

Oedipus' Eye: Caretakers of the Disabled in Ancient Greece

The study of the disabled and their caretakers in Classical scholarship has had a languid pace of development. Within the last fourteen years books like *Eye of the Beholder* (1995) by Robert Garland and *The Staff of Oedipus* (2003) by Martha Rose have provided a general overview of disabilities in antiquity. Yet, there are a number of topics that are left unexplained. In this paper I will examine who the caretakers of the disabled were in Ancient Greek Drama, the role of gender in care taking, the phenomenon of “caretaker burnout”, issues of trust between the disabled person and the caretaker, and how closely the two become intertwined with one another by looking at two plays of Sophocles. There are two areas where care of the disabled took place: At the home and on the war front. Sophocles provides us with a dramatic example of the care of disabled veterans in *Philoktetes*. The play suggests that humans, not the gods, are responsible for most of the suffering inflicted on the disabled person, but they are also the ones that can care for them the most. Does the relationship between Philoktetes and Neoptolemus mirror that of Akilles and Patroklos and if so, how closely. Another play of Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, suggests that even women can be better men than men themselves through the care of the disabled. More questions may arise during the course of this research. For example, is there any hint of a sexual relationship between the blind seer Tiresias and the young men who guide him in the plays of Sophocles? By understanding the nature and character of the caretaker we will better decipher Greek ideas concerning disabilities.

Works Cited

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