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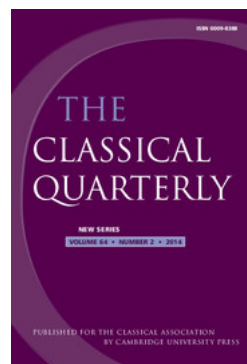
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ARISTOTLE'S USE OF Ἀμαρτία.

THE review of Prof. Bywater's new edition of the *Poetics* (*Classical Review*, December, 1910) once more raised the question of the interpretation of Ἀμαρτία in Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero (*Poetics*, Ch. xiii.).

On the explanation of this important notion depends our conception of the essence of tragedy as presented by Aristotle; but the two latest editors of the *Poetics* in England, Professors Butcher and Bywater, offer fundamentally different interpretations, the former translating 'error or frailty,' implying moral guilt, the latter 'error of judgment.'

In view of these facts it seems worth while to endeavour to throw further light on the subject by examining Aristotle's use of Ἀμαρτία in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to see whether any consistency can be traced in the use of the term, and whether the signification in the *Ethics* is in accord with the passage in the *Poetics*.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Ἀμαρτία occurs five times, and in the sixth passage in the connection παιδικαὶ Ἀμαρτίαι with which we are not now concerned; Ἀμαρτημα is found twice.

I shall discuss the passages successively.

- (1) *Eth. Nic.* III. i. 14: ἕτερον δ' ἔοικεν καὶ τὸ δι' ἄγνοιαν πράττειν τοῦ ἀγνοοῦντα· ὁ γὰρ μεθύων ἢ ὀργίζομενος οὐ δοκεῖ δι' ἄγνοιαν πράττειν ἀλλὰ διὰ τι τῶν εἰρημένων, οὐκ εἰδὼς δὲ ἀλλ' ἀγνοῶν. ἀγνοεῖ μὲν οὖν πᾶς ὁ μοχθηρὸς ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ ὧν ἀφεκτέον, καὶ διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην Ἀμαρτίαν ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοὶ γίνονται.

Here Ἀμαρτίαν clearly refers to ἀγνοεῖ and can have no other meaning than 'error of judgment.' In the following paragraph ἄγνοια is analyzed into ἡ καθόλου and ἡ καθ' ἑκαστα. Any action arising from the former ignorance is considered voluntary, from the latter involuntary. All vice is caused by ignorance of what is fitting (ἃ δεῖ πράττειν). This theory is in keeping with the old Socratic doctrine 'Virtue is knowledge,' which also forms the foundation of Aristotle's system of Ethics, though his followers soon afterwards seem to have departed from this position, as in the *Eudemian Ethics* the full Aristotelian rigour on this point is lost (cf. *Eth. Eud.* II. chs. vii. and viii.).

Butcher (*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry*, p. 318) ascribes to Ἀμαρτία a special meaning: 'the moral Ἀμαρτία proper, a fault or error where the act is

conscious and intentional, but not deliberate. Such are acts committed in anger or passion.' In a note he adduces our passage in support of this special meaning: 'In *Eth. Nic.* III. i. 1110 b 6 the man who acts in anger or drunkenness acts *ἀγνοῶν* or *οὐκ εἰδώς*, though not *δι' ἄγνοιαν*: the acts, therefore, are *ἀμαρτήματα*.'

However, Butcher does not quote the full passage and has therefore lost sight of the true signification of *ἀγνοῶν*. In the context it is immediately followed by *ἀγνοεῖ μὲν οὖν πᾶς ὁ μοχθηρὸς ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ ὧν ἀφεκτέον, καὶ διὰ τὴν τοιαύτην ἀμαρτίαν ἄδικοι καὶ ὅλως κακοὶ γίνονται*.

The *ὀργιζόμενος καὶ μεθύων* are therefore considered *μοχθηροί*, and *ἀγνοῶν* is here used in its widest meaning with reference to the *ἄγνοια ἢ καθόλου* which makes the action *ἐκόν*.

There is nothing in the passage to prove that the acts of any one *ὀργιζόμενος* or *μεθύων*, or acts committed in anger or passion, were considered by Aristotle as *ἀμαρτήματα*, while we have a definite statement to the contrary in *Eth. Nic.* V. viii. 1135 b 22, where the proper distinction between *ἀμάρτημα* and *ἀδίκημα* is accurately defined.

Besides, if *ἀμαρτία* were here synonymous with *κακία*, the sentence would contain a tautology, while the trend of the whole passage makes it clear that *διὰ τοιαύτην ἀμαρτίαν* refers to *ἀγνοεῖ* and is therefore virtually the same as *διὰ τοιαύτην ἄγνοιαν*.

- (2) *Eth. Nic.* III. vii. 3: *ἔστιν δὲ μᾶλλον καὶ ἥττον ταῦτα φοβεῖσθαι, καὶ ἔτι τὰ μὴ φοβερά ὡς τοιαῦτα φοβεῖσθαι. γίνεται δὲ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἢ μὲν ὅτι ὁ οὐ δεῖ, ἢ δὲ ὅτι οὐχ ὡς δεῖ ἢ δὲ ὅτι οὐχ ὅτε, ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ περὶ τὰ θαρραλέα.*

It is evident that *ἀμαρτία* here has the same meaning as *ἄγνοια ἢ καθ' ἕκαστα*, distinguished in Ch. I from the *ἄγνοια ἢ καθόλου* (which makes an action *ἐκόν*), viz., 'a mistake,' 'an error of judgment,' with regard to particular circumstances.

The argument is as follows: true courage is based on accurate knowledge of all dangerous circumstances and conscious victory over all feeling of fear. Wrong judgment with regard to some of the conditions (*τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἢ μὲν . . .*) does not make a coward or a hero.

- (3) *Eth. Nic.* VI. viii. 7: *ἔτι ἢ ἀμαρτία ἢ περὶ τὸ καθόλου ἐν τῷ βουλευσασθαι ἢ περὶ τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον· ἢ γὰρ ὅτι πάντα τὰ βαρύσταθμα ὕδατα φαῦλα, ἢ ὅτι τοδὶ βαρυσταθμον.*

The addition of *ἐν τῷ βουλευσασθαι*, and also of the illustration taken from physics, proves that nothing is meant but the purely mental error either in the universal or in the particular judgment.

- (4) *Eth. Nic.* VI. ix. 3: *οὐδὲ δὴ δόξα ἢ εὐβουλία οὐδεμία. ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ὁ μὲν κακῶς βουλευόμενος ἀμαρτάνει, ὁ δ' εὖ ὁρθῶς βουλεύεται, δῆλον ὅτι*

ὁρθότης τις ἢ εὐβουλία ἐστίν, οὐτ' ἐπιστήμης δὲ οὔτε δόξης· ἐπιστήμης μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁρθότης (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἁμαρτία), δόξης δ' ὁρθότης ἀλήθεια.

Here our term appears in a similar connection with science: 'In "science" there can be no question of correctness (*nor of error*).' There is no room for deliberation; it simply requires knowledge.

- (5) *Eth. Nic.* VII. iv. 2: σημείον δὲ· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀκρασία ψέγεται οὐχ ὡς ἁμαρτία μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς κακία τις ἢ ἀπλῶς οὔσα ἢ κατὰ τι μέρος, τούτων δ' οὐθείς.

There are very good reasons for doubting the genuineness of Book VII. as a whole, since internal as well as external evidence points rather to an Eudemian than to an Aristotelian origin, and therefore any quotation from it cannot carry great weight in an argument like the present one.

However, the passage is of some importance, as it faithfully reflects the master's views on temperance and incontinence expounded in *Eth. Nic.* III. x. Here we find the virtue 'temperance' carefully defined and its meaning limited to right conduct with regard to some bodily pleasures, viz., those of touch and taste (Ch. x. 8).

Conduct—right or wrong—with regard to all other pleasures (those of the mind, like enjoyment of wealth or fame, and bodily pleasures, like the enjoyment of music) is eliminated by Aristotle from the discussion of virtues and vices in particular. It lies outside the sphere of virtue or vice; no moral goodness or guilt attaches to it.

For this reason Butcher, in his edition of the *Poetics* already quoted, p. 319, note 2, was right in remarking: 'Thus ἁμαρτία is opposed to κακία.' But in the text to which the note is appended he seems to regard it as 'a defect of character' and declares: 'Under this head would be included any human frailty or moral weakness, a flaw of character that is not tainted by a vicious purpose.' In support of this statement he quotes our passage, *Eth. Nic.* VII. iv. 2.

However, if we take the sentence in connection with the preceding paragraph, it is evident why the words οὐχ ὡς ἁμαρτία μόνον are inserted and what is meant by ἁμαρτία in contrast to the following: ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς κακία τις.

The sentence states a proof: incontinence with regard to money or honour is not called incontinence simply but with a qualifying epithet, and is only called incontinence by analogy of the real profligacy (with regard to pleasures of touch and taste). This is proved (σημείον δὲ) by the fact that 'incontinence is censured *not only* as an error (supply: as is the case with incontinence in regard to money or honour) but as a kind of vice.'

The contrast between the real incontinence and the incontinence in metaphorical sense which needs the qualification with regard to money or honour, etc., suggested to the writer the addition of the words οὐχ ὡς

ἀμαρτία μόνον as opposed to ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς κακία τις. The real incontinence is censured as κακία, which includes ἀμαρτία; incontinence in the metaphorical sense (with regard to enjoyment of money or honour, etc.) is censured simply as an ἀμαρτία, not as κακία.

As we saw, in *Eth. Nic.* III. x., temperance and its opposite in metaphorical meaning were defined as lying outside the field of virtue or vice; with them there can be no question of moral goodness or guilt. The only meaning therefore which ἀμαρτία can bear in our passage is: error of judgment without any suggestion of moral defect or flaw of character.

From the comparison of these five passages it seems to me that Aristotle is perfectly consistent in his use of the term ἀμαρτία throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the two places where ἀμάρτημα occurs are in accord with our interpretation of ἀμαρτία. In fact the first gives an accurate definition of the word in contrast both to ἀδίκημα and to ἀτύχημα.

Eth. Nic. V. viii. 6: τριῶν δὲ οὐσῶν βλαβῶν τῶν ἐν ταῖς κοινωνίαις, τὰ μὲν μετ' ἀγνοίας ἀμαρτήματά ἐστιν, ὅταν μήτε δὴν μήτε δ' οὐ μήτε οὐ ἔνεκα ὑπέλαβε πράξει . . . ὅταν μὲν οὖν παραλόγως ἢ βλάβῃ γένηται, ἀτύχημα, ὅταν δὲ μὴ παραλόγως, ἄνευ δὲ κακίας, ἀμάρτημα (ἀμαρτάνει μὲν γὰρ ὅταν ἢ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτῷ ἢ τῆς αἰτίας, ἀτυχεῖ δ' ὅταν ἔξωθεν)· ὅταν δὲ εἰδὼς μὲν μὴ προβουλεύσας δὲ, ἀδίκημα, οἷον ὅσα τε διὰ θυμὸν, καὶ ἄλλα πάθῃ, ὅσα ἀναγκαῖα ἢ φυσικὰ συμβαίνει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις . . . , ὅταν δ' ἐκ προαιρέσεως, ἄδικος καὶ μοχθηρός.

There is no reason to adopt, with Susemihl, Jackson's reading (ἢ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτῷ) τῆς ἀγνοίας for τῆς αἰτίας. The change would even materially alter the meaning of the passage. If the ἀρχὴ τῆς ἀγνοίας is in the doer, he is in a way responsible. In *Eth. Nic.* III. v. any one acting δι' ἄγνοιαν τὴν καθόλου is regarded as acting voluntarily, but then there would be no distinction between ἀμάρτημα and ἀδίκημα which it is the very object of the passage to define.

The reading τῆς ἀγνοίας must have influenced Butcher, as he quotes this passage in support of the following statement (*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry*, p. 317): 'As a synonym of ἀμάρτημα and as applied to a single act, it (viz. ἀμαρτία) denotes an error due to inadequate knowledge of particular circumstances. According to strict usage we should add the qualification, *that the circumstances are such as might have been known.*' If we read with the MSS. τῆς αἰτίας I see no ground for this qualification.

On the meaning of αἰτία in this connection Burnet in his edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics* remarks: 'Surely αἰτία here means simply "the charge," "the offence" as often in the orators.'

But retained in its primary sense of 'cause' it presents no difficulty: ἢ ἀρχὴ τῆς αἰτίας = *principium causae*. Though the meaning 'offence' would not be contrary to the sense of the passage, 'cause' agrees better with the definition of ἀμάρτημα as distinct from ἀτύχημα.

Burnet adds in a note to the passage: 'ἀμαρτήματα is here used in its widest sense, including ἀτύχημα.'

However, it is the purpose of the passage to analyze the term ἀμαρτήματα, at first loosely applied (1135 b 12), into two distinct notions: ἀτύχημα and ἀμάρτημα proper. The difference is that the former takes place παραλόγως, the latter μὴ παραλόγως ἄνευ δὲ κακίας, which definition is further explained in parenthesis (ἀμαρτάνει μὲν γὰρ ὅταν ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτῷ ᾗ τῆς αἰτίας, ἀτυχεῖ δὲ ὅταν ἔξωθεν).

The true distinction therefore between these two conceptions is that though wrong is done unintentionally in both cases, the deed is called ἀμάρτημα when any one is the agent, is the *principium causae* (cp. Peters' translation: 'when he sets the train of events in motion'). The hurt comes about μὴ παραλόγως, i.e. the person in question knew to a certain extent what the result of his action would be as he was the agent, but did not expect any evil consequences (ἄνευ δὲ κακίας, 'without evil intent'). For instance, if I give a friend a glass of wine and he drinks the wine which was poisoned without my knowledge, the result takes place, in a way, μὴ παραλόγως, for I knew he would drink it. The hurt comes about μετ' ἀγνοίας, but ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς αἰτίας was in me since I handed it to him, and the deed is therefore a ἀμάρτημα. If my friend had taken the glass from the sideboard it would have been an ἀτύχημα.

If μὴ παραλόγως were taken in its full meaning without any further explanation, the addition ἄνευ δὲ κακίας would be contradictory and ἀμάρτημα synonymous with ἀδίκημα. This is the reason why the phrase μὴ παραλόγως is further explained by ὅταν ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτῷ ᾗ τῆς αἰτίας, thus limiting the sense of the expression, which could otherwise be easily misunderstood.

The distinction therefore accurately drawn in this passage is completely in accord with the conception of ἀμαρτία throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the only difference being that ἀμάρτημα means the act itself which is a result of ἀμαρτία, 'the error of judgment.'

The same signification is apparent in the last passage where ἀμάρτημα occurs:

Eth. Nic. V. x. 4: αἴτιον δ' ὅτι ὁ μὲν νόμος καθόλου πᾶς, περὶ ἐνίων δ' οὐχ οἶόν τε ὀρθῶς εἰπεῖν καθόλου. ἐν οἷς οὖν ἀνάγκη μὲν εἰπεῖν καθόλου, μὴ οἶόν τε δὲ ὀρθῶς, τὸ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεον λαμβάνει ὁ νόμος, οὐκ ἀγνοῶν τὸ ἀμαρτανόμενον. καὶ ἔστιν οὐδὲν ἥττον ὀρθῶς· τὸ γὰρ ἀμάρτημα οὐκ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ οὐδ' ἐν τῷ νομοθέτῃ ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ φύσει τοῦ πράγματός ἐστιν· εὐθὺς γὰρ τοιαύτη ἡ τῶν πρακτῶν ὕλη ἐστίν.

The sense is clear: Every law is laid down in general terms while there are matters about which it is impossible to speak correctly in general terms. So with regard to special cases the law will often be found deficient, but this defect, this mistake (τὸ γὰρ ἀμάρτημα) does not lie in the law nor in the lawgiver, 'but in the nature of the subject-matter, being necessarily involved in the very conditions of human action' (Peters' translation).

Therefore, as the law could not possibly be correct with regard to all special cases and no one is responsible for the defect, ἀμάρτημα here must express the same idea as in the definition quoted above: a mistake made in consequence of wrong judgment (ἀμαρτία), but in this case the error of judgment is due to insufficiency of the human mind, since it is superhuman to frame a law absolutely perfect in its application to all particular cases.

If we now compare the Aristotelian use of ἀμαρτία in the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the passage in the *Poetics* (Ch. xiii.) where the character of the ideal hero of a tragedy is defined, we must, I think, come to the conclusion that the sense of the paragraph will not admit of any other interpretation of the term than that of 'error of judgment.'

It is expressly stated that though 'the tragic hero should arouse pity and fear,' 'pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune and fear by that of one like ourselves' (1453 a 5) and further that the hero should be μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινὰ . . .

We have here then the same contrast of ἀμαρτία to κακία as in *Eth. Nic.* VII. 4. 1148 a 2, and if pity is to be aroused 'by undeserved misfortune,' how then can the conception of ἀμαρτία imply any moral guilt, however slight? The hero must not be a paragon of virtue, but thoroughly human; yet as soon as he is morally responsible in any way for the deed which causes his suffering, his misfortune is not undeserved. This surely is the essence of tragedy: suffering without moral guilt, yet not simply of a hero overwhelmed by disaster, ἔξωθεν, but—in accordance with the accurate distinction drawn in *Eth. Nic.* V. viii. 7—the hero suffers because ἡ ἀρχὴ [ῆν] ἐν αὐτῷ τῆς αἰτίας.

The tragic idea lies both in the fact that the hero is the agent, the cause of his own ruin, and that the disaster is not simply an accident befalling an individual, but a natural consequence of truly human actions: the hero's error must represent a fault which is universally human (φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμιον). But what is more universally human than error of judgment, the insufficiency of the human mind to cope with the mysterious complex of this world, as the player-king in *Hamlet* says: 'Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own'?

In this sense there is also a close connection between ἀμαρτία and the tragic conception of ὕβρις in the older Greek dramatists: the intellectual presumption of man to rely on the resources of his mind to direct his life, a tendency which brings more darkness than light:

ὕβρις γὰρ ἐξανθοῦσ' ἐκάρπωσε σταχὺν
ἄτης, ὅθεν πάγκλαντον ἔξαμᾶ θέρος.

Aesch. *Persae*, vv. 821-22.

Furthermore, if our conception of ἀμαρτία were not the true essence of tragedy, how ever could tragic irony play such an important part in the

composition of a model drama? Where is the force of tragic irony in a hero who brings on his ruin by his own scheming, unless we see him commit a fatal error of judgment at the very time he is relying on his intelligence to direct his actions?

These remarks naturally lead up to a discussion of the drama which as is generally admitted, Aristotle had in mind when outlining the principal rules for the composition of a tragedy and on the interpretation of which, therefore, our conception of Aristotle's theory must to a certain extent depend: viz., *Oedipus Rex*. Butcher finds it, of course, difficult to reconcile his interpretation of ἁμαρτία with the plot of Sophocles' masterpiece, and I too think there can be no reasonable doubt that Oedipus is represented as morally innocent: the slaying of Laios and the marriage with his mother was purely a mistake, an error of judgment.

This, however, might also be called an accident, though fatal, but his greatest error on which the whole action of the drama turns and which is worked out with exquisite and elaborate tragic irony, is his perverse persistence, in spite of all warning, in unveiling the mystery and finding the murderer of Laios.

Oedipus is thoroughly human: an imperious ruler with much will-power and strength of mind. However, the fault which is the cause of his destruction is no specific sin attaching to him as an individual, but the universally human one of blindly following the light of one's own intellect.

I do not understand how in the case of Oedipus ἁμαρτία could possibly be explained as a defect in character or moral flaw, nor how, even suppose his misfortune were caused by a hasty temper and anger, a drama could be truly tragic which presents such terrible suffering as punishment for so small a fault.

I am convinced that the conception of ἁμαρτία as moral weakness forming the basis of Aristotle's tragic idea is as persistent a legend as the theory of the Three Unities proved to be for several centuries. It would be an interesting study to trace its origin and history.

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