

## **An overwhelming dialectical moment. Rediscovering Euripides' *Cretans*, cannibalism and vegetarianism**

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Only shards remain of Euripides' tragedy *Cretans*. Yet the fragments that we do have reveal a drama that appears to be scandalously packed with self-contradictions. Previous scholarship has, as we will see, been unable to account for these inconsistencies. I will suggest a very different interpretation, namely, that Euripides elucidates a normative principle that is fundamental to his polity, and that the obvious self-contradictions serve to present the principle in a remarkably strict and sophisticated manner.

Moreover, I will argue that this discovery yields universal theoretical insights as well – about the role of logical thinking in Greek tragedy and in the early development of political philosophy, but also about the basic principles of interpretation in general. A careful analysis of the *Cretans* and of the path to making sense of its blatant self-contradictions will help us understand how different – indeed, arguably all rational – hermeneutic approaches all rely on the 'Platonic' venture of identifying and eliminating logical inconsistencies.

This paper is part of a project on the origins of political philosophy. In the project, it is argued that political philosophy begins in 'internal critique', that is, attempts to refute a normative view by reference to the very normative principle that is employed in order to defend the view – showing, then, that a view is self-contradictory rather than saying that one does not agree. This path is epitomised in Plato.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, I have argued that the prehistory of this argument can be traced in Greek tragedy.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the project is to rediscover the history of this technique of argument. In the present paper, however, I wish to make sense of a

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<sup>1</sup> *Republic*, 339d-e.

<sup>2</sup> Tralau: *Draksådd. Den grekiska tragedin som politiskt tänkande*, Stockholm: Atlantis, 2010, pp. 23-31.

tragedy that seems to exclude any search for rationality and philosophical argument.

Before beginning, we will need to say something about the myth and the reconstructed drama. In the most common version of the myth, Europa is abducted by Zeus in the shape of a bull. The god brings her to Crete, and after the usual sexual transformation routine of Zeus she gives birth to Minos. Europa then marries the Cretan king, Asterios. Following the death of his stepfather Asterios, Minos and his brothers dispute the succession. Minos says that the gods have granted him kingship and that a magnificent bull will emerge from the sea to prove that this is the case. He then prays to Poseidon, who promptly sends a bull. Yet contrary to his promise to the god, Minos does not sacrifice the bull to Poseidon but keeps it. Enraged, the god makes Minos' wife, Pasiphae, desire the beast. She makes the inventor Daidalos her accomplice and the latter builds a wooden cow. The queen slips into the cow, the bull arrives, and the two beget a monstrous child called Asterios, the Minotaur.<sup>3</sup> Thus the myth.

In what is left of Euripides' play, a chorus of Cretan priests address Minos and present themselves, someone (possibly a nurse) informs someone else (possibly Minos) of the birth and nature of the Minotaur; later, Pasiphae and Minos argue about who is responsible for the monstrous birth, and Minos commands that she be locked up forever. At some – late – point in the play, Daidalos' son Ikaros sings a song. The play may have ended with a *deus ex machina* intervening, but we do not know. For our purposes, it is not necessary to solve the intricate questions about the structure of the drama and the attribution of verses to the characters, for neither the authenticity nor the attribution of the pertinent passages have been questioned.

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<sup>3</sup> Apollodoros, III.1.4; a different version is to be found in Hyginus: *Fabulae*, 40.

What is of interest here is a chain of riddling contradictions that will, or so I will argue, be unravelled – and, in their own curious way, indeed dissolved – as we identify the normative principle that is at play in this tragedy.

## Vegetarianism and raw meat

The chorus begin by addressing Minos.

Φοινικογενοῦς τέκνον Εὐρώπης  
καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου Ζηνός, ἀνάσσων  
Κρήτης ἑκατομπολιέθρου ·  
ἦκω ζαθέους ναοὺς προλιπών,  
οὓς ἀϋθιγενῆς στεγανοὺς παρέχει  
τμηθεῖσα δοκοὺς Χαλύβω πελέκει  
καὶ ταυροδέτῳ κόλλη κραθεῖσ’  
ἀτρεκεῖς ἀρμούς κυπάρισσος.  
ἀγνὸν δὲ βίον τείνομεν ἐξ οὔ  
Διὸς Ἰδαίου μύστης γενόμην  
καὶ νυκτιπόλου Ζαγρέως βούτης  
τὰς ὠμοφάγους δαΐτας τελέσας,  
Μητρί τ’ ὀρεῖα δᾶδας ἀνασχών  
μετὰ Κουρήτων  
βάκχος ἐκλήθην ὀσιωθεῖς.  
πάλλευκα δ’ ἔχων εἴματα φεύγω  
γένεσίν τε βροτῶν καὶ νεκροθήκας  
οὐ χριμπτόμενος, τήν τ’ ἐμψύχων  
βρῶσιν ἐδεστῶν πεφύλαγμα. (*Cretans* 472.4-19 Kannicht)

(Son of Phoenician-born Europa and of great Zeus – you who rule Crete and its hundred cities! I have come here from the most holy temple whose roof is provided from native cypress-wood cut into beams with Chalybean axe and bonded in exact joints with ox-glue. Pure is the life I have led since I became an initiate of Idaean Zeus and a servitor of night-ranging Zagreus, performing his feasts of raw; and raising torches high to the mountain Mother among the Curetes, I was consecrated and named a celebrant. In clothing all of white I shun the birthing of men, and the places of their dead I do not go near; against the eating of animal foods I have guarded myself. (Trans. C. Collard & M. Cropp)

The priests of Zeus thus say that they lead a ‘pure’ or ‘sacred life’, ἀγνὸν δὲ βίον.

We note – though at this juncture only in passing – that they have left a temple where the beams of the roof are fitted together with bull glue, ταυροδέτῳ κόλλη; this could seem significant in a play about the genesis of the bull-man monster, the

Minotaur. In any case, we will return to the glue shortly. But the most obvious way to understand the ἄγνὸν δὲ βίον would be to identify it with the last four verses quoted. The priests wear 'white garments', they avoid either sexual intercourse or the places where women give birth, and they do not eat meat, τήν τ' ἐμψύχων / βρῶσιν ἐδεστῶν. This would all appear very pure in a certain perspective – that of vegetarianism, or perhaps more precisely, of the subversive vegetarian movement that claimed to descend from Orpheus: Orphism.

At the same time, however, the chorus say that they are the servitors of Zagreus, τὰς ὠμοφάγους δαῖτας τελέσας, 'performing his feasts of raw flesh'. This is a bewildering verse. Commentators have discussed to what extent this correlation between Zeus, Zagreus (and if the latter can in fact be equated to Dionysos, as is often supposed), and the mother of the mountain – Rhea – could make sense, or if this must be a bizarre kind of syncretism. While possible incompatibility between the cults is important for our understanding of the fragment, we will focus on another and potentially much more damaging tension. This tension is to do with raw meat. The priests' ritual consumption of raw flesh is, in the Greek context, disconcerting. Civilised people cook their meat; the uncivilised, and beasts, eat it raw.<sup>4</sup>

And then, the overwhelming question: How could these celebrations involving the eating of raw meat ever be consistent with the vegetarianism which the chorus claim to observe just a few verses later? One cannot be a vegetarian and eat raw flesh at the same time. This claim on the part of the chorus would appear to be an eruption of absurdity. As we will see, it is but the first instance in a series of seemingly irrational inconsistencies.

How can we make sense of this contradiction? In a recent edition, Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp argue that '[t]he apparent contradiction between flesh-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Theognis F 541; Segal.

eating and vegetarianism shows reality subordinated to the poetic'.<sup>5</sup> But this claim would appear to create a new problem, while not solving the one that is already there. Why is the contradiction more poetic? And what would be the *meaning* of the inconsistency *qua* poetic? Adele-Teresa Cozzoli, on the other hand, claims that the priests' feasting on raw meat and their vegetarianism are chronologically distinct, as different phases of the initiation in the cult – 'queste celebrazioni sono ricordate dai coreuti come compiute non nel loro ruolo attuale di profeti del dio, bensì ancora in qualità d'iniziandi'.<sup>6</sup> This would be a neat way of doing away with the inconsistency of eating raw meat and being a vegetarian: the celebrants begin with the former, then do the latter. Unfortunately, there is no reason to suppose that this is what the chorus are saying. Cozzoli follows G. Casadio in arguing that such an abyss between initiands and the initiate would be quite normal in ritual contexts.<sup>7</sup> But since the wording of the choral song does not suggest such a distinction we would need some other sort of evidence that would make it plausible – primarily from contemporaneous or earlier cults and rituals prescribing eating of raw meat for initiands and subsequent vegetarianism for the initiate. In another commentary, however, Collard, Cropp and Lee have already argued that this conjunction of the two phenomena is inconsistent, that they are 'brought together artificially, and are nowhere attested for any one cult or sect'.<sup>8</sup> And the counterevidence adduced by Cozzoli is not convincing. She points out that Plutarch mentions ritual feasting on raw flesh as well as fasting. But Plutarch says nothing about any cult that would prescribe principled vegetarianism *as well as* omophagia – and fasting followed by feasting would appear to be quite normal.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Cozzoli cites Diogenes

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<sup>5</sup> Collard & Cropp (eds.) Euripides, VII, *Fragments*, Cambridge (Mass.) & London: Harvard University Press, Loeb classical library, 2008, *ad loc.*, p. 539.

<sup>6</sup> Cozzoli (ed.): Euripides: *Cretesi. Introduzione, testimonianze, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Pisa & Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2001, *ad* 12, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> G. Casadio: 'I *Cretesi* d'Euripide e l'ascesi orfica', in Vincenzo Cicerone (ed.): *Didattica del Classico*, II, Foggia: Atlantica, 1990, pp. 278-310, at p. 292, cited in Cozzoli.

<sup>8</sup> C. Collard, M.J. Cropp & K.H. Lee (eds.): Euripides: *Selected Fragmentary Plays*, I, Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1995, *ad* 16-20, p- 70.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch: *De defectu oraculorum*, 417c.

Laertios' observations about the Pythagoreans abstaining from eating meat; yet this does not prove anything about any supposed conjunction of vegetarianism and raw meat-eating (cf. DL VII, 13).

Other recent commentators, such as François Jouan and Herman van Looy, seem to have passed the issue of inconsistency in silence, discussing the compatibility between Zeus cult and Dionysian rites yet avoiding the problem of vegetarianism versus omophagia.<sup>10</sup>

We are left, then, with an enigma. Euripides has handed a scandalous inconsistency to us, and previous scholarship has not managed to solve it.

Moreover, when we look more closely at this choral song we will see that the self-contradiction does not seem to have been created at a whim. At the very least, in this brief passage it seems to be systematic. We learn that the Zeus priests are *νυκτιπόλου Ζαγρέως βούτης*, 'servitor of night-ranging Zagreus', or, more specifically and literally, the 'cattle-herder of night-ranging Zagreus'.<sup>11</sup> For sure, this is a metaphor: Zagreus, be he Dionysos or someone else, does not possess cattle that his followers tend to.<sup>12</sup> Yet even as a metaphor, it is in tension with Orphic vegetarianism – vegetarians do not, in general, keep cattle. On the contrary, herding of cattle involves slaughter and meat-eating.

Moreover, the temple that the chorus speak of is itself the embodiment, so to speak, of the killing and sacrificing of animals. It is built *ταυροδέτω κόλλη*. Walter Burkert says that Euripides' 'dichterische Phantasie' has come up with a 'mit Stierblut versiegeltes' temple, that is, that bull blood has been sprinkled on the building as part of a ritual.<sup>13</sup> But this is an unnecessary conjecture; it is much more reasonable to suppose – as do most commentators – that the cypress beams are

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<sup>10</sup> François Jouan and Herman van Looy (eds.) Euripides: *Fragments*, VIII:2, Paris: Les belles lettres, 2001, p. 314-315.

<sup>11</sup> The one commentator who rejects *βούτης/βούτας*, preferring *βροντάς* ('thunder', that is, imitation of thunder by means of drums), is Cozzoli, *ad loc.*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> Jouan and van Looy, *ad loc.*, p. 311, point out that Euripides at the very least 'évite l'identification explicite' of Dionysos and Zagreus.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Burkert: *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne & Mainz: W. Kohlhammer, 1977, p. 419.

considered to be fitted with bull-glue.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing strange about bull-glue. Pliny tells us that glue made of bulls' ears and genitals is the best.<sup>15</sup> But what is truly remarkable is that the temple itself presupposes the death of animals – in the Greek context, sacrificing the bull, cutting it, offering it to the gods, eating the meat and, as a by-product, boiling the skin, the genitals or the ears in order to produce glue.

In short, Euripides has evidently constructed a not-so-neat inconsistency. On the one hand, there is vegetarianism; on the other hand, there is the herding of cattle and use of dead animals' bodies for architectural and ritual purposes; on the – impossible, monstrous – third hand, there is the disconcerting and uncivilised eating of raw meat.

### Sacrifice and cannibalism

Baffled yet undaunted, we move on to the other larger fragment, containing the debate between Pasiphae and Minos.

νῦν δ' - ἐκ θεοῦ γὰρ προσβολῆς ἐμηνάμην -  
ἀλγῶ μὲν, ἔστι δ' οὐχ ἐκούσιον κακόν. (472e9-10)

(As it is, because my madness was a god's onslaught, I hurt, but my trouble is not voluntary. [Trans. Collard & Cropp])

ταῦρον γὰρ οὐκ ἔσφαξ[ε.....ἠὺ]ξατο  
ἐλθόντα θύσειν φάσμα [πο]ντίω[ι θε]ωι. (472e23-24)

(since he [Minos] did not slaughter (that) bull (which) he vowed to sacrifice to the sea-god when it was manifested. [Trans. Collard & Cropp])

Pasiphae argues that she is not responsible for the monstrous birth and the preceding monstrosities. She acted at the instigation of the god, the ultimate reason

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<sup>14</sup> Cozzoli: *ad loc*; Collard, Cropp & Lee: *ad loc*., p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*, XXVIII:71, \*\* (XI, 231); cf. Aristotle: *Historia animalium*, 517b.

being the fact that Minos had not sacrificed the bull to Poseidon. What she has done is not ἐκούσιον κακόν, ‘a voluntary bad’. The fact that Pasiphae evokes the notion of voluntariness is, in its own way, interesting. For the Greek legal system and moral thought of the epoch, the question of responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions was a real enough problem – indeed, in Euripides’ time, the orator Antiphon discussed cases from opposing views, one claiming that people are responsible for the consequences of their actions regardless of whether the effects were in fact intended or foreseeable, the other one arguing that one is in fact only responsible for consequences that one intends or should be able to predict.<sup>16</sup> Archaic societies had in general held the former view, but the penchant for the latter was very much in motion in Euripides’ context.<sup>17</sup> But if one adheres to the latter view, it would seem that Minos is in fact responsible for the prodigious birth of the Minotaur, since he is the one who wilfully neglected the promise of sacrifice, thus causing the wrath of the god and the monstrous desire of Pasiphae. And this is what she says:

σύ τοί μ’ ἀπόλλυς, σὴ γὰρ ἡ ἕ[αμ]αρτία,  
ἐκ σοῦ νοσοῦμεν. (472E34-35)

(It is you who have destroyed me! Yours was the wrongdoing! You are the cause of my affliction! [Trans. Collard & Cropp])

Pasiphae’s defence is, says one writer, a ‘beautiful piece of rhetoric’.<sup>18</sup> ‘[S]ophistic brilliance’, another scholar claims.<sup>19</sup> The issue of responsibility deserves to be dealt with at greater length in the future. But what is bewildering about the fragment is what comes afterwards.

<sup>16</sup> Antiphon 3.1.2, 3.4.8; cf. Solon 1 G-P 31-32.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bruno Snell: *Die Entdeckung des Geistes. Studien zur Entstehung und Entwicklung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000, p. \*.

<sup>18</sup> T. B. L. Webster: *The Tragedies of Euripides*, London: Methuen, 1967, p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Reckford: ‘Phaedra and Pasiphae: The Pull Backward’, in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, CIV, 1974, p. 307-328, at p. 319.



πρὸς τὰδ' εἴτε ποντίαν  
κτείνειν δοκεῖ σοι, κτε[ῖ]ν'· ἐπίστασαι δέ τοι  
μιαιφόν' ἔργα καὶ σφαγὰς ἀνδροκτόνους·  
εἴτ' ὠμοσίτου τῆς ἐμῆς φαγεῖν  
σαρκός, πάρεστι· μὴ λίπης θοινώμενος. (472e35-39)

(So either, if you have decided to kill me by drowning, go and kill me – indeed you understand acts of foul murder and the slaughtering of men! – or, if you desire to eat my flesh raw, here it is: don't go short on your banquet! [Trans. Collard & Cropp])

Pasiphae taunts her husband, asking him to kill her. The first possible punishment calls for no lengthy explanation. Drowning her in the sea would, in its own way, appear congruent with her crime: the calamitous bull came from the sea, and drowning her could seem to expel the pollution, bringing it back where it came from. The other possibility does, however, *prima facie* sound absurd. Why does Pasiphae say that Minos is well acquainted with the foul killing of men? We have no evidence of such deeds on his part at this juncture in the myth (later, of course, Minos will demand that Athens send young men and women to be killed by the Minotaur). Moreover, why does she depict him as a would-be cannibal, sarcastically offering him her flesh? Where, then, does the topic of cannibalism come from?

The transition to cannibalism is enigmatic. Moreover, if, as argued by previous commentators, Euripides reflects state-of-the-art legal rhetoric<sup>20</sup> – if, indeed, this is 'beautiful [...] rhetoric'<sup>21</sup> typical of 'sophistic brilliance'<sup>22</sup> – then Pasiphae's words would appear to be not only abrupt but inexplicable.

Why cannibalism? This would seem to be almost as illogical as the conjunction of omophagia and vegetarianism in the first choral song. Cozzoli, who is always eager to iron out any inconsistencies in the *Cretans*, says that it is an 'esplosione

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<sup>20</sup> Jouan & van Looy, p. 313; Collard, Cropp & Lee, p. 73; Collard & Cropp, p. 532.

<sup>21</sup> T. B. L. Webster: *The Tragedies of Euripides*, p. 90.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Reckford: 'Phaedra and Pasiphae: The Pull Backward', p. 319.

d'irrazionalità', yet adds the psychologising explanation that in the heat of the argument, cannibalism represents hatred of other people.<sup>23</sup>

How do we make sense of these inconsistencies and illogicalities? One answer could be that we should not. We could say that the monstrous desire underlying the drama is an 'anomalie [...], un néant psychologique, impropre à toute généralisation', and that we should understand the logical perversions of this tragedy in the same way, just leaving them as they are.<sup>24</sup> I will suggest a very different solution.

### **The Flesh of the City**

Eating of raw meat, vegetarianism, and cannibalism: they all appear to be intimately related in Euripides' drama. But thus far this has appeared to be quite a nest of contradictions. To solve this riddle we will need to approach the principles regulating the devouring of flesh not in Minoan Crete, but in Euripides' city.

In ancient Greece, meat was not everyday nourishment. Yet the killing and eating of animals is fundamental to the order of the *polis* and of the world. Through the sacrifice of animals, the cosmological hierarchy of god, man and animal is maintained. The animal, which is below man, is slaughtered; human beings eat the meat; the gods above receive the scent. Sacrifice thus secures the position of man downwards and upwards, between beasts and gods. Specifically, human beings are different from the god and the animals by the fact that they roast meat. Animals eat raw flesh, gods eat ambrosia.

And this makes grilling the foundation of civilisation itself. The order of the universe and the city is dependent on the human institution of killing animals, cooking the meat and eating it. Civilised people cook meat; uncivilised people eat it

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<sup>23</sup> Cozzoli, *ad* 35-36, p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> André Rivier: 'L'élément démonique chez Euripide jusqu'en 428', in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, VI, Euripide, Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1960, pp. 43-72, at p. 57.

raw. Food and sacrifice are thus intimately related. In the words of Marcel Detienne, ‘pour toute la pensée grecque, la nourriture humaine est inséparable du feu sacrificiel’.<sup>25</sup> Once we see this, we discover the fundamental principle of the *polis*.

Moreover, because of this unity of sacrifice and cooked meat as the ever renewed beginnings of civilisation, deviations from the principle are distortions in the cosmic, theological and political order. In Euripides’ time, this principle was not uncontested. On the one hand, adherents of the Orphic movement, as well as Pythagoreans, at least to some extent denounced the eating of meat. On the other hand, the Dionysiac cult was associated with celebrants’ tearing the limbs off from the bodies of animals and even people, and eating raw flesh.<sup>26</sup> Both sides refuse to take part in the human institution that, according to the principle of sacrifice, maintains the order of gods, men and animals.

This has a number of intriguing implications. First, abstaining from the ritual and meat will, as Detienne says, be an ‘acte hautement subversif’ to the *polis*.<sup>27</sup> Second, and most importantly, Detienne has argued that these different revolts against the city, Orphism and the Dionysiac cult, are symmetrical in their refusal of the normative principle underlying the conception of social and cosmological order. Orphic vegetarianism and Dionysian omophagia are, then, complementary in being two different ways of opposing the principle of sacrifice and roasted meat.<sup>28</sup>

Omitting sacrifice and the eating of meat is consequently related to other fundamental perversions of order. Indeed, a philosopher whom we cannot accuse of just reproducing the moral prejudices of his polity treats cannibalism as part of the same complex as parricide and incest.<sup>29</sup> And in a different way, of course, cannibalism too is a radical protest against the order of the *polis* and the world, for

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<sup>25</sup> Marcel Detienne: *Dionysos mis à mort*, Paris: Gallimard, 1998, pp. 141.

<sup>26</sup> Euripides: *Bacchae*, 746-747.

<sup>27</sup> Detienne: *Dionysos mis à mort*, p. 170.

<sup>28</sup> Detienne: *Dionysos mis à mort*, p. 197.

<sup>29</sup> Plato: *Republic*, 571c5, c9-d2.

it refuses to acknowledge the traditional distinction between human beings and animals. Hesiod formulated the difference when saying that Zeus had given human beings Dike, Justice, and that they may for this reason – and unlike animals – not devour each other.<sup>30</sup> Cannibalism is, then, likewise a revolt against the very source of civilisation.

The fundamental normative principle is thus that *it is imperative to sacrifice animals to the gods, cook them and eat them*. By this act, human beings maintain their position, different from animals, and they exhibit appropriate reverence to the gods. By properly slaughtering animals we uphold the cosmological hierarchy and order, and that makes sacrifice and meat-eating a politico-theological obligation.

What is the implication of all this? In light of the principle that we have excavated, vegetarianism, omophagia and cannibalism are similar and symmetrical in their subversion of the cosmological and public order. In Euripides, we found a bewildering conjunction of omophagia and vegetarianism, both of which the chorus claimed to have observed, as well as a startlingly abrupt transition into the issue of cannibalism. Yet after having rediscovered the principle underlying sacrifice, meat eating, and the order of the world, we should no longer find it startling.

The strange co-existence between the chorus' omophagia and vegetarianism is, of course, not possible. Yet judging by the principle of sacrifice, omophagia and vegetarianism are likewise distortions of order – the order of roasting meat in honour of the gods and for the benefit of human beings. In this respect, Orphic vegetarianism and Dionysian feasting on raw meat are equivalent. They are both contrary to the principle of the *polis*. Is it possible, then, that Euripides elucidates this fundamental principle by constructing an inconsistency, showing that vegetarian and omophagic are aberrations from the perspective of the principle?

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<sup>30</sup> Hesiod: *Works and Days*, 276-280.

Likewise, the principle will help us make sense of Pasiphae's curious evocation of cannibalism. For if sacrifice is necessary as a means of maintaining order in the world and in the city, then all omissions are, in one respect, similar perversions. We know that Minos did not perform the sacrifice, and in that sense, and in light of the normative principle, his omissions and actions are akin to cannibalism.

This is not to say that Euripides, or any Greek legal system, actually considered vegetarianism and cannibalism to be morally equivalent. But what I argue is that according to the principle of cosmological and political embodied in roasted meat, these modes of eating – cannibalism, vegetarianism and omophagia – are similar in not respecting the principle. Cannibalism does not heed the norm that one eat animals, not people; vegetarianism refrains from flesh; omophagia omits the proper treatment of meat, that is, roasting it.<sup>31</sup> As such, these practices deviate from the order of the *polis*.<sup>32</sup>

If the interpretation that I have suggested here is plausible, then Euripides expounds the principle in a remarkable way. By constructing a set of logical inconsistencies, he helps us discover a fundamental politico-theological principle and its implications.

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<sup>31</sup> It has been argued that there must have been a further variant of the myth, according to which Minos did not sacrifice another bull instead of the one he had promised Poseidon. Via the interpretation of a Roman sarcophagus (now in the Louvre and in the Villa Borghese), Carl Robert claimed that a woman carrying a basket represents Pasiphae with fruit offerings for Poseidon, and that this implies a now lost second version of the myth, according to which Minos had refrained from sacrificing the bull on ethical and religious grounds. 'Minos der Mystiker' had, Robert argued, adopted the new religion of the Zeus priests, thus observing vegetarianism and substituting fruit for the bull and inciting the fury of the god (Carl Robert: *Der Pasiphae-Sarkophag*, Halle: Niemeyer, 1890, pp. 15, 19-23; *LIMC*, Minos I, 1). Robert's interpretation is probably much too imaginative for its own good, and it makes very much out of very little, in this case a late set of images (Jouan & van Looy, p. 315). The possibility of Minos being a vegetarian of this kind is intriguing, not least given Pasiphae's sarcastic invitation to cannibalism. But again, even if it could be shown on the basis of other sources that such a version existed, my interpretation would be able to accommodate that version as well. For if the meaning of Euripides' series of inconsistencies is to uncover an underlying, systematic normative principle, and if he does so by showing how these deviations from the principle are symmetrical according to the principle itself, then Minos' vegetarianism and cannibalism would be quite compatible, in a curious, paradoxical way.

<sup>32</sup> It could be objected that this argument trades on a hypostatisation of Orphism (cf. Radcliffe Edmonds: 'Mystai and Magoi, Magicians and Orphics in the Derveni Papyrus', in *Classical Philology*, CIII, 1, 2008, pp. 16-39. But my argument is that if, as argued by Detienne, vegetarianism, omophagia and cannibalism are similar – regardless of ascriptions to -isms – in the perspective of the principle, then Euripides' self-contradictions are no longer inexplicable.

## Conclusions and implications

What are the implications of this? Let me briefly say a few final words.

First, this is a new way of understanding a Euripidean riddle that previous scholarship has been uneasy in dealing with, and as such, the interpretation that I have suggested should throw new light on Euripides, his relation to the political and religious practices of his city, and by extension on the self-understanding of the Greek *poleis*.

Second, while some scholars have argued Greek tragedy inhabits a pre-logical and anti-logical world, in which logical inconsistencies are not considered to be a problem, we have revealed that even a fragmentary drama with obvious logical peculiarities is marvelously systematic in expounding a fundamental normative principle and its implications.<sup>33</sup>

Third, while this tragedy may not exhibit any internal critique that is as explicit as that found not only in Plato, but in Sophokles and Aischylos – that is, attempts to refute an argument by reference to the very principles that are intended to justify the argument –, the play reveals a remarkably sophisticated way of explicating a fundamental normative principle. It locates this principle and explores its implications. The shards of the *Cretans* that have come down to us are thus, in their own, very strange and sophisticated way, a part of the origin of political philosophy.

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<sup>33</sup> For the "pre-logical" thesis, cf. Th. C. W. Oudemans & A. P. M. H. Lardinois: *Tragic Ambiguity. Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone*, Leiden: Brill, 1987, p. 206.