

Hybris, History, Tragedy and Freedom: From the Sacrifice of Freedom to the Freedom of Sacrifice*

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I. Introduction

If the discourse of the ancient Greek philosophy reaches its limits in seeking the consciousness of the universe, the self-awareness of man, and the organization of statehood, then the art of poetic language, especially Homeric and tragic poetry, approaches the historical experience of both the individual and society over time, i.e. history, drawing lessons, messages, ways of life, and eternally valuable insights about the essence of human existence – i.e., freedom. By drawing some examples from Homeric poems, tragedy, and history, we shall try to understand the tragic discourse that condenses and captures the historical experience. The key concept that connects historical action, the way history lives, with the essential core of tragedy is *hybris*.

* The present article's line of inquiry already took shape in the mid-1980s, within the process of a systematic approach to concepts and in the context of teaching the subject of Essay Writing (Expression of Ideas) to candidates preparing for admission to tertiary education. Subsequently, the topic was presented in a more structured manner at philosophical seminars and conferences in Athens (School of Philosophy of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Municipality of Athens Cultural Centre, and the Parnassos Literary Society) and on Ikaria. Gratitude is due to my son Dimitris, who collected transcribed presentations and various notes of mine, thereby contributing decisively to the final form of the present text.

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Our reflections stem from the premise that history, like a pendulum, swings from one extreme to the other. Each extreme is essentially a negative transcendence of history, that is, it risks being a hybris, which is somehow “balanced” by the other end, the second hybris. Such a mechanistic movement describes history more as irrational nature¹, rather than as something that also encompasses man as a rational being². That is, if history is the description of the transition from one extreme to the other, and especially from one hybris to another, in which way man participates in history? Is he carried along by the waves of historical “evolution”, or is there a possibility for human beings to be differentiated and liberated from the prison of the hybris? Do they have at their disposal other possible choices to exercise freedom³? In what follows, we will examine some poetic and historical proposals of exodus from this tragedy of hybris.

II. Poetical Testimonies

Greek tragedy is built on hybris and the chain of hybris following suit, as the tragic poet’s conscience, dragging along not only the participants but also history as a whole, seeks a way out of the initial fall, out of evil and the ensuing sequence of acts of hybris. We will briefly refer to mythological material found in the Homeric epics and tragedy further

1. For a relevant and pertinent observation with further references, see A. D. Vasilakis and D. A. Vasilakis, «Κόσμος: διακόσμηση ἢ ἐκ τοῦ μηδενὸς δημιουργία; Μερικὲς συνέπειες», *Ἀντίφωνο/Antifono*, <https://antifono.gr/kosmos-diakosmisi-i-ek-toy-midenos-dimioyrgia-me-rikes-synepeies/> [24.04.2020], note 40.

2. While some seeds of predestination can be found in the writings of Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo points out that: “*nihil tam in nostra potestate, quam ipsa voluntas est*” (cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, III, 3, 7 PL, as well as J.-L. Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, transl. J. L. Kosky, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2012, p. 162). The Stoic philosophers had already provided arguments to reconcile the concept of necessity with that of freedom.

3. For the various meanings of the term *freedom*, to which we will refer below, see also Anna Kelesidou-Galanou, *Οἱ μῦθοι τῆς ἐλευθερίας*, Athens 1977, and Elli Pappa, *Σπουδὲς στὸ θέμα τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Ἡ ἔννοια τῆς ἐλευθερίας στὸν προσωκρατικὸ ὀλισμὸ*, Filippotis Publications, Athens 1985.

below. At this point, we are concerned with both the inherent tragic dimensions of ancient Greek myths as well as the ways that the tragic poets have exploited the various variations of these myths. Aeschylus is famously reported to have described his own plays as nothing more than “slices from Homer’s great banquet”⁴. Having taken into consideration this broader tragic perspective, let us recall some characteristic cases from the Trojan cycle and its concentric cycle of the Atreides.

Paris commits *hybris* by breaking the unity of the nuclear communion between male and female, Menelaus and Helen – an act of *hybris* that Homer resolves by restoring this rupture with the unity of the couple Penelope and Odysseus⁵. Meanwhile, in the context of the consecutive acts of *hybris*, Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon respond to Paris by committing yet another *hybris*, the war and destruction of Troy. During the decade-long carnage and the death of so many warriors on both sides, Paris’s brother, Hector, also loses his life at the hands of Achilles. The successive extremes, the mutual derailments and deviations are “balanced”

4. Cf. Atheneus, *Δειπνοσοφισταί* VIII, 347e and M. Silk, *Homer: The Iliad* (A Student Guide), CUP, Cambridge 2004 (=1987), p. 5.

5. From the division and rupture of the nuclear society and unity of the *I* with *you* (*Iliad*), Homer returns to the reunification of the *I* and *you*, that is, to the notion of co-existing as a restoration of the unity of the person (*Odyssey*). Existence is therefore understood on the basis of coexistence; the awareness of this fact expresses an essential function of love (cf. also N. A. Nisiotis, *Φιλοσοφία τῆς Θρησκείας καὶ Φιλοσοφικὴ Θεολογία. Σκέψεις ἐπὶ τοῦ προβλήματος τῆς θέσεως τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐν τῇ συστηματικῇ θεολογία*, Athens 1965, p. 45, and M. P. Begzos, *Ὁ Λόγος ὡς Διάλογος: μιὰ προσωπογράφηση τοῦ Νίκου Νησιώτη*, [Ἐκκλησία-Κοινωνία-Οἰκουμένη. 2], P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 126, note 3). (See also, G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts* § 158, p. 307: „Liebe heißt überhaupt das Bewußtsein meiner Einheit mit einem anderen...“. Cf. A. Bundagandu Tekilazaya SJ, *Hegels „Philosophie des Rechts“ als Idee geordneter Freiheit. Eine Herausforderung für Afrika?*, Herbert Utz Verlag, München 2018, p. 117, and Io. Sykoutris’s monumental introduction to Plato, *Συμπόσιον, κείμενον-μετάφρ.-ἐρμηνεία* Io. Sykoutris, [Ἑλληνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη, Ἄρ. 1], Academy of Athens – Hestia Bookshop Publications, Athens 1976, p. 123*, note 1. Of course, this Hegelian “quotation” is superfluous for interpreting love, since we have a legacy of many other texts, such as Paul’s Hymn of Love: *1 Cor.* 13, 1-13). As an aside, we could say that Odysseus is the prodigal son of the Greek world. Just as the prodigal son in the Gospel parable returned because he had a father who was waiting for him, so Odysseus returns to his faithful Penelope. (Indeed, the fruit of their marriage, Telemachus, contributes decisively to this parental reunion). It seems, then, that it is not enough for someone to be with themselves. They must also be welcomed with open arms.

by yet another act of hybris: On his return to his homeland, Mycenae, Agamemnon is murdered by his own wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegisthus. The successive acts of hybris do not end there. Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, commits matricide, as well as the murder of his mother's illegitimate lover, and the Furies then pursue Orestes – but we shall return to the resolution of this drama in a next section of the article. We are focusing here on the tragedy's very essence: How man can liberate himself from the chain of hybris, and how he will be acquitted after having committed hybris; in other words, how he will be saved and redeemed himself⁶, how he will essentially come out into the light of freedom.

III. Historical Examples

The various stories immortalized by the Athenian tragedy reflect the tragedy of history itself. We will present below some brief historical examples in order to show that, when human history reaches a dead end at the level of hybris, then in order to evolve, it risks committing yet another one. If one observes history, as if from a drone, at every major

6. One could argue that in the context of such biblical language the so-called “original sin”, the fall, is a first act of hybris, which throws man into the vortex of the archipelagos of history; this results to the existence's struggle to rise to the surface by bridging the gap. We believe that, on the one hand, this seed of original sin has bequeathed a “sinful tendency” («ἐφάμαρτον ῥοπὴν»); on the other hand, though, it not only bequeaths guilt, but it also exonerates man. In other words, when I do something wrong, the burden of responsibility is shared, because I am also weighed down by the sins of my ancestors. This is what is dramatized in the Theban cycle with Oedipus: due to one “ancestral” hybris (that of Tantalus, father of Pelops), the unfortunate descendants are trapped in this hybris and its consequences (see also the tragical narrative in B. Russell, *Ἱστορία τῆς Δυτικῆς Φιλοσοφίας καὶ ἡ συνάρτησή της μὲ τις πολιτικὲς καὶ κοινωνικὲς συνθήκες ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχαιοτάτων χρόνων μέχρι τῆς ἐποχῆς μας*, transl. Aim. Hourmouziou, vol. A': *Ἡ ἀρχαία φιλοσοφία – ἡ καθολικὴ φιλοσοφία*, I. D. Arsenidis Publications, Athens n.d., pp. 47-48). However, while this existing *status quo* threatens to indefinitely trap humans, by the same token it reduces their guilt. What the era inaugurated by the New Testament offers to ancient Greek thought is the concept of repentance, which we will discuss in the next section of the article.

historical juncture, where there is one extreme, another extreme always follows, and as a rule, blood is shed at every important stage⁷.

During the Middle Ages (12th-13th centuries), Western Europe, in the area now covering France, was structured socio-politically on the basis of the feudal system. However, the autonomy of local authorities progressed to such an extent that one feudal lord would wage war against another, with the result that the country was in danger of being fragmented and suffering a general and irreparable split. The “state” (or, rather, the “states”) within states led the situation to a dead end. Gradually, therefore, the existing institution of central authority was being strengthened and developed, now expressing the need of the local society to put an end to division and achieve unity. However, as this institution was insatiably evolving, it tended to become a state entity, which was not characterized by unity of freedom but by a “unity” that became so suffocating that it threatened to break society into pieces. In other words, one extreme of internal anarchy and disintegration led to the other extreme of absolute monarchy. This resulted in a central authority confronted with new problems and hybriistic responses, which, after centuries of ferment, lead the people to the French Revolution, which, in its turn, leads to the Napoleonic wars – and the extremes continue unstoppable⁸.

We lament the sack of Rome in 476 AD by the barbarian tribes [actually, the German leader Odoacer deposed the last (Western)

7. Throughout history, cries and lamentations have been heard, and who knows how many more rivers of blood will be shed in the future. One might think that history is an explosive mixture of Medea and Cronus, which feeds on blood and devours its own children. This, after all, is the tragedy of history: that hybris means history spilling its blood, a never-ending vendetta. Progress means less blood. If history were mainly a history of wars, then it would not be very different from zoology. Nevertheless, Hegel, one of the philosophical founders and theoretical precursors of totalitarian regimes in Europe, considers war to be a factor that contributes to the “evolution” of history, without realizing the tragic impasse. Woe to hybris! [This view is in accord with that of Karl Popper, *Η άνοιχτή κοινωνία και οι έχθροί της*, vol. 2: *Hegel, Marx και τὰ έπακόλουθα*, transl.-intr. Eirini Papadaki, Papazisis Publications, Athens 2003 (originally published by Dodoni Publications, 1982 and 1991)].

8. Revolution, as can be understood politically, contains the great message of the renewal of history. But it always contains the seeds of counterrevolution as well. After all, every system, whether theoretical or political, contains its own negation.

Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus]. Indeed, did Rome, which had slaughtered almost all the European peoples with its legions, expect to coming out unscathed? The fall of Western Christianity, as a structure with an absolute monarch, the authority of the Pope (even on the very few occasions when he was proved to be virtuous), led to Luther's protestations, Protestantism, and after a long process, to the current secularized "atheism" that characterizes the Western man in the post-Enlightenment era. History is full of similar examples, and man finds it difficult to learn, being drawn to other historically failed extremes, such as idealism – materialism, state economy – private economy, when he could have learned from the positive elements of all these factors, without being attracted to extreme positions and ideas.

If man is trapped between Scylla and Charybdis, between the necessary hybris and a new one following suit, what possibility of escape and salvation does he have? Is the transition from hybris to delusional blindness, nemesis, and retribution a one-way street?⁹ Is man at the mercy of fate, of Heimarmene, of living according to irrational nature? Can there be freedom, as we've asked ourselves in the introduction? The ancient Greek mind, in the field of poetic art and philosophy, gives and reveals astonishing possibilities to man, both on the level of speech and that of faith.

9. Strictly speaking, *hybris* is the excessive behavior of humans that disrupts the divine order. The first stage of punishment by the gods is Ate, which blinds the human mind; instead of repentance, hybris is multiplied. Thus, Nemesis can unfold unhindered – the wrath of the gods, which will bring about the restoration of order and ultimate punishment, the retribution. [Although in a different historical and social context, see the use of this conceptual framework by E. Rakitzis, «Ἡ “μελέτη τῆς ἱστορίας” τοῦ Arnold Toynbee», in: *Ἡ ἐλευθερία ὡς θυσία. Πρακτικά τοῦ Συμποσίου Παπαφλέσσας. Διακόσια χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν γέννησή του (1788-1988)*. Χορηγία τοῦ Δήμου Καλαμάτας, Δημοσιεύματα τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐταιρείας Φιλοσοφικῶν Μελετῶν, [Σ. «Μαρτυρίες», Ἀρ. 2], Athens 1991, pp. 48-63, here p. 60. The title of the conference was given after our presentation on the topic: “The freedom of sacrifice and the sacrifice of freedom” at Ev. Moutsopoulos's philosophy seminars, where N. Nisiotis also taught]. Heraclitus succinctly summarizes this sequence as follows: «Ἥλιος οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή, Ἐρινύες μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξευρήσουσιν». That is why he ends up by saying: «ὕβριν χρὴ σβεννύναι μᾶλλον ἢ πυρκαϊήν» (fragm. B94 and 43 DK). That is also the aim of the Aristotelian principle of *μεσότης* (the mean, the state between the two extremes).

IV. Tragic Solutions

Tragedy as a type of (philosophy of) history¹⁰ offers two solutions to the above cardinal problem, or rather two aspects of the drama's resolution and man's liberation from the clutches of hybris. The first component is sacrifice¹¹. Let us recall here one of the early episodes of the Trojan cycle, as it is depicted by Euripides in his play *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The ships of the Achaeans are anchored in their homeland; there is no favorable wind to sail, the campaign cannot begin, the fleet has been condemned to immobility due to the lack of wind – it is as if the wheels of History have stopped to move forward (towards committing another chain of hybris). What would be the driving force that man could invoke? It is “divinely revealed” that the blood of a sacrifice, like another prime mover, will give new impetus to the course of history. Thus, Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, the Achaeans' supreme commander, is prepared to be sacrificed. Euripides, with his poetic genius, dramatizes Iphigenia's final voluntary self-immolation; not only she sacrifices her freedom to live¹² but also transforms and transmutes her sacrificial death into freedom¹³. Furthermore, it is significant that the childlike innocence and purity of the young Iphigenia suggests that she has not (she had not yet enough time to) immerse herself in hybris. Thus, the ancient Greek

10. The concept of the tragic is not the sole preserve of literary and archaeological research; it is also a field of fruitful philosophical reflection. Without going into his particular approach here, it is no coincidence that, for example, Max Scheler wrote an essay on the subject: „Zum Phänomen des Tragischen“. See M. Scheler, *Τὸ φαινόμενο τοῦ τραγικοῦ*, transl. Th. Loupasakis, introd. Chara Bakonikola-Georgopoulou, [Φιλοσοφία 15], Erasmos Publications, Athens 1991.

11. For this crucial concept that concerned thinkers such as René Girard, see R. Girard, *Τὸ ἐξίλαστήριο θῦμα: Ἡ βία καὶ τὸ ἱερό*, transl. K. Papagiorgis, [Σύγχρονη Κλασικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη 39], Exantas Publications, Athens 1991 and Julia Meszaros – J. Zachhuber (eds.), *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, OUP, Oxford 2013, although our approach differs from their conclusions.

12. Freedom is not only a personal or socio-political issue; it is also a fundamental ontological challenge, a matter of life and death.

13. In Dostoyevsky's work, which invokes both the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, we could sense the realization that the logical judgment of choosing between good and evil is only an initial phase of freedom. We find the fulfillment of this concept in the realization and embodiment of goodness.

experience suggests that when someone participates in hybris, they are already part of the problem; as perpetrators of hybris, they cannot save others, even if their purpose is noble. That is why the voluntary sacrifice of an innocent person,¹⁴ in this case Iphigenia, is capable of changing the course of that historical situation.

In the case of Socrates's voluntary acceptance of his death sentence, as depicted in Plato's dialogue *Crito*, we discern a historical reflection of Iphigenia's sacrifice. This comes into contrast with Nietzsche's dissatisfaction with Socrates and his rationalism in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as his alleged negative influence on the development of tragic art, especially via Euripides. Socrates was fully conscious of the history's tragedy¹⁵; he understood that the only way for him not to participate in the chain of hybris would be not simply to voluntarily give up of his freedom, but of his very life. Socrates's sacrificial act is not so much related to the "study of death" presented by Plato in his dialogue *Phaedo*, but rather with Socrates's voluntary exit from the tragedy of history, so that the suffering caused by successive injustices might cease, at least for

14. In this particular case, we could trace both the similarities and the differences from Isaac's sacrifice by Abraham. Although the son follows his father without having been coerced, he does not know that the victim will be himself. On the other hand, both victims are distinguished for their childlike innocence. Furthermore, as in the case of Agamemnon with the sacrilegious killing of Artemis's sacred animal, so too in the Old Testament case, Abraham had previously committed hybris. Although he had a child with Hagar, Ishmael, he sent them away (albeit at Sarah's suggestion, contrary to the existing law), and then God demanded from Abraham and Sarah to offer Him Isaac as a sacrificial victim – the only child they had been blessed with in their old age. The human sacrifice is ultimately avoided through divine intervention by an angel of God (i.e., God the Word himself); something similar happens in Iphigenia's case.

15. Nietzsche's insistence on the "will to power" turns him into a tragic victim of the tragic vision's awareness. Kierkegaard, on the other wing of existentialism, was able to break free from it to a greater extent than Nietzsche. The Danish philosopher's existential anguish also stems from his awareness of the tragedy of existence as trapped in the endless chain of hybris. On this topic, see more generally N. A. Nisiotis, *Υπαρξισμός και Χριστιανική Πίστις: Η ύπαρκτική σκέψις ἐν τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ, καὶ ἡ χριστιανικὴ πίστις ὡς τὸ ἀναπόφευκτον καὶ βασικὸν πρόβλημα αὐτῆς κατὰ τὸν Søren Kierkegaard καὶ τοὺς συγχρόνους ὑπαρξιστὰς φιλοσόφους Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger καὶ Jean-Paul Sartre*, Athens ²1969 (= 1956), *passim*. (This book was republished from Harmos Publications in 2019, in modern vernacular Greek by N. Aspoulis, with an introduction and editorial supervision by St. Yangazoglou, and a short proem by K. Io. Vamvakas).

a while. Let us not forget that Socrates was condemned to death by the citizens of Athens after the latter's defeat by Sparta; he was condemned by a defeated and declining democracy, a mere pale imitation of the Athenian direct democracy in its heyday.

Contrary to Socrates's death, in the tragic version of the myth of Iphigenia, adopted by Euripides, the young girl finally escapes from Artemis's wrath; the goddess sends the girl "miraculously" to Tauris and replaces her with a deer as the sacrificial victim. The *deus ex machina* comes to complete and perfect the sacrificial offering, presenting unexpected perspectives both in the tragic plot and in the historical course. In this case, it seems that Euripides, the dramatic poet-philosopher, had deeply understood the impasse of *hybris* and the tragedy of history, reminding us that the solution to tragedy cannot come solely from the efforts and initiative of his dramatic heroes. That is why he uses the *deus ex machina*¹⁶. In other words, the discovery and extensive use of this element of theatrical economy is not so much related to the stage action and scenography or to the need for renewal and innovation in theater, but rather with the following realization on the part of the great creator: Within the tragic vicious circle, there can be no way out of the tragedy and a solution¹⁷ as redemption from the tug-of-war of *hybris* with human powers alone, that is, without divine assistance¹⁸.

16. In the Platonic dialogue *Cratylus*, Socrates, despite his considerable dose of irony, observes that «οἱ τραγωδοποιοὶ ἐπειδὴν τι ἀπορῶσιν ἐπὶ τὰς μηχανὰς καταφεύγουσι θεοῦς αἴροντες» (425d, 5-6).

17. Divine intervention in tragedy, as in epic poetry, was a feature even before the introduction of *deus ex machina* [for whom see also G. G. Gerolymatos, «Οἱ ποιητὲς τοῦ 6ου-4ου π.Χ. αἰ. γιὰ τὴν Τέχνη καὶ τὴν Θρησκεία», *Πολιτιστικὴ Ἐννεάδα/Politistikí Enneada* 21 (2006), 60a-62b: 62b]. Apart from Gods' anthropomorphic appearances in the Homeric poems, we have the *Eumenides* case, the last of the three tragedies that comprise Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (see, among others, M. J. Lossau, *Αἰσχύλος*, transl. (Greek) N. P. Bezantakos, Instituto tou Vivliou-A. Kardamitsa Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 116-161). In this case, it is the gods who, despite their disagreements, ultimately acquit Orestes of the serious crimes he had committed, an event that puts an end to the chain of *hybris*. In this way, Orestes's remorse, personified in the hostile *Furies*, is transformed into the *Eumenides*. In post-Christian times, there is the awareness of guilt, the confession of the error-*hybris* to the priest, forgiveness from God, and a return to the former innocent life through participating in Holy Communion.

18. Aristotle (*Ποιητικὴ* 1453a, 12-16) notes that «ἀνάγκη ἄρα τὸν καλῶς ἔχοντα μῦθον

In any case, the monotheistic ancient Greek philosophy, productively questions the relationship between God and man¹⁹. However, art, and more specifically tragic poetry, goes beyond rational assertions²⁰; by giving

... μεταβάλλειν οὐκ εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας, ἀλλὰ τούναντίον ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν ... δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην». On this basis, we could understand the frequent accusations by scholars that Euripides's dramas, such as *Helen* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, are not proper tragedies. The real reason, however, is that the tragic cycles have ended, since without murder there is no tragedy, and therefore there is no reason for tragic continuity.

19. Ancient Greek religion was moving from the Dodektheon to a god of gods. The Greek philosophers' greatest struggle was for them to arrive at the perception of being, a first principle – either that of Heraclitus (λόγος), Parmenides (ὄν/σφαιρός), Anaxagoras («νοῦς πάντα διεκόσμησεν»), Plato (ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ), Aristotle («πρῶτον κινῶν ἀκίνητον»), or the advanced theology of Plotinus and Proclus (ἔν). This course followed by the Greek thought is also vividly reflected in the work of Petros Vrailas-Armenis from Corfu, the most important Greek philosopher of the 19th century (e.g., see *Λόγος καὶ Πίστις*), which is not only characterized by strict method and rational discourse but also by faith. See Ant. D. Vasilakis, *Ἡ Ὄντολογία τοῦ ὠραίου στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Πέτρου Βραΐλα-Ἀρμένη*, Syllogos pros Diadosin Ofelimon Vivlion Publications, Athens 2009, *passim*, e.g. pp. 50-62. We could say that faith expresses mankind's effort to free himself from its personal labyrinth, that is, from its absolute rationalism, the perception that everything can be solved through reason. Let us not delude ourselves, however, that philosophical positions are as proven as we would like to think they are. Let us consider the theory of ideas: It can be organized philosophically and methodically, but it cannot be proven. Plato expresses a belief. The same could be said of Aristotle's prime mover. In other words, the powerful mind and reason always offer ways out of their own reasoning. Almost all philosophers strive to go beyond reason, to the limits of faith; man, trapped within the rigid boundaries of reason, risks remaining disappointed and unfulfilled. See also, E. R. Dodds, *Οἱ Ἕλληνες καὶ τὸ παράλογο*, transl. and introd. G. Giatomanolakis, M. Kardamitsa Publications, Athens 1978. Within the boundaries of our civilization, "irrational" can be understood as supra-rational. In any case, the Arts express reason's suprarational dimension.

20. Philosophy is nothing but our daily struggle to confirm our ignorance. Striving for knowledge quite often means confirming our ignorance. This does not imply the removal, interruption, or suspension of man's struggle to seek solutions to all questions. On the contrary, I'm striving to learn more; still, I wish that people would remain aware that they have not yet reached the final solution. (Those who are arrogant enough about their knowledge should probably learn more). That is why the researcher par excellence, the philosopher, is never satisfied with the acquisition of knowledge; it always delves deeper, with the result that philosophers often change their course. For example, there are differences between two platonic works, *The Republic* and the *Laws*; Wittgenstein moved on from the *Tractatus* phase to his second period (that of *Philosophical Investigations*). This, after all, is the essence of evolution. The philosopher does not arrive at a

meaning in its own unique way to the sacrifice of tragic heroes, but also of the martyrs and great figures of history who, as role models, redeem us in our struggle to break free from the dialectic of hybris²¹, it aims at our redemption²².

V. The Tragedy of History – The Exit

From the perspective of ascribing meaning, we arrive at a point where tragic and philosophical inspiration (*deus ex machina* and monotheism) meet each other and are completed. The point where the two possible solutions to the tragedy of being trapped in hybris (voluntary sacrifice and *deus ex machina*) become even more unified is the crucifixion of the Word of God. God intervenes in history with the incarnation of Christ – without, of course, interfering with or limiting man’s fallen freedom – and comes, «μορφήν δούλου λαβών», to offer Himself as a sacrifice of atonement²³ that will grant the possibility of immortality to

single truth. Therefore, I do not wonder why Plato avoids giving a final definition of virtue in the *Republic*, after the many ones that have been accumulated in the work’s first book. Instead, the philosopher continues the discussion throughout the rest of the dialogue and leaves the issue open. There will always be a dialectical search, which ultimately remains open (which is why we speak of Philosophy), as if the philosopher’s Sisyphean task is to confirm the extent of our ignorance, and therefore the need for new research and a new approach to knowledge. If, however, he believes that he has mastered it, may he not begin to impose it upon others; those systems that thought they had arrived at a theoretical solution that was also practically applicable, they degenerated into tyranny, i.e., the abolition of all forms of freedom.

21. Artistic imagination makes art a mirror of the essence of life, but also, and even more than that, it presents to us things which we do not know about life, that which we do not know that we know, i.e., the unconscious. Thus, art, and especially tragedy, often depicts life much more truthfully than we know it.

22. Art moves beyond “appearances”; it inevitably expresses a deeper reflection, suggesting a message springing from its “mysterious” essence. In the specific case of tragedy, it is about the struggle to free man from hybris and evil.

23. For the notion of *sacrifice* in the Old Testament and the ways it is connected with Christ’s sacrifice see Io. Karavidopoulos’s brief article, «Οἱ Ἰουδαϊκὲς θυσίαι καὶ ἡ θυσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ», *Ἁγία Ζώνη*, <https://www.agiazoni.gr/article.php?id=25776564091914012400> [26.04.2020], and S. Agouridis’s more thorough one, «Ἡ θυσία στὴν Παλαιὰ καὶ στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη», *Ἑπτὰ Ἡμέρες. Ἀφιέρωμα: Ἡ Θυσία/Hepta Himeres/Afieroma: Hi Thysia*,

human nature, as well as an example to every human being who wants to exercise itself and fight for a way out of the history's personal and collective tragedy. In other words, the dual prefiguration that ancient poetry suggests, represents, prepares and teaches is condensed and completed in the historical voluntary sacrifice of the God-man, as a free self-offering that makes the wind blow, if History wants to move forward, thus completing Hellenism's historical experience²⁴.

The sacrifice of the God-man, the new Adam and new Dionysus, is the sacrifice of someone who is sinless, completely innocent; someone who is not part of the hybris chain and takes upon himself all the sin of the fallen world, so that history may have the opportunity to avoid the

Sunday, April 23 (2005), pp. 18-20c. The same special includes texts that refer to related ancient Greek rituals. It is no coincidence that questions about ancient Greek tragedy have also preoccupied theologians. A most recent example is Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination*, OUP, Oxford, 2016 (with useful bibliography in p. 165). The review *Modern Theology* 34, 2 (2018), pp. 220-288, has dedicated a part of it entitled "Book Symposium", with contributions of, among others, (the orthodox and philosophizing) D. Bentley Hart and Terry Eagleton, as well as the final answer of the writer and ex-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Finally, the distinguished classical scholar Io. M. Konstantakos, in his book review of the work of E. K. Petropoulos's, *Τὸ μεγάλο ταξίδι τῶν μύθων ἀνάμεσα στὸν ἀρχαῖο ἐλληνικὸ κόσμο καὶ τὴν Ἑγγύς Ανατολή*, Kleidarithmos Publications, Athens 2021, titled: «Ὁδηγίες χρήσεως γιὰ ἓνα ἐξιλαστήριο θῦμα: Μῦθοι καὶ τελετουργίες τοῦ φαρμακοῦ στὸν ἀρχαῖο κόσμο, ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀνατολία ὡς τὸ Αἰγαῖο», *The Athens Review of Books* 143 (October 2022), 51a-56d, refers to the transmission of myths and rituals from the Hittites and other peoples of the East to Hebrew and especially Greek culture, focusing on the "sacred ritual of the scapegoat or the pharmakon" (p. 52d). In this context, a parallel is drawn with the sacrifice of Christ (p. 55d; cf. also the engraving on the left on p. 53). However, in the present section of our text, we hope that we have shown how the Christian perspective synthesizes, completes, but also transcends previous historical experience.

24. According to Clement of Alexandria, there are two ancient covenants: the Holy Scriptures are the first; the second is that of Greek philosophers, a position that is repeated in the work of Saint Nektarios of Pentapolis (*Περὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας ἐλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας ὡς προπαιδείας εἰς τὸν Χριστιανισμόν*). Cf. and Ant. D. Vasilakis, *Ἡ ὀντολογία τοῦ ὠραίου...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 56-57 (with the bibliographical citations in the notes 3 and 4). For further bibliography on that matter see *op.cit.*, pp. 59-60, note 4 and pp. 61-62, note 4, and also: D. A. Vasilakis, "Hellenism and Christianity: Petros Vrailas-Armenis on the Constituents of Modern Greek Identity", *Akropolis* 3 (2019), pp. 88-109 and P. Farantakis, *Θρησκεία & ἐπιστήμη στὴ νεοελληνικὴ διανόηση. Ἀπὸ τὸν θυμὸ στὴν ἀμφιθυμία*, prologue G. L. Evangelopoulos, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019.

pitfalls of *hybris*²⁵. The voluntary offering and willing blood donation to one's neighbor and to history²⁶ is the act of the saints and martyrs, but also of all the virtuous unsung heroes, the unknown blood donors of history²⁷, all those who fought with an almost sacrificial love that reached to overcome the arrogance in order to achieve freedom²⁸.

The sacrifice on the cross offers to the individuals and History the possibility of escaping from the tragedy of *hybris*²⁹, since it is followed by the Resurrection³⁰. On this altar of the crucifixion and resurrection,

25. We are not devoid of solutions. Where we suffer is in our actual participation in these messages. We aren't so much devoid of goals (e.g., "to make the world perfect") as we do from method. The ethics of the goal depend on the ethics of the means.

26. The point is not what you get out of life, but what you can offer. What saves our conscience in history is what great personalities have given to us, that is, what they sacrificed, and the essence of freedom is the loss of ourselves on the altar of love for the other. In love that reaches the point of sacrifice, there is no boundary between giving and taking: We are giving by taking and we are taking by giving.

27. In a situation where humankind and history had been trapped in the times of Roman persecution, the martyr choose to give his life. He confronts the "deified" Caesar by willingly offering his blood, which is ultimately identified with his freedom.

28. The two keys to the Kingdom, to quote J.-A. Cronin, are love and freedom, concepts that intersect in the consumption of the I within you and we. See also Athanasios [Zoran] Jevtić, *Από την έλευθερία στην αγάπη. Οί όμιλίες τής Ξάνθης*, Domos Publications, Athens 2012.

29. It is as if the poet of Prometheus Bound was prophetically inspired when, shortly before the end of the tragedy, Hermes foretells (vv. 1026-1029): «Τοιοῦδε μόχθου τέρμα μή τι προσδόκα, πρὶν ἂν θεῶν τις διάδοχος τῶν σῶν πόνων φανῆ, θελήσῃ τ' εἰς ἀναύγητον μολεῖν Ἄϊδην κνεφαῖά τ' ἄμφι Ταρτάρου βάθῃ» [I have personally "co-existed" with this tragedy, as I have composed music for the performance of the play, directed by Nikos Parikos, "Exodus from the Aegean": The play was performed in Petralona, Chalkidiki, in 1979, at the Festival of Ancient Theater in Caen, Normandy in 1981, and as part of a conference on ancient drama in Ikaria in 1992]. Aeschylus had Hercules in mind (cf. R. Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology. Based on H.J. Rose's Handbook of Greek Mythology*, Routledge, London and New York 2004, p. 96), without unduly reducing the wealth of connotations. Christos Malevitsis, in an anniversary speech he gave in 1995 about Dionysios Solomos's "The Free Besieged" and in a spirit similar to that of the essay at hand, noted: "This people was Orthodox before Christianity. This may not be directly attested to by its ancient philosophy, but it is indisputably attested to by ancient tragedy" [Chr. Malevitsis, «Τὸ Μεσολόγγι, ὁ τόπος ἀποκαλύψεως τῆς ἐλευθερίας», *Νέα Ἑστία/Nea Hestia* 139, 1651 (1996), pp. 508a-513b, 510a-b].

30. Apostle Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15, 17), «εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, ματαῖα ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν».

the quintessence of freedom is matured and attained, transcending freedom as an individual quantity and right³¹. This is the freedom of sacrifice, insofar as no one is compelled to offer, love, or sacrifice oneself, and the sacrifice as freedom, that is, the offering that reaches the point of sacrifice and is followed by the Resurrection.

VI. Conclusion – Synopsis

Ancient Greek tragedy is not only the highest peak of Greek poetry, reverently contemplated by every subsequent dramatic poetry; it is also the condensation of history, the interpretation of the History's course, the type of approach and solution (why not?) to the problems associated with man as an existence and coexistence. It grasps and strives with great success to define the essence of human drama, namely the problem of freedom, the problem of free will, the problem of choice, of dilemma, of the criteria for choosing quality. His main theme, and for us of unique importance, is the problem of man's escape from the clutches of hybris. Destiny, fate, Aisha, predestination, are not the end, but the beginning, the starting point of reflection. The question it raises is the possibility of man's liberation from the necessity's prison-house.

This necessity is expressed as humankind's deviation from the normal "course" of history, that is, as a disturbance of the historical *equilibrium*, as an excess of measure, proportion, and harmony (*μέτρον ἄριστον* is the extract opposite hybris), and therefore as its confinement in the realm of hybris. Therefore, the question we should have to explore is whether human represent only one link in this chain of hybris, or if they have the possibility of another choice. However, the news is tragic... The only option available to humans seems to be their voluntary crushing as they are struggling between hybristic acts, the free blood donation to the body of History, buttered by the bloodsucking revilers: History risks being the Cronus of the person, the Medea of Freedom. Indeed, History

31. Nowadays, when we talk about freedom, the only thing we do is to simply enumerate a list of rights... Cf. also Chr. Yannaras, *Ἡ ἀπανθρωπία τοῦ δικαίωματος*, Domos Publications, Athens 1998.

naturally feeds itself on its children. But as a qualitative fact, as a field for exercising the freedom of existence as coexistence, History might be possible for it to function as a purgatory for the person. This bloody sacrifice, the price of freedom, is proposed by the Athenian tragedy as a way for man to escape from the natural prison of the universe. Insofar as the solution to the tragedy is bloody sacrifice and the solution will be sought only among imperfect humans, the blood will not stop flowing, because, for the victim, freedom means the offering of love, the sacrifice of blood; for the perpetrator, though, it remains *hybris*. The vehicle of History may use blood as a source of energy, but it is the only way for it to move forward. Euripides had already sensed the problem. He saw that humans were bleeding to death to “redeem” freedom; as a tragic thinker, he sought other solutions. We have no doubt that Euripides’s *deus ex machina*, who comes to provide solutions to humankind’s unsolvable problems, expresses the tragic poet’s profound awareness that the story encapsulating the tragedy of the humankind’s loneliness in the universe is doomed to a bloodbath if it will not transcend its limitations or accepts as a possible solution to its drama the hope that it is not alone, incomplete, and abandoned in space.

In the latest drama that took place in the 4th century AD on Greek soil, to serve as the center of worship for the new faith, the Cappadocian Basil the Great, probably the most brilliant interpreter of ancient Greek cultural production, Homer and the tragic poets, of his time, uses the expression “*bloodless sacrifice*” («ἀνάιμαχτος θυσία»); a sacrifice³² that rejects human sacrifice, which traps man in his bloody history. After all, the free and bloody sacrifice of the Word gave history the possibility for a favorable wind to blow in History once and for all. Philosophy, on the other hand, is maturing in its constant quest for solutions to these problems, using its own arsenal of Reason, achieving brilliant syntheses. Tragic poetry approaches the problem possessing its own arsenal of dramatic representations of human tragedy, inviting the

32. See also L. L. Christensen, “The Deifying Sacrifice: *Thysia* in the Eucharistic Prayers of Byzantine Basil”, in: M. E. Johnson (ed.), *Further Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West: Essays in Liturgical and Theological Analysis*, Liturgical Press Academic, Collegeville, Minnesota 2023, pp. 153-170.

individual to experience the drama in its entirety, to be shaken, to realize the tragic nature of their existence, to gain knowledge, self-awareness of their personal despair, to diagnose their personal illness but also that of History, so that they may begin the struggle for freedom, to break free from the chains of hybris and ancestral evils, the escape from the tragic loneliness of the individual to the freedom of offering oneself up to the point of sacrifice: Where there is not only the demand to “take” but also the joy of “giving”, where “receiving” means “offering” and “offering” means “receiving”, where the boundaries of division are broken down in the –painful– synthesis of unity.

A society unable to realize the bittersweet nature of painful and tragically difficult freedom in the struggle for harmony and unity –let us allow to an aspiring thinker articulating his concerns– risks becoming a victim of a fire igniting by malice, hatred, and divisions, all the more so when the free existence of this society becomes the target of sneaking treacheries. Ancient Greek tragedy is our own history, always the same tragedy. We turn history into poetry so that we can say create history, which for us means gaining the quality of our lives by sacrificing it on the altar of Freedom.

Greek consciousness was prepared for organizing life on the basis of sacrifice; when history matured, Hellenism accepted the new gospel. Love as sacrifice and freedom is not just a psychological term, nor is it a piece of knowledge; it is essentially a category of social organization. To the extent that our lives are not built on these foundations, the personality and its existential anxiety will always be in need of a way out. There will always be a need for a solution and a way out of hybris. This happens on every small or big day, especially with the hope of a return and a comeback to a pre-fall state, before the onset of hybris, that is, with the expectation of the Resurrection.