δὲ πολλοῖς. [ἔτι πάση μὲν δόξη ἀκολουθεῖ πίστις, πίστει δὲ τὸ πεπεῖσθαι, πειθοῖ δὲ λόγος·

[...] opinion may be true or false. But opinion is attended by conviction, for it is impossible to hold opinions without being convinced of them: but no brute is ever convinced, though many have imagination. [Further every opinion implies conviction, conviction implies that we have been persuaded, and persuasion implies reason.]<sup>85</sup>

Accordingly, it seems that the state of mind of someone who is in the process of forming an opinion about something is crucial as this process involves reasoning about perceptions and persuading oneself of what one has understood from them. Persuasion and reasoning, in fact, also depend on the individual state of mind and this is made clear in *Rhetoric*. There, Aristotle explains that in order to produce persuasion, the speaker must understand the character of the audience and frame his discourse to produce the right kind of emotions that might convince the audience of the orator's argument.<sup>86</sup> Aristotle explains this problem in these terms:

οὐ γὰρ ταῦτ' αὖ φαίνεται φιλοῦσι καὶ μισοῦσιν, οὐδ' ὀργιζομένοις καὶ πράως ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ παράπαν ἕτερα ἢ κατὰ μέγεθος ἕτερα·

The same thing does not appear the same to men when they are friendly and when they hate, nor when they are angry and when they are in gentle mood; [but the same thing will appear] either wholly different in kind, or different with respect to magnitude.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Arist. *DA*. III 3, 428a19-23. See Hicks 1907: “πίστις as defined in *Ind. Ar.* 595 b 8sq. is ‘persuasionis firmitas, sive ea ex argumentis et rationibus, sive ex sensu et experientia orta est, atque eae res quae ad efficiendam eam persuasionem conferunt’. Here the word has the former subjective meaning ‘persuasionis firmitas’ and the ‘belief’ is ‘derived from reasoning’” (Hicks 1907, p. 464).

<sup>86</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 1, 1377b20-28.

<sup>87</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 1, 1377b31-1378a1. Grimaldi emphasises τὸ παράπαν, which he takes as meaning “absolutely different” (Grimaldi 1988, *ad loc.*). See Rorty 1994: “The psychology of the *Rhetoric* hardly qualifies as explanatory scientific knowledge. [...] Like the pre-theoretical biology of which it is a branch, pre-scientific psychology is qualified in many different kinds of contingent variables. But psychology is even further from being rigorous than biology. The range of variables that affect our psychology is ‘up to us’ to an astonishing degree. Indeed rhetoric, politics, and poetry would have virtually no place if it were not so” (Rorty 1994, p. 55-56).

The idea is that, in an ideal setting, anyone would be able to reason correctly; however, it is possible that situations, emotions and desires influence how things appear to us.<sup>88</sup> One of the reason why we form false opinion about perceived particulars is because we not only perceive things passively but we interpret them actively according to our states of mind, inclinations and affections: we can recollect with our mind images of things that we have experienced.<sup>89</sup> We do not have just passive αἴσθησις of things but we retain perceptions, ascribing them specific meanings and actively interpreting them in our minds; Aristotle associates this process with φαντασία.<sup>90</sup>

Accordingly, the reasoned reconstruction of various experiences, in the form of belief (δόξα), might be affected negatively by the agent's emotions because sense-perception itself might be vitiated by the individual's state of mind in interpreting, or recalling through memory, what has been perceived. This is one of the reasons why δόξα can be false.<sup>91</sup> This constitutes a problem when the agent's opinion about a certain situation underlies his ethical choice. The content of sense-perception itself, in fact, might be affected by this kind of πάθος, which is characterised by Aristotle as φαντασία, and things might appear in some way differently from what they really are.<sup>92</sup> This is because φαντασία is not separable from, but interdependent with sensation, and whatever appears to someone is bound up with his or her particular history, prejudices, feelings and needs.<sup>93</sup>

εἶτα αἱ μὲν ἀληθεῖς αἰεὶ, αἱ δὲ φαντασίαι γίνονται αἱ πλείους ψευδεῖς. ἔπειτα οὐδὲ λέγομεν, ὅταν ἐνεργῶμεν ἀκριβῶς περὶ τὸ αἰσθητόν, ὅτι φαίνεται τοῦτο ἡμῖν ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὅταν μὴ ἐναργῶς αἰσθανώμεθα πότερον ἀληθῆς ἢ ψευδῆς. καὶ ὅπερ δὴ ἐλέγομεν πρότερον, φαίνεται καὶ μύουσιν ὄραματα.

Moreover, sensations are always true, but φαντασίαι prove for the most part false. Further, it is not when we direct our energies accurately (ἀκριβῶς) to the sensible object, that we say that this object appears

<sup>88</sup> Rorty 1994, p. 74. See also Konstan 2006(b): "The role of evaluation in emotion is thus not merely constitutive but dynamic: a belief enters into the formation of an emotion that in turn contributes to modifying some other belief or, perhaps, intensifying the original one" (Konstan 2006(b), p. 37).

<sup>89</sup> Arist. *DA*. III 3, 427b17-20.

<sup>90</sup> "Aristotle's theory of *phantasia* attempts to deal with a large range of problems. [...] The basic insight underlying the theory is the important one that perceptual perception is inseparable from interpretation" (Nussbaum 1978, p. 268).

<sup>91</sup> See Arist. *DA*. III 3, 427b15-429b20 and see Schofield 1979 and Frede 1995 on the distinction between the concepts of sense-perception, *phantasia*, ὑπόληψις, belief and thinking.

<sup>92</sup> On *phantasia* see also Hankinson 1990: "Perception is [...] rich enough to include judgment: but judgment only in relation to the objects of the sense considered as those objects. [...] but to imagine that your lover's eyes are the blue of cornflowers or that she has the body of Venus de Milo (just in a better state of preservation); or to think that your creditor has a complexion like a jaundice sufferer's or that he looks just like a gorilla: all of these require some further mental effort, one of which involves comparisons" (Hankinson 1990, p. 49).

<sup>93</sup> Nussbaum 1978, pp. 261. See Price 1952; Nussbaum 1978 essay 5; Schofield 1979, pp. 111-113; Frede 1995, p. 289.

(φαίνεται) to us to be a man, but rather when we do not distinctively perceive it [*then the term true or false is applied*]. And, as we said before, visions present themselves even if we have our eyes closed.<sup>94</sup>

Consequently, a wrong judgment about how things really are in front of us, can easily lead one to act wrongly: indeed, for Aristotle, in order to perform an ethically good action, we need to know what context we are acting in. A clear judgment of this kind is difficult for human beings whose perceptions are easily affected by particular memories, prejudices and emotions; and Aristotle has a special interest in cases of this kind.

## 2.2 Acting on the basis of one's own perceptions

Having discussed the possible ways in which, from sense-perception, one might build up false beliefs, I would now like to explore in more detail, how this kind of misunderstanding might affect ethical reasoning and ethical life in general. Aristotle explains animal practical activity with reference to the psychological process that accompanies and promotes our actions: when stimulated by sense-perception, human beings are sometimes imagined as going through a process of reasoning, in the form of syllogism, resulting in a choice to act in a certain way.<sup>95</sup> Whether we consider the practical syllogism as the actual reasoning undertaken by the agent or as an explanation of human action that specifies all the relevant factors that might influence motivation, human beings, for Aristotle, mostly act following some kind of reasoning and the practical syllogism sets out this reasoning.<sup>96</sup> The practical syllogism represents the reasoning that, all circumstances and facts considered, helps to explain practical judgment and activity. The major, general, premise of this syllogism is an opinion relating to the good;<sup>97</sup> the second premise represents the particular situation or object with which we have to deal in our ethical choice.

ἢ [πρώτασις] μὲν γὰρ καθόλου δόξα, ἢ δ' ἑτέρα περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστά ἐστιν, ὧν αἴσθησις ἤδη κυρία.

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<sup>94</sup> Arist. *DA*. III 3, 428a11-16.

<sup>95</sup> Arist. *MA* 6, 701a3-5.

<sup>96</sup> See Nussbaum 1978, pp. 165-222; Kenny 1979; Charles 1984, pp. 86-149; Dahl 1984; Broadie 1991, pp. 214-219; Annas 1993, pp. 87-91 and Sherman 1997, pp. 255-283.

<sup>97</sup> Wiggins 1981(b), p. 248. A “universal action-guiding principle” (Nussbaum 1978, p. 204).



[In the syllogism applied to ethical choice], one [premise] is a universal opinion, but the other is concerned with particulars, and regarding particulars perception is a decisive factor.<sup>98</sup>

As a matter of fact, this is the particular to which we should be able to apply the universal statement of the first premise in order to bring the syllogism to a successful conclusion. Thus, in theory, the choice should be straightforward. In practice, the syllogistic rational process that we should undertake must deal with a particular. And, particulars are a matter where sensation (αἴσθησις) is critical.

ὅτι δ' ἡ φρόνησις οὐκ ἐπιστήμη, φανερόν· τοῦ γὰρ ἐσχάτου ἐστίν, [...] ἢ δὲ τοῦ ἐσχάτου, οὐ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη ἀλλ' αἴσθησις, οὐχ ἡ τῶν ἰδίων, ἀλλ' οἷα αἰσθανόμεθα ὅτι τὸ [ἐν τοῖς μαθηματικοῖς] ἔσχατον τρίγωνον· στήσεται γὰρ κάκει. ἀλλ' αὕτη μᾶλλον αἴσθησις ἢ φρόνησις, ἐκείνης δ' ἄλλο εἶδος.

It is evident, then, that judging [in matters of ethical choice] is not knowledge; for it is concerned with the particular [...]. And the ultimate [particular] is not the object of knowledge but of sensation, not the sensation of proper sensibles, but like that by which we sense that the ultimate particular [in mathematics] is a triangle, and this [kind of sensation] is more similar to perception than to judgment in matters of ethical choice.<sup>99</sup>

Assuming that one knows, in theory, how one should act, one might fail in evaluating the particular circumstances one is in. As explained before, with reference to the *De Anima*,<sup>100</sup> one might, for instance, produce false opinion in interpreting sense perception data or uncontrolled emotions, unleashed by a given perception, might influence one's decision. However, in order to act appropriately, the particular situation has to be clear and the agent has to be in a state of mind that enables him to understand it correctly. I will first analyse the first case: namely, the case of someone who produces a false opinion about the situation and, consequently acts wrongly.

In Aristotle's account, animals, including humans, move by virtue of desire (ὄρεξις) or choice (προαίρεσις) when some alteration has taken place in accordance

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<sup>98</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a25-26.

<sup>99</sup> Arist. *EN* VI 9, 1142a23-30. See also Arist. *EN* II 9, 1109b 21-23. "There is such a thing as neutral cleverness, but the virtuous person does not have this *plus* having the right ends; rather he makes the judgement because his feelings and emotions guide him the right way and make him sensitive to the right factors, and because he is able intelligently to discern what in the situation is the morally right factor. Intelligence, *phrōnesis*, requires that in the agent the affective and the intellectual aspects of virtue have developed together in a mutually reinforcing way" (Annas 1993, p. 87).

<sup>100</sup> See above pp. 102-104.

with sense-perception or φαντασία.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, it seems that emotional responsiveness has a substantial role in ethical action.

Emotions tend to grab hold of dimensions of life and to express them in ways that are distinctive and important. They present themselves as a mode of *registering* value [...] and modes of communicating value that are important to our interaction with others and our engagement in their well being. On this second characterization they express *attitudes*.<sup>102</sup>

However, it seems fundamental that desires and emotions should be brought in conformity with reason: if ὄρεξις is necessary to move towards action, it is also important that it is controlled by reason.<sup>103</sup> Aristotle lists three kinds of ὄρεξις: βούλησις, θυμός and ἐπιθυμία.<sup>104</sup> The first one is described as a rational wish: it is the kind of emotional responsiveness that allows a reasoned resolution.<sup>105</sup> θυμός and ἐπιθυμία are *non-rational* desires that are more difficult to handle in accordance with reason.<sup>106</sup> I will now consider the case of θυμός, aiming to connect these concepts with the *Samia*. The action stimulated by θυμός that is not fully controlled by reason represents a case of ἀκρασία τοῦ θυμοῦ. The person who does not adequately control temper is someone who displays a precipitous and uncontrolled angry reaction to the perception of an offence. In this respect, θυμός might be said to follow reason partially. It is, in fact, right to feel anger, desire or revenge, in the right circumstance with the right person and in the right way. However, uncontrolled anger immediately leads to revenge without paying enough attention to what an accurate evaluation of the circumstances would suggest.

ἔοικε γὰρ ὁ θυμὸς ἀκούειν μὲν τι τοῦ λόγου, παρακούειν δέ, καθάπερ οἱ ταχεῖς τῶν διακόνων, οἱ πρὶν ἀκοῦσαι πᾶν τὸ λεγόμενον ἐκθέουσιν, εἶτα ἀμαρτάνουσι τῆς προστάξεως, καὶ οἱ κύνες, πρὶν σκέψασθαι εἰ φίλος, ἂν μόνον ψοφήσῃ, ὑλακτοῦσιν· οὕτως ὁ θυμὸς διὰ θερμότητα καὶ ταχυτήτα τῆς φύσεως ἀκούσας μὲν, οὐκ ἐπίταγμα δ' ἀκούσας, ὀρμᾷ πρὸς τὴν τιμωρίαν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ λόγος ἢ ἡ φαντασία ὅτι ὕβρις ἢ ὀλιγωρία ἐδήλωσεν, ὁ δ' ὡς περὶ συλλογισάμενος ὅτι δεῖ τῷ τοιοῦτῳ πολεμεῖν χαλεπαίνει δὴ εὐθύς·

For temper seems to listen to reason to some extent, but inattentively, like hasty servants who take off before having heard all that was said and then fail to carry out the right order, or like dogs who bark when

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<sup>101</sup> Arist. *MA* 6, 701a4-6 (Nussbaum 1978); see also Arist. *DA*. III 9, 433a9-17. “Practical knowledge necessarily involves bringing the *nonrational* desires to that extent into conformity with reason’s settled judgments about the values of things” (Cooper 1999, p. 249).

<sup>102</sup> Sherman 1997 p. 28.

<sup>103</sup> See Broadie 1991, p. 217.

<sup>104</sup> Arist. *EE* II 7, 1223a26-28.

<sup>105</sup> Arist. *EE* II 10, 1226b9.

<sup>106</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* I 10, 1369a1-4.

they hear the sound of a man approaching without looking to see whether is a friend; so although temper listens, it does not, because of its excited and hasty nature, hear the order but rushes to take vengeance. Reason or imagination indicates to us insult or slight, [and temper] as reasoning that it is necessary to fight something like this, boils up straightaway.<sup>107</sup>

It seems, therefore, that the ἀκρατῆς τοῦ θυμοῦ acts wrongly because he does not discern correctly the content of the second premise of the practical syllogism; namely, the particular circumstance with which he is dealing. Often, at the mere appearance (φαντασία) of an offense, θυμός concludes, ὥσπερ συλλογισάμενος, that the person has to take revenge immediately. More precisely, he applies the first universal premise that he knows (e.g. “it is right to feel anger and desire of revenge at a given offence”)<sup>108</sup> to a particular situation (“this is an offence”) but he does not acknowledge fully that excessive temper has interfered with his judgment, preventing a thorough examination: the result is that he acts wrongly. Therefore, the person who is in this state runs the risk of being wrong in discerning whether the particular circumstance with which he is dealing requires such an angry reaction. Aspasius’ commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* explains this concept in a particularly clear way.

οὐδαμοῦ δὲ εἰπόντος τοῦ λόγου οὐδὲ τῆς φαντασίας γενομένης, ὅτι δεῖ τιμωρήσασθαι αὐτόν, ὁ θυμὸς ὥσπερ προσταχθεὶς τιμωρήσασθαι, ἄττει ἐπὶ τοῦτο. συλλογίζεται μὲν οὐδέν (λογικῶν γὰρ τὸ συλλογίζεσθαι), ὁμοιον δὲ τι πάσχει τῷ συλλογισαμένῳ, ὅτι δεῖ τοῦτω πολεμεῖν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ λόγος, ὡς εἴρηται, μόνον φησὶν, ὁ δεῖνα ὑβρίσεν· ὁ δὲ θυμὸς, ὥσπερ καὶ τῆς καθόλου προτάσεως κειμένης, ὅτι δεῖ πολεμεῖν τοῖς ὑβρίσασιν, καὶ τοῦ συμπεράσματος ‘τοῦτω ἄρα πολεμητέον’, χαλεπαίνει εὐθέως καὶ ὀρμῆ. ὁ μὲν οὖν θυμὸς τοιοῦτος·

Although reason has in no way said nor has there occurred an impression that it must take revenge, one’s temper leaps to it, as though it has been ordered to take revenge. It does not reason syllogistically (for to reason syllogistically pertains to rational things), but it experiences something similar to one who has reasoned syllogistically that he must fight this man. For reason, as has been said, only says: so-and-so insulted me; but one’s temper, as though the universal premise had been posited that one must fight with

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<sup>107</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 7, 1149a25-34. “When men are angered, they are not victims of some totally irrational force. Rather they are responding in accordance with the thought of an unjust insult. Their belief might be erroneous and their anger unreasonable, but their behaviour is intelligent and cognitive in the sense that it is grounded upon a belief which might be criticised and even altered by argumentation” (Fortenbaugh 1975, p. 17).

<sup>108</sup> “Anger for Aristotle, then, is anything but a reflex to pain or harm, even when the cause is intentional. Aristotle envisages a world in which self-esteem depends on social interaction: the moment someone’s negative opinion of your worth is actualized publicly in the form of a slight, you have lost credit, and the only recourse is a compensatory act that restores your social position. Anger is precisely the desire to adjust the record in this way” (Konstan 2006(b), p. 74-75).

those who have insulted one, and also the conclusion ‘therefore I must fight this man’, immediately grows angry and rushes off.<sup>109</sup>

Looking back at the Menandrian play with the Aristotelian framework in mind we find an analogous situation: Demeas could serve as an excellent example of these passages. He is convinced by his opinions on the basis of an inaccurate interpretation of his perceptions. What he has seen and heard is not adequately evaluated and probably not adequately perceived: the sight of Chrysis, from a distance, holding the child close to her breast tells him that she is definitely nursing the child and διδοῦσαν τιθίον to the infant that it is hers and Moschion’s. He trusts these misleading appearances without further inquiry. Moreover, when he goes back, with his memories, over what he has seen and heard, he gets angrier and more convinced of what those appearances have suggested to him. In this way, moved by φαντασία, and desire, in the form of θυμός, Demeas precipitously formulates a definite accusation that lacks rigorous reasoning but is convincing for himself and presented persuasively to the audience. He would be right to be angry with Chrysis and Moschion if what he has thought he understood was true; however it is not. Moreover, when he tries to make further inquiry, he is again prevented because of anger, θυμός, from hearing the truth when expressed by Parmenon. In this way he fails to achieve a more certain degree of knowledge about the circumstances in which he finds himself acting and he acts wrongly with respect to Chrysis and Moschion. Anger and love for Chrysis mislead his judgment and lead him to false conclusions.

As suggested earlier,<sup>110</sup> in Aristotle, the agent’s judgment can be altered also at another level: that of the first universal premise. Suppose the agent knows exactly with whom he is dealing and under which circumstance, he still needs to decide what would be better to do given these particulars. In fact, at the level of the practical syllogism, knowing exactly the content of the second premise, namely, the particulars of the action, does not exclude the possibility of being wrong in deciding how to deal with this. This might happen, for instance, when the agent does not give “the right genuinely pertinent concern to the major premise”.<sup>111</sup> That is, he substitutes the judgment of what would be universally considered good to do in his case with the judgment of what it is good for

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<sup>109</sup> Asp. in *EN*, 127.11-18 translation by Konstan 2006(a).

<sup>110</sup> See above pp. 104-105.

<sup>111</sup> Wiggins 1981(a), p. 234.

him at that moment and being affected by emotions and desires that a given situation might unleash.<sup>112</sup>

ὅταν οὖν ἡ [δόξα] μὲν καθόλου ἐνῆ κωλύουσα γεύεσθαι, ἡ δέ, ὅτι πᾶν γλυκὸν ἡδύ, τουτὶ δὲ γλυκὸν (αὕτη δὲ ἐνεργεῖ), τύχη δ' ἐπιθυμία ἐνοῦσα, ἡ μὲν οὖν λέγει φεύγειν τοῦτο, ἡ δ' ἐπιθυμία ἄγει.

Accordingly, if there is a universal [belief] which forbids us to taste sweet and another [belief], namely, 'everything sweet is pleasant', and if there is also before us a particular X which is sweet (and this is activated) and a desire in us to taste what is sweet, then the former belief tells us to avoid tasting X but desire bids us to taste X.<sup>113</sup>

In these circumstances, the attractiveness of the content of the second premise is so strong for the agent that his reasoning is put under the control of the agent's emotional reaction to the given situation, and this is what produces the resulting action. This is what happens in cases of ἀκρασία τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, and the kind of desire that leads to the uncontrolled action is, in this case, ἐπιθυμία. ἐπιθυμία promotes the action of pursuing pleasure (ἡδονή):<sup>114</sup> by contrast with θυμός, it does not follow reason but only pleasure.

When it bursts out even against one's better judgment, this is lack of self-control of temper. But the uncontrolled reaction is fuelled by something rational and reflective, since the evaluation it embodies can be unpacked as the thought that one's own worth is to be preserved by asserting itself against anything that denies it. This general evaluation functions as a premiss from which the particular response follows as conclusion. Appetite, by contrast, is a simple tendency to move, with no sense that the move is fitting, towards or away from an object as soon as it is realised that the object is pleasant or painful.<sup>115</sup>

This is why emotions alter our judgment in the same way that sleep, madness or drunkenness can.<sup>116</sup> When we judge the circumstances in which we happen to be, our state of mind is particularly relevant. Indeed it is on the basis of the appreciation of these particular circumstances that we should form our ethical choice. It is clear that, for Aristotle, people that are under the influence of emotion (οἱ ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν ὄντες) are not able to do this and, therefore, they are unable to apply their potential knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) to present circumstances.

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<sup>112</sup> Wiggins 1981(b).

<sup>113</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a31-34.

<sup>114</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 7, 1149a35.

<sup>115</sup> Broadie and Rowe 2002, p. 56, commenting on the above quoted passage.

<sup>116</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a11-15.

ἔτι τὸ ἔχειν τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἄλλον τρόπον τῶν νῦν ῥηθέντων ὑπάρχει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ἐν τῷ γὰρ ἔχειν μὲν μὴ χρῆσθαι δὲ διαφέρουσιν ὁρῶμεν τὴν ἕξιν, ὥστε καὶ ἔχειν πως καὶ μὴ ἔχειν, οἷον τὸν καθεύδοντα καὶ μαινόμενον καὶ οἰνωμένον. ἀλλὰ μὴ οὕτω διατίθενται οἷ γε ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν ὄντες.

Again, the possession of knowledge may belong to men in a manner distinct from those just stated; for in having but not using that knowledge we observe a difference in state of mind, so that in one sense he has and in another he does not have knowledge, as someone who is asleep or mad or drunk. And indeed this is the disposition of those who are under the influence of emotions.<sup>117</sup>

The incontinent person (ἀκρατής) is someone who potentially acts according to the right evaluation of the circumstances; however, he fails to do so. He knows both the general (καθόλου) statement and the particular one that affects the agent's emotions and desires. Therefore, he fails to deal appropriately with the latter, thus, he fails also to apply the knowledge that he potentially has to the actual circumstances.<sup>118</sup>

Moschion's case provides a good example in this respect. Moschion knew the girl and knew what he should have been doing. A correct form of reasoning in this situation should have been:

I premise: To approach an attractive citizen girl that is not one's own wife is wrong

II premise: This girl who is a citizen and is not my own wife is attractive

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Conclusion: To approach this girl is wrong

However, the desire for the girl and the sight of her stimulates the desire (ἐπιθυμία) of Moschion and this hinders the syllogism substituting the correct universal premise with the premise that is more desirable in that circumstance for the subject.

I premise: I find it pleasant to approach attractive girls

II premise: This girl who is a citizen and is not my own wife is attractive

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<sup>117</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a10-15. "There is nothing absurd in *acting* against one's *knowledge* if the agent is not using all the knowledge required for his *action*; but it would seem strange if he were using all that knowledge but acted in violation of it. Perhaps it is assumed here that only knowledge determines an action; for *desire* too may determine an action, and if both *knowledge* and *desire* are present then the stronger of the two prevails" (Apostle 1975, p. 301).

<sup>118</sup> See Davidson 1980 who sees ἀκρασία extending to a broader domain of actions: cases of incontinence are not limited to cases in which an action is performed against what it is suggested by the correct application of a prescriptive universal judgment on a particular case. 'Incontinence' also applies to cases in which the subject acts in a certain way while he holds some available course of action to be "better" than the one he takes, and, what the agent considers "better" is not necessarily a universal prescriptive judgment.

Conclusion: I will approach this girl.<sup>119</sup>

According to David Charles, in cases of ἀκρασία τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, the agent does not formulate any kind of syllogism but simply follows what perception suggests without engaging in a rational assessment of the means through which he can achieve his desired end.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, John Cooper suggests that the practical syllogism does not, in such cases, enter the agent's deliberation because the actual sight of the object itself, or the way the agent represents it to himself, forms a link in a "psychological chain leading from decision through perception on to action". That is to say, in general, every agent, without calculation and without stopping to think about the relevant minor premise, infers that a given action is in order.<sup>121</sup> Even so, if we suppose that Moschion does not actually work out the latter type of syllogism in order to decide what to do, we can still attribute a fundamental significance to the crucial moment in which Moschion sees the object of his desires: the sight of the girl arouses the desire of approaching her and, eventually, it is this desire that overpowers Moschion's better judgment. When he sees her, Moschion no longer thinks that to approach an attractive citizen girl who is not one's own wife is wrong. On the contrary, he thinks that this is a very pleasant activity and that Plangon is actually a good candidate to fulfill his desire to engage in it. Whether or not we accept the interpretation of Charles or Cooper, it seems that the initial cause of the action of the ἀκρατής is the actual perception, or φαντασία, of some object that is relevant to the agent. I believe, however, that some kind of reasoning of the kind represented in the practical syllogism is needed to make full sense of the process going on in the mind of the ἀκρατής.

In fact, I believe that we need to presume different levels of response by different kinds of agent. Some agents, those who are completely virtuous and those who are not virtuous at all, respond readily to perceptions according to what their (good or bad) character suggests. It is, therefore, possible that, in these cases, virtually no reasoning (right or wrong) is involved in the process of deliberation and consequent action. On the other hand, some other kinds of agents, such as Moschion, who do not

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<sup>119</sup> "Et incontinens habet quidam scientiam quoniam malum est fornicari, non operatur autem circa ipsam ut recedat ab hoc; et si scientiam habet quidem, non operatur tamen, nihil est inconveniens si attractus a concupiscentia fornicetur" (Heylbut 1892, p. 418, 23-26, commentary on *EN VII 5*, 1146b31-1147a5; Latin translation by Mercken 1973).

<sup>120</sup> "There is no necessity to attribute such agents [ἀκρατής τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν] calculation or practical reasoning. In their cases there is a sequence involving perceptions and desires in which the final desire arises through perception (*MA 7*, 701a35-36) without the agent reasoning about what to do. For Aristotle there can be intentional action without the agent reasoning or going through a practical syllogism" (Charles 1984, p. 96).

<sup>121</sup> Cooper 1975, p. 52-53.

have perfect virtue but have some share of it, need to consider alternatives by means of some kind of reasoning. This is because their disposition to be properly affected by circumstances and to respond to them in the right way has not yet become second nature for them as it has in the case of the truly virtuous person.<sup>122</sup> However, at the same time, because they are, to a degree, good people, they do not immediately go after what pleasure suggests but reason about what has to be done and whether it should be done. Moschion and Demeas are not bad persons but they are not perfectly virtuous characters either: their decisions require some kind of (right or wrong) reasoning in order to compare alternatives and decide which kind of action is in order.

In conclusion, I have pointed out in Aristotle two possible cases in which practical choice is affected by the agent's perceptions and emotional reactions in a given situation. First of all, emotions can lead to a wrong understanding of people and facts: therefore, scattered pieces of evidence can deceive if they are not appropriately interpreted by the subject. In this respect, I have stressed that having an appropriate insight about the particulars involved in the action is fundamental in order to decide how it would be best to deal with them. Second, given a clear understanding of the circumstances, the emotions aroused by the perception of facts or persons involved can still influence a character's ethical choice; problems arise when the kind and level of emotion is not ethically appropriate to the situation.<sup>123</sup>

### 3. Conclusions

This discussion clarifies Aristotle's approach to emotions and how they can affect people's actions. I do not want to link these passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with *Samia* too closely; I do not want to claim that Menander reproduces on stage what he has read in Aristotle's work: this hypothesis would be very hard to prove. It seems, however, that Aristotle's and Menander's accounts of the effects that emotions and perceptions have on people is analogous and this suggests that they share a set of ideas on comparable topics. Aristotle distinguishes a crucial point when emotions get involved in the rational process that leads to ethical choice. Indeed, in this process it is the sensation (αἴσθησις) of a specific particular that directs our decision and this is often altered by specific emotions that we feel in this context. It seems again that between

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<sup>122</sup> Arist. *EN* X 10, 1179b20-32.

<sup>123</sup> Gill 1997, pp. 5-6.



particulars and right rational choice, there is a gap left for error; and this error is highly conditioned by how we feel about the particular circumstances that we are experiencing. Aristotle compares people who are affected by anger and erotic desire to those who are asleep, mad or drunk: anger and erotic desire affect their bodies and minds and, consequently, such people fail to apply the ethical understanding that they potentially have to respond adequately to situations.<sup>124</sup> The examples of Demeas and Moschion in Menander's *Samia* seem to reflect ethical and psychological processes of the same kind. Indeed, Menander's depiction of characters and situations has shown a special focus on how perceptions and emotions can interfere in people's rational reasoning and ethical behaviour.

Specifically, in the first part, I have presented the consequences produced by Demeas' uncritical approach to perceptions. Although Demeas makes an effort to assemble the pieces of evidence he comes across, he does so hastily and constructs a mistaken set of conclusions. Aristotle provides a theoretical framework that analyses and explains this kind of erroneous reasoning. Menander seems to have constructed his picture of Demeas with a picture of human reasoning and of misguided inference that is similar to that presented in Aristotle. Demeas is led by his anger to misjudge Moschion and Chrysis: his understanding of what happened is thus completely mistaken. Moschion presents a further example of how an agent can go wrong in deciding how to act: when he raped Nikeratos' daughter and when he decided to lie to Demeas, his choice was altered by erotic desire in the first case and by shame in the second.

Aristotle appears to describe a very similar process in his *Ethics*, as illustrated in the second section of this chapter. In many cases, simply having knowledge of what we should do does not mean that we will necessarily act accordingly. Perceptions and emotions have great power over our cognitive faculties and thus, in turn, determine how we represent facts to ourselves. Our thought-processes affect and are affected by our perception, αἴσθησις, of particular things or circumstances on which our ethical choice is based. Thus, emotion and perceptions can lead agents to overvalue desires and feelings in a way that is inappropriate to the specifics of the situation. Reading Aristotle improves considerably our understanding of Menander's characters and the reasons behind their choices. Thus, I think that my interpretation of *Samia* has supported the general hypothesis that Menander and Aristotle apply similar approaches to problems related to ethical choice.

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<sup>124</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a10-17.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Luck, Ignorance and Human Agency*

In the next two chapters, I continue to focus on the ethical theory of Menander and Aristotle, considering further some issues relating to practical action that have been raised by my previous analysis. In the previous chapters, I have discussed the way in which, according to Aristotle and Menander, emotions and states of mind can influence people's theoretical and practical understanding. More broadly, I have discussed how correct intellectual and ethical education helps to give a clearer insight into how things stand and how we should act. I have focused on cases in which the performing of right and wrong actions or the achievement of understanding depends clearly on the agents' ability to act, think and feel in a way appropriate to the situation. For instance, in Chapter 2, I have shown how, in the *Epitrepontes*, Habrotonon's careful analysis of the situation brings together hypothesis, evidence and proofs and concludes the process of recognition successfully. In Chapter 3, with respect to the *Samia*, I have analysed how Demeas' anger and Moschion's shame and lust, by contrast, prevented correct insight into ethical decisions and created the situation around which the complications of the plot unfolded. Accordingly, the comic cases discussed so far, and the parallel discussion of philosophical material, has offered the basis for a comparative study of Menander's and Aristotle's treatment of the individual ability to reason and deliberate on the basis of one's own intellectual and ethical skills.

In this chapter, I consider a different topic: namely, the role of luck and accidental ignorance in people's lives and choices, and the way this is treated by Menander and Aristotle. In these cases, the cause of the agent's factual or ethical ignorance does not consist solely in the agent's ability to handle emotions, for instance in reasoning and understanding correctly. Rather, it depends on something external, as the agent is affected by chance events or accidental ignorance. In this type of situation, the agent is not in a position to achieve an exact knowledge of the particulars of the relevant action, and he finds himself in the middle of a series of unexpected circumstances. These situations are treated by both Menander and Aristotle and the way in which they are presented raises analogous questions: first, what is the role of the

agent in these cases; which kind of challenge do chance and accidental ignorance present to the agent's reasoning and understanding, and how does the importance of the agent's intellectual and ethical ability differ in these cases in comparison with cases of ἀκρασία as analysed in Chapter 3.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, there is the question whether, with respect to the action, the agent's intellectual and ethical virtues are presented as a constitutively significant factor in the process of dealing with chance events. Do these virtues determine the agent's choice and lead to an ethically successful outcome despite chance events that might lead to a different result?

Menander and Aristotle seem to raise the question whether accidental events are to be understood as an inevitable product of fate that determines people's life or as events that agents can significantly affect by a choice (προαίρεσις) that makes a difference to what the event means for the agents themselves and their ethical life. My overall view is that, from the perspective of Aristotle and Menander, the way in which people respond to and handle accidental events is important and forms a significant part of the presentation of the person as an ethical agent. Accordingly, for both Aristotle and Menander, chance events and cases of accidental ignorance turn out to be indispensable ingredients of the human condition because they challenge human rationality and are significant elements in the evaluation of an agent's intentions and choices. An accidental event does not have meaning *per se*: it only acquires significance when we consider how the people concerned respond to the accident. I will start with the analysis of some Menandrian material that is particularly suitable for this kind of inquiry. In particular, I will consider two comedies of Menander, *Perikeiromene* and *Aspis*, in which chance and accidental ignorance play a prominent role in the unfolding of the plot. I will then explore these examples together with Aristotle's treatment of chance and involuntary actions caused by chance and ignorance.

The two comedies I have mentioned contain prologues stated by two peculiar goddess: Τύχη and Ἄγνοια. My view is that, even though these two figures are presented as divinities shaping the action and controlling the characters on stage, manipulating their state of ignorance or surprising them with unexpected events, in the play itself there are evident signs that point in a different direction. These two divine prologue speakers offer an outside perspective on the figures' actions: they explain to the audience what is happening and why they made it happen. They set the plot in motion and they say they wish to achieve a certain result. However, the prologue-speaker does not force the characters into (wrong) involuntary actions and, in their turn,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, section 2.2.

characters can only be partly excused for the mistakes they make as a consequence of unexpected events or unknown situations. Once the circumstances have been created by these two divine-type figures, characters perform good or bad actions voluntarily and are judged accordingly; they are what we can call ‘significant agents’ because they determine, by their choices, the good or bad quality of their action. Moreover, it is through characters’ choices and actions that the prologue speakers bring about the end they desire and fulfil their plan.

In Aristotle, we can see an analogous treatment of comparable issues. In the *Physics*, in particular, Aristotle makes it clear that the meaning of chance events is significantly affected by the agents’ choice in response to the specific event. Human beings, in particular, are able to make use of circumstances of this kind in a way that is different from animals and inanimate beings. In fact, we find that all accidental events, for Aristotle, are given a name according to the subject they affect. Irrational beings can only be subject to natural accidents that might or might not produce significant outcomes.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, rational beings are able to see the accident as a matter of chance (τύχη) to which they have to respond in one way or other.<sup>3</sup> When this happens, it is not always easy to establish where the primary cause of the action lies and, therefore, it is difficult to draw a distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions: specifically, it is difficult to say whether the action is determined by chance or is dependent on the agent’s choice. What seems to be clear, however, is that there is a range of responses that the agent can give to accidental events and, depending on these responses, the agent can affect the ethical quality of his choice and the meaning of the event itself within the context of his life – independently of the more or less successful result the agent produces by this choice. Accordingly, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* we find that, depending on the quality of the agent’s ethical choices, accidental events can be transformed by the agent into injustice (ἀδίκημα), error (ἀμάρτημα) or misfortune (ἀτύχημα): the question of which category is relevant to describe a certain action depends on how the agent confronts the action and responds to it.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even in circumstances that we cannot entirely control as rational beings, we are not passive subjects but significant agents and our choices in some way always affect the quality of our action no matter how fortunate or unfortunate we might be.

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<sup>2</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 6, 197b20-31.

<sup>3</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 5, 197a1-9.

<sup>4</sup> Arist. *EN* V 10, 1135b11-25.

## *1. A play of chance / a chance to play.*

In this section, I will explore the plots of *Perikeiromene* and *Aspis* with a particular focus on the way in which characters face the unclear or unexpected circumstances in which they find themselves acting. The prologues of the two plays seem to invite us to interpret them as plays of destiny in which the characters on stage act according to what they are made to do by the figures in the prologue Τύχη (Chance) and Ἄγνοια (Ignorance). I will argue, instead, that the focus of these comedies is not on the working of these two external forces but rather on the various ways in which characters choose to face them. Menander introduces at least two perspectives on the figures' actions. From an external perspective, the goddess explains why certain events will happen on the stage and which results they will produce. From a human perspective, Menander presents characters in a way that makes it clear to the audience what their own errors or weakness are in responding to the set of circumstances that the goddesses create for them. Thus, the unfolding of the dramatic action and its conclusion, in the *Perikeiromene* and *Aspis*, do not represent an involuntary outcome of fortunate or unfortunate events. The characters themselves collaborate in achieving a happy ending on the basis of their own deliberations and, on this same basis, they identify themselves as ethical agents of a certain kind.

### *1.1 Perikeiromene*

The first surviving part of the play starts in the middle of the prologue given by Ἄγνοια. The figure on stage explains what has happened in the opening lost scenes of the comedy.<sup>5</sup> We are told by the prologue speaker that an Old Corinthian woman once found two exposed siblings, Glykera and Moschion: the woman decided to keep the girl with her and to give the boy to Myrrhine, a wealthy woman who was her neighbour. Before dying, the Old Corinthian let Polemon (a soldier in love with Glykera) have the girl and revealed to her the story of her adoption and the identity of her brother, giving the girl the old clothes that were in her cradle. We are also told that Moschion, seeing Glykera every day and not knowing that she was his sister, has fallen in love with her, and, once, passing by Polemon's house, has hugged and kissed her: the girl did not react

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<sup>5</sup> It is debated which of the characters appear before the prologue. See Gomme and Sandbach 1973, pp. 467-468; Mastromarco 1985 and Arnott 1988.

as she knew he was her brother. But, Polemon's slave, Sosias, saw the scene and reported everything to Polemon. The soldier, driven by anger, and not knowing that Moschion was the girl's brother, cut off her hair. At the moment at which the surviving part of the play starts, Glykera has already left Polemon's house and is now settled in Myrrhine's place. Pataikos (an old man, Polemon's friend) tries to convince her to go back to Polemon who now regrets his actions; but Glykera begs Pataikos to bring back from Polemon's house her belongings, including the clothes she wore when she was exposed with her brother. When Glykera and Pataikos examine them, they discover that they are daughter and father. Moschion, overhearing their conversation, reconstructs his origins and, once all the identities are revealed, Glykera and Polemon get married with the blessing of Pataikos.

The plot has a complex structure and offers several topics of discussion; I will concentrate mainly on some specific issues related to its structure and characters: in particular, I will consider how the story told by the divine-like figure in the prologue has to be understood. Then, I will focus on two characters, Polemon and Moschion: the two possess a lesser degree of information in comparison to the others but, by contrast to Demeas in the *Samia*, they are not meant to discover the truth at any point of the play as they do not have enough evidence to understand clearly what they are experiencing and how things really stand. Nevertheless, as with Demeas, their actions can only be partly excused by accidental ignorance: the temper of the first and the hasty lust of the second lead them to act in a way that is not appropriate to any kind of situation, whatever their state of knowledge at the beginning of their action. Consequently, their errors can be considered non-voluntary only in certain respects and, in fact, their actions are presented as wrong to the audience.

### 1.1.1 *The prologue of Ἄγνοια*

The personified figure of Ἄγνοια appears for the first time, in extant Greek literature, in this prologue. With respect to visual representations, we have two definite images of Ἄγνοια. In one of them, she is a female figure seen from the front and the picture is probably part of an illustrated edition of the *Perikeiromene*.<sup>6</sup> In the other, she is presiding at the murder of Laius by Oedipus and, in this scene, she is represented as

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<sup>6</sup> LIMC, s. v. (Papyrus. Oxford, P.Oxy. 2652. Oxyrhynchos).

turning her face away from the crime that Oedipus is about to perform.<sup>7</sup> The possible analogy between the two figures lies in the context in which they are represented: both figures representing Ἄγνοια witness incidents caused by absence of knowledge of family ties leading to incest or parricide. However, Ἄγνοια is neither a mythological figure nor an Olympian god and there are no traces of a priest or temple devoted to her. The fact that in the *Perikeiromene* she claims power over the events that she is outlining is not supported by any evidence of cult that could entitle her to do so.<sup>8</sup> It is true that often, in the ancient world, natural phenomena, places, divisions of time, states of the body and emotions appear to be represented in human, often female, form. In some cases, they become deities and honoured as Olympian gods,<sup>9</sup> but this is not the case with Ἄγνοια. But her role as a prologue speaker draws our attention to a topic that Menander has treated in the comedies I have analysed in the previous chapters: namely, human misunderstanding, lack of knowledge and the effects that these have on people's actions and character.

In choosing Ἄγνοια as the prologue speaker in the *Perikeiromene*, Menander draws attention to these topics from the outset; this figure initiates the action and it seems that she knows what the consequences will be. Her role seems to be close to that of chance (τύχη) in human affairs. Very often, accidents and ignorance of specific circumstances happen to characters unexpectedly: people cannot control the fact that events will eventually happen and that their occurrence depends on an external force that the playwright chooses in order to create a specific situation. After the situation has been set up, this external force steps back to observe how the figures will react to that, given that they have a character of a certain kind. In the *Perikeiromene*, the responses of the characters on stage seem to be psychologically motivated and intelligible also without Ἄγνοια as prologue-speaker. However, her presence draws attention to the fact that everyone can be liable to a state of unintended ignorance: this state of ignorance comes from outside the agent as if it was produced by an external force. In her prologue, Ἄγνοια informs the audience of the absence of knowledge or unintended ignorance that affects the figures. This absence of knowledge does not depend entirely upon those figures: they are assigned by Menander the level of knowledge that Ἄγνοια wants them to possess and they handle this in different specific ways and this is what makes the plot develop.

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<sup>7</sup> LIMC, s. v. (*Painting from Hermopolis*. Cairo, Museum JE 63609; Lehmann tavv. 9,I; 10,I).

<sup>8</sup> See Stafford 2002 who claims that evidence of cult is a crucial factor for establishing a figure's claim to divine power. "Any figures to whom sacrifice are made must be deemed capable of acknowledging the fact, since those who are making sacrifices are hoping for a response" (Stafford 2002, p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> Stafford and Herrin 2005, pp. xix.

At the beginning of the play, we are told that the Old Corinthian who took care of Glykera is the only one who knows the whole truth. Ἄγνοια does not seem to have a direct effect on her but rather an indirect one: the Old Corinthian tries to oppose the effects of Ἄγνοια when she decides to change Glykera's state of knowledge. In fact, she is afraid that Ἄγνοια might get Glykera in an awkward situation and, therefore, she decides to prevent the goddess' possible effects by revealing the whole truth to her.

Ἄγνοια: τὸν ἀγνοούμενόν τ' ἀδελφὸν τῆι φύσει  
φράζει, προνοοῦμένη τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων,  
εἴ ποτε δεηθεῖη βοηθείας τινός,  
ὄρωσα τοῦτον ὄντ' ἀναγκαῖον μόνον  
αὐτῆι, φυλακὴν τε λαμβάνουσα μὴ ποτε  
δὲ ἐμέ τι τὴν Ἄγνοιαν αὐτοῖς συμπέσει  
ἀκούσιον.

IGNORANCE: She told her about her unknown brother by birth, as she foresaw some [possible] mischance of the kind that happens to human beings; she knew that he was the only relative of that girl in case the girl ever needed help, and this way, she took precautions against something unintended ever happening to them through me – Ignorance.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the motive that lies behind the Old Corinthian woman's revelation is that she knows that, because of the possibility of ignorance, the human condition (τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων) is liable to lead to unintended (ἀκούσιον) actions. Therefore, she – and not Ἄγνοια – decides to change the status of Glykera's knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The Corinthian makes sure that Glykera has appropriate knowledge of who she is so as to avoid some misfortune happening involving her and her brother.<sup>12</sup>

Having acknowledged the truth from the Old Corinthian, Glykera decides to withhold the truth from her brother as *she* wishes (βούλεται) that he should continue his life untroubled by this knowledge. In this way, Glykera contributes to the possible effects of Ἄγνοια. Moschion happens to have the chance (τύχη) of leading a comfortable life and Glykera decides not to change his state of ignorance for the sake of his happiness.

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<sup>10</sup> Men. *Pk.* 136-142.

<sup>11</sup> The Old Corinthian's πρόνοια imply γνώσις and it is contrary to ἄγνοια. “La natura stessa di queste azioni (pre-visione e pre-occupazione, intesa qui in senso etimologico) necessita di un possesso di nozioni che implica e sottintende una γνώσις” (Lamagna 1994, *ad loc.*).

<sup>12</sup> These sorts of accidents are a recurrent theme in tragedy. Aristotle, in particular, recommends tragic plots that involve dealings between those who are bonded by kinship or friendship (Arist. *Poet.* 14, 1453b11-22; see Belfiore 1992, pp. 366-368 and 2000) and in which the prospect of an immediate tragedy is averted and the characters' fortune changes from bad to good (Arist. *Poet.* 1454a4-9; see Halliwell 1986, pp. 224-226; Belfiore 2000, pp. 21-38), these are almost like Menandrian happy endings.



Ἄγνοια: ἐν γειτόνων δ' οἰκοῦσα τὰδελφοῦ τὸ μὲν  
πρᾶγμα' οὐ μεμήνηκ' οὐδ' ἐκεῖνον βούλεται  
εἶναι δοκοῦντα λαμπρὸν εἰς μεταλλαγὴν  
ἀγαγεῖν, ὄνασθαι δ' ὧν δέδωκεν ἡ τύχη.

IGNORANCE: The girl lives now close to her brother but she has not revealed the fact. He seems to be an admirable person and she does not want to bring about any change [in his life]; she wants him to enjoy the gifts that fortune has given to him.<sup>13</sup>

Having been assigned a certain degree of knowledge, the Old Corinthian and Glykera are the ones who decide who must share their knowledge or who must remain in ignorance of the truth. Thus far, it is evident that Ἄγνοια has not directly intervened in human decisions but her presence or absence in human affairs is clearly seen as a variable that needs to be treated carefully: her appearance in the prologue highlights the fact that the plot of the play is about states of unintended ignorance. The two female<sup>14</sup> characters just mentioned, the Old Corinthian and Glykera, are the only ones who possess a clear understanding of the situation and use the knowledge they have; on the other hand, all the other characters are in danger of doing something wrong as they do not know what has happened and are kept in ignorance from the truth.

The prologue continues and the focus now moves toward the other characters who do not know how things really stand. The divine-like figure tells us that the insolent (θρασύς) Moschion, in love with Glykera and always hanging with intent around Polemon's house (ἐπιμελῶς τ' ἀεὶ φοιτῶντος ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν),<sup>15</sup> decides to kiss her. At this moment, Sosias, Polemon's slave, happens to pass by the house: he sees them hugging and kissing and he tells everything to Polemon. It is at this point that Ἄγνοια says:

Ἄγνοια: πάντα δ' ἐξεκάετο  
ταῦθ' ἔνεκα τοῦ μέλλοντος, εἰς ὀργὴν θ' ἵνα  
οὗτος ἀφίκητ' – ἐγὼ γὰρ ἦγον οὐ φύσει  
τοιούτων ὄντα τοῦτον, ἀρχὴν δ' ἵνα λάβῃ  
μηνύσεως τὰ λοιπά – τούς θ' αὐτῶν ποτε  
εὔροιεν.

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<sup>13</sup> Men. *Pk.* 147-150.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 2 p. 39, n. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Men. *Pk.* 151-153.

IGNORANCE: All this flared up for the sake of what had to come, so that he might get angry (I brought him to this as he is not like this by nature), and so as to set the beginning of all the remaining things to be revealed and so that they finally discover their families.<sup>16</sup>

The incident of Polemon getting excessively angry and cutting Glykera's hair is said to be the origin (ἀρχή) of all the following events. How much is this dependent on a totally external force?<sup>17</sup> What the prologue speaker says literally is that ignorance (ἄγνοια) of the fact that Moschion and Glykera were siblings led the already impetuous (σφοδρός)<sup>18</sup> Polemon to a reaction which, because it was excessive, was not entirely in his φύσις. Thus, he displays an excessive, impetuous reaction in a state of ignorance. It is the fact that he happens not to know the truth (ἄγνοια) that makes him angry beyond his nature. The fact of not knowing the truth is not something he can control; it is a circumstance that ἄγνοια and the other two female characters contribute to creating. In this sense, ἄγνοια does have an effect on Polemon. But the decision to cut Glykera's hair is an extreme act that he decides to perform himself and it is not the necessary outcome of the anger that ἄγνοια produced. Menander makes the goddess create the accident but the characters on stage will respond to this in their own specific way once the circumstances have been created outside their own control.

What ἄγνοια goes on to say, in the remaining lines of her speech, is what is going to happen next: what has taken place will eventually bring about a happy ending; thus the goddess reassures the audience without giving further details about how this is going to happen. ἄγνοια says that there are going to be discoveries which all these events, leading Polemon to anger (εἰς ὀργήν θ' ἵνα οὔτος ἀφίκητο), will set in motion (ἀρχήν δ' ἵνα λάβῃ).<sup>19</sup> The influence of the goddess on Polemon is made clear by the prologue speaker; however, the discovery of the truth depends on ἄγνοια only in a specific way. The happy discoveries are brought about by human reactions produced by a state of ignorance. It is thanks to the figures' responses to ἄγνοια that the goddess is able to achieve her desired end. The unfolding of the plot, including Polemon's violent

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<sup>16</sup> Men. *Pk.* 162-167. Körte 1938 (in the Teubner edition of this play) suggests instead ending the parenthetical expression of ἄγνοια at “ἐγὼ γὰρ ἦγον οὐ φύσει τοιοῦτον ὄντα τοῦτον”, so to oppose her negative influence on Polemon to the rest of the sentence, “ἀρχήν δ' ἵνα λάβῃ μὴνύσεως τὰ λοιπὰ τοῦς θ' αὐτῶν ποτε εὔροεν”, describing the good effect of the discovery produced by Polemon's anger.

<sup>17</sup> See Men. *Pk.* 169. “The claim that god turns evil to good may seem a sentimental one; that it is put forward by such a dubious deity as Misapprehension may excuse the spectator from taking it altogether seriously: he may half believe it, half enjoy the paradox” (Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 474).

<sup>18</sup> Men. *Pk.* 128.

<sup>19</sup> “L'inciso è inoltre importante per la caratterizzazione di Polemone, che per la prima volta viene presentato come privo delle abituali proprietà di *miles* comico: anche se egli è σφοδρός (v.8), l'eccessiva violenza della sua ira è causata dalle circostanze eccezionali, non è un aspetto costante del suo carattere” (Lamagna 1994, p. 178). However, Lamagna describes Polemon's anger as ἀτύχημα. See also Capps 1910; Gomme and Sandbach 1973, *ad loc.*

reaction, depends on how people handle their state of ignorance and knowledge or, as we might say, the presence of ἄγνοια in their lives.

In conclusion, I argue, the presence of ἄγνοια in the prologue is meant to highlight the fact that states of unintended ignorance are possible and that unforeseen circumstance can get in the way apparently with no purpose: the human response to them gives them ethical meaning. Her presence points out from the beginning that human beings might face situations in which it is not possible to have full knowledge of the circumstances of the action. Nevertheless, characters are still responsible for their behaviour and the play shows this. In any case, this being a comedy, ἄγνοια also assures the audience that everything will end up well, exactly as she planned. However, the happy ending is not exclusively the result of her deliberation; she does not completely control the characters: ἄγνοια does not direct the actions as a controlling force but as the personification of an element that is outside the characters' control and to which they need to respond in some way.<sup>20</sup>

### *1.1.2 Polemon and Moschion*

This last point leads to the analysis of the two male characters, Polemon and Moschion. If we suppose that, instead of Moschion and Polemon, a perfectly virtuous and balanced person had experienced the same accidental circumstances, we would expect such a person to react differently. Several scholars have defined Polemon's reaction as misfortune (ἀτύχημα)<sup>21</sup> caused by ignorance. To some extent, we might say that we have here the basis for describing the situation as a misfortune. Polemon would have been right to be angry with Glykera for kissing Moschion. He loved her and treated her as a wife:

**Πο:** ἐγὼ γαμετὴν νενόμικα ταύτην.

**Πα:** μὴ βόα.

τίς δ' ἔσθ' ὁ δοῦς;

**Πο:** ἐμοὶ τίς; αὐτή.

POLEMON: I have considered her my wife.

PATAIKOS: Don't scream. Who was the one that gave her to you?

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<sup>20</sup> See Zagagi 1990.

<sup>21</sup> See Lamagna 1994 p. 56; Tierney 1935, p. 249; Webster 1950, p. 204-205.

POLEMON: Who [gave her] to me? She [did].<sup>22</sup>

In these circumstances, knowing that Glykera has kissed another man, Polemon would be right to feel νέμεσις, that is, righteous anger aroused by injustice,<sup>23</sup> which is an emotion “generally aroused at behaviour that runs contrary to socially accepted norms”.<sup>24</sup> If he felt this kind of emotion toward Glykera, we would be right in describing his indignation as an ἀτύχημα, when he finally discovers her to be Moschion’s sister. But Polemon’s indignation does not stop here: it bursts out in excessive anger and this causes his violent act, the cutting of Glykera’s hair. Ἄγνοια, in fact, acts on an agent who is already σφοδρός<sup>25</sup> in his responses. Because of the effect of Ἄγνοια he flares up in anger; however, the assault on Glykera is an extreme act for which Ἄγνοια cannot be held entirely responsible.

As Fortenbaugh points out,<sup>26</sup> Polemon’s attitude can be associated with Aristotle’s description of the ἀκρατῆς τοῦ θυμοῦ: Polemon can appropriately be defined as someone who, being impulsive by nature, would flare up in anger as soon as he thinks he has received an insult<sup>27</sup> and, in this respect, he does not differ from Demeas in my analysis of *Samia*. Polemon transforms what would have been an ἀτύχημα into an ἀδίκημα: he does not control his temper and he makes a mistake i) in considering the right measure of indignation he should feel in the specific circumstance and ii) in determining how he should react to that. In Demeas’ case, θυμός leads Demeas into making a mistake as it prevents Demeas from acknowledging the truth because failure to control his own temper makes Demeas excessively angry. In the case of Polemon, the soldier does not know the truth and he does not have enough evidence to discover it, but, independently of this, because of his excessive anger, he does not understand the right way to act in the present situation as he has interpreted this.<sup>28</sup> This kind of ignorance depends on him and it is a kind of ignorance that is displayed in moral choice:<sup>29</sup> the ἀρχή of his action cannot be placed entirely outside the agent,<sup>30</sup> it is not dependent on his accidental ignorance of the facts but on the fact that he does not understand the right measure of anger he needs to feel towards Glykera and what he has

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<sup>22</sup> Men. *Pk.* 489-490.

<sup>23</sup> LSJ, *s. v.*

<sup>24</sup> Konstan 2006(b), p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> See Fortenbaugh 1974, p. 437.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>27</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 7, 1149a33-35.

<sup>28</sup> See Arist. *EN* IV 12, 1126b14-16.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Arist. *EN* III 2, 1110b31-1111a2 and V 10, 1135b18-20.

<sup>30</sup> Fortenbaugh 1974, pp. 435-436.

to do in her respect. Because of his violent reaction, Glykera does not want to come back to him as she does not want to be assaulted again.<sup>31</sup>

Also Pataikos criticises Polemon for his excessively angry reaction and he provides the audience with an excellent description of Polemon's state of mind.

**Πα:** πάνυ καλῶς.  
ἤρεσκες αὐτῇι τυχὸν ἴσως, νῦν δ' οὐκέτι·  
ἀπελήλυθεν δ' οὐ κατὰ τρόπον σου χρωμένου  
αὐτῇι.  
**Πο:** τί φήεις; οὐ κατὰ τρόπον; τουτί με τῶν  
πάντων λελύπηκας μάλιστ' εἰπών.  
**Πα:** ἔρῃς·  
τοῦτ' οἶδ' ἀκριβῶς· ὥσθ' ὁ μὲν νυνὶ ποεῖς  
ἀπόπληκτόν ἐστιν

PATAIKOS: Fine, perhaps you were agreeable to her, but not anymore! She has gone away because you have not treated her duly.

POLEMON: What are you saying? Not duly? By saying this you have hurt me greatly.

PATAIKOS: You do love her. I know this for sure and, as a result, what you are doing now is senseless.<sup>32</sup>

Polemon has behaved badly, being in a senseless state of mind (ἀπόπληκτον). He now understands what he has done and, in fact, he regrets his violence to Glykera before knowing she is Moschion's sister. Thus, independently of his state of knowledge, he recognises that he has not behaved properly and that he was inappropriately driven by his θυμός.<sup>33</sup> Ignorance of the facts affected a character who was already predisposed to impetuous reactions: although his angry reaction can be partly justified, this was not properly handled and this caused a state of confusion that prevented him from reasoning appropriately. Ἄγνοια is well aware that she is acting on a subject whose individual psychology is particularly suitable for fulfilling the plan she has in mind.<sup>34</sup> she acts on character traits and weaknesses already present in Polemon<sup>35</sup> and, in turn, Polemon

<sup>31</sup> Men. *Pk.* 722-723.

<sup>32</sup> Men. *Pk.* 491-496.

<sup>33</sup> Men. *Pk.* 985-988. "The variation in Menander's portrayal of his soldier's despair is thus the direct result of the poses he has had each one adopt. Polemon is essentially a distraught husband, as his dialogue with Pataikos makes clear. [...] Thrasonides is the excluded lover of epigram, and his threat of suicide accidentally brings him help unmasked" (Goldberg 1980, pp. 52-53). See also, for a contrasting account of Polemon's character, Friedrik 1953, pp. 164-165.

<sup>34</sup> Analogously, in the *Iliad*, "Ate, sent by Zeus, takes away the *phrenes* of the person concerned; as a result, his *thymos* is rendered uncontrollable, his heart swells with *cholos* and the knowledge how to make the right decision which he possesses is rendered ineffective. The gods put a fierce *thymos* in his [Achilles'] chest but at the same time he himself puts it there" (Lloyd-Jones 1971, p. 23).

<sup>35</sup> Analogously, with regards to Homeric heroes see Schmitt 1990, pp. 87-129.

reacts as expected. That is to say, Polemon fails to control his anger and to choose the right thing to do: Polemon's error does not depend on ἄγνοια completely; it also depends on a different kind of ignorance, namely ethical ignorance. The goddess as a supernatural element is only partly the cause of his mistake: she provides him, through the decisions of Glykera and the Old Corinthian, with a state of knowledge that, because it is associated with Polemon's already impetuous character, leads him to anger and to making wrong choices.<sup>36</sup>

During his dialogue with Polemon, Pataikos also warns Polemon to control his temper when talking with Moschion: he says that he needs to make things clear to Moschion but that he should not use violence. What he did to Glykera should be a warning for him: a violent action towards Moschion will definitely condemn Polemon even if he is the one who has been wronged first.

**Πο:** ὁ δὲ διεφθαρκῶς ἐμοῦ  
ἀπόντος αὐτὴν οὐκ ἀδικεῖ με;  
**Πα:** ὥστ' ἐγκαλεῖν  
ἀδικεῖ σ' ἐκεῖνος, ἂν ποτ' ἔλθῃς εἰς λόγους.  
εἰ δ' ἐκβιάσει, δίκην ὀφλήσεις· οὐκ ἔχει  
τιμωρίαν γὰρ τάδίκημ', ἔγκλημα δέ.

POLEMON: By seducing her while I was away has he actually not committed an injustice toward me?

PATAIKOS: He wronged you, so you can bring a charge against him if you ever get into dispute with him; but if you get violent, you will be charged. This offence does not involve vengeance but a complaint.<sup>37</sup>

Pataikos reproaches Polemon but he also defines Moschion's deed as injustice towards the soldier. Moschion's violent action is done, to some extent, out of ignorance and, for this reason, we might be inclined to excuse him for this. However, we do not and, as

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<sup>36</sup> Also in Homer, heroes seem to act apparently according to gods' plans. However, gods often just intervene in the case of a hero who already has a certain disposition. The action that it is presented as the gods' plan is often rooted in the nature of the hero himself: "The wrath of Achilles is seen together with its fearful consequences, which are described as the working out of the god's plan (Hom. *Il.* I, 5). [...] In the dreadful slaughter lies the fulfilment of Zeus plan, which, in turn was caused by Achilles' wrath. Thus the divine intervention followed on the action of the human individual, which was rooted in his own nature. [...] What matters for us, however, is that the final *aition* is not an overreaching plan of Zeus but the unconsidered act of a human being who performs it not under the influence of a god but rather in resistance to one" (Lesky 2001, p. 175). See also Lesky 1961.

<sup>37</sup> Men. *Pk.* 499-503. "Pataikos does not attempt to decide under which category Moschion's supposed offence falls, for both ἔγκλημα and τιμωρία are ambiguous words. The first can be used either of instituting an action in law [...] or of private complaint. [...] The points on which Pataikos is clear are (1) that Polemon has a cause for private complaint at least, 'if he can discuss the matter with Moschion', (2) that Moschion's offence is not one that can be redressed by forcible means but that if Polemon uses force to recover Glykera he will be acting illegally and be condemned when brought to trial" (Gomme and Sandbach 1973, *ad loc.*).

audience, we are more inclined to agree with Pataikos that what Moschion has done is in any case wrong. Pataikos, by contrast with the audience, does not know the real identity of Glykera and Moschion at the relevant moment, but the description that he gives of Moschion's act as injustice (ἀδίκημα) is still appropriate. The fact that Moschion falls in love with his sister unknowingly is an ἀτύχημα. By contrast, the fact that he thinks about a plan to kiss her, knowing that Glykera lives with Polemon and Polemon loves her, cannot be described in this way. Moschion knows he is wrong in kissing her, but he still does it. Without asking her, forming the desire to possess her and planning a way to do it, he runs to her, suddenly, as soon as she appears at the door.<sup>38</sup> In this way, he transforms his action into an ἀδίκημα as he does not control his desire for the girl and decides to obtain a kiss that he knows it is wrong to have: not because Glykera is his sister but because she is Polemon's girl.

Ἄγνοια has told the audience that Moschion is insolent (θρασύς) and the audience has confirmation that he is when, for instance, after having kissed Glykera, he still wants to see her and he does not consider that she might not want to. Daos needs to tell him to stop his stubborn attempts to enter Myrrhine's house and see the girl immediately after she has escaped from Polemon.

Δα: μὰ τὸν Ἀσκληπιόν,  
οὐκ ἔγωγ', ἐὰν ἀκούσηις. τυχὸν ἴσως οὐ βούλεται,  
μανθάνεις, ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς ταῦθ', ὡς ἔτυχεν, ἀλλ' ἀξιοῖ  
π[ρὶν τάδ'] εἰδέναι σ', ἀκοῦσαι τὰ παρὰ σοῦ γε, νῆ Δία.  
οὐ γὰρ ὡς ἀ[λ]η[τηρ]ίς οὐδ' ὡς πορνίδιον τρισάθλιον  
ἦλθε.]

DAOS: By Asclepius, no I am not! If you would just listen! Maybe, you understand, she does not want either these things [to take place] summarily, anyhow. But she expects that, [before] you know [this], [(that she is here for you)], she hears what you have to say. Of course! she has not come here as a [flute girl] or as a wretched prostitute.<sup>39</sup>

Moschion's actions are analogous to those of his namesake, Moschion, in the *Samia*: both characters display what might be called, in Aristotelian terms, ἀκρασία τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν. However, by contrast with Moschion in the *Samia*, in the *Perikeiromene*, Moschion plans his action<sup>40</sup> and he does not feel shame after having done it. His action

<sup>38</sup> Men. *Pk.* 152-156.

<sup>39</sup> Men. *Pk.* 336-341.

<sup>40</sup> In the prologue we are told that Moschion is always hanging around Glykera's and Polemon's house with a bad intent (Men. *Pk.* 31-33).

is wrong: driven by passion he plans a way to assault a girl who is held in someone else's house, when she does not expect it. His act is also different from what Polemon does: the soldier, like Moschion in *Samia*, feels regret after having assaulted Glykera but this Moschion does not.<sup>41</sup> The difference in the response is sensed by the audience which sympathises with Polemon but not with Moschion: "He [Moschion] remains an essentially shallow figure whose disparate acts serve only to initiate the main action and then move it onto its close. His presumed success with Glykera is an illusion based on his own ignorance. His comic bravado is used in counterpoint with Polemon's despair to highlight interest in the soldier".<sup>42</sup> We might say that Moschion's injury has been done with premeditation (προβούλευσις) and choice (προαίρεσις) and, therefore, Moschion has behaved unjustly; and this is independent of his state of knowledge about his kinship with Glykera.

The accidents that happen in the *Perikeiromene* seem, therefore, to have their origin in the characters' agency and in the way they handle their states of knowledge or ignorance. This largely influences the extent to which what can truly be called 'accident' is caused entirely by an external element. It is revealing that, at the end of the play, Polemon's injury to Glykera will be excused not as an accident provoked by the fact that he did not know the kinship between her and Moschion, but because all the troubles he created were resolved in a happy revelation.<sup>43</sup> I hope to have shown that, even though the prologue presents the plot as divinely directed, Menander is careful to show how the characters' choices influence their good or bad actions given the accidental circumstance in which they find themselves acting.

Menander chooses to introduce the plot from an external, divine, perspective but when Ἄγνοια leaves the stage, the characters that she has presented are described from a human, psychological, perspective. This means that the perspective introduced by the goddess does not necessarily affect the whole plot, and that when Menander introduces on stage his characters we need to pay attention to what their perspective is and consider their actions for what they are and not merely as products of Ἄγνοια as a goddess.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the audience understands that, despite the figures' state of ignorance, they choose to act wrongly: however, their errors are not described in the same way. What gives their action a different ethical colour is how characters make a decision and how

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<sup>41</sup> See Arist. *EN* VII 7, 1149b14-21.

<sup>42</sup> Goldberg 1980, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> See Fortenbaugh 1974.

<sup>44</sup> See also Cairns 2001, pp. 16-20 on the narrator's reasons for introducing different, shifting perspectives on a figure's actions with reference to Homer.



their action are reflected on and discussed by the other characters. The *Aspis* presents analogous examples.

## 1.2 *Aspis*

I have already mentioned the *Aspis* in Chapter 2, when discussing cases of mistaken recognition.<sup>45</sup> At the beginning of this comedy, the slave Daos, after an assault on their camp, wrongly identifies his master Kleostratos with a corpse lying close to Kleostratos' shield, and reports this news to Smikrines, Kleostratos' greedy uncle. During the dialogue that opens the comedy, Smikrines immediately shows an interest in the rich war chest that Daos has managed to recover and that will be given to Kleostratos' sister. This situation will trigger a series of events.

### 1.2.1 *The prologue of Τύχη*

After the first scene, the goddess Τύχη enters the stage and explains that Kleostratos is not dead; Daos and the others do not know what really happened and they are going astray (ἀγνοοῦσι καὶ πλανῶνται).<sup>46</sup> She explains the situation and, at the end, she says who she is and claims that she is in control of the entire plot (πάντων κυρία τούτων βραβεῦσαι καὶ διοικῆσαι; Τύχη; “The steward and judge controlling all this. I am called Chance”).<sup>47</sup> I will argue that a closer analysis of the play will reveal that, after various

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<sup>45</sup> Chapter 2, pp. 43-44.

<sup>46</sup> Men. *Aspis* 99.

<sup>47</sup> Men. *Aspis* 146-148. The fact that the name of the goddess is postponed after the beginning of the prologue is a shared feature with *Dyscolos* (12) and – most probably – *Perikeiromene* (21). In the case of *Dyscolos*, Dworacki infers that the audience already knew Pan thanks to his characteristic mask and clothing (Dworacki 1973, p. 34). This might also be the case here. In the fourth century BC, τύχη became quite an important concept and its cult seems to start in this very period in Athens, Thebes, Megara and Corinth (*DNP*, s.v.). If this is true, it is possible that she was characterised like Pan with a particular kind of mask. “Tyche se présente sous la forme d’une figure féminine drapée, généralement debout, plus rarement assise. Elle se définit en général par le port d’une corne d’abondance sur le bras gauche; et c’est, semble-t-il, le premier attribut qui lui soit sûrement reconnu, à partir du IV<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C.; s’y ajoute assez tôt un gouvernail tenu de la main droite, parfois remplacé par une phiale ou par un sceptre. La tête de Tyche enfin est fréquemment surmontée d’un polos ou d’une couronne tourelée” *LIMC*, s. v. Accordingly, it is possible that, in the prologue of *Aspis*, “the dramatist may wish to keep his audience wondering, perhaps looking at the mask and costume for some clue”, and, consequently, the revelation of her identity comes only later in the prologue (Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 73). This being said, it is interesting to note that also in Euripides’ prologues, the prologue speakers, especially if they are human beings, pronounce their name some lines after the beginning of their speech: *Andr.* 5; *Supp.* 6; *HF.* 1-3; *IT.* 5; *Hel.* 22; *Ph.* 12; *Or.* 23 and *Heracl.* 30.

chance accidents orchestrated by Τύχη, the plot starts from a human error in recognition: Daos' error of identification as described in Chapter 2. Furthermore, this error unleashes a wide variety of human reactions that constitute the focus of the plot. These reactions, in their turn, create a situation that will need human intervention in order to bring about the plot's happy ending. Consequently, the prologue speaker has a plan and she expects to be fulfilled; however, like Ἄγνοια, she needs characters to react in a certain way to obtain this final result. The prologue itself, in fact, seems to direct the attention of the audience to Daos' error in the identification of his master and to Smikrines' evil plan. These two events are caused directly by these two characters; that is, they are caused by Daos' inability to construct a correct reasoning based on evidence<sup>48</sup> and on Smikrines wicked intentions.<sup>49</sup>

Τύχη explains what really happened to Kleostratos and, in explaining this, she attributes to Daos the error of identifying his master with someone else who had accidentally taken Kleostratos' shield.

Τύχη: οὕτως ὁ μὲν παρὰ τῷ τροφίμῳ τούτου τότε  
ὦν ἐξεβοήθει τήνδ' ἔχων τὴν ἀσπίδα  
εὐθύς τε πίπτει· κειμένης δ' ἐν τοῖς νεκροῖς  
τῆς ἀσπίδος τοῦ μειρακίου τ' ὠιδηκότος  
οὗτος διημάρτηκεν.

TYCHE: In this way then, the one who was with this one's [Daos] young master went out to help holding this shield and fell immediately. Since the shield lay there among the dead and since the [corpse of the] young man swelled up, he made a mistake.<sup>50</sup>

It is possible to attribute to Τύχη various events that, taken together, lead to Daos' final mistake: for instance, Kleostratos' friend taking the shield and Kleostratos taking someone else's armour and being captured. However, finally, it is Daos who makes a mistake (διημάρτηκεν), that is, he fails to add up adequately the evidence he has and announces Kleostratos' certain death to everyone.<sup>51</sup> However, what Smikrines has called ἀνέλπιστος τύχη,<sup>52</sup> Kleostratos' death, has not happened at all, it is Daos' wrong interpretation that has caused it. Certainly Menander wanted to emphasise the role of τύχη in human affairs and he does it by creating a prologue-speaker that emphasises this

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 43-44 for fuller discussion of this topic.

<sup>49</sup> Goldberg 1980, pp. 34-35.

<sup>50</sup> Men. *Aspis* 106-110.

<sup>51</sup> See on this point Vogt-Spira 1992, pp. 78-81.

<sup>52</sup> Men. *Aspis* 18; see also Konet 1976, pp. 90-91.

theme. The goddess, like Ἄγνοια, represents what happens when accidents and chance events occur in someone's life; but she also gives the characters the scope for independent actions.<sup>53</sup> Some of the events that start the actions are not in the characters' control; what is in their control is how they decide to interpret these events and take them as a basis for action: their actions are what Τύχη needs in order to lead the play to her desired end.

### 1.2.2 Smikrines and Daos

In the rest of her prologue, the goddess directs attention to Smikrines. The wicked old man is not shown feeling any sorrow at Kleostratos' death and, consequently, his greedy nature is immediately revealed to the audience.<sup>54</sup> He is attracted by Kleostratos' war chest and he now plans to take advantage of Kleostratos' death as a pretext to marry his sister, though she was promised originally to Kleostratos' cousin.<sup>55</sup> From a legal point of view Smikrines is allowed to ask the girl in marriage<sup>56</sup>. Now that Kleostratos is dead, he will not have a reliable administrator for his property when he dies.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Smikrines does not trust his younger brother Chairestratos: Smikrines believes that the latter is behaving irresponsibly in giving the girl in marriage to an unknown party. Therefore, for the sake of his own property, Smikrines considers the best option that of marrying the girl himself. Smikrines' plan is to mask his wicked intrigue as a wise solution to an ἀτύχημα, namely, Kleostratos' death.

Σμ: πάντα ταῦτ' ὀργίζομαι  
ὄρων. ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐστὶν ἀλλοτρίως ἔχων  
πρὸς ἐμέ, ποιήσω ταῦτ' ἐγὼ· τὴν οὐσίαν  
οὐχὶ καταλείψω τὴν ἐμὴν διαρπάσαι  
τούτοις, ὅπερ δὲ καὶ παραινοῦσιν τινες  
τῶν γνωρίμων μοι λήψομαι τὴν παρθένον

<sup>53</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1971, p. 162 and on these two specific plays Zagagi 1990. "Such characters [Menander's prologue speaker: Ignorance, Fortune and Proof] may be purely inventions of the playwright to suit the dramatic circumstances of the moment, but the fact that personifications were presented in physical form must have helped, alongside representation in the visual arts, to give them substance in the popular imagination" (Stafford 2002, p. 13).

<sup>54</sup> Men. *Aspis*, 83-99.

<sup>55</sup> Men. *Aspis*, 114-120; see Goldberg 1980, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Being Kleostratos and Kleostratos' father dead, the girl has in fact become an ἐπίκληρος (heiress) and Smikrines, as her paternal uncle, is entitled to ask her hand. For further discussion see Harrison 1968, p. 10-11 and, with specific reference to this play, Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 29 n.1 and pp. 76-77.

<sup>57</sup> Men. *Aspis*, 167-171.

γυναῖκα ταύτην· καὶ γὰρ ὁ νόμος μοι δοκεῖ  
οὔτω λέγειν πως, Δᾶε. ταῦτ' οὖν ὄν τρόπον  
πράττειτ' ἂν ὀρθῶς καὶ σὲ φροντίζειν ἔδει·  
οὐκ ἀλλότριος <εἶ>.

SMIKRINES: I get angry looking at all this. Since he deals with me as a stranger, this is what I will do. I will not leave this property of mine for them to tear in pieces, I will take this girl as my wife as some of the people I know suggest to me. It seems to me that the law says this, Daos. In fact, you should have looked into this, how these things should be done properly. You <are> not unfamiliar [with this matter].<sup>58</sup>

This decision is perceived, by the others, as a demonstration of a lack of decency and human feeling.<sup>59</sup> The audience knows that Smikrines is not suffering a misfortune (ἀτύχημα), as he pretends to be, but, instead, is committing an ἀδίκημα. The old man does not consider the relevance of his age; he thinks he deserves to have Kleostratos' wealth and he is determined to have it: he does not recognise his greed and he does not understand how his pretence is improper in the situation.

From the perspective of the other characters, Smikrines, in his turn, is himself producing an ἀτύχημα. He is making himself the author of an unfortunate circumstance that is imposed on the others and which they do not know how to control. This passage has a similar structure to the *Perikeiromene*: Glykera and the Old Corinthian decide to dispose of their knowledge in the way they think is most suitable for everyone. Thus, their role is associated with that of the prologue speaker because they create states of ignorance in the other characters. In an analogous way, Smikrines' decision to marry the girl surprises everyone and leaves everyone in great distress as if another ἀτύχημα has fallen on the characters after what has been announced about Kleostratos' death by the prologue speaker.

However, Daos will wisely try to resolve the situation: he plans to stage Chairestratos' death. We might say that, to some extent, Daos' role here can be associated with that of Τύχη and Ἄγνοια because, like the goddesses, he decides to surprise the other characters with an accident which is intended to bring about certain discoveries. Indeed, it is in order to reveal Smikrines' true intention that Daos makes up a plan: Chairestratos' family will pretend that Chairestratos has suddenly died. Smikrines will then be interested in Chairestratos' daughter as she will inherit his father's much more substantial property.

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<sup>58</sup> Men. *Aspis*, 180-189.

<sup>59</sup> Men. *Aspis*, 257; 260 and 309.

**Δα:** [        ] δύο τάλ[αντα  
 [        ] αὐτῶι τιν' ἐλπίδ[  
 [        ]. φερόμενον εὐθὺς ἐπ[  
 προπετῆ, διημαρτηκότ', ἐπτ[οημένον  
 ὄψει μεταχειριεῖ τε τοῦτον εὐπόρως.  
 ὃ βούλεται γὰρ μόνον ὀρῶν καὶ προσδοκῶν  
ἀλόγιστος ἔσται τῆς ἀληθείας κριτής.

**DAOS:** [We will give] him two [talents]; if we offer him some hope, you will see him falling, making mistakes, [carried away by excitement] so you will have him in your hands easily. He is only looking and thinking about this thing he wants and he will be an unreasoning judge of the truth.<sup>60</sup>

This said, they plan a way to make Chairestratos' accidental death credible. The alleged tragedy is announced by Daos who quotes tragic verses pretending that all these unforeseen misfortunes have been sent by the gods. But this last ἀτύχημα is skilfully planned by Daos and is meant to lead Smikrines to engineer another ἀδίκημα with the intention of making his ἄδικος nature evident to everyone: in this way, all the other characters would have enough evidence to condemn Smikrines' wicked intentions. The interesting thing, in this scene, is that when Daos announces that Chairestratos has just died, he says, quoting tragic lines, that it is τύχη and not sound judgement (εὐβουλία) that controls human beings.<sup>61</sup> But what he himself is doing here actually proves the contrary: chance affects people's life in various ways but people's responses to it are also important. Daos thinks that Smikrines is not acting in a humane way (ἀνθρωπίνως) and that something needs to be done to resolve the situation: his association with Τύχη becomes more evident here. In the prologue we are told by Τύχη that Smikrines is someone who does not behave correctly with respect to the members of his own family and the community in general.<sup>62</sup> The plot will reveal to everyone what a bad person he is.<sup>63</sup> Daos' plan helps Τύχη in making the revelation possible. We will see that, in the prologue of *Dyscolos*, Pan makes an analogous point: Knemon does not behave well with respect to his family and the community in general: this situation needs to

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<sup>60</sup> Men. *Aspis*, 321-327.

<sup>61</sup> Men. *Aspis* 411.

<sup>62</sup> Men. *Aspis* 114-120.

<sup>63</sup> Men. *Aspis* 138-146.

change.<sup>64</sup> He, therefore, provokes an accident to which characters will respond in various ways and, with their responses, they will produce certain results.<sup>65</sup>

Looking back at the *Aspis*, the fact that Daos creates a situation as Τύχη would have done means that sound judgement and human intellectual ability have a significant role in the accidental circumstances in which people often find themselves in life. Human rationality is able to take accidental events as a basis for further actions: this is what finally determines the ethical quality of the agents and their acts. Daos (similarly to what Glykera and the Old Corinthian do in the *Perikeiromene*) takes up here the role of the prologue speaker, the goddess Τύχη. He stages an accidental event and he lets it affect Smikrines and, from the outside, he watches the reactions of his character and waits to see where they lead, imagining in advance how the situation will unfold. The rest of the play is largely lost; however, we possess a part of the intrigue made up by Daos: the plan consists in pretending that a false doctor diagnoses Chairestratos' death by a sudden attack of "choking spasm". The play probably concludes with the arrival of Kleostratos on stage which resolves the situation and decisively subverts Smikrines' plans.

What is clear is that, from the beginning, the events that happen on stage are for the most part created by the characters themselves. Daos makes a mistake in identifying Kleostratos' corpse (ἀμάρτημα); Smikrines takes advantage of Kleostratos' death (ἀδίκημα) and the other characters are affected by his decision. However, a pretended, and skilfully crafted, ἀτύχημα engineered by Daos will resolve the problem. Τύχη produces the initial accident and she expects that figures will react in a certain way so she will fulfil her plan; however, the plot unfolds according to the characters' intentions and their wise or wicked ethical choices.

### 1.3 Divine prologue speakers and related matters

So far, I have argued that Menander seems to be interested in the range of ways in which people react to unexpected situations. Independently of what might happen or what one might happen to know, people should be able to handle properly at least the portion of reality of which they are aware. When they do not, they show their flaws; the

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<sup>64</sup> This theme seems to be set out explicitly by Plautus' *Rudens*. In the prologue Arcturos states that Jupiter sends gods into the world to ascertain those who act correctly and those who do not so that he can then punish or reward them accordingly (Pl. *Rud.* 9-30).

<sup>65</sup> For further discussion about *Dyscolos* see Chapter 5, section 1.

spectators are amused because they recognise the characters' mistakes but they know that, on stage, everything will end up in a happy way as the goddesses announce at the beginning. The audience is informed of everything by an external entity that declares she produced certain circumstances in order to achieve a specific result. In fact, the actions of the central characters of these comedies originate as reactions to something that the characters did not originally determine, but which was offered, thus giving scope for action. In this way, the audience understands how characters will react to a situation of which all or most of them are not fully aware, by contrast to the audience and the goddesses who see the situation from outside these events. Consequently, the relationship between divine prologue speakers and characters is one of (external) cause and response.<sup>66</sup> the prologue speakers organise things in a certain way so to provoke certain reactions and the characters respond to these events accordingly. Nevertheless, eventually, it is the characters' response that qualifies them as a certain kind of person and that makes them the targets of the audience's laughter. The audience is able to recognise the characters' flaws with laughter because the actions and events that develop from the figures' accidents are finally intelligible at a psychological, human level. After the divine speaker leaves the stage, Menander draws the audience's attention to the characters, how they reason, why they act and which actions they decide to perform.

These general points also apply to previous Athenian tragic texts. Here, I discuss some examples from Euripides' *Ion* and *Hippolytus* that exhibit a comparable relationship between divine prologue speakers and human characters.<sup>67</sup> In Euripides, in fact, we often find that gods and goddesses appear at the beginning and at the end of the dramatic action, delivering a prologue or an epilogue often as *dei ex machina*.<sup>68</sup> At the end of the *Ion*, for instance, the goddess Athena appears to explain to Ion and Kreusa the series of events in which they found themselves involved. She explicitly states that the god Apollo was the one who planned the whole plot and that everything that has happened to them was caused by him in order that they could recognise each other.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See analogously Williams 1993, pp. 51-66 with reference to Homer and Greek tragedy.

<sup>67</sup> Segal argues that New Comedy shares with Euripides a similar treatment of divine intervention: they simply suggest that the gods have planned everything as a mere dramatic pretext (Segal, E. 2001, p. 19). After the prologue they promptly vanish from the play, since their sole function is to explain the situation (*ibidem*, p. 12-13).

<sup>68</sup> "When it seems that events have reached an *impasse*, the gods suddenly appear from nowhere and shout 'Stop!' [...]. What strikes one is its artificiality: the endings have been imposed in what seems a perfunctory manner. Has the action really been rounded off in a satisfactory sense? Has resolution really been achieved? Perhaps not – but a god willed it" (Wright 2005, p. 361).

<sup>69</sup> E. *Ion* 1565-1568.

However, Athena also says that Apollo had to modify his original plan about Ion,<sup>70</sup> which Hermes presented in the prologue. Apollo planned that Kreousa and Ion should recognise each other once they arrive in Athens; however, this plan was spoilt by Kreousa's intention of killing Ion. Apollo, fearing that Ion would actually be killed by his mother's firm resolution (μητρὸς ἐκ βουλευμάτων), had to anticipate their recognition using devices (μηχαναί) on which Athena does not linger further. Analogously to what happens in Menander, it seems that Euripides introduces in the plot two shifting perspectives (human and divine) that seem to interact and motivate each other.<sup>71</sup> The circumstances of the plot are created by an external force, Apollo, so that he could produce certain results; however, in turn, Kreousa's human resolution influences Apollo's plan and the god needs to devise new routes to obtain his desired end. Apollo will finally achieve the result he wishes; however, he needs Kreousa to comply with him in some way. He needs Kreousa to choose to react in one way rather than another for his plan to be fulfilled. God's decisions are final, and Athena's epilogue seems to remind characters of this, but characters are given scope for independent action: more precisely, it seems that the gods themselves need figures to react in a certain way in order to have their desires fulfilled.

The prologue of Euripides' *Hippolytus* offers another example which might constitute a useful point of comparison with the prologues of *Aspis* and *Perikeiromene*. In the drama, the prologue-speaker, Aphrodite, summarises the previous events and introduces the actual circumstances of the play.<sup>72</sup> Phaedra, Theseus' wife, is in love with her step-son Hippolytus and the goddess declares that she wants to bring this affair to Theseus' notice.<sup>73</sup> In fact, she says, it is part of her plan to punish Hippolytus<sup>74</sup> for his disrespectful behaviour to her and his excessive reverence for Artemis. As in the *Ion*, the goddess has a clear plan but she needs Phaedra to take the 'right' decision in order for her plan to be fulfilled. We know that Phaedra is contemplating various possible ways of escaping from her miserable conditions. She says that she is victim of a love passion that is ambiguously characterised as Κύπρις, a term that signifies both the

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<sup>70</sup> E. *Ion* 1563-1564.

<sup>71</sup> Giannopoulou 2000, p. 262. See also Lloyd 1986.

<sup>72</sup> E. *Hipp.* 1-40.

<sup>73</sup> δεῖξω δὲ Θησεῖ πρᾶγμα κάκφανήσεται (E. *Hipp.* 42). "The straightforward meaning of this is that she will reveal to Theseus that Phaedra is in love with Hippolytus. But she does not: she causes Theseus to learn not the truth but Phaedra's false accusation that Hippolytus has raped her; only in the end, when everything is over, is Theseus told the truth by Artemis. This contradiction is not to be resolved by assuming a corruption [...]; the truth is simply that Euripides is not being straightforward. He is not concerned here to give an exact synopsis of his plot, but rather [...] to mislead and mystify without outright misstatement" (Barrett 1964, *ad loc.*).

<sup>74</sup> E. *Hipp.* 45-28.



goddess Aphrodite and the human affection of ‘love’ or ‘passion’ that is growing in her soul.<sup>75</sup> She lists to the audience the three solutions that she has been thinking about in her mind in order to free herself from this painful state: as a final solution she plans to die so as to put a definite end to her struggles.

**Φα:** λέξω δὲ καὶ σοι τῆς ἐμῆς γνώμης ὁδόν.  
ἐπεὶ μ' ἔρωσ ἔτρωσεν, ἐσκόπουν ὅπως  
κάλλιστ' ἐνέγκαιμ' αὐτόν. ἠρξάμην μὲν οὖν  
ἐκ τοῦδε, σιγᾶν τήνδε καὶ κρύπτειν νόσον.  
γλώσση γὰρ οὐδὲν πιστόν, ἦ θυραῖα μὲν  
φρονήματ' ἀνδρῶν νοθετεῖν ἐπίσταται,  
αὐτὴ δ' ὕφ' αὐτῆς πλεῖστα κέκτηται κακά.  
τὸ δεύτερον δὲ τὴν ἄνοιαν εὖ φέρειν  
τῷ σωφρονεῖν νικῶσα προνοησάμην.  
τρίτον δ', ἐπειδὴ τοισίδ' οὐκ ἐξήνυτον  
Κύπριν κρατῆσαι, κατθανεῖν ἔδοξε μοι.  
κράτιστον (οὐδεὶς ἀντερεῖ) βουλευμάτων.

PHAEDRA: I will tell you the course my judgement took. When love wounded me, I searched for the best way to endure it. I made myself start with this: to keep silent and to conceal my illness. For there is no trusting the tongue, which knows how to correct the thoughts of others but invites untold troubles when it speaks on its own behalf. After that, I determined to endure the passion bravely, overcoming it with self-control. Thirdly, because I could not succeed to win love with these [means], I resolved to die, the best resolution (as no one will deny).<sup>76</sup>

Phaedra is not the passive victim of Aphrodite’s plan: her human perspective is relevant for the unfolding of the plot and for characterising her as an agent of a certain kind. First of all, if Phaedra had actually committed suicide before confessing her secret to her nurse, we must imagine that Aphrodite would have thought of some other way to bring about her desired end. In addition to that, as an audience we know how the plot will end and we know that Aphrodite will succeed but, looking at Phaedra’s struggle and the solutions she thinks about to escape the goddess’ plan, we are invited to see the whole story in different terms. The perspectives offered by the goddess and by the characters are different, and they shift during the play. In fact, when we compare Aphrodite’s prologue “with the concrete details of the play, the explanations which the goddess gives are thin and over-simple. They suit the complex of power politics upon Olympus

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<sup>75</sup> LSJ, s.v.

<sup>76</sup> E. Hipp. 391-402. Translation by Shaw 2007 (modified).

better than they suit the complexities of human life”.<sup>77</sup> Phaedra is a woman who happens to be caught by passion for the wrong person: but the ways in which she tries and fails to hide and fight against the feelings that the goddess aroused in her and the consequences that this produces, are humanly and rationally understood and explained. Accidents, events and emotions come into being for no reason – or, at least, for reasons that the figures, as human beings, cannot fully explain: they are produced by external forces, gods, chance and, more generally, accidents proper to the human condition;<sup>78</sup> the figures on stage do not understand the cause of certain events, but their response is crucial to bringing about a certain ending and to showing themselves as people of a certain kind.

Having said that, despite the fact that Menander seems to make use of prologues in a way that is similar to Euripides, I think that there are significant differences in the kinds of actions in which his characters are involved, the quality of their choices and the way in which these are presented to the audience. In Menander, characters’ decisions are presented as clear examples of good or bad choices that the audience is able to witness and to appreciate from an outside perspective along with the goddesses.<sup>79</sup> In the unfolding of the Menandrian comedy we expect to see a good outcome and a set of good or bad choices that will bring about a happy ending despite the various accidents. In tragedy, this is typically not the case: virtuous figures, or figures who make choices the motivation for which is presented sympathetically to the the audience, often experience disaster in the end and the audience is not invited to judge them, or to draw a clear distinction between good and bad agents. On the other hand, Menander deals with everyday life and everyday characters, and he presents them as people who make mistakes, regret this, fall in love and get angry. Because they understand their mistakes, in the end, they lead the plot to a happy ending and the audience is able to understand along with them what went wrong, what one should avoid and how one can make amends for one’s own mistakes.

In conclusion, it is interesting to see that, in the prologues of the *Aspis* and *Perikeiromene*, the divine figures are personifications of abstract concepts rather than

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<sup>77</sup> Winnington-Ingram 2003, p. 215.

<sup>78</sup> “Chance and the gods might be alternative and equivalent ways accounting for the operation within human life of factors which cannot be explained in entirely human terms” (Halliwell 1986, p. 230).

<sup>79</sup> See Gutzwiller 2000 who argues that it is exactly this kind of complicity between the goddesses and the audience that makes Menander’s prologues different from the Euripidean models: “The gods of Euripidean prologues generally explain past happenings and reveal their control over coming events, without direct address to the audience. In Menander, however, the deity of the prologue reveals past and future while making a kind of compact with the audience to accept and enjoy the illusion of the play” (Gutzwiller 2000, p. 115).

Olympian goddess, and the broad ideas that they embody (i.e. ignorance and chance) are often recalled in the plots to explain what has happened to the characters involved. In the *Dyscolos*, we will find a more conventional deity, Pan, as prologue speaker. However, his function here seems to be not very different from that of Τύχη and Ἄγνοια: the god seems to be equally interested in creating for his characters accidents that are meant to produce certain human reactions on stage.<sup>80</sup>

As a matter of fact, Pan does not do anything really characteristic of his status as rural divinity: he makes his appearance, he explains the situation and he declares that he has been the one who produced the incident that will provoke the following events. After that, Pan disappears and, as in the other plays, the characters are left in charge of their action and their mistakes. In this particular case, it is also difficult to suppose that Pan's represents a particular force, such as the compelling motive of passionate love, which is in some way at work in the play and that Pan states he has produced in Sostratos;<sup>81</sup> nor does Pan represent Knemon's cantankerous character. Therefore, it is tempting to say that the function of his prologue seems to be rather that of presenting the characters on stage and preparing a clear setting for the following actions. "In the *Dyscolos*, [...] the one feature that the audience does not take seriously is the agency of Pan. He is a dramatic convenience, imparting an aesthetically pleasing shape to the scheme of coincidences upon which the plot depends, and by his unseen presence adding piquancy to the country-setting of the comedy".<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, Pan does appear and he does express his disappointment at Knemon's bad behaviour: the way in which Knemon is behaving is against human nature<sup>83</sup> and something has to be done to resolve the troubles that this is creating for his family, particularly, his devoted daughter.<sup>84</sup> Pan's plan is to arouse in Sostratos love for the girl and to see what happens after he has done it. This circumstance created by Pan will produce two main outcomes: the first one is the effect that Pan arguably wanted to bring about, that is, to restore Knemon's daughter to society with her marriage to Sostratos. The second one is more unexpected, and this is the partial conversion of the old misanthrope, which finally takes up a great part of the play that is named after Knemon's bad disposition.

The external force, with the mask of Pan, does intervene in the play creating the first accident, after which characters advance the plot by responding to it in various

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<sup>80</sup> See Vogt-Spira 1992 who similarly associate Pan (pp. 138-145) with Ἄγνοια (pp. 116-120) and Τύχη.

<sup>81</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 44.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson 1970, p. 217.

<sup>83</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 6.

<sup>84</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 36-39.

ways. Pan, Τύχη and Ἄγνοια end up having the same functions: they bring to the stage the accidents that start the action off and they watch with the audience the characters' reactions knowing that they will have a specific ending. This function is closely mirrored at a human level by what Daos does in Act Three of the *Aspis*: he stages for Smikrines an accident and he expects to obtain a certain response from him. He does not determine Smikrines' reaction but offers him the chance to reveal his nature in a way that Smikrines himself will decide.

## 2. Aristotle on chance, ignorance and rational agents

Before going on to explain Aristotle's treatment of chance and accidental ignorance, I would like to explore his aesthetic theory about the function of the divine prologues in the context of the dramatic plot.

### 2.1 Prologues and likelihood

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, divine explanations or the gods' presence in drama are categorised as ἄλογος, illogical, and external to the plot. Aristotle suggests that the playwright should deploy them just to fulfil certain functions.

μηχανῆ χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, ἢ ὅσα πρὸ τοῦ γέγονεν ἃ οὐχ οἶόν τε ἄνθρωπον εἰδέναι, ἢ ὅσα ὕστερον, ἃ δεῖται προαγορεύσεως καὶ ἀγγελίας· ἅπαντα γὰρ ἀποδίδομεν τοῖς θεοῖς ὄρᾶν. ἄλογον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν, εἰ δὲ μή, ἔξω τῆς τραγωδίας.

The *machina* should be used for things that are outside the dramatic action, either events that have happened before and which it is not possible for a man to know or events that happen in the future and need a prediction and an announcement, as we attribute to the gods the fact that they see everything. Nothing illogical has to take place in the dramatic action or otherwise [it has to take place] outside of the tragic action.<sup>85</sup>

The plot, according to Aristotle, has to possess an internal coherent logic so that the action is rationally intelligible by an audience in its picture of human actions and

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<sup>85</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 15, 1454b2-7.

interactions. If the playwright conforms to this principle, his audience will be led step by step to the final understanding of the human motivations and mistakes that took place on the stage.<sup>86</sup>

This comes as a consequence of the fact that drama should represent people that act and think as we would probably (τὸ εἰκός) act and think in their position, and being the kind of people they are. Drama should also represent an intelligible motivational chain that links events to actions and to other events that develop necessarily (τὸ ἀναγκαῖον). That is to say, once the events have been created, someone with a specific type of character will probably respond in a certain way because his character will necessarily lead that person to take one decision rather than another.<sup>87</sup> To explain these thoughts, motivations, actions and events from a divine perspective does not help the understanding of this chain. The understanding of what has happened on the stage has to be produced from inside the stage, that is, from inside the plot, within human agency and not outside it.

χρὴ δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἡθεσιν ὁμοίως ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων συστάσει ἀεὶ ζητεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τὸ εἰκός, ὥστε τὸν τοιοῦτον τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγειν ἢ πράττειν ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκός καὶ τοῦτο μετὰ τοῦτο γίνεσθαι ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκός. φανερόν οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰς λύσεις τῶν μύθων ἐξ αὐτοῦ δεῖ τοῦ μύθου συμβαίνειν, καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Μηδεΐᾳ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς.

It is indeed necessary to aim always at the necessary and the plausible in the characters just as in the structure of the facts. So that [it is] either necessary or plausible that a person of such and such a sort says and does things of the same sort and that [it is] either necessary or plausible that this thing happens after that one. It is evident, indeed, that the unravelling of the plot must arise out of the plot itself, and not, as in the *Medea, ex-machina*.<sup>88</sup>

It seems, therefore, that Aristotle suggests the divine prologue should be used in the way that Menander does. The divine voice should be essentially external and separate from the rest of the plot. It supports the playwright in that it should help him in making clear what the circumstances of the action are and what the story is that the

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<sup>86</sup> The aim of drama, however, is not educative but cognitive, as Halliwell notes, “The emphasis on the comprehension of tragedy does contain an element of reassurance and rational confidence: understanding where the failures of action are concerned might imply that in principle things might be effected otherwise, that they might be controlled so as to avoid suffering and misfortune” (Halliwell 1986, p. 236).

<sup>87</sup> For further discussion of this topic see Frede 1992 who interprets the kind of necessity of which Aristotle is talking about here as “necessity in the sense that the character’s action springs necessarily from the kind of person (character) he is. For the critical spectator it is a pleasure to recognise how and why the decision the agents are making, or the sufferings they have to undergo, are *necessary* or *plausible* ones, so that in the end the tragedy appears as an organic whole” (Frede 1992, p. 214). I shall come back to this point in Chapter 5.

<sup>88</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 15, 1454a33-b2.

playwright himself has invented: it also clarifies what the accidents are which the playwright has created to surprise his characters. If the illogical and unforeseeable has to be included in the plot and the audience needs to be informed about this in order to understand the circumstances of the action, this explanation has to take place outside the dramatic action where the characters cannot hear it and where the audience may share the playwright's knowledge. In this way the audience and the playwright comply in creating and observing the accidents to which human condition is liable and occupy a privileged position.

More specifically, in the case of a comic performance, people in the audience see on stage characters that are similar to them: they see human beings affected by accidents and feelings as they are; they see human nature represented as the playwright understands this. Accordingly, they are aware that the events on stage are likely to take place in everyone's life, but they enjoy the opportunity of experiencing those events from a distance, being conscious that, at the moment of the performance, they will not be affected by what is happening or what the playwright, within the prologue, announces for them. Once events and accidents have been explained in the prologue, nothing that goes beyond human intelligibility should enter in the plot. This is why, human rational choice cannot be explained by a *super*-human perspective: characters will explain themselves and their actions throughout the plot, while the figures in prologues create circumstances that the characters do not yet know about and explain these to the audience, drawing the attention to the external force that they represent and that is about to challenge the characters' lives.

## 2.2 Aristotle, *Tύχη* and *Άγνοια*

These ideas can plausibly be linked to Aristotle's treatment of chance and accidental ignorance in his works on ethics and physics. Before exploring this point further, I need to clarify that I am using here the expression 'accidental ignorance' in order to distinguish ignorance of particulars which we cannot control, namely, a kind of 'non-culpable ignorance',<sup>89</sup> from the ethical ignorance to which we are led by incontinence and intemperance. Having said that, the common ground that, in Aristotle, chance and accidental ignorance share is that of events that are external to human agency and which

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<sup>89</sup> Sorabji 1980, p. 235.

just happen to fall in a human being's life.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, it seems to me that we find in Aristotle the same attention as in Menander to the response that the agent gives to accidental events. We find the idea that once chance or accidental ignorance affects someone, it necessarily requires a response from the agent and, that once the agent responds, the person becomes involved in the action. It is this involvement that identifies someone as the performer of an action which he may or may not have expected to be in the position to perform. What seems to be crucial is that, given an unexpected circumstance, the agent and the action itself are labelled with a name, which indicates the ethical quality of the action, *after* the agent has given his response to the accidental circumstance in which he found himself acting. Thus, the agent, being involved in an event, inevitably becomes significantly active because, depending on the response he gives, he decides what significance the accident has for him and his ethical life. In fact, when someone chooses what to do in a given situation he also determines the quality of the resulting action and justifies its being characterised as good or bad.

In support of this point, I consider Aristotle's *Physics* II, 4-6: here rational beings are differentiated from animals, inanimate beings and children by reference to Aristotle's explanation of how events affect the natural and the human world. In the *Physics*, he argues that accidental events are designated differently according to the agents they affect: when something unexpected or with no apparent purpose happens to a rational being, this can be transformed into an accidental cause that contributes to the performing of an action that the rational being chooses to do; in this case, the event takes the name of τύχη. Moreover, as Aristotle makes clear in the *Ethics*, the quality of the agent's response to τύχη – the accidental event that involves him as rational agent – is fundamental for carrying out an ethically relevant action and also for characterising the action as good or bad. This process does not apply to irrational beings.

This last point opens scope for debate about the responsibility that one holds when chance or accidental ignorance intervenes in someone's life: more specifically, it opens up debate about the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action as presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. Here, the attitude of the agent, *before* the deed done in the context of chance or accidental ignorance, and *after* it, becomes crucial for the definition of the *ēthos* of the agent and also for defining the act itself as voluntary or not, unfortunate or unjust. At the end of this analysis, it will be

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<sup>90</sup> This is also analogous to what I have pointed out in Menander at pp. 117 - above: on this analogy see Tierney 1935, especially p. 224 and Gutzwiller 2000, pp. 116-124.

clear that, for Aristotle, very few acts can be identified as completely involuntary and all of them require a human response in order to be characterised in a certain way.

### 2.2.1 *Chance and mere chance*

In *Physics* II, Aristotle offers an extensive treatment of the topic of chance. The context in which he is treating this topic is a general inquiry on nature (φύσις), which is defined as a source and “cause of change and remaining unchanged in that to which it belongs primarily and of itself and not by virtue of concurrence”.<sup>91</sup> However, nature is not the cause of everything but only of those things that have an internal principle that develops in accordance with nature;<sup>92</sup> thus, nature is not the cause of what happens by virtue of concurrence.<sup>93</sup>

Some things, says Aristotle, are by nature, others as a result of other causes (i.e. of τέχνη, τύχη and προαίρεσις, [...]).<sup>94</sup> [...] Aristotle does establish a distinction between two classes of things, one consisting of things which as such have an internal principle of movement (i.e. animals and their parts, plants, and the four simple bodies earth, water, air, fire), the other of things such as beds and clothes which as such have no internal principle of movement, though in virtue of the simple bodies of which they are made they have such a principle.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, it is possible that certain things have other causes and they owe their movement and rest not to nature but to causes that are external to the φύσις of the moving or resting beings: these causes contribute from the exterior to their rest or movement.<sup>96</sup> Initially, Aristotle just provides us with examples of stones and coats as instances of things that owe their change to something other than nature. In the case of the coat, for instance, Aristotle says that it comes into being by τέχνη.

At first, human beings are included in the category of things that are made and develop according to nature’s plan and possess an internal origin of change, namely, their own nature.<sup>97</sup> However, in *Physics* II, chapters 4 to 6, we find cases in which rational beings are shown to be able not only to develop and bring to an end their inner

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<sup>91</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 1, 192b20-23, Charlton 1970, *ad loc.*

<sup>92</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 1, 192b 35-193a2.

<sup>93</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 1, 192b23.

<sup>94</sup> See Arist. *Metaph.* Z 7, 1032a11-15.

<sup>95</sup> Ross 1936, p. 499-500.

<sup>96</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 1, 192b18.

<sup>97</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 1, 193a35-b25.



φύσις but also to adapt to things or events that are external to it, for instance, accidental events (τὸ αὐτόματον). At this point, Aristotle discusses whether events of this kind can be considered as natural causes of a human being's change: in fact, even if accidental events are external to the nature of animal and human organisms, they may still somehow produce change and rest in both the natural and the human realms.

Aristotle therefore considers accidental events involving human beings with a view to deciding whether they can be characterised as natural causes. One difficulty derives from the fact that, when an accidental event happens in the human realm, it seems to change its nature: it does not seem any longer to have been produced by chance but appears *as if* planned by nature. The outcome produced is one that nature or thought would have produced. Aristotle explains that all events that happen accidentally can be ascribed to τὸ αὐτόματον; but if an accidental event affects a human being, this is no longer so described but is characterised as τύχη. Hence, τύχη constitute a subset of τὸ αὐτόματον: its being a subset depends on the fact that the subjects to which τύχη relates are rational animals, namely human beings.

Regarding chance (τύχη), one has the impression of seeing something happening as nature would have produced it.

ἔστι δ' ἕνεκά του ὅσα τε ἀπὸ διανοίας ἂν πραγθεῖη καὶ ὅσα ἀπὸ φύσεως. τὰ δὴ τοιαῦτα ὅταν κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς γένηται, ἀπὸ τύχης φημὲν εἶναι.

Events that serve a purpose might be brought about by thought or by nature. When such things happen *per accidens*, we say that they do so by chance.<sup>98</sup>

In particular, when a rational being is affected by an event *per accidens*, he transforms it into chance using the event itself as a means through which, with thought and choice, he can create his own good or bad luck; thus, the accident turns out not to be in vain but to take place for some sort of purpose (ἕνεκά του). This is why, when an automatic event strikes a human being, it is categorised as τύχη.

δῆλον ἄρα ὅτι ἡ τύχη αἰτία κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἐν τοῖς κατὰ προαίρεσιν τῶν ἕνεκά του. διὸ περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ διάνοια καὶ τύχη· ἢ γὰρ προαίρεσις οὐκ ἄνευ διανοίας.

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<sup>98</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 5, 196b21-24. For extended commentary on the meaning of these lines, see Lennox 1984, especially, pp. 58-60.

It is evident then that chance is a cause *per accidens* of things done according to choice that serve a purpose. Hence, chance [is concerned] with the same [class of events] as thought [is] for there is no choice without thought.<sup>99</sup>

On the other hand, accidental events that occur in the natural world, and affect inanimate beings or animal, do not bring about outcomes of the same kind; more precisely, they do not imply choice or thought. Therefore, such events do not appear to have been produced with the precision of rational choice that belongs only to human beings who can transform them in order to obtain certain ends; for this reason the results are simply called automatic outcomes and not τύχη.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, chance events are defined as concurrent external causes that, together with human choice, produce change and rest in human beings and, thanks to human rational choice, they appear to happen for some purpose and not in vain, that is to say, they produce the opportunity for further rational action. Moreover, to be called ‘chance’ they must happen for the sake of something (ἔνεκά του) and, in order to produce some results, they need a rational being who takes advantage of them. To develop this point, I will refer to the example that Aristotle himself offers. He describes as a case of τύχη the circumstance in which a man, walking in the market place, finds by chance the man who owes him money and, taking advantage of the fact that he has met him, asks him to have his loan back.<sup>101</sup> If we now suppose that, in the same situation, the same man, meeting his debtor, does not ask him for his loan back, then we conclude that the man has not taken advantage of the situation and has missed the chance to recover his money on that day and on that occasion. Accordingly, in this case, the fact that the man was at the market, and the fact that he happened to see his debtor, did not produce any effect. That is, this event was not ‘chance’ but something that happened in vain.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, Aristotle concludes that chance events cannot be classified in any case as determinate causes of change and movement of living beings because chance events do not produce this change necessarily or for the most part and they are posterior to reason and nature because they need reason and nature in order to happen for some

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<sup>99</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 5, 197a5-8.

<sup>100</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 6, 197b14-20. On this passage Judson comments “Thus *E* is the outcome of chance (τὸ αὐτόματον) iff (1) *E* is among the things which come to be for the sake of something ‘without qualification’, (2) *E* does not come to be for the sake of what results, and (3) the cause of *E* is external” (Judson 1991, p. 93).

<sup>101</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 4, 196a3-5.

<sup>102</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 6, 197b23-28.

purpose and not in vain.<sup>103</sup> Hence, the changes that chance events combine to produce are not already determined by a natural plan, for instance, it is not necessary that the man will ask for his loan back when he sees his debtor even if it is a fact that the two men actually meet at the market. Certain things happen because they are necessitated by causes that do not depend on the agent (for instance, the meeting of debtor and creditor at the market) but the moment in which the agent chooses (that is, the man decides to ask for his loan back) makes him the author of a conscious plan that he himself directs towards an end that *he* thinks to be the best.<sup>104</sup> By contrast, things that do not have the capacity of choosing and directing their movement according to a plan are not agents of τύχη but only of τὸ αὐτόματον.

Turning back to Menander, we can find examples that are particularly suitable for illustrating what I have just said about Aristotle's thinking on this topic. In the *Aspis*, Menander presents us with a plot in which accidental events of different types are produced by the rational thought and choices of his characters: it is worth looking more closely at this material to see whether we can find ideas which are analogous to those of Aristotle. I have already explained how, in this play, it appears that a misfortune has happened to Kleostratos, and that Smikrines has taken advantage of it. When Daos conceives his plan to unmask Smikrines, he engineers a misfortune, pretending that Chairestratos died. The interesting thing here is that Daos provides an accidental event, though planning to achieve an explicit aim, that is, to unmask Smikrines. We are offered here an insight into how Menander conceives chance. Daos knows that, by providing the accidental event, Smikrines will take advantage of it in some way and it will be clear to everyone that he and his actions are wicked. The unfortunate event, that is, Chairestratos' death, will create the desired results: as predicted by Daos, Smikrines uses it as an opportunity to take Chairestratos' daughter as his wife with the intention of getting a richer dowry. In the *Aspis* the alleged misfortune did not happen accidentally but was invented by Daos who, like a director or a playwright, wished to produce certain reactions in the characters involved, and actually succeeded in doing so. Chairestratos' death was determined by Daos but Smikrines' response was not a

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<sup>103</sup> Arist. *Ph.* II 6, 198a9-13. "Because the beneficial results of natural processes occur regularly 'always or for the most part' they cannot be the outcome of chance which would yield beneficial results only irregularly" (Granger 1993, p. 168). See also Hankinson 1998, pp. 133-140.

<sup>104</sup> Certain things are necessitated by prior causes. "But if one traces the chain back, one must eventually reach a self-mover which responds to a final cause. So although such phenomena are not themselves in accordance with a conscious plan that aims for the best, they are at least the eventual result of such a plan. It is because they are not directly dependent on the volition of a conscious agent that Aristotle sometimes attributes them to necessity" (M. L. Gill 1982, p. 132). See also Sorabji 1980, pp. 227-245, on which M. L. Gill comments in the article just quoted.

necessary outcome of this event: Smikrines was not forced to choose Chairestratos' daughter as his wife, but he chose her when he was given the chance by Daos.

A further example from the *Epitrepontes* shows the expression of a similar point of view. A first glance at the plot of this play, analysed in Chapter 2, might lead us to think that the story that Menander is creating is based on fortunate events which lead, *per accidens*, to the solution of the plot. Accordingly, it is in these terms that the slave Onesimos, at the end of the play, gives his interpretation of what has just happened. Onesimos' lines, reported below, offer a warning to Smikrines who wants to take his daughter back into his house, since Pamphile was wrongly accused and disregarded by her husband, Charisios. At this stage of the action, everyone knows that Charisios is the legitimate father of the child that Pamphile has exposed; Smikrines is the only one who is not aware of this and he still intends to take revenge on Charisios.

Ον: τοῦτόν τις ἄλλος, οὐχ ὁ τρόπος, ἀπολλύει;  
καὶ νῦν μὲν ὀρμῶντ' ἐπὶ πονηρὸν πρᾶγμά σε  
ταυτόματον ἀποσέσωκε, καὶ καταλαμβάνεις  
διαλλαγὰς λύσεις τ' ἐκείνων τῶν κακῶν

ONESIMOS: No one else, if not his character, is destroying him. But now, while you were starting to do a bad action, chance saved you and you arrived to find a complete mutation and release from your sorrows.<sup>105</sup>

Onesimos says that τὸ αὐτόματον is the cause of the sudden reversal and λύσις of the plot. Gomme and Sandbach explain: “Onesimos is not satisfied with the familiar ἡ τύχη, but he uses a grander word”.<sup>106</sup> In my opinion, his statement is just a confirmation of his partial view of the whole situation.<sup>107</sup> Onesimos has observed the unfolding of the process of recognition initiated by Habrotonon: from his narrow point of view mere accidents have reconciled Pamphile and Charisios, as he did not play a significant role in the process of recognition as Habrotonon did.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, when he first discovers the

<sup>105</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 1105-1109. For further discussion of this passage see Barigazzi 1965, pp. 192-217.

<sup>106</sup> Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 379.

<sup>107</sup> This hypothesis is perhaps reinforced when Onesimos quotes two lines of Euripides' *Auge* few lines later to explain to Smikrines what has happened. He says “ἡ φύσις ἐβούλεθ', ἧ νόμων οὐδὲν μέλει/ γυνὴ δ' ἐπ' αὐτῷ τῷιδ' ἔφν”. (Men. *Epitr.* 1122-1124). Pamphile, like Auge, was raped, she bore a child for nine months, she gave birth to it and now the child has been recognised by its legitimate father; however, the story, and the role of Pamphile in it, is more complex: “It is not enough to dismiss the act of rape, with the subsequent pregnancy, as a deed of overriding nature. We then recognise the irony in the citation from the *Auge*, its inappropriateness for the emotional and ethical circumstances that we have witnessed in the comedy” (Anderson 1982, p. 174). For a detailed discussion of this passage see Furley 2009, *ad loc.*

<sup>108</sup> Vogt-spira also suggests that it is not because of an automatic outcome that the truth has been discovered, the revelation of identities has been taken further by the characters. “Gleichwohl spielt auch

ring, he is afraid to communicate the discovery to his master.<sup>109</sup> Onesimos does not take advantage of the fortunate circumstances that have happened as he is afraid to use them as evidence to reveal the truth to Charisios. Had the action depended on him, the truth would not have been discovered: Pamphile’s rape by Charisios and the discovery of the exposed child would not have been *fortunate* events but they would have happened in vain. The intervention of Habrotonon changes the course of the action as she wants to understand clearly what happened: from her particular perspective, she sees the whole story as a good opportunity to obtain her freedom.<sup>110</sup> Conversely, once Onesimos sees his master’s ring in the cradle of the exposed child, he does not want to speak and he is afraid to take part in the plan. Consequently, at the end of the play it seems to him that only τὸ αὐτόματον has led to the happy ending of the story. On the other hand, Habrotonon helps the action by taking advantage of the accidental pieces of information they progressively discover. In the *Epitrepontes*, “τύχη brings separate strands of action all together”<sup>111</sup> and Habrotonon’s lively mind is needed: the plot needs her quick-wittedness<sup>112</sup> to help mere chance – τὸ αὐτόματον – to become a fortunate event – τύχη.

This brief survey of Aristotle’s treatment of chance, including the discussion of the *Aspis* and the *Epitrepontes*, is intended to underline the importance that Menander and Aristotle give to the role of human rationality regarding accidental events. Menander and Aristotle agree in saying that, in the natural world of coming to be and changing, human rationality is decisive in classifying the accidental events that affect it as τὸ αὐτόματον or τύχη. Nature has a plan and its own teleological aims; but, if human rationality gets involved and chooses, it is able to create something that seems to be nature’s design, though it is not. Aristotle calls this chance (τύχη) and the attribution of this name depends on how human rationality uses it: accidental events might or might not contribute to the performing of an action and it is up to the agent to decide when this is the case or not.

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in diesem Stück der Zufall eine Rolle”, because it gave the “causa efficiens” – that is to say, the various coincidences that brought to the discovery of the ring – which the characters will take as a chance to bring to an end the multiple recognitions (Vogt-Spira 1992, p. 169). See also Stockert 1997, pp. 7-9.

<sup>109</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 419-429.

<sup>110</sup> Men. *Epit.* 546-549.

<sup>111</sup> Arnott 1975, p. 21.

<sup>112</sup> Henry 1985, p. 50.

### 2.2.2 Voluntary, non-voluntary, involuntary actions

The last point in the previous paragraph is crucial for the ethical implications of this topic. The quality of the action that, following the accidental event, one decides to perform can be, of course, good or bad. Consequently, I will now examine how accidental events contribute to the process of ethical deliberation and how the agents' response to these events is again crucial for classifying the event itself according to certain ethical standards. I will show that, as in the realm of natural causes, accidental events need human rationality to be classified as 'chance' or external non-determinate causes of change; analogously, in the field of ethics, accidental events take on different ethical meanings according to how the rational agent decides to use them.

In the *Eudemian Ethics*, we are told that good chance and knowledge are indispensable ingredients that help φρόνησις to achieve welfare and virtue.<sup>113</sup> Aristotle points out that when the wise person is involved in accidental events that he cannot control, or when he happens to be ignorant about particulars of an action in which he is involved, his path towards virtue can be obstructed.<sup>114</sup> When the agent is caught by unexpected and confusing situations he may become the agent of an action that he did not originally want to perform; that is to say, he may perform an involuntary action. However, the line that divides voluntary from involuntary action in Aristotle's account is blurred, and this distinction largely depends on Aristotle's treatment of chance and rational choice.

The previous section has shown that when accidental events happen to someone, if he is a rational agent, he engages with the event and chooses to do something about it. When he exercises choice (προαίρεσις), the agent inevitably becomes the αἰτία of his action: he cannot choose what happens but he can choose what to do about things that have happened to him.<sup>115</sup> The situation, as in Menander, may be said to be provided by divine intervention or by unpredictable chance; however, the choice itself is made by people who have this kind of opportunity. This being said, it is clear that it becomes difficult to define the fully involuntary act induced by chance. It seems, in fact, that the agent acts involuntarily only in situations in which he contributes nothing by his choices.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that only in cases in which the agent is completely controlled by an external force, can we say that he did something

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<sup>113</sup> Arist. *EE* VIII 2, 1247a1-5.

<sup>114</sup> Arist. *EE* VIII 1, 1246b25.

<sup>115</sup> Arist. *EN* III 5, 1112a18-35.

involuntary; for all other cases implying a choice, a sharp distinction is difficult. The examples offered below may clarify this point. Ex 1 presents an action done throughout the agency of an external force; Ex 2 refers to an action done under external compulsion but one that requires, to some extent, human choice in order to be performed:

Ex 1: βίαιον δὲ οὐ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἔξωθεν, τοιαύτη οὖσα ἐν ἧ μὴδὲν συμβάλλεται ὁ πράττων ἢ ὁ πάσχων, οἷον εἰ πνεῦμα κομίσει ποι ἢ ἄνθρωποι κύριοι ὄντες.

Ex 2: ὅσα δὲ διὰ φόβον μειζόνων κακῶν πράττεται ἢ διὰ καλόν τι, οἷον εἰ τύραννος προστάττει αἰσχρὸν τι πράξαι κύριος ὢν γονέων καὶ τέκνων, καὶ πράξαντος μὲν σώζονται μὴ πράξαντος δ' ἀποθνήσκουσιν, ἀμφισβήτησιν ἔχει πότερον ἀκούσια ἐστὶν ἢ ἐκούσια.

Ex 1: Forced [is the action] whose origin is outside of the [subject], this being [the action] in which the one who acts or is acted upon contributes nothing, for example if the wind carried [him] away somewhere or men held [him] under their power.<sup>116</sup>

Ex 2: But those things that are done by fear of greater evils or for some sort of good – for example if a tyrant, who has in his power [someone's] parents and children, orders [him] to do something shameful and, if [he] does it, they would be saved and, if [he] does not, they would die – give room for a debate on whether they are non-voluntary or voluntary.<sup>117</sup>

The difficulty that Aristotle has in defining as voluntary or not cases that are different from Ex 1 is that, in cases such as Ex 2, the agent chooses something. And once the agent chooses, even if he is in a situation of constraint, he becomes the ἀρχὴ of this action.

καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ κινεῖν τὰ ὀργανικὰ μέρη ἐν ταῖς τοιαύταις πράξεσιν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐστίν· ὢν δ' ἐν αὐτῷ ἡ ἀρχή, ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ πράττειν καὶ μὴ.

Thus, they [the actions explained by Ex 2] have in the agent the origin of the movement of the parts of the body instrumental to the act. And because the origin is in the agent it is up to the agent to do it or not to do it.<sup>118</sup>

Consequently, the act itself is defined as a mixed case, and it is closer to a voluntary than to an involuntary action. Consequently, it is possible to say that the evaluation and the characterisation of an action that takes its origin from an external event are in any

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<sup>116</sup> Arist. *EN* III 1, 1110a1-4.

<sup>117</sup> Arist. *EN* III 1, 1110a4-8.

<sup>118</sup> Arist. *EN* III 1, 1110a15-18.

case based on the person that responds to it: the external event is just a concurrent cause but does not determine the agent's choice.<sup>119</sup> To give a list of cases is difficult as it is by the choice of each person concerned that each event is defined. However, Aristotle classifies involuntary action into two groups, namely as i) acts done under compulsion and ii) acts done through ignorance.<sup>120</sup>

I am now going to explore this point further. This discussion is interesting as we find that Aristotle classifies these cases further, that is, as i) acts done under compulsion and ii) acts done through ignorance, depending on the agent's attitude before and after the deed; it is at this point that the parallel with Menander becomes more specific. In treating the first case of acts done under compulsion, Aristotle specifies that what we sometimes claim to have done under compulsion and involuntarily is indeed not well described in those terms. One cannot claim, for example, that one has acted under the compulsion of passions.<sup>121</sup> In this case, the person is just ἀκρατής, and the cause of the action is internal and not external to the agent:<sup>122</sup> his action is therefore voluntary. The truly involuntary action made under compulsion is what we find in Ex 1 and only to some extent Ex 2.

Considering now actions done through ignorance, we cannot indiscriminately list all of them as involuntary: we need to know the agent's attitude *before* and *after* he performed the action. Actions that are done in ignorance of the right choice to be taken are definitely voluntary: this ignorance is again internal to the agent as he, first of all, does not know the best thing to do before performing the action. Accordingly, this case cannot be identified as accidental ignorance concerning particulars, that is to say 'non-culpable ignorance'.<sup>123</sup> However, if the agent ignores the particular circumstances in which he finds himself acting and performs the action, we characterise the action in different ways when we have examined the reaction of the agent *after* having done the deed and having acknowledged how things really were. If the agent regrets what he has done in ignorance, the action is genuinely unintended, that is to say involuntary. On the other hand, if the agent does not regret what he has done, then the action is described as not genuinely involuntary. In fact, even if he did not know the particulars of the action

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<sup>119</sup> "Admittedly, he [Aristotle] thinks that there is an internal origin of voluntary conduct, but an internal origin may be a member of a chain which stretches back ultimately to external factors [...] the notion of an internal origin needs not to exclude external co-operating influences" (Sorabji 1980, p. 321). See also Meyer 1994, p. 71.

<sup>120</sup> Arist. *EN* III 1, 1109b35-1110a1.

<sup>121</sup> Arist. *EN* III 1, 1110b9-17.

<sup>122</sup> Arist. *EN* III 3, 1111a22-b3.

<sup>123</sup> See also Arist. *MM* I 33, 1195a26-34.



before doing it, he appears to be happy about what he has done in ignorance because he does not feel pain about it.

Τὸ δὲ δι' ἄγνοιαν οὐχ ἐκούσιον μὲν ἅπαν ἐστίν, ἀκούσιον δὲ τὸ ἐπίλυπον καὶ ἐν μεταμελείᾳ· ὁ γὰρ δι' ἄγνοιαν πράξας ὀτιοῦν, μηδὲν τι δυσχεραίνων ἐπὶ τῇ πράξει, ἐκὼν μὲν οὐ πέπραχεν, ὅ γε μὴ ἤδει, οὐδ' αὖ ἄκων, μὴ λυπούμενός γε.

Every action done through ignorance is non-voluntary, but involuntary is the one which [produces] pain and regret; for the person who has done something through ignorance [and] is not displeased by that action, though he did not act voluntarily, as he did not know [what he was doing], nor did he act non-voluntarily, since he feels no pain.<sup>124</sup>

In this respect, the characters of Polemon and Moschion in the *Perikeiromene* offer interesting examples. Both are driven by a kind of passion and in this respect they act voluntarily and they perform actions that are unjust; but both are also ignorant about the real identity of people involved in their action and, to some extent, they act in ignorance. However, when they discover the truth, Polemon is even more ashamed of his deed and Moschion is not: these responses affect the way in which they and their acts are viewed by the audience. The first is an impetuous reaction made in ignorance of the actual circumstances: it is still an unjust act but it is clearly an act that Polemon did not want to perform; the other is a voluntary act of bravado typical of a profligate young lover who does not show regret and would be likely to do similar sorts of things in the future.

Aristotle also specifies that, in order to classify an injury as an act done through ignorance, from a juridical point of view, it is also necessary to evaluate the attitude of the agent *before* the deed. We are told by Aristotle that there are three kinds of injuries that might be done with respect to other people:<sup>125</sup> ἀτύχημα, ἀμάρτημα and ἀδίκημα. In the case of misfortune (ἀτύχημα), the agent is completely ignorant of the person, the instrument and the aim of the action. To distinguish the two other cases of injury, the critical element that we need to know is what the attitude of the agent was *before* doing the deed. The fact that the person acted with or without vicious disposition defines the deed as an ἀμάρτημα or ἀδίκημα.

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<sup>124</sup> Arist. *EN* III 2, 1110b18-22. See Williams for a contemporary account of the concept of 'agent regret' and its relevance in the field of unintentional acts: "the regret takes the form of self-reproach and the idea is that we protect ourselves against reproaches from our future self if we act with deliberative rationality: 'nothing can protect us from the ambiguity and limitation of knowledge, or guarantee that we find the best alternative open to us. Acting with deliberative rationality can only ensure that our conduct is above reproach, and that we are responsible to ourselves as one person over time'" (Williams 1976, p. 130).

<sup>125</sup> Arist. *EN* V 10, 1135b16-22 and *Rh. Al.* 4, 1427a25-40.

1] ὅταν μὲν οὖν παραλόγως ἢ βλάβη γένηται, ἀτύχημα· 2] ὅταν δὲ μὴ παραλόγως, ἄνευ δὲ κακίας, ἀμάρτημα (ἀμαρτάνει μὲν γὰρ ὅταν ἢ ἀρχῇ ἐν αὐτῷ ἢ τῆς αἰτίας, ἀτυχεῖ δ' ὅταν ἐξωθεν)· 3] ὅταν δὲ εἰδῶς μὲν a] μὴ προβουλεύσας δέ, ἀδίκημα, οἷον ὅσα τε διὰ θυμὸν καὶ ἄλλα πάθη, ὅσα ἀναγκαῖα ἢ φυσικὰ συμβαίνει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ταῦτα γὰρ βλάπτοντες καὶ ἀμαρτάνοντες ἀδικοῦσι μὲν, καὶ ἀδικήματα ἐστίν, οὐ μέντοι πῶ ἄδικοι διὰ ταῦτα οὐδὲ πονηροί· οὐ γὰρ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἢ βλάβη· b] ὅταν δ' ἐκ προαιρέσεως, ἄδικος καὶ μοχθηρός

1] When the harm done is contrary to calculation, it is a misfortune; 2] when it is not contrary to calculation yet without vice, it is an error, (for one is mistaken when the source which causes the harm is in him, [and] one is unfortunate when it is outside [him]); 3] when a man acts knowingly but a] without previous deliberation, the harm is an injustice (e.g. like those through anger or passion which are compelling or natural to men), for although men act unjustly when they cause harm and are mistaken, and the effect is unjust, still they are not yet unjust and wicked because of these actions, since the harm done results not through an evil habit; but b] when a man acts with deliberation, he is unjust and evil.<sup>126</sup>

To act without a vicious disposition modifies the way in which the action is seen. Moreover, as we have seen before in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the regret that the agent feels after an action done in ignorance determines the classification of the action as involuntary: this means that the agent acted in a certain way because he did not know certain facts and not because of his vicious disposition. On the other hand, not feeling pain means that the agent is overall satisfied with what he has done in ignorance and, therefore, it means that he acted with a genuine intent to produce certain results and he would do that again even in circumstances when he exactly knows how things stand.

This is why, in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, it is argued that, if we want to try to defend someone from the accusation of having been unjust, we have to demonstrate that he did the act but that the damage done to the other person has not been done voluntarily and, therefore, it has been done through genuine ignorance and without a vicious disposition;<sup>127</sup> thus we need to present the deed as an ἀμάρτημα rather than an ἀδίκημα. To give an example of this sort of distinction we can go back to Polemon: we know that he is angry with Glykera because he did not know that she let Moschion kiss her because she was his sister and, because of this kind of ignorance, Polemon decided to cut her hair to punish her. This decision is taken διὰ θυμὸν and it is an ἀδίκημα of the first kind (that is, of the kind 3(a): εἰδῶς μὲν μὴ προβουλεύσας δέ according to the paragraph quoted above). Polemon's reaction is unjust because it is excessive

<sup>126</sup> Arist. *EN* V 10, 1135b16-25.

<sup>127</sup> Arist. *Rhet. Al.* 4, 1427b5-8. The treatise has come down to us among the works of Aristotle but Arsitotle's authorship is not certain. See Coope 1867, pp. 401-402.

independently of his ignorance of the facts: as a matter of fact, he feels regret immediately for what he has done in a moment of anger even before discovering the whole truth. However, we also know that Polemon did have some reasons to get angry because he really thought he had been wronged by Glykera. Had he managed his anger more appropriately and had he chosen to punish Glykera in another way, his harm could have been classified as ἀμάρτημα because it would have been done in ignorance responding to a supposed slight: therefore it would have been done with calculation but without a vicious disposition (that is, case 2: μὴ παραλόγως ἄνευ δὲ κακίας). During the comedy, in fact, Polemon regrets his actions for two reasons: he understands that he has misbehaved because he acted out of i) excessive anger and ii) in ignorance.<sup>128</sup>

Moschion, on the other hand, performs an action that is worth of someone ἄδικος and also μοχθηρός. He kisses a girl who lives in someone else's house as a courtesan, who has decided to give herself to a specific man, and he does it while she is not expecting the kiss. From this point of view Moschion had all the pieces of information he needed to refrain from kissing Glykera but he did it nevertheless; he took his decision according to what his desire suggested to him and he also planned it. His action is clearly an ἀδικημα of the kind 3(b) (that is, εἰδῶς καὶ ἐκ προαιρέσεως). Smikrines, in the *Aspis*, represents another example of 3(b): we know that he has a vicious disposition because, stimulated by his greed, he tries to marry Kleostratos' sister as a consequence of Kleostratos' unfortunate death. This is another clear example of ἀδικημα: independently of the legal position, Smikrines' motivation is ethically wrong. The way in which Menander presents these three characters to his audience corresponds to the analysis that Aristotle would give of their actions; the ethical parameters within which Menander constructs his characters are analogous to the ones suggested by Aristotle.

### 3. Conclusions

What has turned out to be relevant, for both Aristotle and Menander, in matters of accidental event and accidental ignorance, is the response that the agent gives in these cases. Ultimately, the specification of the agent's character and choices depends significantly on what the agent decides to do according to his good or bad motivation.

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<sup>128</sup> Men. *Pk.* 405-411.

Even in cases in which there is an external element that interferes with one's life, the agent should be able to make appropriate use of it to produce an ethically correct action. I hope to have demonstrated that, in both Aristotle and Menander, this external element is not the significant ἀρχή of the action. τύχη and ἄγνοια, chance and non-culpable ignorance, are just seen as opportunities offered to the agent that do not compel the agent to do what he decides to do. If people act according to what an external force tells them to do, there is no space for human choice, there is no reason to talk about voluntary and involuntary actions and there is also little reason to follow, in the theatre, what happens on the stage as the audience would not be involved in the chain of reasons and actions that constitutes the plot.

I hope to have explained how Aristotle and Menander find this topic of relevance and how they aim to analyse the part that human rationality takes in circumstances of chance or accidental ignorance. In Aristotle, chance events, in the natural realm, are given different names according to how human thought and choice decide to take advantage of them. In matters of ethics the response that the agent gives, in cases of accidental events, and his attitude before and after the deed is indispensable for characterising actions as good or bad, voluntary or non-voluntary. Aristotle concludes that few of the so-called 'involuntary actions' can be said to have been compelled by accidental external events. For the most part, in cases of accidental events or accidental ignorance, human choice and right or wrong ethical habituation are the variables to take into account in order to classify the specific action as a voluntary action, an error or an injustice. Menander, in his turn, underlines an analogous point: he constructs plots in which characters affected by accidents and ignorance need to make choices and, in doing so, they reveal their true nature. He is interested in drawing a distinction between the quality of their choices in the face of various accidents: different people, acting in analogous situations of misfortune or ignorance, react in different ways according to their desires and their reasoned choices.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Character, Ethics and Human Relationships: Aristotle and Menander on How We Learn to Be Good and How We Become Bad.*

The *Dyscolos* is one of the plays that has perhaps given most scope for debate about the possible influence of Aristotle on Menander.<sup>1</sup> As pointed out in the Introduction, scholars have often noted that there are similarities between some statements found in Menander's comedies, fragments and *gnomai*, and the general framework of Peripatetic ethical thought. In this play, in particular, it is often possible to find sentences and statements that recall the ideas of Aristotle in his works on ethics and psychology. Therefore, scholars have often agreed on the fact that, although it is not possible to establish a clear Peripatetic influence on Menander, it is, however, possible to argue that there is an *allgemeine Lebensweisheit*<sup>2</sup> that Menander shares with Peripatetic ethics and this comes out particularly clearly in this play. I believe that this argument could be taken further. The analogies between Menander and Aristotle go beyond the similarity suggested by a limited number of fragments, statements or single *gnomai* appearing in the plays. I hope to show in this chapter, and in the conclusions of this thesis, that it is possible to find various themes involved in the *Dyscolos* that, together with the topics analysed in the previous chapters, make up a consistent system of ideas that constitutes Menander's thought about ethics, human nature, psychology and also politics; it is this comprehensive whole that makes Menander's thought analogous to Aristotle's philosophy rather than specific points of similarity.

In Chapter 4, I analysed the role of luck and accidental ignorance in people's life, taking into account how, in Menander and Aristotle, these factors are relevant to matters of ethics. I concluded that it is the agent's approach to the accidental event that determines its significance within the agent's ethical life. What leads one to describe an accident or a state of accidental ignorance as 'misfortune', 'error' or 'injustice' is the

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<sup>1</sup> See Post 1960; Barigazzi 1965; Ramage 1966; Gaiser 1967, pp. 34-35; Anderson 1970; Patterson 1998, pp. 177-211 and Lape 2004, pp. 125-126.

<sup>2</sup> Gaiser 1967, p. 14. For possible Peripatetic influence on the *Dyscolos* see Barigazzi 1965, especially pp.70-115 and Wehrli 1970; for possible analogies between the *Dyscolos* and Theophrastus' thought about character and education, see Steinmetz 1960 and Gaiser 1967.

way the agent chooses to react to the immediate circumstance and how he feels after the accident has taken place. Nature or chance determines the occurrence of a certain event; however, these factors do not determine the specific approach that the individual chooses to take in dealing with it. The quality of the agent's deliberation, responding to a given accidental circumstance, defines him as an ethical agent of a certain kind. The agent's emotional state subsequent to the accidental event reveals his true (good or bad) disposition and intention in performing the action; in this sense, it reveals who he really is. Smikrines, in *Aspis*, is a good example of this: he expresses his wicked nature fully when he finds himself responding to a series of accidents. It seems, therefore, that for both authors life's circumstances and accidents constitute the mirror in which we learn how to know ourselves and others. Hence, I have explored how Aristotle and Menander treat cases in which people react in different ways to similar circumstances and are judged according to their response to them.

Also, in Chapter 4, I pointed out the way in which accidental events represent a chance to correct our inclinations and, as a result, our character, after having had such experiences or having seen other people going through them. In particular, the discussion of the examples of Polemon, in *Perikeiromene*, and Demeas, in *Samia*, in the light of Aristotelian philosophical thought has supported this point more clearly. Both Polemon and Demeas are figures who, more explicitly than others, show, at the end of the play, that they have understood what they did wrong and what they should avoid doing in future. For instance, they learn that their inclination to get angry has caused them troubles and this needs to be somehow controlled in the future.<sup>3</sup> This theme of learning through experience goes back to Chapter 2. There, I observed that, both in Menander and in Aristotle, the role of experience, through perception (αἴσθησις), in theoretical and practical understanding, is essential in order to form a better and more comprehensive view of how things stand and how one should act in facing certain, more or less expected, circumstances. To engage with life's experiences and accidents and to examine our actions, trying to understand retrospectively what we did right or wrong, is indispensable for the correct development of one's character and this builds up a fund of experience and knowledge that helps one's future understanding.

The aim of this chapter is to take this inquiry further and to explore how understanding, experiences and accidents relate to character formation in Menander and Aristotle. To my mind, the two authors share a common view of how people develop their ethical character. With respect to character formation, I believe that the analogy

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<sup>3</sup> Men. *Pk.* 439-442 and *Sam.* 703-705.

between their points of view lies ultimately in the fact that both seem to believe that ethical character depends on the individual because it is up to him to develop certain dispositions (ἔξεις) in the course of his life. It is up to him to develop his natural emotional inclinations and habits with the aim of forming a good character according to correct ethical knowledge. This implies, in turn, a reasoned understanding of what it means to be human and what the aims of a human life are. Both authors share the idea that these natural inclinations and habits cannot be correctly educated to form a consistent character (ἦθος) outside the context of human relationships and the shared discourse about relevant values that these relationships involve. Interpersonal relationships, providing examples and discussion of relevant ethical issues, are fundamental for the achievement of each person's successful ethical understanding and, in turn, this understanding contributes to the happiness of all. In an ideal society, where everyone cares about the other for the sake of everyone's mutual benefits, every member should contribute to discussion about these topics. Accordingly, the experiences and examples of the good or bad dispositions of other people that form part of the shared life of citizens of the same *polis*, members of the same family or community of friends, inevitably influence the development of one's own character and one's own practical understanding.<sup>4</sup>

To explore these themes in Menander's comic production, I have chosen to focus my attention on the *Dyscolos*. I believe that this is the play that most clearly explores the issues involved in matters of character development. More specifically, the play illustrates how interpersonal relationships help to educate a person's dispositions and, eventually, contribute to forming practical understanding. Moreover, the *Dyscolos* sets out clearly that the achievement of this understanding and the successful development of a good character is not only beneficial for the individual involved, but also for the whole community around him. Some of these topics have been mentioned in previous chapters and the themes that I am going to treat in the *Dyscolos* have been discussed also with reference to the other plays. However, I have chosen to focus on this comedy because I believe that it offers a set of themes that are particularly relevant for establishing a comparison with Aristotle's thought in matter of character.

It is possible to identify in this play Menander's ideas about the way in which ethical habituation operates, the causes of the formation of a specific character, and also the possible problems involved in this process and what can be done to avoid them. The

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<sup>4</sup> For the idea that fifth-century BC Greek thought and literature reflect what he calls an 'objective-participant' conception of the person of the kind discussed here, see Gill 1996.

theme of character development, and the role that interpersonal relationships play in this process, will provide further explanation of some of the issues raised at the beginning of my discussion. This is why I have decided to explore these themes in this final chapter, examining the play that more clearly than others illustrates and brings together the set of ideas explored in this thesis.

Accordingly, following the procedure used elsewhere, in the first part, I will analyse Menander's *Dyscolos*, focusing, in particular, on two characters: Knemon, an old misanthrope, and Sostratos, a young man who falls in love with Knemon's daughter. The play is particularly relevant for my argument as it presents us with two opposite examples of behaviour that offer parallels with Aristotle's ethical thought. On the one hand, we have Knemon: the old man has spent his whole life outside the community and he has lost sight of how a human being should behave and what the human community is there for. He has grown old in this misanthropic disposition and the play shows how difficult it is for him now to change despite the fact that, at the end, he recognises his mistake. Sostratos, on the other hand, is a young man: he does not have enough experience of life to face with a firm disposition the difficult situation that he finds himself in. Consequently, he relies on the other characters who advise him on the right way to gain Knemon's daughter and to deal with the old misanthrope. At the end of the play, Sostratos partly changes as he seems to have gained some understanding from his experiences. However, his youth does not enable him to reach complete self-awareness as, for instance, seems to happen to Moschion at the end of the *Samia*.<sup>5</sup>

In any case, the play leaves us with the impression that the young Sostratos will develop a good character, over the years if not at present, and that, on the other hand, Knemon has been responsible for the bad shaping of his own dispositions. Moreover, the reason why we think that Sostratos will grow up as a good person is that we realise that he has proved himself able to engage successfully with diverse experiences and that he has somehow taken advantage appropriately of what circumstances offered and people suggested. Knemon, instead, has become a grouch hated by everyone because he did not take these opportunities and engage with life's experiences and, more generally, did not engage with the other members of the community in the ethical values promoted by a shared life. The way in which those two characters are described and the precision with which their examples can be compared with Aristotelian thought about analogous

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<sup>5</sup> David Konstan argues that the anger that Moschion shows in Act V of the *Samia* is a kind of emotion that is usually attributed to mature Athenian men: the fact that Menander attributes it to Moschion at the end of this comedy means that Moschion now considers himself mature and has the right to be angry. (D. Konstan, lecture notes "Ancient comedy and its influence", Brown University, Providence, RI-USA, Fall 2008).



topics, make the *Dyscolos* different from previous tragic and comic plays such as Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aristophanes' *Wasps*.

In the second part of this chapter, I will explore how a reading of Aristotle's ethical and political philosophy clarifies, and gives further significance to, what we have analysed so far in regard to Menander. It is an important feature of Aristotle's ethical thought that one's own natural, inborn inclinations are only a part of ethical character. What is also needed in order to build up a consistent character is to achieve a sound ethical understanding and to educate one's emotional inclinations in the form of consistent ethical dispositions (ἔξεις). In order to cultivate these dispositions, it is fundamental that we share and exercise them in the context of human relationships: it is by engaging with other people and situations that one sharpens one's own practical understanding and trains one's inclinations. To have various experiences, and to discuss them with others, helps us to form a comprehensive view that is fundamental for achieving any kind of understanding, as discussed in Chapter 2, and that also forms the basis of the process of deliberation, as discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>6</sup> This is also why, in Aristotle's opinion, a young man cannot be properly virtuous: the reason for this is that he needs to develop, through learning and experience, a consistent practical understanding and an adequate education of his emotional inclinations. In this way, by maturing through age, being educated by others in a certain manner and listening to what they have to say about him, he will learn how to be good.

In addition, what I will stress, in the second part of the chapter, is that the correct shaping of one's own character, in Aristotle too, necessarily takes place within a context of interpersonal relationships. A community of fellow-citizens, family or friends, more generally, a community of φίλοι, helps each of its members to understand what is good and what is not. Discussion, feedback and suggestions within these various communities of φίλοι constitute an indispensable ingredient to promote each person's virtuous life in a mutual way. On the other hand, a life lived in isolation keeps the individual away from the possibility of having this sort of dialogue: a man who wants to live alone misses the chance of being observed and corrected by his neighbours and friends and progressively loses sight of what is good and what is not.

In conclusion, it seems that, in both Menander and Aristotle, to discuss and reflect publicly with other members of a community about relevant ethical values is important, and this offers the chance of an improved ethical understanding and also the

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<sup>6</sup> See Arist. *EN* III 5, 1112b10-24, where Aristotle compares deliberation to a search (ζήτησις) where, as when we are constructing a figure, we need to find the principle that makes the figure (or the ethically good deliberation) possible.

actual practice of the ethical virtues promoted by a shared life. In the light of these observations about drama and ethical philosophical discourse, I will attempt a final parallel analysis of Aristotle and Menander concerning the relationship between character, ethics and human relationships. This discussion is also intended to conclude and bring together in a comprehensive argument the topics analysed in the previous chapters.

### *1. The young man and the old man*

In the *Dyscolos* there is a clear distinction between Knemon and all the other characters: Knemon positions himself apart from them – probably also visually on the stage. Menander accentuates his isolation by surrounding him with people that, at a distance and outside his presence, reflect and comment on his solitary nature.<sup>7</sup> The role of these other characters, however, is not solely reduced to the function of commenting on Knemon's bad behaviour. Their presence is crucial for identifying certain topics implicit in the apparently extreme presentation of Knemon. For instance, the character of the young man, Sostratos, underlines the characterisation of the meaning of the old grouch by forming a contrast.

This kind of interaction between the figures of Sostratos and Knemon is reflected in the organisation of their movements on the stage. The way in which Menander organises the structure of entrances and exits of these two characters, and the way in which he seems to have positioned them on stage, underlies their being opposite and complementary at the same time. The two figures, in fact, embody two different kinds of movement. Knemon represents a movement directed toward the interior, towards increasing seclusion; Sostratos, on the other hand, introduces a movement directed toward the exterior and towards inclusion. He arrives on the stage coming from abroad (probably from Athens); he immediately starts sending people on and off the stage, and thus, he sets in motion a series of events that alter the normal order of exits. His movement affects everyone concerned with a force that seeks to include also the space occupied by Knemon. Both these two movements, that of Sostratos and that of Knemon, are, nonetheless, extreme and need to be modified to bring them to a more

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<sup>7</sup> “Menander rations out the effects that the *dyscolos* can produce as the play develops a set of situations to which he must respond. Sostratos' romance, the sacrifice to Pan, and the lost pot are separate events welded into the plot by the cumulative challenge that they make to Knemon and each situation is enacted by a different set of characters” (Goldberg 1980, p. 74).

moderate form of action. I believe that Knemon and Sostratos represent two different, but equally extreme, versions of the same defect: they embody the kind of character that results from lack of ethical development and significant human relationships. I will now give an outline of their characters trying to explain how I see their complementary traits operating in the drama.

Pan<sup>8</sup> himself, in his prologue, describes Knemon as ἀπάνθρωπος,<sup>9</sup> an inhuman figure, one that is completely opposite to the idea of humanity that the members of the audience share:<sup>10</sup> he has a wife but she left him because of his bad character and he now refuses to talk to her in the same way that he refuses to talk to his neighbours. He does not address a word or a greeting to anyone and he insists on living alone inside his house and fields.<sup>11</sup> In this way, Knemon positions himself apart from social conventions represented here by marriage or the simple act of greeting people (προσαγορεύειν). The audience immediately has the impression that there is nothing natural in how he is behaving and in where he is living:

The play begins with Pan's description of the barren landscape of Phyle, where men are forced to work rocks rather than soil, and of Knemon's fragmented household [...]. The sterility of Knemon's land and house is depicted as the outgrowth of his character: Knemon's misanthropic dream of seceding from social relations leads to an obsessive concern with physical boundaries.<sup>12</sup>

His behaviour is painful for his daughter, who is kept away from normal social interactions, and also for the other characters whose projects are blocked by Knemon's misanthropic disposition.<sup>13</sup> Knemon wishes to spare his daughter from any sort of human interaction and he does not want her to be married to anyone except someone equal to him in character;<sup>14</sup> he also wishes that everyone would share his isolated way of living. This attitude is visually stressed by his stubborn attempt to stay inside his property and to protect it and his daughter from any external intrusion.<sup>15</sup> Knemon's behaviour is anti-social not only in the sense that he hates the very sight of other people but also that, by his attitude, he blocks the growth and proliferation of society itself. His daughter will never be married; she will never give birth to legitimate citizens and,

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 139-140 about the discussion of Pan's prologue.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to stress that Knemon is respectful towards Pan and the Nymphs (Men. *Dysc.* 2-4; 10-12): his being ἀπάνθρωπος, therefore, applies mainly to his relationship with other human beings.

<sup>10</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 5-8.

<sup>11</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 8-12.

<sup>12</sup> Lape 2004, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 103-116.

<sup>14</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 321-336.

<sup>15</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 160-172.

when Knemon dies, she will be left without a proper guardian: Knemon's land will gradually be less productive as his old age will prevent the effective farming of his property and no one will inherit it to make it flourishing again.<sup>16</sup>

Knemon also refuses to establish any sort of business contract (συμβόλαιον) with other people or any form of informal friendly agreement: when the slave Getas knocks at his door to ask for a small brazier for the sacrifice that Sostratos' mother wants to celebrate close to Knemon's house, Knemon is surprised that someone would ask him for something by calling at his house. He asks Getas if there is any contract that binds them (ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἐστὶ συμβόλαιον, ἀνόσιε, καὶ σοὶ τι;)<sup>17</sup> and that would explain Getas' presence at his front-door. Getas, in his turn, thinks that Knemon is asking for a formal contract that can officially testify the lending of the brazier and he is surprised by Knemon's question.<sup>18</sup> In any case, Knemon refuses to be involved in the exchange. This is particularly significant as we know that loans of this kind were considered common practice among fellow citizens or neighbours.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in this specific case, Getas asks Knemon for the loan of a small brazier in order to celebrate a sacrifice to Pan, a god.<sup>20</sup> But Knemon refuses to become involved with what is going on just outside his door and he does not understand the reason why he has been asked to be involved, or, probably, the reason why people would need a brazier for a sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> Getas, on the other hand, does not understand why Knemon gets so upset at his request. The two characters clearly lack a common ground of understanding; they almost speak different languages, and the scene sets this out very clearly, playing on their mutual misunderstanding. Finally, Knemon manages to send Getas away empty handed and, in

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<sup>16</sup> See Paoli 1961; Harrison 1968 and Martina 1979 on the legal aspects of the play. "The question is not only that the girl cannot leave the house and no one else can come in; she is also not allowed to grow up – there is a kind of timelessness in Knemon's house. [...] Knemon is in effect seeking stasis, not just solitude, and like a folk-tale villain, he deprives his daughter of her rightful transition towards adulthood" (Traill 2008, p. 51).

<sup>17</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 469-470.

<sup>18</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 466-480. "The question [about the existence of a συμβόλαιον] represents in Knemon's mind the only reason why anyone should wish to approach him. The old man probably intends it in a wide non-specific sense, though Getas' reply, with its mention of witnesses, shows he interprets the question more narrowly and overlaid with financial implications" (Ireland 1995, *ad loc.*).

<sup>19</sup> "Knemon thinks that a *sumbolaion* (contract) exists for this loan, which was the case only in a very specific kind of debt. *Sumbolaia* were drawn up only in instances of professional money-lending [...] in a civic context, loans were much more frequently given on a voluntary basis or reciprocally between neighbours. In these cases no contract was written and their return was based on trust" (von Reden 1998, p. 264; see also Millett 1991 for a broader discussion of this topic). According to von Reden it is this kind of reciprocity that Menander is promoting in this play. On the development of the concept of 'reciprocity' from archaic Greece to the formation of the *polis* see Seaford 1994.

<sup>20</sup> This is not because Knemon does not respect Pan: his refusal to lend the brazier necessary for the sacrifice is based on "his minimalist approach to life" (Wilkins 2000, p. 414). See n. 21 here below.

<sup>21</sup> Handley notes that Knemon seems to have a shocked reaction to the word 'λεβήτιον' [brazier] that Getas just pronounced to formulate his request (Men. *Dysc.* 473-474): "There is nothing extraordinary with the word λεβήτιον or in the request: what shocks Knemon is the thought of having enough meat to need a stew-pot" (Handley 1965, *ad loc.*).

doing so, he adds that he does not want anyone else to think that he is a φίλος: he makes clear that he is different from other people and that he does not want to be involved in any kind of intercourse that is normal for human beings.

**Κν:** ἀνδροφόνα θηρί· εὐθὺς ὡσπερ πρὸς φίλον  
κόπτουσιν.

KNEMON: Murderous beasts! They knock at the door straightway as at a friend's door.<sup>22</sup>

Knemon's seclusion from others is presented on the stage by a movement pointed towards the interior of his house and his property where his life is centred. However, this kind of movement is in sharp contrast with the sudden entrance of Sostratos, Pyrrhias and Chaireas, the young man and his attendants, that appear on stage immediately after Pan's prologue. These three characters introduce a movement that points outward from Knemon's house: in fact, they wish to take the girl out of Knemon's custody and, by joining her in marriage with Sostratos, to restore her to the context of human relationships from which she has been abstracted by her father.<sup>23</sup> It is clear, in fact, that the isolation into which Knemon has forced himself did not benefit him, his daughter or his property. His progressive isolation from the outside world has been responsible for what he is now and how he lives. He himself confesses all this after Gorgias, his step-son, has saved him from the dangerous accident in which he falls into a well.

**Κν:** οὐδ' ἂν εἶς δύναίτο με  
τοῦτο μεταπεῖσαι τις ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ συγχωρήσετε.  
ἐν δ' ἴσως ἡμαρτον ὅστις τῶν ἀπάντων ωἰόμην  
αὐτὸς αὐτάρκης τις εἶναι καὶ δεήσεσθ' οὐδενός.  
νῦν δ' ἰδὼν ὄξειαν οὔσαν ἄσκοπόν τε τοῦ βίου  
τὴν τελευταίην, εὔρον οὐκ εὔ τοῦτο γινώσκων τότε.  
δεῖ γὰρ εἶναι – καὶ παρεῖναι – τὸν ἐπικουρήσοντ' ἀεὶ.  
ἀλλὰ μὰ τὸν Ἥφαιστον – οὔτω σφόδρα <δι>εφθάρμην ἐγὼ  
τοὺς βίους ὀρῶν ἐκάστους τοὺς λογισμούς <θ> ὄν τρόπον  
πρὸς τὸ κερδαίνειν ἔχουσιν – οὐδέν' εὖνουν ωἰόμην  
ἕτερον ἑτέρωι τῶν ἀπάντων ἂν γενέσθαι. τοῦτο δὴ  
ἐμποδῶν ἦν μοι. μόλις δὲ πείραν εἶς δέδωκε νῦν

<sup>22</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 481-482.

<sup>23</sup> "Marriage in classical Athens was not a wholly personal matter; it was also part of the nexus of social relations that bound into a community the discrete citizens' household of which the city state was constituted" (Konstan 1995, p. 95).

KNEMON: No one could change my mind on this, but you will agree. Perhaps I was wrong about one thing, the fact that I thought myself to be, alone among all, self-sufficient and that I did not need anyone. Now, having seen the end of life, being so quick and unexpected, I found that I was not getting it right then. There is always a need for someone to be – and to be there – who will take care [of you]. But, by Hephaestus! I had been really misled by looking at everyone’s life and their calculations, how they are disposed towards making profit, I have never thought that there was someone, among all, that was well-disposed towards another. That was the obstacle for me. Gorgias, alone, has given me the proof, performing an act [worth] of a noble man.<sup>24</sup>

Knemon wanted to be self-sustaining but he did not realise that the way in which he was actually leading his self-sufficient life was harmful to himself, his possessions and others.<sup>25</sup> The value that the old man has attributed to αὐτάρκεια has been absolute: Knemon wished to be self-sufficient from an economical, reproductive and ethical standpoint.<sup>26</sup> He was determined to live and work his field alone, reducing his οἶκος to a minimum and to avoid establishing any sort of contract with other people outside it, what we can call ‘economical self-sufficiency’. With respect to his own family, he did not want his daughter to marry and produce heirs: he did not care about expanding his οἶκος and, therefore, contributing to the proliferation of the community. He was content with being on his own, what we can call ‘reproductive self-sufficiency’. Finally, Knemon thought that he was the only one who was right: he considered that, by himself, he could provide what was needed for his ethical development. He thought that other people just offered a bad example or, even worst, they spoiled his virtuous, solitary way of life, what we can call ‘ethical self-sufficiency’. The play shows that this way of thinking is not the right one. As Knemon himself says, he understands now that he did not get things right: εὔρον οὐκ εὔ τοῦτο γινώσκων τότε.<sup>27</sup>

From this specific point of view, we might say that Knemon shares some traits with another Menandrian character, Smikrines, in the *Aspis*. As discussed in Chapter 4, Smikrines is described as a greedy old man and, like Knemon, his attitude is self-centred and this poses a danger for his community of φίλοι. In fact, he tries to take his relatives’ possessions and Kleostratos’ war-chest for himself. He also tries to disrupt,

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<sup>24</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 711-723.

<sup>25</sup> See Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 245 who note that, according to Arist. *EN* I 5, 1097b8-11, the one who is self-sufficient (αὐτάρκης) is not the one who can provide just for himself, living alone, but also for his family and friends. It is clear that the meaning that Knemon gives here to this word is different.

<sup>26</sup> I thank Richard Seaford for sharing with me his thoughts about this and pointing out these distinctions.

<sup>27</sup> See Anderson 1970, p. 215 who makes of the *Dyscolos* a “complex ethical comedy” exactly because, after having made a mistake, Knemon recognises what he did wrong.

rather inappropriately, his family's reproductive life, as he, an old man, wants to marry his young niece who is already promised to a more suitable young man. He does this because he reasons from his own particular perspective and he does not consider that of his φίλοι. Moreover, no one has yet demonstrated to him that his nature is defective. The slave Daos will be the one who will show the real character of the old man, and what is wrong with it, to everyone, perhaps, also to Smikrines himself. Daos will demonstrate this by engineering a plan with the intention of bringing out a specific aspect of Smikrines's character: his greed and wickedness.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, we do not possess the end of the comedy and we do not know whether Smikrines, seeing clearly his mistakes and his actions from the others' perspective, actually acknowledges his wrongdoing and makes progress in his ethical understanding as Knemon does here. However, we can trace in his character a particular trait that we also find in Knemon and that is shown, in both cases, to be a problem: namely, the fact that he thinks and acts considering only his own point of view and he excludes an interest in the other people around him.

Returning to Knemon, after the accident, the old man admits he was reluctant to open himself up to the external world because he believed that all human beings were corrupt by nature. The experience of the accident has shown him that at least one human being, Gorgias, was not like this, and that people might actually care for him sincerely. The accident is a further element that forms a contrast to Knemon's stubborn resolution to stay inside his boundaries: falling into the well has forced him to ask for external help and this accident has taught him something.<sup>29</sup> When Knemon, under compulsion, steps outside his seclusion, he seems to change his mind about the external world and the rightness of his isolation, but this change of mind is only apparent because he does not wish to change his way of life. Pan's prologue suggests to the audience the reason for this: Knemon is an old man and he has lived in isolation for a long time. He has refused to be acquainted with anyone but himself, which means that he did not share with anyone the knowledge he had of himself, his choices and his dispositions. He wished to remain as he was and refused to listen to what others had to say about this; consequently, he got used to this condition and what had begun just as an inclination became transformed into a permanent disposition. This is why, despite his bad accident and the lesson he learned from it, he declares that he wants to go back again inside his house and he still refuses to be involved in any kind of social intercourse. Accordingly,

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to Chapter 4, pp. 132-134 for a more detailed discussion of these points.

<sup>29</sup> "His [Knemon's] dislike for people is the product of the way the world is, a noisy and thoughtless world from which he prefers to try to live in exile. But even Knemon is not an island, as the play proceeds to demonstrate; nor is it fair to require the others to share an obsession" (Arnott and Walton 1996, p. 101).

he entrusts his daughter to his step-son Gorgias in order to avoid dealing with others in the attempt to find her a husband.<sup>30</sup> Marriage represents a further movement outwards that he does not wish to undertake at present for his daughter in the same way as he did not in the past for himself.

**Κν:** ποῦμαί σ' ὕόν, ἅ τ' ἔχων τυγχάνω  
πάντα σαυτοῦ νόμισον εἶναι. τήνδε σοι παρεγγυῶ·  
ἄνδρα δ' αὐτῆι πόρισον. εἰ γὰρ καὶ σφόδρ' ὑγιαίνοιμ' ἐγώ,  
αὐτὸς οὐ δυνήσομ' εὐρεῖν· οὐ γὰρ ἀρέσει μοί ποτε  
οὐδὲ εἶς.

KNEMON: I make you my son, consider all the things I happen to have as yours. I entrust her to you. Provide her [my daughter] with a husband. Even if I made a complete recovery, I will not be capable of finding [him] by myself. No one will ever please me.<sup>31</sup>

This is also why, at the end of the comedy, he is determined not to join the others in the celebration of the double wedding. To expose himself to other people, to engage with the outside world, is not something in which he is interested because it is something he is not used to. On the other hand, the fact that he decides to adopt Gorgias is a considerable step in the direction of human conventions and a step away from his isolation.

His action in adopting Gorgias as his son and thereby providing for the future of his own family, shows simply and directly that the misanthrope has made a major concession to humanity: his doing what an equitable man would have been expected to do in similar circumstances. He has no son of his own, indeed no close or trusted relations [...] if he dies without meeting satisfactory arrangements for their future, his death will leave his daughter without a guardian and the estate without a master.<sup>32</sup>

At the moment of the final wedding celebration, however, Knemon wants to remain inside the house: Getas and Sikon, two slaves, need to force him outside his house while he is alone peacefully resting. Knemon is now part of an extended family, and his bad misanthropic attitude needs to be corrected or he will continue to be harmful

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<sup>30</sup> “In explaining and amending his character, his speech integrates the variant perspectives presented by the others [...]. He therefore proposes the changes that make possible the play’s happy resolution, but they have a curious limitation of their own. Knemon’s acknowledgement of social responsibility is immediately followed by his delegation of it. He explicitly wishes to continue living his own way, and his reason for adopting Gorgias is to avoid the social intercourse otherwise necessary to secure his daughter’s fortune” (Goldberg 1980, p. 86).

<sup>31</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 731-733.

<sup>32</sup> Handley 1965, p. 257.



to everyone.<sup>33</sup> He has to recognise his obligation towards his new family as he recognised his obligation towards his daughter and the legal system of the *polis* as a whole when he adopted Gorgias.<sup>34</sup>

Γε: θόρυβός ἐστιν ἔνδον,  
πίνουσιν. οὐκ αἰσθήσεται οὐδείς. τὸ δ' ὅλον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν  
ἄνθρωπος ἡμερωτέος· κηδεύομεν γὰρ αὐτῷ,  
οἰκεῖος ἡμῖν γίνετα'· εἰ δ' ἔσται τοιοῦτος αἰεὶ,  
ἔργον ὑπενεγκεῖν.

GETAS: There is a lot of chaos inside, they are drinking, no one will realise. It is completely up to us to civilise this man. Now that we make of him a kinsman by marriage, he has become part of the family. If he will be forever as he is, [it would be] an effort to endure him.<sup>35</sup>

The two slaves take Knemon violently outside and literally push him into joining the others. This final scene brings to an end the forced inclusion of Knemon in the community<sup>36</sup> and completes the many attempts to move Knemon from inside his house to the outside world. It is clear that, at Knemon's age, some sort of change in his way of life can only be produced by a violent and compelling event, and not by a patient and constant education of his inclinations. Having developed a bad disposition for a long time, Knemon has acquired a consistently misanthropic character. Now that he has experienced the world outside his isolation, having being forced into it by the accident, his daughter's marriage and the two slaves, he has also understood that his behaviour with respect to the others was wrong, but his disposition has now grown too fixed to change suddenly at the end of the comedy. We might conclude that, to some extent, he has changed his mind and his beliefs about other people; however, his emotional disposition of distrust with regards to the outer world is harder to change. For this reason, he needs to be forced by the two slaves in order to offer the audience a happy ending in which his change of mind is also reflected in a (forced) change of attitude towards the others.

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<sup>33</sup> “Knemon's resistance to commensality is the ultimate step too far in ancient Greece. He must be forced back into 'civilized' life by Sikon the cook” (Wilkins 2000, p. 412).

<sup>34</sup> See Patterson 1998, esp. pp. 177-211 for more extended discussion about the type of society promoted by the *Dyscolos*. Patterson also links this kind of ideology to the one promoted by Aristotle in the *Politics*. See also Préaux 1957 and Ramage 1966.

<sup>35</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 901-904. See Lape 2004, p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion on the theme of inclusion in *Dyscolos* see von Reden 1998 and Lape 2004, pp. 124-136.

Sostratos' character is sharply contrasted to that of Knemon. As Knemon is closed to every sort of experience, Sostratos is indiscriminately open to all of them. He falls in love with Knemon's daughter as soon as he sees her and he immediately resolves to ask her hand in marriage.<sup>37</sup> Chaireas, a parasite, suggests seeking information about the girl and waiting until they know her identity and status for certain. Sostratos declares that he has no intention of doing this, and, he adds, he has already sent a slave to ask the father of the girl for a meeting.<sup>38</sup> Sostratos agrees that sending Pyrrhias, a slave, to talk with the girl's father, was a mistake, but he realises this only after having sent him precipitously. In fact, he admits, the strong love he felt for the girl made impossible any reasonable attempt to reflect on the situation.

Σω: ἥμαρτον.<sup>39</sup> οὐ γὰρ οἰκέτη  
 ἤρμωττ' ἴσως τὸ τοιοῦτ'ό γ'>. ἀλλ' οὐ ράιδιον  
ἐρῶντα συνιδεῖν ἐστὶ τί ποτε συμφέρει.

SOSTRATOS: I made a mistake, maybe an act like this was not suitable for a servant. But it is not easy to consider how to behave appropriately when one is in love.<sup>40</sup>

Sostratos' behaviour here mirrors that of Moschion in the *Samia*: the two of them represent two young men whose fresh and lively desires have not yet been trained to take on a consistent, more measured, emotional disposition. Their emotions and desires tend to get exclusive control of their reasoning and lead their actions towards the achievement of the desired target.<sup>41</sup> However, when the *Samia* begins, Moschion has already reflected on his actions; he has understood what he did wrong, he is ashamed and he is determined to make amends for his mistake.<sup>42</sup> In the *Dyscolos*, instead, we follow the various stages of Sostratos' increasing self-awareness and we are able to see how his character and his understanding develop.

When we first see Sostratos on stage we acknowledge that emotions unleashed at the sight of Knemon's daughter have hindered correct reasoning in the mind of the inexperienced, young townsman, whose only objective in visiting Phyle was to enjoy

<sup>37</sup> It is true that Pan claims that he aroused in Sostratos love for the girl; however, as the plot will reveal, Pan's intervention seems to be directed towards someone who is already predisposed to be driven by sudden overwhelming desires. Compare Chapter 4, section 1.3.

<sup>38</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 50-71.

<sup>39</sup> "Sostratos realises that he might have been tactless [...]; here, as later [cf. 522-545], he is conscious of his own situation, and capable of seeing himself as other might see him" (Handley 1965, *ad loc*).

<sup>40</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 75-77. See Chapter 4, pp. 139-140 about the role of Pan in this process.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 3, section 2.2 for further discussion on this topic.

<sup>42</sup> Men. *Sam.* 1-56.

the delight of free time as his age and status enabled him to. After these events, in Act Two, we witness Sostratos' meeting with Gorgias, Knemon's step-son. After having been reassured about Sostratos' good intention towards the girl, Gorgias explains clearly to him the challenge of the situation: Sostratos cannot hope to win Knemon's trust and the girl with his current attitude: his aspect and behaviour need somehow to change.

Γο: οὐ πρόφασιν εἰπὼν βούλομαι ἀποπέμψαι κενήν,  
τὰ δ' ὄντα πράγματ' ἐμφανίσαι. ταύτη πατήρ  
ἐσθ' οἷος οὐδεὶς γέγονεν οὔτε τῶν πάλαι  
ἄνθρωπος οὔτε τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς.  
[...]  
Γο: λόγον τιν' ἐμβαλῶ  
περὶ τοῦ] γάμου <τοῦ> τῆς κόρης· τὸ τοιοῦτο γὰρ  
ἴδοιμι κἄ]ν αὐτὸς γενόμενον ἄσμενος.  
εὐθὺς μαχεῖται πᾶσι, λοιδορούμενος  
εἰς τοὺς βίους οὖς ζῶσι· σὲ δ' [ἄγοντ' ἂν] ἴδη  
σκολῆν τρυφῶντά τ', οὐδ' ὀρῶν γ' ἀνέξεται.

GORGIAS: I don't want to send you away with empty excuses, but to show you how things are. The father of that girl is like no other man that has existed in the past or at present.<sup>43</sup>

[...]

I will bring up the topic <of> the girl's marriage. I would be glad myself to see that happening. He will fight right away with everyone, reproaching them for the life they live: [if] he sees you [leading] your life in leisure and luxury, he will not stand the very sight of you.<sup>44</sup>

Gorgias invites Sostratos to find with him a more appropriate way to ask for his step-sister in marriage. In order to achieve his aim, Sostratos has to prove his own strength: he has to mask his status as an aristocratic citizen and work with Gorgias on the fields so that, having the appearance of a farmer, he might have some hope of being accepted by Knemon. Sostratos taking up the challenge, accepts Gorgias' suggestion and starts working. In the event, Knemon's accident will eventually simplify the whole situation as Knemon will entrust his daughter to Gorgias and in this way Sostratos will obtain the object of his desires without difficulties.

This achievement makes him immediately confident enough to handle the whole situation: in fact, he suggests that Gorgias should marry his sister and he starts

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<sup>43</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 322-325.

<sup>44</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 352-357.

organising the double wedding.<sup>45</sup> To persuade his father, Kallippides, of the suitability of this marriage, Sostratos repeats some of the points that Knemon brought out during the monologue following his accident. He talks to his father about the importance of sharing his wealth with others. In particular, Sostratos says that Kallippides must dispose of his property to benefit other people, not only as an act of disinterested generosity, but in order to create with them a relationship of reciprocal interest. If Kallippides does now, or will do in the future, generous acts such as the one that Sostratos is now asking him to perform, then he will always have around him people who care for him and help him in moment of distress.<sup>46</sup> Sostratos' argument seems to be filled with genuine awareness of the ideas that he is expressing. However, Kallippides' abrupt reply quickly dissolves the appearance that Sostratos is offering serious and considered opinions.<sup>47</sup> Sostratos should know that his father is a generous man and he agrees with everything that his son has just said, there is no need to offer these clichés (τί μοι λέγεις γνώμας;).<sup>48</sup> Thus, at the end of the play, we realise that, despite the fact that Sostratos has proved himself able to perform hard work and, more generally, to confront the challenges of a difficult situation, his inclination to get excited quickly at the prospect of what he desires seems not to have left him.<sup>49</sup> We observe him taking up a new confident self with the same speed with which he took up, at the beginning, the role of the young man in love and sent Pyrrhias precipitously to meet Knemon. We have the impression that Sostratos' youth, and also his wealthy upbringing, have not allowed him to engage, until now, in significant relationships that could potentially correct his attitude and change his beliefs about himself and about the world. It is only when Sostratos leaves his usual environment that he discovers something new: he is able to face the situation because Gorgias helps him to see clearly what he needs to do, thus inducing him to meet the challenge of a totally new experience, that of working in the fields as a farmer. The way in which Menander characterises Sostratos is that of a young man who, at the end of the play, appears dependent on the suggestions and help of other people. He has, perhaps, understood what he did wrong and how, in future, he should control his impetuous character in dealing with other people. However, at the end of the

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<sup>45</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 791-818.

<sup>46</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 808-810.

<sup>47</sup> See also Arnott 1964, p. 113 and, by contrast, Post 1960 who makes of Sostratos the flawless hero of the play.

<sup>48</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 813-818.

<sup>49</sup> "His [Sostratos'] newly won maturity is soon undercut by an imminent boast [Men. *Dysc.* 862]. The resulting irony of Sostratos' self congratulation preserves his comic image. Unlike Charisios of the *Epitrepontes* and unlike [...] Moschion of the *Samia*, the conclusion does not bring Sostratos the self-knowledge that will foster true sympathy for him. He still understands less about his affairs than we do, and that extra knowledge continues the distance between him and us" (Goldberg 1980, p. 88).

play, Menander shows us that all he can do is to talk to his father repeating sentences that he does not seem to understand fully and that are not reflected in his actual life experience. As Kallippides points out to him, Sostratos should know that his father already believes in the principles of generosity and benevolence that his son has just stated to him and, allegedly, they are the same principles on the basis of which Sostratos has been raised. However, the young man offers them now to make up a misplaced argument to convince his father of values that he already holds.

In any case, Sostratos has learned something. Like Knemon, Sostratos tackles a new way of understanding as soon as he changes his usual way of life, namely, when he moves out of Athens to go hunting in the countryside. This movement outwards is accentuated further as, pushed by the unexpected compulsion of love, he abandons his usual civic lifestyle and he assumes the appearance of a farmer. Like Knemon, he does not show a complete change of character at the end of the play; he is still an impetuous young man and his inclination needs to be properly educated. However, by contrast with Knemon, we are left with the impression that his youth and his friendship with Gorgias will somehow make possible the emergence of a good character. What is finally suggested by the *Dyscolos* is that to live and share experiences and values with others is good. On the other hand, to live alone and persist in one's own way of life, avoiding significant interpersonal relationships, is bad because one risks lacking understanding of the right way to live. Knemon was not happy while he lived alone but we have the impression that now he has at least learned something from his bad experience. His natural tendency to mistrust the outer world is maybe grown too inveterate to change radically now, but, for the sake of the happy ending, his actions can be (literally) forced to match his renewed beliefs at least about the members of his family.

### *1.2 Other examples of young men and old men*

The theme suggested by the *Dyscolos*, the old misanthrope, living in isolation and distrustful with respect to the outer world is a topic of particular interest for drama not only in Greece.<sup>50</sup> “The misanthrope is not only merely different from other men; he judges them [...]. He perceives himself as the representative of a social ideal that others have betrayed, and condemns his fellow for their perversity and hypocrisy” and this

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<sup>50</sup> See Konstan 1983.

makes of him an easy target of comic humour.<sup>51</sup> Examples of misanthropes appear also in Middle Comedy such as the work of Mnesimachos, who wrote a play called *Dyscolos*, and of Ophelion and Anaxilas, who both wrote plays called *Monotropos*, and Antiphanes, author of a play called *Misoponeros*.<sup>52</sup> However, we do not have enough evidence to draw detailed comparisons with these plays or to suggest any possible link to Menander's own work. What we can suggest is that the idea of the mature man, living in isolation (in the real or figurative sense) or deaf to others' suggestions, especially those coming from younger people, can be traced back to fifth-century Attic tragedy and Old comedy. For instance, the dialogue between Gorgias and Knemon, after the Knemon incident, might suggest a parallel with Aristophanes' *Wasps* and Sophocles' *Antigone* in a way that I will explain shortly. This comparison is not meant to identify the difference, in general, between Menander, Sophocles and Aristophanes, but rather to stress what is specific in Menander's treatment of character by comparing a particular episode in the *Dyscolos* with two dramatic examples that, on the face of it, present the same pattern. Despite these apparent analogies, I believe that what makes the case of the *Dyscolos* distinctive is the way in which Menander constructs his characters and explains their motivations for action. Moreover, as I have mentioned before, in the *Dyscolos*, the figure of the old misanthrope, Knemon, is characterised also by contrast to the figure of the young man, Sostratos who, at the same time, undergoes a very similar process of increasing self-awareness and self-understanding. The *Dyscolos* is, therefore, not only the story of an old misanthrope but also analyses the interaction among various characters and their process of character-formation. That is to say, although Menander may be addressing here a literary *topos* that others have explored before him, he does so in an interestingly original way.

After Knemon has been rescued from the well, Gorgias, his step-son, reproaches him for the fact that he has confined himself in ἐρημία<sup>53</sup> and that he stood apart from the other people's help and support. Knemon affirms that, having seen the result of his choices, he recognises now that the way in which he was living before was not right.<sup>54</sup> Despite the fact that he now seems to have understood his mistakes, the play shows that he cannot completely change his attitudes towards others all of a sudden. However, he makes a step towards a more humane way of acting and allows a double marriage to

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<sup>51</sup> Konstan 1983, p. 97.

<sup>52</sup> Ireland 1995, p. 14. The figure of Timon of Athens probably inspired this kind of literature and the general reflection on the topic of misanthropy: for a survey about the historical and literary relevance of Timon of Athens see Armstrong 1987.

<sup>53</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 694.

<sup>54</sup> Men. *Dysc.* 713-716.

take place. In the *Antigone*, we find another confrontation between a father and a son (the dialogue between Creon and Haemon) in which Haemon tries to persuade Creon to change his mind about his decisions. Haemon approaches his father in the hope of persuading him to release Antigone from the charge of having disobeyed the civic laws by her decision to honour the corpse of her brother Polyneices. Haemon fails in his attempt as Creon persists in his decision of punishing Antigone, who is his sister's daughter and his son's intended wife, with death. The stubborn determination of a key figure is a recurrent theme in the construction of Sophoclean characters: in the same play, for instance, we find the same feature in Antigone herself.<sup>55</sup> It seems, in fact, to be a common trait of Sophoclean heroes (or, more generally, tragic characters) to follow exclusively what their own usual way of thinking suggests, and not to adopt someone else's ἦθος.<sup>56</sup> But the reason why I have chosen to focus on Creon's particular case is that this aspect of his character comes out explicitly in his dialogue with his son, Haemon, who points out with sound arguments what Creon's problem is. The nature of this confrontation invites a comparison with the *Dyscolos*: in both plays, we have two stubborn fathers and two sensible sons who point out to their respective parents a more sound way of doing things. For these reasons, I believe that a comparison between the confrontation between Creon and Haemon, in the *Antigone*, and between Knemon and Gorgias, in the *Dyscolos*, will bring out more clearly possible analogies and differences that will help the understanding of Menander's specific point of view on these matters.

At the beginning of their exchange, Haemon tells his father that he has come to speak to him in Creon's best interest. Haemon wishes his father to consider other people's opinion, in particular, his son's opinion and that of the citizens of his own city.<sup>57</sup> Haemon adds that to listen to other people's views will help Creon to achieve a more measured attitude and to make better decisions. Haemon suggests to his father that he should to try 'wear', φορέω, a way of thinking that is different from the one he is used to.

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<sup>55</sup> "In both Creon and Antigone the deepest motive for action is individual, particular, inexplicable in any other terms than personal" (Knox 1964, p. 110), Knox describes their behaviour as typical of Sophoclean's characters' *heroic temper*. "The Sophoclean hero acts in a terrifying vacuum, [...] an isolation in time and space which imposes on the hero full responsibility for his own action and its consequences", that kind of hero is "one who makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, his *physis* and that blindly, ferociously, heroically, maintains that decision even at the point of self-destruction" (*ibidem*, p. 5). On the character of Creon, see also Winnington-Ingram 1980, especially, p. 126-127.

<sup>56</sup> In tragedies, people "do not sleep" on their decisions (E. Hall, 'Greek tragedy, the Sun and the Unity of Time', Jackson Knight Memorial Lecture, 16 June 2010, University of Exeter, Exeter, England).

<sup>57</sup> *S. Ant.* 688-711.

**Α:** Μή νυν ἐν ἧθος μόνον ἐν σαυτῷ φόρει,  
 ὡς φῆς σύ, κούδὲν ἄλλο, τοῦτ' ὀρθῶς ἔχειν·  
 ὅστις γὰρ αὐτὸς ἢ φρονεῖν μόνος δοκεῖ,  
 ἢ γλῶσσαν ἦν οὐκ ἄλλος ἢ ψυχὴν ἔχειν,  
 οὔτοι διαπτυχθέντες ὠφθησαν κενοί.  
 Ἄλλ' ἄνδρα, κεῖ τις ἢ σοφός, τὸ μανθάνειν  
 πόλλ' αἰσχρὸν οὐδὲν καὶ τὸ μὴ τείνειν ἄγαν.

HAEMON: Do not, then, bear constantly only one way of thinking in your heart, just as what you say, and nothing else, is right. For whoever thinks that he alone is right, or that he has such powers of speech and thoughts as no one else has, such people, when exposed, are always shown empty. But even if a man is wise, it is no shame for him to learn much and not to be over rigid.<sup>58</sup>

Creon refuses to take his son's suggestion, asserting that he is a mature man and is also the king and, therefore, he does not need to be taught by younger people (726-727) or be instructed by his own citizens (734). Creon's response shows that he has a problem that is very similar to that of Knemon: he does not believe that other people can provide him with any sort of suggestion or help.<sup>59</sup> In his turn, Haemon makes against his father the same reproaches that Gorgias makes against the old grouch; Creon has enclosed himself in a deaf and sterile isolation, as Haemon rightly points out to him when he states: "you would do well as a monarch of a desert (Καλῶς ἐρήμης γ' ἂν σὺ γῆς ἄρχοις μόνος)".<sup>60</sup> Because of this resolution, Creon is going against his better interest and is making mistakes. What Creon and Knemon need to do is to open their mind and experience other ways of thinking and behaving so to allow other people to help them for the sake of mutual care and interest.<sup>61</sup>

This point bears another observation: the other feature that characterises both Knemon and Creon is that they struggle to recognise the obligations that they have with respect to their φίλοι, in particular, relatives, and the mutual obligations that this

<sup>58</sup> S. *Ant.* 705-711. Translation by Brown 1987 (modified). Griffith takes these lines as referring to Theognis 215-218 and he reads Haemon's speech as "Greek moralistic debate whether men should maintain a pure and consistent character or [...] should be adaptable, and resourceful in self-preservation" (Griffith 1999 *ad loc.*).

<sup>59</sup> In the case of Creon, this is a recurrent attribute of tyrants in Greek tragedy; see Seaford 2003, pp. 104-105.

<sup>60</sup> S. *Ant.* 739. Creon and Haemon lack a common ground of understanding: "Creon calls Haemon's speech whining and slavish entreaty for a woman (756)". Haemon notes that his father's speech is full of youthful violence (735). "Confusion in the hierarchy of language parallels confusion in the hierarchy of generations. Language and family are interwoven with politics in the increasing questionable order of Creon's city" (Segal 1981, pp. 164).

<sup>61</sup> "Unlike Creon, he [Haemon] understands that *philia* means caring for another for that person's own sake" (Blundell 1989, p. 121).



relationship implies.<sup>62</sup> Creon fails to understand that Haemon, as a φίλος, is speaking in Creon's best interest and that his interest also coincides with his son's.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Creon fails to recognise that he has an obligation towards Polyneices and Antigone as φίλοι: he does not realise the mutual relationship that ties him to them beyond the bounds of the political institution.<sup>64</sup> He only sees them as enemies of his *polis* and, as a consequence, he needs to punish them for the sake of public order.

Despite Haemon's words, Creon's way of thinking does not change until the end of the tragedy and, because of his stubborn insistence on doing what he believes to be right, he fails to understand that what he is doing may be wrong or to appreciate the possible consequences of his actions. On the other hand, Knemon makes possible the comedy's happy ending because he understands his mistake and so is enabled to see more clearly his actions through the eyes of other people. Knemon has also understood that these other people sincerely care about him and that they are asking him to show some reciprocal interest in them for the sake of each one's happiness. Even if Knemon, at the end of the play, does not completely change and his inclinations cannot be totally shaped by his new beliefs about the outer world, he develops to some extent and he achieves an understanding that we do not see equally developed in Creon's case. These differences reflect, to a large extent, the obvious difference in genre between the two dramatic works: it is clear that Knemon needs to make some changes in order to allow the characteristic comic happy ending. However, I think that the differences between the two plays go beyond the difference between tragedy and comedy and reflect certain distinctive features of Menander's dramaturgy.

In the *Antigone*, we see the tragedy brought about by the stubborn determination of two characters, Antigone and Creon, both advancing their own specific claims and both inflexibly committed to the bodies of laws and values in which they believe. The speech between Creon and Haemon has the function of showing more clearly Creon's unyielding determination and the fact that his ideas on the matter are not open to change. In the *Dyscolos*, in partial contrast, we find the divergent (and yet in some ways parallel) presentation of two developing characters, of the way they make choices and, finally, their growing understanding. The exchange between Gorgias and Knemon is a crucial point in this process: it identifies clearly the problems in Knemon's character and it produces some sort of development in Knemon's ethical understanding. This is

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<sup>62</sup> This is another feature of tragic tyrants (see Seaford 2003, pp. 105-106). See Goldhill 1986(a), p. 82; Blundell 1989, pp. 119-121 and Belfiore 2000, p. 143 on the theme of φίλια and its violation in relation to the *Antigone* and, in particular, to the characterisation of Creon.

<sup>63</sup> *S. Ant.* 701-704.

<sup>64</sup> Goldhill 1986(a), p. 82.

one of the main focuses of Menander's play, which, significantly, is named *Dyscolos* after Knemon's character. For Menander, character (understood in an Aristotelian sense) stands very much as the centre of interest in his dramas. His comedies are constructed on the basis of a specific body of ideas about character, choice, human nature and rationality with close links with the thinking of Aristotle and other fourth-century thinkers.<sup>65</sup>

In Sophocles, although in one sense he too is very interested in character (of the kind Knox calls 'the heroic temper'), it is not really the same kind of interest that we find in Aristotle and Menander. Even though it is, in theory, possible to interpret Creon in Aristotelian terms, this is not a very natural reading of the play. It is possible to suggest that, for Sophocles, Creon is stubborn because he has (like Knemon) persisted in his own way of thinking during his whole life and he has become so habituated in this way that he has become rigid and inaccessible to reasoned argument. But, in fact, Sophocles does not present the psychological workings of his figures in a way that would make this a plausible reading of the play. Also, Sophocles, unlike Menander, does not show Creon and Antigone adapting their characters to a different way of life, nor does the play indicate to what extent this kind of change is seen as possible. Sophocles is not interested in defining the ethical status of his figures in the way Menander does nor does he characterise them as ethically good or wicked. Rather, the tragedy invites us to recognise, and to some degree at least, sympathise with both viewpoints.<sup>66</sup> The line between what is right and what is not is presented as blurred or complex, and the disasters as the product of competing, but credible, standpoints rather than as the product of error or failings in ethical character, as they are in Menander.<sup>67</sup>

The other example I wish to consider in comparison with Menander's *Dyscolos*, is Aristophanes' *Wasps*. In the *Wasps*, we face again a situation in which a son, Anticleon, tries to convince his father, Philocleon, to change his way of life. Philocleon, by contrast with Knemon, has not completely separated himself from any form of social interaction. On the contrary, when we first see him at the beginning of the play, he is trying to escape from his house where his son has imprisoned him to prevent him going to the law-court as he does obsessively every day. Despite this point of contrast from Knemon, Philocleon expresses a similarly single-minded attitude: in fact, we know that

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<sup>65</sup> "Non è possibile far risalire alla tragedia tutto il mondo etico di Menandro, quasi che egli ignorasse il grande movimento di idee filosofiche che ferveva in Atene al tempo della sua gioventù [...]. Il suo mondo etico è più ricco, più vivo, più profondamente psicologico" (Barigazzi 1964, p. 120).

<sup>66</sup> See further Gill 1986 (especially, pp. 161-165) and Gill 1990 (especially, pp. 4-5 and 17-29) for this view of the characteristic approach of fifth-century Attic tragedy.

<sup>67</sup> For a recent discussion of the didactic function of Menander's theatre see Fountoulakis 2004.

Philocleon wishes to lead his life as much as possible in the law-courts and to enjoy the exclusive company of his fellow jurymen.<sup>68</sup> The reason why he enjoys this kind of life is that it gives him unconditional power. He does not seem to care about who should be rightly punished or not but takes delight in imposing his will indiscriminately on other people.<sup>69</sup> What Anticleon wants his father to do is to listen to what he has to say about his occupation as a juror: he presents his father and the chorus of wasps (his father's fellow jurymen) with a long, well-constructed argument. Anticleon says that the government is taking advantage of them: it does not give them enough reward for what they do; they are slaves of the system and they do not see how much they have been deceived.<sup>70</sup> Anticleon, like Gorgias and Haemon, represents a “model of normality”,<sup>71</sup> the voice of sound arguments through which we can measure the absurd and extreme character of Philocleon:<sup>72</sup> however, the young men fulfil their function in a different manner and, eventually, they achieve opposite results.

Anticleon wants to try to find some sort of agreement with his father in the attempt to persuade him not to attend law-court sessions endlessly.<sup>73</sup> What is striking in this process of persuasion is that Anticleon tries to change his father's mind about going to law courts, without actually trying to change his father at the ethical or psychological level. He does not try to change his father's motivation for doing what he is doing. Philocleon is interested in going to law-courts because he enjoys exercising his power over other people and harming them; Anticleon, in his turn, suggests that Philocleon could do exactly what he was doing in the law-court by staying at home.

**Bδ:** σὺ δ' οὖν, ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο κεχάρηκας ποιῶν,  
 ἐκεῖσε μὲν μηκέτι βάδιζ', ἀλλ' ἐνθάδε  
 αὐτοῦ μένων δικάζε τοῖσιν οἰκέταις.  
 [...]
 ὅτι τὴν θύραν ἀνέφραξε ἢ σηκίς λάθρα,  
 ταύτης ἐπιβολὴν ψηφιεῖ μίαν μόνην·  
 πάντως δὲ κάκει ταῦτ' ἔδρας ἐκάστοτε.  
 καὶ ταῦτα μὲν νῦν εὐλόγως, ἣν ἐξέχη  
 εἴλη κατ' ὀρθρον, ἠλιάσει πρὸς ἥλιον·  
 εἰ δὲ νείφῃ, πρὸς τὸ πῦρ καθήμενος·

<sup>68</sup> Ar. V. 340-341.

<sup>69</sup> Ar. V. 548-616.

<sup>70</sup> Ar. V. 663-720.

<sup>71</sup> Silk 2000, p. 248-249.

<sup>72</sup> “[Anticleon’s] main function in the play is to represent the true or sensible view of every question. He serves as a foil to Philocleon, a standard of normality by which the old man’s absurdity can be measured” (MacDowell 1995, p. 178)

<sup>73</sup> Ar. V. 471-478.

ὔοντος εἴσει· κἄν ἔγρη μεσημβρινός,  
οὐδέεις σ' ἀποκλείσει θεσμοθέτης τῆ κικκλίδι.

ANTICLEON: All right then, since you have enjoyed doing that, don't go to that place anymore, but stay right here and pass judgement on the servants [...]. Because the housemaid opened the door secretly, you will decide by vote [to apply to] her only one penalty; you used to do that down there every time, anyway. Well, that works reasonably; and then, if it comes out a fine hot day towards dawn, you can literally judge the accused, out in the sun, or if it's snowing, sitting by the fire. When it rains you go inside. And if you wake up at midday, no presiding magistrate will close the barrier against you.<sup>74</sup>

Philocleon finally changes his mind and he agrees to change his way of life completely. His conversion is abrupt and, as an audience, we do not understand what kind of psychological process brought him to take this decision (and, probably, Aristophanes is not interested in offering his audience this kind of analysis). After his supposed conversion, Philocleon takes instructions from his son about how to behave during a symposium and how to dress in order to start living the normal social life that his son has promised to him.<sup>75</sup> Philocleon accepts that he should change his way of life and wear new kinds of clothes:<sup>76</sup> his son tries to give him a new social identity. However, despite the apparent change in his life-style, he continues to demonstrate the same wicked inclinations that had motivated his occupation as a jury man before.<sup>77</sup> As a result, at the end of the play, as the chorus rightly remarks, Philocleon does not actually change his ethical character:<sup>78</sup> his tendency to impose his will on other people actually gets worse because, now that he enjoys the delight of a more sociable life, he has started assaulting everyone in the street in a state of drunkenness.<sup>79</sup> Philocleon's inclinations are fully reaffirmed and Philocleon enjoys an even greater freedom: he can now affirm his nature without boundaries, abusing drinking and dancing without the burden of having to attend law-courts every day.<sup>80</sup>

We might say that Anticleon's re-education of his father to a more sociable life produces results that are opposite to what we find in Knemon. At the end of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ar. *V.* 764-775. Translation by Sommerstein 1983 (modified).

<sup>75</sup> Ar. *V.* 1122-1295

<sup>76</sup> See Pütz 2007, p. 84 who stresses that Philocleon's change is accentuated by the complete change of clothes.

<sup>77</sup> Silk 1990, p. 163.

<sup>78</sup> Ar. *V.* 1451-1465.

<sup>79</sup> "One has the situation – rare in Aristophanean comedy – of reason and common sense defeating the chimeras of the hero, only to find that nothing has been achieved, or more precisely, that things are worse than before" (Whitman 1964, p. 152).

<sup>80</sup> See Silk 1990, p. 163 and also Whitman 1964, p. 154 who describes Philocleon as the characteristic Aristophanic comic hero. On the other hand, Dover 1972, p. 126 is more cautious in ascribing him such feature: Philocleon is essentially a coward and cowardice is not typically to be found in the comic hero.

*Dyscolos*, Knemon changes his attitude towards the external world because he agrees to listen to people who care for him; he appreciates his mistakes and admits his bad inclination: we cannot say the same of Philocleon. Moreover, unlike Philocleon, Knemon wishes to maintain the same way of life because, despite understanding what he did wrong, his misanthropic inclinations and old habits remain hard to change. Philocleon, instead, without really changing his mind, embraces a totally new way of life. His change is abrupt;<sup>81</sup> it is a complete reversal in attitude that is not combined with any change in ethical beliefs: but this comes as no surprise because this is what we usually expect from the people in Aristophanes's comedy. As suggested in the Introduction,<sup>82</sup> it does not make sense to study characters such as Philocleon, Dikaiopolis, Lysistrata, Euripides (as he appears in the *Frogs*) with the intention of charting the rationale of their motivations and choices, that is, of trying to mount an inquiry into their psychology.<sup>83</sup> Their plans and their ideas often change abruptly and they are absurd, they are not similar to anything we would think or do in real life.<sup>84</sup> moreover, they are frequently used as vehicles to comment on stage about people, facts and issues that actually make up the political and artistic life of Athens.<sup>85</sup> Characters in Menander's comedy are different: they behave according to motives and beliefs that we can understand and recognise from our own (ethical and psychological) perspective.

These points of comparison and contrast with Sophoclean and Aristophanic figures help us to define the special character of Menander's play and to show that Knemon's case presents an original and interesting example when considered in relation to the previous tragic and comic tradition. His character, constructed in opposition to that of Sostratos, draws our attention to features of human psychology, viewed from an ethical standpoint, that are analysed in analogous ways by Aristotle.

Before concluding this part, I consider a passage in the *Epitrepontes*. There, we find another angry old man, Smikrines, who, nevertheless, does not share the extreme misanthropic character that characterises Knemon. Smikrines does not want to give back his daughter to Charisios, her husband, who has driven her from his house when he

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<sup>81</sup> That is the feature of the people of Aristophanes (Silk 1990, especially p. 162-163 for the treatment of this particular play).

<sup>82</sup> See Introduction pp. 21-23.

<sup>83</sup> "The characterisation of Philocleon is excellent but its purpose is amusement, not psychological truth. [...] All this is not consistent or realistic, but it is highly entertaining and that is in part why we like the old scallywag" (MacDowell 1995, p. 178).

<sup>84</sup> For a general discussion of this topic see Ehrenberg, 1951; Whitman 1964; Dover 1972; Silk 1990 and 2000.

<sup>85</sup> The question whether we should consider Aristophanic plays as a vehicle of political serious views has been variously debated, for a broader discussion about this topic see mainly: de Ste Croix 1972, pp. 355-376; Rosen 1988, McDowell 1995 and Sidwell 2009.

realised that she had exposed her child, who was offspring of a rape. Smikrines is the only one who, at this stage, has not yet managed to understand that Charisios has turned out to be, as a matter of fact, the rapist and, therefore, the father of the child. At the end of the play, the slave Onesimos criticises Smikrines for the fact that, without knowing the circumstances, he still wants to keep his daughter away from Charisios. Smikrines' slow-mindedness, says Onesimos, is a consequence of his stubborn character: it is at this point that the slave offers a curious account of character, 'τρόπος'.

**Ον:** ἐκάστωι τὸν τρόπον συν[ώκισαν  
φρούραρχον· οὗτος ἔνδο[ν] ἐπ[  
ἐπέτριψεν, ἂν αὐτῶι κακῶς χρη[σώμεθα,  
ἕτερον δ' ἔσωσεν. οὗτός ἐσθ' ἡμῖν θεὸς  
ὃ τ' αἴτιος καὶ τοῦ καλῶς καὶ τοῦ κακῶς  
πράττειν ἐκάστωι· τοῦτον ἰλάσκου ποῶν  
μηδὲν ἄτοπον μηδ' ἀμαθές, ἵνα πράττης καλῶς.

ONESIMOS: They [the gods] gave to each one a guardian, the character. This one destroys us within, if [we use] it in a wrong way, otherwise it preserves us. This is a god for us, it is for each one the cause of doing good or bad. To do well, you must appease this god, doing nothing out of place or stupid.<sup>86</sup>

As Gomme and Sandbach point out, commenting on this passage, Onesimos confuses two concepts: that of a man's character and that of a divine guardian spirit sent by the gods.<sup>87</sup> Onesimos is a slave, rather slow-minded and fearful, and we do not expect from him a speech that shows full awareness of the concepts involved. Onesimos seems rather to put forward arguments that he does not fully understand but that he has, perhaps, heard somewhere. He offers these ideas at this point as this seems to be a good occasion to use them and to make fun of Smikrines. Nevertheless, what Onesimos' brief comment gives us is a definition of character, *τρόπος*, which was, perhaps, part of the shared discourse at that time and that, more importantly, mirrors what we have seen in the *Dyscolos*. The way in which we educate our natural dispositions defines what we are. Depending on how we habituate ourselves to live, we come to be people of a certain kind, and it is why our character is responsible for our fortune and misfortune. As we

<sup>86</sup> Men. *Epitr.* 1092-1099. For a detailed discussion of this particular passage see Barigazzi 1965, pp. 192-217.

<sup>87</sup> "Onesimos' philosophy here will not stand up. He has confused two ideas: (1) a man's character brings him good and bad fortune, (2) man has in him a guardian spirit which will reward good deeds, but punish offences" (Gomme and Sandbach 1973, *ad loc.*).

see in the following section, Onesimos' amusing speech also reflects, in its peculiar way, Aristotle's thoughts about character.

## 2. Aristotle on the individual and his community

In Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that ethical virtue springs from habituation: ἥθος is the way in which one develops one's natural inclinations into settled dispositions in the course of a lifetime.<sup>88</sup> Ethical character depends, in this sense, on the individual, his inborn nature and on how through habituation and reasoning, he educates his natural inclinations and shapes a consistent character. Ethical understanding is improved through experience but also by shared reflection and debate about ethical values: to reflect collectively about what is to be a human being, what constitute human life and happiness, is fundamental for improving our ethical understanding and guiding our actions.<sup>89</sup> In Aristotle's thinking on this topic, one point that I am especially interested in exploring is how the correct development of one's character is benefited by the social context in which one grows up and lives. More precisely, this context provides the knowledge and the experience needed to shape and develop our ethical identity. I believe that it is in this respect that the analogy with Menander's idea of 'character' as presented in the *Dyscolos* becomes clearer.

The Greek word from which the English expression 'character' derives is 'χαρακτήρ', a noun deriving from the verb 'χαρασσω'. The original meaning of this verb is 'to write on stone, wood, metal' or 'to print something on a coin' and it is with this meaning that the word is mainly used in classical authors, including Plato and Aristotle.<sup>90</sup> The term might also indicate a "distinctive mark or token impressed (as it were) on a person or thing by which it is known from the others". Only rarely, it might also be used for a "type or character (regarded as shared with others) of a thing or person, rarely of an individual nature".<sup>91</sup> This last meaning, which is the one closest to what we mean with the term 'character', is found mainly in later authors such as Philodemus and Arrian. It seems, however, that we can already find a similar use of this

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<sup>88</sup> Arist. *EN* II 1, 1103a18-26.

<sup>89</sup> Arist. *EN* X 9, 1179b20-31. See Gill 2006, pp. 135-36.

<sup>90</sup> LSJ, s.v.. For extensive discussion of the history of this term see Körte 1929 and van Groningen 1930; see Diggle 2004, p. 4, for a summary of this discussion with reference to Theophrastus' *Characters*.

<sup>91</sup> LSJ, s.v.

term in a fragment by Menander: “ἀνδρὸς χαρακτήρ ἐκ λόγου γνωρίζεται”.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, Körte concludes that Menander is the first one to use the term ‘χαρακτήρ’ to indicate the features identifying an original unique personality.<sup>93</sup> The evidence for this, however, is slight and the other sources, closer in time to Menander, in which we find the term used with this meaning, are no less problematic. The term also appears as the title of Theophrastus’ work *Characters*, but there is still discussion about the authenticity of this title and, more generally, about the aims of the treatise.<sup>94</sup>

However, in the *Lexicon Menandreo*,<sup>95</sup> we find that Menander makes much more use of terms such as ἦθος or, more frequently τρόπος, to define one’s specific way of acting and behaving, rather than χαρακτήρ which is only found, with this meaning, in the fragment quoted earlier. His usage might be explained by the fact that the Greek word ‘χαρακτήρ’, perhaps because of the etymology noted earlier, implies that this way of acting and being is a trait engraved on us since our birth, which determines our personality and cannot be changed or developed. This is not the same idea that is conveyed by the words ‘ἦθος’ or ‘τρόπος’: these two words suggest the idea of ‘character’ as a set of natural traits developed into stable dispositions as a result of habit and a certain way of life.<sup>96</sup> This idea is analogous to what we find in Aristotle. In Aristotle, we do find reference to the idea that one can be born with a natural inclination to make the right choice.<sup>97</sup> However, it is clear that simply having a good natural disposition is not up to us and, therefore, is not object of praise or blame as it is not something that we achieve by our own means. One cannot be said to have a good ἦθος or to have developed a virtuous disposition until one exercises this inclination and educates it to respond in a certain way, either well or badly.

οὔτ’ ἄρα φύσει οὔτε παρὰ φύσιν ἐγγίνονται αἱ ἀρεταί, ἀλλὰ πεφυκόσι μὲν ἡμῖν δέξασθαι αὐτάς, τελειουμένοις δὲ διὰ τοῦ ἔθους.

So virtues arise in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but by our nature we can receive them and perfect them through habituation.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Men. fr. 72 K.A.; see LSJ, *s.v.* and Körte 1929.

<sup>93</sup> “Ganz auf dieser Entwicklungslinie liegt es nun, dass Menander der erste griechische Schriftsteller, zu sein scheint, der das wort χαρακτήρ für die individuelle Eigenart eines einzelnen Menschen gebraucht hat” (Körte 1929, p. 79).

<sup>94</sup> See for further details Diggle 2004, pp. 4-6.

<sup>95</sup> Pompella 1996.

<sup>96</sup> LSJ *s.v.*; see Men. *Epir.* 1092-1099.

<sup>97</sup> Arist. *EN* III 7, 1114b8-12.

<sup>98</sup> Arist. *EN* II 1, 1103a23-26.



Accordingly, natural traits cannot be the elements that alone shape our ethical character: what defines it is what we decide to do with our natural inclinations or the goods given by chance. This is the meaning that the Greek word ἥθος, as opposed to χαρακτήρ, conveys for Aristotle: and, in using the English word ‘character’, I will have in mind these connotations of ἥθος. Character emerges from the way in which one develops emotional and behavioural habits and deals with them over a lifetime. No matter which kind of inclinations we are born with, we should be able to habituate them in a correct way so as to build up a stable virtuous disposition: in this sense our ἥθος is up to us.<sup>99</sup> It is now possible to include Aristotle’s idea of character in a broader definition of the following kind: character is “[...] a matter of the shaping of human life by an ethical motivation and agency ascribed, at its core, to the individual himself, and for which he might be held responsible, albeit in a context of forces (inherited status, natural capacities, nature and education, and not least, the larger order of a world controlled by gods) which help to create, and to limit, the conditions within which such agency and its attendant responsibility can operate”.<sup>100</sup> No one needs to become someone else to be able to have a good life; this is something that each one can achieve starting from what each one already is, educating in the correct way one’s own natural inclination in the contexts and with the means at one’s disposal.<sup>101</sup> Hence, character is something for which we can be praised or blamed as it is up to us to give shape to a good or bad ἥθος.

### *2.1 Listening and watching friends*

It is also worth pointing out that the act of ascribing praise and blame to one’s own and other people’s actions and choices is in itself an important ethical activity that contributes to one’s own character formation. It is also this kind of activity, that of identifying someone else’s choices and actions as good or bad, that sharpens one’s own ethical understanding, since this offers good or bad examples of this kind.<sup>102</sup> I am now

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<sup>99</sup> Arist. *EN* I 11, 1100b15-23 and III 7, 1114a19-29. “A person’s character consists on those long standing actively dispositional qualities and traits – his natural capacity and habits – that (by setting the general direction of his desires and the range of his passions) directs to choices [...]. It is a stable and enduring configuration of these, structured in order of relative strength and importance” (Rorty 1994, p. 61). See also Broadie 1991, pp. 160-165; Sherman 1997, pp. 240-257.

<sup>100</sup> Halliwell, 1990, p. 33.

<sup>101</sup> See Arist. *EN* IX 4, 1166a17-21.

<sup>102</sup> “Praise and blame are ethical exercises and forces: they are, in fact, paradigmatic forms of ethical judgement. They entail not only the existence but also the sharing of values, since effective praise and

going to explain this statement in more detail by focusing, first, on how this process works for the individual's character development. Secondly, I will consider the implications of this analysis for the larger community in which the individual is embedded.

It is clear that ascribing praise and blame is an act that involves more than one person: first of all, one needs to be surrounded by people who perform choices and actions so that one can observe and judge them – and, maybe, also try to correct them by engaging in a discussion about what is good and what is not. Besides, it is possible that one might not be able to understand, especially at a young age, to whom praise and blame should be attributed; and someone else with more experience needs to step in to show this clearly through reflection and discussion.<sup>103</sup> It follows that to form relationships with other people is fundamental for correct character development. At the beginning of the educational process, one may not understand the reasons why people identify such and such things as good or bad and why one should act in a way rather than in another and habituate one's desires and emotions to respond in a certain way to certain types of situation. This is because achieving a consistent and complete ethical understanding and reaching the level at which virtuous dispositions naturally inform our decisions and actions requires activity and a long process of habituation.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, however, it is necessary to have some knowledge of what is right and wrong, even if, at the beginning we might not fully understand the reason for this: attributing praise and blame and reflecting together with other people on these topics is an important part of this process of ethical development.<sup>105</sup> As brought out shortly, it is important, particularly, for young people, who have not yet developed a consistent ethical understanding, to educate their inclinations by imitating those who are praised as virtuous people.<sup>106</sup> However, this activity also helps those who, having failed to develop a virtuous character adequately, need in any case some guidance to get to know the right thing to do.

εἰ μὲν οὖν ἦσαν οἱ λόγοι αὐτάρκεις πρὸς τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιεικεῖς, πολλοὺς ἂν μισθοὺς καὶ μεγάλους δικαίως ἔφερον [...] νῦν δὲ φαίνονται προτρέμασθαι μὲν καὶ παρορμηῆσαι τῶν νέων τοὺς ἐλευθερίους ἰσχύειν, ἧθὸς τ' εὐγενὲς καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόκαλον ποιῆσαι ἂν κατοκώγιμον ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς

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blame must be addressed to audiences which will recognise and endorse their function: their function and effect are constituted precisely by people's response to them" (Halliwell 1990, p. 45). See also Broadie 1991, pp. 165-170.

<sup>103</sup> See Burnyeat 1980; also, more generally, see Gill 1996 for treatment of these ideas in both Plato (pp. 266-267) and Aristotle (pp. 346-370).

<sup>104</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a21-22 and X 9, 1179b4-35.

<sup>105</sup> Arist. *EN* I 2, 1095b1-9.

<sup>106</sup> See further Chappell 2005, especially pp. 236-239.

ἀδυνατεῖν πρὸς καλοκαγαθίαν προτρέψασθαι [...] οὐ γὰρ οἶόν τε ἢ οὐ ῥάδιον τὰ ἐκ παλαιοῦ τοῖς ἦθεσι κατελιμμένα λόγω μεταστῆσαι· ἀγαπητὸν δ' ἴσως ἐστὶν εἰ πάντων ὑπαρχόντων δι' ὧν ἐπιεικεῖς δοκοῦμεν γίνεσθαι, μεταλάβοιμεν τῆς ἀρετῆς.

If arguments were sufficient by themselves to make people good, then they would have brought many great rewards [...] As a matter of fact, [arguments] appear to have an effect in exhorting and stimulating the liberally-minded among young men, and, perhaps, in causing the character of someone of high lineage and truly a lover of what is noble to be possessed by virtue, but they are not capable to exhort the masses in the direction of what is noble and good [...] For it is not possible or not easy to remove by argument what has been rooted since long time in [people's] characters. And presumably we should be content if, when all the means are available through which we think we become good, we were to get some share of virtue.<sup>107</sup>

In fact, even if, through reasoning, it is possible to modify certain beliefs and make people understand when they are wrong, character traits and natural inclinations that have been growing for long time do not change easily. This is why it is important to train one's emotional inclinations from the beginning in appropriate ethical activity, following the guidance of people who care about one's ethical development. If wrong attitudes, instead, become steadily incorporated in one's character they will naturally inform one's emotional responses at any time. The fact that, after a long time, one understands that these features are wrong might not be enough to extirpate them completely from one's character; they will, to an important extent, always be part of the person.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the activity of ascribing praise and blame to others and to oneself and listening to other (wiser) people's teachings is fundamental for correct ethical development in people who do not yet have a stable virtuous character but can be also useful to those who, having already developed a consistently bad character, need to be redirected toward the right way to live; although their character might not be able to be corrected.

The process of ethical development also goes beyond the individual's personal perspective.

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<sup>107</sup> Arist. *EN* X 9, 1179b4-20.

<sup>108</sup> See Gill 1996, chs. 4-6, for Platonic-Aristotelian ideas about the psychology of ethical development. See also Gill 1998(b) for a comparison of Platonic and Stoic models of character-development. See Gill 2006, pp. 5-14 and 129-146 (especially pp. 134-135) for a comparison of the Platonic-Aristotelian model of development with Hellenistic-Roman (especially Stoic) ideas. See also Nussbaum 1994, pp. 78-101 for discussion of the Aristotelian approach to emotional dispositions viewed in comparison with Hellenistic thought.

τούτοις δ' ἔοικε μαρτυρεῖσθαι καὶ ἰδίᾳ ὑφ' ἐκάστων καὶ ὑπ' αὐτῶν τῶν νομοθετῶν· κολάζουσι γὰρ καὶ τιμωροῦνται τοὺς δρῶντας μοχθηρά, ὅσοι μὴ βία ἢ δι' ἄγνοιαν ἤς μὴ αὐτοὶ αἴτιοι, τοὺς δὲ τὰ καλὰ πράττοντας τιμῶσιν, ὡς τοὺς μὲν προτρέποντες τοὺς δὲ κωλύσοντες.

These statements seem to be confirmed<sup>109</sup> not only by each of us in private life, but also by legislators themselves. For they punish and penalise those who commit evil acts (unless they act by force or through ignorance for which they are not themselves responsible), but they honour those who do noble actions, with a view to exhorting these and deterring the others.<sup>110</sup>

It seems, in fact, that public discussion about ethical values is not only important for the individual involved in the educational process but also for the happiness of the whole community: this would explain why, for instance, the head of a community, whether a *polis* or a family, offers his members the incentive to follow the example of good people and deters them from following bad people. In fact, other people's comments on someone's actions and choices have at least two functions: i) they are necessary to provide the agent with objective feedback on his actions so that he can appreciate his goodness or badness; ii) thanks to this feedback, they help in shaping not only the agent's character but also that of the people who share the agent's life. The combination of these two points is of great benefit for both the individual and the community.

It seems that, for Aristotle, to develop a good character and to perform virtuous actions makes us happy. We learn, in fact, from the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the proper function (ἔργον) of human beings is to live a certain kind of life: this kind of life is constituted by the activity (ἐνέργεια) of the soul in accordance with reason and this activity is performed well when it is accomplished with the appropriate virtue; thus, one's happiness consists in exercising one's own function well, namely, living a life as a virtuous person.<sup>111</sup> But it also seems that what makes our happiness complete is to live in a community where everyone lives this sort of life.

εἰ δὲ τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν καὶ ἐνεργεῖν, τοῦ δ' ἀγαθοῦ ἡ ἐνέργεια σπουδαία καὶ ἡδεῖα καθ' αὐτήν, καθάπερ ἐν ἀρχῇ εἴρηται, ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὸ οἰκεῖον τῶν ἡδέων, θεωρεῖν δὲ μᾶλλον τοὺς πέλας δυνάμεθα ἢ ἑαυτοὺς καὶ τὰς ἐκείνων πράξεις ἢ τὰς οἰκειάς, αἱ τῶν σπουδαίων δὲ πράξεις φίλων ὄντων

<sup>109</sup> The context Aristotle refers to is the discussion about actions performed through voluntary ignorance: namely ignorance about the right thing to do.

<sup>110</sup> Arist. *EN* III 7, 1113b21-26, and see also Arist. *EN* II 1, 1103b2-6. "Rules and general procedures can be aids in moral development, since people who do not yet have practical wisdom and insight need to follow results that summarise the wise judgement of the others" (Nussbaum 1986(a), p. 179). See also Broadie 1991, p. 165.

<sup>111</sup> See especially Arist. *EN* I 6, 1098a3-18 and I 9, 1098b20-1199a8. For discussion of this topic and the apparent contrast between the definitions of εὐδαιμονία in *EN* I and X, see, among others, the essays of Ackrill, McDowell, Rorty, Wilkes in Rorty 1980; Price 1989, ch. 2-4; Broadie, 1991, pp. 366-438; Annas 1993, pp. 27-46.

ἡδεῖται τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς (ἄμφω γὰρ ἔχουσι τὰ τῆ φύσει ἡδέα): ὁ μακάριος δὴ φίλων τοιούτων δεήσεται, εἴπερ θεωρεῖν προαιρεῖται πράξεις ἐπιεικεῖς καὶ οἰκείας, τοιαῦται δ' αἱ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φίλου ὄντος. οἴονται τε δεῖν ἡδέως ζῆν τὸν εὐδαιμόνα. μονώτη μὲν οὖν χαλεπὸς ὁ βίος: οὐ γὰρ ῥάδιον καθ' αὐτὸν ἐνεργεῖν συνεχῶς, μεθ' ἑτέρων δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἄλλους ῥᾶον.

If being happy consists in living and engaging in an activity, and the activity of the good person is good and pleasant in itself, as we said at the beginning; and if what is our own is among the things [that are] pleasant; and if we can contemplate better our neighbours than ourselves, and their actions [better] than our own; and if the actions of good people who are friends are pleasurable for the good person (since they have both [qualities] that are pleasant by nature); then the blessed person will need friends like this, since he prefers to contemplate actions that are good and his own, and such are the action of a good person who is his friend. People think that the happy person should live pleasantly. Life would be difficult for the one who lives alone, since it is not easy by oneself to engage in activity continuously; but it is easier with other people and in relation to them.<sup>112</sup>

Contemplating people who are doing fine actions is like contemplating oneself doing such actions: the happiness created by this kind of activity is refracted by the examples of the people around him. Moreover, to live in a community offers each member the possibility of exercising his ethical understanding and using others who care about him, his φίλοι,<sup>113</sup> as a mirror to read more clearly his own actions and choices. Through one's φίλοι, one acquires a clear and objective perception of what one has done and why one has done it. When a φίλος praises or blames our actions, he or she provides us with a clearer insight about what has been done.<sup>114</sup> This, in its turn, invites us to reflect upon, and analyse, our actions and motivations and, consequently, to acquire better knowledge of ourselves with the aim of improving our ethical understanding.

δῆλον δὲ λαβοῦσι τί τὸ ζῆν τὸ κατ' ἐνέργειαν, καὶ ὡς τέλος. φανερὸν οὖν ὅτι τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ γνωρίζειν, ὥστε καὶ τὸ συζῆν τὸ συναισθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ συγνωρίζειν ἐστίν. ἔστι δὲ τὸ αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ αὐτὸν γνωρίζειν αἰρετώτατον ἐκάστω, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τοῦ ζῆν πᾶσιν ἔμφυτος ἡ ὄρεξις: τὸ γὰρ ζῆν δεῖ τιθέναι γνῶσιν τινά. εἰ οὖν τις ἀποτέμοι καὶ ποιήσῃε τὸ γινώσκειν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ μὴ [...] οὐθὲν ἄν διαφέροι ἢ τὸ γινώσκειν ἄλλον ἀνθ' αὐτοῦ: τὸ δ' ὅμοιον τοῦ ζῆν ἀνθ' αὐτοῦ ἄλλον. εὐλόγως δὴ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ γνωρίζειν αἰρετώτερον.

It will be clear if we ascertain what life is in its active sense and end. Clearly it is perception and getting knowledge, and so to live together is to perceive and to get knowledge together. And to perceive oneself

<sup>112</sup> Arist. *EN* IX 9, 1169b30-1170a6. See also IX 9, 1170a13-19 and IX 9, 1170b9-12.

<sup>113</sup> Which in an ideal *polis* should be the whole of the citizen body: see Arist. *EN* IX 6, 1167b1-4; *Pol.* III 9, 1280b36-1281a5.

<sup>114</sup> Arist. *MM* II 15, 1213a10-20.

and to get knowledge of oneself is more desirable to everyone and hence the desire of living is inborn in all; for living must be regarded as a kind of knowledge. If then one were to cut off and abstract [what is] knowing in itself and what is not[...] there would be no difference between this and that another knows instead of oneself and this is like another living instead of oneself. But naturally the perception and getting to know of oneself is more desirable.<sup>115</sup>

The one who keeps himself away from his φίλοι, is deprived of this fundamental experience. Not having someone to suggest to us that we did something wrong will, most probably, lead us to repeat that mistake again and, more importantly, to fail to achieve the understanding of what is good. It is also possible that, eventually, by living a solitary life, we progressively lose sight of what is wrong with our choices; in refusing to listen to other people's comments, we will start thinking that what we do is actually right. Wicked people, in fact, deliberately avoid other people's company so that they do not have to acknowledge the wickedness of their actions.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the one who already has a wicked inclination and only wishes to spend time with people of his own kind is in an even worse situation as he will intensify his own wicked inclination and that of the people he surrounds himself with.

γίνεται οὖν ἢ μὲν τῶν φαύλων φιλία μοχθηρά (κοινωνοῦσι γὰρ φαύλων ἀβέβαιοι ὄντες, καὶ μοχθηροὶ δὲ γίνονται ὁμοιοῦμενοι ἀλλήλοις), ἢ δὲ τῶν ἐπιεικῶν ἐπιεικής, συναυξανομένη ταῖς ὁμιλίαις·

The friendship of bad people therefore turns out to be an evil (for because of their lack of stability, they share in bad pursuits and turn evil by becoming like one another). But the friendship of good people is good and increases through their association.<sup>117</sup>

It turns out, therefore, that living in a community or among friends is not the only ingredient of good character development: we also need to take advantage of the presence of our neighbours and their feedback on our action.<sup>118</sup> For this reason, fellow-citizens, friends and offspring are classified as external goods as they are the primary material needed for ethical dialogue and activity, and their existence is important for our happiness according to the relationship of mutual benefit that is involved among φίλοι.

φαίνεται δ' ὅμως καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς ἀγαθῶν προσδεομένη [εὐδαιμονία], καθάπερ εἶπομεν· ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ οὐ ῥάδιον τὰ καλὰ πράττειν ἀχορήγητον ὄντα. πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ πράττεται, καθάπερ δι' ὀργάνων, διὰ φίλων

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<sup>115</sup> Arist. *EE* VII 12, 1244b23-34.

<sup>116</sup> Arist. *EN* IX 4, 1166b13-17.

<sup>117</sup> Arist. *EN* IX 12, 1172a8-11.

<sup>118</sup> This is why it is important to live close to one's own friends: see Arist. *EN* VIII 6, 1157b5-11.

καὶ πλοῦτου καὶ πολιτικῆς δυνάμεως· ἐνίων δὲ τητῶμενοι ῥυπαίνουσι τὸ μακάριον, οἷον εὐγενείας εὐτεκνίας κάλλους· οὐ πάνυ γὰρ εὐδαιμονικὸς ὁ τὴν ἰδέαν παναίσχητος ἢ δυσγενῆς ἢ μονώτης καὶ ἄτεκνος

But [happiness] appears, as we mentioned, to require also [the presence of] external goods since it is impossible or not easy to perform noble actions being without resources. For one does many actions through friends, wealth and political power, as by means of instruments. To be deprived of some things such as high lineage, good children and beauty, spoils our blessedness. For anyone who is of utterly ugly figure or of low lineage or solitary or childless is not completely happy.<sup>119</sup>

According to Aristotle, if one is so fortunate to be given external goods of this kind (i.e. wealth, beauty, children and friends), one should be able to use them. One should be able to listen to friends or raise one's own offspring adequately so that they can develop a proper ethical understanding through education, dialogue and a shared life with parents and the rest of the community.<sup>120</sup> The one who is not able to make good use of what he has received in life or does not want to share the goods of fortune with others for the sake of mutual and shared benefit cannot be completely happy.<sup>121</sup> This does not mean that wealth, children and fortune, in general, are sufficient conditions for happiness: but to be provided external goods, and not make good use of them, somehow limits one's happiness; "Some external conditions [...], while not used for the virtuous person as means to achieve his purposes (as e.g., his money or his personal influence might be), put him in the position where the options for action that are presented to him by these circumstances allows him to exercise his virtues fully and in ways that one might describe as normal for the virtues".<sup>122</sup> In turn, to keep one's life and one's good fortune away from others is bad for the community itself. As pointed out before, each member of any kind of community is an indispensable element for building the larger framework of the good life of his community. Each one provides others with the example of his life, sharing his point of view about matters of importance and, in his turn, he benefits from the lives and the opinions of the other members. Therefore, φίλοι should engage as much as possible in mutually helpful

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<sup>119</sup> Arist. *EN* I 9, 1099a31-b4.

<sup>120</sup> "A virtuous man knows the values to himself of having good children, who grow to maturity and fine lives in close mutual dependence with his own, and will, just because he is virtuous, devote considerable effort to procreating and raising such a family" (Cooper 1985, p. 180); "The failure to have good children affects his [the good man's] happiness insofar as it prevents the subsequent activities that might have engaged together with his children" (*ibidem*, p. 189).

<sup>121</sup> See Arist. *EN* IV 1, 1120a5-8; IV 3, 1121b9-16; IX 9, 1169b16-19; Arist. *EE* VII 12, 1245a11-20. See Cooper 1985, p. 127.

<sup>122</sup> Cooper 1985, p. 182.

activity such as contemplation and feasting.<sup>123</sup> To withdraw from this natural system of mutual benefits is not only missing the point of what it means to be a human being, it is also failing to achieve one's own complete happiness and making that of others less complete.

[αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶ] καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις τὸ τῶν καλῶν ὧν πάντες μετέχουσιν, ἢ οἱ ὅμοιοι πάντες ἢ οἱ πλείστοι, μὴ μετέχειν – ὁμοίους δὲ λέγω ὁμοεθνεῖς, πολίτας, ἡλικιώτας, συγγενεῖς, ὅλως τοὺς ἐξ ἴσου – αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ἤδη τὸ μὴ μετέχειν οἷον παιδείσεως ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοίως. πάντα δὲ ταῦτα μᾶλλον, ἂν δι' ἑαυτὸν φαίνηται· οὕτω γὰρ ἤδη ἀπὸ κακίας μᾶλλον, ἂν αὐτὸς ἢ αἴτιος τῶν ὑπαρξάντων ἢ ὑπαρχόντων ἢ μελλόντων.

[In addition it is shameful] not to share in fine things of which all have a share, or all those like oneself or most of them. By those like oneself I mean those of the same nation, fellow citizens, those of the same age, relatives, generally, one's equals; for in the first place it is shameful not to share to the same extent in such things as education and other similar things, but all these things are more shameful if they appear to be one's own [fault]; because in this way they actually [seem to come] more from vice, if one is the cause of one's own past present or future [deficiencies].<sup>124</sup>

It follows that each person should be interested in the correct ethical development of the other person – and, therefore, in the other's happiness – as this is also part of his own ethical development and happiness.<sup>125</sup> This is why in a community where people live together and are concerned for each other's happiness, it is important that ethical values and examples are discussed publicly so to provide the best education for each one in the interest of all.<sup>126</sup> These principles are manifest if we look not only at how, in the large-scale system of the *polis*, private citizens and legislators comment on their fellow-citizen's actions, but also if we observe how friends and relatives behave in the smaller scale system of a family or a community of friends. What these communities have in common is that each member is somehow committed to the other in sharing a certain life (the best possible) and, as such, should sincerely care for the ethical development of his neighbour, his φίλος.<sup>127</sup> I will discuss this point at greater length shortly. First, I

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<sup>123</sup> Arist. *EE* VII 12, 1245b3-10. See also Arist. *Pol.* III 9, 1280b36-38 on which Cooper comments: “And these [marriage, brotherhood, religious festivals], in turn, he evidently means to say, provide the specific sort of connectedness that, in Greek cities, grounds the interest in and concern by each citizen for the quality of mind and character of his fellow citizens” (Cooper 1990, p. 232).

<sup>124</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 6, 384a8-16.

<sup>125</sup> “Aristotle does not have in view the kind of altruism that consists in wanting to benefit, in principle, any other, regardless of his relationship to oneself [...]. Aristotle locates well-wishing firmly within close interpersonal (and mutual) relationships, and not in one-way actions or attitudes” (Gill 1998(a), p. 319).

<sup>126</sup> Arist. *EN* IX 4, 1166a1-b29. See Annas 1993, pp. 249-262; Gill 1998(a).

<sup>127</sup> Arist. *EN* VIII 10, 1159b25-1160a30. “Philia is other-concern restricted to those people to whom one has a certain sort of commitment. The commitment can be deep, as with friendship based on good



would like to point out that, according to this line of thought, the correct development of our character does not depend solely on us and on our individual ability to see and do the right thing; it also depends on the way we value other people and their judgements on our actions.<sup>128</sup> Also, the ethical development resulting from this activity produces benefits that go beyond the individual. Other people's opinions about the agent's actions do not just have an individual-centred educational aim but they play a fundamental role in the collective understanding of what is good and what is bad. Once someone has been led by others to recognise that he made a mistake, it follows that he will be able not only to correct his error, but, also, finally to understand that what he did was wrong and, possibly, if he is mature enough, why. Furthermore, this understanding should prevent the agent, and the people who witnessed his error, from making the same mistake again and, eventually, it should enable the development of a properly virtuous disposition that would constitute the core of εὐδαιμονία for the individual and the community.<sup>129</sup> Thus, it turns out that to live in a community of people who care about their mutual ethical character, a community of φίλοι, is key to having a happy life.

## 2.2 Talking and living with friends

I will now explore in more detail how a community of φίλοι should function in order to promote this kind of outcome. I will take as a case study for this analysis the functioning of a *polis* as described in Aristotle's *Politics*. According to Aristotle, the first forms of associations, such as families and villages, originated in the aim of the satisfaction of bare needs of life such as food and protection from danger.<sup>130</sup> What distinguishes the origin of the civic society is the human need not just for living but living well. The *polis*, therefore, represents the most perfect and complete kind of community, the one in which complete self-sufficiency is achieved (αὐτάρκεια).<sup>131</sup> The desire to reproduce and satisfy the need of food and protection from danger led to the establishment of communities that were self-sufficient only from a reproductive and economical point of view. However, according to Aristotle, these kinds of community

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character, or shallow, as in utility friendship, it can be continuing or transitory. It can be based on natural choice, as with adults developing an acquaintance, or can arise from unchosen relationships as with family relationships" (Annas 1993, p. 250). See also Konstan 1997, p. 92.

<sup>128</sup> "We learn about ourselves by having another self before us whose similar actions and traits we can study from a more detached and more objective point of view" (Sherman 1989, p.143).

<sup>129</sup> Arist. *EN* I 4-6, 1097a15-1098a20. See in particular Cooper 1977, pp. 300-302.

<sup>130</sup> Arist. *Pol.* I 2, 1252b7-15.

<sup>131</sup> Arist. *Pol.* I 2, 1252b28-32. See Irwin 1990, p. 85 and 1988, p. 406.

could not provide for the satisfaction of another desire constitutive of human beings: the desire to live well (εὖ ζῆν). The self-sufficiency achieved with the constitution of political societies, instead, does include this third aspect: this is why the kind of αὐτάρκεια that we find in the *polis* is of the perfect, fully achieved, kind.

The transition from communities such as families and villages to political states is, therefore, a natural development of human nature: human beings do not only eat, reproduce, fight and build fortifications; they also have the natural desire to speak and to communicate to other people what they think and feel, and to discuss the reasons why they do so in one way rather than another. Consequently, at the basis of the formation of the *polis* is discussion about what constitutes a good life, and this is done through discourse (λόγος) about what is right and wrong.

διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῶν πάσης μελίττης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζῴου μᾶλλον, δῆλον. οὐθὲν γάρ, ὡς φαμέν, μάτην ἢ φύσις ποιεῖ· λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζῴων· ἢ μὲν οὖν φωνὴ τοῦ λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος ἐστὶ σημεῖον, διὸ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπάρχει ζῴοις (μέχρι γὰρ τούτου ἢ φύσις αὐτῶν ἐλήλυθε, τοῦ ἔχειν αἴσθησιν λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος καὶ ταῦτα σημαίνειν ἀλλήλοις), ὁ δὲ λόγος ἐπὶ τῷ δηλοῦν ἐστὶ τὸ συμφέρον καὶ τὸ βλαβερόν, ὥστε καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἀδίκον· τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα ζῴα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἴδιον, τὸ μόνον ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἴσθησιν ἔχειν· ἢ δὲ τούτων κοινωνία ποιεῖ οἰκίαν καὶ πόλιν.

It is also clear why a human being is more of a political animal than a bee or any gregarious animal. Nature makes nothing pointlessly as we say and no animal has speech except the human being. A voice is a signifier of what is pleasant and painful, this is why it also belongs to other animals (for their nature goes this far: to perceive what is pleasant or painful and signify this to each other) but speech is for making clear what is beneficial or harmful and hence also what is just or unjust. For this is peculiar to human beings, in comparison to the other animals, that they alone have perception of what is good or bad, just, unjust and the rest and it is community in these that makes a household and a city-state.<sup>132</sup>

Aristotle also explains that the act of getting together and speaking about these things is built into every human being: the ones that do not feel this need are similar either to beasts or gods.<sup>133</sup> “For if the conception of a good has to be expanded in terms of such notions as those of practice, of the narrative unity of human life and of a moral tradition, then goods, and with them the only grounds for the authorities of law and virtues, can only be discovered by entering into those relationships which constitute communities whose central bond is a shared vision and understanding of goods. To cut oneself off from shared activities from which one has initially to learn obediently as an

<sup>132</sup> Arist. *Pol.* I 2, 1253a7-18. See Sorabji 1993, pp. 79-96 on the possession of speech as a criterion to differentiate humans from animals.

<sup>133</sup> Arist. *Pol.* I 2, 1253a26-30.

apprentice learns, to isolate oneself from the communities which find their aim and purpose in such activities, will be to debar oneself from finding any good outside of oneself”.<sup>134</sup> This is why the *polis* needs to promote those activities that bring citizens together; participating in public gathering such as sacrifices or festivals that facilitate citizens’ interaction and the sharing of viewpoints on subjects that are of relevance for collective happiness.<sup>135</sup> If each member brings to the attention of the community his own point of view, and the example of his own conduct, this can be related and compared with that of other people and this will finally produce an improved shared understanding.<sup>136</sup> It is interesting that, in the *Politics*, Aristotle criticises the Spartans, because they cannot offer every citizen the opportunity of joining the whole community in participating in the kind of gatherings that facilitate this dialogue.<sup>137</sup>

The importance of these meetings lies also in the fact that they provide the actual material for shared discussion; they allow people to speak about their own collective experiences and their points of view on these experiences. In this sense, to discuss does not actually interrupt the ethical activity but it actually provides it with concrete examples and new cases about which people can reason together.<sup>138</sup> The getting together of people naturally gives the opportunity of sharing, for instance, one’s life experiences or discussing something that has happened in the community: this is something that people cannot do alone and this is why the “intersubjective communication”<sup>139</sup> of these experiences through dialogue is fundamental.<sup>140</sup> To describe something as good or bad, to give meaning to certain experiences, to establish the values on which the community should build its good life (εὖ ζῆν), we necessarily need to get together and to speak about this.

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<sup>134</sup> MacIntyre 1981, p. 258, here identifies a feature of Aristotelian ethics (the recognition of the communal dimension) that MacIntyre regards as fundamental for any credible ethical theory.

<sup>135</sup> “Il gioco regolato delle asserzioni e delle obiezioni, l’andare e venire delle domande e delle argomentazioni formano il metodo adatto per la costituzione di convinzioni condivise intersoggettivamente” (Bubner 1994, p. 235). See also Barnes 1980, p. 130; Nussbaum 1986(a), pp. 160-179; Starr 1986, p. 220 and Cooper 1990, p. 232.

<sup>136</sup> For a very similar contemporary account of these topics, see Habermas 1981, especially volume II, pp. 99-118, where Habermas explains that the pooling of different examples of conduct (*Verhaltendisposition*) is important for generating an interpersonal dialogue that, through discussion, will finally attune (*abstimmen*) these different examples and provide a shared understanding constituted by the harmonious unity of various points of view.

<sup>137</sup> Arist. *Pol.* II 9, 1271a29-37.

<sup>138</sup> This is a substantial point in common between Aristotle and Habermas (Bubner 1994, p. 236).

<sup>139</sup> I am borrowing here the term from Habermas 2001, ch. 2.

<sup>140</sup> “We know how to learn what we owe to one another; and each of us, respectively, as members of a community, can self critically appropriate our past histories, in the light of such moral obligations, for the sake of articulating a proper ethical self-understanding [...]. The right ethical self-understanding is neither revealed, nor in any other way ‘given’ to us, but achieved in a joint effort. From this perspective, the enabling power built into language is of a trans-subjective, rather than an absolute, quality” (Habermas 2006, p. 123).

Experience that is intersubjectively communalized in the strict sense cannot be conceived without the concept of meaning that is communicated and shared by different subjects. Identical meanings are not formed in the intentional structure of a solitary subject that confronts his world in isolation.<sup>141</sup> For meanings to be identical in any intelligible sense, they must have the same validity for different subjects.<sup>142</sup>

Consequently, the *polis*, originating from smaller kinds of communities, provides, through dialogue, the fundamental criteria for distinguishing between what is good and what is not and this helps shared understanding of the fact that:

βίος μὲν ἄριστος, καὶ χωρὶς ἐκάστῳ καὶ κοινῇ ταῖς πόλεσιν, ὁ μετ' ἀρετῆς κεχορηγημένης ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὥστε μετέχειν τῶν κατ' ἀρετὴν πράξεων.

The best life, both for the individual alone and for the city-state collectively, is a life of virtue sufficiently equipped with the resources needed to take part to virtuous actions.<sup>143</sup>

To be part of a community means that we have already agreed with other members about certain shared values,<sup>144</sup> it means that our ethical development, and that of our φίλοι, proceeds on the basis of a definition of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ that has been established as objective and universal. Accordingly, to be part of a community means to be actively involved in a dialogue that shapes those universal principles that are fundamental for guiding our practical understanding and our choices. They are, in some cases, the principles that are the premises of the so-called practical syllogism as analysed in Chapter 3.<sup>145</sup> By contrast with the universal principles of science, the principles of practical understanding are what they are because they are formed by “abstracting the core, the essential – and in this sense universal – aspect of the ethical life from the incidental, context-specific ones”:<sup>146</sup> this process of abstraction is possible through experiencing a life with others and sharing a discourse about what is good. The one who willingly puts himself outside this dialogue deprives himself of the possibility of recognising these principles and thus deprives the community of his opinions and his

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<sup>141</sup> In this part of the chapter Habermas is discussing and responding to Husserl’s treatment of subjective intentionality as it appears in the *Cartesian Meditations* and in the fifth *Logical Investigation*.

<sup>142</sup> Habermas 2001, p. 43.

<sup>143</sup> Arist. *Pol.* VII 1, 1323b40- 1324a2.

<sup>144</sup> “The justification of state intervention in the lives of individuals is in general provided first by the individuals themselves in so far as they have voluntarily entered into an association which aims at the good life” (Gerson 1987, p. 212).

<sup>145</sup> See Chapter 3, section 2.2.

<sup>146</sup> Gill 2005, p. 21. See also Nussbaum 1978, essay 4.

example on important ethical matters.<sup>147</sup> That is why Aristotle says that someone who lives outside the community is a beast or a god: someone who does not say a word to his fellow human being about what is good and what is not is not a human being as we understand it. He is, in Pan's words, ἀπάνθρωπος: he does not reciprocate the interest that the community has in him and he does not understand the mutual benefits that this relationship would produce for both the individual and the community.<sup>148</sup> In fact, it is natural (φύσει) for human beings – but also for animals – to feel a bond, some kind of φιλία among members of the same species;<sup>149</sup> and, once one has identified fundamental ethical values by sharing one's life with others, it is also necessary that one expresses those values in the everyday life of interpersonal relationships in order to be properly virtuous and, therefore, happy. As pointed out in the previous chapter and at the beginning of this one, experience helps to sharpen not only theoretical but also ethical understanding. This, of course, requires the presence of other people with whom one can develop this understanding until one's own inclination toward doing the right thing becomes fully natural (συμφύειν).<sup>150</sup>

If we now look back at the *Dyscolos*, after this analysis of Aristotle's thought on human community, we can find a number of analogies with Aristotle's account. Knemon made a mistake when he decided to withdraw from every kind of human relationship. Knemon's life provided him with several bad experiences and, in consequence, he became distrustful of other people in general. According to the portrait of the typical old man in the *Rhetoric*, we know that, for Aristotle too, old people usually tend to be overly suspicious (ἄπιστοι) precisely because of their experiences.<sup>151</sup> But Knemon, as an old man, offers an extreme version of Aristotle's stereotype: his misanthropic inclinations have become so accentuated that he has started to mistrust every human being completely and to refuse to share his life with others altogether. His bad character over the years could not be amended by anyone, as no one was allowed to speak to him. He kept himself, his property, and his daughter isolated and condemned to a pointless sterility, painful for his household and for the whole community.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> “A crucial feature of the thinking involved is the idea that *communicating* the ultimate preferability of post-reflective knowledge is the most profound way to benefit others, and that doing so is an integral part of living the best possible human life” (Gill 1996, p. 325).

<sup>148</sup> Arist. *EN* X 6, 1167b2-9. Gill 1998(a), especially pp. 318-319.

<sup>149</sup> Arist. *EN* VIII 1, 1155a15-22.

<sup>150</sup> Arist. *EN* VII 5, 1147a22.

<sup>151</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 13, 1389b21-22.

<sup>152</sup> Knemon and his daughter, however, are decent people. Knemon's daughter has been protected from the external world and she is virtuous as she does not know what malice and corruption are (*Men. Dysc.* 34-36). Also Knemon's character promotes an ethic of work and agricultural labour even if he advocates this to an extreme extent (*Men. Dysc.* 718-721).

Knemon's bad disposition has become a fixed trait of his character because Knemon abstracted himself from any human relationship and from the praise and blame of other people, gradually convincing himself that he alone offered the right example to follow. In this way, he deprived himself and his fellows of a truly happy life because he blocked any dialogue with them: his own and others' ethical, economical and reproductive development was virtually stopped. His behaviour was harmful not only for himself but for everyone around him and it did not produce any significant dialogue that could improve his or any other's understanding of what was right and wrong. When Knemon understands this, it is too late: his emotional disposition to distrust other people and his ingrained instinct to escape their presence can hardly be softened; however, the experiences which he was forced to share have given him some kind of understanding and directed his attention towards values and examples that he now recognises as good and which he should at least try to imitate.

Our understanding of Knemon is deepened by referring to the contrasting character of Sostratos, in the light of what has been said about Aristotle. Sostratos is open to everyone and every experience. What we learn from him is that, while one ought to be open to life's experiences and interpersonal relationships, it is also important to be able to select between them and not pursue one's desires indiscriminately. According to Aristotle, this trait in particular is a common characteristic of young people, who are prone to follow their various, changing desires in an impulsive and quick-tempered way.<sup>153</sup> Because of lack of experience, they are keen to take up all sorts of experiences that life offers them;<sup>154</sup> and this is how Sostratos behaves at the beginning of the play. Young people such as Sostratos, however, have an advantage; by contrast with older people such as Knemon, they enjoy living with others and are more ready to listen to other people's suggestions.

καὶ φιλόφιλοι καὶ φιλέταιροι μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων ἡλικιῶν διὰ τὸ χαίρειν τῷ συζῆν.

And more than other ages of life they are fond of friends and eager for companions because they enjoy living with others.<sup>155</sup>

If they learn how to take advantage of other people's company, they will also learn progressively how to soften their temper and to be good. While they are still young,

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<sup>153</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 12, 1389a2-12.

<sup>154</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 12, 1389a21-29.

<sup>155</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 12, 1389a35-b3.

because they do not yet have a consistently virtuous disposition, young people are more attentive to the opinion of others in their regard;<sup>156</sup> accordingly, they feel shame if they make mistakes as they are afraid of the criticisms of their φίλοι. At a young age, it is this feeling of shame that guides people's actions and choices rather than a clear understanding of what is good and what is bad.<sup>157</sup> This understanding will come with time, experience and education: we know from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that, if young people are guided by the correct education of their emotional dispositions, accompanied by learning and experience, they have a good chance of achieving finally that level of ethical understanding. Sostratos represents again a good example of this general picture: at the beginning of the play he is overly confident and he only follows his own judgement about getting whatever he wants. His meeting with Gorgias confronts him with a difficult situation and this enables him to see that his attitude has been impulsive and quick-tempered. He, therefore, decides to follow Gorgias' suggestions. We saw that, at the end of the play, Sostratos is not completely changed but he has had an ethically significant experience that has potentially taught him something. We also have the impression that the presence of a good friend such as Gorgias will probably lead him in the right direction.

### 3. Conclusions

I hope to have clarified the analogies between Aristotle and Menander in regards to character. In the first part of the chapter, I discussed how Menander constructs the characters of Knemon and Sostratos and how he presents the kind of problems that they exemplify. Both Knemon and Sostratos, for opposite reasons, lack the basic experience and understanding needed for a stable, virtuous character. Sostratos is a young man and his desires and inclinations need to be educated with the help of a more experienced friend such as, for instance, Gorgias. His ethical understanding will develop progressively if he continues to make good use of his resources and to listen to the feedback of his more expert friends. On the other hand, Knemon is an old misanthrope and, at the end of the play, we realise that Knemon's character will probably never change: Knemon's inclinations have been settled features of his character for a long time. At the end of the play, he progresses in ethical understanding but he cannot bring

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<sup>156</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* II 6, 1384a23-25.

<sup>157</sup> Arist. *EN* IV 15, 1128b16-23.

himself to do naturally what he has now understood to be good. Knemon's problem is the fact that he has lived in isolation for long time: no one had the chance to observe and correct his character discussing with him about the best way to live. This kind of behaviour has been a problem not just for him but for everyone who was around him: Knemon's desire to be isolated spoiled the happiness of his family and friends.

In Aristotle we have found analogous ideas: it is up to us how we make use of our natural inclinations and the goods that we happen to receive in life. Friends, as part of the goods given by fortune, are an indispensable ingredient of our happiness as they provide the possibility of example and dialogue. To talk and reflect together about the best way to act and live constitutes an essential ingredient of our own happiness and that of our friends. The *polis* presents, in a larger scale, an example of how a community of friends should work: to be part of a *polis* is to get together and communicate in order to contribute to each person's better understanding of what is good or not for the sake of mutual benefit and everyone's happiness. As in the *Dyscolos*, to exist outside this dialogue spoils one's own happiness because, being alone, one loses the opportunity to relate to others and, therefore, the chance to improve one's own ethical understanding. Also it makes less perfect the happiness of the community because other people will be deprived of the example, the point of view and, more generally, the support of that one member who has decided to live alone.

These observations on the importance of interpersonal public discourse about ethical values have further implications. Public performances, such as Menander's comedies, are themselves part of a shared discourse about what is right and praiseworthy and what is not. Menander's comedy, in particular, suggests cases and circumstances that are very close to what might happen in real life and he analyses them with a specific interest in mapping the psychology of his characters. As suggested in the Introduction,<sup>158</sup> this kind of drama, as far as we are aware, was different from anything that fourth-century Athenians had ever seen. It is possible to argue that watching this kind of play, in that particular context, the audience might have had the impression of observing something that might really have happened to someone. People might have been stimulated by the performance to reflect about the way in which figures did things on the stage and to think about how, instead, they (the members of the audience) would have done it.<sup>159</sup> The performance of a Menandrian comedy, therefore, could have been

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<sup>158</sup> See Introduction p. 18-23.

<sup>159</sup> See Pl. *Phlb.* 49e-50a and Bergson 1911, p. 135-196 for the kind of laughter stimulated in the audience by the errors of comic characters. See also Introduction, pp. 21-23.



an important part of the ethical debate that Aristotle considers indispensable in the life of every civic community.

Menander's comedy thus presents figures who match the audience's understanding of good or bad models of behaviour: they represent people who live like members of the audience. They are not heroes or gods; they are not absurd; they live in a world that is very similar to the audience's world,<sup>160</sup> and they think and make mistakes in a way which, very probably, the audience understood well. In this respect, Menander's comedy provides a kind of entertainment that is different from that offered by Aristophanes. We enjoy watching Menander's characters because we can clearly see what they get wrong from a privileged position and how they finally succeed in gaining understanding and overcoming the problems presented by the action. Consequently, to enjoy a happy ending properly, the audience needs to agree with the playwright about who is a good or a bad person; at the end of the comedy, everything must be resolved, ethically, as it should be. Everyone must feel happy about how things have turned out and, certainly, no one would feel happy seeing a bad person succeeding and a good person failing at the end of what we expect to be a comedy.<sup>161</sup> These observations explain why, during a tragic performance, we feel sorrow when we witness a good character's fall. In tragedy, it is more difficult to identify a clear-cut distinction between what is good and what is not. Tragic characters are presented as having motivation and reasons for action that we tend to follow and engage with emotionally, without necessarily forming a clear-cut view about their ethical status, even when their actions lead to disastrous consequences.<sup>162</sup> Consequently, what we feel at the end of a tragedy is pity and fear for the people represented; we see what went wrong but we cannot clearly condemn them or rejoice at their fall. Conversely, in Menander, we are able to do this as we are given evident indications about who deserves the happy ending and who does not; Knemon in the *Dyscolos* and Smikrines in the *Aspis* provide clear examples of this.

In conclusion, the way in which the playwright decides to draw the characters involved in the play is based on shared, communal beliefs about what is good and what is bad and, on this basis, the playwright knows what makes people rejoice or feel sorrow. Menander's comedies can also be seen as the public expression of those shared ethical beliefs. The interpersonal or public dialogue about ethical values and character-formation that they promote does not just play a role within the text of the plays. In

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<sup>160</sup> They are heroes belonging to the kind of 'low mimetic' mode, according to Frye 1957, p. 34.

<sup>161</sup> "Comedy hopes to spread laughter round its audience, and it is delighted to be interrupted by it always provided that it comes at the right places, and that it is exhaled in complicity and not antagonism" (Silk 1996, p. 190).

<sup>162</sup> Gill 1986, p. 261.

other words, these public performances constitute a forum by which playwright and the audience share values and observe examples of people with various degrees of ethical understanding. The question of the links between Menander's comedies and the broader context of ethical thought in the fourth century BC will be explored further in the conclusions to the thesis.

## CONCLUSIONS

In these final remarks, I would like to draw some conclusions about what has been said so far and to tackle more general issues that have been raised by the material analysed in the thesis and that could give scope for further research. I will, first, summarise the main results of my research on Aristotle and Menander and, second, I will suggest a possible research hypothesis that could be pursued in the light of this research. This hypothesis is too wide-ranging to explore fully within the scope of this doctoral thesis; but outlining it is a useful way to define the significance and the implications of the thesis, as well as to place it in a larger scholarly context.

### *1. The main ideas*

In the early chapters of this thesis, I started by analysing Menander's and Aristotle's treatment of the processes of theoretical and practical understanding. After having introduced the broader research context in Chapter 1, I focused, in Chapter 2, on the process of theoretical understanding and I pointed out that, for both Menander and Aristotle, a complete understanding of how things stand in the world or in the microcosm of the comic plot can only develop out of a combination of empirical evidence based on experience and reasoning that can give meaning to the bare sensory material. The successful conclusion of this thinking process explains everything that has been experienced before giving a unitary and final account of it, as happens in cases of Menandrian dramatic recognitions or in Aristotle's theory of scientific demonstrations. In this respect, I argue, Menandrian comedy also seems to suit Aristotle's aesthetic thought particularly well: watching Menander's comedies, the audience is led to an increasing understanding of the logic of the plot and the reasoning followed by the characters and achieves eventually with them a final understanding of how things stand and who people are.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Chapter 1, section 2 for further discussion on this topic.

I also examined the way in which characters in Menander's comedy seem to progress in their ethical understanding and how the audience is led to follow their ethical reasoning and the acknowledgement of their ethical mistakes that produces the eventual happy ending. At the end of the plot, the audience and the characters have a clear understanding of what went wrong, why people made mistakes and what should have been done to avoid the problems created by their wrong choices. Consequently, in Chapter 3, I focused my attention on Menander's and Aristotle's analogous treatment of ethical understanding. As in the case of theoretical understanding, successful ethical reasoning depends, to an important extent, on how we evaluate the specific particulars with which the action is involved. An adequate perception of what the circumstances of the action are depends on our cognitive faculties and our emotional responses to a given set of circumstances. It seems that, in both Menander's and Aristotle's presentation, we often make wrong ethical choices because emotions aroused in response to the perception of given circumstances hinder our correct ethical reasoning. Perceived particulars often stimulate excessive emotional responses; consequently, our reasoning is distorted because we do not evaluate the particulars of the action correctly.

The fact that we act in circumstances that are not clear or are unexpected does not make us any less responsible for our wrong ethical choices (Chapter 4). Chance and accidental ignorance, *Tύχη* and *Ἄγνοια*, provide us with opportunities for action that we should be able to use in the right way. Both Menander and Aristotle seem to agree in saying that a misfortune does not really affect the quality of our choices: what characterises our ethical deliberation as right or wrong is the reasoning that leads to it rather than the more or less fortunate result that we achieve through it. To an important extent, life's fortunate or unfortunate accidents are an indispensable ingredient of human life in that they provide us with occasions to exercise our ability to reason, to make choices and to see how other people go through the same process. Thus, accidental events provide us with the experience that, together with appropriate ethical reasoning, will progressively sharpen our ethical understanding.

In fact, both Menander and Aristotle seem to agree on the fact that we cannot say we are properly virtuous just because once, or occasionally, we have made the right choice. People such as Demeas or Polemon are often prevented from doing the right thing because their excessive temper overwhelms them. Although we understand from the play that they are fine people and they usually do fine actions, the events presented in the plot demonstrate that they do not show a consistently virtuous disposition: they often make wrong choices because they are not habituated to control their

temperamental inclinations. Truly virtuous agents exercise the full potential of their ethical understanding if, on every occasion, they respond in the right way and feel the right kind of emotion in the right way. Ethical understanding, therefore, like theoretical understanding, requires intellectual and ethical skills that need to be developed into a stable disposition which enables us to find the right solution to any given issue: Aristotle and Menander, as analysed in Chapter 5, seem to agree on this point. To this degree, the process of character formation is, for both Aristotle and Menander, up to us: we decide how to shape our character on the basis of the choices we make in life. The process is delicate, especially in the early stages, but with the help of more experienced friends, teachers and relatives, we may gradually become more capable of making the right choice according to an ethical understanding that increases with age and experience.<sup>2</sup> If, like old Knemon, we do not carry out this process properly and we indulge in bad habits, not listening to the suggestions of others, we risk preventing forever the possibility of developing a virtuous character: our bad inclinations will become deeply rooted habits and no reasoning would be able to make us change our way of life. Interpersonal debate about what is right and wrong is, therefore, indispensable for adequate character-development and, I argue, the New comedy of Menander, being a public performance, forms part of this debate. Living a shared life and engaging in dialogue with other people, with members of the same family, friends or fellow citizens, means finding together with them the right way to live, aiming at understanding what it means to live a good and happy life and to base our actions and objectives on this ideal. This sort of dialogue produces mutual benefits for the individual and the other people involved as it contributes to everyone's understanding and, consequently, everyone's happiness.

In conclusion, I hope that my analysis has shown that Menander and Aristotle share a general vision of human nature and happiness. They seem to have a similar understanding of how people reason and make choices and how this affects their life and character. As already indicated, in Menander and in Aristotle, the critical point, in the process that leads people to practical and theoretical understanding, occurs when human emotions and inclinations become involved in this process. Thus, the specific individual sensation (*αἴσθησις*) of a particular that directs our understanding is closely connected to the specific individual desires and emotions that one feels in that context.<sup>3</sup> When the agent's mind (*ψυχὴ*) is affected by a given perception it can sometimes be

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5, section 4 and Arist. *EN* III 5, 1112b11-24.

<sup>3</sup> Sherman 1997; Cooper 1999; Konstan 2006(b); See also Nussbaum 2001 and Price 2009 for cognate modern theories and Chapter 3, section 2 for further discussion and bibliography on this topic.

imagined as forming a dialogue between reason, emotion and desire<sup>4</sup> on what perception suggests at any given moment. For instance, in the case of *Samia* as analysed in Chapter 3, Demeas' anger and his love for Chrysis underlie his misunderstanding and the formation of defective practical reasoning based on what he has seen and heard. This misunderstanding leads Demeas to make a mistake and to behave badly with respect to others.

In turn, the elements that contribute to the agent's final decision (reason, emotion and desires) are also involved in the explanation that the agent gives of his choices to himself and others; to an important extent, these factors are part of the knowledge that the agent has of himself and his character. For instance, at the end of *Samia*, Demeas, like most Menandrian characters such as Polemon and Knemon, shows that he has understood his errors, he is also able to give an account of what led him into making a mistake and promising not to do it again. In Chapter 5, I noted that sharing this kind of understanding with other people helps to improve mutual understanding of the right way to act and to live; the final happy ending, in Menander, produces better understanding for both the audience and the characters involved.<sup>5</sup> This shared interest in life's objectives and goals is an indispensable ingredient of human happiness. For instance, the case of Knemon, in Chapter 5, has shown clearly that one's happiness also depends on the ability to share one's understanding with others in order to build a shared vision of life's aims and objectives that can guide our actions and, thus, improve our ethical understanding, giving each person the chance to live the best possible life.

## *2. Further implications of the thesis*

As noted in the Introduction, the material analysed in this thesis raises broader research questions. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that there are significant analogies between Aristotle and Menander and that these analogies reflect a shared set of ideas that informs their work and thought. A further question that could be asked is how far the similarities that I have identified are limited to these two authors, and how far they are common to the thought-world of the fourth, or fifth and fourth centuries BC, in Athens? Furthermore, can we identify a significant degree of change or development in

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<sup>4</sup> See Gill 1996, pp. 356-383; 400-443 and 2006, ch. 4. See also Chapter 5 for further discussion and bibliography on this topic.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1, section 2.

these ideas during the fourth century or between the fifth and fourth centuries? Depending on the answer given to these questions, one might also ask what are the main large-scale social or intellectual factors underlying this complex of shared ideas or promoting change within them.

One element that should be considered further is the relationship between Menander's comedy and previous forms of drama. As I have suggested in the main chapters of this thesis, and have illustrated by reference to selected plays, Menander's comedy appears to differ significantly in tone and themes from Old Attic comedy and, in a different way, from fifth-century Attic tragedy. The way in which Menander presents his characters to the audience, focusing on the right or wrong formation of their choices and their understanding of the situation, seems to be a distinctive feature of Menander's theatre that makes his work different from previous kinds of drama. In this thesis, I have not undertaken detailed comparisons between Menander and fifth-century Attic drama regarding the ethical and psychological ideas that each presents, but I believe that it would also be worth pursuing this kind of inquiry. Depending on the answer given to this question it might be asked whether the differences that we find between Menander and fifth-century drama can be explained by apparent changes in the aesthetic attitudes of Athenian audiences in the fourth century. If so, we might want to pursue the question whether this reflects a broader shift of ideas between the fifth and fourth centuries BC in Athens.

To respond to these research questions it would be necessary to look at other kinds of literary sources produced around the same period. The main body of evidence that I suggest should be examined is that of Athenian law-court oratory from the late fifth to the end of the fourth century. The genre of comedy, in the format found in Menander, reflects situations of everyday life and presents everyday people that feel and think in the same way as people in the audience. In this respect, the topics and situations treated in comedy are analogous to law-court speeches: they present ordinary people performing (good or bad) actions and being presented to a jury as good or bad characters on the basis of shared beliefs that are formalised in a specific legal framework.<sup>6</sup>

The situations presented in Attic oratory express similar ideas to those that appear in Aristotle's philosophical works and in Menander's comedies. The rhetorical technique of these speeches is directed at explaining to the jury the point of view of the speaker and also trying to arouse the same emotions that he felt and the same

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<sup>6</sup> See Kahan and Nussbaum 1996.

understanding he had of a given situation in order to produce persuasion and agreement.<sup>7</sup> The defendant must be presented, first of all, as someone who did something according to reasoning that was ethically right and, in their turn, the jurors need to decide if this is justified or not on the basis of the evidence provided.<sup>8</sup>

The situation is similar to that of Menandrian comedies with the relevant difference that the audience there expects a happy ending and does not need to give a final formal judgment about the case:<sup>9</sup> this is what finally enables the release of laughter during the performance. In Menandrian comedy, people in the audience are shown figures that, typically, get into trouble because they carry out wrong reasoning. The audience's laughter indicates that they have realised that this reasoning was actually wrong and that this involves the comic character in a set of problems that are finally resolved.

Both [comedy and forensic oratory] put the audience in the position of judge; both made extensive use of competition in arguments. The audience, however, had a greater tendency to depersonalise the issue under discussion.<sup>10</sup>

However, apart from the similarities that New comedy and forensic oratory share with each other in structure and context of delivery, study of forensic speeches could offer relevant evidence for the questions outlined earlier. The analysis of speeches belonging to different periods, namely the late fifth and the fourth century, might help us to identify a different way of thinking about human nature and of interpreting the motivational chain that brings an agent to perform an action or to understand a situation in a given way. More specifically, this analysis might give insight about the weight given to the agent's perceptions, emotions and desires in explaining the reasoning that brought him to make a certain choice or to understand (or misunderstand) a specific situation. Thus, study of these speeches could offer insights on shared ideas about the functioning of the human mind and the cognitive and ethical processes involved.

In forensic speeches, the defendant often tries to construct his analysis of the case on the basis of the fact that the adversary, contrary to what he himself did, did not act according to ethically rigorous reasoning. The opponent is often attacked on the

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<sup>7</sup> See *Lys. Or.* 1, 17 and 32, 18-19; *Isoc. Or.* 11, 4-5; *Is.* I, 7.

<sup>8</sup> For extended discussion of these features of Attic oratory, see Dover 1974, pp. 23-36; Humphreys 1985 and 1988; Garner 1987; Cartledge, Millett and Todd 1990.

<sup>9</sup> For similar comparison between oratory and drama see essays of Bers and Harding in Worthington 1994; Hall 1995; Goldhill 1999. See Scafuro 1997 for a discussion of the 'forensic' dimension of Greek and Roman comedy.

<sup>10</sup> Humphreys 1985, p. 323.



ground of his wrong evaluation of the circumstances. He is often accused of having made a mistake because he was misled by emotions, such as, for instance, erotic desire or desire for wealth,<sup>11</sup> and he did not make a correct judgment about what was required in a given situation. In some cases, the opponent is also accused of having felt the wrong kind of emotion and this emotional lapse indicates that he has a bad character.<sup>12</sup> What is important to demonstrate in a forensic speech is that the opponent has a defective character and the defendant has a good one; the delineation of the ethical character of the people involved is often seen as a key element in trying to win the case.<sup>13</sup>

Further research on these topics, in the light of the completed research on Aristotle and Menander offered here, could suggest an answer to the research questions outlined earlier. If we can find in Attic oratory a set of ideas that are closely analogous to that found in both Aristotle and Menander, this would help us to determine how far such ideas are common to fourth- (and late fifth-) century Athenian culture as a whole. Also, since the speeches to be examined are from different dates within this period, close scrutiny would enable us to see if there is evidence of a change in thinking during this period. In addition, this material would also provide evidence towards a further question noted at the end of Chapter 5. This is the question whether the focus on the interplay between knowledge and character found in Aristotle and Menander (and perhaps also in Athenian culture of the late fifth and fourth century as a whole) reflects distinctive features of socio-political and cultural life in Athens. Specifically, we might ask whether they reflect the focus on character and on good or bad ethical understanding that is built into the Athenian system of large-scale, semi-public jury courts, which is peculiar to Athens in this period.

My thesis has shown that Aristotle and Menander share a similar thought-word and analogous ideas about human nature and happiness and that these ideas inform their works and thought. The objective has not been to demonstrate the possible direct influence of Aristotle on Menander but to identify a set of ideas shared by the two writers. The degree of similarity demonstrated here gives scope, as just indicated, for further enquiry on the significance and implications of these analogies. Thus, I hope that my thesis can be used as a firm basis for further projects such as the one just outlined,

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<sup>11</sup> *Lys. Or.* 32, 17 and I, 26; *D. Or.* 27 I, 50-51 and 45 I, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Lys. Or.* 24.2.

<sup>13</sup> *Lys. Or.* 4, 8-9; *Isoc.* 1, 10, *Is. Or.* 4, 27-29. For the art of describing characters (*ēthopoiia*) in forensic oratory see Süss 1910; Usher 1965; Russell 1990.

and, therefore, as a possible stepping stone for charting the history of ideas on ethical understanding in a crucial period of Greek civilization.

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