

Σύνεσις and the Expression of Conscience

V. A. Rodgers

MENELAUS. τί χρῆμα πάσχεις; τίς σ' ἀπόλλυσιν νόσος;

ORESTES. ἡ σύνεσις, ὅτι σύννοϊδα δειν' εἰργασμένος.

MENELAUS. πῶς φῆς; σοφόν τοι τὸ σαφές, οὐ τὸ μὴ σαφές.

ORESTES. λύπη μάλιστά γ' ἡ διαφθείρουσά με—

MENELAUS. δεινὴ γὰρ ἡ θεός, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἰάσιμος.

AT EURIPIDES' *Orestes* 395ff, Orestes is portrayed as subject to fits of madness since his murdered mother was buried five days previously. He and Electra are to have their fate decided by the people of Argos, and Electra anxiously awaits the arrival of their uncle Menelaus, who is their only hope of safety. When he appears he recoils in horror at the sight of Orestes and describes him as *τινα νερτέρων*, so wasted is he by the madness. It is thus quite natural for him to ask Orestes, in the first line of the passage quoted above, what the *νόσος* is which is destroying him, but the answer he gets puzzles him. Orestes refers to something called *σύνεσις*, or, in other words, *ὅτι σύννοϊδα δειν' εἰργασμένος*. Menelaus fails to get his meaning, and we ourselves may well ask what Orestes, or Euripides, did mean.

The line has attracted a good deal of attention, and is frequently cited as an example of the existence in Classical Greek of a term or formula which may be rendered by the word 'conscience'. Zucker, for instance, comes to the conclusion from a study of this and other passages that, "Wir finden in der Zeit der Sophistik die Vorstellung vom bösen Gewissen und seiner Beunruhigung und vom guten Gewissen und der von ihm ausgehenden Befriedigung in der Form des häufigen Ausdrucks: sich bewusst sein böser Taten—sich keiner bösen Taten bewusst sein, mit Bezugnahme auf Einzelfälle und auf den inneren Gesamtzustand. Mit anderen Worten: wir finden in dieser Vorstufenform die Vorstellung vom rückschauenden

Gewissen.”¹ Similarly Gernet remarks on a particular passage of Antiphon, “Il n’y a d’ailleurs pas encore dans ce passage de terme abstrait pour désigner la ‘conscience’: Euripide paraît le premier à employer ainsi le mot *σύνεσις* (*Or.* 396) à une occasion qui fait justement penser à notre texte.”² The same line is also one of the passages cited in *LSJ* as examples of the use of the word *σύνεσις* in the sense of ‘conscience’.

That *σύνεσις* and related nouns and verbal formulae can properly be rendered by the word ‘conscience’ may be correct, but it is a recognised problem in translation that it is very difficult to find exactly equivalent expressions in any two languages, not least when the two concerned are an ancient and a modern one, and when the terms involved are as complex as that of ‘conscience’. In English we talk, for instance, of a ‘guilty conscience’, of ‘conscience-money’, of ‘freedom of conscience’ and so on, when it is evident that different aspects of the word ‘conscience’ are meant. When considering this word as a possible rendering for *σύνεσις* and related expressions, we must therefore ask first what meanings the word carries for us, and then which, if any, of these meanings correspond to the usage of the Greek expressions.

A discussion of all the implications of the word ‘conscience’ would be beyond the scope of this article, but one basic distinction which can be recognised in our use of this word is that between what Zucker calls the ‘backward-looking conscience’ and the ‘conscience’ which prompts a course of action, and which might therefore be called ‘forward-looking’. Thus we talk of having a clear or guilty conscience with reference to our past actions, and of following the dictates of our conscience when faced with alternative courses of action. But as well as this basic distinction, a further valid distinction can, I think, be made in the case of each of the two kinds of conscience so far described. When we talk of having a clear or guilty conscience with reference to past actions, we can mean simply that we are aware or are not aware of having, whether by commission or omission, rendered ourselves liable to penalties if we are apprehended. These penalties can be the legal penalties incurred by transgressing the laws of the state, or the censure, wrath or vengeance of those whom we have offended. ‘Conscience’ in this sense could thus be defined as an ‘awareness of culpability’, much as it is used in Shakespeare’s “conscience does

¹ F. Zucker, *Syneidesis-Conscientia* (Jenaer akademische Reden 6, 1928).

² Antiphon, ed. Gernet (Budé, Paris 1954) p.135 n.1.

make cowards of us all." This awareness is usually associated, as here, with feelings of fear, and can be accompanied by a feeling of remorse which is prompted by fear of sanctions and allied with a sense of one's own stupidity in having done the deed. But we can also use phrases like 'having a guilty conscience' and 'being conscience-stricken' to denote a feeling of 'moral guilt'. By this I mean the awareness that one has knowingly violated standards of behaviour to which one subscribes, an awareness which is usually associated with feeling ashamed of oneself. This connotation of such phrases as 'being conscience-stricken' is clearly quite different from 'awareness of culpability', a distinction we often draw when talking of past actions. Indeed the recognition of an act as 'morally wrong', that is, as contravening one's own code of behaviour as distinct from incurring some external penalty, is a necessary prerequisite of a sense of moral guilt.

There are thus at least two senses in which the word 'conscience' can be used with reference to past actions, and a similar complexity is, I think, inherent in this word when used with reference to a future course of action. When a person hesitates to do something he can say, for example, "It would be on my conscience," and he can mean by this that what he did would be an offence rendering him liable to penalties and therefore to the concomitant fear of being found out and punished. This use of the word 'conscience', which I may call 'scrupulous fear', would thus correspond to the 'awareness of culpability' with respect to past actions. But very frequently, of course, the word 'conscience', particularly when found absolutely, is used to denote a personal conviction of the rightness or wrongness of a course of action. Thus when talking of 'freedom of conscience' or of a 'conscience clause' in legislation, we mean the right of an individual to act in accordance with his personal conviction of what is right and what wrong. This meaning clearly differs fundamentally from 'scrupulous fear', since it has reference to a personal code of behaviour as distinct from a recognition that certain things are deemed right or wrong by others so that one will be rewarded or punished accordingly. This meaning, defined by the *OED* as 'a moral sense of right and wrong', thus corresponds to the use of the word 'conscience' to denote 'moral guilt'. Indeed the two uses are very closely related, since it is when one has acted against one's convictions that one feels moral guilt.

We can thus distinguish in our use of the word 'conscience' at least these four elements, namely 'awareness of culpability', 'moral guilt',

‘scrupulous fear’ and ‘a moral sense of right and wrong’. With these in mind let us now turn to the Greek word *σύνεσις* and related expressions. In the lines quoted from *Orestes* the abstract noun is explained or glossed by the expression *σύννοια δειν’ εἰργασμένος*, and this phrase is itself almost certainly, as Zucker suggests, a shortened version of the commoner *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ*. The latter expression seems to have been used first by Sappho,³ but the fragmentary nature of the example precludes any attempt to discover how it was used. In Herodotus both *σύννοια* and *συγγινώσκω (-ομαι)* are found. *σύννοια* is used to denote knowledge shared with others,⁴ *τὰς δὲ μαντηίας τὰς γινομένας τούτους φυλάσσειν, συνειδέναι δὲ καὶ τοὺς Πυθίους*, or, as a development of this meaning, to denote common knowledge of some fact about some other person, which can be to his credit or discredit: *ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων συμμάχων ἐξελέγετο κατ’ ὀλίγους, τοῖσι εἶδεά τε ὑπῆρχε διαλέγων καὶ εἰ τέοισί τι χρηστὸν συνήδεε πεποιημένον* (Hdt. 8.113.3). *συγγινώσκω (-ομαι)* on the other hand appears to indicate a sharing of opinion with someone, an admission or acceptance of the fact that he is right. When, for example, the Sicyonians and the people of Aegina have taken part in an attack on Argive territory, Argos as the victim immediately seeks redress and demands a fine from both peoples, with the result that, *Σικυῶνιοι μὲν νυν συγγινόντες ἀδικῆσαι ὠμολόγησαν ἑκατὸν τάλαντα ἐκτείσαντες ἀζήμιοι εἶναι, Αἰγινῆται δὲ οὔτε συνεγινώσκοντο ἤσάν τε ἀνθαδέστεροι* (Hdt. 6.92.2). Clearly the Sicyonians are ‘pleading guilty’. They are admitting, or acknowledging, the correctness of the Argive charge, and are paying the proposed fine in order to appease Argos and escape worse penalties. The people of Aegina, on the other hand, are ‘pleading not guilty’. They are denying the truth of the charge, presumably in the hope of getting off scot-free. *συγγινώσκω (-ομαι)* thus denotes a sharing of the other person’s point of view, a meaning which lies also behind the cognate noun *συγγνώμη*. For this word means not so much ‘forgiveness’, in the sense of taking pity on someone who has perhaps no excuse to offer for his action, but rather a recognition of that person’s reasons for his action. One shares his view of the action and so admits that he does not deserve the anger or reprisals with which one is threatening

³ *ἔγω δ’ ἔμ’ [αὐτὰι | τοῦτο συν]νοῖδα*, Sappho fr.26.11f Lobel-Page.

⁴ Hdt. 6.57.4, cf. Solon 12.15f (I. M. Linforth, *Solon the Athenian* [Berkeley 1919]), Aesch. Cho. 215ff, Soph. El. 92ff, etc. This basic meaning continues to be the one most frequently found, and is often used to denote ‘complicity’, as for example in Eur. Hec. 870f, *σύνισθι μὲν γάρ, ἣν τι βουλεύσω κακὸν | τῷ τόνδ’ ἀποκτείναντι, συνδράσης δὲ μή*.

him. Thus when Croesus keeps Atys away from hunting and fighting, Atys is highly annoyed because of the poor figure he is cutting (Hdt. 1.37.2-3). When Croesus explains the reason, namely that a dream had warned him that his son would die as the result of a wound, Atys acknowledges the validity of the reason, saying, *συγγνώμη μὲν ᾧ πάτερ τοι, ἰδόντι γε ὄψιν τοιαύτην, περὶ ἐμὲ φυλακὴν ἔχειν* (Hdt. 1.39.1).

When *συγγινώσκω* and *συγγινώσκομαι* are used by Herodotus each once with the reflexive, they appear to differ from the non-reflexive uses in denoting specifically an admission or conclusion about oneself which is reached after talking the thing over with oneself, as it were. The Sicyonians, for instance, admitted to a charge with which they were taxed by someone else, whereas Periander *παρηβήκεε καὶ συνεγινώσκετο ἑωυτῷ οὐκέτι εἶναι δυνατὸς τὰ πρήγματα ἐπορᾶν τε καὶ διέπειν* (Hdt. 3.53.1). He 'admits to himself', 'realises' or 'is aware of' his own inability to cope, without being necessarily taxed with it by someone else. In the same way the Spartans, having driven Hippias out of Athens, are recorded as saying, *ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι, συγγινώσκομεν αὐτοῖσι ἡμῖν οὐ ποιήσασι ὀρθῶς* (Hdt. 5.91.2). This is not so much an acknowledgement of the truth of an accusation as an independent realisation of their error.⁵

σύννοια is not found with the reflexive in Herodotus, but when it is used elsewhere in Greek literature,⁶ it appears, like *συγγινώσκω* (-ομαι) to differ from the non-reflexive uses in indicating that the action of the verb, the 'knowing', is shared not with others but with oneself. It thus comes to mean something like 'to be aware of' or 'conscious of' something about oneself. Thus in a fragment of Gorgias (82 v 11a.5 D.-K.) we find, in suitably rhetorical language, *ὅτι μὲν οὖν οὐ σαφῶς <εἰδῶς> ὁ κατήγορος κατηγορεῖ μου, σαφῶς οἶδα· σύννοια γὰρ ἑμαυτῷ*

⁵ One may note a parallel example in Lys. 9.11, *συνέγνωσαν δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ σφίσιν ὡς ἡδικηκότες*. This passage together with the two Herodotean passages are the only three examples of the use of *συγγινώσκω* (-ομαι) with the reflexive cited by LSJ before Dion. Hal. In Soph. *Ant.* 926, also cited under the reflexive uses by LSJ, the verb is unusually used with a nominative participle directly dependent on it. This may be equivalent to a reflexive use (cf. Eur. *Or.* 396 and n.10 below), but the sense of the expression seems from the context to be that of the non-reflexive verb 'to admit', rather than that of the reflexive verb 'to be aware of'.

⁶ The use of this expression does not become in any way frequent before the end of the fifth century B.C. It does not seem to appear at all in some major authors such as Herodotus, Aeschylus, Thucydides, and possibly Sophocles (Stob. 3.24 attributes to him one fragment containing the expression [v.l. *αὐτῷ*], = fr.845 Nauck). It then appears with some frequency in the speeches attributed to Antiphon, particularly V and VI, in Plato's dialogues and in Xenophon. Aristotle, Demosthenes and Isocrates seem to use it a couple of times each.

σαφῶς οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον πεποιηκώς; and at Aristophanes, *Eq.* 184, ξυνειδέναι τί μοι δοκεῖς σαυτῷ καλόν. This latter example also serves to show that the expression is essentially neutral, since it can be used in connection with good and praiseworthy facts as well as bad.

The mere occurrence of either *συγγινώσκω* (-ομαι) or *σύννοια* with the reflexive would thus hardly justify the use of the word 'conscience' in any of the meanings discussed above, since these expressions would seem to indicate mere awareness or consciousness of some fact about oneself. But though this may be true of these expressions in isolation, are they perhaps used in contexts where the sense of the whole passage may justify 'conscience' in any of its senses? When these expressions are found in connection with some good quality in oneself, as for instance in the line of Aristophanes quoted above, the concept as a whole clearly bears no relation to 'conscience'. If anything, the predominant note is one of pride, much as we talk of 'conscious pride' with reference to our virtues or achievements. It is only when these expressions are used in connection with some unpleasant fact that the context as a whole can, but need not necessarily, suggest the notion of 'conscience'. Thus when Periander *συνεγινώσκετο ἑωυτῷ οὐκέτι εἶναι δυνατὸς τὰ πρήγματα ἐπορᾶν*, there is nothing to suggest that we are dealing in this passage with 'awareness of culpability', least of all with 'moral guilt'. But in the second example from Herodotus where the Spartans confess their mistake, they not only admit something to their discredit, but by their attempts to rectify the situation, *ἐπεῖτε δὲ ἐκεῖνα ποιήσαντες ἡμάρτομεν, νῦν πειρησόμεθά σφεα ἅμα ὑμῖν ἀκεόμενοι* (Hdt. 5.91.3), reveal both a fear of the consequences of their own willed action and a sense of their own stupidity that could perhaps amount to that 'remorseful regret' which can accompany 'awareness of culpability'.

It is thus only the connection of the expressions *συγγινώσκειν* (-εσθαί) *τι ἑαυτῷ* and *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ* with some discreditable fact and with those feelings which were seen to be associated with the various meanings of 'conscience' which could justify any reference to 'conscience', and it is only these feelings which can determine which of the meanings of 'conscience' could be useful in any particular passage. Thus at Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 999ff,

*πῶς οὖν ἑμαυτῷ τοῦτ' ἐγὼ ξυνείσομαι,
φεύγοντ' ἀπολύσας ἄνδρα; τί ποτε πείσομαι;*

ἀλλ' ὦ πολυτίμητοι θεοὶ ξύγγνωτέ μοι·
ἄκων γὰρ αὐτ' ἔδρασα κού τούμοῦ τρόπου,

the verbal expression appears rather unusually in the future tense; but it is clear from the context that we are not dealing with the 'future-looking conscience', but with concern for a past action in which the future tense expresses an inability even to admit the deed to oneself because of the terrible consequences it will incur (*τί ποτε πείσομαι*);). It is also interesting that the act is described as being 'out of character', which might suggest that we are dealing with 'moral guilt'; but such a phrase can refer to the fact that a person is normally law-abiding and does not do what will get him into trouble. Indeed that this statement occurs in a deprecatory prayer to the gods would indicate that Philocleon is offering as grounds for acquittal (*ξύγγνωτε*) the fact that he is 'of previously good behaviour'. It is thus unlikely that 'moral guilt' is here implied, particularly as he also claims that his act was not deliberate. The basic reaction to the deed is one of fearful foreboding of the consequences, which would seem to indicate, if anything, the 'awareness of culpability' which was defined earlier.

It is the association of particular reactions to one's actions with the expression *συνειδέναι τι ἐαυτῷ* which alone justifies any reference to the word 'conscience', and of the types of reaction noted when we distinguished the meanings of 'conscience', it would seem that, as in the Aristophanes passage, fearful foreboding alone is conveyed by this expression. Thus it is because Alcibiades fears the censure of Socrates that he says, *ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον μόνον αἰσχύνομαι. σύνοιδα γὰρ ἐμαυτῷ ἀντιλέγειν μὲν οὐ δυναμένῳ ὡς οὐ δεῖ ποιεῖν ἅ οὗτος κελεύει, ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἀπέλθω, ἡττημένῳ τῆς τιμῆς ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν . . . καὶ ὅταν ἴδω, αἰσχύνομαι τὰ ὠμολογημένα. καὶ πολλάκις μὲν ἠδέως ἂν ἴδοιμι αὐτὸν μὴ ὄντα ἐν ἀνθρώποις* (Pl. *Symp.* 216aff). Again we are hardly dealing here with an expression of moral guilt since, though he has accepted or agreed that he ought to do what Socrates suggests, his reaction to doing the opposite is to fear the consequences of not doing it, namely Socrates' censure. He is ashamed, certainly, but the shame he feels is not 'of himself' but 'before Socrates'. It is a shame which is evoked by the external stimulus of seeing Socrates, so that his reaction is to wish him dead.⁷

⁷ A situation similar to that in which Alcibiades finds himself is described in Xen. *An.* 1.3.10 (cf. *Mem.* 2.9.6), *ὥστε καὶ μεταπεμπομένου αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐθέλω ἐλθεῖν, τὸ μὲν μέγιστον*

This combination of the expression *συνειδέναι τι ἐαυτῷ* with anxious foreboding, amounting to what could be termed ‘awareness of culpability’, is, as one might expect, most commonly found in the context of the law courts and of the relations between men and gods. Plato provides us with a good example of the latter when Cephalus describes the reaction of men to the approach of death (*Rep.* 330E4ff) *ὑποψίας δ’ οὖν καὶ δείματος μεστὸς γίγνεται καὶ ἀναλογίζεται ἤδη καὶ σκοπεῖ εἴ τινα τι ἠδίκησεν. ὁ μὲν οὖν εὐρίσκων ἑαυτοῦ ἐν τῷ βίῳ πολλὰ ἀδικήματα καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὕπνων, ὥσπερ οἱ παῖδες, θαμὰ ἐγειρόμενος δειμαίνει καὶ ζῆ μετὰ κακῆς ἐλπίδος. τῷ δὲ μηδὲν ἑαυτῷ ἄδικον συνειδῶτι ἠδεῖα ἐλπίς αἰεὶ πάρεστι καὶ ἀγαθὴ γηροτρόφος.* A distinction is drawn here between the man who has skeletons in his cupboard and the one who has none, and it is interesting that the counterpart to our expression is a verb of ‘finding out’ or ‘discovering’ (*εὐρίσκων*). What is described is an examination of one’s past life to find out if any of one’s actions have violated the (divine) law (*ἀδικήματα*) and therefore render one liable to penalties. There is no question here of that shame of oneself which results from a violation of one’s personal code of behaviour, but rather of the uneasiness of mind or peace of mind which results from the presence or absence of an awareness of culpability.

In the sphere of the law courts one particular passage in Antiphon (5.93) merits discussion in detail: *εὖ δ’ ἴστε ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ποτ’ ἦλθον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, εἴ τι ξυνήδη ἐμαυτῷ τοιοῦτον· νῦν δὲ πιστεύων τῷ δικαίῳ, οὐ πλέονος οὐδὲν ἐστι ἄξιον ἀνδρὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι, μηδὲν αὐτῷ συνειδῶτι ἀνόσιον εἰργασμένῳ μηδ’ εἰς τοὺς θεοὺς ἡσεβηκότι· ἐν γὰρ τῷ τοιοῦτῳ ἤδη καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀπειρηκὸς ἢ ψυχὴ συνεξέσωσεν, ἐθέλουσα ταλαιπωρεῖν διὰ τὸ μὴ ξυνειδέναι ἑαυτῇ· τῷ δὲ ξυνειδῶτι τοῦτο αὐτὸ πρῶτον πολέμιόν ἐστιν· ἔτι γὰρ καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἰσχύοντος ἢ ψυχὴ προαπολείπει, ἡγουμένη τὴν τιμωρίαν οἱ ἦκειν ταύτην τῶν ἀσεβημάτων· ἐγὼ δ’ ἐμαυτῷ τοιοῦτον οὐδὲν ξυνειδῶς ἦκω εἰς ὑμᾶς.* It is of this passage that Gernet says, as mentioned above, “Ces conceptions et considérations psychologiques ne sont pas de date très ancienne; il n’y a d’ailleurs pas encore dans ce passage de terme abstrait pour désigner la ‘conscience’: Euripide paraît le premier à employer ainsi le mot *σύνεσις* (*Or.* 396) à une occasion qui fait justement penser à notre texte.”⁸ The French word

ἀισχυρόμενος ὅτι σύννοια ἐμαυτῷ πάντα ἐψευσμένος αὐτόν, ἔπειτα καὶ δεδιὼς μὴ λάβων με δίκην ἐπιθῆ . . .

⁸ Though these two passages do not, perhaps, have much more in common than the use

conscience covers, of course, an even wider range of meanings than English ‘conscience’, since it denotes both consciousness and conscience, so that what particular aspect or aspects of *la conscience* Gernet considers present in this passage is not clear. Certainly it would be unwise, I think, to talk of ‘conscience’ in English without specifying the particular aspect involved. In the passage the defendant says that he would not have returned to the city ‘me sentant coupable’ as Gernet himself translates. An unwillingness to face someone or go somewhere indicates fear of the consequences of one’s actions, and this same reaction has already been noticed in other passages where the general context might suggest ‘awareness of culpability’. There is certainly in this passage, as Gernet points out, evidence of that deeper psychological observation which is very much in evidence at the time, but it is the observation of the effect on a defendant of the presence or absence of awareness of culpability. What causes the guilty man’s mental unease is not any feeling of ‘moral guilt’, but his fear of *τὴν τιμωρίαν . . . τῶν ἀσεβημάτων*. As Demosthenes points out in a similar observation (19.208), *τᾶληθὲς ἰσχυρόν, καὶ τοῦναντίον ἀσθενὲς τὸ συνειδέναι πεπρακόσιν αὐτοῖς τὰ πράγματα. τοῦτο παραιρεῖται τὴν θρασύτητα τὴν τούτων, τοῦτ’ ἀποστρέφει τὴν γλῶτταν . . . σιωπᾶν ποιεῖ*. Consciousness of culpability creates a lack of confidence to face a jury, and it is this aspect of the word ‘conscience’, rather than that of ‘moral guilt’, which lies behind these passages.⁹

It would seem from the passages discussed that the phrase *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ* means no more than ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’ of some fact about oneself, but that the association with it of a feeling of fearful foreboding might justify reference to the expressions ‘guilty conscience’ or ‘clear conscience’ in the sense of the presence or absence of an awareness of culpability. What, then, of the line in Euripides’ *Orestes*? It would seem that *σύνεσις* is here used as a noun equivalent of *συνειδέναι τι*,¹⁰ a phrase which, as we have seen, means

of the phrase *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ*, it is certainly true that instances of this expression do seem to increase at roughly this time. Thus this passage of Antiphon dates probably from around 415 B.C., the *Or.* from 408(?) and the *Thesm.* from 410(?).

⁹ Cf. *ὁ συνιστορῶν αὐτῷ τι κἄν ἢ θρασύτατος | ἢ σύνεσις αὐτὸν δειλότατον εἶναι ποιεῖ* (*Men. fab.inc.* fr.632 Edmonds) and *τὸ μὴ συνειδέναι γὰρ αὐτοῦ τῷ βίῳ | ἀδίκημα μηδὲν ἴδοντὴν πολλὴν ἔχει* (*Antiph. fab.inc.* 269 Edmonds), also *Isoc.* 1.16, 3.59.

¹⁰ It is noticeable that Euripides does not use the dative of the reflexive pronoun with *συνειδέναι*. In all but two passages the verb means ‘knowledge shared with others’, but both here and in *Med.* 495 (*σύννοισθᾶ γ’ εἰς ἔμ’ οὐκ εὐορκος ὦν*) the nominative participle seems

no more than to be conscious of something. To the noun also this meaning, and this only, can be attributed. It is certainly an unusual use of the noun, but that it denotes 'consciousness', rather than 'conscience' in any of its senses, is, I think, clear from the meaning of the phrase which it summarises.¹¹

But does the context perhaps justify some reference to 'conscience'? Compare this passage with Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 476f, where the same or a very similar expression occurs:

ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτῇ πρῶτον, ἵνα μὴ ἄλλην λέγω,
ξύνουδ' ἐμαυτῇ πολλὰ δεῖν' . . .

Zucker is of the opinion that the actual use of this expression differs in the two passages, in that here it means *only* 'ich weiss von mir'. This difference of usage can, I think, hardly be proved, and he himself gives no evidence beyond saying that the phrase can refer to 'moralische Tatbestände'. Differences there certainly are in the two passages, but they lie not in the expression itself, which in *both* cases means 'ich weiss von mir', but in the reaction to what has been done. It is very obvious that Mnesilochus has no qualms whatsoever about what 'she' has done. Orestes, on the other hand, is in obvious distress, and describes his condition as *λύπη*. But can one even so talk justifiably, in Orestes' case, of a guilty conscience in any sense? The adjective he uses to describe his deed is *δεινός*, a word which appears to bear no moral connotations at all, being used of things which are extraordinary or monstrous. What he is conscious of is the full horror of the deed, a feeling which need have nothing to do with awareness of culpability or with moral guilt. That awareness of culpability may form part of his distress cannot be denied, but it seems to me that what is being described here, with again that subtler observation of

to indicate that the knowledge is shared with oneself, so that the expression is equivalent to the commoner *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ*.

¹¹ The normal meaning of *σύνεσις* (from *συνίημι*, *συνιέναι* *pace* Plato [*Crat.* 412A], who appears to derive it from *σύνειμι*, *συνιέναι*) is, of course, 'understanding' or 'intelligence'. Euripides' use of it as equivalent in meaning to *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ* (does he perhaps derive it from that word?) is, I think, without precedent, and only two other examples are cited by *LSJ*. In the fragment of Menander (quoted above n.9) it is used as an equivalent of *συνιστορῶν αὐτῷ τι*, which is clearly related to *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ*. The Polybius passage (*οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτως οὔτε μάρτυς ἐστὶ φοβερὸς οὔτε κατήγορος δεινὸς ὡς ἡ σύνεσις ἢ ἐγκατοικοῦσα ταῖς ἐκάστων ψυχαῖς* 18.43.13) is considered to be in all probability a gloss and lacks a context which would give it a precise meaning, but the description of *σύνεσις* as *μάρτυς φοβερὸς* might suggest 'awareness of culpability'.

psychological matters, is an irrational, amoral sense of horror which can end in madness. One play cannot be used to explain another, but it is interesting to note that in the *Electra* Orestes relives the scene of the murder, which was an experience clearly sufficient to prey on his mind and destroy it.

There is thus no evidence to support the rendering of the word *σύνεσις* by the word 'conscience' in any of its senses. It is used with the meaning 'consciousness' and is therefore synonymous with *συνείδησις*, the meaning of which is likewise 'consciousness' as is shown by its use in Democritus: *ἔνιοι θνητῆς φύσεως διάλυσιν οὐκ εἰδότες ἄνθρωποι, συνειδήσει δὲ τῆς ἐν τῷ βίῳ κακοπραγμοσύνης, τὸν τῆς βιοτῆς χρόνον ἐν παραχαῖς καὶ φόβοις ταλαιπωροῦσι.*¹² The passage is akin to the one in the *Republic* discussed above, and describes the same awareness of culpability and the consequent fear of sanctions. So too the use of the word *σύννοια* in Eur. *Andr.* 804ff would seem to denote some kind of meditation on or awareness of one's past actions:

δέσποινα γὰρ κατ' οἶκον, Ἑρμιόνην λέγω,
πατρός τ' ἐρημωθεῖσα συννοία θ' ἅμα,
οἶον δέδρακεν ἔργον Ἀνδρομάχην κτανεῖν
καὶ παῖδα βουλεύσασα, κατθανεῖν θέλει,
πόσιν τρέμουσα, μὴ ἀντὶ τῶν δεδραμένων
ἐκ τῶνδ' ἀτίμως δωμάτων ἀποσταλῆ,
ἢ κατθάνη κτείνουσα τοὺς οὐ χρῆ κτανεῖν.

Hermione's reaction to what she attempted to do is to fear her husband's wrath and wish herself dead rather than meet him. The context is thus very similar to others discussed above in which awareness of culpability is associated with the fear of sanctions and the consequent desire to avoid them. To render the word by either 'conscience'¹³ or 'remorse' (*LSJ s.v.*) could thus be misleading, since

¹² Democr. 68 B 297 D.-K. It is *συνείδησις* which is the strict noun equivalent of the expression *συνειδέναί τι ἐαυτῷ*, and which, rather than *σύνεσις*, after the classical period becomes the word normally used to denote 'awareness of culpability'. The phrases *ὀρθή συνείδησις* and *ἀγαθὴ συνείδησις* are attributed at Stob. 3.24.11–12 to Bias and Periander respectively, and in the *NT* *συνείδησις* is used frequently to denote 'clear' or 'guilty conscience'. In some passages in St Paul's *Epistles* it also seems to be used to mean something like 'scrupulous fear', with particular reference to the wrath of God (*cf.* *ἐνθύμιον* discussed below). The participial substantive *τὸ συνειδός* is similarly found after the classical period with the meaning 'awareness of culpability' as in Paus. 7.10.10, *ὑπὸ συνειδότης ἐπαρρησιάζετο ἀγαθοῦ*; and Stobaeus' own chapter (3.24) is entitled *Περὶ τοῦ συνειδότης*.

¹³ W. H. S. Jones, "Conscience," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, IV (Edinburgh 1911) 38.

there is nothing to suggest we are dealing with moral guilt, and any justification for a reference to remorse or to awareness of culpability is to be found in the context rather than in the use of the word itself.

One other word to which has been attributed the rendering 'conscience'¹⁴ and which therefore merits mention is *ἐνθύμιον*. The word is interesting because it is the only one of those discussed which is used with reference to both past and future actions. Thus of Xerxes it is said (Hdt. 8.54) that he may have had sacrifice offered at Athens because *ἐνθύμιόν οἱ ἐγένετο ἐμπρήσαντι τὸ ἱρόν*, whereas Thucydides records (at 7.50.4) that after the eclipse of the moon at Syracuse the Athenians requested the generals not to proceed *ἐνθύμιον ποιούμενοι*. Is this, then, a word which could justify the rendering 'conscience' with reference to both past and future actions? As Hatch points out in his detailed discussion, it denotes primarily a feeling of anxiety, a weight on the heart or mind caused by fear (e.g. *Od.* 13.421). It then becomes incorporated into religious terminology when it refers specifically to fear of divine wrath. The word is thus used in contexts of fearful foreboding, which at best suggests 'awareness of culpability' in Xerxes' case and 'scrupulous fear' in the Athenians' case. But even so it must be borne in mind that the Greek word refers specifically to fear of divine wrath.

It would thus appear that none of the words and expressions discussed can justifiably be rendered by 'conscience' in any of its senses. They denote an awareness or consciousness or anxious reflection about one's actions. Only certain contexts in which they occur can be said to justify a reference to 'conscience'; and even then, it will be noted, only those meanings of 'conscience' which are connected with the consequence of one's actions, namely 'awareness of culpability' and 'scrupulous fear', are involved. None of the contexts justifies any reference to 'moral guilt' or 'a moral sense of right and wrong', that is to say, those meanings that have to do with a personally accepted code of behaviour.¹⁵

¹⁴ W. H. P. Hatch, "The Use of *ἀλιτήριος* (and Related Words)," *HSCP* 19 (1908) 172; also *LSJ* s.v.

¹⁵ Zucker is of the opinion that the various elements which he considers make up the concept 'conscience' were already present at the time of the Sophists and might have become unified but for Socrates. One of these elements is the concept of 'shame before oneself', a feeling which, it will be remembered, was seen to be a possible concomitant of 'moral guilt'. He refers particularly to a fragment of Democritus quoted by Stobaeus,

Although from our point of view we may be tempted to say that these words and phrases mean *only* 'consciousness', their use in Greek in fact represents an interesting shift of emphasis in the manner in which judgement was passed on past actions. In Homer (*Il.* 9.115f) Agamemnon replies to Nestor's criticisms of the way in which he took Briseis,

ὦ γέρον, οὐ τι ψεύδος ἐμὰς ἄτας κατέλεξας·
 ἀασάμην, οὐδ' αὐτὸς ἀναίνομαι . . .

He concedes the truth of Nestor's accusations, but describes his action as *ἄτη* and himself as under the influence of *ἄτη* (*ἀασάμην*). Indeed when apologising to Achilles he even claims,

ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι,
 ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἡεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς,
 οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην.¹⁶

He regards his action as the result of *ἄτη*, something external to himself, so that he himself is blameless. In exactly the same way, as Boehme suggests,¹⁷ the Homeric hero tends to attribute to his *θυμός* any thought which he no longer accepts as worthy of him. Thus Hector, having entertained the idea of appealing to Achilles' pity instead of fighting him, says (*Il.* 22.122),

ἀλλὰ τί μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;

It may also be noted that in much the same way a mistake is often regarded as being the result of a person having acted *μεγαλήτορι θυμῶ ἐΐξας* (*Il.* 9.109f) or *φρεσὶ λευγαλέησι πιθήσας* (9.119) where the *θυμός* or *φρένες* would seem to be regarded as something apart from the 'self', which is felt to be blameless. When, therefore, the Spartans say 'we

μηδέν τι μᾶλλον τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αἰδεῖσθαι ἔωντοῦ μηδέ τι μᾶλλον ἐξεργάζεσθαι κακόν, εἰ μέλλει μηδεὶς εἰδῆσαι ἢ οἱ πάντες ἀνθρώποι· ἀλλ' ἔωντόν μάλιστα αἰδεῖσθαι καὶ τοῦτον νόμον τῇ ψυχῇ καθεστάναι, ὥστε μηδέν ποιεῖν ἀνεπιτήδειον (68 v 264 D.-K.). This passage certainly describes a form of 'shame before oneself' or 'self-judgement', but that it also implies the existence of that personal acceptance of a code of behaviour which was seen to be the pre-requisite of both 'moral guilt' and 'a moral sense of right and wrong' is, I think, doubtful. What Democritus seems to urge is that one should not do, even privately or secretly, what others would censure if they knew of it (cf. v 244, v 84). The standard of behaviour is still 'what others think', what is 'proper' or 'fitting' (*ἀνεπιτήδειον*), rather than one's own 'moral consciousness'.

¹⁶ *Il.* 19.86ff. See on this passage E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1966) 2f, 5.

¹⁷ J. Boehme, *Die Seele und das Ich im homerischen Epos* (Leipzig-Berlin 1929).

admit to ourselves' that we made a mistake, the recognition of error is no longer externalised (*ἀασάμην*), but is an internal awareness (*συγγινώσκομεν αὐτοῖσι ἡμῖν*).

It is, I think, this internal awareness expressed in the word *σύνεσις*, rather than the strange use of the word itself, which puzzles Menelaus in the *Orestes*. Orestes' affliction has been attributed earlier in the play both by others and by himself to the *θεὰς εὐμενίδας* (*Or.* 37-38), the *αἵματωπούς καὶ δρακοντώδεις κόρας*.¹⁸ But in reply to Menelaus' question as to what is wrong with him, Orestes refers not primarily to these externalised agents of madness, but to *σύνεσις*, an inner consciousness. This concept Menelaus fails to grasp since, as his question to Orestes implies (*τίς σ' ἀπόλλυσιν νόσος;*), he understands Orestes' plight in terms of something external destroying him. That is why he is much happier when Orestes talks of *λύπη . . . ἡ διαφθείρουσά με*, since this can be understood as a form of *νόσος* which, because it is caused from without, can be cured: *δεινὴ γὰρ ἡ θεός, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἰάσιμος*.¹⁹

We are now back to the passage from which we started. I hope it has emerged that the mere occurrence of the word *σύνεσις*, or the related expressions *συγγινώσκειν (-εσθαί) τι ἑαυτῷ* and *συνειδέναι τι ἑαυτῷ*, does not justify any reference to 'conscience' in any of its senses. On the other hand, these words and expressions are not to be dismissed as mere failed candidates for such a rendering. In their own right they indicate a growing awareness of the inner self, and an increasingly subtle psychological analysis.²⁰

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

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¹⁸ *Or.* 256; cf. Aesch. *Choeph.* 1054, *αἶδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες*.

¹⁹ Cf. Phaedra's nurse in Eur. *Hipp.*, who, as Dodds suggests (*op.cit.* [*supra* n.16] 56), cannot grasp that the *μίασμα* affecting Phaedra's mind (line 317.) is purely internal, but understands it in terms of a magical incantation by enemies (line 318.).

²⁰ I wish to thank Professor G. L. Huxley of The Queen's University of Belfast for helpful criticism of earlier drafts of this article.