

Several moments in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* seem to deny the connection between the human realm and the afterlife. The implication is that characters make and justify moral decisions without consideration of postmortem consequences. This is, in fact, how difficult choices are represented in these two plays. Yet in the third, the *Eumenides*, both the Ghost of Clytemnestra (*Eu.* 95-8) and the Erinyes (e.g. *Eu.* 175-8) speak of moral punishment in the beyond. Why can we hear what awaits characters after death whereas we see them acting as though life is their moral horizon? This paper asks what the limits of moral understanding are in the *Oresteia* by investigating its conflicting representations of the afterlife. It thus lays the groundwork for a new perspective on decision making and human freedom in the trilogy.

The debate over moral choice in the *Oresteia*, which had a flurry of activity (Lloyd-Jones 1962; Lesky 1966; Edwards 1977) in response to the major commentaries of mid-century, has been taken up again recently (Helm 2004; Sewell-Rutter 2007). Both then and now it has focused on the *restrictions* governing human freedom, citing such forces as necessity, the divine, and the family curse or guilt of the Atreidae. Taking a different approach, this paper looks for the *source* of human freedom by examining whether characters make their choices with full knowledge. Without access to the moral afterlife as it is presented to the audience, do characters understand the consequences of their actions?

In its first, part this paper argues that specific examples show how the chorus and the characters at the beginning of the trilogy deliberately exclude the afterlife from consideration. It analyzes instances of the silencing of speech about the dead (*Ag.* 568-572[570]), the closing of moral calculation with life's end (*Ag.* 928-9), and the many calls for death as a final release (e.g. *Ag.* 539, 1448-51, 1610-11; *Ch.* 438). In the second part, it briefly compares such restrictions on the scope of thinking to the language of moral decisions in the *Oresteia*: the description of Agamemnon's dilemma at Aulis, Clytemnestra's various justifications for murder, and Orestes' choice of matricide. It thereby shows that consideration in these instances is also limited to the consequences within life, allowing for always morally difficult, sometimes disastrous action. The last part asks why this constricted scope of moral thinking is so strikingly problematized in the *Eumenides*. Clytemnestra's description of her own painful afterlife and the Erinyes' of the judgment and tortures for the dead who have transgressed seem to overturn all previous understandings of morality as bounded by life's end. Yet the *Oresteia* makes sure that only the audience can see the Ghost and that human characters make decisions without any sure knowledge of what the afterlife bears for them. Therefore, this paper argues that, as the counterpart to the much discussed restrictions on moral choice, the *Oresteia* strongly implies that the *disjunct* between human knowledge and the afterlife is a major component of human freedom. Further, that it stems from *ignorance* of moral punishment after death shows that human freedom is represented as fundamentally flawed.