I shall be discussing the practical nature of the ancient unconscious—its preoccupation with questions of good and bad fortune, control and lack of control, security and insecurity. I shall be arguing that these questions are more central to its workings than questions of sexuality narrowly construed, indeed, that sexual anxieties function as just one species of practical anxiety about control and security. It therefore seems appropriate to begin with a dream, to all appearances sexual, which really has, according to the ancient interpretation, a nonsexual practical significance for the fortunes of most of the contributors to this volume—people, that is, who make a living giving lectures and exchanging arguments. In the first book of Artemidoros of Daldis’ work on dream interpretation (Artemidori Daldiani onicoriticon libri V), in a section—to which I shall return—on dreams whose content is that which violates convention in sexual matters, Artemidoros, a professional dream analyst of the second century C.E., interprets the dream that one is performing oral sex on a stranger.

In general, Artemidoros says, this dream is a bad one, indicative of some bad fortune to come—this in keeping with the pervasive Greek view that such intercourse is unclean and base (Winkler 1990, 37–38; Henderson 1975, 22, 25, 183–86). But there is an exception. With his characteristic pragmatism and flexibility, Artemidoros notes that the dream is a happy one,
indicative of future good fortune and security, “for those who earn their living by their mouths, I mean flutists, trumpet-players, rhetors, sophists, and whoever else is like them.” The sexual act is cheerfully read as a metaphor for the successful practice of one’s profession. Beyond the information it imparts, so interesting to the professional academic, this example begins, I hope, to give a sense of some profound differences between ancient Greek and Freudian attitudes toward what the unconscious mind contains and how to decipher its contents. These differences—and also their significance for the reading of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*—will be the subject of this essay.\(^3\)

I have often felt discomfort when hearing discussion of the Freudian Oedipus complex in connection with Sophocles’ play. For while it seems plain that both Freud’s theory and Sophocles’ play explore important aspects of human experience and evoke in their readers a valuable sort of reflection about experience, I have (along, I suspect, with many readers of the play) much difficulty finding the closer link that Freudian interpretations of the play wish us to discover. For it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the play itself is not very much concerned with sexual desire as such, or with deep-hidden sexual urges toward one’s parent, combined with aggressive wishes toward one’s parental rival. Its subject matter does very much appear to be that of reversal in fortune. So it has been understood since Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where it provides the central illustration of the concept of *peripeteia*—and, it appears, with good reason. Incest seems to figure in the plot as that which, when discovered, causes Oedipus to plummet from the summit of good fortune to the very bottom. It is, of course, crucial to the plot that Oedipus is not experiencing desire toward the person whom he takes to be his mother, toward the woman who raised him as a mother, nor, indeed, toward any woman who nursed, held, or cared for him at any time. So far as the intentional content of his desire is concerned, Jocasta is simply a well-placed eligible stranger. It is also perfectly clear that his aggressive action against Laios is in and of itself culturally acceptable, a counterattack in self-defense.\(^4\) Nor is there any sign that Oedipus has at any level hidden knowledge about the identity of the stranger he kills. How could he, when he would never have looked upon his face, even in infancy? Finally, the whole question of erotic desire does not appear to be salient in the play’s treatment of the marriage to Jocasta. The marriage is a political one, and is never described as motivated by *erôs*. *Erôs* is mentioned frequently in Sophocles—but not in this play. In short: the play *seems*, as Aristotle says, to be concerned with the vulnerability of even the best fortune to abrupt disaster. And it is crucial to its construction that the collocation of
circumstances that strikes Oedipus down is not regarded, by him or by anyone else in the play, as the product of his sexual intentions, whether conscious or unconscious.

To say all this is to state the obvious. And yet we post-Freudians have learned to doubt the obvious. We have learned to look in the play for signs of the repressed desires, erotic and aggressive, that Freud made the subject matter of his theory of the Oedipus complex and his reading of the play. Peter Rudnytsky's book (1987) persuasively documents the history of Freud's reading, setting it against the background of nineteenth-century German views of tragedy. It would be instructive to couple this history with a history of the avoidance, in that same period of post-Kantian German thought, of the apparently unseemly conclusions of ancient tragedy about the vulnerability of human flourishing and even of virtuous action to changes in fortune. But if we are to move from understanding how Freud's account of the play came about to assessing it as an account of the play that Sophocles wrote, we must ask whether, in fact, an ancient Greek audience would have made the connections a Freudian makes between the surface of the play and deeper questions of sexuality, or whether, on the other hand, my initial hunch about the gulf between the play's preoccupation with security and Freud's preoccupation with sexuality is correct. But in order to know this we need, in turn, to know a great deal more than Freudian interpreters characteristically tell us about ancient attitudes to the unconscious mind and its decipherment.

This is a vast task, but I intend at least to begin it here, arguing that in some salient and, I think, representative pieces of the evidence we find that the ancient Greeks, unlike orthodox Freudians, did not think that sexuality lies behind every other wish. Instead, they understood the mind's deepest and most anxious preoccupations to be preoccupations—frequently unconscious on account of their upsetting character—about control and lack of control, security and the absence of security. Thus it will turn out, I think, that the best reading of the tragedy does present material bearing an account of what the unconscious mind contains—but not in the way that the Freudian supposes.

Now of course if one believes that Freud's theory is correct, and universally so, one will not be much deterred from the Freudian interpretation of Sophocles by the discovery that the Freudian interpretation is culturally anachronistic. For it will seem plausible to suppose that Sophocles’ brilliance has put him in touch with truths that other members of his culture were slow to discover. And, on the other side, I confess that the explanatory power and the general human plausibility of ancient protopsychoanalytic views is, for me, a part, at least, of the appeal of reading
the play in conjunction with these views, rather than with the Freudian views. But if we leave to one side the question of psychoanalytic truth, we can still see that setting the play in its cultural context promotes a much more economical and unstrained reading of the text, one that can recognize as salient what the text itself presents as salient, rather than searching for signs of what it nowhere says or implies.

I shall devote most of the chapter to the examination of two very different ancient Greek accounts of the unconscious mind and its symbolic and motivational activity. First I shall examine a portion of the dream book of Artemidoros, which, though written in the second century C.E., gives us the most extensive evidence we have about popular beliefs concerning these matters and testifies, it is clear, to deep and persistent cultural beliefs about the crucial importance of “external goods” in the structure of the mental life. Artemidoros confines his account to the reading of dreams, which is, of course, his trade; he has no theory comparable to Freud’s concerning the motivational role of repressed unconscious desires in one’s waking life. I shall therefore turn next to the one ancient theory of the mind known to me that does develop in some detail such a motivational account—namely, to the Epicurean theory of unconscious fears and longings, and their role in explaining behavior. I shall draw some tentative conclusions about the common ground between these two views, and then turn more briefly to the play, to see what light, if any, this background might have shed on how we might approach it. Finally, I shall briefly and tentatively suggest that there is a contemporary psychoanalytic approach that comes closer than Freud’s does to tapping the play’s central preoccupations—namely, the “object relations” approach.

**Artemidoros: Incest and Fortune**

The dream book of Artemidoros of Daldis has recently been the subject of some valuable analyses: by Michel Foucault in the third volume of his *History of Sexuality* (1986)—more convincing, I think, than the second volume (1985) as a reconstruction of Greek popular thought—and by John J. Winkler in his recent book *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1990, 17–44, 210–16). Winkler’s analysis is, I think, more fine-tuned and generally more incisive than Foucault’s, especially in its stress on the flexibility and individuality of Artemidoros’ dream-readings. I have the highest respect for Winkler’s work on the dream-material (see Nussbaum 1990a); what I say here does not go very far beyond what he has already done. But I wish to connect this material with some more general observations about ancient ideas of the mind, and other texts dealing with the
mind, in order to prepare the way for a contrast with the Freudian view and for a confrontation with Sophocles. For this reason I shall be looking more closely than Winkler does at certain sections of the text—especially, at its account of bodily parts as dream-signifiers, and its account of dreams of incest with the mother.

First, some general observations. Artemidoros is important to anyone who wants a better understanding of ancient attitudes to dreaming and sex (and many other things besides) because, although he is himself an expert practitioner with a theory, the theory operates through a detailed understanding of popular cultural symbolism and deeply rooted cultural attitudes (Winkler 1990, 28ff). To find out what a dream signifies, Artemidoros needs to know the various symbolic associations of the parts of the dream-content. Usually he does this in general cultural terms, since he is writing a general handbook. But he makes it clear that the good interpreter must really always take into account the peculiarities of the dreamer's own history, his or her own personal variations on the cultural symbolism. In a nonjudgmental way he must seek to uncover the facts about the dreamer's own practices and associations, so that no relevant symbolic connection will have been overlooked. In my opening example, the interpreter needs to know the dreamer's profession—for this will inform him that the dream of giving sexual pleasure with one's mouth, which has dire associations for most people, has associations with profit and success for the dreamer, as member of one of the occupational groups named. Elsewhere he makes it clear that he also needs full information about the dreamer's sexual practices, if dreams with a sexual content are to be correctly understood. In two cases where males dreamed, one of performing cunnilingus on his wife, the other of being fellated by his, Artemidoros at first expected something bad to happen. He was amazed when it did not, and this seemed to him most "unreasonable." But later the puzzle was solved. He discovered (he does not tell us how) that the two men in question actually had all along had a personal taste for oral-genital activity, a taste that they had not reported to Artemidoros, presumably because of the cultural stigma attached to it. "Both were in the habit of doing that, and not keeping their mouths clean. So it was plausible that nothing happened to them, since they simply saw what excited them" (4.59).8 Thus, though many dreams refer to future events, their significance must be read—as in the case of Freudian interpretation—in terms of the dreamer's own personal history, wishes, and associations (Winkler 1990, 29).9

Artemidoros in general divides dreams into two types: *enhupnia* and *oneiroi*. *Enhupnia* are dreams that directly express a current physical or emotional state. For example, "a lover necessarily sees himself with his
beloved in his dreams, and a frightened man sees what he is afraid of, the hungry man eats, the thirsty man drinks” (1.1). The significance of such dreams is simple and relatively superficial: they signify the dreamer’s current state in a transparent way (Winkler 1990, 32). In general, the presence in a dream of such indications of strong current desires tends to disqualify the dream from having a more complex significance: “Having sex with a known and familiar woman [sc. in a dream] when one is feeling sexy and desires her in the dream predicts nothing, because of the overriding intensity of the desire” (1.78). And, as we have seen, the fact that the two clients turned out to be devotees of oral sex disqualified their dream from predictive significance, even though they were not necessarily in a state of sexual arousal at the time of their dreams.

On the other hand, when dreams do not derive from the dreamer’s immediate state, they can have a far more profound meaning. The class of such dreams, oneiroi, are the subject matter of Artemidoros’ trade—and, he makes clear, of many competing theories and practices of interpretation, prior to and contemporary with his. The interpreter approaches the dream as a complex whole-looking not just at one or two images, but at “the systematized totality of the dream images” (4.28). And this whole is regarded as a kind of symbolic coded language in which the dreamer’s soul speaks to itself about matters of the greatest importance. Much of the code, as I said, is common and cultural; that is why it is possible for Artemidoros to write a general manual of dream interpretation. But a most important part of it is personal, as we have seen. To give another example of this, this time from a clear member of the class of oneiroi, a dream of beating one’s mother, which would usually have been ill-omened, is auspicious for a particular potter, who came into a profit afterwards—the interpretation being that he beat clay (mother earth) for a living, and that the dream used a coded personal language to point to the profitable exercise of his profession (4.2). The art of the interpreter consists in unraveling such complex codes.

If one now asks about the place of the sexual in all this, three dramatic differences between the Freudian theory and the ancient theory will immediately emerge. The first and clearest difference is that for Artemidoros all dreams, sexual dreams included, signify future contingent events, usually events of the near future, whereas for Freudian analysis their significance is usually to be read in terms of the remote past, which is seen as having decisively formed the personality. This is a profound difference; but one should not, I think, overemphasize it, taking it to imply that the Artemidoran theory is magical and of no psychological interest. For Artemidoros as for Freud (as Freud himself saw) dreams are ways the soul has of talking to itself
about deep and important things, usually by speaking in a condensed and displaced associative language. If Artemidoros believes the soul can have access to the near future, his dream contents still reveal, no less than Freud’s, patterns of significance within the dreamer, and connections so deep that they are not always understood by the dreamer, perhaps because they lie too deep to be confronted in waking life without anxiety. *Oneiroi*, Artemidoros insists, “are the work of the soul and do not come from anything outside” (4.59). In the case of both theorists, then, dream-interpretation is the decoding of people’s cryptic and hidden messages to themselves.

Second, again a rather obvious point, one is struck, in studying the sections on dreams of the sexual, by the complete absence of any belief in infantile, or even childhood, sexuality. In Book I, Artemidoros arranges the dream-contents according to the time of life depicted in the content, from birth to death. Dreams of intercourse come right in the middle, after dreams connected with being an ephebe, going to the gymnasium, winning athletic contests, and going to the baths—in other words, as phenomena connected with adult mid-life.11 Artemidoros is not alone in this, clearly. In all the competing ancient philosophical theories about the natural and first desires of the infant, sexual desire is not advanced as a candidate by anyone.12 Epicureans ascribe to the infant a basic desire for freedom from pain and disturbance. Stoics defend, instead, the desire for self-preservation. Aristotelians back, in addition or instead, a desire for cognitive mastery. So far as I am aware, no theorist even mentions sex in connection with the infant, and I think ancient readers would have found this idea absurd. (*Longus’ Daphnis and Chloe* gives one representative example of the fact that sexual desire was taken to awaken at puberty for both males and females, therefore earlier for females than for males.) The radical and unconventional nature of the Freudian view is easy to overlook, since by now the view so infuses our popular culture. (One dramatic reminder of its radical and sudden nature can be found in Rousseau’s *Emile*, the greatest account of the development of desire and emotion in the child in the centuries immediately before Freud. For there it is taken for granted—very much as in the ancient world—that sexual desire will awaken in the male at age sixteen. Much is made of this fact in accounting for the [late] genesis of other-regarding emotions like pity, and the related ethical dispositions.)

The fact that Freud’s ideas on this subject are completely absent from the ancient Greek world is not a trivial one for my project. For if we are to manage to ascribe to Oedipus any formation of sexual desire in connection with his parents seen as such, we will obviously have to push this desire back into very early infancy, before his exposure. Whether we are even entitled to do this is, of course, unclear, since the play does not tell us whether this baby
ever looked on its mother’s face, or was held in her arms. Jocasta gave the
baby to the herdsman in person, so much is clear; but presumably she did so
soon after the birth, without nursing the child, and we have no reason even
to suppose that she would have held the baby herself. Certainly the play gives
us no reason to suppose the baby ever set eyes on Laios, even in the most
early and attenuated sense, a fact which the remoteness of ancient Greek
fatherhood (especially upper-class fatherhood) would in any case render most
unlikely. Even if it is marginally possible that this infant had some vestigial
awareness of its parents, the complete silence of the play about such
matters—although nursing and holding might very easily have been mentioned—together with its emphasis on the fact that Oedipus’ only real
nurse was Cithairon, should make us wary of reading into the text any
interest in infantile patterns of desire. The cultural evidence that such desire
was not recognized by the Greeks in general should make us far more wary
still.

But the most striking aspect of Artemidoros’ view about sexual
dreaming, for the post-Freudian reader, is the type of significance he
attaches to the sexual in the interpretation of the soul’s deliverances. The
post-Freudian interpreter is inclined to seek for a sexual meaning beneath
apparently nonsexual dream-contents. The deepest point at which one can
arrive, in unraveling the mind’s symbolic language, is a point at which one
arrives at some sexual wish. Artemidoros moves, on the whole, in just the
opposite direction. For him, even dreams that have an overtly sexual
content are, like all other dreams, read off as having a significance for the
rise and fall of the dreamer’s fortunes, his or her command or lack of
command over important items such as money, status, friendships, and the
other important things in life. In fact, if one reads the text in connection
with the history of philosophical ethics, one notices a striking coincidence
between the list of important signifieds to which Artemidoros’ account
recurs again and again, and the lists of “external goods” or “goods of
fortune” that figure in Aristotelian and other accounts of eudaimonia (see
Nussbaum 1986a, chs. 11–12). The items in question include: wealth,
health, reputation and status, family and children, friendships, political
roles—in short, all the things generally thought pertinent to eudaimonia
(whether as instrumental means or as constituent parts) that are not
securely and stably possessed or controlled. Their importance in life is
therefore a source of much anxiety to most ordinary Greeks, an anxiety that
motivates a variety of reconstructive philosophical projects aimed at greater
self-sufficiency. Dreams, for Artemidoros, and sexual dreams among
them, signify the dreamer’s (future) command or lack of command over
these significant external goods.
Sex can sometimes figure on the other side of an interpretation, as something signified by a dream content. For sex figures in various ways among the external goods, being an element in marriage, a necessary condition for childbearing, an aspect of one’s status and self-assertion as a citizen, and (in the case of unlawful sexual activity) the source of a diminution of status or citizenship. But it is in this connection with external goods that dreams are read, on the relatively rare occasions when they are, as being about sex. Much more frequently, one discovers an apparently sexual dream being read as “really” about external goods such as standing and reputation (see also Winkler 1990, 34–35).

A corollary of this emphasis on external goods and the dreamer’s position in the world is that the interpreter must carefully scrutinize the specific details of the apparently sexual dream, taking note of the type of sexual activity performed, and above all of the positions of the actors. For the very same activity that might be auspicious if one is oneself penetrating another will be extremely inauspicious if one is on the receiving end. There is no clearer example of this—and of my general point about the nonsexual significance of the sexual—than in Artemidoros’ matter-of-fact discussion of dreams of bestiality. Whatever the animal species in question is, says Artemidoros, if one dreams that one is mounting the animal, then one “will receive a benefit from an animal of that particular species, whatever it is.” But if one dreams that one is being mounted by an animal, one “will have some violent and awful experience. Many, after these dreams, have died” (1.80).

The claim that sexual dreams are “really” about command over external goods can be illustrated from any number of passages in Artemidoros’ account—and not least from its overall construction. For sexual dreams occupy only a brief three chapters, slipped in between dreams of being given a crown and dreams of being asleep. But for our comparative purposes it will be useful to focus on two portions of Artemidoros’ analysis: the account of the manifold significance of the penis, and the account (within the three-chapter section on intercourse) of dreams of incest with the mother. Artemidoros discusses the penis as a signifying dream-content in the course of discussing, each in turn, the parts of the body. It is important to note that it is not more significant than many other parts. It is analyzed after the liver and before the testicles (which are said to signify pretty much the same thing as the penis). Although it takes up a fair amount of space in the discussion (27 lines of text, slightly more than the 18 allotted to the chest, the 20 to the legs, and the 25 to hands, just under the 28 given to feet and the 29 to the tongue, but far less than the 79 allotted to hair and baldness, the 84 to teeth and the loss of teeth)—it is not, as these numbers show, singled out as having any very special significance, or as a central focus of anxiety. The
poignant anxieties surrounding baldness and the loss of teeth seem clearly to be far more pressing items in the soul’s internal discourse. In fact, the penis takes up as much space as it does only because there are so many slang terms for it, giving rise to a variety of verbal associations. Here is Artemidoros’ report on the associations connected with the penis in general, which are to be of use to the interpreter in approaching concrete cases:

The penis is like a man’s parents since it contains the generative code (spermatikos logos), but also like his children since it is their cause. It is like his wife and girlfriend since it is useful for sex. It is like his brothers and all blood relations since the meaning of the entire household depends on the penis. It signifies strength and the body’s manhood, since it actually causes these: for this reason some people call it their “manhood” (andreia). It resembles reason and education since, like reason (logos), it is the most generative thing of all.... It further suggests surplus and possession since it sometimes opens out and sometimes is relaxed and it can produce and eject. It is like hidden plans since both plans and the penis are called médea; and it is analogous to poverty, slavery, and imprisonment since it is called “necessity” and is a symbol of constraint. It is like the respect of being held in honor, since it is called “reverence” (aidôs) and “respect.” (1.45, see Winkler 1990, 41)

The selection of which association to follow up will depend, here as elsewhere, on the totality of the dream content and on the role of these associations in the dreamer’s particular history. But this catalogue should suffice to show that Greek beliefs do not understand the penis as signifying itself—at least, not very often. More often, its presence in a dream points elsewhere, to the network of external and public relations that constitute the focus of a male citizen’s anxieties. Freud expressed the view that the excessive preoccupation with money and success that he encountered in America showed that Americans were overly given to sublimation, and indeed had become, as a result, sexual nonentities. What is for him sublimation is for an ancient Greek the core and deepest point of desire and anxiety.

The account of mother–son incest occurs as part of the analysis of dreams of sexual intercourse, which itself falls into three sections: dreams about intercourse “according to convention,” about intercourse “contrary to convention,” and about intercourse “contrary to nature” (see Winkler 1990, 33–40). In the first category are dreams of all kinds of nonincestuous and nonoral intercourse, both active and passive, with partners of either gender
(the one exception being “a woman penetrating a woman,” which, as we shall see, falls in the third category). Although the goodness or badness of the events predicted by the dream is often connected with the generally approved or nonapproved nature of its content—thus the dream of penetrating someone is usually, though not always, more auspicious than the dream of being penetrated—the whole group is called “according to convention,” regardless of the genders and positions of the actors. “Against convention” are two sorts of dream contents: dreams of incest, and dreams of oral sex. “Against nature” are contents that simply seem to Artemidoros too weird to have any ordinary social signification at all, things that are just off the ordinary map—having sex with a god, having sex with an animal, having sex with oneself (this not in the sense of masturbation, but in the sense of self-penetration and self-fellatio); and, finally, “a woman penetrating a woman.”19 It is important to note that the dream of something “against nature” need not be ill-omened; everything depends on the further analysis of the content, the postures of the actors, etc. (Thus, as we have seen, it can be very good to dream of mounting an animal.)

Artemidoros’ account of mother–son incest is longer than any other discussion in the incest section—on account of the fact, he says, that “the analysis of the mother is intricate and elaborate, and susceptible of many discriminations. It has eluded many dream analysts” (1.79). Here is the main part of Artemidoros’ account—the ancient analogue, or disanalogue, of Freud’s oedipal wishing:

The intercourse in itself is not sufficient to show the intended significance of the dream, but the postures and positions of the bodies, being different, make the outcome different. First we should speak of frontal penetration with a living mother—for it also makes a difference in the meaning whether she is alive or dead (in the dream). So if one penetrates his own mother frontally—which some say is according to nature—and she is alive, if his father is in good health, he will have a falling out with him, because of the element of jealousy which would occur no matter who was involved. If his father happens to be sick, he will die, for the man who has the dream will assume authority over his mother as both son and husband. It is a good dream for all craftsmen and laborers, for it is usual to refer to one’s craft as “mother,” and what else could sexual intimacy with one’s craft signify except having no leisure and being productive from it? It is good too for all office-holders and politicians, for the mother signifies the fatherland. So just as he who has sex according to the
conventions of Aphrodite controls the entire body of the woman who is obedient and willing, so too the dreamer will have authority over all the business of the city.

And he who is on bad terms with his mother will resume friendly relations with her, because of the intercourse, for it is called “friendship” (φιλότες). And often this dream has brought together to the same place those who were dwelling apart and has made them be together (συνεῖναι). Therefore it brings the traveler too back to his native land, provided his mother happens to be living in the fatherland; otherwise, wherever the mother is living, that is where the dream is telling the traveler to proceed.

And if a poor man who lacks the essentials has a rich mother he will receive what he wants from her, or else he will inherit it from her when she dies not long after, and thus he will take pleasure in his mother. Many too have undertaken to care and provide for their mothers, who in turn take pleasure in their sons.

The dream sets right the sick man, signifying that he will return to the natural state, for the common mother of all is nature, and we say that healthy people are in a natural state and sick people are not. Apollodoros of Telmessos, a learned man, also remarks on this. The significance is not the same for sick people if the mother (in the dream) is dead, for the dreamer will die very shortly. For the constitution of the dream woman dissolves into the matter of which it is composed and constituted and most of it being earth-like reverts to its proper material. And “mother” is no less a name for the earth. What else could having sex with a dead mother signify for the sick man but having sex with the earth?

For one who is involved in a suit over land or who wants to buy some land or who desires to farm, it is good to have sex with a dead mother. Some say that it is bad for the farmer alone, saying that he will scatter his seeds on dead land, that is, he will have no yield. But in my opinion this is not at all correct, unless however one repents of the intercourse or feels upset.

Further, he who is in a dispute over his mother’s property will win his case after this dream, rejoicing not in his mother’s body but in her property.

If one sees this dream in one’s native country he will leave the country, for it is not possible after so great an error (harmatêma) to remain at the maternal hearths. If he is upset or repents the
intercourse he will be exiled from the fatherland, otherwise he will leave voluntarily.

To penetrate one’s mother from the rear is not good. For either the mother herself will turn her back on the dreamer or his fatherland or his craft or whatever might be his immediate business. It is also bad if both are standing upright during intercourse, for people adopt such a posture through lack of a bed or blankets. Therefore it signifies pressures and desperate straits. To have sex with one’s mother on her knees is bad: it signifies a great lack because of the mother’s immobility.

If the mother is on top and “riding cavalry,” some say this means death for the dreamer, since the mother is like earth, earth being the nurturer and progenetrix of all, and it lies on top of corpses and not on top of the living. But I have observed that sick men who have this dream always die, but the healthy men live out the remainder of their lives in great ease and just as they choose—a correct and logical outcome, for in the other positions the hard work and heavy breathing are for the most part the male’s share and the female role is relatively effortless; but in this posture it is just the opposite—the man takes pleasure without laboring. But it also allows him who is not in the light to be hidden from his neighbors, because most of the telltale heavy breathing is absent.

There follows a brief digression on the naturalness of the frontal position; and then, in a transition to the following section on oral sex, Artemidoros analyzes the dream of oral sex with one’s mother. To that dream we shall turn later; first, however, some comments on the material just cited. The strikingly non-Freudian nature of the analysis is evident; but a few concrete observations will help to pin it down. First, there is nothing special about mother–son incest in Artemidoros’ account of the soul’s inner language. It is just one more signifier, and it is not singled out as playing an especially fundamental role. It is ranked along with other cases of incest, and all incest along with oral sex; and, as we have already said, the entire account of sexual dreaming is a very brief portion of the longer analysis.

Second, the dream of mother–son incest, like other sexual dreams, is significant, not in terms of underlying sexual wishes, but in terms of things like getting control over an estate, having authority in the city, getting on well with one’s family and friends, getting or losing one’s health, and so forth. The mother’s body frequently signifies country or property. Even when, in the opening paragraph, a dispute with one’s father is mentioned as one
possible significance of such a dream, it is made just one possibility among many, and is not basic to what follows in any sense. Furthermore, the father’s jealousy is just ordinary sexual jealousy, “the element of jealousy which would occur no matter who was involved.” The dream signifies a rupture in one’s fortunes, since good relations with one’s family are conventionally taken to be a central part of one’s fortunes. But neither its specifically sexual significance nor the identity of the parties is dwelt upon. And we must take note of the fact that very many of the dreams in this section are auspicious—again impossible if they were read as in every case denoting a hostile wish.

Third, the significance of these dreams is to be understood not by focusing exclusively on the fact of incest—to which, of course, the Freudian account single-mindedly directs us—but rather in terms of the specific sexual positions and activities employed. Artemidoros is very insistent about this. Thus, to penetrate one’s mother from the front is usually good, to penetrate her from behind usually bad. Standing intercourse, in characteristic fashion, is immediately taken to have an economic significance, in terms of the lack of bedclothes and furniture. The position with the mother on top—in Artemidoros’ novel interpretation, of whose cleverness he is evidently proud—is auspicious (for a healthy man) because it is associated with ease and an absence of heavy breathing.

Fourth and finally, there is not the slightest hint here that the dream should be connected to any deep and extended narrative pattern of sexual wishing going far back into one’s childhood and repressed in adulthood. Such dreams are read matter-of-factly, like others, in terms of the dreamer’s current profession, fortune, and so forth; the mother’s significance in the dream frequently comes from his current professional activities. And far from expressing disturbing repressed sexual material, the dream’s sexual content is not taken to be especially disturbing. Consider the case of the farmer, whose dream of incest with the corpse of his mother is auspicious, “unless one repents of the intercourse or feels upset”—apparently not the usual case! We might add that the range and variety of dreams of this type that were reported to Artemidoros may itself give evidence of an absence of repression of such ideas in Greek culture. For many contemporary people who read this section, what seems oddest is that all these dreams should have occurred at all, in this undisguised form. To the Greeks it seems, apparently, perfectly normal and natural, just as natural as the fact that one’s especially deep anxieties about money, health, and citizenship should assume, in a dream, a disguised form. In short, if anything is, here, so disturbing that it invites repression, it is the soul’s anxiety about external goods.20

Now we must turn to one further dream in the sequence, “the most awful (deinotaton) dream of all,” says our author. For this dream might seem
initially to cast doubt on some of our claims—although more closely inspected, I believe, it supports them. This dream, as I have said, forms the transition between the section on incest dreams and the section on dreams of oral sex. Its analysis goes as follows:

The most awful dream of all, I have observed, is to be fellated by one's mother. For it signifies the death of children and loss of property and serious illness for the dreamer. I know someone who had this dream and lost his penis; it makes sense that he should be punished in the part of his body which erred. (1.79)

A Freudian interpreter might suppose that Artemidoros here at last betrays the Freudian nature of his, and his patients' concerns. For the “most awful dream,” after all, is a dream of intercourse with the mother. And having the dream is linked to the idea of a merited sexual punishment for a transgression that is, apparently, specifically sexual. Sexual error signifies a sexual loss. Don't we have here, after all, the proof that the deepest and most fearful things in the ancient unconscious are, after all, sexual things, and that a repressed thought of incest is, after all, connected in this culture with a fear of the loss of virility?

Things are not so simple. First of all, there is an obvious and striking departure from Freudian concerns in the fact that the dream is terrible not on account of its incestuous content—many incest-dreams, we recall, are auspicious—but on account of the mode of copulation. Here, as elsewhere in the discussion, Artemidoros expresses his culture's view that to perform oral sex is unclean and base; to be made to perform it on someone else is a humiliation. The discussion that ensues makes it plain that the uncleanness of the performer's mouth is thought to make it impossible to share kisses or food with this person any more. (In general, any dream of oral sex with a known person signifies a separation from that person.) Thus the dream of the fellating mother is understood as a dream of the humiliation of the mother by the son, a humiliation that is bound to destroy the household. It is for this reason, and not on account of its specifically incestuous content, that it is so inauspicious. And the son's error, for which he is punished, is not to engage in intercourse with his mother; it is to cause his mother to perform an unclean act after which the household can never be the same. Well might such a dream signify “the death of children and loss of property and serious illness.”

Second, what the dream does in fact signify is, as we just said, “the death of children and loss of property and serious illness.” The man who loses his penis is just one case of “serious illness,” a case picked out by
Artemidoros because of its ironically apposite nature. But, as elsewhere, the “real” significance of the dream is in the dreamer’s relation to “external goods.” And the punishment of the dreamer is the loss, not only of a bodily part, but of the chance to have, in the future, a family of his own. Because he did something destructive and antifamily, he loses the chance to have a family, and to enjoy the position of status and control signified by the penis.

In short: the dream of incest is, at bottom, a code, through which the soul speaks to itself about what it most deeply hopes and fears. Not sex, but control over external goods, are the content of those most basic hopes and fears.

**Epicurus and Lucretius:**

**Unconscious Fears and Waking Actions**

With Epicurus we return to the fourth–third centuries B.C.E.—although most of the material I shall discuss is actually preserved only in Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* of the first century B.C.E. It is not clear which elements in Lucretius’ account of unconscious fear can be traced back to the thought of Epicurus, but for now I shall proceed as if there is a single coherent shared view here.²¹ It will become evident, I think, that, whatever the date of this view’s origin, it reflects many of the cultural preoccupations that still animate Artemidoros’ account somewhat later; and it seems possible to treat it as a source—however theoretically distinctive—for many similar points about what the mind represses and how it speaks to itself.

The Epicurean view of the unconscious differs from Artemidoros’ view in two crucial ways. First, it abjures the popular connection between the life of the sleeping or otherwise unconscious mind and future events. Dreams and other voices in the breast have significance as the record of habits and practices, as the signs of a bodily condition, or as the rehearsal of pervasive anxieties. These categories are connected in that the pervasive anxieties of the soul frequently record the habits of a religious society. Anxieties are not innate, but learned, and habits of discourse and thought form patterns of fear and longing. This focus on the present and the past of the soul might seem to make Epicurus’ view incomparable with that of Artemidoros; for he might seem to be denying the existence of what Artemidoros calls *oneiroi,* and giving us an account merely of *enhupnia* and related phenomena, all of which Artemidoros found rather uninteresting. But a closer look shows, I think, that things are not this simple. For Epicurus’ theory, like Artemidoros’, concerns itself with a secret language of the soul, a complex internalized symbolism in which the mind discourses to itself about what profoundly matters to it. Epicurus, like Artemidoros, is not concerned merely with
transient states of little depth. And, like Artemidoros, he is interested in that which is still at work powerfully within—so, once again, he is not focusing, any more than Artemidoros, on obvious repetitions of the day’s activities and wishes.

The first major difference, then, is less major than it at first appears. The second is more substantial. This is that Epicurus uses his account of unconscious wishing and fearing to explain behavior in waking life. The Epicurean unconscious is active in sleep, but not in sleep alone. As people live their daily lives, the theory claims, they are influenced in a variety of ways by wishes of which they are not aware. These wishes can be brought to light by philosophical examination—and when they are, they will turn out to have broad explanatory significance. This extension of the unconscious’ explanatory role, together with the complex Epicurean account of how such desires are properly unearthed and confronted, gives Epicurus a claim to be called the primary ancient forerunner of modern psychoanalysis. But his account, as we shall see, is most unpsychoanalytic in its concrete content.22

According to Epicurus, then, the mind speaks to itself about what it most deeply wants and fears. And its deepest wants and fears concern its own finitude. The longing for immortality and the fear of death are at the heart of its discourse to itself (Nussbaum 1990d). This fear or longing is, as we shall shortly see, in the first place a response to the human child’s perception of itself as powerless in a situation of great danger, as it emerges naked, hungry, needy, into the world. As the infant becomes increasingly aware, on the one hand, of its great weakness, and, on the other hand, of the delight of living, it develops, progressively, a desire to secure itself in life by protecting its fragile boundaries. This idea is pursued through various stratagems of aggression and self-fortification, described by Lucretius in convincing detail. Money-making, for example, is an attempt to fortify oneself against death, since poverty feels like a condition very vulnerable to death (Nussbaum 1990d). Warlike aggression is, once again, an attempt to make oneself invulnerable (Nussbaum 1990d, 1990b). The pursuit of honor and fame is a pursuit of one’s own deathlessness, through securing power over one’s society (Nussbaum 1990b). And finally, erotic love is, among its other features, a stratagem to solidify and secure oneself, by achieving a fusion with a person who is seen as an embodied divinity (Nussbaum 1989, 1990b). All of these stratagems are nourished by religious cult, which holds out the idea of an afterlife, further feeding both desire and fear. But in their basic form, such anxieties seem to belong to the condition of human life itself.

Lucretius makes it clear that most of the time people are unaware of the fears that are motivating their behavior. The “true voices” are buried “deep in the breast,” beneath a “mask” of confidence (Nussbaum 1990d).
They say that they do not fear death—and yet their behavior betrays them. “Thus each person flees himself” (Lucretius III.1068)—and is aware, at most, of a sensation of great weight in the region of the breast. In moments of abrupt confrontation with the facts of one’s condition, however, rationalization becomes no longer possible, and the true voices emerge. It is this possibility of a confrontation which brings confirmation of the fear from the patient herself that gives the hypothesis of unconscious fear—otherwise supported primarily through the linking of behavior patterns—such conviction and power (Nussbaum 1990d).

A central task of the Epicurean philosophical community is to diagnose and then to cure such anxieties, and the “boundless” longing that is linked with them. There is evidence that the community encouraged pupils to divulge their hidden thoughts and feelings to the teacher, in order to receive his philosophical criticism and therapy (Nussbaum 1986b, and 1994, ch. 4). The importance of this sort of “frank speech” is repeatedly stressed as an essential tool of therapy; and one’s friends participate in the process, helping the teacher to know as much as possible about the structure of the pupil’s illness. We know little about how the Epicurean teacher went about bringing repressed unconscious fears to the surface—but the many analogies between philosophical teaching and medical diagnosis show that they were well aware of this as a problem and investigated the resources of personal narrative with this in mind (Nussbaum 19866, 1994, ch. 4). Meanwhile, the school placed great emphasis on memorization and repetition, in order to drive the healthful teachings of Epicurus deep down into the soul, to a level at which they may even, as Lucretius reports, fill one’s dreams (Nussbaum 19866, 1989). Memory and repetition are the student’s ways of taking Epicurus into her unconscious, so that his teaching will “become powerful” (Letter to Herodotus 85) in her inner world, and can help her in her confrontation with error, even when she is not consciously focusing on the problem. Like Menoeceus, she “will never be disturbed either awake or asleep” (Letter to Menoeceus 132)—for the wise person, and that person alone, “will be the same when asleep” (Diogenes Laertius X 120), undisturbed by any flood of pent-up anxieties, such as those that occur in most people’s lives. Memory makes philosophical discourse active and effective in the pupil’s soul.

It should by now be apparent that, despite the differences in temporal orientation and normative structure, the Epicurean view has much in common with the popular beliefs summarized by Artemidoros. This should be no surprise, since Epicurus’ therapeutic target is just such popular beliefs, and their deleterious effect on the mental life. What Artemidoros takes for granted and makes the subject of his trade, Epicurus wishes to cure by philosophical therapy. But the content is very much the same. In both cases,
the human mind is seen as structured around a very general set of anxieties about one’s limited control over one’s worldly position. These anxieties are seen as to some extent very hard to avoid; for even Lucretius stresses that every living thing longs for the continuation of its life, and consequently shrinks from death (Nussbaum 1990d). But they are powerfully fed by cultural teaching in which great importance is attached to “external goods” that the pupil does not control. The mind obsessively broods about command over these goods; and it cooks up elaborate symbols to meditate about its future with respect to them (in the case of Artemidoros), or its present emotional states that relate it toward an uncertain future (in the case of Epicurus). For Epicurus, the mind goes still further, moving the agent to undertake projects of self-fortification in waking life, projects of whose real significance the agent is unaware, and which will not really achieve the deep goal for which the agent pursues them.

For Epicureans, as for Artemidoros, sex is just one element in this pursuit of control. Epicurus has little to say about sex in the surviving texts; but he clearly does not think of it as a very deep or central force in human life. The desire for sexual gratification is classified as a desire that is “natural but nonnecessary”: i.e., one that is not merely the product of false social teaching, but one whose gratification is inessential to the good human life (Nussbaum 1989). In a famously odd passage, he ranks sexual enjoyments along with other indulgences in unnecessary luxury items:

The truly pleasant life is not produced by an unbroken succession of drinking bouts and revels; not by the enjoyment of boys and women and fish and the other things that a luxurious table presents. It is produced by sober reasoning that seeks out the causes of all pursuit and avoidance and drives out the beliefs that are responsible for our greatest disturbances. (Letter to Menoeceus 132, see Nussbaum 1990c)

This passage presents Epicurus’ view, not the popular views he criticizes. But still, it is evidence for his belief that in no person does sexual desire go, so to speak, to the very core of the personality. People may think sexual desire to be deeper than it is, just as they allegedly think the need for fish and meat to be deeper than it is. But, like other desires for luxuries, sexual desire is the sort of desire that can in fact be therapeutically removed, without injuring the personality in the process. Even culture, which ranks it too high, does not make it so central to the pupil’s life that she will be injured by getting rid of it.

Thus even from the point of view of the cultural material that is internalized and buried in the average person’s unconscious mind, sex
apparently does not play a central role. Lucretius’ famous critique of erotic love does show in detail how socially learned constructs of *erôs* influence both waking and sleeping life. But he does not seem, any more than Epicurus, to think of sex as offering a clue to the essence of the personality. He shows that the construction of love out of natural bodily desire is just a peculiar chapter in the soul’s quest for transcendence of its mortal limits. For the wish of erotic desire, as I have said, is to achieve fusion with a partner who is seen as a goddess (Nussbaum 1989a, 1990c). The poet shows that this wish is the vehicle of a more general wish to transcend one’s own finite mortal condition; its only remedy is to learn to “yield to human life,” *humanis concedere rebus* (Lucretius V.1172). Erotic desire is a form of the basic desire to transcend one’s limits and insecurities, achieving control and stability (Nussbaum 1990b).

Lucretius speaks of the family and its desires. But, once again, the treatment focuses on security rather than on sexuality. First of all, the relation between mother and child gets no special treatment in the poem. Both parents are believed to be intensely concerned about the survival and safety of their offspring; and the “softening” that comes about when they begin thinking of how to protect their vulnerable children is a major ingredient, the poem shows, in the development of morality and society (Nussbaum 1990b). But when the life of the infant itself is described, it is not the mother, but rather the nurse—as one might expect in this society, at least in the social classes who would be Lucretius’ primary readers—who plays the central role. And in this relationship too, the issue is need and security, not sexuality. The infant, helpless and weeping from the disturbances of birth, like a sailor cast forth from the fierce waves, lies naked on the ground, without speech, in need of every sort of life-sustaining help, when first nature casts it forth with birth contractions from its mother’s womb into the shores of light. And it fills the whole place with mournful weeping, as is right for someone to whom such troubles remain in life. (5.222–27)

The “gentle nurse” now calms the child with rattles and baby talk, ministering to its lack of self-sufficiency; and the poet bleakly remarks that the rougher, better equipped wild beasts have no need of such soothing amusements (229–30). The drama of infancy is a drama of vulnerability and protection. The infant’s desire is for freedom from pain and disturbance. The world it encounters is a world that contains countless sources of pain and disturbance. Its central perception of itself is therefore as a being very weak and very helpless. And its relation to the adults around it focuses on its
passionate desire to secure to itself what nature on the whole withholds: comfort, clothing, food, protection.

I believe that the Epicurean account of the predicament of the infant, and of the fruits of this predicament in later anxieties, provides a comprehensive explanatory underpinning for the popular beliefs about “external goods” that Artemidoros records. It also provides what Artemidoros, given his practical professional goals, does not try to provide, an account of the early origins of later deep anxieties. The Epicurean analysis of the anxieties of most human beings, and of their roots in infancy, really does, it appears, get at what people were really most deeply and often unconsciously worrying about. This should not surprise us, since Epicurus insists that therapy cannot proceed without correct diagnosis; and Epicurus’ greatness as a psychoanalyst has been remarked before. But if we put the theory together with the rich and concrete record of ordinary belief in Artemidoros, we have at least the basic outlines of a non-Freudian theory of infancy, and of later unconscious anxieties, fears, and hopes. This theory focuses on the human being’s lack of natural security and on its consequently urgent needs for various external goods. Relations to parents and other close adults are understood as mediated by this general need. Adults are providers of what is needed, bulwarks against danger, sources of support. In another connection Lucretius remarks that when protection fails on account or some act or nonact of another, the natural consequence will be anger and aggressive behavior. Although he does not apply this observation to the case of the infant, it would not be hard to do so. Thus we would also have the basis for a complex and interesting account of aggressive wishes toward parents and other caretakers, when pain and disturbance are not warded off. But this aggression would have little to do with specifically sexual longing and jealousy, everything to do with the desire for security and control. It would be a fascinating task to work out further the details of such a theory.

Oedipus and His Fortune

But now instead, all too briefly, I want to make some suggestions about ways in which this set of concerns might illuminate our approach to the Oedipus Rex. I have spoken elsewhere (Nussbaum 1986a, 1992) of the central role of tragedy in providing Greek citizens with a map of human possibilities, showing, as Aristotle says, “things such as might happen” (Poetics 9) in a human life. I have also said that tragedies frequently seem to do this by exploring extreme cases, nightmares, so to speak of the human attempt to live well in an insecure world (Nussbaum 1986a, ch. 13). I would now like to suggest that we might fruitfully approach the Oedipus as, so to speak, a dream
issuing from the unconscious of its citizen watchers, but an unconscious of
the ancient, rather than the Freudian, kind. What I mean is that if we ask
ourselves how an ancient audience might actually see in the play a kind of
possibility for themselves, connecting themselves to the characters through
the emotions of pity and fear, which (as Aristotle persuasively says) require,
both of them, the belief that one’s own possibilities are the same as those of
the protagonists—if one asks this question, one is bound to focus, not on the
literal events of the play, but on what one might call their Artemidoran
symbolism. In the world whose preoccupations I have tried to depict, an
average member of the audience is very unlikely to believe it a salient
possibility for himself that he would actually do what Oedipus does here,
killing his father and marrying his mother. For one thing, the net of
circumstances that brought this about in Oedipus’ life is too strange and
complex to be very likely to be replicated. But if, on the other hand, we see
the literal events as representing, as in an Artemidoran dream, possibilities
for the rise and fall of human fortunes, we can far more easily see what a
citizen would find terrifying here. If someone who enjoys the extreme of
control, prosperity, and in general good fortune can be so brought low by
events and circumstances beyond his control, then no human life seems safe
from this possibility. For most lives start out more vulnerable and less
Prosperous than his was. Such was, in fact, the understanding of the play put
forward as the obvious one by a very perceptive ancient critic, namely, the
Stoic philosopher Epictetus. Tragedies in general, he wrote, show “what
happens when chance events befall fools”—by “fools” meaning human
beings who attach value to items beyond their control (Nussbaum 1992,
1993). And seeing the fall of Oedipus should, he argues, remind us just how
uncontrolled items like power, wealth, and family connections really are,
giving us a motivation to sever our concern from such things and to adopt
the austere values of Stoicism.

If one turns to the play with these ideas in mind, one is struck by the
fact that while, on the one hand, erôs seems to be absent from it, tuchê is
omnipresent. Oedipus is introduced as kratiston, most powerful (40); and
yet the city itself has been afflicted by forces beyond its control, so that the
citizens can already be addressed as “pitiable children,” paides oiktroi. At line
145, beginning on his fateful search for the causes of the pollution, Oedipus
announces, “We shall either emerge fortunate (eutucheis), with the god’s help,
or as fallen (peptôkotes).” Immediately the Chorus, entering, begins to speak
of its anxious fear and tension (151ff.). And of course, from the first, Oedipus
is present to the audience (through his name alone) as a cripple, someone cast
out naked into the world and maimed by its dangers, a Lucretian, rather than
a Freudian, infant.
The detailed working-out of this reading must wait for another time. Its direction and outlines should already be clear. But I can end this adumbration of such a reading by mentioning that, whether the final lines are genuine or not, they suit admirably the focus of the play as a whole, and of this account: for they portray Oedipus as, on the one hand, successful and “most powerful,” on the other, as one who “came into such a great tidal wave of misfortune.” And their famous moral is the moral of so much of the ancient Greek ethical tradition, insofar as it does not reject the importance traditionally attached to external goods: “Call no mortal prosperous ... before he passes the end of his life having suffered nothing terrible” (1529–30).

What relationship might such a reading of the play—and, in general, such an account of the stresses of infancy and of unconscious fears, longings, and aggressions—have to psychoanalysis? I have spent most of this chapter showing how much ancient “psychoanalysis”—for I think we may call it that—diverges from a single-minded and possibly reductive concern with sexuality that we find in some parts of the Freudian tradition. Indeed, it seems to show the Freudian emphasis on sexuality as time-bound, the local feature of a society unusually anxious about this particular aspect of human life, and therefore in need of repression on that topic.

But there are other psychoanalytic approaches that seem far more in tune with the emphases and concerns of ancient psychology. I plan in future work to compare the ideas I have just investigated with some of Melanie Klein’s ideas about infancy and the genesis of fear and aggression—and with other related work in the object relations school. For while the Kleinian theory is still in some respects Freudian, her account of infancy endows it with complex relationships to objects, seen as providers or hinderers of support. And usually the issue of the infant’s great neediness and its inevitable pain and frustration is stressed in her writings far more than that of sexual desire per se. Her infant’s relation to the breast that either feeds or fails to feed it could usefully be compared, I believe, to the Lucretian account of the genesis of aggressive wishes, particularly if we expand his account as I have suggested. And since the Kleinian picture of the infant’s life endows it, early on, with the possibility of complex emotions such as fear, anger, and envy, once again this seems to invite comparison with the Epicurean account of similar material, and of its eventual repression. Even though Klein does pay homage to Freud concerning the primacy of sexual desire, it seems plain that most of the time her concern is with a broad range of needs and longings, most of them connected around the issue of self-sufficiency and incompleteness. Pursuing the comparison would be of interest, if only for comparison’s sake.
But my real interest in it is a deeper one. For I believe that the ancient views I have discussed are profound and highly plausible in a way that goes beyond strict cultural boundaries; and yet, equally clearly, that they are culture-bound in certain ways, and lack, in some areas, a richness of development that would be required if they were ever to become powerful and plausible for a contemporary understanding. It might emerge, however, that the confrontation between these views and the modern views of thinkers such as Klein, Fairbairn, and Winnicott, and of both with the best of recent cognitively oriented work in experimental psychology, for example the work of Lazarus (1991) and Seligman (1975), might generate a philosophical theory of the human longing for control and self-sufficiency that would preserve the best features of both sources, and link them in a new account of fear, aggression, pity, and love.31

NOTES

1. For an excellent study of Artemidoros, to which I shall refer frequently in what follows, see Winkler (1990).

2. It is clear that both the dreamer and the dreamer’s sexual partner may be either male or female: in this case as in many others, that does not affect the dream’s significance. Here as elsewhere, the Greek uses but a single word for what we distinguish as fellatio and cunnilingus: arrebêtopoiêsai, “do the unmentionable.” The operative distinction in Artemidoros’ account is between its active and passive voices, as the dreamer either performs such activity or has it performed upon him/her.

3. This chapter was originally written for a conference on Sophocles’ play and modern psychoanalysis; in this version I have chosen to retain the focus on this particular tragedy on account of the great influence of Freud’s reading, although numerous texts could have done as well for my purposes.

4. It is paradigmatic of the type of action Aristotle calls involuntary out of excusable ignorance—Nicomachean Ethics, III.1. I discuss this case, with other references, in Nussbaum 1986a, ch. 9 and interlude 2. See also Sophocles’ Oedipus at Colonus, where Oedipus describes his acts as involuntary: lines 1.70–74, 5211–49, 960–87, and cf. 1565.

5. On the issue in tragedy, see Nussbaum (1986a); and on the German critics, especially ch. 13.

6. I reviewed Volume 2 critically in Nussbaum (1985); the relevant point to emphasize here is that, by concentrating on philosophical writers such as Plato and Xenophon, and neglecting other more popular sources, such as the orators and Aristophanes, Foucault could only reach partial conclusions.

7. See also Price (1986).

8. For 1.78–80, I follow Winkler’s translation (1990, 210–26); elsewhere the translations are my own where Winkler does not translate the passage, his when he does. This case is discussed (though not translated in full) in Winkler (1990, 29).

9. Freud is mistaken about this aspect of Artemidoros’ theory, charging him with reading dreams according to a fixed universal key; see Winkler (1990, 29–30), referring to Interpretation of Dreams (Freud 1900, 98–99).
10. This shows the unfairness of Freud's critique of Artemidoros for neglecting interconnections among dream images.

11. Here we find confirmation of the cultural view in accordance with which the young males who are the objects of (older) male desire—the erômenoi—are not thought to feel sexual desire themselves (or at least, this is the cultural norm—Dover 1978; Halperin 1990). This is why sexual dreams belong to a later time of life. Of course a young person might still use sexual imagery to signify some underlying anxiety; but I think that it is Artemidoros’ point that the signifiers have to be familiar from experience, in order to establish their connections with the deeper signified.

12. On the study of children and their inclinations in ancient thought, see Brunschwig (1986). On the appeal to the nature of the child as part of Epicurean ethical argument, see Nussbaum (1994, chs. 4, 12) and the earlier version of the argument in Nussbaum (1986b).

13. See also Winkler (1990, 26–27, 33ff.).

14. Friendships are, for Aristotle, constituents of eudaimonia, not just external instruments. Money, property, etc. are instrumentally valuable. Virtuous action, the primary constituent(s) of eudaimonia, is not called an “external good,” since it is caused by virtuous traits of character, which are within the agent's own control. Strictly speaking, however, it can be impeded by fortune—by the absence of some of the usual “external goods.”

15. Central in such projects is usually the claim that virtue is sufficient for eudaimonia—this idea is defended, it seems, by Socrates, Plato, and the Greek and Roman Stoics.


17. Of course, strictly speaking, anxiety is what is signified by a dream, not the signifier in a dream. But Artemidoros seems to suggest that experiences that are themselves sources of anxiety (baldness for example) will naturally serve a signifiers for other deeper fears.

18. See Abelove (1993) for references to Freud's correspondence on this point.

19. Penetration is the fundamental sex act for the Greeks—see Winkler (1990, passim); Halperin (1990). So fundamental is it that a sex act between two women can only be imagined as (per impossible) a form of penetration; and it is for this reason that the act seems to require an alteration in the laws of nature.

20. It is noteworthy here that Artemidoros does not dwell often on the anti-conventional or illicit status of incestuous intercourse, which might have been a way of linking incest with external fortunes without focusing centrally on its sexual wish-content. This, I think, is the direction Plato takes in the passage on dreaming in Republic IX, where he speaks of the incest dream as something that appetite will contrive, unfettered by reason: in other words, unfettered by reason, appetite is altogether lawless.

21. For further discussion of this point, see Nussbaum (1990), and Nussbaum (1994, ch. 4).

22. Fuller development of the account presented here is found in Nussbaum (1989 1990d, 1990b, 1990c, and 1994, chs. 4–7). (Ch. 5 is a later version of 1989a, ch. 6 of 1990d, ch. 7 of 1990b.) All of these articles contain full references to the relevant ancient texts, and to the secondary literature.

23. We arrive here at a complex issue in Epicurus’ thought. For to the extent that he presents the concern for externals as motivated by an appropriate and more or less inevitable concern for one’s own safety, he would appear to endorse these concerns, or at
least some of them, as rational. On the other hand, he is determined to reject most of the concerns society actually has for these goods—including all anxious concern about death—as irrational. The difficulties this creates for his project are analyzed in Nussbaum (1990d, 1990b).


26. On the enormous importance of control for the emotional life of both animals and humans, see the remarkable analysis in Seligman (1975).

27. This is what I am trying to do in Need and Recognition: A Theory of the Emotions, The Gifford Lectures for 1993.

28. Tuchê designates those aspects of life that human beings do not control: it means “luck” in that sense, not in the sense of “randomness.”

29. Indeed, cognitive psychology is now to a great extent converging with psychoanalysis on this point—see Lazarus (1991); Seligman (1975); Oatley (1992).


31. This chapter was originally presented at Cornell University at a conference on the Oedipus Rex and modern psychoanalysis. I wish to thank Phillip Mitsis for the invitation, and for helpful comments. I am also grateful to Myles Burnyeat and Peter Rudnytsky for their suggestions.

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