

The Athens Greek Religion Seminar, February 9 2016, 15.00

**Pollution and Purification in Athenian Law and in Attic Tragedy:
Parallels or Divergences?**

Edward M. Harris, Durham University and the University of Edinburgh

In the *Odyssey* Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus in revenge for the death of his father Agamemnon. The murder does not create any pollution, and Orestes is held up as a positive moral example for Telemachus. In the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, Orestes is pursued by the Erinyes, who consider him polluted and believe that he deserves punishment even though Apollo claims that he has purified him. Orestes is also considered polluted in several plays of Euripides. What is the reason for the different treatment? This paper will explore the portrayal of pollution for homicide in Attic tragedy and draw on my recent essay published in C. Ando and G. Rüpke, eds., *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion* (Berlin, Munich, Boston 2015). It will also question the view of Meinel that Attic tragedy attempts to make pollution problematic and examine the relationship between law, religion and tragedy.