

BOOK REVIEW

Luck, Fate and Fortune: Antiquity and its Legacy. By ESTHER EIDINOW. Ancients and Moderns. London: I. B. Tauris; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. viii + 213. Paper, £12.99/\$24.95. ISBN 978-1-84511-843-3 (Tauris); 978-0-19-538079-8 (Oxford).

This is an insightful study examining μοῖρα (fate), τύχη (luck, fortune) and related ancient Greek concepts (discussed in Chapter 2) as cultural models, “which explore how we make meaning out of our experiences, and communicate that meaning to each other” (9). Eidinow is very good at discussing both modern and ancient ideas on the question of human responsibility (Chapters 1 and 8), at explaining the analytical tools of cognitive anthropology (Chapter 4), and at using cultural models to explore luck, fate and fortune in Solon and Theognis (Chapter 5). She is aware that she tends towards “generalisations about ancient society” (8) and states that her case studies “are not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of either ancient literature or ancient attitudes” (75). However, organizing her discussion of Thucydides under titles such as “Luck and the Author” (131) or “Luck ‘Happens’” (133), but without considering corresponding phenomena in her discussions of Herodotus and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, seems to undercut the validity of some of her generalizations.

In Chapter 3 Eidinow explores the different ways in which μοῖρα, τύχη, and δαίμων (god, gods, supernatural entities, fate) are presented in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and does this well. However, the reviewer has encountered here some imprecision or lack of clarity. For example, Eidinow describes lines 1297–1302 as introducing “a whole retinue of misfortune-makers all working together” (56) when the Chorus wonders only about two powers: what madness (μανία) has come upon the now blind Oedipus and who is the god (δαίμων) that has sprung upon his miserable fate (δυσδαίμονι μοίρα); μοῖρα here is not an active agent. That “the precise relationship of each of these supernatural entities to the other is never explicitly described” (60) is true, but the weakness of this chapter is that authorial choices are not discussed; this would have been consonant with Eidinow’s concern with cultural models elsewhere in the book and is necessary if

we are to get an idea about the patterns of thought and behavior promoted by the author as well as their relation to similar ideas in Herodotus and Thucydides.

The reviewer thinks that the multivalence of τύχη and τυχ-stem words (good fortune, success, hitting the mark, fortune, happenstance, chance, misfortune) is employed by Sophocles to show how Oedipus sees himself (successful and fortunate: 998, 1080; an unexpected chance/happenstance sprang upon him: 776–7; subject to chance and circumstance: 1025; cf. 1036), how Oedipus sees the misfortune of others without realizing that the misfortune is actually his own (tragic irony: 102, 263) and how the prophet Teiresias sees Oedipus (reading the riddle was a fortunate accident that has turned out to be his ruin: 442; lucky: 423, but with horrible consequences: 415–25). Multivalent and ambivalent terms (such as τύχη and δαίμων) are chosen to construct the archetype of king Oedipus and of the tragic reversal of his life (from seeming happiness to decline: 1189–92; 1206); what is created in effect is the mental image of the reversal of fortune that epitomizes the frailty, misfortune, and suffering of the whole human race (1186–1206). Since archetypes or prototypes are related to cultural models, as Eidinow shows (68–9), it would be fruitful to discuss how the archetype promoted by Sophocles relates to Herodotus and Thucydides.

In Chapter 6 Eidinow’s analysis of patterns of fate in Herodotus’ *Histories* is in general carefully nuanced, although the relation of τύχη with the “reversal model” and “the model of inevitable fate” (115–6) is not adequately explained. Similarly, Eidinow never explains how “Lady Luck’s Lighter Touch” (the title of her section on τύχη: p. 105) can be squared with “the tragic irony of misunderstood *tuche*” (109).

In Chapter 7 Eidinow rightly says that Thucydides’ presentation of τύχη “evokes the unpredictability and randomness of lived experience” (131) and that his use of the verb τυγχάνω expresses unpredictability and coincidence (133–5). But with no discussion of similar usages in Herodotus, Sophocles and Euripides (that is, of similar modes of thought being formed in the same culture), Eidinow ends up overstating what distinguishes Thucydides from Herodotus (140–2).

The reviewer has not noticed any typographical errors but has encountered some imprecision in the footnotes (e.g. n. 11, p. 186 does not make sense and n. 65, p. 195 should be “Solon, fr. 13.65–70”).

The reviewer’s overall opinion is that Eidinow succeeds in establishing a close link between the question of responsibility and the language of fate and fortune in Greek texts of political and rhetorical discourse (Solon: Chapter 5 and Demosthenes: Chapter 8), although how “Herodotus’ search of causes” or

“Thucydides’ careful account of the sequence of events” (154) is linked with mortal responsibility is not clearly spelled out. Similarly, what some readers may miss is a discussion of Greek popular beliefs arising from popular texts such as proverbs and fables (masterfully done by Teresa Morgan in *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2007)), especially since Eidinow gives examples from modern popular culture and her intention is to explore “the perceived role” of fate and fortune “across various aspects” of Greek “daily life” (153).

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